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No Choice but to Care

Performing Care to Survive in Korean Shamanism and Jeju Women

Abstract

Care has been theorized in the context of equality and ethics in academia, with an effort to dismantle the gendered interpretation attached to the concept. In this paper, I study care ontology of Korean shamanism to investigate the ambivalences in care performance that complicates rather than nullifies the gender dimensions. The history of survival embedded in Korean shamanism shows the establishment of peripheral authority in the near-death realms, which is often occupied by women.

I conduct a case study of Jeju shamanism that responds to the island's historical trauma whose justice work is still in process. The harsh survival stories that Jeju women and shamans share indicate that care functions as ontology and performance, bringing healing power regardless of religious doctrines. I examine Lamentations of the Dead, an act in Jeju shamanic ritual, to observe closely its ambiguous qualities that facilitate interaction with discursive space and time. I attend to the performative aspect of the shamanic ritual, whose improvisational necessity enables radical care uncharted by governmental censorship.

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Introduction

Korea has lived with ghosts for thousands of years. Korean shamanism, representative of Korean indigenous spiritual background, is in the founding myth of ancient Korean kingdoms. Despite the reign of modern ideas grounded in science and materialism, ghosts and divine beings make themselves known to Koreans. Referred to as having *sin'gi* (spiritual energies), people with higher spiritual sensitivity occasionally experience ghostly encounters.

This paper explores survival and healing in South Korea, within which Korean shamanism's wisdom occupies a vital place. Responding to the rising interest on care theory in performance studies, this paper demonstrates shamanism's social and political authority established through its care ontology. Although not functioning as an outright rebuttal of patriarchal power structure, care accords subversive potential to the marginal women. Shamanism opens a discursive space that serves as a fertile ground for indefinable and unconforming existences to take shape and grow.

In the case of Korean shamanism, its authority derives from care grounded in brutality, rendering care a radical act that requires determination beyond human capacity. In this paper, I examine Korean shamanism's course of survival in the face of continued repression, and its role in community building. I take particular interest in the politics of care in Korean shamanism, in which shamans are coerced into caring for others and the community. The shamans — selected by divine beings — are pushed to serve others; with real threats of extreme punishment should they refuse the gods' order. I also examine a case study of Jeju shamanic practice that copes with a seventy-year-old trauma, which illustrates the meeting point of shamanic care ontology and ritual with social and political realities.

Performance is the lens and language through which this paper examines human relationships to the spiritual world. It allows elaborating the manifestations of intangible, unverifiable, and ghostly energies that are challenging to address respectfully in a rational language. The highly subjective and individualized experience with ghosts rejects the conventional analysis model of reaching for maximum objectivity. Hyun-key Kim Hogarth, anthropologist of Korean shamanism, describes that "[shamanism] relies on the knowledge gained impromptu by the shaman through her/his sensory experiences" (Hogarth 2009, 7). Indeed, much of the general knowledge about Korean shamanism that I employ derives from decades of personal and secondary experiences with ghosts and shamans accumulated in fragments while growing up in Korea.

Korean Shamanism: A Story of Survival

Korean shamanism is an indigenous practice, religion, and ontology, belonging to the Korean land and people. The foundation myth of the first Korean kingdom, *Tan'gun sinhwa*, relates the story of a divine being's descent from the heavenly world in BCE 2333. This figure, named *Tan'gun*, arrives on earth carrying three tools to rule human society, one of which is the shamanic bell.[1] The myth conveys the significance of the ruler's spiritual power and the theocratic nature of ancient Korea.

Korean shamanism shows a history of survival, since it has endured relentless attempts for substitution. The introduction of new perspectives and worldviews occasionally threatened to substitute Korean shamanism. Over time, different governing authorities have

taken active measures to marginalize Korean shamanism. From the Koryo Dynasty, the first unified nation in the Korean peninsula, founded in 918, Korean shamanism began to be framed as indecent; this was part of a concerted political movement to establish Confucianism as a national ideal (Yi 2005, 152). Later, in the face of modern influences enforced by Japan and maintained by the Korean government in a post-war US alliance, Korean shamanism continued to be relegated to superstition. Titled an "anti-superstition campaign," the modernization movement led by the Chung-hee Park regime in the 1970s eradicated shamanic shrines in local communities and wiped out sacred objects in households.[2]

The modernization movement grouped preexisting thoughts, manners, and practices under the title "tradition," creating the idea of an unchanging and monolithic culture that was irrelevant to modern lives. Korean shamanism was also critiqued as a cultural lag in this sense, and it became subject to shunning. Korean shamanism's current status as National Intangible Cultural Heritage bespeaks its need for conscious respect and systemic support. This status reflects the rising sense of urgency to restore and learn from the wisdom that was disregarded in the modernization process. At the same time, skepticism surrounds the efficacy of conferring National Intangible Cultural Heritage status to Korean shamanism.[3] Korean theologian Dongkyu Kim writes:

> According to a study, about thirty to forty thousand *kut* [rituals] occur in downtown Seoul a year. The numbers indicate that Korean shamanism is not a mere remnant of traditional culture, but a continuing religious worldview meaningful to contemporary Koreans. Even so, existing government policies and academic tendencies about Korean shamanism lean too much toward the preservation and succession of the shamanic "tradition," and fail to let go of the obsession with the "assumed purity" of shamanism. (Kim 2016, 118-19, my translation)

Kim's observation of the discord between practice and thought spells out the paradox of visibility regarding culture and tradition. The inclination to define and interpret original forms and appearances for the sake of visibility fails to consider the fluidity of spiritual roots that may materialize in different patterns. Scholars point to the theatricalization of shamanism in its move to retain its position as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage (Yi 2011, 434). *Kut* as a protected heritage is performed onstage, watched by the audience in silence. In contrast, *kut* in a natural context has people moving in and out of the performing area, creating a discursive scene of eating, drinking, shouting, fighting, and dancing (Choi 1995, 78). Essentially, *Kut* is a special occasion ritual enacted to transform old energies to combat stagnant situations ranging from individual concerns to community needs (Hogarth 2009, 8). While these situations often concern illness or death, at other times, the descendants call upon the ancestors to build better relationship with them. Severed from specific contexts, shamanic performance on the professional stage addresses abstract issues. This theatricalization hyper-visualizes and erases Korean shamanism at the same time. With the circulation of static artistic images and narratives of Korean shamanism, the actual configurations of shamanic operations become invisible (Yi 2011, 434).

Above all, Korean shamanism is a "secular" religion and a shape-shifter, performed and tailored for people's needs. This means that the practice does not operate on strict religious principles or doctrines but through the gods' intuition and whims responding to

individual occasions (Hogarth 2009, 7). In fact, the absence of shared discipline is at the background of the rampant skepticism among contemporary Koreans against the ritual's legitimacy. A common suspicion about the shamans' economic exploitation of their clients, taking advantage of shamanism's lack of transparent principles, has been noted by Korean studies scholar Kyoim Yun's work on economic dimensions of Korean shamanism (Yun 2016, 53). Yun notes how the absence of a public agreement on the particularities of shamanic proceedings often results in dubious last-minute cost increases, igniting blunt altercation between the shaman and the client. Yun's investigation into the business aspect of Korean shamanism reveals a continuing confusion deriving from the religion's ambivalence, performing the gods' dignity and explicit monetary interest at the same time (Yun 2019, 5).

I interpret the series of forced change due to external threats and the internal discordance brought by responding to secular interests as reflective of Korean shamanism's indigeneity. Here, indigeneity refers to the constant transformations Korean shamanism has undergone, constantly incorporating new influences. Rather than upholding a sense of pure and essential Koreanness, indigeneity underscores the adaptive qualities that have allowed shamanism to survive for centuries. A recent example of change in shamanic operations shows a significant shift in the roles carried out by different types of shamans. The 2003 documentary film *'Mudang': Reconciliation Between The Living And The Dead* captures the confusions and concerns arising at the initiated shamans' takeover of *kut* rituals long performed by hereditary shamans.

The distinction between initiated (*kangsinmu*) and hereditary shamanism (*sesŭmmu*) is a distinguishing feature of Korean shamanism. The former refers to the case where divine beings force the candidate to serve as a shaman. The latter points to shamanism as a family profession, handed down for generations, which requires rigorous training to produce sophisticated performance. Hereditary shamanism pertains to ritualistic enactments based on the power of performance — namely, movement, sound, costume, and stage settings that gradually build the energy to enter into a trance-like state. While today's clients view channeling during *kut* as the proof of the shaman's competence, the documentary conveys overt discomfort of the clients when channeling occured during the ritual. The interviewed shamans and clients express faith in having a clear division of shamanic roles and keeping the *kut* rituals free of actual spiritual encounters. These clients are accustomed to having initiated shamans undertake divination and hereditary shamans hold *kut*. For them, embodiment of gods and spirits speaks to a disparate capacity from the performative excellence of *kut* conducted by hereditary shamans. Since the spiritual beings' visit occurs spontaneously, without notice, and the shaman does not hold complete control over their speech and behavior during these embodiments, fear and anxiety accompanied the featured clients of the transition period. The documentary reveals that shamanic performance without the ghostly intervention is no less significant and influential in its healing powers than those with spiritual visits, which is almost inconceivable today as channeling is considered central to *kut*.

Many aspects of hereditary shamanism are now kept alive only in theaters, while initiated shamanism governs the quotidian encounters, performing both divination and *kut*. Although using substantially different forms and modalities, the performative features of *kut* is kept alive in initiated shamans' rituals that has established an identity and expertise of their own, centering ghostly encounters in *kut*. Korean shamanism anthropologist Laurel Kendall

describes the *kut* ritual as, "The gods and ancestors weep, lament, and console the living, and the house gods claim their due in tribute" (Kendall 1985, 166). As such, Korean shamanism is perceived today as responding to issues directly related to spiritual interventions (Kendall 2009, 143, 164; Hogarth 2009, 10).

The limitless flexibility shown in the course of Korean shamanism's survival accounts for the impossibility to pin down or define Korean shamanism through a coherent theory or representation. It involves numberless practitioners and equally discursive cosmologies that result in discords and contradictions. Diana Taylor, whose analysis on the archive and the repertoire has contributed to addressing performance in its own terms rather than the appropriated language of the archive, expands on her previous work by investigating into the oxymoronic role of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage. Taylor writes, "'Safeguarding' culture, and leaving political, economic, and intellectual property discussions off the table, one might argue, in and of itself does violence to the practices UNESCO seeks to protect" (Taylor 2016, 153). In essence, although the repertoire is addressed as "intangible" heritage, UNESCO employs the same conventional means of protection used for the archive, or tangible heritage — documentation and record. Taylor warns against the idea of originality associated with the archive, as its preservation often implies "[erasure of] practitioners and communities as active cultural agents" (Ibid, 152). Denied human agency renders the performers mere vessels of transmission, who are not allowed to transform the material. To investigate Korean shamanism in the realm of the quotidian and incoherence, this paper engages less with the *kut* scenes per se but with the social manifestations of shamanic philosophies, focusing on the topic of survival.

The Pain of Care

Korean shamans' task is to care for and heal others, even to the extent of sacrificing their own comfort or safety. Except for the need to survive, nothing about a shaman's job is for their own good. I take care as the ethical foundation guiding the shamanic practices in Korea. While care is generally conceived of as carrying soft power, associated with warm imagery, I investigate the prevalence of hard power in Korean shamanism's care ontology.

In many instances, Korean shamans take the pain of another into their bodies as surrogate sufferers, as exemplified in the famous Korean shaman's dance on sharp blades called *Chaktu* Riding. The harshness of the job suggests that becoming a shaman is rarely based on choice but more on coercion. Initiated shamans have a harrowing story associated with their attempts to reject the divine calling. When the divine being decides the body they will avail themselves of, the chosen candidate develops a severe sickness called *shinbyŏng*, or spiritual illness (Sarfati 2020, 24-25). If the candidate refuses to take the divine into their body, they come down with divine punishment. For instance, their loved ones would begin to die until they give in and respond to the calling. This punishment is called *indari*, meaning human bridge, and signifies the gods' murder of other humans to get the candidate to accept their destiny (Yu 2019). It is presumed that the shaman must undergo utmost pains to be ready to connect with others' hardships. Theodore Jun Yoo, scholar of modern Korean history and politics, explains the series of gods-inflicted punishment as "symbolism of initiatory death," comparing it with a similar phenomenon in the Siberian context observed by Romanian historian Mircea Eliade. Although the punishment may manifest mainly in the form of

psychological ailments, they are directed toward imposing "close encounters with death," and disappear once the candidate concedes to serve themselves for the gods (Yoo 2016, 20-21). In essence, they must die and be reborn as a shaman.

Due to such harshness and brutality in Korean shamanism, perplexity and awe coexist as to the legitimacy of the 'care' that shamanism sets out to achieve. The coexistence of hard and soft power in Korean shamanism furthers the scope and arguments of human-centered care theory developed in Euro-American contexts that has attended mostly to care's soft power.

Care has been famously theorized by feminist scholars such as Carol Gilligan and Joan Tronto, who accorded academic and political weight to this often-slighted concept. Gilligan and Tronto developed the so-called "care ethics" whose moral focus demands conceiving care as a human feature instead of one dependent only on women. Stating that "care is a feminist, not a feminine ethic," Gilligan proposes that care be considered a human principle and value, functioning as a guiding precept for democracy that patriarchy has long stifled. Gilligan's idea of care performance pertains to "listening, paying attention, responding with integrity and respect," which would restore relationship-making practices (Gilligan 2013, 29). Although these are reactive rather than proactive capacities, they are not the same as sacrificial care. The ethics of care resists philanthropic romanticization of care, represented by a maternal figure. Gilligan advocates interdependence and subjective care, which does not obliterate its practitioner in the process. This idea of care as a radical action was taken up by Tronto who examines care as concrete, embodied, ever-present in daily lives, and therefore highly political. Focusing on the exchange value of care, Tronto associates care theory primarily with the social work context. Tronto's care ethics seeks ways to distribute care democratically as a constitutive part of social equality.

The growing interest in care in performance studies also reflect Gilligan and Tronto's care theories. *Performing Care: New Perspectives on Socially Engaged Performance*, co-edited by James Thompson and Amanda Stuart Fisher in 2020, situates performance as an important site of care work. Thompson and Fisher cite from disabilities studies that wrestle with the troubling power structure in disabilities care discourse. They find performance's demand for interdependence useful as it may offer an escape from care-receiver's perpetual dependence on care-giver, which is one-directional and static (Thompson and Fisher 2020, 10). According to Thompson and Fisher, analyzing performance as care work helps to switch the focus of care ontology from that of "neoliberal agendas that are determined by the values of autonomy and self-realization" to "dependency and interrelationality," which has long been the mission of the care theorists (Thompson and Fisher 2020, 4). The necessity to collaborate and cooperate in theatre-making paint care as a process, nurtured through community spirit (Ibid. 7).

Exploring the care ontology of Korean shamanism furthers Fisher and Thompson's project through its philosophy of mutuality. . To begin with, Korean shamanic procedure occurs not solely for the client but also for the gods and shamans. The shamans perform care under the gods' order, assigned to them as a karmic work (Yun 2016, 29). In this sense, shamanism rebuts the neoliberal claims of autonomous individuals by positioning this life in conjunction with the former lives. Shamanism, as a karmic responsibility, demonstrates that interdependence lies at the center of care work. In an introductory book of Korean shamanism, Hogarth identifies reciprocity as *kut*'s principle. She writes:

> Most entities in all [the participants in *kut*, i.e., the spirits, the [shaman], and the sponsors] are troubled beings, often bearing *han*, a Korean word frequently used by women, which is translated into various English words, such as unfulfilled desire, grievance, grudge, regret, etc., for want of a suitable equivalent. They get together in [*kut*], sharing the common goal of resolving their respective *han*, and bringing about happiness and good luck. It then become clear that [*kut*] is based on the principle of reciprocity, with all three groups exchanging similar services. […] Reciprocity is what maintains cohesion between individuals or social groups in Korean society. (Hogarth 2009, 21-22)

Hogarth's description places reciprocity and community-making at the center of *kut* and shows that care in Korean shamanism moves in multiple directions, forming intricate web of connections.

Care in Korean shamanism is also associated with gender as much as the care theorists examine in their work, yet intrinsically ambivalent to keeping gender divisions. Throughout history in Korea and other societies with patriarchal structure, women have been associated with the power of healing, care, and endurance — qualities often rendered invisible and inconsequential. Women were in the background, functioning as vessels that maintain patriarchal authorities. In this vein, the intensity of healing power and invocation of community spirit in Korean shamanism establishes authority of women who are its predominant practitioners and representatives. Indeed, the divine spirit leading the shamans is a woman figure named Princess Baridegi, whose story conveys profound sacrifice and suffering.

Korean shamanism's adaptation to patriarchal structure, its predominantly female membership, and its equivocal social position combine to produce complex power dynamics under the notion of "care." To begin with, the divine beings that the shaman embodies come in various genders, ages, and characters. A talented shaman excels in acting these differences out, shifting their performative mode every moment, alternating between the self and the spirit (Yun 2016, 24). Subsequently, most shamans embody a gender-fluid or androgynous quality and oscillate between various gendered performances. Liora Sarfati, scholar of Korean shamanism, write that "Cross-dressing and other gender-challenging behaviors are often the first signs that a person is destined to be a [shaman], and prove instrumental in the initiatory healing of many [shamans]" (Sarfati 2020, 20). The female shamans that constitute eighty percent of Korean shamans employ cross-dressing frequently, as "important historic figures and spirits of natural elements are mostly male" (Ibid. 19). Observing a noticeably high intelligence, wit, and pride in Korean shamans, scholars postulate that shamanism's ambivalent position as both fearsome and conducive power may have opened opportunities for women's self-expression and subjectivity otherwise denied in patriarchal Korean society (Choi 1995, 82). Embodying divine power, shamans possess natural authority and speak in a commanding tone to the visitors. If the shaman is diligent with self-discipline and keeps active communication with her gods, the divine power is felt in entering the shaman's place, evoking a sense of unease and fright in the visitors.

Likewise, while the profession serves the purpose of both spiritual and psychological therapy, it is disinterested in providing sympathy or affectionate support which are the general qualities of soft power. The 'care-less' mode in which divination and ritual are delivered,

whose focus lies less in the patient's emotional and psychological comfort but more on intuitive diagnosis and prescription of the issue at hand, reflects the authority of the gods and incites fear and awe in its clients. Here, the delicate dynamics between the care-receiver and care-giver that care theorists are watchful of are under different circumstances. For instance, Tronto cautions against the process of care that may leave "too little distance between care-givers and care-receivers," writing that:

> One of the likely effects of any caring process is that the care-givers will have to struggle to separate their own needs from the needs of the ones who they care for. […] Care-givers often must subordinate their own caring needs to those of the person, thing, or group to which they are providing care (Tronto 1993, 143).

Tronto's alertness to the expected damage from the disrupted boundary between the self and the other reflects a particular toxicity that may develop from a human-centered and private caring process. Individualized care risks investing too much meaning into the other as only two major agents are engaged in the exchange.

In contrast, Korean shamans call themselves "pupils" of the gods, creating a strict sense of hierarchy. When the shamans perform for their clients, they derive authority from their spiritual capacities as the gods' mediators. Although the gods' authority may illustrate them as unforgiving and uncaring superiors, it does not necessarily translate to 'care-less-ness.' The Korean foundation myth pictures the gods descending from the heavens for a humanitarian cause — to help humans have a better life. Likewise, the shaman-embodied gods take shape and voice of the centuries-old ancestors, that of the historical figures or the direct ancestors from one's family tree. As the commands they make are first and foremost care for their offspring, their authority also derives from the trust in ancestral care, which nullifies the unpleasant form through which it is delivered. When it comes to the shamans, they embody the physical and emotional pain of the clients regardless of their will, which forces them to consider the pain as their own. At the same time, the palpability of this connection and the multiplicity of roles that the shaman perform press the shaman to transition swiftly to other parts of shamanic operations, drawing clear boundaries between the shaman and the client.

The authority of the gods, the brutality associated with shamanic profession, and the gender-ambivalent performance of care compels one to question the predominance of female shamans. If Korean shamanism is an example of the care that does not entrap itself in 'feminine' qualities, why are women the dominant practitioners? To answer this question, I attend to the multiple near-death experiences shamans go through in their pre-shamanic life, qualifying them as spiritual interlocutors, equipped with exceptional first-hand knowledge of pain. Rarely can a person claim higher level of knowledge and experience regarding death and suffering than the shamans. In part, shamans' authority derives from their precarity, and women's prevalence in this field evidences a higher level of precarity embedded in feminine lives.

The Jeju case study explores women's cultivation of care as a survival strategy, which derives from traumatic histories. The theatrical prominence of Jeju shamanism, retaining many features of hereditary shamanism, provides a case of politically charged care performance distinct from the initiated ones in the peninsula. I interpret Lamentations of the Dead, an act in

kut that employs pseudo-possession to create political space for suppressed history, as an example where the performance of femininity gains political significance.

Jeju, an Island of Survival

Similar to Korean shamanism, Jeju has a history of survival due to its desolate environment and repetitive political disempowerment. Jeju is an island located south of the Korean peninsula which is known for its unique features, such as the strong dialect that is almost impossible to understand for Koreans in the peninsula. Jeju's extraordinary landscape, conceived from volcanic activity and constituted primarily of basalt, allows its visitors to have a special experience. Due to the stunning beauty of its nature, land people (as the Jeju people say) come to Jeju to enjoy a hiatus from stressful city life. Jeju is also known as the gods' home, as it is the island of eighteen thousand gods and temples. Its foggy weather and the dark shadows of the angular-shaped granite the create mystical mood, suggesting gods' presence in the island.

On the other side of such a paradisiac conception of Jeju in recent years lies centuries of *han* (sorrow)-filled history that shapes the current Jeju identity. Jeju has suffered as the southern frontier, marginalized from the peninsula's politics and culture. It has been subject to foreign attempts to establish a military base. The island was the place for exile, exploitation, and oppression because of its distance from the mainland, which made it easier for officials to evade the central government's eyes. Its natural environment, albeit beautiful, is barren and inadequate for crop production. As a result, Jeju people have struggled with extreme poverty (Kim 1991, 9-10).

Jeju's marginalized position allowed its constituents to explore this untethered space and build an independent community that could survive without relying on the central government. For instance, when the inflow of travelers during the pandemic spread the COVD-19 virus rapidly, Jeju quickly devised a Jeju-specific application called "Jeju Security Code" that demonstrated enhanced convenience and efficacy compared to those used in the mainland. As such, Jeju is dexterous in finding its own ways of survival without external support.

Fig. 1. Entrance to the 4.3 exhibition at Jeju 4.3 Peace Museum. Note its "underground" setting. Photo by Minwoo Park

Going further back from this recent case of survival, the 4.3 Incident, also known as Jeju Uprising, is at the forefront of contemporary Jeju identity and experience. The 4.3 Incident refers to a series of confrontations from 1947 to 1954 between the armed uprising forces and the US military, who took over and maintained the colonial administration in

Korea after Japan retreated. Named after the day of initial uprising, April 3, the Incident swept all of Jeju. Most often, the 4.3 Incident refers to the massacre of Jeju islanders, civilians, and armed forces alike, prompted by Jeju's interference with the establishment of a divided government. The "scorched-earth strategy" of Jeju lasted for four months and killed one-tenth of the island's population by indiscriminate slaughtering and burning of people and their residences (Hwang 2020, 568).

Despite the magnitude of the Incident, 4.3 has been kept silent and hidden for forty years. It was the 1980s that saw the first publication of novels, poems, testimonials, and accounts about the 4.3 Incident as part of the nationwide democratization movement. *Sooni's Uncle*, the first novel that described 4.3 Incident with detail in 1978, made the Incident known to the public, but its author Ki-young Hyun suffered capture and torture. With the passing of the Jeju 4.3 Special Act in 2000, active exhumation and historical redress began. This Act underwent a massive amendment in 2021 to feature the victims' voices and the bereaved at its center. According to the Jeju 4.3 Peace Museum, of the estimated 25,000-30,000 victims, only 14,533 have been recognized as of July 2021. Of the 408 remains found so far, 133 have been identified (Lee 2021, 44-47). The numbers imply the affinity that every Jeju resident has to this history, since at least one of their blood relations is a victim of the 4.3 Incident. Still, the Incident does not have a proper name. It has been framed as a Communist riot, civilian slaughter, public revolt, democratization, or human rights movement. None of these came to name the seven years and seven months of appalling violence, whose legacy continues today (Kim 2018).

Unlike the Japanese colonization that can now be publicly denounced, indicting the US for the crimes and devastations in Korea is a much more delicate topic because of the continued geopolitical division of the Korean peninsula. The US army took the lead in all armed operations in Jeju, and enforced brutal crackdown operations. (Hwang 570). Despite the plethora of evidences indicating direct US responsibility in the massacre, the US continues to refuse holding itself accountable. Such efforts by the ruling parties to erase the history of massacre prevent Jeju from finding out the truth and reach some stage of reconciliation and healing. The Jeju 4.3 Peace Museum, opened in 2008, built the entrance to the exhibition in the form of a dark tunnel, expressing the continued wait for the 4.3 victims who are waiting to be unearthed and recognized (see Figure 1). In my summer 2021 research visit to the Peace Museum, the tunnel stood still in darkness, inviting me to enter and listen to the reverberating

Fig. 2. The Stone Monument, first exhibition upon entering the tunnel. Photo by Minwoo Park

voices. A giant stone monument resembling a coffin was the first item of the exhibition, which was not given a name to suggest that the Incident still waits for further recuperation (see Figure 2).

Jeju Women as Shamanic Beings:

The series of near-death experiences have led Jeju women to create a survival system that sustained their lives through 4.3 Incident. Jeju has a unique culture that center women as its dominant population, but examining women in Jeju is complicated as they occupy a contradictory space. While being the most significant contributor for the island's survival, they have not performed themselves as threats to the society, which does not make a conventional case for women's sovereignty. In fact, both Jeju women and Korean shamans reside in the periphery of patriarchal social structure, rendering their shape and contour illegible to the patriarchal gaze.

The history and culture of Jeju women makes them shamanic beings in terms of their social status and role within the community. Jeju has long identified itself with three words: rocks, wind, and women. The third keyword, women, often refers to *haenyeo*, or "sea women" — divers in the sea without oxygen masks who harvest marine products. Sea diving has been practiced only by Jeju people, primarily women, due to the dangers entailing the work. Despite the deadliness of diving into the sea without high-tech gears, many Jeju women became *haenyeo* to afford living expenses at the absence of men during the modernization period (Kim 2010, 27). Although advanced technology provides much more decent sea diving environment for contemporary *haenyeo*, the number dropped significantly because of the dwindling need for sea diving. The shellfish-farming industry, nonexistent at the time of *haenyeo*s' prominence, has grown as a result of the same technological advancement that improved *haenyeo*s' working environment.

Historically, Jeju has had a much larger female population than males, as men fled to the mainland because of severe labor exploitation. Men's substantial death during 4.3 reduced the already small number of male residents on the island. In contrast, women were not allowed to leave their registered area, so they had to find a way to survive on the barren land without the patriarchs. *Muljil*, or "watering," as *haenyeo* name their work, was the most effective way these women could procure income. It enabled *haenyeo*s to afford living expenses and support their children. Because of the fatality associated with this profession, *haenyeo* developed into a highly collaborative job with a meticulous training system, division of labor, and looking after each other when working in the sea (Cave 2020, 431). *Haenyeo* culture boasts great pride in women's independence, capabilities, and subjectivity. The *haenyeo* union took the lead in sponsoring the community, by funding mayors and establishing schools and town roads. They also participated actively in political contexts, serving as frontline demonstrators and fighters against the Japanese colonial regime (Kim 2010, 27).

Despite the women's conspicuousness in Jeju's social, economic, and political landscape, 4.3 analyses rarely focus on women as important subjects. Gwi-sook Gwon, a sociologist on Jeju, points out that the framing of 4.3 as a "civilian massacre" during the masculine-dominated Cold War confines women to the category of "innocent victims," together with other marginalized populations such as elders and children (Gwon 2014, 181). Gwon compiles the small number of studies on women related to 4.3 and shows the diversity

and richness of available inquiries that could be carried out further. She identifies the intricate community network developed by women, which functioned efficiently at times of crisis, as the most promising topic with ample materials. During 4.3, it allowed women to deliver food and resources to the civilian forces. After 4.3, this community, called *horeomeong* (widow) network, enabled the survivors — primarily women — to deal with post-traumatic stress disorder, side-effects from torture, extreme poverty, and hard labor. It also aided in reestablishment of destroyed towns by reconstructing roads and schools. Meanwhile, Jeju women subsisted on the watering income since it procured their livelihood in the face of colonial exploitations (Ibid. 184-189). The illegibility of Jeju women's political significance despite their glaring presence shows failure to perceive care-driven labor as influential forces of subversion.

Opening a Discursive Space with Radical Potentials

The history of survival in extreme conditions and the financial independence Jeju women obtained mirrors the trajectory Korean shamans who attain authority through near-death experiences. Seong-rye Kim, an anthropologist of religion, finds a noteworthy overlap between Jeju shamanism and its women. Upon investigating the double layers of survival for Jeju shamans, one as widows from 4.3 and the other as shamans, Kim notices great pride in Jeju shamans who frame themselves in heroic terms. She writes, "The 4.3 experience has been harsh indeed. But if we are to reinterpret this experience from the women subject's stance, life as *horeomeong* (widow) and survivor of 4.3 was an opportunity to be liberated from the patriarchal social order" (Kim 2018, 280, my translation). Princess Baridegi, whom shamans repeatedly honor during rituals, conveys a story of surviving extreme level of life's ordeals and achieving a god's status. Baridegi's inception as an unwanted daughter and the abandonment of Jeju women after the men's disappearance place them in the same peripheral space. Their stories culminate in the narrative of overcoming harsh realities and rebirth as stronger beings (Ibid. 281-83). Although both accounts do not negate patriarchy as a whole, their success story without reliance on the male-dictated social structure presents a case of establishing women's authority based chiefly on care.

Kim detects substantial political power in the theatricality of Jeju *kut* proceedings that enable public testimonies in the guise of ritual healing. In fact, Kim's research on Jeju shamanism and 4.3 was initiated by her interest in shamanism's political aspect and the orally generated counter-memory. Kim visited Jeju in 1984, during the time of continuing silence about 4.3. The Incident was not known to the public yet, so her goal was to explore Jeju shamanism in general. However, when Kim started her field research, she noticed that 4.3 lingered in the background of most shamanic practices, since unattended 4.3 ghosts often appeared as the source of the ailment. Typically, Jeju shamans (hereafter *simbang*s as Jeju shamans are called in Jeju dialect) dream about the client the night before their visit. Kim reports that, when the issue related to 4.3, the interviewed *simbang* dreamt the image of *han*-filled spirits in white mourning clothes covered in blood (Kim 1991, 15). These ghosts needed *kut* to transition safely to the underworld. The absence of proper sharing and comforting would turn the ghosts into nameless spirits banished from the underworld, bringing malicious energy to the living (Ibid. 19).

Kim shows a particular fascination with one act from a series of rites held in this *kut*, called *yŏnggeullim*, or Lamentations of the Dead. This highly theatrical ritual stages the *simbang* as a performer in an audience-participatory context. While the dead's family sits as the audience, the *simbang* greets them and tells the story of the dead in a respectful and compassionate language. *Yŏnggeullim* literally means "crying of the soul" in Jeju dialect, and as such, this ritual opens the space for the dead and living to interact in an emotionally charged manner where the *simbang*, the spirit, and the spirit's family exchange tears. It allows the sorrowful spirit to speak about their stories on their own terms, validating their life that was silenced and shamed by the government. In the context of complete silence about 4.3 in public and private domains, the spirit's account of how they died becomes an act of defiance and rebellion. Even without the *simbang*'s pre-knowledge of 4.3, the spirits appear in dreams and tell stories, yearning to connect with their descendants. Kim writes, "The difference between a *han*-filled and an evil spirit does not lie in kind but in the extent to which the living remembers. […] The insatiable hunger and thirst that the resentful spirit expresses are a gesture against erasure from history" (Kim 2018, 179, my translation). While the spirit's account is delivered by an individual *simbang*, it is public memory that is not reducible to personal contrivance.

Collective Crying as Performance of Care

It is compelling to deduce that Lamentations of the Dead is a political rite, as the transmission of counter-memory takes place in a communal space. However, it is also important to recognize the discursive quality of shamanic practices. Indeed, each spirit has its individual story that does not make a coherent whole when put together. Their stories do not have a political agenda or a clear cause and effect narrative. The ghosts' stories are reconstituted every time as experiences and observations come together in the moment (Kim 1991, 10).

To examine the complexity of shamanic rituals that happen only once each time, I explore the intricate relationship between performance, shamanism, and ritual — topics that the foundational figures of performance studies such as Richard Schechner, Victor Turner, and Dwight Conquergood discussed in depth. I foreground the details of Lamentations of the Dead in Kim's research to analyze its theatricality. Because of the fundamental impossibility to record Korean shamanism's vast number of forms and varieties and Jeju's low accessibility, materials specific to Lamentations of the Dead are scarce to find.

In her summary of Lamentations of the Dead, Kim emphasizes its theatrical flavor, which is unlike that of other rituals involving spirit possession:

> Instead of saying that they are possessed by the spirit, the Jeju *simbang* explains that she runs gods' errand and simply delivers the spirit's voice. […] Holding a tear cloth in one hand, the *simbang* gives the sound of "crying" to the descendants, one by one. During Lamentations of the Dead, the family, relatives, and neighbors respond to the ancestor spirit's greeting and instruction with tears. Contents of Lamentations of the Dead are based on what the *simbang* heard from the family about the deceased. It is a history of the spirit's life and death constructed to touch the hearts of descendants and audiences according to the level of the *simbang*'s recitation abilities. […] After each greeting and command, the spirit expresses gratitude to the descendants for holding the *kut* and promises to send

> good luck to them after gladly entering the underworld. At concluding the Lamentations of the Dead, the *simbang* retrieves her tear cloth and gives a deep bow to the audience, saying, "I did *kut*," and the audience responds by saying, "well done." It is the closing of a play's act. Lamentations of the Dead is not a story that the dead spirit tells in the living world. As seen above, it is a reorganization of one's life history in a theatrical form, curated as a memory story. (Kim 1991, 20, my translation)

Kim's description of Lamentations of the Dead establishes the theatrical nature of this ritual and testimony. To cry is to release sorrow, and to respond by crying is to recognize the dead spirit's innocence and need for justice. The *simbang*'s tear cloth indicates the play in action. As the name implies, tear-shedding is central to bringing out the ritual's healing powers. While crying is prone to be interpretated as care associated with femininity, it is also an affective language used by all humans to communicate about what spoken words fall short of delivering. It performs the ethic of care, acknowledging interdependence and expressing mutual devotion for justice.

Through crying, the shaman exhausts her body, pushing her physical strength to the extreme to confront deep wounds. Sometimes called a pseudo-possession, the exact line between spirit possession and theatrical reconstruction of the deceased is blurry in Lamentations of the Dead. In order to deliver divine authority at the same time as the dead's emotions, the *simbang* has to possess performative fluency. The sorrows of the spirit may not be conveyed well if the *simbang* poses as a mere translator. In fact, the newly initiated shamans spend significant time under a proficient shaman, receiving training in performance skills such as singing, dancing, making speeches, and interacting with the audience and musicians. The performative expertise is pivotal even in Lamentations of the Dead that centers on spiritual meetings, since Jeju shamanism keeps much of hereditary shamanic aspects alive.

If Lamentations of the Dead is a theatrical act, the *simbang*'s ability to perform the mediator's role is crucial in releasing the accumulated sorrow of wrongful deaths. The frustration from inexpressibility of the dead and the limited perceptibility of the living can transcend these impediments through the *simbang*'s mediation. In one Lamentations of the Dead recorded by Kim, the *simbang* sensed the dead's desire to speak something and the frustration at being unable to do so. At this moment, the *simbang* asked the family how they died, and the family answered that they died from stabbing (Cho 2018). With such pieces of knowledge provided throughout the ritual, the *simbang* delves into deeper communication with the dead who speaks in broken language. Nevertheless, the distinction between spirit possession and the *simbang*'s pretension does not seem as clear as it seems in the above instance. *Jejusori*, a Jeju news magazine, states that there is no line to draw between *simbang* and spirit in Lamentations of the Dead:

> When the *simbang* performs Lamentations of the Dead, she invites the spirit and says, "I speak through the mouth of *simbang*," and tearfully delivers the spirit's review of their feelings during life, sorrow at dying, their life in the underworld, and requests for the family and relatives.
> The family and relatives start crying after hearing the spirit speak directly to them. Here, the *simbang* is not playing the role of the dead soul, but she is the dead

> spirit herself. Thus, Lamentations of the Dead unties *han* [accumulated sorrow] in mutual crying. It takes place when the human meets the spiritual directly. (Moon 2015, my translation)

According to *Jejusori*'s illustration, Lamentations of the Dead opens up a meeting place between the living and the dead, where emotional outburst enables the spiritual encounter. The spirit does not merely summarize their biography based on factual records, but they go over their lingering emotions, mainly sadness, so that they can untie their bond to the living world. Lamentations of the Dead is complete when the spirit meets listeners who care for their pains. Having transmitted a piece of *han*, or sorrow, into the hands of the descendants, the spirit is finally able to leave for the underworld. This robust exchange between the dead and the living is only possible with an intense emotional load, and the *simbang*'s role is to conduct the ritual in safety. She cannot remain detached from the people involved, but has to offer her body and mind as the soil for the encounter.

Improvising with Proficiency: Shamans as Performers

The impossibility of drawing a line between spirit possession and theatrical reconstruction in Lamentations of the Dead reflects the unclear divide between initiated and hereditary shamans in Korean shamanism. While initiated shamans' divine illness and interaction with the gods and spirits distinguish them from hereditary shamans, the crucial feature deciding the shaman's competence is their qualification as a ritual practitioner. Although connecting with the underworld is an essential element for the shamans, they also have to be equipped with a "theatrical persona" to aesthetically satisfy the clients, along with tactful use of sensitive perception, insight, social and emotional sensitivity, and empathy (Kim 2018, 804). The improvisations and creations deriving from these skills are often likened to the processes and capacities of artists. The shamans are not vacant intermediaries but are active creators with varied levels of artistic proficiency. The initiated and hereditary shamans' respective prominence in Jeolla-do and Gyeongsang-do, two major southern provinces in Korea, demonstrates the culturally determined character of shamanic practices. Thus, regardless of the authenticity of information delivered during the ritual, the success of *kut* depends much on a fluent performance of care.

The 'fluency' of care performance does not imply the shaman's swiftness or technical eloquence but the dexterity in engaging oneself in the ambiguities of the present. Liora Sarfati outlines the role of shaman as mediator and facilitator. Sarfati writes:

> The skillful [shaman] is a mediator who embodies the spirits, facilitating dialogue and negotiation between them and the possessed. During the ritual, the [shaman] moves back and forth between speaking the words of spirits, telling the clients what they can do to appease the spirits, and ordering the assistants to fetch certain artifacts for the rite. Such transitions are often discernable by the different kinds of speech levels (polite, formal, informal) used in each utterance, and the vocabulary chosen by the performer. The [shaman] plays both the role of the spirit and also of herself as a healer. Therefore, it is no surprise that [shamans] are expected to look and behave like the spirits that possess them. (Sarfati 2020, 24)

Sarfati's description of constant transitions between different modes of delivery echoes the aesthetics of improvisation described by feminist ethicist Maurice Hamington in "Care ethics and improvisation: can performance care?" Hamington coins the phrase "caring improvisation" to underscore the high level of authenticity that emerges during improvisation. Hamington writes:

> A caring improvisation is a moment when we draw upon a set of rehearsed cognitive and bodily skills of enquiry and action to responsively perform care on behalf of the needs of others. [...] All care is ultimately improvisational because we respond to the other in the moment including their needs and circumstances (Hamington 2020, 21).

The keywords Hamington employs to depict the aesthetics and ethics of improvisation also explains the performative modes observable in Lamentations of the Dead: action, reflection, rehearsal, relational, responsive, and intentional openness (Ibid. 23). Similarly, while every *kut* procedure requires extensive training to memorize the lengthy speech on top of other performative details, the urgency of each case calls for the shaman's alertness to the particulars of individual situation. The need for immediate care prevents shamans from relying completely on the established routines.

To alternate aptly between the memorized routine and improvisation requires enhanced sensitivity to the shifting energy of the space. Here, I go back to the moment of the shaman's communication with the ghosts and audience in Lamentations of the Dead to inspect the relationship between silence and speech. Keeping a controlled tension between speech and silence, knowing how each function differently, is pivotal for the shaman to achieve good standing. Healing in shamanism commences by speaking; either in divination or *kut*, the audience waits for the shaman to open their mouth and talk. The healing power in the shaman's utterance derives not from the speech itself, but from ventriloquism, as the shaman gives language to the unspeakable. Many proficient shamans speak out their client's mind without listening from them first, articulating in clear language what the troubled mind struggles to elaborate. As the example of the shaman asking the spirit's family about its death shows, shamans comfort the spirits by giving words to the congested emotions requiring expression. At the same time, all communications between shamans and gods transpire in silence, keeping the otherworldly interactions inaccessible and mysterious. Often, clients assume that the more silent the shaman is, the stronger her healing powers (Kim 2018, 227).

Shamans use their bodies to compensate for the limitations of spoken language. In "Performance Theory, Hmong Shamans, and Cultural Politics," Dwight Conquergood observes a series of Hmong shamanic healing rituals, expressing appreciation for shamanism and its political significance. Investigating shamanism's relevance to healing post-Vietnam War trauma, displacement, and suffering, Conquergood demonstrates that shamanism is as relevant to contemporary lives as well as to the past, contrary to what has been generally perceived. Conquergood refuses to conceptualize shamanism as a past practice that pertains to a distant temporal and spatial realm through exploring the nowness involved in its performative aspect.

As Richard Schechner names performance "restored behavior," shamanic rituals engage in the present in their conjuration of the past (Conquergood 2010, 485). Performance

is always a becoming because it opens the space of "an exquisitely controlled chaos" consisting of "a highly complex set of doublings and transformations" (Ibid. 490). Instead of participating in a safe area of existing beliefs and systems, performance challenges the boundaries. Spontaneity and improvisation, which are important theatre skills, reflect performance's engagement with the present's indefinable disorder.[4] As language loses its communicative efficacy in the realm of change and ambiguity, feelings surface through other performative channels such as sound, movement, and imagination. Conquergood writes, "Associated with feelings, emotions, and the body, performance — especially ecstatic and/or divinatory performance — is constructed in opposition to scientific reason and rational thought" (Ibid. 499). In both Conquergood's and Kim's writings, performance fills the gap between the articulate and inarticulate, where emotion and language stay incompatible (Kim 1991, 24-25).

Conclusion

Throughout the paper, I have outlined several points of ambiguities in Korean shamanic performance and power. The shaman's marginal status, the unclear division between initiated and hereditary shamanism, and the importance of improvisation and customization demonstrate that Korean shamanism enriches discursive space and time, led by care performance of peripheral women. In Jeju, care manifests in a women-dominant landscape, where the role and status of shaman and *haenyeo* overlap. They create elusive space and time, often in collaboration, where intangible energies such as emotion or ghosts gain legitimacy. Lamentations of the Dead demonstrates how this authority also obtains political significance through the very performance of caring, in the form of shedding tears.

Cultivating an alternative space does not overtly refute against patriarchal power structure. Women still feature as maternal figures whose subjectivity and independence are erased for the sake of nurturing others, and the care that they produce has the end goal of helping their children prosper through their sacrifices. Also, the weight of the ancestors is substantial, whose spirits return to society in patriarchal shapes. The gods comply with society's dominant ideologies and are perceived by the humans in the form of conventional figures. As Liora Sarfati describes in her study of Korean shamanism's gender performance, "performance is a context that sets cultural boundaries" (Sarfati 2020, 30). Inheriting a centuries-old cosmology, the perceptive frames employed by Korean shamanism reflect cultural stereotypes.

However, I interpret the accommodation conflicting power dynamics in shamanic care ontologies as a radical remapping of the society, as it resists the dictation of a single coherent cosmology. To care involves a radical act to give voice to the unheard, and a dedication and expertise to undertake pain for others. Korean shamanism and Jeju women's survival show the challenging aspect of performing care, emergent only through near-death existences. In both cases, care enables survival, and survival rebirths suffering into authority that draws its power from the peripheral intuition and awareness.

Notes

1. *Tan'gun*'s three tools are a bronze sword, a bronze mirror, and a bronze bell. Named as *ch'ŏnbuin*, the tools are given to him by his father *hwan-in*, who is the ruler of the heaven.
2. The Park regime began in 1961 when Chung-hee Park, the army general, seized power through military coup. It continued for eighteen years until Park's assassination in 1979.Park led a modernization movement that brought fundamental changes to all parts of South Korea.
3. National Intangible Cultural Heritage emerged in 1962 as part of the Cultural Properties Protection Law enacted by the Park administration. It follows the customs of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. *Jeju Chilmeoridang Yeongdeunggut*, representative of Jeju shamanism, obtained UNESCO ICH status in 2009.
4. I use the idea of present in the same way that Jacques Lacan conceptualizes the Real. Lacan categorizes human psyche into three realms: the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real. The Real pertains to the immediate experience obtained through senses, which slips perpetually from perception due to its disorder and absence of classification.

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