Collecting Korean shamanism for the National Museum of Denmark: ethnographic objects as collecting devices

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Summary: *It is a basic undertaking amongst museum professionals who work with various aspects of a collection's meaning, interpretation and history to explore the biography of a historical museum object. This article attempts to depart from this by conceptualizing historical, ethnographic objects as 'collecting devices'. The focus is thereby shifted from the historiography of an ethnographic object to the ways in which an object and its history can be employed as a device in staging new empirical fields for the museum anthropologist. This points toward potentials inherent to the ethnographic museum, namely the possibility that museum professionals and visitors alike can employ ethnographic objects as a means of encountering people outside the museum and everyday social world that they inhabit.*

Keywords: Museum anthropology, social agency, Korea, shamanism, ethnographic collecting, National Museum of Denmark.

ETHNOGRAPHIC OBJECTS AS 'COLLECTING DEVICES'

It is a basic undertaking amongst museum professionals who work with various aspects of a collection's meaning, interpretation and history to explore the biography of museum objects. (O'Hanlon, 2000, 2001; Fihl, 2002, 2003). This article attempts to depart from this exploration by conceptualizing historical ethnographic objects as 'collecting devices'.

Focus is thereby shifted from the historiography of the ethnographic object to the ways in which the object and its history can be employed as a device in staging new empirical fields for the museum anthropologist.

The collecting device methodology explored here, rather than merely collecting information on the biographies of museum objects as they have once been made, used, collected, made into ethnographic objects and exhibited, seeks to document the particular responses,

which historical ethnographic objects elicit on being “returned” to social fields beyond the museum.

This project is based on an examination of three ethnographic collections related to Korean shamanism located in *the Ethnographic Collection* in the National Museum of Denmark: the *Janus F. Oiesen* collection of watercolours by the Korean genre painter Kisan, from 1892, the *Keijo Imperial University exchange collection*, partially consisting of shamanic objects sent to Denmark in 1934 by Japanese colonial scholars in exchange for a collection of ‘Eskimo specimens’, and the *Shin Huy-dong* collection of shamanic objects from 1973 (Petersen, 2008).

This paper primarily focuses on Shin Huy-dong’s collecting activities in Korea, 1973. It presents the *collecting device methodology* through excerpts of an interview session conducted in Korea in 2005 with a shop owner who was involved in Shin Huy-dong’s collecting activities in 1973 and in an ethnographic object collecting trip to Korea in 2007 evolving from the 2005 session.

THE BIOGRAPHIC APPROACH AND THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF COLLECTING

In what is partly an attempt to integrate the study of two central empirical objects of museum anthropology – the Western museum institution and the ethnographic objects held within – a range of studies have focused on ethnographic objects in their shifting spatial settings (Fihl, 2002, 2003; Gosden & Knowles, 2001; O’Hanlon, 2001; O’Hanlon & Welsch, 2000). In *At forfølge tingenes biografi* (Tracking the biography of things) (2003), Esther Fihl elaborates on the biographic approach. Standing in the storage

facilities in the National Museum of Denmark before a pair of shoes from the Olufsen collection collected in 1898 in the Prandash valley in Central Asia, she asks herself what this pair of shoes and the collection as such mean:

I soon realized that the objects neither by themselves nor supported by the written sources of the expedition would be able to sustain an analysis, which in a localized and holistic point of departure strives to clarify the meaning of the museum object in terms of its relation with other elements in the local social and cultural context as it often before has been presented as an ideal for the anthropological analysis of the meaning of things and human interaction with things (Pearce 1994; Wolf 2001) (translated from Fihl, 2003: 187).

Fihl strives to satisfy this epistemological questioning of the significance of historical ethnographic objects by tracking the biography of the object of the Olufsen collection through ‘the shifting, but relevant contexts, which they in their 100-year museum lives have been part of’ (translated from Fihl, 2003: 197).¹

In a topically related study on the history of ethnographic collecting, *Hunting the Gatherers*, Michael O’Hanlon operationalizes the terms ‘the before of collecting’, which is “the theoretical baggage which collectors took with them, and their institutional arrangements”, ‘the scene of collecting,’ “the process of making collections, their content, and issues of local agency and impact” and ‘the after of collecting,’ “the fate of collections once made, and their museum lives” (O’Hanlon, 2000: 9).

The intercultural relation between museum professionals, collectors and local social agents involved in the biographies of the collected objects is the gravitating axis of inquiry in this

50 historical ethnography of collecting.²² This approach serves as a counterbalance to ethnographic studies, which analyse museum objects as empirical objects of the culture in which they were made and used (local culture). Simultaneously, it is also a counterbalance to the museum studies which conceptualize museum objects as empirical objects of the institution in which they are systematized and displayed. Robert L. Welsch eloquently pinpoints the fertile grounds for studies in historical anthropology that this approach carves out:

For those researchers who would like simply to use museum collections as tangible evidence of earlier times – even if not pristine evidence – objects have suddenly become quite complicated documents about the past. They embody the goals of collectors, the cultural lives as well as the interests of villagers, the varied concerns of other local agents, the concerns of national policies, and the competitive interests of the international museum world (Welsch, 2000: 157).

This conceptualization of ethnographic objects as ‘genuine intercultural documents’ (O’Hanlon, 2001), as it has been approached in various ways by O’Hanlon, Fihl, Welsch and others, is challenged from various positions. Nicholas Thomas thus infers that ‘the ethnography of collecting’ approach, while partially intended as a reconsideration of issues on local agency in relation with ethnographic objects, in practice – at least as it is presented in *Hunting the Gatherers* – is imbalanced by ‘[...] the paucity of information which bears directly upon [the issue of negotiation around the practices of collecting]’ (Thomas, 2000: 274). Often museum archives contain little if any explicit information on the intercultural scene of collecting, and thus

Thomas argues that museum anthropology is required to consider indirect approaches to the issue of local agency.

Where Thomas is sceptical about the ability of the methodology to produce knowledge of native agency on grounds of the availability of sources, the biographic approach to ethnographic objects is challenged in other ways. Bente Wolff criticises the biographic focus on the movement of material culture as it is developed by Appadurai in *The Social Life of Things* (1986) and subsequently applied to ethnographic objects:

I would argue that the analytical focus on “things-in-motion” implicitly defines the object in question in accordance with the observer’s own system of classification, and fails therefore to identify principles by which local people classify such objects themselves. (Wolff, 2001: 10)

In the ultimate analysis, this stance challenges the scientific value of historical collections of ethnographic objects in the study of local agency in and around material culture. It raises the question how museum collections established by first the ethnographic collectors’ and then the museum professionals’ own systems of classification can contribute to identify principles by which local people classify such objects themselves.

TOWARDS A COLLECTING DEVICE METHODOLOGY

Tracking the biographies of museum objects in Korea, Japan and Denmark from the National Museum of Denmark in the period 2005–7, I experienced a wide range of reactions and responses when presenting these objects and their histories to individuals

whom I encountered. Far from all of these responses were related to specific historical museum object biographies. Rather, some responses were better understood as the manifestations of social agency (Gell, 1998a). James Clifford's 'museum contact zone' notion congenially subsumes the aspect of intercultural social interactions around historical ethnographic objects.³ With this term, Clifford not only describes museums as scenes of intercultural encounters. He also implies a responsibility on the part of the museum professional in terms of making efforts to reflect on and implement this intercultural feature into museum practice, as the museum's "organizing structures as a *collection* becomes an ongoing historical, political, moral *relationship* – a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull." (Clifford, 1997: 192)⁴

As for the role of museum objects in these intercultural encounters in 'the museum contact zone' we may take useful clues from the British anthropologist Alfred Gell. In *Art and Agency* (1998) Gell develops an 'anthropology of art' defined as the theory of 'social relations in the vicinity of objects mediating social agency.' He proposes that "art-like situations' can be discriminated as those in which the material 'index' (the visible, physical, 'thing') permits a particular cognitive operation which I identify as *the abduction of agency*." (1998a: 13). The underlying contention is that things index, mediate, embody and transmit social agency. A person confronted with a material index attributes an acting capacity to it. For instance, he abducts its making and the intentionalities bringing about this making. On that note, things elicit responses, inferences and interpretations from the

persons in its vicinity which cause Gell to see these things as 'social agents'. This 'action'-centred approach to material culture leads Gell to conceptualize the notion of 'art' within a nexus of relations where persons and things may be viewed as both agents and patients of social agency. In *Vogel's net*, Gell explicitly addresses how this agentive quality can be appropriated in ethnographic museum exhibitions:

What the 'anthropological theory of art' ought to be about, in my opinion, is the provision of a critical context that would enfranchise 'artefacts' and allow for their circulation as artworks, displaying them as embodiments or residues of complex intentionalities. Anthropology should be part of art-making itself, insofar as art-making, art history and art criticism are a single enterprise nowadays. Partly this would consist of the provision of relevant ethnography [...] and partly the discovery of connections between complex intentionalities in western artworks and the kind of intentionalities embodied in artworks and artefacts (now recontextualized as artworks) from elsewhere. This would be a one-sided transaction in art-making, in the sense that essentially metropolitan concepts of 'art' would be in play, not indigenous ones; but objects, as Thomas (1991) has shown are 'promiscuous' and can move freely between cultural/transactional domains without being essentially compromised. This they can do because they have indeed no essences, only an indefinite range of potentials. (Gell, 1998b: 37)

Extending from Alfred Gell's notion of anthropology as 'art-making' in the metropolitan museum display, the *collecting device methodology* I test here, explores the 'return' of museum objects into the field beyond the museum. This employment of museum objects as collecting devices in an empirical

52 field that is operated by the museum anthropologist is an extension of the concept of the interactive museum exhibition. The museum objects transcend their institutional perimeters and 're-enter' the field in mobile, impromptu exhibitions which explore their 'promiscuity'.

In practice, only in rare cases can the museum anthropologist bring the actual, tangible objects along with him out of the museum. Therefore, he must stage mobile, impromptu exhibitions in which the objects are presented in the form of digital images or photocopies. The methodological experiment therefore constitutes the presentation of a fixed materiality (the ethnographic objects), supported by a narrative (mostly a verbal presentation) of the object's biography, and then the collecting of responses (whether as field notes or in audio-visual documentation) to this. As such, the methodology explores the interplay between a certain category of things (ethnographic objects), a certain type of narratives (the textual and verbal corpus that make up the museum anthropologist's presentation), and persons (social agents in the vicinity of material culture). Just as a public museum exhibition in principle is intended for everyone, this staged exhibition of the ethnographic object in social fields beyond the museum does not imply a return to some sort of origin or even to a specific social field. The museum anthropologist is free to define the time, place and 'public' of his staged exhibition.

The 'staged exhibition' to be presented here, however, evolved directly from the biographic tracking of an historical object collection – the 1973 Shin Huy-dong collection – and focus on the responses of individuals who are related with Korean shamanic material culture.

THE COLLECTOR'S NARRATIVE

In the summer of 1973, the external, Lecturer of Korean at the University of Copenhagen, and librarian at the Royal Library in Copenhagen, Shin Huy-dong (1935–85), went to Seoul to make a collection of Korean shamanic objects.⁵ Upon returning to Denmark in the late summer of 1973, he sent a letter to Chief Curator Helge Larsen with the following narrative from the scene of collecting:

Dear Helge Larsen,

After my arrival to Seoul July 19 I had a meeting with the Director of the Emilie Museum (ethnographic museum), Dr. Cho. On my questions on the possibilities to collect the various shamanic objects, he was of the opinion that it would be difficult to get hold of old things, whereas new ones could easily be obtained. In particular, it would be almost impossible to get hold of a used dress, because the shaman thinks that the spirit of the god takes dwelling in the dress. It has to be kept in a special way and can be passed on to new shamans, but it cannot be sold. If it is not to be used any longer, it has to be burned. Dr. Cho suggested that I should hold a ceremony in the museum yard, and that he was willing to arrange it. In that way, I would come in possession of certain things (paper flowers and such for decoration), I would be able to make sound recordings, and take photos. Due to the high price of such a ceremony (approximately DKK 4000), I had to leave the question open for the time being. Thereafter I arranged a meeting a few days later with Mr. Seoh, with whom I have been corresponding. He also emphasized the difficulty in obtaining used "real" things.

In the meanwhile, I met with one of my old friends, and it turned out that his aunt was the leader of the shaman's organization. Thanks to him I had a meeting with her, and she was extraordinarily

sympathetic and helpful. She summoned a couple of other shamans to her assistance, and we agreed that in the course of the following weeks they should collect old artefacts (used), which I would be allowed to obtain in exchange for buying new artefacts for them. Dresses, (four or five) they were also willing to let me have, and the prices were absolutely reasonable. Both Dr. Cho, Mr. Seoh, MiSook Chyung and Mr. Lee were almost shocked by my amazing luck, especially that I had also obtained dresses.

Concerning these objects, kindly see the enclosed documents. Photos and sound recordings of shamanic ceremonies that I attended will arrive in the near future.

The shamaness as well as Dr. Cho and the other mentioned are willing to continue assisting in the future to collect things that the National Museum might be lacking as regards Korean shamanism. - - - Now I just hope that these things will arrive in good order. They will arrive directly to the address of the National Museum in September or October.

Sincerely yours,

Shin H.D. (translated from unpublished document: J.nr. 1462)

As we can see from this letter, Shin made the point that – as an ethnographic collector – he was faced with a basic dilemma. ‘Used’ Korean shamanic material culture was generally speaking inaccessible. Shamanic material culture that has been in ritual contact with the spirits could not be appropriated with money. Meanwhile, shamanic material culture that had not been in use was regarded as having a lesser authentic value for the ethnographic collector. Within this paradigm, the ‘art’ of ethnographic collecting to Shin consisted in transcending this paradox; indeed, it is a common theme in 20th century ethnographic collecting narratives. The art of the ethnographic collector is to be present in (if not

generate) the poignant moments in which ethnographic authenticity – in this case the uncollectible – becomes collectable.⁶

In the earliest stage of encounters between Danes and Koreans resulting in the collecting of material culture related with Korean shamanism entering into in the National Museum of Denmark, Kisan (Kim Chun-gun) mediated the experience of shamanism with watercolours and through a neat composition (Fig.1). Around 1892, the Korean artist made a set of genre paintings on commission for Janus F. Oiesen (1857–1928), who was then British consul and Commissioner of Customs in the Chinese Maritime Customs Service in the Korean open port town, Wönsan.

Shamanism was merely one among a wide variety of motifs. In his images, Kisan translated cultural practices into aesthetically pleasing genre paintings. The National Museum of Denmark attributed to them a considerable ethnographic interest as a media of representation – as objectified representations of Korea, when in fact the paintings were specifically made on commission for a foreign clientele, and thus auto-ethnographic in proper terms. In the period of Japanese colonization of Korea (1910–45), the ‘contact zone’ involving Korean shamanism and the National Museum of Denmark had taken another form. Relying on colonial Japanese academics and their representation of Korean shamanic material culture, Danish museum professionals obtained a collection of Korean ‘shamanism’ and ‘ethnography’ in 1934, in exchange for materials from Greenland. The collecting of Korean shamanism had become part of the research agendas of collecting metropolises and empires exchanging the colonies in object form.

Fig. 1: Kisan Genre-painting of a shamanic ritual (Inv. Nr. A.1505 Ethnographic Collection, the National Museum of Denmark). Copyright: National Museum of Denmark, (photo by Chŏng Pyŏng-mo, 2006).

By 1973, the bridgehead between the Danish museum and Korean shamanic material culture was facilitated by an overseas Korean visiting his native country of birth. Shin relied on personal relations in his collecting activities. To all appearance, this was a move beyond binary collecting relationships of the past, and further dismantled the practical and conceptual distance between the ethnographic museum and shaman. The shamans engaged in the 1973 exchange were themselves fully in charge of object selection and therefore defined the terms and conditions

of interaction with Shin. In other words, Shin did not succeed because he insisted on collecting 'used' shamanic material culture such as dresses, in which 'the spirit of the god takes dwelling'. He succeeded because some members of a shamanic organization suggested such exchanges of new with old.

Shin applied the conceptions of 'used vs. new' and 'real vs. commissioned' to the field work involved. These conceptions stem from the history of Danish ethnographic object collecting activities and can be traced from Helge Larsen, over Henning Haslund-Chris-

tensen, Kaj Birket-Smith, Thomas Thomsen and back in time to Christian Jürgensen Thomsen (See for example Birket-Smith, 1931; Haslund-Christensen, 1944; Lundbæk, 1992). By bringing back 'used' and 'real' objects to the Danish museum, Shin seemingly bridged the gap between ethnographic ideals for collecting and the shamanic conceptualization of material culture. In comparison with most of the other Korean collections in the National Museum of Denmark, this letter is quite detailed and relatively rich in details on the intercultural encounter.

In his letter, however, Shin did not reflect on the intricacies and ramifications of the exchange that he and the shaman's organization engaged in.

This raises various questions as to why these particular shamans engaged in the exchange, whether they considered the museum institution to be an exception to the general rule that a shaman's paraphernalia cannot enter re-circulation beyond the social sphere of the shaman, or whether in fact this general rule was perhaps an ethical interpretation. Another, equally relevant question to the biographic approach regards what the absence of information in the museum archives and in the memories of the museum professionals about the social agency of the shamans with whom Shin interacted has for the 'museum life' of this particular collection, and what the general implications of such absence might be. Whatever the reason, the absence of such information implicitly enables the poignant moment of ethnographic collecting to fully manifest itself. In some cases, the ethnographic museum is reliant on such poignant moments, not terse facts. If the primary source of this magic derives from the people and the practices in which things are considered to be

so, the secondary source of this 'museum magic' is dependent on the ethnographic collector's narrative to transmit the sacred into the museum. Or to render it in a narrative that is comprehensible to the museum.

BIOGRAPHIC TRACKING 2005

In 2005, I thus attempted to find the Korean shamans through whom Shin collected in 1973 in order to explore shamanic concepts of material culture and sacredness specifically related to the 1973 collection. In other words, the intention was to elucidate the concepts of sacredness held by these particular shamans, how they reflected on the exchange with Shin, the ritual implications of such exchange and lastly what were their notions of sacredness for the specific dresses and paraphernalia collected by Shin.

As stated, Shin was not explicit regarding the particulars of the exchange with the shaman organization. While there were a small number of nationwide shamanic organizations in the 1970s, these were sub-organized into local units (Kim Tae-gon, 1981: 455–460), and so it would be virtually impossible to identify the shamans in question by tracking the organizations of the period. Also, in the letter, Shin did not specify who his friends were, who the leader of the shamanic organization was, nor who the other shamans involved in the making of the collection were. Lastly, it was not possible to find Danish informants who had a detailed knowledge of Shin's collection activities in 1973. Shin, however, had enclosed some documents along with the collected objects, which turned out to be useful. In *Journal 1462* in the Ethnographic Collection there is a shop receipt addressed to Shin and with the

56 date July 22, 1973.⁷ Shin does not mention the shop in his collector's narrative, but obviously it had been involved in the exchange to some extent. Most likely, either Shin or the shamans had bought the new objects that were to be exchanged for the shamans' used dresses and paraphernalia bound for the National Museum of Denmark here.⁸ Under these circumstances, the shop appeared to be the best point of departure for further biographic tracking. As it turned out, the shop was no longer located at the address – it had been moved to a nearby location in downtown Seoul – but the owner was the same person who had run the shop in 1973. The shop owner, who also worked as a designer, recognized the receipt as coming from her shop, but could not recollect having met Shin Huy-dong, or being involved in the exchange between him and the members of a shamanic organization.⁹

FROM BIOGRAPHY TO COLLECTING DEVICE

On a hypothetical basis, the shop owner surmised that such an exchange of shamanic dresses taking place between a museum professional and shamans in the early seventies would have been possible. In practice, the biographic tracking of the 1973 Shin collection thus reached an impasse. The possibility of exchanging old, worn-out dresses for new clothes from one of the few shops that were around in those days would have been tempting to some, but far from all shamans. Notably, the shop owner emphasized that such a transaction would have been at odds with the concepts and nobility of the shamanic undertaking. Indeed, she explicated that shamans of considerable level and very traditionalistic shamans, for example, would

never have engaged in such activities. From that, the shop owner inferred, it did not necessarily follow that their motivation for engaging in the exchange with Shin was poverty:

This was a most prosperous period. Our nation was developed then. At that time development started, and with the New Village Movement it was a time of much development... on what ground... I mean the people [of that time] strived for things to go well. They had a ritual [*kut*] held or went to consult the shamans... at the time people did that a lot... because of that, well, there were many opportunities to work and perform *kut*, so when it came to preserving and keeping well, it was left behind. I guess that maybe it was out of a wish to dress and dance in new and really spic-and-span things. But shamans, people engaged with shamanism indeed, also have levels. People of a certain level would not have let go [of their dresses] (translated from Korean: Interview 26.5.2005)¹⁰

The autocratic president of Korea, Park Chung-hee (1917–1979, and who ruled 1961–1979), spearheaded the New Village Movement (*Saemaul Undong*) in the early 1970s as part of an attempt to bring reform and development into rural Korea (Oh, 2003). In this process, shamanism was identified as an obstacle to the modernization of the Korean countryside, and thus had to be rooted out. In fact, this perceived threat became part of the *raison de entrée* for Shin's collection of shamanic material culture in Korea. The archive at the National Museum of Denmark, which was related to the Shin collection, demonstrates how the New Village Movement became known to the Danish museum professionals in 1972 as a possible expulsion of shamanic material culture in the countryside. The Danish museum was

informed by a Danish archaeologist shortly visiting Korea that an “organization or movement for the renewal of the villages is said to be tearing down shamanistic temples by the thousands, after which the inventory is being destroyed” and furthermore that a local scholar found “that the possibility to acquire shaman paintings, etc. will soon no longer exist.”¹¹ By contrast, the shop owner three decades on mentions the same movement as part and parcel of the economic boom of the 1970s, which increased the demand for shamanic activities, but – in her interpretation – even appears to have been instrumental for the societal processes in which material culture involved in these shamanic activities were impacted with concepts of ‘new’ and ‘neat’.

While Shin presented the exchange as being exceptional, the shop owner pondered how Shin, by providing the shamans with new dresses, (unwittingly) mimicked one particular kind of interaction between shamans and their customers:

Well, there would be many cases in which the people who ordered the clothes, [that is] the people, who commissioned a *kut*, wishing to have new clothes rather than used clothes, said to [the shaman] that they would supply them with clothes. [With such prospective of] dancing in neat and tidy dresses – that is my thought – maybe when the scholars came, if really they came like this, and said that they would supply [the shamans] with new clothes for used clothes, then it might have been possible. (Interview 26.5.2005)

Apparently, this propensity for new things also facilitated a re-conceptualization of spirit dresses, in which (if we take Shin’s notes about how the spirit of the god takes dwelling in the

dress as being the general concept at face value) these in some cases became regarded as old, worn and thus useless.

Clearly, Shin’s letter from 1973 and the 2005 interview with the shop owner do not provide a contextual base for understanding the social aspect of Korean shamanic material culture. Rather, it gives an insight into how one social agent engaged his understanding of shamanism as ethnographic collector and how a shop owner/designer recollected her role vis-à-vis shamanic material culture. By all concerns, both collector and shop owner are located at the periphery of shamanic practices. Some of the shop owner’s understandings and interpretations of the social contexts of shamanic material culture may indeed be mistaken in a conventional sense.¹² In the first place, she was no longer much engaged in selling dresses and implements for shamans by 2005. That being said, such apparent misconceptions of the social contextualization of shamanic material culture may contribute to reconsider established scholarly knowledge from new angles to the extent that these are further explored through field observations. In concrete terms, a shop owner’s 1970s experiences and her 2005 perspective on shamanic material culture may produce information on shamanic material culture that offers supplementary narratives to those produced by a thick ethnographic description based on fieldwork among Korean shamans.

TRADITION

The shop owner’s observations on the ‘new’ as it was staged during the dramatic economic boom of early-1970s authoritarian South Korea were closely related with another discursive feature, which cannot be left out of

58 consideration – ‘Tradition’. The shop owner continuously made it clear that shamans abide by tradition and are shaped by it.

The interview with the shop owner produced various cues for a reading of ‘tradition’ as the lingering effects of authoritarian cultural politics.¹³ Even while the shop owner spoke of ‘new’ and ‘neat’, and – as we shall see soon – was quite precise in her identification of the tangible changes that had come about in shamanic material culture in her time, she did this with frequent and recurrent references to the continuity of tradition. The shop owner pinpointed one of the trappings that are particular to the perpetuation and continuity of tradition in Korean shamanism as follows:

More than they [the shamans] themselves choose that of old days, it is usually the spirit mother who tells them to wear it. Generally speaking, all clothing is almost without exception passed down from old days. And to that is added some embroidery or the like. (Interview 26.5.2005)

Furthermore, while the shop owner perceived herself as an innovator in the making of shamanic dresses, this innovative facility was also firmly embedded in tradition, and so, too, were the changes requested by her shaman customers:

I am not doing the design, and the shamans are not doing the design. These are the folk customs objects of our nation that have been passed down from a long time ago. But there is this kind of thing... While being passed down, there are things that the shamans request... They say ‘this is so heavy’ and ask me to make it light... or, ‘make it a little smaller’... ‘my shoulders hurt’... then the design is changed. In some cases slightly smaller... lighter... (Interview 1.7.2005)

ETHNOGRAPHIC OBJECTS AS COLLECTING DEVICES

Having introduced the shop owner’s conceptualization of ‘new’ and ‘tradition’ I now turn to present excerpts of the experiment as it was conducted by presenting her with images and written excerpts from the Shin Huy-dong object collection, on July 1 2005.

I met the shop owner on four occasions during late spring of 2005. In the first encounter, on May 26 2005, I introduced her to the biography of the Shin Huy-dong collection and showed her a few digital images of the objects. In the second encounter, on July 1, from which I cite in the following, I showed her the major part of the ethnographic objects from the 1973 Shin Hyu-dong collection and further presented the collection biography. The conversation evolved as the shop owner elaborated on various aspects of the objects, and I followed up with further

Fig. 2: General’s dress (Chang’gunpok) (Inv. Nr. A. 2719 Ethnographic Collection, the National Museum of Denmark). Copyright: National Museum of Denmark, (photo by National Museum of Denmark, 1988).

questions. The shop owner's responses were not exclusively in response to the mobile exhibition of digital images, photocopies of the ethnographic objects, letter, receipt and verbal accounts of Shin Huy-dong collection, but (inevitably) also arose from the interactive context of interviewer and informant.

1. PRESENTATION OF IMAGE OF A.2719, GENERAL'S DRESS (CHANG'GUNPOK) (FIG. 2)¹⁴

This is a General's costume. You know? ...In old times ... there was such. Now this one... There were also cases in which I sold it to shamans. It is not the 'real form' but ... it is a General's costume. It is a General's costume worn by shamans, but... you know Hideyoshi Invasion on MBC.¹⁵ In which Yi Sun-shin is featured... the drama called Hideyoshi Invasion, the historical TV drama... I supplied goods when they made that historical drama. It hangs in that room. That dress. (Interview 1.7.2005)

The shop owner identifies A.2719 as a *General's dress*. She continues to subdivide the General's dress into two basic types: The 'real form' dress from old days; in other words, the dress worn by generals in the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910). Juxtaposed to this type are the dresses made in imitation of 'real form'. By this definition, the category of the 'imitative' thus interestingly encompasses both the dresses she has made for shamans and for a historical television drama featuring the life and merits of the national hero General Yi Sun-sin (1545–1598), who protected the nation against Japanese invasion. By making the distinction between 'real form' and 'imitative', the shop owner does not imply that shamanism is in the same 'imitative' category as television acting. Her distinctions

are differently construed from those of the ethnographic collector. Likewise, her notions of fabric and technique co-exist with and are dissociated from socio-religious conceptualizations.

But this [dress] is imitative; it cannot be made as the original. That's because of its heaviness due to the attached iron. [I] make it light. But it is [a kind of] general's costume... There are many Generals. Well, General Yi Sun-sin, General Kye-paek.¹⁶ Shamans say that they worship Generals. [...] Some shamans say that they worship General Kye-paek, other shamans say that they worship some other general [...] It's that the general has entered the body [of the shaman]. It is such dress. I also sold such [dresses]. (Interview 1.7.2005)

While conveying the socio-religious framework of explaining the interrelationship between the shaman and the spirit general, she, as a dressmaker and designer of the 1970s, implemented notions of realness and originality that are nestled in the material itself. In concrete terms, the demarcation between the real and the imitative is constituted by iron on the one hand, and lighter materials such as plastic and vinyl-leather on the other:

It could seem like I guided the direction a bit. Because ... this is not an abbreviation of the real general's costume. That's for shamans to dance easily, lightly... For example, these clouts, if they are made in heavy steel, then they [the shamans] can't dance, right. So with something like thin sheet steel... the so-called sheet steel is thin, no? Iron, for example, is thick, and is like thin steel, by shearing aluminium and attaching it.... Later on, plastic came out. Plastic... That's to make it light... If plastic is attached... there is that unusually metal-like, iron-like leather. Something like

60 vinyl-leather. If it is carved in such manner, then it aptly looks like steel. (Interview 1.7.2005)

In successive waves of industrial development, artisans and designers have been enabled to substitute iron with aluminium, plastic and leather, which resemble iron. By extension, this has enabled shamans to dance 'easily' and 'lightly'. In short, in this narrative, the shop owner takes upon her the role of an intermediary in transmitting technological changes into shamanic ritual sociality, which underpins the 'new' while imitating and re-enacting 'tradition'.

In those days life got a little better, and so... there is also the thing that people want to free them of that which is heavy like in the old days... they come to strive for what is light and easy... When living standards improve, then they strive for convenience... so with that, these things also change and become thinner... Lighter... Originally they were somewhat heavy. From then on [people] started to make them lighter... Even not attaching iron, some people have gild there. (Interview 1.7.2005)

The shop owner not only conveyed her awareness of this transmitting facility in words; being presented with the digital image of the General's Dress, she indicated how she displayed her own merits and contribution to mass media engagement with tradition: General Yi Sun-sin dress from the MBC drama, hanging in the next room. In a sense, this display of the General's Dress is analogous to the way the ethnographic museum ascribes value to used dresses and exhibit their authenticity. The shop owner designed a General's Dress, which had been used for nationwide broadcast and had appropriated the now-used dress in a display of self.

2. PRESENTATION OF IMAGE OF 2721C, OFFICIAL'S HAT (*TAEGAM MOJA*) (FIG. 3)¹⁷

The shop owner's response to the General's Dress indicates that the changes that occurred in the shamanic material culture of the early 1970s (and thus materialized in the Shin collection of spirit dresses) continued into the 21st century. However, her response to the Official God's Hat, collected by Shin, blurred such clear-cut notions of continuity.

That's an Official's Hat. Really, this is indeed an old times hat... truly. These days it is not made like that. It was [made] with sponge or the like... old times... These days it is not made like that.

Yes, it is a hat close to the old times original. (Interview 1.7.2005)

As an 'old times' item, the Official God's Hat is distinguished from current times, while simultaneously being identified as 'close to the old times original'. Judging from the shop owner's response, not least the inclusion of sponge in the hat contributes to classifying this particular Official God's Hat as somehow in-between 'old times' and 'old times original'.

Sponge being an inexpensive and easily accessible material, it would be obvious for the shop owner to categorize it along with plastic and iron-like leather as materials utilized for 'imitation'. On the contrary, the sponge gave her associations to 'old days original'. The presentation of the hat elicited an outburst of nostalgia. For a short moment, the shop owner was having a museum-like experience of her professional past as she was looking at a photo with the application of a material used for an Official's Hat that had come into and gone out of use. This incident

Fig. 3: Official's Hat (Taegam moja) (Inv. Nr. A.2721c Ethnographic Collection, the National Museum of Denmark). Copyright: National Museum of Denmark, (photo by Martin Petersen, 2006).

illustrates how the categories of 'original' and 'real' do not refer exclusively to historical periods, but are relative to and interconnected with personal memories of discontinued practices.

The shop owner's responses to the presentation of the Shin Huy-dong collection quite neatly demonstrate how the 'collecting device' methodology can be employed re-contextualize historical museum objects. It provides a venue for exploring in a current perspective what may broadly be termed the social lives of material culture. Further, the

responses of the shop owner spoke of the embeddedness of these objects in the interaction between human social agents (the shop owner, shamans, clients/customers and scholars).

As such, the 2005 interview sessions with the shop owner were not just the terminal point of tracking the 1973 Shin Huy-dong object collection biography. They were also the starting point for staging these objects and their biographies in encounters with local informants to explore social agency in the vicinity of shamanic material culture.

62 COLLECTING DEVICE SESSION, 2007

In 2007, I returned to Korea to collect, using the 1973 Shin collection and the 2005 shop owner interview as a basis. In concrete terms, I visited craftsmen and artists from the shop owner's network, presented them with images from the Shin collection and made object collections. One of these place was a hat making factory. The factory was a small family-run unit that had started business in the 1980s and therefore did not have any role in Shin's 1973 collecting activities. The factory produced hats for stage productions, dancing performances, museum exhibitions and fashion shows with traditional dresses, but also for shamans. I explained my intention to make a collection of shaman's hats that reflected the 1973 Shin Official's Hat, whose 'original' aspect the shop owner had responded to. Being presented with several photos of the Official's Hat from the Shin collection, the eldest daughter smilingly said to one of her sisters:

In old times it was made with sponge like that.

Yes. That's something which was frequently made when I was young... That was a kind of fashion [come and gone]; it does look somewhat inexpensive [now]. Also at the time, there was no specific reason [for the usage of sponge]. It was easy to furl, and then the sponge was dyed. These days, woollen yarn and thread is used instead. (Translated from Korean: Interview March 2007)

The eldest daughter explained that the various figures on top of the hat depicted cicadas, flowers and three figures that she asserted were abbreviations of an original Five Direction colours figure. She showed me a sample of an Officer's felt hat (*pŏnggŏji*) – as she designated

it, which was named Official's Hat (*Taegam moja*) in the object list in the Shin collection – made for shamans, and demonstrated how sponge had been 'replaced' with other materials, but that features generally were unchanged.

The eldest daughter was well informed about the stylistic characteristics of different periods and explained the distinction between the *Officer's felt hat* worn by shamans, sword dancers and actors in historical plays and dramas respectively. For example, only shamans and sword dancers had cicadas on their *Officer's felt hat*. She was not aware of the specific religious implications of the cicada, however, and related that she focused on aesthetics in the process of making these hats. However, she said that in the cases when shamans came to them with hats that had been in ritual use, the feeling was different; it was startling.

When asked whether the shamans ordered the *Officer's felt hat* with certain specifications, the eldest daughter related that they mostly ordered this and the *Courtier's red hat* in a set. In the Shin collection there is indeed also a *Courtier's red hat* (A.2724; designated as *Red kat, Hong kat*). During my visit, the hat maker made such a set on commission for the National Museum of Denmark.

INTERACTIVE EXHIBITION – BEYOND THE MUSEUM

The aim of these collecting device sessions was to experiment with methods through which current museums can approach their historical ethnographic object collections. The outcome was collected as first verbal and later material responses to the presentations. However, the methodological experiment

unfolded in a manner which shared commonalities with ethnographic fieldwork on Korean shamanism.¹⁸ Considered from the perspective of these ethnographies on Korean shamanism, the 'collecting device session' was the earliest stage of an ethnographic fieldwork; the exploratory phase in which the ethnographer grapples to set up the research design of his fieldwork. While the methodological experiment being explored here offers viable roads towards socially embedded collecting and towards ethnographic fieldwork on issues on Korean shamanism, this is besides the point being made here.

The employment of the *collecting device methodology* in Korea in 2005 and again in 2007 in the encounters with shop owners and craftsmen had the character of an interactive exhibition. This exhibition was intermittent and it only had a small and shifting audience, but it generated novel data upon which to reflect. The 'ethnographic exhibition' was divested of its fixed spatial connotations inside a Western metropolitan, postcolonial museum, by constituting a way to initiate, conduct and negotiate intercultural encounters with the use of historical ethnographic objects in 'contact zones' established by the museum anthropologist/ethnographic collector.

Reconsidering Clifford's moral approach to museum 'contact zones' and Gell's notions of a one-sided – i.e. metropolitan – transaction in the anthropology of art-making, this kind of exhibition may easily be criticized as a perpetuation of the historical dichotomy of a Western, metropolitan museum and a non-Western 'Other'. I did not fundamentally alter the *modus operandi* guiding earlier generations of collecting activities related with Korean shamanism and Korean shamanic material culture. Arguably, the employment of ethno-

graphic objects related with shamanism – a category of ethnographic objects with strong historic connotations to 'native religion' – only serves to further polarize these binary relations.

While the 2005 and 2007 collecting device sessions thus do not dismantle this dichotomy, they do point towards a potential inherent to the ethnographic museum for the National Museum of Denmark. Namely, the possibility that museum professionals and visitors alike can employ ethnographic objects as a means of encountering people outside the museum in de-centred, localized, even individualized 'contact zones.' If museums are typically considered places where people go to in order to experience and understand, what I suggest here is that the ethnographic museum may also be employed by people as a place from which they may **depart**, in order to experience and understand the world through interaction in the vicinity of museum objects. Even if the things they bring out of the museum are stored on computer hard disks and wrapped up in loose-leaf binders.

NOTES

1. This preoccupation with the biography of ethnographic objects is framed within larger anthropological discourses on the anthropology of things, and the cultural biography of things launched by Appadurai and Kopytoff (Appadurai, 1986).
2. Notably, O'Hanlon perceives ethnographic objects from the perspective of their process of being collected. In *The Field of Collecting* (2001), he constitutes them as 'genuine intercultural documents'. However, he does not employ the biographic term in these writings.
3. Clifford departs from Mary Louise Pratt's definition of 'contact zone' as 'the space of colonial en-

- counters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.' (Pratt, 1992: 6).
4. Research on current intercultural encounters in the vicinity of historical ethnographic objects is quite commonplace in museum anthropology. Besides Clifford (1997) and O'Hanlon (2000, 2001), Fienup-Riordan (1998), in a project which she designated 'visual repatriation', has documented the responses of a group of Yupik elders in their encounter with ethnographic objects from the Jacobsen collection, which they saw in the Berlin Ethnologisches Museum. Presented in the form of travel writing, Alexia Bloch and Laurel Kendall have also elaborated on this theme of visual repatriation in *Museum at the End of the World* (2004).
 5. This collection was displayed in the large temporary exhibition *Man and Spirits* (1974), which also featured shamanic objects from Greenland, Mongolia and Siberia, collected by Henning Haslund-Christensen (1896–1948) and Knud Rasmussen (1879–1933).
 6. For a 'classic' collector's narrative, see Haslund-Christensen, *Mongolske troldmænd* (1944).
 7. This receipt is written on business paper with the following specifications as to the specializations of the shop: Dancing implements. Classic musical instruments. Buddhist implements. Folklore handicrafts. Manufactured wholesale (translated from unpublished document: J.nr. 1462)
 8. According to his letter, Shin arrived in Seoul on July 19th. As the date on the receipt was July 22nd – only three days later – the purchase was most likely prior to the new/old exchange with the shamans, who first had to select the used paraphernalia before they could hand it over to Shin. Based on an on-site survey I made in the winter 2006 / 2007 of the objects in the Shin collection, it could also be that a part of the objects on the list – showing no sign of use – were commissioned directly from the shop to supplement the objects obtained from the shaman organization.
 9. As a matter of fact, the shop owner did have records of the shop's activities going back to the 1970s, but these were mainly the measurements of her clients for making dresses, and not the receipts for transactions.
 10. In these interview sessions, the shop owner made great efforts to be clearly understood by this foreign interviewer. This effort is clearly reflected in the shop owner's style of conversation. Frequently, she reiterates points with little variation and also searches for similar wordings to facilitate my understanding.
 11. In a letter dated 24.7.72, associate professor Jytte Lavrsen, from the Institute of Classical Archaeology and Archaeology of the Near Orient, Copenhagen University informs Chief Curator of the Ethnographic Collection, Helge Larsen about a recent visit to Korea: 'While being in Korea I heard Professor Whang refer to an aspect, which I find it suitable to inform the Ethnographic Collection of. An organization or movement for the renewal of the villages is said to be tearing shamanistic temples down by thousands, after which the inventory is being destroyed. Ethnologists as well as village elders are said to have protested in vain. At the same time, art collectors have begun to show interest in the paintings from these temples and other folk art. Professor Whang finds that the possibility to acquire shaman paintings etc. will soon no longer exist.' (translated from unpublished document: J.nr. 1392)
 12. For comparison, see for example Shin's *"On Korean shamanism"* (1974, 1978) and Kendall's *Shamans, Housewives and Other Restless Spirits* (1985: 54–55).

13. On the conceptualization of 'tradition' and 'Koreaness' as particularly are modern social constructs that have been utilized as a hegemonic tool in the post-colonial nation-building project, see for example *Constructing "Korean" origins a critical review of archaeology, historiography, and racial myth in Korean state-formation theories* (Pai, 2000), *Nationalism and the construction of Korean identity* (Pai & Tangherlini, 1998) and *Korea between Empires 1895–1919* (Schmid, 2002).
 14. For comparison, see *Shamanic implements, connecting symbols of man and spirits – Seoul city, Kyŏnggi Province, Kangwŏn Province* (국립문화재연구소, 2005b: 65, 185, 234, 295). According to the Kangwŏn province shaman, Pin Sun-ae, the General's dress as a spirit dress is a recent development (국립문화재연구소, 2005b: 234).
 15. *Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC)* is one of the major national South Korean television and radio networks.
 16. General Kye-paek (?–660) is a renowned character from the last part of the Paekche kingdom (18 BCE–660 AD)
 17. For comparison, see *Shamanic implements, connecting symbols of man and spirits – Seoul city, Kyŏnggi Province, Kangwŏn Province* (국립문화재연구소, 2005b: 24, 36, 45, 67–68, 131, 149, 187, 296) and Kim Tae-gon, 'Catalogue of Korean Shamanism' (韓國巫俗圖錄) (김태곤, 1982: 9).
 18. See for example, Laurel Kendall 1985, 1988, 1996.
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