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Shamans and Nativism: Postcolonial Trauma in *Spirits' Homecoming* (2016) and *Manshin: Ten Thousand Spirits* (2013)

Abstract

This article examines the figure of the shaman in contemporary South Korean cinema. By taking a close look at Cho Jung-rae (Jo Jeong-rae)'s feature *Spirits' Homecoming* (*Gwihyang*, 2016) and Park Chan-kyong (Park Chan-gyeong)'s documentary *Manshin: Ten Thousand Spirits* (*Mansin*, 2013), the article argues that the figure of the shaman is deployed in such a way as to articulate South Korean postcolonial anxiety in two diverging ways. Whilst the former film draws on shamanism and nostalgizes the Korean past in relation to the issue of the 'comfort women' (military sex slaves) in contemporary South Korean politics, the latter eschews a coherent historical national narrative in favour of a more fragmented and interrogative account of not only South Korean shamanism but the country's troubled relationship with the Korean War and the post-war modernization project. The article argues that where Cho Jung-rae's film employs ethnocentrism as the primary lens for a nostalgic memory, Park Chan-kyong's documentary disarticulates the historical trajectory of nationalist invocations of a shamanist past, as it aligns the nativist tradition with the wider pro-democracy *minjung* movement.

Keywords

Shamanism in South Korean cinema, *Spirits' Homecoming*, *Manshin: Ten Thousand Spirits*, nostalgia, nativism, 'comfort women', Kim Geum-hwa

Introduction: Cinematizing South Korean Shamanism

During the last two decades, South Korean cinema has seen a proliferation of feature and documentary films involving shamans as the predictable forces of good but also more ambiguously as ominous figures who can detect and foresee death and destruction in the future. From Park Gi-hyeong's *Whispering Corridors* (*Yeogogoedam*, 1998) to Kim Gwang-tae's *The Piper* (*Sonnim*, 2015), shamans are rendered as mysterious yet reliable figures who mediate between the spiritual and the physical worlds, excavating traumas of the past, exposing hypocrisies of the present and pointing toward uncertain futures. In Na Hong-jin's *The Wailing* (*Gokseong*, 2016), for instance, the mother-in-law turns to shamanism after having witnessed her granddaughter become possessed by an evil spirit. After her son-in-law Jong-gu becomes physically and mentally distressed as a police chief overseeing a recent wave of violent crimes in their village, she exclaims: 'I asked the old lady next door to recommend a good shaman'. Grasping the gravity of the situation, the mother-in-law realizes that such otherworldly occurrences warrant a visit from a force more powerful than the local police department. Similarly, in Shin Jeong-won's comedy/horror feature *Ghost Sweepers* (*Jeomjaengideul*, 2012), six shamans from across South Korea come together to exorcize an evil spirit that has plagued a small town on the southern peninsula. Both films thus feature shamans as religious practitioners who possess the ability to go beyond the quotidian and enter a realm that only few mortals can access.[1]

The shaman is also found in Korean classic films, such as Shin Sang-ok's *Rice* (*Ssal*, 1963), which portrays a conflict between a Korean War veteran who attempts to construct a tunnel in his hometown for a rice paddy irrigation line, and the shaman who opposes the plan due to her 'superstitious' reverence for the mountain god. The feature epitomizes the 'anti-superstition "enlightenment" films encouraged by the Park Chung Hee regime' (Chung and Diffrient 2015, 262, n. 27), and by conflating shamanism with superstition, the film marks the two as detrimental to the

health of the nation, thus 'standing in the way of modernization and a prosperous future' (263, n. 27). Choi Ha-won's *A Shaman's Story* (*Munyeodo*, 1972) is one of the first films that feature shamanism prominently on screen. It renders a conflict between a shaman and the arrival of Christianity in a local village and is based on a novel by Kim Dong-ri's *Portrait of a Shaman* (*Munyeodo*, 1936). The film explores shamanism and Christianity vis-à-vis South Korea's post-war modernization project. In her seminal study on the state of contemporary shamanism in South Korea, Laurel Kendall notes that 'Korean shamans are *not* struggling to reconstruct nearly vanished practices as in Siberia or Central Asia, where shamans were effectively suppressed for many decades' (2009, xix-xx, emphasis added). Kendal argues against the view that Korean shamanism is on the wane and could potentially become eradicated as a cultural practice. She notes that even if 'Korean shamans were harassed by political regimes, both colonial and national, throughout the twentieth century and have a generally adversarial relationship with South Korea's Protestant Christian population today, reports of their inevitable demise are overstated' (xx).

My focus in this article is neither the gendered politics of shamanism in contemporary South Korean cinema nor the tropes of masculinity and femininity vis-à-vis the country's socio-political landscape. I am interested in the figure of the shaman as a symbol of nativist pride as well as an element that transgresses and reimagines the postcolonial politics of South Korean modernity. More specifically, I will examine Cho Jung-rae (Jo Jeong-rae)'s feature *Spirits' Homecoming* (*Gwihyang*, 2016) and Park Chan-kyong (Park Chan-gyeong)'s documentary *Manshin: Ten Thousand Spirits* (*Mansin*, 2013) as narratives that employ the figure of the shaman as a filmic device foregrounding anxiety about the colonial past and the postcolonial present. Although Cho's film falls into the genre of the historical drama which, due to its style and sensibility, may offer a limited and perhaps less nuanced view of history, it nonetheless has the potential to convey socio-political messages of personal, communal and national suffering that an expository documentary

may lack. Thus, despite the recognizable differences between the genre of the documentary and that of the feature film, this article investigates the utilization of the figure of the shaman rather than the specificities or accuracy of their historical employment. By looking closely at the various ways that shamanism is projected on screen, I will contextualize this cinematic engagement in a socio-cultural and political field that exposes a particular postcolonial anxiety regarding South Korea's relationship to Japanese colonial rule and US cultural neocolonialism and neoliberalism.

Spirits' Homecoming*: The Nation's Past Restored*

Although Cho's feature saw its release in 2016, the response to the film had been overwhelming well before its release. Fourteen years in the making, during which the director struggled to secure enough investment and distribution, the film made its way to the public only after several rounds of public crowdfunding campaigns. After taking in donations from 75,270 contributors worldwide (Won 2016), Cho released the feature in February 2016 where it topped the South Korean box office charts for a week despite its small-scale budget—around $2 million (USD)—and contentious subject matter. Mostly set in a 'comfort station' (Japanese military brothels—*ianjo* in Japanese or *wianso* in Korean) in Manchuria during the Japanese occupation in 1943, the film portrays the kidnap and sexual abuse of Korean teenage girls by the Japanese Imperial Army. Euphemistically termed 'comfort women', somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 Korean women were forced into sex slavery (Cumings 2005). Subsequently, only 238 have come forward, and merely 46 remained alive in 2016 (McCurry 2016).[2] The film amassed tremendously positive response from the general public, clearly related to its premiere coinciding with the widespread criticism of the settlement agreement between Japan and South Korea over the 'comfort women' issue (Nam and Park 2016). On 28 Dec 2017, the governments of the two countries, without consulting the former 'comfort women', reached an 'understanding' with the aim of strengthening the bilateral ties

between Japan and South Korea. Significantly, the process paved the way for Japan's avoidance of admission of legal responsibilities. Winning the category of People's Choice Most Popular Film Award at the 2016 Chunsa Film Art Awards, *Spirits'* has managed to feed into the nationalist sentiment, despite the director's assurance that it was not 'anti-Japanese' (Shim 2016). Here, I pay attention to the ways the film deploys shamanism to portray South Korea's postcolonial anxiety towards its erstwhile colonizer as well as towards its own role in perpetuating the suffering of former 'comfort women'.

Spirits' opens with the archive footage of a KBS interview with Kim Hak-sun, the first woman to go public about her experiences as a 'comfort woman'. The year is 1991, and Yeong-ok, another survivor now living as a seamstress, upon seeing the interview, begins recollecting her own experience as a young 'comfort woman' in 1943. The scenes of her childhood memories before her kidnap feature stunningly beautiful scenes of rural Korea. The breathtaking views of mountains and forests add a nostalgic and wistful quality to the images of childhood innocence, particularly those featuring the protagonist Jeong-min and her father singing 'Arirang', a Korean folk song that commonly 'articulate[s] Korean indignation toward Japanese colonial domination' (2007, 646). However, the bucolic beauty of the landscape and, by extension, the Korean national integrity, is soon to be disrupted by the arrival of the Japanese Imperial Army soldiers. The national and the personal past is then quickly fed back to the present where we see Eun-gyeong, a young shaman, performing a *gut* (shamanist ritual). 'Shamans are religious practitioners who engage the spirits on behalf of the community', notes Kendall, 'either through encounters during soul flight or by invoking the spirits into the here and now of a ritual space, conveying the immediacy of these experiences with their own bodies and voices' (2009, xx). The scenes featuring Jeong-min are here closely linked to Yeong-ok and Eun-gyeong, bridging the gap between the past and the present throughout the film and setting up a pattern of oscillation between

the two temporalities. Placing the scenes alongside the archive footage of Kim Hak-sun's interview and Eun-gyeong's *gut*, Cho further employs shamanism as a link not only to 1942 (diegetic past) and 1991 (diegetic present) but also to 2016 (year of release), as the names of 75,270 contributors scroll on the screen at the end of the film. In the denouement scene, Jeong-min's kidnap transitions to Eun-gyeong's performance of a *ssitgim-gut*, a ceremony during which a shaman cleanses a dead person's soul. Thus, shamanism in *Spirits'* operates at two levels. First, it is used to call on the spirit of Jeong-min on behalf of the *local* community in Yangpyeong Dumulmeori—the specific place where the *gut* is taking place. Second, it serves as a mediator at the *national* level between Korea's colonial past and its postcolonial present.

'For nearly a century', notes Kendall, 'Korean intellectuals and reformers regarded shamanic practices as the target of a Manichean struggle between modernity and superstition, rationality and magic' (2009, 3). This became particularly visible during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century decline of imperial China and the corresponding rise of imperial Japan, as Korea was annexed as a Japanese colony in 1910. 'The re-examination of traditional Korean folk culture', writes Michael Edson Robison, was a 'feature of enlightenment iconoclasm' in early twentieth-century Korea (1988, 35). By attacking the 'superstition and fatalism' of Korean shamanistic traditions as 'antiscientific and fatalistic' (Robinson 35), early iconoclasts attributed Korea's failings to its dependence on the irrational folk beliefs rather than Western 'enlightenment rationality' and scientific reasoning. The expansion of the vernacular press, especially the two nationalist newspapers that emerged in 1920—the Donga Daily (*Donga ilbo*) and the Chosun Daily (*Chosun ilbo*)—galvanized the emerging Korean nationalist movement: 'Politically, the new press arrogated to itself both the civilizing task of spreading advanced ideas in the colony and the role of spokesman for the nation' (Robinson 53).

The cultural reconstruction boom of the 1920s, with its focus on vernacular literature and research into Korean history and folklore, resulted in the development and intensification of Korean political and cultural consciousness. In contrast to the Japanese Government-General of Korea's official line of 'homogeneity' that located old Korean customs and beliefs as evidence of cultural and historical proximity between Japanese and Korean peoples, nationalist studies of Korean history and customs sought 'a nationalistic theory of *unique* origins' as grounds for political autonomy (Robinson 80, emphasis added). The traditional Korean elite regarded shamanism as backwards and one of the factors that contributed to the country's downfall. It is then ironic that with the rise of 'the critique of Korea's sinified elite tradition … indigenous popular culture became a repository of national symbols and identity' (Robinson 81). Revivalist folklorists of the 1960s and 1970s would come to view Korean traditions 'across a memory horizon of colonial, wartime, and more recent industrial dislocations' (Kendall 19), resulting in the establishment of Cultural Property Protection Law by the Park administration in 1962, a law which would revive, subsume and protect shamanist rituals and other performing arts as part of the country's 'intangible cultural heritage' (Yang 2003). Notably, in 1985, Kim Geum-hwa, arguably South Korea's most prominent shaman, received the status of Human Cultural Treasure, which in effect made the figure of the shaman a part of the national cultural establishment. Taking the divergent perceptions of shamanism in the pre- and post-war periods of Korean history into consideration, I argue that *Spirits'* representation of shamanism serves as a means of reflecting on and grappling with a national trauma in the form of nostalgia for the nation's past. Significantly, this trauma can only be assuaged by the eventual return to Korean 'authenticity' and 'tradition'.

The opening scenes of Spirits' are indicative of the ways the film signals a return to the past. Here, the figure of the shaman establishes the co-existence of different temporalities, which serves as a means of reconciling and healing the lasting wounds between the past and the

present. Svetlana Boym identifies two kinds of nostalgia as a prominent affective state of modern life: the restorative and the reflective. The former, she notes, 'stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home'; the latter 'thrives in *algia*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming – wistfully, ironically, desperately" (2001, xviii, emphasis in original). The former allows ethnocentrism to provide the primary lens for a nostalgic memory—a 'national memory that is based on a single plot of national identity" (xviii). The latter is a "social memory, which consists of collective frameworks that mark but do not define the individual memory' (xviii). *Spirits'* portrayal of a bucolic Korean countryside with its luscious landscape in the opening scenes exhibits the workings of a restorative nostalgia where the pastoral scenes become expressions of the desire for the nation's resurrection and restoration. Apart from the infiltration of Japanese soldiers into this pristine land, the subsequent scenes, which portray the arrival to Song-hui's adobe of Eun-gyeong and her mother, create a visible link between the past and the present. Here, Eun-gyeong's mother recalls the scenes of her husband dying at the hands of an ex-convict. He breaks into the house, kills her husband and rapes Eun-gyeong who becomes traumatized to the point where she has stopped speaking.[3]

Aside from the explicit connection between the sexually assaulted women whose lives have changed drastically after their ordeals, these scenes—read allegorically—recall Japan's invasion and the metaphorical 'rape' of Korea that has been left traumatized and silent until this point.[4] As a result, shamanism enables a reconciliation of the past and the present with a view of appeasing the trauma of the victims (of the past) and the guilt of the survivors (in the present). What is significant here, besides the familial sense of belonging, is the notion of a national identity, as Jeong-min is told by her mother before her kidnap: 'Don't forget our names and where your home is'. These directives, however, do not simply point to the forced physical dislocation of the women; they can also be viewed as an implicit reference to the Japanese assimilation policies which began

at the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. In the outing scene halfway into the film, as the women gather to bathe and rest, their watchman, officer Kuroda, reminds them that speaking Korean is not allowed. If the Korean language is that which has been silenced, its absence is compensated by one of the women who begins to sing. The song is 'Gasiri', a Goryeo period love song about a 'deep sorrow of parting … describing how the woman who is left alone overcomes her acute pain and devotes herself to prayer for her loved one' (Kim 2009, 55). During the song, Jeong-min's memories of her childhood home flash by as the scene transitions to the present, where Yeong-ok is seen watching a news segment about the government accepting registration from surviving victims. Thus, the 'voice' of the past, which was once silenced, has finally found an outlet. Despite disparaging remarks from an administration officer, Kim Hak-sun comes forward to tell her story. If restorative nostalgia seeks to rebuild and restore things as they were at the time of a nation's 'mythical' and idealized past, in *Spirits'* this cannot be done before the past is 'dealt with' not only by the foreign aggressor but also by the current victims of the past crime. Wistfully recollecting the pre-colonial Korea, the film presents a nostalgic search for an ideal homeland with the aim of creating a sense of national coherence and homogeneity that has been lost.

It is during the *ssitgim-gut* at the end of *Spirits'* that the young shaman Eun-gyeong receives Jeong-min's spirit, in effect reconciling the past and present at a national level. The film's recourse to shamanism as an embodiment of 'Koreanness' corresponds to the aforementioned domestication of shamans as symbols of the Korean past. With the scholarly folklore revival of the 1970s and the 1980s, the newfound focus on Korean 'traditions' and customs also fed into *minjung* movement of public protests and dissent against the US-backed dictatorship. Popularizing the notion of *han* 'as the pain of the politically and socially oppressed Korean masses, unbound and released (*hanp'uri*) in *kut*', the *minjung* movement linked *gut* for the dead with specific historical points of oppression, in effect 'recasting … shaman rituals as a widely recognized idiom of protest

theater' (Kendal 22, emphasis in original). The linkage of shaman rituals and social oppression is particularly poignant when viewed in terms of restorative nostalgia. Or, as Boym puts it, 'antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths' (2001, 41). In the shaman ritual at the end of the film, Eun-gyeong and Song-hui overlook the pit in which dead bodies of the women have been burned. Here, the *gut* becomes a device that not only brings back to the present the atrocities committed by the Japanese soldiers; it also castigates South Korea's inability to collectively deal with the aggressor of the past and console the spirits of their fallen countrymen. In the final coda, we see Jeong-min's spirit returning to her childhood home and enjoying a final meal with her family against stunning images of Korean vistas once again. The dialogue between Yeong-ok and Jeong-min makes it clear that the *gut* performed at the end of the film is meant not only to bring back the victim's spirits but just as much alleviate the feelings of guilt on behalf of both the survivors and the nation. 'I am so sorry. I'm so terribly sorry, Jung-min', cries Yeong-ok. 'It's all right. I am here now', replies Jeong-min's spirit, unburdening Yeong-ok's guilt-ridden soul. The sense of collective national guilt, however, becomes even more potent if we delve deeper into the issue of Korea's involvement in the recruitment of 'comfort women'.

In her in-depth study of Korean survivor victims' narratives of their ordeals, Chunghee Sarah Soh argues that the 'comfort women' in effect 'embodied' gendered structural violence in colonial Korea and imperial Japan—violence that resulted in the 'victimization of young women in light of both Japans' colonial economy *and* the centuries-old sexual cultures of Japanese and Korean patriarchy' (2008, xii, emphasis in original). By calling attention to the social-economic parameters of 'colonial modernity', which made Korean working-class women vulnerable to exploitation, Soh argues that 'the lifelong suffering of Korean survivors arose not only within the 'comfort women' system and the broader parameters of Japanese colonialism … but also within Korean patriarchy and its political economy under colonial rule' (xiii). It was in their pursuit of

autonomy, away from the oppressive patriarchy, familial relations and domestic violence, that Korean women fell victims to the sexual economy and prostitution in colonial Korea. Moreover, the masculinist sexual culture in imperial Japan, with its institutionalized gender violence and military hypermasculinity, furthered the tragedies of Korean 'comfort women'. Even recent nationalist attempts to publicly memorialize the 'comfort women' as fallen heroes/victims of the nation have been thwarted by forces who refuse to equate '"ugly comfort women"' (Soh 230) with freedom fighters who died for their country. Seen in this light, the administration officer's remark in *Spirits'* that anyone coming forward as a 'comfort woman' would be regarded as mad, serves as the film's only critique of South Korea's involvement in the 'comfort women' issue. However, the film's grouping of Jeong-min and other young women (and thereby the entire country of South Korea by extension) as the 'victims' of Japanese 'aggression', re-establishes and reinserts South Korea's simultaneous position as a victim of colonial aggression and as a perpetrator of structural gendered violence against women.

If restorative nostalgia is, as Boym claims, 'an abdication of personal responsibility, a guilt-free homecoming, an ethic and aesthetic failure' (2001, xiv), its workings in *Spirits'* effaces the social stigmatization of women survivors in postcolonial South Korea, exhibiting an ethnonational discourse that glosses over the more complex narratives of oppression and sexual exploitation of lower-class women in imperial Japan's occupied territories. Eun-gyeong serves as a mediator who links colonial and patriarchal violence against women in the past as well as in the present. But the film in effect romanticizes shamanism in a *faux* attempt to confront the country's colonial past. Whereas Yeong-ok's self-reproach epitomizes South Korea's inability to confront its history, Jeong-min's forgiveness banishes any self-critique that would instigate an attempt to grapple with the factors that facilitated and perpetuated the suffering of 'comfort women' in colonial Korea and postcolonial South Korea.

Whilst *Spirits'* romanticizes shamanism, Park's *Manshin* takes a different approach by emphasizing class in the representation of native Koreanness. Documenting the life of the Cultural Treasure shaman Kim Geum-hwa from her birth in occupied Korea to her near-death experiences during the Korean War and the harassment from the police and Christian groups, the film appears to follow the tradition of the biopic or a *Bildungsroman*. Making use of voiceover commentary and employing professional actors for the reenactments of 'real-life' events in Kim's life, *Manshin* uses the expository mode of storytelling to trace its protagonists' journey from childhood to adulthood. Yet, Park challenges such representations by inserting within the narrative disparate archive footage that aligns Kim's life trajectory with Korea's postcolonial history, where the images of imperial occupation, the Korean War and neoliberalism work against restorative national nostalgia and the representations of shamanism as a symbol of conservative national identity. By positioning the nativist tradition against nationalism and conservative nostalgia, *Manshin* challenges representations of shamanism in terms of restorative nostalgia.

Manshin: Ten Thousand Spirits*: The Nation's History Ruptured*

If films such as Im Kwon-taek's *The Taebaek Mountains* and *The Divine Bow* (*Singung*, 1979) portray shamanism as a 'non-modern' yet 'inherent' part of Korean culture, *The Wailing* employs shamanism as a filmic device that drives the plot forward. The portrayal of Il-gwang's (Hwang Jeong-min) *gut* as he jumps, yells, twists blades, kills chickens and hammers stakes is a visceral joy. Yet, its voyeuristic portrayal of the ritual also fetishizes shamanism to a point where it becomes a contestant in a battle that the viewer is invited to judge and applaud. *Manshin*, on the other hand, takes a different approach, as it eschews the fetishization of shamanism found in contemporary South Korean cinema and offers a renewed take on the significance of shamanism vis-à-vis 'native' Koreanness in post-war South Korea. In order to historicize and articulate the complexity of the role

of the shaman, the notion of the 'native' should be further dissected in addition to the evolving historical, cultural and political significance of shamanism in South Korea.

In her detailed analysis of the discursive constructions of the 'native' in the context of (resistance to) global capitalism in the PRC and Taiwan, Ming-yan Lai asks: 'Are all nativist claims to alternative grounding merely a derivative of Western imperialist discourse establishing and confirming the power and identity of the West?' (2008, 1). By examining two nativist discourses derived from Chinese articulations of modernity under global capitalism—the 1970s *xiangtu* (the native place) nativism of Taiwan and 1980s *xungen* (search for roots) nativism of the PRC—Lai argues that nativism emphasizes the place of origin and its attachment to the local 'against the abstraction of global forces of modernity and capitalism' (4). Nativism foregrounds the native (rather than the local) as a way of proposing an alternative relation to global capitalism. The two discourses complement each other, where *xiangtu* nativism emphasizes class whilst *xungen* nativism stresses cultural traditions as an oppositional discourse to China's modernization project. As an oppositional practice contingent on its sociohistorical context, nativism is often exploited to work against the foreign. It is neither clearly defined nor does it have definitive political parameters. Thus, despite the close association between nativism and nationalism within discourses of cultural 'authenticity' of 'primordial' peoples vis-à-vis twentieth-century capitalism and Western imperialism, *xiangtu*'s class-focused identification of the native as marginalized is pertinent for my analysis of Park's film. Whilst Lai's discussion revolves around the 'native' resistance to Western-oriented modernity with a focus on the PRC and Taiwan, I nonetheless take a cue from her study for my analysis of *Manshin*. I argue that the film emphasizes class in the configurations and the representations of native Koreanness as a challenge to oppressive structures within the country's economic modernization project. If *xiangtu* nativism emphasizes capitalist exploitation vis-à-vis the realities of manual labour in Taiwan, Park's film offers a similar focus on social injustice and

inequality in its critique of South Korea's economic liberalization. Lai contrasts between *xiangtu* nativism and *xungtu*'s emphasis on regional ethnic cultural traditions as a way of highlighting the former's recognition of the construction of the nation as an alternative modernity at the expense of the marginalization of particular social and economic classes. In the following, I argue that Park's documentary invokes and defies nationalist inscriptions of the native as a way of contesting the positioning of shamanism in relation to nationalism and national nostalgia.

Manshin begins with a crane shot of the protagonist Kim Geum-hwa, standing in front of several huts adorned by paintings of gods. In the same shot, the camera pans left then cranes down to reveal Kim who addresses the gods and asks for blessings not only for herself but also for the film crew filming the occasion. Here, we are witness to the first instance of the film's self-reflexivity, as the audience is made aware of their participation in the act of watching the film. The fact that the very first scene in *Manshin* underscores the means of its own production creates an alienation effect, which is only intensified by the fact that Kim, besides holding cymbals in her hands, is also in possession of what appears to be the film's shooting script. Thus, even before the reconstructions of Kim's early childhood take place in the subsequent scenes, we as the viewers are reminded that what comes next is a reenactment of reconstructed historical events.

Kim's *naerim-gut* (initiation ritual) arrives about 12 minutes into the film. It is preceded by scenes in which young Kim, played by now-established actor Kim Sae-ron, lives the life of an outcast. She is shunned by the villagers who are embarrassed and alarmed by her ability to foresee the future. As the scenes lead up to her initiation ceremony as a shaman, the camera changes its position from the high-angle panning crane shot to a low-angle static shot, making the viewer aware that this is a reenactment. Moreover, by making the hut door frames visible in the shots, Park explicitly draws our attention to the voyeurism involved in the consumption of the *naerim-gut*. Here, the film viewer is made conscious of his/her participation in the fetishization of the seemingly

otherworldly shamanist practice. However, the ostensibly 'comprehensible' and orderly rite suddenly turns unruly by the of images of Seven Stars Deity and other gods springing to life in a disorderly fashion which disrupts the previous coherent narrative and invites the viewer to vicariously experience Kim's trance-like state. The numerous voices, the alternating images and the non-rhythmic music defamiliarize the *gut* and unsettle the viewer's firm grasp of the shamanic experience. The subsequent scenes, which feature archive footage (including amateur recordings as well as TV segments) of not only Kim but also her protégés performing *gut* both in the past and the present, stand in stark contrast to the slick editing of the reconstruction scenes. Shaky filming, non-linear timelines, discontinuous editing as well as the presence of other cameras in the shots defy any straightforward plot that may trace Kim's life. The juxtaposition of fragmentary footage with the scenes reconstructed creates space for a more complex narrative, one that fractures the ostensibly homogenous national history of not only shamanism in South Korea but also the South Korean nation itself.

The representation of the Korean War in *Manshin* is a multifaceted narrative that transgresses linearity, as we see Kim, played now by Ryu Hyun-kyung (Ryu Hyeon-gyeong), being driven to the seaside in a modern car, where she sets out on a journey to Incheon in the aftermath of the United Nations' retreat on 4 January 1951 during the Battle of Uijeongbu (a town north of Seoul in Gyeonggi province). The scenes preceding her 'escape' are those in which she transverses the border between the North and the South and overlooks her future-self performing *jinogui-gut* (a soul-consoling ritual for the dead) for the North Korean and Chinese soldiers in 1998 in Paju. As she recalls her life-threatening sojourn, Kim informs us that other refugees began praying to (the Christian) God whilst a Korean version of S. Fillmore Bennett's hymn 'In the Sweet By and By' (1867) begins to play. As the serene and stunningly beautiful images of young Kim sailing on a boat are replaced by the US warships battering the Korean soil in 1950, the scenes transition to the

Second Battle of Yeonpyeong in 2002, where we see North Korean and South Korean navy ships involved in a confrontation. Linking Christianity's well-established presence in Korea to the US 'invasion' of the country during the Korean War, Park positions both the religion and the war as antithetical to the Korean indigenous cultural practices. If 'foreign' interference is the cause of the Korean War, then the splitting of Korea and the subsequent conflicts between the two countries work as symbols of the lack of common national tradition and native authenticity which, in the case of Park's film, is Korean shamanism.

Yet, this national sentiment, reminiscent of the restorative nostalgia I identified in *Spirits'*, is undercut by the film's emphasis in the later sequence on President Chun Doo-hwan (Jeon Du-hwan)'s involvement in socio-political incidents such as the Gwangju Uprising (1980) as well as his administration's appointment of Kim as Human Cultural Treasure. Here, *Manshin* positions Korean shamanism as a cultural practice that has been usurped by a political regime which has managed to spectacularize and institutionalize it. The most obvious embodiment of this are Kim's appearances on numerous TV shows which are seen as either courageous, feeding into the South Korean sense of national heritage (according to one scholar), or as contaminating the 'purity' of shamanism (in the view of another). Whilst both of the figurations of shamanism are mapped onto a national articulation of modernity and the sense of pride in a national past, the film in fact deconstructs these seemingly contrasting views in two ways. The first is the insertion of multiple split-screens during Kim's various *gut*, which fragments the imagery from two simultaneous streams to four to ultimately sixteen. These constantly changing screens pose a challenge to the viewer, as he/she is unable to place these scenes in their proper chronology and context. Ranging from the reenactment scenes in Park's film to TV footage of Kim and her protégées performing *gut* in the past, the fragmentary and discontinuous images remain detached from any particular point of signification which would either exoticize or domesticize them.

Second, the images of the sea during the final *baeyeonsin-gut* (a prayer for a plentiful catch of fish), which takes place in contested waters near Incheon, begin to be superimposed upon various instances of social and political upheavals in South Korean history. As the young Kim sails under (and on) the Incheon Bridge whilst non-rhythmic music plays in the background, footage of the Sampoong Department Store disaster in 1996, the Seongsu Bridge collapse in 1994, the 1987 June Uprising as well as the 1980 Gwangju Uprising, appears on screen. Here, democratic movements are juxtaposed with the consequences of the state-led modernization projects where the state, in alliance with a handful of large conglomerates (*chaebol*), would pursue economic development at any cost in the name of 'national progress'. Thus, the achievements of the popular social movements such as the 1987 June Uprising, which resulted in the direct election of the next president Roh Taw-woo, are hereby contrasted with the continued authoritarian regimes of South Korean governance whose economic, social and political system is infused with illegal contracting and corporate collusion. Here, we see an articulation of shamanism that is positioned as marginal in contrast to nostalgic nationalism which disregards social and economic oppression.[5] As symbols of modernity and economic growth, the high-rises of Incheon and the Incheon Bridge are juxtaposed with the images of social unrest and political uncertainty that go back to the Korean War, feeding into South Korea's 'compressed modernity'—the country's rapid transformation from being a colonial state (1910-1945) to the partition in 1948 to the devastation and dislocations of people during and after the Korean War (Chang 1999, 31). In *Manshin*, the de-spectacularization of Kim's performances presents shamanism as a strategic nativist strategy that reconsiders it as a marginalized tradition. This way, shamanic nativism becomes 'a project of reclaiming a denigrated identity in an act of postcolonial self-affirmation' (Lai 34) which eschews nationalist nostalgia. Although shamanism serves as a means of representing (and being associated with) those who are socially, politically and economically marginalized, it is also embraced by the university student

protesters as a symbol of resistance to the then authoritarian political regimes. The parallel drawn in Park's film between shamanism as a marginalized tradition and the *minjung* movement conceals the social and economic disparity between the uneducated and disadvantaged shamans and those who are privileged to be earning a university education (which could be viewed as perpetuating the existing social and economic inequality).

Park's inclusion of the Gwangju Uprising contests the figuration of culture which consolidates the national hegemony at the expense of the periphery, identifying power relations that maintain and perpetuate oppression and marginalization in the name of national preservation and resistance to foreign threats. Important to note, however, is the film's reflection on the different levels of marginalization of both shamanism and the 'oppressed masses'. If the *minjung* ideology installed shamans as a symbol of protest theatre and brought the former 'into close contact with university students and dissident intellectuals who sought them out and studied their chants and dances in order to perform more authentic protest *kut'* (Kendall 22, emphasis in original), the images of protesting students banging on drums in *Manshin* nonetheless could reflect the approximation of shamanic rituals for their symbolic value. Gesturing towards the marginal and linking it to the pain of the socially and politically oppressed Korean masses, *Manshin* juxtaposes shamanism alongside pro-democracy movements as a way of cinematically representing those who are marginalized, connecting the marginality of shamanism with the historical oppression of the underprivileged under military regimes. This is exemplified by the film's continuous references to national division and the prolonged military confrontation between the two warring states, which had been used as a political tool by the Park Chung-hee and the Chun Doo-hwan administrations to frame them as threats to national security. The ensuing deployment of surveillance, institutionalized violence and militarized personnel would come at the expense of political freedom and democracy, overriding any sociopolitical issues in the country (Lee 2007). By explicitly referencing President

Chun's domestication of shamanism, the film calls attention to the power relations that promote nostalgic nationalism for the sake of a monolithic nation. Moreover, its historical (re-)presentation works as a strategy that shifts the focus from the nation's nostalgia towards shamanism to its current marginality in contemporary Korean society. Nonetheless, if in *Spirits'*, the Korean heritage works as a tool that promotes national cohesion and homogeneity, in *Manshin*, the juxtaposition of pro-democracy student movements and shamanism exposes its own apparent contradiction. Whilst the film frequently underscores the nation-state's justification of the suppression of differences as the 'inevitable' outcome of a nationalist consolidation of the nation and its native origins, it downplays the social inequalities between shamans and their highly educated counterparts. Yet, by drawing attention to the various regimes' positioning of shamanism in their power struggles to specify South Korea's national cultural heritage, *Manshin* interrogates the country's troubled relationship with its modernization project, pointing to the ways its colonial past haunts the postcolonial present.

Conclusion

*Manshin'*s final sequence works as an assemblage of many of the film's themes and filmic techniques. As the young Kim (Kim Sae-ron) walks around the village collecting scrap metal for her *bangul* (rattle), which is to be used in preparation for her *naerim-gut* (Chung 2013), we realize that the story has gone full circle. This, in fact, is the beginning of the 'narrative', where we see Kim followed by Ryu Hyun-kyung, Mun So-ri and other actors who participated in the making of the film, donate metal items to the young Kim. Suddenly, director Park even further disrupts the film's temporality by providing a full view as the camera lifts to a bird's-eye view of the village, exposing the camera crew filming Kim Sae-ron, zooming even farther out to the point where we realize that the 'traditional' village is itself a film set. Here, space and time are blurred and warped

in a way that they begin to reflect a shaman's relationship to the spirits from the past who inhabit the space of the present.

The restorative nostalgia found in *Spirits'* is revealed to be a product of historical and ideological emplotment in *Manshin*, just as much as the latter refuses to construct a coherent historical narrative of its protagonist's life. If *Spirits'* positions the figure of the shaman as a symbol of tradition and nativism *Manshin* breaks this conservative yearning toward the past and primordial origins by reorienting the figure of the shaman and disrupting the use of shamanism as an affirmation of nationalist opposition to a foreign threat. By problematizing the linkage between nativism and nationalism, *Manshin* disassociates shamanism from the ideological consolidation of the nation and the accompanying social and political oppression. Feeding into the South Korean cinema's tradition of the *musok* film, Park's film offers a new take on not only the portrayal of shamanism in contemporary South Korean cinema but also the country's troubled relationship with the US-backed modernization project and its neoliberal order.

Notes

[1] Laurel Kendall notes that whilst shamans 'who perform the regional traditions of Seoul' are called *mansin*, others 'from central Korea or further south' (2009, preface) are instead referred to as *mudang*. However, the distinction is not always clear, and the term *mudang* can be construed as derogatory, as it is used to describe a 'variety of exorcists, diviners, and other popular religious practitioners' who do not necessarily perform *gut*. Moreover, although the term *mansin* is a gendered one in that it almost exclusively applies to female shamans, Kendall notes that most shamans 'do not derive their primary identity as "women." They see their lives as having been defined by an unwelcome calling from the gods that made them into shamans and caused them to suffer' (17). Because the definitions of *mansin* and *mudang* are oftentimes nebulous and inconsistent, and the distinctions between them unclear, I use the generic term shaman in an effort to avoid confusion and ambiguity.

[2] Although it glosses over the sexual violence and atrocities committed by the Japanese military against the women, I nevertheless use the term 'comfort women' (with quotation marks) instead of 'sex slaves' with the purpose of examining critically the dominant discourse in South Korea and elsewhere of Japan's wartime 'military sexual slavery'. For more on the issue, see Soh pp. 70-72.

[3] In her feminist critique of the film, Son Hui-jeong notes that the sexual violence perpetrated against the women is only reinforced and reinstated upon its victims by its detailed depiction. Here, rape becomes a spectacle where pain and suffering are gendered and sexualized, feeding into the film's nostalgic nationalist sentiment (2016).

[4] In her pivotal 1995 work *Primitive Passions*, Rey Chow brilliantly explicates the linkage (in Chinese cinema) between the female body and the (Chinese) nation.

[5] Here, one could draw parallels to the marginalization of former 'comfort women' whose status in the social landscape of South Korea elicited strong opposition from the conservative nationalist voices (as evidenced by Soh 2008). I thank the reviewer for pointing this out to me.

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