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A Study of the *Aekmagi* Ritual in Jeju Shamanic Religion: Focusing on the Sacred Status of Shamans and the Significance of Sacrifice

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Abstract: In the Jeju shamanic religion, chickens have been sacrificed for *aekmagi*, a ritual to prevent *aek*, a looming misfortune that may cause death. Whereas ordinary participants are thought to be at risk of harm when possessing or eating chickens or other offerings made to prevent *aek*, the *simbang*, Jeju shamans, are thought to be immune to it. *Simbang* are believed to be permanently on the threshold between the human and the divine realms. They help remove *aek* but are not harmed by it, because it only harms humans in the human realm, not the person on the boundary. While the other participants are temporarily placed in the liminal state during *aekmagi* and come back to the ordinary living human realm after the ritual, *simbang* remain in the perpetual liminal state. Chicken sacrifice has been omitted from *aekmagi* since around 2010 in most places in Jeju-do. Though ritual killing is no longer practiced, adherents still think that *aek* is prevented by *aekmagi*. The Jeju people believe that gods are the main agents of preventing *aek* and that they can persuade the gods to do the work without receiving chickens' lives. In addition, due to the change in people's view on killing animals, *aekmagi* without chicken sacrifice has become a more efficient ritual system for nourishing social sustenance by following the new social prescription.

Keywords: Jeju shamanic religion; sacrifice; *aekmagi*; *simbang* (Jeju shaman); sacred status of *simbang*



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1. Introduction

Though *aekmagi* was performed almost all over Korea in various ways for at least a hundred years (Kim 1991), now this ritual is only conducted regularly in some villages of Jeju-do.¹ The first part of the word, *aek*, refers to looming misfortune or evil influences that may cause death, and the second part, *magi*, means preventing. *Aekmagi* can therefore be roughly translated into English as “apotropaic ritual”. In Jeju-do, chickens have been killed and offered to gods for the *aekmagi* ritual, which is necessarily included in every regular *gut*, a shamanic ritual for propitiating and supplicating gods, whether it is for a village community, a certain family, or an individual. The Jeju *simbang* most commonly use red roosters for the sacrifice.² Sacrificed chickens are boiled and eaten by participants while the ritual is being conducted. After the *gut* is over, however, only *simbang* can take the chickens and eat those that were not consumed during the *gut*.

Since around 2010, *aekmagi* in Jeju-do has undergone a radical change, with chicken sacrifices ceasing in most areas of Jeju-do and persisting only in the southeastern part.³ Urgent research on *aekmagi* is needed, considering the current situation of the Jeju shamanic religion in which chicken sacrifice is rapidly disappearing. When I observed and video-recorded the whole process of *yeongdeung-gut* performed in Jocheon-eup Bukchon-li village, Jeju city, in March 2011, a sturdy red rooster was sacrificed for *aekmagi*. But, the *simbang* who conducted the chicken sacrifice in 2011 do not kill chickens any longer. I recognized that chickens were not sacrificed when I observed and video-recorded *Jamsu-gut* conducted in Gujwa-eup Gimnyeong-li village, Jeju city, in April 2013. The *simbang* in charge of the

Jamsu-gut, which is a ritual for female divers of the village, Sunsil Seo, one of my interviewees for this research, said that she stopped chicken sacrifices a few years before the *gut* I observed.

The *simbang* who ceased sacrifice suggest several reasons for it. First, many *simbang* came to be reluctant to kill chickens, especially young novice *simbang*, who began the work after 2000, were unwilling to kill chickens. Since around that time, many people in Jeju have shown interest in Jeju's indigenous shamanic religion, including *gut*, regarding it as Jeju's cultural heritage. Shamanic rituals began to receive heavy coverage in the local media. A wider audience, many of whom were not adherents of the Jeju shamanic religion, visited the ritual place to watch the process. *Simbang* felt burdened to kill chickens in front of nonadherents, some of whom criticized *aekmagi* for cruelty toward animals. Second, Jeju shamans and adherents were forced to experience *aekmagi* without chicken sacrifices when avian influenza spread in Korea in 2003 and 2005. At that time, importing chickens from mainland Korea to Jeju-do and the trade of live chickens within Jeju-do were prohibited. Some *simbang* thought that they were able to prevent *aek* without chicken sacrifices and satisfy the gods by using other offerings.⁴ According to *simbang* Seo and Kim, after the flu pandemics were over, they were emboldened to persuade the gods to prevent *aek* without receiving sacrificed chickens, and the gods accepted their suggestion.

Scholars of Korean religion have dealt with Jeju *aekmagi* only tangentially in their research. Yongjun Hyeon, one of the most prolific scholars of the Jeju indigenous religion, in his representative and comprehensive book on Jeju religion, briefly mentions it as one of the Jeju rituals but does not explain it in detail because, even though they used to be performed frequently, at the time of writing they were disappearing rapidly (Hyeon 1986, p. 240). When Hyeon says that *aekmagi* is disappearing, he means the stand-alone *aekmagi* ritual. While independently conducted *aekmagi* is diminishing, it persists as a vital element within the *gut*, serving as an indispensable component in *dang-gut*, rituals for the village shrine god (or gods), and *keun-gut*, full-scale comprehensive rituals performed in the house of a shaman or a community member. It is commonly observed even today in many villages as part of two *dang-gut*: *singwaseje*, the new year ritual performed in January by the lunar calendar, and *yeongdeung-gut*, a ritual for wishing abundance performed in February of the lunar calendar (J. Kang 2007, pp. 89–90).⁵ In the *gut* conducted for individual persons to pray for abundance or for recovering from illness, *aekmagi* is performed before the last stage of sending back the gods, who were invited to the ritual place, to the divine realm (J. Kang 2015, p. 356).

This article focuses on the Jeju *aekmagi* ritual, exploring it in all its facets. I will examine each aspect of the ritual to articulate its significance by combining preexisting materials related to the ritual with my interviewees' explanations. On the basis of this thorough analysis of *aekmagi*, I will redescribe two academic categories of the comparative study of religions. First, the notion of sacred people will be explored by paying attention to characteristics of the shaman's sacred status revealed in *aekmagi*. *Simbang* are human beings who, at the same time, have a sacred status that is regarded as separate from, or superior to, ordinary human beings. The name *simbang* is said to have come from *sinui-seongbang*, a petty official of the gods, which Jeju shamans call themselves when they recite myths while performing *gut*. They are descendants of gods who have different genealogies from ordinary people, which begins from the shamanic progenitor gods in myths. This distinguished status is clearly seen in the process of disposing of sacrificed animals in *aekmagi*. Unlike ordinary people, they are not harmed by eating or possessing sacrificed animals after the *gut* is over. While the sacred status related to the gods allows them not to be damaged by the *aek* that the killed animals received from clients, they must abide by rules that protect themselves from *aek* because they are human beings also. As sacred people positioned on the boundary between the divine realm and the human realm, *simbang* constitutes an important example that religion stipulates the cosmological location of human beings.

Second, I will examine the characteristics of sacrifice by comparing the old-style *aekmagi*, in which ritual killing is central, with the changed *aekmagi* which leaves out sacrificing

animals. *Aekmagi* involving the killing of animals is obviously an expiatory sacrifice and, at the same time, a communion in which gods, shamans, and clients eat together. It is noteworthy that *aekmagi* without the process of ritual killing still has the character of an expiatory ritual, not to mention a communion. The expression *daemyeong daechung*, which the *simbang* repeats during *aekmagi*, means “some [life] should be offered in place of someone’s life”. The value of the life replaced with something else is not fixed. But, it should satisfy the gods who would accept the offering in *aekmagi*. In order to replace someone’s life, another’s life was believed to be required. Chickens are most commonly used because they are affordable and easy to sacrifice on the spot. After the sacrifice, the *simbang* makes a divination to find out whether the gods are satisfied, and *aek* has been averted by toasting grains of rice and by casting some *mengdu*, a set of shamanic instruments. If he or she receives a bad divination sign, the client should bring more offerings. In case the *simbang* decides that *aek* fails to be prevented by chicken sacrifice and other offerings, more gifts including money are presented nowadays. In the past, very occasionally even a horse or a cow could be offered. As chicken sacrifices are vanishing in many areas in Jeju, expiatory practices and characteristics of sacrifices, manifested in the word *daemyeong daechung*, including destroying animals to redeem human life, are not to be seen in *aekmagi* any longer. However, the communion aspect remains. Along with rice and rice wine, boiled chicken meat, which is purchased at the market, is offered to gods, and then eaten by the participants in the ritual place. Gifts are still presented to the gods by being burnt or passed through the fire; only the animal sacrifice that was conducted to redeem human life is left out. *Aekmagi*, as before, remains a ritual performed to prevent *aek*, that is, looming misfortune, evil influences, or death, by propitiating and making peace with the gods, who are believed to deliver *aek* to people but to withdraw it after the ritual, which is now believed to be possible without animal sacrifice. I will demonstrate how and why animal sacrifice is gradually disappearing and explain the reason *aekmagi* is still believed to redeem human life. I will note that a chicken sacrificed in *aekmagi* is neither identified with deities nor represents the society, though it can be said to be consecrated in the sense that it is offered to gods. *Aekmagi* is a ritual conducted for peace and order in society and individual minds, for which animal sacrifice has come to be considered not necessary.

2. *Aekmagi* Ritual Process

Though Hyeon says *aekmagi* as an independent ritual is disappearing, he also writes that it is performed as part of various *gut*. In *Dictionaries of Sources on Jeju Shamanism*, Hyeon defines it as follows.

[*Aekmagi* is] the name of a ritual process that is performed as part of various *gut*. It is conducted to prevent *aek* and bring good fortune. During *aekmagi*, *Samani-bonpuri* is recited. A *simbang* says that *aek* is prevented based on the fact [that in the myth] Samani enjoyed longevity by treating messengers of the netherworld (or psychopomps) well. *Aek* is prevented by killing a rooster and throwing it to the outside [of the ritual place] to ask [gods] take the rooster instead of human life. It is performed in many *gut* including *siwangmaji*. (Hyeon [1980] 2007, pp. 763–64)

As quoted above, *aekmagi* is necessarily conducted during the *siwangmaji gut*. Hyeon does not place *aekmagi* as an independent entry in *Dictionaries of Sources on Jeju Shamanism* but includes it in the “*siwangmaji*” entry (Hyeon [1980] 2007, pp. 230–38). *Siwangmaji* is a ritual in which Siwang, ten gods of the netherworld, are invited and propitiated. These ten gods, who took root in the shamanic cosmology, which is influenced by Buddhism, are believed to stay in the netherworld and take charge of the lives of living people in this world and the souls of dead people (J. Kang 2015, p. 190). They also manage the netherworld book of the predetermined length of human lives, have messengers deliver the soul of the person whose lifespan is over, and send the soul to hell or paradise according to what the person did while living. *Siwangmaji* is a necessary part of *keun-gut* and is also performed independently if needed. If a person gets a serious illness and the *simbang* in charge of the

person's family and village interprets it as the Siwang summoning the person's soul to the netherworld, *siwangmaji* is conducted to pray to Siwang and other gods to withdraw this illness and prolong his or her life span. Otherwise, it can be performed to pray for the sins of a dead person to be forgiven and his or her soul to be accepted into paradise because it is believed that the soul may become an evil spirit and do harm to living persons if it stays in this world without going to the netherworld. In brief, *aeckmagi* is performed during *siwangmaji* for the purpose of healing a deadly illness or preventing harm that may be caused by a dead person.

To understand further discussions that will be made in the following sections, it is necessary to have a general idea of how *aeckmagi* is conducted. We can find a representative sequence shared by many *simbang* in most areas of Jeju-do outlined by Hyeon on the basis of the *aeckmagi* process carried out by *simbang* Sain Ahn in Jeju city in the 1970s (Hyeon [1980] 2007, pp. 230–38). By summarizing Hyeon's record, I am providing the outline of the whole process of *aeckmagi*, which was included in *siwangmaji*, as follows.⁶

1. A *simbang*, who is dressed like a soldier of the Joseon Dynasty, is ready to begin, standing beside the "*aeckmagi* table," which is set in front of the gate of the client's house. The things placed on the table are three Korean traditional style jackets; three bolts of broad cotton cloth whose length amounts to the multiplication of the client's age and his or her foot length [or/and, whose length amounts to the multiplication of the client's age and his or her reach]; three spools of thread; a bowl filled with grains of millet, barley, and rice; ceremonial paper money made for shamanic ritual; coins [nowadays real paper money]; and three cups of rice wine. Three pairs of straw shoes are placed under the table, beside which a rooster is standing tethered;

2. Shaking the *yoryeong*, a shamanic bell, the *simbang* says, "[I] intend to prevent *aeck*," then sings to report to the gods the time and place of the *gut*'s performance. Then, the *simbang* explains to the gods, by singing, the reason why *aeckmagi* is to be conducted. The *simbang* usually says that he or she is trying to prevent *aeck* in the same way Samani did a long time ago because the person of this house is now threatened by misfortune. Samani is the main character of the Jeju myth named *Samani-bonpuri*;

3. The *simbang* recites *Samani-bonpuri*, which suggests the mythical basis of *aeckmagi*. The myth can be summarized as follows.

Once upon a time, a man named So (family name) Saman (given name) lived very poorly in the land of Junyeonguk (a mythical land). He married and had children. His wife barely managed to feed the family by needlework, but the family fell on even harder times. The wife cut her hair and gave it to him, asking him to sell it in the marketplace and to buy food for the children with the money. Samani sold his wife's hair at a good price. But he bought a firelock instead of grain because he was persuaded by its seller, who said that he would be able to earn money and buy more food by hunting with the firelock. Samani tried to avoid his wife's anger by hunting many big animals, but every day he failed to do so. One day, he found a one-hundred-year-old skull while roaming around the fields. He came to think that it was the ancestor god of his family and brought it to his house to revere it. Since then, the hunting was very successful, and he became rich soon. In the year Samani became thirty-three years old, the skull appeared in his dream in the shape of a grey-haired old man and advised him on how to avoid his looming death. He said, "Your predetermined lifespan is thirty-three years and is now drawing to a close. Three messengers of the netherworld are coming to capture your soul. The *aeck* can be prevented by exerting yourself in treating them. You must prepare three pairs of jackets, three pairs of shoes, three waist belts as gifts for them, and set the table with various dishes in the three-way intersection of the village. At your house, a *keun-gut* should be conducted". ("Forty-thousand and three bulls" are included in the list of the gifts to the messengers. "Forty-thousand and three" is an unreal number, which represents the utmost that Samani can offer.) Samani prepared everything just as the old man said and lay with his face down. Three messengers, who came to the village from the netherworld, felt hungry and ate food at the table. Then, they changed clothes, belts, and shoes. The messengers got to know that

Samani prepared all the gifts and food. And they (along with other gods) were propitiated at the *gut* conducted at Samani's house. After all these, they could not take Samani to the netherworld. They just went back to the netherworld and changed the number of the predetermined age of Samani recorded in the netherworld book, from thirty-three to three-thousand and three, by adding one stroke. (Thirty is written 三十 (three ten) in Classical Chinese. If one adds one stroke to 十 (ten), it becomes 千 (thousand).) In this way, Samani could live three thousand years.⁷

In this myth, we can see the shamanic view that, though the human lifespan is predetermined, it can be extended by performing rituals (J. Kang 2015, p. 203);

4. Following the example of the myth, the *simbang* offers messengers and other gods food, rice wine, and gifts. The *simbang* prays that the gods prevent *aek* and have the client live in peace as *simbang*, and the family did their best to please them. Then, the *simbang* says that he or she will prevent *aek* by offering the life of a rooster, which is called "*gidongcheollijeoksongbeugi*," instead of that of the client.⁸ Ceremonial paper money and straw shoes are burnt. (Other offerings are passed through the fire or exposed to smoke.) The rooster is killed by twisting its neck, and it is thrown outside of the gate.

5. The *simbang* recites the names and ages of the client and his or her family members, shaking *yoryeong*, and praying that their *aek* be prevented. The *simbang* divines by tossing and grasping rice grains (and tossing *sinkal* and/or *sanpan*, which constitute a set of *mengdu* along with *yoryeong*) to find out if *aek* is prevented. (Rice divination is made to know what messenger gods say about the result, and *mengdu* divination is made to know what the *mengdu* god says about the result.)⁹

As we have seen, *aekmagi* is a ritual that is performed to treat and bribe messengers of the netherworld, to prevent misfortune and death by transferring them to the sacrificed chicken. However, the record Hyeon compiled from what *simbang* Ahn recited and performed fifty years ago, which I use for the summary in this section, is just one version of *aekmagi*. Though *simbang* Ahn was a very famous and representative shaman in Jeju in the 1970s, *aekmagi* have not been conducted in the exact same way in Jeju-do. *Aekmagi* rituals may be performed differently according to the regions in Jeju where it takes place and depending on the individual shaman's approach.¹⁰ It is regrettable, as I wrote above, that no other comprehensive records, not to mention research, of Jeju *aekmagi* have been provided. In the following section, therefore, I will redescribe the *aekmagi* ritual by using my interviews with four *simbang*, which were carried out in 2022, along with my own observations of *aekmagi*, both with and without chicken sacrifice, on top of pre-existing records and research. It will help in understanding chicken sacrifices more clearly.

3. Chicken Sacrifice Explained by *Simbang*

Currently, the administrative districts of Jeju-do are composed of two cities, which are Jeju city and Seogwipo-city. The former covers the north side of Mt. Halla, while the latter covers the south side of the mountain.¹¹ But for most of the Joseon Dynasty, since the early 15th century, Jeju-do was divided into three towns. The north half was the Jeju-*mok* district, which was under the jurisdiction of the Jeju magistrate and now corresponds to the Jeju city area, while the south half was divided into two towns, which are Jeogui-*hyeon* on the east side and Daejeong-*hyeon* on the west side. Shamanic practices and beliefs are known to be very weakened in the old Daejeong area, the southwest part of Jeju-do. It is regrettable that there are not enough materials available to expound *aekmagi* that have been conducted in the old Daejeong area. On the other hand, shamanic practices have remained quite strong and conservative in the old Jeongui area, the southeast part of Jeju-do, where there are about ten *simbang* who still perform chicken sacrifices for *aekmagi*, among whom *simbang* Yongbu Oh is the most well known in Jeju-do. The other three interviewees, Yongok Yi, Sunsil Seo, and Yeongcheol Kim, work in the old Jeju-*mok* district and share a similar view on Jeju *gut* and *aekmagi*. *Simbang* Oh, however, has very different opinions in several respects, though he actively interacts with the *simbang* of the Jeju city area, including the other three interviewees. Most of all, the three *simbang* of the Jeju city area have

not conducted chicken sacrifice since ten to fifteen years ago, while *simbang* Oh regards it as important and keeps performing it.

All four interviewees had the same view on the purpose and efficacy of *aekmagi*, which is performed to prevent *æk*. They agree that the purpose of chicken sacrifice is to shift the *æk* of the client onto the chicken, through which the life of the client can be replaced by that of the chicken. They think that the chicken is mainly offered to three messengers of the netherworld and is shared by all the other gods invited to the ritual place. They believe that gifts and food should be prepared for three because three messengers still come from the netherworld just as in *Samani-bonpuri*. However, while Oh still believes that the chicken's life should be offered in place of the client's life, the other three say that it is not necessary anymore. In the rest of this section, I will provide further explanation, covering what Hyeon's records do not articulate, on the procedures and methods of *aekmagi*, the characteristics of chicken onto which *æk* is shifted, the sacred status of *simbang* to whom *æk* does not do harm, and the reasons the *simbang* suggest for continuing or discontinuing chicken sacrifice.

3.1. A. *Aekmagi* Sacrifice Procedure

When a chicken sacrifice was conducted in the Jeju city area, until ten to fifteen years ago, one chicken was killed and offered to prevent *æk* of the village in *dang-gut*.¹² According to *simbang* Oh, in most villages of the southeastern part of Jeju-do, three chickens were sacrificed for *aekmagi* during the *dang-gut* until twenty years ago because they wanted to treat each of the three messengers of the netherworld with one whole chicken, though only one chicken is sacrificed now. In most villages of Jeju-do, *simbang* killed, or still kill, chickens by twisting their necks and hurling their bodies down to the ground while holding the legs. *Simbang* Oh has sacrificed chickens in this way in the *dang-gut* of *Susan-dang*, a village shrine of a fairly large community in the southeastern part of Jeju-do. According to Oh, in Pyoseon village and with the participating families there, chickens have been killed in a peculiar way, by spinning them in the air while *simbang* grasp their necks.

In the *keun-gut* performed in the house of a *simbang* who wants to confirm his or her will to serve the gods, one more chicken is killed for *Jetbugi*—three brother gods, who are shamanic progenitor gods called Chogong or Samsiwang. While ordinary people are believed to be judged after their death by Siwang, ten gods of the netherworld, *simbang* are thought to stand in front of the three brother gods. To invoke blessings for *simbang*, offerings should be made to the three brother gods before any other gods. This additional chicken sacrifice is remarkable because it manifests the exceptional status of the *simbang*, who are at once human beings and officials of the gods.

The dead chicken is thrown from the yard towards the outside. *Aek* is believed to be prevented when the thrown chicken's head faces to the outside, not to the yard. *Simbang* may throw it again to make it face to the outside. Otherwise, he or she may warn the client and participants to watch themselves because *æk* may come again, though it is prevented by the chicken sacrifice. Then, *simbang* cast a small handful of rice in order to ask the gods, especially messengers, if *æk* is prevented. They repeatedly want to check if the messengers are pleased by the offerings and are willing to take the chicken's life instead of that of the client. They try to confirm the result again by tossing *sanpan* and/or *sinkal*, two constituents of *mengdu*, to ask the shamanic progenitor gods and the tutelary god of the *simbang*.¹³ After divinations, the *simbang* invokes favors of gods for the client and other participants.¹⁴

The chickens sacrificed in *keun-gut* or *dang-gut* are boiled and cut up. The meat of the wings, along with cooked rice and rice cakes, are placed on the table for *Siwang*, the meat of the legs is on the table for the village shrine god, the meat of the breast, with bits from other parts and the gizzard, is on the "*gongsissang*," which is the table for the shamanic progenitors and other ancestor gods.¹⁵ Chicken meat is first placed on the tables for the gods, and then, it is eaten by all the participants. The most favored chicken for sacrificial offering is a red rooster, rather than white or spotted ones, though other chickens are permissible. It is ideal to prepare a red rooster that has been raised in a happy family

with many children, in which no member died for a few years. *Simbang* Oh testifies that, in the southeastern part of Jeju-do, chickens and rice for *aeckmagi* were washed with water in which part of a juniper tree was boiled before being offered, though this ritual purification is not conducted even in that area anymore (for purification by washing with water in which part of a juniper tree was boiled, see [Yoo and Watts 2021](#), pp. 84–85).

The chicken is not the only animal that can be sacrificed for *aeckmagi*. In principle, more expensive and bigger domestic animals seem to have been preferred. Just before killing the chicken, the *simbang* narrates, “I cannot offer a horse because I do not have [cannot afford] one and I cannot offer a bull because I do not have [cannot afford] one. Therefore, I replace the life [of the client] with that of *gidongcheollijeoksungbeugi* [a red rooster]”. Though it is ideal to offer more valuable and bigger animals, such as a horse or a bull, the *simbang* sacrifices a chicken because he or she cannot afford to offer a horse or a bull. But there are cases in which more valuable offerings, including bigger animals, are asked. First, if the *simbang* continues to have bad divination signs after the sacrifice, more gifts are to be offered. Second, if *simbang* estimates, before performing the *gut*, that the *aeck* of the client is too heavy to be prevented by ordinary offerings, more valuable offerings, including bigger animals, are expected.

My interviewees remembered that horses and bulls were offered for *aeckmagi* a few decades ago, though not recently. But it was impossible for *simbang* to kill, cut, cook, and distribute the big animals on the spot. So, they were not killed but driven out of the yard of the house to the distant field, like the scapegoat described in *Leviticus* (16:10). While bulls or cows, which were extremely valuable in Jeju-do, were scarcely offered for *aeckmagi*, horses were offered more often, though still on rare occasions, by the early 1980s, according to *simbang* Yi. She helped the late *simbang* Yunsu Kim, who was her husband, as an assistant *simbang* when he offered horses to the gods for Gunpal Ko’s family, in Wasan-li (village), Jocheon-eup (town), Jeju city, in the early 1980s. When Kim divined that a horse must be offered to prevent *aeck*, they were willing to offer one. The family could afford this because they owned many horses. I will explain further about the disposal of offered big animals in the latter part of this section. No interviewees directly experienced bull sacrifices, but they all have heard of it. *Simbang* Oh heard from his shamanic teacher that *simbang* Shin, who was the teacher of his teacher, prevented *aeck* by offering a bull in the early 1940s, in Pyoseon village, Jeongui area. When a community member got a serious illness and seemed on the verge of death, *simbang* Shin conducted a *Siwangmaji gut*, in which *aeckmagi* is included. First, the *simbang* tried to ward off *aeck* by offering chickens and other gifts. However, whenever he tossed *sanpan*, he continued to have very bad divination signs, which notified that *aeck* was still there. While he was taking a rest during the intermission of the *gut*, the ancestor god advised him to offer a bull that was raised in the house. *Simbang* Oh testified about a miracle that he heard from his teacher; *Simbang* Shin just had a bull tied on the way from the yard to the gate, the passage through which *aeck* should go out. Though no one even touched the bull with a knife, the bull suddenly collapsed and died, because it received the *aeck* of the dying patient. The bull, which was supposed to be expelled from the house to the field, died on the spot. And the patient recovered from the illness, according to Oh.

3.2. B. The Characteristics of the Sacrificed Animal and the Sacred Status of *Simbang*

For *aeckmagi* conducted during *dang-gut*, which is performed to prevent the *aeck* of a village, one chicken (three chickens in the southeastern area) was sacrificed and could be shared by any participant. But this was not all. Until several decades ago, when *aeckmagi* for the entire village was over, *aeckmagi* for each household was commonly carried out. Each family of the village brought a chicken and offered it to prevent *aeck* of the family. The *simbang* was supposed to kill all the chickens during *aeckmagi* and take them to his or her home. As I wrote above, chickens offered to prevent *aeck* should neither be eaten by other participants after the *gut* is over nor be taken back by them. Dozens of chickens were usually sacrificed in the village *gut* and the *simbang* had serious difficulty in carrying them. *Simbang* Yi says that her husband and she brought up to fifty chickens with them after

Wasan-li village *dang-gut* by the 1990s. According to *simbang* Seo, her teacher, the late *simbang* Jungchun Yi (1937–2011), had to sacrifice about 60 chickens for *aeckmagi* conducted in the Namdang shrine, Haengwon-li village. *Simbang* Oh testifies that more chickens were sacrificed in the Jeongui area, where he had to twist more than one hundred chickens' necks to kill for *aeckmagi*, though one-third are still offered in that area nowadays.

Though the chickens brought by each family can be offered to the gods and can then be eaten by participants at the ritual place in principle, it is impossible to pluck, cut, and boil so many chickens while the *gut* is performed. It is, therefore, that sacrificed chickens are taken by the *simbang* to their home. Other participants should not have or eat the sacrificed chicken once they leave the ritual place, because it received *aeck* that they must prevent. The *simbang* and their family members are not harmed by possessing or eating. They can sell it also outside the village where chickens were sacrificed for *aeckmagi*. Once the *simbang* come to have it, it becomes harmless meat outside the place from which *aeck* was removed. The chicken meat was a valuable source of protein for *simbang* and their family, especially in January and February of the lunar calendar when important village *gut* like *singvaseje* and *yeongdeung-gut* are performed and *simbang* must avoid pork to maintain purity for quite a long time (for pork impurity in Jeju, see Yoo and Watts 2021, pp. 89–92). Because expensive beef was often beyond the budget of most *simbang*, the chicken taken home after *aeckmagi* was very helpful. However, it was never easy for *simbang* to kill so many chickens and take them home. *Simbang* Oh says that he used to lie sick in bed when he had to twist the necks of more than a hundred chickens. Because *simbang* and their families could not eat up the chickens, they either buried the rest or sold them at the market outside the village. In the Jeju city area, some *simbang* did not kill all the dozens of chickens but threw some live chickens having their heads face to the direction of the outside of the house. Thrown chickens were called "chickens belonging to nobody". *Simbang* had to take the chickens home alive. Though some needy families uncommonly took the offered chicken back home, only *simbang* basically could have and eat chickens offered to prevent *aeck*.

In both the old Jeongui area and the Jeju city area, it has been believed that sacrificial animals for *aeckmagi* can do harm to people because they assume the *aeck* that was originally about to influence people. Only the *simbang* is not influenced by possessing or eating them.¹⁶ *Simbang* should possess exclusively other offerings made to the gods also. As I mentioned above, gifts, besides chickens, are presented to the messenger gods by being placed on the *aeckmagi* table, commonly traditional style jackets, broad cotton cloth, three spools of thread, a bowl filled with grains, ceremonial paper money, real money, and rice wine. Depending on the region, or sometimes the customs of the individual *simbang*, some other gifts, such as rice cakes, cooked rice, and cigarettes, are placed. What can be consumed on the spot, such as food, is shared by participants during the *gut*. What cannot be consumed immediately, like money or grains, is taken back by the *simbang*. Rice and other grains are offered to the gods by tossing a small handful of them into the air, and then, the *simbang* takes the rest. Ceremonial paper money and straw shoes are consumed by being burnt, while real money and cloth are taken by the *simbang*. All the offerings, including money, placed on the *aeckmagi* table can harm people because they have the *aeck* of the client. Just as *simbang* is not damaged by taking or eating the sacrificed chicken, he or she is not harmed by possessing money used for *aeckmagi*.

As I wrote above, horses or bulls, which were offered instead of chickens, were sent to a field distant from the house in which *aeckmagi* was conducted. The animal could belong only to the *simbang*, who would find the animal within a few days and take it home. The donor was never allowed to have it back. *Simbang* Yi and her husband bred horses that they took after *aeckmagi*. But they had to sell them a few years later because the animals became venomous due to the *aeck* they received. Nowadays, when the gods ask for more offerings through divinations, they prefer more money to bigger animals. According to the client's economic situation, the amount of additional money varies, from 50,000 Korean won to 1,000,000 won or more.

The *simbang* I interviewed say that they can possess without trouble sacrificed animals or offerings made for *aekmagi* because they have close relationships with the gods who help prevent *aek*. Their teachers taught them that *simbang*, the petty officials of the gods, are not harmed by *aek*, which the messenger gods help avoid, while it can bring about disaster for lay people. In addition, they are almost never harmed by the influence of spirits, lower deities in the Jeju pantheon, who often inflict harm on people. The lower deities can cause big trouble if they do not leave the house where they visited to be treated in *gut*. But it is alright for *simbang* who conducted *gut* to have them attached to him or her. Even after *dojin*, the last sequence of the Jeju *gut* is carried out to send all deities back to the divine realm, some deities may linger in the ritual place. It is for this reason that the *simbang* entices them to leave the house with him or her lest they should harm the family. The client and family members should not say goodbye or thank you to the *simbang*, or make eye contact with him or her when the *simbang* goes back home after the *gut* because the spirits who are attached to the *simbang*'s clothing or body may not leave the ritual place but stay.

For all that, *simbang* do not think lightly of the bad influence of *aek*. They are relatively safe from the harm of *aek* due to their position in between gods and human beings. They are separate from ordinary people, as can be seen from the belief that they have their own genealogy which begins from the shamanic progenitor gods, Chogong, and that their place in the netherworld is different from that of ordinary people. However, *simbang* must be careful to maintain their in-between position; they are obviously human beings, as well as the officials and friends of gods. They must keep stricter purity rules than ordinary people and conduct more purifications before performing *gut*. If a *simbang* perform *gut* while being polluted, they would be punished by the gods more severely than ordinary people would. *Simbang* employ a kind of safety feature to avoid the bad influence of *aek* during the *aekmagi*; when a *simbang* who takes charge of *aekmagi* writes down the names of those whose *aek* should be prevented on a piece of cotton cloth, the *simbang* writes his or her own name also, praying, "May the *simbang* not get despondent [over the influence of the *aek* of the client]". When the *simbang* offers the cloth to the gods by burning it away, the cloth on which the *simbang*'s name is written is burnt first. The cloth of the main client is burnt next, and then, those of family members are burnt. This is carried out to prevent *aek* that may harm the *simbang* during *aekmagi*. When *simbang* conduct *gut*, they do not directly face the tables set for the gods, but twist their body to the left or right, which is also a safety feature to make any bad influence, which the gods remove from the client, deflect from them.

3.3. C. The Cessation and the Survival of Chicken Sacrifice

Three *simbang* from the Jeju city area emphasize that they ceased sacrificing chickens because times have changed. They and others in the area have tried to persuade the gods to understand the situation in performing *aekmagi* by narrating "though we used to replace the life [of the client] with that of a red rooster, now we are in a different age (or, literally, this is not the time like that)". Those *simbang* think that the era in which killing chickens was taken for granted has passed. The first change is the negative perception of killing animals that spread in Korea, including Jeju-do. As some Jeju *gut* were designated as intangible cultural assets, not only community members or adherents but also visitors from the outside of the village came to observe the ritual, many among whom criticized *aekmagi* for its cruelty. In addition, many of the younger generation among the community members felt uneasy about killing and eating the live animals they raised. Younger *simbang* came to be reluctant to kill chickens during the ritual. Even elderly *simbang* who had done it for a long time came to feel hesitant about taking chickens' lives, especially in front of large audiences.

Second, as the skillful, experienced *simbang* grew old and died, there were not many young people who wanted to become *simbang*. More and more young Koreans lost interest in their parents' religion, and more people came to regard shamanism as a superstition. When respected old *simbang* could not have enough assistants, usually novice *simbang*, they

had to give up sacrificing chickens for individual families during the village *gut*, though they maintained the chicken sacrifice to prevent *aek* of the village. *Simbang* Seo says that it was her teacher, *simbang* Yi, who dissuaded the community members of the Namdang shrine, Haengwon-*li* village, from bringing their own chickens for the *aekmagi* of each family, in the late 1990s, when *simbang* Yi grew old and had trouble sacrificing about 60 chickens. He asked villagers to offer rice or money instead of chickens to prevent the *aek* of their family during the village *gut*.

Third, it became difficult to prepare live chickens, especially red roosters. Chickens were raised in the yards or gardens of many houses until thirty years ago. But as Western-style houses and apartments became more common in Jeju-do, most families did not raise chickens. In Gimnyeong-*li* village, according to *simbang* Seo, already in the early 2000s only one family that ran a chicken farm was able to bring the chickens they raised. When avian influenza spread in Korea several times in the 2000s, it became more difficult to prepare and sacrifice chickens for *aekmagi*. In order to contain the bird flu, the local government restricted the movement of live chickens for weeks. For the *gut* that were supposed to be conducted during this period, naturally, no family was able to obtain a chicken to prevent *aek* of the family. When it became legally impossible to bring live chickens, tie them under the table, and kill them to prevent *aek*, the *simbang* and community members purchased chicken meat from the market and cooked it to offer to the gods with other gifts. The process of sacrificing chickens to replace the lives of people simply had to be omitted.

These practical difficulties in performing chicken sacrifices were caused by changes in the living conditions of community members, whom Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss call “sacrifiers,” along with changes in the situation of *simbang*, whom they refer to as “sacrificers”.¹⁷ The situation of sacrificers is evidently changed, seeing that they do not raise chickens at home anymore, which clearly influenced omitting chicken sacrifices for *aekmagi*. However, it was *simbang*, sacrificers, who took the lead in changing the way of the ritual. I am aware that, as Jongseong Choi points out, the importance of the sacrificers, who are supposed to enjoy the benefits of the sacrifice ritual, should not be neglected in understanding sacrifice (Choi 2022, p. 142). But, I would like to emphasize that the interests and focuses of these two groups are often different. While sacrificers are more interested in the benefits they get from the ritual, sacrificers are more serious about the way of performing the ritual. Lay members, or sacrificers, of shamanic communities in the Jeju city area, whom I have met, think more highly of the result of *aekmagi*, of which the gods inform them through the *simbang*'s divination, than the way it is conducted. The three interviewees from the Jeju city area say that *simbang*, including themselves, first agreed not to sacrifice chickens for *aekmagi* around the early 2010s and then asked villagers for their understanding on this. As I wrote above, already in the 1990s *simbang* Yi, a respected senior *simbang* at that time, stopped the massive killing of chickens, which had been conducted to prevent the *aek* of each family, in Haengwon-*li* village. On a practical note, *simbang* cannot help but feel overburdened in disposing of dozens of chickens in this age of the nuclear family. In contrast, all that lay members have to do is to bring one chicken per family. In addition, the *simbang* were responsible for killing animals on the spot and blamed for the cruelty by the audience, especially nonadherents. According to the three *simbang*, they started thinking about stopping the sacrifice of chickens because they felt reluctant to kill living beings.

The *simbang* who stopped chicken sacrifice say that they could decide not to perform sacrifice any longer because the gods agreed. They persuaded not only community members but also the gods to accept their decision. They believe that the gods agree when they say to them “now we are in a different age”, and that the gods are satisfied by other offerings that are made instead of live chickens. It was the gods, according to these *simbang*, that give positive divination signs when they divine to ask if *aek* is prevented without killing chickens.

Simbang Kim, among the three interviewees from the Jeju city area, tries to suggest the rationale he finds from the myth of *Samani-bonpuri*. He emphasizes that, though Samani offers bulls in the myth, it is not articulated that the bulls are butchered. If bulls are just

offered, chicken meat purchased from the market also will do without killing live chickens. He tries to support the decision not to kill chickens on the spot with the evidence from the text. It is true that *simbang* should treat the gods with chicken because the client cannot afford bulls. But it does not have to involve killing the animal by their own hands. By preparing and cooking chicken meat for the purpose of treating gods with it and sharing it among participants, what is stipulated in the myth is satisfied. By treating the gods with cooked chicken, along other gifts, such as cotton cloth, jackets, ceremonial paper money, real money, rice, and rice wine, *aek* can be prevented.

However, *simbang* Oh, who keeps conducting chicken sacrifice, points out that offering bulls to treat the gods in the myth cannot avoid killing the animals. Therefore, he and about ten *simbang* working in the southeastern area still carry out *aekmagi* by sacrificing chickens. It is the *simbang* that have upheld the tradition. But it is also true that they could maintain their shamanic beliefs and practices thanks to the conservative villagers of this region. While *simbang* Oh actively cooperates with and contacts *simbang* from other regions, he is confident that his decision to keep performing chicken sacrifices is right. He thinks that it was not impossible to prepare chickens for *aekmagi* in the 2000s though it was very difficult. If *simbang* and community members tried their best to follow the tradition, he points out, they could manage to obtain at least one red rooster despite the difficult situation. *Simbang* Oh still believes that it is necessary to offer the lives of sacrificed animals to prevent *aek*. Because it is the responsibility of *simbang* to follow the rules based on *bonpuri*, Jeju myths, they must maintain the original way of performing *aekmagi* as they learned it from their teachers.

Simbang Oh says that he once complained to his teacher, the late *simbang* Geumja Kang, because he himself felt tired and reluctant to kill more than a hundred chickens for *aekmagi* during *dang-gut*. But his teacher firmly told him to maintain the old way of *aekmagi*, saying “*simbang* must become a *baekjeong* [butcher, a person of the lowest class in pre-modern Korea] and also become a *yangban* [aristocrat]. A petty official of the gods is someone who should kill if it is the will of the gods and who should feed if it is the will of gods. If the *simbang* does not fulfill his or her duty, the *simbang* will be hit by *aek*”. Agreeing with his old teacher, *simbang* Oh still conducts chicken sacrifices to prevent *aek* in *gut* for villages and families.

In this section so far, I organized the views of the *simbang* I interviewed on whether to abolish or maintain sacrifice during *aekmagi*, trying to complement preexisting research and records. From these conflicting views and their rationales, I could identify two issues that should be explained further. First, the exceptional status of a *simbang*, who is not, or is scarcely, influenced by *aek*, should be the focus. It is believed that all offerings made for *aekmagi*, not only the animals killed to replace human lives with theirs but also any gifts presented to gods to prevent *aek*, can do harm to the other participants but not to the *simbang*. *Simbang* stand on the boundary between humans and gods, as both a human being and friends and assistants of the gods. This ambiguous location makes *simbang* a sacred person, *homo sacer*, which I will explain further in the next section. Second, the characteristics of *aekmagi* without chicken sacrifice should be investigated. While chicken sacrifice was believed to be a central and necessary process of *aekmagi*, this process is now omitted in most areas of Jeju-do. The ritual that used to center on sacrifice now became one without sacrifice. I will demonstrate that the role and function of this ritual are believed to be the same as before, and how and why a ritual without the central process can maintain the same function.

4. *Homo Sacer* and Jeju Shamans

Aek is apportioned to human beings like destiny. If a person is believed to be in trouble due to *aek*, he or she must prevent or remove it by having a *simbang* perform an *aekmagi* ritual, which is composed of actions and words that propitiate the messenger gods of the netherworld who would take the person’s soul. Offerings are made to the messengers and other gods. To replace the person’s life with that of an animal, a chicken, or other animals

on rare occasions, has been killed or expelled to a distant field. In Jeju-do, there has been the belief that an animal life can substitute for that of a human. The *simbang* is not harmed by eating or possessing the animal that received human *æk*, while the client and all the other participants may be if they possess it or eat it outside of the ritual place.¹⁸ There are some concerns that *æk* might pose a threat to *simbang*, considering the prayers for *æk* not to affect *simbang*. However, these and other processes cannot allow other participants to eat or possess sacrificed animals. Only *simbang* can have the animal and other gifts offered to the gods to prevent *æk*. Though all offerings made to gods are supposed to belong to the *simbang* after the *gut*, other community members can have them if given by the *simbang*. But offerings made for *ækmagi* cannot be given to lay participants because of the threat of misfortunes, including death, they pose. The *simbang*, who can connect people to the gods, is not harmed by the *æk* that he or she prevented. This exceptional status revealed in the *ækmagi* ritual should be explained further.

The status of *simbang* in Jeju-do has been formed by multiple elements, including religious, political, social, economic, and psychological aspects. If we specify one of many elements as the essence and try to explain the status only by it, we will miss its complexity by oversimplifying it. To understand the *simbang*'s exceptional status, we should note that the *simbang* was a religiously important person who nevertheless socially belonged to the lowest class during the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910), which revered Confucianism and suppressed Buddhism and shamanism. This huge gap between the *simbang*'s religious status and their social one remained after the end of Joseon. The social contempt for shamanism in Jeju-do lasted until recently, when traditional Korean culture began to be respected as valuable and worthy of preservation. Under the influence of the modernization movement in Korea that began in the 1960s, shamanism was branded as a premodern superstition that should be discarded even in Jeju-do, where shamanism had been the strongest in Korea. *Simbang* were especially the target of criticism because they were thought to live off the support of community members without being active economically while enjoying religious authority over other people. *Simbang* have an ambivalent sense of identity, at once proud of being petty officials of the gods yet also ashamed of the social contempt.

It is important to consider historical, social, and political factors to comprehensively understand a *simbang*'s status in Jeju society. However, it is also significant that their location on the boundary between the divine realm and the human realm is provided by religious ideas and practices. Jeju indigenous people have believed that *simbang*, as friends of the gods, play the intermediary role between the gods and ordinary people. Their position on the boundary and its characteristic of liminality had not changed by the influence of their social position; they were on the boundary when they were not socially despised but respected before the Joseon period, and likewise when they belonged to the lowest class during the Joseon Dynasty. *Simbang*, regardless of their social status being regarded as lowly or not, were considered high and noble by their community members (see Yoo 2020, pp. 87–90). The sacred status of the *simbang* should and can be understood by tracing their location in Jeju religious cosmology, which distinguishes the divine realm from the human realm.

Giorgio Agamben's examination of *homo sacer* provides useful expressions for explaining the state of exception of both *simbang* and other participants of *ækmagi*. Agamben's subject *homo sacer*, who he indicates may be killed yet not sacrificed, can be located in a similar position as the *simbang*. According to Agamben, *homo sacer* is "simply set outside human jurisdiction without being brought into the realm of divine law," while *homo sacer* at once "belongs to God in the form of unsacrificability and is included in the community in the form of being able to be killed" (Agamben [1995] 1998, p. 82). Likewise, *simbang* are in a state of exception, in which he or she belongs to both the divine and human realms yet is excluded from both realms. The *simbang* is a human being and also a petty official working for gods. The name *simbang* is thought to originate from the title "*sin-ui seongbang*," which *simbang* use to identify themselves when performing *gut*. *Seongbang*, the standard pronunciation of which is *hyeongbang*, designates one of the offices of petty officials under

the magistrate of a town. During the Joseon period, these local petty officials belonged to *jungin*, literally meaning middle people, who neither belonged to the aristocratic class nor the common people. The name *simbang* itself implies a person on the boundary.

As I have mentioned, when a person becomes a *simbang*, he or she is supposed to get out of the human genealogy and be incorporated into the genealogy that begins with the three *Jetbugi* brothers, the shamanic progenitor gods, passes through shamanic teachers and leads to the *simbang*. When the *simbang* dies, it is believed, he or she will be judged by the shamanic progenitor gods, not by the king of the netherworld. *Simbang* stay close to the divine realm but are not in the divine realm, while living in the human realm yet not belonging to the human realm. *Simbang* are believed to be different from ordinary people, belonging to and simultaneously being excluded from both the divine realm and the human realm. The *simbang* is a sacred person, *homo sacer*. And all participants in *aekmagi* become *homo sacer* while the ritual is performed. During the ritual, their lives are consecrated to death, in that they are alive but pretend to be doomed to die soon, being in the state of latent death, which I will explain further soon.

I do not fully agree with Agamben when he seeks to find the meaning of the sacred outside the religious. He thinks the sacred should be found “before or beyond the religious” (9). If we consider religious meaning as secondary or collateral in understanding “sacred life,” we will have difficulty distinguishing it from other exceptional states or statuses for which the word “sacred” is not used. We should not ignore why a certain state of exception has been expressed by using the word “sacred”, while it is not used for other states. Agamben tries to “uncover an originary political structure that is located in a zone prior to the distinction between sacred and profane,” by interpreting *sacratio*, or consecration, as an autonomous figure (74). He argues that, because *homo sacer* may be killed yet not sacrificed, the killing of *homo sacer* should be distinguished from ritual purifications and *sacratio* should be excluded from the religious sphere (82). “Life is sacred only insofar as it is taken into the sovereign exception. *Homo sacer*’s capacity to be killed but not sacrificed is a juridico-political phenomenon,” which should not be confused with a religious phenomenon (85). He asserts that the sacred life was eminently political in character from the beginning (100). According to Agamben,

An assumed ambivalence of the generic religious category of the sacred cannot explain the juridico-political phenomenon to which the most ancient meaning of the term *sacer* refers. On the contrary, only an attentive and unprejudiced delimitation of the respective fields of the political and the religious will make it possible to understand the history of their intersection and complex relations. (80)

I argue that the delimitation of the political and the religious is a very modern and Western way of understanding the world and people. We may delimit the political and the religious in order to articulate a specific trait of our subject of research. However, that hypothetical work should not exclude the generic religious category of the sacred, even if the category might look ambivalent. In spite of Agamben’s critique of the “ambivalence of the generic religious category of the sacred,” this ambivalence comes, at least in part, from generic ideas of the sacred, which religious people have developed as “the opposite of the profane,” covering any objects, humans, characteristics, or relations that are conceived as different from, and so separate from, ordinary ones in the ordinary human world (Eliade [1949] 1996, pp. xviii, 12, 14, 17, 24, 459). The boundary made between the sacred and the profane is the most basic and primordial boundary human beings have ever made. And religious cosmologies have been developed through this boundary. “The act of tracing boundaries” and “their cancellation or negation” (Agamben [1995] 1998, p. 85) cannot be explained without considering a religious cosmology. I am aware that the act of tracing boundaries and their cancellation are not monopolized by the religious but accomplished by complex human situations including the political. However, it should not be neglected that religion has made and maintained the boundaries between realms in the cosmos, and has defined loci of beings in the cosmos, placing them within the realms that are compartmented by the boundaries. Jeju shamanic religion separates the divine realm from the hu-

man realm, and the realm of death from the realm of the living (see [Yoo and Watts 2021](#), pp. 75–98, which is titled “Separating Realms”). And for the discussion of this paper, I emphasize that religions have also created an exceptional liminal situation, which does not belong to a specific realm but is placed on the boundary, such as that of Jeju *simbang*.

Still, Agamben aptly observes that *homo sacer* do not belong to a specific realm but are on the boundary, staying outside of the human realm while being humans, which is very useful for explaining exceptional states of *simbang* and other participants in *aeckmagi*. First, all participants in *aeckmagi* can be said to be temporarily in an exceptional state. They pretend to be in imminent danger and destined to die soon. They are temporarily outside both the realm of death and the realm of life. They are on the boundary between life and death, which is clearly an exceptional state. By using Agamben’s term, they are temporarily regarded as sacred persons. This is the state that requires offerings to the gods, especially those from the netherworld, and that requires the killing of other animals in place of themselves. Participants can go back to the realm of living human beings by making offerings to the gods and by transferring their *aeck* to animals and killing them (now restricted to the southeastern area of Jeju-do).

Aeckmagi ritual locates a participant in the position of “the person that is consecrated to death and that, insofar as it occupies the threshold between the two worlds [the living and the dead], must be separated from the normal context of the living” (Agamben [1995] 1998, p. 98), then returns him or her to the world of the living.¹⁹ The ritual removes the threat of death from the participant who is believed to be in danger of death and confirms that he or she belongs to the realm of life. A critically ill patient, for whom *simbang* prescribes *siwang-maji gut*, including *aeckmagi*, can be said to be already on the boundary between the living and the dead. But in *aeckmagi* performed regularly during seasonal *dang-gut*, when none of the community members are critically ill, every community member is temporarily forced onto the threshold between the living and the dead. The ritual says that we need to prevent *aeck* in advance because none of us knows when we will die, just as Samani did not know he would die soon. Though we may not die very soon like Samani, we pretend to temporarily become Samani and die before long. While performing *aeckmagi*, all participants become liminal entities who “are betwixt and between the positions” (Turner 1969, p. 94). In brief, *aeckmagi* is conducted to confirm that we surely belong to the realm of life though we should recognize that we all are destined to die sooner or later.

We can compare participants in *aeckmagi* with the *devotus* of Ancient Rome, who had “the status of the living body that seems no longer to belong to the world of the living” (Agamben [1995] 1998, p. 97). The *devotus* is the person “who consecrates his own life to the gods of the underworld in order to save the city from a grave danger” (96). The *devotus* can return to the world of the living by performing a ritual, in which he must bury an image of him “seven feet or more under the ground and a victim must be immolated in expiation” (97). “Until this rite is performed, the surviving devotee is a paradoxical being, who, while seeming to lead a normal life, in fact exists on a threshold that belongs neither to the world of the living nor to the world of the dead” (99). The *devotus* is the person who had to die but did not, who was consecrated to the gods of the netherworld but remained in this world. Samani in the Jeju myth is depicted as a person who is placed on the register of the soon to be dead but does not die. Like the *devotus*, Samani is a paradoxical being, one who has to die but does not. He manages to escape from death by offering gifts, including animals to propitiate the gods from the netherworld. All participants in *aeckmagi* are identified with Samani and regarded as persons who are doomed to die soon. From this exceptional boundary state, they come back to the realm of life by offering gifts, including animals that would replace their own lives. In other words, they are temporarily placed in the state of the *devotus*, who are consecrated to the netherworld gods but successfully remain in this world.

Now let us return to the exceptional state of the *simbang*. Unlike other participants, the *simbang* who conduct this ritual are not temporarily forced to be on the threshold between the two worlds of the living and the dead, because they reside permanently on the

threshold between the human realm and the divine realm. The *simbang*'s threshold is on a different level from that of other participants. Their exceptional sacred state lasts even if they are not placed in the state of latent death. As "the priest," in Hubert and Mauss' term, "stands on the threshold of the sacred and the profane world and represents them both at one and the same time" (Hubert and Mauss [1898] 1981, p. 23), *simbang* stand on the threshold of the divine realm and the human realm. Unlike other participants who stand on the threshold of the living and the dead only while the ritual is performed, *simbang* always stand on the boundary between the human and the divine. They are humans but are separate from other humans because they are consecrated to gods as their descendants, friends, and assistants. While other participants, sacrificers, are temporarily placed on the threshold that the ritual provides, *simbang*, sacrificers, permanently stand on the threshold. They are *homo sacer*, who can remove *aek* but are not harmed by *aek*, because *aek* is supposed to do harm to human beings in the human realm, not the person of the boundary, who always stands on the threshold.

To demonstrate a *simbang*'s state of exception in this context, I would nuance and modify Agamben's explanation of the life of *homo sacer*. Agamben writes, "At once excluding bare life [the life of *homo sacer*] from and capturing it within the political order, the state of exception actually constituted, in its very separateness, the hidden foundation on which the entire political system rested" (Agamben [1995] 1998, p. 9). For Jeju *aekmagi*, I would put it as, "At once excluding *simbang* from and capturing them within both the divine and human realms, the state of exception actually constituted, in its very separateness, the hidden foundation on which the entire cosmological system of Jeju religion rested".

5. Sacrifice without Ritual Killing

As mentioned, animal sacrifice is rapidly disappearing in Jeju *aekmagi*. But, as quoted above, Hyeon wrote that chicken sacrifice was an essential activity to prevent *aek*. "Aek is prevented by killing a rooster and throwing it to the outside [of the ritual place] to ask [gods] take the rooster instead of human life" (Hyeon [1980] 2007, p. 264). I described in detail the social changes that caused chicken sacrifice to be left out of *aekmagi*. There were sufficient reasons why *simbang* decided to stop killing chickens. But those reasons do not explain why Jeju people still believe that *aek* can be prevented without killing chickens, though *aek* had to be prevented by killing chickens until just fifteen years ago. To answer this question in this section, I will examine how *aekmagi* is working for participants without animal sacrifice. I will also investigate how *aek* is believed to be removed; that is, how expiation is made without offering an animal's life in place of someone else's life.

We first look into the definition of sacrifice. For the definition of sacrifice, Hubert and Mauss postulated the victim, the object that is destroyed, whether it is an animal, vegetable, food, or drink. But Kathryn Lofton points out that this destruction of the victim can often be a metaphoric expectation rather than a literal one. Though their understandings of sacrifice may seem to be quite different, both agree that a sacrifice is made on behalf of society. As they point out, rituals involving animal sacrifice are conducted to help maintain the society, often by having its members believe their pending misfortunes or evil influences are transferred to the sacrificed animals. People need to feel secure and steady, overcoming restlessness, in order to maintain the society to which they belong, though they are destined to die someday and cannot but live restless lives. For this purpose of supporting society to be fulfilled more efficiently, as the Jeju example shows, rules and procedures of a ritual, which, it was believed, must be strictly followed, can be changed, or even given up. Animal sacrifices are omitted in the Jeju *aekmagi* ritual to make the ritual take better charge of "communication with, and thinking about, the legitimate social order" (Lofton 2017, p. 119) in the society where the thought about killing animals has been negatively changed. However, we can also witness that some people or some regions can put more stress on proper execution and strict traditional rules, while others may think more highly of better ways of communicating and thinking about the social order.

I am not revisiting *Sacrifice* by Hubert and Mauss, which was first published 125 years ago in 1898, for the purpose of applying their theory to Jeju *aekmagi* or criticizing it based on Jeju's examples. Rather, I would like to use their well-known theory as a benchmark against which to examine the chicken sacrifice in *aekmagi* and explain its characteristics clearly. First, I pay attention to their observation that "everywhere the piaculum [expiatory sacrifice] exists side by side with communion" (Hubert and Mauss [1898] 1981, p. 6), which is confirmed in the chicken sacrifice of Jeju *aekmagi*. Though I do not agree with their argument that the piaculum is performed to expulse a sacred spirit, which is not seen in the case of Jeju-do, it sounds persuasive that both the piaculum and communion are primordial components of sacrifice, while it is impossible to trace which of the two came first (Hubert and Mauss [1898] 1981, p. 7). Sacrifice as communion allows the sacrificers to share and eat sacred offerings made to gods. In the Jeju religion, netherworld gods are the agents who are believed to remove *aek* from people. The animals that are killed for expiation are consumed by the sacrificers for communion with the gods and among themselves. Animals sacrificed in place of human lives in *aekmagi* are used for communion, that is, used to treat the gods and shared by participants in the ritual.

As I implied above, Hubert and Mauss argued that the name sacrifice should be reserved for oblations in which the offering or part of it is destroyed (12). Then, they defined sacrifice as "a religious act which, through the consecration of a victim, modifies the condition of the moral person who accomplishes it or that of certain objects with which he is concerned" (13). They asserted that the purpose of destruction like incineration and consumption by the priest was to eliminate the parts of the animal from temporal surroundings for the purpose of making it sacred (38). The evil influences or maleficent powers the victim contained had to be removed, often by returning it "to the world of maleficent powers" (38–39). They saw the scapegoat of the atonement (*Leviticus* 16) as the victim to be sent back to the world of maleficent powers. Likewise, the live bird, which was let go free over the open field in the purification ritual to cleanse the one who was healed from leprosy, was regarded also as the victim sent back to the evil world (*Leviticus* 14: 7; 53). After removing evil influences and consecrating the victim, the bad condition of the sacrificer can be modified. According to them, the sacrificer acquires the sacred state "thanks to the strength that the act of consecration has built up in the victim" (52).

However, their argument may make us overemphasize the consecration of the victim in the sacrifice. The sacrificer of *aekmagi* does not acquire the sacred state through the consecration of the offerings. Though the chicken sacrificed in *aekmagi* can be said to be consecrated in that it is offered to gods, for which it used to be purified by washing in some areas, it is neither identified with deities nor represents the society. Again, the gods are the agents who can prevent *aek*, which is not thought to be the result of human sin or impurity but what is given to humans. It can be prevented only by the intervention of gods who are originally supposed to enforce it. The animal sacrifice for redeeming the human life helps gods, the agents of removing *aek*, intervene in the human crisis. As *simbang* Kim points out, in the myth *Samani-bonpuri*, animals are offered to the gods in order to propitiate the gods, just like other offerings, not to use their consecrated strength. In addition, sacrifice animals in *aekmagi* are not eliminated for purification but presented to gods. In Jeju shamanism, it is gods who remove *aek*. Strictly speaking, animals are killed to persuade gods and to treat gods. Though animal lives are believed to replace the sacrificer's life, the replacement does not happen automatically just by killing animals. Ritual killing in *aekmagi* has been conducted to satisfy the gods with the animal's life instead of the sacrificer's.

Hubert and Mauss manifestly regarded purity and impurity as two aspects of the sacred (60), which often causes confusion. As I pointed out in a former publication, conceptions of the sacred and the profane should be distinguished from systems of purity and impurity (Yoo and Watts 2021, p. 18; see also Smith 2004, pp. 107–8). In the Jeju shamanic religion, though sacrifice and purification may look similar and have much in common, they are clearly distinguished. Hubert and Mauss stressed that the essential thing in the scapegoat of the atonement, which was dedicated to Azazel in *Leviticus* 16, was to drive it

away without killing it (39). But we should note that animals driven away for purification are different from those offered to the divine. In *Leviticus*, the expelled animals should not be owned or eaten, not only by the congregation but also by priests. The bird that was set free for a person who was healed of leprosy was also not for communion or for the priests. It was just driven away. Unlike the scapegoat and the bird, animals used for *aekmagi* are gifts and bribes for gods, which can be eaten in the ritual place or possessed by *simbang*. For *aekmagi*, chickens, horses, and bulls may be driven away from the ritual place, the sacrificer's house, if it is difficult to kill them on the spot. But they are what is offered to the gods, both in the myth and in the real ritual, which are to be ascribed to the *simbang*. Driven away animals in *Leviticus* and in Jeju *aekmagi* have different characteristics.

In Jeju-do, all sacrificed chickens or other animals for *aekmagi* are shared in the ritual place or given to *simbang*. But there is a ritual process of Jeju *gut*, which is comparable to driving away the scapegoat or the bird. In *saedarim*, the purification ritual is included as a part of the *gut*, the *simbang* pretends to drive away birds so that they do not come back. As I wrote in one of my previous publications, *saedarim* is conducted to make the ritual place appropriate for the gods to be served. It is believed to clean not only the human participants and the place but also the invited gods who are thought to become polluted when they enter the human world. It is also supposed to drive out all the impurities that may be lurking around the passageway by which the gods reach the ritual place. During the *saedarim* ritual,

simbang sings songs for washing away impurity accompanied by Korean shamanic instruments. Then the *simbang* sprinkles water from his or her mouth, or by using bamboo branches with green blades dipped in water, onto the people and around the ritual place, making gestures of driving away impurity or birds. In the name "*saedarim*," "*sae*" is equal to "*sa*" of mainland Korea, which means 'impure' or 'evil.' Jeju people have generally read "*sa*" as "*sae*," which has another meaning of 'bird' or 'birds.' In ritual, both meanings of "*sae*" are confused, often on purpose. *Segyeong-bonpuri* and *Jijang-bonpuri* include examples in which "*sa*," the impure or the evil, is expressed as "*sae*," birds ... Therefore, removing impurity is pretended to be the same with driving away birds, as a pun, and a *simbang* makes gestures of scaring away birds while reciting ritual songs. (Yoo and Watts 2021, p. 85)

Simbang perform this purification ritual by pretending to expel birds and by sprinkling water. There is no evidence that shows the original form of pretending to expel birds, and we cannot tell if it originated from the real activity of driving away or releasing birds. But *simbang* always pretend to expel birds for the *saedarim* purification ritual, and birds are related to impurity in the myths. These birds, which are thought to be removed with all possible impurity, do not belong to the gods or the *simbang*.

While *aekmagi* is a ritual conducted to have gods intervene to eliminate dangerous misfortunes that may cause death, the *simbang* is the agent of *saedarim*, who cleanses and removes impurity of his or her own, all participants, the ritual place, and even the invited gods.²⁰ Purification rituals like *saedarim* are needed to maintain the purity, or the requisite condition of a specific realm in religious people's cosmology and to remove the negative influence of other realms (Yoo and Watts 2021, p. 79). For purification, animals are not offered to god/gods but removed by the sacrificer, as is the case of *saedarim*. On the other hand, sacrificed animals are offered to the divine along with other gifts, to change bad human conditions through divine intervention, as we can see in *aekmagi*.

The first reason that Jeju people can believe in the efficacy of *aekmagi* without chicken sacrifice is related to their cosmology in which the gods are important subjects and agents of religious activities. I argue that the role of gods as main characters of *aekmagi* makes it possible to prevent *aek* without chicken sacrifice. Though we easily forget, "in the view of its adherents, practiced religion may belong to the sphere of, and have its source in, the divine. The gods practice religion because religion in essence belongs to them" (Patton 2009, p. 17). Jeju *aekmagi* can be conducted without chicken sacrifice, because it is possible to successfully persuade the gods to prevent *aek* and to modify the bad condition of sacrificers.

Because it is gods that decide to prevent *aek*, the lives of chickens are not necessary if gods accept offerings without chicken sacrifice. *Aekmagi*, after the recent radical change in Jeju-do, namely the omission of the ritual killing of chickens, still maintains other characteristics of sacrifices, *except* that the transfiguration or destruction of the offering is not involved. It is an oblation that modifies the condition of the sacrificer *without* the destruction of the victim or part of it. It is an oblation in which the communion is clearly left but from which the expiatory sacrifice is *not* included. Communion meals, through which sacrificers can be assured of a peaceful relationship with the gods, are steadfastly maintained as before. All the other conditions except the destruction of the victim are met. Sacrificed animals and other offerings are consecrated in that they are offered to and come to belong to gods. Without the destruction but with communion with gods and participants, “the distinctive characteristic of consecration in sacrifice” is obviously left, by which Hubert and Mauss meant “the thing consecrated serves as an intermediary between the sacrificer... and the divinity to whom the sacrifice is usually addressed” (Hubert and Mauss [1898] 1981, p. 11).

Lofton does not rely on one authoritative definition of sacrifice but tries to catch its important characteristics from various theories, having a broader meaning of sacrifice than that of Hubert and Mauss in mind. Lofton examines “many of the theories of sacrifices,” which are “irreconcilable with one another” (113). Quoting Nancy Jay’s observation that “Not all ritual killings are sacrifice, nor do all sacrifices involve slaughter” (Jay 1992, p. xxv), she emphasizes that sacrifice “is exacting, it is controlled, and it is a strategy of managing something on behalf of something else (as a gift to something else)” (Lofton 2017, p. 113). But she does not argue for the definition of sacrifice without destruction or transfiguration of the offering. Some theories, to which Lofton pays attention, emphasize that “the word sacrifice does imply that something has been lost” (113), and she does not deny it. Instead, she thinks that destruction can be “as much a metaphoric expectation as a literal one” (113).

However, while the literal killing of animals used to be a necessary part, even “metaphoric” words about killing animals are missing in the *aekmagi* of the present time, though *aekmagi* without chicken sacrifice still contains important characteristics of sacrifice. Therefore, to explain this recently changed ritual, we should make optimal use of those theories of sacrifice, which do not emphasize that “the offering must be transfigured (ruined, shattered, parsed, plundered) to be understood as sacrificed,” whether the transfiguration is metaphoric or literal (Lofton 2017, p. 113). Most of all, Lofton’s understanding of sacrifice as an “alimentary ritual” (114) is very useful. Invoking Claude Lévi-Strauss’s examination of “totemic classifications” that emphasizes “the conceptual systems” as “means of thinking,” over and above “means of communication” (Lévi-Strauss [1962] 1966, pp. 66–67), she asserts that sacrifice “is nourishing our social sustenance, not a way of conveying ideas about our sociality” (Lofton 2017, p. 114).

The second reason that *aekmagi* is still believed to remove *aek* is sociological, of which the adherents are not aware. I argue that *aekmagi* without chicken sacrifice still works because *aekmagi* without killing animals can better nourish Jeju people’s social sustenance while killing animals was not properly working any longer as a “means of thinking” that accords with what contemporary Jeju people think.

I agree with Lofton that the offerings made to gods are decided by societies. “Throughout history, societies have prescribed offerings to divinities” (Lofton 2017, p. 112). Society prescribes which offerings should be made and conducts the offering following the prescription. Hubert and Mauss would agree that sacrifice is nourishing social sustenance and that society prescribes offerings. They argued that sacrifices can invest individuals with the authority of society. “The sacred things in relation to which sacrifice functions, are social things. And this is enough to explain sacrifice ... [The function of sacrifice] is a social function because sacrifice is concerned with social matters” (Hubert and Mauss [1898] 1981, pp. 102–3). The omission of chicken sacrifice from *aekmagi* can be understood as following a social prescription for social sustenance. Society prescribes what offerings should be prepared and how they should be made, while *simbang* work for society. The words a *simbang*

says to persuade gods to accept offerings without ritual killing, “now we are in a different age,” confirms that he or she is following the social change, the changed prescription.

Finally, I argue that *aekmagi* shows that social decisions and functions may be prioritized over rules and etiquette. I am not saying that rules and etiquette are not important in *aekmagi*. As Jonathan Z. Smith emphasized, sacrifice obviously has a “transactional character,” a transaction that accomplishes “not by sacramentalism, but by an etiquette of infinite degree and baroque complexities” (Smith 1987, pp. 201–2; Lofton 2017, p. 113). *Aekmagi* is surely a transaction that is accomplished by strict etiquette and complexities. However, rules and etiquette are not set in stone. We already saw that, even the ritual killing of chickens, which has been an essential part of *aekmagi*, is not performed any longer in most areas of Jeju. *Aekmagi* conducted according to the radically changed rules still contains the transactional character of sacrifice and seems to be better at nourishing social sustenance. Its transactional character continues by making offerings to gods and having communion with gods and among participants, without killing chickens.

Lofton also emphasizes the importance of rules in sacrifice, without mentioning the possibility that the rules can be changed. By using Fritz Staal’s sentences, she points out that performers’ “primary concern, if not obsession, is with rules” in sacrifice, emphasizing the importance of “the proper execution of their complex tasks” (113). In addition, quoting René Girard, she regards “sacrifice as a category of scrupulous, necessary repetition, a category that provided cookbook style to ritual killing” (114). However, it should also be remembered that scrupulous rules can be changed by the prescription of societies. Changes in rules can be caused by many factors, such as an unavoidable epidemic or newly spread animal ethics. While sacrifice was “a category that provided cookbook style to ritual killing,” ritual killing itself came to be omitted from the cookbook.

To look into the mechanism of *aekmagi* without chicken sacrifice, we need to see it as a ritual in the broader sense, rather than as a specific kind of ritual, like a sacrifice or an oblation. Jeju chicken sacrifice is a religious ritual and so contains typical characteristics of ritual. To borrow Smith’s expression, ritual is a “focusing lens” where “everything, at least potentially, is of significance” (Smith 1982, pp. 54–56), and to use Lofton’s expression, “ritual is a controlled environment, a ring for spectatorship” (112). If one spectates through a focusing lens itself in a controlled environment, everything may seem to be of significance. Here, we should not neglect the matter of “significance”. That is, we need to catch how significant are the objects spectated through the lens. Though everything is potentially of significance, some things may become less significant or lose significance in the environment that is controlled by society. In the *aekmagi* of Jeju-do at present, sacrificing chickens is no longer of significance in the new environment of 21st-century Korea.

Following Durkheim’s view that the source and foundation of religious life is society (Durkheim [1912] 2001, pp. 43, 313), Lofton brilliantly analyzes Britney Spears’s fall and rise at the mercy of the public as “a sacrifice made on behalf of a social body, a sacrifice that centralizes communication with, and thinking about, the legitimate social order (or relationship to divinities, to ideals, to higher principles)” (119). In the same context, Hubert and Mauss asserted that religious ideas, which may include divinities, ideals, or higher principles, are social facts (101). A transfiguration in a sacrifice like severing, ruining, burning, or destroying, can be metaphoric, as in the case of Spears. The more important thing in a sacrifice is “communication with, and thinking about, the legitimate social order”. However, there can be changes in the communication with and thinking about the legitimate social order. Then, the ritual may not adhere to preexisting etiquettes or rules but become changed, corresponding to the change of the legitimate social order, just like the *aekmagi* of the Jeju city area. Whether agreeing with the Durkheimian view or not, in that *aekmagi* is mostly performed at the community level, the members’ attention cannot help being under the influence of society. The case of Jeju *aekmagi* reminds us that recipes of cookbooks or prescriptions can be radically modified in this rapidly changing world.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, I first tried to thoroughly examine the procedure of *aekmagi*, focusing on its recent radical change, that is, the omission of chicken sacrifice. Chickens have been killed and offered to gods for the *aekmagi* ritual, which is necessarily included in every regular *gut*. The lives of chickens have been thought to replace human lives. Gifts and food are offered to propitiate gods, especially the messenger gods from the netherworld who come to this world to take the life of the client, or the sacrificer, and then, gods and all participants have a communion by sharing food together. After the *gut* is over, only the *simbang* can own and eat chickens, which should not be taken back or eaten outside the ritual place by lay participants. Horses or bulls, which used to be very occasionally offered decades ago, also could not be taken back. Offerings made for *aekmagi* are thought to be payment for the gods' removing *ae*k and are attributed to *simbang*. *Simbang* in Jeju-do are believed not to be harmed by possessing or eating offerings, including sacrificed chickens, which are made to prevent *ae*k, while all the other participants are certain to be so affected, at least outside the ritual place. However, a drastic change began about fifteen years ago, and the ritual killing is not performed any longer in many areas of Jeju-do, though it is maintained in the southeastern part.

Then, I revisited two academic categories that have been developed in comparative religion. First, I illustrated the exceptional state of sacred persons to explain the *simbang*'s exceptional status. They are beings residing in between the divine realm and the human realm; they are humans but friends and petty officials of the gods; and they are neither gods who have the authority and ability to prevent *ae*k immediately, nor ordinary people who are damaged by offerings for *aekmagi*. They are *homo sacer* who help remove *ae*k but are not harmed by *ae*k because *ae*k can do harm to human beings in the human realm and not the person of the boundary or the threshold.

During *aekmagi*, all the other participants are temporarily placed under the influence of death, whose souls are soon to be taken by messenger gods from the netherworld. Lay participants are alive but consecrated to death, being in the liminal state, on the threshold between the living and the dead. This liminal state makes it possible for them to partake in the sacrificial meat. Then, they come back to the ordinary living human realm after this temporary exceptional state of the *aekmagi* ritual is over. However, *simbang* stay on the permanent threshold, in the perpetual liminal state. While the temporary exceptional state of the other participants is created to make them live well in the ordinary living human realm, the permanent exceptional state of *simbang* is devised to maintain the cosmos that is mainly composed of the divine realm and the human realm by tracing the boundary between the two realms and by sometimes canceling it in rituals.

Second, I investigated characteristics of animal sacrifice, both as an expiatory ritual and at once a communion, to explain why Jeju people still believe that *ae*k can be prevented without killing chickens, though *ae*k had to be prevented by killing chickens until just fifteen years ago. I point out two important reasons that participants still think that they can prevent *ae*k by performing *aekmagi* without sacrifice.

The first reason that adherents of the Jeju shamanic religion still can believe in the efficacy of *aekmagi* without chicken sacrifice is related to their cosmology, in which gods are important subjects and agents of religious activities. The role of gods as main characters of *aekmagi* makes it possible to prevent *ae*k without chicken sacrifice. People believe that the gods are the main agents of preventing *ae*k and that they can persuade the gods to do the work without receiving the life of a chicken. Chicken sacrifice could be omitted without damaging the efficacy of *aekmagi* because the sacrifice was conducted for the purpose of persuading and treating gods.

I wrote above that, in most villages of the southeastern part of Jeju-do, three chickens were sacrificed for *aekmagi* during the *dang-gut* until twenty years ago. Three chickens were needed to treat each of the three messengers of the netherworld with one whole chicken, just like the other gifts had to be prepared for each of them. If the sacrifice was conducted only for *daemyeongdaechung*, the principle that "some [life] should be offered in place of

someone's life," one chicken would be enough to replace the life of one client. Chickens were killed and offered to ensure that the gods from the netherworld were satisfied and persuaded.

Though animal lives are believed to replace the sacrificer's life, the replacement was needed to satisfy the gods. Chicken sacrifice has been conducted to satisfy gods with the animal's life instead of the sacrificer's. The transactional character of *aeckmagi* without chicken sacrifice continues by making other offerings to gods and having communion among gods and participants. Without sacrificing animal lives, gods are still treated and bribed to prevent *aeck*. To confirm that gods are pleased with the offerings, communion, which is regarded as one of the primordial components of sacrifice, is still performed by offering food to gods and sharing it with all the participants. As the Latin word *sacrificium* means "to make sacred, to sanctify, to devote," the more important action in the *aeckmagi* offering is sanctifying and devoting some that may please the gods, rather than killing living beings itself (see Watts 2007, p. 175, fn. 6).

The second reason that *aeckmagi* is still believed to prevent *aeck* is sociological, of which adherents may not be aware. *Aeckmagi* without chicken sacrifice became a more efficient ritual system for nourishing social sustenance better by following the new social prescription, while killing animals was not properly working any longer as a "means of thinking" that accords with what contemporary Jeju people think.

"Societies have prescribed offerings to divinities" (Lofton 2017, p. 112), and this prescription can be changed according to social conditions. The *simbang* of the Jeju city area ceased sacrifice due to the changed social recognition of killing animals, along with practical reasons that made it difficult for them to kill and dispose of the chickens. They persuade the gods by saying during the ritual, "now we are in a different age". This change of *aeckmagi* in Jeju-do shows that the social prescription of the offerings to gods can be modified according to social changes and that the ritual may nourish social sustenance better without the omitted process that used to be regarded as necessary in it. *Aeckmagi*, in which even a metaphoric destruction of animals, as well as a literal one, is not found, is "made on behalf of a social body, a sacrifice that centralizes communication with, and thinking about, the legitimate social order (or relationship to divinities, to ideals, to higher principles)" (Lofton 2017, p. 119). Of course, there can be some others who think more highly of rules and etiquette. Adherents in the southeastern area believe that the transaction between the gods and the community cannot be accomplished without chicken sacrifice. Hence the old prescription is maintained by the society in that area.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: As I articulated in FN 4, all four my interviewees are bearers and instructors of intangible national assets. They are the presidents or vice-presidents of the two organizations that are designated as National Intangible Heritage by the Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea. Please exclude this statement.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created in this study other than my own observations. Most data presented in this study are available in Hyeon ([1980] 2007) and J. Kang (2015).

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

- ¹ In this article, I do not provide the historical and regional context of the Jeju shamanic religion because I have done it in my previous works. For a brief history of Jeju religions, including Jeju shamanism, see Yoo (2020). For the relation between shamanic tradition in mainland Korea and that of Jeju, see Yoo (2023). I am aware that the term "shaman" is very controversial due to the variety of people this term encompasses. As Michael James Winkelman adeptly demonstrates, the relationship of *mu* (巫) to shamanism is problematic. "Virtually all mentions of historical and contemporary" *mu* ritualists have been translated into English as shamans (Winkelman 2023). However, since this word has long been taken for granted for so long in academia, I decided to use it to translate *mudang*, which embraces Jeju *simbang*. Noteworthy scholars of Korean traditional religions, such as Laurel Kendall (1985), Boudewijn Walraven (2009), and Seong Nae Kim (2018), have translated the Korean *mu* into English

as shaman. Kim argues that Korean *mu* “can be seen as a category of shaman, Korean shamans who are active in the regional and religious-cultural context of Korea” (Kim 2018, p. 22). I also considered that most Korean–English dictionaries also suggest shaman for the Korean word *mu-dang* and shamanism for *mu-sok*.

2 I know that “sacrifice” is a highly controversial term. James W. Watts properly points out that “‘sacrifice’ is an evaluative term rather than a descriptive one” and that “the English term ‘sacrifice’ is itself problematic for cross-cultural comparisons” (Watts 2007, p. 175). But I decided to maintain this term in this article, because most scholars I referred to, from Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss to Kathryn Lofton, used it without reserve. I think a substituted word may cause a muddle and require more pages to clarify.

3 This southeastern part corresponds to Jeongui-*hyeon* town (or Jeongui-*gun* for some time) which was established in 1416, early Joseon period, and abolished in 1914 for reorganizing administrative districts.

4 I interviewed four *simbang* for this research. Three of them, Yongok Yi (b. 1955, interviewed 29 August 2022), Sunsil Seo (b. 1961, interviewed 2 September 2022), and Yeongcheol Kim (b. 1965, interviewed 28 November 2022) are working in the Jeju city area and do not conduct chicken sacrifices any longer. Yongbu Oh (b. 1963, interviewed 28 November 2022) is active in the southeastern part of Jeju-do and still does the ritual killing of chicken for *aekmagi*. The four interviewees are highly authoritative experts and public figures in the Jeju shamanic religion. Seo is the president of Jeju keungut bojonghoe, the Society for the Preservation of Jeju *Keun-gut*, of which the current vice-president is Oh. Yi is the president of Chilmeoridang yeongdeunggut bojonghoe, the Society for the Preservation of *Yeongdeung-gut* of Chilmeori-*dang*, of which Kim served as vice-president. The two societies are the only two shamanic organizations in Jeju that were designated as National Intangible Heritage by the Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea. My interviewees were aware that their interview would be used for academic publication.

5 *Keun-gut* is carried out by four to five *simbang* by using every kind of shamanic musical instrument for four to fourteen days. It is performed either in the house of a person whose *simbang* is in charge of his or her village and decides that the full-scale *gut* should be conducted for the person, or in the house of a *simbang* who recently began shamanic work and needs to pledge that he or she will work for the gods sincerely. *Dang-gut* is usually held seasonally to ask the village shrine god (or gods), and other gods revered in the village, for abundance and peace in the village and families. In addition to *singwaseje* and *yeongdeung-gut*, which I explained above, *mabullim* is held in July by the lunar calendar to pray for eliminating bad influences of the summer rainy season, like mold and mildew, and *simangokje*, which is conducted in September or October as a thanksgiving rite, are *dang-gut* (J. Kang 2007, pp. 89–95).

6 To help understanding, I provide additional information that is not included in Hyeon’s work by using (parentheses).

7 For this summary, I referred to Hyeon ([1976] 2005, pp. 133–41) along with Hyeon ([1980] 2007, pp. 231–37).

8 *Simbang* call the chicken sacrificed for *aekmagi* “*gidongcheollijeoksongbeugi*,” whose correct pronunciation is thought to be “*gidongcheollijeokhyungbaekokgye*”. It designates the rooster, which is known to be great for health if eaten, and whose chest is red and other parts are white (Hyeon [1980] 2007, p. 237). As I will mention soon, *simbang* regard it as a sturdy red rooster.

9 For rice divination, see Yoo (2021, p. 342).

10 In addition, *aek* may be thought to be different according to the purpose of the *gut* in which *aekmagi* is performed. For example, in *aekmagi* included in *muhon-gut*, which is conducted to send the soul of a person who died by drowning to the netherworld, the most emphasized *aek* is related to water and drowning. In this ritual, *simbang* strongly prays that the other family members of the dead person may not be drowned (Hyeon 2002, p. 123).

11 Though the sizes of the two districts are not significantly different (Jeju city is 979 km² and Seogwipo city is 872 km²), the population of Jeju city is three times larger than that of Seogwipo city (Jeju city 492,647; Seogwipo-city 184,163, as of July 2023).

12 In Jeju-do, live chickens have been killed during *gut* for some other processes besides *aekmagi*. In the Jeju city area, at least two chickens were prepared for village or family *gut*. One was killed for *aekmagi* and the other for *sangdangsugim*, which is carried out to send back the gods who the *simbang* invited to the yard, the main arena of the *gut*, for a specific segment of the *gut*, to their assigned seats in *dangkeul*, door leaves hung on the living room walls, like shelves, which are regarded as temporary divine realms prepared in the ritual place (J. Kang 2015, pp. 199, 219, 239). For smooth progress of the *gut*, the gods should move sooner rather than later to where they are supposed to be. But they are often unpliant, not readily following the directions of the *simbang*, the orchestrator of the *gut*. To send them back to *dangkeul*, the *simbang* need to propitiate them by offering a chicken. The *simbang* holds the neck of a living chicken with one hand and plucks its feathers one by one to throw them into the air with the other hand. The *simbang* calls each feather a hawk on which a god rides to go back. The gods are thought to come to this world from the divine realm riding on unseen divine horses and to go back to their world riding on the horses, while they ride on hawks to go back to *dangkeul* in the living room from the yard. The chicken is killed and distributed to the tables of the gods; usually, the meat of the legs and the liver are offered to the ancestor gods of shamans and the breast to the other gods, and then eaten by the participants. In *gut* conducted in mountainous regions, another chicken is killed for *sansinnori* to pray for an abundance of game from hunting. In *sansinnori*, several *simbang* perform a ritual play to reenact the hunting of the mythic time, in which the chicken is identified with a roe deer that Jeju hunters hope to catch more than any other animal. The killed chicken is eaten by the *simbang* and all other participants.

13 A set of *mengdu* is the necessary shamanic instrument of Jeju *simbang* and, at the same time, is believed to be the tutelary god of the *simbang*. It also represents the shamanic progenitor gods, Chogong. While most *simbang* usually divine twice by casting rice

and then *sanpan*, *simbang* Kim divines three times by casting, rice, *sanpan*, and, finally, *sinkal* to know the result of *aeckmagi*. For *mengdu* as both an instrument set that is necessary for *gut* and an independent deity, see Yoo (2023, pp. 208–11).

- 14 In many cases in the Korean shamanic religion, all lay participants of the ritual can be the client. In *aeckmagi* for healing a sick person, or in that which is conducted during *gut* for healing, *simbang* first tries to prevent the *aeck* of the patient but he or she does so for all the other family members also. In a *dang-gut*, *aeck* is prevented and blessings are invoked for the representative of the village and all community members.
- 15 While “*gongsissang*” means the table set for the shamanic progenitor gods, Chogong or Samsiwang, “*gongsipuri*” is a ritual, which is a segment of the Jeju *gut*, conducted to invite and treat all shamanic ancestor gods of the *simbang* performing *gut*, from Chogong, through distant “ancestor *simbang*” who made and used the *mengdu* of the *simbang* performing *gut*, to his or her direct teacher shaman who passed down the *mengdu* to the *simbang*. While the *simbang* narrates the genealogy and the purpose of the ritual, he or she offers the ancestor gods to eat chicken meat, which is thought to designate the chicken sacrificed for *aeckmagi* (S. Kang 2007, p. 138). For *gongsipuri*, see Yoo (2023, p. 210).
- 16 I am aware that this belief has weakened in recent years, even in the Jeongui area. The taboo of eating chickens sacrificed for *aeckmagi* is not as powerful as before. After the Seongsan-dang village *gut* is over, all community members cook and eat the chickens that were killed to prevent the *aeck* of each family instead of giving them all to the *simbang*, though elderly members are still reluctant.
- 17 While the term “sacrificer” designates a ritual specialist or priest who performs the sacrifice, “sacrificer” is “the subject to whom the benefits of sacrifice thus accrue, or who undergoes its effect” (Hubert and Mauss [1898] 1981, p. 10), who correspond to the main client of the *aeckmagi* or all community members in case of *aeckmagi* in *dang-gut*.
- 18 Not only in Jeju but in many other cultures of the world, we can see cases where only priests can have and eat offerings made to gods. As Hubert and Mauss pointed out long ago, the share of the priest has been considered a divine share in many cultures (Hubert and Mauss [1898] 1981, p. 37). According to the Hebrew Bible, priests and their family members could eat their due out of sacrifices offered to the LORD (*Leviticus* 10:14). While my focus in this paper is on why offerings replacing *aeck* can be possessed and eaten only by *simbang*, the sin offering as is described in *Leviticus* is consumed in a way that requires its own explanation. The sin offering had to be eaten only in the holy place, in the court of the tent of meeting, or in that of the temple, only by every male among the priests (*Leviticus* 6: 25–28).
- 19 By applying this interpretation of participants in *aeckmagi*, Agamben’s statement about the Nazi’s consecration of the German people can be redescribed from the perspective of religious studies. Agamben argues that Nazi Germany tried to transform “the entire German people into a sacred life consecrated to death ... through the elimination of the mentally ill and the bearers of hereditary diseases” (Agamben [1995] 1998, p. 180). I would argue that the Nazis tried to place the entire German people in a huge quasi-apatropaic ritual. In this ritual, people were temporarily or latently consecrated to death, by which they were placed in the sacred state. Through the elimination of the mentally ill and the bearers of hereditary diseases, the German people were supposed to come out of this latent state of death to the realm of life.
- 20 It should be remembered that both *saedarim* and *aeckmagi* are mainly conducted as parts of the *gut*, rather than conducted independently. While each procedure of the *gut*, such as *saedarim* and *aeckmagi*, has its own conspicuous goal, the *gut* is conducted to fulfill multiple purposes, like praying for abundance, healing, preventing tragedy, and inviting gods into *simbang*. For these purposes, *simbang* try to propitiate the gods and to intermediate between the gods and participants, through the complex processes of purifying participants and the place, entertaining the gods, making offerings to them, and having communion with them.

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