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THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF SORCERY AND SORCERY ACCUSATIONS IN KOREA

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I Introduction

An intriguing story told by Hendrik Hamel (1630–1692) presents clear evidence of sorcery conceptions in Korea:

> *Among other particulars I remember, that the King being inform'd that his Brother's Wife made great Curiosities at Needlework; he desir'd of her, that she would Embroider him a Vest; but that Princess bearing him a mortal Hatred in her Heart, she stich'd in betwixt the Lining and the Out-side some Charms and Characters of such nature, that the King could enjoy no pleasure, nor take any rest whilst he had that Garment on. After he had long study'd to find what might be the cause of it, at last he guess'd at it. He had the Vest rip'd, and found out the cause of his trouble and uneasiness. There was not much time spent in trying that wretched Woman. The King condemn'd her to be shut up in a Room, the Floor whereof was of Brass, and order'd a great Fire to be lighted under it, the Heat whereof tormented her till she dy'd.*[1]

Sorcery, in fact, seems to have occupied a more prominent place in the daily life of pre-modern Korea than one might assume from the sparse and short references to it in scholarly works of this century.[2] A more detailed study of the subject may contribute to a deeper understanding of the society and ways of thinking of ancient Korea. This article is intended as a reconnaissance of the field.

II Method

A series of anthropological studies which started with E.E. Evans-Pritchard's *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande,* published in

1 Gari Ledyard, *The Dutch Come to Korea* (Seoul, 1971), pp. 210–211.

2 Yi Nŭnghwa, «Chosŏn musok ko», *Kyemyŏng,* 19: 7, 36–37 (1927); Pak Kyehong, *Han'guk minsok yŏn'gu* (2nd ed., Seoul, 1973), pp. 256–259; Yu Tongsik, *Han'guk mugyo-ŭi yŏksa-wa kujo* (Seoul, 1975), pp. 210–211.

1937, has revealed the social significance of the phenomena of witchcraft and sorcery.[3] Evans-Pritchard demonstrated that beliefs which were difficult to understand or mutually contradictory made sense when related to the concrete realities of daily life. In the case of Korean sorcery, too, it is profitable to view sorcery beliefs within their synchronic social context. This is more useful than abstracting a theory of sorcery from any occurrences of black magic in fact or literature irrespective of time.[4] The meanings and functions that sorcery beliefs have within society are of greater interest than such beliefs *per se*.

Anthropological studies stress the fact that in cases of witchcraft and in many cases of sorcery the real victim is the person who is accused of such crimes. This is certainly true in cases of witchcraft, that is, witchcraft as defined by Evans-Pritchard: a magical attack not dependent on any external means, such as spells, tortured dolls *(envoûtements)*, and so forth. The witch kills or harms by means of some inner quality and may not be aware of the evil he or she is perpetrating. A well-known example of this kind of witchcraft is the evil eye. In Korea, such witchcraft seems to have been insignificant or non-existent.[5]

Sorcery is defined as a contrasting form of harmful, anti-social magic. The sorcerer uses external means. Sorcery is not, like witchcraft, (in our eyes) an impossible crime. One might catch a sorcerer red-handed or find tangible evidence of his activities. Nevertheless it is difficult for us to regard the person against whom he acts as a real victim. In fact, the accusations against a reputed sorcerer are more often than not without firm foundation. Generally, a person is suspected for rather vague reasons, is then accused and, belatedly, in the next stage evidence is produced. The nature of the evidence is often dubious. In reality the person who is accused in the one under attack. In this respect there is a similarity between cases of witchcraft and sorcery. In either case the elementary question becomes: what prompted the accusations? It turns out that there is not much

3 For a bibliography of anthropological studies on the subject see: Max Marwick, ed., *Witchcraft and Sorcery* (Harmondsworth, 1970). Those who assume that the anthropological approach is only valid for tribal societies should read A.D.J. Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, 1970).

4 This was the traditional approach, which is still found in Yi Nŭnghwa, «Musok ko.» It was also the method de Groot adopted in his studies of Chinese religion, to which I will refer later.

5 For a rather doubtful example of «evil eye», see Akiba Takashi, *Chōsen minsokushi* (Tokyo, 1954), pp. 77, 109.

difference in the way witchcraft and sorcery incidents start, although each may have its own social sphere.

A study of social relations between attackers and attacked (those who accuse and the accused) may give meaning to the bizarre sorcery incidents. Often a pattern appears whereby accusations are limited to certain social groups. This is clearly the case in Korea. Also the functional value of accusations may become clear. Sometimes they are functional in the traditional sense, in other words, serve to stabilize society; sometimes they facilitate change. Functions of sorcery accusations can be very different at different times. To study the problem of function, detailed research of separate periods is indispensable. Here we will only be able to suggest some possibilities.

III Data

For practical reasons and to avoid comparisons of data too dissimilar in nature, the field of inquiry is mainly limited to the Yi dynasty (1392–1910), with emphasis on its later period (1600–1910). Certainly there existed sorcery before that time. There may have been a case during the reign of Queen Chinsŏng of Silla (r.887–896),[6] but the first clear cases are to be found in the Koryŏ period (935–1392).[7] Sorcery did not end with the Yi dynasty either. Yi Nŭnghwa (1869–1945) in his study of Korean shamanism states that it still was prevalent at the time he was writing, which was in the 1920s. Akiba Takashi and Akamatsu Chijō offer a text against the evil influences of black magic from the repertory of a contemporary exorcist.[8]

For this study I have taken material primarily from the *Chosŏn wangjo sillok* (Veritable Records of the Yi Dynasty).[9] The *Sillok,* in some ways,

6 Iryŏn, *Samguk yusa* (ed. Ch'oe Namsŏn, 4th ed., Seoul, 1974), p. 89.

7 Although Yi Nŭnghwa, «Musok ko,» p. 7, states that sorcery started in the reign of King Ch'ungnyŏl (r. 1274–1308), I have found several earlier references in the *Koryŏ sa,* the first in the reign of King Ŭijong (r. 1146–1170) for the year 1161. Therefore, it is impossible to link the origin of sorcery with Mongol influence, although many cases occurred after Mongol princesses came to Korea as royal spouses.

8 Akamatsu Chijō and Akiba Takashi, *Chōsen fuzoku no kenkyū,* 2 vols. (Keijō, 1938), vol. 2, appendix: «Mugyŏng,» pp. 1–3.

9 *Chosŏn wangjo sillok* (reprint, ed. Kuksa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe, 48 vols., Seoul, 1955–1958). The material about sorcery in the *Sillok* can be traced easily, thanks to Imamura Tomo, ed., *Richō jitsuroku fūzoku kankei shiryō satsuyō* (published by Chōsen sōtokufu chūsūin, Keijō, 1939).

are not the ideal texts for a study of sorcery. Often the kind of detail that is essential is lacking, and too much emphasis is placed on the activities of the ruling class. Their strength lies in their continuity, which is useful for a general survey. A negative argument in favor of the *Sillok* is the fact that other works share to a great extent the weaknesses of the *Sillok.* The *Sillok* do provide an interesting opportunity to see what highly educated Confucians thought about black magic.

Sorcery is mentioned in a variety of other works: law codes, unofficial histories, diaries, medical handbooks and collected literary works of individuals.[10] For sorcery in literature we may turn to books like *Kyech'uk ilgi* (Diary of the Year of the Black Ox), *Inhyŏn wanghu chŏn* (The Story of Queen Inhyŏn) and *Sa-ssi namjŏng ki* (Record of Lady Hsieh's Journey to the South).

IV General Description

In the *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (Diary of the Reign of Kwanghaegun) we find a few pages which constitute almost a catalogue of sorcery techniques.[11] A resumé is given of recent incidents. A blind female shaman read incantations at the tomb of King Sŏnjo (r. 1567–1608) and his first wife. A cat was buried there at night together with spells written on red silk. At court sorcery was practiced in various ways: a human figure was drawn on paper, the eyes were pierced with a needle[12] and the picture was buried in a fireplace; a dog was killed and buried in the woods near the palace; a horse with fettered legs was thrown into a deep pond; at daybreak a cock and a hen were fed pearls and magic charms, whereupon a cat was set on them. The cat was then killed. After the eyes of a gold-colored cat had been gouged out, it was put into a chimney. A rat cut up and hung in a plum tree. White cocks and dogs were put within the palace enclosures. In several places pictures of pigs were scattered. Also used were frogs, dried fish, a turtle (in a privy), crows with feet and wings cut off, and dead

10 A number of these works has been made accessible by Imamura Tomo, ed., *Richō kakushu bunken fūzoku kankei shiryō satsuyō* (published by Chōsen sōtokufu chūsūin, Keijō, 1944), hereafter referred to as *Kakushu bunken.*

11 *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (Chŏngjoksan pon), 87: 10a, 1–12a, 14.

12 This throws into relief the following observation: «From the pictures of Kim Ilsŏng and Stalin posted on the walls somebody always took the eyes out.» John W. Riley, *The Reds Take a City* (Westport, Conn., 1973), p. 5.

magpies. In the same text, a connection is made between the moment someone is born and the kind of black magic effective against him. Whoever wants to cause harm to persons born in the year of the rat or the year of the boar for instance, should cut off a dog's tail and chop off its head.

This catalogue is not complete. One might add the use of bones, both human and animal, bone dust, little dolls which are maltreated with nails and needles, shoes and garments belonging to the victim, wood of trees hit by lightning and wood of trees growing on tombs.[13] The list of methods seems to be inexhaustible.

These sorcery techniques do not seem to be particularly Korean and are quite similar to the methods mentioned by de Groot in the relevant chapters of *The Religious System of China.*[14] On the other hand, not every form of evil sorcery referred to by de Groot occurs in Korea. A special form of black magic called *ku* in Chinese (Kor. *ko*) does not.[15] *Ku* specifically indicates a kind of black magic, prevalent in southern China, that makes the one who employs it wealthy at the expense of others. Ghosts or spectres become the slaves of a person who practices *ku* magic and keep his house spotlessly clean. Therefore extreme cleanliness may betray the presence of *ku* magic. This fact is cited from a Chinese source in *Tongŭi pogam* (Precious Mirror of Korean Medicine) by Hŏ Chun (1546–1615).[16] This compilation devotes considerable attention to remedies against *ku.* Those are all from Chinese works, and I do not think that the specific conception of *ku* had much reality for Koreans. However, the word *ku* is often used in Korea, frequently in the combination that is pronounced *wu-ku* in Chinese and *mugo* in Korean and may be translated as «shamans' *ku.*» The meaning in these cases seems to be black magic in general or sorcery used to kill people rather than magic employed to accumulate riches. I have found only one exception to this.[17]

The most common word used to denote sorcery is *chŏju.* A purely Korean term is *pangjae,* which is sometimes written with Chinese loan-char-

13 *Hyojong sillok,* 7: 49a, 4–8.

14 J.J.M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China,* 6 vols. (Leyden, 1892), vol. 5, bk. 2, part 3, pp. 811–928.

15 For the meaning of *ku* in China see H.Y. Feng and J.K. Shryock, «The Black Magic in China Known as Ku,» *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* 55: 1–30 (1935).

16 Hŏ Chun, comp., *Tongŭi pogam* (reprint of 1814 ed., Seoul, 1974), p. 585.

17 Yi Kyugyŏng, *Oju yŏnmun changjŏn san'go* (ed. Kojŏn kanhaenghoe, 2 vols., Seoul, 1959), I, 387–388.

acters.[18] *Sasa,* «evil demonic influences,» is occasionally used as a synonym of *chŏju.*[19]

It is not clear from our sources how the evil effects of sorcery were supposed to be transmitted to people, by ghosts or by impersonal forces. De Groot gives many instances of the former and few of the latter, but this is a consequence of his view that the study of sorcery only falls within his domain, Chinese religion, as long as an animistic element is involved.[20] The Korean data to which I have referred hardly justify a conclusion. Probably people believed in both possibilities. Later I hope to answer the question as to whether this is an important problem.

Who believed in sorcery? «We have not found in books a single expression indicating disbelief in its reality or in the reality of its effects.»[21] What de Groot said about China can also be applied to Korea. High and low shared this belief and sorcery incidents occurred no less at court than among ignorant slaves. Kings would move from palace to palace to escape the «impurities» buried around their dwellings.[22] Occasionally, all earth around the palaces was removed and replaced with fresh soil.[23] A soothsayer told a provincial magistrate from the time of King Yŏngjo (r.1724–1776) that three slaves, one man and two women, had practiced black magic against him. The official had the suspects beaten to death. His fear of sorcery was so intense that he did not leave it at this, but filled the mouths of the dead with iron, pressed thorns into the bodies and had them buried under a bridgehead.[24]

Sometimes people realized that accusations of sorcery were fabricated, but this did not diminish their belief in its potential. Skepticism is found in a remark that sorcery does not always work; attempts to kill the invading Japanese general Katō Kiyomasa (1562–1611) with black magic regrettably failed, one author noted.[25]

Law codes also show that sorcery was taken seriously. The *Ta-Ming lü* (Ming Code), in force in Korea almost until the end of the Yi dynasty,

18 Yi Nŭnghwa, «Musok ko,» p. 7; *Kyech'uk ilgi* (ed. Kang Hanyŏng, Seoul, 1974), pp. 204, 310.
19 *Injo sillok,* 46: 47a, 3.
20 De Groot, *Religious System,* bk. 2, p. 917.
21 De Groot, *Religious System,* bk. 2, p. 814.
22 E.g., *Injo sillok,* 25: 23a, 1–4.
23 *Yŏngjo sillok,* 25: 23a, 1–4.
24 *Yŏngjo sillok,* 25: 15b, 9–12.
25 Chŏng Chaeryun (1648–1723) in his *Kongsa kyŏnmun nok* cited in Imamura, *Kakushu bunken,* p. 1260.

demands a heavy penalty for sorcery: capital punishment for both the one who practices it and the one who instructs others to use black magic.[26]

It is remarkable that the whole household of a sorcerer was to be exiled for life, even if it was completely ignorant of the crime. This measure was otherwise taken in case of particularly serious crimes such as high treason, rebellion, killing three persons from one household, and cutting off the limbs of a living person (a crime related to sorcery).[27] The law against sorcery in the Ming code was certainly invoked in Korea, even after the legal reforms of the 18th century, as is shown by a passage in the *Ch'ugwan chi* (Compendium for the Board of Punishments),[28] which contains several references to sorcery.

It is hardly surprising that even the highly educated believed in the reality of sorcery. First, there was the example of China, where sorcery was punished at least until 1865,[29] and furthermore, it was not inconsistent with other prevailing conceptions. Sorcery could, for instance, easily be linked to geomantic theories. In fact, abuse of geomancy (Kor. *p'ungsu;* Chin. *feng shui*) might be regarded as a form of sorcery. There is little difference between destroying the good properties of a grave by sticking poles in the grave mound to harm the descendants of the deceased[30] and burying a dead cat on such a spot. Traditional medicine accepted sorcery.[31] Remedies were, among others, acupuncture and ingestion of a poisonous root named *sangnyuk (phytolacca esculenta).*[32] Finally, the resentments that were supposed to drive people to sorcery were often very real. This made sorcery psychologically plausible.

26 *Tae-Myŏngnyul chikhae,* ed. Ko Sagyŏng *et al.* (Han'gukhak kibon ch'ongsŏ, no. 13, Seoul, 1974), pp. 429–430. Cf. the following words of King Injo (r. 1623–1649): «Among ways of killing people, killing with intent to kill is the most serious crime. Among ways of killing with intent to kill, the use of sorcery is the most serious.» These words are cited in the anonymous *Ŭngch'ŏn illok,* reproduced in *Taedong yasŭng* (ed. Chōsen kosho kankōkai, 13 vols., Keijō, 1910), IX, 553.

27 Sŏ Ilgyo, *Chosŏn wangjo hyŏngsa chedo-ŭi yŏn'gu* (2nd. ed., Seoul, 1974), pp. 107–110. The relation between sorcery and cutting off the limbs of a living person is explained in de Groot, *Religious System,* bk. 2, p. 870.

28 *Ch'ugwan chi,* comp. Pak Irwŏn (ed. Chōsen sōtokufu chūsūin, Keijō, 1939), pp. 844–845.

29 De Groot, *Religious System,* bk. 2, p. 886.

30 *Ch'ugwan chi,* pp. 127–128.

31 Hŏ Chun, *Tongŭi pogam,* pp. 585–587.

32 Yi Yuk, *Ch'ŏngp'a kŭktam,* bk. 1, 28b, 5–29a, 5. This work is to be found in *P'aerim* (facsimile edition ed. by Hong Sŏgu, 10 vols., Seoul, 1969), V, 107–108.

It is not my intention to claim that sorcery was not actually attempted by some, but I believe that truth is served when we systematically regard an accusation as false until the opposite is proven. To judge whether a sorcery accusation had a basis in reality, it is important to ask how an incident became public. Extreme skepticism is justified in cases where the accusation preceded the presentation of evidence, especially if the accuser had an axe to grind. Sorcery was practiced in secret. How could someone know that it was practiced against him or his family, unless a witness had managed to see the sorcerer at work? Even if suspicious objects like pierced dolls were found, how could one detect the culprit? People who believed that sorcery was being employed against them naturally suspected their enemies. All too often, accusations seem to have been based on nothing but the suspicions that sprang from tensions in certain relations.

In 1635 there occurred a case which can be accepted as an instance of the actual practice of sorcery.[33] A hunter accidentally saw women take away skulls from the public execution ground. As far as we know, they were strangers to him. He reported this to the authorities, and the women confessed that they were slaves sent by their master, an exorcist. Women with grievances (mostly jealous spouses) would come to this exorcist's house and request him to practice sorcery against their enemies. The absence of any relation between accuser and accused indicates that we may trust the reality of this attempt at black magic. The confessions are of little value. Torture was used freely during interrogations, and the accused were no doubt made very well aware of what they were expected to confess. In his book on European witchcraft persecutions, Norman Cohn has recently shown very persuasively that confessions extracted under such circumstances cannot in the least be trusted.[34]

According to contemporary opinion slaves, both male and female, and concubines were especially prone to use sorcery.[35] More details about these groups will be found in a following section. Sorcery was also associated with shamans, exorcists, and the like. This is clear from a report of recent incidents made to the Ch'ing (1644–1911) in 1652. It probably contained little truth, but for that very reason it represents stereotyped images all the better. One conspirator is quoted as saying to another: «For

33 *Injo sillok,* 30: 44b, 14–45a, 10.
34 Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons* (Frogmore, St. Albans, 1976).
35 E.g., *Yŏngjo sillok,* 36: 30b, 14–15.

achieving success without effort, there is nothing like sorcery... Among shamans there are certainly specialists who are well versed in it.»[36]

These same persons were also able to detect sorcery and find sorcerers. One example has already been given in the story of the provincial magistrate. King Injo conferred high rank on an exorcist who had assisted him in tracking down sorcerers.[37] In some cultures, sorcery detection through dreams is common, but I know only one Korean example of this, in *Inhyŏn wanghu chŏn,* where the ghost of an eunuch appears to the king in a dream and reveals that sorcery was the cause of the death of the queen.[38] This may be nothing but a literary convention derived from stories about magistrates adept at solving difficult law cases. In a few cases, monks and nuns appear as sorcerers' associates and in an isolated instance sorcery with a Buddha image is alleged.[39] The frequency of such cases is hardly to be compared with that of accusations against shamans.

V Historical Context

The material in the *Sillok* does not give a reliable indication of the frequency of sorcery during the Yi dynasty. Two entries recorded in the very beginning of the period mention the execution of sorcerers in the seventh year of the reign of King T'aejo (1398).[40] Then sorcery is mentioned irregularly throughout a period of approximately 380 years, altogether about 130 times. After 1777, however, sorcery does not seem to be mentioned at all.[41] We have already noted that sorcery certainly did not dis-

36 *Hyojong sillok,* 8: 27a, 7–29a, 15.

37 *Injo sillok,* 48: 30a, 12–13.

38 Richard Rutt and Kim Chong-un, tr., *Virtuous Women* (Seoul, 1974), p. 224.

39 *Hyojong sillok,* 8: 29a, 9, and 8: 48b, 3.

40 *T'aejo sillok,* 14: 6b, 2 and 14: 9a, 5. There is a similar *Koryŏ sa* entry for the year 1380: *Koryŏ sa,* comp. Chŏng Inji *et al.* (ed. Yŏnse taehakkyo tongbanghak yŏn'guso, Seoul, 1955), 134: 16b, 2. Pak Kyehong, *Hanguk minsok yŏn'gu,* pp. 256–259, regards sorcery as a symptom of the degeneration of shamanism in the later Yi period. This seems to be an unwarranted conclusion. Firstly, because sorcery was not only or mainly practiced by shamans and secondly, because there is no material that permits us to believe that the incidence of this crime then was more frequent than before. Complaints from officials that «recently the people have grown most wicked,» cited by Pak as proof, are of all times.

41 *Chŏngjo sillok,* 4: 55a, 11.

appear after that date. Therefore, it is quite obvious that the number of entries in the *Sillok* does not reflect the frequency of sorcery. Neither does the number of entries correspond to the number of sorcery cases mentioned. Sometimes several entries refer to one case, while on the other hand one entry may lump together «a hundred» cases.

The number of times sorcery is mentioned does tell us, however, how important the subject was to the historians. In turn, their interest in this subject provides us with an indication of the social significance of sorcery at certain times within the social stratum of the compilers of the *Sillok*. In the first part of the Yi period (until 1600), sorcery is referred to about thirty times, and in the latter part about a hundred times. In view of the fact that the last entry dates from 1777, sorcery clearly received more attention in the period from 1600 until 1777.

Records may be classified in two groups: first, cases among the common people, and second, cases which took place at court or were connected with court circles. A vast majority of the latter might be expected and is indeed found for the later Yi period, with hardly twenty entries out of one hundred referring to commoners. In contrast, during the first part of the Yi dynasty only twelve entries out of thirty connected sorcery with the court. No less than seven of these entries refer to one famous case, «the incident of the roasted rat,» during the reign of King Chungjong (r.1506–1544).

These figures suggest the possibility of a link between factionalism and sorcery at court. Yi Nŭnghwa has proposed such a theory.[42] The accounts of sorcery incidents in the *Sillok* confirm this supposition. It is difficult, however, to assert with confidence that factionalism was the cause of these incidents. Perhaps one should say that factionalism provided a framework in which sorcery incidents could reach a climax and become part of national history.

The greater frequency of sorcery cases in certain periods may also be explained in part by the existence of a kind of sorcery mania, with its own momentum. When, in a certain period, sorcery had received much public attention, some people apparently interpreted every mishap as a result of black magic. Their fears created new incidents, and those in turn may have led others to wonder if their own illness or the loss of loved ones was not due to the evil practices of their enemies.

42 Yi Nŭnghwa, «Musok ko,» p. 36.

Why was sorcery no longer mentioned after 1777, although it continued to exist? The end of the worst period of factionalism might be offered in explanation of the disappearance from the records of cases in court circles. If this were in fact the reason, why were cases among commoners no longer mentioned either? Did the upper class who had to administer the law acquire a greater measure of skepticism towards accusations? In the *Ch'ugwan chi* there is a passage that might be used to support this thesis.[43] Among other skeptical statements we find these words: «Sorcery incidents start with the jealousy of women, then the lies of shamans are added to it and so small things put together become a big thing.» As a basis for a conclusion this is, however, too slight.

VI Social Context

The most fundamental function of the concept of sorcery was as an explanation of illness and death, especially if these struck young and apparently healthy persons.[44] In the *Sillok* and elsewhere there are many examples in which a causal relation of this nature is assumed. Of course, illness and death could also be caused by angry gods or ghosts. This explanation was very common in Korea and did not presuppose action by malicious human beings. Thus the theory of illness and death caused by angry supernatural beings existed side by side with the theory that held sorcery responsible. The latter theory implied a human agent, and therefore had direct social consequences that the former lacked.[45]

In general, sorcery does not require a detailed theory of its functioning to play a role in society. If people believe in the reality of sorcery, they only need to share a basic understanding as to what it is. In my opinion, Korean sorcery conceptions were quite vague and flexible. Probably few people were able to explain the mechanisms of sorcery exactly, but certain elementary notions were common property. The catalogue of methods presented above was varied, but predictable because all techniques conformed to an easily understood stereotype with horror, filth, and death as major elements. The possibility of innumerable variations on this basic

43 *Ch'ugwan chi,* p. 389.

44 E.g., the death of Queen Inhyŏn (1667–1701).

45 Unless, that is, no one was accused although sorcery was suspected. Then the concept of sorcery provided no more than an explanation for sudden death and epidemic diseases. Cf. *Kimun ch'onghwa, kwŏn* 2, cited in Imamura, *Kakushu bunken* p. 1353.

theme made it easy to introduce the concept of sorcery in different situations. Variety also must have made it more difficult to reject the existence of black magic completely and fundamentally. The absence of a clearly articulated theory may be supposed to have had the same effect.

Why were accusations made? As suggested earlier, tensions in certain social relations rather than the discovery of evidence were the principal cause. It is important to note that the same tensions which supposedly drove one party to practice sorcery might have prompted the other party to make an accusation. If two parties were in conflict, both would harbor ill-feeling, although not necessarily of the same nature.

In what social relationships was the concept of sorcery likely to play a role? Anthropologists have found that in most societies accusations of witchcraft and sorcery are confined to certain groups. Korea was no exception. The student of Korean sorcery may easily observe that superiors accused inferiors and that equals accused each other, whereas inferiors never accused superiors. Government officials, deploring the depravity of their times, repeatedly stated that concubines used sorcery against first wives, and slaves against their masters. Sorcery was supposed first of all to be the weapon of those who had little power and no opportunity to take recourse to law if they were abused.[46] Because of their inferior position it was not unlikely that they would employ sorcery as the only way to avenge themselves, and accusations against them might be readily believed for that reason. The prevalent view must have been that the despicable nature of the crime of sorcery was matched by the wickedness of inferiors who plotted to harm those above them. Perhaps for this reason, black magic was often associated with rebellion as another method of overthrowing the sacred natural order.[47] The government was especially concerned about sorcery against superiors, but people believed that sorcery occurred also among equals. Concubines, in particular, often accused each other of employing magic against their rivals.

To a large extent sorcery was a women's affair. In general, free men were involved only indirectly. They would provide material or stand by watching what the womenfolk did. In some cases men plotted against the government, while their women assisted them with the help of black

46 It was legally punishable to give witness against superiors (except in cases of treason). See Sŏ Ilgyo, *Hyŏngsa chedo*, p. 374.

47 Once it was reported that in the capital human bones fetched a high price because they were much in demand among rebellious groups. *Yŏngjo sillok*, 27: 7b, 3–4.

magic.[48] In almost every sorcery case at court the main defendants were female. Men were sometimes accused as accomplices. It is notable that the accusations were not primarily directed against the specialists, the shamans and the exorcists. They were punished, but it is clear that in the first place the charges were aimed at their employers. In many other societies those who possess special magical knowledge are typical objects of accusations. These accusations serve to break their power. In Korea, the shamans did not have much power, and thus they did not warrant an accusation of their own.

An accusation against a woman of the upper class might be political in origin. An example is the charge against Queen Dowager Inmok, who was attacked because she was the mother of a candidate for the throne.[49] A sorcery accusation was a convenient way to get a hold on such women. They could not easily be accused of abuse of political power. The most difficult thing was finding a motive why recourse was had to the crime of black magic. This was not, however, a real problem, as the tensions that led to the accusation could also be considered a motive for the accused to practice sorcery. Such accusations were not always deliberately falsified. Tensions would make people very suspicious of their enemies; an insignificant mishap would convince them that they really had become victims of black magic. Evidence could be found without effort. Association with shamans and sacrifices of an entirely innocent nature were repeatedly interpreted as sorcery.[50] Animal bones, not to speak of bone dust, could be found in almost any patch of ground – and still can be –, if one takes the trouble to start digging. Certain species of birds are in the habit of entering chimneys and some die there, as I recently discovered in my own home. Even such a gruesome practice as the dismembering of corpses, although illegal, may have been in the interest of medicine rather than black magic, if we accept the evidence of a case mentioned in the *Ch'ugwan*

48 Queen Dowager Inmok (1584–1632), for instance, was accused of sorcery and her father, Kim Chenam (1562–1613) of a political plot. For a rare example of a man personally accused of practicing sorcery, see Yi Kŭngik, *Yŏllyŏsil kisul* (reprint, Kojŏn kugyŏk ch'ongsŏ, 2nd ed., Seoul, 1976), VIII, 788.

49 Inmok's son was the youthful Yŏngch'ang taegun (1601–1614). In the *Kwanghaegun ilgi* a great deal of attention is given to the sorcery supposedly practiced by Queen Inmok. In the *Kyech'uk ilgi* the charges are reversed. There it is Kwanghaegun's mother-in-law who practices black magic. *Kyech'uk ilgi*, ed. Kang Hanyŏng, p. 200.

50 *Injo sillok*, 27: 26a, 13–27b, 2.

chi.[51] If the accusation was deliberately false, evidence might be planted. Finally, confessions were easily obtained by the use or threat of torture. Apparently, a confession did not always need supporting evidence. On the contrary, on a certain occasion a witness was unable to dig up evil substances she had buried herself according to her confession, but nevertheless her testimony was sufficient to convict the accused.[52]

A sorcery accusation was also a handy weapon for women who had to compete for the favor of a man. There is no need to suppose that this weapon was always used in the full knowledge that the accusations were false. Women were in constant fear that someone else would take their place, or they would resent the success of a rival in monopolizing the attention of a common husband. Fear would bread suspicion, and suspicion would lead to accusations. It is significant in this respect that love magic and sorcery might be confused. In the *Koryŏ sa* (History of Koryŏ) we read that the picture of a cock, hidden in the king's pillow by a woman to gain his love, was used as evidence of sorcery when discovered.[53] In the *Sa-ssi namjŏng ki* the academician fears that sorcery has been practiced when a number of small wooden dolls are found in a pillow. He is reassured, however: «These dolls were not made to harm a person intentionally. One of Your Excellency's concubines has made them to make You love her.»[54] Apparently the practice of love magic might easily be interpreted as sorcery. Besides, the use of love magic probably was not regarded as completely innocuous, while a woman who was conversant with this kind of magic could be expected to know also how to employ magic to kill. Thus the boundary between love magic and sorcery was not clearly defined. In the Koryŏ period a royal consort accused another woman of having used magic to estrange the king from her.[55] This was not an accusation of sorcery, if we take sorcery in the sense of magic used to kill someone or to do him physical harm. Nevertheless, the aim of the accusation was the elimination of a rival, just as in the case of an accusation of sorcery.

It is difficult to gain a complete understanding of the nature of sorcery accusations against slaves, partly because of the scarcity of material. Too

51 *Ch'ugwan chi*, p. 844. The flesh of rats might be used as a weapon against demons rather than for the purpose of sorcery. Yu Mongin, *Ŏu yadam*, cited in *Kakushu bunken*, p. 1163.

52 *Injo sillok*, 27: 26a, 13–27b, 2.

53 *Koryŏ sa*, 18: 19b, 7–20a, 1.

54 Kim Manjung, *Sa-ssi namjŏng ki* (ed. Pak Sŏngui, in a volume entitled *Kuunmong Sa-ssi namjŏng ki*, 2nd ed., Seoul, 1975), p. 197.

55 *Koryŏ sa*, 105: 38b, 3–6.

often we find notices like the following: «The Special Court (Samsŏng) investigated the case of a private female slave, Hyoyang, who had been accused of killing her master with sorcery. A confession was obtained, and she was sentenced to death.»[56]

Not much is known about slaves accusing each other of practicing black magic. I know of but one example of such a case. In 1734, slaves killed another slave, accusing him of having murdered by sorcery thirty of their kinsmen.[57] Here sorcery was obviously used as the explanation for a sudden epidemic. Fear and grief found an outlet through the selection of a scapegoat. As we do not know how this scapegoat was chosen, it is impossible to understand the accusation more precisely.

There are a few detailed descriptions of cases in which slaves were accused of murdering their masters by sorcery. Here again, the use of the concept of sorcery may probably be regarded as an attempt to explain sudden death. For obvious reasons it was convenient to put the blame on a slave, but apart from that, psychological factors may have been responsible for the choice of particular slaves as culprits. In several cases the slaves had very good reason to dislike their masters. A female slave, for instance, confessed that she killed her master with black magic after he had killed one of her children, wounded her, and taken away her baby.[58] The master's family, probably aware of the slave's feelings, may have felt somewhat guilty or at least uncomfortable, and by a common psychological mechanism converted this feeling into hate. This hate could be justified by accusing the slave of a vile crime.

It is not unlikely that slaves, faced with an interrogation under torture, often drew the conclusion that their fate was sealed and would make a detailed confession, which provided them with a good opportunity to vent their anger against the master and to indulge in fantasies about his magical punishment. In a case that occurred in the 16th century a confession was made which can be explained in a similar way.[59] It seems to have been less a statement of fact than an attempt to give reality an emotionally satisfying coloring. This interpretation may rob the story of its dramatic ap-

56 *Sukchong sillok*, 12: 48a, 14.

57 There is a reference to this incident in Imamura, *Richō jitsuroku fūzoku kankei shiryō satsuyō*, p. 741. The place given there for this story in the *Sillok* must be erroneous. I have not been able to trace it.

58 *Ch'ugwan chi*, pp. 136–137.

59 Yu Mongin, *Ŏu yadam*, cited from Imamura, *Kakushu bunken*, p. 1176. The same story is found in *Ŭn'gye p'illok*, cited in Imamura, *Kakushu bunken*, p. 1315.

peal, but is probably nearer the truth than a literal reading would be. A man was executed for treason, and his slaves were given to his enemies. One of the female slaves served her new master devotedly. When the master became ill, his wife became suspicious and asked a shaman for counsel. The shaman told her to have a look at her husband's pillow. In the pillow human bones were discovered. The slave confessed, without being tortured, that she had hidden the bones in the pillow to avenge her former master.

It is clear from the story that the master's wife initiated the quest for a sorcerer responsible for her husband's affliction. This makes us question the motive for her action. We also wonder how she detected who had hidden the bones. Was jealousy her motive? Did she perhaps resent the slave girl's «devoted service?» It is hard to accept the premise that she correctly surmised the cause of her husband's illness and then discovered without fail the person who had actually committed the crime. The accusation must have been false, and the evidence may have been fabricated. The confession remains. Did the slave try to put a noble face on a crime she did not commit, but for which she in all probability was going to be punished?

VII The Case of Chang Hŭibin

No case of sorcery during the Yi dynasty is better known than that against Chang Hŭibin (?–1701). In the popular imagination she lives on as the prototype of a wicked sorceress. The case of Lady Chang, however, also seems to provide a representative example of the type of sorcery case with which this article has mainly dealt: a case in which accusations may be regarded primarily as the product of social tensions. A more detailed discussion of the charges brought against Lady Chang will therefore be justified.

Lady Chang first served as a concubine of King Sukchong (r.1674–1720). In 1688, she bore the king a son. As the queen, Lady Min (1667–1701), remained childless, Sukchong, in 1689, decided to make Lady Chang's son heir to the throne. Lady Chang, now mother to the crown prince, was elevated in rank. She received the title *hŭibin* (blessed consort) by which she is usually called. In the same year, Sukchong demoted Lady Min and made Lady Chang his queen. Factional rivalry was a major element in these events and would continue to affect the life and

fate of the Ladies Chang and Min. After only a few years Sukchong came to regret his demotion of Lady Min. Consequently, Lady Chang was again relegated to the rank of *hŭibin,* and Lady Min was reinstated as queen. As was to be expected, political and personal tensions continued to exist, and after the untimely demise of Lady Min a climax was reached resulting in the case against Chang Hŭibin. She was accused of having used sorcery to murder the queen in the hope that she herself, once again, would become the first wife of Sukchong.

In the introduction to the English translation of *Inhyŏn wanghu chŏn,* it is said that Lady Chang's recourse to sorcery is entirely credible.[60] Was she actually guilty of an attempt to employ sorcery to murder Lady Min? Mrs. Kim Yongsuk, who has devoted an essay to Chang Hŭibin, agrees that she was guilty, but pleads mitigating circumstances. In her opinion, Lady Chang should be partially forgiven because of the unpleasant situation she had to face.[61] Although I have not made an exhaustive study of the affair, I doubt whether the historian should necessarily have to accept the evidence against Chang Hŭibin. Lady Chang obviously must have been a permanent source of embarrassment to King Sukchong since the reinstatement of Lady Min as queen. One cannot assert with complete confidence that Sukchong deliberately manipulated the accusation, but one can easily imagine the relief he must have felt when Chang Hŭibin was convicted of sorcery. This proof of her wickedness was an excuse for all the mistakes he had made in the past. Sukchong had a strong motive to attack Lady Chang if an opportunity should arise. This opportunity came with the death of Lady Min (posthumously called Queen Inhyŏn). For the premature death of the queen – she was only in her thirties – sorcery was a stereotyped explanation.

Not long after the queen had passed away, the king suddenly announced that a plot of Chang Hŭibin against the queen had been discovered.[62] The manner of this announcement is interesting. The king did not claim that direct, tangible evidence had been found, but started with a character sketch of Lady Chang whose behavior, according to him, had been improper. Lady Chang had never visited the queen during the latter's protracted illness and she had refused to address the queen by her proper

60 Rutt and Kim, *Virtuous Women,* p. 183.

61 Kim Yongsuk, *Yijo yŏryu munhak mit kungjung p'ungsog-ŭi yŏn'gu* (Seoul, 1970), pp. 122–128.

62 *Sukchong sillok,* 35B: 11b, 13–12a, 9. It is significant that in this case the king apparently took the initiative in accusing Lady Chang. Yi Kŭngik, *Yŏllyŏsil kisul,* VIII, 667.

title, he said. First of all, it would seem, Sukchong wanted to convince his audience (or himself) that Lady Chang was of such low moral standing that anything might be expected from her. It is not likely that Sukchong would have felt the need for such preliminary insinuations if he had been able to present incontrovertible proof for his accusations.[63]

The king went on to relate that already during the queen's illness many people had felt that her condition was due to sorcery. This should not surprise us, as sorcery was a standard explanation not only for sudden death, but also for the occurrence of an otherwise inexplicable disease. Nobody dared tell the king of these suspicions, Sukchong's requisitory continues, until the death of the queen confirmed them. All the facts would seem to indicate that these suspicions arising from social tension were responsible for the accusation. In the king's accusation there is no dramatic discovery of decisive evidence such as a mutilated portrait of the queen, as in *Inhyŏn wanghu chŏn.* When he made the accusation for the first time there seems to have been very little evidence, if any.[64]

After the first accusation had been made on the night of the 23rd of the ninth month, no time was lost. On the 25th, the king «presented Lady Chang with death.»[65] A fortnight elapsed before her life really ended, but this was only because some ministers urged the king to show clemency for the sake of her son, the crown prince. The king was absolutely implacable, and in the meantime, after Lady Chang had been convicted, he personally continued the investigation. Confessions were extracted from slaves, but to the historian these cannot be acceptable as evidence. Besides, there are some incongruities in the confessions. The pure god of birth and life, Chesŏk, appears in the context of black magic, for instance.[66] Also incongru-

63 Later Sukchong even tried to shift the blame for his own misstep, the demotion of Lady Min, to Lady Chang. She should have refused to become queen, he claimed! *Sukchong sillok,* 35B: 12a, 12–12b, 1.

64 Stories about the shooting of arrows at a portrait are to be found in the confessions the king obtained in a personal investigation after Chang Hŭibin had been sentenced to death. Anyone accepting these confessions, despite the unreliability of confessions extracted by torture, must believe in the efficacy of sorcery. A female shaman confessed that when she was asked to kill Lady Min, she shot arrows at the latter's portrait. The shaman was succesful: her victim died almost immediately. *Sukchong sillok,* 35B: 31a, 6–13. Many charges against Lady Chang may have been groundless. For instance, she was accused of having built a small shrine and prayed «in secret.» It was customary to pray in a quiet place, and therefore it was easy, indeed, to allege it was done stealthily. *Injo sillok,* 27: 26a, 13–27b, 2, especially 26b, 8–9.

65 *Sukchong sillok,* 35B: 12a 12–12b, 1.

66 *Sukchong sillok,* 35B: 20b, 9–10.

ous is the charge that sorcery material was buried near the king's quarters.[67] If it was Lady Chang's aim to regain her position as first royal consort, as was repeatedly stated, it would be contrary to her purpose to kill the king!

We may conclude that the evidence as presented in the *Sillok* does not allow us to believe in the guilt of Chang Hŭibin. Whatever the truth, in many respects her case is a classic example of a sorcery incident. An atmosphere of fear and suspicion, caused by severe social tensions, and combined with political complications and disquieting occurrences like the unexplained death of a young person, is the ideal condition to foster accusations of an utterly wicked crime, by its very nature committed in secret, a crime which must leave one forever in doubt as to whether it may be a threat to one's life.

VIII Final Remarks

The details of Korean sorcery conceptions are often strange and gruesome. Nevertheless, even well educated and level-headed persons believed in the reality of sorcery. This was not because they had a consistent theory of sorcery, but because immediate, concrete facts of daily life lent reality to sorcery conceptions. In the world view of Yi dynasty Koreans there also was little to positively discourage belief in sorcery.

If one accepts the premise that sorcery accusations mainly become operative when someone is accused of sorcery, the gruesomeness of sorcery techniques turns out to have a function. The more frightening the crime of sorcery is made to appear, the more effective the charges will be if believed. Belief in the accusations is encouraged by stressing the secretive nature of the crime. This emphasis allows one to go on believing in the reality of the crime even if there is not a shred of evidence. One never knows... The inherently secretive character of sorcery also makes it very difficult for the victim to prove his innocence.

In many ways sorcery cases remind us of modern incidents in which a public figure is accused of selling his services to a foreign power, to the CIA, to the KGB, or to another incarnation of the Devil. Such things do happen, but often the accusation is only used to eliminate an opponent. However insubstantial the proof, such an accusation may achieve its aim if the climate of the times – the social context – is favorable. This was as true in Yi dynasty Korea as it is now.

67 Yi Kŭngik, *Yŏllyŏsil kisul*, VIII, 666.

GLOSSARY

Akamatsu Chijō	赤松智城
Akiba Takashi	秋葉隆
Chang Hŭibin	張穉嬪
Chesŏk	帝釋
Ch'ing	清
Chinsŏng	真聖
Ch'oe Namsŏn	崔南善
chŏju	詛呪
Chŏng Chaeryun	鄭載崙
Chŏng Inji	鄭麟趾
Chŏngjoksan pon	鼎足山本
Chŏngjo	正祖
Ch'ŏngp'a kŭktam	青坡劇談
Chōsen fuzoku no kenkyū	朝鮮巫俗の研究
Chōsen kosho kankōkai	朝鮮古書刊行会
Chōsen minsokushi	朝鮮民俗誌
Chōsen sōtokufu chūsūin	朝鮮總督府中樞院
Chosŏn musok ko	朝鮮巫俗考
Chosŏn wangjo hyŏngsa chedo-ŭi yŏn'gu	朝鮮王朝刑事制度의研究
Chosŏn wangjo sillok	朝鮮王朝實錄
Ch'ugwan chi	秋官志
Chungjong	中宗
Ch'ungnyŏl	忠烈
Han'guk minsok yŏn'gu	韓國民俗研究
Han'guk mugyo-ŭi yŏksa-wa kujo	韓國巫教의歷史와構造
Han'gukhak kibon ch'ongsŏ	韓國学基本叢書
Hŏ Chun	許浚
Hong Sŏgu	洪錫禹
Hyojong	孝宗
Hyoyang	孝陽
Imamura Tomo	今村鞆

Inhyŏn 仁顯
Inhyŏn wanghu chŏn 仁顯王后傳
Injo 仁祖
Inmok 仁穆
Iryŏn 一然
Kang Hanyŏng 姜漢永
Katō Kiyomasa 加藤清正
Kim Chenam 金悌男
Kim Ilsŏng 金日成
Kim Manjung 金萬重
Kim Yongsuk 金用淑
Kimun ch'onghwa 紀聞叢話
Ko Sagyŏng 高士褧
Kojŏn kanhaenghoe 古典刊行會
Kojŏn kugyŏk ch'ongsŏ 古典國譯叢書
Kongsa kyŏnmun nok 公私見聞錄
Koryŏ 高麗
Koryŏ sa 高麗史
ku 蠱
Kuksa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe 國史編纂委員會
Kuunmong 九雲夢
Kwanghaegun 光海君
Kwanghaegun ilgi 光海君日記
kwŏn 卷
Kyech'uk ilgi 癸丑日記
Kyemyŏng 啓明
Min 閔
«Mugyŏng» 巫經
Oju yŏnmun changjŏn san'go 五洲衍文長箋散稿
Ŏu yadam 於于野談
P'aerim 稗林
Pak Irwŏn 朴一源
Pak Kyehong 朴佳弘
Pak Sŏngŭi 朴晟義
pangjae 龐災
p'ungsu 風水
Richō jitsuroku 李朝實錄

fūzoku kankei 風俗關係
shiryō satsuyō 資料撮要
Richō kakushu bunken 李朝各種文獻
fūzoku kankei 風俗關係
shiryō satsuyō 資料撮要
Samguk yusa 三國遺事
Samsŏng 三省
sangnyuk 商陸
sasa 卵巢
Sa-ssi namjŏng ki 謝氏南征記
Silla 新羅
Sillok 實錄
Sŏ Ilgyo 徐一敎
Sŏnjo 宣祖
Sukchong 肅宗
Ta-Ming lü 大明律
Taedong yasŭng 大東野乘
T'aejo 太祖
Tae-Myŏngnyul 大明律
chikhae 直解
Tongŭi pogam 東醫寶鑑
Ŭijong 毅宗
Ŭngch'ŏn illok 凝川日錄
Ŭn'gye p'illok 銀溪筆錄
wu-ku 巫蠱
Yi 李
Yi Kŭngik 李肯翊
Yi Kyugyŏng 李圭景
Yi Nŭnghwa 李能和
Yi Yuk 李陸
Yijo yŏryu munhak 李朝女流文學
mit kungjung p'ung- 및 宮中風
sog-ŭi yŏn'gu 俗의研究
Yŏllyŏsil kisul 燃藜室記述
Yŏngch'ang taegun 永昌大君
Yŏngjo 英祖
Yŏnse taehakkyo 延世大學校
tongbanghak yŏn'guso 東方學研究所
Yu Mongin 柳夢寅
Yu Tongsik 柳東植