WHY DO KOREAN CLIENTS SPONSOR SHAMANIC HEALING RITUALS?

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Abstract. Various scholars have suggested that the main function of Korean shamanic rituals is the change of the participants' feelings. I elaborate what these scholars potentially mean by "function", challenge what I take to be their core claim, and argue that at least in the case of Korean shamanic *healing* rituals their sponsorship has rather to be explained based on the clients' ostensible motivational and belief states. Korean clients sponsor such rituals because they want their beloved ones to be healed and because they believe that the shamanic ritual can potentially accomplish such healing. I underpin this thesis by two representative actual Korean shamanic healing rituals.

Why do people pay shamans to perform rituals for them? There is no exclusive answer to this question. Not only do different clients have different reasons for engaging in shamanic rituals, but also one and the same client may have several reasons for doing so. Nevertheless, many scholars have tried to come up with a general account of the nature of rituals and declared that the main function of shamanic rituals is to transform the feelings of the participants (Lévi-Strauss 1963a and 1963b; Scheff 1977; S. N. Kim 1989: 276-278; Rhi 1993: 259-261; Bruno 2002; Walraven 2009: 75). But do clients of shamans sponsor shamanic rituals primarily in order to change their feelings? I argue that at least in the case of South Korean shamanic *healing* rituals, they do not. I claim that in the case of Korean shamanic healing rituals, the clients' sponsorship is explained by their desire to cure their beloved ones, and the belief that the shamanic ritual can potentially accomplish such cure. This claim constitutes the core claim of this paper and is called the *Instrumental Thesis* here.

Before I introduce the Instrumental Thesis I will define what I mean by "ritual", and briefly describe what a Korean *kut* is. Then I suggest why Korean clients make use of the services of shamans, and corroborate my Instrumen-

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tal Thesis by means of two actual Korean shamanic rituals. In the following section, I present an alternative explanation of the sponsorship of shamanic rituals. As mentioned above, various scholars have suggested that the main function of Korean shamanic rituals is the change of the participating clients' feelings. These scholars do not clarify what they mean by "function" and how function is related to the clients' reasons. I elaborate on two possible interpretations of "function" and make explicit what I take to be the core claim of these scholars, namely that (Korean) shaman clients sponsor rituals because they want, consciously or unconsciously, their own feelings and/or attitudes to be changed for the better. This claim is called the *Transformation Thesis*. I continue by explaining why the Instrumental Thesis and the Transformation Thesis are incompatible, and why we have no reason to assume that some inconspicuous benefits rather than the clients' ostensible goals are what explains why they engage in shamanic healing rituals. At the end, I respond to potential objections to the Instrumental Thesis. In particular, I defend that we are justified in ascribing the relevant desires and means-end beliefs to the shaman clients in my two examples.

RITUAL AND KUT

Since the authors cited above often speak of the function of *rituals*, I will first define how I use "ritual", and expose in what way Korean *kut* can be classified as a ritual. Based on Catherine M. Bell's and Stanley J. Tambiah's definitions, I will take a ritual to be an act or series of acts which are performed regularly and in a precise manner, which are considered to be identical to or at least in accordance with cultural precedents, and in which formal expressions are used as well as symbols that represent something holy.[1] What are examples of rituals? Even though the boundary between ritual and non-ritual is blurry and there are borderline cases whose status is contested, scholars seem to agree that church services, baptism, weddings, funerals, animal sacrifices, healing rituals, rain dances, and rites of passage constitute paradigm cases

1 For a more elaborate discussion of defining rituals see Bell (1997:138-169) and Tambiah (2003: 230-232).

of rituals.[2] Besides these, greetings, placing flowers on a grave, kneeling to pray, sports events, military parades, and many other activities have been described as rituals or "ritual-like" (Bell 1997: 138-139; Clack 1999: 109).

A Korean *kut* can be called a ritual, since a *kut* typically exhibits all the features mentioned in the definition above. Broadly speaking, a *kut* consists in formalized actions that are mindfully performed, are performed regularly[3], appeal to some tradition[4], and involve the invocation of supernatural, holy spirits. Of course, this account of what a *kut* consists in is idealized, and precludes neither that Korean shamanic rituals are personalized in order to fit the needs of the clients (Walraven 2002: 94-96, 101; 2009: 58) nor that certain rules may be violated without rendering the ritual invalid (Bruno 2002: 84-90).[5] Accordingly, anthropologist Jane Atkinson emphasizes that we should not think of a shamanic ritual as a strict observance of prearranged rules, but rather as a flexible, creative interaction with spirits and clients (Atkinson 1989: 14-15).

An unabbreviated *kut* usually consists of twelve sessions in which twelve shamanic deities appear. Each session begins with the summoning of a particular shamanic deity. Once the *mudang*, i.e., the shaman[6] gets possessed by

2 Bell and Tambiah do not provide a common pool of paradigmatic cases though. For their considerations see Bell (1997: 93-94) and Tambiah (2003: 227).

3 Regular both in the sense of being performed often throughout the year and in the sense that one and the same client is prompted to hold (preventive) rituals on a regular basis. For instance, Chongho Kim quotes an informant who complains that the shaman who performs *kuts* for her asks people to hold a *kut* each time the shaman meets them, pointing out that something bad might happen if they neglect worshipping the spirits (Kim 2003: 120-121).

4 There is no *one* Korean tradition which prescribes how to perform a shamanic ritual, but various regional traditions.

5 For example, anthropologist Antonetta Lucia Bruno describes an initiation ritual which is accepted as valid even though it corresponds neither in its number nor in its structure to the "traditional" initiation ritual (Bruno 2002: 91ff.).

6 "*Mudang*" (or "*manshin*") is the Korean expression for shamans in central and northern South Korea. Some scholars distinguish up to four Korean shaman types (Howard 1998a: 5-6), but *mudang,* with their ability to tell fortunes by means of their divine power obtained through possession, have been the subject of most ethnological research. Actually there is an ongoing debate about whether *mudang* count as shamans. While some scholars believe that classifying them as spirit-mediums might be more appropriate (Kim 2003: 32), I opine that we can label them shamans if we stick to the inclusive definitions of shamans suggested by William P. Lebra quoted in Youngsook Kim Harvey (1979: 4), Stephen Beyer (Webb 2013: 62) or Andrei Znamenski (2007). For example, Znamenski defines a shaman as "a spiritual practitioner who, in

the gods, he or she — by proxy — gives oracle to the participants. At the end, the gods are sent away. During the ritual singing, speaking, silence, and dance are used to bridge gaps between two phases, to indicate that a new phase begins, or to inform the audience that the *mudang* has taken on a different identity (Bruno 2002: 37-39). Tongshik Ryu, a Korean theologian, classifies *kut* based on the immediate object of the ritual.[7] He distinguishes four kinds of *kut*: blessing-prayer rituals, sickness-relief rituals, dead soul rituals with their subcategories, and initiation rituals (Ryu 2012: 441-442). The first kind is a precautionary measure. Here the participants ask for a long life, wealth, glory, and peace by offering sacrifices to the ancestral spirits and gods (Ibid., 469, 518). The second kind is a means to cure all kinds of psychosomatic afflictions. Typically this is a client's final option after all avenues of (Western and Eastern) medical treatment have been exhausted. Sickness-relief rituals corresponds to what I call healing rituals in this paper. In the third kind of *kut* a ritual is performed in order to alleviate a dead ancestor's grudge or wrath or both, and to send him or her off to the underworld in which the spirit supposedly will not have any negative impact on his or her living descendants any longer (Kim 1989: 257). In the initiation rite neophytes possessed by one or more spirits officially accept their (temporal) possession, determine the

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the course of a ritual session, using a drum, a rattle, hallucinogens, or other devices, enters an altered state (sometimes also called a trance) in order to establish contact with spiritual forces in the other world. The goal of this spiritual encounter is to secure the help of spiritual beings that populate this otherworldly reality to resolve a problem, cure a patient, correct a misfortune, or predict the future." (2007: viii) Accepting Znamenski's definition has the advantage of bypassing the issue whether *mudang* enter the state of ecstasy — understood as the shaman's journey to the realms of the spirits, which is, according to Mircea Eliade, one essential criterion of shamanism (Eliade 1972: 499, 375) — and therefore count as shamans proper or not. For more details, see Howard 1998b; Rhi 1993; Hamayon 1993; Walraven 2009; Ryu 2012: 412. In Znamenski's definition "trance" stands for an altered state of consciousness, but the definition does not constraint *how* shamans establish contact with spirits from another world. The definition emphasizes the *goal* of the encounter — an encounter that mostly occurs during a ritual. It thus fits well with my hypothesis that at least some shamanic rituals are performed to solve problems like diseases.

7 In her 2009 book anthropologist Laurel Kendall makes more or less the same distinction, when she compares two Korean *kut* she has observed. Even though she does not incorporate the initiation *kut*, Kendall (2009: 34) distinguishes between *kut* for good fortune *(chaesu kut), kut* for affliction *(uhuan kut)*, and *kut* to send off ancestors *(chinogi kut)* which correspond to the first three kinds of *kut* in Ryu's classification.

spirits' identity, and acknowledge their role as *mudang*. Of course, this is just one way to classify *kut*, and actual *kut* will exhibit features of more than one of these four kinds. But it will hopefully convey what "*kut*" stands for to readers who are unfamiliar with Korean shamanic rituals.

THE INSTRUMENTAL THESIS

Now that we clarified some significant concepts, we can investigate why Korean clients make use of the services of shamans. In contrast to approaches that rely on the reasons shamans give for the performance of certain rituals, this paper focuses on the perspective of the clients. Sponsoring and participating in a shamanic ritual is an intentional action, and intentional actions are usually explained by motivating reasons, i.e., motivational states (or pro attitudes) such as desires or goals, in combination with means-end beliefs (Smith 1994: 94-96). Agents act in a certain way because they desire something and believe that they can achieve it by acting in a certain way.

The core claim of this paper is that Korean clients sponsor shamanic *healing* rituals because they want their beloved ones to be healed and because they believe that the shamanic ritual can potentially accomplish such healing. I will call this claim the *Instrumental Thesis*. In order to corroborate this claim, I will provide evidence that the clients really have such goals and the relevant means-end beliefs. I start with the motivational states of Korean shamanic sponsors.

Reviewing two books written by Korean shamans Shim Chin-song (1995) and Cho Cha-ryong (1996), Boudewijn Walraven, specialist in Korean studies, summarizes the problems of Korean citizens which motivate them to consult shamans.

> Parents whose children had strayed from home, small entrepreneurs faced with declining profits, wives of adulterous husbands, ailing elderly people afraid of death, desperate investors worried about stagnation on the real estate market, a mother who wanted her daughter to pass the admission examination for a College of Pharmacy and her son that for the Science Senior High School, were all among their clients asking for help. (Walraven 2001: 338-339)

The clients' desires are straightforward. They want the shaman to find their children, bring financial success, chase away a spouse's lover, cure their ailments, comfort them, make a child pass an exam, etc. Do they also *believe* that a *kut* is an adequate means to attain these desires? Since we can infer what people believe only based on what they say and do, I will illustrate that some Korean clients have such an instrumental belief with the help of two examples I take from Chongho Kim's 2003 book *Korean Shamanism: the Cultural Paradox*. This Korean anthropologist conducted the fieldwork for this book mainly from 1994 to 1995 mostly in Soy, a rural area in South Korea. The first case refers to a ritual Chongho Kim (henceforth: C. Kim) observes in 1994. In a harsh way a shaman tries to drive out a spirit that is supposed to be responsible for the mental disorder of an older Korean woman. The ritual is sponsored by the patient's daughter. C. Kim does not mention her name, but for the sake of convenience let's call the daughter Miss Shin. After the ritual, Miss Shin tells C. Kim that she has already sponsored several rituals in order to heal her mother's "madness", all of which have been of no avail. She concedes that she has doubts about the efficacy of shamanic rituals. Nevertheless she has paid for another one, considering it her last chance to cure her mother.

> My mother has been suffering from madness for nearly eight years. Her madness began when my family had a big financial problem, which caused my father to disappear. I still have no idea where he is. Since that time, my mother has been treated numerous times by psychiatrists, but it has all been in vain. I could not help becoming involved in this *kut*, like a drowning person clutching at a straw. What else can I do? Because of my mother's illness, I have even had to postpone my marriage. My brother cannot lead a happy life, either. Do you believe in shamanic healing? You may, as you're an anthropologist. But, it's hard for me. Before this *kut*, I had already tried some *kuts* in the hope of having my mother recover. Probably this is the fourth or the fifth. The previous ones were all fruitless. There was no improvement in my mother's illness. I felt deceived although I had not expected much. However, I decided to hold a *kut* once more because the head shaman for this *kut* is the most famous in Korea.[...]Have you ever seen any patient she [, i.e., the shaman] has cured? I really wish to trust her ability and really hope that my mother will be cured by this *kut*. How do you explain the efficacy of *kut* as an anthropologist? Is it like the placebo effect in psychology? When I took anthropology courses at university, the idea of symbolism sounded plausible to me. However, I'm sorry to say it in this way, but I did not see anything very

> sensible to me at the *kut*. To my eyes, the shamans were just performing a little play. Do you think that their little play will really work? I hope so, but, frankly speaking, I doubt it. (C. Kim 2003: 81)

What Miss Shin says to C. Kim after the ritual reveals a lot about her desires and beliefs. Miss Shin spends a lot of money for another ritual even though she doubts its efficacy. Is her action irrational? I do not think so. Her action would have been irrational if she did not believe that it can change her mother's condition. But doubt is not disbelief. Note that Miss Shin does not deny the efficacy of shamanic rituals in general. For when she states that she tries one more *kut* because this time it will be performed by "the most famous [shaman] in Korea" she implicitly assumes that the failure of the previous rituals have been due to the insufficient skills of the previous practitioners, not due to the inefficacy of shaman rituals themselves. Despite her doubts, she *hopes* that the ritual will help her mother. She explicitly says that she hopes that her mother will recover. And hope that a person S will recover by means of the ritual entails the *belief* that S *can* recover by means of the ritual. Miss Shin probably believes that it is unlikely that the ritual will help her mother, but that does not mean that she does not believe it is possible. Compare Miss Shin with somebody who bought a lottery ticket and hopes to win. The ticket holder may think that it is very unlikely that he wins, but he surely believes that it is *possible* for him to win. Likewise, Miss Shin certainly believes that it is possible that her mother is cured of her mental disorder by means of the ritual. Accordingly, Miss Shin can hardly be said to disbelieve that the ritual can help her mother. Moreover, she indirectly expresses the wish that her mother will be cured by asking C. Kim whether he has ever seen any patient who has been cured by this famous shaman. Miss Shin also expresses her motivation by implicitly stating that the previous rituals were fruitless *because* her mother did not recover. From all this we can infer under which condition she would consider the ritual to be successful: the cure of her mother's mental disorder. All this demonstrates that Miss Shin wants her mother to be cured, and that Miss Shin believes that the shamanic ritual might achieve this goal.

Let's have a look at the other example. A female informant tells C. Kim that her husband — called Mirim's father — got sick after he has attended the funeral of a friend who had died in an accident in 1983. At first, her husband simply cannot digest well, but later his whole body swells. In spite of hospi-

talization for two months in various hospitals, his condition worsens. The physicians tell Mirim's mother that the swelling is due to kidney problems, but the fact that her husband feels guilty because his friend had the accident after both had got drunk together, and the fact that his friend's body was very swollen when he died, make her think that there are also other forces at work. Nonetheless, Mirim's mother does not consider going to a shaman. It is only when the medical expenses become so high that she has to spend all of their savings and even to sell some of their land that she agrees to perform a ritual by a shaman who has been consulted by her sister-in-law. Mirim's mother describes what happens next.

> The shaman advised us to have two sorts of ritual treatments (*cheobang*). One was for the spirits surrounding my house and the other for the spirit of my husband's friend. There were four people in these rituals: the shaman, my sister-in-law, mother-in-law and me. I went back to my place only for these rituals. We held a *kut* ritual, called 'Ritual Pressing Down Household Spirits' (*antaek kut*). It took place in the absence of my husband. And also we had a small ritual to send Sangdo's Father's [i.e., the dead friend's] spirit off.[...]The shaman told me that my husband should be able to be discharged from the hospital three days afterwards. But I didn't believe what she told me. It was unbelievable! How could my husband get well in three days! He had swollen up so much that he looked like a pig!
>
> However I was really surprised at his appearance when I went back to hospital. The swelling had gone! He was so different that I almost couldn't recognize him. The nurses working in the ward said that they hadn't provided any special treatment. What a surprise! He had no significant problems any more in the blood tests. He was discharged and was able to come back home on the exact day that the shaman had predicted. (C. Kim 2003: 176)

Mirim's mother's surprise indicates that she did not expect the shamanic ritual to work, at least not so fast. However, like in Miss Shin's case, being skeptical is not identical to disbelieving that the ritual can help her husband. Mirim's mother hopes that the ritual works, and obviously desires so. Both cases thus militate in favor of an instrumental interpretation of this kind of *kut*. The clients have a sick relative they want to be healed, and regard *kut* as a potentially useful way to achieve this. We thus have a desire and a corresponding means-end belief that together explain why at least these two clients make use of shamanic services. This explanation is corroborated by the fact that, like other healing rituals, these two kut have been sponsored *after*

traditional medical *means* have failed to solve the problem. This strongly suggests that the clients consider the kut to be another (potential) *means* to cure the person in question, no matter how improbable this means may be.

Some scholars may complain that healing rituals are not as prevalent in shamanic societies as they used to be, and therefore do not constitute a representative form of shamanic ritual in general, but here I merely claim that the Instrumental Thesis best explains *some* cases of shamanic rituals, namely *all* (Korean) shamanic *healing* rituals. And since authors like Scheff (1977), S. N. Kim (1989) and Walraven (2009) claim that the main function of *all* shamanic rituals is the transformation of emotions and/or attitudes, presenting *some* counterexamples is sufficent to falsify their thesis.

Moreover, even if, for instance, anthropologist Laurel Kendall's observations in the 1990s in South Korea can be generalized and the main object of *kut* indeed is business success rather than the cure of an illness, this does not — as Kendall herself states — constitute a radical change in the function of the shamanic ritual.[8] In either case the ritual is considered a means to bring about a desired state: curing a patient's illness or bringing about economic changes in one's favor.[9] But I do not intend to make the strong claim that the Instrumental Thesis also best explains why Korean clients' sponsor economic-related rituals, and restricts its scope to Korean shamanic healing rituals.

8 "A few decades ago, sudden and often inexplicable illness posed the most dire threat to the integrity and continuity of the rural family. Today, entrepreneurs' households are vulnerable to human fallibility, to bad debts, thieving employees, and fraud, and to the fluctuations of the overheated market. A system of religious practices oriented toward the health, harmony, and prosperity of the small family farm has been adapted to a world in which these concerns still apply but where the fate of the family, for good and ill, is seen as dangling on volatile external forces in a moment of intense opportunity and danger. The shaman's perception that in the past, shamanic rituals were usually held in response to life-threatening illness whereas now most *kuts* are held in the hope of riches makes perfect sense in light of the medical options and economic possibilities of the 1990s. This is a matter of calibration, not a radical transformation." (Kendall 1996: 522)

9 "As we have seen, the religious practices of Korean petite bourgeoisie, no less than those of the peasants, miners, and proletarians described in other places, are *a means of* apprehending, of attempting to exert some control over the seemingly arbitrary motions of the political economy." (Kendall 1996: 522; italics added)

THE TRANSFORMATION THESIS

As mentioned at the very beginning, some scholars suggest an alternative explanation of the clients' sponsorship. They argue that the main function of rituals is the change of the participating clients' feelings — something I call the *Transformation Thesis*. I will enumerate some instances of this hypothesis in order to illustrate it and to demonstrate its prevalence. According to Antonetta L. Bruno, specialist in Korean studies, "the ritual is efficacious for the client[...]because of the transformation in the realm of emotions which occurs in the client" (Bruno 2002: 9).[10] Walraven agrees. Even though he does not exclude that *kut* might be an interaction with supernatural entities (Walraven 2002: 91, fn. 2), he believes that the main object of a *kut* is the psychological transformation of the client.

> The clients should be liberated from worries and given confidence that they are able to face future challenges.[...]For shamans and the clients, too, this is the criterion for a good, effective *kut*, even if the ostensible aim is something less easily achieved: pregnancy, success in business, or the passing of an examination etc. (Ibid., 92)

Walraven here implicitly distinguishes between *ostensible* and *real* aims of shamanic rituals. For example, a mother *ostensibly* wants a ritual to help her child to pass an exam, but what she *really* wants is, say, to reassure herself that she has done everything possible to boost her child's odds.

One particular kind of the Transformation Thesis is the abreaction thesis held *inter alia* by the Jungian scholar Bou-Young Rhi and by anthropologist Seong Nae Kim. Rhi regards *kut* as "a certain type of modern psychotherapy, a sort of psychodrama" (Rhi 1993: 259), a means to abreact emotions that Koreans are unable to express in everyday life due to the Confucian norm of saving face. In the session in which the *mudang* is possessed by the soul of a dead family member, "highly affect laden dialogues between the living and the dead are exchanged *discharging* thereby the guilt, hostility, frustrations and regret of the clients as well as of the *mudang*" (ibid.; emphasis added).

10 Bruno also writes that the "efficacy of a ritual is judged by the relaxation of emotional tension at the end" (Bruno 2002: 160).

Rhi's interpretation is surely influenced by Claude Lévi-Strauss. Lévi-Strauss (1963b) has construed *Guna* shamans as psychoanalysts who resolve suppressed conflicts by giving expression to them in a setting where they are allowed to become manifest.[11] Regarding a shamanic ritual for complicated child delivery, the French anthropologist argued that the shaman's narratives give expression to physiological processes that otherwise remain unintelligible and thereby enable the expectant mother to categorize and thus order what she experiences which, in itself, is said to have a good physiological effect. In other words, the shaman transforms the woman's psychosomatic state by construing the woman's states in certain culturally acknowledged ways (Lévi-Strauss 1963b: 198). Besides this power of symbols, Lévi-Strauss suggested that two things are crucial for the efficacy of the shamanic ritual: the abreaction the ritual provides for the shaman, the patient and the public, as well as the community's attribution of certain powers to the shaman (Lévi-Strauss 1963a: 180-183).[12]

Lévi-Strauss's thesis regarding the effectiveness of symbols is echoed by S.-N. Kim who states that the Korean shaman is "untying a knotted grudge or freeing one from evil spirits by the narration of origin myths of particular shamanic figures — in a word, abreaction" (S. N. Kim 1989: 276). S.-N. Kim stresses that shamans on Jeju Island, the island south of the Korean mainland, sometimes laugh just in that part of the ritual in which the dead — via the shaman — lament their tragic deaths. She construes this apparently inappropriate behavior as a means to pull the audience out of the collective sense of tragedy and fear into a light-minded attitude of hope and joy, and states that "[t]his may be the foremost goal of the healing rite" (ibid., 278).

11 "In both cases [i.e. shamanism and psychoanalysis] the purpose is to bring to a conscious level conflicts and resistances which have remained unconscious, owing either to their repression by other psychological forces or — in the case of childbirth — to their own specific nature, which is not psychic but organic or even simply mechanical. In both cases also, the conflicts and resistances are resolved, not because of the knowledge, real or alleged, which the sick woman progressively acquires of them, but because this knowledge makes possible a specific experience, in the course of which conflicts materialize in an order and on a level permitting their free development and leading to their resolution. This vital experience is called *abreaction* in psychoanalysis." (Lévi-Strauss, 1963b, p. 198)

12 Lévi-Strauss's theses have been criticized inter alia by Atkinson (1987: 343-346, and 354, n. 6) who argues that these theses are implausible if applied to *mabolong*, an Indonesian shamanic ritual of the Wana of Sulawesi.

I do not deny that shamanic rituals *can* have such relieving effects, and that this thesis can explain why *some kuts* are performed, but the Transformation Thesis does not explain why clients sponsor rituals such as those two mentioned above. But before I substantiate my criticism, we should note that the Transformation Thesis can be interpreted in two very different ways.

FUNCTION AS A CAUSAL MECHANISM

The thesis that the main function of the shamanic healing rituals is a change of the clients' feelings can be taken as a *causal* explanation of *how* healing rituals work. Given that the belief that ritual actions can have physical effects such as the cure of an illness, thriving business or a change in weather conflicts with what we learn in science books, many scholars have discarded such non-empirical beliefs as superstitious and false.[13] But since healing rituals sometimes do achieve their empirical goals, these scholars must provide another explanation. The Transformation Thesis might be construed as an attempt to explain the empirical effects of healing rituals in a naturalistic, psychosomatic way.

For example, the anthropologist William Sax together with psychologists Jan Weinhold and Jochen Schweitzer analyzed healing rituals in Garhwali (North India) and claim that healing basically works "by reconstituting socially dysfunctional relationships" (ibid., 62).[14] At the end of the article, they elaborate on this claim.

> [R]ituals are efficacious primarily because they create and define social relationships. One of the clearest examples of this is a public ritual in which a certain image of society is represented, defined, and embodied. By participating in such rituals, people give implicit assent to this representation.[...] Something very similar to this is happening in the forms of ritual healing we have discussed in this essay. Disrupted or dysfunctional family relationships

13 This position is held *inter alia* by early twentieth century anthropologist James G. Frazer. He takes the instrumental explanations of the natives' magical activities at face value and holds that practices like rain dances are based on the *false* belief that people can produce rain in this way (Frazer 1954: 11-12, 53, 62-65).

14 The authors indicate that the *ultimate* cause of the ritual healing (in Garhwali) might be the local deities (Sax et al. 2010: 73), but they do not dwell on that point, and mostly emphasize the psychosocial mechanism mentioned in the long quote.

> are identified and then publicly and ritually re-configured. The participants are invited to acknowledge conflicts present and past, and to reconcile with each other. (ibid., 74)

Sax et al. hence suggest that there are psychological mechanisms that change the clients' feelings and attitude and thereby enable even the cure of bodily afflictions.[15] Is this what Bruno, Walraven, et al. claim in the case of Korean healing rituals?

First of all, note that if we interpret the Transformation Thesis in this way, the Transformation Thesis and my instrumental explanation are not mutually exclusive. Advocates of the Transformation Thesis may accept that Korean clients sponsor shamanic rituals based on the motivational states and means-end beliefs I outlined above. For the clients can and probably will be totally unaware of the supposed underlying mechanisms, and are likely to misattribute the success of the ritual to non-empirical factors like spirits. Due to their ignorance, the social and psychological mechanisms actually responsible for the success of the ritual are not part of the clients' means-end beliefs and consequently do not constitute the clients' reasons for their actions. I will illustrate this by a more secular example.

A man called Karl lately abstains from eating muffins, potato chips, donuts, etc. When a friend asks him why he has changed his diet, Karl answers that he wants to lose weight and believes that

15 A thesis by the anthropologist Victor Turner can be interpreted in a similar way. Turner construes the *Isoma* ritual, a ritual to overcome the (temporal) infertility of women in the Ndembu tribe of Zambia, as solving not so much a biological, but rather a *normative* conflict for Ndembu wives; namely the conflict between the duty to be a good wife and to reside with or near her husband's parents (due to the norm of patrilocal residence) on the one hand, and the duty to produce children that move to and live in her matrilineal village (due to the norm of matrilineal descent) on the other hand (Turner 1969: 12-13). Turner indicates that the *Isoma* ritual might be efficient, first, because the woman is reminded "where her and her children's ultimate loyalties lie" (ibid., 13), second, because, given the limited biological knowledge, the ritual practitioners as well as the participants *believe* that the ritual works, and third, because the woman makes the experience that she is important. Her state being expressed in symbols of cosmic processes of life and death and the efforts the community members make reassure her that she is cared about (ibid., 43). Like Sax et al. Turner's analysis is plausibly construed as an explanation of the (mental) mechanisms that are responsible for the success of the ritual — explaining *how* the ritual works, rather than *why* humans participate in it.

(A) we lose weight by abstaining from eating food which contains a lot of saturated fat.

But let's assume that (A) is false, and that scientists now rather believe that

(B) we lose weight by abstaining from eating food which contains a lot of carbohydrates.

For the sake of the argument, let's further assume that Karl was unable to recognize that his diet belief is false, because muffins, potato chips, and donuts contain not only a lot of saturated fat, but also a lot of carbohydrates. By abstaining from eating them (and not replacing them with other high-carbohydrate food), Karl effectively loses weight. My point is that even though (B) explains why Karl loses weight, it would be wrong to claim that it explains why Karl lately abstains from eating muffins, potato chips, and donuts. Karl refrains from eating such food *not because* he believes that he can lose weight by abstaining from eating food which contains a lot of carbohydrates. He does it for a different reason.

If we take the Transformation Thesis to be a *causal* explanation of *how* healing rituals work, it might explain why shamanic rituals (sometimes) work and thereby explain why clients do not abandon their (supposedly) false beliefs, but it does not explain why they act the way they do. In order to understand why they sponsor shamanic rituals, we need to refer to the motivational states and the means-end beliefs of the relevant subjects. Authors who aim at explaining the causal mechanisms that make healing rituals (sometimes) achieve their explicit goals might agree, and state that they simply answer a different question than mine. *I* ask for the *clients' goals* and have to refer to their subjective intentions, whereas they ask for the (social and psychological) *mechanisms* that scientifically explain why healing rituals (sometimes) work.

If Walraven et al. have wanted to make this point, then arguing with them would be pointless. But even though this might be what Rhi has in mind, Bruno, Walraven and S.-N. Kim surely do not want to make causal claims. S.-N. Kim explicitly speaks of the change of the clients' feelings as "the foremost *goal* of the healing rite" (S. N. Kim 1989: 278, italics added). Walraven states that even the clients hold that the liberation from worries and the creation of confidence is what makes a *kut* a good and successful one (Walraven

2002: 92). Bruno likewise states that "the ritual is efficacious *for the client*[...] because of the transformation in the realm of emotions which occurs *in the client*" (Bruno 2002: 9; italics added). Walraven's and Bruno's statements entail that a shamanic healing ritual can be judged to have been a success even if the ill person for whom the healing ritual is explicitly performed does *not* recover. Walraven accordingly claims that "the actual benefits of ritual are not necessarily the aims it ostensibly claims to achieve, and that there are *other* unspoken yet positive effects which explain why rituals continue to be performed" (ibid., 91). Evidently Walraven's thesis does not consist in the causal claim that the ostensible aims are realized by a change of the clients' feelings. Rather, he maintains that what the customers want — consciously or unconsciously — is the realization of aims that differ from the ostensible ones.

FUNCTION AS PURPOSE OR GOAL

I therefore conclude that at least S.-N. Kim's, Bruno's and Walraven's statements have to be interpreted as providing alternative reasons for the clients to sponsor shamanic healing rituals. When these authors speak of the function of the ritual, they thus mean its purpose or goal. In Walraven's case, this is very plausible because his statements immediately follow his critique of the Dutch Indologist and philosopher Frits Staal who has made the controversial claim that rituals are "pure activity, without meaning or goal" (Staal 1979: 9). According to Staal, rituals are done neither to achieve nor to express a certain thing. They are done for their own sake.[16] Walraven denies this, at least for Korean *kut*, and goes on to suggest that inconspicuous benefits explain why rituals are still performed.

To sum up, the Transformation Thesis consists in the claim that (Korean) clients sponsor shamanic rituals because they want, consciously or unconsciously, their own feelings and/or attitudes to be changed for the better. They want the ritual to relieve them from their worries, frustration, feelings of guilt, and/or from being low-spirited, and create an attitude of confidence,

16 Staal does not deny "that ritual creates a bond between the participants, reinforces solidarity, boosts morale and constitutes a link with the ancestors" (Staal 1979:11), but he maintains that such "side-effects" can at best explain the *preservation* of rituals, not their *origin*.

hope and joy. Like the Instrumental Thesis, and unlike the causal explanation above, the Transformation Thesis refers to the clients' motivational states and their means-end beliefs, although these states and beliefs are, according to the Transformation Thesis, implicit ones.

DEFENDING THE INCOMPATIBILITY OF THE INSTRUMENTAL AND THE TRANSFORMATION THESIS

Still, despite the difference between the Transformation Thesis and the Instrumental Thesis, the reader might think that they do not exclude each other. For one and the same agent can have several desires to sponsor a ritual, both conscious and unconscious. A specialist in Korean studies such as Song-Chul Kim, for example, argues that Korean Confucian ancestral rituals are performed for several reasons. According to Song-Chul Kim, these rituals are motivated by the "descendants' concern for the well-being of their deceased ancestors, but also by real-world social goals such as solidifying agnatic cohesion among descendants of the same lineage and asserting the *yangban* [, that is, noble] status of the lineage" (2014: 89), as well as by the duty of filial piety (ibid., 90).

I do not deny that rituals can be sponsored for several reasons. But note that advocates of the Transformation Thesis propose not just one reason among others, but the *crucial*, or *primary* reason for the sponsorship of shamanic rituals. They claim to know "the *foremost* goal of the healing rite," "the criterion for[...][an] *effective kut*," or the *real*, as opposed to ostensible, aims of shamanic rituals. And it looks as if there can be only one foremost goal. If the *foremost* goal of a ritual is the transformation from anxiety and worries to hope and joy, then the cure of a patient can be a secondary goal, but not another foremost goal. And it is the foremost or primary reason that explains an intentional action. Secondary reasons are secondary, i.e., the subject would have performed the same action even if he lacked them.

Skeptical readers might object that sometimes more than one goal or desire explain why someone acts in a certain way. Imagine a philosopher who flies to a conference in the United States. We might claim that what explains the flight are his desires to present his paper, receive feedback, and get in touch with his peers. These desires might be regarded as the man's immediate

goals, and might or might not be subsumed under the desire to promote his career. Let us assume that they indeed can be subsumed under this desire. Does the latter alone explain the man's flight to the United States? Not necessarily. Suppose he is reluctant to fly because he tries to avoid actions that contribute to global warming, and that his career ambitions alone do not suffice to make him participate in the conference. But because his sister lives there, not far away from the city the conference takes place, and because he has not seen her for some time, he decides to take the flight so that he can attend the conference as well as visit his sister. If none of these reasons alone had made him take the flight, then surely we cannot claim that there is just one exclusive, foremost goal that explains his action.

Now, do we have the same situation in our examples of sponsoring rituals? The advocates of the Transformation Thesis might accept that the clients have the desires and beliefs I outlined above, but insist that there are other desires which are likewise important. Can we not permit, for instance, that Miss Shin wants to cure her mother, and at the same time consciously or unconsciously, desires to discharge the guilt, hostility, and frustrations (possibly) formed during interactions with her "mad" mother? We *can* imagine that Miss Shin has both desires. But I doubt that both desires are required to motivate her sponsorship of the healing ritual. Unlike the flight case from above, we have no indication that Miss Shin's desire to cure her mother is insufficient to make her sponsor the ritual. And if this desire does suffice to motivate her to sponsor the ritual, then we do not need to refer to any other desires in order to explain her sponsorship.[17]

POTENTIAL OBJECTIONS TO THE INSTRUMENTAL THESIS

Proponents of the Transformation Thesis might challenge the antecedent of the conditional in the last paragraph. They might either deny that the ostensible aim of the ritual is what (sufficiently) motivates Miss Shin or Mirim's mother to sponsor a shamanic ritual, or deny that these clients have the means-end beliefs I ascribed to them. I will first deal with the former option.

17 Even though I focus on desires in this paragraph, I still presuppose that only a combination of desires and corresponding means-end beliefs can explain intentional actions.

One might claim that, for example, Mirim's mother's aim to cure her husband's symptoms is not what *really* motivated her to sponsor the ritual. My opponents could claim that Mirim's mother's real aim was to get reassured that she has done everything possible to cure her husband, or to be able to express her existential anxieties, or something to that effect.

I do not deny that there are cases in which shamanic rituals are sponsored for different reasons than the explicit ones.[18] But in our two cases we have no evidence that our two clients' ostensible aims are not their real ones. It is evident that in both cases the ritual's object is the cure of the *patient*. Consequently, Miss Shin's and Mirim's mother's criterion for an effective, i.e., successful *kut* is, *pace* Walraven and Bruno, not the liberation from *their* worries and provision of confidence, but the cure of their ill *relatives*. After all, Miss

18 For instance, Bruno observed a *kut* in which a shy and quiet client became talkative and relaxed after she had spoken with her deceased mother who had possessed the shaman. What the client said to Bruno after the ritual indicates that the sponsoring of the ritual had been motivated by the wish to be relieved from things the client had not been able to tell her mother in her lifetime. "During the ritual the mother [via the possessed shaman] talked to her and said that she pitied her for being alone now that her husband was with another woman, and she emphatically mentioned the abortion that she forced her to have long ago, because she thought that her daughter was too young to have a child. Hearing these words the client cried and assured her mother that she was all right, that she did not feel any grievance, and that the mother should rest in peace. They both embraced and later the client confessed to me that she had wanted to say these things to her mother for a long time while she was still alive." (Bruno 2002: 160) Another example is a *kut* observed by C. Kim in 1995. A peasant widow, Chisun's grandmother, sponsored a *kut* explicitly in order to cure a back pain that was diagnosed as the result of a disc problem. But C. Kim disbelieves that she did the ritual in order to treat a physical problem, and offer two other reasons for the sponsorship. First, the client used the possibility to speak in the name of her dead husband (when possessed by his spirit) in order to influence her misbehaving adult son. During possession his mother used the authority of his deceased father to reprimand the son who was on the verge of having another extramarital affair, thus wasting lots of money on a lover and risking his marriage. Scolding him in the name of his father had the advantage of not endangering their own relationship. Second, the ritual also functioned as an outlet for the resentment the client had for her mother-in-law. After having been exploited and ill-treated by her parents-in-law for several decades, Chisun's grandmother was able to express the hostility she felt for her mother-in-law — something she would not have dared in everyday life, as she was expected to dutifully care for her mother-in-law, no matter how the latter had previously behaved (Kim 2003: 118-124). The ritual — to which Chisun's grandmother invited many neighbors — allowed her to protest against such Confucian norms, and to gain her neighbors' and relatives' support when publicly expressing her longing for joy and freedom.

Shin describes all previous rituals as fruitless because *her mother's* condition has not changed, not because *Miss Shin's own* condition has not changed. And Mirim's mother too would presumably not have described the ritual for her husband as effective if her husband had not gotten better, even if the ritual had provided her with an occasion to express her anxieties and to lament about her financial crisis.

I thus take it that it is unreasonable to deny that our two clients' sponsoring can be explained by goals that differ from the ostensible ones. But what about the second option? Maybe Miss Shin and Mirim's mother do not have the respective means-end beliefs. Maybe they do not really believe that the shamanic ritual can cure their relatives. Is this a valid objection to the Instrumental Thesis?

Well, there are indeed cases in which we have reason to doubt that the subjects believe what they assert. We are especially skeptical where beliefs collide with what we learn in science books. For instance, if a person states that he performs a certain dance in order to make it rain, we will be skeptical, given that meteorology never mentions dancing as a possible cause of rain. Now, the fact that rain dances are performed at the beginning of the rainy season, and not during the dry season, led some authors to assume that those involved do not really believe that the dancing (alone) will cause it to rain (Wittgenstein 1993: 137). Do we likewise have some evidence that Miss Shin or Mirim's mother do not really believe that the ritual (alone) might cure their relatives? I do not think so. As I argued above, despite their doubts what they say and do implies that they believe in the possibility of a cure. The burden of proof is on the side of my opponents. They would have to demonstrate that our two clients do not really hold the ostensible means-end belief.

Moreover, why would clients pay around USD$5,000, the income of six months for many Koreans (C. Kim 2003: 170), for something they consider useless with regard to the ostensible aim? One possibility is that the clients believe that they can achieve other goals than the ostensible one by means of the ritual, but we have already ruled this possibility out in our two cases. Another possibility is that the clients do it just out of tradition. They do not do it in order to achieve something but because in their community this is considered suitable in such cases. One might thus think that the sponsorship of a shamanic ritual is like the sponsorship of a funeral. In Europe, a funeral

is usually costly, most of which is spent not for indispensable services concerning the disposal of a dead body, but for an aesthetic coffin, embalming, memorial service, a plot of ground, and flowers (Oliver 1979: 978). And even though some bereaved think the latter is unnecessary, they might spend more than they want simply because they believe that this is what is expected from them. Abstaining from optional services might harm their reputation, and earn them the title of an impious curmudgeon. Avoiding such accusation might motivate them to spend more money than they personally think necessary. Do we have similar normative expectations in our two cases? Do Miss Shin and Mirim's mother sponsor the ritual because they believe that this is what people expect from them? I do not think so. Miss Shin never mentions such a motif. And Mirim's mother tells Kim that she took the service of a shaman because her sister-in-law has convincingly argued that her husband's illness does not stem from physical problems, and because the shaman was able to describe her husband's appearance and character even though she has never seen him (C. Kim 2003: 175-176). Moreover, neither Miss Shin nor Mirim's mother would suffer any reputation loss had they not sponsored the shamanic rituals. Quite the opposite is the case. According to C. Kim, most Koreans try to avoid contact with the shamanic world so that most shamanic rituals are held in secret, i.e., only in the presence of the shaman and the clients who are directly involved (ibid., 84). C. Kim suggests that this is due to the shameful and hurting stories that come up during shamanic rituals (ibid., 98, 190) as well as due to the fear of risking accidents, mental illness, and possession as a result of being in contact with the shamanic world (ibid., 172, 180-181, 188-189). If this is true, it can hardly be assumed that Miss Shin and Mirim's mother sponsored their shamanic ritual because they felt social pressure to do so.

I conclude that proponents of the Transformation Thesis are unable to rebut our instrumental explanation as to why Korean clients sponsor shamanic healing rituals, and offer a more plausible one. We have no good reason to be suspicious of the statements made by clients like Miss Shin or Mirim's mother, and to assume that they sponsor rituals for hidden reasons. Of course, it would be desirable to provide more cases in order to corroborate my thesis, but discussing more cases would go beyond the possibilities of an article. Still, since Miss Shin's and Mirim's mother sponsoring are typical examples

of (contemporary) Korean shamanic healing rituals, I believe that the burden to find examples of Korean shamanic healing rituals which have to be explained according to the Transformation Thesis lies on the shoulders of my opponents.

CONCLUSION

In this article I have argued that there are forms of *kut* that are considered tools for empirical goals. It is the desire for the fulfilment of these empirical goals, together with the respective means-end beliefs, and not some alternative benefits or underlying mechanisms, that explain why Korean clients sponsor shamanic healing rituals. The cases of Shin's mother and Mirim's father have shown that we have no reason to doubt the clients' ostensible desires and means-end beliefs. And since these motivational states and beliefs suffice to explain their sponsorship, the benefits mentioned by the Transformation Thesis can be neglected in the explanation.

Why would anybody deny that shamanic rituals are best explained by appealing to instrumental beliefs? In my view, this is due to the variety of activities that are subsumed under the concepts of ritual and shamanic ritual (see the section "Ritual and *kut*" above). There is no such thing as *the* ritual, but a diversity of activities that have been called this way. Among these activities there are many that do not seem to achieve anything useful, but are performed merely out of commitment to a certain tradition. And Frits Staal is probably right that people engage in some of these activities simply for the sake of the activity itself. But it is a mistake to generalize and claim that no ritual is performed in order to accomplish a goal. I suspect that it is against the background of the assumption that rituals do *not* achieve anything, much less the empirical goals they were explicitly performed for, that scholars came up inter alia with the Transformation Thesis. Presupposing that the participants do not act irrationally, scholars like Walraven or S.-N. Kim might have asked themselves what good (other than the explicit goals) shamanic rituals provide. Which problems do they solve? Inconspicuous psychological or social benefits might have seemed to provide an alternative explanation why humans sponsor shamanic rituals. Such a functionalist approach can sometimes be very fruitful, but runs the risk of confounding a secondary reason

for a phenomenon with the primary one. I think that this is what has happened when we try to apply the Transformation Thesis to cases of shamanic healing rituals. Even though such rituals might transform the feelings of the participants, this is usually not the reason why it has been performed. As I have illustrated by two actual cases, shamanic healing rituals are performed because the sponsors hope to attain their ostensible goal, viz. the cure of their beloved ones.

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