

Syncretic Progression of Korean Shamanism for Spiritual Guidance in Contemporary Society

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Abstract

Korean shamanism is a traditional spiritual practice in Korea that has its roots in ancient shamanistic rituals originating in Siberia that has been altered over time to align with Korea's cultural beliefs and values. Shamanism had played a vital role in Korean society throughout its history but faced growing criticism during the Joseon period when it conflicted with Confucianist and Christian tenets. Moreover, shamanism was viewed as "unmodern" and irrational throughout the Japanese colonial period and even during the early decades of Korea's independence. Notwithstanding the public display of certain government-sanctioned rituals in an effort to uphold the country's cultural heritage, many shamans in today's society have resorted to conducting more private rituals oftentimes conducted in secrecy. Nevertheless, Korean shamanism has endured and arguably has experienced a resurgence in recent years, even in the midst of the country's widespread urbanization and global diaspora of Koreans. This paper attempts to consider some historical and contemporary issues around Korean shamanism, including the role of mudangs in preserving Korea's cultural heritage as well as guiding and healing individuals spiritually. Additionally, concerns about the commercialization of shamanic practices and the appropriation of shamanic symbols and rituals in contemporary popular culture are analyzed. Overall, Korean shamanism has been effective in adapting syncretically to remain an important part of Korea's cultural heritage and identity, and its practitioners and supporters continue to advocate for its recognition and preservation within Korea and beyond through the Korean diaspora for both emotional support and spiritual guidance.

Keywords: neo-shamanism, religion, anthropology, Korea, divination