

# The Genealogy and Topography of Korean Feminist Dance since the 1980s\*

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## Abstract

This article aims to trace the genealogy of Korean feminist dance since the 1980s and explores its contemporary topography. In Korean feminist dance genealogy, 1980s feminist dances were often performed at small theaters, rallies, and demonstration sites under the theme of women workers and democracy. In the 1990s, the focus of dance works shifted to themes of childbirth, pregnancy, the double-exploitation of women due to the burden of nurturing and working, and violence and oppression against women within the patriarchal system. Dance works also portrayed women who overcame hardships to live an independent life. Since the 2000s, contemporary South Korean choreographers have dealt with various feminist agendas, including subjectivity, femininity, physicality, motherhood, queerness, sexuality, and *abject*. In this context, the topography of Korean feminist dance can be classified into four key themes: 1) “adversity, sacrifice, and the motherhood of the earth” that depict the lives of oppressed Korean women in a patriarchal family and society, 2) “the self-awakening subject” who finds autonomy without staying as a victim, 3) “subverted gender and sexuality” that reveals and deconstructs the othered gender and sexuality, and 4) “the exploration of a body and a womb” that challenges phallogocentric discourse by sharing women’s physical bodies and embodied experiences.

본 연구는 1980년대 이후 한국 페미니즘 무용의 계보를 추적하고 현대 지형을 파악하는 것을 목적으로 한다. 그 결과 한국 페미니즘 무용 계보적 측면에서 살펴보면, 80년대는 여성 노동자와 민주주의를 주제로 한 공연이 소극장, 집회, 시위현장에서 선보였다. 90년대는 가부장제 내 출산, 임신, 양육과 생산노동 부담으로 인한 이중 착취, 남성과의 권력관계 속 폭력과 억압을 주목하였고 동시에 이를 극복하여 주체적인 삶을 사는 여성의 모습을 그려냈다. 2000년대 이후 한국 동시대 안무가들은 여성을 둘러싼 주체성, 여성성, 신체성, 모성, 퀴어, 섹슈얼리티, 비체 등 다양한 페미니즘 의제를 역동적이고 격렬하게 다루었다. 이러한 계보 속 한국 페미니즘 무용 지형은 네 가지 주제로 분류할 수 있다. 가부장적 가정과 사회 속에서 억압받는 한국 여인의 삶을 그려내는 ‘역경, 희생, 대지의 모성’, 희생자로 머무르지 않고 자율성을 찾아가는 ‘자각하는 주체’, 타자화된 젠더와 섹슈얼리티 재현 방식을 드러내고 해체하는 ‘전복된 젠더와 섹슈얼리티’, 여성의 물리적 신체와 체화된 경험을 이야기하면서 남근중심주의적 담론을 타파하는 ‘신체, 자궁으로의 탐구’이다.

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\* This article is a translated version of “1980nyeondae Ihu Hanguk Peminijjeum Muyongui Gyebo Mit Jihyeong Mosaek” 1980년대 이후 한국 페미니즘 무용의 계보 및 지형 모색 [The Genealogy and Topography of Korean Feminist Dance Since the 1980s], published in *Hangugyesuryeongu* [The Korean Journal of Arts Studies] vol. 31 (2021): 5-25. DOI 10.20976/kjas.2021..31.001. The original paper is revised and supplemented with the content of the exhibition *Tell You about Her: Korean Feminist Dance since the 1980s* (ElephantSpace, February 15-21, 2020), which the author curated with the support of Arko Creative Academy. Translator: Woo Hyokyung.

## Key words

dance, feminism, feminist, the Korean women's movement, sexism

## Introduction

It is often considered unnecessary to discuss feminism in the dance world because it is a highly feminized area where the majority of members are women. However, according to the Western epistemological structure that separates men/women, reason/emotion, and mind/body, dance as art was often recognized as an entertainment or a sensual cultural product that lacked rational thinking compared to other arts. The fact that dance has been marginalized in society and the art world is in line with the tendency to identify women with body and nature. This ironically highlights the importance of feminist discourse in the dance world. Even though women account for the majority of the population in the dance world, men still take powerful positions, such as choreographers, programmers, critics, administrators, and theater officials. This illustrates that both the patriarchal social structure and sexism cannot be avoided in the system, practice, and criticism of the dance world.

Dance is executed through the body of a dancer, which performs social norms of gender and sexuality. Therefore, dance reflects existing gender ideology, sexuality, and body image constructed in the patriarchal system and is embedded with gender discrimination and distortion. However, dancers not only embody and perform social concepts of gender and sexuality but also have the autonomy to criticize and overthrow them. In other words, exploring the body constructed in a dance work not only reveals the gender discourse of Korean society but also shows how to build a woman's voice as a subjective and self-reflective being.

In order to review Korean modern dance history and create a space for feminist thoughts and discourses in the dance field and academia, I curated an exhibition entitled *Tell You about Her: Korean Feminist Dance since the 1980s* in 2020. The exhibition introduced dancers and dance works that challenged male-centered ideologies implicitly embraced by South Korean society and the dance world at that time. It categorized Korean dance works by chronology and theme and screened twelve feminist dance performance videos. Based on the data collected and investigated during the preparation of the exhibition, this paper aims to track the genealogy of Korean feminist dance since the 1980s and perceive the contemporary topography of it. In this paper, "feminist dance" does not only refer to the work of a female choreographer or a dance with a theme of women. It does not understand the concept of woman from a reductionist perspective based on biological anatomy, but rather uses the term to classify dances that conceptualize and practice feminism.

It is not true that there has not been any discussion on feminism

in Korean dance studies. From the late 1990s to the early 2000s, some studies shed light on Korean dance from a feminist perspective. This is because a number of dance works paying attention to Korean women's hardships, tribulations, and sacrifices were created to criticize social structural and institutional problems from the mid-1980s to the 1990s, and critical approaches to these dance works also appeared in the scene. Some previous studies analyzed dancers and dance works from the perspective of certain feminist ideas such as liberalism, ecogism, and postmodernism.<sup>1</sup> Other studies examined feminist trends and representative works that appeared at a certain period in the 20th century.<sup>2</sup>

Notably, existing studies of Korean feminist dance are mostly limited to the 1990s except two studies dealing with feminist dances in the early 20th century.<sup>3</sup> Since 2010, feminism has been recognized as an important lens for diagnosing social problems, and feminist approaches have been expanding to various themes and attitudes in contemporary Korean dance. Nevertheless, as the feminist perspective in Korean dance studies rapidly disappeared in the 2000s, Korean feminist dance discourses still have been limited to the theme of women's sacrifice and suppression by men as in the 1990s.

This paper, under this circumstance, examines how Korean dance has dealt with gender discrimination and sexual liberation in the context of the women's movement history from the 1980s to the present. The research object is limited to post-1980s works because most of the texts and video materials that could be collected and investigated were produced since the 1980s. Rather than discovering or re-examining overlooked feminist dance works, this paper mainly focuses on previously classified feminist works and re-examines the feminist perspective revealed in these works.

This paper consists of two key parts: a genealogy that presents the historical context and development of Korean feminist dance since the 1980s, and a topography that explores feminist approaches in those works. First, the genealogy part chronicles how gender discrimination and oppression were represented in dance works along with the trajectory of the Korean women's movement. Secondly, the topography part classifies the recurring topics found in dance works and analyzes the feminist perspective and choreographic methods through different cases.

To do so, the paper adopts the following research method: Dance works were collected from previous research papers on Korean feminist dance, books on Korean dance history, such as *100 Years of Korean Dance* (2000) and *Korean Dance History* (2014), dance magazines, such as *Choom*, *Dance Art*, *The Performing Arts & Film Review*, *MoMM*, *Dance Forum*, *Dance and People*, and online dance critic magazines, such as *Dance Webzine* and *Dance Post*. Korea under keyword searches of "women," "feminism," and "yeoseongjuui" (Korean translation of "feminism"). After collecting data, I investigated the program books, previews and reviews, and the video database of the Arts Council Korea (Arko) Art Archives

to confirm if these works can be interpreted as feminist works. The list of Korean feminist dance works in the 1980s was then reviewed and supplemented by three experts, including one Ph.D. researcher in dance performance who researched women's physicality in society, another Ph.D. researcher in dance studies specialized in oral and dance documentation, and one dance critic who has been active in dance criticism for the past 30 years.

This study navigating the genealogy and topography of Korean feminist dance since the 1980s contributes to rewriting Korean dance history from a feminist perspective. At the same time, it shows that dance using a body as the main medium not only reveals the ideology surrounding gender and sexuality in South Korean society but also functions as a place of discourse that makes people aware of feminist issues.

## **The Genealogy of Korean Feminist Dance since the 1980s**

### **1980s and 1990s: Social Criticism and Practices**

In the 1980s, the Korean dance world experienced an era of "Dance Renaissance" as it achieved quantitative growth for about 20 years. The establishment of dance departments in universities, the construction of a number of theaters, and the foundations of public dance troupes in the 1970s led to the quantitative expansion and qualitative diversification of dance performances in the 1980s. The major change in the Dance Renaissance period can be explained in two ways. The first was a social change that dance became recognized as art, not entertainment. The second was an artistic change that dance became a structured art delivering meaningful messages.<sup>4</sup> For instance, traditional Korean dance began to address contemporary topics and play critical functions of civilization, building its own form and content, not limited to traditional vocabularies and materials. As a result, a number of works dealing with women's social issues appeared during the Dance Renaissance as choreographers took a new approach to form and content.

The Korean women's movement began in earnest in the 1980s in connection with the growth of feminism as an epistemology and discipline and the progressive social movement.<sup>5</sup> Feminism spread throughout South Korean academia, as Ewha Woman's University first opened a women's studies course in 1977 and launched a master's degree program in women's studies in 1982. The Korean Association of Women's Studies was founded in 1987. The growth of feminism contributed greatly to providing the language, activists, and material resources necessary for the Korean women's movement. The 1980s women's movement tended to struggle for democracy and human rights by challenging the Korean patriarchal system.<sup>6</sup> A number of women's organizations such as the Woman PeongU Association and

the Korea Women's Hot Line were established, and discussions on the causes, structures, and directions for overcoming the oppression of women were actively conducted. The women's movement during this period had a strong tendency to focus on female manufacturing workers, female farmers, and women in poverty as a social reform movement.<sup>7</sup> Female workers, doubly exploited as women and workers under capitalism, were recognized as the main subject of the movement, and the women's movement was emphasized under the umbrella of the national democratic movement.

In the 1980s, dancers dealt with women, labor, and democracy as subjects of artworks, presented performances as social resistance, and participated in social movements. The Minjung dance (people's dance), which was in full swing at the time, illustrated a self-reflective attitude toward the dance world far from engaging with the reality of people. It was Kang Hyesook who started Minjung dance which was based on traditional Korean dance yet had a critical attitude towards the system and a participatory character in social issues.<sup>8</sup> As the founder of the Kang Hyesook Dance Company, she released social critical works including *Daseot Madang Iyagi* [The Story of the Five Madangs] (1992) and *Haengbogeun Seongjeoksuni Anijanayo* [Happiness is Not in the Order of Grades] (1988). *Ttarui aesa* [A Sad Story of a Daughter] (1983) is a story of a rural maid who became a female worker and later was forced into prostitution. The work stirred the South Korean dance world by depicting the oppression of female workers in the capitalist system. Founded in 1985 by female dancers from Ewha Womans University, Dance Troupe Bullim challenged the three conventional categorizations (Korean traditional dance, contemporary dance, and ballet) and introduced Korean folk dance to create a new dance vocabulary. At the same time, works such as *Bulkkocheuro Taolla* [Burning with Fire] (1986), *I Ttangi Chumeul Wihayeo* [For the Dance of This Land] (1987), and *Nodongja Golliat Keurein* [Laborer Goliath Crane] (1991) were performed at small theaters, rallies, and demonstration sites. Cho Kisook, a founding member of Dance Troupe Bullim and Dance Troupe Didim, created a number of works on the themes of women workers and women's liberation. She performed *Bulkkochiyeo I Eodumeul* [Fire, This Darkness] (1987) at the founding ceremony of the Korean Women Link, *Eoneu Yeoseongui Iyagi* [A Story of a Woman] (1988) at the Dance Party for Women's Liberation, and *Ttaldeura Ireonara* [Daughters, Wake Up] (1989) at the rally of the women office workers' union.

The women's movement in the 1990s can be summarized into the legislative-oriented activities of women's organizations and the activities of women's gatherings in universities by so-called "young feminists."<sup>9</sup> With the emergence of many women's organizations in the 1980s, the demand for a nationwide organization was highlighted to coordinate opinions among organizations and to exercise collective influence. As a result, the Korean Women's Associations United (KWAU) was established in 1987. The KWAU led the legalization movement and system reformation

and made achievements such as the enactment of the Gender Equality Act (1987), the enactment of the Special Act on Sexual Violence (1994), the abolition of advantage points for military service (1999), and the abolition of the patriarchal family system (2005). In this way, the women's movement in the 1990s pursued an independent route separate from the democratization movement after the June 1987 uprising and turned their goals to expanding women's political influence and policy proposals rather than direct protests. The subject of the women's movement was expanded from female workers to housewives as the spatial focus of the women's movement was shifted from work sites to family. The areas of the women's movement were also expanded to diverse topics including the environment, education, sex, culture, and ideology related to women.<sup>10</sup>

In the 1990s, university student movements also moved away from the Minjung and democratic movements and began to deal with various agendas. Instead of focusing on the class problem, they raised the issue of power scattered in the daily lives of individuals. At this time, as the ideology of sexual liberation and gender and sexual discourse flowed in South Korea, the movement for anti-sexual violence began to emerge in South Korea. This period, presumably the forerunner of the Korean #MeToo movement, called for a change in the perpetrator-centered perception and institutional transformation over sexual violence committed at home and at work. The issue of victims of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery also emerged at the same time through the public testimony of Kim Haksoon in 1991 in South Korea, although it was firstly testified in 1975 by Bae Bonggi living in Okinawa.

The shift of the women's movement agenda from the policy-driven agenda to the power and oppression issue surrounding families and women in society led to changes in topics and perspectives of women's issues the dance world looked into. Perspectives on the causes and solutions of women's oppression diverged in various ways within feminism, but they were commonly critical of the patriarchal system that controls women's autonomy. A number of dance works depicting women's lives in the patriarchal system were performed in the 1990s with various themes such as violence, discrimination, childbirth and childcare, abortion, and the double burden of housework and labor. These include Kim Unmi's *Nugurado Geureohadeusi* [As Anyone Does] (1993), Lee Eunjoo's *Dareul Ango Seoneun Yeoja* [A Woman Holding a Moon] (1994), Park Myungsook's *Emi* [Mother] (1998), and Han Sanggeun's *Kkotsin* [Flower Shoes] (1999). In addition, Kim Myungsook's *Shin Gongmudoha-ga* (1998) and Jang Sunhee's *Shinshi 21* [New Poetry 21] (2000) are contemporary reinterpretations of classic tales from the perspectives of female characters. There were dance works that brought the female characters into focus. Kim Samjin's *Ssamji* (1997), Kim Kihwa's *Miyal* (1997), and Jeong Eunhye's *Miyal Samcheon-ri* (2002), all satirized male-centered ideology through the masked dancer character Miyal. In the following year after Kim Haksoon's testimony,

Lim Hakseon presented *Namubi* [Tree Rain] (1992), which criticized the Japanese Military Sex Slavery.

On the other hand, there were works that focused on the recovery of women's self-reflection and autonomy rather than dealing with women's oppression and sacrifices in the patriarchal system and confrontations with men. Nam Jungho's *Jahwasang* [Self-Portrait] (1988), Park Myungsook's *Honja Nuntteuneun Achim* [Morning Awakening Alone] (1993), Hwang Misook's *Seongak* (1996), Jeon Misook's *Amkkot* (1998), Choi Teresa's *Hanyeoja, Naege Jayureul* . . . [Freedom to Me, a Woman. . . ] (1998) and Kim Soonjeong's *Meomulmyeo* [Staying] (1997) are good examples.

In the late 1990s, an important event in the history of Korean feminist dance was held, a special theme on women's issues at the International Minjockchoom Dance Festival over two years. The International Minjockchoom Dance Festival committee selected timely topics every year and invited or commissioned artists and companies in the fields of Korean traditional dance, contemporary dance, and ballet. It held a special program entitled *Women, Half of Our World* in 1997 and *Women, for the Motherhood* in 1998. These programs played a role in evoking the system and perception regarding women in the dance world.

### **Since the 2000s: The Diversification of Gender and Sexuality Discourses**

The South Korean women's movement and feminism had stalled for a while due to the establishment of procedural democracy and the expansion of the neoliberal system. However, it came back to the surface in the mid-2010s under the name of the Feminist Reboot. The women's movement in the 21st century is creating a new wave of feminism, led by young women speaking in various ways and voices based on the Internet and social media.

This trend was triggered by the #MeToo movement that hit the world in 2017. The movement began when multiple female victims exposed sexual violence committed by Harvey Weinstein, an American filmmaker mogul. The movement spread to diverse fields, including politics, religion, sports, and culture and arts in South Korea. Even before the #MeToo movement, some people pointed out the underlying misogynistic culture prevalent in South Korea as a social problem. In particular, the 2016 Gangnam Station murder case became a turning point for the feminist movement.

According to Lee Nayoung, the current movement highlights gender equality in terms of human rights and justice, breaking away from the dichotomous concepts of progressivism/conservatism and good/evil.<sup>11</sup> It aims to implant democracy in daily lives by actively challenging the sexist language and customs and the structure that conceived sexism. It also differs from past feminist movements in that it is a collective movement of ordinary women that can be referred to as "Kim Jiyoung,"

(a character in the million-copy selling novel *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* by Cho Namjoo), not by women of a specific class. Now that the era of popularization of feminism has opened in South Korea, feminism is raising various agendas more dynamically and fiercely than ever.

The dance world in the 2000s did not significantly highlight the ruling ideology against women compared to the 1990s. This may be due to the weakening awareness of the importance of feminism and women's movements when individual women began succeeding in society as a whole. Nevertheless, the power and ideological problems that individual women face in their lives and the stories of women pursuing independent lives by resisting and overcoming the patriarchy have continued to emerge as in the 1990s. Jang Eunjung's *Red-Woman in Red* (2001), Sohn Inyoung *Femitage* (2002) and *Anpak* [In and Out] (2005), and Jeon Misook's *Napalkkochi Pieot Seumnikka?* [Did Morning Glories Bloom?] (2003) and Choi Teresa's *Yeojaiyagi* [A Story of a Woman] (2005) are good examples. In the 2010s, the voices of women were extended further across ages and generations forming solidarity in dance works, such as Ahn Eunmi's *Josangnimkke Bachineun Daenseu* [Dance for Ancestors] (2011) or Dancing Women's *Dangsineun Jigeum Barbaretta e Salgo Itgunyo* [You Live in Barbaretta Now] (2012).

Many works reflecting feminism discourse actively dealt with various themes, perspectives, and attitudes created during this period. Heo Seongim explored how female bodies were objectified and reproduced through media, and Jung Geumhyung showed a performance that revealed women's suppressed sexual desires in a subject/object relationship. Choi Jineun's *AlMen* (2014) and *WOMan, Doreul Deonjida* [WOMan, Throwing Stones] (2018) overturned socially defined appearances, behaviors, roles, and characters while queering the fixed gender norms. In addition, works exploring the physical sense, experiences, socio-cultural meanings, and relationships of women's bodies also appeared, including Kim Bora's *Honjanmal* [Talking to Myself] (2011) and *Somu* (2015), Cha Jinyeop's *River Run* (2015), *MIIN: Body to Body* (2017), and Seo Youngran's *Beojainai Jugeum* [The Death of Vagina] (2015).

## The Topography of Korean Feminist Dance since the 1980s

The genealogy of Korean feminist dance since the 1980s demonstrates four prominent recurring themes: 1) "adversity, sacrifice, and the motherhood of the earth" that depict the life of an oppressed Korean woman in a patriarchal family and society, 2) "the self-awakening subject" who finds autonomy without staying as a victim, 3) "subverted gender and sexuality" that reveals and deconstructs the othered gender and sexuality, and 4) "the exploration of a body and a womb" that challenges the phallogocentric discourse by sharing women's physical bodies and embodied experiences.



Although the time when each topic appeared has not been determined, each topic tended to emerge in accordance with the flow of feminism and the women's movement at a specific time. This paper analyzes familiar dance works mentioned in the existing literatures and points out the need for follow-up research to discover more new feminist dance works in South Korea.

### **Adversity, Sacrifice, the Motherhood of the Earth**

The feminist approach that stands out in dance works from the 1980s to the 1990s is a reflection on motherhood. Here, motherhood is expressed as a great and noble source of life in connection with the essential ability to give birth and raise children or is depicted as a respect for the history of violence inflicted on women, their adversity, and their scarifying lives. The concept of motherhood has been reinterpreted in various themes and approaches based on political and social contexts.

Feminist pantheism portrays motherhood as a divine being governing the birth and abundance of all things and linking humans to nature. It is often found in Eastern and Western cultures and myths. This is also related to ecofeminism, which finds the cause of the destruction of the ecosystem in patriarchal and capitalist systems and considers that human domination of nature is similar to that of men over women. Ecofeminism differs from liberal feminism claiming the view that women are perceived as inferior to civilized men is the cause of gender discrimination. Instead, ecofeminism positively views feminine qualities related to nature as a subject with an ontological value.

Lim Haksun's *Huin Saeui Geomeun Norae* [Black Song of a White Bird] (1991) is a work that symbolizes the sea as Mother Nature, the source of life, and shows the sea being contaminated and destroyed by a war as a venue for masculine confrontation. Kang Miri's *Ryu, Saengmyeongui Namu* [Ryu, Tree of Life] (1997) captures the principles of creation and the changing law of the universe based on the idea of *Cheonbu-kyeong* [The Sacred Book of Cheonbu]. The work represents a woman as a being with primitive vitality. As such, works expressing women's noble vitality and the power of the earth reveal a spiritual ecofeminism that draws power from land-based spiritual acts. They argue that the source is embodied in, not separated from, the bodies of women.

Whereas some perspective deems conceiving, child birthing, and nurturing as women's biological and essential abilities, there is another view that these social structural aspects are enforced on women when combined with capitalism and patriarchy to create gender discrimination and oppression. This view is based on socialist feminism that identifies capitalism and patriarchy as the major factors of women's oppression and advocates for its transformation. A number of socialist feminist dance works appeared in the 1990s. These works specifically described the life of a mother who suffers from the responsibilities passed on to her

and is forced to sacrifice. Lee Eunjuo's *Dareul Ango Seoneun Yeoja* [A Woman Holding a Moon] (1994) depicts a woman who has to bear the double exploitation of non-paid labor such as childbirth, nurturing, and housework, as well as paid labor. Park Myungsook's *Emi* [Mother] (1998) commemorates the lives of mothers who have endured violence and oppression in patriarchal ideology while sacrificing themselves to sorely take care of their families. Han Sanggeun's *Kkotsin* [Flower Shoes] (1999) shows the unequal power relationship between men and women, revealing the reality that women will remain victims despite their fierce struggle.

Park Hobin's *Noksaek Jeongarui Bimil* [Secret of a Green Scorpion] (1998) completely destroys the way maternal love is portrayed beyond criticizing the phallic-centered system. This work, which depicts a female scorpion eating a male after mating, threatens the maternal myth in the existing patriarchal system by recreating a castrating woman like "vagina dentata" (toothed vagina).

Except for Park Hobin's work, many dance works in the 1980s and 1990s adopted the myth of motherhood by glorifying the essentialist view of motherhood as a sacred ability of a woman and the life of a devoted mother in the patriarchal system. These works had limitations in that they depicted women only as passive beings who could not escape the bond of maternal ideology. Nevertheless, they are meaningful as the foundational works of Korean feminist dance because they insisted on women's liberation while showing the vitality of women as well as revealing the absurdity of a patriarchal society.

## The Self-Awakening Subject

Women in dance are not just suppressed victims in patriarchal society. They are also represented as independent characters who challenge and struggle with male-centered ideology to find themselves, reflect the existential issues of women, and create solidarity based on understanding each other. This can be seen as existentialist feminism claiming that women should stop recognizing themselves as the other objectified by men while rejecting their internalized otherness and exploring their own existential meaning and values.

Nam Jungho symbolizes the social role assigned to her with costumes and props in her autobiographical work *Jahwasang* [Self-Portrait] (1988). Breaking away from socially assigned roles, she reflects on herself and returns to her role that she chose. In *Amkkot* (1998), Jeon Misook rejects the responsibility for housework passed on to women along with fixed femininity and beauty, and insists on liberation from them. Park Myungsook's *Honja Nuntteuneun Achim* [Morning Awakening Alone] (1993), based on Lee Kyungja's novel of the same title, tells the story of a middle-aged woman, a mother and wife, who discovered her sexual desire and became self-conscious as she abandoned her authoritative husband and fell in love with another man.

Works exploring the inner psychology and existential problems of individual women apart from the narrative of women fighting the patriarchy have begun to appear since the late 1990s. These examples include Kim Soonjeong's *Meomulmyeo* [Staying] (1997), which expresses the changing self-consciousness in the process of maturing from a girl to a woman, Choi Teresa's *Hanyeoja, Naega Jayureul*. . . [Freedom to Me, a Woman. . . ] (1998), which depicts the contradictory psychology of a woman who wants to escape from a man but also wants to be restrained, and Jang Eunjung's *Red* series, which asks existential question of being a woman through a female body.

Choreographers paid attention to the solidarity among various women beyond the private sphere. Nam Jeongho converts a typical household task, doing laundry, into an act of creating a women's community, not an act of exploitation (*Ppallae* [Laundry], 1994). The collective action of women in the midnight laundry site has autonomy, and the semi-naked bath scene is also handled in an alternative way from a male objectifying perspective. Son Inyoung's *Anpak* [In and Out] (2005) shows the relationship between a grandmother, a mother, and a daughter which is changed from their conflicts to their resemblance. Ahn Eunmi's *Josangnimkke Bachineun Daenseu* [Dancing Grandmothers] (2011) presents grandmothers' dancing bodies that embody historic narratives as well as generational empathy. Dancing Women's *Dangsineun Jigeum Barbaretta e Salgo Itgunyo* [You Live in Barbaretta Now] (2012) shows the search for the self and healing solidarity of middle-aged women.

## Subverted Gender and Sexuality

In the 2010s, dancers began to actively deal with gender and sexuality issues. They started to pay attention to women's sexual desires and behaviors that were controlled and removed by the patriarchy, liberated objectified, instrumented female sexuality, and revealed and overthrew the gender ideology regulating masculinity and femininity.

Sexuality, which refers to human sexual attitudes, emotions, actions, tastes, and desires, is not identical by era and culture. Thus, it is considered a social and historical construct. Choreographers indicate that women's psychology and desire for sex and the way the body is positioned are mainly dominated and othered by men. Choreographers reconstructed the sexuality of women, which had been regarded as taboo.

Jung Geumhyung attempted to relate to various kinds of objects in her 2009 work *7gaji Bangbeop* [Seven Ways]. She makes immobile objects, such as vacuum cleaners, ladders, excavators, and exercise and medical equipment, move by using her body, while her body is also moved by those objects. In this process, objects often personified as "he" lose their original function, and "he" and the artist's movements are performed in a way reminiscent of sexual intercourse. Heo Seongim shows the body image and movement of a woman who is objectified and desired,

revealing the power and violence of the gaze. “Nymf” (2015) depicts how the male dichotomous stereotype divides women into seducers vs. victims, sexual beings vs. spiritual beings, and girls vs. women. “Nutchusher” (2019) captures the violence and pain inflicted by the gaze in the process of repeatedly implementing the movements of K-pop female idols and eventually changing them into de-sexualized movements.

When considering gender as a socially created construct, not as biological sex, gender contains a kind of coercion as defined in society. This, however, implies that gender identity is artificially constructed, and repeatedly performed actions can be overturned and reconstructed. Judith Butler suggested queer theories that resist the universal categories and conventional gender norms of women and men. According to her, the subject is constructed and diversified by performativity, and socially normative male and female identities could be disturbed. Because the essential boundary between men and women is uncertain, she argues that the distinction and boundary between heterosexuality and homosexuality is also difficult to set. In Choi Jinhan’s work, gender identity is performed in a queer way. In the 2014 work “A!Men,” Choi Jinhan represents the life of a woman through the body of a man from an elderly to a child. In “WOMan, Doreul Deonjida” [WOMan, Throwing Stones] (2018), the choreographer challenges violence against women by citing the Bible. The role of God (which does not reveal typical femininity) is performed either by a female performer or a male performer crossing two genders, which subverts the traditional gender ideology.

## **The Exploration of a Body and a Womb**

To resist a biological deterministic claim that women are biologically inferior to men, the conceptual distinction between sex and gender has been useful in feminist politics. However, by eliminating the biological body and discussing only gender, the female body eventually remained as its natural state. Since the 1990s, French feminist theorists have begun to pay attention to the inherent differences, namely sexual differences between men and women. This argues that the uniqueness of femininity cannot be explained by male sexual characteristics. They believed that femininity is inevitably colonized and impossible to be reproduced in the male-centered discourse because the world and subjectivity are constituted by a patriarchal symbolic system. Therefore, these feminist theorists assumed that gendered female subjects are radical others to envision and actualize the subjectivity of women.

A female body existed as the main medium of dance, but it was absent from dance as nothing but a simple functioning tool. Recently, choreographers began to explore the body of a woman that previously had not been considered an object for serious reflection. In “Somu” (2015), Kim Bora embodies the physical body part of a woman in an image, expresses an unfixed liquid bodily texture, and depicts the way the body

exists in relation to the world. In Cha Jinyeop's "MIIN, Body to Body" (2017), a woman's body is symbolized in a circular image. The body of a woman crossing the boundaries between subject and object and inside and outside is embodied as a circular image of infinity and a cycle of creation and extinction through movements, a physical space, and a video.

Motherhood has been mythicized as a sacred entity, but the genitals of women, which are the basis of motherhood, are considered dirty and filthy and have been objects of fear and disgust. The female body, as related to childbirth, has been constantly colonized as it is regarded as a monstrous thing destroying the patriarchal symbolic order. Julia Kristeva explains how a female body was repulsed and rejected through the concept of "abject." According to her, a baby starts to separate himself from the others by creating a boundary between him and the others, and the first thing he departs is his mother's body, namely his origin. Through this process of "abjectionization," he enters the symbolic order of the father, and the exiled remains the object of fear and hatred.

The reproduction of a mother's body, that is, the representation of an abject, occurred on stages as a creature that threatened and repulsed the stability of the male symbolic order. Ahn Eunmi's "Dalgeori" [Menstruation] (1993) pours red paint on the stage to dramatically create menstruation, which was a taboo subject at the time. Kim Bora's "Honjanmal" [Talking to Myself] (2011) points out communicational difficulties with others. On stage, her body transforms into an insect, and bodily fluids such as tears, saliva, and urine flow out of her body, and she ends up as a hardened corpse. In this work, the transformation of a human into an insect is a challenge to (male) humans as a dominant being and the male symbolic order on stage by showing the excrement of women, namely an abject, the object of disgust.

Seo Youngran's "Beojainai Jugeum" [The Death of Vagina] (2015) features the original mother as a mother-monster. This work appropriates Joseph Campbell's work *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (1959) to explore how primitive goddesses can be expressed in contemporary women's experiences. It demonstrates how a mother's body for childbirth and reproduction has become a symbol of fear as well as contempt until now. It represents the original mother as an absolute being that reproduces, castrates, and threatens the authority of the father.

## Conclusion

Dance uses the body as a medium. Since it always embodies gender ideology and sexuality discourse, there is room for interpretation from the perspective of feminism. Dance may internalize gender discrimination and the suppression of women created by capitalism, patriarchy, and sexism, or it may criticize and overthrow those. The latter case can be referred as feminist dance. Feminist dance as a social practice refers to

a work that demonstrates a feminist consciousness. This is not limited to the work of a female dancer or any work on the subject of women. Feminist dance therefore shows how gender discrimination, oppression, and inequality operate, criticizes such notions, or dismantles gender identity, sexuality, and body images reproduced by these social structures and notions.

South Korean feminist dance emerged in the 1980s because the feminist discourse and women's movement in Korean society began in earnest at this time. Influenced by the women's movement in the 1980s that centered on women and democratic protest, Korean feminist dance in the 1980s focused on the themes of women workers and democracy and was performed in small theaters, at rallies, and at demonstration sites. In the 1990s, the women's movement included housewives as the subject of the movement, expanded their protest sites from factories to homes, and shifted to support policies and discourses regarding women rather than protests. In this context, 1990s feminist dance focused on childbirth, pregnancy, double-exploitation due to the burden of nurturing and labor, and violence and oppression against women in power relations with men. It also depicts a woman who overcame such difficulties and pursued an independent life. The 21st century women's movement in South Korea took place under the leadership of young women based on online media as the Gangnam Station murder case and the #MeToo movement became catalysts. They created an era that popularizes feminism by collectively working to promote and practice feminist consciousness in daily life. Due to the influence of the Feminist Reboot phenomenon, contemporary South Korean choreographers also actively deal with various feminist agendas including subjectivity, femininity, physicality, motherhood, queerness, sexuality, and abject in their works.

Feminist dance works that emerged in this historical trend can be classified into four main themes. First, they deal with motherhood either as a noble vitality and the power of the earth or as the main reason for creating gender discrimination and oppression under capitalism and patriarchy. Second, they depict an independent woman who does not internalize otherness created by men and lives a life of acquiring autonomy with self-consciousness. Third, they reveal the way women's sexuality is objectified, pursue women's sexuality, and deviate from the standardized gender ideology. Lastly, they disturb the symbolic order of men by discovering and radicalizing unique sexual differences between men and women.

Until now, discussions about the feminist approach in Korean dance were mostly limited to the 1990s, making it difficult to grasp the comprehensive feminist approaches in contemporary Korean dance history. This paper, under this circumstance, is meaningful as a foundational work for the history of Korean feminist dance to examine the history of Korean feminist dance since the 1980s. Even though this paper presents trends in feminist dance with four themes, more detailed topics can be developed if follow-up studies discover more new feminist dance works. In addition, I am proposing a more detailed and in-depth analysis of individual feminist dances for follow-up research.

## Notes

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3. Mihui Yoo, "Reassessment of Choi Sung Hui's Life"; Injoo Park, "A Study on Korean Modern Age Dance."
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5. Na Young Lee, "How to Remember and Inherit the History of the Korean Women's Movement?: Celebrating International Women's Day," *Issue & Review on Democracy* 47 (2020).
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7. Namsik Kang, "The Trends and Issues of the Korean Women's Movement," *Memory and Prospect* 7 (2004).
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9. Jeongeun Kim, "For the Combination of Gender Rights and Labor Rights: An Anti-sexual Movement Assessment," *People's Solidarity for Social Progress* 71 (2007).
10. Jiyeong Jeong, "The Korean Federation of Women's Organization and the Evaluation of Gender Mainstreaming Strategies," *People's Solidarity for Social Progress* 71 (2007).
11. Nayoung Lee, "How to Remember and Inherit the History of the Korean Women's Movement," 17.

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