

**SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF
THE RECENT INVENTION OF
TRADITION IN KOREA: AN OVERVIEW**

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Introduction

Most Korean traditional culture was banned and left to decay by the Japanese government during the colonial period. (1910-1945) Those elements which survived, however, were once again denounced as worthless and consequently abandoned by the Korean government under the wave of modernization which swept Third World countries during the 1960s and 1970s. Despite this series of hardships, elements of traditional culture have not completely perished; they have even begun to proliferate in the 1980s. More and more traditional costumes are worn on various occasions by men and women of all generations. Traditional dishes are proudly displayed in the windows of restaurants. Young people prefer a traditional wedding ceremony to the Western style version, and more and more people are becoming interested in folk religion. It is also interesting to see that the traditional dress of *paji-chōgori* and *turumak*, together with farmers' musical troupes and shamanistic *kut* performances are employed almost

without fail in various activities, be they anti-government protests or festivals organised by college students. We cannot say that all these phenomena are survivals or revivals of "tradition" because there are many new inventions. At any rate, all this presents an interesting contrast to the governmental encouragement of westernisation.

There could be various explanations for these phenomena. Increasing concern for tradition can be seen as a new kind of nationalistic reaction against uncontrollable westernisation, or as an indication that Koreans have become wealthy enough to appreciate non-practical elements of their life. One can also say that Koreans have become interested in their own cultural identity and tradition as they have had more and more opportunities to experience foreign culture through ever-expanding contacts with other countries and peoples.

These explanations are far from generalizations since economic wealth itself does not necessarily lead people to seek tradition, and criticism of westernization cannot simply be identified with the idea of an anti-establishment movement either. More than this, when we examine the situation meticulously we realize that certain traditional elements are monopolized or exclusively manipulated by people of a certain class or category. This leads us to suppose that the invention of tradition, or emphasis on a certain element of tradition, has a specific meaning for a specific category of people in a specific context. In this regard, the meaning of a tradition should be sought by employing a rather different methodology, namely that of setting it more comprehensively within its socio-historical context. The central idea underlying this approach is that the invention of tradition, like works of art or political theory, cannot be interpreted merely in terms of "internal structure." In other words a cultural system cannot be regarded as being unchangeable or unchallengeable. Like all cultural forms which may be treated as texts, or all texts which may be treated as cultural forms, a "thick" rather than a "thin" description is required (as C Geertz (1973) puts it). In order to understand the "meaning" of a tradition, therefore, it is

necessary to relate it to the specific social, political, economic and cultural milieu to which it pertains.

We can observe, for example, that Confucian rites are still performed as they were practised in the 18th century. Can we draw a conclusion, based on this observation, that the rites are performed today in the same manner and with the same meaning and function as they assumed in the 18th century? Or can we say that those who observe the rite today are of the same social background as the people who performed it in the past? Certainly we can imagine that the popularity and significance of the rites has fluctuated according to socio-political situations throughout history. Then we can ask why today a certain category of people tries to revive or emphasize a particular rite. Who are they? An answer to this question may not be found through discovery of a so-called "Korean cultural system." It should, rather, be sought in the context of political manipulation of a cultural tradition by people of different positions involved in a period of socio-cultural change. In this context, regional and class differences about the invention or reproduction of tradition are related to processes of social change. Through the study of the invention of tradition, therefore, we can understand the nature and process of socio-cultural transformation on the one hand and the historical consciousness shaped out of a people's experience of change on the other.

Based on this premise, the present paper attempts an overview of the revival of tradition in various fields and tries to provide some tentative explanations. This is, therefore, not a conclusion but a small beginning to a rather ambitious proposal.

The Invention of Tradition

i. Confucian circles

Confucian institutions were the pivot of traditional society as a whole. Contemporary Korea is characterised as a multi-religious society in which Christianity, Buddhism, and other native and foreign religions coexist, but none enjoys a predominant position in terms of the number of believers or the size of social and political influence. Therefore, Confucianism, which was the only official state religion of the Chosŏn dynasty, is now only one of these several religious sects. Most Koreans who cannot identify their religion would say that they are Confucian and this is partly true in the sense that they practise a rite of ancestor worship in the Confucian manner. Apart from ancestor worship, however, they are not aware of other Confucian rituals. Except for those who are proud of being Confucian, there are few proper adherents to Confucianism. Moreover, these adherents maintain their own closed social network and try to hang on to the status which they used to enjoy in the old social system.

From the late 1970s through the 1980s, adherents tried to strengthen their influence. A Confucian renaissance was especially prominent in the Yŏngnam region. The revival of Confucian teaching and rites were attempts made with governmental support to emphasize filial piety and loyalty to the nation.

With Sŏnggyun'gwan in Seoul as their headquarters, Confucians mounted a nationwide re-organisation and invented new traditions which they tried to popularise through various occasions. In each major city throughout the country, a local-level Confucian school, *hyanggyo*, has been maintained with the Confucian association, *Yudohoe*, under its control. The size of a *hyanggyo*'s property had decreased greatly and its activity become minimal in the sense that it was open only twice

a year for the Commemoration Rite to Confucius, his Great Disciplines, and local scholars whose tablets were kept within it. Now the Confucian schools have resumed some of their roles. Schools are used for classes in Chinese characters and special classes in traditional etiquette for young people. Some local level meetings of prominent figures and lectures for local people are held in them.

Yudohoe has broadened its field of activity by organising young people's and women's divisions, which would once have been unthinkable. Recently the association began to select filial sons and virtuous women to receive awards. *Yudohoe* also organise *kwanne*, a kind of initiation ceremony, for boys of 19. If there is anyone who wants to have his or her wedding ceremony performed in the traditional way, the *Yudohoe* also allows free use of a site and may even preside over the ceremony.

The most noticeable change is found in the *Yudohoe*'s very generous application of membership regulations. In the past, "*gurim*" was a highly prestigious social title men aspired to. Membership in the *gurim* was open to those of *yangban* (aristocratic) status who at the same time had been unanimously approved by existing members of the local *gurim* on the basis of personality and scholarship. Only those who were given the title of *gurim* were allowed to wear ceremonial robes and scholarly dress, and these prestigious robes functioned as the symbol of their exclusive privilege to engage in official matters at various levels.

Under successive governments from 1945 to 1960 dominated by Christian and American influence, Confucians lost their power and authority. Even Confucian ideology and ethics were officially criticised as a source of nepotism and even despotism. During the early stage of the late Pak Chŏnghŭi regime, Confucian ideology was harshly attacked as part of the government's ambitious national development project. Confucian ethics were criticised on the grounds that they irrationally bound people with emotional ties based on familism so that rational behaviour and individualism were almost

impossible. All the backwardness of Korean society was attributed to Confucian ideology. From the later 1960s, however, the situation changed. On the one hand the Korean-US relationship shifted as the two governments split over security and defence policies. Pak's regime sought an independent way to meet the defence problem relying on its own resources, but this was not accepted by the US. Tension between President Pak and Korean Christian leaders developed as a consequence of this deterioration in the Korean-US relationship. President Pak became more nationalistic in his handling of political issues; he began to emphasize national identity. Although he was still critical of traditional culture, he supported a national competition of folk culture. At the same time, he found that the Yŏngnam region, his political base, was a stronghold of Confucian tradition. For reasons of political strategy he changed his antagonistic attitude toward Confucian scholars. He began to emphasize filial piety and familism as the ideological base for loyalty to the nation, and he provided financial support for the redecoration and rebuilding of monuments to scholars of the past including Yulgok, T'oegye and Sŏae. The writings of these scholars were translated and studies on their philosophy were encouraged. Their shrines became sacred places where people were instructed in the proper ways to pay homage.

During the 1980s the Confucian circle became more active. The Minister of Home Affairs was elected head of Sŏnggyun'gwan and various new rituals were introduced in an effort to popularise the teachings of Confucius.

Apart from the activities cited above surrounding the *hyanggyo*, there are many other occasions for activities through which Confucians enhance their social prestige. A man's death provides the bereaved family with an opportunity to demonstrate social status and prestige. The number and nature of visitors who pay homage to the dead is an indication of the social prestige which the family enjoys. It is a singular honour if the *yurim* society agrees to conduct the funeral. Therefore, when a prominent local figure dies, all *yurim* members are informed of the death and are expected to pay a

ritual visit to the family. When the *yurim* decide to conduct the funeral ceremony all the ritual details are exempted from government regulations requiring people to simplify their rites. In such cases, the funeral is allowed to take more than three weeks while an ordinary funeral may last only three days. When a man of the Andong Kim clan who was a great national *yurim* leader died in 1987, his family at first decided to conduct a rather simple funeral, but the local *yurim* objected. They insisted that the funeral should be performed in a proper Confucian way by the *yurim*. They suggested at least nine days of mourning. However, the family was not wealthy enough to afford all the expenses. (The family are expected to provide all the participating *yurim* with food and lodging and even meet travel expenses). Usually more than 300 *yurim* members take part in a funeral. The lineage council of the Andong Kims at last conceded to provide financial help to the family and thus the latter were able to accommodate the *yurim* decision. Every detail of the funeral was filmed by the local T.V. station and it was reported on the evening news as "an unusually good example of preservation of our great tradition." Another example was a local *yurim* leader from Kyŏngnam province who died recently. His disciples and fellow Confucians of the region decided to perform an authentic *yurim* funeral and advertised it in national daily newspapers. The mourning period lasted three weeks, spread over two months. On the day of the funeral, it was reported, more than 500 *yurim* and 800 non-Confucian spectators turned up.

Another important ritual gathering is held when a family wants to erect a tablet in memory of a prominent ancestor. A stone is allowed only for a person of considerable scholarship. Therefore, the ceremony must be undertaken by the *yurim* and all members are invited to come. When a local lineage in Andong performed a rite to erect a tablet for their ancestor, a respected scholar-statesman during the late Chosŏn dynasty, more than 700 *yurim* came from all over the country. They were provided rooms and board for three days and each was given 10,000 *wŏn* as a return fare. It was a spectacular scene as 700 old men wearing ceremonial robes and hats lined up in front of the newly-erected monument stone in the fresh air of an autumn

morning. Another gathering was organised when a lineage of the Kūm clan, which produced the current Minister of Industry, erected a monument for one of their ancestors who died about 200 years ago. About 250 local *yurim* members from the Andong area gathered to attend the ceremony. One representative of the lineage segment proudly told me, "Look at all these prominent local people! We didn't realise that our grandfather was so famous a person." The lineage spent about 10,000,000 *wōn*. Again, a famous lineage of Usōng Kims in the Andong area invited *yurim* from all over the country to the opening ceremony of their lineage museum to display valuables and documents relating to an ancestor. About 1,000 *yurim* members took part in the ceremony. All the above events were announced through the mass media and details of the ceremonies were broadcast by the local T.V. station. Thus, ordinary people could gain a vivid picture of what was going on at the ceremony, a picture virtually unknown to them before.

There are 18 local Confucian schools called *sōwōn* within the sphere of the Andong *hyanggyo*'s supervision. At present they do not exercise their original role as educational establishments. They do however continue to observe a ceremony to the scholars whose tablets are kept in each. At the annual commemoration ceremony held at each school, the *yurim* members are invited to take part. The number and status of the participants give an indication of the prestige of the school concerned. Therefore, one of the schools invited an ex-president of Seoul National University to be its head while another invited several university professors. Usually each ceremony is held at midnight, but one school held its ceremony again the following morning to allow students of a school established with the old *sōwōn*'s funds to participate. Students thus realised the importance of scholarship and gained a special pride from contacting Confucius.

It may be noted that in order to prepare a set of ceremonial robes one must spend 300,000 *wōn* for a gown and another 200,000 to 300,000 *wōn* for a hat. Therefore, *top'o* and *kat* are symbols of economic wealth on the one hand and social status on the other. Unless wearing a ceremonial gown, a man is not

allowed to take part in any ceremony. It is also interesting to see that many recently developed local festivals begin with a Confucian rite although they are not related to a Confucian institution at all. At *Tanjongje*, now held annually on the 5 April in Yōngwōl—where a king was put to death by his uncle—the leader of the local *yurim* assumes the role of master of ceremonies and all ceremonial processes are observed under the instruction of the *yurim*. It is the same in the case of *Kayaje*, a festival held in Changwōn to commemorate the fact that Kyōngnam province was the seat of the ancient tribal federation of Kaya. The festival there begins with a ceremony conducted after the Confucian pattern by the local *yurim*. People now say this is a thousand-year old tradition.

As implied by all the above, being a *yurim* member is a time-consuming job. A proper *yurim* has to spend a great deal of time in various activities that relate to Confucian institutions. At least 80 days a year have to be devoted in this way. At home he spends at least 10 days in a domestic cult for his own ancestors reaching back four generations. He takes part in ancestral ceremonies held at the lineage level for more than 10 days. He also has to be present at funerals of relatives and friends for around 10 days, and to attend regular meetings and special programmes at the *hyanggyo* for at least 20 days. From time to time, he is invited to ceremonies to erect monuments or open lineage museums, and these can last for a further 10 days annually.

In a word, Confucian activities are becoming more and more widespread among the younger generations. In the everyday life of Koreans, the general tendency towards reviving traditional culture is echoed by a proliferation of Confucian ceremonies. Here it is interesting to note that Confucian tradition is especially strong in the Yōngnam area (Kyōngsang province to the East of the central mountains). This is in sharp contrast to the Honam region (Chōlla province to the West of the central mountains) where peasant movements and new folk religions have proliferated. The Confucian tradition is supported by the government in an effort to develop the idea of loyalty to the nation on the one hand and discipline of its

people on the other. It is backed up by some successful stories of adopting Confucian criticism by modernisation theorists. Korea, Japan and Taiwan, all societies strongly influenced by Confucianism, have achieved remarkable economic growth during the last two decades. Bearing in mind its low popularity in the 1960s and 1970s, the economic advances made in each country cannot be attributed in whole to the Confucian tradition. Yet it is true that some businessmen have achieved great success by manipulating a social network based on Confucian ideology. They have thereby demonstrated one important facet of Confucianism. Therefore, the government and students of business administration today attempt a positive interpretation of Confucianism. At the same time, reciprocity is established between the Confucian tradition and social order. Confucian activities are supported by the government, and the *yurim* in turn support the government. In this regard, the revival of tradition in Confucian circles is viewed in the context of their support for the establishment. And thus, through participation in the revival of Confucian tradition, people are able to recall their own prestige and their glorious past.

ii. *New religious movements*

While the Confucian tradition is booming in Kyōngsang provinces it is interesting to see that new religious movements flourish further west in the Honam region. A remarkable increase in various sects can be noted. They are spreading throughout the whole country but are especially strong in the southwestern Chōlla provinces. The forms of these new religions vary but they are based on more or less the same world view and belief system. The most typical example is *Chūngsan'gyo*.

Chūngsan'gyo grew out of *Tonghak*, the so-called "Eastern Learning" of the 1890s, and once took a leading role among the new religions. In contrast to other religious sects, *Chūngsan'gyo* is based on a belief system which views the present as a transitional stage from the Former Order

(*Sōnch'ōn*) to an After Order (*Huch'ōn*) pre-ordained by God. Believers hold that the present is a preliminary phase prior to a new world. All the difficulties, contradictions and hardships including social injustice, immorality, exploitation, violence, and disorderliness are necessary conditions of the present phase. Everything in heaven and on earth was planned by God, within a concept called *ch'ōnji kongsa*. Although the present unsatisfactory situation is normal in that it was prearranged to create the new world, believers are expected to take part positively in the fight to eliminate present evil elements in order to achieve the new order. Therefore, fight is necessary: here revolutionary ideas come to the fore. Followers of *Chūngsan'gyo* are taught to try to resist the present and achieve revolution in their own ways. They learn special spells and magical formulae to exorcise evil spirits or to cure sickness. There are various sects distinguished by differing strategies that aim to realise their leader's teaching. Some sects reject worldly life and go deep into the mountains where they live in isolation. Others have moved to remote agricultural areas and live in closed communities.

New religions are not well organised and most believers are poor peasants in agriculture or low-waged labourers in urban sectors. They do not, therefore, pose a serious threat to the established social order. However, it should be pointed out that they provide the oppressed and exploited, and those intellectuals sympathetic towards the oppressed, with a revolutionary ideology.

It is no coincidence that the so-called *minjung* movement (*minjung undong*) is strong where new religions proliferate. Areas with a strong tradition of peasant movements, including co-operative ventures and anti-government protests, often overlap with regions that support new religions. While the tradition-oriented Confucians in the southeast are from well-off backgrounds, it is the poor peasants who are the core of the new movements in the southwest. Their strong orientation to traditional culture corresponds to the enthusiasm of students and young intellectuals toward the *minjung* movement. These people emphasize tradition as a symbol of an anti-

establishment and sometimes anti-government movement. Their rituals may be regarded as a kind of native movement in the sense that they use a strictly native language, wear traditional costume and eat traditional food. Their behaviour should be understood in the context of social and economic history. Unlike Kyōngsang in the southeast, Honam in the southwest was exploited by absentee landlords to the extent that peasants were unable to improve their economic status. Consequently, few of them had access to political power or opportunities for upward social mobility. They came to feel a sense of relative deprivation. They saw their poor economic condition as a result of the government's dependence upon foreign countries, especially Japan and America. This is quite understandable when we consider that agricultural products are relatively low priced whilst imported factory goods are expensive. Pressure from the United States on the Korean government to import American agricultural products has also damaged local farms. Antagonism toward Japan and America developed into anti-government sentiments because of the belief that the present regime is a kind of American puppet. As a token of their protest, they incline towards more and more nationalistic or chauvinistic attitudes.

iii. Shamanistic movements

Shamanism has recently become popular among college students and young intellectuals, though they do not believe in it as a religion. Folklorists and students of traditional and contemporary dancing, musicologists, and many other dilettantes have organised societies to study *kut*. Shaman rituals. Such societies hold regular meetings where film shows and introductory lectures on various shaman genres are given to the general public. From time to time study groups are organized with hundreds of participants who visit selected places throughout the country where *kut* are actually performed. In addition to these scholarly investigation, newspapers and television stations also publicise some extraordinary largescale *kut*. Books and lectures about

shamanism are now very popular and some shamans are treated as cultural heroes. It is also interesting to see that many highly-educated persons learn shaman rites as disciples or apprentices to famous shamans.

Shamanistic performances are largely divided into two categories. One is the so-called traditional (and thus ordinary) *kut* which has a religious purpose in the domestic sphere. The other is *kut* designed and performed for the general public as a kind of largescale artistic performance. Some famous shamans, like Kim Kūmhwa and U Okchu, are frequently invited to largescale communal *kut* advertised through newspapers. These same shamans also give "special" performances on stage in places such as the Hoam Art Hall, Sejong Cultural Centre, or the National Theatre where people buy tickets and appreciate the performance just as they would a concert by a world-famous musician. Usually, performances are accompanied by an interpretive lecture by a university scholar and followed by comments from a newspaper columnist—the latter typically saying that the performances were very special in that they revealed genuine traditional cultural elements which cannot be easily found elsewhere. Shamans were once even invited by a government-subsidised cultural foundation to perform a *kut* to expel evil elements and induce fertility at a Christmas party for foreign diplomats in Seoul. A shaman's rites are in this regard no longer merely a religious occasion but rather a festive entertainment for common people.

Famous shamans can be paid 5,000,000 *wōn* for a single performance. Their dress has consequently become more and more gaudy and their instruments and decorations more and more elaborate. This is in sharp contrast to shamans in rural areas, who usually wear ordinary clothes and play simple instruments. Some shamans rationalise their new equipment and decoration by insisting that these are prepared according to authentic guidance from their teachers so each *kut* concerned is properly performed. But there is no perfectly-written record to tell us what is genuine. All details depend upon a shaman's memory. No one, however, dares to raise

questions about a ritual dress made of Italian silk or shoes made of German corduroy.

Participants in shamanistic performances are also divided into several categories. Needless to say, there are religiously-orientated people who actually invite a shaman and cover all expenses for a *kut*. These are mostly peasants of low education. City dwellers and intellectuals are divided into two types in their attitudes. One group are interested in shamanism because they believe it is the basic culture of Koreans. In order to unravel the prototype of Korean culture, or to interpret the nature of Korean culture, they collect various *kut* and analyse the cultural content underlying each. A second group are inclined to understand shamanism from its political perspective. They maintain that throughout history shamanism has been a cultural and ideological device allowing the oppressed to manipulate their political responses to the dominant sector of society. This group emphasise that only shamanism has been a purely Korean religion from the beginning of history. They also maintain that shamanism has suffered at the hands of other religions as Koreans have suffered at the hands of foreign powers throughout history. Concern for shamanism is thus a central element among those interested in *minjung* culture, the popular movement which insists that true culture is the culture of the oppressed, which should replace any culture enjoyed by the dominant sector of society. Some young scholars insist that shamanism should be allowed a part in state ceremonies, as a major religion like Christianity or Buddhism, and may even insist that top place must go to shamanism because it is the real Korean religion. Therefore, college students and workers, together with those intellectuals engaged in the *minjung* movement, perceive shamanism as an ideological source for their anti-establishment struggle and a symbolic instrument with which to express protest against foreign elements in the political, social and cultural spheres of their life.

This is clearly exemplified by recently-established patterns of student rallying. Student leaders or candidates for the presidency of a university council should wear a traditional

coat, *turumak*, and their assistants or deputies traditional white clothes, *paji* and *chögori*. They all wear headbands in one of the five cardinal colours—white, blue, red, black or yellow. With a huge banner flanked by smaller banners in the five colours leading, a farmer's percussion troupe follows. The main banner is the so-called farmer's banner saying that farming is the "basis of the world", "*minjung* is the basis of the world", "democracy is the basis of the world", and so on. All other participants march shoulder to shoulder singing recent underground songs. The procession goes around the main campus sites and at some spots stops to perform small shaman rites to suppress evil spirits. These rites are accompanied by various festive activities known as *kut p'an*.

When the rally returns to the starting point, usually the central plaza of the campus, a central shaman rite is performed. In front of an altar with a pig's head, steamed rice-cakes and rice-wine, the master of ceremonies, usually the president of the student council, offers wine to the protective god. The identity of the gods varies according to context. Usually it is the spirit of a fellow student who died by accident while fighting riot police, who was killed by police torture, or who committed suicide in protest against the government. Shaman rites are performed in order to pacify these heroic but unhappy spirits. Students pray for the help of the spirits in support of their fight for democracy, social justice, and the liberation of the oppressed. Another rite is performed to expel the evil ghosts of dictatorship, corruption, torture and anti-nationalism, ghosts who want to sell their nation to foreign powers. This shamanistic performance is the highlight of the whole event. After a series of fierce dances and energetic prayers, students sing a series of protest songs with much shouting. Then the student representatives come forward one by one and burn paper on which they have written their desires. After rice-wine and rice-cakes are distributed to all the participants, they rush to the front gate of the campus and fight riot police. The police inevitably outnumber them in terms of discipline, quality of equipment and manpower. The police shoot innumerable tear gas canisters and the students throw stones and molotov cocktails. After several retreats and advances, the students

become exhausted, run out of stones and are dispersed by the ever-increasing police and tear gas. Within an hour, the campus becomes a silent and peaceful world filled with tear gas and pieces of bricks, coughing professors and grumbling against the police by uninvolved students.

This is an unremarkable scene, observed almost every day since 1980 in Korean universities. Student riots ruthlessly crushed by the police are not new, but the ritualised process on the part of students whereby shaman performance has become an indispensable part in a newly-established tradition. This new tradition is now imported to factory workers who organise protests in support of labour disputes. It stands in sharp contrast to the government's concept of cultural development. The government emphasizes a "Korea in the World" policy, which means that Korea should achieve the status of a first class country in terms of its quality of cultural development. When the government talks of this "first class level", however, it means that Korea should prove her ability to accommodate Western culture as in Europe, America and Japan. The government, therefore, approvingly supports the import of new Western arts and Western life styles. There are many new first class hotels with Western names and luxurious shopping centres which sell high quality imported goods. They continuously open stage shows to introduce the newest French, Italian and American fashions, and American Nights, French Nights and Spaghetti Festivals all year round. American dancing troupes, American musicians and American rock singers are enthusiastically invited, yet Korean traditional paintings were excluded at the World Exhibition of Fine Art which celebrated the 1988 Seoul Olympiad. The government appears to support the national Korean traditional dance team but it does so only when the team organises a largescale mass display like that for the opening ceremony of the 1986 Asian Games. Performances of traditional singers and dancers are supported mainly by private foundations and intellectuals who are interested in traditional arts.

The adoption of shaman performances by student protest movements can be interpreted as a symbol of protest against

the government cultural policy. This protest has a double implication. On the one hand it implies popular rejection of the foreign cultural influence stimulated by government policy, and on the other it is an anti-government movement. This does not necessarily mean that Koreans do not accept foreign culture. On the contrary, they are intoxicated by the American version of Western culture. Students are eager to learn English and to go abroad—especially to America—to further their studies. American fast food, American pop songs and an American pattern of leisure are as popular as jeans and Coca Cola in everyday life. However, college students and young intellectuals are beginning to feel that the present government is too much pro-American. They argue that the dictatorial and unlawful military regimes of Pak Chŏnghŭi and Chŏn Tuhwan managed to survive severe protest and challenge from the people because they were supported by American power. Based on this antagonism, students have begun to criticize America. They believe she has provided strong support to the military regimes. Therefore, incorporating a traditional cultural element in their rallies symbolizes antagonism against America while shaman performances symbolise challenge to the central government. Government and the establishment are seen as equal and are symbolised by the great tradition while the little tradition symbolises the marginal and exploited.

This is also reflected in the students' use of colours. In the Sino-Korean colour symbolism, red is the symbol of the south, warmth, blood, strength, life, happiness and joy. White means the west, cleanliness, land of purity, world of the soul, death, sacredness. Black means north, death, dirt, greed. Blue means east, youth, strength, challenge, manhood. yellow is the symbol of the centre of the universe, of greed, of sexual desire. Wearing white traditional garments symbolizes innocent Korean peasants, while black banners mean death to the greedy foreign invader. A yellow banner means the lustful government while a red banner symbolizes the mixture of blood of the fighters and blood of the exploited. Therefore, red, white and black are the three main colours used in protest movements.

iv. Folk festivals

Many forms of dances, songs, band music and festivals have been rediscovered since the 1960s. The government has held an annual folk festival competition since 1959 in which teams representing each province take part. At first, these were organised to discover hitherto unknown local genres and thus stimulate people to develop their traditional culture at the regional level. However, the competition contributed to shaping a new pattern of tradition. Since the first prize always went to a team which organised a largescale performance with short movements in a well-disciplined manner, people began to produce massive, military-band forms of dancing and musical performances in their effort to win. Many scholars criticized the competition for encouraging people to invent their own traditions while leading ignorant people to believe that such forms were genuine. As the government drove people to rapid economic development through a change in the modes of thought during the 1970s, anything which expressed an energetic, progressive, aggressive, or challenging attitude was highly praised. Therefore, even in the field of traditional folk festivals, any programme creating a similar impression would get high marks. As a result, much folk art including mask dances, mask plays, and farmer's music and dance lost its original form and structure. Yet, still today, people firmly believe that the present forms are the genuine traditional ones.

Among scholars, the debate on originality is now very sharp. For example, in the Andong area, fierce debates have been going on among professors and amateur researchers about what the original forms of the Hahoe mask play, *Nottari palpki* (crossing the bridge), and *Ch'ajŏn nori* (mob fighting using a mock chariot) are. These plays all won first prize at various national folk festivals and are thus now taken as symbols of popular culture in the Andong area.

Hahoe is a famous *yangban* (aristocratic) village dominated by a lineage of the Yu clan. It produced many prominent scholars and high-ranking officials during the

Chosŏn dynasty. The mask dance was played following communal rituals for the tutelary god of the village. Both dance and ritual were performed exclusively by the servants and tenants of the Yus. All expenses were covered by the Yus although they did not participate in any of the events. The mask dance was played by servants with dialogues that ridiculed and criticized aristocrats, scholars and Buddhist monks. The festival lasted three days, during which time the Yus kept aloof, as though they did not exist at all. From an anthropological perspective it was a kind of liminal period according to Victor Turner, or a marginal state according to Arnold van Gennep, in that ordinary social order and roles were not recognised.

The Hahoe mask dance has not been performed since 1928. Under Japanese colonial rule, Korean traditional festivals were banned and many of the *yangban* families left their homes, with their servants. At the same time, the Yus could not afford any performance due to their poor economic condition. In the 1970s, a folklorist found a man who had played in the last mask dance. He persuaded him, a servant, to reveal his class background and tell him about the mask dance. The professor wrote down what the old man described and completed the dialogue on the basis of this old man's memory. He organised a study group for the Hahoe mask dance, instructed by the old man, and the group was awarded first prize at the national folk festival. Since then, the society has developed into a large organisation with many members. They have travelled to various places to perform the now-famous Hahoe mask dance.

However, some scholars raised objections. They did not trust the old man's memory on the grounds that he was only 16 when he participated in the mask dance for the first and last time. Moreover, his memory was not good enough to recall exactly what was going on 50 years before. It was suggested that the scenario of the mask dance was actually made by the professor himself. He had collected several versions of the scenario from similar mask dances found in other places and he put the most plausible dialogue to the old man. Since the old

man was not confident, he had to consent to the professor's guesswork. Since there was no written record, the version which the professor made was accepted as the original. It became the tradition. The professor borrowed masks from the National Museum where they were preserved, and got local villagers to make suitable imitations.

In 1988, the dance was performed in Hahoe village on the 15th of the 1st lunar month. It was advertised through newspapers and local television, and was played by the preservation society with financial support from the county government of Andong. Many tourists and foreigners participated together with student of folk culture and the *minjung* movement. Some mask dancing teams from universities performed their dances as a token of friendship. It was performed in a specially prepared plaza in the village and organised by a man of the Yu family who once served as the director of the local institute of culture and information in Andong. Curiously enough, none of the Yus of Hahoe turned up to the festival. Only the village head paid a short visit, but this was because the head of the county government came.

By remaining aloof from the event the Yus intended to express their status and past prestige. They used to complain that the village, though a famous *yangban* place, had come to be recognised as a village whose customs were those of servants on the lowest step of the social ladder. As the mask dance acquired a label as traditional culture they were, nonetheless, proud of the fact that it originated from their village. The performance gave the Yus an opportunity to appreciate their glorious past, and they became proud of the fact that more and more people visited and viewed Hahoe as a source of traditional Korean culture.

The representatives of the society for mask dance still insist that their play is performed strictly according to the original scenario. "We did not alter one word of the scenario. We tried our best to keep the original form and contents." But others have made the point that the most important aspect of the mask dance is that the dialogue should be allowed its own

flexibility in order to be satirical and to criticise and ridicule the contemporary social, political and cultural scene. There can therefore be no original in the sense that the dialogue must change according to the context and situation in which it is performed today. Analysis of the words reveals that the present dialogues reflect the early 20th century, although the mask dance itself is said to have been transmitted from over 500 years ago.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the trend towards adopting and reshaping traditional elements in the field of religion and folk festivals. There are varying interpretations of these phenomena. They might result from a self-protective nationalistic reaction to the ever-increasing influence of foreign culture, or from people's struggle to find their own cultural identity in the face of foreign imports. The search for cultural traditions or the invention of traditional culture is also seen as a consequence of economic growth. That is to say that the material conditions of Koreans are now sufficiently advanced to allow appreciation of cultural life. All these interpretations are partly true but do not give enough explanation. We can find a more proper answer when we see cultural movements from a different perspective as a form of political reaction to a specific social, political and cultural situation. At the same time, we must admit that not all parts of society seek out the same meanings for tradition although they appear to accept the same nominal forms. As we have seen, tradition as perceived by Confucian circles is different from that emphasized by new religions and the cultured movements of young intellectuals both in terms of meaning and background. The former emphasise the old order and try to invent new traditions in order to strengthen their ideological inclination toward the establishment, while the latter try to emphasize the old—as traditional cultural elements—to symbolize their protest against that same establishment. The meaning of a tradition

clearly varies according to the political situation and contemporary policy. The interpretation of culture is therefore an aspect of political manipulation. In the study of Korean culture the political context should be considered.

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MINJUNG THEOLOGY AND CULTURE

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The purpose of this paper is to attempt a first introduction to what looks to me like the most interesting of recent cultural developments in the Republic of Korea. I want to talk about the emergence of a new cultural movement which I will call the *Minjung* Cultural Movement. This movement is not clearly defined in the sense of having a programme based on basic concepts, statements of purpose, declarations on the means of policy implementation, or the like. Programmes, statements and declarations of this nature are somewhat vague and cover specific sub-areas within the movement, but are not central to it. I do not know whether this is due to the fact that those participating do not have a sense of its global aspects, or whether these elements merely exist in the mind of someone—myself—looking from the cultural distance of Europe. In any case, it is not always easy to decide whether or not a certain scholar or artist should be considered to belong to this movement, and it is even difficult to state exactly when the movement began or who actually started it.

All that can safely be said is that two Korean words have recently acquired additional connotations, thus becoming the underlying concepts for an overall reframing of cultural values. They play today a decisive role in discussions on culture in general, and more precisely on current trends in theology and