

KOREAN SHAMANISM AND MODERN CULTURAL NATIONALISM

GRADES: 9-12

AUTHOR: Gale Lederer

SUBJECT: World History

TIME REQUIRED:

Times requirements may vary depending on which lesson strategy the teacher chooses. The open-ended, student-centered strategy presented here involves student research done outside of class time and should require (1) two to three class periods for the initial introduction to subject and student choice of individual and group projects; (2) two more class periods to discuss the original source material presented in Handouts 5 and 6; (3) occasional planning time for group creative projects during the following week or two; (4) two to three periods for sharing results of the individual research papers and creative projects. However, teachers can easily delete or simplify the more time consuming individual and group projects and create more teacher-centered lessons to save time.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Understand basic shamanistic beliefs and practices in both global and Korean contexts and figure out how shamanism fits into global and Korean cultural history.
2. Research the history of shamanism in Korea and understand the reasons for its coexistence with other religious traditions.
3. Understand the concept of cultural nationalism and the reasons for the persistence of shamanism in the modern, industrially developed Republic of Korea.
4. Analyze and understand modern Korean attitudes toward shamanism.
5. Understand how to evaluate and learn from original source materials.
6. Do individual research and write a three-page research paper (or personal “I-search” paper) investigating Korean shamanism and related issues. (See Handout 3: Suggestions for Individual Research Projects).
7. Research, create and present to the class a hands-on experience of shamanism and its place in Korean history or society through a creative cooperative learning project. (See Handout 4: Suggestions for Group Creative Projects).

MATERIALS REQUIRED:

- Books, pictures, films, music, computers with internet access, Web site addresses (see Resources)
- Musical instruments, art supplies, costumes, props, food, model-making supplies, film or video supplies (see Handout 4: Suggestions for Group Creative Projects)
- Computers with Internet access
- Copies of six student handouts (all attached):
 - Handout 1: Introduction to Korean Shamanism
 - Handout 2: Directions for Project and List of Resources
 - Handout 3: Suggestions for Individual Research Projects
 - Handout 4: Suggestions for Group Creative Projects

Handout 5: The Life and Hard Times of a Korean Shaman: An Oral History (Much of this is excerpted from Laurel Kendall's *The Life and Hard Times of a Korean Shaman*. See the resources section for full bibliographical information).

Handout 6: Modern Koreans' Attitudes toward Shamanistic Beliefs and Rituals: A Series of Interviews. (Much of this is excerpted from Hyun-key Kim Hogarth's *Korean Shamanism and Cultural Nationalism*. See the resources section for full bibliographical information).

PROCEDURE:

1. Day 1: Introduction

Distribute Handout 1 and lead a discussion. Be sure to go over the first two paragraphs (disclaimer). Show pictures of modern Korean shamanistic deities and practices from the sources listed below or from other sources. Have students answer the questions at the bottom of the handout as homework.

2. Day 2: Discussion and Choice of Individual Research Projects

Distribute and lead a discussion on Handout 2 and Handout 3. Have students take these handouts home and bring three sources they have found and three ideas they would consider doing as an individual research project to the next class meeting. Determine that no two students have chosen exactly the same project and go over directions for writing an individual research project synopsis, due the following day.

3. Day 2: Choosing Cooperative Groups and Group Creative Projects

Distribute Handout 4. Divide students into cooperative learning groups wherein they will analyze the materials and data which group members have brought into class. Make other materials, as well as computers with internet connections, available. Allow time for groups to plan their creative projects. Make sure that no two groups have the same subject or the same type of presentation. Help each group write its group creative project synopsis. For homework, students bring in ideas, data and materials to use in the group project.

4. Day 3: Individual and Group Work on Projects

Provide time as needed. Students may also need half a period or so of additional class time for group work as the project progresses. Distribute Handout 5. Have students read and answer questions—as well as continue work on their individual research and group creative projects—for homework.

5. Day 4: Analyzing an Oral History Discuss Handout 5. Ask students what information it reveals about the role and persistence of shamanism in Korean society, why it became primarily a woman's practice and what it did for those who practiced it, etc. Discuss and practice the scholarly use of original source material. Distribute Handout 6: Have students read and answer questions, as well as continue work on their individual research and group creative projects, for homework.

6. Day 5: Analyzing a Series of Interviews Discuss Handout 6. Ask students what this reveals about cultural nationalism, the struggle between traditionalism and modernity, Westernization, globalization, urbanization and capitalism. Discuss and practice the scholarly use of original source material. For homework, have students continue work on their individual research and group creative projects.

7. Day 6: Submission and Discussion of Individual Research Papers Students should share and discuss the results of their individual research, either with small groups or the class as a whole. For homework, have students put the finishing touches on their group creative projects.
8. Day 7: Presentation of Group Creative Projects. Have the various groups present their projects while their classmates fill out evaluation sheets.

EVALUATION:

Evaluate students based on their:

- Willing cooperation and helpful participation in cooperative learning groups.
- Complete, thoughtful, analytical answers to questions on handouts.
- Thoughtful, intelligent, well-researched individual research paper.
- Lively, well-researched, well-presented group creative project.
- Thoughtful, helpful evaluations written on classmates' projects.

RESOURCES:

Books:

Campbell, Joseph, with Moyers, Bill. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Doubleday, 1988.

Clottes, Jean, and Lewis-Williams, David. *The Shamans of Prehistory: Trance and Magic in the Painted Caves*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998.

Covell, Alan Carter. *Folk Art and Magic: Shamanism in Korea*. Seoul and Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym International Corporation, 1993. (Excellent pictures)

Eliade, Mircea. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Princeton, NJ: Bollingen Series, Princeton University Press, 1974. (Excellent background by a master of religious history)

Harvey, Youngsook Kim. *Six Korean Women: The Socialization of Shamans*. Saint Paul: West Publishing, 1979.

Hogarth, Hyun-key Kim. *Korean Shamanism and Cultural Nationalism*. Korean Studies Series #14. Seoul: Jimoondang Publishing Co., 1999.

Howard, Keith, ed. *Korean Shamanism*. Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society, 1998.

Huhm, Halla Pai. *Kut: Korean Shamanist Rituals*. Seoul and Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym International Corporation, 1993. (Good for dance steps, musical instruments, costumes, placing of food offerings and other aspects of the *kut* ritual.)

Kendall, Laurel. *The Life and Hard Times of a Korean Shaman: Of Tales and the Telling of Tales*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988.

Kendall, Laurel. *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits: Women in Korean Ritual Life*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985.

Mason, David L. *Spirit of the Mountains: Korea's SAN-SHIN and Traditions of Mountain Worship*. Seoul: Hollym, 1999.

Yu Chai-shin and Guisso, Richard W.I., eds. *Shamanism: The Spirit World of Korea*. Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1988. (The most interesting article in this collection is Hahm Pyong-choon's "Shamanism and the Korean World-View, Family Life-cycle, Society, and Social Life.")

Films:

Campbell, Joseph, with Moyers, Bill. *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*. New York: Mystic Fire Video in association with Parabola Magazine, 1988. P.O. Box 30969, New York, NY: 10011. (Program Three, "The First Storytellers" is especially appropriate.)

Cherniak, David. *Fire on the Mountain: A Gathering of Shamans*. New York: Mystic Fire Video and Global Vision in association with Karma Ling and the United Tradition Organization, 1999. P.O. Box 422, New York, NY 10012. (This fascinating film documents a shamans' conference held at a Buddhist monastery in the French Alps. The attendees share their rituals, prophecies, stories, hopes, and fears.)

Kurosawa, Akira, director. *Dersu Uzala*. Japan/USSR co-production, 1975. (Beautiful film featuring Siberian folk customs, including shamanism. It's not about Korea, but seeing as how Korean shamanism originated in Siberia, the film opens interesting possibilities for comparison.)

Paradjanov, Sergei, director. *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*. USSR, 1964. (Beautiful film featuring Russian folk customs, including shamanism. It's not about Korea, but it opens the possibilities of interesting comparisons.)

HANDOUT 1: INTRODUCTION TO KOREAN SHAMANISM

Religion (like politics) can be a delicate topic to discuss in a school setting, so let's be very clear right at the start. First, discussing religion in class does NOT mean that anyone in the class is **advocating** that religion. Second, we are in school, not church. We are **historians** and scholars trying to put aside their personal beliefs long enough to discuss delicate topics in a dispassionate but sensitive way. Of course, it goes without saying that no one should ever put down or make fun of anyone's religious beliefs—even if they differ greatly from your own or even make you feel a little uncomfortable.

Shamanism is very different from the monotheistic religious beliefs which many modern Westerners follow. It involves the belief that everything has a **spirit or soul**—and that certain people with special **psychic** gifts (called **shamans**) can connect with these spirits and explain their doings to ordinary people. Shamanism represents just one of the many interesting ways to be human, and there are some things about it—such as its willingness to accept other religious traditions and its concern for nature—which are pretty cool.

Almost all people in almost all regions of the world once practiced **shamanism**. It's probably the world's oldest religion. In fact, the most recent explanation for the impressionistic, incredibly alive **prehistoric animal paintings** found in caves such as Chauvet, Altamira and Lascaux is that these deep, underground, almost inaccessible recesses were places where prehistoric shamans went to seek **trances** and commune with the **animal spirits**. Joseph Campbell, the great historian of mythology, also sees the prehistoric painted caves as religious places. He believes that many early peoples, who were often so dependent on large, dangerous animals for their food and clothing, felt the need to worship these animals and to **appease** their spirits when they killed them. Modern shamans use drumming, chanting, dancing, and sometimes (especially in Korea) costumes, art, and other paraphernalia to work themselves into special states of mind where they feel in contact with the “spirit world.” There is some evidence that there were prehistoric shamans who did the same. As the art historian Alan Carter Covell has stated:

Since time immemorial, ordinary persons have been intrigued by unusual human beings who achieve altered states of consciousness, those who appear to leave their regular body and travel to other realms to become possessed by supernatural forces—call it “ecstasy,” “trance,” “prophetic vision,” “hypnosis,” or whatever... Prehistoric humans bestowed special reverence on those among their number who apparently were psychic and departed from the everyday world to communicate with supra-natural “spirits” and return later with messages...In Siberia, the term for these communicators with special abilities is *saman*, in Indonesia it's *bomoh*, in Malaysia it's *hala*, in Hawaii the spirit-priest is called *kahuna*, all American Indian tribes have their particular “medicine man,” such as the *wabena* for the Chippewa. *Miko* prophesied for the Japanese Shintoists and the oracle of Delphi was famous in the classical world of Greece.

People have consulted shamans down through the ages when they or their friends or relatives were sick, unhappy, frightened, wanted to know the future, or just wanted some outside advice. Throughout much of history, shamanism was the only game in town, and shamans performed the functions now performed by doctors, psychiatrists, priests, teachers, cultural historians, entertainers and advice columnists. Were shamans actually able to heal and help people? Well, yes—sometimes. At the time, most people explained both mental and physical illness, as well as bad luck, as the result of spirit possession. If a sick or miserable person really believed a

shamanistic ritual would drive out the evil spirits and make him or her well and happy, it often did. Even modern doctors know that the mind has a great influence over the body. What we believe to be true often becomes true for us.

However, what is intriguing about the case of Korea is that shamanistic beliefs and practices are still very alive and well in this highly developed industrial society. I personally ran into a full-fledged shamanistic *kut* (ritual) one day as I was walking up Mt. Inwang, which is located in the heart of Seoul, South Korea's very modern capital city. Shamanistic beliefs and practices have continued to be practiced in Korea in spite of the succeeding waves of **Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism** and **Christianity** which have washed over the Peninsula. In fact, shamanism has, to a greater or lesser degree, molded and been molded by all these subsequent religious traditions. For instance, all the Buddhist temples I recently visited feature paintings of *Sanshin*, the shamanistic **Mountain Spirit**—complete with his identifying tiger. Most temples also harbored *Toksong* (the Lone Saint), *Chilsŏng* (the Seven Stars) and often *Obang Shinjang* (the Five Directional Generals) or other shamanistic figures. And, of course, all Korean Buddhist temples are profusely covered with representations of *Yongwang* (the Dragon King) and his minions.

There are, of course, many reasons for the persistence of shamanism in Korea. Some are particular to the Korean experience and some common to other rapidly modernizing countries which feel a need to hold onto something that gave them their identity in the past. Even **developed nations** often feel this need. The anthropologist Hyun-key Kim Hogarth writes that the “impersonal modern urban lifestyle has generated a highly charged romantic nationalism” and that “cultural nationalism is sweeping through Third-World nation-states, as a reaction to the globally homogenized culture, or more specifically **Western-oriented culture**. Asserting one's cultural identity through ‘**quaint ethnic**’ beliefs and objects has become topical, even among the sophisticated educated elites.” Hopefully, when this project is over, you will have come to some of your own conclusions about what Korean shamanism is like and why modern, sophisticated people still sometimes consult *mudangs* (Korean shamans) and go to *kut* (shamanistic rituals).

But let's see where you're at now. Answer these questions briefly on separate paper:

1. What is **shamanism**? Why has it been **so popular** so long in so many places?
2. Why do you think shamanism is **still practiced in Korea**?
3. Define the above words or phrases which are both in **bold and underlined**. For extra credit, also define the words or phrases which are **just in bold**. (Do as many of these as you want.)

HANDOUT 2: DIRECTIONS FOR PROJECTS AND LIST OF RESOURCES

1. Sources: Find at least three sources on shamanism and bring them to class. At least one must cover Korean shamanism, and at least one must include pictures. See the resources list below, or find other materials on your own.
2. Research Question: Think of a question about shamanism to which you'd actually like to know the answer to. Choose from Handout 3 or think of your own question. Beware—no two class members may research the same question. Submit a brief individual research project synopsis, giving your question and the sources you will use to answer it. Your final paper should be at least three pages long and, except for brief quotes, should be entirely in your own words. Include a complete list of the sources you consulted. Be sure to properly cite your source each time you refer to it or quote it. Use proper essay style.
3. Group Creative Project: Get together with a group of like-minded classmates and decide on a creative project concerning Korean shamanism (*musok*) which you will present to the class. Next, do some research on your group's topic. Then, plan what type of presentation your group will give the class. No two groups may present the same subject, and, if possible, no two groups should give the same type of presentation. Check Handout 4 if you need ideas, but feel free to think of your own. Each group should submit a brief group creative project synopsis that includes the aspect of Korean shamanism you will present, the ways you will research it, the means you will use to do it and the role each group member will play.

RESOURCES:

Books:

- Campbell, Joseph, with Moyers, Bill. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Doubleday, 1988.
- Clottes, Jean, and Lewis-Williams, David. *The Shamans of Prehistory: Trance and Magic in the Painted Caves*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998.
- Covell, Alan Carter. *Folk Art and Magic: Shamanism in Korea*. Seoul and Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym International Corporation, 1993. Excellent pictures.
- Eliade, Mircea. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Princeton, NJ: Bollingen Series, Princeton University Press, 1974. (Excellent background by the acknowledged master in the field of the history of religions.)
- Harvey, Youngsook Kim. *Six Korean Women: The Socialization of Shamans*. Saint Paul: West Publishing, 1979.
- Hogarth, Hyun-key Kim. *Korean Shamanism and Cultural Nationalism*. Korean Studies Series #14. Seoul: Jimoondang Publishing Co., 1999.
- Howard, Keith, ed. *Korean Shamanism*. Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society, 1998.

Huhm, Halla Pai. *Kut: Korean Shamanist Rituals*. Seoul and Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym International Corporation, 1993. (Good for dance steps , musical instruments, costumes, placing of food offerings and other aspects of the *kut* ritual.)

Kendall, Laurel. *The Life and Hard Times of a Korean Shaman: Of Tales and the Telling of Tales*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988.

Kendall, Laurel. *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits: Women in Korean Ritual Life*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985.

Mason, David L. *Spirit of the Mountains: Korea's SAN-SHIN and Traditions of Mountain Worship*. Seoul: Hollym, 1999.

Yu Chai-shin and Guisso, Richard W.I., eds. *Shamanism: The Spirit World of Korea*. Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1988. (The most interesting article in this collection is Hahm Pyong-choon's "Shamanism and the Korean World-View, Family Life-cycle, Society, and Social Life.")

Films:

Campbell, Joseph, with Moyers, Bill. *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*. New York: Mystic Fire Video in association with Parabola Magazine, 1988. P.O. Box 30969, New York, NY: 10011. (Program Three, "The First Storytellers" is especially appropriate.)

Cherniak, David. *Fire on the Mountain: A Gathering of Shamans*. New York: Mystic Fire Video and Global Vision in association with Karma Ling and the United Tradition Organization, 1999. P.O. Box 422, New York, NY 10012. (This fascinating film documents a shamans' conference held at a Buddhist monastery in the French Alps. The attendees share their rituals, prophecies, stories, hopes, and fears.)

Kurosawa, Akira, director. *Dersu Uzala*. Japan/USSR co-production, 1975. (Beautiful film featuring Siberian folk customs, including shamanism. It's not about Korea, but seeing that Korean shamanism originated in Siberia, the film opens interesting possibilities for comparison.)

Paradjanov, Sergei, director. *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*. USSR, 1964. (Beautiful film featuring Russian folk customs, including shamanism. It's not about Korea, but it opens the possibilities of interesting comparisons.)

HANDOUT 3: SUGGESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH PROJECTS

There are many interesting things about Korean shamanism. Pick up a book or check out a Web site and start to read—the ideas will pop into your head. The following suggestions are just that—suggestions. Feel free to come up with your own ideas, but check them out with me before you begin. Your final paper should be at least three pages long and, except for brief quotes, be entirely in your own words. Include a complete list of the sources you consulted and be sure to properly cite your source each time you refer to it or quote it. Use correct essay style.

1. Is Korean shamanism (*musok*) actually a religion? Why or why not? If not, what is it?
2. How does Korean shamanism (*musok*) compare to any religion with which you are familiar?
3. What differences are there between the shamanistic world view and that of most monotheistic religions?
4. How has the shamanistic world view affected the culture of modern Korea?
5. What is Korean shamanism (*musok*) like? Describe any aspect (or several aspects) of it in some detail.
6. Where did Korean shamanism (*musok*) originally come from? Why and how did it develop its distinctive characteristics?
7. How is Korean shamanism *musok* connected with T'angun, Korea's mythical founder?
8. How does Korean shamanism (*musok*) compare with any other form of shamanism (such as Siberian, Native North American, South American, etc.)?
9. How does Korean shamanism (*musok*) differ from Korean ancestor worship? Why have both these traditions continued to exist? What functions do they serve?
10. Who are the major deities of the Korean shamanistic pantheon? Include illustrations.
11. Who are the most loved and worshipped of all Korea's shamanistic deities? Why? Collect a large number of images of these deities and explain the imagery. Which seem to contain Taoist, Buddhist or Confucian elements? Do any contain Christian elements? Include your illustrations.
12. How has Korean shamanism (*musok*) changed over the years? For instance, which deities were once popular but no have fallen out of favor? Why have these changes occurred?
13. Describe the Korean shamanistic universe. What levels does it have? What type of beings inhabits each level? If appropriate, include illustrations.
14. Is the shamanistic world view conducive to the development of democracy? Why or why not?
15. What Taoist, Buddhist, and/or Confucian elements can be found in Korean shamanism (*musok*)?
16. How have Korean shamanism (*musok*) and Korean Buddhism influenced each other over the years?
17. Why/how did Korean shamanism (*musok*) survive into modern times?
18. What goes on at a *kut* (major shamanistic ritual)?
19. What are the various types of *kut* (shamanistic rituals) and what are the different functions they serve? Which types are most frequently performed in modern times?
20. What paranormal feats are carried out by Korean shamans (*mudangs*) today? How do you explain them?
21. What other Korean shamanistic rituals or practices exist besides *kut*? What are they like? Who practices these rituals?

22. What functions does Korean shamanism (*musok*) serve in modern Korean society?
23. How do modern Koreans view their shamanistic traditions? Are they proud or embarrassed? Why?
24. What kinds of Korean people go to shamanistic practitioners (*mudang*) or to shamanistic rituals or other events?
25. What kinds of Koreans become *mudang* (shamans)? Why do they do so?
26. Unlike most other shamanistic traditions, in Korea most shamans (*mudang*) are women. Why is this so? Does this have an effect on the way shamanism (*musok*) is practiced in Korea?
27. Most male Korean shamans (*mudang*) wear women's clothes while they perform. Why should this be so? What does this tell you about the nature of Korean shamanism (*musok*)?
28. How does a person become a *mudang*? What process does s/he have to go through in order to become a recognized *mudang*?
29. Find the life stories of several modern Korean *mudang* and explain what you can learn about Korean shamanism (*musok*) from their stories.
30. Find the accounts of several modern Koreans who have either sponsored or attended *kut* or other shamanistic rituals and explain what you can learn from these stories.
31. Historically, one of shamanism's major functions is healing the sick. Collect stories of either psychological or physical illnesses which sick people believe were cured through shamanistic practices. Did it really work? Did these people stay cured?
32. Many *kut* (Korean shamanistic rituals) involve the dead. Why? What does this tell you about the Korean worldview? Is this changing with modern times?
33. What are the differences between northern and southern Korean shamanistic practices?
34. How has Korean shamanism (*musok*) fared in North Korea? What is the attitude of the North Korean government toward it?
35. Were the early kings of Silla (in southern Korea) shamans?
36. When and why did modern anthropologists become interested in Korean shamanism (*musok*)? What have been their attitudes toward it? How have these changed?
37. Collect a number of visual images relating to any aspect of Korean shamanism (*musok*). Look at them closely, see what questions they bring to mind, and answer these questions. Several people can do this project as long as they amass different sets of pictures.
38. Find the actual words of a number of Korean shaman (*mudang*) chants. What can you learn about Korean shamanism (*musok*) from them?
39. What do you think the future will be for Korean shamanism (*musok*)? How will factors such as education, modern medicine, and increasing personal wealth affect the practice of Korean shamanism?
40. How is **Korean shamanism (*musok*) organized?** What associations do *mudang* belong to? Who runs these associations? How much control do they have over their members?

HANDOUT #4: SUGGESTIONS FOR GROUP CREATIVE PROJECTS

Korean shamanism is so fascinating and colorful that you should have no trouble thinking of interesting ways to present your group's research to the class. The following suggestions are just that—suggestions. Feel free to come up with your own ideas, but check them out with me before you go ahead. Everyone in the group should both be involved in the creation of the project and in presenting it to the class.

1. **Art Show:** Draw or paint large pictures of the major Korean shamanistic deities and hang them attractively in the classroom. Label each painting and explain to the class what each deity stands for.
2. **Drama:** Stage or reenact part of a *kut* (Korean shamanistic ritual). Include as many ritual elements as you can. You could also reenact a day in the life of a *mudang* or one of the *mudang*'s clients. There are of course many other possibilities. Be sure that the class clearly understands what is going on.
3. **Food/Cooking:** Set up an altar full of offerings to the different levels of Korean shamanistic deities. Explain to the class what each offering means, then share the food with the class.
4. **Dance:** Learn some of the dances which might be presented at a *kut* and share them with the class, explaining the significance of each. Teach some of the easier steps to the class, and encourage everyone to dance.
5. **Music:** Make simple versions of some of the major instruments used at a *kut*. Explain them and their significance to the class and use them to play appropriate music. If possible, allow the class to participate. You might be able to find ways to modify modern instruments for this purpose.
6. **Panel Discussion:** The panelists might enact the roles of major Korean shamanistic deities, practitioners, or participants. Each panelist should have a two-minute prepared statement, and then be prepared to argue with other panelists and answer questions from the audience.
7. **Debate:** Members of the two debate teams might represent (1) shamanistic deities arguing about who is the most important and why; (2) members of the Korean public arguing about whether the survival of shamanism into modern times is a good idea or not; or (3) almost anything else related to the topic. Each team member should have a two-minute prepared statement and then be prepared to answer audience questions.
8. **Story or Poetry Reading:** Write one large group story (or poem) or a series of shorter stories (or poems) concerning such topics as: T'angun, Korea's mythic founder; the major shamanistic deities and their relations to each other or to the humans with whom they interact; how a person becomes a *mudang* (shaman); a day in the life of a typical *mudang*; or the reasons why modern Koreans practice shamanism or go to shamanistic rituals.
9. **Fashion Show:** Make or create pictures of the costumes used by Korean *mudang* when they take on the role of the major shamanistic deities. Label the costumes and explain to the class the reasons for the colors and styles used, and explain how these costumes are used in a *kut* or other shamanistic event. If possible, allow class members to try on the costumes.
10. **Prop Construction:** Make models of the important items used during *kut* or other shamanistic rituals. Label them and explain and/or demonstrate their use to the class.

11. **Architecture/Model Building:** Make a model of a Korean shamanistic shrine, complete with pictures of the appropriate shamanistic deities. Label the various parts and explain them and their use to the class. A removable roof would probably be useful.
12. **Film/Video:** Write a script of part of a *kut* or other Korean shamanistic ritual and shoot it. Or, make a pseudo-documentary about a day in the life of a *mudang* or a person who decides to consult a *mudang*. You could also film an interview of a group member playing the part of a *mudang*.
13. **Map-Making:** Design a map of Korea and plot major Korean shamanistic sites on it. Consider shamanistic shrines, Buddhist temples which include images of shamanistic deities, places where important rituals occur, mountains important to Korea's shamanistic cosmogony, or any other important shamanistic locale. Devise elegant symbols and create a useful key. Include appropriate illustrations. Hang it attractively in the classroom and explain it to the class.
14. **Timeline:** Create a large, beautiful, detailed, timeline illustrating the history of Korean shamanism (*musok*). Include appropriate illustrations. Be sure that your project is sufficiently informative and that you adequately explain it to the class.

HANDOUT 5: “THE LIFE AND HARD TIMES OF A KOREAN SHAMAN” AN ORAL HISTORY

“The woman who tells her life in the following pages is a Korean shaman, one who invokes the gods and ancestors, speaks with their voice, and claims their power to interpret dreams and visions...”
(Laurel Kendall)

The original source given below is excerpted from the anthropologist Laurel Kendall’s 1988 oral history of a modern Korean shaman whom she refers to only as Yongsu’s Mother. (See resource list for full bibliographical information.) In some ways, this tough, articulate woman’s life story parallels the modern Korean experience. She was born in poverty during the Japanese occupation, barely survived the Korean War, at first resisted what she believed was the call of the spirits, and finally apprenticed herself to an older shaman, thus joining an ancient profession which gave her an income and some status—at least within her own community. As you read her story—told in her own words—think about what qualities and life experiences this woman had which might have led her to become a shaman. What might a woman with a similar biography have become in another society?

First, we need a little background on the history and status of the Korean shaman (*mudang*). According to the anthropologist Hyun-key Kim Hogarth, the kings of ancient Silla were almost certainly shamans. However, the coming of the foreign belief systems of Buddhism and later Confucianism and Christianity caused Korea’s elite class to denigrate the country’s native shamanistic traditions as primitive superstition. Shamanism became an exclusively female and rural practice, though courtly society, even royalty, continued to call upon shamans for rainmaking, healing and divination. Throughout the Koryŏ and Chosŏn kingdoms, the government placed *mudangs* (shamans) in the lowest class along with slaves and prostitutes, and it alternated between employing, taxing and expelling them. Still, shamanism formed a rare sphere of women’s power in a heavily male-dominated society. Under Japanese colonial rule, shamanism (*musok*) was practiced in defiance of the government ban, as a way of expressing cultural nationalism. After liberation, modernization movements, particularly under President Park Chung Hee, tended to again regard shamanism as primitive superstition.

However, as Korea rapidly Westernizes, many modern Koreans have come to see shamanism as a cultural heritage to be treasured, though many still regard it as an embarrassing old superstitious practice. The Korean Spirit Worshippers’ Association for Victory over Communism boasts over 100,000 dues-paying members. The Korean Arts Council and Korean Tourist Board have sponsored numerous *kut* (shamanistic rituals), some of which have taken place in fancy modern hotels. In fact, the government has designated the famous *mudang* Kim Kumhwa as an intangible cultural treasure. And, as in the past, some Koreans, primarily women, still consult shamans for healing, divination and advice. Halla Pai Huhm, an authority on traditional Korean music and dance, confirms this split, saying that “there exists a sort of dualism, a contradiction in the Korean consciousness. Western Christianity has exerted a powerful and lasting impression on the Korean people, it is true. Yet among many Koreans there persists a strange attachment to the beliefs of shamanism, a deep inner feeling permeating much of the contemporary Korean culture.”

Excerpts from Laurel Kendall’s *The Life and Hard Times of a Korean Shaman: Of Tales and the Telling of Tales*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988.

When I was a baby our family was poor, so poor that my mother went out peddling. My mother says I cried too much; she couldn’t leave me behind. That was why her feet used to swell up and throb... We grew, my little brother and I, and when I was five or six years old, we caught the measles. My mother says that she didn’t fret to much about my measles since I was just a

girl...Both of us were sick, but she put her son on the warm part of the heated floor and put me on the cold part. She just set me there to die, but she carefully nursed my little brother. Well then, my brother gave a rattling gasp and died. As for me, the measles went pop, pop, and went away. Wasn't that a surprise? How could it be that the son she had fretted over had died and the daughter that she had left for dead had lived? Now that the illness had passed, my mother went out peddling again.

When I was nine years old, my brother went to X_____ Elementary School and I went to Y_____ Elementary School. Because he was a son, he was supposed to study, but since I was a girl, my father told me to stop. I liked school, so I went anyway...I took the second-year examination and passed it...My father compared our scores, and said, "Bitch! I didn't want the girl to study, but she's done well. Why can't this stupid boy learn anything?" Then he told me, "If you so much as set foot in that school, I'll beat you." My mother had been peddling soup, so she had a little money that she gave me on the sly. She gave me money for the monthly tuition and told me to buy pens and notebooks. *[Eventually my father found out I had been going to school.]* That evening, when my father came home, he beat me. "I told you not to go to school...we don't have the money for it!" But my mother said, "What do you mean by beating this child and preventing her from studying?" As I remember it, Father gave Mom a beating for encouraging her child to disobey. When I saw this...I thought, "If that's the way it is, I don't want to go."

When I was thirteen years old, I went to work in the printing factory...I was so hungry that they often gave me food at the boss's house. *[She also joined the Korean Youth League—a large anti-leftist paramilitary group, and enjoyed the guard duty and military-style drills. Then the war broke out and Seoul fell to the North Korean People's Army.]* Everyone else fled, but did we have anything to eat? Did we have any money? We couldn't flee anywhere...My father ran away when the People's Army got here. One day the People's Army men burst through the door with their guns pointed and told us to come out with our hands raised. They let my brother and sister stay behind, they only seized my mother and I. They took both of us with them, but they sent my mother back home...Then the People's Army interrogated me. Did they ever put me through it! "Your brother's in the National Army, and you work for the opposition *[Korean Youth League]*. Isn't that so?" A little bit later, the commander arrived and shouted at us to stand in a straight line. That chattering fool said that we would be taken to the North, and if we should try to escape, we would be shot.

They took us away in the night...I'd planned to escape during the journey, but it was impossible. We went in a line, forced along all night, and then when it got light, they took us to some abandoned farmhouse...Planes were flying around dropping bombs, so these People's Army bastards led us around at night and kept us inside the houses during the day...When it got dark, they'd give us a tiny bit of food in a ball and then lead us into the night and drag us on again. By the night of the third day, they'd run out of grain and didn't give us even that little bit of food...I was so hungry and cold that I could have died. I mean it.

It was the end of the third day and I was sleeping. A white-haired grandfather appeared. A long white beard spilled down his chest and he stood up tall, holding a twisted staff, the staff that the Mountain God carries. The grandfather spoke, "It's getting late; you don't have much time." I woke with a start. It was a dream...I was the only one awake, and I'd had this dream. My stomach was so empty, but I couldn't do a thing about it. I closed my eyes and settled down again. "It's getting late; you don't have much time." I woke up the girl who was sleeping beside me and told her my dream. "Let's escape! Whether we die in captivity or die trying to escape, it's all the same. Let's get out of here!" The other girl still had some money, People's Army money, the money the reds used, printed with a rake and hoe. "Let's say we'll buy something to eat with this money and get out of here." The guard came over with his stick and yelled at us to go back to sleep. "We have this money and we're so hungry that we can't sleep. Let us go out and buy some

bread.” The People’s Army bastard seemed to think that was a good idea. He was hungry, too. “Can you get back quickly?” “We’ll be right back, before anyone finds out about it.” So he let us both out. It was all because of my dream that I’d gotten up and talked about buying bread. That was why they let me go. It was all because I’d had Grandfather Mountain God’s help, isn’t that so?

We took off, fled to the mountains. We fled by day, and as soon as it got dark, we went into an empty house and slept. We spent two nights that way, and on the third day we reached the pass northwest of Seoul. Just at the base of the pass, there was an endless stream of refugees passing through...We got through. I was on my way home...The house just in front of ours had been bombed away. Would our house be bombed like that too? I climbed up the path and there, our house was standing! I rushed in shouting “Mother!” My little sister was cooking rice in a tiny pot. “It’s me, me! Your sister!” I’d been gone for a week and she didn’t recognize me. I hadn’t washed my face, I hadn’t combed my hair, my clothes were filthy. I kept shouting, “It’s me, me!” She ran away and came back with my mother...She ran to me in her bare feet shouting, “Are you a person? A soul? A ghost?...Are you really human?” “Mother, honestly, I’m a living person. Now hide me quickly so I’ll survive.” Then, on the morning of the fourth day, the National Army entered the city at ten in the morning. Wasn’t I glad? I ran out of the bomb shelter shouting, “*Mansei, mansei!* Ten thousand years to the Korean Republic!” We found our flag and hung it up...Later...the Americans arrived, Canadians and Filipinos, too, but lots of Americans. Life went on.

I was so hungry I could die, and once again I went out peddling. In those days, there were lots of soldiers around, so I sold gum. One day this big guy grabbed me and squeezed me. I ran all the way home, leaving the gum scattered on the ground. My mother went back later and picked it up. She told me, “Work for the print company, at least they’re all Koreans there.” I went to work, and we were able to send my younger brother to school, to eat, and buy some clothes. I worked the night shift, too. I was really too tired to do it, but I did it anyway...I had to earn money so we could live because my father had told us to drop dead and had run away with his little wife [concubine].

I got to be nineteen years old, and then I was so ill that everyone thought I would die. My head ached, my whole body ached. I was so ill that I wasn’t able to eat—not that there was anything to eat. My father’s cousin told us to go and get a divination from a shaman. We did, and the shaman told us to have a *kut* [shamanistic ritual], said that if we had a *kut* I would live...She was known as a great shaman...I fell asleep as she was striking the drum. The *kut* went on all around me, and there I was, sound asleep. While I was asleep, a white-haired grandmother and grandfather arrived and started to massage me. They offered me some water from a dried gourd dipper... “If you drink this, you’ll survive.” So I drank down the water in a single gulp. I opened my eyes. Oh! They were having a *kut* and making a racket! It was all very strange. I told the shaman about my dream. “Well, then, that means you’ll live. That was medicinal water (*yaksu*), no doubt about it.” She went on with the *kut*, and then that *mansin* [shaman] asked me to become her spirit daughter [apprentice]...My mother shook and trembled and really carried on. “What do you mean, your spirit daughter?” My mother wouldn’t agree to it, and was she ever worked up!

I recovered. But then I kept going up to the Immortals’ Rock on the hillside behind our house. My mother thought I was acting strangely, and wondered why I kept on going up there. She forbade it, but I felt drawn back and climbed up that hillside again...I went to work again, and I got sick again...Our house was on a steep hillside...When I opened the gate that night, I don’t know what happened, I blacked out completely and fell flat on the neighbor’s roof, and then I fell off the roof. But I didn’t have a single bruise on me. My mother carried me home on her back. [At this time, Yongsu’s Mother had a number of illnesses, dreams, and hallucinations, including seeing her small Buddha statue burst into flame and move of its own accord.] I’d be so ill, but as soon as there was a *kut*, I would get right up, no matter that I’d been sick and dying. [She tried

going to a Christian church.] When I sat there during the service, my head would start to ache because nothing held my interest; I would just drift away.

Bit by bit our situation got better; we could buy rice to eat and clothes to wear, and that was just great! *[Yongsu's Mother began to enjoy herself, to dress up and go to dances. She had an affair and gave birth an illegitimate daughter—but decided the child's father was worthless and refused to marry him. Her family left Seoul and moved to the countryside— where they eventually pressured her to marry a man much older than herself. She gave birth to two children.]* My husband and I fought constantly after we were married, and then he got sick and died. When he was ill, I went to a *mansin* [shaman], but she said that he would probably die. She told me to make an offering in the shrine, but I didn't know what to do. My sister-in-law went with me to show me. I was supposed to raise my arms over my head and bow, but my arms stuck fast to my sides...The grandfathers [shamanistic spirits] were telling me that I was going to become a *mansin*, that my husband would die, and that it was useless to make offerings in the shrine on his behalf. He died, and on the second anniversary of his death, we had the great send-off ending the mourning period...When it was over, I went back to live in Willow Market, and in the seventh month I became a god-descended person.

[However, Yongsu's Mother was still unsure of her shamanistic vocation. Another shaman encouraged her to put on the Mountain God's robes and dance at a kut.] So I put on the clothes and right away began to dance wildly. I ran into the shrine, still dancing, and grabbed the Spirit Warrior's flags. I started shouting, "I'm the Spirit Warrior of the Five Directions," and demanded money. All of the women gave me money. I ran all the way home. My heart was thumping wildly. I just wanted to die like a crazy woman. We talked about it this way and that way and decided there was no way out. So the next year I was initiated as a *mansin* [shaman].

The rest of this oral history shows Yongsu's Mother to be a success in her new career. Eventually, she has over eighty clients, and tells their fortunes, interprets their dreams, and gives them sensible advice. She performs *kut*, the long, complex ritual which involves food and drink, music, dance, drama, singing, chanting, costumes, and other paraphernalia. *Kut* serves many purposes: healing, honoring the dead, personal or communal good luck, catharsis, a celebration for both spirits and humans, Yongsu's Mother feasts and honors her own personal spirits, goes up the hillside behind the village to make offerings to the Mountain God, and deals with her own complicated family—both dead and alive. She saves her money, builds herself a "splendid house," and refurbishes her spirits' quarters (her shrine). Her son sits for university entrance examinations, but worries her by taking up with a girl from a Christian house. She is "horried at the prospect of a daughter-in-law who will not pray on the mountain." At the end of her oral history, she is intrigued to learn that "I've even come out in a book in America."

Answer the following questions on separate paper:

1. What do you think of Yongsu's Mother and her story? Which parts interested you the most?
2. What experiences convinced Yongsu's Mother that she was called to be a shaman?
3. What personal qualities led Yongsu's Mother to become a shaman?
4. What might a woman with a similar biography have become in another society?
5. What can you learn from Yongsu's Mother's experiences—about Korean history, traditional Korean culture, shamanism, or anything else?
6. How reliable do you think this story is? How can you judge reliability in an original source?
7. For extra credit, record and write up a brief oral history of anyone you know.

HANDOUT 6: MODERN KOREANS' ATTITUDES TOWARD SHAMANISTIC BELIEFS AND RITUALS: A SERIES OF INTERVIEWS

How do modern Koreans regard shamanism today? As you learned in the introduction to Handout 5, they are at the very least ambivalent. As you read the following first-person accounts, think about what you can learn from each one. What attitudes does each person reveal—toward shamanism, modern culture, traditional culture, religion and the meaning of life?

Excerpts from Hyun-key Kim Hogarth's *Korean Shamanism and Cultural Nationalism*. Korean Studies Series #14. Seoul: Jimoondang Publishing Co., 1999.

Hyun-key Kim Hogarth (anthropologist): "I returned to Korea in May, 1987. Korea's development in the 20 years of my absence was unprecedented. Seoul had undergone such a complete metamorphosis that I hardly recognized my hometown. I also found that with the rapid modernization and industrialization, traditional Korean culture was fast disappearing, particularly in large cities, where American culture, symbolized by hamburgers and Coca Cola, dominated... Against this background, Korean shamanism, which had been deprecated and persecuted as tangible evidence of Korea's backwardness, was enjoying a revival as 'something uniquely Korean.'

Kut [shamanistic rituals] were learned and proudly performed by university students as an extra-curricular activity. Sometimes, such performances seemed to take on a political nature. In 1987, soon after my return to Korea, I witnessed a large-scale students' anti-government demonstration in the City Hall Plaza...The students were protesting against the government for the deaths of two students, killed in an accident during a scuffle between the students and the police. They performed a *tari kari kut* ('bridge' *kut*) in which the souls of the two dead students were sent to the other world. A student, playing the role of a *mudang* [shaman], tore through a long piece of white cloth, apparently symbolizing the bridge linking this world and the other world (an onlooker told me). Although of course the student was only imitating a *mudang*, her performance was convincing enough to generate a flood of tears in her colleagues...It was evident that they considered *kut* an important cultural heritage, to be cherished and made use of, whenever a suitable occasion arose."

To find out more about how modern Koreans regard their shamanistic heritage, on October 10, 1993, Hogarth randomly interviewed audience members at a large community *kut* held at the seaside at Incheon to pray for a large catch of fish. She asked them why they attended the ceremony. Here are some of the answers she received:

Miss Yi (aged 11, a primary school student): "I enjoy watching *kut*. It's something old and wonderful. You can't see anything like that these days. I know some of my friends say it's scary, but I'm not scared at all. It's great fun."

Mr. Yi (aged 22, a university student): "My family has never sponsored *kut* as far as I know, but I have occasionally seen my colleagues perform one at the university club. I seem to come across it about once a month now. I watch it because it is an important part of the traditional culture of our ancestors, being handed down to us for generations. Nowadays, young people tend to chase after anything Western, belittling our old traditional culture. Watching a piece of our old culture is a small way of repaying our ancestors for the debts we owe them. I don't watch it in a religious perspective. I am a Christian, but even if my

minister finds out that I've been attending a *kut*, I don't mind. There is nothing wrong with it. I am just showing respect for our old culture."

Mr. Choe (aged 36): "I live in Seoul, but I have come with my young niece to watch this particular *kut*. I go and watch *kut* from time to time, because I think it's good fun. It's also our important tradition. In our family, we don't sponsor *kut*. I only attend other people's *kut*. I've never given it a serious religious significance, but, as it has descended from Buddhism, it can be considered a religion. I've never linked it with nationalism, either. Watching *kut* just brings me closer to the events held by our ancestors."

Mr. U (aged 43): "I come from Taebaek, in Kangwon-do. I love watching *kut*. We don't sponsor *kut* ourselves, but we do regularly offer a sacrifice to Tan'gun Harabŏji [the mythic founder of Korea] at Taebaeksan. *Kut* is a ritual in which we invite the spirits of the dead people, who are our ancestors, and treat them well so that they can be comfortable at heart. The contents vary from *kut* to *kut*, depending on the purpose of *kut*. This *kut* is very different from *kut* held at home."

Mr. Won (aged 58): "My family don't sponsor *kut*, but I love watching *kut*. I don't really understand the meaning of *kut*. I just enjoy the company of people and the spectacle. It's fun, that's all. I don't practice any religion."

An elderly gentleman: "Why are you asking me all these questions?" [*He then slipped into the crowd. I had the distinct impression that he was a regular client, and was very ashamed of the fact, since I later saw him actively participating in the kut, dancing happily with the shamans and paying money for pokchu (good-luck wine).*]

Hogarth also interviewed Mr. Kim Sonuk, project manager of the Changjondong Redevelopment Project, at a large community *kut* which he had organized on the construction site of a new block of apartment buildings on March 9, 1994. The *kut* was held in order to appease the spirits of the people who had died when the old, shabbily built buildings had collapsed and to supplicate Chishin, the Site Spirit, in the hopes that the new construction would go well. The Samsung Engineering and Construction Company paid most of the large cost of the *kut*. Hogarth reports that Mr. Sonuk "actively took part in, and took great delight in, all the proceedings of the *kut*, although he, a picture of urban sophistication in his smart dark Western-style suit, looked incongruous against all the primary colors of the shamanistic costumes and paraphernalia."

Mr. Kim Sonuk (business executive): "The executives were opposed to my suggestion [to hold the *kut*], saying that it was preposterous that the Samsung Conglomerate, which aspire to live in the twenty-first century ahead of everyone else, should resort to such superstitious mumbo-jumbo. They claimed that it was against their motto of rationality and scientism. I eventually persuaded them by arguing that it is a community ritual for all residents, which will greatly improve their morale. After all, *kut* is the root of our folk culture, which we should be proud of to the outside world. *Musok* [shamanism] has been persecuted since the Koryŏ kingdom, particularly since the introduction of Confucianism, but it has been continuously been kept alive by the common people of Korea, despite the severe persecution by *yangban* [upper class] for centuries. It must surely mean something to us all."

Personally, I am a Christian, and I don't consider *musok* a religion. It is more a folk belief system, which can happily coexist with other religions, like, for example, ancestor

worship...Supplicating the spirits means nothing other than looking after and respecting our own ancestors. I hope it will continue to flourish in the dimension of our cultural heritage.”

Hogarth also interviewed Mr. Chong Sangbong, an affluent businessman in his late sixties, at a “rally of *kut* from eight provinces” on October 7, 1993. He had been invited to the *kut* by the Spirit Worshipers’ Association for Victory Over Communism, who had organized the annual event.

Mr. Chong Sangbong (late 60s, businessman): “I was brought up in a Christian household, but I respect all religions. I consider *musok* a religion also. I don’t think there’s anything wrong with *musok*. I have seen a Christian minister sponsoring a *kut*, when his son fell gravely sick. It’s inevitable, as people are ingenious. If they think there may be a cure, they will resort to it. After all nature is strong, while human life is fragile. *Musok* is something our ancestors believed in and practiced for generations. Our ancestors can’t have all been fools. Persecuting and denying something that our ancestors kept faith with for such a long time is wrong.”

Answer the following questions on separate paper:

1. Briefly summarize what each person interviewed above has to say. Why does each person attend *kut*?
2. Why do you think each person holds the particular attitudes he/she expresses?
3. What similarities among the various people do you find?
4. Create a chart or a continuum line where you plot the attitudes expressed by each of the people interviewed above. Which people seem to like *kut* the most? Which seem more ambivalent?
5. Which interview do you find the most interesting? Why? Write down any words or phrases you particularly like.
6. What do the above interviews, taken as a whole, tell you about modern Koreans’ attitudes toward shamanism, modernity, tradition, religion and life?
7. Do you believe that the information you are obtaining via these interviews is reliable? In what ways might unreliability creep in? How can you effectively evaluate the value of information obtained through interviews? Are there ways in which the reliability of this information might be improved?
8. For extra credit, interview anyone you know on any subject related to our present inquiry. Think of ways in which you can determine whether the information you are obtaining is reliable or not.