

## South Korea

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**Kyoim Yun, *The Shaman's Wages: Trading in Ritual on Cheju Island***

Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019. 256 pages. Hardcover, \$95.00; paperback, \$35.00. ISBN 9780295745978 (hardcover); 9780295745954 (paperback).

While much has been published on Korean shamanism, this book addresses the rarely broached topic of shamans' monetary interests. The book navigates the topic from the angle of spiritual offerings (*injŏng*) and reciprocity, carving out a space between academics' and culturalists' romanticization of shamans as ancient relics devoid of practical concerns and modernizers' criticisms over shamanic exploitation and social deterioration. Kyoim Yun navigates "the polemic view of an idealized shamanism of the past and the degenerate practice of the present" (60) to argue that shamanic

rituals involve intensive skilled labor and that they should have monetary value and support the livelihood of shamans.

The first two chapters lay the historical foundation of shamanism in academic and administrative records. The discussion is a familiar one dealing with governmental strategies to purge Korea of shamanism, anthropologists' ethnographic accounts, and perspectives on shamanism. Chapter 1 explains the famous 1702 purge of shamanism from Cheju Island under Governor Yi Hyöngsang's command. This chapter describes the nature and extent of this purge in detail and establishes a micro-history of regional discrimination against these islanders by mainland Koreans. Lacking from the discussion is how the Chosön government carried out exile or punishment of mainland administrators who had fallen into disfavor of the court. It is likely that Governor Yi's work in the Cheju "hinterland" was fueled by his motives to return to the capital, which could also explain the sudden abandonment of his policies after his tenure. Nonetheless, this is a thorough treatment of the 1702 purge and sets the stage for understanding Cheju shamanism.

Yun refers back to the Chosön Period (1392–1897) toward the end of her book to explain that the Korean court hosted shamanic rituals while they were officially and successfully outcasted from the court by the end of the Chosön Dynasty. However, a survey of Chosön ritual practices would have revealed that shamanic court rituals were sponsored through the end of the Chosön Dynasty. These involved metropolitan *kangsinmu*, not Cheju *simbang*. Chosön scholar-officials criticized other ritual institutions, such as Buddhist temples and Catholic churches, as being money-hungry thieves. State-supported and familial Confucian rituals were even criticized for their extravagance and waste of resources. So, how do these institutions compare to Cheju shamanic rituals, and what was unique about their discrimination? Conducting a systematic study of the contradictions inherent between the neo-Confucian rhetoric and various un-Confucian courtly practices would clarify this issue.

Skipping over the nineteenth century, chapter 2 attempts to continue the historical groundwork on Cheju shamanism under Japanese colonialism. Yun discusses several important scholars that published on this topic during this period, but the colonial apparatus's effect on Cheju shamanism and descriptions of sources could have been more clearly outlined and detailed. While this chapter claims to explore the "temporal distance between the empire and the colony" (61), how Cheju Island is differentiated from other regions of Korea is unclear. The concentric nature of imperialist/colonialist power over Cheju Island is flattened, leaving the reader to assume that the Japanese colonial administration viewed Cheju and the mainland as one and the same. It might have been useful to bridge this chapter by asking connective questions about similar topics like moments of globalization (i.e., under Japanese colonialism in chapter 2 and the UNESCO brand in chapter 5). The context for the sources used in this chapter is just as confounding as some of the conclusions that are drawn from those sources. There is another gap in the discussion between the 1930s and 1960s. Thereafter, a short but interesting section called "Rituals of Resistance" appears at the end of the chapter where the author forecasts chapter 3 and introduces her ethnographic research on Sunurüm and the clash between the cultural assets system and *simbang* themselves.

The final chapter, chapter 5, conducts a thought-provoking study of the UNESCO Cultural Heritage designation as a form of "neoliberal nationalism." This chapter involves issues of globalization, cultural labor exploitation, heritage preservation, the

contradictions inherent in the modernization/globalization discourse, and how this organization ignores the controversies surrounding shamanism. Yun details an impressive backstory leading up to Cheju's entry into the UNESCO competition, local "self-exotification" (145), Cheju ritual specialists' attempt to create "tourist realism" in response to their UNESCO recognition (148–50), the spiritual and temporal awkwardness of ritual performance for majority outsider audiences (152), and ultimately the "grave compromise" of the biased UNESCO Cheju performance that "eliminates their magico-religious role, the core of their trade" (156). Yun convincingly assesses the effect of the heritage preservation as having a "rather negative" effect on Cheju *simbang* and illustrates this through the "sanitization" of the ritual performance that has "denied the core of the practice and the *Simbang's* professional role" (161).

Kyoim Yun's writing style is clear, unconvoluted, and pleasurable. The depth at which she engages her subject is suitable for students who have some knowledge of Korean society, culture, and language, but the abundant, unrelatable reference to Korean names, places, and ideas may make this a daunting journey for those new to the subject. There is little common knowledge to latch onto for someone outside the field. To draw in a larger audience, the net could have been cast wider, appealing to people with exposure to topics such as the Cheju April 3rd incident, Cold War massacres, female divers' preservation movement, and Kangjŏng/US military expansion, among others—all subjects that have caught international media attention.

A book like *The Shaman's Wages* is a welcome contribution to an arena that has long needed to study monetary transactions in ritual. While the book's integrity resides in its dedication to private ritual and private monetary/affective exchange, I was left wondering how shamans negotiate between those broader concerns and the people of their village? Questions also lingered around how shamans connect to other experts and technicians in their healing community. As this book has presented their exchange, shamans seemed to operate on an individual transactionary level without a sense of their extra-economic embeddedness. It is not that the lens focused only on the microscopic level of private family rituals, it is that a distinction between private and public was already assumed when the value and worth of *simbang* only begin with their intimate knowledge of families (as Yun aptly illustrates). *Simbang* are the repositories of this intimate knowledge and play a very particular role to mesh their communities/villages together. I wanted to see that space between the micro (private family *kut*) and the macro (national policies, UNESCO designation) enlarged.

Important here are the invisible and unregulated costs for care work, some of which the author outlined in the book. But also important is the community care work that involves inter-family/inter-community reciprocity and the like. While Yun has sufficiently demonstrated *simbang's* physical and affective labor involved in ritual and how "economic matters are intimately and intricately built into the religious practice" (170), I was hoping to see what was "proper" in ritual remuneration. Nonetheless, as Yun argues, although "anthropologists and sociologists have long paid attention to the intersection of religion and economy, fewer studies have approached ritual itself as economic" (171) and *The Shaman's Wages* skillfully fills that void.

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