

## Book Reviews

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*The Foresight of Dark Knowing: Chōng Kam Nok and Insurrectionary Prognostication in Pre-Modern Korea.* Translated and annotated, with an introduction, by John Jorgensen. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018. (ISBN: 9780824875381)

With this translation of the *Chōng Kam nok*, an enigmatic underground classic from the latter half of the Chosŏn dynasty, John Jorgensen has bestowed upon the global Korean Studies community a product of prodigious scholarship. Actually, he has given us two displays of scholarly virtuosity. His introduction to his translation of *Chōng Kam nok* is substantial enough to pass muster as a monograph in its own right. And the translation, even without that introduction, is worthy of sitting on the bookshelves of all of us who study Chosŏn Korea.

As Jorgensen makes clear in his translation, *Chōng Kam nok* is a series of texts, instead of one coherent text. The thread that joins those various texts together is their claim to foretell the future, which is usually, at least in the short term, quite bleak. In its prophecies, a lot of death and destruction is forecast, though sometimes a better life is promised eventually through the emergence of a new dynasty or the appearance of a savior, a “true man.”

To generate its prophecies, the *Chōng Kam nok* draws on a variety of resources, including geomancy, numerology, the Yijing, and glyptomancy (defined by Jorgensen on p. 15 as “the deconstruction of a character into elements to form other characters or combination of elements of characters to form a phrase in a kind of cryptic crossword”). Those various approaches to foreseeing the future are intertwined, making it necessary for the translator to unravel them in order to make sense of this document. To make this work even more difficult to translate, it is written mostly in a Literary Chinese that “does not entirely conform to the grammatical norms of Literary Chinese.” (p. 4) On top of that, many of the terms used in this work cannot be taken literally, since they represent a sort of code that can only be deciphered by someone who understands their geomantic, numerological, or glyptomantic implications in a world view that assumes that change is constant, but there are patterns of change that can be discerned and taken advantage of. Those patterns are hinted at in the allusive references that dominate this text. To make this text understandable today, the translator has had to make the implicit explicit.

Undaunted by the scope of the challenge facing him, Jorgensen plowed ahead and

translated the *Chǒng Kam nok* corpus anyway. However, to enable his readers to understand his translation, he first presents an introduction that is actually a masterful (and dense) history of geomancy in Korea, and its connection with prognostication. He emphasizes geomancy because he sees this work as primarily a manifestation of Koreanized geomancy. One major contribution of his introduction is the clear distinction he draws between geomancy in its homeland of China and what he labels the “politicized geomancy of Korea” (politicized geomancy is geomancy used to predict the fortunes of the ruling dynasty.) He shows how both were manifest in arguments at court and in differences of opinion between the court and people in the countryside. It is politicized geomancy, Jorgensen argues, that dominates *Chǒng Kam nok*, since its major focus is its predictions that the Yi family ruled Chosŏn would not be on the throne much longer.

Even those who aren’t interested in reading *Chǒng Kam nok* in English will still find the introduction to this translation useful if they want to learn more about how Koreans have dealt with the uncertainties life brings. It traces in great detail the use of geomantic prognostication on the peninsula from the ninth century all the way into the twentieth century. Along the way, Jorgensen dismantles the long-accepted notion that the monk Tosŏn (827?-898?), as a master of geomancy, played a major role in the selection of the Koryŏ capital, and also predicted the rise of Wang Kŏn as the legitimate founder of a new dynasty. He also shows that many prophecies, including many in the *Chǒng Kam nok*, are actually “predictions,” of the past, forgeries concocted by later generations in order to strengthen the claims of rulers to legitimate power.

Most of Jorgensen’s historical introduction, however, focuses on the Chosŏn period. After all, that is when the *Chǒng Kam nok* appeared (Jorgensen notes that there is no mention of it before the eighteenth century). He begins by arguing that much of what is written about the role of the monk Muhak (1327-1405) in the founding of the Chosŏn dynasty may be accurate, but his skill as a prognosticator is overrated since he apparently did not do some of what he is credited with doing, or predict what he is credited with predicting. Jorgensen goes on to show that many of the rebellions against the throne in Chosŏn, and there were many over its five centuries, were justified with references to the same sort of fortune-telling we see in *Chǒng Kam nok*. Prognostication, as Jorgensen shows, was used both by rulers to enhance their prestige and, conversely, to gain support for their cause by those who wanted a change on the throne.

There is nothing comparable in English to Jorgensen’s account of prognostication in Korean history. That alone is enough to make this book a significant contribution to a better understanding of pre-modern Korean history. That said, there are a few typos and misleading statements readers should beware of. On page 110 Jorgensen says that the rebel Chǒng Yŏrip died in 1598, but on the next page he gives the correct date of 1589 for his demise. And, on page 112, Jorgensen refers to what he calls “Yulgok’s promotion of *kei* to the primary position.” Yulgok Yi I (1536-84) would have protested loudly against such a characterization of his philosophy. He conceded that *li* needed *kei* to be active but he still put *li* in charge, giving it the authority to direct *kei* to behave appropriately. In another misleading statement,

on p. 175 Jorgensen writes that Ch'oe Che-u (1824-1864), the founder of Tonghak, was possessed by Okhwang Sangje. Ch'oe addressed the spirit he conversed with as Sangje. He never called him Okhwang Sangje, since he was drawing on ancient Confucian terminology rather than Daoist tradition.

Despite these minor missteps, Jorgensen's introduction well prepares the reader for his translation. Only a little more than half as long as the introduction, Jorgensen's translation of the *Chǒng Kam nok* is a tour de force. The source text, read superficially, appears to make no sense, since much of it is not much more than a series of cryptic predictions. Jorgensen's translation, at first glance, also appears to make no sense, either. But it appears to make no sense in exactly the same way the original appears to make no sense, not an easy feat for a translator to achieve. Fortunately, Jorgensen helps his readers understand this enigmatic text by providing well over 1,200 footnotes that suggest ways to interpret both the unusual terms this text uses as well as the unusual ways it uses familiar terms.

For example, on p. 233, Jorgensen refers to a passage in the *Yijing* to make sense of the sentence "where the high-flying dragon arrives, the fallen wild goose will have regrets." He tells us that means that rulers who have risen to the heights of power need to be careful lest they lose their throne and become filled with regret. However, there are some sentences even Jorgensen cannot explain. What does the text mean when it says, on p. 264, "in one pitcher, a heaven (paradise) will be built and the hunting horse still loves"? And why would the text advise readers, on p. 252, "you cannot do better than being cold and poor, so do not seek wealth, for if you are wealthy many of you will die..." The literal meaning of this sentence is clear but why does this text encourage the pursuit of poverty and why does it say that, if you become wealthy, you will die? Does it mean that the poor will not die as early as the rich will? *Chǒng Kam nok* is full of such non-sequiturs, and, since Literary Chinese is heavily dependent on context, that makes it extremely difficult to understand and translate. Jorgensen has nonetheless succeeded in producing a translation that is both readable and understandable (for the most part!).

However, as valuable as this book is, I should point out that it is not an easy book to read. Undergraduates may balk if they are told to read a substantial chunk of it. It is very dense, filled with minute details of history as well as an abundance of explanations of complicated allusions. Moreover, in addition to the 1263 footnotes to the translation, there are over 1,000 additional footnotes for the introduction. As a result, it requires a close reading.

But that effort is well worthwhile, since this translation provides insights into an important feature of Chosŏn culture that heretofore has been on the back burner of Korean Studies. The *Chǒng Kam nok* is filled with warnings of bad times ahead, and predictions of the fall of Chosŏn's royal family. That is because it was produced by Chosŏn's dissenters and marginalized, people who wanted the Chosŏn dynasty to fall. Those who wrote *Chǒng Kam nok* are most likely not the same people who wrote the court documents and essays on philosophy and statecraft that historians of Chosŏn rely on today. This translation, therefore, provides a rare glimpse in English of the thinking of those normally invisible to historians of Korea, who tend to rely on texts produced by the elite. It shows us how those outside elite

inner circles dealt with the uncertainty that life brings, especially life at the margins. By giving us a more comprehensive view of how Koreans thought in Chosŏn times, Jorgensen, with this study of prognostication and the *Chŏng Kam nok*, has made a substantial contribution to a more accurate understanding of Korean history and Korean culture.

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*Elusive Belonging: Marriage Immigrants and “Multiculturalism” in Rural South Korea.* By Minjeong Kim. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2018. 216 pp. (ISBN-13: 9780824869816)

For a long time the Korean peninsula has been considered one of the most homogenous parts of the world. This image of Korea has above all been a deeply cherished self-image for both Koreas during the postcolonial period and even something of a state ideology in the form of the ethno-nationalistic, so-called *tanil minjok* or *minjok tongjilsŏng* cult. Even if the northern part of the peninsula might perhaps actually be one of the most homogenous nations in the world, South Korea is nowadays not homogenous at all.

Since the armistice of 1953, the Eighth US Army (EUSA) has had a continuous presence in the country and there has always been a small Chinese so-called *hwagyo* minority. While mass emigration of all sorts including labour emigration, marriage emigration and overseas adoption plagued the country from the end of the war and well into the 1990s, creating a huge worldwide Korean diaspora, ever since the millennium shift Korea has become more and more of an immigration country. This is due to contract workers and labour immigrants from East, South, Central, and Southeast Asian countries and not the least female marriage immigrants or *oegugin puin* (foreign wife) from mainly Southeast Asia.

Historically when it came to marriages between Koreans and non-Koreans, Korean women totally dominated the statistics between 1953–1994. Hundreds of thousands of women married US Army men, American civilians, Western European non-military men and even dominated Korean emigration to the US in the 1950s and the early 1960s. However, from 1995 and onward, the sex ratio has changed dramatically. And while the Korean women marrying Western men previously lost their Korean citizenship by law, today’s Asian women marrying Korean men are instead immigrating to Korea on a supposedly permanent basis. Both they and their mixed children are expected to integrate into Korean society and culture contrary to the Korean women marrying Western men who instead usually left the country.

Contemporary Korea is without doubt a multicultural society, and around 15% of all annual marriages are nowadays between Koreans and non-Koreans. The Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs has for example estimated that the number of mixed so-called multicultural families or *tamunhwa kajok* in Korea will amount to around 740,000 by 2020.