PART THREE

Narrating, Witnessing, Troubling

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13 Freedom of Speech in Jeju Shamanism

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In November 1989, the world was riveted by the powerful drama unfolding in the city of Berlin. While the wall that had divided the city since 1961 was crumbing in the hands of ordinary Berliners, an event that subsequently became the shining marker of the end of the Cold War, people elsewhere were witnessing their own era-ending, epoch-changing dramas. In Taiwan, the change was principally about the country's celebrated transition to political democracy after four decades of life under the authoritarian Kuomintang (KMT) military rule. This transition involved, crucially, the lifting of the curtain of silence about the 2/28 Incident, the tragic episode of state violence and white terror in 1947–8 (Shih 2014). During the same period, the people of Jeju, a beautiful island near South Korea's maritime border with Japan, were experiencing their own era-ending drama, which was, as in Taiwan (and in Myanmar and in Indonesia, too), also part of the country's transition to political democracy following the popular uprising in 1987 against the decades-long military rule. This drama involved opening a wall, although here as in Taiwan, the wall was a less materially tangible one compared to that in Berlin – the wall of silence that had enveloped the islanders' everyday lives for the past four decades. The opening began with an act of speaking out, which entered the public sphere in 1989.

Called *Ijesa malhaemsuda* (Now we speak out) in the islanders' distinct indigenous language, this publication consisted of twenty eyewitness accounts of the political violence of 1947–9, the time typically referred to as the April Third Incident, or simply 4/3.[1] The incident refers to an armed uprising by a small and poorly armed group of local communists on 3 April 1948, first directed against several police outposts across the island. It also included numerous civilian killings that devastated the island communities following the uprising, caused principally by brutal counterinsurgency military campaigns

1 This and other related episodes introduced in this chapter draw upon Kwon (2020, chap. 6).

and, in part, by counteractions by the communist partisans. The counterinsurgency campaigns had been initially launched by the United States Military Government of Korea (1945–8) that was occupying the southern half of the Korean peninsula following the end of the Pacific War.

The 4/3 incident in Jeju, together with the Taiwanese 2/28 Incident, the Malaysian Emergency, and the First Indochina War, speaks closely to the prevailing, precarious condition of the postcolonial world in the early Cold War. The time refers to the few years following the March 1947 pronouncement of the Truman Doctrine that defined America's place in the post–Second World War world order as the paramount leader in the global fight against international communism. Considering the subject of this volume, we may define this condition in terms of a clash between two different ideas of freedom. One of them is in the sense of Truman's Saving Freedom (the idea that only the United States can afford to defend the Western tradition and the principle of freedom nurtured in this tradition), and also in that of Eisenhower's Crusade for Freedom (which expresses the political idea of the Free World with the religious idea of freedom from tyranny – thus, freedom from communist tyranny) (Scarborough 2020). The other idea of freedom is according to the ideal and imperative of decolonization (i.e., freedom from colonial domination) in the progression of which "freedom," in the sense of Saving Freedom, took up a relatively marginal space compared to another freedom (from oppression and inequality, see below) long propagated by the Crusade for Freedom's antagonist – "tyranny" – since the Russian Revolution in 1917 (Preston 2012; Kirby 2002). Freedom had different colours during this epoch, eventually taking on bifurcating meanings between, in the words of the historian Odd Arne Westad (2005), the Empire of Liberty and the Empire of Equality. Freedom, which was understood at the geopolitical centre by either of these two empires, furthermore, was also not the same as the freedom desired by many nations in the postcolonial periphery of the bipolarizing world order.

The above is familiar to most of us who experienced a small part of the "age of extremes" in the twentieth century (Hobsbawm 1995), although the era's clashing ideas of freedom and their enduring ramifications in contemporary political lives may not be clearly cognized in our encounter with the world by means of ethnographic engagement. As I mentioned elsewhere (Kwon 2010), an understanding of Cold War history, and its relevance for coming to terms with some of the key concepts in contemporary anthropological research, is still in its infancy within the discipline (see also McGranahan and Collins 2018). The recent political history of the concept of freedom is an important subject for an investigation of the idea of free speech. Important to this investigation are not only the bifurcating political meanings of freedom, mentioned above, but also collusions between the religious and the political in the constitution of the freedom concept. The terrain for this investigation is vast. What concerns

this chapter is how the idea manifests itself in a specific local situation at a particular historical moment – such as in Jeju at the end of the Cold War.

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Ijesa malhaemsuda was a culmination of the long-standing political activism of the island's writers, journalists, and dissident intellectuals against the military-led authoritarian rule. It presents views of the 4/3 crisis from a variety of actors – for instance, a secondary school student in town, a village farmer, a former prisoner, and a former partisan fighter. Each of the twenty testimonies provides a rare glimpse of the previously unknown historical reality, and as a whole they are meant to offer a view of the era from multiple perspectives. What is of interest for this chapter is the fact that a story from a local *simbang*, a common reference among the islanders to a specialist in shamanism, a strong tradition in Jeju, acts as the lead testimony, ahead of all other original accounts. It is as if the *simbang*'s story was meant to be a general introduction to the rest of the stories that follow. The *simbang* says:

> Nearly every family keeps some grievous spirits of the tragic dead from the time. If you listened to their stories, you would discover that nearly all the dead were innocent people. They were neither on that side nor on this side. Ensconced in between the two sides, they were simply trying to escape a brutal fate. Some escaped to the mountains to preserve their lives and never came back; other met death while staying quietly at home. Each time I opened a *kut* [shamanic rite], I heard these stories. In *kut* for families who had people working for the police or the government, you would hear more about people killed by the mountain side [mountain-based communist partisans]. In other homes, stories were mostly about the victims of the government side. Many dead had no this or that side origin. I heard from a man [this man's spirit] how his death had been caused by his relative-in-law. His relative had had a grudge against him because of an old marriage dispute between the two families. (Jeju 4·3 Yŏnguso 1989, 21–2)

The making of these testimonies, first in the space of a local newspaper and shortly afterwards as a book, is regarded among the island's intellectuals as one of the most important public events in recent decades and as an event that put an end to the island's long-held silence about its past experience. Such public historical testimonial actions advanced in Jeju earlier and more forcefully than in other parts of South Korea (in relation to the grassroots experience of Korea's civil war in 1950–3, to which the 1948 crisis in Jeju was, in many ways, a prelude). What is interesting about *Ijesa malhaemsuda*, however, as already mentioned, is more than its exemplary status as an act of historical witnessing in the chronological sense.

The efficacy of shamanism as an initiatory act in historical testimony draws upon the islanders' everyday lives during the long Cold War. The anthropologist Kim Seong-nae notes the unique place of the local religious culture of shamanism in the history and legacy of political violence. Kim (1989) conducted fieldwork in a coastal village on Jeju at the end of the 1980s. Her research initially focused on gender questions in the islanders' cultural life, especially the significance of shamanism in the daily lives of the island's women. This shamanism is a religious form existing alongside rituals of ancestor worship, which also takes up an important place in the routines of the islanders' family and communal lives. The anthropologist changed her research focus, however, after discovering fragmented traces of historical violence in the shamanic rituals she was attending. Kim had no knowledge of the 1948–53 violence at that time, nor had she encountered any traces of this tragic past outside the ritual context. Through this experience, Kim (2013) later came to conclude that shamanism in Jeju is a powerful, distinct institution of historical memory.

Kim's (1989) ethnography focuses on the ritual act called locally "the lamentations of the dead." In a family-based performance, the lamentations of the dead typically begin with a tearful narration of the moments of death, the horrors of violence, and expressions of indignation against the unjust killing. Later, the ritual performance moves on to the stage where the spirits, exhausted with lamentation and somewhat calmed, engage with the surroundings and the participants. They express gratitude to their family for caring about their grievous feelings, and this is often accompanied by magical speculations about the family's health matters or economic prospects. When the spirits of the dead start to express concerns about their living family, this is understood to mean that they have become somewhat free from the grid of sorrows, which the locals call a "disentanglement of grievous feelings."

The act of disentanglement is never complete, however. On the next occasion that the family hosts a spirit consolation rite, therefore, it is likely that a similar scene of the spirits of the dead expressing sorrows be repeated, although over time the expression may become less intense. The ritual for lamenting souls is a type of ancestral rite in that it invites primarily the spirits of the dead related in ties of kinship to the ritual-hosting family. Spirits who appear in the ancestral ritual within a *kut*, however, are not the same as those invited to the domestic ancestral death-day commemorative rite called *jesa*. The category of ancestors in the former context is broader in scope than that in the latter. The difference has several distinct, although ultimately interrelated, aspects.

First, the institution of *jesa* is typically restricted to the family's genealogical past traced according to the dominant lineage ideology, which in this case is patrilineal descent (although exceptions do exist). The idea of ancestors in shamanism, in contrast, is open to the ritual host's broad historical relational milieu, including matrilateral and sometimes affinal ties. Observers of

Korea's traditional popular religions explain the difference between these two institutions of death commemoration in several ways. Laurel Kendall (1985) highlights the aspect of gender – the fact that shamanic rituals tend to attract particularly active participation by women, although not exclusively so, in contrast to the ancestral rites of *jesa*, in which male descendants usually take up the organizing role. Also relevant is the deep political history of Korea's kinship system – the fact that this system was primarily of a bilateral character before Korea's neo-Confucian revolution of the thirteenth century onward. As Martina Deuchler (1995) shows, this revolution was both political and social in character, with the aim of realizing a new political order through a radical reform of the existing loose, flexible bilateral kinship order to one that takes patrilineal descent as the singularly meaningful organizing ideology. Key to this revolution was the transformation of the ancestral rite to an institution that was exclusively for the patrilineal genealogical past. Seen together, these two points about the difference between *jesa* and *kut* show that the category of ancestors in *kut* is relatively free from the ideology of the dominant moral order compared to that within the institution of *jesa*, whether we consider this relative freedom in a sociological (as an aspect of gender) or historical (an incomplete neo-Confucian revolution) perspective.

In the Jeju tradition, moreover, it needs to be noted that ancestral rites themselves have a thematically related property, referred to popularly as the "*jesa* unknown even to the crow." The crow here is understood to be a type of messenger between this world and the other world, and the cultural form addressed as such refers to domestic death-remembrance rites that, although formally akin to the *jesa* proper, depart from the latter in substance. The *jesa* unknown to the crow is open to memories of the dead that are not part of the family's ritual obligation (i.e., those who died without descendants or affinal relatives, or even former neighbours who are obliterated). It is also performed rather secretly (so the idea of being unseen even to the watchful eyes of the crow) by an individual or by a very few individuals who feel close to the deceased, in contrast to the *jesa* proper that is a public as well as a domestic event, being open to and often involving a broad descent group. In the aftermath of the 4/3 violence, accordingly, a number of Jeju families took to this ritual form while trying to account for the death of their close relations whose memories were politically sensitive and publicly sanctioned against – that is, as a way of countering the crisis in the ritual order generated by the tragedy of mass death and the ensuing political repression. In this sense, we may argue that the shamanic ancestral rite incorporates both the *jesa* proper and the informal crow-know-not *jesa* practices. In other words, the structure of "the lamentations of the dead" features a relative freedom from the imperatives of the dominant moral and political order, in comparison to that of the ancestral death-day rite.

This idea of freedom, and the related structural difference between the two traditionally pre-eminent institutions of death commemoration, explains how Kim Seong-nae came to discover shamanism in Jeju as a distinct theatre of historical memory. If *kut* was relatively free from the dominant ideology of the neo-Confucian moral order in traditional times, the same can be said about the modern times and with regard to the dominant ideology of anti-communism in the second half of the twentieth century.[2] A similar idea may apply to the organization of *Ijesa malhaemsuda*, which advances the structural specificity of shamanism in the domain of death commemoration to an initiatory act of historical truth telling – that is, in relative freedom from the prevailing atmosphere of the political society that sets ancestors who are acceptable in public memory (those killed by the communist partisans) against those who are not (e.g., those who fell to the state's counterinsurgency violence).

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Much more can be said about this freedom that emanates from the lamentation of the dead. On the one hand, it is clear that this ritual context is not separable from the shape of the broad global political arena that I illustrated earlier with the Truman Doctrine of 1947. Historians argue that it was a decisive event in the history of the Cold War that radicalized, militarized, and globalized the bipolar conflict of the second half of the twentieth century. It was also a signal to the coming-of-age of the US as a global military empire. According to new studies of this epoch, the process was both a political and a religious event in the sense that "freedom" as in Truman's Saving Freedom or in Eisenhower's Crusade for Freedom (or his Freedom in the World) becomes more intelligible, if approached as a concept having double meanings of the religious and the political (Preston 2012; see also Kwon and Park 2022, 17–22). In this light, Andrew Preston writes of an epic drama of "America's Mission." The idea of "mission" in this context runs along a tightrope between the secular (pursuit of aggressive and sometimes expansionist liberalism, as in Manifest Destiny – the idea that the United States is a uniquely virtuous nation and, as such, has the calling to save the world) and the religious (defending the freedom of religion and reaching the unreached, as Upholders of Spiritual Values and Defenders of the Faith). Hence, the idea of mission has both literal and

2 This closely relates to the key message from the currently vibrant anthropology of ordinary ethical life. Although there are several diverging and sometimes mutually conflicting trends in it, this field is very much focused on eliciting normative qualities embedded in human life that are distinct from (or subdued under) the moral directives and dictates emanating from the dominant ideology of a political society. Most notably, see Lambek (2010a) and Keane (2016).

metaphorical meaning in this context, shifting its semantic life between the two spheres, secular and religious, time and again – despite the founding constitutional creed of separation between church and state. Relatedly, the effort to understand the freedom of speech as demonstrated in Jeju shamanic rituals involves paying attention to how this global political project was manifested differently between the centre of Cold War geopolitics and their distant postcolonial peripheries. In the latter, the Cold War was hardly a "cold" war but rather an enduring crisis of civil war or other exceptional conditions akin to a perpetual civil war, in which the political idea of freedom often took on a much more radical meaning than in the Western world (Kwon 2010). The last was amply shown in the Jeju crisis, where the most brutal counterinsurgency violence against the islanders was committed by the paramilitary groups of the Christian youth displaced from their homes in the northern region of Korea, then under Soviet occupation. For these religious youth groups, freedom from communism and the freedom of faith were indistinguishable and made up an identical whole.[3]

3 Korea's northern regions, especially those in the northwest where Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea today, is located, were the original stronghold of Protestant missions, primarily those from America's northern Presbyterian society, to the extent that before the 1940s the city of Pyongyang used to be referred to as the Jerusalem in the East. Between 1945 and 1953, a large number of these Northwest Christians, as they were called, left their homeland, threatened by the revolutionary campaigns, first during the Soviet occupation and later by the North Korean state. An estimated 7,000–10,000 of them, nearly half of the total number of Korean Protestants at that time, joined the exodus to the US-occupied south. The Korean War caused great suffering to the Koreans, and Korea's Christian population was no exception to this. Institutionally, however, the war also provided a great momentum for vitality and growth to Korea's Protestant movement. The Christian movement in the northwest region was strong in the early twentieth century, not only with Presbyterian missions but also with the modernizing elite. Some of these god-fearing, educated, politically moderate, and entrepreneurial Christians, who were also the economic elite and opinion leaders in Pyongyang and its environs, on encountering and suffering the heavy-handed revolutionary politics in their northern home, especially the sweeping land reform that shattered not only their own but also their churches' economic basis, transformed into some of the most fervent and militant anti-communist warriors in the postcolonial era. The experience of the Korean War further radicalized their politically charged religious commitment. The war was a radical existential crisis for the Christian refugees from northern Korea, understood as a possible permanent loss of a secure home after the loss of their original homes in the north. This existential status, however, both religious and political, was also hugely advantageous on the south side of the 38th Parallel in the early Cold War. The US Military Government saw the Northwest Christian refugees as the natives it could work with. These were people who shared with Americans Christian values and enmity against God-denying communism – in contrast to many other native political leaders they encountered in Korea whom that government regarded as too left-leaning or too nationalistic (meaning, in this context, to put the ideal of national liberation ahead of the imperative of struggle against international communism).

In parallel with these historical horizons of global and local proportions, moreover, an understanding of freedom found in the lamentation of the dead rituals equally requires a further in-depth view of the ritual world. One important concept in this matter might be *sovereignty* – referring to the fact that in Korea's shamanic culture, beings in the other world, or supernature, whether they are powerful mythical spirit figures or more human-like ancestral spirits, are all stubbornly autonomous and self-determining entities in their own right and relationally sovereign existents.[4] The same idea applies to the categorical interiority of ancestors – namely, between spirit entities that have the right to join the ritual milieu of *jesa* and those that are excluded from this milieu of remembrance for various reasons. Hence, this idea entails that when spirits take on narration and thus assert their right to speak out (in the context of the lamentation ritual), they do so as fully sovereign beings (within the cosmopolitical world of shamanism), and their right to speak is an inalienable right (again within this world).

The points raised above are all worth careful consideration; for now, suffice it to say that the idea of freedom that is elicited in the rituals involving lamenting and speaking spirits of the dead is in touch with both notions of freedom, as discussed above. One of these is freedom as in the ideology of Saving Freedom, which constitutes the broad historical milieu within which the lamenting spirits had become an otherworldly existence as such in the first place. The other is freedom that has long existed in the tradition of the ritual form and in its given cosmopolitical order, which makes even the socially or politically excluded spiritual beings a sovereign existence in their own right and thereby allows them the equal right to speak in the (ritualized) public space (see Kwon and Park 2022, 136–56). This phenomenon resonates with what the notion of *isegoria* has in store – the idea of freedom that sublimates *equality* of all speakers (rather than freedom of speech as such) in the freedom to speak (see the introduction to this volume). What is clear is that when these spirits speak out, we need to attend to their locution with both of these separate ideas of freedom, geopolitical and cosmopolitical, in mind.

4 This idea of a democratic supernatural world order with reference to Korea's shamanism tradition is from one of South Korea's most prominent anthropologists and folklorists, Yim Suk-jay (1903–98). I discuss his original contribution to the anthropology of religion in Kwon and Park (2022, chaps. 5, 6).