CHAPTER FIVE

Shamans, Students, and the State: Politics and the Enactment of Culture in South Korea, 1987–1988

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On a cold February morning in 1988, the sun a distant glow above the steel gray Pacific ocean, a group of women moves quickly and decisively along a rutted path toward the outskirts of a small Cheju-do village. More women soon join the loosely knit procession, and others can be seen further along the path. They carry their woven baskets on their backs, and all are headed toward a hut made of volcanic rock perched a stone’s throw from the pounding surf. In the hut, the shaman (simbang; munsin) and her three helpers have already arranged their instruments, and costumes hang from the low rafters. As the women arrive, the shaman arranges their offerings on and around the altar, which is soon piled high with ritual foods. The village shaman ritual (kut) soon begins with the shaman calling forth the spirits and asking for their protection during the year to come. In her chants, the shaman catalogs not only the organization of the spiritual world, but also the organization of the village itself. The physical divisions of the village and the economic organization of the women divers emerge in the shaman’s prayers for her customers’ (tan’gol) well-being and prosperity (Tangherlini and Park 1988:24–25, 1990:92). In this way, the shaman’s actions and interpretations of the spirits’ messages are closely linked to the political discourse of day-to-day village life.

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1 For a detailed description of this ritual, see Tangherlini and Park (1988). An overview of Cheju Island shamanism can be found in Jin (1966).
Shamans, Students, and the State

It is now a Friday afternoon in June 1988. An ominous calm settles outside the gates of Yonsei University in the northwestern part of Seoul. Just out of sight of the main gates, several hundred armor-clad riot police wait anxiously, checking their tear-gas rifles and gas masks. Inside the university gates, a group of student demonstrators, most of them members of a university “circle” dedicated to the study of farmer’s music (p’ungmul), have gathered in an outdoor amphitheater. In the center, they have arranged a small altar, on top of which they have placed a bowl of uncooked rice with a spoon positioned vertically in its center. Several students play the hourglass drum (changgu), the same type of drum the shaman plays during her rituals, while another student bows before the small altar. Some of the students I interview refer to this ritual as a kut, consciously invoking the image of a shamanic ritual. Nevertheless, there is no shaman present. The memory of students killed or imprisoned in previous demonstrations and the movement in general are referred to in speeches, headbands, and banners. After the solemn enactment of the ritual and a speech about the tyrannies of an authoritarian government supported by an imperialist United States, the students move to the front gates of the university with the expressed goal of a public march north to a meeting with North Korean students. But, as expected, police block the path. Amid a flurry of tear-gas volleys, Molotov cocktails, and flying bricks, one can hear the hollow beating of an hourglass drum.

The Olympic sports complex, with its giant stadiums designed to reflect aspects of Korean culture, rises next to the southern banks of the Han River. The Olympics have been seen by the government as the Republic of Korea’s “coming out party,” akin to the 1960 Olympics in Tokyo (Han 1989:34; Manheim 1990). The government also views the Olympics as an opportunity to present Korean culture to the world. Large-scale public enactments of “traditional” performances are planned for both the opening and the closing ceremonies. But on this day, a smaller, less public performance of a shamanistic ritual is taking place on the infield of the Olympic track. A group of Olympic officials is present and,

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2 The descriptions of police actions are interpolated from observations during other demonstrations during the year. At this particular demonstration, I was inside the university gates and therefore could not see what the police were doing.

3 For an excellent in-depth discussion of these rituals, see Chei (1995).
more interesting, members of the international press corps. The shaman and her helpers, dwarfed by the massive stadium, seem oddly out of place as the rhythmic beating of the hourglass drum echoes through the cavernous stadium. The kut is ostensibly performed to guarantee the success and safety of the Olympics and, particularly, the main stadium. But it is also intended to present shamanism as an integral part of the official discourse surrounding the Olympics and the presentation of "Korea" and "Korean culture" to the outside world, a project wholeheartedly embraced by the Seoul Olympic Organizing Committee.

Any casual observer of political events in the Republic of Korea in 1987–1988 would have been unable to overlook the ubiquity of performances of traditional cultural forms, which proliferated during this tumultuous period. In early 1987, student protest reached a fever pitch when President Chun Doo Hwan announced as his successor Roh Tae Woo, assuring continuity with his authoritarian regime. The protests forced Chun to agree to the first democratic presidential elections in the history of the ROK (Han 1988:52–53). The protests were successful in part because of the mass appeal of the demand for a democratic, and thus popular, election and in part because of the fear that the Olympics, slated to be held in Seoul in 1988, would be moved to another site (Han 1988:54). As a result, by late June 1987, the government had agreed to democratic elections to be held in December. From June 1987 until the Olympics in September 1988, while the world watched on television, the redefinition of the Republic of Korea was being fought out in journals and newspapers, on college campuses and in the street, and through the conscious enactments of traditional cultural expressions. These enactments of traditional culture were used in part to legitimize the enacting group's definition of Korea and in part to appeal to large numbers of Koreans less engaged with national politics.

By the winter of 1987, because of these frequent performances, "shamanism" had become the buzzword among the foreign press corps, and every reporter wanted to write a magazine article or produce a television story on Korean shamanism. Perhaps one of the most pervasive sounds during the year between Chun's capitulation to the start of the Olympics was that of the changgu, the shaman's hourglass drum. During this time, myriad groups invoked shamanism and the discursive practices of the shamanistic as part of their own political projects. The projections associ-
ated with these enactments of shamanism and the shamanistic became both an expression of Koreaness and an interpretation of the meaning of Korea. At the same time, they emerged as an expression of political power. Just as the shaman ritual performed in the small Cheju-do village can be viewed as intimately linked to the politics of the village, the shamanistic elements expropriated by the government and the students were intimately linked to the political agendas of their groups.

The seeming incongruity of the student movement (haksaeng undong), the government of the Republic of Korea, and candidates from competing political parties using the shamanistic as an important part of their political discourse can be explained. The use of identical symbols by opposing groups is linked to the multivariant meanings produced by and incorporated in the interpretations of shamanism and the shamanistic. Although the government and the students used surprisingly similar enactments as part of their political expression, the meanings attached to and produced by those expressions were frequently oppositional since they were based on dissimilar philosophical groundings.

The study of shamanism is a well developed field in Korean academics, and the topic is frequently engaged by Korean and foreign scholars alike (Ch’oe 1989; Janelli 1986:25; Cho 1985). According to Ch’oe Kil-Sŏng, the history of Korean folklore scholarship can be divided into two main periods: the pre-Liberation period, dominated by scholars such as Ch’oe Nam-Sŏn, Yi Nŭng-Hwa, and Son Jin-T’ae; and the post-Liberation period, generally dominated by scholars principally engaged in kŭkmunjak (Korean literature) research (Ch’oe 1989:29). Although both periods of scholarship can be characterized as “nationalistic” in their underlying philosophical orientation, Ch’oe notes an important distinction between the nationalism influencing the scholarship, referred to as minjokjuŭi, and the nationalism associated with the government, referred to as kŭkkajuŭi (Ch’oe 1989:28; Janelli 1986:44). Ch’oe further distinguishes between the pre-Liberation minjokjuŭi and the post-Liberation minjokjuŭi. The former, which Robinson terms “cultural nationalism,” was part of a wide-scale “culture movement” (munhwă undong) that flourished after the Japanese colonial government instituted its “cultural policy” as a result of

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4 Power associated with the definition of discourse has been explored by the French literary scholar and historian Michel Foucault (1969 and 1976).

5 For further discussion, see the chapter by Shin in this volume.
the March First movement (Janelli 1986:29–30; Robinson 1979:143 and 1988). One of the goals of Korean folklore scholarship during this period was to refute the Japanese claims of Korean cultural inferiority by establishing a historical basis for an independent Korean identity. One cannot ignore the historical dimension of many of these studies, and most works refer in some manner to the ancient roots of shamanism in Korea, often harking back to the postulated “shaman kings” of a prehistoric period (Ch’oe 1927; Yi 1927; Janelli 1986:32–33). Thus, these studies alluded to the image of a strong, unified, and independent Korean nation (Kochoson and Tan’gun Chosön), stretching back in history for five thousand years. In this manner, the minjokjuūi studies of pre-Liberation Korean folklore were closely connected to the independence movement (Ch’oe 1989:29).

The latter type of minjokjuūi, which characterizes the work of the post-Liberation folklore scholars, although influenced by the independence-oriented minjokjuūi of the colonial period, is tempered by a concern for the modernization of the country (Ch’oe 1989:29). Ch’oe characterizes post-Liberation and, in particular, post-1960 research on shamanism as a combination of traditionalism (chënt’ongjuūi) and a reactionary “national spiritism” (minjok chungsimjuūi). He points out five aspects of the post-1960 Korean folklore scholarship that reveal fundamental differences with the independence-oriented minjokjuūi of pre-Liberation scholarship (Ch’oe 1989:40–41). Among these five tendencies, Ch’oe puts particular emphasis on the tendency to collect vast amounts of data. Often, these studies have a strong formalist slant. As a result, the general structures of numerous kut have been detailed exhaustively, and the distribution of rituals and ritual forms throughout the peninsula is well documented. Furthermore, catalogs of ritual clothing, implements, instruments, paintings, and other aspects of material culture associated with Korean shamanism and extensive transcriptions of shamanic chants are readily available. An apparent motivation for many of these studies of shamanism was a pervasive desire to preserve the “ancient traditions” of Korea (Ch’oe 1989:41). Ch’oe further notes the government influence in much of this study, tied into the founding of the “New Village movement” (saemaul undong) by the Park regime, and the resultant nationalistic (kukkajuūi) use of the studies (Ch’oe 1989:41).

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6 For example, see the catalog prepared by the Korean Folklore Museum for a special exhibition on shaman clothes and ritual paraphernalia (1985).
Although the post-Liberation scholarship was influenced by pre-Liberation discourses on shamanism and its close link to the independence movement, post-Liberation scholarship is more a part of a conservative traditionalist discourse on Korean culture with close links to the government’s nationalistic policies.

More-recent studies of contemporary Korean shamanism are less preoccupied with its long and glorious history and more concerned with the role of the individual shaman in a community (Kendall 1985, 1987, and 1988; Harvey 1979 and 1987; Hwang 1988; Mun 1988; Kendall and Dix 1987; Kendall and Peterson 1983). There is also a trend in Korean folklore scholarship to move away from the minjokjuŭi nationalism and toward a minjungjuŭi nationalism, which emphasizes the disenfranchised rural and urban poor as the focus of study (Cho 1985 and 1987; Choi 1995). The move from a historical perspective to a neo-Marxist perspective adds another voice to the discourse on Korean shamanism. Thus, there seem to be three prevalent voices in the Korean scholarship on shamanism: those influenced by minjokjuŭi nationalism, those influenced by chŏnt’ongjuŭi nationalism, and those influenced by minjungjuŭi nationalism. In turn, it is to these various interpretive projects that the government and the students appealed in their enactments of traditional culture in 1987 and 1988. Although both groups used the independence-informed minjokjuŭi nationalism of the pre-Liberation scholarship, the government relied heavily on the chŏnt’ongjuŭi as part of its kukkajuŭi nationalist agenda, whereas the students relied heavily on the minjungjuŭi nationalism to forward their goals of democracy and reunification.

Korean shamanism is a nearly exclusively female enterprise; most shamans are women and the majority of a shaman’s customers are also women. Korean society, however, is pervaded by neo-Confucian ethics, with women frequently relegated to marginal positions (Janelli and Janelli 1982; Kendall 1985 and 1988; Hwang 1988). The performance of a shamanistic ritual, then, has a highly subversive element to it. The shaman moves to center stage and seizes the discursive space, a position generally denied women in male-dominated Korean society. During the perfor-

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7 Most of these studies tend to be by Western scholars studying Korean shamanism. Although such concerns are creeping into the scholars’ work, the majority of Korean shamanism scholarship still tends to be informed by the historical studies of shamanism.
mance of the ritual, the shaman positions herself as the authority, and her references to social and economic organization privilege a point of view—that of a powerful woman—normally devalued by the patriarchal society. Although shamans in Korea are often accorded marginal status by the Confucian hierarchies of village, county, district, and national administrations, the shaman maintains a position of authority among her customers and during performance. In this respect, Korean shamanism engenders a refutation of the hierarchies that organize society and suggests a different power discourse for social organization. Simultaneous with this challenge to social organization, the shaman’s goal is to maintain and protect the community by eliminating potential disruptions of the spiritual world and thereby preserving domestic and communal integrity. In this respect, one can see Korean shamanism as conservative and supportive of the extant social organization, the very organization it apparently contests. Although on the individual level the shaman’s kut offers a marginalized, disenfranchised segment of the population a strong, politically powerful voice, one often denied women by the oppressive Confucian hegemony, on a collective level the shaman’s kut tends to reinforce the established order.

Another aspect of Korean shamanism frequently commented on is the syncretism associated with it (Janelli 1986:33; Harvey 1979 and 1987; Cho 1987:8). The influence of shamanism can be seen in other religious environments common in Korea. One of the most pervasive crossovers is the close alliance between shamanism and Buddhism. In the small Cheju village, most of the shaman’s customers identified themselves as Buddhists, and many of them attended temples as well as the shaman’s rituals (Tangherlini and Park 1988:22–23). Most Korean Buddhist temples include a small temple to the mountain spirit (sin sin) among their buildings. One also finds numerous representations of the tiger associated with this spirit in Korean art. An interesting stylized depiction of the Korean Peninsula depicts it as a tiger ready to spring into the Yellow Sea. These depictions were used by both the government and the student protesters in 1987 and 1988 in representations of Korea; here, an animistic image, that of the tiger closely linked to Korean shamanism, is seized on for a powerful political image. The ecstatic experience associated with shamanism also appears to be enacted in the services of the charismatic Christian sects that have flowered throughout the ROK for the past twenty years.8 Kim Young Sook Harvey’s studies on the

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8 For a more detailed examination of the syncretic nature of Korean Christianity, see the chapter by Pelaez in this volume.
socialization of Korean shamans and the “deaconess” movement within charismatic Protestant sects reveal the willing appropriation of the shamanistic into a framework that should be opposed to the tenets of shamanism itself (Harvey 1979 and 1987). This mutability of the shamanistic in Korea (and the readiness with which it is incorporated into seemingly contradictory settings) is one of the hallmarks of the Korean cultural landscape. It is this mutability, in large part, that allowed both the students and the government to focus on the symbolic representation of the shamanistic as part of their political discourse.

The interpretations of shamanism presented by scholars—from the historical and ethnographic investigations to the examinations of the individual’s role in the power relationships of the kut and the explorations of the syncretic nature of contemporary Korean religions—all contribute to an understanding of the political uses of shamanism during 1987 and 1988. As noted above, folklore scholarship and, by extension, the scholarship of shamanism are politically charged enterprises. The people who chose to use symbols associated with shamanism were undoubtedly aware, albeit to differing degrees, of not only the elements of shamanism, but also the theorizing of shamanism (Janelli 1986:34). Indeed, the shamanistic elements and performances incorporated by the government, the students, and, to a lesser degree, the presidential candidates were frequently prefaced, either in print or in speech, by a theoretical justification for their use. In this manner, these groups invoked not only the discourse of shamanism, but also the discourses on shamanism.

Shamanistic kut are simultaneously subversive and conservative. On the one hand, the established, male-dominated order is undermined by the centering of the female voice and perspective. The male is so silenced that he is frequently not present at all. Primacy is granted to the woman’s role in the domestic and village economies. On the other hand, since the goal of the kut is to appease disruptive spirits and to solicit assurances of prosperity for the family or the community, the shaman works to maintain or reestablish order. This order, in turn, because of the very pervasiveness of the patriarchy, relies on a male-centered view of both domestic and village organization. Interestingly, whereas male-centered ritual in Korean domestic and village ritual life relies nearly exclusively on the approbation of agnatic kin, the shaman kut includes ancestral spirits ignored by these other rituals (Janelli and Janelli 1982; Kendall 1985). In this manner, the kut
reflect more realistically the complex interrelationships and obligations, alliances, and animosities of familial and village life.

The shaman's *kut*, therefore, engages the political on numerous levels and reflects aspects of subversion and reinforcement on all these levels. Shamans often perform ceremonies inside their customers' houses; these domestic rituals constitute most of their business. Domestic rituals usually revolve around getting rid of the disruptive spirits angered by improper valuations of familial relationships or other perceived wrongs (Kendall 1985). In these instances, shamanism is closely related to the politics of the household. Several times a year, the shaman is also called on to perform village-wide rituals, which frequently include appeals for village harmony and prosperity in the coming year. In these cases, because her ordering of the village in chants to guardian spirits entails a negotiation of delicate power struggles in the community, the shaman emerges as an important and politically powerful individual. The chants are closely monitored for omissions or deliberate priviligings in contested space (Tangerlini and Park 1990:92). The shaman is also related—in less direct ways—to national politics. The close relation between the state and ritual in precolonial times is perhaps the closest connection between shamanism and the state. In this respect, the historical appeal to shamanistic ritual in documentation of the state links shamanism to national politics. However, national politics is not a dominant arena for the Korean shaman to express herself (although shamans frequently include prayers for the well-being and safety of village sons in military service and, in 1987–1988, made appeals for a safe presidential election and a successful Olympics). Rather, in the national political arena, one finds syncretic enactments of the shamanistic by opposing political entities, both contesting the discursive space of Koreaanness and the definition of the Korean state.

During the year leading up to the presidential elections and, ultimately, the Seoul Olympics, the student movement successfully appealed to the symbols of Korean shamanism as part of their political endeavor. Although student movements in Korea have a long history of opposition to tyranny and oppression, providing a history of the Korean student movements is beyond the scope of this study. Rather, I hope to highlight the historical background...
claimed by the students in 1987 and 1988 for the use of traditional expressions as part of the performance of dissent in Korea during this period. According to the student movement members I interviewed, students during the Japanese colonial period, as integral actors in the Cultural Nationalist movement, engaged in performances of traditional Korean culture, particularly those expressions that had a long and acknowledged history of political satire.\(^{11}\) These enactments were part of the resistance to the colonial government’s goal of cultural erasure (Janelli 1986:29–30; Hong et al. 1988). What is important here is the students’ claim to this genealogy of student-initiated protest and use of traditional expressions as part of a long history of protest in Korea, even if there is little in the historical record to support such a genealogy. Later, under the military dictatorship of Park Chung Hee, the student movement incorporated folk culture into its discourse of resistance. This incorporation was particularly important given the modernizing agenda of the Park regime reflected in the New Village movement. By the time of the student movement of the 1980s, this time directed against Chun’s authoritarian rule, the students laid claim to a long, imagined heritage of using traditional culture as part of the expressive repertoire of their movement (Anderson 1991).

By the 1980s, minjungjuui had become the underlying philosophy of the student movement, with the intended goal of “the overthrow of military authoritarianism and the establishment of a government of ‘minjung democracy’...[and] the elimination of foreign influence” (Dong 1987:247). In particular, the most active and radical organizations—Sammintu, and later Minmintu and Chamintu—which often organized anti-government demonstrations, incorporated references to the struggle of the minjung in the names of their organizations (Dong 1987:243 and 247; Chŏn’guk haksaeng chŏng yŏnhap 1985). Minjung munhwa (the culture of the minjung) was one of the catchwords of the student movements of the late 1980s.\(^{12}\) Chungmoo Choi suggests that the discourse of the minjung movement “has been the major contending voice aspiring to disrupt and subvert the dominant language, the language of the state and, by extension, of the neocolonial

\(^{11}\) See also Choi 1993 and 1995.

\(^{12}\) For the purposes of this paper, the minjung are taken to be the “class coalition at the core of labor, peasantry and the urban poor” (Dong 1987:244).
forces.... The alternative history or radical reinterpretation of history reaudits the silenced history of the people" (Choi 1993:91). The philosophical theorizing of the minjung cultural movement is based in large part on a conflation of neo-Marxist theories, Kim Il Sung’s juche (self-reliance) philosophy, and a celebration of the struggles of the urban and rural poor within the oppressive construct of the rapidly industrializing republic (Dong 1987:245).

The students embraced the minjung as central to their opposition to the government, whose policy of modernization at any cost they did not consider to be in the best interests of the working masses (Dong 1987:245). They felt that the majority of the population was not sharing in the startling advances enjoyed by the economically privileged and politically powerful, advances made through the hard work of the minjung (Hong et al. 1988:53–56). The populist appeal of the student movement in large part precipitated the government’s concession to allow democratic elections (Dong 1987:250). Although the government had positioned the Olympics as an opportunity to show off the rapid modernization of a country that had been reduced to rubble by a devastating war only thirty-five years earlier, the students viewed the Olympics as an opportunity to force concessions from the government (Hong et al. 1988:34). Furthermore, they considered the games to be a glaring monument to the oppression of the minjung by the power elite and the conglomerates, the chaebol (Dong 1987:252). One result of the incorporation of the minjung into the discourse of protest was the incorporation of minjung culture into the enactment of protest. Subsequently, as Choi has noted, the shamanistic experienced a repositioning as part of the students’ performance of protest (Choi 1993:92–93, 1995:108–109). When the students use kut and the shamanistic as part of their political expression, they are doing so in the spirit of minjungjusii, a view that regards the shamanistic as part of the living traditions of the minjung (Cho 1987:6). In this respect, the students refer to the subversive elements of Korean shamanism—the forceful seizing of the discursive space by a marginalized member of the community. Just as the shaman moves to the center and defines the discourse and enacts the political organization of the domestic or village space, the students engage a similar subversion, positing the minjung as the center of the discursive space. The social order is then defined according to their perspective.

Interestingly, the student performances of kut generally do not include an actual shaman. Instead, a student or group of students
takes on the role of ritual officiator. Nor are appeals made during the ritual to individual ancestral spirits or recognized gods of the shamanic pantheon. Rather, appeals are made to the collective spirit of the minjung and to the memory of martyrs of the movement. By reinterpreting the form of the kut, the students incorporate a secondary subversive element into their ritual, namely the removal of recognized authority (the shaman) and ancestral hegemony (the recognized spirits and pantheon) from the ritual space. The subversive elitism of the shaman’s ritual, with the shaman as officiating authority, is itself undermined by these student rituals. Accordingly, the students’ kut can be seen as doubly subversive. First, by invoking shamanism, the students, like the shaman, undermine the oppressive actions of a male-dominated, patriarchal, authoritarian regime. Second, they undermine the structure of the kut itself by deferring the locus of ritual authority from a singular shaman to the group of students and, by reference, to the collectivity of the minjung as a whole. But, as Choi astutely observes, “In their practice of magical realism, opposition intellectuals emerge as the authorized representatives of the disenfranchised people” (Choi 1993:97; my italics). This appropriation of authority on the part of the students enacts an odd contradiction, since it posits an authority for the disenfranchised at the same time that it rejects the potentiality for such an authority. The students’ use of the shamanistic is not solely rooted in the minjungjwé discourse, however, but also relates to the minjokjuá discourse of the colonial period. In those historical studies of shamanism, it was theorized that Kochosón was an ancient and powerful kingdom encompassing the entire Korean Peninsula, as well as parts of Manchuria. Since one of the main goals of the student movement was reunification, invoking the shamanistic in the discourse of protest inevitably referred to the minjokjuá discourse on shamanism and thereby alluded to a unified Korea.

The shamanistic enactments in the student demonstrations do not end with the use of stylized kut, the madang kuk analyzed by Choi (1993), and p’ungmul. The progression of the demonstration itself can be characterized as ritual. The fever pitch of the battle

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13 The claim of the educated, liberal elite to speak for the illiterate and disenfranchised members of society has a long history in East Asia and can be seen in recent events such as the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989 in China.

14 For a discussion of the politics of naming the music referred to as p’ungmul, nong’ak, or sa’mulnori, see the membership information for the group T’oullim (1987).
with the police has been viewed by some observers as parallel to the emotional intensity that accompanies kut. However, unlike the kut, which is firmly situated in the women’s space, or the women’s defined space, the performance of the demonstration often appeals to a strict division of labor with hierarchies reminiscent of Confucian society. In the demonstration, women are once again moved to marginal roles—breaking up and carting stones for throwing, filling bottles for Molotov cocktails, and dispensing toothpaste and surgical masks to stave off the effects of the unending onslaught of tear gas. In another patriarchal devaluation of women’s protest, the police response is more forceful at demonstrations at coeducational universities than at demonstrations at women’s universities. Just like the shaman’s kut, which included a conservative element (the protection of societal status quo), the subversive act of the student demonstration maintains a conservative element in its reenactment of the Confucian male-centered hegemony during its performance. The male focus of the demonstration and the usually male officiator at predemonstration kut unwittingly reinforce the power structures contested by the movement itself. Thus, like the shaman ritual, the student demonstrations are at once subversive and conservative.

Whereas the student movement makes a strong appeal to min-jung munhwa in its appropriation of folk expressions as part of its discourse of struggle, the government appropriations of folk culture are grounded in the conservative chŏn’ongjuŭi (traditionalism) interpretation of minsok (folk customs). As Janelli points out, “nationalism does not have a uniform effect on folklore research throughout the world. Instead, it interacts with theoretical and substantive issues in each nation to produce a somewhat different discipline” (Janelli 1986:27). In Korea, “official” uses of folklore rely on a romantic view of the folk. In these studies, the folk are construed as the rural population who, because they are not modernized, are storehouses of ancient traditional lore and therefore can provide insight into the rich and glorious cultural inheritance that forms the basis of Korea’s uniqueness (Ch’oe 1989:40). Here the concept of “the older, the better” is seminal. The gov-

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15 For example, at a demonstration at the front gate of Ehwa Women’s University in April 1968, only a handful of police showed up to prevent the intended march.
16 For examples of studies of the effect of nationalism on folklore scholarship, see Wilson 1976 and Cocchiara 1952.
17 Presumed age is seen as conferring authenticity.
ernment, through its appropriation and presentation of folklore, can simultaneously legitimize its rule and claim a connection with the folk. In this respect, the government's enactments of folklore can be seen as fusing the political aspects of kukkajuĩi nationalism with the scholarship based on traditionalism. The government's appeal to folk culture is also based in part on the historical side of the minjokjuĩi-inspired scholarship of the colonial period. Like the students' enactments of the shamanistic, the government in this manner further refers to a past during which Korea was a unified kingdom. As in other countries where governmental uses of folk culture are commonplace, the Korean government's use of folk culture in 1987 and 1988 as part of its political discourse was largely motivated by a desire to claim a legitimizing inheritance of tradition.\

In the Law for the Conservation of Cultural Properties, promulgated by the Park regime in January 1962, the government proposed several categories of "cultural properties" worthy of preservation (Yi 1969:21). Among these categories were "intangible cultural properties" and "folk materials." Under the rubric of "intangible cultural properties" are listed particular performance traditions within the broad genres of dance, music, drama, and handicrafts. Folklore materials deemed worthy of preservation are those that "are considered typical as an indicator of the Korean people's basic mode of life" (Yi 1969:21). As part of the government's efforts to preserve folk culture, performers of considerable skill—and often of considerable age (a choice once again motivated by the maxim "the older, the better")—are designated as Living National Treasures. As part of this honor, the performer receives a stipend from the government and funds to train apprentices. Given the primary focus of folklore scholarship in Korea on shamanism, it is not surprising that numerous kut received the designation Intangible Cultural Property, with a concomitantly large number of shamans being dubbed Living National Treasures. Examples of typical, yet exceptional, folk materials associated with shamanism are also enshrined in the National Folklore Museum. This emphasis on the preservation of culture implies a high degree of stasis. Rather than viewing tradition as a living process—the position incorporated in the students' view of minjung culture—the view bounded by the cultural properties preservation act is

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18 For a more detailed discussion of this tendency among various states striving to define the nation, see Anderson 1991.
ultimately one that considers folklore to be a static endeavor with an emphasis on "older" and therefore purer expressions of the spirit of Korea.

The Korean Folktale Museum is one of the most notable examples of the government's presentation of folklore as part of its definition of Koreaness. Among the numerous dioramas are many that present shamanism in a romantic light. Often these displays are intended as much for the numerous school groups that troop through the museum grounds daily as for foreign visitors.\textsuperscript{19} It is interesting to note that the Korean Folktale Museum is on the grounds of the old royal palace, the Kyŏngbok'k'ung. In 1988 the National Museum, dedicated to the display of archaeological finds and fine arts, was also on the palace grounds. Housed at the time in the former Japanese colonial government building, it immediately called to mind the colonial period and, in so doing, the scholarship of people like Ch'oe and Yi.\textsuperscript{20} Through this spatial arrangement, the Folk tale Museum displays of folk materials invoked simultaneously the theoretical discourses of the colonial period and the contemporary discourse of chónt'ongju". This intertextual reading of the museum location, in turn, establishes a connection between the current government and the postulated shaman kings of antiquity. The folk museum's goal of preserving national traditions and its static, romantic displays of folk culture further invoke the discourse of traditionalism.

In 1987 and 1988, the Korean government sponsored frequent performances of Intangible Cultural Properties, often for urban populations who were perceived as losing touch with folk culture and, by extension, the legitimacy of the state.\textsuperscript{21} Among these events were performances of Intangible Cultural Property kut by Living National Treasure shamans, which anthropologists have dubbed "superstar kut" (Choi 1991). In its sponsorship of the rituals, the government appeals to the conservative element of the shaman kut, the preservation of the societal status quo. At the same time, these rituals incorporate the government's chónt'ongju".

\textsuperscript{19} In 1987 and 1988, foreign language signage was minimal, with most descriptions written primarily in Korean.

\textsuperscript{20} See Pai's chapter in this volume for the history and politics of this remarkable building.

\textsuperscript{21} People from all walks of life participated in the pro-democracy rallies in late June 1987. Indeed, these protests were forceful because they were not dominated by students from the student movement, whom the government and the newspapers (at the time under strict government control) could dismiss as "radicals."
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(Traditionalism), its nationalistic and romantic interpretation of the folk. Thus, the government invokes the discourse of shamanism as an expression legitimizing village organization and the scholarly discourses on shamanism—chǒnl’ongju’i and minjokju’i—as a powerful, historically privileged, and culturally valuable phenomenon. Homi Bhabha’s comment—“It is the problem of how, in signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated and translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic”—may aid our understanding of the processes at work in the institutionalization of culture undertaken by the Korean government (Bhabha 1994:35).

One particularly striking performance of a superstar kut took place on February 28, 1988, at the HoAm Art Hall in downtown Seoul. As the shaman, Kim Kûm-Hwa, performed a highly stylized and abbreviated ritual, complete with a theatrical light show, two well-known students of shamanism provided an amplified “play-by-play” commentary on the progression of the performance. Here, an enactment of the discourse of shamanism was completely wedded to an enactment of the discourse on shamanism. In this case, the discourse on shamanism was a conservative chǒnl’ongju’i nationalistic view of the performance as a nearly static cultural property. Thus, the ultimately government-sponsored superstar kut removed the subversive element of Korean shamanism. The performance was recontextualized from a charged political statement in the domestic or village arena, enacted by otherwise marginalized figures, into a theatrical event by a state-certified performer seen through an interpretative framework based on the preservation of cultural properties and invoking a historical view that posits shamanism as a reflection of the glorious past of a strong Korea unified under a centralized ruling elite. Whereas the audience in the village consists primarily of marginalized women struggling to survive in an unfavorable economic climate, the audience in the art hall comprised upper-class Koreans and foreigners. The recontextualization changed the political expression of the kut from one of disenfranchised people seizing a discursive space normally denied them by the patriarchy in order to (re)organize society according to their precepts into one of the state alluding to the long tradition of the rural populace as subservient to the desires of the state.
Governmental uses of the shamanistic in 1987–1988 were not solely limited to the museums and the superstar kut. Political candidates—those from the opposition parties and the government party—appealed to the shamanistic in their campaigns as well. Perhaps the most remarkable of these enactments were the giant rallies held on successive weekends for the three main candidates—Roh Tae Woo, Kim Yong Sam, and Kim Dae Jung—on Yǒuido Plaza in Seoul. Three-quarters of a million people were estimated to have attended each rally. The candidates’ campaigns made sure that everyone in the crowd had a small flag; during the speeches they were waved wildly with each rhetorical point. The visual result was akin to that of the whirling shaman during her ecstatic dance. Groups dressed in traditional clothes and playing p’ungmul were ubiquitous across the plaza, with the one modification to their dress being a banner in support of the day’s candidate. While the candidates spoke of economic opportunity and the burgeoning of democracy and the crowds waved their flags enthusiastically, the live musical accompaniment was the hollow beating of the hourglass drum. Attempting not to miss any possible group appeal, the candidates also blared pop music and “trot” through the massive speaker towers that surrounded the plaza. Thus, one could hear an odd confluence of pop music, bus-driving music, and p’ungmul throughout the day. Just as the discourse of student protest appealed to the shamanistic, so too did that of the political candidates engaged in the presidential race, a competition precipitated in large part by the student movement’s protests.

The most visible government-sponsored presentations of folk culture during 1987 and 1988 occurred during the Olympic games. The Olympic games offered the government the opportunity to present Korean culture not only to Koreans but also to foreigners (Korean Overseas Information Service 1990:508–514). Although the Olympics are hosted by a city, the Seoul Olympics were considered much more as a national Olympics, and therefore the political agenda presented was that of the Republic of Korea’s government (Manheim 1990). The large-scale presentations proffered state interpretations of folk culture. Among the most prominent were an arts festival, with numerous performances of Intangible Cultural Properties by Living National Treasures, and the opening and closing ceremonies of the games themselves (Dilling 1991). These representations often removed the aspects of satire and subversion so germane to the performance of most folk
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ritual in Korea, emphasizing instead the historical component and thus the connection between a strong, centralized authoritarian government and these static enactments of unique and ancient traditions. However, most Koreans viewing the ceremonies would have been unable not to read the subversive aspects of the shamanistic back into the presentations. For a Korean audience, then, the opening and closing ceremonies resulted in a self-contradiction: the ceremonies at once celebrated and undermined the successes of the Confucian-informed, authoritarian, albeit now marginally democratic, government.

The seeming incongruity of the appeal to shamanism, the shamanistic, and the discourses on shamanism by opposing political groups during the years 1987 and 1988 no longer appears as contradictory as it did at the start of this brief study. Shamanism itself has been shown to be both subversive and conservative, and it is in this difference, rather than opposition, that meaning should be sought. Jacques Derrida suggests the term “differénc,” with its potential double meaning in French, to describe the paradox of a construct that contradicts itself (Derrida 1967). Rather than a focus on oppositions, the building block of structural studies, a focus on difference—the incorporation of self-contradiction—is startlingly fitting for the study of shamanism and the enactments of the shamanistic in Korea. In the enactments of the shamanistic in Korea in 1987 and 1988, “denotations, connotations, intertextual and archetextual components, isomorphisms and harmonies overlap and intersect in these texts, creating staggered or multilayered systems of meaning” (Sherzer 1986:9). Exactly this type of multivalence of meaning was produced by and through the performance of shamanism and the shamanistic.

One of the most pervasive symbols in Korea, the tae’guk, consists of two contrasting forms fitting together to form a circle. This um yang symbol is instrumental to the shamanistic. At the same time, the symbol is part of the discourses of both the student movement and the government enactments of culture. In addition, as Margaret Dilling notes, the um yang symbol was considered as an organizing principle for the opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympics, with the three-part structure of these ceremonies further linking them to the shaman’s kui (Dilling 1991:111–112). During 1987 and 1988, the students’ use of shamanism and the shamanistic was linked to their appeal to minjungjiut nationalism and a concomitant appeal to minjung culture. In their enactments, the contesting, challenging, and sub-
versive elements of shamanism were privileged, even though the conservative was not entirely eliminated. The government's use of shamanism was linked to its institutionalization of minsok, according to the precepts of chŏnt'ongjuŭi, and a kŭkkajuŭi nationalistic political agenda. However, although the government attempted to invoke solely the conservative elements of shamanism and the discourses on shamanism, simply by engaging the shamanistic it presented an opportunity for an intertextual rereading of the subversive back into the enactment. The political enactments of shamanism in Korea in 1987 and 1988 can be seen as an example of the syncretic and contradictory adjustment of Korean cultural expressions to the politically charged yet self-contradictory phenomenon of Korean shamanism and the important role the "traditional" plays in the constructions of the concepts of Korea and Koreanness.22

It is a late December afternoon in 1987, only a week before the first democratic elections in the Republic of Korea. Opposition party candidates are holding impromptu and "spontaneous" rallies in downtown Seoul, which is closed to traffic. Meanwhile, Roh Tae Woo's rally has effectively shut down Yŏuido Plaza. People crowd up and down Ch'ŏng'no, a main thoroughfare in Seoul leading directly from city hall up to the gates of Kyoŏngbokkung and the National Museum. The atmosphere is both celebratory and tense. The sound of a changgu can be heard, emanating first from one group of students, then further up the street from an opposing camp. In front of city hall, a rally for Paek Ki-Wan, a candidate allied with a faction of the student movement and a person attuned to the concept of minjungjuŭi, has grown to considerable size.23 As night falls and the rally intensifies, I am drawn to the vision of a woman dressed in shaman's robes dancing ecstatically on the roof of a Kia truck, bouncing up and down on her toes, twirling around and around until she is just a blur of color—a shaman's dance at a presidential candidate's rally in the heart of modern downtown Seoul on the top of a truck built by one of Korea's massive conglomerates. The sign above city hall says that there are 278 days to the opening of the Olympic Games.

22 Eric Hobsbawn (1990) mentions the concept of "invented" traditions when discussing the appeal to traditional expressions by the state as part of the move toward producing national symbols. See also Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983.
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Works Cited


