

Research Article

Perceptions of Religious Cults and Korean Traditional Shamanism

To what extent have the perceptions of Korean citizens on religious cults impacted their perceptions of Korean traditional Shindo?

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Abstract: Societal perceptions of religious cults have traditionally been neutral or negative. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, this perception has worsened as religious cults became involved in coronavirus scandals. In South Korea, there have also been rising instances of Shindo-Korean traditional shamanism-being involved with these scandals. This study therefore sought to discover the potential link between the perceptions of Korean citizens on religious cults and their perceptions of Shindo. The study was conducted in South Korea, using a mixed-method approach. The data was collected from a randomized sample of 94 individuals from an online survey. The survey was validated by the AP Research board of Korea International School. The quantitative findings of this study confirmed through a Chi-square test for independence that there is a strong correlation between Korean perceptions of religious cults and Shindo. The qualitative findings discovered that this correlation was based on negative perceptions of both concepts, which were generally formed by external and internal biases. The external biases were recent events involving religious cults and negative media portrayals of them. The internal biases were critical views towards faiths in general, and critical views towards any non-orthodox faiths. These findings hold critical implications for the study of non-mainstream religions in Korea, as well as better understanding the nuances present in societal perceptions of religious and cultural concepts.

Keywords: South Korea, religion, shamanism, perception, impact.

Introduction

Korean shamanism-more specifically referred to as Shindo-occupies an integral part in South Korean history and culture. It was adopted as a symbol of national liberation due to its role throughout the Japanese occupation of South Korea in the early 1900s, becoming a prominent component of Korean identity (Seo, 2013). However, Shindo's historical importance and positive reception by Koreans contrast with more recent social developments, with public sentiment regarding non-mainstream religions (including religious cults) growing progressively negative.

Three recent incidents brought the issue of religious cults to the fore of public discourse in Korea. The first was the MV Sewol ferry disaster in 2014, in which the ferry capsized and killed a total of 304 crew and passengers. It was later found that the ferry's de facto owner-Yoo Byung-Eun-was the head of a controversial religious sect called the Evangelical Baptist Church of Korea, otherwise known as the Salvation Sect (Fermin-Robbins, 2018).

The second was the impeachment of former president Park Geun-Hye in 2016. During this incident, controversy arose from the discovery of one of her close aides-Choi Tae-Min-being the founder of a religious cult called Yongsae-gyo (Fermin-Robbins, 2018).

The third incident was the more recent COVID-19 outbreak in Daegu, one of South Korea's largest cities. The Shincheonji Church of Jesus, another religious cult, was widely blamed by the public and the media for deliberately causing and spreading this outbreak. The leader of the Church-Lee Man-Hee-was later arrested for hiding evidence of the group's involvement with the spread. This incident, coupled with the unprecedented nature surrounding COVID-19, caused the public perception of religious cults to grow exponentially negative (Introvigne *et al.*, 2020).

It is evident that the ferry disaster, presidential impeachment, and COVID-19 have caused extensive moral panic¹ surrounding religious cults and other fringe religions.

Additionally, other events could have caused Koreans to perceive religious cults and shamanism in a similar light. One prime example is the growth of the Unification Church in Korea. The Unification Church, founded by self-proclaimed messiah Moon Sun-Myung, was created in 1954 combining Christian and Korean shamanistic ideas. The Church was widely referred to as a religious cult in South Korea, especially due to its associations with certain criminal activity and corruption of its leadership (Barker, 2018).

These developments bring about the question: to what extent have the perceptions of Korean citizens on religious cults² impacted their perceptions of Korean traditional Shindo?

Literature Review

History

A general point of consensus amongst historians is that Shindo was created around the time of the early Joseon dynasty, from the influences of mainly Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Korean traditional folklore. Korean Shindo is based on ideas of equality amongst all humans and the mediation of conflicts (Seo, 2013). Due to this nature of Shindo, many Koreans have traditionally turned to the religion for spiritual healing.

South Koreans' perceptions of Shindo have changed dramatically since then, reaching back to when Western missionaries brought Christianity to Korea in the mid-1800s. Upon witnessing Shindo, Christian missionaries described it as idolatry or demon worship. Eventually, the influence of Christianity led to many Koreans adopting a stance of lessened tolerance towards Shindo and shamanistic practices (Oak, 2010). Christianity's negative influences on Koreans' perceptions of Shindo continued to be prominent up until the early 1900s (Walraven, 1993).

After South Korea's liberation from Japan in 1945, Christianity re-emerged in importance (A. Kim, 2000). During the Korean War, high American presence led to Koreans heavily adopting elements of Western culture into their traditional religious practices. As this kind of cultural syncretism occurred, increasing the influence of Christianity and American culture, traditional theologies of Shindo diminished in importance (Kwon and Park 2018).

This changed in the 1970s, when a series of protests broke out in response to the administration of Park Chung-Hee-a military dictator who suppressed democratic processes to focus on economic growth. Koreans used Shindo to spearhead social movements and protests against the government (Seo, 2013). Seo contends that this period solidified Shindo as a tradition with heavy nationalistic connotations.

¹ Moral panic describes the sensitization of the public which occurs when "a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interest" (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994).

² Throughout this paper, the researcher will be using the term "religious cults" in reference to the general idea of non-mainstream religions and new religious movements. This is because, in Korean language, the term that directly translates to "religious cults"—종교 컬트—does not hold the stereotypical negative connotation that it does in Western societies and is used as a blanket term for such organizations.

On this claim, S. Kim suggests a qualifying viewpoint that, since then, this nationalistic version of Shindo has diminished in prominence. Certain groups have continued to use Shindo to drive social movements or to promote nationalism. Other groups have exploited Shindo as a means of economic gain by creating markets for spiritual healing. Therefore, S. Kim argues that Shindo has remained a distant but recognizable part of Korean culture (S. Kim, 2020).

However, D. Kim presents an opposing viewpoint that some Koreans seem to consider it as a cultish tradition and view it in a negative light. Shamanism has generally been stereotyped as “superstitious” due to society’s understanding of it being a method to gain worldly benefits through spiritual methods, a term often associated with religious cults (D. Kim, 2012). Hong furthers this claim by contending that, while some understand shamanism to be a significant historical and traditional facet of Korea, they also negatively view these characteristics as a “hindrance to modernization” (Hong, 2016).

Current Situation

Currently, there seems to be both negative and positive perceptions regarding the Korean public’s opinions of Shindo.

One possible factor for a shift in public perception regarding Shindo is the rapid modernization and Westernization of South Korea since the late 1900s. Oh argues that Shindo is now increasingly viewed by South Koreans as either an irrelevant practice or a fringe religion. He suggests that this is due to the popularization of Christianity as an effect of Westernization (Oh, 2014).

However, there are several indicators that the Korean public’s perception of Shindo could also be favorable. One such indicator is the fact that it is an empowering tradition for women. Korean Shindo is uniquely dominated by female shamans-“mudangs”. Due to the history of female oppression and lack of educational opportunities for women in South Korea, Shindo became a way for women to express control to an extent (Oh, 2016).

When taking into consideration the growing feminist and progressive movements in Korean society-as can be seen with the emergence of the #Metoo movement and the protests following the Nth-room incident, in which women were harassed, raped, and threatened online-it could be deduced that this role of Shindo in empowering women could stimulate Koreans to view Shindo more favorably.

Additionally, public perception of Shindo may be positive as it is involved with many different kinds of modern practice. Businessmen seek shamanistic help in predicting their success rates, and weddings and funerals are often held with the blessings and guidance of shamans. Although most Koreans do not believe in the religious aspects of shamanism per se, Koudela suggests that this prevalence of shamanistic traditions in Koreans’ everyday lives may foster a more positive perception of the religion (Koudela, 2015).

Hypothesis

The initial hypothesis was that Koreans’ perceptions of religious cults are significantly correlated to their perceptions of Korean traditional shamanism. This hypothesis was based on evaluation of previous literature, which suggests a connection between religious cults and shamanism in Korean society. Given this, it can be hypothesized that Koreans’ opinions on one influence the others as well.

Call for Research

A review of the existing research suggests that a gap in research is evident. Firstly, there is a lack of research focusing on moral panic-inducing³ incidents in regards to religious cults, as well as their

³ See: Footnote 1.

impacts on Koreans' perceptions of Shindo. Although there exist studies⁴ that have hypothesized the impact of certain developments on the public's perception of Shindo (such as Westernization, modernization, and Christianity), there are none that focus on the impacts of organizations like religious cults on this perception. This research would add to theoretical discussions in the field of religious studies in Korea by identifying possible connections made between two religiously correlated practices. The incidents identified in the current events section-the presidential impeachment and the coronavirus-are examples of moral panic-inducing incidents involving religious cults that will help fill this gap in the research.

Furthermore, few studies have been written about the Korean public's perception of Shindo in practice. Nearly all the studies conducted on this topic are written from the theoretical perspective-for example, the theoretical impacts of spiritual healing practices on the public perception of Shindo, or the theoretical impacts of its involvement in the everyday lives of Koreans on public perception. However, a theoretical standpoint does not equate to evidence of the public's actual perception of Shindo. Evidence is crucial to delineate what the public's perception of Shindo is and to test theories that attempt to explain the reason behind it. Therefore, this gap frames a clear need for research incorporating evidence of South Koreans' actual perceptions of Shindo.

Methodology

In order to fill these gaps, a research survey was conducted. To minimize sample bias, the survey was posted on Korean websites for the general public to access. No critically determining information about the respondents-such as their names or email addresses-was recorded. Questions regarding non-critically determining information, however, were asked to confirm sample diversity. The results showed that there was, indeed, significant diversity in respondents' age, gender, political affiliation, and religious affiliation⁵.

The survey itself included both quantitative and qualitative elements.

A. Quantitative Data

The quantitative data was gathered from two main questions:

- 1) What is your opinion of religious cults?
- 2) What is your opinion of Korean traditional shamanism?

Each question had the answer choices: positive/neutral/negative.

The quantitative data was gathered for the purpose of testing to see if there is a statistically significant relationship between Koreans' opinions of religious cults and Koreans' opinions of traditional shamanism. The data was analyzed with the Chi-square test for independence to find this potential association. Chi-square test for independence is a statistical test that shows the level of correlation between two variables (McHugh, 2013), making it ideal for analyzing this particular data. The test was done with SPSS, a widely used statistical analysis software.

B. Qualitative Data

The qualitative data was gathered from two main questions, the first of which was a multiple-choice question and the second, a short answer question:

- 1) Is your opinion of Korean traditional shamanism impacted by your opinion of religious cults?
a. Answer choices: No/Yes, slightly/Yes, strongly
- 2) Explain your reasoning for your response to the previous question.

The qualitative data was gathered for two purposes. The first was to evaluate how Koreans perceived the relationship between their two opinions to be, and observe how this perception could differ from

⁴ (Oh, 2014)(Oh, 2016)(S. Kim, 2020) (Koudela, 2015)

⁵ See: Appendix A

what was statistically suggested with the analysis of the quantitative data. It was also gathered to evaluate for what reasons Koreans held this perception. The qualitative data was analyzed with deductive thematic analysis, a method of analysis established to be useful in examining different perspectives, observing similarities and differences, and identifying new insights (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Operational Definitions

There is one main operational definition that must be noted.

1. “Perceptions”

“Perception” refers to the attitudes of the South Korean public in regards to Korean Shindo and religious cults. The general perception of the public towards Shindo or religious cults can be evaluated by analyzing the perceptions of individuals who make up the public.

In this paper, perception is measured through three categories: positive, negative, or neutral. A positive perception would mean that one attributes either personal or societal value to Shindo or religious cults. A negative perception would mean that one believes that Shindo or religious cults are invalid beliefs or cause harm to themselves or others. A neutral perception would mean that one does not believe that Shindo or religious cults affect themselves or others in any significant or particular way.

Results

As the methodology included both quantitative and qualitative parts, the results are also split into quantitative and qualitative sections.

A. Quantitative Results

The quantitative data was produced through a Chi-square test for independence conducted with the Independent Variable (Koreans’ opinions of religious cults) and the Dependent Variable (Koreans’ opinions of Korean traditional shamanism). Below is an organized cross-tabulation showing the results.

Organized Cross-Tabulation

	Opinion of Religious Cults: Negative	Opinion of Religious Cults: Neutral	Opinion of Religious Cults: Positive	Total	Significance
Opinion of Shamanism: Negative	22	1	0	23	
Opinion of Shamanism: Neutral	13	49	0	62	
Opinion of Shamanism: Positive	1	6	2	9	
Total	36	56	2	94	***
a. Source: author’s survey b. Note 1: *** $p < 0.001$, Chi-Square test i. *($p < 0.05$), **($p < 0.01$), ***($p < 0.001$) c. Note 2: highlighted cells are ones that have an expected count of less than 5					

B. Qualitative Results

The first portion of the qualitative data was derived from the question asking respondents directly if they believed their opinions of religious cults to affect their opinions of Korean traditional shamanism.

The results of this question are outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Responses per Category

	No	Yes, slightly	Yes, strongly
Number of Responses	51	32	11

The second portion was derived from participants' narratives explaining why they selected No/Yes, slightly/Yes, strongly for the previous question. These narratives described the reasons why people drew connections between their perception of religious cults and Korean traditional shamanism. These reasons were categorized by themes, from which eight recurring themes were identified. These eight themes were chosen to be analyzed due to their consistency throughout the 94 total responses. Therefore, these themes illuminate possible justifications people give for the extent to which they drew connections between their perception of religious cults and shamanism.

Below is Table 2 outlining the eight recurring themes and their corresponding definitions.

Table 2. Definitions of Recurring Themes

Theme	Definition
Lack of Knowledge	Having a lack of knowledge on the topic of religion, religious cults, or Korean traditional shamanism.
Lack of Interest	Having a lack of interest in faith. This could be a lack of interest in general faith, or an indifference to faiths other than their own.
Tradition and History	References to the historical/cultural importance of certain religious practices in Korean tradition. These references include the cultural value of shamanism and the cultural contributions of religions.
Media Information	The influence of mass media's portrayal of religion, religious cults, or Korean traditional shamanism.
Recent Events	Recent events surrounding religion, religious cults, or Korean traditional shamanism. Such events include current Protestant controversies, the coronavirus pandemic (connected with the Shincheonji Church of Jesus), and former president Park Geun-Hye's impeachment.
Religious Freedom	Belief in the values of religious freedom and diversity.
Anti-Faith	A negative or critical perspective towards faith. This could be portrayed as describing general faith or certain faiths as "harmful" and "extreme".
Strict Orthodoxy	A negative or critical perspective towards non-mainstream faiths/any faiths which do not conform to orthodoxy. This could be portrayed as describing certain faiths as "pseudo-religion(s)" and their followers as "bigots".

Table 3 below organizes the eight recurring themes in a cross-tabulation with the three response categories (No/Yes, slightly/Yes, strongly).

Table 3. A Summary of the Written Responses + Corresponding Themes

	Lack of knowledge	Lack of interest	Tradition and history	Media information	Recent events	Religious freedom	Anti-faith	Strict Orthodoxy
No	Number of responses including theme: 5	Number of responses including theme: 11	Number of responses including theme: 7	Number of responses including theme: 1	Number of responses including theme: 3	Number of responses including theme: 8	Number of responses including theme: 3	Number of responses including theme: 3
Yes, slightly	Number of responses including theme: 1	Number of responses including theme: 1	Number of responses including theme: 7	Number of responses including theme: 1	Number of responses including theme: 3	Number of responses including theme: 3	Number of responses including theme: 8	Number of responses including theme: 2
Yes, strongly	Number of responses including theme: 0	Number of responses including theme: 0	Number of responses including theme: 0	Number of responses including theme: 2	Number of responses including theme: 3	Number of responses including theme: 0	Number of responses including theme: 5	Number of responses including theme: 3
Total	Number of responses including theme: 6	Number of responses including theme: 12	Number of responses including theme: 14	Number of responses including theme: 4	Number of responses including theme: 9	Number of responses including theme: 10	Number of responses including theme: 16	Number of responses including theme: 8

*Note: the highlighted boxes denote the recurring themes that appeared most frequently in each category.

As shown above, certain recurring themes appeared more frequently in each of the three categories than others. Below is an organization of the most frequently appearing themes per category according to the percentage of responses the themes appeared in. “Frequent themes” were decided based upon the criteria of exceeding 10% of total responses for their respective categories.

Table 4. Most Frequently Recurring Themes per Category by Percentage

No	Yes, slightly	Yes, strongly
Lack of Interest: 21.57% of total “No” responses	Anti-Faith: 25.0% of total “Yes, slightly” responses	Anti-Faith: 45.45% of total “Yes, strongly” responses
Religious Freedom: 15.68% of total “No” responses	Tradition and History: 18.75% of total “Yes, slightly” responses	Strict Orthodoxy: 27.27% of total “Yes, strongly” responses
Tradition and History: 13.73% of total “No” responses	X	Recent Events: 27.27% of total “Yes, strongly” responses
X	X	Media Information: 18.18% of total “Yes, strongly” responses

Through identifying which recurring themes appeared most frequently in each category, table 4 shows that certain themes are more indicative of if and to what extent Koreans believe that they draw connections between their perception of religious cults and Korean traditional shamanism.

Data Analysis/Discussion

A. Quantitative Analysis

The Chi-Square test for independence was used to analyze the potential association between Koreans' opinions of religious cults/NRMs (IV) and Koreans' opinions of Korean traditional shamanism (DV).

An examination of the Table of Cross-tabulation tells us that there is a relationship between the IV and DV. For example, as the IV becomes more negative, the DV also becomes more negative, which points to a positive correlation between the two variables.

The Chi-Square test also shows that this relationship is statistically significant. It is measured at an alpha level of 0.001, which proves the hypothesis that there is a significant correlation between Koreans' opinions of religious cults and their opinions of Korean traditional shamanism. The statistically significant correlation can also be seen visually in a diagonal line down the cross-tabulation.

However, it is important to note that the Chi-square test found four cells in the cross-tabulation to have an expected count of less than 5. This indicates that the accuracy of conclusions drawn by the data in those cells cannot be confirmed due to a lack of data. Also note that three out of the four highlighted cells are in the "Opinions of religious cults: Positive" column. Out of the 94 respondents, only 2 had positive opinions of religious cults. This shows that a lack of respondents in that column hinders the drawing of accurate conclusions relating to the correlation between the IV and the DV in that column. Therefore, the overall result can be stated that the Chi-square test for independence proves that the relationship between opinions of religious cults and shamanism is statistically significant in terms of negative and neutral opinions, but cannot be confirmed for positive opinions.

B. Thematic Analysis

Deductive thematic analysis was conducted on narrative responses from the survey to identify the reasons why people draw connections between their perception of religious cults and Korean traditional shamanism. By analyzing the recurring themes which appeared most frequently for each response category (No/Yes, slightly/Yes, strongly), a new understanding of these reasons can be derived.

1. Category: No

The themes which appeared most frequently in this category are "Lack of Interest", "Religious Freedom", and "Tradition and History".

"Lack of Interest" in this category is characterized by those who do not have a particular opinion on either religious cults or Korean shamanism. Some responses which fell under the "Lack of Interest" theme stated that the respondents hold "no interest in cults", they are "not interested in religion," or that they were "never religious".

This "Lack of Interest" can be further explained through an analysis of "Religious Freedom". Narratives which included the theme of "Religious Freedom" commonly demonstrated a lack of interest in shamanism or religious cults due to the respondents' general respect for faith. To illustrate, responses under "Religious Freedom" have claimed that "all religions should be respected", and that they "believe in religious diversity". Narratives including this theme also demonstrated a lack of interest in the two topics due to the respondents' devotions towards certain orthodox religions which seem to teach indifference to other faiths. For example, one response states

that the respondent is “Catholic but [has] no objection to other religions”. Another states that the respondent is Buddhist and was taught that because Buddhism is “a fight with [themselves]”, they are “not affected [by other faiths]”.

“Tradition and History” in this category is characterized by a positive view of general faith or shamanism due to their historical and traditional values. To illustrate, responses that fell under “Tradition and History” state that “religion is a part of life” and that “[shamanism is] a good representation of [Korean] culture”. However, this did not necessarily mean that respondents held the same positive view for religious cults. Although the majority of respondents claimed that they held neutral views of religious cults, some responses expressed their distaste, stating that they found cults “off-putting”.

Overall, the conclusion that can be drawn from the “No” category is that the themes “Lack of Interest”, “Religious Freedom”, and “Tradition and History” and their corresponding narratives generally point towards either a neutral or slightly positive stance on religious cults and shamanism. From this, it can be inferred that respondents believed that their opinions of the two had to be negative in order for them to justify making a correlation. Additionally, the few responses that showed a positive perspective of shamanism and a negative perspective of religious cults suggest that the direct clash between respondents’ perceptions of the two is a strong reason as to why respondents could not create a connection.

2. Category: Yes, slightly

The themes which appeared most frequently in this category are “Tradition and History” and “Anti-Faith”.

“Tradition and History” in this category is characterized by qualified neutral perceptions of religious cults and shamanism. Respondents claimed that “if a religious cult holds a cultural or traditional value, [it] should be preserved in general, as long as it is ethical”, and “While I appreciate the culture of the religion, when it interferes with rules that must be kept in modern society, I think my viewpoint becomes slightly negative”.

In contrast to the previous theme, “Anti-Faith” in this category consists of relatively biased and negative views of religious cults and shamanism. Responses stated that religious beliefs and cults “bring harm to society”, “Shindo is like a cult that defies logic and science”, and that shamanism and religious cults are “extreme”, “illogical”, “secretive” and “reckless beliefs”.

Overall, the conclusion that can be drawn from the “Yes, slightly” category is that the themes “Tradition and History” and “Anti-Faith”, and their corresponding narratives, point towards either a neutral or a negative stance on religious cults and shamanism. Similarly to the previous category, it can be inferred that respondents believed that their opinions of the two could not be positive in order for them to justify making a correlation.

It should also be noted that under “Tradition and History”, respondents commonly referred to “religion” or “religious cult” in their responses when addressing shamanism and religious cults. This could be because respondents perceive both religious cults and shamanism to hold some form of cultural value. Due to this, respondents may categorize religious cults and shamanism under the same schema.

Additionally, the narratives under “Anti-Faith” show that respondents seem to believe shamanism and religious cults to be connected to an extent, and are allowing their opinions of one to shape the other. Two main reasons as to why this connection is made are apparent. The first is a critical or unaccepting view of “illogical” belief systems—which pertain to spiritual belief systems in general. This indicates that the respondents perceive spiritual beliefs of all kinds to fall under the same

schema, whether they be religious cults or traditional belief systems. The second is a critical view of faiths that are “secretive”, which presumably means less well-known or mainstream. From the narratives, it can be inferred that the respondents believe these “secretive” faiths to be deceitful and duplicitous. Under this umbrella definition, the respondents likely grouped non-mainstream religions such as cults and shamanism into a schema.

It is therefore apparent why the respondents believe their opinions of religious cults are connected with their opinions of shamanism.

3. Category: Yes, strongly

The themes which appeared most frequently in this category are “Anti-Faith”, “Strict Orthodoxy”, “Recent Events”, and “Media Information”. All themes under this category are characterized by those who hold strongly negative biases towards faith and religious cults.

The narratives under “Anti-Faith” generally state that religious cults are “taking advantage of people” and are “harmful to the lives of good people”. These narratives could be caused by influence from “Recent Events” as portrayed by “Media Information”. Responses falling under “Recent Events” claim that the activities of the “Shincheonji Church”, the “[President] Park impeachment”, and the “Daegu COVID outbreak”—all of which are organizations or incidents directly tied to religious cults—have caused them to develop negative perceptions of religious cults. Responses falling under “Media Information” state that “[cults] have a very bad perception in the media” and that “the media only presents the negative aspects of cults”. It can be reasonably assumed that this may be because of the moral panic that was induced by these recent events that was previously mentioned in the introduction and literature review.

Narratives under “Anti-Faith” are characterized by those who are intolerant and unaccepting of any faiths other than their own. Responses under this theme claim that non-mainstream religions are “untrustworthy and dangerous” and characterize them as “pseudo-religion”. The aforementioned faiths would evidently include religious cults and shamanism.

Overall, the conclusion that can be drawn from the “Yes, strongly” category is that the themes “Anti-Faith”, “Strict Orthodoxy”, “Recent Events”, and “Media Information”, and their corresponding narratives, point towards a strongly negative stance on religious cults and shamanism. From this, it can be inferred that respondents believed that they created a strong connection between religious cults and shamanism due to having strong (negative) opinions on both.

It should be noted that the respondents generally referred to “cults” or “pseudo-religion” in their responses when addressing both religious cults and shamanism. This may be because they perceive both religious cults and shamanism as falling under the same schema of unorthodox, “harmful” belief systems.

From this, it is clear why the respondents believe their opinions of religious cults are strongly connected with their opinions of shamanism.

Limitations

Before presenting the conclusion derived from both the quantitative and qualitative findings, it is imperative to address certain limitations which may hinder the validity of the conclusion. These limitations are namely present in the process of analyzing the quantitative data through the Chi-square test for independence.

The data used for a Chi-square test for independence must fulfill the three requirements listed below (Starnes, 2015). Two of the three requirements have limitations that must be discussed.

1. The data samples must be randomly chosen.

It was established in the methodology section that the method was created with the intention to choose the sample pool as randomly as possible. However, there is a limitation to this random selection in the form of the research survey itself. The method entailed that the respondents would choose to take the survey—making the survey a self-report survey. Self-reporting can facilitate various sample biases, which include the data being affected by external or internal bias (Althubaiti, 2016).

Another limitation that arose from the survey was the fact that it was posted online, meaning that the sample data gathered was limited to respondents who had access to the Internet and an electronic device. This could also constitute sample bias, as those who have access to these resources are often those in the middle or upper class, which is not representative of the entire Korean population.

However, these limitations are inevitable with regard to the limited resources available to the researcher. Given the researcher's circumstances—a lack of budget, reach, and pandemic restrictions eliminating the possibility of conducting randomized surveys in person—the method outlined in the methodology section was the most conducive for randomized selection of data samples. These limitations could be addressed in further, well-resourced research in the future to provide possibly more accurate and comprehensive data regarding this area of study in Korea.

2. Each category needs to have an expected outcome of at least 5.

In the quantitative analysis section, it was established that four cells in the cross-tabulation had an expected outcome of less than 5. The implications of how this could hinder the accuracy of the conclusions drawn for the “Positive” opinions were also described in the aforementioned section.

However, this limitation can also be justified by the limited resources and capabilities of the researcher. As the researcher has no official budget or platforms through which to acquire a greater sized sample pool to ensure that each category of the cross-tabulation would have an expected outcome of at least 5, it is within reasonable justifications that some categories could have an expected outcome of less than 5. This justification becomes even more reasonable when taking into consideration that the ratio of “Positive” opinions for both religious cults and shamanism to “Neutral” and “Negative” opinions is significantly small. This limitation, again, could be addressed in further research to provide more accurate data regarding this area of study.

3. The population size of the country in which the sampling took place must be at least ten times the sample size.

The third requirement of the Chi-square test for independence was met. The data used for the test had a sample size of 94. The results drawn from this data were applied to South Korea's population in the analysis and conclusion. South Korea's population of around 51,00,000 in 2020 evidently far exceeds the required population size of 940 for this particular test (The World Bank, 2021).

Conclusion

When analyzing both the results of the quantitative and qualitative data and analysis together, some nuances are made apparent. It has been established that the Chi-square test for independence proved that there is a significant correlation between Koreans' opinions of religious cults and their opinions of shamanism (with qualifications of accuracy for the “Positive” opinions), and thereby confirmed the null hypothesis. However, answering whether people's opinions of religious cults actively impact and “cause” their opinions of Korean traditional shamanism is difficult. Therefore, the qualitative data aimed to add nuance or explanation to the confirmed hypothesis by identifying what were the factors that explain the connection people make between religious cults and Korean traditional shamanism.

From the qualitative data analysis, it can be concluded that those who claimed to make a **slight** or **strong** connection between religious cults and shamanism held negative opinions of one or both.

These negative opinions were generally formed by external and internal biases. The external biases were recent events involving religious cults and negative media portrayals of them. The internal biases were critical views towards faiths in general, and critical views towards any non-orthodox faiths.

Additionally, it is important to note that the numerical qualitative results are somewhat different from the quantitative. It has already been established that the qualitative results and analysis proved the hypothesis correct: there is a statistically significant correlation between Koreans' perceptions of religious cults and shamanism. However, when asked about this correlation directly, 54.26% responded that there was "No" correlation, 34.04% responded "Yes, slightly", and 11.70% responded "Yes, strongly".

This discrepancy between what the quantitative and qualitative data yielded may be reflective of the discrepancy between the respondents' actual opinions and how they perceive their own opinions. One explanation for this could be that, while the quantitative data took into consideration how negatively or positively the respondents viewed religious cults and shamanism, the qualitative data only considered the extent to which the respondents connected their opinions of both topics. This could be connected to the previously done analysis of the narratives and themes, in which it was found that the respondents generally justified creating a connection between religious cults and shamanism by having negative beliefs of one or both. The difference with their actual opinions could be found in the fact that this does not necessarily have to be the case; holding neutral or positive beliefs of one could also lead to neutral or positive beliefs of the other.

Therefore, the general conclusion from analyzing both the quantitative and qualitative data is that the null hypothesis is confirmed, but with caveats from the qualitative analysis.

Implications and Future Research

The results of this study hold implications for the field of study of non-mainstream religions in Korea—more specifically, Korean society's perceptions towards non-mainstream religions. Moreover, the implications of the qualitative data could help to enhance understanding of the nuances present in these societal perceptions through evaluation of the extent to which the internal and external biases found in the narratives affect these perceptions.

Additionally, the results of this study partially answer the two gaps in research addressed in the introduction: research focused on moral panic-inducing incidents in regards to non-mainstream religions, and research incorporating evidence of South Koreans' actual perceptions of Shindo.

However, further research is required in order to better understand the reason behind the discrepancy this study found between Koreans' opinions of religious cults and shamanism, and their perceptions of their own opinions (as mentioned in the conclusion). Moreover, future research could focus on if the results of this study could be applicable in other countries around Korea, or possibly worldwide.

Conflicts of interest

There is no conflict of interest of any kind.

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