

# SHAMAN

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## Shamanic Symbolism in the Revived Ceremonials of the Salish Indian Nation of the Pacific Northwest Coast

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*This article is based on original information received by the authors who worked for many years as anthropologically trained psychiatrists in the Pacific Northwest among the Coast Salish Indian people and their neighbours, and on relevant ethnographic reports going back to the time of early contacts in the 19th century. The authors attempt an analysis of Coast Salish shamanic ceremonials practised in the past in the context of the North American Indian guardian spirit complex, and revived in modified form in the 1960s as psycho- and sociotherapeutically effective winter spirit dance ceremonial. The analysis is conducted on the level of symbolic content and on the level of formal structure; it encompasses the symbolic process of the spirit dance initiation, of the Coast Salish mask myths and dance ritual, of shamanic "Indian Doctoring", and of the "Power Board and Pole" ceremonial which derives from the now obsolete shamanic spirit canoe rite.*

### THE SYMBOLIC PROCESS OF SPIRIT DANCE INITIATION

The seasonal *spirit illness* of future spirit dancers in traditional Coast Salish culture was a stereotyped pathomorphic, i.e., illness-like, but not pathologic, prelude to the public exhibition of spirit powers in the dance ceremonial, in many aspects analogous to Eliade's (1964) initiatory sickness associated with the ecstatic initiation of shamans.

In contemporary Coast Salish society, *spirit illness* is often fused with reactive depressive and psychophysiological symptom formation in the context of socio-cultural deprivation (cf. Jilek 1974). However, its traditional meaning has been preserved. The afflicted is said to be suffering from *syíwils tə q'á-q'ey*, 'the spirit song's sickness'. He is con-

ceived of as being possessed by a wild, untamed power which could destroy him unless it is tamed and utilized as guardian spirit power. This power will benefit the patient only through initiation into spirit dancing; it is ambivalently perceived as beneficial to those who follow the traditionally prescribed 'Indian ways' of dealing with it but as destructive to the resisting deviant. It is called *syíwil* in Eastern Halkomelem, or *syáwən* in Western Halkomelem dialects. These words are usually translated as 'spirit song'. They are derived from the root *yəw*, 'having contact with the supernatural', and related to *yəwilmət* which is designatory of the shamanic ritualist who officiates at the initiation ceremonial. Together with his assistants, he helps the initiate-patient to "get out his spirit song" in order to manifest *syáwən* power in the choreographic psychodrama of the spirit dance. The spirit song signifies and embodies the powers conferred on the spirit dancer in a guardian spirit vision experience, called *su'lia* (Duff 1952), 'vision, dream', or *s'álya* (Kew 1970), 'what you see in your dream'; an altered state of consciousness induced in the initiate-patient by psychological, physiological, and physical means (cf. Jilek 1974). In contemporary usage *syáwən* denotes the essence of the whole guardian spirit ceremonial performed annually during the winter season. The sufferer from spirit illness is *q'a-q'əy*, 'dying sick'. His utter destruction is inescapable unless he submits to a vicarious ritualized "death" in the ordeal of spirit dance initiation in which he is "grabbed" and symbolically "clubbed to death", only to be resurrected ("stood up again") and born again to a new life as a "baby", after a quasi-fetal period of regression while secluded under the nursing care of "babysitters".

According to one key informant, himself a leading ritualist and active spirit dancer for over 50 years, initiation implies rebirth and a "return from the dead"; drums and rattles are used extensively to "bring in the life spirit to the baby". The act of rebirth takes place when after a gestation period of four days the "song is found", cried out by the baby and accompanied by the drumming and singing of the attendants. Then the baby is "run" through the woods, has a bath in the smokehouse and submerges four times in an ice cold mountain stream which "brings the baby fully back to life". It is interesting to note that submersion-emersion in and from water, and disappearance-reappearance in and from the woods, have been traced as an archetypal death-and-rebirth symbol in the mythologies of ancient cultures by C.G. Jung (1952:366, 411). In

contemporary spirit dance initiation, power is instilled by the ritualist and his "workers" who charge up to the initiate and "put their power" into him. As in Salish Indian Doctoring, power is blown unto the initiate-patient by the shamanic healer whose *stéqam*, 'breath, pregnant with power and vitality' (Robinson 1963:105) appears synonymous with the archetypal breath of life (cf. Genesis 2:7).

There is an apparent contradiction in curing by instilling the spirit power which is supposed to already possess the sufferer from spirit illness. This can be understood if we consider that the initiation as practiced today is the result of a relatively recent development in which the time-consuming traditional quest for a guardian spirit (cf. Benedict 1923) has become merged, under acculturative pressures,<sup>1</sup> with the initiation to spirit dancing which is the only surviving major Salish ceremonial. Formerly, power acquisition was achieved in the adolescent spirit quest and the initiation proper followed in mature life, as proof and collective confirmation of individually obtained power. Thus while traditionally spirit power was acquired in an individual quest and later manifested and tamed in the initiation, it is now acquired by, and in, the initiation process which at the same time constitutes the only treatment of spirit illness. One could therefore say that the newly found spirit song of the initiate can have two different meanings today: it is both an inheritance of the power quest, and a birth cry. In two different systems, one the spirit power quest, the other the initiation which consists in being killed and reborn, the song takes place just at the point where the two systems merge.<sup>2</sup>

The ambivalent character of the initiate spirit dancer—vulnerable and helpless yet also dangerous and powerful—is expressed symbolically in behavior and paraphernalia. The initiate "babies" are considered dangerous, because they "have not yet learnt to control their power". They could easily "harm others without realizing it, by looking across at someone, wishing to have something of theirs or wishing for something to happen to that person". The babies' unregulated power is

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<sup>1</sup> As explanation for abandoning the traditional Salish spirit quest our informants point to the Whiteman's encroachment upon, and pollution of, wilderness areas where spirits used to be encountered in the past. Undoubtedly, an important factor is the time constraint imposed upon young Indian people in modern Western society.

<sup>2</sup> Discussion comments by Professor C. Lévi-Strauss, July 9, 1974.

also revealed in dancing behavior; they make wild jumps and disordered steps which have to be controlled by the efforts of the group of drummers and singers who accompany them. The initiates are at all times accompanied by “babysitters”, also called “watchmen”, whose duty is to both protect and check their charges. They hold on to a rope tied around the baby’s waist. The initiates are “blind”. Their eyes are covered by the long headdresses or by blindfolding. Yet they are also “seeing”, when guided by their power it is assumed that they can find their way around the smokehouse during the dance, bypassing people and bonfires. Their glance and their touch carry power; they must therefore avoid eye and body contact. Initiates are forbidden to “shoot” their power at others by pointing the finger at them. Unborn children are especially in danger from this strong and uncontrolled power and pregnant women are therefore urged to avoid any encounter with the initiates. One of the first White reporters on Coast Salish rituals, the Rev. Myron Eells in the 1870s already observed the power-taming aspect of spirit dance initiation:

Their dance consisted chiefly in running around with ropes encircling them, held by others ... I infer it was an initiatory custom with the black tamanous.<sup>3</sup> Some of them, I heard, were starved a part or all of the time ... Their faces were blacked in various ways. With the music of the drum and singing they jumped around in a space 20 feet in diameter, throwing their arms wildly about ... At the end of the house I saw four of the heads adorned with headdresses of cloth strips ... Their bodies lay prone underneath the bed platform. Each one held down by a single man ... They evidently struggled to rise, and during the evening one did get up, and it required two or three men to put him down again (Eells 1889: 664–7).

On the other hand, the initiate is vulnerable and has to be protected from other sources of power. His own spirit power is not yet solidly anchored in his body and can be “drawn out” easily by anything that is powerful. For this reason, he must avoid looking at powerful things which could “suck the spirit right out of the newborn baby”. These taboos preclude looking at the sun, the fire, ritual objects such as the

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<sup>3</sup> From *tomanoas*, the gloss given as Cowichan term for ‘guardian spirit’ by Capt. Wilson (1866:281).

*sxwaixwe* mask, and dead bodies. Also forbidden is looking downstream, which is "towards death" (the land of the dead in Salish culture is traditionally situated in the direction of sunset, and it will be noted that in the Coast Salish area the course of major streams is from East to West). Initiates have to avoid any contact with menstruating women as "blood is too powerful". Spontaneous bleeding in general indicates the presence of a supernatural power, as exemplified in myths of the Salishan speaking Bella Coola (Boas 1898). Initiates use straws when drinking from vessels which may have been handled by others, lest they risk the danger of spirit contamination. In logical consequence of the taboo of contact with anything power-charged they have to be wary of touching themselves, thereby causing a "short circuit" of power. For this reason they have scratcher-sticks to scratch their heads. Initiates must enter a place by moving backwards through the door in order to escape a surprise exposure to powerful things or persons. Strands of wool are placed around their wrists, ankles and waist in an effort to prevent the spirit power from being "drawn out of the newborn babies". The same method is resorted to in the case of a deceased person to prevent the premature release from the dead body of the spirit which might become dangerous to surviving kin at the home.

The spirit ceremonial neophytes are subjected to various diet taboos which, as many traditional prescriptions and proscriptions today, are rationalized by the younger generation in terms of physical hygiene. One important injunction exists against partaking of very hot or very cold food or beverage. Hot, steaming food was traditionally considered objectionable to spirits in Northwest coast cultures (cf. Drucker 1951:184). Very cold food is still felt to "take the life out of chest and stomach" where spirit power is thought to reside. Likewise, the initiate is cautioned against eating anything raw; he is given smoked, cooked, or preferably dried foods. This is reminiscent of food in the land of the dead, which in Salish mythology consists of dried wood (cf. Adamson 1934:22). At the same time, this particular dietary prescription can be viewed as a symbolic move from nature to culture.

Once he has "found his song", i.e., expressed his power publicly, the initiate is invested with his regalia, the new dancer's "hat" and "pole". This is expected to occur on the fourth day of initiation. The "hat" or headdress made of thick, long woolen strands, is called *sáyíws* which derives from *sæy*, 'wool' and *-yíw*, 'having contact with the supernatu-



ral'.<sup>4</sup> Before being placed on the baby's head, this headdress is subjected to a purification and power-charging ritual. It is purified by being passed through fire four times, and charged with power from four fully dressed spirit dancers who dance around the smokehouse with it and present it four times to each of the four corners. The recurrence of the magic number four of Salish mythology in this ritual undoubtedly ensures special potency. After four years of faithful adherence to the spirit dance ceremonial, the human-hair-headdress, *máqəl tə sáyiwš* (from *máqəl*, 'human hair', is bestowed on the mature spirit dancer as insignia of his responsibility. We may interpret this ascent from animal to human hair as graduation from an animal-like level of untamed, wild power to a human-like level of controlled and socialized power.

The new dancer's staff is *qáwə*, the 'cane of an infirm person', but it is also "like a canoe pole", and the neophytes are instructed to use the staff when walking as if "poling upstream", meaning "towards life". This long pointed staff is adorned at the top with paddles "for water", eagle feathers "for sky", deer hoofs "for animals", and cedar bark "for trees", so that "no part of the world is left out". Today, souvenir scarves are also attached and sometimes presented to the "witnesses" at the ceremonial as a special favour. The staff is made of a young spruce tree obtained by the ritualist from a high place in the mountains directly in the light of the rising sun, as he faces to the east from where life arises. The tree is carefully dug out with its roots intact. It is stripped of bark, and the four top branches are cut short. In the smokehouse the chief ritualist or Indian Doctor "works" on the pole, burning the bottom in a fire "to make sure that it is really dead" and to purify it. He then paints four red rings ("red is life") on the top part and instills spirit power by blowing his breath onto it. In this way, the stick has been made to come alive again by the ritualist and is now "shaking by itself", which demonstrates that it is charged with spirit power. The neophyte taps this power by holding the shaking pole tightly with his two hands; he can "hear his song coming out of it". While dancing his tour, the new dancer leaves his staff with the babysitters. Upon returning to his seat he immediately clings to it for strength and protection.

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<sup>4</sup> The Musqueam have another term for the initiate's hat, *sxa'yus* (Kew 1970:163) which is reminiscent of Puget Sound *skayu*, 'inhabitant of the land of the dead' (Haeberlin 1918:254) and again evokes the death-rebirth theme.

At the end of the initiatory season the new dancer's "pole" is deposited in a big hollow cedar far away from human habitation. In traditional times this was the usual procedure with all ceremonial objects (Waterman 1930:547). Should his "pole" be found by someone, the new dancer would be in danger; should it be buried, he would die, as allegedly happened in a recent case. It is not difficult to recognize in the new spirit dancer's "pole" the archetypal maternal symbols of the Tree of Life and the World Tree, which is also the Tree of Rebirth (Jung 1952:368–419). As does its owner, the initiate's staff has to undergo the ritual ordeal of dying and being born again as a receptacle of power.

After four years of active participation in the ceremonial, the "grown up" spirit dancer qualifies to carry the *k<sup>w</sup>əcmín?*, 'rattle stick', a clublike carved staff decorated with individual designs, on top a human or animal head and deer hoof pendants. The mature dancer is well in control of his spirit power and no longer in need of ongoing protection. However, immediately after each dance tour even the senior ritualist feels vulnerable and holds on to his rattle stick for support. When this moment comes, the spirit dancer "cries like a baby because he is being born again, he is like a newborn baby again". Thus in every winter season and at every dance the spirit dancer relives, in attenuated form, the process of his past initiation, with spirit illness, death and rebirth. His individual dance and song manifests and expresses the spirit power he acquired and has learned to control.

#### THE SYMBOLIC PROCESS OF THE *SXWAIXWE* CEREMONIAL

Carved masks, of which there is an abundance in neighbouring regions of the Northwest Coast, are conspicuously absent in the Salish area. It is the more interesting, therefore, that a few families in the Fraser Valley region and the Gulf of Georgia have hereditary rights to a type of most elaborately carved wooden mask. This type of mask is of relatively recent origin, dating back only five or six generations (Duff 1952). Its extraordinary features are very different from those of other traditional masks of the Pacific Northwest. Comparison of earlier descriptions and pictorial representations of the *sxwaixwe* mask (Boas 1897; Curtis 1913; Stern 1934; Codere 1948; Barnett 1955) with recently carved specimens shows that over many decades its strange ap-

pearance has changed very little: protruding peg-like eyes in a flat face dominated by a nose shaped like a bird's beak and a large hanging tongue, one or two figures standing out like horns from the squarely cut front, commonly representing birds, sometimes with human faces. The mask is surrounded by a wooden disk adorned with swan feathers. The *sxwaxwe* is used in a special dance ceremony performed in connection with the rites of puberty, marriage, name giving, at the opening of a new smokehouse, or at other very important social occasions. The *sxwaxwe* dancer wears a white garment richly adorned with feathers. In one hand he holds a rattle of sea shells and in the other a spear or a cedar branch. The *sxwaxwe* rites we observed on several occasions during recent years were surrounded by an aura of mysticism and danger. In view of the limited access of outsiders to this unique ceremony a brief description of the contemporary *sxwaxwe* dance is presented here.

The dancers—strong young men chosen by the owner of the mask—prepare for the dance in a hidden enclosure in one corner of the smokehouse. With groaning noises and the sound of their shell rattles they indicate their readiness. Meanwhile the audience becomes increasingly excited; new spirit dancers present are hidden behind the backs of their “babysitters” and wrapped in blankets to be shielded from the powerful spirit of the *sxwaxwe*. A selected group of women gathers on the side opposite to the enclosure, ready to drum and sing. Finally the masked dancers burst forth from their confinement and chase around with violent movements and rapid steps, howling, shaking their rattles and swaying their masks as they dance around the hall of the smokehouse, presenting a frightening spectacle. When the female chorus sets in with a melodious song and slow rhythmic drumming the ferocious *sxwaxwe* immediately calm down, stepping heavily in time with the slow rhythm, swinging their rattles in a slow but forceful movement. As soon as the women stop singing, the *sxwaxwe* run wild again while the spectators react with fear and awe. Again the women repeat their soothing song which pacifies the wild dancers. During the calm periods people hasten to put some coins in the dancers' hand, carefully avoiding touching the *sxwaxwe* costume. Finally, the women's forceful drumming and singing compels the dancers to disappear behind the walls of their confinement, but three times the unruly *sxwaxwe* sally out and chase around again until at the fourth at-

tempt they are ultimately overpowered by the women's song. People sound a sigh of relief once the last *sxwaixwe* dancer has disappeared.

Each family with hereditary rights to a mask has a story explaining its origin and can name the exact place where the mask was procured. There are two opposing clusters of origin myths. On Vancouver Island the *sxwaixwe* is supposed to have come down from the sky, while on the mainland of British Columbia it is said to have been fished out of the sea or out of a lake. However, ethnographic sources suggest that the first *sxwaixwe* mask originated from somewhere up the Fraser River (Barnett 1939; Duff 1952). The name of the mask appears in *sx<sup>w</sup>á·y-x<sup>w</sup>eyla*, anglicized Squiala, 'place of the *sxwaixwe*', which is the name of a Coast Salish Indian band and of a locality in the vicinity of Chilliwack, British Columbia.

In his comparative analysis of *sxwaixwe* masks and numerous versions of the *sxwaixwe* myth along neighboring Coast Salish tribes, Lévi-Strauss (1975) conclusively demonstrates that the *sxwaixwe* occupies a central place in Salish culture. Its bird-fish configuration corresponds to the two basic origin myths. The feather costume, the nose in the form of a bird's head or beak, and the two bird heads on top represent the sky realm; the fish-shaped tongue and shell rattles represent the aquatic realm. In some versions of the myth the *sxwaixwe* is connected with certain fish or with women changing into certain fish which Lévi-Strauss (1975) has identified as a deep water rock fish, Red Snapper, of the *Sebastes ruberrimus* species.<sup>5</sup>

Lévi-Strauss has revealed the mask's pre-eminent role in society. Beyond its functions in the service of individual owners, the *sxwaixwe* mask is the mediator of exogamous marriage. His interpretation is corroborated in the story told by our key informant in which the appearance of the *sxwaixwe* among the Scowlitz Indians, Upper Fraser Valley, changed the abnormal social and sexual attitudes of two sisters and their brother. The *sxwaixwe* has shamanic healing power as well, and this will become readily apparent from a brief summary of mainland

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<sup>5</sup> L.J.-A. noticed while scuba fishing that the eyes of the Red Snapper bulge out when this fish is brought to the surface, a phenomenon caused by pressure differences. It may well be that the protruding eyes of the *sxwaixwe* mask symbolize the Red Snapper which is looked upon as a supernatural being by several Northwest Coast Indian tribes.

versions of the origin myth. These versions relate how a young man, afflicted with a smelly skin disease, feels rejected and ridiculed and decides to end his life. Arriving at a lake or stream he jumps into the water with the intention of drowning himself. Instead, he recovers consciousness and finds himself on the roof of a house. He is invited in by the water spirit people and asked to cure the chief's daughter (or some other sick persons) there. He recognizes that their illness is caused by the spittle or the tears which he had dropped into the water. He cures the sick persons, and in some versions he marries the chief's daughter. In every version he is given the *sxwaixwe* mask which has to be fished out of the water by his sister, who must use her own hair as fishline. On returning home the hero is cured of his skin disease. He has now become a shaman himself, endowed with the power to cure certain illnesses. His sister marries and is given the mask as dowry; the mask brings its owners good luck and riches. Some versions state that whenever the men dance with the *sxwaixwe* there is an earthquake, a reference to the chthonian powers of the mask (Lévi-Strauss 1975).

In contemporary Coast Salish culture the *sxwaixwe* rite is often performed in conjunction with the winter spirit dances. Barnett (1955) and Lévi-Strauss (1975) draw attention to the rule that the *sxwaixwe* dancers must not at the same time be spirit dancers and maintain that the *sxwaixwe* rite is not part of the winter spirit ceremonial. Yet it is obvious from the myths of origin that the mask is thought of as having supernatural properties, and that it bestowed shamanic curing power upon its first owner. The young man who received the mask is presented as being at the age of, or in the process of, training for his spirit quest (Boas 1894; Stern 1934; Codere 1948). He falls ill, and in order to get cured he has to go through the initiation experience of death and rebirth. He drowns, i.e., he journeys to a beyond which is under water, encounters water spirits, and is reborn, coming out of the water<sup>6</sup> and returning home with the *sxwaixwe* mask, the representation of the spirit power he has acquired.

In some versions the hero is depicted as bathing and purifying himself for many days before he jumps into the water (Jenness 1955:91) in the manner of those questing for spirit power. In others he goes swim-

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Jung (1952) for the rebirth symbolism of emergence from water in Old World mythology and Judaeo-Christian religious traditions.

ming and diving every day in order to get strong (Boas 1894:455); he lies down by the water to sleep and has a dream-vision of two spirit helpers who advise him what to do to get cured, and who impose food taboos on him (Stern 1934; Jenness 1955). Some versions tell that the hero has been away for four days or for four years (Smith 1938; Codere 1948), which are the traditional time spans in the Salish spirit dance initiation process. Before he re-enters the parental home his kinspeople have to clean themselves and the house and to place new mats where the returning hero will stay (Stern 1934). The same procedure was followed whenever a shaman came home with newly acquired spirit power. Most versions relate that he got cured after having healed the underwater people and that he knew medicines and could cure certain diseases upon his return (Codere 1948). The hero thus has become an Indian Doctor—he can make people sick and also cure them (Hill-Tout 1902). The boy who is to receive the *sxwaixwe* has been singled out in his family which is often the case with shamans-to-be. He is afflicted with a skin disease, a condition often attributed in North American Indian myths to a hero who, at first rejected, subsequently acquires supernatural powers stronger than anybody else's. In the version related to us by a prominent local owner of one mask, the hero's previously unsocialized attitude is epitomized in the traditional text of the *sxwaixwe* song which states that he had a 'stomach of stone'.<sup>7</sup> Through the *sxwaixwe* experience he undergoes a personality change, a social cure such as is also effected by the spirit dance initiation (cf. Jilek 1974). In the spirit quest the initiate sees his ceremonial attire and face painting in a dream or in a vision; in this version of the *sxwaixwe* myth

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<sup>7</sup> According to our informant, the expression 'stomach of stone' implies that the hero had a negative social disposition; he was not communicating with and had little concern for his people. In discussion Professor Lévi-Strauss has commented that this expression is reminiscent of what is said about the Coeur d'Alène Indians of Idaho, namely, that they have a heart as tiny as a bird's and very hard, because they are considered to have a mean disposition. Linguistic evidence from related Salish languages suggests that the suffix for 'stomach' is used to signify emotional states, such as Thompson Salish *k'əs-ænk*, 'angry', literally, 'bad stomach'. Mythological evidence suggests that in this particular case the hero's father was the tribal ancestor who had been changed into stone by the Transformer *Χals* which as a rule was inflicted upon a person as a punishment for misdeeds. The father's meanness is also indicated by his name which contains the prefix *qəl-*, 'bad' (for details of the myth see Boas 1895:27).

an Indian Doctor is called in and has a vision of the *sxwaixwe* costume to be worn with the mask.

It appears that the shamanistic properties of the *sxwaixwe* mask have been lost and that it has been taken out of the spirit ceremonial complex where it undoubtedly once belonged. However, the power inherent in the mask is still believed to be so strong that the vulnerable new spirit dancers present at the *sxwaixwe* ceremonial must be shielded and protected from its influence. This power may be seen as deriving from the stark combination of binary oppositions symbolized in the mask itself, in the ceremonial costume, and in the choreographic drama of the *sxwaixwe* rite. The bird-fish nature of the mask, combining the aerial and aquatic realms, is repeated in the costume. The dancer is adorned with feathers while holding a sea shell rattle.

Most conspicuous in the *sxwaixwe* rite is the antagonism of the sexes: the wild power of the male dancers—only strong young men can perform the *sxwaixwe* dance—is tamed by the women's peaceful soothing song which imposes order and rhythm on chaotic energy. In agreement with Lévi-Strauss' (1975) interpretation of the *sxwaixwe*, we summarize in conclusion: On the level of cosmos and nature, *sxwaixwe* is a mediator of distant elements, joining heaven and earth, sky and water, bird and fish. On the level of human society, *sxwaixwe* is a mediator between distant kin groups, joining man and woman in exogamous marriage (brother gives mask to sister when sister marries into another band) and also joining distant tribes in ceremonial functions at which the *sxwaixwe* mask is displayed. Lévi-Strauss has turned our attention to the fact that the peculiar form of the mask resembles the shape of the copper plates used so extensively at Northwest Coast potlatches. This further emphasizes the mediator role of the *sxwaixwe* in the exchange of wealth between social units. Its function is equivalent to that of the copper plates which were symbols of riches and the main objects in the exchange of wealth among the coastal tribes north of the Salish area. Beyond these important mediator functions of the *sxwaixwe* mask, the myth attests to its shamanic origin and power which is still manifested in the contemporary ritual.

## SYMBOLIC PROCESSES IN INDIAN DOCTORING

The Salish shaman, or "Indian Doctor", is the one who travels to search and find the patient's lost soul or guardian spirit, and restores it to the rightful owner. Consequently, his name  $\check{s}x^w\lambda\hat{e}\cdot m$  derives from  $\check{s}x^w\lambda i\hat{e}\cdot m$ , 'searcher of souls' and  $\check{s}x^w\acute{\alpha}l\cdot\acute{\alpha}m$ , 'on one's course of travel'.

Two basic disease concepts appear to have been brought from Central and Northern Asia to North America with consecutive waves of palaeolithic immigrants: (1) soul or spirit-power loss, (2) intrusion of a pathogenic object or spirit-power into the patient. Attending to these conditions has exclusively been the shamanic healer's business in Asia as well as in America (cf. Eliade 1964, ch. vii, ix). Hultkrantz (1953:448, 370) in his extensive review of the soul and spirit concepts of aboriginal North America, differentiates between *soul loss* and *spirit-power loss*. In soul loss conditions, the "soul has disappeared or strayed to a place whence it cannot by itself return—e.g. the realm of the dead"; while spirit or power loss implies the "loss of a guardian spirit that is so intimately connected with the individual that his life is imperilled". The latter concept is especially characteristic of Puget Sound Coast Salish and some Interior Salish groups, but it is also found in such diverse populations as the Iroquois, Pawnee, Caddo, Shoshoni and Paviotso tribes and among New Mexico pueblos in the context of *nagualism*.

Soul loss and evil-agent intrusion as pathological theories and indication for shamanic soul recapture and evil-agent extraction were very widespread among the native peoples of Canada (cf. Margetts 1975). Culture element research in Northwestern America has depicted the following distribution: the soul-loss theory is universal among the northern Northwest Coast tribes and among the Gulf of Georgia Salish; while in the Plateau area soul-loss illness is recognized mainly by tribal groups which do not recognize spirit loss illness, and vice-versa. Intrusive object or spirit as cause of disease is accepted by all northern Northwest Coast tribes, by nearly all Gulf Salish, and by most Plateau groups (cf. Drucker 1950; Barnett 1939; Ray 1942). Early references to soul loss by abduction among Coast Salish groups are made by Eells (1889:677):



Sometimes before a person dies, it may be months, it is supposed that a spirit comes from the spirit world and carries away the spirit of the person, after which the person wastes away or dies suddenly. If by any means it is discovered that this has been done ... then they attempt to get the spirit back by a tamanous, and if it is done the person will live.

and Wickersham (1898:346):

You might be asleep and your father who is dead might come and get your soul and take it to where the dead stay, across a river. Next day you would feel bad (sick) and grow worse, and finally die ... The soul may be separated from the body. The tamanous man can steal a soul away from the body and kill the person.

More recently descriptions of disease by soul loss and the intrusion of pathogenic agents, and of the shamanic cures of such conditions among the Coast Salish of British Columbia, have been presented by Barnett (1955:210–211) and Duff (1952:112–113). It is evident from their reports that the objects which were magically “shot” into the patient by evil shamans in order to cause illness were in fact animated power-agents, and that there is no essential difference between the pathological theories of object intrusion and spirit intrusion. Today, the role of the few remaining “Indian Doctors” is viewed as geared to healing activity, and “shooting of power” is only attributed to the malevolent caprice of immature spirit dancers. In contemporary Salish *Indian Doctoring* the concepts of soul and spirit-power are closely associated. It is believed that the spirit power may leave a person due to a sudden fright experience as the soul was traditionally believed to do. Wike (1941) in her unpublished manuscript on southern Salish spirit dancing categorizes loss of soul and loss of spirit power as separate conditions which, however, have the same cause—capture by shaman or ghosts—and which call for the same therapeutic procedure—shamanic travel beyond this world and recapture of soul or spirit power; without this the patient would ultimately die.

According to our informants, loss of spirit power is mostly the result of inappropriate behavior on the part of the owner. In one case, however, a girl's spirit power was taken away by a shaman on her father's request, whereupon she instantly “died”. In order to revive her, the

shaman had to “put the spirit back there”. We have observed *Indian Doctoring* of patients suffering from psychogenic symptoms which were diagnosed as due to spirit intrusion (example 1) and soul loss (example 2).

*Example 1. Spirit Intrusion: Contemporary Treatment*

While the patient, a young girl, was wailing and crying, the shaman, accompanied by the drummers, chanted rhythmically, trying to get in contact with his supernatural power which helps him to find out the cause of the ailment. Suddenly the drumming and chanting stopped. After a period of tense silence the shaman declared that the patient’s illness was caused by the intrusion of her deceased grandmother’s spirit. He promised to cure her if she had complete faith in him, citing examples of such cures which were confirmed by witnesses in the audience. During the healing ceremony he explained each step of the forthcoming procedure to the patient who was held by female relatives. He was “fixing” water, handling it as a precious substance with which he splashed the patient. He then removed the pathogenic spirit by making grabbing movements with his cupped hands, “taking over the spirit” to his own chest in order to control it. Finally he let the spirit free with gestures as if freeing a captured bird. The girl’s father was requested to hold a glass of fresh water while kneeling beside the shaman who transferred power into it. The shaman then instructed the patient to slowly drink this water while he was chanting. Pointing at her mouth and stomach, he pronounced: “The fixed water goes down here and takes all the rest of your illness away, you will be cured. Now smile and the world will smile at you.” At these words the patient abandoned her rigid posture, got up smiling and embraced her healer. Speechmaking by witnesses and relatives concluded the ceremony.

*Example 2. Soul-Loss: Contemporary Treatment*

When called to attend to a teenage girl’s ailment on another occasion, the shaman announced that the patient was suffering from “soul loss sickness”. He said that his special spirit power had let him see and find the lost soul “on the other side of the river”, i.e., in the land of the dead (note the archetypal river Styx symbolism). He was going to return the

lost soul to her rightful owner. However, he also stated that his spirit power had advised that the patient should become a spirit dancer for her own future protection. If she did not, ancestral spirits would again take hold of her soul and cause her serious ills. Drumming started again. The patient appeared to re-enter the trance state which she had entered initially under the effect of continuous rhythmic chanting and drumming. The shaman made gestures as if capturing the lost soul from the air, holding it in his closed hands. He then transferred the soul back to its owner by rubbing it on the patient's chest and sides. The girl started to cry and wail while the shaman stood in front of her with his head lowered and his eyes closed. He listened intensely for the emerging spirit song, sometimes placing his ear to her chest. Finally he was able to pick up the tune from her wailing and began to sing the newly found spirit song. Drumming was intensified and the shaman's helpers fell in with their voices, the patient now crying out loudly. The shaman proceeded to "blow power" into the patient's body and continued to chant until the girl blurted out her spirit song, led and accompanied by the chorus. She was "stood up", held by her relatives while she clumsily made her first dance steps. After hours of crying and wailing, accompanied by rhythmic chanting and drumming, the patient had found her own way of expressing her guardian spirit power. She was led to a makeshift tent for seclusion to undergo the required process of initiation into spirit dancing.

#### THE SYMBOLIC PROCESS OF THE POWER BOARD AND POLE CEREMONIAL

A number of ethnographic reports on the Coast Salish mention shamanic spirits associated with a specific rite, under the heading of *sg<sup>u</sup>dī lātc*, *skudīlitc*, *sk<sup>w</sup>adi' ləc*, *sk<sup>w</sup>əni' ləč*, or *s-g<sup>w</sup>ədīlič* (Haeberlin and Günther 1924; Wike 1941; Jenness 1955; Kew 1970; Amoss 1972; Collins 1974). The authors describe particular paraphernalia which may be used in this context; painted cedar boards, cedar poles, twisted cedar branches or cedar bark, and twisted vine maple. They are credited with the power of discovering lost persons and objects, "smelling out" hidden things, clairvoyance and recognition and cure of illness.

We have observed the *sk<sup>w</sup>əniləč* procedure on several occasions in the smokehouses of the Coast Salish, performed by Indian Doctors for

diagnostic and therapeutic purposes during the winter ceremonial. The paraphernalia used in this ceremony consisted of either a pair of cedar boards or a pair of loopshaped cedar branches or bark, bandaged with scarlet cloth similar to the "twisted ring of cedar bark in horseshoe shape" mentioned by Wike (1941:39). The "power boards" were rectangular cedar boards, approximately 30 x 45 cm, with slots by which they were held. They were painted black and white, either showing the bare outline of a mask-like face, or a skeletonized figure. The following characteristics were attributed to the *sk<sup>w</sup>əniləč* paraphernalia: they (1) have innate power; (2) move by themselves; (3) seek out their objects and (4) have the capacity to cure.

An Indian Doctor of the highest reputation in the Coast Salish area, whose cooperation in the treatment of Indian patients we learned to appreciate, told us that he went on the quest for healing power at age thirteen. One day the sound of drumming guided him to a "trembling" cedar tree from which he obtained a *sk<sup>w</sup>əniləč* song and eventually also his healing power. Later in life he returned to this tree to make a set of paraphernalia. He took some bark, shredded it and mixed it with red facial paint and wrapped it with red cloth. By their own power the two sticks he had thus made twisted into a loop-shaped form.. They have the power to "twist things and men", i.e., to impose their innate twisting power on them. He also commands the *sk<sup>w</sup>əniləč* power of the cedar boards, the cedar branches, and the vine maple.

"Power poles" have been important instruments in *sk<sup>w</sup>əniləč* ceremonies in the past, and a trio is said to be still in use on Vancouver Island. Our informants describe them as of different length up to ten feet, with some red cedar bark tied near the top end. The poles were held horizontally by the shaman's assistants, who often had difficulty controlling the violent shaking movements, while the owner sang his song, accompanied by drumming. In behavior, function, and ceremonial significance the "power poles" are identical with the "power boards".

As author-observer descriptions of *sk<sup>w</sup>əniləč* ceremonies are rarely encountered in ethnographic literature, we are presenting here a summary of our observations of contemporary *sk<sup>w</sup>əniləč* rites. The ceremonies were supervised by the Indian Doctor who owned the paraphernalia used on these occasions; either a pair of painted "power boards" or twisted "power sticks". The Indian Doctor in charge was assisted by other ritualists, by two groups of four ceremonial "workers", and by

drummers and singers. Each instrument was carried by a pair of husky “workers” holding on to it with one hand and to a companion’s belt with the other. The paraphernalia were “warmed up” at the bonfires in the smokehouse and “fed” by women, who threw pieces of smoked salmon and poured a little water into the flames. One after the other, the paraphernalia were carried around the smokehouse hall, facing the audience while people stood up in reverence. The instruments would then “smell the ground” and seemed to be magnetically attracted to each other, defying the “workers’” efforts to keep them apart. Rushing together and sweeping up high, the powerful tools would drag their guardians with them in a wild chase around the hall until their master, the Indian Doctor, intervened. Only he had the power to slow down and separate the unruly instruments. This procedure was repeated several times. The *sk<sup>w</sup>ānilāč* ran wild and the strong workers, in spite of desperate attempts to tame the instruments, were pulled around the hall, into each corner, out of the door and in again, lifted up and lowered to the ground in undulant movements. Again and again the power-charged instruments would pull together and had to be separated and pacified by the Indian Doctor who occasionally “blew power” into his hands before touching them. From time to time, he held them close to his ears, listened attentively and nodded his head. The instruments would then move around slowly, “smelling” and “searching” while the people watched on in suspense. The *sk<sup>w</sup>ānilāč*, just like the spirit dancer, is “blind” and yet seeing. The eyes painted on the power boards appear blind and the twisted power sticks are “blindfolded” by red cloth wrapped around them, and yet these paraphernalia point at and single out persons in the audience for recognition, reprimand, or treatment. In the *sk<sup>w</sup>ānilāč* curing rite, a sick person singled out by the paraphernalia would be quickly surrounded by relatives and friends. The power-laden tools would move up and down on all sides of the trembling patient, stroking him in gentle passes, and emanating their healing power while the Indian Doctor chants his song. At the end, with all drums being beaten, the *sk<sup>w</sup>ānilāč*, in a final display of power, would chase its keepers four times around the smokehouse hall with such speed that the excited audience perceived them all as flying. The contemporary use of the *sk<sup>w</sup>ānilāč* paraphernalia as instruments of diagnosis and treatment in the broadest sense, as means to elicit and correct “wrong” conditions, will not readily provide cues about their ori-

gin, nor will enquiries with the ritualists. In ordinary "Indian Doctoring" (s. above) the *sk<sup>w</sup>əníləč* is not employed. We have to turn to older ethnographic sources on Coast Salish culture and to the etymology of Salish terms in order to reconstruct the derivation of this ceremonial and comprehend its symbolic significance.

All over the Northwest Coast area the ritual journey to the land of the dead in order to recover a lost or abducted soul or guardian spirit was performed by individual shamans with the help of their special spirit powers. In the form of a pantomime rite uniting the powers of a group of shamans in the effort to retrieve a patient's soul or guardian spirit, this shamanic voyage has been noted by culture element researchers among Coast Salish and Interior Salish populations (Barnett 1939; Ray 1942). It is noted among the Kwakiutl, Nootka, Tsimshian, and Haida (Drucker 1950).

Most of the ethnographic information on such collective shamanic expeditions to the realm of the ghosts was gathered in the southern Coast Salish area. As early as 1889, Rev. Eells (1889:677) reported on a big *tamanous* "power ceremony" of this kind in which eight Twana shamans, dismissed by the Reverend as "arrant humbugs", engaged in a pantomime trip to the land of the dead. Günther (1927:298) heard of a defunct ritual performance among the Klallam, called *sme'tnaq*, in which several shamans went to the land of the dead to recover a soul. This shamanistic performance was the famous Coast Salish spirit canoe ceremony, a curing rite of great antiquity, never witnessed by any of the area's ethnographers who described it under various related names: *smitinák*, Klallam (Curtis 1913); *sbEtEtda'q*, Snohomish (Haeberlin 1918); *sptda'q<sup>w</sup>*, Dwamish (Waterman 1930); *smatnatc*, Lummi (Stern 1934); *spadák*, Puyallup-Nisqually (Smith 1940); *bəsbətəda'q*, Twana, 'soul-loss curers in a group soul recovery' (Elmendorf 1960); *báttadak*, Skagit (Collins 1974). The northern Puget Sound Salish word *sbətətdáq* is a duplication, indicating continuous action or plural, of the southern Puget Sound Salish term *spədák* and equivalents which are related to Halkomelem *spaləq<sup>w</sup>*, 'ghost'.

Old Pierre, the Coast Salish shaman of the Lower Fraser Valley, told Jenness (1955:61-63) that the *sk<sup>w</sup>əníləč* ceremony originated among the southern Coast Salish in the State of Washington. He said the *Sea sk<sup>w</sup>əníləč* spirits traveled in canoes like the related *q<sup>w</sup>ax<sup>w</sup>əqs*. While the latter held up long poles, the former held boards in the air. In dancing,

therefore, the protégés of either spirit carried power-charged poles and boards, respectively, which were serving the same purposes. If we follow Old Pierre's trace of the *skʷəníləč* origin to the Puget Sound tribes in northern Washington, we read in Haeberlin and Günther (1924: 59–64) about the *sg<sup>u</sup>dī'letc* board and the *q'woxq!* pole and their ritualized displays of power. The spirit in whose dance the cedar board was used was said to travel in a canoe. To the Puyallup-Nisqually (Smith 1940:114), *skwadilitc* suggested an object of inherent power which "could be used to go to the land of the dead to watch for souls".

In Dorsey's (1902) original account of the spirit boat and its function among the Dwamish, and in Waterman's (1930) detailed report, we note pictures of boards with hand-holds painted on the cedar planks of the spirit canoe and quite similar in shape to the power boards used today.<sup>8</sup> "Power entered these things during certain ceremonies and they dragged people about causing them to quiver and shake. The particular term for this object is *skudi'litc*", wrote Waterman (1930:302). There is also the closely related *q<sup>ε</sup>oxq<sup>ε</sup>* spirit power which likewise jumps, quivers, and drags the carrier of its pole around, and we recognize it as identical to the *q<sup>w</sup>ax<sup>w</sup>əqs* poleholding spirit of Old Pierre.

According to the original informants the painted designs on the spirit boat planks represent the shamans' spirit helpers travelling to the other world. They are surrounded by dots which stand for the "songs" revealed to the shaman by his particular spirit helper. On one of the planks (Dorsey *op. cit.* plate 64; Waterman *op. cit.* fig. 52, 53) the painting represents a spirit power "which can twist a victim into a knot". This twisting power is called *sxuda'tc* in Dwamish dialect. In his classical report on the Salish spirit canoe, Haeberlin (1918) relates that there was a painted cedar board beside each man in the ceremony, owned by the shaman and depicting his vision experiences; the Snohomish term for these "magical boards" is rendered as *swan'c*. It will be noted that by inserting into Dwamish *sxuda'tc* and Snohomish *swan'c* the mystical suffix *íl* which is used in Coast Salish languages to denote special supernatural relationships, terms equivalent to Halkomelem *skʷəníləč* can be derived. Shamanic power boards of Quinault medicine men were already described by Willoughby (1889:278); they

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. illustrations in Dorsey, *op. cit.* plates 65, 66; Waterman *op. cit.* fig. 54, 147; Wingert 1949, plate 16.

were called “my doctor” or *se-guan* which is probably a lay transliteration of *syəwəŋ*, spirit song and power. Curtis (1913) mentioned carved planks, representing vision experiences, which stood beside the bed of Coast Salish shamans.

Images with skeletal details found on shamanic boards and spirit canoe figures had already been recorded in the drawings of Coast Salish planks by members of Wilke’s United States Exploring Expedition 1838–1842 (Wingert 1949 plates 6, 7, 14, 21). To the old Quinault shamans, deer hoof pendants attached to ceremonial objects signified “rattling bones” (Willoughby 1889:278). In the tradition of the Upper Skagit the shaman used a “skeleton spirit” to diagnose soul loss, and to assist him on the journey to the land of the dead to return the lost soul to its rightful owner (Collins 1974:201). In Amerindian cultures we often find the shaman depicted in a “kind of x-ray style that goes back to Upper Palaeolithic times” (Furst 1973:33). Eliade (1964:63; 159) states:

In the spiritual horizon of hunters and herdsmen bone represents the very source of life, both human and animal. To reduce oneself to the skeleton condition is equivalent to re-entering the womb of this primordial life, that is, to a complete renewal, a mystical rebirth ... The skeleton present in the shaman’s costume summarizes and reactualizes the drama of his initiation, that is, the drama of death and resurrection.

We conclude, therefore, that the skeletonized design we observed on modern Salish power-boards is of very ancient origin and symbolizes the process of death and rebirth in the context of shamanic healing.

In the now obsolete Salish spirit canoe rite each of the participating shamans carried a long staff or “magical pole” which was handled in the manner of canoe poles or paddles to propel the magic vessel to the land of the dead (Dorsey 1902:234; Waterman 1930:540; Haeberlin 1918:253). According to Dorsey and Haeberlin, the term for this pole among the Puget Sound Salish was *toucht’ d* or *tsk!ō’ sEd*, respectively, meaning ‘canoe pole’. The Halkomelem equivalent is *θk’ wósal*, from *θk’ wát*, ‘to pull’; a verb colloquially used to denote propelling a canoe. When Wike (1941) collected her data in the northern Puget Sound area, the concept of the spirit canoe was gone, but the shaman travelling to recapture an individual’s abducted spirit power still relied on his



*suqo'sad* cane, a term clearly equivalent to the above expressions. Among the Lummi who are the southern neighbours of the Fraser River Salish, each of the medicine men enacting the spirit canoe ceremony took his position in the symbolic boat armed with a pole "just as he would were he to go out into the water" (Stern 1934:80). These poles were referred to as *qakwa*, which term takes us back to the *q<sup>w</sup>ax<sup>w</sup>aqs* spirits described by Old Pierre, which travelled in canoes, held long poles, and were associated with the Sea *sk<sup>w</sup>aníláč*.

In conclusion: the contemporary Salish *sk<sup>w</sup>aníláč* rite is vestigial of the ancient psychodramatic enactment of a collective shamanic boat journey to the land of the dead. The Salish spirit canoe of old retraced the voyage of the deceased person's soul, as it were, for in the past the dead were commonly buried in the southern Coast Salish area in a canoe which journeyed to the other world with them.<sup>9</sup> The grave canoe was placed on a support frame which held a special power for the recovery of abducted souls. This power was known by the term *sbətada'q* (Elmendorf 1960:452) which also labels the spirit canoe ceremony.

## THE STRUCTURE OF SALISH HEALING

In the foregoing sections we have presented the four main types of therapeutic ceremonial activity as practiced today among the Coast Salish Indians. We have tried to identify the elements which, when analyzed and combined in terms of symbolic content and formal structure, reveal the same basic symbolism, and the same structural pattern in all four types of rituals:

### *Basic Symbolism: Shamanic Journey to the Land of the Dead*

Very aptly the Halkomelem Salish term for shaman, *šx<sup>w</sup>lác·m*, is derived from the verb *lám*, 'to go', he is 'the one on his course of travel'. In his therapeutic pursuits, the shaman travels to the other world, to the Land of the Dead from whence only return those who have acquired shamanic powers. Eliade (1964) has demonstrated the universality of

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<sup>9</sup> For comparative ethnological data on the association of the nearly universal idea of the "Boat of the Dead" with that of the "Shamanic Boat", see Eliade 1964:355-358.

the shamanic journey to the “underworld” for the recovery of a soul or guiding spirit, in the cultures of North and South America, Central and North Asia. As we have shown with our data, this shamanic voyage is most conspicuous in the *skʷəni'ləč* rite, which derives from the now obsolete spirit canoe ceremony, and in Indian Doctoring, in which a lost soul or guardian spirit is fetched from the Land of the Dead “across the river”. The *sxwaixwe* myth combines the shamanic travel to another world under water with the hero’s cure and shamanic initiation. It thus repeats a general theme of North American Indian mythology (cf. Eliade 1964:312). Salish spirit dance initiation, with its leitmotif of death and rebirth, implies the novice’s travel to the Land of the Dead. His journey starts when he is “clubbed to death”, and he does not return fully to the land of the living until he has found his spirit song. He then re-emerges to live a healthier and socially more rewarding existence. Like the shamans in the spirit canoe, the initiate is highly vulnerable. While on his trip he must be protected by “babysitters” and by his uniform and staff. With the staff he “poles upstream, toward life” in the same manner as the spirit canoe voyageurs.<sup>10</sup> The initiate has to fast and must resist the temptation of accepting food with which he is “teased”, for the myths tell him that he who accepts food in the Land of the Dead will remain there forever. The mature spirit dancer relives this archetypical journey at every winter ceremonial. In a trance, he dances around the hall of the smokehouse which always extends in East-West direction, “looking to the Land of the Dead”.<sup>11</sup> Although blindfolded, he finds his way past obstacles just as does the shaman on his voyage to the other world. The spirit dancer has to beware of stumbling or slipping which augurs ill, as did the shaman’s misstep or fall during the spirit canoe ceremony. When returning to his seat the dancer feels rejuvenated “like a newborn baby”.

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<sup>10</sup> According to Waterman (1930:556) the spirit canoe rite was linked with spirit dance initiation through a special spirit power, *Xe'dxedib*.

<sup>11</sup> Shamans travelling in the spirit canoe were facing West when on their way to the Land of the Dead, and facing East when returning to the living world. The spirit canoe ceremony could therefore only be performed in a house lying in the direction of East and West (Haeberlin 1918:252).

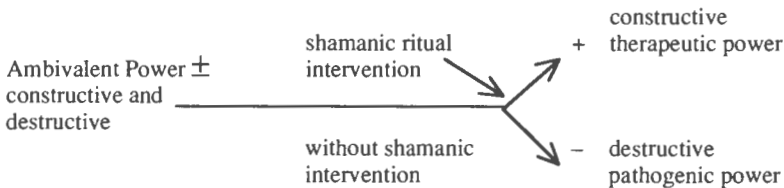
Structural Pattern

Our data on the therapeutic ceremonials of the Coast Salish can be summarized in a schema representing the dialectic process of supernatural power in the four types of ritual activity:

	POWER ACQUISITION	POWER MANIFESTATION	POWER TAMING	POWER UTILIZATION
Indian Doctoring	Shaman's quest for healing power	Shaman's initiatory sickness	Shamanic initiation ordeal; Intervention by senior shamans	Treatment of soul and guardian spirit loss; Treatment of spirit intrusion
Power Board and Pole Ceremonial	Shaman's quest for <i>sk<sup>w</sup>.ani'loč</i> power; ritual preparation of paraphernalia	Display of "wild" power of new spirit dancer	Manipulation of paraphernalia by shaman in <i>sk<sup>w</sup>.mil'č</i> ceremony	Diagnosis: "smelling out" and "searching" power; Therapy: transfer of healing power from paraphernalia to patient
Spirit dance initiation	Spirit quest: Power appears in dream vision; finding of song	Spirit illness; Display of "wild" power of new spirit dancer	Spirit dance initiation ordeal; Intervention by ritualist, workers, babysitters, drummers	Therapeutic, social, economic benefits of guardian spirit power
<i>Sxwaxwe</i> Ceremonial	Mythical quest, hero's acquisition of mask; (later by inheritance)	Display of "wild" power of <i>sxwaxwe</i> dancers (male)	Intervention by chorus (female) in <i>sxwaxwe</i> ceremony	In myth: therapeutic, social and economic benefits; In ceremonial: social and economic benefits of <i>sxwaxwe</i> power

Supernatural Realm

Human Realm



The Salish concept of power implies an inherent ambivalence due to the combination of binary-opposed destructive and constructive forces.<sup>12</sup> Resolution is achieved through shamanic ritual intervention which tames the potentially dangerous power, and transforms it into constructive, therapeutic power which can be used beneficially. Without such intervention, the destructive, pathogenic potential of supernatural power is realized, to the detriment of the individual.

In reference to Lévi-Strauss' (1963) ideas on the effectiveness of symbols, we may assume that the confirmed therapeutic effects of Salish ceremonials are achieved through the use of collective symbols which are patterned in accordance with neuropsychologically determined structural laws, and which therefore have direct access to the unconscious.

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. C.G. Jung (1952:654, 747) on the archetypal *coincidentia oppositorum*, the ambivalent union of opposites which is seen as generating the dynamic tension of psychological extremes and which leads to release of energy.



Professor Claude Lévi-Strauss in discussion with an hereditary Coast Salish Indian Chief at the authors' home in 1974. Photo: W.G. Jilek.



Coast Salish spirit dancers in ceremonial attire at Indian canoe races. Photo: W.G. Jilek.



Coast Salish spirit dancers in ceremonial attire at Indian canoe races.  
Photo: W.G. Jilek.



Festive procession of *sxwaixwe* dancers in full regalia.  
Photo: W.G. Jilek.



*Sxwaxwe* dancer performing in the ceremonial house.

Photo: W.G. Jilek.



Coast Salish shamans of the Snoqualmie tribe travelling to the Land of the Dead in the ancient spirit canoe ritual, Tolt, Washington State, 1920.  
Photo: Dr Leechman; private collection Prof. Margetts, Vancouver.



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## Neurocognitive Foundations of the Shamanic Perspective: A Brief Exploration into the Role of Imagination in Cognition and in the Creation of Experience

JAMES ALEXANDER OVERTON

SAN DIEGO, CAL.

“ . . . even to a scientist, [the brain] is the organ of the imagination.”  
W. Grey Walter, “The Living Brain,” 1953

“Imagination is more important than knowledge.”  
Albert Einstein

*The fundamental premise of this paper is that there exists a single, highly complex, common neurocognitive capacity responsible for the development of many uniquely human cognitive and cultural phenomena, including shamanism, the shamanistic worldview, art, and language. This essay is representative of a work in progress aimed at initiating the scientific exploration into this primary human neurocognitive faculty, identified and referred to herein as ‘imagination’. The task however, is monumental. Not only is the study of imagination lacking in the Western intellectual and philosophical tradition, but this very tradition is founded “upon a widely shared set of presuppositions that deny imagination a central role in the constitution of rationality” (Johnson 1987). The viewpoint adopted in this inquiry departs quite radically from this convention. Herein imagination is considered to be a fundamental and essential human mind-brain function, and shamanism is one of the most dramatic and first recorded manifestations of this cognitive faculty. The purpose of this paper is twofold. First of all, as its title suggests, its aim is to be a preparatory neurocognitive investigation into shamanism and related phenomena, a field of study all but ignored by the neural sciences at large. In this regard, it is intended to introduce a theoretical structure upon which two traditionally disparate fields of inquiry – namely the study of shamanism (and related phenomena) and the field of cognitive neuroscience – can lend to and share with each others’ respective spheres of knowledge. Also, by introducing*

*shamanism within the same context as language and suggesting that both share a common neurocognitive foundation (imagination) it seeks to further legitimize the neurocognitive exploration of these types of phenomena. Secondly, this essay identifies imagination as the essential neurocognitive faculty that is both manifested by shamanism and gives rise to it. Thus, it intends to lay the foundation upon which a neurocognitive approach to the study of shamanism, as well as trance and other related phenomena at large, can be built by defining a new field in cognitive neuroscience: the study of imagination.*

## PART I: THE SHAMANIC PERSPECTIVE: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

We alone brood about what didn't happen, and spend a large part of each day musing about the way things could have been if events had transpired differently. And we alone ponder what it will be like not to be. In what other species could individuals ever be troubled by the fact that they do not recall the way things were before they were born and will not know what will occur after they die? We tell stories about our real experiences and invent stories about imagined ones, and we even make use of these stories to organize our lives. In a real sense, we live our lives in this shared virtual world. And slowly, over the millennia, we have come to realize that no other species on earth seems able to follow us into this miraculous place.

– Terrence W. Deacon, *The Symbolic Species*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> While Deacon and I appear to agree on the role that this virtual world plays in human existence, we differ significantly on the interpretation of *why* we are this way. For Deacon,

The doorway into this virtual world was open to us alone by the evolution of language, because language is not merely a mode of communication, it is also the outward expression of an unusual mode of thought – symbolic representation. Without symbolization the entire virtual world that I have described is out of reach: inconceivable. My extravagant claim to know what other species cannot know rests on evidence that symbolic thought does not come innately built in, but develops by internalizing the symbolic process that underlies language. So species that have not acquired the ability to communicate symbolically cannot have acquired the ability to think this way either (Deacon 1997).

On the other hand, my theory emphasizes the role that imagination (including imagery and its linguistic subordinates such as metaphor and analogy), and not just symbolic representation, plays in the ability to develop language.

*The Shamanic Perspective in Overview*

The “*shamanic perspective*”<sup>2</sup> is a theoretical schematization of the nature of cosmological beliefs common to most pre-industrialized societies. As a model, the *shamanic perspective* was originally developed and adopted within the context of the manifestations of such a worldview both cross-culturally as well as in modern society, particularly in literature, religion, and mythology. In essence “the shamanic perspective is the cosmological view intellectually engaged by one who has acquired an essential and core knowledge of the [universal] nature of shamanic beliefs and practices”<sup>3</sup> (Overton 1998b). It is characterized by a view of the cosmos in which objects, “[r]ocks, trees, rivers, and clouds were all seen as wondrous, alive” creating an environment of “enchantment” and belonging in which “a member of this cosmos was not an alienated observer of it but a direct participant in its drama” (Berman 1984), the drama of being and existence. It is a worldview based on a sense of “merger, or identification, with one’s surroundings” that predominated in the West until the very “eve of the Scientific Revolution” after which it was replaced by the “disenchanted” and mechanistic perspective of the Cartesian (or Scientific) paradigm (Berman 1984).

Nevertheless, despite the shift in the dominant Western cultural paradigm – from a shamanic to a scientific perspective, from an enchanted cosmos to a mechanistic one – vestiges of the shamanic perspective remain present in Western society. A closer look at beliefs and religious

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<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed account of the shamanic perspective, please see Overton 1994, 1998a, 1998b. For support of this theoretical account see, for example, Winkelmann 1992, Lehmann and Myers 1993, La Barre 1990, Eliade 1974, 1978, Heinze 1991, Krippner and Welch 1992, Schultes and Hofmann 1992, Langdon and Baer 1992, or Walsh 1990.

<sup>3</sup> The shamanic perspective is therefore a theory, a model or paradigm abstracted from a reality which consists of many diverging beliefs, traditions, rituals, and customs, and condensed into a single framework. The multifaceted nature of the reality to which the shamanic perspective points can be conceived of as *the shamanic worldview*. Thus, the shamanic perspective is the theoretical standpoint adopted in order to comprehend the shamanic worldview in its multifaceted diversity. However, although the distinction between the shamanic perspective as a theory and the shamanic worldview as a reality is important to note, within the context of this essay I will use the two terms interchangeably unless a distinction is explicitly required.

practices reveals that the shamanic perspective is not unique and limited to shamanistic cultures proper, but rather spans human societies in general. For this reason the shamanic perspective is a term which can not only be employed to refer to a common worldview shared and prevalent in pre-industrialized cultures and societies around the globe. Rather, *it can equally be applied to the unofficial systems of beliefs that predominate in so-called modern societies as well.*

*The “Shamanic Nine”: Nine Fundamental Features of the Shamanic Perspective*

According to the shamanic perspective, the following properties and/or beliefs can be seen as characteristic of this shamanistic worldview:

1. *Belief in an “alternate” reality* whose existence parallels that of the material world of the senses (perception), otherwise known as “ordinary” reality. This alternate reality, sometimes also referred to as “non-ordinary,” or “ultimate” reality, is frequently multidimensional and, together with “ordinary” reality, leads to a “tiered” division of the cosmos, in a manner consistent with, and reflected in, the cultural beliefs and mythological record of any given society. In fact, one of the distinguishing features of the rise of the modern human species is the practice of ritualistically burying our dead and of ‘communicating’ with them, under the assumption that their primary existence lies in a world beyond, in an “alternate” reality.

2. This multifaceted concept of the cosmos allows for *the existence of “supernatural” forces, beings, and entities* whose behavior and presence in an “alternate” reality is believed to have an effect on the outcomes of events and the status of individuals – human or otherwise – in this “ordinary” reality.

3. The belief that *all entities, animate or otherwise, are imbued with a life force (such as chi or ki), consciousness, soul, or some other ethereal or immaterial substance* that allows them to be influenced and/or to exert influence in a manner that transcends the laws of classical physics.

4. Equally, *certain actions or rituals performed in “ordinary” reality can lead to effects in “non-ordinary” reality.* In many societies there exists the belief that any given individual can commit acts (such as transgressions, for example) that affect forces or entities in “non-ordinary” reality which in turn may directly or indirectly have an impact on “ordi-

nary” reality. This “connectionist” view of cause and effect between different dimensions, forces, and entities of the cosmos is embodied by the “web of life” concept in which all things are interconnected and interdependent.<sup>4</sup>

5. These societies commonly have *designated human agents*<sup>5</sup> who have distinct capacities for relating to these dimensions, forces, or entities of “alternate” reality in such a manner as to affect the outcome of events in this (“ordinary”) world. The specific designations, powers, and responsibilities of these agents vary cross-culturally according to the level of social complexity obtained by a given society (Winkelman 1992). Nevertheless, axial to the advent of a shamanic worldview is the figure of the shaman. The shaman is a magico-religious practitioner who is functionally defined as an individual capable of “willful ecstasy,” that is, of being proficient (perhaps with the assistance of psychotropic substances) at entering into an alternate state of consciousness (ASC) in order to perform social and healing functions in a given society. The act of entering into an ASC is interpreted by the cultural milieu as the shaman experiencing an alternate reality. Thus, the shaman is a mediator of the sacred and the profane, and functions within a given society as a result of this ability for ecstatic flight (e.g., Eliade 1974, La Barre 1990, Walsh 1990, Winkelman 1992).

6. *These shamanic, shamanistic, or priestly characters can exert indirect influence on non-ordinary forces, beings, and dimensions during normal waking consciousness (e.g., via magico-religious rituals), or gain direct access to them in an alternate state of consciousness (e.g., journey, trance, ingestion of hallucinogens, fasting, etc.).*

7. Despite the existence of these specialized agents, *all humans have (occasional) episodes during which they experience aspects of the non-ordinary dimensions of reality.* This is particularly believed to be the case during death or sometimes dreaming, for example, in which the soul

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<sup>4</sup> Ironically, this “systemic” or ecological principle is beginning to replace the more mechanistic paradigm dominant in scientific thought for the last few centuries (Capra 1996).

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Winkelman’s “magico-religious practitioners” including shamanistic healers (shamans, shaman/healers, healers) and mediums, priests, and sorcerer/witch types (Winkelman 1992).



or “anima,” considered an essential and perennial component of one’s being, departs the body to migrate to an alternate dimension.

8. Another common way of gaining information from the nature of events in alternate reality and their effects on this world is by *reading “signs” such as clouds, tea leaves, entrails, and others*. The conviction here is that proper analysis of these events and objects will unveil a deeper and hidden message, invisible to the casual observer.<sup>6</sup>

9. For individuals who share and partake in these beliefs and observances, *the effects of these events can be quite dramatic both in a positive way (e.g. healing) as well as in a negative manner (e.g. Voodoo-death)*.

Although a more detailed explication of some of these remains to be formulated, it is appropriate to identify several critical and unique faculties or features of the human mind-brain indispensable for the many aspects of the shamanic perspective:

– The ability to conceive and consciously represent or experience in the present events, entities, locations, and mythological dimensions (*realities*) that transcend those encountered by everyday experience resulting from perception alone. Without this ability (that I will describe as imagination) virtually nothing shamanic or even distinctly human would be possible.

– The ability to assign *meaning*, that is, the experience of psychological and physiological responses, to these conceptualizations as if they were *real* – on a par (if not more so) with the significance attributed to information available to the mind-brain via the senses (perception).<sup>7</sup>

– The ability to enter, by various means, into alternate states of consciousness, resulting in the creation of experiences by the mind-brain for its own internal representation (what will later be described as *imaginoception*), that is, experiences that transcend perception, and furthermore

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<sup>6</sup> These methods of divination are cognitively no different from a stockbroker’s avid analysis of patterns of numbers on a computer screen in order to determine the future behavior of the market. It is primarily in the premises that the diviner and the broker bring to their respective tasks that they differ.

<sup>7</sup> Imaginary concepts have throughout the history of our species had much greater significance and bearing upon our behavior than the objects within the perceived reality that surrounds us, and have greatly influenced the ways in which we have perceived reality itself. It might be said that, in the human condition, imagination is nine-tenths of reality.

that are or can be influenced and shaped by cultural and social convention and context.

A fundamental premise of this study is that the worldview represented by the “shamanic perspective” is not *only* a cultural phenomenon inherent within a limited number of aboriginal communities, remnants of a pre-industrial age, but is a manifestation of neurocognitive properties of the human mind-brain *as denoted by the above three faculties*. These neurocognitive properties are so essential to our ‘humanness’ that they are represented in every human endeavor: language, art, tool making, religion, science, etc., and are easily taken for granted and overlooked. The claim is, therefore, that *the shamanic perspective is the result of the same evolutionary processes that led to the birth of the modern human mind-brain*. This is why the shamanic perspective is in fact so common to *all* humans and their societies regardless of geographical location, cultural or technological development, or historical period.

The first component of this claim, namely that the ‘shamanic perspective not only reflects a worldview characteristic of pre-industrialized societies, but rather that it is in fact a perspective inherent to *all* human communities’ is perhaps the more perplexing one. What evidence of the prevalent nature of these beliefs could be brought in defense of such an argument? The answer is both obvious as well as potentially polemic: religion and superstition. Although the believers and practitioners of any given religious tradition tend to disavow any relation between their own faith and that of its shamanic origins, virtually every form of religious and superstitious belief shares some, if not all, of the nine essential aspects of the shamanic perspective as delineated above. Christianity, for example, in all of its versions and denominations, inherently encompasses many of the “shamanic nine”:

– *Belief in alternate realities* (Heaven, Hell),

– *Faith in the existence of supernatural forces, beings, and entities* (God, the devil, angels, saints, Jesus, the Trinity, etc.) that can not only manifest themselves in any form or state, but can also influence the existence of beings or objects in the form of healings, miracles, etc.

– *Assertion that certain rituals or acts performed in ordinary reality can lead to effects in “non-ordinary” reality* (good deeds, sacraments, or faith can lead to Heaven while bad deeds can lead to Hell; prayer can lead to help from God).

– *Belief in the existence of designated agents who intercede between non-ordinary and ordinary reality* (the Pope, cardinals, bishops, priests, dead saints, evangelists, etc.).

In fact, while it is difficult to posit universals common to *all* religions that would satisfy every scholar equally, it is certainly possible to identify recurrent themes common to *most* religious beliefs. In this respect Pascal Boyer (*The Naturalness of Religious Ideas*) argues in favor of common recurrent – if not universal – themes. Boyer asserts, for example, that “in most human groups one can find a set of ideas concerning nonobservable, extra-natural agencies and processes” (Boyer 1994), while Boyer and Mithen both agree that “a belief in non-physical beings is the most common feature of religions; it may indeed be universal” (Mithen 1996). Other commonly recurrent themes identified by Boyer are:

1. the assumption that “a nonphysical component of persons can survive after death and remain an intentional being, that is, a being with beliefs and desires”;

2. the belief that certain individuals “are especially likely to receive direct inspiration or messages from extra-natural agencies, such as gods and spirits”;

3. and the assertion that “performing certain ritual ‘recipes’ in the exact way and order prescribed can bring about changes in physical states and affairs” (Boyer 1994).

As can be seen, the above ‘recurrent themes’ are essential facets of the “shamanic nine” identified previously. Furthermore, as far as superstitious beliefs in the United States, a recent Gallup Poll showed that 72% of all Americans believe in angels, 79% believe in miracles, 65% believe in the devil, and 28% believe in communication with the dead (Vyse 1997). Such figures, together with the rising trend of the New Age movement in the United States, indicate that the shamanic perspective is alive and well even in the world’s most developed and technologically advanced industrial nation.

The second component of the principal claim is that the same neurocognitive development that led to the shamanic perspective also led to the uniqueness of our species. The assertion that a neurocognitive faculty exists that is

- a) so fundamental that it is indispensable for other characteristically human abilities to develop and exist (language, art, religion); and

b) that the development of this faculty can be traced to the earliest evidence of the existence of the *Homo sapiens sapiens* and the modern human mind, needs to be fully addressed. Although this can only be done after elaborating upon the nature of consciousness and imagination (the subject of Part II of this essay), an evolutionary perspective reviewing the first evidence of this neurocognitive faculty will contribute greatly to the development of this claim.

### *An Evolutionary View of the Shamanic Perspective*

The evolution of human behavior can be followed over the time period from 5 million to 100,000 years ago. It is a process highlighted by various events that have left a traceable archeological record beginning with the use of tools, the control of fire, and ultimately with the capacity to “interact socially with their dead, and to represent the universe in art” (Fletcher 1995). It is impossible to ascertain *exactly* when the shamanic perspective made its initial appearance in the collective human or hominine psyche. However, two distinct events in the archeological record establish its presence: ritualistic *burial of the dead* and the development of *shamanistic art*, respectively.

#### Burial of the Dead

It is not until the archeological record from approximately 100,000 years ago that the first evidence appears, indicating that hominines<sup>8</sup> started treating their deceased differently than any other piece of dead meat. 100,000 years ago, Neanderthals began to show indications of interacting with their dead. However, since the type of interaction differed significantly from location to location, “we cannot assume that this behavior can be explained in terms familiar to us” (Fletcher 1995). Whether Neanderthals did in fact bury their dead or not is the subject of heated and intense debate (Rowley-Conwy 1995). Even more difficult to ascertain is whether these Neanderthal burials, when they did take place, necessarily indicated “notions of the supernatural or the presence of magical or re-

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<sup>8</sup> *Hominine* is the current term applied to what was until recently referred to as *hominid*, that is, a species in the human family (Lewin 1998).

ligious systems" (Groves 1995). This doubt, however, does not extend to the clearly ritualistic burials of Modern Humans, such as those discovered at Sungir, Russia dating to 28,000 years ago. In the Sungir site the deceased are heavily adorned on all parts of the head and body with as many as 4903 beads and fragments. It becomes difficult to hypothesize that such an investment would have occurred without "a concept of death as a transition to a non-physical form" (Mithen 1996). Therefore, the consensus among scholars of paleoanthropology appears to be that when regular ritualistic burial, indicating a belief in an afterlife, does appear, this "surely requires the combination of a developed capacity for memory and the ability to envisage a future stretching beyond one's own lifetime" (Fletcher 1995). In cognitive terms, therefore, this behavior represents a mental ability to conceptualize a time and circumstances or events transcending the individual's life span, and bringing existence into another plane or dimension: a cognitive capacity indicative of what I will describe later as *imagination*.

### Art and Its Meaning

While the earliest form of ritualistic burial of the dead serves as convincing initial evidence for the presence of the shamanic worldview, the appearance of art as a form of expression and communication is even more unequivocal:

Once humans could consciously link past actions with an object, they possessed the basic capacity for artistic expression. Linking an observed object with remembered characteristics leads to the ability to recall characteristics of a person or animal without direct observation. Instead of seeing and merely remembering the past, humans could remember visions of the past and represent them as objective shapes (Fletcher 1995).

Paleolithic art has been a "source of fascination" since the day, in 1879, when the daughter of Don Marcelino de Sautuola discovered the painting of a bison in the Altamira Cave in northern Spain (Burenhult 1993). Initially the artistic discoveries were believed to be too perfect to be the creation of Stone Age humans. Only did much later unearthings, in the form of datable strata and more artistic finds, convince the scientific world. The earliest of these images dates from 30,000 years ago and, as

Neanderthals are not believed to have possessed art, are considered a means of expression belonging exclusively to *Homo sapiens sapiens* – the modern human. Those hominines, the first *Homo sapiens sapiens* to appear in Europe about 40,000 to 35,000 years ago, constitute the people we know as the Cro-Magnon. Within a given society, those responsible for this remarkable artistic production are believed to be “a limited group of selected individuals – a sort of priesthood, in the form of medicine-men or shamans” (Burenhult 1993). Hence as a result of their connection with the spirit world, early shamans are considered the first artists of the human species.

However, the question of what constitutes “art” as distinct from other forms of artifact is a valid one. According to Mithen, the designation of ‘art’ must only be attributed to those items “which are either representational or provide evidence for being part of a symbolic code, such as by the repetition of the same motifs” (Mithen 1996). From this viewpoint, one of the earliest examples of art, dating some 30,000 to 33,000 years ago, is an ivory statuette found in southern Germany. This item, meticulously reconstructed, depicts a human body with a lion’s head, and is carved from the tusk of a mammoth. Other prehistoric art was found in the Chauvet Cave in the Ardeche region of France, containing clear artistic examples of shamanistic motifs dating from 30,000 years ago – “the oldest known paintings in the world” (Chauvet et al. 1996). Neurocognitively speaking, the importance of this early art and its contents is that it represents the birth of the ‘Modern Human Mind’.

The ‘Early Human Mind,’ on the other hand, whose mental capacities can equally be ascertained by the archeological record, most likely possessed the individual cognitive processes required to produce art. These individual capacities would be the ability to a) produce artifacts from templates, b) communicate intentionally, and c) interpret symbols (“technical,” “social,” and “natural history” intelligence, respectively) (Mithen 1996). However, what distinguishes the Modern Human Mind from the Early Human Mind is the synergistic ability (“cognitive fluidity”) to combine all of these three cognitive processes into the production of this Upper Paleolithic art (Mithen 1996). What further distinguishes the Modern Human Mind is the mythological nature of the artwork as characterized by animals in the form of humans (“anthropomorphic thinking”) and humans in the form of animals (“totemic thought”):

Indeed, the anthropomorphic images within this art, such as the sorcerer of Les Trois Freres, are most easily interpreted as being either supernatural beings or shamans who communicated with them. As was most forcefully argued by the French prehistorian Andre Leroi-Gourhan, these painted caves are likely to reflect a mythological world with concepts as complex as those of the Dreamtime held by the Australian Aborigines (Mithen 1996).

*Thus shamanism – and therefore the shamanic perspective – is intimately tied to the earliest recorded manifestations of the Modern Human Mind: the ability to express abstract thought in the form of imagery, that is, the ability to imagine.*<sup>9</sup>

In summary, the shamanic perspective is a universal phenomenon that begins with, and indeed marks, the very advent of humankind. It arises because of an increase in the cognitive capacity – the ability to imagine – of the first modern humans and continues to manifest itself because of this capacity. The shamanic perspective is “universal,” not because the realities in which the shamans and these societies believe are universal (or even “real”), nor because we have an inherent or innate shamanic or shamanistic “module” in our brains. The shamanic worldview appears because the modern human mind-brain has the innate capacity to create and/or recreate, consciously and even volitionally, an experience independent of that of the senses, and then to respond psychologically and physiologically to that experience as if it were real. This capacity is critical for planning the outcomes of events in such a manner that mental simulations of future behaviors are possible, and to permit a selection of the most favorable courses of action before committing valuable resources. It is this neurocognitive faculty that I refer to as *imagination*. Thus my argument here is that it is not a mere coincidence that the advent of the shamanic perspective takes place at the very same time as the Early Humans make the evolutionary transition into Modern Humans. Rather, the very same evolution of this neurocognitive development (imagination) gave rise to art, language, and religion, as well as technological revolutions.

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<sup>9</sup> Although there is evidence that other animals exhibit forms of what I define as imagination, especially in its non-conscious form, it is the degree to which humans can and do rely on this phenomenon and on the conscious control and “cognitive fluidity” of the same, that characterizes the Modern Human Mind.

In order to investigate the claim that imagination is indeed the neurocognitive foundation that permits the development of the shamanic perspective, then imagination must first be established as a neurocognitive faculty. The lack of scientific investigation of imagination (as well as of shamanism) presents the first crucial challenge. Thus, the first goal of the following section must be the exploration of imagination in cognitive terms. Since I am also stating that the faculty of imagination gave rise to the ability to produce human language, then this relationship will be another focal point of Part II of this essay. Ultimately, in order to comprehend the significance and extent of imagination, several perspectives must be employed, including the relationship between imagination and alternate states of consciousness in addition to language and metaphor.

## PART II: IMAGINATION, COGNITION AND THE CONSCIOUS MIND

In most areas of science, theories of origin are in the mainstream. The origins of the solar system, of the Earth, of its continents, mountains, and life forms, and of the human race itself are central issues in a variety of disciplines, from astronomy to zoology. Yet the question of human cognitive origins has not been in the forefront of cognitive science. In fact, cognitive science has built its edifice mostly on the study of two recent, and highly specialized, kinds of minds: literate English-speaking adults and computers.

In animal research, an important lesson was learned long ago: to do justice to the mental capabilities of animals, we must study a variety of species and place them in an evolutionary context. We cannot understand their cognitive capacities without accounting for their place in the biological order. For some reason, human cognitive research does not seem to have learned the same lesson. Cognitive science often carries on as though humans had no culture, no significant variability, and no history.

Merlin Donald – *Origins of the Modern Mind*

### *Imagination: A Word in Search of Meaning*

While language, memory, perception, and attention are cognitive processes studied by many disciplines and from numerous perspectives, imagination has seldom, if ever, been considered a formal subject for scientific investigation and hence, to date, lacks a paradigm for its study,



let alone a dedicated discipline. The *Imagino-Hypothesis*<sup>10</sup> is such a paradigm: it is a neurocognitive theory of imagination emphasizing the unifying and primary role that this most essential of all mental processes plays in the creation of human experience. In this theory, my fundamental premise is that as *Homo sapiens sapiens* (“the man that knows that he knows”) it is *imagination*, and not *knowledge*, that determines the nature of our (subjective) reality. The *Imagino-Hypothesis* is a theory that addresses the broad question: *what is imagination and what role does it play in human existence (culture, cognition, behavior, and physiology)?*

Historically the study of language has enjoyed a privileged position in the behavioral sciences. Human language has often been interpreted as the basis of cognition, or at the very least the highest representation of cognition, as well as the uniquely and distinctly human phenomenon. While other organisms possess the capacity to communicate, humans can compose “long, complex sequences of sounds to represent an infinitely large number of meaningful states of affairs” providing us with the ability to not only describe “the current situation” but also “the past and the future, alternatives to reality, and false states of affairs” (Barsalou 1992). Human language is considered “a system of communication, a medium for thought, a vehicle for literary expression, a social institution, a matter for political controversy, a catalyst for nation building” (O’Grady et al. 1997).

Given the established and central position that language occupies in the study of human cognition, identifying the manner in which language relies on imagination serves as a starting point for a cognitive approach to its study. As applied to language, the issue of imagination in a more specific sense becomes: “what role does imagination play in the development and use of language?” The relationship between language and imagination will be explored from various perspectives. One emphasis that will be made in the current study is on the relationship between imagination and language in the development of *meaning*.

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<sup>10</sup> For a complete version of the Imagino-Hypothesis, please see “The Imagino-Hypothesis: From Myth to Mind to Molecules. The Role of Imagination in Culture, Cognition, Behavior and Healing,” (Overton, forthcoming). Also see “Shamanism and Clinical Hypnosis: A Brief Comparative Analysis,” (Overton 1998b) where I first introduce the term Imagino-Hypothesis and elucidate its significance within the context of both of these healing traditions.

### What Exactly Is Imagination?

*Imagination*, as mentioned earlier, is the ‘undiscovered continent’ in the science of human thought. It is a term undiscovered in its totality, and while its true cognitive significance remains to be fully explored and explained, it also appears to be a term that elicits very different connotations, particularly within scientific circles (where it is least known). As virtually anything else of profound human-interest, imagination is also a concept that defies exact definition, but in this regard it is in good company, as even such commonly investigated cognitive functions as memory, attention, intelligence, or even cognition itself, also elude precise denotation<sup>11</sup>. An exploration of the term will be initiated by introducing a brief list of the more representative definitions from two conventionally accepted sources in the English language (depicted in Table 1 below).

<i>Imagination:</i> (Webster’s Dictionary)	<i>Imagination:</i> (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate)
1. The power to form mental images of objects not perceived or not wholly perceived by the senses;	1. The act or power of forming a mental image of something not present to the senses or never before wholly perceived in reality;
2. The power to form new ideas by a synthesis of separate elements of experience, and the ability to define new ideas;	2. The ability to confront and deal with a problem; resourcefulness;
3. Intuitive understanding;	3. A creative ability;
4. The tendency to attribute reality to unreal things.	4. The thinking or active mind; a creation of the mind.

Table 1. Dictionary Definitions of Imagination

Each of the above definitions addresses various, although not all, cognitive facets implicated in the mind-brain faculty referred to herein as *imagination*. Some of these definitions are self-explanatory and clearly allude to imagination as a high-level cognitive faculty, while others require detailed and individual explication, a process that will direct the exploration of the significance of the term:

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<sup>11</sup> This is even more the case with such cognitive phenomena as consciousness, mind, trance, or hypnosis.

—“*The power to form mental images of objects not perceived or not wholly perceived by the senses*” (Webster’s Dictionary, No. 1). In general, this refers to the mind-brain’s ability to produce imagery in the absence of (complete) information arriving from the senses and is perhaps one of the most commonly considered notions when contemplating the term *imagination*. Careful scrutiny of this definition reveals two distinct, yet complimentary capabilities: a) *the ability to produce images in the absence of perceptual input*, and b) *the ability to produce imagery that completes or modifies perceptual input in the creation of an experience*. It is important to note that imagery is not, as some readily believe, limited to the visual modality, but rather is a multimodal function, and so we can speak of auditory imagery, ‘hearing’ in the absence of sound, olfactory imagery, ‘smelling’ in the absence of a scent, etc. Nor is the ability to produce imagery limited to static objects, as we can recall dynamic scenarios from past events, or even picture ourselves performing actions. This dynamic aspect of imagery is frequently referred to as ‘motor imagery.’ What is also particularly important to note here is that imagination is additionally defined in terms of the ability to produce images which *compliment those constructed by the senses* (see “b”) above). In other words, imagination is a function of the mind-brain that can, in conjunction with an imperfect sensory stimulus, lead to a completed experience.

—“*The act or power of forming a mental image of something not present to the senses or never before wholly perceived in reality*” (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate, Definition No. 1). This definition, although intimately related to the previous one, adds another important dimension to the concept of imagination: *the mind-brain’s ability to transcend reality in the creation of new images*. Thus, not only can we use our imagination to recreate known objects and events from the past, but it can also be employed to create images of objects and event that have never existed in our experience. For example, a winged-unicorn can be created in our minds from a horn, a horse, and a bird. Imagination allows us to construct mental scenarios about events in the future, or mentally simulate the potential results of various courses of action. It also enables us to mentally experience events pertaining to objects or entities that never could exist in reality and that defy the laws of nature, such as an entity that could vanish in ‘thin air,’ walk through walls, or fly without wings or other means of propulsion.

–“*The tendency to attribute reality to unreal things*” (Webster’s Dictionary, No. 4). Intimately related to the imagination’s complimentary role in the formulation of an experience, this definition is perhaps one of the least recognized facets of the human imagination. In essence it refers to the mind-brain’s ability to produce images so authentic in nature that the mind-brain itself is incapable of distinguishing them from an experience resulting from external sensory input.

The explication of the term imagination is far from complete. Nevertheless, I will offer the following functional definition in summary of the above information: *Imagination is the ability to experience psychological and/or physiological responses (i.e., to attribute meaning) to stimuli or sensations that are not (wholly) perceived by the senses, and the ability to manipulate, create, and recreate these experiences.* Like the mind from which it is an emergent property, imagination has a conscious and a non-conscious component, each of which will be subsequently explored later in this essay. For the moment, note the considerable overlap between the functional definition and the definitions offered by the dictionary, as well as the relationship between them all. Moreover, although all these definitions capture component parts of what imagination is, they cannot do justice to the role that this principal neurocognitive faculty plays in our species. For one thing, imagination performs a major role in how we experience events as they take place in time and space with respect to the present.

### Imagination and Time and Space

Perhaps no two concepts are more capable of defining so much of our existence as *time* and *space*. At any given moment in our lives we can view ourselves somewhere along a temporal continuum stretching from past to present and into the future, as well as within a spatial context, both physical (e.g. geographical) and socio-cultural (nationality, social class, religion, family, etc.). And yet, our direct experience, our *knowledge*, that which we can truly and objectively quantify, qualify, and share with other sentient beings, is limited to the perceptual inputs we receive (exteroception and proprioception) in the *here* (space) and the *now* (time). Imagination plays a major role in the unification of human experience by allowing the integration of the *there-and-then* (space and time other than the current and present) into the *here-and-now* (present space

and time). Therefore it is imagination and *not* empirical evidence (knowledge) that ultimately determines the nature of our reality. Without the ability to transcend the limitations of the *here* and *now*, of the immediate, nothing that we consider truly cognitive would be possible. Indeed, it is our ability to displace the contents of our phenomenological mind beyond the immediate limitations of our corporeal existence – the *here* and the *now* –, as well as the *degree* to which we can exercise this capacity, that so characterizes and distinguishes us from other animals, including other primates.<sup>12</sup> Without imagination we would not be *human*. It is precisely the ability to conceive of (to imagine) a time *beyond* our time and *before* our time that leads our mind-brains to issues and questions of belonging, origins, and transcendence. Imagination also gives us the ability to develop answers, the collection of which constitutes a cultural group's mythology, to resolve those issues in an attempt to overcome the anxiety resulting from the cognitive dissonance that the lack of answers engenders.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, as the past no longer exists, when we do re-experience the past we must recall it into consciousness. The experiences that are elicited, however (visual, auditory, olfactory, etc.), are not 'real' in the sense of a perception; they are in fact an imaginary recreation of the past. Thus episodic memories are not only inexact, but also faulty and subject to change, confabulation and distortion, including the phenomenon of implanted or false memories (Schacter 1995, De Rivera and Sarbin 1998). The cultural and historical past is also an illusion<sup>14</sup>; it is a collective recreation by a social group, brought into existence by way of their collective (and selective) imaginations (Anderson 1991). Equally, the future does not exist. It is a creation of our minds, a mental projection into time, an *imagining* to which we attribute 'reality' and significance. In fact,

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<sup>12</sup> Compelling arguments can and have been made that other animals exhibit the capacity to plan, deceive, etc., yet it is the degree to which humans imagine and the overwhelming role that imagination plays in the human condition that is unique.

<sup>13</sup> It is possible to speculate that the need for cognitive resolution to states of dissonance results from the very fact that imagination plays such an important role in the completion of an experience given lack of perceptual input. Thus, there seems to be a 'cognitive inertia,' expressed as curiosity, to provide explication for the *how*, *when*, *what*, *who* or *why* of current events.

<sup>14</sup> As Napoleon stated: "What is History but a fable agreed upon?"

most of what we consider 'knowledge' is neither factual nor objective. It is in actuality the product of our imagination. When the world was considered flat, or Newtonian physics was the ultimate explication of the Laws of Nature, or the Bible the undisputed word of God, these were all considered 'facts' and 'knowledge,' even though they had never been empirically validated and were later to be disproved. Thus it could be argued that their validity was based upon *belief* (what was imagined to be true) rather than *knowledge*. Imagination is what allows us to create images and phenomenological narratives, in space as well as in time, for events of which we have no immediate empirical (perceptual) evidence. It allows us to create a shared, collective conceptual integration of the perceived and the imaginary, and thus permits such concepts as culture, society, art, literature, etc. Imagination is the neurocognitive faculty that allows us to extend our 'knowledge' beyond the empirical evidence brought to us by our senses, beyond that of the here-and-now.

### *Imagination and the Mind*

The key to understanding the relationship between imagination, cognition, and the shamanic perspective or worldview can be sought in the nature of human consciousness itself. Although consciousness as a topic of study has eluded scientists and philosophers alike, certain aspects of consciousness can be examined, even if from an intuitive perspective. The first question that could be asked is 'what does it mean to be conscious?' Comparing states of the mind-brain in which we would consider ourselves to be conscious to those, such as a coma, in which we are not conscious, one could conclude that *to be conscious is to have a standpoint and a perspective, that is, to have a self and a series of experiences of which that self is aware*. Therefore, any brain state in which the individual retains awareness of a self-identity or of 'being,' and is thus aware of having experiences, can be considered a conscious state.<sup>15</sup> Of course, this notion presumes that consciousness, like the mind of which it is a manifestation, is a result of the activity in the brain, as op-

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<sup>15</sup> This is true whether the 'self' is stable as during a normal waking state, or whether it varies, as is the case with someone suffering a dissociative disorder such as multiple personality disorder (MPD), for example.

posed to some detachable and perennial substance that transcends the body, as in a 'soul.'

A fundamental question that could be asked regarding consciousness is, given that consciousness is inherently linked to having experience, then what types or categories of experiences are possible? With this question in mind we find that conscious experiences can be divided into three fundamental categories:

1. *Emotions, affects or drives*. These are easy to experience, yet difficult to define. A 'textbook' definition of an emotion or a drive would be something like this: *an emotion is a state of psychological and physiological arousal expressed by distinctive somatic and autonomic responses*.<sup>16</sup>

2. *Perceptions*, which are, from the standpoint of conscious awareness, the internal representation of information in the conscious mind that arises as a direct result of peripheral nervous system activation. Typically perception is divided into *exteroception* (vision, audition, olfaction, etc.) and *interoception* (pain, limb position, temperature, etc.); and

3. *Imaginoceptions*. Many experiences that are common to the human mind are neither emotional nor perceptual in nature. For example, there are experiences such as dreaming, daydreaming, mental imagery, fantasy, hypnogogic states, trance experiences, hallucinations (drug as well as psychotically induced). These do not fit the definition of perception as they do not directly result from peripheral nervous system activity, and while they may or may not be accompanied by emotional contents, in and of themselves they cannot be classified as emotions. Furthermore, even though these types of experience are all quite distinct, they have the following characteristics in common:

– They can all be characterized in terms of the vividness of the imagery experienced.

– They all require a certain degree of dissociation from perceptual (e.g., external and corporeal) awareness (a state commonly referred to as *absorption*).

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<sup>16</sup> This definition, of course, has no practical function as it does not really help one understand what an emotion is, yet from a scientific perspective it does serve to indicate the link that the mind has with the body and a physiological means by which these interactions can take place.

– Numerous psychophysiological studies<sup>17</sup> have suggested that there is a relationship between the manifestation of these phenomena and theta rhythm (4–7 Hz) activity as recorded in the human EEG.

– They all constitute experiences that arise as a result of the brain's own internal activity, that is, (mostly) without the assistance of external information arriving from the peripheral nervous system.

*Imaginoception* is the term I apply to this category of human experiences in order to study these phenomena within the context of a coherent paradigm. Thus, *imaginoception is the internal representation of information, in conscious awareness, not arising as a direct result of peripheral nervous system activation.* Phenomenologically, imaginoception is the counterpart to perception; not surprisingly, many studies have demonstrated that all of these types of phenomena which I have grouped under the category of imaginoception, activate much of the same neural substrate in the brain as is responsible for the creation of a conscious experience in their perceptual counterpart (e.g., Kosslyn et al. 1995; Farah 1995). Therefore, visual imagery and visual perception share much of the same “neural hardware”; auditory imagery and auditory perception, and so on. One could surmise that, while perception indirectly (via information arising from the PNS) gives rise to activation of areas in the brain responsible for the creation of conscious experience, *during imaginoception, the mind-brain itself is the primary causal factor in the activation of the very areas which lead to any given experience.*

A graphical way of representing the interaction between ‘self’ and the three fundamental dimensions of conscious experience (emotion, perception, and imaginoception) is the *Phenomenological Triad*, depicted below:

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<sup>17</sup> In the “The Theta Consciousness Theory” (Overton, forthcoming), I review both the psychophysiological as well as the behavioral and phenomenological evidence pertaining to the hypnotic trance, the shamanic journey and the meditative states, among others, concluding that these are all contextual and cultural variants of the same neurophysiological state: theta consciousness. Some of the evidence that I review includes the fact that (a) virtually any meditative technique can be employed as a hypnotic induction; (b) any shamanic experience (journeys, shape-shifting, etc.) can be achieved during hypnotic trance; and (c) much of the reliable psychophysiological evidence obtained over the years concerning meditation, journeying, hypnosis, and related cognitive processes, centers on theta rhythm activity as recorded in the EEG.





Fig. 1. The Phenomenological Triad

Each conscious experience requires a 'self' and a series of experiences, composed fundamentally of emotion, perception and imagoception, of which that self is aware.<sup>18</sup> As conscious experience surrounds the phenomenological self, the Phenomenological Triad depicts the 'self' at the center of the diagram in order to represent that it is the standpoint from which the awareness of (conscious) experience takes place. Also reflected in the Phenomenological Triad is the dynamic relationship between perception, emotion and imagoception, in which an emotion, for example, can lead to the conscious formulation of an inner experience (imagoception); or a sound (perception), can give rise to a memory of a past event (imagoception), etc.

#### *Imagoception And EEG: Neural Correlates*

Psychophysiology is a method of studying the relationship between physiological (usually neural) and mental activity. It includes such methods as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), positron emission tomography (PET), event-related potential (ERP), and the magnetoencephalogram (MEG). The electroencephalogram or EEG is also a common psychophysiological instrument of investigation. EEG is a continuous recording of electrical activity on the scalp for the purpose of measuring

<sup>18</sup> One may question, "what about ideas, where do they fit in this schema?" The notion of whether an idea, once in its conscious form, is distinct from an image is open to debate. However, for the present theoretical purposes I have subsumed ideation under imagoception.

underlying neural activity. The data collected is in the form of sinusoidal-type input, which is then typically deconstructed into its five constituent frequencies via the application of a Fast Fourier Transformation or FFT. These component frequencies typically include the following: delta (0–3 Hz), theta (4–7 Hz), alpha (8–14 Hz), beta (15–60 Hz), and gamma (60+ Hz). One of the more common applications of the EEG has been in the study of sleep/wake cycles, that is, in the transition between waking consciousness and sleep. As the human mind-brain moves from being alert and awake, to drowsy, to sleep, and then back to waking consciousness, changes in the EEG accompany the shifts between these states (see Fig. 2 below).

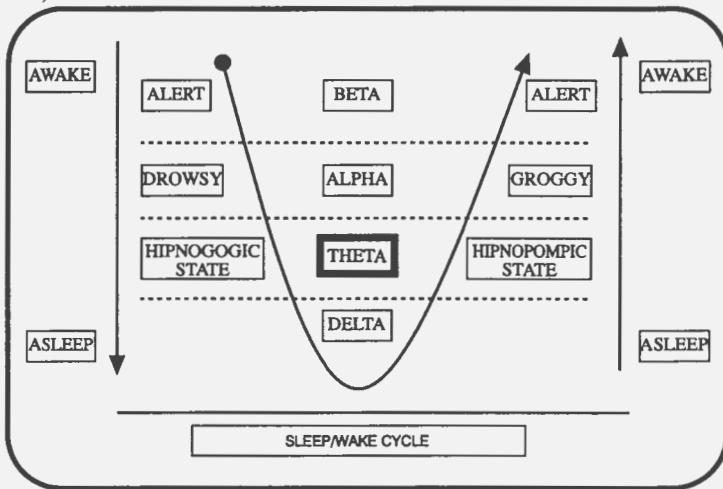


Fig. 2. EEG and the Sleep/Wake Cycle

The above diagram demonstrates that changes in the dominant frequency of the EEG accompany changes in the sleep/wake cycle of the mind-brain. During normal awareness the dominant frequency in the EEG is the beta frequency. As the individual becomes drowsy, the EEG slows down from beta to alpha. The hypnagogic state, depicted by predominantly theta waves in the EEG, marks the transition into sleep and is characterized by various degrees of vivid imagery. As the EEG slows down even further into the delta frequency consciousness is lost and sleep is entered. The cycle repeats itself in the opposite order as the indi-

vidual awakens from sleep and progresses towards normal waking consciousness. The "twilight state," as theta is sometimes called, upon awakening is referred to as the hypnopompic state, and marks the phenomenological transition between sleep and (awakening) consciousness. Both the hypnopompic and the hypnogogic states are examples of imaginoception. However, imaginoception can occur not only during the transition between sleep and waking consciousness, but also during sleep in the form of dreaming, and during wakefulness in various forms, as depicted in the figure below.

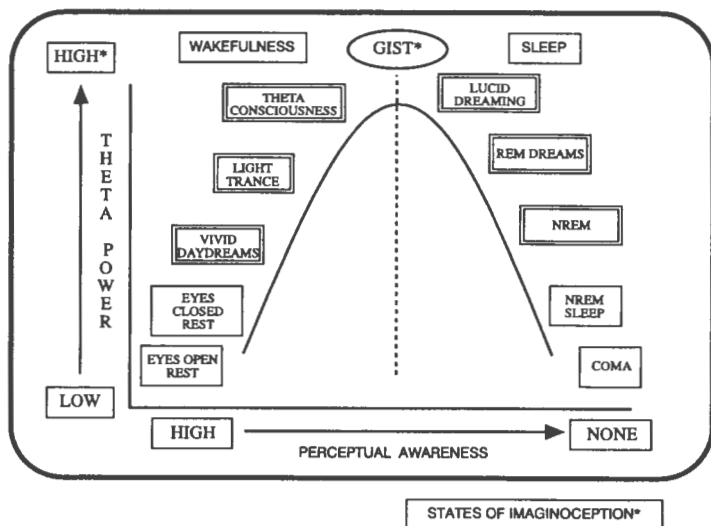


Fig. 3. States of Imagoception

The above diagram represents the relationship between perception and imaginoception in the mind-brain as seen from various perspectives, each of which is worth elaborating upon in order to comprehend the relationship between cognition, imagination, imaginoception and consciousness in general. On the horizontal axis the diagram is divided into Wakefulness and Sleep, separated by a vertical dashed line that terminates at an oval box with the letters GIST written inside. GIST represents "Generalized Increase of Synchronized Theta activity," which ap-

pears to be a psychophysiological correlate of the increase of imaginoception.<sup>19</sup> On the WAKEFULNESS side of the diagram changes take place in conscious awareness as one moves from left to right, as well as up along the vertical axis. The transition that is taking place is in the contents of conscious awareness, a shift that moves from the almost total perceptual awareness denoted by the “Eyes Open Rest” box, to the almost total imaginoception state denoted by the “Theta Consciousness” box. Thus we have a progression between perception and imaginoception in which as we move from eyes open to eyes closed, daydreaming, light trance, and theta consciousness or deep trance, consciousness shifts from perception to almost total imaginoception.

On the SLEEP side of the diagram the progression moves from lack of conscious awareness during sleep to a gradual increase in consciousness, which consists of the phenomenon known as dreaming. At the apex of this progression is lucid dreaming, a conscious state during which the dreamer is aware of the fact that he or she is dreaming. Thus theta consciousness and lucid dreaming are similar states, each accomplished during opposite stages of the sleep/wake cycle.

The boxes surrounded by a double border represent imaginoception states. It is important to notice that these states of imaginoception occur on both sides of the sleep/wake division. On the SLEEP side of the diagram dreaming takes place due to neurochemical changes in the brain that originate in the brainstem -- with lucid dreaming being somewhat of an anomaly as it requires a certain degree of volitional control. However, on the WAKEFULNESS side, imaginoception is entered either through volitional acts of the mind-brain, or through the ingestion of mind-altering substances (e.g., LSD, alkaloids in general), or pathological causes (e.g., temporal lobe epilepsy, and schizophrenia).

### Imaginoception and the Conscious and Non-Conscious Mind

An important aspect regarding ‘deep’ states of imaginoception is the appearance of *imaginals*. Imaginals are those entities of the mind-brain that appear autonomous in their behavior during dreams, for example. Unlike

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<sup>19</sup> Although much evidence exists in support of this theory, it remains a controversial issue and thus just a theory and the central premise of “The Theta Consciousness Theory” (Overton, forthcoming).

a consciously (volitionally) controlled image, the imaginal appears to have a 'life' of its own. We can, for example, imagine a close friend or relative in our mind's eye, their movement, speech, gestures, etc. These are all conscious efforts. But in a dream, a vivid daydream, in hypnotic trance state, or during a shamanic journey, this same individual may communicate to us 'freely,' walk, gesticulate, etc., as if on their 'own' accord, beyond our conscious or volitional control. At this point the imaginary entity adopts the status of an imaginal, and the state of the mind-brain is one of supraliminal communication between the conscious and the unconscious facets of mind-brain.<sup>20</sup> A brief digression is required here in order to elaborate upon the relationship between the conscious and the non-conscious minds.

– First, let me state very clearly: as an independent and distinct module in the mind-brain, *the conscious mind does not exist!* It is merely a theoretical construct to refer to an illusion, like the sense of self, that is an individual's awareness of the result of the activities of a collection of neurobiological mechanisms (neurons, glia, dendrites, axons, synapses, neurotransmitters, etc.) that we collectively refer to as a *brain*. Because the operations of the brain, an organic substance, gives rise to a series of properties and behaviors, including consciousness, that we call *mind*, I prefer to think of the two as versions of the same entity, and thus refer to the combination as the *mind-brain*.<sup>21</sup>

– Secondly, whatever mind-brain information becomes conscious information, must first have been non-conscious information. For example, as the reader may see the words written on the page, before the information appears in the form of a conscious experience (e.g., letters, words and sentences), it has undergone numerous transformations through the visual system – all of which are beyond conscious awareness. In other words, the conscious mind is a diminutive subset of the non-conscious mind.

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<sup>20</sup> This type of interaction can lead to what Jung refers to as a process of 'individuation'. See, for example, "Man and His Symbols," Jung 1964.

<sup>21</sup> One way in which I explain this combination is in terms of an electrical circuit and the electromagnetic field that arises from the electrons that circulate through the circuit. The brain, like the circuit, is material, but in its operations it gives rise to the mind which, like the electromagnetic field, is immaterial. However, anything that would vary circuit or field, mind or brain, would affect the properties of the other. Thus, they are really facets of the same phenomena.

– Finally, most of the information in the mind-brain is non-conscious, that is, we are only aware of an insignificant amount of all of the information stored or processed in our mind-brain at any given time. Most of the functionings of the mind-brain are not only non-conscious, but also beyond conscious awareness, much less conscious (volitional) control.

Nevertheless, as the contents of the conscious mind move from perception towards imagination, there is a transformation in the type of information, that is both quantitative (in the form of more imagery) as well as qualitative. One of the clearly qualitative changes is the dreamlike properties that the phenomenological experience adopts, particularly in the manner in which the imagery, unlike during normal waking consciousness, is much less under volitional control. Such is the case with the emergence of imaginings. Clearly, from a neurocognitive point of view, imaginings are a ‘mere’ creation of the non-conscious mind. However, it is not difficult to comprehend why their appearance in dreams, hallucinations, deep daydreams, and trance states (hypnotic dreams, shamanic journeys), are the cornerstones of the creation of the shamanic perspective. This is likely for several reasons:

– For one thing, shamanic ecstasy, the experience of existing in a time and place beyond the here and now, of out-of-body flight, is the basis of shamanism and the shamanic worldview (e.g., Overton 1994, 1998a, Eliade 1974, 1978, Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1998, La Barre 1990; Walsh 1990).

– Imaginings, and the ‘dreamscapes’ in which they appear, are products of the non-conscious mind, in the sense that they operate beyond conscious (volitional) control, and their nature and appearance tend to be consistent with the beliefs, schemata, learned myths, and memories of the individual mind-brain from which they emerge. This explains why the mythological experiences of the shaman while journeying are always a cogent manifestation of his or her own cultural background (e.g., Harner 1990, Overton 1994, 1998a, Eliade 1974, 1978, La Barre 1990, Walsh 1990).

It is quite likely that the first notion of a ‘soul’ or of ‘soul flight’ resulted from the phenomenology of dreaming, and from the similarity between sleep and death. The experience of the dreamer is often not only quite removed from the surroundings within which the individual fell asleep and later awakened, but is also often as ‘real’ as those same surroundings appear during waking consciousness. In addition, while the

individual lies asleep he or she appears to an observer to be inactive and immobile, a state bearing many of the behavioral and external characteristics of death. Upon awakening, however, the soul seems to have returned, as evidenced by renewed corporeal activity, perhaps even accompanied by detailed descriptions of the worlds and entities encountered in "another reality" (e.g., Eliade 1974, 1978, Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1998, Kalweit 1988, La Barre 1990, Walsh 1990). *Yet most mammals dream!* In this regard, what distinguishes the Modern Human Mind is the ability to:

a) voluntarily enter a similar dreamlike state from waking consciousness in order to communicate the ensuing occurrences to others, either while they are taking place or after the fact; and

b) to apply these experiences to "ordinary reality."

In both of these cases this is possible because of the faculty of the imagination. The shaman employs his or her imagination by vividly experiencing (imaging) the mythological dimension of the Dreamtime, while perhaps even simultaneously narrating these events to a gathered tribe. The observers/listeners are employing their imagination while internalizing the recounted experiences (language, art) of the shaman in their own conscious minds and thus attributing them with meaning.

### Imagination vs. Imaging

The three dimensions of the phenomenological mind (emotion, perception, and imaging) are what constitute the awareness of being alive, of existing. Any events that are experienced from the past, or any events that are planned pertaining to the future, are represented in the *here-and-now* within the confines of these phenomenological dimensions. Conscious experience varies widely, dramatically enough in some cases to merit the categorical distinction of *conscious states*. What all these states have in common is some combination of these three dimensions. There are states, such as dreaming, shamanic journeying, the hypnotic trance, etc., in which the imaging component far outweighs the perceptual. In each and every case, conscious experience is a matter of the *degree* to which these dimensions are expressed.

The question that remains unaddressed is the relationship between imagination and imaging. Imagination, as I have defined it, is principally a *neurocognitive faculty*, that is, a mind-brain process that is

employed (consciously or unconsciously, volitionally or otherwise) for a purpose. Imagination, however, can be viewed as a *neurophysiological state* that may transpire for no reason at all. Thus, while the ingestion of a psychedelic substance induces an increase of imagination, this state is the result of manifest neurochemical transformations in the mind-brain, not of cognitive function. Similarly, a schizophrenic hallucination results from neurochemical imbalances (at least according to one prevailing theory), not a cognitive process. Such a distinction based on pragmatic ends is not without potential ambiguity. For example, the ingestion of hallucinogens for the purposes of journeying identifies the gray areas of such a distinction.

Another difference between imagination and imagination is that the latter always refers to a conscious experience, whereas imagination can take place, as in the case of language, the placebo effect, or Voodoo death (to be discussed in further detail below), in the absence of, or accompanied by very little, conscious imagery. Both the conscious manifestation of imagination and all forms of imagination are likely to have a similar neurophysiological basis, one that leads to the mind-brain's ability to produce its own experiences. However, the two concepts are not entirely synonymous.

### *Imagination, Language and the Linguistic Signal*

The linguistic signal, in whatever form it manifests itself (visual, auditory, tactile, etc.), enters into the (human) organism as a component part of the perceptual stream, together with the rest of the sensory information gathered by the mind-brain. In addition, it does not enter into a system that is passive, automatic and without history and expression. In order to appreciate the tremendous abyss that separates human language from that of the machine, together with the role that imagination plays in this process, below is a table which summarizes some of the characteristics of various theoretical automatons and their abilities to communicate:



TYPE OF SYSTEM	TYPE OF SIGNAL	SIGNAL INTERPRETATION	SIGNAL TO RESPONSE MAPPING	RESPONSE
DETERMINISTIC AUTOMATON	Complete Predetermined $S = \{S_1, \dots, S_n\}$	None	Direct	Discrete, Limited $R = \{R_1, \dots, R_n\}$
STATE DEPENDENT OR STOCHASTIC AUTOMATON	Complete Predetermined $S = \{S_1, \dots, S_n\}$	None	Probabilistic State Dependent	Discrete, Limited $R = \{R_1, \dots, R_n\}$
PATTERN COMPLETION DETERMINISTIC AUTOMATON	Incomplete Predetermined $S = \{S_1, \dots, S_n\}$	Pattern Recognition	Direct	Discrete, Limited $R = \{R_1, \dots, R_n\}$
PATTERN COMPLETION STATE DEPENDENT OR STOCHASTIC AUTOMATON	Incomplete Predetermined $S = \{S_1, \dots, S_n\}$	Pattern Recognition	Probabilistic or state dependent	Discrete, Limited $R = \{R_1, \dots, R_n\}$
LANGUAGE PARSING STATE DEPENDENT OR STOCHASTIC AUTOMATON	Unlimited Complex Predetermined By Grammar Rules	Rule Based Parsing	Direct, Based On Results Of Parsing	Discrete, Limited $R = \{R_1, \dots, R_n\}$

Table 2. Automaton Signal/Response Chart

— The *Deterministic Automaton* operates only on a limited set of signals  $S \{S_1, S_2, \dots, S_n\}$  that it can recognize, and on an equally limited and predetermined response set  $R \{R_1, R_2, \dots, R_n\}$  with which it can reply. Also, it can only recognize a signal that is complete. It does not *interpret* the signals, but merely maps them directly onto preprogrammed responses.

— The *State Dependent or Stochastic Automaton* also operates only on a limited set of signals  $S \{S_1, S_2, \dots, S_n\}$  that it can recognize, and on a limited response set  $R \{R_1, R_2, \dots, R_n\}$ . As in the previous case, the signal must also be complete, for it is incapable of transforming the signal beyond its incoming form. In the process of selecting a response for a given signal, however, the mapping is based either on the internal state of the system or alternatively on some form of probability function that perhaps simulates this state. Either the probability function or the state of the system determines which of the preprogrammed responses will be executed.

— The *Pattern Completion Deterministic Automaton* is the same as the Deterministic Automaton, except that it has the ability to accept an in-

complete or degraded signal and then select from its preprogrammed signal set which one is the most appropriate. The rest of its function is identical to that of the Deterministic Automaton.

– The *Pattern Completion Stochastic or State Dependent Automaton*, like its less sophisticated sibling, the State Dependent Automaton, has a function that selects the appropriate response for a given signal. The difference between the two however, is that the Pattern Completion Stochastic Automation has the capability of pattern completion when provided with an incomplete or degraded signal.

– The *Language Parsing State Dependent or Stochastic Automaton* is endowed with an extra degree of flexibility in the input stream it recognizes as a signal. Capable of parsing a string as input, in theory it can parse any input that is encoded according to a predetermined syntax. The signal interpretation is essentially the parsing procedure, and the signal to response mapping is direct, dependent on the results of the parsing. Its response is discrete and limited and based on the predetermined response set R.

Living organisms, unlike automatons, are continuously receiving and processing information from their environment and responding to this information in adaptive ways. Much of this information is not only pertinent to their survival, but is also replete with ambient noise and distortions. The organism's system must be capable of transforming this imperfect information into an adequate enough signal for the purposes of producing an effective and appropriate response. Human methods of communication, such as language (written, verbal, sign, etc.), art, or music, require an additional level of interpretation, one that makes the message highly subjective, based on experience, mood, circumstances, and context. Imagination plays a distinctive role in this process.

### Imagination and Meaning

The Imagino-Hypothesis is founded on a theory of imagination concerned with both a) the nature of human experience, and b) the way in which the human organism responds psychophysically to an experience, in other words, the extent to which one attributes *meaning* to an experience. Human experience is the result of the neurocognitive properties of the mind-brain. It arises from the mind-brain's conscious and

non-conscious components as well as from the dynamic interactions between the two. *Meaning*, as shall be further emphasized below, is related to the degree to which an organism responds to an experience (i.e., an event, stimulus, or situation). This response encompasses not only the psychological, but also the physiological, including reactions from our endocrine, immune, and autonomic systems. Therefore, the greater the psychophysiological ramifications of an experience, the more *meaningful* that experience becomes. Now contrast the communicative capacities of the automatons described above with that of the human organism detailed in the table below:

TYPE OF SYSTEM	TYPE OF SIGNAL	SIGNAL INTERPRETATION	SIGNAL TO RESPONSE MAPPING	RESPONSE
HUMAN ORGANISM	Unlimited Incomplete Determined by Context	Completed by imagination Based on experience, i.e. attributed meaning	State dependent Based on signal interpretation (meaning)	State dependent Based on signal interpretation (meaning)

Table 3. Human Language/Response Chart

*In the case of the human organism, the neurocognitive flexibility that it exhibits makes the linguistic process astonishingly complex and diversified. In terms of the type of signal, the variety of potential signals is unlimited, and the information conveyed is always beyond that which is directly communicated. But why is that? Because the signal is always incomplete and always requires completion and subjective interpretation by the receiving party. Equally, the Signal Interpretation, the Signal to Response Mapping, and the Response all depend not only on the present context of the communication as well as on the past experiences<sup>22</sup> of the receiver, but also on the manner in which the receiver chooses to manipulate the images (imagination) that the signal elicits. Thus, unlike the*

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<sup>22</sup> Latin American writers in the latter half of the twentieth century introduced the notion of the implicit reader completing the text with each reading. This idea anticipates the fact that, experientially, the text is incomplete until it is read, and that the meaning that it encompasses is particular not only to each individual reader, but also to each reader in *subsequent readings of the text*. In other words, as we are in a perpetual state of change, the dynamic play of text and reader will also change with each reading and impact upon the meaning of the text.

*case of the machines, the human organism, the linguistic signal, and the environment or contexts, all conspire in the creation of the meaning of the signal in an individual human. Meaning does not reside in the signal, as it does for the automaton. Furthermore, automatons lack a sense of 'self,' another dynamic element crucial in the creation of experience, and therefore of meaning.*

### Language, Metaphor, and Cognition

Metaphor is a process by which an experience obtained in one domain is employed in order to derive meaning in another domain. It is a process that is universal as well as central to human thought and conceptual systems in general, not only to human language. Moreover, the means by which the experiences or cognitions are being transferred is via the use of imagery (e.g., Laughlin et al. 1992; Lakoff and Johnson 1981). The use of imagery “draws with it significant cognitive and perhaps, even affective and metabolic associations that enrich (whether appropriately or inappropriately) the association available to a conscious network at the moment” (Laughlin et al. 1992). Therefore, imagination is the basis of metaphor and hence central to our linguistic and cognitive processing in general. It can readily be said that to “conceive” of something is to employ our imagistic capabilities to create a phenomenological experience of that event, object, etc. In other words, to conceive is to imagine.

A wide variety of concepts and terms employed commonly in everyday usage in our language in reality masquerade as different manifestations of the human imagination. The following charts include definitions of some of these words as they are defined in Webster’s dictionary. At the bottom of each chart in bold *Italics*, the word is redefined in terms of imagination:

#### EXPECTATION

To look forward with hope/dread;

Something regarded as almost certain or fit;

A reasonable chance;

*To imagine will take place*

#### TO EXPECT

To think likely;

To anticipate the coming of, with or without pleasure;

To hope for;

*To imagine probable*

<p><b>BELIEF</b></p> <p>Conviction that something is true, especially the teachings of a religion;</p> <p>Conviction that something exists;</p> <p>Something accepted as true;</p> <p><i>To attribute reality to an imaginary event or object</i></p>	<p><b>TO BELIEVE</b></p> <p>To have confidence in the existence, truth, or efficacy of;</p> <p>To give credence to;</p> <p>To accept as true;</p> <p><i>To imagine probable or even real</i></p>
<p><b>TO SUGGEST</b></p> <p>To put forth for consideration;</p> <p>To make one think of, bring to mind;</p> <p>To make one imagine;</p> <p>To propose as a possibility;</p> <p><i>To make imaginable</i></p>	<p><b>SUGGESTIBILITY</b></p> <p>The state or quality of being suggestible;</p> <p><i>The state or quality of being capable of imagining (as real)</i></p>

*Table 4.* Conceptual Variants of Imagination

What do all of these terms (expectation, belief, and suggestion) have in common with ‘imagination’? In each of the above cases, a partial or incomplete stimulus, sensation, piece of information, or evidence (real, imaginary, or a combination of both), evokes a psychological and/or physiological state or response, as if the stimulus were in fact ‘real.’<sup>23</sup> Table 4 is only a small example of the way in which imagination in its ubiquity manifests itself under many different guises. As stated earlier, perhaps the most pervasive way in which imagination is present in language and in human thought is via the use of metaphors and metaphorical thinking. Nevertheless, the view that metaphors and thus imagination are central to thought is not commonplace in the science of cognition. In fact, this perspective is quite contrary to the traditional Western view of language and thought, as well as of metaphor. As we shall see below, however, there are two distinct traditions regarding language, meaning, and experience: one from the West, and another, quite different, from the East.

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<sup>23</sup> A good example of this is the “placebo effect” to be discussed further below.

*Language and Meaning in the West: The Objectivist's Perspective*

With respect to language, imagination, and meaning, the dominant paradigm of Western intellectual thought is eloquently captured in what Johnson refers to as "objectivism," that is, "the tradition that treats meaning and rationality as purely conceptual, propositional, and algorithmic" (Johnson 1987). Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate in detail upon the specifics of the Objectivist paradigm, a summary of its principal arguments can be instrumental in delineating the radical nature of the contradictory direction proposed herein. Meaning, from the Objectivist's standpoint, can be summarized as follows (following Johnson 1987, emphasis mine):

1. "*Meaning is an abstract relation between symbolic representations (either words or mental representations) and objective (i.e. mind-independent) reality.*" In other words, symbols derive their meaning exclusively by virtue of their ability to refer to objects, entities, properties, and relations among them that objectively exist in the 'real' world.

2. "*Concepts are understood as general mental representations (Kant) or as logical entities (Frege).*" Either way, concepts are considered to be highly abstract and well-defined in a manner in which they can be employed to identify the number, nature, and properties of the objects or entities they encompass, as well the relationships that these objects or entities can enter into. Therefore, concepts must be relatively general in order to symbolize or contain the objects that they represent. As the concept of "car" applies to all cars, it cannot be specific and therefore there can be no image that corresponds to the concept "car."

3. "*Concepts are 'disembodied' in the sense that they are not tied to the particular mind that experiences them*" in the manner that images are. The image that I create of a car is believed to be subjective ('embodied'), whereas my concept of car "can be objective and float free of any given embodiment." It is, according to the Objectivist viewpoint, "this shareable, abstract, and general nature" of concepts that permits the communication of objective knowledge.

4. "*The task of a theory of meaning is to be able to explain the meaningfulness of any string of symbols that is not nonsense.*" This task, according to Johnson, is usually accomplished by explaining the conditions under which a given string (sentence, statement) would be true, or by defining the conditions and circumstances under which it would be

true, provided a proper context in the world. Furthermore, a theory of meaning is only required to be capable, in principle, of describing the condition of satisfaction for any possible sentence.

5. *"Any analysis of meaning must be given ultimately in terms of literal concepts."* In other words, there can be no "irreducibly metaphorical or figurative concepts in the final analysis." Thus, the thesis is simple: "the basic concepts into which meaning is analyzed must map definite, discrete, and fixed objects, properties, and relations."

6. *The Objectivist theory of meaning "is compatible with, and supports, the epistemological claim that there exists a 'God's-Eye' point of view, a perspective that transcends all human limitation and constitutes a universally valid reflective stance."* In other words, concepts are understood to lie in logical relationships (with other concepts) regardless of how we might comprehend or organize them.

The Objectivist's perspective regarding meaning is the result of the development of an intellectual tradition based on concepts that can be traced back to Plato's ideal forms, Aristotelian logic, as well as Christianity. Based on the strict and detailed interpretations of a text, Christianity drew rules governing the nature of life, society, Man, and God, and thus gave birth to the idea of an objective Truth beyond subjective experience, in a tradition that made science possible in the West.<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that this is the same tradition that led to the mechanistic or scientific perspective<sup>25</sup> of the world, one in which inanimate objects in nature are all dead, and only humans have a soul, or the scientific equivalent – a mind. Nonetheless, an entirely different concept of meaning could have arisen within the context of an intellectual tradition that

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<sup>24</sup> Ironically, this same strict interpretation of text in search for absolute meaning also gave rise to innumerable sects within the Christian doctrine, thus if anything providing evidence that absolute meaning *cannot* be found in the reading of a text and that any linguistic communication is subjectively understood.

<sup>25</sup> Imagination, being a fundamental and essential neurocognitive faculty, still plays a major role in the scientific perspective. Even non-religious beliefs are a function of the capacity to imagine: how many of us with a scientific worldview have ever seen a molecule, a photon, or have ever measured the current of electrons flowing through a circuit? As in the case of the society that employs its imagination to internalize the shaman's experiences as their own, we also conduct our lives as if the truths of the scientists were as real as our own personal experiences.

viewed concepts, words, experience, and meaning from a different perspective.

#### LANGUAGE AND MEANING IN THE EAST: THE GREAT TRADITIONS OF TAOISM AND ZEN

One day the Buddha arrived at Vulture Peak, where he had been delivering daily discourses to his disciples. On this occasion twelve hundred people greeted him, all waiting for him to speak. He sat in silence as they waited. Time passed, but still there was just more silence. Finally, he speechlessly held up a flower and beheld it, watching carefully for the reactions of his disciples. Not understanding the significance of the Buddha's gesture, they all remained quiet. All save the venerable Kasypa, who knowingly broke into a smile . . .

One day a nun asked the sixth Zen patriarch, Huineng, to assist her in her attempt to understand the sutras, the Buddhist sacred texts:

– “I’ve been studying the Nirvana Sutra for years and years, and there are still some passages that I don’t quite understand. Do you think you could explain them to me?” inquired the nun.

– *I’m sorry, but I can’t read. If you can read the passages out for me I’ll see if I can help you understand them,* replied Huineng.

– “If you can’t even read the words, how can you understand the Truth behind them?” the nun remarked.

The first passage presented above pertains to the legendary origins of Zen Buddhism, one of the East’s most renowned philosophical and spiritual traditions, one that has inspired the martial, philosophical, and cultural milieu of millions. The story ends with Kasypa realizing that no words could be a substitute for directly experiencing the living flower. It was this concept *of a direct transmission of meaning that extends beyond the boundaries of language* that is attributed with the significance of giving rise to the birth of this tradition. In acknowledgment of Kasypa’s understanding the Buddha is reported to have said, ‘Here is the Way and I transmit it to you’, and in this fashion, the Buddha emphasized “that the unmediated experience of existence – the here-and-now experience – is a profound mystical insight” (Bancroft 1979). Consequently, Zen has been summarized as



A special transmission outside the Scriptures;  
 No dependence upon words and letters  
 Direct pointing to the mind of man  
 Seeing into one's own nature. (Watts 1958)

Similarly, the second passage ends with the Zen Master replying:

*Words and truth are unrelated. The truth can be compared to the moon. Words can be compared to a finger. I can use my finger to point out the moon. But my finger is not the moon and you don't need my finger to see the moon, do you?"*<sup>26</sup> (Chung 1994)

While the sutras (Buddhist scriptures) are considered "the entombed words of the Buddha," in the Zen tradition it is emphasized that the truths to which the scriptures point must not be mistaken for the words that they enclose. "Zen does not denigrate the sutras; it simply warns that they are but a finger pointing to the moon and not the moon (Mind) itself. . . . Mind is the substance of Zen, and the sutras the [substance of the] mind of the Buddha" (Kapleau 1989). From the Zen perspective, "creeds, dogmas and philosophical systems are only *ideas* about the truth, in the same way as words are not facts but only *about* facts" (Watts 1958). The impossibility of conveying truth by means of words is comparable to the impossibility of explaining

the beauty of a sunset to a man blind from his birth. . . . For the wisdom of sages is not in their teachings; otherwise anybody might become a sage simply by reading the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the *Dialogues* of Plato or the Buddhist Scriptures. . . . Nothing, however, is easier than to confuse the wisdom of the sage with his doctrine, for in the absence of any understanding of truth another man's description of his understanding is easily mistaken for truth itself. Yet it is no more truth than a signpost is the town to which it points. (Watts 1958)

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<sup>26</sup> From this perspective it could be stated that most of the Western (cognitive) linguistic tradition has been intent on studying fingers, missing out on all the heavenly glory encompassed in experiencing the moon (mind). This is similar to trying to teach a young child or a pet to look at where one is pointing with a finger. The result after many trials (and much frustration) is a renewed and repeated interest in the finger.

To further illustrate the point, the story of a famous concert pianist playing a dissonant piece for a private audience is recounted. After finishing the piece an elderly man approached the pianist and said to him, "I don't understand that piece. What does it mean?" Without a single word, the pianist turned and played the piece again. Upon finishing he turned to the older man and said "*That's* what it means!" (Kapleau 1989).

The historical development of Zen, in reality, can be equally attributed to Taoism as well as to Buddhism. One Taoist character particularly renowned for his influence on the development of Zen is Zhuangzi. Zhuangzi's approach to teaching relied on parables and anecdotes, tales of imagination and flights of fancy in order to "point the reader in the right direction" and "to depict the weaknesses in language as a vehicle for understanding the true nature of the world" (Chung 1992). For Zhuangzi "Words are not just wind. Words have something to say. But if what they have to say is not fixed, then do they really say something? Or do they say nothing? People suppose that words are different than the peeps of baby birds, but is there any difference, or isn't there?" According to one interpretation of this passage, words do carry significance, though their meaning is neither constant nor do they carry any intrinsic significance in and of themselves. "The meaning of any word is dependent on and in turn contributes to the general context of the sentence, paragraph, or any body of discourse. In other words, words mean nothing out of context but have come to have meaning according to how they are used in any given situation" (Fox 1995). Thus Zhuangzi compares language to fish bait:

The bait is the means to get the fish where you want it, catch the fish and you forget the bait. The snare is the means to get the rabbit where you want it, catch the rabbit and you forget the snare. Words are the means to get the idea where you want it, catch the idea and you forget about the words. Where shall I find a man who forgets about words, and have a word with him? (Graham 1989)

For Zhuangzi, language is part of the *process* of communicating experience, "not the goal" (Chung 1992). Therefore, it can safely be said against the Western Objectivist's viewpoint, that there is an entire intellectual tradition based on the notion that meaning does not reside in language, but rather it can be found in each individual directly experiencing

the reality to which the words are pointing. In this sense, language, like other means of human communication such as art and music, requires imagination to interpret and to internalize. For this very reason the appearance of art in prehistory, as well as the rich shamanistic meaning it embodies, should be regarded as representative of the beginning of the Modern Human Mind.

### *Imagination and Language*

But what is 'language', and how *exactly* does it relate to imagination? *Human language is the use of symbolic representation to communicate experience (and hopefully meaning)*. This definition in itself may seem innocuous enough; nonetheless, within the context of this theory, it carries two important connotations:

1. *A phenomenological interpretation of the significance of the term experience*. Common parlance attributes experience with the connotation of a reality-based interaction with the objective world, thus, from this limited perspective *perception* is the foundation of experience. The capacity of the human phenomenological mind, however, is far more gifted than this narrow perspective allows for. Dream, thought, hallucination, and emotions (love, jealousy, anger) all constitute examples of a variety of human experiences that have no objective counterparts. Hence, I argue that human experience has two other components, in addition to the perceptual: namely the imaginary and the emotional.<sup>27</sup> It is incumbent upon any system of communication that pretends to meet with the expectation of being labeled a "human language" to be capable of expressing all of these three dimensional facets of human phenomenology.

2. *A phenomenological interpretation of the term meaning*. By *meaning* I am signifying the creation of an *experience* in the receiver of the message. Without the capacity to create an experience from a given symbolic representation, there can be no meaning. A grammatical comprehension perhaps. A potential manipulation and transliteration of symbols, also. But no meaning. Ultimately, therefore, *language is the use of*

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<sup>27</sup> From this perspective it can be understood that computers will never have the capacity to *understand* as they lack the biological substrate required for the true comprehension of *meaning*.

*symbolic representation in order to communicate – create, recreate – experience.*<sup>28</sup>

Without the capacity, for example, to create mental (imaginary) spaces in which entities or objects (imaginals) share, borrow, or synergistically combine features and faculties, such contemporarily regarded facets of language as metaphor, metonymy, frames, or conceptual integration (“blending”) would not be possible. Furthermore, anthropological and paleo-neurological theories support my thesis that language, art, and shamanism all appeared as a result of the same neurocognitive capacity: the conscious ability to develop and manipulate imagery. Ultimately my theory rests on the argument that imagination, a solely human ability, is *the* primary cognitive function that allows us to engage in this transfer of significance via symbolic representation. Imagination permits us to experience the *then* and *there* in the *here* and *now*. It enables the creation and conceptualization of such non-existent (from a perceptual standpoint) objects and entities as gods, unicorns, and corporeal or spiritual transcendence, and it empowers us with the potential to attribute them factual as well as linguistic significance. Without imagination we could not have what we humans refer to as language, art, or religion. Without imagination we simply would not be human.

The more psychological and physiological ramifications the signal elicits in the receiver, the more meaningful the experience becomes, and the more meaning the signal, *from the receiver’s subjective standpoint*, can be said to carry. Therefore, language communicates meaning by eliciting experiences in the receiver. Without imagination, the capacity to employ metaphor, analogy, conceptual integration, etc. would cease, and language as we know it would not have taken place. Grammar and syntax, on the other hand – as they are commonly understood – consist of our observation of the rules of a given language. *Syntax does not convey*

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<sup>28</sup> This standpoint also precludes any concerns for classical linguistic concepts such as grammar or syntax. I believe that much of the tradition in linguistic theory has placed far too much emphasis on issues of form and disregarded the fundamental purpose of language, which is that of communication. And thus my question does not pertain to the mechanics of the encryption and decoding of the code, but rather addresses the essence of the code itself, that is, how is human communication possible? Another way of approaching this same topic is to ask ourselves this fundamental question: without imagination, what sort of communication would we humans have?

*meaning*. Syntax reflects the rules that govern the process of translation of the linguistic signal into an experience beyond that observed by whichever sense it is engaging. Experiential interpretation of what the linguistic signal conveys is what leads to and allows the individual to attribute meaning to the signal. Furthermore, the linguistic signal does not take place in either spatial or temporal isolation of the individual's context. It is quite different to say "Stop!" to someone while they are driving down a highway, as compared to when they are filling your cup of tea. The *meaning* that the same word elicits changes entirely with the context.

### *Imagination, Language and Healing*

#### Words, Imaginings, and Responses

Throughout this essay I have referred to the fact that imagination has a non-conscious as well as a conscious component. Since I have already explained that all information that becomes represented in the conscious mind is non-conscious first, the idea of non-conscious imagination may not be all that difficult to entertain. The imagination manifests itself non-consciously in two essential ways.

First of all, overwhelming evidence exists to suggest that what we imagine has ramifications that manifest themselves throughout our entire nervous system, and consequently in the endocrine and immune systems with which the nervous system interacts (and likely throughout our entire organism).<sup>29</sup> Taking into consideration that any experience (perception, imagination, or emotion) is the result of the integrated activity of neural networks in the brain, which in turn has discernible connections with the rest of the functioning tissues of the entire body, this conclusion should be rather obvious.<sup>30</sup> And since the conscious mind is a minuscule subset of the non-conscious mind, the majority of the influence of

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<sup>29</sup> The study of such interactions is central to such disciplines as psychoneuro-immunology (PNI), psychoneuroendocrinology (PNE), and stress physiology in general.

<sup>30</sup> Obvious as it may seem, this simple fact has eluded mainstream science until relatively recently, no doubt due to the influence of the Cartesian dualistic view of mind and body which has dominated the scientific paradigm for centuries.

these imaginings is beyond our conscious awareness, let alone volitional control.

Secondly, since any conscious imagining arises as a result of non-conscious activity in the mind-brain, it is easy to conceive of situations in which the non-conscious basis for the imagining exists, but due to extenuating circumstances, such as other more pressing demands on the conscious mind, it does not manifest itself in its entirety (or perhaps at all) at a conscious level. This 'non-conscious' imagination would still have the power to elicit systemic responses.

The human capacity for responding, consciously or otherwise, to what is only imagined is quite well characterized by the phenomenon known as the *placebo effect*. In the placebo effect an inert substance, such as a pill, has the capacity to elicit a full-fledged psychological and/or physiological response as if the pill in fact had organic properties. A study performed by Buckalew and Sallis (1986), reported that in pills, the placebo effect varied with the size, form (pill or tablet), and color of the medication, e.g., green tablets were imagined as better for anxiety, while blue pills made better tranquilizers, etc. Additionally, capsules were viewed as significantly stronger than pills and larger preparations were imagined to be more powerful than smaller ones. The authors also discovered that these results varied across cultures and gender. Further evidence suggests that placebo works best if both the clinician and the patient believe that it will work (Morris 1997). The only explication possible for these findings is the intervening role that the human imagination, both consciously and non-consciously, performs in the processes of interpreting and creating the outcome of the event – even if the event is supposedly beyond conscious control. As David B. Morris states, “a full understanding of the placebo response in humans ... requires a biocultural model that acknowledges the intrinsic role of culture, meaning and belief” (Morris 1997).

The dark side of the placebo effect has sometimes been referred to as the *nocebo-effect*, and as its name suggests, it entails negative outcomes also based on expectation (imagination). It is the causation of illness or even death simply by the expectation either of a *specific* or a *generic* negative outcome. “The nocebo hypothesis,” according to Robert A. Hahn, “proposes that expectations of sickness and the affective states associated with such expectations cause sickness in the expectant,” and because expectations are largely the result of learned cultural variables, the

nocebo effect will vary from society to society (Hahn 1997). Voodoo death is perhaps the most notorious example of the nocebo effect, and was defined by Walter Cannon as "the fatal power of the *imagination* working through unmitigated terror" [emphasis mine] (Cannon 1942). The power of the human imagination is so pervasive that the stress-response, a psychophysiological reaction initiated by the mind-brain that the organism undergoes in order to prepare the system for fight or flight, can be initiated just by thinking of an event:

Sometimes we are smart enough to see things coming and, based only on anticipation, can turn on as robust a stress-response as if the event had actually occurred ... unlike less cognitively sophisticated species, we can turn on the stress-response by thinking about potential stressors ... Thus, the stress response can be mobilized not only in response to physical or psychophysiological insults, but also in expectation of them (Sapolsky 1998).

It is important to note that we are all constantly subject to the placebo or nocebo effect, as well as to the stress response, as these are no more than *the result of a complete psychophysiological response to an imaginary stimulus believed to be real*. An organism that waited for full empirical confirmation of the presence of a predator prior to enacting a flight response would have failed to perpetuate its genes long ago. In the case of the human mind-brain, as Sapolsky suggests, the same cognitive capacity that allows us to give rise to art, religion, or language, also causes us to enact full systemic responses to these imaginings, often beyond our volitional control or even awareness.

The shaman's ability to heal is entirely central to the shamanic worldview. As I discussed in detail in my paper "Shamanism and Clinical Hypnosis: A Brief Comparative Analysis," the use of imagination in order to produce psychological and/or physiological responses is central to healing practices such as shamanism and clinical hypnosis (Overton 1998b). Perhaps the most dramatic use of imagination elicited by language in order to produce a meaningful experience is during the hypnotherapeutic encounter (Overton 1998b). Hypnotherapy, which consists of the use of words to create images that result in (psychological and physiological) responses, consists of creating the most appropriate experience (imagination) in the client/patient in order to engender the desired psychological and/or physiological change. What is most interesting is

the fact that very different, even opposite imagery elicited in clients, can result in the same psychophysiological response (Overton 1998b). The use of imagery in hypnotherapy can be roughly divided into *process imagery*, in which the client's imagination is guided towards a series of events or processes that will lead towards the desired state, and *result imagery*, in which only the end goal or end state itself is imagined. The distinction between process and result imagery is an important one in understanding the role of imagination in the placebo and nocebo effects, as well as in shamanic healing. For instance, it has been recorded that different, even opposite, uses of imagery in hypnosis can lead to the same response. Thus "cool" and "warm" can be equally used to cure migraines or to block an inflammation response after a severe burn.<sup>31</sup> In both cases the *experience*, that is, the conceptual blend engendered in the client's phenomenological mind, is but a finger pointing to a deeper *meaning*: the cessation of the headache and of the inflammation response, respectively. Furthermore, while the *meaning* that the experience creates is the result of the receiver's imagination, it also is an example of the non-conscious functioning of the imagination in the human mind-brain. According to the Imagino-Hypothesis, the placebo response itself is largely the result of the automatic, and non-conscious, effects of result imagery of the client's mind-brain of itself:

The placebo effect does not take place without the idea that frames [i.e., gives context to] the use of the placebo, i.e., a suggestions of some form [direct or indirect] which leads the patient to expect and anticipate a particular outcome from its employment. Thus a strong parallel can be drawn between result imagery and placebo [or nocebo], namely, *that the placebo [or nocebo] effect is the consequence of an individual unconsciously and automatically engaging in the result imagery caused by the very ideas suggested [including contextual cues] about the placebo's use [and effect]* (Overton 1998b).

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<sup>31</sup> In metaphorical terms, process imagery consists of the metaphorical representation of the end goal to be achieved, while result imagery is the image of the state itself. Thus "cool" or "warm" are but representatives of the 'process' intended to lead the client to a state of health (result). Often the result imagery is not sufficient to achieve the goal in the client's mind; the hypnotherapist must find the appropriate process imagery to plausibly fit the client's cognitive-emotive schemata.



This is equally the case during shamanic healing in which the healer, and not the client, undergoes profound imaginary experiences (journeys) for the purposes of the intervention. Because of the healer's and the client's shared worldview in which the cause of the disease lies in the interference of unseen forces from "non-ordinary" reality, it is logical that the efforts of the shaman while entering that "non-ordinary" reality on the client's behalf, will yield the desired results. *Whether the client is following along with the shaman's descriptions of the events taking place in "non-ordinary" reality on his or her behalf (process imagery), or simply considering – even non-consciously – the end state of being healed (result imagery), or some combination of the two, imagination still plays a major role in the healing process.* Therefore, as in the case of the placebo response, it is the non-conscious functioning of the imagination that largely is responsible for the effects.<sup>32</sup>

#### The Placebo Effect: A 'Cognitive-Emotive' Perspective

In the field of psychosomatic medicine, a useful distinction is often made between the psycho-social stimuli themselves, or *stressors*<sup>33</sup>, the neuro-psychophysiological *responses* they elicit, and the "cognitive processes" that "mediate between a situation and the emotional response" (Meichenbaum 1974). Generally speaking, research on the role of cognitive variables in stress reactions indicates that how an individual responds to stress to a great extent is influenced by: a) how the individual appraises the stressor; b) to what cause the present state of arousal is attributed; and c) how one assesses his or her ability to cope (Meichenbaum 1974). These, and many other sample cognitive processes, constitute examples of the functioning of an individual's *cognitive set* or *schemata*<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> It is important to note that when administered a placebo the patient or subject is unlikely to dwell on detailed imagery of its effects. The placebo response is automatic and largely non-conscious, based on the strength of the expected (imagined) outcome of its application.

<sup>33</sup> For the present purpose, a *stressor* will be defined as a stimulus, situation, or event, which tends to elicit an undesirable psychological and/or physiological response (Davidson and Neale 1994).

<sup>34</sup> A *schema*, sometimes referred to as a *filter* or *frame*, can be defined as an organized body of knowledge, a mental representation of a set of related categories

Schemata are a very important aspect in all of our cognitive processes, and affect how we view, interpret, recount and associate the events, people, entities, objects, locations, actions, etc. that affect both ourselves and the world around us. Schemata are employed in perception, memory, learning, and retrieval as a means of filtering, encoding and connecting or relating information. The purposes of schemata are to allow us to generalize from known events and associations in the past and present, in order to *explicate the past, interpret the present, predict the future*, and to *determine an immediate course of action* based on the above.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the deployment of the wrong schema, or, equally, that of a faulty one, would lead to inappropriate responses (psychological and of physiological) to stimuli (events, locations, people, entities, objects, actions, etc.) (Howard 1987, Barsalou 1992, Reisberg 1997, Eysenck and Keane 1996, Davidson and Neale 1994, Meichenbaum 1974, Bechtel and Abrahamsen 1996).

However, one fact that is most often overlooked in the cognitive literature regarding schemata is the role played by emotive content. Few events, locations, people, entities, objects, actions, etc., directly pertaining to an individual are completely devoid of emotional content in our mind/brain, but rather each are invested, to a greater or lesser degree, with any number of emotions, such as joy/sadness, anger/fear, acceptance/disgust, surprise/anticipation, etc. Furthermore, as

a) it is generally recognized that emotions are a link between cognitive processes and physiological responses, and

b) the expression of these emotions, particularly in the case of strong ones, carries somatic, autonomic and endocrine responses (Rosenzweig et al. 1996);

the conventional concept of schemata needs to be expanded in order to encompass the emotional content (i.e. emotive and physiological responses) associated with each cognitive element or factor of an individual's schemata. This expanded notion of schemata is what I refer to as *cognitive-emotive schemata*. Cognitive-emotive schemata serve

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(Howard 1987), or the encoding of general knowledge which can be applied to many situations (Eysenck and Keane 1996).

<sup>35</sup> The aforementioned stockbroker and the diviner operate quite similarly if one takes into account the different schema that each brings to their respective tasks.

1. to organize, filter and select what the individual perceives;
  2. to associate what has been perceived with other memories, images, and ideas;
  3. to ascribe meaning – cognitive and emotive – to those perceptions based on the results of the above associations;
  4. to determine which response, psychological and physiological, to engage (which of course includes coping strategies);
- and they also indicate

1. how to store and encode (in memory) these events for future reference;

2. how to interpret the future (Howard 1987, Barsalou 1992, Reisberg 1997, Eysenck and Keane 1996, Davidson and Neale 1994, Meichenbaum 1974, Bechtel and Abrahamsen 1996);

or more generally, they determine how the world is viewed, how one perceives oneself within it, and what the patterns are which govern the interactions between the two.

These cognitive-emotive schemata are instrumental not only in mediating the stress-response, but also in the experience, and thus the meaning, that we attribute to any stimulus, including a linguistic signal, a placebo, or the threatening gesture of a hostile medicine man. In general, cognitive-emotive schemata are inextricably related to the imagination that emanates from them, and which in turn can serve to modify them. In the case of language, its only 'objective' basis is the fact that words refer to objects in the world (real or imaginary, like a unicorn), the ways in which these objects interact, and the fact that it follows rules and order (syntax). Meaning however, is purely subjective, residing neither in the word nor in its referent. Instead, meaning lies in the dynamic interplay between emotion, perception, memory and imagination elicited by the linguistic signal as it 'resonates' (evokes psychological and/or physiological responses) in the mind-brain of the individual.

Shamanic healing, like clinical hypnotherapy and many other forms of therapeutic practices that rely on the imagination, requires the manipulation of the cognitive-emotive schemata of the client; that is, the shaman elicits the most appropriate imaginary (conceptual) 'blend' in order to achieve the desired psychological and/or physiological transformations. Manipulation of these cognitive-emotive schemata via imagination (conscious or non-conscious) is an extremely powerful tool because of the inherent role that imagination plays in the functioning of the mind-brain.

A primary goal of this paper has been to investigate the shamanic worldview in terms of the human capacity to imagine. An equally important goal was the development of a theoretical foundation upon which shamanism and shamanic phenomena can be adequately addressed within the context of modern cognitive and neural sciences. As neither the study of imagination nor of shamanism are presently encompassed, or even considered, by the current scientific paradigm<sup>36</sup>, a study of this nature is highly speculative and must be based on acceptable evidence from existing and established fields of knowledge. In this vein, this paper began by reviewing theories concerning the first archeological evidence of the modern human mind-brain as we know it today. The archeological record attests to the fact that the beginning of the modern mind is intimately intertwined with evidence of the origin of a shamanic worldview as a system of belief (i.e., ritualistic burial of the dead and shamanic art). Ironically, the very evidence that substantiates the origin of the modern human mind-brain is shamanism, a topic of study that could not be further removed from what is considered acceptable research within the domain of the cognitive neurosciences. In other words, the only evidence we have of the first manifestation of the modern mind-brain is via the archeological legacy of the first shamans. And yet the mention of shamanism alone (or even its derivative, clinical hypnosis, which is taught in schools of medicine) is likely to elicit sardonic glances, if not downright ridicule from mainstream cognitive and neural scientists. This state of affairs is without a doubt the legacy of a very lengthy process that characterized the development of western intellectual thought. Although the details of this process are beyond the scope of this study, one of many major thinkers responsible for its development can readily be identified in the figure of René Descartes.

The mechanistic worldview that was most clearly manifested with this individual has in fact distorted in many senses the ideology of its founder, for “we no longer think like Descartes that the world is *like* a clock.

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<sup>36</sup> Paradigm in the Kuhnian sense. For Kuhn, a paradigm represents a conceptual framework within which a scientist works. It is a set of specific assumptions about the acceptable nature of scientific inquiry, detailing the methods, findings, and conclusions that are seen as admissible and meaningful. See “The Structure of Scientific Revolutions” (Kuhn 1996).

We think that it *is* a clock” (Lewontin 1995). Thus we have missed the moon for the finger. We have somehow lost an enchanted sense of the universe (which is quite inevitable with the advent of science), but we have also, to the amazement of many, completely lost sight of the true metaphorical, and therefore imagistic, nature of our most unique and defining attribute: the mind-brain.

The study of logic, syntax, semantics, and symbolic representation, so wonderfully inspired by great thinkers like Noam Chomsky, have ultimately failed, and failed miserably, to substantiate their claims that these are the basic principles underlying our cognitive processes. Hence, the failure of artificial intelligence (AI) to produce an artificial mind remotely deserving of the latter designation. Other disciplines such as medicine and the clinical sciences in general, unencumbered by the misguidance that the behavioral sciences are subject to, driven by pragmatism, have made use of the knowledge that the employment of the imagination has to offer: results. Thus, inspired by innumerable examples of the effects of the mind-brain (imagination) on the development or dissolution of quantifiable and measurable organic pathologies, or even of its ability to alter behavioral anomalies, efforts have been made to apply the scientific method in order to substantiate the claims. Suffice it to say that the American Medical Association approved hypnosis as a method for treatment nearly half a century ago. Since that time, fields in the biomedical sciences such as PNI and PNE, clinical hypnosis, sports psychology and various schools of psychotherapy have accumulated a wealth of information substantiating the effects of imagination on behavior, performance, and pathology.

Yet what remains lacking is a paradigm for the study of the imagination based on the mind-brain. In this respect, while the cognitive neurosciences have lost the opportunity to lead the field in the study of what is clearly an essential function of the human mind-brain, their knowledge and skills are clearly needed. Indeed, the study of the imagination from a neurocognitive perspective could serve as a substantial force to integrate a wide variety of disciplines under a single more encompassing, more powerful, and more convincing new paradigm for the 21st century. As I have illustrated in this initial study, the human imagination is at the heart of art, alternate states of consciousness, language, shamanism and religion, Eastern philosophy, and numerous other disciplines, for it would seem that imagination is the common neurocognitive faculty that gave

rise to all of these intellectual and spiritual developments, to everything that makes us distinctly human.

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## News and Notes

FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SCIENCE AND SHAMANISM 2001  
PRESENTED BY CENTER FOR SHAMANISM AND CONSCIOUSNESS  
STUDIES & SHAMANIC DIMENSIONS NETWORK

### Call for Papers, Panels, and Poster Sessions

*Purpose:*

The purpose of this conference is to launch a forum for the development of a scientific framework for the study and research of shamanism and the processes underlying its phenomenon, such as shamanic states of consciousness, healing, and journeys. It intends to focus on the understanding of some of the techniques employed by the shamans in their practices, both in terms of western empiricism and traditional cosmologies. The exchange is open to behavioral, social, physical, and biological scientists who can shed empirical light on the phenomenon of shamanism. By studying and investigating shamanism within the fabric of cosmological laws, it is implied that, by chance or necessity, the same biophysical laws govern everything. Our comprehension of natural processes is delineated, and thus limited, by the paradigms devised to understand the universe. To label a phenomenon as supernatural or unnatural because its processes are not yet understood is to imply that the scientific models of nature applied today can adequately explain the manifestations of the universe. A paradigm shift, or a shift in our perception of reality and the natural world, is urgently needed. By applying the essential constructs of science, we may be able to demonstrate the existence of a biophysical basis for shamanism as a technique of ecstasy and transformation. Shamanism is a natural attribute of existence on earth, a preternatural rather than a supernatural phenomenon.

*Objective:*

For a phenomenon to become part of scientific epistemology, it is required that it either be proven or disproven by a scientific method. Although science has not managed, as yet, to produce positive proof in favor of shamanic states of consciousness, neither has science been able to disprove it. To dismiss a possibility because it does not fit into the model of contemporary scientific theories does not make for empirical science, but scientific superstition. As a result, shamanism and related phenomena fall within the realm of scientific possibilities that must be addressed. New shifts in paradigms may demonstrate that such occurrences are, indeed, part of a natural process. Consequently, our aim is to explore new grounds using a cross-disciplinary approach. To encourage a new form of dialogue, conference presentations will be grouped by subject category rather than academic field, and will be followed by a cross-disciplinary panel discussion.

*Main Divisions of Conference Themes:*

Shamanism as a Cultural System  
 Shamanism as a Biophysical System  
 Phenomenology and Ontology of Shamanism  
 Cellular and Genetic Biology  
 Biocybernetics, Biophotons, and DNA  
 Shamanic State of Consciousness  
 Genetic Basis of Consciousness  
 Varieties of Shamanic Experiences  
 Quantum Fields and Consciousness  
 Shamanic Healing  
 Neuroscience  
 Ethnobiology and Ritual Complex  
 Cognitive Sciences and Psychology  
 Ethnobotany and Ethnomedicine  
 Transfer, Storage, and Retrieval of  
 Ethnopharmacology and Pharmacognosy Information of Medicinal Plants  
 "The Quark and the Jaguar"  
 Neurochemistry and Behavior  
 Complex Adaptive Systems

*When:* March, 2001

*Where:* Palm Springs/Palm Desert, California, USA

Located in the Coachella Valley of southern California, this area is rich in Native American Indian cultural heritage. It offers world-class conference, resort, and hotel facilities, as well as exceptional sightseeing attractions. Palm Springs/Palm Desert is about a 2.5-hour drive to Los Angeles (University of California at Los Angeles, University of Southern California, etc.), a 2-hour drive to Pasadena (California Institute of Technology), a 2-hour drive to San Diego (University of California at San Diego, University of San Diego, California State University at San Diego), a 1-hour drive to Riverside (University of California at Riverside), a 45-minute drive to Loma Linda University, and many other academic institutions.

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# SHAMAN

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## Common Motifs and Effects in Shamanic Passage Rites and Nō Theatre

JOHN A. DOOLEY

MANCIET, FRANCE

*This paper demonstrates that the universal “pattern” of passage rites manifests itself in oriental shamanic rites of calling back the dead. These rites would appear to fall under the Buddhist rubric of mōshū, or “wrongful clinging”. The same notion appears to have its analogues in the dramatic action of Nō, which, however, depicts characters anxious to give up this “clinging”. It is these whom the audience can identify with. The comparative approach adopted involves the action, forms of dialogue and the strangely shifting nature of character which is common to both the shamanic ritual and the drama. Both these forms of activity appear, broadly speaking, to exorcise bad spirits by making them into good ones. Nō in effecting its cure emphatically engages in tacitly upholding the most transcendental Buddhist precepts; the ritual appears to exist happily where it is needed, and where alternative forms of drama are not yet powerful or appealing enough to supplant it.*

Although Benito Ortolani has observed in his book *The Japanese Theatre* that there is no demonstrable “historical continuity” in the development of Japanese Nō theatre from the Buddhist temple ritual of the *shushi*- ‘ceremonies of exorcism, divination and magic’ (Ortolani 1995: 88–89), he introduces a number of parallels which suggest that Nō’s origins lie, to a great extent, within the boundaries of those shamanic rituals which have to do with calling back the dead. It is, perhaps, within these limits that Nō constitutes an alternative means of emotional release, a catharsis which was—and still is—provided by those spirits called up in rituals which Buddhism can only disapprove of; such rituals falling under the rubric of *mōshū*, a term meaning ‘wrongful clinging’, be it that portrayed in a Nō play ‘by a spirit still



clinging to some aspect of its earthly life'<sup>1</sup> or that of a client's clinging to the deathly signs of an ancestor as summoned by a shaman.

This paper will begin by examining the recurring analogies which are to be found in such rites as they are enacted in Korea, Siberia, and Japan. These will in turn be compared to their counterparts in Nō. That comparisons should be made over so wide a field seem justified if one considers that both Nō and calling back the dead rituals employ forms which in numerous ways accord with Arnold van Gennep's (1960: 191) notion of the "pattern" which informs all passage rites. This "pattern" comprises the three main structural divisions of the rites: (1) "separation"; in the case of the dead this will be the movement from Paradise as it is contrived by the shaman who will represent the deceased, and communicate the spirit's sentiments to his family in the real world. Paradoxically, in (2), the *limen*, or threshold for the dead is, this structured and temporal world of ours. It will, to the dead, reveal itself as posing such items as V.W. Turner's conditions of the "middle". These may be seen as an overall tendency to strip and level the ritual subjects; to shy away from socially structured entities, and to move towards a condition which Turner cites as "communitas". In this the relationships between one person and another are direct and immediate as they move together at the behest of the elders. It is a realm in which there is constant reference to "mystical powers", and there is an "absence of worldly status" (Turner 1974: 82–121). As I shall demonstrate, all these conditions obtain to a greater or lesser extent in the shamanic seances under discussion. The return of the deceased, via the shaman, from this world to the next, constitutes the final stage (3) of the pattern: the spirit's "re-incorporation", his return to Paradise. Like all initiands at this point in the rituals, the status of the deceased, will, typically, have been enhanced: he will usually have been seen to put his family matters on a good footing; while, generally soothed by his reception, he will return to Paradise as a spirit changed for the good rather than evil. This cursory description of the "pattern" and the motifs which cluster about it will be developed throughout this paper, enabling us finally to compare the latter with their parallels in the plots of certain Nō plays. Such comparisons will, among other things, reveal the similar cathartic effect of these institutions. It is hoped that in place of the absent "historical

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<sup>1</sup> See Royall Tyler's (1992: 16) description of this term as it is relevant to Nō.

continuity”, an ongoing, common universal “pattern” may provide a consistency of events of an alternative order.

#### NŌ, ZEAMI: THE RITUAL CONNECTIONS

Ortolani’s outline of the various theories propounding shamanic and other ritual origins of Nō is a useful one. I shall begin by abstracting from it those ideas which have to do with rituals calling back the dead. Thus, according to Toshio Akima, the family of Kan’ami and Kiyomoto Zeami (1363–1443), the founders of Nō, belonged to a group of outcasts, the *Asobi-be*, who specialised in the conducting of funeral rites. This family specialisation provides a convincing reason for Zeami’s casting of ghosts in his Nō plays (Akimo 1982: 501–507). Takeshi Umehara (1972) notes that the *bugaku* dance *Somakusha* was first performed at the Hōryūji temple in order to appease the soul of Prince Shōtoku (circa 593–621) which was out for vengeance after the extermination of his descendants. Umehara suggests that Zeami could have been a *chinkonsha*—a performer of rites for the repose of departed souls—and that he used *somakushi* as a model for his Nō ghost plays (Umehara 172; quoted by Ortolani 1995:89). These rites, according to Irit Averbuch, included “Spirit-pacification (*chinkon*) (which) was a ritual for strengthening the soul of a dying person...to call back the departed soul or to energize a weakened spirit [...] This rite was later called *kagura*” (Averbuch 1998: 101).

The example of the appeasement of Prince Shōtoku’s soul gives some weight to William Ridgeway’s contention that Nō—springing from the *kagura* held periodically in the Shinto temples to honour the dead—was frequently for the ancestors of the local nobles who would have every reason to keep up Nō as part of the family rites. This helps to account for why the local populace were generally excluded from such rites; why Nō actors were respected; and why great princes took part in the performances themselves (Ridgeway 1915: 332). It might be noted that in Japan, Korea and Siberia, those who call back the dead are generally classified as shamans, hence it is likely that Zeami himself—had he indeed been a *chinkonsha*—would have had shamanic connections. These might, or might not have included some form of shamanic initiation.

As Averbuch (1998: 101) observes, *kagura* was not only a later term for the spirit-pacification rite called *asobi*, but also included the notion of “shaking the spirit” in order to bring it back or energize it. Yasuji Honda, one of the more distinguished scholars who has contributed theories concerning the primitive *kagura*’s influence on Nō, relates the protagonist’s role of the *shite* in Nō to the *kamigakari*, the divine possession of Japanese shamanism which may, for instance, take possession of the *miko*, and use her tongue to communicate to her followers. In *kagura*, this possession can take three forms: *kamikuchi*, in which a *kami* or spirit, speaks through the medium; *kikuchi*, in which a live human being leaves its body and communicates through the medium it has possessed; and *shinikuchi*, in which the ghost of the deceased speaks through the shaman. Honda argues that in the type of Nō play in which the *shite* impersonates a supernatural being, a god, a ghost, or even a distant soul, his role derives from that of the *miko* in *kagura* who, while in a state of *kamigakari*, is overtaken by a spirit and utters the *takusen* or divine utterance. Moreover, the *waki* role is often that of a monk because it derives from the role of the ascetic who in some shamanic rituals induces the *miko*’s divine possession (Honda 1958: 191–230; quoted by Ortolani 1995:91). The role of the “wandering monk”; and that of the *waki* vis-à-vis the *shite*, I shall examine in more detail below.

#### THE MIKO AND THE UNIVERSAL MOTIF OF BLINDNESS

A *miko*, Ortolani defines generally as a “Japanese version of the North Eastern Asian tradition of a shaman...a medium who acts as the bridge between the people and the ancestral deities”, and has to do with healing and divination (Ortolani 1995: 2–3). The *miko* derives her authority from Uzume and her dance in the following myth. The sun goddess Amaterasu, constantly offended by her objectionable brother Susa-no-wo, takes refuge in a cave from which she cannot be coaxed by the other gods. Cast into an indefinite period of darkness, the world languishes until Uzume comes and dances tranced and naked before the laughing gods. Wondering at the revelry, Amaterasu peeped from the mouth of the cave and the world again was shot with light. This patent version of a cosmogony has been interpreted as a ritual for the repose of departed souls, appeasing the souls of the ancestors, and the sum-

moning of them back. Uzume's dance can be seen as a *chinkon-sai* performed during winter to reinvigorate the sun and to ensure its return (Ortolani 1995: 4–7).

Ortolani fully acknowledges that this origins' myth, a commonplace of passage rites, could lie at the base of *kagura* performances, noting that the *sakaki* tree, the mirror, pendants of white and coloured papers; the use of objects like twigs, or tufts of grass to accommodate the deities, or *kami*, all of which play their part in this ritual, can be found in the texts describing the Uzume myth. Other studies (Sasamori 1995; Knecht 1993, 1997) have analysed the blind *miko* referred to by Ortolani (1995: 22). This type is known as the *azusa miko* or *itako* whose task is quite specifically to call down the dead in a rite known as *kuchi-yose*. This is done with the help of her *azusa yumi*, or catalpa bow. A further refinement of the ritual patterns practised by the *itako* is revealed in Peter Knecht's twofold division of the rites. Only the first of these, those which call back the newly dead of the past year, are called *shin(i)kuchi*. The rites for those that have been dead longer are called *furukuchi* (Knecht 1997). Is this rather more staid, less intense ritual connected with the *furyu* dance-plays of Nō? Whatever, the *azusa miko*'s direct link with Nō comes in her appearance in Zeami's *Lady Aoi*, where with the help of her bow, she calls down the spirit of Lady Rokujono Kiyasudokoro (Sasamori 1995: 41).

The *itako*'s blindness—or poor sight—is a universal attribute of the seer. V. Avrorin's analysis of the Nanai root-word *ningma-*, 'to shamanize', reveals that the Manchu root has to do with 'seeing with closed eyes' (Van Deusen 1996: 64). This finding aptly describes the condition of the famous seer of Attic tragedy, Teiresius, who was given his inward sight by Athena, after she had blinded him for seeing her naked in her bath (Graves 1957: 98). The Korean folk theatre also boasts its archetypal blind man. He appears in Daniel Kister's description of the *pyölsin kut* with its ongoing scurrility which mocks Confucian social values, encourages fertility and parades the hope of happiness both here and in Heaven. In one, *Pongsa* (blind man) *kori*, the plucky, afflicted figure, having had his sight restored, declares: "...if we faithfully call the attendant spirits, they give clarity of sight to every man, woman...and old person in the village without exception" (Kister 1993: 46). This is reminiscent of the faith of the blind *itako*, who also

calls on the spirits in *kuchiyose* to pronounce on what is troubling them or the family from whom they have been separated (Knecht 1993: 75).

Meewon Lee (1996) has, in turn, examined the extensive shamanic connections in the *Tashiraegi*, a theatrical performance which takes place on Korea's Chindo Island. Most of the players of this drama are hereditary shamans, which is not surprising given their renowned histrionic skills, and the fact that much of this drama is intended to console the souls of the dead. The protagonist of the *Tashiraegi* is a drunken blind man who, among other items in his comic routine, acts out what is the ritual of *couvade* as he imitates the throes of his wife in childbirth (Lee 1996:131–141). What conceivably we have here is the euhemerized enactment's of myth being parodied, so that the seeming transition from normal consciousness to trance of the shaman, his inward sight, becomes simply drunkenness and blindness in a profane character. Just as in folk tales there can often be found an accretion of passage rite entities, so, too, in the *kori* we find the gratuitous motif of *couvade* thrown in to increase the merriment Lee's (1996: 136) note to the effect that it was the custom for blind men to recite the scriptures in Korea because it was thought that their condition gave them a unique power to communicate with the gods suggests a half-way house in the long descent to dramatic parody.

There are, however, despite the common traits of the seer, differences between the character of the blind man and the *itako*. The former is, for example, an actor moving in a profane world of "make-believe". The *itako* is, I believe, a shaman moving within the sacred world of a belief system. I say "believe" because certain authorities disallow any claim that the *itako* is a shaman. Ichiri Hori, for example, denies them this status; also Carmen Blacker, who writes that these women can no longer achieve a "truly ecstatic state. What passes for trance among them is seen on shrewd inspection to be mere imitation" (Blacker 1975: 140; quoted by Sasamori 1995: 42–43).

Quite what is meant by "shrewd inspection" is open to question, and reminds one only of the problems the word "trance" involves. I would prefer to adopt Roberte Hamayon's notion that "...the shaman does nothing other than *respect the model of behaviour prescribed for his function*. He takes up his role as shaman" (Hamayon 1993:14). Shamans can thus be compared to actors in so much as they take up a given

role. In doing so their efficacy depends not so much on an unverifiable state of trance as on the quality of their performance.<sup>2</sup>

The shamanic figure of the *itako* and her connections with Nō are further defined by Peter Knecht's (1993) paper "*Itako and Mokuren: An Instance in the Ritual of Kuchiyose (Calling the Dead)*". He maintains, for instance, that Mokuren is a shaman and also "the model and 'ancestor' of the *itako* themselves and of their trade: their calling up of the spirits of the departed" (Knecht 1993: 82). They preside then squarely over a universally enacted passage rite. There are two versions of the Mokuren myth, both of which tell of Mokuren locating his mother in Hell, his efforts to save her, and her subsequent deliverance. Despite variations, the two myths narrate basically the same tale. Having located his mother, Mokuren asks Buddha how best he can summon her. Buddha instructs Mokuren to prepare a peach-wood bow. When Mokuren strikes the latter, his mother appears. She complains bitterly of the hunger of herself and the other spirits who are so weak they cannot climb out of Hell. Mokuren prepares an offering of food, but when he proffers this to her, it turns to ashes. On enquiry, Buddha suggests that Mokuren would have done better to feed all the spirits in Hell, not just his mother. Despite differences in details, both stories drive home a final lesson: "What went wrong was that Mokuren offered the food only to his mother instead of to all the hungry spirits...it is not the food offering as such, but the somewhat selfish thinking that only looks at one's own relative" (Knecht 1993: 79).

We have here what appears to be an aetiological myth which reveals not only Buddha's reservations regarding certain shamanic passage rites, but also how they might be improved. As Knecht (1993: 78) relates, Buddha, finally touched by Mokuren's concern for his mother, pulls her up to Paradise at the end of a silken cord. Here, Buddha appears to be criticising the rituals of calling back the dead by proposing that they are too particularised, too parochial. They, in a word, fall into the category of *mōshū*; in this case revealing an unrighteous concern with only our nearest and dearest. Furthermore, they have no transcen-

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<sup>2</sup> Gilbert Rouget (1985: 7) marks out the confusion that inevitably follows the word "ecstasy", and suggests that the word be used only for states "attained in silence, immobility, and solitude...and...restricting 'trance' to those that are obtained by means of noise, agitation, and in the presence of others". In this case our *itako* would not be expected to attain to ecstasy.

dental aim, no ability to transport the soul to Paradise; to attain to Enlightenment: the Buddhist passage to “reincorporation”, to Nirvana. In fact *kuchiyose* runs totally counter to the Buddhist notions of release from the cycle of reincarnation. With these strictures in mind, one is reminded of S.M. Shirokogoroff’s (1935: 282) notion of the belief system of North Asian ethnic groups as “shamanism stimulated by Buddhism”. With this in mind, I should like to posit Nō as a shamanic dramatic vehicle “universalised by Buddhism”, for most “through lines”<sup>3</sup> of action in a Nō play are given their thrust and intensity by Buddhist tenets decreeing that no matter how much one has sinned, the attainment of Enlightenment is always possible. It is this awareness that contributes its urgency to the action of plays like *Sotoba Komachi*, *Lady Aoi*, *Atsumori*, *The Diver*, and *Nightbird*, driving the action forward and rendering to nothing the often dislocated structure of the plays, the “dissolution of personality” in the characters, and the absolute concepts imparted to the Nō actor by Zeami himself. I shall return to these points later in this paper.

One may deduce from these seemingly anti-theatre phenomena that while Buddha looked on his own shamanic dismemberment with a benign eye (Eliade 1964: 428), he simultaneously disapproved of shamanic ceremonies that were ruled by no other motives than the need to be reassured of the deceased’s well-being, his good intentions, and his final return from the realm from whence he came—all this without any zeal for the extinction of desire and human existence. Nō, on the contrary, provides drama which deals with these same returning spirits, but on the level of the Absolute which promises—as they throng the stage—eventual Enlightenment. The latter is not only for those characters bound within the plot, but for the actors and audience who will obtain a more indirect catharsis as they identify—each in his own way—with the characters in a play<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The term comes from Stanislavsky, who uses it to distinguish the main impelling line of action in a play.

<sup>4</sup> *Catharsis* as originally defined in Aristotle’s *Poetics* has, in the academics’ surge to define it, been stripped of all precise meaning (see Bennett 1981). In this paper I shall use the term to mean any process in ritual or theatre which purifies, purges, or exorcises with a view to restoring socio-cosmic harmony in an individual or group. Thus spirit-pacification will involve rendering the relationship between humans and spirits an amicable one. In this way social and cosmic forces will be balanced.

## NŌ AS A DEFENCE AGAINST POSSESSION BY SPIRITS

Nō audiences, as Itsuko Terasaki notes, had of old, a belief in demonic possession by spirits who had “died by mistreatment, harbouring resentment or rage, or those who had suffered violent deaths”. These angry spirits were able to harm the offender, and “Until a proper appeasement was offered, *onryo* continued to disturb the living via spirit possession and other malignant acts”. Belief in these spirits existed alongside “basic Buddhist concepts”, and it was a mixture of the two which made audiences “emotionally receptive” to plays like *Sotoba komachi* and *Lady Aoi*—both depicting possession as a main theme (Terasaki 1984: 156–157). While these two plays have an explicitly exorcist catharsis, other Nō plays, it could be argued, implicitly exorcise what could become in us obsessions, phobias and dreams<sup>5</sup>. Keith Thomas notes Dover Wilson’s commentary on the ghost in *Hamlet*, observing that “every firm Protestant in the audience would have been justified in regarding the apparition as a devil in human form”; while certainly the ultimate catastrophic results which stem from his appearance appear to confirm that this was Shakespeare’s own view of events (Thomas 1973: 705). In fact the Jacobean theatre of England would seem, with its hundreds of ghosts, to have provided an exorcist drama in which spirits, as in Nō, could be identified with and finally expelled through the action on stage.

Both Knecht and Kister, in describing those rites they have attended of calling up the dead, emphasise the troublesome nature of many of the spirits who present themselves. In Japan, the latter can, Knecht observes, make their presence known in dreams, or in the nastier form of persistent sickness or some other kind of misfortune; in which case the standard remedy is a *kuchiyose*, a ritual in which the ancestral spirit pledges to support the family as long as the latter do not forget their obligations to the dead (Knecht 1993: 80).

Kister, likewise, reports similar mischievous spirits to be found in Korea, where “inexplicable illness or family adversity” cause the bereaved to look for an unsettled ancestor spirit who needs to be con-

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<sup>5</sup> See Goldman (1975: 154) who perceives drama as exorcising our ghosts in terms of “instinctive fears, innate aggressions, scars left by various traumas...suppressed desires”.



soled. Perhaps certain Confucian mortuary rites have not been satisfactorily performed, or a grave has flooded. Whatever the cause, the shaman will be summoned to placate the offended spirit (Kister 1995: 21).

The presence of similar spirits among the Ekhirit-Bulagat of Siberia is noted by Hamayon. Known as *destins* these spirits show all the deadly, malefic nature that characterises this class of beings: they kidnap souls, cause houses to burn, and souls to wander; a condition which is understood in terms of various nervous disorders (Hamayon 1995c: 16).<sup>6</sup> Hamayon notes the similarities between the latter spirits and those summoned by the Korean shaman, or *mudang*, when a family suffers misfortunes at the hands of a discontented spirit. In Siberia, the summoning of the *destin* is done by the shaman or a living relative who impersonates the dead soul. Once summoned, the consoling of the deceased comes with a song of invocation, after which the shaman expresses the spirit's views<sup>7</sup> and feelings. The *destin* is consoled by this treatment, and it is by the utterance of her sentiments that the shaman is seen to "make the evil souls into good ones" (Hamayon 1995c: 16–17 and *Singularities n.d.* 280).

In her analysis of the rite, Hamayon remarks that "impersonating dead souls...neither implies mastering the spirits..." nor the submission of the shaman to the latter. What the shaman attempts to do is to make the spirits seem present among the participants of the ritual. In this he can be compared to any form of "representation" in the arts. Similarly in *Nō* the actor does not master the ghost or character he impersonates, nor in turn, is he mastered by them. As Hamayon observes, the shaman represents the dead in the same way as the actor represents a character or ghost on stage. He—the shaman—does so in order to play—to act his part in the ritual action. Representing the dead means—in the true sense of the word—to make them present in spite of their being absent and invisible (Hamayon 1995d: 15). This is precisely what the actors do for the characters in a *Nō* play; or for that matter, in any play.

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<sup>6</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the *destins* see Hamayon: *Singularities n.d.*

<sup>7</sup> The idea that modern Western man has grown beyond such phenomena as *destins* and the like is arguable. See Dmitrieva (1996: 68–78) on present day *bylishki* (tales) which contribute to a "lower mythology" of demonic beings, among whom she classes UFO-naughts, whose source, she reports, is the devil.

This actor-shaman conjunction appears also to exist in the Korean rites of calling back the dead, for as Kister reports, the *mudang* acts as “spokesman” but not medium, for the soul of the deceased. In other words, as with our Siberian case, there is no question of either actor or spirit mastering the other. However Kister wonders whether in the “drama of the moment”, the distinction between the two is recognised by the participants (Kister 1995: 20).<sup>8</sup> In this sense the shaman is like the actor who is spokesman for a certain character in a drama. He will not be expected to be possessed by the character in question, only to humanly support its representation.

The *itako* on the other hand, appears still to rely on her powers as a medium when accommodating the passage of spirits. As Sasamori (1995: 42) observes, the *itako*'s profession is considered shameful because it involves dealing with spirits of the dead. Yet this condition seems to be contradicted by the belief that the *hotoke*, or spirits of the dead, the *itako* has to treat with, change their impure and fearful nature and become harmless during shamanic ceremonies.<sup>9</sup> The clients, it seems, “sob and cry while listening to the voice of the spirit. Their breathing synchronises with the rhythm of the spirits breathing, who has come from the dark world of death”. As one blind, the *itako* also lives in a dark world (Sasamori 1995: 53). Sasamori notes that the spirits' utterances have little “high ethical” or “philosophical quality”, an observation which reminds one that what may satisfy the sentiments of a family may not satisfy the outsider; hence the old question of the desirable or undesirable status of such rites which surely await the hand of the master dramatist to render them worthwhile. By this I mean the provision of a dramatic plot which employs universal entities to trigger the sort of catharsis which avoids *mōshū*, not the particularised action which characterises so many of those rituals which call back the dead.

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<sup>8</sup> This lack of recognition suggests, as one might expect, that early drama was born as an entity before the participants of ritual comprehended it as such.

<sup>9</sup> Is it worth observing that historical characters who have committed their share of atrocities in the real world: *Richard III*, *Arturo Ui*, for instance, become harmless when existing within the parameters of the drama.

## NŌ'S MAKING OF EVIL SOULS INTO GOOD ONES

"Making evil souls into good ones" is a process that is clearly undertaken by many of the plots of Nō. Komachi, Atsumori, the Diver, the Old Man (in the play *The Damask Drum*), and the Nightbird are all characters, spirit or otherwise, who could be troublesome to humans if they are not granted, through Mahayana Buddhism, the possibility of redemption. Nō, in fact, creates characters which suggest the "equal potentiality of all to achieve Nirvana" (Terasaki 1984: 156). Thus Komachi, a character who was modelled by Zeami on one of Japan's greatest woman poets, despite the likelihood of her becoming a mischievous spirit, rises above such a fate, impelled as she is by a plot in which every word reveals Buddha's drawing of the sinner towards enlightenment. One example of this is the early exchange between the worn out Komachi and the priest after she has dared to rest on a decayed *stupa* during her arduous flight from the city:

- Priest: Say, there, pauper woman. Is that not a *stupa*, a sacred body of the Buddha, you are sitting on? Move away...
- Komachi: ...But I do not see any trace of writings nor the shape resembling it. It looks like a piece of stump to me.
- Priest: ...the wood in the shape of the Buddha's body must surely show some trace.
- Komachi: I too am a humble withered bough,  
but the poetic flower in my heart  
is still alive; a good enough  
offering for the Buddha,  
I should think (Terasaki 1987: 171).

As Terasaki remarks, Komachi's recognition that her "poetic flower" can be a humble offering to Buddha reveals she is already on the path of her quest for Enlightenment.

In *The Diver*, the Japanese diving girl appears initially as a human being, but later reveals herself as a ghost. Years before, when asked by a local ruler, Fuhito, to dive for a priceless pearl at the bottom of the sea, she had refused until he had promised to make the son she had borne him, his heir. In the depths of the sea, having need to hide the

jewel on her own body, she fatally cuts herself open in order to secrete the jewel before returning with it. Hence, after death, the years of separation from her son have turned her into a grieving spirit. However, this same son, Fusazaki, through Buddha's love, has returned and through his ordering of the monks to chant the *Lotus Sutra*—sung to guide and comfort the spirits of the dead—she may also attain to Enlightenment.

Here, with a plot lifted from the "Devadatta" chapter of the actual *Lotus Sutra* with all its symbolism, we have a vehicle, much like a morality play, which allows us to identify with a spirit who, through Buddha's love, and by the due attentions of her kin, is turned into an angel of good. It is in this manner of providing heroines which the audience can identify with, and through whom they can obtain catharsis, that Nō can be seen as exorcist drama comparable to shamanic ritual whose aim is also the expelling of noxious spirits, the redeeming of them; all this with an eye to gaining essential favours from them.

#### THE "PATTERN" OF RITES OF PASSAGE IN *NIGHTBIRD*

Nō "dream-vision" types of play, like the two we have looked at above, readily reveal a pattern which in both staging and content is reminiscent of passage rites. For example, "separation" in Nō is found both in the "curtain" and "bridge" negotiated by spirits who cross from their world to the world of man on stage. This notion of "separation" is again emphasised in the plot of the play. Thus in *Nightbird*, the monster protagonist of this name, is depicted as being sealed off from the world in a hollow log and thrown into the river. The log, of course, is the proverbial World Tree of rebirth. As in *The Tale of the Heike* from which the plot is derived, the log gets caught on a sandbank, and the monster, *Nightbird*, is released by a wandering monk. In the past the monster has tortured the Emperor; that is until Monomoto Yorimasa (poet and warrior, 1104–1180) shot him down with an arrow. The monster (played by the *shite*) complainingly tells the monk his story and begs the latter to pray for him. It is clear that the monk (as played by the *waki*) constitutes a stock character who moves within the sphere of the sacred: the threshold or middle where transitions take place outside the prevailing social structure. As such he appears to be a potential master of initiation, a notion the unfolding plot confirms. As Tyler indicates in his analysis of the play: if this being (the monster) is to rejoin the natural

functioning of the universe, he literally needs reform. Who better to accomplish this than the *waki* who, as defined by Nogami Toyochirō, is “the actor who *sees*”, whereas the *shite*, as protagonist, is *seen*. “The *waki* is therefore “subject” while the *shite* is “object” (Toyochiro 1930: n.p.; quoted by Tyler 1997: 66). Here, it is suggested, the *shite* is analogous to the ritual subject, while the *waki*’s “seeing” is the discerning of the way through the *limen*, the labyrinth, the discernment of what constitutes the path to Enlightenment. Once released, Nightbird or monster (*shite*) enters into a relationship with the monk (*waki*) who asks the monster who he is. Despite being the protagonist, the rather “odd” looking Nightbird would seem to have the usual lowly status of the novice, and to need both a new identity and the certain ethico-religious refinement which will come only after undergoing certain ordeals of initiation.

The monk now enters into a contest with the monster (*waki versus shite*) which may be seen as the *agon* or ordeal of the *limen*. Utterances at this stage become ambiguous, thus Nightbird refers to the *waki* as “you who have left the world”, words which could refer not only to the wandering monk being outside society, but also to his being part of the sacred other-world of the *limen*. The constant reversals which occur in this realm are echoed in the dialogue. For instance when the *shite*’s story about being hit by Yorimasa’s arrow is over, the *waki* says through the chorus: “Now, turn that one thought over / and take on strength to rise.”; words which Tyler (1997: 81) construes, through a Buddhist commentary, thus: “At the extreme point, to turn the root of delusion toward awakening”. Riddlingly this epigram describes the process of initiation. Meanwhile the monster, if he is to be delivered from his monstrous state, must appear to the monk in his true shape. He duly does so, and the monk is momentarily terrified of this characteristic grotesquerie of the “threshold”. The world of the initiate is again evoked by the *shite*’s reference to a bamboo pole which he grasps in order to fence with the monk. The arcane speech of the “middle” utilises words which mean not only “fence”, but also “intersecting destinies”: those of the *shite* and *waki*. It is at this crucial point that the “awakening” of the monster can take place; his “incorporation” into Paradise begin.

This world of the *limen* is meanwhile described by the monster as being located in this spot to which he has floated “upon the night tide

moon of the real". Here, in this sort of "Dreaming", the *shite* is in the presence of the Buddhist Teaching as it is represented by the *waki* as master of initiation. The latter is also symbolised by the moon, just as the *shite* will himself be symbolised in the moon's reflection. This satellite will become the vehicle of his final Enlightenment or heavenly re-incorporation. As Tyler says, in his guise of a real monster the *shite* awaits *shinnyo* or reality. This is why, in the play, he wishes again to be struck by the "true arrow of the Teaching" as it will be delivered by the *waki*.

In the original *Heike*, Nightbird was brought down by Yorimasa's arrow. In the play, the *shite* wishes to be struck by the "true" arrow of teaching as it is directed by the *waki*. Hence, in a sense, the latter has taken the place of Yorimasa. In *Heike* the Emperor was overwhelmed by delusion, or the monster. Similarly the *waki* is also terrified—or deluded—by the monster at first, but later overcomes his fear. Thus at this point, as Tyler (1997: 82) asserts "...both aspects of human nature are present in the same wandering monk". The *shite* in finally sympathising with the Emperor he tormented, and rejoicing in the "arrow" of the Teaching Yorimasa shot him with, has acknowledged his own Buddha Nature. By doing this, he likewise, merges with the suffering Emperor and Yorimasa. At this point the full implications of the ordeal: the bamboos crossed in the duel between the *shite* and *waki* become apparent, for in acknowledging his own Buddha Nature the *shite* reveals the "crossing" (or re-incorporation) with the *waki* will soon be complete.

As Tyler remarks: this final crossing is evoked with images of the moon; the first of these runs:

*yumiharizuki no* Thanks to a parting shot  
*iru ni makasete* from the moon's drawn bow.

Here, there is a punning on "*iru*" which means both to 'shoot (an arrow)' and 'set' or 'go in' in the case of the moon. In fact, at the end of the play the *shite* can see, for the first time, two moons: one moon above the mountain, another in its reflection in the sea. The first moon symbolises Enlightenment, and is inseparable from the wandering monk, the second "sea-moon" is identified with the *shite* and his movement to the same state. As the *waki*'s moon sinks towards the mountain tops, so does the reflected moon of the *shite* appear to rise up

to meet it; both “go in” at the same moment. As Tyler (1997: 84) says: “The eye of the imagination—the eye that sees the real play—sees *waki* and *shite* vanish together. Master and adept have completed the passage in what is a sublime image of mystic re-incorporation. Contained in this denouement is the protagonist’s—the *shite*’s experience of both Aristotelian *recognition*: the seeing of the moon for the first time; and, a *reversal*, the final movement from “delusion” to Enlightenment, as *waki* and *shite* “go in” simultaneously—thus enacting what is Aristotle’s ideal culmination of a plot.

#### CALLING BACK THE DEAD RITUAL—SOME DRAMATIC AFFINITIES

In Antonetta Bruno’s account of *kongsu*—a Korean oracular rite in which the *mudang* calls back both ancestors and gods—similar, though less dramatically articulated denouements manifest themselves at the end of the ancestral part of the proceedings. At this point the chief shaman, the *mudang* acting for the ancestor, speaks his final remarks about the condition of the family tombs: “I don’t know which tomb is lost...That’s why the wind of the mountain came out...A lot of drought (but) because (you) clean the tomb and turn the other way the confusion from each house, the sickness is prevented...” (Bruno 1998: 12). Here the ancestor’s *recognition* of causes is plain enough, just as is the *reversal*: the prevention of the “sickness” because the *recognition* has been acted on.

Further denouements involving *recognition* and *reversal* can be discerned in the finale of the second part of this rite: the Taegam sequence (Bruno 1998: 12–17). In this there are various symbols to be recognised, like the seeming footprints of the deceased, which are discerned by his family in a heap of rice. They see this as a sign that he has changed into a bird, and that he has joined his deceased wife. All these are *recognitions* by the family; while, for both the family and the ancestor, the movement from man to bird is a form of *reversal*; as also is his movement back to Paradise, led as he is by the *mudang* along the narrow strip of white cotton which symbolises the path back, and which he has had to *recognise* is the way of his return. In some cases this nar-

row strip of cotton—as if in accordance with the term *denouement*—is actually unknotted<sup>10</sup>.

It is surely clear from these examples, that ritual and Nō drama both bring about *catharsis*, even if in different ways: the ritual form is more personal and more direct; the dramatic, more universal and distanced, i.e., through identification<sup>11</sup> with the characters in a play; not with the comforting representation by the shaman of a particular spirit who one can address indirectly through the shaman. The possibility of doing this lies in the fact, as I have noted above, that the “impurity” and “fear-someness” of spirits of the dead change to harmless *hotoke* during the shamanic rite. In other words they lose something of their personality.<sup>12</sup> This milder aspect of the spirits, the abnegation of their personality, is reflected in Nō by what Peter Lamarque refers to as the “dissolution of personality”. This is characterized by “the apparent lack of autonomous identity in the characters”, a quality which is imparted by omitting personal detail and concentrating only on “specific abstracted qualities” (Lamarque 1989: 157, 160).

This dramatic refinement can be seen in *Atsumori* after its adaptation from the saga *The Tale of the Heike* for Nō by Zeami. As Keene observes: any comparison of the two tales shows that most pathos and drama has been deleted from the play. “*Atsumori*’s youth, his resemblance to Kumagai’s son, his insolence in response to Kumagai’s solicitude, Kumagai’s regret when forced to kill *Atsumori*—all are eliminated (Keene: 1973: 50–51; quoted by Lamarque 1989: 161). These “refinements” Lamarque divides into three categories: a. The special care in first choosing a character from legend who has qualities like “grace, poignancy, or forbearance”; b. The stripping away of descriptive, factual content. Detail is filled in by the imagination or with associations the audience has of the legend. This lack of detail is compounded by the constant concealment and disturbing of identities at

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<sup>10</sup> See Kister 1995: 37.

<sup>11</sup> By “identification”, I mean “to make one with; to associate inseparably” (SOD), that is to become one with the hero, the heroine, the group, or a particular chief object or action in a dramatic work.

<sup>12</sup> I use the term “personality” in the generalised version one might cull from personality theorists. Thus it can be: “(that a) body was moved by one or more indwelling spirits. When the resulting behaviour was disruptive, the spirit was probably a devil, when it was creative, it was a guiding genius” (Skinner 1974: 184).



crucial points in the drama; c. Distinctive personal characteristics are dissolved into a core of essentially emotional qualities, “leaving only a shadow or ghost of the original subject” (Lamarque 1989: 161). In these measures can be seen evidence of those “stripping and levelling” processes that are adopted in the *limen*. The characters are, it might be argued, de-structured, returned to a condition of the dead, and any identification of the spectator with them will duly be with that of characters who have, to an extreme degree, all the typical undifferentiated qualities of the initiand in a passage rite. Part of the genius of Nō is how, in its transformation to a consummate art form, it inexorably works out its own severely abstract logic of passage motifs; in this way ensuring the effectiveness of the old rites will be retained.

The reasons for this stringent stylisation are obvious. Nō, in creating a dramatic vehicle which would encourage an aesthetic and Buddhist movement towards Enlightenment, had to break completely loose from old ritual forms which centre on the shaman’s particularisation of a role: a representing of the dead man’s gait, a habitual form of utterance, a tic; the use, as a lure, of clothes once worn by the deceased. Nō’s insistence on the universal as absolute, as opposed to the presentation of the solely universal, detail-rounded character we find in Western drama, is the means by which it severs itself from material described by Sasamori as neither highly ethical nor philosophical in quality. It is a part of the distancing from what Buddhism sees as *mōshū*, a condition that is made up of those “desires and resentments” which manifest themselves in the “wrongful clinging” which makes itself felt in such rituals, Nō brings about this distance in its “dream vision” plays such as *The Diver*, *Sotoba Komachi*, and *Nightbird*. In these, as Tyler (1992: 16) indicates, the *shite*, or protagonist, is portrayed as a spirit clinging to some aspect of its earthly life, and only too eager for the *waki*’s—the supporting actor’s help to renounce this “clinging”. Such aid is often forthcoming from a stock liminal figure like a wandering monk who offers help and guidance by reciting scriptural texts (Tyler 1992: 16). It is in this way that Nō, as an implicitly Buddhist dramatic vehicle, would seem to have addressed the problem posed in the Mokuren myth discussed earlier.

Another structural component which Nō shares with passage rites can be discerned in the number and function of the actors they employ. There are, for instance, certain parallels to be discerned in the relation-

ship between the Korean *mudang* and her helper in *kongsu*, and, in Nō, the *shite* and the *waki* who may—as I have mentioned above—be seen respectively as the protagonist and his supporting actor. Bruno, for instance, notes that in *kongsu* “the chief shamaness is supported by her assistants...acting as responders. This last role is vital in cases where the client is passive (for example, if she is not familiar with shamanic rite). Here the responder becomes the...interpreter between the shaman/divinity and the client, who needs an explanation in ordinary language of the content of the...ancestor’s words” (Bruno 1998:17). This role of the “responder” is much like that of the *waki* who, as Tyler has indicated elsewhere, is not so much an actor as “one who stands aside and watches. He is an onlooker” (Tyler 1997: 65). But then Atsuyoshi Sakakura (1984: 4; quoted by Tyler 1997: 65) has observed that the *waki*, as such, is not so much the “representative of the audience” as an “interpreter” (*kaisetsucha*) who conveys to the audience things it cannot know on its own”. Or, as we might say, with my brief analysis of *Nightbird* in mind: *what the initiand cannot know on his own*. The analogues here clearly suggest that there are firm connections between these leaders of ritual and the actors of Nō.

There are, moreover, certain parallels between the irregular grammar of the utterances which stem from both ritual participants and Nō actors. Broadly speaking, in *kongsu* there is a tendency for the *mudang* not to “specify who she represents” (Bruno 1998: 18). Tyler notes a similar tendency in that Japanese avoids specifying grammatical subjects, verbs are invariant as to person and number, and nouns have no plural form. More striking is Tyler’s (1992: 10) statement that in Nō “...a speaker who seems to be in the first-person mode may suddenly shift to a third-person point of view in order to narrate his or her own actions”. A like phenomena is reported by Bruno in *kongsu*: where “the form of the speaker (*mudang*) is continually switching, making it difficult to identify who she represents”. Thus in one part of the ritual the father-in-law speaks *through* the *mudang* using the first-person pronoun. At another moment the *mudang* speaks *for* the father-in-law in the third person as a close friend; and later she addresses words *to* him. Finally she speaks for herself as shamanic officer of ceremonies (Bruno 1998: 18). Given that both this ritual and Nō have century-long traditions governing these changes, the question of the indeterminacy of the

persons being addressed or addressing would indubitably repay further analysis.

Despite the chaotic syntax of what are these highly particularised dialogues, Bruno (1998: 19) sees in these “the personality of each soul...with his or her physical needs. The release of the desires and resentments of both the living and the dead is fundamental in shamanic belief as a means of preventing and resolving crises”. There is in this an echo of what every student of drama recognises, namely that the real, let us say great playwright, is constantly meeting his ghosts; take, for example, Eugene O’Neill’s return to his ghosts before beginning work on *Mourning Becomes Electra*, or Ibsen’s reporting of his walk through the arcades of Munich with Hedda Gabler (Meyer 1971: 727). It is these same ghosts, I would suggest, that—through the medium of the playwright’s pen—ensure that what is said on stage issues from a distinct “personality”; one who is not (for instance, in a poorly conceived play) given only a course of action to do, and words to utter as he does so.

Kister’s reportage of the dialogue between the dead and the bereaved in a Korean ritual, gives a good idea of this sort of material which obviates crises, but which Nō so determinedly jettisons.<sup>13</sup> Thus in one *chinogwi-kut* the deceased spirit of a father chides his son and American daughter-in-law for not having had children. Too many contraceptives are being used, suggests the spirit. ...Maybe the son should not have married a foreigner... (Kister: 1995: 19). In another exchange, the spirit of a son drowned at sea is poignantly recalling to his mother that at the time he had set out to sea, he had told her: “It would be better if I did not go” (Kister 1995: 20). Despite the likely Buddhist criticism of the nature of such dialogues, and the strictures of outsiders on what could obviously be the wounding effect of the spirits’ comments, scholars have assured me that the *kuts* are enjoyed by the participants, and that the atmosphere of these is usually a joyful one. As one commentator reports of a participant of a Western Buryat ritual of this sort: “When...(she) came home she felt much better and at ease. Before she had felt depressed and at a loss how to deal with life. Now the ceremony had given her peace in mind” (Fridman 1999:135). I accept these

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<sup>13</sup> For a concise account of the typical action in the plots of other, similar rites, see Kim (1981: 121–130).

points. Obviously if the rituals do not generally console and uplift the morale of the congregation they will not accomplish the cure they are designed to deliver.

Most of the rituals that have been examined have contained a myth which appears, by its narration, to either authorise or spell out the origins of the shaman's role as healer. Nō, too, as I have shown, has its myths and legends which likewise both authorise the plots and provide roles for the actors. The plots exist by reason of their aesthetic appeal, their power to entertain and to exorcise noxious psychic elements in the audience. The complete performances must, by illusion, also make the audience "believe" in what is happening on stage<sup>14</sup> Rites, on the other hand, proceed by way of belief that what is presented by the shaman, even though invisible, is present, whereas the audience in the theatre know perfectly well that Sotoba Komachi is not present in the actor playing the role, though throughout the performance they will "suspend this disbelief".

#### ORIGIN OR AUTHORISING MYTHS

Besides the origin myths of the *itako* that have earlier recounted, there are those alternative myths they utilise in order to cure both "mental and physical disease". One of these myths is the *Oshira sutra* which begins with a stallion and a maiden falling in love. The subsequent slaying of the beast by the girl's outraged father results in the abduction of the maiden, who is carried to heaven by the horse. The couple are finally reincarnated and return to earth as useful silkworms. Sasamori (1995: 46) considers that here we see "the familiar figure of the horse in its shamanic context"; a point he probably bases on the fact that a partnership between man and beast, or men as beasts, is well attested to

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<sup>14</sup> At the profane level of plot, Nō posits the concept of *hana* (flower) which is concerned with the beauty of the performance into which "the audience's attention is drawn despite itself" (Ischii 1987: 111). Even here is a hidden shamanic connection: a hunting metaphor; for a Terence Cave notes, what draws the spectator into the performance is recognition that there is a "scandal" because plots are about incest, adultery, murder, "goings-on" that are not seen until it is too late. This recognition is a scandal in the French sense of scandal: a stumbling block, an obstacle to belief, and it is a scandal in that according to the etymology of the word it seduces the reader or spectator into a trap or snare: a *scandalon* (Cave 1988: 1).

in shamanic literature. Thus Eliade (1964: 172–174), in describing the Araucanian ritual, *ngillatun*, notes similarities with the Altaic rite in which the shaman rides to heaven on a horse. In the former myth, it is a female shaman who mounts a wooden horse while grasping a wooden sword; in the latter, it is a shaman. Presumably when the *sutra* myth is narrated by an *itako* it will authorize her as a woman to effect the cure.

A similar origins myth is chanted by the *mudang* in the *chinogwi-kut* as it is enacted in the Seoul area and along Korea's east coast. The tale, as Kister reports, establishes the credentials of the *mudang*—as the Abandoned Princess spirit—to lead human beings through the rigours of death. The story concerns the abandonment of the seventh daughter of a king. The latter has cast her out with the aid of the dragon spirit of Buddha. This daughter survives, however, and later returns to her father who is mortally sick by then. The princess agrees to undertake an arduous journey in order to get medicine for him from the Guardian Spirit. The latter demands that she marry him before giving her the potion, and she bears him several children before returning with the cure. Finding her father dead when she arrives, she revives him, and then rejoins her spirit husband in Heaven (Kister 1995: 24). This would seem to be another initiatory scenario which shares with other myths the archetypal journey to the heavens. In *Nō*, by contrast, these myths are superseded by the audiences' prior knowledge of the legend from which the plot of the play is drawn, a knowledge which, as we have seen above, helps the spectator fill in those details which *Nō* has abstracted from its characters.

Once having concluded her tale, the *mudang* then proceeds to take on the role of the Abandoned Princess as psychopompe. Thence, with the aid of symbolic decor like a flower-covered “gate of thorns” around which she dances, she finally ushers through the deceased who is symbolised by his white funeral clothes laid out on a table carried by the bereaved. The long sleeves of the *mudang* reveal she is leading, a sweep of the fan signals the ousting of evil spirits (Kister 1995: 25).

With regard to those myths which might legitimise the Buryat shamans to conduct the rites under discussion, we have nothing so short, particular or convenient as the Korean and Japanese myths we have summarised. Their right to officiate presumably derives from their initiation. Eliade's chapters on Buryat initiation differ from Hamayon's, he maintaining that the spiritual marriage to a “celestial bride” appears

to be a secondary role (Eliade 1964: 76). Hamayon, on the contrary, sees the shaman's legitimacy stemming from an initiation in which the ancestors call only those they see fitted to be shamans, this call carrying within itself the tacit behest that the shamans will inherit and marry their—the ancestors'—spiritual wife (Hamayon 1995c: 10–11). This seeming lack of a specific authorising rite, however, does not disallow the Mongolian Buryat version of the *Gezer* epic of having supplied such a deficiency. In this legend, with its extensive shamanic associations, Julie Anne Stewart has located a number of episodes which, like those I have cited above, could aptly cover a rite of calling back the dead. One of these is a likely soul-retrieval rite depicting the resuscitation of Gezer by a cleansing herb known as the “blue beard of the clouds”. This, with water and potions, is administered in an *ariulga* rite for the dead hero. It involves “smudging” Gezer with the smoke from the burned herb in order to cleanse him and bring him back to life (Stewart 1999: 61–62). It is this sort of rite from the epic which could, without strain, stand in to authorise the calling back of the dead by the shaman of today.

The type of action contained in the *Gezer* epic I have cited, vividly exemplifies what might be termed the archetypes of Aristotle's class of actions he refers to in the *Poetics* as “probable (or plausible) impossibilities” which in the poetic and dramatic realm he sees as preferable to “improbable (or implausible) possibilities”. According to S.H. Butcher's gloss on this celebrated dictum, the former may be seen as poetic entities which cannot be really accepted as higher realities or “coherent and connected” wholes, but could once have been part of the traditional belief or enshrined in popular superstition, and from there are transferred to the supernatural and the “marvellous” as we find it in poetry and drama (Butcher 1951: 95 and 178). This transference in all those Buryat and other myths we have narrated appears to have taken place in the *Gezer*, but not to the same polished and sophisticated level it has attained to in Nō theatre. Some kind of development along the lines suggested by Butcher is attested to in Hamayon's report on the Buryat “Gezer Games” (1995) which included wrestling, “dramatic spectacle” depicting Gezer as mythical hero, together with the encouragement of the festival's participants to make an offering at an *oboo* or cairn: a ritual centre dedicated to the spirits of the place (Hamayon 1998: 63–64). There are some echoes here of those indigenous Greek

rites for the dead chiefs from which Ridgeway thought tragedy could have evolved (1915: 5 et seq.).

The same origin myths occur, according to Ortolani in the Japanese *waki nō* or *Kami mono*. The latter term means plays about gods. The purpose of these is to relate the story of a shrine, or else to praise a god or a *kami*. In the plays, the gods appear first in disguise, and then, with a costume change, in all their glory (Ortolani 1995: 132–133).

The importance of these myths to *Nō* is borne out by Honda's contention that the shamanic roots of *Nō* are to be seen in the structure of the plays. This is "like an illustrated, acted out narration of a past event—more like a narrated re-enactment than like the apparent presentation of the actual event itself as is the common practice in *kabuki* and Western drama" (Honda 1958; quoted by Ortolani 1995: 91–92). Ortolani notes Hoff's comparison of Honda's idea with that of Gerald Else's theory that Attic tragedy began with the story-telling Greek *rhapsoidoi*, just as Honda sees *Nō* as emerging from the *katari* told by shamans. There are, indeed, any number of strange kaleidoscopic movements in *Nō*, shifts, which in a play like *The Diver*, transform the ongoing dialogue between the *shite* and the chorus into narrative. The Diver has just revealed to her son, Fusazaki, that she is the ghost of his mother:

Diver:           ... And I myself—for why should I hide it?—,  
                    Am that diver's ghost your mother.

*Fan held upright, she approaches Fusazaki, then hands him the fan: it now represents her letter.*

Chorus:         Look then, at what I have written here,  
                    and have no doubt. Only comfort me!

*Restraining tears, she goes to base square*

Now I must go back under the sea,  
for I came by night, as one in a dream  
and day, alas will be breaking soon (Tyler 1992: 32).

At this point the chorus can be seen to have taken over the Diver's speech; and in doing this have somewhat eerily—even in the reading of

it—continued the dialogue into what Honda has aptly termed “narrated re-enactment”. Meanwhile, the Diver, in base square, acts out in dumb show those actions appropriate to the words of the chorus. The spreading of her arms signals her disappearance into the sea. But then, this dramatic convention of arbitrary change is not quite as strange as it may seem if we consider the rituals we are comparing to this drama.

Thus in *kongsu* there are three *mudangs*: the chief, and her two assistants. As speakers in the rite they will take on “(…the multiple identity of shaman/ancestor/divinity) and the identity of the person to whom the speech is directed” (Bruno 1998: 3). As we have seen above, one of the main difficulties in her study of the rite was the “specifying of the identity of the speaker at any given moment of the ritual” (Bruno 1998: 3). Given that members of the deceased’s family can also engage in the dialogue, and that there is no precise blocking in the rite—as in *Nō*, little priority seems to be given to the clear embodiment of each character in the ritual. The process can be followed in the following sequence; note the typical “narrated re-enactment” style in the dialogue of the chief *mudang* as she takes on the role of a deceased younger brother: “While I was living in such a way I didn’t live well, so I died. There are so many *won* (desires) and so much *han* (resentment) which led to ill-health. So I couldn’t have any offspring. I keep going by being alone and live one full life!…” Music and dance follow, and then the shaman takes up a dress which belonged to the deceased. Seeing this as an added sign confirming the return of the young man’s spirit, the maternal aunt who is present cries out: “Welcome! Welcome!” The deceased brother now begins to enquire of the aunt as to whether or not he was married. Like the Diver in death, the young man occasionally appears to be entangled in dream, while at the same time the *mudang* who is playing him (perhaps because of the skirl of the action) can no longer be identified (Bruno 1998: 7–8). The aunt’s dialogue with the *mudangs* portraying the brother help one to a definitive view of his character.

It is roles like these, floating free from any specific shaman, helper (or spectator?) that the *Nō* playwright appears to be exploiting in *The Diver*; a process which arises because he, like Bruno, has realised that a collective shamanic rendering of character does not finally destroy the individual personality of a soul with its need for Enlightenment. A fact which once recognised is aesthetically flaunted by the easeful dramatic



movement in which the protagonist's utterances are merged into those of the chorus. Proof of survival is provided by the existence of the silent, indefatigable *soul-image* of the Diver going through her dumb show in base square. She remains there, despite the earthly notion of her character having been materially and logically shredded to pieces by the incorporation of her words into those of the chorus. Without some form of this singular ritual paradigm having been existent, surely *Nō*, as drama, would have been quite *un-thinkable*.

What then of the shamans other helpers, the friends and the family of the ancestor? Certainly they cannot be transferred into roles as apt as those of the leading shamans; nor can they be allowed—in the vastly Buddhist context of *Nō*—to merge into a self-indulgent group which—on stage—approves of the earthly clings of the *shite*. The early masters of *Nō* found the one logical way to change their stance, and that was to allow them to form the chorus. In this way they are not only able to identify with the *shite* but also to *become him* by adopting his dialogue. In this way, their identification with the latter would render them subject to the full disciplinary force of the *waki* as he works to set the *shite* on the path of Enlightenment. It is in this context that the Diver's (*shite*) "dumb-show" can be seen as a sign that she, though bound speechless into the traditional fluxing of character in the drama, remains yet an individual soul working its way to Enlightenment.

A further sign of *Nō*'s association with passage rites motifs are the *torimono* which have already been mentioned with regard to their place in *kagura*. Ortolani notes the development of these hand-held objects in which the spirit or power is thought to reside. He suggests that originally the *kamu kagura*, the house of the gods, would have been the column or centre for invoking the ancestral deities. When the shamanic central axis was abandoned, *torimono* came in the shape of objects held in the shaman's hand: paper pendants, pine branches, bamboo, swords, halberds, fan, willow, bow and arrows, all of which became standard equipment for many *kagura* (Ortolani 1995: 14). The *torimono* have also been seen as an instrument of shamanic transmission of messages from the dead. Here, the branches of the tree in the medium's hands stands for the shamanic tree itself. Ortolani makes the point that such staffs as Hermes' *kerykeion*, or herald's staff, perform the same function (Ortolani 1995: 19). Further, in *Nō*, the constant use of *torimo* like

the fan and *sakaki* branch shows a continuing belief in possession by spirits (Ortolani 1995: 93)<sup>15</sup>.

Not only Nō theatre boasts these charged objects. Western theatre, too, has its numinous stage properties, take for example the daggers which have been used to despatch King Duncan in *Macbeth*. These will be handled gingerly in the Green Room of an English theatre. The supernatural power of these objects seems not unlike that encountered in *sacra*, the sacred artefacts which, in the case of the Australian aborigine, contains the sacred identity and soul of the initiand. Such a connection is suggested by Richard Seaford (1981) in his discussion of the origins of Euripides' *Bacchae* in the initiation rites of the Dionysiac Mysteries. In this paper he discusses George Thomson's view that *anagnorisis* (recognition) in Classical Greek plays of *georismata* (tokens by which a lost child is recognised in drama) derive from the revelation and recognition of *sacra* comprehended by the initiand in initiation rites. Evidence for the eruption of ritual forms in early Greek drama—together with the "riddling language of tragic *stycho-mythia*"—Seaford finds in ritual patterns of early satyric drama (Seaford 1981: 271–273).<sup>16</sup>

Whether or not it is a sacred myth or a belief system authorising the ritual plot of the shaman, it is clear that they both have the same function: that of universalising the rite by tying it back to its cosmogonic origins. Without this the significance and finally the efficacy of the rite would be undermined by an unlegitimized shaman conducting petty, particular proceedings which would lead to none of the purging, exorcism and the healing that we expect from the authorised rite.

The myths upon which the plots of Nō are based appear to be both sacred and profane. Thus the Buddhist *Lotus sutra* contributes to the plot of *The Diver*, and is a sacred myth; the plot of *Atsumori*; on the other hand, would seem to be profane. Whatever, I have shown how, with *The Tale of the Heike* from which *Atsumori* has drawn its plot, the

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<sup>15</sup> See above, where the Diver uses her fan to symbolise a letter. Lamarque notes two other conventions (in Taylor 1976: 216): a single sweep of the fan indicates the loosing of an arrow; twice repeated it denotes the fluttering of wings or a wind. Note, also above, a *mudang* "ousts" evil spirits with a sweep of her fan. It would be interesting to have a specialist's comparative study of the symbolic use of the fan in Nō and in calling back the dead ritual.

<sup>16</sup> See also Thomson 1946: 188–191.

adapters have done everything in their power to retain, not the *universal-absolute of the plot at a sacred level, but its universal-absolute at a profane level*. By “absolute”, I mean beyond the universal: the typical of human kind and nature; the “absolute” being a state that is free from limitations or exceptions; which is perfect and complete. It is this latter condition of Nō which can be seen as the analogue of *the particular at a sacred level* in those rites which call back the dead. What both activities have in common is the need to reduce damaging spirit forays, and both the rites and the theatre have worked out their own most efficient movements to such an end.<sup>17</sup>

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# “In Search of the Spirits”: Shamanism in China Before the Tang Dynasty. Part One

GÁBOR KÓSA

BUDAPEST

*Scholarly investigations in the last decades have produced a great variety of suggestions and hypotheses concerning “the shamanic substratum” of Chinese culture. These studies have most often applied a diachronic, i.e. historical, archaeological or philological method to investigate the presence of shamanism in the Chinese religious landscape. However, beyond the field of Sinology, the conclusions of these recent studies are not widely known. On the other hand, not even Sinology has made an attempt comprehensively to treat the origin and the development of this presumed substratum. In the next few pages, I will summarise the main hypotheses and evidence of shamanic influence on the Chinese religious complex, contending that a more detailed analysis and a thorough reassessment of classical sources will later be needed further to clarify some of the unknown aspects of shamanism in ancient China.*

## I. THE QUESTION OF SHAMANISM IN CHINA

### *1.1. Shamanism in China – A Diachronic Analysis*

The question of whether we can detect traces of shamanism in traditional Chinese culture is inextricably entwined with the definition, or rather the plethora of definitions, of shamanism. As, naturally, no single definition can be given, there is no standard to compare the Chinese phenomena with. Accordingly, even if in our investigations we found some features corresponding to certain shamanic traits, the system as a whole would not necessarily meet the criteria applied by shaman researchers. Therefore we should follow the opposite route. We must study the word *wu*, usually translated as ‘shaman’, observe



the *wu*'s activities and most common characteristics, the historical development of his/her function,<sup>1</sup> and, finally, summarising all these features, compare it with similar phenomena from the traditional areas of shamanism.<sup>2</sup>

In our investigations, however, we face several obstacles. The difficulties of studying Chinese shamanism on the one hand derive from the fact that the different epochs require different fields of knowledge. The Neolithic and the Shang period would evidently necessitate the knowledge of an accomplished archaeologist and an expert on Neolithic religions, whereas the Chu studies require an art historian and an expert on literature. To compare Taoism and shamanism one should possess a thorough knowledge of the Taoist Canon, and the practices in vogue during the period in question. What is more, one should be an expert on the relationship between the nomadic steppe and the Chinese Empire to trace their possible interaction, and the ideal explorer must equally be familiar with the various layers of Chinese language comprising etymological developments, the oracle bone inscriptions, the classical language of prose and verse or, if the study is further extended in time, the Manchu dialects. These might be the reasons why hitherto nearly all studies endeavoured to elucidate only specific aspects of Chinese shamanism, without anybody aiming at a general overview of the issue in question.

Other difficulties might arise due to the historical development of China and the methodology of shamanistic research. The official cult and, more generally, the religious policy of the Chinese state, in certain eras of Chinese history at least, violently attacked concepts and rituals bearing even the slightest resemblance to shamanism. For this reason, a great number of texts and clues disappeared forever which might furnish evidence for the existence of a "shamanic substratum" (Loon 1977: 168) in ancient China. Furthermore, the general research of shamanism, as far as the synchronic studies are concerned, developed its own system of methods, basically borrowing ethnological and cultural-anthropological methodology. However, the development of the historical, i.e. diachronic, study of shaman-

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<sup>1</sup> On some Chinese historical approaches see Shi 1993: 47.

<sup>2</sup> As the majority of readers will be familiar with the general characteristics of traditional shamanism, in this study such comparisons will be completely omitted.

ism did not evolve simultaneously with the synchronic investigations. The natural reason is that, with no written material being available, except for some Greek, Latin or German sources, nothing necessitated the application of a more philological approach to the study of shamanism. The rock carvings in Siberia or the Palaeolithic cave designs triggered hot debates on the ancient development (or even existence) of shamanic culture; these finds, however, did not demand the help of philology as no written records were involved. For these reasons, the researcher, in lack of contemporary written material, was obliged to extrapolate his theories based on the field data obtained during synchronic research.

This is not the case in China, however, where, despite the state intervention mentioned above, we still possess abundant information pertinent to the role and function of the ancient *wu*. The real question is therefore to what extent the correspondence between the *wu* and the traditional shaman can be demonstrated. As a starting point, we should accept A. Waley's opinion on the topic.

In ancient China intermediaries used in the cult of Spirits were called *wu*. They figure in old texts as experts in exorcism, prophecy, fortune-telling, rain-making and interpretation of dreams. Some *wu* danced, and they are sometimes defined as people who danced in order to bring down Spirits (...) They were also magic healers and in later times at any rate, one of their methods of doctoring was to go, as Siberian shamans do, to the underworld and find out how the Power of Death can be propitiated. Indeed the functions of Chinese *wu* were so like those of Siberian and Tungus Shamans that it is convenient (...) to use shaman as a translation of *wu*.<sup>3</sup>

This identification, however, calls for further clarification. Can we apply Waley's description to the whole history of China, or should we use the *wu* as shaman only for a certain period? Do the activities of the Chinese *wu* really correspond to that of the traditional shamans? These and similar questions will constitute the underlying problems of the discussion in the next few pages. After briefly summarising the theories about the etymology of the word *wu* and re-

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<sup>3</sup> Waley 1955: 9. A. Waley was one of the first to treat the problem of shamanism in the *Chuci* discussed later.

viewing some definitions concerning his/her sex, we will follow a historical path to discover the hidden traces of Chinese shamans.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.2. *The Semantic Field of Wu*

The proposals for the etymology of the word *wu*<sup>5</sup> merit further consideration,<sup>6</sup> as they may reveal some hidden aspects of the semantic associations of ancient Chinese thinking. In an early essay, Hopkins suggested that “the three modern characters *wu*<sup>7</sup> (shaman), *wu* (the negative verb, not to have), and *wu* (to posture) can all be traced back to one primitive figure of a man displaying by the gestures of his arms and legs the thaumaturgic powers of his inspired personality” (Hopkins 1945: 5). E. Schafer, relying on Chen Mengjia’s scholarship, asserts that an archaic form of *wu* (martial) strikingly resembles one of the early forms of *wu* (shaman). “The semantic development of the former was from ‘ceremonial dance’ to ‘martial dance’ to ‘martial’.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> A detailed description of the *wu*’s functions (rain-magic, divination, healing, exorcism, etc.) and his/her main characteristics (outlook, clothes, reclusion, shaman techniques (dance, music), shaman attributes (drums, mirrors), helping spirits, shaman journeys, etc.) will be discussed in an article to be published in one of the subsequent issues of *Shaman*. On the primary sources referred to see Loewe 1993.

<sup>5</sup> Though it is not common knowledge, J. Needham, the greatest scholar of the history of Chinese science, also made his own contribution to the traditional interpretations of the word shaman (Shirokogoroff, Laufer, Vajda, etc.). Citing the 25th chapter of the *Shiji* as an evidence, he proposed that the word *xianmen* might be etymologically related to the word shaman. “Qin Shi Huangdi wandered about on the shore of the eastern sea, and offered sacrifices to the famous mountains and the great rivers and the eight spirits, and searched for *xian* and *xianmen* and the like” (Needham 1956: 133).

<sup>6</sup> According to V. Mair the ancient form of the word *wu* (*myag*) is cognate to an proto-Indo-Iranian root which later evolved into Latin *magus* or Greek *magos*. Consequently, he suggests that the appropriate translation of *wu* should be the word *mage* (Mair 1990).

<sup>7</sup> In all citations Chinese words are given in *pinyin* transcription.

<sup>8</sup> Schafer 1951: 154. It is worth noting that fight constitutes one of the major tasks of the shaman. This fact is occasionally indicated by the use of swords during ceremony.

Hopkins' suggestion about the linguistic relationship of the words 'shaman' and 'dance' is easy to accept,<sup>9</sup> but what about the negative verb *wu*?<sup>10</sup> Can we find a semantic basis for such an etymology? Pang Pu's article furnishes evidence that we can. "Recently the character *wu* has been found to indicate not the absence of something or absolute nothing, but the gods or ghosts that are invisible and inaudible yet exist somewhere else."<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, we can observe that this type of invisibility is a recurrent characteristic of the shamans, who, in their trance and ecstasy, try to become similar to the inhabitants of the spiritual world. Xu Shen's definition of the word shaman can be rendered in several ways, one of which runs as follows: "*Wu* is a *zhu* (invoker or priest), a woman (...) who is able to render [herself] invisible, and with dance to invoke gods to come down."<sup>12</sup> Another source describes two shamanesses as being "great beauties who wore fabulous clothes, were skillful in singing and dancing, and were able to make themselves invisible."<sup>13</sup> One can assume, furthermore, that this invisibility is closely related to a magical technique called "hiding" (*mianni fa*). Certain magicians are said to teach people this technique (Ngo 1976: 49). The concepts underlying such procedures are clearly expressed in the following excerpt from the *Baopuzi*: "The human body is naturally visible, and there are methods for rendering it invisible, spirits are naturally invisible and there are procedures for making them visible."<sup>14</sup> Considering all these facts, it seems highly probable that these two words are related, both in their etymological and their semantic origin.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> B. Karlgren suggests that the word *wu* itself depicts two dancing shamans (Karlgren 1923. No. 1282).

<sup>10</sup> Basically following Karlgren's reconstructions, Ommerborn also maintains that the original oracle-bone character of *wu* (void) depicts shamans performing a rain ceremony, and, accordingly, accepts the close relationship between rain-dance and non-existence (Ommerborn 1996: 69).

<sup>11</sup> Pang Pu's article from 1986 is cited by Liu 1998: 227.

<sup>12</sup> Chow 1978: 66. Another translation would suggest that she is serving the invisible word.

<sup>13</sup> The biography of Xia Tong in *Jinshu* (Chow 1978: 68).

<sup>14</sup> *Baopuzi* 16:71. On the question of invisibility in Taoism see Robinet 1979.

<sup>15</sup> On the later philosophical meanings of *wu* see Ommerborn 1996.

Moreover, we can add that both the word *ling*<sup>16</sup> (magical power) and the original character of the word *yi* (healing) contained the word shaman as an element. Finally, one might cite another linguistic etymology proposed by R. Mathieu, who suggested that the word *wu* (raven) is also etymologically related to the word shaman.<sup>17</sup> Such a hypothesis is further supported by the fact that the raven as a mediator between Heaven and the human race is a recurring theme in many cultures. In sum, we could even define the Chinese shaman using the different etymologically related words: the shaman, accompanied by his helping animal, the raven, dances to become similar to the inhabitants of the invisible world in order to combat evil forces and heal with his magical power. After this brief etymological and semantic analysis, we should turn our attention to the question: who is, after all, the Chinese shaman?

### 1.3. The Wu – Some Definitions of Sex and Gender

As attested in a great variety of sources, there is a clear distinction between shamans (*xi*) and shamanesses (*wu*).<sup>18</sup> Ge Hong, the passionate collector of southern traditions, also refers to it: “Those who can see the ghosts (*gui*) are called *xi* if they are men, and *wu* if they are women. It is the gift of nature, it cannot be acquired.”<sup>19</sup> Xu Shen, whose dictionary is a treasure-house of interesting word etymology, defines *wu* as follows: “Shamans (*wu*) are invocators (*zhu*). They are women who can perform services to the Shapeless and

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<sup>16</sup> The character comprising three mouths and rain originally must have referred to the ceremony of rain-magic (Kremsmayer 1954: 71). Its inherent connection with shamanism is well illustrated by the fact that, as Li Xueqin emphasises, in certain early sources the word *ling* denoted a drum (Lawton 1991: 164).

<sup>17</sup> The linguistic connection is based on the analysis of V.A. Tugolikov and N.J. Bichurin (Mathieu 1984: 305–306).

<sup>18</sup> *Xunzi* 9:29; 18:67; *Guoyu* 2:1; *Baopuzi* 2:7; *Wenxuan* 3:30a (*Zhang Heng: Dongjingfu*); *Sanguozhi* 50:1202; *Hanshu* 25a:1189; *Hou Hanshu* 59:1911. In referring to the primary sources I often used R. Mathieu 1987, which I indicate only in specific instances. Furthermore, I unified the numerical references of the citations.

<sup>19</sup> *Baopuzi* 2:9b.

make the Spirits come down by dancing.”<sup>20</sup> The *Guoyu* says that “a spirit descends into the person if it is a man we call him *xi*, if a woman we call her *wu*.”<sup>21</sup> The *Wei Zhao* commentary to the *Guoyu*, however, might indicate that the distinction is not universally valid: “The *wu* and the *xi* are those who can see the spirits. In the *Zhouli* men are also called *wu*.” The commentator is right because one of the earliest sources (the *Zhouli*) uses the term *wu* for both sexes. Within this category, however, it makes a functional distinction as the principal task of the male *wu* is to dispel evil ghosts (exorcism), while the female *wu* most often engages in the ritual of rain-making. The male or female character of Chinese shaman is, thus, not as simple as it seems to be. W. Eberhard, for example, argues that a local distinction is needed: in the *Dai* culture shamans were mostly women, while in the *Yao* culture they were men.<sup>22</sup>

A great variety of sources, however, clearly indicate that in ancient China, as in the history of Japan, shamanism was, essentially, associated with the female principle. The well-known *Yijing* links the word *wu* with a trigram of feminine meaning: “*Dui*, the fertile marsh, the youngest daughter, the shamaness (*wu*).”<sup>23</sup> W. Eichhorn is of the opinion that shamans in China were, originally, women, but later on, as the patriarchal aspect of society became more and more influential and exclusively dominant, they were gradually losing their positions, being replaced by male shamans.<sup>24</sup> According to Dong

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<sup>20</sup> *Shuowenjiezi* 2024. (Falkenhausen 1995: 288).

<sup>21</sup> *Guoyu Chuyu* 18:1a–1b.

<sup>22</sup> Eberhard 1942: 323. In the *Yao* culture almost everybody engaged in any supernatural activity is labelled as *wu* (Eberhard 1942: 57).

<sup>23</sup> This definition is to be compared with the fact that in the state of *Qi* it was the eldest daughter, called little shamaness (*wuer*), who was responsible for all the religious tasks of the family (Thiel 1968: 157).

<sup>24</sup> According to R.C. Kagan two basic principles are to be distinguished in Chinese history. The first one is the feminine, agrarian and matrilineal culture of the Neolithic, the dominant religious form of which was shamanism. Later on, however, this original culture was step by step pushed aside by the feudal, patriarchal and patrilineal Zhou dynasty that supported the official cult, later codified as Confucianism (Kagan 1980: 4). Though this explanation seemingly oversimplifies the question of the Chinese religious complex, it would still provide a simple but relevant insight into the well-known feminine character of Taoism, which, in this interpretation, would be the complementary aspect of the masculine Confucianism.

Zhongshu, during drought, i.e. the dominance of *yang* forces, shamanesses are employed on account of their *yin* (feminine) qualities.<sup>25</sup> E. Schafer also attributed female characteristics to the *wu*. Schafer believes that the shamanesses of ancient China were representatives of the fertility goddess, therefore, on a graphic and phonetic basis he adds several words to the original cluster of concepts (feminine, dance, shaman, fertility, and rain-making). All the related words (fertile, woman, net, membrane, egg, embryo, boat, pot, receptacle) “show a close attachment of the root-ideas ‘maternity/ fecundity/fertility’.”<sup>26</sup> During the Han dynasty, in the second century AD, Wang Fu complains about the great number of shamanesses.<sup>27</sup> J.J.M. de Groot (1964: 1209), the first scholar examining popular religion in China, also found that a predominance of women among shamans was a general feature of Chinese shamanism. Thus, there seems to be an apparent consensus, which associates shamanism with the female principle. The frequent association of shamans with the south and the principle *yang*,<sup>28</sup> however, indicates that the question needs to be further elaborated on, above all, considering the often encountered phenomenon of the androgynous nature of shamans.

## II. NEOLITHIC AND SHANG SHAMANISM

The finds of two major Neolithic cultures both launch relevant questions pertinent to the history of Chinese shamanism. The Yangshao (5100–3000 B.C.) and the Longshan (3000–2000 B.C.) civilisation both produced several artefacts, which would indicate the presence of some kind of shamanism in Neolithic China;<sup>29</sup> some scholars indeed

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Although Westerners regard this kind of analysis as a simplification, one can argue that the analysis of a religious complex, which applies the philosophical terminology of the culture in question (in this case the *yin-yang* polarity) could also be of scholarly value.

<sup>25</sup> It is to be added that no extant pre-Qin source mentions the concept (Falkenhansen 1995: 289).

<sup>26</sup> Schafer 1951: 154–155.

<sup>27</sup> *Qianfulun* ch. 12.

<sup>28</sup> *Lunheng* ch. 22; Groot 1982: 1194–1195; Eberhard 1942: 320.

<sup>29</sup> The possibility of shamanic influence at such an early stage of culture has always been a hotly debated issue. Even if such a possibility was refuted at a general

argue that the roots of shamanism can be traced to this period.<sup>30</sup> K.-C. Chang claims that the dancing stick figures found at Datong (in Qinghai) might represent shamans performing funerary ritual,<sup>31</sup> while the skeleton figure found on a vessel from the Neolithic site Banpo depicts a shaman's initiation after his dis-memberment. Furthermore, Chang provides a shamanic context for the mosaic dragon and the tiger figures from Puyang when suggesting that these representations might have been the helping animals of the *wu*-shaman, i.e. the owner of the tomb.<sup>32</sup> Other evidence, in Chang's opinion, also reaffirm his theory of Neolithic shamanism. He suggests that the jade *cong* and similar objects from the burial sites of Liangzhu and Taosi of Longshan culture are tools employed by these early shamans in their rituals.<sup>33</sup>

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level, the Chinese archaeological sites might still reveal some novelty in the future. K.-C. Chang seems to have accepted the hypothesis concerning the existence of a pan-Asia-American shamanism from the Palaeolithic era, put forward by P.T. Furst. This and similar ideas seem to underlie nearly all the writings by K.-C. Chang (see Johansen 1999: 43).

<sup>30</sup> Chang 1983: 114; Mathieu 1987: 10. On the evidences, generally, see Poo 1998: 21–22; Keightley 1998: 774–775.

<sup>31</sup> Besides Chang, two Chinese scholars, Wang Wei and Sun Qiyang also arrived at the same conclusion (Keightley 1998: 774. n. 35).

<sup>32</sup> “One major feature of *Yangshao* worth noting is that it has yielded many remains that are indicative of shamanistic beliefs and practices. These include, for example, a skeletal (X-ray) style of art, bisexualism in ceramic art, and, above all, the tomb of a figure, presumably religious, flanked by a dragon to his left and a tiger to his right, both formed with clam shells. (...) The *Yangshao* culture, definitely, is not the only regional Neolithic culture with a shamanistic orientation. Large dragon images laid out on the ground with stones have come to light recently from both the *Xilongwa* and *Daxi* cultures. These three cultures have very little in common in terms of material artifacts, so it is likely that shamanism is a substratal feature” (Chang 1999: 50–52). Some artifacts from the Majiabang and the Hemudu (5000–3500 B.C.) cultures have been also interpreted as shamanic (Chang 1999: 53).

<sup>33</sup> “The most common ritual jades are *bi* and *cong*. These are now regarded by many scholars as shamanic paraphernalia endowing the bearer with the power to ascend from Earth (symbolized by the square shape of the *cong*) to Heaven (symbolized by the round shape of the *bi* and *cong*) with the assistance of the shaman's animals (which are engraved on all kinds of ritual jades)” (Chang 1999: 63; also see Chang 1989). Again, it is not only Chang who accepts such a hypothesis. Huo Wei



All these finds, however, can be regarded as shamanic only if one assumes that shamanism strongly permeated the religious activities of these early cultures. Otherwise, it sounds more reasonable to agree with D.N. Keightley, the foremost expert on Neolithic and Shang culture, who, actually applying Occam's razor, says that "the archaeological evidence in the Chinese Neolithic abounds with tantalizing clues that will in many cases accept a shamanistic interpretation—though not (...) require one."<sup>34</sup>

The preceding hypotheses, if accepted, would naturally mean that the subsequent period of Chinese history (the Shang dynasty) was also permeated by shamanic beliefs. While in the case of Neolithic Shamanism it was more or less only K.-C. Chang who supported such a view, the theory of Shang shamanism is based on a much wider foundation, being supported by a whole range of scholars. The Japanese Fukunaga Mitsuji, who divided Chinese religious history into four major phases, labelled the Shang period "the Way of the Spirits", i.e. shamanism.<sup>35</sup> Another Japanese researcher, Aka-tsuka Kiyoshi, expounds 14 arguments to support his theory that shamanism had a dominant role in Shang society.<sup>36</sup> W. Eichhorn, similarly, asserts that the major religious form of this period was shamanism, which was integrated into the whole system of ancestral beliefs.<sup>37</sup> U.

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and Li Yongxian also associated these jade finds with shamanic activity (Keightley 1998: 774. n. 36).

<sup>34</sup> Keightley 1998: 774. The pros and cons are discussed in detail in the first part of Keightley's article (1998: 774–793). Also see other papers by Keightley (1983, 1984, 1989).

<sup>35</sup> Kohn 1995: 402. Johansen (1999: 47) also states that "shamanism corresponding to our definition was already fully developed in the Shang period in China and to the north, and that it came into being by at least about 3000 B.C."

<sup>36</sup> Keightley 1998: 963. On Keightley's critique of Akatsuka's views on Chinese shamanism see Keightley 1982: 299–301.

<sup>37</sup> Eichhorn 1979: 16–17. On the connection between shamanism and ancestral beliefs see Erkes 1950. During the sacrifices to the ancestors, one of the descendants impersonated the ancestor, i.e. let the spirit of the ancestor enter his or her body (on the function of this impersonator (*shi*) see Carr 1985). Although no text shows clear evidence of any trance being involved, still the function seems to be analogous with that of the shaman. The conspicuous resemblance of these two functions is further supported by the fact that both persons are complemented by another religious figure, the invocator (*zhu*). From a later period (Zhou dynasty) we

Johansen stressed that during the Shang period both in China and in the northern regions a completely full-fledged form of shamanism was present.<sup>38</sup> The same opinion was expressed by J. Paper who claimed that shamanism, in an indirect way, made a fundamental contribution to Shang culture.<sup>39</sup> If one assumes that all these opinions are true, it is not too far-fetched to regard the priests around the king, or what is more, the king himself as a shaman. This is exactly what some scholars argue.

Zhang Minghua calls the Shang king a “shaman-master” (*wushi*), while K.-C. Chang, in complete agreement with Chen Mengjia, Li Zongtong, and Yang Xiangkui, also believes that in this early period the role of the king and the shaman was intricately connected.<sup>40</sup> “In the oracle bone inscriptions are often encountered inscriptions stating that the king divined or that the king inquired in connection with wind- or rain-storms, rituals, conquests, or hunts. There are also statements that ‘the king made the prognostication that...’ pertaining to the weather, the border regions, or misfortunes and diseases; the only prognosticator ever recorded in the oracle bone inscriptions was the king... There are, in addition, inscriptions describing the king dancing to pray for rain and the king prognosticating about a dream. All of these were activities of both king and shaman, which means in effect that the king was a shaman.”<sup>41</sup>

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have some evidence that the *wu* and the *shi* differed not in their roles, but in the area where they displayed their functions: while the *shi* was the protagonist in the ceremonies presented to the ancestors, the *wu* participated much more in the rituals directed to the deities of natural forces (Falkenhausen 1995: 297–298).

<sup>38</sup> Johansen 1987: 12. A mythical parallel can be found in the *Yibenji* chapter of the *Shiji*, which says that the first shaman, Wu Xian held an official position during the Shang dynasty (Falkenhausen 1995: 289. n. 33)

<sup>39</sup> “Since shamanism is and was common both to the north and west of China, it is probable that aspects of shamanism were part of the religious complex of one or more of the cultures that led to the development of Shang civilization.” (Paper 1978: 33).

<sup>40</sup> Chang 1990; 1990a; 1994; Ching 1997: 1–34). The same idea is expressed by Xiao 1979: 96 and Liu 1994: 330. On the close relationship between the shaman and the king, with Japanese examples mostly, see Sasakai 1990: 116–125.

<sup>41</sup> Chen 1936: 535 (quoted in Chang 1983: 45, 47). Å. Hultkrantz, a leading expert on shamanism, quoting an article by Manabu Waida, says that the enthronement ceremonies of early Chinese dynasties, as well as the paraphernalia of the

The mythical history of China abounds in examples of emperors who possessed distinctive shamanic traits.<sup>42</sup> According to several sources, the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi) was the Lord of spirits and shamans.<sup>43</sup> While describing another mythical Emperor, Yao, a commentary to the *Yijing* says: "The Great Man unifies his virtue (*de*) with the Heaven and the Earth, his splendour with the Sun and the Moon, his orders with the four seasons, and the calamities and blessings with the spirits."<sup>44</sup> The same is true for *Yu*, who was considered to be the Lord of the spirits and the controller of the flood. At the same time, the basic form of the shamanic (and later Taoist) ritual dance (the so-called *Yubu*) can also be traced to the mythical figure of *Yu*. The founder of the Shang dynasty, King Tang, in the days of drought, just like the shamans later, sacrificed himself.<sup>45</sup> The interpretation of the Chinese character *wang* merits attention, as this word is a visual summary of the shaman's main function. The character, according to the Han interpretations at least, designates a person who links the three parts of the cosmos, the Heaven, the Earth and the human world.<sup>46</sup>

The king made divination in nearly all questions, major or minor. The questions were always directed towards the spirits of one of the ancestors, who manifested himself through a mediator. K.-C. Chang proposes that during such a divination process, the diviner might

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Japanese emperors' coronation ceremony can be traced to the basic forms of shamanic rituals also found among nomadic tribes (Hultkrantz 1989: 48).

<sup>42</sup> The documents containing such references were written much later, during the Zhou or the Han dynasty.

<sup>43</sup> In the 28th chapter of *Shiji* we read that during the reign of the Yellow Emperor 7000 dukes were living at sacrificial sites with magical power (*shenling*). On the territories with the strongest "mana", *Huangdi* himself met the spirits. Furthermore, in the 13th chapter of *Shanhaijing* Huangdi gives an order to the six shamans to resuscitate the corpse of *Yayu* (Thiel 1968: 189).

<sup>44</sup> Thiel even asks: "Does the passage speak about the Emperor or a shaman?" (1968: 186).

<sup>45</sup> *Lüshichunqiu* 9; *Mozi* 4; *Xunzi* 19. On rain-magic as the activity par excellence of the shaman see Schafer 1951; Cohen 1978. On the Shang practice see Qiu 1983-85; Glum 1982.

<sup>46</sup> Thiel 1968: 195. Interestingly, the word 'yellow' (*huang* which gave name to the Yellow Emperor, the prototype of all later emperors) was originally pronounced in the same way as the word 'king' (*wang*) (Karlǵren 1964. No. 707, 708).

have had a verbal or mental contact with the spirit of the deceased ancestor. The evidence for such a contact, according to Prof. Chang, is the word *bin*, which occurs often on the oracle bones, and has two possible meanings: to receive as a guest or to act as a guest. Using an analogy from a later source (*Shanhaijing*), which says that “Qi ascended to Heaven three times to be a guest there”, Chang concludes that the diviner visited the realm of ancestors, and, consequently, the divination process must have involved an ecstatic journey to the realm of the spirits.<sup>47</sup> Besides music and dance being an integral part of the ceremony, alcoholic drinks were also served, and thus all these factors enhance the possibility of ecstasy being involved.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to the oracle bone inscriptions, the most important relics from the Shang dynasty are the bronze vessels. Suggestions for the interpretations of the pictorial representations on them range widely. To sum it up briefly, the motifs can be either figurative or purely geometrical. In the following discussion we concentrate exclusively on the vessels with figurative designs. The most frequently occurring motifs are animal figures, which can be “real” (like bird, fish, rabbit, horse, deer, bear, etc.) or “mythical” (*taotie*, *feiyi*, *kui*, *long*). On a small part of the representations human and animal figures appear together. As to the interpretation of these motifs, two major “schools”, that is points of view can be distinguished. Certain scholars (F. Waterbury, Ph. Ackermann, K.C. Chang, E. Childs-Johnson) argue that these motifs are meaningful signs with particular religious, ritual or mythological messages. The other school (L. Bachhofer, M. Loehr, R. Bagley), on the other hand, asserts that the

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<sup>47</sup> D.N. Keightley (1998: 808–814) devotes several pages to the refutation of this hypothesis. On the other hand, numerous scholars are inclined to stress the shamanic nature of Shang divination (e.g. *Xiao* 1979: 96; *Liu* 1994: 330). We must add, however, that the theory of Shang shamanism seems to be mainly supported by Chinese and Japanese scholars, which might be partly attributed to the fact that for them the concept of shamanism has a much broader meaning than for their Western colleagues.

<sup>48</sup> Keightley is much more sceptical about the ecstatic nature of divination. He concludes that “Shang divination appears to have involved no shamanistic flight to other realms” (1984: 20).

pictorial representations on the vessels are iconographically meaningless, in other words, they are mere decorations.<sup>49</sup>

K.-C. Chang, who naturally belongs to the first group of scholars, argues that as the bronze vessels were used in the ceremonies whose main tenet was to communicate with the spirits and the ancestors, it is not too far-fetched to assume that the decorations on the vessels must have contributed to this “spiritual communication”. Further-more, as the priest performing the ritual, just like the diviner in the case of divination, functioned as a shaman, mediating between the human world and the realm of spirits, one cannot exclude the possibility that the animals on the vessels were creatures helping him to achieve his goal. It would be mere fantasy, of course, unless we find some evidence which proves that the animal figures on the vessels can be interpreted as spiritual beings. K.-C. Chang seems to have found an allusion to such a possibility. A passage from the *Zuozhuan* might help us to clarify the problem in question.

In that year, King Zhuang of Chu went on a military expedition against the Rong tribe of Luhun. When he reached the Luo River he halted to view his troops near the Zhou capital in Luoyang. King Ding of Zhou sent Wangsun Man to welcome the King of Chu, who impudently asked Wangsun about the size and the weight of the *ding*-tripod, the royal symbol. Wangsun Man’s pointed reply began as follows : “*Ding*-tripods do not matter: virtue does. In the past when the Xia dynasty was distinguished for its virtue, the distant regions put into pictures their distinctive *wu*, and the nine pastors sent in the metal of their provinces. The *ding*-tripods were cast, with representations on them of those *wu*. All the *wu* were represented, and (instructions were given) for the preparations to be made in reference to them, so that the people might know (the distinctions) between the helping and the harming spirits. Thus the people when they went among the rivers, marshes, hills, and forests did not meet with the injurious things, and the hill-spirits, monstrous things, and water-sprites did not meet with them (to do them injury). Hereby a harmony was secured between the high and the low (or heaven and earth) and all enjoyed the blessings of heaven.

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<sup>49</sup> Kesner 1991: 29. The starting point for the latter opinion is that the figurative designs evolved from the meaningless geometrical decorations (see M. Loehr’s opinion quoted in Chang 1983: 61–62).

The meaning of the passage, of course, depends on the interpretation of the word *wu*. Obviously, in this case it does not mean 'things', as it usually does. Using analogies from the *Zuozhuan*, it is highly probable that the word here means sacrificial or helping animal. The occurrence of the word in other sources also indicates the probability of this meaning. The most conspicuous proof for such a hypothesis is the human figure between the open mouths of animals, which, according to Chang, depicts a shaman with his helping animals on their ecstatic journey.<sup>50</sup>

Chang's theory was preceded by J. Paper's article, who argues that the so-called *taotie* design, which is the most frequent bronze vessel motif, evolved from a helmet or a mask, symbol of "the Shang-king himself, the institutionalized shaman-chief, whose essence was the ability to interact with the spirit realm and who, upon death, will ascend to Heaven to merge with the spirits as a clan ancestor, able to communicate with the vague powers beyond the ken of men."<sup>51</sup> E. Childs-Johnson also approves Chang's theory, claiming that the *taotie* motif can be traced back to a so-called *gui*-mask, symbol of the ancestral spirit manifesting itself through an animal mask.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Chang 1983: 65, 73. S. Allan, on the other hand, prefers to believe that it does not depict the journey of the shaman, rather, it generally refers to the passage to the world beyond. As a proof to her thesis, she calls attention to the so-called *yue*-axes on which the same motif appears. "As K.C. Chang has observed, the open animal mouth occurs in many cultures as a symbol of passage to the other world. He further suggests that the man held by the tiger is a *wu*, a sorcerer or 'shaman', as he interprets the term. The appearance of this motif above the blade on a *yue*-axe, however, suggests that the motif is not a representation of the shaman's passage to the other world, but an allusion to the passage of death, the cult of which is, after all, the central concern of Shang ritual. If the man has a specific reference, it is more likely to be the ritual impersonators of the dead, the *shi*." (Allan 1991: 154, 157). As the function of *shi*, however, might have, as noted above, a shamanic background, it is not impossible that both Chang and Allan are right.

<sup>51</sup> Paper 1978: 36; also see Paper 1995: 63–83. Before Paper, Chang and Childs-Johnson, Carl Hentze, equipped with a less scientific methodology, also made an attempt to connect Shang vessels with some shamanic paraphernalia (Hentze 1960–63).

<sup>52</sup> Such a mask is "the symbol of the Shang king's access to the supernatural realm of his ancestors" (Kesner 1991: 34). Also see Child-Johnson's (1995: 80) opinion: "I have recently demonstrated that certain modes used to represent the animal image in Shang art were designed to symbolize magical transformation from

The theory of the shamanic origin of bronze vessel designs is, naturally, not shared by all Sinologists.<sup>53</sup> Recently, for instance, L. Kesner violently attacked Chang's theory, though he himself had to admit that, as the majority of the examples cited by Chang are of southern provenance, the impact of a local shaman tradition can not be excluded. If, nevertheless, the existence of Shang shamanism, could be proved beyond doubt, it would also explain the strange phenomenon of the shamanism of Chu, a southern state which was often described as the inheritor of Shang culture.

### III. SHAMANISM DURING THE ZHOU DYNASTY AND THE STATE OF CHU (11TH – 3RD CENTURY B.C.)

The Zhou period is in several aspects continuing the Shang culture, thus, evidently, the variety of cults and rituals of the Shang period as well. The Rites of the Zhou (*Zhouli*) contains some relevant passages concerning the unique status of shamans within the ritual hierarchy. It was the Ministry of Rites that handled ritual matters, where, among the nine divisions, one can find the Division of the Invocators. The first office of the Invocators is that of the Manager of the Shamans, who were basically ritual administrators, without being involved in shamanic trance themselves.

The Managers of the Shamans<sup>54</sup> are in charge of the policies and orders issued to the many Shamans. When the country suffers a great drought, they lead the Shamans in dancing the rain-making ritual. When the country suffers a great calamity, they lead the Shamans in enacting the long-standing practices (*wu-heng*<sup>55</sup>) of Shamans. At official sacrifices, they [handle] the ancestral tablets in

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the human to the animal realm and that this transformation facilitated communication with the ancestral spirits”.

<sup>53</sup> D.J. Keegan, for example, insists that the functions of the *wu* appearing on oracle bones differ widely from the *wu* used during the Zhou or Han periods (1979: 39).

<sup>54</sup> The term “Spirit Medium”, used for *wu* by Falkenhausen, was replaced by me with the word ‘Shaman’ (G.K.)

<sup>55</sup> It is interesting to compare this concept with a citation from the Analects, which attributes this particular virtue to the southerners. “The Master said, The Man of the south have a saying: ‘A Man without stability (*heng*, G.K.) cannot be made

their receptacles, the cloth on which the spirits walk, and the box containing the reeds [for presenting the sacrificial foodstuffs]. In all official sacrificial services, they guard the place where the offerings are buried. In all funerary services, they are in charge of the rituals by which the Shamans make [the spirits] descend.<sup>56</sup>

The shamans themselves are described in the subsequent passages, which attribute specific functions to the male and female shamans.

The Male Shamans are in charge of the *si* and *yan* Sacrifices to the Deities of the Mountains and Rivers. They receive the honorific titles [of the deities], which they proclaim into the [four] directions, holding reeds. In the winter, in the great temple hall, they offer [or: shoot arrows] without a fixed direction and without counting the number. In the spring, they make proclamations and issue bans so as to remove sickness and disease. When the king offers condolence, they together with the invocators precede him. The Female Shamans are in charge of anointing and ablutions at the exorcisms that are held at regular times throughout the year. When there is a drought or scorching heat, they dance in the rain-making ritual. When the queen offers condolence, they together with the invocators precede her. In all great calamities of the state, they pray, singing and wailing.<sup>57</sup>

As is evident from the commentaries, the shamans were, unlike other Zhou ritualists, not fixed in number, and can actually be regarded as being outside the mainstream Zhou ritual hierarchy.<sup>58</sup> It seems as if shamans were employed merely on account of their ability to communicate directly with the spirits, as the official invocators simply did not possess such a skill.<sup>59</sup>

Within the history of the Zhou dynasty, just like in the whole history of Chinese shamanism, the state of Chu has enjoyed exceptional status. This ancient state seems to have been par excellence the centre of all shamanic phenomena, the former “possessors” of which were

into a diviner or a physician’ Good!” (*Lunyu* XIII. 22. E.B. Brooks and A.T. Brooks 1998: 116). On *heng* see Carr 1992.

<sup>56</sup> *Zhouli* 50:15a–19b (Falkenhausen 1995: 285).

<sup>57</sup> *Zhouli* 50:20a–23b (Falkenhausen 1995: 290).

<sup>58</sup> See Falkenhausen’s opinion: “They were placed outside the ranked bureaucracy of the Zhou court, and may have formed their own system.” (Lawton 1991: 160).

<sup>59</sup> Falkenhausen 1995: 296. On the whole question see Falkenhausen 1995.



the Shang, “the inheritors”, presumably, being the Taoist priests. This southern state covering modern Henan, Hunan, Hubei and Anhui was flourishing during the Eastern Zhou period (800–221 B.C.).<sup>60</sup> This exponent of shamanic tradition made several major contributions to Chinese culture—a distinctive art differing largely from the other regions and ages of China, a monumental poet (Qu Yuan), several mythological and philosophical works (*Shanhaijing*, *Zhuangzi*, *Huainanzi*)<sup>61</sup>, and one of the most important school of religious Taoism (*Shangqing*).<sup>62</sup> However, before analysing these

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<sup>60</sup> On Chu generally see Barnard-Fraser 1972; Blakeley 1985–87; Cook and Major 1999; Lawton 1991; Major 1978.

<sup>61</sup> The last two works will not be discussed in detail. For a general overview let’s quote Le Blanc’s (1985: 7–8) opinion: “Many of the original and idiosyncratical features of *Huainanzi*, ideas as well as style, reflect the peculiarities of Chu culture. The early commentaries of *Huainanzi* by Xu Shen (30–124) and Gao You (205–212) already felt the need to explain many expressions particular to the cultural area of Chu and unintelligible to Northerners. The many poetic passages of *Huainanzi* are couched in a language closely akin to some songs of *Chuci* (the Songs of Chu). Recent research by Chinese linguists has also revealed the similarity of the rhyme system of *Huainanzi* with that of other earlier or contemporary *Chu* writings. The great importance given to the self-transformative aspect of Taoism in *Huainanzi*, especially the themes of ‘mystical flight’ and ‘return to the beginning’, may at least in part be rooted in the shamanistic traditions of Chu. The close affinity on many essential points between *Huainanzi* and *Zhuangzi* is best explained, it would seem, by their common indebtedness to the transcendental spirit of the poets of Chu.”

<sup>62</sup> Also see Major’s (1999: 124) recent summary of the major characteristics of Chu religion. “I would propose that Chu religion is characterized by at least the following special features that define its regional distinctiveness as compared with the mainstream religious tradition(s) of the Central Plains states: A special emphasis on spatial orientation and directionality in the definition of a religious cosmology; this feature is shared with ‘mainstream’ ancient Chinese religion but accorded unusual importance in Chu • Belief in, and rites directed at gods of directions and months depicted as being masked, monstrous, or otherwise extraordinary in appearance • An emphasis in religious iconography on a small and consistent set of animal images, most importantly snakes, dragons, predatory birds, and tigers (in part a legacy evolved from Shang dynasty motifs) • Religious use of iconic and probably apotropaic figures depicted as having protruding tongues, bulging eyes, and (usually) antlers • An unusual emphasis on hunting as an aspect of ritual behavior, and on hunting scenes as part of the décor of ritual bronze vessels • Shamanism, mediumism, and other manifestations of spirit possession in a state of trance, together with • A belief in the capacity of the temporarily disembodied human soul to undertake spirit journeys through time and space”.

products of Chu culture in detail, I present the larger context (namely the north-south opposition), in which Chu represents the southern side, furthermore, the most influential hypotheses concerning the origin of the Chu culture.

### III.1. NORTH AND SOUTH

The north-south opposition can be articulated in the following, rather simplified way: the two major intellectual, spiritual and religious movements of ancient China developed in two distinctive areas. Confucianism can basically be linked to the tradition of the northern states of Lu and Zou, where its major exponents (Confucius and Mencius) were born. On the other hand, Taoism originated from and developed in the rather different religious context of the southern state of Chu, where two of its major originators (Laozi and Zhuangzi) were born.<sup>63</sup> The topographical indebtedness of these two influential traditions, however, are only consequences of a wider spiritual dissimilarity concerning the mentality of the two regions. True or not, this discrepancy between the two ways of thinking has been clearly expressed by several authors. M. Loewe, the top expert on Han society and culture articulated this idea as follows: "There is the evidence of a natural, romantic and free tradition, sometimes associated with the south, and that of a formal, classical and inhibited tradition, sometimes associated with the north."<sup>64</sup> The sources from

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<sup>63</sup> This fundamental opinion is shared by Yu Weichao, who adds Legalism to Taoism and Confucianism, claiming that this basically political tradition can also be defined locally. Accordingly, Legalism was born in the intellectual sphere of the three Jin states and the state of Qin, the latter becoming the leading political force at the end of the 3rd century B.C. (Yu 1995: 132).

<sup>64</sup> Loewe 1994: 38. Further examples could be amply quoted. In 1904 Liu Shipai published a seminal essay which asserts that the northern culture of China is based on the reverence for reality, therefore, it aimed at an accurate description of factual events and everyday life; in contrast, the southern tradition (*Chuci*, *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*) prefers fantasy, illusion and visions. Later on the literary aspect of this opposition was demonstrated in the different styles of the two major poem collections (Qu Yuan's *Chuci* and the *Shijing*). Wang Guowei further elaborated on the problem, writing that the northern imperial China was aristocratic, mundane and strongly inclined towards politics, while the southern regions lay emphasis on the common people and imagination. Guo Yintian is further of the same opinion when

the Zhou and Han dynasty, and more generally, the northern tradition regarded the South as barbaric and uncivilised.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, we can assert that there is a tendency both in the Chinese tradition and in Sinology which differentiates between a northern and a southern tradition from which the Confucian and the shamanic Taoist traditions respectively evolved. As far as the source and origin of Chu culture is concerned, in his groundbreaking article J.S. Major summarised nine hypotheses, which can, of course, be supported by numerous data of different kinds:

1. The dominant inhabitants of Chu were not indigenous to the region but were a northern group ethnically distinct from the Shang Chinese and related to the inhabitants of the Mongolian steppe and northeast Asia, who, for reasons not clearly understood, migrated south around the end of the second millennium B.C.” 2. The belief system of the early Chu people was a variant of the pan-European Grand Origin Myth, transmitted to them by the proto-Indo-European inhabitants of the south Siberian steppe and in turn transmitted by them to the Shang Chinese; the cosmological mythology of ancient China was essentially a Chu phenomenon and survived most strongly and coherently in Chu in the Zhou period.<sup>66</sup> 3. The religious tradition of Chu was indeed strongly character-

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stating that the north is conservative, utilitarian, rational and realistic, while the south is characterised by an innovative, destructive, imaginative and romantic spirituality (on these and other opinions see Schneider 1980: 94–109).

<sup>65</sup> Zheng 1963: 237; Fung 1952: 175–176. The description in a later document (*Santian neijing*) implies that the state of Chu simply does not belong to China, i.e. it is a totally different country (Kohn 1995b: 15).

<sup>66</sup> The novelty of Major's ideas can be duly appreciated when compared with the former suggestions on the relationship between the Chu and the Shang tradition. “The traditional ideas of the Chu people as recorded in the Chu Silk Manuscript show that they still followed the ways of Shang” (Rao 1972: 122). “The Chu culture preserves some Shang lore and legends not found in Zhou works” (Ho 1975: 316–317). Hayashi mentions “the preservation and the development of Shang culture which had entered the Chu territory” citing the Chu survival of Shang official titles, bronze decor, and bronze bell types as evidence (Hayashi 1972: 177). Rao Zongyi, He Bingdi and Hayashi Minao all assume that the pro-Chu civilisation was the recipient of the Shang culture, which is not completely approved by Major, who exchanges the roles. Major, however, also admitted that “there is some agreement that the Chu culture in part represents a survival and/or revival of Shang culture” (Major 1978: 228). The hypothesis that Chu in a certain sense gained possession of the cultural heritage of the Shang is supported by the fact that the so-called Huai-style (700–300 B.C.) bronze vessels of the Chu state resuscitated motifs which be-

ized by shamanism and was directly related to the shamanistic cultures of north and northeast Asia. 4. The state of Qi also had, to perhaps a lesser extent, a shamanistic religious culture, with elements in common with that of Chu. 5. Taoism and the *yin-yang*/Five-Phase School of Naturalism were in large part derived from the Qi and Chu element of the religious-intellectual heritage of Shang and Zhou. 6. A belief in immortality and in ecstatic spirit-journeys was both a characteristic and a consequence of the distinctive religious cosmology of Qi and Chu and its expression in shamanistic practices. 7. Burial practices in Chu differed significantly in form and intent from those of the Middle States. The purpose of burial in Chu was not so much to adhere to a semisecular cult of ancestor worship as to prepare the deceased for a spirit-journey to paradise. 8. The Qin-Han political unification of China resulted in the gradual destruction of a distinctive Chu culture, but also in the increased dissemination of Chu beliefs and practices throughout China. 9. Local cults reflecting Chu beliefs and practices survived in the Huai-Yangtse region at least into the Tang period (Major 1978: 231).

Major emphasises that Chu shamanism can be regarded as a proven fact, as all historical data support such an idea. The sources, for instance, refer to a king of *Chu* who, in case of emergency, danced exactly as shamans do.<sup>67</sup> In 531 B.C. Marquis Wu of Qi summoned a shaman called Wei from Chu because he needed help to contact (the spirits of) the five legendary emperors. Duke Zhao of Chu (515–489 B.C.) had an official with sacerdotal functions who, in order to benefit the state, “could contact the deities above and the spirits below”<sup>68</sup> What is more, even from a much later period (the Song dynasty) we have some evidence that this southern people occasionally gathered to drum, dance and sing. The same source alludes to them never applying doctors and medicaments, instead they cure diseases with some kind of divination (Eichhorn 1973: 95).

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came extinct by 950 B.C. (Karlgrén 1941). The close connection between Chu and Shang is also approved by leading Chinese archaeologist Zheng Dekun (1963: 12).

<sup>67</sup> Eichhorn 1973: 60. The king reigned between 540–529 B.C.

<sup>68</sup> *Guoyu Chuyu* 2:7 (Eichhorn 1973: 94).

### III.2. THE ART OF CHU

During the last decades numerous statues, strikingly different from official Chinese art, were excavated in the territory of the former state of Chu.<sup>69</sup> The artefacts found at Chu burial sites bear antlers and have a long protruded tongue, which have just about no analogy in “normal” Chinese art.<sup>70</sup> The history of their interpretations is interesting enough to review. The first interpretator of these strange figures traced their origin to India (Salmony 1954), while Hayashi Minao identified them with the figure *Jiangliang* appearing in the *Shanhajing*. Mizuno and Wang Ruiming think that they represent mountain spirits (*shanshen*), Peng claims that they are the three-dimensional representations of a dragon, while Chen Yaojun and Yuan Wenqi are of the opinion that the statues represent *Tubo*, the Lord of the Underworld (Dematté 1994: 332). The latest interpretation argues that the antler was associated with the ascension to Heaven, longevity and immortality, while the protruded tongue is the symbol of desire for new life, for rejuvenation and resurrection. The author of the present article thinks that the former interpretations have not given full explanation for this, as well as the other queer phenomena of Chu art, so these odd statues need further clarification, especially in the light of shamanism.<sup>71</sup>

### III.3. QU YUAN: CHUCI

So much scholarly attention has been paid to this collection of poems that it is sufficient to cite some basic statements from the relevant studies. The *Chuci* is usually considered to be the most promi-

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<sup>69</sup> On Chu art see Barnard-Fraser 1972–73; So 1999.

<sup>70</sup> “No representations of faces with protruding tongues are known in North China until the Han Dynasty and no archaeological remains of fantastic animals with two horns have come to light” (Chang 1972: 33, 35).

<sup>71</sup> J. Rawson (1980: 166), for instance, correlates shamanism with certain Chu figures: “The wearing of antlers seems to have been significant in these shamanistic rituals. It seems probable that carved wooden figures with such antlers represent the shamans or their powers”. Also see Miyakawa-Kollautz 1966.

nent proof of southern shamanism.<sup>72</sup> “It was the poetry of South alone (...) that preserved the legacy of the distinct shamanistic cult of nature in the *Chuci* ‘Songs of *Chu*’ (principality in modern Hunan-Hubei region) toward the end of Zhou-period. In most grandiose form we meet it in the poetry of Qu Yuan (about 340–278 B.C.), the greatest poet of classical China. The poems expressing his cosmic-size sorrow and longing to get off the place of his exile deep in the south, represent the best source of ancient Chinese shamanistic practice and technique” (Ecsedy 1984: 108–109). Qu Yuan, the alleged author of most of the poems, was born in Chu, had a successful official career, but, as a result of his enemies’ activities at the court, he was exiled. From that time on, he lived in the countryside, writing poems. Later, as the mythical narrative in the *Shiji* says, he became so desperate that he jumped into the river Luo to meet his death. People from the countryside cherished his memory by choosing the alleged date of his suicide (the fifth of the fifth month) to be his festival.<sup>73</sup> Qu Yuan’s purpose was, it now seems, to rewrite the shamanic songs of this area in a more refined manner.

In former times the people living in the area lying between the Yuan and Xiang rivers south of Nanyang were superstitious and much given to the worship of spirits. In their service of the gods they would sing, play, drum, and dance to do them pleasure. It was in this area that Qu Yuan concealed himself after his banishment. Full of grief and bitterness and in a greatly disturbed state of mind, he would go out to watch the sacrificial rites of the local inhabitants and witness the singing and dancing which accompanied them. Finding the words of their songs crude and barbarous, he composed the Nine Songs to replace them. In his work he both sings the praises of the gods and at the same time uses the hymns as a vehicle for expressing his own resentments.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> On *Chuci* generally see Chan 1962; Chen 1986; Hawkes 1959, 1967; Schneider 1980; Sukhu 1999 and Waley 1955.

<sup>73</sup> Qu Yuan was not the only person with shamanic gifts who died on this very day. “Cao Xu, the Zhejiang shaman who was drowned in AD 143 while going out in a boat to seek the river god met his death on the fifth day of the fifth month, the day of the Dragon Boat Festival, whose great antiquity has been demonstrated by Wen Yiduo” (Hawkes 1974: 74–75).

<sup>74</sup> From Wang Yi’s introduction to *Jiuge* (Hawkes 1967: 73. n. 5). D. Hawkes uses this particular part of the introduction to prove that the poems of the *Chuci* are, actually, the secularised versions of an originally oral and religious tradition

D. Hawkes, analysing the various layers of *Chuci*, classified the poems as follows: "Apart from the explicitly shamanistic poems (*Jiuge*, the 'Summons' poems, and the unclassifiable *Tianwen*) the content of the *Chuci* poems is classifiable into two main categories: one, which I shall designate *tristia*, expresses the poet's sorrows, his resentments, his complaints against a deluded prince, a cruel fate, a corrupt, malicious and uncomprehending society; the other, which I shall designate *itineraria*, describes the poet's journeys, occasionally real ones, but more often the imaginary, supernatural journeys to which I have just referred."<sup>75</sup>

In the Nine Songs "male and female shamans, having first purified and perfumed themselves and dress up in gorgeous costumes, sing and dance to the accompaniment of music, driving the gods down from heaven in a sort of divine courtship."<sup>76</sup> In the *Lisao* po-

(Hawkes 1967: 73). The same attitude is echoed in the words of Liu Yuxi (772–842): "Of old, when Qu Yuan was living in the region of Yuan and Xiang [rivers], the people of those parts summoned the spirits in crude and rustic language; he then wrote the Nine Songs, and even today they sing and dance them in Chu" (Schneider 1980: 66). The adjectives used to describe the original poetry of Chu are, of course, to be understood in comparison with the standards of the more refined and, at the same time, more secular poetry of the North.

<sup>75</sup> Hawkes 1967: 82. The *tristia* and *itineraria* poems lead some scholars to think that the *Chuci* cannot be regarded as shamanic because the purpose of the poet is not to help his fellowmen but to escape from the world in consequence of his personal sorrow (Peters 1983: 126–133).

<sup>76</sup> Hawkes 1959: 35. See, for example, the poem "The Great Lord of Fate", the shamanic nature of which is easy to grasp. "(Lord:) Open wide, wide, oh! the heaven's door! / I will descend, oh! on cloud blue-black. / I bid whirlwind, oh! to go before / And icy rain, oh! to wash the track. (Witch:) The lord in flight, oh! comes into view. / I'll cross mountains, oh! to follow you. (Lord:) The young and old, oh! of the nine Lands, / Your life or death, oh! is in my hands. I soar up high, oh! serene in flight; I ride on air, oh! on shade and light. (Witch:) I will speed up, oh! with our lord divine; I will lead him, oh! to holy peaks nine. (Lord:) My cloudlike dress, oh! floats in the breeze, / My pendants hang, oh! in rainbow hue. I control light, oh! and shade with ease. / The people know not, oh! what I will do. (Witch:) Of Holy Hemp, oh! I pluck the flower / To give to our lord, oh! going away. Old age draws nearer, oh! with each passing hour. / The farther he's, oh! the sadder I stay. (Lord:) My dragon chariot, oh! rumbles loud / I drive my steeds, oh! into the cloud. (Witch:) Laurel in hand, oh! I wait and sigh; The longer I wait, oh! the sadder am I. (Witch:) With a broken heart, oh! what can I do? / Better keep fit, oh! in mind and heart! / Each man is fated, oh! to have his due; It's not up to us, oh! to meet or part" (Xu

ems the poet himself, desolated and exiled, leaves for a shaman journey,<sup>77</sup> while in the *Zhaohun* poem a wandering soul is addressed and prayed for to return.<sup>78</sup> The invoker is, without doubt, a shaman, who

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1994: 39–41). Instead of the traditional translation, I used a modern one because “the translation of *Chuci* by David Hawkes, mentioned above, is now outdated in many respects” (Kroll 1996: 157).

<sup>77</sup> “At dawn I leave the E’ergreen State, oh! / At dusk I reach the mountain’s crest. / I halt before Celestial Gate, oh! / To see the Sun sink in the west. // I bid the Driver of the Sun, oh! / To Holy Mountains slowly go. / My way ahead’s long, long one, oh! / I’ll seek my Beauty high and low. // I drink my steeds in the Sun’s Bath, oh! / I tie their reins to giant tree. / I break a branch to brush Sun’s path, oh! / I wander for a while carefree. // The Moon’s Charioteer goes before, oh! / The curtain-rolling Wind runs after. / To clear the way the phoenixes soar, oh! / The Lord of Thunder bursts in laughter. // I order giant birds to fly, oh! / All day long, by night as by day. / The whirlwinds gather up on high, oh! / The rainbow greets me on the way. // They part and join in proper order, oh! / In various hues and up and down. / To open I bid Heaven’s Porter, oh! / He looks at me with a deep frown. (...) I thither steeds on Endless Peaks, oh! / After I crossed the Deathless Stream. / Gazing back, tears run down my cheeks, oh! / On high I find no beauty of my own. (...) I bid the Lord of Cloud above, oh! / To find astream the Nymphean Queen. / I give my belt as pledge of love, oh! / To Lord of Dream as go-between.” (...) “I turn to Kunlun Mountains high, oh! / The winding way is wide and long. / The rainbow banners veil the sky, oh! / The phoenix bells ring merry song. // At dawn I start from Heaven’s Ford, oh! / At dusk I reach the Western End. / The phoenixes sing in accord, oh! / Their wings with rainbow banners blend. // I go across the Sandy Ridge, oh! / I rove along the River Red. / I bid a dragon serve as bridge, oh! / For me to cross and go ahead. // The way is perilous and long, oh! / I bid cars go another way. / T turn left round Mount Pillar Strong, oh! / ‘Let’s meet at Western Sea,’ I say. // A thousand chariots in my train, oh! / On wheels of jade run side by side. / I drive eight dragon-steeds amain, oh! / Cloud banners spread like rising tide. // I slow down speed and curb my will, oh! / My spirit soars far, far away. / I sing nine songs and dance my fill, oh! I steal the pleasure of a day. // I rise to see the splendid sky, oh! / I bow to find my home below. / My horses neigh and my glooms sigh, oh! / Looking back, they won’t forward go.” (*Lisao* 47–56; 86–92. Xu 1994: 15–19; 27–29).

<sup>78</sup> It should be noted that Sima Qian, Liu Xing and Wang Yi all believed that the *Zhaohun* was written for a living person, not for the dead (Hawkes 1985: 221–222): “The wizard came down to play his role: Come back, O soul! Why should you leave your breast And roam north, south, east, west? eh! Why desert your place of delight And fall in a sad plight? eh! // O soul, come home! Don’t eastward roam, eh! The eastern giants are nine fathoms tall; They seek and catch souls they enthrall, eh! // Ten suns together shine, Melting stone and metal fine, eh! The giants are accustomed to the day, But you souls would melt away, eh! Come home, come home! Don’t eastward roam, eh! // O soul, come back! Don’t stay with southerners whose



gives a detailed description of the dangers of the realm beyond that awaits the departed soul.

### III.4. SHANHAIJING

Besides the *Tianwen* part of *Chuci*, the only document that preserved much of the ancient Chinese mythology is “The Classic of the Mountains and the Seas” (*Shanhaijing*).<sup>79</sup> The *Shanhaijing*, “the book of shamanism”,<sup>80</sup> contains twenty three references to *wu* shamans, and, moreover, a description of the mountains where “the shamanistic ascent was to take place.”<sup>81</sup> The *Shanhaijing* is a “cata-

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teeth are black! They have tattooed forehead; They sacrifice the flesh of the dead, Whose bones are pounded to shred, eh! // There huge serpents defile, And foxes run from mile to mile, eh! The nine-headed snakes go Swiftly to and fro And swallow men high and low, eh! Come back, come back! Do not stay with those with teeth black, eh! // O soul, come back from the west vile Where quicksands quake from mile to mile, eh! If you fall in the thunderous whirlpool, You would be swallowed by water cool, eh! // If you're by luck not drowned, You'll find vast wilderness around, eh! Where wasps are big as gourds; red ants As huge as elephants, eh! // No grain grows there; man feeds On dry and thorny reeds, eh! The barren earth would make men rot; No water could be got, eh! // You'll find no shelter near at hand In such a boundless land, eh! Come back! Don't westward go, Or you would fall in woe, eh! // O soul, come back, do not go forth! You can't stay in the north, eh! Where ice rises pile on pile And snowflakes fly from mile to mile, eh! Come back! Do not go forth! You cannot stay long in the north, eh! // O soul, come back! Don't hide Up to the sky, eh! Where the man eating tiger guards The nine gates with leopards, eh! The nine-headed monsters without cease Pull up nine thousand trees, eh! // The wolves and jackals go With hostile eyes to and fro, eh! They hang out man for sport and throw Him into the abyss below, eh! // They wait for orders from the high, Then man may shut his eyes and die, eh! Come back, come back at my call, Or in danger you'll fall, eh! // O soul, come back! Don't go To the Hell down below, eh! Its guardian has nine tails; The horn on his head ails, eh! // With shoulders huge and bloody thumb, He pursues men, fearsome, eh! His three-eyed tiger's head And bull-like body would cause dread, eh! // On human flesh he'd feed, eh! Come back! Don't go below Or you'll be lost in woe, eh!” (*Zhaohun* 5–20. Xu 1994: 187–193). On the ceremony of retrieving the errant souls of the sick see Yü 1987.

<sup>79</sup> On the *Shanhaijing* see Birrell 1999, Finsterbusch 1952, Mathieu 1983.

<sup>80</sup> Yuan Xingpei's opinion from 1979 (Chang 1983: 114).

<sup>81</sup> Chang 1983: 48. The cult of mountains is a basic characteristic of Chinese religious life and, thus, seems to constitute an integral part of all Chinese religions, whether Confucian, Taoist or Buddhist (See Naquin-Chün 1992).

logus rerum”, a detailed, and, ostensibly at least, rather monotonous enumeration of mountains and rivers, plants and animals, stones and minerals, strange peoples with their even stranger customs, and, in addition, deeds of gods and goddesses. Everything mentioned above is described in a plain, objective and “positivist” tone, presenting all its odd contents in a realistic manner.

In the text the reader may often encounter shamans, who seem to be primarily responsible for and engaged in the communication between Heaven and Earth. They usually dwell in places (most often mountains) where this kind of ascent and descent is possible. “The Country of Shaman Whole (Xian, G.K.) lies north of the country of Girl Deuce. In his right hand Shaman Whole holds a green snake. In his left hand he holds a scarlet snake. His land lies near Mountain Climbscreen. The land of shaman Whole is the place from which crowds of shamans make their ascension and descend from the mountain.”<sup>82</sup> Xian, according to other sources, seems to be a major figure in Chinese shamanism. He lives in the north, invented (more precisely, used for the first time) yarrow stalk divination, and was sent by Emperor Taimou to invoke the spirits of mountains and rivers. R. Mathieu thinks that Xian actually refers to a people practising shamanism.<sup>83</sup>

In the 15th chapter we read about the Shaman mountain, which seems to be closely connected with some kind of purification process. “To its west are the yellow bird and the great god’s drugs for the Eight Purification Rites.”<sup>84</sup> R. Mathieu, relying on *He Yixing’s* commentary, concludes that the mountain in question was situated on the borderland of modern Sichuan and Hubei. This assumption would be merely of geographical interest if we ignored the fact that this region once belonged to the territory of the state of Chu.<sup>85</sup>

The *Shanhaijing*, furthermore, specifies the names of some shamans. Two lists of names are recorded in two different chapters, the first consisting of six, the second of ten names. “East of the Open-bright there are Shaman Robust, Shaman Pushaway, Shaman Sunny,

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<sup>82</sup> *Shanhaijing* 7:3b (Birrell 1999: 116).

<sup>83</sup> *Huainanzi* 4:8b; *Lüshichunqiu* 17:10b; Mathieu 1983: 402. n. 1.

<sup>84</sup> *Shanhaijing* 15:2a (Birrell 1999: 167).

<sup>85</sup> Mathieu 1983: 455. n. 7.

Shaman Shoe, Shaman Every, and Shaman Aide. They are all on each side of the corpse of Notch Flaw and they hold the neverdie drug to ward off decay.”<sup>86</sup> The second list contains some names common with the first one. “In the middle of the Great Wilderness there is a mountain. Its name is Mount Fertileoak-jadegate. There is where the Sun and the moon set. There is Mount Divinepower<sup>87</sup> (*Ling, G.K.*). This is where Shaman Whole, Shaman Reach, Shaman Share, Shaman Robust, Shaman Motherinlaw, Shaman Real, Shaman Rite, Shaman Pushaway, Shaman Takeleave and Shaman Birdnet ascend to the sky and come down from Mount Divinepower. This is where the hundred drugs are to be found.”<sup>88</sup> It is worth noting that both passages include explicit references to some kind of healing process.

### III.5. MAWANGDUI TEXTS

Although of later origin, the finds at Mawangdui near Changsha, may prove that the Chu culture survived during the subsequent period.<sup>89</sup> Allan (1991: 30) emphasises the fact that Mawangdui lies within the boundaries of the former state of Chu, while M. Loewe maintains that the finds discovered can easily be explained with the help of the representative southern works like *Chuci* and *Shanhaijing*.<sup>90</sup> Chinese scholars also seem to agree on the issue. “It has been suggested by Gao Zhixi that the contents of tombs at Mawangdui illustrate a conscious revival of Chu practices and styles.”<sup>91</sup> The

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<sup>86</sup> *Shanhaijing* 11:6a. The original Chinese names are as follows: shaman Peng, Di, Yang, Li, Fan and Xiang.

<sup>87</sup> Eichhorn (1973:72) thinks that this mountain lies in modern Henan. Wen Yiduo, furthermore, asserts that most of the Shaman mountains are to be found in the state of Chu.

<sup>88</sup> *Shanhaijing* 16:3a. The original list of the shamans' names runs as follows: shaman Xian, Yi, Fen, Peng, Gu, Zhen, Li, Di, Xie and Luo.

<sup>89</sup> See Major's ninth hypothesis as well as Chang's view: “This powerful state (Chu, G.K.) was overthrown by the Qin Dynasty in 223 B.C., but the people and the culture maintained their distinct identity into the Han Dynasty” (Chang 1968: 396).

<sup>90</sup> On the painting found in the tomb No. 1. at Mawangdui see Loewe 1994a: 17–59.

<sup>91</sup> Rawson 1989: 98. n. 10.

twelve strange figures of the Silk Manuscript, as Hayashi Minao convincingly suggests, may represent deified shamans, also featuring in the *Shanhaijing* and the *Huainanzi*. True or not, the Mawangdui finds seem to bear some evidence of the influence of Chu culture in the Han period.

#### IV. SHAMANISM DURING THE HAN DYNASTY (206 B.C. – 220 A.D.)

During the Han period China, compared to the former dynasties, underwent a profound religious change,<sup>92</sup> which is, at least in part, attributable to the former Qin (221–206 B.C.) unification.<sup>93</sup> Shamans and magicians were employed in order to ensure, above all, the personal welfare of the king, and not, as previously seen, to maintain the balance of the state. Everybody, including the emperor himself, was longing for immortality; magic and occult practices were flourishing, alchemists and black magicians were eager to fulfil the (apparently) insatiable thirst of the kings for personal longevity. On the other hand, this is the very period when the China of subsequent centuries, with its ideology of a more secular structure of a basically moral cosmos and state, was born.<sup>94</sup> Dong Zhongshu, who is considered to

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<sup>92</sup> “During the early Han (221 B.C.–A.D. 6) fangshi were agents of a dramatic diffusion of nontraditional knowledge and interests into the highly centralized, literate, and essentially conservative court mainstream. (...) Unassimilated cultures from remote areas, notably Yan and Qi (Shandong), the Yi regions (Sichuan), and Chu (Yantzi River valley), were introduced and promoted, and practices performed by priests among populace, were elevated into court use” (DeWoskin 1983: 3).

<sup>93</sup> “Political unification gave the Qin and the Han emperors an opportunity to assimilate systematically practices and beliefs from many parts of the area we today call China, but which, in the fourth and third centuries B.C., had been parts of independent political entities. What resulted was not only a new political, social and economic order, but also, it now seems, a new religious or ideological outlook” (Rawson 1999: 7).

<sup>94</sup> Although during the Han dynasty shamanic culture was, as contemporary sources indicate, flourishing (see e.g. Lin 1988, 1994), at the same time a shift from shamanic cults to moral values can also be attested. The following passage from Wang Fu’s major work, the *Discourse of the Recluse*, for example, overtly refers to the insufficiency of shamanic practice: “The good and bad fortune of human

be the ideological originator of later China, made an attempt to describe the changes of the universe, in the first place with the concept of *yin-yang* and the Five Elements (*wuxing*), and excluding a lot of notions related to spirits, magic or shamanism.<sup>95</sup>

The majority of Han emperors were, as sources reveal, rather susceptible to shamanism, magic and witchcraft.<sup>96</sup> During the reign of Gaozu (202–195 B.C.) there must have been a flourishing shamanic “culture” all over the country, as the following passage testifies:

Four years afterwards (201 B.C.), order having been established in the empire, the emperor decreed that sacrifices should be instituted in Chang’an (the imperial residence), with officers for invocation or conjuration and female *wu*. The *wu* of the Liang country were to sacrifice to Heaven and Earth, the celestial spirits of the soil, the celestial water, the gods within the rooms and the upper part of the hall, etc. The *wu* of Jin sacrificed to the five emperors, to the king of the East (the Sun), the gods of the clouds, the rulers of destiny, the earth-divinities of the *wu*, the (deceased) clansmen of the *wu*, to the persons who first cooked food, and the like. The *wu* of Qin sacrificed to the chief among the local gods of the soil, to the protectors of the *wu*, to Zu and Lei, etc. The *wu* of Jing sacrificed downstairs before the hall to the ancestors of the *wu*, to the

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beings is directed by their behavior and decided by fate. Behavior is self-determined; fate is regulated by heaven. People are definitely in control of their own affairs, but those things within heaven’s power cannot be known. The prayers and invocations of shamanesses and shamans can sometimes be of help, but they cannot mediate when one offends against virtue. Shamans, historians, and those who offer prayers and invocations no doubt enable one to commune with the spirits and ghosts, but they can only be of help in trivial matters. When it comes to the great course of fate, there is really nothing one can do” (Sommer 1995: 103).

<sup>95</sup> Although, for example, being involved in a rain ceremony himself, *Dong* applies the more abstract philosophical concept of *yin* and *yang* to clarify the meaning of the ritual.

<sup>96</sup> The shamanic practices at the Han court might be, partly, attributed to Chu influence. “However, another source of contact with Chu may have been the wider concern with Chu exhibited by the Han court. In discussing the survival and compilation of *Chuci*, David Hawkes has pointed out that *Chu* poetry and presumably other Chu customs were fostered by Liu An, the Prince of Huainan, himself a member of the Han Imperial house. Further, when his cousin became Emperor under the title of Wudi, Chu poetry was fostered at the Han court itself. It seems likely that far more from Chu than just poetry was supported by the court. A fashion of dress and luxuries is likely to have accompanied the vogue for Chu lyrics” (Rawson 1989: 98). On Chu influence on the Han also see Major 1999: 141–143 and Sukhu 1999.

rulers of destiny, the bestowers of rice, and others. The *wu* for the nine division of the sphere sacrificed to these nine divisions. All those *wu* sacrificed within the Palace at fixed annual times. The *wu* of the Huanghe sacrificed to this river at Lijin, and the *wu* of the southern mountains sacrificed to these mountains, as also to Qinzong, who is the emperor Ershi. Each of these sacrifices was celebrated in stipulated seasons and months.<sup>97</sup>

Another Han emperor, Wudi also seems to be a major employer of shamans and magicians.<sup>98</sup> Wudi summoned shamans from the state of Yue to establish altars in the capital so that the sacrifices to the heavenly spirits and the myriads of demons could be properly performed.<sup>99</sup> On the other hand, Wudi, unlike Qin Shi Huangdi, for example, seemed to trust both his shamans and his Confucian scholars.

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<sup>97</sup> *Shiji* 28:II.16; *Hanshu* 25: I. 1. 15 (Groot 1982: 1200).

<sup>98</sup> "In addition Wudi had made several journeys and spend considerable effort in searching for the immortal beings of Penglai; and in several famous incidents he had shown his susceptibility to the influence of shamans and mediums such as Shao Weng and Luan Da" (Loewe 1970: 191).

<sup>99</sup> "In that time (109 B.C.) the two Yue states had been destroyed. A man from there, named Yongzhi, said, 'The people of Yue believe in *gui*, and in their sacrificial services they see them; these beings are often employed by them with useful results. The king of eastern Ou honoured the *gui* and lived for one hundred and sixty years; his descendants neglected their worship, and came to decay and ruin.' On this the emperor ordered that the *wu* of Yue should institute invocations and sacrifices which were in vogue in Yue, and lay out a terrace for the purpose, without an altar, and that they should also sacrifice to the celestial deities, the supreme Emperor, and hundreds of *gui*, and practice divination by means of cocks. The emperor placed his confidence in those *wu*, and thus the sacrifices of Yue with the divinations by means of cock commenced" (*Shiji* 28: I. 33; 12:I. 20; Groot 1982: 1205). The same source relates that "in the next year (118 B.C.) the Son of Heaven was ill in the Dinghu palace, and his condition became very precarious; there was no *wu*, no physician whom he did not call, and yet he did not recover. Then Yinshui Fagen said, 'There is in the province under Your Majesty's immediate rule a *wu*, into whom, ever since a certain day on which she was taken ill, a spirit descends.' The emperor called her, and instituted sacrifices for that spirit in Ganquan; and when he felt ill, he sent some one thither to interrogate the (deceased) princess Shen. This princess said (by mouth of the *wu*?), 'the Son of Heaven need not feel concerned about his illness; but as soon as he feels a little better he must do his best to come to me at Ganquan'. The emperor became better, rose, and went to Ganquan; and when he had recovered he proclaimed a general amnesty, and banqueted the princess Shen in the temple of Longevity" (*Shiji* 28: II. 13; Groot 1982: 1201). We might assume that the sick-

During the reign of Han Wudi people trusted the spirits and demons summoned by the shamans, in particular those from the state of Yue. Dong Zhongshu, the well-known Confucian scholar reproached the Emperor several times. One day Wudi wanted to test [the efficacy of] the Confucian teaching, therefore, he ordered a shaman to curse Dong Zhongshu. Dong, however, wearing his courtly garment and facing south recited the classics, so no harm could reach him. The shaman magician, however, suddenly collapsed and died.<sup>100</sup>

It was also during Wudi's rule that the first *gu*-experts appeared,<sup>101</sup> who were most often associated with black magicians.<sup>102</sup> This type of magic, during the Han-dynasty in particular, often accompanied the shamanic activity, so much so that a specific expression (*wugu*) was

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ness mentioned above may refer to some kind of shaman sickness, which seems to be an unavoidable characteristic of becoming a shaman all over the world. If this assumption proves to be true, it would be a major discovery, because, as far as I know, we completely lack sources which would allude to this obviously "compulsory" station of the birth of shamans of all times.

<sup>100</sup> *Fengsu tongyi* 9:69 (Eichhorn 1973: 77). In the light of the pious tradition Dong Zhongshu is, apparently, the "winner" of this magical competition, even though he seems to apply the same techniques of magic so much despised by Confucians of later generations. The whole situation might remind the reader of the Buddhist "conquest" of Tibet when the Buddhist monks, in order to prove the superiority of their teachings, had to display the same magical powers as the original religious leaders of Tibet had.

<sup>101</sup> Eberhard 1942: 141. An earlier case from 540 B.C., which reveals a different meaning of the term, is recorded in the *Zuozhuan*. "The prince of Jin called for a doctor. In response the Prince of Jin sent Dr. Huo. After the examination the Dr. said to the prince of Jin: Nothing can be done for this illness. When the afflicted person approaches the women's apartments, he has *gu* hallucinations. This loss of reason is neither caused by bad spirits nor by bad nourishment, but by passion (...) the *gu* is the woman who seduces the man." (Transl. by M. Loewe; Kagan 1980: 9).

<sup>102</sup> Feng-Shryock 1935; Loewe 1970: 190–196. "The term *gu* can be traced from the oracle bones until modern times, and has acquired a large number of meanings and connotations. The Yin bone character clearly represents insects or vermin within a pot or cauldron. In literature it is taken by commentators to hold a variety of particular meanings, including insects living in grain or into which grain is transformed; maggots breeding in a pot; object that can be injurious to man; poisonous vermin contained within the human stomach; to bewilder or cast spells; emanations of evil; and the spirits of sentenced criminals whose heads had been exposed on stakes. In general the term is used to imply magical processes and has been translated as 'Black Magic'." (Loewe 1970: 191).

used to label those involved in such activities.<sup>103</sup> Further, this kind of black magic spread so quickly that in 85 B.C. an office was established (*sili xiaowei*) to control practising *gu*-shamans. Moreover, the Han Statutes declare that “those who dare to poison people with *gu* or teach others to do it will be publicly executed.”<sup>104</sup> Other emperors of the Han (e.g. Wendi, Xuandi, Chengdi, etc.), of course, also used magic and shamanism to achieve their goals.<sup>105</sup>

Far from the court, among the people ecstatic activity was in vogue, often linked with religious movements or rebels. The most prominent cult was perhaps that of Xiwangmu, presumably of southern provenance, which soon became an integral part of the millenarian movements of the period. In 3 B.C., for instance, “thousands took to the roads, letting down their hair, walking barefoot,”<sup>106</sup> all expecting the arrival of Xiwangmu.<sup>107</sup> In 25 B.C. the rebel of the

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<sup>103</sup> “There is a further difficulty in regard to practices of the Han period, as these are mostly described not as *gu* but as *wugu*, i.e. *gu* in which shamans participate or are concerned. It is not clear whether the specific mention of the shamans necessarily introduces a new element in the concept” (Loewe 1970: 192).

<sup>104</sup> *Hanshu* 6:7a (Loewe 1970: 195). A century later, however, the imperial persecution afflicted not only *gu*-magic practitioners, but minor shamans as well. “The persecution of the Chinese shamans of the north was initiated on a large scale in 99 B.C., where all of their wayside shrines were abolished. They had enough vitality to survive systematic oppression through the centuries, though greatly diminished in the north by the Tang times” (Schafer 1967: 101).

<sup>105</sup> Sometimes, however, the emperors themselves became victims of real or, occasionally, fake magical processes. “Under the reign of the Emperor Zhao, Xu, considering that this monarch was young and childless, aspired to the crown himself; and as in that Chu region *Wu*-ist and demonistic practices were in vogue, he fetched a female *wu*, Li Nüxu by name, and ordered her to bring down a *shen* and make incantations. Nüxu burst into tears as she said, ‘the emperor Xiao Wu descends into me’; and while all the bystanders prostrated themselves she exclaimed, ‘It is my strict order that Xu shall become the Son of Heaven’. Many a time Xu gave money to Nüxu and sent her to the Wushan (or hill of the *wu*) to pray, and — the emperor died (74 B.C.). Xu then said ‘how good a *wu* this Nüxu is’; he slaughtered an ox, to present it as a thank-offering with prayers.” (*Hanshu* 63: II. 14. The translation of the whole story can be read in Groot 1982: 1206–1208).

<sup>106</sup> Transl. by H.H. Dubs (Kagan 1980: 13).

<sup>107</sup> The figure of Xiwangmu, as most of its attributes show, seems to be closely related to shamanism (Cahill 1993: 17).



Red Eyebrows “was led by shamaness drumming and dancing in ecstasy”,<sup>108</sup> who, finally, even succeeded in capturing the capital.

During the Eastern Han dynasty the activity of the shamans obviously did not subside, as is evident from a citation by Wang Fu, who violently attacks the customs of his time: “Nowadays people leave their households and silk-weaving and, instead, follow the shamans’ path: they are drumming and dancing, worship the deities, and deceive the common people and the folk.”<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, various sources attest the general practice of the so-called *nuo* ceremony, which was basically of apotropaic purpose. Both the purifying function and the paraphernalia of the ritual makes it plausible that it was of shamanic origin.<sup>110</sup> The history of the *nuo* rituals can be, as some scholars assume, traced to Shang times,<sup>111</sup> and prevailed during the Zhou period; Confucius himself, for instance, was present on such occasions.<sup>112</sup>

Briefly we must mention the other well-known figures of the Han period, the magicians (*fangshi*).<sup>113</sup> As mentioned before, J.S. Major assumed that the tradition of Chu and Qi, and, consequently, the shamanic and magic traditions respectively, might be traced to a common origin (Major 1978: 231). It is true that magicians of Qi performed activities, apparently bearing a strong resemblance to those of the shamans of Chu, like divining, healing or exorcising, etc.

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<sup>108</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 41: I. 11. (Groot 1982: 1205).

<sup>109</sup> *Qianfulun* 3:9b–10b. It can be deduced from the first part of the critique that these people were, above all, female shamans.

<sup>110</sup> “The Exorcist wears a headdress of bear fur ornamented with four-eyed yellow gold decorations, and he is attired in a black cloak and vermilion robe. Clutching halberd and shield, he leads the hundred minor officials in the seasonal *Nuo* exorcism as they drive out pestilence from the chambers. At mourning processions he walks at the head of the file, and at the grave site he enters the tomb and waves his halberd in all directions to dispel baneful terrestrial influences” (Sommer 1995: 30).

<sup>111</sup> Chen 1936. Other sources for the *nuo* ceremony can be found in the *Lunheng* and the *Zhouli* 31: 12.

<sup>112</sup> “If his countrymen were celebrating the great *nuo* festival he dressed in his courtly robe stood on the eastern stairs” (*Lunyu* X.10). The wearing of the courtly robe might indicate that Confucius did not really see any discrepancy between the official rituals of the state and popular cults of the countryside. The common roots of these two types of religious phenomena were recently advocated by Poo 1998.

<sup>113</sup> See Ngo 1976; DeWoskin 1981, 1983.

The *fangshi*, however, besides their magical skills and knowledge, were also well-versed in the classics and the traditional genres of the literati. Therefore, they could be termed as intellectual shamans.<sup>114</sup> The relationship between the shamans (*wu*) and the magicians (*fangshi*), and the interaction of *Chu* and *Qi* still awaits a detailed analysis.

In conclusion, we can assert that the Han period was a real, but seemingly final, golden age of shamans and magicians. “We have now had before us sufficient evidence to perceive, that in the second and first centuries before our era the *Wu*-ist priesthood actually was the priesthood proper of China, even for the highest man in the world under heaven.”<sup>115</sup>

## V. SURVIVAL OF SHAMANIC ELEMENTS IN RELIGIOUS TAOISM (200–600 A.D.)

### V.1. Taoism and Shamanism

As we have mentioned before, a great number of scholars claim that Taoism can be regarded as the inheritor of shamanic culture, more precisely, that certain shaman techniques were preserved within the Taoist tradition.<sup>116</sup> H. Maspero (1971: 42–46) claims that Taoist meditation is derived directly from shaman ecstasy,<sup>117</sup> while R. Mathieu states that esoteric (i.e. religious) Taoism has incorporated a

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<sup>114</sup> Poo 1998: 197. “They (magicians, G.K.) were mainly known for their expertise in a variety of arts: forms of divination, such as astrology, physiognomy, numerology, milfoil analysis after the *Yijing* (Book of Changes), dream interpretation, etc; medical techniques, such as acupuncture, moxibustion, pharmacology, dietetics, and the like; shamanistic practices, such as purifications, exorcisms, travels to the other world, and spirit mediumship” (Kohn 1993: 4).

<sup>115</sup> And Groot, slightly simplified though, proceeds to describe the subsequent history of shamanism: “It was evidently not yet dethroned by a Confucian state-religion, which in those ages was just being built up from elements mentioned in the Classics, and which was destined to become to this day the only official and orthodox religion which excommunicates *Wu*-ist office from its pale” (Groot 1982: 1205–1206).

<sup>116</sup> Taoism was, actually, a vast receptacle of the most diverse traditions; therefore, it is not surprising to find shamanism among them.

<sup>117</sup> Thiel (1968: 165), in addition, is convinced that shamanic techniques of ecstasy were transformed into Taoist “techniques of ecstasy”.

great variety of shamanic methods (Mathieu 1987:23). M. Eliade also remarks that Taoism has, to a greater extent than yoga or Buddhism, assimilated archaic techniques of ecstasy (Eliade 1989: 453).<sup>118</sup> This kind of similarity can be, perhaps, attributed to the fact that Taoism and shamanism, or certain of their layers at least, were born in the south in the state of Chu. This is the region where the *Laozi*, the *Zhuangzi*<sup>119</sup> and the *Huainanzi* were written. It is evident, therefore, that some scholars discovered the similar aspects of shamanism and Taoism. This apparently perfect consensus of scholars, however, is challenged by a *Zhuangzi* story.

Ji Xian, a shaman living in Zheng, according to the story, possesses the mediumistic ability to foresee the future of individuals, and therefore functions as a diviner. When he encounters Liezi's master, the Taoist Huzi, however, he can do nothing but identify the inner states of the mind that the Taoist Huzi lets him see.<sup>120</sup> The story definitely suggests that Taoists demarcated themselves from mediumistic shamans,<sup>121</sup> and considered Taoist teachings and techniques, because of their conscious character, superior to shamanic methods.<sup>122</sup> Taoism, it seems, defined itself not, as one would naturally think, in relation to Confucianism or Buddhism, but, above all, in opposition to the cults and movements usually characterised as vul-

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<sup>118</sup> Also see L. Kohn's opinion: "Many of their (Taoists, G.K.) powers are similar to the abilities of shamans. Taoist immortals heal the sick, exorcise demons or beasts, make rain or stop it, foretell the future, prevent disasters, call upon wild animals as helpers, and remain unharmed by water and fire, heat and cold. Control over the body, a subtle harmony with the forces of nature, as well as an easy relationship with gods and spirits, ghosts and demons are equally characteristics of successful shamans as of the immortals of Tao" (Kohn 1993: 280).

<sup>119</sup> Probably, it is not accidental that *Zhuangzi* is often referred to as "The True Book of Flourishing South" (on *Zhuangzi* and shamanism see Ching 1997: 178–181; Paper 1982; 1995: 125–155).

<sup>120</sup> *Zhuangzi* 7:5.

<sup>121</sup> "Taoist practice has many forms of trance but Taoism does not admit possession by 'external' spirits" (Schipper 1993: 218. n. 9).

<sup>122</sup> K. Schipper, citing the same passage, claims that "Taoist texts of all ages, from the *Zhuangzi* to the works of Bo Yuchan (d.1226), reject the *wu* and their ecstatic cult" (Schipper 1985: 34).

gar, licentious or shamanic.<sup>123</sup> The explanation for such an opposing attitude might be that Taoism, being rather closely related and akin to these cults, must have kept himself at a distance from its own source (Schipper 1993: 247).<sup>124</sup>

Although seemingly contradicting his own opinion cited above, K. Schipper maintains that these two religious complexes are rooted in common ground, and actually complement each other.<sup>125</sup> This complementary feature can be observed, for instance, during the Taiwanese *jiao* ceremony, when the classical Taoist rite is carried out within the temple, whereas the rituals containing local and shamanic elements are performed outside the temple.<sup>126</sup> It means, therefore, that from the Taoist point of view, the two rituals (the classical-Taoist and the local-shamanic) complement each other, but, on the other hand, both have their own position in the hierarchy. The main characteristics of the rites are summarised by Schipper (1985: 35) as follows:

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<sup>123</sup> M. Strickmann's opinion quoted in Schipper 1985: 35. "In every period Taoism has been defined in relation to shamanism" (Schipper 1993: 6).

<sup>124</sup> "On the other hand, many Taoist cults were so similar to popular practices that Taoist authors themselves were sometimes hard put to distinguish between the two. There is no contradiction here, because Taoism was a superstructure at least partially derived from and always in close contact with popular religion. It was in order to keep their religion 'pure' that Taoist developed a jealously guarded orthodoxy and orthopraxis" (Seidel 1989–90: 284). On the topic, furthermore, see Nickerson 1994 and Stein 1979.

<sup>125</sup> "For the religion of the common people, from antiquity up until the present, I often make use of the term shamanism. (...) It should be seen, I think, as being the substratum of Taoism" (Schipper 1993: 6).

<sup>126</sup> In no other way could one better illustrate the duality of esoteric and exoteric practice, which in this case manifests itself in spatial relationships as well. Furthermore, it can be supported by the fact that the priest in charge of the inner (esoteric) rituals is allowed to perform the exoteric rite outside, while it was impossible to happen vice versa (Schipper 1985: 22).

## Ritual

Written language (classical)	Spoken language (vernacular)
Ritual generally read	Ritual recited by heart
Manuscript transmission	Oral transmission possible
Meditation	Trance
Pantheon of cosmic powers	Pantheon of historical deities
Abstract cosmology	Mythology
Bureaucratic metaphors	Military metaphors
Elaborate music	Monotonous chanting
Texts mainly in prose	Texts mainly in rhymed verse

## Specialists

<i>Daoshi</i>	<i>Fashi</i>
Hereditary	Vocational
Organized profession	Unorganized, linked to cults
Higher classes	Lower classes
Recognized by the state	Not recognized by the state
“Black-Head”	“Red-Head”
Shoes	Barefoot
Many vestments	Symbolical nudity.

The comparison clearly shows that, although the possibility of the common root cannot be excluded,<sup>127</sup> nevertheless in Taiwan two markedly different traditions coexist and collaborate. K. Schipper criticises J.J.M. de Groot who made an attempt to trace both the classical Taoist and the local rites to shamanism. On the other hand, K. Schipper also seems to be of the opinion that the rituals and myths of shamanism gradually transformed into the mystery-cults, liturgy and theology of Taoism (Schipper 1993: 8). Obviously, however, it is the characteristics of the local, and not the classical tradition, that display a close relationship to shamanism.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> E.g. in the case of music. “Daoist ritual music has its origins in shamanism” (Takimoto-Liu 2000).

<sup>128</sup> All the features associated with the local *fashi* priest are identical to those of the shamans (vocation, state of trance, journey to the spiritual world, singing in

## V.2. The Celestial Masters and the Supreme Clarity

Two sects of religious Taoism<sup>129</sup> excel in possessing shamanic heritage.<sup>130</sup> In both cases, however, only certain aspects were transmitted, and not the whole system. The Celestial Masters possessed an elaborated description of the different spirits and ghost, while the School of Supreme Clarity laid emphasis on the technique of spiritual excursions.

The founder of the *Tianshi* sect,<sup>131</sup> Zhang Daoling received a revelation from the deified Laozi in 145 A.D., after which Zhang created a Taoist kingdom in Sichuan where the indigenous people and, presumably, indigenous cults were intensively involved in this early Taoist movement. For them, the basic source of dangers were the activity of demons and spirits, and therefore they collected all extant methods to control these evil forces. The *Nüqing guilü*, for example, claims that the most potent method is calling the demons by name, the second one is wearing protective talismans, while the third most effective way to control ghosts is to pray for help to divinities invoked during meditation or visualisation. According to the teachings of this school, the diseases are, of course, also caused by demonic forces. The sick, therefore, after confessing their sins, signed a contract in which they solemnly promised that they would never commit any crime. Three copies of the contract were placed on the top of a mountain, in the water and in the fire, thus conveying

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verses, magical dance, addressing deities and spirits, divination, exorcism, healing, etc., see Schipper 1985: 29).

<sup>129</sup> Although the sharp distinction between philosophical and religious Taoism is outdated, for the sake of simplicity we still use it. Roughly, the distinction is as follows: the representative sacred scriptures of philosophical Taoism (*Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, *Liezi*, *Huainanzi*) are works that, above all, construct a theoretical framework without overtly referring to actual practices. The major schools of religious Taoism, on the other hand, focus on new revelations, rituals and practice. The most influential religious schools are the Celestial Masters (*Tianshi*), the Highest Clarity (*Shangqing*), the Numinous Treasure (*Lingbao*) and the Perfect Reality (*Quanzhen*).

<sup>130</sup> In actual fact the Celestial Masters inherited elements of the *fangshi* tradition of the Han dynasty, rather than being the direct heirs of the shamanic culture of earlier times (Sivin 1995: 27–30).

<sup>131</sup> On the *Tianshi* see Kobayashi 1992 and Kohn 2000. The word sect naturally does not denote one in the European sense of the word; it simply means school.

the confession to the three realms (offices) of the universe. In other instances, the victim of the demon had to consume the ashes of a talisman exposed to fire. The usage of talismans for apotropaic and healing purposes was a basic feature in the sect. Some scholars even suggested that these talismans have a shamanic origin, preserving the secret language of the shamans (Hammond 1992–93: 249. n. 71).<sup>132</sup>

On the other hand, similarly to the phenomena mentioned above, this sect also opposed mediumistic shamanism, which in a Chinese context might reveal a certain degree of indebtedness.<sup>133</sup> In sum, this correlation between the *Tianshi* sect and shamanism can be further supported if we consider a citation from Eliade on shamanism which, however, could equally be applied to the members of the *Tianshi* sect. “They are pre-eminently the antidemonic champions: they combat not only demons and diseases, but also the ‘black’ magicians” (Eliade 1987: 206–207).

As far as the other sect (*Shangqing*) is concerned,<sup>134</sup> one can with certainty trace its origin to the shamanic tradition of the south.<sup>135</sup> Between 364–370 a series of revelations was the start for the evolution of a new sacred literature. One of the specific techniques described in these revealed texts is the ecstatic journey,<sup>136</sup> which al-

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<sup>132</sup> On the traditions of talismanic lore see Drexler 1994.

<sup>133</sup> The ambiguous situation is aptly described by Robinet: “Using old practices to their advantage, the Celestial Masters assumed an exorcistic role that connected them once more, despite claims to the contrary, to the ancient *wu* shamans. The Masters sought, however, to establish an independent identity and affirm their uniqueness and authority, and to this end they worked on two levels. On the one hand, they inherited and took over the ancient powers of the *wu*. On the other, they set themselves off from them in the eyes of the literate by battling against popular beliefs and practices that were actually very close to their own” (Robinet 1997: 64).

<sup>134</sup> On the Highest Clarity generally see Robinet 2000.

<sup>135</sup> See e.g. Strickmann 1981: 122–208.

<sup>136</sup> “Ecstatic excursions are travels to the realms of the otherworld that go back originally to the journeys of the shaman. Leaving the physical body behind, the soul of the meditator surges up and beyond, meeting divine powers and spirits of the stars” (Kohn 1993: 191). “Taoist ecstatic excursions are a formalized development of the spirit travel of the shamans of old” (Kohn 1993: 249). Although the connection of these journeys with shamanism is obvious, the purpose of such journeys was not identical with that of traditional shamanism. The *Shangqing* journeys did not aim at helping the community, they were performed exclusively on behalf of the individual.

ready had a long history in philosophical Taoism.<sup>137</sup> The *Shangqing* texts give a detailed description of different kinds of ecstatic journeys. In the *Yiyin jielin*, for example, the adept invokes the kings of the Sun and the queens of the moon, and departs for a journey to the realm of the stars. In this Taoist school the constellation Ursa Major (Big Dipper), consisting of seven visible and two invisible stars,<sup>138</sup> had an equally important position as the Sun and the Moon. Basically, three practices were associated with the Big Dipper: invocation with a protective purpose, letting the forces of the stars enter one's body, and ascending to the stars. According to some texts the adept must visualise the Ursa Major, originally conceived as a Ladle, as a vehicle that carries the adept to different regions of the universe.<sup>139</sup> In the Chinese mythological history the steps of *Yu* refer to a sacred dance, with a presumably shamanic background.<sup>140</sup> This dance was performed both by shamans and by Taoists of the *Shangqing* tradition. The *Shangqing* texts describe it as a dance to be performed on the planets or in the void.<sup>141</sup>

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

As one might expect, no definite or conclusive answer can be given concerning the elusive phenomenon of Chinese shamanism. The debates, the hypotheses and theories of Sinology, however, might in

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<sup>137</sup> The *Zhuangzi* refers to it with the expression 'free wandering', the title of its first chapter. The *Chuci*, the *Liezi* and the *Huainanzi* contains such passages as well (Robinet 1989: 163).

<sup>138</sup> The two invisible ones are the *Fu*, which is analogous with the planet Mars, and the *Bi*, being analogous with the North Star (Robinet 1989: 172).

<sup>139</sup> This function of the Big Dipper is already present in the writings of Sima Qian: "The Dipper is the carriage of the Emperor; it is placed in the center (...) governs the four cardinal points, separates the *yin* and the *yang*, and determines the four seasons. It balances the five agents and arranges the divisions (of time) and the levels (of space). It fixates the various measures" (Robinet 1989: 178). Despite its name, the Big Dipper functions as a carriage in both cases, also see Hungarian *Göncölszekér*.

<sup>140</sup> On ancient Chinese dances in general, and on *Yu*'s steps in particular see Granet 1959.

<sup>141</sup> See Robinet 1976. On the later, Tang development of this tradition see Schafer 1977: 234–269.



many aspects be relevant for researchers of other fields of shamanism. Firstly, I endeavoured to demonstrate that the history of shamanism is an important and recurring issue within Sinology. A great number of scholars, experts on different aspects of Chinese religion, art and history, have taken positions on this question, and the contending theories will probably stimulate even more vigorous debates in the future. Secondly, I tried to prove that Sinology, originally equipped with the necessary philological apparatus, could make a methodological contribution to the general study of shamanism. Thirdly, if we, though in a more limited scope than thought before, accept the *wu*-shaman identification, we can conclude with some confidence that China produced one of the most abundant set of source materials for the study of ancient shamanism. In my essay I tried to summarise the most important theories and the basic conclusions of Sinologists regarding this aspect of Chinese religious complex. Finally, although I discussed Chinese shamanism separating the different time periods, on the basis of traditional dynastic division, I am convinced that, after surveying the questions of each period, we must be able to draw a general tableau on the development, changes and the permanent parts of this “shamanic substratum”. Naturally, this greater venture can be the subject only of a later investigation. Therefore, this and the next study should be conceived as a tiny contribution to a would-be more general description and analysis of Chinese “shamanic substratum”.

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## Glimpses of Murut Shamanism in Sabah\*

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SABAH, MALAYSIA

*The study is done in a little known ethnographic area, Sabah, at least in the field of indigenous shamanism. What is perhaps fascinating is that the three shamans studied in relation to Murut shamanism do not merely exercise traditional roles but also engaged themselves in public subversive activities. This study proposed to see shamans as the existential and human symbols of the local practice of shamanism. In addition, this study established the "perspectival difference" (even among Muruts themselves) between the perceptions of Muruts who have "heard of" the shamanic practice and those who are actually practicing Murut shamanism. The juxtaposition of both perspectives in this study is seen as complementary. The practice of shamanism and the shamanic "route" undertaken by the shamans of each culture, and even the manifestation of "subversive memory" by the shamans, have to be seen as context-specific. Indeed, there are differences amidst the similarities in the diversity of shamanistic practices.*

In a society where modernization has left no indigenous culture untouched, shamanism seems to have become a subverted and outmoded practice in Sabah.<sup>1</sup> The status of shamanism among the indigenous peoples of Sabah may well be described as endangered. Yet it is no secret that indigenous shamanism has made its presence felt, albeit unevenly, in every strata of the same society in Sabah. My field research among the Muruts has confirmed that shamanism among the Muruts is still in practice and the shamans are regularly sought after by the Muruts.<sup>2</sup> Rather than a subverted and outmoded

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<sup>1</sup> Sabah is one of the thirteen states forming the federated nation of Malaysia. It occupies the northern territory of the Borneo Island. In the colonial era, it was known as the British North Borneo.

<sup>2</sup> My field research was from January 15–April 30, 1999.

practice, my fieldwork has convinced me of the need to foreground the political dimension of shamanism for the simple reason that shamans had engaged in subversive practice in Sabah. The Muruts, literally mean "Hill People," are the third largest indigenous tribe after the Kadazandusuns and Bajaus in Sabah. The Muruts are by no means a homogenous group. They are subdivided into dialect groups such as the Baukan, Gana' Kalabakan, Okolod, Paluan, Selungai, Serunding, Tagal, Timugon, and the Beaufort and Keningau Muruts. The 1991 census has indicated that there are 54,037 Muruts in Sabah, with about 90 per cent of them geographically concentrated in the southwestern part of Sabah (Pensiangan, Keningau and Tenom).

This four-month immersion has privileged me with a deeper understanding of the Murut worldview of the seamless reality and not a few of the invaluable close-up glimpses of Murut shamanism. My conversation with the Muruts and particularly two of their shamans has enabled me to gain a deeper insight of Murut shamanism. From the conversation, I found out there is a perspectival difference between what is shared from what is heard, and, what is shared from what is practiced, especially by the shamans themselves. These two perspectives will be borne out by the descriptive ethnographic accounts below. To conclude this impressionistic study, I will provide an albeit unfinished portrait, consisting of few characteristics of a Murut shaman and shamanism. I will make special mention that unique to the three shamans under study have been an added political dimension, rightly called "subversive memory," which far supercedes the traditional roles exercised by the shamans of the many communities of indigenous peoples.

The first part of this study consists of descriptive accounts related to the first perspective. Fend Osman is a young graduate from one of the Malaysian universities. I consider him an educated Murut who is incredibly rooted and informed about his culture. He is the first Murut I encountered who explains to me his perception of Murut shamanism.<sup>3</sup> He believes that meditation (*bertabak* in Malay<sup>4</sup>) and

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<sup>3</sup> Personal conversation with Fend Osman, in his village known as Pulutan. January 18, 1999.

immersion in the river water are two essential prerequisites for the acquisition of shamanic knowledge and power. The apprentice would have to meditate in the middle of the night while her/his body remains immersed in the water of a stream where the initiation took place. Then the spirit (he used the Malay term *jiwa*) would come and there would be an ensuing struggle between the apprentice and the spirit. If the *jiwa* lost in the struggle, the apprentice would get the power of the *jiwa* but not vice versa. Osman uses two Murut terms, *Pilias*, to explain the inherent power within the person to ward off a charging bull, and, *kabal* which denotes the power which protects a person from being injured. He is among the first Murut to have mentioned to me the three renowned Murut shamans: Ontoros, Korom and Garing. He knew that Korom was a soldier during the British rule of Sabah. He said that when Korom was shot at, the bullets would not wound or kill him.

The second perspective is represented by Umbalau. He is an older Murut in his late 50s. He speaks from within the realm of his personal experience. He names his shamanic practice (in Murut) *sasambui*.<sup>5</sup> He explains that the person with the shamanic power cannot be killed by a bullet or wounded/injured by a knife (*parang* in Malay). He recounts to me that, "when the person with shamanic power goes into the forest, s/he can transform into a pig. When s/he is shot at, s/he reverses from the state of a pig to that of a human being and poses a question to the hunter, why did you shoot at me?" When I asked him as to who is eligible to practice *sasambui*, Umbalau replies that not only the *bomoh* (a term in Malay for a shaman) but ordinary person can practice *sasambui*. He adds, "The Muruts do not hold healing rituals for the sick in the village community. It is common that the family brings the sick to the shaman or the shaman visits the family of the sick."<sup>6</sup> He then shares with me

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<sup>4</sup> Malay is a link-language for the many diverse ethnic peoples in Malaysia. The more developed version of this language is known as the official *lingua franca* of Malaysia known as *Bahasa Malaysia* (Malaysian language or just Malaysian).

<sup>5</sup> Personal conversation with Umbalau, in his village known as Terbias Bias. January 20, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> This is Umbalau's response to my account of the communal healing rituals of the indigenous people in West Malaysia known as Orang Asli ("Original People"). One of the subgroups of Orang Asli, called Semai, invited me to attend their healing

a personal incidence which took place in a village known as Sumatalung where a shaman used *sasambui* to cure him of an abdominal pain. A boiled chicken egg was used to rub his abdomen. It was cut open with a knife. There is an indication in the middle of the egg. The shaman requested for a gallon of water. The shaman prayed over the water, chanting some incantations. He brought the water home and drank it till he was healed. In gratitude for the cure, he presented the shaman with a knife and a chicken. Umbalau said that he had to pay for the chants used in the *sasambui*. When he had acquired the shamanic power, he could cure persons suffering from snake-bite. However, he admitted that he does not perform *sasambui* anymore since he has embraced Christianity. He was told by the pastor of the Calvinist church that such practice is incompatible with the Christian faith.

Murut shamans are by no means all male. I have been told of two woman shamans in the Murutland.<sup>7</sup> The first is a woman in a village called Scalaban by the name of Inang Urik. She uses a rock with a hole in the center to bring about healing. The stone is said to be able to whistle and the sound is especially audible to the ears of those who are destined to hear it. A Murut man whom I met latter told me how he met up with this woman and she eventually cured him of a protracted ailment. The second is a young woman, living in another village called Sasadukon who is in her 20's.

It is my conviction that Murut shamanism cannot be understood apart from the shamans, living or dead. The two are inseparably linked. Shamans are the existential embodiment and therefore the human symbols of shamanism. My conversation with Umbalau convinced me that it is important to understand shamanism through the eyes of the skilled shamans themselves. Since there are three renowned Murut shamans, let me begin chronologically in an ascending order of seniority. I will begin with the living and end with the late Korom who lived before the late Ontoros. The following

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ritual known as *sewang terang* held in their village situated in the state of Perak, Malaysia.

<sup>7</sup> Personal Conversation with Lim Jit Ping at a village called Pakalungan. March 7, 1999.

accounts bespeak of the second perspective I have mentioned earlier in this study.

Garing bin Muntalan is a living legend, a hero and a reputable shaman among his people.<sup>8</sup> I befriended him over the course of various conversations on different occasions. He was born in a village known as *Sibuah*, situated in *Sumatalong*. Now he resides in a village known as Bantul, situated at the border of Sabah and Kalimantan, Indonesia. His father's name is Muntalan Bin Kalanong. His mother's name is Apoi. At fourteen years old, he married his first wife by the name of Kantul binte Matob from Sumontibal, Kalimantan. Garing divorced Kantul, only to remarry her after his second and third marriages failed. All in all, he has ten children. He joined the border scout when he was thirty-four years old and he was a border scout for forty-three years (from 1923–1967). He was with the Goorkhas for three years. He was decorated with a royal medal for bravery by Her Majesty, the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh for his contribution to the 2nd K.E.O. Goorkhas.<sup>9</sup> When he was the president of the rural development council, he was also decorated for his service by the former Chief Minister of Sabah, Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan on the 23rd of October, 1993.<sup>10</sup>

Garing narrated to me the incidence which earned him the British medal of bravery.<sup>11</sup> He was ordered by the Goorkhas to climb a Tarap tree in order to take a photo of the Indonesian soldiers during the wartime between Indonesia and Malaysia, a time known as The Confrontation. The Goorkhas soldiers asked him to cut and remove the branches so that it would not block his sight when he took a

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<sup>8</sup> Among the indigenous peoples, *bin* and *binte* are terms in Malay which means 'son of' and 'daughter of' respectively. E.g., Garing bin Muntalan indicates that Garing is the son of Muntalan.

<sup>9</sup> Elap Garing, the son of Garing Muntalan, showed me the medal when I stayed in his village from April 14–18, 1999. The medal was made by Spink & Son, Ltd., 5–7, King Street, St. James, London, S.W.1, UK.

<sup>10</sup> The award was presented to Garing bin Muntalan when the former Chief Minister inaugurated the longhouse which was built by a company known as Kretan Sdn. Bhd. which was based in a town called Tawau situated in the Eastern part of Sabah.

<sup>11</sup> Based on a personal interview on April 15, 1999. Elap Garing, his son, acted as my interpreter.

photo. But the branch broke and he decided to climb down. However, the Indonesian soldiers fired on him and the bullets shot off all the branches of the tree. They fired the mortar as well. All the Goorkhas soldiers ran away. They thought that Garing was dead. But he managed to escape from it the heavy firing unscathed.

My first encounter with him was rather casual.<sup>12</sup> It was before the commencement of a political rally in a Murut village by the river called Selungai. Physically, he is a man of small stature. He is rather healthy for a person in his early 80s. I first interviewed him in a village known as Pakalungan.<sup>13</sup> He was very evasive and elusive when asked if has any personal knowledge of *lumaagon*, a term denoting shamanism.<sup>14</sup> When the questions were repeated, Garing flatly denies any knowledge of *lumaagon*.<sup>15</sup> Garing resorts to safeguarding himself and the knowledge of *lumaagon* with the word *rahsia* (a term in Malay which means secret). The background to his evasiveness, I found out from Garing latter, was due to people's misplaced association of Garing with Ontoros. The British considered Ontoros a rebel. Garing has reason to fear such an association. The British has captured Ontoros. Garing feared that the British would imprison him as well. Garing further disclosed that in the past, there had been adverse misinformation about him and his shamanic practices.

I was not able to solicit a full autobiographical account of how Garing bin Muntalan became a shaman. Suffice for this study the partial portrait provided by his son, Elap Garing and a former Murut apprentice. Elap mentions that his father received the shamanic power when he was fourteen.<sup>16</sup> It came to him through dreams. After the reception of the dream, he devoted himself to ten days of solitary living in a cave. His father spent as long as six months in

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<sup>12</sup> This meeting took place on March 9, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> The interview was conducted on March 10, 1999, with Lim Jit Ping as my interpreter.

<sup>14</sup> I found out from Elap Garing that what is termed *lumakon* is pronounced as *lumaagon*, a term used in the Murut language at the border (Murut Sempadan) between Sabah and Kalimantan. Personal conversation with him in his village called Bantul. April 15, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> "Kando," ('no' in Murut) was Garing's repeated reply.

<sup>16</sup> Personal conversation with Elap Garing in his village, Bantul. April 12, 1999.

apprenticeship under the direct guidance of the spirit. Elap said that his father could turn into a pig when he was young, at a time when he was working with the border scouts. He used to swim after the pigs in the river. Still referring to his power, Elap states that his father would never beat them when they were children for fear that his beating would cause them injury or even death. The shamanic power acquired by his father has been used for curative purposes. Recently Elap told me that some years ago, his father healed a young Murut man by the name of Desa.<sup>17</sup> He was near death and the relatives from his village, known as Seliman, sent word to Garing to come and cure Desa. When Garing arrived, he asked for a *limau* (a lime) and a needle which he heated up over a flame. Then Garing poked the needle, top down, through the middle of the lime. He blew his breath on the needle. After the ritual, he asked for a knife to split the lime opened. One half of the fruit looked healthy while the other half spoilt. Within a week of this simple ritual, Desa was healed.

A former apprentice by the name of Simpanan Angkong shares with me his experience of apprenticeship with Garing.<sup>18</sup> During the training, he saw Garing's hand and gradually his whole body became dazzling white. Then suddenly he disappeared from sight. Simpanan says that Garing instructed him and other apprentices to bathe in the river water without using soap. In the process of bathing, his left hand must tap the right side of the heart seven times and the right hand must tap the right side of the heart again seven times. Then Garing instructed them to lift up the huge boulder. They failed. Garing then came over to the rock and he lifted it up as if it was made of cotton. For failing to lift up the boulder, Garing told them to bathe in the river water again. Simpanan recounts that once they waded up a small river. Suddenly there was a big flood. Some of them shouted while others stood their ground. When they went home, many fell ill. Simpanan says that he realized that it was not so much a flood as a snake-like creature swam down the river. With regard to the site of apprenticeship, Simpanan says it was a place for foretelling and meditation. In that place, Garing could even enter a

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, July 13, 1999.

<sup>18</sup> Personal conversation with Simpanan Angkong at his village in Selungai. March 8, 1999.



small hole. The initiation ceremony required the use of eggs. When each of them was broken, the egg-white would turn into lather, flowing from upstream downstream, washing over the apprentices.

Known among the Muruts is another great shaman and hero by the name of Korom bin Andoat. I have already gathered some information of Korom before I obtained an eye-witness account from Garing bin Muntalan. My first informant, Samuji bin Lumbis mentions that Korom hailed from a village known as Kakatur. His birthplace was Sumatalon.<sup>19</sup> When he was born, his eyes did not open for a week. This abnormal circumstance earned him the name Korom, a term in Murut which means that his eyes were closed. When he was young, the cobra came to suck his blood but ran off. His deceased wife's name is Angalas. Korom has a daughter called Hita binte Korom, now residing in a village called Sibuah. Korom was a police sergeant who was trained in London. After the Japanese occupation, his father requested Korom to come back to Sumatalon. Samuji believes that Korom has killed many white people in Sandakan and Kota Kinabalu, towns situated on the East and West coasts of Sabah respectively. He is a person blessed with enormous power. He drank poison and broken glasses but he did not die. When he was in prison, he could break out. Laminit Mansi, another Murut informant, believes that Korom was a Catholic.<sup>20</sup> He contends that Korom had three wives and a daughter. He fought against the Japanese during the imperial occupation of North Borneo. Korom was captured by the Japanese. When they burned him, they found that Korom has turned into a log. Instead of Korom, it was the log which was burning in the fire. Laminit also informs me that Korom's body was not found at his grave. He believes that Korom's corpse is perhaps residing in Mount Kinabalu.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Personal conversation with Samuji bin Lumbis at Pakalungan. March 11, 1999.

<sup>20</sup> Personal conversation with Laminit Mansi at Pakalungan. April 21, 1999.

<sup>21</sup> Mount Kinabalu, standing at 12,344 feet, is the highest peak in Malaysia. It is known among the Kadazandusuns as the eternal abode of those who have died.

The most informative account came from Garing bin Muntalan who has been a close associate of Korom.<sup>22</sup> Korom was a decorated hero. He was with the police for twenty two years, from 1937–1959. He was tall. His physique resembled that of a European. Korom obtained his power from a dream. In the dream, he was instructed to go up to Mount Kinabalu. He began his ascent at 6.00 in the morning and reached his destiny at 4.00 in the afternoon. He slept near to a solitary bamboo tree which has two offshoots. A woman appeared in a dream and spoke to Korom, "If you marry me, I will assist you in whatever difficulties you encounter." In the night, the woman pointed out to Korom a place up in the mountain where there is water. She said to Korom, "Your body is too hot" and she instructed him to bathe in the river. When it was raining and the wind blew, the ground all around him was soaking wet except the area where he was bathing. The women took care of him. Since Korom married the woman, he stayed for two weeks up in the Mount Kinabalu. During those two weeks, Korom did not eat, nor was he hungry. At night, as told by the woman, Korom bathed in the stream at the bottom of Mount Kinabalu. At first, Korom received shamanic knowledge which was harmful. The woman made it known to Korom that with the bathing, she would offer him other forms of knowledge. He became a person of enormous power. Garing narrates to me his personal knowledge of Korom:

"If he hits anyone with his hands, the person would died immediately. His shamanic power even extended to his knife (*parang* in Malay). During the Japanese occupation, he used his *parang* to kill three to four Japanese. When his *parang* remained in the scabbard, it was short. But each time he drew out his *parang* forth to use it, it lengthened. He was able to put his hand to the earth in the sandy hole, he would be able to hear the sound of the wild boar. After the initiation, he was called to London to take part in a boxing match. Unfortunately, he hit his opponent in the jaw bone and it was severely damaged. Then he returned to Sabah and was stationed in the police station in Kapayan. During the time of the British, he was put

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<sup>22</sup> Personal conversation with Garing Muntalan at Pakalungan. March 12, 1999. His son Elap Garing acted as an interpreter. The conversation continued in Bantul on the 15th of April, 1999.

to the test. He was tied up, put in a sack and thrown into the middle of the sea. But to their utter surprise, he was found to be drinking in a coffee shop. During the time of the Japanese, he was chopped up and burnt in a fire. But he turned into a wood.”

In the distant past, the most renowned legendary hero and shaman among the Murut was Ontoros who lived before Korom. Garing admitted that he has not personally met Ontoros.<sup>23</sup> But he has obtained a first-hand account from two Murut eye-witnesses by the names of Sibal and Liguran. They stayed for a month in Garing’s village. Both of them have since died. According to both of them, Ontoros was born in Ulu Sililiran. Sibal reported to Garing, “Ontoros wanted to fight the government but we the villagers ran away from Ontoros. We only hoped in his knowledge/power.” Garing continued his narration and his son Elap translated it into Malay for my understanding:

“Sibal told me that Ontoros was relying on his jinx but the jinx did not help him because he was fighting against the government.<sup>24</sup> Four bullets which were fired at him turned into air and rain. The police fired at Ontoros, the bullet came out of the gun, shot upwards, exploded in the air. Ontoros smoked a pipe (*tung* in Murut). Which-ever direction he blew the smoke of his pipe, he hoped that the enemy would die. Ontoros placed all his hope on the pipe because he had no guns. Ontoros fought against the *Orang Puteh* (literally translated as White People or Europeans) and half of them perished. When the *Orang Puteh* saw that they could not overpower him, they made a flag. They admitted as much that they had failed in their attempt to capture him. It was Ontoros who had overpowered the British instead. The *Orang Puteh* called Ontoros and asked for his pardon. They were just pretending. Ontoros came out and wanted to forgive the *Orang Puteh*. The *Orang Puteh* had the police lined up and were standing on guard. They called on Ontoros to leave his *tung* in the cave. Ontoros left his pipe in the cave, came out and met with the *Orang Puteh*. Ontoros shook hand with all the *Orang Puteh*. Ontoros was prevented from taking his pipe. If he brought it

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<sup>23</sup> The narration was recorded on 15th of April, 1999.

<sup>24</sup> Elap Garing seems to use the word jinx or *kuasa* in Malay rather interchangeably during the interpretation.

with him, as the *Orang Puteh* (falsely) promised, Ontoros would not have been conferred any title of honour by the British. The *Orang Puteh* brought Ontoros to Kota Kinabalu. Ontoros wanted to kill the *Orang Puteh*. But they surrounded Ontoros. They tied his hands with several rounds of wire." Ontoros questioned them, "Why did you tie me up?" The *Orang Puteh* replied, "We want you to free yourself so that you can get your title of honour." Ontoros suspected and retorted, "You want to kill me. I am still alive. This is my pouch. Open it. Immediately it became tin." The *Orang Puteh* fired upon him but the bullets did not explode. Ontoros however instructed them, "I will only die if you give me a pistol. When I shoot myself, I will die." Then Ontoros requested for a golden bullet which could kill a person like him with shamanic power. So he fired the pistol into his ear and the bullet came out of the other ear. Ontoros aimed the pistol into his mouth and the bullet came out through his anus. He just bent down and picked up the bullet. Ontoros asked the police to bring him from Kapayan to his village. So they brought him there. On reaching his village, he disappeared immediately into the cave. Antanom, his village representative and successor, searched for him in Kemabong. And since that moment, Ontoros is nowhere to be found. His grave was nowhere to be found too. Nowadays, no one could visit the cave. Visitors are liable to get their swollen or they may die. They are forbidden to cut the nearby trees down using a knife."

From the ethnographic information solicited through interactive conversation, I gather that the social status of the Murut shamans within the village is rather paradoxical. On the one hand, they are perceived as ordinary village members (S/he is one of us). Shamans go about their daily chores (fishing, repairing the net, hunting) like every other villager. On the other hand, there is an aura (not so much as "ill repute") of awe and respectability about them (Winzeler 1993: xxvi). However, ill repute is acquired by persons who possess and use knowledge (*ilmu hitam* which means "black knowledge") for evil ends. According to Ijah, a young Semai woman in her early 30s, such persons live on the edge of the village and are

feared and avoided by the villagers.<sup>25</sup> The Murut shamans acquire their shamanic knowledge not so much as a consequence of an illness or an abnormal period of mental derangement (Winzeler 1993; Laura W. Appell and George W. Appell 1993. xxv: 72). Rather, the spirit appears to them through the mediumship of dreams. They receive the dreams and willingly act on the instructions contained therein. There is also a period of initial apprenticeship, either directly from the spirit or through a skilled shaman. Those initiated normally demonstrate enormous latent strength/power. They have been admonished not to ostensibly demonstrate their power for reasons of sheer exhibitionism. Their power is used persuasively to convince their followers, to overpower the opponents psychologically on other occasions, but normally for curative purposes. Curing is not so much done through a common ritual as on a one-to-one basis.

Perhaps most unlike shamanism of other indigenous peoples, Murut shamanism has demonstrated a "subversive memory" in the past. Each of the three shamans has been known to engage in the direct political subversion of the hegemonic powers – Ontoros, the British, Korom, the Japanese and Garing, the Indonesian. In fact, the last two have been decorated for their heroic acts, no less by the first hegemonic power! Whether Murut shamanism continues to demonstrate such subversive memory today is anybody's guess. Yet I often wonder to myself whether the shamanistic perception of reality as a seamless whole is not subverting the one-dimensionality presupposed by the positivistic rationality of the west, imposed upon the rest of the world outside of Euro-America. Indigenous shamanism can be construed to be subversive because it battles to restore the seamless holism in a world dominated by scientific rationality. Is not this the kind of holism sought after by increasing number of people living in a world so violently dichotomized and compartmentalized by a western notion of rationality? Is not this exercise of subversive memory an irruption against the power of control perpetuated by western scientific rationality that blatantly excludes and erases the other cultural worldviews? Is not this seamless holism a challenge to

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<sup>25</sup> Semai is one of 19 subgroups among the aboriginal people known as *Orang Asli* ("Original People") in West Malaysia.

build a harmonious relationship between humankind and nature within a multidimensional world and universe?

Yet it must be acknowledged that Murut shamanism with a rich history of its own in Sabah today has become a marginal institution. Therefore it warrants that Murut shamanism be studied critically and comprehended historically if its rich treasure is to be unearthed for the enrichment of other cultures and communities (Langdon 1986: 20). With the gradual surge of interest and research on indigenous shamanism, what is Murut shamanism on the peripheral of a dominant society in Sabah may even occupy central stage in the distant future. The retrieval of its subversive memory may prove to be a much needed strategy to restore the world to its seamless whole as envisaged by the indigenous shamanism located differently around the globe. So, what can be said of the status of Murut shamanism in Sabah? Extinction, maybe. Threatened. True. Subversive. Possible.

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## News and Notes

### THE 6TH CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR SHAMANISTIC RESEARCH (ISSR), VILJANDI, ESTONIA, 2001

The 6th Conference of the International Society for Shamanistic Research will be held in Viljandi, Estonia, between 12th–16th August, 2001. The main topics of the conference will be 1. New viewpoints on the northern shamanism, 2. Shamanism in the interdisciplinary context.

The preliminary program of the conference:

- August 11. Saturday. Arrival. Registration.
- August 12. Sunday. Opening of the conference. Sessions.
- August 13. Monday. Sessions.
- August 14. Tuesday. Excursion to South-Estonia and Tartu.
- August 15. Wednesday. Final session of the conference.
- August 16. Thursday. Departure.

The participation fee of the conference will be USD 200. Abstracts (1–2 pages) and the papers should be sent to the Organizing Committee by January 2001.

Members of the ISSR and all colleagues who are interested in shamanistic studies are kindly invited to attend the conference.

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Information on the conference will also be available at [www.folkscene.hu](http://www.folkscene.hu).

**TUNSURIBAN**  
**Shamanism in the Chepang of Southern and Central Nepal**  
By Diana Riboli

Diana Riboli, who was born in Italy and holds a Ph.D. in Ethno-Anthropological Sciences, has been carrying out a programme of research in Nepal for more than ten years. During this time she has undertaken many field expeditions, six of which were conducted under the auspices of the Italian National Centre for Research (C.N.R.) within the framework of a research project into the condition of ecstasy in the Himalayas. This volume represents the culmination of her research and also forms the basis of her Ph.D. thesis for the University of Rome "La Sapienza".

Her present work focuses on one of the lesser known ethnic groups of Nepal—the Chepang—and, more particularly, on the form of Shamanism practised within this group.

Until about twenty years ago the Chepang were nomadic hunters and gatherers, but now, due to dramatic changes in their life style, they live under what might be considered very difficult conditions.

The situation in which this ethnic group finds itself at present may seem somewhat paradoxical: on the one hand they are regarded by many as, at best, outcasts or, more often, as untouchables, but the *pande*—the Chepang shamans—are held in great esteem, being considered among the most powerful in Nepal. The Chepang *pande* call themselves *tunsuriban*, a word which describes their ability to move freely in both the celestial and chthonian kingdoms.

The whole life of the Chepang revolves around the presence of the *pande*, who is the key figure in the community. He, or she, is responsible for communicating with the spirits, gods and forefathers and is also a diviner, therapist and psychopomp.

The study of this ethnic group, which very few projects have previously dealt with, required many years of intense field work and involved more than thirty *pande*.

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