

THE COSTUME OF RITUAL DANCE IN MONGOLIAN AND KOREAN BUDDHISM

MUNYOUNG KIM¹ – HYUNJIN CHO² – JAEYEONG LEE³

¹Keimyung University, Nam-gu, Myungduck-ro, 104, Daegu City, Korea
e-mail: munyoung@kmu.ac.kr

²Keimyung University, Nam-gu, Myungduck-ro, 104, Daegu City, Korea
e-mail: hyunjin7@kmu.ac.kr

³Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Dongdaemun-gu, Imunro 107, Seoul, Korea
e-mail: jylee@hufs.ac.kr

This paper investigates the diversity of costumes of Buddhist ritual dance in Mongolian and Korean Buddhism. Both the Mongolian *Tsam* dance and the Korean *Nabi* dance have developed to reflect the regional characteristics of costumes and symbolic systems and are closely related as far as the ideas of rebirth and afterlife are concerned. Both the Mongolian and the Korean dance, performed by monks, display common features that symbolise the spiritual role of the monks in guiding people on their way from birth to death. The symbolism of the ritual dance costume is related to the traditional culture, in both Mongolia and Korea, but Mongolian *Tsam* uses more shamanistic and decorative elements based on the ceremony of shamanism, while Korean *Nabi* dance shows an exceptional beauty in its self-restraint.

Key words: the costume of Buddhist ritual dance, Mongolian *Tsam* dance, Korean *Nabi* dance, rebirth, afterlife, symbolism.

1. Introduction

Various rituals carry great implications in Mahayana Buddhist ceremonies. Rituals are connected to the worship of Buddha, for example, Bulgongsisik provides etiquette for the consumption of food after worshipping to Buddha and Jaeui, including procedural aspects of Buddhist ceremony. In particular, ritual dance in ceremony is at the core of Buddhist arts having the power to join the eyes and mind of the public together with its visual effect. Accordingly, it plays the role of inspiring devotion and promoting active participation in ceremony.

In religion, dance is the best way to connect men with god, and this is especially well manifested in Mongolian and Korean Buddhist ritual dance (Im 2010, p. 30).

Ritual dance in Mongolian Buddhism may be best exemplified by *Tsam*, the ritual dance performed in the temple by monks. Ritual dance is one of many blessing-

seeking faiths and recognised as a kind of education that controls and guides the lives of monks and believers as well. Of these, the *Tsam* dance, which is performed with colourful masks, is also connected to a kind of religious, probably shamanic power that gives the audience more of a feeling of awe than a sense of beauty. In other words, it is an exorcising effect that seeks to control unruly souls and worship the guardian deity as a metaphor for gradually overcoming the ego, the goal of Buddhism. This dance is also seen as a divine and dramatic performance art (Yeo 2000, p. 83).

The *Tsam* in Mongolia and the *Yeongsanjae* in Korea originated around the same time; during the Yuan Dynasty and the Goryeo Dynasty, respectively. They have the same religious implications in that both pray for blessedness by seeking the truth of Buddha. However, there are some differences. The *Tsam* in Mongolia is actually an exorcising ceremony while the *Yeongsanjae* in Korea is a reposing ceremony for an easy passage into eternity. The *Tsam* is a Buddhist ceremony, incorporating a mask dance and a feast, and is performed with aesthetic attention to harmony of art, dance and music in unison, while the *Yeongsanjae* is more simply centred on singing and dancing. They share in common temporal and spatial characteristics of the ceremony and performances that are conducted by monks (Park, S. H. 2012, pp. 427–429).

The focus of this paper is limited to the *Tsam* in Mongolia and the *Nabi* dance of *Yeongsanjae* in Korea which are discussed in the common context of Buddhist ceremony. The purpose of this research is to explore the similarities and differences of both ritual dances in terms of emotion, culture and religion, and based on this, to investigate the diversity of costumes of Buddhist ritual dance.

2. The Origin of Buddhist Ritual Dance and a Review of its History

Buddhist ritual dance may be said to have originated from the Bharata Natyam, a classical dance from India, the birthplace of Buddhism. Dance in India is inseparably entwined with the thought and life of Hinduism. The Shiva, one of the three main gods in India, is the god of dance, and it has been believed from ancient times that Shiva moves the universe by dancing and the stars are moved by dancing as well (Bae–Kim 1985, p. 47). The stone statues found in temples all around the regions of India are the best sources for studying the history of Buddhist ritual dance (Miyao 1991, p. 246). These statues, especially the relief sculpture in pagodas, make it possible to infer that there was close relationship between religion and dance in ancient times. The pagoda in Bharhut (a Buddhist site located in northern Nagod in mid-India) from the 2nd century B.C. seems to be an offering of music and dance carved in stone. This sculpture shows that Buddhists introduced the *Puja*, the Hindu ceremony of worship (Nakamura 1984, p. 300) that demonstrates the style of early Buddhist ritual dance.

Mahayana or northern Buddhism was propagated to China, Mongolia, Korea and Japan, and according to one approach this stream can be divided into Exoteric Buddhism and Tantric Buddhism. Exoteric Buddhism includes such denominations as *Tiāntáizōng*, *Chánzōng* and *Jingtūzōng* which are based on a comprehensible doctrine, while Tantric Buddhism is based on a profound doctrine that is not comprehen-

sible beyond a supernatural power (Han 1994, p. 235). This difference between Exoteric Buddhism and Tantric Buddhism manifests itself in the ritual dances of Mongolian and Korean Buddhism, and in particular, the influences of Tantric Buddhism upon Mongolian Buddhist ritual dance are remarkable. Mahayana Buddhism absorbed some pre-Buddhist, shamanistic elements too. Tantric Buddhism was first born when the power of Buddhism weakened under the influence of Hinduism in India. Indian Buddhism re-established itself by introducing elements of popular belief and its religious influence was restored. Tantric Buddhism spread into Tibet and to Mongolia and became transformed under the influence of the local belief systems (Jeong 1995, p. 175).

Compared to Mongolian Buddhism, Korean Buddhist ritual dance is identified with the characteristics of Exoteric Buddhism. The characteristics likely arose from the process of Buddhist thought and culture, which were prosperous in the Inner Asian region including China between the 4th and 9th centuries, being propagated to Korea in late 4th century. The intellectual class and the privileged aristocratic class were central in the process of introducing Buddhism to ancient Korean society. In this process, Buddhism was not grasped as a kind of culture, but perceived as a kind of idea centring around its theoretical nature (Hong Y. S. 1993, pp. 18–19). This kind of idea is well represented in the *Nabi* (butterfly) dance in Korean Buddhism.

3. Buddhist Ritual Dances *Tsam* and *Nabi* (Butterfly) Dance

The Mongolian Buddhist ritual dance *Tsam* was outlawed in 1921 due to the abolition of old customs after gaining independence from China, but was fully revived and handed down in the 1990s by old Mongolian monks. Currently it is performed in Gandan Temple in Ulaanbaatar every New Year's Day. Mongolian *Tsam* received its form from Tibet at an early stage and was absorbed into the Mongols' religious and ceremonial culture with unique native cultural styles added to it, including Mongolian popular beliefs, customs and mythology (Park, S. H. 2012, pp. 421–425). *Tsam* is also closely related to the Samsara (cycle of life) in Buddhism. It emphasises the autonomous ascetic practice of holding a clear consciousness at the middle world of life and death through meditation. The process of ascetic practice in particular is based on the experiences of saints who felt and realised the world of consciousness and the eternal life of creation where regeneration forms a connection between death and the middle world. It shows the roots of the philosophy via which one can reach the level of absolute freedom from death through scriptures like 'The Bardo Thodol' (Bar do thos grol), which illustrate the process of death and rebirth. The essence of the *Tsam* may be summarised as a performance with appearance of various gods of the Buddhist pantheon who symbolise guiding a human being to enlightenment and watching over the right and wrong attitudes to life of the living being. These gods originate from various religious and belief systems; for instance, the idea of the horrible god of death Yama, who rules the underground world, was introduced from India. Yama is symbolised by a blue-black image with a bull head, holding in his hands a snare and thorned club with a skull hanging from it. The idea of death is not much different in the world of Shamanism either. Therefore the Mongolian *Tsam* is a dance of monks

who act as guides to death, a very important ceremony and manifestation of belief (Lee, B. O. – Lee, J. S. 2000, pp. 3–4).

The dance of Korean Buddhist ritual is performed in the process of soul-to-paradise-prayer. *Yeongsanjae* shows the unique spirit of Korean Buddhism in which the Buddhist truth and the desire of the public are combined, and most of the Buddhist ceremonies currently handed down are related to the *Yeongsanjae* ceremony (Choi 2000, p. 76). Ritual dance as a symbolic expression of Buddhism is called *Jakbeopmu* and it has had an important role in the popularisation of Buddhism in the form of enlightenment through dance. In this respect, the common point of the Tibetan *Tsam* dance, the formal origin of the Mongolian ritual dance *Tsam*, and the *Yeongsanjae* is that they are both performed by monks. There are also common points in formal and visual terms; the composition of *Tsam* dance is Buddhist Mandala, while that of *Yeongsanjae* is Buddhist *Paljeongdo* (noble eightfold path, Skrarya ashtanga marga); the location lyrics, genre and accompanying instruments are the same, five colours are used for the clothes and masks in the *Tsam* dance and also for the bow clothes of *Nabi* dance in *Yeongsanjae* (Yoon 2009, pp. 202–203). The *Nabi* dance is especially referred to as costume dance suggesting that it is the wearing of costume that enables *Nabi* dancing. There are instructions for the dance movements whereby the larva, the former self of the butterfly, while crawling on the earth, should see a bird flying overhead and have the inner desire that “If I could fly, I would offer the most beautiful smelling flower to Buddha” and after he is able to fly and his desire is fulfilled, he dances the *Nabi* dance in jubilation. It is also called *Haetal* (salvation), symbolising Buddhism through its depiction of the delight of enlightenment, comparing it to a larva when it metamorphoses into a butterfly breaking out of its cocoon (Kim, J. H. 2003, p. 131). Images of the butterfly in temples symbolise the regeneration of a soul being born again in paradise and are depicted in paintings or on the altar portrait of the temple. A butterfly fluttering here and there was regarded as a messenger that comes and goes between the earth and heaven. It was believed that a butterfly delivered to heaven all the hopes of people – including wealth, glory and love – and then returned to earth bringing the heavenly will and, moreover, the heavenly blessing (Park, C. M. 2010, p. 77). On the other hand, in the Korean funeral ritual even death is regarded as a festival. Wooden dolls adorned with flowers are used to decorate the coffin and these ornamentations include a sculpted butterfly on the guardrail of the coffin symbolising delight, happiness and good fortune. It shows the will of the deceased’s offspring to overcome and sublimate the desire for the ideal land of the better world and sadness with delight.

4. The Costume of Ritual Dance and the Symbolism of *Tsam* and *Nabi*

A. The Costume of *Tsam* Dance

Tsam dance costumes vary in colour according to their particular role, but the typical ones, worn by the main characters, consist of a robe (袍) like the Mongolian deel, with wide triangular sleeves decorated with multicoloured stripes, and ornamented with the

bones of animals. The basic costume in Mongolian *Tsam* consists of a deel, decorated with a cape that covers the shoulders, an apron that wraps around the waist and a divination sign decorated with beads. The Mongolian deel is a type of dress with the jacket and skirt joined, there is a line along the front neck opening and five folds at the waist attached to the bodice in the form of a gusset. The multicoloured stripes on the sleeve and the linear pattern of the bodice differ according to each character. Patterns used for the lines depict skulls, flame and the *Geumgangjeo* mark. The sleeves are funnel shaped and triangular, the cuffs are wider than the armhole and create a fluttering effect when dancing. However, an older person's deel is an unfolded type with a straight collar that has straight sleeves of narrow width. The cape is produced variously in five-colours including blue, red, yellow and black in the same pattern. The black apron can be embroidered with animal symbols or geometric patterns and decorated with a colourful fringe or texture. There are skull or flame patterns to decorate the outer lines. As for shoes, older people wear tiger patterned arctic boots and the others wear two kinds of animal shaped red boots with the toe raised. As for accessories, there are a number of types: spear sword heart, skeleton, bent sword, dagger and three-pronged spear.

Mongolian Buddhism became syncretised with numerous elements of Pre-Buddhist beliefs (a kind of shamanism and native religious views). The ritual scriptures and ritual costumes of the *Tsam* refer to this fact as well. The costume of the Mongolian ritual dance is abundant in the use of animal symbolism that includes, among others, masks of bulls and deer, various pieces of cloth, skull decorations, small bell decorations and busts of cows and deer, and these bear close resemblance to Shaman costume. Mongolian Shamans are believed to fly freely in space to interchange with souls, so the dance costume is used as a tool for the Shamans' free movement. Therefore, concerning the symbols and decoration of the costume of Mongolian Shamans, objects of belief are used for the major decoration and materials of the dance costume. Accordingly, the Mongolian dance costume is foundational in each Shaman's belief and it is typical to use symbols as instructed by a god mother or master whose rank has been transmitted from generation to generation or who was possessed by a spirit. In Mongolian Shamanism, the earth is symbolised by darkness and the spirit world by colour. Moreover, sky is symbolised by blue, the sun by yellow, earth or *Lus* (the spirit of earth) by green and dark blue, *Savdag* (the spirit of water) by black and fire by red. Essential feelings and aspects of manhood, such as sin, responsibility, symbol, sacrifice and fortune are expressed by black and white and the human life by red (Puriev 2003, pp. 172–179).

Characters appearing in Mongolian *Tsam* mostly take animal forms. Symbols used frequently by Mongolian Shamans are deer, bear, eagle or owl. They believed the souls of these animals to be in touch with god. Especially the bird-shaped symbol is thought to enable Shamans to fly freely between this world and the next. As such the closer a Shaman's dance costume to a bird is and the lighter it is, the more comfortable it is for flying (Eliade 1992, pp. 159–161). They believe thus it becomes easier to fly up to the sky and receive god, and this theme is echoed in the costume of *Nabi* dance in Korean Buddhism.

B. The Costume of Nabi Dance by Yeongsanjae

The costume of the *Nabi* dance in Korean Buddhism is composed of a broad-sleeved Buddhist robe, a surplice, *Daeryeong* (brilliant silk about 20cm wide placed on front chest and fastened by red string) and a red string, and peaked hat. A dancer puts on grey or white pants and a Korean-style jacket, with the Buddhist robe over it, and the surplice on top of them. The broad-sleeved Buddhist robe is made of white cotton cloth, and the length of the trunk and the width of the sleeve are the same. A breast-tie of about 2 cm in width called a 'Doltti' is stitched to the dress. There is also a so-called 'Dangaji' with an opening under the arm, for Buddha to come out through the opening (Kim, E. K. 1980, p. 238). The front collar of the torso is divided into eight sections that are stitched to each other, which are called 'eight Geumgang' or 'eight great broad-sleeved Buddhist robe'. The surplice has blue and white embroidered letters of '天 (heaven)' and '王 (king)' on top of a square red cloth, the '天' is attached to the top two corners and the '王' to the bottom two corners of the surplice. In some cases, the letters '日 (sun)' and '月 (moon)' are attached to the part above the middle, or birds, rabbits or the letters 日 and 月 can be broidered on the round white space using various kinds of threads. The surplice is more elaborate; it has more items than that of an ordinary one and a green and yellow *Yeongja* (string) attached to the front of the chest and back of the shoulder. The surplice is worn with the *Daedae* (wide belt). Also there is something called a *Samjangildan* (three big partitions and one narrow partition) with a *Tongmunbul* at each partition, where it is split about 1cm and stitched. *Tongmunbul* means 'the gate through which Buddha comes and goes' and it is opened to the whole surplice. There is a *Yukgwangbosal* (one of the disciples of the Buddha to remedy living things) and on either side of it, there is silk of three different colours tied together and fastened to the shoulder. On the front of the chest, there is a *Daeryeong*. A peaked hat, made of window paper and linen, is put on the head, dyed yellow with gardenia, embroidered with various kinds of coloured thread and gold thread, and painted in vibrant colours. White, yellow, red, green and grey are used for the *Nabi* dance costume. Yellow represents earth, white is for water, red is a symbol of fire, green symbolises wind, and grey represents nothingness. The lotus, held in the *Nabi* dancers' hand, is well known for its pure beauty. By virtue of its nature being born in water and spending its life there without getting wet, it means Sakyamuni Tathagata who is never contaminated by worldly customs. It symbolises the spirit of the ascetic who is born at Ito (彌土 mud) but is not contaminated. Related to these representations is a myth of a lotus raised up from the navel of the sun god of Indian myth Visnusin 'Mahabarada' and King Beomcheon was born from this flower to create the universe. This designates the lotus as the flower of light and the flower of life (Hong S. H. 2003, pp. 57–58).

Two ritual dances have been compared based on the above data and from the common point of Buddhist ritual dance. The Mongolian *Tsam* uses more shamanic elements and various decorations, while the Korean *Nabi* dance shows an exceptional beauty of self-restraint.

5. Conclusion

Ritual dance in Mongolian and Korean Buddhism began with the introduction of Buddhist culture, handed down and developed over a long period of time, and currently forms part of a very artistic traditional culture in both Mongolia and Korea. Buddhist ritual dance is principally rooted in Buddhist religion and its culture, and also has status as a genre of traditional arts that represents the sense of beauty unique to the nation. This tradition was instrumental in forming the Mongolian *Tsam* and the Korean *Nabi* dance, the research of which has led to the following conclusion.

Firstly, Mongolian Buddhism began as Tantric Buddhism, a denomination of Mahayana Buddhism born in India. It was propagated to Tibet and Mongolia and transfigured into a native form of religion within each region due to the fusion of politics and culture. Korean Buddhism shows the characteristics of Exoteric Buddhism. Both the Mongolian *Tsam* dance and the Korean *Nabi* dance have developed to reflect the regional characteristics of costumes and symbolic systems. Secondly, these Buddhist ritual dances in Mongolia and Korea are closely related by ideas of regeneration and share in common the representation of these themes. In both ceremonies these beliefs are demonstrated in the monk's dance, depicting their role as a guide to those on the way to death. Lastly, with regard to the symbolism of ritual dance costume related to the traditional culture in Mongolia and Korea, Mongolian *Tsam* uses more shamanic and decorative elements based on the ceremony of shamanism, while Korean *Nabi* dance shows an exceptional beauty of self-restraint. In other words, the Mongolian *Tsam* dance, seeking the engagement of the public, is influenced by shamanism and makes use of very symbolic and shamanistic images that can draw the eye of the public and encourage participation. The Korean *Nabi* dance, on the other hand, was developed out of ascetic practice, so as to bring the monks closer to salvation. As a result, although the two share a common origin, they took different directions in the course of their development and this is also reflected in the costumes: whereas the *Tsam* dance and its outfit are elaborate and symbolic, the *Yeongsanjae Nabi* dance outfit uses muted colours to express the beauty of self-restraint.

This paper has the character of a survey research of documents and digressive relic materials. Hereafter, investigative research will be needed with the participation of researchers who are well versed in the interpretation of the doctrine and scriptures of Lamaism.

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