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The Public Image of Role of Shamanism in Contemporary Korea

Veřejná image role šamanismu v současné Koreji

Olomouc 2022 Natálie Šumská

vedoucí diplomové práce: Mag. Andreas Schirmer, Dr.

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Abstrakt

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Autor:	Natálie Šumská
Vedoucí práce:	Mag. Andreas Schirmer, Dr.
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Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá korejským šamanismem a jeho rolí v současné Koreji. Pomocí kvalitativního výzkumu médií zkoumá jak se o šamanismu a šamanech reportuje v zahraničních a korejských médiích psaných v anglickém jazyku. Hlavním cílem je přiblížit jakou roli šamanismus zastává v současné Koreji v kontextu historie postavení šamanismu v korejské společnosti.

Abstract

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This bachelor thesis focuses on Korean shamanism and its role in contemporary Korea. Through a qualitative analysis of media examines how is reported in international media and Korean English-written media about shamanism and shamans. The main aim of the analysis is to find out what kind of role shamanism has in contemporary Korea in context to the status of shamanism in Korean society throughout the history.

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Transcription

Since in this bachelor thesis are terms or names transcribed from Korean alphabet, *han'gŭl*, to Latin alphabet, the used system of transcription is McCune–Reischauer romanization. The transcription is emphasized by Italics. In the chapter 1 are also used characters from *Hanja*, system using Chinese characters. It is used to express the origin of the term in context of shamanism. The order of Korean persons' names is in accordance with Korean convention, which means the forename comes after the last name.

1 Introduction

Nowadays, in South Korean society we can see a mix of various religions that coexist peacefully next to each other. We can consider shamanism as one of them, which is acknowledged as a remnant of the religious practices back from the Neolithic era. In Korea, shamanism is usually referred to as *musok*. The first syllable, *mu* (巫), is used for shaman, while the second syllable *sok* (俗), carries the meaning of custom, practice, or habit. This could be interpreted as indicating that in the eyes of the learned who coined this term, shamanism was not a religion but rather a kind of folklore or folkway.¹

People from the Neolithic era believed there were two kinds of spirits. Good spirits could bring them luck while evil spirits brought despair. Thereby, people needed a third person who will communicate with spirits and exorcise evil by dancing and singing.² Thus, shamanism is deeply rooted in the culture and influenced Korean society throughout the years. Even though there were other dominant religions later, and some of them tried to weaken the position of shamanism or make it even dissolve, shamanism survived till now.³ Not only that, but the influence of the folk religion is noticeable in imported religions, and to be accepted by the Korean people, had to adopt some of the aspects of shamanism.⁴ Because while Confucianism and Buddhism educated the populace methodically with a script, Korean shamanism was merged into the mentality of the people.⁵

Laurel Kendal defines shamans as: “religious practitioners who engage spirits on behalf of the community, either through encounters during soul flight or by invoking the spirits into the here and now of a ritual space, conveying the immediacy of these experiences with their own bodies and voices.”⁶ The performance of the shaman, ritual, *kut* (굿), is performed with music and offerings to charm spirits while the shaman is dressed in special clothes – gods’ costumes.⁷ The rituals are continual interactions between both sides of the stages – between shamans, who perform, and between people for whom this ritual is performed.⁸ There is a great number of different kinds of rituals that shamans can perform. For example, *chaesu kut* is a ritual that is

¹ Jinseok Seo [Sō Jinsōk]. *The Role of Shamanism in Korean Society in its Inter-and Intra-cultural Contacts*. (Tartu: University of Tartu, 2013), p. 13, 20.

² Carter J. Eckert, Yi Kibaek [Yi Kibaek], Young Ick Lew, Michael Robinson, and Edward W. Wagner. *In Korea, Old and New: A History*. (Seoul [Sōul], Korea, 1990), p. 7.

³ Tongsik Yu. “Shamanism: The Dominant Folk Religion in Korea.” *Inter-religio* 5 (1984), p. 9.

⁴ Andrew Eungi Kim. “Christianity, Shamanism and Modernization in South Korea.” *CrossCurrents* 50, no. 1/2 (2000), p. 116.

⁵ Seo, *The Role of Shamanism*, p. 21.

⁶ Laurel Kendall. *Shamans, Nostalgias, and the IMF: South Korean Popular Religion in Motion*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2009), p. xxi.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. xxi.

⁸ Boudewijn Walraven. “National Pantheon, Regional Deities, Personal Spirits? Mushindo, Sōngsu, and the Nature of Korean Shamanism.” *Asian Ethnology* 68, no. 1 (2009), p. 58.

performed to force out misfortune and to improve good fortune and prosperity.⁹ This *kut* is performed even in contemporary Korea. With this is connected the word *Hell Chosŏn* (헬조선), which encapsulates the outrage Koreans feel toward the current situation in the country, which is full of social inequality.¹⁰ Instead of working as ordained clergy, shamans work mostly independently. Normally, there is no relationship between shaman and client, on the contrary, when the results are not satisfactory, clients either could look for other shamans, try to find help at a different religious place (Buddhist or Christian), or they could do simply nothing else.¹¹ Throughout history, whilst the Korean man got Confucian education, his wife could pray for offspring in a Buddhist temple and when he fell into sickness, the help generally came from a shaman or soothsayer. There was merely an ethical dimension, the people were attaining contentment through the combination of all three.¹²

Korean shamans are mostly women.¹³ Male shamans are called *paksu*.¹⁴ Their number is significantly lower. By *mudang* (巫堂), usually, a female shaman is associated.¹⁵ However, this term can also refer to a male shaman. Besides these two main terms, there is also the expression *mansin* (萬神), which could be translated as “ten thousand spirits” and in central and north Korea considered a polite term for shaman. Even though *mudang* is considered a demeaning name, it is more frequent, and studies about shamanism are often using it neutrally.¹⁶

Although contemporary Korea has recently experienced a huge development in socioeconomic aspects, the role of shamanism still has a strong position in Korean’s lives. Shamans had to adapt to new technologies and a new, fast-changing lifestyle. These changes can be seen not only in performed practices alone¹⁷ but also on the internet, where we can find modern, young shamans using social media (such as Instagram) for their practices.¹⁸ Even though Korea is now a modern, advanced country, society is still suffering from hardships and each person has

⁹ John A. Grim. “‘Chaesu Kut’: A Korean Shamanistic Performance.” *Asian Folklore Studies* 43, no. 2 (1984), p. 237.

¹⁰ Dirk Schlottman. “Dealing with Uncertainty: ‘Hell Joseon’ and the Korean Shaman Rituals for Happiness and against Misfortune.” *Journal of the International Society for Academic Research on Shamanism* 27, no. 1 (2019), p. 7.

¹¹ Kendall, *Shamans, Nostalgias, and the IMF*, p. 30.

¹² Sung-Deuk Oak [Oak Sung-Dŭk]. “Healing and Exorcism: Christian Encounters with Shamanism in Early Modern Korea.” *Asian Ethnology* 69, no. 1 (2010), p. 105.

¹³ Kendall, *Shamans, Nostalgias, and the IMF*, p. xx.

¹⁴ Jongsung Yang [Jongsŭng Yang]. “Korean Shamanism: The Training Process of Charismatic ‘Mudang’.” *Folklore Forum* 21, (1988), p. 22.

¹⁵ Jung-young Lee. [Jungyoung Yi] “Concerning the Origin and Formation of Korean Shamanism.” *Numen* 20, no. 2 (1973), p. 136.

¹⁶ Laurel Kendall, “Of Gods and Men: Performance, Possession, and Flirtation in Korean Shaman Ritual” *Cashiers d’Extrême-Asie* 6, (1991), p. 45.

¹⁷ Schlottman, *Dealing with Uncertainty: ‘Hell Joseon’*, p. 6.

¹⁸ Hojeong Kim [Hojŏng Kim]. “Not Your Grandmother’s Mudang, or Shaman.” *Korea JoongAng Daily*, August 29, 2021.

troubles, which may differ from those in the Neolithic or Chosŏn era but are still burdening. That could be one of the reasons why Korean shamanism did not vanish.¹⁹

This thesis focuses on the role of shamanism throughout history of Korean Peninsula and after division of the peninsula, the focus is on Republic of Korea, since most of the sources explain the situation of shamans living there. This topic could be considered tabooed, nevertheless, the fact the shamanism is still thriving to these days, even though mostly in secret, is a proof of the how deeply ingrained this folk religion is. The first part of the thesis focused on the gradual development of shamanism, which competed with Buddhism, was oppressed by Confucian elites, collided with Christianity, and then upheld as essential part of the Korean culture by government. Then thesis describes current trends or issues that influenced shamanism, such as internet, new needs of the clients or political controversies. Last part of thesis includes analysis of three Korean English-written media, where was examined how and what each reported concerning shamanism.

2 History and development of Korean shamanism's role throughout the history

As said above, Korean shamanism probably originated from folk religions. During *Kochosŏn*, Ancient *Chosŏn*, most of the first leaders had both functions: political and religious. It is believed that mostly shamans were headmen and ruled the people.²⁰ With the development of the small states, political and religious functions were divided. While political function was a matter of leaders, the religious function was left to shamans only. The position of shamanism was then shaken during the era of the Three Kingdoms when new religions and ideologies came into the spotlight – Confucianism, and Buddhism.²¹

2.1 Imported religions, shamanism, and its role

Even though shamans were originally the ones who ruled over the people, when kingship developed, it was more convenient for leaders to accept one of the imported religions. In this case, we are talking about Buddhism, which was spread by the monk Sundo through the Korean peninsula and mostly accepted around AD 372.²² Buddhism was ideal at the time for the leaders, who wanted to strengthen the authority of a throne, considering the concept of a single body of all believers. This perfectly complemented the new structure of the centralized power of a throne.²³

¹⁹ Schlottman, *Dealing with Uncertainty: 'Hell Joseon'*, p. 6, 7.

²⁰ Eckert, *In Korea, Old and New: A History*, p. 7, 11.

²⁰ Yu, *Shamanism: The Dominant Folk Religion*, p. 19.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20-21,33.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²³ *Ibid.*, 23.

Even though Buddhism was accepted in all Three Kingdoms, among them Silla was almost two centuries late, which is a result of the resistance of followers of local shamanism. This is proof that shamanism's position was powerful enough to compete with Buddhism, imported religion.²⁴ After the unification of the Korean peninsula by Silla, paradoxically Korean shamanism was oppressed by the government. In addition to that, Buddhism, which replaced shamanism in all aspects, perceived the folk religion as its rival – good examples are the stories that were around the founding of Buddhist temples.

For an instance, a story about the temples as *Kuryongsa* contained bad dragons, who were supposed to represent the shaman god and were mostly dislodged by monks, who founded the temple.²⁵ However, it could also be seen that during this time Korean shamanism accepted Buddhist ceremonies and gods, to survive.²⁶ Even though the relationship was not strictly peaceful, Buddhism had the upper hand and causing some conflicts²⁷, Korean shamanism and Buddhism in Korean history were coexisting together.²⁸ Even though there was a ban by the government, the royals still called for shamans to do rain rituals or rituals dedicated to local gods.²⁹ In addition to that, also Buddhist festival P'algwanhoe was held during the Koryŏ dynasty in Buddhist temples. Seemingly a Buddhist festival, arranged by royal families, was, nevertheless festival with shamanistic elements, where official shamans engaged to wish for good luck.³⁰ That can imply that the importance of shamans was still quite essential even for the throne, which is only another proof that shamanism was embedded in the society, paradoxically even after acquiring Buddhism.³¹ The influence of shamanism could be seen even later, in contemporary Korea. Some Buddhist deities originate from shamanic deities, also pavilions made for Korean local gods can be found in the temples.³²

Around the same century as Buddhism, also Confucianism made its way to the Korean peninsula, the difference is it did not have an as huge influence as later in Chosŏn when it was chosen as a fundamental ideology of the dynasty. Until then it kind of worked only as a moral basis, explaining how one should act, while Buddhism was the religion with the leading role.³³

²⁴ Ibid, p. 23.

²⁵ Yu, *Shamanism: The Dominant Folk Religion*, p. 23.

²⁶ Hung-youn Cho. "Cultural Interbreeding between Korean Shamanism and Imported Religions." *Diogenes* 47, no. 3 (1999), p. 50.

²⁷ Dongkyu Kim. *Looping Effects Between Images and Realities: Understanding the Plurality of Korean Shamanism*. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2012), p. 23.

²⁸ Cho, *Cultural Interbreeding*, p. 50.

²⁹ Seo, *The Role of Shamanism*, p. 23, 24.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 31.

³¹ Ibid, p. 23-24.

³² Ibid, p. 31.

³³ Kim, *Looping Effects*, p. 24.

2.2 Shamanism and the “confucianization” of the Korean peninsula

In this era of Korean history, as is well known, Confucianism, specifically Neo-Confucianism, became the main political ideology. Even though there were some similarities, Neo-Confucianism had a different concept of civilization.³⁴ Which meant more oppression not only for shamanism but also for Buddhism and monks. Neo-Confucians dealt with shamans and monks as outcasts of society. Nevertheless, that was not the attitude of each person in the dynasty. While men of Neo-Confucianism saw shamanism as something superstitious or devilish, most lower-class people and women, even from a royal family, believed in shamanism.³⁵ Just the evidence that there had to be so many memorials demanding the dissolution of shamans and their practices, hints, that the practices were still enjoyed by people with a different kind of status. Although, it is concluded that the law against the shamans was unclear since some shamans could get the status of national religious specialists, medical practitioners, or artists.³⁶

Confucianists wanted to have control over shamans and the uneducated masses. A new law system, *Kyōnggukdaejön*, made shamans leave the area of city walls. Shamans had to register and were under the control of the Office of Rites, which was because of the medical practices of shamans. They also had to pay a shaman-specific tax, which gave them rights as taxpayers. That was quite paradoxical since they were forced to leave walls within the city, which later expanded to the borderline of the Han River.³⁷ Although the registration was obligatory, because of heavy oppression, shamans presumably avoided getting registered. As mentioned, they were mostly female, and they could hide under the policies of Chosŏn’s typical patriarchal structure, since females, according to Chosŏn patrilineal registry laws, were comprised under male heads of the households. Even if shamans’ earnings were the main income of the household, it is assumed, that they were mostly encompassed under the occupations of a father or a husband.³⁸

There was constructed ritual system based on the social hierarchy. Confucian literati wanted to make sure that any form of worship was under state control, and that everyone in the society understand who to worship according to their social status. From this, it can be assumed that Confucianists made, in fact, the effort to make shamanism disappear and substitute it with its values and rituals. Since Confucian literati considered rites as a measure of civilization, by establishing rites and music, they believed to accomplish the process of civilization and tried to keep cultural and political control over the uneducated population. Though they were proud of

³⁴ Boudewijn Walraven. “Our Shamanistic Past: The Korean Government, Shamans and Shamanism.” *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studie* 8, (1993), p. 7.

³⁵ Cho, Cultural Interbreeding, p. 51.

³⁶ Kim, *Looping Effects*, p. 28.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 29.

³⁸ Merose Hwang. *The Mudang: Gendered Discourses on Shamanism in Colonial Korea*. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2009), p. 42-43.

this achievement, people who did not follow rites endorsed by them and sought the help of shamans in their shrines could be still found.³⁹

The world view of shamanism and Neo-Confucianism are similar on some points. For instance, Confucians' attitude towards gods or ghosts did not contradict the existence of beings, that were venerated by shamans. They were simply considered evil and not worth worshipping. Nevertheless, Confucian literati did believe there is a way to approach the gods and blessings could be granted by proper rituals. Another aspect is the fact that Confucians were convinced of "invisible links" connecting the whole universe, also due to strong faith in *yin* and *yang* and the five primary substance. Shamans often explained misfortune because of humans' misdeeds. And in case of disasters such as floods and droughts appearing, rulers interpret it as signs from the heavens of their own, human's, immorality. Therefore, both would have faith that certain behavior could evoke such responses.⁴⁰

It can be concluded that for Confucian elites the worldview would not be the issue. They often brought up the practices of shamans, such as the noise of their gongs and drums, and overjoyed dancing during rituals, which were contrary to the aesthetic sensitivity of Neo-Confucians.⁴¹ Another issue with shamanism could be the fact, that most shamans were women. For instance, *p'ansu*, male blind exorcists, whose spiritual world did not differ significantly and who also were repressed by Confucian ideology, still were regarded more highly than the female *mudang*.⁴² As mentioned before, shamans' major clients were also women, which could only contribute to a negative attitude towards shamanism, considering the hierarchy of society. While men had education opportunities, women were deprived of such, and besides, intellectual women generally were not respected. Viewing women as uneducated again could strengthen the judgment of a shaman being a fraud who is fooling unlearned people. Therefore, shamanism would be condemned as irrational and illiterate individuals' culture.⁴³

2.3 Shamanism and the "opening" of the Korean peninsula

During the time the Korean peninsula opened to the influence of foreign countries, Confucianism started to lose its impact.⁴⁴ Christianity and its missionaries who tried to extend the belief's influence also in east Asia happened to have a quite positive response from many Koreans, who viewed the import of the religion "from the west" approvingly. This represents a sharp contrast

³⁹ Kim, *Looping Effects*, p. 30-32.

⁴⁰ Boudewijn Walraven. "Confucians and Shamans." *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, no. 6 (1991), p. 29.

⁴¹ Kim, *Looping Effects*, p. 36-40.

⁴² Walraven, Confucians and Shamans, p. 39.

⁴³ Kim, *Looping Effects*, p. 42-43.

⁴⁴ Walraven. Our Shamanistic Past, p. 8.

to other non-European countries, whose native populations mostly suffered from conflicts of missionary work and huge culture shocks.^{45 46}

Early Christian missionaries' opinion on *mudang* was shaped by the approach of the elite, considering them as "the lowest of the low"⁴⁷, connecting Korean shamanism with words such as "exorcism, superstition, demon worship".⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the confusion of the missionaries can be noted, considering texts implying that "... even the highest and best educated classes of people do not hesitate to call for the *mudang*, when they are in trouble," or the reality, that men, who in normal life do not believe in such things, in a moment of sickness, would send their wives to a shaman, who could recognize which spirit is guilty of the mischief happening to him.⁴⁹ From this could be deduced, that even though Confucianists did try to substitute shamanism with various methods before, it did not affect common people that much. However, after modernization became an essential value for Korean people, shamanism came to be treated as an obstacle.⁵⁰

Amid the colonization of Japan, the oppression of shamanism went on, given that Japan deemed shamanism as the root of Korean culture and religion.⁵¹ In fact, the Korean folk religion was one of the genres of the verbal arts, that got the most attention from the Japanese colonial government.⁵² Still, the practices of shamans were restricted and under the control of the Government General, thus shamans happened to be treated as criminals.⁵³ According to the study by Han Dohyun, Korean shamanism was classified as undeveloped by Japanese colonial scholars. And while Japanese Shinto was labeled as developed, scholars were insisting that both evolved from the same root.⁵⁴ These researches were supposed to support the cultural assimilation policy, which aimed to transform Koreans into loyal Japanese citizens, and were used to uphold, for instance, the hypothesis that Japan and Korea had the same ancestry. In the end, in 1923, Korean shamanism was interpreted as an "indigenous faith".⁵⁵

On the other hand, the very persecution itself done by the Japanese encouraged some intellectuals to ponder over their national identity. Because of that, the stance on shamanism started to shift a little, embracing it as an element of the Korean culture, which would be divergent from Japanese culture, where the existence of shamanism was denied at the time. Shamanism started to appear in literature, however, recognized as primitive. For an instance, Kim Tongni's

⁴⁵ Cho, *Cultural Interbreeding*, p. 58.

⁴⁶ According to the statement from French Church, in the middle of the 19th century, there were around 23 000 native Korean converts situated on the Korean peninsula.

⁴⁷ Laurel Kendall, *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits: Women in Korean Ritual Life*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1985), p. 32.

⁴⁸ Kendall, *Shamans, Nostalgias, and the IMF*, p. 5.

⁴⁹ Kendall, *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits*, p. 32.

⁵⁰ Kim, *Looping Effects*, p. 66.

⁵¹ Cho, *Cultural Interbreeding*, p. 51.

⁵² Kim, *Looping Effects*, p. 75.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁵⁴ Seo, *The Role of Shamanism*, p. 24.

⁵⁵ Kim, *Looping Effects*, p. 75.

work narrated shamanism as a crucial part of his own culture, yet strange and distant to him and his readers.⁵⁶ Thus, shamanism to Korean scholars has functioned only as something as a national symbol, with possible strength to unify into one country all Korean people,⁵⁷ which could be seen even later in Korean history, when shaman symbols were used by dissidents or students to express their criticism toward the government.⁵⁸ Besides, during these hard times, *mudang* were still sought by common Korean people. For instance, by mothers, who wished to find partners worthy of marriage for their children, shamans were well-known as great matchmakers. Furthermore, when smallpox epidemics broke out in the period of late nineteenth and twentieth century, although vaccines were available, more trusted was smallpox *kut* performed by shamans.⁵⁹

However, there was still an already established negative view of shamanism colliding with the “new” positive attitude.⁶⁰ For example, anti-superstition campaigns were not done only by Japan, but also by associations of Korean young men. These campaigns consisted of diverse programs, such as public seminars, lectures, and newspapers, there are even cases when they broke into locations of rituals and damaged shamanic equipment.⁶¹ Newspapers used *mudang* as an instance of “rural femininity”, and “simple farm women”, and made a comparison between women of rural and urban areas, also regarding shamans as a barrier to modernization.⁶² Yet, the *Chosŏn ilbo* editorial indicated differences between *mudang* and doctors, even though *mudang* were mostly treated as uneducated. Comparing them with doctors implied, that the editorial did treat shamans differently from illiterate farm women. Another editorial, *Tonga ilbo*, pointed out that “simple farm women” are conducted by shamans because of a lack of their education, once again blaming it on behalf of women⁶³, which supported the statement that shamanism is a religion of women, thus also uneducated masses.⁶⁴

After the Korean peninsula opened more to foreign influence, another religion appeared in the country. Christianity was rather accepted by many locals, the missionaries from the West however continued to portray shamanism as superstitious religion and emphasized that shamans – *mudang*, were women with a bad reputation. Yet, they could be surprised since even though the position of the shamans was low in society, in a matter of trouble, most of the people went to a shaman for help, without regard to their status. Despite the negative attitude, after Japan’s oppression, some intellectuals started to think about shamanism as a fundamental part of Korean

⁵⁶ Walraven, *Our Shamanistic Past*, p. 12.

⁵⁷ Kim, *Looping Effects*, p. 74.

⁵⁸ Walraven, *Our Shamanistic Past*, p. 20.

⁵⁹ Hwang, *The Mudang*, p. 152, 153, 160.

⁶⁰ Walraven, *Our Shamanistic Past*, p. 11, 12.

⁶¹ Kim, *Looping Effects*, p. 67.

⁶² Hwang, *The Mudang*, p. 101, 103.

⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 110.

⁶⁴ Kim, *Looping Effects*, p. 43.

culture, although primitive. Nevertheless, there were still strong campaigns against superstition, that continued to perceive shamanism as an obstacle to development.

2.4 Shamanism and the New Village Movement in South Korea

After the Korean war and the division of the Korean peninsula into the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea, most of the information about shamans came from South Korea. The pressure on *mudang* was still strong and shamanism would be regarded as something shameful. If a foreigner would ask locals for *mudang* in the area, they would often receive an answer that no one like that resides in the neighborhood.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, during this time a lot of articles and dissertations on shamanism were carried out, to find cultural originality. This era of Korean history is characteristic of the New Village Movement, beginning around 1970. It was a symbol of modernization of the country through economic growth, improvement of living conditions, and the development of the mind as well.⁶⁶

The intention of this campaign, heavily influenced by the contemporary Western concept⁶⁷ was to tighten the gap between the countryside and the city and propagated modernization by being scientific, rational, and economic. A lot of old customs were deemed inconsistent with the wanted development. That included not only rituals performed by *mudang*, but also Confucian traditions. The push for modernization aimed to educate Koreans living in non-urban areas to make them replace the habits and values they had cherished so far with more modern principles.⁶⁸ On the other hand, religions like Buddhism or Christianity expanded rapidly since Korea's government still wanted to permit people to have the freedom to select a religion.⁶⁹

Nonetheless, the Ministry of Culture pointed out that the anti-superstition campaign was like the one during the colonial rule and regarded as crucial to protect shamans as masters of traditional song and dance. A Cultural Properties Protection Law, executed in 1962, established performing arts, together with rituals, as a part of the cultural heritage, which could be used as a protection of *mudang* from the government.⁷⁰ During the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century, the government launched programs for cultural preservation, which included also *mudang*, who were considered "keepers" of the rituals, receiving stipends from the government for being Humans Cultural Assets, rituals then officially appointed as Intangible Cultural Assets.⁷¹ There were still "agents" of the New Village Movement though, fighting against "superstitious" religion, for instance, there were cases of village shrines burned down or imprisoning of the

⁶⁵ Walraven, *Our Shamanistic Past*, p. 13.

⁶⁶ Kim, *Looping Effects*, p. 68.

⁶⁷ Seo, *The Role of Shamanism*, p. 61.

⁶⁸ Walraven, *Our Shamanistic Past*, p. 13.

⁶⁹ Seo, *The Role of Shamanism*, p. 61.

⁷⁰ Kendall, *Shamans, Nostalgias, and the IMF*, p. 19.

⁷¹ Walraven, *Our Shamanistic Past*, p. 16.

shamans,⁷² nonetheless, the popularity of the concept of studying shamanism also as a crucial part of Korean culture grew and a lot of works were written during that time. Although the “shamanism” in these works is not certainly matching with the reality of the *mudang*’s rituals and beliefs,⁷³ educated Korean did start to consider the practices of shamans as part of the Korean culture.⁷⁴

Despite the turnover of the stance of the government on shamanism, the government viewed it only as an element from the past. For example, the Korean Overseas Information Service issued a booklet in 1985 that explained and emphasized that animism did survive but only among simple rural people who attend ceremonies handled by shamans. It can be assumed that this is false information since shamans and their practices would decrease at the same velocity as a rural population.⁷⁵ Also considering the fact, that shamanism has not been included on the list of the peninsula’s religious organizations, hints that it was and is not regarded as a religion by the government.⁷⁶ Additionally to that, shamanism is consistently excluded from the statistics issued by the government. In the eyes of the authorities, shamanistic rituals depicted mainly essential cultural heritage, so they decided to preserve them for future generations,⁷⁷ moreover also proposing ten regional shamanic rituals to UNESCO as Important Intangible Cultural Property between 1980 and 1996.⁷⁸ Besides, there were teams consisting of shamans traveling around the world and supported by the government. The chosen *mudang* performed for foreign audiences, although, only as singers, dancers, actors, or musicians, so it can be concluded, that the government put an emphasis only on the artistic side of shamanism. Along with that, festivals happened as well, often perceived differently by authorities and most of the local participants. Even though the festival for Nam I, the honored general, was partly funded by the Korean Culture and Arts Foundation and the Seoul City government, a meaningful part was managed by a shaman. While the government thought of the festival as an occasion for visitors to remind themselves of the history and additionally, to propagate a campaign against Jurchen, most of the citizens saw this as an event that could bring them luck, once again engaging with the event because of the religious aspect. However, the role of the ancient Korean culture keepers given by the government was often acknowledged by the *mudang* themselves, willingly using it as a propagation for them. For example, a male shaman, Chŏng Kang-u, published a novel concerned about a shaman’s life, declaring its purpose was to preserve “our thing”.⁷⁹

⁷² Kendall, *Shamans, Nostalgias, and the IMF*, p. 19.

⁷³ Walraven, *Our Shamanistic Past*, p. 14, 15.

⁷⁴ Kendall, *Shamans, Nostalgias, and the IMF*, p. 19.

⁷⁵ Walraven, *Our Shamanistic Past*, p. 18.

⁷⁶ Kim, *Looping Effects*, p. 103.

⁷⁷ Cho, *Cultural Interbreeding*, p. 51, 59.

⁷⁸ Kyoin, Yun. “The Economic Imperative of UNESCO Recognition: A South Korean Shamanic Ritual.” *Journal of Folklore Research* 52, no. 2–3 (2015), p. 185.

⁷⁹ Walraven, *Our Shamanistic Past*, p. 17, 18, 22.

In the meantime, Christianity, which popularity in the country was still growing, was attacking shamanism with hostility. Regardless of embracing some elements of shamanism such as possessions by demons or exorcist healing rituals, they compelled people wanting to convert to completely separate themselves from the past religion – shamanism, which had to be done by burning down everything the Protestant Church correlated with the old beliefs and evil spirits.⁸⁰ As mentioned before, South Korea wanted to develop and become like western countries, Christianity, coming from the West, was considered a modern factor, convenient for the movement, that could help the country to advance into, what was considered, a more developed civilization.⁸¹ Western medicine was an additional element of why a lot of people were drawn to Christianity along with the ability of missionaries' medicines to heal sicknesses.⁸² Another aspect of the acceptance of the imported religion could be also higher equality when it comes to men and women. Despite the patriarchy continuing to be strong, the opportunities for women multiplied. Thanks to Christian organizations, they could get education or job opportunities almost on the same level as men. That was a new attitude, considering Confucianism, prevailing since the Chosŏn dynasty, with a strong hierarchy allowing education mainly for the elites made up of men.⁸³ The Protestants' approach to shamanism, for instance, calling it even terms like "demon worship",⁸⁴ made a lot of *mudang* to have a negative relationship towards the Protestant Church.⁸⁵ In the work of Jinsŏk Sŏ "The Role of Shamanism in Korean Society and its Inter- and Intra-cultural contacts", the introduction part described the author's own experiences with shamanism. In one situation, his mother went to a *mudang* due to the hard times of the family, and the advice given by the shaman was to instantly visit a church, otherwise, all members of the household would perish.⁸⁶ This could be a surprising decision of the *mudang* since often the solution in such cases was holding a ritual – *kut*. Although according to the author his mother was a Buddhist who often visited the shamanic shrine to make offerings, in the end, the whole family converted to Christianity, and the situation for them did get significantly better. Since then, there could be noticed the influence of the Church had on the author's mother, because afterward, his mother looked upon shamanism with aversion, thinking that the cause of the family's misfortune was certainly the old habit of shamanism. That is often the perspective on shamanism of most of the Christians in the country.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ Oak, *Healing and Exorcism*, p. 95, 96, 99.

⁸¹ Kim, *Christianity, Shamanism and Modernization in South Korea*, p. 114.

⁸² Oak, *Healing and Exorcism*, p. 97, 101.

⁸³ Donald Baker. "The Impact of Christianity on Modern Korea: An Overview." *Acta Koreana* 19, no. 1 (2016), p. 56.

⁸⁴ Oak, *Healing and Exorcism*, p. 97.

⁸⁵ Cho, *Cultural Interbreeding*, p. 59.

⁸⁶ Seo, *The Role of Shamanism*, p. 9, 20.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 9-11.

Since Korean folk religion could be treated as something genuinely Korean,⁸⁸ throughout history constantly supporting the oppressed and disadvantaged classes, while emphasizing equality and philanthropy, shamanic symbols were usually used by dissidents or students, to express political statements,⁸⁹ who gave a new context to shamanistic symbols. For instance, a *Kut Movement*, where only the term could suggest a relation to shamanism. However, the expression *kut* itself has a broader meaning – either “spectacle” or could be found linked to as described by Boudewijn Walraven: “...certain festive communal events having certain elements in common with the shamanic ritual performed by others than *mudang*.”, which was convenient the devotees of the movement, who could distance themselves from shamans, yet could take advantage of the symbols of the shamanism.⁹⁰

During the modernization of South Korea, a lot of things changed. With the movement of modernization, which tried to fight “superstition” either by education or attacking the shamans, but also with the initiative from the scholars, who deemed *mudang* as an important part of the Korean culture. This resulted in shamanism being acknowledged by the government as part of Intangible Cultural Assets, while *mudang* could be called the “keepers” of the culture, that was supposed to be preserved. However, the government only saw it for its artistic side, disregarding the reality of the shamans, which always did not correspond with the impressions of common people, who saw any event with a *mudang* as a possibility to get a bit of luck. The popularity of Christianity also grew during modernization. Christianity let itself be influenced by shamanism but had a rather negative view of the folk religion, which was often embraced by Koreans, who believed in Christianity. Nevertheless, the shamanistic symbols were often adopted by dissidents or students, who wanted to express their opinions about the government. Since shamanism was treated as something sincerely Korean, that was on the side of disadvantaged and persecuted classes.

3 Introduction to the practical part

3.1 Introduction

The second part of the bachelor thesis will try to analyze English-written articles from the media that report on shamanism. The oldest article is from 13th of January 2016 on The Korea Times, and the newest is from 29th of October 2022. Therefore, it will be an analysis of articles written during approximately six years. There are also few articles coming from English media not focused on Korea only, but general news - for instance, media such as BBC or Reuters - however, the English-written media focusing on Korea especially, have a more significant role, since these

⁸⁸ Walraven, *Our Shamanistic Past*, p. 20.

⁸⁹ Seo, *The Role of Shamanism*, p. 40.

⁹⁰ Walraven, *Our Shamanistic Past*, p. 20, 21.

are mostly reports, which are translated from the Korean-written news. This part will be divided into two main sections. First one will try to explain today's reality of shamans and indicate information that could be essential to understand the analysis. The second part will be the analysis of the articles alone. The analysis' fundamental center of attention would be how and what media report, what are the issues, or what exactly is discussed.

4 Korean shamanism and contemporary trends

As was mentioned already a few times before, shamanism did not evaporate throughout history even if elites attempted so, thus it is not surprising that shamanism still exists nowadays and is even thriving with a solid online presence. Shamans were quite swiftly accustomed to the new developments, being one of the first ones using the internet for commercials of online fortune telling.⁹¹ The website usually had a similar variation of services, like a guestbook, the possibility to contact the shaman through an email address, there was also phone or mobile number, and a map with directions towards shrines or *mudang*'s house.⁹²

Even though the "official" function of shamans shaped into the "keepers" of the Korean traditional culture in the government's eyes and some of the shamans actively labeled themselves as such⁹³, the role was still uncertain, for instance, the shamans could not and still cannot to this day register their religious practices as their profession. As mentioned, shamanism is not considered a religion either.⁹⁴ The effort of the government to maintain shamanism as an essential part of the culture was successful when UNESCO added the Jeju ritual to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009. A lot of shamans from the mainland migrated to Jeju Island after the ritual got recognition, but since they are not originally from Jeju, they cannot join the heritage projects.⁹⁵ It is said that around 300,000 shamans live in Korea,⁹⁶ yet with non-existent official statistics, it is hard to determine the real numbers. Nevertheless, shamans do have the opportunity to open their shrines, join the union of shamanism and organize rituals.⁹⁷ Also, with the new development of the government's opinion, the performances of *kut*, for instance, on the festivals, could be enjoyed by anyone, regardless of religion. However, under the condition that it had to pretend it is just a cultural event, without any spiritual context.⁹⁸

⁹¹ Sang-Hun Choe [Sanghun Chŏ]. "In the age of the Internet, Korean regain popularity." *The New York Times*, July 6, 2007. <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/06/world/asia/06iht-shaman.1.6527738.html>

⁹² Dirk Schlottman. *Cyber Shamanism in South Korea*. (Institute of Global Cyber Society Kyung Hee Cyber University, 2014), str 49.

⁹³ Walraven, *Our Shamanistic Past*, p. 16, 22.

⁹⁴ Seo, *The Role of Shamanism*, p. 24.

⁹⁵ Yun, *The Economic Imperative of UNESCO Recognition*, p. 183, 184.

⁹⁶ Sang-Hun Choe [Sanghun Chŏ]. "In the age of the Internet, Korean regain popularity." *The New York Times*, July 6, 2007. <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/06/world/asia/06iht-shaman.1.6527738.html>

⁹⁷ Seo, *The Role of Shamanism*, p. 24.

⁹⁸ Kendall, *Shamans, Nostalgias, and the IMF*, p. 32.

There are probably a large number of rituals happening every day, based on data from the Korea Worshippers Association annually more than 60,000 rituals are held,⁹⁹ but considering the importance of the privacy of the client, the rituals are mostly happening in secret. The new ways shamans can represent their practice are through social media such as Facebook, Twitter¹⁰⁰, Instagram, or YouTube.¹⁰¹ Some young shamans also post on their blogs.¹⁰² It is, nevertheless, used mostly for propagation and self-portrayal, because lots of practices, as was already mentioned, must be kept secret.¹⁰³

4.1 Current development of shamans' life and practices

As stated before, Hell Joseon is still a very current term that haunts younger generations. The crisis of unemployment followed by poverty, no endeavor to start a family, and a high suicide rate¹⁰⁴ with 26 deaths per 100 thousand population in 2021. Even though the rate decreased, since just a decade ago the number of deaths was as big as 31.7, it is still the highest ratio among members of the OECD.¹⁰⁵ And this does not concern only younger generations, it is considered a misfortune also to the generations of parents, who “invested” in their children through education, which is resulting in no desired outcome.¹⁰⁶

Mudang had to adapt to these new growing concerns if they wanted to earn money, which occurred for two of the rituals to be the most in-demand by clients. *Ch'aesukut* 제수굿, a ritual to increase happiness, and *uhwan'kut* 우환굿, a ritual to fight against misfortunes. Although *ch'aesukut* was one of the most favorite rituals over the recent decades, the traditional wish for the well-being of the whole family as the main point is substituted by integrating the person's attempt to achieve success and wealth.¹⁰⁷ Shamans are looked for not only to perform the rituals but also for advice, especially during elections, when politicians seek out shamans for recommendations that could help them to succeed, no matter what religion they believe in.¹⁰⁸ This could be seen also amid recent presidential elections happening in 2022. While televise debates of the candidates were happening, the conservative party's candidate, who happened to be also

⁹⁹ Karla Cruz, “Shamanism in Korea.” *Embassy of the Republic of Korea to Norway*, November 5, 2021. https://overseas.mofa.go.kr/no-en/brd/m_21237/view.do?seq=141&srchFr=&srchTo=&srchWord=&srchTp=&multi_itm_seq=0&itm_seq_1=0&itm_seq_2=0&company_cd=&company_nm=&page=1

¹⁰⁰ Schlottman, *Cyber Shamanism in South Korea*, p. 51.

¹⁰¹ Hojeong Kim [Hojōng Kim]. “Not Your Grandmother's Mudang, or Shaman.” *Korea JoongAng Daily*, August 29, 2021.

¹⁰² Sang-Hun Choe [Sanghun Chō]. “In the age of the Internet, Korean regain popularity.” *The New York Times*, July 6, 2007. <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/06/world/asia/06iht-shaman.1.6527738.html>

¹⁰³ Schlottman, *Cyber Shamanism in South Korea*, p. 51.

¹⁰⁴ Schlottman, *Dealing with Uncertainty: 'Hell Joseon'*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ N.N. “Suicide rate South Korea 2000-2021.” Statista, October 4, 2022.

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/789337/south-korea-suicide-death-rate/>

¹⁰⁶ Schlottman, *Dealing with Uncertainty: 'Hell Joseon'*, p. 8, 9.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 5, 8—11.

¹⁰⁸ Sang-Hun Choe [Sanghun Chō]. “In the age of the Internet, Korean regain popularity.” *The New York Times*, July 6, 2007. <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/06/world/asia/06iht-shaman.1.6527738.html>

elected president in 2022, Yoon Suk-yeol (윤석열), had a symbol meaning “king” (王) on his palm, perceived as a shamanic, magic symbol. He was criticized, also called names such as “shaman president” by other politicians, who also viewed it as an absurd situation going around with the magic symbols on his palm. Once more, this situation could suggest that shamanism, even though proclaimed as an important part of Korean culture, is again perceived in a bad light and as something “absurd” or superstitious. One of the prospective candidates, Yu Sŭngmin, even pondered over the question if someone like this should be a candidate or even a president. Despite Yoon rejecting any connection of the symbol to shamanism, arguing that it was “just a message from the supporter who wished for him to be confident as king during debate”, he indeed apologized and claimed he should have been more careful to wash it off. Nevertheless, even after this situation and his election, he is often repeatedly found in circumstances involving shamans and shamanistic practices.¹⁰⁹

However, the current president is far from the only one who has been connected to shamans in some way. Back in 2016, the scandal of president Park Geun-hye, which is considered one of the biggest in years, consisted of the shaman too, and some even labeled her as a Korean Rasputin.¹¹⁰ And this could go even further into the past, where the father of president Park Geun-hye, Park Chung-hee, who was a military director back in the 60s and 70s, was close with fortune-teller Ch'oe T'aemin, whose daughter is Ch'oe Sunsil, later known as the Korean Rasputin. On top of that, Ch'oe T'aemin, who established a cult that fused mostly Buddhism and Christianity, was also compared to Rasputin, but this time in the leaked U.S. State Department cable.¹¹¹ Park Geun-hye admitted that Ch'oe helped her with “public relations” issues and did some editing work on her presidential speeches.¹¹² Even though an investigation by police and media reports connoted that her involvement was much deeper. The charges accused Ch'oe of using her influence, embezzling money, and taking care of classified documents, yet she did not have either security clearance or an official position.¹¹³ Nonetheless, some *mudang* criticized the media for labeling her as a shaman, calling it a “disgrace”. The information, that Ch'oe is a shaman, was assumed because of the colorful pockets that she created for Pak’s inauguration ceremony. However,

¹⁰⁹ Mina Kim. “S. Korean conservative party’s primary devolves into row over shamanistic beliefs.” *Hankyoreh*, October 4, 2021.

¹¹⁰ 양승진 [Sŭngjin Yang]. “What’s behind S. Korea’s surreal scandal.” *Korea Herald*, November 3, 2016. <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20161102000971>

¹¹¹ Ishaan Tharoor. “South Korea’s president is hardly the only leader to turn to mystics and shamans.” *The Washington Post*, November 2, 2016.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/11/02/south-koreas-president-is-hardly-the-only-leader-to-turn-to-mystics-and-shamans/>

¹¹² 양승진 [Sŭngjin Yang]. “What’s behind S. Korea’s surreal scandal.” *Korea Herald*, November 3, 2016. <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20161102000971>

¹¹³ Ishaan Tharoor. “South Korea’s president is hardly the only leader to turn to mystics and shamans.” *The Washington Post*, November 2, 2016.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/11/02/south-koreas-president-is-hardly-the-only-leader-to-turn-to-mystics-and-shamans/>

shamans claimed that this was not any shamanic ritual, as it was just part of Korean folklore. Additionally, they argued that neither Ch'oe nor her father was *mudang*, since they never went through the process that any shaman must undergo and just imitated shamanistic practices.¹¹⁴ This suggests that the media often portrayed things differently, however, the possibility that shamans are often involved in the highest politics is not whatsoever ruled out. And clearly, this is also something frowned upon among other politics.

As was already mentioned, according to most of the *mudang*, clients' desires shifted, shamans called them as much as obsessed with getting rich quickly¹¹⁵ and without much effort, if the response to the wishes from the gods was not fast enough, clients were displeased rapidly with shamans' services. Besides, demands on the shamans were rising, as too greedy shamans were not popular, since the idea is to get everything as cheap and fast as possible. But, on the other hand, older women were commonly inclined to their ideas about the rituals and ritual's parts, which often led to criticism of shamans if they did not comply with particular methods.¹¹⁶ Based on the dialogue with a shaman in Kendall's book, while in the 70s and 80s rituals for good fortune were rare and rituals to send off the ancestors were indeed common, in the 90s and later, clients prefer to include some small offerings for the ancestors in a *kut* that is held for their interests. Also, an example of the new motives for rituals could be seen in rituals such as *ch'a kosa*, which was said to be performed quite frequently as a small ritual for a newly bought car of a family.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, one of the most important factors that influenced the lives of every Korean, consequently also the clients, was the IMF crisis and the subsequent progression of the society.

4.1.1 IMF crisis and recent movements in South Korea

During the 90s, predominantly small and medium-sized businesses went bankrupt,¹¹⁸ followed by the crucial year 1997, where also large industrial conglomerates - *ch'aebol* - bankrupted as well. Korea was basically on the edge of bankruptcy, at this point the arrangement with the IMF was requested by the government. There was huge financial aid from several parties, however with conditions concerning macroeconomic, financial, and restructuring policies. If the program of the IMF was suitable or not is questionable, as there could be found a lot of works criticizing but also supporting the program.¹¹⁹ Nonetheless, this situation struck the whole country and therefore affected shamans and their clients.

¹¹⁴ Ha-young Choi [Ch'oi Hayoung]. "Don't call Choi Soon-sil a shaman, it's a disgrace to shamans '무당을 모독하지 말라' 최순실 무당 지칭에 무속인들 빨났다." *Korea Times*, November 8, 2016. http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2016/11/113_217758.html

¹¹⁵ Kendall, *Shamans, Nostalgias, and the IMF*, p. 131.

¹¹⁶ Schlottman, *Dealing with Uncertainty: 'Hell Joseon'*, p. 14, 15.

¹¹⁷ Kendall, *Shamans, Nostalgias, and the IMF*, p. 131, 132.

¹¹⁸ Kendall, *Shamans, Nostalgias, and the IMF*, p. 145.

¹¹⁹ David T. Coe, and Se-Jik Kim [Sejik Kim], eds. "Korean Crisis and Recovery." International Monetary Fund, September 12, 2002. <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/nft/seminar/2002/korean/>

With the unemployment and homelessness rate surging, anxiety could be felt throughout the Korean population and while the problems of clients, such as job or business loss, were well-known even before the whole crisis happened, shamans alike could feel the crisis. People simply did not have enough money to sponsor *kut*, even at the lowered prices. As reported by Kendall, some shamans claimed to perform rituals for “white-collar” jobs, which was rare back when employment was rather stable in the corporate world. While shamans declared to help people during these hardships, unsurprisingly, South Korean media chided them for making a profit from the crisis. At the beginning of the new century, the situation gradually improved,¹²⁰ still, this period is often called one of the worst national crises after the Korean War.¹²¹

As already stated before, with the new millennium even shamans have not escaped the use of the internet. However, according to shamans interviewed by Schlottman, they mostly did not consider the internet as the factor that could somehow change the ritual practices of “real shamans”, because it had to be done in person, during the encounter with shamans. They mostly predicted that if cyberspace is going to have some role, it will probably be used only for providing information and knowledge, even in the future. There is also mentioned a website for shamans: <http://mudang.com>, which is, unfortunately, not working at the moment. Nevertheless, it could be considered one of the most essential platforms for shamans at the time.¹²² Currently, if the popularity of the website Naver and the application KakaoTalk is considered,¹²³ it probably could be helpful for shamans and their practices as well. For instance, some *mudang* takes reservations through Naver and does consultation through KakaoTalk—basically using social media to communicate with people. And even though she underwent the formal process to become *mudang*, the way she is communicating with her clients is distinctive from previous generations.¹²⁴ After paying a visit to the shaman’s page on the Naver, it is possible only to do reservations for 부직, the talisman or charm, which takes about 30 minutes according to the page. There is also the possibility for consultations however the client wishes. Either face-to-face, via messages, calls, or video-call.¹²⁵

Worth mentioning is also the situation of women in South Korea. As was described before, after Confucianism took over as the main ideology of the country, women mostly did not possess

¹²⁰ Kendall, *Shamans, Nostalgias, and the IMF*, p. 145-148.

¹²¹ David T. Coe, and Se-Jik Kim [Sejik Kim], eds. “Korean Crisis and Recovery.” International Monetary Fund, September 12, 2002. <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/nft/seminar/2002/korean/>

¹²² Schlottman, *Cyber Shamanism in South Korea*, p. 37, 38, 44.

¹²³ “Social Media in South Korea -What Are the Most Popular Platforms for Digital Marketing?” *Inquivix*, May 11, 2022. <https://inquivix.com/digital-marketing-in-south-korea/social-media-in-south-korea/>

¹²⁴ Hojeong Kim [Hojöng Kim]. “Not Your Grandmother’s Mudang, or Shaman.” *Korea JoongAng Daily*, August 29, 2021.

¹²⁵ “칼리신당. [K'allishindang]” 네이버 예약 [Neibö yeyak]. Accessed October 26, 2022. <https://m.booking.naver.com/booking/10/bizes/573442?fbclid=IwAR196K00GdGxYYxdla0O-mPNkpSzUoPmhF7fs7L6sU0mAPEyHD-3ePWNTro>

important statuses and did not get the education that men did. It could be assumed that the view of shamans by the elites could be influenced also by the fact *mudang* and their clients likely were mostly women.

Feminism would be gaining attention already around the 90s. It could be visible for instance in Shakespeare's theater plays, specifically, in the context of shamanism, Hamlet, and the character of Ophelia. "...usually Ophelia is a medium who is possessed by a ghost...she reminds us of traditional Korean women. Ophelia can be said to be a victim of a patriarchal society,"¹²⁶ is a description of "Koreanized" Ophelia from Yi Hyonu in Shamanism in Korean "Hamlets" since 1990: Exorcising Han. Since Ophelia's desires were never unveiled, the consequence is her madness, which is the only way she could be free from prejudice and social customs. That is one of the ways a certain amount of people became *mudang*. While some inherited such positions, around 65 % became shamans due to distresses like family problems or mental disorders. The depiction of each Ophelia is unique in the Korean versions of Hamlet; however, her shamanistic role is constantly repeated. Considering the relationship between shamanism and feminine power, it is no surprise. *Mudang* in the shamans show were mostly individual women who gained power from religious practices, even though they were outside of the Confucian structure's boundaries, which was emphasized by Janice C. H. Kim based on case studies.¹²⁷ The rising voice of feminists "peaked" during the years 2016 and 2017 with former president Moon Jae-in promising to be "feminist president". Nonetheless, nowadays, feminism could be considered almost a dirty word in South Korea. A huge number of young Korean men are of the opinion that they are being ignored and see women as a threat.¹²⁸ That is one of the factors that also influenced the 2022 elections when Yoon asserted an "anti-feminist" stance and for instance said there is no need to focus on women's rights anymore.¹²⁹

Another trend to notice is the appearance of shamans in entertainment. There could be found cinematics influenced by shaman traditions or even those that had a shaman as one of the main protagonists. For instance, 'The Shaman Sorceress' got a jury award at Annecy animation film festival. A story about *mudang* living with her family – husband and mute daughter, when her son, who converted to Christianity, comes back home. This causes conflict and tragedy for the whole family.¹³⁰ Although in this case, the portrayed shaman was a woman, there are quite a

¹²⁶ Hyon-u Lee [Hyonu Yi]. "Shamanism in Korean 'Hamlets' since 1990: Exorcising Han." *Asian Theatre Journal* 28, no. 1 (2011), p. 106.

¹²⁷ Lee, Shamanism in Korean "Hamlets", p. 106, 107, 114.

¹²⁸ Yoonjung Seo [Yunjung Sŏ], Julie Hollingsworth. "How feminism became a hot topic in South Korea's presidential election." *CNN International*, March 8, 2022. <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/03/08/asia/south-korea-election-young-people-intl-hnk-dst/index.html>

¹²⁹ Raphael Rashid. "'Devastated': gender equality hopes on hold as 'anti-feminist' voted South Korea's president." *The Guardian*, March 11, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/11/south-korea-gender-equality-anti-feminist-president-yoon-suk-yeol>

¹³⁰ Ji-won Park [Jiwŏn Park]. "'The Shaman Sorceress' wins jury award at Annecy animation film festival." *The Korea Times*, June 22, 2020.

handful of movies or series with shaman being one of the essential elements, however, it is the role played by the male actor. For example, the crime thriller ‘The Wailing’ from 2016, where a male shaman is invited to perform *kut* due to gruesome murders.¹³¹ In the thriller series from 2018 ‘The Guest’ once again the shaman is played by the male, while also combining the concept of the shamanistic ritual and exorcism, more typical for Christianity.¹³² One of the newest movies, ‘Daemuga’ (2022), which is blending a mix of genres and pointing out real issues of today’s society. Three shamans who make efforts to perform *kut*, but these characters are once again played by male actors.¹³³ Throughout history until today, the largest representation of shamans was women, as mentioned before. However, on first look it could be noted, that in some of the movies or series the role is played by men, as even the shaman characters are men, which in reality is indeed rare, as already said in the first chapter.

Shamans in contemporary Korea are not focused on healing issues anymore, such as during smallpox epidemics, because the Western style of medicine is predominant and advanced. Still, shamans often consult clients who have issues that are considered taboo matters. For example, personality disorders are regarded as shameful and often left with no proper medical care. And while *mudang* are not professionals in any way, people often come to them for advice or help with such concerns. Shamans often call their practices the “treatment of the soul”, as they give spiritual-cultural context to clients’ despair and troubles, help clients to voice them out, and aim to support their reintegration back into society.¹³⁴

Since the beginning of the millennium, there were quite a few factors, that influenced the whole Korean country, thus also shamanism. From the importance of the internet and social media to the shift of clients’ difficulties and hardships. The status of shamans in eyes of the government still being the one, who rather just preserves the culture, than religious practitioners. Shamans as characters in movies are also getting recognition in Korean entertainment. Although, many times depicted as men characters. Nevertheless, *mudang* and their rituals are still relevant, not just for common people, but also for politicians, as mentioned. Crises of almost everyone shifted, as the demand for rituals for success and wealth is high, it seems that essential is also consultation or help in taboo topics.

¹³¹ Suh-young Yun [Suhyoung Yun]. “‘The Wailing’: thriller posing spiritual questions.” *Korea Times*, May 9, 2016.

¹³² Jin-hai Park [Jinhai Pak]. “‘The Guest’ explores exorcism, supernatural power.” *Korea Times*, September 9, 2018.

¹³³ Yeon-soo Kwak [Yönsu Kwak]. “Multi-genre film ‘Daemuga’ adds shamanic voice to hip-hop.” *Korea Times*, September 28, 2022.

¹³⁴ Schlottman, *Dealing with Uncertainty: “Hell Joseon”*, p. 22, 34.

5 Analysis of articles about shamanism

The analysis aim is to portray how and what the media report about shamans and shamanism generally. Since there are also few articles about Korean shamanism in international media, I decided to divide the analysis into two parts, whereas the first part is dedicated to articles from international media and the second part is about English language Korean media, that have a more significant role in the context of the thesis.

5.1 Used methodology

The method used is qualitative, proposing a typology of what and how the chosen media report about shamanism, while interpreting the content of these articles on the light of the whole text corpus as well as in the light of the general knowledge laid out in the first part of this thesis. The articles were found using the search tool on each website and keywords: Shaman, shamanism, *mudang*, folk religion. Then all the articles were reviewed in view of the purpose of the present thesis, excluding articles that just contained the word shaman in the text, without reporting anything of relevance regarding the topic of this thesis.

5.2 International media

The number of chosen articles from the English media, that are reporting about shamanism, is twelve. Here is a list of the media and in the brackets is the number of the articles found on the websites:

1. Reuters (5)
2. The Guardian (4)
3. The New York Times (1)
4. The Sydney Morning Herald (1)
5. The Washington Post (1)

The main purpose of some of the articles is to introduce shamanism in the context of some concrete issues taking place in South Korea to the readers of the articles. They mostly contain basic information about the shamans, just to understand the background and inform the reader about the phenomenon of shamanism existing in South Korea, even after the fast development of the country. Some of these articles have an interview with *mudang* and/or *mudang*'s clients, who often express their experience or opinion on the matter, frequently extended with experts' insight.

There are three articles from 2016 reporting on the once already mentioned scandal of Park Geun-hye and her advisor, who is considered a shaman by the media. They were published by the Washington Post, the Sydney Morning Herald, and the Guardian.

One of the articles, published by the Guardian back in 1998, with the headline: "Korean shamans blame Christian extremists for raid on royal bomb" reported about an occurrence

related to vandalism of statues and tombs. Admiral Yi Sunsin's tombs were damaged by tools of traditional shamans, which sent "shockwaves" throughout the country. Afterward, statues of Tangun were beheaded by Christian extremists, expressing their negative opinion on the campaign for enforcing the beliefs of Korean mythology. The shaman who tarnished the tombs turned herself in with the explanation that, since the admiral was appearing in her dreams, she did the ritual there to cure herself from headache. However, the police speculated motivation with a deeper meaning for her actions. The article also included the point of view of one of the most famous *mudang* in the country at the time – Kim K'ŭmhwa. In her eyes, it was a strategic move to discredit shamanism, as the behavior of the female *mudang* was called the acts of "cutting the bloodlines of the family and the nation."¹³⁵ One of the Reuters articles is discussing the trend of "fate cafes", where anyone can come to find out about what the future holds for them while explaining what are the factors that determine such – facial characters and birth dates. The article also mentions that this way could be more comfortable for the clients instead of the *kut*, which is labeled as outdated for younger generations and intimidating even for older customers because of its nature: "The glaring eyes, raised voices, and bluntly given information – and not always pleasant information, at that – of the *mudang* shamans can be intimidating."¹³⁶ However, this article did not explain the purpose of the *kut* any further, basically comparing it to the fortune-telling in the café. As was explained, the rituals of shamans are performed in case of any misfortune or troubles, that can be taboo in the society, while fortune-telling is about revealing the fate of the person. This article also used term "*mudang* shamans".

Even international media did not fail to notice the current president's relation with shamans as two of the media – Reuters and the Guardian – published a total of four articles about Yoon Suk-yeol and his decisions correlated to the shaman that the president's wife presumably often debate with about important issues. Recently, there are two articles about his decision to move out of the Blue House, also upon recommendation of "feng shui experts" as labeled by Reuters¹³⁷ or the Guardian's "shamanistic healers". Though the allegation was denied by the president, calling it a strategy of the political opponents how to discredit him.¹³⁸

Although the coverage of the topic is not the biggest in international media, which is not that surprising, considering how taboo shamanism throughout history was, it can be assumed that foreign media did indeed notice the folk religion and issues around it. And even further back in the past, the first article about shamanism that could be found in the Guardian's online version,

¹³⁵ John Gittings. "Korean shamans blame Christian extremists for raid on royal tomb." The Guardian, July 15, 1999.

¹³⁶ "Seoul cafes offer up tea, cake -- and fate." Reuters, November 19, 2010. <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSLNE6AI04X20101119>

¹³⁷ Hyonhee Shin, Yeni Seo [Hyonhee Sin, Yeni Sŏ]. "Good move? S. Korean president's home stirs feng shui furore." Reuters, March 18, 2022.

¹³⁸ Justin McCurry, Raphael Rashid. "Claims of shamans and curses as South Korea's president shuns official residence." The Guardian. May 10, 2022.

came out in 1998 reporting on the conflict between shamans and Christians. Some of the media articles mentioned the curiosity that even though it is the age of the internet, shamanism is thriving. Considering how big of an affair the situation with Park Geun-hye in 2016, it is no surprise at all that there were around three articles about her and Ch'oe Sunsil. However, given the recent occurrences of Yoon Suk-yeol with shamanism, it is discussed quite often in the media, with four articles in media.

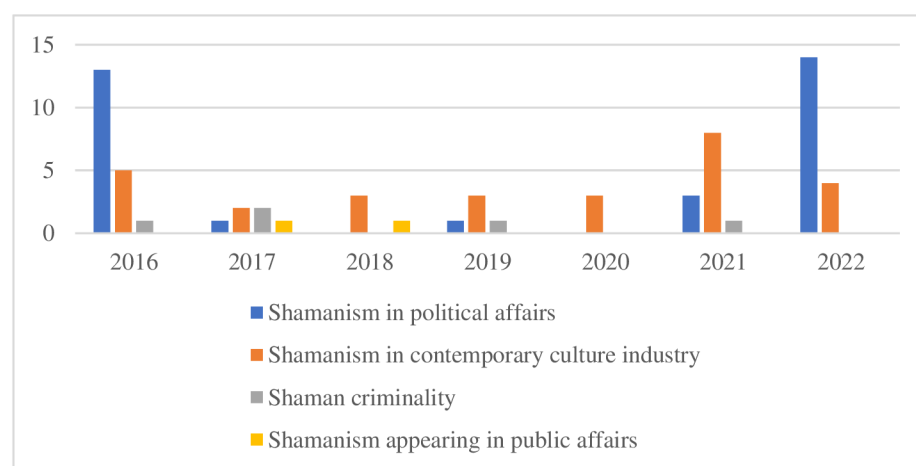
5.3 Korean English-written media

This part of the analysis focuses on Korean media written in the English language. Altogether there are 67 articles, and they were published on three websites of Korean media: the Korea Herald, the Hankyoreh, and the Korea Times. Even though there are also older articles, I decided to analyze what was reported during approximately the last six years, the first article was published on January 13, 2016, and the last one on October 29 in 2022. There were twenty-five articles from the Korea Times, twenty-nine from the Korea Herald, and the website with the least number of articles was the Hankyoreh with twelve articles.

The next step was to categorize these articles according to the topic, which was settled into four categories:

1. Shamanism in political affairs
2. Shaman criminality
3. Shamanism in the contemporary culture industry
4. Shamanism appearing in public affairs

The results of how many articles in all three media were in each category each year are following:



Graph 1: Articles sorted according to category and year of publication

5.3.1 Shamanism in political affairs

As shown in Graph 1, the involvement of shamans in articles about politics is mostly during 2016 and 2022, with rising numbers in 2021 as well. It is related to two issues that were already mentioned in Chapter 4.1.

In 2016 all three English-language media screened for this thesis were writing about the engagement of Ch'oe Sunsil with former president Park Geun-hye. And again, even though there was no direct evidence of her being a shaman, she was called such by the media. Nevertheless, the *Korea Times* and the *Korea Herald* did publish articles with opinions of shamans that claim that the allegations were false and that "...the tradition and history of Korean shamanism is being dragged through the dirt when strictly, it is not related to the scandal," as declared by the head of the Korean Federation of Shamanism, Yi Wŏnbok.¹³⁹ There are different types of articles, for instance, opinions on the whole situation, where a student of Kyŏnghŭi University, Ku Yaerin, shared her viewpoint on the issue, arguing that for Korean people it did not matter what kind of religion is involved, either be it Buddhism, Christianity or shamanism. What angered them is the fact that the president was a "puppet to some random woman".¹⁴⁰ Both the *Korea Times* and the *Korea Herald* covered this.

An article from November 9, 2016, reported about the Public Safety minister nominee resigning due to participation in shamanistic activities and issues with plagiarism. This was reported around the same time when all the issues regarding Park Geun-hye emerged.¹⁴¹ While the *Korea Herald* did not offer details what kind of shamanistic activities he participated in, the *Korea Times* made clear that he was an organizer of the shamanistic events, where also *kut* happened. The nominee, Pak Sŭngju, claimed, it was only a cultural event, that could help people who felt anxiety over the increasing risk of earthquakes and threats from North Korea's military.¹⁴²

The last article mentioning the scandal with Ch'oe Sunsil is from 2019 from the *Hankyoreh* as it reports about the arrest of the former National Police Agency Commissioner for interfering with elections during the administration of Park Geun-hye. Additionally, he was communicating with Ch'oe Sunsil, since he sent her annual reports based on shamanism and divination.¹⁴³ In 2017, a "fortune teller" called "Dr. Corn" managed to make it into the headlines as one of the fringe candidates to run for presidency. Among the English newspapers screened for this thesis, only the *Korea Herald* found this worth reporting. However, there is just a small mention of his profession and education and then the article continues with information about other candidates for president.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Romy Doo. "'Choi Soon-sil is sullyng tradition, shamanism'." *Korea Herald*, November 17, 2016. <https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20161117000844>

¹⁴⁰ Yae-rin Ku [Yaerin Ku]. "Religious cult and 'Choi gate'." *Korea Times*, November 17, 2016. http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/opinion/2016/11/137_218418.html

¹⁴¹ Hyŏnchŏng Yi. "Public safety minister nominee steps down over shamanism controversy." *Korea Herald*, November 9, 2016.

¹⁴² Min-ho Jung [Minho Jung]. "Government of cultists?" *Korea Times*. November 7, 2016.

¹⁴³ "[Photo] National police commissioner sent Park reports based on divination." *Hankyoreh*, May 17, 2019.

¹⁴⁴ Se-hwan Bak [Sehwan Bak]. "[Election 2017] Fringe candidates include shaman, 'Dr. Corn'." *Korea Herald*, April 9, 2017.

After this, there was no article about any issue regarding shamans and politics, however, since the election of the new president was getting closer, following 2021 there could be seen a rise in the category of Shamanism in political affairs. That is associated with the connection of current president Yoon Suk-yeol with shamanism, which started to happen already during the pre-election period when he claimed that he does not see any fortune-tellers, does not know how his mother-in-law visits them and emphasized that some Korean women also go to fortune-tellers. Then he was seen with the shamanistic symbol on his hand during the debate.¹⁴⁵ As was mentioned, other nominees rather harshly criticized him. About this pondered the article written by David. A. Tizzard published for the Korea Herald. He shared his impression of the “hunt” that happened whenever a politician was somehow involved in shamanistic practices, which he considered weird since shamanism is the most “Korean” of all the other religions existing in the country, after all. Tizzard suggests that belief in shamanism is unfairly looked upon by contrast to Christian belief: “Nevertheless, it does strike me as incredibly strange that one man having a Chinese character written on his hand for good luck is deemed evidence of him being unfit to rule yet were his opponent to wear a cross around his neck this would be, if not agreeable to all, perfectly acceptable to polite society.”¹⁴⁶

While the media Korea Herald and the Hankyoreh were active in reporting about the situation of the current president and shamans, the Korea Times published only three articles, one of them being Tizzard’s opinion piece, As for the two other, one reported mainly about the calls that happened between Kim Kōnhūi, the president’s wife and online news reporter, where she expressed her controversial opinions and declared that she enjoys talking to “fortune tellers”.¹⁴⁷ The last one is the summary of crucial issues around Yoon’s involvement with shamanism before his election when he was prosecutor general. He allegedly ordered to not investigate the cult, Sinch’ōnji, which was blamed for the main outbreak of COVID-19. His order was said to have been influenced by advice from his fortune-teller Kōnjin, who, supposedly, would have had a deeper relationship with Yoon and his wife, Kim Keon-hee, than they admitted, as revealed by the already mentioned seven-hour long call between Kim and a reporter.¹⁴⁸

5.3.2 Shamanism in contemporary culture industry

Of all four categories, this is the second with the most the articles, with a number 28. As was already mentioned, the government considered shamanism as part of Korean culture from the past.

¹⁴⁵ Hyeong-woo Kan [Hyōngwu Kan] “Once tight-lipped Yoon talks self into trouble.” *Korea Herald*, October 6, 2021.

¹⁴⁶ David A. Tizzard. “Metaverses, Shamanism and Christianity.” *Korea Times*, January 29, 2022.

¹⁴⁷ Dong-hwan Ko [Donghwan Ko]. “Wife risk emerges as double-edged sword for PPP presidential candidate.” *Korea Times*, January 17, 2022.

¹⁴⁸ Dong-hwan Ko [Donghwan Ko]. “Fortune-telling and Korea’s presidential election.” *Korea Times*, January 28, 2022.

Therefore, the assumption that this category will be one of the most comprehensive of them all would not be absolutely wrong.

From articles about movies with shamans, dance performances, or exhibitions infused with shamanistic elements to the opening of the shaman museum and interviews with shamans. This is also the only category, where anything was published at all regarding shamanism during 2020, which was the year when the COVID-19 epidemic started. Both the *Korea Herald* and the *Korea Times* published articles about the animated movie “The Shaman Sorceress”, which won the jury award. The last article of this year is about an exhibition, that describes how epidemics were dealt with in the past. It was done through rituals for spirits as well. The article also mentioned smallpox,¹⁴⁹ which was also indicated in Chapter 2.3, where was explained that even in the 20th century the ritual conducted by *mudang* was the standard way to heal it. The article also mentions that Chosŏn dynasty doctors realized how, for instance, the plague, was spread. However, kings still held rituals and common people trusted shamans while perceiving restrictions during the epidemics and behaving according to them, as well.¹⁵⁰

There are six interviews with persons, that are somehow connected to shamanism. Two of them were famous personas before. Model, who was famous during her teen years¹⁵¹ and veteran actor, Jŏng Hokŭn, who changed his profession in 2014. In the interview with Jŏng, he explains his experience from childhood, where his grandmother was *mudang*, however, his father was ashamed of her. His mother wanted him to be quiet about everything associated with shamanism as well, so he accepted it was not a good job. He also discussed the judgment of shamans in society, as also his actor career happened to be on hiatus since he became a shaman. Apparently, casting directors were hesitant to cast someone who is well-known shaman, according to his words. Nevertheless, he has a channel on YouTube, where he counsels celebrities and says to use the platform to change the shaman typical image a public could have as he does not appear in colored clothes and heavy make-up.¹⁵² In the interview from The Hankyoreh with Ch'oe Chunsik, the founder of K-Culture Center, could be noticed that, while in other interviews from other two media, there is often mentioned, how Koreans have a “love-hate relationship” with shamanism, “it triggers conflicting views and attitudes” and “...they [shamans] are still widely frowned upon by the majority of the public”, in this one Ch'oe claims every Korean is half-shaman. Even though it emphasized it is Ch'oe's point of view, there is an acknowledgment that Koreans with different religions come to shamans for help in any difficulties and that

¹⁴⁹ Mee-yoo Kwon [Mŭiyu Kwŏn]. “Museum shares ancestors’ insights into epidemics.” *Korea Times*, May 11, 2020. http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/art/2020/05/398_289348.html

¹⁵⁰ *ibid*

¹⁵¹ “Teen star reveals how she became a shaman.” *Korea Times*, January 13, 2016.

¹⁵² Min-sik Yoon [Minsik Yun]. “[Interview] ‘It’s just a job’: Actor-turned-shaman speaks against prejudice toward shamanism.” *The Korea Herald*, October 29, 2022. <https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20221028000653>

“...some people will present themselves like traditional Confucian scholars during the day, but turn into shamans by night.” In his opinion, it is also no surprise that titles of TV programs often use shamanistic terminology and why no one finds it weird “...is because of the shamanist energy that courses through Koreans’ veins.”¹⁵³

There are 8 articles about movies or series that have a shaman as one of the characters. And as was already mentioned before, most of the shaman characters in the referred movies are men. And even though, The Korea Herald published this interview with the actor, a man, who became a shaman, the majority of shamans are women, as was already said above. In the same interview, there is also a claim at the beginning of the article saying “...many Koreans have a love-hate relationship with traditional shamans, or “mudangs” as they are called here,”¹⁵⁴ which could imply they did not distinguish a difference between shamanistic terms, since *mudang* is mostly used to refer to a female shaman, as said in Chapter 1.2, however, this interview is with the male shaman.

5.3.3 Shaman criminality

However, throughout the analyzed years, with a total of five articles about the topic, all of them were reported only by one newspaper, *The Korea Herald*. Even though there is a possibility that other media also reported these crimes, they were not found under any searched keyword.

Most of these articles are about shamans who in some way harassed someone. For instance, there is a report about sexual assault done by a shaman during the ritual, published in 2017, where *mudang* was found guilty of the crime. The English article used the Korean term *mudang*, but it was used in the context as the translation for the word shaman. The shaman was imprisoned for six months for ripping the victim’s clothes while performing the ritual, which caused the victim to feel sexually harassed.¹⁵⁵ There was another article from 2019, which specified, that a male shaman was a culprit, who was also accused of rape among other things.¹⁵⁶ Or an article about a couple, who abused their niece to the death, because she was possessed by a demon in their opinion, “...the wife was found to be shaman,” as disclosed in the article.¹⁵⁷ Another article reported the brutal murder of a girl done by her mother and brother. They claimed that she was possessed. The article then revealed that the mother had a “spiritual illness”, which

¹⁵³ “[Interview] Uncovering the cultural, spiritual energy behind the Korean Wave.” *Hankyoreh*, June 9, 2022. https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/1046376.html

¹⁵⁴ Min-sik Yoon [Minsik Yun]. “[Interview] ‘It’s just a job’: Actor-turned-shaman speaks against prejudice toward shamanism.” *Korea Herald*, October 29, 2022. <https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20221028000653>

¹⁵⁵ Eun-byel Im [Ūnpyel Im]. “Shaman found guilty in ritualistic sexual harassment.” *Korea Herald*, December 3, 2017.

¹⁵⁶ He-suk Choi [Hesuk Ch’oe]. “Shaman on trial for sexual assault.” *Korea Herald*, February 15, 2019.

¹⁵⁷ “Couple indicted on murder charge over fatal abuse of 10-year-old niece.” *Korea Herald*, March 7, 2021.

could be deemed as a shamanic calling, while also her grandparent was a shaman.¹⁵⁸ Even though all four articles are about shamans committing crimes, there is one that reports about the shaman, who won the court being accused of fraud for doing an enormous number of rituals, 133, which cost the client around 560 million won. Nonetheless, the court sided with the shaman, as there was a chance that the victim relied on the shaman's services deliberately to escape her hardships.¹⁵⁹

5.3.4 Shamanism appearing in public affairs

In the last category are only two articles, that discussed shamanism as resulting from hardships and unfair conditions and also as siding with those who suffer under such conditions. For instance, there is an article reporting about “spirit marriages”; how many shamans and fortune tellers are all together in South Korea.

A *Korea Times* article from 2017 focused on how many people were doing the profession of fortune tellers and shamans. Although it distinguished that the methods of both are different while having a similar goal, once again it mentioned that the shamans are simply called “*mudang*” in Korea. The article reported that there were around one million fortune tellers and shamans, and their numbers were rising, in spite the fact of the economic downturn. This was explained by Cho Sungche, head of the Institute of Muchŏn Culture, with a statement that during the hardships due to economic troubles, lots of people becomes shaman as a result of spirit possession.¹⁶⁰

Although in the article about spirit marriages from 2018 the main topic was victims of the Kwangju Massacre in 1980, it mentioned the fact that spirit marriage is a ritual performed by a shaman. The ritual is called the “afterlife marriage” ceremony and the shaman performed a song for young bride and groom who could not get married, while their mothers were present. Even though it is just a short acknowledgment of the shaman's role in it, it is evident that rituals like that were still happening even in 2018. The ritual went on for three days, for two souls, that suffered their death too young, due to violence of the massacre.¹⁶¹ Thus, it can be assumed, that, in this case, shamanism sided with those who were oppressed, and became victims of the regime as could be seen throughout the history.

¹⁵⁸ Jeong-yeo Lim [Jŏngyŏ Lim]. “Filicidal mother claims daughter was ‘possessed’.” *Korea Herald*, August 22, 2016.

¹⁵⁹ Jeong-yeo Lim [Jŏngyŏ Lim]. “Shaman ruled not guilty of fraud.” *Korea Herald*, August 30, 2017.

¹⁶⁰ Eun-ju Chyung [Ŭnchu Ch'yun]. “South Korea has 1 million shamans, fortune tellers.” *Korea Times*, November 27, 2017.

¹⁶¹ “Citizens hold ‘spirit marriages’ to honor victims of Gwangju Massacre.” *The Hankyoreh*, May 20, 2018.

Conclusion

Korean shamanism has a long history, and it is deeply rooted into Korean society. This thesis attempted to unfold what kind of status had shamanism and shamans throughout the history to present days. There are assumptions, that shamans were the ones who ruled over the clans in Ancient Chosŏn. However, with an import of new religion, Buddhism, and afterwards new ideology, Confucianism, the role of shamans slowly but surely decreased, mostly in eyes of the elites. Even though they still had some role on condition of performing rituals in case of some disasters, shamans became oppressed group of the society. Nonetheless, different case was with common people, who still visited *mudang* whenever they felt the need to do ritual. Either for their ancestors or due to sickness or some kind of unluckiness. Even though the oppression continued and was stronger during and even after colonization from Japan, because of actions of the Japanese, the urgency to find something purely Korean grew among scholars. The shamanism was great example of that and even though scholars started to slowly advocate that, the anti-superstition campaigns continued. Later, the government did embrace that shamanism was essential part of the Korean culture and promoted it as such, still, shamans were mostly considered only as “keepers” of such culture. This also led to Jeju ritual being added to UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. However, how government described shamanism did not correlate with the reality of shamans, who were and are still active in their practices, adjusting to situations and trends.

Every now and then, issues related to Korean shamanism catches the attention of international media as well. In such cases, it is mostly about the engagement of shamans in politics, which is considered as scandalous. In case of Park Geun-hye, the possibility that Ch’oe Sunsil might not be shaman at all was not mentioned, which, truth to say, was not emphasized in most of the articles in Korean English-written media either. The international media provided articles with basic information about shamanism adding interviews with shamans too. This could suggest that shamanism is fundamental enough for Korean society to be noticed by foreign media.

The second part of analysis is based on that during in less than six years there could be found 67 articles. Most articles fit either in category of politics issues or culturally themed category. Once again, the politics affairs with shamanism were mostly due to controversies on the political scene, where it could be assumed it is not suitable for politicians to be connected to shamanism in any way, as the situation of current president hints. Even though in eyes of Westerner it could be considered absurd, it seems to be substantial for the Korean society according to how many articles in Korean English-written media are published about such issue.

Shamanism is described by the government mostly as part of Korean culture and not a religious practice and there are many articles that write about the usage of anything related to

shamanism in the culture. Even though these articles do not go deeply into anything related to, for example, practices of shamans, they offer a curious glimpse to how embodied the folk religion in the culture is. The trend to portray shamans in the movies are not uncommon too, even though it does not depict that, in fact, shamanism is the domain of women. But even through the popularity of the shamanistic elements, the real clash with shaman in the entertainment industry is still not perceived well, as was explained in the interview with veteran actor-turned-shaman. Nonetheless, considering how many articles are published about shamanism in the culture, it seems to have influential status regarding culture.

Shamans are still humans, so the fact there were some reports about shaman's committing crimes should not be surprising. However, what strikes the most is that under the searched keywords, the articles about shaman and crimes were found only on The Korea Herald. It is essential to know about crimes that were committed no matter what profession or religion concerned, however, these crimes in this case were always correlated to some shamanistic activities offenders made. The articles of public affairs category informing about general stuff, one of the articles reported of still happening rituals performed by *mudang*, which could imply that the rituals are still relevant to these days.

Even though there are academic research on what kind of rituals are popular among clients, the interpretation of role of shamanism in media could be described as the phenomena influencing many aspects of culture and society. However, the religious or "healing" characteristic is not widely acknowledged. There is not much emphasis on the terminology, some articles considered term *mudang* same as shaman. Except the reports about crimes and about spiritual marriages, most of the articles does not mention any connection of today's shamanism and their practices – rituals. Rituals are mostly brought up in articles about crimes, as most of them happened during the rituals. It can be assumed that shamanism could be indicated mainly as the cultural foundation of the society according to the articles, but any attachment of politics with shamans was considered scandalous as media reported. Therefore, shamanism and its role cannot be connected with cultural matters only since it does affect other issues as well. Though shamanism is for sure essential part of Korean history and culture, it has not remained in the past. The fact their practices and ways of approach changed according to the trends and needs of clients means they are still in demand for the "healing" or any other kind of rituals they offer. Considering the analysis, the public image of the role of shamanism could be considered as neutral, until it concerned politics. As was mentioned by columnist, it would not be problematic for a presidential candidate to wear a cross to express his Christian beliefs, however the shamanistic symbol on the hand of Yoon Suk-yeol was criticized. There is not any statistics, that would show if the engagement with shamans influenced decisions of voters. However, seeing how big importance it seems to have for Korean and even foreign media to constantly report about it, one would assume that it must be significant for the public in some

way. But, in the end, Yoon won the elections, hence it seems the involvement with shamans did not matter that much to public judgment – if at all.

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