

VOICES BETWEEN WORLDS

• MUSIC IN KOREAN SHAMANISM •

RITUAL, PERFORMANCE,
AND PRESENCE ACROSS TIME
AND SPACE



Voices Between Worlds: *Music in Korean Shamanism*

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First Edition

Listening Across Worlds

Music has occupied an uncertain place within the historiography of Korean shamanism. Historians of religion have traditionally emphasized belief, ritual symbolism, and the social role of the *mudang*, while musicologists have more often devoted sustained attention to court repertoires, *p'ansori*, and other canonical genres of Korean traditional music. As a result, the musical dimensions of the *gut* have frequently appeared only in passing—as accompaniment to ritual action rather than as a historical subject deserving investigation in its own right.¹ Court chronicles preserve official attitudes toward ritual specialists while revealing comparatively little about the music performed during ceremonies. Missionary writings frequently interpret ritual through theological opposition rather than musical observation. Even early ethnographic studies, despite their considerable documentary value, devote greater attention to costume, movement, and spirit possession than to vocal style, rhythmic organization, or ensemble practice.²

The surviving musical evidence presents a different historical picture. Archival recordings, published transcriptions, photographs, preservation reports, and ethnographic scholarship demonstrate that music provided the structural framework through which ritual unfolded. Rhythmic cycles regulated ceremonial time, vocal invocation articulated communication with the spirit world, and instrumental performance coordinated movement among ritual specialists, musicians, and participants. These musical processes formed an integrated performance system whose structure varied according to region, ceremonial purpose, and hereditary lineage. Treating music as the principal medium through which ritual developed changes the historical questions that can be asked of Korean shamanism. Performance itself becomes evidence capable of illuminating regional history, systems of transmission, and patterns of cultural continuity that textual sources alone seldom preserve.³

This study begins with a historiographical problem rather than a descriptive survey. Scholarship has produced sophisticated accounts of Korean religion, ritual symbolism, and social practice, yet comparatively few studies have examined how musical performance itself functioned as a historical force within the *gut*. The central question guiding this essay is therefore straightforward: what can the music of Korean shamanism reveal about the historical development of ritual practice that written documents cannot? Addressing that question requires close attention to melody, rhythm, vocal production, instrumental texture, ensemble interaction, and performance practice alongside the documentary record that preserves them. Musical analysis serves here not as illustration but as historical evidence, providing insight into patterns of regional development and cultural transmission that remain only partially visible in textual sources.⁴

The documentary record supporting such an investigation is necessarily uneven. Government records reveal official attitudes toward ritual specialists while offering only scattered observations concerning musical practice. Colonial publications preserve valuable descriptions of ceremonies but frequently reflect the ideological assumptions of their historical context. Ethnographic research documents repertoires, instruments, apprenticeship, and ceremonial

organization in far greater detail, although these studies likewise reflect changing scholarly priorities over time. Commercial recordings preserve vocal timbre, instrumental balance, and rhythmic organization unavailable through written description, yet the technical limitations of early recording technology compressed ceremonies that historically extended across many hours. Contemporary preservation initiatives have expanded this archive through audiovisual documentation, institutional publications, and critical editions, allowing scholars to compare historical recordings with living performance traditions across multiple generations.⁵

These materials preserve different kinds of evidence and therefore require different methods of interpretation. Sound recordings capture relationships among voices and instruments that notation cannot adequately represent, including flexible intonation, shifting timbre, rhythmic elasticity, and the continual adjustment of ensemble texture throughout performance. Musical transcription clarifies melodic contour, rhythmic organization, and formal structure while necessarily simplifying vocal nuance and improvisatory variation. Documentary photography records ceremonial space, costume, and instrumental arrangement but remains silent regarding musical interaction. Historical interpretation consequently depends upon bringing these sources into conversation rather than privileging one form of documentation over another. The archive preserves fragments of performance whose broader historical significance emerges through careful comparison.⁶

Regional diversity occupies a central place in this study because Korean shamanism has never existed as a single, unified musical tradition. Ceremonies documented in Seoul and Kyönggi Province differ substantially from those preserved in Hwanghae, Chölla, Kyöngsang, and Jeju. Differences in *changdan*, vocal production, ornamentation, instrumentation, ensemble texture, and ceremonial pacing reflect centuries of local musical development rather than isolated stylistic variation. A *Jinogwi-gut* performed for the dead employs musical procedures distinct from those heard in a communal *Dodang-gut*, while the extended narrative singing characteristic of Jeju traditions differs markedly from the comparatively compact ceremonial structures documented around Seoul. These regional traditions reveal that Korean shamanic music developed through interconnected local lineages whose diversity resists reduction to a single representative style.⁷

The role of accompanying musicians also requires reconsideration. Historical descriptions frequently position the *mudang* at the center of ritual while treating the ensemble as secondary. Ethnomusicological evidence points toward a more collaborative model of performance. Percussionists adjusted rhythmic density in response to ceremonial movement, reed players reinforced and anticipated vocal phrases, and ensemble members continually modified tempo, articulation, and texture as rituals progressed. These musical decisions directed the unfolding of the ceremony alongside the actions of the ritual specialist. Performance emerged through sustained interaction among experienced musicians whose collective knowledge shaped ritual as decisively as spoken invocation or ceremonial gesture.⁸

The chapters that follow examine Korean shamanic music through historical documents, musical analysis, preservation literature, and ethnomusicological scholarship. Particular attention

is given to regional performance traditions, apprenticeship, vocal practice, rhythmic organization, archival evidence, and the changing relationship between ritual performance and cultural heritage. By treating music as historical evidence rather than as an accessory to religious practice, this essay argues that Korean shamanic traditions occupy a central place within the musical history of the Korean peninsula and offer important perspectives on the preservation, transmission, and continual renewal of ritual music.⁹

Historical Foundations of Korean Shamanism

The historical origins of Korean shamanism remain the subject of considerable scholarly debate because the earliest documentary evidence is both fragmentary and filtered through the perspectives of outside observers. No surviving text describes the emergence of Korean ritual traditions directly, and the ceremonies now recognized collectively as *gut* developed centuries before sustained written documentation became available. Historians therefore reconstruct the early history of Korean shamanism through a combination of Chinese dynastic histories, early Korean chronicles, archaeological evidence, later religious texts, and comparative ethnographic research. Each category of evidence preserves different aspects of the tradition while presenting distinct interpretive challenges.¹⁰

Among the earliest written descriptions are the Chinese dynastic histories compiled during the first millennium CE. Works such as the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguozhi*) and the *Book of the Later Han* (*Hou Hanshu*) describe ceremonies performed among the peoples inhabiting the Korean peninsula before political unification. These accounts refer to communal rituals involving singing, dancing, feasting, and seasonal observances associated with agriculture and political authority. Although these texts never employ the modern term *gut*, they document ceremonial performances in which music occupied a central role within collective religious life. Their value lies not in providing complete descriptions of Korean ritual but in demonstrating that organized musical ceremonies formed part of the peninsula's religious landscape centuries before the appearance of later historical sources.¹¹

The limitations of these early documents deserve equal attention. Chinese historians wrote from outside the societies they described, interpreting local religious customs through political and cultural frameworks shaped by imperial administration. Their observations emphasize practices that appeared unfamiliar or noteworthy from the perspective of the Chinese court while omitting details that modern musicologists would regard as essential, including instrumentation, melodic organization, rhythmic structure, and performance technique. Consequently, these texts cannot be read as transparent descriptions of early Korean music. Instead, they provide evidence for the existence of ceremonial performance while leaving its musical organization largely undocumented.¹²

Later Korean chronicles preserve additional evidence but present different interpretive problems. The *Samguk Sagi* and *Samguk Yusa* record legends, political history, and religious traditions that illuminate the cultural environment within which ritual specialists operated. These texts describe ceremonies associated with mountain spirits, ancestral worship, Buddhism, and local

deities, reflecting a religious landscape in which multiple systems of belief coexisted and frequently overlapped. References to music often appear indirectly through descriptions of court ceremony, festivals, processions, or religious observances rather than detailed discussions of shamanic performance itself. Even so, these chronicles demonstrate that music permeated religious life across the peninsula long before systematic musical documentation emerged.¹³

Archaeological discoveries provide another perspective unavailable through written documents alone. Bronze bells, drums, stone chimes, and other ceremonial objects recovered from prehistoric and early historic sites indicate that organized sound occupied an important place within ritual activity long before surviving historical narratives were compiled. These artifacts cannot reveal the melodies or rhythmic patterns once performed, yet they testify to the presence of musical instruments within ceremonial contexts extending back many centuries. Archaeology therefore establishes material evidence for ritual sound even where documentary sources remain silent.¹⁴

Modern scholarship has generally rejected attempts to reconstruct a single uninterrupted lineage connecting prehistoric ritual directly to contemporary *gut*. Such narratives often underestimate the profound historical transformations introduced by state formation, Buddhism, Confucianism, colonial rule, industrialization, and modern preservation efforts. Instead, historians increasingly understand Korean shamanism as a tradition that accumulated layers of religious practice across successive historical periods. Musical performance likewise evolved through continual adaptation, absorbing new repertoires, instruments, ceremonial forms, and regional practices while preserving recognizable principles of oral transmission and ritual organization.¹⁵

Buddhism exerted a particularly significant influence after its introduction to the Korean peninsula during the Three Kingdoms period. Rather than replacing existing ritual traditions, Buddhist practice frequently coexisted with local ceremonial customs. Historical evidence indicates that many communities participated simultaneously in Buddhist observances and shamanic rituals, drawing upon different religious specialists according to circumstance. Musical exchange accompanied these interactions. Although Buddhist chant and shamanic invocation remained distinct traditions, their coexistence within shared cultural environments encouraged the circulation of vocal techniques, ceremonial repertoires, and ritual aesthetics whose precise historical development continues to attract scholarly attention.¹⁶

Confucianism transformed the public status of shamanic practice in different ways. During the Chosŏn dynasty, Neo-Confucian political philosophy increasingly shaped official attitudes toward religion, emphasizing state ritual, ancestor veneration, and social order while criticizing practices regarded as heterodox or superstitious. Government documents preserve numerous efforts to regulate or discourage shamanic activity, yet these same records demonstrate that ritual specialists continued to serve local communities throughout the dynasty. The persistence of the *gut* despite repeated official criticism suggests that musical and ceremonial traditions remained deeply embedded within everyday social life beyond the reach of administrative policy alone.¹⁷

The coexistence of official criticism and continued popular participation also shaped the historical transmission of music. Because ritual specialists generally operated outside state institutions, musical knowledge developed through apprenticeship rather than written curricula. Songs, rhythmic cycles, instrumental techniques, and ceremonial procedures were transmitted orally across generations of performers, allowing regional traditions to preserve considerable musical diversity despite the absence of centralized institutional authority. This decentralized process of transmission remains one of the defining historical characteristics of Korean shamanic music and provides the foundation for the regional traditions examined in the following chapter.¹⁸

Music, Ritual, and Religious Syncretism

Korean shamanism developed within a religious landscape characterized by continual interaction rather than rigid separation among belief systems. Indigenous ritual practices coexisted with Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoist cosmology, and later Christianity, producing a ceremonial environment in which religious traditions frequently overlapped without dissolving into one another. Historians have increasingly emphasized that Korean religious life cannot be understood through exclusive categories of belief. Communities often participated in multiple religious traditions simultaneously, selecting ritual specialists according to the particular needs of a household, village, or individual circumstance.¹⁹ The *gut* emerged within this pluralistic environment, and its music reflects centuries of adaptation to changing religious and social conditions.

Buddhist influence appears most clearly in ritual language, ceremonial symbolism, and concepts concerning the afterlife. Funerary ceremonies such as the *Jinogwi-gut* and the *Ssitgim-gut* incorporate prayers and ritual sequences that parallel Buddhist concerns for the peaceful transition of the deceased while preserving distinctly shamanic methods of musical performance and spirit mediation. These similarities should not be interpreted as evidence that one tradition simply absorbed the other. Historical scholarship instead demonstrates prolonged coexistence in which ritual specialists borrowed selected ceremonial elements while maintaining separate institutional identities and systems of transmission.²⁰

The musical consequences of this interaction are more subtle than the textual evidence alone might suggest. Buddhist chant generally emphasizes controlled melodic recitation within relatively stable vocal frameworks, whereas shamanic invocation allows considerably greater flexibility in tempo, timbre, rhythmic pacing, and vocal ornamentation. The contrast illustrates differing ritual objectives rather than differing levels of musical sophistication. Chant seeks liturgical continuity through disciplined repetition, while the vocal practice of the *mudang* responds continuously to the changing movement of the ceremony, the actions of participants, and the progression of ritual events.²¹

Confucianism shaped Korean musical history through a different process. Court ritual cultivated repertoires governed by careful regulation, written documentation, and institutional performance practice. Musical authority rested within state-sponsored academies, hereditary court musicians, and formal ceremonial protocols. Shamanic music occupied an entirely different social

position. It remained rooted in household ceremonies, village observances, and local ritual communities whose repertoires circulated through apprenticeship rather than written notation. These contrasting traditions existed simultaneously for centuries, demonstrating that Korean musical history developed through multiple systems of transmission rather than a single national musical culture.²²

The distinction between court and ritual music should not be exaggerated into complete isolation. Musicians moved between ceremonial environments, regional repertoires circulated across communities, and changing political conditions encouraged the exchange of instruments, performance practices, and musical ideas. Certain percussion techniques, melodic gestures, and ensemble practices appear across multiple genres of Korean traditional music, although they fulfilled different ceremonial or artistic purposes within each setting. Shared musical vocabulary therefore reflects historical interaction rather than the disappearance of regional or religious distinction.²³

Daoist cosmology likewise contributed concepts that became embedded within Korean ritual life. Ideas concerning balance, cosmological order, directional symbolism, and the relationship between human activity and the natural world appear throughout many ceremonial traditions documented by historians of Korean religion. Musical performance participated in these broader cosmological ideas through carefully organized ceremonial sequences whose progression corresponded to changing ritual objectives rather than abstract musical form. Rhythm marked transitions between ceremonial stages, instrumental timbre distinguished phases of invocation, and vocal performance articulated communication across the symbolic boundaries separating the human and spiritual worlds.²⁴

Regional traditions demonstrate that these interactions never produced uniform ceremonial practice. Rituals documented on Jeju Island preserve narratives and musical procedures rarely encountered in the Seoul region, while ceremonies associated with Hwanghae Province display distinctive approaches to percussion, vocal declamation, and ensemble coordination. Such differences remind historians that religious exchange occurred locally rather than universally. Communities adapted external influences according to existing musical traditions, resulting in multiple regional syntheses rather than a single national pattern of development.²⁵

This historical process also cautions against interpreting Korean shamanism as a static survival of prehistoric religion. Every major period of Korean history introduced new political institutions, philosophical systems, musical repertoires, and cultural influences that shaped ritual practice in varying degrees. The persistence of the *gut* therefore reflects neither complete continuity nor complete transformation. Its musical history reveals continual adaptation within recognizable systems of oral transmission, apprenticeship, and regional performance. These characteristics help explain why contemporary ceremonies preserve musical principles whose historical roots extend across many centuries while remaining responsive to the religious and social realities of the present.²⁶

Major Types of Gut

The term *gut* refers not to a single ceremony but to a diverse body of ritual traditions that developed in response to different religious, social, and communal needs. Historical documents, ethnographic research, and preservation records consistently demonstrate that ceremonies varied according to region, hereditary lineage, ceremonial purpose, and local performance practice. Differences extended well beyond ritual sequence. Repertory, instrumentation, vocal style, rhythmic organization, ceremonial duration, and ensemble interaction all changed according to the function of the ceremony. The musical diversity preserved within these traditions provides some of the clearest evidence that Korean shamanism developed through regional lineages rather than through a standardized national ritual.²⁷

Among the most significant ceremonies is the *Naerim-gut*, the initiation ritual through which an individual formally becomes a *mudang*. Ethnographic studies describe this ceremony as both a religious transformation and a process of musical transmission. Senior ritual specialists and accompanying musicians guide the initiate through successive ceremonial stages, demonstrating repertoires, rhythmic cycles, vocal styles, and performance practices acquired through years of apprenticeship. Because musical knowledge cannot be separated from ritual action, initiation functions simultaneously as religious instruction and professional musical education. Much of the tradition's repertory is transmitted in precisely these ceremonial settings, where observation, repetition, and participation remain more important than written instruction.²⁸

Ceremonies for the deceased constitute another major category of *gut*. The *Jinogwi-gut*, widely documented throughout the Korean peninsula, seeks to assist the deceased in passing peacefully into the next world while restoring harmony between the living and the dead. Closely related traditions include the *Ssitgim-gut* of southwestern Korea, whose ceremonial sequence emphasizes purification through vocal invocation, percussion, dance, and symbolic acts of cleansing. Although both ceremonies share broad ritual objectives, regional traditions preserve distinct repertoires, melodic formulas, and rhythmic organization that reflect local musical histories rather than uniform national practice.²⁹

Comparison between the *Jinogwi-gut* and the *Dodang-gut* demonstrates how ceremonial purpose shapes musical performance. During a *Jinogwi-gut*, the ensemble generally favors measured pacing, extended vocal invocation, and comparatively restrained percussion, allowing ritual speech and sung prayer to occupy the foreground. Instrumental accompaniment supports the unfolding ceremony without overwhelming the vocal line, and rhythmic cycles frequently expand to accommodate the natural cadence of invocation. The *Dodang-gut*, by contrast, serves an entire village community and commonly employs denser ensemble textures, more vigorous percussion, and greater rhythmic momentum. These contrasting musical environments correspond directly to different ceremonial objectives. One accompanies communication with the deceased through sustained reflection, while the other reinforces communal participation, collective protection, and village solidarity through increasingly energetic musical activity.³⁰

Communal ceremonies illustrate the equally important social dimensions of Korean shamanic music. The *Dodang-gut* frequently extended across many hours and, in some regions,

several consecutive days. Vocal performance, percussion, dance, and ceremonial movement organized participation among ritual specialists, musicians, and members of the community rather than separating performers from observers. Musical repetition, changing rhythmic density, and recurring melodic formulas allowed participants to recognize ceremonial transitions while reinforcing collective involvement throughout the performance. The function of music therefore extended well beyond accompaniment. It structured communal experience through sound.³¹

Regional traditions further expanded the diversity of ceremonial practice. On Jeju Island, the *Yeongdeung-gut* honors the sea goddess Yeongdeung and reflects the island's maritime economy and religious history. Its musical language differs noticeably from mainland traditions. Extended narrative singing occupies a prominent place within the ceremony, allowing vocal lines to unfold across broad melodic spans before punctuated responses from percussion or reed instruments. Ceremonies documented in Seoul and Kyönggi Province generally alternate more frequently between vocal and instrumental passages, producing a comparatively compact musical structure. These differences reveal contrasting approaches to organizing ceremonial time while preserving common principles of ensemble coordination and oral transmission.³²

Northern traditions associated with Hwanghae Province likewise preserve distinctive musical characteristics. Ethnographic descriptions frequently note vigorous percussion, forceful vocal declamation, and rapid interaction between singer and ensemble. Southwestern traditions associated with Chölla Province often favor broader vocal phrasing and comparatively restrained rhythmic pacing during funerary ceremonies. Such regional distinctions are especially valuable because they demonstrate that musical variation reflects long histories of local performance practice rather than individual stylistic preference. Comparative study therefore provides one of the most reliable methods for reconstructing the historical development of Korean shamanic music across the peninsula.³³

Despite these regional differences, several musical principles remain remarkably consistent. Percussion establishes ceremonial time through recognizable *changdan*, vocal invocation carries the ritual text, melodic instruments reinforce and ornament the singer, and ensemble members continually adjust performance in response to the changing progression of the ceremony. The *gut* is therefore best understood not as a collection of unrelated local customs but as an interconnected family of musical traditions united by shared performance principles while preserving distinctive regional identities.³⁴

Instruments and Ensemble Performance

The instrumental ensemble of the Korean *gut* developed through centuries of regional practice rather than according to a standardized national model. Although particular combinations of instruments differ across the peninsula, ethnographic documentation consistently identifies percussion as the musical foundation upon which ritual performance is constructed. Melody, rhythm, and vocal performance operate as an integrated system in which each performer contributes to the ceremonial progression of the ritual rather than occupying an independent

musical role. The ensemble therefore functions less as an accompanying group than as a collective body whose members continuously shape the unfolding structure of the ceremony.³⁵

The *changgu* occupies a central position within this ensemble. Its hourglass-shaped body and two contrasting drumheads allow performers to articulate complex rhythmic patterns through combinations of resonant bass tones and brighter, sharper attacks. Ethnomusicologists have frequently described the instrument as the principal interpreter of *changdan* because it establishes rhythmic continuity while remaining sufficiently flexible to accommodate changes in tempo, vocal pacing, and ceremonial movement. Skilled performers rarely execute rhythmic cycles mechanically. Instead, subtle alterations in articulation, accentuation, and phrase length respond to the actions of the *mudang* and the broader ceremonial environment.³⁶

Supporting the *changgu* is the *buk*, whose deeper resonance provides weight and structural emphasis within the ensemble. Rather than duplicating the rhythmic activity of the hourglass drum, the *buk* reinforces larger rhythmic divisions and ceremonial transitions, creating a broad sonic foundation upon which more intricate percussion may develop. The interaction between these two instruments illustrates the layered nature of Korean rhythmic organization. Multiple rhythmic voices coexist without obscuring one another, producing a musical texture characterized by balance rather than competition.³⁷

Metal percussion contributes another essential dimension to ritual performance. The *kkwaenggwari* produces bright, penetrating accents capable of cutting through dense ensemble textures, while the larger *ching* introduces sustained resonant tones that frequently announce important ceremonial transitions. Neither instrument functions merely as rhythmic decoration. Their contrasting timbres organize attention, signal changes in ceremonial sequence, and reinforce moments of heightened ritual significance. Participants familiar with the tradition recognize these sonic cues as indicators of changing ceremonial activity long before verbal explanation becomes necessary.³⁸

Melodic accompaniment most commonly centers upon the *piri*, whose distinctive double-reed timbre occupies a register capable of blending closely with the human voice. Rather than presenting extended instrumental melodies independent of the singer, the instrument frequently echoes vocal phrases, anticipates melodic entrances, or sustains tones that support transitions between successive invocations. This close relationship between voice and reed instrument produces a musical dialogue in which melodic leadership shifts fluidly between performer and ensemble without disrupting ceremonial continuity.³⁹

Regional traditions employ these instruments differently. Ensembles documented in the Seoul and Kyōnggi region frequently emphasize balanced interaction between percussion and melodic accompaniment, producing a comparatively dense instrumental texture throughout much of the ceremony. On Jeju Island, where extended narrative singing occupies a more prominent place, percussion and melodic instruments often assume a less continuous role, entering selectively to articulate structural divisions within longer vocal passages. Northern traditions historically associated with Hwanghae Province preserve particularly energetic percussion characterized by

rapid exchanges between instruments and voice, whereas funerary ceremonies documented in southwestern Korea frequently employ broader rhythmic pacing appropriate to their ceremonial purpose.⁴⁰

These regional distinctions should not be understood simply as differences in instrumentation. The same ensemble may perform remarkably different musical functions depending upon the ritual context. During a *Jinogwi-gut*, percussion often remains comparatively restrained, allowing vocal invocation to dominate the musical texture while maintaining rhythmic continuity beneath the surface. In a *Dodang-gut*, the identical instruments may produce substantially greater rhythmic density, encouraging communal participation through dance, movement, and collective response. Instrumental performance therefore reflects ceremonial purpose as much as inherited regional style.⁴¹

Communication within the ensemble depends upon continual observation rather than predetermined execution. Percussionists respond to changes in gesture, breathing, vocal pacing, and bodily movement, while melodic instruments adjust phrase length and ornamentation according to the progress of the invocation. These musical decisions rarely draw attention to individual performers. Their significance lies in maintaining the continuity of ritual through coordinated adaptation. Historical recordings consistently demonstrate that successful performances emerge through shared musical judgment developed over many years of apprenticeship rather than through rigid adherence to fixed musical scores.⁴²

The organization of the ensemble also illustrates why Korean shamanic music resists complete representation through notation alone. Conventional transcription can document rhythmic frameworks, melodic contours, and formal organization with considerable precision, yet it cannot fully preserve the subtle adjustments in articulation, tempo, ensemble balance, and timbral interaction that define live ceremonial performance. Modern scholarship therefore increasingly combines notation with archival recordings, audiovisual documentation, and ethnographic description, recognizing that each preserves dimensions of musical practice unavailable through the others. Instrumental performance remains fundamentally collaborative, unfolding through real-time interaction that no single documentary medium can capture in its entirety.⁴³

The Musicians

The historical prominence of the *mudang* has often overshadowed the musicians who accompanied Korean shamanic ritual. Ethnographic accounts, preservation reports, and archival recordings demonstrate that the success of a *gut* depended upon an experienced ensemble whose members possessed extensive knowledge of repertory, ceremonial sequence, and regional performance practice. Percussionists, reed players, and singers did considerably more than accompany ritual action. Their musical decisions influenced pacing, coordinated transitions, reinforced ceremonial structure, and responded continuously to the evolving demands of the performance. The *gut* therefore emerged through collective musical judgment rather than through the actions of a single ritual specialist.⁴⁴

Musicians acquired this knowledge almost entirely through apprenticeship. Instruction emphasized sustained observation, repetition, memorization, and direct participation in ceremonies under the supervision of experienced performers. Written notation played only a limited role within this educational process. Although song texts and repertory lists were occasionally recorded in notebooks, essential aspects of performance—including rhythmic flexibility, vocal ornamentation, instrumental balance, ceremonial pacing, and ensemble interaction—could only be learned through repeated participation in ritual life. Musical authority consequently rested upon embodied knowledge rather than written documentation.⁴⁵

The gradual nature of apprenticeship shaped both technical ability and interpretive judgment. Younger performers commonly began by assisting with practical responsibilities surrounding ceremonies before assuming increasingly demanding musical roles within the ensemble. Familiarity with repertory developed alongside a growing understanding of ceremonial sequence, regional conventions, and the subtle musical adjustments required at different stages of ritual. This progression reflected a broader principle of Korean traditional music in which mastery depended less upon technical display than upon long experience within established lineages of transmission.⁴⁶

Communication among performers relied upon shared musical understanding rather than explicit instruction. Percussionists observed changes in breathing, gesture, and vocal delivery, adjusting rhythmic articulation to accommodate the movement of the ceremony. Reed players responded to the phrasing of the singer through ornamentation, sustained tones, or anticipatory melodic gestures that prepared subsequent vocal entrances. These interactions rarely attracted attention individually, yet they collectively shaped the continuity of the ritual by ensuring that musical performance remained responsive to ceremonial developments as they occurred.⁴⁷

The relationship between the *mudang* and the ensemble illustrates what may be understood as **sonic agency**. Historical descriptions often portray the ritual specialist as directing the ceremony while musicians simply follow. Musical evidence indicates a far more reciprocal process. During moments of heightened ceremonial intensity, percussionists frequently increased rhythmic density to support dance or spirit invocation. At other moments, they reduced instrumental activity to foreground spoken prayer or sustained vocal recitation. The ensemble did not merely react to ritual; its musical decisions actively influenced the pace, emotional character, and structural progression of ceremonial events. Authority therefore circulated through performance rather than remaining concentrated in a single individual.⁴⁸

Regional traditions demonstrate that this collaborative relationship assumed different musical forms across the peninsula. In Seoul and Kyōnggi traditions, vocal and instrumental passages often alternate rapidly, encouraging continual dialogue between singer and ensemble. Jeju performances preserve longer stretches of uninterrupted narrative singing, requiring musicians to respond through carefully timed structural punctuation rather than continuous accompaniment. Hwanghae traditions historically favored vigorous percussion capable of sustaining highly animated ceremonial movement, while funerary repertories documented in Chōlla Province

frequently employed broader rhythmic pacing that allowed vocal invocation to unfold with greater deliberation. These regional distinctions reveal different approaches to ensemble interaction while preserving common principles of apprenticeship and oral transmission.⁴⁹

Historical recordings further demonstrate that ensemble performance combined stability with flexibility. Fundamental *changdan* patterns remained recognizable across successive performances, yet performers continually modified articulation, tempo, instrumental emphasis, and phrase length according to ceremonial circumstances. These variations were not instances of unrestricted improvisation. They reflected informed musical interpretation developed within established regional traditions whose underlying structures remained remarkably consistent across generations.⁵⁰

Many ritual musicians participated in musical activities beyond the *gut*. Village festivals, theatrical performance, seasonal celebrations, and other communal events provided additional opportunities to develop repertory and instrumental technique. The movement of performers between these different contexts encouraged the circulation of musical ideas throughout Korean traditional culture while allowing regional identities to remain intact. Instruments associated with shamanic ritual consequently appeared within broader musical environments without losing their distinctive ceremonial functions.⁵¹

Twentieth-century preservation initiatives altered the public role of ritual musicians without fundamentally changing the methods through which musical knowledge was transmitted. Experienced performers increasingly participated in recordings, museum demonstrations, university lectures, and cultural heritage festivals, introducing repertoires once confined largely to ritual settings to wider audiences. Yet apprenticeship continued to provide the principal means through which younger musicians acquired the interpretive judgment required for ceremonial performance. Historical recordings and published transcriptions became valuable educational resources, but they supplemented rather than replaced direct instruction from experienced practitioners.⁵²

The history of Korean shamanic music therefore depends as much upon the musicians as upon the ritual specialists they accompanied. Their repertoires, instrumental techniques, rhythmic interpretation, and collective musical judgment preserved traditions that written documentation alone could never adequately record. Examining their contribution reveals that the continuity of the *gut* has always depended upon communities of performers whose knowledge survived through listening, participation, memory, and performance across successive generations.⁵³

Voice, Timbre, and Invocation

The vocal practices of Korean shamanism differ substantially from those associated with court repertoires, Buddhist chant, or the cultivated lyric traditions of *kagok* and *sijo*. Ethnomusicologists have consistently observed that ritual singing privileges expressive flexibility over standardized vocal production, allowing changes in timbre, dynamic intensity, articulation, and declamation to correspond with the evolving demands of the ceremony.⁵⁴ Spoken prayer frequently develops into heightened recitation before expanding into sustained melodic invocation, producing a vocal style

that moves continuously between speech and song. These gradual transformations resist clear categorical boundaries and have long complicated attempts to document ritual performance through conventional musical notation alone.

Melodic organization within these invocations generally favors gradual development over dramatic intervallic contrast. Rather than relying upon wide melodic leaps, singers employ repeated pitches, subtle ornamental inflections, flexible intonation, and carefully controlled changes in vocal color. Expressive intensity emerges through timbre, pacing, articulation, and rhythmic elasticity as much as through melodic contour itself. The emotional force of the performance therefore depends less upon melodic complexity than upon the performer's ability to shape vocal sound in response to the ceremonial progression unfolding around them.⁵⁵

Text occupies an equally significant place within this musical language. Ritual invocations combine inherited ceremonial formulas with references to ancestors, local deities, household concerns, geographic landmarks, and the immediate purpose of the ceremony. A familiar melodic framework may therefore support different texts from one performance to another while retaining its ritual identity. This adaptability illustrates one of the defining characteristics of Korean shamanic music: stable musical structures coexist with continually changing verbal content. The transmission of repertory consequently depends upon remembering both musical organization and ceremonial context rather than fixed compositions preserved through written scores.⁵⁶

The *piri* participates in this vocal practice through close musical dialogue with the singer. Rather than presenting independent melodic material, the instrument frequently reinforces vocal contours, anticipates phrase entrances, echoes ornamental gestures, or sustains pitches that bridge successive invocations. Percussion contributes a complementary function by maintaining rhythmic continuity while remaining responsive to changes in vocal pacing. During periods of extended prayer, rhythmic articulation often becomes comparatively restrained. As ceremonial intensity increases, percussion gradually expands in density and energy, supporting dance, movement, and heightened vocal expression without obscuring the clarity of the text.⁵⁷

These interactions reveal another dimension of sonic agency within the *gut*. Ensemble members continually evaluate breathing, gesture, phrase length, and ceremonial movement before responding through subtle musical adjustments. A percussionist may delay the arrival of a cadence while the *mudang* completes an invocation, or a *piri* player may sustain a pitch long enough to support an especially elaborate vocal ornament before yielding once again to the singer. Such decisions require acute musical awareness developed through years of apprenticeship. They also demonstrate that ceremonial authority emerges collectively through coordinated listening rather than through predetermined execution of fixed repertories.⁵⁸

Regional traditions illustrate these principles with particular clarity. Ceremonies documented in the Seoul and Kyōnggi region often feature frequent alternation between vocal and instrumental passages, producing a texture characterized by continual musical conversation. Jeju traditions preserve considerably longer narrative sequences in which the voice may remain uninterrupted for extended periods before percussion or reed instruments articulate structural

divisions. Hwanghae repertoires historically favored vigorous declamatory singing supported by energetic percussion, whereas funerary traditions documented in Chŏlla Province frequently employ broader melodic phrasing and comparatively restrained rhythmic environments appropriate to rituals for the deceased. These contrasting approaches demonstrate that vocal style developed through local performance traditions rather than national standardization.⁵⁹

The physical demands of ceremonial performance likewise shaped vocal production. Many *gut* ceremonies extended through an entire night or across successive days, requiring singers to maintain vocal projection, flexibility, and expressive control over prolonged periods. Historical descriptions repeatedly emphasize endurance as an essential aspect of ritual expertise. Musical authority depended not only upon ceremonial knowledge but also upon the ability to sustain vocal clarity, rhythmic stability, and expressive communication throughout performances whose duration exceeded that of most staged musical events.⁶⁰

These characteristics explain why transcription alone cannot adequately preserve Korean shamanic music. Western staff notation effectively represents approximate pitch relationships and rhythmic organization, yet it cannot fully capture flexible intonation, shifting timbre, speech-song transitions, ornamental nuance, or the continual interaction between singer and ensemble. Modern ethnomusicologists increasingly combine transcription with archival recordings, audiovisual documentation, and descriptive analysis in recognition that each preserves different dimensions of performance. Collectively, these sources provide a more complete historical record than any single documentary medium can achieve independently.⁶¹

Voice therefore occupies a position far more complex than that of a melodic carrier within the *gut*. Vocal performance directs ceremonial pacing, articulates ritual language, coordinates interaction with accompanying musicians, and mediates communication between ritual specialists and participants. Its historical significance lies not simply in the preservation of songs but in the continual adaptation of vocal practice through regional transmission, apprenticeship, and performance. The study of Korean shamanic music consequently depends upon listening as carefully to vocal timbre and expressive inflection as to melody or rhythm, for these qualities preserve aspects of musical history that written documents cannot adequately record.⁶²

Rhythm, Time, and Ceremonial Structure

Among the defining characteristics of Korean shamanic music, rhythm has attracted the greatest sustained attention from ethnomusicologists because it governs the temporal organization of the entire ceremony. The recurring rhythmic cycles known as *changdan* do considerably more than establish meter. They provide an elastic framework within which ritual unfolds, allowing performers to expand, contract, or suspend musical motion according to the requirements of invocation, dance, prayer, and ceremonial transition. Unlike the fixed metric structures common to many Western musical traditions, *changdan* accommodates continual variation while preserving an underlying sense of rhythmic identity recognizable to experienced performers and participants alike.⁶³

The *changgu* serves as the principal interpreter of these rhythmic cycles. Its contrasting drumheads permit performers to articulate both broad structural accents and intricate interior rhythmic figures, creating multiple layers of rhythmic activity within a single pattern. The *buk* reinforces larger structural divisions through its deeper resonance, while the *kkwaenggwari* and *ching* contribute contrasting metallic timbres that announce important ceremonial transitions. Together these instruments establish a rhythmic environment that remains remarkably coherent despite constant variation in articulation, tempo, and dynamic intensity.⁶⁴

Ethnomusicological analysis demonstrates that rhythmic flexibility should not be mistaken for rhythmic instability. Beneath the surface variation of individual performances lie recognizable *changdan* patterns transmitted through generations of apprenticeship. Experienced percussionists modify phrase length, accentuation, articulation, and tempo without abandoning the underlying rhythmic framework. This balance between continuity and adaptation enables ceremonies to respond to changing ritual circumstances while maintaining musical coherence throughout performances that may continue for many hours.⁶⁵

Comparison among different forms of *gut* illustrates how rhythmic organization reflects ceremonial purpose. During a *Jinogwi-gut*, percussion frequently adopts measured pacing that supports extended vocal invocation and spoken prayer. Cadences may be prolonged while the *mudang* completes a ritual formula, allowing musical time to accommodate ceremonial action rather than imposing rigid temporal constraints upon it. The *Dodang-gut* employs a markedly different rhythmic character. Denser percussion, more frequent rhythmic acceleration, and energetic exchanges between instruments encourage communal participation through movement, dance, and collective response. Identical instruments therefore produce contrasting musical environments according to the objectives of the ceremony.⁶⁶

Regional traditions reveal additional rhythmic diversity. Rituals documented in Seoul and Kyōnggi Province often alternate regularly between vocal and instrumental passages, creating a balanced interaction between rhythmic continuity and melodic development. Jeju traditions preserve extended narrative singing in which percussion frequently functions as structural punctuation rather than continuous accompaniment. Hwanghae repertoires historically favored energetic rhythmic articulation capable of sustaining animated ceremonial movement, whereas funerary traditions in Chōlla Province commonly employ broader rhythmic pacing appropriate to rituals emphasizing remembrance and purification. These regional distinctions illustrate that rhythmic organization developed through local historical experience rather than centralized musical regulation.⁶⁷

Rhythmic variation also reflects continual interaction among performers. Percussionists respond to vocal pacing, bodily gesture, ceremonial movement, and changes in ritual intensity, making adjustments that influence the progression of the ceremony without disrupting its structural coherence. This process exemplifies sonic agency in practical terms. Musical decisions actively shape ritual experience by directing movement through time, coordinating participants,

and signaling transitions between successive ceremonial stages. Rhythm therefore functions not simply as accompaniment but as an organizing force that governs the ceremonial life of the *gut*.⁶⁸

Historical recordings further illuminate the remarkable consistency underlying this apparent flexibility. Comparisons among performances recorded across different decades reveal enduring *changdan* frameworks despite differences in tempo, instrumentation, vocal style, and regional interpretation. Such continuity suggests that performers regarded rhythmic identity as a stable musical foundation upon which interpretive variation could occur. Preservation initiatives have therefore documented not a series of unrelated performances but multiple realizations of deeply rooted rhythmic traditions whose essential characteristics remain recognizable across time and place.⁶⁹

The duration of many ceremonies further distinguishes Korean shamanic rhythm from staged musical performance. Household rituals frequently continued throughout an evening or extended into the following morning, permitting rhythmic cycles to develop gradually over long periods. Modern preservation performances presented in concert halls, museums, or cultural festivals necessarily condense these ceremonies, reducing repetition and abbreviating transitional passages to accommodate practical constraints. Scholars have therefore cautioned against treating staged presentations as direct equivalents of household ritual. The repertory may remain substantially unchanged, yet the temporal experience created by the performance differs significantly from that of the traditional ceremonial environment.⁷⁰

Contemporary ritual specialists increasingly consult historical recordings preserved through institutional archives while continuing to learn through direct apprenticeship. Archival documents illuminate earlier approaches to rhythmic interpretation without prescribing exact methods of reproduction. Performers compare historical examples with living traditions, adapting inherited *changdan* to present ceremonial circumstances while maintaining continuity with regional practice. Preservation thus becomes an interpretive activity grounded in historical knowledge rather than an attempt to recreate a single authoritative performance.⁷¹

The study of rhythm within Korean shamanic music therefore extends well beyond questions of meter or percussion technique. Rhythmic cycles organize ceremonial time, coordinate ensemble interaction, support vocal performance, and shape the participation of everyone present within the ritual space. Their continued transmission across generations demonstrates that musical continuity depends not upon mechanical repetition but upon informed interpretation carried forward through apprenticeship, listening, and performance. Rhythm preserves history precisely because it remains capable of responding to the changing circumstances of living ritual.⁷²

Preservation, Performance, and Cultural Heritage

The twentieth century transformed the historical circumstances under which Korean shamanic music was performed, documented, and transmitted. Industrialization, urban migration, Japanese colonial rule, war, and rapid economic development altered many of the communities that had sustained hereditary ritual lineages for generations. These changes did not eliminate the *gut*, but they reshaped the environments in which ceremonies occurred and the methods through which

musical knowledge was preserved. By the middle decades of the century, scholars, musicians, and cultural institutions increasingly recognized that many regional traditions faced unprecedented pressures, prompting systematic efforts to document performances before important repertoires and performance practices disappeared from living memory.⁷³

Documentation expanded significantly during the 1960s and 1970s through collaborations among ethnomusicologists, government agencies, and cultural organizations. Researchers recorded ceremonies, photographed ritual performance, interviewed practitioners, transcribed repertoires, and assembled collections that remain among the most valuable resources for the study of Korean traditional music. These projects represented a decisive shift in scholarly priorities. Earlier observers had often regarded shamanic ritual as a social or religious curiosity. Preservation initiatives increasingly approached it as an important component of Korea's musical heritage whose historical significance extended beyond the communities in which it originated.⁷⁴

The establishment of the Important Intangible Cultural Properties system marked a turning point in the preservation of Korean performance traditions. Rather than limiting cultural heritage to monuments, manuscripts, or archaeological sites, preservation policy acknowledged that music, dance, craftsmanship, and ritual knowledge also required institutional protection. Recognition focused not only upon repertoires but upon the individuals and hereditary lineages responsible for transmitting them. This distinction reflected an important principle: musical traditions survive through performers rather than documents alone. Archives may preserve evidence of performance, yet the knowledge required to interpret rhythm, vocal style, ceremonial pacing, and ensemble interaction continues to depend upon living practitioners.⁷⁵

These preservation efforts inevitably altered the contexts in which ritual music was encountered. Ceremonies historically performed within households or village communities increasingly appeared in museums, universities, concert halls, and cultural festivals. Such presentations introduced wider audiences to traditions previously experienced primarily within ritual settings. At the same time, scholars have repeatedly cautioned that staged demonstrations cannot be understood as direct equivalents of household ceremonies. Concert performances necessarily shorten ritual sequences, reduce repetition, and modify audience participation to accommodate institutional settings. The repertoire may remain recognizable, but the social and ceremonial conditions under which it is performed have fundamentally changed.⁷⁶

Commercial and institutional recordings assumed equal importance within this preservation movement. Recordings created by the National Gugak Center, universities, broadcasting organizations, and cultural heritage institutions documented repertoires representing numerous regional traditions. For historians, these collections preserve invaluable evidence concerning vocal timbre, ensemble balance, rhythmic interpretation, ornamentation, and instrumental interaction that written transcription alone cannot adequately represent. Their value extends well beyond preservation. Recordings permit direct comparison among performances separated by decades, allowing scholars to observe both continuity and gradual transformation within regional traditions.⁷⁷

The archive has consequently acquired an increasingly active role in contemporary musical transmission. Younger ritual specialists and musicians consult historical recordings alongside direct apprenticeship with experienced performers. These archival materials are rarely treated as authoritative scores requiring exact reproduction. Instead, they provide historical evidence of regional styles, vocal techniques, rhythmic practices, and repertoires that may no longer appear regularly within contemporary ceremonial life. Archival recordings therefore function as educational resources through which performers deepen their understanding of inherited traditions while continuing to interpret them within present-day ritual contexts.⁷⁸

This interaction between archive and living performance complicates conventional understandings of authenticity. Preservation does not require that every ceremonial detail remain unchanged across generations, nor do practitioners generally regard historical recordings as models demanding literal imitation. Musical traditions have always evolved in response to changing communities, religious practice, and historical circumstance. Contemporary scholarship increasingly defines authenticity through continuity of transmission rather than through exact historical replication. Apprenticeship, regional identity, ceremonial function, and shared musical understanding remain the principal measures of continuity because they preserve the processes through which tradition has historically developed.⁷⁹

Debates surrounding preservation have therefore shifted away from simple opposition between tradition and innovation. Earlier scholarship occasionally implied that change represented decline or loss. More recent ethnomusicological research recognizes that adaptation has characterized Korean shamanic music throughout its history. Regional traditions have continually absorbed new influences, responded to changing social conditions, and adjusted ceremonial practice without abandoning their fundamental musical principles. Preservation succeeds not by preventing change but by ensuring that change occurs within historically grounded systems of musical knowledge transmitted across generations.⁸⁰

International recognition has further expanded scholarly interest in Korean ritual traditions. UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage encouraged broader discussion of performance traditions maintained through living communities rather than permanent monuments. Korean preservation initiatives have become important case studies within these international conversations because they demonstrate how documentation, institutional support, and apprenticeship may coexist without reducing ritual music to museum exhibition. Korean shamanic music thus contributes not only to the cultural history of the peninsula but also to wider debates concerning the preservation of intangible musical heritage throughout the world.⁸¹

Colonialism, Modernity, and Changing Ritual Worlds

Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945) marked one of the most significant turning points in the history of Korean shamanic music, although its effects varied considerably according to region, political circumstance, and local practice. Colonial administrators regarded indigenous religious traditions through shifting ideological frameworks that alternately documented, regulated, or marginalized

ritual activity. Shamanic ceremonies frequently occupied an ambiguous position within these policies. Some continued with comparatively little interference, particularly in rural communities, while others encountered increasing administrative scrutiny as colonial authorities sought to regulate religious assemblies and reshape public expressions of Korean culture. The historical record therefore reveals neither uniform suppression nor unrestricted continuity, but a complex pattern of adaptation negotiated within changing political circumstances.⁸²

Ironically, the colonial period also produced many of the earliest systematic descriptions of Korean ritual music. Japanese scholars, folklorists, and ethnographers recorded ceremonies, published photographs, collected song texts, and documented regional customs that later disappeared or changed substantially. These materials remain indispensable historical sources because they preserve performances otherwise lost to history. Their documentary value, however, must be considered alongside the intellectual assumptions that shaped their production. Colonial scholarship frequently interpreted Korean ritual as evidence of a "primitive" stage of religious development or as material supporting broader narratives of imperial governance. Contemporary historians therefore approach these documents simultaneously as invaluable archives and as products of colonial knowledge whose interpretations require critical evaluation.⁸³

The emergence of commercial recording during the early twentieth century introduced another important source for reconstructing Korean musical history. Recording companies operating in Seoul documented court music, folk repertoires, theatrical performance, and selected examples of ritual music for commercial distribution. Technological limitations confined these recordings to only a few minutes in length, requiring producers to extract representative sections from ceremonies that traditionally unfolded across many hours. Although fragmentary, these recordings preserve vocal production, instrumental timbre, rhythmic interpretation, and ensemble balance with a level of precision impossible to recover from written description alone. They remain among the most valuable primary sources available for studying early twentieth-century Korean performance practice.⁸⁴

The incompleteness of these recordings has significantly influenced modern scholarship. Because no commercial release captures the full ceremonial progression of a traditional *gut*, historians reconstruct performance through comparison among multiple forms of evidence. Early recordings preserve sound, ethnographies document ceremonial sequence, photographs record spatial organization, and published transcriptions clarify melodic and rhythmic structure. None of these materials is independently sufficient. Historical interpretation therefore depends upon assembling a composite understanding from sources that illuminate different dimensions of the same musical tradition. The fragmented nature of the archive has encouraged increasingly interdisciplinary methods within both musicology and ethnomusicology.⁸⁵

Urbanization during the twentieth century introduced additional changes. As population shifted toward expanding cities, many ritual traditions adapted to environments very different from the village communities in which they had long flourished. Household ceremonies continued to be commissioned, yet changing patterns of employment, housing, and family organization affected

the scale, duration, and frequency of ritual performance. These developments did not sever continuity with earlier traditions. Instead, they required musicians and ritual specialists to negotiate new social conditions while preserving inherited repertoires and ceremonial practices. The flexibility that had long characterized Korean shamanic music proved equally important in responding to the realities of modern urban life.⁸⁶

The Korean War further transformed the historical landscape of ritual performance. Communities were displaced, hereditary musical networks were disrupted, and the political division of the peninsula separated performers whose traditions had previously developed through continual regional exchange. Northern repertoires became especially difficult to document after the establishment of the Demilitarized Zone, forcing scholars to rely increasingly upon prewar recordings, colonial-era publications, and the testimony of performers who later settled in South Korea. As a result, the surviving documentation of northern traditions remains uneven, shaped as much by twentieth-century political history as by earlier musical development.⁸⁷

Rapid industrialization during the second half of the twentieth century accelerated these changes while simultaneously encouraging renewed scholarly interest in traditional culture. Universities expanded research devoted to Korean music, preservation organizations increased documentation projects, and cultural institutions undertook systematic efforts to record regional repertoires before further social transformation altered them beyond recognition. The resulting body of scholarship shifted attention away from treating shamanism exclusively as folklore or religious custom and toward examining its music as an essential component of Korean cultural history. Vocal production, ensemble interaction, rhythmic organization, apprenticeship, and regional variation consequently became central subjects of scholarly investigation.⁸⁸

This changing intellectual environment also reshaped the meaning of the archive itself. Recordings created during preservation projects became educational resources for younger performers, while contemporary ceremonies generated new documentation that continues to expand the historical record. The archive no longer functions solely as a repository of disappearing traditions. It participates actively in the ongoing transmission of musical knowledge by connecting historical performance with contemporary interpretation. Each generation contributes new documentation while simultaneously drawing upon earlier records to deepen its understanding of inherited regional practice.⁸⁹

By the closing decades of the twentieth century, Korean shamanic music occupied multiple cultural environments simultaneously. Ceremonies continued within households and communities that maintained longstanding ritual traditions, while universities, museums, festivals, and cultural heritage institutions presented related repertoires to audiences whose interest centered upon history, preservation, and performance. These parallel contexts expanded the visibility of Korean shamanic music without reducing its ceremonial significance. Instead, they revealed the remarkable capacity of the tradition to sustain its musical identity while responding to profound historical transformation across more than a century of political and social change.⁹⁰

Gender, Ritual Authority, and Musical Transmission

The history of Korean shamanic music cannot be separated from the history of the women who preserved it. Although male ritual specialists have existed throughout Korean history—particularly within certain regional traditions—the majority of practicing *mudang* documented since the late Chosŏn period have been women. Their prominence distinguishes Korean shamanism from many institutional religious traditions on the peninsula and has attracted sustained attention from historians, anthropologists, and ethnomusicologists alike. Music occupied a central position within this authority. Ritual knowledge depended not only upon religious experience but also upon mastery of extensive vocal repertoires, ceremonial sequence, rhythmic organization, and ensemble coordination acquired through years of apprenticeship.⁹¹

Confucian political ideology profoundly influenced official attitudes toward female ritual specialists. Neo-Confucian writers generally regarded shamanic practice with suspicion, criticizing ceremonies as incompatible with ideals of social hierarchy and moral order. Government records periodically describe efforts to regulate or suppress ritual specialists, particularly within urban centers and administrative districts. Yet these same documents reveal the limitations of official policy. Families continued to commission *gut* for illness, funerary observances, household prosperity, agricultural concerns, and communal protection throughout the Chosŏn dynasty. The continued demand for ritual performance demonstrates that popular religious life frequently operated according to priorities distinct from those articulated by elite political discourse.⁹²

The musical implications of this historical situation are significant. Because ritual authority remained concentrated largely among women, the preservation of many vocal traditions likewise depended upon female practitioners whose repertoires circulated outside institutional systems of musical education. Court musicians transmitted repertoires through state-sponsored organizations supported by written documentation and hereditary appointment. Shamanic musicians relied instead upon oral instruction, long apprenticeship, memorization, and direct participation in ceremonial performance. Two distinct systems of musical transmission therefore developed simultaneously within Korean history, each preserving different repertoires, performance practices, and conceptions of musical authority.⁹³

Ethnographic research consistently demonstrates that musical competence formed one dimension of broader ritual expertise. Experienced *mudang* possessed detailed knowledge of invocation texts, ceremonial order, regional repertoires, and the circumstances under which particular songs or rhythmic patterns should be employed. The ability to sing accurately represented only part of this expertise. Performers also interpreted changes in ritual pacing, coordinated interaction with accompanying musicians, and adapted musical performance to the needs of individual ceremonies. Musical judgment developed gradually through repeated participation in ritual life rather than through isolated technical instruction.⁹⁴

This process of transmission rarely followed rigid hereditary lines. Although many practitioners learned within family traditions, apprentices also sought instruction from respected ritual specialists outside their immediate households when opportunities arose. Regional movement, marriage, and changing patterns of community life encouraged the circulation of

repertoires and performance techniques among neighboring traditions. Musical exchange therefore accompanied continuity. Regional identities remained recognizable even as performers incorporated selected repertoires and interpretive practices encountered through broader professional networks.⁹⁵

The relationship between female ritual authority and musical performance has attracted increasing attention within feminist ethnomusicology. Scholars have observed that the *mudang* occupied a position largely unavailable to women within many formal institutions of premodern Korean society. During ritual, female practitioners exercised ceremonial leadership, directed musicians, interpreted spiritual experience, and mediated communal concerns through public performance. Their authority derived neither from bureaucratic appointment nor hereditary political status but from recognized ritual expertise expressed through music, speech, movement, and ceremonial knowledge. Performance therefore became one of the principal means through which women exercised public authority within local communities.⁹⁶

This authority contrasts sharply with that associated with Confucian court music. Court repertoires emphasized institutional discipline, written preservation, hierarchical organization, and ceremonial regularity. Shamanic performance depended upon interpretive flexibility, oral transmission, and continuous adaptation to changing ritual circumstances. These differences should not be interpreted as evidence that one tradition possessed greater musical sophistication than the other. Rather, they illustrate how distinct social institutions produced equally sophisticated yet fundamentally different systems of musical knowledge. Korean musical history encompasses both traditions, each reflecting the political and religious environments from which it emerged.⁹⁷

Twentieth-century preservation initiatives further transformed the public visibility of female ritual specialists. Recognition as holders of Important Intangible Cultural Properties brought national attention to performers whose work had previously remained rooted within local ceremonial communities. Recordings, documentary films, museum exhibitions, and university collaborations preserved repertoires while simultaneously expanding scholarly understanding of women's contributions to Korean musical history. These initiatives encouraged researchers to examine ritual specialists not merely as religious practitioners but as accomplished musicians whose repertoires constitute an essential component of Korea's cultural heritage.⁹⁸

The expansion of archival resources has likewise reshaped contemporary transmission. Younger practitioners increasingly study historical recordings, documentary films, and published transcriptions alongside traditional apprenticeship. These materials broaden access to earlier regional styles without replacing the importance of direct ceremonial participation. Musical interpretation continues to develop through performance, where vocal nuance, rhythmic flexibility, and ensemble interaction can be experienced rather than simply observed. Archives preserve historical evidence, but living performance remains the environment in which musical knowledge acquires practical meaning.⁹⁹

The preservation of Korean shamanic music therefore depends upon more than institutional documentation or governmental recognition. It continues through performers whose

authority rests upon sustained engagement with inherited repertoires, regional traditions, and ceremonial practice. Examining the central role of women within this process broadens understanding of Korean musical history by demonstrating that some of its most enduring traditions survived outside the institutions that have often dominated historical narratives. Their contributions reveal a parallel history of musical transmission in which ritual performance, oral instruction, and community participation preserved a sophisticated body of musical knowledge across successive generations.¹⁰⁰

Ritual, Community, and Everyday Life

Although Korean shamanism is frequently examined through the history of religion, its musical traditions developed within the rhythms of everyday community life. The *gut* was commissioned not only during moments of crisis but also to mark seasonal transitions, agricultural cycles, household prosperity, healing, memorial observances, and communal festivals. Music accompanied each of these occasions in different ways, shaping ceremonies that reflected the practical concerns of the communities that sustained them. Ritual performance therefore occupied a place within ordinary social experience rather than existing apart from it.¹⁰¹

The circumstances prompting a *gut* varied considerably according to region and local custom. Household ceremonies addressed illness, recurring misfortune, family conflict, successful harvests, fishing expeditions, business prosperity, and the commemoration of deceased relatives. Village ceremonies emphasized collective welfare, agricultural abundance, and protection from natural disaster. These differing objectives produced corresponding differences in musical organization. Repertoires, rhythmic pacing, vocal delivery, and ceremonial duration were selected according to the purpose of the ritual rather than from a single fixed sequence inherited unchanged across generations. Musical flexibility thus emerged as one of the defining characteristics of Korean shamanic performance.¹⁰²

This adaptability depended upon informed musical judgment. Experienced ritual specialists and accompanying musicians continually adjusted repertory, tempo, instrumental texture, and ceremonial pacing as circumstances developed throughout the performance. Vocal invocations might be extended to accommodate prayer, rhythmic cycles repeated to support ritual dance, or instrumental passages abbreviated when ceremonies required prolonged spoken dialogue. Such decisions reflected neither improvisation nor departure from tradition. They represented practical applications of musical knowledge acquired through long familiarity with regional repertoires and ceremonial practice.¹⁰³

Performance also depended upon continuous communication among everyone present. The *mudang* coordinated movement through vocal and physical gesture, while percussionists, reed players, singers, and assistants responded through carefully timed musical adjustments. Members of the household recognized familiar rhythmic patterns, participated in ceremonial activities, prepared offerings, and responded to musical cues indicating transitions between different stages of the ritual. The distinction between performer and observer therefore remained considerably

more fluid than in modern concert performance. Music functioned as a shared language through which the ceremonial community organized collective action.¹⁰⁴

This communal character explains why Korean shamanic music survived repeated periods of political and social transformation. Government policy, institutional preservation, and scholarly documentation all contributed to its continuation during the twentieth century, yet none could have preserved the tradition independently. Musical transmission ultimately depended upon communities that continued to commission ceremonies, support practitioners, and recognize the social value of ritual performance. The archive records this history, but living communities sustained it.¹⁰⁵

Modern ethnomusicology has increasingly emphasized this broader social perspective. Rather than isolating musical structure from everyday experience, scholars examine ritual performance alongside kinship, seasonal labor, local history, patterns of settlement, and systems of community organization. Such approaches reveal that melody, rhythm, vocal style, and instrumental performance acquire their fullest significance only within the ceremonial environments for which they were created. Music therefore becomes both historical evidence and social practice, preserving relationships among performers, participants, and communities across successive generations.¹⁰⁶

The continuity of Korean shamanic music consequently depends upon more than the preservation of songs or rhythmic cycles alone. It encompasses systems of apprenticeship, regional identity, ceremonial knowledge, communal participation, and shared historical memory. Every performance renews inherited musical traditions while responding to the needs of the present, illustrating that continuity has never depended upon exact repetition. Instead, it has emerged through informed interpretation grounded in regional practice and collective experience. This dynamic process of renewal remains one of the defining characteristics of Korean shamanic music and provides the foundation upon which its future preservation continues to rest.¹⁰⁷

Listening, Documentation, and the Historical Record

The reconstruction of Korean shamanic music depends upon an unusually diverse documentary record. Government reports, dynastic chronicles, missionary writings, ethnographic publications, commercial recordings, photographs, preservation surveys, and audiovisual archives each preserve different dimensions of ritual performance while leaving others undocumented. No single category of evidence provides a complete history of the *gut*. Historians and ethnomusicologists therefore reconstruct the tradition by comparing sources whose strengths compensate for one another's limitations. The resulting historical narrative is necessarily composite, assembled from materials produced for very different purposes across more than a century of documentation.¹⁰⁸

Government documents generally preserve institutional attitudes toward ritual specialists rather than detailed accounts of musical performance. Administrative records illuminate changing legal status, official regulation, and broader political concerns, yet they seldom describe repertory, instrumentation, or performance practice with precision. Missionary publications present another valuable but limited perspective. Their descriptions frequently emphasize theological

interpretation, often treating ritual music as evidence of religious belief rather than as an artistic tradition worthy of independent analysis. Such sources remain historically significant, but their observations require careful contextualization before they can be incorporated into musicological interpretation.¹⁰⁹

Ethnographic scholarship transformed this documentary landscape by directing sustained attention toward performance itself. Researchers documented ceremonial sequence, repertoires, apprenticeship, instrumentation, vocal production, rhythmic organization, and regional variation with a level of detail unavailable in earlier historical writing. These studies also introduced methods that privileged long-term observation, comparative analysis, and close engagement with practicing musicians. Even so, ethnographies remain products of particular historical moments. Each reflects the intellectual priorities, methodological assumptions, and preservation concerns of the period in which it was produced. Contemporary scholarship therefore treats ethnographic documentation as historical evidence requiring interpretation rather than transparent description.¹¹⁰

Archival recordings preserve dimensions of musical performance unavailable through written documentation. Vocal timbre, flexible intonation, instrumental balance, rhythmic articulation, and ensemble interaction can be examined directly rather than inferred from descriptive prose. Recordings also allow scholars to compare performances separated by decades, revealing both continuity and gradual transformation within regional traditions. Such comparisons demonstrate that Korean shamanic music has never remained static. Vocal delivery, instrumental texture, and rhythmic interpretation evolve gradually while preserving recognizable structural principles inherited through apprenticeship and ceremonial practice.¹¹¹

The relationship between notation and recorded sound illustrates one of the central methodological challenges confronting ethnomusicology. Western staff notation effectively represents approximate pitch relationships and rhythmic organization, yet it cannot adequately capture microtonal inflection, shifting vocal color, flexible tempo, or the continual negotiation among performers that characterizes live ritual. A transcription may accurately record melodic contour while omitting precisely those expressive qualities that distinguish one regional tradition from another. Contemporary scholars therefore combine notation with audio recording, audiovisual documentation, and descriptive analysis, recognizing that each medium preserves different forms of musical evidence.¹¹²

Digital preservation has further expanded opportunities for historical research. Recordings once accessible only through specialized archives have increasingly been digitized, allowing scholars to compare regional traditions across broader chronological and geographical ranges. Audiovisual documentation preserves gesture, spatial organization, ceremonial movement, and interaction among performers alongside musical sound, enriching the historical record far beyond what earlier documentation could provide. Digital archives also broaden access for younger practitioners, enabling them to engage historical recordings as part of their continuing musical education while remaining grounded in living systems of apprenticeship.¹¹³

The archive consequently occupies a dynamic position within the history of Korean shamanic music. Earlier preservation efforts frequently viewed documentation as a means of rescuing traditions believed to be disappearing. Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes that archives also participate in the continuing life of those traditions. Historical recordings influence present-day interpretation, contemporary performances generate new documentation, and successive generations of scholars revisit earlier collections with new analytical questions. Documentation therefore functions not simply as preservation of the past but as an active component of musical transmission itself.¹¹⁴

Careful attention to documentary evidence also encourages greater methodological restraint. Historical silence should not be mistaken for historical absence, and surviving sources cannot support conclusions extending beyond the evidence they preserve. The absence of detailed notation from an early account does not imply musical simplicity, just as incomplete recordings do not represent the entirety of a regional tradition. Responsible historical interpretation requires distinguishing clearly between documented evidence, scholarly inference, and informed speculation. Such distinctions strengthen rather than weaken the historical argument because they acknowledge both the richness and the limitations of the surviving record.¹¹⁵

The study of Korean shamanic music therefore depends as much upon historical method as upon musical analysis. Archives preserve voices, instruments, ceremonies, and repertoires across successive generations, yet they remain incomplete witnesses to living performance. Their greatest value emerges when recordings, texts, photographs, transcriptions, and ethnographic accounts are examined together as complementary forms of evidence. Read in this way, the documentary record reveals a musical tradition whose history continues to unfold through preservation, performance, scholarship, and renewed interpretation.¹¹⁶

Korean Shamanism in Contemporary Scholarship

During the past four decades, scholarship on Korean shamanic music has undergone a marked transformation. Earlier studies frequently approached ritual through the disciplines of folklore, anthropology, or comparative religion, emphasizing belief systems, myth, and ceremonial symbolism. While these investigations established an essential documentary foundation, music itself often occupied a secondary position within broader discussions of Korean religious life. More recent research has increasingly recognized performance as a historical subject deserving independent analysis. Questions concerning vocal production, rhythmic organization, ensemble interaction, regional repertory, apprenticeship, and documentary practice now occupy a central place within ethnomusicological scholarship, reflecting a broader movement toward understanding ritual through sound as well as text.¹¹⁷

This shift has also encouraged greater attention to historiography. Contemporary researchers no longer treat Korean shamanism as a static survival of an ancient religious system. Instead, the tradition is understood as the product of continual historical development shaped by political change, regional exchange, religious interaction, and evolving systems of musical transmission. Musical evidence has proven especially valuable in tracing these developments

because repertoires, performance practices, and rhythmic structures frequently preserve patterns of continuity that remain invisible within official documents or institutional histories. Performance therefore contributes directly to historical interpretation rather than merely illustrating conclusions drawn from written sources.¹¹⁸

Comparative regional research has played a particularly important role in reshaping scholarly understanding. Earlier surveys occasionally described Korean shamanism as though a relatively uniform ceremonial tradition extended throughout the peninsula. Detailed ethnographic documentation demonstrates otherwise. Rituals associated with Seoul, Hwanghae, Chŏlla, Kyŏngsang, and Jeju preserve distinctive vocal styles, instrumental combinations, rhythmic organization, repertoires, and ceremonial structures reflecting centuries of local development. Comparative analysis has consequently replaced generalized description as one of the principal methodological approaches within contemporary scholarship. Regional diversity is no longer treated as peripheral variation but as fundamental historical evidence.¹¹⁹

Attention has likewise turned toward the role of performers as interpreters rather than passive transmitters of inherited repertoires. Historical recordings reveal that experienced musicians consistently modify tempo, articulation, ornamentation, and ensemble balance according to the unfolding requirements of each ceremony while maintaining recognizable regional identities. These observations challenge earlier assumptions that oral traditions depend primarily upon exact repetition. Contemporary ethnomusicology instead emphasizes informed interpretation as the principal mechanism through which continuity is maintained. Musical traditions remain stable precisely because performers understand how and when variation may occur within established ceremonial frameworks.¹²⁰

The concept of authenticity has undergone comparable revision. Preservation efforts during the twentieth century occasionally implied that authentic performance required faithful reproduction of historical models. More recent scholarship approaches authenticity as a characteristic of transmission rather than replication. Ritual specialists remain authentic not because they reproduce every detail of an earlier performance but because they continue systems of apprenticeship, regional practice, ceremonial knowledge, and collective musical understanding inherited across generations. Historical recordings therefore function less as definitive models than as documentary conversations between past and present performers.¹²¹

Digital humanities have further expanded the possibilities of research. Large collections of recordings, photographs, manuscripts, and documentary films are increasingly available through institutional archives, permitting comparative analysis at a scale unimaginable to earlier generations of researchers. Digital preservation facilitates the study of regional variation, long-term stylistic change, and performance practice while simultaneously improving public access to historical collections. These developments have encouraged collaborations among historians, ethnomusicologists, archivists, linguists, and performers whose combined expertise has produced increasingly sophisticated interpretations of Korean ritual music.¹²²

The growing importance of audiovisual documentation has also reshaped scholarly methodology. Earlier ethnographies frequently relied upon written description supplemented by limited musical transcription. Contemporary researchers routinely integrate high-quality audio recording, digital video, spectrographic analysis, and synchronized transcription when documenting ritual performance. These methods preserve gesture, bodily movement, instrumental interaction, vocal nuance, and spatial relationships alongside musical sound, providing a substantially richer historical record than written notation alone could achieve. Such approaches recognize that musical meaning frequently emerges through the interaction of sound, movement, and ceremonial environment rather than through pitch and rhythm in isolation.¹²³

Current scholarship increasingly situates Korean shamanic music within broader discussions of intangible cultural heritage, ritual performance, and oral transmission throughout East Asia while remaining attentive to the particular historical circumstances of the Korean peninsula. Comparative studies have demonstrated important similarities in apprenticeship, ceremonial organization, and regional diversity across neighboring traditions without obscuring the distinctive musical characteristics that define Korean ritual practice. Such comparisons reinforce the importance of local historical evidence while contributing to wider theoretical conversations concerning performance, preservation, and musical continuity.¹²⁴

The continuing expansion of this field demonstrates that Korean shamanic music can no longer be regarded as a marginal subject within either Korean studies or ethnomusicology. Its repertoires illuminate questions of musical transmission, historical memory, regional identity, gender, religion, preservation, and documentary practice that extend far beyond the boundaries of ritual itself. As archival resources continue to grow and new analytical methods emerge, Korean shamanic music will remain an indispensable subject for understanding not only the history of Korean traditional music but also the broader processes through which musical cultures preserve and reinterpret their past.¹²⁵

Listening Across History

Korean shamanic music occupies a distinctive place within the history of the Korean peninsula because its continuity rests neither upon written notation nor institutional preservation alone, but upon performance itself. The surviving documentary record demonstrates that ritual music has been transmitted through apprenticeship, regional practice, collective memory, and repeated ceremonial experience across centuries of political, religious, and social transformation. Historical chronicles, ethnographic scholarship, archival recordings, preservation initiatives, and contemporary performance each preserve different dimensions of this history. Considered together, they reveal that the *gut* has never been a static relic of an earlier religious world. It has remained a living musical tradition whose continuity depends upon continual interpretation within changing historical circumstances.¹²⁶

Examining Korean shamanism through music rather than belief alone also alters the historiographical questions that shape its study. Religious history has traditionally emphasized cosmology, ritual symbolism, and the social functions of the *mudang*. These perspectives remain

indispensable, yet they explain only part of the historical record. Musical performance preserves evidence unavailable through textual documentation. Rhythmic organization, vocal production, instrumental interaction, ensemble coordination, and regional repertory illuminate systems of transmission that official documents rarely acknowledge. Performance therefore constitutes a historical archive in its own right, preserving knowledge through sound, memory, and practice as effectively as manuscripts preserve knowledge through writing.¹²⁷

Regional diversity further challenges any attempt to define Korean shamanism through a single representative tradition. The ceremonies of Seoul and Kyōnggi, the vigorous percussion traditions historically associated with Hwanghae, the funerary repertoires of Chōlla, the ceremonial practices of Kyōngsang, and the expansive narrative traditions of Jeju each demonstrate that Korean ritual music developed through local histories rather than centralized musical authority. Their differences extend beyond repertory or instrumentation. They encompass distinctive approaches to musical time, vocal expression, ensemble interaction, and ceremonial organization that together illustrate the remarkable adaptability of oral musical traditions across diverse cultural environments.¹²⁸

The collaborative nature of ritual performance likewise emerges as one of the central findings of this study. Historical descriptions often privilege the ritual specialist while relegating accompanying musicians to the background. Ethnomusicological evidence reveals a more complex musical reality. Percussionists, reed players, singers, assistants, and the *mudang* collectively shaped ceremonial progression through continual listening and responsive performance. Musical authority circulated throughout the ensemble rather than remaining concentrated in a single individual. This collaborative process explains both the flexibility and the stability that characterize Korean shamanic music. Performance changed from ceremony to ceremony, yet the principles governing those changes remained deeply rooted within regional traditions and long-established systems of apprenticeship.¹²⁹

The history of preservation reinforces this understanding of continuity. Archival recordings, published transcriptions, institutional documentation, and cultural heritage initiatives have expanded opportunities for research while safeguarding repertoires that might otherwise have disappeared. These materials should not be interpreted as substitutes for living tradition. Their greatest value lies in documenting earlier performances that contemporary musicians continue to interpret through apprenticeship and ceremonial practice. Preservation succeeds because archives and living communities remain mutually dependent. Recordings preserve sound; performers preserve interpretation. Together they sustain traditions that neither could maintain independently.¹³⁰

Korean shamanic music therefore contributes to broader discussions within musicology and ethnomusicology concerning oral transmission, ritual performance, documentary practice, and intangible cultural heritage. Its history demonstrates that musical continuity cannot be measured solely through written notation or institutional lineage. Communities preserve music through repeated performance, shared listening, embodied knowledge, and collective memory.

Every ceremony renews inherited repertoires while responding to present circumstances, allowing tradition to remain recognizable without becoming historically fixed. Such continuity reflects the enduring capacity of musical practice to accommodate change without relinquishing identity.¹³¹

Future research will undoubtedly expand this picture as additional archival collections become accessible and new analytical methods continue to develop. Digital preservation, comparative regional study, audiovisual analysis, and interdisciplinary collaboration promise to deepen understanding of repertoires whose historical significance extends well beyond ritual itself. Yet the central conclusion remains unchanged. Korean shamanic music is best understood not as the accompaniment to religious ceremony but as one of the principal forces through which ritual knowledge has been organized, transmitted, and preserved across generations. Listening to these traditions as historical evidence reveals a musical culture whose richness cannot be fully recovered through documents alone. Its history survives because performers have continued to give it sound.¹³²

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Glossary

bok (복)

Blessing, good fortune, or prosperity. Many *gut* ceremonies seek to restore or encourage *bok* for an individual, household, or community.

buk (북)

A barrel drum used in Korean traditional music and shamanic ritual. Within the *gut*, the *buk* provides a broad rhythmic foundation that supports vocal invocation and ensemble coordination.

byeolsin-gut (별신굿)

A communal village ritual performed to invoke protection, prosperity, and well-being for an entire community. Musical performance emphasizes collective participation through extended percussion, singing, and dance.

changdan (장단)

The cyclical rhythmic framework that organizes much of Korean traditional music. Rather than functioning as a rigid meter, *changdan* provides a flexible temporal structure that may expand or contract according to performance practice and ceremonial needs.

***changgu* (장구)**

An hourglass-shaped double-headed drum central to Korean traditional music. Within the *gut*, the *changgu* articulates rhythmic patterns that organize ceremonial movement and coordinate the ensemble.

***ching* (징)**

A large suspended gong producing a deep resonant tone. It commonly marks ceremonial transitions and reinforces structural moments within the ritual.

***dodang-gut* (도당굿)**

A communal village ritual traditionally performed to promote the health, protection, and prosperity of an entire settlement. Musical performance often features energetic percussion, communal participation, and extended ceremonial duration.

***gut* (굿)**

A Korean shamanic ritual combining music, dance, prayer, offerings, and spirit mediation. The term encompasses many regional ceremonial traditions rather than a single standardized performance.

***gugak* (국악)**

Traditional Korean music. The term includes court music, ritual music, folk traditions, theatrical music, and other historical genres.

***jinogwi-gut* (진오귀굿)**

A ritual performed for the deceased, intended to assist the spirit's passage into the next world and restore harmony between the living and the dead. Its musical character generally emphasizes measured pacing and extended vocal invocation.

***kkwaenggwari* (꽹과리)**

A small handheld brass gong producing bright, penetrating tones that articulate rhythmic accents and ceremonial transitions.

***mudang* (무당)**

A Korean ritual specialist, commonly translated as "shaman." The *mudang* leads the *gut* through singing, prayer, dance, invocation, and ceremonial performance.

***naerim-gut* (내림굿)**

The initiation ceremony through which a new *mudang* formally accepts the spirits and enters ritual life. It serves as both a religious rite and an important occasion for transmitting musical knowledge.

***p'ansori* (판소리)**

A genre of Korean narrative singing performed by a solo vocalist and drummer. Although distinct from shamanic ritual, it shares certain historical and vocal characteristics with other Korean oral traditions.

***piri* (피리)**

A cylindrical double-reed wind instrument with a penetrating tone. In shamanic ceremonies it frequently reinforces or ornaments the vocal line while contributing to the overall ceremonial texture.

***sijo* (시조)**

A traditional Korean lyric song genre characterized by carefully structured poetic texts and controlled melodic development.

***ssitgim-gut* (씻김굿)**

A funerary ritual found primarily in southwestern Korea. The ceremony emphasizes purification through music, prayer, and symbolic acts intended to prepare the deceased for the afterlife.

***yeongdeung-gut* (영등굿)**

A Jeju Island ritual honoring the sea goddess Yeongdeung. Its musical style reflects the island's distinctive ceremonial traditions and maritime cultural history.

Further Reading

Readers interested in pursuing Korean shamanic music beyond the scope of this essay may wish to begin with the following works, which represent foundational scholarship in ethnomusicology, Korean religious history, and traditional music.

- Don Baker, *Korean Spirituality* (2008)
- James H. Grayson, *Korea: A Religious History* (2002)
- Keith Howard, *Songs for the Spirits: Music and Mediums in Modern Korea* (1990)
- Keith Howard, *Korean Shamanism: Revivals, Survivals, and Change* (1998)
- Laurel Kendall, *Korean Shamanism: The Cultural Paradox* (2009)
- Laurel Kendall, *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits* (1985)
- Laurel Kendall, *The Life and Hard Times of a Korean Shaman* (1998)
- Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology* (2005)
- Robert C. Provine, Yosihiko Tokumaru, and J. Lawrence Witzleben, eds., *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, vol. 7 (2002)
- Timothy Rice, *Ethnomusicology: A Very Short Introduction* (2014)
- Michael J. Seth, *A History of Korea* (2016)
- Song Bang-song, *Korean Music: Historical and Other Aspects* (2000)