Change and Innovation in Traditional Music and Dance in Folklore Festivals

Hahn Man-young

1. Introduction

Any aspect of culture, including the arts, is subject to change since people’s life style and sense of values also change. Traditional folk art, as well as music and dance, has changed in the past and will continue to do so. Many folklorists, ethnomusicologists, and dance ethnologists have studied causes for such change and innovation within traditional folk arts. It is generally acknowledged that one of the reasons for change is the influence of foreign culture. The procedure is often explained dialectically. 1) encounter, 2) discord, 3) reconciliation, and 4) change. We may consider other factors of changes caused by social, economic and political change.

In this paper, I propose the view that traditional folk art can not avoid being changed by national or international folk art festivals, new phenomena of the 20th century. It is said that the latter part of the 20th century is an age of mass communication and tourism.

A village festival of the past is included in the festival of a large city or nation. International festival organizations such as CIOFF, (Counsel International des Organisation de Folklore et d’Arts Traditionnels) formed in Europe in the latter part of the 20th century, standardize participation groups and their repertoires, leading to change and innovation in the original folk art. This paper describes the changes which occur in traditional Korean folk art when its venue shifts from an original setting to the stage of

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national and international folkart festivals

2. National Folkart Contest of Korea

As in many countries of Asia, almost every village in Korea has its own festival of religious origin. Each festival has a certain name according to its history or natural surroundings, such as Sanshinje(a rite to the mountain god), Pung’ojje(a rite to the sea god), Sŏnanggut(a rite to the village god), Somorigu(a rite to the agricultural god), or Ch’umogut(a rite to the village hero).

According to statistics gathered in 1985 there are 112 such festivals still celebrated in Korea. They are related to the agricultural calendar, most of them held in May or October after rice planting and harvesting. A ritual ceremony to heaven is at the heart to the festival. The villagers enjoy themselves singing, dancing, and carousing. Before the 19th century, almost every village had such festivals. But at the time of the Japanese occupation of Korea(1910–1945), such festivals were banished from villages for political reasons, disguised as modernization, and much of the traditional folklore was almost irretrievably lost.

Since World War II, however, village festivals have been restored. Beginning in 1961, the Korean government has held the National Folkart Contest every year to stimulate the revival of traditional folklore for the sake of restoration, preservation, and transmission of traditional folklore, music and dance. For the contest folkarts are divided into five genres: 1) farmers’ band music, 2) mask dance drama, 3) folk dance, 4) folk song, and 5) traditional games. Old men recollect the traditions of their youth and the young reproduce them. The folklore items presented in the contest are condensed to 30-minute presentations of highlights only. Thanks to this contest, many local festivals have in turn been revived.

During the 1970s, many village and city festivals were not only restored but enlarged. Lantern processions and games, such as swinging for women, traditional wrestling, tug of war, and folksong contests were added to the festival, lengthening it to three or four days. This trend has continued to the present day. Also during the festival, a tumultuous street flea market is set up, including a circus, streetshows, and gambling. In addition to this, some large-scale festivals sponsor contests of pop songs, poems or essay composition, and athletic games like soccer, baseball and basketball. Thus the particular regional characteristics of the village or city festivals are gradually decreasing and losing their genuineness. In an effort to rectify this, folklorists have recommended to the organizers that they eliminate the ex-
traneous items which have become attached to these festivals and aim at maintaining the essential elements of music, dance, songs and games which give a distinctive flavor to each village festival. This advice goes unheeded, however, for local organizers want to attract crowds rather than the smaller numbers genuinely interested in traditional folklore. The national Folkart Festival has contributed tangibly to the restoration and preservation of folklore which had become extinct or nearly so.

However, at the national level as well some inevitable conditions of the contest have caused the items presented to lose their genuineness, and this in turn has brought in new dynamics or change in traditional music and dance. Let us examine first the conditions under which the contest is held.

(1) Location

Held in a different major city every year, the contest takes place in a public stadium. The large space requires many performers, often numbering in the hundreds. This means that the folklore items must be choreographed and reproduced as a mass game. Under these conditions, a solo folk singer and dancer are not suitable and all movements must be exaggerated since minute details cannot be seen. The size of the performance venue also determines which genres work well there. In a public stadium, a mass game such as a tug of war performed by hundreds of people is popular; in a gymnasium, mask dance drama may be suitable; in an auditorium or theater, solo performances of music and dance are more appropriate. However, since every item is standardized to be performed in a stadium, it should be rearranged to fit the place.

(2) Time limitations

The performance time for an item at the national Folkart Contest is limited to 30 minutes. Reduced to the scale of all the other items in the repertory, an item formerly spanning a whole day or several months now takes 30 minutes. It should therefore be rearranged and reproduced to show only the highlights or a medley of the various scenes. For instance, the field songs of Jindo island in the southwestern region of Korea were work songs for rice cultivation carried out from spring to autumn. There were songs for 1) pulling up the young rice shoots, 2) throwing the bundles of young shoots across the paddies, 3) transplanting, 4) the first weeding, 5) the second weeding, 6) the third weeding, 7) harvesting the rice, 8) carrying the sheaves of rice on the ox to the farm, and 9) threshing.

To be condensed into 30 minutes for the contest, the melody and text
which were originally improvised by the farmers through many hours of repetition are now reduced to two or three verses. In particular the lead singer's music, which varied according to the singer, is now arranged as in a written score. Farmers, whether they had a good voice or not, formerly sang by turns. Now, however, the lead is sung by semi-professional singers and the rhythm is more clearly articulated. Because of the new format, therefore, both form and function have changed.

(3) Function and effect

In the village festival, all the villagers are participants and performers, so they are not conscious of an audience; that is, they are both performer and audience at the same time. They do not need any stage props and background except for the natural environment. However, the situation changes once this item is placed in a stadium. There they need stage props, colorful costumes, exaggerated motions, instrumental accompaniment, and semi-professional singers and dancers to produce an exciting show. Thus, the original function of the festival, whether it had religious or social origins, is lost and now changed into a show for entertainment.

While it may be interesting for an anthropologist, folklorist, or ethnomusicologist to spend the whole day observing farmers singing one or two songs while they work, we are skeptical that the event also holds equal value for the researcher. They should be grateful for the National Folkart Contest of Korea.

3. Folkart performance in a Theatre

The second performance context for folkart which we will discuss is a theater or auditorium where more theatrical refinement is required than in a stadium.

(1) Location

A proscenium stage of a theater or auditorium is able to accommodate 20 to 40 dancers/musicians. Due to a strong lighting system, the motions of every performer can be seen in detail, and they are conscious of the audience's intense awareness of them. Therefore they require a professional production and much practice. A scene which is judged to be tedious by the producer is cut out relentlessly regardless of its importance to the elderly performers. In addition, a young and good looking performer is preferable.

The performers become more and more professional, audiences continually require new items, and the director inevitably adds a new device to
the traditional item to make it more enjoyable. Thus the traditional and original repertory changes into a new theatrical medium.

(2) Time limitations
The performance time for each item on a theater program usually does not exceed 5 to 10 minutes on stage. The tempo of the music and dance as well as the production process thereby tend to be accelerated. Music should also be arranged in accordance with dance which is choreographed to fit the stage condition. Therefore, the music is arranged, the song text is refined; moreover, it is not sung live by the dancer-singer but is pre-recorded and transmitted electronically. The quality of improvisation is therefore lost.

(3) Theatrical effect
Theatrical devices such as an artificial stage background instead of a natural environment, colorful costumes, and dramatic props are added to the original. However, when prepared for an audience, the melody and text are refined, rhythm is more clearly articulated, the performance times are standardized, and dance is choreographed according to stage conditions and program structure. Folklore items, originally characterized by much improvisation, are changed into a ready-made show for others. On top of this, a new flavor of theatricality is added. The original authenticity is gradually lost and a new folkart form appears.

4. Conditions of International Folkart Festivals
A Korean dance group first participated in an international festival at the Paris International Folklore Festival of 1960. Of course, many dancers had given performances in Japan, America, Europe and Southeast Asia before 1960, but these were dance recitals given in theatres. The Korean Folkdance Group, which was formed in haste for this purpose (1960) comprised 42 members who were almost all virtuoso dancers with their own private dance studios. It goes without saying that the result was like a choir consisting entirely of soloists. Why did this happen? Because they could not understand the nature and condition of an international folkart festival.

Conditions at an international folkart festival usually include the following:

1) Number of performers: about 25 to 40
2) Stage conditions
   According to the host countries, conditions vary between an outdoor
theater or plaza with proscenium or an arena-type stage similar to an indoor auditorium. Either stage can accommodate 30 to 40 dancers. It has a simple lighting system and a small greenhouse (dressing room?). A large stage setting or background is not used, but stage props are available.

3) Time limit
The participating group must be ready to accept the requirements of the host country. In one place, a 30-minute performance is required and in another place, 20 minutes. Performance times depend upon how the host country builds a one-night program. Sometimes only 5 minutes are allotted for a performance or the host country requests a dance procession through the town! Consequently, each item may at best have 5 to 7 minutes of performance time.

4) Audience
Most audiences are composed of local people who do not know the cultural background and language of the foreign performers. Even if a simple explanation is given on the program, it is insufficient. Therefore, it is best to have a simple rather than complicated text, and pantomime, which can easily be understood as an international language. It may not be suitable to have a complicated religious text or dramatic situation with an intricate historical background, or to have symbol or metaphor which cannot be understood by foreign audiences.

5) Tour conditions
Several conditions for performance tours have to be considered.

a) Since it takes more than a month to conduct a performance tour, a performer with a regular job cannot participate.

b) The performer should be in good health.

c) The appearance of the performer should be comely.

d) It is desirable that the performer have an awareness of the world and, if possible, speak a little English. To satisfy these conditions, old farmers and villagers must probably be excluded.

6) Repertory
Group dances are preferable to solos. The participating group needs much practice to become a good ensemble. In Asia (?) a professional or semi-professional dance troupe usually is more suitable than a village festival group
5. Change of Traditional Folklore

There is no Korean traditional folklore item which satisfies all these requirements for an international festival. Most Korean traditional folklore has a religious origin related to heroic ancestor worship, and dialogue is frequently used to convey the dramatic story inherent in folklore. The performance time often takes many hours or even days. To make repertory suitable for such an international festival, music, choreography and stage production need to be arranged. It is in this process that traditional music and dance undergo change. The resulting, altered repertories for an international folkart festival or theatrical stage have now become so-called standard repertories for Korean dance groups. They are so far from the original folkart that a village performer may not be able to execute it. As a result, professional folklore groups are needed to perform such repertory items.

In 1962, the National Dance Company of Korea was established, followed by the Seoul City Dance Theater in 1974. After that, many big cities, such as Pusan, Taegu, Kwangju, Daejeon, and Inchon established city dance companies. These public dance groups perform not only the standard repertory but also new dances based on traditional dance idioms.

Here I would like to describe the original folkart and variants of several standard repertories which are often performed by Korean troupes at international festivals.

As a demonstration of various contexts for performance I will describe several examples from each of four traditional folkarts: I a women’s circle dance (kanggangsuwollae); II farmers’ band music (nongak); III monk’s drum dance (sungmu), and IV fan dance (puch’ē ch’um). The sequence of these examples moves in the direction from close to the traditional from and context to far from the original. The examples on film and their settings are themselves a kind of documentation of current concepts of authenticity and artifice. As well as describing what is represented on the video I will note details of the particular medium used.

1. Kanggangsuwollae

1) Kanggangsuwollae

This representative folkart is a women’s circle dance traditionally performed under the light of the first full moon of the lunar new year. It originated from the south-western coastal area and is designated as an “Intangible Cultural Asset”
Legend has it that this dance originated during the time of the Hideyoshi Invasion of 1592. At that time, a huge Japanese naval armada was threatening the southern coastal region, a rich grain district. Admiral Yi Soon-shin, Korea's naval commander-in-chief at the time, devised a strategy whereby he had the young maidens of the coastal village perform this dance around a large bonfire, thus leading the Japanese to believe that a formidable repelling force was awaiting them on shore. Admiral Yi's brilliant tactics, plus his invention of the ironclad "Turtle Ships", saved Korea from the overpowering Japanese navy, and he is honored to this day as one of the great heroes of Korean history.

The first representation of the circle dance is in a vintage black and white film from around 1950's. It is probably as early a depiction of Kanggangsuolae on film as can be obtained, so it is as close a representation of the 'original' tradition practiced in a life context as we can presently view. About 25 women in white in hanbok with (probably red) sashes, some with braided hair, others with their modern shorter 'perms', dance in an isolated setting out in nature near a traditional-style aristocrat's house with no other people to be heard or seen. First a narrator's voice-over and then superimposed titles give information about sequence of increasingly fast rhythmic cycles chinyangjo and chungmori, and then mentions chongsok mae. The audio track is continuous, while the visual track cuts from one tempo section or formation(circles, spirals, serpentine lines) to the next. Whether this is the sequence of the original film or a matter of editing is not apparent.

2) The second example of Kanggangsuolae is from a contemporary MBC live broadcast of the national Folk Arts Festival. Two large groups of women, perhaps fifty in all with one group in blue, the other in red, form long lines on the grass of an athletic stadium. Three women, standing at a microphone, give the call of the traditional song which goes with the dance, while the dancers return the response. The dancers form a wider variety of formations than in the first example, perhaps because this film is continuous while the first was fragmentary. The dancers wear long braided/tied to the short, permed haircuts current among middle-aged Korean women. The performance is both natural and professional, the dancers obviously accustomed to public performance and contests. A narrator introduces the folk dance to the TV audience and another announcer asks for expert commentary by a professional folklorist. The TV camera shoots from a variety of angles, distances, and locations: close up on individual dancers or stationary as lines of dancers pass by, or even aerial views from
the sky above the stadium.

3) The third version of Kanggangsuolla, presented by the National Dance Company, is more impressionistic. The setting is a dark stage of an indoor theatre with only a painted moon and artificial lighting to simulate the lunar new year moon and the bonfire of the original story. The dance is choreographed quite differently from the traditional dance. The dancers do not even hold hands, dancing separately at the beginning. They are dressed in blue-green hanbok and do not sing. There is a singer heard at first, then replaced by kômungo (six-stringed zither) and changgo (hourglass-shaped drum); later a taegûm (horizontal bamboo flute) is the 'singer' and as the tempo quickens, a kômungo solo provides the accompaniment. The dancers finally form a circle and then spiral in the t'aegûk pattern. The three examples show well a spectrum of performance contexts for kanggangsuolla.

II Sùngmu, Buddhist monk's dance

The Buddhist monk's dance performed in conjunction with the ceremony is known as chakpûp (literally, "making the Dharma") and includes three types: butterfly dance (nabi ch'um), and drum dance (para ch'um), and drum dance (pôpgo ch'um). All three occur during the premeal ritual from Yongsan-chae; they also frequently occur individually between chants in all ceremonies. The drum dance is especially performed in the morning and evening offices at the temple.

1) The three versions of the monk's dance also span distant and current forms. The first is the less well known but more 'authentic' setting of an actual Buddhist temple with a monk alternating dancing and drumming before a large temple drum (A Second monk continuously beats the drum on its other side). Accompanying musicians play a large gong (chung) and conical oboe (t'aep'yôngso) and hourglass-shaped drum (changgo) off camera. At one point the monk bends backward and slowly encircles the edge of the drum head with his sticks. The drama and dignity of this gesture is in marked contrast to the current staged version which will be discussed in example 3.

2) Example two of sùngmu is a version for indoor stage, but the skill and spirit of the soloist are so full of Korean feelings (môt, hung, ...) that it retains the air of a ritual action rather than a performance merely for entertainment, as are most of the other staged example on this video. A famous master of sùngmu in contemporary Korea, Yi Mae-bang is shown during the long build-up of the dance preceding the actual drumming.
Whereas the monk had alternated dance and drumming, the current staged version is about two-thirds dance followed by the drumming section as climax and then a quick close. Yi Mae-bang follows the custom of having the instrumental ensemble fade away as the drum solo gets going. The video provides the full version of his intense but effortless drumming. His performance represents the monk’s dance raised to high art.

3) The final version is a common experience in modern-day Seoul in hotel performances for Western tourists and businessmen, at Korea House, or even prior to the Opening Ceremony of the Seoul Olympics. Six ever-smiling young women each standing within a space provided by three drums, perform drumming motions in perfectly synchronized patterns. Much emphasis is put on backbends and showy techniques. One is, more reminded of the use of the dance by kisaeng to entertain their patrons rather than by monks to prepare for spiritual freedom.

III Puch’ae Ch’um, Fan dance

The four examples of the fan dance range from its origins in shaman ritual(kut) to the now familiar group performances of the ‘traditional’ Korean fan dance, a standard part of every dance company’s repertory, especially when they go abroad.

1) In the first case, a genuine-looking shaman(mudang) performs a ritual dance with the props of fan and bells. Her audience appears to be urban Koreans specially collected for the filming occasion. The fan serves more than a ritual or aesthetic purpose when it becomes a flat plate for soliciting money from the audience-participants.

2) In the second example, famous shaman dancer, Kim Suk-ja, performs a codified version of a shaman’s dance outdoors on a grassy lawn with a fan prop. She is accompanied by a live ensemble of changgo and taegum. An invisible narrator explains the event to a likewise invisible audience.

3) The third case is drawn from tapes of the 1986 Asian Game ceremonies in Seoul in which hundreds of dancers form numerous shapes: lines, circles, serpentine spirals, and squares.

4) The final fan dance took place during the International Folk Festival at the National Theatre during the same 1986 Arts Festival. Members of the National Dance Company perform on stage with an effective stage set of an enormous fan spread as backdrop. This version closes with the now expected finale of the dancers grouped in several layered circles drawing audience applause by their shudder of vibrating fans.
IV Nong’ak, Farmer’s dance

The final genre illustrated by accompanying video is the ancient folk music and dance, farmers’ band music, in four versions ranging from the hills of Chöllabukdo to its newest codification as a staged art form.

1) The prize-winning team of real farmers from Inshil-P’ilbong perform part of an entertainment section of nong’ak ritual called p’ankut on a large open space near their village. This film footage from the early 1980s. with many segments of spontaneous play, is a valuable document of a fast-disappearing set of ritual performers.

2) The second version, Pisan nong’ak, was filmed at the 27th National Folkarts Contest. About forty performers compete in a stadium at Taegu with the typical current mix of men and women players.

3) The third example features the kind of individual performances which follow those of the entire group in a p’ankut performance: sangmo ch’um (hat-streamer dance), sŏlchanggo (standing houglass drum dance), sangsoc ch’um (the small gong leader’s dance), and yŏldup’al ch’um (30meter long streamer acrobatics).

4) Finally, the demonstration closes with an early film of “Samulnori”, a troupe of percussionists who came together around 1978 to put the four instruments of traditional Korean folk percussion on stage. Seated, they play two gongs (ching and kkwanggwari) and two drums (changgo and puk) in intricate rhythmic patterns derived from farmers band music. The original leader, Kim Yong-bae, appears in a now historic film as then leader of a group which has since become so popular they have started a samulnori “movement” among young people in Korea.

The entire demonstration film illustrates the interesting idea that a change of context, form, and function in the presentation of a traditional art can actually separate into distinct art forms. One cannot say that the shaman’s use of a fan as a ritual object during her ecstatic dance when possessed by a deity during a kut is the same fan dance as performed by professional show-business dancers working every night at a Seoul city hotel to entertain foreigners. It is difficult to see the Little Angels’ drum dance prior to the opening ceremony of the 1988 Seoul Olympics as being in the same tradition as monks in a secluded temple using drumming as an aid to meditation and concentration. Perhaps the Samulnori troupe is on the right track when they recognize their indebtedness to the percussion tradition of farmers but claim they are making a new art form.
6. Conclusion

Traditional folklore as well as music and dance continues to change not only under the influence of political, economic and social factors, but also through an encounter with foreign cultures. However, national or international folkart festivals, a new device of the 20th century, have also brought change to traditional folkart.

The international folkart festival was actively initiated in Europe and then in the United States. Folklore groups of Asian countries participated in order to show culture and arts to the Western world. But as a result, their traditional folkart changed because of the various conditions in the festivals.

Korean traditional folklore was originally performed at a village festival where time limits are disregarded. It stems from a religious or historic origin. No audience is needed since the villagers are both performer and audience at one and the same time. When performed at international folkart festivals, however, these folkarts change. The following chart summarizes the differences in eight dimensions of a Korean folkart when it is performed within a Korean traditional festival and at an international festival.

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Korean Traditional Folkart Festival</th>
<th>International Folkart Festival</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>religious or historical</td>
<td>entertainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>village</td>
<td>stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time limit</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>standard (5–7 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performer</td>
<td>villager</td>
<td>professional performer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>folk music</td>
<td>arranged, pre-recorded music with instrumental accompaniment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>traditional</td>
<td>Choreographed with new devices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>an old village leader or, more often, shaman</td>
<td>director or choreographer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>natural</td>
<td>artificial stage setting</td>
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I have not spoken about the aesthetic value of change in traditional folklore, music, and dance. While traditional folklore is still alive, and therefore also changing in the villages of Korea, my concern has been with the innovations and new creations which occur when these folkarts are transferred from their original local settings to the arena of national and international folk festivals.
### GLOSSARY

<table>
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<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Korean</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
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<tr>
<td>Changgo</td>
<td>장고</td>
<td>長高</td>
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<td>추모굿</td>
<td>祭奠</td>
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<td>한복</td>
<td>漢服</td>
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<td>강가세월례</td>
<td>長安世月禮</td>
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<td>무당</td>
<td>墨丈</td>
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<td>勝樂</td>
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<td>法歌舞</td>
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<td>북</td>
<td>北</td>
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<td>桐谷</td>
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