



WOMEN
IN ASIAN
PERFORMANCE

Aesthetics and politics

Edited by Arya Madhavan

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AN UNEXPECTED VOICE

Performance, gender and protecting tradition in Korean mask dance dramas¹

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Introduction

The Republic of Korea has a rich tradition of mask dance dramas. Each of the dramas combines story, dance motions, masks and live music as outlined in previous publications on the mask dance dramas, their history, and their meaning.² Unlike some of the arts presented at the court by government slaves, in private by courtesans called *gisaeng*, or within the context of shamanic ritual, every character in the mask dramas – including sexy young shamans, old grandmothers, and midwives – was originally performed by men. The Neo-Confucian culture of the Joseon Dynasty placed a high value on propriety, which generally limited performance by women to special, private events. Consequently, women did not appear in mask dance dramas, which were performed in the *madang* (village festival site). The only known exception is the mask dance drama group Bongsan Talchum. At the very end of the Joseon Dynasty, this drama was performed as a market stage show and is reported to have included a beautiful *gisaeng* in the role of Sadang, a character who sings with the mask perched on top of her head (Seo, 1988, 28). This added an extra draw for the show – a beautiful and musically trained songstress.

The mask dance dramas that are still performed were mostly developed during the late Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910). The Republic of Korea's practice of certifying and safeguarding, and to some extent subsidizing, the intangible cultural heritage of the nation extends back to the 1962 *munhwajae bohobeop* (Cultural Property Protection Law). This law, the second in the world to actively protect intangible heritage, emphasizes pedagogical transmission and demonstration of traditional skills. The mask dance dramas, along with other Korean arts, were researched and in some cases largely reconstructed amid conflicting interests and tense negotiations to serve

as representative “authentic” heritage (Hangukminsokhaksuldancheyonhapoi, 2010; Howard, 2006; Jeong, 2008; Yang, 2003; Yim, 2003). Today they are protected either as *jungyo mulhyeong munhwajae* (important intangible cultural properties) or as *si/do mulhyeong munhwajae* (regional intangible cultural properties). My observations and ethnographic research have focused on the nationally certified mask dance drama groups such as Bongsan Talchum (from Hwanghae Province in present-day North Korea), Songpa Sandae Noli and Yangju Byeolsandae (from the Seoul area), Hahoe Byeolsin'gut Talnoli (from North Gyeongsang Province), Goseong Ogwangdae (from the south coast) and Dongnae Yayu (from the Busan area), which illustrate this chapter. All are principally comedies – they include lively music, dancer-actors in masks and were traditionally performed at festivities marking turning points in the agricultural year.

When a mask dance drama is certified for inclusion on the list of protected culture, the *wonhyeong* (archetypal form) of the mask dance drama is fixed. From that day forward, the mask dance dramas are to be performed without any substantial alteration from this supposedly authoritative version, an idea critiqued by Yang Jongsung (2003), Keith Howard (2006), Jeong Sujin (2010) and others. Tensions ebb and flow in different arts due to issues such as improper *wonhyeong* revealed by subsequent research (Howard, 2012; Yang, 2004), and artists/groups who resist controlling efforts by officials at the Cultural Heritage Administration (Yang, 2003). At the time of certification (1964–80), a few mask dance drama groups included women. In an atmosphere of near-extinction of these traditional performances, willing female participants were welcomed by some groups, although then (as now) women mostly performed non-speaking, fully clothed female characters.

In the Republic of Korea in 2015, the ways women are – and are not – involved in mask dance drama reveals intersecting issues of traditionalism, national representation, authenticity, gender and women's empowerment. Furthermore, there is dissonance between the sexism considered acceptable in pre-modern society and contemporary government support for what could be seen as disempowerment of women in the contemporary world. Here I sketch the changing role of women in mask dance dramas and ask what the implications of this change are for the future of the Korean mask dance dramas. In this chapter I seek to answer several questions about the participation of women. How have Korean women conformed to or resisted the cultural expectations and social norms that have created a barrier between them and participation in mask dance dramas? How has this changed over time? What do contemporary mask dance drama performers think about the participation of women in performance? How does the participation of women challenge notions of authenticity in Korea's nationally protected cultural heritage?

Changing roles for women in Korean society

With the exception of courtesans, female performers in pre-modern Korea were of low social standing. As Korea modernized, men lost their position of primacy

in public performance, both within Korean tradition and increasingly in Western and hybrid forms (Atkins, 2010; Killick, 2010; Maliangkay, 2007). The last century witnessed a drastic shift in Korean women's performance participation. However, just as other scholars have noted the enduring connections between class, status, gender and roles in the performing arts elsewhere (Doss-Quinby et al., 2001; La Rue, 1997; Najera-Ramírez, 2002; Silverman, 1996, 2012; Van Nieuwkerk, 1995), Korea has held to some traditional ideas about what roles women can engage in onstage.

There are three main reasons why women have entered the ranks of mask dance drama performers. First, the participation of women in the mask dance dramas increased during the pro-democratization struggle. The *minjung munhwa undong* (Minjung Cultural Movement) in the 1970s and 1980s reunited ordinary Koreans with their traditions, particularly traditions like the mask dance dramas which showed resistance to authority figures. Because the satirical elements in the mask dance dramas resonated with the fight against authoritarianism, university students and others were (for a time) attracted to learning mask dance dramas as a display of nationalism and a reconnection with their roots. Some of them also utilized the dramas in protest, later transitioning to a new hybrid drama form, *madanggeuk*, to more explicitly express their political ideals (Kim, 1997; Yang, 1988). These cultural movements inspired groups and performances that included men and women. Some of those performers, both men and women, wanted to continue the activity they enjoyed and later joined heritage troupes. Other women began learning as bored housewives seeking for a meaningful hobby (Baker, 1995). Those who did not lose interest form the core group of women, mostly in their fifties, involved in mask dance dramas today.

A second reason why women currently do – and will continue to – perform mask dance drama is because the dramas are taught in the educational system. In a search for income, members of each group are teaching in schools and after-school programmes, inspiring some young people to continue learning. Although groups may primarily seek to attract young male members, classes cannot be confined to only one gender if a school is co-educational. Although mask dance drama study in university is still not that common, all the younger women (mainly in their twenties) in mask dance drama groups that I have spoken with began dancing through after-school programmes several years before auditioning for their university arts programmes. Today, women who have attended university programmes of traditional music, dance or *yeonhui* (folk theatre) carve out spaces for full-time artistic performance. When such dedicated performers seek a place in official mask dance dramas groups, it becomes even more difficult to justify the lack of roles for women.³

The single most important reason more women perform today, however, is that mask dance drama groups are under tremendous pressure to ensure pedagogical transmission. This has continually brought women into groups because the genre is relatively unpopular compared to traditions such as *pansori* (epic story-songs) and *sanjo* (solo instrumental music). Often no performers are recruited for more than

a year, and the average age of performers in every group is rapidly advancing. Young performers must overcome multiple obstacles, not least changing interests and financial hurdles, in order to continue, which has pushed most younger performers to become full-time professional artists, or to quit performing.⁴ Even though every group hopes to recruit younger, energetic men to continue the traditions, sometimes they must take advantage of any performer that they can rely on.

The evolution towards a greater role for women in performance mirrors the situation in many parts of the world, where traditional ideas of propriety and gendered spheres of activity in society created obstacles to women's performance. These days, senior teachers' attitudes towards women performers of traditionally male arts are softening worldwide. In the early 1990s, Barbara Thornbury found that, in Japan, another country where the government works to protect tradition, "females can take roles that heretofore have been restricted to males" (1994, 220). Carol Silverman, documenting the cultural politics of Balkan Romani music and dance, also found that women are increasingly able to negotiate traditional ideas of honour and perform in public what was once confined to private women's spaces (2012).

Barriers to women's participation

Many mask dance drama characters, including most female characters, communicate through mime and dance, with no spoken lines. Only men typically viewed the mask dance dramas – women and girls were not part of a normal audience. The absence of women in either the cast or the audience freed the performers to create content that was not culturally acceptable for a mixed audience. The barriers to women's participation in mask dance dramas are reinforced by the essentialized beliefs about gender that continue to be a major factor in Korean society, so that this examination of mask dance dramas also serves as an observation of gender negotiation in contemporary Korean society.

In the Korean mask dramas, rather than showing a level of awe and respect for the female body and its reproductive powers,⁵ the presence of female characters is part of the male-centred humour, what Chan E. Park has called the "patriarchal imagination" (2012, 123). Common female characters include a concubine, a grandmother and a shaman. These roles are often crass and direct rather than elegant or captivating, and they engage in public urination, grooming, sexual acts and childbirth, depending on the drama. During the Joseon Dynasty, watching such acts was highly amusing, as long as men played every role. These bawdy, earthy folk dramas provide two challenges to women who may want to participate: the embarrassment involved in some of the actions; and the revealing nature of some costumes. Old grandmothers, midwives and procuresses are typically bare from just below the breasts to below the belly button, not unusual in late Joseon society. Although the grandmother is considered unattractive (as revealed by her dark and spotted mask), she and the midwife both use the *eongdeongichum* (butt dance), a side-to-side exaggerated hip sway, as their primary mode of locomotion around the stage. Any performer can act lewdly, fully dressed or not.

Goseong Ogwangdae mask dance drama's Hwang Jong-uk is the group's office manager and ranked *jeonsu gyoyuk jogyo*.⁶ When the government set up their cultural safeguarding measures, they established a ranking system for teachers and learners of the arts – Hwang's rank is the second highest, usually attained after at least thirty years. This rank is usually held by about five people per mask dance drama, depending on the government-appointed committee that oversees rank examinations, testing knowledge and performative skills. I interviewed Hwang about the gender issues in mask performances. He explained:

In the Joseon Dynasty women couldn't even watch mask dance dramas, particularly *yangban*, or really any woman above the lowest class. The mask dance drama had such strong gender roles, [and because] they were performed at night, it would have been difficult for women to be wandering around and see them. With the exception of the character of Aesadang, women couldn't be mask dance drama performers during the Joseon Dynasty. Other than women who were selling their bodies, we can clearly say they weren't part of mask dance dramas.

(Hwang, 2015)

Dongnae Yayu performer Baek Jeonggang, an *isuja* (the third-highest-ranked type of performer), discussed the transition from all-male teams to the inclusion of women in the mask dance dramas:

Because men were the leaders of society, men did women's roles, and women couldn't act at all. Men put on women's clothes, and used women's gestures – yet now that in our country we have gradually instituted civil rights, women of skill and ability have emerged and some of them like the mask dance dramas. They asked, “why do men have to act the women's roles?” and now many women come out to practice.

(Baek, 2015)

However, even when included, women are relegated to women's roles and groups adjust costumes if a woman performs certain roles. When women act in the role of the old grandmother, they either change the dress to cover more of the body, or they use a flesh-coloured leotard under their costume. The exposed skin, however, is often incorporated into jokes, either in dialogue or in action, and in these cases men continue to perform the role, arguing against the changes to the story that would result from making the costume more modest. The old grandmother in Goseong Ogwangdae, for example, performs a belly-dance by sucking and protruding “her” belly rhythmically, to the delight of the audience. In mask dance drama, performers are often pushed towards parts that physically “match” their bodies, and this means that men with large bellies are encouraged to play the parts of women with exposed bellies. The Yangju Byeolsandae drama's director and *isuja* Kim Sunok told me, “Men are still doing the part of the procuress, because her belly sticks out as she

dances. This is a serious problem for women to do the role, although it would be good for women to perform and we often practice it. Yu Gyeongseong used to do that role, he had a forty-four-inch waist. Forty-four inches!” (Kim S. O., 2015). I asked Hwang Jong-uk about women performing racy content and he explained:

In the case of Goseong Ogwangdae our grandmother's actions are rather well-mannered, but Tongyeong Ogwangdae and other places like that are different, they are really explicit. Dramas like Yangju Byeolsandae are really extreme, so viewing is restricted to adults [if everything is performed]. There are too many extremely sensual actions and it's really difficult for women to perform. In [Goseong Ogwangdae] women don't perform the grandmother or the concubine. Dongnae Yayu has women perform the grandmother, so does Gangnyeong Talchum. That's a little strange. It's not correct. The concubine could be done by a woman without problem, but not grandmother because it's a speaking role.

(Hwang, 2015)

Grandmother, the only female character that has lines in most dramas, is the chief point of tension. While in groups like Bongsan Talchum, with a history of strong female leadership, she has long been performed by women, in other groups female artists still struggle for this starring role. A woman's voice from behind the grandmother's mask can be justified but, for others, women speaking the lines of male characters is taking things too far. This raises the question of why certain changes to the dramas, like women in speaking roles, are not acceptable (to some people), while other changes are considered merely a matter of adjusting to contemporary conditions (Figure 10.1).⁷



FIGURE 10.1 The old grandmother from Gasan Ogwangdae and Bongsan Talchum

Dance, or participation in certain types of dance can have implications for a woman's reputation (Silverman, 2012; Van Nieuwkerk, 1995). Therefore, it is unsurprising that in many mask dance dramas sexual scenes have been toned down through the years in tandem with an increase in female audience members and performers. In many mask dance dramas the sexual content is now allusive, rather than explicit. For example, in a Songpa Sandae Noli sex scene, the playboy Chwibali dances with the young woman Somu through a series of synchronous movements. Seated, legs outstretched and feet touching, they hold hands, pulling back and forth regularly on one side and then the other. Next, the couple jumps up and down in unison facing the audience, with arms locked around each other's waists and hips touching. A few minutes later, Somu is experiencing morning sickness. In most cases, the children in the audience may not realize what is going on in this drama or even in Bongsan Talchum drama – after the grandmother is reunited with her husband (Yeonggam), Yeonggam lies prostrate on the ground, with his folded fan erect above his groin. His wife (who is wearing a *hanbok* dress) straddles his body and jumps up and down, pausing for an extra jump above the erect fan – the allusion clear to adult audience members. In addition, dialogue may sail over the heads of younger audience members. In Yangju Byeolsandae, after the old grandmother has died and her children (Dogki and his sister) and husband (Sihalabi) are gathered at the body, the following dialogue occurs:

- Dokgi's Sister: Well, I've checked the pulse all over her body.
 Sihalabi: Yes.
 Dokgi's Sister: Her whole body is dead. She is dead. But . . .
 Sihalabi: She is dead.
 Dokgi: But the place in which father used to struggle to make sister and me is still alive.
 Sihalabi: What? What is still alive? I have to feel it. Let me feel it!
 Dokgi: It is still alive. Why are you in such a rush to feel it? I have to feel it first.
 Sihalabi: Well, are you going to feel it?
 Dokgi: I felt it. It is still alive.
 Sihalabi: You! Damn you!
 Dokgi: If you still want to struggle with it, you go ahead. It's all right, even in front of us.⁸

Beyond the revealing costumes and sexualized actions and dialogue, an additional barrier to women's participation is the various ways that the function of humour is enhanced when men play women's roles. Those characters with an exposed midsection, and those with covered bodies, express femininity in drastically different ways. The men who perform fully clothed roles can fool the audience into thinking that they are women. Many interviewees asserted that when the face beneath the mask is revealed, the audience is entranced and impressed by the skill of the

man who could fool them through body language and movement that was feminine, but not exaggerated. Hwang expressed a typical viewpoint:

If a man performs, after the performance when he takes off the mask, it's more interesting. People think it's a woman under the mask, so it's a surprise when you take the mask off. First, mask dance drama has to be humorous. When men express femininity the interest and comedy is enhanced, the dramas are more . . . frank. Through this [cross-gender acting] there is more humour. If women play women's roles – can they expose their bellies? We cannot see their bare skin. Also when women act like women, it's just . . . like that, the same as the story.

(Hwang, 2015)

To Hwang, women acting like women is less impressive, less of a skill, than if men act like women. Freeing up gender in mask dance dramas cannot be accomplished by arguing that everyone is performing gender identity in everyday life. We need to consider Hwang's generationally typical ideas within the context of the authenticity that is expected of nationally registered items of cultural heritage. Women playing women does change the drama, as when a woman in the part of the old monk no longer appears to be a lascivious seducer of a young woman, but rather just two women dancing prettily together.

Unsurprisingly, some groups make it hard for women to join. For example, Hahoe Byeolsin'gut Talnoli has only one woman in their drama's preservation association. Yet the region has branded itself with images of the masks, and holds a large, successful annual mask dance drama festival headlined by the Hahoe group, a group that teaches extensively in local schools. As gender equality advances in Korea, is it tenable to tell the many young women learning the drama that they will only ever be able to participate from outside the official preservation association? Groups actively recruit young men, but often with little success. Could it be time to let women perform in men's roles? As Hwang Jong-uk tells me:

I don't think that women can show [perform] manhood in an interesting way. Personally, I think that Goseong Ogwangdae members should be men. But I can't forbid women from being involved. Just imagine women performing Malddugi [the horse groomsman] – that wouldn't work. Even if a woman performs Madangsoe [a male house servant], the character changes, so why not make it a female character, such as Hyangdan [a female house servant]?

(Hwang, 2015)

Here Hwang points out that if changes are accepted, a male character such as Madangsoe could be replaced with the female equivalent, Hyangdan. For Hwang this change would make a woman performing the role more natural than if she was embodying a male character. This is closely connected to a deep-seated belief that women cannot fool an audience into believing they are really men.

The case of Yangju Byeolsandae: a long history of women's participation

Yangju Byeolsandae is an example of a group which included women early on, partially due to involving young women in learning activities. In an interview with director and isuja Kim Sunok, she explained how she and several other young women, also from Yangju (a small town north of Seoul), had been organized into their own independent performance group in the early and mid-1960s. She described that exciting time of performing as a middle-schooler. She was Chwibali, the playboy, a key role. At that time the children's troupe practised every day in a tiny room without missing a single rehearsal. Kim explained that Korean audiences were not very interested in traditional arts, so they often performed for the American military bases (Kim S. O., 2015).

According to Kim, the children's team actually performed more than the adult team at this time, and when they grew up, in the late 1960s, the two teams were merged – bringing a large number of young women into the group, including Kim and her younger sister (who is now a jeonsu gyo-yuk jogyo for the group): “At that time there were adults performing, but there weren't many people learning, so when the kids grew up it was natural for them to start performing together [with the official group].” With this sort of early start, they naturally included a large number of female performers, with women taking over the performance of almost all the female characters. Kim explained, “We were the first group to have women performing, from 1961, 62 – after us, Bongsan Talchum was listed [as cultural heritage], and they had Yang Soeun performing, so the Cultural Heritage Administration had to accept women's performance” (Kim S. O., 2015).⁹

Kim Sunok (2015) explained that in Yangju Byeolsandae women sometimes perform male roles without speaking lines, including starring roles like that of the old monk. “Right, there are so many women these days. However, if they speak, the audience will find it so awkward that a *yangban* gentleman has a woman's voice. It's not easy to change expectations based on knowledge of our traditional arts.”

The case of Dongnae Yayu: women for transmission

Having observed that Dongnae Yayu has more female members than many, I visited the preservation association director of the Dongnae Yayu mask dance drama in Busan. I guessed that Director Jeong Yeongbae (a jeonsu gyo-yuk jogyo) had been under intense pressure from within the group to include women in more roles. He explained:

Women's power has increased [in society], and in Dongnae Yayu we do not believe that only men can do the mask dance drama. Women have been doing women's parts such as the bride and grandmother for a long time already. Now there has almost been a generational replacement. Women here are enthusiastic enough to take the roles traditionally taken by us, the men. Many women members of our group are waiting for a chance to perform.

Now in Dongnae Yayu, women are now performing Mundungi [the leper], even though truthfully it should be a man's role with rough masculine style, but they take that role anyway. But that's our difficulty right now, because we can't just tell them to stop performing that role so that men will do it. There are many women and they don't have any other roles, so below each of them there is a line of people waiting to perform. I don't have a successor, there is no next-Yeonggam [the old husband], because that role cannot be taken by women.

(Jeong, 2015)

Jeong smiled throughout our interview, but the impression I received was one of deep worry. He questioned the power of the accompanying music (since many of the drummers are now women), the increasingly feminized dance motions and the lack of young male performers.

So we have a disconnect, women enjoy doing mask dance drama, but I'm worried about the invisible damage this is causing to the mask dance dramas. Truly, the women involved are doing well. If they come and start, they see it to the end. I heard that Andong Hahoe [Hahoe Byeolsin'gut Talnoli] is not even receiving women as members, will that save their group? I don't know. If even one musician [is a woman], then women can be admitted into any role.

(Jeong, 2015)

Jeong understood that tradition was constantly changing, and that holding to the *wonhyeong* was unrealistic.¹⁰ His manner demonstrated great respect for women's performance capability, but he was clearly worried that other groups with stricter attitudes towards gender may be making a better choice for the safeguarding of tradition. Isuja Baek Jeonggang, who was also present for the interview, added his thoughts about change: “In the madang anyone could comfortably dance – you or me, no matter, it was just a *nolipan* [fun activity]. But now from this *nolipan* origin a stage art has arisen. The dance gets more pretty, more beautiful, small changes are made until the dance is increasingly pretty” (2015).

Baek raises the issue of the shift in performance aesthetics from relatively spontaneous and improvisatory fun to staged national heritage. Dramas once performed twice a year are now led by artists with many decades of commitment to dozens of rehearsals and performances per year. The codification caused by the *wonhyeong* and the polishing impact of increased frequency has had a deep impact on the mask dance dramas, even before factoring in essentializing ideas about the softer, gentler, more graceful motions of women.

The future of women in Korean mask dance dramas

In 2015, it seems that another shift may be in motion for women's performance in Korean mask dance dramas. Specifically, it seems that others share my growing

awareness that women are appearing in an ever wider array of roles, and a specific effort to reverse this change is under way. I first learned of this from one of the women I have grown close to, a mask dance drama participant with more than thirty years of experience whom I have often observed dancing in women's roles and occasionally in non-speaking men's roles. She confided in me that even these common women's roles were going to be performed by men in the future. At a performance approximately two months later, I observed this erosion of women's participation. Although the number of women members of that group had not changed, men were performing two roles I had only seen embodied by women for the previous ten years.

These essentializing attitudes towards men and women in performance is not the only possible approach. In Indonesia, mask dance drama is commonly performed by either women or men, without correspondence between the role and the dancer's body. Henry Spiller (2010), Felicia Hughes-Freeland (2008) and Christina Sunardi (2015), among others, have found that audiences and professionals "recognized that male style dance was not necessarily best when performed by a male, and female style dance was not necessarily best when performed by a female" (Sunardi, 2015, 13). This allows female performers the freedom to embody any role, without being seen as inauthentic to the performance. Within Korea there are genres where gender is not essentialized – for example, *pansori*, epic story songs where singers voice both male and female characters making all performances "cross gender vocalization" (Park, 1998, 63).¹¹

In Korean mask dance dramas, however, the more roles women take, the more I hear accusations of lost authenticity. The recent, renewed challenge to the participation of women, and indeed the fight for a performative foothold that has characterized the past fifty years, has continually foregrounded the performer's gender over embodiment of the character. When women are permitted to perform – in the role of a woman – they are not only limited by the more constrained movement vocabulary of most female characters, but their ability to portray a woman is even accorded less respect because it is seen as natural capability rather than skill. Scholars such as Judith Butler, on the other hand, have long argued that gender is constructed through the way we discuss gender identity and the assumptions we hold about what it is to be a woman (or man), a process that embeds gender concepts within political and cultural processes (1990, 3). This gender identity is then performed. For example, Kim Yeongsuk, an *isuja* for Songpa Sandae Noli, seems to have internalized sexist ideas about women's participation. In fact, she told me that women cannot perform in men's roles because their dance motions were not powerful enough, that they were physically incapable of the challenges of the motions (Kim Y. S., 2015).

Therefore, despite the increased gender equality in Korea, where a woman is head of state, the field of mask dance drama performance can be seen as a site of stubborn adherence to gender dichotomies that constrain women. Some women do think of it this way, and many become frustrated, yet most long-term female participants remain in the arts because women's criticisms of gender imbalance and

inequity are cast as a lack of commitment to the preservation of tradition. For example, later in my conversation with Kim Yeongsuk, she explained that trying to keep others from performing "her" role did not make sense when considering needs of the group, including the need to train younger performers. She and the other women at Songpa Sandae Noli have each performed all of the key women's roles, and now that the group has renewed interest in seeing men performing the women's roles, she is willing to give them a chance. "Let's try it, and see how it looks, how the audience reacts. I cannot claim to be the best performer" (2015), she explained. Kim, fully committed to the group, has chosen to portray the situation as one of collectively searching for excellence in performance. Fortunately, the next generation seems less inclined to force female performers to sacrifice themselves for the perceived authenticity of performance. For example, Goseong Ogwangdae *isuja* An Daecheon, a full-time professional performer of traditional music and mask dance drama, remarked, "I don't think it's even right to say a woman cannot do the role, rather we should follow the performer's character. If the personality matches the role, I don't think it makes a difference if it's a man or woman performing. That's all!" (2015).

Conclusion

During my examination of women's entry into the ranks of performers I found a collision of mask dance drama meaning and aesthetics, authenticity in heritage preservation, and beliefs governing gender. Attitudes towards performance by women expose a web of dualities, inconsistencies and internal contradictions at play in the traditional performance realm. Women bring enthusiasm and consistency, yet not all involved are willing to agree that women have a right to perform on an equal footing with the men. Challenges to women's performance go far beyond sexism and body politics into the deeper meanings of the dramas, and of what it means to safeguard traditional heritage. Women's involvement in mask dance dramas, and the vast difference in their degree of involvement in different locales, highlights the importance of performance contexts, history and personalities in determining women's roles. Just as Candida Jaquez sees Mexican mariachi music as a context for working through some of the issues with traditional gender roles in a "comparatively non-threatening environment" (2002, 174), I believe that discussions about women's equality and role in society are occurring in the lower-stakes environment of Korean mask dance drama preservation.

It is my hope that, through discussing the current discourse governing women's participation in the mask dance drama tradition of Korea I can clarify the interplay of gender and tradition. The space for participation by women is expanding and contracting at the same time, but overall monolithic constructions of gender roles cannot be sustained in the mask dance dramas, particularly if each preservation association wants to foster a large, dynamic group of potential successors to these performances of Korean heritage. As many mask dance dramas struggle to keep performing and to attract participants, the politics of women's participation will

substantially shape the future of the dramas. Despite the preservationist forces, the dramas will continue to evolve and change, and groups are gradually moving beyond strict limitations on women's participation.

Glossary

Isuja: third-ranked performer/artist

Jeonsu gyoyuk jogyo: second-ranked performer/artist, a master teacher

Madang: outdoor performance space, with the audience on all sides of the performance

Muhyeong munhwajae: intangible cultural property or heritage item

Notes

- 1 I would like to thank the kind performers who I interviewed for this chapter; their names appear in the text. In addition, I am grateful for the valuable assistance of Yoo Minhyung, Bak Najeong and Jung Hoijung. Discussion with Leticia Isabel Soto and Logan Clark brought me to appropriate theoretical readings. Two anonymous reviewers and the volume editor, Arya Madhavan, gave useful feedback. Finally I would like to thank Jena Barchas-Lichtenstein for her clarifying and excellent editing. Any remaining mistakes are mine. Part of the research for this chapter was carried out with support of the Asian Cultural Council, the UCLA International Studies Institute and the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship.
- 2 The authoritative Korean text on mask dance dramas is by Yi Duhyeon (1964). For an English overview, see Saeji (2012), as well as the National Gugak Center's book on Korean Folk Theatre, or *yeonhui*, which is available in both PDF and printed formats (available to download from <http://tinyurl.com/zospzqz>; accessed on 9 May 2015).
- 3 This echoes the situation of other gender-coded performances around the world. See, for example, Leonor Xochitl Pérez's experiences as a female mariachi (2002).
- 4 The theme of professionalization is one that I explore extensively in my upcoming monograph on mask dance dramas (publication expected in 2018).
- 5 Compare Christina Sunardi's (2015) discussion of the power of femaleness in Javanese theatre and dance.
- 6 Jeonsu gyoyuk jogyo is the second-highest rank within the system for intangible cultural heritage preservation overseen by the Cultural Heritage Administration. Someone at this rank has usually been actively involved for over thirty years. The government oversees the examination to advance to this rank, which tests both knowledge and performative skills. Most groups have about five people at this rank, and only one or two at the rank above, national human treasure (*boyu*). Meanwhile, the rank of *isuja* (experienced performer) is much more common, with as many as twenty or twenty-five *isuja* in each mask dance preservation association.
- 7 For example, explicit dialogue and actions may be skipped or performed, depending on the expected audience and the group itself.
- 8 From the translation by Cho Oh-Kon (1988, 104). Note that this dialogue is somewhat tame – more appropriate for an academic book chapter.
- 9 This has also been addressed briefly in Janelli and Yim (2013).
- 10 Jeong Sujin (2010) discusses how Korean folklore studies reveal a romantic approach to the existence of an authentic original form, or *wonhyeong*.
- 11 There are differences in how men and women perform *pansori* (Mueller, 2015). However, the participation of both men and women is welcomed.

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