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Heonik Kwon and Jun Hwan Park

Abstract

The Korean War was a formative event in the making not only of Korea's contemporary political geography, but also of its religious landscape. This is the case with shamanism as well as other more institutionalized religions. Focusing on the originally northern-Korean Hwanghae shamanism tradition now based in Incheon, this paper examines how rituals of this tradition engage today with legacies of the 1950–1953 war. In Incheon, an important episode of this war was the amphibious landing in September 1950 led by Douglas MacArthur; a notable change in Incheon's Hwanghae shamanism in the postwar era has been the introduction of the persona of MacArthur and other emblems of American power to its ritual world. This article asks how foreign these apparently foreign symbolic entities are and whether they can be seen as a manifestation of Hwanghae shamanism's authentic, traditional ritual order confronting a new historical and physical environment.

Keywords: Korean War, Incheon, Hwanghae shamanism, displacement, MacArthur, American Century, ritual power

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Obanggi (five-direction flags) is a familiar object in the material culture of contemporary Korean shamanism. Consisting of five hand-held flags of different colors, it is an important instrument of *kut*, shamanic rites, especially in the ritual's fortune-telling acts. Each color signifies a specific cardinal direction and a set of divinatory meanings as related to the conditions of human well-being. It also represents certain types of spirits and their supernatural powers with which these conditions are believed to interact. The yellow flag, which represents the center, speaks of the vitality of ancestral spirits, for instance. The red flag, associated with the southerly orientation, is considered a representation of the power of mountain deities. In a typical *obanggi* divination, the shaman interprets the combined meanings of two or more flags blind-picked repeatedly by the client. The chosen colors are supposed to help map the client family's health and business prospects by showing which spirits might respond to the family's specific wishes and how strongly they would do so. It is not surprising, therefore, that most people who solicit a *kut* usually show acute interest in the five-flag divination. One can even argue that these clients are willing to endure the long and costly ritual for encountering those moments in which they can test their luck and fortune with the bundle of red, white, yellow, blue, and green spirit flags. *Obanggi* is a compass for the spirit world, reaching out in all directions and to all classes of animate entities within it; within the act of ritual divination, it is an important means of communication between humans and spirits.

Similar objects exist in the secular domain of traditional Korea: for instance, the instrument of military pomp during the Chosŏn dynasty, which is also called *obanggi* or *taeobanggi* (great five-direction flags). These traditional military artifacts feature different animal as well as color symbols, which together make up the four cardinal directions plus the position of centrality. The turtle associated with the north, for instance, represents the condition and imperative of preparedness for fortified defense in the image of its shell. The five-direction flags in this secular military form can even be seen today. We saw one version in the re-enactment of a Chosŏn-era military procession held in memory of Yi Sunsin, the celebrated sixteenth-century naval commander, in the southern coastal town of Tongyeong in August 2016. Another interesting example would be the opening ceremony of the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang,

during which a puppet show of five-directional animal symbols attracted great interest.

It is not clear how these two material forms, ritual-magical and secular-military, are historically interconnected. Some practitioners of shamanism believe that the five-color, five-direction flags of today's form are relatively new to Korea's shamanism tradition, tracing the origin of these objects to the end of the nineteenth century, which was a time of profound crisis in Korea. According to this observation, the appearance of *obanggi* as a ritual device coincided with the weakening of the relevance of *obanggi* as a military instrument amidst the crumbling of the traditional moral and political order within which the object found its meaning. The crux of the argument is that *obanggi* shifted the sphere of its symbolic life from historical reality to a ritual world during an epochal change in the constitution of Korea's sovereign order from the long-held traditional dynastic form to the uncertainties of the modern era involving the advent of colonial occupation by Japan. Although this observation requires more historical evidence as proof, it is safe to conclude that in exploring the symbolic property of *obanggi* as a ritual instrument, one may consider not merely questions of supernatural power and ritual efficacy, but also issues of political sovereignty and secular authority. This is in line with Boudewijn Walraven's emphasis on the merit of historical contextualization in understanding the evolution of Korea's popular religious concepts and symbols (Walraven 1999). Broadly related issues are found in Caroline Humphrey's now classic study of shamanism in political history that explores the cosmology of Daur shamanism in northeastern China in relation to great transformations in that region's broad political landscape involving the rise and fall of the Mongol and Manchu states (Humphrey 1994; 1996). One may explore the combined issues of ritual power and political sovereignty with regard to political conditions on the Korean Peninsula at the turn of the nineteenth century, during which time Korea was powerless in the face of escalating tensions in broader Northeast Asia, including the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). In this essay, a similar question will be explored in the context of another major military and political crisis in Korea's modern history: the experience of the Korean War following the partition of the nation into two separate political entities in the mid-twentieth century.

Our enquiry will focus on a field of contemporary Korean shamanism that has assimilated symbols of American power into the vista of its spirit world. This field consists of a group of ritual specialists of northern Korean origin, originally from the Hwanghae region and now based in Incheon, South Korea. One of them, Chung Hak-Bong, made prolific use of the traditional five-colored flags. She had a wealth of knowledge about the Hwanghae-do shamanism tradition and was known to be a “traditionalist” among her colleagues and academic experts on Korean shamanism, who put great value on preserving this tradition’s authentic ritual aesthetic forms. Madame Chung possessed an object that would be difficult to define as traditional, however. Kept in her modest domestic spirit shrine in central Incheon, this object consisted of five flags: the national flag of South Korea plus those of four political entities that have had a great impact on the unfolding of Korea’s modern history: China, Japan, Russia, and the United States. In the home of Kim Kum-Hwa, another authoritative figure in the cultural tradition of Hwanghae-do *kut*, the American flag is displayed prominently as part of her spirit shrine. One of Chung Hak-Bong’s former pupils employs in her ritual performance not only the American flag, but also the portrait of arguably the most famous American known to Koreans from the time of the Korean War: General Douglas MacArthur. In the *hwan*, or spirit portrait (see Kendall and Yang 2015), the American general is standing alongside the aforementioned General Yi Sunshin, Korea’s national war hero from a different historical epoch. In the *kut* performance of another Hwanghae-do shaman in the broader Incheon area, Kim Kye-Sun in Bucheon, the spirit of MacArthur likes to give divinations using South Korea’s national flag, which has become part of the shaman’s *obanggi*.

What is the American general doing in the ritual world of Korean shamanism? May Chung Hak-Bong’s five-nation flags, including the American flag, be considered a new form of *obanggi*? Notable in the background of Madame Chung, and other Hwanghae-origin shamans of her generation, is the experience of the Korean War. These ritual actors were displaced from their homeland in northern Korea because of the war, and the place in southern Korea where they made a new home after the war is an important site of Korean War historical memory, as will be detailed shortly. Is it possible, then, to read traces of this war in Madame Chung’s unconventional five-flag artifact? What is

MacArthur's role in connecting the historical reality of war to the displaced ritual world of Hwanghae-do shamanism? This essay explores MacArthur's place in the religious landscape of the northern Korean shamanism tradition after this local religious tradition landed in Incheon during the Korean War.

Freedom Park

The South Korean port city of Incheon, located 30 kilometers west of Seoul, holds an important historical legacy of the Korean War (1950–1953). In September 1950, the town's coast and harbor became the theater for a massive amphibious operation by United Nations forces. General MacArthur led this offensive operation against the North Korean forces that were then occupying Incheon and Seoul, as well as much of the rest of South Korea. Referred to as the Incheon Landing, the successful assault is considered a turning point in the Korean War. It broke the strategic order of North Korea's military advance and contributed to turning their hitherto triumphant southern march into a chaotic retreat to the 38th parallel and then further to the border with China, before the situation changed again following China's intervention in the war in October 1950. The landing also marks a pivotal episode in the Korean War as described in South Korea's official history of the three-year-long conflict. Incheon has a public museum dedicated to the history of the Incheon Landing, in which pictures of MacArthur, then Supreme Commander of the United Nations Forces in Korea, are featured prominently with his signature corn-cob pipe and sunglasses. In recent years, the city has turned Wolmido (Wŏlmido), the site of one of the fiercest fights of the Incheon operation, into a heritage site and tourist attraction. Wolmido used to be a small island in the West Sea, also known as Hwanghae (Yellow Sea), located off the coast of Incheon, before it became part of the city through land reclamation. The South Korean Navy, together with Incheon municipality, hosts a public commemorative event in Wolmido each year in the presence of a great number of veterans and other interested visitors. Dubbed as a "victory day" in the Korean War, the event includes a modest re-enactment of the landing. The island is also well-known in North Korea, as it is associated with a particularly heroic resistance by the

country's coastal defense forces against superior American firepower. The Battle of Wolmido is one of the five most heroic and victorious episodes in North Korea's official Korean War narrative. The 1983 war film *Wolmido* remains one of North Korea's most important cultural productions.

Although the Incheon Landing is sometimes referred to as the “Normandy of the Korean War” and has been typically associated in the past with the military savvy of MacArthur, it is interesting to note that in recent years, the memorial event has become increasingly indigenous in content. South Korea's public media outlets today emphasize the hitherto forgotten sacrifice of the country's marine forces in securing Wolmido and other locations along the Incheon coastline. This is the case with a new feature film about the Incheon Landing released in 2016, in which the battle over Wolmido is central to the plot. In the memorial gathering held on the Wolmido's shore in September 2016, MacArthur was celebrated along with Yi Sunsin, a powerful naval commander of the Chosŏn era and a figure familiar to every schoolchild in South Korea in relation to Korea's war against Japan in the sixteenth century. Today, Wolmido is an important heritage site of the Korean War and of the war-forged alliance between South Korea and the United States. However, its popularity has long been overshadowed by another memorable site in Incheon's old quarter.

This site is on a modest hill called Eungbongsan (Ŭngbongsan) overlooking Wolmido, and widely known for its Freedom Park (Chayu kongwŏn), the public recreation space on the hilltop. The Freedom Park area boasts several prominent memorials, including an imposing concrete structure built for the centennial celebration of Korea's opening of ties with the United States in 1882. The area also holds other historic relics relating to the opening of Chosŏn, the so-called Hermit Kingdom, to other foreign powers. Eungbongsan and its environs were an exclusive residential area for Westerners at the end of the nineteenth century (Inch'ŏn munhwa chaedan 2006). The recreation area on the hilltop is known to have been the first modern public park in Korea, and then known as Man'guk kongwŏn (international park, or literally, “ten-thousand-nation park”). The expression “ten thousand nations” was at that time a popular way of referring to international society. The “ten thousand” speaks of multitude and entirety, and the same is true with *mansin*, meaning

literally “ten thousand spirits,” in popular reference to the practitioners of shamanism in Korea. The park’s name was changed to Western Park (Sōgongwōn) during the Japanese colonial period (1910–1945), recovering its original name briefly after the end of the Pacific War in 1945. After the Korean War, the park’s name changed once more, this time to Freedom Park. The last change was part of the general transformation of the park’s premises into a memorial space for the Incheon Landing, especially in recognition of the hero of that important episode of the Korean War, Douglas MacArthur. The change included the erection of a prominent bronze statue of MacArthur in 1957, overlooking the old theater of the amphibious maneuver.

In 1957, the city of Incheon, as elsewhere in Korea, was still struggling to recover from the destruction of the 1950–1953 war. At that time, the park on Eungbongsan was, along with the nearby Chinatown, a cherished recreation area for the war-weary townspeople, and it bustled with cheap eateries and makeshift fortune-teller stalls. Because of its proximity to the maritime border between the two Koreas, postwar Incheon received a large influx of refugees from northern Korea. The refugees came especially from Hwanghae and Pyongan provinces along the West Sea coast, a region in northern Korea traditionally with a large Protestant population. Referred to as the “northwest group” in Korea’s church history, the displaced Christians from this region built new bases in Incheon, before some moved on to Seoul and elsewhere to build a powerful evangelical movement and the mega-churches that came to be associated with South Korea in subsequent decades. Harboring strong anti-communist sentiments, some of these originally Incheon-based and war-displaced faith groups played a pivotal role in South Korea’s postwar Protestant sectors (Yoon 2017). Along with its powerful Protestant movement, the northwest region’s tradition of shamanism also found a new home in Incheon before some of the actors in this tradition expanded the sphere of their activity to Seoul and elsewhere. One of the most prominent of these actors, Chung Hak-Bong, settled in Incheon, whereas Kim Kum-Hwa, another powerful practitioner of Hwanghae-do shamanism, made her mark in Seoul, establishing a strong network of clients in that metropolis and eventually earning the title of “national human cultural treasure,” a highly honorable official recognition bestowed by the government of South Korea. Kim later became

an international celebrity. Among her numerous overseas activities was the 1982 *kut* she performed in Knoxville, Tennessee, held in celebration of the centenary of Korea-US diplomatic relations. Both Chung and Kim belong to the Hwanghae shamanism tradition, and the *kut* they perform have many common elements. For this essay, however, attention will be drawn to an interesting difference between the two eminent practitioners of Hwanghae shamanism. Kim Kum-Hwa does not shy away from the fact that her spirit world includes a symbolic element of American power, as illustrated earlier by the presence of the American flag in her shrine room. For Chung Hak-Bong, in contrast, her relationship with symbols of American power has been a more subdued and guarded subject, known only to her immediate circles of clients, students, and friends, even though Chung also keeps the American flag in her shrine room as part of her cherished collection of five-nation, five-directional flags. The symbol of American power that she found difficult to disclose was connected to Freedom Park and the statue of the American general that dominates that public space.

The American General

Douglas MacArthur (1880–1964) has been referred to as a man of the American Century (Leary 2001; Manchester 1978). Historians have varying opinions as to when this so-called American Century started. Henry Luce famously placed the date to 1941, when the United States, uniquely among the Western powers, joined World War II on both the European and Asian fronts (White 1992). Other observers favor a much earlier date. For instance, in his *Empire as a Way of Life* (1980), William Appleman Williams highlights the last decade of the nineteenth century, following its victory in the Spanish-American War, as the time the US joined Europe's imperial club. In Williams' scheme, the United States' colonization of Hawai'i and the Philippines are pivotal episodes in the making of the American Century. Douglas MacArthur's life history is compatible with both renderings of the American Century. MacArthur was a crucial actor in America's involvement in World War II in the Pacific. After the war was over, he governed the defeated, US-occupied Japan. His mission

in Japan included overseeing the dismantling of Japan's imperial sphere, which for Korea meant American military occupation of what is now South Korea. Shortly after war broke out on the Korean Peninsula in June 1950, MacArthur took up another responsibility, now as supreme commander of United Nations forces in Korea. MacArthur's life is also closely intertwined with the longer version of the story of the American Century. He served the Philippine government as a defense advisor, following in the footsteps of his father, General Arthur MacArthur, who had served as the military governor of American-occupied Philippines at the turn of the last century, before the American presence in that country was challenged by Japan, Asia's unique regional imperial power. He took part in World War I, also known as the "Great War," which, while a formative event in modern European history, also had broader global relevance. The post-World War I era constituted the beginning of the long process of decolonization in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America; it is also considered the beginning of the rise of the US as a global power (Manela 2009). Before the Great War, MacArthur had toured Japan, China, the Philippines, and elsewhere in Asia sometimes as an aide to his father. These were followed by other short tours of duty, including to the Panama Canal in 1912.

Douglas MacArthur's experience in Panama made a mark in the ethnographical literature. The Kuna Indians of Panama are renowned for their figurative religious art. Created for divinatory or healing purposes, Kuna shamanic art includes a multitude of amulets in andromorphic and other forms and in various sizes (Fortis 2013). Some of these amulets feature "gringos," or white colonists (Severi 2001), including a quite sizeable wood-carving that is supposed to represent Douglas MacArthur. Michael Taussig (1993) explores these figurative forms in the logic of negative dialectics. His interpretation focuses on the politics of reproduction: specifically, the political relationship between an image and the substance the image reproduces. Taussig does not see the gringo amulets as syncretic artifacts that bring together indigenous form and foreign identity. The introduction of the foreign into the indigenous form, according to him, should be considered not merely in a formal analysis, but rather with reference to the concrete context within which these objects are made to exist. That context is healing rituals in which the Kuna shamans confront ailments in

indigenous bodies resulting from the exposure of these bodies to the white-ruled, exploitative labor regime. The whites are powerful, economically and politically, and the gringo amulets confront their secular power by transforming it, within the healing rite, into a curative power. Taussig's analysis presents two forms of power in confrontation (without a move to synthesis, so the idea of negative dialectics): the secular politico-economic power versus the magical ritual power. Their sources are the same—the world of the whites, in this case—and the art of the shamanic rite consists, crucially, in the appropriating of the foreign power to protect the indigenous body from the abuse of that very power. Taussig defines this process as the magical power of mimetic art (Taussig 1993, 8).

Similar ideas are explored in Danilyn Rutherford's approach to the images of *amber beba* (big foreigners) found among the Biak in Irian Jaya (Rutherford 2002). These images from Indonesia's West Papua include a figurative depiction of MacArthur in relation to his historical foothold on the island and its environs during the final years of the Pacific War. Rutherford asks how the "big white foreigners" became a source of magical power for the Biak. Another important, broadly relevant example is Seong-nae Kim's work on the images of American power appearing in Jeju shamanic discourses (Kim 1995). Her work focuses on the legacies of the political violence experienced in the chaos of the early postcolonial years in 1947–1949 by the people of this beautiful island on Korea's southern maritime border with Japan. Referred to as the April 3rd incident, the violence against the people of Jeju was committed mainly as part of the counterinsurgency warfare waged initially by the US Military Government that occupied the southern half of the Korean Peninsula at that time, following an insurrection by a small group of local communists in April 1948. Kim highlights an oversized, intimidating image of an American serviceman appearing in a shamanic initiation dream of her key Jeju informant, asking how this dream imagery relates to the shaman's ritual healing power in relation to the many Jeju families whose genealogical pasts are deeply scarred by the 1948 violence. Kim's careful analysis of Jeju shamanism's confrontation with the history of postcolonial anti-communist violence suggests a point that resonates with Taussig's, relating the image of American power (the political and military power of the American occupation of postcolonial Korea) to the

efficacy of Jeju shamanism's ritual healing power. Like Taussig, Kim emphasizes the politics of alterity embedded in the process of mimetic representation: the fact that the imperial power actualized in the ritual healing is radically different in character from the secular imperial power that the ritual organization appropriates. The former is life-affirming and life-regenerating, in contrast to the power that is brought into the ritual as part of mimesis, which approaches life as a mere object of power and is thus indifferent to life's inalienable authenticity and sovereignty.

We shall return to the question of sovereignty at the end of this essay and with reference to Yim Suk-jay (Im Sökchae) and his powerful political theory of Korean shamanism (Im 1970). For now, it suffices to mention that the above discussions on the inception of American power into indigenous ritual worlds deal with the dynamics of symbolic formation in the contexts of colonial or postcolonial domination: a situation that accompanies a radical hierarchy of power between the indigenous world and the foreign forces. Concerning this essay's principal subject matter, which relates to the milieu of a civil war, however, the interpretative strategy may require further deliberation on the relationship between indigenous symbolic forms and the foreign power.

MacArthur occupies a controversial place in Korea's modern history and memory. At one extreme, he is considered a hero of South Korea who rescued the country's political existence, at the outset of the Korean War crisis, from the threat of annihilation. His heroic status is in large measure anchored in the episode of the Incheon Landing and part of the broader public understanding of the history of the war-forged South Korea-US alliance. This understanding was strong during wartime South Korea. One illustration of this is a prayer that addresses MacArthur as the savior of the Korean nation, which was popular among some Christian groups in postwar South Korea. On the other hand, MacArthur is considered responsible for some powerfully regrettable episodes and legacies of America's Korean War. These include the indiscriminate aerial bombing campaigns that the US waged in North Korea (and in parts of South Korea), and the threat of thermonuclear attack against enemies, the legacies of which continue to reverberate on today's Korean Peninsula in terms of North Korea's determined pursuit of nuclear armament. They also involve a broader critical understanding of the US's place in the unfolding of modern

Korean history: notably, its formative role in the partitioning of Korea in the first place. These radically diverging understandings of American power's place in modern Korean history are sometimes played out in Freedom Park, where in recent years competing civic groups have clashed with one another in front of the park's MacArthur statue (Kim 2007). Some of these groups considered the statue a stain on South Korea's public space and called for its removal, whereas the opposing groups protested this appeal, regarding it as treacherous and benefiting North Korea. These controversies surrounding MacArthur's legacies resulted in a curious situation: today, the American general's statue in Freedom Park is guarded around the clock by Incheon's municipal police force. While regarded as regrettable and cumbersome by the locals who frequent the park, the situation probably represents the health and strength of South Korea's political democracy today. Such conflicts were long unthinkable under military-led authoritarian rule, during which time critiquing American power was considered synonymous with supporting communism. They also illustrate how different the public understanding is today of US-Korean relations, as compared to during the earlier postwar years. For instance, some of the youth who took part in the student-led democratic uprising in April 1960, which led to the toppling of South Korea's postwar authoritarian regime led by Syngman Rhee, brought flowers to MacArthur's statue, which was then considered a symbol of liberty, after hearing that Rhee had stepped down. Such an act of tribute would be unthinkable to the majority of South Korean youth today.

The important point is that in the historical context of the Cold War, especially in that of a civil war that took place as part of global political bipolarization, unlike in the context of colonial domination as in Panama, the symbolism of the empire's power may go beyond the horizon of alterity between the foreign and indigenous. In Cold War politics, the dominant foreign power did not necessarily cancel out the indigenous society's formal sovereign existence, but was often exercised through the latter. The relationship of domination, in this political world, was justified by the existence of an external ideological enemy and the imperative of a common existential struggle against that enemy. Accordingly, for a society like South Korea that was on the frontlines of a global ideological struggle, the American power's foreignness had to be negotiated

with the foreignness of its ideological nemesis, in this case communist North Korea. In the process of rapprochement between the two Koreas at the beginning of the 2000s, therefore, critical new understandings of the character of American power advanced in the South Korean public sphere. When relations between Seoul and Pyongyang deteriorated in the subsequent decade, likewise, the foreignness of North Korea was once again magnified while the old ties of alliance with the US were reemphasized. In short, in the Cold War historical context of the Korean Peninsula, past and present, the character of American power remains a contentious subject in South Korean society, in sharp contrast to the public's clearly negative and critical view of Japan's former colonization and its legacies today. Nowhere was this reality manifested more clearly than in the controversies surrounding the memorial for MacArthur in Freedom Park.

Freedom Park is an important site of memory in today's South Korea, involving contrasting views of the country's experience of national partition and civil war as part of the advent of the American Century. Beyond this domain of secular politics and public history, MacArthur's place on the hill in central Incheon is of considerable importance as well for the tradition of Hwanghae shamanism that found a new home in Incheon after the Korean War. In this tradition's postwar magico-religious geography, the American general has a much more localized existence (see below), compared to his controversial place in the wider secular public sphere. Moreover, the general's place within this tradition closely relates to the experience, among those who follow the Hwanghae shamanistic tradition, of a wartime, radical displacement from home. It needs to be made clear that displacement in this context refers primarily to the specific process in which a locally grounded spiritual, cosmological form had to adapt to new landscape, after having been uprooted from its familiar locale. This dislocation may have had a political character; in this case, the fact that shamanism in northern Korea had confronted an existential crisis, in the immediate postcolonial years, under North Korea's anti-religion, anti-superstition campaigns. Considering this fact, Hwanghae shamanism's displacement from home may be considered from the angle of religious freedom, an angle that is part of the discourse of northwest Korean Protestantism during and after the Korean War. Seen from this angle, one may be tempted to

approach the American symbols found in post-Korean War Hwanghae-origin shamanism primarily as representations of American power in the secular sense (see Choi 2010; Han 2002); that is, the power that helped to defend the southern half of Korea from the menace of communism or the foreign power that has dictated the fate of Korea in recent history. However, this is not what we do in this essay. In this issue, we agree with Taussig and Kim that the concept of power in shamanism's ritual world cannot be reduced to notions of power relations that are familiar in the secular political world (see also Severi 2015). We argue that what appears to be American as part of the spirit world is not the same as the "American" as in the American Century. For an understanding of the unique place of this foreignness in the spirit world, we need to turn to the spirit of MacArthur.

The Spirit of MacArthur

General Im Kyōngŭp in the West Sea, General Yi Sunsin in the South Sea, General MacArthur in Incheon's coastal waters—let us go to obtain their agreement!

The above is part of Chung Hak-Bong's invocation of invitation to the multitude of spirit helpers during her *kut*. Variations of this invocation are known to several other shamans in the greater Incheon area who follow the Hwanghae-do *kut* tradition. Hwanghae shamanism is known to have a particularly pronounced aesthetical form involving warrior helper spirits, compared to other regional shamanism traditions in Korea. Specialists in Korean shamanism associate this distinct character of Hwanghae shamanism with the position of Hwanghae in traditional Korea as a border region with Korea's northern neighbors, a region that had historically been vulnerable to the chaos of war. The Hwanghae region is located along the northeast coast of the West Sea, an area that has traditionally been active in seasonal croaker fishing; accordingly, the Hwanghae shamanism tradition is also renowned for its elaborate fish fertility ceremonies. Im Kyōngŭp, an official of the seventeenth-century Chosŏn court,

is an established shamanist spirit helper whose legends bring together the work of a warrior and that of wealth generation through fishing.

Legend has it that General Im was on his way to China to aid the declining Ming defend itself against the rising Qing. His men were hungry, and so were the residents of an island where his ships stopped en route. In the face of this dire situation, General Im came up with the ingenious idea of a fish trap, with which the islanders were able to catch many nutrient-rich yellow croakers and thereby overcome hunger and deprivation. Croaker fishing and trading then became a vital economic activity for the islanders and for people in coastal Hwanghae, as well as in other communities of the West Sea coastline that lie along the migration route of the yellow croakers. In gratitude, people began to erect shrines in honor of General Im, some of which still exist today on some islands near the maritime border with North Korea. These include Yŏnp'yŏng (Yeonpyeong), an island northwest of Incheon and west of North Korea's Hwanghae coast, which keeps a shrine for General Im on a small hill. Today, the island also has a museum that tells the history of the area's once prosperous croaker fishing and commerce.

Some of those who learned ritual knowledge from Chung Hak-Bong make pilgrimages to these shrines. One of them, Incheon resident Lee Jong-Ja, routinely renews her spiritual ties to General Im through a visit to Im Kyŏngŭp's shrine on Yŏnp'yŏng Island. She regularly visits shrines along Korea's South Sea coast dedicated to Yi Sunsin as well, often with her own disciples. Lee Jong-Ja usually begins her shrine tour with a visit to MacArthur's statue in Freedom Park. This is in part because the spirit of MacArthur is her tutelary spirit helper; however, it is also because the American general is, for her, a locally seated shamanic deity, just as the coastal waters of Incheon with which MacArthur is associated are more immediate to her spirit world compared to the relatively distant maritime sphere represented by General Im or General Yi. Lee Jong-Ja recounted the occasional difficulties she and her students encountered during their journey, especially with the local authorities who disapproved of activities of a religious nature at sites they considered part of a public historical heritage. These difficulties were particularly pronounced in Freedom Park. MacArthur's statue on the park premises is a modern memorial, unlike the shrines for General Im and General Yi, which resemble in form a traditional ancestral or

communal house of worship from the Chosŏn era. The park has recently been the site of disputes between contending civic groups which have gathered on the premises bringing clashing messages over the significance of this site of memory. For both groups, who were mostly from outside the locality, irrespective of their diverging views, the local shamans' prayer and offering-giving activity at what they considered a war memorial appeared strange and was unwelcome. For Lee and her students, however, Freedom Park was no different from any of the other sacred sites they regularly visited to renew their ties with helper spirits. Although she often visited several other places as part of her annual pilgrimage, Lee's engagement with the place of MacArthur and those of two other generals has been a must in her long career. An amicable relationship with these spirit generals has been vital for her fame and popularity, in her view, as it brings luck to her as well as to her regular clients.

Korea's traditional popular religious knowledge demonstrates two distinct types of supernatural spatiality in relation to the maritime world. One of them concerns the master of the seawater, the Dragon King, whose authority in the maritime environment is believed to be universal and encompassing. In contrast, the second type points to a specific maritime sphere that is defined in relative terms to a marker in the terrestrial world. All the warrior spirits mentioned earlier belong to this second type. The spirit of MacArthur is identified, for instance, with the coastal waters of Incheon. These spatially limited shamanist spirits' places in the maritime world, moreover, entail a certain movement between the sea and the land. In the case of Im Kyŏngŭp, this movement takes on an alimentary and economic character. This spirit persona is referred to as the master of croakers in places on the West Sea coast, and his magical power is associated primarily with fishing activity. The differentiation between these two types—the mythical universal deity figures such as the Dragon King, and the historical sphere-specific persona which speaks of movements between the sea and the land—is made evident in the Hwanghae fish-fertility rites. These rites present the human relationship with the sea in the terms of generosity (the sea deity's gifts to humans) and in those of reciprocity (offerings of gratitude made by the humans to the generous giver). The persona of Im Kyŏngŭp is introduced to this broadly reciprocal relationship between the sea world and the land-based community in the image of *homo faber*, as it

were, the inventor of the technology of exploitation of sea resources. Referred to as a spirit entity that is anchored in the maritime world of the West Sea, General Im's actual existential sphere is, nevertheless, firmly placed in the land-based community of the human world. For this reason, in part, in communities that worship Im's power and efficacy such as on the island of Yŏnp'yŏng, the general's spirit is worshiped as part of the community's ritual for mountain deities. The same is true in Sŏsan along the West Sea coastline, where the spirit of General Im shares with the coastal community's existing mountain deity the honor of receiving ceremonial offerings during its *sansinje* (ritual for the mountain deity).

The legendary history of Yi Sunsin is relatively weak in the symbolism of economic disposition. This history is anchored in the territorial defense against foreign invasion and in the related idea of sovereignty. The sea-to-land movement here consists of that of *hwa* (disaster), rather than that of *pok* (fortune), as this was the case with General Im's legends; in other words, the flow of life-threatening and life-destructive forces against which the spirit general must wield his spirit sword to help the community to protect its lives. General Yi's close figurative association with the imperative of territorial sovereignty is far from being a property of shamanism alone. In the heart of South Korea's capital of Seoul, a statue of Yi Sunsin stands imposingly on the city's most prominent boulevard, with Korea's old palatial complex to his back. General Yi is a much more recognized and publicly prominent historical figure than General Im in South Korean society today. In the popular religious realm, however, Im has deeper roots and a relatively more established status than Yi. General Yi's sphere of supernatural influence is identified primarily with the peninsula's southern coastal world. This is in line with the fact that his historical legacy as a heroic defender of Korea against Japan's invasion is concentrated in Korea's South Sea. The realm of Im's spiritual power covers nearly the entirety of Korea's West Sea; this corresponds with the migration routes of the yellow croaker and the related, seasonally shifting fishing locations. The existence of the MacArthur spirit, as noted in the song of spirit invitation cited above, is much more localized, being restricted to the coastal waters of Incheon. This way of imagining his realm is grounded in the historical event

of the Incheon Landing and in the broader history of the Korean War, within which this military event finds its meanings. The amphibious action involves a movement between the sea and the land, an important element in the legend of General Im. There might be another possible point of correspondence between the two warrior spirits. Earlier we mentioned Im's status as one that is anchored in a local mountain, as well as a spiritual entity whose magical power is identified with the maritime sphere. Interestingly, it might be possible to see MacArthur's statue on Incheon's Eungbongsan in light of the hilltop shrine for General Im, as a place for a principal local spirit in Incheon that is equivalent to the place of General Im in the historical context of Hwanghae. This is far from speculation if observed in relation to the way Lee Jong-Ja and her students practice their pilgrimage. The analogical relationship between the religious geography of Im and that of MacArthur opens an interesting question as to the rise of the American general as a shamanist helper spirit in the first place. To explore this question, however, it is first necessary to come to terms with the wartime displacement of the Hwanghae-do shamanism tradition from its familiar landscape in the northern coastal region.

Displaced Spirits

It is not clear exactly when MacArthur was first introduced into Incheon's Hwanghae-origin shamanism. It was sometime in the 1960s, according to our conversation with Chung Hak-Bong and others; most definitely after his statue on Eungbongsan was completed in 1957, and probably following the death of the American general in April 1964. Chung belonged to the first generation of Hwanghae-origin shamans in South Korea; however, she considered herself part of the second generation, as her teacher and spirit mother, U Ok-Joo, had also escaped her homeland to settle in Incheon. This was before the Korean War broke out in June 1950, amid the strong anti-religion and anti-superstition politics of the then-nascent North Korean state. U Ok-Joo taught others, and Chung in turn tutored many trainees in the postwar years. Today, the genealogy of Hwanghae shamanism in South Korea has expanded to a fourth generation.

Evidence suggests that by the third generation—that is, the generation following Chung Hak-Bong’s—the spirit of MacArthur had become an established element in Incheon’s Hwanghae shamanic world. Several of Chung’s spirit daughters had by then come to take the spirit of MacArthur as their tutelary and initiatory spirit. Such connectivity has intensified in the subsequent generation. Conditions were different in the time of Chung Hak-Bong, to whom MacArthur, although being part of her ritual world, remained so as one of a multitude of spirit helpers. How things were in the first generation remains largely unknown. Chung Hak-Bong argued that her teacher U Ok-Joo and other older generation Hwanghae shamans in Incheon had not meaningfully related to “the general in Freedom Park,” as she sometimes referred to MacArthur. However, we find that even in the first generation, practitioners of shamanism in Incheon were obliged to relate to traces of American power, even though this was not by means of MacArthur’s spirit.

The organization of a Hwanghae-do *kut*, especially that familiar to U Ok-Joo and her line of descent in terms of ritual knowledge, is known to contain a particularly vigorous performance involving the spirits of military generals, compared to other regional traditions of Korean shamanism. A typical Korean *kut* introduces a multitude of spirits, moving from one distinct category of spirits to another. The idea is that for a successful *kut*, one has to entertain all the spirits of different cosmological dispositions, even though the specific purpose of the *kut* may highlight a particular class of helper spirits and their functional prominence. For instance, warrior spirits can take on a relatively higher relevance than other spirit entities in a curative rite (as these spirits are believed to be effective in fighting against illness-causing spirits), whereas in a ritual intended mainly to augment the client family’s business prospects, the performance with spirits associated with the generation of wealth, typically referred to as *taegam*, can be relatively more pronounced (Park 2012). The performance with spirits that belong to the category of *changgun* (warriors or generals) is, therefore, only a small part of the complex and long ritual procedure. In the Hwanghae-do tradition, however, as noted, the place of these warrior spirits goes beyond a functionally specific, structurally partial existence within the entire ritual process, to the extent that the efficacy of the entire ritual is sometimes measured in terms of the *changgun* spirits’ power and its realization.

The Hwanghae shamanic ritual tradition is, however, also known for its particularly powerful performance involving the *kunung* spirits. Constituting the concluding part of a *kut*, this performance invites the crowd of anonymous spirits and provides offerings to these hungry, unremembered spirits that have not had the privilege of being entertained in the previous phases of the ritual. The *kunung* signifies the spiritual existences that are other than the shaman's established kindred spirits or the spirits that are not an integral part of the client's kinship identity. For this reason, the *kunung* performance usually takes place outside the space in which the shaman and her clients perform the series of hostings for the invited kindred spirits. The anonymous spirits may include some illness or misfortune-causing spirits, which are, although related to the client family in ties of kinship, usually unremembered by the latter. These spiritual entities can be categorically ancestral in the sense that they are related to the client family in ties of kinship. However, they are non-ancestral spirits in the practical sense that their historical existence is unremembered by the family. Despite these specificities, the most typical image of the *kunung* is the spirits of fallen nameless soldiers in battlefields. The Hwanghae shamanism's rituals for *kunung* spirits display a powerfully vivid and vigorous scene in which the shaman, possessed by the hungry spirits, devours bloody raw meat offered to the latter. While this is underway, the glimpse of a look of satisfaction on the shaman's face can be a haunting experience for the onlooker. The look communicates a pleasurable sensation, on the part of the anonymous spirits, that their marginal existence in the spirit world is recognized by the living.

It is a broadly shared view among our interlocutors in Incheon that rituals for the *kunung* spirits are a particularly challenging task in that locale. Chung Hak-Bong shared with us on several occasions the daunting experience of taking up the *kunung* phase of a *kut* that she performed with her teacher U Ok-Joo as a relatively novice shaman. The *kut* took place in Wolmido, the site of a fierce battle during the Incheon Landing. She vividly described her awe in confronting the immensity of the spirit crowd that day, the intensity of this crowd's collective interest in what she was doing, and in the offerings prepared for the occasion. Later in her career, she had many other occasions to perform *kut* on the former coastal battlefield; this time, in the capacity of presiding shaman and together with other, younger shamans under her tutelage. In the descent

of ritual knowledge from U Ok-Joo, according to Chung, one of the most difficult and necessary skills for a novice shaman is to manage effectively the consolation rite for the crowd of hungry spirits. A similar observation is made by those who follow Incheon's Hwanghae ritual tradition in the generations following Chung's. As noted earlier, some of these actors relate to the spirit of MacArthur as their tutelary helper spirit and, accordingly, regard the MacArthur statue in Freedom Park as a focal point of spiritual power within Incheon's local religious geography. They have developed a host of highly inventive iconography relating to the power and eminence of this novel local spirit-persona. In the *kut* performed by these actors today, the spirit of MacArthur appears in a dazzling array of demonstrative forms: American-brand cigarettes and liquor, a corncob pipe, sunglasses, and a portrait. These forms also include a US Army uniform bought on the black market, and the dance of a shaman wearing this uniform. In parallel with these demonstrative forms associated with the hero of the Incheon Landing, the ritual world of Incheon's Hwanghae shamanism holds other traces of the Korean War. Notable among them is the intensity of the hungry spirits of the anonymous sea dead, demonstrated through the shaman's heavy breathing and trembling body while under the influence of these desperate souls, and the messages of appreciation and gratitude from these nameless beings that the exhausted shaman later delivers.

Changgun and *kunung* are coextensive categories and are both related to a history of war, even though they are dealt with separately within the ritual order. Moreover, some *kunung* spirits are considered a type of *changgun* spirit, as testified by identities referred to as *kunung changgun*. What distinguishes these two categories is the dynamics of individuation. All *changgun* spirits are in possession of some specific historical characteristics and related individual personalities, which are made demonstrative during the *kut* by particular items of clothing and other material objects. For instance, offerings of foreign whisky or cigarettes are associated exclusively with MacArthur. The same applies to the American army uniform worn by the shaman during the rite. These aesthetic qualities of individuation are absent from the world of *kunung*. The ritual for the lost and unremembered souls presents no such personable artifacts or individuated offerings as seen in the ritual phase conducted with the

eminent general's spirit. The *kunung* are the *demos* of the spirit world, as it were, and their strong presence in the ritual world has been an integral element in the development of Hwanghae shamanism after the Korean War.

Conclusion

One of our principal interlocutors in Incheon, Lee Jong-Ja, once told us that “the spirits are history. No spirits exist without history, and we may not understand them without history.”¹ She did so while we were conversing about the background in which the spirit of General MacArthur came to settle in her ritual world as a tutelary helper spirit. Our conversation is ongoing, and we note that the following is a tentative conclusion. The idea of history referred to here is not in opposition to myth; it is a subtle and open-ended notion about temporal depth that is attentive both to historical events and the pre-existing scheme of ideas, that which Sahlin calls the dialectics of event and structure in making history (Sahlin 1985). The idea is that history has both event-focused and structurally-shaped properties, and that an understanding of this history requires attention to the contingent events and, at the same time, the organizing scheme of ideas and values within which these events turn into meaningful episodes. If we conclude that the spirit of MacArthur is a history, following Madame Lee, what kind of history is this *history*?

In this essay, we have proposed an understanding of this “history” as a conjuncture of two analytically separate historical trajectories. One of these trajectories is anchored in the events of the Korean War: the war's locally prominent episode, the MacArthur-led Incheon Landing of September 1950. The prominence of this episode in local history is manifested in the cityscape of Incheon; most notably, in the form of Freedom Park and the statue of MacArthur within it. Related to this locally specific monumental, material-historical heritage of the Korean War, there are other war-related questions that are specific to the recent history of Hwanghae shamanism. One question that is central to understanding this historical trajectory connects to an experience of displacement and the related imperative to find a home in a foreign environment. We explored this question in terms of an analogical relationship

between two spirit identities: General Im in the old home of Hwanghae, and General MacArthur in the new home of Incheon. We proposed that seen within this historical trajectory in which the subject of historical experience is the tradition of Hwanghae shamanism, it is possible to consider the novice spirit of MacArthur as an extension (or invention) of a traditional shamanist entity, especially that of General Im.

These two historical paths are distinct from each other in a way that is akin to the analytical differentiation between event and structure mentioned earlier, although we believe that they are inseparable and closely communicative in the making of the MacArthur spirit. Another distinction between the two is worth mentioning. In the event-focused, secular historical trajectory, MacArthur's legacies are today a controversial subject, as mentioned earlier, signifying the merit of the South Korea-US alliance, on the one hand, and on the other, the hierarchical, negative aspects of this international relationship. Either way, MacArthur is principally an embodiment of American power in this sphere. Along the mythic, structure-focused trajectory, in contrast, MacArthur's place finds its relevance primarily in the context of the local landscape of postwar Incheon and in the extension of Hwanghae shamanism's traditional pattern of spirited geography. Seen within this sphere, it is not even certain whether MacArthur is an *American* general, an identity that is paramount in the secular historical narrative. MacArthur in the mythic narrative, rather, has a Hwanghae identity of northern Korean origin that happens to have been brought to the new locality in coastal southern Korea.

If the spirit of MacArthur has both secular-international and localized, mythic-structural properties, a similar idea can perhaps extend to the constitution of the material object we introduced at the outset of this essay. The object consists of five national flags in a row that Chung Hak-Bong keeps in her domestic spirit shrine in central Incheon. Korea (its traditional flag now representing South Korea) stands at the center, together with the flags of the four powers that have had a great impact on the unfolding of Korea's modern history. On the Korean flag's right are those of the United States and Japan, with China and Russia are on its left. Like the traditional military object *obanggi*, the four foreign territorial entities in Chung's five-nation flags encompass four directions; to China across the West Sea, United States on the other

side of the Pacific, Japan across the South Sea, and Russia in the north. Hence, the artifact may be representative of the geopolitical relations that have shaped Korea's fate in modern history, with China and Russia on the one side, and Japan and the United States on the other. All these political entities have a history of waging war with one another in and around the Korean Peninsula since the end of the nineteenth century, and their powers continue to affect the unfolding of events in the region. The city of Incheon, as the gateway for Western and other powers to Korea, maintains traces of these powers in terms of numerous material heritage sites, especially in and around the Ten-Thousand-Nation Park, today's Freedom Park. This is a story of brute power politics, a history of the pursuit of power, and of violent wars that were unleashed as part of these contests for power.

On a closing note, we return to Chung Hak-Bong's five-nation flags and ask whether this artifact demonstrates a geopolitical property that is distinct to the secular geopolitical history of modern Korea. In a recent conversation, Madame Chung returned to her experience of performing *kut* on the Incheon seashore. The occasion was a public event hosted by the Incheon municipal authority, aimed at praying for peace on the Korean Peninsula. Chung vividly recalled the confusion and fear she felt while confronting the powerful collective of *kunung* spirits from the West Sea. She said that these spirits were all hungry and desperate individuals, and that they appeared to be of different national groupings. The collective of these spirits included, according to her, some Japanese *kunung* and Russian *kunung*, which we understood related to the incidents of the Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War that took place in the West Sea at the turn of the last century. In the light of this conversation, we speculate whether one may approach the relevance of her five-nation flags from the perspective of the world of nameless spirits, as objects that represent the ruins and living traces of modern history in the maritime world of the West Sea. If such an approach is justified, we note that the world represented by the five-nation flags departs radically from the historical space of geopolitics that is familiar to us. For this world is not one that is formed by modern sovereign political entities, imperial or otherwise, but rather a world of those whose lives were broken by these entities' pursuit of hegemony. Although this observation remains a speculative point, the idea of sovereignty behind it is

not. According to the legendary scholar of the culture of Korean shamanism, Yim Suk-jay, Korea's shamanism tradition has a distinct political theory that he calls parallelism—a theory that postulates subjectively sovereign and mutually parallel existences in all types of spirits and in all the “ten thousand spirits” (Yim 1970, 1971; also Yim Tonhŭi 2001). He observes that deities in Korean shamanism have each a unique and specific functional qualification and that seen together, they are all equal to and independent from each other (Yim 1970, 88). Following Yim's insights, we may conclude that the symbolic presence of American power is possible in Korean shamanism only to the extent that this power coexists with other powers and respects the latter's unique sovereign existence. This radically pluralist and egalitarian worldview is embedded in Korean shamanism, according to Yim. Broadly similar views and aspirations are found in the idea of the international world that prevailed in Korea and wider East Asia at the turn of the last century, as demonstrated by the Freedom Park area's original reference to “ten thousand nations,” which celebrates not only the reality of multitude but also the principle of equality among all the constituent units of world society. The same idea may apply to the process in which the spirit of MacArthur has become part of the world of Hwanghae shamanism's “ten thousand spirits” following the Korean War. If this is indeed the case, we can add that the point raised by Kim and Taussig on the critical property of power in shamanism is pertinent: the power of the American general in the ritual world is distinct from the general's power as a representative historical figure of the American century, and is quite *un-American*.

Note

- 1 Lee Jong-Ja, interview by authors, Incheon, South Korea, July 2015.

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