



Title of the article: Intangible Authenticity from Body to Body: Transmission of Korean Traditional Dance as an Act of Translation

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Abstract

I examine the transmission of Korean traditional dance as an act of translation through the body, focusing on dances recognized as national intangible cultural heritage, whose transmission is methodically regulated for the purpose of preservation. Drawing on Gabriele Klein's idea of transmitting dance as a practice of translating contemporary choreography, I use the term "translation" to refer to the transmission of intangible material from body to body. I show that in translating Korean traditional dance, the dancing body acts as both the original and the translator; that it is through the act of translation that dance exists, and the tradition continues its life. Considering the process of transmitting dance translationally expands the scope of both dance studies and translation studies, ultimately offering a productive perspective on performance translation by opening up the possibility of a new mode: corporeal translation.

Keywords: Korean traditional dance, intangible, authenticity, transmission, translation

Biographical note -

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Consider this set of images: birds soar through the sky, their wings beating in graceful rhythm. Those in the first row, in the second, the third, and all the way to the last form a grand flock, moving in unison through the air. In the blink of an eye, they begin to curve. Twisting and turning, the flying bodies draw a semicircle. Hundreds of flapping wings, shifting as one, now propel in a new direction.

In the next image, words cascade from a mouth at the bottom. They rise and unfurl, taking the shape of a trumpet-like wind instrument, expanding in all directions. Beside this cascade, a pair of eyes watches intently. Slightly narrowed, they are meticulous and unwavering, capturing every drifting word with precision. Together, these images—of birds flipping direction and words examined by watchful eyes—form the Korean word for translation, *beonyeok* (번역). Among the seventy percent of Korean vocabulary composed of Chinese characters, known as Sino-Korean words, *beonyeok* consists of two Chinese characters: *beon* (翻) and *yeok* (譯), both originally pictographs. The first letter, *beon*, is the combination of “fly,” “order,” and “turn over.” The second letter, *yeok*, combines “word” and “look into.”

Here is another image to consider: onstage, bathed in the spotlight, stands a lone female dancer in a white *hanbok*—a traditional Korean attire consisting of a short jacket and a long skirt—loosely holding a long white silk fabric in one hand. Poised on the stage, her body contains different versions of a single choreography. Innumerable hours and days spent in the teacher’s small studio and the school’s

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vast dance halls—filled with overlapping faces and voices of teachers—pass before her eyes like scenes from a film. Now, she waits anxiously for the accompaniment music. In the next moment, she hears the first beats—the sound of *janggu*, a traditional Korean hourglass-shaped drum, accompanied by a bamboo flute and low timber string instruments—and within seconds, she decides which version of the dance to perform. Quietly, the dancer begins to move her hand, holding the fabric, as her right foot takes a small step forward. This is an image of *a dancer as a translator*. The flying birds, the cascading words, and the dancer deciding on a version to perform collectively illustrate how I understand the term “translation”—a term that is itself challenging to translate—and, importantly, what it might signify in the broader context of dance *and* translation.

In this essay, I explore the transmission of Korean traditional dance as an act of translation through the body, focusing on dances recognized as national intangible cultural heritage, whose transmission is methodically regulated for the purpose of preservation. In translating Korean traditional dance, the dancing body acts as both the original and the translator. Here, the term “translation” is considered neither in a linguistic sense nor as a matter of decoding meanings, as in everyday usage. Rather, I use it to refer to a practice of transmitting non-linguistic intangible material. In other words, I intend to utilize and expand on the concept of translation to consider the practice of transmission, where intangible material is passed from one person to another, and thus continues to *live*

through dancers' bodies. I argue that what is transmitted from one dancer to another through the act of translating dance is not only choreography (defined here as the material dancers receive and perform) but also authenticity. I will show that through the act of translation, dance exists, and tradition continues its life. Considering the process of transmitting dance translationally expands the scope of both dance studies and translation studies, ultimately offering a more productive framework for performance translation by introducing a new mode: corporeal translation.

To discuss the transmission of dance as a practice of translation, I must first examine the way dance exists, as this condition the mode of its translation. Unlike other art forms, dance exists *through* the body. In visual art, a work of art exists as an object. In theatre—an art form closest to dance in many aspects—a work initially exists as a script, especially in the case of spoken theatre, even though the performance of the script is an integral part of theatre. In dance, however, no object contains dance in the way a script or other fixed object might. While various dance notation systems have been used in recording dance, most of them tend to work better for a limited number of formalized and standardized genres, most notably ballet.¹ Alternatively, dance is often video recorded. However, using video as a medium for transmitting dance presents a problem: a recording of dance inherently reflects the perspective

of the person who made the recording. In other words, even if the video visually captures and contains the choreography in its entirety, what it presents is already not the dance as it is but a mediated recreation of the choreography on a screen (which is yet another material with its own issues), often involving video effects such as zoom-ins and zoom-outs. Therefore, choreography is primarily passed on from dancer to dancer, from body to body. In this sense, dance exists *through* the body: the body learns, performs, and teaches dance to another body that, again, learns dance.

In this light, I consider a dancer as a translator in the sense that the dancing body acts as both a receiver and a transmitter of dance. Translation theorist Susan Bassnett (2002: 83) writes that the translator is “after all, first a reader and then a writer and in the process of reading he or she must take a position.” This idea of the translator as both a reader and a writer is based on her premise that the translator reads the source language text (the original language of the text) and then, through a process of decoding according to a different set of linguistic and cultural systems, translates it into the target language (the language into which the text is translated). I draw inspiration from such translational processes to explore the way dance is transmitted from one dancer to another. In this process, a dancer, acting as a translator, receives choreography, undergoes a

¹ Korean dance scholar Judy Van Zile (2001: 51) writes that even though various kinds of notation systems have evolved, most have been associated with “specific kinds of dance” and served “primarily to jog the memory of those who already knew the dances.” Yoo Si-hyun (2000: 56) also discusses how

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“irrelevant” a notation of Korean traditional dance became as a Laban movement analyst “clothed” the Korean dance with the “Western movement notation system” which lacks the “understanding” of Korean traditional dance.

process of understanding and acquiring it, and then transmits it through performing it.

Before proceeding further, it is important to clarify what I mean by Korean traditional dance: it is one of three subgenres of Korean dance, typically referring to “older dance forms” that are considered to be emblematic of Korea (Van Zile 2018: 92). This includes dances originally performed in the royal court; those performed as part of Confucian, Buddhist, and shamanic rituals²; dances by farmers in villages; and those practiced and performed by *gisaeng* (highly trained courtesans, the Korean counterparts to the Japanese *geisha*). Another subgenre, called “new dance” (*sinmuyong*), emerged in the early twentieth century during Japanese colonization and the country’s modernization/westernization. Dancers sought to embrace what was considered authentically Korean while also deliberately creating a new form of dance to represent Korea. The third subgenre, “newly created dance”³ (*changjak chum*) emerged in the mid-1970s after independence from Japan amid rapid social, political, and cultural shifts. Dedicated to a creative succession of tradition, this new genre both drew from traditional dance and developed a strikingly new style, reflecting the aesthetics and the ideas relevant to contemporary society (Van Zile 2001:15).

These categorizations of Korean dance are not strictly defined and are often hotly debated, especially when determining which dance belongs to

which category. It is not uncommon for the first two genres to be collectively referred to as “traditional dance,” partly due to the complex genealogies of their development and partly due to disagreements about what qualifies as Korean or even traditional (Van Zile 2018: 93). In this essay, I refer only to the first category as “Korean traditional dance.” As mentioned earlier, I consider dances that are recognized as intangible cultural heritage within the broader sense of traditional dance.

In her article “Passing on Dance: Practices of Translating the Choreographies of Pina Bausch,” Gabriele Klein (2018) examines the process of transmitting dance as a practice of translating contemporary choreography, as exemplified in the work of the Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch over the past decades. In examining dancers’ practice of passing on dance, which she argues is a praxis of translation involving “discontinuities in the form of alternative interpretations, readings, or acts of understanding” (2018: 396), Klein uses the analogy of the children’s game “Chinese Whispers”. In this game, each player whispers words into the ear of the next player, who then passes them along to another player. The game ends when the last person says out loud what was whispered in their ear. Most of the time, the words spoken out loud by the last player turn out to be significantly different from the initial ones, making everyone laugh at how much it changed over the process of being passed on from

² For more about Korean traditional dance and its roots in shamanic rituals, see (Kendall, 2009).

³ Despite the terminology, Korean creative dance can be considered to be Korean “contemporary dance” in many Journal of Emerging Dance Scholarship © Dahye Lee

aspects, from the historical and political background of its development to its aesthetic and movement characteristics.

person to person, sometimes even unintelligible, or entirely different (ibid).

Using this example, Klein (2018: 397) makes a point that when passed on from one to another, “intangible goods”—that is, choreographies in this context— “are never the same,” as this mode of translation is “never one-to-one.” Rather, the translational process situates the intangible material in new personal, cultural, and historical contexts, in which it is continually newly framed by each individual. Therefore, Klein asserts, passing on dance is “more than merely transferring the same object or content,” as the translated movement “follows its own path” (2018: 399). This latter part clearly evokes philosopher Walter Benjamin’s well-known metaphor of translation, which reads as the following: “a translation touches the original fleetingly and only at the infinitely small point of meaning ... to follow its own path ... in the freedom of linguistic development” (Rendall and Benjamin 1997: 163).

In this context, Klein (2018: 411) argues that the issue of “authenticity” becomes “obsolete” in the process of passing on dance. She asserts that, instead, the continuous production of difference, while simultaneously striving to transport the identical, is far more important. The assertion as such is premised on the impossibility of translating movement that is fundamentally “ephemeral, existing only in the moment” (Klein 2018: 399), which naturally makes the act of passing it on “always brittle, fragile, and ambiguous” (2018: 401). This line of thought echoes the phrase “authenticity is an impossibility,” once articulated by theatre historian David Wiles (2007: 366) in his reflection on the predicament of theatrical translation. As the qualities of the original can never be fully known, translator’s task cannot simply be “to capture what was there [in the past]—the original”; instead, they must continuously strive to “find a language that connects with the body,” writes Wiles (2007: 366).

Klein’s perspective on the process of passing on dance as a practice of translation indeed offers some critical insights into the issue, which potentially can be extended to other cases of transmitting choreography. It also speaks of the essence of the ephemerality of dance, perhaps almost resistant to the act of translation by nature, causing fundamental problems for dancers in passing it on.

However, Klein’s case does not fully account for how Korean traditional dance is transmitted. If the analogy of “Chinese Whispers” is to be applied to the context of Korean traditional dance, several additional conditions must be met: First, participants must be trained in passing on information. As with many other traditional performing art forms, Korean traditional dance requires the dancer’s body to be highly skilled, achieved through years of intensive training. Second, participants must be committed to transmitting the original with minimal distortion. This condition implies that Korean traditional dancers practice the dance with the intention of preserving its essence as much as possible, similar to traditional performing arts in other regions. Finally, the process must be repeated until what the last person transmits is nearly identical to the original. Consistent with the previous, this final condition suggests that dancers undergo extensive training,

often involving the repetitive practice of choreography. In this context, when transmitting Korean traditional dance, authenticity—an element deemed obsolete in Klein’s case of translating choreographies— remains a crucial value to be transmitted from one body to another. Through her extensive process of acquiring the material, the Korean traditional dancer as a translator internalizes it so that the translation follows its *own* path that remains *continuous* with the path of the original. In this way, instead of lying dormant in the past as something that “can never be known in the present” (Wiles 2007: 366), the traditional dance as the original is made alive through the dancer’s body as a translator. As will be further demonstrated, understanding the transmission of Korean traditional dance as an act of translation requires considering a new mode of corporeal translation.

The process of transmitting Korean traditional dance choreographies that are recognized as national intangible cultural heritage needs to be considered within the following distinct contexts: First, the dancer, recognized by the government, acts as the original to be transmitted. Here, the dancer as the original is not just the bearer of choreography—that is, the material performed—but also the bearer of authenticity to be transmitted.⁴ It should be made clear that the dancer is considered the original not

because the dance is her own creation, but because she is regarded as embodying the tradition *as it is*. Second, other dancers, also recognized by the government, serve as legitimate translators of the original. Third, translations of the original are made through these legitimate translators, involving rigorous training over a long period of time.⁵ These three points are based on the premise that the dancer as a translator is considered the physical entity within which the original is internalized. As such, what arises here, unlike in Klein’s case of transmitting dance, is the question of “rightfulness”; that is, which body rightfully performs, and when the performance demands authenticity (Curran 2014 :107). While the aim of this essay is to consider the transmission of Korean traditional dance as intangible heritage translationally, rather than focusing on the system for preserving the heritage and its operation, a brief overview of how it works is necessary to understand the process of the transmission.

Beginning in 1967, seven Korean traditional dances became designated as Important Intangible Cultural Assets (*Jungyo-muhyeong-munhwajae*) under the Korean Cultural Property Protection Law (*Munhwajae-bohobeop*; hereafter called CPPL). The law was established in 1962 with the purpose of preserving and promoting Korea’s tangible and intangible cultural heritage.⁶ Out of seven dances,

⁴ This brings up another interesting question as to whether it is possible to “extract” or “detach” what is internalized from what internalizes it. Japanese theatre scholar Maki Morinaga (2005 :45-72) deals with this issue in depth in the context of esotericism as a mode of knowledge and the logic of Japanese theatrical and martial arts.

⁵ Morinaga (2005: 46, 63) examines the notion of “legitimate transmission” in Japanese *noh* theatre. She writes that transmission first and foremost needs to occur within a group, Journal of Emerging Dance Scholarship © Dahye Lee

and depending on the student’s lineage and talent, the distinction between “appropriate” transmission that “reinforce[s] the tradition” and “inappropriate” transmission that “endanger[s] a tradition” can be made. She argues that the way these criteria are set “reveals the operations of the presumed dichotomy of inside/outside and the notion of body-as-a-medium of transmission.”

⁶ The law was initially implemented by the Empire of Japan during the first year of its occupation in 1911, as the governor-

four dances were originally created to be performed in the court from the fifteenth century to the late sixteenth century: *Cheoyongmu* (“Dance of Cheoyong”), *Hak Yeonhwadae Hapseolmu* (“Crane and Lotus Flower Dance”), *Seungjeonmu* (“Victory Dance”), and *Jinju Geommu* (“Sword Dance”). The other three, originating from some of the dances performed by shamans and *gisaeng* at courtesan houses: *Seungmu* (“Monk’s Dance”), *Taepyeongmu* (“Dance of Peace”), and *Salpurichum* (“Exorcism Dance”) (Korea Heritage Service, n.d.). While the last three were created in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the techniques and aesthetics were derived from the older dances.

As these dances as, intangible cultural assets can only be preserved through human performers with extraordinary abilities, the CPPL recognizes individuals who are “outstanding bearers of the assets,” namely, “holders” (called *boyuja* in Korean). Therefore, recognition is given to intangible cultural assets as well as to individuals who are recognized to be particularly adept in enacting them (Van Zile 2001: 53). For each dance, there are one to three *boyuja*⁷ (literally, “a person who possesses”; more informally *in’ganmunhwajae*, which translates to “human cultural property”).⁸ As these names of the status suggests, they are the bodies in which the intangible material is (believed to be) securely held.

The process of transmission is carried out through teaching, based on the strong teacher-pupil relationship, in which the pupil as the translator receives and internalizes what the teacher as the original transmits. The system governed by the CPPL is based on the hierarchical yet close and prolonged relationship between teacher and pupil, thereby ensuring a legitimate pedagogical genealogy through which authenticity is transmitted. In the highest status are the “holders” (*boyuja*), considered as “masters”; and importantly, what they hold in their bodies—not only choreography as a composition, a sequence of movements of physical bodies, but also the way the choreography is performed through their body—is regarded as the original. In this sense, in Korean traditional dance, the dancing body is both the *holder* of the intangible material and the *original* to be transmitted. Thus, other dancers strive to translate the original into their own bodies not merely through memorizing the choreography but through acquiring and internalizing what the holder transmits over a long period of time.

If the holder is the highest-ranked performer of the dance, considered a “master,” then the next in rank is their first-generation pupils, called *Jeonsu Gyoyuk Jogyo*, which literally means “transmission teaching assistant.” Despite their rank’s name designating them as assistants, they are, in fact, teachers of many younger traditional dancers. By the

general of Joseon (then Korea) “passed a Temple Act, ... which required an inventory made of all movable and immovable properties in Buddhist sites considered worthy of preservation.” Although the South Korean government after the liberation in 1945 replaced it with the law designed by Korean authorities, the system still has its foreign roots, resembling its Japanese counterpart. See (Van Zile 2001:52).

⁷ Although there is only one official name for each dance on the list of intangible cultural heritage, there are different schools of the same dance form under the lineage of different holders, such as Lee Mae-bang style *Salpurichum* and Han Young-sook style *Salpurichum* (“Exorcism Dance”).

⁸ Most of them were newly designated between 2019 and 2021, after the “masters” (*boyuja*) and some of the first-generation pupils who had been recognized as *boyuja* recently deceased.

time they are awarded this status, many are already in their seventies or even older. Some of them are then regarded as yet another master by their role in the transmission process, as the original masters are often too aged to teach themselves and leave most of the teaching duties to their trusted pupils (Saeji 2015: 248). These are the pupils who learned directly from the holders, meaning they were directly transmitted to, and are therefore considered the most legitimate translators of the original.

Next in rank in the system is the second-generation pupil, collectively called *Isuja* (meaning “who has completed a course of study”). These are dancers who have trained under the first-generation pupils for a decade or more and have performed frequently. Many of them are also respected as experts in the repertory, performing widely and offering lessons to younger dancers. Following them and ranking last are the third-generation pupils, known as *Jeonsuja* or “trainees.” This group includes those recently accepted into the system, who no longer have a direct connection to the master as the original and thus are considered the least legitimate translators within the long genealogy of the transmission system. That said, this is where every dancer begins. Through rigorous training over time, they advance in rank by passing examinations. The fact that it takes many years of intense training to be granted the title *Isuja* after starting as trainees illustrates that the transmission process requires

undivided devotion of time and effort to embody the tradition as closely as possible to the original, thereby keeping it alive through their bodies (Saeji 2015: 249).

The transmission is usually conducted through classes, whether in groups or individually. During teaching, the teacher predominantly demonstrates the movements, and students then follow by reenacting them as closely as possible. The teacher often counts the rhythm, frequently accompanied by drumbeats and provide brief instructions (such as “bend more”; “sit more”; “you are moving too fast,” or “movement is too light”⁹). In her interview with Yoo Si-hyun (2000), Lee Ae-Joo (1947-2021), among the first-generation pupils, who had been recognized as a “holder” of *the Monk’s Dance*, recounted the lessons by her teacher, Han Young-Sook (1920-1990), one of the most influential Korean dance masters. Han rarely spoke words, said Lee, but “spoke everything through her dancing.” While few words were exchanged, Lee was able to experience “internal communication” with her teacher, which she believes was possible due to the sheer amount of time she had learned from and spent with the teacher, inside and outside the classes (Yoo 2000: 100). This internal communication in the transmission of Korean traditional dance begins with “the very basic things in life,” as Lee explained.

This included regularly visiting and staying

⁹ As a practitioner of Korean traditional dance, I received instructions like these during my training with masters. I learned *Salpurichum*, as shown in Figures 3 and 4. I often trained in my teacher’s tiny studio with her, who was then in her eighties (a traditional setting, as the traditional dance repertories were originally performed inside a room with only

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several audience members). She would first demonstrate a sequence of the dance, then I would follow as she counted the rhythm by beating an hourglass drum. She would correct my arm, shoulder, or the angle of my head from time to time, but most of the time, the teaching was done through demonstrating and following.

at the teacher's house, sharing meals together, and even cleaning her house until her teacher passed away.¹⁰ Through those long dialogues over meals, the pupil learned about the teacher's food preferences, eating habits, and even recipes. Lee recounts that these were not merely incidental but deeply connected to the learning process, providing insight into the teacher's ideas about dance and life

the accumulated training, signified by the aged dancing body that represents a lifetime devoted to learning and a more direct connection to the essence of the intangible tradition.¹¹ In this context, "the older performers, particularly the remaining members of the first generation certified in the CPPL, are seen as embodied stores of memory" (Saeji 2012: 312). Therefore, the holder,



Figs. 1 and 2. Dancers practicing Lee Mae-bang style *Seungmu* ("Monk's Dance") at his Dance Training Center in Mokpo, Lee's hometown in the southern tip of the Korean Peninsula. Dedicated to preserving the original of his dance, the center was established.

(Yoo 2000: 100-101).

As the structure of the system shows, the legitimacy of the dancer as a translator largely depends on the dancer's distance from the original in the system. This can also be compared to the distance between the original text and the translated text in literary translation. In the transmission of Korean traditional dance, holders are deemed the original of the dance due to the importance of "cultivation" in Korean traditional dance. This cultivation refers to

"manifesting the authentic embodiment of tradition," is considered the original (Yoo 2000: 101). And ultimately, the teaching is to keep the dance authentic; that is, to transmit authenticity.

At this point, some issues with this system of transmission might become apparent. First, there is the question of how to determine what constitutes the "authentic embodiment" of tradition; that is, how to assess whether authenticity has been successfully transmitted; whose embodiment is considered

¹⁰ This is also characteristic of the training in Japanese traditional arts, such as the dance-drama *noh*, where apprenticeship is referred to as *deshi*.

¹¹ This notion of cultivation is a common thread in Asian traditional dance. In her contribution to the book *The Aging Body in Dance: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Japanese dance Journal of Emerging Dance Scholarship © Dahye Lee

scholar Kikuko Toyama (2017:130) discusses the association between the aged dancing body and authenticity in Japanese traditional dance. She examines how the aged dancing body through "dance in inaction" is "placed as a model, a reference point," that is, "bodies of depth, of pathos, capable of carrying the repose."



Fig. 3. Dancers practicing Lee Mae-bang style Salpurichum (“Exorcism Dance”) at his center in Mokpo, South Korea. http://leemaebang.com/board/list?board_name=brd_gallery

authentic, and to what extent. For the past decade or so, there has been a movement that holds that traditional dance needs a new way of translation. The term “*Shin Jeontong Chum*” (literally, “new traditional dance”) is used by several leading dance critics and later by dancers, who advocate for a new practice of performing tradition, such as a creative interpretation of traditional dance or incorporation of elements in traditional dance into the genre of creative dance (Bong 2019: 2-3). Yet, how different this *new* traditional dance actually is from traditional dance remains to be seen, while the debate about what constitutes traditional dance continues unresolved. As mentioned earlier, Korean dance encompasses a broad spectrum, from traditional dance (now including new traditional dance) to new

dance and creative dance. The latter two were intended as creative continuations of tradition, aiming to embody an essentially Korean identity in contemporary society. Within this spectrum, what is considered authentic and truthful to tradition, and what is not? How is the degree of authenticity determined? What processes and criteria are involved in assessing and passing on authenticity? Can this process—such as the one regulated by the CPPL in Korea—be relied upon as a foolproof method for preserving authenticity from one body to another?

One might also ask if the practice of transmitting Korean traditional dance comfortably sits with the discourse of translation. Today in translation studies, where the translator is often seen

as “a liberator,” the focus on authenticity tends to be considered old-fashioned, associated with terms such as “purity” and “faithful.” Especially as the relationship between source language and target language has been reconsidered from postcolonial perspectives, the translator’s task has become not to merely copy but to “liberate” the words from the confines of source language and create a translation in a new language that is equally creative, rather than inferior to the original (Bassnett 2002: 5-6).

Still, why is it important that this case of transmitting dance that values transmission of authenticity be considered an act of translation? I contend that it is because the practice of transmitting Korean traditional dance is not merely about

copying—even when it may appear so. Rather, it involves reenacting tradition through the dancer’s body, thereby continually prolonging its life. The Slovak translator and translation theorist Anton Popovič once wrote that the translator’s purpose is to “reproduce [the original] as a living work” (Bassnett 2002: 88). If the translator does so by moving a text from one language to another, then, in viewing the process of transmitting Korean traditional dance translationally, the dancer first acts as a reader of the dance; through the process of internalizing it, she then becomes a *writer* who reproduces the dance through her own body.

In closing this essay, I want to emphasize two key aspects of the act of translating Korean



Figure 4. Lee Mae-bang style *Seungmu* (Monk’s Dance) was adapted into a group dance in 2021 by his pupils to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the Lee Mae-bang Dance Conservation Association. <http://www.sctoday.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=36558>

traditional dance: First, the tradition continues to live through the bodies of the dancers as translators. Dances now considered traditional were once newly created—whether by an individual dancer or a collective—and have come to be perceived as traditional through repeated practices of transmission. Through these transmissions, the dances have persisted in contemporary Korea and beyond. Thus, the act of translating dance maintains traditional dance as a *living* material that would otherwise have remained confined to the past. Second, the act of translating connects tradition with *creation*. I would like to consider this connection through Benjamin’s notion of “the life and continuing life of works of art”—taken unmetaphorically. Korean traditional dance, as a living material, has become an integral component of its transformative successor: *changjak chum* (“newly created dance”), the new form of Korean dance that has developed over the past half-century amid intense sociopolitical and cultural turbulence. Van Zile (2001: 61) argues that, regulated through the protection system, the practice of transmitting Korean traditional dance has become “a kind of ritual” in that it represents “an active process of continuing the vision of the past.” From its inception in the mid-1970s, *changjak chum* pioneers faced the urgent task of addressing the problem of tradition—namely, overcoming the rupture from tradition caused by colonization and reclaiming tradition by creating a new dance form based on it. Throughout the trajectory of *changjak chum*, the drive to remain contemporary has always persisted. At the same time, two questions have accompanied one another:

Is this contemporary enough? But also, is this traditional and authentic enough? The inherently elusive task of being both traditional and contemporary continues to challenge the current generation of Korean dancers.

The act of translation enables the continuing presence of traditional dance, translated through the dancing bodies, which in turn becomes a vital part of constructing the new form of Korean dance in the present. A hundred years ago, Benjamin (in Rendall, 1997: 153) wrote that the translation, which “proceeds from the original,” indicates that the original has “reached the stage of [its] continuing life.” In this essay, I have explored how the life of Korean traditional dance continues through corporeal translations from one generation of dancers to the next.

Consider the opening images of this essay: the visualization of the Chinese character for *beonyeok*, “translation” in Korean. A grand flock of birds moves in unison through the air—from the first row, to the second, to the third, and finally, to the last. In an instant, they trace a soft curve together. This image of the birds, their hundreds of wings flapping in gentle rhythm, mirrors the dancers, passing on tradition from generation to generation, from body to body. As each dancer’s body acts both as a vessel and a conduit—actively bridging past, present, and future—the life of Korean traditional dance continues.

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