

THE IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON TWO INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE ELEMENTS IN KOREA

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of this paper is to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis on the realm of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Drawing upon the 2021 Questionnaire Survey, we focused on two elements of ICH in Korea, namely *Namhaean Byeolsingut*, a Shaman ritual of the South Sea, and *otchil jangin*, a master of lacquer craftsmanship. The rationale for this selection lies in the dual classification by the Korean government, categorizing them as either valuable or perishable traditions within the realms of traditional performing arts and handicrafts. Since the inception of the intangible cultural heritage preservation system in 1962, ICH elements have been protected and preserved, with a focus on these two categories among the myriad of cultural traditions. The bifurcated classification system remained in force until 2015, when the newly enacted 'Protection and Promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage' law came into effect.³ This legislative update resulted in the subdivision of the previous two classifications into seven distinct categories. The reclassification primarily drew inspiration from the 2003 UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage. These include traditional knowledge, oral traditions and expressions, traditional customs, social rituals, traditional festivals, traditional performance and arts, as well as traditional skills.⁴ The subdivision aimed to provide a more nuanced and inclusive framework that aligns with the diverse nature of ICH, as outlined in the global standards set forth by UNESCO. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the majority of ICH elements continue to align predominantly with the original two categories even within the expanded framework introduced by the new law. A comparative study between these categories enables us to scrutinize the diverse effects of COVID-19 on Korean ICH.

Namhaean Byeolsin-gut, or the Shaman Ritual of the South Sea (referred to as gut or shaman ritual hereafter), has a longstanding tradition in the coastal areas

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³ See the websites of Korean Cultural Heritage Administration, www.cha.go.kr

⁴ See the websites of National Law Information Center, <http://www.law.go.kr>

and islands of the South Sea in Korea. Fishing villages historically conducted shaman rituals to promote the well-being of the community and foster a sense of cooperation among villagers. However, with the acceleration of the nation's industrialization and modernization in the 1960s and 70s, the practice gradually waned in the South Sea regions. Shamanic practitioners and their adherents faced a crisis with the discontinuation of their rituals. In response, they established the Preservation Society of *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut* in 1987, with its workshop situated in the city of Tongyeong, Gyeongsang Namdo. The society is led by the master shaman, Jeong Yeong Man, designated a Living Human Treasure (LHT) by the central government. Due to the efforts made by the Preservation Society, several coastal and island villages have maintained the shaman rituals. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 led to the suspension of rituals for the past three years.

The second research site focused on the lacquer workshop located in the city of Jeonju, Jeolla Bukto. Yi Eui Shik, a master lacquer craftsman, or *otchil jangjin* in Korean, is responsible for transmitting traditional skills and knowledge of *otchil*—a unique lacquering technique employing a specific plant. *Otchil*-ware is crafted by applying raw *ot*, collected from the *ot* tree or refined *ot*, onto wooden frames. Widely used as a natural paint, *otchil* renders objects waterproof, moisture-proof, and insect-proof. Designated as a bearer of *otchil* or Living Human Treasure by the provincial government of Jeolla Bukto, Yi Eui Shik's workshop and products also fell victim to the repercussions of COVID-19. Many ICH bearers in the domain of traditional crafts faced financial hardships since the pandemic's outbreak. The demand for lacquerware, particularly among affluent consumers, companies, or

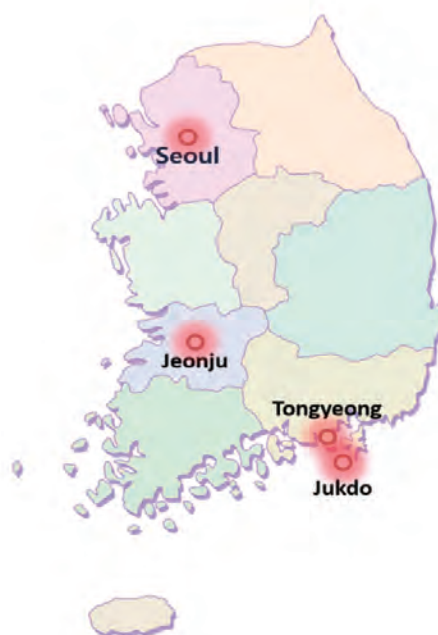


Figure 1. Field Research Sites

governmental institutions seeking luxurious gifts, has sharply declined. The reduced occurrences of high-profile events and gatherings due to the pandemic further contributed to the dwindling opportunities for the purchase of such high-priced gifts.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Our fieldwork concerning these two ICH elements unfolded from August 30, 2022, to January 29, 2023. The research was conducted in two distinct locales: Jeonju in Jeolla Bukto and Tongyeong in Gyeongsang Namdo, alongside the Island of Jukto in Korea (Figure 1). Despite the confirmation of COVID-19 cases in both cities and Jukto during the initial stages of 2020, the incidence was relatively low. Throughout the pandemic, these regions were meticulously regulated by the central government's preventive guidelines and mandates, compelling adherence to emergency regulations. Comprehensive insights into the COVID-19 situation and the government's responsive measures are derived from the figures (Figure 2, Tables 3 and 4), and summaries compiled from city government reports and reputable news sources. It is noteworthy that statistical data pertaining to the Island of Jukto was unavailable, leading to the exclusion of Jukto cases from this analysis.

Table 1. The COVID-19 situation and the government's responsive measures in Tongyeong City (Y-M-D)

2020. 02. 24	The first patient visited Tongyeong. Notice of temporary closure of public sports facilities
2020. 02. 26	On the 26th, social welfare centers, etc. are temporarily closed, and traditional markets are closed for 5 days.
2020. 02. 29	Youth After School Academy Closed
2020. 03. 03	Provision of rules for COVID 19 self-quarantine areas (2nd edition)
2020. 04. 07	Intensive social distancing extended by 2 weeks until 4.19 Patents 378 (total), 65 self-quarantine. Since then, daily corona patient statistics are provided,
2020. 04. 08	Patients 407 (total), 77 self-quarantine
2020. 04. 30	Patients 673, 51 self-quarantine
2020. 05. 30	Revision of detailed guidelines for distancing in daily life (3rd edition)
2020. 06. 10	Implementation of KI-PASS (electronic pass)
2020. 08. 23	Early closure of beach in Tongyeong
2020. 12. 01	Revision of detailed guidelines for distancing in daily life (4th edition)
2020. 12. 08	Social distancing Level 2 upgraded (until the 28th). Restaurants, cafes, and indoor sports facilities are open until 9:00 PM. Packing and delivery only.
2021. 01. 31	Announcement of social distancing administrative order extension
2021. 02. 15	Notice of social distancing Level 1.5 administrative order

2021. 04. 30	Social distancing Level 1.5, extended
2021. 06. 01	Permission to gathering up to 8 people, but in the case of immediate family gatherings, vaccinated persons are excluded from the limit of 8 people
2021. 07. 01	Social distancing reform proposal - Private gatherings of 8 or more people allowed
2021. 07. 09	Apply Level 2 social distancing due to corona spread (reinforced)
2021. 07. 17 – 28	Administrative order banning private gatherings of 5 or more people
2021. 07. 20 – 28	Administrative Order for Level 3 Social Distancing
2021. 08. 09 – 22	Announcement of special quarantine rules in Tongyeong (Suspension of incentives for those who have completed vaccination)
2021. 10. 18	Extension of the Level 3 social distancing and extension of the special quarantine rules in Tongyeong
2021. 10. 30	1st administrative order notification of social distancing following the phased daily recovery transition
2021. 12. 02	Administrative order change on quarantine rules related to eating at movie theaters and concert halls
2022. 02. 04	Corona Vaccination Information for Teenagers Going to School
2022. 12. 29	Guidance on additional vaccinations when traveling abroad
2023. 01. 19	Guidance on medical centers such as self-inpatient hospitals for COVID-19 patients in Tongyeong at home
2023. 01. 30	Mandatory indoor mask conversion to recommendation.
2023. 02. 21	60,678 (cumulative) corona patients

Table 2. The COVID-19 situation and the government’s responsive measures in Jeonju City (Y-M-D)

2020. 01. 22.	First suspected case confirmed and quarantined.
2020. 01. 28.	Jeollabuk-do raised the response level as the infectious disease crisis alert was raised from ‘caution’ to ‘warning’
2020. 01. 31.	Cancellation of large-scale events (Full-moon festival, international choir contest, etc.). Installation of heat detectors in multi-gathering places such as Jeonju Station and express/local bus terminals
2020. 02. 09.	Operation of the Regional Economic Emergency Response Team in response to the COVID-19
2020. 02. 10.	Live Coronavirus information provided (Jeonju city website & mobile app.)
2020. 02. 20.	First patient reported. Daycare centers, local children’s centers, Jeonbuk Senior Welfare Center, senior citizen centers, and healthy family support centers are closed and suspended, and swimming pools in Jeonju are suspended.
2020. 03. 03.	Provision of rules for COVID-19 self-quarantine areas (2nd edition)
2020. 04. 07.	COVID-19 Intensive social distancing extended by 2 weeks until 4.19
2020. 05. 30.	Revision of detailed guidelines for distancing in daily life (3rd edition)
2020. 06. 10.	Implementation of KI-PASS
2020. 12. 01.	Guidelines for distancing in daily life (4th edition) revised and enforced

2020. 12. 02.	Corona confirmed cases nationwide 35,163 (death 526), 94 new cases in Jeonju
2021. 01. 04.	Inspection of 162 high-risk facilities for COVID-19
2021. 01. 25.	Job opening for COVID-19 prevention
2021. 02. 26.	Public briefing on COVID-19 vaccination
2021. 04. 01.	Start of COVID-19 vaccination for seniors aged 75 and over
2021. 04. 02.	Announcement of COVID-19 social distancing level 2 upgrade (04. 02- 15.)
2021. 08. 09.	Announcement of COVID-19 social distancing level 3 upgrade (08. 09- 22.)
2021. 08. 27.	COVID-19 social distancing level 4 upgraded (08. 27.- 09. 09.)
2021. 10. 05.	Information on implementation plan for additional vaccination (booster shot) for COVID-19 vaccination
2022. 01. 17.	Measures to strengthen social distancing (until 2. 6)
2022. 01. 26.	Order to close all 470 daycare centers in the city
2022.01. 29 - 02. 22.	Enshrinement facilities closed during the Lunar New Year holidays
2022.03. 30.	1,330 Patients in the Province and 4,206 in the previous week, the highest number of patients
2022. 04. 18	Cancellation of mandatory prevention guidelines for multi-use facilities, etc. and cancellation of mandatory prevention guidelines for gatherings, meetings, and events
2022. 04. 25.	Removal of mandatory public transportation quarantine guidelines
2022. 07. 25.	Suspension of face-to-face visits to facilities vulnerable to infection such as nursing homes
2022. 09. 03.	Corona test abolished before entry regardless of vaccination
2022. 10. 04.	Lifting restrictions on visits to nursing hospitals
2023. 01. 30.	Mandatory indoor mask conversion to recommendation
2023. 02. 21.	408,772 (cumulative) corona patients

Numbers of COVID-19 patients in the cities of Jeonju & Tongyeong from February 2020 to January 2023

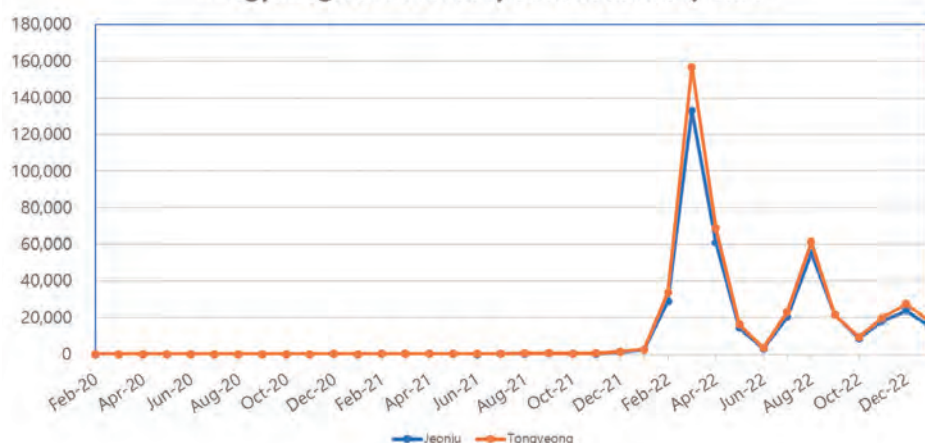


Figure 2. Numbers of COVID-19 patients in the cities of Jeonju & Tongyeong from February 2020 to January 2023. (Sources: Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency, <https://ncv.kdca.go.kr/covdash/biz/dsbd/covDsbdOcrn.do>)

Table 3. COVID-19 cases in Tongyeong City & Gyeongsang Namdo (South Gyeongsang Province) from February 2020 to January 2023. (Sources: Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency, <https://ncv.kdca.go.kr/covdash/biz/dsbd/covDsbdOcrn.do>)

2020		2021		2022		2023	
Month	Number of Patient	Month	Number of Patient	Month	Number of Patient	Month	Number of Patient
	Tong-yeong S. Gys Province		Tong-yeong S. Gys Province		Tong-yeong S. Gys Province		Tong-yeong S. Gys Province
Feb.	- 59	Jan.	2 686	Jan.	213 7,619	Jan.	2,832 75,003
Mar.	- 37	Feb.	4 172	Feb.	4,946 112,349		
Apr.	- 21	Mar.	18 777	Mar.	23,929 643,639		
May	- 6	Apr.	13 955	Apr.	7,795 248,149		
June	- 11	May	14 784	May	1,776 55,991		
Jul.	1 25	Jun.	6 548	Jun.	325 15,316		
Aug.	0 77	Jul.	57 1,956	Jul.	2,832 75,463		
Sep.	1 55	Aug.	74 2,777	Aug.	6,159 221,632		
Oct.	2 25	Sep.	9 1,480	Sep.	2,457 94,537		
Nov.	0 309	Oct.	17 1,548	Oct.	822 39,301		
Dec.	6 700	Nov.	70 2,007	Nov.	1,664 77,487		
		Dec.	261 5,661	Dec.	3,762 120,870		

Table 4. COVID-19 cases in Jeonju City and Jeolla Bukto (North Jeolla Province) from February 2020 to January 2023. (Sources: Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency, <https://ncv.kdca.go.kr/covdash/biz/dsbd/covDsbdOcrn.do>)

2020			2021			2022			2023		
Month	Number of Patient		Month	Number of Patient		Month	Number of Patient		Month	Number of Patient	
	Jeonju city	N. Jeolla Province		Jeonju city	N. Jeolla Province		Jeonju city	N. Jeolla Province		Jeonju city	N. Jeolla Province
Feb.	1	4	Jan.	37	202	Jan.	2,393	5,371	Jan.	14,962	37,553
Mar.	5	8	Feb.	84	152	Feb.	28,854	61,952			
Apr.	2	5	Mar.	161	260	Mar.	132,974	317,872			
May	0	3	Apr.	151	485	Apr.	60,974	166,703			
Jun.	2	6	May	54	289	May	14,491	36,427			
Jul.	0	12	Jun.	49	139	Jun.	3,020	7,934			
Aug.	26	48	Jul.	105	403	Jul.	20,420	43,936			
Sep.	13	41	Aug.	369	821	Aug.	55,148	134,891			
Oct.	10	38	Sep.	458	927	Sep.	21,522	55,506			
Nov.	34	168	Oct.	229	672	Oct.	8,510	23,181			
Dec.	109	503	Nov.	374	1,145	Nov.	18,226	47,877			
			Dec.	1,225	3,236	Dec.	23,781	61,622			

We conducted on-site visits to the workshops of Intangible Cultural Heritage bearers, engaging in both interviews and participant observation. Our fieldwork encompassed not only interviews with the primary figures associated with the ICH but also extended to include other active participants dedicated to the safeguarding of the specific ICH under investigation.

The interviews were semi-structured, open-ended, and in-depth, involving both the ICH bearers and their associates. Their perspectives, emanating directly from their involvement in the field, were meticulously documented and transcribed in Korean. Throughout the interview sessions, the respondents exhibited a sincere demeanor, providing forthright responses to the posed inquiries, and these sessions typically extended for one to two hours. Concurrently, participant observation was undertaken during our time in the field.

Our research methodology comprises three integral components: data collection from the field, analysis of the interview materials, and a comparative study of the two ICH elements. Data collection involved compiling interview transcripts, photographs, and audio-visual recordings. When scrutinizing the interview materials, our researchers delved into discerning the distinctions and commonalities between the two ICH elements—the shaman ritual and *otchil* crafts. The field work schedules are outlined as following (Table 5).

Table 5. Schedule for the field work

Date	Interviewee	Contents
2022.08.30.	<i>otchil</i> master	Introductory session
2022.09.03.	<i>otchil</i> master	General information
2022.09.05.	<i>otchil</i> master	Inquiries on COVID effects
2022.09.05.	<i>otchil</i> master	Participant observation on <i>otchil</i> practices and training session 1
2022.09.28.	Shaman & other members	Collecting General information
2022.10.07.	<i>otchil</i> master	Participant observation on <i>otchil</i> practices and training session 2
2023.01.14.-01.16.	Field trip	Visit crafts museums and galleries
2023.01.17.	<i>otchil</i> master	Photos, videos and other related materials during the period of pandemic
2023.01.26.-01.27.	shamans and musicians	Collecting general information and Inquiries on COVID effects
2023.01.28.-01.29.	field trip to the rituals	Participant observation of the ritual in the Island of Jukto

GENERAL INFORMATION OF THE TWO ELEMENTS

Namhaean Byeolsin-gut

Namhaean Byeolsin-gut, the shaman ritual of the South Sea in Korea, unfolds as a village gut—an shamanic ceremony held in the islands of Hansando, Saryangdo, Jukdo, and numerous others within the South Archipelago of the Korean peninsula. The South Sea, adorned with hundreds of islands, presents a picturesque panorama, concealing behind it the harsh reality of the islanders' livelihoods, heavily reliant on fishing. In recent times, these islands have witnessed a decline in population, particularly among the younger generation aged between 20 and 40. Consequently, economic, social, and cultural challenges on the islands have intensified.

Despite the population decrease, the islanders who remain have cultivated a closely-knit community, shaped by the ecological and environmental conditions of island life. They have sustained their economic, social, and cultural fabric, placing a premium on cooperation. The village gut, once an embodiment of communal spirit, is now on the precipice of extinction, often reduced to a mere annual cultural event. The resilience of this tradition owes much to the diligent efforts of the *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut* Preservation Society.

In a bid to safeguard the endangered *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut*, Jeong Yeong Man, the master shaman (Figure 5, 6 and 7), rallied practitioners to conduct the ritual outside islands where invitations had ceased. This initiative evolved into the Preservation Society of *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut*. Recognizing the cultural signifi-

cance, the Korean government accorded protection to the shaman ritual, designating it as a National Intangible Cultural Property in 1987. The gut practitioners were officially acknowledged as transmitters of the ritual, with Jeong Yeong Man assuming leadership of the preservation society. Comprising 30 members, including shamans, musicians, and dancers, the society is invited to village gut, where they perform rituals for and with the villagers, imbued with a spirit of reverence.

The gut serves as a community-based ceremony occurring between the first and full moon of the Lunar New Year, aimed at invoking good harvest for fishermen and the general well-being of villagers. The frequency of the gut ritual varies among villages, occurring every two or three years, with exceptions like Saryangdo Neuryang village, which conducts it once a decade. In 2020, the ten-year village ceremony took place just before the onset of COVID-19, sparing Neuryang villagers from a decade-long wait. The sporadic nature of the gut ritual in the South Sea islands is a response to the economic challenges faced by the islanders. Village heads must mobilize funds for the ceremony, with villagers contributing money, time, and labor voluntarily.

On January 28 and 29, 2023, *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut* unfolded in Jukdo village, embodying a ritual transmitted over 400 years.⁵ As part of the village ceremony, the elderly villagers, some in their seventies and eighties, presented elaborate offerings to the Dragon God. Despite their sincere devotion and lifelong commitment to the ritual, a sense of pessimism permeated their perspectives on its future.

'I am apprehensive about the future of this ritual. Who will uphold it? There's uncertainty whether I will be here next time to prepare offerings for the sea and fish gods. No one knows.' (A senior village woman in Jukdo)

Essentially, *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut* is a ritualistic plea to the gods for a bountiful fish catch and the safety of South Sea islanders. Historically, islanders conducted *Byeolsin-gut* regularly, fostering a communal bond, expressing gratitude, mitigating risks, and serving shared objectives. In recent times, however, many islands in the South Sea have abandoned the village ritual due to factors such as the rise of Christianity, population decline, economic burdens, and labor shortages caused by aging. Consequently, the *Byeolsin-gut* Preservation Society has witnessed a diminishing role and diminished activities. In response, Jeong Yeong Man and the Preservation Society have strived to rescue the village ritual as an embodiment of communal faith, even extending its reach to urban settings as a folk art showcased at city festivals. This not only serves the city dwellers' nostalgia for a bygone culture but also broadens the societal impact of the Preservation Society. Jeong Yeongman, the *daesasani* (master shaman) and the chair of the Preservation Society, has tirelessly worked towards ensuring the sustainability of the shaman ritual.

⁵ In the years of 2021 and 2022 the gut was not held in the village due to COVID 19.

'I worry more than anyone else about the continuity of the gut. My family has kept the gut alive for 400 years, and otherwise, it would be extinct.' (Jeong Yeongman, shaman/chair of Namhaean Byeolsin-gut Preservation Society)

Some members of the Preservation Society have voiced their perspectives on the future trajectory of the ritual.

'I don't believe it's feasible to rescue the shaman ritual in this cultural milieu, even with government subsidies. What we truly need is a strategy to overcome the negative perception of the shaman ritual. With the advent of Westernized education, the ritual became stigmatized as an archaic cultural element, deemed negatively superstitious. I believe that actively studying how to reintegrate it and practicing it can breathe life back into the shaman ritual, without relying solely on government initiatives and preservation policies.' (Yi HW, a member of Namhaean Byeolsin-gut Preservation Society)

Despite surface appearances of Jukdo Gut surviving with care, the elderly villagers' sincere efforts to preserve the shamanic ritual, and the Preservation Society members' commitment, as pointed out by master shaman Jeong, 'We are still alive but barely holding our heads above water, working hard to avoid drowning.'



Figure 3. Master Shaman, Jeong Yeong Man (Photo: H. Hahm)



Figure 4. Jeong Yeong Man and his student shaman (Photo: H. Hahm)



Figure 5. Preparing gut with Jeong Yeong Man, a shaman and other members of Preservation Society (Photo: H. Hahm)

Traditional *Otchil* Crafts

Korea boasts a rich lacquerware tradition spanning over 2,000 years, with state regulation of lacquerware dating back to the Unified Shilla period (the 8-9th century). The precious nature of lacquer, or *otchil*, led successive Korean dynasties, including the later Chosun dynasty, to meticulously control its production and distribution at the national level. In the late Chosun period, lacquerware gained popularity among the affluent classes, becoming sought-after household items. However, the widespread popularity of western-style furniture in the 1980s, coupled with the introduction of cashew as a more economical substitute for lacquer, resulted in a decline in demand for traditional lacquerware. Despite this, artisans like Lee Eui Shik (Figure 8) have tenaciously upheld the *otchil* tradition.

Lee Eui Shik embarked on his *otchil* journey at the age of fifteen when, as the eldest son following his father's passing, he assumed responsibility for his family's livelihood. Initially employed in a Jeonju-based lacquer workshop, he absorbed the intricacies of lacquer while diligently running errands for three to four years. His earnest commitment led him to Seoul, where he sought guidance from esteemed lacquer masters like Choi Hwan Chang, Baek Sun Won, and Hong Sun Tae.

Creating an array of works from furniture to trays, teacups, and candlesticks, Lee Eui Shik's expertise extends beyond the application of *otchil* to encompass design. Inspired by antique materials and products, he has dedicated his life to transmitting traditional lacquer techniques to the next generation, showcasing extraordinary talent in both *otchil* and design. Presently, he operates a workshop (Figure 9) producing various traditional lacquer crafts (Figure 10), including furniture, decorative houseware, and practical tableware. Furthermore, his workshop serves as a bastion for the transmission of *otchil* craftsmanship, actively engaging

in the education and training of those eager to learn *otchil*. Lee Eui Shik is involved in formal education at universities, and even during the challenging period of COVID-19, his commitment to transmitting knowledge persisted. Despite the hushed ambiance in his workshop during the pandemic, transmission training persisted with a limited number of students adhering to COVID prevention protocols. Notably, Lee Eui Shik adapted to the situation by connecting with college students through online platforms for his classes.

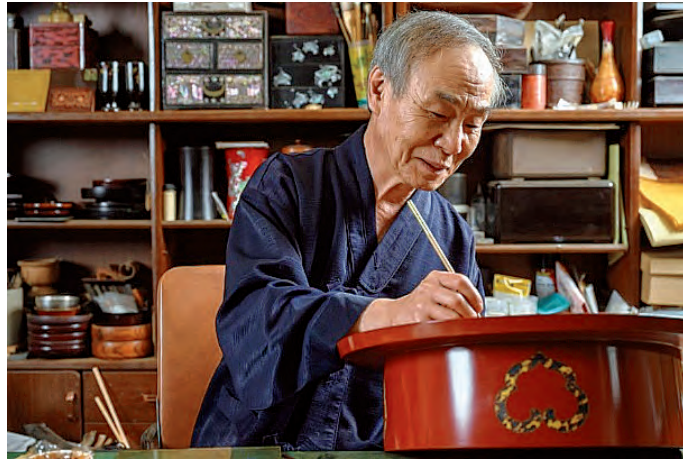


Figure 6. Lee Eui Shik, Master Lacquer Crafts (Photo: H. Hahm)



Figure 7. In His Workshop (Photo: H. Hahm)



Figure 8. Lee Eui Shik's work, Decorative Box (Photo: H. Hahm)

CHANGING ASPECTS OF THE TWO ELEMENTS UNDER THE PANDEMIC

Namhaean Byeolsin-gut

Time for reflection

Amid the pandemic-induced hiatus of village gut rituals and city performances, the approximately 30 members of the Namhaean Byeolsingut Preservation Association, encompassing shamans, musicians, and dancers, found themselves with an unexpected surplus of free time. Seizing this opportunity, the members voluntarily initiated a capacity-building workshop (Figure 11) facilitated by the benevolent support of Jeong Yeong-man, the master shaman and head of the Preservation Society. Leveraging online platforms, the members convened regularly to partake in a series of workshops designed to enhance their skills through introspective contemplation of their past endeavors. The schedule and focal points of these workshops are succinctly outlined below (Table 6).

Within the workshop, a distinctive lecture series spearheaded by Jeong Yeong Man, the master shaman, took center stage. He underscored the imperative need for delving into the history of *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut*—a facet often overlooked, particularly by younger members preoccupied with mastering music, dance, and narratives. Recognizing this gap in spiritual and historical understanding, Jeong Yeong Man seized this opportune moment to impart knowledge. The members of the Preservation Society unanimously deemed these workshops profoundly meaningful, fostering a deeper comprehension of the gut's societal and cultural functions. Consequently, they affirmed their commitment to practice and transmit the gut.

In a poignant reflection on the purpose of conducting gut rituals, Jeong Yeong Man articulated during an interview on January 26, 2023, 'The purpose of throwing gut for the deceased and for the living descendants as well. People

Table 6. Schedule and focal points of the workshops

Date	Topics of Workshop
2020.04.03	Discussion on the two guts: Jukto and Juklim village guts
2020.04.17	Discussion on Saryang Island's ritual
2020.10.28	Understanding of intangible cultural heritage
2020.12.23	Learning from old video records, Jansan geolri
2021.02.24	Study from basic concept of gut to in-depth study of the gut
2021.03.31	Study of the shaman guts in the village of Geoje. Visit Geoje
2021.04.24	Study on the relationship between cultural heritage and <i>Namhaean Byeolsin-gut</i>
2021.10.13	- Study on the meanings of ritual goods - Study on the differences between <i>Byeolsin-gu</i> and <i>Owisaenam-gu</i>
2021.12.22	Study on the 24 seasonal divisions to the rituals
2022.01.22	Ritual process of <i>Juklim gut</i>
2022.02.24	Colloquium of ICH
2022.06.25	Meaning and Process of <i>Seongju-gut</i>
2022.07.23	Why are shamans considered as superstitious figures?

(descendants) tell me to have the deceased go to a good place. I need to release what's stuck in their chests. Yes, the deceased must have gone to a good place because the person you (descendants) love has died. The purpose of gut is to return the living to normal while giving a vague sense of hope.' This sentiment encapsulated the essence of *Byeolsin-gut*, a tradition spanning over 400 years in the coastal villages and islands of the South Sea, gradually diminishing in recent times and exacerbated by the COVID-19 outbreaks over the past three years. Apprehensions regarding the post-pandemic future loomed large.



Figure 9. Online Capacity building workshop through Zoom (Photo: H. Hahm)

In response to this crisis, the Preservation Society prioritized internal education, cultivating an awareness of the vital significance of village gut. Aligning with Jeong Yeong Man's belief that crisis resolution lies in adhering to fundamentals, every member embarked on efforts to create gut rituals centered on the living, infused with the essence of the soul and heartfelt resonance rather than mere spectacle. The master shaman's teachings became integral during the pandemic, emphasizing the de-emphasis of extravagant music and dance techniques. Notably, *Sinawi* music, a crucial component of *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut*, was approached with a focus on natural learning over time, avoiding excessive constraints on thin music. Jeong Yeong Man encouraged the accumulation of skills and know-how through extended practice, recognizing the physical toll while emphasizing the organic acquisition of expertise.

Sharing namhaean byeolsin-gut activities through social media

The Preservation Society has recently embarked on an active utilization of Social Networking Services (SNS). Presently, the schedule of *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut* activities is promptly communicated through platforms like Facebook and Instagram. This strategic shift has garnered attention not only from the local community but also from professionals, manifesting a heightened interest in the cultural richness embedded in *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut* sites. To amplify outreach, the Society shares photos and videos of the transmission activities through diverse channels such as YouTube, homepages, and additional SNS platforms. This concerted effort has enabled the establishment of connections with individuals nationwide, expanding the network beyond the pre-existing confines of *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut*.

Within this burgeoning network, the promotion of *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut* has flourished, accompanied by an influx of supportive and encouraging messages. Preservation Society members express that these endeavors bolster their resolve to transmit this cherished tradition.

Jeong Eun Ju, a Preservation Society member, shared her experience, stating, 'I used Facebook and Instagram extensively for the promotion of *Byeolsin-gut*. It's not a natural inclination for me to engage in social media, but the circumstances left me with no choice. Now, as I primarily upload content to promote *Byeolsin-gut*, I've received numerous positive responses and friend requests from previously unknown individuals. It became apparent that many people share an interest in *Byeolsin-gut*, prompting them to seek connections. Accepting these connections has fostered engagement, with individuals leaving comments and contributing to the dialogue.' This shift to online platforms has not only facilitated promotion but has also become a conduit for fostering a broader community around *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut*, reaffirming its cultural significance.

Attempts to transition into a new format and achieve self-sufficiency

Fortuitously, the Preservation Society has recently welcomed young members into its fold, embarking on a transformative journey toward self-sufficiency. This endeavor involves the creation of a children's play version aimed at educating young minds about the intricacies of *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut*. Furthermore, active participation in diverse events within nearby cities has been undertaken to amplify the promotion of *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut*. While these initiatives spark hope for the future of gut traditions, the reality is nuanced, with pervasive negative connotations surrounding gut practices. The Preservation Society, cognizant of the looming threat of gut's potential submersion into the currents of industrial-driven capitalism and urbanization in Korea, staunchly believes in its responsibility to safeguard this heritage from vanishing.

In a significant departure from tradition, *Namhae Byeolsingut* was ingeniously transformed into a puppet play format, tailored to provide a child-friendly introduction to *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut*. This innovative approach debuted in 2019 and garnered immense popularity, enduring even during the pandemic era while adhering to COVID-19 prevention measures. Audiences comprised children ranging from kindergarten to elementary school students, marking a successful foray into a more accessible and engaging avenue.

Through these pioneering activities, the Preservation Society cultivated newfound confidence and devised comprehensive plans to attain self-sufficiency. Reflecting on this transformative journey, Jeong Yeong Man, the master shaman, expressed surprise and optimism, stating, 'I was very surprised. Really, I have a lot of obsessive thoughts about the *Saemaul Undong*⁶ or some prejudice about a gut in the past. Even after developing this (children's puppet show), my worries did not stop. People would point fingers at me again because of shaman. But it turned out the complete opposite. A new world is coming so that I feel a lot of hopeful things.' This testimony underscores the profound impact of these innovative endeavors in challenging preconceptions and fostering a sense of hope for the future of *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut*.

Otchil Master

Low-cost products

Elaborate lacquer crafts, known for their intricate detailing, were traditionally high-end items, commanding prices ranging from several millions to a million won, contingent upon the type and size of decoration. Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Lee Eui Shik's workshop was frequented by patrons who purchased these exquisite lacquer crafts. These premium pieces were typically

⁶ Saemaul Undong, called New Village Movement, is a social reform movement initiated by the Park Chung Hee government in the 70's to eradicate poverty of Korea. There are conflicting assessment about Saemaul Undong. In this context, Jeong showed a very negative opinion about it because many folk rituals and traditional customs were banned for being superstitious.



Figure 10. *Otchil* spoons and chopsticks (Photo: H. Hahm)

acquired by the affluent class or individuals with specific ceremonial purposes. Notably, some Korean presidents chose these crafts as diplomatic gifts during their international tours. However, the pandemic brought a stark shift in consumer behavior, with sales of high-priced lacquer crafts dwindling amidst the economic downturn.

In response to the challenging economic landscape, Master Lee pivoted his focus to crafting practical tableware with more accessible price points. Remarkably, these lacquer tableware items gained significant popularity, especially a sought-after set of spoon and chopsticks (Figure 12). The range of tableware expanded to include utensils, cups, and plates, priced between 50,000 won to 300,000 won. Intriguingly, the surge in demand for lacquerware during the pandemic was not solely driven by affordability. Scientifically proven attributes such as the prevention of germ penetration and antibacterial properties became additional selling points. This newfound recognition positioned lacquerware as items capable of safeguarding against the Corona-19 virus, contributing to their heightened popularity during these unprecedented times.

Online activities

Amidst the disruptions caused by the pandemic, the scheduled arts and crafts exhibitions faced cancellations, presenting unforeseen challenges for Lee Eui Shik, the lacquer master. Undeterred, he dedicated several months to art creation and online training for his students while awaiting the resolution of the pandemic. Recognizing the limitations of online training, he resumed in-person sessions at the workshop once the peak of the pandemic subsided, implementing comprehensive anti-corona measures.

As the pandemic persisted, a shift towards online exhibitions emerged. Lee Eui Shik, adapting to this new landscape, decided to participate in online exhibitions, a novel experience for artisans. Together with his daughter, Seon Joo, groomed as his successor, they prepared to showcase their work at the Cheongju Craft

Biennale—an international craft exhibition covering various fields, including ceramics, wood lacquer, textiles, and metals.

Unlike traditional exhibitions, online showcases required extensive video and photo preparation. Collaborating with his technologically adept daughter, they produced an introductory film detailing the lacquer craftsman's process, from collecting raw lacquer to the final design stages. Seon Joo highlighted the advantages of online exhibitions, citing the accessibility it provided to a global audience, particularly those unable to attend international exhibitions in person. She emphasized the ease of viewing and the enhanced visibility for artists worldwide. Quoting Seon Joo in a September 5, 2022, interview, 'I think that it is not easy to go to the exhibition held abroad even in normal days. Even if it is an international exhibition that is held in Korea, it would be difficult for those who are interested in the exhibition to come to Korea to see it. However, the advantage of online is that you can easily and thoroughly view the exhibition. In addition, as artists are introduced abroad, they could have more opportunities.'

Participating in the Biennale, an international platform, garnered attention from both domestic and overseas online visitors. The video presentation, shared through platforms like the Biennale homepage and YouTube, showcased the traditional knowledge, skills, and beauty inherent in lacquer crafts. The impact of this online exhibition surpassed the reach of traditional ones, significantly elevating Lee Eui Shik's profile. Subsequently, he received an invitation to exhibit Korean lacquer crafts at the Tel Aviv Crafts and Design Biennale in 2023, extending the influence of his art to Israel.

Limited time for training

The realm of lacquer crafts demands an intricate blend of specialized knowledge and delicate manual dexterity, necessitating an extensive investment of time and effort to master the craftsmanship. The learning process extends beyond theoretical education, requiring numerous hours of practical experience. Lee Eui Shik, also involved in teaching at the University of Traditional Culture, not only imparts knowledge in his regular classes but also opens his workshop for hands-on training sessions with students.

However, the advent of the pandemic significantly impacted training practices. In 2020, as university classes transitioned to online platforms, the emphasis shifted more towards theoretical education than hands-on training. The absence of practical facilities for crafts students became a notable challenge during the pandemic. Despite these limitations, a silver lining emerged as students were still able to grasp the value of craftsmanship through theoretical studies.

Reflecting on this, Lee Eui Shik, the master of lacquer, expressed, 'Lacquer crafts require a lot of practice. However, during the pandemic, I couldn't have students take practices, so I mainly taught design and theory. How raw lacquer comes out, how to refine, etc. I also thought of the design in advance so that they could use it during practice.' Despite the constraints imposed by the pandemic, efforts were

made to ensure that the theoretical foundation and design aspects of lacquer crafts were adequately conveyed to the students, acknowledging the indispensable role of hands-on practice in the traditional learning process.

DISCUSSIONS

The far-reaching repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic have left an indelible mark on society, particularly impacting various facets of ICH. This fieldwork report aims to meticulously document and analyze the transformative effects experienced by two distinct elements of ICH in Korea: the shaman ritual (*gut*) and lacquer craftsmanship (*otchil jangin*), offering insights into their responses to the challenges posed by the pandemic.

A noteworthy distinction between the two lies in their modes of practice—the shaman ritual being a collective endeavor and craftsmanship occurring at an individual level. The shaman ritual encountered greater difficulties in finding alternative modes of practice or transmission activities during the pandemic. As demonstrated, Lee Eui Shik could continue training students individually in his workshop, whereas the Namhaean Byeolsin-gut Preservation Society faced restrictions on group gatherings, compelling them to shift to online workshops. Additionally, village rituals were prohibited, exacerbating the threat to the transmission of *gut*.

Both elements, however, expressed satisfaction with their engagement in online activities. Despite initial unfamiliarity with new communication and presentation methods, they discovered the advantages of promoting ICH in diverse ways through online platforms. The Preservation Society, through regular online capacity building workshops, deepened members' understanding of the ritual, fostering a stronger commitment to transmission. Active use of social media platforms garnered more support, transforming fans into advocates. Similarly, lacquer master Lee and his successor achieved international recognition for lacquer crafts through online exhibitions.

The negative impact of the pandemic, marked by the suspension of primary activities like ritual performances and *otchil* practices, prompted the masters to view the crisis as an opportunity. They seized the moment to hold capacity-building workshops and diversify their production, introducing new items such as lacquer tableware and puppet shows for children. This resilience and adaptability embody the spirit of Living Human Treasures, highlighting their ability to turn challenges into opportunities for innovation and growth.

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