

SHINZATO Yoshinobu

## *Musok* as “Culture”

### The Intangible Cultural Properties Discourse in South Korea

This paper examines the development in South Korea of the discourse on shamanism (*musok*) as intangible cultural property, focusing on the exclusion of its religious aspect. The country’s “national intangible cultural property” system, which started in the 1960s, has contributed to shamanic rituals and music by acknowledging their value. However, scholarship has not concretely examined this process. What elements of shamanism have been highlighted as cultural property? How has shamanism’s religious aspect been excluded? This paper shows how the intangible cultural property discourse on shamanism has highlighted shamanism’s artistic nature and communal aspect as Korean culture while negatively regarding its fortune-telling function and rituals, as well as the religious beliefs shared by *mudan* (shamans) and followers, as having little value. This exclusion of shamanism’s religious aspect shows its history of generally being removed from the category of religion and having only its cultural aspect tolerated.

KEYWORDS: *musok*—shamanism—intangible cultural properties—concept of “religion”—modern and contemporary South Korean history

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IN SOUTH Korea, shamanism (*musok*) was looked down on as superstition. However, after overcoming the social chaos that stemmed from liberation from Japan's colonial rule in 1945, and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, from the 1960s onwards an affirmative gaze towards previously disregarded aspects of the country's culture took shape, and, in this process, a positive value was attached to shamanism.<sup>1</sup> Notably, in South Korea from the 1960s onwards, many shamanic rituals were designated as intangible cultural properties, and there are many *mudan* (shamans) engaging in this profession with state recognition. The designation of shamanic practices as intangible cultural properties has influenced the daily lives of *mudan* in significant ways. For example, it has rendered affirmative society's gaze towards shamanism.

Scholars played a major role in the designation of shamanic practices as intangible cultural properties, and with their discourse providing a boost, the state endorsed shamanic rituals. However, existing scholarship has not paid attention to how scholars attempted to legitimize shamanism as culture.

The field of folklore studies has led the research on shamanism and intangible cultural properties. Most of this scholarship has focused on presenting the skills involved in intangible cultural property-designated *gut* (shamanic rituals) or proposals for preserving and utilizing *gut* as intangible cultural properties (HONG 2005). In the field of religious studies, I Yongpŏm has furthered research on shamanism and intangible cultural properties and raised the issue that the cultural property designation process tends to exclude perspectives that see shamanism as religion. He argues as follows: Shamanic practices are recognized as culture. However, unlike Christianity and Buddhism, they are not recognized as religion. For this reason, during intangible cultural property designation deliberations, bringing up the religious and ritual aspects of *mudan* and their believers can be disadvantageous. As much as possible, religious aspects have been excluded, and shamanism's value only recognized in terms of its cultural aspects (I Yongpŏm 2011). He brings together these points as follows:

Rather than seeing shamanism as one traditional culture of the past to be protected by the intangible cultural property system, the valid social foundation

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1. For an overview of the discourse on shamanism in South Korea from 1945 onwards, see SHINZATO (2017). This article is a revised and expanded version of part of my dissertation (SHINZATO 2018a).

for transmitting shamanism is precisely the societal awareness that it is a religion alive in the contemporary daily lives of South Koreans—just like Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity. (I Yongpöm 2011, 437)

I Yongpöm asserts that when designating shamanic practices as intangible cultural properties, understanding it as “religion” is essential, as well as that this will serve as an important “social foundation” when transmitting them to future generations. These statements also indicate that perspectives seeing shamanism as religion are overlooked in the intangible cultural property system.

In light of I Yongpöm’s presentation of this problem, this article aims to make clear the historical transformation and concrete development of the discourse that narrates shamanic practices as intangible cultural properties. I will particularly highlight how their religious aspects are excluded. I Yongpöm makes important points for understanding shamanism’s phases in South Korea but does not concretely discuss the aspects of practices held to be intangible cultural property or how their religious aspects have been excluded. This article aims to address these points and contribute to the body of scholarship on discourses regarding shamanism. Also, the removal of shamanism’s religious aspects in the intangible cultural property discourse is significant in that it shows part of the history of shamanism in modern and contemporary South Korea. Throughout its modern and contemporary history, shamanism has generally been excluded from the category of religion and only had its cultural aspects tolerated. Below, by going over changes in the cultural property system in South Korea as well as why this paper uses intangible cultural property survey reports (entitled *Muhyöngmunhwajae chosapogosö*), I will lay the groundwork for then considering the discourse on shamanic practices as intangible cultural properties.

### *1. Intangible Cultural Property Designation and Intangible Cultural Property Survey Reports*

South Korea’s 1962 Cultural Property Protection Law led to state policies related to cultural properties. This law “aims for both cultural betterment of the nation and contribution to the culture of humankind by preserving and utilizing cultural properties.”<sup>2</sup> Under this aim, tangible cultural properties, intangible cultural properties, natural monuments, and folklore materials became subject to designation. The category of “intangible cultural properties”—“theater, music, dance, craft techniques, and other intangible cultural products that have great

2. Translator’s note: All English translations of Korean are based on the author’s Japanese translations. See [https://www.law.go.kr/%EB%B2%95%EB%A0%B9/%EB%AC%B8%ED%99%94%EC%9E%AC%EB%B3%B4%ED%98%B8%EB%B2%95/\(00961,19620110\).Cultural Property Protection Law, Article 1, took effect 10 January 1962](https://www.law.go.kr/%EB%B2%95%EB%A0%B9/%EB%AC%B8%ED%99%94%EC%9E%AC%EB%B3%B4%ED%98%B8%EB%B2%95/(00961,19620110).Cultural%20Property%20Protection%20Law,%20Article%201,%20took%20effect%2010%20January%201962).

value in our country's history or art"—is especially important in relation to shamanism.<sup>3</sup>

While in 1961 the state had already launched the Cultural Property Management Bureau in the Ministry of Education and assigned cultural property-related duties to it, it took the opportunity to establish a cultural property committee as a Ministry of Education advisory body to survey and deliberate topics related to cultural property preservation, management, and utilization. The committee's first sub-committee was assigned to deliberate tangible cultural properties, the second sub-committee intangible cultural properties and folklore materials, and the third subcommittee natural monuments. Cultural property policy changes included the Cultural Properties Management Bureau rising in status to become the Cultural Properties Administration in 1999, as well as the creation of an additional Cultural Properties Committee sub-committee specifically for intangible cultural properties in 1985. However, the basic structure remained the same: the committee (primarily composed of scholars) or commissioned outside scholars would create reports on candidates chosen for deliberation by the committee, and designation would be decided based on these reports.<sup>4</sup>

This paper will focus on the discourse regarding shamanism in these intangible cultural property survey reports. These are important documents because they played decisive roles in intangible cultural property designation decisions. The Cultural Properties Committee primarily referred to these reports in its deliberations. In 1996, when improvements to the system for cultural properties' state designation, and designation procedures, were being discussed, it was seen as a problem that "skill surveys and designation deliberations tend to rely on the opinions of Cultural Properties Committee members that specialize in the relevant field." This shows just how much weight was held by these survey reports, which brought together the "opinions of Cultural Properties Committee members" (NO AUTHOR 1996, 874).

Two hundred and forty-seven reports on intangible cultural property candidates were submitted up through 1997, and these were published in twenty-five volumes. Between 1964, when intangible cultural property designation began, and 2020, 146 practices were designated as such; 113 were designated from 1964 to 1997, and thirty-three in 1998 or later. In other words, up until 1997, three or four new intangible cultural properties were designated every year, and from

3. Cultural Property Protection Law, Article 2, Item 2, took effect 10 January 1962.

4. Regarding transformations in the intangible cultural properties system and the importance of intangible cultural property survey reports in designation decisions, refer to CHŌNG Suchin (2008).

1998 onwards, one or two.<sup>5</sup> While from 1998 onwards the basic structure—scholars creating reports upon which cultural property designation decisions were made—did not change, the foundation of cultural property administration was formed by 1997. Reports up until 1997 are currently viewable, and this paper covers up through this year.

While generally intangible cultural property designations were deliberated in the financial year following the submission of intangible cultural property reports, in some cases this took place several years after submission. However, as described above, up through 1997, of the 247 practices on which reports were submitted, 113 were designated. This averages out to seven individual reports submitted each year, three or four of which were designated. This is a 40 to 50 percent selection rate. Going through all of the reports, I have collected and analyzed shamanism-related passages therein. The selection rate for shamanism-related reports is about the same. This rate is somewhat high because the Cultural Properties Committee first deliberates whether a practice merits the creation of a report. In other words, reports are only created for practices whose value has been recognized to a degree.

The basic structure of these reports is as follows. First, in the introduction, the views of the people who carried out the survey are briefly presented. Then, in the main text, the practice’s origins, content, and characteristics, as well as the skill-holders’ brief biographies, are discussed. This is followed by the authors again emphasizing the practice/the skill-holders’ significance in concrete terms. Below I will consider the discourse that presents shamanic practices as intangible cultural properties while focusing on parts of the reports in which the surveyors clearly show their perspectives.

## 2. Shamanic Practices as Intangible Cultural Properties

### 1. THE EXCLUSION OF SHAMANISM IN THE 1960S

First, I will list the shamanic rituals and music currently designated as intangible cultural properties.

1. *Ŭnsan pyölsinje* (Ŭnsan mountain spirit ceremony). State Intangible Cultural Property no. 9, 1966.
2. *Kangnŭng tanoje* (Kangnŭng *tano* festival). State Intangible Cultural Property no. 13, 1967.
3. *Sinawi* (instrumental ensemble music). State Intangible Cultural Property no. 52, 1973, revoked in 1975 because skill-holder moved overseas.

5. I have referred to information regarding intangible cultural property designation included on the Cultural Heritage Administration’s website: <https://www.cha.go.kr/main.html> (accessed 12 February 2020).

4. *Yangju sonori gut* (*gut* of a cow play in Yangju). State Intangible Cultural Property no. 70, 1980.
5. *Cheju ch'ilmöridang gut* (Cheju *ch'ilmöridang* shrine *gut*). State Intangible Cultural Property no. 71, 1980.
6. *Chindo ssitkim gut* (Chin Island *ssitkim gut*). State Intangible Cultural Property no. 72, 1980.
7. *Tonghaean byölshin gut* (Tonghae coast *byölshin gut*). State Intangible Cultural Property no. 82-1, 1985.
8. *Söhaean baeyönsin gut mit taedong gut* (Söhae coast *baeyönsin gut* and *taedong gut*). State Intangible Cultural Property no. 82-2, 1985.
9. *Wido ttibae nori* (Wi Island *ttibae* play). State Intangible Cultural Property no. 82-3, 1985.
10. *Namhaean byölshin gut* (Namhae coast *byölshin gut*). State Intangible Cultural Property no. 82-4, 1987.
11. *Hwanghaedo p'yöngsan sonorümgut* (Hwanghae Province P'yöngsan cow play and *gut*). State Intangible Cultural Property no 90, 1988.
12. *Salp'urich'um* (*salp'uri* dance). State Intangible Cultural Property no. 97, 1990.
13. *Kyönggido dodang gut* (Kyönggi Province *dodang gut*). State Intangible Cultural Property no. 98, 1990.
14. *Seoul saenam gut* (Seoul *saenam gut*). State Intangible Cultural Property no. 104, 1996.

Focusing on these fourteen practices, below I will examine the discourse on shamanism as culture. However, I want to point out that even though shamanic practices were highlighted as intangible cultural property from a variety of angles, as of the 1960s, they were still not recognized as culture. Above, I touched on society's negative gaze towards shamanism. Starting around the 1960s, a discourse that tried to assign value solely to shamanism's cultural aspects began to appear. However, it was largely limited to scholars and was not a way of thinking that spread widely in society. While scholars were deciding whether to designate practices as intangible cultural properties, they were unable to unilaterally instill value in practices of which society was critical. We can see this in the (1) Ünsan mountain spirit ceremony and (2) Kangnüng *tano* festival, as well as the words of folklore scholar Im Sökchae, who actively wrote shamanism-related reports in the 1960s.

Both of these practices have diverse elements, such as dance and theater, that are not *gut*. These elements received the vast majority of attention in these practices' reports, with little being said of shamanism. Over the course of ninety pages, the Ünsan mountain spirit ceremony report discusses its origins, content, and holders (Im Tongkwön 1965). However, the only mention of shamanism is the word *mudan* appearing in the discussion of its content. No more details are

provided (Im Tongkwön 1965, 275). Similarly, the Kangnŭng *tano* festival report covers its origins and legends, content, and *gut* over approximately 140 pages (Im Tongkwön 1966). However, in terms of shamanism, while there is a description of the Kangnŭng *tano* festival’s *gut*, it is only described as one ceremony, and no attempt is made to delve deeply into shamanism (Im Tongkwön 1966, 357). The folklorist Hwang Rusi states that according to a researcher involved in intangible cultural property designation at the time, while the predominant view in 1960s society that shamanism was superstition made it impossible to designate a *gut* as an intangible cultural property, in the case of the Kangnŭng *tano* festival, people were rushing to restore Kwanno masked dance drama (*kamyön’gük*), which allowed this *gut* to be adventitiously designated (HWANG 2004, 372). While Hwang does not touch on the reason why the Ŭnsan mountain spirit ceremony was designated as an intangible cultural property, it was probably due to circumstances similar to those of the Kangnŭng *tano* festival; while other diverse reports dealing with shamanism were also submitted in the 1960s, none of their candidates were successful, and it was only in the 1970s or 1980s that shamanic practices finally started to be designated.

In the 1960s, the folklorist Im Sökchae actively submitted reports covering shamanic practices (on *Kwanbuk chibang muga* [Kwanbuk region shamanic songs] in 1965 [IM Sökchae and CHANG 1965], *Kwansö chibang muga* [Kwansö region shamanic songs] in 1966 [IM Sökchae and CHANG 1966], and *Chulp’o muak* [Chulp’o shamanic music] in 1970), but none were designated as intangible properties. This shows that the designations of the abovementioned two practices as such were exceptional. Perhaps gathering that it would be difficult for Chulp’o shamanic music to receive designation, under the heading “Shamanic Music: The Current Situation,” Im revealed his agony as follows:

There are outstanding shamanic music skill-holders who have changed professions and also many who hide that they are a shaman. . . . Even protecting them and taking measures to prevent them from becoming demoralized might lead ordinary people to have the misunderstanding that, for example, shamanism, which is seen as superstition, is being protected; shamanic rituals and shamanic music cannot be separated. One is unable to justify protecting and nurturing shamanism, and this is very agonizing.

(Im Sökchae 1970, 405)

In the 1960s, it was basically impossible for shamanic practices to be designated as intangible cultural properties. This was due to concerns that doing so could “lead ordinary people to have the misunderstanding that, for example, shamanism, which is seen as superstition, is being protected.” From an early stage, researchers were equipped with logic to legitimize shamanism as culture.

However, in the 1960s and early 1970s, scholarly discourse on shamanism was not yet accepted by society.

One can also tell from the opinions voiced by members of the Cultural Properties Committee that shamanism was seen as especially problematic. While not many records remain, the committee's meeting minutes (*Munhwajaewiwönhoe hoeïrok*) every now and then contain direct statements on the subject. As an example, let us consider a report on the paper flower folk craft *kkonnil*, especially the artificial flower techniques passed down in shamanism and Buddhism. The report lists the "shamanic Kim Sökch'ul" and "Buddhist Kim Yöngdal" as *kkoch'il* craftspersons, and argues that their techniques should be designated as intangible cultural properties and preserved for generations to come (SIM 1973). However, in the end, *kkoch'il* was not designated. The reason for this can be found in the following exchange recorded in the meeting minutes:

Ye Yonghae: The surveyor's opinion is that Kim Yöngdal's skills are outstanding. What does everyone think?

I Tuhyön: In the case of *kkoch'il*, there is a problem because it is related to shamanism. Both individuals engage in shamanism. Since *kkoch'il* is part of shamanism, I think prudence is required.

Im Tonggwön: They are a kind of *mudan* boss.<sup>6</sup> (NO AUTHOR 1979)

While the report introduces Kim Yöngdal as a Buddhist craftsperson, it is asserted that there is a problem because he in fact is in an intermediate position between Buddhist monk and *mudan*. The anthropologists/folklorists I Tuhyön and Im Tonggwön were core members of the Cultural Properties Committee. For them, there was no problem with Buddhism. In fact, in 1973 the Buddhist ritual/music *pömp'ae* was designated as a national intangible cultural property (no. 50; redesignated in 1987 as the Yöngsanjae [Vulture Peak ceremony]). In cultural property designation, there was no problem with "religion" itself (SÖNG and I Hyeku 1965). In *kkoch'il*'s designation decision process, shamanism, or more specifically committee members' negative view of it, became a problem.

However, this view of shamanism as problematic would gradually change. From the 1970s to the 1980s, despite almost no changes in the committee's composition, the skillful highlighting of shamanism's cultural aspects would enable such practices to acquire official recognition as an intangible cultural property. An example is the designation of (11) Hwanghae Province P'yöngsan *sonorüm gut* (a *gut* that prays for a bountiful harvest), which was surveyed by I Tuhyön, the person who made the "there is a problem because it is related to shamanism" comment above. In 1988, it was designated as an intangible cultural property, despite, according to the meeting minutes, deliberations clearly touching on the

6. Emphasis added by author here and below.



fact that that the skill-holders (the female shamans Chang Pobae and I Sönbi) were engaging in shamanism (NO AUTHOR 1988b, 449–95; I Tuhyön 1988). A *gut* that is directly related to shamanism and had been surveyed by I Tuhyön—who had opposed designating *kkoch’il*—was designated as an intangible cultural property without any problem in 1988. In the *kkoch’il* report, the artistic parts of shamanism are emphasized (SIM 1973, 652–54), and in the Hwanghae Province P’yöngsan *sonorüm gut* report, the theatrical/artistic aspects of the *gut* are brought to the fore (I Tuhyön 1988, 114–16). There was no major difference in terms of the logic employed, namely, that shamanism is culture. However, the former was rejected, and the latter accepted. The gaze of committee members toward shamanism had changed. Also taking into account Im Sökchae’s statements above, we can see this as showing that the general understanding of shamanism in South Korea had transformed. As we will see below, for all of the shamanic rituals designated as intangible cultural properties in the 1970s and later, their designation was made possible by skillfully highlighting these rituals’ cultural aspects.

### 3. *The Discourse on Shamanism in the 1970s and Later: Inclusion Only As Culture*

Before turning to intangible cultural property from the 1970s and later, I want to mention that for intangible cultural property surveyors, who primarily specialized in folklore studies, it was self-evident that shamanism was not a religion and they basically saw the beliefs and rituals found therein as superstitious or as having little value. For this reason, reports tended to refrain from mentioning, or to exclude, spheres related to *mudan* or followers’ beliefs, as well as these practices’ ritual aspects.

With that said, it is not that all shamanic practices covered in reports that highlighted beliefs and rituals were not selected for designation. For example, (14) Seoul *saenam gut*, which was designated in 1996, is an example of a designated practice whose report actively mentioned aspects relating to religious belief. The report regarding this shamanic rite in Seoul for the dead (and said to include a great number of palace ritual elements from the Chosön era) emphasizes its significance in the section on its origins and current situation, and then provides details on the practice under the following headings: “Seoul *Saenam Gut*’s Composition and Characteristics”; “Performers’ Daily Life History and Major Performances”; and “Performers’ Transmission Genealogy and Performance Standards” (CHO and KIM 1995). The surveyors clearly present their opinions when discussing its origins and current state. They emphasize both the gorgeousness of Seoul *saenam gut* and the views of South Koreans regarding deceased spirits that are identifiable therein: “*Saenam gut* is based on South

Koreans' unlimited and exceptional disposition, or foundation, regarding the deceased, and Seoul's *saenam gut* has the most gorgeous and exquisite structure" (CHO and KIM 1995, 506).

Due to the aim being designation as an intangible cultural property, the surveyors, naturally, touch on its artistic nature by referring to gorgeousness. However, we should note that this practice was designated after its report had mentioned its religious aspect: an "exceptional disposition" towards the deceased.

There is another similar case: (10) Namhae coast *byölshin gut*, which was designated in 1987. As far as I can tell from my research, these are the only two shamanic practices that were successfully designated as intangible cultural properties despite highlighting religious aspects. The report on Namhae coast *byölshin gut* (a rite for a bountiful fish catch), discusses its significance under the heading "Reason for Designation," and then continues by discussing this practice in detail: "The Bountiful Fishing Rite's Ceremonies and Content," "Music and Shamanic Dance," "Shamanic Implements and Shamanic Clothing," and "Performer Report" (HA and I Sora 1986). As is the case for *saenam gut*, the surveyors candidly state their opinions in the first introductory section. They assert that this practice's religious aspects are more valuable than its entertainment ones: "Religious belief is primary in Namhae coast *byölshin gut* and it does not have much entertainment"; "there is great religious belief"; there are elements that "make viewers serious," and so on (HA and I Sora 1986, 182). However, while the end result for this *gut* was the same as *saenam gut* (designation as an intangible cultural asset), we can tell that at least the Cultural Properties Committee overlooked this practice's religious aspects: in the committee's meeting minutes, Namhae coast *byölshin gut*'s reason for designation is described as follows.

Namhae coast *byölshin gut* is a major festival for a bountiful catch of fish. It is held in hamlets in the Namhae coastal area, primarily in Gyeongsangnam Province's Ch'ungmu and Köje Island. *The gut music is more outstanding than any byölshin gut extant in South Korea*, and it is also unique. Therefore, it shall be passed down and preserved. (NO AUTHOR 1988a, 482–83)

While the report clearly states that religious belief is primary in the practice and that it contains fewer entertainment-related aspects, when designated as an intangible cultural property, only its outstanding musical and cultural aspects were discussed. Due to biases in the committee meeting minutes, there is no way of finding out details regarding the gap between the report's content and the committee members' reasons for designation. However, in the sense that at least ultimately it was designated not because of its religious aspects but its musical and cultural ones, we can see Namhae coast *byölshin gut* as a practice

that, like the other shamanic rituals considered below, was recognized as a form of culture.

As for (3) *Sinawi* (a native Korean term referring to a form of improvisational instrumental ensemble music), which was designated in 1973, it was the first shamanic practice for which surveyors successfully acquired designation by highlighting shamanism’s cultural aspects. The report explains this practice under headings such as “Reasons for the Designation of the Shamanic Music *Sinawi* as an Important Intangible Cultural Property,” “*Sinawi* Music,” “Skill-holders’ Skills: Overview,” and “Skill-holder Report” (YU and I Pohyöng 1971). Like other reports, the surveyors state their opinions at the beginning. Therein, they assign value to shamanism by establishing grades within shamanic music and explaining that “hereditary shamans” are more artistically outstanding than “possessed shamans.” Shamanism can be roughly divided into possessed shamans who become *mudan* through an experience of being called to serve a spirit (found primarily north of the Han River) and hereditary shamans who do not have possession experiences and inherit their position (found south of the Han River). Noting that the hereditary shamans who have engaged in shamanism through generations maintain traditional lines of music and dance, the *sinawi* report emphasizes that it is necessary to preserve their shamanic music because these practitioners are technically and aesthetically superior. On the other hand, it also sounds the alarm that in recent years elements from possessed shamans are finding their way into hereditary shamans’ practices:

In shamanism as well, due to generational changes and trends, the ritual structures of hereditary shamans are very complex and the economic burdens great. For this reason, even south of Seoul, things like simple Seoul-style *scripture reading and fortune-telling* have made inroads. . . . This is a problem both from the standpoint of folklore studies as well as in terms of the folklore music system. Therefore, the shamanic music tradition that has been transmitted in the area south of Seoul must be preserved before it vanishes.

(YU and I Pohyöng 1971, 547–48)

If shamanism is included in the category “religion,” then “scripture-reading and fortune-telling” could be understood as shamanism’s religious functions. However, this report takes it as a given that shamanism is not a religion. While seeing scripture-reading and fortune-telling as having little value, the report calls for immediately preserving “the shamanic music tradition” as one original cultural form. In this way, upon entering the 1970s, a focus on cultural aspects allowed shamanic practices to be designated as intangible cultural properties.

The *sinawi* report speaks highly of elements in this shamanic practice that it sees as one original (prototypical) form of Korean culture. When *gut*, on the other hand, were designated intangible cultural properties, an emphasis on their

role in maintaining community order in hamlets (on their communal aspects) also served as an effective line of argument. One example is the (5) Cheju *ch'ilmöridang gut* (*gut* for the thunder god, which symbolizes the god of wind/rain and the god of agriculture). The report first concisely states the reasons for designation application, which is followed by sections entitled “Historical Origins,” “Characteristics,” “Shrines,” “The *Gut* Ceremonial Program,” “Textual Records and *Gut* Today,” and “Skill-holder Survey” (CHANG and HYÖN 1984). Unlike other reports, the authors especially focused their efforts on the “Characteristics” section. Therein, they state that a distinguishing aspect in the case of Cheju Island is that “the ritual for the thunder god exists as a village *gut*, a rite.” In other words, while in other places *gut* are “rituals of individual religious belief, it is a village *gut* in the case of Cheju Island.” This, the report says, is why designation as an intangible cultural property is appropriate (CHANG and HYÖN 1984, 636). Here, the authors find value not in small-scale *gut* that focus on religious beliefs but in *gut* that are “hamlet festivals” manifesting community spirit.

The report on (6) Chin Island *ssitkim gut* (a festival for souls of the deceased), which, like Cheju *ch'ilmöridang gut*, was designated in 1980, also emphasized communal aspects. After the introduction, this practice is explained under the headings “An Overview of Chin Island *Ssitkim Gut*,” “Chin Island’s Shamanic Music,” “Chin Island’s Shamanic Dance,” “Other (Decorations, Shamanic Implements, and the *Ssitkim Gut* Skill-Holder),” and “Appendix (Lyrics to the Shamanic Music of Chin Island *Ssitkim Gut*).” The surveyors offer their views in the concluding section titled “Recommendation Statement Regarding Designation as an Important Intangible Cultural Property” (CHI, I, and CHÖNG 1979). I want to highlight this recommendation’s emphasis on the practice’s communal nature. It is critical of shamanic divination, the practice’s individualized aspect carried out by *mudan* and believers that also involves religious belief. This criticism is the flip-side to the report’s high valuation of the practice’s communal aspect, namely, village cohesion.

Hereditary shamans, who carry on the shamanic ritual tradition transmitted from ancient times, today are not passing on the ritual performance techniques to their children and are themselves abandoning [this] occupation and switching to other ones. For such reasons, their techniques’ traditions are being lost and instead *dominated by pseudo-shamanistic rituals of fortunetellers and others. This is unfortunate for the transmission of traditional culture.*

(CHI, I, and CHÖNG 1979, 175)

According to the above-quoted passage, it is good for “the transmission of traditional culture” to not be “dominated by pseudo-shamanistic rituals of fortunetellers and others.” The attitude shown here holds that of the various parts of shamanism, it is *gut*, which is the fruit of the communal aspects and can be

enjoyed together by people, that has value. This stance attempts to exclude the divination function of shamanism and assign value to its cultural function, particularly its communal aspect.

Other examples of shamanic practices that were successful in intangible cultural property designation due to an emphasis on their communal aspects are the (7) Tonghae coast *byölshin gut*, (8) Söhae coast *baeyönsin gut* and *taedong gut*, and (9) Wi Island *ttibae* play. These are rites for bountiful fish catches that were designated in 1985. In their reports, they are discussed in sub-sections found under the broad heading “Bountiful Fish Catch Rite.” For this reason, the composition of their reports is basically the same. For example, in the case of Tonghae coast *byölshin gut*, we find “Reason for Important Intangible Cultural Property Designation Application,” “Introduction,” “Characteristics,” “The Bountiful Fish Catch Rite’s Ceremony and Content,” “The Bountiful Fish Catch Rite’s Shamanic Music and Dance,” and so on. The practice’s communal aspect is particularly highlighted under the first subsection (I Tuhyön 1984). None of these three practice’s sections on reason for application actively mention shamanism. Rather, they emphasize the practice’s role in bringing vibrancy to villages and maintaining their order. For example: “The festival in village life and the entertainment/performing art function” (I Tuhyön 1984, 11), “Unity between shipowner groups and ordinary fishers, and the centripetal role that brings them together” (CHANG and HA 1984a, 123), and “Whole-village rites for a bountiful catch that is an enjoyable and fun festival for the whole village, including the old, young, men, and women” (CHANG and HA 1984b, 209).

In reports, there was also a discourse that, while closely connected to perspectives regarding ethnic roots and communal aspects, focused particularly on the practices’ artistic and traditional beauty to emphasize shamanism’s value. The report on the (4) *gut* of a cow play in Yangju, which was designated in 1980, describes it as a practice that developed from ritual and religious shamanism into artistic shamanism. This *gut* prays for family health and a good harvest for a year on the lunar calendar’s New Year and first day of spring. While in 1967 a report on the practice was submitted, it was not designated (I Tuhyön 1967). A survey was again carried out in 1975, and it was designated in 1980. The 1975 report’s section “Reason for Again Seeking Consideration as Important Intangible Cultural Property” only discusses the unsuccessful designation attempt in 1967 and the new survey being carried out. The “Historical Origins” section highlights this practice’s significance. This is followed by “Characteristics,” “The Cow Play’s Composition, Lines, and Lyrics,” “Materials Used in the Cow Play,” and “Skill-Holder Report,” which all provide detailed explanations (I and CHÖNG 1975). The explanation of this practice’s historical origins states that it must be understood as a form of entertainment and theater that focuses

on performance art, and not understood as a ritual. This line of argument highlights the value of the Yangju cow play and *gut* in terms of its artistic nature.

If one divides the functions of Korean shamanism into priests, divination/prophesy, shamanic medicine, and entertaining performance art, the “cow play” belongs more to the entertaining performance art function, and is something that shows the *process by which ritual develops into theater*.

(I and CHŎNG 1975, 299)

The report on (12) *salp'uri* dance (*sal* means “bad fortune” and *p'uri* “to undo”), which was designated in 1990, also emphasizes this shamanic practice’s artistic aspects. It mentions Kim Suk-cha as one of this dance’s skill-holders. Kim is a famous hereditary shaman, and is especially highly regarded for her performances of this dance. The report focuses on Kim’s dance. After providing an overview of the practice under the headings “Reason for Important Intangible Cultural Property Designation Application” and “*Salp'uri* Dance: Origins and Changes,” it describes her high-level skills in the sections “The Content and Characteristics of Kim Suk-cha’s Dance” and “Art-Holder Survey.” Also, “Kim Suk-cha’s Dance Scores” is attached as reference material (CHŎNG Pyŏnggho 1990). When discussing the reason for the application, the report emphasizes that the *salp'uri* dance is “the most outstandingly artistic dance of our country’s dances” (CHŎNG Pyŏnggho 1990, 619). At the same time, the report also states at key points that *salp'uri* is not religion. The two passages quoted below are found in the “*Salp'uri* Dance: Origins and Changes” and “Art-Holder Survey” sections.

While it is a fact that our country’s dances have been done at sites of *gut* carried out by *mudan* and at sites carried out by *p'ungmul* performers, even so, it is not the case that *salp'uri* dance is a religious ritual dance done by *mudan*.

(CHŎNG Pyŏnggho 1990, 620)

This dance is also performed in Kyŏnggi Province area’s *dodang gut*. Having said that, though, it is not a *mudan* dance that is part of a religious dance lineage.

(CHŎNG Pyŏnggho 1990, 630)

In these passages, *mudan* and *gut* are important concepts. *Mudan* generally present dances in the context of *gut*. Of course, shamanic religious beliefs regarding spirits of the dead and divine spirits play a role therein. The surveyor’s top priority was having readers in society, who see shamanism as superstition, recognize this practice as culture, and, therefore, from the surveyor’s perspective, religious dances in *mudan* and *gut* were only elements to be excluded. At the beginning of this section, I stated that scholars involved in the designation of intangible cultural properties generally did not see shamanism as religion. In the case of the *salp'uri* dance, however, we find an exception: the surveyor

presented *gut* as religion or religious ritual. However, with that said, here importance is attached to the *salp'uri* dance being art and culture, not religion. Like other reports, he assigns higher value to shamanism as culture. Also, while from an academic perspective we can call Kim Suk-cha a *mudan* because she is a hereditary shaman, in this concept, generally shamanism's religious aspects are strongly present. Therefore, the *salp'uri* dance report adopts the strategy of defining this dance as that not of a *mudan* but of the artist Kim Suk-cha, and emphasizing that it is entirely an artistic dance separate from dances with a religious genealogy, in other words, separate from *gut*.

As a final example, let us consider (13) Kyönggi Province *dodang gut*, a *gut* primarily done in village shrines called *dodang*. Unlike the *salp'uri* dance report, this practice's report emphasizes that the *gut* is also culture. While the *salp'uri* dance report primarily tries to show from an artistic perspective that the dance is culture, this report attempts to draw readers' attention away from negative ideas about shamanism by emphasizing not only *gut*'s artistic nature but also its communal aspect. Here as well, the existence of the *mudan* is eliminated. Shamanism's cultural value is emphasized while bringing the reader's attention to other aspects.

The Kyönggi Province *dodang gut* report's "Reason for Intangible Cultural Property Designation Application" section concisely describes the significance of this practice, and its "Central South Korea Hereditary Shamanism and the Decline of *Dodang Gut*" section is about difficulties its transmission faces. The practice is specifically discussed under the headings "The Content of Tongmak *Dodang Gut*" and "The Characteristics of Kyönggi Province *Dodang Gut*." Also, attached to the report are two sets of materials: "Skill-holder Survey" and "Kyönggi Province *Dodang Gut* Photographic Materials" (I Tuhyön et al. 1970). Interestingly, this report discusses Kyönggi Province *dodang gut*'s characteristics in terms of the four aspects of shamanism, music, dance, and theater, and its shamanic aspect is divided into "festival-like nature" and "artistic nature." These latter two could surely be adequately explained when discussing this practice's musical, dance, and theater aspects. Despite this, they are highlighted when discussing its shamanic aspect. The report is trying to hide the existence of *mudan* and *gut*, which tend to be seen as superstition, and emphasize the value of shamanism by focusing entirely on its cultural elements. First, let us turn to the report's discussion of the practice's "festival-like nature":

*Dodang gut* was a festival that aims to create harmony in the community around the village tutelary deity, and it is the largest event in the village. Through this event, a sense of community and communal ties are strengthened and order is maintained. Its core function is for people to gather in one place and enjoy themselves together. (I Tuhyön et al. 1970, 782)



Here, community harmony is highlighted as a function of shamanism, and *mudan* are not mentioned. The discussion focuses on the sense of community in the village and local area. Next, let us turn to the “Shamanic Aspect” section’s discussion of the practice’s “artistic nature.”

It is said that religion fades away and art remains. This shamanic practice of Kyōnggi Province hereditary shamans is now declining, but parts still remain that should be investigated with regard to its artistic nature.

(I Tuhyōn et al. 1970, 783)

From the statement that “art remains,” we can see that the authors understand Kyōnggi Province *dodang kut*, and by extension this shamanic practice, as more art than religion. Emphasizing this practice’s festival-like and artistic nature as its “shamanic aspects” was a method for legitimizing shamanism as culture and replacing the negative view of *mudan* and *gut*.

### Conclusion

Above, I examined the historical changes and concrete unfolding of the discourse that discusses shamanic practices as intangible cultural properties. When doing so, I highlighted how shamanism’s religious aspects have been excluded. With few exceptions, in the 1960s it was impossible to designate a shamanic practice as an intangible cultural property. This was due to the negative view of shamanism at the time. However, in the 1970s, it became possible to do so, but only by skillfully highlighting shamanic practices’ cultural aspects. These cultural aspects primarily fell into three categories. First, a practice’s historical aspect—namely, its status as one original form of Korean culture. This was greatly brought to the fore in the report on *sinawi*. Second, a *gut*’s communal nature and order-creating function in villages. This was pronounced in the discourses regarding Cheju *ch’ilmōridang gut*, Chin Island *ssitkim gut*, and rites for bountiful fish catches. Third, the traditional beauty/artistic aspect found in the passages regarding *salp’uri* dance. From the 1970s onwards, when designating shamanic practices as intangible cultural properties, a discourse on shamanism as culture took shape while intertwining with these three aspects. This can be seen by the (4) report on the *gut* of a cow play in Yangju emphasizing its historical aspect and artistic nature, as well as the Kyōnggi Province *dodang gut* report highlighting its communal aspect and artistic nature.

We have seen that reports generally did not assess the religious aspects of shamanism. While Seoul *saenam gut* was an exception, in the other reports, neither shamanism’s divination and ritual aspects nor the religious beliefs shared by *mudan* and believers were assessed. Rather, these attempts to have shamanic practices be designated as intangible cultural properties avoided such aspects as much as possible. Beliefs and ritual aspects excluded by the reports’ authors



could have been understood as shamanism’s religious aspects when seen from another angle. However, these aspects had little value to the authors—they were only things to be excluded. This paper shows part of the history of shamanism in modern and contemporary South Korean history that has generally been excluded from the sphere of religion.

Having said that, it is incorrect to assert that from the 1970s to the beginning of the 1990s no one in South Korean academia saw shamanism as religion. Some scholars used the concept of *mugyo* (lit., “shamanism-religion”; modeled after terms for other religions, such as *Pulgyo* [lit., “Buddha-religion”; Buddhism] and *Kidokkyo* [lit., “Christ-religion”; Christianity]) to highlight shamanism’s religious aspects. This was first done by scholars seeking to have South Korean-style theology (referred to as “indigenization theology” or “people’s theology”) take root. Ultimately, it spread bit by bit in society through the fields of religious studies and psychiatry, students’ statements in the democratization movement, and so on (SHINZATO 2018b). However, this kind of perspective was not widely adopted, and even when people partially included shamanism in the category of religion, due to the influence of the concept of “religion,” it was criticized as a religion that lacks true ethics, a view of history, and a sense of community—in other words, as not being equipped with a universal set of values. This led to the formation of a viewpoint that saw shamanism as a religion that is not really a religion.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, in contemporary South Korean religion and folklore research, to a certain degree, a perspective that sees shamanism as religion has taken root. In the field of religious studies in South Korea, primarily from the 1990s, research has been published that calls for reflecting on the Christian-modeled concept of religion, especially positions that excessively emphasize monotheism and universal values.<sup>8</sup> This led to a perspective that sees shamanism as a religion that has become widely established in related academic spheres. At present, though, scholars are still involved in intangible cultural property designation and management. For this reason, it is necessary to continue to observe—on the levels of both discourse and practice—how the religious aspects of shamanism will be reflected or excluded in the intangible cultural property system. This paper has limited itself to reports regarding practices that were designated as intangible cultural properties, and generally has not touched on those that were unsuccessful. By further surveying and analyzing such unsuccessful

7. Regarding the perspective grounded in the concept of “religion” that sees Korean shamanism as a “religion that is not a religion,” see CHÖNG Chin-hong (2003, 160–87).

8. Chang Sökman has systematically discussed the spread of the concept of “religion” in South Korea (CHANG Sökman 1992). This led people in academia to be strongly aware of issues surrounding this concept.

cases and related topics, I plan to further deepen our knowledge regarding shamanic practices as intangible cultural properties and, by extension, the relationship between shamanic practices and South Korean society.

(Translated by Dylan Luers Toda)

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