

Cultural politics or cultural contradiction? Prejudice against shamanism in Korean society

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Introduction

This paper is concerned with the origins of prejudice against shamanism in Korean society. To explain the widespread prejudice, cultural politics have often been employed. In many existing studies, the prejudice is explained as a result of the cultural politics between Confucianism and shamanism. There is no doubt that the framework of cultural politics is helpful in understanding some aspects of the prejudice against shamanism. However, within this framework of cultural politics, the origin of the prejudice remains, mostly outside shamanism, and is to be found in other ideologies. It is noteworthy that shamanism has been continuously suppressed despite the change of ruling ideologies throughout Korean history. Shamanism has never been welcome, but always despised, no matter what Koreans took as their ruling ideology in different periods. Why has shamanism always been oppressed in Korean society regardless of the change of the ruling ideology?

Rather than examining the cultural politics between shamanism and various dominant ideologies, I look into a problem which is, I think, much more fundamentally embedded in the suppressions. This is the cultural contradiction of shamanism in the Korean cultural system. In many studies of Korean shamanism, this problem is not properly examined, but overlooked, mainly because their informants are, primarily, shamans, who are the main supporters of shamanism, even though they share many of the negative attitudes of other Koreans. To understand the logic behind the prejudice, we need to listen more closely to the voices of ordinary Koreans. My analysis is particularly focused on ordinary Korean women, showing how their opinions about shamanism differ from those of female shamans, even though both parties are Korean women. I exemplify the cultural contradiction surrounding shamanism with the case of a Korean woman's prejudice against shamanism.

Cultural Politics

The literature on Korean shamanism has consistently reported the negative connotations associated with shamans and their practice. In Korean literature, the shaman is

described as a greedy, calculating charlatan, who callously exploits the sufferings of her clients and manipulates their credulity and trust for her own selfish gain ... The *mudang* is portrayed as a greedy, selfish, insensitive charlatan. (Wilson 1983: 115-126)

Even a Korean scholar of folklore argues that “since shamanism is regarded as superstition, Koreans do not consider it a religion” (C-K Chang 1982: 60, quoted in Howard 1990: 160). Also, criticising the current use of shamanic practice, a well-known professor Dong-Kil Kim pleads to the public in a newspaper column, “Let’s not go backward!” (*Hanguk Ilbo*, 2nd February 1984). An anthropologist Kendall also reports that the shaman is disdained in Korean society “as a neurotic at best, a charlatan at worst” (1983: 107). In traditional Korea, shamanic practice was referred to as a “matter of malignance (*heungakjisa*)” (T-S Yu 1983: 48).

Indeed, many anthropologists have commented on negative opinions toward shamanism in Korea. Their explanations have, however, mostly focused on the cultural politics between Confucianism and shamanism from the 15th century onwards (e.g. Harvey 1979, 1980; Kendall 1984, 1985; Kendall and Dix 1987; Kendall and Peterson 1983; Sered 1994; Wilson 1983). The following statement is typical:

... the Yi government represented the political triumph of neo-Confucianism... Its exponents immediately launched a comprehensive, national program of social reform in which shamans and shamanistic cults were quickly identified as foremost targets of attack... Since the fall of the Yi Dynasty in 1910, subsequent governments, including the present one [1980], have continued the traditional policy of persecuting shamans to some degree. Thus, shamans and their families continue to suffer the ostracism directed against outcastes in Korea. (Harvey 1980: 42-3).

In fact, cultural politics has often been employed to explain the suppression of shamanism not only in the study of Korean shamanism (Harvey 1979; Kendall 1985; 1996d; S-N Kim 1989), but also in the study of other “shamanisms” (e.g. Thomas and Humphrey 1994; Tsing 1993). Some authors, like Wilson, see the Confucian opposition to shamanism as motivated primarily by gender issues, and the negative attitudes to shamans as being an extension of the Confucian dismissal of women as inferior beings:

The negative stereotypes of *mudang* [Korean shaman] are the combined product of centuries of systematic oppression of *mudang* and of women’s powerlessness in traditional Korean society. ... The stereotype of *mudang* as ignorant, irrational, perverse creatures is but an extension of the Confucian stereotype for *all* Korean women. (Wilson 1983: 126, italics in original)

Can these arguments about cultural and gender politics really explain the widespread prejudice against shamanism in Korea today? I start with the question of the Confucian suppression of shamanism.

There is no doubt that there was active suppression of shamanism during the Yi Dynasty, 1392-1910, when Confucianism was the ruling ideology. In the Yi Dynasty, anybody involved in supporting shamanic practice was supposed to be punished with a hundred lashes in public according to *Gyeonggukdaejeon*, the Dynasty's law book (see G-H Park 1989: 46). Although the punishment was not implemented as strictly as it was supposed to be, it indicates the severity of the suppression at that time. Even ten lashes often killed a strong man.

However, Confucianism has been remarkably weakened in recent Korean society where it is hardly more than a superficial cultural survival. A national survey taken in 1983 shows that "only 0.5% of the 43% of the entire self-declared religious population admitted being Confucian. ... Confucianism lost its role as the provider of the leading ideology of the Korean society" (S-H Kim 1988: 5). The most rapidly growing ideology in contemporary Korea is Christianity (see A. Kim 1995). It can be said that contemporary Korea is dominated by Christianity. "Of all the non-Western nations, Korea is the most successfully Christianized" (Y-H Yoon 1992: 9). Considering the current balance of power between religious groups in contemporary Korea, it is hardly believable that Confucianism is the main source for the omnipresent prejudice towards shamanism.

This fact can be confirmed from the comments of the well-known Korean shaman Kum-Hwa Kim (see C-H Kim 2001, Chapter 6, for her details). She never spoke to me of being treated badly by Confucians, but she has often complained about Christians. For example, she said to me,

One night in 1993, when we [her *kut* team members] were performing a *kut* ritual in a mountain near Seoul, forty or so Christians interrupted us. They surrounded us closely with fire sticks in their hands. It was a really scary situation. Shouting, "Go away, Satans!", they drew a cross on our backs with red paint and even on the head of the pig we were using for the ritual. Because they outnumbered us so much, we had no choice but to bear the humiliation.

I myself witnessed an attack made by a Christian woman against Kim in 1991, when the shaman ran an office in Seoul. In order to attract more clients, the office was positioned in the main road nearby a subway station, with a large wooden plate in its front saying, "*Ingan Munhwajae 82-Na Ho Kim Kum Hwa Musok Yeonguso*" (National Living Treasure No. 82-B Kum-Hwa Kim's Research Institute of Shamanism). Consequently, subway passengers could easily identify the place as a shaman's office. It had three rooms: a waiting room, a consultation room and a kitchen. I was talking with Kim while sitting on the leather lounge in the waiting room when a woman brashly opened the door. I looked up at her. She looked to be in her late 40s and held a Bible in her hand. Without saying hello, she just shouted at us, "Go away, Satan! Repent your sins!" And then the Christian woman disappeared, shutting the door with a bang. When she had gone, the shaman Kim clicked her tongue and said to me, "You were frightened? But it is nothing to me. I've experienced this sort of thing many times. Now I am immunised."

I would argue that, in contemporary Korea, Christianity is far more effective than Confucianism in producing prejudice against shamanism. However, despite the above

assertions, I do not suggest that Christianity, rather than Confucianism, should be regarded as the main origin of the prejudice against shamanism found in Korea.

However, within this framework of cultural politics, the origin of the suppression remains, mostly, outside shamanism, and is to be found in other ideologies. However, is it really sufficient to argue that the accusations against shamans by the Korean government at that time were totally baseless, or merely an expression of Confucian hostility to women, even though they were commonplace in that period? In the early 20th Century, Western Christian missionaries brought another ideology to Korean society. In that case, do we have to change our direction for the origin of the suppression of shamanism and argue instead that “the negative image of Korean shamanism originated from the Western colonialism” (S-N Kim 1989: 213)? Why should it always be the dominant ideology which takes the prime responsibility for the suppressions? Can shamanism itself really have nothing to do with the origin of the suppressions?

Cultural Contradiction

It is noteworthy that shamanism has been continuously suppressed despite the change of ruling ideologies throughout Korean history. Shamanism has never been welcome, but always despised, no matter what Koreans took as their ruling ideology in different periods: Confucianism in the Yi Dynasty (1392-1910), Japanese Colonialism (1910-1945), and modernism and Christianity in recent Korea.

I am not discussing ancient Korean societies, such as the Bronze Age, the Three Kingdom period, and the Silla and Goryeo Dynasties, because the historical documents available are not sufficient for a proper discussion. It was 1927 when a Korean scholar Neung-Hwa Yi suggested in his article, "*Chosun musokgo*" (A study of Korean shamanism), that shamanism be regarded as the archetype of Korean thought, and that the kings of ancient Korean societies had been shamans (N-H Yi 1927). His suggestion is understandable in terms of his position in the Korean society of the 1920s. At that time, Korea was a Japanese colony, and he was a pioneer of Korean nationalism. The journal in which his article was published was *Gyemyeong* (Enlightenment). A well-known Korean historian and folklorist, Suk-Jae Yim, has been very critical of Yi, arguing that the historical materials referred to by Yi were too weak to be evidence for the connection between shamanism and ancient religions (S-J Yim 1970 and 1971). Actually, the first historical document in which *mu*, the Korean term for shaman, appears is *Yisanggugjip*, written in the 12th Century (I-H Kim 1987: 30). I agree with Yim. It is hard to find any historical evidence that the kings of ancient Korean society used communication with the spirit world or performed shamanic rituals like those of present-day Korean shamans. In any case, it is not rare to find social sanctions against shamans and their clients even in historical documents about Goryeo Dynasty (see G-H Park 1989b; T-S Yu 1975).

“The survival of shamanism in Korea is a kind of miracle: shamans have been beset and harassed for centuries. War has been waged on their ceremonies, and grim persecution has alternated with sheer contempt” (Zolla 1985: 101). In terms of the degree of oppression on shamanism, there has been no big difference between the regimes in Korean history:

[In] the neo-Confucian government of Yi Dynasty throughout its long reign ... shamans were designated *ch'omin* (“outcastes”) by government decree ...

During their period of colonization in Korea (1910-1945), the Japanese continued the policy of persecuting shamans ... The present Korean government has mounted a renewed campaign to eradicate shamanism from Korea. Police raids on shamanistic ceremonies are a commonplace occurrence. (Harvey 1979: 10-11)

Why has shamanism always been oppressed in Korean society regardless of the change of the ruling ideology? Why has the relationship between shamanism and state power been so bad, no matter what the ideology of the state? Is it because shamanism is indigenous to Korea, or a form of “popular culture” (*gicheung munwha*; *daejung munwha*) in Korean society, as assumed by many scholars (e.g. S-N Kim 1989; H-Y Cho 1984, 1987, 1990; G-H Ju 1992; I-H Kim 1987; T-G Kim 1989d and 1993)? In that case, how can we explain the suppression of shamanism implemented by the Park regime, 1961-1979, even though it strongly promoted nationalism? During that period, “People would come knocking on our doors, crying, ‘stamp out superstition’ and then they’d take our equipment and burn it. I don’t know how many times they dragged me away. ... Some people understood but others would report us to the police”, as the shaman Kum-Hwa Kim recalls (quoted in S-N Yi, 1992: 52-53). It is hard to believe that the government suppressed shamanism without any support from the common people, or in total opposition to their views.

Rather than the cultural politics between shamanism and various dominant ideologies, I shall look into a problem which is, I think, much more fundamentally embedded in the suppressions. This is the cultural contradiction of shamanism in the Korean cultural system. In many studies of Korean shamanism, this problem is not properly examined, but overlooked, mainly because their informants are, mostly, shamans, who are the main supporters of shamanism, even though they share many of the negative attitudes of other Koreans. While shamanism is stigmatised as superstition in Korean society, where “Koreans clearly regard shamans and their families as social deviants—as outcastes” (Harvey 1976: 5), existing studies are mainly focused on shamans and their arguments. The shaman-centred studies are ultimately incapable of understanding the cultural paradox of shamanism, since that paradox itself clearly indicates that shamans and their clients interact in a cultural environment where shamanism is not reconcilable to the dominant culture.

A significant aspect of Korean shamanism is that it is dominated by women. Most Korean shamans are women, and their clients are mostly women too. Women conduct *kut* or Korean shamanic ritual, and most of the participants are women. This characteristic of Korean shamanism, i.e. the dominance of women, has been highlighted in many studies (Harvey 1979, 1980; Kendall 1983, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1988a, 1989; Kendall and Dix 1987; Kendall and Peterson 1983; S-Y Yoon 1977). However, it is too naïve to assume that all Korean women are enthusiastic about shamanism. Throughout my fieldwork in 1995, I met numerous Korean women who said that they had never been in favour of shamanism. While some women had become involved in shamanism, the negative opinion towards shamanism was also commonly found among Korean women. As evidence of my assertion, I shall introduce a Korean woman, whose prejudice against shamanism I found very striking. She was the first landlady during my fieldwork in 1995 in Soy, a rural area of Korea.

Gilsu's Mother

It can be said that Gilsu's Mother was an ordinary Korean woman in Soy. She was thirty-nine years old, and born in Soy, where she had had a primary school education only, like most of the Soy women of her age. She worked on the farm with her husband and three children and her mother-in-law, just like most of her neighbours. She had never left Soy for long. Her income was similar to that of most of her neighbours. And she did not have any special experiences which might have led her to be hostile to shamanic practices. The only thing in her experience, as far as I know, which differed from her neighbours was her participation in a health project as a village health worker in 1986-1988, during which time I had worked with her as an anthropologist. However, I do not think that the project made a big impact on her life. As far as I knew, the main reason why she participated in the project was the payment she received when she attended a project meeting. I had lived at her place for three months during 1987. When I returned to Soy for fieldwork in 1995, I decided to stay at her place again because she was the most familiar person to me in the village.

In the first phase of my fieldwork, she gave me a big welcome and offered me plenty of support for my research. She allowed me to stay at her place and did not hesitate to give her permission for my tape-recording. Tape-recording was not new to her, since I had used a tape-recorder when working with her seven years before. With her assistance, I was able to reintroduce myself to most of the villagers, whose memories of me had become dim, since I had been away for a long time. She did not hesitate to answer my questions about her neighbours. It seemed to me that she thought of my research as similar to the previous time, even though I told her that my research was much more focused on shamanism this time than before.

She seemed to regard me as a helpful person in several ways. First, my boarding fee was significant for a peasant who did not have any income during the winter. One of the main concerns of the village women about me during the first month of my fieldwork was how much I paid for board per month. Another reason was her children's education. She often asked my advice about how to get a high score in the university entrance examination. Gilsu, her eldest son, was about to take the examination. Most Korean housewives were concerned about their children's education, and she was no exception. Furthermore, both Gilsu's Mother and Father were keen to get information from me about the world outside.

However, after a couple of weeks had passed, she began to turn her back on me. Whenever I asked about her neighbours, she ignored my questions. She said, "I don't feel very comfortable telling you about my neighbours' family affairs. Also, I don't really understand why you are studying such a nasty thing. Do you really think that shamans can cure patients? I have never seen a patient who got well through a *kut*. Isn't it just superstition?" She seemed to be getting more doubtful about my research. I found that she tried to listen to me transcribing tapes through the wall between her kitchen and my room. At that time I did not have an earphone. I turned the volume down as low as possible, but the wall was not sound-proof. Her neighbours peeped into my room to see what I was doing. They often stopped talking when I came in. I began to feel something was going wrong with my fieldwork. As I feared, one day she told me, looking serious, "My neighbours are saying that you are a spy!" This happened about twenty days after I began to stay at her place.

I was shocked. For me as a fieldworker in Korea, where the Cold War ideology was still vigorous, that was a really dangerous sign. My fieldwork was becoming really difficult at that point. Not only a tape-recorder but even a notebook was hard to use in the presence of my informants. When I took out a notebook and wrote something down in it, Pyongil's Grandmother cast a suspicious glimpse at me and said, "What are you writing down?" I lost confidence in continuing my research in the village. At last, Gilsu's Mother informed me that she could not feed me any more because she had got a job in a factory. What this meant was that she did not want me to stay at her place any more. When I asked her to help me find another house where I could stay, she replied, "Is it necessary for you to stay in my village?" That meant that she wanted me to leave the village. I had to find a new place by myself. My new landlady was Chisun's Grandmother, whose house was next but two to Gilsu's Mother's.

However, the job in a factory was not a real reason but a mere excuse. Gilsu's Mother kept the job for only one week. She was on casual work to replace her friend, Eunsun's Mother, who was on holiday. I realised what the reason really was a month later when I came across her on a road in the village. She said to me sarcastically,

How are you? Is your research going well? I am sure you feel much better with Chisun's Grandmother. She likes superstition a lot, doesn't she? You've got lots from her, huh? She must be a good assistant for your research. But we are not fond of that sort of superstition. ... Even though she does not like to pay medical insurance, she doesn't mind paying for a shaman. Is the shaman better than the medical doctor? Funny! How silly she is!

Gilsu's Mother seemed to be criticising not only Chisun's Grandmother but also my research. There were no talismans (*bujeok*) in Gilsu's Mother's house. This meant that she did not go to practitioners of "superstition" such as shamans. In most cases, a talisman indicated the utilisation of a shaman. As far as I could tell, every housewife who had used a shaman had one or more talismans on their walls. Providing talismans was also regarded by shamans as an important part of their work. Chisun's Grandmother got seven talismans from Soh Bosal three days after the shaman had conducted a *kut* for her. By contrast, Soy Christians never put talismans on their walls. They were very strict about not having any talismans. However, some villagers did not have talismans in their houses even though they were not Christian. Gilsu's Mother was one of these. I never saw her going to the Soy church, which was about 600 metres away from her place. When I said to her that I could not find any talismans in her place, she replied,

They're useless. I don't believe that a talisman can do anything. When one of my friends, Yongik's Mother, bought an expensive talisman for her son who was about to have a university entrance exam last year, I thought she was silly. Yongik failed the exam despite the talisman. If I had the money to purchase talismans for my children, I would spend it on private tuition instead. I have never had a talisman.

I never heard Gilsu's Mother using the term *mansin* or *bosal* when she referred to a shaman. These terms are less derogatory than *mudang* in the Korean language. However, Gilsu's Mother called Soh Bosal "Big Village Mudang". Soh Bosal lived in Big Village, next to Willow Village where Gilsu's Mother lived. She had never

visited Soh Bosal's house, even though it was only 150 metres away. I had never noticed Gilsu's Mother talking with Soh Bosal. When they encountered each other, they just passed without saying hello. Gilsu's Mother said to me, "I know her, but I have nothing to do with her. I can never understand why people visit her. She doesn't help us." Gilsu's Mother also said,

I don't understand why some people seek treatment from shamans. They should go to hospital. A shaman does not show us any visible evidence like an X-ray film. How do we know whether a shaman deceives us or not? Superstition is quite tricky. I think that the *kut* is a very expensive imposture, and the shaman is a swindler.

In fact, Soh Bosal was entirely excluded from the Soy community, suffering from the stigma imposed on her as a shaman. She recalled,

When I moved into Soy seven years ago, few people welcomed me. Everything was hard. Anse's Grandmother, who was the leader of the Association of Female Villagers (*Maeul Bunyeohoe*) at that time, was especially bad to me. When I appeared, she whispered to her friends, "A swindler is coming!". I learnt about it later.

During my stay in Soy, Soh Bosal did not play any leading role in the Soy women's community. Her role was restricted to shamanic practice. Actually, she herself was not interested in other forms of ritual such as *chesa*, the ancestor worship ritual commonly held in almost every household, and *tongche*, the village's annual ritual. They were conducted by ordinary men and women, as reported by many existing studies (e.g. C-M Kim 1993; K-K Lee 1977, 1985).

With Gilsu's Mother, who had shown such strong prejudice, it was not easy for me to build up a good rapport again. She always kept her distance from me and did not show me any friendship. It was obvious to me that she gossiped with her village friends about my research. I was very concerned about her because she could endanger my project severely.

A few months after I moved out from her place, I had an opportunity to give Gilsu's Mother a ride to a hospital where her mother was hospitalised. I was very happy that the occasion came up, because she had not liked to ride in my car before. Even though I often offered her a free ride, she did not seem to feel comfortable. But on that occasion she wanted to deliver a heavy box to her sister-in-law who lived in the central township, and she asked me to help her with this job. Also, it was time for her daughter to go to school. She sat with her daughter in the back seat. It took about twenty minutes to get to the central township from the village. She seemed to have very complicated feelings towards me as I drove the car: both grateful and cynical. She spoke to the back of my head from the back seat,

I'm sorry, but I really don't understand why you are studying superstition. It's been many weeks since you began studying superstition here. Can you tell me about any patient who has really recovered after a *kut*? I have never seen a patient who got better through *kut* ritual treatment. Muno's a good example. His illness is getting worse even though his mother has held three or four *kut* rituals for him. Why are you studying such a nasty thing? How can a patient get better without the proper medical treatment? You have said that your university is supporting your research, but I am afraid that you are wasting

time and money. Thank you for the lift anyway, but I really can't understand your research.

I had a glimpse of her in the car's rear mirror. She was talking like a judge, but I could feel that she was trying to understand me, even though she had not changed her negative attitude about my research. Sometimes I felt sorry for her, because my fieldwork interrupted her life. I must have been a great burden to her, since she had tried to get me to leave her village. It seemed to me that my research was a mystery and a source of confusion to her. She had a common sense view about shamanism, just like other ordinary Korean women.

"The Shaman Department of Seoul National University"

There was a moment when she began to show her friendship to me again. From late spring I gave a hand to my neighbours in their agricultural work. I spent one or two hours on this job every morning instead of other exercise. Even though this job took all day long, sometimes, because it was hard to leave in the middle of work, it was very helpful for me to get a good rapport with them. It seemed to me that the cooperative work and sweat created a feeling of community. Everybody welcomed a free hand. Actually agricultural work was quite boring for them, as sometimes they worked alone for a long time in the fields. They often said, "Even a bit of encouragement helps with this boring job." Gilsu's Mother was no exception. She welcomed me whenever I came to give a hand. One morning I helped her to plant sesame in her dry field, which was quite big. Gilsu's Father was out at a casual job in a factory. After an hour's work, we had a break. It was a very sunny day. I was enjoying the soft and fresh morning breeze. Giving me a drink and some snacks, she asked me tentatively,

You graduated from the Seoul National University, didn't you? Does the Seoul National University have a shaman department? I don't know what sort of departments the university has, but you must have graduated from the Shaman Department of Seoul National University. Am I right?

I could not help laughing. The Shaman Department of Seoul National University? What a puzzling idea! It must have come to her mind as a result of her long struggle to understand my research on shamanism. How hard my research topic was for her to understand!

Let us explore further this question of the "Shaman Department of Seoul National University." As far as I know, every Korean regards the Seoul National University as the best university in Korea, and almost every high school student is keen to be a student there. The Seoul National University is a symbol of success in contemporary Korea. The University's graduates occupy a large proportion of dominant positions such as government ministers, company presidents, professors and so on. While the Seoul National University is a symbol of success, the shaman is a symbol of misfortune in Korean society. No Korean wants to become a shaman. There are plenty of interviews in which many different shamans confess that they never wanted to become shamans (e.g. C. Choi 1987; J-Y Hahm 1993; Harvey 1979; Howard 1990; R-S Hwang 1986 and 1988; Kendall 1988a and 1996a; S-N Kim 1989; T-K Kim 1988; H-J Park 1992; Sun 1992; C-H Yi 1993). Harvey describes this matter well:

Still, Deaconess Chang resisted, thinking she preferred death to being a *mudang*. (Harvey 1979: 221).

I have never met or heard a Korean shaman who did not have experiences of misfortune before becoming a shaman. Misfortune experiences are one of the most essential prerequisites for becoming a shaman. In these contexts, “The Shaman Department of Seoul National University” was composed of two contradictory symbols: success and misfortune. It was an invention of a Korean woman trying to understand my research on shamanism, which involved these two contradictory symbols. I did not think that I was a very successful person in terms of my social position, but Gilsu’s Mother did, as I was a graduate of Seoul National University. She seemed to think that I had no need to be involved in shamanism, with which only people of misfortune would get involved. She often said, “How happy I would be if Gilsu got in to Seoul National University!” However, she never said, “How happy I would be if I were to hold a shamanic ritual at my place!”

Concluding Remarks

What I have tried to do in this paper is to show how ordinary Koreans feel about shamanism and about the contexts in which they may be forced to make use of it. The material I have presented supports my suggestion that the prejudice against shamanism which is commonly found in Korean society mainly originates from the cultural contradiction surrounding shamanism in the Korean cultural system, rather than from the cultural politics between shamanism and dominant ideologies such as Confucianism and Christianity. This cultural contradiction explains why shamanism has been suppressed in Korean society regardless of the change of its ruling ideologies. Because of the cultural contradiction, shamanism is still seriously stigmatised and its validity is denied by Koreans. I argue that shamanism has a contradictory position within the Korean cultural system, and that this cultural contradiction is the main origin of prejudices against shamanism found in Korean society. From this perspective, I do not think that shamanism is a form of popular culture.

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