July 9, 2026 <minato-nakazawa@people.kobe-u.ac.jp>

# Medical Anthropology (13) **"Sharmanic paradigm of ethnomedicine"**

based on Chapter 10 (pp.385-428), In: Winkelman M "Culture and Health: Applying Medical Anthropology", Jossey-Bass, 2009.

**Shamanism (cf. Foundation for Shamanic Studies https://www.shamanism.org/)**

- Hunter-gatherer shamans and the related shamanistic healers are seen universally, but not fully understood
- Modern origin of the concept of shaman came from outside Western cultures, which caused bias in understanding
- Shamanistic practices (incl. use of ASCs [altered state of consciousnesses] for community healing rituals) are widely found
- Modern impact of shamanism on Western world began in 17th C in "enlightenment" context (Flaherty 1992).
  - Modern origin of "shaman" in English came from Tungus (Siberia), Europe accepted it as sensational and outlandish, producing a view of the shaman as a madman and fraud, "exotic other", an irrational side of human nature.
  - Early nonprofessional ethnographic studies led to more complete descriptions of shamans by 20th C, linked with translations of earlier sources. In 20th C, professional studies raised interest in what appeared as significant cross-cultural similarities (seen in almost all foraging = hunter-gatherer societies) in shamanic practices: Considered as a universal form of religion and ritual healing intrinsically tied to human nature.
    - ASC has psychological and physiological effects with adaptive benefits: Brain-wave discharge patterns synchronizing information processing, producing an integration of the behavioral and emotional dynamics of the lower brain into the frontal cortex. Shamanic rituals stimulate autonomic nervous system (through serotonin neural pathways, release of endogenous opioids) and associated emotional mechanisms to expand the innate capacities of visual symbolic system of dreams that provides significant representations of self, others, and emotional life.
  - Contemporary application of shamanism to health problems is found in the use of **drumming circles** and other shamanic practices for the treatment of addiction (cf. https://www.shamanism.org/effective-core-shamanic-drumming-circles/).

**Ecstasy, spirit world, and community**

- Eliade (1964) "Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy" revealed cross-cultural patterns: Core of shamanism is the use of "techniques of ecstasy" in interaction with the spirit world on behalf of community.
- Shaman's ecstatic state = ASC ~ magical flight ~ the shaman's soul leaves his body and fly to the sky.
- Shaman controls the spirits to accomplish many tasks
  - Healing: assisting in the recovery of lost souls and protection against evil spirits
  - Divination（予言）, clairvoyance（千里眼）, diagnosis: personal animal spirits travels to get information
  - Obtaining food, by directing hunting activities
- Shamanic ritual is the social activity of greatest importance in hunter-gatherer societies: Basic cosmoligical, spiritual, religious, intercommunity, healing activities

**Shamanism as a cross-cultural phenomenon**

- Systematic cross-cultural studies illustrate empirical features of shamanism (universal or not?)
  - Cross-cultural studies of magicoreligious practitioners (based on many studies by Winkelman et al.) established universals of shamanism. Whether in Africa, Asia or Americas, hunter-gatherer societies had the same kinds of healing practitioners (=shamans).
  - Cross-cultural characteristics of shamans: Empirically derived characteristics of shamas = highly esteemed charismatic leaders (initiating most important collective ritual activities, organizing communal hunts, deciding group movement), who provide healing and also attacking others with spirits, control animal spirits.
  - Physical healing
  - Biological bases of shamanic universals
  - Shamanistic healers
  - Evolution of the shaman

**The integrative mode of consciousness**

- Consciousness can be classified into 4 conditions
  - Waking consciousness
  - Deep sleep
  - Rapid eye movement
  - Transpersonal, mystical, transcendental consciousness, characterized by slow brain wave patterns in the alpha and theta range ~ exclusive to humans ~ integrative consciousness ~ accessed in various mode by different culture.

**ASCs (Altered State of Consciousnesses) in the integrative mode of consciousness**

- Shamanic ASC *Related to neurological change. see, https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2021.610466
- Possession ASCs
- Mediative ASCs
- Dream and shamanic consciousness
- Functions of shamanic ASCs

**Neurognostic structures**

- Animism: spirits as self and other
- Visionary experiences and healing
- Shamanic flight as a body-based experience
- Shamanic initiatory crisis: death and rebirth: Are shamans psychopaths?

**Bases for shamanistic therapies**

- Physiological basis of shamanistic therapies (incl. music and dances as expressive therapies)
- Opioid release and emotional healing through community bonding
- Social and emotional healing
- Soul loss

- Possession
- Meditative detachment
- Spirit relations and self
- Ritual transformation of the self

**Shamanic roots in contemporary religious experience and healing**

- Contemporary religious experiences
  - Confirming: self's awareness of a divine other
  - Responsive: divine's awareness of self
  - Ecstatic: union of self and a divine other
  - Revelation: messages from a divine other
  - Control: the self dominated by the divine other
- Shamanic techniques in contemporary psychotherapy
  - Journeying and power animals in attachment dynamics
  - Visions as psychobiological communication
  - Containment and release
  - Unfolding unconscious potentials
  - Individuation: self-integration
  - Shape-shifting
- ASC therapy for drug rehabilitaion ~ "Drumming out drugs"

**<Debate of next week>**

- In general, shamanism is regarded as traditional barbarian culture in Western urban life. Should shamanism disappear in the modern and future world? Or should we still appreciate the value of shamanism?
  - Prop side: Shamanism should disappear.
  - Opp side: Shamanism still has *raison d'etre*.