

Scenario for Introductory Unit

Kay, a Hmong friend of yours, hears that you are studying shamans in one of your classes. "That's what my family does – but when people talk about Asia they often don't talk about shamans!" She explains that in the Sacramento Hmong neighborhoods where she grew up, many young people no longer want to learn the traditional prayers and often stay away from the rituals that shamans do. (See link to "Between Two Worlds: the Hmong in America" in online schedule). So she, her anthropologist boyfriend, two of her sisters, and a few of their Hmong friends – all of whom want to preserve Hmong traditions into the future – are getting up their nerve to ask their elders to try something new. They have two goals: (1) to strengthen social ties (i.e., the "social web") in their Hmong neighborhood (and ideally those around them as well), and (2) to inspire children and young adults to reflect deeply about Hmong traditions, and especially the role of Hmong shamans.

Knowing that you have studied some public shamanic practices that strengthen social ties and get people thinking more deeply, Kay consults you about the two options that she and her friends have come up with (see also links in the online schedule):

- A. Kay wants to ask a shaman of their clan to perform a **large ceremony** like the one they do each year for the **New Year** for all families of that clan. But Kay also wants to **invite families of the three other clans** represented in their extended neighborhood, and possibly to include one of those clans' shamans in the ritual. The shamans would stand on wooden benches as they often do before their home altars, channeling the voices of these spirits and receiving instructions. Kay would like the focus to be on honoring not only the guiding spirits of the performing shamans, but also all the powerful spirits that have been guiding the Hmong community since it came to America.
- B. Kay's boyfriend told her about an anthropologist who lived with the Hmong at a refugee camp in Laos, working with residents to create processions and dances to teach them to avoid diseases common their crowded spaces. Kay wants to use this model to hold a **procession and dance circling the space of a neighborhood park or community center**, including a few shamans but also Hmong dressed in celebratory costumes like those created at Ban Vinai, as well as masked figures representing guiding spirits. The center of the space would be reserved for a symbolic object that would absorb all the negative energy of evil spirits, which would then be destroyed at the end.

When Kay hears from you that these kinds of events share certain features with shamanic practices from Korea and Mongolia, she **wonders if you can offer any advice on how to approach these proposed activities, based on lessons you learned from the corresponding Asian practices.**

HOMEWORK: Gather evidence from the on-line historical records of the Korean and Mongolian practices assigned for this unit (see reading guide) that helps you evaluate the way(s) and extent to which each practice strengthened social ties (i.e., the "social web") and inspired participants to think more deeply about what shamans do.

- Identify relevant **people, their roles & relationships in the social web, actions, objects, words and spaces/locales** and **words used for reflection** – especially ones that show way(s) **practice strengthens the social web** of participants **AND deepens their reflection** about shamanic power.
- In the End-of-Unit challenge, you will be asked to apply to the above proposed practices A & B the lessons that you learned from the way the two historical Asian practices strengthened social ties and inspired participants to think more deeply about shamanic powers. So for now, **focus on ways that the historical Korean & Mongolian practices are similar to those described in A & B above.**