

P'ANSORI

The Song of Shim Ch'ōng*

Translated by Marshall R. Pihl

* * *

Blindman Shim finally spoke.

"Would I ever deceive you about anything? But I couldn't speak for fear your heart would be filled with worry once you knew. While I was waiting for you earlier, I grew very uneasy when the sun set and you hadn't come. So I went out to find you but fell into a ditch crossed by the path. I was sure to die but, luckily, an alms-gathering monk from Mongun Temple pulled me out and saved my life. He told me that my eyes would be opened in this life and I would see all the things of heaven and earth if I donated three hundred sacks of rice with a true heart! In a moment of passion I put myself down for it but reconsidered after I had sent the monk away. Now I regret it. When I haven't even a single piece of money, where are the three hundred sacks to come from?"

aniri

[1:20b]

Shim Ch'ōng listened in good humor and consoled her father.

"Please don't worry, father. Do eat your rice. If you give in to regret, you cannot keep a true heart. Father, if you wish to open your darkened eyes

*This is part of "The Song of Shim Ch'ōng" (translation of the *Shim Ch'ōng ka*, a *p'ansori* number) in *The Korean Singer of Tales* by Marshall R. Pihl, one of the *Korea Journal's* Contributing Editors, published by and copyright of the Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, Massachusetts, U.S.A. in 1994. The *Korea Journal* has reproduced part of the song in commemoration of the late Dr. Pihl's long and seminal contribution to the journal, with permission from the Council. The Council sent the journal the following statement of condolence on Dr. Pihl's death.

"The editors at the Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, wish to express their sadness on the news of Marshall Pihl's death, and wish to send their deepest condolences to Dr. Pihl's family, friends, and the Korean Studies community to which he dedicated so much of his time, energy and love. Dr. Pihl was a joy to work with, and will be greatly missed by the Council."

In a courageous act of filial devotion, this scene relates Shim Ch'ōng's decision to depart her blind father and sacrifice herself to the perils of the Indang Sea as a means to restore his vision. Both painfully aware of the consequences of her action, this selection affirms the strength of their bond and represents a critical moment on the path of their destiny.

and see all the things of heaven and earth, then I shall get together three hundred sacks of rice somehow or other and present them to Mongun Temple.”

“But, no matter how you try, what can be done in our straits?”

Shim Ch’ōng replied.

“Wang Hsiang broke the ice
And caught a carp through the hole.
A man by the name of Kuo Chü
Had set out dishes for his parents,
But his son sat and ate
At the head of the table.
As he tried to bury him alive.
He unearthed a jar of gold
And with it served his parents.”

chung mori

“Although I cannot match
These men of old in filial service,
I believe that Heaven is moved
Whenever one is sincere.
The sacrificial rice will be obtained
In the natural course of events.
Please don’t worry yourself so deeply.”

[1:21a]

She consoled him in every way. Starting that day, she made herself clean in body and mind, cut her fingernails and arranged her hair, swept and cleaned the house, and

aniri

In the back garden she builds an altar.
When Ursa Major tilts across the midnight sky
And all is desolate and silent,
She lights a lamp brightly
And offers toward the north
A bowl of pure water with prayer:

chinyang cho

“On this particular day Shim Ch’ōng
Bows and reports with all respect.
Sun, moon, stars, and planets of the heavens;
Gods of the earth and mountains in this realm below!
Village spirits, gods of the rivers in all directions!
Sakyamuni, Eight Diamond Kings,
Eight Guardian Generals, Ten Great Kings,
Holy Emperor, and Kangnin Spirit!
I beg you pray for us!”

“God has placed the sun and moon
In heaven for the sight of man;

If they were not there
 What could we discern?
 My father, born in the year of *muja*,
 Became blind within thirty years
 And cannot see anything.
 I beg you let this body of mine, instead,
 Bear my father's flaw
 And then brighten my father's eyes!"

And thus she prayed without end. One day Shim Ch'ōng heard that some men from a trading ship out of Nanking were trying to buy a fifteen-year-old maiden. Pleased to hear this, she sent Kwidōk's mother as a go-between to ask the particulars of their intention to buy a person. aniri
[1:21b]

"We are sailors from Nanking. If we make a sacrifice when we pass the waters at the Indang Sea, we can cross the boundless seas without incident and make our fortunes. So, if there is a maiden who will sell herself, we will not begrudge her the price."

Shim Ch'ōng was delighted to hear of this and spoke to them.

"I am a person of this village. My father is blind; but if he serves the Buddha sincerely with a sacrifice of three hundred sacks of rice, it is said his eyes will open and he will see. However, we are destitute and utterly without the means to make an offering, so I intend to sell myself. What do you think of buying me?"

Hearing this, the sailors replied, saying, "Your filial piety is profound but you are desperate."

They acceded and immediately delivered three hundred sacks of rice to Mongun Temple.

"The ship leaves on the fifteenth day of the third month of this year," they said, and left.

Shim Ch'ōng spoke to her father.

"The three hundred sacks of sacrificial rice have already been delivered so please don't be worried any more." [1:22a]

Blindman Shim was startled.

"What does this mean?"

How could such an inherently filial daughter as Shim Ch'ōng deceive her father? But it was unavoidable under the circumstances. She replied using a clever trick to deceive him for the nonce.

"The old lady of Minister Chang's household asked last month to take me as her adopted daughter. I couldn't possibly have agreed then. But now, with no way to arrange for the three hundred sacks of sacrificial rice, I explained the situation to the old lady. So I have sold myself as her adopted daughter for the gift of three hundred sacks of white rice."

Blindman Shim, not knowing the true color of events, listened with pleasure.

"That would be an admirable thing to do! That lady is the wife of a national minister and so is perhaps no common person. They must have

enjoyed plentiful reward and therefore their three sons command great authority in the official life. Still, it does sound strange to say that you have sold yourself as a child to a yangban. But, in that you sell yourself as an adopted daughter to the household of Minister Chang, should I be concerned? Just when are you going?" [1:22b]

"They say they will take me on the fifteenth of next month."

"Ah, how well this has worked out!"

From this day on, Shim Ch'öng was plunged deep into thought.

To be separated by death forever
 From her dim-eyed, white-haired father
 And to be born into the world
 Only to die at the age of fifteen:
 Such thoughts leave her senses stunned.
 She has no heart for household tasks
 And gives up eating altogether.
 Having passed the time in melancholy,
 She thinks matters over and over again.

chinyang cho

"This is water that has been spilt,
 An arrow that has been set in flight.
 The day draws slowly closer—
 This will not do!
 As long as I remain alive
 I shall see to father's clothing and laundry."

After lining his spring and autumn clothing
 And stitching up his summer suits,
 She irons them and sets them aside.
 She pads his winter clothing
 And puts it away in the chest, wrapped in a cloth.
 She rolls blue cotton chin straps for hats,
 Which she hangs up on the wall;
 And, fashioning inner hats,
 She attaches their ties and hangs them up.

She reckons the day of the ship's departure
 And it is only one night away.
 It is the third watch of the desolate night
 And the Milky Way has turned.

[1:23a]

Facing just her lonely candle,
 With both knees bent up under her,
 And her butterfly eyebrows lowered;
 She draws a long, deep sigh.
 No matter how filial a daughter,

Can her heart be calm?

"I'll sew up father's stockings
For this last time," she thinks.

She slips thread into a needle;
But her breast is seized with feeling,
Her eyes are dim and her spirit is dazed.
Endless tears well up from her very heart.
But, for fear her father will be woken,
She cannot cry aloud.
Weeping with hoarse sobs,
She touches her face to his
And caresses his hands and feet.

"How many more days will you know me?
Once I am dead and gone,
In whom will you trust as you live on?
Oh, sad, Father!
After I came of age,
He gave up begging;
But even from tomorrow on
He'll become the village beggar.
How he will be spurned!
How he will be contemned!
By reason of what flawed destiny
Did my mother die in the first seven days
And am I parted even from my father?"

[1:23b]

"Could this have happened to another?"

chung mori

"When Su T'ung-ch'ien was separated from his mother:
The sun set at Ho-liang and tears welled up within the clouds.
When separated from brothers on Lung Mountain:
There was one less to put dogwood in his hair.
When friends were separated at Wei-ch'eng:
There were no more old friends west of Yang Gate.
And when the beauties of Wu and Yueh were separated from their men:
For the traveler on Kuan-shan, how long his road?"

"There have been many such partings.
For people who have parted while they live
There comes a day to hear of news
And there comes a day for them to meet again.
But when my father and I have parted,
On what day will I hear his news

And at what time will we two meet again?"
 "Mother, who is dead and gone,
 Has journeyed to the Yellow Springs;
 And now that I have come to die,
 I shall go to the Water Palace.
 How many thousand *li* does it take to journey
 From the Water Palace to the Yellow Springs?"

"Though my mother and I try to meet again
 How would my mother know me
 And how would I know my mother?
 If perchance I ask the way and find my mother,
 On the day when we two meet again
 She will surely ask for news of father.
 With what words would I answer?"

"If only I could bind tomorrow morning's sun
 To the branches of the Fu-sang Tree
 As it rises from this night-long stay in Hsien Lake,
 Then I could care a little longer for my poor father.
 But sad! Who could stay
 The sun and moon in their transit?
 Alas, alas! How sad!"

[1:24a]

The world is heartless,
 For soon the rooster crows.
 Shim Ch'öng is helpless.

chinyang cho

"Rooster! Rooster! Still your cry!
 I beg of you, be still!
 I am not Meng Ch'ang-chün
 At the midnight frontier gates of Ch'in!
 If you cry, day will dawn
 And when day dawns, I die.
 It is not sad that I die.
 But how can I go, forgetting my father
 Who has no one to depend upon?"

Before she realized, the east had grown bright and Shim Ch'öng knew she must set about preparing and serving her father's rice for the last time. When she opened the door and stepped outside, the sailors were standing beyond the brushwood gate.

aniri

They spoke to her, saying, "This is the day the boat sets sail. Please let us go then, quickly."

As Shim Ch'öng listened to these words, the color drained from her face, the strength disappeared from her limbs, her throat grew tight, and her

senses, dazed. She barely managed to call the sailors to her.

[1:24b]

"Please heed me, sailors. I also have already realized that today the boat sets sail. But my father does not yet know that I have sold myself; and when he comes to learn of it, there is going to be some trouble. So, I beg you hold off just a while. After I have made father's rice for the last time and he has finished eating, I shall tell him and prepare myself to leave."

The sailors answered, "Please do so."

Shim Ch'ōng went back inside and, while in tears, made rice and offered it to her father. Sitting across the small table from him, she did all she could to see that he ate well. She broke off pieces of seasoned fish and put them into his mouth; she wrapped rice in dried seaweed and put it on his spoon.

"Please eat a lot."

Blindman Shim was quite unaware.

"Ah! Today's side dishes are very tasty! Were there memorial rites at somebody's house?"

Blindman Shim had dreamed a dream that night about the relationship of parent and child. There was portent to the dream.

"Child, child! It's a strange thing. Last night I had a dream. You were riding a large wagon and seemed to go on without end. The wagon would be something ridden by a noble person; perhaps there will be some happy event at our house! If not, perhaps it was a palanquin from Minister Chang's house to take you there!"

[1:25a]

Shim Ch'ōng guessed it was a dream of her death but replied falsely.

"That is a good dream!" she said, and moved the food table away. After she lit her father's pipe for him, she turned to the table to eat. But tears boiled up from within her heart and poured from her eyes. As she thought of her father's situation and the fact that she was going to die, her senses became dazed and her body trembled. She could not eat.

After removing the food table. Shim Ch'ōng washed her hands again and went into the family shrine in order to take her leave. She opened the door of the shrine with care and there paid her last respects.

"This unworthy descendant Shim Ch'ōng
Has sold herself to be taken
As a sacrifice at the Indang Sea
In order to reopen her father's eyes.
Though this burning of incense
For our ancestors may cease,
I shall bear them in my heart forever."

chinyang cho

After withdrawing tearfully
And closing the door of the shrine,
She goes back to her father
And, catching hold of him with both hands,
Falls into a swoon.

[1:25b]

chajin mori

I would sell my eyes to buy you;
 Though I sold you to open my eyes,
 What would I open my eyes to see?
 By reason of what cruel fate
 Did I become a widower?"

"Hey, you! You fellows there!
 It's all right to do your trading
 But where have you seen a human being
 Bought and then killed in rites?
 With God's benevolence
 And the clearness of the spirits' hearts,
 Would you escape your retribution?
 Have you lured away without my knowledge
 Then paid a price and bought
 The only daughter of this blind fellow—
 Young child, unknowing of the world?
 I don't want rice, nor do I want money!"

"Louts! You common fellows!
 Don't you know the ancient texts?
 During the great seven-year drought
 When people prayed with human sacrifice,
 The Emperor Ch'eng T'ang had compassion:

[1:26b]

*What I pray for now
 Is for humanity.
 If you must kill people to pray,
 Then take my body in their place!"*

"Making a sacrifice of himself,
 He wrapped his body in white grass,
 Cut his hair and fingernails,
 And prayed in Shang-lin Gardens:
 Then came great rains to cover
 Thousands of *li*, it is said."

"Since such a thing once happened
 How would it be for me
 To be taken in her place?
 Look here, villagers!
 Do you only stand and watch such louts?"

Shim Ch'öng catches hold of her father
 And consoles him tearfully.

chung mori

“Father, there is nothing we can do.
 Though I die first, father,
 Please let your eyes be opened
 And see the bright, wide world.
 Find yourself a good person
 And, bearing sons and daughters,
 Send down your progeny
 Without thinking of this unworthy daughter.
 Live a long, long, healthy life!
 Since this is the will of heaven
 What good is our regret?”

When the sailors took in this sad spectacle, their leader conferred with *aniri*
 them.

“In view of the maiden Shim’s filial piety and Blindman Shim’s situa- [1:27a]
 tion in life, how would it be if we devised a plan to see that he went neither
 hungry nor ill-clothed?”

“Yes, what you say is proper.”

They brought into the village two hundred sacks of rice, three hundred
yang of money, and one bolt each of cotton and hemp cloth. They called the
 villagers together and made arrangements.

“Give the two hundred sacks of rice and three hundred *yang* of money
 to a diligent man to increase it well without interest and so provide food for
 Blindman Shim. Give him twenty of the three hundred sacks as a year’s pro-
 visions; and if you put out the remainder each year, taking long-term inter-
 est, he will be amply provided for. And, with the cotton and hemp, prepare
 his clothing for the four seasons. Have our intentions published by the local
 magistrate and conveyed to the village.”

When the sailors had made all arrangements and asked Shim Ch’ōng to
 go, the lady of Minister Chang’s household in Murŭng Village finally heard
 of this and quickly sent her serving girl to call for Shim Ch’ōng.

The maiden follows after the servant. *chinyang cho*
 The minister’s lady dashes out the gate
 And, grasping the maiden’s hand, cries,

“Oh, you thoughtless person! [1:27b]
 I had thought of you as my child,
 But you do not know me as a mother!
 To sell yourself and face your death
 For three hundred sacks of rice
 May be ultimate filial piety,
 But can it be the same as
 Staying in this world and being filial?”

“If you had only consulted with me,

I would have assisted at once!
 Now, I am going to provide you
 Three hundred sacks of white rice---
 Give it back to the sailors
 And cease this silly talk!"

The maiden Shim responds, saying,

"Though now I may regret
 Not speaking at the outset,
 What is there that can be done?
 In begging help for father,
 How could I presume upon another's treasures?
 And, even if I gave back
 The three hundred sacks of rice,
 It would be untoward for the sailors.
 That, also, is a difficulty."

"For me to promise myself to them,
 Only to go back on the agreement,
 Would be the act of an unworthy person.
 In this I cannot obey you.
 How dare I lift my face
 And what words could I say
 Months after receiving payment?"

[1:28a]

"I shall repay the favor of
 Your kind words and great benevolence
 After going to the netherworld,
 As the old man repaid Wei K'ó
 By binding his enemy's legs."

Tears soak the collar of her jacket.
 The lady looks once more
 And sees that Shim Ch'ǒng means her words.
 With no choice in the matter,
 She can neither try to dissuade Shim Ch'ǒng
 Nor can she let her go away!
 Shim Ch'ǒng, in tears, speaks to her:

"Lady Chang, in a former life
 You were my parent.
 When shall I again attend you?
 I shall compose a poem
 To express for you my feelings;
 Hence you can divine them

When you look upon it."
 Lady Chang happily gets out
 The paper, brush, and ink.
 As she lifts up the brush and writes,
 She lets flow tears of blood
 That fall one by one and blossom
 As flowers on a picture scroll.
 They hang it in the main hall
 And the lines of poetry read:

chung mori

*Birth and life, death and return are but the passing of a single dream;
 Why should this draw forth our feelings, inundating us with tears?
 But in life there is a moment—most heartbreaking of them all:
 As the southern bank of the Yang-tze greens, and someone there does not* [1:28b]
return.

Again and again Lady Chang
 Tries to detain Shim Ch'ōng.
 But then, seeing the poem, speaks:

"You are surely not
 A person of this world!
 Your poetry is truly a fairy's work!
 Clearly the cycle of destiny is finished
 And the Jade Emperor calls you back.
 How can you avoid it?
 I shall also write a poem
 To harmonize with yours."

*Wind and rain, unbidden, come darkly in the night.
 A famous flower, borne on the wind—at whose gate will it fall?
 Heaven surely must have pity for one exiled in this world;
 And so breaks the strong ties between a father and his child.*

Shim Ch'ōng pressed the poem to her bosom and separated tearfully *aniri*
 from Lady Chang. One could not have borne to watch.

Shim Ch'ōng returned and went to take leave of her father. Shaking [1:29b]
 with agony, he took hold of her.

"You're leaving me for dead! You can't just leave! Take me with you!
 You can't go alone!"

Shim Ch'ōng consoled her father.

"Do I break the bonds between parent and child because I want to break
 them? Do I die because I want to die? That our way is blocked by misfortune
 and that there is a time to live and to die are solely matters of Providence.
 What use are lamentations? In our hearts, there will be no day of parting."

Shim Ch'ōng gave her father into the hands of the villagers and fol-

lowed the sailors.

As she lets loose painful wails,
She tightens her waistband,
Hugs up her trailing skirts,
And lets her disheveled hair
Fall loose below her ears.

chung mori

The tears that fall like rain
Soak into her clothing,
Stumbling back and forth,
She grasps for support as they go
And looks toward a house across the way.

“Older daughter of the house!
With whom will you do
Your hemstitching and embroidery now?
Do you perhaps remember
When we played together after swinging
Last year on Tano Day?”

chinyang cho
[1:29b]

“Younger daughter of the house!
We were going to pray together
On the seventh day of the seventh month.
But now it’s all in vain!
When shall I see you again?
You all were born to good fortune;
Stay well and take good care of your parents!”

The villagers, men and women, old and young alike,
Cling to each other and cry
Until their eyes are swollen.

chung mori

God in Heaven might well understand:
For after the parting at the village wall,
The bright sun disappears
And somber clouds gather densely;
The green mountains seem to frown
And the sound of the river is a hoarse sob;
Languid flowers, once colorful and fair,
Seem to wither now and lose their hue,
And even the deep green willows droop sadly.

As spring birds, full of feeling,
Make a hundred cries, one of them asks:
“Nightingale there!

From whom have you parted
That you come crying for your friend?"

Suddenly a cuckoo cries, letting blood.
No matter how you cry from that branch—
Somewhere within the empty, moonlit hills—
Your heart-rending plea, *Oh! To go home!*
How can that body whose price is paid
Ever once again come back?

[1:30a]

A flower, borne on the wind,
Brushes against the jade-fine face;
She picks it up and gazes on it.
*They say the spring wind takes no one's part;
But why does it blow a flower my way?*
Princess Shou-yang of the Emperor Wu of Han
Had a crown of flowers;
But a person on her way to die—
For whom will she adorn herself?
Do blossoms falling in the springtime mountains
Fall because they want to?

The course of events is beyond us:
Whom do we hate? Whom do we fault?
Looking back at one step
Crying at a second step,
She arrives at the river's head.
By a gangplank laid at the bow
They lead Shim Ch'ōng aboard;
And, after placing her in the passengers' tent,
They weigh anchor and hoist sail.

chajin mori

The sailors raise their oaring chant,
Ōgiya, ōgiya!
Ōgiyang, ōgiyang!

aniri

To the *tung-dung* beating of a drum, they worked their oars to row the
boat.

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