

Original Article

A Study on the Structure and Transmission of Folk Belief through Oral Histories of the Busu-dong Mokshinje

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This study investigates the Busu-dong Mokshinje, a traditional tree-centered village ritual practiced in Daedeok-gu, Daejeon, with the aim of examining its ritual structure, symbolic meanings, modes of transmission, and contemporary transformation. Particular attention is given to the ways in which the ritual embodies collective memory, local identity, and relationships between the community and the natural environment. **Methods:** The study employed a qualitative research design combining ethnographic documentation, oral history interviews, documentary analysis, and symbolic anthropological interpretation. Oral-history data were obtained from four elderly residents aged 74-87 who had long-term experiential knowledge of the Mokshinje. The interview materials were transcribed and coded using NVivo, followed by open and axial coding to identify recurring themes related to ritual procedures, sacred space, role allocation, transmission, memory, and perceived change. These data were triangulated with field records, audiovisual materials, photographs, and documentary sources. **Results:** The findings show that the Mokshinje historically functioned as a community-wide ritual organized through clearly differentiated roles and collective participation. The sacred Dangsan tree operated as both a ritual center and a symbolic marker of protection, boundary, and communal identity. Oral testimonies further revealed procedural simplification, declining participation, and the increasing formalization of ritual practice. Nevertheless, the ritual continues to serve as a medium through which local memory, symbolic order, and community identity are reproduced. **Conclusions:** The Busu-dong Mokshinje should be understood not as a static remnant of folk religion but as a cultural practice undergoing adaptive reconfiguration. Its sustainable transmission requires the diversification of transmission agents, renewed community participation, and the integration of oral-history documentation into eco-cultural and digital heritage strategies.

Keywords: Cultural memory, Folk religion, Mokshinje, Oral history, Ritual transmission, Symbolic anthropology

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1. Introduction

Folk belief is a cultural practice in which communities symbolically establish the relationships among nature, humanity, and transcendent beings within a particular ecological and social context. In Korea, traditional village beliefs have been expressed through ritual practices centered on sacred trees (sinmok), typically situated at the boundary of the village, where communal rites are performed to invoke peace and prosperity. Such beliefs extend beyond

mere religious behavior to encompass collective memory, symbolic spatial constructions, and the seasonal rhythms that structure agrarian life [1].

Among these traditions, the Mokshinje (木神祭, Tree Spirit Ritual) is a representative form of village folk belief grounded in nature worship. This rite involves the veneration of a specific tree believed to house a guardian spirit, with offerings made to ensure the village's safety, prosperity, and protection from calamities. The tree functions both as a symbol of vitality and as a protective figure, simulta-

neously representing the boundary and center of the village. Through the repeated performance of such rituals, the traditional worldview linking nature, community, and the divine is maintained and reconstituted [1].

The Mokshinje preserved in Busu-dong, Daedeok-gu, Daejeon, exemplifies this synthesis of natural veneration and communal belief. The ritual, centered around the sacred Dangsan tree, has historically been conducted around the first full moon of the lunar year, with the active participation of the entire community. Although a few practitioners continue to maintain the tradition today (National Intangible Heritage Center), the forces of industrialization, urbanization, and shifting lifestyles have increasingly eroded the ritual's practical foundation. Observable phenomena include generational discontinuity, reduced participation, and the formalization of the ritual structure.

Within this reality, ethnographic documentation and oral history recordings of traditional rituals like the Mokshinje serve not merely to preserve cultural heritage, but also to restore the memory structures of communal culture and reassess the contemporary significance of local traditions [2,3].

The aim of this study is to analyze oral histories related to the Busu-dong Mokshinje through an ethnographic lens, exploring its ritual structure, symbolic system, transmission dynamics, and contemporary reinterpretation. This research argues that the Mokshinje is not a relic of the past but a multidimensional cultural practice that symbolically organizes the relationship among nature, humanity, and community, functioning as a medium of collective memory.

This study sets out to achieve three specific objectives. First, it ethnographically describes and interprets the core components of the ritual—its sequence, ritual space, and understanding of the sacred body. Second, it examines the dynamics of transmission by analyzing generational differences in memory, changing modes of participation, and shifts in communal consciousness revealed through oral testimonies. Third, it explores how the Mokshinje can be recontextualized and utilized as a cultural asset within the framework of contemporary urban society. These objectives aim to provide a foundational analysis of how community-based folk belief systems might pursue cultural sustainability in the present era.

2. Historical and Regional Context of the Busu-dong Mokshinje

2.1. Historical background of Busu-dong

Busu-dong, located in the eastern sector of Daedeok-gu, Daejeon, is a historically agrarian village whose socio-cul-

tural identity was shaped by its distinctive ecological features. The name "Busu," which translates to "floating water," gestures toward the area's once-abundant wetland topography, including a matrix of seasonal streams and tributaries that supported rice farming and sustained the village's agricultural economy for centuries [4]. This environmental affordance not only dictated patterns of subsistence but also fostered a cosmology in which nature was imbued with agency and spiritual resonance.

Within such a context, local beliefs in tree spirits and tutelary deities (jangseung, sanshin, and dangsan) emerged as meaningful systems of ecological integration and social regulation. As Seo [5] and Im [6] have argued, Korean folk religion cannot be divorced from the ecological and moral economy of rural communities, where the land is not merely productive but also sacralized. In Busu-dong, the center of this cosmology is the Dangsan tree—designated as a shintai (神體, Spiritual Embodiment), or sacred embodiment of a guardian spirit. The tree's physical location at the edge of the village is not incidental but symbolically rich, marking both spatial boundaries and social thresholds. Echoing Turner's [7] notion of liminality, the Dangsan tree functions as a ritualized border between the profane and the sacred, the cultivated and the wild, the human and the divine.

2.2. Origins and transmission of the Mokshinje

The Mokshinje (木神祭), or "tree spirit rite," belongs to a broader typology of Korean village rituals that reflect localized negotiations between cosmology, ecology, and community structure. Although variously labeled as dangsan-je (Village Guardian Tree Ritual) or sanshin-je (Mountain Spirit Ritual), such rites share a core structural logic: they are community-centered events intended to reaffirm social cohesion and seek divine protection from natural calamities or misfortune [1]. In Busu-dong, the Mokshinje is traditionally performed in conjunction with Jeongwol Daeboreum (the first full moon of the lunar calendar), a liminal temporal point associated with agricultural renewal and spiritual purification [8].

Oral histories collected from four key informants—Participant A, Participant B, Participant C, and Participant D—provide an indispensable ethnographic window into the internal logic and evolution of the Mokshinje. Their testimonies detail not only the ritual's procedures (e.g., the preparation of sacrificial food, altar construction, offering sequences, and the reading of the chukmun or written invocation), but also its embeddedness in a now-eroding structure of community labor and reciprocity. These observations reinforce Im's [6] assertion that village rites func-

tioned historically as “symbolic enactments of local order,” serving to spatially and morally organize collective life.

Moreover, the intergenerational transfer of ritual knowledge, particularly the memorization and performance of the chukmun, reflects a hybrid mode of oral and literate transmission—a hallmark of Korean ritual culture [5]. Whereas older practitioners recall orally transmitted invocations with near-liturgical precision, younger generations rely increasingly on printed scripts, underscoring both a weakening of embodied memory and a shift toward archival forms of ritual continuity. This tension aligns with Assmann’s [2] distinction between communicative memory (living memory within three generations) and cultural memory (ritualized, textually mediated memory), suggesting that the Mokshinje is in the midst of a mnemonic transition.

2.3. Regional transformation and the contemporary significance of the Mokshinje

Since the 1980s, Busu-dong has undergone rapid urban transformation following the establishment of the Daedeok Research Complex and surrounding industrial corridors. This transition has accelerated the breakdown of the traditional (local values) that underpinned folk belief systems, replacing communal rhythms with individualized temporalities and weakening the structures that once sustained practices like the Mokshinje [9,10].

Yet despite this fragmentation, the Mokshinje persists—albeit in modified form. The ritual now functions less as a seasonal necessity and more as a site of symbolic resistance and cultural memory. Assmann’s [2] theory of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) provides a productive lens through which to interpret this transformation. As collective infrastructures erode, rituals like the Mokshinje are reactivated as mnemonic anchors, enabling communities to perform continuity in the face of rupture.

Significantly, the ecological dimension of the Mokshinje has gained new relevance. The Dangsan tree—long venerated as a spiritual protector—is increasingly reimagined as a symbol of sustainable coexistence between humans and the environment. This symbolic shift resonates with emerging discourses in ecological anthropology and environmental humanities, which argue for the de-anthropocentrization of ritual and the recognition of non-human agencies in cultural life [11]. In this way, the Mokshinje is not merely a vestige of past belief, but a culturally adaptive mechanism capable of negotiating the demands of contemporary life while retaining its ritual efficacy.

Taken together, the historical and regional dimensions of the Busu-dong Mokshinje reveal how folk beliefs operate

not as static remnants but as dynamic cultural systems. Rooted in ecological realities, mediated through oral transmission, and reinterpreted in changing social conditions, the Mokshinje exemplifies the flexible durability of Korean vernacular religiosity.

3. Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

3.1. Theoretical framework

3.1.1. Ethnographic approach

This study is grounded in a classic ethnographic tradition that privileges sustained, immersive engagement with a community’s cultural practices in order to uncover the symbolic structures and social meanings embedded in everyday life. Drawing on Geertz’s [12] concept of “thick description,” the research treats the Busu-dong Mokshinje not merely as a sequence of ritual actions but as a complex cultural performance through which the community negotiates its relationship with nature, the sacred, and collective identity.

In the context of Korean folklore studies, ethnography has proven especially effective in illuminating local systems of belief and the ritual enactments that sustain them [5]. By embedding the researcher within the spatial, temporal, and social contexts of the Mokshinje, this approach facilitates the observation of not only explicit ritual practices but also tacit cultural norms and interpretive frameworks that govern community participation. The ethnographic lens adopted here allows the study to access the experiential dimensions of tradition—embodied behaviors, gestures, material culture, and spatial arrangements—that are often overlooked in textual analyses alone.

3.1.2. Oral history methodology

Oral history serves as a primary methodological tool in this study, not simply as a means of gathering historical information but as a critical practice for recovering marginalized voices, revealing plural memories, and unpacking the interplay between individual experience and collective memory [13,14]. Given that village rituals such as the Mokshinje are rarely documented in formal archives, oral testimony provides a unique access point to intergenerational knowledge transmission and subjective interpretations of cultural change.

Following best practices in oral history, interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format to balance narrative

freedom with thematic consistency. The testimonies of four key elders—Participant A, Participant B, Participant C, and Participant D—were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and subjected to iterative rounds of coding and thematic analysis. The interview process was dialogical, allowing participants to assert agency over their narratives, and reflexive attention was paid to the power dynamics and memory politics inherent in the production of oral testimony [2,3]. Divergent or contradictory recollections were not treated as epistemological deficiencies, but rather as productive sites for understanding the selective, negotiated nature of memory within shifting cultural and historical contexts.

3.1.3. *Symbolic anthropology*

In addition to ethnographic and oral historical methods, this study applies a symbolic anthropological framework to analyze the ritual as a system of signification. Building on Turner's [15] theories of ritual symbolism, liminality, and *communitas*, the Mokshinje is interpreted as a structured process through which the community reaffirms cosmological order, negotiates social roles, and reconstructs boundaries—both spatial and moral.

Key ritual elements such as the *shintai* (sacred tree), *jaejang* (ritual altar), *chukmun* (written invocations), and the sequence of offerings are examined for their semiotic value. These symbols are not considered static or universal but are interpreted as culturally contingent expressions of shared cosmologies, ecological values, and historical consciousness. In this framework, the Mokshinje functions as a performative discourse in which metaphysical, ecological, and ethical dimensions converge.

3.2. *Research design and data collection procedures*

3.2.1. *Research design and temporal scope*

The empirical materials analyzed in this study originated from a local cultural documentation project conducted in Busu-dong between late 2023 and early 2024. These materials included oral-history recordings, audiovisual documentation, photographs, and field records relating to the Mokshinje. The present study did not retrospectively characterize these earlier documentation activities as research conducted under the subsequently issued IRB approval. Rather, the materials were treated as pre-existing documentary sources, and their selection, secondary analysis, interpretation, and use for the present academic study were undertaken following ethical review by the Institutional Review Board in 2025.

3.2.2. *Fieldwork procedures*

The field-based documentation from which the present study draws was produced in Busu-dong between late 2023 and early 2024, in conjunction with the annual ritual cycle surrounding the lunar new year. The documentation activities included observation of ritual planning, preparation of ritual implements and offerings, the performance of the Mokshinje, and the post-ritual communal gathering (*eumbok*). The resulting materials comprised photographic records of ritual spaces and objects, fieldnotes documenting spatial configurations, gestures, and verbal exchanges, audiovisual recordings of the main ritual process, and sketch maps of the ritual topography, including the sacred tree and gathering routes. Particular attention was given to embodied ritual knowledge, the sequence and choreography of ritual actions, and the social roles and hierarchies enacted during the ceremony.

3.2.3. *Oral history interviews*

The interview participants were selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria: long-term residence in Busu-dong, direct experience with the Mokshinje, and substantial knowledge of its ritual procedures and transmission history. Four elderly residents, aged 74–87, were included because they had either participated directly in the preparation and performance of the ritual or had observed its practice over an extended period. Accordingly, the oral-history corpus analyzed in this study represents the perspectives of older community members with sustained experiential knowledge of the Mokshinje rather than a comparative sample across generations.

Each participant took part in two to three interview sessions lasting approximately 60–90 minutes. Interviews were conducted in or near the village setting to support contextual recall and to allow participants to connect their memories with specific ritual sites, practices, and spatial features. The interviews were audio- and video-recorded and fully transcribed.

The transcripts were analyzed through a staged coding process using NVivo. Initial open coding identified recurrent references to ritual procedures, sacred space, ritual roles, transmission, memory, and perceived change. These codes were then grouped through axial coding into broader analytical categories, including ritual structure, symbolic associations, transmission patterns, and perceived transformations in participation and practice. Emerging themes were subsequently compared across participants and contextualized through field observations and documentary sources.

3.2.4. Documentary and archival sources

Supplementary data were gathered from regional cultural heritage archives, including municipal records, historical maps, previous ethnographic surveys, and the National Cultural Heritage Administration's intangible cultural asset database. Press articles, digital platforms, and community pamphlets were also consulted to trace public representations and institutional framings of the ritual over time.

3.2.5. Triangulation and validity

To enhance methodological trustworthiness, the study triangulated three principal data streams: observational field records and audiovisual documentation, oral-history interviews, and documentary or archival sources. Convergences among these materials were used to strengthen interpretive confidence, while discrepancies were retained as analytically meaningful evidence of contested memory, cultural change, and differing perceptions of ritual continuity. Rather than forcing agreement among sources, the analysis treated divergence as part of the social process through which tradition is remembered and reinterpreted.

3.2.6. Ethical considerations

The research protocol for the present study, including the academic analysis and use of the oral-history materials, was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of K University (IRB No. KKUIRB-202503-HR-050) in 2025. The audiovisual interviews and field documentation analyzed in this article had originally been produced during a local cultural documentation project conducted between late 2023 and early 2024. Accordingly, the 2025 IRB approval is reported as applying to the present research protocol and subsequent analysis and use of those materials, rather than as prospective approval for the earlier documentation activities. The oral-history materials were used in accordance with the approved protocol and applicable consent conditions, with appropriate measures taken to protect participants' personal information and confidentiality.

This methodological framework positions the study as a holistic and deeply contextualized inquiry into the Mokshinje, integrating multiple qualitative lenses to capture both its historical depth and contemporary reconfiguration. It demonstrates how ethnographic immersion, dialogical oral history, and symbolic analysis can collectively illuminate the cultural logic and adaptive resilience of Korean folk rituals in the face of modernity.

4. Analysis of Oral Testimonies: Structure and Practice of the Mokshinje

The Busu-dong Mokshinje has been practiced as a periodic communal ritual to pray for peace and prosperity, centered around a sacred tree (shintai) located at the village entrance. The structure revealed through oral testimonies includes the ritual's procedural stages, spatial layout, symbolic elements, participant roles, offerings, and temporal and spatial dynamics. These components are understood as embodied practices expressing the village's folk worldview and social order.

4.1. Ritual procedure and components

The Mokshinje generally follows four major phases. First, the day before the ritual, villagers clean the site and prepare offerings, including pork, rice cakes, makgeolli (rice wine), and seasoned vegetables—symbols of harmony and agricultural abundance. Second, on the morning of the ritual, the site is purified and transformed into a sacred space. Participants gather in ceremonial attire. Third, a village elder or ritual officiant recites the invocation (chukmun) and makes the formal offerings. Fourth, following the ritual, the community shares in the offerings (eumbok), reaffirming solidarity.

This sequence reflects the canonical structure of Korean village rituals [6], enacting the community's moral order and facilitating symbolic communication between humans and the divine.

4.2. Symbolism of the sacred tree and ritual site

The sacred tree at the village entrance, a centuries-old Dangsang tree, is not merely a natural object but regarded as a sentient protector. Oral accounts describe it as a 'living presence' or 'ancestral guardian.' It marks both the boundary and spiritual center of the village. A temporary altar is set up, and the ritual area is enclosed using straw and tree branches to create a liminal space—a concept elaborated by Turner [7] as a transitional zone where normal social structures are suspended and community is reconstituted.

4.3. Roles and social hierarchy in the ritual

The four oral-history participants constituted the principal knowledge holders through whom the social organization of the Busu-dong Mokshinje could be reconstructed. Their importance lies not simply in their age but in the duration and depth of their engagement with the ritual, including direct participation, observation, transmission

of ritual knowledge, and familiarity with changes in its procedures over time. For this reason, the participants were selected not as a statistically representative sample of village residents but as purposively identified cultural informants possessing sustained experiential knowledge of the Mokshinje.

Historically, the Mokshinje appears to have been organized through a differentiated allocation of ritual responsibilities based on age, gender, experience, and familiarity with ritual procedures. Ritual authority was generally associated with seniority and accumulated knowledge, while other forms of participation involved the preparation of offerings, maintenance of the ritual site, assistance during the ceremony, and participation in the post-ritual communal sharing. These differentiated responsibilities suggest that the Mokshinje functioned not only as a religious observance but also as a performative setting in which the internal organization of the village community was reproduced.

The testimony of Participant A is particularly suggestive in this regard. He recalled that “the most reverent elder who knew the ritual would recite the invocation.” Rather than indicating that ritual authority was determined solely by chronological age, this account suggests that the officiant’s legitimacy was associated with a combination of seniority, ritual competence, moral reputation, and community recognition. Ritual leadership therefore represented a form of culturally authorized knowledge embedded within the social relations of the village.

At the same time, the oral testimonies indicate that ritual roles were not independent tasks but mutually dependent components of a collective practice. The preparation of offerings, maintenance of sacred space, performance of the invocation, and communal sharing of food together constituted an interconnected division of ritual labor. The Mokshinje can therefore be understood as a social mechanism through which ritual knowledge, authority, and communal obligations were enacted and transmitted.

The NVivo-assisted analysis further reinforced this interpretation. References related to ritual roles were initially coded alongside categories such as ritual procedure, sacred space, participation, transmission, memory, and perceived change. Through axial coding, these initial codes were reorganized into broader analytical categories, including ritual structure, symbolic associations, patterns of transmission, and transformations in participation and practice. Within this analytical structure, statements concerning officiants, preparation roles, ritual knowledge, and changes in participation were interpreted not as isolated observations but as evidence of the broader social organization of the Mokshinje.

4.4. Offerings, temporal structure, and spatial order

The types of offerings correspond to agricultural symbolism—representing fertility, longevity, and harmony. The ritual is conducted around the lunar new year, an auspicious time for forecasting the year’s fortunes. According to the Academy of Korean Studies [8], Jeongwol Daeboreum rituals reaffirm communal ties and invoke blessings for the upcoming year. The ritual’s temporal cycle functions not as mere repetition but as a structure for renewing collective memory. The spatial arrangement of the sacred tree and altar delineates symbolic centers, boundaries, and hierarchies within the village.

4.5. Ritual narrative and community order

According to informants, the Mokshinje transcends a functional exchange with divinity. It is a narrative mechanism linking the village’s past with its present. The invocation recounts the origin of the village, the power of its guardian spirit, and the wishes of its people. Through participation in this performance, individuals affirm their belonging to the community. This cyclical enactment aligns with Assmann’s theory of cultural memory [2], in which ritual repetition reproduces collective identity and encodes social ethics.

The oral accounts indicate that the Mokshinje also served as a means through which villagers recalled shared narratives concerning the community, the sacred tree, and collective well-being. Recurrent references to village protection, communal participation, and the authority of experienced ritual practitioners demonstrate that ritual memory was embedded in specific practices and places rather than transmitted solely as abstract belief.

5. Transmission and Transformation of Belief: Based on Oral Testimonies

5.1. From communal practice to individualized faith

Historically, the Busu-dong Mokshinje was a community-wide ritual held annually around the lunar new year. According to informants, the entire village participated, with each member playing a specific role in the preparation and performance of the ritual. These practices were essential in reaffirming social order and transmitting collective identity across generations.

However, urbanization, demographic shifts, changing lifestyles, and the diversification of religious worldviews have significantly altered this pattern of transmission. What was once a communal undertaking has increasingly become

a symbolic act led by a few individuals or families. This shift reflects a broader structural erosion of the ritual's practical base and its reconfiguration as symbolic performance.

Seo [9] noted a similar trend in rural communities, observing that village belief systems are increasingly reduced to ceremonial displays, with weakened social interactions among villagers. The fragmentation of community life renders the original function of such rituals obsolete, as they no longer serve as active instruments for community integration.

Therefore, the transformation of the Mokshinje should not be dismissed as mere decline. Instead, it should be understood as a process of symbolic recontextualization and cultural repurposing. The symbolic meanings and memory functions embedded in traditional beliefs remain potent. Their sustainability depends on how meaning is reconstructed within contemporary cultural frameworks.

5.2. Stratified memory and divergent testimonies

Oral testimonies revealed notable differences in how the Mokshinje is remembered. The four elderly informants differed in the ways they remembered and interpreted the Mokshinje, particularly with regard to its former communal significance, changes in participation, and the weakening of ritual transmission. Their accounts also frequently referred to declining participation among younger residents; however, these references represent the elders' perceptions rather than direct testimony collected from younger generations. One youth respondent noted, "I've heard about it, but I've never taken part."

These discrepancies highlight that folk belief systems are not static narratives but multilayered memories shaped by personal experiences, social positions, and generational perspectives. Assmann [2] emphasized that cultural memory is formed through hierarchies, conflicts, and selective encoding. Thus, the oral narratives reflect not a single historical truth but a contested field of memory construction.

Accordingly, oral history should not merely document what happened but interpret how the past is selectively remembered, forgotten, and reinterpreted in varying contexts.

5.3. Ritual formalization and cultural reconfiguration

Testimonies indicate that the Mokshinje has undergone procedural simplification and a shift from experiential performance to symbolic representation. In the past, the sacred tree was meticulously prepared, and community-wide participation was the norm. Offerings were carefully arranged,

and invocations were memorized and delivered with reverence. The ritual was a space of collective embodiment of ethical and sacred order.

In contrast, today's ceremonies are less frequent and often organized by a small number of individuals. One elder noted, "We used to prepare everything together, but now just a few people manage it." Another added, "We don't memorize the invocation anymore—we just read it from paper."

This evolution should not be viewed as a rupture. Rather, it represents an adaptive response wherein traditional rituals are reformulated within new socio-cultural conditions. Seo [9] found that village beliefs now tend to maintain symbolic identity while streamlining their practical content or reframing it as cultural events.

Hence, the formalization of the Mokshinje signifies not the death of tradition but its transformation into a 'living heritage'—a reconfiguration of form and meaning aligned with contemporary realities. Such reinterpretation opens pathways for engaging cultural memory and fostering renewed communal identity.

Taken together, these testimonies demonstrate a shift in the mode of ritual practice: collective preparation and embodied ritual knowledge have diminished, while a reduced set of procedures, written invocations, and the involvement of a smaller number of practitioners have become increasingly prominent. The evidence therefore indicates a transformation in how the Mokshinje is practiced and transmitted, rather than allowing a simple distinction between continuity and disappearance.

6. Contemporary Significance and Strategies for Transmission

The Busu-dong Mokshinje, while retaining the form of traditional village belief systems, has undergone reinterpretation within the rapidly urbanizing and industrializing contemporary Korean society. Although participation has dwindled and generational transmission is tenuous, the ritual continues to function as a medium for evoking collective memory, cultural identity, and symbolic meaning within the community.

The findings both support and extend previous studies of Korean village belief. Seo's studies of rural folk practice identified the weakening of collective ritual participation and the reorganization of traditional practices under conditions of social change. The Busu-dong case demonstrates a similar contraction of collective participation, but it also reveals a further transition: ritual continuity is increasingly mediated through the memories of a small number of

knowledgeable elders, written ritual texts, audiovisual documentation, and subsequent archival use. The significance of this case therefore lies not only in the simplification of ritual practice but also in the changing medium through which ritual knowledge is transmitted.

6.1. The ritual as a mechanism for reproducing communal solidarity

In its original form, the Mokshinje represented a communal act of collaboration and mutual aid. Preparing offerings and reciting invocations together around the sacred tree served as a ritualized reaffirmation of social bonds and village identity. Turner's [7] concept of *communitas* is relevant here, describing how ritual moments suspend social hierarchies and forge affective solidarity among participants.

Although such physical cohesion has waned, the symbolic framework of the Mokshinje can still revitalize communal consciousness. The ritual continues to offer a symbolic space where fragmented communities can reengage with shared heritage and social ethics.

6.2. Cultural memory and the ritual as a site of remembrance

The Mokshinje functions as a *lieu de mémoire* (site of memory), concentrating layers of social, historical, and symbolic narratives. Testimonies indicate that the ritual encapsulates not only religious beliefs but also past lifeways, environmental relationships, and communal aspirations. Assmann [2] explains that cultural memory is sustained through repetitive symbolic acts. The Mokshinje, in this sense, is a ritual through which the community remembers itself and defines its identity. Hence, its transmission is not merely about preserving ritual form but also about maintaining a mnemonic structure through which local history and values are kept alive.

6.3. Potential as an eco-cultural resource

The centrality of the sacred tree highlights the ritual's ecological ethos. Reverence for nature, seasonal cycles, and regenerative values embedded in the ritual align with modern concerns about environmental sustainability. Park [10] has suggested that traditional practices of nature worship can be reinterpreted as resources for urban ecotourism, eco-education, and community festivals.

Thus, the Mokshinje may be repositioned not only as a heritage ritual but also as a meaningful site for ecological awareness, with potential for integration into sustainable local development strategies.

6.4. Diversifying agents of transmission

Currently, the ritual is primarily maintained by elderly men, leading to concerns about long-term viability. For sustainable transmission, it is imperative to diversify agents of cultural reproduction. This includes educational institutions, cultural foundations, civic groups, youth organizations, and artists, all of whom can serve as co-producers of tradition.

Intergenerational programs involving youth, increased participation of women, and interdisciplinary collaborations can transform the ritual into a platform for cultural creativity and communal regeneration.

6.5. Digitization and cultural heritage strategy

While the oral documentation of the Mokshinje has been an essential step in preserving its intangible elements, reliance on textual formats alone limits accessibility and engagement. A strategy of digital heritage development is required—one that includes multimedia documentation such as video, audio, 3D modeling of the ritual site, and interactive maps. Such digitization could link the Mokshinje with local archives, schools, and museums, allowing broader public interaction. This approach would not only preserve but also activate the ritual as a living heritage, engaging future generations in dynamic ways.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the Mokshinje ritual in Busu-dong, Daedeok-gu, Daejeon, using ethnographic approaches, oral history methods, and symbolic anthropology frameworks. By focusing on oral testimonies and on-site observation, the research revealed that the Mokshinje is not merely a residual tradition but continues to function as a vital medium for cultural memory and communal identity.

First, the ritual embodies a complex system of symbols that reflect the reciprocal relationship between nature and humans. The ritual procedures, spatial arrangement of the sacred tree and altar, and use of seasonal offerings together demonstrate how the Mokshinje performs a symbolic reconstruction of local cosmology and ethics.

Second, oral testimonies reveal divergent generational perspectives and experiences of the ritual. While the ritual's material base has weakened in the face of urbanization and social change, some community members continue to regard the Mokshinje as a source of cultural regeneration. This supports the view that tradition is not a static legacy but a negotiated practice shaped by present contexts.

Third, the study did not treat the ritual as an isolated

religious act but as a symbolic communication system that sustains communal memory. The sacred tree and the ritual ground operate as lieux de mémoire, through which the village's values, history, and sense of belonging are periodically reaffirmed. This analytical lens connects the field study to broader theories such as Assmann's cultural memory and Victor Turner's ritual theory.

Fourth, the study identifies the necessity of transforming the mechanisms of ritual transmission. Instead of preserving form alone, the Mokshinje should be revitalized through expanded participation, educational engagement, and digital documentation. Diversifying the agents of transmission and integrating the ritual into contemporary cultural infrastructures can enhance its relevance and sustainability.

In summary, the Busu-dong Mokshinje illustrates how folk religion is reinterpreted and recontextualized in modern society, remaining a dynamic site for the negotiation of identity, memory, and value. The future of such traditions depends not only on their preservation but on their creative reinterpretation in line with contemporary communal needs. The sustainable transmission of folk religion requires not the repetition of the past, but the continuous reconstruction of meaning within lived experience.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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