

history. She also offers a method and suggestions as to how the material can be brought to life. It is therefore hoped that her book will stimulate other researchers to turn their efforts to this seemingly inconspicuous source for information about Japanese life.

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KOREA

KIM, CHONGHO. *Korean Shamanism: The Cultural Paradox*. Vitality of Indigenous Religions Series. Aldershot, Hampshire, UK: Ashgate, 2003. xxii + 248 pages. Maps, photographs, figures, tables, bibliography, index. Paper £17.99; ISBN 0-7546-3185-0. Hardback £47.50; ISBN 0-7546-3184-2.

Kim Chongho has approached his study of Korean shamanism from a unique perspective, that is, a focus on the “ordinary people who make use of shamans” (xiii). He states that previous studies largely examine the shamans who conduct the rituals and their worldviews, and that such an approach is not able fully to explain the cultural paradox of shamanism. What is the cultural paradox of Korean shamanism? Kim explains this in the form of a question in his preface: “why do Koreans use shamans even though prejudice against shamanism is universal and much consultation of shamans goes on in secret?” (xiii). The basic question behind the book is thus intriguing and worthy of pursuit.

Kim’s research for this volume took place over several fieldtrips to Korea, between 1991 to 1996, with the greatest amount of material collected over eight months from late 1994 through August 1995. He also comments—at numerous points in this volume—that his study “would not have been successful without my lifelong experience of Korean culture and society and long-term work experience as an anthropological researcher in Korea before this project” (9). The research for this study was mostly conducted in a small village south of Seoul, but Kim also supplements this with the experiences of his relatives, particularly his mother-in-law.

At the outset of the volume, Kim attempts to establish the uniqueness of this work vis-à-vis other scholarship, particularly the extensive research conducted by Laurel Kendall on this topic.¹ He sees Kendall as a “Western feminist, [who] romanticizes Korean shamanism” as a women’s religion that arose as a result of their suppression by the patriarchal system (xiv). Additionally, he tells his readers that he wants to demonstrate how the cultural paradox of Korean shamanism affected him as a native Korean, including his feelings of “shame associated with this topic” (xv). Thus, his approach is aimed at providing insight into how Koreans understand shamans.

This volume provides much insight into the motivations for several shamanic rituals attended by Kim. He provides many details—in fact, he oftentimes bludgeons his readers with spurious minutiae—and the reader is able to gain an understanding of why and what sort of situations prompt Koreans to seek out shamans. Kim refers to this as the “field of misfortune” and shamanism is in practice the framework by which most Koreans deal with experiences of misfortune (100). The paradox, according to Kim, is that although people condemn shamanic practices and beliefs, they nonetheless continue to turn to shamans when struck by misfortune. All in all, this theme runs throughout the volume and seems to be confirmed by the research presented. In this respect, the volume offers an additional and welcome viewpoint on shamanic rites because it moves away from shaman-centered research and instead examines the broader context in which shamans are used.

In spite of this, I found myself often irritated at the superior tone of Kim’s narrative. It

almost seems that the writer wishes to convey to his reader that *only* a Korean could understand what he had discovered in his study. At numerous points in the book, Kim comments that his being a “native Korean” allowed him to have a deep understanding of Korean culture (e.g. 9, 34, 56, 90, 91, 158). This is particularly pronounced when he attempts to establish the superiority of his work over that of the aforementioned Kendall, described as a “Western feminist anthropologist” (e.g. xiv, 107) or otherwise diminished for not being Korean (69, footnote 2). Kendall’s record does not need to be validated by this reviewer; I cite Kim’s many criticisms of her research by way of illustrating a larger problem with the approach in this volume: the author’s opinion that his findings are something that only a Korean researcher could arrive at, and are superior to the research results of non-Koreans.

In spite of Kim’s attitude of superiority, there are numerous factual errors in his work, particularly in regards to his understanding of Korean history. He states that Buddhism and Confucianism competed in Korea for over five hundred years (36); in actuality, both belief systems entered the peninsula in the fourth century. The relationship between these two worldviews varied greatly depending upon the period, social class, and the social sphere in which the two ideologies interacted. Kim also claims that there is no evidence that the kings of ancient Korean kingdoms performed shamanic rites (191, footnote 2). However, there are numerous ancient records—both Chinese and Korean—that demonstrate political rulers conducted rites to the heavens to ensure good harvests or success in battle. Such rites are considered the predecessors of the village shamanic rites conducted in Chosŏn Korea (1392–1910). Finally, Kim’s basic understanding of the relationship between women and the dominant Confucian ideological system of Chosŏn seems, at best, simplistic (147–48, 156). Chosŏn was not a monolithic entity. During its five hundred years, social conditions varied greatly depending upon one’s status and geographical location. We cannot, as such, make generalizations based upon “women” as a single group.

Kim’s volume thus leaves me with mixed feelings. His research in this volume centering on a client-centered approach to Korean shamanism is good and requires no justification on the basis that the author is Korean. However, his arrogant attitude and rambling (oftentimes diary-like) narrative style make reading this volume exceedingly difficult. Unfortunately, after careful consideration of this book, my overall feelings ended upon such a negative chord.

NOTES

1. Kendall has published numerous books and papers on Korean shamanism and is considered a leading figure in this field. Her publications include *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits: Women in Korean Ritual Life* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1985); *The Life and Hard Times of a Korean Shaman: Of Tales and the Telling of Tales* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1988) among others.

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CHINA

ZHAO DEGUANG 趙德光, ed. (2003). *Ashima wenxian huibian* 阿詩瑪文學彙編 [A Collection of Ashima Literature]. Kunming: Yunnan minzu chubanshe 昆明云南民族出版社.