The Continuation and Variation of Ghost Images with Korean College Students

Si-Chan Lee

Department of Chinese Language and Literature, College of Humanities, Cheongju University, Cheongju, Korea; chan@hanmail.net

Abstract

This paper is about the continuation and variation of typical Korean ghost image, Kushin and Dokkaebi, Korean college students have. Most of ghost images in Korean college student’s mind are females with long hair in their white gown; another ghost image, Dokkaebi, is male. In the past, these ghost images have been transmitted orally or through traditional literature from generation to generation. But throughout this study, I found that due to TV, films and other media being the center of the public culture, most of the students described ghost having different images from typical ones. Nevertheless, dreaming of ghost Korean only dream typical Korean ghost, a rarely dream of the nontraditional ghost. It can say that a common ghost image in a race doesn’t change in a short time.

Keywords: Dokkaebi, Ghost Image, Korean Ghost, Kushin, Networking

1. Introduction

Mankind in common has a feeling of awe and horror of nature and death and some of them believe everything in the world has its own soul. With no exception, we can see animism in Korea and ‘Kushin’ and ‘Dokkaebi’ are represented as the subject of horror. Laponse (1957) researched 482 children aged 6 to 12 for their mechanism of specific action and found out that forty-three percentage of them had seven and over images of horror. The research showed that nonrealistic images of ghost and bugaboo are more horror than practical dangers for children. Another study of ‘Preschool Children’s conception of Kushin and Dokkaebi’ showed that Kushin is a projection of fear for children being afraid of separation from their mothers, and Dokkaebi is one being afraid of their fathers experiencing at their Oedipal Stage. And another research is a study of the feared objects of children between 7 and 12 years of age.

This study is focused not on children but the adult for their continuance and variation of images of the ghost with the survey of 100 college students in South Korea. Through this study, it is expected to discover the interrelation between the image of horror immanent in college students, the major group of public culture and the related cultural industry.

2. Methods

This paper is made by asking 100 college students of ghost images in their mind and analyzing its result. It surveyed 100 Korean college students and made up of 21 statements that the students had to respond.

This survey focused on three aspects. First, the questions consist of two aspects of consciousness and unconsciousness. The concept and figure of the ghost are the part of consciousness, and whether one has ever dreamed of ghost dream or not is the part of unconsciousness. Such question might be a psychoanalytical question. Second, the question is about from where you got the information of the Kushin and Dokkaebi. From this, you can see the process for Korean
college students to accept and figure the Kushin and Dokkaebi. Third, the questions are about the character of the Kushin and Dokkaebi. Through these questions, it could be seen whether people perceive the Kushin and Dokkaebi just as the subject of horror or others. All of twenty-one specific questions divided into these three aspects. The following is the survey questionnaire:

- What is a Kushin?
- What does it look like?
- Draw the Kushin that you imagine.
- How does it move?
- Does it have legs or arms?
- Is it a woman or a man?
- How is their character?
- Have you ever heard a Kushin story? From whom?
- Have you ever seen a Kushin in your dream? If you did, how did it look?
- What is a Dokkaebi?
- What does it look like?
- Draw a Dokkaebi.
- How does it move?
- Does it have legs or arms?
- Is it a woman or a man?
- What is its character?
- Are there any differences between a ghost and a Dokkaebi? If there are something different, what are they?
- What are the ghosts or monsters that you are most afraid? Write them in order.
- Are there any representative ghosts or monsters in Korea? Write them in order.
- Where do you think might be easier to spot a ghost? (For example, in the kitchen, the bathroom, the cemetery, the school, a dream and so on).
- Have you ever seen a foreign ghost or monster in your dream? (For example, Dracula, Zombies, Witches and so on).

### 3. Results of Survey

#### 3.1 Gender of Kushin and Dokkaebi

Only one percentage of Korean college students said Kushin is male Table 1. And most of the students answered that it is a soul wandering around with a grudge. The below is the image they have drawn of Kushin. These are typical Kushin images they drew. These Kushin images wearing long white dress covering their feet enough and long hair hiding their own faces make you feel much horror Figure 1. By these pictures, you can conclude the horrible Kushin image Korean college students have been unexceptionally female. That is a very significant result. The long hair is a symbol of woman. With long hair covering its face, it can't be clearly recognized and most of the cases it is bleeding. That can be a typical device for Korean to make horrible image maximum. And most of the Kushin in the pictures have no feet or are in the air. Being in the air it can be faster than human and it means it may be close to somebody in a flash.

Then why Koreans fixed Kushin as female? In the traditional feudal society, most women suppressed. Those women who suppressed and suffered under the suppressive society in their lifetime have nothing but accumulate a kind of bad energy called a personal grudge and they changed themselves into Kushin after death. That makes the androcentric society tense and cautious. In most stories of Kushin, the target of attack from Kushin is mainly men. That is a psycho-social mechanism in which the horrible image of Kushin they have restrains the contradictory structure of sexual inequality.

#### Table 1. Gender of Kushin

| Subject   | M1 | F1 | Total |
|-----------|----|----|-------|
| Kushin    |    |    |       |
| M2        | 1  |    | 1     |
| F2        | 12 | 14 | 26    |
| M2 or F2  | 22 | 51 | 73    |
| Total     | 34 | 66 | 100   |

M1: Male (student)  F1: Female(student)
M2: Male (Kushin)   F2: Female(Kushin)
M2 or F2: Male or Female(Kushin)

Then, through this study you can find out that none of the Korean college students regard Dokken's sex just as female. They think Dokkaebi is male or bisexual Table 2. The image of Dokkaebi from Korean college students have one or two horns and hairy masculine figure. And it exclusively has clubs grown horns Figure 2. It is
interesting that Forty-four percent of the respondents answered Dokkaebi is bisexual. That means that they perceive Dokkaebi not as fixed sex but as capricious sex. It is a sort of transgender.

By another study, the origin of the word, Dokkaebi comes from 'Dok-Ku' and 'Abby'. 'Dok-Ku' means a pounder and 'Abby' means father. And most of the images of Dokkaebi drawn by Korean college students are urchins rather than scary things.

In the folk tale, Dokkaebi is not described just as an evil like Kushin. Dokkaebi repeatedly encounters humans presenting itself in a remote place and enjoy having a party. Sometimes Dokkaebi suffers a big loss to man and sometimes gives good luck. So, Dokkaebi is a subject of horror and a friendly being for Korean at the same time.

Having a talent of changing its sex with ease Dokkaebi is bisexual. That is why liberation and freedom are the symbol of Dokkaebi. In the second picture below, the common image of Dokkaebi described by Korean college students has the horns on its head and the clubs grown horns in its hand. From the pictures of Dokkaebi below you can feel funny and humorous than horror and scare.

Figure 2. Frequency of appearance of Dokkaebi in drawings of Korean college students.

Table 2. Gender of Dokkaebi

| Subject    | M1 | F1 | Total |
|------------|----|----|-------|
| Dokkaebi   |    |    |       |
| M2         | 20 | 36 | 56    |
| F2         | 14 | 30 | 44    |
| M2 or F2   | 34 | 66 | 100   |

M1: Male (student)  F1: Female(student)  
M2: Male (Dokkaebi)  F2: Female(Dokkaebi)
M2 or F2: Male or Female(Dokkaebi)

3.2 Source of Kushin and Dokkaebi Image

On the Table 3, you may know that the image of Kushin and Dokkaebi for Korean college student is mainly from the effect of public culture not from the oral tradition. Mass media stimulating the sense of sight of the masses is a main mediator for the present Korean youngsters. In the past, Kushin and Dokkaebi image made of oral tradition from their parents or grandparents could be depicted in different shapes. On the contrary, the image from the film or drama could be visually uniform. That means that the image of horror in a society can easily make of a typical type through mass media. In the sense of being political misused the image of horror image made by mass media has significant meaning.

Table 3. Source of Kushin & Dokkaebi Image

| Subject        | Kushin & Dokkaebi |
|----------------|-------------------|
| P              | 74                |
| T              | 26                |
| Total          | 100               |

P: Public culture(TV, Movie, Internet) T: Transmitting by word of mouth

3.3 Foreign Ghost Image

From Table 4 below you can see that the foreign ghosts haven’t settled down in Korean's subconscious yet. Especially, that is clearly revealed when eighty-two percent of the respondents said not seeing the foreign ghosts in their dream. But the meaningful results could be deduced from this survey. Among the foreign ghosts, Zombie holds thirteen percent of them. The heroes of horror movies imported in the 1980s to 90s were mostly Dracula and Vampire and from the year of 2000s on Zombie has been the hero of the movie. That’s why Korean people of those days mostly dream of Zombie.

The fact that Zombie appears in the dreams of Korean college student, the main audience of the movie says that a horror image transfers over the national boundary without any limit. Then, the reason why the images of a Witch, Vampire and Dracula who constantly came out to mass media before Zombie’s appearance couldn’t be fixed in Korean's subconscious as a horror image can be a work to be studied. Their appearance are so different with those of traditional Korean ghosts that they couldn't remain in Korean's subconscious at a horror image.

Through the fact that less than twenty percent of the ghost image appear in Korean's dream, you may set up the following hypotheses. First, at least fifty years are needed for the new image of ghost to expand the field of the subconscious in other cultures. Being seen in the East Asian folk tales the image of Kushin and Dokkaebi can’t be said to be quite Korean. Nevertheless, the reason Kushin and Dokkaebi image has settled down as a typical horror image in Korea is that it has a history of more than fifty
years. Zombie movie has been popular over twenty years in Korea. As the result, it is noticeable that Zombie fixed about thirteen percent of Korean's subconscious. Second, when a ghost has a completely different appearance like in hair style and costume it has a difficulty in transferring its image as a horror in alien's subconscious. That is the very point in which the images of Witch and Dracula can't penetrate to the area of the subconscious of Korean in spite of continuous exposing of themselves to mass media. In the other hand, because Zombie images are various in races and their costumes are routine and ordinary in the world. So Zombie image possibly expands itself to Korean subconscious. And with constant exposal of itself in Korean over fifty years Zombie can be sufficiently settled down in Korean subconscious as a horror image.

In the other hand, because Zombie images are various in races and their costumes are routine and ordinary in the world. So Zombie image possibly expands itself to Korean subconscious. And with constant exposal of itself in Korean over fifty years Zombie can be sufficiently settled down in Korean subconscious as a horror image.

### Table 4. Foreign ghost image of a dream

| Subject      | Foreign ghost image of a dream |
|--------------|--------------------------------|
| Witch        | 1                              |
| Vampire      | 1                              |
| Dracula      | 3                              |
| Zombie       | 13                             |
| None         | 82                             |
| **Total**    | **100**                        |

### 3.4 Character of Kushin and Dokkaebi

#### Table 5. Character of Kushin and Dokkaebi

| Subject | negative | positive | Non-responses | total |
|---------|----------|----------|---------------|-------|
| Kushin  | 46       | 44       | 10            | 100   |
| Dokkaebi| 26       | 63       | 11            | 100   |

Table 5 is the result of the question; what's the character of Kushin and Dokkaebi. Forty-six percent of the answers show Kushin is scary or vicious and Forty-four percent says Kushin has manlike character. It is a personal grudge that represents the character of Kushin. Twenty-six percent of the respondents say Dokkaebi is scary or vicious and forty-four percent says it has manlike character. It is mischievous that represents Dokken's typical character. Though Kushin and Dokkaebi have typical horror images for Korean, many of the students perceive them as positive characters not negative. That is a very meaningful result. That means that they perceive Kushin or Dokkaebi as creatures with similar characters of human rather than scary things. From this survey, you can understand that especially many Koreans perceive Dokkaebi as a friendly urchin rather than a monster.

To understand this phenomenon you should analyze Korean's collective unconscious. Concerning of this, the next chapter shows the process of change of Kushin and Dokkaebi images.

### 4. The Process of Change: Ghost Images with Korean College Students

#### 4.1 The Collective Unconscious of Korean: Dokkaebi

To understand the reason Kushin and Dokkaebi image has been settled down on Korean as horror you need to speculate Korean's collective unconscious. Collective unconscious, a term coined by Carl Jung, refers to structures of the unconscious mind which are shared among beings of the same species. But this paper circumscribes it within Korean. Korean's collective unconscious about Dokkaebi may back to the myth. It is Chih Yu that is related to the myth directly. Chih Yu appears in Chinese myth and a descendant of Yum-Jae.

By the myth, there were 81 siblings and all of them have copper heads with long horns on them and iron brows. They were very fierce. During the war against the empire, he had help from Kua-Fu, God of wind and rain and other Dokkaebies. Later he was admired as a god of war Figure 3.

You can see the image of Chih Yu on the tiles sculpted the figure of a devil in Silla dynasty Figure 4. And Chih Yu, god of the Eastern Asia, is probably the god admired by the eastern barbarians like Yin Dynasty or ancient Korean. The appearance of the god of wind and rain who helped Chih Yu in Dangun mythology supports this.

“Donggooksesigi”, a book in Chosun dynasty, says that the court noble and yangban, nobleman, have charms drawn of Chih Yu’s name and figure on the Tano Festival. From this, you can see that Chih Yu is a familial God to Korean.

During the World Cup in 2002 the roads and playgrounds in Korea were filled with ‘Red Devils'; Korean supporters for the World Cup and their flags drawn Dokken's faces Figure 5. Like this, the image of Dokkaebi inherited thousands of years ago from Chih Yu mythology became a symbol of the collective unconscious of Korean.
4.2 The collective unconscious of Korean: Kushin

Unlike Dokkaebi, the period when Kushin has settled down in Korean’s collective unconscious as a horror image is relatively short. The Kushin image drawn by Korean college student is affected a lot from mass media. That image of Kushin seems to emerge since the films and televisions pervaded on a full scale. The first appearance of Kushin image is in the movie titled “The Public Cemetery under the Moonlight (1967)” (Figure 6) and “The Lady Kushin (1967)” (Figure 7). A series of television drama, “Korean Ghost Stories (1977-1989)”, showed hundreds of Kushin and all of them have similar images. After these dramas, the images of Kushin in horror movies are almost fixed. The pictures below are the images of Kushin in the films from the first horror movie to the relatively recent horror movie, “an old fox with nine tails (1994)” (Figure 8) and “Whispering Corridors (1998)” (Figure 9). As you see in these pictures, the image of Kushin is almost typical and this is not different from that of students’ drawings. Unlike that of Dokkaebi, Kushin image is made from mass media. You can sure that this image of Kushin has been made for the last fifty years and settled down on Korean’s collective unconscious.

Figure 3. Chih Yu.

Figure 4. Roof tile of mask of devil.

Figure 5. Red Devil.

Figure 6.

Figure 7.
4.3 Variation of Korean Ghost Image in the Future

Let us check the possibility of variation of the ghost image seen by Korean college student. From the result of the study, you already checked that among the ghost seen in students’ dream, thirteen percent of them are Zombies. You could predict that Zombie will be another typical horror image transplanted in Korea. Zombie films have been popular since “Resident Evil (2002)” to “World War Z (2013)”. At last Korean movie “Zombie School” was produced in 2014.

Most of Zombie movie is somewhat extraneous because of the foreign actors. But when Korean actors substitute the foreign actors, Zombie will be a ghost image for the students. However, it is certain that Kushin and Dokkaebi will be a typical horror image for Korean in the future. It’s because they have been transplanted to the sphere of the collective unconscious. But with mass media it seems that the globalized ghost image will expand its territory. In conclusion, unlike being transmitted by oral or literary work, the horror image will be transplanted in human’s brain much faster by mass media. That’s the point.

5. Conclusion

The source of the ghost image in South Korea college students mind can be found from Korean culture and most of varied ghost images from TV or film. So, it can be concluded that the ghost images in a race have been transmitted orally and in literature texts from generation to generation for a long time. And it seems to take more than fifty years for a new image of ghost to settle down in Koreans.

6. References

1. Lapoue R. An epidemiologic study of behavior characteristics in children. A.J.P.H. 1958 Sep; 48(9): 1134–44.
2. Kim SM, Hong KM. Preschool children’s conception of Kui Shin and Dokkaebi. Korean Neuropsychiatric Association. 1983; 22(1): 15–26.
3. Lee KH. A study of the Feared object of Primary School Children. Korean Journal of Child Studies. 1986; 7(1): 25–47.
4. Kim YK. Dokken’s real character and Horned Korean. The Four Seasons Press. ROK. 2010; 5.
5. Jung CG. The concept of the collective unconscious. Collected works. 1936; 9.1: 42.
6. Jeong JS. The myth of Eastern Asia. Golden Owl Press. ROK. 2004; 4.