

Revitalizing tradition through festivals: the role of tourism in the production of a ‘traditional’ festival, the Tamnaguk Ipchun Gutnori on Jeju, S. Korea

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Abstract

By means of this working paper, I have explored the relationship between tourism and tradition, demonstrating how tourism is concerned with the process in which the festival is bound by appropriation and the evolution of cultural practice and tradition. Using a ‘traditional’ festival, the Tamnaguk Ipchun Gutnori, held on Jeju Island in South Korea where they have been striving for the development of a large scale growth of tourism targeting an inter-Asian market, the “paper” investigates to what extent tourism influences the process of ways in which the festival has had to change over the years. At the same time, tradition is revitalized through the festival whose philosophy is also challenged by the actual performers. The paper explores ways in which the traditional festival is appropriated for tourism and how this affects the festival in terms of altering the dates, the aesthetics of performances, spatial configurations of rituals and the procession itself. As a result, the paper reveals that tourism is not the unique component to be considered with reference to factors that bring changes to the festival. In actual fact, the aims of the festival and internal dynamics of festival participants also contribute to these changes. Further analysis needs to be done.

Keywords: traditional festival; ritual traditions of Confucianism and shamanism; Jeju Island

Background

To date, festivals seem to be everywhere. Wherever human spirits are free, people recognize the need to set aside the work and worry of everyday life for celebratory use, sometimes even in spite of cultural dominance and economic deprivation (Rinzler & Seitel, 1982). Since the post-Second World War period, Southern Europe has witnessed new celebrations being created and older ones being revived. Various academics recognize secularization, industrialization, rationalization of production, mass media and the advent of mass tourism as factors that have influenced the recent revitalization

of public celebrations throughout both industrialized and developing countries in Europe (Boissevain, 1992). With the influx of modernity, the growth of urban areas, stimulated by industrialization, not only contributed to revivals of ritual traditions but rendered traditional agricultural methods outmoded. Furthermore, tourism plays a big part in the growth of festivals as they are emerging as one of the fastest growing types of tourist attractions. Mayfield & Crompton's work (1995), set in North America, suggests that there are eight generic reasons for the stimulation of interest amongst non-profit and governmental entities in staging festivals. Examples of these are: recreation/socialization, culture/education, tourism, internal and external revenue generation, natural resources, agriculture, and community pride/spirit, all of which embrace the outcome of Hamilton, Frost, Awang & Watt's (1989) survey which researches the primary reasons for staging festivals.

Not only is tourism one of the driving forces behind staging festivals, but it plays a part in affecting socio-cultural change that has been of interest to tourism researchers for many years. Greenwood (1972), who might initiate ongoing mainstream and multi-disciplinary tourism debates in the area of festivals and events, argues that the Spanish Ministry of Tourism's involvement in the festival resulted in the transformation of a local festival into a tourist event so that "the ritual has become a performance for money. The meaning is gone (p.78)". In order to allow everyone to see the festival, the Municipal Government decided to hold the "Alarde" twice on the same day. Consequently, the public celebration that used to be performed as an affirmation of their belief embedded in local culture for the participants themselves was altered to become a public spectacle for the outsider. What he pointed out is that tourism turns culture into a commodity that is packed and sold to tourists, and in the end, results in a loss of authenticity.

Although Greenwood's perspective initiated a continuous and ongoing debate within the area of tourism, it was also criticized, for example his view of which tourism brings negative consequences into local culture is far too generalized (Boissevain, 1996). There are signs and evidence of selling local celebrations to tourists, but this does not mean that commoditization is destroying them. Neither is the social aspect of tourism always negative, nor are locals always passive in the face of tourism. Commoditization can be seen as "part of a very positive process by which people are beginning to re-evaluate their history and shake off the shame of peasantry (Abram, 1996: 198)". Far from being passive in the process, communities are capable of confronting and coping with tourism: through the promoting process of their culture, people (re)discovering

their own history and traditions and beginning to realize their own value (Cohen, 1988); the strategies festival organizers use echoes partly with the presence of tourists, but it does not dampen the ways in which villagers actively engage in using festivals as a means of asserting and reaffirming their local identity (Bendix, 1989); and dance performers in Bali slightly alter the performances they provide for tourists in order to protect the local significance of more original performances (Chambers, 2010).

Furthermore, there are other aspects that might be affected by these sorts of alterations in which culture can change under the pressure of circumstance and from its own internal dynamics (Greenwood, 1989). More importantly, within a given setting, “each festival seems to yield its own body of specialized information about the relationships among political and social entities (Brandes, 1988: 178)”. Therefore, with regards to the relationship between “festival” and “tourism”, in the case of the TIG festival with its lengthy history of tourist development, neither in Europe nor in America, would insight be brought into research on both the process of invented tradition, and the role of tourism within it (Bendix, 1989).

The festival, the Tamnaguk Ipchun Gutnori (TIG)

Meanings of the festival

In search of the significance of the festival Tamnaguk Ipchun Gutnori (TIG), reborn in 1999, I analyzed the title of the festival itself, discourse represented in academic literature and interview data. Firstly, the TIG is an occasion which celebrates the ‘onset of spring’ through the re-enactment of traditional performances which are believed to have taken place in the Tamna Kingdom era. By examining each component of the title for example, Tamnaguk, Ipchun and Gutnori which denote its origin, the date on which it originally took place it, and the method of celebration, respectively, I was able to discover its meaning. For example, Tamnaguk refers to the Tamna Kingdom that was an independent state on Jeju between the 7th and 12th centuries. Ipchun is a combination of Chinese characters, Ip (立 stand up or rise) and chun (春 Spring), which commonly refers to either the ‘onset of spring’ and ‘spring’ itself, is one of 24 seasonal divisions in the solar calendar, that always falls on the day of the 4th of February. Gutnori is a compound noun that means a shamanistic play or enactment.

Secondly, the meaning of festival could be considered to be connected to the traditional ‘moving period’ on the island. It is called Singugan, a combination of Chinese

characters, Sin(新 new), gu(舊 old) and gan(間 between), indicating the period which lasts seven days between two seasonal divisions, Daehan and Ipchun. In Jeju folklore, it is well known as the period in which people can do house-moving and repair toilets since it is believed all deities go up to heaven under the order of the heavenly king who will then ordain them for new posts back on earth. During this period, all gods and goddesses are absent from earth for their transition until their return after Singugan. Therefore, “it is characterized as the festival of welcoming the New Year not only in the sense that Ipchun is the first seasonal festivity held after their return, but in the sense that Ipchun Gut, being a series of shamanistic rituals, is an instrument used in assisting them on their return to the earth (Han, 2003: 323)”.

Lastly, as also found in academic literature stating that “it is the day when the new season begins and thus, new life begins (Jin, 1969: 68)”, interview data revealed that the meanings of the festival are closely affiliated with the meaning of the Ipchun. Spring is the most uttered term in informants’ accounts while others consider it as the day when the New Year commences. Moreover, the taboo based on the belief in which (on the day) female visitors bring bad luck to house-holds and therefore, are prevented from visiting others, provides people with a strong sense of significance as represented in terms such as ‘new season’, ‘new year’ and ‘rebirth’. Those above meanings, grounded in tradition, resonate with the significance of the festival. For this reason, festival audiences, and performers seem to bring their own meaning to what they do for or what they give to the festival. Their involvement is of great significance. For example, it is important for performers to play gongs and drums as it is a way not only to awaken the earth but to shoo away bad insects for farming. For both performers and festival-goers, to hang their wishing papers on the straw line is significant as they believe their wishes will be granted. This ‘belief’ in which the earth must be ritually cultivated at the start of the growing season so as to produce a bountiful harvest for the year, is imbued with meanings embedded in practicing traditional rituals and also is represented in forms such as the present festival.

Forms of the present festival

There were two main issues to be considered in the process of forming the present structure of the festival. One is how to deliver meanings rooted in tradition of the Ipchun to the audience and the other is that the form should be instrumental for achieving its aims of creating a public urban space wherein people’s interests as well as

involvement for the festival are spontaneously drawn while traditions are preserved and transmitted (the festival pamphlet 2009, p.6). Along with the aims, meanings embedded in the Ipchun have been constituted as the current form of the festival: the ways in which the earth is ritually cultivated are represented through both the procession, street performance and the masked dance whilst belief and wishes for a good harvest, as well as the people's well-being, are affirmed and reaffirmed by means of two rituals - Confucian ritual for a wooden cow and the Ipchun Gut.

The festival lasts two days and opens with a Confucian-styled ceremony devoted by the farming community to wish for public welfare and an abundant harvest for the year. A wooden cow that is made anew annually, not only plays the role of a worshipping object during the ritual, but leads the procession and resides in a prominent resting place where festival goers hang their wishing papers on the straw rope fencing around it. On the second day, the Ipchun Gut, is derived from full scale shamanistic rituals. During the ritual, the god is asked to both protect the wellbeing of the city and secure a good harvest for the year ahead. This beautifully choreographed ritual provides festival-goers with the opportunity to experience an 'authentic' shamanistic rite performed by the Preservation Committee for the Jeju Chilmeori Shrine Yeongdeung Gut which was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity of UNESCO on October 1st 2009.

Then, in order to dramatize the people's wish of securing a good harvest for the year, Ipchun masked dances are performed in 6 stages: 1) a dance of the stone grandfather, 2) a dance of Hojang who plants seeds in the field, 3) a dance of the hunter who shoos away the bird that pecks seeds from the field, 4) dances that signify the settlement of seeds and their growth, 5) the conflict between the stone grandfather's wife and his mistress and 6) a dance to make a wish for a good harvest for the year. This dramatic form performed by the independent theatric group 'Durunanum', has received a lot of attention from the organizer as it is centred on restoring traditional masked dances as portrayed in photographs taken in 1914.

Major changes that have taken place between 1999 and 2008

Since 1999 when the festival was first introduced to Jeju City, it has undergone some changes in terms of its form and the structure of its program, the organizing body of the festival and the number of participating groups. Firstly, as mentioned in the previous section, traditional meanings of the Ipchun were chronologically summarized on the

festival program with four main elements such as the Confucian ritual for the wooden cow, the procession of the wooden cow, the Ipchun Gut and the Ipchun masked dances. In addition to the main structure of the festival program, the declaration ceremony of 'The Year Of The Local Culture' served as a momentum that other periphery events including invited performances from mainland Korea and participants from other spheres were adopted to the festival. It was in 2001 that the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism inaugurated the cultural scheme in order to resurrect and promote 'the uniqueness of the local culture'. By making it a collective event, where performing groups from elsewhere were invited to entertain the audience, the content of the festival changed to become what it is today.

Secondly, while the Jeju Minyechong has mostly remained as an organizing body for the festival, it was in change between 2000 and 2004. In 2000, the Jeju Minyechong ran the festival in collaboration with the Institute of Jeju Traditional Culture that took over the festival independently the following year. Then its role was substituted by the transmission and preservation Committee of the TIG until it was replaced by the Jeju Minyechong in 2004. The problem is that the Committee has not have a legal position to be subsidized by public funds, although it was founded for the festival so as to promote public interest as well as their involvement and thus, to create a festive space where local support helped both in (re)producing and in utilizing urban spaces.

Last but not least, similar reasons for motivating the public to come to the festival resulted in the increase, from 2001, of participating groups such as the Farming Leaders' Association and Pungmul troupes from nearby villages. All 26 villages in the City now have their own Pungmul troupes as 16 out of 26 have been founded since 2000 with support by the Jeju City as it encouraged their growth. One interviewee from the city hall (May 15, 2009) explained the rationale of its establishment stating that 'once the group is founded, city dwellers have the opportunity not only to learn traditional Korean music and performances, but to show their performance to the audience through participating in local cultural events. By doing so, we allow them to contribute to their society by taking part in the transmission process of tradition, whilst performers themselves realize the significance of their/our culture'. As a result, approximately 20 groups and more than a thousand individual participants contributed towards making the festival in 2009.

The role of tourism affecting in the festival production and its consequences

In *Lonely Planet Korea* (Richmond, Whyte, Soriano & Balasingamchow, 2010), Jeju Island is introduced as one part of Korea that tourists never miss because it is South Korea's top holiday and honeymoon destination where swaying palm trees along the roads lead them to sandy beaches and towering volcanic craters. As far as the tourist is concerned, traditions and heritage on the island are not attractive enough to be the focus of an entire holiday but would probably complement it. Yet, stimulated by the government in search for the link between festivals and regional tourism policies, festivals have been harnessed as a medium to attract the new segment of the tourist market (Azara & Crouch, 2006). Furthermore, being held at a heritage site where the governmental building has stood for hundreds years and where dozens of tourist attractions and hotels are nearby, the TIG is marking a '2 day' tourism market whereby a variety of tourists' experiences are all in one setting.

Although there are no statistics available of how many tourists attend the festival, the presence of a potentially interested tourist audiences has contributed to the appropriation of the festival by both the organizer and performers, and hence has affected it in terms of altering festival dates, the aesthetics of performances, and the space configuration of rituals and the procession. The data I collected reveals that its appropriation for tourism led to both positive and negative responses. Firstly, most performers were not happy with regards to the alteration of the festival date, as one informant (March 6, 2009) stated 'the date itself is meaningful. If the date is changed, the significance of what we do at the festival as performers and the festival itself is meaningless...after the festival I expressed my opinion in the meeting where the Mayor of the city and representatives of Pungmul troupes from 26 villages gathered and discussed our performances for another up and coming festival, the First Full Moon festival. I know it was a big decision to make and understand why it should be done...if it keeps the day, it would be more meaningful'. On the other hand, those who have to conform to the conventional five-day working week in order to earn money welcomed this arrangement. For instance, one performing group claimed the meaning would be greater with the greater number of participants in the festival. This was one of the groups who proposed to the city council to hold the festival over the weekend due to the difficulty in mobilizing their members for performances.

Secondly, as the type of folkloric aestheticization is recognized as an important part of cultural practice (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998; Guss, 2000), Pungmul performers from villages have employed aesthetic choices in their costumes and dramatic choreography over the years. With their skills incorporated in traditional folk music and performances,

they have become active in engaging in other events taking place on and out of the island. One performer (March 3, 2009) from a village troupe that recently replaced their outfits in order to differentiate them from other troupes proudly announced 'we practice folk performances through courses provided by the city and prepare all stage properties for ourselves. In addition, our performance is limited neither to the festival nor to domestic tourists. We give traditional performances to international tourists, especially for those who are disembarked from cruise ships. The event is like a welcoming show for them. They like the music we play and are willing to take pictures of us. I think our pictures have travelled with those tourists globally. We are very popular'.

Aside from this, the rituals and procession have shown a tendency to be more staged and spectacular by the space configuration, which gives rise to a greater potential for creativity and change (Turner, 1982). Rituals were arranged to be located in the centre so that they are seen as significant components of the whole occasion (Manning, 1992). Moreover, as ceremony masters continue now to take their role in leading the procession after the ritual, the way in which they are featured, relatively hinders the role of Pungmul troupes. When I asked what the meaning of their participation in the festival was, one leader of the Pungmul troupes responded expressing his antagonism towards the Farming Leaders' Association that was responsible for delaying the moment of the procession. 'I will not participate in the festival next year unless our leader is a ritual leader. More than 1,000 members of our community perform both in the opening ceremony and in the procession. Although the Farming Leaders' Association does nothing but preparing the ritual, its representative plays a role as one of three ritual leaders. To be honest, the festival has become bigger and drawn the attention away from citizens themselves since we joined the performance in 2000. If we did not perform here, how many members of the association would do this for the festival? We are not puppets for the festival, are we? (March 3, 2009)' Despite his wishes, the representative of the Pungmul troupes could not take the role of a ritual leader in the festival of 2010 of which I witnessed his group and himself coming back and performing for.

Conclusion

The TIG is shown (although my analysis has not been fully completed yet), as another example of revived public celebration designed partially to create tourism where the notion of tourism revolves around the festival production and is not only open to changes in internal dynamics between the organizer, performers and even locals as onlookers but also it is bound up with external, circumstantial pressure including the

cultural policies of the government.

Different from Greenwood's (1989) concern, the case of the TIG would not seem to suggest that the tourist industry on the island has actively used and abused the festival as a local attraction. Rather, it would seem to confirm the case of Interlaken analyzed by Bendix (1989) in which tourism is not the unique component to be considered with reference to factors that bring changes into the festival. As for major changes that have taken place between 1999 and 2009, securing measurable audience figures was the first priority in the decision making process at an organizational level as it is closely associated with the success of the festival. Furthermore, the type of competition observed with regards to the participants, in which dozens of performing groups create another dimension such as conflicts in their different interests and divergence from the original content of the festival itself.

However, due to the fact that I am still researching and the space limitation this paper has, I have not yet ascertained why performers keep coming back to the festival and how conflicts and divergence generated by performers are resolved. On Jeju, locals are not only fully aware of the presence of tourism but seem to be flexible when dealing with the process of cultural commoditization. Accordingly, further investigation might help me to discover how the local people cope with and confront tourism while they are engaged in using tradition for tourism within the festival setting.

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