

Original Article

# A Study on the Jangseungje and Sanshinje in Eumnae-dong Dwitgol: Oral Histories, Collective Memory, and Community Rituals

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## ABSTRACT

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**Objectives:** This study presents a case-based analysis of the symbolic structure, transmission, and communal functions of the Jangseungje (village totem pole rite) and Sanshinje (mountain spirit rite) in Eumnae-dong Dwitgol, Daedeok-gu, Daejeon, South Korea. **Methods:** Using a qualitative oral-history approach, this study analyzes three informants' testimonies documented in the 2025 Oral Documentation Series on Folk Beliefs in Daedeok-gu through thematic interpretation in order to examine how these rituals reflect the community's collective memory and identity. **Results:** The study reveals that the Jangseungje and Sanshinje operate as a ritually integrated dual system of folk religion, symbolizing boundary and center, protection and prosperity. Through repeated communal participation, these rites function as embodied performances that preserve social norms and cultural identity across generations. **Conclusions:** Drawing on theories of cultural memory by Assmann, collective memory by Halbwachs, lieux de mémoire by Nora, and performative memory by Connerton, the paper argues that these village rituals act as dynamic sites of memory and identity formation. The Eumnae-dong case demonstrates the sustainability of non-institutionalized folk beliefs rooted in oral tradition and community practice, offering valuable insight into contemporary reconfigurations of Korean ritual culture.

**Keywords:** Collective memory, Community ritual, Cultural memory, Folk belief, Jangseungje, Oral history, Sanshinje

## 1. Introduction

In Korean society, folk beliefs have long functioned as more than mere acts of worship or religious observance; they have served as core mechanisms for sustaining local community identity and social cohesion across generations. Among these, community-based rituals performed at the village level hold particular ethnographic significance, as they embody the cumulative expression of a community's natural environment, historical experiences, and social structures. Such rituals are also practical forms of collective memory—remembered, reenacted, and transmitted across generations through recurring participation in shared time and space [1,2]. These folk practices encompass layered meanings, including reverence for nature, ancestral wor-

ship, and prayers for the community's peace and prosperity. Through their repeated enactment, they enable community members to internalize social norms and group identity.

Among the most representative expressions of Korean folk religion are the Jangseungje (ritual for guardian poles) and Sanshinje (ritual for the mountain spirit), both of which have been handed down in various forms throughout the country. While their specific manifestations differ by region, they commonly aim to safeguard the community and promote harmony with the natural world. The Jangseungje is performed at the village boundary, targeting wooden or stone totem poles (jangseung) to ward off evil spirits and ensure internal peace [3]. In contrast, the Sanshinje is a ritual conducted to honor the mountain spirit believed to dwell in the hills surrounding the village—a spiritually

hybrid practice that seeks balance between humans and nature through reverence for the sacred presence of the mountain [4,5]. Against this broader background, the present study focuses on the integrated local practice of these two rituals in Eumnae-dong Dwitgol.

The Jangseungje and Sanshinje traditions as practiced in the Dwitgol neighborhood of Eumnae-dong, Daedeok-gu, Daejeon Metropolitan City, preserve the archetypal structure of Korean folk rituals while demonstrating a unique integrated system in which the two rites are performed in continuity. This study focuses on these rituals, as documented in the Oral Documentation Series on Folk Beliefs in Daedeok-gu: The Jangseungje and Sanshinje of Eumnae-dong Dwitgol [6], drawing on the oral testimonies of three informants—Kim Su-ung, Park Hyeon-su, and Yeom Bok-ryeol. The aim is to investigate the historical development and transformation of these rituals, as well as their sociocultural impact on the village community.

Historically, the Jangseungje and Sanshinje were annual events conducted around the first full moon of the lunar year, with the full participation of community members in preparation and performance. These rituals were not solely religious acts directed at supernatural beings, but also multivalent communal functions that involved cooperation, division of roles, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and the reaffirmation of village identity. However, the pressures of urbanization, industrialization, and generational discontinuity have placed these practices at risk of interruption, with only partial remnants surviving today—often as components of local festivals or cultural reenactments.

The objectives of this study are threefold. First, it aims to analyze the symbolic structure and traditional form of the Jangseungje and Sanshinje based on oral historical documentation. Second, it examines how these rituals have been remembered and practiced within the internal dynamics of the village community. Third, drawing primarily on Halbwachs's concept of collective memory and Connerton's concept of performative memory, the study interprets how such rituals contribute to the formation and sustainability of communal identity in Korean society, while referring to Assmann and Nora in a supplementary manner where relevant. Furthermore, by comparing the Eumnae-dong case with similar ritual traditions in other regions, the study seeks to illuminate both the particularity and universality of its ethnographic significance.

Ultimately, this article contributes to the fields of folklore studies, cultural anthropology, and sociology by tracing how folk rituals function as a living matrix of memory, belief, and everyday practice in local communities. It also offers insights into the broader possibilities for preserving and revitalizing intangible cultural heritage through com-

munity-based documentation and interpretation.

This study adopts a qualitative oral-history approach and is designed as a microhistorical case study of the Jangseungje and Sanshinje traditions in Eumnae-dong Dwitgol. The primary data consist of the testimonies of three local informants—Kim Su-ung, Park Hyeon-su, and Yeom Bok-ryeol—as documented in the 2025 Oral Documentation Series on Folk Beliefs in Daedeok-gu. The data were examined through close reading and thematic analysis, with particular attention to ritual structure, transmission, symbolic meaning, and communal memory. Because the study is based on a small number of informants from a single village, its findings are intended not as statistically representative claims but as an interpretive reconstruction of local ritual memory and sociocultural meaning.

## 2. Literature Review

Previous studies on Jangseungje (village totem pole rites) and Sanshinje (mountain spirit rites) can largely be classified into three major thematic streams. The first focuses on the structure and transmission methods of folk religious rituals specific to individual regions; the second addresses the social functions of these rituals and their role in reinforcing community cohesion; and the third examines the transformation of such rituals and their reinterpretation as cultural heritage in contemporary contexts.

The first category of research has offered a wide range of analyses on the structural elements and regional characteristics of Jangseungje and Sanshinje. Kang [7] explored the Sanshinje and Tapje (stone pagoda rites) of Okhwa-ri in Cheongwon, highlighting the syncretic features that blend indigenous beliefs with Confucian ritual forms. Kang and Park [5] analyzed the Sanshinje performed at Taehwa Mountain in Gongju, elucidating how geographic factors and collective belief systems coalesce to shape ritual structure. Seok [8] conducted a comparative study of the components and transmission practices of the Sanshinje held in Segori, Yeongi-gun. Meanwhile, Kang [9] focused on the Oeumsan Sanshinje in Gangwon Province, arguing that these rituals embody not merely ceremonial function but also expressions of collective unconsciousness.

Further contributions include Park and Kang's [10] ethnographic examination of the Wonsusan Sanshinje in Yanghwa-ri, Sejong, as well as An's [11] exploration of the oral traditions and mythological narratives surrounding the Sanshinje of Gyeryongsan. Kim [12] investigated how the folk legend of Beomgol in Nonsan contributed to the naming of the village and the intergenerational transmission of the Sanshinje, thereby illustrating the deep en-

tanglement between ritual practice and communal historical narrative.

The second stream of research centers on the communal function of folk rituals and their role in fostering social integration. Kim [4], in his study of the Seodalsan Sanshinje in Seoul's Heukseok-dong, examined how newly emerging urban folk religions contribute to identity formation and solidarity among community members. Yoo [13] analyzed the continuity and transformation of the Jangseungje in Jugok-ri, Nonsan, shedding light on the interplay between ritual practice and shifts in local power structures. Kwon [14] studied the Jangseungje of Noryangjin, exploring how participation in ritual restructured internal community hierarchies and legitimized social order through symbolic action. Lee [15] provided a theoretical discussion on how historical experiences become "folk-ized" within the transformation of Jangseungje, examining the ritual as a spatial expression of memory and collective identity.

The third body of scholarship investigates the transformation of folk rituals in the context of modern society and their reconfiguration as intangible cultural heritage. Kim [16] proposed the festivalization of the Jangseungje in Goryeong, analyzing how traditional rituals are repurposed as tourism resources. Lee [17] offered an ethnographic account of a Sanshinje performed as a grassroots protest against wind farm development in Buan, emphasizing the political utility of ritual as a mode of communal resistance. Oh and Pyeon [18] explored archival contracts (gyemunso) related to Sanshinje performed in the Baegun-Chiaksan region of Gangwon Province, demonstrating the economic and organizational dimensions of ritual. Park [19] traced the historical transformation of the Museongsan Sanshinje based on Daedong-gye documents from Bujeon-dong, while Seo [20] conducted a comparative analysis of local Sanshin myths and ritual traditions in Eumseong, clarifying the mutually constitutive relationship between folklore and ritual enactment.

Additional comparative and theoretical contributions have expanded the scholarly lens beyond Korea. Kim [21] conducted a cross-cultural study of mountain spirit beliefs in the Mount Fuji region of Japan, offering insights into both the universal and region-specific dimensions of Sanshin worship across East Asia. Assmann [22] employed the concept of cultural memory to explain how rituals externalize communal memory and construct collective identity. Nora [23], in his discussion of lieux de mémoire, emphasized how ritual sites such as totem poles, village altars, and stone pagodas serve as symbolic anchors of memory. Halbwachs [1] articulated how collective identity is reinforced and reconstructed through ritual enactment, while Connerton [2] theorized how bodily performances reproduce social hierarchies and moral frameworks through embodied memory.

While this extensive body of literature has explored ritual structure, transmission, transformation, and communal functions, relatively few studies have employed a micro-historical approach that places oral testimony and the lived memory of community members at the center. The present study differentiates itself by foregrounding oral historical data compiled in the Oral Documentation Series on Folk Beliefs in Daedeok-gu [6], with the goal of analyzing how the Jangseungje and Sanshinje have persisted through local memory and how their meanings and communal roles are being reconstituted in the contemporary context.

### 3. The Historical Context and Ritual Structure of the Jangseungje and Sanshinje in Eumnae-dong Dwitgol

#### 3.1. Regional context and the framework of folk belief

Eumnae-dong Dwitgol is a traditional village located on the northern slope of Eumnae-dong in Daedeok-gu, Daejeon Metropolitan City. The area has long been characterized by an agricultural way of life shaped by its environmentally harmonious terrain. Geographically, the village is bounded by mountain ridges to the east and open fields to the southwest, creating a spatial configuration in which external boundaries and internal centers are distinctly demarcated. This natural setting has historically supported spiritual practices aimed at protecting the village from malevolent external forces and maintaining inner tranquility, ultimately facilitating the establishment and continuation of both Jangseungje and Sanshinje [3,6].

According to oral testimonies by informants Kim Su-ung, Park Hyeon-su, and Yeom Bok-ryeol, the jangseung (village guardian poles) and sanshin (mountain spirit) shrines were respectively located at the village entrance and on the mid-slope of the rear mountain. Traditionally, the Jangseungje was performed first, followed by the Sanshinje in a sequential ritual order. This ritual logic reflects an integrated system of worship designed to maintain the equilibrium between external and internal forces—protecting the village boundary while simultaneously honoring the sacred natural center within.

#### 3.2. The Jangseungje: guardian of boundaries and safeguard of the community

The Jangseungje in Eumnae-dong Dwitgol is performed at the site of male and female jangseung statues erected at the village's threshold. The rite traditionally takes place

around the time of the first full moon of the lunar calendar (Jeongwol Daeboreum), with senior male villagers assuming the primary organizing role. According to Park Hyeon-su, “The jangseung bore the inscriptions ‘Cheonhadaejanggun’ [Heavenly Great General] and ‘Jiha Yeojanggun’ [Earthly Female General]. Everyone from children to elders would bow before them and make wishes” [6]. The ritual involved draping the poles in white cloth, crowning them with ceremonial headgear, and offering items such as rice cakes, seasoned vegetables, and makgeolli (rice wine).

The central purpose of the Jangseungje was to ward off misfortune, disease, and natural disasters originating from outside the village, while securing the health and well-being of its inhabitants. The ritual was structured not through the authority of a designated officiant but through the organic participation of community members. Women typically prepared the ritual offerings, older men led the ceremonial procedures, and youth were tasked with preparations and cleanup, thereby facilitating the transmission of ritual knowledge across generations.

The jangseung itself functioned as a *lieu de mémoire*—a “site of memory” [23]—symbolizing both spatial boundary and communal identity. Even outside the formal context of the ritual, the jangseung served as a sacred space where villagers would stop to pray or make wishes, and this sacral-ity was cyclically reaffirmed through ritual performance.

### *3.3. The Sanshinje: symbol of natural harmony and the cycle of life*

Following the Jangseungje, the Sanshinje was held at a sacred site located halfway up the mountain at the village’s rear. As recounted by informant Yeom Bok-ryeol, “If you climb the mountain, there is a shrine for the mountain spirit, surrounded by a few pine trees. That’s where we offered wine, meat, rice cakes, and bowed in reverence” [6]. The central figure of worship was the sanshinryeong halabeoji—the Mountain Spirit Grandfather—often imagined as a white-haired elder, in accordance with traditional iconography.

The Sanshinje was a rite of petitioning for abundance, a successful harvest, good health, and long life. Although there was no formally appointed officiant, the procedure followed a relatively fixed pattern: (1) offering ritual foods such as meat, fruit, and rice wine before the sanshin; (2) purifying the surrounding area to transform it into a sacred space; (3) performing collective bows and wish-making; and (4) sharing the ritual food in a communal meal. These sequential elements were preserved as a bodily practice transmitted through repeated participation—what Connerton [2] describes as a “performative structure of memory.”

The ritual site of the Sanshinje not only served as a physical manifestation of the sacred natural world but also symbolized the spiritual and social center of the community. It constituted a key location where what Assmann [22] terms the “externalization of cultural memory” took place. Through repeated ritual performance, the Sanshinje reinforced collective identity, anchoring the community within both spiritual and ecological frameworks.

### *3.4. The integrated structure and symbolism of the Jangseungje and Sanshinje*

In Eumnae-dong Dwitgol, the Jangseungje and Sanshinje are not independent rituals but are rather performed as an integrated sequence, forming a unified ritual system. Together, they articulate a dualistic spatial logic that encompasses both the outer boundary (jangseung) and the inner sacred center (sanshin). The joint performance of these rituals reveals the community’s collective will to ritually cleanse and stabilize both the external and internal dimensions of its existence.

Each rite not only performs its own symbolic function—repelling external threats and affirming internal harmony—but also mediates communal cooperation and participation. While the Jangseungje emphasizes separation from the external world and boundary protection, the Sanshinje invokes communion with nature and inner sanctity. Through this dual orientation, the community defines itself as an entity both in need of protection and in harmony with its ecological surroundings [1].

Participation in these rites involves more than spiritual observance; it constitutes a form of symbolic practice through which memory is constructed and social identity is cyclically reaffirmed. The testimonies of village elders make clear that ritual actions—bowing, offering, cleaning, eating—functioned as vehicles of cultural transmission. In this sense, the Jangseungje and Sanshinje are not merely religious ceremonies but rather complex embodiments of memory, belief, community ethics, and social order, comprising a richly layered system of Korean folk spirituality.

## **4. Modes of Transmission and Contemporary Transformation**

### *4.1. Traditional transmission structure and oral foundations*

The Jangseungje and Sanshinje rituals in Eumnae-dong Dwitgol have been transmitted over generations through informal, non-textual means, without reliance on written

manuals. The preparation of offerings, procedural order, timing, and division of roles were all acquired through intergenerational memory and embodied habit, exemplifying what Connerton [2] defines as “performative memory.”

As oral informant Kim Su-ung recalled, “In the old days, no one taught us explicitly. When spring came, we just followed the elders as they erected the jangseung and conducted the rituals. It was something we learned through our bodies” [6,9]. Rather than being monopolized by designated ritual specialists, the rituals were carried out through a voluntary, cooperative structure involving the entire village. This collective performance enabled younger generations to absorb the rhythms and forms of the ceremonies through direct participation.

A defining feature of the transmission process was intergenerational collaboration, particularly in ritual preparation. Women were typically responsible for preparing the ritual foods and arranging the altar; elder men oversaw the ceremonial procedures; and youth contributed by erecting the jangseung and transporting ritual objects. As Yeom Bok-ryeol recalled, “When the men set up the jangseung, the women cooked at the base of the hill, and the children carried the utensils. The entire village was involved” [6]. This testimony underscores that the transmission of ritual knowledge was rooted less in verbal instruction and more in embodied, communal practice—anchored in the village’s very social structure.

#### *4.2. Disruption and transformation amid urbanization and industrialization*

The rapid urbanization and industrialization that began in the 1960s fundamentally altered the fabric of traditional rural life in Korea and posed serious challenges to the continuity of community-based rituals. Urban expansion, land development, and population shifts drastically changed the demographic composition of the village. As the elder generation—once the primary custodians of the rituals—either aged or relocated, the intergenerational chain of ritual practice became increasingly fragile.

Park Hyeon-su lamented, “In the past, whenever the ritual was held, the whole village came out. Now, only a few elders remain; they still have the will, but there are no people left to perform the ritual” [6]. His statement reflects not only the discontinuation of the rituals themselves but also the gradual disintegration of the ritual community.

Additionally, administrative redistricting and urban infrastructure projects led to the destruction or privatization of traditional ritual spaces. The original location of the jangseung was displaced due to road expansion, and the sanshin shrine area was incorporated into a park develop-

ment plan, making it inaccessible as a sacred communal space. As a result, the spatial sanctity of the rituals—essential to their symbolic efficacy—has been compromised.

Consequently, both the Jangseungje and Sanshinje were suspended for decades, with some residents noting that “though we still have the desire, we lack both the space and the people to carry out the rituals.” This reveals that in modern Korean society, the sustainability of intangible cultural heritage cannot be guaranteed by preservation of tradition alone.

#### *4.3. Recomposition of memory and cultural heritagization*

Amid this crisis of rupture, recent efforts have emerged—spearheaded by local communities and scholars alike—to document and culturally recontextualize these folk religious practices. In the case of Eumnae-dong Dwitgol, the Jangseungje and Sanshinje have been reassembled and narrated through the Oral Documentation Series on Folk Beliefs in Daedeok-gu [6], in which the rituals’ history, structure, and meaning are reconstructed through the voices of local informants. This initiative constitutes an important first step toward the restoration and communal preservation of ritual memory.

Projects such as these function as cultural mechanisms that enable the recontextualization of interrupted ritual traditions. As Assmann [22] notes, cultural memory is not a mere recollection of the past but rather a symbolic and institutionalized process of identity reconstruction. The Eumnae-dong case exemplifies how such memory work can be enacted through oral documentation and local initiative.

Currently, some residents and regional cultural organizations have formed working groups dedicated to the restoration and potential reenactment of the rituals. These efforts include the collection of visual materials, photographs, and ritual paraphernalia, as well as discussions about future commemorative events. Such activities indicate the potential for further institutionalization—whether through official cultural heritage registration or integration into village festivals.

Moreover, in contemporary society, these folk rituals are increasingly being recognized not only for their traditional and sacred value but also for their broader social functions: community revitalization, reinforcement of local identity, and educational engagement. These expanded roles suggest that the rituals may regain their cultural vitality in forms that differ from their historical antecedents. In this light, the Jangseungje and Sanshinje of Eumnae-dong offer a valuable model for understanding how folk traditions can be adaptively sustained and socially reactivated in the present.

## 5. Communal Functions and Sociocultural Significance

### 5.1. *A space for practicing solidarity and cooperation*

The Jangseungje and Sanshinje rituals held in Eumnae-dong Dwitgol functioned not merely as religious ceremonies of supplication to local deities but as communal spaces where cooperation, solidarity, and interpersonal dialogue were actively realized. Typically held around the time of the lunar New Year's first full moon (Jeongwol Daeboreum), these rituals were collective events involving the entire village, in which all residents took part through the division of labor and shared experience—thus reinforcing the community's sense of cohesion.

As oral informant Yeom Bok-ryeol recalled, "Back then, the whole village came together to prepare for the rites. One person made seasoned vegetables, another brewed rice wine, and the children carried firewood. Everything just flowed naturally" [6]. This testimony illustrates how these rituals served as occasions for social unification, not as isolated acts of devotion but as performative moments of embodied community.

According to Durkheim's [24] concept of collective effervescence, when a group expresses shared beliefs and emotions, society experiences a moment of self-reproduction and strengthens its collective identity. In the case of Eumnae-dong, the collective bowing before the jangseung and the communal sharing of offerings at the mountain shrine exemplify precisely such moments of ritualized social integration.

### 5.2. *Conflict mediation and the reaffirmation of social norms*

Beyond their celebratory functions, these rituals also operated as mechanisms for restoring moral order and mediating internal tensions within the community. Informant Park Hyeon-su stated, "Before the rite, if anyone had been in conflict, we would encourage them to reconcile. We all wanted to bow with a pure heart" [6], emphasizing that a state of harmony was considered a precondition for effective ritual participation.

The Jangseungje and Sanshinje, therefore, were not confined to the ceremonial acts themselves but encompassed a wider range of preparatory and supplementary practices—cleaning, conflict resolution, meal sharing—that collectively served to symbolically restore community ethics and social order. As Connerton [2] argues, the repetitive enactment of ritual allows a society to "remember through the body," reestablishing norms and hierarchies through per-

formative means.

In the Eumnae-dong case, ritual preparation naturally entailed generational role distribution and the implicit recognition of the authority of elders. This was not a mere reproduction of age-based hierarchy, but rather a symbolic confirmation of accumulated communal knowledge and experience. According to Assmann's [22] theory of cultural memory, such symbolic practices do more than enable short-term communication; they serve to sustain intergenerational identity across time.

### 5.3. *Collective memory and the reinforcement of communal identity*

Through the repeated narration and enactment of local history, mythology, and folklore, the Jangseungje and Sanshinje functioned as mechanisms for constructing the community's collective memory. Halbwachs [1] emphasized that collective memory is not an aggregate of individual recollections but is structured through shared social frameworks. Rituals serve as concrete sites where this collective memory is performed and embedded.

In the case of the Sanshinje in Eumnae-dong, a commonly shared oral legend holds that "the mountain protected the village," which served as a symbolic narrative reaffirming the community's origins and destiny. This aligns with Nora's [23] notion of lieux de mémoire, or "sites of memory," wherein physical and ritual spaces anchor and activate collective remembrance.

The jangseung poles were not only ritual objects but also places of personal supplication and everyday veneration. Informants recalled that "bowing before the jangseung could help one conceive a child or recover from illness" [6,19]. Both the jangseung and the mountain shrine acted as semiotic systems through which communal memory was embodied, and the village's spatial identity was made visible and meaningful.

The ritual repetition of these acts and the continued veneration of these places reinforced the villagers' sense of "we" as a coherent social unit. Conversely, the discontinuation of the rites was not merely perceived as the cessation of a tradition but as the destabilization of communal identity itself.

### 5.4. *Symbolic boundary-making between inside and outside*

The Jangseungje and Sanshinje also functioned as symbolic mechanisms for demarcating boundaries—between inside and outside, human and nature, the secular and the sacred. The jangseung served as protective markers,

shielding the village from external threats and evil spirits, while also symbolizing a deterrent to outside interference. In contrast, the Sanshinje signified the community's desired harmony with nature, representing a positive, reciprocal relationship between the village and the larger ecological world.

Informants clearly understood the hierarchical distinction between the deities, stating, "The jangseung is the guardian at the village entrance; the mountain spirit is like a god in the sky" [6,26]. Through such differentiated roles, the rituals provided the community with a framework for organizing spatial and spiritual order, with each ritual symbolically encompassing either the village's protective boundaries or its internal sacred center.

These multi-layered functions extend beyond the preservation of traditional ceremonial form. They represent a form of folk praxis through which community memory, spatial identity, social order, collective identity, and ecological consciousness are simultaneously constructed and maintained.

## 6. Comparative Perspectives and the Universality and Particularity of Korean Folk Beliefs

### 6.1. Nationwide patterns and shared structures

The Jangseungje (village totem pole rite) and Sanshinje (mountain spirit rite) are among the most widely observed communal rituals across rural, mountainous, and coastal villages in Korea. Traditionally, these ceremonies served multiple purposes: to pray for peace, abundance, health, protection from disease, and fecundity. While their symbolic targets, spatial configurations, and ritual procedures vary depending on the ecological and geographical context of each village, they exhibit a recognizable structural core.

In the Chungcheong region, for example, rituals such as the Sanshinje of the Taehwasan Sanhyanggye in Gongju [5], the Sanshinje of Segori in Yeongi-gun [8], and the Sanshinje of Wonsusan in Yanghwa-ri, Sejong [10] exemplify mountain-centered rites. These cases share key features: the establishment of a mountain shrine (sanshindan), full participation of the local community, and integration with regional geomantic (pungsu) traditions. Together, these function to maintain communal order through a combination of cosmological belief and local cooperation.

In coastal and mountainous areas of Gangwon Province, such as the Sanshinje of Oeumsan [9] and the mountain rites held during the Gangneung Dano Festival [25], the ritual focus lies on veneration of mountain spirits (sanryeong)

and shamanic purification. These often incorporate spirit possession rituals (gut) or masked performances as integral components.

Urban reinterpretations of these traditions can also be found, such as the Dodanggut of Bonghwasan in Seoul—designated as Seoul Intangible Cultural Property No. 34 (Seoul Metropolitan Government 2024). This urban ritual mimics the format of traditional dangsanje (village guardian rites), while being transformed into a festivalized and tourist-oriented event. In doing so, it facilitates the reconstitution of cultural identity and the formation of memory communities among city dwellers.

Despite regional and contextual variations, these cases share a common structure:

- Regular ritualized engagement with sacralized spaces: including jangseung, dangsan trees, or sanshindan;
- Communal participation: division of labor for offering preparation, ritual execution, and shared meals;
- Dual ritual objectives: symbolic protection from external threats and internal well-being;
- Reproduction of collective memory: through oral storytelling, origin myths, and intergenerational transmission.

This configuration aligns closely with Assmann's [22] framework of symbolic repetition and the representation of cultural memory, wherein rituals serve as temporal and spatial condensations of shared identity and belief.

### 6.2. The particularity of the Eumnae-dong Dwitgol case

While the Jangseungje and Sanshinje of Eumnae-dong Dwitgol exhibit the structural characteristics noted above, several distinctive features differentiate them from other regional examples.

First, unlike many regions where Jangseungje and Sanshinje are conducted separately—or where only one has survived—the Dwitgol case presents a fully integrated ritual system. Here, the boundary (symbolized by the jangseung) and the sacred center (symbolized by the sanshin) are ritually linked, forming a comprehensive symbolic geography in which the entire village is sacralized.

Second, these rituals were not officiated by designated ritual specialists. Rather, they were collectively maintained through an elder-centered, autonomously coordinated structure. According to the recollections of informants [6], responsibilities were organically distributed among villagers, underscoring a performative model of communal memory rather than a hierarchical or liturgical one.

Third, the Jangseungje and Sanshinje of Eumnae-dong remained, until recently, non-institutionalized. Unlike for-

mally registered cultural heritage sites such as the Taehwasan Sanhyanggye or Gangneung Dano rituals, the Dwitgol traditions persisted through localized oral memory and embodied practice, unmediated by bureaucratic codification or external validation.

Fourth, recent oral documentation efforts have transformed the community's internalized ritual memory into a publicly archived corpus. This shift—from lived memory to textualized representation—marks what Connerton [2] and Assmann [22] have described as a transition from performative to recorded cultural memory. The Dwitgol case thus offers insight into how communities negotiate the boundary between informal transmission and formal recognition.

### *6.3. The contemporary relevance and reconstructive potential of folk rituals*

Comparison between the Eumnae-dong case and other regional examples reveals that Korean folk rituals are not simply static cultural legacies. Rather, they are dynamically reconstituted forms of memory practice and strategic resources for community survival. In contemporary contexts, these rituals have been revalorized in the following ways:

- Educational resource: integrated into school curricula and local heritage education programs;
- Cultural tourism: adapted into regionally branded festivals and promotional content;
- Community revitalization: serving as instruments for restoring social cohesion in aging or declining villages;
- Politics of memory: appropriated within local government strategies for cultural branding and identity-making.

From this perspective, the Eumnae-dong case is particularly significant. It exemplifies folk belief not as abstract tradition but as lived practice (*saenghwal jeje*) embedded in daily life. As such, it offers a compelling model for sustaining ritual culture through a triadic strategy: oral documentation, cultural recordation, and community-led reconstruction. This integrated approach demonstrates how memory and ritual may continue to operate as vital frameworks for cultural resilience in the face of modernization and social change.

## **7. Memory, Place, and Performance: Theoretical Implications**

This section explores how the Jangseungje and Sanshinje rituals of Eumnae-dong Dwitgol function as mechanisms for the construction and reproduction of communal memory. It also examines how such memory becomes materialized

and sustained through place and embodied performance. The discussion is framed primarily around Halbwachs's notion of collective memory and Connerton's theory of performative memory, with selective reference to Assmann's cultural memory and Nora's *lieux de mémoire* where conceptually necessary.

### *7.1. Externalization and symbolic repetition of cultural memory*

Assmann [22] posits that cultural memory is not a mere reproduction of the past but a symbolic practice through which a society continuously reconstructs its identity. For cultural memory to be sustained, it must be externalized through rituals, symbols, places, and exemplary figures. Through such externalization, communities re-enact the past in the present and establish a foundation for projecting themselves into the future.

The Jangseungje and Sanshinje of Eumnae-dong exemplify this mechanism of externalized cultural memory. As annually repeated rituals, they enact and preserve foundational narratives about the village's origins, ancestral beliefs, and ethical norms in concrete temporal and spatial settings. The jangseung poles and the mountain shrine serve not only as sacred objects but as symbolic mediators and material anchors of memory. These rituals do not simply preserve the past—they recontextualize and actualize it, providing a stage upon which communal identity is reconstituted through practice.

Moreover, recent efforts to document these rituals through oral history have institutionalized previously ephemeral, embodied forms of memory. By transforming memory from speech and action into written text, this process initiates a new phase in the mediation of cultural memory and realizes Assmann's notion of the institutionalization of memory.

### *7.2. Sites of memory and ritual space*

Nora [23], in his theory of *lieux de mémoire*, argued that in societies where spontaneous memory has been disrupted, specific sites—whether physical, symbolic, or institutional—emerge to preserve and reactivate collective remembrance. He emphasized that such sites are not simply physical locales but symbolic fields in which memory is projected and reanimated.

The jangseung and mountain shrine in Eumnae-dong are not merely stages for ritual performance; they are dense symbolic spaces imbued with the collective memories and emotions of the community. These spaces are understood by villagers as “places where spirits reside” and “where

the village is reborn.” Through ritual repetition, these sites help sustain the spatial memory of the community’s boundary (jangseungje) and its inner moral order (sanshinje), exemplifying Nora’s concept of the symbolic organization of memory.

Particularly significant is the fact that these ritual sites are increasingly threatened by urban development and spatial repurposing. This highlights the need not only for physical preservation but for processes of social re-signification that can sustain their mnemonic value under changing conditions.

### 7.3. *Collective memory and communal identity*

Halbwachs [1] theorized memory as inherently social, arguing that individual recollections are shaped, structured, and sustained through collective frameworks of communication, ritual, and symbolic interaction. For Halbwachs, memory is not lodged in the individual mind but in the relational space of community.

The Jangseungje and Sanshinje rituals of Eumnae-dong function precisely as frameworks for the formation and reproduction of collective memory. By re-enacting stories, myths, and ancestral practices, villagers reaffirm their belonging to a historically grounded community. These rituals are not just remembrances of the past—they constitute a communal narrative about what kind of community the village is and aspires to be.

For example, the mythic memory of the mountain spirit protecting the village and ensuring a good harvest is collectively sustained across generations. This shared narrative undergirds both the village’s identity and its collective future. The jangseung and sanshin thus serve as symbolic vehicles for transmitting historical, moral, and spatial meanings that define the community.

### 7.4. *Performative memory and embodied practice*

Connerton [2] distinguishes between inscribed memory (narrative, textual) and incorporated memory (bodily, performative), arguing that the latter plays a crucial role in the reproduction of social order. Through repeated ceremonial practices, societies remember not just cognitively but corporeally—they “remember by doing.”

The Jangseungje and Sanshinje have been preserved for decades without written procedures or official codification. Their longevity is attributable to a performative, embodied learning structure in which ritual knowledge is transmitted through participation. The sequence of the rite, the types of offerings, and the roles of participants were learned and internalized through collective repetition rather than

formal instruction. As several oral informants attested, “In the past, no one had to teach us—we all just knew what to do by following the elders” [6,21].

This embodied mode of memory functions not merely to transfer information but to reproduce communal values, social hierarchies, and moral codes. When intergenerational transmission is interrupted, it is not only the ritual but the social memory itself that is at risk—what Connerton calls the “breakdown of bodily memory.”

## 8. Conclusion

This study has examined the Jangseungje and Sanshinje rituals traditionally practiced in the Dwitgol neighborhood of Eumnae-dong, Daedeok-gu, Daejeon Metropolitan City. Drawing on oral history data preserved in The Oral Documentation Series on Folk Beliefs in Daedeok-gu: The Jangseungje and Sanshinje of Eumnae-dong Dwitgol [6], the analysis focused on the cultural symbolism, modes of transmission, and communal functions of these rituals. By engaging with the life-history narratives and embodied memories of local informants, the study has demonstrated that these folk rituals are not merely religious performances, but dynamic enactments of collective memory and powerful mechanisms for rearticulating communal identity.

First, the Jangseungje and Sanshinje are organized according to a dual symbolic structure that demarcates and integrates the outer and inner realms of village life. The jangseung functions as a protective boundary marker warding off external threats, while the sanshin serves as a guardian of internal abundance and health. These sacred figures are embedded in everyday village practices and have been transmitted through generations by means of oral tradition and embodied participation.

Second, the rituals operate as arenas of performative memory [2], enacted and transmitted through bodily repetition rather than formalized manuals. The sequence of ceremonial acts—ritual preparation, sacralization of space, and communal feasting—has provided a structure through which cooperation, solidarity, moral norms, and social hierarchies have been enacted and sustained [26]. In this way, the rituals have played a central role in the cohesion and continuity of communal identity.

Third, although these rituals have faced increasing discontinuity since the 1960s due to urbanization, demographic aging, and environmental transformation, recent efforts at oral documentation and cultural recordation have enabled a partial restoration of their cultural memory in immaterial form. This process exemplifies Assmann’s [22] concept of the “externalization of memory” and aligns with

Nora's [23] notion of lieux de mémoire—showing how memory can be reconstituted even in the absence of unbroken ritual tradition or preserved sacred space.

Fourth, comparative analysis with other regional cases—from Gongju and Yeongi to Gangneung and Gangwon Province—has revealed both the structural universality of Korean folk religion and the unique features of the Eumnae-dong example. In particular, the integration of Jangseungje and Sanshinje into a single ritual system, their elder-centered and autonomously organized character, and their transmission through oral performance rather than institutional regulation constitute key points of distinction.

Ultimately, this study advances the argument that folk religious rituals should not be regarded solely as objects of ethnographic preservation. Rather, they are active sites of memory reconstruction, community restoration, and cultural identity formation. The Jangseungje and Sanshinje of Eumnae-dong are not relics of the past but living cultural assets that continue to respond to fundamental questions about communal belonging and value in contemporary Korean society.

### Author Contribution

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### Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Institutional Review Board of Konkuk University (IRB: KKUIRB-202503-HR-050).

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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