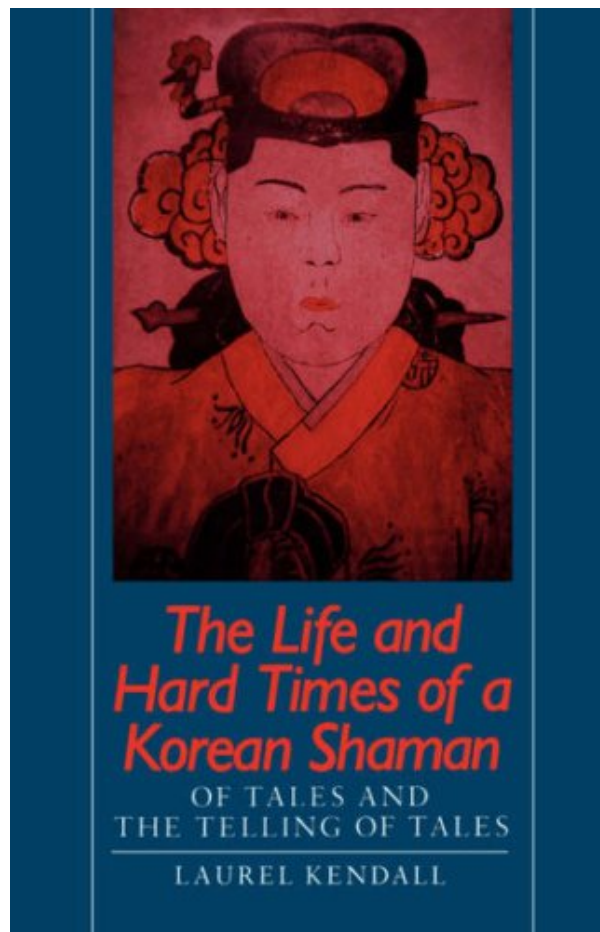
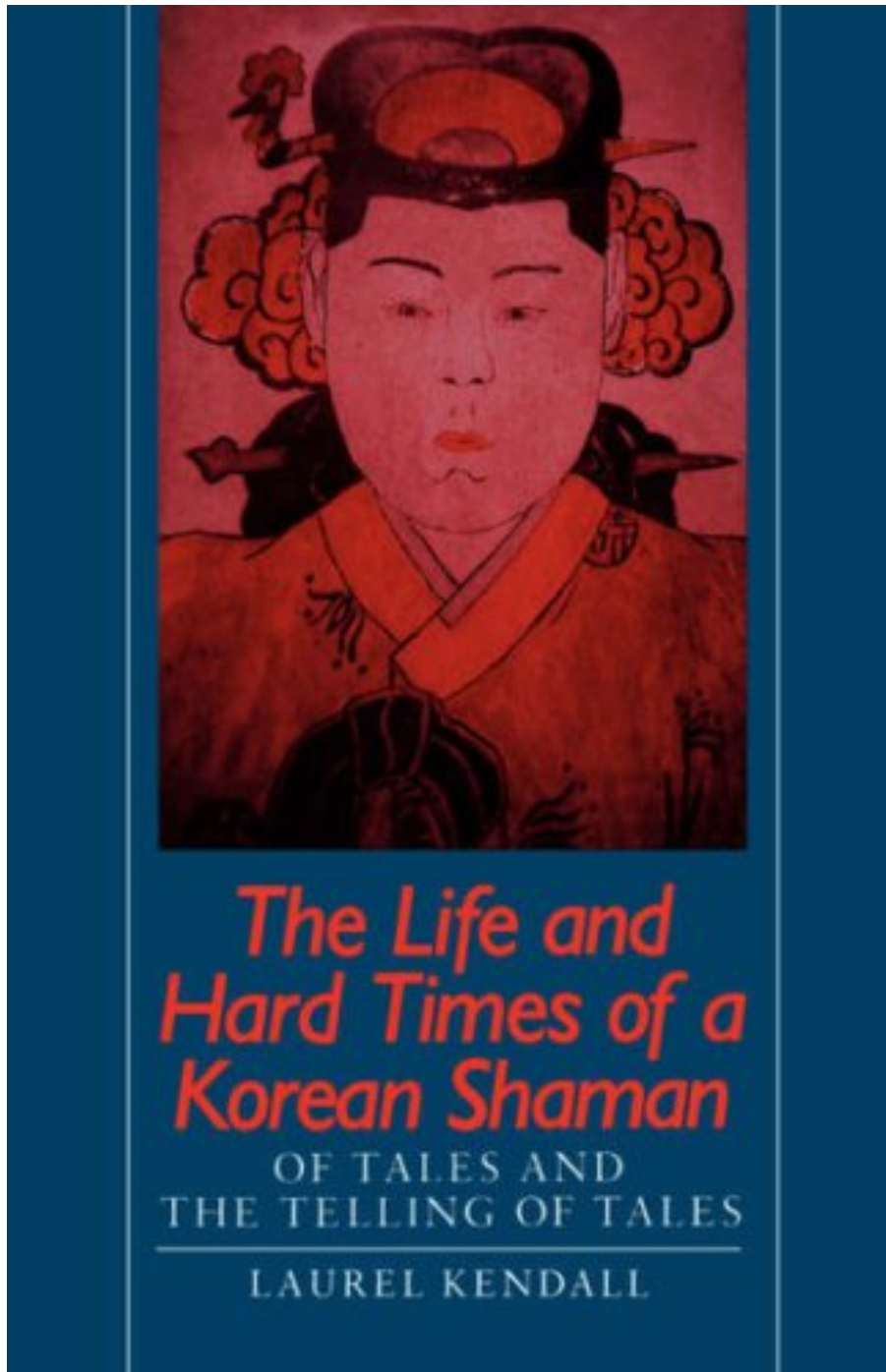


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SHAMAN: OF TALES AND THE TELLING OF
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From Publishers Weekly

Following her ethnographic survey of Korean women (Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits), Kendall returned to her field notes to quarry this book devoted to a single person. The aging, garrulous shaman whom Kendall calls Yongsu's Mother recounts her life and times in a flock of rehearsed, windy tales, the events now distilled and dramatized. The pattern is not exotic: denied an education by the need to help support her family; given no love by a philandering father; bearing an illegitimate child after her lover left her; pressured into a bad marriage; jailed briefly during the Korean War, etc. Even her description of her religious calling is circumspect (she refers to gods as grandfathers), and the prosaic, familiar complaints of social injustice give this a universal but impersonal air. Kendall tries for something more by acknowledging that, as observer, she has an effect on her subject. So she mixes personal with professional comments and balances her affection for Yongsu's Mother with her doubts about certain tales' truthfulness. Finally, the faithful anthropologist, hanging on the words of a lonely old woman, stands in for the shaman's absent children. The premise is not uninteresting, but nothing in the book comes alive.

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About the Author

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Book by Kendall, Laurel

- Sales Rank: #498617 in Books
- Brand: Brand: University of Hawaii Press
- Published on: 1988-12-12
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.50" h x .39" w x 5.51" l, .46 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 168 pages

Features

- Used Book in Good Condition

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Most helpful customer reviews

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

Interesting study of folk culture

By C. E. Stevens

The story of "Yongsu's Mother" is compelling, informative, and thought-provoking at the same time.

Yongsu's Mother clearly enjoys telling her stories, and has developed a flair for the dramatic (at the expense of accuracy from time to time it appears). I read this book for a class on East Asian folklore, and while I realize Yongsu's Mother is not the archetypal shaman, her experiences shed light on not only Korean shamans, but Koreans in general.

The most interesting part of the book, besides the stories, is Kendall's struggle to ascertain the accuracy of Yongsu's Mother's stories. Yongsu's Mother is presumably not deliberately lying to Kendall, but instead exhibiting a fundamental human paradox: the past, presumably done with and set in stone, is made fluid by the human mind and memory. The point is not that Yongsu's Mother's variations destroy her credibility, but rather that the variations give insight into her, and presumably her culture's, psyche.

This was a wonderful book ... don't be scared off by the title: this is not a book specifically about religion, but a biography about a woman who happens to be a shaman. 5 out of 5 stars.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Fascinating Reading Material, but not comprehensive

By A Customer

This is an exhilarating account of the life of a Korean Shaman, and her interesting life in modern Korea. It is fun to read just for pleasure and it's interesting. Because it is a case study, it does not necessarily purport to be representative of all Korean Shamans, but nevertheless it teaches a lot about Korea in this century.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

a good sample of life in Korea

By Wyote

I've lived in Korea for 3 years, and recently read this book as part of my exploration of the culture here. I consider this one of the better books I've read for this purpose.

Everyday I see these old people, and my Korean isn't good enough to have a conversation of any substance with them. I can communicate well enough to know that they have fascinating stories of another world, one I can barely imagine. And then, I can't understand any of the details!

Well, this is one of the stories they'd have to tell me.

As another reviewer pointed out, it's a biography, not an exploration of Korean shamanism; Kendall has written a good book on that topic, however.

The subject, called "Yongsu's Mother," was a young girl at the time of the war, so her memories are quite fascinating. Her perspectives of the family dynamics, jealousies among siblings, relationships between first and second wives, and between a new wife and her in-laws are quite revealing.

A Korean friend told me about her mother, whose mother secretly threw her school books to her over a fence so that the grandfather wouldn't know the girl was going to school. Yongsu's Mother tells a similar story.

In other ways as well I sense that Youngu's Mother's story is not too remarkable for women of her generation. But it's not a summary of Korean history or anything, just one woman's story. And it's a good one, thanks to the story-telling talents of Yongsu's Mother and Laurel Kendall.

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