

Estonian Academy of Arts  
Faculty of Art and Culture  
Cultural Heritage and Conservation



# Narrative as Cultural Heritage: Preserving Significance

## The Story of a Korean Shaman Painting

Bachelor's thesis

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*“These aren’t ordinary paintings. These aren’t just works on paper. They have had gods put in them, so they are very significant for us.”*

Shaman So Kyong-uk tells author Laurel Kendall in *God Pictures in Korean Contexts. The Ownership and Meaning of Shaman Paintings*, page 82.

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## Introduction

This study of a shaman painting of Korean origin came to be from wanting to know more about the challenges conservators face with preserving objects of religious background. The tension between an object having been used as ritual asset and seen as evidence of historical or cultural value and presented in an ethnological museum as such, provides for a complex investigation into how and why the object is preserved. A possible treatment option considering the shift away from inherent practical proceedings of conservation science and emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach will be discussed. Conservation treatment methodology of the painting will be prepared to the best of the author's ability and knowledge, proposed as possibility if necessary in the future. The case of the Korean shaman painting allows contemplation on the importance of involving intangible values into preservation process, creating a narrative to convey significance in order to perceive the object's integral whole. A study of this kind will be the first in the sphere of conservation science based in Estonia conducted on an object of Korean origin, and will hopefully open an exchange of critical heritage studies between the Asian and the European scholarship. As knowledge of East Asian methods has thus far been limited to Japanese paper conservation in national institutions,<sup>1</sup> and Asian studies lead by an interest in South Korea have begun to attract attention thanks to Tallinn University of Technology and their involvement in collaborative efforts of cultural and entrepreneurial exchange,<sup>2</sup> progress in this field is beneficial to not only heritage professionals in Estonia,

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<sup>1</sup> Collaboration projects between Estonian and Japanese conservators at Art Museum of Estonia; professional paper conservator at Conservation and Digitization Centre Kanut trained in practical Japanese techniques as a few examples.

<sup>2</sup> Tallinn King Sejong Institute and the Embassy of the Republic of Korea to Estonia and Finland organizing cultural activity events, student exchange, and helping local students participate in international contests in Seoul, South Korea.

but for further collaboration between the two countries often identifying themselves as beacons of technological innovation.

The problem with working out a conservation treatment approach to this certain object is that we do not have the information equivalent to what approach would be taken in the so-called *original* context, in Korea. Although the painting's context is now a European museum, its' (not *original*, but) context *of origin* is still culturally considered Korean. With an all-inclusive and informed decision of treatment being the main goal, not having representatives of a culture to consult can result in missing out on valuable information. Fortunately, materials on shaman paintings by native Korean scholars and established international Korean studies scholars are available to exhaust and rely on as qualitative insight to put together a well-informed story. As Estonia has no such connections to Korea-related research, in a fortunate fate Museum Volkenkunde, Museum of World Cultures in Leiden, the Netherlands boasts some of the earliest Korean artefacts<sup>3</sup> collected in Europe and provided the opportunity to become acquainted with the specific object, distinguished with number RV-5995-7 now documented, studied, and being analyzed in detail. Any further practical work will be completed by the author in the event of a successful submission into Leiden University to commence a Master's course in critical heritage through East Asian studies. The current study will be concluded keeping not only the ethical concept of sufficient technical ability in mind, but as an attempt to appreciate, consider, evaluate, and incorporate the cultural needs of an object. Mechanically passive conduct of conservation proves most pro-active in preserving the significance of a Korean shaman painting in the collection of a European museum, as instead of physical integrity essential integrity is sought to be sustained through preserving narrative.

With the help of extensive sources on Korean religious affiliations, contemporary conservation theory, and professional opinions available to exhaust at Museum Volkenkunde this research would not have been possible. The author expresses gratitude

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<sup>3</sup> Eds. D. Kim, E. Nam, *The Korea Collection of Museum Volkenkunde*. Seoul: Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation, 2016, p. 34.

to the ERASMUS+ mobility program, Research Center for Material Culture, and Museum Volkenkunde collections management for establishing a collaborative research internship. The author personally thanks Cindy Zalm, Daan Kok, Fiona MacKinnon, Harm Linsen, and the RCMC staff, especially Ninja Rijnks-Kleikamp and Wayne Modest. Andrew and Sidney Thompson from Restorient, freelancer Irina Tsjeroenova, Maris Allik from Conservation and Digitization Centre Kanut, and Linda Lainvoo for their professional insight. Prof Dr. Boudewijn Walraven for his kindness and immense contribution of data collected in this study. Farideh Fekrsanati and Hilka Hiiop, magnificent supervisors who have provided firm guidance and heartfelt support. And Karwin Chion Cheung, who offered not only specific knowledge on Korean matters, but words of encouragement in times of trouble.

This research has been made possible by the aid of many capable people, and any shortcomings within the study are the author's sole responsibility.

The research conducted has provided constructive development in the studies of preserving an object's intangible presence as much as tangible form and will be discussed subsequently.

## **1. Taking care: material and meaning**

The study of material religion investigates interaction between human bodies and physical objects through sensory perception in certain temporal and spatial contexts, occasionally (de)constructing and (re)interpreting communities or individual objects of religious tradition.<sup>4</sup> Considering cultural heritage phenomena in danger of negligence, researching the values objects or customs hold raises awareness and consequently appreciation of unique legacies internationally. Often something as simple as extending a bit of *care* can prove to be of immense aid in preservation.

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<sup>4</sup> Eds. S. Brent, *Key Terms in Material Religion*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015, p. 3.

By definition, care represents responsibility, regarding something with esteem, extending attention or concern. As heritage professionals, the task of care for phenomena of cultural value entails, in a way, speaking for the unanimated. Assessing condition, establishing storage solutions, and further tendance all ensure as long term survival as possible. It can even be seen as sense of duty to take action if one is able and sufficiently skilled, as in this way the presence of an object of significance can be prolonged.

The concept of care can vary according to relation with an object and cultural or professional background. In conservation respectful treatment of an object entails preserving aesthetic, physical, chemical, and conceptual integrity, accrediting each with equal importance. No change within this integrity should be decided upon uninformed, as any action could be of paramount effect on the whole of the object. As such, conservators are in fact preserving the narrative behind works of art, as evidence of cultural or historical significance is what carries on their value. Preserving narrative as method of discourse attempts to investigate further from material composition studies to exhaust all and any available information regarding an object. Connecting data collected from material analysis, interviews, literature, and cultural acquaintance offers apprehension of the object's integrity mentioned above.

It is emphasized that as much as the object's tangible form is valued as heritage, so should its intangible value be communicated as such. This could be achieved by telling a story, as a story comes alive with visual incentives and in the same way is perpetuated in objects representative of the narrative. Without physical materia it is difficult to explain certain characteristics of a legacy, as the living tradition of painting Korean shaman deities. In order to communicate their significance professionals responsible for taking care of the object in question are tasked with not only preserving narrative, but also conveying the story to the general public or in this case, visitors of an ethnographic museum. The story a Korean shaman painting tells is one of ancient spiritual tradition, divine proximity through material culture, and perseverance.

As care does not only entail basic maintenance or a consciousness, thorough research extending to material analysis can also be considered as such. A series of investigation of

both the tangible and intangible properties of RV-5995-7 was undertaken to gather information relevant to its preservation and interpretation.

For this the characterization grid<sup>5</sup> described by Barbara Appelbaum was used to categorize information and comprehend data collected. Further structure of the study at hand will be based on the quarters I-IV below as object-specific and non-object-specific information will be considered with material and non-material aspects.

	<b>Material aspects</b>	<b>Non material aspects</b>
<b>Object-specific information</b>	<p><i>Information:</i> Observed phenomena and their interpretation, materials identification, determination of structure.</p> <p><i>Source:</i> Object.</p> <p><i>Strategy:</i> Physical examination, analysis, imaging, testing.</p>	<p><i>Information:</i> History of the object, current values, projected future.</p> <p><i>Source:</i> Custodian, others.</p> <p><i>Strategy:</i> Interview, consulting institutional records.</p>
<b>Non-object-specific information</b>	<p><i>Information:</i> Methods of manufacture, material properties, deterioration studies.</p> <p><i>Source:</i> History of technology, materials science, conservator's knowledge of similar objects.</p> <p><i>Strategy:</i> Consult conservation literature.</p>	<p><i>Information:</i> Information about related objects, art history, general cultural information.</p> <p><i>Source:</i> Allied professions, conservator's prior knowledge.</p> <p><i>Strategy:</i> Review literature, consult allied professionals.</p>

1.1. Information to be included in the integral study of an object, from *Conservation Treatment Methodology* by Barbara Appelbaum, 2007.

The first quarter will be made up of general information first known about the painting in The Museum System (TMS), the internal database of Museum Volkenkunde. Surface microscopic examination *in situ* in Leiden, the Netherlands and later analysis of material samples in Tallinn, Estonia reveal the character of colours used, composition of paper, and texture of various additions.

The second quarter will explain how Korean shaman paintings are made and used in the living tradition of *musok*.

The third quarter is greatly made up of the known history of RV-5995-7, which can fortunately be provided by a previous custodian.

<sup>5</sup> B. Appelbaum, *Conservation Treatment Methodology*. Oxford: Elsevier Ltd., 2007, p. 11.



The fourth quarter will extensively explain the cultural background and significance of Korean shaman paintings in their context today to connect the object in question to present attitudes towards cultural heritage in contemporary view.

This information will be considered in suggesting a treatment approach of the painting.

## 2. I quarter: general information, object's condition, material analysis



2.1. *Verso*



2.2. *Recto*

The object was acquired into the collection of Museum Volkenkunde in 2003 as a gift from practicing Korean shaman and collector of various shaman paraphernalia Jung Munsan (정문산) to professor Boudewijn Walraven, an esteemed Korean Studies professor at Leiden University specialized in researching Korean shamanism and long-time facilitator of Korean counterparts. It is not known exactly where and when Jung Munsan acquired the painting and in which condition, but in TMS the painting is dated from 1965.<sup>6</sup> There are later additions to the object like adhesive tape to repair tears

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<sup>6</sup> The iconography and deterioration of material suggests late 19th or early 20th century. However, the 1960s were a time when collecting these paintings were at a peak, so it can be assumed the previous owner acquired the painting in 1965.

and synthetic silk ribbons to allow the painting to be hung up, which would be done if the painting was used during rituals.<sup>7</sup>

These kinds of shaman paintings are believed to manifest the deity they depict and are highly regarded as objects of reverence amongst shamans. The paintings are usually hung up as a backdrop to an altar but some are dismantled, folded and taken with the shaman to perform rituals away from home.<sup>8</sup> These circumstances provide for damages of soot build-up from burning candles and incense, constant exposure to heat and light, continuous wear and tear from handling and folding, as well as weakening and breaking of parts where the painting is fixed to the wall or hung up.<sup>9</sup>

Korean shaman paintings are hand painted and often traced from popular predecessors, never signed by artists who complete them. The painting in question depicts General Im, the deified persona of Im Gyeong-eop (1594 - 1646) who was a prominent general during the Joseon dynasty and respected for his service and loyalty to the country.<sup>10</sup>

### **Condition of the object**

Dimensions: 99 x 76 cm. Length of ribbons 82 cm each.

The painted paper consists of four layers and has been folded together frequently, the creases making up nine panels. The top corners and top middle section is lost, probably due to mounting technique. The material is stiff overall and brittle at places with pieces from edges already broken off or in danger of doing so. In the bottom corner there are two holes seeming to have occurred while folded due to their shape and size. Throughout the extent of the painting there are small damages of material loss, pierced through or ripped to form lacunae with painted paper still attached crumpled. The original material is darkened with dust on both sides. The top corners of the painting have later additions of synthetic ribbons sewn on and taped over on one side. In lower corners paper has folded over revealing the four layers of material. There is a tear along one side.

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<sup>7</sup> From conversation with Boudewijn Walraven, 26. I 2018. Notes in author's possession.

<sup>8</sup> From conversation with Boudewijn Walraven, 26. I 2018.

<sup>9</sup> L. Kendall, Things Fall Apart: Material Religion and the Problem of Decay. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 2017, p. 861-886.

<sup>10</sup> Im Gyeong-eop. – Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Im\\_Gyeong-eop](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Im_Gyeong-eop), accessed 13. V 2018.



2.3. Locations and nature of damage on *verso* and *recto*.

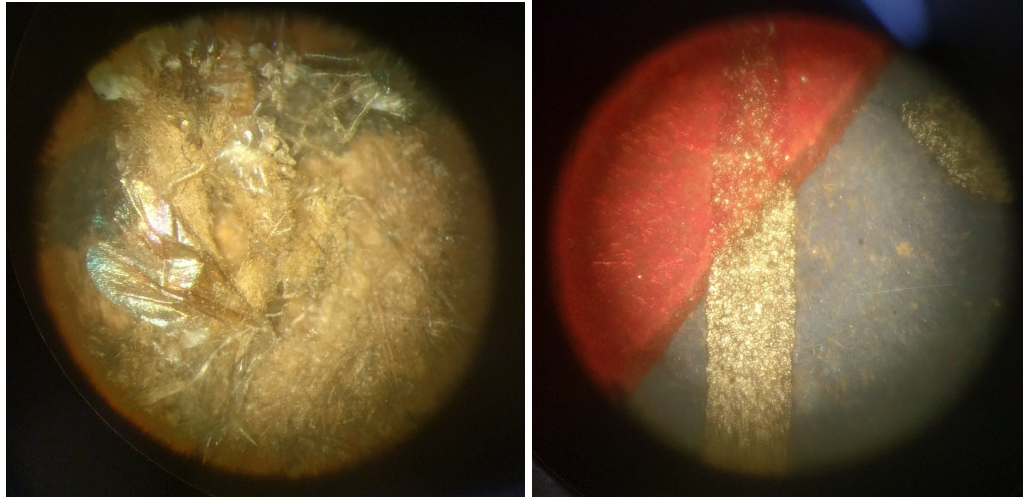
a. Loss of original material, ribbon sewn and taped;  
 b. major loss of middle upper section;  
 c. loss of original material, ribbon sewn;  
 d. attached paper material on surface;  
 e. pierced lacunae and insect excrement;  
 f. evidence of removed tape and tear along side;  
 g. loss of pigment due to unclear reasons;  
 h. frayed edges of painted paper layer;  
 i. fine white paint splatter;  
 j. insect shells;

k. migrative pigment;  
 l. loss of painted paper layer;  
 m. loss of pigment due to abrasion/tape removal;  
 n. tape adhesive residue;  
 o. lacunae;  
 p. fine dark spots;  
 q. folded edges;  
 r. glue stain;  
 s. skinned paper layer;  
 t. attached piece of paper, maybe with textile tape;  
 u. loss of original material, corner piece taped to surface, ribbon sewn;  
 v. indentation of pigments on *verso*;  
 w. migrative pigment on *verso*;  
 x. loose piece of original material.

<p>Material loss, evidence of tape, crease (a., e., h., b., q., f., g., o.)</p>	<p>Material loss, loose pieces, white paint spatter (q., i.)</p>	<p>Material loss, crumpled edges, sewn ribbon, lacunae (d., c., k.)</p>
<p>Creases, loss of pigment, frayed edges (m.)</p>	<p>Creases, loss of pigment, stains of adhesive (g., m., n.)</p>	<p>Loss of pigment, frayed edges of creases (h.)</p>
<p>Loss of pigment, lacunae, crumpled, folded, and frayed edges (q., o.)</p>	<p>Creases, loss of pigment (p., g.)</p>	<p>Crease, loss of pigment, minimal staining (g.)</p>

2.4. Details of damage on *verso*.

*Verso:*



2.5. Dead insect shells.

2.6. Detail of silver pigment.

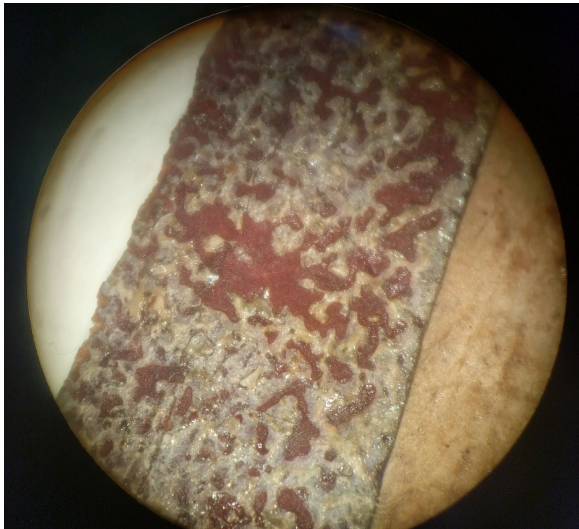
Taken through KAPS SOM® microscope.

Painted colours of red, blue, green, pink, yellow, black, white and silver appear subdued under a layer of set dust. Along the edges a red line borders the painting. A particular pinkish-red hue has migrated through to the *recto* and smudged on the *verso*. Where details have been painted blue, the colour has faded in spots due to pigment loss revealing paper material underneath. This could be caused by mold damage of the binder. Overall on the surface of the painting there are a few glue stains, white paint spatter at the top, signs of deterioration due to tape adhesive where the pigment has removed, and insect excrement on top corners. There are also remains of insects on the surface (see fig 2.5), adhered to the paper. Dark spots on the bottom half of the painting could be either mold or ink (see fig 2.9). Deteriorated adhesive has yellowed and darkened the paper surface in lines where the tape has been attached. Evidence of thumbtacks suggests the painting has been hung several ways. The most visually disturbing damages are two holes and tears along creases which have been backed with tape. Along the creases, painted paper has frayed and folded. The top edge of the painting is very fragile, having suffered damage of extensive material loss. The ribbon sewn on with white thread can be viewed on one corner and taped over on the other. At the top, remains of another paper have attached to the surface.

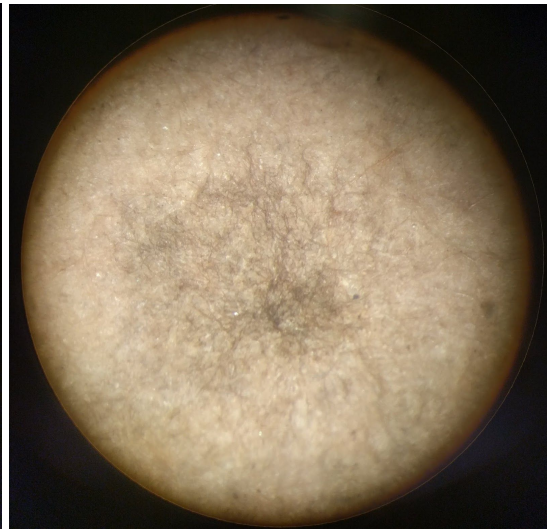
<p>Loss of material, sewn ribbon, skinned paper layer, adhesive (a., s.)</p>	<p>Loss of material, adhesive, paper adhered to surface, tape (x., b.)</p>	<p>Loss of material, skinned paper layer, adhesive, tape (n., u., f.)</p>
<p>Creases, staining, pigment indentation, adhesive, tape (v., p.)</p>	<p>Lacuna, adhesive, tape, pigment indentation and migration (f., v.)</p>	<p>Tape, pigment indentation, crease (v.)</p>
<p>Skinned paper layer, creases, staining (f., s.)</p>	<p>Creases, skinned paper layer, adhesive, reaction of pigments(n.,w.)</p>	<p>Lacunae, creases, skinned paper layer, adhesive, staining (v., o.)</p>

2.7. Details of damage on *recto*.

*Recto:*



2.8. Textile or paper.



2.9. Ink stain or mold.

Taken through KAPS SOM® microscope.

Paper is darkened and damaged. Along the top edge it appears a piece of red textile is attached to the painting (see fig 2.8, upon closer inspection it looks to be thick red paper with adhesive residue from a textile tape remaining). Six pieces of cello tape, four of one kind and two of another kind, have been put in place along the creases and upper corners for support. Earlier tape removed has left darkened residues of adhesive at the top, along middle creases and on lower panels of paper. Some of the tape has peeled away a layer of material probably whilst being removed. The residue left is solid and flaking.

Pigment has seeped through from the front to form light spots and pink stains in various places, along the bottom edge and through a torn crease next to one of the two holes at the bottom of the painting. Silver details (see fig 2.6) that have been painted with an unstable pigment (with glue-like binder as can be seen through the microscope KAPS SOM® 20x magnification) have reacted on the paper in such a way that it can be viewed as lighter risen spots on the backside. Various stains can be seen on the surface. Some lightened, some yellow, some dark spots that could be mold. Wood splinters can be seen inside the paper which means probability for higher acidity<sup>11</sup> (see fig 2.11). At the top

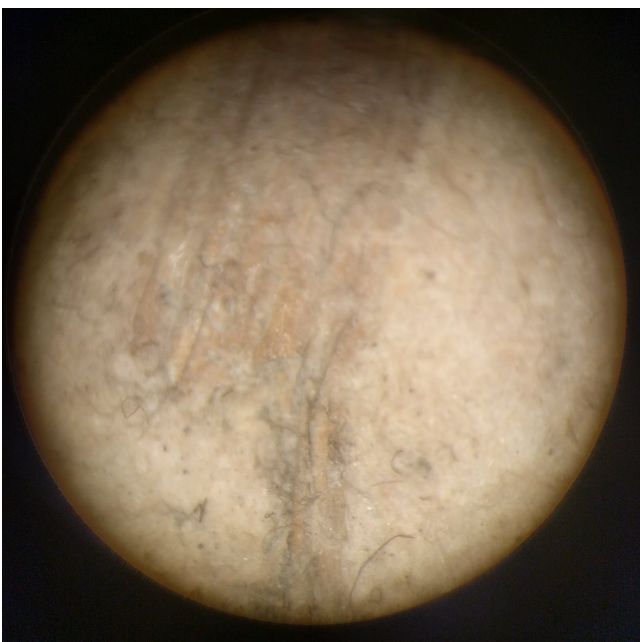
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<sup>11</sup> Conversation with Andrew Thompson, 16. II 2018. Notes in author's possession.

next to one of the adhesive tapes *Im Jang Kun* (임장군) is written in ink which means “General Im” (see fig 2.10).



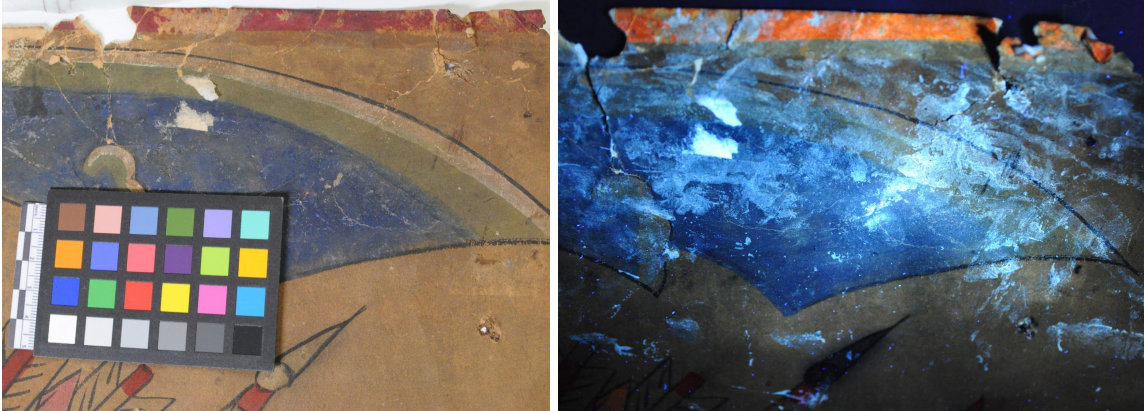
2.10. From top to bottom: 임장군



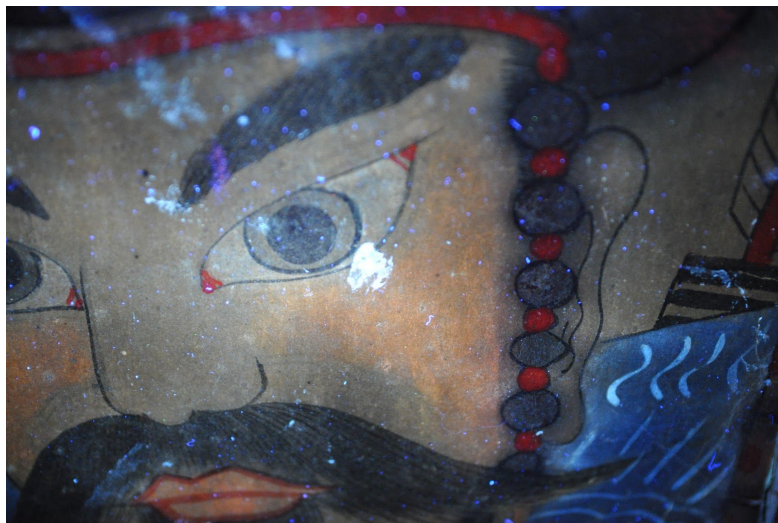
2.11. Wood splinter in paper.



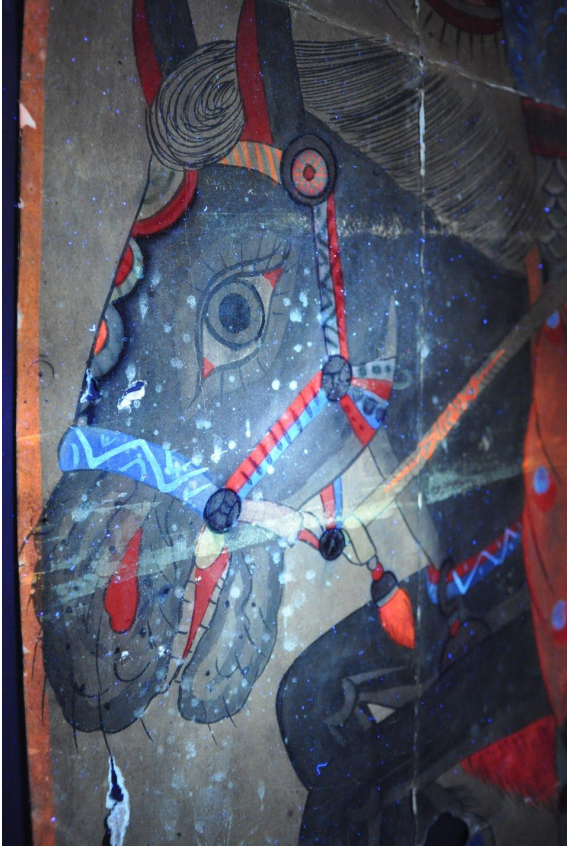
After surface investigation, the painting was photographed under ultraviolet light. This shows which pigments used might be similar to each other and which might not be, providing insight which cannot be seen without the proper equipment.



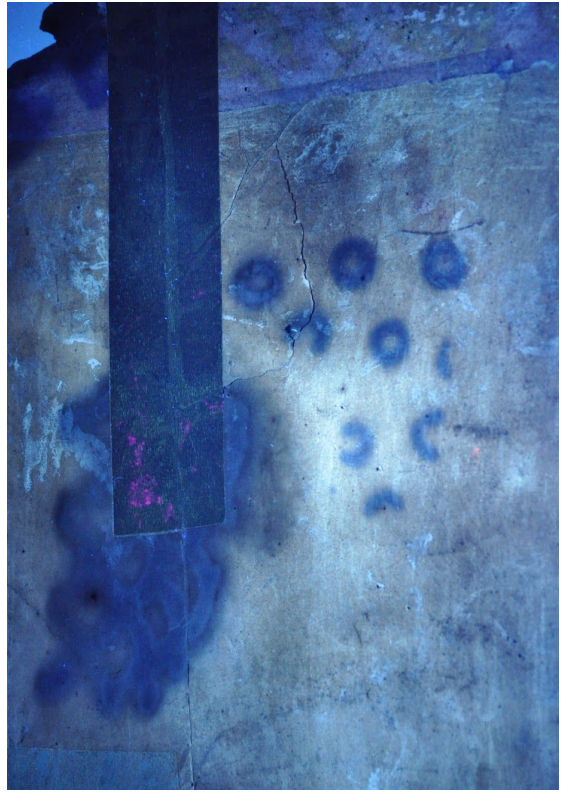
2.12. Detail of painting under visible light and UV-light, showing smeared adhesive residue.



2.13; 2.14. Detail under visible and UV-light, showing powder-like substance and splatter of paint or adhesive on the surface.



2.15; 2.16; 2.17; 2.18. Details under UV-light on *verso* and *recto*.



2.19; 2.20. Details under visible and UV-light. White pigment on *verso* appears dark on *recto*.



2.21. Detail of adhesive residue under visible and UV-light. Largest lacuna on the right.

In order to evaluate how sensitive the pigments in painted colours are, solubility on most of the surfaces was tested with distilled water and fine cotton swabs. The tests confirm what is also apparent during visual evaluation of the object: the most sensitive are the red and pink colours, having already migrated in part or widely losing binder. Other colours prove to be quite adherent to the substrate, showing little to no sign of powdering.

A porosity test performed with introducing distilled water with a bamboo pick to the surface of the paper material on the *recto* to evaluate water resistance proved satisfactory. Although the paper material is brittle it shows to be dense enough as the water introduced sinks immediately and does not leave staining on the surface.



2.22. Location and extent of pigment solubility tests under KAPS SOM® 20x magnification.

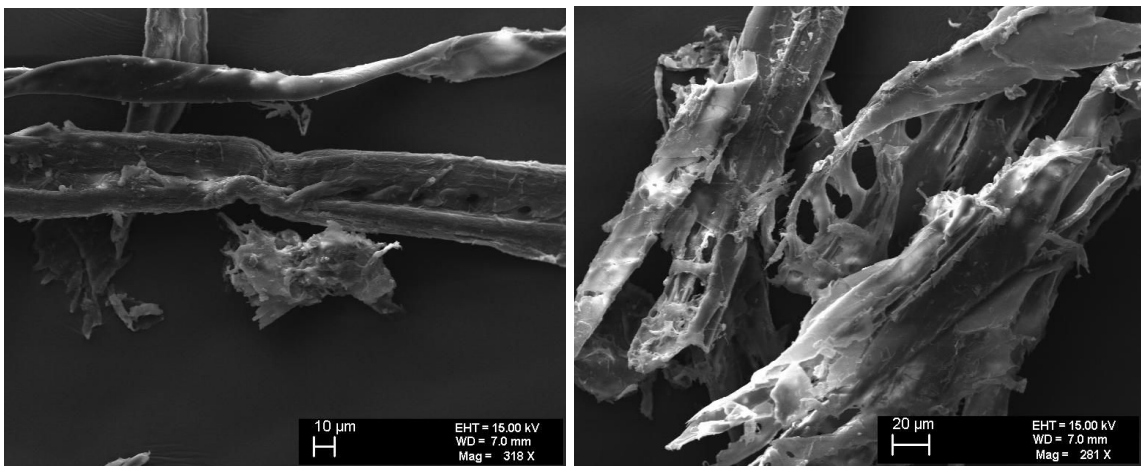
There are two kinds of basic pink coloured pigments and two kinds of basic red coloured pigments used on the painting. Lighter tones are watered down versions. The border is most likely a mix of both a pink and a red colour. One red is more sensitive than the other and has migrated on the surface. One pink colour has bled through to the *recto*, but not all details painted with pink show such signs, thus confirming two kinds of pigments used. Seemingly, one kind of blue, green, black, white, and yellow coloured pigment has been used, these show less powdering or none at all. Only the white has reacted strangely with the paper material, as could be seen under UV-light. Two kinds of silver colours have also been used, one with a high concentration of adhesive and the other darkened to black, both migrating through to the *recto*. Unfortunately, the binder used in these colours is unknown, but appears very much like simple adhesive under microscopic investigation.

In the Material Analysis Research laboratory at Tallinn University of Technology under the supervision of professor Urve Kallavus, fibres from the top layer of the painting were thoroughly investigated under an optical microscope (OM) and a scanning electron microscope (SEM). This revealed many different types of plant fibres had been used in making the paper the painting consists of. At least three types of fibres can be seen with a 40x magnification from a sample of 0,5 cm in length.



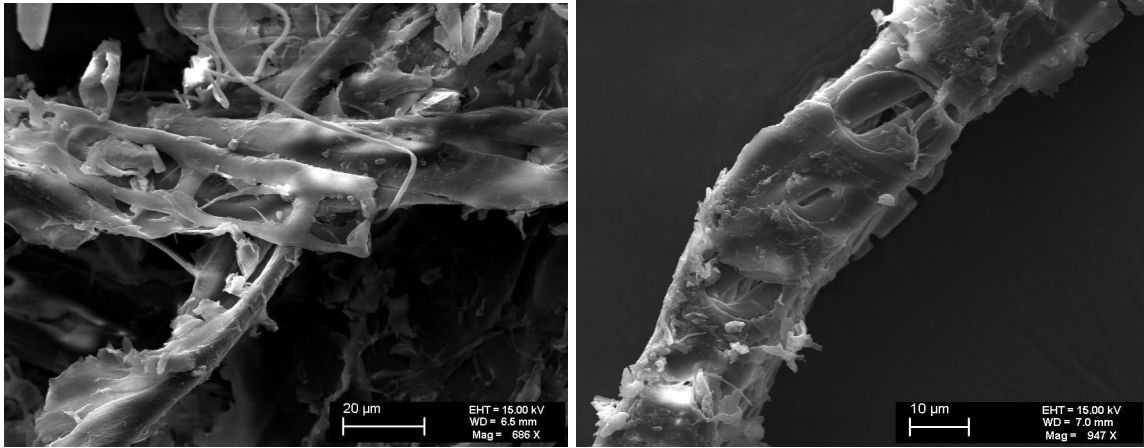
2.23. Left: round coniferous tracheids; middle: long fibre of cotton and fibre of linen; right: square deciduous tracheids.

The same fibres can be seen in SEM analysis.



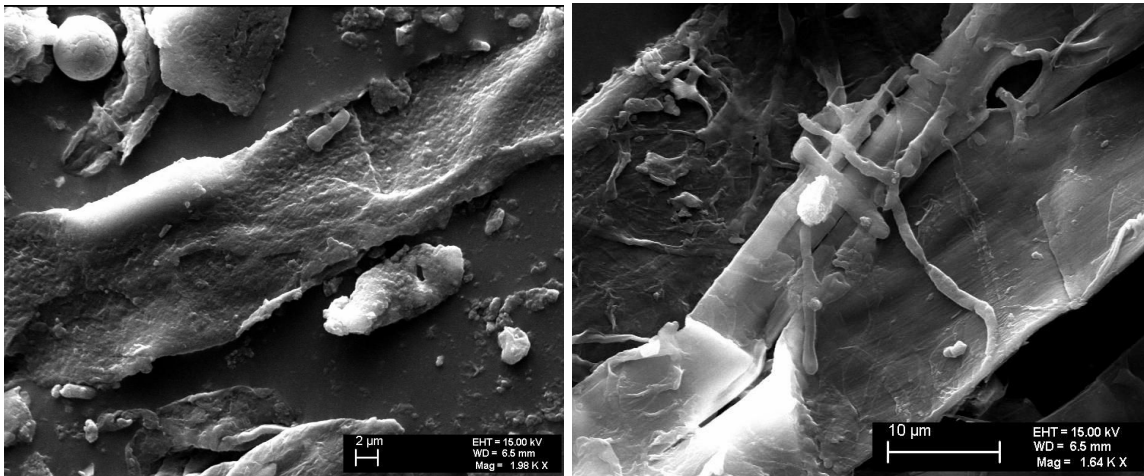
2.24. Left: cotton fibre and coniferous fibre; right: extensively damaged deciduous fibre.

Many other plant fibres can also be found, but the exact source is most likely a tree of Asian origin, as the tracheids do not match any trees known to Estonian specialists. These fibres will be identified with the help of Korean experts at a later date.<sup>12</sup>



2.25. Fibres up for identification.

High magnification investigation shows spores and hyphae on the surface of the paper, which indicate heavy mold damage. Deterioration of the material is far more extensive than assessed on visual inspection beforehand.



2.26. Left: spore in top corner, bacteria on lower half; right: hyphae on plant fibre.

Material analysis allows highly detailed information about the object to be gathered. Exhausting available scientific research methods, valuable auxiliary data can be accessed.

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<sup>12</sup> Expected July 2018.

### 3. II and III quarter: making *mushindo* and the journey of RV-5995-7

The second quarter of non-object-specific material aspects will explain how Korean shaman paintings are created as well as disposed of. The properties and behaviour of paper material and history of paper-making technology help roughly date the painting at hand, providing temporal context.

The oldest surviving shaman paintings (a little over 200 years old) are rendered freehand and display a certain kind of savage naivism, comparable to early 20th century primitivism in Europe and North America.<sup>13</sup> Ethnographic imagery once considered sacred becomes valorized as high art in the eyes of scholars and collectors. Much like Korean shaman paintings known as *shinhwa/mushindo*.



3.1. Oldest shaman painting known, from Cheju National University Museum.

3.2. Simpler sketch from Great Buddha temple in Kangwon. Cheju National University Museum.

<sup>13</sup> L. Kendall, *God Pictures in Korean Contexts*, p. 18, 36, 45.



These paintings were traditionally hand-made by Buddhist monks, but as the demand for god pictures grew, so did production methods. At first paintings were created on high quality silk or Chinese mulberry paper with pigments also imported from China. In the 1900s, machine-made paper was used, with figures traced on paintings from popular pre-existing imagery. From the 1960s or 1970s commercial prints became more popular, as they were much more accessible and financially a sensible choice.<sup>14</sup> Although authenticity within these images is rather considered as the ability to establish contact between the gods and the shaman, some still prefer hand-painted paintings to poster-like pictures.

When commissioning paintings, *manshin* communicate their visions of gods to traditionalist painters who then match the revelations as closely as possible.<sup>15</sup> Many pictures now are produced with pattern papers that outline the basic figures, features, and paraphernalia characteristic to gods and generals, as well as indication of colors to be used in each section. Bodies, swords, and other details are painted first, leaving the face as last,<sup>16</sup> for animation can only take place after.



3.3. Incomplete painting of Spirit Warriors, Gahoe Museum. 3.4. Painter An Chong-mo, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> L. Kendall, *God Pictures in Korean Contexts*, p. 26, 57.

<sup>15</sup> L. Kendall, *Things Fall Apart*, p. 875, 877.

<sup>16</sup> L. Kendall, *God Pictures in Korean Contexts*, p. 36, 99.

If a painting has been in use in rituals for a while, it is likely to get damaged from live fire, direct sunlight, rodent and insect activity, or simply from constant handling. Korean shamans have traditionally buried or burned damaged pictures to respectfully get rid of physical material and commission a new, fresh “seat” for their deities.<sup>17</sup> As the divine is treated with the utmost respect, the medium through which the connection between the shaman and the spirit is made should be one of pristine condition. Before any disruption (whether dismantling, relocating, or disposing) the paintings are deanimated, severing the active tie to the divine.<sup>18</sup> Still, the proof of what they once were and how they were used stays long after any disturbance of integrity takes place, even if hung up in a museum behind glass in a completely different context, or simply stored for many more years. In a way, the deity on the painting is still present, although not intently.

Based on studies of paper material deterioration and information about paper-making technology developments to distinguish hand-made from machine-made, it is possible to roughly date the painting, as wood pulp could not be used in making paper before 1844.<sup>19</sup> Rise in acidity levels with deterioration of paper also derives from this as the lignin in wood splinters compose. Although according to The Museum System (TMS) the painting in question is dated from 1965, the deterioration of material and style of depiction suggests the 1900s (see fig 4.5 and 4.6 as comparison of paintings from early 20th century). As the paper composition of the painting indeed includes wood, it can be deduced that it is no older than late 19th century at the earliest. This confirms the rarity of the painting, as shaman paintings were only collected from the early 20th century. If the painting is in fact as old as material analysis and iconographic history suggests, it is remarkable the painting has not been disposed of according to tradition and has remained intact to become part of the collection of Museum Volkenkunde, where it is now available for research.

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<sup>17</sup> L. Kendall, *Things Fall Apart*, p. 875, 877.

<sup>18</sup> L. Kendall, *Things Fall Apart*, p. 877.

<sup>19</sup> From lecture on paper conservation, Estonian Academy of Arts. Notes in author’s possession, 2017.

Professor emeritus of Korean Studies and author of many volumes on shaman traditions, prof Dr. Boudewijn Walraven offered irreplaceable insight into how the painting came to be in the collection of Museum Volkenkunde, providing information for the third quarter. The painting was at first a gift from shaman Jung Munsan to prof Dr. Walraven who saw fit to in turn give it to the museum he was closely connected with.

According to him, the painting is typical of *Hwanghae* (region under North Korean jurisdiction) ritual tradition, where paintings are commonly folded and transported. These paintings are also hung up on walls during rituals. A shaman has their own array of deities, categories of gods that should be represented in materia. On average, shamans have 20-30 paintings permanently fixed on their shrine and sometimes just as many portable pictures. During their career shamans acquire more of these painted deities, as they serve more spirits with their professional abilities developing. When a shaman retires from service these paintings are passed down to an apprentice, but in the absence of pupils, the paintings are often burned or buried as a way of getting rid of spiritually potent physical material with consideration. Nowadays, shamans themselves see value in old paintings and treat them with respect, storing them nicely at home or giving them away to trusted collectors. New paintings are commissioned in their place, to offer a designated space for divinities.

Shamanist paintings are seen as folk art in Korea, not controversial as heritage, but not accepted as religious material by the government. The painting in question was brought to the Netherlands with shaman and collector Jung Munsan in hopes of receiving recognition with carrying on intangible cultural heritage. According to prof Dr. Walraven, he was ambitious to open a museum some time in the future to exhibit the shaman paraphernalia he had collected over the years but has now unfortunately passed away. On his last trip to see prof Dr. Walraven, Jung Munsan donated the painting and some other objects as evidence of valuable folk art,<sup>20</sup> laying foundation for the opportunity to research Korean shaman tradition at Museum Volkenkunde.

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<sup>20</sup> From author's e-mail exchange with Boudewijn Walraven, 8. II 2018.

#### 4. IV quarter: living tradition of shaman paintings and religious influence on cultural heritage

Korean thought has been influenced by and intertwined with various spiritual practices. The primary religions and philosophies which have affected the Korean people and Korean society most significantly are shamanism, Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, filial piety, and forms of ancestor worship.<sup>21</sup> Their influences will be discussed to understand the contemporary approach to phenomena of historical and cultural value.

In Korean shaman tradition, paintings *shinhwa/mushindo* are believed to manifest the deities they depict and are regarded highly as objects of reverence amongst shamans called *mudang/manshin* and their clients. The paintings are usually hung up as a backdrop to the shaman's altar/shrine *shindang* but some are dismounted, folded and taken with the shaman to perform rituals or *kut* away from home, in case they hold a personal significance. Rituals are held whenever necessary to heal sickness, solve financial and relationship problems, bring good fortune, avoid misfortune, and provide protection.<sup>22</sup>



4.1. Paintings hung up behind a shaman's altar.

<sup>21</sup> W. Park, *Traditional Korean Thought*. Seoul: Inha University Press, 2002, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> W. Park, *Traditional Korean Thought*, p. 34.

A painting is material extension of the god. Shaman traditions are very much alive in South Korea, and divine manifestation through visual aid is still an important part of carrying out a proper *kut*. Upon retiring, shamans pass on their pantheon of gods to their apprentices. In these paintings, representations of gods have also been passed down from past teachers and from their teachers.<sup>23</sup> This way, paintings live many lives as generations of shamans contact spirits through media deemed intact enough to become divine seats once more.

To understand the cultural connotations of a shaman painting one must understand the basic beliefs of shamanism.

Shamanism or *mugyo/musok* is generally defined as a form of religion practiced in Northeast Asia including Korea, based on a belief in spirits which can only be influenced by shamans or *mudang/manshin*, who become vessels for the spirits themselves and pass on the will of the gods.<sup>24</sup> Spirits, gods, or deities become visible through their material realization in the corporeal bodies of shamans.<sup>25</sup> To communicate with the gods, rituals are held to invoke a spirit, entertain a spirit, pray to the spirit to fulfil a human desire, and finally respectfully ask for the spirit's return to the nether world.<sup>26</sup>

Even though in the Korean countryside shamanism represents the most basic reality of religious experience to regular people, in the capital Seoul and other urban areas, traditional shamanism is usually regarded as superstition, even a cult. In ancient times, shamans were regarded as the highest sphere of society.<sup>27</sup> According to researcher of Korean shaman history, Chang Chu-kun, archeological evidence suggests shamanism existed in the Korean peninsula even as a part of Bronze Age culture and is considered the indigenous religion of Korea.<sup>28</sup> Chang also refers to professor W.Y. Kim, who proposes that one of the most well-known treasures of Korean history in the world, the

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<sup>23</sup> L. Kendall, *God Pictures in Korean Contexts*, p. 89.

<sup>24</sup> C. Chung, *An Introduction to Korean Shamanism*. - *Shamanism, The Spirit World of Korea*. Ed. C. Yu, R. Guisso. California: Asian Humanities Press, 1988, p. 30.

<sup>25</sup> L. Kendall, *Things Fall Apart*, p. 875.

<sup>26</sup> W. Park, *Traditional Korean Thought*, p. 32.

<sup>27</sup> W. Park, *Traditional Korean Thought*, p. 36.

<sup>28</sup> C. Chung, *An Introduction to Korean Shamanism*, p. 30.

golden crowns of the Silla era (57 BC–935 AD) were not only the symbols of kingship, but also represented the symbol of the chief shaman of the kingdom (see fig 4.2 and 4.3). Elements of sacrificial activities tied to rituals have been noted in literature describing the Silla period. For example, in the oldest surviving chronicle of Korean history the *Samguk sagi* (History of the Three Kingdoms), the second king of Silla was also called the High Shaman.<sup>29</sup>

Then and now shamans take on the role of priest, healer, and prophet, becoming the representatives of folk art and culture, but in modern Korea shamanism is sometimes mentioned with certain embarrassment and seen as an outdated custom paranoid housewives (main patronage of *kut*<sup>30</sup>) still sponsor. In reality many Koreans of all age, status, religious affiliation and gender participate in shaman rituals, simply because of its familiar ways and accessibility.<sup>31</sup> That is why in spite of repression and limitations throughout history, shamanism in Korea is still very much prevalent as spiritual experience.

Korean shamans are traditionally women who have learned from their matriarch, whether kin by blood or bond. But many male shamans also keep shaman tradition alive, especially on *Jeju* island. Each *manshin* has their own pantheon of gods to channel during rituals, accumulated throughout their career. They become vessels for spirits of deceased ancestors, mythical characters, sprites of nature, and deified historic personas. Although in the West, shaman rituals are sometimes referred to as “exorcism”, spirits and demons are never expelled during *kut* like in the Christian concept. On the contrary, deities are brought forward to appease and entertain them to ask for good favour. Shamans put on an energetic show to display their superhuman abilities. While manifesting certain deities they dance, sing, consume meat and alcohol. It is important to note that shamanism is considered the indigenous religion of the Korean peninsula and the basis of all consequent mainstream doctrines.

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<sup>29</sup> C. Chung, *An Introduction to Korean Shamanism*, p. 31.

<sup>30</sup> K. Kim, *Kut and the Treatment of Mental Disorders*. - *Shamanism, The Spirit World of Korea*. Ed. C. Yu, R. Guisso. California: Asian Humanities Press, 1988, p. 157.

<sup>31</sup> D. Baker, *Korean Spirituality*. USA: University of Hawaii Press, 2008, p. 124.



4.2. Silla golden crown named national treasure. The shape and height of the crown also matches other hats worn by shamans during rituals. Charms or beads are often hung from the rim for aesthetic effect or acoustic enhancement. 4.3. An example of Korean shaman headwear.

By nature, indigenous shamanism is inclusive and flexible in incorporating elements from other dominant belief systems, on the account of characteristically avoiding conflict and a strong sense of self-development. Everyday life is influenced by the will of spirits, whether positively or negatively. To sustain good fortune, the living must keep the spirits of the dead content by offering them nourishment and entertainment. Then, certain spirits will bring certain luck – in wealth, health, fertility, happiness and also business.<sup>32</sup> *Manshin*, who mediate between clients and gods, are key to the relationship. Through thick and thin, they have kept unique ancient traditions alive by catering to the needs of the many Koreans who turn to shamans in times of trouble.

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<sup>32</sup> C. Chung, *An Introduction to Korean Shamanism*, p. 44.

As for shamanism being an actual religion, is doubtful. It has no sacred script or organizational authority, and is more implemented by culture than conversion.

The gods are contacted through paintings that represent them. This is how material culture tells a story – it shows something unseen to anyone but the *manshin*. The *manshin* embodies the unseen and presents it to spectators in a way to confirm divine presence as a heightened spiritual experience. If asked, many *manshin* claim themselves to actually be Buddhist, simply inclined to channel heavenly generals.<sup>33</sup>

When Buddhism or *bulgyo* was first brought to the Korean peninsula from China in the 4th century, new structured practices were met with some resistance but after a while absorbed into the shaman way of life. As Korean shamanism lacked certain philosophical doctrines and sensible structure, adopting Buddhist aspects into their practices helped acquire social respectability and at least an outward appearance of an organized religion, to maintain presence in higher circles.<sup>34</sup>

The struggle for respect first started when Buddhism became the belief of the court and shamans were sought after by peasants, as they represented connection with heaven amongst the mortals, thus acquiring the image of a religion of the uneducated. It is more likely that exposure to war, doubt in the crown, hunger, and poverty, encouraged the Korean people to soothe their immediate struggles and misfortune.

Now, Buddhism and shamanism are so closely intertwined in Korea, that many shamans state themselves as Buddhists, not even distinguishing the two as separate. Their syncretism is deeply rooted in Korean culture, seen more as a general traditional philosophy than religious practice.<sup>35</sup>

According to the *Samguk sagi (History of the Three Kingdoms)*, Taoism was introduced into the Korean peninsula in the 7th century when the king requested calendars, books, and pictures depicting respect for deities from Tang China. Taoism was then considered the official religion and showed many similarities with shaman practices - a form of exorcism and good luck charms like amulets were prominent, heaven and sacred

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<sup>33</sup> H. Kim Hogarth, *Syncretism of Buddhism and Shamanism in Korea*, p. 234.

<sup>34</sup> H. Kim Hogarth, *Syncretism of Buddhism and Shamanism in Korea*, p. 235.

<sup>35</sup> H. Kim Hogarth, *Syncretism of Buddhism and Shamanism in Korea*, p. 234.



mountains were worshipped by common people. In state affairs, passive methods were used when faced with conflict in war, which exhibit pacifist views, present also in ancient shaman thought. Poetic flow, reflection, and a certain magical mystery characterize the Tao, but practices were mainly kept to have political support and approval from China.<sup>36</sup> In that respect, Buddhism had a deeper influence on the interior of the Korean people. From the 14th century onwards with the creation of Joseon society, Confucian politics as a powerful structured body of authority greatly succeeded in suppressing shaman and Buddhist practices alike, even burning down places of worship in 1703.<sup>37</sup> A new practical, moral, masculine, and pious era dawned upon the Korean people. But with ancestor worship being an irreplaceable part of Confucian values, shamanistic tradition once again found a way to sync “innovation” with their own practice. Shaman gods are often *mudang*'s own ancestors who demand respect and attention on a regular basis. Much like Confucian ancestral rituals, that are held around the year on certain dates for deceased predecessors. Shrines in every household were set up and whole feasts offered to parents and grandparents. The spirits of the deceased were and still are believed to influence the living after death, able to affect their fortune. Filial piety as unquestionable respect for elders dictates the social life of the average Korean. A certain hierarchy stays intact from Joseon era Korea, which implies an elder male citizen as the most important in local community, work environment, and family matters. This is why shamans often refer to their revered divinities as spirit grandfathers and spirit grandmothers,<sup>38</sup> as an inherent esteem is held towards old age and accumulated experience. Not completely considered a religion, but a political and social ideology,<sup>39</sup> Confucian values are still rooted in Koreans as subconscious cultural inclinations. All of the aforementioned have influenced Korea over many centuries, intertwining to develop a unique and bizarrely harmonious presence of spiritual sponsorship, but Christianity was only thoroughly presented in East Asia after the 1830s, when the ports

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<sup>36</sup> C. Yu, Korean Taoism and Shamanism. - Shamanism, The Spirit World of Korea. Ed. C. Yu, R. Guisso. California: Asian Humanities Press, 1988, p. 101.

<sup>37</sup> B. Walraven, Songs of The Shaman. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1994, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> H. Kim Hogarth, Syncretism of Buddhism and Shamanism in Korea, p. 224.

<sup>39</sup> D. Baker, Korean Spirituality, p. 138-139.

opened for foreign scholars, missionaries, and international trade.<sup>40</sup> Confucian scholars had studied Catholicism scholastically before, but as it developed into a practicing religion over time, it was branded heresy and successfully prohibited. In the 20th century, pastors mainly from the US and Europe arrived to preach a whole new set of beliefs which included unprecedented values such as social equality, individuality, and liberalism. Modern education and Western medicine was provided for all, as hospitals opened and medical professionals were trained. This partly resulted in disbelief of the supernatural.<sup>41</sup>

From that time onwards Korea has experienced an explosion of converting to Christianity as the new religion was seen as a way to modernize oneself. It offered comfort, peace, and hope in the afterlife through compassion and promised salvation. And although first missionaries insisted on high morality which suited Confucian scholars, ancestor worship was seen as worship of false gods, thus insisted to abandon as tradition of the Korean people. This, in time, has been successful as a critical view of divine matters has grown. Despite its large following, Christianity never became an official state ideology as however inclined to innovation, Koreans have proven to stay true to their roots. Still, Christian values have greatly shaped Western influence, connecting the once Hermit Kingdom to the rest of the world.<sup>42</sup>

As we can see from this syncretism to fulfill the universal human desire to transcend the limitations of individual existence and overcome suffering, a versatile mix of beliefs has given shape to modern thought and way of life in Korea.

But in light of different influences, views on what is deemed valuable to perpetuate vary. To the shamanistic man, nothing is permanent. And according to taoist belief, everything must flow in the natural rhythm, returning to where it came from.<sup>43</sup> In shaman tradition, up until a few centuries ago, paintings have been deanimated and destroyed. The painting in question might have been deanimated at some point, but these images never really lose

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<sup>40</sup> W. Park, *Traditional Korean Thought*, p. 113.

<sup>41</sup> W. Park, *Traditional Korean Thought*, p. 113.

<sup>42</sup> W. Park, *Traditional Korean Thought*, p. 124.

<sup>43</sup> C. Yu, *Korean Taoism and Shamanism*, p. 109.

their factor of something more than merely paper: their spiritual potential to accommodate gods.

Having successfully survived repression from the Confucian elite, heavy syncretism with Korean Buddhism, and means of modernization by converting to Christianity, shaman traditions have sustained their relevance in offering solutions for hardship of the people. If not seen as practical aid, shamans' work is universally agreed upon to help keep folk traditions alive and attest to the uniqueness of Korean culture.

### **Collecting paintings**

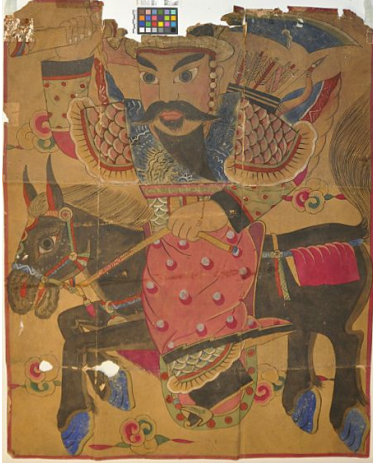
Since the late 19th century Korean shaman paraphernalia and especially paintings have become to be appreciated by collectors and art historians as evidence of ethnographic value, with also shamans themselves respecting deteriorated material due to once being held in high esteem during service and seen as objects of worship.<sup>44</sup>

These objects have been collected by Western anthropologists and Korean art historians, enriching collections in both European museums and establishing them in South Korea (Gahoe Museum in Seoul, National Folk Museum, The Museum of Shamanism). The shift from certain destruction to possible preservation testifies to the change in attitudes towards shaman traditions and a growing conscience to care for objects that carry national cultural narrative.

Examples of shaman paintings of generals display variations in level of intricacy painting clothes, horses, hands, and faces. At first look they resemble one another greatly, but on closer inspection details betray differences in the artists' hand which implies distinction of time, region, and affiliation. Photograph of RV-5995-7 included once more for comparison (fig 4.4).

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<sup>44</sup> L. Kendall, *Things Fall Apart*, p. 878.



4.4. RV-5995-7. General Im.



4.5. General Im.



4.6. Warrior Spirit.



4.7. Warrior Spirit.



4.8. General on White Horse.



4.9. General on White Horse, composition borrowed from Jacques-Louis David's *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*. Gahoe Museum.

In *Things Fall Apart*, author and esteemed anthropologist of Korea, Laurel Kendall describes how the imagery is decided:

*“Most important is that the image match the manshin’s vision of the god, not just any general but a general bearing an appropriate weapon in an appropriate gesture and riding on a mount of appropriate color and markings.”*<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup> L. Kendall, *Things Fall Apart*, p. 877.

Old shaman paintings are extremely rare, and until recently (early 20th century), local collectors had little interest in acquiring “possibly ghost-ridden things from a shaman’s shrine.”<sup>46</sup> In Western view, Korean art consists of Buddhist sculpture, ceramics, porcelain, and muted ink paintings showcasing refinement and elegance. Shaman paintings do not fit this kind of description. That is why in many art galleries, museums, and private collections internationally only artwork considered “elite” is exhibited as “truly Korean.”

In contrast, the main collectors and scholars of Korean shaman paintings now are themselves Korean and value shaman paintings as a “Korean thing” both before and after designation as “art” in the 21st century. This is instigated by an intimate nostalgia for rural past,<sup>47</sup> as South Korean economy and society have progressed with such vigour after the Korean War (1950-1953), that global modernization has since overshadowed an attempted folk art revival.<sup>48</sup> Devaluing traditional Korean culture under the Japanese colonization, infatuation with Westernization after independence, and Christian opposition to indigenous religion denigrated pluralist shamanic traditions.<sup>49</sup> Shaman paintings are an undeniable part of Korean art, but as they are difficult to classify and sometimes explain, they have been left out of the most commonly recognized genres of Korean art and consequently from Korean art history.<sup>50</sup>

Shamanism in the 21st century has acquired respectability as essential part of traditional Korean culture and as the roots of modern society. Appreciation as heritage is not always accompanied by complete acceptance of the *mudang*, Western scholars describe a tension between viewing shamanism as “truly Korean” and as superstition of wailing women in the eyes of the general Korean public.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> L. Kendall, *Things Fall Apart*, p. 878.

<sup>47</sup> L. Kendall, *God Pictures in Korean Contexts*, p. 28.

<sup>48</sup> D. Baker, *Korean Spirituality*, p. 13.

<sup>49</sup> L. Kendall, *God Pictures in Korean Contexts*, p. 57.

<sup>50</sup> L. Kendall, *God Pictures in Korean Contexts*, p. 35.

<sup>51</sup> B. Walraven, *Songs of The Shaman*, p. 3.

Homer Hulbert, an early Christian missionary to Korea, wrote:

“as a general thing, we may say that the all-around Korean will be a Confucianist when in society, a Buddhist when he philosophises and a spirit-worshipper when he is in trouble.”<sup>52</sup>



4.10. Korean shaman painting with the attributed title *Unification of Old Religions* depicting Jesus Christ as “charity”, Buddha as “mercy”, and Confucius as “benevolence and righteousness”. Illustration of syncretism and inclusiveness in shaman thought.

Although no shaman painting has yet been designated national treasure, various foreign scholars like anthropologists, art historians, linguists, etc. have taken interest in shaman tradition and continue to promote appreciation not only in international circles but in the Korean context as well. Lectures, workshops, and colloquiums are put together to discuss iconography and interpretation of these remarkable folk paintings. As with Korean people, through this kind of valorization, historical consciousness of heritage has grown, as has national pride<sup>53</sup> in systematically repressed traditional practices.

<sup>52</sup> H.K. Hogarth, *Syncretism of Buddhism and Shamanism in Korea*, p. 353.

<sup>53</sup> T. Kim, *Korean Shamanism - Muism*. Seoul: Jimoondang International, 1998, p. 147.

## 5. Treatment suggestion: preserving narrative

Conservation as science of preserving cultural and historical heritage phenomena is often seen as preservation of material integrity foremost. Conceptual integrity is used as a tool of explaining physical form, but a reversed approach could prove even more comprehensive benefits in safeguarding cultural values. In the last ten years major research projects have been embarked on by Estonian scholars, where telling the story behind an object has become as much a part of the process as practical conservation-restoration work.<sup>54</sup> As feedback, vast interest in cultural heritage and awareness of objects of historical importance outside specialty professionals has grown, which confirms that communicating a narrative well enough is of remarkable effect on heritage preservation. Emphasizing significance behind works of art through their tangible form raises awareness of the values objects carry, thus promoting appreciation and apprehension of national legacy.

In the case of the Korean shaman painting, it is important to consider all information gathered and to put together the narrative to communicate its significance. In this respect, the painting has recontextualized many times, being made as medium for divine communication, revered as such, after a while most likely deanimated at one point to be retired as object of admiration, repaired when damaged as not to perish, collected as “art”, and perpetuated as ethnographic evidence in museum context. Each piece of information contributes to comprehending the whole as failing to exhaust available sources such as custodians, caretakers, literature, and analytic methods can result in loss of knowledge and an incomplete picture of the object’s cultural, historical, aesthetic, conceptual, emotional, and intellectual integrity.

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<sup>54</sup> Ongoing project *Christian Ackermann - The Pheidias of Tallinn, Arrogant and Talented* (2016-2020). [www.ackermann.ee](http://www.ackermann.ee) with Estonian explanation.

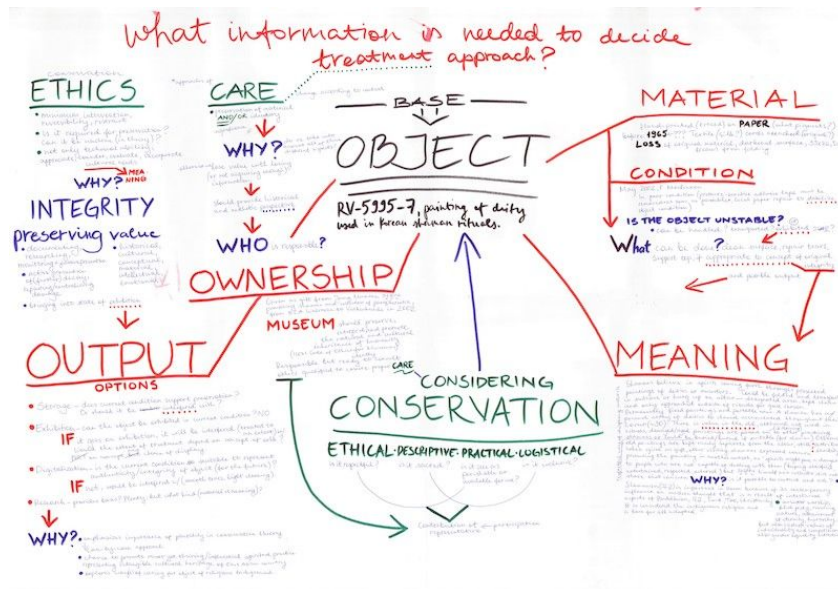
John C. Moses, assistant conservator at the National Museum of the American Indian, writes:

*“[...] an appropriate course of action and a legitimate treatment option with regard to the conservation of [...] sacred art or artifacts is well-informed and carefully considered non-intervention, with conservators familiarizing themselves as far as is appropriate with the non-physical attributes of the object, and its current significance to its originating indigenous culture or its modern-day descendent population, and taking these criteria into account in determining the extent of their interactions with it.”*<sup>55</sup>

Familiarization with the cultural context in question is mentioned, as empathy and willingness to learn about certain groups of people and their material culture goes a long way in obtaining viable information in preservation.

It is important to understand what the object in question represents in its context of origin as well as current context.

In light of extensive data collected and many possible conservation method approaches discussed below, a mind-map was drawn up by the author to consider relevance and significance of each piece of information.



5.1. Mind-map to determine research objectives. High quality scan as appendix.

<sup>55</sup> J. C. Moses, The Conservator’s Approach to Sacred Art. WAAC Newsletter Vol. 13, Nr. 3, 1995.



The main question is presented as “what information is needed to decide treatment approach?” Further treatment planning depends directly on the possible output for the painting. Whether exhibited, digitized or stored, how much *can* and *should* be done varies according to situation.

If the painting were to be displayed, extent of intervention would also depend on the conceptual precept of the certain exhibition. It is important to establish what exactly the museum wishes the painting to represent. The contemporary prints of shaman deities on permanent exhibition at Museum Volkenkunde today explain the spiritual practice in general, outlining the function of rituals and mentioning a polytheist pantheon. To communicate imagery as expression of material religion, the prints available and accompanying explanation is sufficient.



5.2; 5.3. Commercial prints of shaman deities from the 1990s.

If the paintings' function as expression of living tradition in *musok* doctrine were to be communicated, perhaps an older example and an in-depth explanation would be eligible.

In order to convey the story RV-5995-7 tells, staff in charge has the responsibility to gather the information collected into a concise message about the object. If exhibited or introduced somewhere in a museum setting, long texts are difficult to read and dispel a visitors attention. The narrative offered should be short enough to grasp, as informative as feasible, and intriguing to evoke an emotional response. This will ensure the visitor remembers the object and its story.

A visual column of RV-5995-7 was compiled by the author to post on RCMC social media in order to introduce some of the objects in Museum Volkenkunde's collection (visual column as appendix). In this column, the basic characteristics of shaman paintings are explained, from what is depicted on the certain painting, how the paintings are used in Korean shaman tradition, how those traditions are seen today, and how the painting in question came to the museum:

This painting from Museum Volkenkunde Korea collection, distinguished with the number RV-5995-7, depicts General Im, the deified persona of Im Gyeong-eop (1594-1646) who was a prominent general during the Joseon dynasty and respected for his service and loyalty to the throne. The image is hand painted and most likely traced from a popular predecessor, compiled of four layers of machine-made paper, with additions of synthetic silk ribbons that have been sewn on to allow the painting to be hung up, as it was meant to be. The age of the painting is unclear, but is believed to date from the late 19th or early 20th century. The object was given to the museum as a gift from practicing shaman and collector of Korean shaman paraphernalia, Jung Munsan, through prof dr. Boudewijn Walraven in 2003.

Paintings of Korean shaman tradition - *taenghwa/mushindo* - are believed to manifest the deities they depict and are regarded highly as objects of reverence amongst shamans - *mudang/manshin* - and their clients. The paintings are usually hung up as a backdrop to the shaman's altar but some are dismounted, folded and taken with the shaman to perform rituals - *kut* - away from home, in case they hold a personal significance. Korean shamans are traditionally women who have learned from their matriarch, whether kin by blood or bond. Each has their own pantheon of gods to channel during rituals, accumulated throughout a shaman's career. They become vessels for spirits of deceased ancestors, mythical characters, sprites of nature, and deified historic personas. *Manshin* communicate their visions of gods to traditionalist painters who then match the revelations as closely as possible, but never sign their work. Necessarily, a painting is a material extension of the god. As shaman traditions are still very much alive in South Korea, divine manifestation through visual aid is an important part of carrying out a proper *kut*. As opposed to traditional hand-made materials, machine-made paper and even

cheap commercial prints have been used over the past decades, but offering a seat to gods at altars has never ceased. Authenticity within is rather considered as the ability to establish a connection between the gods and the shaman, and is seen as evidence of great capacity. What matters is if the *manshin* ensures contact with whomever she bears in mind. As anthropologist of Korea, Laurel Kendall has put it: “*Most important is that the image match the manshin’s vision of the god, not just any general but a general bearing an appropriate weapon in an appropriate gesture and riding on a mount of appropriate color and markings*”. So what exactly is depicted in paintings is very important for a shaman to have the power to put on a successful *kut*.

In 456 words the narrative of one painting is conveyed sufficiently for a visitor to grasp its significance. Information from all four quarters is included to explain cultural background, production, iconography, and individual history. The example of a well-informed narrative communicates the most important details of the painting to understand why the object is preserved in a museum and seen as valuable from an ethnographic stance.

Preserving the painting considering physical material, the paper substrate would most likely be of first priority as it is the main constituent of the object to be treated. Consulting professional paper conservators of different backgrounds reveals many variants of treatment methodology.

Freelance paper conservator Irina Tsjeroenova based in the Netherlands suggests removing the adhesive tape and residue of glue on both front and back surfaces of the painting completely, as the adhesive could deteriorate further and even migrate through the paper to damage pigments. Ripped or frayed fragments would need local repairs to be stable when handling the painting as they could rip more when, for example, turned around.<sup>56</sup> This raises the question whether the painting would actually be handled any more than it has been since being acquired into the museum’s collection in 2003. As the object is not actively prepared to go on exhibition or digitized, it will further be stored safely and not handled any more than put on storage shelves. Another thing to consider is the danger of adhesive deteriorating further. It could be argued the remains of glue have already done its worse and should not be removed. Mechanically removing the adhesive

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<sup>56</sup> From conversation with Irina Tsjeroenova, 8. III 2018. Notes in author’s possession.

also risks loss of original paper material, as most likely it will not detach easily. Damaging the brittle paper any further is not a risk to be taken lightly.

Paper conservators specialized in Asian art, Andrew and Sidney Thompson strongly affirm that the danger of undertaking any invasive action is greater than leaving the object as it is. Without any treatment deterioration would still be active, but even the slightest intervention should be justified with extensive tests.<sup>57</sup> A water test to see how porous the paper is, a gluten test for identifying binder, and a pigment solubility test to evaluate the extent of powdering are sufficient to determine whether any treatment can be initiated.

On-site collections' conservation policy at Museum Volkenkunde as an ethnographic museum would not object exhibiting the painting as it is, interfering as little as possible or not at all, for evidence of past use which are of value for ethnographic objects might be lost. Depending on the exhibition concept and display options, minor treatment such as dry cleaning could be needed in order to present the object. On the other hand even the accumulated dust on the painting might give valuable information in the future as material analysis methods evolve and as such, cleaning the surface would take away from the possibility of acquiring more information. With this in mind, one might argue removing loose dust goes against the minimal intervention principle as well, but in this case, surface dirt such as insect excrement and remains can damage the paper material and pigments while decomposing. In this case, the prospect of further damage outweighs the risk of possibly losing information, endangering already sensitive substance in favour of a precarious technological accomplishment yet to be achieved is optimistic but simply too irresponsible of cultural heritage caretakers.

In Estonia, it is suggested by paper conservator Maris Allik from Conservation and Digitization Centre Kanut to not rush into any decision to interfere with the material too much. Usually a surface cleaning and wet treatment to neutralize acidity are considered when treating a paper object first, but a painting with already fugitive pigment will not be washed, even if high acid levels can be seen from the hue of the paper substrate. As

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<sup>57</sup> From conversation with Andrew and Sidney Thompson, 8. III 2018. Notes in author's possession.

digitization has acquired an importance in conservation, the image would benefit from surface cleaning and local repairs of the top layer to reveal as much of the original painting as possible, if chosen to be perpetuated as a digital image. This could be done with a mix of methyl cellulose and wheat starch, gently coercing the turned paper layer into place and fixing it with the adhesive. As the material is very brittle, it might be necessary to wet paper locally. This, however, could provide a problem as in many places that need to be reattached, the folded paper is painted and moisture can cause pigment to bleed. As basic practice, any foreign material on the surface of the paper that can further damage the object is removed.<sup>58</sup> Broken off pieces and pieces in danger of doing so can be supported with regular japanese paper often used in paper conservation. In any case, if it is possible to avoid further loss of original material, an effort should be made in that favour.

But is it absolutely necessary to interfere with the condition of the object to ensure its preservation?

In the case of the Korean shaman painting from the collection of Museum Volkenkunde, the damage of the object has become part of its story. Loss of paper material at the top is evidence of heavy use, meaning the painting has been employed as medium of divine connection actively. The muted colours confirm build up of dust and soot, which also imply being exposed to ritual use, as candles and incense is burnt in the immediate vicinity of shaman paintings. Despite extensive damage, the painting has been held onto and repaired. It has been taped to prevent further loss and even new ribbons have been added. Perhaps whomever did so wanted still to use the painting for its' intended purpose: to be hung up during rituals and revered. It was kept safely for a collector to acquire it and find fit to finally give to an ethnographic museum, thus carrying on its story.

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<sup>58</sup> From conversation with Maris Allik, 12. V 2018. Notes in author's possession.

In terms of preserving evidence of use as integral part of the object, a hands-off approach is preferable, but as material analysis results reveal the fibres are much more damaged than expected, another round of testing would be beneficial in considering the use of biocides to determine their risks and advantages in neutralizing fungal decay. If it is deemed necessary, a more invasive approach to ensure stable storage conditions suspending active deterioration would be conceivable.<sup>59</sup>

In case of interference with the condition of the object, immersion with low concentration consolidant or biocide could be an option. The image would have to be supported with a protective film in order to keep fugitive pigments from dissolving. Another option could be fine gas, as the substance administered would distribute evenly and in a controlled manner. If only needed locally, a simple saturation with the help of a syringe might be considered, although liquid can form aureola. These options can only be considered if there is incentive for immediate action. If the painting is not in direct danger of complete disintegration and will not be put on display or otherwise exhibited, it is worth considering restraining from treatment for now, but ensuring stable storage conditions. If damage from fungi is only on the surface, a dry cleaning would also be sufficient.

For stable storage an acid-free and durable cardboard box together with collections' manager Harm Linsen and the author was built, installing a simple mechanism for easy removal of the painting out of the box in order to avoid damaging the object's already brittle edges. Both the inside borders of the box and the lid were reinforced with thick cardboard along vulnerable areas subject to pressure and possible collapse, which would also damage the painting inside. Individual loose pieces inside a petri dish were attached to the paper underneath the painting in order to store every piece of original material in one unit.

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<sup>59</sup> K. Konsa, *Modern Conservation: Connecting Objects, Values and People*. *Baltic Journal of Art History*, 2015, p. 54.

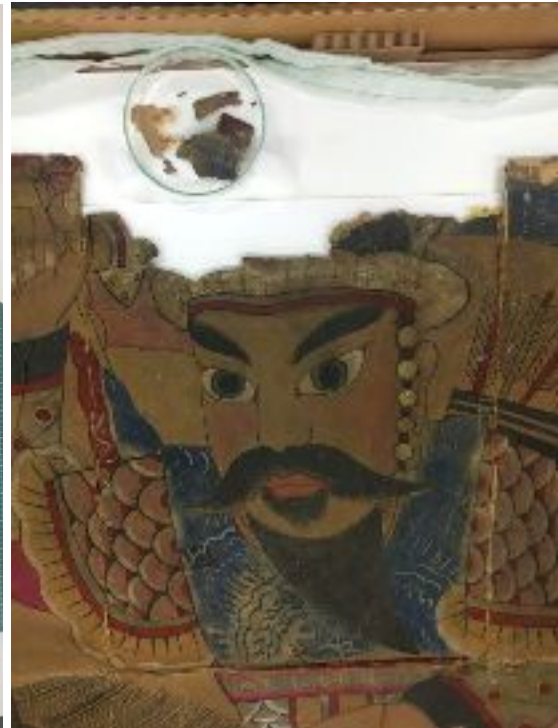


5.4. Thick cardboard held in place on base of storage box to provide even surface for the painting.

5.5. Textile loops for easy lifting out of box.



5.6. RV-5995-7 in new storage box.



5.7. Detached pieces fixed in place inside box.

The painting is seen as of ethnographic and even archeological value. All addition to the original acquired after being completed as painting is evidence of previous use and as such, serves as narrative importance. Without the additions, the object would not have the same significance as an example of Korean shaman painting tradition survived and revalorized in European context. As in conservation of contemporary art, different materials used in one work of art can cause damage to each other while deteriorating, but removing an indispensable part of the conceptual whole alters the object's integrity. That is why even if the tapes on the shaman painting might or might not damage paper material further, the risk of taking away from the significance - the narrative - of the object should be avoided with great caution.

The painting is no longer used in rituals and never will be again, so any treatment must follow the agreement of considering the painting as cultural information carrier, but as a museum object. Not preserving the object would mean loss of a tangible link to the past.<sup>60</sup> Museums as holders of communal memory must sustain and properly communicate that link to people. The institution of a museum as educator is long outdated, instead the function as intermediary should be considered, as artefacts are recontextualized and in a way animated to interact with visitors.<sup>61</sup> This is how material culture comes alive, but *“...to make decisions it is necessary to know exactly what the object represents”*<sup>62</sup> and presents as the integral meaning.

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<sup>60</sup> M. Clavir, *Preserving What is Valued*. Canada: UBC Press, 2002, p. 28.

<sup>61</sup> G. F. MacDonald, S. Alford, *Museum for the Global Village*. Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1988, p. 9.

<sup>62</sup> M. Clavir, *Preserving What is Valued*, p. xviii



## **Conclusion**

Much like in Estonia in the orthodox tradition, paintings of saints are considered to be the most genuine representation of sacred presence in material form. Often conservators that are knowledgeable and respectful of the doctrine are preferred to interfere with the integrity of wooden paintings that carry imagery of the venerated. A guideline like this has not been implied to paintings of Korean shaman origin yet, but research suggests all objects of cultural or historical value should be treated with equal respect. Whether still in use as objects of reverence or once valued as such, phenomena that carry national cultural narrative as ethnographic evidence emphasize the intangible values of heritage, which can be contextualized both emotionally and intellectually through research. In the field of conservation and preservation, not only technical abilities are of great importance, but tools to consider and implement the cultural needs of an object. One such tool is story-telling. Simple, yet effective.

If knowledge is power, then data is key. All informative sources regarding an object or phenomena should be coerced to share their piece of the puzzle. Some pieces might not seem very important at first, but in the end a full picture could not be seen without them. Investigation into the material and meaning of an object used in ritual tradition offers explication of intangible values in cultural heritage and stresses the importance of preserving narrative. Through material analysis, composition studies offer factual information regarding deterioration of substance and implication of age. Technological research provides insight into the production of shaman paintings studied and how the material is handled in the context of origin.

The fortunate opportunity to receive information from a previous custodian unravels the history of the object and adds a human element to the investigation. Peoples' individual ambitions and inclinations come into play when attributing value to the painting in question, also influencing regard to any similar objects encountered in the future as well. Acquainting with art historical and theological literature lays foundation for

understanding the cultural context of Korean shaman paintings as considerable genre in art history.

A look into the iconography, perception, and historic background of shaman paintings brings forward their uniqueness in not only their own living tradition but as indication of an indigenous spiritual practice as basis of a contemporary society. Shaman paintings should be treated with respect and promoted accordingly in not only the Korean context, as one should be proud of one's heritage, but also internationally as enriching ethnographic phenomena shared by our communal historical consciousness.

The research conducted is the first in the sphere of conservation science in Estonia based on an object of Korean origin, and will hopefully bring attention to conveying value with narrative and develop heritage preservation studies between the East Asian and the Estonian scholarship, providing thorough analysis of objects from religious background different to local context.

## **Kokkuvõte**

Käesolev töö sündis soovist uurida väljakutseid millega konservaatorid religioosse taustaga objekte säilitades kokku puutuvad. Esemed, mida on kasutatud rituaalides ning nähakse ajaloolis-kultuurse väärtusena ja eksponeeritakse selliselt etnograafia muuseumis, pakuvad alust viia läbi uurimus selgitamaks kuidas ja miks neid esemeid säilitatakse. Läbi korea päritoluga šamaanimaali on võimalik vaadelda konserveerimisprotsessi kaasnevate immateriaalsete väärtuste olulisust, luues objekti terviklikkuse edastamiseks narratiiv. Kõnealuse objekti konserveerimismetodoloogia probleem seisneb teadmatuses, kuidas käsitletakse sarnaseid esemeid mitte nõ *päris*, vaid *päritolu* kontekstis Koreas. Kuigi maali kontekst on nüüdseks muuseum Euroopas, loetakse päritoluks siiski korea kultuuriruumi. Seades eesmärgiks informeeritud ning arvestava otsuse edasiseks töökaiguks, on kultuuri esindavate inimeste puudumine oht jääda ilma olulisest informatsioonist. Selleks võttis töö autor ette praktika Leideni linnas

Hollandis etnograafia muuseumis Museum Volkenkunde, kus on üks suurimaid korea esemete kolleksioone Euroopas.

Uurimuse läbi viimiseks valiti objekt RV-5995-7, korea päritolu šamaanimaal paberil, mis kujutab kindral Im-i, kes on Joseon dünastia ajal elanud lugupeetud Im Gyeong-eop-i (1594-1646) jumaluseks kuulutatud kehastus. Pilt on maalitud käsitsi, kuid ilmselt kopeeritud vanemalt populaarse kujutusviisiga šamaanimaalilt. Maal koosneb neljast masinaga valmistatud paberi kihist ning pildi ülaosasse on õmmeldud sünteetiliselt siidist paelad, et maali saaks üles riputada nagu korea šamaanitraditsioon ette näeb. Samuti on tagakülge toetatud teibiga. Maali vanus ei ole kindel, kuid ikonograafia baasil pärineb pilt arvatavasti 19. sajandi lõpust või 20. sajandi algusest. Maal saabus Museum Volkenkundesse kingina praktiseerivalt šamaanilt ning kolleksionäärilt korea uuringute professorile aastal 2003.

Korea šamaanimaalid või *mushindo* esindavad šamaanide ning nende järgijate jaoks jumalusi, mida pildid kujutavad. Need maalid on kõrgelt hinnatud jumaliku kohalolu materiaalse manifestatsioonina. Tavaliselt on maalid riputatud üles šamaani või *manshin*-i altari tagaseinale, kuid vahel võetakse need sealt maha ja volditakse kokku kaasa võtmiseks, kui šamaan viib läbi rituaali või *kut*-i kodust eemal. *Manshin*-il on eriline suhe maalidega, igaüks neist esindab jumalat, keda rituaalide ajal kehastatakse. Šamaan muutub kanaliks jumalate ning klientide vahel, kes rituaale sponsoseerivad. Need jumalused võivad olla surnud esivanemad, müütilised tegelased, loodushinged, ja pühakuks kuulutatud kehastused ajaloolistest isikutest. Maalid lastakse maalida täpse visiooni järgi traditsioone järgivatel meistritel. Kui aga šamaanimaal on minetanud oma esteetlise väärtuslikkuse, on kombeks materjalist lahti saada kas maalid maha mattes või põletades. Tänapäeval kasutatakse praktikas ka lihtsaid printkoopiaid, mis on kättesaadavamad ja taskukohasemad. Kuna šamanism on Korea põlisreligioon ning teiste järgnevate religioonide aluseks, praktiseeritakse šamanistlikke traditsioone ka tänapäeva Koreas, kuid maalides nähakse nüüd ka ajaloolist väärtust, mis tõttu neid enam tavapraktikas ei hävitata.

Uuritud asjakohast kirjandust, viies läbi intervjuusid professionaalidega ning analüüsid materiaalsel koosseisu, on võimalik selgitada kõnealuse šamaanimaali olulisust läbi kujunenud narratiivi. Andes edasi mitte ainult materiaalseid omadusi, vaid ka kultuurilisi ning iseloomulikke kindlale maaližanrile, kannab lugu edasi objekti olulisust kultuuripärandina. Konserveerimispraktikas osutub eetiliseimaks tööviisiks nii vähene sekkumine kui võimalik, et mitte panna ohtu objektile nähtavaid etnograafilisi tõendeid varasemast kasutusest, mis kujundavadki maali narratiivi. On oluline, et sama tähtsaks kui peetakse füüsilist terviklikkust, peetakse ka kontseptuaalselt tervikut.

Töö on ehitatud üles Barbara Appelbaumi poolt loodud iseloomustuskünnisele, mille baasil uuritakse esimesena objekti materiaalseid omadusi. TTÜ materjaliuuringute keskuses teostatakse mikroskoopilised uuringud kahjustuste ulatuse määramiseks. Teisena selgitatakse kuidas korea šamaanimaale tehakse ning kasutatakse korea šamaanide elus traditsioonides. Kolmandana avatakse kõnealuse maali individuaalset ajalugu, ehk kuidas objekt Euroopa muuseumisse sattus. Neljandana on laialdaselt selgitatud objekti kultuuriline kontekst ning olulisus pärandina tänases kultuuriruumis.

Kogutud informatsioonist saab järeldada, et objekti on ümber mõtestatud mitu korda. Esmalt on maal loodud jumaliku sideme saavutamiseks, seda funktsiooni minetades on maal säilitatud kunstiteosena ning parandatud, et vältida edasisi kahjustusi, seejärel on kollektsionäär maalil näinud tõendust unikaalsetest traditsionaalsetest väärtusest ning sellisena ka Euroopa muuseumile üle andnud. Kõik kahjustused on saanud osaks maali narratiivist, jutustades loo objektist, mis esindab oma päritolu kultuuri iseäralikku pärandit.

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