



Cultural resources and management in the coastal regions along the Korean tidal flat



Hanhee Hahm ^{a, b}, Seongmi Jeong ^a, Myeonghun Jeong ^c, Soon Cheol Park ^{d, *}

^a Department of Archeology and Cultural Anthropology, Chonbuk National University, Republic of Korea

^b Center for Intangible Culture in Chonbuk National University, Republic of Korea

^c The National Folk Museum of Korea Researcher, 37 Samcheong-ro, Jongno-gu, Seoul, 110-820, Republic of Korea

^d Division of Electronics and Information Engineering, Chonbuk National University, P. O. Box 561-756, 567 Baekje-daero, Deokjin-gu, Jeonju-si, Jeollabuk-do, Republic of Korea

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ABSTRACT

The Korean tidal flat (*getbol*) region is characterized by close relationships between regional inhabitants and *getbol*-related goods and services. To illustrate this point, we made a provisional list of cultural entities found in and around the *getbol* areas of the West Sea region. In the process of this inventory, we confirmed that folk culture is composed of direct representations of *getbol* villagers' livelihoods. This culture has increasingly become endangered and risks disappearance due to land reclamation, urbanization and industrialization. The Korean government has implemented conservation policies regarding cultural heritage in urgent need of protection, but has largely overlooked *getbol* folk culture. We also examined the structural relationship between designated and undesignated cultural entities in the *getbol* area. The core *getbol* culture consists of undesignated folk cultural entities. These undesignated folk cultural entities clearly have a more direct relationship with the sea and tidal flats. Designated cultural entities are more indirectly related to this environment and comprise the periphery of the *getbol* culture. Government entities and academics have viewed these two categories of cultural entities independently, but they are closely interrelated and interdependent. The notion of cultural landscape is far less established or reflected in *getbol* conservation and management policies in Korea than in those implemented in the Wadden Sea region of Europe. We further indicate the uniqueness of Korean cultural landscape developed by folk culture and warn of a direct application of the Wadden Sea's cultural landscape approach to the Korean *getbol*.

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1. Introduction

The Korean tidal flat regions are quite unique in terms of the close interactions between nature and humanity. There are not many other areas in the world where a multi-faceted area of similar scale contains such a complex web of tidal flats, human use and cultural heritage. In this paper, we present the rationale for such argument by first showing the diversity of the cultural entities located in the region of tidal flat. Second, a significant portion of cultural entities found in the region of tidal flat consists of multi-faceted folk culture. As a historic and current source of the villagers' livelihoods, the tidal flats should not be viewed simply as a target of protective measures. The future management policy

should move toward the protection of the cultural landscape in which diversified living culture and heritage are extensively protected and carefully administered in line with the goals of sustainable development.

Since the mid-1990s, as awareness of tidal flat conservation in Korea has increased, a contrast has emerged in evaluations of tidal flat reclamation by the two interested sides, the advocates and conservationists. The pro-reclamation advocates have insisted on the rationale and necessity for development. These advocates consider the sea to be vacant space, any amount of which can be reclaimed at anytime to expand the land area and view reclamation as a key symbol of development and progress (MAF and KARICO, 2000). In contrast, conservationists have emphasized the importance of tidal flats for two main and intrinsically inseparable reasons: their environmental benefits and high economic value. In arguing for the conservation of tidal flats in Korea, scholars, specialists, and practitioners have presented different perceptions and

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +82 63 270 2467; fax: +82 63 270 2461.
E-mail addresses: scpark@chonbuk.ac.kr, scpark@jbnu.ac.kr (S.C. Park).

assigned different meanings and values to this ecosystem (Cho, 2003; Hahm and Kang, 2007; Je et al., 1998; Jeon et al., 2002; Koh, 2001, 2008). In the course of these prolonged disputes, development advocates have adopted new ideas and strategies from the West, such as green or environmentally conscious development and wise use, in order to counter the issues raised by their opponents (JSTSEI, 2000). Due to these domestic divisions and the global issue of sustainable development, the economic value of tidal flats has drawn much public attention (Choi, 2004; MMAF, 2003; Shin, 2000; Yi, 1998). This economic focus is unique, as international conservation policy has focused instead on the maintenance of biological and cultural diversity (Brosius and Hitchner, 2010; Koh, 2008; World Heritage Centre, 2010).

The pursuit of conservation policy based on economic value may not reduce the vulnerability of these tidal flats in Korea. We can provide compelling evidence to support this point. Since the 1999 proclamation of the Korean Coastal Management and Conservation of Wetlands Acts, the government has made efforts to fulfill the international wetland protection agreement including the designation of ten tidal flats and four natural reservation areas as protected areas. Concurrently, however, many tidal flats have been destroyed through government-sanctioned land use and industrialization in the name of economic progress. The reclamation of tidal flats and the construction of industrial plants on land created by such reclamation projects continue in Korea. The Ministry of Land, Transport, Marine Affairs and Fisheries (MLTM) reported that the total area of tidal flats was 2 489.4 km² in 2008, a reduction of 60.8 km² since 2003. Thus, the imperative of tidal flat conservation based on economic value is frequently overshadowed by that of development in present-day Korea rendering many tidal flats vulnerable.

Our argument in this paper is that the value of tidal flats should be reassessed from a cultural, rather than economic, perspective. Humans' relationships to tidal flats are distinctive in Korea: fishing villages have developed in inshore areas and villagers have long utilized tidal flats extensively developing a way of life identified as the *getbol* (tidal flat) or *getsallim* culture (Kim, 2007; Yoon, 2004). In this study, we examined *getbol* cultural features which are embedded in local life and make up the cultural landscape in the region of tidal flats. The notion of cultural landscape in this paper is largely drawn upon the UNESCO Guidelines in which it defines as cultural properties those which represent the “combined works of nature and of man” (World Heritage Centre, 2010).

2. Characteristics of Korean *Getbol* culture

A characteristic feature of *getbol* culture is the close association of regional inhabitants with tidal flat-related goods and services. related to the tidal flat. The meaning of *getbol* was introduced in the previous chapter (Koh and Khim, 2014). The combination of the two syllables comprising *getbol* (*get*, muddy seacoast; *bol*, vast flat area) evokes the coastal flats that are common on the west coast of Korea, where villagers use the term. The related term *getsallim* (*salim*, managing household affairs) emphasizes people's economic and cultural associations with the tidal flat ecosystem. Several studies have indicated that the goods and services related to the tidal flat ecosystem are crucial for households in fishing villages (Hahm, 2004a; Kim, 2007; Koh, 2001; Park, 2003). Worm, clam and octopus catches are economically important to villages and contribute large portions to household incomes (Hahm, 2004b; Yoon, 2004). Villagers' livelihoods depend on subsistence fishing and other *getbol* elements, which is reflected in the cultural entities located in *getbol* regions. Many religious rituals and festivals are performed in these regions to ensure good catches and fishermen's safety.

In this study, we aimed to characterize *getbol* cultural entities using field surveys, public and private databases, and secondary academic data. Our primary purpose was to make a provisional list of these entities, but we also sought to describe regional, institutional, and classificatory variation. We assumed that each *getbol* area was distinct in terms of ecosystem and political, social, and economical backgrounds, allowing examination of the regional distribution of cultural characteristics. We defined cultural entities according to the current cultural management system of Korea as institutionally designated or undesignated the latter of which are predominant in remote fishing villages. The central and provincial governments have designated cultural entities considered to have superb historical or artistic value as cultural assets for the purposes of conservation, education, and tourism. These entities are protected under the Cultural Properties Protection Law (CPPL), enacted in 1962, and managed according to provincial law. We classified cultural entities using a system aligned with those of the central and provincial governments and other academic sources. Designated cultural entities were categorized as archeological and historical entities, folk cultures, scenic views, or natural monuments; undesignated cultural entities were categorized as rituals, festivals and customs, local foods, oral expression and music, cultural spaces and marketplaces, or traditional knowledge, skills, and tools. Finally, we determined the proportional relationship of characteristics in each category between undesignated and institutionally designated cultural entities and analyzed the structural relationships between the two.

In the final section of this paper, we compared perceptions of and management practices in the Korean *getbol* and European Wadden Sea (Koh et al., 2009), where cultural entities are well preserved and considered to be essential components (CWSS, 2010; Vollmer et al., 2001). Experts in the Wadden Sea region have incorporated the concept of cultural landscape into relevant management practices (Enemark, 2005; LancewadPlan, 2007, 2008; Vollmer et al., 2001). This concept is far less established in the coastal region along the tidal flat in Korea and has not been integrated into management practice (Oh, 2005). We must define cultural landscape as a unit of entities that can be observed in the field. The landscape of fishing villages in the *getbol* region shaped historically in the context of environmental change, provides an opportunity to define such a cultural unit. Thus, the government policy of excluding consideration of the *getbol* cultural landscape from management practices must be examined.

3. Study area and data collection

In conducting surveys for this study, we found that many village folk cultures in Korea were not systematically recorded, whereas data on designated cultural entities were officially recorded and kept in government bureaus and online databases. The lack of comprehensive surveys of cultural entities in *getbol* areas on the west coast motivated the present inventory study.

For this study, data on cultural entities along the west coast of Korea were collected primarily from (1) official documents provided by the Cultural Heritage Administration (CHA) and provincial and local governments and (2) public and private online databases [e.g., government offices, the encyclopedia of intangible cultural heritage in Korea (ICHPEDIA)], as well as from academic publications. The CHA is the public agency responsible for coordinating research on cultural entities and designating them as part of Korea's cultural heritage. At the provincial level, Bureaus of Culture and Tourism conduct surveys and designate cultural entities (provincial cultural heritage). ICHPEDIA, based on the Wikipedia model and run on the Web 2.0 platform, contains data on institutionally neglected folk cultural entities (e.g., performance, arts, traditional

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