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From Controversy to Culture: Commodification of Contested Heritage in Gunsan and the Gangneung Danoje Festival in South Korea

Dijk, Claire van

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From Controversy to Culture:

Commodification of Contested Heritage in Gunsan and the Gangneung Danoje Festival in South Korea

By

Claire van Dijk

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Supervised by Dr. Christopher Green

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Introduction

As the traditional Farmer's Performance was held next to the giant wooden swing and the UNESCO booth, the visitors at the Nanjang Market enjoyed their sacred rice wine and the warmth of spring. Walking along the Namdaecheon Stream, I could see international musical performances combined with shamanic rituals, no sign of protest against the preservation of Korean shamanism. In Gangneung, South Korea, the end of May marks the beginning of the Gangneung Danoje Festival, a practice listed on the UNESCO World Heritage list for intangible cultural heritage, despite the ongoing controversies surrounding shamans in Korean politics.[1] About 345 kilometers to the southwest, buildings constructed during the Japanese colonial occupation of Korea (1910-1945) stand firmly along the Modern Cultural Belt near the coastline of Gunsan. Among them, visitors taking in the "retro charms of the city streets"[2]. The buildings, before so condemned for their colonial context, are now Registered Heritage in South Korea.[3] These are two examples of controversial cultural practices and structures in Korea that are now being preserved, commodified and promoted to a broader public. The choice whether or not to preserve specific forms of heritage reflects the governmental and societal perception of a nation-state's own 'national history'. When these historic structures or cultural practices are designated as national heritage, the dominant perception of controversial sites can drastically change. Preserving their existence and promoting tourism establishes a different type of meaning to history in the present.[4] It can tell us something about contemporary understandings of Korean history and how heritage influences what it means to "be Korean".

This research will examine the process of 'heritagization' and the subsequent commodification of cultural practices and structures in South Korea that are surrounded by domestic contestation. Two case studies of tangible and intangible forms of heritage in this contested context will be studied: the heritagization of Gunsan City and the Gangneung Danoje Festival.

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[1] Kwang Ok Kim, "After the Heritage. The Fate of Gangneung Danoje between Religious Ritual and Cultural Festival," In *Heritage and Religion in East Asia*, ed. Shu-Li Wang, Michael Rowlands and Yujie Zhu (London: Routledge, 2020): 55.
[2] Hye Young Kim, "Relishing Retro in Gunsan," Koreanet, March 17, 2020. https://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/FoodTravel/view?articleId=183322. ; Hae-rin Lee, "Gangneung carries Spirit of Communal Harmony through Danoje Tradition," *The Korea Times*, July 6, 2023. https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/lifestyle/travel-food/20230706/gangneung-carries-spirit-of-communal-harmony-through-danoje-tradition.
[3] Hyun Kyung Lee, "Beyond "Imagined" Nostalgia: Gunsan's Heritagization of Japanese Colonial Architecture in South Korea," *International Journal of Asian Studies* 20, no. 1 (2023): 98.
[4] Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Routledge, 2007), 48-53.

The city of Gunsan on Korea's Western coast was transformed into an essential trade port during the Japanese occupation. The Japanese colonial forces built infrastructure such as storage buildings, railroads, and harbors. Due to political disinterest, many of these buildings have survived until today.[5] The local government has now been working on the project "Modern Cultural Belt", as it heritagizes the buildings and transforms them into tourist destinations. They are making sure the colonial buildings are preserved and commodified rather than neglected. Its most significant issue is the contested perception of the Japanese colonial period, and the extent to which its commodification should be celebrated.[6] Gunsan is an example of commodified and modernized tangible heritage, where the sentiment of Korean 'victimhood' is expressed but also challenged, and where commodification for light-hearted tourism melts with these national identity narratives.

The Danoje Festival is held every year in the city of Gangneung, celebrating the 5th day of the 5th month on the Lunar Calendar. The festival consists largely of spiritual shamanic rituals and performances.[7] The UNESCO listing of the Gangneung Danoje festival as a specific, regional and "Korean" form of intangible heritage in 2005 has brought a great sense of prestige and popularity to the festival.[8] Due to multiple ongoing political scandals surrounding shamans and the growth of Christianity, the shamanic religious activities have become controversial. At the same time, some forms of shamanic spiritual guidance have actually become more popular among younger people.[9] The festival is being formed into a tourist attraction for the region, which makes the preservation of actual lived cultural practices possible, but also affects local culture.[10] The core of this intangible heritage is thus contested, and within its preservation, different notions of national identity are promoted.

By analyzing and comparing these two case studies, this thesis aims to answer the following question: How are contested narratives of national identity conveyed in the process of commodification of heritage in the cases of Gunsan City and the Gangneung Danoje Festival in South Korea?

[5] Lee, "Beyond "Imagined" Nostalgia," 91-94.
[6] Lee, "Beyond "Imagined" Nostalgia," 95-97.
[7] Kim, "After the Heritage," 55.
[8] Xiaojun Ke, "South Korea's Intangible Cultural Heritage Claims and China's Ontological Security," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 28, no. 4 (2022): 476-477.
[9] KTimes, "Why Shamanism Continues to Thrive in Korea," *The Korea Times*, October 18, 2024. https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/southkorea/society/20241018/why-shamanism-continues-to-thrive-in-korea.
[10] Kim, "After the Heritage," 55-58.

The research will look at the way heritagization of the two case studies is done, how it is influenced by domestic political divisions, and how its commodification in turn changes the significance of those domestic conflicts. I argue that local governments in these case studies are increasingly minimizing the influence of domestic contestation surrounding the heritage, by making use of popular trends that evoke a sense of "national" nostalgia and entertainment.[11] This qualitative research will consist of discourse- and content-analysis focused on national identity and heritage tourism.

In order to answer the research question, this study will be divided into three chapters; the first chapter contains a thorough theoretical framework for the subsequent analysis of the two case studies. A clearer picture can then be painted of the specific Korean political and social context in which the case studies exist. The second chapter will cover the research on the case study of Gunsan City, the contested narratives surrounding the Japanese colonial architecture and the current level of heritagization. The third chapter analyzes the case study of the Gangneung Danoje Festival, the commodification of the shamanic rituals and my own experience at the festival. The final part consists of a discussion about the negative and positive outcomes and a conclusion of the research.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

National Identity

Important components in earlier research on the relationship between controversial heritage and national identity often have to do with decolonization, collective memory and the nature of international relations. In the academic field of heritage and memory studies, these topics have become increasingly relevant, as cultural heritage and its protection tend to be linked to the formation of national identity through policies. Specifically in relation to the dominant heritage discourse in Korea and Japan, the scholar Hyun Kyung Lee has written extensively on the issue of 'difficult heritage'. Much work on this topic, including Lee's, has focused on the examples of the Seodaemun Prison and the Gyeongbokgung Palace and Government-General Building in Seoul.[12] These discussions will be used to build on the two aforementioned case

[11] Lee, "Beyond "Imagined" Nostalgia," 91-92.
[12] Hyun Kyung Lee, "The Problematic Past and Difficult Heritage: The Japanese Colonial Occupation of Korea and its Architectural Legacies", in '*Difficult Heritage' in Nation Building. South Korea and Post-conflict*

studies in South Korea. The source of many of the discourses around national identity in relation to heritage can be traced to Benedict Anderson and his 'imagined communities' rhetoric, as Lee also discusses.[13] Anderson's theory argues that the nation is a construct, its existence depending on the perception of the people within it who imagine they belong to the same group.[14] Although different schools of thought debate about the origin of nations, of which the modernists and primordialists are the most apparent opponents, Lee argues that all theories essentially come to a similar conclusion; that national identity is a "sense" of belonging between a group of people. That feeling of unity is then emphasized through comparing the group to 'other' groups who are essentially different.[15] This view on the creation of national identity is useful to understand the way the "nation" in Korea is perceived and how different types of heritage are popular or controversial. I argue that the modernist theorists such as Anderson best explain current issues of nationalism and the perception of cultural heritage issues, as individuals tend to link themselves to national heritage because they imagine it as a product of their own past. When it comes to popular narratives in Korea, the primordialist theory takes the forefront, as the Korean community as 'homogenous' and as a product of its history is an apparent idea in the way local or national governments decide to promote Korean culture.[16]

Heritage and 'Difficult' Heritage

McDowell has argued that heritage is 'carefully selected history', and therefore, can be formed and reproduced through politics in a manner that supports certain narratives and creates a collective idea of a national identity.[17] Important in the formation of that identity is the collective memory that heritage can produce. The way Korean politics deal with the memory of the Japanese colonial period is an important indication for the way heritage from this period is treated, which we will see mostly in the case of Gunsan City.

In order to research two cases of Korean heritage, it is important to cover earlier theories written about what is currently meant by 'heritage'. Laurajane Smith's work extensively covers the place of heritage in modern societies and the authoritative discourse surrounding most of

Japanese Colonial Occupation Architecture, ed. Hyun Kyung Lee (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 1-2.

[13] Lee, "The Problematic Past," 19-20.

[14] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised edition (London: Verso, 2006).

[15] Lee, "The Problematic Past," 20-21.

[16] Lee, "The Problematic Past," 21.

[17] Sara McDowell, "Heritage, Memory and Identity," In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, ed. Brian Graham and Peter Howard (London: Ashgate, 2008), 40-41.

heritage issues in research and in practice.[18] This discourse acts as if heritage is inherently historical and that one can pass it over through generations without change, therefore forming present identities. However, as Smith has argued and as is useful to understand in this research, heritage can be defined as a 'cultural practice' that is constructing and shaping issues of the present.[19] That practice is what can be called 'heritagization'.[20] Heritage can be used to create meaning to present human life and, as a consequence, is dominant in shaping national identity. As is becoming increasingly apparent in a politically tumultuous world, heritage can then not only be used to produce statements about the past of a national collective, but also to support current political ideologies and assertions of power.[21] Because that heritage is deemed important to preserve, groups and individuals in power can then decide how to present it.[22] This will also be a useful way to view the process in which tangible and intangible heritage in Korea is 'heritagized', either through the influence of large international organizations such as UNESCO, or by local governments and groups. The two case studies of Gunsan City and the Gangneung Danoje Festival in Korea contain 'painful' Korean pasts, namely the memory of the Japanese colonial period and the existence and past of controversial religious practices.

Research has been done on the 'cultural conflict' that both of these issues have been causing mainly between nation-states. Local issues become national issues through the creation of national memory that opposes the historical narratives of "other" nation-states. Especially important in the Korean context, is the presence of North Korea and their growing tendency to promote their 'national heritage' as distinct from other states. Kim and Kim explain how since the 1990s, the North Korean government began showing interest in preserving tangible forms of heritage between its borders and promoting a type of national culture.[23] From the early 2000s and especially since Kim Jong un's presidency in 2012 onwards, the state has been increasingly aligning itself with the UNESCO World Heritage conventions and listings in the hopes of demonstrating their willingness to preserve domestic tangible and intangible heritage, and mostly to partake in the battle of national cultural recognition and power.[24] The most contested example was the 2002 application of the 'Goguryeo Tombs' to UNESCO by North Korea. As

[18] Smith, *Uses of Heritage*."
[19] Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 11-13.
[20] Lee, "The Problematic Past", 24.
[21] Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 48-53.
[22] Smith, *Uses of Heritage,* 29.
[23] Jihon Kim and Myoung-Shin Kim, "Changes in North Korea's Heritage Law and Policy in Relation to UNESCO World Heritage during Kim Jong-Un's Regime," *International Journal of Cultural Policy : CP* 30, no. 3 (2024): 289.
[24] Kim and Kim, "Changes in North Korea's Heritage Law," 289-290, 299.

China claimed the tombs also belonged to Northeast China, with the Chinese state setting up the "Northeast China History Project", UNESCO eventually awarded both North Korea and China with world heritage status in 2004.[25] This meant not only international recognition of the importance of heritage efforts in North Korea, but also the recognition of North Korea as a full-fledged and legitimate nation-state to South Korea.[26] It meant South Korea could not ignore the heritage present within their borders, and the efforts to preserve sites and apply to the UNESCO World Heritage List became an issue of international competition pertaining mostly to North Korea, China and Japan.[27]

Therefore, the UNESCO World Heritage Listing has in many senses increased the tensions that 'battling' for a place on the heritage list has provoked.[28] Trifu has emphasized how with the growth of cultural diplomacy and soft power, next to states like North Korea and China, both South Korea and Japan have increasingly been interested in promoting their cultural heritage, giving historic buildings and practices a positive outward story.[29] With the enactment of the Cultural Properties Conservation Law in South Korea in 1962, and the country joining UNESCO in 1950, the interest in listing and protecting what was deemed Korean cultural heritage began to expand.[30] Especially from the 1990s, the combination of increased interest in heritage listing and UNESCO, and the growing popularity of Korean cultural property, caused the issues of 'difficult' heritage to become evident. Lee writes how many terms have been created to describe this type of heritage that is not positive in the collective national memory, with words such as 'negative', 'dissonant', 'contested', 'undesirable' or 'dark' heritage all being used for the same issue.[31] Rico has defined negative heritage as "sites that may be interpreted by a group as commemorating conflict, trauma and disaster".[32]

[25] Marco Milani and Antonio Fiori, "The Impact of Political Alternation on South Korea's Foreign Policy," in *The Korean Paradox : Domestic Political Divide and Foreign Policy in South Korea*, ed. Milani, Dian and Fiori (Abingdon, Oxon; Routledge, 2019), 40.
[26] Marco Milani, "Progressive and Conservative Visions of Inter-Korean relations," in *The Korean Paradox : Domestic Political Divide and Foreign Policy in South Korea*, ed. Milani, Dian and Fiori (Abingdon, Oxon; Routledge, 2019), 54.
[27] Milani and Fiori," Impact of Political Alternation," 40-41.
[28] Ioan Trifu, Pieter Wagenaar and Jeroen Rodenberg, "Dealing with a Difficult Past: Japan, South Korea and the UNESCO World Heritage List," In *Cultural Contestation* (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2018), 199-202.
[29] Trifu, "Dealing with a Difficult Past," 203.
[30] Kim, "After the Heritage," 55.
[31] Lee, "The Problematic Past," 27.
[32] Trinidad Rico, "Negative Heritage: The Place of Conflict in World Heritage," *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites* 10, no. 4 (2008): 344.

Political Divide in Korea and its Impact on Heritage

Many of the national political discussions revolve around Korea's position to other powerful neighbouring states and the relationship with them. Especially the historical narratives around Korea's relation with Japan, and the question of how to view Korea's relation with China now that it is expanding its power in the Asia Pacific and beyond, have become of vital importance in domestic politics.[33] Milani, Fiori and Dian have extensively written about the 'paradox' in Korean domestic politics, especially with regards to foreign policy. Particularly after a series of dictatorial presidencies, the nation's democratization starting in 1987 led to an increasing division in domestic politics, with two main political sides intensifying; progressive and conservative.[34] This conflict in domestic politics has had major influence on the way some groups and politicians approach the preservation of certain heritage sites and practices. The president in office and their political colour have been greatly affecting Korea's foreign policies and the attitude between the heritage that will be discussed in this research.[35]

Since the democratic elections in 1987 up until very recently, when conservative president Yoon Suk-yeol's impeachment was upheld on march 31st 2025, South Korea has had five conservative presidents in office.[36] Three presidents in office have been representing progressive parties. The progressive president Roh Moo-hyun, and conservative presidents Park Geun-hye and Yoon Suk-yeol have been impeached, all in the 21st century. It demonstrates how presidential actions can become unpopular quite quickly, and the country can be very politically polarized.[37] A progressive president seems to often replace a conservative one, and vice-versa. Important issues that are much discussed are the relationship with the United States, China and Japan, the stance against North Korea and its security concerns, and the state of democracy and corruption.[38] For the cases of Gunsan City and the Gangneung Danoje Festival, the most apparent political and societal contestations in relation to 'progressives' and 'conservatives' are the attitude towards the Japanese colonial period and the presence of shamanism in Korea. The more progressive faction of Korean politics tend to have a very negative perception of the Japanese colonial period from 1910 until 1945, and

[33] Marco Milani, Matteo Dian and Antonio Fiori, "Interpreting South Korea's Foreign Policy and Security Policy under the "Asian Paradox", in *The Korean Paradox : Domestic Political Divide and Foreign Policy in South Korea*, ed. Milani, Dian and Fiori (Abingdon, Oxon; Routledge, 2019), 1-2, 7-8.
[34] Milani, Dian and Fiori,"Interpreting South Korea's Foreign Policy," 3.
[35] Milani and Fiori, "Impact of Political Alternation," 30.
[36] Jean Mackenzie, "South Korea's President has been Removed from Power: What Happens Now?" *BBC,* 4 april, 2025*,* https://bbc.com/news/articles/cz01mjv0v0go.
[37] Milani and Fiori, "Impact of Political Alternation," 49.
[38] Milani and Fioro, "Impact of Political Alternation," 49-50.

Japan's contemporary attitude towards their wartime crimes. Especially under the leadership of Abe Shinzo, Japan has become notorious for the way they approach their colonial history in school curriculums and international relations.[39] The more conservative faction tends to approach Japan differently; they view the relationship with their neighbour as economically necessary. Japan apologizing for their colonial past is of less importance than the benefits of reconciling with their strategic neighbour and sustaining the triangular relation with the United States.[40] As for shamanism, although its long cultural history is somewhat celebrated by both political sides, due to multiple controversies in which conservative presidents and leaders have used shamans in high decision-making positions, the progressive faction has grown resentment for its existence.[41] Most conservative presidents tend to present themselves as Christians, and as rational politicians. However, several of them have been caught using shamans as spiritual guides and giving them access to highly confidential political and security documents, including the former presidents Park Geun hye and Yoon Suk-yeol.[42]

Kim and Kim have shown how progressive and conservative political factions have clear disagreements when it comes to major political issues, and their decisions have an impact on the way cultural heritage is viewed. The fact that opinions about the preservation of some forms of cultural religious expressions or historic structures diverge makes their existence in a 'Korean national identity' inherently contested, and it is clear this identity is not just one 'idea' among Korean people. These issues offer a better understanding of the reasons why heritage might be contested at all; political narratives greatly affect the perception of national and cultural identities. The question remains if that divide still holds meaning among younger generations in an era in which the popularity of heritage tourism and entertainment keeps growing. This will be further dealt with in the case study chapters.

[39] Brad Glosserman, "South Korea-Japan Relations. The Comfort Women Lens," in *The Korean Paradox : Domestic Political Divide and Foreign Policy in South Korea*, ed. Milani, Dian and Fiori (Abingdon, Oxon; Routledge, 2019), 125-126.
[40] Glosserman, "South-Korea Japan Relations," 131.
[41] Min-kyung Jung, "Shamans and Presidents: A History of Strange Intermixing in South Korean Politics," *The Korea Herald*, January 6, 2025, https://www.koreaherald.com/article/10383992.
[42] Shalon Park, "The Politics of Impeaching Shamanism: Regulating Religions in the Korean Public Sphere," *Journal of Church and State* 60, no. 4 (2018): 636.

Heritage Tourism and the Case Studies

This contested image of specific cultural heritage does not promote certain tangible and intangible heritage positively. However, over recent years, heritage has increasingly been transformed into tourist spaces. Local and national governments are trying to put a positive spin on difficult national history, both to increase the chances for UNESCO listing and to attract tourists. The negative association that is created around 'difficult' heritage in national memory needs adjustment in order to achieve this.[43] Research done on heritage tourism is therefore useful to understand the specific case studies in this paper. Hyung Yu Park extensively writes about the development of heritage tourism, the increased commodification of heritage and its implications on national identity.[44] Policies created to promote tourism to heritage sites can cause historical events to either be forgotten or remembered by a national public. This also means that the promotion of heritage can influence the perception of religious practices.[45] Three notions are most important in this research on Gunsan City and the Gangneung Danoje Festival, namely the use of nostalgia in commodification of heritage, city branding and religious tourism.

In the case of Gunsan City, Lee has emphasized the usage of nostalgia for a past time that has extremely negative connotations, but still attracts visitors.[46] By promoting a heritage site as a place for tourism and light-hearted recreation, a positive spin is given to negative heritage that makes a controversial place much more attractive to a broader national and international public. The idea of 'city branding' by local governments causes a growth of "imagined nostalgia' around certain time periods that are being romanticized through promoting the existing heritage.[47] Kim's work will be useful in researching religious tourism in the case of the Gangneung Danoje Festival. A feast that is closely related to Shamanism, which was heavily oppressed especially during the Japanese colonial period, is now promoted as a tourist attraction.[48] Saeji has written about the commodification of religious practices at the festival, and how Shamanism has been turned into heritage.[49] UNESCO listing specifically has had important implications for the development and globalization of the festival, as well as the

[43] Lee, "Beyond "Imagined" Nostalgia," 91.
[44] Park, "Politics of Heritage Tourism," 78-79.
[45] Park, "Politics of Heritage Tourism," 79-81.
[46] Lee, "Beyond "Imagined" Nostalgia," 91.
[47] Lee, "Beyond "Imagined" Nostalgia," 92.
[48] Kim, "After the Heritage," 57.
[49] Cedarbough T. Saeji, "Replacing Faith in Spirits with Faith in Heritage: A Story of the Management of the Gangneung Danoje Festival," In *Safeguarding Intangible Heritage: Practices and Policies,* ed. Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa (London: Routledge, 2018), 158.

image the local traditions have gained.[50] The implications for locals and the practices they have been engaging in will be further discussed in this paper.

This research will also discuss the promotion of Gunsan City and the Gangneung festival by official promotional material and websites, and through my own experience at the festival in Gangneung. Especially important in this thesis is the promotion of heritage through using popular trends among younger generations. The above-mentioned literature, as well as UNESCO documentation, are useful in combination with the discussed research that has been done on both heritage sites. These theories on the formation of national identity, the process of heritagization, the political divide, and the use of nostalgia, and 'dark' and religious tourism will be used in the analysis of the two Korean case studies in this paper. Literature on the case studies of Gunsan City and the Gangneung Danoje festival can consequently be compared, and a clearer picture of how those contested narratives about national identity are constructed, can be drawn.

Chapter 2: The Heritagization of Gunsan City

Introducing Gunsan

Gunsan City is located on the West coast of South Korea, in the North Cholla Province just beneath the Geum River. The city of Gunsan is a port city, originating from just before the Japanese colonial period at the beginning of the 20th century. The port was primarily used for the export of grain and rice, and the industry as well as the population grew rapidly under Japanese command starting from the 1910s. It grew into a well-known international port at its peak.[51] This means that the Japanese have largely created industrial and administrative buildings in the city and region, and built the vast majority of the infrastructure, transportation systems and seaport structures that were and are used to facilitate the trade industry.[52] Although the region flourished economically during the colonial period, the city experienced extreme economic decline starting from the liberation period and especially from the 1960s through the 1980s. Its location as an important colonial seaport became less significant and the Korean

[50] Saeji, "Replacing Faith in Spirits," 156-157.
[51] Changhyo Yi and Junyoung Ryu, "Growth, Decline and the Challenges Facing a Policy-Dependent and Former-Colonial City: Gunsan, Korea," *Cities* 43 (2015): 37.
[52] Lee, "Beyond Imagined Nostalgia," 93-94.

authoritative government under the presidency of Park Chung Hee did not include the region in plans for economic developments. Both Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo-hwan mainly sought to uphold the development of the region they themselves were born in, leaving behind some other parts of the nation in their plans.[53] This is an important reason for the preservation of Japanese colonial architecture in Gunsan and for a lot of the physical structures to stay untouched. Many of the local citizens did not have much of an opinion on the existence of some colonial architecture; they were viewed merely as old, empty buildings in decline.[54]

However, to solve the dire economic situation, the Gunsan Municipal Government has been actively restructuring the city center since the early 2000s and 2010s, and has been promoting the remaining architecture as products 'stuck in time' where people can experience the past.[55] Gunsan has now become a city of historic tourism for a time that has gained such a negative connotation within the idea of Korean national identity.[56] Next to that, Gunsan also hosts a U.S. Airbase, adding somewhat of an international image to the city.[57] This chapter aims to research the way Japanese colonial architecture in Gunsan is being commodified, it seeks to answer the question on how narratives around Korean national identity are expressed through 'contested' heritage in the city and how heritagization of tangible heritage under those conditions of domestic political contestation is transformed. Gunsan represents a shift in narrative, in which heritage tourism, city branding, and the usage of nostalgia and popular terms among younger people are getting more significant than the politics surrounding Korean nationality.

Significance of the Japanese Colonial Past in Korea

The period of Japanese colonial occupation of Korea, from 1910 until 1945, has been shaped into a time of exploitation, oppression, cultural assimilation and suffering within public opinion and education and in the larger idea of Korean national identity. A large part of South Korean people perceive this part of the national past as shameful and negative. Industrial, infrastructural and economic changes that Japan made within Korea during this period are therefore also seen as exploitative practices.[58] Current conflicts between Korea and Japan over territorial or cultural issues continue to reinforce that negative political relationship.

[53] Lee, "Beyond Imagined Nostalgia," 95.
[54] Lee, "Beyond Imagined Nostalgia," 98.
[55] Lee, "Beyond Imagined Nostalgia," 95.
[56] Yi and Ryu, "Growth, Decline and Challenges," 44-45.
[57] Jason Kim, "A Town Untouched by Time and Tide," *Korea JoongAng Daily*, May 14, 2009, https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2009/05/14/etc/A-town-untouched-by-time-and-tide/2904774.html.
[58] Lee, "The Problematic Past," 4.

Since heritage as a national statement has become increasingly important in politics, the preservation or destruction of tangible structures from the colonial period have come to mean something within the image of 'Koreanness'. These structures can be turned into visual memories and thus representations of the past. The way local or national governments deal and represent the remaining structures can influence the collective memory surrounding the heritage and the way people view its existence.[59] Specifically in Korea, national narratives and origin myths have become essential in the idea of 'Koreanness'. This has caused a sense of homogeneity within Korean society, and the idea that all Koreans share their blood through the same ancestor "Dangun" has become a widely spread and common idea that sets the tone for some forms of Korean nationalism.[60] All peoples, customs and objects that are not Korean then become "the other", or in Japan's case, have become an "enemy", which also has been widely promoted by different Korean governments.[61]

This idea of Korean ethnic nationalism and the Dangun myth have been more extensively researched in the past, mostly by Hyung Il Pai. Important in that research is Pai's discussion of how this homogenous idea was actually promoted by the Japanese colonial authorities during the colonial period to set 'Koreans' apart from the 'Japanese' and consequently validate the rule and exploitation over Korea.[62] He also demonstrates how extensive work on archaeology in Korea was mostly done by Japanese, resulting in many of the Korean cultural heritage properties to actually have been identified in the colonial period.[63] The designation of certain cultural heritage and properties as inherently Korean and worthy of preservation reinforces this "true" idea of what the Korean people are, what kind of structures represent them, and what kind of heritage does not.[64] All this is to say that 'Korean' heritage can be contrasted with 'other' heritage, meaning that the same counts for the choice of what to do with property that was built by this 'enemy' that represents such a painful national and colonial past.
However, although the idea of an origin myth is apparent in Korean society, there has not been only one understanding of a form of Korean national identity. The earlier discussed political

[59] Lee, "The Problematic Past," 29.
[60] Hyun Kyung Lee, "South Korean Responses to Japanese Colonial Occupation Architecture," in '*Difficult Heritage' in Nation Building. South Korea and Post-conflict Japanese Colonial Occupation Architecture*, ed. Hyun Kyung Lee (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 254.
[61] Lee, "South Korean Responses," 255.
[62] Hyung Il Pai, *Constructing "Korean" Origins : A Critical Review of Archaeology, Historiography, and Racial Myth in Korean State-Formation Theories,* 1st edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), 26-27, 36, 54-55.
[63] Pai, "Constructing "Korean" Origins," 24-28.
[64] Pai, "Constructing "Korean" Origins," 1-6.

divide, in which Korea's stance vis-a-vis Japan is an important factor, has had a major influence on the way heritage from the Japanese colonial period is perceived. A few issues have strengthened certain political attitudes towards Japan. One of the most controversial developments over the last 30 years has been the lack of Japanese historical awareness and repentance, mainly revolving around the comfort women and forced labour issues during the colonial period. [65] Korea has been focusing on their position as a 'victim' of colonialism in between large powerful nations, and this narrative has been widely spread throughout domestic political discussions and foreign policy decisions.[66] After Korean democratization, issues of wartime crimes committed by Japan began surfacing and comfort women victims, who had been trafficked and forced to be sexually abused by the Japanese colonial authorities, started speaking out about their pasts. Issues of exploitation, forced labour and racial discrimination were brought up against Japan's pacifist stance as Korea strengthened its political and economic position.[67]

Although some forms of apologies have been given by Japan over the years, there has been a lot of reluctance in Japan to truly acknowledge historical wrongdoings, especially in their history teachings.[68] For Korea, it became an issue that accelerated narratives of victimhood and 'difficult history, and it could be added to their history to create a national identity that counters Japan.[69] This remains a large obstacle that weakens changes of stable relations between Korea and Japan. Progressive presidents like Moon Jae-in have largely focused on this more cold and cautious stance against Japan, and rather seek good relations with China until Japan has done more to apologize. Conservative presidents have generally focused less on the historical issues and more on strengthening economic and strategic ties with Japan and the US.[70] This narrative of victimhood largely marks the attitude towards the memory of the Japanese colonial period, and can be dependent on dominant narratives in domestic politics. For a city like Gunsan, these diverging sentiments about what the "Korean national identity" towards Japan really is has had a large influence on the fate of the colonial structures. It makes their existence pieces of domestic contestation.

[65] Glosserman, "South Korea-Japan Relations," 122.
[66] Milani and Fiori, "Impact of Political Alternation," 30.
[67] Glosserman, "South Korea-Japan Relations," 122-126.
[68] Glosserman, "South Korea-Japan Relations," 124-127.
[69] Glosserman, "South Korea-Japan Relations," 129.
[70] Milani and Fiori, "Impact of Political Alternation," 38-39, 43, 47, 49-50.

Colonial Heritage Practices

A large number of Japanese colonial architecture was frowned upon, deemed shameful and was destroyed by the Korean authorities shortly after liberation in 1945 and during Park Chung Hee's presidency in the 60s and 70s.[71] The 2000s saw a change in the way heritage and memory was to be approached in Korea. As world heritage became increasingly significant due to the growing number of UNESCO World Heritage listings, being able to demonstrate that a state is preserving heritage linked to some type of ancient or modern cultural history could contribute positively to the image of that state. This idea also spread to local governments, causing the rise of regional museums and the creation of places to remember that history.[72] Promoting places of heritage outwards also became a strategy to improve city branding and increase income for smaller regions. It means that municipalities have gained some more control over the preservation practices of local modern heritage, albeit under the supervision of the national government. One of the most important changes made in Korean heritage law has been the implementation of the Cultural Property Protection Law in 2001.[73] This act states among other things that "historic sites and particularly commemorable facilities which are of outstanding historic or academic value" should be protected and preserved.[74] The law has caused the sentiment around historic architecture to shift; over the last 15 years, Japanese colonial buildings have gained a more neutral or even positive image due to its historic and mostly educational value. National narratives around 'difficult' heritage have made more room for the commodification and heritagization of modern history.[75] Changes in political parties in power and their attitude towards Japan and foreign policies have influenced the way the Japanese heritage is viewed. The emphasis on economic and strategic relations with Japan have transformed modern history into a more objective phenomenon and the progress

Change of Narrative in Gunsan's Heritage Tourism Projects

This takes us back to the city of Gunsan. One of the earlier national projects that boosted the economic position of Gunsan, and thus the reconsideration to popularize Gunsan as a city, was the Saemangeum Development Project. This project started as early as 1987, with the aim to

[71] Hyun Kyung Lee, "Mapping the Memories of the Japanese Colonial Occupation of Korea (JCO)," in '*Difficult Heritage' in Nation Building. South Korea and Post-conflict Japanese Colonial Occupation Architecture*, ed. Hyun Kyung Lee (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 84-86, 90.
[72] Hyeong-Jeong Kim, "Making Korean Modern Museums: Japanese Colonial Buildings as Heritage and Resource," *Acta Koreana* 17, no. 2 (2014): 583-584.
[73] Kim, "Making Korean Modern Museums," 583.
[74] Korean Legislation Research Institute, "Chapter I General Provisions," in *Cultural Heritage Protection Act*, Statutes of the Republic of Korea. https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_service/lawView.do?hseq=33988&lang=ENG .
[75] Lee, "Beyond Imagined Nostalgia," 91.

reclaim land and use it for agricultural and industrial purposes, and boost local economies.[76] A large seawall was built with a length of about 34 kilometers.[77] The project was and is still very controversial however, due to the damage it is causing to the maritime environment and its sea life in the area.[78] Over the years, multiple tourist attractions have been created around the seawall, making the industrial structure attractive and thus pulling visitors to the cities surrounding the project.[79] Most notably, The Protection Law gave the local government in Gunsan the opportunity to consider aiming for national protection of some of the architecture still present in the city. Multiple projects were created to rebrand the city into a place that represents 'modern history and culture'. In 2009, a large project that was to be divided into two parts was launched named "Remaking Gunsan as a City of Modernity and Culture".[80] A mission began to rebrand the city's image, make the location attractive to visitors and give a more positive spin to the present tangible heritage. The first part of the project revolved around reviving certain structures such as the Japanese Dongguksa Temple, the transformations of the Joseon Bank into the 'Gunsan Colonial Architecture Museum', and the Japanese 18th Bank into the 'Gunsan Modern Art Museum'.[81]

The second part of the project lasted from 2009 to 2015, and demonstrates the largest change in perspective regarding the narrative of the Japanese colonial heritage. It included the making of the "Modern Cultural Belt" within the city, with the creation of the 'Gunsan Modern History Museum' as the highlight.[82] The city center was to be transformed into a heritage landscape or 'heritage-scape' that represents modern Korean history in the 20th century. In order to make it easier for visitors to explore this area, a trail was created that passes the traces of modern history named "historic heritage trail.[83] Thus began the difficult transformation of the national narratives on Japanese colonial heritage in Gunsan. The following slogan was created to promote the sites: "Time Travel back to the 1930s".[84]

[76] Yi and Ryu, "Growth, Decline and the Challenges," 43-44.
[77] Saemangeum Development and Investment Agency, "Tourist Attractions in Saemangeum Seawall," Tourist Attractions - Seawall. https://www.saemangeum.go.kr/sda/en/content.do?key=2010214151548.
[78] Yi and Ryu, "Growth, Decline and the Challenges," 44.
[79] Saemangeum Development and Investment Agency, "Tourist Attractions in Saemangeum Seawall,".
[80] Hyun Kyung Lee and Shu-Mei Huang. "The 'Commodified Colonial Past in Small Cities: Shifting Heritage-making from Nation-building to City Branding in South Korea and Taiwan." *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 28, no. 5 (2022): 552.
[81] Lee and Huang, "The 'Commodified' Colonial Past," 552-553.
[82] Lee, "Beyond Imagined Nostalgia," 96.
[83] Lee, "Beyond Imagined Nostalgia," 97.
[84] Lee, "Beyond Imagined Nostalgia," 97.

Through these city branding efforts, the Japanese colonial period and its architecture have gradually been changed into a 'concept' for national and international tourists. Lee has argued how the feeling and attraction of 'nostalgia' has been used in the promotion of the sites in Gunsan. Lee discusses the psychological notion of "imagined nostalgia", meaning that a certain national past can be reimagined by creating nostalgia for a time that the public has not experienced but can be imagined.[85] The terms "modernity" and "modern" are used in the names of all three museums and the development of new technologies and industries are demonstrated in the museum and the heritage trail. The early 20th century is then no longer only portrayed as an exploitative and dark period, but also a period of progress.[86] The process of colonization and modernity are often seen as two phenomena working at the same time in Korea and larger East Asia.[87] However, referring to the Japanese actions in Korea as progressive and helpful can also be highly controversial. Opening up the Japanese colonial heritage sites and promoting the 'travel back in time' concept did spark some opposition from multiple sides. Some of the local scholars at Gunsan University argued that the history of the city before colonization was completely ignored in the projects, ignoring important parts of the city's development.[88] Moreover, a local group strongly opposed the restructuring and rebranding of Japanese colonial structures into places of "modernity", but rather wished the city to focus on the Korean Joseon era. These voices however were not deemed more important than the economic incentive of the rebranding of the city.[89]

[85] Lee, "Beyond "Imagined" Nostalgia," 92.
[86] Hokyung Chung and Jongoh Lee, "Modern Industrial Heritage as Cultural Mediation in Urban Regeneration: A Case Study of Gunsan, Korea, and Taipei, Taiwan," *Land* 12, no. 4 (2023): 4.
[87] Chung and Lee, "Modern Industrial Heritage," 4-6.
[88] Lee, "Beyond "Imagined" Nostalgia," 96.
[89] Lee, "Beyond "Imagined" Nostalgia," 96.

Figure 1: Interior of the Gunsan Modern History Museum

Source: Hye Young Kim, "Relishing Retro in Gunsan," Koreanet, March 17, 2020. https://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/FoodTravel/view?articleId=183322.

Figure 2: Map of the Cultural Belt

Source: Seung-hye Yim, "Architecture of Gunsan reflects Imperial Japan's Design Influence: A Walk through the City provides a Look at a Time Long passed," Korea JoongAng Daily, October 28, 2018. https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2018/10/28/features/Architecture-of-Gunsan-reflects-imperial-Japan039s-design-influence-A-walk-through-the-city-provides-a-look-at-a-time-long-passed/3054803.html.

The "Retro" Trend in Colonial Heritage

However, what is still missing in some of the research about the branding projects in Gunsan, is the usage of popular trends and terms among younger generations on social media. I argue that the commodification and promotion of colonial structures in Gunsan is deliberately done through using terms and concepts that are popular among those younger people, such as "time travel", "retro", "newtro" or "vintage".[90] An analysis of the quite large amount of promotional material, and content of visitors stating their experiences at the sites, can make clear how trends are used to increase heritage tourism in Gunsan. The Modern History Museum, the Sinheung-dong Japanese House and the Modern Life hall are spaces that present themselves as places for education on the colonial period; the dark sides of Japanese colonialism and exploitation tend to still be highlighted.[91] In these spaces, Korean struggles and issues such as the comfort women and forced labour as lived experience under Japanese rule are depicted.

However, many other sites do not necessarily add this type of educational content, and mainly revolve around the 'vintage' aesthetic or refer to films and series that have been filmed at the location. These same sites also often include the "travel back to the 30s" sentiment that do not focus on the historical struggles during this time and merely aims to give the visitors a new experience.[92] There are a number of articles, websites, video's and blogs in which visiting Gunsan is promoted to the public. In many of them, the word "retro" is used to express the ambience of the sites. To begin, the Gunsan Modern History Museum holds its own website where the museum and other sites in Gunsan are promoted. It offers quite an extensive amount of information about all the activities in the area and the exhibitions at the museums.[93] The different pages clearly promote different sides of the museums in Gunsan. The colonial past and struggles of liberation are highlighted in multiple exhibitions, and the website does link to that information. For example, there is a March 1st Movement 100th Anniversary Memorial Hall about which information and opening times are provided, and Gunsan is said to be the "first city south of the Han River where March 1st Independence Movement took place" with pictures of the memorial hall showing.[94] However, the website also provides promotional material that sets a much lighter tone for the experiences in the city. The museum itself has

[90] Kim, "Relishing Retro in Gunsan,"
[91] Lee, "Beyond "Imagined" Nostalgia," 104.
[92] Lee, "Beyond "Imagined" Nostalgia," 100.
[93] "Gunsan Modern History Museum," Jeonbuk Special Self-Governing Province Gunsan-si, https://museum.gunsan.go.kr/.
[94] "Gunsan March 1st Movement 100th Anniversary Memorial Hall," Gunsan Modern History Museum, https://museum.gunsan.go.kr/new/contents/exhibition601.jsp.

made a promotional video that shows the Geumgangwon Exhibition Hall, after having visited multiple other attractions. This video is posted on the official Youtube account of Gunsan City. A group of three women happily skip along the different sites with small Korean flags in their hands. The sites portraying colonial and liberation struggles are also presented in a positive manner as the group happily demonstrates all locations.[95] This video, and the channel in general, are meant to attract domestic tourists on a day trip or a weekend to Gunsan, and enjoy the presence of historic and cultural attractions as well as visit restaurants and filming locations.

Moreover, many articles can be found that promote Gunsan to the public. The website Koreanet and its YouTube page under the same name have posted an article and video titled "Relishing Retro in Gunsan". The article talks about the 'retro' feel that visitors can experience during their time in Gunsan and again, how one can feel like traveling back in time.[96] One area specifically, referred to as the "Modern History Culture Street", is named due to it being turned into a 'pedestrian-friendly town'. This part of the city is completely refurbished by the Gunsan city government to create a retro atmosphere and make it as convenient as possible to stroll along the heritage site as a tourist on foot.[97] An emphasis is also put on the Gunsan Modern History Museum and its objects and environment being made to look like the visitors are in the 1930s.[98] In the video made under the same name by Koreanet, one can view all the different sites where one can visit. No distinction is made between sites of 'difficult' history or sites with a lighter history and more of an entertainment aspect.[99] References are also made to certain sites where popular films or TV series were filmed, which can be made a part of one's trip to the city. Rather than focusing mainly on the 'difficult' heritage and how it may affect Korea's relationship with Japan, this material in the media is promoting the town outwardly as a place to find education and recreation, and for younger people to experience times they are not familiar with.[100]

News Outlet Korea Joongang Daily has published an article about Gunsan titled "A Town Untouched by Time and Tide", again referencing the city as a place to "travel back in time"

[95] 군산시 공식채널, "군산 어디까지 가봤니~?," *YouTube*, 24 September, 2019. https://youtu.be/g7KfSMgWq44?si=srgIlu_cPaNRU824.
[96] Kim, "Relishing Retro."
[97] Kim, "Relishing Retro."
[98] Kim, "Relishing Retro."
[99] Koreanet, "Relishing Retro in Gunsan," *YouTube*, March 1, 2020. https://youtu.be/kbPzJzMO2SI?si=txq8eSr80BB-zUyZ.
[100] Kim, "Relishing Retro."

and feel a sense of nostalgia for an imagined lost period.[101] Because of the presence of many buildings from the early 20th century, the city can be promoted as if it has been stuck in time and where one can escape from the more 'modernized' cities elsewhere in the country. This article also mentions the Gyeongam-dong Railroad village, which has become a popular tourist attraction in the Gunsan area. Here, part of a railroad track constructed in 1944 runs through a small village that was formed in the 1970s, and was mainly used to transport newspapers. The buildings in the village still stand, with some more than 10 houses still being inhabited. Some shops are purposefully refurbished to represent the 70s style of nostalgic shops and Korean companies and the shops sell retro-themed items.[102] Although this village stems from a much later time in the 20th century, it adds to the sense of nostalgia around Gunsan and the ability to 'time travel' through multiple decades of the previous century. Some videos are made by foreigners who visited Gunsan, many showing the viewer the food they ate and the images they shot, but keeping the significance of the Japanese colonial architecture out of discussion.[103] For foreigners visiting the city even more so than for Koreans, it is a place that offers feelings of nostalgia and in which they can enjoy a few days of experiencing different parts of 'Korean' culture, food and history,

Especially multiple decades throughout the 20th century tend to be romanticized by young generations as a period in which modernity and technology were just on the horizon and social media and the internet were still absent. On social media platforms, this romanticized version of those decades creates that "imagined nostalgia" for a period young people today have not experienced. The desire to travel back in time, take pictures of objects and buildings that feel 'old-fashioned', and experience a sense of nostalgia overshadow the feeling of shame and horror that so often is connected to the Japanese colonial period.[104] Visitors may come to Gunsan to enjoy themselves rather than to feel shame, guilt or horror from thinking back to the Korean past. Research on the way younger generations tend to view and conceptualize heritage from the colonial past, done by Youn and Uzzell, can clarify this current trend. This research states there is indeed a relation between the sense of a national identity and the way different

[101] Kim, "A Town Untouched."
[102] Korea Road Tour, "Gyeongamdong Railroad Town: Tourist Attraction in Gunsan (South Korea)," YouTube, 30 July, 2018. Gyeongamdong Railroad Town(경암동 철길마을) - Tourist attraction in Gunsan(South Korea)
[103] Welcome to Korea, "(2019) 8Things To do in Gunsan || Free Travel || Episode02," *YouTube*, March 21, 2019. https://youtu.be/PA-J_0NzYaQ?si=YPsPohl3_nPRKcjy.
[104] Lee, "Beyond Imagined Nostalgia," 101, 107-108.

generations view (colonial) heritage.[105] For younger generations, the distance to the history in which these sites were used is great enough not to feel a sense of connection or shame to darker parts of its context.[106] Many of them tend to look for a positive experience, and the link that some of the heritage has to colonialism does not automatically create a feel of negativity or victimhood. A negative past only really becomes relevant when it is emphasized in the site or attraction.[107] It makes it possible for local governments such as that in Gunsan to promote the existing heritage in a light-hearted way. Due to Gunsan's position in Korea as a middle-sized city some less relevant than the large metropole that is Seoul, it can afford to shift the focus of its buildings to provide entertainment on top of providing historical awareness.

Reflecting on Gunsan's Case

The narratives surrounding heritage that construct different senses of national identity in Korea, such as its meaning in the exploitation of the Japanese colonial forces against Koreans, can be altered over time and fluctuate with the opinions of younger generations and trends. The political divide between progressives and conservatives and their diverging opinions on how to deal with the Japanese colonial past, have in the past influenced the way heritage from this period is dealt with. However, over the last couple of years, tangible heritage such as that in Gunsan has been promoted positively, as a place to travel back in time and have fun during a light-hearted experience.[108] Although it is still present in the main museums in the city, the graveness of the history related to the heritage is pushed to the background. This causes the heritage to no longer be a vital negative component of what it means to be "Korean", but is rather viewed as another moment in time separate from one's individual and national identity.

The commodification of the Japanese colonial architecture in Gunsan demonstrates how heritage can be used in different ways by local and national governments to quite easily affect the narratives around its history. The promotion of colonial structures in Gunsan is done through the usage of concepts such as nostalgia, 'time travel', and 'retro' or 'vintage' aesthetics.[109] These trends have become important for younger generations and foreign tourists visiting Gunsan. Turning these structures into places of entertainment has led to an increase in

[105] Seung Ho Youn and David Uzzell," The Young Generations' Conceptualisation of Cultural Tourism: Colonial Heritage Attractions in South Korea," Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research 21, no. 12 (2016): 1340.
[106] Youn and Uzzell,"The Young Generations' Conceptualisation," 1325.
[107] Youn and Uzzell, "The Young Generations' Conceptualisation," 1339.
[108] Lee, "Beyond "Imagined" Nostalgia," 105.
[109] Lee, "Beyond "Imagined" Nostalgia," 92.

the amount of tourists visiting the heritage sites for a positive experience.[110] I argue that although the narrative of victimhood linked to a larger Korean national identity is still sporadically depicted in some of the sites, the financial incentive to popularize colonial heritage through the "retro" trend tends to overshadow the need to emphasize 'difficult' history in the case of Gunsan. It may disconnect a young public from a darker depiction of Korean history, It seems a strong political stance is also not a very apparent incentive for the local government to pursue commodification of their architecture when it can be lucrative. Heritagization in Gunsan's case has provided a space that transcends narratives of Korean victimhood, and has led to a more light-hearted version of heritage preservation and tourism.

Chapter 3: The Heritagization of the Gangneung Danoje Festival

Introducing Gangneung Danoje

Every year, a large festival is held in the city of Gangneung on the Eastern coast of South Korea to celebrate the harvest and to give blessings to several local deities. Although locals celebrate the festival for as long as 50 days, the most important day is the fifth day of the fifth lunar month and traditionally opens with a series of mostly shamanist rituals.[111] Through bringing a sacred tree from the forest down into the city of Gangneung, the spirit of the mountain named Daeguallyong, the state and the goddess are invited into the realm of humans.[112] To start the festivities, a sacred liquor named Sinju is brewed that travels along with the sacred tree.[113] The shamanic rituals are at the center of the festival, with some forms of Buddhist and Confucian rituals having been incorporated throughout the years.[114] Surrounding natural areas are worshiped through these rituals; important are the Taebaek Mountain range to the West and the East Sea that borders Gangneung with its vast coasts. The history of the festival as a concept most likely dates far back to around the Goryeo Dynasty in the 10th century. However, the way the Gangneung festival is held today really only originated after liberation from the Japanese

[110] Lee, "Beyond "Imagined" Nostalgia," 105, 107.
[111] Kim, "After the Heritage," 55.
[112] Saeji, "Replacing Faith in Spirits," 157.
[113] UNESCO, "Gangneung Danoje Festival," Nomination File No. 00141, ich.unesco.org. https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/gangneung-danoje-festival-00114.
[114] UNESCO, "Gangneung Danoje Festival."

imperial occupation and the Korean War, around the 1960s.[115] During my own visit to the festival this May 2025, which I will talk about in detail later in this chapter, I experienced the blend of different types of entertainment with the spiritual shamanic rituals. The earlier mentioned Cultural Properties Conservation Law enacted in 1962 made way for the increased perception of importance to list, protect and preserve forms of 'national' heritage that can represent South Korea in some way.[116] Even though this occurred during the period of vast modernization under Park Chung Hee, the Gangneung Danoje Festival was actually recognized quite early on. In 1967, it was designated as No. 13 National Intangible Cultural Property.[117]

However, most important for Korea's national cultural status, was its listing on the UNESCO World Intangible Cultural Heritage list in 2005. This has had large implications for the local organizers, the religious groups celebrating and the number of visitors traveling to Gangneung during the festivities. Institutionalization of heritage in Korea is what boosted the image of the celebrations and developed the festival into a national and international phenomenon rather than just a local one.[118] Dano as a celebratory period is not unique to Korea, similar festivals are celebrated in surrounding Asian nations such as China, Japan and Vietnam. The incorporation of local shamanic rituals is what sets the Gangneung Danoje festival apart, its UNESCO listing having caused friction with China over the importance of the other local Dano celebrations.[119] This larger international controversy around the Dano festivals falls outside of the scope of this research, but it does demonstrate the significance of heritage in contemporary international relations. It is clear that specific shaman rituals are highlighted in the heritagization process and the cultural expressions are considered unique and can somehow represent a historic version of Korea no longer found in today's modern society. Specific performances such as the Gwanno mask dance, Ssiruem competitions and Odokdeggi folk songs and traditional music are highlighted by UNESCO.[120] This causes for the a similar narrative as in Gunsan; the festival allows visitors to 'travel back in time'.

[115] Sunny Jeong and Carla Almeida Santos, "Cultural Politics and Contested Place Identity," *Annals of Tourism Research* 31, no. 3 (2004): 642.
[116] Saeji, "Replacing Faith in Spirits," 156.
[117] Kim, "After the Heritage," 57.
[118] Kim, "After the Heritage," 58.
[119] Oiwan Lam, "UNESCO is Unwittingly Contributing to the Controversy Surrounding the Term 'Lunar New Year," *Global Voices*, February 4, 2025. https://globalvoices.org/2025/02/04/unesco-is-unwittingly-contributing-to-the-controversy-surrounding-the-term-lunar-new-year/.
[120] UNESCO, "Gangneung Danoje Festival."

This chapter analyzes the way the Gangneung Danoje Festival has transformed over the last decades, and the impact the national perceptions of shamanism have had on the type of celebrations that are held. My own experience visiting the famous Nanjang market during the festival has provided me with more insight on how the festival is celebrated on the ground. The contested political views on shamanism within Korea influence the commodification of the festival and the level in which the shaman rituals are considered historical cultural heritage, or rather a tool for entertainment and tourism.[121] So how is this festival being commodified in conditions of domestic contestation? A local religious practice has been transformed into a national celebration of heritage, with the UNESCO listing causing a sense of national pride.

Shamanism in Korea and its Controversies

Before continuing about the nature of the festival and my experience, it is essential to get an understanding of the current place of shamanism in South Korea. Shamanism covers a very large part of the religious rituals that are held during the Gangneung Danoje festival. Although shamanism has been prevalent on the Korean peninsula for many centuries and has become truly embedded in parts of the national cultural expressions, its existence has become controversial for multiple reasons. Some scholars have argued that the significance of shamans and their practices in fortune-telling, possession and their link to the supernatural world, have had great impact on the spread of Protestant Christianity in the country.[122] The shaman functions as a mediator between humans and God, and the figure of Jesus can therefore be linked to such a position. The spiritualization of the natural world around people was already a highly present concept; and Christian missionaries knew to incorporate that with the spreading of the Christian faith.[123] Shamanism has been regarded both negatively and positively, as its practices have also contributed to a sense of national pride and identity over the last years. The historic nature of Korean shamans can provide a quite unique form of national heritage to Korean people, and practices like Gangneung Danoje have come to represent "Koreanness" as heritagization became more widespread.[124] At the same time, Christianity has become so prevalent that the more rogue-like and mythical aspects of

[121] Saeji, "Replacing Faith in Spirits," 157.
[122] Il Mok Kim, "Assessing the Nexus between Shamanism and Protestantism in South Korea," *Madang* 15, no. 1 (2017): 8-10.
[123] Kim, "Assessing the Nexus," 15.
[124] Boudewijn Walraven, "Our Shamanistic Past: The Korean Government, Shamans and Shamanism," *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies* 8, no. 1 (1993): 21-22.

shamanism tend to get scrutinized by the more extreme evangelical Christians in Korea.[125] Especially this enormous growth of Christianity in the country from the 19th and 20th century onwards, the modernization period that scrutinized "backwards" traditions around the 1960s, and the continuous usage of shamans by conservative presidents and other political higher-ups, have painted a negative picture of the religious practices mostly among progressives and some conservative evangelical Christians.[126]

The debate around the influence of shamanism in Korean politics took root during Park Geun-hye's presidency. In 2016, multiple controversies around Park were brought to light. Not only was Park involved in illegal lobbying and corruption through two different groups, she was also accused of giving "top-secret" political security access to someone that was deemed her shamanic guide.[127] This woman, named Choi Soon-Sil, turned out to be the daughter of another controversial religious leader named Choi Tae-min who was closely related to more cult-like organizations and had worked with Park's father, president and dictator Park Chung Hee.[128] Within these religious organizations, one of which was called the "Church of Eternal Life", shamanism and Christianity appeared to be intertwined in different ways, demonstrating that the two often are not as separate in Korean society as they may appear.[129] Park Geun-hye would wear certain jewelry that depicted shamanic symbols and Choi was often by her side. This turned out to be one of the main reasons for Park to get impeached, and the phenomenon of shamanism being incorporated into Korean politics has since stayed prevalent.[130] Even very recently, another shaman has come into disrepute in light of the impeachment of former president Yoon Suk-yeol. Since Yoon's impeachment, finalized only on April 4th 2025, investigations have been initiated in Yoon's visits to alleged shaman 'Geonjin' over a period of almost two years.[131] Yoon would ask advice about the future of multiple military officials and other politicians, and during the period of his inauguration in 2022, it was rumored that Yoon chose the location of the presidential office on the basis of advice from a shaman.[132] On

[125] Saeji,"Replacing Faith in Spirits," 161.
[126] Saeji, "Replacing Faith in Spirits," 161.
[127] Park, "Politics of Impeaching Shamanism," 636.
[128] Park, "Politics of Impeaching Shamanism," 636-637.
[129] Park, "Politics of Impeaching Shamanism," 648-650.
[130] Jung, "Shamans and Presidents.".
[131] Michael Lee, "Who is the Mysterious Shaman with Alleged Ties with Yoon?" *Korea JoongAng Daily*, May 2, 2025. https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/2025-04-30/national/politics/Who-is-the-mysterious-shaman-with-alleged-ties-with-Yoon/2297418.
[132] Jung, "Shamans and Presidents."

April 30th, Yoon and his wife Kim Kon Hee's residence was raided and searched after allegations of corruption that involved the 'shaman' Geonjin. Yoon and Kim are suspects of corruption, interference by third parties in the elections, and receiving illegal political funds. Kim also allegedly received expensive gifts from the religious movement "Unification Church".[133] Opposition parties and political rivals have often made these accusations of shaman interference, making presence in the political realm a recurring political weapon as well as a potential risk.[134] They make a case for the protection of secularism in Korean politics, as religious interference in the highest level of national politics could take away from the democratic and secular principles.[135]

However, as demonstrated by the latest impeachment scandals, shamanism seems to remain present in the lives of politicians in influential positions. All that to say, shamanism has been highly embedded into politics, especially among conservative presidents, and as a consequence has become a controversial phenomenon. Using shamanism in politics, giving unelected individuals access to security details and depending on their spiritual advice when giving important political orders, has become the talk of day.[136] Since the last 10 years, some Christian fundamentalist groups have attended the festival as a form of protest, bringing crosses and signs that curse the shamanist practices and support Christianity.[137] Attempts to distinguish shamanism as cultural heritage and preserve intangible practices had not been exercised until the process of heritagization became more widely accepted. Shamanism is often practiced in secret, and when in need of spiritual guidance it is still quite popular to seek the advice of a shaman. However, many Koreans will not call themselves members or followers of a type of shamanic religion, making it possible to seek guidance next to practicing other types of religions or being non-religious.[138] This causes shamanic rituals, as is the case with the formerly mentioned presidents, to often become a quite personal and covert experience, especially when practiced for personal reasons.

[133] Hyo-jin Lee, "Prosecutors search Ex-President Yoon Suk Yeol's Home for Evidence linked to Shaman," *The Korea Times,* April 30, 2025. https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/southkorea/politics/20250430/south-korean-prosecutors-search-ex-presidents-home-for-evidence-linked-to-shaman.
[134] Jung, "Shamans and Presidents."
[135] Park, "Politics of Impeaching Shamanism," 636-637.
[136] Roald Maliangkay, "There is No Amen in Shaman: Traditional Music Preservation and Christianity in South Korea," *Asian Music* 45, no. 1 (2014): 81-83.
[137] Kim, "After the Heritage," 64.
[138] Saeji, "Replacing Faith in Spirits," 161.

Revival of Shamanism and Cultural Expression

These negative perceptions of shamanism do not imply a total lack of interest in the religious expressions. On the contrary, there has actually been a revival of popularity of shamans and shamanic guidance among younger Koreans over the last few years. The historic and 'traditional' appearance in media, films and TV series have made shamanism into another 'time travel' and nostalgic experience, and one that provides a sense of what it means to be Korean.[139] There is a tendency of the 'shamanism aesthetic' to be romanticized in this sense.[140] As fewer young Koreans are actively religious, shamans could provide some replacement for the need to find comfort and spiritual expressions. The strongly competitive and modernized society where young Koreans feel the intense pressure to be successful can also be a reason for the desire to individually seek guidance from a shaman.[141] Not only do young Koreans increasingly visit shamans for spiritual guidance during events or in their free time, some have turned into shamans themselves. A video by the South China Morning Post demonstrates a young Korean woman practicing shamanic rituals. Lee Kyoung-hyun has her own social media channel where she posts videos of her experiences as a shaman and spreads popularity to younger viewers. She emphasizes how "shamanism is deeply rooted for Koreans", and how the religious practices have made a comeback after a period of scrutiny.[142] Another young woman named Park Chae-bin visits Lee to ask for consultation on her career troubles. She even seems to visit Lee as an alternative to visiting a psychiatrist. It appears these young Koreans are talking to a young shaman in the form of counseling, hoping the shaman will understand their societal struggles better than a medical specialist.[143]

Although the immense societal pressure on young Koreans is a reason for them to find comfort in shaman meetings, another very important reason for this renewed interest is the impact of heritage on national prestige. The "Koreanness" of the shamans and their rituals offer a sense of national pride, representing a uniqueness to the practices. Walraven has argued how the Korean government has also been using shamanism as a way to represent what 'being Korean' really entails. The abstract rituals, dress and performance art that has become a part of Korean shamanism throughout years of what is now deemed Korean history, can that way strengthen

[139] KTimes, "Why Shamanism Continues,"
[140] Saeji, "Replacing Faith in Spirits," 164.
[141] KTimes, "Why Shamanism Continues."
[142] South China Morning Post, "Shamanism finds New Followers in Young South Koreans," *YouTube*, June 21, 2024. https://youtu.be/Ts1m3byReoA?si=Ea8M30hKbLysYE8z.
[143] South China Morning Post, "Shamanism Finds New Followers."

a sense of nationalism.[144] And for Korean people, it can provide a spiritual connection to their own forms of a national identity, while looking for comfort in their daily lives. As awareness around heritage preservation grew, so did the concern for preservation of the performance skills and traditions within shamanism and during the Danoje festival. The heritagization process of the Gangneung Danoje festival has increased the scale of the festivities and the shamanic rituals have become one of the most important elements to the festival.[145] Gangneung Danoje has not only been recognized by the local and national governments, but also by UNESCO, the most important international organization for heritage recognition. This designation has greatly impacted the perception of the shamanic rituals and the celebrations of the festival. It turned into not just a regional success story, but a national prestigious event that sets Korea apart from other nations.[146] This year's edition of the festival revolved around the 20th anniversary of the UNESCO designation. It was presented as "20 years of Dano" in promotional material and physically at the festival.[147] Because UNESCO listing is so politicized, especially in international relations and forms of soft power, the designation of the festival as worthy national heritage has contributed to the increased pride and interest linked to some of the shamanic customs.

Gangneung Danoje as Pride and 'National' Heritage

We can see this pride and enthusiasm through analyzing the forms of promotion the festival Committee and local authorities in Gangneung have created around the festival. In the 1970s, a local organization named the 'Cultural Institute of Gangneung' established a committee so that the festival could be locally organized into an official cultural folk festival specific to the region. This Committee has since taken the role of organizing the festivities upon itself, with local politicians, merchants, religious practitioners, and businessmen as members.[148] The local gathering of involved parties was created in part to emphasize the significance of the festival in their own lives and cultural expressions. This highly organized version of the festival thus originated around the same time the Committee was established. The official website and many of the celebrations and attractions for visitors are created by this same group. On the website, the reader is greeted by this Committee, explaining their goal and praising the cultural

[144] Walraven, "Our Shamanistic Past," 21-22.
[145] Saeji, "Replacing Faith in Spirits," 167-168.
[146] Saeji, "Replacing Faith in Spirits," 158-159.
[147] 강릉단오제 [Gangneung Danoje Festival], https://www.danojefestival.or.kr/.
[148] Kim , "After the Heritage," 57.

importance of the celebrations.[149] The UNESCO designation is one of the first subjects mentioned on the introductory page, and the festival itself is referred to as "the successor of today's traditional cultures and the educator of the true Korean spirit".[150] This sentence implies the transformation from Gangneung Danoje as a local festival to a national celebration that somehow embodies a whole 'national Korean essence' and is therefore something to be proud of. The word 'shamanism' is also not mentioned in this greeting, but rather a more broad and inclusive message is spread in which the festival embodies multiple types of religious expressions and is not only celebrated by locals from Gangneung.[151] An added organization chart shows the division of the Committee, which consists of a chairman, a board of directors, and a general assembly, among others.[152] Through the years, this organization has become highly structured and coordinated. Next to this Committee taking care of the organization, the city government of Gangneung does partly subsidize some of the costs that are made for the first days of rituals that take place.[153]

The organization has created a pamphlet, also accessible in English, that extensively explains some of the history behind the festival and the different rituals that are practiced.
It demonstrates the perception that the Committee has in relation to the celebrations, and the extent to which the historical context still matters to them in the preservation of the intangible cultural heritage. The text explains quite extensively what kinds of rituals are held, and which Gods and spirits are celebrated. Many pictures of people wearing the religious clothing and the temples are included.[154] Also described in quite some detail are all the different 'guts' that are performed. These are shamanist rites in which offerings and sacrifices to the Gods and spirits are made, which start off the festival and continue on during the whole 50 days.[155] The pamphlet describes again this "ancient" feeling to the festival, and wants to invoke almost a mythical sense that is connected to the rituals. The importance of the festival in Korean culture

[149] 강릉단오제 [Gangneung Danoje Festival], "Greeting," *danojefestival.or.kr. https://danojefestival.or.kr/contents.asp?page=176.*
[150] 강릉단오제, "Greeting."
[151] 강릉단오제, "Greeting."
[152] 강릉단오제 [Gangneung Danoje Festival], "Organization Chart," https://danojefestival.or.kr/contents.asp?page=521.
[153] Kim, "After the Heritage" 66.
[154] 강릉단오제 [Gangneung Danoje Festival], "Leaflet. A Thousand Year's Harmony. Gangneung Danoje Festival," 2-7. https://danojefestival.or.kr/contents.asp?page=531&kind=2&IDX=6617.
[155] 강릉단오제, "Leaflet. A Thousand Year's Harmony, " 7-13.

is emphasized by explaining the UNESCO designation and its placement as no. 13 National Treasure, as these facts invoke a sense of cultural significance with possible visitors. A part is included that describes the festivities as the "encounter of tradition and modern" in which the street performances are highlighted.[156]

However, it is clear that the makers of this pamphlet want to provide more historic and cultural insight into the preserved heritage for potential visitors, since the description of the rituals and the cultural significance is described in detail. Clearly, combining the 'tradition' and the 'modern' is thought to be an effective way to appeal to the reader. The text tells the reader this is what the "Sintong Daegil Street Play" is for. Here, many activities and performances are held, and this modernized version of the festivities is considered the reason the festival still exists. To quote the text: "Any traditional culture that is not renewed or recreated based on its original identity is likely to be swept away in the rapid flow of contemporary civilization", and continuing that the Sintong Daegil Street Play "eliminates concerns" about the festival being seen as backwards.[157] This quote demonstrates the perception of the Committee on the preservation of the festival, and the desire to make the traditional look modern rather than outdated. It is demonstrative of the broader tendency to make the merger of 'tradition' and 'modernization' part of a Korean national identity.[158] The local Gangneung government has been actively promoting a 'global' feeling to the festival, even hiring "culture planners" that transformed the festival into a cultural festival that includes performances from international artists.

Personal Experience at the Festival and International Promotion

This year at the end of May, I was able to travel to Gangneung and visit the most well-known part of the festival myself; the Nanjang Market. My own visit to the festival has provided more insight on the way the local heritage is celebrated and promoted, and how the cultural heritage of Danoje is presented to the public. Hundreds of stalls were lined up along the Namdaecheon Stream, filled with food, drinks, souvenirs and traditional hand-made items. Arriving in the

[156] 강릉단오제, "Leaflet. A Thousand Year's Harmony," 16-17.

[157] 강릉단오제, "Leaflet. A Thousand Year's Harmony," 17.

[158] Saeji, "Replacing Faith in Spirits," 168.

afternoon, it was only starting to get more crowded. The atmosphere was friendly and joyful, and I could sense some feeling of pride among the crowd. Although many celebrations are held throughout the entire city, a lot of the cultural performances, demonstrations and more popular entertainment are centered at the market. Through large speakers, the performances were announced both in Korean and English. I walked into a competition of Ssireum, traditional Korean wrestling, which was uniquely added to the UNESCO intangible heritage list as a joint item for both South and North Korea in 2018.[159] The audience was beyond excited to watch and participate. Next to this tent appeared the giant wooden swing on which women dressed in hanbok and couples try to swing as high as possible, with official announcers and the audience being in awe of how high the couples could swing. After having tasted the sacred liquor Sinju, an essential part of the shamanic rituals in Gangneung, a Haksan Odokdeggi performance collective took the stage. In a call-and-response performance led by one elder man, this farmers' performance group mimicked working on the fields while interchangeably performing with musical instruments. Again, I noticed a lot of older Korean people interacting with the performers and clearly being familiar with these traditional showcases. Interestingly, the focus at the festival was not just on the celebration of this local form of Korean shamanism, but rather combined more broad national 'Korean traditions' with the local ones.

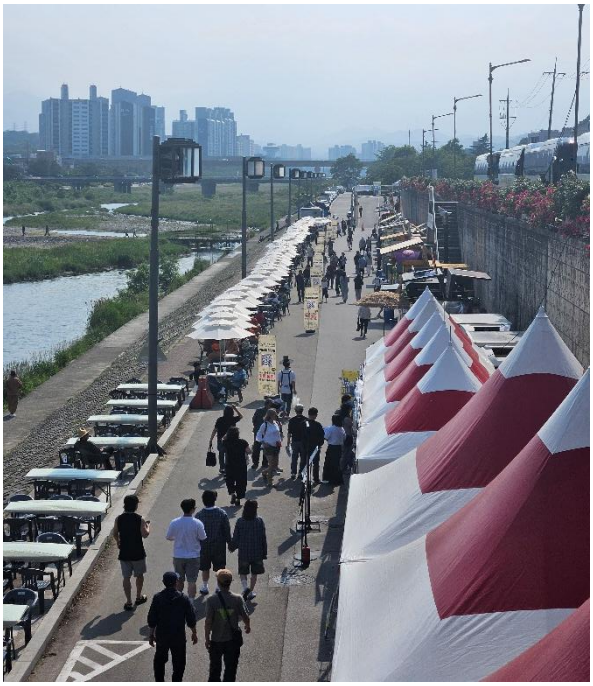

Figure 3: Stalls at the Market

Figure 4: Entrance Sign

Most apparent to me was this year's theme; it revolved around the 20th anniversary of the UNESCO designation. The logo, pamphlets and maps all included this '20 years of Dano'

[159] Min-sik Yoon, "Ssireum becomes Koreas' 1st jointly inscribed UNESCO World Heritage Item," The Korea Herald, November 26, 2018. https://www.koreaherald.com/article/1850822.

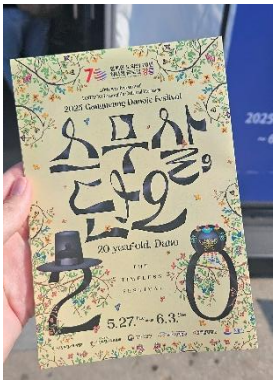

Figure 5: Festival Pamphlet

theme, and a special UNESCO stall was constructed where one could learn about 'significance' of UNESCO's existence, the process of listing heritage practices, and the history of Korean cultural practices and items that have become national and UNESCO heritage. It was clear that this was something Gangneung Danoje could be extremely proud of and formed a gateway to make the festival more internationally relevant. The day I visited, multiple musicians from different countries across the world performed with their local instruments and songs. The crowds reacted enthusiastically upon the sight of these foreign performers. They had come from Slovakia, Poland, Latvia and Mongolia, among others. Along the hundreds of food stalls and restaurants was also the international food stalls, with their snacks slightly adjusted to Korean tastes.

Figure 6: Gwanno Mask Performers

In the evening, a large parade was held across the streets of Gangneung. Lines of crowds had gathered, local Gangneung elders and children mixed with foreign visitors like myself. The parade started with some of the Danoje shamanic figures, as well as the very signficant carrying of the sacred tree from down the mountains.[160] This was followed by participants wearing the Gwanno drama masks, that like Ssireum and Odokdeggi have been celebrated as their own unique form of cultural heritage.[161] After children playing traditional instruments had passed, the parade was continued by groups from around the world. The musicians, having played at the market earlier, participated waving the flags of their own countries, as well as additional groups from countries in Asia and Europe. The audience waved, yelled and smiled at the sight of these people that have traveled all the way to Gangneung. There is no doubt the joy of the viewers was created by the interest that those foreign visitors have for Gangneung and its heritage, the parade was all about the international image of the festival.

Figure 7: The Wooden Swing

[160] Saeji, "Replacing Faith in Spirits," 157.
[161] UNESCO, "Gangneung Danoje Festival."

My visit taught me the festival is promoted as local heritage that represents a national cultural image to both a national and international audience. The UNESCO designation has clearly had a large impact on the nature and popularity of the festival, and has led to the local shamanic celebrations getting blended with broader national expressions of culture. The religious aspects of shamanism have been transformed into cultural expressions, changing the rituals into performances. At the same time, the pride that surrounds the more traditional Danoje rituals is visible among the visitors, and their existence is celebrated by a growing number of people. Although the majority is of an older age, many of them brought their younger relatives to enjoy and learn about the cultural experience.

Figure 8: Haksan Odokdeggi Farmers' Performance

Figure 9: Tasting of Sinju

Figure 10: Ssireum Competition

Figure 11: UNESCO Stall

Figure 12: Washing of Hair in Changpo

Figure 13: Carrying of the Sacred Tree

Figure 14: International Flags in Parade

Through changing the nature of the festival from "religious" to "cultural", the practices have become more comprehensible for international visitors and overshadow the negative aspects of shamanism.[162] Now, the shamanic rituals are considered a "Korean essence" both to Koreans themselves as well as to 'outsiders' who are not as familiar with the political or religious context in Korea. A page where some of the more significant parts of the celebrations are mentioned, concludes with a praise of the festival as a whole, stating that it attracts over 600,000 visitors each year.[163] In order to attract not only domestic tourists but also international visitors, an emphasis is put on the historic nature of the rituals and the "ancient" feeling to the festival. The official website has now posted a summarizing video of this year's festival. The video purposefully shows multiple foreign visitors sharing their excitement about their visit.[164] A German and an American woman are interviewed, as well as a Korean citizen wearing a hijab. All of the different rituals and celebrations are shown. An emphasis is put on the

[162] Kim, "After the Heritage," 70.

[163] 강릉단오제 [Gangneung Danoje Festival], "Formation," https://danojefestival.or.kr/contents.asp?page=522.

[164] 강릉단오제 [Gangneung Danoje Festival], "2025 강릉단오제 엔딩영상 [Gangneung Danoje Ending Video]," *YouTube*, June 9, 2025. https://youtu.be/-GWXak1tqkI?si=cVQrllcAEA5JXkps.

UNESCO anniversary after which the international musicians can be seen in the video, many shots pending over to young children and foreign visitors.[165] The images showing different generations talking about history create a sense of timelessness and make use of the 'retro' trend that has become such a popular means to promote sites of historic cultural heritage. The international significance of UNESCO listing is thus combined with the time-travel concept, both making the festival attractive to tourists and presenting both a local and an international image. It makes it possible for a local festival to have grown into a large intercultural celebration.

Perception of Local Groups

What is mostly protected under national and UNESCO heritage laws, is not necessarily in the best interest of every party involved. The positive messages that are spread in promotional material do not necessarily reflect the opinions of all local groups. Some local groups, among them residents and shamans, have voiced discontent with the way the festival is being endorsed and promoted throughout the last 20 years. Some do not agree with the increased commodification of the religious practices as rituals have transformed more into performances rather than personal cultural expressions in some settings.[166] The importance of 'culture' over 'religion', and the gradual decentering of the shamanist aspects into more of a hybrid of Korean religious practices, takes away from the festival's authenticity in their opinions.[167] Some of the rituals have turned into performance art and an acquired skill, rather than a system of belief. There have also been so many activities and entertainment added to the festivities, that a large number of the shamanist rituals have become less visited.[168]

However, other Gangneung residents at the same time sense a feeling of inevitability, and in order to preserve the customs practiced during the festival, its promotion and growth is necessary.[169] Even many locals themselves have expressed they like the festivity aspect of the festival more than they really care for a personal spiritual experience, and they enjoy some of the more light-hearted activities.[170] There is thus some contestation between residents around how the rituals should best be preserved. Although the festival is being promoted as a location

[165] 강릉단오제, "엔딩영상,"
[166] Kim, "After the Heritage," 70.
[167] Kim, "After the Heritage," 70-71.
[168] Saeji, "Replacing Faith in Spirits," 162
[169] Saeji, "Replacing Faith in Spirits," 160.
[170] Saeji, "Replacing Faith in Spirits," 163.

for entertainment, the festivities still revolve around the religious traditions that they were based on. Providing a stage for local performers who are skilled in traditional art connected to the festival, also Going back to Smith's work, when heritage is considered a 'cultural practice' that is ever evolving and is representative of current cultural expressions, the festival in its current form can be an effective way of preserving heritage that is still culturally significant to a group of people.[171] Many local residents are still attracted to the celebrations, and the UNESCO designation is attracting visitors from outside of Gangneung and Korea to learn about the heritage practices.

Reflecting on Gangneung Danoje's Case

The increased awareness around heritagization, and the designation of national intangible heritage of the festival by UNESCO, has popularized the Gangneung Danoje festival in circumstances of domestic contestation. Shamanism can be considered a deeply rooted part of society in Korea and in narratives of Korean identity, but also has become a contested practice. The growth of Christianity in the country, and the ongoing controversies surrounding corruption scandals and mingling of shaman figures in Korean politics and larger religious organizations, have tainted the perception of those shamanic practices. At the same time, those same practices in which people individually seek counseling through a shaman, have become more popular among younger Koreans. The spiritual aspect attracts young adults who get stuck in the stressful competitive society they experience in their daily lives.[172]

Promoting the rituals at the festival as inherent to Korean culture creates a connection to not only local residents, but to a wider Korean and international public. Combining this sentiment with promoting the UNESCO listing, the celebrations have transformed from a local religious celebration to a national event.

There is a danger of reducing cultural skills and rituals to more superficial performance art and entertainment. It is therefore important in areas such as Gangneung, where cultural forms of heritage are preserved, to include opinions of the local performers and residents in decisions on the festival.[173] Governing bodies, such as the Gangneung local government and the organizing Gangneung Danoje Committee need to keep involving interested local parties that are connected to the religious expressions, rituals and performance. However, much like the

[171] Smith, "Uses of Heritage," 11-13.
[172] KTimes, "Why Shamanism Continues."
[173] Kim, "After the Heritage," 73-74.

increased heritagization of the structures in Gunsan, the commodification and promotion of the festival can also provide an environment in which the cultural skills can actually be protected and taught to the next generations. Popularizing the celebrations in Gangneung has increased interest in the historic nature of the festivities and the participation of a much larger group of people. At the festival, I could see quite a lot of older Korean people visiting with their children and grandchildren, showing them some of the more traditional performances. The popularization of the celebrations can contribute to the exposure of cultural heritage to younger generations and create renewed interest. With the incorporation of different types of Korean historical forms of heritage, the performances and rituals could form a type of education on cultural heritage in Korea and beyond that younger children can experience. Although it is unclear how ongoing issues with shamans in politics might influence the festival's popularity in the future, for now, the large-scale and international celebrations in Gangneung have successfully pushed the more negative associations with Korean shamanism to the background.

Discussion

When comparing the cases of Gunsan and Gangneung, there is a difference in the way tangible and intangible forms of heritage are preserved. Important is the much stronger involvement of people in the intangible practices in Gangneung than in the preservation of tangible heritage in Gunsan. This means that people and their skills are also "heritagized", rather than just exploiting the existing buildings and structures in Gunsan.[174] Another difference is the contested narrative behind the heritage sites; in Gunsan's case, the controversy is created by outside influences, namely the Japanese occupiers. As for Gangneung Danoje, the shamanism discussion is very domestically relevant, creating an important difference between the two case studies. In both cases, the conflicts have moved to the background, as the colonial past and the shamanic rituals do not people from visiting these places for entertainment. A large number of visitors seem to separate some of the ongoing conflicts from the historical practices that are showcased at the site. A celebration of "Koreanhood" appears in both cases to be more important than the tensions within Korean society and politics around these topics. The connection to an 'essential' Korean past appears stronger to visitors than the political debates that are hidden beneath the tourist destinations.

[174] Saeji, "Replacing Faith in Spirits," 164-167.

This outcome does have implications for the way heritage is viewed and for local groups whose practices are increasingly being commodified. An outline of both negative and positive consequences can be discussed:

Negatives: This increased commodification can simplify the heritage sites, and change tangible and intangible cultural heritage into places for entertainment and day trips. Some of the more accurate historical representation can be overshadowed by light-hearted recreation and it could potentially take away from some of the historical value of the heritage.[175] Moreover, local traditions and forms of culture practiced by a local minority group such as in Gangneung, is transformed into places of entertainment and performance. There is a danger these cultural skills may lose some of their cultural and historic depth, and the individual spiritual meaning of rituals could be overshadowed by the need to commercialize the local traditions.[176]

Positives: Dominant narratives around Korean victimhood, and political influence on the perception of Japanese historic buildings and local shamanic practices can be diminished by popularizing the heritage sites. Increased interest in visiting these places and viewing the performances offers the opportunity and means for local organizations to restore and preserve the buildings and their cultural knowledge.[177] Increased commodification brings about more awareness of the existence of the heritage, and can make people interested to learn more about different parts of Korean history. When more people are aware and younger generations are exposed and interested, it could help preserve these local cultural traditions.

Conclusion

How are contested narratives of national identity conveyed in the process of commodification of heritage in the cases of Gunsan City and the Gangneung Danoje Festival in South Korea? By making use of popular trends, international heritage listing and forms of commercialization of a type of 'cultural past', local governments are increasingly overcoming the contested nature of some of the existing heritage. This contested nature can be overcome by transforming sites and structures into places for cultural entertainment, slightly more so than places solely for education purposes. Domestic contestation does not automatically keep people from visiting heritage sites when they experience the activity as a positive outing. Incorporating heritage

[175] Kim, "After the Heritage," 70-71
[176] Kim, "After the Heritage," 72-74 ; Saeji, "Replacing Faith in Spirits," 167-168.
[177] Saeji, "Replacing Faith in Spirits," 167-168.

organizations, such as the local Committee in Gunsan, or UNESCO on a much larger scale, can popularize the sites and the goal to preserve the heritage. Making use of trends that younger generations might recognize, the heritage sites are gaining popularity even when their history and existence is one of struggle, political discourse and controversy.[178] In the case of Gunsan, the 'retro' or 'newtro' trends are incorporated into the modernized and restructured streets of the "Modern Cultural Belt".[179] And the promotion through various mediums incorporate the created sense of nostalgia for a period most visitors have not experienced. These desires to 'travel back in time' and experience the past through traveling and visiting sites appear to increasingly obscure the national narrative of Koreans as 'victims' of other nations. Making use of the international recognition for UNESCO listed heritage, the Gangneung Danoje Festival Committee has changed its image into a broader representation of Korean ritual culture towards an international audience, as became very apparent during my visit. The popularity of heritage tourism has created space for mainly local governments to create a form of branding around the historically contested sites. This contradiction is not necessarily created deliberately, but can be seen as a consequence of the increasing desire to commodify types of heritage that have the potential to attract visitors to a certain site.

More research can be done on the way locations or practices that are domestically contested are being commodified into tourist spaces, in Korea and beyond. Other studies could especially focus on the negatives and positives of these developments, and the effects on the improvement of preserving local forms of cultural heritage at large.

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[178] Lee, "Beyond "Imagined" Nostalgia," 97, 101, 104.
[179] Lee, "Beyond "Imagined" Nostalgia," 97-99.

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