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Shakespeare and Shamanism

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Honors Project

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Introduction

“This above all: to thine own self be true,” (*Hamlet* 1.3.78). Simple advice yet difficult to follow in the vastly connected world of the present. Influences stem from everywhere as the planet shifts towards a homogenous global culture. When artists create, it is unlikely that their work bares no mark of outside inspiration. Sometimes the mark is meant to be obvious though, and the combination of multiple influences is what creates the unique. South Korean adaptations of Shakespeare do just that by combining early modern English texts with East Asian culture. The mere translating of the texts into Korean would suffice as a cross cultural adaptation but that is not the route directors choose to take. Instead, there is a considerate appeal to adding elements of shamanism into the plays. Shamanism is the oldest spiritual practice in Korea with trails and traditions leading into the present day, but why include it in South Korean Shakespeare adaptations? What connection is there between shamanism and Shakespeare?

Shakespeare’s original plays are decorated with Christian allusions; characters often paraphrase Bible verses or reference its popular stories. This inherent religious aspect could be what ties shamanist adaptations and Shakespeare together. To find out, one must analyze shamanism’s role in Korea, the Korean Shakespeare adaptations, and religion in Shakespeare itself. Director Yang Jung-Ung and his theatre company, Yohangza, serve as a reputable source for adaptations being invited to various Shakespeare festivals and world arts centers across the globe including Shakespeare’s Globe.¹ In terms of which plays to examine though, it is best to choose those belonging to different genres with popular acclaim in order to ensure a broad scope and numerous resources. *Hamlet* is one of Shakespeare’s most well-known tragedies and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is an iconic comedy, so these two will suffice. Comparing director

¹ The troupe’s website lists their credits as Australia, Cuba, Germany, Poland, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taipei and the United Kingdom.

Yang Jung-Ung's adaptations of *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'s and their South Korean shamanism background alongside the original Shakespearian texts can reveal how the appearance of shamanism in his adaptations has a connection to the appearance of religion in Shakespeare's plays. This will ultimately point to the function of shamanism in Korean Shakespeare adaptations and why adaptors choose to include it. While Yang cannot stand for all Korean adaptors, his work nonetheless suggests that there is an interconnected web of reasons driving adaptors to take on Shakespeare's plays: Shakespeare's plays are inherently relatable to a Korean context and also allow Koreans to establish their own image via shamanism then present that image to the world.

Shamanism in Korea

Shamanism, particularly in a Korean context, might be an unfamiliar subject to those outside of Korea, so it is best to go over its features. Shamanism, or *musok* as it is called in Korean, is Korea's oldest indigenous spiritual practice, and while shamanism itself exists in different cultures across the globe with different variations, all forms have the same three central tenets according to theologian Margaret Stutley. The first is a belief that the world is full of spirits that can interact with humans' lives, and the shaman acts as a liaison between the spirits and humans (2). Contrasting to present day Christianity, there is no central god assigning meaning or guiding humanity in shamanism, nor does man go to another realm such as Heaven or Hell upon death. Korean shamanistic beliefs suppose that man remains a part of the earthly realm after he dies because man was born out of this earth to begin with (Hahm 60-61). Since living beings do not go anywhere after they die, the world is full of spirits and these spirits do not sit by idly. If they have a vendetta, someone is in trouble. As Hahm describes, "the dead are thought to be able

to mobilize the forces of nature in order to exact revenge,” but they are not the only ones able to wreak havoc (70). Other nonhuman spirits, such as the mischievous nature goblins *dokkaebi* who inhabit inanimate objects, can prey on humans either out of vengeance or just for entertainment. With so many spirits floating around or hiding in discreet objects, there is a high probability of one getting irritated and enacting damage on human life, so villages need some way to appease them. Enter the shaman. Shamans in Korea are predominantly female and are referred to as *mudang*. Someone can become a *mudang* one of two ways: *gangshinmu* in which the person undergoes a mystical experience or prolonged illness caused by a spirit; and *seseummu* in which being a *mudang* is matrilineal. As the first way of becoming a *mudang* emphasizes, shamans must have a connection to the spirits and be able to communicate with them. This ability makes her a community’s diplomat to the spirits and allows her to find solutions to their problems.

Communicating with the spirits to find out what is upsetting them leads into Stutley’s second and third defining characteristics of shamanism. The second characteristic requires that the shaman’s spirit be able to transcend into the mystic realm through the use of singing, dancing, and drumming to induce a trance (2). In Korea, a *mudang* transcends into the spirit realm through a ritual called *gut*. *Gut* is ultimately what Stutley outlines above, a combination of singing, dancing, and musical performance around the shaman which allows spirits to take control of her body and speak through her. The staging for a *gut* is often quite simple needing only an open space to lay down reed mats and an accompanying percussionist to perform. The costuming is where it becomes elaborate, though. *Mudangs* wear layers of tent style dresses and jackets with hanging sleeves brushing the floor all colored in vibrant primary colors with accents of embroidered designs. As for accessories, there are stovepipe hats with flat, wide brims, simple conical hoods, cloth banners, folding fans, and swords with tassels hanging off their hilt. The

styling of the outfit and objects change depending upon with which spirit the *mudang* is trying to communicate. While *gut* may be performed to appease the spirits, it can also be done to aid in transitioning a deceased into the spirit realm, to heal someone who is mentally ill, or to simply ask for blessings (“Shamanism in Korea”). The definitive goal of a *gut* is to set the participants at ease and lessen worrying about their problem. In this way, the *mudang* acts as a counselor to the community, aiding in psychosomatic concerns, Stutley’s final measurement for shamanism (2). Thus, shamans in Korea form an integral part of the community as they mediate between the plethora of spirits and the worried humans to appease any discrepancies and set the participants of *gut* at peace.

With the rise of modernization and disintegration of villages for skyscraper cities, shamanism was likely to slip into the background of Korean culture, yet it remains an active part of Korean life. While the country has shifted towards Christianity and away from a shamanistic world-view due to its perceived inability to address modern day challenges, as Hahm describes, *gut* and other shamanistic rituals are still common practice even amongst the most modern individuals (94). For example, the cast and crew of the 2018 Korean dramas *Mr. Sunshine* and *Hide and Seek* initiated their filming by holding a *gosa*, or blessing ceremony, in which money is placed inside a decapitated pig’s head then offered to the spirits in return for success. So, despite *gut*’s less than contemporary principles, “[it] is now viewed as a communal experience unique to Koreans,” (Kim 280). Amid rapid globalization, Koreans have developed a sense of pride in their ancient shamanistic heritage.

This unique heritage can be turned into a cultural commodity, according to Seo, and used as a marketing tool for the country as it presents itself on the global stage. South Korea has been expanding its cultural content industry over the last few decades via government funding and the

creation of the Korea Creative Contents Agency (KOCCA). The Culture content industry is the development of products which aim to have economic value whilst embodying a cultural element, such as way of life, mythology, and historical records (Seo 81). The KOCCA outlined five archetypes available for cultural content production: 1) Traditional ethics and values 2) Prominent historical personas 3) Historical events 4) Fairy tales, legends, and literature, and 5) Special inanimate objects. However, Seo notes that shamanism appears a minimal facet of the cultural content industry as it does not even have its own category. This is especially surprising given the rampant popularity of shamanistic archetypes in non-Korean films, such as James Cameron's *Avatar* and the Harry Potter franchise, where protagonists journeys into realms of the supernatural in an attempt to save mankind (82, 89-90). Shamanism can provide Korea with a valuable cultural commodity on the global stage should they choose to use it.

Korean Shakespeare adaptors have not been shy about using it on their stages, though. Director Yang Jung-Ung and his theatre company, Yohangza, stand as an example. Founded in 1997, Yohangza means "voyager" as Yang directs the troupe to experimental grounds in "an exciting collision of the past and the present: a reworking of existing Korean styles and themes infused with contemporary elements," according to the company's website. Yang's adaptations of Shakespeare have earned him a place on the Globe stage in London, and his *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are of particular note for their use of traditional Korean culture. Before one can understand Yang's use of shamanism in his plays and how it relates to Shakespeare though, one must understand the connection between Shakespeare and the role of Christianity in his plays.

Christianity in Elizabethan England

Early modern England was a time of religious unrest. With the church and state jointly connected, each new ruler brought new religious turmoil. Beginning with Henry VIII's split from the Church in Rome, England's dominant religion danced between Catholicism and Protestantism from 1533 to 1558 (Wood 222). Henry's son favored reformation, but his elder half-sister, Mary, was Catholic. After both spent a short time on the throne, Elizabeth I took over and reverted back to Protestant views to govern England (Hopkins 130). "Elizabeth's policies stressed outward conformity of religion, or at least absence of obvious nonconformity. People were required to attend church each Sunday" (Forgeng 28). Catholics thus were coerced into conversion and viewed as enemies of the state. Government agents were even planted inside Catholic households to monitor their actions (Preedy 166). James I followed Elizabeth's stance and saw more opposition from non-Protestants. His organization of the Hampton Court Conference in 1604 and attempt to appease the varying dominations created the King James Bible but did nothing to stop the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 in which dissatisfied Catholics sought to blow up Parliament upon the king's visit and end the government's persecution of Catholics. While the plot was a failure, it succeeded in furthering the tension between the Protestant state and Catholic followers (McDonald 317-318). Religious unrest was a dominant theme of early modern England and left Christianity in the foreground of citizens minds.

Christianity in Shakespeare

Shakespeare could not have been ignorant of Christian teachings. Like other English citizens, Shakespeare would have been required to attend church every Sunday and he likely had a copy of the Bible to read at home (Hamlin 9). His familiarity with Christian texts likely began

when he was young, though, as biblical readings could have been a part of his grammar school curriculum. Biblical scenes were also popular at the time from depictions on painted cloths and panels to knife sheaths. Ballads based on Bible stories were also popular as entertainment (22-29). The church's structure further made it easy for congregations to memorize passages, or at least recognize them, and Psalms is the prime example of this. The book was regularly recited "according to a set calendar, with the entire book being completed each month," (14, 16). The proliferation of Biblical literature and hearing the text read each Sunday would have thus tuned audience's ears to its diction and Shakespeare kept this in mind while writing his plays. It is no coincidence that the repeatedly read Psalms is also the most referenced biblical book in Shakespeare's plays. He filled his work with allusions to Christian stories and texts "primarily because it was a vast, readily available storehouse of powerful stories, characters, and language that everyone knew," (17, 41, 123). He wanted his audience to understand nuances in his work and Christianity provided means to do that.

Examples of Christianity in *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are widespread. The most obvious and maybe most famous is Bottom's misquoting of 1 Corinthians in the fourth act of *Dream*: "The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report," (4.1.211-13). The majority of Bible versions at the time read "The eye hath not scene, and the eare hath not heard, neither haue entered into the heart of man,"² but Bottom regularly mixes up the senses so the line adds to his comic nature as the audience would have recognize his bumbled attempt at scripture (Shaheen 151). *Hamlet* may have the most biblical allusions out of all Shakespeare's plays. One such example comes in Act 2 of the play while Hamlet is talking to Polonius. Hamlet refers to the

² The Geneva and Tomson versions are the exception reading "The things which eie hath not seene, neither eare hath heard, neither came into mans heart."

older man saying “O Jephthah, judge of Israel...” The story of Jephthah appears in the book of Judges 11:30-40. It is about a judge of Israel who promises that if God grants him victory in battle, he would sacrifice the first person who greets him when he returns home. The first person to greet him happens to be his daughter, but he follows through with his promise. Hamlet calling Polonius “Jephthah” is of particular note since Polonius is the father of Hamlet’s love interest Ophelia, foreshadowing that Polonius’s ambition and involvement at court will ultimately lead to his daughter’s downfall (Shaheen 546). *Hamlet* also demonstrates how Shakespeare matched scripture’s structure to suit his audiences’ ear like in the line “O shame, where is they blush,” alluding to “O death, where is thy sting? O graue, where is they victorie?” in 1 Corinthians 15:55, a common verse during burial services (3.4.81; Shaheen 553). Shakespeare knew his audience and their religious background so he used it to his advantage when writing his plays. With this understanding now in place, one can open up Yang’s plays and explore his use of shamanism in the adaptations and understand how he utilizes the spiritual practice in a similar way Shakespeare utilized Christianity.

Hamlet

Yang is not alone in his adaptation style of *Hamlet* by including shamanism. All *Hamlet* productions in Korea between 1990 and 2008, about 45 in total, stage shaman rituals usually with Ophelia as a *mudang* and representative of traditional Korean women. Often times though, the whole production itself is a shamanistic ritual (Lee 105-106, 115). Yang seems to follow the later of these two as the stage of his *Hamlet* is no more than reed mats atop a bed of sand, emulating an outside community gathering around a *gut*. Off to the side of the mats is an accompanying chorus of Korean drums and cymbals who commence the start of the show with

flashing lights in a thunderous affect that calls the audience into a frenzied state much like a shaman in *gut*. An explicit *gut* takes place soon after the start of the play though as a memorial service for the late King Hamlet occurs. After Claudius and Gertrude bow in remembrance then exit, four *mudangs*, marked by their traditional clothes, enter the scene with Horatio to comfort the grieving Hamlet with a song. “Poor soul, poor soul,” they sing. “We part for good. You are no longer of this world.” However, the late king can still interact with this world via the *mundangs* and “the dearly departed comes for a visit,” as the priestesses spin across the stage before stopping to tower behind Hamlet and chanting “I’m here. I’m here. Today I borrow this shaman’s body and lips to finally come see you,” (Yang 00:03:42-00:05:23). The possessed shamans tell Hamlet how his father died and take the place of the king’s ghost walking the ramparts in the original play.

A similar occurrence happens at Ophelia’s funeral as well. As Hamlet is contemplating Yorick’s skull, the wavering voice of a *mudang* comes in calling to Ophelia’s departed soul, “listen if you can hear me...rise and come back to us,” (Yang 01:26:28-01:27:01). A short candlelit procession enters and once everyone is in place, Ophelia speaks through the shaman. She asks her brother, Laertes, why he did not come home to her, why he left her in a lonely state after their father’s death, before apologizing for leaving him alone now too. A bundle of fabric is placed into a metal cauldron and set on fire (Yang 01:30:57). What should be of note here is that while the shamans served a functional purpose in replacing the ghost and telling Hamlet the truth of his father’s death, the inclusion of *mudangs* in Ophelia’s burial is voluntary. The action could have proceeded with just the royal family and Laertes coming in to mourn thus causing Hamlet to react and leap out. Having the *mudang* speak as Ophelia does provides Laertes’s character some emotional relief but considering Ophelia’s ghost does not materialize anywhere in

Shakespeare's original play and he does not talk to spirit, their inclusion is again unnecessary and purely the result of creative freedom.

Yang employed this creative freedom at the conclusion of his play as well. Shakespeare's version ends with Fortinbras and his Norwegian troops storming the castle to find a room full of dead bodies and lonesome Horatio, but Yang completely ignores the Norwegian invasion subplot in the adaptation. So, with no Fortinbras to tie things up, how does he end his play? Shamans. Specifically, shamans performing a *gut*. In Yang's play, Hamlet gives his final line of "I die and the rest is silence" whilst Horatio holds him (01:53:30). There is a moment of silence then familiar chanting somewhere offstage. Horatio slowly stands as the percussion starts and more voices join in singing before four shamans walk on stage and perform around Hamlet. Thus, Yang employs *gut* three times in his performance and uses it to bookend his show.

Lee offers an explanation as to why adaptors like Yang include *gut* in *Hamlet*. Making up twenty percent of all Shakespeare performances in Korea, *Hamlet* is Korea's favorite play and this is because "there is some fellow-feeling between *Hamlet* and the Korean people," namely because of the shared feeling of *han* (Lee 105). *Han* is the ultimate Korean sentiment. It is a combination of unresolved resentment and grief that is said to run in the blood of all Koreans. The concept originated during Japanese colonial rule and is easy to understand in this context as a painful remembrance of the past. If *guts* can provide emotional cleansing and a chance to expel *han*, then employing it *Hamlet* allows the Korean audience to be exorcised alongside the title character (88). Modern Korean society's wish is for social unification, but in order to solve their divisions, they must acknowledge the painful fact that they have separated (124). Hamlet reflects this emotion as he struggles to come to terms with his father's death and the hatred he feels towards Claudius. The final *gut* in Yang's play is thus symbolic of Hamlet finally releasing his

anguish. For other *gut*-filled *Hamlet* adaptations though, the final scene leaves the characters “withdrawn from the past but [facing] a present that is interwoven with a past they want to forget in a complex way,” (117). Like modern Korean society, they find themselves having to piece together a better tomorrow out of the broken shards of yesterday. Staging *Hamlet* as a *gut* for the audience though encourages Koreans to “let go of worldly agonies like Hamlet’s and leave the theatre in a freer spirit,” (123). Yang starting his show with a *gut* then ending with one suggests this is his intent as what the audience is watching is not two separate rituals but the opening and closing of a single ceremony with the story in between a part of the *gut* and an effort to console them. Lee’s connection of *Hamlet* and *gut* to *han* is important to consider when looking at Shakespeare and South Korean ties.

Gut’s appearance in Yang’s rendering of *The Mousetrap* presents another important point to consider. *The Mousetrap* is a play that Hamlet devises to gauge Claudius’s guilt and determine if he murdered his father. It is based on *The Murder of Gonzago*, a play that echoes the alleged events leading to the murder of Hamlet’s father. Thus, if Claudius reacts to the storyline, then he likely killed Hamlet’s father. Yang’s audience gets to see *The Mousetrap* acted out, as did the original Shakespeare audience, but Yang makes his version a spin on traditional *tal* drama. *Tal* means “mask” in Korean and their use proliferate Korea’s earliest forms of entertainment. While Yang does not have his players wear the wooden masks (most are considered historic relics) he none the less replicates their appearance through face paint. The most obvious is *Kaksi*, a white face with two red dots on the cheeks and one on the forehead representing a bride character. The wife character in Yang’s *Mousetrap* wears the same red dots on her white face. The *tal* drama reference is important when one considers that the origin of *tal* performance is *gut* as shamans might wear the mask of a spirit that they sought to contact. This is why Korean theatre critics

like Lee Yun-taek argue that *gut* is the origin of Korean theatre and all “Korean theatre should be seen as rooted in past traditions,” (Cho 56). Shamanism has an inherent connection to Korean drama and Yang’s rendition of *The Mousetrap* gives a nod to this. Yang gives an even bigger nod in his *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* production to delve deeper into the use of traditional Korean culture.

A Midsummer Night’s Dream

Dream is the opposite of *han*. It is a light-hearted comedy with an ending focusing on life through the lover’s marriages, rather than the death heavy bloodbath that is *Hamlet’s* closing scene. So, *guts* to expel grief need not take place in the play, but shamanism and *gut* still play a key role the adaptation. The main way Yang introduces traditional culture into the adaptation is through his characters and staging. Fairy king and queen Oberon and Titania, Puck, and the other accompanying sprites are replaced by the *dokkaebi* Dot, Gabi, and Duduri respectively.

Dokkaebi are goblin-like ghosts from Korean mythology, though the KOCCA’s definition suggests that *dokkaebi* “can refer to all unusual beings the Korean people believe to be scary or mysterious,” (Seo 98). Considering these spirits like to help humans one minute then play tricks on them the next, they are an uncanny force. Their infamous nature earns them a substantial spot in Korea’s cultural content industry, having their own website run by the KOCCA (Seo 98).

Throughout the play, the *dokkaebi* toy with the humans in the woods, mainly by making faces and gesturing at them while they have their backs turned, but they also point back to shamanism’s inherent connection to Korean theatre. Many of the actors are doubled casted so when they are not in their human role, they don a *tal* over the back of their head to signify the role switch while simultaneously referencing *gut* and the duality of shamans.

Yang's stage references other early Korean theatre forms as well. The director has commented that his stage "hints at being a *madang*, the stage of a traditional Korea theatre," (Cho 123). *Madang* translates to "yard" and helps explain what original Korean theatre was like. Similar to *gut*, it was held out in the open in a communal space. With no physical performance platform to create boundaries, the actors and audience are free to interact (Cho 35). Yang attempts a similar interaction in his *Dream* adaptation. In scene 2 of the performance, Dot (Oberon) calls out to audience as fellow *dokkaebi* and once he gets them to respond, proceeds to complain to them about his wife.

The yard setting combined with the masks and music can also be connected to *talchum*. As explained, *tal* means "mask". Combine this with the word *chum* meaning "dance" and one can quickly grasp what type of performance *talchum* is. Cho writes that Yang's dances directly draw from traditional *talchum* gestures and movements to use in performance. However, the moves are so "extracted out of their original contexts...[they] do not form genuine Korean dances," (Cho 118-119). No complete *talchum* dance is performed but rather an assortment of dances are stitched together with other connecting moves to create a Frankenstein-like choreography. No Korean audience member would be able to point out a traditional dance being referenced, Cho argues, but the performance would nonetheless be Korean. Yang's goal is not to copy the dances but to use them to inspire a performance embedded with a Korean feel and emotion (Cho 118-119). Placing "Koreaness" over traditional accuracy is significant to Yang's use of shamanism, and this will play a role in the coming section understanding Shakespeare's connection to shamanism.

Shakespeare and Shamanism

Yang is not using shamanism in its original context; he is using it in an adaptive form to suggest meaning, namely “Koreaness”. For Yang then, as Ingham argues, his use of shamanism is in line with the cultural content industry. He cites Young Joo-Choi saying, ““what differentiates Yang from his elders is that he adopts traditional culture without a historical or social consciousness. His purpose in adapting traditional culture into his style is not so much the implied interest in his nation, but an interest in aesthetic images that can transcend local languages and communicate directly with other cultures,”” (Ingham 12). Yang is not looking to duplicate shamanistic modes directly but rather use them to imply a Korean image, and this image is then used to appeal to a Korean audience.

If Yang is just going after a Korean image in his plays, why use shamanism to do so? It does not even have its own category for cultural content production outlined by the KOCCA and is minimally used by other content creators. Shakespeare’s use of religion holds the answer. Recall how Christianity and Bible verses are utilized in his plays. References are made because they provided familiar context to early modern English audiences. Shakespeare wanted his audience to understand his work and Christianity provided easy means to do that. As Hamlin summarizes Frye’s argument, “there is no Christian doctrine, *per se*, in Shakespeare, except insofar as he puts theological ideas or language into the mouths of his characters for the dramatic purposes of a play,” (69). A good example of this is how Shakespeare compares his characters to Christ. Because Christ is such a central figure in Christian doctrine, the audience could have quickly recognized when Shakespeare was setting up a sympathetic parallel or the more often used ironic contrast (Hamlin 71). Bible was a point of reference for original Shakespearian audiences because Christianity and its teachings were everywhere in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England.

While shamanism is not a state enforced religion, it is nonetheless imbued in modern Korean culture. As the oldest indigenous practice on the peninsula, its teachings have been with the nation since its foundation and carry on to today as *gosa* ceremonies show. Shamanism is not saturating Seoul, but is it still recognizable and resting in the background of people's minds like nursery rhymes taught to children. It is there in unconscious subtleties and Yang uses this knowledge to tap into a familiar context his audience will understand. The *dokkaebi* in *Dream* are an instance of this. A Korean audience would know that *dokkaebi* are mischievous beings and play tricks on humans before coming into the show, therefore Yang could set up their characters with little verbal explanation and even foreshadow to the play's events. The symbols he uses do not have to be direct as Shakespeare was not direct in his quoting. They just need to bear a Korean aesthetic and theme to convey the story to his audience.

Shakespeare and South Korea: Why Adapt?

Yang chooses to adapt Shakespeare in the same way he adapts shamanism. Shakespeare is a globally recognized source. Even Korean pop songs reference him.³ So, Shakespeare's plays are another source to draw from to tell stories. "...everybody knows somethings about Shakespeare," Cho writes, "...most of Korean theatregoers would know the story of a number of Shakespeare's plays. Therefore, the audiences would not go to the theatre to discover the story, rather, they would have expectations of what the performance could provide for them in terms of spectacle or fantasy," (71). Audience members would already be familiar with Shakespeare's

³ Upon writing, female singer Taeyeon released the track "Four Seasons" with the line "Like one of Shakespeare's plays/ it seems we have confronted what will be our last love." The music video has over nine million views as of April, 2019.

work and thus understand the traces of it in the adaptations. Shakespeare is thus a well-known vessel used to convey Yang's shamanistic display.

Cho's statement proposes another explanation as to why Yang chooses to adapt Shakespeare. The name "Shakespeare" entices audiences to watch, and spectators go just to discover how the story has been adapted. As Hutcheon suggests, one of the reasons as to why adaptors choose to adapt is economic lures (86). A safe way to ensure a monetary success is to cater to an audience's desires. As Cho suggests, audiences love to see familiar works reimaged. One needs not look further than the trend taking place at Disney Studios producing live action remakes of their most popular animated films as evidence of this. Due to their popularity, Shakespeare's works likewise have a high level of fecundity and longevity to spawn sturdy adaptations as a cultural meme (7). Combine this with themes in the plays easily relatable to a Korean context, as is the case with Hamlet and the sentiment of *han*, and it is almost a guaranteed success. Yang therefore uses Shakespeare to sell his content. Cho even suggests that Yang exploits Korea's traditional theatre to do the same thing and therein create "an exotic spectacle as a means of garnering international success," (127). While this downplays an inherent connection to religion in Shakespeare and shamanism in Yang's adaptations, the two playwrights nonetheless utilize the spiritual practices and context of their culture to tell their story in a way that the audience will comprehend its layered subtleties.

Cho's overall argument though is that Korean adaptations of Shakespeare are an attempt to assimilate the plays into Korean culture and create a uniquely Korean performance, blending a global story with local traditional (63). Korea is consequently not trying to mimic traditional Shakespeare performances but is seeking to establish it their own form. Their desire to stand apart can be rooted in the country's rapid economization and subsequent exposure to global

powers.⁴ “Korea designs beautiful frames for computers and IT products, which are stuffed with software developed and processed abroad, just translated into Korean,” Seo writes, stressing the installation of other countries presence into their nation (85). Seo perceives the boom in Korea’s cultural context industry as a way to balance out foreign content at mass in Korea. Hence, the use of shamanism in Shakespeare would function as a way to reestablish the nation’s presence against oversea involvement (Western theatre). Like a young adult coming out of adolescence, South Korea is trying establish itself and say “This is who I am” to the parent powers that have watched over it since the 1950s war. Yang’s target audience demonstrates this.

Yang is aiming for both a Korean and foreign audience with his plays. Using shamanism as Shakespeare did religion validates the Korean aspect; it is included because it something the audience knows. However, an international audience can still enjoy the adaptations. One could argue that the shamanism aspect of Yang’s adaption could be overlooked like the Christianity in Shakespeare’s plays since one does not need to understand the religious allusions in order to grasp the plot. Yohangza’s performance of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* at Shakespeare’s Globe in London delivers further insight.

Cho was present at the 2012 performance and gives a detailed recount of the event. Yang did not alter his adaption in anyway save for the addition of a few English lines. “[The actors] retained the same costumes, music, props and acting style. All the features of the production, including its engagement with the audience, were almost identical with those that I had attended before,” (129, 130). The audience engagement, a successor of *madang’s* open yard performance, though, was unfamiliar to the European audience. Foreign audiences might be made uncomfortable by performers’ playfulness as the 2012 Globe audience demonstrated with their

⁴ From 1962 to 1996, South Korea’s GNP per capita jumped from just \$87 USD to \$10,543 USD.

unreceptive attitude to catching florescent rings tossed by the performers during the opening act (123, 130). Having a partially Korean audience at the performance was also vital to translating the humorous moments of the play. “[The Korean audience members] obviously understood all the comic implications that could not be fully understood by the international audience,” Cho explains. “The laughter always began from the Koreans and then spread over the space,” (128-9). However, this could be a misinterpretation on Cho’s part for she later states that the English lines were strategically placed in comical scenes and calls the performance one of the best synthesis of actor and audience engagement despite blaring language barriers (129-30). Yang’s work is still entertaining to foreign audiences. Were it not, the Globe performance would not have been such a success. “Thus, it might be argued that Yohangza were successful in creating a unique experience that stood out from the shadow of Shakespeare’s text and presented a performance that was not only full of vitality, humour and innovative syntheses but could also communicate to audiences of all kinds – exactly what Yang had been aiming for,” (130). By targeting a Korean audience alongside a Western, Yang is not only establishing a Korean image via the shamanistic influence but also making others notice said image by enticing them in with Shakespeare. In the rising wave of culture content, South Korea is trying to hold its own as a global player, and their adaptation of Shakespeare reflects that. Shakespeare gives them a place alongside Western powers but instilling shamanism helps regenerate the Korean cultural identity by allowing them to remember and hold onto who they are.

Conclusion

There is no one reason as to why Korean play directors like Yang choose to adapt Shakespeare but rather there is an interconnected web of reasons driving adaptors to take on

Shakespeare's plays: Shakespeare's plays are inherently relatable to a Korean context and also allow Koreans to establish their own image via shamanism then present that image to the world. South Korean Shakespeare adaptations do this by combining early modern English texts with East Asian culture, specifically shamanism. Shamanism is the oldest spiritual practice in Korea with trails and traditions leading into the present day. At its core, it believes that the world is full of spirits that can interact with humans' lives, either helping them or hindering them. Shamans, or *mudang* in Korean, acts as the liaison between the spirits and humans to keep peace in a community. This is accomplished through a ritual called *gut* in which a *mudang* transcends into the spirit realm via dancing and music. *Gut* can be used to expel back luck or wish for good. With the rise of modernization and disintegration of villages for skyscraper cities though, shamanism was likely to slip into the background of Korean culture. Nevertheless, it remains an active part of Korean life particularly in relation to the modern cultural context industry. Korea can use the native practice as a way to sell its culture to foreign nations.

Christianity was likewise a cultural commodity in early modern England. From knife sheaths to painted cloths, scripture proliferated. Christianity at the time was not all pretty paintings though as religious unrest was a dominant theme due to protestants and Catholics continually fighting. In order to banish resistance, the state required citizens to attend church. Shakespeare would have been aware of this church culture for he was also forced to participated in it, and thus religion made a way into his plays. That is not to say that Shakespeare was preaching to his audience though. Putting biblical references into his plays allowed him to describe characters and situations to the audience in comfortably familiar terms.

Yang uses shamanism in the same way. Yang does not use shamanism in its original context as an extension of religious practice; he is using it in an adaptive form to suggest meaning,

namely “Koreaness”. He uses shamanism to tell his audience a message in familiar terms they might understand. Yang chooses to adapt Shakespeare in the same way he adapts shamanism. Shakespeare is a globally recognized source therefore Shakespeare’s plays are another source to draw from to tell stories. The name “Shakespeare” entices audiences to watch, and spectators go just to discover how a famous story has been adapted. As Hutcheon suggests, one of the driving reasons why adaptors choose to adapt is monetary based. A safe way to ensure a monetary success is to cater to an audience’s desires, such as seeing a classic reworked. Combine this with themes in the plays easily relatable to a local audience, like *han* in *Hamlet*, and it is almost a guaranteed success.

Cho insists though that Korean adaptations of Shakespeare are an attempt to assimilate the plays into the peninsula and create a uniquely Korean performance. Given Korea’s rise in global power, Seo perceives Korea’s cultural context industry as a way to balance out foreign content and Shakespeare adaptations could be a part of this. Yang’s work can be an example of this. The adaptor is not only establishing a Korean image via the shamanistic influence but also making others notice said image by enticing them in with Shakespeare. In the rising wave of culture content, South Korea is trying to hold its own as a global player, and their adaptation of Shakespeare reflects that. Shakespeare gives them a place alongside Western powers but instilling shamanism helps regenerate the Korean cultural identity by allowing them to remember and hold onto who they are.

The last seventy years have been a pivotal point in South Korea’s history. Divided from the north in 1953, the nation rose from scarcity to an economic contender distributing brands such as Samsung and LG overseas. The breakout success of K-pop over the past decade has only pulled Korea further into the world spotlight. With everyone looking and foreigners filtering in, the

landscape or modern Korean society is steadily changing. Much like the religious unrest in Early Modern England, South Korea is stuck between two ideologies: the native culture they know and the pressing global culture from abroad. It is a turmoil that almost every country faces; should they adapt to the global times or stay with their traditions? As in Korea's *Hamlet* adaptations, the country has moved forward from the painful past of war and hardship "but face a present that is interwoven with a past they want to forget in a complex way," (Lee 117). Though becoming an international participant will likely secure Korea's economic future, the nation's history will always be present in the background. Korean adaptors can try to present a comprehensive synthesis of this defining past mixed with modern influences, but they are only a small part of Korean culture. The coming years will tell how Korea will find themselves in this evolving space, and the world will be waiting to see what form they take.

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