Tung-fang Shuo, Buffoon and Immortal, in Japan and Korea

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Tung-fang Shuo[1] (traditional dates: 159–93 B.C.) is one of the most charming characters of the Han period. Ssu-ma Ch’ien calls him a ku-chi[2], a term which combines the implications of both a loquacious person and a wit. He was the constant companion of, and court-jester to Han Wu-ti (141–87 B.C.). Eventually he came to be revered as a hsien[-jen] (immortal), although from the outset as well he has been considered as such.

The gist of his official biography (Shih-chi 126, Han-shu 651) is as follows:

Tung-fang Shuo (style: Man-ch’ien[3]) was a native of Yen-tz’u in P’ing-yüan, Ch’i (Northern Shantung). He was fond of traditions and classical accomplishments, and was well-versed in the philosophical theories of the various schools. When Wu-ti in the beginning of his reign issued a proclamation calling for men of talent to assist in the government Tung-fang Shuo came to Ch’ang-an and sent in an application, in which he put himself forward in the most immodest terms. His application for candidacy took up 3000 writing-tablets and took two months to read. The emperor was fascinated and engaged him. In the beginning he was a petty official, but because of his striking remarks and curious behaviour he was constantly favoured by the emperor. Whenever he was invited to dine with the emperor he put the remaining meat down the front of his clothing into his chest, so that his garments were entirely soiled. He loved a joke or any trick or prank, and his stories were easy to understand and so popular that even children and cowherds spoke of them. Thus all kinds of strange tales and original sayings were attributed to him. With his emoluments he took a beautiful young lady from Ch’ang-an as his sweetheart, but, after having lived with her for one year, he repudiated her and took another beauty. Because he made a regular practice of this and squandered all his wealth on pretty women, the people called him a dissolute fool. However, he persuaded the emperor to promote him. Once he was impeached because of having made a mess in the palace while drunk and he was forced to resign, but later he was appointed again. He used to say: ‘The men of antiquity retired from the world deep into the mountains, but people like myself retire from the world at Court.’ When he felt that he was going to die he warned the emperor with the following words: ‘In the Book of Songs it is said:

They buzz about, the blue flies²,
Lighting on the fences.
O happy and courteous sovereign,
Do not believe slanderous speeches.
The slanderers observe no limits
And throw the whole kingdom into confusion.’

Would that your Majesty stay far away from artful talk and repudiate slander!’

The biography in the Shih-chi appropriately concludes with a quotation from the Lun-yü (VIII, 4): ‘When a bird is about to die its cry is mournful, when a man is about to die his words are constructive.’

His tomb is located in the Province of Shensi, twenty li to the south-east of Hua-hsien.4

Although legendary traits of Tung-fang Shuo are already found in ch. 65 of the Han-shu and the legends around his life were embellished by Kuo Hsien[4] (ca. 26 B.C.–ca. 189
55 A.D.) in his Tung-fang Shuo chuan⁶, his real hagiography begins in the 2nd century A.D. with the appearance of works like the Feng-su t'ung-i[⁵]. The most important sources for the traditions concerning Tung-fang Shuo are further: Po-wu chih[⁷], Han Wu-ti nei-chuan[⁸], Lieh-hsien chuan[¹¹], Shen-hsien chuan[¹³], Shi-hshuo hsien-yü[¹⁶], [Han Wu] Tung-ming chi[¹⁸], San-tung chu-nang[¹⁹], and T'ai-p'ing kuang-chi[²¹]. Western works containing detailed information about the mysterious faits et gestes of Tung-fang Shuo are Doré’s Recherches, Lionel Giles’ A Gallery of Chinese Immortals, Mayers’ Manual, and Münke’s and Werner’s works on Chinese mythology.¹⁴

According to the Feng-su t'ung-i he was an immortal: ‘Under Huang-ti he was Feng-hou[²²], under Yao he was Wu-ch'eng-tzu[²³], under the Chou dynasty he was Lao Tan[²⁴] — He transforms himself all the time and his aspect is ever-changing.’¹⁶

In other sources (Shen-hsien chuan, T'ai-p'ing kuang-chi) we read that his father was Chang I[²⁵], a native of Lui-tz'u in P'ing-yüan, while his mother was of the T'ien[²⁶] clan. His father was 200 years old, but had the face of a young boy. When Shuo was three days old his mother died, and his father threw him out on to the road, but he was rescued by a neighbour’s wife. Because it dawned in the east when the woman found him, he was sur-named Tung-fang. He was called Shuo, since he was born on the first day of the eleventh month.¹⁷

As a small child he disappeared sometimes; upon his return he told his foster-mother about the supernatural events which had happened to him.¹⁸

When Emperor Wu issued his proclamation calling for men of talent Tung-fang Shuo presented himself in person at the palace and made a declaration which closed with the following words: ‘I am now twenty-two years of age. I am nine feet three inches in height. My eyes are like swinging pearls, my teeth like a row of shells. I am as brave as Meng Fen[²⁷], as prompt as Ch'ing Chi[²⁸], as pure as Pao Shu[²¹], and as devoted as Wei Sheng.[³⁰] I consider myself fit to be a high officer of State; and with my life in my hand, I await your Majesty's reply.’²³

Soon he became the emperor’s trusted adviser. On one occasion he drank off some elixir of immortality which belonged to the emperor, and the latter in a rage ordered him to be put to death. But Tung-fang Shuo smiled and said: ‘If the elixir was genuine, your Majesty can do me no harm; if it was not, what harm have I done?’ Being amused at his clever reply, the emperor pardoned him.²⁴

According to an apocryphal tradition he is said to have solved the problem of the origin of a mysterious black substance discovered at a great depth in 120 B.C. when the artificial lake of K’un-ming (in Shansi) was being excavated. The substance is explained as being ashes that remained following the conflagration that took place at the end of a kalpa, and the event is quoted in support of the tradition that Buddhism was introduced in the 2nd century B.C. or even earlier.²⁵

The most famous legend about Tung-fang Shuo is connected with the tale of Hsi Wang-mu’s visit to Emperor Wu, a condensed version of which follows here. The Queen-Mother of the West, Hsi Wang-mu, received by the emperor on the seventh day of the seventh month²⁶, offered him five peaches, each of which was the size of a pill. She herself ate two peaches, the emperor kept the peach-stones in his lap and said: ‘The peaches were so delicious that I would like to plant the stones.’ The Queen-Mother replied: ‘My peach-tree bears fruit only once in three-thousand years.’ The emperor and the Queen-Mother were quite alone together, but Tung-fang Shuo had crept into the
corridor and was peeping at the Queen-Mother through a window. She noticed this and told the emperor: 'That young fellow came three times before to steal my peaches.' The emperor was astonished and from that time Tung-fang Shuo was considered a divine being.27

One day Tung-fang Shuo bestrode a dragon and flew away. A multitude of people observed him ascending from the north-east and moving farther and farther away. After a while, he was enveloped in a large cloud which made it impossible to see where he went.28

It is significant that Tung-fang Shuo was a fang-shih31 (magician) from Ch’i, a region where shamanism was extensively practised.29

Wang Ch’ung (A.D. ca. 27-ca. 97) attacked thousands of the superstitions that were believed even by the learned. He also had his doubts about Tung-fang Shuo. In his Lun-heng we read: ‘Tung-fang Shuo is said to have been possessed of Tao . . . He was not as successful as Li Shao-chüń32 in magical arts, wherefore then was he credited with the possession of Tao? . . . He exaggerated his age. People finding out that he looked rather strong and young and was of phlegmatic temper, that he did not care much for his office, but was well-versed in divination, guessing, and other interesting plays, called him therefore a man possessed of Tao’31

Tung-fang Shuo was the spirit of the planet Venus (chin-hsing33), for which reason the goldsmiths and silversmiths adopted him as their patron deity.32 He was, however, also known as an incarnation of the planet Jupiter (sui-hsing36), because this star was not seen in the sky during his life on earth.33

He was a poet34 and two works dealing with imaginary geography and all kinds of marvels, Shen-i ching35 and Shih-chou chi36, as well as a ‘Spirit-Chess Manual’, Ling-ch’i ching37, are ascribed to him.38

In art he is represented as a smiling old man carrying one or more peaches (c.q. a branch laden with peaches), accompanied by a deer, or in company with Hsi Wanyu.39

Li Po (701–762) calls Tung-fang Shuo a che-hsien48, an immortal banished from Heaven to earth, in his Yü-hu yin49.40 Later Li Po himself as well as Su Tung-p’o (1037-1101) were honoured by the same epithet.41

It would be an almost superhuman task and, at the same time fall outside the scope of this article to list all references to Tung-fang Shuo in later Chinese literature. A few representative samples, however, follow here:

In San-hsien-shen Pao Lung-t’u tuan-yüan52, the 13th story in Feng Meng-lung’s (1574–1645/46) Ching-shih t’ung-yen, the prefect of Chien-k’ang, admiring a blind diviner, calls out: ‘Were Tung-fang Shuo of the Han to re-live, he could not surpass you!’42

Wu Te-hsiu54 of the 17th century wrote a play entitled Tung-fang Shuo t’ou-t’ao chi55.43

Our hero also appears in other theatrical pieces, e.g., in folkplays representing the Eight Immortals which go back to the early 15th century.44

In the famous T’ao-hua shan by K’ung Shang-jen (1648–1718) Tung-fang Shuo is mentioned three times. In Scene 11 he is referred to as a wit or a jester; in the prologue to Scene 21 the master of ceremonies states that the performance of Part I has impressed him as if it had been written by Ssu-ma Ch’ien and staged by Tung-fang Shuo.45
In Japan Tung-fang Shuo appears—under the name Tōbō Saku—for the first time in a Chinese poem by Fujiwara no Umakai (694–737), entitled ‘Deploring Unemployment’:[59]:

Wise men lament a [useless] passing of the years, enlightened rulers hope for a daily renewal [of their virtue].
In the days of Chou [Wen Wang] took the Old recluse into his chariot.46
[Wu-ting of] Yin dreamt of getting hold of such a man.47
Soaring up [to heaven birds’] wings have different strength48, oblivious to each other the [fishes’] scales are all the same.49
Wearing his southern cap, [Chung I] was upset by the music of Ch’u50, being a messenger in the North, [Su Wu] was wearied by barbarian dust.51.
In learning I am on a par with Tung-fang Shuo,
in age I am older than Chu Mai-ch’en.52
I am already rich in grey hairs,
but my thousands of scrolls are of no avail.53

From this poem, entirely in Chinese style we can only deduce that Tung-fang Shuo was known in Japan. Strangely enough, this is the only time we see him praised for his learning in that country.

The 16th story of the Kara-monogatari54 recounts Hsi Wang-mu’s visit to Emperor Wu and is supposed to be based upon the Han Wu-ti nei-chuan55, but—and not only because a tanka is embodied in it—it breathes a typically Japanese atmosphere. We should note the fact that the appearance of yellow sparrows in the palace-garden is explained by Tung-fang Shuo as a portent of Hsi Wang-mu’s impending visit, for normally her advent is announced by bluebirds.56

In the Heike monogatari (first conceived ca. 1240) Saitō Takiguchi Tokiyori, who became a Buddhist priest at the age of nineteen, exclaims: ‘A lady named Sei Öbo (= Hsi Wang-mu) lived long ago, but is alive no longer. Tōbō Saku is likewise but a name and nothing more. This world, in which it is uncertain whether one dies young or old, is like a flash of fire struck from a stone.’57

In the Taiheiki (ca. 1370?) we find the following passage: ‘Employed in service even a mouse becomes a tiger, unemployed a tiger becomes a mouse—this theory of Tōbō Saku is truly appropriate.’58

In the Soga monogatari (end of the 14th century) another curious utterance is ascribed to Tung-fang Shuo: ‘When angels do not engage in debauchery calamities may follow or they may not’59 meaning that lascivious desires may lead either to happiness or to misfortune. There is no way of fathoming destiny; there is no reason why a prostitute might not become a pious nun.

The Nō play Tōbō Saku by Komparu Zempō Motoyasu (1453–1532) is based upon the legend of Hsi Wang-mu’s visit to Emperor Wu.60

In the preface to the Taionki, a work on the ars poetica by the well-known haijin Matsunaga Teitoku (1570–1653), we find a description of Teitoku’s development as a poet: ‘He had already composed poems in the traditional vein of Kakinomoto61, but then he turned to the humorous style of Hōsaku (= Tōbō Saku).’62 This means that he began as a composer of waka, but later devoted himself to the art of writing haiku.

A kabuki drama entitled Tōbō Saku was staged for the first time in 1696 at Osaka, but nothing is known about its contents.63

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The kabuki play *Sukeroku yukari no Edo-zakura* (1713) contains the following passage: 'In olden times, at Mio Bay in the Province of Suruga, a fisherman named Hakuryō married an angel and, having seen the colour of the milk flowing from her breasts, he started to brew white sake. Thanks to drinking it he prolonged his life. The dispeller of evil Tōbō Saku drank eight cups of this white wine and became 8000 years old, Urashimatarō drank three cups and became 3000 years old. Miura no Ōsuke, however, was a teetotaller; therefore he just pretended to pour sake into his cup and lived on until he was 106.

The famous scientist, novelist, playwright and artist Hiraga Gennai (1728–1779) mentions Tung-fang Shuo twice in his *Fūryū Shidōken den* as a paragon of ideally humorous behaviour.

In the title of *Karakuchi* by Namiki Shōzō (1730–1773), credited with the invention of the revolving stage, Tung-fang Shuo’s name is only used to indicate that it is a collection of humorous stories.

The calligrapher Sawada Tōkō (1732–1796) compiled the *Tōbō Saku gazō san*. The *Tōbō Saku kusenzai*, an *ehon* by Tomikawa FusanoBU, *uki yoe* painter and dime-novel writer (fl. 2nd half of the 18th century), was printed in 1770.

A comic poem (*kyōka*) by Hezutsu Tōsaku (1758–1825) entitled ‘Upon meeting the old man of the Iwabuchi Sandoya at the hot springs of Yoshina (Izu)’ reads as follows:

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ayakare ya
Tōbō Saku ga
kusensai
taorishi momo no
kazu mo sando ya
How strange
that the number of times
Tōbō Saku in his 9000 years
picked the peaches
was also three!
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Tung-fang Shuo’s name also appears in several *senryū*. Three samples are:

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momo made wa
Tōbō Saku mo
te wo nobashi
As far as the peaches
even Tung-fang Shuo
extended his arm.
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As *momo*, ‘peach’, is homophonous with *momo*, ‘thigh’, this *senryū* refers (or may be applied) to a person who is a ‘toucher.’

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setchin de
Tōbō Saku wo
kajitte i
In the privy
at a peach
he nibbles.
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Said about someone who is suspected of having stolen something. Here Tung-fang Shuo himself is used in the sense of ‘peach.’
Tôbô Saku ga
ganso nari
Of living by robbery
Tung-fang Shuo
is the inventor.72

Some Japanese books on divination bear Tung-fang Shuo's name; I only mention here the Tôbô Saku hiden okibumi which has a preface dated 1684 and was printed several times between 1686 and the end of the Edo period.73

Tung-fang Shuo's name was also used in formulæ for warding off evil in order to safeguard one's life, e.g., 'Among those who lived long Tôbô Saku became 9000 years old, Urashimatarô 8000 and Miura no Ôsuke 106.74

In connection with Japanese folk-religion it should be mentioned that Tung-fang Shuo might be identified with, or represent an aspect of Jurôjin[78], one of the Shichifukujin, the Seven Gods of Luck.75

The Shichifukujin, consisting of three gods of Indian origin (Bishamonten = Vaishramana, Ben[zai]ten = Sarasvatî, Daikokuten = Mahâkâla), three gods of Chinese origin (Hotei = Pu-tai, Fukurokuju, Jurôjin) and one Japanese god (Ebisu), appear rather late in Japanese history, not before the beginning of the Edo period.

Sometimes Jurôjin does not appear amongst the seven gods, his place is taken by a shôjô[79] (sea-demon) or by Kichijôten[nyo] [80] (= Laksmi, the Indian goddess of fortune or beauty; on other occasions Fukurokuju and Ebisu are replaced by Kichijôten[nyo] and Hiruko[81] (the leech-child).76

In Japanese art Fukurokuju (Happiness-Emoluments-Longevity) is usually accompanied by a white crane, Jurôjin (Old Man Longevity) by a white stag, on which he sometimes rides. Jurôjin is also represented carrying the kinetic peach.77 Although he is often considered to be a double of Fukurokuju, his name and appearance as well as his nebulous character (a star-god administering the span of life, the god of scholastic success, etc.) all warrant an identification with Tung-fang Shuo or certain aspects of this immortal.

In modern Japan we may still encounter the expression Tôbô Saku niku wo saku, 'Tung-fang Shuo cuts off [a portion of] meat,' meaning 'blaming and praising oneself at the same time.' This saying was inspired by the following incident: On one occasion the emperor intended to present his officers with a gift of meat. As the assistant to the imperial butler did not appear, Tung-fang Shuo drew his sword and, having cut off a piece of meat, he put it in the breast of his robe and went off. He was reported for his want of decorum, and ordered by the emperor to apologize. He replied: 'How impolite of me not to wait for the imperial command to receive the gift! How bold of me to draw my sword and cut the meat! How generous of me not to cut too much! How kind of me to take it home as a present for my little lady!' The emperor laughed and said: 'I told you to confess your faults and here you are praising yourself!' Then he presented him with another gift of meat and wine to take home to the little lady.78

In Korea Tung-fang Shuo is called Tongbang Sak, Tongban Sak, Tongbang Sagi, Tongbang Sôk, Tongbang Sôgi79 and Samch'ôn Kapcha Tongbang Sak[83] (Tung-fang Shuo of the 3000 First Binary Terms of the Sexagenary Cycles).80 In a chidu-sô[84] (the first song sung at a shamanistic sacrifice invoking the ancestral spirits) from Seoul we
After having lived 3000 cycles Tongbang Sak became a visitor of the Yellow Springs (Hwangch'ón-gaek[85]).

Although the beginnings of the Korean puppet-play may perhaps be traced back to the Koryǒ period (918–1392), the most general type of puppet-play, Kkoku Kaksi[88], acquired its present form in the Yi period (1392–1910). Kkoku Kaksi may be translated as 'puppet-woman.' In the play she is the wife of a Mr. P'yo, whose name will re-appear below. The text has been transmitted orally and was for the first time noted down by Kim Chaech'öl[89] (1907–1933) from the mouths of two puppet-players, Pak Yŏngha[90] and Kim Kwangsik[91], who had been specializing in this play for thirty years. Act 4 is called 'Old Man Tongban' (Tongban[g] noin [92]):

[Enter Old Man Tongban clearing his throat].

**Villager.** Hey there! Old Man Tongban! Why do you have your eyes closed?

**Tongban.** Ah! You don't know why my eyes are closed? But I have drunk the elixir of immortality from the Mountain of the Three Gods 84 and have memorized the Buddhist Tripitaka, and now that I returned to this world everything around me is impure and so I keep my eyes closed.

**Villager.** Now, listen! Everything beautiful in this world has been created by the Lord-on-High. Moreover, its pleasures are the same as those in Heaven. Therefore, please open your eyes just for a moment.

[Old Man Tongban opens his eyes and looks around.]

**Tongban** Ah, indeed! When I see you all and Iook around it's a good world.

**Villager.** Hey!

**Tongban.** What's the matter?

**Villager.** Everybody who comes to this place must sing a song and perform a dance.

**Tongban.** Hey! I am different from other human beings. Although I appear in this world, I am actually living in the mountains and observing the Way of the Buddha. Being different from human flesh how could I dance and sing? However, since I have already made my appearance, I shall dance while opening and closing my eyes, if you beat out the rhythm. According to my movements everything will turn out as you wish.

**Villager.** Fine! Well, let's start the music!

[When they beat out the rhythm Old Man Tongban, opening and closing his eyes, spreads his arms rapturously and dances with gusto.]

**Villager.** Why! Look! When he appears in the human world Old Man Tongban is no better than the rest of us!

**Tongban.** [Is surprised, shakes his head, and shouts:] Hey! What about this? I have danced, you see?

**Villager.** You didn't dance! You just turned around waving your arms.

**Tongban.** Anyhow, I have danced. However you look at it, it's all the same. Now let me also try to sing a song!

**Villager.** That's all right, too. I'll beat out the rhythm, so please go ahead with your song!

**Tongban.** Yes! Listen to my singing! [Song describing the joys of returning to the Land of the Immortals.]
[Old Man Tongban guffaws.] What is all this? Look here, when I use the Eight Trigrams to divine with I discover that Scholar P’yo who lives in the sea south of Cholla-do has lost his wife and has acquired a concubine called Tolmorijip with whom he is running a wine-shop on the bank of the Nodul-gang. In order to find his wife and at the same time do a bit of sightseeing in the Diamond Mountains in Kangwon-do he has set out on a journey and will also come here. If I appear before his eyes, there will be embarrassment on both sides, since he is a yangban and I am an immortal. Therefore I shall withdraw.

In another version of this puppet-play, recorded in April 1964 by Yi Tuhyon from the mouths of Nam Ullyong and Song Poksan, Act 6 is entitled Tongba Sak: Tongbang Sak. [Enters.] Oh my goodness! I have wandered around in the world and have been sightseeing in all the Eight Provinces. After having roamed around for several hundred years, I am here today. Everything is really worth seeing, hearing and watching.

Villager. Who are you?
Tongbang Sak. You must think I am a gentleman who has lived 3000 years.
Villager. You have lived 3000 years?
Tongbang Sak. That’s right.
Villager. If you have lived 3000 years, are you the man who is called Tongbang Sak?
Tongbang Sak. Of course!
Villager. For what reason have you appeared?
Tongbang Sak. For what reason have I appeared? In order to do some sightseeing I have toured the Eight Provinces. I went here and there and everywhere, and when I came here today there was a sound of drums and fifes were being played with a great display of elegance. And as I watched an enormous number of people gathered, so I became excited. Although I have lived 3000 years, my eyes have gradually become sharper and as big as they are now. Therefore I have come to take a look.

Villager. Have you come to let the people look at you?
Tongbang Sak. Yes. When people look at me and when they all say: ‘That gentleman has gone off and lived for 3000 years; it is Tongbang Sak who has lived 3000 years,’ the result is that I, the tiny Tongbang Sak of yore, have become what I am today. So I hope that you, ladies and gentlemen, will look at this performance. [Exit. Music.]

As Tongbang Sogi he makes a very short appearance in Act 4 (entitled Isimi) of a version recorded by Sim Usong:

Tongbang Sogi. Ahem, ahem!
Sanpaji. Who’s that?
Tongbang Sogi. I am Samch’on Kapcha Tongbang Sogi who has lived 3000 years.
Sanpaji. Ah, then you are Samch’on Kapcha Tongbang Sogi?
Tongbang Sogi. That’s right!
Sanpaji. So, why you come here?
Tongbang Sogi. I have been knocking about here and there and, because there are many people here, I have come. Hey you! Shall I sing a sijo? [Sijo.] Now that I’m old, I’ll never be able to become young again ... ayaya ... [He is seized by Isimi and devoured.]
Yi Kawŏn[105] has convincingly demonstrated that certain passages in Min'ong chŏn[106], a short story by Yŏn'am Pak Chiwon (1737–1805), have been influenced by Tung-fang Shuo’s biographies in the Shih-chi and Han-shu.98

In Korean novels Tung-fang Shuo’s name is frequently mentioned. In the Sim Ch’ŏng chŏn, e. g., we read that on the occasion of the heroine’s birth a neighbour’s wife prays that Tongbang Sak’s span of life and Sŏk Sung’s riches99 may be bestowed upon the baby.100

Tung-fang Shuo’s name is often used in shaman songs101, mostly in connection with invocations imploring longevity. As an example here is a translation from the Haero ch’ug’ŏn[108] (Supplication for Growing Old Together):

When your destiny102 and happiness are allotted to you may Sŏk Sung103 and Wang Kae104 give you happiness, may you be blessed with the longevity of P’aeng Cho105, may your sexagenary cycles be those of Tongbang Sak and your destiny like that of the Great Duke Kang.106

May a first and a second eighty years be allotted to you: altogether one hundred and sixty years!

May you become white-haired and may your white hairs become black again!

May your fallen teeth grow back again!

If sharing joys and growing old together for a hundred years until your knees stand higher than your jaws should prove inadequate in this world, may you then meet again in the next and share another hundred years of joy!107

In the fertility ritual Tongnae chisin pali[pki[114] Tongbang Sŏk is mentioned as a symbol of longevity – in this case in connection with the correct choice of a site for a house according to the principles of geomancy (p’ungsu).108

Some Korean proverbs in which Tung-fang Shuo’s name is used are:

Tongbang Sagi pam kkakka-mŏktit handa, Tung-fang Shuo makes believe he cracks chestnuts and eats them (even he has no time to crack them entirely: to finish some work halfway).

Tongbang Sagi injolmi mŏktit handa, Tung-fang Shuo makes believe he is eating rice-cakes: said of someone who eats his food slowly and carefully.

Tongbang Sagi-nun paekchijang-do noptago hayŏttanda, Tung-fang Shuo said that even a sheet of white paper is worth considering109: one should be careful and make no mistakes.

Samch’ŏn Kapcha Tongbang Sagi-do chŏ chuğul nal mollatta, Even Tung-fang Shuo of the 3000 cycles did not know on which day he would die: nobody knows what will happen to him.110

In Korea Tung-fang Shuo even appears in primary school textbooks. In a reader for the third grade we find the following story (condensed):

‘Once upon a time an old man who lived in a mountain-village by mistake crossed over a pass called Samnyŏn-gogae (Three Years’ Pass). According to tradition anyone who crossed this pass would only live for three more years. The old man grew weaker and weaker, and was prepared to die. A young neighbour visited him and said that he knew how to cure him. All he need do was to cross the pass again. “If you cross the pass
once, you will live for only three years more. Therefore, if you cross it twice, you will live six years more, and so forth.” The old man went back to the pass, stamped his feet while crossing and prayed: „Please let me live according to the number of times I stamped!” A voice replied from somewhere: “Don’t you worry! Tongbang Sak, too, stamped his feet about 60 000 times over this pass.” It was the voice of the young man who had hidden himself in the neighbourhood. The old man shouted happily: “Yes, yes! Tongbang Sak, Tongbang Sak of the 3000 cycles!”

The passages concerning Tung-fang Shuo that I have cited are far from comprehensive, but may be considered as fairly representative.

Many famous or notorious Chinese historical figures appear in Japanese and Korean traditional literature as paragons of high ethical virtues and loyalty or as repulsive personifications of immoral behaviour. The hermit-scholars Po I and Shu Ch’i, and Ming-huang’s concubine Yang Kuei-fei are only three examples out of hundreds. Tung-fang Shuo is certainly not the only person of the Han period often referred to in Japanese and Korean literature, but he is beyond doubt the most popular one – and, moreover the only immortal of that period. He is a figure from history transformed into a myth, a synecdoche like our Methuselah, Nimrod, Croesus, Lucullus, Don Quixote or Scrooge.

It should be especially noted that this lovable eccentric became an organic constituent of Japanese and Korean folklore. In most cases he preserved his original character; sometimes new traits have been added to his personality. The declarations and utterances ascribed to him are at times reminiscent of those of Masters of Zen.

That his name has become a by-word in Korea and Japan is clear from his appearance in the Kkoktu Kaksi (where he even functions as the contemporary of the other puppets and the public), shamanistic texts, senryû and proverbs – all forms of literature familiar to even the most humble members of society.

2  I.e. flatterers.
3  See Legge, James, The She King or the Book of Poetry, Hongkong 1871, II, Bk. XII, Ode V, 1, 2.
6  By Ying Shao[6] (3rd quarter of the 2nd century A.D.).
10  By Ko Hung[14] (284–336), the author of the Pao-p’u-tzu[18].
12  Ascribed to Kuo Hsien (cf. supra, n. 5), but probably compiled in the first half of the 6th century.
Clues to the Subjects of Chinese and Japanese Art, Hejzlar, Josef

A Gallery of Chinese Immortals: Selected Biographies, London/Shanghai/Yokohama 1924;

A Chinese Biographical Dictionary, London/Shanghai/Yokohama 1898, p. 792;

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A Ghost: Chinese Tales of the 3rd-6th Centuries, Shanghai/London 1924;

A Handbook of Biographical, Historical, Mythological, and General Literary Reference, Shanghai/London 1924;

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41 In the Li Po chuan of the T’ang-shu we read: ‘When Po arrived at Ch’ang-an he went to see Chia Chih-chang[51]. Chih-chang saw his work and sighed: “You are a che-hsien!”’ See also Ōno, op. cit., pp. 86–87 and cf. pp. 72, 102 and 216.


43 The play was printed at the Kuang-ch’ing t’ang[56] at the end of the Ming period, but the author was still alive around 1692. See Ku-pen hsi-ch’u is ung-k’an, 2-chi, Commercial Press 1955.


45 Vide T’ao-hua shan, annotated by Wang Chi-ssu[57] and Su Huan-chung[58], Peking: Jen-min wen-hsüeh ch’u-p’an-shu 1959, pp. 72, 76 and 133; Chang, op. cit., pp. 319 and 326; The Peach Blossom Fan (T’ao-hua-shan) by K’ung Shang-jen (1648–1718), translated by Chen Shih-hsiang and Acton, Harold, with the collaboration of Birch, Cyril, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1976, pp. 81, 87 and 151.

46 The Old Recluse[60] is Chiang Tzu-ya[61], the most influential generalissimo in the wars resulting in the overthrow of the tyrant Chou Wang (1154–1122 B.C.) and the establishment of the Chou dynasty. See Werner, op. cit., pp. 59–65.

47 Wu-tung[62] is the dynastic title of the king who is supposed to have ruled from 1324 to 1265 B.C.

48 A reference to Chuang-tzu I: ‘When the P’eng (a fabulous bird of gigantic size: the roc) is moving to the Southern Ocean it flaps its wings on the water for three thousand li. Then it ascends on a whirlwind ninety thousand li… A cicada and a little dove laughed at it, saying, “We make an effort and fly toward an elm or sapanwood tree; and sometimes before we reach it we drop to the ground. Of what use is it for this creature to rise ninety thousand li and make for the south?”’ See Waltham, Claes, Chuang Tzu: Genius of the Absurd arranged from the work of James Legge, New York 1971, pp. 39–40, and cf. Ware, James R., The Sayings of Chuang Chou, New York 1963, p. 15.

49 A reference to Chuang-tzu VI: “Confucius said, “Fishes breed and grow in the water; man develops in the Tao. Growing in the water the fishes cleave the pools and their nourishment is supplied to them. Developing in the Tao men do nothing and the enjoyment of their life is secured. Hence it is said, ‘Fishes forget one another in the rivers and lakes; men forget one another in the arts of the Tao.’” Vide Waltham, op. cit., p. 100, and cf. Ware, op. cit., p. 52.

50 Chung L[63] of Ch’u was made a captive by the State of Cheng.

51 Su Wu[64] was made a prisoner by the Hsiung-ku.

52 Chu Mai-ch’en[65] († 116 B.C.) was a wood-cutter who ultimately rose to the rank of Minister of State.


54 Sometimes ascribed to Saigyo Hōshi (1118–1190) or Fujiwara no Narinori (1135–1187), but probably written towards the middle of the Kamakura period. For a description of the work vide Levy, Howard S., The Dwelling of the Playful Goddesses, China’s First Novelette by Chang Wen-chen (7657–730), Tōkyō: Dai Nippon Insatsu 1965, pp. 86–89. The text is found in Zoku gunsho ruiju XVIII (k. 503), pp. 109–111, and in Heian-chō monogatari shū (Yūhōdō bunko), 1914?, pp. 587–590.

55 Cf. supra, n. 9.


58 See NKB 36, p. 149.

59 See NKB 88, p. 224.


61 I.e. Kakinomoto no Hitomaro (ca. 662 – ca. 710).

62 See NKBT 95, p. 24.

63 See Kokusho sōmokuroku VI, Tōkyō: Iwanami shoten 1969, p. 101d.


65 In the Urashima tradition we find a rather complicated elaboration of a marriage between a mortal man and a fairy (cf. the hagoromo tradition). Here the idea of the existence of a utopia outside this world is clearly expressed. See also Rumpf, Fritz, ‘Über japanische Märchen – Hagoromo (das Federkleid),’ Toung Pao XXXIII (1937), pp. 220–276.

66 I.e. Miura no Suke Yoshiakira[79] (1092–1180). He died in battle, but Minamoto no Yoritomo ignored his death out of admiration for his loyalty. Therefore Yoshiaki’s second son, Yoshizumi, is reported to have said: ‘If he were still alive, he would have been 106.’ Cf. Kiyū shōran[71] by Kitamura Nobuyoshi[72] (1784–1856) cited in Nakano Yoshihirī[73], Rigen daijiten, Tōkyō: Tōhō shoin 1933, p. 631; cf. NKBT 31, p. 137.


68 See NKBT 55, pp. 170 and 214.


70 Cf. Kokusho sōmokuroku VI, loc. cit.

71 See NKBT 57, p. 374.

72 Cf. Ōmagari Komamura[77], Senryū daijiten II, Tōkyō: Takahashi shoten 196715, p. 212.

73 Cf. Kokusho sōmokuroku VI, loc. cit.

74 See NKBT 98, p. 391, n. 14. A similar formula was: ‘A crane lives to be 1000 years old, a tortoise 10 000, Miura no Ōsuke 106.’ Cf. NKBT 100, p. 489, n. 16. For yakuharai and yakuotoshi in modern Japanese vide Barghoorn, Keyssner, etc., op. cit., pp. 40–42. With regard to this subject Ikeda Yasaburō’s Nihon koji monogatari (Tōkyō: Kawade shobō shinsha 1961†), pp. 211–214, contains several quotations from novels by Ibara Saikaku (1642–1693) and even a folk-song from Tsushima (in which Tōbō Saku is mentioned again).


76 I.e. the first child produced by Izanagi and Izanami. Vide Philippi, Donald L., Kojiki, Princeton/Tōkyō 1969, pp. 51 and 399.


79 The -i indicates endearment.

80 This means that he would be 180 000 000 years old! Actually, however, samch’ŏn kapcha seems to be synonymous with 3000 years; cf. infra, n. 91.

81 In contrast to the ancestors of the shamans who lived only 80 or 100 years. Cf. Akamatsu Chijō[83] and Akiba Takashi[87], Chōsen fuzoku no kenkyū, 2 vols., Tōkyō/Keijō/Dairen/Hōten/Shinkyō: Ōsakayagō shoten 1938–1939, Vol. I, p. 265.

82 For other versions of Kkoktu Kaksi recorded later see below. Two different versions – in which Tung-fang Shuo does not appear – have been recorded in Choe Sang-su, A Study of the Korean Puppet Play (Korean Folklore Studies Series No. 4), Seoul 1961.

83 I.e. a musician seated in front of the screen, cf. infra, n. 90.
Samsin: the legendary founders of Korea (Hwan’in, Hwan’ung and Tan-gun) or the three gods governing childbirth, Cf. Vos, Frits, *Die Religionen Koreas, Die Religionen der Menschheit* 22, 1, Stuttgart/Berlin/Köln/Mainz 1977, pp. 79 and 84.

The text gives kúnmok-cha-húk[93] (he who goes near ink gets black).

A very curious mixture of colloquial Korean and hanmun (written in han’gu!); left untranslated.

On Cheju-do?


Drummer and professional singer.

From the text it becomes clear that samch’on kapcha must be understood as meaning ‘3000 years.’

Isimi is the name of the snake in *Kkoktu Kaksi*. Tongbang Sök’s fate is shared by several other persons appearing in the same act. For the text of this version vide Sim Usöng, *Han’gug-ui minsok-kuk*, pu: Yonhui-bon 13 p’yön, Seoul: Ch’angjak-kwa pip’yöngsa 1975, p. 303.


Vide Schipper, op. cit., p. 70, n. 1.

Vide Yi Kawnøn[105], *Han-munhak yón’gu*, Seoul: T’amgudang 1969, p. 428.

Vide Yi Kawnøn[105], *Han-munhak yón’gu*, Seoul: T’amgudang 1969, p. 303.

Vide Yi Kawon, Yón’am sosol yón’gu (Han’guk munhwa ch’ongso 18), Seoul: Úryu munhwasa 1965, pp. 233–236.

Sök Sung = Shih Ch’ung[107], a rich man who was always striving to outshine Wang K’ai (see n. 104).

Kufung chón, Sim Ch’ong chón, annotated by Chang Chiyöng, Seoul: Chóng’umsa 19732, p. 96, and the translation into modern Korean in *Han’guk kojon munhak chonjip* 6, pp. 68–69.

In the sense of life-span.

See supra, n. 99.

= Wang K’ai[109] (3rd century A.D.), arrogant brother-in-law to Emperor Wu of Chin, who did good service in the field.

P’eng Tsu[110], great-grandson of the legendary Emperor Chuan Hsü. He became over 700 or 800 years old.

= Chiang T’ai-kung[111], i.e. Chiang Tzu-ya (see supra, n. 46). Cf. a passage in the *Hoesim kok*[112], attributed to Sōsan Taesa Hyujjong (1520–1604): ‘praying for a destiny like that of Tongbang Sök and a life-span like that of the Great Duke Kang.’ Vide Im Tong’gwøn[113], *Han’guk min’yo yón’gu* (Kug’o kungmunhak ch’ongsö II, 12), Seoul: Sönmyöngmunhwasa 1974, pp. 217–220, esp. p. 218.


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Vide Akamatsu & Akiba, op. cit. I, pp. 343 (cf. also p. 348).

Lit.: ‘is high’.


