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„Mythology, Ritual and Female Empowerment:
A Comparative Study of Shamanism
in Korea and Japan“

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1 Introduction

Shamanism is a term the conception of which changed slightly over time. Early works on the subject had generally a more narrow view on what it encompasses, but the definition got broader as time went by. I will shortly introduce two of the more important authors on shamanism, namely Mircea Eliade and Ioan Lewis, whose works are quite often referenced when reading on the topic of shamanism and spirit possession. This introduction will help in getting an overview of what is understood under the terms of “shamanism” and “shaman” in general. From there I will move on to a definition of what is usually referred to as “Korean shamanism”, a belief system that is also known under various indigenous terms, e.g. *musok* 巫俗, *mugyo* 巫教 or just *mu* 巫. In Japan, by contrast, what constitutes “shamanism“ is slightly more complicated as there is no unique religious system built around spirit mediums and shamans, but the shamanistic occurrences are rather integrated into Buddhism and Shintō. This may be the reason why shamanism in Japan had a less turbulent history than in Korea (the exception being the ban of syncretistic religions such as Shugendō 修験道 during the rise of State Shintō and the nationalist phase of Japan during the first half of the 20th century). In Korea, shamanistic practices were prohibited for a long time during the Confucianism-influenced Joseon dynasty (1392-1910), although rituals were still practiced in secret (Schlottmann 2007: 97-101).

Since a comprehensive discussion and comparison between shamanism in Japan and Korea would be impossible in the framework of this thesis, I will highlight several aspects that seem of importance to me on this subject. As there are shamanistic elements to be found in the origin myths of both countries, I will compare myths showing traces of shamanistic elements in Japan as well as in Korea. Furthermore, since women play the larger part in Korean shamanism and an important role in the Japanese counterpart I will compare the situation of female shamanism in both countries and try to find the reasons for its comparatively high importance. Lastly I will take a look at the rituals to see which kind of rituals exist in the two countries and whether they overlap or not.

1.1 Shamanism in Northern and Central Asia, according to Eliade

When talking about shamanism in East Asia it is first imperative to know what shamanism per se is and how it has been defined. Much research on the subject was done in the 20th century, from which the understanding of what constitutes a shaman originates. One of the more influential scholars on the subject was the Romanian historian and religious scholar

Mircea Eliade (1907-1986). He is the author of *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, a standard work on the subject first published in 1951.

In this book Eliade advises against using the terms “shamanism” and “shaman” lightly, as it was done in the early 20th century. At this time every person involved in magico-religious activities like medicine men, witch doctors or magicians in every “primitive” society were referred to as shamans by ethnologists. This inflationary use of the term made it hard to define what a shaman actually is. Eliade writes that although a shaman often fulfilled various roles in archaic societies, like healing, serving as a religious authority or escorting souls it is necessary to clarify what distinguishes the shaman from other religious figures (Eliade 1997: 13).

The term “shaman” originated from the Tungusic word *šamán* (“to know”) and was used in Siberia and Central Asia. The shaman used to be a focal point in the archaic religious landscape of Central and Northern Asia, however, he was not the only religious person of importance as there were also others fulfilling different functions like sacrificers or leaders of various cults. A shaman was above all else respected for his ability of living through ecstatic experiences, which were seen as deeply religious. Thus Eliade claims that the most important characteristic of shamanism are its techniques of ecstasy (Eliade 1997: 14). Other regions like North America, Indonesia and Oceania have their own kinds of shamanism, in many ways similar to the one found in Siberia. Eliade notes that although shamanism might play a big part in the religious life of people in certain regions, it is usually found as a mixed form together with other religious or magical practices and is only in few cases the central part (Eliade 1997: 14). In distinguishing shamanism from other magico-religious practices Eliade maintains that the shaman uses a specific kind of trance. Therefore not every religious specialist using ecstasy can be called a shaman. Trance in shamanism involves the idea of the soul leaving the body to travel to heaven or the underworld. A similar distinction must be made when referring to the shaman’s relationship with spirits. There are many cases in ancient and modern society where people interact with spirits. The important trait that sets the shaman apart from others in that regard is that he is not merely possessed, but has mastery over the spirit in the sense that he can, as a human being, interact with the spirit without acting merely as an instrument of it. There are however also shamans who get possessed by spirits involuntarily but according to Eliade these cases are always explainable deviations (Eliade 1997: 15). The core elements of Eliades concept of shamanism are: relationships with spirits, techniques of ecstasy enabling the magical flight to the heavens, the descent to the

underworld and mastery over fire. These elements are found in many regions and religions, merging with various cultural practices and rites. Shamans are “chosen ones”, having access to religious spheres that are unavailable for the other members of their community. They are furthermore defined by receiving a vocation or suffering through a religious crisis and are segregated from others by the intensity of their magico-religious experiences. (Eliade 1997: 16-17).

When it comes to gaining shamanistic power prevalent in Siberia and Northern Asia Eliade mentions two main methods and a third, slightly less distinctive one. The first one is the hereditary transfer of the shamanistic profession, the other one is through spontaneous vocation. The third category involves an individual picking up the role of a shaman through his own volition or being urged to do so by others. The practitioners of the latter category are considered weaker in their spiritual strength than the ones who inherit the right to become a shaman and those who receive a religious calling. No matter which method of choosing occurred, the prospective shaman is considered qualified to practice after a twofold training process. The first part of this process involves the experience of ecstasy either in dreams or trance. The second part consists of learning about shamanistic techniques, about the spirits, the genealogy of their clan, secret languages and others. This process is seen as the initiation ritual (Eliade 1997: 22-23). In West- and Central Siberia it occurs that both, the hereditary and the religious types of vocation, are to be found within the same communities, both types equally accepted. The prospective shaman may suffer from constant nervousness and epileptic seizures prior to starting his profession. These events are seen as encounters with the gods. It also happens that when a shaman dies, his protective spirit seeks out another family member, who in turn shows eccentric behavior until instructed by another shaman about spirits and how to control them. In other cases a dead shaman may appear in the dreams of a, most times sickly and neurotic, person, urging him to follow the calling (Eliade 1997: 24-26).

Among the Tungusic shamans both main vocation types are common. The vocational calling manifests itself mostly in a hysteric crisis that needs to be followed up by a period of learning from a shaman, ending in an initiation ritual. Afterwards the neophyte is recognized as a shaman within his community. The apprenticeship takes place after the first experience of ecstasy. It occurs that a child is chosen to become a future shaman, but fails to make an ecstatic experience and is dropped as a consequence (Eliade 1997: 26-27). Among the Buryats and Altayans the role of the shaman is transmitted either from the mother’s or the father’s side, but may also occur spontaneously. In both “inherited” cases the calling happens through

vocational dreams and seizures, caused by ancestral spirits. In dreams these spirits take the neophyte to the underworld, while by day the future shaman is trained by an experienced shaman as his mentor. This way the training happens both in the physical and the spiritual realm. The prospective shaman may also be chosen by the gods themselves. If a person for instance is hit by lightning, it is seen as a vocational calling, the lightning symbolizing the heavenly descent of the shaman's powers. In this case the neophyte has to seek out a shaman for tutelage (Eliade 1997: 28-29). When analyzing the various ways of becoming a shaman in Siberia and Central Asia, two facts are evident: First the coexistence between hereditary shamanism and the shamanism received by a vocational calling of the gods or spirits. The second characteristic is the sickly nature of the neophytes and the occurrence of sudden illnesses after the calling (Eliade 1997: 30).

1.2 Receiving a Vocation and Training

Eliade states that these experiences illustrate that the person was chosen by supernatural forces and serve as a mere preparation of what is to come. But at other times, the sickness, dreams and states of trance themselves are already part of the initiation. In this case the religious state of the neophyte is changing and he is faced with the three stages that symbolize the traditional model of an initiation ceremony: suffering, death and resurrection. From this point of view the sickness symbolizes suffering. The closeness to death that the neophyte experiences in agony and unconsciousness is analogous to the symbolic death. The experiences made during the initiation sickness and dreams are mostly similar: They deal with the dismemberment of the body, followed by regeneration of inner organs and intestines, the ascension to the heavens where one is able to talk with gods and spirits and finally the descent to the underworld where one comes into contact with spirits and the souls of dead shamans as well as other religious revelations. Eliade sees both realms as equally important, since the neophyte receives his shamanistic power from a heavenly being, but needs the experience provided by spirits and dead shamans all the same (Eliade 1997: 43-44). However, the initial step does not always manifest itself as sickness, but as a change in the future shaman's lifestyle. If he starts to meditate heavily, sleeps a lot, seeks solitude, is absentminded and has prophetic dreams, it may fulfill the same function as the sickness, being the first step of being chosen (Eliade 1997: 45). After receiving the vocation to become a shaman, either in the form of ecstasy or a revelation in a dream, a time of learning follows. The future shaman has to make himself familiar with mystical techniques as well as the religious history and mythology of his community. This time of preparation is usually followed by an initiation ceremony.

This ceremony is however rather formal, since the neophyte at that time is already familiar with the practices and has already experienced states of ecstasy. So the ceremony itself serves mainly for the shaman to be recognized as such by the community (Eliade 1997: 116).

1.3 Tasks and Functions

Although of high importance in the religious life of Central and Northern Asia, the shaman is not involved in all aspects of religion. He does not offer sacrifices and is not involved with rituals pertaining to birth, marriages or funerals. Among the shamans duties are matters that are not controllable by ordinary people. Altayan shamans are frequented in case of infertility or difficult births. In Northern Asia it occurs that a shaman is present at a funeral in order to pacify the spirit of the dead and to hinder its return. He is also at times present at marriages to protect the newlyweds from evil spirits. In these cases he restricts himself to the defense against spirits (Eliade 1997: 177).

The main tasks of a shaman revolve around the human soul. He prevents the soul from leaving the body and becoming a victim of evil spirits. Shamans are often consulted on medical matters where it is believed that the origin of the problem is of supernatural cause or the soul of the person was led astray. In these cases the shaman catches the soul and unifies it again with the body. He is also a guide to the souls of the deceased, leading them to the underworld. He gains this skill from the vocational journey, where his own soul travelled to the heavens and the underworld in an ecstatic experience. He knows the way to the underworld and is enabled to journey there without harm through the sanctification given to him through the initiation process and protected by his guardian spirits. The Altayan shamans were also used to guide the souls of sacrificial animals to the gods. When involved in sacrificial rituals, in most cases, shamans do not kill the sacrifices themselves but rather conduct the pertaining rituals and serve as a guide to the soul (Eliade 1997: 177-179). Other mystical skills employed by shamans are divination and fortunetelling. They are frequented when one wants to locate lost people or animals, as well as lost items of importance (Eliade 1997: 179-180).

However, a shaman's main task in Central and Northern Asia is the practice of magical healing as the reason for many illnesses is seen as a "theft of the soul". In that case, the shaman simply catches the soul and unifies it again with the body of the sick person. In other cases the reason may be different. It also occurs that a magic item is believed to have entered the body or that a person is possessed by an evil spirit. The treatment under these

circumstances consists of the shaman pulling out the harmful object or exorcises the spirit. There are also combinations, where a “theft of the soul” takes place and the affected person is possessed by a spirit at the same time (Eliade 1997: 208-209).

Eliade’s work on shamanism is widely regarded as one of the most important achievements in the field. Some of his views and statements were discussed and expanded upon by later researchers. Especially Eliade’s stance on spirit possession and its relationship to shamanism is a topic that many scholars argue about. To Eliade, a shaman is mainly a religious figure who undertakes magical journeys to the heavens and the netherworld while in a state of trance. Spirit possession and the role it plays in shamanism is, although acknowledged by him, not seen as an important characteristic.

1.4 Trance and Possession, Lewis’ Concept of Shamanism

Ioan Myrddin Lewis (1930-2014), professor of anthropology at the London School of Economics and author of several books on religion and anthropology criticizes Eliade’s viewpoint in his book *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*, first published in 1971 and reedited with a new preface in 1989.

Regarding the terms “shamanism” and “shaman”, Lewis states that these are rather frequently used by American researchers and not as often by their British colleagues. Usually the term shaman in the context of anthropology is used “to denote a variety of social roles, the lowest common denominator of which is that of inspired priest” (Lewis 1989: 43).

Lewis stresses the importance of the relationship between shamanism and spirit possession. He takes issue with the definition of shamanism offered by Eliade, since it is quite specific. According to Eliade a shaman is an inspired priest who undertakes trips to otherworldly realms while in an ecstatic state of trance. During these journeys the shaman talks with gods and supernatural beings for the well-being of the people in his community. For Eliade, spirit possession is not an essential part of shamanism. It may occur in some forms of shamanism, but these can be explained as a more recent innovation in the shamanistic complex (Lewis 1989: 43-44).

Lewis sees in the varying forms of shamans and mystics prevailing in religions and belief systems across the world a recurring universality of mystical experience as well as a “remarkable uniformity of mystical language and symbolism”. In order to identify the mental state of the beings experiencing such mystical phenomena, Lewis uses the term “trance”

(Lewis 1989: 33). Based on a definition of the *Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*, he calls it “a condition of dissociation, characterized by the lack of voluntary movement, and frequently by automatism in act and thought, illustrated by hypnotic and mediumistic conditions”. He adds that “trance may involve complete or partial mental dissociation, and is often accompanied by exciting visions or hallucinations” (Lewis 1989: 33-34). In order to enter said state of trance, Lewis mentions various techniques such as “the use of alcoholic spirits, hypnotic suggestion, rapid over-breathing, the inhalation of smoke and vapours, music, and dancing; and the ingestion of such drugs as mescaline or lysergic acid and other psychotropic alkaloids”. The method depends on the socio-cultural context of the individual. Lewis also lists what he calls “self-imposed mortifications” like fasting and ascetic contemplation like transcendental meditation. There is also the method of deprivation of one's senses, most notably featured in the mystical flight of shamans. In scientific terms, the achievement of a state of trance can be traced back to the endorphins in the human brain, the production and release of which can set this state into motion. Lewis sees this as a possible explanation for mystics and other religious figures altering their state of consciousness without the use of external auxiliaries like hallucinogenic or psychotropic drugs (Lewis 1989: 34).

This altered state of consciousness may occur under very different circumstances and is interpreted by different cultures in different ways. According to Lewis the trance state is:

[...] subject to both physiological and cultural definition. Some cultures follow our own medical practice in spirit if not in detail in seeing this condition as a state of mental aberration where no mystical factors are involved. Other cultures see trance as mystically caused; and others again interpret the same physiological phenomenon in different ways in different contexts [...] (Lewis 1989: 34-35).

This difference in views leads to heavily deviating interpretations of trance. Whereas the Catholic Church for a long time during the middle ages and beyond believed trance to be a sign of possession and the devil's work, other cults celebrated trance as a sign of divine inspiration (Lewis 1989: 38-39). Lewis claims that although the possession by an external being or spirit may serve to some as an explanation of trance, it cannot be said that spirit possession always occurs in relation with a state of trance. He stresses that possession must not be confused with trance. Though there are some cultures where trance is usually interpreted as being possessed, there is also the possibility of suffering from possession long before one reaches the state of trance. Illness per se for example may be seen as a form of possession (like the shamanistic initiation sickness mentioned by Eliade and other scholars on

the subject), but the patient is not automatically experiencing trance. In the case of possession in the form of an illness, the patient often only enters a trance state when receiving treatment from a specialist by way of exorcism or similar means used to appease the possessing being (Lewis 1989: 39-40).

Lewis concludes his thoughts on spirit possession clarifying that possession is one of the most widely distributed mystical explanations when it comes to states of trance and similar conditions. Another reason that is often referred to as the source of trance is the temporary absence of a person's soul, a state mostly described in anthropological research as "soul-loss". The argument exists that both these phenomena, the soul-loss and spirit possession, occur in mutual necessity. The reason behind this trail of thought is that after the victim suffers a soul-loss, the space inhabited by his or her soul is now open for a spirit to enter and possess.

Other anthropologists have taken a liking to Eliade's theory, such as Belgian anthropologist and professor of the Free University of Brussels, Luc de Heusch (1927-2012). According to de Heusch, shamanism as postulated by Eliade, is an antithesis to spirit possession. Shamanism symbolizes the ascent of man to the gods, whereas possession symbolizes the descent of gods to man. In his view, in shamanism, men see themselves as equal to gods, whereas in possession, they act as an incarnation of them. Although explained in a logical way, Lewis cautions from lightly adopting this opinion, as the empirical evidence proves otherwise. Shamanism and possession occur in correlation with each other, especially in the Arctic regions which are seen as the point of origin of shamanism. Lewis delivers his definition of shamanism as follows: "Shamanism and spirit possession regularly occur together, and this is true particularly for the Arctic *locus classicus* of shamanism. Thus, amongst both the Eskimos and the East Siberian Chukchee, shamans are possessed by spirits. More significantly still, this is also true for the Arctic Tungus from whose language the word shaman derives, and whom, therefore, we may take to epitomize the phenomena under discussion." He continues that

[...] the Tungus word shaman (pronounced *saman* among the adjacent Manchus) means literally 'one who is excited, moved, or raised' (and this, incidentally, is very similar to the connotations of other words in other languages employed to describe possession). More specifically a shaman is a person of either sex who has mastered spirits and who can at will introduce them into his own body. Often, in fact he permanently incarnates these spirits and can control their manifestations, going into

controlled states of trance in appropriate circumstances. [...] the shaman's body is a 'placing', or receptacle, for the spirits. It is in fact by his power over the spirits which he incarnates that the shaman is able to treat and control afflictions caused by pathogenic spirits in others (Lewis 1989: 44-45).

Lewis states that the *séance* is a shaman's main task, although he undertakes other roles as well. *Séances* are held to communicate with the spirits of either the worlds above or below. His other tasks are similar to what Eliade writes about shamanism. The shaman sacrifices to benevolent and malevolent spirits, helps healing the sick and undertakes divination with the help of his spirits. Since the *séance* is the main ritual of the classic shamanism it cannot be understated that spirit possession plays an important part in the shamanistic complex, and is not a minor occurrence like Eliade claims it to be (Lewis 45-46).

The shaman in general is assumed to have been a most important part in the life of the Tungus clans. So if the shaman was to lose his power or die, a successor is urgently required, either by tutelage or by inheritance, otherwise it is believed that evil spirits would run rampant. "Pathogenic spirits" as Lewis calls them, are also seen often as the root of illnesses, although they are not the only ones. These spirits may also serve to cause the initial seizure and sickness of a prospective shaman, who afterwards shows signs of what is known as "arctic hysteria". Similar to Eliade, Lewis finds the key symptoms to be "hiding from the light, hysterically exaggerated crying and singing, sitting passively in a withdrawn state on a bed or on the ground, racing off hysterically (inviting pursuit), hiding in rocks, climbing up trees etc." (Lewis 1989: 47).

Afterwards the affected are either encouraged by their surroundings to take up the role of a shaman, or not. If they take up the task, they learn to produce a state of trance at will, most often through the ways of music and singing, becoming what Lewis calls "masters of spirits". The controlled production of the trance state is seen as a controlled possession of spirits. Lewis notes that there are two types of possession among the Tungus shamans: Involuntary possession where a person is possessed by a spirit, and voluntary, where a spirit is possessed by a person. The involuntary possession is witnessed in uncontrolled trance that is interpreted as illness, whereas the voluntary one is an instance of controlled trance, and characterizes the main task of the shaman. Therefore Lewis finds Eliade's argument of the spirit possession playing but a minor role in the shamanistic complex hard to believe and Luc de Heusch's opinion that spirit possession and shamanism are completely separate

phenomena even more so. The shaman, even in the Tungus tribes observed by Eliade, makes use of the incarnation of spirits “in both a latent and an active form” (Lewis 1989: 48-49).

Lewis concludes his thoughts on the correlation of shamanism and spirit possession stating that:

[...] we are perfectly justified in applying the term shaman to mean [...] a ‘master of spirits’, with the implication that this inspired priest incarnates spirits, becoming possessed voluntarily in controlled circumstances. The evocative Polynesian expression ‘god-box’ expresses the relationship between the shaman and the power he incarnates very exactly. All shamans are thus mediums and, [...] tend to function as a ‘telephone exchange’ between man and god. It does not follow, of course, that all mediums are necessarily shamans, although [...] the two are usually linked. People who regularly experience possession by a particular spirit may be said to act as mediums for that divinity. Some, but not all such mediums are likely to graduate in time to become controllers of spirits, and once they ‘master’ these powers in a controlling fashion they are proper shamans. Thus, what so often begins as a hostile spirit intrusion may later be evaluated as the first sign of grace in the assumption of the shamanistic calling. Although not all such traumatic experiences necessarily have this outcome, all shamans seem to have experienced something of this initial trauma. (Lewis 1989: 49-50).

1.5 Relationship between Shamans and Spirits

Lewis states that the relationship between the shaman or a medium and the possessive spirit varies from culture to culture. In the belief systems of the Tungus tribes it is widely thought that the shaman and the spirits he incarnates are bound to each other by a contractual relationship. With the support of the spirits, the shaman is able to attain a kind of enlightenment and gains a “mysterious luminous fire which the shaman suddenly feels in his body and which enables him to see all that is otherwise hidden from mortal eyes” (Lewis 1989: 50). This state is called “gnosis”, and describes a state of illumination one receives for the offering of the self. Lewis sees this as an act of controlled spirit possession. Although the first contact is with minor powers or tutelary spirits, this experience enables the shaman to communicate with much more powerful spirits or deities later on. As the shaman grows in power, so does the repertoire of spirits he may call on. The highest form of spirit possession a shaman may achieve is by managing an incarnation of a divinity that completely blots out his

own personality through the course of the possession ritual (Lewis 1989: 51-52). The relationship between a shaman and a spirit is often interpreted as either marriage or kinship. Which model is chosen depends on the sexual identity and the character of the shaman and the spirit (Lewis 1989: 52). The kinship link is evident when a shaman calls down an ancestor spirit. Regarding the marriage between shaman and spirit, Lewis states that “conversely the idiom of marriage seems to be favoured where stress is laid on the contractual rather than the biologically determined nature of the relationship, and where the possessed subject and the possessive spirit are of opposite sex” (Lewis 1989: 52).

1.6 Concepts of Shamanism in Japan and Korea

In her book *Chinkon Kishin: Mediated Spirit Possession in Japanese New religions*, Birgit Staemmler of the Faculty of East Asian Studies of the University of Tübingen and specialist in modern Japanese forms of shamanism defines spirit possession and ecstasy mainly along the lines of Eliade and Lewis, but concludes that there are four different types of spirit possession or ecstasy that can be identified, divided among two sub groups, namely unsolicited and solicited spirit possession. She states these as follows:

1. Unsolicited spirit possession or ecstasy by a malevolent spirit or deity, manifesting itself as illness or possibly as trance, which is valued negatively. In these cases the disturbing spirit needs to be exorcised or sometimes appease and accommodated.
2. Unsolicited spirit possession by a benevolent deity, manifesting itself as the controllable trance of a prophet to this deity. It may be regarded as a proof of the deity's powers that humans may not solicit prophecies.
3. Unsolicited spirit possession or ecstasy manifesting itself as illness or trance combined with other symptoms, e.g.: dizziness, aches, or aimless wandering. This is understood to be the sign for a shamanic vocation. Thus, the spirit is accommodated or the soul strengthened, and the sufferer is initiated into the knowledge and techniques of a shaman or other religious specialist.
4. Solicited spirit possession or ecstasy which is voluntarily and willingly induced by a shaman or medium, in order to communicate with spiritual beings and cure people, escort souls or appease enraged spirits or deities (Staemmler 2009: 23-24.).

Staemmler also describes another unique type of possession, namely mediated spirit possession. She defines it as being characterized of consisting of at least two people and a spiritual being. Of these two people, the mediator, as Staemmler calls him or her, actively

induces a trance state that involves possession upon the second person, the medium. These rituals consist of three distinct main phases: the induction of the spirit possession, the conducting a dialogue with the spirit, and sending back the spirit. The mediator has to either make a spirit or deity possess the medium, or cause an already possessing spirit to reveal itself. During the medium's possession, the mediator engages the spirit and after identifying it, questions it for either advice or to reveal the reason for misfortunes or illness. The spirit will speak through the mouth of the medium and answer the mediator. Afterwards the mediator sends the spirit on his way back to where it came and returns the medium to its normal state of mind. The main reasons for using this type of possession are to get information on future events or reasons for misfortune. A unique characteristic of this ritual is that the mediator gets to ask spontaneous and unexpected questions if necessary. This differs from similar rituals where the medium knows beforehand the questions he or she will be asked. Another characteristic is that a shaman who operates alone needs to prepare for a long time before he fully controls his altered state of consciousness, whereas the mediator may work even with a less experienced medium. This type of possession is mostly used for exorcism or for healing purposes (Staemmler 2009: 26-28).

Hyun-key Kim Hogarth, specialist in Korean shamanism, agrees that the central element that defines a shaman is the mediation between the supernatural and the human worlds while utilizing states of trance. She also states that another important feature of shamanism is the ability to journey freely through cosmological planes as well as that the entering at will of an altered state of consciousness. These are the main criteria that differentiate a shaman from an ordinary spirit medium. The shaman is aware of what goes on during the changing of his consciousness while the spirit mediums may not remember what transpired at all, having served only as "passive channels for the received revelations" (Kim Hogarth 1999: 12). Kim Hogarth sees shamans as "largely altruistic people" that fulfill a plethora of roles. As shamans elsewhere, Korean shamans serve as healers, cure diseases of the body and the mind, engage in divination, are "highly sensitive to social needs and act according to them", are able to improvise rituals if need be (since in many shamanic societies there were no written documents or traditions to which one could call upon), but also serve as keepers of tradition in preserving customs and oral traditions. They also serve as counselor and what Kim Hogarth calls "folk psychiatrists", offering advice and counsel, but also fulfill the role of necromancers and guide souls to the afterlife (Kim Hogarth 1999: 12-14).

Tae-gon Kim, one of the most influential researchers on shamanism in Korea mentions that characteristics of shamanism have been integrated into other religious systems, e.g. phenomena such as ecstasy, trance and possession, making it difficult to consider these as the trademarks of shamanism (Kim 1998: 26-27). Because of this issue it seems hard to define the unique characteristics of shamanism and its relationship with its Korean counterpart. Kim argues that shamanistic phenomena in countries like Korea have in research been called shamanism because it was convenient to simply allude to the many similarities. Kim criticizes that criteria such as ecstasy, trance and possession, which are used to define shamanism, bring about confusion since some researchers use conflicting definitions of these terms. As an example he mentions that at times trance and possession are included in the concept of ecstasy while at other times they are treated separately. This is further explained by bringing face to face the views of anthropologists Mircea Eliade and Erika Bourguignon. While the former claims the core characteristic of shamanism is ecstasy, which he defines as “soul-loss” during the spirits journey to the realm of the dead, Bourguignon claims that the most fundamental characteristic is the possession of the soul by a spirit, not the loss of it. Because of these conflicting theories, Kim finds it necessary to first define the core terms when talking about forms of shamanism. He explains trance as a change of consciousness, ecstasy as the loss of the soul and possession as the receiving of spiritual power. Trance is the “first level” of the change of consciousness for a shaman, while the other two are a continuation or a deeper level of the change of consciousness (Kim 1998: 27-28). With this definition in mind, Kim divides the types of shamans regionally, with the ecstasy type of shaman in Northeast Asia and the neighboring Siberia and the possession type in South Asia, Africa and Northeast America. However he also explains that a geographic distribution of the different types cannot be seen as absolute, since there are always exceptions and in some places the trance type coexists with the possession type. The various types of shamanism can be explained by local cultural differences (Kim 1998: 28).

1.7 Conclusion

After having taken a look at the different opinions of the authors mentioned above on how shamanism is defined, I will now move on to find a general consensus on what constitutes shamanism.

The first analyzed author in this thesis was Eliade, who diligently studied shamans in the *locus classicus* of Northern and Central Asia from which the term itself originates. Eliade distinguishes between actual shamans and other persons like medicine men and priests, who

were mislabeled as shamans by early ethnologists. A shaman's duties are, according to Eliade, the magical healing, the escorting of souls and the fulfilling of religious functions within the community. To do so the shaman utilizes techniques of ecstasy. In trance his soul leaves his body to journey to the heavens or the underworld. During this process he retains mastery over the spirits and is thus able to fulfill the desired function for his clients. In order to obtain these supernatural powers the shaman either inherits the right to practice shamanism from his forefathers or receives it through spontaneous spiritual vocation, often preceded by a period of illness.¹

Lewis on the other hand emphasizes the importance of trance and spirit possession in the context of shamanism. He mentions that shamanism and spirit possession occur together, and that the most significant technique of a shaman is the induction of a spirit in his own body, utilizing the powers of the spirit in controlled possession. According to him, shamans are spirit mediums that serve as a link between men and gods or spirits. The absence of the soul that is seen as essential for shamanism is enabled through possession.

Like Lewis, more contemporary researchers tend to put a heavier focus on the relationship between shamanism and possession. Staemmler for example states that the shaman as a spirit medium can experience different states of possession with varying symptoms depending on the possessing spirit. Kim Hogarth suggests that the most important feature of shamanism is the ability to journey through different realms of existence as well as the ability to enter an altered state of consciousness at will. This opinion is also shared by Tae-gon Kim.

After taking into consideration the various deviating opinions on shamanism I will now try to define what is to be understood by the terms shamanism and shaman over the course of this paper: Shamans are magico-religious men or women who serve as an intermediary between the human and the supernatural world. To do that they use techniques of trance to get into contact with spirits and deities, by either letting their own body being possessed by a spirit or inducing the spirit into someone else. They do so in order to serve the benefit of their community, conduct healing rituals or guide souls to the afterlife.

¹ However, despite Eliade's claim that the journey through supernatural realms is mandatory for shamanism, these kinds of spiritual journeys are notably absent in the Korean version of shamanism (Schlottmann 2007: 86).

2 Korean Shamanism

2.1 A Religious History of Korea

In order to better understand the importance of shamanism in Korea in a historic context, I will start by giving an overview of the religious history of Korea. Religious beliefs in prehistoric times are evidenced only by ornaments found in burial sites. James Huntley Grayson, a British expert in Korean religion claims that these findings prove that there was at that time a belief in the concept of an afterlife. He also likens the use of animal motifs such as horse, tiger and bird motifs as shamanistic in origin and draws parallels to Siberian shamanism (Grayson 2002: 13-14). By the fourth century A.D. Korea consisted of the Korean peninsula as well as areas of southern and eastern Manchuria. The prevalent culture at the time is named “Korean Primal Culture” by Grayson and is largely Siberian and Central Asian in origin. The primal religion revolved around the indigenous belief in a supreme heavenly spirit named Hanullim 하느님 and in other spirits that serve this deity. Several festivals were held throughout the year in order to pray for a good harvest. The other main purposes of prayers back then were the curing of disease, the appeasing of spirits and sending of souls to the afterlife. Grayson states that these rites were typically conducted by a shamanic figure (Grayson 2002: 19-21).

Throughout the fourth to sixth centuries an influx of Chinese culture took place. The period to the end of the seventh century was a time of unrest and battle over supremacy over the country, with the kingdoms of Koguryo 高句麗, Paekche 百濟 and Silla 新羅 being the political main players during this era, which saw the introduction of Buddhism in Korea. Buddhism manifested itself at the end of the fourth century in the form of monks that propagated it. Due to the prestige China held in the Korean people’s minds, Chinese Buddhism was readily accepted, first by Koguryo and Paekche, and later by Silla (Grayson 22-27). In the sixth century Buddhist monks from Koguryo undertook journeys to China in order to further their religious knowledge and brought back elements from not only the Mahāyāna school of Buddhism but also of the Hīnayāna school. At the same time the kingdom of Paekche, and later Koguryo, sent monks to Japan, helping to introduce Buddhism there. King Seong 聖王 (490-554) of Paekche was a big facilitator in helping Japan adopting Buddhism. The most successful one was the monk Hyeja 惠慈 (?-623) who tutored the crown prince Shōtoku Taishi 聖德太子 (572-622), one of the key figures in establishing Buddhism

in Japan. He sent envoys with a letter of recommendation of Buddhism to the Japanese court in 538, 545 and 552 (Grayson 2002: 30-33).

It is argued by modern scholars that the religions in Korea before the arrival of Buddhism shared a certain folk philosophy which was later found again in Confucianism. This theory stems from the analysis of the founding myth of Korea revolving around the legendary founder Dangun Wanggeom 檀君王儉. This myth contains three of the cornerstones of Confucianist thinking: The relationship between father and son, the relationship between lord and subject and the relationship between husband and wife. It is thus argued by proponents of Confucianism that already at an early age, Korean society had a grasp of three out of the five Confucian values (the other two being the relationship between elder and younger siblings and the relationship between friends). Confucianism promotes harmony throughout society. During the time of the Sinification of Korean society, Confucianism was, like Buddhism, gradually adopted by the three kingdoms. The influence of Confucianism was however rather subliminal and did not yet manifest in a concrete school of thought before the seventh century (Grayson 2002: 48-51). Daoism, the third major religion of China at the time, was adopted in Korea during the times of the Three Kingdoms only sparsely. During the final days of Koguryo, several members of the upper classes began showing interest in Daoist thinking and its concepts of immortality (Grayson 2002: 51-52).

After cultivating doctrinal schools of Buddhism in addition to esoteric Buddhism, Seon 禪 Buddhism, the pendant to Japanese Zen and Chinese Chan, began to flourish in Silla in the ninth century. The traditional schools of Buddhism were on a decline. (Grayson 2002: 68). After the establishment of the Koryo kingdom in 935, a Confucian-style examination system was introduced in 958. This process would continue till the end of the tenth century. In the early Koryo period, no attrition was felt between Buddhism and Confucianism, as the first was seen as being for the spiritual wellbeing of the people and the latter for the wellbeing of the state. In his quest of institutionalizing the relation between state and religion, King Kwangjong 光宗 (925-975) wanted to unify all Buddhist schools under one banner. This move however proved unsuccessful (Grayson 2002: 79-83). During the early years of the Koryo period, *musok* played an important part in the religious life of the ruling elite. After the shift away from Buddhism and towards Confucianism over the course of the period, *musok* came under criticism as Confucian scholars were not pleased with the popularity shamanistic practices enjoyed with the women at court. Despite this notion, *musok* rituals that served the

common well-being of the state were still practiced by orders of the king and high ranking politicians (Schlottmann 2007: 93-94).

The later part of the Koryo period was plagued by unrest and violence. Koryo was invaded by the Mongols six times between 1231 and 1258, when the country surrendered to the aggressors. During their occupation of Koryo, the Mongols tried in vain to launch an attack on Japan in 1274 and 1281, a move that put a strain on Koryo's economy. Mongol control of Koryo lasted until the 1360s, when the Ming dynasty came to power in China and decidedly weakened the Mongols (Grayson 2002: 93-96). At the closing of the Koryo period and the beginning of the Joseon 朝鮮 (1392-1897) period, Buddhism lost its importance as the philosophical motivation of the country and the focus shifted to Confucianism. This marked the first time in Korean history that both these belief systems came in open conflict with one another. Confucianism was no longer merely a system of practical ethics but its rules about moral values came to be interpreted as a religious system of its own and became the most important social influence, not only to be used in governing the country (Grayson 2002: 103-104).

The socio-cultural revolution that took place when Yi Seonggye (이성계;李成桂, 1335-1408) came into power and founded the Joseon dynasty was accompanied by a religious one as Confucianism supplanted Buddhism. The new capital was established in Hanyang 漢陽, which later became Seoul and a close relationship with the Chinese Ming dynasty was pursued by Yi Seonggye, who reigned under the name of Taejo of Joseon 朝鮮 太祖, this policy being termed *sadae* 事大, „serving the great“. The governmental system was changed according to the views of Confucianism. The king surrounded himself with Confucian advisors whose task it was to make sure the king's conduct was in line with Confucianist thinking (Grayson 2002: 107). Buddhism on the other hand faced a decline in the Joseon period. Similar to its situation in China, Buddhism in Korea was usually dependent on promotion by the government or the monarchy. Due to the strong influence of Confucianism this was not the case during that time (Grayson 2002: 120-121).

In the middle of the Joseon period at the end of the 16th century, Japan became a united nation and the reigning military leader Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣 秀吉 (1536-1598) invaded Korea in 1592 and ravaged the country for six years. Naval commander Yi Sun-shin 李舜臣 (1545-1598) was able to repel the Japanese navy with armored warships and assistance of the Ming empire. However, this conflict left Korea in an economically weakened state (Grayson

2002: 112). The invasion of Japan was followed by the Manchu Qing Empire in 1627 and again in 1632 which ended with the surrender of Korea to the invading forces. As a result, Korea had to become a vassal to the Qing. After the state was ravaged by war and invasions, Neo-Confucianism became once again very popular among the elite, especially the teachings of Yulgok 栗谷 (1536-1584) who focused on a practical and pragmatic approach for Confucianism (Grayson 2002: 124-128). During the Joseon period an attitude shift towards *musok* took place. Despite having fulfilled courtly duties in the past, practitioners were degraded to the lowest social class and were seen as equal to slaves, butchers and prostitutes. They were forced to leave the capital and live at the countryside. Men in important positions were prohibited to visit shamanistic performances. Practicing such rituals was forbidden and punishable. The handling of the prohibition by the court was, however, contradictory. Despite the ban, shamans were called to the court from time to time to practice ceremonies and rituals, often at the behest of noble women (Schlottmann 2007: 97-99).

Korea in the later Joseon period was confronted with the arrival of Western ships in the first half of the 19th century. After a tumultuous start Christianity began to gain a foothold in Korea. Similar to Christianity, Buddhism started to gain renewed popularity since the opening of Korea, besides others thanks to the removal of suppression of religion, and also partly due to Japanese colonization, as Japan itself was heavily influenced by Buddhism. Later, over the 1960s and the following decades, Buddhism has grown exponentially partly due to the forming of lay associations, increasing institutional work and through missionary work overseas. Korean folk religion also sees itself as belonging under the umbrella term of Buddhism (Grayson 2002: 184-194).

Musok faced hard times during the Japanese colonial period where it was suppressed but had even more difficult times under president Park Chung-Hee (r. 1967-79) who prosecuted *mudang* in the name of modernization and forced them into hiding. In the 1980s however, *musok* made a comeback and the numbers of practitioners were growing again. Today they are especially prolific around the Seoul area (Choi 2005: 17-18).

2.2 Shamanism in Korea

Kim Tae-gon, founder and co-president of the International Society for Shamanistic Research as well as professor at Kyung Hee University of Korea, sees Korean shamanism as a religious phenomenon rooted in folk religion that has become one of the most widely accepted belief systems of Korean society. As already mentioned (see above, p. 4), in Korean it is known as

musok (“shamanistic customs”), *mugyo* (“shamanistic religion”) or just *mu* (“shamanism”). Kim himself uses, in English, the term “Muism”. It centers on a kind of shaman called *mudang* 巫堂 who preside over its ceremonies and rituals. It can be traced back to long before the arrival of Buddhism, Confucianism and other religions. Due to this fact, research on *musok* may be used as an important reference for studies about Korean history, religion, ideology and others (Kim 1998b: 25).

According to Kim, *mudang* can be categorized into four groups, each with characteristics of their own, that are also encountered in different parts of the country. Most common is the basic type of *mudang*. In this type, a person becomes a *mudang* by experiencing the reception of a spirit. The main task of the *mudang* is to conduct religious ceremonies, called *gut*, utilizing song and dance accompanied by music. *Mudang* are also able to predict the future and engage in fortune telling with the help of their spiritual ability received from their spirits. Kim further divides the basic *mudang* type into various subcategories, but defines the most important characteristics of this type as follows: The practitioner has to have had a spiritual experience and thus own spiritual power. This spiritual power is provided by a tutelary deity or spirit, who is seen as the owner of the body and soul of the *mudang*. The supernatural feats that the *mudang* performs are enabled by the tutelary deity. Also, a master of ceremonies is necessary in order to perform rituals (Kim 1998b: 28-29).

One of the aforementioned subcategories is the *seonmudang* 선무당. The *seonmudang* also earn their power through spiritual experiences, yet they cannot preside over ceremonies. Kim calls this an “inferior level of *Muism* with very limited ability performing simple offering of prayer by rubbing hands in supplication to God and fortune telling using their spiritual power”. This subcategory is often encountered in the northern and central areas of Korea, with only a few occasional appearances in the southern parts of the country (Kim 1998b: 29).

The second type is the *tangol* 당골 type of *mudang*. The main difference compared to the basic type is that the right to conduct ceremonies is passed on through the bloodline and is traced back through several direct ancestors. Thus it remains in one family. This hereditary type of *musok* can be found in the Honam (southwest Korea) area and the Yeongnam (southeast Korea) area. The *tangol* in the Honam area preside over an assigned area that belongs to only that bloodline. The *tangol* in Yeongnam did not have designated areas of practice, but in more recent times the same policy of presiding over assigned areas has been

adapted, so Kim sees the practitioners of *musok* in both regions as having no essential differences (Kim 1998b: 29-30).

Kim identifies the essential characteristics of the *tangol* type as the succession through bloodlines and through this succession also the handed down responsibility for an assigned regional district. Another key factor is that over the years the ceremonies and rituals have become more systematized and resemble a religious institution. No receiving of a spirit is taking place, thus there is no belief complex involving certain gods and the *tangol* type of *mudang* does not need to keep a shrine in his home. Rituals are used to entertain a deity but no actual interaction is happening (Kim 1998b:30).

The third type of *mudang* is the *shimbang* 신방 type. This type is more similar in its belief system to the basic type of *mudang* and different from the *tangol*. Compared to the latter much more emphasis is put on the concept of god and spiritual power. But a trait in common with the *tangol* is found in the inheritance of the right to be master of ceremonies through bloodlines. Many *mudang* belonging to this category are found on Jeju Island, slightly southwest of the Korean peninsula. The focus on a clearly defined belief system and spiritual powers shows a strong resemblance to the basic type of *mudang*, but in practice the rituals are quite different. In rituals conducted by the *shimbang mudang* the spirit does not possess the master of ceremonies directly, but instead possesses the body of a medium. In this state, the *shimbang* type may ask questions to the possessing deity. Then the medium will answer with the voice of the deity. Kim points out that despite these differences, the *shimbang* and *tangol* type must be viewed as closely related since in both rituals, the master of the ceremony himself is a distinct entity that does not experience possession directly. However the focus on spiritual power and interaction with deities puts it also in close relation with the basic type (Kim 1998b: 31).

Kim claims the key characteristics of the *shimbang* type to be the hereditary succession of being the master of ceremony through bloodlines, the focus on spiritual power and a clearly defined belief system. Deities may only be interacted with through a medium which is separate from the *mudang*. The rituals themselves are conducted with songs and dance but no interaction with supernatural beings takes place (Kim 1998b: 31-32).

The fourth type of *mudang* is the *myeongdu* 명두 type. In this type, the *mudang* has received the spirit of a dead person, mostly a child under the age of 7 years , although spirits of older children have also been reported (Kim 1998b: 32). The spirit is then called upon and

invited to a shrine in the home of the *mudang* and used to tell fortunes. This type is most often found in the Honam area, and only seldom in the central and northern parts of the peninsula. The key points of this type of *mudang* are: the spirit of a dead child has to be received, the *mudang* specializes in fortune telling and cannot perform the same rituals containing songs and dance as the other types. Other spirits are also invited when the spirit of the dead child is summoned (Kim 1998b: 32).

Kim notes that the *myeongdu* type can be seen as part of the basic *mudang* type, since both focus on the use of spiritual power to call the gods or spirits. In the case of *myeongdu* it is a dead child with blood relation, in the case of *mudang* it is a god or gods of nature, like the gods of the sky, the mountain, the stars and others. But the *myeongdu* is able to call the spirit even without a specific ritual (Kim 1998b: 32-33).

2.2.1 Controversy regarding *Musok* and Shamanism

Kim states that *musok* or Korean shamanism cannot be equated with what is traditionally called shamanism because it is, according to him, unique to Korea. Thus it should be classified as a religious institution of its own (Kim 1998a: 26). However, there are also differing opinions on this subject. Seong Nae Kim, Professor of Anthropology at Sogang University in Seoul, mentions that three arguments exist concerning the relationship between *musok* and shamanism in general. First there is the opinion that only the hereditary types of practitioners are considered to be *mudang*. The second hypothesis is that *musok* emerged from two different cultural systems, explaining both the hereditary and the charismatic *mudang*. The third argument considers both types of practitioners as originating from the same cultural place but having changed over time (Kim 1998: 35-38).

2.2.2 *Kangshinmu* and *Seseummu*

With the illustrated differences in mind these types of *mudang* may be divided into two groups, namely *kangshinmu* 降神巫 (god-descended shaman) and *seseummu* 世襲巫 (hereditary shaman). The basic *mudang* and *myeongdu* are counted among the *kangshinmu* whereas the types where priesthood is inherited by bloodline belong to the *seseummu* category. Generally, *kangshinmu* are located in the central and northern areas of Korea, whereas *seseummu* are found in the southern regions, mixed with *kangshinmu*. So whereas *kangshinmu* appear all over the peninsula, the southern regions are more densely pervaded by the *seseummu* who in turn are almost nonexistent in the central and northern parts. (Kim 1998b: 33).

Kim sees various reasons for the regional division. Both groups may originally have been one when they first arrived in Korea and later changed over time and respective local influences. Another opinion is that one of the types may originally have been an outside religious movement that made its way to Korea and started coexisting with an already existing one. Others claim that both types came from outside, already different in their practices and another argument sees both types emerging from within the country, developing in the northern and southern region independently and adjusting to local rites and needs and thus creating different systems (Kim 1998b: 33).

A possible reason for the less institutionalized *kangshinmu* in the northern regions may be found in the history of the north. Due to the harsher mountainous landscape and hardened through various conflicts and wars with surrounding countries, the people in the northern and central parts of Korea were according to Kim “not accustomed to society being governed within a religious structure” (Kim 1998b:33).

However, quite the opposite is true for the southern part of Korea, where the land and people were less subjected to wars and conflicts, with a warmer climate and a land more suited for agricultural use. This led to a more stable society and helped nurturing the acceptance of governing structures such as religious ones. So *mudang* in the south had an easier time to become an accepted part of society. Over time the religion of the *mudang* became more and more sophisticated and organized and went from an isolated and private to a recognized religious institution. Kim sees the geographical differences that ushered in cultural as well as social and historical differences as the driving force in creating different types of practitioners (Kim 1998b: 33-34).

The ceremonies, called *gut* 굿, vary between *kangshinmu* and *seseummu* and display clear differences. These differences can be seen mostly in the spiritual power of the *mudang*. The former summon a deity during a ritual that then becomes one with them. In the case of the latter while they also summon a deity, it manifests as a separate entity. This leads to different styles of ceremonies (Kim 1998b: 34).

In ceremonies of *seseummu* types of *mudang*, the *shingan* (a “god pillar”) plays an important role. It has to be present at the site the ceremony takes place and is seen as necessary for a *seseummu* to call down a deity. They are however not used by *kangshinmu*, who are seen as being able to freely summon supernatural beings. In essence, the *shingan* is seen as a passageway to help a god find his way to the mortal world (Kim 1998: 34-35).

A trademark of *gut* performed by *kangshinmu* is the clothing, which is different for each god that is to be summoned. This results in a *mudang* at times wearing as many as 12 to 20 different suits of clothing over the course of a ritual. *Seseummu* however wear only about two or three sets of clothes during their performance. The importance of the clothes is also a different one. For *kangshinmu* the special clothing serves the purpose to identify the *mudang* in order to receive spiritual power. In the case of *seseummu* the clothing has no impact on the ceremony itself. It is merely used to identify the one presiding over the ceremony, and thus has no divine meaning and does not play any role in the spiritual power of the *mudang* (Kim 1998b: 35-36).

The musical instruments used when performing a *gut* are similar for both types. However the *kangshinmu* tend to mainly use percussion instruments. The songs have a fast rhythm and beat. On the other hand, the songs of the *seseummu* tend to be slower and more melodic. Though they also use the same percussion instruments, various wind instruments like fiddles and flutes are added (Kim 1998: 36). The percussion instruments are supposed to inspire the *mudang's* emotions in order to incite the altered state of consciousness necessary to summon the spirit. The music of the *seseummu* with no spiritual power to it is more formal, whereas in the case of the *shimjang* type on Jeju Island it often has a faster rhythm similar to the *kangshinmu*. There are also a few cases where *kangshinmu* add flutes to their utilized instruments (Kim 1998b: 36-37).

When dividing the *mudang* on the Korean peninsula per gender, Kim observes that male *mudang* are often found in the southern region, and mostly females in the northern region. In Cheju Island as well as the Yeongnam area the right to conduct ceremonies is hereditary by male bloodlines. In the case of the *kangshinmu*, women are predominant and practicing men are few (Kim 1998b: 37).

Tae-gon Kim's division of *mudang* is shared by other scholars on the subject. Hyun-Key Kim Hogarth, a scholar of anthropology and shamanism from the University of Kent at Canterbury states that *mu* or *musok* is essentially the Korean equivalent of what is understood as shamanism. This is according to her already evident in looking at the radicals that the Chinese character for the word consists of. Kim Hogarth describes it as "the linking of heaven and earth through two humans dancing in the air. She sees in the many different terms used to describe *mu* the deep influence it had on religion and Korean society as a whole. She also divides shamans in Korea in the two broad groups of *mudang* that Tae-gon Kim mentions, namely *kangshinmu* and *seseummu*. For Kim Hogarth the main difference is the practice of

kongsu 公수, mediated spirit possession used by the former type of *mudang*. She also sees here a parallel to the Japanese *miko*, who is capable of being possessed by a spirit, and the “ascetic shaman proper” (Kim Hogarth 1999: 2-3). Kim Hogarth sees *mudang* as “religious specialists with paranormal abilities, which they use to mediate between the spirits and humans” and thus can be defined as shamans, since both types of *mudang* perform functions associated with shamanism in other cultures (Kim Hogarth 1999: 45-47).

The *mudang* needs special powers to communicate with gods and spirits. As above mentioned, there are mainly two ways by which these powers are acquired: by a religious experience or through bloodline succession (Kim 1998: 41). In the case of a *kangshinmu* the psychic powers are received after experiencing an initiation sickness, named *shinbyeong* 神病 (spirit-/god sickness) or *mubyeong* 巫病 (shaman sickness) (Kim 1998: 41-42).

3 Shamanism and Spirit Possession in Japan

3.1 The Religious History of Japan

Only a few things can be said with certainty about Japan’s religious history in early times. It is widely assumed that even in prehistoric times *kami* 神 were worshipped. The only historic evidence that can be taken into account covering that time is the Chinese chronicle *Weizhi* 魏志 (“Chronicles of Wei). The *Weizhi* tells of a priest-queen named Himiko 卑弥呼 (ca. 170-248), who ruled her people with magic. Based on this it is believed that in prehistoric times there was a male and a female regent, the male serving as a political, and the female as a divine and religious figurehead.

Before the Chinese state model entered Japan in the seventh century, the controlling forces of the country were *uji* 氏, clans. A trademark from that era are the *kofun* 古墳, megalithic tombs that were supposed to put on display the splendor of the ruling class between the third and seventh century. These *uji* worshipped *ujigami* 氏神, guardian and ancestral deities of their clans. After the influx of Chinese culture in the seventh century, the influence of the *uji* was waning as the *tennō* was established as the supreme ruling power and the power of the *uji* was reduced to administrative rights (Scheid 2001-2015e).

A potential trigger for Japan to adopt Buddhism may be traced back to the then-allied Korea, in the sixth century. King Seong (r. 523–554) of the Korean Kingdom Baekje recommended a Japanese king later known as Kinmei Tennō 欽明天皇 (r. ~540–571) to

promote Buddhism in Japan. The introduction of Buddhism did however not happen from one day to the next but was a gradual process, initially opposed by some clans, but at the same time also fostered by others. The big breakthrough of Buddhism happened under the regency of Shōtoku Taishi 聖徳太子 (572–622) during the Asuka period (飛鳥時代 *Asuka jidai*, 587–710). Shōtoku Taishi was a big proponent for Buddhism and even gave up his residence in Ikaruga near Nara to the new religion on which grounds the Hōryū-ji 法隆寺 temple was built. He also is said to have created a moral codex influenced by Chinese paragons. This codex includes principles and values of Confucianism but also promotes the practice of Buddhism. The decades following his death saw a continuation of the orientation towards Chinese culture. In 654 the Taika reforms (大化の改新 *Taika no kaishin*) started. Under these reforms, the *ritsuryō* 律令, a law system following values and methods from China was established. This system established the whole land as property of the state, and local rulers as officially sanctioned administrators. Buddhism was essentially part of the process of the Sinification of Japan (Scheid 2001-2015c).

Buddhism in Japan saw its first peak during the Nara period 710–784 under Shōmu Tennō 聖武天皇 (r. 724–49). After a turn of events known as the Dōkyō 道鏡 Incident, which will be elaborated on later in a different context, the next emperors tried to sever the connection between the court and Buddhism. As a consequence Kanmu Tennō 桓武天皇 (r. 781–806) relocated the capital to Kyoto in 794 and a general anti-Buddhist notion was felt in the aristocracy. Scheid argues that at that time a “Shintō awareness”, opposed to Buddhism, was felt by the ruling class (Scheid 2001-2015b).

After the political capital was moved to Heian-kyō, as Kyoto was known at the time, the bigger temples stayed behind in Nara. This way political and religious matters did not intersect the way they did before, at least not regionally. Soon after the beginning of the Heian period (*heian jidai* 平安時代, 794-1185) two important religious figures emerged: Saichō 最澄 (767–822) and Kūkai 空海 (774–835), who both were sent to China in order to further their studies of Chinese Buddhism. After their respective return, each would found a school that would greatly impact the landscape of Japanese Buddhism, Tendai-shū 天台宗 by Saichō and Shingon-shū 真言宗 by Kūkai (Scheid 2001-2015d).

At the end of the Heian period the political landscape of Japan was shook by the Genpei war (*genpei gassen* 源平合戦, 1180-1185), a civil war between the two rivaling warrior

dynasties of Taira 平 and Minamoto 源. Minamoto no Yoritomo 源頼朝 (1147–1199) came out victorious of this war and founded a new ruling dynasty under the title of *shōgun* 将軍, located in Kamakura 鎌倉. The Kamakura period (1185-1333) was also a blooming period for Buddhism, as new schools such as Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗 (“true pure land school”) Nichiren 日蓮 and Zen 禅 were introduced in addition to Tendai, Shingon and the old Nara schools. Buddhist temples at the time also played an important part in war, not only as a place where *kami* were worshipped for assistance in battle, but also some of the bigger temples maintained armies of *sōhei* 僧兵, warrior monks, who were called upon especially when it came to inter-Buddhist territorial disputes (Scheid 2001-2015h).

During the Muromachi period (室町時代 *Muromachi jidai*, 1336-1573) both Buddhism and *kami* worship existed as one syncretistic religion, as Buddhas and *kami* were perceived as being largely the same. The Ryōbu Shintō 両部神道 school even equals Dainichi Nyorai 大日如来, the main Buddha of esoteric Buddhism with Amaterasu 天照, the highest deity in Shintō (Amaterasu and her connection to shamanistic rites in Japan will be discussed in a later chapter). But also differing opinions were felt - other schools of Buddhism renounced *kami* whereas some Shintō shrines did the same with Buddhism. A possible reason why *kami* never really disappeared from the religious lives of the people, even in Buddhism’s most influential times, was that they were important for the national identity. They were believed to be responsible for the defeat of the Mongol invasions with *kamikaze*. Afterwards the country was at times referred to as *shinkoku* 神国, „land of the gods“. This notion was important for more traditional thinkers during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods who sought to re-establish the tennō as supreme ruling power (Scheid 2001-2015l).

The final years of the Muromachi period were spent in unrest and civil war, a period called *sengoku jidai* (戦国時代 “time of the warring states”, 1467–1568). During these tumultuous times, the first Christian emissaries arrived in Japan. Their arrival turned out to be crucial in the war, as Oda Nobunaga 織田信長 (1534–1582), one of the three warlords credited with the unification of Japan, used his good relations to the Jesuits to gain superior weaponry and turn the war in his favor. He was opposed by the temples of mount Hiei 比叡山 and their armies of warrior monks, but in 1571 Nobunaga razed the whole temple complex to the ground, an action that has supposed to have claimed the lives of 1500 monks and warrior monks and destroyed 400 buildings within the complex. It is argued that Nobunaga’s actions

against the temples caused an essential rift between politics and religion. In earlier times, religion had been used to gain spiritual support, but Nobunaga saw in it only a political tool (Scheid 2001-2015k). After the Christians involvement in the war, and ambitious missionary attempts and following rebellions, a total ban of Christianity in Japan and the *sakoku* 鎖国 policy was established, where Japan was closed off and no foreigner could enter or leave, the only exception being a tightly controlled port in Nagasaki. This policy should last from 1639 to 1853 when the American Admiral Perry arrived (Scheid 2001-2015g).

During the Edo Period (江戸時代 *edo jidai*, 1600–1867) Buddhism became once again more affiliated with the state. Despite the firm presence of Buddhism, two other schools of thought became popular among the intellectuals of the country: Neo-Confucianism as well as a new interest in Shintō (Scheid 2001-2015j).

The Edo period also saw the rise of *kogaku* 古学 (“study of old things”) and *kokugaku* 国学 (“study of the nation”). *Kogaku*’s main purpose was to de-mystify history and ancient texts, especially Chinese ones, focusing on what had originally been Japanese. A core idea was that Shintō was an original Japanese religious system that played a vital role in shaping the Japanese as a people. According to *kokugaku* Shintō and the *tennō* are what define Japanese culture (Scheid 2001-2015i). The tail end of the Edo Period is known as *bakumatsu* 幕末 and is marked by various developments like governing issues, civil war like riots, natural catastrophes and epidemics which forced Japan to once again open its shores to the West, ending the country’s isolation policy for good (Scheid 2001-2015a).

After opening up the country, Japan started modernize in order to compete with Western countries. This creation of the modern nation state of Japan began with the Meiji Restoration (明治維新 *meiji ishin*) in 1867 and 68. One of the aims was to restore the *tennō* as the center of national power with the Meiji *tennō* 明治天皇 (1852–1912, r. 1867–1912) being the first one. Also, Shintō should be connected with political power, a development that ushered in the new ideological system of State Shintō (国家神道 *kokka shintō*), which focused on nationalist ideas and worship of the *tennō*. The new Japanese constitution (1889) left out the idea of State Shintō altogether, mentioning only that Japan was always to be governed by the *tennō* and that the *tennō* was to be seen as holy and invulnerable.

After the Second World War the promotion of Shintō of people in public service was prohibited according to an American “Shintō directive”. On January 1st in 1946 the *tennō*

gave a nationwide speech, broadcast on the radio, where he proclaimed to be human, probably due to pressure of the occupying forces. Although he lost his religious authority, he still had the powers granted to him by the constitution. However, the separation of religion and state continued by cutting off government sponsorship of all shrines and temples (Scheid 2001-2015m). The next section will give a brief historic overview of Shugendō, a belief system that forms part of the shamanistic complex in Japan.

3.1.1 The History of Shugendō

Shugendō is a religion of syncretistic character. Its practitioners are either referred to as *shugenja* 修験者 or *yamabushi* 山伏. Staemmler notes that the term *Shugendō* means “the way of mastering extraordinary religious powers” and *shugenja* “men who master extraordinary religious powers”. The term thus already denotes their involvement and mastery in religious matters. The founding of Shugendō is attributed to En no Ozunu 役小角, also known as En no Gyōja 役の行者 (633-~700). He was a religious practitioner who spent some years on Mt. Katsuragi practicing austerities. His religious lifestyle in the mountains inspired Esoteric Buddhists as well as lay people from the eighth century onward. The influential monks Saichō and Kūkai, both Esoteric Buddhists, regarded spending years in solitude and meditation on a mountain as an important part of training for a monk (Staemmler 2009: 64-65).

The *kami* are believed to be found in particularly terrifying or awe-inspiring places like mountains or seas. This belief is deeply integrated in Shintō, where *kami* that cross over from their world into the human world are welcomed and worshipped. In addition they were made tutelary gods to families or villages. After the arrival of other religious systems that started to take an influence on society and the practice of religion, more and more people would start visiting spiritual places in the mountains and practiced ascetic exercises under the guidance of ascetics that gained special power from the *kami* and thus were understood as religious figures. Among those were ascetics and disciples from the esoteric schools of Buddhism, namely Tendai 天台宗 and Shingon 真言宗. From the end of the Nara period (710-794) to the mid-Heian era such mountain ascetics were known under several names, for instance *genja* 験者 (“disciple of esoteric practices”) and *yamabushi* or *hijiri* 聖 (“holy one”) (Hori 1975: 265). During the Heian era these people were known as *shugenja*. This development paved the way for the establishment of Shugendō as a religious tradition (Miyake 2001: 11-12).

A characteristic of Shugendō is that the doctrine and practice of the religion is closely interlinked. As a consequence practice is valued highly. Many of the religious traits were adopted from Esoteric Buddhism and some important parts of the doctrine like sacred formulas and ritual gestures were only handed down from teacher to pupil. Over time, Shugendō became closer with Esoteric Buddhism. Deities were also taken from Buddhism, as were rituals. Sacred mantras were borrowed straight from Esoteric Buddhism. Although their meanings were often not very clear, they were used for various purposes like “exorcism, rain-making and protection from evil” (Staemmler 2009: 67-68).

In Japan the belief that mountain regions, especially valleys and caves are inhabited by spirits and other supernatural beings is shared by all Japanese religions, not only Shugendō. It is believed that the spirits of the dead and ancestral spirits dwell there. Furthermore mountains are seen by the *shugenja* as the liminal area where our world ends and the otherworld begins. The mountain may symbolize both the way to heaven through its peak, and the way to the underworld with its caves. Thus the ascetics living in the mountains gain a liminal character themselves and are viewed as half-human and half-spiritual beings (Miyake 2001: 78-80).

Both local *kami* as well as foreign ones are worshipped. However in earlier times people worshipped and enshrined only the local *kami*, trying to reap spiritual benefits and protection through them. With the introduction of other religions and belief systems such as esoteric Buddhism and Daoism, even more spirits and *kami* were presumed to exist and more and more religions tried to harness the power of the spirits. Around the 9th and 10th century, *shugenja*, who made these supernatural abilities their own, started to appear in great numbers (Miyake 2001: 11-12).

During the 12th century two schools emerged: the Honzan school 本山派 that belonged to the Shingon school of Buddhism and the Tōzan school 当山派 that belonged to Tendai Buddhism. Furthermore several smaller local schools were established such as Haguro 羽黒修験道 (Haguro Shugendō) and Nikkō 日光修験 (Nikkō Shugen). Between these schools rivalries were started about the use of certain paths and the sale of amulets. With the further propagation of Shugendō the religion started to appear in more and more diaries, local chronicles and folk tales. Impressed by the abilities of the *shugenja*, showcased during their journeys from one holy mountain to another, they soon attracted a following and were able to establish several parishes throughout the country. Up and until the 13th century, *Shugenja* were usually unmarried, but in the following centuries the trend changed and many of them

had wives and children. At that time female *shugenja* also started to appear. After several religious reforms in the Edo period the practitioners of Shugendō were forced to register either with the Honzan or the Tōzan branch. According to Staemmler, *yamabushi* at this time were either “mendicant, homeless ascetics travelling the holy mountains and practicing austerities; *shugenja* who practiced austerities living in one set mountain; itinerant *shugenja* who organized pilgrimages for lay people to mountains they were associated with; and – due particularly to official restrictions on the freedom of movement – a vast majority of village *yamabushi*”. These *shugenja* that lived in villages had not the affinity to mountains as others, as they practiced rituals for the prosperity of their village while serving as hereditary priests in local shrines. Most of them had only once over the course of their initiation ritual, practiced their craft in the mountains. In their villages they usually performed rituals for the benefit of agriculture or conducted rituals for individual clients. During the Edo period *shugenja* were often married to spirit mediums and performed rituals together, such as the *yorigitō* 憑祈祷, a ritual involving mediated spirit possession (Staemmler 2009: 64-67). During the Meiji period in 1872 Shugendō was abolished by the government and the *shugenja* were forced to register with either the Tendai or Shingon school of Buddhism, become Shintō priests, or return to their secular life. Shugendō however endured as it was practiced in secret and survived in local practices or new religious movements. After freedom of belief was again granted in 1945 some of the *shugenja* that had joined the Tendai and Shingon schools would become independent and return to their old practices (Staemmler 2009: 67).

3.2 Shamanism in Japan

Concrete research on shamanism in Japan can be traced back to the beginning of the 20th century. It is argued that the reason why this did not happen earlier is because during the Meiji Era (1868-1912) the government prohibited practices of ecstasy in Shintō. In addition the focus of most fields of research was on studying acquisitions and technologies gained by the opening of Japan to the West. According to folklorist Nakayama Tarō 中山太郎 (1876-1947) another reason might have been that people exercising shamanistic practices had such a low social standing that it was not deemed necessary to put energy into research on that matter (Nakayama 1930: 57-61). One of the first works dealing with shamanistic occurrences in Japan was *Miko kō* 巫女考, authored by the renowned folklore scholar Yanagita Kunio 柳田國男 in the year of 1913. At this time shamanism outside of Japan was not well known and the practices of spirit mediums were seen as a Japanese characteristic. In 1930 that view started to change when Nakayama Tarō published his book *Nihon miko shi* 日本巫女史

(„Chronicles of the Japanese *miko*”), where he connected the local practices with shamanism outside of Japan. After the Second World War research on anthropology, ethnology folklore and shamanism started to gain more attention in Japan and the West (Blacker 1999: 32: Fairchild 1962: 14-15).

When speaking of “shamanism” and “shamans” in Japan, it is first and foremost important to understand that Japanese shamanism itself is not a religious belief system on its own. Rather elements found in Shintō and Buddhism maybe interpreted as shamanistic practices and phenomena. These interpretations rest upon the definition of what constitutes shamanism. Shamanism rather serves as an umbrella term, the practitioners in Japan have names of their own, which will be discussed shortly and will over the course of this paper referred to as such. One of the most famous researchers on shamanism in Japan, Carmen Blacker, claims that the shamanism found in Japan can be traced back to two cultural streams. It is assumed that a northern stream of Altaic or Tungusic origin came from the Asian continent and spread to Korea, Japan and the *Ryūkyū* Islands. The second one is believed to have come through Polynesia and Melanesia (Blacker 1983: 76).

Ichiro Hori states that for a long time, roughly from ancient history to the Middle Ages, shamanistic practices were undertaken by *miko* 巫女. Several more specific terms distinguish femal shamans by location or function, such as *kannagi* 巫, *kuchiyose* 口寄せ („necromancy” or “medium”, *jinja miko* 神社巫女 („shrine *miko*“) *ichiko* 市子 („city *miko*”) or *sato miko* 里巫女 („village *miko*”) (Hori 1968: 182-183).

In addition, there exists also a second type of shaman, the *gyōja* 行者 (ascetic) or *yamabushi* 山伏 (mountain ascetic, the practitioners of Shugendō) who is usually male. These ascetics are mostly followers of Buddhism. They specialize in healing rituals, where malevolent spirits which are seen as the cause of sicknesses of body or mind are banished. The ascetics acquire their power through feats of ascetic practice that includes fasting, reciting sacred texts while standing under a waterfall as well as a journey to the other world. What has to be noted here is that Shugendō is not always brought up when the subject of shamanism in Japan is discussed. Hori speaks of Japanese shamanism as a female-centric phenomenon and omits Shugendō from the subject (Hori 1968: 181 et seq.).

Blacker mentions the difference between medium and ascetic in their way of interaction with the supernatural. The medium interacts with spirits that come to the human

world, but the ascetic is able to transcend to the world beyond. This journey is accomplished in one of two possible ways: either through a visionary form while in trance, resembling the shamanic mystical flight or in symbolic form with “the other world projected by means of powerful symbolism on to the geography or our own, he can make the journey through the barrier in body as well as soul” (Blacker 1999: 22). As mentioned above, this process bears a heavy similarity to the types of shamanism in North and Central Asia researched by Eliade. However, the type of trance of the medium and the ascetic differ as well in some aspects: The medium shows, when possessed, physical symptoms such as violent shaking of the hands, heavy breathing or a “peculiar levitation of the body from a seated, cross legged posture” (Blacker 1999:22). This kind of physical behavior while possessed by an otherworldly entity is seen as more convincing to the clients than a silent and calm one. The trance of the medium is either self-induced or induced by a second person like the ascetic. The kind of trance the ascetic undergoes is a different one. It is calm and a nearly comatose state while his soul leaves the body to undertake a transcendental journey. Blacker states however that this kind of intense trance has become rarer in recent centuries and is nowadays only occasionally accomplished and instead substituted with symbolic action. Both of these types of individuals have the ability to bridge the ordinary world and the world of the supernatural by using trance and, in the ascetic’s case visionary flight which are widely interpreted as core elements of shamanism (Blacker 1999: 22-23). It is argued that the part of the ascetic was also practiced by women up until the seventh century when Buddhism took over the more active part of what may be called Japanese shamanism. Both, the female medium and the ascetic, share some characteristics also associated with shamans. These include the vocational calling, initiation rites, ascetic training as well as the ability to communicate with spirits and deities (Blacker 1983: 76).

Since the end of the 19th century shamanistic elements may also be found in Japanese New Religions (*Shinkō shūkyō* 新興宗教). Some of these cults originated from possession experiences of their founders, examples including Nakayama Miki 中山 みき, founder of Tenrikyō 天理教, *Deguchi Nao* 出口 なお and *Deguchi Onisaburō* 出口 王仁三郎, founders of Ōmoto 大本 as well as Kitamura Sayo 北村 サヨ of Tenshō Kōtai Jingūkyō 天照皇大神宮教 (Blacker 1999: 127-139).

3.2.1 Supernatural Beings in Japanese Shamanism

The types of spirits that the *miko* and the *yamabushi* interact with can, according to Blacker, be roughly divided into four types. Two of these types are viewed as superior to human beings in various ways, but can still be summoned. The other two are seen as inferior to man, are oftentimes malevolent and must be exorcised (Blacker 1999: 34).

3.2.1.1 *Kami*

The *kami* are the more powerful of the first two types of spirits and deities as mentioned above. They are the principal objects of worship of Shintō. Famous Japanese scholar Motoori Norinaga 本居 宣長 (1730-1801) stated that everything extraordinary, powerful or terrible can be named *kami*. Everything that implicates a sense of mystery or wonder from the *tennō*, dragons, the sea, mountains or foxes can be a *kami*. But despite the differing nature, *kami* share characteristics that enable the *miko* or the ascetic to interact with them (Blacker 1999: 34-35). When entering the human world, *kami* may possess things like trees, stones, islands, mountains, mirrors, swords or special human beings like mediums. The deity is in need of a medium if it wants to relay a message, without medium it is voiceless. *Kami* are viewed as neither good nor evil but as appearing amoral. However the *kami* may either appear benign or malevolent, depending on the treatment they receive. If worshipped correctly and receiving the right offerings, a *kami* may cause positive effects for his followers. If neglected however *kami* are believed to cause negative consequences such as sickness and sterility (Blacker 1999: 41).

3.2.1.2 Spirits

The second type of supernatural being superior to man are spirits of the dead and ancestral spirits. After death the soul of the deceased is called by several names like *hotoke* 仏 (Buddha), *reikon* 霊魂 (spirit, soul) or *tama/tamashii* 魂 (soul, spirit). These names are commonly used indistinctively (Scheid 2001-2015f). As long as *tama* resides inside one's body, it fills it with vitality and life. After death it leaves the body and has to be properly honored and nourished by the surviving family members in order to reach the final state of rest and salvation, a state known as *jōbutsu* 成仏. Usually around 33 years are required for the *tama* to reach final peace, but in some cases the period lasts longer, sometimes up to 49 years. After this time the soul ceases to exist as an individual and joins the other ancestral spirit to form a collective spiritual being. From this point in time onwards the spirit does not have to

be separately worshipped by the family. Even this kind of spirit may, just like the *kami*, take possession of a medium (Blacker 1999: 43-44).

Should the necessary rites be neglected by the members of the family or the offerings not be enough nourishment for the *tama*, the dead spirit becomes a discontented, wandering ghost. This roaming, angry ghost is the third type of supernatural being that *miko* and *yamabushi* deal with. In this case the spirit of the deceased family member will curse his living relatives and cause misfortune. According to Blacker, these souls are viewed as “less than human, malevolent, spiteful, in need of succor and restitution”. Different factors can cause the ghost to be discontented, like suffering from neglect during their time to reach *jōbutsu* or if they do not receive the offerings of rice, water and sutras. They will be appeased however if the offerings are resumed. Another reason for a spirit to turn evil is if it died without relatives to worship it in death. These restless, wandering spirits are known as *muenbotoke* 無縁仏 (“death spirit without affinity”). They will attack and possess sick and weak persons. At the yearly ancestor festival, the O-bon お盆 many people make offerings on a separate altar for these types of wandering ghosts to ease their discontent (Blacker 1999: 47-48).

A subtype of death spirits and the most dangerous of all is the *tama* of people who died through violence, lonely or with anger and resentment in their hearts. These are called *onryō* 怨霊 (“vengeful ghost”) or *goryō* 御霊 (“honorary ghost”). These persons may have died in battle or felt profound sadness when dying. These furious ghosts require stronger means to appease than the others. They exact their revenge by causing their victims sicknesses like headaches, fever, physical weaknesses or even mental disorders. During the Heian Era (794-1185) the fear of these kind of ghosts reached its pinnacle and many diseases, misfortunes and even natural disasters were ascribed to vengeful spirits (Blacker 2004: 53). The best known historic example of *onryō* is the famous scholar, poet and politician Sugawara no Michizane 菅原道真. In 901 he was exiled to Kyūshū and after two years in exile he died, alone and dishonored. Soon after his death, the country was plagued by calamities such as drought, floodings, storms and epidemics. This was seen as Michizane’s doing and so he posthumously received the status of *kami* to placate him. In his honor the Kitano-Tenman-gū 北野天満宮 shrine in Kyōto was built where he is worshipped under the name of Kitano Tenjin 北野天神 (Blacker 1999: 48-49; Scheid 2001-2015f).

The second type of ghosts that are seen as having a status below humans according to Carmen Blacker, are animal spirits. These appear mostly in the form of snakes, foxes, dogs or similar four legged animals. These spirits also may take possession of humans and must be exorcised (Blacker 1999: 51).

After having taken a look at the spirits and ghosts that inhabit the supernatural world I will now move on to the mountain ascetic and analyze how they obtain their shamanistic powers.

3.3 Practice of Shugendō

The *shugenja* receives his magico-religious abilities by one out of two possible ways by which he may gain entry to the sacred life. The first way is by a supernatural vocation where he is called upon by either a deity in a dream or state of possession to leave his old life behind and start a new one. The second possible way is if the individual in question comes to decide that the life he has been leading is meaningless and chooses out of his own volition to seek another life, one were supernatural powers are required. Ichiro Hori calls these two ways of becoming a shaman the “vocation type” and the “quest type” respectively. Regardless of the way, both lead to the same path, being the acquisition of special powers that are needed to cross from the normal world to the other (Blacker 1999: 85).

The supernatural calling can appear in one of three ways, often after an individual had to endure a period of suffering. First is the supernatural dream where a spirit appears and talks to the prospective medium. This spirit may either be an ancestral spirit like the late father or grandfather, or a deity from Buddhism or Shintō. The second way is known as *kamigakari* 神憑り, meaning the possession of a divinity. Third there is the spiritual journey to other worlds during which the soul is guided by a guardian deity (Blacker 1999: 167-169).

The exercises needed to acquire these powers are generally called *gyō* 行 (“asceticism”). In order to remove body and mind from their accustomed habits these practices are painful, strenuous and arduously repetitive and require great strength of will to endure. These *gyō* are a requirement in order to give the medium or the ascetic the skill to put him- or herself into trance, to exorcise spirits and undertake otherworldly journeys. Continuous training is necessary to store and maintain this kind of power. The three most important parts of the ascetic training consist of fasting, cold water ablution as well as reciting of holy words of

power. Not only the ascetic, but also the *miko* as female mediums have to undergo this kind of training (Blacker 1999: 85).

Abstinence from certain types of food has been viewed as a necessary austerity to gain supernatural powers as early as the first appearance of *shugenja* in the 8th and 9th century. These include *shiodachi* 塩断ち (“abstinence from salt”), *nikudachi* 肉断ち (“abstinence from meat”), *kokudachi* 穀断ち (“abstinence from cereals”) as well as *hidachi* 火断ち (“abstinence from cooked food”). These types of abstentions are found in old tales and biographies of ascetics in the early medieval times and are still practiced today among *shugenja* (Blacker 1999: 86).

The second necessary type of asceticism constitutes the ablutions with cold water. Especially standing under a waterfall in the middle of the night in the cold of winter is regarded as a means to cultivate spiritual power. Should no waterfall be available, the practice of *mizugori* 水垢離 (“ritual washing”) is used. *Mizugori* is done by pouring cold water over one’s head and body with a wooden bucket. This exercise is at times repeated for an immense amount of times. Some female mediums practice *mizugori* a thousand times a day during the final days of their training. This ritual is supposed to cleanse the body along with the abstinence of certain foods. It is believed that an individual can thus approach a *kami* without repelling it with impurity. Additional benefits gained by the ascetic or the medium are spiritual clearance and concentration. Through the weakening of the body it is sought to strengthen the spirit. After having practiced the rite of ritual washing, the practitioners do not feel the cold of the water anymore and some even feel glowing warmth. Blacker sees in this potential proof that at that time the ascetic “has risen above the ordinary human condition” (Blacker 1999: 92-93).

Lastly there is the ascetic practice of the recitation of words of power. These are usually sutras found in esoteric Buddhism. The power of these recitations is felt in two ways. First they have a characteristic of magic spells as, for instance, to cure illnesses, exorcise demons and evil spirits, manipulate the weather or help with conceiving children. The second way the power of the sutras is felt is in the person that recites them. Thus to effectively use them in their magico-religious sense, one has to first master them in their ascetic usage (Blacker 93-94).

There are also two subsidiary aspects in the training of the ascetic. Both of these can be traced back to ancient times but are still practiced today: the first is the seclusion, *komori* 籠

もり, in usually a dark place like a cave, in a temple or shrine or in one's own home. The place of the seclusion is only left to conduct the ritual water ablution. The second subsidiary aspect is the continuous wandering from one holy place to the next, most often conducted in a circular pattern. At each station deities are called upon and holy words are recited. It is believed that this helped the ascetic strengthen his spiritual power. However, during this journey the other aspects of the training must not be neglected (Blacker 1999: 98-100). According to testimonies of mediums and ascetics alike, these practices of ascetism ended up filling them with mysterious and spiritual power after enduring the hunger, cold and depravity of sleep associated with their training (Blacker 1999: 102).

After a *shugenja* obtains his special powers he is able to make contact with the spirit world. This happens during the course of various rituals and in the form of exorcism. *Shugenja* are also known for various demonstrations showing their special skills, including walking across fire or boiling coals (*hiwatari* 火渡り), dousing themselves with boiling water (*yudate* 湯立て) as well as climbing up a ladder of swords (*katanawatari* 刀渡り). The first two feats demonstrate the imperviousness to heat gained by their ascetic training, the climb up the ladder of swords symbolizes their ascent to heaven (Blacker 1999: 247-251).

4 Shamanism in Korean and Japanese Mythology

4.1 Shamanistic Figures in Korean Mythology

4.1.1 The Founding Myth

An important story with regards to the origins of shamanism in Korea is about the legendary founder of Gojoseon, the first Korean kingdom, Dangun Wanggeom 檀君王儉. In ancient times the heavenly king Hwanin 桓因 had a son named Hwanung 桓雄. Hwanung wanted to live among humans and leave the heavenly kingdom. His father chose one of three mountains that was especially suitable for Hwanung's descent, namely Baektu mountain. He gave him three heavenly treasures, a sword, a mirror and a bean shaped piece of jade, and sent him on his way, accompanied by three thousand of his loyal subjects (Schlottmann 2007: 80). The place of Hwanung's descent was named Shinshi, the divine city, placed on a mountain. He and his followers proceeded in teaching the people more than 360 arts, among them medicine, moral principles and agriculture. During that time, there also lived a female bear and a female tiger. They both prayed to Hwanung to receive his blessing in being reincarnated

as humans. Hwanung gave them a bundle of holy herbs and 20 pieces of garlic. He explained to them that if they ate those and stayed away from sunlight for 100 days, he would grant their wish. Both of them stayed inside a cave, but 20 days into the ordeal the tiger gave in to see the sunlight. The bear persevered and became rewarded with being transformed into a human woman. However, she could find no husband. So she resorted to prayers in front of a sandalwood tree to receive a child. Hwanung heard her prayers and took her for his wife. They received a child which was to be known as Dangun. Dangun went on to found the first kingdom in Korea and lived for nearly 2000 years. He served as a link between the heavenly and the human world and prayed to his holy ancestors on behalf of his people. After his death he became a *sanshin*, a mountain god. (Schlottmann 2007: 79-82).

This story is considered to be one of the oldest in Korea, dating back to the third century A.D. Dangun himself is said to have been born in 2457 B.C. and went on to found the first kingdom in 2333 A.D., exactly 125 years later. Since Dangun is considered a culture hero who helped to establish many cultural traits, he is often seen as the founder of the Korean indigenous religious movements (Owens 1975: 21-23). It is also argued that Dangun may be a prototype for shamans in Korea since he, a heavenly being, was chosen to found the kingdom of Korea, thus making him a link between the spiritual and the human world and the original mediator in Korean history (Schlottmann 2007: 82). Schlottmann sees in the female bear a guardian spirit. The bear is a common totem animal found in many shamanistic cultures. So not only is Dangun a mediator between heaven and earth, but the changing of the bear to a woman may also be interpreted as a shamanistic initiation of the woman (Schlottmann 2007: 82-83).

After discussing the Dangun myth, it must be mentioned that there is a very similar story to be found in Japanese mythology, namely the story of the descent of Ninigi no Mikoto 瓊瓊杵尊. Ninigi was the grandson of Amaterasu Ōmikami 天照大御神, the sun goddess. He was ordered by her to descent to the worldly realm to secure the reign of their lineage. Ninigi was given three items that should later become the three imperial regalia of Japan: the sword Kusanagi no Tsurugi 草薙劍, the mirror Yata no Kagami 八咫鏡 and the curved jewel Yasakani no Magatama 八咫瓊曲玉 (Naumann 1988: 93-96). Ninigi descended on the peak of a mountain, went on to marry one of the daughters of the mountain god Ōyamatsumi no Kami 大山津見神 and later became the ancestor of Jinmu Tennō 神武天皇 (Aston 1956: 84

et seq.). In that regard, Ninigi is a connective element serving as a link between the supernatural and the human world and as such may also be seen as a kind of shaman.

4.1.2 Myths on the Origins of Korean Shamanism

According to his dissertation about Korean Shamanism, Donald Dean Owens, founder of the Korea Nazarene University, claims that many myths deal with the origins and the foundation of Korean shamanism, often revolving around female shamans or *mudang*. These stories commonly show some similarities and some nearly identical key points seemingly running through most of them. Elements of these myths are found in the chants and ritual dances of *mudang* even today. The central shamanistic character in the more relevant stories is a “holy mother” figure that is seen as the eldest ancestress of today’s shamans (Owens 1975: 14). The other central character in this story is a man believed to be a Buddhist monk who lived in a temple on the Jirisan mountain sometime during the Silla Dynasty (57 BC – 935 AD). According to the story, the monk was taking a walk when he saw a mountain brook overflowing, carrying unusually large water and creating a torrent. This sparked his interest and he climbed up the mountain to seek the source of the water. There he was confronted by a giant woman. The woman declared herself as the “heavenly queen” taking the form of a normal human woman. She put a spell on the monk and seduced him to marry her. After performing divination rituals with water they were married. The marriage spawned eight daughters, who were all taught in the ways of shamanism and learned to praise the Amida Buddha. Each of the daughters went to one of the eight Korean provinces and introduced shamanism there (Owens 1975: 14-15). It is believed that in this story, the character of the “holy mother” is actually the “holy mother of the heavenly king”, the goddess presiding over the Jirisan. Mountains are often seen as personified deities and Jirisan is considered one of the most sacred mountains (Owens 1975: 15).

Owens claims that the fact that the “holy mother” was a divine figure before becoming human as well as the fact that she bore eight daughters who all became *mudang* may be taken as possible evidence that in the beginning Korean shamanism was practiced by women. This belief that their profession was inherited among a long maternal line is even shared among shamans themselves, the exception being the shamans of the Jeju province, where male shamans are very prominent. Another noteworthy detail is the mention of the Amida Buddha in the story as well as the Buddhist monk. Buddhism was introduced in Korea during the fourth century, around 372 A.D., but shamanism in Korea may be traced back earlier than that.

This leads to the conclusion that myths were adapted over time and elements of contemporary important religions were added in (Owens 1975: 15).

Another myth centers on a princess who is also seen as a founding figure for shamanism in Korea. This tale is considered one of the most popular among the *mudang* in the Gyeonggi province in South Korea. The main character is the princess of Yao who is believed to be the daughter of a Chinese ruler who reigned around 2300 B.C.. According to the story the princess had a special talent for powerful prayers for her country and because of her the land enjoyed peace and wealth and no natural catastrophes occurred. The king recognized her talent and let his daughter help his people as much as she possibly could. Due to her efforts she became a holy figure in the eyes of the people. Altars were erected in her honor and she received a sizable following, especially women. In order to support the king's daughter, many followers started to practice shamanism. So in this story, the founder of Korean shamanism is actually a Chinese princess, the daughter of a mythical king of China. However, there exists a variation of the story with the princess being the daughter of a ruler of the Goryeo dynasty, which was established in 918 A.D. (Owens 1975: 16-17).

A similar tale is the story of the princess Pari-Kongju *바리 공주*, also known as Chil-Kongju *칠공주*. This story is not only important for followers of shamanism, but is one of the most famous myths in Korean history in general. Schlottmann mentions that this tale exists in roughly 40 variations under various names spread all over the Korean peninsula (Schlottmann 2007: 87). The story centers on a king who did not have any sons but only daughters. When his seventh daughter was born, he got so angry that he put her in a box and threw that box in a river. The small child was rescued by a Dragon King and brought to heaven, where she resided till she was fourteen. When she came down to earth, she heard that her mother was very sick. To save her, the daughter went to acquire medicine water from the Western sky but in order to get the sacred water, she had to work for the guardian of the spring for nine years. Three years she carried water, the next three she had to make fire, the final three she had to gather firewood. When she returned and saved her mother's life, the king was relieved and offered her lands and jewels as reward. The daughter declined and became the goddess Manshin Shinju *만신신주*, the mistress of ten thousand spirits (Owens 1975: 17-18).

The medicine water in the story is seen as containing shamanistic powers and the princess is often seen as the spirit of the medicine water. People regularly visit healing springs to bathe in them and listen to the flow of the water to "hear" the princess speak and receive

her healing powers (Owens 1975: 18). As already noted, spiritual journeys of the soul are not part of *musok*. However, the tale of the princess Pali tells just of this kind of journey. This is seen as a hint that Korean shamanism is related to the traditions of shamanism in Northern Asia (Schlottmann 2007: 86-88). Two other myths deal with a princess by the name of Kongsim 공심 who became the ancestress of all shamans. One of them, originating in the Gyeongsang province, tells that the princess one day went insane and because of that, was banished from the palace grounds. She was brought to the Namsan mountain and from there was led to the highest mountain of the Gangwon province. There she experienced a dream where a crane with blue and white wings flew into her mouth, impregnating her. Sometime later she gave birth to two twin boys. Both her sons became high ranking officials at court and each of them married and had four daughters. All of these eight daughters learned the art of shamanism and were sent forth to different provinces in the land to aid the people. Due to the efforts of her granddaughters, the princess was revered as the ancestress of all *mudang* (Owens 1975: 18-19).

The other story about the princess named Kongsim tells how she went insane due to a mysterious illness. The king called all the most famous doctors to help her but she could not be cured. To hide her strange behavior, the king locked her in a room with dark curtains. The princess was only visited by a maid who took care of her while she occupied herself with prayers and meditation. Inspired by the princess' devotion to her prayers, the maid herself took up the same prayers and meditations. Later the maid went out and helped many people with the power of these prayers. Because of that, the king recognized the special talents of his daughter and released her. Thanks to the maid's efforts spreading the benefits of shamanism throughout the country, the princess is seen as the progenitor of all *mudang* (Owens 1975: 19). This mysterious illness that could not be cured by ordinary means is of course the spirit sickness that some *mudang* experience before they become fully blown shamans.

4.1.3 Observations and Similarities

What all of these stories have in common is the fact that the central characters themselves are not actual *mudang* but mediums that act as a link between spirits or deities and human beings. So the practitioners of shamanism themselves are, according to these myths, the descendants of higher spirits and deities and use their skills for the benefits of the common people (Owens 1975: 26-27). A similar notion that is featured in all of the stories is that *mudang* are not only of heavenly, but also of noble and kingly descent. This is notable because in Korean society, especially in medieval times, the practitioners of shamanism were looked down upon and

used to belong to the lowest social class (although rituals were still practiced in secret or sanctioned by the ruling elite, as already mentioned, see p. 4). Owens mentions that because of this, sometimes an “air of arrogance and condescension” exists towards people that can be perceived when *mudang* practice their rituals (Owens 1975: 27).

Mountains also play an important role in all these myths. The character of the “holy mother” in the first tale discussed for example was a personification of the Jirisan. In the story of the princess that was sent from court and forced to roam the land, she had her dream about the crane on the highest mountain of the province. Many shamanistic altars and shrines have been erected on the mountainsides and are visited regularly by people seeking spiritual aid. Especially popular is an altar on the Manisan mountain on the island of Ganghwa, which is said to have been frequented by Dangun himself in order to pray (Owens 1975: 27-28). Mountains are generally important in shamanistic cosmology, as they are viewed as a place where heaven and earth meet. They are a place where gods descend and were humans worship them (Schlottmann 2007: 83).

The next characteristic of these stories about the origin of shamanism is that there is a focus on women. The notable exception here is the Dangun myth. The story about Dangun is, as a founding myth, constructed in a patrilineal way. This patrilineal structure mirrors the way Korean society has been for many centuries.

As for the other tales, it is always a woman who becomes the ancestress of the *mudang*. In this context it is also worthy to note that many male shamans dress up as females when performing rituals (Owens 1975: 28-29). Another common feature that some of the stories share is that the mediums make traumatic or unusual experiences before encountering the supernatural, as for example the princess who suffers an incurable illness or the daughter that was cast away by her father just because she was a girl. It is widely reported that shamans, not only in Korea, experience neurotic periods or strange sicknesses as part of their initiation. There is also the fact that many of the myths deal with matters of health were either the ancestresses or the *mudang* that are inspired by them use their skills in helping people or exterminating illnesses process (Owens 1975: 39). Lastly, the stories about the *mudangs* ancestresses contain numerous references to Buddhism in order to legitimize the divine origin of shamanism. From a historic viewpoint, a syncretistic development between Buddhism and *musok* happened over time in Korea where both belief systems complemented the other in departments it was lacking. Buddhism absorbed folklore deities which provided the people with familiarity after its introduction to Korea, and *musok* which did not have a moral and

philosophical structure of its own adopted these elements from Buddhism (Kim Hogarth 2002: 344).

4.2 Shamanism in Japanese Myths

Although not as obvious as the similarities between the Dangun and Ninigi myths, the following tales that will be discussed may be understood as an equivalent to the aforementioned Korean stories since they contain examples of shamanism and spirit possession as well.

4.2.1 Amaterasu and Ame no Uzume

One of the most famous stories contained in Japanese myths is the opening of the heavenly rock cave. It is featured in the *Kojiki* 古事記 as well as the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 and may be seen as one of the oldest examples of spirit possession in Japan's myths. The story tells of how the sun goddess Amaterasu secluded herself in a cave following various mischievous actions by her brother Susanoo 須佐之男. After she withdrew herself into the depth of the cave, the entire heavenly realm grew dark and caused permanent night. All the other deities assembled and tried to devise a plan to lure Amaterasu out of her hiding place. They made numerous ceremonial offerings concluded by a delightful dance of the deity Ame no Uzume no Mikoto 天宇受売命 whose performance caused the other deities such amusement that they burst out in loud laughter. This made Amaterasu curious enough to take a peak outside her rock cave where she was confronted and convinced by the other deities not to go back into the cave again. With Amaterasu outside, the light in the heavenly plain went on again (Chamberlain 1932: 64 et seq., Staemmler 2009: 47).

Ame no Uzume's dance is described as follows by Chamberlain in the classic translation of the *Kojiki*:

[...] and her Augustness Heavenly-Alarming-Female hanging [round her] the heavenly clubmoss from the Heavenly Mount Kagu as a sash, and making the heavenly spindle-tree her head-dress, and binding the leaves of the bamboo-grass of the Heavenly Mount Kagu in a posy for her hands, laying a soundingboard before the door of the Heavenly Rock-Dwelling and stamping till she made it resound and doing as if possessed by a Deity, and pulling out the nipples of her breasts, pushing down her skirt-string usque ad privatas partes (Chamberlain 1932: 68-69).

German japanologist Birgit Staemmler sees this story as noteworthy for a variety of reasons. For one it represents a kind of mythical model of a ritual performed at the imperial court. It is also referred to as one of the most influential themes for Shintō ritual performances. However, it may be seen as a divine predecessor of spirit possession in Japan (Staemmler 2009: 48).

From the above it is rather obvious that the versions of the story in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* differ in a few instances, the most striking ones being the following: According to the *Kojiki* translation by Chamberlain, Ame no Uzume only fakes spirit possession, whereas in the *Nihon shoki* her possession is real and it is said she spoke a “divinely inspired utterance” (Aston 1956: 44). Antoni speaks in his translation of the *Kojiki* of Ame no Uzume performing a divine possession (Antoni 2012: 40). In addition, the *Nihon shoki* omits the obscene gestures of Ame no Uzume as well as the laughter of the other deities (Aston 1956: 44-45, Staemmler 2009: 48).

A second instance of possessed dancing occurs during the descent of Ninigi no Mikoto 瓊瓊杵尊, the grandson of Amaterasu. In this episode Ame no Uzume is sent to question Sarutahiko Ōkami 猿田毘古大神 on his identity. During this process she goes about exposing herself in the same way she did during the dance in front of Amaterasu’s cave. Shchepetunina argues that both of these incidents represent a *miko* in a state of possession (Shchepetunina 2010: 150-151).

Staemmler argues that Ame no Uzume’s dance in front of the rock cave may be viewed as a precursor of the whole spectrum of spirit possession and shamanistic occurrences in Japan (Staemmler 2009: 48-49). She also links the ritual called *chinkonsai*, a ritual held annually at the imperial palace, to the story. The *chinkonsai* is dated back by the *Nihon Shoki* to the year of 635 CE, the *Taihō* code makes mention of it in 701. Since then it has been performed annually until the time of the Ōnin war (1467-77). It was taken up again in 1797 and persisted throughout the Meiji Restoration (Staemmler 2009: 49). The ceremony was usually performed during the hours between sunset and sunrise. The participants, consisting of ministers, priestesses and musicians presented offerings and performed music and dances with one female dancing on a pedestal and participated in a formalized snack and sake. This ceremony was performed to resemble the myth, possibly leading to the impression that it may be an invented tradition, probably enforced by emperor Tenmu who at the time sought to strengthen his family’s claim to power through the creation of rituals and the compilation of

supportive national history. To facilitate this development, rituals were invented to affirm the emperor as the successor of the sun goddess Amaterasu (Staemmler 49-50).

When it comes to Amaterasu Shchepetunina states that stories in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* serve as a source for knowledge on magico-religious practices in Japan, representing the state of things before the arrival of Buddhism and the Chinese culture. She argues that Amaterasu herself is depicted as *miko*, giving of an “image of a medium possessed by the divinity” (Shchepetunina 2010: 149), as described by Chamberlain in his translation of the *Kojiki*:

[...] and she forthwith unbinding her august hair, twisted it into august bunches; and both into the left and into the right august bunch, as likewise into her august head-dress and likewise on to her left and right august arm, she twisted an augustly complete [string] of curved jewels eight feet [long], --of five hundred jewels, and, slinging on her back a quiver holding a thousand [arrows], and adding [thereto] a quiver holding five hundred [arrows], she likewise took and slung at her side a mighty and high-[sounding] elbow-pad and brandished and stuck her bow upright (Chamberlain 1982: 54-55).

Shchepetunina argues that the described attire of Amaterasu as well as her utensils matches that of *miko* when conducting rituals. Objects like the Magatama beads and the bow are elements associated with *miko* and thus may possibly have been used to establish a connection between the sun goddess and shamanism in Japan. Also, in the part of the myth where Susanoo desecrates Amaterasu’s palace, Amaterasu is again described as a shrine *miko* (Shchepetunina 2010: 149-150).

4.2.2 Okinaga Tarashi Hime/ Jingū Kōgō

The story of the princess Okinaga Tarashi 息長帯, more commonly referred to as Jingū Kōgō 神功皇后, constitutes a further example of spirit possession mentioned in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki*. Jingū Kōgō was the consort of emperor Chūai 仲哀天皇. When Chūai planned to invade the land of Kumaso 熊襲 the Prime Minister Takeuchi 武内宿禰 asked her for the “divine orders”, while the emperor was playing his lute. He was then answered by the empress who, “divinely possessed” (Chamberlain 1932: 277), told him that to the west was a country full of riches and treasures. The emperor however said that the deities that spoke through her were lying, since one would only see the sea when looking to the west. This

enraged the deities and they claimed him unfit to rule the land. Shortly after that he died all of a sudden (Chamberlain 1932: 278). After the emperor's passing, Takeuchi once again sought out the commands of the deities. He also asked them their names and which deities they were. They told him that the land was to be ruled by the child the empress will bear. He was also disclosed that the child was to be male and commanded him that offerings had to be made to the deities in order to successfully cross over to the west. They also revealed their names to Takeuchi: Amaterasu, Sokotsu Watatsumikami 底津綿津見神, Nakatsu Watatsumikami 中津綿津見神 and Uwatsu Watatsumikami 上津綿津見神 (Chamberlain 1932: 279-280).

The version of the story featured in the *Nihon shoki* is very similar and possession by a deity is featured in both accounts of the tale (Staemmler 2009: 53). Okinaga Tarashi-hime was the wife of emperor Chūai and after his death is said to have ruled herself during the third century before the coming of age of her son Homuda Wake 譽田別, who later became Emperor Ōjin 応神天皇. It may be argued that the compilers of the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* tried to identify the legendary third century empress Himiko 卑弥呼 with her. According to Staemmler this might have happened to attest to her as well as to the possession ritual "historic existence and great antiquity" (Staemmler 2009: 54). Though it cannot be said with certainty that such a ritual existed in the times of Himiko it may be guessed however that it was common in the eighth century since it is described in detail in both chronicles (Staemmler 2009: 54, Naumann 1988: 109).

This myth is also of importance in relation to the prevalence of female mediums in Japan. In both version of the tale it is always the empress that delivers the divine message, not the emperor or the other high officials involved. Due to lack of other examples it can however not be said for sure if at that time Okinaga Tarashi Hime was chosen as the medium because she was a high ranking female or if such a ritual could have also been conducted with a lower born individual (Staemmler 2009: 54).

A rather common element of most ceremonies of spirit possession that is featured in this story is to ask the possessing spirit its name. In this example the spirits are highly regarded deities, so their message is deemed rather important. The medium delivering the message usually also enjoys a higher reputation the higher the rank of the spirits (Staemmler 2009: 54-55).

4.2.3 Yamato Hime and the Ise Shrine

Another shamanistic occurrence in Japanese mythology pertains the founding of the Ise shrine 伊勢神宮 (Ise Jingū), which is dedicated to Amaterasu. It is said that Sujin Tennō 崇神天皇 wanted to erect a shrine in Amaterasu's honor. He ordered his daughter, princess Toyosukiiri 豊鍬入姫 to find a suitable place and build it. The reason behind his decision was that until then, Amaterasu had been worshipped in the imperial palace together with Yamato Ōkunitama 大和国魂. However due to the occurrence of epidemics and social unrest at the time of Sujin's reign, it was decided that this was not enough and Amaterasu needed her own place of worship (Ōbayashi and Watanabe 1982: 30, 133; Florenz 1919:243). After being ordered to build the shrine, princess Toyosukiiri was further obliged to serve Amaterasu as priestess. Later on Toyosukiiri was replaced in her service to Amaterasu by Yamato Hime no Mikoto 倭姫の命. Yamato Hime is said to be the one responsible for the choosing of the site. At the Isuzu River Amaterasu told her in a dream that she wanted to stay there and thus the location was chosen for the construction of the Ise Shrine (Hammitzsch 1937:9ff, 32).

4.2.4 Shamanism in Usa

Staemmler sees another episode of the chronicles as noteworthy in regard to spirit possession. The respective tale centers on the Buddhist monk Dōkyō. Dōkyō was a scholar of esoteric Buddhism and gained a high rank in the imperial court after healing empress Shōtoku 称徳天皇 (r. 749-758). While holding his new position he received an oracle by Hachiman Daibosatsu 八幡大菩薩. He claimed that according to this oracle, if he was to take over as emperor, the country would see an era of peace and wealth. Soon afterwards Hachiman appeared in a dream to empress Shōtoku who then dispatched Wake no Kiyomaro 和気清麻呂 to the Usa Shrine of Hachiman in order to confirm the oracle received by Dōkyō. When Wake no Kiyomaro arrived in Usa, the oracle delivered unto him a different tale than what Dōkyō had told. The oracle spoke that only people belonging to the imperial lineage were entitled to the throne. After delivering the news, Dōkyō had Wake no Kiyomaro banished. However, after Empress Shōtoku's death Wake no Kiyomaro was pardoned, whereas Dōkyō was sent to exile (Staemmler 2009: 57).

The main message of this tale may be seen as the fact that it is a requirement to be a direct descendant of the sun goddess in order to rule, but it also further confirms that at the time of the compilation of the chronicles, mediated spirit possession was used to deliver oracles. They were usually conducted by a priestess who received the spirit and was, while in

the state of spirit possession, assisted by a male priest. The medium's possession may have been solicited, as it was delivered via request. According to Staemmler these oracles played an important role in politics at the time (Staemmler 2009: 58) It is, however, mentioned by Scheid that by the end of the ninth century, the Buddhist part of the temple and shrine complex in Usa took over the divination process and banned women from these rituals (Scheid 2014: 44-45).

4.3 Comparison

When comparing the myths of Korea and Japan with regards to the occurrence of religious phenomena that are widely seen as shamanism, clear differences between these two countries appear. The most important conclusion that can be drawn from such a comparison is that although there are numerous myths that explicitly deal with the origin of shamanism in Korea, this clear concept is missing in the Japanese tales. This mirrors the situation of the nature of shamanism in Korea and Japan: whereas *musok* is its own tradition, shamanistic elements in Japan are embedded into Buddhism and Shintō.

When taking a look at Korea one can easily see that in the myths and legends where shamanism plays a role, it often appears as a central theme or as one critically affecting the end result of the tale. For example several stories share the motive of a princess who turns out to be the ancestress of shamanism, be it either by her own daughters or by inspiring others. They do so after enduring traumatic experiences reminiscent of the shamanistic initiation sickness.

Also the Korean myths contain parts that may be interpreted as shamanistic in origin. The mountain as the axis mundi, the union between god and human, the bear and tiger as totem animals are all signs pointing to the folk religions originating in northern Asia. This is also insinuating that the origin of shamanism in Korea may be traced back to this area (Schlottmann 2007: 82-83, 86). On the Japanese side, the story of the descent of Ninigi has clear parallels: a deity, equipped with a sword, mirror and bean-shaped jewel, is sent down to rule the human realm and becomes a forefather of the respective nation. It is argued by Owens that elements of the Dangun myth are most likely adapted from Siberian shamanism and that the general motive of the story is common in other cultures as well. An outline for the story was for example found carved into the wall of a shrine in what is now the Shandong province in China, dating back to at least the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. - 220 A.D.) (Owens 1975: 20-25).

Apart from the parallels between Ninigi and Dangun, the occurrences of shamanistic happenings in Japan's mythical past are very different from the Korean ones. They are mostly featured in the two chronicles, *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. These chronicles, both roughly compiled around the same time, tell of the legendary origins of the country, the *kami* as well as the imperial lineage. As mentioned above shamanistic practices are found in several stories, however the myths themselves are focused on detailing the history of the country and thus the shamanistic elements featured in the chronicles are not the focus or end result of the myths, but are a means to an end. One might argue that at the time, such practices like consulting oracles and possession by gods and spirits were common since they were described in great detail (Naumann 1988: 109). What both countries have in common however, are myths that justify the divine origin of their respective nation, and shamanistic elements are found in both.

5 The Role of Women in Shamanism and its Rituals

5.1 Lewis and the Idea of Peripheral Cults

Regarding the connection between shamanism and women, Lewis states that there is a type of possession that is in most cases restricted to women. This possession is regarded as an illness and is treated

[...] not by permanently expelling the possessing agency, but by reaching a viable accommodation with it. The spirit is tamed and domesticated rather than exorcized. This treatment is usually accomplished by the induction of the affected women into a female cult group which regularly promotes possession experiences among its members. Within the selected cult group, possession has lost its malign significance (Lewis 1989: 26).

This leads him to the conclusion that this type of possession is perceived differently by men and women. Men see it as a sickness, women as a, what Lewis calls, "clandestine ecstasy". Possession cults such as these are potentially protest movements against men as the dominant sex and support women to make their wishes heard. They also may help women in manipulating men such as their own husbands or male relatives (Lewis 1989: 26).

Lewis calls these types of possessions "peripheral cults" for three reasons: First, the possessive spirits are amoral and have no affinity to the respective society's values. Second, the origin of the spirits is believed to be from outside of society. The third reason are the possessed person themselves, since they are the weak "periphery" to the powerful center of

the societal stratum, which Lewis claims are women in most societies (Lewis 1989: 26-27). This possession may also occur for downtrodden men who “are subject to strong discrimination in rigidly stratified societies”. Consequently, peripheral possession cannot be regarded as a female-only phenomenon, but should be viewed more generally as a form of protest by those who are socially ignored.

Lastly peripheral possession may serve as an aggressive strategy, where the victim enjoys privileges that he or she usually does not, as Lewis puts it

[the shaman] is allowed many liberties with those whom in other circumstances he is required to treat with respect. Moreover, however, costly and inconvenient for those to whom his normal status renders him subservient, his cure is often incomplete. Lapses are likely to occur whenever difficulties develop with his superiors. Clearly, in this context, possession works to help the interests of the weak and downtrodden who have otherwise few effective means to press their claims for attention and respect (Lewis 1989: 27-28).

I will now take a look at the situation of women in shamanism in Korea and Japan and the rituals they conduct and will afterwards verify if Lewis’ statements hold true in the context of these two countries.

5.2 The Case of Korea

Though it is argued that Shamanism as it exists in Korea is closely related to its Siberian form², a major difference is the predominance of women in the Korean version. In fact women play such an important role in Korean shamanism that even in the southwestern regions of the country where the role of a shaman is inherited in a patrilineal tradition, the female shaman is the main actor in rituals, being only assisted by a male one. Another example of the importance of women in this belief system is that in a few cases transvestism occurs, as a male shaman dresses up as a female in order to create a feminine aura for a spirit to appear, a practice very popular in the Gyeonggi province (Kim 1998: 115-116). According to Janice Kim the reason for this is that “[...]in functional terms, religion, spirituality, and shamanism reside within the feminine sphere” (Kim 1998: 116).

² A sentiment that is not shared by all scholars on the subject. As mentioned above, Tae-gon Kim, as one of the more influential writers on *musok*, states that it is an indigenously Korean phenomenon.

In his dissertation *Power to the Powerless: Shamanism and the Korean Woman* (1985), Brian Alden Wilson sees the most basic explanation for this trend in the way the Korean society works, a notion that is seemingly inspired by Lewis' view. Korea is led by Confucian values and has a strong patriarchal character that sees women in a lower social role than men. Wilson states that there are numerous connections that help explain why the role of the shaman is practiced mostly by women in this male dominated country. The most obvious one he finds is the notion of power. Men in Korea have more opportunities to gain and exercise power. All the power of the state used to be, and still is, mostly in the hands of men. So men have all the instruments and tools of decision-making and for shaping society in their hands, women have no say in politics. The role of women is relegated to wife, mother and daughter. However, women have ways of indirect power to enforce their will. They steer the course of the family, manage their children's education and the family income and choose the spouses of their children (Wilson 1985: 1-2).

In contrast to the power of the state which is directed by men and the power over the individual family which is held by women, Wilson mentions a third power, namely the power of the supernatural. This kind of power reflects the influence that the dead may have on the living and the way the gods, spirits or demons may enter the lives of human beings and cause good or harm in various degrees. Should these supernatural powers make an impact on a person, a shaman is needed as a mediator between the world of the living and the spirit realm. This kind of power is perceived as very different of the initial mentioned power of the male-dominated state and as a consequence women who engage in those activities are sometimes shunned by the male part of the Korean society. Wilson states that

It is my hypothesis that Korean shamanism is a woman's activity involving the acquisition and manipulation of power and authority to women. It is argued that the growth and maintenance of shamanism as a woman's activity in Korea can best be understood as a physiological, psychological and sociological response to the institutionalized restrictions placed upon the lives of Korean women, particularly lower –class Korean women (Wilson 1985: 2-4).

Despite the greater numbers of women among shamans, there are also men to be found. Like the women in this profession, they too are mostly from the lower classes of society. Shaman rituals are most often organized and attended by women who seek to get a prayer recitation, an exorcism ritual or make contact with a deceased family member (Wilson 1985: 7-8). According to Wilson men visit shamans rather for practices regarding the worshipping

of ancestors and divination, while women most often wish to appease a spirit. The shamans that deal with the dead are almost all female, not only in Korea, but also in Japan and China (Wilson 1985: 12-13).

The patrilineal social system of Korea may be traced back to as early as the Iron Age. It is assumed that ancestor worship was a big part of the Korean society for the longest part of known history, even before Confucianism was adopted. The result was the social dominance of men over women. The most important part women played in society for the longest time was to produce a male heir. Failure on part of the woman to do so could lead to divorce. Her other duties under the confines of Confucianism were to stay at home and care for her husband and also obediently serve his family and ancestors and not hinder her husband's outside affairs. So after having left their own family, many women ended up as a quasi-servant to their husband and his family (Wilson 1985: 15-17). This is however not a matter of only the distant past, but is still occurring in present day. According to Wilson, even in villages, women play no role in administrative and political matters and are excluded from village meetings (Wilson 1985: 17).

Wilson argues that the role women in Korea occupy puts them under constant interpersonal and psychic stress as they are forced into this demanding situation where they consistently have to prove themselves - day by day. The result of such practice he calls a state of powerlessness and helplessness that may manifest itself as a psychosomatic disorder (Wilson 1985: 18). This disorder may sometimes be interpreted as the vocational call of a shaman, similar to the ones encountered in the writings of Eliade and other scholars of shamanism. Other times it may happen more passively, as women go to visit a shaman to exorcise the bad spirits possessing them. Shamanism in this light may be seen as a way of coping for women suffering from the constant subordination under men and society in general as the power lost in ordinary life is regained in the control over spirits and the shamanistic ritual itself. Sometimes the spirits exorcised are not only symbolic of the own inner conflict of a woman, but her clash with societal norms as a whole (Wilson 1985: 23-24). Wilson describes this process of coping with societal pressure taking place during a shamanistic ritual as "a transformational event in which the stress syndromes emanating in social or interpersonal conflict are dramatized in a symbolic warfare in which demons of affliction, repression and disorder are engaged in battle and successfully put to rout under the aggressive generalship of the woman-shaman" (Wilson 1985: 18).

Wilson mentions that most shamans he encountered in his field research were female and poor, a state he sees as representative of the overall phenomenon of female shamans in Korea. For him this observation is a possible evidence that a society based on the institutionalization of male power may serve as a breeding ground for religious phenomena where women may empower themselves through spirit possession. He reinforces his opinion by quoting the mentioned works of Ioan M. Lewis. Lewis wrote about ecstatic religions and argued that women can show signs of psychosomatic illness or possession when they are forced to constantly deal with society's pressure and a world governed by men while being viewed as the "lower class" themselves (Wilson 1985: 27). Lewis himself wrote that possession "works to help the interest of the weak and downtrodden who have otherwise few effective means to press their claims for attention and respect" (Lewis 1989: 28). This weak and downtrodden he speaks of are women in the case of a patriarchic society, serving as periphery to the center structure of power governed by men (Wilson 1985: 28). Some female shamans in Korea admit that they at times resent being born as a woman and being robbed of opportunities for fame and fortune or even social acknowledgement only due to their gender. But while waging a personal uphill battle with society, female shamans learn to deal with their lot. They become wives, mothers and conductors of shamanistic rituals, earning the acknowledgement from their family and success in demand for the services they provide as a shaman (Wilson 1985: 28-29).

Wilson however takes issue with Lewis's claim that women in this case serve only as a periphery to the male central. In the context of household the woman is central. She may start in the peripheral region with the husband's family, but becomes an integral part of the power structure after delivering a son (Wilson 1985: 29). Another viewpoint differing from Lewis' theory of women as periphery is that only some women may be seen as living in a peripheral role to the male center. This may clearly be observed as not all women go through the same experiences, only some are disturbed so deeply in their view of their role and helplessness in society that they succumb to spirit possession as a sort of protest (Wilson 1985: 31-32). It is however not always inter-gender conflicts that triggers the intense emotions that pave the way for being susceptible for illness and possession sometimes the rivalries between women aspiring to the same goals can lead to the same result (Wilson 1985: 32)

5.2.1 Possession and Women in Contemporary Korean Society

According to Wilson the conflicts women face, be they open or internal, are stemming from expectations by the patriarchic society of which kind of role they should fulfill and how to do

that. When this pressure culminates in illness, this weakened state may at times serve as a breeding ground for spirit intrusion. A possessing spirit may well be responsible for the sickness in the first place (Wilson 1985: 34).³

Possession in general is usually understood as the direct result of the spirit of a superhuman being like a god, a demon, a witch, a sorcerer or similar kinds of supernatural beings (Wilson 1985: 35). Researchers have argued that spirit possession “may be viewed as a symbolic expression of a society’s model of its social structure and on another level as a means by which an individual can play roles otherwise not available to him, such as a woman playing the role of a man or a lower class person playing the role of a powerful individual” (Wilson 1985: 35). It is assumed that in a society that enforces rigid control over individuals, and thereby hinders their personal activities in everyday life as well as freedom for individual achievement, spirit possession is wider spread than in more liberal societies. Another factor is a society with “fixed social distinctions” (Wilson 1985: 35). The possession by a spirit may in this kind of society not affect the structure of society directly, but may serve an individual to help reshuffle her place in society. This development is overall helpful to keep society at equilibrium. Possession and trance are also a state of a manifestation of cognitive dissonance. Here the physiological stress is the result of a cognitive conflict caused by trying to adapt to the demands and pressure by society or social changes (Wilson 1985: 35-36).

Spirit possession and hereby induced altered states of consciousness play “an important role as mechanisms for both stability and change on the micro as well as on the macro-levels of individual and corporate interaction” (Wilson 1985: 36). Wilson states that a large part of the complex of shamanism in Korea is the direct result of people, mostly women, being exposed to intense gender- and status-related stress that in turn results in psychic and physical illnesses which are then attributed to supernatural causes. Since women in Korean society are in steady conflict with societies’ pressures and expectations, all while being regarded as inferior to men, shamanism may serve as a “therapy” in order to maintain psychic balance and stability through rituals in which both the cause and the resolution of personal and psychic conflicts are dramatized (Wilson 1985: 37).

³ It is argued by Susanne Knödel that shamanism in most advanced civilizations, when practiced within the confines of dominant religions like Buddhism, Hinduism or even Islam, while focusing on possession and not on the shamanistic journey of the soul, is most often practiced by women (Knödel 1998: 29-39).

5.2.2 Women and Shamanism in Korea's History

While Wilson approaches the subject from a psychological point of view, Janice Kim, expert in Korean history, puts the relationship between women and shamanism in Korea in historical context. She states that East Asian tradition is marked by contrasts. Masculinity represents the rational world, whereas femininity represents the spirit world. This concept also prevails in Korea, as is evidenced by popular folk tales such as the already mentioned tale of *Pari-Kongju* (see above, p. 43), a story of a princess who, despite being dismissed by her father at birth, used her ability to serve as an intermediary between the mortal and the spirit world to restore her dead parents to life. The tale serves to show both the Confucian quality of filial piety as well as explains Korean shamanism. According to Kim “it portrays customary perceptions surrounding the mutual dependence between shamanism and women. Princess Pari’s supernatural abilities for example demonstrate a predominant belief based on notions of the ‘dark nature’ of femininity and popular interpretations of the mysteries of procreation, whereby women are inherently more inclined to interact with the spirit world than men” (Kim 1998: 113-114). The story is also a useful metaphor for the social situation of female shamans in Korea. The biggest part of shamans in Korea are women, and women in general have a subordinated role in society but gain possible autonomy through the practice of shamanism, attaining a different kind of power than men, the power over religion and spirituality. Although the traditional woman possesses her own kind of power over the matters of the household, the powers gained through shamanism are considerably different and lead to the female shaman fulfilling new ritual, social and spiritual roles. Through this women gain both control of public and private matters and thus symbolize “the authoritative dimensions of Korean womanhood” (Kim 1998: 114). In this context there is a remarkable difference between both the traditional domestic role and the role acquired by a shaman as the former is associated with the bringing of new life into the world while the latter is associated with making contact with the dead (Kim 1998: 114).

Regarding the strong correlation between shamanism and women, arguments about nature versus nurture, the human disposition and environmental influences have been brought forward. Kim mentions that shamanism may be a prehistoric religion which stems from an archaic matriarchy. She also adds statements dealing with social and cultural explanations, such as Lewis’ view about lower class women, or people in general, in societies with a rigid hierarchical structure, where women occupy a peripheral role and suffer from oppression by the patriarchic society. Another argument comes from French anthropologist Roberte

Hamayon who claims that gender-specific forms of shamanism are conditioned by the nature of the spirits themselves (Kim 1998: 115).

On a similar note as Wilson, Kim also argues that when assessing the roles of female shamans in society one has to take a viewpoint from “a holistic conceptualization of power”, since when it comes to women, power plays in Korea are not only encountered in forms of obvious repression and institutional powers, but also in the confines of everyday life. Traditional models of power relationship are focusing mostly on hierarchical structures. These do apply for Korean women as they face suppression under a traditional male-dominated society, but on the other hand, women are glorified in literature and art for their virtues they show as mothers and wives. This glorification is however reserved for women who have accepted their role in traditional society. Female shamans on the other hand are seen as women who dissociate themselves from their traditional gender role, circumventing the ordinary way of life and gaining power through their interaction with spirits. They gain spiritual authority as well as secular autonomy. Through interacting with clients, serving as counselors or diviners, they gain interpersonal power and also strengthen their position in their own household by contributing material gains (Kim 1998: 116-117).

When taking a look at the traditional way of life of women in Korea, one has to take into consideration that gender roles are in most societies constructions of men and that the role of women is often defined as a contrast to the role of men. In the case of Korea this results in the women inhabiting the “inner sphere”, attending household and family matters, whereas the world of men is the “outer sphere”. The former realm was generally viewed as inferior to the latter. Even noble women were used to obey orders their whole life, first those of their father, then those of their husbands, and later those of their sons. Throughout the Joseon dynasty (1392-1897) aristocratic women were literally confined to the *anbang* 內房, the “inner room”, a room symbolizing the head of the household (Kim 1998: 118). During their youth, even noble women were schooled in the Confucian values and learned how to properly conduct themselves whereas young men attended academies to later fulfill their roles in the public realm. From the age of seven onwards women received an education aiming to enable them to fulfill their later role as wife and mother. The core qualities that Confucianism bestows upon women are chastity, self-discipline, submissiveness and humility. Minding these qualities they were expected to take care of the household, while enjoying only limited activities and movement in public. They were also expected to refrain from offensive

language, restrain themselves and be mindful of proper appearance and modesty (Kim 1998: 118-119).⁴

The strictness of the Confucian society allowed only for very limited social mobility for women. At the start of the Joseon era, only four occupations for women were socially accepted: court ladies, midwives, *kisaeng* 기생 (a form of entertainer and sometimes prostitute), or shamans (Kim 1998: 119). Of these four, shamans were seen as the lowest role, but were admired at the same time. However that notion changed over the following centuries, where *mudang* were prohibited to reside in the capital and were partially restricted in their activities. This was partly due to the influence Confucianist thinking was taking on the government and also due to the general social devaluation of women that occurred during the time. *Mudang* were often imprisoned or even sentenced to death and even female clients of shamans received various prohibitions, e.g. being forbidden to worship in Buddhist temples. They were further prohibited to visit a shaman's house, as it was believed to corrupt the spirit. Women in general were forbidden to form social networks among themselves, and a ban on female institutions of public assembly was established. Many of the traits from the Joseon era still carry over to present day. Women who become shamans renounce their traditional feminine role. Seeking personal as well as material independence they are thereby able to escape oppressive family relations reshuffle their role in the hierarchy of their family and society (Kim 1998: 119-120).

These cumbersome living circumstances still carry over to present day, as Confucianist thinking is still engrained in Korean society. When the conditions of a woman's life grow too harrowing for her there is a chance she will suffer an illness that turns out to be the procedural sickness called *shinbyeong* that serves as a supernatural call to becoming a shaman. There is a belief in Korean folklore that spirits when looking to possess a human being tend to gravitate towards one whose soul is already fractured and under heavy pressure. So for many women a hard life followed by the initiation sickness is the way of becoming a shaman, the exception being those that receive their religious status through hereditary rites. So from a religious perspective the sickness itself is necessary for becoming a shaman, but from a sociological perspective the sickness is necessary for a woman to break free from the confines of traditional society (Kim 1998: 120).

⁴ Knödel agrees that the rules introduced during the Joseon dynasty played a major role in establishing Shamanism as a women's phenomenon. (Knödel 1998: 29-39).

The spirit sickness occurs oftentimes when a woman is unable to adequately fulfill her role in public or private life. The lead up to this state may be caused by physical or mental problems and conflicts. Documented cases include physical failures like a problematic appendectomy, psychological ones like trouble with the mother-in-law as well as economic troubles and poverty where a woman had to resort to begging in the street and living in a cardboard shack. For women who suffer through such times *shinbyeong* serves as a way of coping with the discrepancies between social expectations and their own personal interests, using their role as shaman to transcend their traditional position (Kim 1998: 121). Shamans also transcend their former role in society in terms of power, since the religious complex of shamanism in Korea stands outside the boundaries of Confucianism. In Confucianism women are expected to strictly adhere to their role of fulfilling their domestic and subservient duties for the benefits of their family but in shamanism they receive a new calling and move outside those constraints, as their role as intermediary between the supernatural and the mortal world takes center stage in their lives. These acquired supernatural abilities are considered to be the primary source of the change in their social standing, even before the secular gains they are able to procure in this new stage (Kim 1998: 121-122).

The women who practice shamanism see their interactions with the spirits as the main source of the change in power regarding their role in society. They gain personal affirmation through making contact with supernatural beings. The events unfolding when they make contact with a spirit however are only seldom explained in secular terms, and *mudang* usually “perceive their experience in a supernatural framework” (Kim 1998: 122). The nature of the gods and spirits themselves provide the shaman with internal, personal power. The types of spirits may be various influential political or religious figures of Korean history. The embodiment of the characteristics and authority of these powerful, often male, figures and gods during a ritual imbues the *mudang* with confidence and personal strength as well as reaffirms their religious power (Kim 1998: 122).

The changes in a woman’s life after she accepts her calling and becomes a shaman are considerable. Not only is her spirit strengthened by the interaction with supernatural spirits, but so is her economic condition. The material rewards help her to an increasing state of autonomy and lead the way to economic independence. In Confucianism women are normally excluded from the political and financial aspects of society. However in reality some women support their husband’s income with work of their own when necessary. These activities, like shop keeping and peddling are however not enough to provide a woman with financial

independence. After becoming a shaman, women may support themselves in most cases without being dependent on the community or their household and are, in mostly, better off financially than before. But it is not only the material rewards of their activities that empower shamans, but rather feminine power gained through it and the social and cultural consequences of economic autonomy (Kim 1998: 122-123).

Another sort of power gained by shamanism is that women get to exercise interpersonal power where they may take influence on others. They gain independence in public and interpersonal influence in their private lives. After becoming a shaman and being financially successful, a female shaman's husband and children often start to form a new kind of materially and affectionate dependence. In some extremes this may lead to the husband being completely dependent on his wife's income (Kim 1998: 123-124). The payment a well-regarded *mudang* receives can be quite impressive and by far exceeds average earnings of other families (Schlottmann 2007: 205). So the traditional male-female relations in Korean families shift a little in the case of shaman families, as the woman often provides the most income in addition to doing her traditional household duties. *Mudang* frequently reverse gender roles in their own domestic sphere. In some cases the husband even takes over the usual household duties normally reserved for women like housekeeping shopping and attending to children. Men in such families are sometimes judged by others as being lazy and living off of their wives earnings, but it is argued that some men married to shamans are, similar to their wives, just not fit for their predetermined role in society, preferring a less domineering lifestyle and taking the traditional role of the woman in the private sphere, whereas female shamans take the role of men in the public sphere. The personalities are at times also reversed as to fit their role within the family, with the husband being rather quiet and mild while the woman showing a rather assertive and masculine attitude. This role reversal of traditional gender identities is only a part of the interpersonal power that comes with being a shaman; the other part exceeds normative bounds: through the interaction with gods and spirits the shaman is revered in her family, as she provides her kin with protection and blessings from supernatural beings (Kim 1998: 124).

Not only do female shamans exercise influence over their own family, but also over their clients to whom they serve as counselors and spiritual authorities. They are frequented mostly by women. But not all visits to a shaman are for the overall good of the family, some consults are for personal troubles concerning marriage, maternity or the household (Kim 1998: 125). The wishes of the clients vary from wishing for a successful marriage, the birth of

a son after having given birth to only daughters up to that point among others, but are mostly within the expectations of the traditional status of woman in Korean society. Shamans then offer advice or affirmation and in doing so relay interpersonal power to their patron (Kim 1998: 125-126). In this regard Kim writes that “especially when hardship and consultation for divination coincide, shamans exercise positive interpersonal powers through which they provide a ‘reduction of distress and improvement of functioning’” (Kim 1998: 126). Another benefit women receive from visiting a shaman is a way to escape the traditional male-dominated society by immersing themselves in the spiritual realm of the shaman, freeing them from the strict social realm. Kim describes the relationship between a shaman and her female patrons as a two way process. The women rely on the shaman for spiritual strength and the shaman on the other hand relies on domestic networks in order to further their business. As a consequence a shaman may occasionally even serve as an entertainer or guest among gatherings of women (Kim 1998: 126).

Another aspect where the interpersonal power of shamans comes into play is in their relationship with their children. After having suffered through hardships in their life which in the end led to their existence as a shaman, most female shamans strive to provide their own children with better opportunities than they had received themselves. Although they renounce the traditional role of womanhood and oftentimes develop masculine character traits, they still try to become virtuous mothers for their children (Kim 1998: 127).

So it is safe to say that interpersonal power for a shaman comes in various ways. Material autonomy, the usurpation of the dominant role within the family as well as the influence taken upon their clients are all examples of a shaman exercising her power. But even more feminine interpersonal power is exercised within the institutional complex of shamanism itself. When a neophyte becomes a professional *mudang*, she requires tutelage by a spirit mother, called *shin ōmōni*. The spirit mother serves as the neophytes mentor and has in some cases even family relations with the to-be shaman. Sometimes it may be the mother, other times the older sister that guides them (Kim 1998: 126-127). Through this cooperation between women to establish a new shaman with initiation rites and later with co-operative rituals, the feminine characteristics of the shamanistic complex in Korea are even more emphasized. Larger rituals may involve as many as up to a dozen shamans and are viewed as a very good example of the mutual integration of women’s and shaman’s culture. Thus the whole network of female shamans in Korea implies that the practice of shamanism may be seen as a way of empowerment and socialization of Korean women (Kim 1998: 127).

Shamanism in Korea must however not be misunderstood as a “women’s religion”. Although women, when frequenting a shaman may participate in shamanistic rituals, some do so only reluctantly because it is expected of them by other family members. (Kim 2003: 84). Chongho Kim of the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology also speaks against the notion championed by Lewis and others that shamanism in Korea is often interpreted as a counter movement against the patriarchal order of Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity. Kim argues that this point of view originated in anthropological research in the 1970s where it was suggested by Lewis’ text *Ecstatic Religion* that any kind of religious movement that consisted mainly of women and was involving trance and ecstasy was automatically to be interpreted as a kind of resistance movement by women against society. Another factor for moving research into this direction was the women’s spirituality movement in the 1980s and 1990s (Kim 2003: 89). This notion that shamanism is not a pure women’s religion is also shared by Schlottmann, who states that *musok* was pushed into that direction due to historic developments, but is ultimately not gender specific.

Schlottmann also states that in present day the phenomenon of shamanism is for many people not compatible with the state of scientific knowledge and is sometimes associated with being old-fashioned and thus becomes marginalized. Kim however concludes that possession cults may, as Wilson and Lewis claim, in fact be a form of cultural rebellion of the social and economic underprivileged. In the case of Korean shamanism the social position of women may certainly be said to have been playing its part in the predominance of women in that field but it is not solely responsible for it (Schlottmann 2007: 110-111).

It is however, not disputable that women dominate *musok* in Korea. Even the few men that perform rituals work under the supervision of a female most of the time and when performing a ritual sometimes even wear women’s clothing. This may be observed in cities as well as in small towns (Kim 2003: 106). However, it is not true for areas where the male hereditary shamans reside.⁵ In that case only men have the right to oversee a ceremony (Kim 1998: 37). Despite that, most people involved in rituals are women. When a family visits a shaman, the females of the family may help with the preparation of the ritual or participate themselves, but the men of the family usually stay outside the ritual room or occupy themselves with something else in the meantime. Men do usually not participate nor is it expected of them - most of a *mudang*’s clients are women anyway (Kim 2003: 106).

⁵As mentioned above, in the Honam and Yeongnam areas in the southeast and southwest of South Korea, and on the island of Jeju.

Not all women are enthusiastic about visiting shamans. Numerous women are not in favor of shamanism, they share the general skeptical or negative opinion on shamanism. Although it is often argued that shamanism is a women's religion, none of the women throughout Korean history who occupied leading positions in politics have been practitioners of shamanism themselves (Kim 2003: 106-107). In more recent times as women occupy more and more important and socially recognized positions in public, women practicing shamanism are not the ones being looked up to by other women. Also they seldom occupy leading positions, even in small communities. Shamans are oftentimes not even recognized in official data in districts. Many villages have associations for female villagers, however none of them are made for shamans or have a shaman in a leading role in such an organization. Kim states that "there is a kind of consensus in Korean society that shamanism is not accepted in everyday life" (Kim 2003: 107). In more recent times women aspire to other career choices more in line with jobs that are also aspired to in other countries, such as teachers, nurses, office worker, physicians, lawyer, scholars and journalists. Even in rural areas most of the young women aspire to socially acceptable jobs (Kim 2003: 107).

5.2.3 *Gut*, the Korean Shamanistic Ritual

Shamanistic rituals in Korea are known as *gut*. This term is specifically used for ceremonies that include the descent of spirits and the *mudang* entering a state of trance. Thus *gut* are rituals that are exclusive to *musok* and are different from other religious rituals in Korea. Hyun-Key Kim Hogarth argues that the basic ideology of *gut* is a return to "a paradisaal age in which human beings could easily go up to the sky and maintained familiar relations with the gods" as well as "an age in which binary oppositions, such as god-man, man-woman, sacred-profane, heaven-earth etc. did not exist". She quotes Eliade who stated that this is accomplished by "the abolition of time through the imitation of archetypes and the repetition of paradigmatic gestures." *Gut* therefore symbolizes a desire to follow a "divine model" in replicating the behavior of gods (Kim Hogarth 1998: 23-26). During a *gut*, the *mudang* undertakes through purification a journey from this world to a "primordial paradisaal age". This elevation of ordinary people and bringing them face to face with deities and spirits is for Kim Hogarth a mirror of the general value system of Korean society, "which prizes life above all else". So in accordance to the general values, the values of *musok* are also to be seen as worldly, corporeal and existential. The spiritual world is entirely separate, but is in harmony with this world. In order to keep this harmony upright, the dead have to be correctly sent away so the balance which is shattered by their death is restored (Kim Hogarth 1998: 26-27).

Gut is structured as a drama and consists of three basic principles. The first is inviting of the spirit, followed by entertaining and appealing to the spirit, and finally the sending off. *Gut* most of the time consist of twelve parts, where each part is an independent ritual dedicated to a specific spirit. The number twelve is seen as important as it symbolizes completeness similar to the year that consists of twelve months (Kim Hogarth 1998: 45-46). When a spirit is called down and possesses the *mudang*, it speaks directly with the client in a highly dramatized fashion: The *mudang* changes his voice in order to properly impersonate the respective spirit and the clients are assisted by other *mudang* in questioning or bargaining with the spirit (Kim Hogarth 1998: 46). There are many varieties of *gut* that are encountered to this day, with many local variations. All of them can however be divided into four main groups: rituals for the dead, healing rituals, rituals for the *mudang* themselves such as *naerim gut*, the initiation ceremony as well as rituals for prayer or good luck (for individuals and communities). Kim Hogarth states that generally speaking spring and autumn are the busiest times of the year for a *mudang*, whereas summer and winter are relatively quiet (Kim Hogarth 1998: 57).

Kim Hogarth states that the ideology of *gut* may be summarized in four key points: First, *musok* is a human oriented cult which values the living. Second, its main purpose is to grant happiness in this world, not the next. Third, harmony and unity are of great importance as is upholding of social codes and structures. They may merely be temporarily abolished over the course of a ritual. Fourth, harmony and unity are represented in the number three, as “composition and development of all the elements of life are believed to be based on the units of three”. It has been suggested that the view of the world by Korean shamanism is similar to the Hegelian theory according to which development occurs through dialectic which comprises thesis, antithesis and synthesis. The number three is found throughout the field of *musok*. Among the most important gods in the pantheon are the *samshin* 三神, the Three Spirits or *sambul* 三佛, the Three Buddhas, the spirits tasked with fertility and birth. The use of the trident during rituals also highlights the importance of this number. The trident is one of the ancient military weapons used during *gut* and is symbolizing the fending off of malevolent spirits that are seen as the cause of various misfortunes befalling humans. The number three also plays a role after the ritual has ended, as the sponsor has to make an offering of rice three days after (Kim Hogarth 1998: 27). Another aspect of *gut* deemed essential by Kim Hogarth is the importance of drinking, singing and dancing with the gods.

These activities are used to invite the spirits down and entertain them. This is however not restricted to benevolent gods, but also to evil ones (Kim Hogarth 1998: 27-28).

A distinguishing factor that sets *gut* apart from other Korean rituals is a vast display of color and noise, a stark contrast to Confucian rituals that are in comparison modest in that regard. Thus representing an audiovisual spectacle, a shamanistic ritual “attracts and involves everybody in the vicinity” (Kim Hogarth 1998: 28). According to Kim Hogarth, the following elements further help distinguish *gut* from other rituals: colors, food and drink, music, dance, drama and costumes and accessories.

5.2.3.1 Symbolism of Colors, Food and Drinks

The colors are the most immediate apparent characteristics of a *gut* ritual. Bright colors are used and dark moody colors are avoided. In classical works on shamanism the use of color has been interpreted as a way of symbolically creating a rainbow to build a bridge between humans and spirits. In addition to colors, special symbols are used for further symbolization. Each color represents a specific spirit, which is supposed to bring the client good fortune. White is representative of the Heavenly Spirit, red of the Mountain Spirit, blue of the General Spirit, yellow of ancestor spirits and green of other spirits. According to Kim Hogarth, it cannot be said with certainty when the importance of colors for shamanistic rituals came to be. The meaning of the colors themselves may however be discussed: White represents heaven as it has no color of itself and thus may be equaled with “nothingness of emptiness”. Therefore the spirits associated with heaven are also played by *mudang* wearing white clothes (Kim Hogarth 1998: 28-29). Deities from Buddhism are also represented with white colors to show their divine origin. Another reason may be that the ultimate purpose of Buddhism is to emptying the mind of all worldly desires which in turn may also be equaled with emptiness, hence the color white. In the past Korean people often wore white to show their worship of heaven and veneration for their mythical descent from Dangun (Kim Hogarth 1998: 29-30).

Red is seen as the color of luck. This trend can be found in other cultures as well - in China red is regarded as lucky and holy and is associated with weddings. In Korea too, many traditional bridal costumes are red. Since red is also the color of blood it symbolizes life. Why the color red represents the Mountain Spirit can only be speculated as there is no concrete evidence according to Kim Hogarth (Kim Hogarth 30-31).

Yellow is the color of the ancestors, the reason for which may be interpreted in two ways: First yellow represents the color of the ancestors’ flesh. Second, according to ancient

Chinese beliefs, yellow represents the fifth direction, the middle, in addition to east, west, south and east. Kim Hogarth claims that the fifth is the “most important direction, since it acts as a pivot for the other four directions. Gold, the symbol of wealth and the most precious, being also yellow, it is understandable why the most important centre is represented in that colour” (Kim Hogarth 1998: 31). The link between the color yellow and ancestral spirits may also be explained by Confucian values. In Confucianism, worship of the ancestors is regarded highly, and is thus of great importance.

Blue is representative of the General Spirit and associated with masculinity but also with brutality and mercilessness. The General Spirit is called upon to vanquish evil spirits for the well-being of a *mudang*'s clients (Kim Hogarth 1998: 31).

Finally black represents an amalgamation of all colors and thus is seen as symbolizing numerous other ghosts and wandering spirits. The color black itself is shunned by many people in East Asia since it is associated with death, darkness and evil forces. Black is therefore usually replaced with green. The symbolism of colors pertains not only to clothing but is also relevant for other aspects of *gut* like for example ritual food and accessories.

Food and drinks are important for shamanistic rituals in Korea and provide a feast for all participants. Drinks consist mainly of wine like *soju* 燒酒, a distilled alcoholic beverage. The offering of foods however is more comprehensive. Food served during a ritual ranges from cooked or raw rice, fruits, cooked vegetables and various types of meat, both cooked and raw. The foods offered however are different from what people in Korea would usually eat. Kim Hogarth argues that the absence of Kimchi is especially striking as it is an important part of the Korean cuisine. She sees the possibility as reason that Kimchi is regarded as too low a food for the spirits to eat. But since other relative simple foods are offered, she argues that the actual reason may be that Kimchi lacks symbolic value. The biggest part of the food offering consists of a part of an animal, be it a pig's head or a skinned whole pig. The forelegs of an ox are also a usual offering as are beef ribs and roasted or boiled chickens. Generally the more high-cost the ritual, the more meat is offered. The reason why large parts of an animal, or even whole animals are offered may be a remnant of live sacrifices of ancient times. The type of animal is also of importance. Oxen are of note as they used to be the most treasured possession of common people in rural areas of Korea and a representation of labor and livelihood. Kim Hogarth notes that if a farmer offers an ox to a spirit that “it is an extra pair of hands, legs and body for him. It is an extension of him; in other words, the farmer identifies

himself with the ox. When he offers an ox to the spirits he not only offers his most prized possession, but the whole of himself” (Kim Hogarth 1998: 32-34). This offering of oneself is also symbolized by writing the name and birthdate of the client on the animal’s back, equaling “the death of his/her old polluted self and rebirth as a purified cleansed person”. Oftentimes a black pig is sacrificed as black stands for pollution. Why a pig is chosen instead of an ox cannot be said with certainty, but one can guess that it is because of reasons of availability since oxen are scarcer and pricier to come by. The offering of beef ribs may be explained by signifying devotion to the gods as the ribs are close to the heart (Kim Hogarth 1998: 34-35).

The importance of rice offerings can be understood by at looking at the Korean word for rice. Cooked rice means *pap* 밥 which also translates as “meal”. So the meaning of a rice offering is not only that of a meal, but symbolizes prosperity and life itself according to Kim Hogarth. On a related note, steamed rice cakes named *tteok* 떡 are served for the participants in *gut* and they too symbolize the entertainment aspects of witnessing a ritual. Besides they serve to entertain the spirits. A table with fruit offerings is also essential as fruits represent sincerity, hard work and devotion. In addition fruit also carries the meaning of success and achievement. Thus the offering of fruits symbolizes the desire to achieve a goal or to have one’s wish granted (Kim Hogarth 1998: 36-37).

Another food offered during *gut* are nuts, especially chestnuts. Kim Hogarth states that nuts “symbolize ‘bearing’, and particularly ‘core’ and ‘substance’. The removing of the prickly burs and hard shells symbolizes discarding one’s old self, i.e. the purification of pollution, and the pure white flesh of the chestnut, symbolizes a rebirth as a purified new being”. During the ceremony the nuts are meshed together with dried red dates and then given to the client for eating. The clients do not explicitly voice their wishes directly to the spirits called down during a ritual, but also make their desires known through the type of food offerings (Kim Hogarth 1998: 37-38).

5.2.3.2 Music in *Gut*

Music is an essential tool that helps the *mudang* achieving a state of trance as well as setting the mood for the other participants in the ritual. *Gut* in general also have a redemptive quality. The participants are supposed to vent their built-up feelings like anger, resentment, grief and other grievances and transform them into positive feelings like hopefulness and joy. Music during a shamanistic ritual maybe divided into instrumental music played by musicians and vocal music consisting of recitations, singing, ritual chanting and sutra chanting.

The instrumental musicians are called *chaebi* 재비 or *aksa* 악사 and accompany all vocal music as well as some of the dialogues during *gut*. They also assist the *mudang* in entering the state of ecstasy. Loud percussion instruments are the dominant category of instruments during shamanistic rituals. Of importance among them are especially the double sided hourglass shaped drums named *changgu* 장구 and brass cymbals of various sizes named *chegeum* 채금. These are considered the most significant musical instruments for *gut* and as long as they are available the ritual can be performed. However, also various other small drums, barrel drums, and gongs are used. The rhythmic beating of the drums helps the *mudang* in reaching an ecstatic state while dancing. Besides, the loud noise created by the drums is also believed to scare off evil spirits. Other types of instruments used are flutes and pipes, like for example a small pipe called *piri* 피리 with eight holes that makes shrill sounds, which is the most popular woodwind instrument for *gut*. Stringed instruments are also featured such as *haegeum* 해금, a small fiddle with two strings. The musicians playing for rituals are often skilled in more than one or even all types of instruments and are able to improvise to capture the mood of the participants (Kim Hogarth 1998: 38-40).

The vocal part of the music, generally referred to as *muga* 巫歌 („shaman songs“), is more complex than the instrumental one. It is divided into four parts, according to the nature and function of the tunes. The first part is recitation, dealing with reciting stories such as creation myths and biographical poems of shamanistic spirits. These are sung in a monotonous voice while accompanied by drums which are also played by the *mudang*. Recitations may last for several hours. They are supposed to invoke the spirits by praising them and finally cause them to descend but they also describe the history and roles of the spirits. Recitations are very prominent with the hereditary *mudang* (Kim Hogarth 1998: 41).

The second part of *muga* is the singing of melodious songs called *t'aryōng* 妥靈 (“ballad”). These songs are however not conceived as being sung by the *mudang* but by the spirit possessing her or him. It is believed that the spirit is enjoying itself singing and thus is appeased and more open to the wishes of the clients (Kim Hogarth 1998: 43).

Ritual chanting is also used to invoke spirits. This differs from the aforementioned songs as it is less melodious but sung to a monotonous tunes and drum beats. Ritual chanting occurs during the purification of the ritual site and the invocation of spirits.

Lastly there are incantations. Buddhist sutras are chanted in order to chase away evil spirits. These spirits are also believed to have come from the Buddhist pantheon, thus the chanting of Buddhist scripture which is believed to have magic properties helping with the spirits. The chanting is accompanied by a wooden gong that is often used by Buddhist monks (Kim Hogarth 1998: 44).

Dance and drama are also integral parts of *gut*. The dance involved in *gut* may be classified in four parts. According to Kim Hogarth these are

1) possession dance, starting with a leisurely turning around and ending with a frenzied repetition of jumping up and down in the air with both arms going straight up and down, performed by the shamans to achieve a state of ecstasy/ trance, which is highly ritualized, 2) merry dance, performed by the spirits via the possessed shamans, by way of enjoying themselves, often accompanied by gay songs, 3) *mugam*, resembling the shamans' possession dance, performed by the sponsors, who jump up and down, dressed in the shamans' costumes., some of whom actually enter a state of quasi-trance, and 4) 'fun'dance by all the participants, including the casual spectators, at the end of *kut* (Kim Hogarth 1998: 45).

5.2.3.3 Costumes and Accessories

The charismatic *mudang* uses a wide array of costumes and accessories to call down and accommodate the spirit. The clothes are of high importance as it is believed that the spirit recognized the costume and can then descend into the *mudang* wearing it. The *mudang* usually acquires a lot of costumes representing gods and spirits over her, either given to her by a senior *mudang* or being donated by clients (Kim Hogarth 1998: 47). Various accessories are used by the *mudang* perform rituals. These items vary in form and purpose. Brass bells called *pangul* 방울 are used by the *mudang* before and while she is in a state of ecstasy. There are several bells, usually between seven and eight of various sizes, attached to a Y-shaped stem. Fans are also used, especially in connection with spirits derived from Buddhism. The above mentioned trident (see p. 66) is associated with the General Spirit but has also a different meaning in the context of shamanism. The three branches represent, according to Kim Hogarth, branches of the cosmic tree, the *axis mundi*, which connects heaven and earth and spirits and humans. Swords are also used for dramatic effect to symbolize the fight against evil spirits, as are knives. Boats are used to symbolically send the dead off to the other

world. Lastly there are convex brass mirrors called *myeongdu* 明斗, which are hung at a *mudang*'s private shrine and are regarded as tutelary spirits (Kim Hogarth 1998: 47-51).

5.3 Female Shamans in Japan

According to Hori Ichirō, in Japanese shamanism the leading role is played by female shamans, similar to Korean shamanism. The focus on females is already seen in the terminology used to describe a shaman. The term *miko* 巫女 is used, which explicitly refers to a female whereas there is no special term for men. Hori draws on the classification of Tarō Nakayama, who divided female shamans into two categories. First there are the *kannagi* 巫 who used to practice rituals for the imperial court as well as Shintō shrines. Over the years however the importance of this type of shamans diminished until they only served in formal Shintō rituals and lost their original functions. The second category consists of the *kuchiyose miko* 口寄せ巫女, which is used as an umbrella term that is used to denote various regional types of *miko* (Hori 1968: 201). These are shamans who either settle down or roam from village to village in order to fulfill requests of clients there. Their main function is the utilization of trance techniques, serve as a medium for spirits, fortune telling and divination. Interacting with deities, spirits or the dead is usually their most requested service (Hori 1968: 181-182). The female shamans of the first category usually receive their position by inheritance, being chosen among families of Shintō priests. Women of the latter category however become shamans through initiatory rites or training by a teacher like an already experienced shaman (Hori 1968: 182-183).

5.3.1 Female Shamans in Japanese Prehistory

Hori states that Korean shamanism had a close relationship with Japanese shamanism in ancient times. But throughout history the role of female shamans changed due to sociopolitical changes as the transition from the ancient matriarchic society to a patriarchic one under the strong influence of China. Female shamans were thus degraded from playing important political roles to being marginalized into folk culture (Hori 1968: 187).

Hori argues that the ancient priestly queen Himiko (see above, p. 27) represents the “original type of Japanese shamanesses”. Himiko was probably enthroned at an early age, with fourteen or fifteen, reigning well over 60 years. She was never married, but had a male attendant (Hori 1968: 187-191).

Regarding Himiko as serving as the “ancestor” of Japanese shamans, a theory exists postulated by Gina Barnes that rulership during the early Kofun period during which Himiko reigned, was actually heavily inspired by the Chinese Queen Mother of the West mythology. The Queen Mother was according to Barnes “both legitimator of political rulership and a ruler’s guide in the afterlife”. Seen in this light, Himiko might have been a charismatic avatar of the Queen Mother (Barnes 2014: 3). According to the *Weizhi* Himiko “occupied herself with magic and sorcery” and was enthroned as a ruler in a time of social unrest and conflict possibly caused by the male rulers before her. So she might have been put onto the throne in order to bring order and peace to the country. Barnes mentions that the Daoist Queen Mother mythology, which at the time was very popular in China, has probably found its way to early Japan by word of mouth (Barnes 2014: 18). Barnes believes that Himiko, at the time probably a shamaness residing in the Nara region, may have been a chosen avatar of the Queen Mother, since this would be an explanation as to why people would all of a sudden chose a female ruler. Another hint at the popularity of female leaders during these times was the fact that the *Weizhi* also states that after Himiko’s death around 250 A.D. a male king was once again established, but caused such outrage with the people that he was assassinated and instead replaced by Iyo 壹與, a thirteen-year-old female relative of Himiko. With the Queen Mother mythology in mind, this turn of events is explainable by the unwillingness of the people to accept a male ruler, who could not serve as a representative of the Queen Mother (Barnes 2014: 18-19).

Barnes argues that despite being mentioned in the ancient Chinese chronicles, there is no mention in the Japanese chronicles, the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* about either Himiko or Iyo. She sees the reason mainly in the *ritsuryō* 律令 system, a law system based on the principles of Confucianism prevailing at the end of the Asuka (538 – 710) and the Nara (710 – 794) period during which the chronicles were compiled. In the centuries between the female rulers and the compiling of the chronicles, the socio political landscape changed from a female oriented ruling ideology to a male one under Confucian values. But it is evident that there are persons occurring in the chronicles that are either representative of Himiko or have at least similar shamanic qualities. According to Barnes these are Princess Yamato Totohi Momoso Hime, the seeress aunt of emperor Sujin, and Yamato Hime no Mikoto (Barnes 2014: 19). Yamato Totohi Momoso Hime is said to have been married to the kami Ōmononushi 大物主, a parallel to the Queen Mother of the West, who herself was married to a god. A possible connection to Himiko is seen in her relation to the ruler, emperor Sujin,

whereas Himiko was assisted in ruling by her brother (or a “male attendant” according to Ichiro Hori). The Queen Mother also ruled together with the King Father (Barnes 2014:19). Taking into consideration the status of Himiko and her possible reincarnations in Japanese myths, one can easily guess that there may be a connection between the powerful shamanistic female figures in mythology and the fact that shamanism was, especially until the introduction of Buddhism in Japan, a female oriented phenomenon.

5.3.2 Possession in Heian Japan

Similar to already mentioned interpretations of Korean shamanism, Doris Barga, professor of Japanese at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and author of the book *A Woman's Weapon. Spirit Possession in The Tale of Genji*, states that spirit possession in Japan may be interpreted in the same light of serving women as a hidden aggressive strategy. She explores this phenomenon in depth and also its meaning for the Heian period (794-1185 A.D.) in her book on spirit possession in the Tale of Genji. She explains male empowerment as the source for women's aggression in a society like Heian Japan, when polygyny was, for men in aristocratic life, a part of their routine. In this context

[...] spirit possession is a counteracting female strategy of breaking the behavioral code for the same purpose of empowerment. The hole in the fence not only serves men to access their power over women; it is also the site of women's *mono no ke* – the spirits who intimidate their audience and aim to correct men's excessive vision (Barga 1997: 2-3).

In Heian Japan, male aggression in pursuing women was enabled by the education of women. They were taught from a young age to conduct themselves properly, not to openly show disgust and remain silent. In this patriarchic society that permitted polygamy, women were married off to appropriate suitors and were expected to not show their grievances or rebel against their husband. Further a woman was to be true to her husband, while he was allowed to pursue other women. This status quo served as a breeding ground for underlying aggression as Barga writes:

Polygyny as a social structure dictated that a wife be faithful spouse and accept her status as one of several women among whom her husband has divided his amorous attention. In fact, polygyny allows men sexual privileges, expects women meekly to acquiesce in their inferior sexual status, and – as a result of this unrealistic expectation – produces endemic female jealousy. Men then condemn this emotion as a form of

deviance. Married and unmarried women were expected to respond to their lovers with the same docile acceptance of the double standard (Bargen 1997: 3-4).

So women could only repress their feelings of jealousy and seek other forms of protesting. Spirit possession serves as this disguised form of protest against the male dominance and the society that subdued women overall. It is not a very specific method, however, as it is not directly targeted at individual men, but takes revenge indirectly at society via the means of possession. It is mostly women suffering through personal or somatic crises like sicknesses or difficult pregnancies that have a tendency to become possessed. It is argued that the women becoming possessed are not “victims” but are the ones actively protesting against the male dominated society. This leads to a temporary switch of the allocation of power, as women assert control over men but without actively claiming any authority. (Bargen 1997: 6-7).

5.3.3 Female Shamans in Japanese Folklore Studies

In his studies about *miko* (also called *fujō* 巫女) in the Tōhoku (the northeast) region of Japan, Kawamura Kunimitsu of Osaka University, scholar of Cultural Anthropology and shamanism in Japan, states that female shamans can be roughly divided into two categories and distinguish themselves by the way of introduction to their role as spirit medium and the way they are acknowledged in society. The broad differences between these two types are the following: The first type, usually referred to as *itako* イタク, is blind, be it partially or fully, and performs *kuchiyose* rituals and invocations. The second type, which Kawamura refers to as *kamisama* 神様, is not blind and performs invocations and exorcisms.

However, due to the often overlapping duties of both these types of female shamans, Kawamura urges that the most defining criteria in differentiating those two are the processes by which women become shamans in the first place (Kawamura 2003: 263-264). Blind shamans go by various names, depending on the province and prefecture. When born blind or blinding at a young age, the parents usually arrange for the girl to become the apprentice of a seasoned shaman in order for her to have an occupation and a place in society after they are gone. They start their training around the age of ten, sometimes later if the eyesight is lost at a later age, but almost never past the age of twenty. It is seen as imperative that tutelage starts before the coming of womanhood. The reasons for this are various, among others that girls and young women have a better memory to remember and recite sutras and ritual texts. Another is that at a young age, girls are more apt to endure the physical part of the training

like ascetic exercises and household chores for her master. The final and main reason for starting training at a young age is that they are supposed to be more susceptible for being possessed by a kami. This is necessary to conclude the initiation ritual to become a full-fledged shaman at the end of her apprenticeship. The education for an aspiring shaman lasts up to five years and it is mandatory to conclude with the possession ritual (Kawamura 2003: 264-265). The blind young girl is not seen as a full-fledged member of society until she is married to a kami and thus gains its authority. During this process she becomes an accepted member of her respective community and is seen as having become a socially accepted woman (Kawamura 2003: 268).

The second type of female shaman is neither blind nor is an institutionalized initiation ritual required. The women in this category do not make the choice to become a shaman in their youth, but most of them have an encounter with the supernatural in their twenties, thirties or even older. They come into contact with a kami after suffering a personal crisis. This crisis manifests most often as a psychosomatic sickness. However, it may also manifest as the result of discord within the family, as for example with their husbands or their mothers-in-law. Other factors are problems with the raising of children, living in poverty or working under arduous conditions. When one of these circumstances or a combination of them become too grave for a woman to bear, it may usher in a psychosomatic illness. This condition often interferes with their respective day-to-day work, be it household duties or any kind of money-earning employment or business (Kawamura 2003: 268-269). If their condition cannot be cured by conventional means, i.e. conventional Western medicine, they go to practitioners of folk religious treatments. These folk religious practitioners may suggest that the disturbance suffered by the patient is originating by the workings of evil spirits or kami and in order to cure the woman various practices may be prescribed. Among them are invocations, exorcism, memorial services for the deceased and the encouraging of faith in kami and buddhas. If these kinds of treatment are successful and the afflicted woman is relieved of her symptoms, the treatment ends and she may return to her normal life (Kawamura 2003: 269-270).

Should the illness persist after both western medicine and folk religious treatment methods having been used in vain it occurs that the afflicted woman starts to develop an intense belief in the supernatural and kami. Along with this heightened religious sentiment, often goes a neglecting of her worldly duties. She starts to neglect her role as a housewife and caring for her children as well as her career. As her engagement in her role within the family and at work lessens, the more often she visits shrine, temples and frequents shamans

(Kawamura 2003: 270-271). This development of a woman finding herself more drawn to the spiritual world while neglecting her secular duties is referred to as *shinjin nobose* 信心のぼせ or “devotion dizziness” (Kawamura 2003: 271).

This situation may lead to further conflict within the family, most often with the husband as well as her mother-in-law. As a consequence the woman starts to isolate herself, believing that no one can understand her condition and is often praying to kami to deliver her from the illness or frequenting a shaman for that matter. Over time she may come to the realization that her condition is a calamity that is affecting the whole household and in trying to relieve the situation she devotes herself even more to her beliefs. During this process of becoming estranged to her own family and growing closer to the practice of folk religion, the woman may take up tutelage under an established shaman, dedicating herself to devotion and ascetic exercises to evoke the possession of a *kami*. If a woman is possessed by the *kami*, it is instilled into her that she henceforth uses her abilities to help people. After the initial possession the *kami* will take possession of the shaman and utter oracles and prophecies now and again. However if it turns out that the utterings are not those of a benevolent *kami* but an evil spirit, it has to be exorcised (Kawamura 2003: 271-272).

It also occurs that a woman, knowing that her condition causes a burden to her family, as well as being scorned by other people due to being unable to work, starts to obsess over her situation which in turn causes her to lose the balance of her mind. In this state she starts uttering strange words and shows unusual behavior. From a folk religious perspective, recovery from these mental disturbances is achieved through devotion to prayer and ascetic exercises. If these methods do not work and the affected woman quits prematurely, the symptoms will occur over and over again. Kawamura calls this a “warning on part of the *kami*”. The *kami* thus indirectly urges the woman to embrace her fate as a shaman. For this type of shaman it is necessary to be recognized as such by her community as there is no fixed ritual that serves as an official entry point like there is for the blind medium. This mostly occurs when people perceive a supernatural deed conducted by the shaman like curing an illness or having correctly predicted a future event (Kawamura 2003: 272-273).

5.3.4 Shamanistic Rituals in Japan

In this chapter, rituals of Japanese shamanism involving female shamans will be discussed. I will start off with the rituals that also involve the *yamabushi* followed by information on the rituals involving only female mediums.

5.3.4.1 *Yorigito* and *Oza*

One of the most important cornerstones in Shugendō is the practice of ascetic exercises performed on sacred mountains. These are, as already mentioned (see above, p. 39), water ablutions, strict abstention of certain foods and the reciting of sacred texts (Staemmler 2009: 69). Another of the more famous Shugendō rituals is a prayer called *kaji kitō* 加持祈禱. This prayer's function is the asking for worldly benefits by the *shugenja* during a state where he becomes “one with a deity through ritual gestures and incantations”. Staemmler further states that there are other uses of this prayer as follows: “There were *kaji kitō* for all purposes, some attaching a deity's powers to the client, others driving away evil influences as in rituals of exorcism and healing”. Another ritual practiced by *shugenja* was *goma* 護摩, a fire ritual “of offering and of salvation” (Staemmler 2009: 69). The range of rituals conducted by *shugenja* was wide, as there were also practices for this-worldly benefits such as tracing lost objects, finding the culprit of a crime as well as ceremonies to exhibit the ascetic powers one gained by ascetic exercises such as the *hiwatari* and *yudate* (Staemmler 2009: 69-79).

Shugendō has a close relationship with folk religion, overlapping in some fields such as prayers, exorcism and amulets. If a person suffers a streak of bad luck and prophylactic rituals do not help, the cause has to be found. To do that, the *shugenja* needs to employ means of divination to find out what the reason might be. If the cause should be an ancestral spirit of neglected deity, the cure would be for the client to fulfil his or her duty towards the spirit. If the possessing spirit is malevolent in nature, however, and affects the client's body or home through possession of curses, the *shugenja* has to practice exorcism (*tsukimono otoshi* 憑物落とし) or subjugation (*chōbuku* 調伏). This may be done by “placing a sword beside the patient's bedside, forcing it to leave through the incantation of powerful words and ritual gestures, or converting and pacifying it through the reciting passages from sacred texts” (Staemmler 2009: 70). If all of this should not work and the malevolent spirit is still active, the *shugenja* may resort to a ritual of mediated spirit possession, the *yorigitō* 憑祈禱.

The name *yorigitō* means “spirit possession prayer” and derives from the *abishahō* 阿尾奢法 ritual⁶. Similar to its precursor ritual, *yorigitō* is practiced by a monk in

⁶ The *abishahō* ritual belongs to Esoteric Buddhism. One of the earliest examples of its performance was said to have been undertaken by the monk Sōō (相応, 831-918), a disciple of Ennin and the founder of one of the temples on Mount Hiei, the Mudōji 無動寺 temple. Later on, a certain monk Gyōson (行尊, 1057-1135), who became head of the Tendai school, is also reported to have conducted such a ritual. Both of these monks, who were also known for healing rituals involving prayer and incantations, performed it on imperial orders (Staemmler 2009: 62). The Chinese and Japanese sources reporting details of the rituals overlap in several details. The first is the use of children as mediums. One of the oldest sources that describe the ritual, the *Sokushitsu*

combination with a medium. It is not only conducted for healing purposes but also when in need for advice of spirits and deities. For the latter, the appropriate deity is induced into the medium and is then questioned regarding the matter at hand, be it an impending danger, questions about the harvest or issues regarding individuals. The *yorigitō* ritual was part of many villages' annual cycles. The performance of the ritual bears many similarities to the *abishahō*, but includes local deviations concerning the terminology, place of the ritual, the people involved in the ritual and the deities that are questioned. The conductor of the *yorigitō* is usually a *shugenja*, the spirit medium is mostly a child, a woman, and in some cases a man. Miyake Hitoshi, one of the leading scholars on Shugendō and folk religion in Japan, made the observation that while in matters of exorcising a female medium is used, the one partaking in inquiring rituals is often male (Staemmler 2009: 70-71). Before the ritual, the medium has to undergo a purification ritual such as a water ablution. Then at the start, the *shugenja* will recite incantations and perform ritual gestures for the benefit of his and the medium's spiritual strength. Afterwards the spirit or deity is called down by incantations and instruments like drums and bells and is then induced into the medium. The arrival of the spirit will then be symbolized by a quivering wand or branch that the medium holds in her or his hand or by taking possession of the medium, resulting in trance like symptoms. Then the *shugenja* will ask the spirit for its name before questioning. After corresponding with the spirit, it is sent back to its place of origin and the medium's state of trance is ended. The latter happens by either the *shugenja* removing the wand or branch from the mediums hand or clapping her on the back (Staemmler 2009: 71-72). The *yorigitō* ritual was practiced throughout Japan, and reached its peak during the Edo period (1603- 1868).

The popularity of the *yorigitō* ritual inspired similar ones such as the *oza* 御座 ritual of the Ontakekyō 御嶽教, one of the thirteen official schools of Sect- Shintō in the prewar

ryūken makeishuraten setsu abishahō 速疾立験摩醯首羅天説阿尾奢法 advises that the practitioner has to select between four and five healthy young boys or girls. It is possible that girls may have been the preferential choice, as a lot of times only girls are mentioned. It is unclear however if all of the chosen mediums answered the questions asked during the ritual, as the source does not distinguish between singular and plural (Staemmler 2009: 62-63). Another factor that is of importance in descriptions of the ritual seems to be the qualification of the practitioner, as it is required to “recite numerous secret formulas or sutras before a deity or spirit takes possession of the mediums. It need not be he, however, who then asks the deity or spirit about the particular matters for which the ritual was performed” (Staemmler 2009: 63). The primary function of the ritual was to acquire information about matters of either past, present or future. That differs from similar rituals used for healing purposes. It can be speculated that when used on imperial orders, like it was reported for Sōō and Gyōson, the ritual may have been conducted to ask political or military questions. It is also reported that the questions were usually answered to the full satisfaction of those involved. After the ritual, the mediums are returned to their normal state of mind. This is accomplished by getting their faces sprinkled on with holy water. (Staemmler 2009: 63-64).

period, founded in 1882 which started out as a collective of various individual pilgrim associations. Ontakekyō bears similarities with Shugendō in both doctrine and practice. Staemmler states that

[...]they share the essential importance attributed to climbing a specific mountain connected with ascetic exercises such as abstaining from certain foods or standing under a waterfall. Ontakekyō's main deity, Ontake Ōkami 御嶽大神 is identified with one of Shugendō's main deities, Zaō Gongen. Fudō Myōō too, is central to both religious traditions that also revere regional deities and others including the inevitable "eight hundred myriads of deities" (*yaoyorozu no kamigami* 八百万の神々) (Staemmler 2009: 74).

Another parallel is the worshipping of deified deceased ascetics. The doctrines of Ontakekyō are focused on "the purification of body and mind through prayers as well as water, on achieving an awareness of the divine and on realizing it in everyday life" (Staemmler 2009: 73-74). Illnesses and misfortunes are believed to be caused by spiritual phenomena and thus cannot be cured by ordinary medicine. Rituals practiced by Ontakekyō are also very similar to the ones by the *shugenja* including journeys through holy mountains, ascetic practices, demonstrations of the abilities gained through ascetic austerities like walking across fire or climbing a ladder of swords. Staemmler argues that the most important ritual of Ontakekyō is the *oza* ritual, which is an adopted version of *yorigitō*. Similar to the ritual it is devised from, *oza* is used for various purposes like gaining information, calling out to a deity for help to an immediate problem or for protection. The ritual itself always follows a certain procedure. The active participants sit facing the altar while the congregation takes a seat behind them. The practitioner starts reciting prayers and texts of purification and invokes a deity accompanied by ritual gestures. The recitation is accompanied by "the chime of a handbell, the clatter of rings on the practitioners' short staffs and the incessant bangs of a drum" (Staemmler 2009: 74-75). During the recitation of the *Hannya-shingyō* 般若心經, or Heart Sutra, the practitioner suddenly jumps up and turns away from the altar and shows signs of possession like trembling of the arms and shallow breathing. In this moment it is believed that a deity has taken possession of his body. Then, the practitioner next to him moves to the mediums former seat and assumes the role of the mediator. The mediator is called *maeza* 前座, the medium *nakaza* 中座. The *maeza* puts a wand called *noruhei* ノルヘイ into the *nakaza*'s hands. The *maeza* continues by asking the deity its name. After the deity is identified, all of the present practitioners chant its name and the *maeza* starts a standardized

dialogue with the deity while bowing down. The *nakaza* impersonating the spirit of deity sits down while holding the wand upright and is asked for advice or help in the matter for which it was called upon. This may involve the curing of illnesses, protection for material goods, financial aid or help with family problems. Those on whose behalf the deity is summoned must then come before it and bow deeply in front of the *nakaza*. Through the medium advice is then offered by the deity. This advice may be for example the invocation of the deities' name fifty times in order to lift misfortune or the person may be touched upon the head or shoulder with the *nakaza*'s wand to grant a wish. It may occur that numerous deities, one after the other, enter the *nakaza*. When the *nakaza* lowers the wand, it symbolizes that no deity or spirit will enter during this session. To conclude the ceremony the *maeza* pats the *nakaza* on the back and shoulders, massages his arms and removes the *noruhei* from the medium's hands. Slight variations may occur during the *oza* ritual such as that the *nakaza* picks up the wand himself before entering a state of trance. The number of deities being called down in a single ritual may vary as well. The first deity is a higher ranking deity followed by smaller or local deities or spirits which are often consulted for more specific problems. Staemmler states that most often it is between one and three but in some cases it has been reported that the number can be exceed even ten (Staemmler 2009: 75-76). A difference to the *yorigitō* may be found in the types of practitioner. Whereas the mediums in *yorigitō* are usually women or children whose role is regarded as inferior compared to that of the *shugenja*, the *nakaza*'s role in *oza* is according to Staemmler "valued more highly than that of the *maeza* – possibly because it is difficult to find someone who is willing and able to enter into an altered state of consciousness as someone who can act as a mediator" (Staemmler 2009: 76-77).

5.3.4.2 Possession Rituals by Female Mediums

As above mentioned, the *miko* in the northeast of Japan may be, as Kawamura wrote, divided into two types: the blind *itako* and charismatic *kamisama*. The main tasks of the blind mediums are the rituals known as *hotoke oroshi* 仏降ろし or *kuchiyose* 口寄せ, a practice that involves the summoning of a dead person's spirit. The other ritual they engage in is called *haru gitō* 春祈祷, also called *kami oroshi* 神降ろし (Kawamura 2003: 276).

As for the *hotoke oroshi*, there are two types of spirits that are usually summoned: the first one is the spirit of a recently deceased person, a *niibotoke* 新仏 ("new Buddha"), the second one is within a ceremony held during spring time where an ancestor spirit is summoned. During these rituals, the *miko* lets the spirit of the deceased speak through herself

and her clients may also ask questions to their relative or ancestor. During the *haru gitō* or “spring invocation” ritual, the *toshigami* 年神, the *kami* of the year is called upon, in addition to a local tutelary deity, the *ujigami* 氏神. Both, the *toshigami* and the *ujigami* are then questioned about predictions for the following year. Other functions they may be tasked with are prayers for the material and physical well-being of the *miko*’s clients. Kawamura notes that the blind medium during all of the mentioned rites is never possessed by the deity that possessed her during her initiation ritual. This *kami* rather serves as a guardian spirit watching over the *miko* and the business she conducts with her clients (Kawamura 2003: 277).

During the *hotoke oroshi* ceremony, the *itako* plays on a zither with one string. A rice offering is also prepared for the spirit with two branches stuck in the rice bowl in order for the spirit to cling to. The spirit is baited with recitations of sacred texts and the sound of the zither. The medium is then possessed by the spirit. Generally, the blind medium does not remember what the spirit has said while possessing the medium nor does she recall the experience of a psychosomatic sensation or state of trance. The *kamisama* however does actively experience the arrival of a spirit or *kami* (Kawamura 2003: 277-278).

Kamisama gain their status by a supernatural calling. They specialize in invocations, exorcisms and oracles but do not perform the *hotoke oroshi* and *haru gitō*. During such a ritual, the *kamisama* invites a deity to possess her thus enabling her to use its divine power on behalf of her clients. According to Kawamura, most of the *kamisama* belonging to this category are possessed by the *kami* who possessed them initially again when conducting rituals. But there are also some who invite other deities to possess them. Although they do not engage in *hotoke oroshi*, they perform memorial rituals for aborted children. Some also perform rites for the spirits of the dead who cannot reach Buddhahood. For such a ceremony, the *kamisama* invites not only her tutelary *kami* to possess her but also the spirit of the dead person (Kawamura 2003: 277). During a state of possession, the *kamisama* feels the spirit that enters her body. When she is possessed by an evil spirit, *kamisama* reportedly feel heavy and weary and other negative feelings that evil spirit causes her clients. The power given to her by her tutelary *kami* helps her to cope with the malevolent spirits (Kawamura 2003: 278-279).

5.4 Comparison

The most obvious similarity between Korean and Japanese shamanism is the dominance of women. On one hand, this is explained by scholars like Tae-gon Kim and Ichiro Hori with the claim that shamanism itself originates from an archaic matriarchy, so the reason for the great

number of females in Korean and Japanese shamanism may be interpreted as a following in the footsteps of prehistoric times.

According to the theory of the peripheral cults postulated by Lewis, the huge number of female *mudang* in correlation to male ones in Korea may easily be explained by psychological means: The women rebel against the men dominating society and the husband's family dominating family life. They are seeking power elsewhere and thus upset the balance of the establishment. Wilson's work strongly supports Lewis' notion of possession as a peripheral cult applied mostly by women. On a similar note, Doris Barga also argues that spirit possession was used as a "woman's weapon" in Heian era Japan, as a way for disregarded women to get revenge on men. This observation that possession was used in a similar way as in Lewis' idea of peripheral cults is evidenced by the possession episodes in the *Genji monogatari* written during the Heian period where polygyny was custom among men of high birth. What also holds true for Korea and Japan is the statement of Susanne Knödel according to which possession-based shamanism in advanced civilizations while occurring under the umbrella of a dominant religion like Buddhism is usually a women's phenomenon.

However, Wilson also establishes the theory that societal pressure may not always make women susceptible to being possessed by spirits, but it may be the spirits themselves that seek out socially troubled people and are thus themselves responsible for the occurring spirit sickness.

When discussing shamanistic phenomena in Japan, the origins of *miko* are often traced back to powerful female figures in Japan's (religious) history like Himiko, Amaterasu, Ame no Uzume and Empress Jingū. This idea may originate from the "Chinese Mother of the West" mythology that was established in China and most probably brought over to Japan. But in Korean mythology, as seen above, shamanism can be traced back to a male mythological figure, namely Dangun. Another grave difference between female mediums in Korea and Japan may be seen in the fact that part of the *miko* are blind girls that are urged by their parents to train under an experienced practitioner in order to play a role in society.

As for the rituals conducted by female mediums in Korea and Japan there are clear similarities. The reasons why people frequent the respective mediums are nearly identical. The clients of Korean *mudang* as well as of Japanese *miko* are coming to them both on behalf of dead relatives to see them properly sent off to the afterlife, as well as for their own benefits in praying for their physical and financial well-being, and for healing and exorcism rituals.

What is of note here is the fact that despite the long history of shamanistic occurrences in Japan and Korea it seems that the purpose for which such spiritual mediators are used still are in fact very similar to the duties of the shamans of the *locus classicus* of shamanism in Siberia.

6 Conclusion

The first part of this thesis is comprised of an explanation and an overview of shamanism. An influential definition of shamanism is delivered by Mircea Eliade, who claims that a shaman is not just any magico-religious being but considers as defining trait the utilization of techniques of trance and ecstasy. The journey of the soul is another characteristic deemed important by Eliade. However, not all scholars on the subject share this definition. Lewis claims that spirit possession must be considered as part of the shamanistic complex. He mentions the use of spirit possession as an essential tool that a shaman uses to help his community. More contemporary researchers like Tae-gon Kim, Kim Hogarth and Staemmler share this notion of the importance of spirit possession as part of shamanistic practices. With these arguments in mind, I have come to the following working definition: A shaman is an intermediate between the human and the supernatural world who uses techniques of trance and ecstasy to communicate with deities and spirits and by either letting those take possession of his body, or by inducing them into a medium.

Shamanism in Korea, also known as *musok*, centers on the *mudang*, who are in most cases female. *Mudang* are generally divided into two categories, *kangshinmu* and *seseummu*. *Kangshinmu* become shamans via the reception of a spirit, whereas *seseummu* are hereditary shamans who do not actively experience possession of spirits and deities but conduct ceremonies in a symbolic fashion. The *seseummu* are mostly male, but are vastly outnumbered by the usually female *kangshinmu*.⁷

What Japanese forms of shamanism have in common with Korean *musok*, is that the charismatic mediums, the *miko* or *kamisama* are female. In Japan there seems to be a difference between men and women who engage in spiritual activity. The *miko* specializes in rituals where she may enter a state of trance and let a supernatural being speak through her. The other type is the male ascetic, the *gyōja*, who specializes in healing rituals and exorcisms and sometimes conducts rituals in combination with a spirit medium. To gain his shamanistic

⁷ Kim Hogarth mentions that *seseummu* were more numerous than their counterpart at the start of the 20th century, but in present day, their numbers have dwindled, whereas the *kangshinmu* have grown in number. She believes this turn of events signals a return to what she calls the “original form” of *musok* (Kim Hogarth 1998: 97).

power, the ascetic has to undergo a spiritual journey to the other world, which is done mostly in symbolized form by performing austerities in the mountains. We find here a grave difference between the two countries' forms of shamanism, as in *musok* no journey of the soul takes place. Since this has been one of the pillars of Eliade's influential definition of shamanism, it has sparked debates about whether *musok* can be considered shamans as such.⁸ But the aforementioned broader definitions of shamanism that occurred after Eliade's pioneering work do mend this issue and make it clear that *musok* is a type of shamanism. Japan however fits better within Eliade's framework, as the supernatural calling as well as the journey of the soul (partly in symbolized form) plays a role for female mediums and the *gyōja* respectively.

The myths of Japan as well as Korea that involve elements referring to either shamanism or spirit possession are in both instances associated with the divine origin of the respective nation. Both the Dangun and the Ninigi myths share obvious common elements: Divine beings are sent down to Earth and become the progenitors of the imperial lineage of their respective countries. Both serve as a link between the supernatural and the human world and may thus be interpreted as types of shamans. Dangun is still subject of *mudang* songs, whereas the connection Ninigi may have to shamanism has not been broadly discussed as of yet. However, the general theme of the story can be assumed to date back longer than to the creation of the respective myths in Japan and Korea since it is argued that similar stories are found in other cultures as well, most notably Siberia⁹ and China, dating back to well before the other two.

As for the other relevant myths, they involve in both cases female shamans or spirit mediums. It may be argued that in early times these practices were only conducted by women. In Korea several mythological stories exist where *musok* plays an integral part in the story, usually tracing it back to holy or royal beings. In the case of the Japanese myths, they are used to further enforce the divine origin of the imperial lineage. The reason for these differences may be found in how the concepts of shamanism are embedded in the respective societies. *Musok* in Korea is its own tradition, whereas the Japanese version is integrated in Buddhism and Shintō.

⁸ Joon-sik Choi from the Ewha Womans University in Seoul argues that Siberian shamanism is most definitely the origin of Korean *musok* and believes that research on *musok* may be beneficial in helping to reconstruct ancient Siberian shamanism (Choi 2005: 60).

⁹ Kim Hogarth writes that even the name Dangun is derived from similar names used by the Mongol, Buryat and Tartar tribes, all of which have the meaning of „sky“ or „heaven“ (Kim Hogarth 1998: 241).

The emphasis on female shamans and mediums in the myths is found throughout history and even in contemporary society in Korea and Japan. Some scholars like Hori and Kim believe that shamanism in both countries may stem from an archaic matriarchy which utilized shamanistic cults. Himiko is an example of an ancient ruler that has been described as a shamanistic figure. However, this societal construct has been changed to a patriarchy under the influence of Chinese culture.

With regards to the situation in Japan, the argument of the “Queen Mother of the East” ideology exists, originating in China, which may have been the inspiration why Himiko was regarded as a charismatic ruler, followed later also by another female in Iyo. This may be true for Korea as well, as Korea was influenced by China earlier than Japan was, and may be a factor that played a role in answering this question.

Lewis believes the reason for the prevalence of females in shamanistic context to be a form of rebellion against the men who dominate societal as well as family life. He calls this phenomenon “peripheral cults”, a notion shared by Wilson, who applies it to the context of *musok*. Doris Borgen made the argument that in the Heian era in Japan, females who felt neglected and betrayed by men utilized spirit possession in a similar manner. When looking at the current state of female shamans in Japan, Kawamura has described two groups of female shamans, the charismatic *kamisama* and the blind *itako*. The *kamisama* shows similarities to female *mudang*: They too suffer through the spirit sickness after experiencing personal crises. These may be problems within the family, conflicts with the mother-in-law or living under strenuous conditions. They start to neglecting their secular life more and more until they embrace their calling to become a *kamisama*. These are clear parallels to the situation of how many *mudang* come to receive their supernatural calling. Thus it may be argued that if Lewis’ theory of peripheral cults applies to Korean shamanism, it has to be stated that it holds true for the charismatic *miko* in Japan as well. The blind *itako* however, cannot be considered part of this theory as they are chosen because of their disability and are instructed by experienced *itako* and are therefore not chosen via supernatural means.

Regarding the rituals, it may be observed that here is a similarity to the types found in both nations: In Korea and also in Japan there are shamanistic rituals for the dead in order to either send them safely to their destination in the afterlife, or to communicate with one’s ancestors. The rituals for the living range from divination to praying for luck, fertility and financial wealth. However there are also healing rituals that are conducted as well as exorcism

of evil spirits. The purpose of these rituals shows great similarity to what Eliade describes in his work on shamanism in north- and central Asia.

Overall the most striking resemblances between shamanism in Korea and Japan are the similarity of the origin myth which justifies the divine origin of the imperial lineage, ritual complexes that serve the same functions and most notably the dominance of women. The similarities may indeed be attributed to a common origin that points to Siberian shamanism. Blacker mentions a cultural stream from Siberia that may have affected the development of shamanistic systems in Japan. This is for example evidenced by the name *itako*, which she traces back to names used for shamans by Tungus tribes like *udagan*, *idakon* or *idugan* (Blacker 1999: 28). Hori too sees a strong resemblance between Korean and Japanese shamanism and states that they are in their rites very similar to the north and central Asian tribes (Hori 1968: 186-187).

Sarah Milledge Nelson of the University of Denver also claims that during the time of the formation of the states of Korea and Japan both may have been influenced by Tungus shamanism. At the time women were found in leading roles (Nelson 2008: 230). This goes together with Barnes' theory involving the Queen Mother of the West mythology which, originating from China, was adopted in early Japan and also possibly in Korea. This might explain why historically shamanism in Korea and Japan was a women's phenomenon. From that point on, the incarnations of shamanism in both countries developed independently but the considerable similarities they share give evidence of their common origin.

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8 Appendix

8.1 Abstract

This paper aims to compare the religious phenomenon of shamanism as it exists in Korea and Japan. To accomplish this, different key points of shamanism will be contrasted, searching for similarities and their possible common origin. Since the term “shamanism” itself has been subject of various interpretations, the first chapter introduces certain important authors on the subject and defines shamans as magico-religious persons, who specialize in the interaction with supernatural beings by using techniques of trance, ecstasy and spirit possession in order to help and support their community.

The main part of the thesis focuses on the occurrences of shamanism in Korea and Japan, as its appearance differs between the two countries. In Korea, shamanism is practiced largely within the confines of a belief complex known as *musok*, *mugyo*, or *mu*. In Japan shamanistic elements are found integrated in both Shintō and Buddhism. The paper details three main points of comparison. The first is the existence of shamanism in the respective country’s mythology. After taking a look at various myths and stories, it can be seen that both countries’ origin myths contain shamanistic elements.

The second main point of comparison details the predominance of women and the third the types of rituals conducted. Both countries’ types of shamanism are mostly practiced by women. Two possible reasons for this gender distribution that are presented are historical, as some believe shamanism to originate from an archaic matriarchy, and societal, where it is seen as a way for women to stand up to and empower themselves in male dominated societies. The rituals performed by shamans for their clients in Korea and Japan are very similar in their purpose, consisting largely of interaction with deceased relatives, fortune telling, exorcism and healing.

Overall the comparison suggests that both types of shamanism share common elements and similarities that might be traced back to Siberian shamanism. However, due to historical and cultural developments of the respective countries both types of shamanism have evolved differently over time.

8.2 Zusammenfassung

Ziel dieser Masterarbeit ist es, eine vergleichende Studie zwischen dem Phänomen des Schamanismus wie er in Korea und Japan vorkommt darzustellen. Um das zu erreichen werden verschiedene markante Schlüsselpunkte schlaglichtartig beleuchtet. Diese werden dann auf Ähnlichkeiten geprüft und mögliche Gründe dafür gesucht. Da der Begriff „Schamanismus“ selbst in der Wissenschaft verschiedenartige Interpretationen erfahren hat, werden im Einführungskapitel die Definitionen einiger wichtiger Autoren aus dem Feld angeführt und schließlich eine für die Arbeit gültige Definition erstellt: Unter einem Schamanen ist jemand zu verstehen, der mit übernatürlichen Wesen interagiert indem er Ekstase- und Trancetechniken und Geisterbesessenheit verwendet um seinen Klienten zu helfen.

Der Hauptteil der Arbeit dreht sich um Schamanismus wie er in Korea und Japan vorkommt. Koreanischer Schamanismus versteht sich als eigenes religiöses System, welches als *musok*, *mugyo* oder nur *mu* bekannt ist. In Japan hingegen ist Schamanismus in Buddhismus und Shintō eingegliedert.

Nach der eingehenden Diskussion über Schamanismus in beiden Ländern werden drei Teilbereiche verglichen. Zuerst wird die Mythologie auf schamanistische Elemente hin untersucht, wobei vor allem bei den Entstehungsmythen Parallelen zu sehen sind. Der zweite Hauptpunkt widmet sich der Untersuchung der Rolle der Frauen, die im Schamanismus beider Länder eine dominante Rolle einnehmen. Zwei mögliche Gründe dafür liefern eine historische Erklärung wonach Schamanismus auf ein archaisches Matriarchat zurückgeht, und eine gesellschaftliche, nach welcher Frauen sich der Geisterbesessenheit als eine Art Auflehnung gegenüber den sozial höhergestellten Männern bedienen. Den dritten Vergleichspunkt stellen die jeweiligen Ritualkomplexe dar. Die Rituale in den Ausrichtungen des Schamanismus beider Länder weisen große Ähnlichkeiten auf und haben meist dieselben Beweggründe – Kontakt mit Verstorbenen, Weissagungen, Geisteraustreibung und Heilungsrituale.

Zusammenfassend hat sich bei diesem Vergleich gezeigt, dass beide Arten des Schamanismus gemeinsame Elemente aufweisen die sich auf den sibirischen Schamanismus zurückführen lassen. Jedoch lässt sich darauf schließen, dass sich beide Ausprägungen aufgrund kulturhistorischer Faktoren im Laufe der Zeit auf unterschiedliche Weisen weiterentwickelt haben.

8.3 Curriculum Vitae

Personal Data

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Education

10/2011-present	Master's Programme "East Asian Economy and Society", University of Vienna
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