

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: KOREAN DANCE AND *PANSORI* IN D.C.:  
INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS, THE  
BODY, AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY AT A  
KOREAN PERFORMING ARTS STUDIO

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This thesis is the result of seventeen months' field work as a dance and *pansori* student at the Washington Korean Dance Company studio. It examines the studio experience, focusing on three levels of interaction. First, I describe participants' interactions with each other, which create a strong studio community and a women's "Korean space" at the intersection of culturally hybrid lives. Second, I examine interactions with the physical challenges presented by these arts and explain the satisfaction that these challenges can generate using Csikszentmihalyi's theory of "optimal experience" or "flow." Third, I examine interactions with discourse on the meanings and histories of these arts. I suggest that participants can find deeper significance in performing these arts as a result of this discourse, forming intellectual and emotional bonds to imagined people of the past and present. Finally, I explain how all these levels of interaction can foster in the participant an increasingly rich and complex identity.

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THE BODY, AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY AT A KOREAN PERFORMING  
ARTS STUDIO

By

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## Preface

In the summer of 2009, I joined the Washington Korean Dance Company's dance and *pansori* (Korean singing) classes. I intended to stay for only a few months at the studio, interviewing participants and participating a little myself. What was meant to be a short fieldwork project expanded as I remained at the studio for more than sixteen months and decided to continue studying there for some time to come. My journey from my original role as a novice ethnomusicologist doing her first major fieldwork to a regular member of the dance studio brought unexpected challenges as my status changed from outsider seeking information with little to lose in the way of social relationships to a relatively young student at the school seeking the approval of my teachers and acceptance by my fellow students and members of the wider Korean community.

As my teachers and I began to recognize potential in my dance and singing, I began to aspire to grow as a learner, performer, and future teacher of Korean performing arts whose learning and future career in these arts depend upon the support of my teachers and my demonstrable ability to fit into Korean social and learning situations. This presented new challenges and transformed my field work; whereas I had originally planned to rely primarily on interviews for information, I came to rely more on the knowledge gained from long-term participation in the studio, interaction with its members, and embodied knowledge of the process of learning Korean dance and song in this particular setting.

This thesis presents some of these experiences and explores what the studio offers to its participants. It focuses first on the studio as a Korean linguistic and

cultural space which can potentially strengthen both Korean identity among its members through participation in the arts and a sense of belonging to the studio's close knit community of women. Second, this thesis examines the challenges presented by the physicality of these arts and how these challenges can give the participant a sense of satisfaction, even over the course of many months or years of study. Third, it examines the role of discourse about the history and meanings of the dances and songs, and how these and other culturally-coded aspects of these arts can enrich the experience of learning them.

## Note on Romanization

I have used the Korean government's Revised Romanization system for Romanization of Korean terms, with the exception of individuals' names which are spelled according to the preferences of those individuals. The first time each name appears, I have also given its spelling in Korean and Revised Romanization for consistency (National Academy of the Korean Language 2000). In references to other publications in English, I have only given the name of each author as it appears in the publication. For Korean names in general, I have put family names first and given names second, as is customary in Korea, except when referring to authors of publications in English who have published their writing using the opposite name order.

## Dedication

To my teachers,  
who give students like me the gifts of new intellectual, cultural, and artistic worlds,  
and to my family,  
who prepared me to receive them.

## Acknowledgements

I have many people to thank for helping me complete this thesis. First, my advisor, Dr. Provine, whose teaching and guidance in this thesis have been invaluable to me and who always responds to my shortcomings with support, useful criticism, and cheer. His knowledge as a scholar on Korea, generosity in sharing his knowledge and resources, and high expectations delivered with good will have helped me to grow as a student of ethnomusicology during the process of preparing this thesis far beyond the level I was at when I began. Although this brief thesis cannot demonstrate the entirety of my newly-acquired knowledge and growth as a scholar, I trust that my future body of work will demonstrate the depth and breadth of knowledge that I gained during the preparation of this thesis, due in large part to Dr. Provine's guidance.

Next I would like to thank Dr. Witzleben and Dr. Sandstrom for their teaching during my years as a graduate student here and for their help in preparing this thesis. Their comments on this thesis have been extremely useful and I greatly appreciate the time they devoted to helping me with it.

I am very grateful my dance teacher, Kim Eun Soo *Seonsaengnim*, the founder and director of the Washington Korean Dance Company, for all that she has done for me. When she allowed me to join classes at the dance studio, she opened up a new world to me at a time when I was struggling to make any contacts in the Korean community. In her classes I found new happiness in dancing, and I appreciate her teaching and the beauty of her dancing each day. I am also grateful to her for allowing me to interview her, for introducing me to the other women at the studio,



and for encouraging me to sing. It was also because of her entering me into the Korea Times' singing competition at the 2008 KORUS Festival that many new opportunities opened up for me to experience the Korean community here, and I will never forget that.

I would also like to thank my wonderful *pansori* teacher Kim Eunsu *Seonsaengnim*, who is so supportive of her students and brings out voices we never knew we had. Without her enthusiastic encouragement, I never would have had the opportunity to grow through performing as I have over the last year and a half and to see so much of the Korean community in the process. She has been not only a teacher, mentor, and guide, but also a close friend. I am very grateful for her generosity in teaching me, her faith in me as a performer, and her friendship.

I am also very grateful to Bae Jung-Lan *Seonsaengnim* for her teaching and for continually modeling a level of dancing that I aspire to. I also thank the rest of the women in the Washington Korean Dance Company's dance classes for the experiences we share together at the studio. It is a joy to be able to see you all every week and dance next to you. I am equally grateful to the members of the *pansori* classes at the studio and the other members of Washington Sorichung (워싱턴 소리창, *Wosingteon Soricheong*) for the shared experience of singing together every week and performing together. It is thrilling to sing together with women possessing such powerful voices.

I also thank Yang In-seok *Seonsaengnim*, Helen Shin, and the rest of the Washington *Kayo* Charity Association (WKCA) for making me a member of their group and allowing me to learn about another subgroup within the Korean community

here through the performance of *teuroteu* (트로트) and other genres of *gayo* (가요).

I especially thank Yang *Seonsaengnim* for all of his *gayo* coachings.

I am also grateful to Melanie Pinkert for her lessons in *gayageum*, Sebastian Wang for his lessons in *janggu*, and my current English students at the Washington Language Institute, through whom I constantly learn new things about life in Korea and what it is like to live as a Korean immigrant in Maryland. Thank you also to my friends and coworkers in Korea who gave me such a positive experience there.

Without them, I might never have gone in this direction in the first place. I am especially grateful to my friend Jenny and the other members of Bethany Presbyterian Church in Seoul, who gave me as a going-away present my first *hanbok*. It has repeatedly served as my performance attire when singing *pansori*, and without it I would not have been able to participate in many of our public *pansori* performances.

Thank you to my grandparents for always being such inspirations to me. Finally, thank you to my parents for their support, for raising me and my brother to do what we do, and for being adventurous enough to take part in our increasingly culturally hybrid lives.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The study of universals and specifics has long been a part of the ethnomusicological and anthropological canon (see Nettl 2005: 42-59), producing a wide variety of studies and approaches, from Lila Abu-Lughod's "ethnographies of the particular" (1991), which disrupt images of cultural homogeneity by focusing on the specifics of a particular group of individuals, to the use of Arjun Appadurai's "-scapes" (1990; 1991) in macro-level studies such as Su Zheng's dissertation on Chinese music in New York City (1993) and Mark Slobin's exploration of levels of comparison between music-cultures using the broad categories of superculture, subculture, and interculture (1993). This thesis is an "ethnography of the particular," although it certainly may become part of larger comparative studies in the future. Although this thesis concerns performing arts that are part of a diaspora with links to the home country, and the issues I examine here may also be common in other similar settings, I examine the fieldwork site almost entirely at the local level.

This thesis forms a small piece of an underexplored area in ethnomusicology: the presence and use of Korean performing arts in Korean diasporic communities in the United States. Despite the existence of many Korean music and dance studios in the U.S., little has been written on this topic, with the exceptions of Judy Van Zile (2001; 1996) and R. Anderson Sutton (1987), who have written about Korean dance and music in Hawai'i, and Ronald Riddle, whose article on Korean music in Los Angeles was published in the *Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology, Volume VI: Asian Music in North America* (1985). Thus far, nothing seems to have been written about

Korean performing arts on the East Coast of the United States, and much that was written earlier about Los Angeles and Hawai'i is now out of date.

The field work for this thesis takes place at the Washington Korean Dance Company studio, which is situated on the edge of Falls Church, Virginia, a few miles from Annandale, and is part of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. With the third largest Korean community in the United States (after Los Angeles and New York), the D.C. area is well worth examining as a site for Korean diasporic studies, and the town of Annandale is the main center of the area's Korean community, with a high concentration of Korean businesses and places to socialize.

The Washington Korean Dance Company (abbreviated in this thesis as WKDC) studio houses a professional dance company, dance classes for teenagers, and community dance classes for adults. All the participants in these classes are women and, with the exception of me, all are of Korean ancestry. Most of the women in the adult classes were born in Korea and immigrated to the United States as adults, whereas many of the girls in the classes for teenagers were born and/or raised in the U.S. The studio also hosts classes in *pansori* (판소리, Korean epic song and storytelling), *gayageum* (가야금, stringed instrument plucked with the fingers), and *janggu* (장구, hourglass-shaped drum). All of these classes are taught by experts who majored in the instruments they teach. Although all these classes are currently housed in the dance studio, the teachers have come together to plan a more comprehensive Korean Performing Arts Center, which will have separate instructional areas for dance, *pansori*, *gayageum*, and *janggu* and will give equal weight to dance and music.

This thesis focuses on two community adult classes and two *pansori* classes which take place at the dance studio. Existing within a large Korean community, the studio makes up a subculture within a subculture, and each of the studio's classes is its own micro-culture existing at the intersection of the individual lives which comprise it. The studio is also part of the larger Korean diaspora and is connected to practices in Korea. As a result, although this thesis focuses on a single studio, it may inform larger studies at a more macro level, forming a piece of more general studies about Korean performing arts, subcultures in the United States, and diasporic "intercultures" (Slobin 1993).

### **Theoretical Concerns**

#### **Artistic Practices and the Creation of Community**

This thesis examines a variety of ways in which the Washington Korean Dance Company studio can contribute to the lives of its participants, with a particular focus on individual identity. It also examines how the social nature of the studio and the dance forms studied there feed one another, offering up a variety of benefits to suit the varying needs and backgrounds of the participants. I argue that the types of dance taught at the studio are innately suited to the formation and long-term continuation of the studio's community. At the same time, studio practices such as the sharing of food and conversing in Korean set the studio apart from many other artistic spaces, including some other Korean dance studios in the area, so that women may remain members of the studio for many years primarily because of its strong sense of community. Thus, there is a symbiotic relationship between the arts and the community of the studio, as each thrives because of the other; this is a community



which exists for the purpose of studying Korean performing arts, but at the same time, the study of arts there flourishes because of particular community-building practices.

### **Cultural Space**

A major theoretical component of this thesis is the creation of cultural space. In this case, the studio creates a space that is both linguistically and culturally Korean and serves as a women's space. Many Korean spaces exist in Annandale, Virginia, and to a lesser extent, in other towns surrounding Washington, D.C. The presence of such spaces makes it possible for Korean and Korean-American residents of the area to engage in a variety of levels of involvement with Koreans and non-Koreans, and the women at the studio come from a variety of backgrounds; some live their lives primarily in Korean spaces, of which the studio is just one, while others operate mostly in English-language environments away from other Koreans and come to the studio in order to be in a Korean space. Most of the women at the studio fall somewhere between these two extremes. The studio offers up a great deal to participants from any part of this continuum. Although for some people it is just one of many Korean spaces from which to choose, the communal nature of the studio and the shared goal of learning Korean dance and music make this particular space different from most others. This thesis explores that difference and how the arts are uniquely able to bring these women together.

Performance of identity is also intimately related to the concepts of community and cultural space as the women can use dance and music to perform Korean national/ethnic identity, local group identity as members of the studio community, and a range of other identities such as spirituality and gender.

### **Authenticity, Ownership, Transmission**

This thesis also touches on ideas about authenticity, ownership, and transmission of dance and music from teacher to student. High quality training of the teachers and authenticity based on the Korean national treasure system are both important elements in claiming authenticity. Receiving awards from authorities in the traditional arts is another important way of gaining prestige. Authenticity must be maintained, however, through regulation of performance. This is described in more detail in Chapter 2.

Edward Bruner presents a useful framework from which to examine the concept of authenticity. He defines four different ways in which something can achieve the status of being labeled “authentic” (1994):

1. Being credible and convincing to the observer
2. Resembling the original
3. Being the original, rather than a reproduction or copy
4. Being certified as valid by an authoritative figure or authoritative body

Bruner’s purpose in defining these types of authenticity is not to create a definitive measurement for actual authenticity, but instead to examine why people perceive some things to be authentic and others inauthentic.

In Korea, the authority of the Ministry of Culture and Information (문화공보부, *Munhwa Gongbobu*) and the Committee on Cultural Properties (문화재위원회, *Munhwajae Wiwonhoe*) of the Cultural Property Preservation Bureau (문화재관리국, *Munhwajae Gwalliguk*) play a significant role in designating the authenticity of traditional performing arts and the people who practice them. In this

performing arts world, such formal designations of authenticity are important. The Nation Treasure system gives recognition to certain tangible and intangible “Important Cultural Assets,” and in the case of traditional performing arts, certain dances and pieces of music are labeled Intangible Cultural Properties, while certain people are recognized as either holders of these dances or pieces of music or National Living Treasures themselves. To be taught by an individual recognized under this system gives a dancer or musician greater cultural capital than to be taught by someone who is not recognized (see Van Zile 2001: 51-62 for more on the National Treasure system and Korean dance). Awards won in competitions also serve as important formal designations of authenticity and quality as a performer.

Through the National Treasures system, particular styles of dance and *pansori* are passed on through generations of teachers and students, creating schools of dance and of *pansori*. Although there is room for individual style, careful transmission is important. As a result, when a student of Korean dance or *pansori* performs, she (or he) is representing not only herself but also her teacher and school.

These ideas about transmission and ownership are reflected in practices at the Washington Korean Dance Company studio. A song or dance learned at the studio does not become the property of the student once it is learned; if she wants to perform it, she must obtain her teacher’s permission, and permission may or may not be granted.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Van Zile similarly notes control over performance at the Halla Huhm Korean dance studio in Hawai’i: “Posted on a bulletin board at the studio in the late 1990s was a copy of a letter to students and parents asking them not to use the name of the studio or its dances without consulting with Mary Jo Freshley, the woman currently in charge of the studio” (2001: 230).

### **Culture, Cultural Hybrids, Diasporic Community as a Third Space**

The elusiveness of the concept of “culture” can be a vexing problem in this age of transnationalism, global communication, and migration. Zheng (1993), Slobin (1993), and others in ethnomusicology have found Appadurai’s concept of “-scapes” particularly useful in theorizing transnationally-dispersed cultures. Appadurai recognizes that people “are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogeneous” (1991: 191), and Gupta and Ferguson find that “we need to ask how to deal with cultural difference while abandoning received ideas of (localized) culture” (1992: 7). Abu-Lughod also seeks to disrupt ideas of homogeneous cultures and cultural differences “by focusing solely on particular individuals and their changing relationships” (1991: 154).

In discussing the Korean community of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, I find Su Zheng’s dissertation on Chinese-American music in New York City particularly helpful (1993). She describes people in immigrant communities as living in two or more worlds at once, part of a triangular relationship between the immigrant society, the homeland, and the host country. People in this diasporic community may remain connected to their homeland through travel, media, or imagination and memory.

The “Korean community” of the Washington D.C. area is, of course, a partially “imagined community”: it is large enough that its members do not all know each other personally, although there are extensive networks of acquaintances and friends within the community (Anderson 1983). Although Korean people in the Washington D.C. area may not all see each other face to face, the two local Korean-

language newspapers see to it that most Korean people in the area know what is going on in the “Korean community,” reporting even on small events in this community so that names and activities of local people may be known even without personal communication (as is often the case with local newspapers in any language).

These newspapers also report on events in Korea, the United States, and other parts of the world. Local Korean-language television and radio stations similarly connect members of the local Korean community with each other and with current developments in Korea. Free Korean-language tabloids containing news about Korean celebrities can be picked up at many local Korean businesses. These tabloids are full of advertisements for local Korean-owned businesses as well as classified ads.

Events in the Korean community are advertised in the local Korean language newspapers and using paper flyers in local Korean businesses. Concerts of guest artists from Korea draw large, mostly Korean crowds, since they tend to advertise through these media.<sup>2</sup> The prominence of the local Korean language newspapers as a source of information contributes to the feeling of a small, local Korean world, separate from the non-Korean world which coexists in the same general geographic space. The internet also provides a means for communication and connection within the local Korean community and between this community, other Korean diasporic communities, and Korea. These media-scapes create a body of shared knowledge

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<sup>2</sup> Many of these are performances of traditional music and dance, showcasing a variety of artists in their respective instruments and genres. These performances are often sponsored by Korea’s Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, among other organizations. Current popular music acts from Korea rarely visit the Washington D.C. area, opting instead for Los Angeles and/or New York City, although auditions by Korean pop management companies looking for future pop stars do come to Annandale.

among many members of the local Korean community, which can both unify this community's members and differentiate them from the non-Korean community.

The Washington D.C. Korean community comprises a hybrid culture in which Korean cultural elements are inscribed within an American context and take on new forms and meanings. Individuals in this community combine Korean and American cultural elements to form hybrid lifestyles. The creation of such hybrid lifestyles and the transnational nature of the community, both through travel and through exchange of knowledge between the community and the two countries to which it is connected, disrupts the idea of homogenous, geographically-based "cultures," just as Appadurai and Gupta and Ferguson suggest. Yet in order to describe in what ways these lifestyles are cultural hybrids, we must use language of cultural difference, identifying some lifestyle elements as "Korean," others as "American," and perhaps others as specific to the Korean diasporic community. This might seem to present a dilemma. Cultural differences between Korea and the United States are real and are palpable to people who experience crossing between the cultures. Yet the idea of "culture" tends to blur differences between individuals in each cultural group, creating an undesirable image of homogeneity within each supposed "culture."

One way of looking at the concept of "culture" which I find helpful in this case is Thomas Turino's idea of culture as a set of habits shared among people (2008: 17, 94-95). In order to look at culture, he begins at the level of the individual, arguing that the "self" is comprised of the body of the individual and his or her entire set of habits. His use of the word "habits" is closely related to Bourdieu's *habitus*, indicating patterns of thought and behavior that are largely shaped by the society in

which one lives but can also be altered through individual agency. Turino defines culture as a set of habits that are shared by a group of people (2008: 17, 94-95).

Thus, one person can belong to many different cultures, as he may have some habits in common with one group of people and other habits in common with another group.

In the case of the Korean community of Washington D.C., this way of imagining culture is useful. The lives of individuals in this community contain identifiable mixtures of habits shared by many Korean people and habits shared by people in the United States. These habits can form based on convenience, social pressures, personal preferences, and beliefs about others' expectations based on being Korean and being in the United States.

I propose that a combination of Zheng's and Turino's theories produces a fairly accurate way to view culture in the Korean community of the Washington D.C. area. On a more macro level, people are indeed connected to three worlds: the United States, Korea, and the local Korean community, and transnationalism through travel and media is common here. At a more individual level, each person's lifestyle is affected by these three worlds at the level of habits—habits of daily actions and habits of thought. Houses here often contain a mixture of Korean household goods purchased in local Korean-owned stores and non-Korean goods, for example. Conversations may be in Korean and may follow customs for showing levels of respect but be on the topic of American politics or television or the American economy.

Furthermore, individuals' hybridized lifestyles and ways of interacting may change in different social situations. This point is important because individuals'

ways of hybridizing the cultures can change in different situations. As a result, certain situations and spaces draw out different combinations of Korean habits and American ones. Because of this, certain spaces become sites for the dominance of Korean habits. I refer to these as “Korean spaces” in this thesis and suggest that the Washington Korean Dance Company studio is one such Korean space. Korean restaurants and other Korean-owned business also form Korean spaces. Some people in the Korean community may live their lives primarily in Korean spaces, while others may spend most of their time in non-Korean spaces. The WKDC studio draws women from both groups as well as women who are balanced in between these extremes.

#### **“Optimal Experience” or “Flow”**

Chapter 3 of this thesis examines the physical experience of dancing at the WKDC studio, using psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s famous concept of “optimal experience” or “flow” (1990). Csikszentmihalyi identifies this as the experience of being fully absorbed in an activity to the point that one loses sense of time and is completely in the moment. Being “in the zone” is a common phrase used to describe this level of concentration. Csikszentmihalyi finds that such a high level of concentration is highly enjoyable and that people may go to great lengths to experience it.

To reach his conclusions, Csikszentmihalyi interviewed many people who described this experience doing a wide variety of activities including music, dance, sports, games, and reading. He identifies criteria for the experience of flow, the most important of which is a level of challenge that matches the skills of the individual.



Another important factor is the presence of reachable goals. These and other criteria are discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Csikszentmihalyi identifies these criteria in order to suggest ways in which almost any activity can be designed to create the experience of flow and thus be enjoyable. Csikszentmihalyi pays significant attention to both music and movement as conducive to creating the experience of flow. Turino (2008: 4-5, 17, 30-31, 43, 99, 133, 174-176, 181-182, 185, 233) also applies Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow to musical experiences, arguing that "certain types of music-making contain the conditions for flow in unique and particularly pronounced ways" (2008: 5).

### **Identity**

Identity is currently a common theme in ethnomusicology, but a recent article by Timothy Rice suggests that this term often goes unexplained in ethnomusicological writings. After reviewing articles from the journal *Ethnomusicology* which include the words "identity" or "identities" in their titles, he finds that ethnomusicologists have often neglected to define "identity," refer to the concept's use in other disciplines, or even refer to other ethnomusicologists' uses of this term (2007). Instead, Rice finds that "ethnomusicologists who have produced this corpus of work seem to take for granted identity as a category of social life and social analysis" (2007: 20). As a result, "the discussion of identity generally is riven with splits, distinctions, and contradictions that ethnomusicologists would do well to consider and respond to" (20-21).

Rice identifies two different concepts of identity discussed, though not actually defined, in some of the *Ethnomusicology* articles. The first is what he terms

“individual self-identity” (2007: 21). This kind of identity, he says, “has taken at least two forms in the literature on identity. One is concern for self-definition or self-understanding that implies questions like who am I and what is my true nature. The other is a concern for the psychology of belonging to, identification with, and ‘suturing’ to social groups” (2007: 21). Rice describes some studies which might be read as addressing these issues and concludes by saying, “It seems to me that these two processes, creating a sense of self-understanding and self-worth and creating a sense of belonging to preexisting social groups, might be called authoring the self through music, especially through reflection and discourse on one’s own musical practice” (23).

This kind of identity formation is also described, though in different terms, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. He describes a dual process of “differentiation” and “integration,” which he says produces a more “complex” individual (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 41-42). This kind of identity formation is central to this thesis (see Chapter 4 for more on Csikszentmihalyi’s description of this process and how these ideas are applied to this thesis).

The second concept of identity described by Rice is “group identity,” the identity of a group of people such as a nation-state. This kind of “identity,” he says, is currently more common in ethnomusicological studies than “individual self-identity.” Rice states, “Identity in most of these cases seems to be about collective self-understanding as represented by various characteristics, activities, and customs, including music” (24). Ideas about how this kind of identity is formed follow two contrasting lines of thought: “essentialist” and “constructivist.” The essentialist

position sees identity as a set of timeless, essential qualities that characterize the group. Essentialist positions of identity are used in “the identity politics of nationalism, on one hand,” and “opposition to the powerful from subaltern positions defined by ethnicity, race, class, and gender on the other” (24). In essentialist-oriented writings on music, music is often said to reflect and symbolize an already-existing group identity or essence.

A constructivist position, on the other hand, sees group identity not as something which already exists in some essential form but as a concept which is always constructed “from the cultural resources available at any given moment. Rather than durable and stable, identities are contingent, fragile, unstable, and changeable” (24). A constructivist viewpoint often tries to discern “whether, to what extent, and how music making and music listening participates in the construction of various forms of emerging and changing social identities” (24).

Rice writes that the constructivist view has “gained the upper hand in recent work in cultural studies and in ethnomusicology” (24). However, he points out that authors of articles which take a constructivist stance “repeat the mantra that music helps to construct social identities” (25) but often “fall back into a discussion in which the social identity already exists, and music’s role is primarily to symbolize, or reflect, or give performative life to a pre-existing identity” (25).

Rice identifies another common theme in constructivist views of identity: “that identity, rather than being unitary, is multiple and fragmented. Instead of a single self with enduring, deep, and abiding qualities, we possess multiple selves (gendered, racialized, ethnicized, nationalized, and so forth) whose expression is

contingent on particular contexts and specific performances of the self in those contexts” (27). He then goes on to describe the possibility for music to express multiple identities, especially drawing from Thomas Turino’s use of Peircian semiotics.

This thesis is mainly concerned with “individual self-identity,” since it examines the experience of studying at the WKDC studio and potential effects of the studio experience on the individual. It focuses on the dual process of becoming a more skilled and extraordinary individual (“differentiation”) and of becoming more connected to other people (“integration”) (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 41-42). However, the idea of “group identity” is also an important part of this thesis, as parts of one’s “individual self-identity” are often inseparable from, and dependent on, “group identities.”

In exploring the process of “integration” in this thesis, I do not focus only on face to face connections with others; instead I include both face to face connections with the “real” community of the WKDC studio and connections formed with a variety of “imagined communities” of the past and present (such as shamans, *gisaeng*, women of the Jeolla region of Korea, one’s genealogy of teachers, and other performers of traditional arts, all of which are discussed in Chapter 4). Emotional and intellectual connections with these groups of people contribute to an “individual self-identity” that is more “integrated” with other people, bonded emotionally and intellectually to a variety of “imagined communities.”

What each of these “imagined communities” means to the individual depends on the existence of some kind of “group identity” associated with each of these

communities. How the “integration” process affects an individual’s sense of “individual self-identity” depends on the “group identity (or identities)” of each of the groups to which she is “suturing” herself. How she perceives the group to which she is “suturing” herself may be influenced by a “group identity” shared by the individuals within that group, or by a “group identity” imposed by others upon that group. Often, the individual perceives this “group identity” not through personal observation but through discourse about the group. Chapter 4 of this thesis examines discourse about certain groups of Korean women and how this can affect an individual’s experience at the WKDC studio.

#### **A Note on Labels: Korean, Korean American**

Throughout this thesis, I frequently refer to the Washington D.C. metropolitan area’s local “Korean community” or to the people within it as “Korean.” I may occasionally interchange “Korean” with “Korean American,” but in general I use the former much more frequently than the latter. The reason for this is that the term “Korean” is a more inclusive term than “Korean American” and more accurately includes all of this community’s members. This thesis explores a community which includes some people who self identify as “Korean” and others who self identify as “Korean American.”

The term “Korean” is often regarded as including both people of Korean nationality and people of Korean ethnicity regardless of nationality. The term “Korean American,” on the other hand, is limited to people of Korean ethnicity who either were born in the United States or immigrated here and have chosen to adopt a sense of American identity over time. Sometimes the term “Korean American” is

reserved for a more specific group: Americans of Korean descent who have been raised (and perhaps born) in the United States, do not speak perfect Korean, and are at least primarily culturally American. Within the Korean community of the Washington D.C. metropolitan area, even long-term residents who have obtained American citizenship after immigrating from Korea are often referred to simply as “Korean,” reserving the term “Korean American” for the second generation in order to recognize cultural differences between the two generations.

The use of the terms “Korean” and “Korean community” to represent Washington D.C. metropolitan residents of Korean descent is especially appropriate because of the presence of a considerable number of people who lead transnational lives between Korea and the United States. Many Korean people come to this area for short periods of time and return to Korea, while others stay here for long periods of time while thinking of themselves as Korea nationals.

Furthermore, within the Korean community around Washington D.C. the term “American” is often used specifically to label non-Koreans, despite the fact that many people in the Korean community are American citizens. Even those women in the WKDC studio who have lived in the United States for a long time and have American citizenship sometimes say about our performances: “Were there many Americans there?” or “Many people liked the performance. Americans too.” In these contexts, “American” means non-Korean, or at least people who do not look Korean.

Thus, the terms “Korean” and “American” are often used within the local Korean community to differentiate between people of Korean descent and everyone else, while the term “Korean-American” is often used within the community here and

in Korea to label someone who is so culturally American that he has lost (or never learned) Korea language and culture. Therefore, in this thesis, I frequently refer to the Washington D.C. metropolitan area's local "Korean" community, which includes people who identify as Korean and those who identify as Korean American.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Korean Performing Arts in the United States**

Sources on Korean dance and music in the United States are almost nonexistent. Judy Van Zile's work on the Halla Huhm Korean dance studio in Hawai'i is an exception (2001; 1996). R. Anderson Sutton has also written some about this studio and about Korean music in Hawai'i (1987), primarily reporting on Korean traditional musicians in the area, their efforts to teach, and the mostly lukewarm interest of the local Korean population. Ronald Riddle's article on Korean music in Los Angeles found that traditional music was all but nonexistent there and that most of the Korean population there had no knowledge of it (1985). Many years have passed since then, and traditional Korean performing arts groups now seem to be much more significant in Korean-American communities in general. Each year in the Washington D.C. area, several concerts of guest artists from Korea draw large crowds. A number of Korean music and dance studios exist both in the Baltimore/Washington D.C. area and in New York City.

#### **Korean Dance**

Writings in English on Korean dance in general are scant, but Judy Van Zile's recent book is a major contribution (2001). This book includes an introduction to

dance categories in Korea and to the National Treasure system; chapters on two court dances: *Cheoyongmu* (처용무) and *Jinju Geommu* (진주 검무); chapters on the dancers Kim Cheonheung (김천흥) and Choe Seung-hui (최승희), a chapter comparing different dance performances meant to suggest shamanistic rituals (with a brief section on *salpuri*), and a chapter on the Halla Huhm Korean dance studio in Hawai'i. Christine Loken-Kim's dissertation (1989), includes a great deal of useful information about the history of dancers in Korea, with a focus on *gisaeng* and shamans. She also gives effort-shape analysis of Korean dancers from several generations, noting apparent generational changes. Her findings are summarized in an article as well (1993). In the dissertation, she uses Korean subjects' reactions to different performances of the dance *salpuri* to draw conclusions about aesthetics of the dance and how these relate to ideals of womanhood in Korea.

A large number of very introductory articles on Korean dance has been published in the *Korea Journal*, including those by Sung Kyong-rin (1963) / Sŏng, Kyŏng-nin (1976), Chŏng Byŏng-ho (1997), Hahn Man-Young (1976), Alan C. Heyman (1990), Eleanor King (1977), Christine Loken-Kim (Loken 1978), Park Jeong-hye (1997), Song Soo-nam (1990), Kim Ch'ŏn-hŭng & Alan C. Heyman (1975), and Sŏng, Kyŏng-nin & Alan C. Heyman (1975). Many of these are also re-published in the book *Korean Dance, Theater and Cinema*, compiled by the Korean National Commission for UNESCO (1983). Many of these introductory articles present Korean dance without much detail or actual attention to histories of dances. Instead, they give basic descriptions of dances or of Korean movement in general, sometimes with highly subjective interpretations by the authors. Loken-Kim's



“Moving in the Korean Way” (1978) is a particularly interesting combination of detailed observation of Korean dance characteristics and oversimplifications of Korean dance genres and Korean people in general. Many of these articles contain essentialist statements about Korean people by both Korean and non-Korean authors. Such statements seem at times to reflect authors’ biases. At other times they seem to reflect common discourse in Korea about Korean dance and a “strategic essentialism” used when presenting Korean dance to non-Koreans (Spivak 1988).

Chapters on dance in the book *Korean Performing Arts: Drama, Dance & Music Theatre* (ed. Yang Hye-suk 1997) present a basic introduction to Korean dance history but like the articles from the *Korea Journal* are designed for readers who have little knowledge of Korean dance or history and are therefore unable to provide much detail. The absence of any citations, notes, or bibliographic material suggests that it is based on common discourse about Korean dance rather than on careful attention to verifiable sources.

For more detailed documentation and analysis of Korean dance, one must turn to works in Korean, as most Korean dance literature has yet to be translated into English or incorporated into English works in much detail. Many Korean works exist for the purpose of documenting the steps of particular dances, and some compare the dance styles of different individuals, using descriptions and series of photographs to capture the movements of individual dancers. Kim Moon Ae’s *3inui Salpuri Chum Tamgu* (3인의 살풀이춤 탐구), *The Study of Three Salp’uri Dancers*, for example, compares the *salpuri* of three renowned dancers with contrasting styles (1996). One of these dancers is Han Young-Sook (한영숙, Han Yeong-suk), who was the dance

teacher of the Washington Korean Dance Company's director, Kim Eun Soo (김은수, Gim Eun-su). The other two dancers in this book are Yi Mae-bang (이매방) and Kim Suk-ja (김숙자). Another book, *Seungmu, Salpuri Chum*, contains photographs of the movements of seventeen different dancers performing *salpuri* and/or *seungmu* (Kim Jeong-nyeo 1990). Such photographic documentation is vitally important, but as photographs are still, they miss the movement quality (effort) of dancers (Dell 1977). The absence of sound in the photographs also makes it impossible to observe the dancers' interpretations of music, which is an essential element of Korean dance. Videos of such great dancers as Han Young-Sook, Yi Mae-bang, and Kim Suk-ja are now emerging on the internet, which invites hope that more scholars will have access to these primary sources of information (see the videography for brief videos of each of these dancers). Hopefully more scholarly works will emerge which include video footage and attention to individual styles of dance—including effort, timing, and interpretation of music—rather than the emphasis that still photography places on shapes.

### **Dance in Ethnomusicology**

Dance has long been a part of ethnomusicology but has mostly been studied alongside music-making activities. On its web page, the Society for Ethnomusicology's Dance Section repeatedly words its purposes in terms that emphasize the interrelationship between music and dance, although in a few places it states that its members study both this interrelationship and dance “on its own terms.” The emphasis on dance's interrelationship with music in the Dance Section's mission and list of aims reflects the rareness of ethnomusicological works which focus

primarily on dance itself. A survey of the Society for Ethnomusicology's journal *Ethnomusicology* reveals very few articles highlighting dance, and most of these focus on the music which accompanies dancing (List 1997; Downey 2002; Ragland 2003; Solís 2005).

Books which focus on dance are also fairly rare in ethnomusicology, but Tomie Hahn's book *Sensational Knowledge*, on Japanese *nihon buyo*, is a recent notable contribution (2007). In her text are some parallels to my experiences in Korean dance, yet perhaps the most valuable aspect of this book is its deeply reflexive approach, as Hahn shares her personal experience as a dancer. Her organization of the book and her ideas and writing style convey a sense of artistry that reflects the artistic world she is writing about. Her writing is influenced by the work of other highly reflexive writers such as Lila Abu-Lughod (1991; 2000) and Ruth Behar (1996). The reflexivity of these works is something to strive for, and although this thesis is not nearly as reflexive as it could be (that will have to wait until future writing), their writings have influenced my faith in personal experience as a legitimate source of knowledge.

### ***Pansori* and Korean Music**

Works in English on *pansori* and Korean music in general are more plentiful than those on Korean dance. In the area of *pansori*, works by Marshall R. Pihl (1994), Heather Willoughby (2002; 2000), and Chan E. Park (2003), are particularly important and useful. All three writers include information on the history of *pansori*, while each makes his or her own individual contribution to knowledge of this tradition. Pihl's book focuses primarily on text (entirely in English translation), and

the relationship between official, written *pansori* text and actual performance. Willoughby's focus is on the importance placed on *han* in *pansori* and on elements of the vocal techniques, music, text, and *ballim* (발림, physical actions) that express the sentiment of *han* (often described as a combination of sorrow, regret, longing, and bitterness). Park's book covers a wide range of topics, including *pansori*'s relationship to other Korean musics and shamanism, the gentrification of *pansori* in the nineteenth century, the creation of *changgeuk* (창극, opera-like dramatizations of *pansori* repertoire), themes in *pansori* texts, modern-day transmission of *pansori*, depictions of gender in *pansori* repertoire, and her own performances of *pansori* for American audience with *aniri* (아니리, spoken narrative sections) performed in English. Andrew Killick has also produced a body of scholarship on *changgeuk* (1998; 2001; 2002; 2003).

### **Music in Asian American Contexts**

In the title of this section, I have purposefully skirted around both the terms “Asian American music” and “Asian American” as a noun. Both labels have their uses, but I am uncomfortable labeling either the arts or the people discussed in this thesis as “Asian American.” It seems to me that people can label themselves in different ways at different times, according to their environment and preferences, and that people can utilize the arts in ways that may or may not express a specifically “Asian American” identity. Instead, I opt for “Asian American contexts” as an umbrella term for this section because the term suggests environments in which Asian and American elements are present, without applying labels to particular people or art

forms. Within such a context there is room for many self-proclaimed identities (and labels applied to others) and for multiple perspectives and interpretations.

I would argue that the arts studied at the WKDC studio are themselves most appropriately labeled “Korean,” rather than “Korean American” or “Asian American,” because they are not significantly different from arts in Korea. However, these Korean arts can be used by their performers to communicate Korean, Korean-American, and/or Asian American identities depending on the context of the performance. Artistic work which utilizes the term “Asian American” often has a pan-Asian American political agenda which is not shared by the WKDC studio. Instead, the WKDC projects a specifically Korean or perhaps Korean-American identity. However, an individual member of the studio who identifies as Asian American could potentially perform in a context and with a mindset that expresses Asian American identity even though the studio as a whole promotes specifically Korean culture.

In some Korean arts studios in the United States, I would suggest, there are sufficient differences from practices in Korea to label the arts taught at those studios “Korean American” or “Asian American” (for example, Halla Huhm’s studio in Hawai’i, described by Judy Van Zile (2001: 220-234) or the Asian American Arts Center in Centreville, Virginia). However, the Washington Korean Dance Company studio maintains a strictly Korean identity, and the teachers teach choreographies and songs either learned in Korean traditional arts departments or choreographed within the established boundaries of “traditional” choreography. This is one source of the studio’s self image as authentic compared to other studios.

Although in the case of the WKDC studio a purely Korean identity may be a mark of authenticity, the term “Asian American” has significant uses in other contexts. Its use has encouraged Asian Americans to come together and find a political voice and to share common experiences while acknowledging their diversity. The term “Asian American” has also been important in establishing a place for the study of Asian American experiences in the academy with the creation of Asian American studies departments. Because of the importance of the concept of “Asian American” in academia, it is worthwhile to examine scholarship on music in Asian American contexts.

Joseph Lam encourages the use of the term “Asian American music” as a means of categorizing a larger body of musical activities beyond nationally- or ethnically-labeled musics such as Chinese music and Vietnamese music. He suggests that the term “Asian American music” is necessary in order to create a framework for comparison of different musics within this category:

Unless all the musics of Asian Americans are theoretically correlated in one way or another, their similarities and differences cannot be compared and understood in the contexts of Asian American and American culture and history. For example, if we discuss *taiko* drum music as a clearly defined and independent entity that references only Japan and America, we have neither reason nor analytical framework to compare that *taiko* drum music with *p'ungmul* music (Korean farmer's music of drums and gongs) of Korean Americans, *kulintang* music of Filipino Americans, and other similar genres that have been successfully transplanted from Asia to America. In the process of transplantation, the musics have developed different strategies to integrate various Asian and American musical elements, adjust to the social and political environment of American society, and express minority experiences directly and indirectly. Without broad and coordinated comparison of those strategies, there is no telling what is unique to specific ethnicities, and what is common to all of them. (Lam 1999: 42)

Lam also states that “to establish this research site in American academia and society, the term Asian American music is needed” (1999: 43). Lam describes “Asian American music” as “a simple term that refers to the musics of Asian Americans who incorporate Asian and American elements in their musical works. However, as it is currently used, the term is ambiguous and can be used to refer to a large variety of musics, ranging from works that sound like traditional Asian music, such as Vietnamese zither music and Japanese *taiko* drum music, to those that are hardly different from mainstream American popular and art music, such as rap, jazz, Broadway musical, and instrumental concerto” (1999: 34).

Deborah Wong responds to Lam in her book, *Speak it Louder: Asian Americans Making Music* by purposefully avoiding the term “Asian American music” and addressing this avoidance (2004). She takes as her subject not “Asian American music,” but rather “Asian Americans making music” (2004: 4). She states,

If anything, I have gravitated toward the position that any music being performed or created by an Asian American is Asian American music, and I don’t think this is as dissembling as it might seem. Rather, I want to understand why some Asian Americans make music, and what sounds they make and for whom. This is a very different question from the more common one of *whether* Asian American music exists. (2004: 12)

Wong’s book is an exemplary work on music performed by Asian Americans. It covers a wide range of topics, with an emphasis on resistance and the performance of Asian American identities vis-à-vis hegemonic whiteness and white/black dichotomies. The book’s use of performance theory and coverage of a wide range of Asian American groups is very significant.

Whereas Lam and other writers on “Asian American” arts such as Amy Ling (1999) focus on expressive culture that combines Asian and American (and often other) elements and addresses concerns specific to Asian Americans, the arts studied at the WKDC studio are more like the “Asian immigrant music cultures” treated as a particular subtopic by Wong (2004: 14) in her literature review and described by Nazir A. Jairazbhoy in the *Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology*, Volume VI (Asian Music in North America) (1985). Whereas most of the “Asian American music” of Lam’s article, the “Asian American arts” of Ling’s book, and the music made by Asian Americans in Wong’s book tends to address issues specific to being an Asian American, immigrant musics are imported from their home countries, although they may change and develop in new directions in their new host country.

Nazir A. Jairazbhoy describes a number of phenomena that may occur in immigrant musics brought to the United States from Asia. He shows great concern for the preservation of traditional musics and suggests that one possible role of diasporic musics is the maintenance of these musical traditions in the new host country, separated from changes which occur back in the country of origin. He also describes the phenomenon of immigrant groups finding interest in the music of their homeland only after coming to the United States. In some cases, the development of interest in one’s native musical traditions may not occur in the generation that migrates but may emerge in the second generation. Members of this generation may either develop interest in learning these traditions on their own or be forced to learn by their parents (1985: 7).



The WKDC studio includes many first generation women who immigrated from Korea, some of whom never studied traditional arts in Korea while others majored in them. At the same time, it also attracts a separate group of second generation (and “1.5 generation”) teenage girls and children, many of whom are encouraged by their parents to learn about Korean culture through dance. My role in performances in the community here, I fear, is accurately described by Jairazbhoy as well: “With a modicum of talent and learning, an individual can be projected into the role of an indispensable musician or accompanist, merely because there are no “professionals” in the vicinity. It should be mentioned, however, that once this new role is thrust upon them, many are conscientious and undertake to remedy their deficiencies as best they can in the new environment” (1985: 7).

Highly influential to this thesis is Su Zheng’s dissertation (1993) on music performance among Chinese Americans in New York City. I find her identification of a triangular relationship between the home community, the host community and the immigrant community particularly useful and have noted similar transnational ties in the Korean-American community around Washington, D.C.

Kip Lornell and Anne K. Rasmussen’s book *Musics of Multicultural America: A Study of Twelve Musical Communities* makes the point that the many world musics which exist within the United States ought to be included in the broad concept of “American Music” and that these musics ought to be given more scholarly attention (1997: 15). Lornell and Rasmussen also make an insightful point about the study these musics:

Serious consideration of world music tradition in the United States (for example Chinese music in America, or Chinese-American music) has

lagged far behind [study of world musics in their native geographical regions] due to the privileged position of the authentic in academia (see, for example, Handler and Linnekin 1984). Over the past two decades, however, ethnomusicologists have expanded the purview of their discipline to include not only musical practices characterized by age, place, and purity, but also those rich with the complexities of the contemporary, the mediated, the transnational, and the postmodern, phenomena that have been identified and theorized by contemporary thinkers, perhaps most notable among them Arjun Appadurai (see, for example, Appadurai 1990). (Lornell and Rasmussen 1997: 15)

Other important works on music in Asian American contexts are Adelaida Reyes's *Songs of the Caged, Songs of the Free: Music and the Vietnamese Refugee Experience* (1999), which examines the under-researched topic of refugee experiences and the effects of forced migration on musical practices, and Casey Man Kong Lum's *In Search of a Voice: Karaoke and the Construction of Identity in Chinese America* (1996), which examines karaoke in the lives of a variety of groups of Chinese Americans in New York and New Jersey.

### **Korean American Populations**

A large number of books and articles exist on Korean American populations in the United States. Many of the books designed for general readership are on Korean Americans in general, focusing on Korean American history on a more macro level (Ilpyong J. Kim 2004) or on personal life stories (Kim and Yu 1997; Mary Paik Lee 1990; Charr 1996). Other books and articles focus on topics such as religion among Korean Americans (Kim, Warner, and Kwon 2001; Ecklund 2006; Rebecca Kim 2006; Sharon A. Suh 2004; Yoo and Chung 2008; Okyun Kwon 2004; Yong-Ho Choe 2004; Hurh and Kim 1990; Min and Kim 2005; Min 1992; Kelly H. Chong 1998; Rebecca Kim 2004), Korean American politics (Angie Chung 2007), Korean

Americans and the economy (Hyojoung Kim et al 2009), ideas about race in Korea and among Korean Americans (Nadia Kim 2008), and race relations with African American communities (Kwang Chung Kim 1999).

Mary Yu Danico's book (2004) is a notable contribution for its focus on the "1.5 generation" of Korean Americans in Hawai'i, those born in Korea who move to the United States during childhood. Paul Jong-Chul Yoon's dissertation (2005) is on the role of Korean Christian church music in identity formation among 1.5- and second-generation Korean Americans. A considerable number of articles and books exist which question old theories of assimilation and acculturation among immigrants or emphasize the role of transnationalism in immigrant lives, challenging the concept of immigration as a one-time, unidirectional process (Jenny Hyun Pak 2006; Huhr and Kim 1984).

A number of books and articles focus on Korean-American women (Jenny Hyun Pak 2006; Song and Moon 1997, 1998; Song Young I. 1987, 1996; Pyke and Johnson 2003). Yen le Espiritu (1999) writes about changing spousal relations among Asian American immigrants as Asian American women generally are more successful at finding work in the United States than their husbands. Lim (1997) also writes about Korean immigrant women's challenge to gender inequality at home, due in part to their recognition of their contribution to family income. Eunju Lee (2004) writes about gender in small business ownership and Miliann King (2004) writes about Korean American women's work in the service sector.

Kyeyoung Park's (1997) book on Korean American small business owners in New York City contains several chapters focusing on gender. The book finds that

success in creating a small business becomes the goal of many Korean immigrants, even though owning a small business is considered to be much lower on the social ladder than the professional jobs many of them had in Korea. Park notes in the book that Korean American women almost universally work outside the home.

If we consider Korean residents in the United States as a whole, including those with strong transnational ties to Korea, the universality of women working has changed with new migratory patterns. One major recent change is the arrival of many Korean mothers to the United States in order to enroll their children in American schools. Many of these women arrive on student visas and are not allowed to work in the U.S. The husbands of many of these women remain in Korea in order to support their families, creating split, transnational families which may remain so for many years.<sup>3</sup> Seung-kyung Kim has been researching these families, known as “wild goose” (기러기, *gireogi*) families, in the Washington D.C. area, and has given some presentations on the topic. She is currently working on a book manuscript titled *Global Citizens in the Making?: Transnational Migration and Education in Kirogi Families*.

### **Gender in Ethnomusicology**

Several sections of this thesis address the topic of gender and women’s space. Considerable ethnomusicological work has been done on these issues, and Ellen Koskoff has been a major figure in the study of gender in ethnomusicology. In the introduction to her book *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (1989),

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<sup>3</sup> I currently teach English to several women who are part of *gireogi* families at a *hagweon* (학원, Korean private academy) in Rockville, Maryland.

Koskoff introduces research on a variety of issues related to gender in musical performance in a variety of cultures. One major issue explored in this introduction is the effect of cultures' views about women's sexuality on women's performative genres and styles in those cultures. She especially emphasizes that a woman's musical role can change over the course of her life, as her reproductive abilities and role in society change with age (1989: 3). Other topics included in this chapter are the creation of separate women's music cultures, designation of certain musical instruments as appropriate for men or women, music and inter-gender relations, acts of crossing into the performative realm of the opposite sex, and value placed on the music of each gender.

Koskoff notes that in many societies which link gender and music, separate male and female "performative environments, genres, and/or performing styles" emerge (1989: 9). Such separation, she says, "can also act as a positive catalyst for female bonding" (1989: 9). Music can also play a role in inter-gender relations, and Koskoff names "four categories of music performance (which) thus emerge in connection with inter-gender relations: (1) performance that confirms and maintains the established social/sexual arrangement; (2) performance that *appears* to maintain established norms in order to protect other, more relevant values; (3) performance that protests, yet maintains, the order (often through symbolic behavior); and (4) performance that challenges and threatens established order" (1989: 10).

Citing an abundance of existing ethnographic descriptions of women's musical activities which focus on women's social roles, Koskoff states, "Valuable as these descriptions are, what is needed now is a deeper analysis of the relationship

between a society's gender structure, what ideologies surround gender, the nature of inter-gender relations, and how all of these affect music behavior. Further, we must invert this question and ask how music behavior itself reflects and symbolizes gender behavior" (1989: 4).

In the same book, Carol E. Robertson theorizes power and gender in women's musical experiences, stating that "a long-range goal of this study is to contribute to a systematic approach to the relationship between gender, social power, and performance" (1989: 226). She provides three different ethnographic examples of uses of power through music. The first two examples are from Ghana and Argentina, and they "serve to illustrate how women carve out their own domains of performance power" (1989: 230). The third ethnographic example, the D.C. Area Feminist Chorus, is provided as an example of the "complexity of a women's culture," as this group split into two groups reflecting different beliefs, needs, and desired cultures of the membership (1989: 239). Robertson concludes the chapter with a list of questions, grouped into several different approaches, which she suggests could be developed by researchers to study "women's music from a systematic, cross-cultural perspective" (1989: 242).

Pirkko Moisala's article "Musical Gender in Performance" focuses on gender and music in two ethnographic settings: in her home country of Finland and among the Gurung people in the mountains of central Nepal. She makes four fundamental points: "(1) music is, like language, a primary modeling system, that is, a system that guides or forms our perceptions of the world or a system on which we model the world around us; (2) music is a bodily art; (3) music is most often publicly performed

and, thus, subject to social control; (4) music exists only in performance, even though the norms of performativity are brought to bear on the performer; and (5) music has the ability to alter one's state of mind" (1999: 1).

In this article, one of the points Moisala examines is how supposed gender-appropriate behavior is communicated to children and adults through music-related norms such as which instruments should be played by boys and girls. She states, "As a primary modeling system, music is one of the first elements through which an individual perceives and begins to pattern the gendered 'world and reality' of his or her surroundings. . . . Through musical performance, for example, children learn about acceptable cultural behavior, including gender roles and rules. Music does not function as a 'teacher,' however. All musical performances are encapsulations of a gender system" (1999: 4). Moisala also emphasizes music as bodily art, as the body is required to produce music, and points out that this ties music to sexuality, among "other bodily dimensions" (1999: 8). Moisala asserts that "the body is one of the most understudied aspects of music and, possibly, also one of the most difficult subjects of study" (1999: 11).

### **Korean Women in Korea**

A considerable amount of research on Korean women has been published in English. *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, edited by Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi, is a feminist-oriented book on Korean women and contains Elaine H. Kim's revealing chapter "Men's Talk: A Korean American View of South Korean Constructions of Women, Gender, and Masculinity," which

examines the speech of Korean men (and some women) about gender in the late 1980s (1998: 67-118).

Laurel Kendall's book *Getting Married in Korea: Of Gender, Morality, and Modernity* (1996) focuses on wedding customs in Korea, while her book *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits: Women in Korean Ritual Life* (1985) focuses on shaman-related practices. Nancy Abelmann's *The Melodrama of Mobility: Women, Talk, and Class in Contemporary South Korea* (2003) focuses on women's words and life stories. *Korean Women: View from the Inner Room*, edited by Laurel Kendall and Mark Peterson, is a collection of chapters on various topics related to Korean women (1983). Seungsook Moon's *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea* (2005) studies the effects of South Korea's militarization and continued male conscription system on ideas about gender and roles of men and women as citizens.

Laurel Kendall's book *Under Construction: The Gendering of Modernity, Class, and Consumption in the Republic of Korea* (2002) is a particularly interesting collection of chapters on various topics related to gender in late twentieth-century South Korea. In this book, Cho Haejoang's chapter, "Living with Conflicting Subjectivities: Mother, Motherly Wife, and Sexy Woman in the Transition from Colonial-Modern to Postmodern Korea" includes some particularly useful historical information about changing gender norms in Korea during the twentieth century. In order to talk at all about Korean women's gender norms in this thesis, it is necessary to take into account changing gender ideals among Korean women in the twentieth



century, rather than treating Korean gender norms ahistorically. For this reason, I relate some details of Cho's chapter here.

Cho describes three generations of South Korean women. She characterizes each generation as a whole, just as one might characterize the "Greatest Generation," the "Baby Boom Generation," or "Generation X" in the United States, identifying generally pervasive trends without claiming that all individuals of each generational group fit into these generalizations. Cho writes first of the strength of older generations of Korean women during the twentieth century, which was encouraged by historical circumstances in Korean society:

Over the past century's experience of colonial modernization, the image of the enormously strong and eternally self-sacrificing mother took on a particular cast in the expectation that invincible women should compensate for men's weakness, for their 'emasculatation' under colonialism. Women were expected to have boundless fortitude in the face of men's shortcomings. The weakened agency of the Korean male subject forged a peculiar gender relationship: an over-protective mother and her feeble but noble son. (2002: 167)

The first generation discussed by Cho, which she calls the grandmother's generation and defines as having been born around 1920, having grown up during the Japanese colonial era, and having raised children around the time of Liberation (1945) and the Korean War (1950-1953), was defined by self-sacrificing, strong motherhood. During this time of struggle, "A woman who had assumed rough, assertive, 'masculine' (*namsŏnjŏk*) behavior in the defense of her family's interests was not stigmatized" (Cho 2002: 172). Femininity was unimportant as she was unequivocally a "womanly woman" by her "familial, caring, and managerial roles as the female head of an extended household" (172).

Cho describes the next generation, the “mother’s generation,” as “aggressive modern wives, backstage managers of hustling industrialization” (172). This group is defined as having been born in the 1940s and having grown up in the 1950s and 1960s. Women of this generation generally became housewives in modern nuclear family units and devoted their energy to their children and family finances. This generation of women is characterized as frugal, competitive, and assertive. Women of this generation are well-known for their aggressive competition promoting their families’ welfare in a rapidly modernizing society. Again, femininity was not important as these women defined themselves in terms of their families (177).

Some of the women at the WKDC studio are from this generation, although some of them moved to the United States as young women and missed much of this aggressive, competitive culture. Others immigrated later and were a part of the culture described by Cho for much of their lives.

The third generation, the “daughter’s generation,” born in the 1960s and growing up with mass media during the 1970s, grew up with career ambitions. Many took part in the Nationalist-Democratic Movement and the women’s liberation movement. In universities, women’s studies courses became very popular among both men and women, and many young women talked about “self-realization,” asserting that they wanted to be defined not by familial relations but as individuals” (Cho 2002: 179). These women planned to have careers rather than become housewives like their mothers. However, Cho argues, their mothers wished not only for their daughters to have good jobs but also to “be suitable brides for upper-middle class families” (179). These mothers were also unwilling to provide child care for

their daughters' children, which forced their daughters to stop working once they started their own families. During this time, young women came to see heterosexual relationships as more important than family relationships, and attracting men became a chief concern. At the same time, in South Korean society as a whole, progressive attitudes gave way to neoconservatism:

The feminist vision of enlightenment lost its vitality as the utopian movements of the 1980s died down. Neoconservatism is regaining popularity, while a sophisticated consumerism rapidly expands. Many young and educated women who once had progressive ideas seemed to change their minds: They now seem to think that it is wiser to adapt to the existing system than to resist it. ...The women of this generation glided into the consumer world, making themselves into attractive objects to be gazed at and purchased by desirable men. ...

In the 1980s, the dominant female image was of a patriotic and intellectual woman. By the mid-1990s, campuses had filled with fashionable girls who imitated the styles of *Vogue* models or Sharon Stone in the movie *Basic Instinct*. Discovering their subjectivity away from their mothers and the weight of history, young women literally remade their faces with heavy makeup, plastic surgery, and sessions in private beauty schools. (Cho 2002: 181-182)

Some of the women at the WKDC studio are from this generation, and those who immigrated prior to the neoconservative shift described by Cho are likely to have brought a very different image of the ideal Korean woman with them to the United States than those who immigrated later. How their ideas about gender were affected by their new American environment is yet another factor that may vary considerably between individuals. Just as the women at the dance studio come from a variety of hybrid mixes of Korean and American cultures, their idea of what it means to be a Korean woman can differ considerably according to age, time of immigration, and a wide variety of other factors such as class and occupation.

### **Methodology: The When and Where of the Field Work**

This thesis is the result of seventeen months as a member of the Washington Korean Dance Company studio in Falls Church, Virginia, beginning in mid-June 2008. I began as a member of the adult beginner dance class, which meets twice a week for about ninety minutes per class. I also began *pansori* classes once a week for about one and a half to two hours per class, plus occasional private lessons in *pansori*. After my first seven months at the studio, I was invited to join the advanced dance class once a week (for two hours each time) in order to learn the dance *seungmu*, and I joined an additional one-hour *pansori* class afterwards. During the month of October 2009, the studio added two-hour dance rehearsals on Sundays in preparation for our performance at the John F. Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. on November 7, 2009.

I also participated in many small group *pansori/namdo minyo* performances, the first of which occurred only one week after I had started *pansori* classes. Most of these were separate from the WKDC's group *pansori* classes, as I often performed with only my *pansori* teacher and her two regular private students. My *pansori* teacher and I became close friends over time as well, and our frequent dinners together after *pansori* classes and performances have been valuable times for discussion and learning outside of class. I also became close to several members of the dance studio, whose passion for Korean traditional arts, and dance in particular, have been influential to my writing although they preferred not to be quoted directly.

I conducted an interview with the studio's director, Kim Eun Soo, parts of which are included in this thesis. I also conducted an interview with one other

member of the studio, which informs this thesis although it is not directly quoted at the request of the interviewee. These interviews were fairly free-form but used a set of guiding questions specifically tailored to the individual interviewee. Director Kim's interview was audio recorded for accuracy and was conducted in a combination of English and Korean, with other women from the studio helping to translate.

During late July and early August of 2008, I also took four group classes at another Korean dance studio in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area and had two private lessons at the instructor's home. Due to financial and time restraints, as well as gentle pressure from both studios against studying with teachers from competing schools, I ceased my activities at this studio and concentrated on the Washington Korean Dance Company studio.

Since October 2008, I have also been a member of the Washington *Kayo* (가요, *gayo*, popular song) Charity Association (WKCA), a group of singers who perform popular Korean songs, mostly from the mid-twentieth century, for Korean senior citizens' groups in the Washington D.C. area. My involvement with this group will be the material for future writing and, though not included in this thesis, gave me another means of interacting with and being a part of the local Korean community. My teaching activities at two Korean private schools in the local area have also informed my view of life in the local Korean community, as my adult English students in particular talk with me about their lives here. My own experiences living in Seoul from July 2005 to July 2006 as a music and English teacher, and my rather ravenous consumption of Korean media through the internet in the years since that

time, also formed a vital foundation of learning prior to my entry into the Washington D.C. Korean community through the WKDC studio.

### **Thesis Overview**

This thesis examines what the WKDC studio offers to its participants. Each member of the studio may draw what she will out of the studio's offerings to create a rewarding experience. This thesis does not draw conclusions as to which benefits of the studio are most important to the largest number of participants, for many women have studied at the studio over the years and I cannot study all of their experiences. In the future, I hope to delve deeper into the experiences of the studio's current members through more extensive interviewing, but that is beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, this thesis explores the variety of benefits offered by the studio, from which the members may take what they will. I explore how the nature of the arts themselves allows for the creation of a long-term studio community and how the women's communal practices contribute to an environment in which long-term study of the arts can flourish. I argue that these communal practices create a Korean cultural and linguistic space that is also a women's space.

Chapter 2 gives some background information about the studio and its location. It introduces the community outside the studio in order to convey the variety of backgrounds and lifestyles that women at the studio can have. The studio reflects a heterogeneous Korean diasporic community and serves as a meeting point at which the various, culturally hybrid lives of many women intersect.

This chapter then conveys the sensory experience of studying at the studio, describing typical classes. Much of the fulfillment of studying at the studio is in these

sensory experiences. The chapter finally focuses on the interactions of the participants with each other and the studio space. These interactions create a sense of community within the studio, a Korean space where the culturally hybrid lives of many women intersect, and a place where identities can be formed and expressed, both as members of the studio's specific group and as Korean women. Identity as a member of the studio can be a source of pride, and the quality of the studio and its genealogy can be an important factor in this. As a result, the studio's quality must be maintained through regulation of public performances.

During a dance or song at the studio, the participants interact very little with each other. Instead, they interact primarily with the music, their own bodies, and (in dance classes) their image in the mirror. Chapter 3 focuses on participants' physical engagement with the dances and songs themselves and how this can be fulfilling in and of itself, potentially producing states of "flow" or "optimal experience" (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's theory of "flow" indicates the necessity of challenge to meet the skill level of the individual, this chapter exposes some hidden challenges of Korean dance which may go unnoticed by observers but are, sometimes acutely, felt by learners at the WKDC studio. This chapter also emphasizes the importance of training in Korean dance, despite introductory English-language literature which tends to stress its naturalness and connection to everyday Korean movement and thought.

Chapter 4 explores ways in which participants can engage with the dances and songs on a more intellectual and emotional level. I argue that belief in meanings and histories of an activity can heighten an experience to something beyond the in-the-

moment experience of “flow.” I suggest that discourse surrounding the dances and their histories provides a range of meanings from which the individual participant can choose depending on what discourse she has been exposed to and what she finds personally meaningful.

Certain dances have the potential to link the participant intellectually and emotionally with subgroups of women in Korean tradition, as the participant emulates these women of the past and present. Through such emulation, the participant can enrich her own identity by becoming part of an “imagined community” with these different subgroups (Anderson 1983). At times, the participant may imagine herself to be one of these women while she is dancing, in order to heighten the performance for the audience and the experience for herself. At other times, she may instead connect with these women by feeling only that she is paying tribute to their memory through performance. Both of these concepts of the self in relation to these subgroups of women can heighten the feeling of being in the moment while dancing, as the dance gains new significance. At the same time, they can produce a long-lasting sense of the importance of the performance beyond the immediate pleasure of performing and contribute to the development of an increasingly complex identity that reflects both a deeper sense of one’s personal abilities and a sense of increasing connectedness with other groups of people.

Chapter 5 forms the conclusion of this thesis, summarizing points made in earlier chapters and identifying areas for future study.



## Chapter 2: Interacting with Others: Creating Korean Diasporic Space and Community at the Intersection of Culturally Hybrid Lives

### **The Fieldwork Setting**

#### **The Area Surrounding the Studio**

The Washington Korean Dance Company studio is located in Falls Church, Virginia, a few minutes' drive from the town of Annandale which contains a very high concentration of Korean businesses in its fairly large business district. Annandale's concentration of Korean businesses is one of the highest in the United States and the highest in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. Sometimes informally referred to as a "Korea town," Annandale's main road is visibly dotted with signs in Korean. Many of its small strip malls have Korean owners and are mainly full of Korean-owned businesses. Yet not until one explores the nooks and crannies of Annandale's oddly laid-out streets, the tucked away corners and the spaces inside them, does one experience the extent to which Annandale functions as a central meeting place for Korean residents of surrounding towns seeking out Korean linguistic, cultural, and material spaces.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Two of Annandale's main roads intersect at about a 45-degree angle, dividing the center of the town into a wedge shape which is further subdivided into oddly shaped lots and buildings facing odd angles, creating actual nooks and crannies in the town's layout. Furthermore, some Korean businesses are situated in very small spaces, in basements, or on upper floors, and are difficult to find unless one already knows about them.

The Korean restaurants and cafes in Annandale bustle with activity at night, and within the center of Annandale are at least ten *noraebang* (“singing room” establishments, like the Japanese karaoke box).<sup>5</sup> There are establishments for buying Korean household goods, imported clothing, groceries, fresh rice cake, books, *hanbok* (traditional dress), Korean-style “French” baked goods, CDs and DVDs, and cosmetics, among other things. Korean service-oriented businesses are numerous as well, including beauty salons, auto garages, doctors’ offices (practicing both Western and Eastern medicine), dry cleaners, bath houses, printing service places, travel agencies, private academies in subjects such as English and music, and at least one fortune-teller. The two main Korean language newspapers serving the Washington D.C. metropolitan area have their offices in Annandale as well. Thus, Annandale provides a high concentration of Korean spaces in which to socialize, work, play, eat, shop, and receive services.

Annandale also has a highly concentrated population of Spanish speakers. Latino-owned businesses are noticeably present, and the local HMart, part of a chain of Korean grocery stores, sells a considerable number of products marketed to residents from Mexico and South and Central America. HMart and many Korean restaurants employ both Korean and Latino workers, and Spanish language newspapers are sold alongside Korean ones in stands outside of HMart as well as in other places around town.

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<sup>5</sup> There are probably more *noraebang* than the ten with which I am familiar. Many are tucked away in basement areas, second floors, and the hallways of restaurants, bars, or cafes.

Besides Annandale, other towns in the D.C. metropolitan area function as lesser centers for Korean businesses and residents. Centreville, (Virginia), Ellicott City (Maryland), and, to a lesser extent, Rockville (Maryland) all contain relatively high numbers of Korean businesses and residents. Korean people live in many parts of the Washington D.C. metropolitan area, however, and the presence of Korean Christian churches in many towns reflects this widely distributed population. Korean churches are enormously important to many members of the Korean community and serve as a major center for socializing and raising children with awareness of their heritage (see Kim, Warner, and Kwon 2001; Ecklund 2006; Rebecca Kim 2006; Sharon A. Suh 2004; Yoo and Chung 2008; Okyun Kwon 2004; Yong-Ho Choe 2004; Hurh and Kim 1990; Min and Kim 2005; Min 1992; Kelly H. Chong 1998; Rebecca Kim 2004; Paul Jong-Chul Yoon 2005).

Due to modern transportation and media, many people in the Korean community, both those born in Korea and those born in the U.S. to Korean parents, maintain transnational ties between the U.S. and Korea. Some travel back and forth or go on brief trips to Korea, and many have family members in both countries. Even those who remain in the U.S. without traveling back to Korea usually maintain some kind of intellectual ties to Korea through media. Many people in the Korean community read Korean-language newspapers either in local printed form or online. News about Korean popular culture is common knowledge among many Korean residents, and free local Korean-language tabloids can be picked up at many Korean establishments. These contain news about Korean celebrities and pop culture and are funded by the local advertisements and classified sections that fill up many of the

tabloids' pages. Thus, many people are connected through "mediascapes" and "ideoscapes" to Korea (Appadurai 1990; 1991). However, these "-scapes" do not impose themselves on people; they exist as something with which people may choose to engage. People may choose to use these available media out of personal desire to stay informed or be entertained in Korean. They may also choose to use these media if they feel social pressures in the Korean community to stay informed and thus maintain shared knowledge with other members of the community.

Many people who settle in Annandale and the surrounding towns can manage to live with very little English language use. Others can break away from the Korean community and interact entirely in non-Korean circles. Most people fit in somewhere between the two extremes. The amount of one's daily life spent in Korean linguistic and cultural settings is often a matter of choice but is sometimes imposed upon people based on circumstances such as family situation and job.

People in the Washington D.C. metropolitan Korean community live in a place where several worlds intersect. Hypothetically, a Korean immigrant living in a part of the United States without a Korean community, and without access to a diasporic Korean community through the internet or other means, would form the only link between two worlds: her current home and Korea. But if she is situated within a diasporic community, that community becomes a third world, where the other two intersect, creating the triangular relationship described by Zheng (1993). When such a community exists, specific spaces become sites for the creation of this third world.

I suggest that the Washington Korean Dance Company studio serves as one such space. This studio fulfills different needs for different women. For some, it is the only place where they can socialize freely in Korean and interact with other Korean people. For others, it is just one part of a life conducted almost entirely in Korean linguistic and cultural spaces. For a few, the studio is the center of their social lives, and many hours are spent there each week.

### **The Washington Dance Company Studio**

The Washington Korean Dance Company studio is situated on Gallows Road in Falls Church, Virginia. This is a main road dotted with businesses, some of which are in old, slightly worn-down buildings and others of which are in very new buildings with apartments on the upper floors. There are not many Korean businesses on this road, but two large Korean grocery stores, HMart and Grand Mart, are within walking distance on either side of the dance studio.<sup>6</sup>

The Washington Korean Dance Company studio is located on the second floor of a three-story building. One is unlikely to know that a Korean dance studio is there unless one already knows about it either from advertisements in one of the local Korean newspapers or by word of mouth, the two primary means by which people learn of the studio. Also on the second floor are a Taekwondo studio and a ballroom dance studio, both of which have highly visible signs on the side of the building that faces the road. These signs are lit at night. In contrast, the Washington Korean Dance Company has no advertising sign, except for the words “한국 무용 학교”

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<sup>6</sup> Grand Mart burned down in the winter of 2008-2009 and has been closed for nearly a year, but it is preparing to reopen.

(*Hanguk muyong hakkyo*, Korean dance school) written in Korean in small, brown letters on a stairwell window that faces the road.<sup>7</sup> On one side of the building, the words “한국 무용” (*Hanguk Muyong*, Korean Dance) are written on a window in larger white letters, also in Korean only. As the wall inside is also white, the letters on the window are practically camouflaged.

The first floor of the building houses a Verizon store, a check cashing business, and a convenience store called *La Placita*. The third floor houses a church, whose congregation seems to be made up mainly of African immigrants. This church is positioned directly above our dance studio, and the sounds from its services travel down to us on certain days of the week.<sup>8</sup>

The most striking visual element of the building’s exterior is the large picture on the front and side of the building of a Taekwondo master performing a kick in mid-air. The Taekwondo studio across the hall from our dance studio is thriving, attracting many students of all ages and many ethnicities and who speak a variety of languages with their parents. The masters at the studio are Korean, and the head master was a Taekwondo world champion. The primary language of the studio’s masters is Korean, but they speak English well enough to teach their diverse students. The studio is decorated with both an American flag and a Korean flag and the students count aloud in Korean as they go through their exercises.

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<sup>7</sup> It was about six months before I noticed this small label and I had looked at the building many times, noting the absence of any sign.

<sup>8</sup> I do not know much about this church but have seen members of the congregation in very beautiful attire and been treated to some of the music and preaching style through the apparently not-soundproof ceiling of our studio during our *pansori* classes. I can only imagine what they think when they hear us.

In contrast to the diversity of the Taekwondo studio, the Washington Korean Dance Company studio, which is also a thriving place of instruction, is composed entirely of Korean women, with the exception of me.<sup>9</sup> Whereas the Taekwondo studio door is often open, and has a window into a seating area where parents can watch their children learn, the Korean Dance Company door is solid wood and generally closed. Sometimes the sounds of drumming beat their way from the studio into the hallway, the Taekwondo studio across the hall, and even the hallway on the first floor of the building where the elevator and stairwell to the upstairs floors are located. These sounds sometimes spark the curiosity of students at the Taekwondo school.

One enters the building through a door to the side which faces a small parking lot and an auto garage. The short, white first floor hallway does not look particularly clean or new, and neither do the elevator and stairwell that lead to the second and third floors. It is an altogether industrial, functional environment. On one occasion when the floors were cleaned, some of us wondered whether the landlord was preparing for some kind of inspection, so unusual was this occurrence. The second floor of the building contains a hallway, restrooms, a water fountain, and doors to the Korean dance, Taekwondo, and ballroom dance studios. The turquoise carpet and men's bathroom are usually quite dirty, but the women's bathroom is reasonably clean, and the women at the WKDC studio frequently lock it when they leave the

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<sup>9</sup> One man briefly joined the *pansori* classes for a few months this year, and two of the *pansori* teacher's private students, who take lessons outside the studio, are male; one is a college student and the other an eleven-year-old boy whose sister also studies *pansori*. They occasionally visit the group *pansori* classes at the studio, especially when preparing for an upcoming group performance, but are not regular members of the classes.

building. It is important not only as a bathroom but also as a necessity for food preparation and clean up, a vital part of the studio's community.

The door of the WKDC studio is decorated with white stick-on letters giving the studio name and hours, but many of the letters are missing and the hours not up to date. To the right of the door, however, is a very nice gold plaque with the studio name in both Korean and English.

The nondescript exterior of the studio conceals a visually, socially, and sonically dynamic space, full of colorful objects and colorful characters, in which women's lives come together for the sake of studying Korean arts and can be profoundly affected by the experience.

As the studio door opens, one is first likely to notice the many pairs of shoes stowed to the right of the door and the window to Kim *Danjangnim*'s (Director Kim's) office, which is her private space and also stores new props for future use. Behind her desk, shelves hold many plaques and awards of appreciation, as well as some newly-acquired masks which she recently bought in Korea in order to begin teaching masked dance to us next year. Next to her office is a closet-like changing area, which is also the studio's main storage area. It holds two racks of costumes which are used in performances and sometimes rented out to non-company members. Above the racks of costumes are shelves which hold drums used in dancing: *janggu* (장구, hourglass-shaped drums) and *buk* (북, barrel-shaped drums) as well as other props and hats: some hats in the military style used for *geommu* (검무, the knife/sword dance) and some in the style once worn as part of outdoor attire by *gisaeng* (기생, female performing artists who were part of a formal government



entertainment system until the early twentieth century—see Chapter 4). A rice cooker is also stored there, as is a short table with Korean mother of pearl artwork which is used for eating while seated on the floor. Along the wall between the doors to the office and changing room are chairs and stacks of cushions for sitting on the floor. Behind the stacks of cushions, a mirror covers part of the wall.

As the studio door opens further to the left, one sees the surprising expanse of the studio. Its wooden floor is impeccably clean, as food is often shared while sitting on the floor. On the wall opposite the door, a long row of mirrors covers most of the wall, though not all the way to the floor or ceiling, which sometimes means that our feet or hands are cut off from view when we dance. To the right of the long mirror are a microwave and coffee maker. An electric fan sits on the floor in front of the mirror, as do a few boxes of wooden sticks for drumming, extra fans for communal use if needed, and *sogo* (소고, small hand-held drums). A few large *buk*, their frames painted with pink flowers, sit on the floor and are occasionally used by our teachers to emphasize rhythms while the group dances. To the left of the row of mirrors is a sound system with many CDs and a small refrigerator which contains various foods and drinks, including kimchi, various Korean side dishes, water, and Heineken. A *janggu* sits on a wooden stand, and our teachers use this to accompany us from time to time, instead of the CDs we usually dance to, when going over a specific step or slowing down parts of dances. Windows perpetually covered by blinds line the left wall of the studio. They are rendered inaccessible most of the time by two or three rows of drums suspended from tall painted wooden stands, which are used in *sam buk chum* (three-drum dance).

The back wall of the studio is similarly lined with several rows of larger drums, also on wooden frames, used in *o buk chum* (five-drum dance). Both sets of drums are brightly painted—in yellow, blue, orange, green, brown, and red for *sam buk chum* drums and in pink, green, white, and brown, with small amounts of blue, orange, red, and yellow, for *o buk chum* drums. Even while sitting unused in these storage positions, they contribute to the colors of the studio. Also along the back wall are a television and DVD player and a large wardrobe with glass doors, whose rack is jammed full of colorful costumes. Also rather jammed into this wardrobe are sixteen or so large cloth flowers which are used for our “Flower Dance,” which is based on the court dance *Hwagwanmu* (화관무, “Flower Crown Dance”). In all directions, the walls of the studio are decorated with framed photographs of previous performances, plaques and certificates of appreciation for performances given, and frequent newspaper articles about the studio (all from local Korean-language newspapers).

Opening the door to the studio can feel like walking into a completely new world, one full of color and the kinds of objects that symbolize Korean national identity in travel books and tourist brochures, things that are not easy to find in the United States and must be imported from Korea. When we are dancing, the swish of brightly-colored practice skirts and the sounds of Korean traditional instruments add additional auditory and visual components. One who enters into this space might feel transported to some distant place in Korea, either one that is imagined, and perhaps existing in some mythical past, or one that the person has actually experienced, such as a modern day performance space in Korea or a classroom at the National Center for Korean Traditional Performing Arts.

Despite the significance of the studio's material culture, it is not the studio space itself and the objects in it which define the studio and what one experiences in it, but rather the people who inhabit it and their practices. Each class at the studio has its own character based on the individuals which comprise it and their purposes for being there. When one opens the door to the studio, one sees women dancing, preparing to dance, or chatting in Korean, sometimes while seated on the floor eating.

The most defining presence in the studio is its founder and director, Kim Eun Soo (김은수, Kim Eun-su), whom others often call either Kim *Seonsaengnim* (김선생님, Teacher Kim) or *Danjangnim* (단장님, Director). Kim *Seonsaengnim* majored in Korean dance at Ehwa Women's University, studying under the legendary dancer Han Young-sook (한영숙, Han Yeong-suk). After graduating, she became an assistant instructor at the university, won many first place awards in competitions, and was honored with a silver medal at the Sixth Dong-A Dance Competition, one of the most important dance competitions in Korea. She was also a member of the Korean National Dance Troupe, which performed at the Sapporo Olympic Games. She immigrated to the United States on December 18, 1977, where she gave up dancing for a time and started a family. In 1986, she and two other women who had majored in Korean traditional dance began practicing together at four o'clock on Sunday mornings, alternating between one location in Maryland and another in Virginia. They also began to perform. Kim *Seonsaengnim* began teaching Korean dance classes in 1993, and since that time many women and girls have come through the studio, some staying for many years.

Kim *Seonsaengnim* manages the studio, directs the professional company, and teaches the adult beginner class. Her demeanor is very dignified and she is highly respected. She scowls at our mistakes and sharply reprimands us, but after the reprimands are done, her scowl often warms into a smile. When she dances, her face often radiates with this smile, and it is one of the most immediately striking things about her dancing. Her dancing is very elegant, with clean lines, like Han Young-sook's, little extra embellishment, and only hints of *eokkae-chum* (어깨춤, shoulder dance) that is prevalent in folk styles.

Bae Jung-Lan (배정란 Bae Jeong-Nan), or Bae *Seonsaengnim* (배 선생님, Teacher Bae), is second in command at the dance studio, teaching many of the classes there and acting as the leader of the professional company. Like Kim *Seonsaengnim*, she majored in Korean dance in college (although she also had training in ballet and modern dance), and she dances beautifully with exquisite attention to detailed movement and rhythm. Her movements often emphasize syncopation in the music, as she may momentarily accelerate an otherwise smooth movement on certain beats or subdivisions of beats. Her breathing and corresponding shoulder movement is more obvious than Kim *Seonsaengnim*'s and is an important part of her style and expressiveness. Her tall, delicate frame is the ideal in today's places for Korean dance instruction, and her dancing is graceful and restrained, creating a very elegant look and feeling. When she is not dancing, her manner can be very dignified but is often youthful, exuberant, and playful. As a trained dancer, she often uses playful and humorous movement to make others in the studio laugh. Though highly respected as a teacher and dance expert, she is a little younger than many of the

women at the studio and teaches in a more congenial tone, explaining and sometimes teasing, but never reprimanding. Unlike Kim *Seonsaengnim*, she sometimes uses touch in her teaching, moving our arms to the correct position or pushing our backs downward further so we lean forward more in the dance *seungmu*. Both teachers primarily teach by modeling movements for us many times, although Bae *Seonsaengnim* dances together with the classes more often than Kim *Seonsaengnim*, who often observes from the side and generally only dances with us in order to teach something new or model a particular movement that she wants us to improve.

### **The Beginner Class**

#### **Introduction**

Each class at the studio has its own micro-culture composed of the individuals in the class and partially determined by their reasons for being there. As mentioned earlier, the professional company, known as the Washington Korean Dance Company, is comprised of women who majored in Korean dance before immigrating to the United States. They meet on Mondays for rigorous full-day practice sessions that begin in the late morning and end in the late afternoon. The women rehearse their dance repertoire during this time, taking breaks to eat together and chat. Members of this company give frequent performances at cultural events. They are all very serious about dance and although they are friends and socialize enthusiastically during breaks, the fundamental purpose of perfecting and maintaining their dance repertoire is clear in their long, rigorous rehearsals.

Although the creation of the professional company was the original purpose of the studio, its community classes have come to form a vital part of the studio. My

own experience at the studio began in June 2008 as a member of the adult beginner class. The other members of this class had joined one to six months earlier. One additional woman joined the class several months after I did, but otherwise the class has remained constant during the seventeen months since I joined, with no additions or subtractions.

The beginner class meets twice a week, for approximately ninety minutes each time, on Monday evenings and Saturday mornings. When the women arrive at the studio they change into rehearsal attire, which includes a long rehearsal skirt and white shoes specially made for Korean dance. These shoes are designed like ballet flats but have an upturned toe which emphasizes the flexing of the foot and rolling of the foot from heel to toe on the floor, a characteristic movement of Korean dance. Plain socks can be worn during practice, but special socks with an upturned toe, *beoseon* (버선), are used in performance. Many of the women also wear *sokbaji* (속바지), white pants worn under the rehearsal skirt which are gathered at the ankles and have a slightly puffy shape.<sup>10</sup>

At or a few minutes after the beginning of the class time, the first dance begins. This first dance is always *gibon* (기본), the “basic” dance used to teach fundamentals of Korean dance movement. It includes, among other things, some numerically labeled movements of walking forward and backward with corresponding sets of arm movements. Just as dancers must painstakingly master the movements of this dance in order to understand the fundamentals of Korean dance,

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<sup>10</sup> Some styles of *sokbaji* have a straighter, slightly tapered leg and are not gathered at the ankles. *Sokbaji* are worn not only in dance settings, but also under *hanbok* (한복, traditional Korean dress).

this thesis gives a particularly detailed description of certain steps of *gibon* in order to highlight some fundamental aspects of Korean dance in general.

### **The Dance *Gibon* (기본, “Basic”)**

One fundamental movement in the studio’s *gibon* is the shifting of weight from the right foot to the left foot, with graceful alternating arms.<sup>11</sup> As the weight shifts to the right foot, the dancer inhales and the arms come out slightly to the sides (to almost a 45-degree angle with the floor at their highest point). The dancer exhales and bends the knees with most of her body weight on the right foot while lowering the arms and letting them cross the body, the left arm in front and the right arm behind. The dancer then inhales, rising from the knee bend, coming back to the center, and bringing the arms back out to the sides (up to almost a 45-degree angle to the floor). She continues moving slightly to the left, shifting most of her weight onto the left foot. The dancer then exhales, bends the knees slightly with the weight on the left foot, and slowly drops the right arm in front of the body, the left arm behind the body. This set of movements is usually repeated twice and occurs several times during *gibon*.

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<sup>11</sup> Throughout this thesis, I refer to the versions of dances as they are performed at this particular studio. Although all Korean dancers learn some form of *gibon*, the choreography and sequence of steps can differ from studio to studio. Similarly, each dance mentioned in this thesis can actually be thought of as a dance type which can be choreographed differently as long as it adheres to norms of movement vocabulary, certain elements of choreography, costume style, props, and music.

### Interlude Number One: On Breath

In all dances taught at the WKDC studio, the element of breathing is extremely important. Although it is possible to perform each movement without actually inhaling and exhaling (as our teachers do while giving verbal explanations), the breath initiates each movement and ties together all the movements of the body. Arm movements in particular are initiated by the breath, which causes a slight lifting of the shoulders and a movement that seems to flow from the shoulder down to the elbow, lower arm, and finally the hand. The subtle lifting and lowering movement of breath, whether or not it is actually caused by intake of air, is one of the most fundamental elements of Korean dance. This aspect of the dance was not emphasized in the beginner class, however, until about a year after I joined, when we began learning *gibangmu* (기방무, *gisaeng* dance) which begins with clear shoulder movement from breathing.<sup>12</sup> Bae *Seonsaengnim* frequently specifies timing of inhalation and exhalation during the dance *seungmu* in the advanced class.

The next step in our studio's *gibon* is a forward and backward walking step with the arms held straight out to the sides, parallel to the floor, with palms down. The dancer takes eight steps forward, rolling the foot from heel to toe and deepening

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<sup>12</sup> *Gibang* (기방), or *gyobang* (교방) is a word for the places where *gisaeng* studied the arts and entertained their male clients.



into a slight knee bend as the foot comes into contact with the floor. After the last forward step on left foot, the right foot steps forward in the air for a moment but is quickly placed behind the body, initiating eight steps backward. The arms, at shoulder height, remain straight, although there may be a slight, almost imperceptible movement in the arms and fingers. As in many Korean dance movements, this movement of the arms is a slightly delayed response to the lifting and lowering of the body with the bending and straightening of the knees.

### **Interlude Number Two: On Graceful Arm Movement**

In Korean dance, movements are generally initiated from the breath and sometimes travel to the extremities of the body in such a way that the movements of the hands and feet follow slightly behind the movement of the body's core, which tend to occur on the beat. The movement from the breath to the shoulders, down the arms, and to the hands is very subtle, and in some cases, as in the first step of *gibon*, the arms appear to remain straight while having a slight suppleness. In most movements, the arms have a greater suppleness than in ballet but not the obvious arm undulations found in bellydance. The ability to perform this slight delay of movement at the body's extremities has been one of the most difficult things for the women in the WKDC studio's community classes to master and can be difficult to teach.

In trying to describe this movement verbally, I turn to the bamboo that grows outside my apartment in Annandale. If I move a large stalk of this

bamboo (or any limber tree or plant) up and down or from side to side, its branches and leaves tend to follow the back and forth movement with a slight delay due to inertia; as I move the main bamboo stalk upward, its branches stay down for a split second until they are pulled up. As I change direction quickly, pulling the stalk downward, the branches continue to move up due to inertia until they are forced to change direction. The motion of the arms in many dance movements is similar to this; they move in reaction to the core of the body's movements, often with a slight delay so that the hand is the last thing to move. This creates grace. Foot movements sometimes follow this pattern as well; oftentimes, as the leg is lowered to the ground, the foot gently flexes up, like a leaf momentarily held in position by inertia or air resistance, before being lowered to the floor, heel first.

The second step in *gibon* also moves forward for eight counts and then backward for eight counts, but with a different step and arm pattern. As the right foot steps forward, the dancer inhales and the left arm rises to a vertical position. The left foot comes forward and lightly touches the floor next to the right foot, but the weight remains on the right. The dancer exhales and draws the left hand directly downward to the back of the head, with elbow out to the side. The dancer then performs the same movement on the other side, stepping forward on the left foot and raising the right arm, but as the dancer initiates the step forward on the left foot, she simultaneously returns the left arm to its original position, straight out to the side at

shoulder level, using a forward, horizontal movement of the forearm. This action is performed four times (two per side) forward, and four times backward.

The third step in our *gibon* begins with an inhalation as the right foot steps forward and the left follows to meet it, while the right hand, which is still behind the head from the previous step, is drawn forward slightly and upward past the temple and then brought out to the right side in an arc while the dancer exhales and bends the knees slightly. The right arm finishes its arc parallel to the ground, at shoulder level. While this entire movement is being performed, the left hand, which begins held out to the side, parallel to the ground with palm down, lifts slightly (a movement initiated from the inhalation which travels out to the hand) and rotates to face palm up, moving down again slightly on the exhalation. Next, the dancer inhales again and raises the left arm in an arc to an almost 90-degree angle with the ground while also lifting the left leg, knee bent. The dancer may do this in one smooth motion or may add a little extra inhalation on the last subdivision of the beat, with an accompanying extra lift of the body. She then exhales, lowering the left foot to the ground and drawing the left hand downward behind the head, elbow directly out to the side. The entire set of movements is repeated on the opposite side.

The use of unilateral movement (movement of the arm and leg on the same side of the body) is one identifiable characteristic of Korean dance, while bilateral movements (movements of the right arm and left leg or left arm and right leg) occur frequently as well. As described above, the first few step sequences in our studio's *gibon* include both unilateral and bilateral movement. Some other key elements which occur later in the dance are a slow lowering to the floor and movements

performed while kneeling on the floor, followed by a rise to a standing position and a repetition of the same moves on the other side of the body. As many dances require the dancer to lower herself to the floor and rise again, this movement is an important part of *gibon*'s function as a warm-up dance. The dance ends with the dancer spinning in circles on the heels, first counterclockwise and then clockwise, while performing the same arm movements that were performed in the dance's second series of steps. Over time, the dancer trains to be able to spin very quickly on the heels, an important skill in the Fan Dance in particular although many Korean dances include turning of some kind. The ability to turn repeatedly without becoming dizzy is important for many of the dances.

#### **Other dances in the beginner class**

After dancing *gibon* one or two times, the beginner class progresses through a series of dances they have already learned, doing each one or two times from beginning to end. *Buchae chum* (부채춤, "Fan Dance") is often first. Whereas the studio's classes of teenagers perform a group version of *buchae chum*, bringing their fans together to create giant waves, opening and closing flowers, rotating circles, and other shapes, the adult beginner class's *buchae chum* is a solo dance. Although this dance dates only to the mid-twentieth century, it is a popular dance in presentations of Korean culture both within Korea and without, and its relatively recent invention often goes unmentioned in performances and writing (for example Hahn Man-Young 1976: 35). This dance uses colorful costumes and fans, and the dancers are to smile during its performance. Among different studios, the musical accompaniment to *buchae chum* varies from one choreography to another, although some pieces of

music are more common than others. In the WKDC studio adult classes, the accompaniment to this dance is the piece of music most commonly played for *buchae chum*, an instrumental recording of the folk song “*Changbu taryeong*” (창부타령) played by *gayageum*, *danso*, *janggu*, *buk*, *geomungo*, *piri*, and *haegeum*. The piece is in the pentatonic mode *gyeongjo* (경조) (*sol-la-do-re-mi*), with phrases ending on the pitch *sol* below *do* and returning to *do* on the downbeat of the next phrase, inviting strong movements, such as the dramatic snapping open of a fan, on these downbeats.

The recording begins with a *gayageum* solo and the entrance of the *danso* on a trill. Both fade out and there is a momentary silence before the ensemble as a whole begins the song. Most of the instruments play in heterophony, although each instrument fulfills its particular function in the texture of the ensemble. The *geomungo* mostly plays supporting low notes which might be thought of as functioning like a bass line or as a simplified version of the main melody. Instruments sometimes drop in and out of the texture, the most dramatic example of which is a brief *gayageum* solo from 1:45 to 1:54, accompanied only by the *janggu*. The piece begins in the *jangdan taryeong*, a 12-beat cycle at a moderate tempo, and changes to the faster *jajinmori* at 2:29 before returning to the original tempo and *jangdan* at 3:26 and finally slowing to an end.

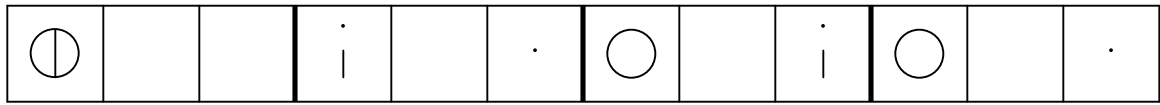
### **Interlude Number 3: On *jangdan***

The term *jangdan* is sometimes translated into English as “rhythmic cycle.” It indicates not only the meter and tempo, but also which beats are to be given emphasis, and sometimes which strokes are to be played on the percussion instruments. One might relate this to the concept of a “rock beat,” which indicates not only meter but also a general rhythmic pattern. However, just as a rock drummer can change the rhythm within the general feeling of a rock beat, a drummer or other musician can play with different rhythms and elaborations within the *jangdan*. The versions of *jangdan* transcribed in this chapter are very basic versions of these *jangdan* and there are many ways to play around with them within certain norms.

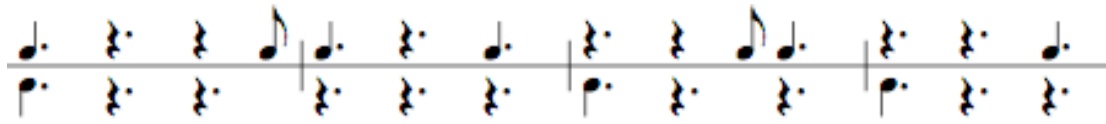
#### **Figure 1: Key to Strokes on *Janggu***

⊙	<i>deong</i> (뎡)	Both drum heads are struck
○	<i>kung</i> (콩)	Left head is struck
	<i>deok</i> (덕)	Right head is struck with the whole of the stick
⋮	<i>deo-reo-reo-reo</i> (더러러러)	Tip of stick bounces on right drum head
	<i>gideok</i> (기덕)	Right head is struck twice, first with the tip of the stick just before the beat, then with the whole stick on the beat
·	<i>deo</i> (더)	Right head is struck lightly with the tip of the stick

Figure 2: Basic *Taryeong Jangdan*

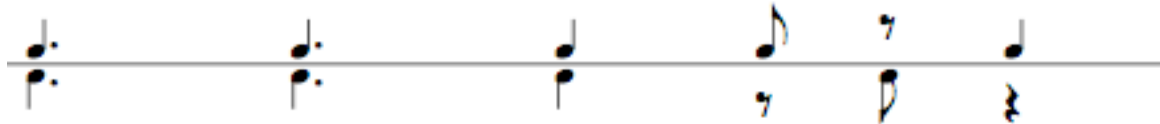
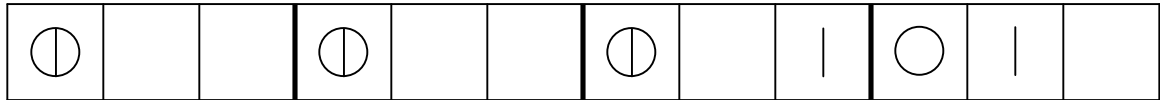


(So Inhwa 2002: 108)

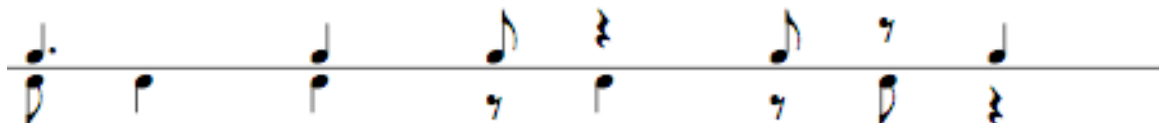


덩	-	-	기	덕	-	더	쿵	-	기	덕	쿵	-	더
<i>deong</i>	-	-	<i>gideok</i>	-	<i>deo</i>	<i>kung</i>	-	<i>gideok</i>	<i>kung</i>	-	<i>deo</i>	-	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		

Figure 3: Basic *Jajinmori Jangdan*



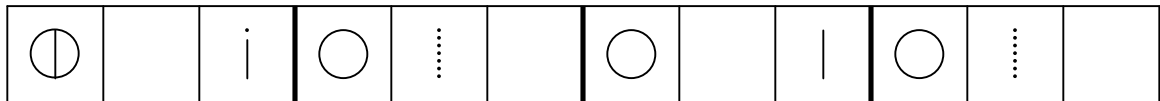
덩	-	-	덩	-	-	덩	-	덕	쿵	덕	-	
<i>deong</i>	-	-	<i>deong</i>	-	-	<i>deong</i>	-	<i>deok</i>	<i>kung</i>	<i>deok</i>	-	



더	덩	-	덩	-	덕	쿵	-	덕	쿵	덕	-	
<i>deo</i>	<i>deong</i>	-	<i>deong</i>	-	<i>deok</i>	<i>kung</i>	-	<i>deok</i>	<i>kung</i>	<i>deok</i>	-	

Next in the progression of dances is often *salpuri*, which is danced with a white silk scarf (수건, *sugeon*) in the dancer's hands. The dance begins with slow, carefully controlled movements and a sense of intense but restrained internal energy. The music used for *salpuri* is *sinawi* (시나위), which begins in the 12-beat *jangdan* known as *gutgeori* (굿거리).

**Figure 4: Basic Gutgeori Jangdan**



(So Inhwa 2002: 118)

똥 - 기덕 쿵 더러러러 - 쿵 - 덕 쿵 더러러러 -  
*deong - gideok kung deo-reo-reo-reo - kung - deok kung deo-reo-reo-reo*

*Sinawi* is an improvisational form of music performed by an ensemble of instruments, sometimes with a vocalist. In the recording used in the WKDC studio's beginner class, the instruments are the *daegeum*, *ajaeng*, *haegeum*, *gayageum*, and *janggu*. Although the *sinawi* which accompanies *salpuri* is a secular genre, the name *sinawi* is also used for a genre of music used in shaman rituals for the dead.

In this dance, movements are restrained but stress the strong beats in the music with subtle movements in the arms and torso, controlled breathing, movements of the feet, and flicks of the scarf, with particularly strong emphasis on the first beat



of each twelve-beat cycle. Breathing is a vital element in emphasizing beats and creating a feeling of tension and release in this dance.

One characteristic feature of this and most other choreographies of this dance is a point at which the dancer drops the scarf and moves upstage, with her back to the fallen scarf, only to stop, turn around, return to the scarf, and sink to the ground. She then lowers herself to the floor, her head just above the ground, and reaches for the scarf, sometimes lingering there depending on the choreography, before gently picking up the scarf and rising again to finish the dance. After this point, the *jangdan* changes to *jajinmori* (at 3:10 in our choreography) and the dance becomes slightly faster and more animated, though still with grace and restraint, as the dancer expresses ecstatic joy.


This particular *salpuri* was choreographed by Han Young-Sook as a going-away present for Kim *Seonsaengnim* before she emigrated to the United States. Although we have learned the dance in class, only Kim *Seonsaengnim* is allowed to perform it. (See Chapter 4 for more on the significance and meanings of *salpuri*.)

*Sogo chum* is often next in the class's progression of completed dances. In this dance, each dancer holds a small drum in the left hand and a stick in the right and plays simple patterns on the drum while dancing in a vigorous style suggesting folk dance. This dance is accompanied by a recording of *taepyeongso* (태평소, a double reed instrument), *jing* (징, large gong), *janggu*, *buk*, and *kkwaenggwari* (꽝과리, small gong). It begins in a slow 12-beat *taryeong jangdan* and changes to *jajinmori* at 2:43. At 4:02, the tempo quickens and the *jangdan* changes to a 5/4 *eonmori* (엇모리) *jangdan* as the dancers move quickly in a circle. At 4:39, it slows down to

a slow 4/4 *hwimori* (휘모리) *jangdan* which changes to a fast *hwimori* at 5:28. The tempo suddenly slows at 5:46 and the piece ends at 5:49.

**Figure 5: Basic *Eonmori Jangdan***

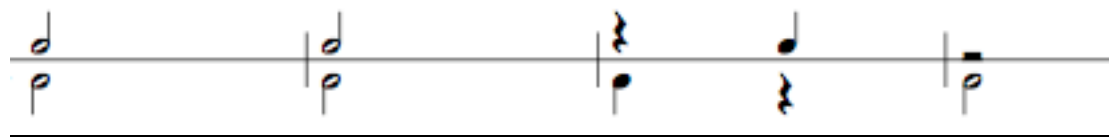
⊙			○	
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덩	-	덕	쿵	덕
<i>deong</i>	-	<i>deok</i>	<i>kung</i>	<i>deok</i>

**Figure 6: Basic *Hwimori Jangdan***

⊙		⊙		○		○	
---	--	---	--	---	--	---	--

덩	-	덩	-	쿵	덕	쿵	-
<i>deong</i>	-	<i>deong</i>	-	<i>kung</i>	<i>deok</i>	<i>kung</i>	-

The last dance in the progression is often *sam buk chum*, “three-drum dance.” In this dance, the dancers are arranged in a line across the stage, each with one drum behind her and one drum on either side of her. Each drum is suspended from a wooden stand at about chest height and is double-headed, so that there is only one

drum between each pair of dancers; one plays on one head of the drum and the other plays on the other head. The dancers perform synchronized movements, beating the three drums within their space in the line. At one point in the dance, the dancers move downstage, out of their drumming spaces, for a short time, but they stay for the most part in their own small drumming area and the movements are always to be done in perfect synchrony. One particularly impressive move in this dance occurs when each dancer turns her body to face one drum and then bends backward to play the drum on the opposite side. Another impressive move occurs when the dancers play around the entire rim of the drum, starting at the top of the rim and pivoting with the feet while twisting into a backbend as they play down the side of the rim and then the bottom of the drum, and return to standing upright while finishing the pivot, to complete the circle back to the top of the drum. This dance is performed without recorded music. Instead, it is accompanied live by the *janggu*, played by either Kim *Seonsaengnim* or Bae *Seonsaengnim*. Sebastian Wang, who teaches *janggu* and *samullori* at the WKDC studio and the University of Maryland in College Park, often plays the *janggu* accompaniment in performances.

During the late summer and fall of 2009, the usual progression of dances was disrupted by preparations for the studio's biennial recital, held at the John F. Kennedy Center on November 7, 2009. Extra Sunday rehearsals were also added to the regular class schedule. The beginner class learned two new dances for this performance. The first is referred to as "Flower Dance" in class, as it is based on the court dance *Hwagwanmu* (화관무, "Flower Crown Dance") but uses nontraditional music and therefore does not have a traditional name. The recording to which this dance is

performed features a *haegeum* along with several non-Korean instruments. The meter is in 4/4 and the mode is pentatonic (*sol-la-do-re-mi*).

The second dance is *gibangmu*, for which the dancers wear attire based on *gisaeng* fashion and dance in a style influenced by *gisaeng* dances (see Chapter 3 for more on this dance's musical accompaniment and Chapter 4 for more on *gisaeng*). This dance and the "Flower Dance" took up the bulk of rehearsal time during the months before the performance and some of the other dances were practiced only occasionally as a result. The usual progression of dances (with the inclusion of these two newer dances) should resume again now that the performance has occurred. Although with such a large repertoire of dances, there are days when one or two dances are skipped, in most classes each dance is performed at least once.

In addition to the usual progression of dances performed from start to finish in each class, the beginner class usually has a dance in progress and learns a few new steps of this dance during each class period. Whereas Kim *Seonsaengnim* usually gives little feedback on the other dances, only occasionally calling out corrections during the dance or pinpointing a problem after the dance is done, she teaches the day's new steps carefully. Each dance is learned this way, little by little during each class, until the dance is complete and can be added to the class's repertoire.

During this instruction time, or when pinpointing problems in the dances already learned by the class, Kim *Seonsaengnim* teaches primarily by modeling, first demonstrating and then having the class dance the step along with her. She often corrects students by imitating their movements in an exaggerated, comical way, performing a quick code switch from her elegant, dignified movement style to the

student's awkward pose or movement. During *sogo chum*, she might call out (in Korean), "No! Why are you doing this?" while making a violent stabbing motion with the stick against the head of the drum. "It should be this..." she might say (in Korean), lightly tapping the drum with the stick using a buoyant arc of the arm. During such reprimands, her expression is one of feigned (or possibly real) crossness, but she soon switches to amused laughter as the student and others in the class burst out laughing. She may repeat the comical movement to elicit more laughter, and the person who made the mistake usually laughs the loudest, embarrassed perhaps but not too disheartened. Such funny moments are sometimes the highlight of the class, making it fun and relaxing.

In this beginner class, the women sometimes chat a little between dances and before and after class about all sorts of topics such as family, the economy, American politics, or news events in Korea. Such chats rarely go on for long, however, and the women often go from one dance to the next with little conversation, quickly grabbing some water and the props required for the next dance. As the performance at the John F. Kennedy Center approached, the women became very serious about given a polished performance and focused on dancing, not socializing. At the same time, however, with the added contact of extra rehearsals, helping each other with costumes, and knowing that we would perform together, a new but elusive sense of closeness began to emerge during this time.

### **The Advanced Class**

Although the advanced dance class meets on Tuesdays and Thursdays, I have only attended the Thursday classes, as the dance *seungmu* is taught only on Thursdays

and I was invited specifically to learn this dance. The advanced class is mainly made up of women who have studied at the studio for a number of years. Several have studied there for a decade. In contrast to the beginner class, which generally begins on time, the advanced class usually socializes over food for up to twenty minutes into the scheduled class time. A subgroup of these women meets to socialize beforehand and they are usually sitting on the floor sharing food as the rest of the class arrives and joins them. The personalities of the women in the class range from quiet and subdued to boisterous and exuberant, and in conversation the more colorful characters are often dominant, making the rest of the group laugh frequently. Korean is the language of conversation and instruction in both this class and the beginner class, although English words or phrases may be sprinkled in. Occasionally an individual switches to English for as long as several sentences (sometimes for my benefit), before the conversation inevitably switches back to Korean.

The pace of the class is relaxed and the women in this class treat each other, and both teachers, as friends and peers. After some time, the class gets up from the circle on the floor and performs *gibon* as a warm-up. Bae *Seonsaengnim* teaches the class, with Kim *Seonsaengnim* observing and coaching from the side. This class usually performs *gibangmu*, *salpuri* (with different choreography and music from that performed in the beginner class), and *o buk chum* (“five-drum dance”) from start to finish. The class also sometimes does *sanjo* (산조), which is performed with a fan, and occasionally the same *buchae chum* and *sogo chum* as the beginner class. The dance in progress for this class is *seungmu*, which the class has been learning, little by little, since December 2008. Recent focus on *gibangmu* for the recital at the John F.

Kennedy Center has required that *seungmu* and some of the other dances be set aside temporarily. Whereas the beginner class often moves from dance to dance quickly, with little extra time for socializing, transitions between dances are often lengthy in the advanced class as there is more conversation. Bae *Seonsaengnim* sometimes has to prod the members of the advanced class to end their conversations and prepare to dance.

### **Pansori Classes**

The two main *pansori* classes at the Washington Korean Dance Company studio meet on Wednesday and Thursday evenings.<sup>13</sup> The Thursday classes occur immediately after the advanced dance class ends and consist mostly of women from the advanced dance class. The Wednesday night classes are attended by a few women from the advanced dance class, but most of the women who attend on Wednesdays do not take dance classes at the studio, coming only for *pansori*. The format of each class is the same.

Coincidentally, the teacher of *pansori* at the Washington Korean Dance Company studio has the same name as Kim *Seonsaengnim*, Kim Eun Su (김은수, Gim Eun-su). This often leads to confusion as they are sometimes thought to be the same person. *Pansori Seonsaengnim* Kim Eun Su arrived in the United States three years ago and has been teaching *pansori* in the United States for a few years. She is quite young, in her late twenties, and has a tomboyish, vigorous personality with an intensity that matches her gruff, deep voice. She began studying *pansori* in middle

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<sup>13</sup> Women from these classes sometimes have extra small group lessons at other times as well.

school, attended the National Center for Korean Traditional Performing Arts' high school, and majored in *pansori* in college. She studied *pansori* under a renowned master, Kim Yeong-ja (김영자).

*Pansori Seonsaengnim* is currently studying English in Virginia, a skill she hopes will prove useful both in the United States and in Korea, where English proficiency is considered an elite and highly desirable skill. She continues to stay in contact with her teacher, Kim Yeong-ja, and may return to Korea in future years to assist her with teaching. She also has thoughts of eventually establishing her own *pansori* school in Virginia and settling there permanently. She is ambitious, working toward the hope of a stellar career as a *pansori* singer and teacher, and has been very active performing and promoting her students. In addition to the group *pansori* classes held at the dance studio, she teaches some other classes in the community and has several private students.

*Pansori* classes at the dance studio always begin with the song “*Geumgangsan*” (금강산), a song about the beauty of Mt. Geumgang. Then other songs from the group’s repertoire are practiced, usually from start to finish. Most of these are *namdo minyo* (남도 민요), folk songs from the southwest region of Korea.

The group’s current folk song repertoire consists of the following:

“*Ieodo Sana*” (이어도 사나), a song about the women divers of Jeju Island,

“*Deulgukhwa*” (들국화), “Wild Chrysanthemum,”

“*Sinsacheolga*” (신사철가), song of the four seasons, using them as a metaphor for different stages of life,

“*Donghae Bada*” (동해 바다), a song about the East Sea,



“*Hamyang Yangjamga*” (함양 양잠가), a song in which the singer proclaims undying love and suggests that no matter what shape her lover takes in his next life she will be reincarnated as its match,  
“*Ganggangsullae*” (강강술래), a song of harvest time, sung during the autumn festival Chuseok, and accompanied by dancing in a circle (see Chapter 4),  
“*Saetaryeong*” (새타령), song of the birds, and  
“*Jindo Arirang*” (진도 아리랑), a widely popular song with many verses which often serves as our encore piece because it is an audience favorite.

The group also sings “*Sacheolga*” (사철가), another song which uses the four seasons to represent different stages of a person’s life. This piece is a *danga* (단가) a short song which is used by *pansori* singers as a warm-up in performances before beginning pieces from the *pansori* repertoire. The classes are just beginning to learn songs from the actual *pansori* narrative repertoire, beginning with “*Sarangga*” (사랑가), the “Love Song” from *Chunhyangga* (춘향가, the story of Chunhyang).

The most striking thing about the *pansori* classes is the loud, heavy vocal quality used in singing. Each woman in the class sings loudly with a full sound, and *Pansori Seonsaengnim*’s voice is very loud and expressive, with the seasoned huskiness that comes from years of singing *pansori*. She comes from the *pansori* school known as *Gangsanje* (강산제), the River and Mountain School.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Gangsanje* (The River and Mountain School) was created by Pak Yu-jeon (박유진), who had previously developed the school of *pansori* known as *Seopyeonje* (서편제, Western School). According to Chan E. Park, his change of style was the result of his performing in Seoul, where audiences found the *Seopyeonje* style to be too melodramatic. As a result, he developed *Gangsanje* as an extension of his earlier

As is the case in Korea as well (see Park 2003: 160), each student in the class brings an audio recording device, records parts of the class, and is expected to practice at home. Each student is given a paper with the lyrics to the song and *Pansori Seonsaengnim* teaches by modeling lines of the song and having the class echo after her. She often has individuals sing alone as well so they can hear themselves and so that she can pinpoint any individual problems. She breaks lines down into single words if necessary, having students echo the word after her and sometimes slowing down the tempo in order to make each pitch clear. During the class, *Pansori Seonsaengnim* accompanies herself and the students on the *sori buk* (소리북, drum used in *pansori*). As in the dance classes, the women in the *pansori* classes sometimes chat between songs. Occasionally someone brings a snack to share. All the *pansori* students recently performed in a studio recital held at George Mason University on September 27, 2009. It was the first major performance by the group, although members have participated in some smaller performances at local cultural festivals. *Pansori Seonsaengnim*'s private students and I give frequent performances at cultural festivals and events hosted by local Korean cultural organizations.

### **The Symbiotic Relationship Between the Arts and the Studio Community**

Ethnomusicologists have long been interested in the relationship between the arts and the creation or maintenance of community. At the WKDC studio there is a

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style, incorporating the stronger elements of *Dongpyeonje* (동편제, the Eastern School, based on the style of Song Heungnok, 송흥녹) into his singing (2003: 180). Marshall Pihl writes that the River and Mountain School is “noted for its dense rhythmic subtlety and the innovative interaction of its words and drumming patterns” and notes that the highly-regarded singer Kim So-hui (김소희) sang in the style of this school (1994: 93).

strong sense of community, but this is a community that comes together specifically for the purpose of studying the arts; without these arts, most of these women would not meet at all. However, the actual dances taught at the studio involve almost no interaction between the dancers. In general, when the music is playing, each woman in the class interacts only with herself in the mirror, the sound of the music, and memories of how the teachers demonstrated the dance.<sup>15</sup> These are not communally-oriented, interactive dances and it would be very possible at a similar studio for participants to come into the studio, dance, and leave without much interaction with each other at all. Although the arts themselves are the reason that the studio members gather, the studio's sense of community is reinforced during the interactions that take place before, after, and between the dances. These bonds can keep women coming to the studio for a long time, contributing to the long-term health of the studio and making continuation of classes possible. In this way, the arts themselves and the sense of community at the studio feed each other.

### **Cultural Space, Community Practices, and Identity**

#### **The WKDC Studio as a Korean Space and Korean Identity**

As stated earlier, the presence of many Korean spaces in the area around the WKDC studio makes possible a range of culturally hybrid lifestyles. A person living

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<sup>15</sup> Only in the dance *gibangmu* is there any interaction between dancers, and this is only in the form of eye contact as the dancers face each other in circles and groups. There is no physical interaction in this or any of the dances. In the classes for teenagers, however, several dances include a great deal of interaction between dancers. The girls in the teenagers' class face each other in the dance *geommu* and physically connect their fans together in *buchae chum*. Their performance of the dance *ganggangsullae* involves a great deal of physical interaction (see Chapter 4 for more on *ganggangsullae*).

in the Korean diasporic community can mix habits brought from Korea and habits acquired in the U.S. Some of these new habits may be recognized as “American,” while other new habits might not be generally recognized as “American,” but may be the result of moving to the U.S., being among different people with different resources available, and also perhaps wanting to change or believing one should change based on one’s ideas about the United States.

The local Korean community, which mixes these Korean- and American-derived habits, is by nature a hybrid culture, and the people who live within this community can practice a range of mixtures of Korean and American habits. The exact mixture of habits from the two cultures, and the amount of contact one has with Koreans and non-Koreans is sometimes a matter of choice, but some people are bound by circumstances that are out of their control. Employment can be easier to obtain within the Korean community because of personal networks and Korean-language classified ads. Social pressures within the Korean community can prevent young adults from moving out of their parents’ homes and becoming more independent. Young adults who have come here from Korea to study English sometimes find it difficult to find friends outside of their English classrooms. Korean Christian churches are major gathering places and may attract people because of their worship styles and because of the comfort of having fellowship with others and studying the Bible in Korean. Between the time demands of family, work and/or school, and (for many people) church, there may not be much time for meeting people outside the Korean community.

On the other hand, other people may be separated from “the Korean community” by their jobs, by marrying into non-Korean families, by belonging to non-Korean places of worship, or by having networks of friends who are not Korean. A person who is not connected to “the Korean community” through networks of acquaintances but wants to connect with other Korean people can find it difficult to begin. This seems to be one reason for the popularity of churches, as they are welcoming and oriented toward fellowship, wishing to draw people in and connect people with each other.

The Washington Korean Dance Company studio also functions as a place where Korean women can gather, both to study the arts and to connect with each other. These women all have culturally hybrid lives, although the mixture of Korean and American elements varies individually. In the context of the WKDC studio Korean habits are dominant, and this is one reason women come to the studio (myself included). The language of instruction and socializing is Korean (though sometimes with some English words and phrases sprinkled in or very brief code switches to English). Korean social practices are observed as well, and many of these are embedded in the language, such as greetings and ways of showing respect.

When food is shared at the WKDC studio, it is usually identifiably Korean, bought from one of the local Korean-owned stores. Red bean bread and other assorted breads from one of the local Korean bakeries is a common snack in the advanced class. Some other foods which have been shared in various classes are: dried squid, dried persimmons, fruit, various kinds of *ddeok* (떡, soft, chewy rice cake), red bean ice cream pops, and *gimbap* (김밥, rice and seaweed rolls similar to

sushi but using different ingredients). The fact that the foods shared at the studio are identifiably Korean is significant, but it is also significant that very little effort is required to obtain these kinds of food. Because of the presence of so many Korean businesses, these foods are just a part of daily life for many people here.

The dominance of Korean language, social practices, and food make the WKDC what I would call a “Korean space.” This is a separate issue from the subject matter taught at the studio. If the subject of study were tap dance but these practices remained the same, it would still be a “Korean space” because it would function as a space where Korean habits are dominant, the most fundamental habit of which is language. On the other hand, a studio could teach Korean dance without being a “Korean space” if elements like language and social practices were dominantly non-Korean. In many American university world music ensembles, for example, the cultural space in the classroom is quite different from the culture of the music’s place of origin.<sup>16</sup>

The WKDC studio performs many functions for many different people, but one of the most obvious of these is maintaining a sense of Korean national or ethnic identity. By both teaching Korean performing arts and being a “Korean space,” the studio offers a place to be with other Korean women and to learn art forms that epitomize Korean national identity. A studio needn’t be both a “Korean space” and a

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<sup>16</sup> Some teachers of these ensembles make an effort to incorporate extra-musical cultural practices into the world music ensemble classroom and bring it closer to a space which resembles the native culture. One major insurmountable difference in many (though not all) cases is language: much of culture is so embedded in language that the necessity of teaching in English, and students’ inability to understand the music’s native language, make it impossible to create an approximation of the music’s native cultural setting.

place of instruction in Korean arts to contribute to a sense of Korean identity; a tap dance studio made up mostly of Korean people and dominated by Korean language has the potential to reinforce Korean identity as does a *pansori* class taught in English in an American university. It is significant that the WKDC studio is both a place of instruction in Korean arts and a “Korean space.”

For some women who study at the studio, and especially for the second-generation and “1.5 generation” youth of the teenager classes, the studio may be one of their only connections to Korean culture. On the other hand, some of the women at the studio are immersed in the local Korean diasporic culture and maintain close transnational ties with Korea through travel, personal communications, and media. As much of their lives is conducted in Korean spaces, there may be little need to reinforce Korean identity. For them, the studio may be a place not for adventure into new cultural territory but for the comfort of being among other Korean women. Yet the dance studio allows both groups of women to perform Korean identity in a public way, transforming into an image of Korean women that is symbolic of Korea itself.

#### **The Studio as a Women’s Community**

It is significant that the WKDC classes are made up entirely of women, who are grouped in classes roughly by age. Korea is primarily a homosocial culture, especially among the older generations. Women’s clubs are common in Korea, and the studio functions as such a club for some of the women. There they can talk animatedly, tell jokes, and have fun together.

Although men can perform Korean dance and major in it in university dance departments, Korean dance, like ballet, continues to be dominated by women. The

WKDC studio's dance classes do not currently include any men, which may be due to a number of factors. The gracefulness of Korean dance may be seen by some men and boys as less masculine, and therefore less desirable to learn, than Taekwondo or dance styles such as popping and b-boying (breakdancing), which are very popular among Korean and Korean-American male youth (in Korea and the United States). Most of the dances taught at the studio are performed exclusively by female dancers in Korea, although a few are performed by both men and women (*seungmu* and *salpuri*). The repertoire taught in the studio's community classes does not currently include any of the dances associated with male dancers, such as *hallyangmu* (한량무) and *dongnaehakchum* (동래학춤, "Crane Dance"), but mask dance—a genre associated with men—is to be added to the class repertoire in the near future. Besides the repertoire and the dance style itself, the women-dominated social environment of the studio might be uncomfortable for a man to enter into, but this is a matter of conjecture at present.

The effect of the women-only environment of the studio on social interaction within it also remains a matter of conjecture; whether the women's patterns of socializing in the studio are also exhibited at home, at work, or in other parts of life is beyond the scope of this thesis and would require further study. Nevertheless, the studio is one center of socialization that follows a common pattern among Korean women in Korea and the United States: the formation of women's groups as main centers for socializing. It is possible that the colorful personalities which emerge from some of the members is the result of this environment, but it is also possible that those who are especially animated in the studio are equally animated in other parts of



their lives. Korea has had a long history of separate spheres for men and women, and although there is more mixing of men and women in recent decades in relationships such as dating, friendships, and work colleagues, Korea remains fairly homosocial, especially among the older generations.

In the generation of Korean women represented by older members of the WKDC studio's advanced adult class, the prevalence of homosocial interaction and certain historical factors in Korea have produced a generation of Korean women who are often characterized as aggressively assertive. Leading Korean feminist Cho Haejoang describes women of this generation as powerful within their homosocial sphere. In contrast, when she arrived in the United States in 1971, she says, she was taken aback by American female college students' concern with sexual attractiveness, femininity, and finding dates:

In my opinion, the United States was a terrible place for women. Of course, in south Korea there were also girls who wanted to be sexy and who thought of romantic love all the time, but they were the minority. Most south Korean girls cared much more about their female friends than about boyfriends. I remember thinking to myself, "You are lucky to be a Korean woman. You do not have to adopt a self-conscious pose to attract other people's attention, men's in particular. You say whatever you want to say without worrying about losing your femininity, and you are not preoccupied with your external appearance."

It took me a long time to realize that I came from a homo-social culture, a culture that values same-sex friendship and social interaction over heterosexual relationships and romance. . . . In spite of my pride in the powerful individual Korean women who surrounded me in my youth, I came to realize that these women were not collectively empowered. That is, in spite of the homo-social circumstances that appeared so laudable to me, south Korean women's power was not institutionalized and consequently was limited to their immediate social relationships.

This realization leads me to the first question that I raise in this chapter. Why could south Korean women appear to be so powerful when they are structurally so powerless?" (2002: 166)

In the context of the WKDC studio, the women do indeed appear to be very powerful, possessing strong personalities. This may be partly due to the women-only environment of the studio. The homosocial nature of the studio may very well produce a sense of comfort and less self-editing of expression than would be the case if men were present. Yet I hesitate to make this point without further study. I do wonder whether certain men might be able to fit into the fabric of the studio without changing its environment or the social interactions which occur within it. A long tradition of separate spheres for men and women in Korean society has meant that women often continued to dominate in designated women's spheres, such as the woman's part of the household or shaman rituals, even if men entered into them. So far, there have not been any men present in the dance classes, but the presence of a man in the *pansori* classes for a period of time did not affect the women's expression; he was quiet and the women interacted with him little, continuing to dominate conversation in the class.

#### **Communal Efforts and Identity as a Member of the Studio**

As discussed earlier in this chapter, most of a dance class's time at the WKDC studio is devoted to performing one dance after another, without stopping during dances. Participants interact little during these dances, as interaction is not built into the choreography, but they may converse between dances.

In addition to the already-learned dances practiced from start to finish, there is always a new dance in progress which is learned little by little each week. It can take several months to learn a dance this way. During the part of the class devoted to learning new steps, there is more interaction between participants and the teacher.

During this time, the pace of the class slows due to the need for verbal explanation and repetition of the day's new steps. As mentioned earlier, humor is an important part of instruction, and laughing about mistakes together can create a sense of bonding between participants during this time.

As stated earlier, during the dances that are performed from start to finish there is little interaction between participants; each dancer primarily watches herself in the mirror. There is an exception to this, however: when someone joins the class for the first time and must catch up by learning from the class's other participants. When someone new joins the class, she learns by standing in the back of the group and following everyone else, trying to stay out of their way and perhaps feeling quite foolish. I went through this and saw another woman do the same. Sometimes this learning period can be very long as the new student struggles not only with learning the dance style but also with remembering the choreography to many dances at once. During this time, the newcomer learns primarily by watching the other women in the class.

When I first joined the beginner class, I was one of three women who had not yet learned all of *sam buk chum*, and we all came to each class early in order to get caught up in a small group lesson with Kim *Seonsaengnim*. In addition, this group of women often stayed late on Saturday afternoons in order to review what they had learned and to help each other. Other members of the studio also helped us learn the dance if they were present while we were practicing. Thus, although the dances' choreographies are not very interactive, they are sometimes learned in very communal ways.

At times, studio members contribute their individual professional talents to the studio, especially in preparation for performances. This adds to the studio's sense of communal effort. A graphic designer in the beginner dance class designed very impressive posters for the studio's recital at the John F. Kennedy Center on November 7, 2009, while an artist in the *pansori* class painted a beautiful backdrop for the *pansori* studio's performance on September 27, 2009 at George Mason University.

The Washington Korean Dance Company studio is a place where women can come together in a Korean space and learn arts that are symbolic of Korean national identity. This has the potential to strengthen individual participants' sense of Korean national and/or ethnic identity. At the same time, a woman who joins the studio becomes part of the studio's community and is able to include belonging to this group as a part of her identity. Because of the studio's good reputation, being a part of it can be a source of pride.

***Authenticity, Ownership, and Performance: Maintaining the Status of the Studio***

One aspect of the WKDC studio which may be a source of pride to some participants is the training of its teachers, who have excellent credentials to match their talent. Kim *Seonsaengnim*, Bae *Seonsaengnim*, and *Pansori Seonsaengnim* all trained from a young age, majored in their respective performing arts in college, and learned from excellent teachers. The National Treasures system, which designates certain arts Intangible Cultural Assets and names certain people either holders of an Intangible Cultural Asset (such as a particular dance style) or National Living Treasures themselves, can be significant in determining the value of teacher-to-

student genealogies. *Kim Seonsaengnim*'s teacher, the legendary dancer Han Young-sook, and *Pansori Seonsaengnim*'s teacher Kim Yeong Ja have both been recognized by this system. These teaching genealogies can be an important factor for some people in judging the authenticity and quality of the studio.

At the same time, authenticity and quality must be maintained by members of the studio. Once one learns a dance or song, it does not become her property to perform wherever she pleases. She must obtain permission from her teacher to perform, and her performance represents the studio and her line of teachers.

Members of the studio's community adult dance classes occasionally perform alone (with the teachers' permission) at places such as a workplace international festival, a conference, or a Korean cultural event. In general, however, the adult dance classes only perform as a group at the studio's biennial recital. The professional dance company, on the other hand, gives many performances. These performances are often in the government sector or at educational venues such as museums or universities, and the quality of the venue and purpose of the performance are important.

The studio's *pansori* classes have also given several performances in the community, while *Pansori Seonsaengnim*'s private students and I have given more frequent performances. As the *pansori* studio is relatively new, *Pansori Seonsaengnim* spent much of last year presenting us in frequent performances for Korean or multi-cultural festivals and gatherings of Korean cultural organizations. This year the studio is more established, due in part to our winning many awards at the 9<sup>th</sup> National Korean Traditional Performing Arts Competition (제9회 미주 국악

경연대회), held in New York City on August 29, 2009. Our performances in the competition attracted a great deal of attention from New York City's Korean traditional arts organizations. As a result, the standard for our performance venues has gone up as *Pansori Seonsaengnim* becomes more careful about choosing where we perform.

As mentioned earlier, anyone from the studio who wishes to perform dance or *pansori* must have permission from the appropriate teacher, and this permission is not always granted; the quality of the event is important in order to maintain the studio's cultural capital in the local Korean community. This protects the status of the studio, and by extension the identities of its participants as members of the studio community.

## Chapter 3: Interacting with the Body: Challenges of Korean Dance and *Pansori*, and the Potential for “Optimal Experience” or “Flow”

### Introduction

In the WKDC studio’s dance classes, most of class time is spent performing dances that have already been learned, from start to finish. During these dances, there is little interaction between the dancers. Instead, the dancers interact with the music, memory of the teacher’s version of the movements, and their reflection in the mirror, rather than with other people. Of the dances practiced by the studio’s adult classes, only in part of the dance *gibangmu* is there any interaction between the women. In this dance, the dancers briefly face each other across the stage and then in a circle, but there is no physical contact between people in any of the dances and *gibangmu* is the only dance which includes any eye contact. This makes the community practices described in Chapter 2, such as chatting and eating together, very important to the studio’s sense of community, as the dances themselves do not encourage interaction between dancers. Interaction before, after, and between dances forms the community of the studio, although the knowledge that we are all learning the dances together forms the basis for such interaction.

The experience of performing the dances in class is largely personal, yet it is clear from participating and observing others that doing the dances is deeply satisfying to the women at the studio. During the dances, the women’s faces are often marked with an expression of determination and focused concentration. Those who

are more advanced infuse their dance with a strong sense of some inner state, which is one of the most important elements of performance in Korean dance.

Whereas Durkheim's theory of "effervescence" has been applied to ethnomusicological thought about music and dance that is performed as a group, with interaction between players or dancers, it does not apply well to the more personal dance experience of the WKDC studio. It does explain the feeling of togetherness that comes from the interaction in the last parts of *gibangmu*, but not the satisfaction from the highly individual, personal dancing of the other choreographies in which each woman dances in her own space and focuses primarily on herself.

In order to explain the satisfaction of doing the dances themselves, I turn to Csikszentmihalyi's theory of "optimal experience" or "flow" (1990).

### **"Optimal Experience," or "Flow"**

In a study seeking to examine how happiness is generated, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi found that, universally across many cultures, a deep sense of happiness can be generated by hard work, challenging oneself, and overcoming difficult circumstances. In further studies, he found that people who performed challenging tasks that generated satisfaction described the experience in similar terms and had in common certain criteria which made the task satisfying, despite the wide range of tasks which generated the feeling. Csikszentmihalyi calls the feeling "optimal experience" or "flow" and describes it as "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it" (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 4). He expands on this basic definition:



Contrary to what we usually believe, moments like these, the best moments of our lives, are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times . . . The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. . . . Such experiences are not necessarily pleasant at the time they occur. The swimmer's muscles might have ached during his most memorable race, his lungs might have felt like exploding, and he might have been dizzy with fatigue—yet these could have been the best moments of his life. (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 3-4)

Facing challenges and experiencing “flow” is not only an enjoyable experience when it happens but can also cause long-term changes in the individual as he or she develops skills, a sense of focus, and confidence in his or her abilities.

The optimal state of inner experience is one in which there is *order in consciousness*. This happens when psychic energy—or attention—is invested in realistic goals, and when skills match the opportunities for action. The pursuit of a goal brings order in awareness because a person must concentrate attention on the task at hand and momentarily forget everything else. These periods of struggle to overcome challenges are what people find to be the most enjoyable times of their lives. A person who has achieved control over psychic energy and has invested it in consciously chosen goals cannot help but grow into a more complex being. By stretching skills, by reaching toward higher challenges, such a person becomes an increasingly extraordinary individual. (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 6)

Csikszentmihalyi found that people are drawn to activities which produce this feeling and although certain activities are especially conducive to producing this state (such as yoga, playing music, dancing, and skiing), almost any task can be designed to produce the feeling of optimal experience if designed with certain criteria in mind.

Csikszentmihalyi identifies a set of common criteria which make an activity more likely to produce the state of “optimal experience.” The most important criterion is that the activity be challenging to the individual without being beyond the individual's abilities. As the task challenges the individual, his or her skill improves,

and the task must therefore become increasingly difficult over time in order continue to be challenging. Another criterion is the ability to concentrate on the task. The presence of goals that are reachable is also important, as these goals help the person maintain focused concentration on the task. The task should also be bounded in time and place; the individual should know that the task will not continue forever or in all parts of his life but will end at some point in time or with movement to a different location. This too allows him to concentrate on the task. The possibility of immediate feedback is another criterion, as the individual must be able to tell whether she is doing well and whether she is meeting her goals (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 49; Turino 2008: 4-5).

### **Applying Csikszentmihalyi's Theory to Korean Dance**

Dance classes at the Washington Korean Dance Company studio can be ideal for creating the experience of flow because each dancer can challenge herself with increasing difficulty to match her skill level. As each woman dances in her own space and monitors herself in the mirror, she can create new goals for herself, learning the choreography first and then examining the details of the teacher's version of the dance, adding new layers of complexity to her dance each time. Even if she eventually feels she has mastered a dance, there are always new ways to challenge herself and new discoveries to be made, even about dances she has been performing for a long time. The class also meets the criteria of being bound by time and space and of having the possibility of immediate feedback, as each woman monitors herself in the mirror and may get feedback from her teachers as well.

This chapter explores the physical challenges of Korean dance and *pansori* as taught at the Washington Korean Dance Company. I suggest that these challenges, and the ways in which they condition the body and mind to reach new levels of skill, contribute to a learning environment within the studio that is ideal for the creation of “optimal experience” or “flow.” At the same time, the dances are gentler on the body than many other forms of dance and therefore allow the women who study at the Washington Korean Dance Company studio to study there for a long time, reaching new levels of skill without becoming frustrated by the physical limitations of aging. This chapter emphasizes the carefully disguised physical difficulty of the dance and the importance of both repetition and variation which make it possible for individuals in the classes to continually challenge themselves. Korean dance is not as physically easy as it looks nor does its movement style come as naturally as one might guess, and both of these aspects of the dance make it a potentially long-term, rewarding pursuit for women of a variety of levels of ability and ambition. Furthermore, these factors give the dance student an ideal environment in which to experience the state of “optimal experience” or “flow.”

### **Meot and Heung**

Nearly every introductory article or book on Korean dance includes the significance of two inner states which are supposed to be conveyed by the dancer:

*meot* (멋) and *heung* (흥). Van Zile writes:

No discussion of traditional Korean dance would be complete without mention of *mŏt and hŭng*. Among the more difficult Korean words to translate, these terms refer, respectively, to an inner spiritual quality of charm or grace and a feeling of lively animation or enthusiasm, both of which lead to an almost irrepressible joy or giddiness. This is

described by Koreans as the ultimate quality the Korean dancer strives to achieve in folk dance, and specific movement characteristics either contribute to achieving this desired state or are the physical manifestation of its having been achieved. (2001: 12)

Korean dance does not generally tell stories but instead conveys moods, states of mind, and ideas. Much of the introductory literature stresses this point, emphasizing the value placed on conveying spiritual states rather than on pure athleticism (for example, Heyman 1990: 63; King 1977: 37; Chung 1997: 94; Loken 1978: 43, 45-46).<sup>17</sup> Although the point is sometimes overstated, undervaluing both the importance of training in Korean dance and the importance of emotional expression in other dance genres such as ballet, it identifies a valid difference.

While the value placed on internal spiritual states and on *meot* and *heung* over athleticism can make Korean dances less outwardly showy than many other kinds of dance and may make them look physically easy, these same internal elements of the dance can actually make Korean dances much more physically demanding than they appear to be. Some of the more active dances, like *sogo chum*, *o buk chum*, and *sam buk chum*, are clearly aerobic, as their movements are fast and strong. However, three more subtle elements of Korean dance add to the physical demand of these, and indeed all, dances performed at the WKDC studio. The first is the necessity of breath control, as breathing is choreographed into the dance in order to create lifting and lowering, expansion and contraction, and tension and release in the movements. The second is the importance of generating an internal state that is strong enough to be perceptible, whether this internal state takes the form of light exuberance (as in *sogo*

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<sup>17</sup> For a particularly detailed study of emotions perceived by Korean viewers in the dance *salpuri*, see Loken-Kim's dissertation (1989).

*chum*, *o buk chum*, and *sam buk chum*) or includes a heavier feeling (as in parts of *salpuri* and *seungmu*). The third is the importance of physical restraint, so that all movements are carefully controlled, even in the more active, exuberant dances. In all dances, the tension between the intense inner mood radiating out and the outward restraint required to temper it requires a great deal of energy and control. As a result of this tension, the dances can be intense exercise while the movements themselves may seem easy to those unfamiliar with the demands of the dance.

Awareness of, and ability to produce, *meot* and *heung* is acquired only over time. As a result, a beginning dancer may perform the dance's choreography without feeling that the movements are particularly strenuous, while a more experienced dancer may sweat despite having years of training. As the beginning dancer improves, however, she may come to perceive that her dance lacks *mat* (맛, tastiness) and begin to infuse her dance with *meot* and *heung*, adding a new level of skill to her dance and also increasing its physical difficulty. Thus, Korean dances such as those practiced at the WKDC studio provide continuous challenges for the dancer as she studies dance and improves over time.

### **Repetition and Variation**

Dance students at the WKDC studio perform each dance many times over the course of the months or years during which they study. In general, each dance is performed from start to finish one or two times per class period, sometimes with feedback from the teachers and sometimes without. This might seem antithetical to the creation of flow, potentially resulting in boredom. However, because of the nature of the learning process and the elusive challenges of the dances, students can

continually find new ways to challenge themselves, pinpointing new details and subtleties to hone in on. Furthermore, repetition gives the student many opportunities to experiment, trying new variations within the choreography to progress as a dancer.

In the Washington Korean Dance Company's adult beginner class, Kim *Seonsaengnim* teaches each new dance carefully, adding on a new section during each class period until the dance is complete. As the participants are not trained dancers, however, the result is never exactly uniform and each participant produces her own variation of Kim *Seonsaengnim*'s model. After the dance is learned (which usually takes several months), it is performed in its entirety at each class and Kim *Seonsaengnim* rarely dances together with the students. If a new student joins the class, she must learn the rest of the class's existing repertoire by watching the other students and following them. Kim *Seonsaengnim* occasionally dances together with the class during some sections of the dances, and she may pinpoint certain moves and make corrections after the dance has been performed in its entirety. However, there are moves in some of the dances that I have never seen her demonstrate. As a result, on occasions when Kim *Seonsaengnim* does demonstrate, it is very important to watch carefully and remember it later. The demonstration of a step can lead to major revelations that can be incorporated into one's dancing. As a result, even though participants in the classes perform the same dances for months or years, there are always new discoveries to be made.

Slight variations are not just the product of unprofessional dancing; they are a part of the nature of Korean dance. Each dancer has her own way of dancing and of interpreting each piece of music. As a result, even if one feels she has mastered a

dance she can always experiment with subtle movements within given choreography, even trying on others' interpretations. One important area in which dancers can experiment is in the interpretation of rhythm.<sup>18</sup>

In most musical accompaniments for Korean dance, meters are compound, often in 12/8. Furthermore, meter in Korean music is based on a set of *jangdan* (장단), basic rhythmic patterns that can be realized in many different elaborate ways. In *pansori*, the *jangdan* is played on one drum, the *sori buk*. In Korean dance accompaniment, the *jangdan* is usually played by several percussion instruments, each with its own function in the ensemble. Collectively, these instruments create elaborate rhythms.

In a given recording used for dance accompaniment, the percussion instruments elaborate on the basic form of the *jangdan* in many different ways over the course of the recording. The choreographer who creates a dance to previously recorded music, and the dancer who performs the choreography, must therefore listen to the musicians' realizations of the *jangdan* and create their own bodily interpretations of the music. In general, the movements of the first part of the dance *salpuri*, which is performed to the 12-beat *jangdan gutgeori* (굿거리), emphasize the first beat of each twelve-beat cycle. Other emphases within the twelve-beat cycle depend on the percussionists' realization of the *jangdan* in the recording, the choreographer's interpretation, and the dancer's own style. Emphasis on certain beats

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<sup>18</sup> Of course, an accomplished dancer can also create new choreographies and develop the skill of improvisation. In the context of the Washington Korean Dance Company's community dance classes, however, participants do not generally do either of these.

is usually prescribed by the choreographer or teacher, but the dancer can sometimes experiment with subtle changes in movement within the choreography.

Different dancers interpret rhythms differently. Bae *Seonsaengnim*, for example, tends to emphasize syncopation in her dancing by adding slight momentary accelerations in movement (initiated internally with accelerations in breath) on certain beats or subdivisions. Kim *Seonsaengnim* usually teaches the same movements to the adult beginner class at an even velocity, without these extra accelerated pulses. Sometimes some of the pulses come into her dancing when she is demonstrating with performance-level presence, but her dancing never includes as many as Bae *Seonsaengnim*'s.

In the advanced class, where I have not yet learned the choreography of some of the dances, I get through those dances I do not yet know by following the other women, just as I did during my first few months in the beginner class. I usually focus on following Bae *Seonsaengnim*, but if she is not dancing I often choose to follow another woman in the class, who is also a member of the professional company. Yet there are slight variations in how she embodies the complex rhythms of the music compared to Bae *Seonsaengnim*. These variations make the dance seem even less familiar as I try to imitate her version of the dance.

The possibility of many interpretations of the music offers continued challenges to the dance student. Even if I were to learn the dances perfectly, imitating Kim *Seonsaengnim* or Bae *Seonsaengnim* exactly, I could always challenge myself by trying other interpretations of the music, either trying out other dancers' interpretations or creating my own. The ability to experiment with rhythm or to try



on other dancers' idiosyncratic interpretations of the rhythm provides new ways for the dancer to challenge herself and widen her possibilities.

To illustrate this point, I take here a *jangdan*, *gutgeori*, giving several of the many ways a *janggu* player might realize it.

**Figure 7: Sample Realizations of *Gutgeori* on *Janggu***

**Sample 1.**

⊙		i	○	⋮ *		○		○	⋮	
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덩 - 기덕    쿵    더러러러 -    쿵 -    덕    쿵    더러러러 -  
*deong - gideok    kung deo-reo-reo-reo - kung - deok    kung deo-reo-reo-reo*

**Sample 2.**

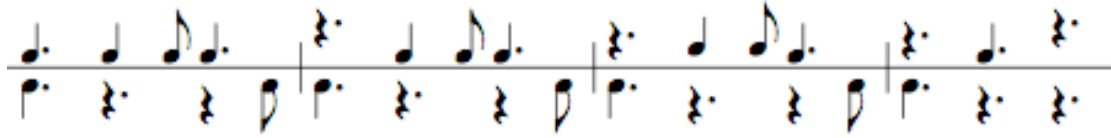
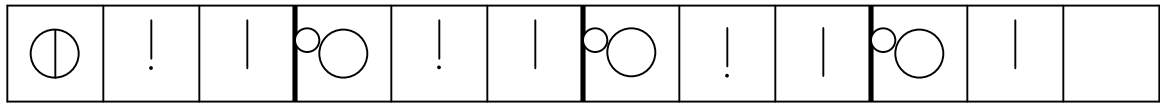
⊙		i	○	⋮		○	!		○		
---	--	---	---	---	--	---	---	--	---	--	--

덩 - 기덕    쿠쿵    더러러러    쿠쿵    덕    기덕    쿠쿵    덕 -  
*deong - gideok    ku kung deo-reo-reo-reo    ku kung deok gideok    ku kung deok -*

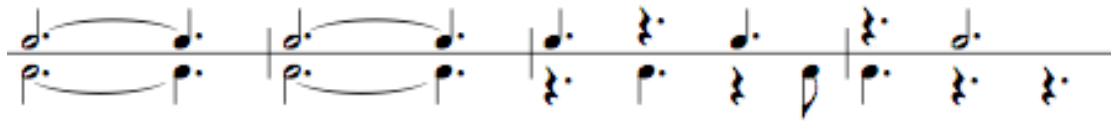
\* Note that Western notation for this symbol is approximate each time it appears.

**Sample 3.**



덩 덕 기덕 쿠쿵 덕 기덕 쿠쿵 덕 기덕 쿠쿵 덕 -  
*deong deok gideok ku kung deok gideok ku kung deok gideok ku kung deok -*

**Sample 4.**



덩 - - 덩 - - 덕 쿵 덕 쿠쿵 덕 -  
*deong - - deong - - deok kung deok ku kung deok -*

Below are several examples of different ways a dancer might interpret a *gutgeori* pattern. The interpretation will vary according to the percussionists' and other musicians' playing and may be choreographed into the dance or elaborated upon by the performer. I include the dancer's performance of the rhythm only over a basic *gutgeori* notation so as not to give the impression that a particular musical realization of *gutgeori* will always produce the same interpretation by the dancer.

To indicate the dancer's interpretation of the rhythm, I indicate only breath patterns. An infinite variety of movements could be based on the foundation of these breath patterns. The breath pattern is indicated using an arrow with dots on each

emphasized beat. Ascending lines indicate inhalations and descending lines exhalations. The slope of the line indicates the speed of breath; a steeper slope indicates faster breath and a more gradual slope indicates slower breath.

(Note: Slopes are approximations only and are not written precisely to scale.)

**Figure 8: Sample Interpretations of *Gutgeori* in Dance**

**Sample 1.**

Sample 1 consists of two parts. The top part is a rhythmic diagram with 11 boxes. The first box contains a circle with a vertical line through its center. The second box is empty. The third box contains a vertical line. The fourth box contains a circle. The fifth box contains three vertical dots. The sixth box is empty. The seventh box contains a circle. The eighth box is empty. The ninth box contains a vertical line. The tenth box contains a circle. The eleventh box contains three vertical dots. A long arrow starts at a black dot on the left and slopes upward to the right, ending at the right edge of the diagram.

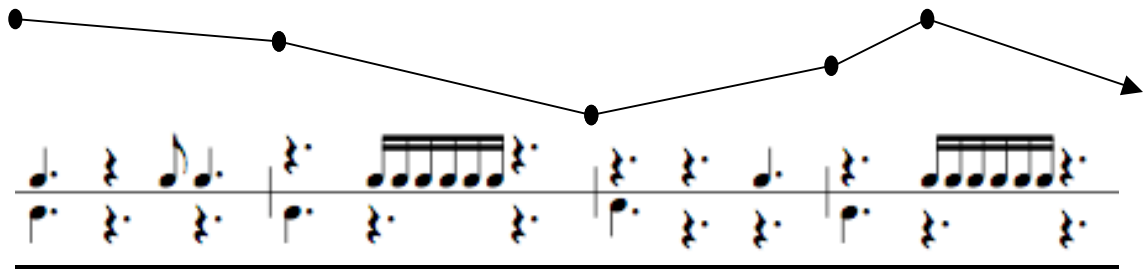
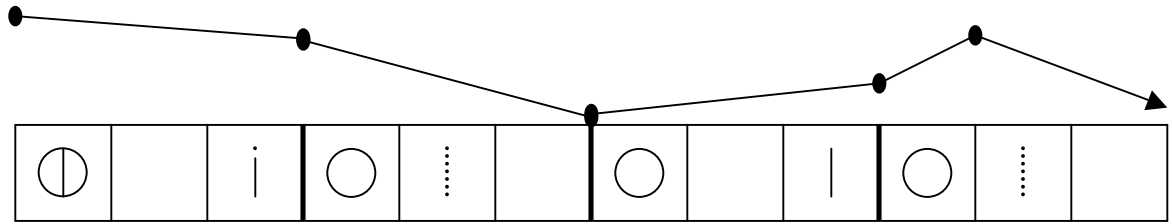
The bottom part is a musical score on a staff. The first measure contains a quarter note, a quarter rest, and a quarter note. The second measure contains a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter rest. The third measure contains a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter rest. The fourth measure contains a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter rest. The fifth measure contains a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter rest. The sixth measure contains a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter rest. The seventh measure contains a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter rest. The eighth measure contains a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter rest. The ninth measure contains a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter rest. The tenth measure contains a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter rest. The eleventh measure contains a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter rest. A long arrow starts at a black dot on the left and slopes upward to the right, ending at the right edge of the staff.

**Sample 2.**

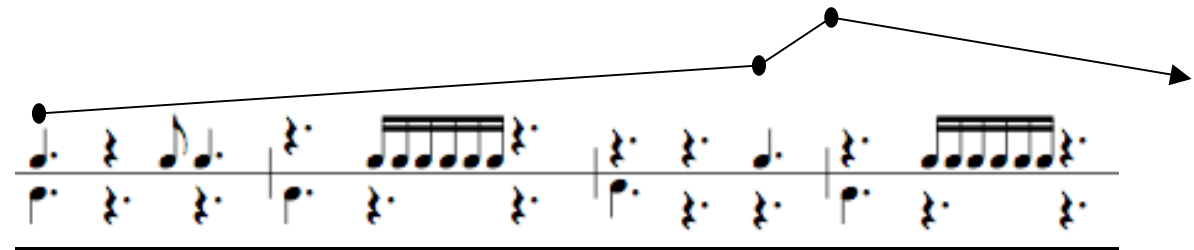
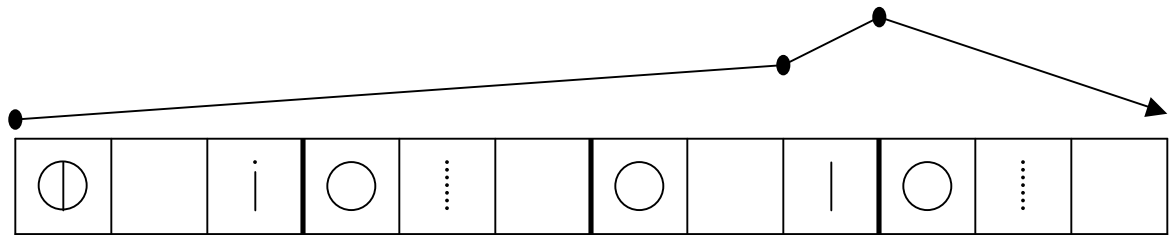
Sample 2 consists of two parts. The top part is a rhythmic diagram with 11 boxes. The first box contains a circle with a vertical line through its center. The second box is empty. The third box contains a vertical line. The fourth box contains a circle. The fifth box contains three vertical dots. The sixth box is empty. The seventh box contains a circle. The eighth box is empty. The ninth box contains a vertical line. The tenth box contains a circle. The eleventh box contains three vertical dots. A long arrow starts at a black dot on the left and slopes downward to the right, ending at the right edge of the diagram.

The bottom part is a musical score on a staff. The first measure contains a quarter note, a quarter rest, and a quarter note. The second measure contains a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter rest. The third measure contains a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter rest. The fourth measure contains a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter rest. The fifth measure contains a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter rest. The sixth measure contains a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter rest. The seventh measure contains a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter rest. The eighth measure contains a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter rest. The ninth measure contains a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter rest. The tenth measure contains a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter rest. The eleventh measure contains a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter rest. A long arrow starts at a black dot on the left and slopes downward to the right, ending at the right edge of the staff.

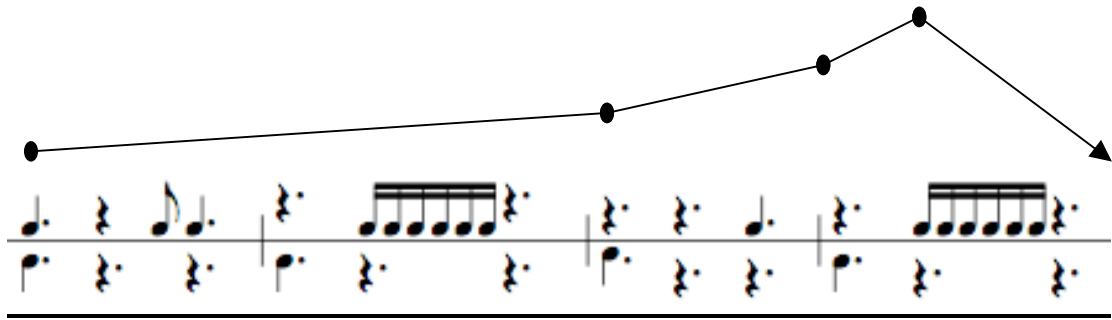
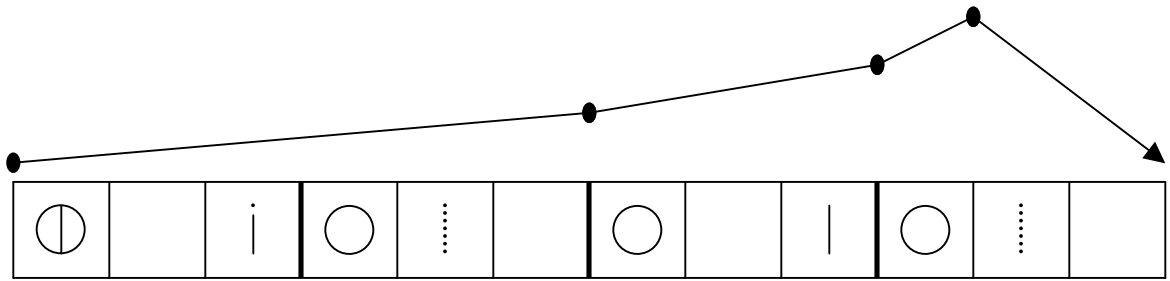
Sample 3.



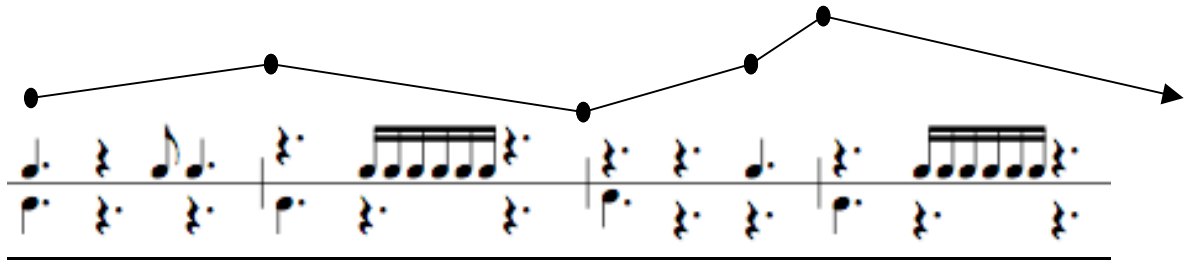
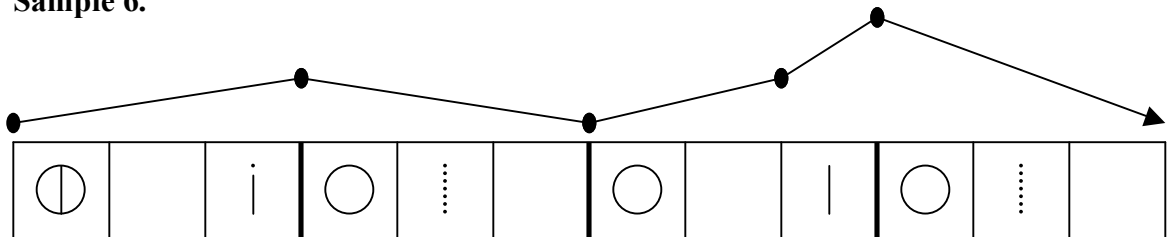
Sample 4.



Sample 5.



Sample 6.



The choreographer's, teacher's, and individual dancer's interpretations of the music can also be affected by other instruments besides percussion. In many of the dance accompaniments, the instruments weave in and out of the music's overall texture with changes in volume, register, and rhythmic density. At the WKDC studio, dances are performed to recordings on CD (with the exceptions of *sam buk chum* and *o buk chum*). The music in most of these recordings was improvised at the time the recording was made, as most of the pieces which accompany Korean dance are not composed and are highly improvisational. In the piece "*Changbu taryeong*" which accompanies *buchae chum*, each musician follows a melody heterophonically, improvising variations on the melody. In most of the other recordings, however, there is no set melody and each musician improvises according to more general rules for each instrument. Different performances of the highly improvisational *sinawi*, for example, come out quite differently. When a dancer choreographs a version of *salpuri* to go with a particular *sinawi* recording, she must interpret the musical events that occurred in the original musical improvisation. If another dancer performs the choreography, she too must listen to the recording and interpret the musical events that occurred in the musicians' original improvisation, translating the sounds into movements. Choreography made for one recording of *sinawi* is unlikely to fit another recording of *sinawi*, as each performance of this improvisational music genre is different.

In Korea there is also a tradition of joint improvisation between the dancer and live musicians in dances such as *salpuri*. In such situations there is a dialectical relationship between the dancer and the musicians so that the dancer has the power to

affect the musicians' playing. Today, however, dances are usually choreographed and are often performed to recorded music. Sometimes, choreographed dances are performed with live musicians who must follow the dancer.

Most of the accompaniments used in the WKDC studio are rhythmically complex. In the recording which accompanies *gibangmu*, for example, percussion instruments in the ensemble include *janggu*, *buk*, *kkwaenggwari* (꽝과리, small gong), and *jing* (징, large gong), while melodic instruments are the *daegeum* (대금, flute), *haegeum* (해금), *geomungo* (거문고), *gayageum*, and the voice of a *pansori* singer. Because of the complex rhythms created by different instruments playing their individual improvisations within the whole texture, the dancer can sometimes choose between many possible ways to interpret the rhythm in the recording by focusing either on the basic *jangdan* or on the different rhythmic elaborations of specific instruments.

As the practice at the WKDC studio is to perform the same dances in each class period for many months and even years, (while gradually adding new dances to the repertoire), the dancer has many opportunities to experiment with subtle changes in her dancing. The dance's ability to continually challenge without being rough on the body makes possible years of satisfaction doing the dance. This aspect of Korean dance is one of its inherent features that makes possible the long-term continuation of the WKDC studio's community as the women can find enjoyment in the dance to suit their desired level of challenge for many years.

### *Aging as a Dance Student, Dancing as One Ages*

Whereas dancers of some forms such as ballet cease performing professionally as they get older, Korean dancers of certain genres can dance well into old age. Although the flashier dances such as *o buk chum*, *sam buk chum*, and *buchae chum* are generally performed by younger dancers professionally, certain genres, such as *salpuri* and *seungmu*, are often performed by renowned older dancers. One reason this is possible is because the movements of these dances, and Korean dance in general, are gentle on the body, putting much less stress on the joints and feet than many other types of dance. Another reason is the emphasis on the conveyance of emotional states and ideas rather than on athleticism or youthful beauty. Perhaps the most important reason is the status that these particular dances hold as Intangible Cultural Assets.

In Korea, shamans, Buddhist monks, and folk entertainers have long danced regardless of age. Although performances by *gisaeng* were once intended purely as entertainment, and young *gisaeng* preferred in dance performances, the mid- to late-twentieth-century designation of certain dances as national Intangible Cultural Assets led to great interest in older dancers. As a result, renowned older dancers have not only taught younger performers but have also continued performing themselves. Those who are chosen as National Living Treasures are required to both teach and perform, and one must be at least fifty years old to be honored with this title.<sup>19</sup>

Whereas a woman in her fifties, sixties, or seventies would seem out of place in a ballet or hip hop performance, women of this age fit naturally into today's range

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<sup>19</sup> See Van Zile (2001: 51-62) for more on the National Treasure system and dance.



of images of Korean dancer. The same is true of *pansori*, as many renowned *pansori* singers perform well into old age and are believed to gain new depth of expression over the years. Therefore, women who study at places such as the Washington Korean Dance Company studio need not be discouraged from studying there for decades, for they have many models of famous older dancers who continued to perform and be respected for their performances. The ability to perform Korean dance and *pansori* does not suddenly deteriorate with age (except in cases of serious disability) but can ripen and gain emotional depth. Here is another way in which the nature of these arts themselves makes possible the continuation of the studio's community in the long term.

Furthermore, the dance itself conditions the body in certain ways, strengthening the core and legs, increasing breath control, and improving hand-eye coordination and the ability to manipulate objects deftly. Whereas some kinds of dance are rough on the body, Korean dance is gentle on the joints and conditions the body to dance for a long time. Physical benefits of this can transfer into other parts of life as well, especially as dancers age. *Pansori*, too, conditions the body to sing for a long time, as the act of singing *pansori* causes physical changes in vocal production. As one sings, one is able to set new goals which can only be met with these physical changes in the voice. Again, this creates a situation conducive to “optimal experience” or “flow” as the body changes in preparation for new challenges.

### **Physical Transformations**

Physical transformations can occur while studying either dance or *pansori* at the Washington Korean Dance Company studio, leading to newfound abilities and the

potential for new goals. One subtle ability which can be gained through both dance and *pansori* is the ability to control breath. Breath control, which is so important in *pansori* and Korean dance, is common in health-oriented mind-body practices such as yoga and tai chi and thus may have health benefits in addition to providing a challenge in the studio. Loken-Kim notes the role of breath in many traditions that seek to alter states of consciousness (1978: 45). Although Csikszentmihalyi does not specifically address the use of breath, he writes of the effectiveness of such Eastern mind-body practices in creating altered states of consciousness and “flow” experiences (1990: 20-21, 103-106).

Another aspect of Korean dance that may subtly condition the body and mind over time is the act of performing unilateral movements, such as raising the left arm and left foot together, in addition to bilateral movements. The use of both bilateral movements and unilateral movements (as in the second and third step sequences of *gibon*, respectively) forces the brain to work the body in a variety of ways and can strengthen stability and groundedness, not only in dance but also in daily movement.

One of the more obvious physical transformations that can occur when studying Korean dance, aside from general physical fitness from aerobic activity, is an increase in leg strength. One of the more physically demanding movements in Korean dance is the lowering of the body to the floor, sometimes in a squatting position and sometimes with one knee to the ground, and the raising of the body from such a position. The dancer must do this quickly in some dances and very slowly in others. Often much of the dancer’s weight is on one foot during these moves, requiring her to raise and lower her body primarily using only one leg. Such level

changes require leg strength, balance, and control. Although many Korean people are quite accustomed to such level changes from sitting on the floor, the amount of control required to do it slowly or to do it quickly while performing a 360-degree turn and manipulating fans, knives, or flowers is a different matter altogether. Some of the squats required in *seungmu* are deemed very difficult by the women in the class, and I have experienced a tremendous increase in leg strength since I joined the studio.

Strength in the core of the body is also very important, especially in *seungmu*, and I have noticed changes in my core strength since I began to learn this particular dance. Studying *seungmu* has improved all my other dances, as the control learned in this dance carries over into other choreographies. Leg strength, the ability to perform highly-controlled level changes, and strength in the core of the body have the potential to help with stability in daily life as well.

*Pansori*, too, causes physical changes in the body as the voice becomes stronger. Willoughby (2004: 125-141), Pihl (1994: 104-105), and Park (2003: 157-163) all write about the famously grueling process of obtaining the right voice for *pansori*. Although I have been attending *pansori* classes for only a few days per week, my own voice has become stronger and thicker, with the ability to produce a slightly rougher sound and a vocal timbre closer to that of a double reed instrument. As a result, certain sounds which I was physically unable to produce now come automatically with my vocal quality.

In a *pansori* class last year, *Pansori Seonsaengnim* assured the class that her teaching would match our skill level and that we would be ready for increasingly complex singing styles over time. She told us not to worry that *pansori* would be too

difficult; we would be ready when the time came to sing it. The first year, she said, we would learn a simple version. She then demonstrated singing a passage straightforwardly, with little ornamentation. The second year, we would learn it again with more embellishment. The third year, the embellishments would increase, and she demonstrated again with embellishment that requires vocal training. The *pansori* student always has new challenges to meet as the voice becomes more seasoned.

### **Extensions of the Body**

Besides changing the body itself, Korean dance gives one the ability to manipulate extensions of the body. Many of the dances taught at the Washington Korean Dance Company studio use objects as extensions of the arms. Knowing how to manipulate the objects is a skill one must develop while learning the dances. To a new dancer, the objects' behavior may seem unpredictable. Over time, however, she learns to manipulate each object, such as how to flick the hand in just the right way to make the scarf snap in the right direction and fall to the ground on the correct beat. Skills developed in the studio learning how to manipulate these objects can potentially carry into other parts of life, as the dancer gains confidence in her hand-eye coordination and ability to manipulate objects dexterously. As almost every dance requires mastery of a different object, a student at the WKDC studio can encounter new challenges with the addition of each new dance to her repertoire.

**Figure 9: A Sampling of Dances Practiced at the WKDC Studio and their Props**

Dance	Props
<i>Gibangmu</i> ( <i>Gisaeng</i> Dance)	1 small scarf
<i>Sam Buk Chum</i> (Three Drum Dance)	2 thick drum sticks; 3 drums suspended from stands
<i>O Buk Chum</i> (Five Drum Dance)	2 thick drum sticks; 5 drums suspended from stands
“Flower Dance” (based on the court dance <i>Hwagwanmu</i> )	2 large flowers; long sleeves
<i>Geommu</i> (Knife/Sword Dance)	2 dance knives
<i>Buchae Chum</i> (Fan Dance)	2 large fans
<i>Seungmu</i> (Buddhist Monk’s/Nun’s Dance)	2 thick drum sticks; very long sleeves; drum suspended from stand
<i>Salpuri</i>	1 long scarf
<i>Janggu Chum</i> (Hourglass Drum Dance)	1 stick; hourglass drum
<i>Jindo Buk Chum</i> (Barrel-Shaped Drum Dance)	1 stick; barrel-shaped drum
<i>Sanjo</i>	1 fan
<i>Gibon</i> (Basic)	none
<i>Taepyeongmu</i> (Dance of Peace)	none
<i>Ganggangsullae</i> (Harvest Moon Dance)	none

Note: In many dances, skirts are also manipulated with the hands.

**The Importance of Training in Korean Dance**

The movement style of the dances described in this thesis is identifiable as clearly Korean, but this does not mean it comes naturally with growing up in Korea. It is a specific aestheticized way of moving which requires training and a great deal of work. Although it may be easier for someone who has grown up seeing the movements than for someone who has not, many Korean people today do not observe traditional dance to a significant extent. It may be that this is a generational difference, but I suspect it has long been this way since the kinds of dance discussed in this thesis are derived mostly from the traditions of *gisaeng*, who performed for a

privileged few. People train to become dancers; if people merely picked up this style of dance naturally, there would be no need for training schools<sup>20</sup>.

Like Judy Van Zile (2001: 5), I have seen members of audiences in Korea dance spontaneously at performances in a way characteristic of Korean folk movement, with emphasis on shoulder movement and arms raised with relaxed hands. In all cases, these have been members of older generations, although I suspect young people in Korea have viewed such movement enough to at least imitate it. Yet this kind of movement is derived from folk dance traditionally performed by nondancers for pleasure in village social settings. It is quite different from the professional style of dance taught at the WKDC studio and at community centers, private institutes, and university dance departments in Korea.

Even among trained dancers, everyday movement and dance movement are quite different, requiring a kind of code-switching between the two physical modes. Van Zile briefly describes such a code switch in a performance at the twelfth Seoul Dance Festival:

A lone male dancer, clad in pants and jacket clearly inspired by the attire of aristocrats of former times (*yangban*), appeared to wander through a forest. His movements could have come from anywhere—England, the United States, Japan. But in a moment I was very definitely in Korea; the meandering stopped as the dancer placed both feet together, torso tilted forward a bit, and knees slightly bent . . . (2001: 3)

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<sup>20</sup> Note that this thesis is not dealing with folk dances traditionally performed by regular people in villages. In Korea, the dance genres taught at the WKDC studio are danced by trained professional dancers. People who perform these dances today are trained in universities or private dance institutes, but in earlier times the precursors to these dances were taught in schools for *gisaeng*.

Similarly, there is a moment at the end of a video of Yi Mae-bang performing *salpuri* in which he suddenly breaks out of his dance movements in order to take a bow (see the YouTube video listed as “*Salpuri*” (*performed by Yi Mae-bang*) in the videography). Whereas his movements during the dance are characterized by a tension between internal initiation and external control, and the rate of movement is quite slow, he suddenly breaks from this movement style and becomes relaxed, arms loose at his sides, and bows at a normal speed of movement for everyday life. The effect is a sudden “frame break” (Goffman 1986: 345-377), a code switch between movement styles that makes it clear that the dance movements, which seemed to be so innately part of him during the dance, form only one of his movement languages.

Code-switching between movement styles happens often at the WKDC studio. Bae *Seonsaengnim*'s dancing is elegant, delicate, and carefully controlled, with initiation from the breath. Her movement is regulated by the style of the dance. In life, however, she switches to more relaxed movement. At the studio, she often expresses her energetic personality by entertaining the other women with exaggerated, comical movements that have no place in Korean dance. Occasionally, if something goes slightly wrong during dance practice, she deliberately breaks from her refined dancer's movements into a brief comical style. For example, recently, when one of her *seungmu* sleeves got caught in the ceiling pipes for a moment and brought down a clump of dust, she broke frame from her otherworldly dance to cough exaggeratedly before continuing with her seemingly deeply spiritual movements (Goffman 1986: 345-377).

When I began studying at the WKDC studio, I expected to lag behind the other women in the dance and *pansori* classes due to my not being Korean. To my surprise, however, I started picking up ways of moving and ways of using the voice that are considered to be identifiably Korean, to the point that I began giving performances in *pansori* along with *Pansori Seonsaengnim*'s private students and Kim *Seonsaengnim* sometimes had me model specific movements for the rest of the women in the beginner dance class. I have found, perhaps predictably, that my years of training in music and dabbling in dance give me advantages over many of the women in the studio despite my not being Korean. Of course, if I were to join a class of university students majoring in these arts, my abilities at this point would probably place me at the bottom of the class due to their long-term formal training in these particular arts. However, my ability to excel within the context of the WKDC studio's community classes seems to me to disrupt a generally assumed link between Koreanness and Korean dance and between Koreanness and *pansori*-style vocal timbre. For the women in the studio, Korean dance movement is not acquired naturally simply by growing up in Korea, as most of them have, but must be learned.

Further studies on this would be interesting, comparing the everyday movement characteristics of different generations and comparing women who remain in Korea throughout their lives with women who immigrate to the U.S. or another country. One might suspect that these women's everyday movement could have changed since immigrating to the United States—that they must relearn “Korean movement” *because* they are in the U.S.—but I do not think this is the case based on



my experiences in Korea and the women's retention of Korean language and other Korean cultural elements in the U.S.

Moving as a trained Korean dancer moves and singing in a *pansori* style do not come naturally with being a part of Korean culture. Observation of performances over time is necessary to acquire these particular aestheticized styles, but many Korean people, both in Korea and in diasporic communities, do not spend a significant amount of time observing such performances. Even for those who do, training is necessary and this training can be very challenging.

### **Conclusion**

The physical challenges of Korean dance are deceptively hidden in the nature of the dance. Breath control, the creation of an outwardly radiating inner state, and the bodily control required to temper it require a great deal of energy and add an elusive element to the achievement of excellence in dance. Some of the movements of Korean dance are also physically difficult, and as these movements condition the body, the individual becomes ready to face new challenges. *Pansori*, too, causes physical changes which prepare the body to take on new challenges. Skillful manipulation of objects adds another element of difficulty and each new dance one learns may introduce a new object to be mastered.

The result of all these factors is that study of Korean dance and *pansori* offers many challenges to learners of varying skill levels. As the learner's skill increases, she can set new goals for herself, and mastery requires many years of study. Yet the dance is also gentle on the joints and the rest of the body. Combined with the focus on inner states and the corresponding belief that dancers can improve as they age,

Korean dance is well-suited to long-term study, presenting challenges for every skill level according to the ambition of the individual learner without becoming impossible with age or being abusive to the body.

All of these factors create an ideal situation for the creation of Csikszentmihalyi's "optimal experience" or "flow." Hard physical work and personal ambition to reach new goals can produce a rewarding state of flow in which the music, the movements, and the image in the mirror are all that matter at that moment. Due to the importance of *meot* and *heung*, it is difficult to dance well without this level of focus on the present.

Singing *pansori* and *minyo* also requires a high level of focus. The amount of breath required and the feeling of resonance in the body can produce an elated feeling, as can hearing one's own voice at its fullest. The act of letting so much sound out of the body can produce a feeling of catharsis, as I and several other women in the class have noted, even though most of the songs sung in the class are not the tragic material made to express the sentiment of *han*.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the significance of potential "flow" experiences created in the dance and *pansori* classes, students' engagement with the dances and songs can be rewarding on additional, much deeper levels. Chapter 4 explores existing discourse about the meanings and histories of Korean dances, *pansori*, and *namdo minyo* and examines how this discourse can affect the individual learner's engagement with the dances and songs on a more intellectual and emotional level as she binds herself with

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<sup>21</sup> *Han* is a deep feeling of sorrow and pain, especially from oppression. See Chapter 4 under "*Salpuri*" for further explanation. Also see Willoughby (2000; 2002) on the expression of *han* in *pansori*.

other, largely imagined, people of the past and present and constructs an increasingly integrated and complex identity.

## Chapter 4: Interacting with Discourse, Memory, and History: Generating Personal Meaning

### **Introduction: Beyond Challenges and Focus: Creating Meanings**

Some of the women who study at the WKDC studio may have little or no knowledge of specific discourse about the dances taught there, coming only for exercise, socializing, fun, and personal challenge. To these women, the dances may represent a generalized Korean culture. However, many at the studio have at least some knowledge of common discourse regarding the meanings and histories of certain dances. To a learner at the studio familiar with this discourse, performing these dances can shape individual identity in more complex ways.

Discourse about meanings and histories of Korean dances is often vague and uncertain, though sometimes presented uncritically as fact in conversation or written material. Uncertainty about meanings and origins among more careful writers is reflected in the vague language of certain introductory materials on Korean dance. In less cautious texts, meanings and histories commonly ascribed to dances but lacking historical evidence are repeated uncritically as common-knowledge facts.

The uncertainty of meanings and histories among some scholars of Korean dance and the false certainty of others make for frustrating research, but in the context of a dance and music studio this same uncertainty and openness of meaning, tentatively prescribed through discourse but still debatable, gives students many options from which to form their own personal emotional and intellectual connections to the dances.

This chapter focuses on particular dances taught at the studio (and, to a lesser extent, on *pansori* and *namdo minyo*) and the variety of meanings and histories associated with them. To a Korean dance or *pansori* student living in a diasporic community, these dances can be significant not only as representations of Korea in general, but also as representations of specific Korean spiritual traditions and sentiments believed to be particular to Korean people. In particular, each dance can be tied to historically significant groups of Korean women: *gisaeng*, shamans and their (mostly female) clients, and women of Jeolla-do, the southwestern part of the country.<sup>22</sup>

Significantly, each of these groups of women is now part of national images of traditional Korean culture but is also stigmatized by some parts of Korean society. Some people also view these groups as empowering women's spheres within traditional Korean culture. Because of the variety of viewpoints regarding these women of the past and present, participants at the WKDC studio can, consciously or subconsciously, choose to find personal meaning in some of these interpretations while ignoring others.

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<sup>22</sup> This chapter focuses on these groups of women because the particular dances taught at the WKDC studio are associated with these groups. Members of the WKDC studio are all women and learn dances which are primarily performed by women. This does not mean that all Korean dance and singing is exclusively performed by women and associated with women's performing traditions. Men perform *pansori* (which was originally performed only by men) and certain dances as well, and the male traditions of *gwangdae* (광대, traveling entertainers) and of scholars' training in the arts are particular male traditions from which certain performing arts emerge.

## *Deeper Meanings of Dances*

### *Seungmu*

The dance *seungmu* offers an example of the variety of meanings available to the dancer due to under-documented history. This dance is generally understood to represent a Buddhist monk or nun and is usually translated into English as “Monk’s Dance” or “Nun’s Dance.” Although there is a repertoire of genuinely religious ceremonial dances performed by Buddhist monks and nuns, *seungmu* is a purely theatrical dance, performed by a professional dancer for an audience in a secular setting.

The dancer wears a robe (usually white) with very long sleeves, a red sash which is looped diagonally over one shoulder, and a square-shaped white hat similar to those worn in actual Buddhist dances. The long sleeves are the focus of the dance, as they fly into the air in lines or large curves. These sleeves conceal drum sticks held in the hands which extend the arms as if they were the wings of a great bird.

In the last part of the dance, the dancer’s arms emerge from holes within the sleeves, drumsticks in hand, and the dancer plays a solo on a large drum upstage on stage left. Although the dancer does not play the drum until the end of the dance, the drum is noticeably present on stage during the entire piece, acting as the stage’s single piece of scenery until it becomes a part of the performance. Although the movements in most of the dance are unlike those in actual Buddhist dances (Van Zile 2001: 17), the drum is a clear reference to Buddhism, as a very large drum is used in Buddhist ritual and a drum similar to that used in *seungmu* is used in the Buddhist dance *beopgochum* (법고춤). The sound of a *moktak* (목탁, a small hollow wooden

instrument struck with a stick) is heard in the beginning of the musical accompaniment to *seungmu*. This is another very clear reference to Buddhism, as this instrument is used by Buddhist monks and nuns for a variety of purposes. The rest of the music in *seungmu* is quite different from music used in Buddhist ceremonies.

The dance *seungmu* is sometimes said to represent a Buddhist monk who grapples with the temptation of a beautiful woman (Hahn Man-Young 1976: 35). Others say it represents the ecstasy of attaining enlightenment (Van Zile 2001:17). Many sources claim that it developed as a dance over a long period of time, being performed by entertainers before reaching its twentieth-century form (for example Cultural Properties Administration 2000: 103-105), but due to the absence of historical records on dance, these claims cannot be verified.

Some sources attribute the “current version” of *seungmu* to Han Seong-Jun (the grandfather and teacher of Han Young-Sook), who recreated it for the stage based on older forms of the dance which were being performed by entertainers (Chŏng Byŏng-ho 1997: 91). Just how he might have changed it is not specified. Several sources (Chŏng Byŏng-ho 1997: 91) say that this dance was performed by *gisaeng*, while others make no mention of *gisaeng* whatsoever. None of the sources in English address the presence of different styles of this dance, such as the styles of Han Young-Sook, Yi Mae-bang, and their respective students. How these individuals have affected the dance does not seem to be taken into account as the twentieth-century version of *seungmu* is discussed as one single unit, even though it is actually a dance with varying styles and a history of change in the twentieth century.

Although the dance's identity as representing Buddhism is generally understood and often repeated uncritically, not everyone agrees even with this most fundamental aspect of the dance's supposed meaning and significance. Lee Kyong-hee writes of an interview with Lee Ae-ju, a professor of Korean dance at Seoul National University, who was a student of Han Young-Sook. Professor Lee prefers to think of the dance as related to shamanism, nature, and indigenous Korean folk movement and sentiments rather than Buddhism:

“I believe that the nun's dance embodies not only the basic structure of Korean traditional dance but also the stream of our national history itself,” said Lee Ae-ju, a leading *sungmu* performer and professor of Korean traditional dance at Seoul National University. “Whenever I prostrate myself on the stage to begin this dance,” she noted, “I feel as if I am turning into a small seed buried in the ground, or an embryo in the womb.”

She envisions the seed sprouting and growing into a big tree. After a thriving summer, the tree will wither in accordance with the laws of nature and, eventually, the leaves will fall, signifying the finale of an era. “And my dance will also come to a close,” she said.

Prof. Lee went on to explain that, like most theorists in Korean native dance, she feels there is little religious influence of Buddhism in the nun's dance, in spite of its title and the costume of the dancer.

“If we have to discuss the religious aspect of this dance,” she said, “I'd rather say that it has more shamanistic influences than Buddhist.” (Lee 2001: 174)

Her emphasis on shamanism is intimately connected with ideas of national identity, both because of shamanism's significance as Korea's indigenous religion and because of shamanism's connection to nature. Lee Kyong-hee elaborates later in the article, based on Professor Lee's interview:

Lee explains that *sungmu* has a much deeper meaning than most people believe nowadays. “There is no doubt that the dance represents the folk dance traditions of the Koreans, including all important movements and symbolizing all inherent emotions,” she said.



“And it is a very philosophical dance, too,” she emphasized. “It stands for our traditional philosophy of heaven and earth, and their harmony.” ...

In this sense, the spiritual origin of the dance antedates the introduction of Buddhism into Korea, with its remote roots in the primitive religious faith of the Korean people. Lee argued, “I believe that the dance continued to evolve through our history, absorbing shamanistic elements and finally borrowing Buddhist-style props in later centuries, probably during the Choson period,” she said. (Lee 2001: 175)

Professor Lee’s interpretation reflects her feelings about shamanism and Buddhism in Korean history and as representing Korean culture. Her ability to believe this alternate interpretation of *seungmu*’s history demonstrates the vagueness of its origins in common discourse. This vagueness makes alternative interpretations acceptable in general discourse about the dance, even when such interpretations are not supported by actual historical documentation. Her emotional connection to shamanism, as expressed in her statements above, also reflects a not-uncommon view that ties shamanism with Korean national identity.

### **Shamanism, Korean National Identity, and Gender**

Shamanism in Korea predates the coming of Korea’s other major belief systems: Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity. With its belief in spirits existing in households and natural features such as mountains, it is a religion intimately tied with place. Whereas Korea’s later belief systems came from distant lands, shamanism is Korea’s indigenous religion, and, despite general stigmatization of shamanism as superstition, it holds a place in national consciousness as representing indigenous Korean culture. Current perceptions of shamanism as representing indigenous Korea are largely due to nationalistic efforts in the twentieth century.

Keith Howard writes:

The perception that shamanism forms the cultural core of Korea stems largely from Ch'oe Namsŏn and Yi Nŭnghwa's efforts in the 1920s as part of the cultural nationalist movement, and the subsequent activities of folklorists, to find icons of identity that would mark Korea as distinct from its neighbors, Japan as a colonial ruler and China as the progenitor of Confucian orthodoxy. It has become a virtual testament of faith that shamanism emerged during the Bronze Age, some 2,500 years ago. In 1987, Kim Yŏlgyu wrote:

Shamanism is gradually disappearing from Korea, but our shaman consciousness is not easily lost. The consciousness may remain with Koreans forever, because it once gave meaning to our lives (1987: 168-9).

Shamanism is, then, an important symbol, fully meeting the nationalist and identity aims of the preservation system.” (2006: 135)

A great deal of Korean music and dance is believed to have distant roots in shamanism, a view that has been promoted in certain writings on these arts. On the topic of shamanist roots of Korean music, Howard writes the following:

Shamanism is considered to have the longest history of any religion on the peninsula (in English, see Clark 1932/1961: 175-7; Han Woo Keun 1970: 52; Joe 1972: 11 and 43-4; Im Sok-jae 2003: 3; Lee Yong-shik 2004: 17), and the perception that it constitutes a core element of Korean culture, tied to the populist *minjung* culture, has been a common theme of Korean scholarship over the last few decades (Kim Yŏlgyu 1971: 274; Yi Sangil 1984: 31-5; Kim Kwang-il 1984: 261-9; Cho Hung-youn 1987; Sim Woo-Sung 1994: 77). In one notable case, Hahn Man-young, encountered in Chapter 2 questioning whether shaman rituals should be preserved within the state system, has contributed a much-reproduced account that promotes shaman roots for much of the traditional music canon (Hahn 1975: 17-22; 1985: 16-31; 1990: chapter 2). (Howard 2006: 122-123)<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The passage on Hahn Man-young from Chapter 2 of Howard's book relates the following:

Hahn Man-young [Han Manyŏng], whom I interviewed in 1990, commented:

We have a healthy cultural heritage but we have also chosen to preserve traditions that to my mind are not so

Many writers on religion in Korea have found that Korea's shamanist foundation also affected each of the other religions to come to Korea, as elements of shamanism influenced Korean Buddhism, and elements of both shamanism and Buddhism influenced Korean Confucianism. Some have argued that Korea's shamanistic religious foundation can be seen in the practices of Korean Christian churches (for example Jang 2004; Andrew Eungi Kim 2000).

Today, some people continue to see shamans regularly while others seek them out in times of emergency as an extra precaution. Still others reject shamanism altogether. In general, shamans and most of their clients are women, and shamanism is often thought of as a women's religion, although men can participate as well (see Kendall 1985: 165-166).

Shaman rituals have long been places for women to gather, dance, and share an experience that can be spiritual, cathartic, fun, conducive to bonding between women, and socially transgressive in an acceptable space (see, for example, Kendall 1977; 1985: 165). Furthermore, shamanism affords special otherworldly powers to women. Women who become shamans after marriage also become the heads of their households, higher in status than their husbands, and thus shamanism gives real-

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healthy. For example, we have appointed folksongs formerly sung by courtesans and shaman rituals as Intangible Cultural Properties. Yes, they are part of our tradition, but have we stopped to make judgements about their value? They are base culture. Even if they are to be preserved, they should not be disseminated to our people. Are such things 'Assets'? I don't think so, because they are a reflection of a corrupt society.

Han was at the time a distinguished and influential musicologist who had published a body of research on folksongs and Buddhist music; he retired from his professorship at Seoul National University in 1992 to pursue a vocation as a Christian minister. (2006: 35)

world powers to certain women, besides their connection to the supernatural (Wilson 1983: 113). Because of the powers afforded to women by this religion, and because of its creating a space for women to transgress against social norms, shamanism is sometimes viewed as a religion that has been empowering to Korean women.

The following passage comes from Choi Hee An's book *Korean Women and God: Experiencing God in a Multireligious Colonial Context* (2005), which reflects on Korea's main religions and their impact on the lives of Korean women. Its section on shamanism demonstrates Choi's beliefs about connections between shamanism, women, and *han*, beliefs which are shared by a significant number of people:

One of the unique characteristics of Korean Shamanism is that it represents the voices of oppressed people. Using forms of Shamanism, oppressed people can satirize their oppressors and caricature their oppressive reality. Shamanism has been and is sometimes called the religion of Korean women, because most shamanistic rituals have been practiced exclusively by female shamans and most myths and stories have been handed down by women throughout the generations. ... However, not only female shamans, but also most Korean women perform shamanistic rituals in their everyday lives. Shamanistic rituals and storytelling provide women with a cathartic release from their oppressive reality and empower them to share their pain. Hence, in shamanistic practices, women tell their *han* and share the reality of their lives. (Choi Hee An 2005: 17)

As shown in this passage, whereas shamanism is stigmatized in much of Korean society, some people view it as a symbol for the inner strength and spirituality of Korean women and as a tool of the oppressed. This is a view that some people studying Korean dance and other arts may share, while others may not.

To some people, shamanism, though often relegated to superstition, still symbolizes a women's sphere of power and mutual support. To some people it symbolizes a pure, indigenous religion of Korea. A dancer's view of shamanism

affects how she perceives supposed shamanistic elements in Korean dance. In the case of Professor Lee Ae-ju, her feelings about shamanism as Korea's indigenous culture influence her interpretation of the dance *seungmu* as shamanistic in origin, an interpretation that clearly makes the dance more personally meaningful to her. On the other hand, Van Zile writes of an event at Halla Huhm's Korean dance studio in Hawai'i in which Christian parents of several dance students refused to let their children participate because they were to learn movements used in shaman and Buddhist rituals (2001: 231). Depending on how a dancer views shamanism, the supposed shamanistic elements of certain dances can be either a source of inspiration or a source of discomfort.

### *Salpuri*

Just as *seungmu* has a "common-knowledge" but tenuous relationship to Buddhism, the dance *salpuri* is commonly understood to be derived from shamanism, although different people have different understandings of the exact nature of the relationship (Van Zile, 2001; Loken-Kim 1989; Cultural Properties Administration 2000).<sup>24</sup> The name of the dance is sometimes translated into English as "exorcism dance," and *salpuri* is the name of a shaman ritual for the dead. Despite the name, however, the dance bears little resemblance to actual shaman ritual and it has been argued that the dance has no discernable connection to shamanism (Van Zile, 2001;

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<sup>24</sup> Several poorly-researched (or perhaps just poorly worded) introductory writings on Korean dance discuss the theatrical dance *salpuri* as if it were actually a part of shaman ritual: "The original intent of *Salp'uri* was exorcism" (Hahn Man-Young 1976: 35). "I have been thrilled at the richness of Korean dance, and the final tribute I must pay is to the shaman-derived exorcistic dance known as *Salp'uri* (exorcise the evil influences). A solo dance, typically performed by the oldest mudang [Korean term for a particular type of shaman], dressed entirely in white, using a long white scarf . . ." (King 1977: 54).

Loken-Kim 1989; Cultural Properties Administration 2000). Van Zile (2001) synthesizes the work of a number of other writers on this topic, suggesting that changes undergone by both *salpuri* and shaman rituals complicate any efforts to determine an exact relationship between these traditions:

Connections are often made between contemporary theatrical versions of *salp'uri* and shamanism. Dancers and dance teachers consistently point out that *salp'uri* has its roots in shamanism. The basis of the concert form of this dance seen today is generally attributed to Han Söng-jun, who is said to have choreographed it in Seoul in the mid-1930s, and to have named it after a rhythm and dance used in shaman rituals in South Chölla Province (Loken-Kim and Crump 1993: 14; Ku Hee-seo 1997: 156; and Kim Kyoung-ae 1997: 178). Howard (1989: 174 and 248) points to changes that occurred in Chindo Sshikkim Kut [shaman ritual for the dead] to prepare it for designation as an Intangible Cultural Asset, as well as changes that have taken place since its designation, indicating the effect of recent theatrical dance forms on it, particularly as performed by what he refers to as the "Asset Team," the individuals designated by the government to perpetuate this ritual. Huhm, who studied *salp'uri* with Han Söng-jun in the 1930s, believed that despite contemporary dancers' attributions of the concert dance to Han, today's version is quite different from that taught by him (personal communication 8 No. 1992). According to her, in Han's version the dancer was frequently stationary or almost stationary and sang a great deal; today's dancers are in almost constant motion and do not sing. (Her description of Han's version of the dance is, interestingly, similar to some of the sections of Chindo Sshikkim Kut analyzed here, in which singing predominates.) Although the dance may originally have had strong ties to shamanism, Huhm believes its present theatrical manifestation is related to shamanism in name only, and that it is a direct descendent of a dance developed by female court entertainers (*kisaeng*) during the twentieth century.

Korean scholar Chöng Pyöng-ho concurs with Huhm:

Originally called *Sugöñch'um* because it is performed with a long handkerchief (*sugöñ*), [it] was renamed under Japanese colonial rule [1910-1945] by ... Han Söng-jun. Though the term *salp'uri* refers to the expulsion of evil spirits and bad luck, the dance does not contain any direct reference to shamanic exorcism. It is merely a beautiful dance performed to the

accompaniment of shamanic music from the southern region. (Chung Byung-ho 1997b: 146)

Chõng also states that Han was an instructor at a *kyobang*, a place where female entertainers were taught the performing arts (ibid.). Loken-Kim, citing Kim On-gyõng, indicates that the female entertainers' version of salp'uri was based specifically on one part of what she calls Honam Sshikkim Kut, that is, Sshikkim Kut from the southwestern provinces (1989: 129-130). Ku Hee-seo (1997: 164) states that To Salp'uri, a particular version of salp'uri performed by Kim Suk-cha [and now by Yang Gil-sun, 양길순], a dancer and member of a family of hereditary shamans, derived from the Todang Kut of Kyõnggi Province. If all these comments are accurate, it is possible some versions of salp'uri are directly tied to shaman dance and some are not.<sup>25</sup>

Kendall suggests numerous connections between “dancing girls” and shamans (1991-1992: 54-56), and posits that shamans and female entertainers “may have borrowed elements of each others' performance” (ibid.: 60). Howard points to links based on performance and class (1992). Shaman Pak In-o (in Guillemoz 1998: 75) states that in the past shamans “were often recruited from among the ranks of dancers.” Unfortunately, the current state of Korean dance history does not allow us to know just how much, if any, of Han's choreography was based on ritual dance, how much of what is seen in contemporary salp'uri has affected the movements performed today by Chindo shamans, and whether specific movements originated among shamans, female entertainers, or other dancers. (Van Zile 2001: 159-160)

More certain than the dubious shamanistic origins of *salpuri* are the sentiments it is meant to express. Its title is often translated “release from sorrow,” and the dance is meant to express (usually a woman's) sorrow and bitterness which is eventually released and replaced by ecstatic joy. More specifically, the first part of the dance expresses the sentiment of *han*, a sentiment that is often believed to be uniquely Korean and is a mixture of sadness, longing, regret, and bitterness (see Van Zile 2001; Willoughby 2000; Loken-Kim 1989). This dance is particularly associated

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<sup>25</sup> See the videography (under the section titled *Salpuri*) for videos of Kim Suk-ja and Yang Gil-sun performing *Do Salpuri*.

with the *han* of women. Both *han* in general and the *han* of women in particular are common themes in this dance, *pansori*, Korean films (most famously those of Im Kwon-taek (임권택, Im Gwon-taek), and other artistic and creative forms.<sup>26</sup>

The association of *salpuri* with women is so strong that some writings on Korean dance ignore the presence of male dancers, such as the famous Yi Mae-bang, and claim that *salpuri* is exclusively a women's genre (for example, Hahn Man-Young 1976: 35).<sup>27</sup> The book *Korean Intangible Cultural Properties: Traditional Music and Dance*, published by the Korean Cultural Properties Administration, claims, "Today, *Salpurichum* is danced exclusively by women soloists, so that it exudes a peculiarly feminine grace seasoned with eroticism" (Cultural Properties Administration 2000: 117). While the supposed "erotic" element of *salpuri* is highly questionable and its exclusivity to women inaccurate, this particular book makes the inclusion of these statements all the more ironic by including pictures not of a female dancer, but instead of Yi Mae-bang, without including his name.

That *salpuri* begins as an expression of *han* and ends with a release from it is not debatable, but the source of the dancer's *han* is open to interpretation. The dance is often presented as the mourning of a widow (see for example Hahn Man-Young 1976: 36), and when a woman performs it she wears white, the traditional color of

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<sup>26</sup> For more on *han* in the performing arts, see work by Heather Willoughby on *han* in the performance of *pansori* (2000; 2002), Loken-Kim on *han* in the dance *salpuri* (1989), and Killick on *changgeuk* (2001), who "argues that the portrayal of *han* as central to *pansori* is a constructed ideal that is incongruous with a historical perspective on the genre" (Willoughby 2002: 112).

<sup>27</sup> Jeong Jae-man (정재만), another renowned male dancer, who was a student of Han Young-Sook, also dances, choreographs, and teaches *salpuri*.



mourning in Korea.<sup>28</sup> Yet a dancer can use events from her own life or imagination to conjure up the feeling of *han* and make *salpuri* personally meaningful.

### ***Gibangmu, Remembering Gisaeng***

During much of its history, Korea had a system of professional female entertainers who were educated and trained in the arts in order to entertain the royal court and provincial government officials. These women were called *gisaeng*. Many traditional Korean dances are derived from dances performed by *gisaeng*, but the dance *gibangmu* in particular is explicitly meant to portray *gisaeng*. The name *gibangmu* comes from the word *gibang* (기방), a later version of the word *gyobang* (교방), the term for the government-appointed schools where *gisaeng* were trained until the Japanese colonial period (Pilzer 2006: 297). The *gisaeng* of the Goryeo and Joseon eras are remembered in a variety of ways, which lead alternately to either honor or stigmatization of the *gisaeng* legacy (see Pilzer 2006).

Most *gisaeng* were state slaves who came from hereditary outcaste classes (*cheonmin* 천민), while others were “conscripted or sold from poor families” (Pilzer 2006: 296). Daughters of *gisaeng* were destined to become *gisaeng* themselves, and as Loken-Kim points out, some daughters of shaman families were sent to be *gisaeng* (1989: 47).

In order to be appealing companions for men, *gisaeng* were educated in music, dance, poetry, calligraphy, and textile crafts (Pilzer 2006: 296). During the Joseon era, they were the only women to receive formal education and were also the

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<sup>28</sup> When *salpuri* is performed by a man, he wears baggy pants and a vest or light coat (Van Zile 2001: 16).

only women who were free to associate with men. For these reasons, they are sometimes thought of today as representing “a cultural hero or prototype of modern, independent womanhood” (Pilzer 2006: 307) for this era of Korean history. Yet they were viewed as both artists and women of loose morals, subverting neo-Confucian values. David McCann writes:

Although the *kisaeng*'s formal training in etiquette, painting, singing, verse-writing, and other arts was an imitation of the training through which a male in Yi Korea became an official, repeated attempts to cleanse official society of these women indicate that the *kisaeng* were viewed as being subversive of proper decorum. (McCann 1983: 134)

The ways in which *gisaeng* are thought of today are varied and even conflicting.

Pilzer writes:

The history of the vanished Korean female professional entertainer known as *gisaeng* is riddled with ambiguities. These arise from the inherent social-structural ambiguity of Korean (and many other) traditional female entertainers who have operated outside of established morality but in a way that often reinforces the conventions they seem to subvert. The ideological contexts in which *gisaeng* are remembered are no less ambiguous: as symbols of national culture, as pre-modern symbols of the oppression of women, and as early examples of emancipated females. Some scholars understand the *gisaeng* to have been a kind of sex worker or a prostitute, while many others insist that the *gisaeng* were entertainers, forbidden from selling their bodies, who only became involved in sex work under Japanese colonialism (1905-45). (Pilzer 2006: 295)

Loken-Kim (1989) and Pilzer (2006) point out that the different classes of *gisaeng* that once existed are today often lumped together in memory due to changes that occurred during the Japanese colonial period. In reality, for much of their history each of these classes lived in quite different circumstances, and their social positions and services changed considerably over time. According to Pilzer, during the Goryeo Dynasty (A.D. 918-1392), “*gisaeng* were often selected as kings’ concubines and

given noble rank. But due to the neo-Confucian prescriptions of the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910), the gisaeng lost much of this class mobility and were demoted in status” (Pilzer 2006: 296).<sup>29</sup> Pilzer explains that female entertainers of the nineteenth century were grouped into several different classes, and that only those of the highest class were actually referred to as “*gisaeng*”:

Kwon Do Hee describes female performers of this time as divided into three classes: entertainers attached to the court (*gisaeng*, *yegi*, *ginyeo*, or *gwangi*), private female entertainers (*sampae*) who performed for the aristocratic and middle classes, and itinerant group performers (*sadangpae*) who performed for commoners. The Hanyang (Seoul) court and other regional government centers trained *gisaeng* in government schools called *gyobang* or *gyobangcheong*; and some *gisaeng* operated privately outside the confines of state circles. The *sampae* were entertainers and hostesses who sang *jappa* (literally ‘miscellaneous songs,’ narrative songs mostly sung seated) and *sijo* (aristocratic song poems) to entertain their customers, and unofficially practiced prostitution. The troupes of itinerant female singers called *sadangpae* that toured the country specialized in folk songs and standing dance songs (*ipchang*) and traded sex for money or goods. (Pilzer 2006: 296-297)

According to this account of class differences between female entertainers, state-employed *gisaeng* did not engage in prostitution and were in this and other respects quite different from the privately-operating *sampae* and *sadangpae*. During the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945), however, the state-run *gisaeng* system was disbanded and *gisaeng* entered “private *gisaeng* guild-run schools, which were overseen by the colonial government” (Pilzer 2006: 299):

There formerly state-employed female entertainers mixed with the private *sampae*, and the distinction between state and private *gisaeng* disappeared. ... Also, while this industry was upper class, it was connected by bureaucracy to the system of licensed industrial

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<sup>29</sup> During parts of the Joseon period, neo-Confucianism even demanded separation of men and women in the court, necessitating the education of women in medicine and also in musical instruments formerly played by men (Pilzer 2006: 296).

prostitution introduced by the Japanese. Gisaeng were registered and monitored by the colonial government much as prostitutes were, more and more high-ranking gisaeng were forced into sex work, and, according to Pak Jeongae, the principle of ‘sell one’s talent, not one’s body’ gradually fell away. In the Asia-Pacific War some gisaeng were even fed into the military sex industry, sent to the fronts to entertain Japanese officers and enlisted men, and many seem to have been forced into the military sexual slavery of the so-called ‘comfort women’ system. (Pilzer 2006: 299)

According to this account, it was because of the twentieth-century blurring of *gisaeng* entertainment and prostitution that much of the general population came to think of *gisaeng* of all historical periods as prostitutes. This built upon already-existing discourse dating to the Joseon era which labeled *gisaeng* as immoral women who threatened Confucian values, even if it was only for their education and ability to socialize with men.

In the 1960s, the South Korean government began a process of canonizing Korean national culture, with one emphasis being on the traditional arts. Former *gisaeng* and other women who had been trained in *gisaeng* schools were elevated to teaching, research, and performing positions, but “the women were now subjected to the new pressures of national culturalism. For one, this meant unspoken injunctions to be discreet about the gisaeng and the colonial past, the sexual frankness of folk music, and so on” (Pilzer 2006: 306). Pilzer writes:

However much the institutions heading the canonization of national culture and the performers themselves sought to resurrect traditions of the late Joseon Dynasty free of the taint of Japanese colonialism, modernity, or the aura of change, the colonial gisaeng legacy continues to exert a profound influence on that national canon. ... The place of the gisaeng in the official national-cultural story is strategically vague. The effort to preserve the cultural forms of the gisaeng has not been an effort to canonize the gisaeng legacy as a chapter in the history of Korean traditional arts, despite its centrality to traditional art practice. Several developments were byproducts of the social juncture and

conceptual conflation of the *gisaeng* with sex workers: the *gisaeng* label disappeared from the public discourse on traditional arts, performers spoke of their former status as *gisaeng* reluctantly and with much ambivalence, and the historical *gisaeng*, while absorbed by the canons of national culture, disappeared from their discourses. (Pilzer 2006: 306-307)

According to Pilzer, stigmas related to *gisaeng* have faded somewhat since the twentieth-century version of *gisaeng* entertainment died out several decades ago:

As ‘*gisaeng* tourism’ faded in the 1980s and popular consciousness began to remember the historical separation of the *gisaeng* from the sex industry, performers spoke somewhat more openly about their teachers’ pasts as *gisaeng* as pride in the tradition began to flourish. Despite the fact that most of the singers I have worked with are married modern women, several of them consider their own intelligence, frankness, performative power, and emotions to be the inheritance of *gisaeng* legacies. Some performers and numerous other women told me that had they been born in the Joseon Dynasty, they would certainly have become *gisaeng*. For some, then, the *gisaeng* has become again not wholly a symbol of the oppression of women but a cultural hero or prototype of modern, independent womanhood,” (Pilzer 2006: 307)

As in the case of shamanism, *gisaeng* are remembered in a variety of ways and a dancer’s understanding of *gisaeng* can have a profound impact on how she views Korean dance, and *gibangmu* in particular. In her study of the Halla Huhm Korean dance studio in Hawai’i, Van Zile found that stigmas related to *gisaeng* affected reception of Korean dance as a whole in Hawai’i:

To many older Korean-Americans dance still carries with it the stigma of the *kisaeng* established during the war years—the notion of a woman of loose morals whose dancing was only part of an evening’s entertainment. (Van Zile 2001: 230)

The Washington Korean Dance Company, on the other hand, openly emulates *gisaeng* in performances of the dance *gibangmu*. The image of *gisaeng* described in the studio’s introduction to the dance, however, is quite specific. The dance is

introduced to the audience, through program notes or verbal introduction, as a dance portraying the “high class *gisaeng* (palace maiden entertainers) who were accustomed to palace culture and etiquette,” and who performed the dance for kings (Washington Korean Dance Company 2008). Here, the studio invokes the image of the high-class *gisaeng* of the palace. In an interview, I asked Kim *Seonsaengnim* about stigmas related to *gisaeng*, describing Van Zile’s findings in Hawai’i. She seemed surprised and described the *gisaeng* as having been separated into two types: those who were entertainers and those who were “women of the night.” The dance *gibangmu*, she said, specifically portrays the former and not the latter (Kim Eun Soo 2008).

An individual’s understanding of *gisaeng* as a category depends on the discourse to which he or she has been exposed. Many students and professionals in Korean traditional performing arts have had former *gisaeng* as teachers, or as teachers of teachers, creating an artistic genealogical bond and personal connection to these women. People in the general population, on the other hand, may be exposed to images of *gisaeng* primarily through popular culture, as *gisaeng* are included in many Korean period films and dramas. In most of these, *gisaeng* are not primary characters and their entertainment quarters function only as backdrops for occasional scenes. An exception, however is the very popular Korean drama *Hwang Jin Yi*, which seems to have had a significant effect on many people’s view of *gisaeng* by presenting *gisaeng* as fully-realized characters (2006).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The word “drama” is used, regardless of dramatic or comedic content, to indicate a television miniseries. Many are around sixteen to twenty-four episodes long, but some number in the fifties, sixties, or higher. Korean dramas are very popular both within Korea and outside the country.

The drama *Hwang Jin Yi* takes place in the sixteenth century and presents a fictional imagining of the life of Hwang Jin Yi, a legendary *gisaeng* to whom famous poems are attributed but about whom nothing is known for certain.<sup>31</sup> In this popular drama, *Hwang Jin Yi* enters a *gyobang* at a young age after being raised in a Buddhist temple, drawn to the beauty of Korean dance. The drama portrays her as a dance prodigy and shows her long-term study of both dance and *geomungo* as well as her intelligence and wit in poetry.<sup>32</sup>

Throughout the drama, the arts and the *gisaeng* who practice them are revered. The utmost importance of the arts in the drama and the portrayal of Hwang Jin Yi and other *gisaeng* as fully-realized (and often tragic) characters gives new and more personalized images of *gisaeng* to the general viewership. At the same time, however, the drama portrays the *gisaeng* of both the palace and the provincial *gyobang* as having engaged in high-class prostitution, although the character Hwang Jin Yi escapes this due to various plot twists and her exceptional talents as a dancer and musician. Thus, the drama retains this more “shameful” aspect of the *gisaeng* image (contrary to the historical findings discussed earlier in this chapter) but simultaneously raises its female characters above it by making them fully-realized, often tragic heroines who live for their art.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The most famous poem attributed to Hwang Jin Yi is discussed by David R. McCann in his chapter “Formal and Informal Korean Society: A Reading of *Kisaeng* Songs” (1983: 134-136).

<sup>32</sup> The *geomungo* is a fretted stringed instrument which is plucked with a wooden stick, usually while seated on the floor. It has a low sound and is an instrument associated with scholars. In the drama, Hwang Jin Yi’s ability to play this instrument as a woman is considered exceptional.

<sup>33</sup> This drama’s popularity is palpable even without formal study of its effects, although such a study would be very interesting. The costumes for the drama were

A dancer studying at the Washington Korean Dance Studio can potentially draw from a wide range of discourse about *gisaeng* in order to find her own significance in dancing *gibangmu* and other dances. Many of the women at the studio regard *gibangmu* as one of the studio's most beautiful dances, while a few may dance it reluctantly due to its association with *gisaeng*. In addition, *salpuri*, *seungmu*, and *geommu* were also once performed by *gisaeng* and many other dances are derived from *gisaeng* styles of dance. Thus, the very act of performing Korean dance as a woman may bring to mind the image of *gisaeng*, as Van Zile suggests it did in Hawai'i (2001: 230). The possibility of stigmatization, however, is countered by discourse that celebrates *gisaeng* as keepers of Korea's traditional arts and as women who became artists and intellectuals despite their low class background, transgressing the neo-Confucian mores of their time. This image of *gisaeng* can be a source of

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designed by Kim Hye-soon (김혜순, Gim Hye-sun) who based them on traditional styles but used many non-traditional fabrics (Lee Hyo-won 2007). The *gisaeng* style of *hanbok* used in this drama attracted a great deal of attention, with its skirt that fits tightly around the torso almost down to the waist instead of billowing out from a higher point. Other characteristics of the style worn in the drama are the use of nontraditional patterned fabrics and the layering of a second skirt over the main skirt, often pulled upward so that it puffs out near the waist and leaves much of the main skirt visible below. The unique style of one of the drama's most popular *hanbok*, with its white top (저고리, *jeogori*) decorated with large red flowers, became very popular, as did music from the drama (for a photograph, see Lee Hyo-won 2007). At the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Korean Traditional Performing Arts Competition (제9회 미주 국악 경연대회) in New York City this year, a dance performance titled "Hwang Jin-i-wa Hallyangmu (황진이와 한량무)/Hwang Jin Yi and Noble Men's Dance" was given by the winner of the previous year's competition surrounded by a group of female dancers dressed as men. The dancer portraying Hwang Jin Yi wore a version of the red flower *jeogori* from the drama. A version of this dress is also on display for sale at one of the *hanbok* shops in Annandale. A participant in a music and dance competition in Maryland also wore a version of this dress while performing on the *gayageum* during a Lunar New Year celebration in January 2009.



inspiration to women, and especially to women studying Korean traditional performing arts who can construct intellectual and emotional bonds to their own imagined versions of *gisaeng* through performance.

### **Women of Jeolla-do**

#### ***Namdo Minyo and Pansori***

The final group of women discussed in this chapter are the women of Jeolla (전라), the southwestern region of Korea. Although it was once a single province called Jeolla-do, it now consists of North Jeolla and South Jeolla provinces. The Jeolla region is famous as the source of many of Korea's folk arts and especially for *pansori*, as many of Korea's great *pansori* singers came from there. It continues to be a home of *pansori* connoisseurs. At the same time, however, Jeolla represents the opposite of the "sophisticated" urban culture of Seoul, and the dialects of the southern parts of Korea are stigmatized as the Seoul dialect remains highly preferred.<sup>34</sup>

The text of *pansori* and *namdo minyo* reflects the dialect of Jeolla-do. At the same time, the strong, husky vocal style might be thought of as reflecting the robustness for which people of this region are reputed. Delicate femininity is not an aim in the vocal style of *pansori* and *namdo minyo*, and the aspiring singer of these genres must shed delicacy in order to achieve the right sound and expressivity. To women living under current social pressures to be feminine, the sound of *pansori* and

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<sup>34</sup> One *pansori* enthusiast suggested that I study someday with a teacher from the Jeolla region but emphasized that I *must not* pick up her dialect.

*namdo minyo*, and the feeling of performing these genres, can be liberating in itself.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, performing these genres can also make the singer feel connected to her own image of the women of Jeolla-do. Whether these women are seen as empowering role models or as crude and backward country folk of the past depends on the point of view of the individual.

Texts of some songs also refer to Jeolla-do, such as the song “*Ieodo Sana*” (이어도 사나), which is about the women divers of Jeju Island. These women are famous for their ability to dive in the ocean to astonishing depths without diving equipment in search of abalone and other seafood. The women of Jeju Island are also famous for being the breadwinners of their families while their husbands raise the children, a rare counterexample to the division of labor in the rest of Korea and in most of the world.

The fact that *pansori* was once an exclusively male genre of performance adds another layer of gendered meaning to performing *pansori* (see Chan E. Park 2003: 214-232). Although women have been well established in *pansori* from more than one hundred years, a student of *pansori* may find significance in the fact that it was once a male genre. Chan E. Park takes interest in how the vocal technique and performing style of female *pansori* singers emulates the male originators of the genre,

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<sup>35</sup> One young woman who majored in traditional performing arts in Korea before coming to the United States told me that her low, slightly husky voice was always a problem for her in Korea, where many young women speak in higher, purposefully young-sounding, cute voices. She feels more comfortable in the United States, she said, where young women generally talk in a less girlish style and her vocal quality does not stand out. On the other hand, many women of older generations in Korea speak in low, gruff voices, reflecting changes in expected performance of femininity as women age and also generational changes in women’s behavior (see Cho 2002 on generational changes in the performance of femininity in Korea).

who in turn are generally believed to have based the genre on the singing of female shamans (Chan E. Park 2003: 214-232). Through performance, *pansori* students at the WKDC studio can imagine themselves as a part of a community with others who have performed *pansori* in the past—both men and women. Through the genealogy of our teacher, we can also connect with a certain subgroup of singers, as we come from one school and not from another, a differentiation that can further strengthen a sense of identity.

### ***Ganggangsullae***

In the WKDC studio's recent performance at the John F. Kennedy Center, one of the most popular performances was the teenagers' performance of *ganggangsullae* (강강술래, sometimes written (and pronounced) as 강강수월래, *ganggangsullae*). Although this thesis generally does not cover the teenagers' dance classes, this particular dance is so significant and relevant to this chapter that I would be remiss if I did not mention it. The dance performed by the WKDC teenagers is a staged, choreographed portrayal of a custom of women in Jeolla-do who would gather at night during the harvest time to sing songs and dance. The dancing is most famous as a circle dance which begins slowly and increases in speed, but other dance formations are involved as well. The genre of songs accompanying this dance is referred to as *ganggangsullae* and is an exclusively women's genre. In its original context, it was a time for women to sing and dance in an all-female setting. Keith Howard relates an anecdote from an interview with Cho Kongnye (조공네, Jo Gong-nye), an Intangible Cultural Property holder for rice cultivation songs (Property 51), who was born around May 1925:

When I was twelve and the sixth full moon came around, women gathered together to sing and dance *Kanggangsullae*. I asked if I could sing with them. My mother agreed, but my father objected: ‘A woman’s place is to be hidden in the house,’ he said. I ignored him and went. The women danced around singing song after song. They clapped their hands, they jumped up and down, and they joined hands and snaked around following each other. (Howard 2006: 88)

Today, *ganggangsullae* is performed on stages and in group celebrations around the time of Chuseok (추석, a harvest holiday during which families gather).

The version that is performed today, however, is the result of a reworking and formalization of the genre by Bak Byeongcheon (박병천) (b. 1933) in 1972 (Howard 2006: 106). Howard explains:

Pak’s exact role in restructuring the rice cultivation songs is less clear than with *Kanggangsullae*. For the latter, he was paid by the Chindo [진도, Jindo] administration to work with islanders on the northeast, but he prepared himself by working with Cho Kongnye and other women in Inji, since as a woman’s genre it had formerly been performed in secret outside the ambit of men. Before this time, we know from the bureau’s report written by Im Tonggwön [임동원, Im Dong-won] in 1964 that *Kanggangsullae* had sections in free rhythm, used improvised texts that imparted flexible stanza lengths and incorporated a mix of dance steps. . . . Pak, in an unusually frank account, in February 1984 told me his version of what had happened:

*Kanggangsullae* used to be performed by women to the light of the full moon and could go on for a very long time. I reorganized it totally differently to create a formal genre lasting 30 minutes. In the old days, the women had started, stopped, played, joked, sung and so on. They sang what they felt like singing. If I included everything as it had been, then I could not make *Kanggangsullae* beautiful for the 1972 National Folk Arts Contest. So I cut it back to the basic songs, adding percussion instruments so that everybody would walk in step. The steps hadn’t been fixed, but I made them regular, basing them on well-known Korean dance steps. *Kanggangsullae* didn’t follow any rhythmic cycles before, but I introduced them, making the whole thing strict and measured. In reality, then,

*Kanggangsullae* as it is now performed is my composition. Someday, perhaps people will research the old performance style and reinstate it. But, what we now perform is a professional work, taking elements from the tradition to show its beauty.

The percussion instruments, in the past the domain of men, were soon dropped, leaving the song once again unaccompanied. (Howard 2006: 107)

The version of *ganggangsullae* performed by the teenagers of the WKDC studio is not the full thirty-minute rendition described above but rather a shortened version choreographed for the stage. In the performance at the John F. Kennedy Center on November 7, 2009, the backdrop on the stage was lit dark purple, with a yellow-orange spotlight as the full harvest moon. The WKDC's version of the dance begins with one of the dancers from the professional company leading two young girls by the hand to gaze at the moon. After leading the children offstage, the professional dancer enters the stage again, leading by the hand a line of about twenty teenage girls who step in time slowly to the music, tilting their heads to the right and left in time with the step. The girls wear white *jeogori* (the top part of *hanbok*) and either red or blue skirts, with the skirt colors alternating in the line. As the last girls in line enter the stage, the line curves around into a semicircle. On a musical cue, the girls' steps increase in speed to double-time, and on another musical cue they begin skipping quickly and close the circle.

There are many sections to this dance and many different steps, not all of which are performed in a circle. At one point, the girls stand in a line and bend forward at the waist to hold onto each others' skirts, gathering closely to form a bridge with their backs. One of the girls then walks across the backs of the others,

with an assistant on either side to hold her hands and pull her skirt away from her feet. As the girl progresses along the bridge, the girls whose backs she has stepped on sway back and forth behind her. This part of the dance is called “treading on roof tiles.” After the girl descends, the professional dancer in the front rises from her bent-over position and leads the still bent-over line of girls in a snaking pattern around the stage, waving her arms to the music. She eventually closes the circle, creating a tight circle in which all the girls are bent over and holding onto each others’ skirts. The girls then lunge toward the middle of the circle as they step on their left feet (the inside foot in the circle), and return to neutral as they step on their right feet, causing the circle to contract and expand. This section of the dance is called “catching a mouse.” (To see these and other sections of *ganggangsullae*, see the UNESCO documentary video “*Ganggangsullae*,” listed in the videography.)

The WKDC version of *ganggangsullae* is performed to a recording of women’s voices accompanied by drumming. The women’s voices are robust, sometimes singing slowly and at other times singing quickly in *jajinmori* or *hwimori*. The speed of steps in the choreography corresponds with the music, fast and vigorous at some times and slow at others. Near the end of the song, during a slow vocal solo in free rhythm on the word “*ganggangsullae*,” the girls stand in a large circle facing outward and perform slow, seemingly meditative movements. First they slowly lean backward to look up slightly and return to a neutral position. Next they rise slightly on the balls of their feet while lifting their arms out to the sides a little, and gently descend to the floor with heads down. As the voices of the other women in the recording join the soloist, the girls look upward, rise up slightly, and descend again.

The tempo of the music suddenly quickens and the drumming resumes as the girls quickly rise, grab hands, and dance in a circle again for the quick climax of the performance.

This is a particularly popular dance among audiences. Although its movements are relatively simple, the vigorousness of the dance, the contrast between fast and slow sections, and the innovative and varied choreography are striking. Particularly important in the effect of the dance are the powerful, husky voices of the women in the musical recording. The effect of a group of Korean-American teenage girls dancing together to the these women's voices is very striking.

Knowledge of this dance's background further enhances the significance of the dance, as a girl dancing it might imagine herself to be one of the women of Jeolla-do, temporarily ignoring the conventions of society to enjoy dancing together. She may also feel that she is memorializing or paying tribute to these women and their traditions. Removed one step further, she may memorialize through her dancing the other dancers who have staged this dance, placing herself in the community of women who have performed it on the stage.

***Grace, Strength, and Gender: The Potential for Korean Dance and Pansori to Open Up New Performative Possibilities on Stage and in Life***

While the three dances discussed in the beginning of this chapter (*seungmu*, *salpuri*, and *gibangmu*) are relatively slow, restrained, and internally focused, coming across as deeply contemplative or spiritual, the most vigorous dances in the WKDC studio's repertoire—*sogo chum*, *sam buk chum*, and *o buk chum*—are quite different in mood. In all three, the dancers play drums, smile, and are outwardly focused,

clearly aiming to entertain the audience and not focused on deep internal emotions or ideas. These dances are not particularly tied to history, spirituality, or the expression of personal sentiments as they are more oriented toward entertainment. However, they can still have an effect on the identity of the woman who learns and performs them, as she is able to imagine herself in new ways.

All three of these dances (and other dances as well) are characterized by a balance of strength and grace. *Sogo chum* includes large movements and stylistic elements derived from folk dance, such as an emphasis on shoulder movement from the breath. The hand-held drum used in this dance is small and not particularly loud, but the percussive act of striking it contrasts with the use of flowing sleeves or scarves in *seungmu*, *salpuri*, and *gibangmu*. The drumming in *sam buk chum* and *o buk chum* is very loud and deep in pitch, which can be exciting for both the performer and the audience. To be in a line of women playing drums and creating that thunderous sound can be quite thrilling.

At the same time, all three of these dances are to be performed with grace. When professional dancers perform *sam buk chum* and *o buk chum*, the effect is a very traditionally “feminine” one; the performers of these dances are usually young, with slight frames, and they smile and perform everything with seeming ease and grace, moving in perfect synchrony. In the adult beginner and advanced community classes at the WKDC studio, whose members are enthusiasts but not professionals, the strength and stamina used in these dances is more noticeable. Without the studied delicateness of the professional dancer to mask the effort required by the drumming, the women in these classes appear strong when they play. In these classes, the power



of playing drums is not masked by well-rehearsed smiles for the audience, but rather shows on their faces, as does their determination and drive. These dances continue to be favorites among members of the dance classes, and they are also audience favorites when the WKDC's professional team performs. In a rehearsal I observed of the professional company, one of the older women proclaimed "*Halmeoni* (할머니, grandmother) power!" after finishing *o buk chum*.

These dances allow women to express themselves in ways that are coded as feminine and beautiful (gracefulness, flowing movements, and lightness), combined with elements that are strong (using leg strength, performing large movements quickly, striking objects, and creating loud sounds). Through learning these dances, a woman acquires both skills that are beautiful and "feminine" and skills that run counter to common views of femininity by emphasizing strength and loud sounds.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, producing loud sounds is also part of singing *namdo minyo* and *pansori*. The act of singing in the robust, decidedly "unfeminine" style of *pansori* and *namdo minyo* can be empowering to women because it allows them to imagine their own performative possibilities differently as their voices increase in strength, volume, and roughness.

Furthermore, gender-crossing is a part of the narrative repertoire of *pansori*, as the singer must portray both male and female roles. Although the group classes at the WKDC studio have almost exclusively studied *namdo minyo* and are just beginning to learn pieces of the narrative *pansori* repertoire, *Pansori Seonsaengnim*'s private students and I frequently portray characters of the opposite sex in our *pansori* excerpts. *Pansori Seonsaengnim*'s two main private students, a fourteen-year-old girl

and her eleven-year-old brother, sometimes perform an excerpt from the *Song of Heungbo* together. In these performances, the girl sings the role of a cruel older brother and the boy the role a victimized younger brother. The casting is effective not only because of their real-life ages but also because of the girl's powerful, husky voice and strong temperament and the boy's sweetness of voice and character. His strength in *pansori* performance is his *aniri* (spoken sections), during which his portrayal of the female characters is particularly effective because his sweetness comes out in their lines. His sister's strength in performance is her strong, rough voice, which drowns out everyone else's when we sing together. In the section of the *Song of Chunhyang* that I usually perform, I mostly portray men in the sung sections and switch between the characters Bangja (a male servant), Chunhyang (a fifteen year old girl), and Hyangdan (her female servant) during the extended spoken passage. The opportunity to portray both male and female characters is one of the aspects of *pansori* that I appreciate most, as I could never hope to play male roles in most other performing genres. This aspect of *pansori* in particular can be liberating to the performer, male or female. Whereas many performing genres require strict adherence to the stereotypes of the performer's gender, *pansori* gives the performer the opportunity to perform a wide range of genders, even though each of the characters may be portrayed in normatively gendered ways.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> In several performances lately, the private students and members of the group *pansori* classes at the WKDC studio have performed dressed in the traditional clothing of male scholars instead of in women's dress. *Pansori Seonsaengnim* remained in women's dress in all of these performances, however, and led the group with her voice and the *sori buk* (drum). I have not yet discerned the reason for our costuming; *Pansori Seonsaengnim* has suggested that it looks "cool." This may have

Korean dance, *pansori*, and *namdo minyo* have the potential to empower their performers because they require the development of new habits such as graceful movement; quick, percussive movement; and singing loudly without regard for “feminine” vocal aesthetics. These habits are required and nurtured in the studio and may trickle into other parts of life, either unconsciously or consciously, as a result of the individual’s recognizing her ability to perform them. The result is a wider range of performative options in daily life, which can cause the individual to see herself in new ways. A dance participant’s newly-acquired grace may cause her to see herself as more feminine and attractive than she did before. On the other hand, her newly-acquired strength and her new ability to produce thunderous sounds on the drums and to perform vigorous choreographies may cause her to see herself as more physically strong than she did before. A *pansori* student may see herself as having a stronger voice than she realized and may become less afraid to open her mouth wide and make unflattering facial expressions. Chan E. Park quotes famous *pansori* singer Ahn Suksŏn (안숙선, An Suk-seon): “It is so important to put strength in your abdomen and open your mouth really wide, even at the expense of showing the inside of your mouth, uvula and all. . . . When a woman opens her mouth so wide, to the point where a huge vein stands out on her neck . . . I used to be really ashamed, you know, but I conquered that” (Park 2002: 229).

These changes can affect not only the way a woman in the studio views herself, but also how she interacts with other people outside the studio. As she gains confidence in her abilities, she may interact more confidently with those around

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also been influenced by cost and the greater ease of matching these costumes with each other.

her. How this affects particular relationships varies with the individual, and to examine this among members of the studio would require an interview project beyond the scope of this thesis; the women come from such a variety of backgrounds that it is impossible to make generalizations in this area.

Just as the women at the WKDC studio come from a wide range of culturally hybrid backgrounds, their ideas of normative gendered performance may differ according to many factors, including their age, time of immigration to the United States, and experiences in the United States. As Cho Haejoang explains, historical factors in Korea have produced very different gender norms in different generations (2002). The age of an individual and the time that she left Korea, among other factors, may affect her idea of “normal” gendered behavior for a Korean woman.

Even within one generation of women, the time of immigration to the United States is a major factor that can produce widely different ideas of what it means to be a Korean woman. Some members of the WKDC’s adult classes, for example, come from the generation of women whom Cho labels the “daughter’s generation” and describes as having grown up with “self-realization” in mind (2002: 179). This was the generation of the Nationalist-Democratic Movement and the women’s liberation movement in the 1980s. It is also the generation of women who later largely gave up their career ambitions to become housewives, while cultivating an image that was much more “feminine” than women of previous generations. Because Korean women of this generation underwent such changes, at what point a woman of this generation immigrated to the United States could have an immense effect on the view of femininity that she brought with her to the United States. A woman of this generation

who came to the United States before Korea's neoconservative turn, for example, might have continued on a career path in the United States while other women of her generation in Korea gave up their career ambitions. Besides age and time of immigration, a woman's class, job, family situation, and personal experiences in Korea and the U.S. are additional variables which can affect her ideas of normative gendered behavior.

Because each individual at the studio is affected by so many factors, it is impossible to generalize specific ways in which the studio affects gendered self-image and performance of its members; further study of this issue would require more particular study of individuals and their lives outside the studio and would involve a large interview project.

At present, I assert only that the arts practiced at the studio encourage the development of habits which may not already be part of the individual's repertoire of daily performance. They may open up new ways of performing, not only in the studio and on stage, but also in daily life.

### **Conclusion**

Existing discourse and remembered histories of these dances and songs shape current thoughts about what they are supposed to mean and what kind of person one is emulating when one performs them. At the same time, however, participants are aware that the dances and songs are theatrical representations of traditions and people from the past; performing *gibangmu* does not make one a *gisaeng*, one need not be Buddhist to perform *seungmu*, and one can live in an urban apartment and still sing

*namdo minyo* and *pansori*. These are today considered art forms and Korean cultural treasures, officially designated as important to Korean national culture and identity.

As a result, a participant in the WKDC studio can choose to identify with some parts of a dance's or song's history and not with others. She may identify with *salpuri*'s commonly-believed association with shamanism, using the dance to feel a connection with that specific part of Korean national identity, perhaps valuing it as a women-dominated sphere or as Korea's indigenous belief system. On the other hand, she may choose to ignore the association with shamanism and dance *salpuri* as a lament for lost love or as a general expression of *han* whose source may come from her life or her imagination. *Seungmu*, similarly, can be connected with Buddhism, shamanism, or a general sense of spirituality. In *gibangmu*, the dancer is certainly representing a *gisaeng*, but exactly who that portrayed *gisaeng* is, what she does, and how her profession is evaluated depends upon the individual. *Namdo minyo*, *pansori*, and *ganggangsullae* can connect the performer with Korea's folk traditions and the women of Jeolla-do. While *ganggangsullae* comes specifically from women's practices, *pansori* was originally a genre for men, and each of these origins can have an effect on how the individual learner finds significance in performing these genres.

By studying and performing these genres of dance and song, an individual can construct emotional and intellectual bonds with these groups of people. The way in which she imagines herself in relation to them can take on a number of forms.

First, just as an actor must use her imagination to pretend to be the character she emulates in performance, a woman dancing at the WKDC studio may imagine herself to be a *gisaeng* during *gibangmu*, a widow during *salpuri*, or a woman of

Jeolla-do during *ganggangsullae*. This seems to be the case for Kim *Seonsaengnim* and at least some of the other women at the studio. The following excerpt comes from my interview with Kim *Seonsaengnim*:

Lauren Ash-Morgan: Do you think about certain things while you are dancing?

Kim Eun Soo: Yeah! We have to!

LAM: Like what, what do you think about?

KES: Like when we dance *gibangmu*...we are not *gisaeng*, but when we dance we think, "I am *gisaeng*."

Another woman: Yeah. Pretending [KES: Yeah.] we are *gisaeng*.

KES: Like *salpuri* ... we think we got a lot of *han*. We cannot just dance like that; we have to ... at the same time we have to think too."

(Kim Eun Soo 2008)

Imagining oneself to be a character, or bringing up certain emotions either from one's life or from one's imagination, can improve the performance, as the expression of sentiments is so important in the dances. Within the studio classes, where there is no audience and the women dance for their own enjoyment, imagining oneself to be someone else or somewhere else can heighten the personal experience of dancing or singing. Robert C. Provine calls this kind of imagining "imagined context," a term which I find very useful in labeling this phenomenon (personal communication, 30 October 2009).<sup>37</sup> Csikszentmihalyi notes that imagining oneself to be someone else or to be in a different time or place can produce a state of altered consciousness which can increase the feeling of "optimal experience" or "flow" (1990: 73-74).

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<sup>37</sup> Another "imagined context" which may occur at the WKDC studio is imagining oneself to be performing for an audience, even when one is actually performing only for a mirror. Although the adult beginner and advanced classes do not perform often, the biennial studio recital can serve as a real performance that participants can both remember and look forward to during practice sessions at the studio.

On the other hand, the performer's mind may stay firmly fixed in the actual context of the studio or performance space. Yet in this mindset too, there is the potential for connection with other remembered people, as the performer may consciously memorialize them through performance. This is another way in which a woman at the WKDC studio can feel a connection with other people of the past, as she may pay tribute to the legacies of *gisaeng*, shamanism, Buddhism, or traditions of Jeolla-do through performance.

Finally, each dance or piece of music is not connected only to the person performing it and to its original (real or mythical) origins; as it is passed on from teacher to student over several generations, it becomes a part of each dancer's life and its style may reflect the unique qualities of various teachers in its genealogy. As a result, a performance of *salpuri*, for example, memorializes not only the imagined widow character that the dancer may be emulating, or the concept of shamanism, but also the other teachers and dancers who have danced it. The person who choreographed the dance is especially significant. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the *salpuri* studied in the WKDC studio's adult beginner class was choreographed by Han Young-Sook as a going away present for Kim *Seonsaengnim* when Kim *Seonsaengnim* left Korea. As a result, this dance has special significance and is only to be performed by Kim *Seonsaengnim*. This and other dances choreographed by Han Young-Sook, as well as the general style that we learn from Kim *Seonsaengnim*, connects our studio with Han Young-Sook and her grandfather, Han Seong-jun. This may make participants in the studio feel that they share a small part of these dancers' legacies.



All of these ways of mentally connecting oneself with others can contribute to an increasingly complex and layered “individual self-identity” that is “integrated with,” or “sutured to,” many different groups of (real or imagined) people (Rice 2007: 21; Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 41). The process of “creating a sense of belonging to preexisting social groups” is described by Timothy Rice as one way of “authoring the self” and developing “individual self-identity” (2007: 23). Csikszentmihalyi writes of a similar process, of becoming more “integrated” with others, which he says can be one result of “flow” experiences. He describes this as one half of a dual process that makes a person more “complex.” The other half is the process of becoming a more extraordinary individual who is “differentiated” from others by possessing unique skills (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 41). This is related to the process of “creating a sense of self-understanding and self-worth” described by Rice as another process of “authoring the self” (Rice 2007: 23). Although in his concept of becoming more “integrated” with others Csikszentmihalyi seems to be considering only the bonds that form between people who share an activity in the same time and place, I extend this concept to bonds formed with (real or imagined) people who share an activity but are divided by time or space.

Csikszentmihalyi approaches these ideas from the starting point of the “flow” experience. He suggests that continually challenging oneself over a period of time is satisfying not only during times of “optimal experience” but also in the long term, as one naturally becomes a more “complex” individual (1990: 41). He argues that by developing increasing skills and experiencing “flow,” one becomes more complex by

becoming both more unique, or “differentiated” from others, and more “integrated” with other people:

Feeling a flow experience, the organization of the self is more *complex* than it had been before. It is by becoming increasingly complex that the self might be said to grow. Complexity is the result of two broad psychological processes: *differentiation* and *integration*.

Differentiation implies a movement toward uniqueness, toward separating oneself from others. Integration refers to its opposite: a union with other people, with ideas and entities beyond the self. A complex self is one that succeeds in combining these opposite tendencies.

The self becomes more differentiated as a result of flow because overcoming challenge inevitably leaves a person feeling more capable, more skilled . . . after each episode of flow a person becomes more of a unique individual, less predictable, possessed of rarer skills.

. . .

Flow helps to integrate the self because in that state of deep concentration consciousness is unusually well ordered. Thoughts, intentions, feelings, and all the senses are focused on the same goal. Experience is in harmony. And when the flow experience is over, one feels more “together” than before, not only internally but also with respect to other people and to the world in general. (1990: 41)

Chapter 3 of this thesis focused on the ability of Korean dance and *pansori/namdo minyo* to foster new skills in the dancer or singer, which is an example of the process of “differentiation” described by Csikszentmihalyi, a process of becoming a more skilled and extraordinary individual. At the same time, the WKDC studio presents opportunities to become more “integrated” with many groups of people. As discussed in Chapter 2, the women at the WKDC studio connect with each other and form a community through face to face interaction. As this chapter demonstrates, however, they can also create mental connections through performance to a wide range of people from the past and present. In these cases, connections form with other (real or imagined) people (of the present or past) at an intellectual level,

and these connections are usually one-sided, existing in the mind of the individual learner or performer who is aware of those who came before her. However, as students who study Korean performing arts create mental connections to the same people of the past or present, they share common ground, which increases the potential for bonding between these students. When all of these bonds are examined collectively, they form an “imagined community” of people connected to each other emotionally and intellectually, who share common knowledge and practices even if they do not all know each other personally (Anderson 1983).

Whereas the term “imagined community” is often used to deconstruct a seemingly real and unquestioned community, I use the term not to diminish the bonds which can potentially form through performance, but instead to demonstrate and celebrate the power of interpersonal bonds that exist at an intellectual level alone (i.e. not through face-to-face contact). As the individual creates intellectual and emotional bonds with others, her identity becomes more integrated with others as she counts herself a part of these groups of people. The simultaneous process of becoming an increasingly extraordinary individual and becoming more connected to others can create a sense of identity that is increasingly complex as the sense of self becomes both stronger through increased awareness of one’s own unique abilities and more diversified, belonging to many different groups of people. Studying at the Washington Korean Dance Company studio is about more than a generalized Korean identity; its arts invite the learner to construct an identity that is increasingly complex.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

### *Future Directions of Study*

There is a great deal to be studied about both the WKDC studio and the wider Korean community of the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. Kim *Seonsaengnim* plans to expand the studio to create a more comprehensive Korean Performing Arts Center, and I believe that this studio is historically significant and ought to be documented. I am especially interested in doing further interviews with the studio's teachers and participants in order to explore the significance of the studio in their lives further. I would also like to document the performing styles of the studio's teachers. The fact that they trained in Korea at different times, and came to the United States at different times, presents interesting questions as to how their styles might reflect Korean dance styles at different points in time. Kim *Seonsaengnim*, for example, left Korea in the 1970s, partway through the dance career of Han Young-sook, whose style continued to change over time. Many of the dances performed at the studio are Kim *Seonsaengnim*'s choreographies, while a few others were choreographed by Han Young-sook. These dances ought to be documented and preserved.

There are many Korean dance and music studios in the United States, and I am aware of specific ones in the Baltimore/Washington D.C. metropolitan areas and New York City. These would be interesting subjects of study and comparison. In Korea, too, there are community-oriented traditional performing arts classes, and I am

curious about how their practices and the experiences of the participants compare with those at the WKDC studio.

The Korean community of the Washington D.C. metropolitan area hosts a wide variety of performing arts-related groups. The Washington Kayo (가요, gayo) Charity Association (WKCA), of which I have been a member since October 2008, performs popular twentieth-century songs, mostly of the *teuroteu* (트로트) genre. Most of the group's performances take place at events for local Korean senior citizens' associations, and members of these groups also participate by selecting and performing songs. The WKCA also meets each month at restaurants or members' houses to have dinner and sing Korean songs. During our performances, I have had the opportunity to observe the enthusiasm of many Korean people here for these songs, and in particular the songs of Lee Mija (이미자, Yi Mi-ja). This is a topic I find especially interesting and would like to explore further. It was originally a part of this thesis but had to be cut as I narrowed my focus to the Washington Korean Dance Company studio.

Another topic which I had to cut from my original concept of this thesis is the popularity of current Korean popular music (K-pop) among many people in the Korean diasporic community. Many people of Korean descent here keep up to date with popular music in Korea, primarily through the internet but also through means such as newspapers, tabloids, and rented videotapes of Korean television programs. Local Korean businesses play recent pop songs as background music, and many people here are familiar with lyrics and dance moves associated with current popular

songs. Singing at *noraebang* or on one's home *noraebang* system also continues to be a popular pastime.

Two other areas of study were originally part of my concept for this thesis but had to be cut as its focus narrowed. The first is the popularity of b-boying (breakdancing) as a symbol of Korean youth identity in both Korea and the U.S. The second is a study of Korean cultural events held in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area, the biggest of which is the three-day KORUS Festival held in Annandale every year. This festival is organized by the Korean Embassy's KORUS House and includes performances by local acts and ones imported from Korea. Each year, a famous Korean b-boy crew serves as the main attraction. The festival draws large crowds every year and includes many performances, song contests, and vendors selling food and other items. I hope to write about this in the future.

### **Thesis Summary**

This thesis has endeavored to convey the experience of studying Korean dance and *pansori* at the Washington Korean Dance Company studio, examining the experience at a number of levels of interaction: interactions with the studio space and other members of the studio community (Chapter 2), interactions with the physical challenges of these arts (Chapter 3), and interactions with discourse about histories and meanings of these arts as well as with (real or imagined) people of the past and present (Chapter 4). Each of these interactions has its own rewards for the participant and can have potentially powerful effects on her sense of identity by making her both more aware of her unique abilities and more integrated with other groups of people.

That a Korean dance studio in the United States can give participants a sense of Korean identity is an obvious (though important) point. This thesis has sought to go beyond looking at the studio as a place for finding a generalized Korean identity, however, revealing other facets of identity that can be nurtured at the studio.

First, this thesis established the importance of the Korean community which exists outside the studio, and how the concentration of Korean businesses and people in this area makes it possible for individuals to maintain a wide range of hybrid balances between Korean habits and habits adopted in the United States. This thesis also embraced Zheng's (1993) idea of the diasporic community as a third space existing in a tertiary relationship with the original homeland and the host country. Although the "Korean community" is too large to be connected through face to face contact, such a community exists as an entity largely due to local Korean newspapers and other media in addition to extensive networks of personal acquaintances.

This thesis discussed the WKDC studio as a "Korean space," a place where Korean habits are dominant in practices such as language and social interaction. However, the studio remains a hybrid place situated in a diasporic context, not an exact replica of a place in Korea, as the reality that one is living in the United States is always present. Both the dominance of Korean habits in the studio and the subject matter taught there can contribute to a sense of connection with Korea. At the same time, belonging to the studio's community can add another layer to the individual participant's identity. Chapter 2 described practices at the studio and how they contribute to its strong sense of community.

Chapter 3 examined the individual participant's interaction with the physical challenges presented by the arts themselves. The challenges inherent in Korea dance are not necessarily obvious to those unfamiliar with the dance because of the dance's emphasis on expressing internal states such as *meot* and *heung* rather than on overt athleticism. Yet this more internal element of the dance makes it challenging, not only mentally but physically as well, since it requires that the dancer generate a great deal of energy from within while controlling that energy externally. In addition, the breath control and muscular control required of these dances is more physically challenging than it might seem. As the dancer progresses, she may find her body developing new physical stamina and control, making new and more challenging goals possible. This is also the case with *pansori* and *namdo minyo*, as the voice changes over time and enables the singer to reach for increasingly higher goals. In this chapter, I explained how these challenges can lead to a sense of happiness and intense satisfaction by explaining Csikszentmihalyi's theory of "optimal experience" or "flow" and suggesting that the arts practiced at the studio create an ideal environment for the creation of flow experiences.

In Chapter 4, I examined how one's ideas about the histories and meanings of arts performed at the studio can heighten the experience of studying there and deepen the long-term significance of studying Korean performing arts in the individual's life. I presented the varied, and sometimes conflicting, strains of discourse about the dances *seungmu* and *salpuri*, and about shamans, *gisaeng*, and women of the Jeolla region. Some of these strains of discourse are celebratory of these groups of women, while others stigmatize them. An individual's interpretation of a song's or dance's



significance can depend upon which strains of discourse she has heard and which she chooses to believe.

The presence of these various histories and meanings makes the process of learning Korean dance, *pansori*, and *namdo minyo* potentially more rewarding, allowing the learner of these arts to connect emotionally and intellectually not just to a general idea of Korean identity but also to subgroups of women within Korean culture. Because of the range of discourse regarding these subgroups and art forms, the individual can potentially construct a version of the dance's interpretation that is meaningful to her by embracing some of these strains of discourse and ignoring others. In some cases, however, stigmas about groups such as *gisaeng* or shamans can lead individuals to feel uncomfortable performing genres connected to these traditions or allowing their children to (Van Zile 2001: 231).

Finally, the end of Chapter 4 tied together all chapters of this thesis by returning to the topic of identity, focusing on the studio's potential to enrich participants' sense of "individual self-identity" (Rice 2007: 21). The topic of identity had first appeared in Chapter 2, which discussed two different kinds of identity supported by the WKDC studio. The first is the studio's potential to strengthen an individual's sense of Korean identity, both because it is a "Korean space" and because it teaches Korean performing arts. The second kind of identity identified in Chapter 2 is the individual participant's sense of belonging to the studio community. While a sense of general Korean identity might be thought of as linking the individual to an "imagined community," the WKDC studio community is a very real, face to

face community and is actively maintained through practices such as communal eating and chatting before, after, and between dances and songs (Anderson 1983).

In Chapter 4's return to the topic of identity, I examined how an individual's perception of the dances' and songs' meanings and histories has the potential to foster intellectual and emotional bonds between the individual and different groups of people of the past and present. Through performance, an individual may see herself as joining the legacy of these groups (shamans, *gisaeng*, women of the Jeolla region, and dancers and *pansori* singers of the past and present). She may imagine herself to be one of these people, performing in an "imagined context" (Provine 2009), or she may remain firmly rooted in the real context of the studio or performance space while paying tribute to these people and traditions. In either case, she creates an intellectual and emotional bond to their legacy, joining an "imagined community" of others who share similar bonds (Anderson 1983).

In all of these cases of identity formation, the individual's sense of identity is strengthened by becoming more connected with other people, either through face to face contact or through the creation of intellectual and emotional bonds with an "imagined community." The individual thus becomes more "integrated" with other (real or imagined) people through performance (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 41).

At the same time, identity is strengthened through the very individual process of grappling with the challenges of learning these art forms and setting new challenges for oneself. By acquiring new knowledge and skills, a participant in the studio becomes increasingly extraordinary and unique, a process Csikszentmihalyi refers to as "differentiation" (1990: 41). These new skills make it possible for her to

set new goals for the future and imagine herself in new ways. Gender crossing in *pansori* and the combination of elements coded as “masculine” and “feminine” in *namdo minyo*, *pansori*, and Korean dance also allow the individual, male or female, to see new possibilities of self expression that might previously have been outside the boundaries of acceptable gender performance (Butler 1990). This, too, makes the individual a more extraordinary person with new skills and abilities.

The simultaneous process of becoming more unique and extraordinary and becoming more integrated with others is what Csikszentmihalyi describes as a process of becoming a more “complex” self (1990: 41). Using different terms, Timothy Rice refers to both of these processes as ways of “authoring of the self” in the formation of “individual self-identity” (2007: 23). Through these processes, individuals at the Washington Korean Dance Company studio are able to explore not only a generalized Korean identity, but also a complex range of layered identities and a deeper sense of self.

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## Videography

(alphabetized by topic, then title)

### **Buchae Chum (“Fan Dance”)**

“*Buchaechum*” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEXDj4gCLPU&NR=1>

“*Buchaechum* (solo)”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6bNbPibgtQ&feature=related>

“Korea dance with fans”

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jToM9HhH6w&playnext\\_from=PL&feature=Playlist&p=F042B3909C534B65&playnext=1&index=4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jToM9HhH6w&playnext_from=PL&feature=Playlist&p=F042B3909C534B65&playnext=1&index=4)

“*Puchaechum* (Fan Dance) - Korea House”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rz7sGaUhDuQ&feature=related>

“‘Traditional’ Korean Fan Dance - *Buchaechum* 부채춤”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiFT5mOpPTQ&feature=related>

### **Court dance**

“Beautiful Korean traditional court dance!”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NH77MsD9Fs4&feature=related>

### **Ganggangsullae**

“Chuseok Celebration Performance at NCKTPA-Ganggangsullae(1)”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrCJvn91JQw&feature=related>

“Chuseok Celebration Performance at NCKTPA-Ganggangsullae(2)” [Staged performance; includes “treading on rooftiles.”]

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=noMcr\\_pQQlc&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=noMcr_pQQlc&feature=related)

“chuseok fullmoon welcome dance ganggangsullae” [Staged performance; includes “treading on rooftiles.”]

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zgmT6WHqac0&NR=1>

“Ganggangsullae” [Short documentary from UNESCO TV.]

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6D73WBzzEG4&feature=related>

“진도강강술래 – 국립무용단” (“Jindo Ganggangsullae – National Dance Company”)

[http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch\\_userid=av1000&prgid=34892276&catid=31003303&page=15](http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch_userid=av1000&prgid=34892276&catid=31003303&page=15)

**Gyobang Gutgeorichum**

“korean traditional dance 김수악 명인의 교방굿거리춤” [Performed by Kim Su-ak.] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2jG3GgGliDg&feature=related>

**Hallyangmu**

“Hallyangmu(閑良舞)”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BW91yQYIkXM&feature=related>

“Korean Traditional Dance ‘HanRyangMoo’”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTURCNQJ9sY&feature=related>

**Hanbok Style Made Popular by the Drama Hwang Jin Yi**

“여령무(Yeoryeongmu)”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hthi0g7TOw&feature=related>

**Hwang Jin Yi (Television Drama) Dance Excerpts**

“Hwang Jin Yi Farewell Dance”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kawy9wPngBo&feature=related>

“Hwang Jiny for her love”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVvflqY8ya0&feature=related>

“Hwangjiny *Geommu*(검무) : A dynamic sword dance! - 1 - ”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGeC5vrlYDY&feature=related>

“Hwangjiny *Geommu*(검무) : A dynamic sword dance! - 2 - ”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CS9wO3Xi0rk&feature=related>

“Hwangjiny *Geommu*(검무) : A dynamic sword dance! - 3”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hn5C1cTfWIU&feature=related>

**Janggu Chum**

“Korean Dance”

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzN\\_54U2mYg&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzN_54U2mYg&feature=related)

**Salpuri**

“Ardhyana’s Site” (Blog). <http://ardhyana.multiply.com/video/item/1>

“Danse coréenne Salpuri - Salle Pleyel 2006 / 살풀이춤”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PDYIB5FSW8U&feature=related>

“도살풀이” (“*Do Salpuri*”) [Performed by Yang Gil-sun (양길순)]

[http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch\\_userid=av1000&skey=%EC%96%91%EA%B8%B8%EC%88%9C&prgid=34598454](http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch_userid=av1000&skey=%EC%96%91%EA%B8%B8%EC%88%9C&prgid=34598454)

- “도살풀이-김숙자” (“*Do Salpuri* – Kim Suk-ja”)   
[http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch\\_userid=av1000&skey=%EA%B9%80%EC%88%99%EC%9E%90&prgid=34844607](http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch_userid=av1000&skey=%EA%B9%80%EC%88%99%EC%9E%90&prgid=34844607)
- “도살풀이-김숙자” (“*Do Salpuri* – Kim Suk-ja”)   
[http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch\\_userid=av1000&skey=%EA%B9%80%EC%88%99%EC%9E%90&prgid=34830158](http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch_userid=av1000&skey=%EA%B9%80%EC%88%99%EC%9E%90&prgid=34830158)
- “korean traditional dance”   
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aYnvt1bmnW4&feature=related>
- “*Salpuri*” [Performed by Yi Mae-bang]   
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ev6GXqAcvG0>
- “*Salpuri*(살풀이) 2”   
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zN67BW1CrFQ&feature=related>
- “*Salpuri*(살풀이) 3” [Performed by Kim Ok-seong, 김옥성]   
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3hUk\\_3UWxhU&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3hUk_3UWxhU&feature=related)
- “*Salpuri*(exorcism dance)” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-aOjdKA\\_JI&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-aOjdKA_JI&feature=related)
- “살풀이 – 한영숙” (“*Salpuri* – Han Yeong-suk”)   
[http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch\\_userid=av1000&prgid=34893826&catid=all&page=16](http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch_userid=av1000&prgid=34893826&catid=all&page=16)
- “살풀이 – 한영숙” (“*Salpuri* – Han Yeong-suk”)   
[http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch\\_userid=av1000&prgid=34893826&catid=all&page=13](http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch_userid=av1000&prgid=34893826&catid=all&page=13)
- “살풀이 – 이매방” (“*Salpuri* – Yi Mae-bang”)   
[http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch\\_userid=av1000&skey=%EA%B9%80%EC%88%99%EC%9E%90&prgid=34893221](http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch_userid=av1000&skey=%EA%B9%80%EC%88%99%EC%9E%90&prgid=34893221)
- “살풀이 – 이매방” (“*Salpuri* – Yi Mae-bang”)   
[http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch\\_userid=av1000&prgid=34893463&catid=31003303&page=14](http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch_userid=av1000&prgid=34893463&catid=31003303&page=14)
- “살풀이 – 김수악” (*Salpuri* – Kim Su-ak)   
[http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch\\_userid=av1000&skey=%EA%B9%80%EC%88%99%EC%9E%90&prgid=34891886](http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch_userid=av1000&skey=%EA%B9%80%EC%88%99%EC%9E%90&prgid=34891886)

**Sam buk chum (“Three-Drum Dance”)**

“Amazing Lady Drummers from Korea”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1vPdRGKTic&feature=related>

“Korean Drumming” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJheaVcMT-4&NR=1>

“*Samgo-Mu* (Korean Drum Dance)” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmiCI\\_cW-60](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmiCI_cW-60)

“Samgomu (Three Drums dance) - Korea House”

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y\\_at86nHMjA&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_at86nHMjA&feature=related)

**Seungmu**

“Korea Traditional Dance.”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7XkYS5qo4gQ&NR=1>

“Seungmu(僧舞).” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXIRAMNYmX0>

“승무 – 한영숙, 정재만, 박재희” (“*Seungmu* – Han Yeong-suk, Jeong Jae-man, Bak Jae-hui”)

[http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch\\_userid=av1000&prgid=34893792&catid=all](http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch_userid=av1000&prgid=34893792&catid=all)

“승무 – 이매방” (“*Seungmu* – Yi Mae-bang”)

[http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch\\_userid=av1000&prgid=34891590&catid=31003303&page=15](http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch_userid=av1000&prgid=34891590&catid=31003303&page=15)

“승무 – 정재만” (*Seungmu* – Jeong Jae-man)

[http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ref=google&redirect=prg&ch\\_userid=av1000&prgid=32854223&catid=](http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ref=google&redirect=prg&ch_userid=av1000&prgid=32854223&catid=)

**Taepyeongmu**

“태평무 –한영숙” (“*Taepyeongmu* – Han Yeong-suk”)

[http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch\\_userid=av1000&prgid=34893730&catid=31003303&page=14](http://channel.pandora.tv/channel/video.ptv?ch_userid=av1000&prgid=34893730&catid=31003303&page=14)