

# Physical Expression as “Moving Text” in the Korean Bongsan Mask Dance

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## Abstract

*This article examines the aspect of physical expression in the Korean Bongsan Mask Dance, a composite art form that combines theatre, music, and dance. Compared to other Korean mask plays, movement is highly important in the Bongsan Mask Dance as it contains a variety of technically developed and stylized physical expressions. Considering that dance is so prominent and influential in the development of the story, this drama is referred to as the Bongsan Mask Dance rather than the Bongsan Mask Play. This paper focuses on both direct and indirect physical expression—often neglected despite their importance—and this is in contrast to other studies of this work, which have primarily the actors’ dialogue. This paper classifies physical expression into three types based on style and form, and into four categories according to function and role. Also, it argues that physical expression in the Bongsan Mask Dance functions not only as a supportive but also an independent medium that develops the story, contributes to the overall coherence of the artistic work, and communicates critical ideologies and themes differently from speech.*

**Keywords:** *Bongsan Mask Dance, Joseon Dynasty, functions of physical expression, criticism, speech, movement*

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## **Introduction**

The Korean Bongsan Mask Dance (hereafter "Bongsan Dance") is an emblematic traditional folk play, one of many that are still performed today. Although this dance has ritualistic and artistic functions (Chae 1987, 1997; Jung 1991; S. Chung 1986; Jo 1975, 1981; D. Lee 1988; K. Lee 1995; M. Lee 1994; J. T. Park 1990), its entertainment is derived mostly from its drama, various styles of dance, musical elements, and esoteric characters (D. Lee 1981; S. Lee 1981; J. Y. Park 2001; Suh 1997). However, this entertainment is not so much related to providing pleasure, but rather a style of Korean humor that both directly and indirectly criticizes the corruption of the political establishment, the depravity of religion, and the dominance of patriarchy in society through its content and comic elements (Y. Kim 1980). The reason why the Bongsan Dance has been frequently performed even in modern times is the timelessness of its message: in a cultural way, it portrays people's desire to express what it is like to be suppressed (Chae 1997). Assemblies were forbidden under the military regime of the 1960s–1980s, and this stricture resulted in indirect cultural protest. During that time, the Bongsan Dance was mainly performed in the street—the meeting place for young people—and also in many universities by students, who kept the democratization movement alive, even though they had not systematically learnt the dance. In this way, cultural activities like the Bongsan Dance served not only as sources of cultural amusement but also as a resistance movement. Due to its ability to impersonate and parody the establishment in a humorous fashion, the Bongsan Dance therefore has been maintained as one of the best-known and most performed emblematic plays.

## **The Origin and Content of the Bongsan Mask Dance**

Although the region of Bongsan in Hwanghae-do province is regarded as the Bongsan Dance's birthplace, its exact origin is unknown as it was initially handed down orally (J. T. Park 1990; Jung 1991). The Joseon Dynasty was established in 1392, and this period is regarded as the era from which a

systematically organized version of the Bongsan Dance emerged. This emergence arose from the content of the Bongsan Dance; it generally reflected the society of this Dynasty—its feudal system, elite class, and religion (Buddhism) (Jo 1981; D. Lee 1969; J. T. Park 1985; S. H. Song 1960). In this respect, a brief understanding about the historical and social background of Joseon society is significantly required to understand the Bongsan Dance.

After the Japanese invasion of Korea (1592) and by the time of the Manchurian invasions (1627 and 1636), many changes were occurring in the Joseon society. Many people were starving to death and suffering from a lack of necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter. These conditions resulted in widespread dissatisfaction, antagonism toward the dysfunctional social order, and distrust of the leadership and the social class system. People tended to blame the economic system for their difficulties, and eventually, they banded together occasionally to make their voices heard. This collective mindset, based on their sense of kinship, spawned a realization that they should participate in politics. Moreover, a postwar market economy emerged, providing a natural gathering point for laborers to meet and discuss political and economic issues. In this way, farmers and other laborers gained a public voice on the basis of their numbers and growing economic power (Suh 1988).

Meanwhile, class distinctions were abolished as the land-owning and slavery systems collapsed. The lower classes' upward mobility in social status became possible with their economic power. Concurrently, some of the *yangban* 兩班<sup>1</sup>—who were beginning to lose the power struggle—were removed from office, and had their assets and properties confiscated. They were ultimately forced to subsist by working as members of the lower class.

After the 17th century and during the postwar period, western scientific knowledge and Catholicism were finally imported from China (Suh 1975). These fresh ideologies introduced new possibilities for reestablishing society after the war, and people became aware of their own less-than-ideal conditions. Neo-Confucianism had fueled societal structure in the

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1. The *yangban* were the ruling class or the noblemen in the Joseon Dynasty.

Joseon Dynasty with its emphasis on filial duty, androcracy, feudalism, and study. However, this idea fell out of favor and bureaucratic feudalism lost its strength. The Realist School of Confucianism emerged as an alternative with its functional—rather than traditional or authoritative—perspective on society. Consequently, egalitarianism was supported and became influential during this period.

This confluence of events gave rise to more practical ideologies, and also a populace that was beginning to achieve wealth and higher social status. Furthermore, these social and cultural phenomena created a brand-new environment; a satirical play like the Bongsan Dance could be performed to culturally demonstrate people’s real-life conditions and opinions, and also to elicit a response from the public. Compared to other plays, the Bongsan Dance is quite direct in terms of portraying the public’s critical opinions about the elite class. Despite the straightforwardness, this dance is still satirical and humorous, and the criticism is indirectly implied through compositional artistic elements such as dance, music, drama, and comical masks. In this respect, the Bongsan Dance is regarded as an enjoyable black comedy rather than a strict depiction of real life (Chae 1987; Jo 1981).

The Bongsan Dance consists of seven acts: Four Young Monks’ Dance (Act 1), Eight Buddhist Monks’ Dance (Act 2), Sadang’s Dance (Act 3), Old Priest’s Dance (Act 4), Lion’s Dance (Act 5), *Yangban*’s Dance (Act 6), and Miyal’s Dance (Act 7). Each act differs in duration, performers, and method of developing the story. However, the various acts are united with the common aim of criticizing the corruption of Buddhism, the elite class, and the feudal system, and this purpose underlies the ideologies of the Joseon Dynasty. Act 1 through Act 4 relate to and implicitly criticize the corruption of Buddhism, and Act 5 depicts the corporal punishment of an apostate monk. The *yangban*—the representative of the establishment—becomes an object of ridicule in Act 6, and Act 7 is to criticize the feudal society. Although each act is independent, its physical expression functions as an effective medium for developing the respective story. The title of each act contains the name of one character or refers to the main character’s dance, and this fact shows the importance of dance in terms of con-

veying the message of each act. There are various kinds of physical expressions for the Bongsan Dance; they can be classified into three types according to form and style, and can also be divided into four different types according to function.

### Three Forms of Physical Expression

Basically, two main criteria categorize Korean dance: one relates to the performer's social status and the performance place (e.g. court dance [*jeongjae* 呈才]<sup>2</sup> and folk dance), and the other is the purpose and form of the dance (e.g. court dance, ritual dance, and folk dance) (M. Kim 2003; Hwang 2005; and Sung 2000).<sup>3</sup>

According to Lee Doo-Hyun (1988), a widely accepted view on the composition of the Bongsan Dance is that it consists of two parts: the dance and theatrical aspect—which are expressed as mime and other actions—and dialogue. While the dance, mime, and other actions use the same representational medium (the body), Lee argues that the symbol and message are delivered mainly through the theatrical expressions of mime and actions, in conjunction with the dialogue. He also stresses that the dance part contributes little to deliver the message of the Bongsan Dance. Although this research admits the importance of the dialogue and the other theatrical components (mime and the other actions) in delivering the

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2. The *jeongjae* is the Korean court dance counterpart of the folk dance. The court dance evolved and was performed in national events after the period of the Three Kingdoms, which was influenced by Buddhism and also established by royal authority. As the Bongsan Dance came into being, the court dance was also in its prime in the Joseon Dynasty, its purpose being mainly to praise and congratulate the King on his achievements. It has serene, elegant, and understated movements; expression of personal emotion and character is suppressed; and the movements and other forms are very organized and precise.

3. As this paper aims to discover the functional role of physical expression, which takes a number of different forms in the Bongsan Dance, the latter criterion will be used for categorizing Korean dance. Clearly, different functional purposes require various forms of expression, and this concept provides the best framework for this analysis.

message of the Bongsan Dance, it will depart somewhat from Lee's idea by arguing that physicality—which for the purposes of this study including mime and other actions as well as the pure dance movements—is also significant in delivering the message of the Bongsan Dance. To explicate this idea, this chapter will examine the various functions of physical expression, their development, and their independent importance in transmitting the meaning of the Bongsan Dance. Therefore, all movements (e.g. mime, other actions, and pure dance moves) have the body in common as their medium, and they will be categorized as *physical expressions*; this physicality will be focused on in order to examine its potential. The number of forms of expression have a different delivery mechanism than verbal expression (e.g. dialogue), and these forms will also be examined.<sup>4</sup>

Most examples of physical expression in the Bongsan Dance are based

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4. However, I do not use the term *dance* in this examination to avoid causing confusion; the concept of dance in the Korean context is slightly different from the western one. As previously mentioned in Lee's classification (although it is arguable), the meaning of dance is widely accepted in the Korean context as technically developed and stylized moves, mainly used for art's own sake. In a Western context, however, the notion of dance broadly embraces gesture, *mime*, and movement sequences, and it includes spatial, dynamic, visual, and aural elements. The western notion of dance is closer to the understanding of *play* in the Korean context, whereas the western term *pure dance* more accurately expresses what dance means in the Korean context. Moreover, instead of using the term *mime*, I intentionally use the term *danceto* refer both to mime in the Korean context, and also to explicit representations of people's natural movements and life habits. In its origins, in the way it is used, and in its purpose, *mime* generally refers to the delivery of stories word-for-word by translating them into movement, and it is designed to make a dramatic impact in delivering a story. Since the 1960s, in the context of performance, the term *everyday movement* is used to refer to non-stylized and unskilled movements, not real-life physical activity itself. Therefore, using the term *mime* can limit the potential meaning of physical expression to such movements aimed solely at delivering meaning, and using the term *dance* causes confusion in both Korean and Western theatre contexts. My research interest, in contrast, lies in the broader functions of the activities represented through the medium of the body, embracing a number of forms of *representation*. Moreover, I use the term *expression* rather than *representation* or *manifestation* in order to convey my opinion that a variety of physical expressions can contribute both to delivering the message of the Bongsan Dance and performing its own functional role. With this in mind, using the term *physical expression* clarifies the focus of my research.

on everyday movements and informal expression, and they indicate that the Bongsan Dance was made for and by the public. Nonetheless, a small number of formalized physical expressions infuse an artistic quality and sense of stylization into this dance. Three categories may be constructed for the forms of physical expression manifest in the seven acts: stylized, character-based, and intermediate.

First, the stylized form is typified by formal and delicate movements. The Four Young Monks' Dance in Act 1 shows similarities to a court dance called *jeongjae* in relation to its pattern and detailed and classic stylization. Although these kinds of formalized movements are diametrically opposed to the general character of the Bongsan Dance—consisting mainly of crude physical expressions—the formalized movements enhance both the variety and degree to which movements are completed, lending validity to label the performance a dance rather than a play. From the functional perspective, detailed movements are designed to convey a specific objective and supply their own context. Concentration on technique naturally reduces reliance on interpretation.

Second, the character-based form focuses on exaggerated and humorous physical expressions using everyday movements. The dance is named after a character featured in the particular dance (e.g. Lion's Dance and Miyal's Dance). The "shoulder dance" and the "hip dance" also belong to this category as they are named after the part of the body, emphasized in the dancer's movements during the dance's performance. Unlike the first type, this kind of physical expression has similarities with folk dance, employing humor for serious criticism and enabling the viewer to regard the work as a kind of black comedy. Moreover, commonplace and natural physical expressions, such as characters' everyday movements, make the play more familiar to viewers, who can then more easily understand the emotions and concepts acted out by the characters.

Lastly, the form with intermediate style contains elements of the previous two forms; the "jump dance" is a good example of this combination of character and style, because it exhibits elements of the character-based form but shows signs of having developed toward the formality and refinement of the stylized form. Its common and folk origins are revealed in its

dynamic, tough, and unsophisticated physical expressions such as high jumps, kicking, and arm-waving. However, it also includes characteristics of both the *yeonpungdae* 燕風臺 and the *kkaekki* forms,<sup>5</sup> which require detailed and highly skilled technique. With two contrasting characteristics, the jump dance is the most representative performance of the Bongsan Dance, combining characteristics of both folk and court dances.

### The Functions of Physical Expression

The combination of formal and informal movements in the Bongsan Dance offers a platform that embraces various kinds of physical expression. This variety in forms not only appeals to audience members with different tastes, but also demonstrates a wide variance in the functional possibilities of physical expressions based on these movements' characteristics.

The various forms of physical expressions are classified into four types based on their functions. The physical expressions in the Bongsan Dance function as a supportive medium for speech, and also operate as an independent medium—that logically develops the story and contributes to the coherence of the artistic work—conveying critical ideologies in a way that differs from speech.

#### *Physical Expression as Spiritual Purification and Consolation*

In Act 1 and at the end of Act 7, physical expression is used to purify the entire play spiritually and console the characters rather than develop the story. These elements are regarded as customary features (Keum 1999)—normally situated at the beginning and end of a play—and are used to symbolize a prayer for the public's peace and stability. The Ceremonial Opening Dance, functioning as a ritual event in Act 1, is performed at the

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5. The *yeonpungdae* maximizes technically expressive movements (e.g. bending backwards and forwards), and its movements are circular like a whirlwind. The *kkaekki* form consists of walking very quickly in short strides.



beginning of most plays. Traditionally in Korea, such a ritual event is believed to exorcize evil spirits and bring good luck, being an expression of belief in and dependence upon the god (Choi 1981; S. Lee 1991). Act 1 delivers the primary message of the entire play by depicting the strife between two contrasting types of monks (older and younger monks). Younger monks have different religious values than their elders even though they are also Buddhist. The Four Young Monks' Dance is the Ceremonial Opening Dance in Act 1. This dance includes highly skilled and sophisticated movements, revealing the expertise of the actors as well as a concentration on the physical expressions themselves, thereby rendering Act 1 highly independent of other dramatic developments. Four older Buddhist monks appear in Act 1, carrying on their backs four young monks wearing Buddhist robes. The physical contact between the four devout young monks and the profane older Buddhist monks at the beginning of the play signifies the coexistence of holiness and degeneration. It symbolically conveys the overall message of the Bongsan Dance: the differences are apparent in the depth of religious belief and social status since the four young monks are higher than the older Buddhist monks and consequently much closer to the sky, but no difference exists in the value of human beings as they are physically connected.

The four older Buddhist monks are hunched over from the weight of carrying the younger monks, which symbolizes the weight of religion. The older monks then put the young monks down in front of the musicians and straighten their backs, signifying that they have liberated themselves from this weight. The older monks then exit while performing the jump dance, fluttering their long sleeves behind them in an S-shape to show that they have been relieved from the pressure of religion. This jump dance is an exemplary one in the Bongsan Dance, demonstrating worldly pleasure and the performers' self-enjoyment through active and dynamic physical movements (e.g. raising the arms and legs), and representing the characteristics of the secular Buddhist monks.

After the older Buddhist monks leave, the dance of the four young monks begins. Unlike the active movements of older Buddhist monks' previous dance, the four young monks portray stability by assuming a 2:2 for-

mation instead of demonstrating dramatic changes in height or direction; two monks stand on the left and two on the right or a circular formation embracing the four cardinal points—north, south, east, and west—to symbolize acceptance and openness. The monks fold their hands, kneel, and bow at the cardinal points expressing their respect for the audience and other participants. Although they wear masks, their calm gaze and slow motions ensure that they have enough time to attract the attention of the audience and to commune with them. At the beginning of the dance, the main movements concern the arms as the four young monks raise their arms and place them over each other's shoulders. As they move, they look at one another, moving in the same direction and all making identical motions to the same beat. The distinct feature of this dance is that the dancers avoid performing individual actions. After dancing in line, they assume a series of certain formations (e.g. circles and even-numbered formations like the aforementioned 2:2 arrangement) and the slow motion of the group presents a static image. The four young monks also flutter their long sleeves like the older Buddhist monks, but the horizontal formation of the four young monks' stretched arms visually connects each one to the next. Thus, the four young monks appear to be connected not only to each other but also to the older Buddhist monks, who reappear at the end of Act 1.

The other example of physical expression as spiritual purification and consolation in the ritual event is also depicted at the end of Act 7.<sup>6</sup> In this part, solace and spiritual purification are represented differently than in the Four Young Monks' Dance. Whereas the dance by the four young monks in Act 1 establishes a quiet atmosphere, the Shaman's Dance—part of Act 7—closes the Bongsan Dance with the dynamic repetition of physical moves.

This spiritual purification in Act 7 is performed in relation to the story of one woman named Miyal, who resists patriarchal society. Although she is murdered by her husband—a symbol of male chauvinism—the shaman

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6. Although Act 7 is one story, the physical expressions are classified into two types based on function. Later in this text, the beginning of Act 7 will also be an example of physical expression as a self-contained story. Moreover, this part is introduced as the last function of physical expression in this paper.

performs a ritual to heal Miyal's spirit and her soul is comforted. The shaman performs this ritual on the request of another male character Namgang, demonstrating the message of the Bongsan Dance: the suffering and tragic deaths of women by sexual discrimination should be addressed and healed by all members of society.<sup>7</sup> Miyal symbolizes the powerless lower class population, the opposite of the ruling class. Namgang's and the shaman's condolences signifies that: the reversals of fortune in reality do not mean a failure of spiritual resistance against the irrational social system, and people can mentally and psychologically overcome their difficulties by trusting in their beliefs. Moreover, through the repeated dynamic physical expressions performed by the shaman at the end of Act 7, the performer and the viewers can become immersed in the emotions that Koreans believe naturally lead to maximizing self-positivity.<sup>8</sup> At the beginning, the shaman rings a bell to the north, south, east, and west, similar to the way the four young monks position themselves in order to commune with viewers sitting in all directions. The shaman repeatedly jumps and energetically rings the bell, moving only her arms and legs while keeping the rest of her body still, and contributes to an image of Korean shamanist prayer. Various turning movements accentuate the actions further.

Although it is a solo female dance, its power and activity resemble Miyal's dance in its independent energy and strong image. The shaman's dynamic movements imply that women's rights should be protected and

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7. Although I have presented Miyal's character as an example of a woman who resists patriarchal society—explaining consolation as a function of physical expression by comparing this scene to the Four Young Monks' Dance—Miyal's character and the symbolism of her story have been interpreted in a number of ways. By way of example, Miyal not only symbolizes suppressed women but also represents the old and unproductive ones. For example, the relationship with the Yongsansamgae girl in Miyal's story symbolizes the shift from the old to the new and the old being replaced by the new, as well as the shift from non-productivity to productivity.

8. According to Korean dance educators and dancers, the representative characteristic of Korean dance is the performer's self-enjoyment and self-positivity—by which they mean that performers are driven by their own enthusiasm—so they give incomplete impromptu performances. The great importance of dance is related to its reason and meaning, and it is the process of attaining a spiritual state of perfect selflessness (Song 1998; M. Kim 1995; and Kim and Lee 2003).

upheld. Repetition, turning, jumping, and rapid movements are accompanied by physical expressions of self-enjoyment, regarded as emblematic of Korean dance. The angles of the elbows and knees of the four young monks are small, as they draw energy from outside to inside by lowering their center of gravity and moving in a circular form. However, the shaman intentionally stretches her arms and legs, expanding energy outwards. While the Four Young Monks' Dance shows its purpose in an abstract and devotional way and also with a highly skilled and stylized form, the Shaman's Dance conveys the message at the end of Act 7 by using general physical moves that are widely prevalent among the public. The two aforementioned parts of the performance show how deeply rooted spiritual rituals are with the public, and how similar objectives may be achieved even through entirely different types of physical expression.

#### *Physical Expression as a Vehicle for the Text*

In Act 5 and Act 6, everyday movements accompany the characters' dialogue as opposed to formal or stylized actions. As a result of its nature, speech operates as the primary medium for directly delivering the message of the Bongsan Dance. In both acts, the dialogue forms an ever-greater part of the play's development, and the physical expressions have neither independence nor meaning by themselves. Therefore, comprehending the story without the performers' dialogue is difficult. Act 5 features a lion that has been sent by Buddha to punish the eight Buddhist monks, and they eventually beg forgiveness for their corruption. In terms of content and message, this act is an extension of the previous four; it concludes by criticizing the degeneration of the religion. The eight Buddhist monks and the lion first appear in a cat-and-mouse pursuit that explicitly depicts a relationship between a superior and his inferiors. Seven of the monks are aghast and flee, but one is curious about the unidentified lion. He approaches the lion slowly on bended knees, hushing the lion to calm it. The monk then greets the lion warmly before inquiring about his identity.

The conversation taking place between the monk and the lion is the focus of the act. Although the monk's speech is the main factor to develop

the story, the lion's simplified nonverbal, one-to-one answers to the monk's questions replace the text and function effectively as speech. When the monk asks the lion a question, he lowers his head and kneels, standing back when the lion answers him with aggressive gestures. The conversation is thus atypical; all of lion's reactions are nonverbal, but the monk repeatedly ask questions (e.g. "Are you a kind of deer or tiger?"). To these questions, the lion answers with exaggerated motions.

Hence, the two characters alternate between tension and relaxation, represented by their standing positions, relative height, and lines of movement. As the monk knows neither the identity nor the origin of the lion, he keeps his distance from the lion, moving in a wide semicircle behind the lion rather than threatening him by approaching him from the front. After walking around the lion, the monk kneels before him asks who the lion is. The lion also bends low to the ground to hide his identity. The monk's cautious exploration of the lion induces the creature to respond passively. The moments where they stand in line, their relatively similar height and the monk's semi-circular lines of movement behind the lion conceal who is dominant in the relationship. After his long investigation, the lion's nonaggressive attitude causes the monk to become confident, and he stretches out to swing his arms, whipping at the lion and saying "How dare you not recognize and fall before man, the lord of creation?" At this point, the lion reveals his whole appearance in an active defense against the monk's attack. The monk once again asks the lion, "Has Buddha ordered you come here to punish our corruption?" When the lion affirms this query, the two begin a grim struggle. After the fight, the monk accepts his defeat and asks the lion to forgive his depravity, by lowering his height before the lion and bowing his head while asking, "If I repent of my sin and cultivate my moral sense from now on, could you please absolve me from all my sins?" After the forgiveness by the lion, the monk and the lion perform the jump dance together with raised arms and legs, and this performance is a display of confidence and happiness. In the lion's erect and victorious position, he is three times taller than the monk who takes a position of humility behind the lion. The lion also shows his pleasure by dynamically bending his knees and shaking his head, rather than expressing himself verbally. Even if phys-

ical expression comprises a large portion of the story, it functions as a supportive medium so that understanding both the dance and the speech is necessary to understand the story.

This notable emphasis on dialogue in Act 5 is also present in Act 6. While physical expression in Act 5 operates as a companion to the message conveyed by the dialogue, however, physical expression in Act 6—the *Yangban’s* Dance—works to convey hidden intentions and its meaning is contrary to what is expressed in the dialogue. In Act 6, the speech by Malttugi, a servant of the *yangban*, conveys indirect criticism of the *yangban* (the governing class). In terms of content, this act criticizes not only the *yangban’s* ignorance—though they pretend to be erudite—but also their corruption as bureaucrats and of a criminal Chwibari, who they have bribed with a handful of silver (G. Kim 2000; J. T. Park 1999; and J. Y. Park 2001).

When the *yangban* first appear, Malttugi leads the group of *yangban* as a guide to a place where they can enjoy themselves, and introduces them as noble and intelligent governors. However, Malttugi’s quick pace during his jump dance is much faster than that of the *yangban*, following him and waddling along slowly. Walking quickly, Malttugi comes up behind the group of *yangban* appearing to drive them just as a shepherd herding his flock, since they do not know where to go in the direction he wants them to go.

When they arrive in an unfamiliar place, Malttugi has an opportunity to show his hostility to the *yangban* with speeches, hiding his real intention. Malttugi’s antipathy toward the *yangban* is revealed in his physical actions; aggressively placing a whip on the floor in front of the *yangban*, he says “This is a very beautiful and comfortable place!” Although his aggressive behavior persists, the *yangban* continue following him without resistance until they exit. Malttugi apparently serves the *yangban* throughout the entire act as a slave, but he continually performs the dynamic jump dance while leading the three *yangban*. Eventually, the jump dance shows his feeling of superiority over the *yangban*; even though Malttugi’s speech says the opposite, they obviously have no problem-solving skills.

What Act 5 and Act 6 have in common is that the characters’ dialogue

develops the story while the physical expressions, in turn, support the dialogue throughout the acts. Moreover, as presented in Act 5, the presence of three *yangban*—in comparison to the solitary Malttugi in Act 6—also represents a change in positional power, and this representation is emphasized by the fact that the *yangban* order Malttugi around. However, the major difference between the two acts is the way of indicating the characters' real intention; Act 5 shows the intention through both speech and physical expression, while Act 6 only utilizes physical expressions for it.

The role of the participants in Act 6 is also broadened by both verbal and nonverbal expressions. For example, the conversation in Act 5 is a rather simple back and forth between the performers only, whereas Malttugi engages in conversation with others (audiences, *yangban*, and musicians) and creates multiple three-dimensional interactions in Act 6. This arrangement serves in order to remove the traditional boundaries of the play and allow the audience to become participants in the story. In other words, as a servant of the *yangban*, Malttugi actively expresses his ideas to different groups of people involved in the play. Malttugi pretends to have a conversation with various groups of people, and it is a plot device designed to deliver his opinions more clearly. To convince more people to agree with his opinions—which is critical in terms of emphasizing the *yangban's* ignorance—his target conversation is not limited to performers within the play. Malttugi attempts to engage with musicians and the audience both physically and verbally, allowing the audience to watch the *yangban* and listen to Malttugi's opinions without prejudice. Malttugi's interaction with different target groups broadens the number of people involved in the play.

### *Physical Expression as a Bridging Metaphor*

Act 2 and Act 3 use physical expression as a method of conveying abstract information in concrete form and information through abstraction. These two acts are visually enjoyable and independent enough to be performed as plays themselves, without a link to the other acts in the story. However, the main role of these two acts is to contribute to establishing a smooth connection between the Bongsan Dance and the audience, and also to enhance

the overall coherence of all acts. These two acts establish coherence by presenting a visual foreshadowing of stories; this consistency will be presented in the coming acts, and the roles related characters will play. They represent the message of the play metaphorically through physical expressions and songs, and these physical tools are effective to attract the audience's attention and enhance the integrity of the performance as a synthetic artwork—rather than a mere verbally descriptive developmental play.

In Act 2, the Buddhist monks—who appeared with the four young monks in Act 1—mainly perform the jump dance. Throughout the entire Bongsan Dance, this dance symbolizes secular pleasure, a sense of superiority, and aggression. Beginning Act 2 in a tranquil mood, the movements of the Buddhist monks provide a smooth connection to the Four Young Monks' Dance in the previous act, hiding their faces with their long sleeves and reminding the audience of the four young monks with masks. These calm and cautious motions, at first, like those of the four young monks, but they become slowly dynamic as the eight monks become competitive, taking turns in boasting about their dance skills. Accompanied by loud music, the skilled physical movements of the jump dance reveal that the monks are not interested in practicing asceticism. Except for the first monk, whose movements are the most similar to the Four Young Monks' Dance, the seven monks perform the jump dance with short speeches through which they are saying "Enjoy life to the fullest."

The circular formation the eight Buddhist monks assume in Act 2 also overlaps with and echoes the circular image of a troupe of traveling actors and dancers, who appear in Act 3. Therefore, the images of Act 2 and Act 3 are naturally connected through this circular image. The physical expression of an old man—expelled by the other performers for chasing after a dancing girl in Act 3—also foreshadows Act 4 (an old priest falls in love with one dancing girl Somu in this part). These two acts are thus connected smoothly through similar movements and forms. Though connected by similar physical movements, however, the performers' appearances in Act 3 are very different from those in the rest of the play.

Since Act 3 does not deliver specific content, the performers do not play a certain role. All performers appear to sing for the sake of unmasked



pleasure in this act, causing viewers to concentrate even more on the performers and their physical movements than on the story. That is, Act 2 and Act 3 are independent because they do not provide their own concrete stories; their main function is to provide a visual bridge between the previous and the following acts by portraying similar images.

### *Physical Expression as a Self-contained Story*

The “Bongsan Mask Play” is referred to as the “Bongsan Mask Dance” partly; it is because the movement is given a great deal of weight in developing and delivering its content, and also partly because of the high standard and artistic value in physical expression. In the play, the high level of development in physical expression allows the audience to understand the story without the support of dialogue. Act 4 and Act 7 best illustrate the play’s low level of reliance on speech, thereby resulting in the use of physical expressions as an independent medium. The content, themes, psychological states, and relationships among the main characters in Act 4 are revealed through their physical expressions, height, and lines of movement across the stage. In this act, the degeneration of Buddhism is concerned, and the eight profane Buddhist monks accompany a devout old priest. The eight depraved Buddhist monks hold the old priest’s monk accoutrements—the symbol of his religious asceticism—to show that they intend to make the old priest violate the Buddhist commandments. As in Act 2, the eight Buddhist monks’ continuous repetition of the jump dance at the same tempo represents their characters’ principal message. Although their long sleeves still swirl in an S-shape, the sharp image of right angles and their pulled-up toes emphasize a more aggressive and dynamic attitude. The high jumps from bent knees direct their energy outward. They arrange themselves symmetrically—four monks to the right and the other to the left—with the old priest in the center. The sudden dropping of their long sleeves conveys a change in their strategy, from compulsion to conciliation, in bringing about the old priest’s depravity. Aware of the old priest’s weaving movement, the eight Buddhist monks begin reciting prayers loudly with their hands together. Although their hands assume a praying

position, their feet perform the jump dance and the dance becomes increasingly dynamic. As soon as the eight Buddhist monks exit the stage, the dancing girl named Somu appears and tempts the old priest as the eight Buddhist monks had. The physical movements between the old priest and Somu portray complicated emotions without the use of speech, and it makes the Bongsan Dance even more dramatizing. When the old priest first sees Somu, his willingness to remain ascetic is represented by the relative positions of the two dancers; they stand back to back and in a diagonal line. However, they begin to turn their heads from side to side and move closer to one another. These slow shifts in their relative positions show the changes in the old priest's feelings. At last, the two stand face to face, close to each other, and along a horizontal rather than a diagonal line, representing the old priest's emotional state after he has completely succumbed to Somu's allurements. Throughout this process, their distance from one another and their relative standing positions reveal their psychological and emotional states, but the shifts are indicated mainly by their physical movements. The old priest's solo dance after being lured by Somu shows Buddhism to be effete. Although Somu and the old priest are fond of each other, Chwibari (who also likes Somu) challenges the old priest to a dance duel. The old priest and Chwibari compete and attempt to show their superiority by jumping as they face each other, and their power relationship is represented through the height of their jumps.

Act 7 also has a lower degree of dependence on speech. Moreover, the plot and development of the story are understandable only by discerning the characters' features. Act 7 uses the love triangle, as well as Miyal's active search for her husband lost in the war, to attack feudalism and male chauvinism. As Miyal looks for her missing husband, she consistently swings her hips, contrary to the stereotypical images of women in the Joseon Dynasty.<sup>9</sup> In this way, Miyal's physical expression is used to present pro-

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9. The Confucian concepts of the Joseon Dynasty regard women as playing a supportive role, only permitting females to give birth, raise children, and perform housekeeping activities. Second marriages and social activities are prohibited by both ideology and the law.

gressive ideas.

This hip dance and her amusing imitation of the *yangban*'s turned-up toes echo the theme of the Bongsan Dance, which expresses dealing with difficulty through humor. She also crudely expresses her sexual desire. After she lays her husband on the floor, she repeatedly jumps above his pelvis in a simulation of sexual intercourse, however, she also shakes her arms and waves a fan in an S-pattern, which resembles the movements of the jump dance. Nonetheless, the husband involves himself with another woman while Miyal dances by herself, the conflict being represented by their positions in a diagonal line with their backs turned to one another. Suddenly, the husband attacks Miyal and, although she strongly resists, he kills her. Miyal, who goes out to search for her husband by herself instead of waiting for him, expresses sexual desire, and her revenge on her flirtatious husband portrays women's social desire in the Joseon Dynasty. However, her ultimate demise at the hands of her husband as a result of his concubine's jealousy represents the conflict between women's progressive ideas and men's chauvinism.

## Conclusion

As different purposes of function require different forms of expression, the three forms of physical expression in the Bongsan Dance are designed to maximize the four different functions of physical expression through which symbolism is conveyed. The symbolism conveyed through physical expression contributes to the play's overall coherence as an artistic satirical drama in two ways. The former relates to the inner logic of the play, explication of the subject matter, and the inner state of the characters, while the latter relates more to the outward mechanics of the play.

First, the diversity of the physical expressions is a tool for intensifying the subject and the satirical weight of the commentary on an illogical society. As a result of this capacity for variety, physical expression functions as a form of spectrum that reveals the true intentions of the characters. In Act 5, for example, the nonverbal reactions of the lion with its head and legs are

very effective in highlighting the corruption of the eight Buddhist monks. Another example is that Malttugi's physical expressions can reveal his innermost thoughts about the decadent *yangban* in Act 6, even though his speech is subservient. This style of presenting Malttugi's dual aspects through speech versus physical expression vividly depicts the irony and thus intensifies the satirical features. In this case, physical expression also converts a character's innermost feelings—not conveyed in their speech into visible, explicit moving text that is easily comprehensible.

In addition, as physical expression sets no limits on style or form, it can be adapted to the characters and circumstances. For instance, the Four Young Monks' Dance in Act 1 and the Shaman's Dance in Act 7 have the same thematic objective, but they have substantially different styles of movement. Nor is there any difference in terms of the quality of physical expression performed by the various characters, revealing another message of the dance—that no difference exists between the high and low classes and both should be equally respected.

Physical expression is also used for a detailed explanation of characters' emotional and psychological states. In Act 4, the old priest's movements describe his emotions and psychology in detail, so that each stage of development in a plot that criticizes the depravity of religion is clearly shown without a need for characters to speak. In Act 7, the shaman's repetitive and consistent movements represent the strong resistant psychology of women, who are persecuted under a feudal and patriarchal social environment.

Second, physical expression serves as a means of connection in three different ways: between the acts, between the play and the performers, and between the play and the audience. Thus, physical expression makes the play interactive, transforming the audience into participants and resulting in a production without any absolute or fixed character. As the Bongsan Dance remains so accessible to the audience, both audience and performers can participate in creating a multi-dimensional play, free of the traditional boundaries between players and spectators.

With regard to connections between the acts, the jump dance serves as a good example of this link; for example, it connects Act 2 and Act 4 to

Act 6. These three acts have different contents and themes, but they also have the jump dance in common. Its purpose is similar in the different stories. In Act 2, this dance shows the eight Buddhist monks' pursuit of hedonism, whereas it portrays Chwibari's triumph in his contest with the old priest for Somu in Act 4. In Act 6, Malttugi uses the jump dance to taunt the *yangban*. Therefore, physical expression connects both the independent acts and the stories, promoting the coherence of the Bongsan Dance as a well-organized play.

An example of the connection between the play and the performers is provided in Act 6, regarding Malttugi's physical expressions. Even though Malttugi has been deprived of educational opportunities, he is smart enough to invade the *yangban*'s means of intellectual entertainment "poetry reading." By way of making fools of the *yangban* and winning the musicians to his side, Malttugi physically approaches the musicians—who are performers in the play but not actors—and asks them to play for his poetry recital. That is, he invites them into the play to intervene in his conflict with the *yangban*. As a result of this interaction, the traditional boundary between the play's cast of characters and people outside the world of the play is eradicated. The boundary with the audience is also removed, since Malttugi makes the bold and dramatic gesture of asking permission from both the musicians and the audience before he performs his socially and officially forbidden poetry recital. Here, the three targets of Malttugi's conversation essentially redefine who is involved in the play, because it is shown to include the musicians and the audience as well as the actors.

Act 6 also provides an effective paradigm of the connection between the play and the audience. The criminal Chwibari slowly approaches the audience, pretending to blend in and become a part of it. Through the *yangban*'s speeches, the audience becomes aware that the *yangban* are hunting Chwibari. As the Joseon Dynasty has been portrayed as irrational, the audience is drawn to feeling compassion for Chwibari, assuming that he has undoubtedly been a victim of unfair social circumstances. Thus, the audience becomes emotionally attached to Chwibari, so that its members feel justified in accepting and hiding him when Chwibari becomes part of the audience. As he becomes a part of the audience both physically and

emotionally, the audience members cease to see any difference between themselves and him, and even begin to see themselves as occupying Chwibari's position.

This involvement of the audience is also present in Act 7 when Miyal and her husband—who are eagerly searching for each other after the war—look around, hold out their hands, and ask the audience about each partner's whereabouts. The audience responds by pointing in the relevant direction, thus functioning as witnesses to the location of characters and symbolizing the time the characters have spent in tracing each other's whereabouts. In addition to functioning as time, the audience also functions as the space between the husband and wife, as Miyal and her husband repeatedly enter at and exit from different directions with the audience located between them. Thus, the audience links both the time and the spaces through which the husband and wife have passed during the play.

As previously described, the two ways in which physical expression contributes to the overall coherence of this artistic satirical drama are expressed throughout all of the acts and also used for different functional purposes. However, the diversity of physical expression is especially stressed through the functions outlined earlier: a (physical expression as spiritual purification and consolation); b (as a vehicle for the text); and d (as a self-contained story); and its service as a means of connection is especially stressed through functions b (as a vehicle for text), c (as a bridging metaphor), and d (as a self-contained story). In conclusion, the physical expressions used in the play establish connections with the spectators that elicit feelings of cooperation, participation, and communication between the audience and the performers. Hence, physical expression contributes to the Bongsan Dance by displaying people's ideas and desires at a time when direct critical expression was not allowed. Physical expression not only acts as a supplement for the indirect nature of the performers' speech, but also develops independently in complete acts where it serves as the main means of delivering the people's opinions. Consequently, physical expression covers what the text cannot by means of various forms and functions, and studying and comprehending physical expression is crucial to achieving a full understanding of the Bongsan Dance.

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