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## The Aesthetic World and Formalistic Structure of Korean Dance

*Hee-wan Chae*

### Abstract

Two aspects of a unified concept made up of labor-play-*gut*, the latter being shaman ceremony performance, form the fundamental basis of Korean traditional dance. One is formalism or characteristic structures, and the other is Korean consciousness, or the aesthetic world. The aesthetic consciousness reflected in Korean traditional dance relates to naturalism that sheds light on the concept of being danced, rather than to dance; the beauty of curved lines, as shown in *taegeuk* (the Great Ultimate); moments in stillness that are permeated by the energy of the universe; *no'gyeong* that makes possible the progression from nothingness to being; pathos, inner cry, and outer laughter, which are revealed in the process of *salpuri* (exorcism); humor and reconciliation; naiveté, rough and simple; a light in the shadow; the vigor and spirit of revolution; and cosmic reconciliation.[1]

### Key words

aesthetic world; formalistic structure; Korean dance; labor-play-*gut*; *no'gyeong*, Non Finito; outer laughter as inner cry; *Salpuri*; *Sinmyeong*

### 1. Introduction: What is Korean dance?

Generally speaking, Korean dance may be defined as all kinds of dance found in Korea but narrowly speaking it is said to be the dances of traditional Korean society and the dance styles that retain the characteristics of these dances. As a rule, it is traditional dance, new dance, and dances created today in a Korean style that are included in a narrow definition of Korean dance and are contrasted with some foreign modern dances or Western ballets. Even though dances that have Korean characteristics in their techniques could be considered a kind of Korean dance, there remains the problem of formulating the judging criteria for determining what constitutes Korean dance. What are Korean dance characteristics?

Eighty years ago, during the Japanese colonial era, one of the masters in the field of studying Korean aesthetics, Yu-seob Koh (1905~1944), said: "The art of the Chosun Dynasty(1392-1910) belonged to folk things, so religion, life, and art could not be divided into separate things. Therefore, the art of Korea did not exist only for appreciation that could be separated from art and religion, but art and life were one." [2] We could say, therefore, that the undivided state of life, art, and religion is parallel to that of labor, play, and *gut*, the latter being shaman ceremony performance in Korea, in the performing arts. Thus, labor-play-*gut* as a single entity forms the fundamental basis of traditional Korean dances.

There is a deep-rooted basis for the undividedness of labor and playfulness. There is a kind of spiritual sentiment in the world of *gut*, an undivided state between labor and playfulness. There is suffering, illness, poverty, disaster, depression, and the confrontation with killing in the scenes of *gut* that solve

rancor, heals illness, settles quarrels, and contributes to living together in peace through the spirit of play. In short, it is the practice of the ecstasy of spiritual energy (*sinmyeong*) that achieves the expelling of evil and negative energy (*salpuri*), and purification (*sitgim*).

Yu-seob Koh determined that in the arts of Korea there were not sophisticated, formal, and ordered tastes but rather unsophisticated, friendly, and innocent tastes because the arts were not practiced for commercial purposes. He describes characteristics unique to Korean arts as technique without technique, planning without planning, being unsophisticated, being unconcerned, going with nature, deep great taste, a child-like adult quality, solitary humor, and rhythmically linear stream, all of which are directly manifest in Korean dance.

From the analogy between Korean arts and Korean dance, let me suggest the aesthetic characteristics of Korean traditional dance. There are two aspects to this approach. One is formalism or structure, or formal characteristics, and the other is the Korean consciousness of the aesthetic world of dance.

## **2. Formalism as structure and formal characteristics of Korean dance**

a) *Siga'akmugeuk'ilche*: poetry, music, song, drama and dance as a total art work (詩歌樂舞劇一體)

*Siga'akmugeuk'ilche*, a Sino-Korean phrase, refers to a total or comprehensive work of art (in German, *gesamtkunstwerk*) that includes instrumental music, songs, drama, and dance as part of a whole. This concept is commonly found in many Asian performance genres. For example, *poongmool* (the farmer's band) is a genre that represents *siga'akmugeuk'ilche*, with its inclusion of music, songs, and dance, in addition to drama, all as one in its performance. Here each of the components is interrelated in an organic and continuous way, forming a total art rather than being a simple collection of separate parts.

b) *Circular view*

The phrase 'circular view' relates to how the audience literally sees a performance. In a performance space the circular view is achieved by having at least three angles or directions from which the audience views the performance, much like in an amphitheater where the audience is seated all around. Usually straight lines are viewed as somewhat distorted in a circular view performance space because audience members view the performance from multiple perspectives. In a dance performance a straight line with dancers in line, either forwards or backwards, can be created only after making a concentric circle on stage, as a matter of visual contrast. With presentation on a proscenium arch stage, the audience views the performance from only one direction and focuses only on that one spatial direction.

However, in the circular view stage the audience views not only the stage but, at the same time, the rest of the audience. This creates a shared space and an expansion from a linear viewpoint.<sup>[3]</sup> Here an audience is able to view not only the audience in the same plane but also upper levels and shares the same view as the one who looks down from above. An

omniscient view point is created by looking down from above and looking out across the entire field of performers and audience members. This is the perspective of god, heaven, and earth, similar to the third person perspective in a novel. The audience shares the event, each from his or her own seat, and therefore they are both producers of the event in addition to spectators. This is a multiple-perspective (*sabangchigi*), not a concentration of view but an expansion and collaboration of a network of perspectives. Through this network the central content is reinforced within an organic structure of interrelation with the surroundings. Unfortunately, most of the contemporary performances of Korean folk dances are now presented in Western-style theaters, and the characteristics of the circular view and its traditional performance aesthetic have been gradually lost.

*c) Improvisation within performance settings*

Most of the Korean performing traditions rely heavily on improvisation that may differ according to the performance setting and environment. Based on the specific dance tradition, the performers improvise movements and gestures, exhibiting creativity and personality by embodying the energy and context of a given performance setting. Contrary to the concept of *ga'wonje* (家元制, in Japanese *I'emoto*), not allowing the addition of new material and patterns that deviate from the original form, a transmission and preservation method typically found in Japanese traditional theatrical genres such as *noh* and *kabuki*, the Korean theatrical genres are based on improvisation. Creativity and the individuality of *deoneum*, meaning "added," seem to be encouraged in performances.<sup>[4]</sup> Even in court dances that are supposed to adhere strictly to the rules of *ga'wonje*, improvisation seems to have played an important role, as change is inevitable throughout the course of history. Because of such improvisation, creativity is revealed in an open framework or structure based on spontaneous respect of the audience and the performance situation. Within this context, the process of a performance is prioritized over the output or product of the performance, with each moment subject to change according to the performance environment and setting.

*d) The performance aesthetic of progressive linearity*

Within Korean performing traditions, the concept of progressive linearity is known as cyclical evolution. For example, a performance is an endless process of creating and releasing tension. In this regard, one of the characteristics of Korean traditional dance, *seonmyo* (line drawing), is central in shaping the dance gestures and movements and is closely related to and influenced by the philosophy of *yin* (陰) and *yang* (陽). Known as *seonmyobeob* (線描法), this is found in the Korean shape described as *taegeuk* (太極) that symbolizes the Great Ultimate, the source of the dual principle of *yin* and *yang*. The constant dialectics of creating and releasing tension are found in dance gestures and movements of Korean folk dance genres. These are manifest in such characteristics as the winding-unbinding movements of *Seungmu* (The Monk's Dance), *ggaeggichoom*, *oesawi*, *yangsawi*, *gyeopsawi*, *gopsawi* of *talchoom* (mask dance drama), and *mongdurisawi* of *ilchoom* (work dance).

In other words, the process of creating and releasing tension is a process of tying and untying the knot of life, a reference to a metaphoric concept. In dance, the concept is expressed in movements of being turned over and turned upside down, as when the arm is rotated to turn the palm to face upward and then downward. This process of tying and untying can also be divided into four phases: introduction; development; turn, or climax; and conclusion. These are common sequences of composition found in other arts, such as music, theater, and literature. The dual concept of tying and untying or creating and releasing tension is expressed in the process of emotionally curved lines that create a harmony or balance between tension and release.

e) *Yeonsan* (mountains in succession, 連山) structure

A Sino-Korean word *yeonsan* means “mountains in succession,” which is commonly used to designate a formal and structural configuration in the arts. Here, each formal section of a work is metaphorically identified as a mountain, and a succession of mountains creates a large-scale work. Within such a work, each mountain is characterized with the distinctive shape of its summit, and each is interconnected as part of a long mountain chain, similar to the omnibus structure. This circular structure is common in many Korean folk art genres, such as *pansori* (a vocal form), *talchoom* (masked dance drama), and folk paintings. A smaller section and its artistic expression and identity serves to create a larger work but at times it may present the entire work. Here, the smallest unit of a section is called *maruchae*.<sup>[5]</sup>

f) *Bijeongbipal* (step, neither the shapes of 丁 (jeong) nor 八 (pal) 非丁非八)

When referring to one of the kinds of steps or movements of the foot, *bijeongbipal* means neither the shapes of 丁 (*jeong*) nor 八 (*pal*), as if opening but narrowing, with a simultaneous sense of progressing and spreading, in a somewhat ambiguous contrast. *Bijeongbipal* is also applied to the basic lower posture of Korean traditional archers and especially to the major position of their feet. This is achieved by relaxing the upper body, which creates a slight leaning forward and emptying or hollowing of the chest, and centering the body's gravity in the lower part of the torso. It also refers to the angle of the front and back foot when the archer shoots at a target seventy to one hundred meters away. In martial arts the underlying dynamics of motion of the human body are revealed, as they are in Korean dance. The posture of *bijeongbipal* is also shown when a skilled woodworker is planing a wooden panel. The harmony between convergence and divergence is revealed in the fuzzy theory that describes the posture: leaning forward or standing back momentarily, which can be metaphorically described as looking at the center of the moon but focusing on the surrounding fuzzy lights that emanate from it, rather than on its center.

g) *Sa* (worship 事) and *dongsa* (working with partnership 同事)

In Asian aesthetics some examples are divided into *sa* (事, worship) and *dongsa* (同事, working with partnership) based on their disposition. The Korean poet Ji-hah Kim tried to critically elaborate on the opinions of a Chinese aesthetics scholar,

Zhangpa, and I would like to introduce his theory into defining the characteristics of Korean dance.[6]

The concept of *sa*, or worship, is found in a phrase in the Chinese canon, *Liji* (禮記), and relates to people trying to imitate the cosmos. Its origin is in a kind of courtesy (禮) that relates to people imitating and worshipping such natural phenomena as wind, rain, frost, and snow. In other words, it refers to revealing or describing nature. Even though it is similar to Western mimetic theory, the Asian concept does not refer to a realistic style. In the expression of *sagunihchoong* (事君以忠, one must do his best to serve the king through his own royalty) *sa* means "do service" within a vertical structure. In court music and dance and elite kinds of dance, it relates to imitating the cosmic order, to revealing the ideology of a country and a monarch, and hence reflects the objective principles of the cosmos and the metaphysics of the ruler. The principles of the cosmos should be realized on earth and can be included in the concepts of sublime or exquisite. The action of dance is said to focus on the upper body and head, which can suggest the focus on heaven as a characteristic of dance.

In contrast to *sa*, *dongsa* means to labor together and to do duty together. In Chinese society working together refers to a companion or partnership in the office or factory. This means that workers respect each other and work together with their own creativity. In describing *dongsa*, a great master of Korea, Choi Je-uh (1824~1864, 崔濟愚), said that *dongsa*, in the phrase that we call "him" (*nim*) as owner and respect him like parents, means working together, from which the concept of *dongsa* is derived. That means to respect, to love, to share the sublime, and to serve each other as a becoming creation. To keep *dongsa* means that humans participate in the order of the cosmos and throw themselves into it, creating the world. The process of creating the world does not imply to imitate the cosmic principle but to intervene in it and change its shape. As comedy or tragic comedy rather than sublime or exquisite, it leads to satire and distorts reality. The dances such as dance on the soil, labor dance, and clown dance could be included in the category of working together. However, both the concepts are contrasted with each other or combined with them, which would be distinguished from those of China.

In the ancient Korean tribe of Dongyi (東夷族) there were concepts that embraced both dual and triple ideas. While in Chinese culture dual features dominated, resulting in *taegeuk*, *yin-yang*, Great *yang*—Great *yin*, Young—*yang*, Young—*yin* (四象), and the Eight Trigrams for divination (八卦), the essence of Korean culture embraces tripartite concepts that interlock dual features over triple ones. These create a kind of inclined balance. As I have pointed out, this inclined balance of interlocking contrasts forms the logic and viewpoint of culture of Kim Ji-hah. Mutually contrasting things such as heaven and earth, court and folk, elite and common, principle and reality, reason and emotion, upper body and lower body, moderation and passion, opening and closing, finishing and beginning, and tension and relaxation, do not create opposites but rather an inclined balance, maintaining an interrelationship with each other. This can be interpreted as a contemporary transformation of the traditional idea of struggle in harmony.

In short, as the dual and tripartite ideas of *sa* and *dongsa* are inter-locked, *sa* is most likely to characterize the court style and *dongsa* the folk or country style.[7]

### 3. Aesthetic consciousness and the aesthetic world of Korean dance

Here, I elaborate on broad concepts within the world of aesthetics and on how these concepts are specifically manifest in the aesthetic consciousness of Korean traditional dance.

#### a) Korean naturalism

In Western arts, naturalism refers to an extreme realism in depicting and reflecting on society, much like a scientist writing a research paper based on scientific experiments. Naturalism in Eastern philosophy implies the unity of nature, in which skillfulness and technical elements in the arts are achieved without specific intention or having a specific plan. In other words, there are endless possibilities when not doing anything (無爲而無不爲). This constitutes detachment and emptiness. This is not participating in activity but participating in observation and contemplation. This is artificial nothingness and inactivity.

In Korean dance, performers often discuss the aesthetic concept "to be danced," using the passive voice rather than the active voice "to dance." The concept is somewhat difficult to understand but when they use the phrase "to be danced," they mean being natural, without intention of embellishment and control. Indeed, it is of itself, as in nature. Nature flows in the unity of itself, and the arts are a mere reflection of nature or the resemblance of the status of nature. This is Korean naturalism. Nothingness becomes the "thing" that opens up endless possibilities in creating art. This is the world of *no'gyeong* (老境), the spiritual realm and enlightenment achieved in reaching old age.[8]

#### b) Taegeuk Seonmyo (*line drawing of the ultimate* 太極線描)

The beauty of Korean dance resides in linear motions that can be either straight or curved, and even straight lines are viewed as curved and soft. The image of the straight-curved line is found in many Korean artifacts and buildings, such as the shape of the toe of the traditional padded socks (*beoseon*), the lines of houses with thatched or tiled roofs, a white porcelain jar, and the mountains and streams of the Korean landscape. This concept can be translated in music to the stepwise and gradual movement of a melodic line. The straight-curved lines of *taegeuk*, as introduced in the previous section with *hwalgaejit*, are the foundation for creating the circular space of the original archetype, and also the source for creating the magnetic field and gravity, and of collaborative energy and ecstasy. The mimetic terms and dance gestures *deong-sil deong-sil* (lively) and *neo-ul neo-ul* (waveringly) imply a person of joy and ecstasy who reaches beyond the energy of physical states and enters the spiritual realm of all directions: left, right, above, below, horizontal, vertical, time and space. Thus, *taegeukseon* is an image of the dynamic balance of infinity.

#### c) Jeong-Joong-Dong (*movement in stillness* 靜中動)

*Salpurichoom*, a newer Korean dance, is often described as *jeong-joong-dong* (stillness-moderate gesture-movement) or movement in stillness, as if silence is endless speech. In Korean dance, rather than delivering countless motions in small episodes, the dancer expresses *jeong-joong-dong* by focusing on the hidden beauty of spiritual force; a single, subtle hand gesture becomes a highly artistic dance. This is also called *no'gyeong*. There is a Korean saying, "There is no young genius in the performing genres," meaning that nothing compares to a single gesture of an old person! There are a number of ways of expressing *jeong-joong-dong* with the use of metaphorical descriptions, such as when a painter paints a wide sea covering the entire canvas in blue or draws a couple of waves while leaving empty and blank space between them. The blank space might be translated as *jeong-joong-dong* in a dance performance, with the waves being the seeds of creativity. This is as if one or two small rocks thrown into the water make gentle concentric circles in contrast to one large rock which creates a big splash. It is a silent movement, and nothingness becomes "the thing" that generates the endless possibilities of creativity and expression.

#### d) *Salpuri* and *sinmyeong*

The process of a shaman ritual is the process of *salpuri*. The word *sal* (煞) denotes negative energy that may reside and afflict the living, with such things as illness, misfortune, accidents, social oppression, historical tribulation, and natural disasters, and also conflicts between god(s) and the cosmic world. In other words, the purpose of the ritual is to confront death and expel *sal*. The process of *salpuri* involves conflict, and hence through it the nature and source of the negative energy are gradually brought within awareness, all via religiously ritualized symbolic representation. In the process of becoming aware of the struggles and resolution of those struggles, the positive energy, heavenly joy, and ecstasy are at last revealed on stage, and the supernatural and transcendental power are generated to unify the divine (god) and humanity. At the climactic moment, the artistic impulse, in the form of music and dance, is reached and that is called *sinmyeong*. The energy of *sinmyeong* increases based on the intensity and degree of *sal*, and if the *sal* is shared in the process of untying the knot, if it becomes a communal rather than a personal negative energy, the *sinmyeong* becomes greater.

As found in one of the Korean performing traditions, *Cheoyongmu* (處容舞, the dragon dance that was performed by male dancers at royal banquets during New Year celebrations) is a perfect example of *sinmyeong*. The story behind this dance relates that Cheoyong, the son of the underwater king, casts away an evil spirit, or *yeoksin*, that tried to seduce his wife by giving an impressive performance of music and dance. Based on this story, people used an engraved image of Cheoyong to ward off illness and disease. Since then, Cheoyong has become a representative of *salpuri*, getting rid of evil spirits and energy, of the people. As the story describes, *salpuri* is not a mere performance for entertainment but implies deeper meanings reflecting the complexity of society, an awareness of reality, and social struggles and the resolution of these struggles, all revealed in the process of *salpuri*. Therefore,



*salpuri* evokes *sinmyeong*, the virtuous power of life. At this point one can realize that *sinmyeong* sheds light on the shadow, or darkness, by revealing the source of pain and suffering and then purifying and cleansing the mind and body, healing it, and eventually transforming it into a divine and lofty status. In addition, *sinmyeong* is the critical transcendence in the realities of this life that helps to enter into the world of transcendent reality.

Furthermore, *sinmyeong* is a life experience of the universe that reveals the creative reasons that are united with an awareness of social reality and the coexistence of healing and liberation from a particular situation. Accordingly, *sinmyeong* creates a new time and space through the formation of the immanent hope of the people as they break away from the restraint of reality. Thus, *sinmyeong* is an important concept in modern aesthetics that seeks the source and power of life for fundamental problems and seeks endless possibilities for revealing the sources of religion, arts, and the inner world of human beings. *Sinmyeong*, as an aesthetic experience distilled from creativity and nostalgic experience, is the unity between heaven and men, and also passion, rage, transcendence, and birth. At the same time, *sinmyeong* is the source of energy for inspiration, fantasy, expression, imagination, and passion that provides infinite possibilities for creativity.

As the most prominent concept of Korean aesthetics and also the beauty of Korea, *sinmyeong* is the "duplicated intricateness of alternating between opposing forces," as in the combination of the worlds of light and darkness, pain and suffering of everyday people (*han*), heavenly and lofty joy, and aesthetic and ethical ideals. Such terms as *heuin' geuneul* (white shade) and *sigimsae* (fermentation, or the degree of maturity within an aging process) adequately express the bright and splendid *sinmyeong* that reveals the cultural characteristics of the Korean people.

*e) Humor and pathos, outer laughter and inner cry, and healing*

The dramatic content of the Korean folk dance is often humorous, poignantly transforming an inner cry into an outer laugh. It is clear that such humor conveys the power of the life of the people. An historic document recently discovered by Sueop Kim contains a story of Cheoyong that is different from the story that gave rise to the court dance described above.<sup>[9]</sup> In this story Cheoyong was a hunchback, and the dance he created is known as *Gopsachoom* (the Dance of the Hunchback). According to Kim, although *Cheoyongmu* had been performed on the first day of the New Year at the Choseon Royal Court and was based on a different story, a different Cheoyong dance is still performed in the Yeongnam area in the south of Gyeongsang province, where it is known as *Gopsachoom* and *Mundungchoom* (the Dance of the Leper). People in this region believe that the hunchback Cheoyong was a *ddangseonang*, a regional term for shaman, who expelled evil, diseases, and natural disasters. Similarly, *cheonang-gut*, an eastern seaboard shaman ritual commemorating Cheoyong, is preserved as an object of religion and as a part of the masked dance drama known as *JinjuOgwangdae*, and *Gopsachoom* and *Mundungchoom* are well-preserved and

performed today.

The history and anecdotes in relation to Cheoyong, in addition to a number of surviving different versions of *Cheoyongmu* that had been performed as *gopsachoom* and *byeongsinchoom*, stimulate us to think about what *byeongsinchoom* actually is and what kind of protagonist Cheoyong really was.

*Byeongsinchoom* has been performed since the reign of King Heon'gang of the Silla Kingdom (B.C. 57-A.D. 935). It is a dance of *sinmyeong* that heals and harmonizes the world and sheds light on the shadow. In fact, *byeongsinchoom* might be easily misinterpreted as ridiculing disabled and handicapped people by mimicking their gestures, but the meaning and spirit of the dance go much deeper. Through the dance, the latent potential of *sinmyeong* is gradually evoked and physical limitations are liberated and transformed, and in watching and appreciating the performance people experience an empathy that gives great consolation and comfort. In addition, the dance, if performed by a disabled person, is a self-disclosure in which the disability is identified as being either from a congenital defect or from having some mental or social disorder. In a sense it is a kind of self-criticism, and also a kind of social criticism that acknowledges that the society to which the individual belongs is corrupt and abnormal. Thus, the dance, as the powerful *sinmyeong*, implies the spirit of liberation and the liberation of society.

On one hand, *byeongsinchoom* can be viewed as a heartbreaking dance for people who live in darkness and begrudge a life-long accumulation of pain and suffering. On the other hand, the dance can lead to the path to *sinmyeong* that casts light on the shadow and provides hope through wit and humor. Here laughter turns into crying, especially the *byeongsinchum* performed by Master Ok-jin Gong (1931~2012) and the individual repertoires of *Yuranggwangdae*, a wandering folk performing troupe. According to the theologian Yeong-hak Hyeon, the wit and humor expressed in *byeongsinchoom* is "the aesthetics of the five viscera and the six entrails."<sup>[10]</sup> The dynamic energy and paradox in *byeongsinchum* are true representations of *sinmyeong* of the people and their communal and shared awareness and sensibility. The dance has a truly humane quality that harmonizes people and creates fellowship within society that is an integral part of the lives of the people.

f) *Antiquity/ rusticness* (古拙), *simplicity* (簡朴) and *naiveté* (素朴)

*Gojol* (古拙) refers to antiquity and rusticness, like the rough and indented surface of an old tree. One might picture the image of being crooked and bent by age and the old hardships of nature. This is also called an archaic type, the utmost original form beyond time and space, as if an old person behaves like a child. As discussed earlier, this is the status and the world of *no'gyeong*, enlightenment achieved in reaching old age; the world of peace and tranquility. Suitable to the sense and sensibility of a child, it articulates the gallant, simple, and naive in much the same way that paintings or calligraphy that are seemingly poor in quality do. This simplicity and naiveté are commonly expressed in most Korean traditional dance.

g) *Vigor and the spirit of revolution*

Here, I would like to introduce the sword dance *Geomgyeol* (劍訣), known to be performed by Choi Je-uh, the founder of Cheondoism (天道教). *Geomgyeol* was danced by the *Donghak* (東學, the Korean religion against the Western religions) revolutionaries to train their bodies and minds. After preparing food for an ancestral rite on a hill deep in the mountain, the revolutionaries drank herbal medicine to control their bodies and minds, and they began to dance holding a wooden sword. Legend relates that the revolutionaries could jump into the sky as if they were briefly flying before touching the ground. Because *Geomgyeol* is done by revolutionaries to train for war and in mock combat it is a strong representation of *Donghak* thought. The dance could be dangerous, perhaps taking away a life, while at the same time protecting a life.

Je-uh Choi was executed in Daegu by the Choseon government for the crime of rebel activities and was guilty of "dazzling the crowd and the people with singing and dancing with a magical sword."<sup>[11]</sup> This is a good example of how one might lose life for dancing a sword dance, and the story demonstrates the paradox of how life and death intersect. The surviving lyrics of the song used in *Geomgyeol* that can help trace back the content of the dance are:

The glorious transformation of the universe is finally upon us, having waited for fifty thousand years, and a man of wisdom with the sword of the dragon and vigor is born, ascending high to the sky. The sword rules the days and months, and the crystal-like robe covers all things in the universe. Who would confront him? He is a man of unparalleled strength.<sup>[12]</sup>

The lyrics describe *Geomgyeol* as a dance of vast, immense, and boundless character, and therefore it is a dance of *sinmyeong*. It is the dance and song that contain the energy of transformation and the transformation of the universe. This is the correct, right dance representing noble ambition and expressing the heroic spirit of Choi Je-uh, who dreamed of changing society and opening a new sky of the universe. *Geomgyeol* also expresses the energy of *sinmyeong*, the very energy and spirit of expelling outer powers, and evokes the development of humanity, revitalization of life, and opening the new sky, meaning revolution.

It is unfortunate that only the lyrics have survived while the dance form has been lost.

h) *Pungryu* (streams of wind, 風流) and reconciliation of the universe

Tracing back to the Silla Kingdom, the concept of *pungryu* embraces the meaning of the cosmic energy in which all things and matter in the universe live together in harmony, and the magnanimous and vast spirit of the universe. The concept is used for training both body and mind of *hwarangdo* (花郎徒), a group of young noblemen and spiritual leaders of the Silla Kingdom, who enjoyed *Pungryuchoom* (the Dance of *Pungryu*). The spirit of *pungryu*, as the totality and combination of the three religions, Buddhism, Confucianism and *Seondo* (仙道,

Korean Taoism), reveals *hyeonmyojido* (玄妙之道), profound philosophy and righteous morality that is used in dance to express the enjoyment of nature and the natural movements that clarify body and mind, ingested and absorbed from the energy and life of nature. The spirit of *pungryu* is also related to the idea and thoughts of enlightenment that represent the characteristics of the education of *hwarangdo*: "Training the body and mind with morality and moral justice, helping each other with the enjoyment of singing and dancing, and following the mountains and rivers [are our preparation], and in so doing, there is no place one cannot reach."<sup>[13]</sup> These thoughts and ideas are the same as fair and square, righteous and divine, and life and healing that contribute to the thoughts of *Hong'ik-In'gan* (弘益人間, humanitarianism) and the important values of humanity and the promotion of public welfare. The core of the spirit of *pungryu* resides in the thoughts of *jeophwagunsaeng* (接化群生, life and people living in harmony): All lives face each other and are lived in harmony and contribute to each other's transformation, evolution and development. Many Korean dances express the reconciliation of the universe whose concept is closely related to the spirit of *pungryu*.

i) *Jinsok'ilyeo* (the divine in the vulgar 眞俗一如)

There is a well-known dance called *Mu'aemu* (無 舞), known to be first danced by Wonhyodaesa (元曉大師, the great Buddhist monk, Wonhyo, 617-684).<sup>[14]</sup> According to a folk tale, Wonhyodaesa was an apostate monk who, after seducing the princess Yoseok, had preached to the people with dancing and singing while holding a jar, which appeared quite odd. This dancing and singing were based on the repertoire of *gwangdae* (廣大), members of professional performing troupes who ranked at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Wonhyodaesa spread Buddhist doctrines using simple melodies and arguments with ease, bringing profound and complex Buddhist doctrine to the people, and awakening in them the words of Buddha and the truth of life that were already among them and that were found in their everyday lives. Beyond the words and doctrine, Wonhyodaesa would tell the story of Buddha with physical gestures, creating a dance of *Mu'aemu*, symbolically preaching to the people and promoting the popularization of Buddhism. From the dance, one can realize that divine and vulgar are the same and that truth is not a distant entity but is among us in our daily lives. At that time, Wonhyodaesa may have appeared to have been a beggar or homeless person but he taught people the important lesson that the tenuous things in life can be of a sublime and divine character, affecting the thoughts of the people, which he practiced through bodily gestures in the form of music and dance. Thus, by sending the message of *jinsok'ilyeo* (眞俗一如), a concept that the divine being is among us in daily life, *Mu'aemu* espouses Buddhism.

j) *Aesthetics of the unfinished* (non finito)

In general, I argue that the work of the arts in the twentieth century can be completed by the reader's, the audience's, and the viewer's mind, ears and eyes, that is, the consumers of arts rather than the artists themselves. This is called reception theory and aesthetics, whereby a new work of art can be created based on the perspectives and viewpoints of the

consumers, who help to push toward the true meaning of appreciation and enjoyment. For example, viewers can express different impressions and judgments of the same performance that proves that the truth is almost impossible to be revealed in the world of truth. However, in the dimension of the world of the arts, truth can be exposed through self-awareness and self-creation and, through that process, the work of the arts is finally completed by the consumer. This is truer in Asian arts than in Western-European arts, where there is a view that a work of art is being completed through the "wind of frost" of history and time. This concept has a thread of connection with the beginning phrase, *ilsimusi'il* (一始無始, one beginning without beginning) and the ending phrase, *iljongmujong'il* (one ending without ending, 一終無終) that appeared in *Cheonbu'gyeong* (天符經, Korean inherent scripture on the principle of universal creation).<sup>[15]</sup> Here, the concept is rather philosophical in that the beginning and ending are interlocked, thus the completion is incomplete and unfinished.<sup>[16]</sup> In other words, emptiness can be considered as being complete and therefore, in Korean dance, the intent or act is not to dance but to be danced.

k) Gomujinsin (*being inspired and playing the limit*, 鼓舞盡神)

From the chapter titled *Dongyichuan* (東夷傳) in the book *Sanguozhi Weizhi* (三國志魏志, The Records of Three Kingdoms of Old China), we can feel the flowing energetic power in scenes of the ritual ceremony for heaven as a collective *sinmyeong* of the people. Without the rest the world of the ordinary at the site of drinking and dancing, things become sacred and the participants soar up to the sky in a state of ecstasy. This means *whanheeyong'yak* (歡喜踊躍, leaping in joy and ecstasy) and *gomujinsin*. In opening the door toward heaven with the sounds of drums, dancers all soar into the scene and continue to dance until their energy is spent. When they can no longer dance, life itself comes to a stop in the space in which they exist. The dance scene embraces the timely satisfied state when the dancers are almost exhausted by dancing, which is tired of itself.

#### 4. Conclusion

Concepts of labor-play-*gut* provide the fundamental basis of Korean traditional dance. I would like to summarize the aesthetic characteristics of Korean traditional dance in the two categories discussed here: formalism as the structure or formal characteristics, and the Korean aesthetic consciousness in the aesthetic world of the dance.

In relation to formalism and structuralism, there is the concept of *sig'a'akmugeuk'ilche*, an artistic totality that includes poetry, song, instrumental music, dance, and drama, all in harmony as revealed in one body. The spirit of improvisation and liquidity are also important in Korean performing genres where the content and form are subject to change according to the type of audience and venue. The circular view, symmetrical and asymmetrical structures, *yeonsan* structure, and *taegeuk seonmyo* all contribute to the formal uniqueness of Korean dance.

Characteristics of aesthetic consciousness reflected in Korean traditional dance as abstracted from the content of the world of

aesthetics are: Korean naturalism that sheds light on the concept of being danced rather than to dance as creating the unity between nature and humans; the beauty of curved lines as shown in *taegeuk*; *no'gyeong* that makes possible the progression from nothingness to being; awareness of reality that sheds light on the shadow of reality; pathos, inner cry, and outer laughter that are revealed in the process of *salpuri*; wit, humor, and reconciliation; naiveté, rough and simple; *han*, a light of the sad and shadow; the vigor and spirit of revolution; cosmic reconciliation; *jinsok'ilyeo* of the divine being found among vulgar and everyday life; the spirit of *pungryu* that expresses the harmony of all things in the universe; the spiritual realm of *mu'aemu*; and the completeness in unfinished work.

The future that defines the past is "nearly completed," or *non finito* aesthetics and artificial inactivity in wriggling our way to the present time. Therefore, eventually, as *jinsokilyeo*, it is *gojol* in the aesthetic peace toward *gomujinsin*.<sup>[17]</sup>

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### Endnotes

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[1] This article is written on the basis of some published articles of my own, such as "The World of Traditional Korean Dance" in the journal *Traditional Culture* (Jan. 1986); "The Beauty of Korean Dance" as in the lecture at the Institute of Korean Aesthetics in Busan (1997,1999); *What is the Ethos of Korean Dance?* (Seoul: Myeonggyeong Press, 2000); "Vital Thoughts of Korean Dance" in *The Trend of Korean Culture and Thought 4* (Daegu: Youngnam Univ. Press, 2002); "The Ancient Ceremony Toward Heaven and The Origin of Korean Dance" in *Korean Aesthetics* Vol.3 (2005). Any other sources mentioned in this article are indicated in the endnotes.

[2] Yu-seob Koh, *The History of Korean Arts and Culture* (Seoul: Tongmun'gwan Press, 1965).

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[5] Tae-hyun Choi, "A Research on Time Rhythm of Jinyang" in *Study on Haegeumsanjo* (Seoul: Segwang Press, 1987). Ae-ju Lee, "A Study on the Structure of Seungmu and its Dance Language," *The Studies of Korean Folk Cultures* Vol. 27

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[7] Ji-ha Kim, *Searching for the Aesthetics of White Shade* (Seoul: Silcheonmunhaksa, 2005).

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[9] Su-eob Kim, "Omundung'yi Madang of Jinju Ogwangdae," *Baedalmal*, Vol. 23 (1998). "The Figures and Songs of Cheoyong," *Baedalmal*, Vol.25 (1999).

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[12] Je-uh Choi, "Geomgyeol" in *Yongdam'yusa* 龍潭遺詞, *manuscript*, (1922).

[13] Dong-sik Yu, *The Diagram of Pungryu and Korean Religious Thought* (Seoul: Yonsei Univ. Press, 1997). Ji-ha Kim, *The Complete Works of Ji-ha Kim Vol. 1, Vol.2, Vol.3* (Seoul: Silcheonmunhaksa, 2002); Ju-sik Min, "*Pungryu; Han'guk'in eui Mi'euisik [Pungryu, Aesthetics of Korean People];" Han'guk eui Meot gwa Areumda'um [Flavor and Beauty of Korea]* (Seoul: Gukhak Jinheungwon, 2003).

[14] Jae-yeon Yang, "Mu'aehee-sogo" in *The Research on Korean Literature* (Seoul: Ilshinsa, 1976).

[15] Ji-ha Kim and Hee-wan Talks Chae, "Wanderings and Settlements, Its Double Mutual Interlocking and Korean Aesthetics," *Korean Aesthetics*, Vol. 1 (Busan, 2003).

[16] Su-hyun Kim, "Toward the Theory of Categorical Structures in KoreanAesthetics," *Korean Aesthetics* Vol. 4 (Busan, 2005).

[17] I thank Judy Van Zile, Professor Emeritus of Dance at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, for revision suggestions to the original manuscript.