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Miracles in Korea

HONG MANJONG

Translated by DAL-YONG KIM

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Translator's Preface

Miracles in Korea is a collection of thirty-eight stories about Korean mountain wizards, Taoist hermits with supernatural powers, divine Taoists, and divine beings, who enjoy perennial youth, longevity, and immortality and sometimes ascend to heaven. Its author, Hong Manjong (1643–1725), drew upon *A Survey of the Geography of Korea* and several unauthorized chronicles and compiled the stories in chronological order from the Ancient Joseon Age (2333 B.C.–346) to the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910). Jeong Dugyeong drew up the "Preface" to this collection, Song Siyeol wrote the "Postscript," and Hong Manjong's adopted son added some anecdotes. Hong Manjong showed that the idea of a mountain wizard and Taoist thought had always existed as underlying presences within Korean history. He implicitly argued against the widespread belief that they failed to develop religious denominations or cultural sects. *Miracles in Korea* enumerates a large number of anecdotal details in illustration of the idea of mountain wizardry and presents the idea as an inherent traditional form of Korean spirituality which later merged with Taoist thought.

The thirty-eight anecdotes demonstrate that mountain wizardry, Taoism, and supernaturalism have survived to influence all classes of the Korean people in their pursuit of eternal youth, longevity, and immortality and in their practices of fortune-telling, animism, totemism, geomancy, and sun worship. Traditional Korean spirituality is a syncretic multiplicity of conventional religions including Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism, and Taoism. The elective and contrastive components of the religions have produced a strong sense of cultural dynamism. Korean mountain wizardry, Taoism, and supernaturalism did not act as the primary ruling ideologies of ancient Korean kingdoms but have formed the spiritual backbone of the common people. Hong Manjong's book provides much information about the people, activities, and customs associated with the original aspects of Korean religiosity.

Hong Manjong was a scholar and poetry critic during the middle of the Joseon Dynasty who went by the nickname of Uhae and by the pen name of Hyeonmukja or Jangju. He passed the first state examination for office in the first year (1675) of the reign of King Sukjong and was appointed to several government posts. He later resigned from government service and engaged in Korean and Chinese studies. He wrote books on history, geography, narrative literature, songs and ballads, and poetry and published *Fifteen Critical Essays*. He also compiled *The Complete Catalogue of the Eastern Country's Chronicles*, *The Dense Wood of Poems and Narratives*, and *Miracles in Korea*.

Hong Manjong presented Korean mountain wizards, Taoist hermits, divine Taoists, and divine beings as weary of social activism and aware of the fragility of human achievements. They usually retreated to a countryside or mountain setting to commune with natural beauty. The wizards, the hermits, and the divine Taoists composed or recited poetry about nature or painted pictures of natural settings in their attempts to capture the creative forces at the center of nature's vitality. They shared their outings with friends, drinking a bit of wine, and enjoying the autumn leaves or the moon. The author included the founders of the ancient Korean kingdoms in the list of the Korean mountain wizards and supernatural beings of divine birth, perennial youth, longevity, and immortality. All of the founders including Dangun, Park Hyeokgeose, and King Dongmyeong existed before Chinese Taoism was first introduced to the Goguryeo Kingdom (37 B.C.–668). It was in the seventh year (624) of the reign of King Yeongnyu that Chinese Emperor Gaozu of the Tang Dynasty sent a Taoist preacher to teach *The Classic of Morality*. Hong Manjong traced the original source of Korean Taoism to the birth myths of ancient Korean kingdoms. He made his book a precious source for the study of Korean mountain wizards, Taoist hermits, and supernatural beings.

Korean mountain wizardry, based on mountain worship, formed the basis of Korean primitive religions. The idea of mountain wizardry is a key component of almost all the myths and folk narratives of the Korean people. The idea was also associated with modern folk religions that appeared after the Eastern Learning Revolution in the North Jeolla region in 1894. Korean mountain wizardry generated the birth myths of ancient Korean kingdoms, whose original archetype is the Dangun mythology. The wizardry, along with Korean shamanism, has served as the background knowledge for Korean popular spirituality.

As Choi Chiwon (857–?) in "A Preface to the Epitaph of Gentleman Nan" explains, Korean mountain wizardry demonstrates a romantic turn of mind that later materialized into the profound reason and immeasurable arts of the flowers of youth in the Silla Dynasty (57 B.C.–935). The system of Silla chivalry began to be put into practice in the thirty-seventh year (570) of the reign of King Jinpyeong and appropriated the care-free and elegant lifestyle of the four

mountain wizards of Silla. Sill chivalry replenished the style with Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist virtues. The chivalry aimed at excelling in beauty, bravery, and military arts and functioned as a basic instrument for educating the talented youths of the kingdom. Indigenous Korean mountain wizardry merged with the disciplinary Chinese Taoism introduced in the wake of frequent cultural exchange between the Unified Silla Kingdom and the Tang Empire. The scholars of the Silla Kingdom who returned home from studying in Tang introduced disciplinary Taoism to the Korean people. Mountain wizardry became the most unique and remarkable folklore legacy of Korean Immortal Taoism, or Korean Taoism immersed in mountain wizardry and supernaturalism. *Miracles in Korea* deals with the identity and personality traits that led Korean Taoist hermits to transform themselves into Korean mountain wizards.

Miracles in Korea compiles the lives of various Korean Taoist hermits and mountain wizards by drawing upon a diversity of sources: expositions, comments, direct observations and the like. Hong Manjong picks out more than thirty personages of various backgrounds who typify Korean Taoism and mountain wizardry and concentrates on their dominant religious traits to the exclusion of other aspects of personality. The hermits and wizards demonstrate the nature of Korean religiosity by revealing their moral qualities, ethical standards, and religious principles through their actions, speech, thoughts, and outward appearances. More than thirty Korean Taoist hermits and mountain wizards are, however, identifiable individualized variants of a traditional type built around the single idea of Korean Immortal Taoism. They are all portrayed with much individualizing detail and subtle particularity in various moral temperaments, psychological motivations and spiritual leadership, so they are named "mountain wizards," "Taoist hermits with supernatural powers," "divine Taoists," or "divine beings," respectively or interchangeably, in English terms. However, their lives provide readers with direct and immediate access to many distinguished aspects of that inner Taoist life, i.e., to the intellectual, emotional, and moral complexities of Korean Taoist personality that lie behind the title of a Korean Taoist. The lives of Korean Taoist hermits and mountain wizards probe and explore the puzzling questions of Taoist human existence. *Miracles in Korea* gives meaningful insights into Korean Immortal Taoism and provides a comprehensive vision of ancient Korean life.

Taoism is based upon the ideas and attitudes of Laozi (580 B.C.?–480 B.C.?) and Chuangzi (370 B.C.?–280 B.C.?), two Chinese scholars who dedicated their lives to balancing their inner spirit. These scholars lived at the time of social disorder and religious skepticism after the collapse of the Zhou Kingdom. They developed the notion of the Tao (way of life) as the origin and force of all creation, speaking of the Tao as unknowable in its essence but observable in its manifestations. Almost all Taoists believe that the Tao lies not only behind the functions and changes of the natural world but also behind the

bewildering multiplicity and contradictions of human society. Laozi and Chuangzi thought that the concept of Tao was the answer to the burning issue of that day—how to find a stable, unified, and enduring social order—and that the order and harmony of nature is far more stable and enduring than either the power of the state or the civilized institutions constructed as a result of human learning. Many Chinese Taoists maintained that the purpose of human life is to lead a life according to the fundamental, universal principle of Tao which requires passivity, calm, non-striving, humility, and lack of planning. Laozi and Zhuangzi reinterpreted the ancient nature worship and esoteric arts of Chinese people in order to find out how to use knowledge of the Tao to enhance and prolong life. Some Taoist hermits searched for "isles of the immortals" whom they understood as many supernatural manifestations of the one Tao in the natural world and within the human body. They experimented with herbal medicine and pharmacology that could ensure immortality and practiced both magic and proto-science. *Miracles in Korea* implicitly deals with the principles and practices of Immortal Taoism through its narratives of Korean Taoist hermits.

Chinese Taoism won the sympathy of the Korean people without difficulty who were already familiar with the conventional ideas of Korean mountain wizardry and supernaturalism. As Chinese Taoists encouraged avoiding public duty in order to search for the transcendental world of the spirit, Korean mountain wizards and divine Taoists beings had no concern for affairs of the state, mundane matters of administration or elaborate ritual. *Miracles in Korea* shows that Korean mountain wizards, Korean divine Taoists, and Korean immortal Taoists never failed to use Taoist methods for building up a healthy body. They endeavored to inhale the "atmospheric force" of nature through dietary treatment, medicine, and breathing exercises. Yeon Gaesomun (603–665), the prime minister of the Goguryeo Kingdom, expressed his belief in the superiority of Taoism over Confucianism and Buddhism and invited Chinese Taoists including Shuda to the kingdom. Chinese Taoism was established as the state religion of the Goguryeo Kingdom in the second year (643) of the reign of King Bojang.

During the Goryeo Dynasty (918–1392) that established Buddhism as the state religion, legalistic and ritual Taoism came into vogue and was used even to pray for the good luck and virtue of the royal household. Korean mountain wizardry became so intermixed with Buddhism by the mid Goryeo Dynasty that its original ideology was hardly perceptible. Korean mountain wizards now have their shrines in almost every modern Buddhist temple. During the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910), the Confucian doctrines of Zhuzi (1130–1200) prevailed, but Immortal Taoism was popular enough to draw religious attention from the populace. Groups of Confucian intelligentsia adopted the idea of disciplinary

Taoism. Taoism has been established as a traditional Korean religion which serves as a link between the Confucian tradition and folk tradition.

Immortal Taoism encouraged the Korean people to take the joyful and carefree attitude toward life which Korean mountain wizards and divine Taoists had already promoted. Taoism, mountain wizardry, and supernaturalism historically performed major roles in offsetting the moral and duty-conscious, austere and purposeful character of the Korean people that was usually ascribed to Confucianism. *Miracles in Korea* shows that both the Taoist idea of Laozi and Zhuangzi and the image of a mountain wizard or supernatural being inspired in the Korean people both a love of nature and a wish to retreat into a mountain. Both the ideas and the images present nature as inspiring an intense affirmation of life and encourage the life of health, well-being, vitality, longevity, and even immortality. *Miracles in Korea* demonstrates that the search for the elixir of life, Taoist regimen, and internal discipline characterize the life of a Korean mountain wizard or immortal Taoist. Taoism, mountain wizardry, and supernaturalism encourage a positive, active attitude toward the occult and metaphysical theory on the nature of reality, whereas the agnostic, pragmatic Confucian tradition considers these issues of only marginal importance. The Taoist heritage has put emphasis on individual freedom and spontaneity, laissez-faire government and social primitivism, mystical experience, and techniques of self-transformation. Immortal Taoism represents the antithesis to Confucian concern with individual moral duties, community standards, and governmental responsibilities.

Miracles in Korea deals with the cultural fabric of the Korean populace into which Korean mountain wizardry, Taoism, and supernaturalism were woven, so the book serves as a source of insight into Korean spirituality and culture. Several anecdotes present Korean popular magico-religious practices that constitute unique aspects of Korean spirituality in general and Korean Immortal Taoism in particular. The ancient practices of spirituality have been admired by the Korean populace and are found particularly in biographies of noted Korean religionists. The practices can give access to some of the mythical, archaic, and primordial wisdom of the Korean populace that has been lost or buried through the modernization process. As Jeong Dugyeong (1597–1673) said in the "Preface" to *Miracles in Korea*, Hong Manjong rendered a distinguished service in preserving precious knowledge of Korean spirituality for posterity. The book demonstrates that Korean people have grafted the foreign religion of Taoism onto the native idea of a mountain wizard and a supernatural being and developed it into their own culture.

The English translation of *Miracles in Korea* primarily intends to introduce to the English-speaking world many Korean Taoist hermits' incorporation of Taoism into their world view, value system, attitudes, and beliefs. Thus, the English edition is not guided by the Korean text alone but considers English-

speaking cultures' conceptions of social institutions, religious spirituality, and linguistic norms. This edition endeavors to recognize the ideological, cultural, and linguistic background presented in the original text by the author and open the way to realize the overall meaning potential at the other end of the communicative channel. The English version aims to enable communication to take place across cultural barriers. The original copy of *Miracles in Korea* gives brief accounts of Korean mountain wizards, Taoist hermits with supernatural powers, divine Taoists, and immortal Taoists who appear in anecdotes, legends, and some books.

The original text of *Miracles in Korea* was written in Chinese characters in 1666 and translated into modern Korean by Lee Seokho in 1982. My English version of the book attempted to be made in consultation with the original copy in literary Chinese as well as with the modern Korean translation. Hong Manjong cited and mentioned many works of Korean and Chinese literature, so the Romanticized spelling of the East Asian proper nouns in the English edition is done according to "The Romanization of the Korean Language" published in 2000 by the National Academy of the Korean Language and to "The Standard Pronunciation of the Chinese Language" set in 1985 by the National Construction Committee of the Chinese Language. The English version of Hong Manjong's work has the Romanized names of persons, kingdoms, and places used in Korea and China, side by side or alternatively, in accordance with the language used by the speaker or narrator. Their literary meanings in English are sometimes added, where necessary.

The translator added footnotes with specific details in order to discuss peculiar Taoist events and define Taoist terms, concepts, and points of view that have been prevalent in Korean and Chinese society. The footnotes can lead to understand Korean (and Chinese) spirituality, religiosity, cultural features, and popular psychology. An index was also added to provide a comprehensive list of Taoists, monarchs, books, Taoist concepts, and cultural items that Hong Manjong mentioned for demonstrating his interpretation of Korean history, society, and culture. The index supplements the Romanization of Korean or Chinese proper nouns by the addition of Korean or Chinese characters for the convenience of readers who have knowledge of the Korean or Chinese language. The English translation of *Miracles in Korea* attempts to elucidate the cultural patterns, themes, and postulates presented in the Korean text, considering the norms prevalent in the English culture. Korean and English discourse have their own specific ways of expression that are associated with different social contexts. Hong Manjong dated events in two ways: by the reigns of Korean or Chinese monarchs and the sexagenary years of the lunar calendar that could be converted into the twelve-year cycle of the animals of the zodiac. The translator let those titles and names stand and added the corresponding dates of the Chinese era parenthetically.

The formulation of Korean ideas in the English language requires various translation-inherent explications that are dictated by differences in the syntactic and semantic structure of the two languages, such as an increase in the number of separate words in the English syntax and a choice of words with more specificity in the English text, by differences in text-building strategies and stylistic preferences between the Korean and English languages and by differences between the two cultures. For a proper rendering of the Korean words and phrases into the English language, the translator needs a wide range of information about the meanings of word choices, about how the Korean and English languages combine their collocational and syntactic behaviors, about what values, beliefs, and perceptions the language behaviors produce and about what the behaviors tell the reader about the author's attitude. St. Jerome maintained that the sense should have priority over the form when he translated the Hebrew Bible and the major deuterocanonical books into Latin. He rendered one sentence rather than one word at a time, going across the boundary between freedom and fidelity.

St. Jerome launched a divergent attack on literalism, but the English version of *Miracles in Korea* has a word-for-word translation of book titles and cultural items in Korean and Chinese. The important semantic element carried implicitly in the Korean (and Chinese) language requires both implicit introduction into and explicit identification in the English language. The translation of songs and poems needs to be rendered literally because the language of poetry is predominantly connotational rather than denotational and always removed from ordinary speech. The translation of poetry presents difficulties in conveying all the features of the original source language in a manner acceptable to the target language culture and tradition, so the success of the translation is determined by the intrinsic poetic value of the translated text. The English poet Robert Browning insisted that poetry translation "ought to be absolutely literal, with [the] exact rendering of [the] words, and the words placed in the order of the original. Only a rendering of this sort gives any real insight into the original." The English edition of *Miracles in Korea* endeavors to do a literal translation of the original poetic text, constantly reworking and reassessing the translated English text in an attempt to make it correspond to the Korean text on as many levels as possible.

The English translation of *Miracles in Korea* benefited from the help of professors, including Professor Kim Gihyeon and Professor Na Kyung Soo of Chonnam National University in Korea on the Chinese language and Chinese philosophy and on Korean folklore, respectively. The professors assisted me in specific areas, but the responsibility for the translation falls on me. I am grateful to the Korea Literature Translation Institute for financially supporting the English translation of this work. I also thank Chonnam National University for financially helping the publication of the work.