



## National Pantheon, Regional Deities, Personal Spirits? *Mushindo*, *Söngsu*, and the Nature of Korean Shamanism

Korean shamans (*manshin* or *mudang*) practicing in the tradition of Hwanghae province possess numerous paintings of spirits of deceased shamans (*söngsu*) who assist them in their activities. Attention has been paid to such paintings (*hwan*) mainly in the context of shamanism as a part of Korean national heritage, and the role they play in the lives of individual shamans has been neglected. If one looks beyond the surface of these *hwan*, which often seem to be almost identical, it turns out that shamans have very personal relationships with the figures depicted, who may have been professional as well as genealogical ancestors. In some cases, the paintings also represent the spiritual essence of a living person (including the shaman her-/himself). A detailed investigation of the very personal meaning that *hwan* have for individual shamans helps to understand the dynamics of rituals. Taking into account the very personal nature of the shamanic experience involved also strengthens the claim of the Korean *manshin* to be called shamans according to a general definition of shamanism formulated by Roberte Hamayon.

KEYWORDS: Korea—Hwanghae province—shamans—spirit paintings—*hwan*—*söngsu*—personalization of ritual—agency of material culture

IN SEVERAL regions of Korea one finds striking depictions of the deities and spirits worshipped by shamans (*mudang*, or more politely *manshin*), either in the shrines at the shamans' homes (*shindang*) or in the commercially exploited facilities (*kuttang*) where most shamanic rituals (*kut*) are conducted these days. In Korean the most neutral appellation for these pictures is *mushindo* (literally "pictures of shamanic gods"), but alternatives are *musokhwa* or *muhwa*, *hwabun*, *t'aenghwa* (a term more commonly used for Buddhist paintings), *hwan*, or *maji*. Generally colorful and striking in appearance, these pictures immediately attract the attention of whomever sees them and consequently they are often used to illustrate descriptions of shamanic rituals. They may also arouse interest as probably the only genre of Korean folk paintings that is still truly alive at the beginning of the twenty-first century. However, from a purely academic point of view, they have rarely become the focus of concentrated study. A number of books and articles on them have been published,<sup>1</sup> but many aspects of the paintings have hardly been touched upon. A substantial part of the literature has the character of an exhibition catalogue, with brief descriptions of the works, which in some cases do not even indicate their regional provenance.

In this paper I intend to do two things: following an introductory section, I will first present some detailed ethnographic material based on fieldwork conducted between 1999 and 2000, and less intensively in subsequent years, among shamans in the Republic of Korea who follow the traditions of Hwanghae province (now part of North Korea).<sup>2</sup> Second, I want to consider this material in the light of certain academic debates conducted in Korea about the nature of Korean shamanism and also to review it in the context of a general theory of shamanism.

The outcome will not be the last word on the problem of whether the phenomena referred to as *musok* (customs of the Korean *mudang*) or *mugyo* (the religion of the *mudang*) actually deserve to be referred to as shamanism, but will, I hope, contribute at least to a modest degree to a better understanding of the functioning and continued existence of *kut* in modern Korea.<sup>3</sup> It may also help us to see shamanic practices in Korea within a more global perspective. Paradoxically this will be achieved by focusing on the particularity of the rituals and their context as it is encountered in the course of purely non-comparative ethnographic investigations.

APPROACHES TO *MUSHINDO*

*Mushindo* may be studied from a variety of academic disciplines such as religious studies, art history, folklore, or anthropology, to mention only the most obvious options. They may also be studied within a variety of discourses. Depending on the disciplinary approach and the discourse that frames the investigation, certain questions will be highlighted and others obscured, and different values may be assigned to similar facts. In recent decades the dominant discourse in Korean academia has been that of the nation or ethnic unity (Kn. *minjok*), which makes “Korea” the quasi-natural unit of aggregation for discussing all kinds of topics. The area studies approach in academic circles outside Korea, whereby in roughly the same period of time Korean studies has firmly established itself alongside Chinese and Japanese studies in many universities, predisposes overseas researchers to adopt a similar perspective, even if in many cases the discourse has a quite different emotional charge. There is always a temptation to extrapolate from data derived from regional fieldwork to draw conclusions about Korea as a whole. Book titles will generally contain the word “Korea” or “Korean.”<sup>4</sup>

*Minjok* discourse is also found in discussions about *musok* and *mushindo*. Shamans are often valued according to the degree to which they are deemed to embody the national heritage of the authentic traditions of Korean shamanism, whether these are regional or not, and in some cases shamans are subsidized by the government to promote the continued existence of this part of Korea’s cultural heritage. Nearly all of the articles and books on shamanic paintings referred to above mention the word “Korean” in the title, and the compiler of two of them, YUN Yölsu (1994), argues that tracing the meaning contained in these paintings and their symbolism in fact means to trace the national spirit, *minjok chöngshin* (KAHOE PANGMULGWAN 2004, 145). I have no objections against *minjok* discourse in principle, and in fact have argued for its validity in the practice of history as long as it is not taken to ultranationalist extremes (WALRAVEN 2001). But is it the most fruitful approach for the study of *mushindo* and the deities they depict?

The author of one of the best studies of the pantheon of Korean shamans (YANG 1996) has cautioned in a conference paper (YANG 1999) against drawing hasty conclusions about the “Korean shamanic pantheon” on the basis of the observation of only a few shamans. I fully agree, but would like to question, however, the significance of identifying the “Korean pantheon.” Would it not be equally or more relevant to understand the pantheon of a single shaman, which constitutes a more organic entity? In other words, is shamanic ritual a phenomenon that derives its significance from the fact that it occurs on a national scale and in a national (or regional) context, or is it important because of what it means in a concrete, limited setting, in individual lives? Of course, these days many shamans themselves like to stress that they are keepers of “Korean national treasures,” and “shamanism” is frequently presented as an important component of Korean ethnic identity (HOGARTH 1999), but that should not keep us from asking questions about the implications of such a “nationalization” of shamanism. This is all the more justified because

of the great number of private rituals that take place everyday, but receive much less attention than certain showcase rituals “of national importance” such as the *Tano-je kut* in Kangnŭng held around the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, which is shown annually on national television (albeit for a few brief moments only), or the performances of officially appointed keepers of particular rituals that have been recognized as part of the national heritage.

I will argue that efforts to create the abstraction that a “national pantheon” inherently deny an important characteristic of the practices of the shamans. One of the most striking features of Korean shamanic beliefs and rituals is that the world is seen in very particularistic terms. This has created tension from the moment the institutions of the state developed and created general, streamlined procedures in which the place of the personal and the individual became smaller and smaller. Such tension was already detectable very early in Korean history, but came to a climax in the Chosŏn period (1392–1910). There is a huge contrast between the shamanic view of the world and the rigid, bureaucratically conceived cosmic order of Confucianism, the official ideology of Chosŏn, in which social status and rank determined what invisible beings an individual might worship, and individuals were encouraged to accept unquestioningly whatever fate Heaven (which was said to be “impartial,” that is, directed towards public benefit rather than personal interests) had in store for them (WALRAVEN 1999). Whereas to the orthodox Confucian, prayers to obtain personal and private advantage were anathema, interventions of this kind are the *raison d’être* of the shamans.

The rituals of Korean shamans are not only for (groups of) individual people, but also personal in a different sense. This paper builds on earlier research that examined the various ways in which the rituals of Korean shamans are “personalized” to establish a rapport between the shamans and their clients that in the final analysis makes the rituals meaningful to all the participants (KENDALL 1985, BRUNO 2002, CHOI 1989, KIM Seong Nae 1989, WALRAVEN 2002). The *kut* performed by Korean shamans do not belong to the kind of ritual that finds its meaning merely in its correct execution. Certain students and theoreticians of ritual, of whom Frits Staal is probably the most outspoken and most outstanding example, have argued that ritual has no intrinsic meaning, and that the details of ritual and the various ritual actions have no symbolically expressive function, its having no meaning belonging to the very essence of ritual (STAAL 1975). In Korean shamanic rituals, however, there is constant interaction between the performers of the ritual and those for whom the ritual is performed. They are engaged in a dynamic communicative process in which meaning is constantly transmitted, emotionally affecting the participants (BRUNO 2002).

A ritual like the *kut* only becomes meaningful as ritual rather than as an artistic performance when in certain ways its execution effects an emotional change in the clients. In fact, one sees that Korean shamans adapt traditional ritual structures or add variations within the general structure for that very purpose. The difference between a performance by shamans at a folklore festival and a true ritual is that in the latter the clients are not mere spectators, but engage in active emotional

interactions with the shamans. An example of a borderline case may be illuminating. A performance ritual held in 1999 at the former Södaemun Prison for the spirits of independence fighters who had been executed there, on the occasion of the conversion of the prison into a commemorative site, quite suddenly and perhaps unintentionally turned into a true ritual. Although the event had many of the outward characteristics of a “national” folklore performance, at a certain moment part of the audience (who included descendants of the patriots who had died in Södaemun Prison in the colonial period) suddenly became highly emotionally involved when Kim Maemul, the chief shaman, re-enacted a scene of violent death, a standard element in death rituals of the Hwanghae tradition. They rushed to her in tears to succor the dying person and in the next part of the ritual strained to hear the words spoken by the dead through the lips of the shaman. However, in the more public performances of shamans (including village or neighborhood rituals, which often are “preserved” as cultural relics rather than as living traditions), this is rare. Yet, if the aim is to understand the apparently undiminished frequency of shamanic rituals performed for individual clients in a newly industrialized and almost totally urbanized society like present-day Korea, attention to the dynamics and particularities of the daily rituals is indispensable. It is in all the modifications of the standard format of the *kut* that are added to suit the context—which may seem like idiosyncrasies or even mistakes if seen from the viewpoint of “orthodox tradition”—that the ritual fulfils its most fundamental function.

If ritual is examined in this way, formalized ritual traditions (which may be said to have national or, more likely, regional characteristics) only play a role inasmuch as they furnish the general conditions and the cultural parameters within which events take place. The importance of this framework should not be underestimated. The creation of meaning, however, is a dynamic process that ultimately takes place in the concrete setting of specific rituals, and the agents of this process are all the individuals present on the spot, whether they are shamans or clients. It is ultimately to individual people that things become meaningful. Therefore, the specific conditions of each ritual and an individual’s circumstances are of crucial importance. The specific adaptations that directly address the concerns of the people for which each ritual is held are more important than the general procedures and purpose of the ritual, which often are the main focus of more traditional folkloristic accounts of *kut*.

#### MUSHINDO IN HWANGHAE PROVINCE RITUALS

From the perspective outlined above, I will discuss part of the pantheon of some shamans performing in the style of Hwanghae province who are active in South Korea, and thus, to begin with, redirect the discussion to the regional level. Hwanghae province shamans are noted for the fact that they always perform their rituals against the colorful background of numerous paintings of the gods or spirits they worship, which almost completely cover the walls of the space where the ritual is held. For every ritual they take along at least a suitcase full of such paintings

to create the sacred space that facilitates the emotional transformations they are after. Usually the paintings are so numerous that they have to be hung on the walls partially covering each other. These visual representations offer the researcher a valuable entry into a world that, without their mediation, would remain without form. So far, however, *mushindo* have too often been treated merely as a colorful backdrop, a kind of wallpaper, or as specimens of folk art. They have hardly been examined as an integral part of the dynamics of the ritual and an important component of the mental world of the shaman.

The deities depicted include mountain gods, heavenly gods, and immortal maidens, divine generals, dragon gods, and child spirits, as well as the spirits of deceased shamans. By and large, there is a fixed spatial distribution of these pictures. Next to the entrance of the room where the ritual is held is a picture of the local tutelary deity Sŏnang, the only one of all the pictures that does not present the deity in human form; in the Hwanghae tradition, Sŏnang almost always assumes the shape of a tiger.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes a picture of the Ten Kings of the Underworld (FIGURE 1) accompanies that of Sŏnang, and even more rarely a picture of three *yŏngsan taegam*, spirits that are related to people who have died in an unnatural manner. These *taegam* may also be grouped together with the *sŏngsu*, a category of spirits that will be discussed below. Above the main altar table, which is usually set against the wall facing the door, the pictures of heavenly gods, divine generals, and other important deities are hung.<sup>6</sup> Against one of the side walls, or sometimes facing the main altar, paintings are affixed of a special class of spirits, the *sŏngsu*, whom I provisionally will identify as spirits of deceased shamans. This group of spirits is extremely important to the shamans and will be discussed in detail below. They are so close to the shaman that it is tempting to refer to them as the shaman's "familiar," if that term would not carry connotations of subservience that do not at all apply to the *sŏngsu*, who are served respectfully rather than serving the shaman. Pictures of mountain spirits are arranged on the other side of the main altar.

The *hwan*, as they are usually called by Hwanghae province shamans, are painted in a rather stereotypical fashion, which makes it relatively easy to identify them as belonging to a certain category of supernatural beings, even though particular styles of individual painters may be distinguished.<sup>7</sup> However, the general characteristics of fixed categories of deities and the stylistic similarities of the paintings that are churned out in considerable quantities by certain workshops obscure one essential feature. Even deities who belong to general categories have entered the shaman at a specific moment, through an individual process including dreams or visions. In his earlier work the late Kim T'aegon presented several examples of shamans who after a dream or vision had pictures made that matched what they had seen during their initiatory experiences (summarized in KIM T'aegon 1993, 29). In other ways, too, there tend to be particularistic connections between the gods and the shaman. Mountain gods, for instance, may be the gods of mountains that have an individual significance for the shaman, for instance because they are the deities of mountains in the place of origin of the shaman or have assisted the shaman in

certain ways (for instance, see KENDALL 1988, 56–57). Other associations of a different nature will be discussed below.

### SÖNGSU

The contrast between stereotyped iconography and personal connotations is strongest in the case of the *söngsu*. The term *söngsu* is sometimes used to refer to deities in general, but more specifically it stands for the spirits of dead shamans, who assist living *mudang* from the beyond. As will soon become clear, this definition is a simplification, but for the moment it has to suffice. Another name for these deities, which in contrast to *söngsu* are also used by Kyönggi province shamans, is *taeshin*. According to one source, another alternative is the deity *kambhñg manura* (KUNGNIP MINSOK PANGMULGWAN 1995, 42–44).<sup>8</sup>

The *söngsu* are represented in a very limited number of stances and costumes. Most commonly the *söngsu* wear the red robes and the flower-adorned *kkotkat* (“flower hat,” FIGURE 2) that are characteristic of the Hwanghae province shaman. Occasionally one sees a different costume, such as the white robes of Chesök, originally an Indian deity (Indra) who entered Korea with Buddhism, where he became a god in charge of fertility and longevity. The *söngsu* are most often represented in the attitude the shamans assume when they present an oracle (*kongsu*) from the gods who have descended into their bodies, with the two most characteristic attributes of the shaman, the fan and the bells, in the right and the left hand respectively. Sometimes both hands are lifted above the shoulders in the pose that is assumed when the gods are about to enter the shaman’s body (FIGURE 3). These two attitudes, of which the second (according to some shamans) is a rather recent innovation, both show the *mudang* in one of the most crucial moments of their profession. In the background of the *söngsu hwan* one frequently sees a number of bronze mirrors (*myöngdo*) of the kind that constitute an alternative representation of deities (including *söngsu* themselves, who also may be “represented” by a set of clothes).

As the way facial features are rendered is not very realistic and quite stylized, at first sight the *söngsu* seem almost identical to each other (FIGURE 4). To the shamans who worship them, however, things could hardly be more different. They have very personal and sometimes highly emotionally-charged relationships with their *söngsu*. In many cases (though not all), they have actually known them as teachers or senior colleagues while they were still alive, and some of the conflicts that characterized these relationships in the past may continue in this new association. In other instances, the *söngsu* are shamans of a more distant past whom they have never met personally, but even in such cases they are important to the identity of individual *mudang*, as they provide them with the distinctive pedigree that lends them the authority needed to perform an effective ritual. The stories shamans tell about these “ancestors” constitute a kind of oral history of their profession, or to be more exact, of their own shamanic lineage.

The *söngsu* act as helpers to the shamans in various ways, by assisting them in their daily practice and by teaching essential parts of the shaman’s craft such as

dancing, music, and singing. According to one shaman they sit on top of someone's head when they do the latter.<sup>9</sup> This same informant explained that it was doubtful whether a school where shamans could learn to dance and sing would be successful, because attending such classes would be a public admission that one's own *söngsu* were inferior.<sup>10</sup> She thought that only through private tuition, and in secret, could this problem be evaded. The *söngsu* may also see to it that a shaman is often asked by clients to perform rituals.

Deities of categories other than the narrowly-defined *söngsu* sometimes also have a close personal relationship with a shaman, who, for instance, may worship one of her forebears or a child that died as a personal deity.<sup>11</sup> In Hwanghae province rituals, ancestors of the shamans quite often appear as deities of the *shinjang* (literally "divine warriors") category. The *shinjang* are not only close to the *söngsu* in the sense that they also have a personal relationship with the shamans and that the representations of *söngsu* and *shinjang* are grouped together during rituals, they also fulfil a similar role vis-à-vis the shamans, assisting and inspiring them. One of the shamans from the sample I will discuss in greater detail below worships a *shinmyöng shinjang* (FIGURE 5). *Shinmyöng* may be translated as "divinity," but in the parlance of the shamans it is used to refer to the sparks of the divine that shamans have within them, and rather should be translated as the "divine inspiration" or "divine fervor" that enables shamans to practice.<sup>12</sup> This *shinmyöng shinjang* is, and it was explained to me, the *shinjang* of the *söngsu*.

Whereas in Seoul (Hanyang) rituals the *shinjang* are military figures, in Hwanghae *kut* they frequently have the appearance of educated, professional gentlemen from the Chosön period: physicians, geomancers, or scholars (FIGURE 6). They are often associated with *pöpsa* (literally "dharma masters"), male religious practitioners who use a cylindrical drum rather than the hourglass-shaped drum typical of Hwanghae province shamans and perform so-called "sitting rituals," which are more sedate in all senses of the word.<sup>13</sup> It is also possible that an ancestor turns into a deity of another general category, like that of the mountain gods (KIM Myöngja 2002, 23–24).

Last but not least, there exists a special connection between *manshin*, *söngsu*, and the *chaktu* general(s). Mounting the razor-sharp straw cutters (*chaktu*) may be said to be the most quintessentially shamanic act; it is emblematic for the activities of the shaman. The merging of the identities of the shaman and the general is embodied in the *hwan* depicting the *chaktu* general (FIGURE 7; cf. FIGURE 8). This image of the deity is in fact a depiction of the shaman in the costume of the general standing on the knives, while two people on the sides firmly hold the knives to prevent them from wobbling. It becomes impossible to make out whether the picture represents the god or the shaman. It is no accident, therefore, that the family name of this general is said to be that of the shaman. "That's me," some shamans will say, while pointing at the general's picture. The *chaktu* general is very important as he (or she: if the shaman is a woman the general will be a woman, too!) is in charge of the powers of the shaman (KUNGNIP MINSOK PANGMULGWAN 1995, 35) and as such is also known as the *söngsu* general (who, some *mudang* say, originally was a shaman himself).<sup>14</sup> The importance of this general is such that his or her *hwan*



receives a place above the central altar, not with the *söngsu* (who occupy a kind of intermediary position between the shamans and the other deities). The peculiar cap the shaman wears when this general descends into her is called *söngsu moja* (KUNGNIP MINSOK PANGMULGWAN 1995, 73). Consequently, it is no surprise that certain ritual actions connected to the *söngsu* are inserted in the context of the *chaktu köri*, the sequence of the ritual in which the shaman mounts the knives.

The *söngsu* are regularly worshipped in the *shindang*, the private shrines of shamans they maintain at home, and whenever a shaman performs a *kut*, but they will receive special attention in the *chinjök* ritual that shamans periodically perform for their deities at their own expense to express their gratitude for all the help they have received from them.

#### FIVE CASE STUDIES

In order to trace the range of *söngsu* and other deities with whom Hwanghae province *manshin* maintain a personal relationship, I will present five brief case studies.

Case one: Manshin X is a relatively young shaman, born in 1965. Among the *söngsu* she worships, there is first of all her spiritual mother (*shin-ömöni*), who was a Hwanghae province *manshin* active in the south, in Ch'ungch'öng province. Then there is an older colleague who worked with the same spiritual mother, with whom Manshin X stayed for a while after her *shin-ömöni* had died. Both *söngsu* conform to the general rule that *söngsu* are deified spirits of deceased shamans and both are part of the direct “spiritual lineage” of Manshin X. But the total range of her *söngsu* is not confined to such figures. She also worships her own father as a *söngsu*, although he never was a shaman (FIGURE 9). He did, however, have the spiritual energy (*shinkki*) to become one. After his death, Manshin X's *shin-ömöni* told her to make a picture of him and worship him. According to Manshin X, such cases are rare and it is more common that someone worships a father as a *shinjang*. Manshin X also worships an older brother who died at the age of four (before she was born). When she held a *chinjök kut* (24–26 October 1999), on the final day, in the absence of the regular clients who had attended the *kut* during the previous days, another shaman performed the sequence for the ancestors. With only the members of her team and the ethnographer present Manshin X showed deep emotion when these deceased relatives made an appearance.

Like the older brother who died before she was born, not all the *söngsu* worshipped by Manshin X are people she has known personally. She also venerates a certain Chöng-ssi, a male shaman of “about one hundred and fifty years back” and a female *söngsu*, Chöng-ssi halmöni, who goes back three generations.

Case two: The second case is that of the much longer-established Manshin Y, who was born in 1931 (interviewed 24 May 2000). She introduces a picture of her *Chaktu* general as a portrait of herself. Among her “professional *söngsu*” is a male *söngsu*, Hö-ssi, who is worshipped by many other shamans. He may be said to be the least personal of all the *söngsu*. She also worships Kim Kibaek, a famous

Hwanghae province male shaman (*hwaraengi*, or in dialect, *hwaraei*) who is said to have died in 1944 in police custody after he had defied Japanese colonial oppression in an oracle he presented during a ritual (KUNGNIP MINSOK PANGMULGWAN 1995, 132–33). Manshin Y was connected to him through her father’s younger sister, who professionally cooperated with him. A *söngsu* who belongs more directly to Manshin Y’s own spiritual lineage is the spiritual mother of her own spiritual mother (in other words, her spiritual grandmother). There also is a *söngsu* who was a shaman who used to do *kut* together with Manshin Y’s spiritual mother. Of the *söngsu* general she worships, Manshin Y explicitly says that this deity, too, originally was a *manshin*.

A particularly interesting case is a *hwan* worshipped in her *shindang* that represents Manshin Y’s daughter. The daughter has never been a shaman and is still alive, but when she was seven years old she began to suffer from the symptoms of a shaman’s calling, such as illness and other forms of misfortune (*shin kamul*). This went on for three years. The mother thought her daughter was too young to become a shaman and probably did not want her to become one anyway. Therefore she tried, successfully, to avert this fate by worshiping the daughter’s spiritual aspect in the form of this *hwan*, which represents the daughter in the robes of a shaman, exactly like the other *söngsu*.

*Söngsu* may also be related to the clients of a shaman. The grandchildren of a woman who during her life had worshipped the deity Pugun halmöni were afflicted by illness, but recovered when they requested Manshin Y to worship their grandmother.<sup>15</sup> Although Manshin Y did not say so, it is possible that this, too, was a way to avoid someone in the family having to assume the burden of becoming a shaman, because illness is, after all, one of the forms of *shin kamul* by which someone is pressured to become a *mudang*.

A pattern that is also seen with other shamans is that not all of Manshin Y’s *söngsu* belong to her own regional tradition. She worships a Taeshin halmöni whom she also refers to as Inam halmöni, “the grandmother from the south.” Interestingly, Manshin Y readily introduces southern elements in her rituals when clients hail from the south, for instance in an initiation ritual for a woman from Chölla province I witnessed.

Case three: The male shaman Paksu A belonged to the same generation as Manshin X. He was born in 1969 and died in 2006. Among Paksu A’s “professional *söngsu*” was a male shaman who performed rituals in the Kyönggi-province style and was famous for his Pari kongju death rituals. This *söngsu* (FIGURE 10) lived in the same neighborhood and handed over his “lineage” to Paksu A, who also venerated the spiritual mother of this *söngsu*. Another *taeshin* was the deceased daughter of a woman who used to play the drum during rituals. Since he worshipped her, Paksu A said, he was often called by clients to work for them. This is but one of the ways in which *söngsu* may assist a shaman.

In Paksu A’s pantheon, relatives were well-represented. He worshipped both his maternal and his paternal grandmother as *Pugi halmöni*. To some shamans among his *taeshin* he was not directly related by blood, but a personal connection existed

because there was a relationship between these shamans and a relative of Paksu A. A paternal aunt (*komo*) of his is also active as a shaman, and Paksu A venerated his *komo*'s spiritual mother as well as the sister of the father of this *komo*'s husband, in her time a great shaman, who is one of the main spirits possessing his aunt. Moreover, in spite of the fact that this *komo* was still alive, Paksu A worshipped her as a "living *söngsu*" (*san söngsu*), in the same way he paid homage to *hwan* of his own "spiritual essence" or the spirit that governed his fate, his *chiksöng*. "That's me," he would say, pointing to the picture of this *chiksöng* (FIGURE 11). He emphasized this identification by explaining that he had this picture, in which the *chiksöng* rides a white horse, made after he himself had performed a large-scale ritual in which the leading shaman traditionally goes around the village on horseback when the ritual begins. The spiritual essence that demands respect and veneration is not the exclusive possession of deceased shamans, but may also be present in the living. It is not surprising, then, that in another picture he had both himself and his *komo* depicted while both were still alive.

Another *san söngsu* he worshipped depicted a client who, because she suffered from afflictions that were interpreted as *shin kamul*, feared she might have to become a shaman and therefore came to him to avert this fate (FIGURE 12). The thinking behind this is the same as in the case of Manshin Y's daughter: worship of the spiritual element in the client's personality was used as a means to suppress her vocation.<sup>16</sup> The forces in her that drove her to become a shaman were separated from the actual person and made to reside in the painting. More than a simple icon, the *hwan* was charged with spiritual power, a power that as we shall see is present in other shamanic paintings as well.

Paksu A's professional *söngsu* also included people whose shamanic paraphernalia had been given to him by their relatives. One of them was a famous Kyönggi-province-style *manshin*. Such paraphernalia of deceased shamans, which are either accidentally discovered or received from their families, are known as *kuöbi*, *kuyöbi*, or *kuaebi*.<sup>17</sup> In one case, Paksu A received such a *hwan* from a woman because she had reasons to fear that if she would keep the painting she herself would have to accept a calling as a shaman. According to Paksu A, things like this happen quite often. This underlines the potential power all the paintings have. Although before and after the rituals they are often handled quite casually, the spiritual essence they represent deserves care and respect; a failure to accord the paintings what is due to them, for instance by not regularly allowing them to "participate" in rituals, is potentially dangerous. In fact, after Paksu A's untimely death some voices were heard attributing his death to the paintings of other shamans he had been collecting, as antiquities rather than ritual objects, and presumably had neglected. Some members of Paksu A's team also voiced concern when in recognition for a performance tour we had organized for him, he presented some old *hwan* no longer used in rituals to a Korean colleague of mine and to me, because they feared that without proper ritual attention the paintings might bring misfortune.<sup>18</sup>

Rather than permanently entrusting *hwan* that belonged to a deceased relative who practiced as a shaman, a family may also bring the paintings with them when

they commission a ritual (FIGURE 13). The shaman will then take them out and make the gods participate in the event, allowing them to “dance” by holding the pictures while she whirls around.

Case four: Manshin Z is in her late sixties (around the year 2000). The deities from the professional and genealogical lineages she worships are linked in such a way that a particularly dense network of relationships is created. First there is her professional lineage, beginning with her spiritual mother. She is worshipped by Manshin Z in spite of the fact that she was not a very good *shin-ömöni*. She did not teach her spiritual daughter well and used to beat her (in the past not so unusual as a part of the education of a fledgling shaman). Even now she does not really help Manshin Z. Manshin Z also worships two preceding generations of her professional lineage, her spiritual grandmother and great-grandmother. The latter is her *to-buri* or *to-söngsu*, the most important of all the *söngsu*, who in the array of her *söngsu* always is given a spot in the upper right corner.

Manshin Z’s spiritual great-grandmother is, however, also related to her in a different way. She was married to a brother of Manshin Z’s paternal grandfather. The latter in turn was the grandson of a man who performed Ant’aek rituals (for a peaceful household) and now also is part of Manshin Z’s pantheon as a *shinjang haraböji*. He is one of the most important of Manshin Z’s deities and provides her with important information, she says. Manshin Z also worships two of her own siblings as *söngsu*. The first is her younger brother, worshipped as Ch’angbu taeshin, but also in the guise of a Hwanghae province shaman.<sup>19</sup> He should have become a male shaman, but did not and died at the age of twenty-five. Because of this the *shinkki*, the essence that predisposes someone to become a spiritual practitioner, passed on to his elder sister so that Manshin Z had to become a shaman. In other words, this *söngsu*, who should have been a shaman, never was active as such, once again confirming the fact that *söngsu* cannot simply be defined as the spirits of dead shamans. The same story applies to the second sibling, Manshin Z’s sister, who also had a vocation as a shaman, but could not accept it because of the opposition of her husband (FIGURE 14). She died around 1990. In addition to this, Manshin Z worships two of her sons, who both passed away when they were still

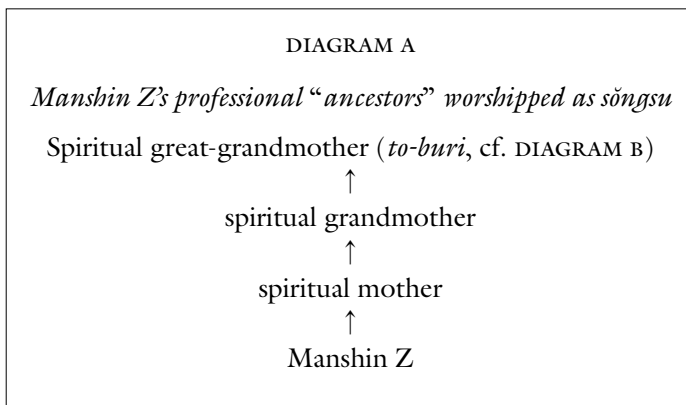




FIGURE 1. The Ten Kings (or judges) of the underworld. (All photos by the author)



FIGURE 2. Three *sŏngsu* with the typical paraphernalia of a Hwanghae province *man-shin*: the hat adorned with artificial flowers (*kkotkat*), the red robes, the fan, and the hand-bells (“99 bells”).



FIGURE 3. A *sŏngsu* in Buddhist robes in the *shin-dang* of the spiritual daughter of Manshin Z.



FIGURE 4. Four *sŏngsu* paintings hung on the wall during a ritual, behind the drummer (the “drum grandmother”).



FIGURE 5. The *shimnyŏng shinjang* worshipped by Manshin X.



FIGURE 6. A pharmacist, a spirit of the *shinjang* category.



FIGURE 7. The Chaktu General.



FIGURE 8. An actual shaman dancing on the *chaktu* knives.



FIGURE 9. The father of Manshin X.



FIGURE 10. *Songsu* venerated by Paksu A. The different forms of his hat and bells characterize him as a shaman in the “southern style,” not in the tradition of the northern province of Hwanghae.



FIGURE 11. Paksu A’s personal guiding spirit (*chiksŏng*).



FIGURE 12. Painting made in order to avoid becoming a shaman.



FIGURE 13. Söngsu Changgun, brought to a ritual by the clients who commissioned it, in order to keep the spirit satisfied.



FIGURE 14. The *söngsu* of the younger sister (on the top) and the younger brother (in the middle) of Manshin Z.

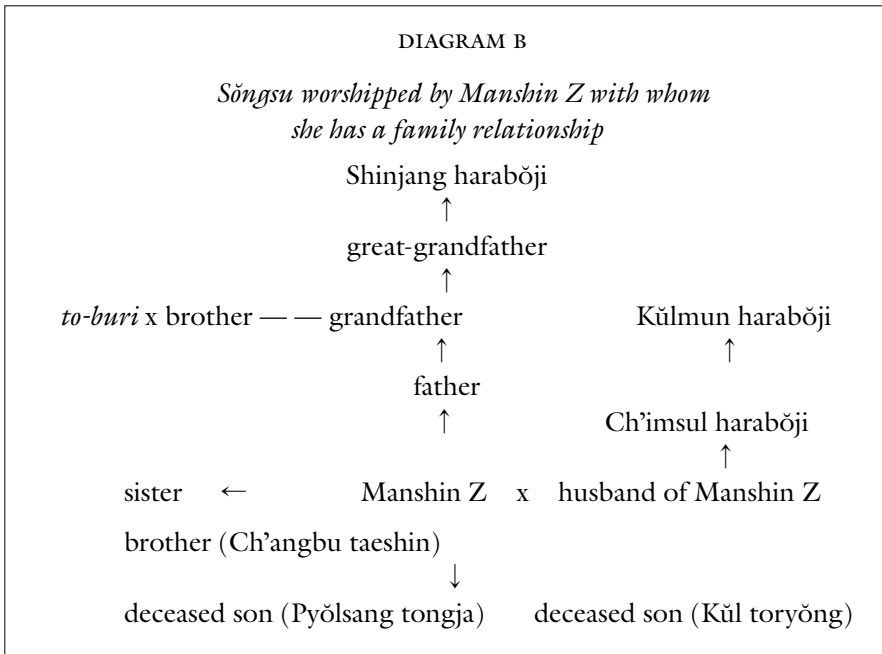


FIGURE 15. Pyölsang Tongja, the spirit of a child who died of smallpox.



FIGURE 16. A *shinjang halmöni* worshipped by Manshin Z.





young: one died at the age of two from smallpox and became a *pyölsang tongja* (a child spirit of a smallpox victim; FIGURE 15), the other died at the age of seventeen and turned into a *kül toryöng*.<sup>20</sup> Manshin Z also worships her father-in-law as *ch'imsul haraböji*<sup>21</sup> and her grandfather-in-law as *külmun haraböji*,<sup>22</sup> both deities of the *shinjang* category. These relationships are rendered in diagram B.

Additionally, there are some *söngsu* to whom she is related neither by blood nor through her professional lineage. Hö-ssi nam-*söngsu*, also worshipped by Manshin Y, is a *högong taeshin*, in other words, a *söngsu* who first came to her in a dream or vision, not through personal acquaintance. In a sense this, too, is a personal link, as are the connections established through Manshin Z's relationships with clients who have entrusted her with the care of objects that belonged to relatives of theirs, who practiced as shamans or similar practitioners. There are four of these figures among Manshin Z's *söngsu*. Manshin Z's *söngsu* also include the figure of a *shinjang halmöni*, who is represented sitting behind a table with a basin filled with rice in which two knives have been inserted (FIGURE 16). This *shinjang halmöni* was the mother-in-law of a regular client of Manshin Z, who gave her the actual knives depicted in the *hwan*. Manshin Z places a picture of this *shinjang* among the regular *söngsu* she worships. This is regular practice among Hwanghae shamans; as mentioned earlier, *söngsu* and *shinjang* are grouped together.

Case five: The final example is Manshin Z's *shinttal*, her spiritual daughter, who was born around 1960 and has a much smaller array of *söngsu*, which does not so much reflect her relative youth as the much shorter period that has passed since she was initiated. The first two cases presented above, with their numerous *söngsu*, are of shamans who actually are junior to this *shinttal* in age but commenced their career when much younger. In the case of this *shinttal*'s *söngsu* there are family ties in all

instances. The first spirit to enter her was the maternal grandmother of her father. Another *taeshin halmöni* hails from her mother's family. She is depicted in Buddhist robes with Buddhist headgear (the *kokkal*) in the guise of the Pulsa (literally "Buddha Teacher") spirit, but assuming the pose of the shaman with raised arms, ready to receive the spirits, a pose that is never used for depictions of Pulsa himself.

A third figure is the dead father of the first husband of her mother, who did "sitting rituals" (in southern style, without dancing) and worshipped *shinjang*. Manshin Z's *shinttal* knew nothing about her mother's first husband until she saw this figure in a vision. She claims that only after she made inquiries with her mother did she learn of his existence. This makes clear that her worshipping this person has nothing to do with a truly hereditary pattern of transmission in spite of her family connection to him. Moreover, it provides additional evidence that in spiritual lineages there is no fixed barrier between different regional styles of shamanic practice. The *shinttal* also worships a *külmun haraböji* (a deity from the *shinjang* category)<sup>23</sup> to whom she is related on her father's side.

Summarizing these five cases, one may distinguish at least three main categories of *söngsu* and similar spirits with whom the shamans have special personal ties.

1) Spirits with whom the *manshin* has a family relationship.<sup>24</sup> Within this category there is considerable variation. Whereas in Confucian thought there is an essential difference between patrilineal and matrilineal kin, among the *söngsu* both are represented. The difference between one's own kin and one's in-laws, equally important to Confucians, does not appear to be crucial either. Relatives related by blood are more numerous among the *söngsu*, but Manshin Z, for instance, worships both her father-in-law and her grandfather-in-law. In this group, there are quite frequently relatives who should have become shamans but did not, and therefore added to the needs of the shaman who worships them to assume the shaman's calling.

2) Spirits with whom the shaman has had a professional relationship. This group may include the *shin-ömöni* and other figures from her professional lineage, but also the spirits with whom a shaman during his or her life has established contact in different ways. Among this group one may also count *högong taeshin* (literally "empty space *taeshin*") who do not belong to someone's professional lineage and whom the *manshin* that worships them has not known personally either. These spirits have come to her through the personal religious experience of dreams and visions.

3) *Söngsu* who have come through *kuöbi* from other shamans. In this case, the descendants of the deceased shaman are often clients of the shaman who receive the paintings. In other words, these *kuöbi* become a physical token of a spiritual bond between the shaman and her clients. If the descendants do not take care of their ancestors in this way, it is believed they may become ill or meet with all kinds of adversity and discord (*p'ungp'a*), or even that one of them will have to become a shaman him or herself to avoid all this.

The very personal deities or spirits of the *söngsu* and *shinjang* categories in the context of ritual may receive attention as a group. To illustrate this point, I will briefly consider a *chinjök kut* held from 8 to 10 April 2000 by Manshin Z. In the

most central section of the ritual, which Manshin Z performed herself, all her most personal deities made an appearance. First the *shinjang* danced, and then Manshin Z let her ancestors “play” by dancing with their costumes. A very dramatic reenactment of a death scene was followed by a “resuscitation” of the dead and direct communication from them. Then once again Manshin Z danced with the clothes of the dead and with a pile of folded *hwan* of her *söngsu*. Next she put on a yellow general’s costume embroidered with dragons and manipulated with the straw-cutters on which she would stand in the immediately succeeding part of the ritual, the *chaktu köri*, which took place outside. Manshin Z then changed into the general’s costume with the *söngsu moja* (*söngsu* cap) on her head and mounted the knives. For each of her *söngsu* she had prepared a long piece of white cloth, a *söngsu tarae* (literally, a *söngsu* bridge), similar to the “bridges” of cloth that are used to conduct the spirits of the dead to paradise. Each was inscribed with the name of one of the *söngsu*. Standing on the knives, she took these up, one by one, lifting them respectfully above her head. When she had descended again, after she had presented oracles for a considerable period of time, Manshin Z split the pieces of cloth lengthwise one by one, not with her body, as is more common, but with the sharp edge of her cymbals, to say a symbolical goodbye to these faithful helpers of hers. The split pieces of cloth were finally placed on the main altar. All along the atmosphere was highly emotional and it is certainly no exaggeration to say that this part of the ritual, which was devoted to the members of Manshin Z’s pantheon with whom she has the most personal connections, was the very core of the proceedings of three days of ritual.

#### CONCLUSIONS FROM THE CASE STUDIES

The evidence of their pantheon shows that so-called possessed or inspired shamans from Hwanghae province almost all have other shamans among their ancestry, which suggests an element of heredity in spite of the fact that hereditary shamans are said to be typical of the southern provinces.<sup>25</sup> This quasi-hereditary pattern still remains within the framework of “inspired shamanism” because it is linked to the common concept of spiritual influences as being not personal in the individualistic sense of the word, but as running in certain families (either patrilineally or matrilineally). This idea of a hereditary element is expressed in the term *söngsu puri* (“*söngsu* roots”; the shamans use the word *puri*, not *ppuri*, but the translation “roots” is nonetheless appropriate).<sup>26</sup> At almost every initiation ritual one hears that the neophyte has to accept her vocation because of shamans among the ancestors or because a relative (whether dead or alive) refused to become a shaman. The evidence of the *hwan* corroborates this. Many *söngsu hwan* are depictions of relatives, some of whom have never actually been shamans, although they did have *shinkki*, the predisposition to become a shaman.<sup>27</sup>

The evidence of the *hwan* also suggests that the mixing of regional styles that one sees at present, and which is often seen as proof of the decline of shamanism in the wake of modernization, has been going on for some time. No one knows if this

is the result of recent events, including the massive displacements of the Korean War that took Hwanghae province shamans to the south, plus urbanization on a gigantic scale, or whether the greater mobility of the later Chosŏn period had already set this trend in motion. In any case, the presence of so many *inam sŏngsu* among the spirits of Hwanghae province shamans relativizes the importance of the regionally defined pantheon. In fact, if one assumes personal links between the shaman and the *sŏngsu*, it is only logical that in the present circumstances, now that there is great mobility and people with very diverse regional backgrounds live shoulder to shoulder in big cities like Inch'ŏn and Seoul, the *sŏngsu* reflect this intermingling.

What is the significance of the *sŏngsu* for the dynamics of the ritual? An analytical distinction may be made between the effects on the shamans themselves and the effects on the clients. The *sŏngsu* and the other deities that have a close personal connection with the shaman (such as some *shinjang* or *tongja*) are conceived as being very intimately linked to her career. The *sŏngsu* often appear in stories shamans tell about the experiences they have when they receive their calling and during their subsequent careers. Not surprisingly, considering the very personal nature of these spirits, shamans often feel a strong emotional bond with their *sŏngsu*. When Manshin Z held her *chinjŏk kut* and honored the *sŏngsu* with the *sŏngsu tarae*, she unmistakably betrayed great emotional involvement in all her actions. It is in ritual action of this kind that the personal life story of the shaman and the pantheon become integrated and the shaman validates her position in the social world of shamanic ritual, which comprises herself, her fellow shamans, and her clients.

During the rituals, the intimate associations with the members of their pantheon also find expression in the communications of the shamans to their clients. They are relevant, therefore, not only to an understanding of specific rituals and the inner world of the shamans, but also to the perception of the clients of what is going on. In some cases, a *sŏngsu* actually comes from the family of the clients. This taking care by the shaman of someone else's ancestral spirits might be compared to the spiritual adoption of children of the clients, which is a better-known way to cement the relationship between shamans and those they serve. I have come across one case in which such a relationship lasted for over forty years.

As was said previously, the rituals of Korean shamans do not belong to the kind of ritual that finds its meaning merely in its correct execution, a ritual is meaningful only when the performance of the ritual by the shaman affects the clients in certain ways. In a successful ritual (that is, a ritual that shamans and clients regard as such), something happens between shamans and clients, something that is not entirely predictable because it depends on a variety of contingent factors. One of these factors is the degree of emotional involvement and inner conviction of the shaman, and this in turn is related to the personal stakes the shaman has in the worship of the spirits.<sup>28</sup> The *hwan* of the *sŏngsu* and other spirits with whom the shaman entertains intensely personal relationships are a concrete, physical expression of this involvement. Therefore, the pictures of these spirits should be regarded as such and

not stripped of their meaning by forcing them into a generalized national or even regional pantheon or by seeing them merely as charming specimens of folk art.<sup>29</sup>

Some shamans will, moreover, publicly remark upon their personal connections with certain spirits, which will consequently be well known to their regular clients. Thus Manshin Z never lets her clients forget that one of the *shinjang* she worships was related to her, and in life, she adds with obvious pride, practiced as a lawyer. This may be regarded as a legitimation device, which assists in building confidence. Seen in this way, the pictures of *sōngsu* and similar spirits are like the framed diplomas medical doctors have on display on the walls of their offices.

Thus in various ways the *sōngsu* may help the shaman to achieve her aims as I have defined them: that is, to effect in her clients a changed orientation with regard to the future. The clients need to be pulled out of a view of time as an inexorable succession of events that is outside their control, fatally determined by the mistakes and resentments of the past, and instead gain the confidence that they are capable of influencing what lies ahead of them; their households need, as Laurel Kendall has phrased it, to be “revitalized” (KENDALL 1985, 177; WALRAVEN 1993). The personalization of the *sōngsu* and other deities is one of the factors that contribute to the dynamic process that is a shamanic ritual and to its success. Too great a concentration on the more general, national, or regional characteristics of the pantheon stands in the way of a proper understanding of this aspect of the rituals.

#### MUSHINDO AND THE PLACE OF KOREAN SHAMANS IN THE GLOBAL SHAMANIC TRADITION

The personal nature of the pantheon is also important for the purposes of another, seemingly completely different debate: that concerning the relationship between Korean *mudang* rituals and shamanism worldwide. A fundamental problem in such a discussion is the point of departure. Which definition of shamanism should give it a sense of direction when there is so much variety, disagreement, and confusion concerning the meaning of the term?

One of the most interesting attempts in recent decades to formulate a theory of Siberian shamanism that also might be useful for more general comparisons has been HAMAYON (1990). In the conclusions of her unusually rich and subtle study, which is based on a wealth of ethnographic material, Hamayon presents an intentionally simplified definition of shamanism, which I will quote in an English translation I have slightly amended for the sake of clarity (738–39). The definition is primarily grounded in Hamayon’s analysis of the shamanism of hunting societies, but it is intended to be of a much wider applicability. Please note that one problem that has led to gigantic confusion and acrimonious debate, that of the reliance or dependence of the shaman on ecstasy, trance, or possession, is completely bypassed in this definition.<sup>30</sup>

Shamanism is a symbolic system founded on a dualist conception of the world which implies that mankind entertains relations of alliance and exchange with

supernatural beings that are thought to govern natural beings, [supernatural beings] on whom its survival depends, [or] more generally [on which depend] the factors of uncertainty in its existence. The shaman assumes general responsibility for this system of alliance and exchange with the supernatural, which on his part demands a personalized skill...<sup>31</sup>

The work of the shaman, she elaborates in the same context (735), “is based on the putting into operation of personal qualities within a framework of rules. The personalization [of these rules], far from being an absence of codification or a transgression, is a condition for the efficacy of these skills in the service of the collective order.” The work of the shaman is characterized by pragmatism: “[pragmatism] first of all, at the level of the ritual, where the efficacy of the shaman, based on his talents of seduction and his craftiness, excludes all notions of a liturgy to be applied. His practice is by definition a personal art” (741). It is the personalized, charismatic character of the shaman’s profession that makes it difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile on a permanent basis with the regulated order of centralized states, while for the same reasons it also resists the codification of a doctrine, and the formation of a clergy and a church (736).

With this definition in mind we turn our gaze once more to Hwanghae province rituals and Korean shamanism in general. Undoubtedly, a tremendous social and mental distance lies between the simple tribal hunting communities that Hamayon regards as the *locus classicus* of shamanism and the rituals of twenty-first century urbanized and industrialized Korea. Yet we may conclude that from the perspective of her definition of shamanism it is precisely the personalization of the pantheon, which can be discovered inter alia through detailed attention to the categories of *mushindo* considered in this paper, that—together with the personalized, pragmatic skills of practitioners—lends strong support to the claim that Hwanghae province *manshin* rightfully belong to a global tradition of shamanism.<sup>32</sup>

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#### NOTES

1. In particular, YANG Chongsŭng 1995 and 1996, KUNGNIP MINSOK PANGMULGWAN 1995, KIM T’aegon 1993, YUN Yölsu 1994, KAHÖE PANGMULGWAN 2004, and KANGNÜNG-SHI OJUKHÖN/SHIRIP PANGMULGWAN 2004. COVELL (1984), the only monograph in English on *mushindo*, lacks in scholarly rigor and makes no attempt to delineate regional traditions.

2. Some of the shamans practicing in this style today were born in Hwanghae province and fled to South Korea before or during the Korean War, but now the majority are descendants of refugees from Hwanghae province.

3. KENDALL 1996 and KIM Seong Nae 1989 have contributed to providing an answer to this question by focusing on adaptations to social changes in contemporary shamanic rituals.

4. This is not to say that outside Korea, or even in Korea itself, all researchers of Korean shamanic rituals have been confined by this paradigm. Laurel KENDALL 1985, for instance, devotes detailed attention to the way the concerns of women are addressed in private shamanic rituals, while GUILLEMOZ 1983 describes the beliefs related to the activities of *mudang* in the strictly regional context of one particular village.

5. A male shaman from Inch’ön nicknamed Kkot-toryöng (which might be translated as “Pretty Boy”) has a picture of a Söngang grandmother riding a white horse (associated with

Sönang) in the spot that usually is reserved for the picture of Sönang in the shape of a tiger. During her rituals Manshin X (mentioned below) worships Sönang in the shape of a Chosön-period gentleman. Both cases are exceptional.

6. The vegetarian heavenly deities are worshipped in the first part of the ritual and their pictures taken away when the hard-drinking and meat-loving generals are venerated in the second part.

7. Even though the paintings are generally unsigned, the trained eye of experienced shamans is often capable of distinguishing the style of well-known individual painters such as An Süngsam or their ateliers.

8. It should be noted, however, that the pictorial representations of *kambhüng manura* (or *kamüng manura*) are quite different, depicting an official on horseback; see YUN 1994, 157.

9. Interview (face to face) with Manshin Y's *shinttal* (forty years old at the time), 27 May 2000.

10. In actual fact, such schools do exist, and apart from these, shamans use all possible means available to them, including books and videotapes, to learn their craft.

11. See, for example, KENDALL 1985, 142.

12. This is closer to the meaning of *shinmyöng* in the colloquial expression *shinmyöng nada*, to get excited/enthusiastic.

13. Among shamans there is a saying: “*Taeshin* are the ancestors of *manshin*, and *shinjang* of *pöpsa*.” See Yi Yongböm 2002, 242. In this paper I will demonstrate that there are, in fact, also *shinjang* among the ancestors of *manshin*.

14. While the shaman stands on the knives, other generals may also make an appearance, such as the “Chinese general,” who in broken Korean demands a taste of Korean liquor.

15. *Haraböji* (grandfather) and *halmöni* (grandmother) are often used by shamans as general appellations for male and female spirits.

16. Rituals to suppress a vocation to become a shaman (*nullim kut*) are a regular part of the repertoire of the shamans.

17. For speculations on the etymology of this word, see YANG 2004, 153. Most likely the term is derived from a term meaning something like “old karma.” The term does not exclusively refer to shamanic paintings, but is also used for other shamanic paraphernalia.

18. Interestingly, in their discussions on this topic they inclined to the opinion that the potential danger was greater for my Korean colleague than for me, a non-Korean.

19. *Ch'angbu* were actors/entertainers in the Chosön period who quite often would be husbands of shamans and take care of the musical accompaniment of rituals. After their death some of these *ch'angbu* were worshipped and so they became a special category of shamanic deities.

20. Literally translated this is a “scripture young man.” “Student spirit” would be an adequate translation.

21. Literally, “Acupuncture Grandfather,” the spirit of an acupuncturist.

22. A “Scholar Grandfather.”

23. It should be noted that this particular meaning of *shinjang* is typical of shamans who follow the tradition of Hwanghae province. In Kyönggi province and Seoul, *shinjang* are “spirit warriors” (KENDALL 1985, 14–15). Most likely the term originally derives from Buddhism, where it refers to martial protectors of the faith.

24. Such cases have been reported in earlier ethnography, for example in KENDALL 1985 (68) and 1988 (55 and 68).

25. Although the meaning of the distinction has sometimes been relativized, the concept of inspired versus hereditary shamans has endured and nowadays is even used by shamans

from Chindo Island in the south to argue for their superiority over the inspired shamans. In Korean academic circles, there are increasing doubts, however, concerning the usefulness of the distinction. Yi Yongböm (2002 and 2003) has questioned the division in *kangshinmu* (“shamans in whom the gods descend”), and hereditary shamans (or priests), *sesümmu*. He traces the history of this dichotomy and notes that the distinction is not a native category (not part of a “folk taxonomy”), and seems to have been introduced in the colonial period. It is not entirely without empirical basis, but in many respects there are grey areas, where the distinction is difficult to make or meaningless. The findings presented in this paper point in the same direction. The journal *Han’guk musokhak* has published a series of articles (including Yi Yongböm 2003) intended to re-examine the *kangshinmu-sesümmu* dichotomy in issues 7–9.

26. See KIM Myöngja 2002, an article that in many ways prefigures the conclusions drawn by Yi Yongböm.

27. KENDALL 1985 pointed out that families of clients, too, sometimes worship the spirits of deceased relatives that appear in the rituals of the shamans.

28. In WALRAVEN 2002, I failed to give this aspect its full due.

29. The intensely personal nature of the relationships shamans have with their spirits also emerges in their life stories; see HARVEY 1979 and KENDALL 1988, and also the autobiographical accounts not a few Korean shamans have written and published in recent years.

30. In this, Hamayon goes one step further than an earlier anthropologist, William P. Lebra, who tried to distance himself from attaching too much importance to the physiology of trance or possession. In his definition of a shaman Lebra spoke of “culturally defined trance states” (in other words, spirit possession); cited in HARVEY (1979, 4). Because Korean shamans are possessed by the spirits, some researchers insist they should be called mediums. In my view, this is not very enlightening because the *mudang* are not at all passive mediums, but actively direct the course of the rituals, often with great skill. Hamayon’s definition allows us to steer clear of such discussions, which are not very fruitful.

31. Hamayon adds that this function provides the shaman with a central place in “shamanic societies.” As she continues to explain, in a (post-) agricultural society such as Korea, however, shamanism is marginalized and shamans have lost this central leading role.

32. The evolutionary model drawn up by Hamayon is more refined than may appear from the very brief description that is possible in this context. Suffice it to say that when applied to Korean shamanic phenomena, it does not only show continuity, but also accounts for differences in the traits of earlier stages in the model, which in Korea have completely disappeared. Where Hamayon’s definition allows a conceptual linking of Siberian and Korean rituals, others have looked for meaningful comparisons with East Asian societies such as Vietnam, China, or Japan that are much more similar to Korea in terms of social structure (KENDALL 2006, 162–64), an enterprise that with its focus on East Asia as an integrated “field of study” brings rewards of its own.

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