

The Reflection of Shamanism in South Korean Television Series

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ABSTRACT: This study explores the representation of Korean shamanism in South Korean television series (K-dramas) and examines how these productions contribute to the preservation and promotion of shamanic traditions in the context of globalization. The research is based on the hypothesis that Korean shamanism has survived not only through those who still practice traditional rituals but also through mass media and new technologies, particularly K-dramas and online platforms, which have made these practices accessible to a global audience. To address the research questions, 40 South Korean dramas and films produced between 2010 and 2023 were selected and analyzed using thematic content analysis. The selection was based on the full viewing of each production, during which recurring scenes and themes related to Korean shamanism were identified. The findings reveal that shamanism is consistently and faithfully represented across a wide range of genres—including action, comedy, historical drama, fantasy, and family narratives. Regardless of release year, these series regularly depict traditional elements such as healing and funerary rituals, talismans, spirit interpretation, and exorcisms. As such, K-dramas play a significant role in preserving and popularizing Korean shamanic traditions for both domestic and international audiences.

KEYWORDS: K-drama; movie; media; Korean culture; spirituality; traditions; rituals.

TITLU: „Reflectarea șamanismului în seriile de televiziune sud-coreene”

REZUMAT: Această lucrare explorează reprezentarea șamanismului coreean în seriile de televiziune sud-coreene (k-drame) și analizează modul în care aceste producții contribuie la păstrarea și promovarea tradițiilor șamanice în contextul globalizării. Ipoteza de la care pornește studiul este că șamanismul coreean a supraviețuit nu doar prin intermediul celor care încă practică ritualurile tradiționale, ci și prin mass-media și noile tehnologii, în special k-dramele și mediul online, care au făcut aceste practici accesibile unui public internațional. Pentru a răspunde întrebărilor de cercetare, au fost selectate 40 de K-drame și filme sud-coreene, realizate între 2010 și 2023, care au fost analizate prin metoda analizei tematice de conținut. Selecția s-a bazat pe vizionarea integrală a acestor producții, identificând prezența unor secvențe sau teme recurente legate de șamanismul coreean. Rezultatele evidențiază o reprezentare a șamanismului în diverse genuri — de la acțiune și comedie, la drame istorice, fantastice și de familie. Indiferent de perioada de apariție, aceste seriale reflectă constant elemente tradiționale precum ritualuri de vindecare și funerare, talismane, dialoguri cu spiritele și practici de exorcizare. Astfel, k-dramele contribuie semnificativ la conservarea și diseminarea internațională a tradițiilor șamanice coreene.

CUVINTE-CHEIE: K-drama; film; media; cultura coreeană; spiritualitate; tradiții; ritualuri.

Introduction

For many viewers, K-dramas serve as a gateway to Korean popular culture, facilitating the global expansion of knowledge about South Korea (Choi 2015, 32). These television productions are distinguished by a large number of episodes and a wide variety of sub-genres, including historical epics, melodramas, family dramas, romantic comedies, medical dramas, crime series, action dramas, thrillers, horror, as well as fantasy and supernatural series (Miyose 2022, 2).

Over the past two decades, the popularity of K-dramas has increased significantly due to the Korean Wave (Hallyu) phenomenon, which has led to the expansion of Korean cultural consumption beyond the geographical and cultural boundaries of South Korea (The Korean Wave 2011, 12; Choi 2015, 31). Since the late 1990s, Hallyu has manifested in various fields, including gastronomy, language, fashion, tourism, and the beauty industry (Choi 2015, 32; Buja 2017, 248). This phenomenon has contributed

both to the promotion of ancestral traditions and to the emergence of new social trends (Suciu 2021, 105).

In general, younger generations tend to adopt modern subcultures at the expense of traditional practices. However, Korean shamanism has managed to maintain its relevance, becoming increasingly visible thanks to Hallyu, which has attracted Western students interested in both traditional and contemporary Korean culture (Stine 2015). Shamanic rituals are frequently depicted in K-dramas and Korean films, contributing to their preservation among young South Koreans and promoting this spiritual practice to an international audience.

Literature review

The origins of Korean shamanism cannot be precisely determined, but it is known that it existed in Korea as early as the Han dynasty period (Eliade 1997, 421).

Shamanism is a multi-deity religious practice characterized by a holistic and tolerant approach, where there is no rigid separation between divinity and humanity, good and evil, body and spirit. This belief system promotes equality between men and women, without imposing judgments on individuals based on their personal traits. Unlike organized religions, shamanism does not assume the existence of an omnipotent deity, nor does it have churches or a codified scripture. Within this practice, it is believed that human beings exist before their birth and remain an integral part of nature and the community even after death (Breen 2004, 47; Stine 2015). Therefore, life must be lived authentically, and each individual is encouraged to channel their energies toward meaningful experiences (Breen 2004, 47).

Shamanism does not follow a systematic philosophy or theology and does not incorporate concepts such as sin or the afterlife. The only certainty within this practice is the belief that an individual's destiny is not under their control but is instead determined by a supernatural force that influences their existential trajectory (Kim 2011, 106).

In Korean shamanistic tradition, it is believed that the spirits of ancestors, including former kings, generals, and other significant historical figures, influence an individual's fate and fortune. These spiritual entities must be honored through shamanic rituals in order to seek their support and blessing (Kim 2000, 116).

A fundamental belief in this spiritual system holds that the souls of the deceased retain characteristics similar to those of the living, experiencing sensations such as cold, hunger, or anger. For this reason, during shamanic ceremonies, food is offered to the spirits, which consume only the essence of the offerings as part of the ritual process of communication and alignment with the afterlife (Breen 2004, 46).

In Korean shamanistic tradition, spirits are divided into two main categories: benevolent spirits, associated with those who lived long lives and died naturally, and malevolent spirits or ghosts, originating from individuals who passed away in tragic circumstances, such as accidents or suicides (Lee 1984, 199). Among these, women who died unmarried are considered particularly dangerous, as they are believed to harbor a desire for revenge against the living (Breen 2004, 46).

Shamanic rituals, known as *gut/kut*, incorporate music, dance, and food offerings, aiming to fulfill desires such as prosperity, health, longevity, and, traditionally for men, the birth of male heirs. These aspirations are predominantly material, and shamanic practice is often associated with the capitalist tendencies of Korean society (Kim 2000, 118).

Shamanism has played a significant role in the development of capitalism in South Korea, encouraging individuals to put in continuous effort to secure material success. Unlike other spiritual beliefs that promote passive waiting for a miracle, Korean shamanism emphasizes that regardless of participation in a ceremony to seek assistance, one must work hard to achieve the desired results. This perspective instills perseverance in Koreans, reinforcing the conviction that they have done everything possible to ensure their success (Kim 2000, 118).

Shamanism continues to be an essential element of contemporary Korean society, being practiced and sought after in various situations such as tragedies, medical conditions, or difficult decision-making. In this sense, the role of the shaman can be compared to that of a consultant, similar to how Westerners turn to psychiatrists for guidance and clarification. Each Korean shaman builds their own pantheon of deities and spirits, some even including figures such as Jesus Christ, based on individual traditions and beliefs. However, those who seek the services of shamans do not show a deep interest in the identity of the invoked entities or the precise meaning of the rituals performed, focusing instead on their effectiveness (Tudor 2022, 34).

Religions that spread in Korea after shamanism had to adapt to it in order to be accepted in society. Buddhism, for example, integrated some shamanic deities, thus creating a syncretic religious system (Kim 2011, 102; Tudor 2022, 43). Conversely, shamans included Buddha statues in their sanctuaries, demonstrating that the fusion between the two traditions occurred in both directions, influencing Korea's religious and spiritual structure. By the time Confucianism entered the Korean peninsula, shamanism was already deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness, making it impossible to eradicate. Later, although official government ceremonies and ancestor worship were conducted according to Confucian principles and exclusively led by men, shamanism continued to be practiced in the households of ordinary Koreans, where it remained an authentic form of traditional religion (Lewis 2014, 9).

In Korean shamanic practice, women play a crucial role, honoring household deities and warding off malevolent entities through rituals. These ceremonies involve the presence of a shaman in a state of trance, accompanied by drumbeats, ritual bells, and an energetic atmosphere marked by lively celebrations. Additionally, the ritual may include moments of silence, solemn acts of reverence, and elements of asceticism (Stine 2015).

There are specific rituals for both men and women, with the majority of shamans being female. Although male shamans exist, they are less common and traditionally serve a female clientele. During *kut* rituals, male shamans wear women's clothing, except for trousers, which remain hidden beneath the skirt (Stine 2015).

Initiation into shamanism involves an intense process that begins with a traumatic possession illness, followed by an initiation rite and apprenticeship under an experienced shaman. This "shaman's illness" is not necessarily hereditary, and there have been cases of individuals raised in Catholicism who later became shamans. Initially, they resist supernatural manifestations—sometimes for years—but ultimately, accepting possession and undergoing the initiation ritual leads to healing from afflictions caused by this experience. Future shamans undergo extensive training, which can last several years (Stine 2015).

After initiation, shamans fulfill their role in the community by publicly performing songs, dances, and ritualistic acts that embody divine presence. In addition to *kut* ceremonies, they provide divination services and conduct various private rituals either in their own altars or in clients' homes. In some cases, shamans lead pilgrimages to sacred mountains, locations dedicated to spiritual interaction (Kendall 1987, 30; Stine 2015).

The understanding of Korean shamanism is incomplete without analyzing the relationship between shamans and the women in Korean households, who are the primary beneficiaries of these practices. Shamans act as specialists consulted for spiritual and ritual expertise, interpreting the will of deities and explaining the procedures necessary to maintain balance between the material and supernatural realms (Kendall 1987, 27).

The aesthetics of *kut*, the shamanic ceremony, along with elements of mythological folklore, are perceived as culturally specific traditions, promoted as expressions of Korean identity (Roibu and Roibu Crucianu 2017, 240).

Moreover, flexibility and pragmatism are perhaps among the most significant contributions of shamanism to Korea, enabling Koreans to readily embrace other beliefs, which has influenced the country's religious and cultural tolerance (Tudor 2022, 44-45).

Objectives and Research Questions

This study is based on the hypothesis that, in the context of globalization, Korean traditions, particularly shamanism, have survived both through practitioners who continue ancestral rituals and through mass media and digital technologies. K-dramas and online platforms have contributed to the promotion and accessibility of these practices worldwide.

Through this analysis, the study aims to examine how Korean shamanism is represented in South Korean television dramas (K-dramas). Thus, this research will address the following research questions:

RQ1: How is Korean shamanism portrayed in K-dramas and what elements are emphasized?

RQ2: In what ways does the representation of shamanism differ between historical and modern dramas?

RQ3: What are the cultural and social implications of this representation for the international audience's perception?

Method and Limitations

To address the research questions, this study examines a sample of 40 K-dramas and movies produced between 2010 and 2023, chosen as a result of the author's individual observation and viewing of each title. Although several films were also analyzed alongside television series, the term 'K-drama' was used throughout to collectively refer to all selected audiovisual materials. The details of these productions are presented in *Table 1*. The selection of these series was based either on titles suggesting a connection to ghosts or supernatural phenomena or on the identification of relevant sequences related to shamans and shamanism.

To ensure a rigorous evaluation, a systematic analysis of these TV productions was conducted, focusing on video fragments relevant to the research theme. The review process aimed to identify essential elements and correlate them with the study's objectives. The research was grounded in content analysis, identifying and coding specific shamanic elements present in the viewed fragments. The collected informations was systematically structured into themes and subthemes, facilitating a coherent and in-depth organization of relevant aspects.

One limitation of this study lies in the inability to analyze a broader sample of K-dramas relevant to the addressed theme. Time constraints influenced the selection process, limiting the number of productions included in the research and, consequently, the diversity of perspectives examined.

Nr.	K-drama/movie title	Year	Genre
1.	Dong Yi	2010	Historical romance
2.	Hello Ghost!	2010	Comedy
3.	Spellbound	2011	Horror · Romantic comedy
4.	The Moon Embracing the Sun	2012	Historical fantasy
5.	Arang and the Magistrate	2012	Historical horror · Romance
6.	The Master's Sun	2013	Romantic comedy
7.	Plus Nine Boys	2014	Romantic comedy
8.	Night Watchman's Journal	2014	Historical fantasy
9.	Oh My Ghost!	2015	Comedy horror
10.	Hwajeong	2015	Historical · Political
11.	Fatal Intuition	2015	Crime thriller
12.	Who are you?	2015	Police · Mystery · Horror
13.	Bring it on, Ghost!	2016	Romantic comedy · Mystery
14.	Mirror of the Witch	2016	Historical · Mystery · Romance
15.	Meloholic	2017	Supernatural · Fantasy

16.	A Korean Odyssey	2017	Romantic fantasy
17.	Wonderful Ghost	2018	Comedy
18.	Sketch	2018	Action · Fantasy · Crime
19.	Lovely Horribly	2018	Romantic comedy · Horror
20.	The Tale of Nokdu	2019	Historical · Romantic comedy
21.	He is Psychometric	2019	Mystery · Fantasy · Comedy
22.	The Fiery Priest	2019	Action comedy
23.	Tale of the Nine Tailed	2020	Fantasy · Action · Romance
24.	Hi Bye, Mama!	2020	Family · Supernatural
25.	Kingmaker: The Change of Destiny	2020	Historical · Folklore · Romance
26.	Memorist	2020	Crime · Mystery · Fantasy
27.	The Cursed	2020	Gothic horror
28.	The Game: Towards Zero	2020	Mystery · Crime
29.	Hometown	2021	Mystery · Thriller
30.	Jirisan	2021	Mystery · Fantasy · Thriller
31.	Lovers of the Red Sky	2021	Historical fantasy · Romance
32.	Sell Your Haunted House	2021	Comedy · Fantasy · Supernatural
33.	Secret Royal Inspector & Joy	2021	Historical comedy
34.	The Ghost Station	2022	Comedy horror
35.	May I Help You	2022	Romantic comedy · Fantasy
36.	Jinxed at First	2022	Fantasy · Romance
37.	From now on, Showtime!	2022	Romantic comedy
38.	Strange School Tales	2022	Mystery · Horror · Supernatural
39.	Behind Your Touch	2023	Comedy · Thriller · Fantasy
40.	Destined With You	2023	Fantasy · Romance

Table 1: *Table of K-dramas and movies selected for the analysis*

Findings and Discussion

Korean shamanism is one of the oldest spiritual practices, having a significant influence on South Korean traditions and beliefs. Over time, this practice has evolved, adapting to social and cultural changes, and K-dramas have become a crucial vehicle through which shamanism remains present in the public consciousness.

Through the analysis of K-dramas, we observe how shamanism is represented in various forms—ranging from the traditional roles of shamans to modern reinterpretations where characters develop supernatural abilities. This diversity not only preserves these practices but also helps to understand how they integrate into contemporary realities.

For a more in-depth examination, using the method of thematic content analysis, the portrayal of shamanism in K-dramas can be categorized into multiple thematic groups, each illustrating a distinct aspect of this practice.

Typology of representation in K-dramas

Korean shamanism is faithfully represented across various K-drama genres, including action productions, comedies, historical dramas, family dramas, and fantasy series, as well as shows exclusively centered on characters who exhibit shamanistic abilities.

The analyzed series can be classified into two distinct categories based on the degree of integration of shamanic elements within the narrative structure. The first category includes productions that feature

only sporadic sequences illustrating shamanic rituals, with these moments playing a secondary role in the unfolding action. In such cases, shamanism is presented as a contextual or symbolic element without directly influencing character development or the central conflict of the story.

The second category consists of series in which one or more characters—whether main or secondary – display shamanistic abilities, even if they are not officially recognized practitioners of the tradition. These characters use their shamanic skills in various ways, either to provide insight into certain events or to influence other characters' decisions, thereby contributing to the narrative dynamics and the progression of the plot.

Of the nine K-dramas that include brief sequences referencing shamanic practices, five are historical dramas set during the Joseon period, while four are modern productions. Among the latter, two are action dramas, and the other two combine elements of family drama and comedy, highlighting aspects of everyday life.

The remaining 31 K-dramas explore shamanism in greater depth, focusing on characters who exhibit abilities associated with this practice. Within this group, five are historical dramas, two alternate between past and present, and the remaining 24 are modern productions, suggesting a significant integration of shamanic elements into contemporary representations.

In conclusion, out of the total analyzed series, 12 are historical dramas, while 28 are modern productions, reflecting both the preservation of shamanic traditions and their reinterpretation in current contexts.

In South Korean dramas, both historical and modern, shamans are usually portrayed as young or middle-aged characters. The depiction of elderly shamans is rare, with such figures appearing only occasionally in specific contexts.

Roles and Duties of Shamans

In Korean television series, shamans are depicted as figures with prophetic abilities, providing guidance and spiritual protection. They act as mediators between the world of the living and the spirit realm, facilitating communication and balance between the two dimensions. Their practices include healing rituals, exorcism, and guiding souls to the afterlife.

Making predictions

In historical dramas, the shaman plays a crucial role in society, with responsibilities that include predicting future events such as births or deaths and assessing the compatibility of prospective spouses. These practices are rooted in traditional beliefs and are depicted as essential in making major decisions, especially within aristocratic or royal contexts.

Additionally, the shaman employs divinatory methods such as facial feature analysis and palm reading, as shown in *Fig. 1*, performing rituals aimed at purifying the spirits of the living and ensuring spiritual protection. These techniques reflect the belief that a person's physical characteristics can offer clues about their destiny and influence on those around them.

To obtain answers to various dilemmas and complex situations, the shaman turns to the study of ancient manuscripts containing rituals and esoteric practices passed down through generations of shamans. These sacred texts serve as a valuable source of knowledge, providing spiritual guidance and established methods for interpreting signs and solving problems.

Provides spiritual protection

In the context of South Korean historical dramas, shamans play a crucial role in providing spiritual protection to individuals and royal families, employing various methods and specific artifacts. They craft talismans designed to safeguard against negative influences, dispel misfortune, and defend against malevolent

spirits. Additionally, these talismans are used to ensure the birth of male heirs within royal families and to facilitate a prince's ascension to the throne, reflecting the belief in the shamanic ability to influence destiny.



Fig. 1: Screenshot of a shaman reading the king's facial features in *Kingmaker: The Change of Destiny*, episode 3, 00:47:47 (2020), directed by Yoon Sang-ho. Accessed on Viki, July 1, 2025.

In certain situations, shamans are perceived as human talismans, being called upon to stay near the king at night to protect him from harmful energies, block misfortune, or guard his sleep from nightmares. This practice highlights the deep trust placed in shamans and their role as spiritual guardians of political leaders, emphasizing the ritualistic dimension and protective function of their presence.

Act as mediators between the world of the living and the spirit realm

In Korean shamanic tradition, the shaman serves as an intermediary between the world of the living and the spirit realm, facilitating communication between them through various ritual practices.

As shown in Fig.2, at times, the shaman invokes the souls of deceased relatives for clients who seek to establish a dialogue with those who have passed, offering a form of reconciliation or spiritual clarification.



Fig. 2: Screenshot of a shamanic ceremony in *Destined with You*, episode 1, 00:59:57 (2023), directed by Nam Ki-hoon. Accessed on Netflix, July 1, 2025.

In other instances, the shaman consults their own shamanic relatives, such as their mother or grandmother, to receive guidance and support in interpreting messages transmitted from the beyond, as shown in *Fig. 3*.

This intermediary function highlights the shaman's essential role in maintaining balance between the physical and spiritual dimensions, reflecting the importance of ancestral traditions in managing connections between past and present generations.



Fig. 3: Screenshot of a shaman performing a ritual to invoke ancestral spirits in *Arang and the Magistrate*, episode 3, 00:07:24 (2012), directed by Kim Sang-hoon. Accessed on Viki, July 1, 2025.

Provides rituals for healing, exorcism, and soul guidance

Shamanic practices depicted in K-dramas—such as rituals for healing, exorcism, and soul guidance—hold a central place, serving to restore balance between the spiritual and physical realms. During these ceremonies, shamans use a variety of symbolic objects, including bell bracelets to summon spirits, drums, colorful ribbons, and talismans, each playing a specific role in the ritual process.

Individuals who have undergone an exorcism may develop heightened sensitivity to the spiritual world, which manifests as the ability to perceive ghosts. This capacity is attributed to residual energies left behind after possession, which do not fully dissipate once the ritual is completed.

The shaman assesses the influence of malevolent spirits on a person and identifies appropriate methods for their removal, employing specific techniques and chants designed to banish negative entities and restore harmony to the affected individual.

Beyond protection and purification rituals, the shaman performs ceremonies dedicated to physical and spiritual health, offering guidance and interpretations regarding the fate of newborns. These practices include predicting the future of a potential king, emphasizing the shaman's role as an intermediary between cosmic forces and human society.

Ritual and Symbolic Elements

In Korean dramas, shamans use various ritualistic and symbolic elements to highlight and enhance the spiritual dimension of their practices. These include specific ritual objects, traditional attire worn during ceremonies, and sacred locations where the rituals take place. These components contribute to the authenticity and visual impact of shamanic representations in cinematic productions.

Ritual objects

Ritual objects play a fundamental role, being used both for summoning spirits and for strengthening the connection between the shaman and the supernatural realm. The space where the shaman operates is arranged with distinct ritual objects designed to facilitate spiritual connection and the performance of shamanic ceremonies.

Among the frequently encountered artifacts in these ceremonies are bell bracelets, used to summon spiritual entities; drums, meant to create a sacred rhythm; colorful ribbons, symbolizing protection and purification; and talismans, designed to ensure the energetic safety of participants.

Additionally, shamanic dances are characterized by expressive and dynamic movements, accompanied by food offerings dedicated to the summoned spirits. These offerings include fruits, pastries, and pork dishes wrapped in greenery, believed to facilitate the fulfillment of ritual requests and ensure the proper unfolding of the ceremony.

Shamanic attire

Shamans, regardless of gender, are characterized by wearing specific garments, either white or in various shades, adapted to the ritual context. Korean shamanic attire also reflects their social and marital status, highlighting differences between unmarried individuals and those who have experienced marriage or widowhood. According to shamanic traditions, unmarried women wore their hair in a loose ponytail down their back, while married or widowed women wrapped their ponytail around their head, creating a clear visual distinction between the two categories.

In contemporary times, in k-dramas, modern shamans adopt a hybrid approach to attire, blending traditional elements with contemporary influences. They opt for elegant outfits when interacting with clients, with men choosing formal suits and women sophisticated dresses. This suggests an adaptation of shamanic practices to modern realities and a reconfiguration of spiritual authority within a more refined framework.

Ritual locations

The space where shamanic rituals takes place plays a fundamental role in the process of communicating with the spiritual world and strengthening the connection between the shaman and the invoked entities. In this tradition, shamans experience prophetic dreams and are often depicted in front of the altar in their own home, where they receive clients for consultations and spiritual ceremonies. Alternatively, rituals are also performed outdoors during the *kut* ceremony, providing participants with a sacred setting for spirit invocation and shamanic practices, as shown in Fig. 4.



Fig. 4: Screenshot of an outdoor shamanic ritual in *The Moon Embracing the Sun*, episode 3, 00:59:45 (2012), directed by Kim Do-hoon. Accessed on Netflix, July 1, 2025.

In certain circumstances, ceremonies take place in secluded spaces, such as rooms dedicated exclusively to these practices, as shown in *Fig. 5*, or natural areas like forests. These locations are often marked by symbolic constructions, such as stone pyramids, which serve as monuments commemorating the souls of the deceased or as focal points for the energies needed to fulfill the participants' wishes. Thus, the selection and arrangement of these ritual sites reflect the belief in the importance of sacred spaces as protective environments and facilitators of interaction with the supernatural realm.



Fig. 5: Screenshot of the interior of a ritual chamber used for shamanic ceremonies in *Arang and the Magistrate*, episode 1, 00:38:10 (2012), directed by Kim Sang-hoon. Accessed on Viki, July 1, 2025.

The Modernization of Shamanism in K-Dramas

In modern productions, the representation of traditional shamanic rituals remains relevant, yet it is adapted and blended with contemporary elements, reflecting the evolution of this practice in today's society.

Adaptation of traditional rituals to the digital age

In contemporary representations of shamanism in K-dramas, traditional practices are adapted through the integration of modern elements. For example, talismans, which were traditionally physical objects meant to provide spiritual protection, are reinterpreted as digital talismans, carried in the form of a photograph stored on a phone, reflecting the influence of technology on ancestral beliefs.

Transformation of shamanic attire into contemporary style

Modern shamans adopt a style that blends traditional elements with contemporary aesthetics, appearing at client meetings in elegant attire. By choosing formal suits and sophisticated dresses, men and women contribute to a redefinition of the shaman's image within contemporary society.

Acquiring shamanic abilities in modern contexts

Modern K-dramas also introduce characters who, although not shamans, exhibit supernatural abilities. These characters, originating from various professional fields such as law enforcement,

medicine, or journalism, reflect the expansion of the shamanism concept beyond its traditional framework, thereby redefining its role in contemporary society.

Specialization of shamans in specific rituals

Certain shamans specialize in specific ritual practices, focusing exclusively on ceremonies such as post-mortem marriage between spirits or facial feature interpretation to determine a person's fate. These practices are rooted in traditional beliefs, aimed at facilitating the transition of souls into the afterlife or offering clarity regarding individuals' existential paths. As shown in *Fig.6*, post-mortem marriage rituals are conducted by modern shamans to ensure peace for the souls of deceased individuals who never married, serving as a ceremony intended to restore spiritual balance for those who have passed without forming a couple. The ritual emphasizes the importance of the continuity of interpersonal connections, even beyond earthly life.



Fig. 6: Screenshot of a contemporary shaman performing a posthumous marriage ritual in *The Master's Sun*, episode 5, 00:16:32 (2013), directed by Jin Hyuk. Accessed on Viki, July 1, 2025.

In modern exorcism rituals, shamans use a variety of esoteric artifacts, each playing a symbolic and functional role in the process of eliminating malevolent influences. Among these objects are salt, hairpins, talismans, knives and swords of various sizes, censers, medallions, and other artifacts designed for protection against spirit possession.

In addition to shamans, there are also characters who, although unable to perceive ghosts, exhibit supernatural abilities. These include individuals capable of predicting the moment of a person's death simply by observing their eyes, accessing someone's memories through touch, or having visions of future events. These abilities, though not directly associated with traditional shamanism, are integrated into modern representations of spiritual phenomena.

In some cases, these supernatural abilities are leveraged for economic purposes. For example, certain characters in K-dramas exploit their ability to detect spirits to conduct business in real estate, purchasing haunted houses at reduced prices, exorcising them, and reselling them later. Other characters are hired to remove spirits from various locations, such as homes or educational institutions, either through coercive methods—if the entities refuse to leave the material world—or by fulfilling their wishes, thus facilitating the souls' transition process.

Acquiring shamanic abilities through traumatic experiences

The supernatural abilities manifested by certain characters are acquired through traumatic experiences, including extreme situations such as near-death experiences, awakening from a coma, severe accidents, head injuries, or significant emotional losses, such as the death of a relative or an entire family. These events intensify their connection to the supernatural world, influencing their perception of reality.

In some cases, characters become victims of attempted murder and fall into a coma, during which their spirit separates from their body and travels through familiar places, interacting with loved ones. This experience has a transformative role, allowing them to explore the spiritual dimension and understand the mysteries surrounding them. Upon returning to their physical body, these characters awaken with a changed perception of existence, acquiring abilities that transcend the material world.

Certain characters in K-dramas exhibit symptoms of spiritual possession, being influenced by malevolent entities or the ghost of a maiden, known for its vengeful nature. These supernatural occurrences create confusion and unease, leading them to seek help from shamans, who are regarded as intermediaries between the material and spiritual worlds. However, the characters discover that while shamans have the ability to summon spirits, the process of removing them is far more complex and does not allow for simply sending the entities back to the afterlife. Thus, interaction with these supernatural forces becomes a challenge, requiring extensive ritualistic practices to restore the affected individual's spiritual balance.

Certain characters manifest supernatural abilities through various forms of intuitive expression. Some create visual representations of their premonitions while in a trance, translating their visions into symbolic drawings. Others write involuntarily, guided by an inexplicable force that enables them to convey messages or prophecies. There are also cases where the future is perceived by merely touching a person's skin, this type of clairvoyance granting access to events that have yet to unfold.

The ability to see ghosts can manifest either in childhood or adulthood, depending on the personal circumstances of each character. Initially, the appearance of spirits causes fear and confusion, leading characters to ignore them or attempt to distance themselves. Over time, however, ghosts begin to seek help to resolve unresolved issues from their lifetime, fostering a deeper interaction between the world of the living and the spirit realm.

This supernatural gift becomes a central element in their development, altering their perception of reality and influencing the narrative progression of the K-drama.

Dynamics of Shamanism in South Korean Society

This category, through television series, offers a broader perspective on how shamanism is perceived, practiced, and represented in South Korean society, both in the past and present.

Gender balance and role distribution in the representation of shamans

The representation of shamans in K-dramas indicates a equitable distribution between men and women, specifically 35 female shamans and 31 male shamans. This suggests a reassessment of traditional roles, reflecting a contemporary perspective on shamanic practices. *Fig. 7* depicts a male shaman offering spiritual guidance in a modern Korean drama.

Regarding characters who possess supernatural abilities but are not shamans per se, the gender distribution shows a slight difference, with seven men and five women. This disparity can be interpreted as a narrative adaptation influenced by the current social and cultural context, exploring new ways of integrating shamanism into modern representations.



Fig. 7: Screenshot of a male shaman offering spiritual guidance in *The Tale of the Nine Tailed*, episode 6, 00:48:43 (2020), directed by Kang Shin-hyo. Accessed on Netflix, July 1, 2025.

In most cases, characters endowed with shamanic abilities use them for the greater good, working as police officers or law enforcement collaborators. Through their supernatural talents, they contribute to crime investigations, community protection, and solving mysteries that transcend material reality.

However, in three of the analyzed series, antagonist characters possessing special powers are also introduced, using them in ways that contradict the moral principles of the main heroes. These negative figures intensify the conflict between good and evil, highlighting the complexity of the interaction between shamanism and the ethics of supernatural actions.

Official institutions dedicated to shamanic practices

In five of the historical dramas, the existence of an official institution dedicated to fulfilling the spiritual needs of the royal family is highlighted, serving the purpose of training and instructing shamans. This institution was not limited to initiating and refining experienced practitioners but also functioned as a training space for individuals exhibiting symptoms of the "shaman's illness," a phenomenon interpreted as a sign of their vocation for this spiritual tradition.

The initiation process involved renouncing one's previous life and adopting a new identity within the shamanic community. New initiates began their existence alongside their spiritual mother and spiritual sisters, integrating into a ritualistic training system aimed at developing their abilities to mediate between the material world and the supernatural realm.

Legacy and transmission of shamanic traditions

Certain characters in K-dramas inherit shamanic abilities passed down through generations, thus preserving their family's spiritual legacy. This continuity of tradition allows them to develop and apply ancestral practices, strengthening the role of shamanism within their community and maintaining their connection to the supernatural world.

Rituals and spiritual practices

The composition of participants in shamanic ceremonies varies depending on the narrative context of K-dramas, reflecting significant differences in the structure of these rituals. In certain situations, neighbors and friends are present, contributing to the communal nature of the event and reinforcing the

collective role of spiritual practices. In other cases, participation is restricted exclusively to the family members of the person requesting the ritual, emphasizing the personal and intimate dimension of this interaction with the supernatural realm.

In some instances, the shaman resorts to practices associated with black magic, including the utterance of curses and rituals involving animal sacrifices, and in extreme circumstances, human sacrifices. These practices are intended to influence supernatural forces, playing a central role in various spiritual traditions and dramatic representations.

Additionally, the shaman offers interpretations and guidance regarding the possibility of a deceased person's return, a theme frequently explored in cinematic and literary productions. This subject highlights the connection between shamanism and beliefs related to the afterlife and reincarnation.

Rituals dedicated to those who have perished by drowning are conducted near bodies of water, where a sacred setting is created to facilitate communication with spirits. These ceremonies are often depicted in K-dramas, emphasizing the importance of water as a purifying element and a mediator between the material and spiritual worlds.

Shamanism in the Context of Royalty and Politics

In Korean television series, shamanism is portrayed as having a profound influence on power structures in South Korean history, manifesting through the presence of characters with shamanic abilities within the royal family. Among these figures is a concubine who, due to her spiritual gifts, becomes one of the most influential personalities in the kingdom, wielding considerable authority over political and social decisions. Additionally, another historical drama portrays a prince endowed with the ability to see ghosts, a skill he uses to restore order and strengthen his leadership position. This supernatural ability not only grants him access to essential information but also transforms him into a leader perceived as having a privileged connection with the invisible forces of the universe.

Beyond these prominent figures, there are also representations of romantic relationships between princes or kings and shamans, highlighting the interaction between political authority and spiritual influence. These connections symbolize the fusion of temporal and supernatural power, emphasizing the role of shamanism in either strengthening or challenging governing structures.

Shamanism and interaction with spirits

In K-dramas, some characters acquire the ability to perceive the presence of ghosts, while others develop skills specific to shamanic practices, facilitating interaction with the supernatural world. These abilities enable them to communicate with spirits and intervene in their transition process.

To eliminate the persistent presence of spirits, characters choose to fulfill their final wishes, helping them find peace. Such gestures include assigning a name to a newborn, delivering news of a person's death to their family, or erecting a gravestone for those whose bodies were never recovered. These symbolic actions aid in the spirits' departure from the material world. Once their wishes are fulfilled, the ghosts find peace and disappear, grateful to those who assisted them in their final act of fulfillment.

This dynamic illustrates the deep relationship between shamans and spiritual entities, highlighting their intermediary role in maintaining balance between the material world and the beyond.

Interpretation of thoughts and supernatural perception

Certain characters exhibit extrasensory abilities that allow them to perceive the thoughts of those around them, either through eye contact or by touching their skin. These abilities facilitate a deep connection with individuals, influencing their interactions and decisions.

Another character possesses a distinct ability, being able to hear only the thoughts of animals. This trait highlights a modernized interpretation of shamanism, in which supernatural perception extends beyond traditional communication with spirits, exploring intuitive dimensions and interspecies interactions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The analysis highlights that Korean shamanism is depicted across various K-drama genres, including action productions, comedies, historical dramas, family series, fantasy, and shows dedicated exclusively to characters with shamanic abilities. The shaman appears as an intermediary between the spirit world and the living, performing traditional rituals, predicting the future, and protecting the royal family or the community.

Over time, practices have modernized, with contemporary dramas showcasing shamans who blend traditional elements with technology, modern clothing, and new fields of activity. Characters who are not shamans acquire supernatural abilities either through inheritance or traumatic experiences, broadening the concept of shamanism into a wider thematic exploration.

Although shamanism was traditionally practiced by women, its representation in K-dramas shows an almost equal distribution between female and male shamans.

Regardless of the release year, these series consistently integrate elements related to shamanism, either through brief sequences or detailed representations. In such moments, shamans are depicted in front of altars or outdoors, performing health and funeral rituals, creating talismans for various situations, and discussing spirits, the afterlife, reincarnation, karma, and exorcisms. These elements suggest that, in South Korean culture, shamanism continues to be perceived as a valuable practice, both through the lens of its historical significance and its reinterpretation in the present.

In historical K-dramas, shamanism is often portrayed as a central element of power and political influence, where shamans serve as advisors to kings and queens or as influential figures operating from the shadows. Shamans are feared and respected, playing a semi-official role in decision-making. Rituals are grand, conducted in sacred spaces, and shamans are viewed as intermediaries between the material world and the supernatural realm. Additionally, there is a strong connection between shamanism and destiny, as the ability to foresee the future or communicate with spirits can justify a leader's rise to power or the transformation of a political structure.

On the other hand, in modern K-dramas, shamanism is integrated into everyday life, serving a practical function for individuals in difficulty. Characters with supernatural abilities are often police officers, doctors, journalists, or investigators, and shamanism becomes a form of clairvoyance applied to solving crimes, deciphering mysteries, or protecting the community. Shamans are either marginalized or adapted to capitalism, offering consultations on financial success, luck, and personal relationships. Rituals are more discreet, tailored to urban society, and take place in commercial spaces or online.

This evolution reflects changes in Korean society, where shamanism, although considered an archaic practice, continues to be relevant but in a reinterpreted form.

Through these representations, K-dramas play an important role in preserving and promoting Korean folk religions, helping South Koreans maintain their traditions and customs while making them increasingly known and accessible at an international level.

To improve the analysis of the representation of shamanism in K-dramas, it is recommended to expand the number of series studied. By including a broader sample that encompasses productions from various periods and genres, a more detailed perspective on the evolution of this theme in South Korean cinematography can be obtained.

This approach would allow for the identification of recurring narrative patterns, thematic variations, and specific cultural influences, thus providing a deeper understanding of how shamanism is perceived and integrated into dramatic structures. Additionally, comparing historical, fantasy, and contemporary series could highlight how social and cultural changes have influenced the representation of this phenomenon over time.

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