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## 2: DOMESTIC ANCESTOR WORSHIP

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The cult of the dead in Ch'inan can be seen as a code that, once deciphered, reveals how groups are articulated and how they are subdivided along economic and political lines.

Emily Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village*, 91

The importance of the model of the clan village (*tongjok purak*) in the Japanese and Korean ethnography of Korea that I had been reading in graduate school had made me think that even for an ecological study I should make ancestor worship an integral part of my research plan for understanding village social organization.<sup>1</sup> I was thus initially upset to hear the news, when I returned from a visit to a schoolteacher's house, that ancestor worship had happened the night before in the Hong family with whom I lived. Or that's what I initially thought I had heard.

I knew from reading the basic outlines of Korean ancestor worship: household rites (*kije*) for near ancestors, and seasonal rites (*sije*) for distant ancestors. What I had read about Korean family ritual emphasized the strong influence of China, so I had made sure to study literary Sinitic, as well as Korean, so that I could understand Sinitic elements of Korean culture. I had also paid great attention to the highly influential recent work on Chinese lineage organization by the British social anthropologist Maurice Freedman who had adapted to stratified Chinese lineages the African segmentary lineage model worked out by Evans-Pritchard, Fortes, and Bohannon whom, of course, I had also read.<sup>2</sup>

Freedman had pointed out that, in contrast to the African case in which genealogies are orally transmitted and can be periodically revised to reflect changing socio-political reality, China has written genealogies of great depth that cannot easily be revised as lineages expand and become internally differentiated over time. Freedman argued that lineage

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<sup>1</sup> Zenshō Eisuke, *Chōsen no seishi to dōzoku buraku* (Koreans Surnames and the Clan Village). (Tokyo: Tokō Shoin, 1943); Suzuki Eitarō, *Han'guk nongch'on tapsagi*. (A Field Report on Korean Villages). (Seoul: Idae Ch'ulp'anbu, 1961) [translation of Chōsen nōsen shakai tōsa ki, 1943]; Pak Kihyōk, *Three Clan Villages in Korea: Socioeconomic Study 1961-2*. (Seoul: Ehwa University Press, 1963); Ko Ponggyōng, et al, *Han'guk nongch'on kajok ūi yōn'gu*. (A Study of the Rural Korean Family). (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1963); Kim T'aekkyu, *Tongjok purak ūi saenghwal kujo yōn'gu*. (A Study of the Life Structure of a Clan Village). (Taegu: Silla Kaya Munhwa Yōn'guwōn, 1964).

<sup>2</sup> E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) p144; M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *African Political Systems*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1940); Paul Bohannon, *Social Anthropology*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963) pp 137-40.

segmentation was expressed in China through the creation of new ancestral halls where in the arrangement of ancestral tablets “genealogical principles of arrangement were modified by the social status of the dead and their living descendants”.<sup>3</sup> This allowed asymmetrical segmentation of lineages by which one line could increase its prominence without needing a corresponding partner line with which to contrast as would be the case with African symmetrically segmented lineages. Domestic memorial ancestor worship for the recent dead, Freedman emphasized, was a separate aspect of ancestor worship that is more about reciprocity between the living and the dead in order to preserve the dead’s memory, satisfy the dead’s needs, and allow the living to obtain what little help they could from their benevolent but not-very-powerful ancestral spirits. While the hall cult for distant ancestors was male centered, about the domestic cult for near ancestors he wrote:

... whatever the theoretical inferiority of women in the sphere of ancestor worship, they occupied a central position in its performance. The women cared for the domestic shrines and probably carried out the ordinary daily rites of lighting incense . . . it was the women who had prime charge of the ancestors in the home, remembering their death-dates and praying to them in need.<sup>4</sup>

Having learned this about China in graduate school I feared on that day in Korea that the women of my household might well have taken care of ancestor worship while I was out that afternoon.

I was certain ancestor worship would be an important analytical tool. Not only had the village men in P’albondni been filling my ears with tales of their lineages’ illustrious ancestors and genealogical pedigrees, as noted in the introduction, but anthropological accounts of China emphasized that ancestor worship is an important means of social control that functions to regulate, maintain, and transmit Confucian sentiments conducive to the smooth functioning of the patrilineages that structure village life.<sup>5</sup> Newer, less functionally-oriented anthropology of Chinese religion also emphasized that ancestor worship reveals the worshippers’ conception of their social world.<sup>6</sup> Ahern had linked the responsibility to make ancestor tablets to descendants’ obligations incurred through inheritance, but controversy still swirled about whether Chinese ancestors were solely benevolent, or whether (as in Africa) they could punish descendants as a means of social control. In any case, symbolic analysis of ritual actions and offerings could reveal beliefs and classifying principles, while observation of ritual groupings and participation would allow analysis of social relations.<sup>7</sup> It was imperative, I thought, that I observe such

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<sup>3</sup> Maurice Freedman, *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China*. (London: Athlone Press, 1958) p79.

<sup>4</sup> Maurice Freedman, *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China*, p85.

<sup>5</sup> A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society: Essays and Addresses*. (London: Routledge, 1952) p158-60; C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of their Historical Factors*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1961) p285.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur Wolf, “Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors,” In Arthur Wolf, ed. *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974) p 133; Emily Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974) p 91.

<sup>7</sup> Maurice Freedman, “On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion,” In Arthur Wolf, ed. *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974) p 21.

ceremonies so as to be able to analyze principles of village social organization and delineate the important social and ritual groupings.

As potent and pertinent as the Chinese model seemed, however, my reading had made me aware of significant differences between Chinese and Korean ancestor worship. While the two published English-language professional ethnographies available about Korea in the 1970s were quite sketchy about ancestor worship, Chungnim Han's 1949 University of Michigan dissertation based on interviews with refugees from a North Korean village was more informative.<sup>8</sup> Han treated domestic ancestor worship as a "life crisis ritual" related to death, while she treated seasonal ancestor worship together with other holidays such as lunar New Year, and Autumn Eve as rituals of social solidarity. The religious division of labor by gender that she described also differed from the Chinese case. Men in Upper Han Hamlet were in charge of both domestic and seasonal ancestor worship. Since Korean ancestral spirits are fundamentally good and protect the welfare of the family members, Han explained, ancestor worship functions to strengthen a social structure based on patrilineages. She also noted that married women independently worship house gods and other spirits, often with the help of a shaman (*mudang*) saying that the male and female cults operated independently of each other.<sup>9</sup>

While Han's dissertation was very helpful, especially since it supplied Korean terminology, it was clear that the village she studied—that of her husband—was upper-class, and being in North Korea, was now inaccessible to Americans. Leading families in this village even before World War II had sent their sons to high school and college some two hundred miles south in Seoul, the capital. The leading lineage in Upper Han Village, moreover, had a separately built ancestral hall. While Freedman described ancestral halls as ubiquitous in southeastern China, my Korean language reading had made me aware that such *sadang* are found in Korea only in the few villages with high upper-class families.<sup>10</sup> Osgood in 1947 had elicited an account of three generations of domestic worship at lunar New Year at a more ordinary village on Kanghwa Island near Seoul in which he described a temporary altar furnished with ancestor tablets that was set up in the house where the ancestral husband and wife were given three offerings of liquor following which the descendants shared a ritual meal.<sup>11</sup> Brandt, in his study of a South Korean farming and fishing village in South Ch'ungch'öng Province, did not describe ancestor worship in detail. However, a hint of a different interpretation from Han's could be found in the work when, after emphasizing Chinese influence on ancestor worship and its social function "to emphasize and reinforce structural kinship relations," he tantalizingly remarked on the "superstition" involved "in guarding against the evil effects of discontented or malevolent ghosts and as helping to

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<sup>8</sup> Cornelius Osgood, *The Koreans and their Culture*. (New York: The Ronald Press, 1951); Vincent S. R. Brandt, *A Korean Village between Farm and Sea*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

<sup>9</sup> Chungnim C. Han, "Social Organization of Upper Han Hamlet in Korea." (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1949) pp 207-14.

<sup>10</sup> Yi Tuhyön, "Üi-sik-chu," In *Hanguk minsokhak kaesöl*, edited Yi Tuhyön, Chang Chugün, and Yi Kwanggyu. (Seoul: Minjung Sögwan, 1974), 226.

<sup>11</sup> Cornelius Osgood, *The Koreans and their Culture*, pp119-21. Osgood states he was in the village only during the summer of 1947, so this account could not have been based on observation.

ensure the material prosperity and health of the living”.<sup>12</sup> Did that mean that ancestor worship somehow guards against ghosts? Could those ghosts be ancestors? Brandt was silent about these questions. Unlike Osgood, Brandt could speak Korean, but neither ethnographer gave in their writing any Korean terminology on ancestor worship or on supernatural entities, making it difficult to follow up on their insights in further fieldwork. Could the Korean ghosts be part of the same triad of socially defined “gods, ghosts, and ancestors,” that Arthur Wolf had found in Chinese vernacular religion that revealed their “conception of their social world”?<sup>13</sup>

My reading on ancestor worship in Korea thus had given me a bare outline of Korean practices, and my training in the ethnography of China made me certain there were important analytic insights to be found from detailed observation of Korean ancestor worship. Reading on Chinese ancestor worship also suggested what information would be necessary to analyze principles of village social organization and delineate the important social and ritual groupings. I thus knew that I should record meticulously how ancestor worship is conducted, precisely how tablets are written, and how, by, and for whom prayers are offered. I knew I should also record precisely who attended and participated in each ceremony. If I did that, I felt certain I would find a key to village social organization.

Luckily it turned out that domestic ancestor worship ceremonies (*chesa*) in P’albongni were held between 11:00 PM and midnight on the evening preceding the death day. The actual death day in the Hong household was Friday, February 4<sup>th</sup>, so the “night before” that I had feared I missed was, in fact, that very night. I had missed nothing. Ancestor worship turned out to be something families in P’albongni were proud of and wanted outsiders to know about. My host father was, in fact, anxious that I witness the ceremony as an important example of Korean culture.

Because domestic ancestor worship and funeral ancestor worship are both about reciprocity between generations and caring for the souls of known persons, in this chapter I follow the lead of Han (1949) and treat funerals and domestic ancestor worship as a single complex. Lineage rituals will be dealt with in the following chapter.

From encounters with ancestor worship practices among a variety of informants I gradually came to realize, over the course of a year, that while Korean ancestor worship has borrowed certain forms of Chinese ritual and thus looks similar to Chinese practice on the surface, the relationship of ancestor worship to gender and to social stratification in Korea is quite distinct from what I had learned about China. In addition, the treatment of souls in Korea ties ancestor worship to other aspects of the tapestry of Korean folk religion that owe little to Chinese sources.

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<sup>12</sup> Vincent S. R. Brandt, *A Korean Village*, p115

<sup>13</sup> Wolf, Arthur, “Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors,” In Arthur Wolf, ed. *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974, 131-82.

## HOUSEHOLD WORSHIP FOR GREAT GRANDMOTHER

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The family had butchered a chicken that morning so in the evening the house head, his younger brother, two agnatic cousins, and an agnatic *tangsuk* (father's cousin) shared an unusually festive and rich meal of chicken soup with the three surviving lineage grandmothers. Hamlet residents Ko T'aesun and Granny Shin just happened to drop by for dinner as well. Later on, the male cronies of our house head (all village natives and substantial landowners) came by to shoot the breeze. The male children played *paduk* (go), *yut* (a board game in which patterns of cast sticks determine the number of moves), or Chinese chess (*changgi*) trying to keep awake while a school-teacher cousin went into the other room to write the paper tablets and the prayer. These he copied from a ritual manual handwritten in literary Sinitic (*Hanmun*).

The paper ancestral tablets said (in Sinitic):

“Illustrious late great grandfather student *pugun* sinwi

“Illustrious late great grandmother *yuin* of the P'yŏngch'ang Yi Clan sinwi

*Sinwi* (“spirit seat”) is the formal term for this kind of ancestral tablet. The term *pugun*, whose dictionary definition seemed to mean “prefectural lord”, actually is a general title for a deceased male ancestor, or, in the past, for a tutelary deity of a prefecture. The term *yuin* the dictionary tagged as “milk person” but my informants told me it is similarly an honorary title for deceased female ancestors.

A short folding table<sup>14</sup> was set up on the upper portion (*unmok*) of the Inner Room as an altar.<sup>15</sup> It was furnished with two candlesticks and food offerings including three kinds of fruit, three kinds of meat, two bowls of chicken soup, and two bowls of rice. The paper tablets (for great grandmother and her spouse) were pinned to a mat propped against the wall behind the offering table.

When the clock struck 11:00 PM there was a checking of watches. They thought the clock might be a little fast, so they turned on the radio to hear the hour of 11:00 strike, and reset their watches and clock accordingly. The house head was the expert, so the younger cousin did everything under this head head's direction. All of the males, young and old, had to wash before the ceremony. Women didn't.

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<sup>14</sup> As Koreans traditionally sit on the floor, the folding table was 12-14” high, as was standard in rural Korea.

<sup>15</sup> The Inner Room is the main room of a farmhouse where mothers and children dwell. The *unmok* or “upper portion” is the part of the floor furthest from the stove (and thus coolest in the winter), while the *araenmok* or “lower portion” is closest to the neighboring kitchen stove, and is warmest. The *araenmok* is the seat of honor for guests.

The four cousins all put on white *top'o* [ritual coats] while the *tangsuk* from the village up the valley put on his blue *turumagi* [a traditional wrap-around coat]. The ritual manual was set to the right of the table. All the male children were woken for the ceremony—at some effort.<sup>16</sup>

As the ceremony opened with the lighting of the incense the males lined up in front of the altar. The senior surviving male agnatic descendant of the deceased was the chief celebrant (*chegwan*). He began two full bows (*k'ün chŏl*) beginning from standing position down to hands and knees and lowering his head so that it almost (but did not quite) touch the floor. The other men followed suit. He made an offering of a cup of *makkŏlli* (barley beer).<sup>17</sup> After a second set of bows and another offering of *makkŏlli* the head celebrant chanted in a sing-song voice the Sinitic prayer (*ch'ungmun*) that had been copied for the occasion as the participating males remained on hands and knees.

Now the years' sequence is Red Snake, twelfth month Red Rat, 16<sup>th</sup> day Black Dragon of the old moon.

Your filial great grandson, Sŏnggyu, dares to report to  
Late illustrious great grandfather, student *pugun*, and  
Late illustrious great grandmother, *yuin*, of the P'yŏngch'ang Yi Clan. Another year has gone by, and  
Late illustrious great grandmother, the year and time of your passing approaches.  
On viewing the distant past, we cannot overcome our longing

Partake

The chief celebrant's younger brother then made a separate offering of liquor with the requisite bows, as did the *tangsuk* from the village up the valley. The chief celebrant made a final offering. The participants waited as the ancestors took their meal. When they were done the soup was removed and the lid put on the rice bowls. Everybody bowed twice, and the ceremony was over. The chief celebrant burned the paper tablets and prayers in the incense burner.

By now it was about 11:50 PM. During the whole ceremony the women, who had prepared all the food, watched but did not participate in the offerings or bows. Soon, however, men and later the women were enjoying the banquet for the living called *ũmbok* "imbibing fortune". All who had eaten the earlier banquet enjoyed this one as well, including the grandmothers and wives (after serving everybody else).

This all took place in the Inner Room (*anbang*) of the courtyard house, a room associated with the house mistress and her children. I now heard a commotion across the courtyard in the *sarangbang*, the room for senior males. There was a boisterous group of senior men of the hamlet. As it was early in my fieldwork, I wasn't yet able to identify all of them but they seemed to be friends of the house head. They also were served the banquet food and drink.

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<sup>16</sup> Raw notes 1, Feb. 3, 1977.

<sup>17</sup> In 1977 under Park Chung Hee's Yusin system it was still illegal to make *makkŏlli* out of rice since South Korea was trying to be self-sufficient in grain, but did not yet produce enough rice. The less flavorful barley was used instead.

## AN AID IN UNDERSTANDING VILLAGE SOCIAL STRUCTURE?

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This Korean ancestor worship that I had witnessed was explicitly based on ancient Chinese models, but somehow it seemed completely different in spirit from what contemporary ethnographers had been reporting about rural Taiwan and Hong Kong (the only parts of “China” accessible to Western ethnographers in those days). Unlike in pre-1949 Southeast China, for example, P’albongni houses did not have permanent ancestral altars. Nor did they have the equivalent of the Japanese *butsudan*—a publicly displayed lacquer cabinet with ancestor worship material. Most Eight Peaks families had a small box with ancestor worship paraphernalia that they stored away when not in use, and brought out only at the proper time<sup>18</sup>. They wrote paper tablets (colloquially called *chibang*) and prayers in literary Sinitic on the day of the ceremony, and burned them at the end, so Han’s upper-class account of wooden ancestor tablets (*sinju*) wasn’t relevant here. In fact, the only term villagers consistently understood for ancestral tablets was *chibang*.<sup>19</sup> One Wŏnju Yi informant remembered seeing wooden tablets before the Korean War, but nobody in P’albongni had them in 1977. The offerings had been set up on a regular low banquet table that afterwards was used for an actual banquet with participants sitting on the floor, as was customary in rural Korea where chairs and beds were not traditional. The only thing that set “imbibing fortune” apart from a regular banquet was the candles, the small incense burner, and a bowl for discarding spent offerings of liquor that was set in front of the banquet table.

This ritual had been to appease the soul of the celebrant’s great grandmother of the P’yŏngch’ang Yi clan who was born probably in 1898 and died on February 4<sup>th</sup> probably around the time of the Korean War<sup>20</sup>. It took the form of a banquet for both her and her husband celebrated on the night before her death. The souls of the two—who being dead would, of course, only understand literary Sinitic—were summoned to the banquet by burning incense, received the two ritual bows of respect for the dead from the participants, were offered cups of liquor, a Sinitic prayer and a banquet of their favorite food, and then sent back to repose in their graves, presumably satisfied.

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<sup>18</sup> I later saw in other parts of Korea houses of upper class lineage heads (*chonggatchip*) that have a special room with ancestor tablets that is opened only when celebrating ancestor worship. No house in Eight Peaks Village had such a room.

<sup>19</sup> The Hong house head informed me that ancestral tablets can also be termed *sinju* (神主) or *wip’ae* (位牌) in addition to the *sinwi* (神位) written on the paper tablets here. All these terms can be found in a Korean dictionary. Frankly, however, people never understood what I was talking about with any of these terms until I explained that I was talking about ancestor worship.

<sup>20</sup> The genealogy I consulted to get this information gave birth years and death days, but did not give death years for older ancestors. Since years are given in the 60-year sexagenary cycle I had to do a little cross-checking to determine which sixty-year period the birth year belonged to. Since her adopted son was born in 1881 and died in 1942, and since he probably was adopted after the death of her husband whose hope for male issue died with him, her birth year could conceivably have been 1838 rather than 1898.

The ceremony in this Namyang Hong house had been explicitly modeled on the examples in *Sarye P'yŏllam* (A Convenient View of the Four Ceremonies), a hand-written copy of which had been consulted in writing the paper tablets and invocation.<sup>21</sup> This work by Yi Chae was originally compiled in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century and republished in a woodblock edition in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The manuscript is a simplification of the Song Dynasty Chinese scholar Zhu Xi's *Family Ceremonies* that had been decreed in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century to be the model for Chosŏn Dynasty ancestor worship.<sup>22</sup> Doing household ancestor worship for ancestors up to the great, great grandparents (*kojo pumo*) was originally a guideline intended for the upper class, the *yangban*. Lower classes were supposed to worship one, two, or three generations. (Hence three generations in Osgood's village but four in P'albongni whose main lineages considered themselves yangban.)

Rather than matter-of-fact household ritual as seen in China, Eight Peaks Village household ancestor worship was a highly elaborated ceremony that required intricate ritual knowledge, the ability to read and write Hanmun (literary Sinitic using traditional Korean pronunciation<sup>23</sup>), the cessation of all everyday activity for a twelve to twenty-four hour period, cooperation and participation of a large number of kin, and ceremonial activity and banqueting that included neighbors lasting into the wee hours of the morning. This ceremony clearly was a very public statement about ritual propriety and household standing not only in the village, but including even the neighboring village from which a kinsman came to participate. And it seemed to be an entirely a male-centered ritual that celebrated male kinship links. Though the women were necessary to prepare the ritual foods<sup>24</sup> the house ancestors were not, of course, the women's own progenitors since they had married in from outside the lineage.

What beliefs and classifying principles were being revealed? A key informant from the Wŏnju Yi lineage who had given me some background ideology during a discussion of tradition wrote a basic ideological principle into my notebook.

If bone (*ppyŏ*) and blood (*p'i*) come down you can't get married, but if the flesh is a little bit more distant you can get married. Blood and bone refer to the father, and flesh refers to the mother. You can marry your mother's distant clan members [*ch'injok*]. As for your father he's called "same surname same clan seat" [*tongsŏng tongbon*]. Because your mother's surname is a different surname marriage is possible.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The four ceremonies are capping (a coming-of-age ceremony), marriage, funeral, and ancestor worship. The house head told me that he had personally been told to hand copy this book by his grandfather.

<sup>22</sup> Yi Kwang-gyu, "Han'guk ch'injok kwan'gye e mich'in Chungguk ūi yŏngnyang" [Chinese influence on Korean kin relations]. *Illyuhak nonjip* 4 (Seoul National University Department of Anthropology, 1976), p114.

<sup>23</sup> Korean traditional pronunciation of Chinese characters is thought to be derived from the pronunciation of late Tang. It preserves word-final consonants that have been lost in Mandarin. Tones are noted in dictionaries but not pronounced in practice. Unlike in the Japanese *kambun* reading tradition, the order of the written characters is not altered when chanting them.

<sup>24</sup> Even though Ko T'aesun was related through his grandmother, the social relation was between participating males.

<sup>25</sup> Raw field notes March 13, 1977.



Subsequent interviewing confirmed that the bone/flesh metaphor using native Korean terminology was widely known. Housewives I interviewed would confirm, “Yeah, the bones come from the father. The flesh from the mother.” While my informant had used this metaphor to explain the incest prohibition, it has a transparent relationship to patrilineal ideology. Flesh rots away and so do ties through females while bones are long lasting. They stay in the grave for a long time, so four generations of ancestor worship become necessary on the male side. In geomancy that I found relevant for funerals (see below) the bones in the tomb can accumulate the energy of the landscape and spread good fortune to descendants.

Since the ceremony was to care for the welfare of the souls of near ancestors, and for demonstrating filial piety—the cardinal Confucian virtue—it was clearly about reciprocity between generations. According to classical ideology the obligation of filial piety follows from parents giving one birth and care. Ahern, however, had demonstrated that Taiwanese tablets were also made to acknowledge material benefactors.<sup>26</sup> I as yet had no data relevant to this particular interpretation. The obligation the Hong family had to great grandmother was certainly a kinship obligation. But what seemed most striking about it was its demonstration to the world of the Hong’s possession of culture and high status. The importance certain villagers placed on this culture and decorum was demonstrated to me when one of my key informants recited from memory in literary Sinitic the entire sequence of the ancestor worship ceremony from setting up the altar and calling down the spirits to sending the ancestors away at the end.<sup>27</sup> Were the men, then, acknowledging their ancestors’ bestowal of high status and culture on them? While reinscribing and consolidating social ties with one’s close agnatic kin was clearly one consequence of these ceremonies, reinscribing social relations with unrelated local men of equal status who were invited to banquets to “imbibe fortune” (*ũmbok*) was also clearly important. Soon, in fact, I would be invited to other family’s ancestor worship banquets since my education and knowledge of literary Sinitic gave me relatively high social status in the village despite my youthful age. In addition, hidden in the cracks were kinship relations that were not exactly “celebrated” but that nevertheless were acknowledged: Ko T’aesun participated as a matrilineal descendant of the great grandmother being worshiped, and Granny Shin, I found out much later, was a “widowed” concubine daughter-in-law whose existence was otherwise not acknowledged by the Hongs.<sup>28</sup>

What about the gender message? The females prepared the food and watched the ceremony, but did not participate in it. The women with whom I conversed appreciated the status-enhancing aspect of ancestor worship, but they did not know the details of agnatic kinship. Granny, for example, knew that the man whom the house head had told me was a *tangsuk* (father’s cousin) was an agnatic relative, but she did not know his name, or

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<sup>26</sup> Ahern, *Cult of the Dead*, 139.

<sup>27</sup> The phrase for descent of the ancestors is *kangsin*, “descent of the gods” but this phrase is misleading since I was to find that villagers never spoke of the ancestors as gods except when reciting Chinese texts.

<sup>28</sup> She was also extremely poor, so I suspect the family would not have begrudged her a meal for that reason as well.

understand the meaning of the term *tangsuk*. Perhaps the obligation to care for souls of the dead was solely a male obligation. Solving this problem would require further research.

Three days later I attended a second ancestor worship ceremony among the Namyang Hong. In most respects the ceremony resembled the one previously described. Present, however, were two married out daughters, the widowed second daughter-in-law of an uncle from Soep'ani, and Granny Shin. This was in addition to the local lineage members as well, of course, as the house head, the son of the deceased. The older daughter had brought a chicken to be butchered for the banquet. In this ceremony for a father whom most of the participants had known personally, the women came into the room and observed while the younger daughter from Tumiri over Alder Pass who had prattled to her child about "grandpa's ceremony" (*harabi che*) washed and put on Hanbok before the ceremony and took part in the bows asserting defiantly that she had the right to honor her father (who had died six years previously). Five libations were offered—the first two by the eldest son, two more by collateral lineage elders, and the final one by the eldest son. At the time I supposed this female participation was a sign of changing times (but see more on this issue below), and I didn't reflect much about the fact that the eldest daughter had provided the chicken for the ceremony that was the responsibility of her brother who was not poor, and who had inherited the house and property. Later that month some of the Namyang Hong residents of the village went to Ch'unch'ŏn to participate in ancestor worship at the house of the senior-most descendant of their minimal lineage segment (*tangnae*), their great, great grandfather (*kojobu*), the most distant ancestor worshiped in domestic ceremonies, showing that this minimal lineage segment is consolidated through domestic ancestor worship.

Most of the ancestor worship ceremonies that I attended were at this time in the winter and early spring. Ancestor worship banquets included special foods and were practically the only time the basically vegetarian villagers ate meat, since chicken soup was normally served only at this time. This observation provided an opening for considering a different theoretical model inspired not by Chinese ethnography, but by Melanesian.<sup>29</sup> I hypothesized in my ecological monograph that ancestor worship banquets acted as a homeostatic dietary mechanism to distribute high quality food to kinsmen during times of year when the death rate was high, since apart from these ancestral banquets villagers' daily diet was almost entirely vegetarian. Granny Shin, who was dirt poor, might well have been motivated to imbibe fortune by dietary considerations. Through my genealogical investigations, moreover, I was able to statistically show that the death rate was highest in late winter and early spring which was precisely the times when food stores became low, a time that villagers called "barley pass" (*pori kogae*) because by then many families had consumed their rice stores and were subsisting on barley until the summer grain crops

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<sup>29</sup> Roy A. Rappaport, *Pigs for the Ancestors: Ritual in the Ecology of a New Guinea People*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

came in. The ramified banqueting among kin might well have helped sustain poorer agnatic relatives during this time.<sup>30</sup>

Overall, though, even though I was finding significant differences having to do with social stratification and gender, the Chinese model had led me to ask pertinent questions and gather the information I needed to construct my own model, so it still seemed to be serving me well.

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## VILLAGE FUNERALS

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On May 1<sup>st</sup> the gentleman who had first greeted me when I had entered the village the previous December suddenly passed away from what sounded like a heart attack. The next day I watched the geomancer (*chigwan*) brought in from a neighboring village locate the grave. The family had already chosen for the grave a plot of land they owned, so the geomancer's task was primarily to orient the grave taking into account the deceased's horoscope, and to determine the most propitious time for the body to be interred the next day (third day after death). This funeral mobilized most of Big Hamlet in what amounted to a communal ritual.

The next day the village funeral bier (*sangyō*) was brought to the courtyard of the deceased's house. (I had earlier been informed that the villagers maintain a "funeral bier" rotating credit society, a *sangyō kye*). The body had already been prepared by members of this society the day before, and that evening there had been drinking at the house of the bereaved that I didn't feel I could attend.<sup>31</sup> The funeral the next day was a very complex affair. Here I will focus on the four ancestor worship ceremonies held on that day: (1) upon removal of the body from the house and depositing it in the funeral bier, (2) in front of the completed grave, (3) on the verandah of the house after returning with the soul tablet from the gravesite, and (4) at the mourning shrine inside the house after the funeral. The mourning group who participated in the rituals was headed by the eldest son of the deceased, a 19-year-old in full mourning—a hemp head covering tied with straw rope, a hemp cloak tied with a straw belt, and hemp leggings. He was leaning on a staff because he was supposed to be prostrate with grief for his father. Three other sons (the oldest of whom was also in full mourning), the widow, two daughters, and two sons-in-law, all wore appropriate levels of mourning. The widow was joined by her senior sister-in-law and her nephew's wife, neither of whom required mourning dress.

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<sup>30</sup> Clark W. Sorensen, *Over the Mountains are Mountains: Korean Peasant Households and their Adaptations to Rapid Industrialization*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988) pp111-18.

<sup>31</sup> I thought this was out of respect for the bereaved family, but this was a mistaken notion. I later found out that families in mourning are not supposed to be left alone, and everybody visits them even if they were not intimate with the mourners. The night before burial at a house in mourning, I later found, can be almost festive.

Children were shoed away before the body was removed from the house. (Children are thought particularly susceptible at this time to *sangmun sal*, malign forces emanating from the direction of the body, possibly from a spirit).<sup>32</sup> Loud keening led by the women rose up as the body was brought from the house and placed in the bier. An altar with typical ancestral offerings had been placed in front of the bier, and the paper spirit tablet was fastened to a small chair-like holder placed to one side. Perhaps because the chief mourner (the eldest son) was only nineteen, an unrelated adult village male lit the incense, bowed twice, offered a libation, and chanted a prayer in literary Sinitic. He then he took the funeral bell and rang it as he shouldered the chair-like spirit tablet holder at the head of the procession, followed by a man carrying a red lineage banner. The bier covered with a canopy and decorated with colorful roosters and dragons was shouldered by 8-10 village men singing a rhythmic dirge, followed by the mourners both male and female [picture 256] in a manner similar to that described by Osgood for a village on Kanghwa Island (Osgood 1951: 117).

After the body was removed from the coffin and placed in the grave, covered with lime, and roofed with logs, teams of village men took turns doing “lime treading” (*hoedaji*)<sup>33</sup> while singing a refrain to the call of a lead singer, the villager Yi Hanyŏn. I wasn’t able to record the song at the time, and when I later asked the singer to repeat it for me, he told me he couldn’t because it is an improvised song about the life and fate of the deceased. In 1983, however, I found farther information about this song that modified my understanding of funerals, as discussed in Chapters 9 and 12.

The second ancestor worship ceremony followed at the gravesite when the burial was complete. This offering was preceded by an offering, done to the side, to the mountain god. I was able to catch the first four characters of the chant, *t’oji chi sin*, identifying the mountain god as ‘god of the soil’ in literary Sinitic. The ancestral altar erected in front of the grave was laden with unusually rich offerings, all food such as people would eat except for mounds of candy meant more for show than for consumption. The celebrant this time was the senior son-in-law, but otherwise the sequence was the same as in front of the house. Wailing, two bows, a libation, a chanted prayer in Chinese, and two more bows. After this ceremony the mourners accepted condolences from visitors who bowed in front of the altar.

The third ancestor worship took place at the threshold of the house as the tablet stand with the tablet were returned from the gravesite. This time the 19-year-old eldest son performed the libation for the first time in his life. His 17-year-old brother was then literally pushed through the unfamiliar motions of bowing and offering a libation by his senior brother-in-law. The two older married sisters also offered libations.

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<sup>32</sup> Laurel Kendall, “Wood Imps, Ghosts, and Other Noxious Influences: The Ideology of Affliction in a Korean Village,” *Journal of Korean Studies* 3:113-45. (1981)

<sup>33</sup> I did not elicit this term in 1977, but it was confirmed to me by Kim Segeon 5/7/2015.

Finally, the spirit tablet and stand were brought into the house and placed on the mourning shrine, a table erected in a spare room with offerings. Here the eldest son bowed twice and again offered a libation.

These sequences of ancestor worship showed structurally distinct patterns from the household worship described above. Unlike domestic ancestor worship in which the offerings were prepared by the women but enacted by male agnates, here members of the funeral and wedding society, who can be neighbors as well as kinsmen, did the work of preparing the meals and arrangements. Close relatives, male and female, consanguineal and affinal made ritual offerings. These were not simply the so-called *yubokch'in*, or mourning group, since the initial offering had been made by an unrelated senior villager. The loud keening of the women when the body was brought out of the house, and later when it was lowered into the grave, seemed an essential element. To handle the contingency of a 19-year-old chief mourner, the first two offerings were made by a senior male villager and the eldest son-in-law respectively, only devolving onto the inexperienced young man who was the eldest son when the tablet was brought back to the house, showing clearly how villagers improvise adaptations of ritual to handle specific exigencies. The symbolism of the ritual, however, was clearly about tending the soul of the dead: assuaging it with mourning, placing the body in the grave, and then bringing the soul back to the house for ancestor worship by his successor, his eldest son.

During the funeral I took pictures and wrote down what I saw, but I didn't get much in the way of explanation of what was going on. In later serendipitous encounters with village Christians, however, I confirmed that the funeral was about the placement of the soul of the deceased. When I discussed the funeral with an older Christian villager, Yi Chonggak, for example, he told me that the funeral was about the soul of the deceased, and that souls (*hon*) and spirits (*kwisin*) are the same thing, but that Christians don't believe in souls. At that another younger Christian, who noticed the word *kwisin* written in Korean in my fieldnotes, interjected to tell me that spirits (*kwisin*) don't exist on earth because souls (*hon*) go up into the sky.<sup>34</sup> A third Christian, Yi Chisŏn, confirmed that other believers would criticize a Christian who continued ancestor worship and acknowledged that some people believe the souls of the dead must be worshipped to avoid harm from *kwisin*.<sup>35</sup> All of this talk confirmed that Christian villagers—who had all been converted within the past ten years—thought that villagers believe the body goes to the grave and the soul is brought back from the grave to the house for ancestor worship, that it is possible souls might become errant spirits, and that some people fear them. It was ironically easier in 1977 for me to elicit talk of souls from Christians because they had been given explicit teachings on the locus of the soul after death, and as Christians they did not fear that I, as an American, would criticize them for superstition. It was initially harder for me to elicit talk of souls from non-Christians.

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<sup>34</sup> Interviews from 5/20/77.

<sup>35</sup> Interview from 10/4/77.

Another line of evidence came from a funeral for a drowned logger that the village held in July 1977. The villagers felt sorry for the young widow with her baby son, and so put on the funeral as if the man had been a villager. Coworkers lowered the body into the grave. The stench of the body after three days of summer heat was overwhelming. The head coworker who was arranging the orientation of the body jumped out of the grave in fear when he spotted blood oozing through the shrouding. It took a good deal of persuasion to convince him to clamber back down into the grave and finish orienting the body. The widow made the graveside offerings on behalf of her infant son. Yi Yuyŏn, a friend of mine from the Wŏnju Yi lineage who had a sŏdang education and a good grounding in ritual, wrote the Sinitic prayers for the ceremony, and also wrote them into my fieldnotes (that are a little bit chaotic for having been written amid all the hubbub of the funeral). The four prayers are given below.

Sacrificial prayer chanted after the body is placed in the funeral bier:

The soul cart has already departed, thus the rite of procession to the grave is the final end in this world.

Inscription on the paper spirit tablet carried to the grave and back:

Now the year's sequence is Red Snake 6<sup>th</sup> Month 7<sup>th</sup> day of the new moon White Dragon. Illustrious late father student *pugun*, your spirit tablet is already made. We prostrate ourselves to respect your soul.

Prayer to the Mountain God just before the level earth offering:

We dare report to the God of the Soil: today we make a gravesite for student *pugun* [give lineage]. Spirit! Protect the plot to the right from the distress of having no descendants. We respectfully offer up immaculate liquor, dried meat, cured meat and roots. Partake!

Level earth prayer (offered when the tomb is finished):

Now the year's sequence is Red Snake Sixth Month 7<sup>th</sup> day of the new moon White Dragon. Your brightly meritorious orphan son dares to report: Illustrious late father student *pugun*'s form returns to the grave. Become a spirit and return to the room! Arise to the house, the old following the new! It arises! It follows!

These prayers clearly express the ambivalence of a rite of passage: the body and soul pass the house threshold and are laid in the grave in a "final end." Yet the soul is transformed, rises from the grave and returns with the spirit tablet across the threshold to the house as an ancestor.

Later in November informants aware of my interest in ritual gave me a systematic exposition of the ancestor worship done in the house after burial. They listed the rituals from memory in literary Sinitic as follows:

- (1) Ch'o-u (初虞)—the first chesa done after the funeral of a person who has died. In order to comfort the soul of the one who has died the day of the funeral must not pass before this chesa is done.
- (2) Chae-u (再虞)—the second chesa done after the funeral of the person.
- (3) Sam-u (三虞)—the third chesa done after the death of the person. Normally after this chesa is held the members of the lineage go up to the grave and *sŏngmyo*—visit the grave and tend it.
- (4) Chŏlgok (卒哭)—done on the hundredth day, or three months after on a *chŏngil* [day with 4<sup>th</sup> Celestial Stem] or a *haeil* [day with the 12<sup>th</sup> Horary Branch, Pig]
- (5) Sosang (小祥)—done [at the grave] on the first anniversary of the death
- (6) Taesang (大祥)—done [at the grave] on the second anniversary of the death.
- (7) After the taesang the ordinary *kije* are done [i.e. death day household rites]
- (8) Kaejang (改葬)—if things go bad for the descendants, there may be a reburial of the body.<sup>36</sup>

The “three remembrances” or the “three anxious thoughts”, to translate the Chinese character *u* of the first three ceremonies, are the three main ancestor worship ceremonies held at the mourning shrine set up in the house for somebody newly dead. As noted in the ethnographic descriptions above, the first ceremony returns the soul of the newly dead from the grave to the house where it is comforted through a standard ancestor worship ceremony with incense, two kowtows, three offerings of liquor, a prayer, and a meal. The second, the manuals say, should be celebrated at dawn on the first *yu* day after the funeral. The third is supposed to be celebrated at dawn on the first *kang* day after the *chae-u*, after which the mourners visit the the tomb and tend it (as can also be done on lunar New Year, Hansik, and Harvest Moon).<sup>37</sup> In effect the soul is invited into the house for three or four days, and then reintroduced to the tomb where it will stay. The fourth ceremony, *cholgok* is the final household ceremony after which the mourning shrine is dismantled, and no rites are held until the first anniversary of the death when the *sosang* rite is held at the tomb. The mourning period ends with the *taesang* rite at the tomb on the second anniversary of the death.

In the case of Mrs. Pan, however, even these memorial rituals were not enough. Mrs. Pan died in the fall. Normally her body would have been washed and wrapped in linen the day after her death. But she had died of a painful and lingering illness and had taken so much medicine that her body began to smell right away. She had been wrapped in linen and plastic, and temporarily buried on the day of her death. The family thus began their second day observances with formal keening in front of the tent covering the body, before retiring

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<sup>36</sup> Indecks 11/17/1977.

<sup>37</sup> The distinction of *yu* days and *kang* days has to do with the Ten Celestial Stems that are used in traditional calendrics to name the days in the hexagenary system. *Yu* days are those marked by the second, fourth, sixth, eighth, and tenth stems while *kang* days are those marked by the first, third, fifth, seventh, and ninth stems. The three rites thus follow each other in quick succession with at most a day separating the *ch'o-u* and *chae-u* while the *sam-u* occurs on the day following the *chae-u*.

to the inner room of the house (where the body would normally have been kept until the day of burial) to hold their first post mortem ancestor worship. The next day was the burial that in most respects resembled those described above. The geomancer was the same person as before. One villager did explain to me, as preparations were underway for returning the spirit tablet to the house from the grave where we were, that since the soul (*honbaek*) had been buried in the grave, they now were returning the soul home (*panhon*), that is the yin soul, the *baek*, was being left in the grave and the yang soul, the *hon*, was being brought back to the house. Late that afternoon the sons-in-law who had come from town for the funeral left for the city, not hiding their disdain for what they clearly considered backward village customs. As I sat in the house eating with the younger brother of the deceased woman (who was about my age) I began to realize that a shaman ceremony (*kut*) was about to commence in the house to also deal with the soul of the deceased. This is described more fully in Chapter 5.

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## UNLEARNING THE CHINESE MODEL

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It took me the better part of a year to piece together this holistic picture of household ancestor worship and funerals from a variety of people with different relations to me—Christian, non-Christian, male, or female, with a Sinitic education or not—who each gave me a slightly different take on ancestor worship and funerals. While not, perhaps, the master key to village social organization I had hoped for, I did find in 1977 that the study of ancestral ritual gave me insight into the villagers' conception of their social world. Most obvious, and most importantly, the whole complex of funerals and domestic ancestor worship expressed the fundamental importance of reciprocity between the generations, that is the value of filial piety (*hyo*) by which children take care of parents in their old age and after their death because their parents gave birth and raised them. This aspect is congruent with the Chinese model that I brought with me to Korea from graduate school, but to understand other aspects of the Korean ancestor worship complex I also had to unlearn parts of the Chinese model.

In the funeral I could see, of course, the ritual work of rearranging social relations after death. The prayers derived from Chinese manuals point to the Korean funeral, like that of China, to be about care and feeding of the souls of the recently deceased by those close to them. Unlike in China, however, there was a contrast in P'albongni between household ancestor worship that excluded female participation and funeral ancestor worship that did not. In P'albongni, although men carried the palanquin and prepared the grave, female wailing at the removal of the corpse from the house and its lowering into the grave seemed essential to assuage the soul's passage to the grave. Participation in offerings in the funerals I observed was not limited to the mourning kin (*yubokch'in*) that are so well-defined in the ritual manuals. Mourners expressed both fear of the body and longing for the deceased. While the eldest son's ancestor worship in the mourning shrine at the two funerals of village residents may well conform to Radcliffe-Brown's dictum that these rites



“function to regulate, maintain, and transmit sentiments upon which the constitution of society depends”,<sup>38</sup> the sense of danger when crossing thresholds (shooing away of children, fear of *sal*—arrows of misfortune—repeated ancestral offerings), and the concern in prayers for proper placement of the soul that, according to interviews, might go astray shows Korean appreciation of the complexity and ambiguity of social relations after death. The worship of local mountain gods (who in these circumstances are not named deities but generic *genii loci*) in a “Confucian” family ceremony whose protocols are recorded in the ritual manuals that are also used for household ancestor worship also exposes links between Confucian ceremonial and other aspects of Korean vernacular religion that extend beyond the cult of the dead itself. The slippage between souls (*hon*) and spirits (*kwisin*) that informants were telling me about, moreover, implies these entities are not fundamentally separate. All of this was beginning to point to a model of Korean vernacular religion whose “classifying principles” diverge from those of China despite their Sinitic veneer: gods, spirits, and ancestors are overlapping categories that are contextually, rather than categorically, distinguished from one another, while the hobgoblins (*tokkaebi*) discussed in Chapter 5 add an additional twist.

Bringing the souls of the dead back to the house clearly expresses the ideology of corporate family in which the eldest son in each generation continues an existing family line, rather than beginning a new family. Such corporate families never die out so long as a successor is found, and they thus can include both the living and the ancestors of the past who are treated with respect like parents.<sup>39</sup> Intergenerational reciprocity was not just ideological, however. The welfare of the living was partly a consequence of the benevolence of the dead in bequeathing land and social status to the living (as will become clear in the Hong family rite on *kuil* mentioned in the next chapter) motivating reciprocal gifting to the dead from the living. There was also, in short, a material basis for the ideology of filial piety.

Solidarity among the descendants of the great, great grandfather, the most distant ancestor worshiped in domestic rites was clearly created through this household worship. In Korea only the eldest son does ancestor worship, so his brothers must come to his house for the ceremony twice a year (once for the father and once for the mother). For more senior ancestors, too, only the eldest son in the senior male line does domestic ancestor worship, so all the agnatic descendants of a single great, grandfather meet regularly for these ceremonies up to ten times a year forming a minimal lineage called technically a *tangnae*.<sup>40</sup> This solidarity, however, turned out to be less agnatic than I had expected. Worship was always for married couples who had been house head and house mistress who, of course, had to come from a different lineage because of the incest tabu. While succession was in the senior male line, participation was not limited to descendants, since collateral agnates regularly showed up. Moreover, the banqueting that accompanied ancestor worship

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<sup>38</sup> Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function*, 157.

<sup>39</sup> Clark Sorensen, “Asian Families: Domestic Group Formation,” and “Ancestors and In-laws: Kinship beyond the Family.” In Grant Evends, ed. *Asia’s Cultural Mosaic*. Singapore: Prentice-Hall Simon and Schuster (Asia), 89-151.

<sup>40</sup> This term was known to ritually adept villagers but is not widely used in ordinary discourse.

(imbibing fortune—*ǔmbok*) seemed as important as the worship itself. Care of souls may have been the pretext for ancestor worship, but the Sinified style through which ancestor worship was performed sent a strong message throughout the village about the worshipping household's culture and status. Solidarity among non-kin male status equals was celebrated through these banquets, and kinship relations through females also qualified one for participation in banquets even by a normally spurned former concubine, not to mention the solidary group of sisters-in-law and daughters who prepared the ancestral table. Thus, the agnatic emphasis of the ritual manuals does not encompass the full sociality of the total event that is more bilateral and class bound in reality than it seems in ideology.

The division of labor between men and women in household ancestor worship was very striking, and different from China, but the fact the women made offerings to the souls of recent dead at the funeral ultimately made me feel that their exclusion from the Confucian ancestor worship complex was not total in P'albongni. While they typically did not participate in household memorial worship except in a couple of cases, they clearly had a stake and interest, at least, in those ceremonies that were for people they had personally known. Women would travel to neighboring villages to observe ancestor worship ceremonies among bilateral kin. Both men and women talked about the souls of the dead. Most common was the term *hon*, though one educated man used the term *honbaek* and explained that the *hon* is the yang soul, and the *baek* is the yin soul that remains in the grave while the *hon* is what returns to the house for ancestor worship. Nobody gave me a more elaborated explanation of the parts of the souls or where they go after death.<sup>41</sup> Both men and women agreed, however, that souls (*hon*) and spirits (*kwisin*) are basically the same thing. Thus, even though Mrs. Pan's soul was termed a *honbaek* during the funeral, and a *hon* when worshipped at the household memorial shrine, when the village women that evening sent the soul "to a good place" as described in Chapter 5, her spirit inhabiting the pine branch was termed a *kwisin* once it leapt from the spirit tablet in the household mourning shrine into the spirit stick invoked by the shaman.

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<sup>41</sup> "According to what elders say the *hon* is consciousness (*chǒngsin*) and the *paek* is the soul (*nǒks*) in the body, and although its contents are unclear, they use the phrase 'three *hon* and seven *paek*'. When a person dies, they say the *honbaek* flies out of the body, and then after the three remembrances are done the *hon* arrives safely in the spirit tablet (*sinju*) that the descendants have enshrined, and the *paek* stays in the grave somewhat later. Yi Kwanggyu, *Agnatic Groups and Ancestor Worship*, 17.