

Cyber Shamanism in South Korea

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요 약

In the twenty-first century, religious life is increasingly moving from churches, mosques and temples onto the Internet. As the Internet overcomes barriers of time and space, religion enjoys an ever-increasing accessibility on a global scale. Many researchers prove that the internet has an impact upon culture and religion and that as a result the meaning of electronic faith and the future of traditional and/or indigene religion in cyberspace will be an important topic to observe.

Since the beginning of the New Millennium, Korean shamans maintain a very strong online presence. In this paper, the main objectives are to give of overview to the development of Korean cybershamanism in the last decade and to investigate to what extent online worshippers and cybershamans constitute virtual communities and how interactive the social networks of those groups are. The objective of this study is to shed light on the relationship between conceptions of indigene religion and changing media environments by examining websites of traditional Korean Shamans and the provided content for those who access them.

Key words: cyberspace, shaman, mudang, cybershaman, religion, virtual community, ritual

1. Preface

A dominant assumption of many social scientists in the last Millennium has been that with the processes of modernization (economic, technological, and social), religious faith would be replaced so that religion becomes socially and culturally irrelevant.¹⁾ Few social theorists were prepared for the global resurgence of religion in the last two decades as a public force and a powerful shaper of religious subjects. This phenomena of religious vitality became therefore of increasing interest in social science research and countless publications characterize the current social science debate.²⁾

Since religious institutions and groups are increasingly integrating the Internet into their everyday practices, the need to examine the phenomena of the Internet and World Wide Web in terms of their specific uses by various religious groups is evident. Is cyberspace becoming a new, or the new, sacred space? How is the internet shaping, conceptualizing, and/or extending users religious engagement online and offline? Does it just provide an "illusion of sociality" or is there evidence of genuine social interactions online which can lead to or enhance human communities in the 'offline' world?

As one of Asia's most economically prosperous and dynamic regions with the best Internet connectivity and speed in the world³⁾ and as a nation in Asia where shamanism (*musok, mugyo*)⁴⁾ has survived the challenges of modernity and asserts its place in the religious structure of the country, South Korea presents an interesting and unique case study for the

1) see Giddens 1993, McGrath, A. 2004, a.o.

2) see Riesebrodt 2001, Stoffel 2002, Graf 2007 u.a.

3) stand: July 2013

4) *mu-sok* with the ending *sok*, means 'customs or culture' and refers to the custom of shamanism, whereas

mugyo, with the ending *gyo*, 'religion', highlights the meaning of shamanism as a religion.

examination of the Internet and indigenous religion.

The current research seeks to provide a more detailed analysis of the development of Korean cybershamanism in the last two decades and to question the relevance of cybershamanism for the relationship between online and offline religious practice and socialization. Koreans might be among the most active users of the Internet but does this also imply that they embrace the Internet as a new arena for exploring indigenous religion?

Before those questions can be answered it is necessary to give a definition of the ethnological term shamanism and the word composition "cybershamanism".

2. Shamanism

Even though numerous attempts to find a general definition of the term shamanism have been made by religious scholars, anthropologists, ethnologists, sociologists and psychologists, a universal definition has not originated. Diversity of opinion arises from the complexity of the phenomena shamanism. Depending on the respective perspective of the scientist, particular aspects of shamanism or the ritual practice of shamans are emphasized, which makes it difficult to arrive at the essence of a phenomenon and explains the quite different viewpoints of definitions you encounter in popular and scientific publications. A scientific study of shamanism is further complicated by the fact that the researcher comes into contact with unusual, often not rationally explained thinking and actions.

Although there are many controversies about a general definition there is a relative consensus on the most important key features of shamanism: The

shaman acts as an intermediary between a worldly and a spiritual or supernatural world with the aim to help people of his society. As other important characteristics of a definition I suggest the following criteria:⁵⁾

1. Shamans are men or women who are able to produce an ecstatic state of consciousness through direct contact with spirits, forces of nature or transcendent energy. This contact is induced consciously and may take the form of a soul's journey or can also be achieved by spirit possession.

The contact with transcendent beings is tied to concrete, cosmological ideas. Based on these concepts, a second point of definition can be framed:

2. The contact with this other world is searched at the request of a community. The members of this community believe that the world of spirits has an impact on their "material existence". The contact is only desired by the community, when the normality of their life has come to an imbalance due to transcendental powers.

In the view of the shamans and their group the area in which the spirits exist, is not an unknown alien world. The spiritual world is, in combination with the worldly reality, part of a complementary whole. It is a very real place where gods, spirits and ancestors in a complex system of functions, duties, attributes, properties, and functions exist. This idea of a pantheon is an essential part of the shamanic worldview. This leads to the third point of definition:

5) see Schlottmann 2007, 47-51

3. The shaman exerts control over one or more spirits and is not controlled by the spirits. The contact is controlled in order to identify causes of grievances and to gain insight and knowledge that are necessary to solve the problem.

Little importance has previously been given to defining the initiation process. As an essential transformation process with far-reaching consequences and symbolic character, I focus my fourth definition point explicitly to the initiation:

4. The initiation of shamans is an existential transformation process, which is often experienced as a personal crisis by an individual in the form of a mandatory 'calling'. This crisis is mastered with the help of an experienced shaman and leads subsequently to public acceptance. The meeting and identification of the helping spirits in an altered state of consciousness and the resulting public recognition of the new shamans are two main features that characterize the shamanic transformation process.

In South Korea, there are various, regional variations of shamanism. Korean shamans are divided by many shaman researchers into two or three types. In this subdivision, the criterion of the altered state of consciousness is in the focus of the classification. A distinction is made between the northern spirit possessed shamans and the southern hereditary shamans. Both regional variations of traditional Korean shamans comply with the above definition in many points.

3. Cybershamanism

Cyberspace is the contemporary term for computer-mediated communication, the rapidly increasing new world of e-mail, databases, virtual reality, computer games, and a raft of culture-shaping, digital technologies on the internet. This virtual place offers virtual worship, cyber-prayers and talk-boards for all of the major world faiths, as well as for indigene religions and new religious movements. People value the Internet as a context for exploring issues of faith and religion in relation to other contexts in their everyday life, outside of organized religion.⁶⁾

Cyberspace transforms activities associated with practices of religion and reshapes religious traditions, spirituality, beliefs, and individual religious identity.

Hojsgaard's defines cyberreligion as a term, "whose contents reflect the main features of postmodern cyberculture (...) a solid opposition to traditionally structured religious institutions" and yet as "a phenomenon that addresses the same type of ontological and metaphysical questions that religious institutions and traditions have usually done."⁷⁾

Cybershamanism on the other hand, is a term that is used in different ways. It is used as a self-designation by some neo-shamans who are regularly online to promote their spiritual content or by virtual artists who work in the spheres of magic and mystic. In particular, in the esoteric scene, the term cybershaman has gained great popularity and is used in conjunction with self-awareness, healing and magic. Thereby, the boundaries between neo-shamanism, neo-paganism and cybershamanism are often blurred.⁸⁾

6) see Meyer 2009, Hojsgaard 2005, Dawson & Cowan 2004

7) Hojsgaard 2005, 62

8) see Grieve 1995, Groothies 1997, Shawn 2002

Other self-proclaimed cybershamans⁹⁾ use the web itself to exercise their shamanic practices and celebrate virtual rituals. They are viewing cyberspace as a new spiritual space and define it as an artificial otherworld.

On the other hand for the American shamanic researcher Terence McKenna the concept of cybershaman is less specific and is used in contexts that appeal to the utopian visions of alternative or avantgardistic cybercultures, such as Raves, the big techno parties. The focus of these "ecstatic events" is the DJ who can transform the dance floor to a sacred space.¹⁰⁾

In this article, the term cybershamanism is not to be separated from the culture specific ideas and social structures associated with it, but is understood as a modern adaptation to the reality of life.

“Life in cyberspace is in continuity with so-called ‘real life’ and this holds true for religion as well. People are doing online pretty much what they do offline, but they are doing it differently.”¹¹⁾

For traditional Korean shamans the virtual space is a social platform for exchange of information, advice and a place to acquire customers. What defines this social space opened up by the Internet is the lack of "presence" and the missing of face-to-face interaction of small groups which is usually considered necessary for the formation of authentic social communities, religious or otherwise.¹²⁾

This change in character of communication in virtual space and the new interactive user participation, that crosses old borders of interaction, raises the question of the relevance of "virtual shamanism". What is the impact of

9) Groothies 1997, 105–107

10) Mayer & Schetsche 2006, 220–222

11) Lorne & Cowan 2004, 1

12) see Grieve 1995

the Internet on *musok* and how does the Internet affect social or cultural components in Korean shamanism? Are cybershamans creating new spiritual and virtual communities in Cyberspace? Those questions are answered very ambivalently by Korean scientists as well as by Korean shamans.

4. Relevance of cybershamanism from the perspective of Korean shamans and Korean scientists

The previous scientific analysis and investigation about religious or spiritual websites and congeneric activities on the Internet¹³⁾, that have dealt mainly with content and feature of presentation, already highlighted that the cyberspace enriched "reality" by a paradoxical virtual dimension is a "spaceless space".¹⁴⁾ It creates new opportunities for new forms of localization and dimension of meaning that are reflected in this time-space compression or the modern global network. It obviously encourages the development of new forms of virtual grouping.

During 2002–2005, I conducted several interviews in the course of my research on Korean shamanism with a question about the "importance of the Internet for Korean Shamanism in the New Millennium." The result of the survey reflected the diversity of opinions. Some selected exemplary statements illustrate how strongly the opinions differed on this issue.

13) Bauwens 1996, Bräuchler 2005, Döring 1999, Ignacio 2005, Kollock & Smith 1999, Lövheim & Linderman 2005

14) Castells 1996, Herrera 2007

4.1 Cybershamanism from the perspective of Korean shamans

*Baksu*¹⁵⁾ Go Songju described his own activities on the Internet as a "waste of time" and did not believe that future clients and followers could be recruited in cyberspace. He speculated that it is not possible without personal contact to respond to the needs of his customers and their problems.¹⁶⁾

*Mudang*¹⁷⁾ Lee Hae Kyeong argued from a practical point of view, that the Internet as a platform for Korean shamans helps to make contact with netizens and the younger generation. At the same time she condemned cyberspace as a virtual place that offers the opportunity for individuals who "know nothing about shamanism", to pursue their own commercial interests. In principle, she welcomed the development of cybershamanism as further evidence of the flexibility of *musok*. She emphasized in the interview, that cybershamanism, with no shaman counterpart in "reality", can easily lead to degeneration of this religious tradition. She hypothesized that Korean cybershamanism of the future, will be less a reflection of the traditional shamanic ritual practice, and rather a self-contained form in which elements of other religions, cultures and arts will be mixed.¹⁸⁾

Mudang Chunbokhwa perceived the Internet as a medium to establish contacts with an international, younger generation. She considered the development of cybershamanism to be a concomitant of technological changes in the modern world. In her opinion, this recent development should be taken into account in the education-process of young neophytes. Nevertheless, she is of the opinion, that the ritual practice of "real shamans",

15) traditional term for Korean male shaman

16) interview 07.01.2004 in Suwon

17) traditional term for Korean female shaman

18) interview 30.12.2002 in Seoul

will remain unaffected, because in the present and in the future, customers want to experience spirituality by themselves and therefore have to be convinced by the capabilities of a *mudang* they meet in person. For this reason, cybershamanism will in the long term only be of informative character. Virtual interaction with customers from a commercial point, such as offering amulets via paid downloads or virtual divination are in her eyes, to be condemned as cheating.¹⁹⁾

Mudang Sung Kyong-suk is convinced that cybershamanism as virtual religious practice, is not in the spirit of the gods. She admits though, that the Internet paradoxically offers the opportunity to present information and knowledge about *musok* and can provide contacts to shamans. In the wake of rapid social developments, cybershamanism could be a force to be reckoned to maintain the traditional shamanism as a kind of "cyber library"²⁰⁾.

4.2 Relevance of cybershamanism from the perspective of Korean scientists

The scientific assessments differ greatly in this issue as well. Cho, Hung-youn assessed cybershamanism as an "uninteresting phenomenon" that has "no meaning" for *musok* under cultural aspects.²¹⁾

Yoon, Yee-heum believed that a scientific assessment about the significance of cybershamanism and the effects, changes and interplays on traditions and the traditional practice of *mudang*, currently is premature and will possibly be feasible "only in 20 years" because most of the recent customers still prefer a personal contact with a shaman. Accordingly, he also

19) interview 15.01.2003 in Seoul

20) interview 20.02.2003 in Suwon

21) interview 14.08.2003 (Ansan University)

took the position that cybershamanism is not (yet) important for the recent Korean shamanism.²²⁾

In contrast, Park, Il Young estimated the growing number of shamanic web presence as a good sign of acculturation and an expression of flexibility which must be understood as a positive development. In comparison to other religions in Korea, *mugyo* has become very well adapted to modernity. In his opinion, the adaption of Korean shamanism to the new virtual environment is self-evident because the character of shamanism especially in the shamanic myths and cosmological conceptions fit together very well with the structure of cyberspace.

It is therefore no coincidence that shamans were able to establish themselves on the Internet. Park, Il Young stressed furthermore, that the growing spiritual interest of a new generation that is familiar with cyberspace, began to visualize their ideas of spiritual worlds and different realities and alluded in this context to the successful American movie, "The Matrix".²³⁾

Kim, Song-nae refers to the the new cyberworld as a chance of a new "virtual religiosity" and emphasizes the potential in cyberspace to present the shamanic cultural heritage free of social prejudice:

„(…) actual cyberspace shamans could reach a much wider potential clientele and more netizens if they realize their proper position in the virtual reality. Especially, confronting deep rooted social prejudices, the Korean shamanic tradition could be more effectively publicized to the public by means of vast open and democratized practises in cyberspace.”²⁴⁾

22) interview 03.12.2003 (Seoul National University)

23) interview 11.08.2003 (Bucheon Catholic University)

24) Kim, Song-nae 2001, 293–294

5. Virtual reality versus reality?

These different views about cybershamanism inevitably raise the questions to what extent shamans are, at the beginning of the millennium, already established as virtual communities and what impact was exerted by cyberspace on the social practice of *mudang*.

Previous anthropological studies, that have based their research focus on the formation of groups and forms of community on the internet and within a broader research field of sociology, analyzed virtual communities under structural aspects (quality of social relationships, impact of the Internet on institutional, economical, cultural and social areas) show, that a strict separation between online and offline research is not useful.²⁵⁾

The contextual approach emphasizes, that the construction of virtual reality has to be understood in the context of the "real" socio-cultural and historical reality of the people, since the Internet and social structures of reality influence each other.²⁶⁾ A famous example is the analysis of Miller and Slater on the Internet use on the Caribbean island of Trinidad and Trinidadians living in the UK, in which they prove a constitution of a Trinidadian ethnicity via cyberspace.²⁷⁾ The ethnographic research of Bräuchler²⁸⁾ about the online activities of Christian and Islamic protagonists and the construction of identity and collective identity on the Internet during the Moluccas conflict is another example. The very detailed work of Ignacio²⁹⁾ on the emergence of transnational Filipino diaspora communities using newsgroups and chat groups like "Global Pinoy" or "Pinoy Overseas"

25) Marotzki 2003, 153f

26) van Dijk 1999, 142

27) see Miller/Slater 2000

28) see Bräuchler 2005

29) see Ignacio 2005

underlines the assumption, that the Internet is "not a kind of placeless place"³⁰⁾ but an integral part of the communicative and interactive social life. Scientists with a contextual approach distance themselves from research and ideas which imply a splitting into a real world and a virtual world. Accordingly, it is of no surprise, if Miller and Slater demand in their research

“(…) that we need to treat Internet media as continuous with and embedded in other social spaces, that they happen within mundane social structures and relations that they may transform but that they cannot escape into a self–enclosed cyberian apartness.”³¹⁾

An analysis of Korean shaman websites, which is not limited to processing the information content of every webpage, but sees the website as a reflection and extension of the social practice of *mudang*, should consequently accommodate the relationship between online and offline activities due to the fact that the Internet is the interface between information technology and social practice and thereby part of a material culture that is rooted in modernity.

To what extent websites of Korean shamans can be understood as virtual communities and as articulation of a collective identity with transnational character can only be answered through a detailed analysis of websites that deal with the aspects of presentation, self–presentation, virtual communication and virtual interaction.

30) Miller/Slater 2000, 4

31) Miller/Slater 2000, 5

6. From "Cyborg" *mudang* "Cysha" to Cyber Shamanism – historical overview

An overview of the short history of Korean shaman websites illustrates the procedural character of the construction of virtual identities on the Internet.

The first *cybershaman*, who appeared in 1996 with his own website on the internet, was Kim, Kwangsu. He offered his services and information about Korean shamanism under the name Puche Tosa.³²⁾ The publication of a shamanic website with "e-mail counseling" to the issues of family, individual problems, business, shamanic ritual practice and the presentation of newspaper articles on the topic, information about *musok*, Korean traditional culture and traditional amulets (*bujeok*), attracted great attention and provoked controversy, some of which included the allegation that such a web presence would give a false impression of modern South Korea to the world. But at the same time, Puche Tosa was courted by the press and the media, who reported extensively about his life and his virtual fortune-telling. Though Puche Tosa stated as a motivation for the formation of his website to spread, "the right information about shamanism" and stressed that it was important for him to change, "the religious communities prejudice against shamanism", with increasing awareness, the website started to transform slowly. He imposed a charge for the "e-mail counseling" and at a later date, after an update, the *bujeoks* were offered for download with a fee.³³⁾ In contrast to today's e-communities in forums, blogs or social networks, he offered no space for interactive information exchange. The site was created as a self-presentation of a shaman including some information and services. Bilateral communication relationships developed from the combination of personal meetings and media interaction. The "enlightened motivation", which justified a publication of shamanic contents must be seen against the

32) Kim, Song-nae 2001, 277-278

33) Kim, Song-nae 2000, 279

background of a social debate about Korean nationality. Religious, spiritual and traditional aspects of Korean culture played an important role for the construction of Korean identity in the modern world. This "national justification" was an essential part of most shamans presences in the late 90s. Especially, shamans who were designated "Living National Treasure", promulgated knowledge and impressions of their ritual practice by the new medium.

Commercial aspects of shamanic websites played a minor role in the "early years", for the few private shaman websites that were online before the economic crisis of 1997 and 1998.³⁴⁾ However, almost all offered to a small extent, activities of divination available for a fee or the sale of *bujeok*. How sensitive and problematic the topic *musok* and the internet has still been in the 90s and how much the rejection of *mudang* as a representative of a shameful, backward looking and primitive superstition was perceived, can be illustrated by the history of the first *cyborg mudang* "Cysha".

In September 1998, the Korean Internet Service Company "LG Internet" announced, that a virtual Shaman would come down in the Internet Service "Channel i" after her "apprenticeship in the mountains". The company called this cybershaman animation character embodied in the design of a gender neutral 10 year old child "Cysha". The aim of "Cysha" was to help in the fight against viruses and pornography. At the same time Cysha should have offered virtual *bujeok* for download and a divination service. The announcement of a virtual shaman sparked a boisterous debate and finally LG Internet canceled the project "Cysha" to keep themselves from further criticism. The ethnologist Kim, Song-nae characterizes the removal of "Cysha" as an "abortion". But at the same time, "Cysha" became involuntarily

34) Kim, Song-nae suggests in this context approximately 20 web properties of Korean shamans in the world wide web in 1998 (see Kim, Song-nae 2000, 271)

the herald of the new virtual Korean shamanism that developed at an explosive rate during the economic crisis.³⁵⁾

The socioeconomic crisis, which stoked existential fears and was responsible for many life crises in Korea stimulated new interest in spiritual guidance and help. As a result, the content and the design of the websites changed. Although many of the private shamans websites offered informative articles and reports on the subject *musok*, commercial aspects increasingly dominated the content of the pages and influenced the design. With the establishment of the shaman portal <http://www.mudang.com>³⁶⁾, a podium developed on the Internet, that can be considered the most important platform for Korean shamans at the beginning of the New Millennium. This shaman portal created a large network because it was connected closely with the various branches of a new pullulating ritual industry (film,³⁷⁾ customer recruitment,³⁸⁾ publications,³⁹⁾ various newspaper projects⁴⁰⁾, et cetera)

Pak, Ku-won, the initiator and director of the website, established the shaman portal in 1999. His interest in creating a website with and about the various Korean shamans aimed to present informative and commercial offers but the basic issue was essentially of economical nature. The growing attention that *musok* experienced in public, as well as the contact with

35) see Stoffel 2003, Schlottmann 2007

36) From 2005–2009 the domain changed to <http://www.shaman.co.kr>. Since 2009 www.shaman.co.kr is the domain of one shaman. Today, Pak, Ku-Won has the domains www.neomudang.com. and jeomjip.com.

37) For example: consulting and creating contacts with shamans for the film „Mudang: Reconciliation of the Living and the Dead“ from Park, Ki-bok

38) Organizers of festivals in the country and abroad contacted Pak, Ku-Won

39) Support and financial assistance for various book projects, which were advertised on the website afterwards

40) Temporary collaboration with the editor of the magazine "Korean Tradition".

traditionally interested scientists and folklorists encouraged him to invest in this "business niche" and hence he formed a staff of 6 people (photographers, programmers, web designers, et cetera).⁴¹⁾

Approximately 80 % of the shamans who contacted the editors of <http://shaman.co.kr>, had only basic ideas of how the layout of their website could be designed and around 10% had no idea at all of their virtual self presentation. Hence in general, the web designer created the "new virtual image" having sole responsibility. Only 10% of Korean shamans developed their own concepts of what their site should look like. While the shaman portal has been mainly considered as a virtual podium in the first few years, the scope and powers of Pak, Ku-won and his team increased significantly from 2000–2005, with a high interest in Korean shamanism and shamanic ritual practice. A growing number of customers turned directly to Pak, Ku-won and asked him to recommend a shaman. This role as negotiator was regarded with suspicion by some shamans and led to intense debates several times.

7. Analysis of selected Korean shaman websites⁴²⁾

In the following table I analyzed 48 websites, which have appeared on several shaman portals for their style of presentation and self representation of Korean shamans. The aim of the study was, in addition to an analysis of interactive communication structure and the structure of shamanic websites, a documentation of the growing multimedialisation (movie, photo, animation) and the collection of evidence for the putative

41) several interviews and meetings with Pak, Ku-Won between 2002–2004

42) for more details about the websites see Schlottmann 2007 487–488

transnationalization of shaman websites.

In general, the tendency for more visualization of rituals is highly visible. Irrespective of whether the websites used more photos or not, the following table only focuses on photo galleries that are separately listed as a subdomain. These galleries are more meaningful because they are used as demonstration and documentation for spiritual qualifications (for example *naeringut*⁴³⁾) highlight special shamanic traditions or underline the explicit status of a *mudang* (national treasure, festivals, performance of rituals abroad).

	gallery		film			kontakt				language			ritual				tradition			self-p.					
	PF	RF	AF	FF	IK	EM	GB	F	AS	TA	K	JA	E	G	GS	W	J	B	H	Ha	X	LL	SW	LE	FK
1	x	x	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	x	x
2**	-	x	x	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	x	-	x	-	-	-	-	-
3*	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	-	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	x	x	-	-	-
4**	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-
5*	-	x	-	-	-	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	-
6**	-	-	-	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	-	-	x	x	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	-
7**	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	x	-	-	x	x	-	-	-
8**	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	x	-	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	x	-	-	x	x	-	x	-
9**	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	x	-	-	x	-	-	-
10**	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x					-	-	x	x	x	-	x
11**	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	-	x	x	x	-
12*	-	x	x	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	-	x	x	-	-
13*	x	-	-	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	-	-	x	-	-
14**	x	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	-	-	x	x	x	-	-
15*	-	x	-	-	-	-	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-
16*	x	-	-	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
17**	-	x	x	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	x	-	-	x	-	-	-
18**	-	x	x	x	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	-	x	x	x	x
19	x	x	x	x	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	x	x	-	-	-	-	-	-
20*	x	-	-	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
21**	x	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	x
22**	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	-	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	x	-	-	x	x	-	-
23**	x	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	-	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	-	-	-	x	x	x	x	-
24	-	-	-	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	-	-	-	-	x	x	x	-	-
25*	-	x	x	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	x	-	-	x	-	x	-
26*	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	-	-	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	-

43) Initiation ritual for a neophyte

27	x	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	x	x	x	-
28**	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	-	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	x	x	-	-
29*	x	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	x
30**	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	-	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	x
31**	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	-	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-
32**	x	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	x	-	x	-
33**	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-
34**	-	-	-	x	-	-	x	-	-	x	x	-	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	-	x	-
35*	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	-	x
36**	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	x
37**	x	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	-	-	x	x	-
38*	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	-	x
39**	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	-	-	x	x	-
40	-	-	-	x	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-
41*	x	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	-	-	x	-	x
42**	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-
43**	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-
44*	x	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-
45*	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	x	x
46**	-	x	-	x	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	-	-	x	-	x
47**	x	x	-	x	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-
48	x	-	-	x	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	-	-	x	x

* May 2006 not accessible anymore
 ** October 2009 not accessible anymore
 *** September 2013 not accessible anymore

Fotogalerie

PF = private photos of shamans
 RF = photos of rituals

Film

AF = amateur films of rituals created by private persons
 FF = TV-reports of rituals
 IK = interviews und comments published in TV

Kontakt

EM = e-mail
 GB = guestbook
 F = forum
 ASZ = map and directions
 TA = telephone, mobile, exact adress

Sprache

K = Korean
 JA = Japanese
 E = English

Ritualpraxis

G	= ritual (<i>gut</i>) general
GS	= special <i>gut</i> , exact classification
W	= fortune telling
J	= chiseong
B	= bujeok

Tradition

H	= Hwanghaedo
Ha	= Hanyang, Gyeonggido
X	= different traditions or no specific tradition

Selbstdarstellung

LL	= CV, outstanding characteristics of academic, artistic or musical nature
SW	= Description of the spiritual career with details about <i>sinbyeong</i> and/or spiritual anecdotes
LE	= Literary productions, such as essays, poems, short aphorisms or explanations about rituals or amulets a.s.o.
FK	= foreign comments (newspaper, quotes from scientists, artists or celebrities about the shaman)

The analysis of texts refers exclusively to posts that are similar to printed texts and are characterized by a more or less permanent presence with the intention of self description.

Chat style communication is mentioned in the table as an option under the category "contact".

Virtual "gimmicks", that could only be found at two websites are not listed in the table, although they certainly have interactive character and are a special type of computer-mediated interaction.

However, they deserve a special mention because they contribute in cyberspace to a "materialization" of religious practice in virtual space. Before 2005, shaman Kim, Keum Hwa offered the lighting of incense at a cyber-*sansingak*⁴⁴⁾ and shaman Buchedosa had a virtual shrine where customers could choose a prayer service by ticking a prayer.

44) a shrine for a mountain spirit

The data in the tables were checked 16 months later. At that time 16 web properties (33.3%) could no longer be accessed. Of these 16 sites, two were decommissioned because of late payment. The other sites were now no longer active. Further checks in the years 2009 and 2013 manifested the fast pace of content in Cyberspace and illustrated that one of the greatest difficulties in studying cybershamanism in general, and especially in South Korea, is keeping pace with its rapid developments and changes.

The structure of the studied websites is almost identical. Almost all websites offer opportunities to contact via email, phone number, mobile number or a guestbook and show a more or less animated map with directions to the shrine or home of the *mudang*. Most guestbooks could be viewed only with an ID and could not be entered by outsiders. On no website had a forum been set up (until the end of 2006). Apart from three exceptions, which offered English and Japanese language versions of the website, all the others were only in Korean. Exceptionally in a few cases, a bilingual menu (English– Korean) led to a broader overview (map) with the content of the website.

At least 85.4% of the examined websites showed one or more photo galleries. During 2004, the majority of the galleries were organized as thumb galleries. From 2006 animated slide shows appeared more frequently. All amateur photographs showed scenes of rituals. A third of the websites were equipped with one or more film clips of varying length.⁴⁵⁾ Some *mudang* also presented recordings of their private rituals with original sound that were much longer. The emphasis of private films were to capture ecstatic moments and the zenits of ecstatic ritual practice (*jakdu dance*⁴⁶⁾). In

45) 1–10 minutes long interviews or excerpts from television.

46) dancing barefoot on a knife

contrast, the TV recordings showed either interviews or scenes of dance and traditional aspects.

Normally under the category of self representation, texts with information about Korean shamanism, essays about rituals and spirituality, autobiographical reports and/or descriptions of *sinbyeong*⁴⁷⁾, testimonials from clients and shamans as well as literary productions were stored.

The lack of forums from 2002–2006 was already a clear indicator, that interactive communication played a subordinate role on individual shamanic websites. Still, the creation and design of a website, the obvious possibility to make contact and the guest books were non-binding options for the visitor to make an anonymous first contact from the spatial distance of cyberspace. The first cybershamans created informational and commercial websites as a service with the clear indication that the new virtual space is a possibility for "communication to a stranger" with no further obligation.

8. Korean cybershamanism – recent developments and changes

Cyberspace as a place of social interactivity is huge, global, anarchic and rapidly growing. With the development of social networks, blogs and many forums it is nearly impossible to observe a social phenomena in totality or to follow the complex networked communication online.

“One of the greatest difficulties in studying religion on the internet is keeping pace with its rapid developments and changes. This has been a significant issue when developing theoretical frameworks for examining religious participation on the World Wide Web. Religion has always had a

47) spiritual sickness of shamans

significant online presence, but it is a shifting environment with the number of sites increasing rapidly, and the types of sites created changing significantly with the advancements of new technologies.”⁴⁸⁾

Consequently, the current state of facts must be seen as an overview with a short half-life of knowledge. Nevertheless, trends are seen which allow initial conclusions.

Cybershamans in Korea recently do not use cyberspace to theorize spiritual questions, discuss new media or create new forms of community. The new ways to socialize and/or represent for example like on you-tube, facebook, twitter, tumblr and so on, are part of modern direct marketing and used to combine information with self portrayal. There is a clear separation between private and public presentation that parallels the development of social media. After an initial euphoric phase at the beginning of the millennium, in which Korean shamanism was elevated to a symbol of national identity and accordingly was more ubiquitous in the media, things calmed down again. Ten years later, cybershamanism plays no important role for the life of Korean shamans. The Internet is still used as an advertising and information area. The field of public relations and the formation of groups has shifted to social networks. In a figurative sense, one can say that private contacts, group meetings and discussions take place behind closed virtual doors. Postings on social networks merely allows friends and acquaintances a glimpse into the everyday life of shamans. The privacy of the customer is of great importance and therefore it is not to be expected that this will change in the foreseeable future. Different to many other social groups, that have been analyzed by social scientists to offer a comprehensive and multispatial analysis of transnational life across the

48) Helland 2005

highly mediated worlds where diaspora is lived and imagined, Korean shamanism is obviously in general still a very local, confidential phenomena.

A new development of the last years is the growing number of Korean artists, photographers and filmmakers who present themselves as part of a "shamanic world". The boundaries between cybershamanism and neo-shamanism with elements of *musok* have become blurred in recent years.⁴⁹⁾ This global trend to combine traditional spirituality with art goes along with a revival in popular and personal spirituality, that can be seen as the result of a cultural shift of the postmodern era.

9. Are Shamanic portals virtual communities?

Shaman portals are complex websites, that merge thematic communities with a common interest. There are communities with geographical characteristic traditions (Hwanghaedo, Gyeonggido, et cetera) emphasizing their local customs and traditions. Those websites on a shaman portal, target in a transnational context, Korean emigrants or their descendants as potential clients and visitors. They serve the request to exchange information, make contacts and to create a kind of "Korean identity" for an anonymous diaspora.

To what extend shaman portals like www.shaman.co.kr represent virtual communities, who perceive themselves as a social entity and if this portal provides a cyberspace on which collective identities can arise, is questionable. It is doubtful if virtual communication is even considered as a contribution to the construction of collective identities and if there is in

49) Orchid Red (<http://youtu.be/ywQJsjCKpjY>),

Jung Kuho (<http://enkr.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/889351/dance-review-wagner-meets-korean-shamanism-in-fashion-forward>

Halla Huhm (http://www.hawaii.edu/korea/halla_huhm/Repertoire/shaman.html)

general the wish for such a "fraternization". Obviously, there is a community that is active in cyberspace, but a mediated communication between group members is rarely seen. The sporadic communication in guestbooks, chat rooms or via e-mail can't be evaluated as an intended contribution to constitute group relations because of the short interaction time. The virtual communication does not take place between shamans and therefore does not serve the purpose of establishing social relationships between groups of shamans or their followers and customers. The options to interact on shamanic portals are made to facilitate the initial contact with foreign visitors and the communication is not based on the principles of regularity and commitment, but rather are non-binding and anonymous.

Korean shaman portals are virtual platforms of interest groups whose appeal lies in the multitude of offers to attract potential new customers. In this sense, shaman portals are not virtual communities that contribute to the construction of collective identity via computer-mediated communication but rather commercial podiums for relatively loose, social networks, where the feeling of togetherness hardly plays a role.

10. Conclusion

The adjustment of Korean shamans to urban life, to new Western value concepts, the new global communication structures, the emergence of new transnational social spaces and the dynamics of global development are part of a recent process of differentiation, that reflects the fragmentation of modern society. In light of these rapid and vehement changes to capitalization, the commercialization of shamanic ritual practice in the modern era is no surprise. The critics who condemn these changes focus only on one side of the coin that all too easily stamps modifications and

adaptations as degeneration. This judgment ignores the vitality of Korean shamans, who in the search for new ways of interaction and communication had to change and to adapt to a new generation of customers. The ability of modern communication media, most notably the Internet and its various applications, remove spatial barriers so that the activity of Korean shamans can cross national borders. Korean Shamans twitter, create websites and blogs, offer virtual fortune telling or background information about shamanistic traditions. They film documentaries or perform on stage and offer an international audience unusual insight into an alien world.

A comprehensive analysis of the results on the topics, virtual community and shamanic websites show that there are no virtual communities at the beginning of the millennium that exist in isolation and without reference to a concrete real world counterparts in cyberspace.

While the criteria "formation of a group" and "common interest" can be proven for almost all shamanic websites, even if the groupings differ greatly in form, shape, motivation and content, there is hardly any evidence of internet based communication, with the aim of group formation processes in cyberspace, that are beyond already existing interpersonal relational structures.

Group formation with multilateral structures of communication in cyberspace can be recognized to some extent in the various internet cafes where cybershamans are active. But the short life of the individual forums, the anonymity of many members and the variable quality of the questions and answers about *musok* raise the question to what extent these groups can be qualified as virtual communities, that are relevant for researching shamanic culture or shamanic identity and whether these forms of community can be seen as virtual communities ergo cybershamanism.

The evanescent small number of self-appointed Korean cybershamans who do not meet the criteria of my definition and are still active on the Internet, were not considered in the present article. In general, there are individuals, that assembled and personalized their religious behavior and beliefs after they created hybrids of traditional rituals, combining different sources of knowledge and practice to create individualized patterns of spiritual life. The Internet, as a free and open space, offers greater freedom to those modern neo-shamans by removing traditionally established entry barriers, such as formalized mentoring, education and initiation rituals. They are another religious manifestation of computer-mediated religious life that must be seen in the global tendency of online religious seekers to cultivate traditional religions in a new context. They are worthy of another academic examination in the field of religious studies.

Conclusively, one can note that there are many active cybershamans in Korea, using the Internet for self-expression and establishing contacts. They have adapted to the online environment and have changed the manner of communication.

An interaction between social practice and cybershamanism is not demonstrated in traditional Korean shamanism presently. Virtual spirituality plays an irrelevant role in the context of *musok*.

It seems that online spiritual shamanic experiences are too narrow and limited and have to be accompanied by real life interaction.

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국문초록

한국에서의 사이버샤머니즘

Dr. Dirk Schlottmann

21 세기의 종교 생활은 점점 더 인터넷상의 교회나 집, 또는 모스크로 이동하고 있다. 인터넷은 시간과 공간의 장벽을 초월하기 때문에, 종교는 이제 전 세계에서 언제 어디서나 접근이 가능해지고 있다. 이미 많은 연구자들이 인터넷이 문화와 종교에 상당한 영향을 미치고 있음을 입증했으며, 이러한 이유로 사이버 공간에서의 신앙의 의미와 전통적인 또는 토착적인 종교의 미래는 중요한 연구 주제가 된다.

21세기가 시작된 이후로 한국 무당은 온라인 상에서 자신의 존재를 각인시키고자 매우 활발하게 노력하고 있다.

본 논문은 지난 10년간의 한국의 사이버 샤머니즘의 발전을 추적하고, 온라인 숭배와 사이버 샤머니즘이 어느 정도까지 가상 커뮤니티를 형성하고 있으며 가상 공동체들간의 사회적 네트워크들이 어떻게 상호작용을 하고 있는지 파악하고자 시도한다. 이를 위해 한국의 전통 무당들이 운영하는 웹사이트와 이들이 제공하는 콘텐츠를 조사, 분석함으로써 한국 토착 종교의 구상과 전통적인 한국 무당들의 변화하는 미디어 환경 사이의 관계를 조명한다.

키워드: 사이버 공간, 샤먼, 무당, 사이버 샤머니즘, 종교, 가상 커뮤니티, 제의

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