Traditional Korean Dance

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“Imperial Jewel”

Traditional Korean Dance Group
Traditional Korean Dance

- originated in ancient shamanistic rituals thousands of years ago
- benefited from regular support of:
  - royal court
  - numerous academies
  - an official ministry of the government
Traditional Korean Dance in the Occupied Korea (1910-1945)

- Due to cultural suppression by Japan during the Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula (1910-1945), most dance academies died out and some dances were lost.

- A few pioneering Korean dancers such as Choi Seung-hee (최승희 崔承喜 1911-1969) created new forms of Korean dance based on traditional dances and kept many of the traditions alive in secret.
Traditional Korean Dance Today

- Traditional Korean dance is enjoying a vibrant resurgence.
- Numerous universities in Korea teach Korean traditional dance.
- Some universities abroad now provide instruction in the forms.
- Top dancers are recognized as "Living National Treasures" and are charged to pass their dances down to their students.
- The lineages of dance and dancers are now traceable back several generations.
In modern Korea, there are at least six different kinds of dance:

- Court, Folk, Shamanistic, Confucian, Buddhist, Modern concert dance

Today, these classifications usually refer to the style of dance rather than the occupation, class, or religion of the dancers.

National dance academies teach these forms.
Dances and dance styles formerly restricted to royal audiences (the court) have become Korean classical dances. They are performed regularly in public concerts.

In conversation, Koreans classify their dances into four types: court, folk, sacred, and modern concert dance.
Movements of Traditional Korean Dance

- Many uniquely Korean gestures and body movements characterize all traditional Korean dances.

- These characteristics include:
  - the sliding each foot forward on the floor to end in an upturning of the toes (echoing the shape of the dancers’ slippers)
  - the lifting and lowering of the shoulders.
Differences in Traditional Korean Dance

- Korean dance classifications are distinguished by style, content and where they were historically performed. Both types are currently performed at celebrations and festivals.

- Korean classical court dances
  - Tend to be slow in tempo, dignified and refined.
  - They were performed by professional dancers at the palace for the king, queen and their guests.

- In contrast, Korean folk dances
  - Are lively and earthy.
  - They were performed by regular citizens to express emotions at different times (good harvests, weddings, funerals).
Types of Ritual/Folk Korean Dance

- Fan Dance (ritual dance / folk dance)
- Salpuri (ritual dance / folk dance)
- Kanggangsuwollae (folk dance)
- Mask Dance (folk dance)
- Sword Dance (folk dance)
- Drum Dance (folk dance)
The fan dance is one of the most popular traditional folk dances of Korea. It is a relatively modern dance developed in the 18th century using the fan, a prop used in shaman rituals. Apart from their decorative and everyday functions, fans are thought to expel evil and bring prosperity. The grace of the music combined with the colorful costumes and shifting geometrical designs lead the audience to believe that they are surrounded by a garden of flowers.
Salpuri (Shaman Ceremonial Dance)

- A traditional folk dance.
- Said to have originated from the shaman’s dance to exorcise evil spirits and bad luck.
- A solo dancer dressed in white dances with a long white handkerchief to the distinctive salpuri rhythm from the southwestern regions of Korea.
- The distinctive up-and-down movement from the dancer’s heel firmly grounded with the toes up carries through the body to the shoulders and rises and falls with the breath.
- This dance is one of the most powerful artistic expressions of the Korean sense of han, a mixture of deep rooted anger, grief and longing.
Kanggangsuwollae

- Kanggangsuwollae is a circle dance for women.
- It is performed during the Harvest Moon Festival, Ch’usok, the holiday on the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month.
- According to legend, this dance was used as a successful military strategy in 1592 during the Japanese Invasion of Korea.
There are eight variations of the masked dance drama that contain music, song, mime, dialogue and dancing.

The cast consists of shamans, monks, old wives, yangban (landed gentry) and young concubines.

The mask dance was often performed at night and consists of several acts with dialogue that was a parody on life or had a satirical plot.

The masks are secured in back with a black cloth.

Masks are made of paper, wood, gourds and fur.

Red, white and black are used on the masks to identify the sex and age of the characters. (An old person’s mask is black; a young man’s is red; and a young woman’s is white.)
Gum Moo (Sword Dance)

- Gum Moo is a military dance that was handed down from the age of the Shilla Dynasty almost two thousand years ago.
- The origins of this dance are said to have come from the Shilla people who danced this dance to cherish the memory of a young boy, Hwang Chang Rang.
- The young boy, Hwang, had given his life for his kingdom in a suicidal attack on the opposing Baek-Jae Dynasty’s king.
- It is told that the Shilla people commemorated the young boy’s heroic deed by wearing a mask that made the dancer look like the young soldier.
- During the fifteenth century of the Chosun Dynasty, when Gum Moo began to be performed in the king’s palace, the militaristic function of the dance was changed to a more elegant and artful dance as it is passed on today.
Painting of a sword dance performance
Modern Sword Dance
The Janggo Dance is a very energetic and rhythmic dance. The drums, called janggo, are double-headed and shaped like an hourglass. The janggo is played by striking the skin with the palm on the left side and with a bamboo drumstick on the right. Dancers dance while beating the drum strapped to their bodies. In an artful fusion of music and choreography, the dancers dance and spin around playing vibrant yet graceful rhythms.
Web Resources on Korean Dance

- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_dance
- www.koreandance.net/overview.html
- www.koreasociety.org/index2.php?option=com_docman&tas
- http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enwiki/858752