

# Of hungry ghosts and other matters of consumption in the Korean spirit world<sup>1</sup>

Laurel Kendall

*American Museum of Natural History*

## 1. Introduction

1.1. This essay is about contradictory impulses, about the desire for and the moral disdain of consumption, and how these impulses are set at play in contemporary shaman rituals in the Republic of Korea (hereafter “Korea”). I will argue that in their portrayals of gods, ancestors, and ghosts, Korean shamans embody *both* desire for and disdain of material wealth, acknowledging the tangled emotions inherent in a lived history of rapid social transformation and unprecedented material possibility. Debate over the positive and negative aspects of global consumption is on going within the discipline of anthropology where it has been linked to an older anthropological insight that things are always more than things. I would like to tie this discussion to an aspect of popular religious practice—in Korea and many other places--which has been despised as “irrational” and “superstitious: the deployment of material goods in the quest for non material ends such as health, wealth, and good fortune. As I hope to show, popular religion is one domain where the contradictory attributes of global consumption can be both literally and figuratively digested.

1.2 The following anecdote introduces some of the paradoxes of the contemporary Korean moment. It also highlights two very different attitudes toward what ritual is and how it works: The shaman, Yongsu’s Mother, was setting out the offerings for the ancestors at a client’s home. To make a good display, she had purchased a large bunch of bright yellow bananas. Her client’s husband took offense at the bananas. They were imports, he said, not indigenous to Korea, not “*urigôt*,” not “ours.” “*Uri*,” this possessive pronoun is so often used in Korean speech to make a link between intimate collectivities of “us” and the imagined community of nation. The bananas were not Korean products and therefore unsuitable offerings for Korean ancestors. Yongsu’s Mother, surprised but never at a loss for words, defended her choice. “We offer bananas,” she said, “so that the ancestors can enjoy them. They weren’t able to eat them in the past. A single banana used to cost thousands of w n.” The man was adamant, and a purist, “When you do rituals in our house, you should just set out pears and apples as we have done from long ago.” Yongsu’s Mother was astonished by his rigidity, his unwillingness to share with the ancestors all of the delightful gustatory possibilities of the contemporary moment.

1.3 At one level, Yongsu's Mother and her interlocutor reflect two distinct polarities in Korean attitudes toward and dealings with the ancestors. The apples and pears that the man considered as traditionally appropriate are foods specified in ritual manuals that describe the procedures for making ancestral offerings (*chesa*) including placements of food and the directional orientation of the offering table and the officiants. Even my illiterate village landlord could recite the Sino-Korean formula for the proper arrangement of offering food on the ancestors' tray, "Red in the east (apples) and white (pears) in the west." In Korea, these procedures are explicitly identified with the neo-Confucian tradition where the proper and precise enactment of rites—including the directional orientation of the participants, the offering tray, and the items on the offering tray—is an expression of "propriety" (*ye*, Chinese *li*), an act of morality. The rites express virtue irregardless of whether the ancestors literally imbibe the offering food (a fine point that many contemporary Koreans gloss with ambiguity). For Yongsu's Mother, on the other hand, ancestors have human appetites and feelings. The dead respond to the affairs of the living as an active and hungry presence capable of making their displeasure known through appearances in dreams or by causing illness or misfortune. Because the dead are also a part of the present tense, their tastes, like those of the living, can expand to new horizons of consumption. Why should they not crave a taste of banana, something that would have been beyond their means in this lifetime? If living family members can afford to enjoy bananas, how can they not share them with the ancestors?

1.4 But there is more to this disagreement between Yongsu's Mother and her client's husband than the old play between Confucian and shaman, man and woman, form and substance that intrigued a generation of Korea anthropologists weaned on French structuralism, myself included ((Brandt 1971; Dix 1987; Kendall 1985; Sorensen 1983)). In 1990s Korea, the man considered bananas improper because they were a *foreign* item of consumption. His disdain was of a piece with concerns that had been abroad in Korea from the late 1980s. A newly prosperous Korea had been pressured to open her borders to foreign goods. Brand names originally encountered as luxury goods, the forbidden fruit of the black market, were now available on the bulging shelves of supermarkets and in the 7-11 stores and their clones that seemed to be springing up on every street. The importation of beef and tobacco, harmful to domestic production, had been vigorously resisted, but to no avail. I recall signs strung across Seoul streets in 1988, "Smoking is bad for your health, smoking foreign cigarettes is bad for the nation's health," a moral equation of the human body and the body politic. In the early 1990s, a national campaign for moderate consumption vested the purchase of foreign goods with an unpatriotic aura, injunctions that would become even more strident in the wake of the I.M.F. crisis in 1997 (Nelson 2000). In Laura Nelson's apt characterization, the man who disdained bananas as not being sufficiently Korean was an exemplar of "consumer nationalism," for whom the use of domestic goods had taken on both moral and emotional qualities; it was wrong to offer foreign bananas to Korean ancestors.

1.5 Korean anti-foreign consumption discourses are about genuine concerns for fiscal well-being and they are also transparent expressions of nationalist sentiment, but they are about other things as well. They reflect a more general ambivalence about the costs of Korea's economic success. In so many conversations, with so many different kinds of people over the last several years, I have heard speculations that in the desire to modernize, too much has been thrown away, that Koreans have

lost a critical national essence, an ability to endure and triumph in hard times. These discourses are witnessed in widely varied contexts of ethnographic writing, from my own discussion of nostalgic revivals of the traditional Korean wedding (Kendall 1996a), to Richard Grinker's (Grinker 1995) account of south Korean fantasies of finding their lost former selves in the harsh and economically deprived north, to Nancy Abelmann's (Abelmann 2001) description of a successful middle class woman's nostalgia for what she remembers as the simpler and purer Korea of her youth.

1.6 But Yongsu's Mother's advocacy of the bunch of bananas was no less moral and emotional than her interlocutor's. She also positions herself in relation to the past, but in a different way. She had known extreme hunger and poverty during the Korean War and its aftermath<sup>2</sup> and speaks of the comforts of her present life with a mingling of pride and wonder, "Could I ever have imagined myself living the way I do now?" She, and others like her, those who knew not merely the relative deprivations of underdevelopment but bitter, bitter poverty, seldom romanticize the vanished Korea of their childhoods. It is thoroughly consistent with her worldview and experience that filial children should want to share the sweet taste of imported bananas with ancestors who once ate coarse barley and millet.

1.7 Contemporary Korean life—at least until the economic crisis of 1997—was replete with a contradictory disdain and celebration of consumption. Foreign goods harm Korea, so everyone says, but the sheer abundance of suspect objects is simultaneously a measure of national accomplishment. This paradox, which can make even simple purchases moral and patriotic choices, is the subject of Laura Nelson's recent ethnography. When my own interlocutors expressed dismay over particularly shocking instances of consumption—and people seemed to love talking about it—I could not but suspect that they relished the notion of Korea as a place where such shocking things were possible and maybe even within one's own reach. Post-war deprivation followed by years of government-ordained austerity, "no rice" days and restrictions on foreign goods--tantalizingly present for some through the back door of American military bases—had given way, seemingly overnight, to a flowering of shopping malls and top line label recognition.

1.8 To some degree, the Korean consumer's paradox recalls a Euro-American experience where, by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, new patterns of intensive market consumption, made possible by successful industrialization and changes in merchandising, had confounded the disciplined and restrained Protestant Ethic with its own entrepreneurial success (Felski 1995; Miller 1987:147). Social historian Nancy Cott notes how the growth of the market posed a particular problem for Protestant Christian Americans who had long equated "worldliness" with carnal sin (Cott 1977). Ironically, notions of selling as seduction, and consumption as the satisfaction of lust have been used to good effect in marketing, as students of popular culture are constantly reminding us ( Felski 1995; Ross, 1983; Williamson, 1986).

1.9 The sexual sell is also evident in 1990s Korea, but it is generally regarded as a new thing, a side effect of democratization, a novel response to the lifting of censorship. The moral disapprobation surrounding getting and spending comes from a more generalized disdain for craving, appetite, and naked ambition as a contradiction of both Buddhist salvation and Confucian injunctions to balance and moderation and it is mediated by a specific local history. Laura Nelson suggests

that the particular disapprobation cast upon consumption in general and the consumption of foreign goods in particular is the product of specific strategies of national development, ideologically committed to “self reliance” but practically export-oriented, dependent upon certain critical imported goods and favorable trading conditions in global markets such that when the Republic of Korea became a successful player, it was forced to open its markets to foreign goods. (Nelson 2000).

1.10 Between them, Yongsu’s Mother and her client’s husband, arguing across their contemporary Korean moment, manage to capture both sides of the discussion in a now significant body of anthropological and related writing about consumption as a cultural phenomenon. The client’s husband might side with those who see the consumption of foreign goods as symptomatic of the homogenizing influence of the global marketplace, an assault on the social and cultural meanings previously embodied in local goods, a prompt to diverse and sometimes unpredictable forms of resistance (Comaroff and Comaroff 1990; Pred and Watts 1992; Williamson 1986). Yongsu’s Mother stands with those theorists, most particularly Daniel Miller, who see consumption as constitutive of local culture as who celebrate the creative potential of local culture to appropriate goods from out there and reinscribe them with local significance and meaning (Howes 1996; Miller 1994; Miller 1995; Thomas 1991).<sup>3</sup> And well might Yongsu’s Mother side with those who see culture as a creative bricolage. Yongsu’s Mother is a shaman; it is her business to make sense of things from “out there.”

## 2. New visions

2.1 Anthropologists who study shamans are reaching a new understanding of this broadly comparable phenomenon. Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer in Siberia (Balzer 1993; Balzer 1996), Caroline Humphrey in Buriatia (Humphrey 1999), and Marina Roseman (Roseman 1998) and Carol Laderman (Laderman 1997) in Malaysia, and myself in Korea (Kendall 1996b) have all described shamans as highly innovative practitioners who adapt contemporary imagery into rituals aimed at addressing contemporary concerns. This is perfectly consistent with what shamans are supposed to do, report from “out there,” either by recounting their adventures of magical flight or by invoking the spirits and manifesting them through their own bodies. Korean shamans--the *mudang*, *mansin*, or *posal*--transmit dreams, visions, and intuitions in the persona of gods and ancestors as inspired words and formulaic phrases pour from their mouths. Gods once associated with the prosperity of family farms and feted after the harvest are now solidly entrenched in the world of family enterprise. Through the mouths of shamans, they proclaim an active presence as “the Spirit Warrior of Business, the Spirit Warrior of Commerce, the Electrician’s Spirit Warrior” (*Changsa Sinjang*, *Yongop Sinjang*, *Chonopkisul Sinjang*). The kings and generals, princesses, and Buddhas who appear in antique dress inhabit a landscape where references to raising a multi-story *pilding*--they have borrowed the English word--are hyperbolic prognostications of good fortune for more modest investments, such as foretold my own household’s successful purchase of a small co-op apartment in New York, a failed factory owner’s financial recovery, and a bar girl’s future prospects for a bar of her own.

## 3. Goods in the shaman world

3.1 But if Youngsu’s Mother’s practices are a fluid domain while her client’s

husband invokes the fixed texts of a ritual manual, both are in agreement that offering apples, pears, or bananas to the ancestors is the expression of a relationship with the ancestors, (although they might disagree about the form and precise substance of that relationship). Both might accept a long tradition in anthropological writing that regards things as more than things. Anthropologists from Marcel Mauss (Mauss 1969) to Arjun Appadurai (Appadurai 1986) have asserted that objects are embedded in social relationships and that transactions in things convey multiple meanings. Appadurai, in particular, focuses our attention upon shifting contexts of significance as objects move from one domain of experience to another. Appadurai has also been credited with bringing the mass produced commodity into the domain of anthropologically significant goods (Miller 1995). Mary Douglas (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992a, xxii; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992b, 151; Comaroff and Comaroff 1990; Douglas and Isherwood 1979), and others remind us that material objects, even the most ordinary sort, can be encoded with moral and emotional significance. In Janet Hoskin's (1998) ethnography, a green bottle becomes a "biographical object" evoked in the funeral of a young woman to suggest perishability without renewal. In Daniel Miller's (Miller 1998) recent work, the booty of a weekend shopping expedition comes home invested with love.

3.2 Korean shamanic practices assume that favorable interactions between human and spirit are affirmed through transactions in tangible goods: food, liquor, clothing, and cash. All shaman rituals, both simple and elaborate, require offerings of rice, fruit, alcohol, and mountain herbs, candles, incense and cash displayed face up along the altar. More elaborate rituals require meat and large steamers of rice cake to feast the deities. Clients are sometimes called upon to make gifts to the gods in the form of costumes and equipment bestowed upon the shaman and kept in her shrine. When Korean shamans perform *kut*, the appearance of multiple spirits is marked by multiple changes of bright and often spectacularly spangled clothing. Each costume is an offering, either from a client who has a particular relationship with a particular category of spirit or from the shaman herself who has been advised to make this gift through a dream or vision granted by her spirits. Even newly-made and newly-dedicated costumes are thus artifacts of a reconstructed history in which a remembered or very distant ancestor "carried a sword and served in the palace," "was a destined shaman," or "zealously honored the Seven Star Spirits" and as a consequence, has sufficient spiritual power to be transformed into a minor deity (Kendall 1985, Ch.4, 6). An experienced shaman may thus have multiple robes for several spirits. When she performs an annual ritual for her own gods and ancestors and her community of clients, she will bundle on several layers of the same robe to bestow blessings on multiple clients and also, less explicitly, to advertise that her spirits are powerful spirits who have brought her much business.

3.3 The elaborateness of the shaman's shrine accoutrements—offering bowls, incense burners, candlesticks, and decorations—are similar indications of a successful practice, evidence of efficacious gods and satisfied clients who have been advised to provide these things on the basis of the shaman's dreams and visions. By a similar logic, experienced and successful *mansin* usually flaunt a great deal of jewelry in real gold and gem stones. Powerful gods bring the shaman business. Potent gods demand offerings, cash, and clothing, and potent gods are efficacious on behalf of clients and shamans.

3.4 Should these transactions between humans and gods be characterized as “gifts,” “fees,” or “bribes?” An attempt to make such distinctions in a Korean context is as clumsy and unsatisfying as the anthropologist’s old dichotomization between “gifts” and “commodities.” (Appadurai 1986). These are simply not distinctive and mutually exclusive categories. The giving of goods and cash to spirits is modeled upon similarly ambiguous transactions with powerful and influential beings in the everyday Korean world. Offerings are “gifts” insofar as they are a ritualized affirmation of an enduring relationship—in this instance, a relationship with gods and ancestors. Offerings to the gods—who are often portrayed in the guise of high officials—also have the quality of “fees” or “bribes” insofar as the relationship is asymmetrical and the gift is intended to nurture the recipient’s favorable regard to the giver’s future advantage.

3.5 This “spiritual materialism” is, of course, a troubling aspect of shamanic practice for modern rationalists, as many contemporary Koreans would define themselves. It is not “rational” to give material goods to non-material spirits. While pre-, colonial, and more than one post-colonial regime have attempted to suppress Korean shamans altogether, in recent years a number of self-styled professional associations have attempted to improve the social condition of shamans by reforming their practice (Kendall 1998).<sup>4</sup> A utilitarian impulse to “teach the shamans” not to make “wasteful” uses of offering food is almost always a part of the agenda. In the summer of 1994, my field assistant would never fail to point out the piles of offering food left to rot outside a shrine; a documentary on this theme was fresh in her mind. Bearing an awareness that this domain of activity is as problematic for some Koreans as it would have been for the Victorian fathers of the anthropology of religion, I shall attempt to situate the giving of goods to gods and ghosts within a frame of signifying practices and social experience.

#### 4. New things

4.1 The flowering of material life in late twentieth century Korea can be seen in the physical accoutrements of shamanic practice. Costumes are more elaborate. Some of the gauzy synthetic robes that were common in the 1970s have been replaced with fantastic satin creations studded with sequins. The offerings in the shrines reflect the spirits’ own changing tastes: a carton of Pringles, a small but expensive package of imported kiwi fruit, ornately dressed dolls in glass boxes. Child Gods (Tongja) are given large, cuddly stuffed animals, toy airplanes, and in more than one fantastically decorated shrine, a bubbling aquarium equipped with shifting colored lights (“To amuse them while I’m out working,” a shaman told me).

4.2 Like many of their flesh-and-blood counterparts, the spirits have a fondness for foreign goods. In a market stall that vends dried fish and confections used in ancestor rites and shaman ceremonies, I found bags of tiny Snickers bars such as Americans buy in anticipation of Halloween trick-or-treaters. “These are imported,” the proprietor chuckled. “These days, the Child Gods don’t like traditional sweets. This is what they want to eat.” New fashions for drink have also entered the spirit realm. I have seen my own contribution of Chivas Regal hold pride of place at the center of one shrine for a period of several years. When the Supernatural Official of a tiny bar appeared in a *kut*, he refused a cup of *makkoli*,

the traditional coarse fermented rice brew normally offered to this spirit, and insisted on drinking whiskey. A similar spirit, at another *kut*, was slow to take the proffered cup of *makkoli* and was accused of having developed a taste for beer. My own Supernatural Official, appearing in the person of Yongsu's Mother, dragged three whiskey bottles off of the altar but returned the one that had a Korean label on it.

4.3 Whisky replaces traditional, often home made or locally brewed coarse rice wine. In an older, agricultural Korea, *makkoli* was poured out for the household gods when offerings were made after the harvest. In the shamans' *kut*, the Supernatural Officials, the gods whose influence can make or break a family's fortunes, routinely carouse with cups of *makkoli*. Made from fermented rice, *makkoli* is associated with prosperity from the land, with rice as an old idiom of wealth and fertile abundance. Where the Supernatural Officials crave whiskey, they have left farming behind, become cosmopolitan in their tastes, and their influence on a family's good fortune extends to new realms of entrepreneurship and investment. The whiskey demanded by the bar proprietress's official was her very source of livelihood, at least potentially, a "biographical object" in Hoskins' sense (Hoskins 1998).

4.4 Oh yes, it provokes a smile when familiar commodities—the Snickers bars, Pringels, and Chivas Regal—appear in distant shaman shrines. But these things are more than playful decoration, more than merely status symbols, although of course, they are that as well. Not every shaman has access to duty free Chivas Regal courtesy of her own anthropologist. Perhaps I should think of myself as one more foreign commodity in the shrine. When kiwi fruit and Pringles are chosen from a Korean supermarket shelf and placed within a shrine, they become—with the other offering food--part of a transaction between human and spirit enacted within the frame of contemporary Korean life. In the remainder of the discussion, I will focus on some of the ways that contemporary consumer goods are deployed in ritual evocations of ancestors and gods. As we shall see, this play of gods and goods both resists and resonates with Korean discourses of consumption.

## 5. Ancestors, ghosts, and goods

5.1 In the Korean shaman world, ancestral manifestations articulate longing and craving, longing for those left behind and craving for the pleasures they missed while in this world. The Buddhist notion that emotional bonds hold souls back from release and salvation, causing them to wander in pain, is braided with the Confucian obligation of the living to succor the dead. Parents who died young constantly remind their children that in life, they worked hard and had scant opportunity to enjoy themselves. In the sometimes wrenching, sometimes humorous dramas of ancestral manifestation performed by shamans in *kut*, living kin are called upon to provide the dead with gifts of food, drink, clothing, and "travel money." The expressions of grief and recrimination that the dead level at the living are resolved when the dead finally accept these tokens of obligation and expresses their gratitude. The living have, for a time at least, made peace with old ghosts.

5.2 In contemporary *kut*, many meetings between the living and the dead occur in a borderland between the impoverished past and the thoroughly commoditized present. Sometimes these encounters are painful, as when a long-dead child

accuses, “You didn’t buy me medicine,” and someone answers, “We didn’t have any medicine back then.” Sometimes the gesture is more playful, “Give the old man a bottle of *Baccus* tonic, he couldn’t enjoy *Baccus* back when he was alive,” and the little brown bottle of popular pick-me-up is given over to the ancestor. Often, the dead will tug on their relatives’ clothing, insisting that they were never able to wear such fine fabric when they were alive. One dead mother-in-law, noting the fine quality of her daughter-in-law’s blouse, asked “Did it cost a million won?” “No, only five thousand” (a bargain), her son chuckled. Another dead mother-in-law asked for a ramie cloth jacket such as she had never been able to wear in her lifetime. Manufactured ramie cloth was fashionable and cheap in the summer of 1994, a revival of older tastes, but in the past, it had been hand-loomed and expensive. Now it was available in inexpensive factory-made garments; nearly everyone could wear it. Judith Williamson’s (1986: 12) characterization of the commodity as an object of “congealed longing” takes on added poignancy here, where longing is not only “congealed” but also “entombed.”

5.3 Recent ancestral encounters provide at least two different takes on contemporary life. On the one hand, the dead remind the living of the distance between hard times and this time, a better time. They play to an often-recounted Korean story about hard work, struggle, and hard-earned rewards. But by mapping desires for contemporary consumer goods onto older notions of hungry souls who are never completely satisfied, who reappear in subsequent rituals through the duration of living memory, the play of the dead also becomes a dramatization of desire within the frame of capitalist consumption. None of us, living or dead, will ever be satisfied with what we have. The market would not have it so. The economy would grind to a halt. Consumer societies tantalize us with the relentless possibility of newer, better products, and we are all hungry ghosts.

5.4 And some have more reason for dissatisfaction than others. The inflated Korean real estate market of recent years (Nelson 1996b, Thomas, 1993), the high cost of preparing a child to pass the all-important college entrance examinations (Cho 1995), and the constant visual display of seemingly boundless and very expensive things to buy have brought with them an uncomfortable awareness of those who have been left behind. The “have-nots” are sometimes seen as objects of pity, sometimes as having an ominous potential for social unrest. Their frustrations are akin to those of the unsettled dead.<sup>5</sup>

## 6. Divine appetites

6.1 The gods’ appetites are another matter, not a plaintive, dependent cry of longing but a boundless, authoritative demand, an expression of “greed” or “rapacious appetite,” called *yoksim* in Korean. The Supernatural Official’s appetite is exhibited in *kut* as a Rabelasian comedy of excess. Routinely contemptuous of the heaps of meat, rice cake, and offering food that have been set out for him, he smears meat grease on client faces, demands musicians and sometimes dancing partners, and shows his lust by thrusting dried fish and other stiff, straight objects at the client. Cold cash is an important prop, as the Official extorts 10,000 w n bills from the usually giggling client, decorating his cheeks, chin, forehead, and waistband with money. The gods’ demands are a measure of their power, the potentially dangerous energies that can also be turned to the benefit of their clients. “Give me more,” says the Supernatural Official. “First make me rich,” says the

client.

6.2 Within the logic of shamanic performance, great piles of money inspire the shamans to make robust manifestations of the gods who cackle with pleasure and dance and sing. When I sponsored a kut, my former landlady and fictive mother was concerned—knowing my academic frugality—that I would not make an appropriately lavish display. She offered to lend me money. The gods' appetite is a measure of the shaman's power. Not only her lavishly fitted shrine, but the rings that twinkle from her fingers testify to the popularity of a particular shaman, the success of her gods in satisfying client wishes. Shamans, the bearers of demanding gods, are themselves stereotypically avaricious. When a shaman, in the persona of a Supernatural Official, addresses a client's prayers for wealth with the statement, "Your greed is even greater than my own," a three-way conflation of purpose is suggested. They are all in this together, the client too. The ambitions that drive gods, shamans, and clients, the ambitions that drove the Korean economy, are reduced to comic play.

6.3 But a morality play, it is not. If the mood of ancestral encounters is lachrymose, that of the Official's play is ebullient. The gods cackle, first with disdain and then with pleasure. Yoksim is not an admirable quality, but its satisfaction can be very pleasant for gods and humans alike. This is, after all, the contradiction at the heart of most consumption discourses, all over the world. Excessive consumption is routinely condemned and, simultaneously, desired, desired and consequently condemned. As Michael Taussig would have it, the coherence and equilibrium of the social world is perpetually traumatized by the thrill of "giving and spending for the hell of it" (Taussig 1995: 392).

## 7. Discussion

7.1 I have presented Korean shamanic practice as a domain of "creative imagination," in Raymond Williams' terms, a space where the dominant system fails to reduce all experience into instrumentality and all things into commodities" (Williams 1977 : 151). The view from the Korean shaman world is not a simple "reflection" of new tastes and fashions. New material, grafted onto older forms of belief and practice, becomes the substance of dramas of ambivalence, a site for both the celebration and satire of consumption, a paradox that many Koreans live with every day. This is possible, in part, because the Korean shamanic ritual encourages the expression of emotion, and wry humor, in part because this domain is fluid, adaptable, and consequently open to new material, and in part, because interactions between human and spirit, as extensions of relationships between humans, are grounded in transactions in literal material goods. The spirits' own changing tastes are testimony to their presence and agency in the mundane world. They, in effect, are us.

7.2 We can return now to the argument between the shaman and her client who became stand-ins for those practitioners of cultural studies who would argue for the inevitability of "some overt or covert form of symbolic contestation" against global market forces (Pred and Watts 1992) versus those who celebrate the appropriative potential of commodities. At first blush, the Korean shaman material would favor an appropriative interpretation, following the work of Daniel Miller and others who have shown how global goods, like the Chivas Regal offered to the Supernatural Official, are localized within specific social and historical contexts,

vested with new meanings, and become the very stuff of local culture (Miller 1994). Yes, we can see something of all of this in the shaman's shrine. The things themselves have been taken over, set at play, used as props in dramas about the desire for things. But let us not forget the contradictory ground on which these dramas unfold. Greedy gods and hungry ancestors make trouble; this is the expressed motive for holding a *kut*. They demand satisfaction, their demands are bothersome if not dangerous, and satisfaction is a temporary state. It is precisely because shamans are so adept at deploying things, at bringing new commodities into the very substance of transactions with the spirit world that Korean *mansin* are capable of simultaneously mocking both anti-consumption discourses and the act of consumption per se, offering their own apt commentary on a confusing moment in time.

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<sup>1</sup> Because this text will be “read” on Microsoft 97, I have removed or attempted to remove all diacritical marks from standard McCune Reischauer romanizations. I apologize for the resulting confusion which is an artifact of electronic incompatibility and my own middle-aged resistance to breaking with the habits of a lifetime and adopting the new system.

<sup>2</sup> The remembered hardships of her early life are a significant part of her personal narrative as presented in *The Life and Hard Times of a Korean Shaman* (Kendall 1988).

<sup>3</sup> These are not irreconcilable positions. Jean Comaroff’s has illuminated how the clothing of colonial subject in store-bought goods went hand in hand with the thorough transformation of the Southern Tswana into a rural “peasanteriat.” At the same time, rural Tswana women developed a distinctive style of dress that signified both limited dependency on the market and ethnic distinction (Comaroff 1996).

<sup>4</sup> As I have described in another place, campaigns enjoining “rational” and “wholesome” rituals that respecting economies of both time and money have been a part of Korean life for much of the twentieth century (Kendall 1996a) **Ch 3.**