

Korean devil posts (장승 Chang Sŭng)

The Korean name for these carvings is translated literally as *road idols*. Missionaries from the West, who first forced their way into the Hermit Kingdom in the 1870s, called them *devil posts*.

Devil posts were part of the indigenous religion in Korea, a form of shamanism. Two posts, one male and one female, were placed by the roadside leading into each village. They scared away evil spirits who would otherwise have preyed on the villagers.

Although devil posts were made in many shapes and sizes, they were always carved with snarling teeth and angry eyes, and they always carried the same inscription. The male always has a stylized hairpin through his topknot, the bundle of hair at the back of his head. Since many Westerners might not recognize the male by his hairpin, I have added a purely Western adornment to this female: earrings.

The inscription is in Chinese characters. The use of Chinese characters, along with much else of Chinese culture, was imported into Korea during the fourth through sixth centuries A.D. Although a distinctive Korean alphabet called *Hangul* was invented by King Sejong in the 15th century, written Korean still uses many Chinese characters.

The inscriptions on the two posts are:

<u>Male Post</u>		<u>Female Post</u>	
天	Heaven	地	Earth
下	Under	上	Over
大	Great	女	Female
將	} General	將	} General
軍			
軍		軍	

A literate spirit would have been concerned by these two ferocious generals, male and female, who between them ruled heaven and earth. Presumably, the big teeth would have been enough to frighten away an evil spirit who could not read.

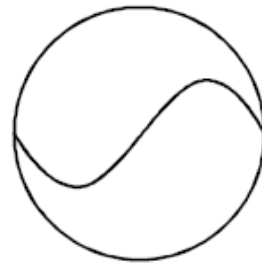
The marks between the eyebrows are also found on all devil posts. These marks, called *pundra* in Hindi, are worn by Hindu devotees to mark what was regarded as the seat of *Vishnu*'s and *Shiva*'s highest aspects. The form of Mahayana Buddhism that came to Korea from India via China brought with it certain features of Hinduism, including the pundra. Buddhism flourished as the state religion of Korea for 800 years until the coup d'etat of General Yi in 1392. It would have been natural for shamans to incorporate such a prominent symbol of the country's dominant belief into their own practices.

The symbols on the hats also have meaning.

Male's Hat

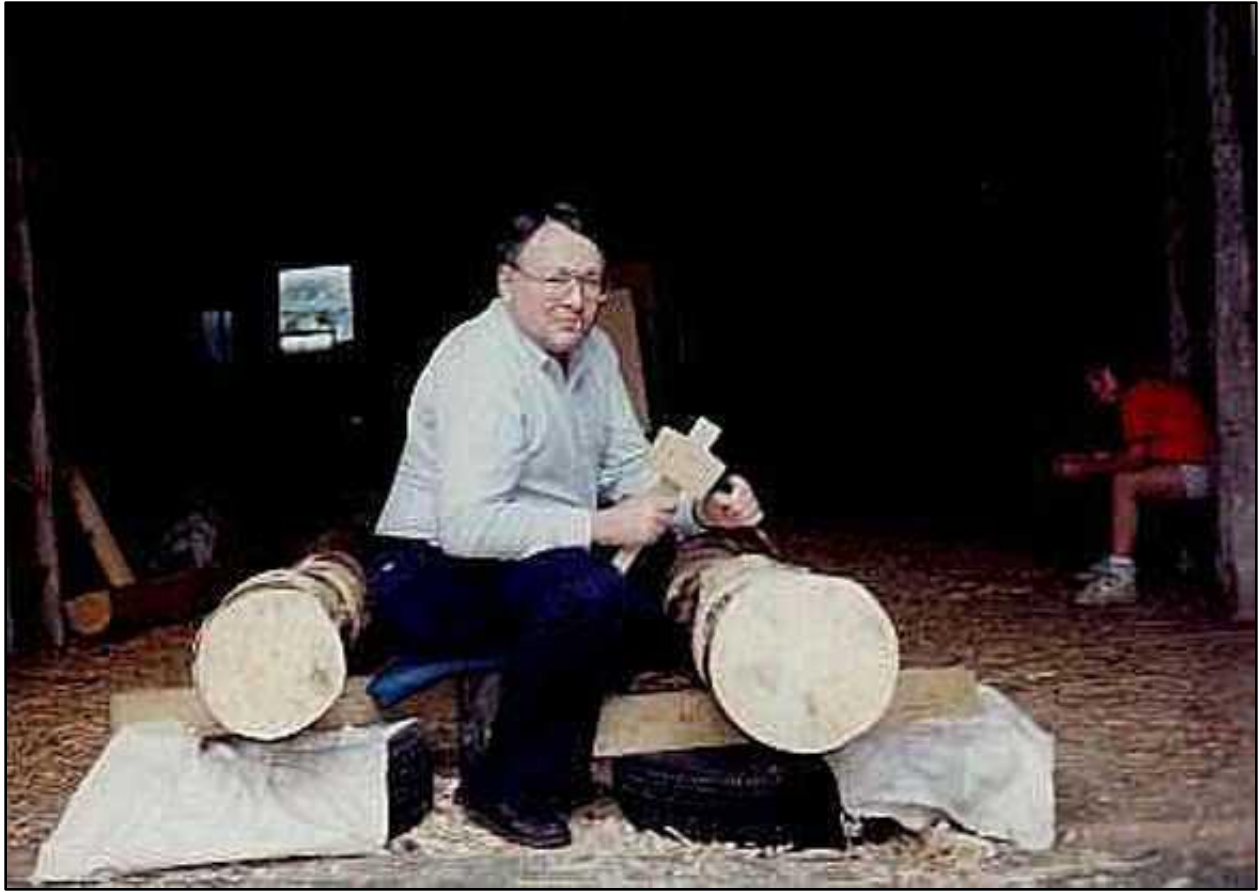


Female's Hat



The Chinese characters on the male's hat mean *Double Happiness*. If symbols are carved on his hat, this is usually the one used. There is less consistency in the symbol on the female's hat. I have chosen the *Taeguk*, which forms the centre of South Korea's flag. The upper section is the *Yang*; the lower section is the *Um*. Locked together in perfect balance, these two opposites symbolize the duality of the universe. There is good and evil, night and day, life and death, being and not being. A central thought in the Taeguk is said to be that while there is constant movement within the infinite sphere, there is also balance and harmony.

Jim Hawley, August 1995



September 8, 1994 - Starting to carve the male post's yes



April 20, 1995 - Progress early the next spring



October 16, 1995 - Four of the male's five characters are done



August 19, 1996 - The devil posts are done. Liz and Rosie help them work.



January 15, 1997 - Standing silent guard in winter