CROSS-CURRENTS
EAST ASIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE REVIEW

The Bawdy, Brawling, Boisterous World of Korean Mask Dance Dramas: A Brief Essay to Accompany Photographs

CedarBough Saeji, University of California, Los Angeles

Note: This essay is a companion piece to "Korean Mask Dance Dramas," a photo essay also published in the September 2012 issue of the Cross-Currents e-journal. The photo essay features 24 photographs taken by the author in Korea in the years 2008-2011.

Introduction

Korean mask dance dramas are captivating and entrancing. Comedy, tragedy, and social commentary meld with energetic dance, distinctive masks, and lively music. These dramas are often colloquially and incorrectly referred to as *talchum* ("mask dance") in Korean—in fact, *talchum* is one of the major variants of mask dance drama from Hwanghae Province in present-day North Korea. Performers of other variants have long objected to the broad application of the term (akin to calling all in-line skates "Rollerblades" or all MP3 players "iPods"). Only in the late 1990s did academia catch on, when two highly respected midcareer mask dance drama scholars, Bak Jintae (Daegu University) and Jeon Kyungwook (Korea University), began to use the terminology *talnoli* ("mask play") and *gamyeon-geuk* ("mask drama") in their publications.

I needed to watch only one performance, in 1997, to fall in love with the mask dance dramas, but at first the many forms of the genre melded together in my mind. It took repeated exposure and study over more than a dozen years for me to see the profound similarities and differences among all of Korea's mask dance dramas. Part of my learning process was exploring the existing scholarship on mask dance dramas. Many of these prior publications were written by scholars of literature who explored the dramas through text. Few scholars have direct experience of mask dance dramas, and those who do generally gained their knowledge from a few years of participation in a college club. Consequently, it is not surprising that much mask dance drama

scholarship paints the different mask dance dramas with too broad a brush. After all, most scholars' exposure was limited to learning a single mask dance drama, taught by upperclassmen, with occasional intensive classes led by professionals. Few college club performers and participants in intensive camps can articulate the differences between the mask dance dramas except in the most general of terms. Therefore, in this short essay, I will attempt to supply the reader with a framework for understanding the complexity of Korea's many mask dance dramas.

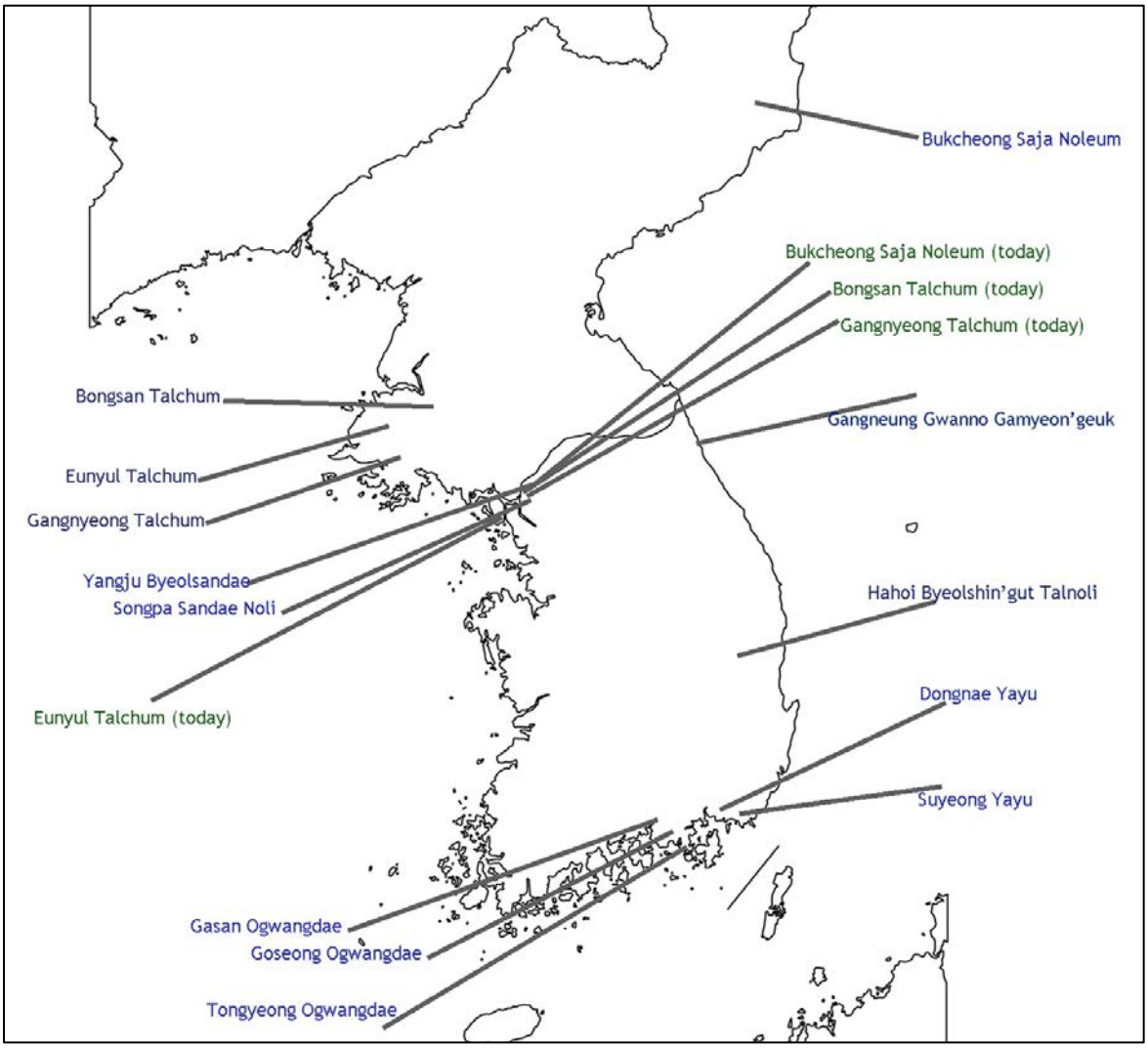
Discussion of mask dance dramas in Korea generally refers to the mask dance dramas that are listed under the 1962 Cultural Property Protection Law (CPPL) of the Korean government as "Important Intangible Cultural Properties." Of the other mask dance dramas performed today, some are variants of the nationally recognized dramas, listed in a provincial equivalent of the CPPL. Most, however, are *madanggeuk*, new creations that emphasize drama and dialogue much like Western dramas, although they also incorporate traditional movement, vocabulary, and themes. There are fourteen nationally certified mask dance dramas, all shown in Figure 1 below. I have listed them according to the order in which they were certified as Important Intangible Cultural Properties. Although the order and year of listing is analytically troublesome, the earlier listed arts generally still had living performers and had already come to the attention of scholars at the time the law was passed, while arts listed later were more likely to have been resurrected.

In Figure 1 below, the names of the mask dance dramas clearly show regional variants. However, it is easier to understand the major variants of mask dance dramas by observing the placement of the dramas on a map. As you can see in the map shown in Figure 2, there are distinct groupings of dramas: three *talchum* in Hwanghae Province, two *sandae noli* near Seoul, three *ogwangdae* and two *yayu* in two different parts of Gyeongnam Province (*ogwangdae* and *yayu* are sometimes considered a single variant). The other mask dance dramas, Bukcheong Saja Noleum, Gangneung Gwanno Gamyeon'geuk, Deotboigi (from Namsadang), and Hahoi Byeolshin'gut Talnoli are quite distinct from one another and from the other dramas, for reasons discussed in this essay.

Figure 1: Mask Dance Dramas of Korea. Compiled by the author.

Cultural Property Number	Name	Year	Region	Other
2	Yangju Byeolsandae (양주별산대)	1964	Central Korea (Yangju in Gyeonggi Province)	Mask dance drama
3	Deotboigi (덧뵈기) of Namsadang (남사당)	1964	Namsadang was an itinerant variety show	One of the acts in Namsadang is a masked dance drama
6	Tongyeong Ogwangdae (통영오광대)	1964	The south coast (Tongyeong in Gyeongnam Province)	Mask dance drama
7	Goseong Ogwangdae (고성오광대)	1964	The south coast (Goseong in Gyeongnam Province)	Mask dance drama
13	Gangneung Gwanno Gamyeon'geuk (강릉 관노 가면극)	1967	The central east coast (Gangneung in Gangwon Province)	The mask dance drama is one part of the regional festival Gangneung Danoje (강릉단오제)
15	Bukcheong Saja Noleum (북청사자놀음)	1967	The northeast coast (in Hamgyeong Province, DPRK)	Mask dance drama
17	Bongsan Talchum (봉산탈춤)	1967	The central northwest (in Hwanghae Province, DPRK)	Mask dance drama
18	Dongnae Yayu (동래야류)	1967	The south coast (within Busan)	Mask dance drama
34	Gangnyeong Talchum (강령탈춤)	1970	The central northwest (in Hwanghae Province, DPRK)	Mask dance drama
43	Suyeong Yayu (수영야류)	1971	The south coast (within Busan)	Mask dance drama
49	Songpa Sandae Noli (송파산대놀이)	1973	Central Korea (within Seoul)	Mask dance drama
61	Eunyul Talchum (은율탈춤)	1978	The central northwest (Eunyul in Hwanghae Province, DPRK)	Mask dance drama
69	Hahoi Byeolshin'gut Talnoli (하회별신굿 탈놀이)	1980	The central south (near Andong in North Gyeongsang Province)	Mask dance drama
73	Gasan Ogwangdae (가산오광대)	1980	The south coast (Gasan in Gyeongnam Province)	Mask dance drama

Figure 2. Historic and Present Locations of Korea's Mask Dance Dramas. Compiled by the author.



History

The history of the mask dance dramas has been admirably researched. Yi Duhyon's work (I rely on the 1981 edition of his original 1964 text) set the standard for the topic. More recently, Jeon Kyungwook has concentrated his efforts on a thorough exposition of the history of the mask dance dramas. Jeon's text, originally in Korean, was published in abridged form in English in 2005. A basic overview of the history of mask dance drama on the peninsula always mentions the existence of the oldest mask—a shell mask uncovered in a midden heap in Dongsamdong (in Busan). Historians speculate that the performing arts were influenced by music, dance, and

drama from beyond the peninsula in the same way that sculpture, visual art, and clothing styles entered Korea along the Silk Road, often accompanied by major new philosophies, such as Buddhism and Confucianism. Although tomb paintings point to the long existence of masked play in Korea, Korean mask dance dramas are scarcely mentioned in the documentary record, even in the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910).

There are few records of the specific mask dance dramas listed in Figure 1 existing before the nineteenth century, although mask dance dramas are mentioned in passing in older texts, such as poems by Bak Je-ga (1750–1805) and Gang I-cheon (1769–1801). In the early Joseon period, performing arts were funded by the state, with mask dance dramas included in court and regional government performances under the auspices of the Sandae Dogam (a performance and ritual bureau). The Sandae Dogam was disbanded, however, due to the financial strain of the invasions in the early 1600s and perhaps also due to the frivolity-eschewing Confucian ideology of the government. When the Sandae Dogam was abolished, performers must have continued to perform—at least for major regional festivals—but without government oversight the dramas diverged from the Sandae Dogam model. Scholars agree that the major similarities in the basic themes of most mask dance dramas can be partially ascribed to the Sandae Dogam. Certainly the *talchum* and *sandae noli* variants include almost all the same major characters and story elements.

It is less clear what the *ogwangdae* and *yayu* variants owe to the Sandae Dogam. Scholars generally agree that traveling performers, similar to the Namsadang—who performed an abridged version of the *sandae noli* variant—were active in the region of present-day Busan. It is believed that local farmers decided to begin performing their own mask dance dramas when the traveling troupe could not meet local demand for holiday performances all around the southern region. Although traveling performers or resettlement may account for the common themes, local origin tales tell a different story. For example, according to legend, Tongyeong Ogwangdae was founded after a chest full of costumes and masks floated down the river to Tongyeong (Bak 2001). Certain dramas, however, show little or no relation to the Sandae Dogam model. Hahoi Byeolshin'gut Talnoli and other mask dance dramas such as Gangneung Gwanno Gamyeon'geuk were performed as part of village shamanic rituals, and their independent development is clear to even a casual observer.

Decline and Resurrection

Traditionally, the mask dance dramas were performed during important holidays, such as Baekjung, Dano, Daeboreum, and Chuseok. However, like most Korean traditional arts, mask dance performance declined significantly during the Japanese occupation (1910–1945). Although many lay publications place the blame for this decline directly at the feet of Japanese cultural policies that oppressed local expression, even stating that the Japanese forbade the dramas, the cessation in mask dance drama performance was mostly a by-product of Japanese policies. Performances were not explicitly forbidden until after the Sino-Japanese War began in 1937. Prior to 1938 the largest obstacle was that Japanese policies to promote Shintoism and control the flow of resources within Korea had eliminated many regional festivals and ceremonies commonly associated with folk arts like the mask dance dramas. The dramas were, however, increasingly performed in markets to attract business (a practice that began in the late Joseon dynasty). For example, Songpa Sandae Noli was performed in Songpa Market until a flood in 1925 destroyed the port around which the riverside market revolved (Yi BO 2006, 1985).

The first generation of Japanese folklorists traveled to Korea to record disappearing folk customs in the manner of Western salvage anthropologists. Soon after, early Korean folklorists began studying local traditions, including the mask dance dramas (Janelli 1986). It is due to the work of these folklorists that scholars today can write entire books comparing different transcriptions of dialogue from Bongsan Talchum,[1] that an entire set of Yangju Byeolsandae masks were taken to Japan,[2] and that we can examine photos of Hahoi Byeolshin'gut Talnoli from 1940.

The 1950s and 1960s

The subsequent division of the peninsula, civil war, and lean years before the Republic of Korea began to prosper economically resulted in a temporary halt to most performing arts activity. Some of the mask dance drama activities in the 1950s and early 1960s revolved around refugees from the north.[3] When President Rhee Syngman held the National Folk Arts Contest in 1958, establishing what would become a significant annual event, Bongsan Talchum performed and won a presidential award. After Park Chung Hee became president he established the Cultural Property Protection Law (CPPL) in 1962. One of the four areas of the law was

intangible cultural heritage: intangible arts such as music, dance, games, and rites were nominated for protection under the law, a process that required documentation and often a prize-winning performance at the National Folk Arts Contest. In 1964 the first seven arts were certified, including Namsadang, Yangju Byeolsandae, Tongyeong Ogwangdae, and Goseong Ogwangdae. Many of the mask dance dramas were included in the law only after a significant process of reconstruction, dependent in large part on the memories of elderly informants. Unfortunately, in the case of arts such as Gangnyeong Talchum there were no former performers available to assist in reconstruction. Thus, despite the best efforts of everyone involved, it is likely that the reconstructed version is an idealized and imagined version of what may have once been performed.[4]

The attempt to prohibit natural change under the guise of protecting the authenticity of Korean tradition has also impacted the mask dance dramas. Incremental changes in response to the environment exist in all arts and are part of a natural process of renewal. Even without the tumultuous twentieth century, the Korean mask dance dramas would never have been performed in the same way 150 years in the past as they are today. However, in the wake of the Japanese occupation there has been an attempt to return the arts to their pre-1910 format. As an example, Yi Hunsang, a historian who participated as a young college student in the resurrection of the mask dance drama Gasan Ogwangdae, explains that the art had incorporated a Japanese colonial police officer character. However, when Gasan Ogwangdae was submitted to the cultural Heritage Administration for certification under the CPPL, the character became a pre-Japanese Korean policeman instead (Yi HS 2010).

The 1970s and 1980s

Extra impetus for the protection and resurrection of rural traditions grew during the Minjung Pro-Democracy Movement.[5] The presidency of Park Chung Hee had reappropriated folk culture as a tool for nationalism, but the prodemocracy activists (who opposed Park) aligned themselves with the commoners of the past and began ardent study of folk traditions—such as mask dance dramas. In the 1960s people learned music and drama, feeling a connection to their roots and their past. Later on these performance skills were utilized in protests against the government. Such use could be as simple as drawing a crowd through the seemingly apolitical

activity of providing entertainment, then speechifying once the crowd grew too large for the police to quickly disperse. Eventually the protestors switched to working with *madanggeuk,* plays that were rooted in traditional Korean theatrical concepts but generally abandoned dance in favor of more complex (and potentially more politically pointed) dialogue.[6] The performance of *madanggeuk* has fluctuated in the years since Korea achieved democracy and continues today.

The Performers

The mask dance dramas have been repeatedly glossed as a folk art performed by the commoners. However, the historical reality is more complex. During the Joseon dynasty the *banin*, a professional entertainer class whose members also worked as butchers, performed the *sandae noli* (Jeon KW 2005, 2008). The *banin* was a slave class, but nationalist scholarship in Korea tends to minimize mention of the large number of slaves in Joseon-dynasty Korea.[7] Gangneung Gwanno Gamyeon'geuk was performed by the slaves of the local government, until government slaves were outlawed. The traveling performers of the Namsadang were similarly lowly, but commoners—mostly farmers—performed the majority of other mask dance dramas. Only in a few cases, such as Bongsan Talchum, did the performers include minor civil servants and merchants.[8]

In the nineteenth century, when mask dance dramas were performed by locals, the actors for a mask dance drama would be recruited a month or so before each performance, and they would be responsible for a wide range of preparations in addition to practicing the play. Sometimes, as in Suyeong Yayu, these actors were already members of a guild that was responsible for preparing festivities for the village. As the actors prepared they sometimes played drumming music and blessed individual homes in exchange for payment (in rice or cloth) that could be used to obtain the necessary paraphernalia for the production. Those who had never participated before would fill the minor roles, and the most articulate repeat actors would act the coveted parts. All of the parts in the dramas were acted by men until late in the Joseon dynasty. At that point, in a few cases, such as Bongsan Talchum, noted beauties (sometimes shamans, sometimes *gisaeng*, the Korean equivalent of geishas) were recruited for roles like that of the winsome beauty Somu. In this case they would perform with the mask worn like a hat atop their

heads, and the audience would increase in size as locals seized an opportunity to stare at the young woman.

In modern Korea the fourteen mask dance dramas listed in Figure 1 are performed by preservation associations that are responsible for teaching and performing the dramas. They receive modest funds from the government to run their office, as well as subsidized rehearsal and office space. Once a year the Cultural Heritage Administration[9] also provides a lump sum to be used in a grand full-length performance; funds from local and national programs allow other performances during the year. The members of the preservation association have ranks that roughly correspond with the length of participation, and members of the two highest ranks also receive small stipends. There are female members in each of the preservation associations, and in some they take most of the female roles and even a few male roles. However, in other groups it is still customary to have men act certain female parts, as this may add to the comedic effect.

Characters in Korean Mask Dance Dramas

The characters in the Korean mask dance dramas are "types" rather than specific individuals. Therefore they do not have names like the characters in a Western play (Romeo Montague), but are known by a title, or a distinguishing descriptive nickname. The important character of the old wife or old grandmother is called (often using dialectical Korean) "granny" or "big momma." As can be seen in the photographs, several *yangban* (upper-class literati) are known by the colors of their clothing in the dramas in which they also represent the five directions (Red Yangban, Blue Yangban, and so on). In some dramas less important *yangban* may be known simply as Third Yangban or Fourth Yangban. The servant character is almost always called Malddugi, no matter where on the peninsula the mask dance drama is from, and the young female shamans (even when there are more than one in the drama) are called Somu.

Masks

The masks in Korean mask dance dramas are made out of a wide variety of materials, but the majority are made from papier-mâché. Formed on molds, these masks are made from Korean traditional *hanji* mulberry paper. They may have fur, hair, twine, or other materials glued on; many also sport hats that are attached to the mask. In some cases, such as the lion mask, the

mask has a superstructure made from a basket. Other masks are made from gourds and from paper. The masks for Gasan Ogwangdae, crafted from thick paper folded in half and painted, are particularly distinctive. The masks from Hahoi Byeolshin'gut Talnoli were kept in the village shrine and were not burned between performances; this set of masks is the only set carved entirely from wood. The masks from all other dramas were customarily burned at the end of the show to dispel any associated spirits.

The appearance of the masks is generally quite exaggerated, with large features and vibrant colors in order to be clearly visible from a distance. In general characters with white masks are beautiful, pure, or sit around inside (like *yangban*), while dark masks belong to the old and those who have had a difficult life, and red masks are associated with drunkenness. Many characters have ugly or misshapen faces; the more criticized in the drama the worse their visage will be. *Yangban* often have harelips or misplaced features, and old monks will be dark and are often pockmarked (other characters may insult them for their dripping pustules!).

Most masks are attached to a hood that covers the hair of the player. The performers wear a white headband with a pad on their forehead inside the mask. There are also usually pieces of foam glued to the inside of the chin and on the cheeks of some masks. These pieces increase comfort and airflow between the face and the mask, permitting the straps to be tightly cinched at the base of the neck without too much discomfort. With the exception of a few starring roles, the performers constantly rotate through the different parts; hence for those with unusually large or small faces the eye holes are sometimes poorly placed.

Crucial Elements of the Mask Dance Dramas

The mask dance dramas have four major themes. This holds true whether the drama is performed full length over four hours (as in the *talchum* and *sandae* variants) or when it is completed in a little more than an hour (as in the *ogwangdae* and *yayu* variants).

Humor

The mask dance dramas are full of humor—in fact, most of the content is humorous. The humor most often spoken of by scholars is satirical in nature. The upper class *yangban*, for example, are lampooned. Through dialogue the knowledge of this educated class is shown to be

lacking and their greed and ordinary human desire to get drunk, consort with women, and enjoy festivities (attend mask dance dramas!) is brought to the fore. In almost all mask dance dramas it is a servant who shows up the *yangban*, a formula that provided a playful release of tensions within a stratified society. The use of drama or theater to release this type of tension has existed in many societies throughout history. The mask dance drama scholar Cho Dongil has examined the audience reaction to mask dance drama performance at length and advanced a well-known thesis that the mask dance dramas provide a cathartic release (the Korean term is *shinmyeongpuli*). The mask dance dramas permitted the temporary upending of established power relations to permit unequal society to endure (Bakhtin 1984).[10]

Recurring jokes with the *yangban* as the dummy include (in the *sandae* and *talchum* variants) the process of securing lodging for three *yangban* who have come to town to watch the mask dance drama. Their servant explains that their inn (which is really a pigpen) has a door to the sky and ushers them offstage to the "inn," calling "*du du du*" and shaking his whip at their heels. The audience knows that *du* is the sound you make when you drive pigs. In the *yayu* and *ogwangdae* variants a *yangban* loses all his composure when he meets a strange creature. This creature (*bibi* or *yeongno*) terrifies the *yangban* as it explains in Tongyeong Ogwangdae, "I have eaten ninety-nine yangban; if I eat one more, I can go up to heaven!" and chases him around the stage. In some plays (such as Suyeong Yayu) the *yangban* is consumed; in others (such as Goseong Ogwangdae) the *yangban* argues his way out of danger.

All the humor is not about the *yangban* and their failings of intellect and improper or undignified actions. There are many other types of humor within the mask dance dramas as well. Much humor is related to physical bodily processes—there is always, for example, a character that checks for onlookers and, finding none, relieves him- or herself. There is sex,[11] labor, childbirth, death, farts, beautification processes, clothing malfunctions, looking up skirts, and picking of lice, and several characters are smelly. There are physically or mentally challenged characters in the mask dance dramas who run around the stage doing comical things (like poking *yangban* in the butt) or dance, their arms and legs akimbo, sometimes with a giant hunch on their back, like the character Ggopju from Bukcheong Saja Noleum. Much of this humor is earthy, and it generally needs no dialogue: characters are pushed, they fall, they pull at each other or fall

over each other. Sometimes words are part of the joke, such as a son finding that the one part of his mother's corpse that is still warm is the place that "father likes the most."

A fair amount of the humor has to do with who is performing the action. When a monk plays a card game it is funny because it is against his precepts; for another character the same behavior would be less amusing. Indeed, the monks bear the brunt of many jokes, if not as many as the *yangban*. There are three reasons why monks receive this treatment. First, there were political reasons to lampoon the monks. During the Goryeo dynasty (918–1392), the monks held enormous power, and the clergy was very large. The Joseon dynasty (1392–1910) was partially predicated on the moral superiority of Confucianism over the supposed corruption in Buddhism.[12] The mask dance dramas, originally performed under the auspices of the Sandae Dogam entertainment office, could have partially filled a government propaganda role. Second, in the early Joseon many temples were forcibly closed, and monks were abruptly kicked out and forced to live life as regular citizens. Lacking clothing other than robes, robe-attired former monks may have engaged in many activities with which monks were not habitually associated, leading to criticism. Third, it is human nature to expose the failings of those who claim moral superiority. With their status reduced to the level of shamans, butchers, and slaves, monks were even safer to criticize than the *yangban*.

The way that monks are treated in the mask dance dramas varies greatly. In the *ogwangdae* variant there is only one old monk who dances his way into the heart of a woman (or two). In other mask dance dramas, there may be a group of monks—they might seek to pay a woman to entertain them, or be drunk (in Bongsan Talchum, they are so drunk that one monk has a hard time getting up off the floor), or they may lose a lady they have seduced to a younger (and also morally questionable) suitor. Even a monkey will criticize the old monk who has forsaken his vows by seeking companionship with a woman (or two). This excerpt from Songpa Sandae Noli demonstrates the humor involved in these scenes where the monks are reprimanded and corrected.

Instructor:	That's right, you're monks! And if you're monks should you have red faces from drinking or should you be praying to Buddha and chanting sutras?[13]
Monks:	We should behave as monks...
Instructor:	Ah-ha-ha! [Brings the disciplinary paddle up to rest on his shoulder]. I see you understand. You are not adulterers or truants, but monks. So take my words to

heart. No more pleading illness to get out of your duties. From now we'll correct your mind and start studying sutras. If there is someone who is wrong, I'll give him a smack with the paddle. You understand?

Monks: Yes!

Instructor: Repeat after me and memorize this. *Namuamitabul* [a prayer to Amitabha Buddha].

Monks: *Namuaebitabul.* [They change *ami*, which sounds like "mother" to *aebi*, which sounds like "father."]

Instructor: *Namuamitabul.*

Monks: *Namuhalaebitabul*. [This time they say *halaebi*, or "grandfather."]

Instructor: *Namuamitabul.*

Monks: *Namuhalmidotabul.* ["Also, grandmother."]

Instructor: Be quiet, all of you! [The scene ends with more scolding, and the instructor smacks each of the bad monks on the buttocks with the paddle as they leave the stage.]

In this short excerpt the audience can enjoy some clever word play and feel their own superiority, because they could do correctly what the monks cannot seem to do. At the end, when the monks are disciplined by their master, the message is clear that monks must behave a certain way, and that chanting should be taken seriously.

Ritual Elements

Most of the mask dance dramas include ritual elements for purification and warding off evil. Just the presence of a lion, or other scary creature (such as the *yangban*-eating bird Bibi, the strange lion-like *juji* from Hahoi's drama, or the dark-faced monks from the *talchum* variant) was thought to scare away spirits that might bedevil the community. When performed full length, the mask dance dramas also include shamanistic framing elements. The shamanic element at the beginning of the mask dance drama is a ceremony called *gosa* performed by the players and guests before an altar, with the masks arranged behind the altar.[14] A traditional final element includes burning the masks (or returning them to a shrine in the case of mask dance dramas such as Hahoi Byeolsin'gut Talnoli), and whether the masks are burned or not, there is a shamanic ceremony at the end of almost every mask dance drama. This comes in the form of a funeral conducted within the final act of the play (generally for the old grandmother, although in Gangneung Gwanno Gamyeon'geuk, it is the young maiden who has died). These ceremonies may include large funeral parades, a makeshift shamanic rite with the daughter of the deceased playing the part of the shaman, or an elaborate shamanic rite such as in Eunyul Talchum, in

which the play's highlight is a long song recited by the shaman as she dances, shakes bells, and splits a cloth—just as shamans do in regular life.

An early scene in each mask dance drama contains elements meant to purify the performance space. Later in the play are other elements that are meant to scare away evil spirits, both from the performance and from the village where it was being held. In the *sandae noli* and *talchum* plays purification is accomplished through the dance of novice monks, who bow in each direction. In *yayu* and *ogwangdae* plays there is a scene with five characters who are simultaneously five generals representing the five directions and five *yangban* (referred to as five clowns in the title—*o* means five, *gwangdae* means clown). They bow in each direction, each wearing a color corresponding with a different direction (yellow, the center, is always the leader).

Positive Buddhist elements appear in the mask dance dramas as well, not just in the dances of the novice monks mentioned above, but also in the form of the lion. The lion, a creature associated with Buddhism, was not endemic to Korea. When a lion (or two) appears in the mask dance dramas it has the power to scare away evil and represent the Buddha positively. Bukcheong Saja Noleum has no material critical of monks, and the entire cast of players recites a Buddhist mantra to pray for the (successful) healing of the sick lion under the guidance of a monk. Here is an abridged scene from Bongsan Talchum:

Lion Driver:	You lion! Listen carefully to what I say. I want to know the reason you came down. Did you hear that we, all monks, tricked our master—who was devoting himself to prayer for Buddha—into apostasy? So you came down to punish us? Are you going to eat all of us?
Lion:	[Nods. He is ready to jump on the Lion Driver.]
Lion Driver:	[Scared]. I'm in great trouble! [...] We regret that we've behaved terribly. But we're now going to devote ourselves to prayer to become good disciples of Buddha. Can you forgive us?"
Lion:	[Pleased, nods and dances with the Lion Driver].[15]

This dialogue makes it clear that the lion has come after the dance of a fallen monk to show the benevolent forgiveness of the Buddha. The passage cannot be interpreted as against Buddhism, as the final conclusion of the scene is that Buddha will forgive those who have strayed (now that they promise to be good monks again).

Some scholars assert that there are remnants of ancient fertility rituals in the mask dance dramas as well. In the first scene of Hahoi Byeolshin'gut Talnoli, Gakshi (a bride) dances on the

shoulders of another player, and in the following scene two *juji* (very strange-looking lions), one male and one female, dance together. These scenes have been interpreted in multiple ways, but certainly the second scene seems to show copulation. In Gangneung Gwanno Gamyeon'geuk the fertility meaning is even clearer in the dance of two characters called Jangjamari. These two, with their giant swollen bellies, are dressed in a large sheet of fabric, the color of tilled earth, decorated with rice seedlings or seaweed, appropriate to the early summer transplanting season at which the drama was performed.

The Struggle between the Wife and the Concubine

Most of the mask dance dramas include a scene where the old wife (who is generally old and ugly and has lost her children) meets the young concubine (who is coquettish and sexy in brightly colored clothing) on the arm of her long-absent husband. This scene remains very popular, as the audience can easily relate to it. Although it is comedic, it is tragic as well, since in most cases the old wife winds up dead (sometimes after she has inadvertently caused the death of the concubine's infant). Many in the audience identify with the tough but long-suffering old woman, as male infidelity has long been an accepted element of Korean society (until the 1990s, infidelity on the woman's part was grounds for legal prosecution). It is worth mentioning, however, that the old man in this scene is a *yangban* (if perhaps not a successful one) or he would not have a concubine, nor would he wear the clothing that he does. Modern audiences may not notice the old man's status, but during the Joseon dynasty, the inability of the *yangban* to handle his domestic affairs with propriety would have been an important element of this scene. The old woman is usually the only woman in the mask dance dramas given speaking lines, and her dialogue is typically sharp and biting. Sometimes, however, the concubine also speaks, in which case the dialogue quickly heats up, as in this example from Eunyul Talchum:

Concubine: My dear husband! Who is this old bitch beggar woman, saying what she is saying? Let's go, husband, let's go home.[16]

Old Wife: You, bitch! This is my husband. You are a nobody to my husband.

[Malddugi and Choegwari enter and witness the scene.]

Concubine: [Furious] You tell me! I can tell, even after just one little glance at you. You are a beggar woman who has been following a cauldron vendor for some grains of leftover rice. And you are flirting with my husband!
Old Wife: You, nonentity. This is my old husband, not yours. [The two women fight. There are several exchanges of dialogue as Malddugi and Choegwari decide to moderate. Their solution is to test the two women on their knowledge of their husband. The young concubine describes nothing interesting but the old wife claims that her husband has unique genitalia.]
Malddugi/Choegwari: [Approaching the old husband to examine him] Show us your thing.
Old Husband: [Resisting] What do you think you are doing? Who are you anyway? You are not judges or officials. You have no right to take a look at my thing!
Old Wife: [Rushing toward her husband and pulling his pants down]. Here it is!
Malddugi/Choegwari: [Nodding] Old woman! There is no doubt that this old man is your husband.
Old Wife: [Pulling his hand] My old husband, come home with me.
Concubine: [Jumping on the old wife] Husband! [The two women fight. The concubine kicks the old wife to death.]
Old Husband: [Rushes to his old wife, checks her pulse, and listens to her heartbeat. Certain of her death, he cries.] Oi, oi, oi... [Turns to the concubine]. My dear young wife. My old wife is dead. They say, "No enemy in the face of death." My poor old wife! We must offer her a death rite and placate her murdered soul so it can go to nirvana. Hurry! Go and fetch a shaman.

Audiences are very sympathetic to the old woman, who exhibits nothing more than proper wifely concern for her husband as she searches for him across the peninsula. He, on the other hand, ignores his responsibility to his wife and their children while sightseeing, partying, and finding a "little wife" to warm his bed. This conflict is resolved when the *yangban* responds by organizing a proper ceremony after the old woman has died.

Daily Life

Finally, though it may seem quite obvious, daily life of the Joseon dynasty was reflected in the mask dance dramas. In addition to portraying aspects of life from birth to death (and the rituals associated with both), there are motions that are said to reflect those of common farming activities, and countless tasks are carried out during the dramas—from weaving, to hunting, to butchering an ox, to washing, to educating children. There is rich ethnographic detail to be extracted from the mask dance dramas, if now filtered through generations of performers who have never had a loom in their own home.

Categorization of Mask Dance Dramas

Most scholars categorize mask dance dramas in one of two ways. The first is to talk about variants such as *talchum, sandae, ogwangdae,* and *yayu,* as I have in this essay. However, this schema leaves out Hahoi Byeolshin'gut Talnoli, Gangneung Gwanno Gamyeon'geuk, Bukcheong Saja Noleum, and the Deotboigi from Namsadang. Other scholars dispense of the variant types terminology and instead refer to the dramas geographically, as northern (the three *talchum* and Bukcheong Saja Noleum), central (sometimes including Deotboigi and Gangneung's drama with the *sandae* variant), and southern (lumping Hahoi Byeolshin'gut Talnoli together with the *ogwangdae* and *yayu* dramas). Unfortunately, this schema is fundamentally flawed, because although Deotboigi may seem to be a simplified version of certain scenes from *sandae noli*, the other three plays are unique and should not be lumped together with plays in any other dramas.

Differences in Movements

The geographical classification is often accompanied by a discussion of how the movements in the south are smaller and slower because of the warmer weather, whereas the movements in the north are large and masculine. This simplistic discussion of dance movements in the dramas is only possible because most scholars have not learned northern, central, and southern dramas as I have. Although it is true that the motions of many *talchum* characters are large and aggressive, the virile characters (such as Malddugi) have highly athletic movements in all the dramas, no matter where they are from. In fact, the *ogwangdae* variant employs less dialogue and there are more stretches of extended dance in these dramas. Extended dance scenes are physically taxing and must either proceed to a climax or maintain a somewhat slower pace to preserve the energy of the players throughout the scene. A signature character of the *ogwangdae* is the leper; overcoming his disease through his dance, the scene proceeds to a climax. Another character from the *ogwangdae* is Bibi (sometimes called *yeongno*), a creature from heaven that bedevils the *yangban*. Bibi, however, does not dance slowly—he runs to catch the *yangban*, jumping through the air to pounce on his victim again and again. The dance movements of this character are broken by dialogue between Bibi and the *yangban*, who is pleading for his life. Even with such breaks, the performers would hardly agree that southern mask dance dramas use

smaller, gentler motions. In the *sandae*, variant dance movements characteristically keep the heels on the ground with less extension to tiptoe, resulting in a more sedate overall impression—if scholars asserted that the central dramas were less energetic, I would be more inclined to agree!

There is relatively little scholarship devoted to the dance motions of the dramas, with the exception of teaching manuals; however, dance scholars have published on Korean folk dance with chapters on mask dance dramas.[17] There are also unpublished dissertations and theses that go into more detail on nonverbal aspects of various mask dance dramas and a few journal articles or book chapters; among these, several chapters in a book edited by Chae Heewan (2009) are particularly worth reading.

Differences in Dialogue

Gangneung's drama is entirely nonverbal, while the *talchum* and *sandae* variants have more complex dialogue and more dialogue in general (partially due to the longer running time). The *talchum* variant, in particular, employs more dialogue using Chinese root vocabulary and allusions drawn from Chinese literature (references to locations, events, and people). Although slippage toward standard Seoul-dialect Korean occurred at the time of certification, most of the mask dance dramas still preserve some of the dialectical expressions native to their region.

Most scholarship has focused on the story or, more specifically, on the dialogue of the mask dance dramas. For these stories, generally performed only once or twice per year, emphasis on the dialogue is problematic at best. The mask dance dramas were orally transmitted; this was unavoidable as very few participants were literate. In the preliterate era each act proceeded from one important element of the story to the next, sensitive to the audience response, but the specific dialogue employed shifted constantly, with only the most popular jokes and punchlines surviving for multiple renditions. These oral narratives included plentiful repetition and patterns in the dialogue, which made it easier for the players to memorize their lines. The dialogues were not transcribed from the memory of elderly informants until the late 1930s, in the earliest case (Bongsan Talchum), and most were not transcribed until research began to list them for protection under the CPPL (in the 1960s). Therefore, the dialogue we hear today in a mask dance drama performance can be considered only a stale approximation of the constantly shifting dialogue of the past. In the heyday of mask dance drama performance in the late nineteenth

century, the dialogues were responsive to the audience and local concerns. Today, however, it would be "inauthentic" to include a reference to the current president, a well-known scandal, or social trends, whereas the nineteenth century equivalent was commonplace and part of the fun.[18]

Finally, it is important to note that in the past no one had pin microphones under their masks, so the mask dance drama dialogues were not always audible. Mask dance dramas were performed outdoors, and the players had to shout through the masks and drown out the noise of the bonfire lighting the scene, the conversation of inattentive audience members, and other environmental background noise. A literal reading of the existing transcribed dialogue ignores how many words were actually audible to the audience, artificially increasing the importance of the individual lines.

Different Characters

The mask dance dramas are generally made up of independent scenes (the same mask is not necessarily the same character from one scene to the next), and each scene is a stand-alone story. This means that each scene can communicate a different message without worrying about continuity. As an example, in act 11 of Songpa Sandae Noli, an old woman and man are reunited but argue because the husband has a concubine. After the old woman leaves, a handsome police inspector steals the young concubine. In act 12 an old man and woman are reunited, they argue, and the old woman dies. After she dies her husband calls the children and a shaman and they hold a funeral ceremony. The two scenes are understood as containing different characters and communicating different messages, and hence there is no confusion.

Two mask dance dramas are different: Gangneung Gwanno Gamyeon'geuk is a single continuous story. In Bukcheong Saja Noleum the play is framed through the eyes of a *yangban* who visits Bukcheong and is shown the marvelous local entertainment by his servant, one act at a time. He watches sword dancers, hand drum dancers, and of course the dance of lions, one after the other.

Despite the similarities in the dramas, many beloved characters appear in only a few mask dance dramas. For example, the leper often plays a starring role in *ogwangdae* plays. The lion is the symbol of Bukcheong Saja Noleum, although different lions appear in the *talchum* as well. The *talchum* plays, however, tend to be represented by a group of eight naughty monks.

Finally no one can forget Hahoi Byeolshin'gut Talnoli's two hysterically funny servants, Choraengi and Imae.

Different Music

Another difference between the mask dance dramas is the accompanying music. There are two types of music with mask dance dramas: *pungmul* drumming music and a type of ensemble (*samhyeon yukgak*) including two *piri* (oboe)*, haegeum* (fiddle)*, daegeum* (flute)*, janggu* (hourglass drum)*,* and *buk* (barrel drum). The *sandae* and *talchum* variants use *samhyeon yukgak,* but all the other mask dance dramas use *pungmul* music in the type common in that region, with the exception of Bukcheong Saja Noleum. Bukcheong's mask dance drama prominently features the *tongso*—a large vertical bamboo flute, only used in folk music in this one case, that is more commonly heard in China than in Korea. Only one book, by a senior member of Bongsan Talchum, treats mask dance drama music in detail. [19]

Conclusion

The academic study of mask dance dramas in Korea is no longer fashionable, as it was in the wake of the prodemocracy movement, yet there are many facets of the mask dance dramas that remain to be studied. Through this essay and the accompanying photographs I hope that I have been able to stimulate your interest in these fascinating dramas.

CedarBough Saeji, PhD, is a researcher at the Center for Korean Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Glossary

Korean	**Romanized Korean**	**English Translation**
비비	Bibi	A mystical creature from heaven, like Yeongno, who appears bird-like. He wants to eat *yangban*.
북	Buk	Barrel drum
대금	Daegeum	Transverse bamboo flute
꽹과리	Ggwaenggwari	Small gong
해금	Haegeum	Two-string fiddle similar to the Chinese *erhu*
장구	Janggu (colloquially장고Janggo)	Hourglass drum

징	Jing	Large gong
주지	Juji	Strange "lions" in Hahoi Byeolshin'gut Talnoli who do not look anything like lions.
마당극	Madanggeuk	A modernized form of the mask dance dramas that generally includes more dialogue and less dance.
말뚝이	Malddugi	The servant of the *yangban*
피리	Piri	Small oboe-like reed instrument made of bamboo
소무	Somu	A beautiful and seductive female shaman
통소	Tongso	Large horizontal bamboo flute
풍물 also 농악		Traditional performance music in rural communities coupled with shamanic rituals and other performance arts, or used to encourage group labor. *Nongak* was the accepted term in the past but *pungmul* is now preferred.
양반	Yangban	The upper class, also a character in mask dance dramas
영노	Yeongno	Yeongno is a character who, like Bibi, wants to eat *yangban*.

Notes

1. Specifically Choi (2006).
2. Chan E. Park recounts how the Japanese bought a set of masks in Yangju before they could be burned and then paid other (amateurs) to perform using the masks before taking the masks back to Japan (2003: 99–100).
3. Hometown associations are common in Korea to provide support for people from one community while they reside in another. These associations remain active today, mostly to support the many migrants to Seoul from other provinces in Korea.
4. For more about the reconstruction of Gangnyeong Talchum, see Yang JS (2004). For those who do not read Korean, Yang briefly mentions the situation regarding reconstruction of the art in his 2003 publication (80–82).
5. For more on this topic, see Lee NH (2007) and Yang JS (2003).
6. There has been a lot of excellent scholarship on *madanggeuk*. Perhaps my favorite account is the book on the Minjung by Lee NH (2007), but other good sources include Yang JS (1988), Lee YM (1997), Kim KO (1997), and Kim YE (2010).
7. For a more detailed explanation of slavery in the Joseon dynasty, see Palais (1995).
8. In my master's thesis I argued that the presence of these more connected and powerful members of the community with the performance troupe is one reason that the mask dance drama has consistently been the most professional and successful from the nineteenth century until the present day.
9. The Cultural Heritage Administration (Munhwajae Cheong) has changed its name several times. Most previous scholarship refers to it as the Bureau of Cultural Properties or other

similar names (Office of Cultural Properties), translated from the long-standing Korean name Munhwajae Gwalliguk.

10. I have included two of Cho DI's publications on this topic in the bibliography (1997, 2006). The Korean book is far superior to the English article.
11. Sexual acts in the mask dance dramas today are much less ribald and obvious to the audience than they once were. This is both due to changing ideas of propriety and because what was understood to be sexual intercourse to an audience 100 years ago may not be "read" in the same way today.
12. Some historians of Buddhism have argued that the wide-scale reports of corruption in Buddhism is an example of "winner's history." Regardless, it is widely known that monasteries controlled ever-larger amounts of the country and that they were not taxed. By taking back the holdings of the monasteries, the fledgling Joseon dynasty was able to amass the resources needed to firmly grasp power for the new monarch and his supporters. For more information, see Lancaster and Yu (2002).
13. My translation from Yi BO (2006: 137–138).
14. I have seen this referred to as a *talje* in Cho OK (1988: 167).
15. From the translation of Cho OK (1988: 268).
16. From an uncredited translation formerly available on the website of Eunyul Talchum. I have cleaned up some awkwardness in the English.
17. The best of these, by Jeong Byeongho, is only in Korean (1995). Unfortunately the English-language books that address Korean dance tend to stop at an exhaustive one-by-one description. Lee BO (2008) at least explains overall dance aesthetic concepts, but this publication is not focused on mask dance dramas.
18. An example of such an element that survives today from Yangju Byeolsandae appears in the speech of Togki, the old grandfather's son. In the drama Shinhalabi explains, "I have a prodigal son. But it has been many years since he went to Manchuria to work with a railroad construction company." Quotation from the translation of Cho OK (1988: 98).
19. See Kim HS (2006).

References

Bak, Jintae. 2001. *Tongyeong Ogwangdae*. Seoul: Hwasan Munhwa.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1984. *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Chae, Heewan, ed. 2009. *Chum, Tal, Madang, Mom, Mihak Gongbujip* [A Compilation of Aesthetic Studies of Dance, Mask, the Village Sqaure, and the Body]. Seoul: Minsokwon.

Cho, Dong-il. 1997. "A Comparative Analysis of Katharsis, Rasa, and Shinmyong P'uri Theatres." *Korea Journal* 37 (3): 63–77.

———. 2006. *Talchumui Wonri Shinmyeongpuli* [Talchum's Origin in Expression of Shinmyeong]. Seoul: Jishiksaneopsa.

Cho, Oh-Kon. 1988. *Traditional Korean Theatre*. Fremont, CA: Asian Humanities Press.

Choi, Changju. 2006. *Bongsan Talchum Geukbon Yeongu* [A Comparative Study of Pongsan Tal-Chum Plays]. Seoul: Em-Aed.

Janelli, Roger. 1986. "The Origins of Korean Folklore Scholarship." *Journal of American Folklore* 99 (391): 24–49.

Jeon, Kyungwook. 2005. *Korean Mask Dance Dramas: Their History and Structural Principles*. Seoul: Youlhwadang.
———. 2008. *Traditional Performing Arts of Korea*. Seoul: Korea Foundation.
Jeong, Byeongho. 1995. *Han'gukui Minsokchum* [Korean Folk Dance]. Seoul: Samseong Publishing.
Kim, Hoseok. 2006. *Bongsan Talchum Eumakbon* [Bongsan Talchum's Music]. Seoul: Minsokwon.
Kim, Kwangok. 1997. "The Role of Madanggeuk in Contemporary Korea's Popular Culture Movement." *Korea Journal* 37 (3): 5–21.
Kim, Young-eun. 2010. "Madanggeuki Suyonghan Jeontongjeok Miuishikgwa Geu Eungyong [Traditional Aesthetic Awareness Adopted by Madanggeuk and Its Application]." Inmunhak Yeon-gu [Humanities Journal] 80:71–99.
Lancaster, Lewis, and C.S. Yu, eds. 2002. *Buddhism in the Early Choson: Suppression and Transformation*. Fremont, CA: Asian Humanities Press.
Lee, Byoung-ok [Yi Byeong-ok]. 2008. *Korean Folk Dance*. Seoul: Korea Foundation.
Lee, Namhee. 2007. *Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
Lee, Youngmee. 1997. "Korean Traditional Theatre and Madanggeuk Theatre." *Korea Journal* 37 (3): 40–62.
Palais, James B. 1995. "A Search for Korean Uniqueness." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 55 (2): 409–425.
Park, Chan E. 2003. *Voices from the Straw Mat: Toward an Ethnography of Korean Story Singing*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
Yang, Jongsung. 1988. "Madanggeuk: The Rejuventation of Mask Dance Drama Festivals as Sources of Social Criticism." Unpublished M.A. thesis. Bloomington: Indiana University.
———. 2003. *Cultural Property Protection Policy in Korea: Intangible Cultural Properties and Living National Treasures*. Seoul: Jinmoondang.
———. 2004. *Gangnyeong Talchum Jaryojip* [Gangnyeong Mask Dance Drama Sourcebook]. Seoul: Minsokwon.
Yi, Byeong-ok. 1985. *Songpa Sandae Noli Yeon-Gu* [Research on Songpa Sandae Noli]. Seoul: Shinmudang.
———. 2006. *Songpa Sandae Noli Yeon'gu: Seoului Talchum* [Songpa Sandae Noli Research: Seoul's Mask Dance]. Seoul: Jinmoodang.
Yi, Duhyon. 1964 (1981). *Han'gukui Talchum* [Korean Mask Dance Dramas]. Seoul: Iljisa.
Yi, Hunsang. 2010. "Talgeundaegi Muhyeongmunhwajae Jeongchaekgwa Minsok Munhwaui Jeongchihak" [Reflections on Intangible Cultural Asset Policy and Folk Culture Politics in the Postmodern Era]. *Bigyo Munhwa Yeon'gu* [Comparative Cultural Research] 16 (2): 31–69.
———. 2012. "Reflections on the Intangible Cultural Heritage Policy and Folk Culture Politics in the Postmodern Era: An Autoethnographic Account of the Reconstruction of Kasan Ogwangdae." *Korean Social Sciences Review* 1 (1): 1–35.