

The Shamanic Ritual Specialists in the East Coast of Korea; An Hereditary or Shamanic Ritual Tradition?

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Abstract

As Korean folk beliefs have been little studied in academic literature, Korean ritual specialists, or shamen, are also not well-known. Therefore, it was necessary to do an ethnographic study in a village to figure out how they work. Based on a field observation conducted in 2007, a specific ritual tradition in East coast of the Korean peninsula has been studied. The observation has been carried out at certain villages in North Gyeongsang which have kept a shamanic ritual for the fishermen's welfare in their villages. The ritual was performed by a troop of Seseubmudang, hereditary shamans. An ethnographic approach is adopted to study the function of "hereditary" shamans and how they communicate with divinity even in their "normal" state. This article presents one of the East Coast ceremonies called byeolsin-gut through which this type of shaman can play an intermediary role for the benefit of the villagers.

Keywords : ritual specialist, hereditary shaman (seseub-mudang), religious figure, mudang (shaman and shamaness), East Coast, byeolsin-gut (shamanistic ritual), Korea

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ผู้เชี่ยวชาญพิธีกรรม shamanic ในชาญฝั่งทะเลตะวันออกของเกาหลี พันธุกรรมหรือประเพณีด้านพิธีกรรม shamanic?

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บทคัดย่อ

ความเชื่อของชาวพื้นเมืองเกาหลีและผู้เชี่ยวชาญทางด้านพิธีกรรมยังไม่เป็นที่รู้จัก ดังนั้นจึงมีความจำเป็นที่จะต้องทำการศึกษาด้านชาติพันธุ์ในหมู่บ้านแห่งหนึ่ง บทพื้นฐานของการสำรวจภาคสนามในปี 2007 ได้ทำการศึกษาประเพณีด้านพิธีกรรมเฉพาะแควบชายฝั่งทะเลตะวันออกของคาบสมุทรเกาหลี โดยได้ดำเนินการที่หมู่บ้านแห่งหนึ่งใน North Gyeongsang ซึ่งยังคงรักษาพิธีกรรม shamanic เพื่อความผาสุกของชาวประมงในหมู่บ้าน พิธีกรรมกระทำโดยกองหทัยแห่ง Seseubmudang hereditary shamans และได้นำวิธีการทางชาติพันธุ์มาใช้ศึกษาหน้าที่ของ “hereditary” shamans และพากษาเข้าถึงเทโพย่างไรแม้อยู่ในสภาพปกติ บทความนี้นำเสนอหนึ่งในพิธีกรรมซึ่งเรียกว่า byeolsin-gut แห่งชาญฝั่งตะวันออก ซึ่งผู้ทำพิธีประเพณีสามารถแสดงบทบาทเป็นตัวกลางระหว่างชาวบ้านและจิตใจ (ดวงวิญญาณ)

คำสำคัญ : ผู้เชี่ยวชาญทางพิธีกรรม, hereditary shaman (seseub-mudang), religious figure, mudang (shaman and shamaness), ชาญฝั่งตะวันออก, byeolsin-gut (shamanistic ritual), เกาหลี

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Introduction

The Republic of Korea is a singular country in matters of belief. It is a multi-faith society where indigenous religions coexist with the great religions of the world. Thus, it could be said that there is no dominant religion in Korea. Almost half of the Korean population declares as atheist. Regarding believers, half of them are estimated to be Buddhist and the other half Christian (Protestant and Catholic)³.

Korean syncretism is influenced by shamanism and ancient animisms beliefs shaping consciousness. These beliefs are deeply embedded in the daily life of Korean people. Thus, it is not surprising that they have a tendency to depend on a “traditional” way, for example, a “religious” expert like a “shaman” when they encounter difficulties in their daily life. This is their last resort, outside the great religions. However, Korean society is currently in a course of a very rapid economic growth. It was industrialized, urbanized and globalized over the last fifty years, after the Korean War (1950-1953). Geographically, Korea is a peninsula that is surrounded by seas on three sides; West, south and East. The peninsula has a fairly long border with China and another, very small one, with the Russian coast. In the natural environment, marine life grows naturally. But the fisherman’s life is hard and difficult because it is often prone to natural disasters and thus a ceremony for the welfare of fishermen villages has been held regularly in three

³ Cf. Censuses believers in years 1995 and 2005 prepared by the South Korean National Statistical Office.

coastal areas for a long time. In the East coast, it is called *byeolsin-gut*. This *gut* addressed to the spirits is intended for the prosperity of the villagers, the abundance of fisheries and marine safety. The ritual takes place every year, or every 2, 5, and 9 year depending on a region; it includes the province of Gangwon and Gyeongsang. The ritual is traditionally led by specialists called shamans. It is noted that there are two different types of shamans in Korea; inspired and hereditary. The inspired shaman is called by *gangsin mudang* in Korean, while the hereditary one is *seseub mudang*. The shamans leading the *byeolsin-gut* are hereditary ones as they are not owned or inspired by a spirit. The difference of the two comes from the way to become a shaman; innate or acquired. *Mudang* represents the religious personality in Korean shamanism. As a shamanic personality, *mudang* has personal practice in essence but it can be regrouped according to its characteristics. In other words, the implementation of ritual practice made by these two types of shamans is quite different. For example, the ritual dance of the inspired shaman is out of improvisation for making dynamic actions against the very boosted Malheur (Woe) in a state of unconsciousness, while that of the hereditary shaman evokes a set of traditional Korean arts in humble movement to express and transmit Happiness. Hereditary shamans of the East Coast are different from other ones in that symbolic contact with the spirits is achieved only through ritual practice that uses specific objects, and hence they are distinguished from the conventional shamans by the existence in the absence of the mind. We are thus interested in the various objects used in the shamanic ritual of East Coast, *byeolsin-gut*, in a fishing village. *Mudang* needs the shamanic tools to establish a direct link between

the faithful (ritual applicant) and one or plenty of spiritual entities. Based on collected ethnographic materials and observations of their ritual performance in 2007, this paper shows how the function of shaman is deployed in ritual practice perpetuating the ritual for generations within a community. A detailed description of the ritual of a fishing village in question relates to a hereditary tradition and living heritage in a fishing village of East Coast.

The ambiguous and multi-religious personality of «mudang » in Korean shamanism

Recently, it has been recognized that the models of Siberian shamans can't be applied to those of Korean shamans even though the Siberian people are close to Korea geographically and linguistically.

The word shaman has been etymologically known since the seventeenth century. The term saman (or *šaman*) means the ritual specialist, the shaman *Tungus-Manchu* in several languages. It would be built based on the root *sam* (meaning jump, stomp, and jump for a wild) or the root *sa* (meaning know)⁴. Thus, it is a type of religious figure and shamanism is named after the shaman. It comes from the tribal religious system of polar Siberia whose religious specialist falls into a kind of ecstasy, trembling their bodies, crying spontaneously and jumping up and down. Those expressions seem to give the impression of madness. To become a shaman, he/she

⁴ Cf. Lot-Falk, E. : « A propos du terme chamane » in *Etudes mongloes et sibériennes*, n° 8, Paris, 1978, p. 7-18.

must enter the abnormal state of ecstasy associated with technique of trance, that is to say, shamanic illness, or what is more commonly called “possession”. Unlike the Siberian shaman, the Korean shaman or *mudang* does not always make the ecstatic journey which is the typical characteristic of what is defined as shaman according to Eliad. Therefore, the representation of Siberian shamans is different from the personality of *mudang* in Korea.

When it comes to Korea, the words for shamanism, professionals of shamanism, and ceremonies celebrated by *mudang* are *mu* (巫, *mudang*), *mudang*, and *gut* respectively. It is the *mudang* who plays the role of the shaman in Korean society. *Mudang* is a generic term for the people working in the shamanic field in Korea. Today, the term generally refers to the female shaman and has a negative connotation to Korean people.

Indeed, in the traditional society, these shamans were a different caste belonging to the lowest class as the acrobats, prostitutes, and butchers. Farmers would not marry their children to them. Paradoxically, shamans (*mudang*) can come from all classes of society, such as aristocratic, middle and lower social class. Note that the caste system no longer officially exists in Korea today after social reform in 1894.

The etymology of the word *mudang* is not known, but some experts assume that the term is derived from *udagan* for the shamaness in some Altaic populations. Beliefs in shamanism and nature probably had arrived at the Korean peninsula with the first Altaic migrants from Central Asia in the Neolithic period around 5000 B.C.

Korean oldest texts, written in Chinese, also refer *mudang* to

the character currently-pronounced “wu” in Chinese, “mu” in Korean. The term *mudang* is attested in a text at 1391 (Park 1973:3) in the sense of “temple mu” for the first time. This sino-Korean term is unknown in China. It can be said that the term *mudang* derives from *mu* (巫) as shaman is written as巫 in Chinese and this is the character that transcribes shamanism in the West. According to the lyrics in the world of *seseub-mudang*, 巫 expresses that human (人) serves as a link (丨) between heaven (一) and earth (丶). Deduced from the form of the hieroglyphic character, 巫 is a gesture where heaven, earth and man join together in the ritual practice of shamans. It means the harmony of the three universal principles⁵. It represents an intermediary between man and the spiritual entity of nature through his ritual practice. There is no decisive manner that evokes the role of healer, divine, and medium in the word of *mudang*. The role of officiant is rather significant in shamanic activity. In addition, the word *mudang*, as any other Korean words, has no marked gender and it tends to refer to the shamans rather than shamanesses (female shamans).

There are also different names designating shamans in northwest and center regions of the peninsula; female shamans are called *mansin*, a sino-korean word meaning ten thousand gods, and male shamans are called as *baksumudang* where *baksu* is probably derived from the sino-Korean word *baksa* meaning doctor or scientist. In South West, women are called as *dangol* and in Southeast, *munyeo* is shaman woman and their husbands are called as *yangjung*, *hwarang*, and *hwaraengi* meaning flower boy. From the

⁵ The testimony taken care of with a shaman of East Coast byeolsin-gut (2007).

regionally different names for shamans, it is deduced that the characteristic of *mudang* includes his traditional and social function as well as religious role.

Process to become a ritual specialist: qualification of inspired and hereditary shamans

In general, the shamans are grouped into two categories: *gangsin-mudang*, which means gods (sin) descend (gang), (in other words, inspired mudang) and *seseub-mudang*, where *seseub* means heredity. The *seseub-mudang* learns the trade in their family (father, mother, uncle, and aunt etc.) and the status of shaman is inherited from generation to generation within lineage. In geographical view, the former is located in the province of North-West and central Korea, while the latter is found in southern provinces.

The main characteristic of *seseub-mudang* is that they tend to accomplish perfection of ritual art. Achieving perfection is indeed an opportunity for the shaman to be recognized as a true *mudang*. It is also considered as mature shaman or experienced and independent, but it is not related to a process of initiation. Indeed, there are two different modes of initiation to be a *mudang* in Korean shamanism; the qualification of inspiration for inspired one and hereditary qualification of his/her own form of shamanism.

Concerning the inspired shaman, there are three phases to accomplish his shamanic activities.

1. The divine descent: It is the initial symptom traditionally known as a shamanic fate that the shaman candidate falls ill. It is called “*sin byeong*” or “*mu byeong*” where mu is shaman and

byeong is disease. It is originated from the context where the indisposed symptom is not of medical cause. Therefore, there is no medicine to be able to heal the sick. This disease is just a cause of suffering, visions, and auditory hallucinations, etc. If these symptoms continue, it is believed that a god descends on the patient's body and spirit.

2. Divine reception: Doing *Naerim* (down) *gut*, which is defined as an initiation rite, is considered as one solution to cure the patient. He/she must accept his/her shamanic fate. The term “*sin-naerim-batta*” describes the success of receiving a god which is supposed to dominate the patient, and the accomplishment means curing the patient.

In the ceremony of initiation, the one who plays a role of mother becomes divine father or divine mother of the healed person. During this initiation rite, the recipient becomes a diviner officially; the grantee guided by the divine father or mother must not only accommodate the spirit but also show its ability to receive others. And then he must live within his personal sanctuary (*sindan*) and pray for more evident divination every day.

3. Personalization of the ritual art: The elected must initiate a specific ritual around his master (the divine mother or father) to become a *gangsin-mudang*. The divine master leads for a certain period until his or her daughter or son manages to adequately perform ritual practice (*gut*). Consequently, learning the *gut* requires three to four years of intensive study under a master. *Gangsin-mudang* is supposed to establish a connection between the visible world and an invisible one during the ritual. He embodies the spiritual entities through the process of initiation. Therefore, this

type of *mudang* tends to put on more special ritual clothes to clarify his embodiment during conversations with the spirits during the ceremony.

It should be noted that *gangsin-mudangs* are closer to Siberian model than the others in Korea although their functions, ritual practice and discourses are not identical. The only differences are the process of initiation and one of divination techniques. Today, this type of shaman is much more numerous and dominant in Korean shamanism, where their function is basically to play a religious role increasingly involving the action of divine activities and techniques of divination as a fortune teller.

Hereditary shamans (*seseub-mudangs*) claim that their ancestors practiced the profession of shaman and embodied the religious function of the shaman in their local community. Heredity and heritage associated with it refer to the fact that a right to exercise this function is passed from generation to generation within a lineage. The existence of the sector and the customers called “*dangolpan*” also reveals the perpetuation of the shaman in the current environment. In other words, they have no innate vocation which is proper shamanic fuel. Thus, they strive to attain divinity by the perfection of their arts such as music, dance and narrative. Today, this type of shaman is a minority in Korea. The last authentic heirs remain in the region of East Coast according to our data collected since 2007. The present form of shamanism is established by a strong patrilineal ideology. In the shaman group, hereditary qualification is claimed by the men who play the role of musician, while women, not hereditary, become the ritualists of their husbands. Thus, the way of transmission of the ritualistic function is

includes elements of matriarchy because ritualistic status is transmitted from mother-in-law. It is a hereditary transmission of the acquired characteristics when it comes to a group of hereditary shamans of the Kim family originated from the East coast.

Here, the genesis of the group and what it implies concern the process of transformation of a shamanic tradition through the existence of *seseub-mudang* and puts into perspective the legitimate modes of reproduction adapted to the particular needs of a society.

1. The origin of the hereditary shaman function: The founding ancestor of the lineage of inherited shamans of the Kim family is an aristocrat (*yangban*) in the mid-nineteenth century. Due to his marriage with a shaman woman, his social status has been transformed to the lowest class of the social ladder; the same social status was officially conferred on subsequent generations until the abolition of this system by the social reform in 1894.

2. The marital relationship: The function is perpetuated by intermarriage between the families of hereditary shamans in the East coastal region. Ritual activity is based on couple, the shaman and the drummer. That is to say, if there is no drummer, the shaman female can neither sing nor dance. It is the woman who sings, dances, and recites and the man runs the drum. Shaman couples work in groups which have a maximum of ten members. They are obliged to cooperate in large ceremonies.

3. Sector customers: It's called *dangolpan*; customers (*dangol*), place or premises (*pan*). It is a privilege to have *dangolpan* of approximately ten locations, which ensures hereditary shaman activities. It is transmitted from generation to generation, from father

to son in a lineage. People in the communities are the followers of this type of shamanism. They regularly invite their ritual specialist referred to herein as hereditary shaman to their collective (or individual) ritual. Having a regular client (*dangol*) to the shaman implies a commitment and responsibility. Therefore, these ritual specialists can have a great influence on the regular customers, while it is officially considered that shamans in Korea have no connection with political and religious institutions. Sector customers are indispensable institutions for the survival of shamanism.

Mediation tools: « symbolic » companions for ritual specialists

When it comes to shamanic activity on the East coast, the female shaman plays the role of officiant, and the man is in the role of musician and actor as mentioned earlier. As officiants and ritualists, the women of the group carry important objects which represent a kind of divine symbol of ritualists in all ritualistic ceremony, *gut*. The objects symbolically allow the person to be the leader of the *gut* in the sense that the shaman descends from heaven.



Figure 1.Ritualistic representation: the female hereditary shaman of the East coast in Korea (11.2007, photo by Jeong HK)

Figure 1 shows the scene of the ritual and the costumes and the objects are explained as below.

- A vest with a belt as a religious habit: This is a unique costume called *kxaeja*. It is placed above the traditional clothing (*hanbok*), which is the religious habit. It is a long vest blue (dark) or purple (blackish) with a green stripe (strap) for women. The ritual specialist expressed in these words: only the person who comes down from heaven can wear *kxaeja*. It is here *munyeo* (shamaness). She did not put it on whenever she runs the *gut*; for example, we never see her wearing of this vest for the rest of time or during the break of the ceremony. All of their costume is devoid of representations of spirits but it is held to be an officiant and ritualist aspect of her function.

- A fan (*buchae*) with a yellow towel: This is an intrinsic object that the shamaness takes in right hand during most of the ritual execution. This is the symbol of a sublime person. Note that the color of the napkin is yellow or similar to this color. It means that happiness is attracted to yellow color, putting away misfortune. In the case of the inspired shamans, it should be red.

- A divine knife (*sinkal*) decorated with a fringe in Korean paper (*hanji*): The shamaness holds in her right hand.

- A copper recipient (*notdogi*): It is an object to reveal the presence of mind and its power through a magic trick lifting with the jaw of the shamaness.

- A long stick called *sindae*: Bamboo is 350 cm long with adorned leaves and it symbolizes the path by which the mind comes down. It should be standing in shamanic ritual.

- A long bamboo pole decorated with fringes: It is called *cheonwangdae*. During the ritual of *Cheonwang-gut*, the shamaness

leads to welcome the sovereign in heaven (*Cheonwang*) to pray for the villagers, the clients of the ritual. In the middle of the ritual, the officiant of the village (*jegwan*) hangs his Korean traditional coat (*durumagi*) on the stem of the bamboo, and then the villagers put money (offering) on the same stem.

- A small stalk called *sonnimdae*: It is a small bamboo decorated with fringes. The shamaness put this rod over her shoulder at the ritual, *sonnim-gut*. The villagers put money (offering) on this rod⁶ too.

Traditional faith in ritual specialists and inherited traditions of a fishing community

A shamanic ritual of a fisherman village as well as other *guts* was observed in 2007. It is commonly known as the *byeolsin-gut*. The term *byeolsin* is known only in the most illuminating definition developed by Seokchul Kim (1922-2005)⁷, the former leader of the band of shamans inheriting the Kim family tradition; the gods are honored in an exceptional way. In his definition, this term does not designate mind or his name, but it indicates how to do the ritual. This shamanic ritual is a kind of collective ritual transmitted from generation to generation in a small fishing village *Daedongbae* 2-ri located in the city of Pohang in North Gyeongsang Province. The village has 115 inhabitants: 38 families (households) including 22 fishermen. The majority of the residents are elderly women, called

⁶ Cf. BAK K., JANG H., *:Donghae-an byeolsin-gut* (동해안별신굿, The East Coast *byeolsin-gut*), Séoul, éd. *Hwasanmunhwa*, 2002, pp. 57-111 et 158-234.

⁷ Kim Seokchul is the holder of East Coast *byeolsin-gut* until 2005.

Haenyeo, who were divers to harvest seafood and fishermen. The village has only 18 boats. Fishermen are engaged in inshore fisheries as the owners of a small boat less than 2 tons. It is well known that the work of fishermen and divers for sea products are dangerous. They often feel disconnected from life ashore as they spend most of their lives at sea. Far from home, the fisherman has no real family life, even if we say that every life can be different depending on the life conditions, for example, work on the great fishing, offshore fishing, and coastal fisheries etc. For the well-being of fishermen and villagers, this ritual is traditionally dedicated to the god of the village, the sea god, the god of fertility and birth and various other gods related with the life of the fishermen and villagers. Besides, it is the place for entertainment with songs related to boats, flowers and lanterns.

Firstly, we present the interview with locals as a necessary step to comprehend the continuity of shamanic ritual and its transmission in a society and to clarify the context in which ritual specialists from hereditary shaman families evolve. According to the villagers older than sixty years old, the group of hereditary shamans of the Kim family has been invited every two years to the village ritual since a long time before they were married. In 2007, the informants presented these shamans as the only ones to be able to embody and lead their *gut* in the province; - everyone here knows their parents and their families. It is called *Hochul-ne* (family *Hochul*) in the surrounding villages. Their *gut* was really well done at the time.

In other words, this village is one of the sectors called *dangolpan* that the Kim family has inherited from his father and he

has the right to exercise the function connected with spiritual entities in his community. The ritual is supposed to exist for one hundred and fifty years without any major break in the transmission of ritual practice thanks to the dedicated sectors. The villagers have total confidence in this ritual as expressed in the following statement by the villagers: “The *gut* has been executed without interruption even if we lacked a meal.” Shamans have a great influence on the villagers to such an extent as to establishing a customer relationship because their ritual practice is recognized as quite *effective*. The *effectiveness* depends on prosperity, abundance of fisheries and marine safety in the maritime life of villagers. It is true that the *byeolsin-gut* is effective. It's really mysterious. In the year when we made only *jesa* (Confucian worship), fishing was less successful compared to the year when the *byeolsin-gut* occurred. The most abundant fish were caught in years when it was done. Nobody wants to oppose the ritual or delete it due to the fear of divine punishment, but the younger people at the age of forty or fifty want to increase the interval between two rituals from two years to five years or even ten years. In fact, the ritual costs a sum of money which is the sign of the sincerity of the applicant. Charges for shamans are not negligible; for example, the villagers have paid a total of 12 million won (€ 7,000) for eleven shamans in 2007. Therefore, the ritual for safeguarding of the villagers depends on the economic wealth of the village.



Figure 2. Panoramic view of fishing village, daedongbae 2-ri (11. 2007 Photo by Jeong HK)



Figure 3. Panoramic view of *gut-dang* (sanctuary) (19.11.2007, photo by Jeong HK)

The observation of a « shamanic » ritual of East Coast

As usual, this "collective" or "village" ritual, *byeolsin-gut* was achieved under the leadership of the village chief (*dongjang*). The date of the ritual was selected by the main shamaness. The ritual lasted from the 10th day of the 10th moon until the morning of the 11th day (the 19th to the 20th November) in 2007. When we got to the village the day before (the 9th day), we saw a rope ban (*geumjul*) for impurity expulsion at the entrance of the village that is the place of sanctuary called *Golmaegi dang*. In the evening, a group of officiants went to the shrine for the ritual offering to the gods of the village. They consist of three musicians, the village chief and his wife, and the director of the cooperative fishing village. It was to announce the village ritual. Indeed, the village ritual was dedicated to the god of the village (*golmaegi*), the god of the sea (*Yongwang*), the grandmother *Samsin*, god of fertility and birth (cf. Guillemoz) and various other gods in the life of the villagers. The ritual offering is made as follows. The shamanic ceremony begins with a rite of purification of place to hunt the wandering spirits and ends with a ritual to give the remains of the offerings to the gods. To do this, the *gut-dang* (sanctuary) is set up in the town hall (*Maeulhoegwan*) where the ritual takes place. In the sanctuary, an altar is installed for the wife of the village chief to prepare the food offerings.

The ritual in the *gut-dang* was carried out all day long (day and overnight). It started at 8 am of the 10th day and ended at 8 am on the 11th day. During the day, the five shamanesses executed in turn fifteen sequences (*gut-geori*) according to the ritual order in the tradition of the villagers. The shamanic ritual is performed as

follows: The spirit is invited, received and returned. It is called as *Cheong-sin* for the invitation of the spirits, *O-sin* to rejoice (receiving) spirits, and *Song-sin* for the return of spirits. First of all, *bujeong-gut* (*bujeong*: impurities) was executed by the shamaness as in other ceremonies and it began with a purification rite to hunt the wandering spirits. Then, she did *sejon-gut* which was related to the goddess of childbirth, childbirth and fertility of the offspring. The last one was to call Grandmother *Smansin* who is part of a couple with *Sejon*, the Buddhist monk. Following this ritual, we moved to get to places of sanctuary to welcome and receive the ministering spirits called Grandfather and Grandmother *Golmaegi*, the founders of the village and shamanic ancestors. The officiant (village chief) held the rod of God (*Sindae*) throughout the march and everyone followed it while the shamans played the fanfare music. This is called the *dansmajii-gut*. This is, in the context of ritual performed by hereditary shamans, a singular and obligatory passage to prove the presence of mind to worship. During this rite, the religious character may appear in some mysterious phenomena. To do this, all *munyeo* participated in this ritual shared the role of mediation in the following manner.

1. Show the presence of mind: A shamaness performed a “magic trick” by lifting with her jaw a copper vessel (*notdongi*) in *gununggut* to honor the souls. This is a symbolic act to reveal the presence of mind and her divine power. However, according to the shamans in question, this phenomenon is not really magic because it resulted from training throughout their lives.
2. Give blessing: Another shamaness gave rice cakes (*gyemeon-tteok*) to villagers in the *gyemyeon-gut* for ancestors.
3. Demonstrate the spirit that descends: Doyenne selected by shamans among the villagers held the divine rod (*Sindae*) which

symbolizes the way from which the spirit descends. The descent of the spirit was manifested by sound from the bustle of the bamboo held by the doyenne. If one fails, you can't go to the next step because it means that the mind is not ready to worship in the *gut-dang* (*sanctuary*).



Figure 4. Doyenne holding a divine rod (Sindae) at the shrine of Golmaegi
(19.11. 2007 Photo by Jeong HK)

The singular phenomenon was actually observed at the ritual effectuated in 2007 and then the villagers moved to another place of sanctuary Grandmother *Golmaegi*. After lunch, the shamans visited some villagers for the rite called *Salpuri* because they were asked to perform the ritual to wash evil spirits away. Then, everyone returned to the *gut-dang* where two *munyeos* performed alternately *Hahoe-gut* (*hahoe*: reconciliation) and *Josang-gut* (*josang*: ancestors) until we dined. After finishing dinner, another *munyeo* wore the black hat made of horsehair (*gat*) surrounded by

white paper as a bandage for *Seongju-gut* dedicated to the male spirit of the ridge beam protector of the household. Indeed, it is a typical Korean hat for a man. The white colored paper headband symbolizes the removal of impurity. Following this rite, his colleague *munyeo* executed the *Sansin-gut* (*Sansinis* is the god of the mountain) for one hour (from 21 h 50 to 22 h 50). After that, we had a half-hour break while the villagers served Korean noodles. To pray for happiness and abundance in the village, *cheonhwang-gut* (*cheonhwang*: supreme god) was performed from 22:30 to 24:30. In the middle of this rite, the shamaness burned a piece of paper. This act aims to seek the advice of the spirits about the gut, and to know whether it went well. She explained that if the ashes stuck easily to the ceiling, it meant that the god was satisfied. We saw that the ash stuck to the ceiling of the *gut-dang* at the rite.

The *cheonhwang-dae* is mentioned by a kind of blessing shaman who wishes to avoid victims of the Spirit. In the recitation of the text, the shaman read it for the people as "*cheonhwang-daejapjimalla*" (Don't grab *cheonhwang-dae*) and "*cheonhwang-daejapjimalgosarara*" (Don't grab *cheonhwang-dae* throughout life). According to the shaman, these texts contain the negative direction to the shamanic symptom (*sin naerim*), and also include the sense of "Don't become mudang" or "Never be inspired throughout life."

The *simcheong-gut*, one of the most important rites in the village, was executed for about 4 hours from 1 am to 5 am at the dawn of the 11th day. The aims of this rite are for protecting the eyes and keeping away misfortune. The text of an ancient shaman relates to a tale called *Sim Cheong-jeon* where a girl named *Sim Cheong* is the main character. The story goes that the girl was sacrificed to the

god of the sea named *Indangnsu* for his father in the blinding sight. During the rite, the villagers hung monetary offerings on the rod which carries a large artificial flower (*sondae*). The shamaness carried it on her shoulder while praying to protect them. In this rite, the shamaness practiced divination to predict the happiness and the misery of the village playing a theatrical scene, the Game of the Blind, a subset of *Simcheong-gut*, in which she played a blind role (*bongsa*) which is actually a fortune teller. The villagers told him and asked personal questions. According to the villagers, doyenne divination is explained as follows. Although *munyeo* is not divination and does not naturally do divination, she divines it successfully in *Sim Cheong-gut*. In divination, I always ask her intimate questions. Indeed, as a hereditary shaman, she is not capable of clairvoyance, but she has mastered it through rational methods such as almanac, physiognomy, palmistry, and *Juyeok* or intuitive methods such as clairvoyance, clairaudience etc. We attended *sonnim-gut* (*sonnim*:guest) for about 2 and a half hours from 4:50 am to 7 am and *Yongwang-gut* (*youngwang*: god of the sea, the king Dragon) from 7 am to 7:30 am. It is recognized as the most important symbolic rite in the last *byeolsin-gut* that normally lasts two hours at best. At the end of the day, *munyeo* has devoted a half-hour. The last sequence to complete the ritual should be completed by 8:00 am because this ritual is scheduled in a day. Only the couple officiating the village participated in the boat game (*Baet-nori*) in which all of us take a long cloth tied to the boat as a dragon (*yongseon*) hanging from the ceiling of the *gut-dang* and we sing while agitating it. In fact, the villagers went to take a rest in the corner of *gut-dang*, sleep at home or work at sea as some of them

begin early in the morning. The shamanic ritual ended with *daegeori-gut* to return all of the gods and stray sprits spoiling this world to their world for half an hour. This is the last process of ritual called "*song-sin*" (song: resend sin: god). This ritual involves the representation of a play and witty jokes. It should be noted that it is the man (husband or male shaman) who does, contrary to the rules of East Coast shamanism saying that it is the woman (female shaman) who runs the ritual. Thus, only two shamans participated; a man plays a role as an actor, while the other plays the guide drum (*janggu*). This rite is performed in the form of conversation. The actor-shaman threw the prepared gourd offerings of rice, which means symbolically healing and return of all lower and wandering spirits. After finished around 8 am, all objects used in the *byeolsin-gut* were burned and the offerings of rice are discarded at sea by the director of the cooperative fishing village. Besides, the shamaness made some individual prayers requested by the villagers for the happiness of their families or their children before she goes home.

This observation of ritual in the village is an opportunity for us to look inside a traditional society in some aspects such as religious bias, as well as symbolic, economic, political, and aesthetic values. Shamanism in the fishing village in question can't be considered as a legal institution separated from the society. The fishermen of the villagers need this type of collective ritual to support their morale when they go to sea. The god of the village is thus sought for ensuring their life and their happiness. The local religious specialists called hereditary shamans provide their proper ritual art satisfying technical needs of the traditional society. It is now possible to say that the collective beliefs in the fishing village are similar to a

religious system. However, it is different from Buddhism, Christianity and even Neo-Confucianism⁸. In this local religious system, the ritual specialists have only a marginal role. In other words, fishermen and divers of seafood (*haenyeo*) in the village are exposed to a dangerous daily life and they try to know the sea as it affects their boat, the product of the sea and their life. Their life would depend on each decision and an error could be fatal. However, it is impossible to know everything about Nature. In this context, they have developed a coherent method as a religious system to explain the order of things and events, to meet the anxieties about accidents and human suffering, and to establish an honorable alliance with Nature. It explains the long term relationship between the villagers and the ritual specialists.

Conclusion

Long condemned as a superstitious practice in traditional Korean society, the shamanic ritual is rejected and ostracized by the Korean government. The existence of shamans has been neglected, whatever their essence is, since the 1970s. Shamans and shamanism is not an accepted subject in Korea. Certain shamanic personalities, widely known *mudang*, now are receiving cultural recognition as national treasures. However, there is a break in the transmission of profession of shaman because of their refusal to be inherited by a family tradition function despite the recognition as human national treasures in 1985. In other words, it is obvious that the ritual

⁸ It is a kind of social morality governing relations between individuals and ritual code used for the worship of ancestors, funeral and marriage. Then it is the ideology of Chinese Chu Hsi (1130-1200), dominant adopted and disseminated by the Korean aristocratic dynasty "Joseon" (1392-1910), the last dynasty in Korean Peninsula.

tradition in question, led by ritual specialists, is in sharp decline. They are called *seseub-mudang* in Korean and it is translated by hereditary shaman in this study. These people observed in this paper are the last heirs of shamans from the Kim family since the 19th century. Their ancestor is the founder of the lineage of shaman musicians in the region of the east coast. This study shows that this ritual is still very important to the fishing village and it is why they are spending considerable sums, 12 million de won (\approx 12,000\$ USA) to organize it. The expense of such money would reflect the idea of the villagers; it is the sign of the sincerity of the applicants of the *gut*. The continuity of the ritual tradition depends on both collective belief of traditional clients, and on its apparent effectiveness, as well as the economic wealth of the village. For the villagers, it seems that the way this type of shaman communicates with divinity is no longer so important. The religious characteristics of the hereditary shamans and their functions are not influenced by the perpetuation of a shamanic tradition village as witnessed; it is true that their ritual (*gut*) is less preferred compared to that led by the previous generation. After the death of their parents, they executed the ritual to be faithful to them. Therefore, the shaman as the ritual specialist is a kind of ritual symbol to all of the villagers. It may have contributed to the fact that the heirs of shamans today are restricted to the artistic aspect of their performance and are increasingly involved in stage performances where their universe remains human and representation (technique or art) is a means of mediation with the public of their art. Finally, the type of shamanism discussed here corresponds to the needs of a particular type of society, which is here the inhabitants of the fishing village.

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