The Nature of the Mother Goddess in a
“A Lay of King Tongmyŏng”

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The following story, which is contained in Yi Kyu-bo’s “A Lay of King Tongmyŏng,” has been interpreted as being part of a mythical chapter of Koguryŏ nations’ birth. King Tongmyŏng set off for the south until he and his men reached the Ŭm river. But they could find no ferry to cross the river. Chumong raised his whip to the sky and uttered a long, sad, plaintive cry. The fishes and turtles rushed to put their heads and tails together to form a great bridge which the friends at once used to cross over the river... While they were resting under a large tree, a pair of doves messengers sent by his mysterious mother, brought barley grain in their bills.

Yi also quotes parts of the Ku Samguk sagi in order to give specific verification of appropriate data. The mysterious tales were dropped both in Kim Pu-sik’s Samguk sagi and Iryŏn’s Samguk yusa. Later on, the Wei shu and T’ung tien which contain comparatively rich mythological data on the Koguryŏ and Puyŏ period re-tell these stories with little detail and many omissions. Perhaps one explanation may be that the Chinese gave full treatment to their own mythology and skimped a question on that of other countries. However, a question could be raised here as to why the Samguk sagi and the Samguk yusa omitted the mythological part of King Tongmyŏng’s story.

The more one scrutinizes the historiographical value and viewpoint of both the Samguk sagi and the Samguk yusa, the more one is faced with the extremely difficult problem of understanding the original meaning. In general, traditionally speaking, the usual interpretation was that the Samguk-sagi was seemingly

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embellished through the eye of the Confucian historical perspective and the Samguk yusa was colored by that of the Buddhistic worldview. It is widely believed that even though the year of publication of the latter is much later than that of the latter, the former carries more historical information of an archaic nature, for example, ancient foundation myths and stories which the former has probably omitted. According to Ch'oe Nam-sŏn in his Interpretation of the Samguk yusa (Ch'oe, 1943), because the Samguk sagi was written in the style of a formal historiographical system from the Confucian historical perspective, it seems to be perfectly reasonable that the archaic mythological components should be omitted even in order to follow the system of formal historiography which is the essence of the writing style and sentence structure of this period. It could be said that one can compensate for the lack of information in the Samguk sagi by consulting the Samguk yusa which employs a somewhat different style and point of view in terms of the recording of history. However, I do not think that the record of Samguk yusa does not retain the purity of old historical materials. The understanding of the early history which appears in the record of Samguk yusa seems to be based not only on the early tradition up until Koryŏ era but also more on a traditional self-sustaining basis, which differ from the ideas included in the Samguk sagi. The author could collect oral and written forms of the mythological tales on the basis of the above tradition. Furthermore, as being relatively free from the limitation of a systematic written form as well as ideological regulation, the remaining collections are more similar to the original form of the early records and ideology. Incidentally, this alleged, seemingly original form of historical recognition might be viewed from the aspect of the age of the late Koryŏ, not from that of the early age of the Three Kingdoms. Needless to say, there were many periods of social and cultural change from the time of the early Three Kingdoms to that of the late Koryŏ dynasty. Therefore, it is understandable the nature of the archaic historical records as being different from that of the early history.

Considering the limited nature of the Samguk sagi and the Samguk yusa, one can see the reason for the evaporation of such historical information as had been recorded in the Ku Samguk sagi. Further and more importantly, one can recognize the reasons why King Tongmyŏng’s goddess mother and the barley myth were most likely treated as trivial things and finally omitted during the process of compilation of these historical documents. Fortunately, Yi Kyu-bo who tried to return to the old tradition, against the trends of the elite culture in the Koryŏ dynasty, which was built on the interests of a military group, faced contradictions amid the political turmoil both of national and international. As a literati, he set up the King Tongmyŏng’s
myth possibly as a momentum of nationalism, as an expression of the recognition of the early tradition. In other words, the "Lay of King Tongmyōng" could be revived because reexamining even a few parts of the Ku Samguk sagi was necessarily to use the interpretation of this myth. Shortly after that, however, this kind of reexamination process became rather dull. Therefore, the heritage of the conservative view of the early tradition was successfully carried on while creatively the developmental progress in the sequence of the historical recognition ultimately faded away. One of the resulting examples is just as has been stated Iryōn discarded some portions of the tales of the mother goddess. This is a good evidence to show the general regression of historical recognition concerning King Tongmyōng's myth. The contents of the relevant parts, particularly in relation to the mother goddess in general is comparable to the character of the agricultural spirit and should be quoted here from other sources. Basic, common characters are seen, at a glance, largely in spite of several regional differences. The mother goddess functions as a symbol of fertility. She is finally believed to be an agricultural spirit because her role has significantly something to do with the fruit and cereal spirit. In Greek mythology, the agricultural spirit has a horse's head, surrounded by fierce animals like snakes, and she holds a dolphin in one hand and a dove in the other. Barley and wheat are sacrificed to the spirit of the mother goddess. (Larousse, 1959:174).

A situation not unlike that which occurred in India recurred in Greece and the Aegean, where an Indo-European cultus was superimposed on that of the Minoan-Mycenaean tradition in which the Goddess was predominant. Thus, on the mainland and the adjacent islands she was the principal object of worship in the Bronze Age, especially in Crete, Cyprus and the Peloponnese, where her emblems and adjuncts abounded—those of the snake, dove, double axe, horns of consecration, phalli and obese female figurines, together with representations of sacred pillars, trees and mountains on which she is often depicted as accompanied by wild and fantastic beasts and horned sacrificial victims (James, 1959: 128). It was those gods introduced from Syria by slaves and traders that made a much deeper and more permanent impression. Thus, there were successive temples to Syrian deities, and from Northern Syria came Atargatis who in Rome was known as the Dea Syria, popularly called Diasuria, or Iasura, and the goddess of Hierapolis-Bambyste near the Euphrates. Although the character of this Goddess became debauched at this period, it still conformed to the general pattern of the Mother-goddess cultus in Western Asia. Where Syrian slaves abounded and the cult was firmly established, on a number of votive inscriptions dating from just before the Christian era the name of Atargatis and Hadad are combined, the Goddess being identified with
Aphrodite. Fishes and doves were sacred to her, and she was said to have been changed into a fish and her daughter, Semiramis, into a dove (James, 1959: 183-84). Instead of doves, vultures are well-known symbols of the Mother Goddess, particularly in Egypt (Neumann, 1954: 141). Even though the symbols of the Mother Goddess have been different and its social function also has been regionally and temporally diversified, in general, its basic tradition in terms of these cultural traits have preserved. In the Chinese culture sphere, the sun and moon signify the male and female principles of polar tension respectively. This symbolism has incorporated the cosmology of the yin-yang hypothesis. This kind of symbolic transformation can be seen in the context of the Mother Goddess belief system and its phenomenal tradition transmitted to and dominating the symbolism of alchemy (Neumann, 1954: 328). Influences can even be traced to Christianity.

Our attention, in turn, should be heavily focused on the hypothesis of a myth composed of the mother goddess and doves having a considerable connection with the diffusion of barley cultivation. According to E Werth, the development of agriculture can be divided into three different and evolutionary stages. For example, the use of the digging stick, hoe cultivation, and finally plough cultivation in that sequence (Werth, 1954). He also suggested that barley primarily originated from the Northwestern part of India and the cultural complex based on barley cultivation spread throughout the world following the same routes as the diffusion of plough cultivation. His hypothetical formulation further expanded to the connection between plough cultivation and the existence of doves (Werth, 1954: 451). The argument could be reinterpreted to mean that doves, whether wild or domesticated, did not seem to exist outside the circle of the plough cultivation area. Werth kept re-emphasizing the relationship between the agricultural spirit of Mother goddess and doves. Furthermore he pinpointed doves as a divine symbol of the Mother Goddess throughout the Orient. If someone once meticulously traced the above diffusional interconnection, he could not deny that a kind of culture complex consisted of these three traits: the Mother Goddess, barley and doves (Werth, 1954:447).

Barley did not exist in Northeastern Asia at first. It was eventually transplanted from Northwestern India and Central Asia with the introduction of the plough system. Manchuria and other areas where the temperature is rather cold seems to have begun barley planting much later than areas of mild climate. Historically speaking. Viewing the context of interrelationships among the above three cultural traits, one can imagine the appearance of the Mother Goddess in this area. It is already known that since the Paleolithic era, there was of course the Mother Goddess belief regarding fertility and prosperity. Although female gods were
admired and observed as fertility spirits before the introduction of barley, it may be assumed that the Mother Goddess must have been more seriously treated at the time of concentrated efforts toward full barley cultivation. I, therefore, would like to insist that Chumong's divine mother was connected with barley and doves in the *Ku Samguk sagi* and, the mysterious tale was quoted in Yi Kyu-bo's "A Lay of King Tongmyong".

It is really difficult to ascertain the initial time of barley cultivation. However, the Chinese character interpreted as "barley" comes from the turtle-bone hieroglyph of the old China (天野, 1962 69-70). A Chinese scholar, Ding Wei-fen, analyzes a sentence from a chapter of Zhou song si wen pian in the *Shi ching*: "The heaven's god gives barley and wheat to people and asks them to cultivate them" (○我來年帝命率育). He intentionally points out the term "lai mou" (barley and wheat) in the sentence and insists that the names of these plants are the same as those of a place called "lai wu" in the Shantung region. And, further, according to him, names of the plants describe the barley and wheat produced in those areas. He goes on again examining other literature and definitions of some words. For example, he quotes the following words of "mai ju dong fang" (麥居東方: people in the Eastern country raise barley) from the *Ji zhong zhou shu* and, further, "ji shui yi mai" (濟水宜麥: in the area of the Ji shui river the barley grows very well) from the chapter entitled zhu xing xun in the *Huai nan zi*. Considering that Ging zhou situated in the proximity of the river Ji shui and close to the area of Lai wu in Shantung, Mr Ding suggests that barley had been raised from early times around the area of the Tongyi people (天野, 1971, Ding, 1934). However, Mr. Ding considers the word "lai" to mean barley and the character "mou" to mean wheat from the quotation of *Shi chung's* story: "The God of Heaven gives barley and wheat to people and asks them to cultivate them." Further he tries to make a connection with the regional name of Lai wu. This speculation seems to be weak. First of all, the Si wen pian was written in praise of the ancestral founder of the Chu state, Hao ji. Therefore, Mr Ding's hypothesis would not be acceptable because the story deals basically with the time before contact with the people of Tongyi. Even so, the historical documents which state "people in the East raise barley" and "in the area of the Ji shui river the barley grows very well" ultimately and clearly tell us the fact that barley and wheat cultivation were going on in the area of Shantung at the time. Another source says that the discovery of wheat from the layer of the shell-mound fossils at the site of Gu xiang duen which he on the outskirts of the city of Haer bin of the Huei luengjiang sheng in Manchuria (德水, 直良, 1934). *Barley and wheat cultivation seems to have started by means of human power with stone digging*.
sticks in order to till the field deeply enough for planting rather than by means of animal power with plough.

It may be acknowledged from the above comparative analysis that Chumong’s mother should be considered to be an agricultural spirit related to barley cultivation. Aryōng of the Silla seems to have been the same character as the Chumong’s mother. She could be an officiant as King Namhae’s sister, Ano, was founding the clan. Furthermore, one can see the relationship between Aryōng’s role and its relation projection to the task of agriculture, fertility, and prosperity. Even though Aryōng’s character as the agricultural spirit does not appear both in the chapter of Pak Hyōk-kō-se’s accession to the throne in the Samguk sagi and in the legends of the Samguk yusa, our attention must be focused on the following sentence from the Samguk sagi, describing the accession year of Pak-Hyōk-kō-se: “When the King visits six tribes of the country, the queen (Aryōng) follows him. She recommended agriculture and sericulture to people. And then, they can utilize their land productively.”. It seems reasonable to think that the historical transformation of the early Silla Dynasty has the same pattern as shown in the Karak guikki. Later on, some parts of the legends were divided to become portions of vaguely worded parts of written documents. Further Kim Pu-sik ignored important records in the Ku Samguk sagi and discarded the tales of Chumong’s mother. This was because she was an agricultural spirit which was considered to be anti-Confucian ideology. Confucian ideology had its moral basis on the parallel system of the patriarchal family. And also he struck out the legendary character of Aryōng and treated her as a dependent component of the Pak Hyōk-kō-se story. As has been described the myth of the female spirit in Korean history cannot be truly examined because historians later omitted or embellished them. However, we can trace their history and realize what their characters and their meaning were. We can also see the relatively deep relationship between the Mother Goddess myth and the female spirit for agriculture in Europe and the area of the Middle East and some related components with the culture traits of people in the early history of Korea. Those similar kinds of components that could be mentioned are phallicism, as shown on Silla pottery and belief in fertility spirits which has endured until the present times. In relation with the above ideas presentation, one can suggest additional legendary myths including ones about chickens, magpies, hawks, mandarin ducks, etc. and the relief line-painting on pottery showing many kinds of birds. The reason why we mention several different kinds of birds beside doves is that the eagle, owl and others appeared on the pottery and had the same function as the doves did.

If we compare Chumong’s divine mother with the same sort of tales from the
Silla era, we might include the tales of "the goddess mother of the fairy peach" "The goddess mother was a Chinese princess named Shasu. She learned the magic of the fairies and flew through the air to visit the scenic beauties of the land of the Morning Calm, often staying long. Her father the Emperor tied a letter to the foot of a hawk and sent it to her. The message read: "Build your new palace on the mountain where the hawk perches to rest. The princess flew with the hawk and saw it stop on Sôak (West Hill in Kyǒngju). She landed there and became the mountain spirit, calling the hill Sôyǒn-san (West Hawk Mountain). From then on she did many wonders." From the above story one can note the presence of a hawk similar to that of the doves which carry her father the Emperor's letter and the hawk which is a messenger of the goddess mother. The story has been embellished with a kind of Buddhistic worldview. Following the above story, the next sentence goes on "Long ago a princess of China went adrift and was cast upon the shores of Chinhan, where she gave birth to a son who became the founder of a kingdom in Haedong (East of the sea). Hyǒk-kǒ-se and Aryǒng were begot from the princess." Therefore from the above short story, there seemed to be another myth about birth of Hyǒk-kǒ-se and Aryǒng. If the goddess mother of the fairy peach could be identified as an agriculture spirit, this legend could have been created at the time that Chinese agricultural technology was transferred to the Three Kingdoms area. Next, there is a story called, "The two Buddhas of Naksan and Chosin", about a Lovesick Monk which are worth being paid attention in the Samguk yusa.

"In the olden days, when Uisang Pǒpsa had returned from his first visit to China, he heard that the goddess of mercy (Kwanum) had taken up her abode in a cave on the seacoast. He therefore called the place Naksan, after the Indian mountain Pota-Nakkan-san, which is better known as So-Paekhwa (Small White Flower) because the graceful white-clad image of Kwanum Bodhisattva there resembled a white flower on a slender stem... Soon after Wonhyo, another famous Silla monk, made a pilgrimage to worship this Buddha. When he arrived at the southern foot of the mountain, he saw a woman harvesting rice in a field. Wonhyo liked women and peasantry, so he said to her in jest, "Will you give me some rice?" "No, I am sorry, I cannot," she replied "It is a lean year and beggars are not welcome." Proceeding further, he met a woman washing her menstrual band in running water under a bridge. He addressed her in jest: "Let me have a drink of the cool water." "All right, come and drink," rang out her clarion voice, and she scooped up some of the unclean water in a half-moon-shaped gourd and pressed it to his lips. Wonhyo drained the gourd and dipped more water from the mountain stream to quench his thirst. As he did so, a blue bird in a pine tree nearby called to him 'Come on, my good monk Hyuye-Hwasang!' and disappeared, leaving a woman's shoe under the tree. When Wonhyo reached the temple he found another shoe, of the same size and
shape, by the pedestal of the Kwanım Bodhisattva. He then realized that these shoes belonged to the two women who he had met, and that they were both incarnate Buddhas. From that time on people called the pine from which the bird had called the Kwanım pine. Wonhyo wished to enter the cave and see the graceful figure of the living Buddha there, but a storm was raging at sea and his little boat almost capsized, so he was forced to desist.

The Indian mountain Pota-Nakka-san from the story originally comes from the imitation of the sound of the Sanskrit word, Potalaka, Potala. Those regional names stet known in legend to be the original place of the Kwanım-Bodhisattva on the southern coast of the Indian peninsula. After unification, the people of the Silla named the Kumnan cave along the sea coast in the T'ongch'ŏn county, Kangwon Province as the Pota-Nakka-san and believed this area to be the original place of the Kwanım Bodhisattva. Incidentally, this story probably tells us about a kind of acculturation phenomenon between the old belief system of the female spirit, the controlling fertility and prosperity with the Buddhistic components of the monk's character. From the story, one cannot but notice the relationship between the female spirit and rice and later on between the female spirit and the woman's menstrual band as well as the blue bird. This potential connection can be recognized as enough evidence to justify the existence of the female spirit. It is interesting to figure out the transformation from barley to rice at this stet. According to the chapter on the mountains and rivers of the T'ongch'ŏn county Kangwon province and the Kumnan cave in the Yūji-saingnam, a scholar, Yi Che-hyon and a poet An Ch'uk, in the late Koryŏ dynasty described the landscape of the cave relation to the sea and flying blue bird into the cave. The bird was called the sea-bird by the fishermen. One point can made of the relationship between the sea-bird and good catches of fishing industry.

We have thoroughly discussed the nature of the female spirit as a kind of agriculture spirit. The Yŏngsŏng (agricultural spirit) and the Sajik (land spirit) from the chapter on Koguryŏ history in the Wei shu comes surely from Chinese ideologies. And one of these may raise the question of its reality. The Chinese translated the Korean belief in Chumong's goddess mother to the Chinese belief in Yŏngsŏng and the Sajik. This question should be investigated later in another paper. Anyhow, the belief in the Mother Goddess can be also found in the chapter on the Koryŏ dynasty in the Zhou shu. "There are two divine shrines: one is believed as the Puyŏ spirit, a wooden figure in woman's shape, the other is considered to be the T'unggo spirit, believed to be the founder, Puyŏ spirit's son. People guarded them inside the sacred building. This belief is described as sacrifice for the daughter of
the Habaek and Chumong.” From the record, there must be two shrines for King Tongmyŏng’s spirit and his mother goddess. This belief has been transmitted up to the time of the Koryŏ dynasty, as it appear in Sŏnhwa bongsa Koryŏ-Do-gyŏng. The chapter on the Han period of the Wei shu says: “People observe and sacrifice for the spirits after sowing in their fields in May. At this time, all the people got together and sung, dance, and drink for days and nights. When they dance together, they get up and make a circle and trot the land and jump into the air. This dancing looks exactly like the takmoo in China. After harvesting, people get together and play and dance again.” People sacrifice and prepare for a ceremonial rite in May in order to guarantee a good harvest and another rite in October for thanks for good harvest to the spirit. During these two cyclical and seasonal rituals, people dance and trot the land. This scene looks like the present Nongak (agricultural music by Farmer’s band). The relationship between them must be considered to be a deep and considerable cultural tradition. The spirit which people sacrifice to at the time of Han could be assumed to be similar to the goddess that we have been discussing in this paper.

p.s.: Recently a bronze jar was unearthed in the vicinity of the city of Taejŏn. It includes a drawing pattern in which one man ploughs with a digging stick called a ttabi and a bird on a tree with several boughs. This bird, can be thought of as being of similar character to the bird examined in early part of this paper, on the one hand. On the other hand, the Western queen myth shows the same animals as shown in the Greek myths of the agricultural spirit. From this evidence, both the Western queen myth and the mother goddess of the fairy peach seem to have originally contained the nature of agriculture the spirit. (see Han Pyŏng-sam, 1971)

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GLOSSARY

An Ch’uk 安軸
Ano 阿老
Aryŏng 阿英
Chinhan 秦韓
Ch’oe Nam-sŏn 崔南善
Chumong 朱蒙
Ding wei-fen 丁維汾
Ging zhou 青州
Gu xiang duen 頤鄉屯
Haerbin 哈爾濱
Habaek 河伯
Haedong 海東
Han 韓
Hao ji 后稷
Huai nan zi 淮南子
Huei lueng juang sheng 黑龍江省
Iryŏn 一然
Ji shui 濟水
Ji zhong zhou shu 汲家周書
Kwanim 観音