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## Shifting Agencies through New Media: New Social Statuses for Female South Korean Shamans

Liora Sarfati

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# Shifting Agencies through New Media: New Social Statuses for Female South Korean Shamans

Liora Sarfati

*South Korean shamans (mansin) increasingly rely on new media for networking and advertising their services. They exert power and intention through their manipulation of the Internet and other mass communication media, while facilitating the expansion of these spiritual activities in South Korea and internationally, despite the lingering stigma. Historically, Korean shamanism (musok) was an orally transmitted tradition that was mastered mainly by illiterate low-ranking women within the neo-Confucian hierarchy. A growth in literacy has sparked a process of change, which has been accelerated by new media and technology. Since the 1970s, the individual agency of mansin in creating positive publicity and a positive social image for themselves has significantly increased. Evidence of this new agency is based on fieldwork among successful mansin in Seoul. Daily and ritual mansin activities, film representation of mansin, Internet home pages, and online portals of musok associations are analyzed to demonstrate how the visual and textual dimensions of the new media work jointly with other semiotic modalities to construct the image and scope of musok in contemporary South Korea and worldwide.*

Some months ago, Mansin Sin Myönggi was featured on the Facebook page of a colleague, who was in Seoul for an international conference. The photograph labeled “With a Korean Shaman,” showed the male Western-looking scholar embracing a colorful, silk-robed female Korean performer. Any discussion of this type of online representation raises questions of agency, gender, and human-object relations. Mansin Sin’s hard-won online visibility in this Facebook post encapsulates all of these issues. This is because Mansin Sin is a woman from a traditionally outcast social stratum of spiritual mediators photographed

Liora Sarfati is a lecturer at the Department of East Asian Studies of Tel Aviv University. Her research on the production of shamanic rituals in contemporary South Korea includes the representation of this belief system in staged rituals, museums, films, television, and the Internet.

beside a male foreign scholar after performing at a respected international venue in contemporary Seoul. “Shaman” is a highly debated term in the Korean context, and the local term “*mansin*,” meaning “ten thousand spirits,” would have been more appropriate.<sup>1</sup> But this was an online post about an artistic performance for an audience with little knowledge or interest in the efficacy and history of the ritual and so the uploader used this international expression.<sup>2</sup> Who had the most effective control over the *mansin*’s Internet representation through a foreigner she had just met? The *mansin* clearly wanted to perform and be photographed, hoping that the owner of this selfie would tell all of his friends that there were *mansin* in South Korea, and that they performed in respectable venues such as academic gatherings. She planned her performance and chose her outfit but, in fact, despite all her hopes of exposure, she was little more than an exotic anecdote for the conference scholars.

My male colleague photographed her and wrote about the performance on Facebook. But, when asked about the woman next to him in the picture, he was unsure. He just posted the picture to document his visit and show his friends how interesting it was. He saw the shamanic performance as “just another cultural show during the conference.” It was beautiful and exotic, but South Korea was not his main research site, and he was not very interested in the show’s symbolism or the performer’s identity. The photograph meant much more to me. I wanted to see if she was really the spiritual healer I had met earlier. The photograph was not clear enough, but a background banner in the photograph confirmed what I thought. The woman in the photograph was *Mansin Sin*. I was glad to see the success of this practitioner who I had been following since 2007. The image also provided information about her whereabouts in South Korea. As we know, and as this example demonstrates, the Internet can abridge distances. In South Korea, it also abridges social status gaps and cultural biases toward practitioners of this unique vernacular religion known as *musok* (Korean shamanism).

In some ways, the new medium of the Internet enhances practitioners’ agency and control over their public representations. In other ways, they lose control over their online portrayal. Some Internet venues reduce the *mansin*’s ability to influence how other online participants use photographs and texts about *musok* as seen above. The free flow of information is one of the Internet’s outstanding features.

While caution is required when discussing the changes within South Korea’s online cultural discourse, this article provides many examples of how *mansin* find new avenues for self-representation and promotion through the Internet, which allows them to share information, ideas, and images with wide audiences. The article focuses on the processes through which South Korea’s hyper-technologized society, including its healers and diviners, find new forms of social power and personal agency. It also investigates why this process has been significantly accelerated by the use of new media. Internet and new media are global phenomena affecting much of the cultural discourse and practice in the societies where they

are dominant. The case of musok is especially interesting because the ancient tradition of spirit mediation works with the latest technology to create a new form of discourse, relevant and accessible to urban people in a highly media-saturated society.

When mansin first started exploring their ability to gain publicity through mass media they were sometimes criticized for using their religious assets for financial gain. Writing about affluent mansin, Choi Chungmoo described how, after establishing a musok school, one practitioner eagerly sought press publicity as “a way to reach out to the public for fame and prestige, a way of exploiting her spiritual power as a commodity.”<sup>3</sup> Gradually, however, as mansin increasingly became the topic of mass media representations, as far as I can tell there is no visible decline in their devotion to ritual practice, client support, or apprentice mentoring. When I asked famous mansin if they felt that engagement with the media had reduced the time spent on religious activity they all gave me the same answers. They see self-promotion as integral to their spiritual quest because broadening their potential client base allows more people to benefit from their ritual efficacy and problem-solving skills. I only heard criticism of mansin who are featured in the media from less successful practitioners, and this seemed to be sparked by jealousy rather than religious ideology. I never heard a mansin client grumble about a practitioner wasting her time on television appearances or Internet activity. Quite the opposite, many clients found their spiritual consultant while browsing musok websites.

Internet platforms of musok are presented through networks on electronic devices as tangible as shrines, altars, or statues. Cameras and flat screen televisions enable distribution and viewing of filmed musok performances. Cell phones and computers provide fast, convenient communication between practitioners and their clients. These artifacts have become a material necessity in the offices of most mansin. Under rural conditions, which existed in South Korea until the 1970s, mansin conducted long rituals, known as *kut*, in their clients' homes. These events, with their festive atmosphere, would draw large audiences.<sup>4</sup> In South Korean cities today it is forbidden to perform noisy rituals, and so most mansin practice at rented mountain shrines. The privacy and isolation of these new ritual locations has made casual observation of other people's *kut* rituals almost impossible. However, mediation through electronic platforms allows musok to remain visible even in urban clusters where *kut* rituals are no longer within easy reach.

This process has been ongoing since the proliferation of television sets in South Korea in the 1970s and the rise in literacy, which have enabled more and more practitioners to engage in newspaper representation, book publication, and documentary films. As Choi Chungmoo described in the 1980s, the idea that mansin could be educated surprised many Koreans following the wide media coverage of a PhD student initiated as a mansin.<sup>5</sup> This remains a popular prejudice among many Koreans, even though many contemporary mansin are college graduates.

Being literate and able to use computers allows mansin to join the virtual world. Since the 1990s, South Korean culture has been increasingly saturated with Internet platforms and users. Some virtual worlds create fantasy lands where users, mainly gamers and forum members, can easily change their identities and engage in activities remote from their daily lives.<sup>6</sup> In musok online representations, however, the assumption of false identities by practitioners is not appreciated and interaction generally leads to face-to-face communication. So, in this case, instead of causing “a crisis of boundaries between the real and the virtual, between time zones and between spaces, near and distant” the Internet facilitates dialogue and contact between real spaces and people, otherwise impossible in such a scope without the mediation of elaborate technology.<sup>7</sup>

### **EXPLORING VERNACULAR RELIGION AND CUSTOMS IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH KOREA**

“Musok” is a contested term that overarches a heterogeneous cultural arena of communication with gods and spirits, performance events, individually tailored cosmologies, and elaborate material manifestations. Echoing Richard Schechner and other Performance Theory scholars, my definition of musok practice includes activities beyond ritual, such as the Internet self-representation of musok practitioners and their portrayal in the media.<sup>8</sup> By changing cultural expectations, contemporary mansin are able to achieve extensive public visibility and trust through the interplay between technological innovations and their unique personal abilities. Mansin were traditionally considered the lowest social strata—the impure—according to the neo-Confucian hierarchy.<sup>9</sup> During their rituals, mansin experience possession trances. Their bodies are believed to host various gods and spirits, and their spoken words during such possessions are believed to be uttered by the possessing spirits. It is not rare to see an entranced mansin behave in manners considered by most of the audience members to be immodest or masculine, such as smoking and making sexual gestures toward women in the audience.<sup>10</sup> Such behaviors and the lack of central organization and acknowledged sacred texts has led to the lingering negative stigma associated with this spiritual vocation.

In South Korea, the delicate balance between the religious belief that mediation with the supernatural is necessary and a cultural disdain for those who provide it has led to the marginalization of mansin. The thousand-year-old norm of female predominance in charismatic spirit mediation and the male domination of Korean politics, official scholarship, and neo-Confucian ritual life augmented and reified the low status of mansin.<sup>11</sup> In public rituals it is common to have male interpreters explain the performance’s meaning to audiences, a custom that mansin accept and support. I have observed mansin seeking to hire famous scholars as inter-

preters in order to legitimize their performances.<sup>12</sup> However, through their online representations mansin enjoy having the ability to control their self-representation, iterate their own ideas, and choose their interpretations.

Musok is considered an ancient practice. Indication of spiritual practices have been found in archeological sites dating back a few thousand years. National historians in Korea benefit from discussing unique practices of ancient Korea as a proof of the nation's uniqueness through the ages. However, such findings are often contested and their meanings are not always clear-cut, as they might include objects without substantial texts that could help interpret them.<sup>13</sup> Current Republic of Korea government publications often state that musok is almost extinct in contemporary South Korea and that the main reason why this tradition has not disappeared completely is due to governmental preservation efforts. For example, an online explanation about a Cheju Island shamanic ritual states, "The ritual's designation as an important intangible cultural heritage paved the way for its survival."<sup>14</sup> Regardless of official pessimism regarding the fate of South Korea's kut, spirit mediation rituals are widely practiced in contemporary South Korea.<sup>15</sup> More than two hundred thousand mansin are listed as members of their professional organizations.<sup>16</sup>

When I started my fieldwork with mansin in the summer of 2005, I planned to live in a rural area where I thought that the traditional Korean lifestyle was still practiced. I was inspired by Laurel Kendall and her narrative about her initial attraction to this research topic.<sup>17</sup> While visiting several villages in order to set my location, I kept on hearing the same advice, "All of the best mansin are in Seoul." The local mansin and stores that supply mansin with their ritual artifacts convinced me that rural mansin, like many of their fellow villagers, would rather live in large cities where there are more potential clients. I switched my initial plan to study an "authentic" setting to study mansin in the city, using methods of urban ethnography. Gradually, I extended the network of mansin with whom I worked. I was introduced to several practitioners by Korean scholars and approached other practitioners independently while participating in public rituals. Since my initial research focus was on performance production, the use of new technology, and commercialization, my informants were mostly well-established mansin who performed large-scale kut. These mansin were also the ones who had had enough money and interest to establish websites as early as the mid-1990s. Visiting stores selling musok artifacts put me in touch with a wider range of mansin, including the less famous ones who are less studied by Korean scholars. I also met officials from a large mansin association, participated in several of the association's events, and subscribed to their printed newspaper. All of my mansin informants asked me to cite their real names in my ethnography and were always happy to receive a copy of a published work, even though they cannot read English. They understand that scholarly publications can bring domestic and international visibility.

The study of cultural spheres on the Internet has increasingly become integral to the anthropological, sociological, and psychological analysis of diverse societies.<sup>18</sup> In South Korea, the Internet became a common household apparatus as early as 2001, when more than 85 percent of households were already connected.<sup>19</sup> South Korea has been the world's most Internet-connected nation since the early 2000s.<sup>20</sup> Digital media are currently the main venue for publicity, advertising, public discourse, and culture construction. Therefore, since 2007, my locational ethnography has been enhanced by the documentation of my informants' personal websites (*homp'eiji*) along with different musok portals, some of which are sponsored by mansin associations. As often happens in ethnographic fieldwork, the field dictated how it needed to be investigated, and I cooperated.

In 2005, my five main informants were over fifty years old, and two had already kept updated webpages since the mid-1990s. My other informants adopted this practice later as Internet awareness grew. I have followed the activities of my five best-known practitioners while gathering data on their artifact collection and public performances, which were my initial research interests. Thus, my ethnography was based mainly on these affluent, well-established practitioners who had the resources to create their websites with the help of private web masters. Still, not all affluent mansin had personal websites as early as the 1990s, and the challenges and efforts by those who tried to establish an online presence should not be taken for granted. Their continuous online presence demonstrates their entrepreneurship and agency in establishing the norms of their profession.<sup>21</sup> After consulting mansin, musok website platform providers, and musok artifact store owners, I estimate that by now at least 20 percent of mansin who practice for clients have a website. Producing a website is considered cost-effective for musok because with the development of ready platforms prepared by Internet providers, a simple website costs as little as \$2000, which is equivalent to one good silk ritual costume. This cost can be covered by, say, ten new clients at most, with one or two consultations each (about \$50–\$100 per meeting).<sup>22</sup> However, not all websites attract significant traffic without active promotion. The cost of operating an online brochure or full website could rise if a mansin decides to advertise it as a link through large musok portals or Internet magazines. In 2014–15, all of the mansin I met, young, old, famous, and less famous, either had an Internet promotion platform or were planning to establish one soon. The choice between a simple online brochure, free blog, social network page like Facebook, or Twitter account depended on each mansin's intentions and options. The most famous practitioners already had such online venues in the early 2000s and served as role models for aspiring new practitioners. Diviners who do not get possessed or perform kut were not included in my research sample but are discussed by David J. Kim as a part of the musok world, and by Seoungnae Kim as popular online sellers of *pujök* (talismans) charms.<sup>23</sup>

## THE EFFECT OF MODERNIZATION ON MANSIN EDUCATION

In August 2007, Sin Myönggi, the mansin mentioned above, invited me to visit her country home. In the entrance hall to the spacious white structure hung her framed Master of Business Administration diploma from a known university. She explained that as a young woman, she was apprenticed to an elderly practitioner and thought little of her options in life. Her spirit-mother (*sinömöni*) was a renowned and respected mansin, and young Mansin Sin felt lucky to learn the mysterious ways of the supernatural from her. Busy with learning her new profession, she had no plans beyond that spiritual quest. In her late forties, after achieving financial stability, she began studying business and took pride in her grades. Gazing at her diploma, she reflected that had her *sinömöni* been alive, she might have been surprised by her apprentice's educational aspirations. Growing up in Korea in the early twentieth century, the old mansin was socialized to accept male dominance in formal education. Her spirit daughter, Mansin Sin, has access to new mechanisms of social status formation such as a merit-based education, and she learned to manipulate this resource along with mass media, the Internet, and other publicity venues. Through her website, Mansin Sin strives to change the negative social image of mansin and musok through posting online publications and appeals.

I first met Mansin Sin at a public New Years' blessing ritual that she performed in February 2007. The ritual was held at Unhyöngung, a small palace in downtown Seoul, which also serves as a museum. It was advertised on a bulletin board at the entrance gate and I just marched in. Before the ritual began, Mansin Sin sat in the palace courtyard and prepared *pujök* for visitors. I watched as she artistically crafted red ink characters on thin yellow paper and recalled from my reading that mansin were illiterate women. Although I had already noticed that most mansin under the age of sixty could easily read and write Han'gul, I did not know they could write Chinese characters, as these have largely been neglected in the South Korean public school program since the 1980s. Some of the mansin I met through my fieldwork would buy commercialized *pujök* prepared by male professionals at specialized stores and keep yellow slips of paper and red ink at their divination desks, so they could at least draw some basic patterns on the spot, according to their clients' needs. Mansin Sin's skills have been acknowledged as artistic, and her drawings have been exhibited at several festivals, including the famous Tanoje. She recalls how she learned to write complex ideograms (*hancha*) using artistic calligraphy by reading self-teaching calligraphy books and taking private lessons. Calligraphy was once the main marker of an educated male scholar in traditional Korea, and the ability of women to venture from the lower social ranks into this discipline increased greatly after South Korea's modernization.

This was not the only route which allowed Mansin Sin to cross the social boundaries between spirit mediator and scholar. In 2001, she published a book

about her life and practices, and in the mid-2000s, opened a gallery of musok paintings (*musindo*) in her country house.<sup>24</sup> This elaborate exhibition showcased glass-boxed ritual artifacts with English labels. Interestingly, none of the Korean scholars, including those who knew that I was interested in ritual art, ever suggested this as a research site. After asking several Korean scholars about this exhibition, I got the impression that although they knew about the gallery, and many had also visited there, they were reluctant to promote it. Later in 2010, Mansin Sin published a 300-page book mainly of photographs of her *pujök* talisman calligraphy.<sup>25</sup> I asked Mansin Sin if Korean scholars knew about her gallery and collection, and she answered that they all knew about it and ignored it. She added, “It was all my work and money. No one wants to help a mansin progress with technology. . . . People do not think that mansin should do these things. They would rather keep us uneducated and tame.”<sup>26</sup> However, several scholars have supported Mansin Sin’s efforts and helped her get bookings for public performances at official and respectable venues.

In the past seventy years, Korea has experienced profound social change. Since its days as premodern agrarian territory annexed to Japan, Korea has become a divided postindustrial nation, influential in world economics, and affecting global security. Political change has gone hand in hand with substantial cultural change and one of the most significant social changes of the past century in South Korea is the emergence of social mobility.<sup>27</sup> The penetration of capitalistic values into the Confucian cultural sub-layer of South Korea has increasingly allowed mansin who are successful business owners to acquire social prestige and an advanced education.<sup>28</sup>

The education of mansin and their production assistants extends beyond formal institutional learning. In a world where knowledge is openly flowing, mansin have become experts in Korea’s traditional arts, which extends outside musok practice. Mansin gain their knowledge through diverse communication channels. For example, historical television melodramas have created a general awareness of life in premodern Korea. As a result, the general public is much more knowledgeable about the clothing and accessories worn by famous kings and queens who often possess mansin during *kut*. Some decades ago, a mansin possessed by Queen Min (a political figure allegedly murdered by Japanese soldiers during an international palace intrigue in 1895<sup>29</sup>) had no such help in creating the queen’s costumes and headpieces for the *kut* representation. However, the imagination of today’s mansin is fed by pop culture products, such as television dramas. They can also find information on Korean history websites and read books about it. In one case, an owner of a musok artifacts’ store told me about an important study of musok costumes which she consults when designing costumes for clients.<sup>30</sup> Today, the sources of knowledge about musok which are available to mansin are truly diverse.

## NEW MEDIA HELP MANSIN TO GAIN CONTROL OVER THEIR PUBLIC IMAGE

Many mansin are keen amateur researchers and carefully study the costumes they use when personifying the spirits of historic royalty. For example, on Mansin Sō Kyōnguk's website, she markets herself as a performer of traditional arts by posing in outfits from contexts outside of musok rituals.<sup>31</sup> In the first image on her website, a top banner, she is wearing a headpiece consisting of a flat golden panel with dangling strings of beads. This headpiece is often worn by elderly men playing the main role in staged processions and television reenactments of Confucian court rituals.<sup>32</sup> The "Further Reading" links on her website are labeled in vertical writing considered more traditional than horizontal left to right script. The background for the links and the colorful pattern above them consist of lotus petal shapes, a common motif in Buddhist temples. At first glance, a knowledgeable visitor might deduce that the website is about traditional secular performance arts or Buddhism as there are no specific musok-related images.

If the website showed musok images right from the start, occasional visitors might be reluctant to continue reading it because of their own biased attitudes toward musok. Refraining from using such imagery allows the mansin to draw more potential readers to the texts of this Internet representation in a manner that gradually exposes website visitors to mystic perspectives and spiritualistic content.

To accentuate the scholarly background of the practice of mansin in this Internet representation, Mansin Sō's website includes articles by Sin Usōng of the Kongju Folklore Museum and Dr. Yang Chongsūng, a senior curator of the National Folk museum. The texts describe musok in general and analyze the main rite conducted by Mansin Sō—the commemoration kut for General Ch'oe Yōng. Other texts describe the mansin's abilities and successes in healing. Thus the website tries to establish an image of the mansin as a well-read, educated professional, rather than a hysterical spiritual mediator, as the prevailing prejudiced stereotype portrays them.

In premodern Korea, mansin mainly rose to prestige and public recognition via word-of-mouth transmission of their rituals' success. In time, printed bulletins, newsletters, advertisements, and posters became the accepted ways to promote mansin services. Since the 1980s, the social status of mansin has also improved as they became part of the government intangible cultural preservation system.<sup>33</sup> In modern South Korea,

[s]cholars value shamans and their rituals as evidence of ancient and enduring national traditions, while the observers maintain their intellectual distance, as learned men and modern progressives, from the unlettered and superstitious-seeming women who maintain these practices in the twentieth century.<sup>34</sup>

Here, Laurel Kendall criticized scholars who continued to view mansin as unlettered when she conducted her fieldwork in the 1970s, a time when this social marker had ceased being relevant. In Korea of 2016, literacy rates were nearly 100 percent and large sections of South Korean society have shifted from an inherited social status to a merit-based cultural economy allowing more mobility. Mansin have been part of this march toward literacy not only as avid readers of literature and research about them, but also as authors of published books by respectable presses.<sup>35</sup> A famous Korean scholar informed me that I should not choose Sin Myōngi as an informant because her published books were proof that she was no longer considered a valuable source of musok knowledge. In his view, one could not be both a scholar and a mansin, and even her training with a prestigious mansin could not compensate for the fact that she chose to dedicate time and effort to writing a book, while she should have, according to him, focused solely on ritual and traditional practices.

The scholar's resentment toward Mansin Sin's efforts to gain scholarly recognition is symptomatic of the disdain with which mansin continue to be regarded in contemporary South Korea. As I discussed earlier, greater visibility in the media and government recognition have started to change this prejudice. However, the process is still ongoing. Mansin Sin is aware of this bias and addresses it on her website, where she writes,

I have been a mudang for better and for worse for twenty-four years and four months. Still, it seems that although religious leaders of the world relate to us with respect and pride . . . prejudice, and ignorance about the meaning of musok and [about the fact] that mudang work [in South Korea] still exists. Therefore, I hope that the website [chunbokhwa.com](http://chunbokhwa.com) can help us gain affirmation through explaining the meaning of musok and kut ritual particulars, and musok teacher-student relationships.<sup>36</sup>

By discussing her efforts to gain recognition online, the mansin positions her work as more than spiritual healing. She is also a social activist, working toward a community goal: to improve the public image of musok. It takes time to alter a public image, but the newly gained online agency of mansin, who actively seek to bring new audiences to their rituals and generate greater appreciation of their work, speeds this process.

Through the ages, mansin could become rich and influential by advising politicians and merchants on spiritual and practical matters, but they were still considered unworthy as spouses and neighbors because their behavior was considered immodest and required contact with supernatural entities that many Koreans perceived as terrifying. Mansin were also criticized by the government and press and persecuted by the police until the 1970s for disrupting the civil order with their noisy crowded rituals and for extracting large sums of money from their clients.<sup>37</sup> With this social climate, the agency of mansin was mostly limited to offering services to clients who sought professionals to handle spiritual rituals and divinations

for a fee, as they had done for hundreds of years. The price of a full day kut ritual in Seoul ranges from about \$2,000 to \$20,000, depending on the expertise and composition of the mansin team and musicians, the ritual's sponsor, and the expenses for food, decorations, and offerings. Maybe a third of the ritual's fee is earned by the lead mansin. Successful practitioners perform several times each month, but others suffice with less work and sometimes prefer not to perform for clients in order to hide their engagement in this stigmatized profession. I met mansin whose husbands did not know they had been initiated as spirit mediators, but most of my informants practiced in public and held many short private office consultations that were much cheaper than a full-scale ritual (office consultation costs around \$50–100 each). Some mansin had not completed their initiation and learning process and cannot perform kut. They suffice in renting small offices and offering short sessions of divination and blessings.

Affluent mansin spend large portions of their earnings on expensive ritual artifacts for their home shrines as well as on portable paraphernalia, often against the advice of their spouses and children. Mansin usually live in middle-class homes and drive practical cars rather than the black social status varieties used by South Korean executives and politicians.<sup>38</sup> Lately, this trend seems to be changing. In 2014, I started noticing that the more affluent mansin were driving black status cars. Still, most practitioners do not wish to attract attention to their affluence because they realize the stigma of mansin as charlatans and exploiters of suffering people.<sup>39</sup>

Since the late 1980s, the South Korean government has attempted to preserve kut as part of the Intangible National Asset System. This program grants mansin the title of *ingan munhwajae* (living cultural asset)—living cultural assets of a cultural heritage such as the kut ritual—and pays a modest monthly stipend for performing and teaching a ritual which has been officially recognized. Living cultural assets are expected to perform ritual texts prepared by government-hired scholars, mostly men.<sup>40</sup> Female practitioners are not meant to produce, create, or alter rituals. Rather, they are expected to transmit texts produced by men, which are to some extent based on original performances by other female mansin. Thus, official recognition of the vernacular oral tradition has transformed the mansin's performance into a male-approved script.

However, the Internet has changed this asymmetrical power and its tensions related to gender, hegemony, and religion. Mansin have managed to seize control and generate positive publicity and a positive image through social media. The Internet has enabled them to become professionally active beyond ritual events and within the mainstream digital media that is so prominent in contemporary South Korea. Official nominations and academic publications regarding mansin are based on the opinions of government-appointed scholars. Dependence on male intellectuals to achieve public exposure and legitimacy has decreased in the age of the Internet because educated mansin are often well equipped to control their own websites. Commercial relationships with technology providers have

replaced the need to negotiate with male scholars who might turn up their noses at their mansin informants. Most Internet production companies in Korea are still male dominated. The new knowledge is kept along traditional gender lines, but affluent mansin have considerable leverage when they become clients of such providers. In this novel situation, mansin have real opportunities to practice agency. Power has now shifted into their hands and largely depends on personal and financial capabilities. Mansin, who controlled various political and decision-making processes even in premodern times, have acquired new methods of control and power through these innovative technological opportunities.

Mansin use the Internet to promote their businesses and access wider audiences. Their websites often list public performances and official awards, such as Intangible Cultural Asset nominations. Official recognition is considered proof of professional superiority. The celebrity National Shaman Kim Kūmhwa has many videos and photographs on her website along with explanations of her effort to preserve the designated rituals. She has also shown a keen interest in promoting her religious and artistic performances in the media since the early stages of her career.<sup>41</sup> Mansin, even those without an official title, often scan newspaper articles about themselves and upload them into their websites as proof of social recognition. They also provide links to television appearances in talk shows. The most popular time to interview mansin on television shows is before the New Year, when it is customary in South Korea to seek divination and advice in order to improve one's luck in the New Year.

As early as the mid-1990s, some famous and successful practitioners already had their own individually designed websites, whereas less affluent mansin ignored this medium at first and later sufficed with advertising their services on musok portals or presenting amateur videos of their rituals on YouTube, Naver, and other local free blog and video uploading platforms. Mansin present themselves in short texts and video clips showing kut performances where they discuss their beliefs, initiations, and successes as healers.<sup>42</sup> Some video clips are evidently amateur productions prepared with modest technology. The free Internet platforms allow mansin who are not *k'ūn mudang* (star shamans, literally big shamans) easy promotion and access to many potential clients. Financial success, personal tastes, and knowledge of digital media are key factors in choosing Internet platforms and the scale of online activity. This innovative communication tool has been adopted by mansin of different ages and levels of success.

### CHANGING AGENCIES IN THE PRODUCTION OF MUSOK-RELATED MEDIA

In the early 1990s, anthropologist Kim Chongho described the planning meeting for a documentary film in which the famous Mansin Kim Kūmhwa met with two television filmmakers. The mansin felt that the media professionals knew little

about musok and showed them a tape of an initiation kut and two books she had published. While watching the tape together, she offered points for improvement that she hoped the new documentary could achieve.<sup>43</sup> I highlight Mansin Kim Kūmhwa here as an exception to the norm which existed then. As the most established mansin in South Korea, she has been able to state her views even in front of (male) journalists and filmmakers and discuss her preferences in a conscientious manner.<sup>44</sup> The latest documentary about her, *Mansin* (Ten thousand spirits, 2014) was directed by Pak Ch'angyōng. In this docu-drama she narrates the dramatized life story of the elderly Mansin Kim. The film shows Mansin Kim Kūmhwa with tears in her eyes, watching the filming of her staged initiation kut event on the movie set. She is also interviewed along with her family members. Such scenes reinforce her support of the way her story was dramatized and filmed and explicitly express her agency and importance in the production.

However, as noted previously, Mansin Kim is an exception. In the past, most media exposure of musok has been controlled by the professionals, who filmed, edited, and added commentaries by scholars and experts as they saw fit. The mansin who were featured were considered vessels that carried ancient traditions into the present but their agency in the process has often been ignored. Even when Mansin Kim was featured in two recent short documentaries, *Knives Dancing* by National Geographic and *Korea Next* by the Discovery Channel, her voice was mainly heard while she chanted during a ritual as an English-speaking narrator explained what was happening.<sup>45</sup> She was not interviewed extensively like in the film *Mansin*. As noted, the gaps between mansin and professional filming and publication experts are due to discrepancies in education and experience with mass communication devices as well as deeply rooted gender hierarchies and media conventions.

In 2006, Mansin Yi Haegyōng (sometimes spelled in English as Lee Hae-kyung) informed the public directly what she thought about the media coverage of her performance in the documentary film *Sai esō* (Between), directed by Yi Ch'angjae. In contrast to the event discussed above when anthropologist Kim Chongho mediated the interaction between Mansin Kim and filmmakers in the 1990s, Mansin Yi launched an Internet blog while *Between* was being filmed. On that blog, she shared her experiences and thoughts about participating in the film.<sup>46</sup> She is very proud of this website and directed me to it at our first meeting. The blog used artistic black-and-white photographs from the film's shooting as a background for its texts. When Mansin Yi first began to write the blog it was produced with the help of the film crew. However, after the film's release, the mansin took control of website management. In the past eight years, this website has changed in form and structure and is now still a well-maintained, popular, artistically designed Internet venue, which complements Mansin Yi's activity on Twitter, Facebook, and her Naver blog. Calling herself shamanlee or using the Korean spelling of her name, she often uploads her thoughts and stories and posts photographs of various mountain pilgrimages that she undertakes, the progress



**Figure 1.** A black-and-white artistic photograph from the film set of *Between* serves as a background to Mansin Yi Haegyŏng’s (Lee Haegyung) narration on her blog that used to be hosted at [www.mansin.co.kr](http://www.mansin.co.kr). Accessed December 10, 2010. Site discontinued. Reprinted with permission from Yi Haegyŏng.



**Figure 2.** The opening page on Mansin Yi Haegyŏng’s current website contains a collage of photographs depicting the cover of the documentary film *Between*, advertisements of her public rituals, herself performing rituals, the mansin meeting with a foreign scholar, and printed publications about her, [www.mansin.co.kr](http://www.mansin.co.kr). Accessed December 27, 2015. Reprinted with permission from Yi Haegyŏng.



**Figure 3.** A professional close-up photograph of a traditional paper flower prepared by Mansin Yi Haegyong is featured on her blog, <http://blog.daum.net/shamanlee>. Accessed December 27, 2015. Reprinted with permission from Yi Haegyong.

of her new home shrine construction, and her public performances and other gatherings. She announces her annual large-scale ritual for her guardian spirits online and invites the public to participate. She hires programmers and designers for technical assistance and closely oversees their work.

Affluent mansin have considerable control over their representations in new media as they can choose the content and form for their virtual public sphere. The Internet has changed the previous domination of the media by professionals because it allows almost anyone to upload images, ideas, and texts onto a broadly visible platform. Even mansin who cannot afford their own website can use general platforms such as YouTube for online publicity.<sup>47</sup> Mansin use the Internet to contact potential clients and bridge cultural biases and geographical distances. One of the first musok portals—Mudang Dat Com—was established in 1999 and became a supplier of musok website construction.<sup>48</sup> Other agencies followed. Mansin organizations and musok research associations maintain portals offering information, advertisements, and news. Managers and administrators of such associations are mostly famous mansin, male scholars, relatives of mansin, and fans of specific performers. Mansin association portals enable easier communication and knowledge transfer between practitioners.

The Federation of Associations for the Respect of Beliefs sponsors an elaborate portal.<sup>49</sup> Upon reaching the page, one sees a photograph of layered mountains in shades of blue and gray symbolizing the hour of dusk. A yellow lotus flower rises like the sun. Inside the yellow shape is the Chinese ideogram *kyŏng* 敬, which

means to venerate. The Korean text below the sun explains that the website belongs to the three hundred thousand musok practitioners of South Korea. One click on the screen takes the visitor to an opening page with a top banner photograph of countless people worshipping on a rocky shore. The banner quickly disappears and is replaced by a photograph of some seventy mansin clad in kut attire. Vertical banners in the background suggest a festival. Below this image are links to upcoming events, photo galleries, definitions of musok, the organization's structure, and a bulletin board with advertisements of rental shrines and for individual mansin practitioners. A practical link on this portal features an interactive map of South Korea. Clicking a region brings contact information for mansin in that area. It costs little to be included in the list and even novice mansin can afford such promotion. The portal indicates the professionalization of musok and increasing education of mansin who can read and use it easily.

In the musok portals, communication is not personal but consists of invitations to events and promotions by providers, such as rental shrines and artifact stores. Still, these portals allow communication between unacquainted mansin, creating a broad musok community that did not exist before this virtual space mediated between them. Mansin who surf musok portals comprise a large interest group. They can read about other performers, view artifacts they might not otherwise have seen, and absorb the depiction of musok presented by the organizations and producers of relevant portals. Through the Internet, which allows textual representations of mutual interest, mansin have managed to establish an imagined community, whose geographically scattered members can connect through common symbols and imagery.<sup>50</sup> Together with commercialization, television, and other mass media products, the Internet has transformed this diverse local vernacular religion into a more homogenized cultural construction.

### **ONLINE REENACTMENT OF MUSOK SYMBOLISM**

By documenting their activities on the Internet, mansin can express their ideological and professional concerns to much wider audiences than just their ritual audiences. The Internet is far less supervised than television, film, and printed media and allows mansin a relaxed arena in which to express their opinions. Mansin have been symbols of subaltern consciousness because they speak the words of the spirits. The criticism that they state has been considered as stemming from a supernatural origin and not their own thoughts. Reenactment of social criticism in kut rituals was a part of the symbolic roles of mansin and their imagery in the mass public protests of the 1980s. The South Korean dictatorship at that time was criticized by the dramatization of the protesters who were killed by the police. The actors used artifacts laden with musok symbolism and reenacted a ritualized possession trance to symbolize the mediation of the intentions of the spirits of the

dead protesters.<sup>51</sup> The power of the Internet with its high visibility and audiences which have spread across diverse geographical regions and countries enable mansin to reenact social criticism online and in this manner craft a new platform to maintain a norm that has been an established symbol of their spirit mediation practices.

Mansin Sō Kyōnguk publishes her opinions online about the link between body and spirit. She uses the Internet platform that she established and sponsored to empower her agenda. When presenting her personal life story, she criticizes modern medicine, as in the following narrative about the revelation of her shamanic quest published on her website, “When she was seventeen, she again became sick with an unknown disease. The doctor diagnosed it as ‘lovesickness.’ There was no reason for her to have such a sickness.” The story shows the limitation of modern medicine when a patient suffers from inexplicable symptoms. In Mansin Sō’s case, the illness was due to the supernatural intervention of spirits who wished her to become a mansin. A conventional doctor could not understand this way of seeing the world. The same narrative also appears in a colorful brochure that the mansin hands to participants in public rituals.<sup>52</sup> The Internet allows Mansin Sō access to a much larger audience because many people who have never visited her in person can read her perspectives by Googling relevant terms such as “mudang,” “*kwisin*” (spirits), or “mansin.” This preserves the symbolic meaning of the relationship between human beings and spirits and disseminates it through digital media.

Mansin Sō’s attitude to spiritual healing is evident from her website description of her practices and services. When she discusses the efficacy of traditional healing through writing she also expresses confidence in the gods’ assistance through trance rituals.

That person [Sō Kyōnguk] became an *excellent* musok practitioner. People who enjoy musok emphasize that “she must dig well into the core of things,” she is a person who “has original information about problems that are delivered from the dead [*kongsu*],” and who can heal a disease based on accurate examination. She searches thoroughly for the source of malaise and then pulls it from its roots.<sup>53</sup>

Internet-mediated musok representations, such as this excerpt from a mansin’s website, do not create new religious concepts but rather adapt old texts, perspectives, and activities to the new media. Therefore, the term “online religion,” which implies the creation of a new kind of belief system, does not necessarily apply to the case presented here. In her article, Seongnae Kim discusses practitioners who do not study the kut tradition and would rather engage in eclectic, new-age spiritualism. In discussing these practices, Kim refers to such practitioners as “Korean cyberspace mudangs as a type of neo-shaman.”<sup>54</sup> Practitioners like these have not established a new online religion, but rather their Internet activity is particularly central to their practice because they cannot perform full-scale rituals.

Mansin always had the option of not performing kut even before the Internet age; therefore, this is not a symbolic innovation but rather a shift in locale and medium. Musok representation online does not offer new deities or ritual forms, and its repertoire is very similar in form and practice to the pre-technological era. The same tendency for cultural features to persist through the Internet is also seen in other cultures and religions.<sup>55</sup> We might find symbolic innovation outside the musok community, when shamanic icons are used for advertisements and product branding. Such non-religious contexts offer new opportunities for altering the negative stigma of the practice.

Musok and its imagery started to appear in secular technological contexts in 1998. Then the LG Internet company harnessed mansin fame as fighters of evil influences by launching Cysha, a virtual cyber-shaman that would help fight viruses and unwanted pop-ups. Cysha was promoted as a child spirit that descended from the mountain to help people, in this case, in their efforts to eliminate viruses from their computers. The service included images of talismans that could be downloaded as screen savers. The project is described by Seongnae Kim, who recounts that it was quickly aborted due to public discomfort with using superstitious imagery to promote major corporate services.<sup>56</sup> This incident proves that despite the widespread phenomenon of online musok services, the general public, which often dichotomizes modernity with vernacular religion and musok with progress, was still not fully convinced; the movement toward change is still ongoing.

Another case of using musok imagery in secular computer-related activities is a beautiful advertisement produced by the Compaq computer company in 2006. Compaq produced a series of advertisements, each one featuring a different young, smartly clad, beautiful woman, including a model dressed as a mansin. The campaign presented women as professionals who use sophisticated technology. It featured the mansin not because musok is an established symbol of peace-making, healing, and problem solving, but because Compaq offers a professional tool for Korean women, and mansin is perceived as a female's occupation.

Such representation of mansin practice and profession boosts mansins' confidence in their lifestyle while it legitimizes their participation in South Korean society. Portraying mansin as beautiful and sophisticated in new contexts that were historically closer to the male and elite spheres of society strengthens the willingness of musok practitioners and followers to fight the negative prejudice they encounter and to continue espousing their unique religious perspectives. Aware as they are of the controversial and sometimes negative stereotypes of their trade, mansin selectively ensure that the ideas and images they post online will not be perceived as wild or disgusting. On Mansin Sö's website she only posts images that convey wealth aesthetics, traditional flair, professionalism, and harmony. There are no images of kut scenes showing a wild-eyed practitioner, animal sacrifice, or anything that might not seem respectable. However, such images and narratives do appear in the printed leaflets that Mansin Sö hands to

audiences in public kut. Autobiographical information that could repulse the occasional website visitor, for example, god sickness (*sinbyōng*), whose symptoms resemble insanity, are not mentioned online but are elaborated in the various versions of Mansin Sō's printed promotional material. A clear distinction is made between more general online audiences and those more committed audiences who attend rituals and may witness some of its less socially acceptable aspects. Mansin Sō is not shy about showing these aspects of her practice. She does not use a pseudonym or hide behind a mask. She just chooses to whom and where to show each aspect.

Like many contemporary mansin, Mansin Sō's real name appears in her printed and Internet material. In ethnographies of the 1970s and 1980s, authors mentioned the use of nicknames related to locations, life history, and professional expertise, instead of formal names.<sup>57</sup> This practice has diminished over time, and such names are mainly used in the mansins' closest social circles.<sup>58</sup> They are absent from printed and Internet representations. Mansin introduce themselves using their real name and are addressed by their real names by their clients in line with the common professional discourse in South Korea's service and performance sectors. Interestingly, whereas mansin use their real names on websites and blogs, clients asking questions on these websites often use aliases, for example, Lonely Girl, Worried Mother, or Desperate Jobless. Thus clients prefer the anonymity of the Internet when seeking spiritual guidance. If they wish to discuss private matters with the mansin online there is usually a special place where you can log into a private clients' space. The Internet allows them to engage with musok discreetly, which is important since for many people consulting a mansin is a highly emotional experience (where they discuss personal problems), and the anonymous virtual sphere of the Internet makes it easier.

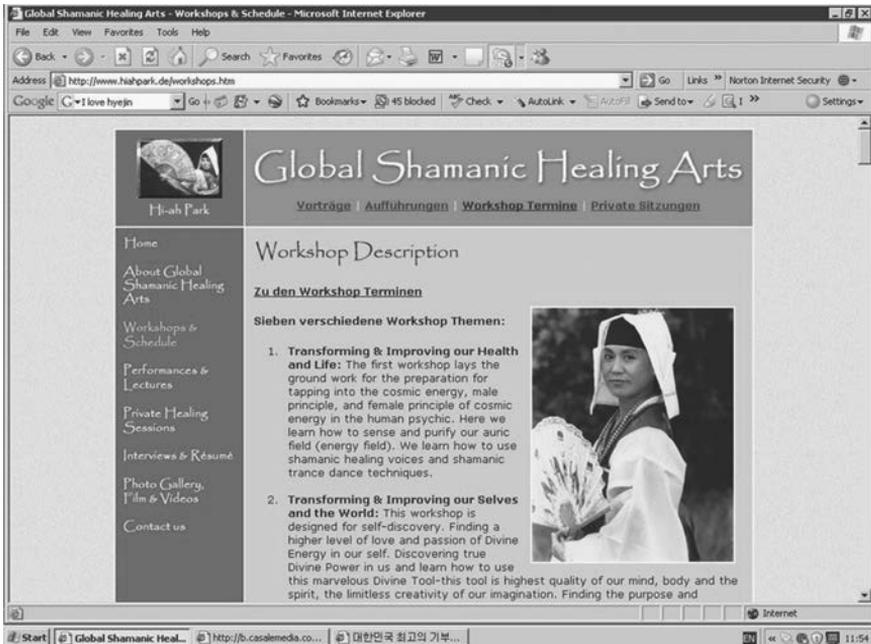
Echoing Baudrillard, Rob Shields argued that the risk of computer mediation is that "the virtual comes to be seen as more real than the real."<sup>59</sup> Given its abundance of information and opportunities and its broad use by people of various nationalities, languages, ages, and socioeconomic statuses, it is understandable that the Internet has produced new doubts and predictions about the future of culture, society, and especially non-mediated personal communication. However, in the case of musok, the only things that have relocated to new media through sophisticated virtual interactions are simple consultation activities and generic talisman sales. Consumers of Internet divination and *pujōk* charms expect the practitioner to also exist in reality and practice off screen as well. Most spiritual consultations that start out as website communication with mansin are eventually dealt with offline, when the online consultant decides that a real meeting is needed.

In a recent sample of sixth months' worth of correspondence on Mansin Yi Hae-gyōng's question-and-answer section of her blog, more than half the questions related to fixing an appointment to see Mansin Yi. Blog visitors wrote that they found her blog very interesting and wished to consult her about their personal problems; clients complained that her address had changed and that they could

not find her office; and apprentices wrote to say that her phone line had been busy, and they could not reach her easily. Mansin Yi addressed some of the posts directly but in other cases she wrote a general answer saying she was very busy lately and suggested trying to contact her by phone to set up a meeting. We thus see that much of the traffic through Mansin Yi's website involved making a face-to-face appointment, showing that although technology has added new forms of musok practice, it has not reduced the need for offline spiritual consultations.

## INTERNATIONAL PROMOTION OF MUSOK THROUGH THE INTERNET

Several mansin have broadened their activities to other countries with the aid of Internet advertising. Mansin Hiah Pak's webpage, Global Shamanic Healing Arts, contains information in English and German about her performances and workshops in Europe and America.<sup>60</sup> Until recently, there was no information in



**Figure 4.** The Global Shamanic Healing website by Mansin Hiah Park, who lives and works in Germany. The screen capture is from the old website [www.hiahpark.de](http://www.hiahpark.de). Accessed December 12, 2010. Site discontinued. Her new website address is [www.hiahpark.com](http://www.hiahpark.com). Reprinted with permission from Hiah Park.

Korean since she lives in Europe and targets international audiences.<sup>61</sup> The performances of Mansin Park, who was initiated in Korea by Mansin Kim Kūmhwa, include Western elements, such as modern dance and new-age concepts.<sup>62</sup> Her website asserts that Korean mansin “express our true self . . . by connecting body, mind, and soul into joyous worship of a Higher Power (whom you can name as Spirit, God, Goddess, Life Energy, Almighty) then ultimately, return to the Self.” This discourse resembles the new-age terminology of other practices like yoga and Buddhist meditation, and demonstrates how it has become easier to recontextualize musok within a cross-cultural spiritual search thanks to Internet platforms.

Mansin Sin Myōngi’s website has a complete Japanese-language version because her son was a graduate student in Japan and she traveled there often to visit him and to perform for third- and fourth-generation Japanese Korean immigrants who no longer read Korean. Her website not only mediates between Mansin Sin and her potential Japanese Korean clients, but also between Korean tradition and a non-Korean-speaking imagined community of musok practitioners and clients. This community is imagined because mansin clients living in Japan cannot communicate directly with the Korean-speaking mansin and her other clients. The idea of community is related to a shared ideology or vernacular religion, without the ability to connect in other communication aspects. It allows the Korean minority in Japan to maintain contact with their ancestral identity. Through the Internet, Mansin Sin functions socially as a facilitator of ethnic identity and incorporates her work into processes of historical consciousness formation. In a late-modern globalizing world, individuals can choose how to represent themselves and to create new and complex identities.<sup>63</sup> Mansin Park and Mansin Sin can target audiences of other nationalities with the help of the Internet and become not only mediators between humans and spirits but also act as bridges between cultural aspects of South Korea and other world cultures. Their identity as international cultural figures has been enabled through their Internet activity.

Intercultural communication encounters also take place within South Korea and are increasingly common as the number of foreign workers and tourists grow. Only a few kut events are performed with the main intention of attracting foreign tourists and residents, and few mansin speak foreign languages, which would allow them to hold divination rituals for foreigners. However, several public kut are held annually in places that attract foreigners. For example, in October 2013, two rituals were held in Insadong led by Mansin Kim Namsun. Other rituals are performed at the National Folk Museum and Namsan Folk Village. There may be interactions with non-Koreans during these events, in which mansin, who rarely speak foreign languages, are mediated by a Korean-speaking foreigner or a Korean who speaks English. In other cases, tourists simply enjoy the dance and music but do not understand the chants or learn about musok. The exotic qualities of kut make it an interesting topic, and a certain amount of information about it has been disseminated in English through magazines, books, and lectures.

Mansin Yi Haegyöng was featured in an article in the English magazine *Seoul* by Robert Koehler, a translator, blogger, and the magazine editor. The magazine readership consists mainly of foreigners living in South Korea. Koehler also publicized a public kut that Mansin Yi performed in 2007, which allowed interested foreigners to participate. In this article in *Seoul*, which referred to Mansin Yi as “Woodstock Mansin” because of her love of Western rock music, Mansin Yi also advocates the need to make musok more accessible to the young generation of Koreans by updating archaic terminology and texts.<sup>64</sup> Mansin Yi has acquaintances among the Korean-speaking foreigners living in Seoul and has been invited to perform at international events as a representative of traditional Korean arts. For example, on August 26, 2007, she performed a ritual dance for participants of the international CORLAS head and neck surgery professionals annual meeting at the Lotte Hotel, Seoul, where she distributed charms for blessings to audience members. The event was described on the scientific association’s website thus bringing mansin also to the attention of those who did not attend her performance.<sup>65</sup> Although mansin performances have long been organized for attendees of scientific conferences and sporting events, international visibility of musok has increased due to the Internet.

Today blogs by tourists, resident English teachers, and other foreigners visiting and living in South Korea form an important source of kut photographs and travel accounts of encounters with mansin. In these accounts, authors often emphasize the exotic and spiritual aspects of the practice and their personal impressions. Mimsie Lander wrote,

Upon entering the main gate of *Inwangsan*, I immediately felt as if I were walking into a distant, spiritual world, far from the chaos of Seoul. . . . I felt fortunate enough to be there when a rite was being held. I didn’t want to come across as being disrespectful, so I stayed put and observed from the outside.<sup>66</sup>

Sometimes, the occasional non-Korean kut visitor is surprised to find that the ritual and its practitioners are not as other worldly as they expected, as Ogedei writes,

Most amusing was at one point the shaman was text-messaging in the middle the ritual! She also had a way of weaving her remarks at the other people into her ritual [by] chanting as if they were part of the prayer. When the camera people got in her way, she was yelling at them to get out, and when she was reading names written on ceremonial paper, she complained about how small the writing was. This was all done in a manner that sounded as if she was still chanting. At two points in the ritual, the shaman led a traditional community song and dance with the senior *haenyeo* [women divers of Cheju Island] taking part. Unlike a regular quiet religious ceremony, the shaman ritual was very much a community-oriented affair.<sup>67</sup>

Other authors preferred to write an introduction to the practice, including references to academic writings.<sup>68</sup> These sources are read by English speakers in Korea and abroad and increase people's knowledge of topics related to musok.

### **THE INTERNET AND SHIFTING AGENCIES IN A CHANGING SOCIAL ORDER**

Musok's acceptance as part of postindustrial South Korean culture can be seen in new kinds of rituals sponsored by the government and large companies. An established norm reflecting such change is inviting mansin to perform kut for the success of a new financial venture such as the opening of a new mall or the inauguration of a new office building. The South Korean government also uses new media to raise awareness of musok in an attempt to preserve South Korea's unique traditions. However, this does not mean that the government accepts the religious concepts and ideologies that are the basic components of musok, such as spirituality, possession, and polytheism. It is clear from the Cultural Properties Preservation Office website that the government wishes to preserve aesthetic forms rather than religious and spiritual practices. According to the website, "Because the songs and dances performed during the exorcism have high artistic as well as historic values, the art of exorcism is designated as an important intangible cultural asset."<sup>69</sup> The policy of ignoring religious activities that could be perceived as primitive, superstitious, or intimidating is consistent with the official attitude expressed in printed tour guides and brochures, showing once more that the Internet does not offer new perceptions of musok compared to older kinds of media. Thus, both mansin and the government upload those parts of musok that serve their goals.

The Internet enables mansin to reach audiences that do not participate in musok and therefore they use adapted texts like the ones mentioned above along with beautiful images to present this spiritual activity. Mansin and musok association websites often outshine government websites in sophistication, beauty, complexity, and amount of traffic. Unlike government websites, which present information in formal texts with small photographs, musok portals and mansin websites present beautiful large photographs, videos, and personal statements by mansin. Private musok websites depict a living tradition rather than an attempt to petrify it as a museum item to be explained by experts.<sup>70</sup> Unlike static informative government representations of musok, private and commercial interactive Internet representations are updated often and enable virtual communication. Consequently, mansin websites often lead their audiences to intense offline involvement in the musok scene, as the sponsoring mansin intended.

In premodern and early-modern Korea, government officials were the only social strata expected to demonstrate sophistication and refinement. Improved overall educational and literacy opportunities have given mansin greater access to

respectable social circles and activities. The Internet has also sped the process of mansin becoming knowledgeable and educated; therefore, instead of practitioners mainly serving as the passive conveyors of tradition and subject matter for scholarly research and fame, mansin have become active participants in constructing their own images. Mansin use scholarly research for their own fame creation by citing scientific findings on their websites. These citations are often uploaded in order to legitimize the practitioner's authenticity and performance skills. Realizing that it is not enough to simply have ritual efficacy in a competitive, media-saturated society, successful mansin actively seek to attract scholars and mass media professionals to their kut. This trend is not new to the twenty-first century (it has been discussed in ethnographies since the 1980s, e.g., by Choi Chungmoo) and has been growing ever since.<sup>71</sup> All the same, I found that many South Koreans, especially Christians, were surprised to learn that mansin invite foreign scholars to their private rituals. For those outside musok circles, musok is a secret cult that should be practiced privately. Not all South Koreans engage in musok practices and some are exposed to it only through the mass media and online presentations.

Since the late 1990s, scholars and community leaders have voiced concern that the Internet will snuff out face-to-face communication leaving a virtual world which will eventuate in anti-social, detached, alienated, and desolated individuals.<sup>72</sup> South Korea's online musok activity shows these concerns to be unfounded. Mansin websites and musok portals leave much room for an optimistic view of the Internet—as a vehicle for creating larger social networks, greater communication in long distance relationships, loci of communication between geographically diverse communities, online support groups, and in building social capital through online activities.<sup>73</sup> Online musok activity helps mansin and their followers to create a sense of community and shared destiny that is often difficult to establish under urban conditions. However, I have not witnessed any cases of exorcism without face-to-face engagement of practitioners, objects, and clients. Unlike Seongnae Kim's 2003 prediction that a large portion of musok activity will move to the virtual sphere, in 2015 I find that most practices are still held in tangible real-life venues.<sup>74</sup> As many have already discussed, since the 1970s—and as I describe in detail elsewhere—the venues have changed mostly to rental shrines.<sup>75</sup>

Through the Internet, mansin have achieved increased agency and greater opportunities to engage in musok for clients. In contemporary South Korea being famous is important, and the Internet has become a space where a new type of fame can be created and maintained. Mansin have adapted to this new cultural option quickly and incorporated technology-mediated communication as a venue for self-promotion of their spiritual practice. New media are serving to enhance social acceptance of vernacular spiritual practices in South Korean society.

Digital media and especially the Internet have introduced several new practices to musok. The most outstanding new features include fast and innovative methods

of communication between mansin and their clients, heightened visibility for mansin within South Korean society, the establishment of connections between mansin, and the bridging of distances and performance styles to create a community of musok supporters. The Internet has also helped to improve musok's public image, promoted public musok events, and broadened the clientele of mansin. The deep involvement of most mansin with new media allows electronically promoted musok to be considered an integral part of musok tradition although it is difficult to separate long-existing mechanisms such as word-of-mouth reputations from Internet-enhanced images and ideas. The locational and virtual modalities work alongside one another to enable musok to thrive in contemporary South Korea.

## NOTES

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1. Quoted text translations from Korean to English are mine.

2. Mansin are Korean traditional healers who use possession trances to communicate with spirits and gods. Other practitioners that perform similar rituals without possessions often practice *sesümmu* (hereditary musok ritual masters) but are not believed to embody supernatural entities. Scholars have debated the terminology, as in Taegon Kim's work, "Definition of Korean Shamanism," 9–44. See also Yi Tuhyön, *Han'guk musok kwa yönhui* [Korean shamanism and theatricality]; Yang Chongsüng, "Kangsinmu sesümmu yuhyöngnone ttarün musok yöngu kömt'o" [A discourse of Korean shamanism studies examining possessed shamans and hereditary shamans], 9–34; Laurel Kendall, *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits*; and Ch'oe Kilsöng, *Han'guk musongon* [About Korean shamanism].

3. Choi Chungmoo, "Nami, Ch'ae, and Oksun: Superstar Shamans in Korea," 5.

4. Laurel Kendall, *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits*.

5. Choi Chungmoo, "Nami, Ch'ae, and Oksun."

6. Dalyong Jin, *Korea's Online Gaming Empire*.

7. Rob Shields, *Cultures of Internet*, 7.

8. See Richard Schechner, "Restoration of Behaviour," 2–45.

9. See Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea*, 12–13.

10. See descriptions of kut rituals in Ch'oe Kilsong, *Han'guk musok ui yŏn'gu* [Research of Korean shamanism]; and Laurel Kendall, *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits*; and Antonetta Lucia Bruno, *The Gate of Words*.

11. For a discussion of gender in South Korea's vernacular religions, see Ch'oe Kilsong, "Male and Female in Korean Folk Belief, 227–33. For more on the status of women in modern South Korea, see Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi, eds., *Dangerous Women*.

12. This trend of asking for scholars' "guidance" was common from the 1970s according to Laurel Kendall, *Shamans, Nostalgias, and the IMF*, 15–16.

13. Local and foreign scholars have often interpreted such findings in contradictory manners as shown in Hyung-il Pai, *Constructing "Korean" Origins*.

14. Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea, Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity "Cheju Shamanism as an Item of Intangible Culture Heritage Preservation," accessed August 20, 2013, [http://jikimi.cha.go.kr/english/world\\_heritage\\_new/intangible\\_treasure\\_07.jsp?mc=EN\\_04\\_02](http://jikimi.cha.go.kr/english/world_heritage_new/intangible_treasure_07.jsp?mc=EN_04_02). Interestingly, in a recent return to this website I noticed that the title and text have changed and that now the ritual is discussed in the present tense, as an existing practice. The role of the cultural preservation system in the survival of this practice is now mentioned only briefly.

15. Liora Sarfati, "Objects of Worship"; and Sanghun Choe, "In the Age of the Internet, Korean Shamans Regain Popularity."

16. Kwangkyo Lee, *Korean Traditional Culture*, 222.

17. Laurel Kendall, "Who Speaks for Korean Shamans When Shamans Speak of the Nation?," 55–72.

18. Internet and personality is discussed in Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen*. A pioneer ethnography of Internet culture in Trinidad is the text by Daniel Miller and Don Slater, *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach*. Work discussing Christian websites and forums includes Robert Glen Howard, "A Theory of Vernacular Rhetoric," 172–88; and Robert Glen Howard, *Digital Jesus*.

19. Misu Na, "The Home Computer in Korea," 291–307.

20. Chris Taylor, "The Future Is in South Korea."

21. A similar observation of Mansin Kim Kūmhwa's role in the establishment of the expectations of musok practitioners was elaborated in the dissertation "Divining Capital" by David J. Kim.

22. A detailed description of such meetings is presented in Dong-kyu Kim's dissertation, "Looping Effects between Images and Realities," 172–89.

23. Seongnae Kim, "Korean Shamanic Heritage in Cyber Culture"; and David J. Kim, "Divining Capital."

24. Sin Myōnggi, *Mudang naeryōk* [A shaman's life story].

25. Sin Myōnggi, *Myōngsōng hwanghu sinp'il pujōk* [Magical talismans of the empress].

26. Interview with Mansin Sin, October 25, 2007.

27. Nancy Abelmann discusses several personal narratives of women who experienced mobility-related events in their life, in Nancy Abelmann, *The Melodrama of Mobility*.

28. Contemporary changes in agency and gender hierarchies have also occurred in Confucian ancestors' rites in Korea as shown in Roger L Janelli and Dawnhee Yim, "Ancestor Rites and Capitalist Industrialization in a South Korean Village," 298–328.

29. Tatiana M. Simbirtseva, "Queen Min of Korea: Coming to Power."

30. Kim Ŭnjŏng, *Hanguk ũi mubok* [Shamanic outfits of Korea].

31. Mansin Sŏ Kyŏnguk, Ch'ŏghyangsa [The temple of the noble fragrance], [www.mudang.co.kr](http://www.mudang.co.kr). The website has undergone several changes recently, and some of the images described here, which were shown there since 2005, have been replaced by newer ones.

32. For descriptions of musok deities and their corresponding ritual outfits, see Liora Sarfati, "Objects of Worship."

33. Two dissertations on the topic are Choi Chungmoo, "The Competence of Korean Shamans as Performers of Folklore"; and Jongsung Yang (Yang Chongsŭng), "Folklore and Cultural Politics in Korea."

34. Laurel Kendall, "The Cultural Politics of 'Superstition' in the Korean Shaman World," 33.

35. See, for example, the book of the first designated Intangible Heritage living cultural asset, Kim Kŭmhwa, *Kim Kŭmhwa ũi mugajip: Komunatta e mansin, hŭina paeksong ũi norae* [Kim Kŭmhwa shamanic texts and songs] or the book by Sin Myŏnggi, *Mudang naeryŏk*.

36. Mansin Sin's website address was first [www.chunbokhwa.net](http://www.chunbokhwa.net), and then she changed servers and it became [www.chunbokhwa.com](http://www.chunbokhwa.com).

37. Several examples can be found in Chongho Kim, *Korean Shamanism*; Laurel Kendall, *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits*, 31–35; and Kyoim Yun, "A Rite of Modernization."

38. Laura Nelson discusses the role of cars as social status markers in South Korea in her book *Measured Excess*.

39. As shown by Kyoim Yun, "A Rite of Modernization."

40. Jongsung Yang, "Korean Cultural Property Protection Law with Regard to Korean Intangible Heritage," 180–88.

41. Mansin Kim's early engagement with media is described by Chungmoo Choi in "Nami, Ch'ae, and Oksun: Superstar Shamans in Korea." A description of a highly media-covered ritual for the anniversary of the famous video artist Nam June Paik in 2007 is analyzed in Mina Cheon, *Shamanism + Cyberspace*. The mansin herself published several monographs. See Kim Kŭmhwa's website, accessed July 20, 2014, [www.gukmu.com](http://www.gukmu.com).

42. One such productive YouTube user who represents her work in these manners is Cho Mihŭi. See, for example, the video *Shaman of Korea*, accessed August 20, 2013, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=k\\_QeO29-MBE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_QeO29-MBE).

43. Chongho Kim, *Korean Shamanism*, 211–15.

44. See also David J. Kim, "Divining Capital."

45. The National Geographic film *Knife Dancing* was produced in 2005. *Knife Dancing*, accessed December 15, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jgbYESmeJo>. The Discovery Channel's documentary *Korea Next: Shaman of the Sea* was directed by Han Sunhee and produced in 2012. Scenes are available on YouTube. See Korea Next "Shaman," accessed August 20, 2013, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=2L1aCTJndmk&list=UUrfw7FQym4R8gAYM5UG4J5w&index=5](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2L1aCTJndmk&list=UUrfw7FQym4R8gAYM5UG4J5w&index=5) for examples.

46. The film *Sai esŏ* (Between) by director Yi Ch'angjae was produced in 2006 and distributed by Seoul's DK Media. Mansin Yi began writing her blog during the film's production. *Hwanghaedo mansin Yi Hae-gyŏng* (blog), accessed July 20, 2014, [www.mansin.co.kr](http://www.mansin.co.kr) has changed very much since then and is now a website. She has a blog: *Han'namdong*

*mansin*, accessed July 26, 2014, <http://blog.daum.net/shamanlee/13722010> and a Twitter account. Beautiful photographs of her are also featured on the blog *Photoanthropos* by Dirk Schlottmann, accessed July 20, 2014, [www.photoanthropos.com/portfolio-ii/lee-hae-kyeong/korean-shaman-lee-hae-kyeong-%EC%9D%B4%ED%95%B4%EA%B2%BD/](http://www.photoanthropos.com/portfolio-ii/lee-hae-kyeong/korean-shaman-lee-hae-kyeong-%EC%9D%B4%ED%95%B4%EA%B2%BD/).

47. For example, see Mihūi Cho, *Shaman of Korea*.

48. Mudang Dat Com is now represented on the website portal Neomudang, accessed July 25, 2014, <http://www.neomudang.com>.

49. That mansin association website is maintained under the name Kyungsin, accessed July 20, 2014, [www.kyungsin.co.kr/](http://www.kyungsin.co.kr/).

50. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

51. Timothy Tangherlini, "Shamans, Students, and the State," 126–47.

52. Jongsung Yang, *Gut (Kut—Shamanic Ritual)*, 7.

53. See the Yang Sō Kyōnguk website Ch'oōghyangsa, accessed July 30, 2013, [www.mudang.co.kr](http://www.mudang.co.kr).

54. Seongnae Kim, "Korean Shamanic Heritage in Cyber Culture," 10.

55. For example, see Daniel Miller and Don Slater, *The Internet*.

56. Seongnae Kim, "Korean Shamanic Heritage in Cyber Culture."

57. Laurel Kendall, *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits*, xi–xii; and Youngsook Kim Harvey, *Six Korean Women*, 40 and 86.

58. The tendency to use full names has already been noted by Laurel Kendall in "Korean Shamans and the Spirits of Capitalism," 523n3.

59. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, as discussed in Rob Shields, *Cultures of Internet*, 9.

60. Hiah Park's website Global Shamanic Healing, accessed July 20, 2014, <http://www.hiahpark.com>.

61. Hiah Park, personal e-mail communication with the author in November 2007.

62. "New-age" is a broadly debated term. I use it here as a reference to eclectic practices based on terminology and ideology of spiritual connectedness with nature and the self. For a detailed discussion of the term "new-age" and its various definitions and meanings, see Mariana Ruah-Midbar, "The New Age Culture in Israel."

63. Phil Agre, "Life after Cyberspace," 3–5.

64. Robert Koehler, "A Woodstock *Mudang* in a 21st-Century World," 36–44.

65. Collegium Oto-Rhino-Laryngologicum Amicitiae Sacrum (CORLAS), accessed August 20, 2013, site discontinued, [www.corlas.org/Annual%20report%202007\\_painover%20sio1.doc](http://www.corlas.org/Annual%20report%202007_painover%20sio1.doc). By now, this online news item is unavailable, but a report of the event is still online, mentioning the performance of Mansin Yi. See CORLAS, accessed November 5, 2015, [//www.corlas.org/wp-content/pdf/annual\\_report2007.pdf](http://www.corlas.org/wp-content/pdf/annual_report2007.pdf).

66. Mimsie Ladner's blog post from 2011, "Sunshine and Shamanism," *Seoul Searching* (blog), accessed March 16, 2015, [www.myseoulsearching.com/2011/03/sunshine-and-shamanism.html](http://www.myseoulsearching.com/2011/03/sunshine-and-shamanism.html).

67. Ogedei's blog post from 2008, "An Authentic Korean Shaman Ritual," *Teach English in Asia* (blog), accessed March 16, 2015, site discontinued, [www.teachenglishinasia.net/blogs/ogedei/authentic-korean-shaman-ritual](http://www.teachenglishinasia.net/blogs/ogedei/authentic-korean-shaman-ritual).

68. For example, Ethlenn's blog post from 2012, *Korean Shamanism* (blog), accessed March 16, 2015, <http://ethlenn.blogspot.co.il/2012/11/korean-shamanism.html>; and a Tumblr post from 2014, "Shamanism in Modern Korea Blog," accessed March 16, 2015, site discontinued, <https://www.tumblr.com/search/korean%20shaman>.

69. Cultural Properties Administration, "Shamanic Arts' Preservation," accessed March 16, 2012, site discontinued, [http://www.ocp.go.kr:9000/ne\\_dasencgi/full.cgi?v\\_kw\\_str=EXORCISM&v\\_db\\_query=A1%3a00&v\\_db=2&v\\_doc\\_no=00003042&v\\_dblist=2&v\\_start\\_num=1&v\\_disp\\_type=4](http://www.ocp.go.kr:9000/ne_dasencgi/full.cgi?v_kw_str=EXORCISM&v_db_query=A1%3a00&v_db=2&v_doc_no=00003042&v_dblist=2&v_start_num=1&v_disp_type=4).

70. Most living traditions undergo changes to fit the changing circumstances in which they function. This point has been argued by many, for example, Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin, "Tradition, Genuine or Spurious?," 273–90.

71. Chungmoo Choi, "Nami, Ch'ae, and Oksun: Superstar Shamans in Korea."

72. Richard E. Kraut et al., "Internet Paradox," 1017–32; and Norman H. Nie, "Sociality, Interpersonal Relations, and the Internet," 420–35.

73. John Bargh and Katelyn McKenna, "The Internet and Social Life," 573–90; and Ulf Hannerz, "Transnational Research," 235–56.

74. Seongnae Kim, "Korean Shamanic Heritage in Cyber Culture."

75. Laurel Kendall, "Korean Shamans and the Spirits of Capitalism," 512–52; and Liora Sarfati, "Objects of Worship."

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