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Professional prophecies in modern South Korea

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Táto diplomová práca sa zameriava na veštenie (predpovedanie budúcnosti) v modernej kórejskej spoločnosti. Napriek tomu, že Južná Kórea je jednou z najrozvinutejších a najmodernejších krajín sveta, veštedstvo v nej pretrvalo. A aj keď sa väčšina moderných Juhokórejčanov považuje za kresťanov alebo budhistov, stále veľa ľudí navštevuje veštcov, aby našli riešenia svojich každodenných problémov alebo len ako formu zábavy. Úvodná teoretická časť práce poskytuje základné východiská týkajúce sa vzniku veštenia a jeho histórie. Ako autoritatívny výskum kategorizuje metódy veštenia a ako môžeme klasifikovať praktiky, ktoré sa používajú v Kórei? Ako sa tieto praktiky vyvinuli? A aké bolo postavenie veštenia v kórejskej spoločnosti a kultúre v minulosti? Hlavná časť tejto práce zahŕňa analýzu najbežnejšej metódy veštenia rozšírenej v Kórei, ktorou sú „štyri piliere osudu“ (*saju*). Prostredníctvom všeobecného pochopenia princípov, na ktorých *saju* stojí, sa pokúša zostaviť čiastkové proroctvá, ktorých objavenie je možné očakávať v získaných horoskopoch. Ďalej skúma, do akej miery veštcovia uplatňujú všeobecné pravidlá a aké sú rozdiely medzi priamym veštením (z očí do očí) a online veštením, v otázke zhody obsahu. Na záver porovnáva výsledky a zistenia so zavedeným výskumom, či už sú v zhode alebo v rozpore.

Annotation

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This master thesis project focuses on fortune telling (divination, prediction) in modern Korean society. Despite the fact South Korea is one of the most developed and modern countries in the world, the practice of fortune telling has persisted. And even though a majority of modern South Koreans conceive of themselves either as Christians or Buddhists, a great number of people still visit fortune tellers to either find solutions for their everyday problems or simply as a form of entertainment. The introductory (“theoretical”) part of this work provides basic backgrounds in regard to the origins of fortune telling and its history. How does authoritative research categorize the methods of divination and how can we classify the practices that are applied in Korea? How did these develop? And what has been the place of fortune telling in Korean society and culture in the past? The main part of this work involves a discussion of the most common fortune telling method prevalent in contemporary Korea, that is the “four pillars of destiny” (*saju*). Through a general understanding of the principles on which *saju* stands, it tries to set up partial prophecies that are expected to appear in fortune readings that are to be given. It further examines to which extent the general rules are applied by fortune tellers and what the differences are between face to face and online divinations in the matter of content match, comparing the results and findings with established research, be it for confirmation, be it for contradiction.

Pod'akovanie

Týmto sa chcem poďakovať vedúcemu svojej diplomovej práce Mag. phil. Andreasovi Schirmerovi, Dr. za jeho odborné rady a skvelý prístup, vďaka ktorému bol celý proces bez zbytočného stresu. Moja vďaka patrí aj zvyšnému profesorskému zboru za vedomosti, o ktoré sa so mnou podelili a spolužiakom za nezabudnuteľné roky strávené na univerzite. Nakoniec by som sa samozrejme rada poďakovala svojej rodine, ktorá ma počas celého štúdia neúnavne podporovala a Wookbongovi, že ma ako prvý vzal ku kórejskej veštici a tým dal možnosť na vznik tejto práce.

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Editorial note

For romanization of Korean words, this work uses the Revised Romanization of 2000 developed by the National Academy of Korean Language. In case of well established, widely-known romanization, it should be preserved. Foreign words are written in italics.

Introduction

The desire to know the future and eagerness to know what it brings is a natural part of humankind. Different forms of fortune telling practices were present throughout history all around the world and South Korea is not an exception. “The fortune teller said all my hardships will end next year, so I need to hold on just a little longer.” One would not expect those are words of a thirty years old Korean man – an acquaintance of mine. Indeed, when one says “South Korea,” modern smartphones, cars and high-tech technologies come to mind in the first place – or at least for the general public. How can it be explained that a country, which is associated with modernity and innovations, cannot let go of the practices commonly labeled as unscientific or even “occult”? The interest in this topic is demonstrated by an increasing number of academic works that try to find answers for those questions, related to Korean fondness for divination. This work is built on the existing literature and aims to provide more light into the matter.

The first part of this thesis maps the history of divination on the Korean peninsula. It aims to present its origins, evolution and the position of fortune telling, from the Three Kingdoms era up to the present to help better understand its importance in Korean society. This is followed by an introduction of the main forms of divination, used nowadays.

The main part of this work focuses on the most common divination form practiced in South Korea, that is the “four pillars of destiny” (*saju*). To make a prophecy based on *saju*, fortune teller work with dates of birth, which affect different aspects of one’s destiny. *Saju* is said to be more of an analytic system rather than mere superstition, so it can be expected the prophecies will be somewhat consistent. The main objective is to evaluate the consistency of divination. Do fortune tellers always stick to the same criteria? Moreover, through understanding of essential principles on which *saju* stands, this work tries to create its own partial prophecies and later compares them to the obtained professional readings. Four distinct fortune readings are used for this purpose. The findings obtained through analysis of the readings are discussed in accordance with existing literature.

In the last part, I examine the motivation of Korean people to see fortune tellers against the backdrop COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Terminology

The terms fortune telling and divination (*jeom* or *jeombok*) are both generally understood as the practice of predicting information or events in people's lives. The term divination is widely used as a part of different religious rituals that may involve various spirits or deities (*sinjeom*). Therefore, in order to obtain answers to questions about the future, the diviner uses various ways to consult supernatural beings. He thus represents some sort of medium between the client and the imaginary superpower. By contrast, fortune telling accounts for less formal practices. A fortune teller (*jeomjaengi* or *yeoksulga*) may use different methods through which he will predict the future.¹ The most common forms of fortune telling are astromancy (prediction based on stars), cartomancy (based on cards, e.g. tarot cards), onomancy (based on names), and palmistry (based on palm lines).

When applied to the Korean setting, those who could be actually called diviners are the Korean shamans (*mudang*). There are quite many different types of them in Korea. Those, who learn their trade from their parents or other older relatives, are the hereditary shamans. Those shamans who are considered as chosen by the spirits and having accepted their vocation after overcoming the so-called "shaman illness" are supposed to wield more spiritual power. These shamans get "possessed" during the ritual in order to serve as a medium to communicate with supernatural entities. When people are concerned about the future, they can also visit shamanic diviners. Unlike the already mentioned shaman types, these do not perform shamanic rituals (*gut*), but they ask the client's questions directly to the spirits and obtain answers by throwing rice grains, coins, etc.²

Diviners in Korea can be divided into two groups. Shamans and shamanic diviners correspond to what Young calls "mediumistic" diviners who use methods in which a spiritual inspiration holds primacy. They can work in groups while dealing with clients,³ and the vast majority (around 95 %) of those shamans and shamanic diviners are women.⁴

The "analytical" or "professional" diviners (fortune tellers in the common terminology) used to be literate and educated men in the past. Analytical diviners work

¹ GORDON, J. Melton: *The Encyclopedia of Religious Phenomena*, 115–116.

² BAKER, Don: *Religion in twenty-first century Korean Lives*, 93–94.

³ YOUNG, B. *Elizabeth: Spirits and Other Signs*, 51–52.

⁴ BAKER, Don: *Religion in twenty-first century Korean Lives*, 94.

one-on-one with their clients, while using methods which utilize an analytical system based on Chinese philosophy. They deny that what they are doing is anyhow religious, since they do not consult spirits. Instead, they are using ancient books and writings.⁵ For the purpose of this work, the terms divination (diviner) and fortune telling (fortune teller) will be used as synonyms, referring both solely to the trade of professional diviners.

⁵ BAKER, Don: *Religion in Twenty-First Century Korean Lives*, 94.

2. Historical view on the divination in Korea and China

2.1 Origins of fortune telling and its development in China

Fortune telling has a long history in Korea. Under strong Chinese influence, Koreans adopted various styles of predicting the future. The first one is assumed to have been a divination method used in the ancient Shang dynasty. The diviners used to read images that would appear on the animal when burned or heated over fire, to predict the future and get answers for questions such as trivial daily problems, harvests and wars. The most common material for fortune telling were turtle's belly or back shells that were generally found in the south and west of Yangtze river.⁶ This was called *bok* (卜), which means telling the message of God by human tongue.⁷ In Korean language, the divination, and one of the way of calling fortune telling practices is *jeombok* (占卜) which originated from the Chinese characters.⁸

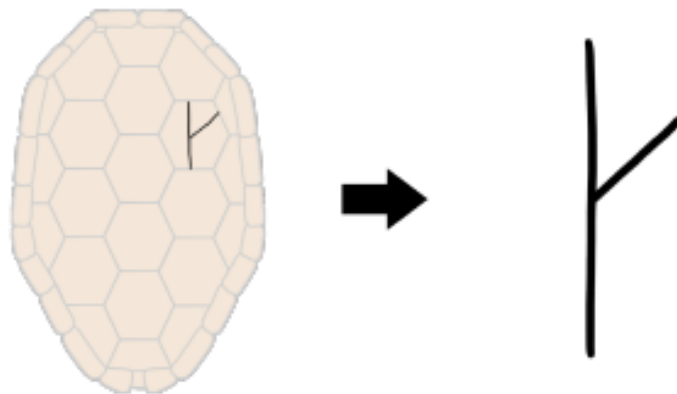


Figure 1 Origin of the *bok* character. Source: Naver hanja dictionary.

The Spring and Autumn period (771–476 BC) and the period of Warring States (475–221 BC) were times in which various ideas and philosophies blossomed enough to be called the era of “Hundred Schools of Thought”. This era produced many scholars; among them namely Confucius who wrote a great number of books that later influenced Korea.⁹

It was around this time when the divination by reading images had been gradually replaced by divination based on numbers. The precondition was the existence of the *Book of Changes* (*I Ching*, kor. *Juyeok*) – an ancient divination text, which is also one

⁶ LEE Shi-song: *A Study on the Implications of Vocabulary derived from Divination*, 45–46.

⁷ Ibid, 182.

⁸ LEE, E-Wha: *Korea's Pastimes and Customs*, 246.

⁹ Definition and History of Myeongni [online].

of the Five Chinese Classics. This text defined fortune telling as “finding out what will happen, by calculating the given numbers”¹⁰ on a considerably random basis – determined by tossing dice or coins. Through this process a hexagram formed by six horizontal lines was made. The combination of broken and unbroken lines could make 64 different hexagrams. Each of them was named and included a short text as a result of divination.¹¹ The *Book of Changes* became the subject of interest for many scholars and as the basis for divination practices has eventually helped to evolve many different ways of fortune telling across East Asia.¹²

Even though the practice of judging one’s fortune by examining the harmony of 10 Heavenly Stems and 12 Earthly Branches (Chinese zodiac), as well as the *Book of Changes*, existed earlier in the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BC) it was during the Warring States period when the practice was met with the Yin and Yang theory and the theory of five elements and began to develop into subtle technique for predicting human fate.¹³ Scholars that are said to contribute greatly into systematizing fortune telling practices were Zou Yan and Guiguzi.

The unified Chinese empire under the Tang dynasty (618–907 AD) was another era of cultural and political growth, which greatly contributed to the development of Korea as well. Li Xuzhong (kor. Lee Heojung), assumed to have been active in the 9th century, was the fortune teller who first established predictions of the future based on the so-called three pillars.¹⁴ He argued that human destiny is determined by the year, month and day of one’s birth. Later, during the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), Xu Ziping (kor. Seo Geoi) added his own research of Yin and Yang and five elements theories to the pillars theory. He wrote *Japyeongbeop* (*Ziping’s Laws*), a study which served as the basis for posterior’s *Yeonhae japyeong*, an academic work, in which the time of one’s birth was added as the fourth pillar. This book is said to be the first systematic and comprehensive book on the four pillars of destiny theory.¹⁵ Afterwards the theory was enriched by many other scholars throughout China’s history to form a concept similar to the one which is used nowadays.

The last imperial dynasty ruled by the Han Chinese, the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), had a diverse fortune telling culture throughout the whole society. Different

¹⁰ LEE, E-Wha: *Korea’s Pastimes and Customs*, 247.

¹¹ RUTT, Richard: *The Book of Changes (Zhouyi)*, 122–125.

¹² LEE, E-Wha: *Korea’s Pastimes and Customs*, 249.

¹³ AN, Seungyeol: “Seungyeol: History of Myeongni”.

¹⁴ Definition and History of Myeongni [online].

¹⁵ KIM, Jongki: “History of Four Pillars Studies”.

aspects of it were described by R. J. Smith in his work *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers: Divination in Traditional Chinese*. The four pillar method, called *bazi* (eight characters) in China, was the most popular and accessible form of divination. But apart from that, physiognomy, hand reading, geomancy (feng shui), *I Ching* divination, astrology based divinations and many other methods using different objects, such as bamboo sticks or bones were also common.¹⁶

In the time of Qing dynasty (1636–1912) divination was still widely used across the large empire. At that time the research on the four pillars of destiny was still ongoing, but after the Chinese Communist party came into power, the existing divination literature and ideas were wiped out in the process of Cultural Revolution. Scholars engaged in fortune telling had to flee to Taiwan to continue their studies.¹⁷

Fortune telling in China, as it required literacy, was almost exclusively men's culture. Women engaging in divination practices were more of a shamanic origin and used methods such as consulting spirits and were therefore looked down upon by the intellectual class.¹⁸ This is one of the many things which Korea and China also had in common, considering the patriarchal societies. Moreover, it should be noted that this was a highly simplified view on Chinese fortune telling and should serve solely as a theoretical background to the topic.

2.2 Divination on Korean Peninsula

2.2.1 Ancient Korea, the Three Kingdoms (57 BC–668 AD) and the Unified Silla period (668–935)

Without a doubt the oldest type of *jeombok* on Korean ground was a shamanic divination.¹⁹ In ancient times there were no professional fortune tellers, but with the establishment of the tribal states, shamans, who predicted the fate of a king or country, emerged. In each of the three kingdoms, they had their own title. In Goguryeo they were called *samu* (master shaman), in Baekje *ilja* (person who foretells the fate of the day), and *ilgwan* (official in charge of the fate of the day) in Silla.²⁰ A glimpse into what the divination may have looked like in this point of Korean history can be found in *Samguk sagi* (*History of the Three Kingdoms*) and *Samguk yusa* (*Memorabilia of the Three*

¹⁶ SMITH, Richard J.: *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers*, 45–197.

¹⁷ KIM, Jongki: "History of Four Pillars Studies".

¹⁸ SMITH, Richard J.: "Women and Divination in Traditional China: Some Reflections".

¹⁹ YOO, Kwangsuk: *Applicability of Religious Economy Model (REM) to the Growth of Fortunetelling in Contemporary Korea*, 50.

²⁰ Fortune teller [online].

Kingdoms). While the *Samguk sagi*, compiled by Kim Busik in 1145, is the oldest official record of Korean history, the *Samguk yusa* from 1281 contains considerably more of Korean myths, legends and folktales.²¹

Both of the annals, tell a famous story of the King Uija of Baekje. One day he ordered servant to dig a ground outside of the palace and found a tortoise with an inscription on its shell saying: “Baekje is like a full moon and Silla is like a crescent moon”. When the king asked the shaman about the meaning, the shaman explained to the king that the full moon can no longer grow and will therefore decline, while the crescent moon is gradually getting bigger. The indication that the Baekje will be defeated by Silla made the king angry and he had the shaman killed.²²

Another legend from the *Samguk yusa* mentions a diviner named Chunam. When asked by the queen of Goguryeo why the river in border region flowed backwards the diviner revealed that the unnatural sexual behavior of her and the king is reversing the way of Yin and Yang. The angry queen accused him of being a conman and not a real fortune teller. She gave him a test to guess what’s in a box, where she had put a mouse. Chunam answered that there are eight mice and was killed for his wrong answer. Right before he died he swore to be reborn as a military general in Silla and destroy Goguryeo. The next day the king had a dream of Chunam’s spirit entering the body of Kim Yusin’s (the lead persona in Silla’s unification) mother. They found out afterwards that the mouse in the box had another seven mice in her womb and that Chunam was executed unjustly.²³

The two stories show how divination was performed in the ancient kingdoms, as well as they show that an unpleasant prophecy for the king might get one killed. Divination was used to foretell the future of a nation through the metamorphosis of animals, meteorological or natural phenomena, transformation of plants and so on. The diviner’s function was to observe and interpret occurrences of natural disasters and astronomical objects such as the sun, moon or stars. Animals like for instance magpies, horses, cattles, or chickens were major objects of interest in Korean prophecies. For the plant divination, they minded things like dried up trees or its blooming in unusual seasons. Dream interpretations were also frequently mentioned.²⁴

²¹ KIM, Kichung: *An Introduction to Classical Korean Literature*.

²² Ibid.

²³ KIM, Kichung: *An Introduction to Classical Korean Literature*, and: A scary fortune teller and Silla hero Yushin Kim [online].

²⁴ *Handbook of Korea*, 454.

All those divination practices were performed together by same diviners but later the functions of shamanic diviners, who specialized on foretelling the future based on turtle shells, animal bones and other original methods, and those who specialized in astronomy got strictly divided. Especially the latter were later incorporated into the state governments. The Silla kingdom even had an institution called *Gwansanggam* to supervise them.²⁵

The image of fortune telling in Korea was changing also by active acceptance of Chinese culture during the Three kingdoms. Goguryeo and Baekje were particularly keen on adopting innovations from their neighbor. Along with Buddhism new divination methods got into Korea. Goguryeo accepted Buddhism in 372 and Baekje in 384. Goguryeo even established *Taehak*, a national academy that taught Chinese classics and among them the first divination book – the *Book of changes*. Silla was the slowest on taking up, as it adhered the most to the traditional shamanistic beliefs. Silla accepted Buddhism in 527 and established *Gukhak*, a suchlike institution for teaching Confucian classics, only after its unification in 682.²⁶

When the Unified Silla dynasty was close to its collapse, lived a Buddhist monk named Doseon (826–892), who contributed greatly to the enrichment of Korean divination. Apart from Daoism he studied *Seon* Buddhism and traveled to Tang China to gain more knowledge on astronomy, mathematics, *I Ching* divination and geomantic techniques. He is considered the founder of the geomancy (*pungsu*, lit. wind and water) in Korea. He adopted the Chinese principles of feng shui into the Korean landscape and cultural traditions and created a system called *bibo pungsu jiri* (“Assistance to geomancy principles”). His teaching placed greater emphasis on harmony with nature. Doseon claimed that picking an auspicious spot for building temples or even cities could bring good fortune and prosperity for whole dynasties.²⁷ By utilization of geomantic principles he predicted that the Silla’s capital Gyeongju would be misfortunate, and on the contrary Gaeseong (Kaesong), Seoul and Pyeongyang will become national centers in the future.²⁸ Because he is said to have made numerous accurate forecasts for the kingdom as well as for individuals, he is regarded as a sort of

²⁵ Fortune teller [online].

²⁶ KIM, Jinwung: *A History of Korea*, 65–67.

²⁷ Biography of Doseon [online].

²⁸ KIM, Jinwung: *A History of Korea*, 106–107.

founder-patron for contemporary Korean fortune tellers. Doseon's geomancy theories were significantly expanded by Confucian scholars in Goryeo and Joseon dynasties.²⁹

2.2.2 Goryeo (918–1392)

Taejo Wang Geon, the founder and the first king of Goryeo dynasty, was especially known as a passionate follower of Doseon's *pungsu jiri*. According to *Goryeosa (History of Goryeo)* he has left his political will, known as "ten injunctions" (*Hunyo sipjo*), for his successors to obey in order to secure Goryeo's prosperity in the future. For instance, the second injunction states that Buddhist temples should be built exclusively according to Doseon's recommendations and geomancy principles. If the temples were to be built arbitrarily, the nation's fortune would not last long. Wang Geon also insisted that thoughtless constructions of temples were the reason for Silla's fall. The fifth injunction is about the importance of Pyeongyang for its auspicious location. Apart from the main capital Gaeseong and "Southern capital" Seoul (Hanyang) (which were too labeled by Doseon as fortunate), Wang Geon made Pyeongyang the "Western capital". In this injunction, he advised that every king should visit the city four times a year for at least 100 days overall.³⁰

Buddhism served as the state religion during the Goryeo dynasty, but Confucianism also played an important role in governing the kingdom. Silla had its "bone rank system" which was a hereditary status of its people, however, king Gwangjong implemented Chinese-style national civil service examination (*gwageo*) in 958 to select people for official positions through the entire period. Among the examination types there were *jesureop*, a composition test in literature or poetry, *myeonggyeongeop*, which tested knowledge of Confucian classics, and *jabeop*, a miscellaneous exam for specialists with technical knowledge. Through the last exam the specialist on divination (*bogeop*) and geomancy (*jirieop*) were chosen together with specialists on, for example, medicine or state law.³¹

Goryeo, following the Silla's system, had an institution in charge of astronomy (*Taesaguk*) and one in charge of fortune telling (*Taebokgam*). Lately they merged and changed its name several times. To *Sacheondae* (1023), *Sacheongam* (1116), *Gwanhuseo* (1275), and finally by the end of the period it was called *Seoungwan* (1308). After the implementation of Gwangjong's examination system, private fortune tellers

²⁹ Biography of Doseon [online].

³⁰ GLOMB, V., LÖWENSTEINOVÁ, M.: *Kórejská náboženství*, 40–42.

³¹ KIM, Jinwung: *A History of Korea*, 133.

could be selected and appointed into those institutions as officials with the title *bokjeong* or *bokbaksa* – doctor of divination.³²

Divination based on the *Book of Changes*, along with other methods, was performed in the temple or royal shrine for important state's matters, such as wars, politics, capital city transfers or during epidemics. It was usually conducted by appointed officials, but there were times where the king himself used the divination in the serious time of need. King Hyeonjong (r. 1009–1031) is said to use divination to decide how to deal with the Khitan invasion in 1010.³³

Shamanism during Goryeo was still widespread and therefore shamans weren't yet at the bottom of the social ladder. However, in the middle, and particularly in the late dynasty, opposition to shamanic practices began. The importance of shamans and shamanistic rituals in royal courts and other high level national ceremonies started to fade and therefore the demand for their services moved onto influencing the life of individuals.³⁴ King Myeongjong (r. 1170–1197) even ordered a ban on shamanic practices, which started the expulsion process of shamans from the capital. A famous poem from that time named “Old shaman” (*Nomupyeon*) by Lee Gyubo, offers a detailed insight on shamanic craft and stresses the need to overcome those superstitious practices.³⁵

2.2.3 Joseon dynasty (1392–1910)

At the beginning of the last Korean dynasty, Neo Confucianism replaced Buddhism as the main national ideology. In order to create a sample Confucian society the government went as far as adopting anti-Buddhism and anti-folk religion policy.³⁶ Monks and shamans were expelled to the countryside or to the mountains, and major Buddhist rituals and festivals which took place in Goryeo were abolished.³⁷

The divination office *Seoungwan* was maintained and later renamed to *Gwansanggam* – Office of observance of natural phenomena, which incorporated fields as astronomy, creation of calendars and almanacs, meteorology, divination and

³² Fortune teller [online].

³³ KIM, U. K. Seong: “Kwanum (Avalokitesvara) Divination”, 4–5.

³⁴ GLOMB, V., LÖWENSTEINOVÁ, M.: *Kórejská náboženství*, 68.

³⁵ National Folk Museum of Korea: *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk Beliefs*, 272.

³⁶ KIM, U. K. Seong: “Kwanum (Avalokitesvara) Divination”, 2.

³⁷ YOO, Kwangsuk: *Applicability of Religious Economy Model (REM) to the Growth of Fortunetelling in Contemporary Korea*, 66.

geomancy. *Gwansanggam* had 20³⁸ officials, who could still be appointed through the civil service exam. Those specializing in were responsible for determining the fate of the nation and individuals.³⁹

In fact, most of the *yangban* (nobility) class was familiar with divination techniques and the concept of fortune telling. The *Book of Changes* was still a classic that formulated Neo Confucian worldview and ideology and was therefore studied by everyone aspiring for an official position. Many scholars studied divination and attempted to foretell their own future or the future of their family based on their knowledge.⁴⁰ There is rich evidence for this, as many *yangban* kept personal records. For example, General Lee Sunsin (1545–1598) used coins or stick-casting divination, to get answers about his family, farming or even battles which were to be fought.⁴¹ Another *yangban* O Huimun, writes in his daily records about his attempts to make predictions about the future through interpretation of his dreams, animal behavior or natural phenomena.⁴² Interesting insights into what Joseon fortune telling looked like are provided by Michael C. E. Finch's article "Dealing with Uncertainty: Divination During the Imjin War (1592–1598) as Recorded in O Huimun's *Swaemirok*", in which he focuses on numerous fortune readings given to O Huimun by divination official Lee Bongnyeong.

Although never mentioned directly, Lee Bongnyeong probably used the *Book of Changes*, or different text based on it, when performing divination, as he is described to cast coins. Another method mentioned, and widely used in Joseon, was divination to determine auspicious days. Ming scholar Lin Shaozhou's (kor. Im Soju) work *Cheongidaeyo (Summary of the Profound Secrets of Nature)* was a book, which used various applications of Yin and Yang, and five element theories to choose lucky days for ceremonial occasions as weddings or funerals and other everyday life matters e.g. moving to a new house or making soy sauce. It was first introduced to Joseon in 1636 and in 1737 an extension called *Sinjeung cheongidaeyo (New Addition to Summary of the Profound Secrets of Nature)* was published under Office of observance of natural phenomena by Yin and Yang department graduate Ji Baekwon.⁴³ Similar guidebooks,

³⁸ YOO, Kwangsuk: *Applicability of Religious Economy Model (REM) to the Growth of Fortunetelling in Contemporary Korea*, 53.

³⁹ FINCH, C. E. Michael: "Dealing with Uncertainty", 34–35.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 33.

⁴¹ KIM, U. K. Seong: "Kwanum (Avalokitesvara) Divination", 5.

⁴² FINCH, C. E. Michael: *Dealing with Uncertainty*, 34.

⁴³ LEE, E-Wha: *Korea's Pastimes and Customs*, 218.

however, existed already in Korea in the 15th century. Namely they were *Chwaryo sinseo* (*New book of the Essentials Summary*) and *Seontaek yoryak* (*Selection Summary*).⁴⁴

It is estimated that Xu Ziping's *Japyeongbop*, on which four pillars of destiny (*saju* or *saju myeongnihak*) was based, got into Korea early in the Goryeo dynasty, when cultural exchange with Song China was common. During the Joseon dynasty, *myeongnihak* (learning of the principles of life (luck)) was one of the regular subjects in the highest Confucian educational institution – *Seonggyungwan*.⁴⁵ In the framework of this learning unknown Joseon scholars compiled *Myeongni jeongjong* (*Orthodox Life Principles*), a book claiming that the fate of human beings can be predicted according to instructions given. They were however so extremely obscure that the book could not gain a general public interest. The credit, for the real spread of popularity of the four pillars divination in the 18th century can, be given to *Dang saju*. It was an easy to use, modified version of four pillars divination method that was first written by the already mentioned Li Xuzhong of Tang dynasty (which gave it the name). It provided a simple guide into judgment of the human destiny based on the date of birth correlating with the five elements, divided one's life fortune into four stages – early, middle, late and great fortune, explained connections with 12 Chinese zodiacs and family relationships. It was also full of colorful illustrations which made it even more likable for commoners.⁴⁶

Lee Jiham's (1517–1578) *Tojong Bigyeol* (“The Secrets of Tojong”) was another script for Korean fortune telling which got popular in the late Joseon dynasty. It was a modified version of the *Book of Changes*. After numerous equations using one's birth date a person ends up with a 3 digit number which determines his yearly fortune. It consisted of, relatively short, 144 different fortunes, but was popular for its simplicity and used mainly around the New Year, especially in early January.⁴⁷ Physiognomy, that is the determination of one's fortune based on his physical appearance, got into Korea along with Buddhism and was therefore widely performed by monks. By the 17th to the 18th century there was a notable increase of physiognomy professionals, who

⁴⁴ FINCH, C. E. Michael: “Dealing with Uncertainty”, 38.

⁴⁵ AN, Seungyeol: „History of Myeongni”.

⁴⁶ LEE, E-Wha: *Korea's Pastimes and Customs*, 251–252.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 213–217.

even set up shops on the streets along with other divination performers to read fortunes of passersby for a fee.⁴⁸



Figure 2 “Alms Gathering” by Kim Hongdo. Source: National Museum of Korea.

Among them, there was another group of professional fortune tellers called *pansu*. *Pansu* were visually impaired people, who practiced fortune telling and exorcism as a means to make a living. The first official records of them begin to appear in late Goryeo dynasty, but in Joseon the mentions are more frequent. For instance, in the “king Sejong chronicles” (*Sejong sillok*) a blind fortune teller Kim Hak-ru made a very accurate prophecy, that the king himself directly met him and granted him a house.⁴⁹ Fortune telling was the most common occupation for the blind and it is estimated that the number of blind fortune tellers was much higher than those who weren’t visually impaired. Most of them were therefore self-sufficient, and young intelligent blind men could even advance to the government office through the same examination as other aspiring diviners. Having mentioned king Sejong already, during his reign in 1445, 10 clever blind people, who were studying miscellaneous sciences in *Seonggyungwan*, were selected and assigned to the Office of observance of natural phenomena.⁵⁰ As officials they were commonly called *myeonggwamaeng* (blind fortune judger) with *maeng* referring to their eye condition.

⁴⁸ LEE, E-Wha: *Korea’s Pastimes and Customs*, 253.

⁴⁹ KIM, Mantae: “A Study on the Development Aspect of Blind Fortune Tellers in Korea”, 251.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 251–257.

As was hinted at the beginning of this chapter, shamanism wasn't in accordance with Confucian learning and therefore oppressed strongly by the Joseon government. The effort to get rid of this "superstitious" tradition however was not very effective. According to official records there were about 2600 professional shaman houses in business in the late 18th century,⁵¹ and shamans were patronized not only by commoners but by Joseon elite as well – especially by its female members. Confucian ideology denied a meaningful role in the society for women. Since they weren't even allowed to take part in Confucian religious worship they became leaning toward shamanism as a way to embrace their spirituality, which considerably strengthened the Shamanism-women relationship persisting in Korea.⁵² This phenomenon can be also detected in O Huimun's records. He describes three occasions when his wife and elderly mother invited a shaman to their house – to pray for one's recovery, perform *gut* to chase evil spirits from the house and to tell fortunes of the family members. Even though the *yangban* shows repugnance towards the shaman he never forbids her from visiting.⁵³

2.2.4 Opening of the country and Korea under Japanese rule

In 1882 Korea ended its isolation policy and opened up to the world. In the direct confrontation with the western nations Korea had to reevaluate fundamentals of its world perceptions. It was evident that the reforms are much needed to catch up as a modern nation. So-called Gabo reforms, which started in 1894, abolished the hierarchical social class system and eliminated *yangban*'s privileges. Governmental institutions and laws were reconstructed to better fit western standards. In the course of the overall ascend of the nation, spread of knowledge and in gaining the West's respect, the traditions and folk culture were often labeled as the source or weakness or main obstacle.⁵⁴ Therefore, Korean divination obtained two main enemies.

First, with the opening to the country, Korea got flooded with Christian missionaries. They are mostly associated with the enlightenment about modern science and education. Missionaries characterized traditional beliefs as fetishism, superstition, devil worship, sorcery, and so forth.⁵⁵ Homer B. Hubert, an American teacher and Methodist missionary who arrived in Seoul in 1886, made a statement about Korean

⁵¹ LEE, E-Wha: *Korea's Pastimes and Customs*, 245.

⁵² KIM, Andrew Eungi: "Nonofficial Religion in South Korea", 296.

⁵³ FINCH, C. E. Michael: "Dealing with Uncertainty", 46–47.

⁵⁴ ROBINSON, Michael. E.: "Nationalism and the Korean Tradition", 35, 47.

⁵⁵ OAK, SungDeuk: "Healing and Exorcism", 103.

people's beliefs that "...the most prominent idea in connection with these superstitions is the idea of luck. Lucky days, lucky hours,.....luck or ill-luck in everything." He contemplated that this omnipresent idea about good fortune is a serious complication in the spread of Christianity.⁵⁶ Another missionary Horace G. Underwood (arrived in 1885) describes *mudang* as female sorcerer and *pansu* as exorcist, destiny decider or fortune teller, but also commonly labels them as witches and wizards.⁵⁷ Missionaries encouraged people to give up on such delusional practices as was the "witchcraft", and in the time of need turn to modern medicine or to the God.

Second, newly spawned Korean nationalism brought up the Korean intellectuals to search for a way to enlighten and rebuild their own "backward" society. Some of them founded the Independence club (*Dongnip hyeophoe*) in 1896, to promote Korean independence, democratic principles and national self-empowerment. The newspaper issued by them, *The Independent (Dongnip sinmun)* often targeted shamans as a means to show that society requires necessary changes. Articles about them appeared once a month on average, and often accused them of lying, stealing, and of corrupting the public.⁵⁸ In 1897 they made a report about a police order stating that "*mudang*, fortune tellers, geomancers and other deceptive persons must be arrested wherever they are found".⁵⁹

In fact, similar narratives were present even after Korea was declared Japan's protectorate and after its annexation in 1910. The editorial of the *Korea Daily News (Daehan maeil sinbo)* wrote in 1908 as follows:

Generally speaking, people of some countries world-wide have confused and foolish habits from an unenlightened era. There are very few people as severely confused as Koreans. ... As descendants of fortune-tellers, people are very foolish for deciding to pray to their ancestors' bones in order to assess good and bad fortune in their lives through *mudang* and *pansu gut* and for believing in divinations about the nation's fortune. All of these things have cultivated eternal harm to our nation and people.⁶⁰

Another newspaper *Joseon Ilbo* accused shamans in 1921's editorial of "wasting economical efficiency of households", "generate divorces", and of "moral damage".⁶¹ Additionally, *Donga Ilbo* in 1934 appealed to "exterminate shamans, *pansu* and to

⁵⁶ OAK, SungDeuk: "Healing and Exorcism", 107–108.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 110.

⁵⁸ HWANG, Merosé: *The Mudang*, 86–88.

⁵⁹ VANVOLKENBURG, Matthew: "To Devise an Escape from Destiny", 118.

⁶⁰ HWANG, Merosé: *The Mudang*, 248.

⁶¹ Ibid, 151.

gather all fortune tellers and match makers”, and “urged police to take actions against such people who worked in similar networks”.⁶²



Figure 3 House of a fortune teller from colonial era. Source: National Museum of Korea.

The Japanese colonial government was more systematic and oppressive in its religious regulations. Even though Korean enlightenment activists called for the break of superstition in an effort of the country’s development, Japan suppressed folk practices for the purpose of maintaining order in the colonial society and for the easier control of Koreans. Only Shinto, Christianity and Buddhism were regarded as official religions. Other religious practices which weren’t organized or institutionalized were often punished as fraud. Such policies, for example, made shamans who wanted to perform rituals show registration cards.⁶³ To become legitimized by the government those doing “traditional work” (shamans, *pansu*, other fortune tellers) formed a group – *Sungsinin johap* (Union of spirits (gods) worshipers), which was officially recognized under Shinto as “labor and culture union”. All of the diviners were forced to join one or other organization to legally provide its services.⁶⁴

In particular, blind people who depended on fortune telling to a large extent, grouped, protested and eventually received permission from the Japanese Government-

⁶² HWANG, Merosé: *The Mudang*, 152–153.

⁶³ YOO, Kwangsuk: “Expansion of Religious Pluralism in Korean Civil Society”, 326.

⁶⁴ HWANG, Merosé: *The Mudang*, 188.

General to hang a signboard on their houses and engage in private fortune telling business.⁶⁵ Regardless of colonial intentions and efforts, in 1933 Murayama reported in his government sponsored survey that fortune telling enjoys widespread popularity.⁶⁶

2.2.5 Korea after Liberation

Year 1945 brought liberation for Korean people along with the end of the Second World War. When the first republic was proclaimed in South Korea the president Lee Seungman (Rhee Syngman) was already 73 years old with a rich past associated with the Independence club or American missionaries. The legal structure favored official religions, and Lee as a Christian himself, tried to build the nation on Christian principles. The Korean protestant church made an effort to monopolize ideas on life happiness such as wealth or health and tried to make its members feel guilty about using services of traditional diviners.⁶⁷ At this time it wasn't even unusual to qualify anything "folk" as left-wing and communist.⁶⁸

Concurrently, bigger fortune telling streets started to form as diviners (mostly *pansu*) started to gather at places located near parks and markets, which were frequented by a lot of people. For Seoul it was the foot of Namsan Mountain, in Daegu they met in front of Dalseong Park, and under Yeongdo Bridge in Busan. As life got barren during the Korean War, people engaged in divination to make a living increased. Some fortune tellers who fled from Seoul joined those in Busan. The Yeongdo Bridge became the perfect spot, as it was lifted about 6 times a day to let large ships pass. It provided enough time to give fortune readings to people while they waited. However, when the Korean War ended most diviners returned to Seoul to resume their labor.⁶⁹

Another stage of Korean history under the authoritarian rule of Park Chung Hee is related to rapid economic growth, urbanization and industrialization. Even though Park regarded pre-modern religious practices as an obstacle to his developmental objectives, and criticized Korean people for being submissive to fate in their patronage of fortune tellers, the fortune telling market had a stable growth since.⁷⁰

It was in the time of his reign in the 70's when two most cited research works in this field were conducted. Both Janelli's *Logical Contradictions in Korean Learned*

⁶⁵ KIM, Mantae: "A Study on the Development Aspect of Blind Fortune Tellers in Korea", 260.

⁶⁶ YOO, Kwangsuk: "Expansion of Religious Pluralism in Korean Civil Society", 326.

⁶⁷ YOO, Kwangsuk: *Applicability of Religious Economy Model (REM) to the Growth of Fortunetelling in Contemporary Korea*, 79.

⁶⁸ HWANG, Merosé: *The Mudang*, 234.

⁶⁹ KIM, Mantae: "A Study on the Development Aspect of Blind Fortune Tellers in Korea", 261–263.

⁷⁰ VANVOLKENBURG, Matthew: "To Devise an Escape from Destiny", 129.

Fortunetelling and Young's Spirit and Other Signs: The Practice of Divination in Seoul, Republic of Korea bring valuable insights on Korean divination and are useful until present day. Apart from their definition on mediumistic (shamanic), and analytic (professional, horoscopic) diviners (see chapter 1), they describe fortune telling at that time as “thriving”⁷¹ or “readily accessible”.⁷² In the newspaper, advertisements of professional fortune telling appeared habitually.⁷³ Diviners could be found on major streets in cities, near railroad terminals or local markets as for example Namdaemun (South Gate) or Dongdaemun (East Gate) market. They either sat on the straw mats or installed small stools. Those migrant fortune tellers appeared mostly in winter time. Others worked in marked offices on a stable daily basis, but the summer business was slow for them likewise. Blind fortune tellers gradually moved to poorer Northeastern Seoul, where the rental prices were lower and gave basis to the later known Miari fortune telling street.⁷⁴

Janelli further concludes that fortune tellers had “rather low status” and that parents would oppose their own children to marry any kind of diviner. Still, analytic diviners were perceived somehow better than *mudang*, as they were educated to some extent, while many shamans were illiterate.⁷⁵ Both mention that most of the divination customers were women, and Young even claims that “everyone in Seoul either went to a diviner or knew someone who went”, which only proves its ongoing popularity. The reason sees Young in diviners being “responsive to urban problems” such as adaptation to stressful lifestyle and poor working conditions, providing “culturally-indigenous counseling service”.⁷⁶

The number of diviners in practice was difficult to estimate. Even though the government urged membership in diviner’s associations, the join remained optional and therefore most of the fortune tellers refused to take part in it. Some of them even considered the government as “antagonist not a supporter” and feared effusive control. In 1977 there were three main organizations – Shaman association, Association for horoscopic diviners and Organization of blind diviners.⁷⁷ The blind’s association especially operated as a private guild. They trained new aspiring fortune tellers

⁷¹ JANELLI, Dawnhee Y.: *Logical Contradictions in Korean Learned Fortunetelling*, 1.

⁷² YOUNG, Barbara E.: *Spirits and Other Signs*, 70.

⁷³ JANELLI, Dawnhee Y.: *Logical Contradictions in Korean Learned Fortunetelling*, 1.

⁷⁴ YOUNG, Barbara E.: *Spirits and Other Signs*, 38–40.

⁷⁵ JANELLI, Dawnhee Y.: *Logical Contradictions in Korean Learned Fortunetelling*, 20–21.

⁷⁶ YOUNG, Barbara E.: *Spirits and Other Signs*, 90, 483.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 63–66.

restrictedly and forbid other diviners to settle in Miari valley, which resulted in limited competition⁷⁸ and after all, into decline of the number of *pansu*.

Overly, the conditions for fortune tellers would gradually improve as governments started to promote research on folk traditions as an effort to invoke Korean nationalism. The first such attempts can be seen in the 1970s while in the 80s the trend continued.⁷⁹ In the 1980 the Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation was established, and shamanism with other traditions started to be seen as a part of unique Korean culture, which is to be cherished and preserved. This cultural nationalism further invoked interest in divination throughout society.⁸⁰ For instance, one of the most used and popular telex services in 1988 was the government-run fortune telling page “The Prophecies of Tojong”.⁸¹ Another commonly stated reason for the growth of fortune telling business in South Korea is the financial crisis of the late 90’s, known also as the IMF crisis of 1997. Insecurities brought up by the crisis such as rapid privatization or unemployment made people turn to fortune tellers as a means to overcome them, since official religions and nationalistic values did not provide sufficient psychological support for individuals anymore.⁸²

2.2.6 Contemporary Korea

New millennium brought new forms of divination to Korea. Because of modernization some of them moved to the online space and by 2002 there were more than 1000 different fortune telling internet sites.⁸³ *Saju* cafés also boomed as clients could, beside a drink, enjoy fortune telling as an extra service. *Saju* cafés, street fortune telling stalls or even self-operated fortune vending machines are more popular among young clientele, while older people prefer more intimate and enclosed offices. Fortune tellers can be found basically everywhere, but they keep gathering around the most crowded areas such as downtowns, entertainment districts, universities, department stores or hospitals. The number of street fortune tellers was high enough to have the Seoul city

⁷⁸ YOO, Kwangsuk: “Return of Divination to the Public Sphere”, 736.

⁷⁹ KIM, Andrew Eungi: “Nonofficial Religion in South Korea”, 297.

⁸⁰ YOO, Kwangsuk: *Applicability of Religious Economy Model (REM) to the Growth of Fortunetelling in Contemporary Korea*, 83.

⁸¹ VANVOLKENBURG, Matthew: “To Devise an Escape from Destiny”, 125.

⁸² YOO, Kwangsuk: *Applicability of Religious Economy Model (REM) to the Growth of Fortunetelling in Contemporary Korea*, 64.

⁸³ KIM, Andrew Eungi: “Nonofficial Religion in South Korea”, 286.

implement a series of initiatives between 2008 and 2013, to move them into designated areas which resulted in many of them moving their services indoors.⁸⁴



Figure 4 Street fortune telling vendors in downtown Busan. Source: KRALOVA (2020).

According to an article published by *The Economist* in 2018, there were more than 300,000 fortune tellers offering their services in Korea, but the real numbers might be even higher.⁸⁵ The reason for popularity in providing divination services can be, apart from growing demand, also a notable low start up costs, while no specific certificate to operate is needed. The Korean Fortune Telling Association is promoting this career path as a lifelong secure vocation in an aging society, where it is difficult to get employed. There are many people including housewives and businessmen, who are preparing for retirement attending night fortune telling classes. The number of people reading related divination books and using fortune telling mobile applications is also increasing,⁸⁶ and approximately 2–3 new applications are getting launched every day.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ KIM, David J.: “Four Pillars and Four Diviners”, 302, 310–311.

⁸⁵ “In South Korea fortune-telling will soon be a \$3.7bn business”.

⁸⁶ CHYUNG, Eun-ju: “South Korea has 1 Million Shamans, Fortune Tellers”.

⁸⁷ “In South Korea fortune-telling will soon be a \$3.7bn business”.

3. Types of fortune telling

Different types of divination were present throughout Korean history and especially those which we can call analytic forms, are used in contemporary Korean society on a regular basis. Based mostly on written text, they have changed little over time and therefore people can still enjoy fortune telling in a similar way as did people in the past. The most popular method is definitely the four pillars of destiny (*saju*) type of divination. As the main focus of this work is on the *saju*, it will be examined in the next chapter in more detail. This chapter is dedicated to closer introduction of other well established methods.

3.1 Geomancy

As was mentioned earlier, geomancy (*pungsu jiri*) has been present in Korea since the era of the Three Kingdoms (see chapter 2). Based on its principles, the Buddhist temples and ancestral shrines were built and capital cities of dynasties chosen. As a form of divination, the main purpose is to ensure one's good fortune by embracing the energy (*gi*) which flows through earth. This auspicious spot where the energy hoards up is called *myeongdang* (bright or fortunate land, spot). To find the *myeongdang* a geomancer (*jigwan*) used a special spyglass and 24 direction-compass called *yundo* to further determine land's prosperities with accordance to geomancy handbook.⁸⁸ If for example, a house is to be built on such a spot, it is believed that the resident can utilize its good energy and will prosper. By simplifying the principles, it is generally believed that a good spot faces south (and preferably a bank of river) and is backed by a mountain. The prevalence of those ideas in the Korean mind can be demonstrated by the real estate market, where the prices of houses following *pungsu* principles are generally higher. However, the best way to secure good fortune for oneself and the whole family is through the burial of ancestors. By burying members of the family at *myeongdang* the energy of the land flow through their bones and can therefore directly bind to the buried person's descendants. For this reason, people would hire geomancers to locate and pick the best place to build a tomb. It wasn't unusual to even relocate ancestor graves if a misfortune would fall upon family. Former president Kim Daejung is known for moving his parents' grave after his three unsuccessful candidacies and before his final win in

⁸⁸ GRAYSON, James H.: *Korea: A Religious History*, 221.

1997.⁸⁹ Nowadays with the modern urban cemeteries, and high ground prices people have no other choice but to turn away from the traditional burial, and incinerations are getting more popular.

3.2 Physiognomy

It was stated already that physiognomy is a form of divination based on physical appearance. Concerning specific parts of a human body it can be further divided into more categories, from which the most widely used are facial (*gwansang*) and hand (*susang*) readings. Face reading is used to determine one's personality and fortune through their facial features. It is commonly believed that a face is one's record of life starting from the earliest moments.⁹⁰ The readers consider face color, surface area (which is believed to mark parts of one's life), balance of facial features, facial expressions and body language, associating them with personality, social relationship and future events. For instance, crooked nose or large protruding birthmarks are considered unlucky in contrast to lucky small birthmarks above lips, light skin tones or even double chin. Face reading gets more difficult as the popularity of plastic surgeries in Korea grows. Although some believe that with plastic surgery one can change their fortune and actually go consult a fortune teller before undergoing the change of appearance. That gives the normally beauty-oriented plastic surgery culture a secondary purpose in Korea and that is the securing of good fortune in life.⁹¹ *Gwansang* was considered to be systematic and statistical, and therefore one of the most reliable. It is commonly used by *saju* fortune tellers to complement given readings.⁹² Certain revival of interest regarding *gwansang* brought up successful historical movie "The Face Reader" in 2013 and TV drama "The King's Face".⁹³

3.3 Auspicious days

To secure a satisfactory outcome of an important event, people used to consult *ilgwan* to help them pick the most auspicious day (*giril*). As was already introduced in chapter two, this idea follows the theory of Yin and Yang with five elements. The invisible energies of the universe give each day in the calendar specific characteristics and make some of them more auspicious than others. When deciding about a fortunate date,

⁸⁹ KIM, Andrew Eungi: "Nonofficial Religion in South Korea", 292–294.

⁹⁰ A Complete Guide to Korean Fortune Telling [online].

⁹¹ KIM, Andrew Eungi: "Nonofficial Religion in South Korea", 291 – 292.

⁹² YOUNG, B. Elizabeth: *Spirits and Other Signs*, 156, 169.

⁹³ VANVOLKENBURG, Matthew: "To Devise an Escape from Destiny", 126.

however, one's *saju* should be considered together. That's because specific days affect everyone differently. For a person whose key element is, for example wood, the most suitable day would be that marked by water, and to the contrary a "metal (gold) day" would be considered unlucky (for more on the five elements relationship see next chapter). Nowadays the most common time when consulting the lucky days is when the wedding is planned, but other big projects such as moving to a new house or starting a new business also make people visit fortune tellers. Some mothers even request a C-section to deliver a baby on a certain day or generally plan parenthood in accordance to the auspicious years.⁹⁴ This became an issue in 2012, as it was difficult to enroll kids into kindergarten due to the high birth rate of 2007 – the "year of the golden pig". Among so many peers, it is most likely that many will suffer in even more fierce competition to enter universities and find a job.⁹⁵

3.4 Name analysis

In Korea it is believed that names can be selected to balance the fortune of one's birth date. Name analysis (*seongmyeonghak*) is used either to interpret a person's fortune according to name, or to create a new suitable (beneficial) name for a newborn baby and for the adults who are wishing to change. The most important factors to consider are name's characters (or letters), number of strokes and its pronunciation. Since Korean names are traditionally recorded in Chinese characters along with the Korean alphabet, it is often possible to change the appearance or meaning of certain characters without a shift in pronunciation. Brush strokes are associated with hexagrams found in the *Book of Changes* and in the case of Korean names, basic consonants are represented by one of five basic elements. If, therefore, someone's *saju* lacks balance in elements, it can be compensated by using a name with necessary consonants.⁹⁶ In addition, Andrew Eungi Kim provides in his article examples on ridiculous names given to children as a result of their parents' excessive dependence on fortunate names. Some of them are: Seonggi (sex organ), Musik (moron) or Bang Gyinyeo (farting girl).⁹⁷

⁹⁴ KIM, Andrew Eungi: "Nonofficial Religion in South Korea", 288–289.

⁹⁵ VANVOLKENBURG, Matthew: "To devise an escape from destiny", 131.

⁹⁶ YOUNG, B. Elizabeth: *Spirits and Other Signs*, 184–186.

⁹⁷ KIM, Andrew Eungi: "Nonofficial Religion in South Korea", 289–290.

3.5 Marital compatibility

Another popular form of fortune telling people seek is called *gunghap*. *Gunghap* means marital compatibility, and it is based on the information about one's date of the birth (one's *saju*). It therefore involves the interpretation of both woman and men's horoscope, to calculate couple's potential harmony within the concept of Yin and Yang. The fortune teller inspects both internal and external compatibility of partners. Internal compatibility determinates how well a married couple fit together in sexual manner, while external compatibility shows the harmony of personalities and mutual inclination. If the couple happens to not be well matched, it predicts an unhappy marriage. In the past, it was a must go-through process before any talks about a wedding even started, and even in the present it might not be unusual if a couple in love broke up, simply because their *gunghap* is ill-fortunate. In this case fortune teller might advise one or both individuals to change their first name in order to improve their matrimonial lots.⁹⁸

3.6 Tarot cards

The most recent method of fortune telling, which has become utilized in Korea just in the last few decades is tarot cards reading. It became popular mainly among young women clientele but is gaining wider acceptance since. The tarot playing cards were known in Europe sooner, but started to be used for divination purposes in the 18th century. Out of the original 78 card deck, this divination usually uses the main 22 cards known as "The Major Arcana". Each of them carries a specific meaning and the best known are for example n. 0 (the Fool), n. 6 (the Lovers) or n. 10 (the Wheel of Fortune).⁹⁹ *Taro* fortune telling is done by an individual asking a specific question. The reader formulates answers based on the type and order of cards drawn from the deck. One question costs about 3,000 won, and apart from being cheap, the reason for its popularity among young people may be that the cards are pretty and readings are quick.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Complete Guide to Korean Fortune Telling [online].

⁹⁹ KIM, Do-Yeon: *A Comparative Study about a Year of Fortune between Saju Myeongri and Tarot*, 21–23.

¹⁰⁰ "In South Korea fortune-telling will soon be a \$3.7bn business".

4. The four pillars of destiny

Finally, let's take a look at the famous four pillars of destiny divination type. It represents one's personalized horoscope based on the date of birth. The basis for a diviner being able to read one's horoscope, is the belief of the existence of the invisible cosmic energies around us that transcend time and space. Those energies are in constant motion and every year, month, day and time emits concrete energy that affects the baby at the moment of birth. The exact time can be further translated into eight characters as stated by a fixed calendrical system that repeats itself in a cycle.¹⁰¹ The exact term for this horoscope is *saju palja*, literally standing for the four pillars (year, month, day, time of birth) and eight characters by which they can be categorized.

Yin and Yang

Probably the most familiar concept around the world is the Yin and Yang theory. Two forces that represent opposites to each other, or better to state – they are defined by each other's existence. If Yang represents active, strong, positive, bright, manly forces, Yin is described as passive, weak, negative, dark and having feminine energy.

5 elements

Wood (*mok*), Fire (*hwa*), Earth (*to*), Metal (or gold, *geum*), and Water (*su*) are the 5 basic elements that affect one's fate. They coexist and react with each other in a form of mutual nourishment or restraint (see table 1 and 2).

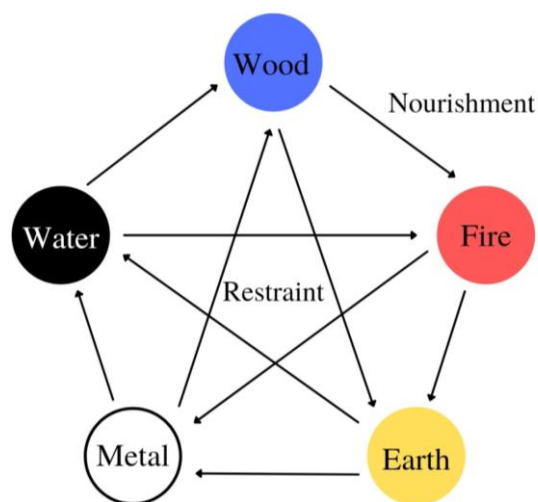


Figure 5 Mutual relations of the 5 elements. Source: SHIN (2012).

¹⁰¹ YOUNG, B. Elizabeth: *Spirits and Other Signs*, 102.

Table 1 Mutual nourishment of the 5 elements. Source: SHIN (2012).

Nourishment (<i>sansaeng</i>)	Helping and saving each other
Wood nourishes fire	The wood burns and saves the fire
Fire nourishes earth	Fire burns and ashes return to earth
Earth nourishes metal	When the soil hardens, metal forms inside
Metal nourishes water	Through metal water occurs
Water nourishes wood	Water saves trees (wood)

Table 2 Mutual conflict of the 5 elements. Source: SHIN (2012).

Restraint, conflict (<i>sanggeuk</i>)	Checking and pressing each other
Wood restrains earth	Trees absorbs nutrients from the soil
Earth restrains water	Earth blocks the flow of the water
Water restrains fire	Water puts out fire
Fire restrains metal	Fire melts metal
Metal restrains wood	Trees are cut by iron (axes)

Those relationships between elements are said to be the most important in the horoscope interpretations. Similarly, as it would be with the Yin and Yang, the balance of the elements is considered crucial. If the person's *saju palja*'s elements are well balanced it suggests success, peace, harmony or even good health. Other ways round misfortunes emerge from the imbalance. Those can be corrected through fortune teller's advice, for example by meeting a spouse, who possesses the element one is missing, or as already mentioned, by changing the name to one, which has appropriate consonants.¹⁰²

Heavenly stems and Earthly branches

Yin and Yang together with 5 elements are sources of Heavenly stems (*cheongan*) and Earthly Branches (*jiji*), which are used to mark certain energies in one's *saju palja*. The upper characters of *saju* are represented by one of the 10 Heavenly stems. Those are *gap, eul, byeong, jeong, mu, gi, gyeong, sin, im and gye*. Bottom line will then contain either of the 12 Earthly branches – *ja, chuk, in, myo, jin, sa, o, mi, sin, yu, sul* or *hae*. Units of both categories always occur in the same sequence through time whether applied to any pillar.

¹⁰² YOUNG, B. Elizabeth: *Spirits and Other Signs*, 125.

Odd-numbered units are defined by Yang energy and always combine with other odd-numbered (Yang) units. Same to this, even-numbered stems will always combine with even-numbered (Yin) branches. The sexagenary cycle (*yukgap*, or *kanji*) of 60 years respond to these 60 possible combinations. As was stated, the succession is always constant with stems repeating 6 and branches 5 times through one cycle.¹⁰³ Current cycle started in 1984 and will be completed by 2043. That makes the year 2022 the 39th year in the sequence and in the Korean traditional sexagenary cycle, it is labeled *ImIn*.

To assign two characters of the first pillar, the fortune teller simply looks up the corresponding year of birth in the book called *Manseryeok* – calendar of ten thousand years. Although, experienced diviner will be accustomed to the sexagenary cycle and know it by heart. If one is not familiar with the date of birth according to the lunar calendar, the diviner will again use the *Manseryeok* to assign you to your lunar month of birth and the characters for the second pillar. Because the solar and lunar months considerably differ, there is a chance of errors to occur. For this reason, the month pillar (along with the hour pillar) varies the most when read by different fortune tellers. For the month pillar, the sexagenary cycle is completed in 5 lunar years.

The third pillar (day) marks 24-hour periods that repeat every 60 days. The last pillar (hour) is composed of earthly branch, decided by the exact time of birth, and by the stem which is chosen in relation to one's birth day's stem, that can be found in the charts of diviner's almanacs. The time's branch is decided by dividing the day into 12 two-hour periods (see table 4). Each day starts at 11 p.m. (or 11.30 p.m. is also common in readings), and the full cycle is completed in 120 hours, therefore 5 days.¹⁰⁴

Along each of the 8 characters (except the day's stem) usually appear one of the "10 deities" (*sipsin*) – *bigyeon*, *geopjae*, *siksin*, *sanggwan*, *pyeonjae*, *jeongjae*, *pyeongwan*, *jeonggwan*, *pyeonin* and *jeongin*. Any of the deities is attributed to the characters by the relations between stem or branch's element and its Yin and Yang energy with those of the day's stem. This is because the day stem is considered to be the most important when reading *saju* and represents one's ego. Once again a brief chart can be found in the *Manseryeok* to determine which 7 deities are relevant. They refer to the relationship of the ego with wealth, status and honor, connections to friends or

¹⁰³ YOUNG, B. Elizabeth: *Spirits and Other Signs*, 107.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 113–114.

knowledge and qualifications, and can therefore be used by fortune tellers when making interpretations of a client's personality and future prospects.¹⁰⁵

An interpretation of any *saju* is a complex process that tries to grasp as many clues from the system of basic associations between given entries. Since the stem of the birth day pillar represents oneself, its element is considered the most important factor in proposing character traits. Its Yin or Yang energy is likewise crucial. Assumptions can be made also by the possessed four earthly branches, as each of them represents one animal of the zodiac (*ddi*) and its nature. Altogether, the system is rich in the associations as can be seen in the charts below. Apart from those already mentioned, each stem represents for example, direction, body part, emotion, season or behavioral pattern.¹⁰⁶

Barbara Young in her work states general rules diviners follow when making the interpretations. (1) Day of birth being the key factor was mentioned several times. Next, (2) one's character can't be predicted by a zodiac sign alone. This suggests the popular discussion of one's so-called Chinese zodiac among the public is looked down on by the diviners. Moreover, (3) stems are more important than branches, and (4) minimally three pillars are needed to know personality. Therefore, a horoscope can be read even if the exact time of birth is unknown. (5) A strong or weak *saju* indicates strong or weak physical condition. Generally, the strong *saju* would show a lot of Yang energy or well-balanced elements. Lastly, (6) a person's luck occurs in cycles.¹⁰⁷

The concept of time and the energies moving within it makes it possible to suggest a person's luck accordingly. The flow of "great luck" (*daeun*) is commonly calculated by diviners. The energy of the great luck changes every ten years and is considered either good or bad, depending on the harmony between the elements which influence the years and the element of one's *saju palja*. Other readings are possible with different length of the time cycles. Interesting phenomenon concerning time is also *samjae*. It refers to three consecutive years of misfortune. Out of every twelve years (whole branch cycle), nine are considered fairly lucky and the three bear a possibility for extreme hardships, especially the middle one referred to as "resting *samjae*".¹⁰⁸

Through *saju paulja* it is also possible to read family relationships. In this case, the day pillar represents oneself or siblings, the year pillar ancestors, the month pillars

¹⁰⁵ Conceptual summary of the six and ten deities [online].

¹⁰⁶ YOUNG, B. Elizabeth: *Spirits and Other Signs*, 116–129.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 130–135.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 135, 136, 142.

one's parents (or spouse if one is a woman), and finally the time pillar represents children (or in man's case wife). When interpreting the relationships, mutual relations among the elements are the most important. Moreover, the fortune teller will look for "harmonies" and "conflicts" which are formed by different combinations of branches. For example *ja* (rat) is in conflict with *o* (horse). The rules should also follow the hierarchy of Confucian relationships; therefore a good, auspicious relationship could be for example water-element husband and wood-element wife (because man is above woman and water nourishes wood).¹⁰⁹

Taking in account that already enumerated rules are just the surface of the complex system, which includes much more information accessible only through deeper understanding of the subject, it is impossible to count all the possible interpretations. Every fortune teller will apply the associations in a way he or she prefers, so even if they share the same basis there is a high probability the given horoscopes will differ.

4.1 Basic associations in *saju palja* system

Table 3 Associations based on 10 heavenly stems. Source: YOUNG (1980).

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
Stem	<i>Gap</i>	<i>Eul</i>	<i>Byeong</i>	<i>Jeong</i>	<i>Mu</i>	<i>Gi</i>	<i>Gyeong</i>	<i>Sin</i>	<i>Im</i>	<i>Gye</i>
Energy	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
Element	Wood		Fire		Earth		Metal		Water	
Color	Blue		Red		Yellow		White		Black	
Direction	East		South		Center		West		North	
Season	Spring		Summer		All seasons		Autumn		Winter	
Internal organ	Liver		Heart		Intestines		Lungs		Kidneys	
Body part	Hand		Breast		Head		Foot		Leg	
Feeling	Sensitivity		Severity		Calmness		Violence		Doubt	
Emotion	Anger		Joy		Thought		Worry		Fear	
Behavior	Benevolence		Etiquette		Trust		Justice		Knowledge	
Stage of life	Birth		Illness		Love		Age		Death	
Letter of alphabet	G, K		N, D, R, T		-, H		S, J, CH		M, B, P	

Table 4 Associations based on 12 earthly branches. Source: YOUNG (1980).

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
Branch	<i>Ja</i>	<i>Chuk</i>	<i>In</i>	<i>Myo</i>	<i>Jin</i>	<i>Sa</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>Mi</i>	<i>Sin</i>	<i>Yu</i>	<i>Sul</i>	<i>Hae</i>
Energy	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
Element	Water	Earth	Wood	Wood	Earth	Fire	Fire	Earth	Metal	Metal	Earth	Water
Animal zodiac	Rat	Cow	Tiger	Rabbit	Dragon	Snake	Horse	Sheep	Monkey	Chicken	Dog	Pig
Time period	11 pm -1 am	1-3 am	3-5 am	5-7 am	7-9 am	9-11 am	11am -1pm	1-3 pm	3-5 pm	5-7 pm	7-9 pm	9-11 pm

¹⁰⁹ YOUNG, B. Elizabeth: *Spirits and Other Signs*, 137.

Table 5 Characteristics accounted for each branch. Source: YOUNG (1980).

	Characteristics
<i>Ja</i>	Noble, precious, uncommon, royal
<i>Chuk</i>	Misfortune, bad luck, woe, evil things
<i>In</i>	Power, prestige, authority
<i>Jin</i>	Very fond of opposite sex, strength, government position
<i>Sa</i>	Very good at literary pursuits
<i>O</i>	Blessing, good fortune, luck
<i>Mi</i>	Travel, change, opposition
<i>Sin</i>	Solitude
<i>Yu</i>	Sharpness, sensitivity
<i>Sul</i>	Talented, good at various artistic endeavors
<i>Hae</i>	Longevity

Table 6 Characteristics accounted for each *sipsin*. Source: Conceptual summary of the six and ten deities [online].

	Characteristics
<i>Bigyeon</i>	Strong ego and subjectivity, inability to communicate, lack of flexibility
<i>Geopjae</i>	Strong eloquence, waste of wealth, gambling, marital discord
<i>Jeongin</i>	Accepting everything purely, empathy, soft hearted, education field
<i>Pyeonin</i>	Education field, laziness, easy to get tired, self-doubt, unpractical, loneliness, knowledge
<i>Siksin</i>	Honesty, expressiveness, strong assertiveness, social skills
<i>Sanggwan</i>	Sensitive, strong emotional expression, light-mouthed
<i>Jeongjae</i>	Cautious, timid, accurate calculations, clingy to wealth, economic planning
<i>Pyeonjae</i>	Extrovert, impulsive, impatient, large investor
<i>Jeongwan</i>	Honesty, principles, informed, inflexible, giving advices
<i>Pyeongwan</i>	Active, decisive, analytic power, determination, stubbornness, coercion

5. Analysis of personal *saju palja*

Following part of this work focuses on the analysis of horoscopes given for particular eight characters in the four pillars of destiny divination system. The analysis will examine readings in three main ways. First, based on the basic associations of the system stated in the previous part, it attempts to make assumptions on the horoscope by relevant keywords. The presupposition is that the following readings will contain the basic theory to a relatively high extent. Exact ratio is to be found out. Second, two readings made by the same fortune teller on a face to face basis were made in 2020 and 2021 respectively. The aim is to discover whether and to what extent the two readings correspond to each other. Lastly, two direct readings will be compared to the reading received through the internet site and mobile application. Overall consistency will be evaluated by comparison of extracted, directly stated adjectives (and its synonyms), and by other terms which may be important for the purpose.

5.1 Own interpretation

The date of birth used for the analysis purpose is May 31, 1996. All of the fortune tellers visited insisted that the time of the birth should correspond to the Korean time (GMT+9). Therefore, the 7-hour difference between the place of birth in Slovakia and Korea, changes from 1 o'clock to 8 o'clock a.m. With the help of online *Manseryeok* the date of birth is rewritten in the following eight characters.

Table 7 Eight characters for May 31, 1996

	Year	Month	Day	Time
Stem	<i>Pyeonin</i>	<i>Jeongjae</i>	<i>Ego</i>	<i>Pyeonin</i>
	+	-	+	+
	<i>Byeong</i>	<i>Gye</i>	<i>Mu</i>	<i>Byeong</i>
	丙	癸	戊	丙
	Fire	Water	Earth	Fire
Branch	+	-	+	+
	<i>Ja</i>	<i>Sa</i>	<i>Jin</i>	<i>Jin</i>
	子	巳	辰	辰
	Water	Fire	Earth	Earth
	<i>Jeongjae</i>	<i>Pyeonin</i>	<i>Bigyeon</i>	<i>Bigyeon</i>

The first pillar for this date is called *byeong ja*, second *gye sa*, third *mu jin* and the last pillar *byeong jin*.

By the overall distribution of the Yin and Yang energy, it can be seen that six out of eight characters possess Yang, which makes 75%. It can be assumed that the personality may be described as positive, strong, active and manly.

The main factor that affects the personality, however, was said to be the element of the birth day's stem. In this case that would be *mu* – earth, together with yang energy. From the chart of associations on 10 Heavenly stems (table 3) we can extract adjectives for someone born in the element of earth as calm, thoughtful and trustful. Taking in account its neutrality by residing in the center and representing all seasons, it can be expected that the personality could be described as a non-conflict type, corresponding with the already given vibes of calm and thoughtfulness.

In terms of balance of the five basic elements, this *saju palja* has three earth elements. Same, the fire element is present three times. Even though the main element is earth, the high possession of fire could affect the personality and therefore add adjectives as joyful, severe (bold?) and the term etiquette could be understood as well-mannered or courteous. Also, if the balance of the elements means good health, the absolute absence of the metal and wood could be interpreted as a problem with lungs and liver respectively. To fill the gap of absent elements, fortune teller might advise the partner should be in the element of metal. Since wood restricts earth, it is unlikely that a wood element spouse would be advised. On the other hand, a spouse with the element of fire could represent helpful nourishment. The balance should be maintained in the terms of Yin and Yang energy as well, and therefore it is expected that a Yin energy spouse will be suggested. Yin energy man could be described as soft, gentle and maybe a little bit feminine. Another way to counter the lack of metal and wood element, if asked about auspicious name, a name possessing consonants G, K, S, J or CH could be designed by the diviner.

According to the table of characteristics accounted to each Earthly branch (table 5), the branch *ja* is described as noble, royal. *Jin* gives strength, fondness of opposite sex and suggests to a work for government. Very good at literary pursuit of the branch *sa*, could possibly hint at a job as a writer.

The last table (table 6) consists of associations given to each of the *sipsin*. Apart from personality, prospects of employment or economic situation can be guessed by its distribution. The model *saju palja* possesses three of them. *Pyeonin* three times, *bigyeon*

and *jeongjae* both twice. 60 % of person's character in this category is defined by the *sipsin* standing next to the branch of birth's month, 30 % from the time's branch and the rest from the remaining deities.¹¹⁰ Through *pyeonin* adjectives lazy, self-dubious, impractical and lonely can be added. Education field could be interpreted as the teacher would be a suitable occupation, and exhaustion as a possible health issue. *Bigyeon* further adds traits as strong (ego), subjective (individual), non-communicative and inflexible. Lastly, *jongjae* gives a person cautious and timid personality and other traits such as being clingy to wealth and being good in economic planning could be interpreted as one being somewhat economically stable.

All of the relevant traits, retrieved from the tables and through surface understanding of the *saju palja* system, will be organized in the chart (table 10) and further look for in the given readings.

5.2 Face to face divination

The visited fortune teller was chosen randomly, without previous research. Mrs. Ryu resides in Dongseong-ro, Daegu – the city in the southeast of the Korean peninsula. Dongseong-ro is a district, which is often labeled as a downtown of Daegu, with numerous shopping streets, cafés, restaurants and nightclubs. Although it is possible to meet people of all ages around here, the dominance of the youth is obvious. Fortune telling offices are stuck between the trendy shops, waiting for customers. There are over 40 of various divination offices marked on the map around this district and the Mrs. Ryu's is located right in front of the newly opened amusement facility with a giant ferris wheel on its rooftop. A small entrance could be missed easily if it wasn't for its bright red door and huge letters on the banner above them stating – *saju, gunghap, taro, jakmyeong* (naming).

After entering the office, the door bell rung slightly and Mrs. Ryu welcomed the customers with an energetic “come on in!” It was a small place filled with a scent from aromatic incense sticks and with books piling on the shelves or oven on the floor. The walls were covered with photos of lotus flowers, amulets or calligraphy works. Generally it felt very full yet somehow intimate. The room could take up to 4 customers. Two could wait for their turn near the entrance behind the pink curtain and another two could sit at a table across from the fortune teller. Mrs. Ryu was a lady in her 50's and apart from being fortune teller she shared that she is also a calligraphy artist and all the

¹¹⁰ Conceptual summary of the six and ten deities [online].

works around are actually her own and for sale. She spoke in a strong Daegu dialect, quite loud, but when she was about to give customer the fortune reading, she lowered her voice like she was about to share a secret. After she heard the customer's request and the date of birth, she would quickly look something up in the big book on the table (probably *Manseryeok*), then took out a clear sheet of paper with pen marker and wrote down the eight characters. She used the pen throughout the whole reading to mark the most important terms and to make explanations. After the reading was over she would smile and ask if there were any more questions. General *saju palja* reading cost twenty thousand won (around 15€), but it can be ten thousand won (7.5€), if the customer has one specific problem, he or she wants to discuss. The most expensive service in the offer was a consultation on auspicious names, worth of two hundred thousand won (150€). What follows is a transcript of the fortune telling reading given to author.¹¹¹

5.2.1 February, 2020

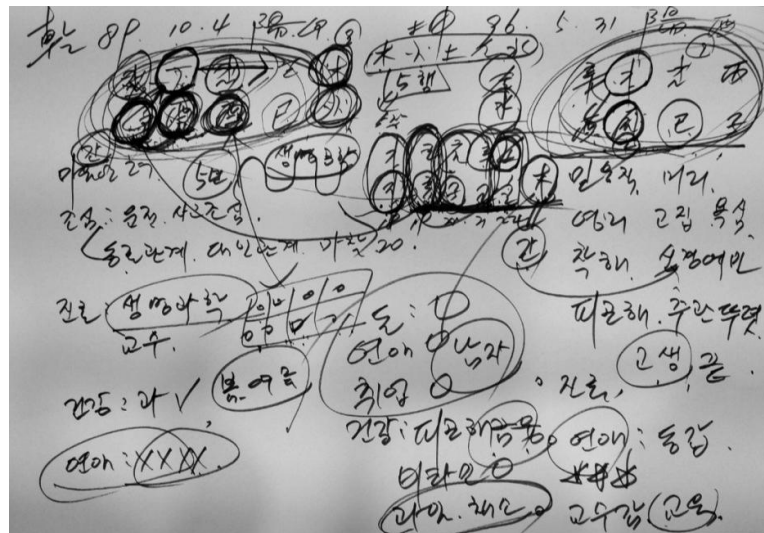


Figure 6 Fortune teller's sheet 2020. Source: KRALOVA (2020).

Mrs. Ryu: You want to see your *saju*? When were you born?

B: Year 1996, May 31. I was born at 1 o'clock, so here it should be sometime between 7 to 8 o'clock...

Mrs. Ryu: At night? (writing characters on the paper) So we should go with the *jin* time...Now, let's just speak comfortably, even if you might have a

¹¹¹ Readings given at *Saju Nara* – 60 Dongseong-ro 6-gil Jung-gu Daegu, South Korea, on February 15, 2020 and May 7, 2021.

problem understanding. Have you had your *saju* read before?

B: Yes I have.

Mrs. Ryu: Okay, if we look at the young lady...You were born with the “big mountain-like earth” personality. In this case, the “earth” would mean trust or reliability. That type of person who will always maintain neutrality. If this “earth” personality comes out to society, you might hear things like: “That girl is fine.” You are also stubborn. And here, among the five elements there is no *geum* (gold, metal). You are not a very talkative and sneaky type. A very mature person. Although You are young, you are deep inside. It’s clear that you are very independent, and that you have got your ambitions. Also, you are kind. A small weakness might be your lack of flexibility and conservativeness, even though you are very understanding. While you are holding the earth element, you were born in the warm season of May, that’s why You have a strong and clearly individual personality. You could meet a man who is gentle. Even meeting a foreign man from a different country is okay. Here (pointing at characters) when “gold, water” fortune comes, you might use your luck better, so the last and this year – from here, you will get fortunate. And because your luck is improving it looks like you could start a good relationship, okay? Looking at you, you are not in the age to be hurried into getting married right? Even if you are dating, thoughts about getting married are a bit...

B: Well, if everything goes well? But right now I don’t have any intention of getting married early.

Mrs. Ryu: Right. There is no rush yet. Still, we should follow the man’s good flow of fortune (when getting married). So don’t be too hasty about marriage, okay?

As for young lady’s health – bones, joints, lungs, and bronchial tubes – these are weaker than others. You are very low on calcium? I see...Your liver is also weak; it would be good if you didn’t drink, smoke or anything like that. Even your nervous system looks somewhat sensitive.

So now, I hope You will eat a lot of fruits and vegetables with vitamins.
And drink plenty of water. I wish you did that...

(Speaking to herself) Fire nourishes earth...here. Do you by any chance
also have a research position here?

B: No. I am attending a graduate school, majoring in Korean language.

Mrs. Ryu: Majoring in Korean? So after you graduate, your *geureut*... (bowl –
meaning *saju*) It would be good even if you do your own things (start
own business). Set up your own language school. And if not, your *saju* is
a *saju* of a person who will be able to live in a foreign country. It is okay
for you to leave your country and live somewhere else. Even if you
moved back and forth. Your situation tells that you could get into the
education field or something like that. On the other hand, I don't think it
should be in any technological field. Your *gwanun* (fortune to be a
successful public servant) is weak so it doesn't seem like you are going
to work for the government. The homemaker type (could mean manager
position). Even though there is money coming, I can't see that they
would leave. This *saju* shows a very bold and sincere person. All the
homemakers look like this. This person feels like...a noble *yangban*
maiden from the old Joseon dynasty. Very considerate, even though
stubborn. You can just look at it this way...

As for you, this year will be good. You said you are studying this year
right? When do you plan to graduate then?

B: Probably next year or in early 2022?

Mrs. Ryu: If you keep studying now, you will do well. You are lucky at the
moment. Your fortune still looks fine for now so work hard. If you try
hard even after you graduate it will turn out well. You will get a job or
something like that. For now the more you study the better you can use it
in the future. Do you understand? So do it.

5.2.2 May, 2021

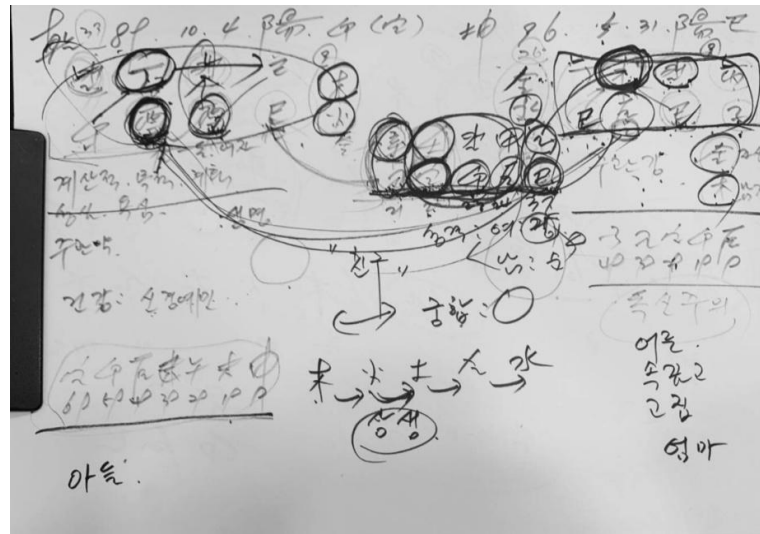


Figure 7 Fortune teller's sheet 2021. Source: KRALOVA (2021).

Mrs. Ryu: You are still very young right? Are you 26? You were born with the nature of “earth” like a “big mountain”. The *pyeongin* characters are around and since there are a lot of them your “earth” is powerful. You are very individual. You were born in the year of the rat in April (of the lunar calendar). Even here, because you were born during *jin* time, your work might be research or something in this field... professor, researcher and this kind of occupation fits you well. Are you doing this kind of job? If you are 26, haven't you graduated already?

B: Well I am majoring in Korean, doing my master's degree.

Mrs. Ryu: You could really become a professor then. Professor or something like that would turn out well. (speaking to herself, calculating) Ha... Even here, your flow (of fortune) is good in the future. Also here...It went well here as well. You will live fortunate life (lit. eat well and live). For you, financially, more than having your own business, I see salary... so I think it would be perfect if you became a professor. For becoming a public official your *gwanun* (government luck) is a bit weak. Because you don't have *gwanun*, rather than becoming a public official, you could go to a higher position in workplace, or become a professor in your own field. For real it feels like you should be a professor. You also won't have to worry about living. Money or food. There won't be any big problems.

So... In the *saju palja* there is no character of “becoming a man”. Inside this character there is a man called *eulmok*. Your luck is to meet a family type man, rather than a man with a reputation. Someone with real intentions and someone who earns money with sincerity.

You have no character for “becoming a child” either. (as well as man) However this *saju* bowl is big. So you will perhaps follow your honor to the high positions. You might stay single (live in celibate). So you might date, but you can be seen as born for not getting married, having children or doing house chores and such. But you will excel at everything you do (lit. there will be victory after victory). You can understand it like that.

In the case of this year, the year of the ox (*sinchuknyeon*), you are overly fortunate so you will meet relationship again.

You are a woman but you are mature, thoughtful and stubborn. It’s like a mother-son relationship. You are the mother and the son is your partner. So if you date, your partner shouldn’t argue and try to beat you himself. There is a lot of understanding and tight hugs between you two. And you are extremely calculative. You would really not do anything to harm yourself. If both partners are strong, they will bump into each other, but if one is a little stubborn and the other is a bit gentle, the harmony of personalities is just right.

You were born in the hot season, in the time when days are getting warmer, so you need “metal and water”. Those are the elements which you need for your five elements. In terms of compatibility you fit well with someone who possesses those elements, whether you end up marrying or not. You are also capable of a lot of things so you will live well. It’s because...No matter how talented you are, if the luck doesn’t follow it won’t happen. And here the luck follows nicely...Even this part is very good. Also even though you are young, you don’t seem like a child. You are mature.

What you lack is a bit of flexibility and wit. You seem a bit lazy and slow but you are carrying your own rice bowl, so if you become a professor or something like that, you will probably live a good life, so that’s okay.

5.3 Online divination

Online fortune telling allows customers to see divination regardless of time and space and without previous appointment. The only requirement is an ability to connect to the Internet. It may be for its convenience that people seek this form of divination, but it is important to take into account that the modern way of life made the network generation to be absolutely comfortable with obtaining information online.¹¹² As it doesn't require any social interaction it further provides a service of total anonymity for those who prefer so. The medium is now a computer or smartphone, through which a divergent aesthetic experience can be generated. The readymade sets of fortunes are however still written by a fortune teller. They are combined through algorithms which should act in accordance with the rules of a specific type of divination, and the regular update (at least once a year) of the scripts is needed to ensure clients come back for their readings.¹¹³

Finding a satisfactory website providing *saju* was surprisingly difficult, and also, most of the visited sites that are still running, tend to have a slightly out-of-date design. The numbers of existing sites from the early 00's were most likely shut down due to the present predominance of the mobile fortune telling market. The site eventually chosen for the analysis is run by a software company E-softing CO.,Ltd.¹¹⁴ The service is completely free and together with traditional *saju* provides readings based on *Tojeong bigyeol*, the Book of Changes, Chinese zodiac, tarot cards and many more.

On the other hand, there is a vast supply of mobile fortune telling applications, as the number of apps more than tripled in the past five years.¹¹⁵ If one types *unse* (fortune) in the Google's Play store, the scroll through all the applications available to download seems infinite. One company, JM Soft has for example 18 different divination apps to choose from. Some labeled "pro" or "premium" cost anywhere from 1.5€ to 10€, but most of them are free to download. Among those free apps however, many will contain in-app mini transactions to let people see the full readings. Naturally, truly free applications can one get only by seeing countless advertisements. Similarly, as the internet sites, mobile applications offer from numerous different divination methods. Traditional *saju*, *gunghap*, *Tojeong bigyeol*, *Dang saju*, reading based solely on the 5 elements theory, blood type or zodiac signs are considered a necessity. It further

¹¹² KIM, David J.: "Divination and its Potential Futures", 605.

¹¹³ Ibid, 613.

¹¹⁴ <http://unse.edu.cheumsketch.co.kr/>

¹¹⁵ KANG, Hongmin: "An uncertain future, what about next year's fortune".

provides the user with colorful graphs and analysis of one's *saju* attributes. Many will also contain a dream interpretation vocabulary, personalized calendar for auspicious days, or will even advise users with the numbers supposedly bearing a possibility to win the lottery. Every morning it will send a notification to remind one to check that day's fortune which can be told for instance by picking a tarot card from a virtual deck. The options are variable enough to prevent the user from quick exhaustion and if there is still something to discuss, the app can serve as a catalog of fortune tellers ready to answer direct phone calls. The app used for this work – *Unse bigyeol* (The secret to fortune) from DHcommunication, had over one million downloads and a flattering rating of 4.6 stars. The content of both, the internet site and the application readings are summarized in table 9.

6. Results

6.1 Consistency of the face to face and online readings

This part works with the terms, divided into five main categories (see table 8 and 9), which were extracted from all the readings received. It aims to numerically evaluate, to which extent are the horoscopes in accordance.

Personality

Fortune teller Mrs. Ryu used altogether in 2020 and 2021 at least 13 different terms to describe personality. Out of the thirteen, 5 were used both times (38.5 %). Those were namely – stubborn, individual (strong, independent), mature, considerate (thoughtful) and lacking flexibility. If the terms from online readings are added, 38 different traits can be counted. Out of them, 22 (55 %) are used more than once. For three times 6 different traits are repeated (15.8 %), and 1 attribute (mature), is presents across all sources (2.6 %).

Health

In 2021 Mrs. Ryu's fortune lacked any information on health and therefore the agreement would be zero. In the three remaining sources, only 2 (13.3 %) predictions appeared twice (problem with lungs and advice to avoid smoking) and 1 (anxiety or sensitive nervous system) can be found in all three horoscopes (6.6 %). Another 12 (80 %) appeared just once and among them also very specific tips on how to get, for example, a good night's sleep – “wear loose pajamas or sleep completely naked”, and “drinking lemon tea is especially good for you”.

Occupation and wealth

Concerning the future occupation, out of 10 mentions, Mrs. Ryu repeated herself twice (20 %). She made the same prediction for both years about the possibility of “becoming a professor” and having “a little luck in working for the government”. On the other hand, in this category she made her only completely opposing prediction when she stated in 2020 that it would be good to run own business, while in 2021 she suggested that the fate is to be employed. Together with online fortunes 16 different terms were extracted. Just once mentioned were 11 of them (68.75 %), 4 were mentioned twice (25 %) and 1 (professor or work in education) all four times (6.25 %). In the case of the wealth fortune (economic condition), all of the predictions suggested a stable financial situation,

without serious monetary problems, but also without any luck to become considerably rich. All of the entries in this category will be therefore considered as one congruent prediction.

Relationships

“Gentle man” was the only one (16.7 %) description of the ideal spouse, out of 6 entries regarding relationship in face to face divination, that was repeated. The same term was actually the only one present across all fortune telling sources (5.9 %). Three suggested “(maternal) protectiveness” (5.9 %), 4 other terms appeared twice (23.5 %) and 11 terms one time each (64.7 %).

Overall, the face to face divination accounted for 30% match. The highest percentage of match (if the wealth and health aren’t considered) is present in the personality category (38.5 %) and the lowest in the relationships (16.7 %).

Across all of the four fortune telling readings received, 36 out of 87 entries appeared more than once. That makes the degree of compliance (more than 50 %) relatable to 41.4 % of all entries. Among them, 12 had more than 75% appearance rate – 8 terms appeared three times (9.2 %) and 4 terms were always present (4.6 %). Same as for face to face divination, the overall match was highest for personality (55 %) but health had the lowest overall match (20 %).

Total	1	2	3	4
87 (100 %)*	51 (58.6 %)	24 (27.6 %)	8 (9.2 %)	4 (4.6 %)
		36 (41.4 %)		

*Percentage evaluation of the number of repetitions of individual terms across four sources.

6.2 Conformity with the basic associations

All the terms that were extracted from the *saju palja* theory system in chapter 5, were organized in table 10. As the table shows, from the all 30 terms that were expected to appear, as much as 24 (80 %) appeared at least once, in one of the fortune readings. Online readings (through internet site and mobile application combined) included slightly more items from the table, than readings given directly by fortune teller. Fortune teller, through both years, mentioned 16 (53 %) and the online readings 19 (63 %) of them. The face to face divination of 2021 involved the lowest number of used terms from the table – only 8.

Table 8 Categorization of the face to face divination.

	2020	2021
Personality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trust worthy, reliable • stubborn • individual, strong, independent • mature • considerate (understanding, thoughtful) • lack of flexibility • maintaining neutrality • ambitious • kind • conservative • noble 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stubborn • individual • mature • thoughtful, (considerate) • lack of flexibility • lack of intuition • lazy
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bones, joints, lungs, bronchial tubes, liver – weak • low on calcium • sensitive nervous system • avoid drinking, smoking • drink plenty of water • eat vitamins 	X
Occupation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • private business • working overseas • education field • technological field x • work for government x • homemaker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research • professor • employment rather than own business • work for government x • high position • successful
Economic condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • money come, don't leave 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • money or food won't be problem
Relationship (Ideal spouse)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gentle man • foreign man possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • remain unmarried • without children • mother figure in relationship • gentle man preferable • family type man with real intentions and sincerity

Table 9 Categorization of the online divination.

	Internet site	Mobile application
Personality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has dignity (sophisticated, noble, elegant) • charming, attractive • generous • mature • compassionate. caring • has manly attitude • easygoing • cheerful (manly) • individual, strong, bold • broad-minded (manly) • has leadership ab. • careful • timid, shy • solitary, introverted • calm, patient • gentle, kind, soft • clever, quick witted • talented • curious • trustworthy, responsible, honest • faithful • thoughtful, understanding • stubborn • cold hearted, indifferent • maintains neutrality • stingy in speech • picky, has difficult personality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has dignity (noble, elegant) • charming • generous • mature • caring • has manly attitude • cool and easygoing • careful • timid • solitary • doesn't talk openly • conservative • ambitious, aspirant • virtuous, principled • punctilious, diligent • perfectionist • indecisive • selfish • lacks flexibility • lacks intuition • sensitive to emotions (ins.) • pungent in language • inconsistent in character
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • chest pains • heart disease • lung disease • heartburn • let go of anxieties, stress, anger • avoid smoking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • small illnesses rather than serious ones • seasonal illness • blood pressure • keen on getting STDs • release anxiety with acupressure • good night sleep • lemon tea

<p>Occupation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • entertainment • education • private business (but it may delay achievements) • engineering • work for government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • entertainment • education • kindergarten teacher • research • counselor • finances • designer • working overseas • stress-free workplace • mental work
<p>Economic condition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good financial management • prosperous life • life without economic difficulties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • money comes and goes • difficult to build large assets • income guaranteed to a certain extent
<p>Relationship</p> <p>(Ideal spouse)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • popular with opposite sex • realistic in dating (marries when the man is sure of his job and economic power) • don't overflow with feminine cuteness • maternal protectiveness to the loved one • takes initiative in relationship • feminine man • elegant, fragile man 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • popular with opposite sex • romantic love (spiritual side more important than material one) • difficult to show emotions • protective of partner • possessive with partner • arguments • live separately with partner • kind-hearted man • man with soft, pure side • man with positive attitude • intelligent man • self-less man • trustful, reliable partner • man with agility and fast judgment

Table 10 Mentions of the relatable basic associations across all the sources

		2020	2021	Internet	Mobile
Personality	calm (neutral)	O		O	O
	trustful	O		O	
	thoughtful (considerate)	O	O	O	
	noble, royal	O		O	O
	lazy		O		
	self-dubious				
	unpractical				
	lonely		O	O	O
	subjective, strong, ego	O	O	O	
	inflexible	O	O		O
	non-communicative	O			O
	timid			O	O
	cautious			O	O
	courteous (etiquette)				O
	joyful (positive)			O	O
	severe (bold, brave)	O			
	active				
	manly			O	O
Health	problems with lungs	O		O	
	problems with liver	O			
	exhaustion				
Occupation	government position	X	X	O	
	writer				
	teacher	O	O	O	O
Wealth	clingy to wealth	O			
	good economic planning			O	
Relationships (spouse)	fond of opposite sex			O	O
	spouse with yin energy	O	O	O	O
	spouse with fire element				
	spouse with metal element		O		
Total	30 (100 %)*	13 (43 %)	8(26.5 %)	16 (53 %)	13 (43 %)
		16 (53 %)		19 (63 %)	
		24 (80 %)			

*Percentage evaluation of the number of terms that appeared in each source.

7. Discussion

According to the results, if the relatable prediction would be considered just that which appeared at least three times, it could be summed up as following: The holder of this *saju palja* is mature, considerate and independent (strong). She has a noble personality but can be stubborn and lack flexibility. She can suffer from anxiety and be a loner type of a person. Her ideal partner is someone gentle, toward whom she expresses maternal protectiveness. She will live financially a worry free life and she has a potential to work in an educational field.

Most of this brief prophecy uses the basic associations, which clearly shows that the diviners and authors of predictions work with the same foundations. This fact is also supported by the results in which it was evaluated that 80 % of the extracted basic theory appears in concerned prophecies. Those represent the main information the clients should expect every time they visit a fortune teller. On the contrary, in this work's findings, that makes just approximately 14 % of the full content. That proves the fortune readings differ greatly when given by different sources, as there are numerous prediction manuals.¹¹⁶ Therefore the findings are in agreement with the statement that the interpretations vary according to the fortune teller's personality, worldview, and level of knowledge or preferences.¹¹⁷

The degree of match was the highest for personality category in both direct divination and in overall prediction across all horoscopes. The reason is that the evaluation of a person's character takes up the most space of one prediction. Also, as was mentioned earlier, one's personality is mainly described according to one of the five elements, for which the character traits are fixed and therefore leaves less space for diversity. However, it should be noted that in face to face divination, one fortune teller will give a personality description to the client only in the first sitting. As it might be interesting only for occasional clients, if one becomes a regular to specific diviner, this category is obviously the first to be left out altogether.

On the contrary, other categories take into account more variations from the system. To interpret a client's fate concerning his or her relationships, health issues or future employment prospects, a fortune teller will need a deeper understanding of the whole *saju palja* order. Along with the fortune teller's preferences and style of

¹¹⁶ JANELLI, Dawnhee Y.: *Logical Contradictions in Korean Learned Fortunetelling*, 68.

¹¹⁷ KIM, David J.: "Four Pillars and Four Diviners", 604.

interpretation, this might represent the reason why the prophecies are more divergent in remaining categories. For example, additionally to already mentioned interpretation methods such as *sipsin* or Heavenly stems (*cheongan*) and Earthly branches (*jiji*), more complicated methods can be used. One of them is called *jijanggan*, or Janelli in her work mentions so called *isibunseong* (twenty meteors or stars), through which information on relationships and stages of a person's life can be read. For instance, *isibunseong* obtained from the year pillar, tells about relationship with parents (seniors) and represents one's whole life, while the day pillar hints at relationship with spouse and represents one's youth.¹¹⁸

Next, the reason why direct fortune telling reported lower conformity (30 % in contrast to overall 41.4 %) is due to the fact, it contains considerably less information. One meeting with a fortune teller is relatively short, ranging anywhere between 10 to 20 minutes. Since the horoscope can't be prepared in advance the diviner needs to improvise. All the knowledge on *saju palja* obtained is used to make a story, which should be able to entertain clients.¹¹⁹ While speaking, a fortune teller takes the client's feedback into account and acts accordingly. That directly affects the direction of the sitting. If a fortune teller discovers some topics his client responds to, he might devote more time to it, while he will completely omit others. That happened in 2021, when Mrs. Ryu decided to withdraw any prediction on health, but repeated her prognosis on "becoming a professor" several times, because she could probably sense her prediction rang a bell.

To successfully read the client fortune tellers use different techniques. David J. Kim in his article "Four Pillars and Four Diviners" interviewed four fortune tellers and among them Mr. Sam revealed to use physiognomy for more complex reading. He also admitted to studying linguistics to help him pick hints from client's speech.¹²⁰ Another fortune teller Mr. Chu would also try to identify changes in client's mood and their positive or negative facial and verbal expressions. He would, however, limit questions from clients to demonstrate confidence and certainty.¹²¹ This monologue-type prophecy can be applied to Mrs. Ryu's style as well.

Additionally, Janelli pointed out some other strategies fortune tellers use when they deal with their clients. The most common is to tell the client that (1) "a good

¹¹⁸ JANELLI, Dawnhee Y.: *Logical Contradictions in Korean Learned Fortunetelling*, 48–49.

¹¹⁹ KIM, David J.: "Four Pillars and Four Diviners", 313.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 312–313.

¹²¹ Ibid, 315.

fortune awaits in the future.” Mrs. Ryu was no exception when she told her prophecies as: “your fortune still looks fine; you will live well”; and so on. Fortune tellers also (2) reinterpret made prophecies or (3) offer alternatives: “Set up your own language school. And if not...” As was mentioned already, in 2021 Mrs. Ryu seemed to find a reaction when she said the word “professor”, so she repeated it another five times until the visit ended. The strategy is described by Janelli as (4) “emphasizing, elaborating upon and repeating predictions that were right”. Next, fortune tellers (5) “make predictions in the form of questions”: “you are low on calcium?” (6) use difficult terminology: “*eulmok*”; and give (7) conditional predictions: “if you keep studying; if you try hard,...” Lastly, diviners will (8) avoid precise predictions and (9) generalize so “either confirmation or disconfirmation is impossible”.¹²²

Altogether fortune tellers use all these strategies to achieve their main goal and that is to emotionally satisfy their clients. If the client leaves satisfied with the prophecy received, or at least entertained, there is a possibility he or she will come back in the future. Clients can also leave positive reviews or tell about their experience to friends, which might lead to more people coming to look for diviner’s services. In the end, the popularity, the number of clients and their loyalty are all signs of a diviner’s success.¹²³ It is therefore not surprising that any kind of prophecies are so vague, if one wrong prediction can cause loss of an appreciated client.¹²⁴

On the contrary, if the online divination is taken into account, the match was a little higher. Online readings are readymade and offer a huge amount of information – some could be even 30 pages long. With more information it is more likely that the predictions will coincide, but there are also far more contradictions as between different sources, as well as within the same reading. That’s caused by the absence of the fear of losing clients for inaccurate or entirely wrong prophecies. Quite common is to find rather opposing descriptions of personality. Since people are hard to outline as nobody is either “the Yin or the Yang”, it should not be surprising to be described by one source once as “gentle” and “shy” and then “cold hearted” and “bold”. This is what Janelli calls “situational personality”, when neither is easy to deny, as people act differently when in different situations.¹²⁵

¹²² JANELLI, Dawnhee Y.: *Logical Contradictions in Korean Learned Fortunetelling*, 72–86.

¹²³ KIM, David J.: “Divination and its Potential Futures”, 606.

¹²⁴ KIM, David J.: “Four Pillars and Four Diviners”, 315.

¹²⁵ JANELLI, Dawnhee Y.: *Logical Contradictions in Korean Learned Fortunetelling*, 75.

Once again, *saju palja* works with so many different rules of interpretation that it is impossible to avoid contradictions. In our case, the Internet reading suggested for example, that “the holder of this *saju palja* is realistic in dating and will marry only when the partner is sure of his job and economic power”. The mobile app, however, stated that “the holder desires romantic love and spirituality is more important for her than material things”. Which of the two can be considered correct? Simply, when two different sources come up with two completely contrasting predictions it is up to the client to choose the one which suits his worldview the best. Even though this work doesn’t aim to evaluate accuracy of fortune telling, as it would be very subjective, it is in fact a crucial standard for clients, that they are even willing to test – speak as little as possible to confuse fortune teller or visit the same one repeatedly in disguise to see if the prophecy changes.¹²⁶ If the clients receive a reading they find accurate, the fortune teller or the online fortune telling source automatically gains credibility from their perspective.

It should be noted, however, that clients do not expect their horoscope to be 100 % right or at least they do not give the contradictions enough attention. By interviewing clients David Kim and Janelli found out that they remember “only a small portion of the reading”¹²⁷ and some state that they “only remember the good stuff and forget the rest”.¹²⁸ Janelli further concludes that clients remember selectively only things which are important for them and that they have a great tolerance when it comes to incorrect predictions. They either ignore or tolerate them “in return for emotional satisfaction” or rationalize them by assuring themselves that “fortune teller can’t always be right”.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ KIM, David J.: “Divination and its Potential Futures”, 610.

¹²⁷ JANELLI, Dawnhee Y.: *Logical Contradictions in Korean Learned Fortunetelling*, 102.

¹²⁸ KIM, David J.: “Divination and its Potential Futures”, 610.

¹²⁹ JANELLI, Dawnhee Y.: *Logical Contradictions in Korean Learned Fortunetelling*, 92–108.

8. Customer motivation and divination during pandemic

In the 70's Young found out that people visit fortune tellers mainly on three main occasions. First to mention, is asking about one future during a certain season – particularly around New Year, when people get significantly more curious about what awaits them. Secondly, they tend to seek fortune teller advice at special life events that occur (marriage, birth of a child, etc.), or lastly, because of personal problems.¹³⁰ That was more than forty years ago. If we look further into the past, from Huimun's records (see chapter 2) it is obvious that in the 16th century divination served people basically in the same way. The *yangban* consulted diviner in different matters concerning himself or his family. That would be also childbirth or marriage, but also civil service examination prospects and health. He would also make records to feel bored before meeting fortune teller, and even though he showed signs of skepticism in received readings, they did provide him with needed psychological support. The whole idea that fortune telling's core remains unchanged throughout history is underlined by Finch's observation that even the diviner tried to emotionally satisfy his customer by never giving a misfortunate reading and ending all of them with encouragement to not feel anxious.¹³¹

Moving back to the present, according to the results of one of the most recent surveys conducted by Embrain Trend Monitor, the reason why people seek fortune telling services were once more “comfort of mind a reduction of worries” (86.7 %), “gaining positive energy and hope” (64.4 %), “resolving uncertainty” (41.3 %) and “to prepare for future” (35.3 %).¹³² There is therefore no doubt that divination continues to provide people with mental satisfaction. Jennifer Jung Kim has put it as: “divination is comforting and is a more socially acceptable form of therapy than psychiatry or psychotherapy”.¹³³ Even Mrs. Ryu's business card described her as a “life counselor”.

It is not surprising that the instability of society under the influence of COVID-19 pandemic has affected the use of fortune telling services. The anxiety caused by the unpredictable development of pandemic brought even more people to look for answers and comfort in divination. At the beginning of 2022, 84.5 % of 1000 surveyed people admitted to the usage of fortune telling services, while almost 50 % said they use them

¹³⁰ YOUNG, B. Elizabeth: *Spirits and Other Signs*, 385–393.

¹³¹ FINCH, C. E. Michael: “Dealing with Uncertainty”, 35–49.

¹³² LEE, Suji: “Why do you see horoscopes? 8 out of 10 people: Heart comfort, less worry”.

¹³³ JUNG-KIM, Jennifer: “Women and Divination in Contemporary Korea”, 396.

on a regular basis. 60 % also agreed with the opinion that more people look for horoscopes online due to the fear of transmitting the disease, even though only 17.1 % actually believed in online divination.¹³⁴ Indeed, internet divination is often labeled inauthentic or less respected,¹³⁵ and many are reluctant to pay for it. On the contrary 53.4 % of respondents said they trusted famous fortune tellers.

Another survey that focused on students concluded similar numbers as 81 % of them said they see their fortunes. Overwhelming majority also stated they use different online methods while only 15 % visits fortune telling offices or cafés. The results are in agreement with the presumption of the young generation preferring indirect divination forms. The most popular methods in this group were tarot (62 %), zodiac (57 %) and *saju* (37 %). Even though the consumption of divination services is slightly changing, through this survey it is easy to agree with Andrew E. Kim, who noted that there was “a successful transmission” of those practices “to the younger generation”.¹³⁶ The interesting fact is that the youth tend to be more willing to believe in divination, with only 11 % of students saying they don’t believe at all.¹³⁷

Whether or not the COVID-19 pandemic affected the willingness of Korean youth to believe in the supernatural is disputable, but what is for sure is that the popularity of divination phenomena in those challenging times is not exclusive to Korea. According to *The New York Times*, the growth of fortune telling business started already before the pandemic. American consumers’ spending in online astrology and fortune telling apps almost doubled between 2018 and 2019 – to 40 million dollars. . It can be therefore expected that the numbers got even higher later on. A psychology professor from York University, James Alcock, said for *The NY Times* that he is not even surprised because “if you look throughout history, whenever there has been some sort of upheaval or some sort of collective anxiety in society, interest in (divination) has shot up”.¹³⁸ In India, which experienced critical times with coronavirus in April 2021, Ajay Bhambi said for *Reuters* that his divination “business had risen 40% since the outbreak”.¹³⁹ Even articles from France hints at growing interest in tarot and astrology during pandemic and that especially in French youth, saying almost 70 % of those aged 18–24 now believe in

¹³⁴ LEE, Suji: “Why do you see horoscopes? 8 out of 10 people: Heart comfort, less worry”.

¹³⁵ KIM, David J.: “Divination and its Potential Futures”, 606.

¹³⁶ KIM, Andrew Eungi: “Nonofficial Religion in South Korea”, 296.

¹³⁷ KIM, Yunji: “81% of teenagers see fortune untact, such as tarot”.

¹³⁸ MACDONALD, Fleur: “What, if Anything, Can Psychics Tell Us About All of This?”.

¹³⁹ KATARIA, Sunil: “Indians seek out fortune tellers to fight COVID-19 blues”.

different types of fortune telling and that this trend “has been on a rise for the past 20 years.” A diviner “Mrs. Morin”, specializing in tarot card readings based in Paris, said that French youth “need something to believe in”. She continues with a pondering that in the past people prayed and visited churches a lot more, but nowadays they are less religious and that some of her clients see her as “a replacement for a priest”.¹⁴⁰

What this diviner said is actually in accordance with Yoo Kwang Suk’s findings regarding the Korean divination market. He suggests that its growth is linked “to the cultural inability of monotheistic rationality to overcome social and economic uncertainty like the IMF financial crisis” and if we apply it to the present issues, also uncertainty around the pandemic. Fortune telling is practiced to certain extent throughout the whole religious spectrum by Korean Buddhists, Protestants and Catholics, as well as by people who aren’t affiliated to any of the religions. On the one side, it does not require commitment and religious loyalty, but on the other, it seems to offer its consumers, what religions fail to.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ WILKINS, Charlotte: “‘Revival of the occult’: French youth turn to tarot, astrology during Covid-19”.

¹⁴¹ YOO, Kwang suk: “Return of Divination to the Public Sphere”, 739.

Conclusion

The interest in divination in contemporary Korean society was cultivated from ancient times. The first documented divination practices were associated with shamanism as the first form of religion on the peninsula. Divination was used to communicate with the gods and mainly to ensure prosperity of kingdoms. Later on, diviners specialized in foretelling the future, got segregated from shamans and what continued was approximately 1000 years of a high prestige of those fortune tellers, while shamans were continuously losing their stable position in society. Through cultural and economic exchange with China, new methods of divination were introduced into Korea, and along with them also the system of civil servants examinations which were used to appoint officials specialized in divination. At the turn of the 19th and 20th century, the class system was abolished and with the enlightenment era, all kinds of fortune tellers found themselves at the fringes of society alongside shamans. Korean people, however, didn't give up on divination. Fortune telling persisted as a popular private sector service, characterized nowadays by free competition and new technologies.

The Korean divination market offers a wide variety of different divination methods, for example the most widespread four pillars of destiny (*saju*), geomancy, physiognomy, determination of auspicious days or names and many more. For the young clientele, the most popular method is west-imported tarot cards reading.

Saju represents a personalized horoscope based on the year, month, day and time of one's birth. The main interpretation consists of five categories: personality, health, economic situation, suitable occupation and relationships (choice of a suitable partner). When making a prediction, the fortune teller takes into account multiple variables from the complex system and interprets them subjectively. That can result in a high number of different prophecies based on the same date of birth. However, according to the findings of this work, the basic interpretation reported 41 % of match among the readings and up to 80 % match with the core theory, which is easy to look up alone, even though the diviners will try to convince their clients there is a whole ideology behind *saju*, which they can never comprehend.

Frequent consumers of divination are probably well aware of what their *saju* represents, and the repetition of the information extracted from the main theory can be a reason why many young people are attracted to different fortune telling methods, such as tarot, where the subjectivity of interpretation is even higher and diviner is freer when

giving readings. Another reason can be the Korean nature – the desire for something “new, modern and trendy”, and in this regard *saju* is just something too traditional. Nevertheless, the changing preferences do not reflect a loss of interest in divination among Korean people. As an example, the present day “obsession” with 16 personality’s website can be given, as it presents a very similar way of insight into people’s character, relationship and professional prospects.

When it comes to perception of prophecies the presumption of belief is important. If one is not a complete skeptic, he or she will find and select subjectively suitable information in any kind of divination. Whether the client visits a fortune teller directly or uses online service is also a choice affected by personal preferences. And despite the fact that still more Koreans use mobile phones to have their fortunes read, face to face divination cannot be considered as doomed to extinction, as it provides emotional satisfaction and anxiety relief in a form of psychological counseling. The proof for this claim can be found in increasing interest in fortune telling services each time an individual or society faces uncertainty and unrest.

This work aimed to provide insight into fortune telling phenomena in the Korean environment in the framework of existing literature. Its findings related to the conformity of four pillars of the destiny divination system can serve as a starting point for further, in-depth research this topic deserves.

Resumé

Záujem o veštenie sa v súčasnej kórejskej spoločnosti pestoval od staroveku. Prvé zdokumentované veštecké praktiky boli spojené so šamanizmom, ktorý predstavoval prvú formu náboženstva na polostrove. Veštenie slúžilo na komunikáciu s bohmi a na zabezpečenie prosperity kráľovstiev. Neskôr sa veštcí, ktorí sa špecializovali na predpovedanie budúcnosti, vyčlenili od šamanov. Nasledovalo približne 1000 rokov vysokej prestíže týchto veštcov, zatiaľ čo šamani postupne strácali na svojom postavení v spoločnosti. Kultúrnou a ekonomickou výmenou s Čínou boli do Kórey importované nové metódy veštenia a spolu s nimi aj systém skúšok štátnej správy, na základe ktorých boli vymenovávaní úradníci špecializovaní na veštenie. Na prelome 19. a 20. storočia došlo k zrušeniu triedneho systému a s dobou osvietenia sa popri šamanoch ocitli na okraji spoločnosti všetci veštcí. Kórejci sa však veštenia nevzdali. Veštenie pretrvalo ako populárna služba súkromného sektora, pre ktorú je v súčasnosti charakteristická voľná súťaž a nové technológie.

Kórejský trh ponúka širokú škálu rôznych metód veštenia, napríklad najrozšírenejšie štyri piliere osudu (*saju*), geomanciu (feng šuej), fyziognómiu, určovanie priaznivých dní, či mien a mnohé ďalšie. Pre mladú klientelu je najobľúbenejšou metódou vykladanie tarotových kariet importovaných zo západu.

Saju predstavuje personalizovaný horoskop založený na roku, mesiaci, dni a čase narodenia. Základný výklad pozostáva z piatich kategórií: osobnosť, zdravie, ekonomická situácia, vhodné povolanie a vzťahy (výber vhodného partnera). Pri predpovedi veštec berie do úvahy viaceré premenné z komplexného systému a subjektívne ich interpretuje. To môže viesť k veľkému množstvu rozličných proroctiev založených na rovnakom dátume narodenia. Podľa zistení tejto práce však základná interpretácia uvádzala 41% zhodu medzi čítaniami a až 80% zhodu so základnou teóriou, ktorú si je možné individuálne naštudovať, aj keď sa veštcí budú snažiť presvedčiť svojich klientov, že komplikovanú ideológiu *saju* nikdy nedokážu pochopiť. Pravidelní konzumenti veštenia si pravdepodobne dobre uvedomujú, čo obsahuje ich *saju* a opakovanie informácií vyťažovaných z hlavnej teórie môže byť dôvodom, prečo mnohých mladých ľudí priťahujú iné metódy veštenia. Toho príkladom môžu byť tarotové karty, kde je subjektívnosť výkladu vyššia a veštec je pri interpretácii budúcnosti voľnejší. Ďalším dôvodom môže byť kórejská povaha – túžba po niečom novom, modernom a „trendovom“. V tomto smere je *saju* možné považovať za príliš

tradičné. Meniace sa preferencie však neodrážajú stratu záujmu o veštenie medzi Kórejčanmi. Ako príklad možno uviesť súčasnú „posadnutosť“ webovou stránkou 16 osobností, ktorá predstavuje veľmi podobný spôsob nahliadnutia do charakteru ľudí, ich vzťahov a profesijných vyhliadok.

Pri prijímaní prorociev je dôležitý predpoklad viery. Ak niekto nie je úplný skeptik, nájde a vyberie subjektívne vyhovujúce informácie v akomkoľvek druhu veštenia. Či klient navštíví priamo veštca alebo využije on-line službu, je tiež voľba ovplyvnená osobnými preferenciami. A aj napriek tomu, že stále viac Kórejčanov používa mobilné telefóny k nahliadnutiu do budúcnosti, veštenie tvárou v tvár nemožno považovať za odsúdené na zánik, pretože poskytuje emocionálne uspokojenie a úľavu od úzkosti vo forme psychologického poradenstva. Dôkazom tohto tvrdenia je rastúci záujem o služby veštenia zakaždým, keď jednotlivec alebo spoločnosť čelí neistote alebo nepokojom.

Cieľom tejto práce bolo poskytnúť náhľad na fenomén veštenia v kórejskom prostredí v rámci existujúcej literatúry. Jej zistenia súvisiace so zhodou naprieč horoskopmi skúmajúcich štyri piliere osudu, môžu slúžiť ako východisko pre ďalší, podrobnejší výskum, ktorý si táto téma zaslúži.

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