Transactions with the Realm of Spirits in Modern Korea

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to understand the reason why kut and other shamanic practices in Korea are so much in demand, in spite of the high sums of money they require, and will examine, in the process, the modern transformations of rituals and the criticisms directed against the supposed ethical shortcomings of modern shamans who demand so much money, and against the “mistakes” these shamans are alleged to make during the ritual. The paper suggests that the notion of reciprocity is not the only relevant factor in the analysis of the transactions within the ritual, but that monetary and material transactions are to be considered as a means to create a communicative setting for the participants, who engage in decision-making, negotiation and bargaining. That what allows shamanic rituals to survive in a modern society are changes in the behaviour and mental attitudes of the participants. Because the efficacy of a ritual is based on the emotional reassurance of the client, the evaluation of the competence of the shaman is shifted away from religious and ritual correctness to her communicative competence.

Keywords: shamanic practices, modernization, monetary transactions, emotional transformation, communicative competence

Introduction

For ages Korean shamanic practices have been criticized for their costliness and the ostentatious display of material wealth. Often criticism is also directed against the ethical shortcomings of the shamans who demand so much money, and against their “mistakes” in ritual acts during the ritual. Against this perspective, in this paper I explore why, in spite of all this, shamanistic rituals are still in demand, by describing the monetary and material transactions involved in ritual practices as a means of communication between the participants. Rather than following in the footsteps of the criticism voiced by outsiders of the kind mentioned above, in this paper I also stress the emic perspective, according to which the criterion the clients apply for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the ritual is focused on emotional satisfaction. I want to note, moreover, that the attitude of shamans toward money and materialism which emerges in the first part of the paper is not to be considered as universal: sharp differences exist among individual shamans, which are also influenced by regional variations in shamanic tradition.

Shamanism is deeply concerned with well-being and happiness in this world. One of the most obvious reasons why Korean shamans [mudang] are still in demand lies in one of the primary functions of the shamans: i.e. their performance of rituals in order to bring their clients material prosperity. Recent anthropological
fieldwork has highlighted an increase in the demand for rituals held to resolve economic afflictions (such as bankruptcy or a business breakdown) which are manifested through physical or mental disorders or material disasters.  

Although the spirits in a sense are the absolute and fundamental raison-d'être of all rituals (which would and could not exist without them), in fact the goals are various and differ according to the participants (shamans, ritual assistants, clients, audience). Yet all these ostensible or hidden purposes of ritual together serve the fundamental function of shamanism, which as I will argue later is closely related to the realm of the emotions. This fundamental function is often neglected in descriptions of the transformation process that Korean shamanism is undergoing, which involves increasing participation of shamans in theatrical performances, an increase in the number of institutions (mudang schools, professional associations and official positions held by shamans as holders of 'Cultural Assets') in which shamans participate, an increasing demand for Chae-su-hut (rituals to bring prosperity), the tendency to 'equal money with nobility', i.e. high social status, shamans managing their own careers as superstars, or shamans writing their autobiographies. The modern transformation of Korean shamanism also affects the structure of the ritual, which becomes shorter and is performed more and more during the daytime instead of during the night, or shortened to last one day instead of several. Moreover, the traditional apprenticeship, which demanded the display of filial duty on the part of the newly initiated apprentice shaman, the spiritual daughter, toward her teacher, the spiritual mother, has been almost abandoned. Face-to-face apprenticeship is slowly replaced by the use of impersonal media (such as video and audio tapes or written sources).

One of the obvious questions that arise at this point is this: to what extent do all these modern transformations affect the shaman's view of her spiritual world? This question leads to further questions: how should one define the relationship between the transformations mentioned and the function and meaning of material objects within the ritual, and how are the material aspects of ritual related to its effectiveness? One of the common denominators underlying the questions mentioned above is the problem of the criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of a ritual, which will be analysed in the conclusion of this article. Preliminary to that, first a brief description of how the monetary aspect is involved “off-stage,” that is before the ritual, is given in section I. In sections II and III follow two fragments of oracles extracted from rituals I have witnessed and I present my analysis of the ritual, is given in section I. In sections II and III follow two fragments of oracles extracted from rituals I have witnessed and I present my analysis of the transformation process that Korean shamanism is undergoing, which involves increasing participation of shamans in theatrical performances, an increase in the number of institutions (mudang schools, professional associations and official positions held by shamans as holders of 'Cultural Assets') in which shamans participate, an increasing demand for Chae-su-hut (rituals to bring prosperity), the tendency to 'equal money with nobility', i.e. high social status, shamans managing their own careers as superstars, or shamans writing their autobiographies. The modern transformation of Korean shamanism also affects the structure of the ritual, which becomes shorter and is performed more and more during the daytime instead of during the night, or shortened to last one day instead of several. Moreover, the traditional apprenticeship, which demanded the display of filial duty on the part of the newly initiated apprentice shaman, the spiritual daughter, toward her teacher, the spiritual mother, has been almost abandoned. Face-to-face apprenticeship is slowly replaced by the use of impersonal media (such as video and audio tapes or written sources).

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1 This is a revised version of paper written for the Workshop "Ghosts and Modernity in East Asia," Leiden, 8-10 July 1999.
2 See Kendall 1996.
5 Choi Chungmoo 1991.
6 Walraven 2001.

I investigate the participants’ idea that “this world is a copy of the other world” as the logical basis to explain the reciprocity and the hierarchy in the pantheon, but also the shaman’s behaviour in the context of ritual which is considered ‘mistaken’ according to the tradition. In doing so, I attempt to investigate the shaman’s cognitive approach towards transactions with the realm of gods. Next, in section V, I read the performers’ mistakes as attempts to introduce changes which fit modern needs, and I explore how shamans perceive their breaking of traditional rules. In section VI, I try to answer the question why the rituals and other shamanistic practices are so much in demand despite their high cost and criticisms against shamans’ money making or against the ambiguity of their identity and role during the ritual. Finally I suggest that multiple factors influence the clients’ view of the efficacy of a ritual and among these I emphasize the emotional shift which occurs during the ritual.

I.

When a problem arises that requires the intervention of a shaman, the client is the very first person who has to engage in a monetary transaction. In this way, she concludes the first ‘contract’ with the realm of spirits. The client goes to a mudang to have her divine what is the cause of the problem and the result of this divination may be that it is necessary to have a ritual performed, whether it is on a small or a big scale. Translated into monetary terms, this means that the client has to pay, before a certain day, an amount of money that might vary according to whether it is performed in Seoul (which is considered most expensive) or in other cities; the price can vary from five million wŏn in Inch’ŏn to twelve million wŏn in Seoul. In deciding upon the price to be paid the mudang has to consider what she sees as her level of professionalism: the tendency is to equal a higher price with a more skilful mudang and a bigger ritual. Part of the money is used for paying the assistants, the musicians, and the room in a ritual hall[hutang] if it is necessary to rent one, and also for the food to be offered and other material goods to be used during the ritual. In a ritual of normal scale, a group of two to five mudang take part. Among them the ‘chief mudang’ is usually the mudang whom the client contacted; the other shamans are either ‘guest mudang’ invited by the chief mudang to perform some sequences of the ritual or ‘assistants’ who play musical instruments and help the performers during the ritual and in the preparations. In the case of a big ritual professional musicians are invited, too, and the number of shamans increase. According to the male shaman CMS, he performs about three to five full rituals a month as chief mudang and ten as a “guest mudang.” Besides this, a shaman’s income includes money earned by performing kosa, a small-scale ritual which takes usually four to five hours, of which the price is about 1,500,000 wŏn and from other religious activities, such as prayers (ch’iso˘ng, a prayer ritual, about 300,000 wŏn, divination 30,000~50,000 wŏn) and the like.  

7 These were the prices given by CMS, a palku mudang, in January 2006 when the exchange rate was about 1,000 wŏn to one US dollar. All shamans are referred to only by the initial letters of their name. 
8 CST, a shaman, personal communication held on May 17th, 1997.
What remains of the money given by the client after the initial payment is used as a kind of ‘floating capital’, a cash fund from which a client takes what is needed to satisfy the continuous demands of the spirits during the ritual. The amount of this is usually fixed before the ritual between the client and the chief shaman, although some complaints may arise at the end because of confusion about the amount of money that was actually given. 'Spontaneous offerings' by the audience are another source of income for the shamans during the ritual.

II.

If 'off-stage', before the ritual begins, the skill of the mudang and the length of the ritual are interrelated with financial matters, the next question is how material values are dealt with ‘on-stage’ by the spirits and how they are handled in the contacts between the two realms, those of humans and spirits. We need to delve into the oracles, kongsu, presented during the ritual, when the spirits speak through the mouth of the shaman, and analyse the language behaviour displayed in them in order to grasp the idea of reciprocity between the two realms. 10

Taegam, the Official, is well known for being a demanding spirit. In his sequence, within the ritual, when he appears and enjoys himself as a guest, when, as the Korean expressions goes, he ‘plays,’ 11 his pantomime, his body language, the sequence, within the ritual, when he appears and enjoys himself as a guest, when, as the Korean expressions goes, he ‘plays,’ 11 his pantomime, his body language, the chants the mudang sings to entertain him and his own speech during the oracle all together clearly delineate his character and make this sequence one of the richest of the ritual from a linguistic and paralinguistic point of view. What most interests us is how the audience receives his insistent demands for money, good food, good music and wine. His performance involves a particularly ‘free’ and intense dialogue with the participants, who take part in bargaining with the divinities regarding the offerings.

The following sequence is extracted from a funeral ritual performed in Seoul in the house of the chief mudang in 1994. 12 The eldest son sponsored the funeral ritual and all the daughters-in-law and the maternal aunt were present, too. The Taegam dances, jumps and whirls around to the frenetic accompaniment of a drum, a flute and a gong. He performs divination for each member of the family, who without being able to see which colour they pick, select one out of five coloured flags. He offers rice wine to the members of the family and gives luck to the family waving the flags with both hands in a gesture of fanning the lucky wind toward the family, yelling “Yeah, Hop! Bruuu...” The women receive the luck in their skirts, raising the hem to collect it. Again there is divination with the five coloured flags: the auspicious red colour comes out and the Taegam smiles, he pulls his ear toward the front in a sign of pleasure that he hears good music, then he laughs and jumps up and down. With hand gestures he asks for some money and he arranges the money around his face, tucking the bills under his hat and hat band. 13

The women give more, or laugh and shyly refuse, only to give something in the end. The Taegam wants still more and the women are embarrassed.

Participants:
Taegam = shaman
A = aunt
D = daughter-in-law
Tone: comic-satirical

Taegam: (Speaking tone)

D: How much?

Taegam: (in a speaking tone) If you do, it is not so good. As you are several families, give me five thousand won. (in a singing tone)

D: OK, I will do as you ask. (Laughs)

Taegam: ...I, the Tutelary Spirit, (do you think that I am a god who) sees a person and doesn’t put him at ease? I am the Tutelary Spirit, give me some money!

(Parodie)

D: Please help the daughters-in-law!

A: Don’t let the eldest mourner be sick. Everyday he goes to hospital.

Taegam: It is not because he is weak, today, but it is because he is very worried.

D: Yes.

Taegam: ...I, the Tutelary Spirit, (do you think that I am a god who) sees a person and doesn’t put him at ease? I am the Tutelary Spirit, give me some money!

(Taegam indicates he will help)

D: How much should (we) give? I will give only three bills of 10,000 won.

Taegam: If you do, it is not so good. As you are several families, give me 100,000 won!

D: OK, I will do as you ask. (laughs)

Taegam: (in a singing tone) This thing, today I receive the ritual and...

D: How much?

Taegam: (in a speaking tone) There are six bills. Are you short of money?

Participants:
Taegam = shaman
A = aunt
D = daughter-in-law
Tone: comic-satirical

Taegam: (Speaking tone)

D: How much?

Taegam: (in a speaking tone) If you do, it is not so good. As you are several families, give me ten thousand won.

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mother cannot stay for a long time... because they are buried together. They are not comfortable day or night. (singing tone) Because today this ritual is done, I will let them be comfortable while they stay there... (speaking tone) Absolutely don't put up a pisok\(^\text{18}\) not yet, not yet... One side of the original mountain\(^\text{19}\) has fallen down like this... it will be a good idea to plant some trees.

D: Yes. (Music and dance, during which the Official demands more money)

A: Yes. (Aunt complains that Taegam asks for too much money).

Taegam: As I will not let you get hurt by nangma\(^\text{20}\) (the aunt might get hurt in a fall), keep quiet!

A: I just watch the ritual and eat the rice cake.

Taegam: The Official is favourably (disposed to you), so just keep quiet! The young clients\(\text{[the daughters-in-law]}\) whether they spend money or not, (you should tell them) ‘Hurry, spend it! Hurry, spend it!’ You just sit there (without urging the young women to pay up).

A: Aigo! It’s so frustrating that it is impossible not to spend money! (Laughter)

Taegam: Ah! Ah! Today I enjoy myself in this way~ (singing tone) In a place between south and west~ Today in this place (you) have a certain property and because of a document (you) have to decide and it seems that there will be some work to do~ (speaking tone) If it is not so, say it is not so! (everybody laughs) Today I said I would play and I did, but they persist in not giving me money (laughing the daughters-in-law decide to give the rest of 500,000 won except one bill)... If I fix your luck, suddenly all the good omens appear...

D: Please promise to do so. (Music)

One of the basic ideas underlying shamanism is the reciprocity between human and spirits expressed in the flow of monetary and sacrificial transactions, as a means of exchange between the two realms that enables the mudang to establish contact. Taegam helps but demands attention in the form of offerings; the ancestor spirit will protect his descendants but wants to be looked after; and the living give money, but demand favours in return. Basically, these transactions are set within the discourse of ‘give and take’ or ‘the gift theory’\(^\text{21}\), presupposing the notion of reciprocity in the relationship between gods and humans, between giver and recipient. The intention behind the giver’s behaviour is similar to that of a person

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\(^{18}\) A grave stone with the name of the deceased.

\(^{19}\) The original mountain is the mountain of the place where a person belongs, his home town.

\(^{20}\) Literally “falling from a horse.”

\(^{21}\) Tylor 1958.
belonging to the lower classes confronted with someone of higher status. His aim is to profit from the latter's benevolence: do ut des.23 An approach based on this notion is one-sided, however, as long as it does not take into account the dynamism of the communication through which a consensus is reached by means of the strategical use of an active dialogue between the participants. The sense of flexibility in money dealings involves an art of dialogue which gives a certain emotional reassurance to the client. Although the power of decision-making is stacked in favour of the shaman, the feeling that there remains a margin in decision power while the dialogue evolves and ritual acts are performed is fundamental from the client's point of view.

In kongsu, the oracle, mentioned above, the reaction of the clients is crucial in building up the dialogue and making the communication functional. In the case of a regular client, a person who is familiar with kut and with Taegam, the dialogue with the Official assumes an intense and comic tone. The handing over of a high sum of money becomes the main content of the dialogue in which reciprocity is negotiated. The profit that each party may obtain depends mostly on the communicative competence they display in the strategy of bargaining: Taegam will try to extract as much money as he can, and the client will not restrain herself from asking more promises, while at the same time she tries to extract as much explanation and information on their ancestors and what the future holds for the living members of the family as possible. This 'give and take' is not performed only through the traffic of money; the entertainment offered to the deity functions in the same way. Moreover, Taegam pays back the devotion expressed by the performance of the ritual (through non-verbal language) by picking up an auspicious flag for the family of the client, fanning 'luck' inside the skirt of one of the daughters-in-law and similar gestures.24

III.
The recurrence in rituals throughout Korea of money as a "gift" is a symbolic value that goes beyond the function of reciprocity and is much more complex in meaning, involving various forms of communication. In kilalakhm, 'levelling the road', a sequence of the purification ritual performed for the soul of a deceased person in the province of Cholla, thousands of won bills are placed along a strip of cloth of which the two ends are held by the family members of the deceased to create the road over which the soul of the deceased is guided towards the 'other world'. In the same ritual, among the paraphernalia there is so-called 'paper money', with which the mudang dances and which she holds in her hand throughout almost the entire ritual. In the rituals performed in the area of the provinces of Kyōnggi and Hwanghae, money is placed on the back of a pig and inside its mouth or on top of the carcass of a cow or of a pig during the ritual act of sashil, when the meat is balanced on the prongs of a trident, to get to know what the god is thinking, and to see if the offering is well accepted by the gods (if the balancing act succeeds the answer is affirmative). The money is also placed within the underwear or other pieces of underclothing of a patient during a healing ritual. These clothes are used to cover a hen that is used as a substitute for the corpse of the sick person and will be buried at the end of the ritual. Money is also placed on top of flags used for divination, and offered to the mudang by members of the audience who receive kongsu from gods. One of the symbolic functions of money which emerges is that it is the medium through which the giver and the recipient communicate, and the transaction is the concrete and visible form which this communication takes.

Thus both before and during the ritual there is an ostentatious display of monetary transactions. The changing hands of big sums of money, the abundance of food and other offerings lying on the spirits' tables catch our attention. The symbolic value of money during the ritual, its being a matter of concern for all the participants, and the 'quid pro quo logic' which governs Korean social thinking result in the spending of money to regale the spirits.

Taegam is not an exception in his 'give and take' relationship with humans. While sharp and direct language is typical of Taegam, the theme of 'give and take' is the basis of other oracles as well. In a less obtrusive manner and in a more formulaically patterned speech style, the Mountain Spirit says the same in an initiation ritual through the lips of the spiritual mother.25

Sangsam hōri
Because they all came to look for (me), in this way, to the splendid mountains and rivers

(They have) offered this devotion and

Please receive this devotion and26
(Because) your body is in such pain
I will protect (you) and help

If there was not this devotion
It would have been a big problem
You all would almost have been punished27

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22 Brelich 1991:43.
23 The stress on money is not always the same in shamanistic rituals in Korea. It is very strong in the rituals performed by 'charismatic' shamans and less among the 'hereditary shamans'. The way the money is collected may constitute a target of criticism. A mudang was very much criticized for not stopping to collect money from the audience during a Taegam sequence when she performed a ritual in a theatre. But also not collecting the proper amount of money may be criticized as a lack of devotion, chŏngsang, of the officiant towards the gods, after all the mudang is collecting money to offer it to the gods.
24 At Seoul on May 12th, 1997.
25 The speaker is not always the Mountain God. As is characteristic of kongsu, sometimes a switching of the speaker occurs: in line 5 it is the mudang who speaks, while in lines 6 and 7 the god takes over again.
26 The pain refers to the shamanic illness of the neophyte.
27 This refers to the belief that if a person does not accept her vocation as a shaman, her relatives are at risk and may even die.
For the moment your body should not hurt in this way
Gods exist, don’t they?
If your body would continue to hurt
What use would the gods be?

In the oracle above, the basic idea of the practical function of a ritual[kut] is expressed by the Mountain God, which is, in brief, that there must be devotion by humans towards supernatural entities to receive their help, and that there must be a response to justify the existence of the gods.

Demands, complaining, bargaining and negotiating between humans and spirits are common as the subject matter of oracles. A careful look at the oracles mentioned above suggests that the idea of reciprocity is expressed by material items handled by the inhabitants of both realms, but also that basically reciprocity relies on the mutual promise to take care of each other. The spirits can produce the welfare the living demand by using their spiritual power, which humans lack. On the other hand humans can endure the interference in their life by spirits and ancestors as long as, through the spirits’ assistance, they can prevent spiritual revenge by vengeful spirits, and, most importantly, as long as they can benefit from the beneficial influence of the spirits.

In kut, each act can be read as an act performed with an aim; for instance, it is performed to manipulate the relationship of cause and effect, or the relationships of the inhabitants of the various levels of the universe. Religious acts such as praying, entertaining the participants (both gods and humans) by music and dance, burning incense or burning Korean white paper, soji, an act that is at the same time sacrificial and divinatory, sacrificing animals, balancing the sacrificed animal on the prongs of the trident and the like are not the expression of a pure devotion, i.e. without any hope of something which will be given in return in the near or distant future. The implicit promise of a return gift by gods/ancestors for the devotion expressed by humans is the silent message behind these acts. The “gift,” as a religious gesture, is a performative act: the (non-verbal) illocutionary act simultaneously functions as a perlocutionary act to the participants (most of all to the clients), that is words or actions imbued with effect.

Looking from the point of view of language, both sides, humans and spirits, communicate their thoughts within the ritual to each other through the symbolism of material objects and through verbal and non-verbal languages. Inhabitants of both realms ask, receive and compromise, in other words they maintain a dialogue sending each other messages through the shaman. A deeper insight in the structure of the offerings and the identification of the recipients suggests a complex differentiation in the modality and in the nature of the offerings in relation with their recipients. Bell indicates how the ‘language’ of the food offerings, which is diversified according to whom the sacrifices are offered, communicates the position of the recipient in the hierarchy of gods, ancestors, and ghosts; it also indicates the relationships between the deities and the living.28

IV.
The hierarchy of gods in the shamanistic pantheon generally reflects the social hierarchy of Korean society in language behaviour as well as in other respects. Shamans say that each god is different in looks, in language, and in the things he or she wants as offerings. The celestial gods, the gods of Sun and Moon and the Seven Stars do not accept offerings that are related with blood and alcohol. In exchange for vegetarian offerings they confer longevity and luck through the symbolism of rice cake and fruits, which are distributed among the audience at the end of the sequence dedicated to the Seven Stars[Chilsŏng]. In the rituals performed according to the style of Hwanghae Province, after this sequence, during a pause, all pictures of celestial gods are taken away from the altar before the ritual continues and at the next meal meat and fish are served as a sign of the end of the sequences dedicated to the celestial gods. Compared with other gods, the celestial gods are considered as in some way less involved in human affairs, less similar to humans, higher in the hierarchy and thus more powerful. This is also expressed in the tone and in the style of their speech: it is more formulaic, nearer to a monologue, less dialogical. They are like the wealthy and literate elite among humankind. The second category of gods, the terrestrial gods, for instance, Officials, Mountain Gods, Spirit Generals and the like, are more similar to the living in terms of their character: they are greedy and wrathful, and easily get angry, but they are also more ready to compromise and negotiate. They enter into a more intense dialogue with the living and the offerings clearly indicate their attachment to human affairs: eating, drinking, money and other material offerings like clothes, listening to good music and dancing. The ancestors may be included in this category, depending on their behaviour. Bureaucrats, employers and the like are the mundane equivalents of this category of gods. To the third category belong the miscellaneous, inferior spirits[chapsim or chapsi] that are relatively neglected by the shamans during their rituals. The shamans scatter the remainders of the offerings in the area where the ritual is performed or, at best, arrange a small table with food for them. In the same way the beggars and the poorest social stratum are ignored but also feared in society. As a mirror of Korean society, this pantheon reflects its class hierarchy.

The view that the spiritual world is related with material welfare and the human character of gods are expressed by the way newly initiated shamans describe their idea of gods compared with shamans, that is human beings. In the eyes of one of these young shamans I interviewed, the gods are jealous and ambitious ‘[...] if you see them in such a light, there is nothing to be surprised about,’ she added. The logic lying beneath the symbiotic relationship29 between the inhabitants of the two realms is that ‘this world[isings] is a copy of that world[chŏsings] and consequently according to the shaman’s view of her spiritual world it is only natural that prosperity in the world beyond is translated into prosperity in our world. Moreover, the concept that a big sum of money or an abundance of offerings equals profound devotion and, in the final analysis, a positive response from the gods is strongly rooted in

29 For more on this symbiotic relationship, see Bruno 1995.
within the ritual. Sun Soonhwa describes her behaviour regarding 'making money' and serves the government.

A further explanation of the logic which relates a shaman's demands of money to the clients with her relationship with the spiritual realm is given in the following example, which has been taken from the context of kut. A mudang interviewed by Sun Soonhwa describes her behaviour regarding 'making money' within the ritual.

Between the spirits and the client, I wish I could hold my tongue and stop that greedy demanding. I don't like those greedy spirits. The spirits world is strange, however. The greedy spirits tend to bring more blessings to the client. When they demand more, they seem to have a plan to bless the client more. But I still like going to the generous spirits who take little and give abundantly. The spirits have served her well, i.e. made her earn well, as she has respected them.

It is a common idea that shamans earn money easily. The criticism against shamans has for centuries been directed against their thirst for money, their greediness. This criticism is shared nowadays by many older shamans, who deplore that recently the number of initiation rituals has increased because young people are attracted by the idea of earning money easily by performing rituals, while their spiritual motivation is negligible.

V.

There is another aspect of ritual that may illuminate the relationship between shamans and the spirits they worship. The borderline between the realms of supernatural entities and humans becomes even thinner when the behaviour of the mudang in the context of one of the actual scenes of a ritual is considered and one notes the remarkable degree of flexibility with which shamans conduct kut. To grasp this, one needs to analyse the details that are often considered as 'mistakes', or a 'breaking of the rules' according to traditional shamanic knowledge. Once one abandons the idea that ritual is not necessarily dictated by the rigid rules of tradition, it is easier to understand why such 'mistakes' occur so frequently, even in rituals where a mudang who is a keeper of an Intangible Cultural Asset is performing. Each instance of 'breaking the rules' may serve as a valuable basis of interpretation of all kinds, but 'mistakes' are particularly useful as a point of departure to interpret the shaman's view of the spiritual world in relation to the modern transformation of Korea and Korean shamanism. Indeed, for the purpose of our argumentation in this article these 'mistaken' acts are fundamental.

Although the tendency to modify the structure of the ritual is considered as 'a breaking of the rules', the explanation given by the performers for their actions suggests that they attempt to adapt the ritual to fit modern concepts of time and space (e.g. rituals are shortened or modified when performed in apartments). If modernization means transformation and the changes regard the structure and the content of kut (e.g. shortening it, reversing the order of sequences or omitting some of them and the like), then it is interesting to take into account how the shaman, the performer, explains this. More than one mudang repeated to me: 'Songsu ponun han poniyoo, cheja[mudang] ponun kak ponida' [the origin of the gods is one, the origin of mudang is different], in the sense that gods are the same for all mudang, but the ritual performed for the gods is different for each mudang. A male shaman who had been initiated a few years before, explained that although the divine law is one, its application may vary because each mudang interprets and understands it in a different way. He concluded that the problem of correctness is meaningless because a mudang performs an act according to his or her own interpretation of the traditional rules.

This point of view is stressed even more by the 'assistant' Cho-si, who while affirming that many problems arise because the participants break the traditional rules, recognizes the importance of nunchi[tact], that is the ability to understand the context of a kut or the feelings of others and adapt one's own behaviour accordingly. He explains that a mudang who knows her regular clients depending on the context of the ritual sometimes feels the need to shorten the length of kut and cut out sequences; in this case the mudang has 'nunchi'. On the contrary, the elderly people who insists that the ritual has to be performed according to the way they saw it in the past when they were young, thus according to tradition, do not have 'nunchi'. 'Kut has to be changed a little, we need to match it with modern times!'

There is also flexibility of a different kind, which equally illustrates how within kut the distance and distinction between humans (in casu the shamans) and the gods is small. During kongsu, when it is traditionally believed that gods or ancestors speak through the shaman's mouth, the mudang who acts as officiant and speaks for gods or ancestors shows great ambiguity in her speech behaviour.

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30 This is mitigated by another belief: that it is not the absolute sum of money that counts, but the devotion that is displayed in the act of giving. If a poor man offers one million it counts more than when a rich man offers 10 million.


32 In The Gate of Words Language in the Rituals of Korean Shamans I have analysed the power of criteria of evaluation of 'breaking the rules' by participants and their strategy in the manipulation of traditional rules according to the context, Bruno 2001.

33 Personal communication on Nov 12th 1999.
switching identities with great ease.34 In many instances it is quite ambiguous whether her words are those of one of the deities or her own,35 spoken for her own benefit. This is demonstrated in the following example. The assistant Cho-ssi recalled in an amused and slightly surprised tone how the mudang CST burned soji, white paper, for herself during the ritual and then herself referred to this act later during kongsu, when the deity said (through the mouth of CST): “Thirty-four(-year old) CST, listen to me carefully! I am the god to whom you have prayed for seven days...”

CST’s religious act had not followed the tradition according to which soji burning and kongsu are performed for the client but not for the mudang who is acting as the performer. Nevertheless in this way she justified her own unorthodox behaviour. This made her not less unforgiving when confronted with the ‘mistakes’ of others. What follows is an example where CST criticizes a mudang X after having witnessed her ritual with me. Her critique is interesting for several reasons, and gives a general view of how a mudang perceives the spiritual world in relation to the transformation of religious acts, divorced from judgements of correctness purely based on the idea of ‘tradition’.36

All the mudang know the reason why they are doing kut when they do it, but this (mudang) doesn’t know it and that’s why kongsu doesn’t come out, the gods do not appear, her gods do not appear at all! I asked her why she (decided) to perform kut and she answered: “I do kut whenever I feel that I want to do it.” But I looked at her spirit altar and it is a new one and the gods have taken their places there: the General isolated by himself is shaking his head and the child gods[aegi shin] by themselves are shaking their heads (they do not seem to be harmonious and happy). And then, (during the ritual) she did not offer any money, that’s lack of devotion, her heart is somewhere else. But her spiritual mother doesn’t talk (teach) [...]. This Sŏngsu(the Tutelary Spirit of mudang X) is a very powerful Sŏngsu, but she only has puri37 (she doesn’t worship Sŏngsu, believing that to have had a mudang for her mother is enough). [...] It is a war against the gods! Have you seen how each person pushes others to do a sequence? “You do it!” “No, you do it!” [...] Isn’t this woman something! When a human being fights against a god, it is the human who loses! Yesterday I prayed a hundred times, only in this way my clients are at peace, but today looking at this mudang (I noticed) that she has no devotion. Her spirit altar is too chilly. Today in this ritual she had to offer so much devotion, but she didn’t. In the Sanch’on and in Chilsŏng sequences, the mudang should die and be reborn. And in the Changoon sequence the mudang has no longer to be aware of what she is doing, but the gods did not appear (in her). Watching how she played Toin Sŏngsu I thought it was senseless to keep watching this kut. [...] This ritual is done for her twenty-seven-year-old daughter! Today they did the ritual, hushing up the reason for this ritual. [...] Today’s kut is an Uhwan kut[a healing ritual] and not a Chjojk kut38. This is done twice a year; if you perform it often it means there are some problems.

As the mudang CHP suggested, if a mudang is not intelligent she does not ‘feel’ the gods, however powerful they might be. So, according to CST because the mudang X ignored the reason why she is doing the ritual, no kongsu was produced and the gods did not appear.

In sum, the evidence demonstrates on the one hand that there is an ostentatious flow of money and goods during the ritual. The price paid to have a ritual performed is quite steep compared with the average standard of life, and shamans and shamanism often become targets of criticism, because of the modern transformation of traditional ritual practices. On the other hand, the cultural interpretation given by the participants of the ritual lays stress on the similarities between ‘this’ and ‘that world’; the logic lying behind the hierarchy in the pantheon, the character and taste of the gods, the need for money and of material goods, and also the shamans’ ambiguity of role and identity during kongsu, is that this world is not very different from that world. One is a sort of extension of the other. ‘That world’ is not necessary identified within a structured division of levels in the cosmos: ‘Chosŏng, that world, is everywhere, near you, here or over there [...].’39

VI.
If the behaviour of the participants can be interpreted according to this logic, it is not yet sufficient to understand the reason why kut and other shamanistic practices are so much in demand, in spite of the modern transformation they are undergoing and the high sums of money they require. The notion of reciprocity makes it more plausible that the spirits will do something for the client and constitutes an important means of exchange to establish contact between the realms of humans and spirits. But this is not the only determinant that makes it possible for shamanistic rituals to survive in a modern society. As time elapses also the behaviour and mental attitude of participants change; they are “modernized” and a new attitude is slowly established within the tradition. Ethnographic data suggest that in this respect the notion of efficacy is of particular salience. Spirits in modern life are functional because of the efficacy of ritual.

Money is one of the factors that render a ritual efficacious, but I would say that a multiplicity of other aspects is involved: such as the aesthetic features of the ritual (music, dance, the religious skill of the shaman) and the shaman’s ability to build a bridge between the realms of spirits and humans. While the shaman’s secret knowledge enables her to make reciprocity functional, and thus efficacious, this knowledge is acquired by experience and it is flexible and modulated according to differences in context. The ritual is efficacious in a different way for each

34 For more see Bruno 2001: 35-57.
35 The same interview on Nov 12* 1999.
36 This example is taken from Bruno 2001.
37 The word ‘puri’ is used here to refer to ancestors who were shamans.
38 A ritual for all the gods worshiped by a shaman
39 The mudang SMK, personal communication held on May 10* 1997.
participant, for the gods, for the ancestors, for the shaman-performer, for the client, and for the audience.

In some cases, promises that some kind of material offerings will be given by humans to supernatural entities are not sufficient and some kind of action provides the solution for resolving a crisis. Required in such cases are daily acts of devotion by the mudang or by the client, to pacify the spirits, to restore the broken relationship between the inhabitants of this world and the beyond or to obtain the realization of a wish and so on. A mudang will dedicate herself to praying every day at dawn and at night, go to the mountains once a week for her devotions and so forth, to obtain in return, as part of the mechanics of reciprocity, the realization of her clients wish.

According to the mudang CHP, to have a good result from a kut the mudang must be intelligent and competent. Otherwise she will not feel the gods, however powerful they may be. She should also not demand too much money and try to stick to the amount which was established before the beginning of the ritual; nor should she be rude or aggressive, because the client must not feel fear in the place where the ritual is held. The mudang should not be too compliant, either, otherwise the client will not follow the shaman's advice. On her part, the client must have a certain knowledge of the ritual to appreciate it. For the assistant Cho-si the client must be instructed; he explained what she has to do to participate in the ritual and appreciate it:

Above all, during the sequence of Ch'o Kamhungan many ancestors arrive and not always the mudang knows who they are and so she asks 'With your grandfather other ancestors arrived..., who are they?' (is there any other deceased person in your family?) Some clients want to test the competence of the mudang and so they remain silent, other clients are afraid and so they pray in silence, rubbing their hands. I feel frustrated when they don't answer intentionally [...].

To say that a ritual is proceeding well:

 [...] there must be smoothness, the participants must feel good and find interest in the performance of the kut. Sometimes you have a dream and you understand the meaning of the dream during the kut and other times the dream matches perfectly with the kut. It depends very much on the psychological state of the members (of the team of shamans), sometimes kut are very tiresome. Some other time a mudang catches the cause of the problem and resolves things one by one. So she feels that everything is proceeding well. [...] Money is related with Taegam but not so closely; when he says he will give money it means there is a problem (that is, principally Taegam helps a person who is in need) and we(the shamans) have to search for the origin of the problem. It is like in the case of a mudang, when it is blocked, when the gate through which the mudang will be summoned is blocked, money cannot enter because the door is closed, she cannot work. Very important are the ancestors.

Cho recalled what happened after a ritual which I witnessed, telling me how once the mudang had succeeded in finding out the source of the problem the client felt emotionally closer to the shamans.

In brief, the ritual is efficacious when the competence of mudang assures smoothness in the proceeding of the ritual, which follows the order of sequences one by one, and when the intense exchanges with the gods benefit the client. Also, the ritual acts should be well performed.

VII.

In the fragments of interviews quoted above, the client's point of view needs further investigation, because in the final instance the client is the person who pays to have a ritual performed and to whom the ritual must function as a reassurance that the offerings he or she has made during the ritual will not have been in vain and will produce the desired result. Atkinson suggests on the basis of her research among shamans in Indonesia that a transition occurs in the emotional sphere of the clients when their attention is shifted away from the illness they are suffering to satisfying the demands of the shaman: the substitution of an old with a new worry.

In Korean shamanic rituals I have witnessed, I have gained the impression that such an interpretation of shifting is not applicable, at least not without some modification. The client's concern to find the money to pay the ritual (the new worry that should take the place of the old one) does not seem to worry him/her during the ritual. Indeed, although the material goods demanded by spirits and ancestors are important, it is not the main concern of the ritual: the ritual does not stop abruptly to be cancelled because a demand is not satisfied. Often mutual promises between the client and spirits that they will satisfy the demands in the near future are enough. The recognition of immaterial values within the ritual implies that one should also look beyond the traffic of money or objects. The idea of reciprocity between the two realms involves more than material welfare: in fact, reciprocity exists also within the emotional sphere; indeed a ritual will not be effective if emotional aspects are neglected.

Fear of being cursed by spirits, fear that one has not fulfilled one's filial duty, feelings of anxiety, uneasiness because one has failed to establish or maintain communal ties etc., these are complex emotions, which play a determinant role with regard to the effectiveness of a ritual, in the meaning that such negative

40 The mudang CHP, Nov 12, 1999.

41 Same interview.
emotions may be transformed in the ritual process. The successful transformation of a client's emotions is fundamental for the continuation of shamanism, and for the survival of the shamans. Hence in the end the ritual must be efficacious and emotionally satisfying from the client's point of view. To illustrate this, I will present a fragment from a last ritual.

The client is the owner of a sauna in downtown Seoul. She is a married woman in her forties. About twenty employees work under her. Once a month she consults a Buddhist monk or a mudang to have her fortune read. Although a week before she already had a ritual performed, she decided to have another one with a different shaman.

The reasons for having yet another ritual were complex. Because the Official of the site where the sauna is erected had not been well entertained, 'the wind of the Local Official had risen,' causing administrative problems with the law; yet, according to divination the place was auspicious.

From the interviews with the client that I did before and during the ritual and after one month the hidden reason for the ritual emerged. Emotions guided her in her decision to insist on meeting the second mudang who she knew by name only (she saw the mudang for the first time in a monthly magazine for women). The divination that this mudang gave helped her to find peace of mind, and therefore she was able to decide not to relocate the sauna. But mostly, it was the impression she received from the second mudang that affected her: her cleanliness, and her brightness of appearance.

(At the end of the ritual she remembered particularly her change of emotions as the most salient feature of the ritual.)

Did the ritual go on for 12 hours? Then I should have been exhausted but strangely my mind was relaxed, sequence after sequence [...] although I still have many things to think about, my feelings are very calm. I think the most important thing is that first of all the mind must be calm, I think that is the most important thing and then you have the feeling that the work will, bit by bit, proceed well.1

Multiple factors play together to create an atmosphere that influences the client's view of a ritual and produces the transformation of her emotions. It is significant that interviews given by shamans suggest that the client must be aware of what is going on. But the ethnographic data also demonstrate that a profound knowledge of the technical aspects of shamanism by the client may prove counter-effective for the smooth proceeding of the ritual because it makes it difficult to gain

the trust of the client by the shaman. If cognitively the tendency is that a client is ignorant of and little interested in the technical knowledge of kut, emotionally she is aware whether things are proceeding well or not and this is mostly evaluated on the basis of the intensity of the atmosphere created by the shaman. This atmosphere must capture her inner feelings, enabling her to reach emotional catharsis. In the ritual, the client must, for instance, cry and laugh, to distance herself from her own emotions at the end. Together these things effect the emotional transformation that in the last instance makes the ritual effective. The dynamic of transformation which relies, among other things, on offerings and promises of material goods renders the ritual effective in the emotional realm. In short, the modern transformation of ritual practices and the great sums of money involved in the ritual are insignificant to the client compared with her emotional satisfaction and expectation of a future compensation.

Not even a negative evaluation based on “mistakes” committed by mudang, such as scholars or other mudang may give, substantially affects the client's point of view. The difference attributed to the meaning of “mistakes” by shamans and clients respectively lies in the nature of the relationships between gods, shamans and clients: there is the relationship between mudang and gods, between mudang and scholar, between mudang and mudang on the one hand and that between mudang and clients on the other hand. The “mistakes” may be fundamental in the eyes of mudang or scholars but they are of no importance in the eyes of clients. For the latter, the most important criterion of evaluation is whether the selection of the mudang has been the right one, because it is in this person that her trust and faith are placed. Her decision is made not according to the importance of a specific divinity, but according to the specific qualities of one particular mudang, not an abstract entity, and this grants her an emotional reassurance which affects her communicative competence in dealing with monetary transactions. On the other hand, it is the mudang's communicative competence which reassures the client that she has “invested” her money properly by selecting the right shaman.

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1 Chaesu ritual on May 31st, 1997.

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GLOSSARY

| aegsin | 에기神 |
| aigo | 아이고 |
| Chilsung | 七星 |
| chison | 致誠 |
| Cho'okambung | 初感興 |
| Chaesu kut | 财數兟 |
| Changgun | 將軍 |
| chapshin | 雜神 |
| chapkwii | 雜鬼 |

| Chinjok kut | 천적 굡 |
| Cho-ssi | 조氏 |
| Cholla | 全羅 |
| Chongsong | 精誠 |
| Chosing | 지승 |
| Hwanghae | 黃海 |
| Inch'on | 仁川 |
| isung | 이승 |
| kiltakku | 길담음 |
kongsu  공수  Sanch'ŏn kŏri  山川거리
kosa  告祀  sangt'ol  庭 돌
kut  곫  Sangsan kŏri  上山거리
kuttang  곫堂  sashil  사실
Kyŏnggi  京畿  soji  燒紙
mudang  落語  Sŏngsu  頌敘
nangma  落鳥  Sun Soonhwa  欣順花
nara manshin  江南神  Taegam-nim  大韓南
nunch'i  根植  T'oin Sŏngsu  陶印敘
onil  原宿  Ulwan kut  愛患谷
paisu mudang  白水무당  Wŏn  原
pisŏk  碩石  wŏn  原
puri  부리  Yu  楣

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