

Androgyny of Sword Dance Costumes in the Joseon Dynasty

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Abstract

Neo-Confucianism was the dominant ideology of the Joseon Dynasty Korea. Male and female costumes reflected a clear distinction in male and female sex roles. This study analyzes cross-dressing in sword dance performances. The research method examines relics, paintings, pictures, and documents relevant to sword dance costumes as well as for the military. The results are: First, the composition of sword dance costume was jeogori (upper garment), skirt, and shoes with military costume of jeollip (hat), jeonbok (long vest), and jeondae (belt). Second, the sword dance costume and military costume are very similar except for the basic inner wear, shoes, some details and methods of wearing. Third, the sword dance costume gradually adopted military items and features. The sword dance costume was basically female, with overall additions of a male costume, to express an androgynous image; however, the cross-dressing phenomena in the sword dance were not intended for the pursuit of sexual pleasure.

Keywords

androgyny, sword dance, dance costume, military costume, the Joseon Dynasty

Introduction

The androgynous costume is widespread in modern Korean fashion; however, the distinction between male and female costumes was clear in traditional Joseon (1392-1910) society. The Joseon Dynasty was dominantly Confucian and emphasized the distinction between men and women. However, some cross-dressing phenomena existed in the Joseon Dynasty, where females attired in male costumes. When females performed the sword dance, with plenty of sword-brandishing, they would wear male costumes, especially in military clothing.

Previous studies have been done on sword dance costumes (Nam, 1995; Nam, 2002; Yoon, 2007; Choi, 2010; Hwang & So, 2011), but no study has addressed the borrowing of male costumes by female dancers. This study will scrutinize the sword dance from the perspective of structure, characteristics, and changes to confirm the cross-dressing phenomena in a traditional Confucian society. The following perspectives will be used in this research.

First, the items for sword dance costumes will be examined.

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Second, a comparison will be made between sword dance costumes and military costumes.

Third, changes in sword dance costumes will be examined to analyze meaning.

The research method include an examination of relics, paintings, pictures, and documents relevant to sword dance costumes as well as for the military to understand their interrelationship and meaning. This study is limited to the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910).

Theoretical Background

Female and Male Costumes in Joseon Dynasty

The dominant ideology in the Joseon Dynasty Korea was Neo-Confucianism developed in Sung China through the philosophical reexaminations of Buddhism and Taoism (Koh, 2003). A feminist perspective indicates that Confucianism is based upon the unequal structures of the different genders. Confucian discourses on genders are built upon the Yin-yang theory, rationalizing the hierarchical order with male corresponding yang superiority and female corresponding yin inferiority (Choi, 2003).

There are clear differences between men and women; consequently, men were free to go out, while women were not free to go out. For this reason, the male costumes in the Joseon Dynasty were developed in outdoor items including official hats, coats, and shoes, while the female costumes were developed with indoor items such as *jeogori* (upper garments) and *chima* (skirts). Male *jeogori* and *baji* (pants) were basically inner wear for the outward *po* (coats) made of plain and simple materials; however, *jeogori* and skirt for females mainly staying inside were decorated in gorgeous materials and colors. Female headgear in the Joseon Dynasty was not for cold or decoration, but mainly for protection from males. When they go out, women were supposed to cover up their faces with headdress called *sseugaechima* or *jangot*.

There was a clear distinction in sex roles between males and females in the Joseon Dynasty with clear differences in male and female costumes. However, there was also a tendency toward conformity in costumes forms and clothing methods that eventually developed a tendency of common clothes for men and women. For example, originally male costumes such as *jangui* (one kind of coat), *juui* (one kind of coat), *magoja* (one kind of jacket) were

gradually adopted for females in later years (Ku, 2001).

Cross Dressing in the Joseon Dynasty

The Joseon Dynasty was a time when male costumes and female costumes were strictly distinguished with a few occasions for cross dressings when a man wore a female costume or a woman wore a male costume. Dancers were often dressed in costumes of the opposite sex to express the proper role.

For example, female sword dancers were in costumes of *hyeopsu* (coat), *gwaeja* (long vest), *jeonda* (belt) with *jeollip* (hat). These are the items for Joseon Dynasty military costumes. We can find another example in the case of *Seonyurak* (boat entertainment), where the female dancer in the role of master of ceremony in *jurip* (hat), *cheollik* (coat), *gwangdahoe* (belt), and *suhwaja* (shoes). On top of them, it was thoroughly military costume with arms like *donggae*, *hwando*, and *deungpyeon*.

The cross dressing of the Joseon Dynasty was not intended for any kind of sexual pleasure. This phenomena ironically developed due to the Confucian doctrine of strict male-female discrimination. It was not permitted for men and women to share the same accommodations; consequently, female dancers had occasions to play male roles with necessary costumes and decorations.

In the early period of the new Joseon Dynasty, female dancers performed in the palace feasts, regardless of the gender of the attending audience. Due to the occasional happenings in moral doubts, gradually female dancers were to perform for internal parties with the main participants being females, while boy dancers replaced female dancers in outside parties with male participants. In 1432 (Sejong 14), 60 boy dancers between the ages of 8-10 were recruited for the first time in the history of Joseon Dynasty (Kim, 2001). To express victory in war or a military success, female performers were to wear male military costumes in dancing and musical performances. The costumes for dancing boys were quite similar to male costumes, but androgynous with partial borrowings such as *hwagwan* (coronet), *saekdong* (stripes of many colors) from female costumes (Park, 2014).

Sword Dance

Sword Dance is performed with brandished swords called as *kalchum*, *geommu*, or *geomgimu* in Korean. It is believed that

sword dances were developed as ceremonial dances in primitive communal societies and later developed into military war dances (Park, 2002). The mural paintings of *Goguryeo* tombs in the 4th century roughly describe the sword dance of the period. According to an old legend, a *Silla* boy named *Hwang Chang* sword-danced in the *Baekje* court to murder a *Baekje* king, sacrificing his life thereby. The *Silla* people began to do the sword dance in the memory of him with the mask of the boy thereafter (King *Sejong* the Great Memorial Society, 1994). This sword dance is believed to have been performed up to the end of the *Goryeo* period, but it is not included in the *Akhakgwebeom* (compendium of music and dance) in 1493 (Seongjong 24), thus making us suspect the dance was not performed in the early Joseon Dynasty (The Academy of Korean Studies, 1991). From the early nineteenth century, that the dance was often performed particularly in *Seoncheon*, *Uiju*, *Jeongju*, and *Yongbyon* of *Pyongan* Province with the name of *kalchum*. The first document where the sword dance of the local *gisaeng* school was recorded in the court entertainment is *wonhaengeulmyojeongniwigwe* in 1795 (Jeongjo 19). The records show the sword dance was performed in the royal court banquet of 1829 (Sunjo 19), 1868 (Gojong 5), 1901 (Gwangmu 5), and 1902 (Gwangmu 6) (Song, 2012).

According to the record of *Uigwe*, the nineteenth century sword dance was performed by four female dancers in the attire of military costume over their red silk skirts under the music of Melody of *Muryong*. Two of the four dancers faced each other to dance forward or backwards with open hands, changing positions, facing the opposites, kneeling and standing, with swords constantly swirling. Playing with the chained swords, dancers would demonstrate a variety of dance poses.

Analysis Results and Discussions

The Composition of the Sword Dance Costume

We can understand and confirm the sword dance and costumes from the folk paintings in Figure 1 - Figure 3. Particular notice is worthwhile with “*Ssanggeomdaemu* (the Facing Dance with Double Swords)” by Yoonbok Shin, one of the three distinguished folk artists in the Joseon Dynasty (Figure 1). The female in the left shows her costume in light green *jeogori* and red skirt, with



Figure 1. *Ssanggeomdaemu* (18th Century) Kansong Museum Collection.



Figure 2. Banquet to Welcome New Governor of *Pyeongando* Province (1745) National Museum of Korea Collection National Gugak Center. (2001). p.192.

jeonbok (military long vest) and dark blue *jeonda* (military belt) in the front. Her head carries a *jeollip* (military hat), and she holds swords in both hands, showing white underwear and white socks under her skirt. The female in the right wears green *jeogori* with dark blue skirt, and green belt, demonstrating limited differences in colors.

Figure 2 shows the female in the left with white *jeogori*, dark blue skirt, dark red *jeonbok* (military long vest), dark blue *jeonda* (military belt), with *jeollip* (military hat), and a sword in her hand. The female in the right shows yellow *jeogori* with red skirt, in green *jeonbok*, dark blue *jeonbok*, with *jeollip*, and swords in her hands. Figure 3 shows two females in the same costumes. They wear yellow *jeogori* with red skirt, in black *jeonbok* and black *jeonda*, with *jeollip*, and a sword in their hands.

More researches is done on the documents about the royal court banquet in the Joseon Dynasty. From the painting of the royal banquet in the *Uigwe* of 1848, we can understand the overall clothes, while confirming the individual items with their names and shapes from *Boksikdo* (the Drawings of Costumes). Table 1 shows the sword dance costume shows *jeollip* (military hat) in the attire



Figure 3. Banquet in Celebration of Arrival of New Regional Magistrate (18th Century) Korea University Museum Collection National Gugak Center. (2001). p.196.

劍器舞



Figure 4. Sword Dance Heonjong Musin Jinchan Uigwe (1848).

笠 戰



劍器舞服飾

Figure 5. Jeollip Heonjong Musin Jinchan Uigwe (1848).

帶 戰 藍



Figure 6. Namjeondae Heonjong Musin Jinchan Uigwe (1848).

子 掛 的 紫



Figure 7. Jajeok Gwaeja Heonjong Musin Jinchan Uigwe (1848).

袖 袂 香 金



Figure 8. Geumhyang hyeopsu Heonjong Musin Jinchan Uigwe (1848).



Figure 9. Sword Dance Costume (Left), Banquet to Welcome New Governor of Pyeongando Province (1745) National Gugak Center. (2001). p.196.

of dark violet *gwaeja* (long vest) over orange gold colored *hyeopsu* (narrow sleeved coat), with dark blue *jeondae* (military belt). In the same document we read “Female performers in the sword dance wear *jeollip* in red silk skirt and blue black silk *gwaeja*, with dark blue *jeondae* (military belt) and green shoes” from *gongnyeong* chapter. These records indicate that the female dancers in the sword dance shared in their *jeogories* and skirts with red silk skirt, green shoes as their basic common costumes, to have further decorations with military costumes such as *jeollip* (hat), *gwaeja* (vest), *hyeopsu* (coat), *jeondae* (belt) in places of hwagwan (coronet), and

Table 1. Comparison of Sword Dance Costumes and Military Costumes

Item	<i>Jeollip</i> (military hat)	<i>Jeondae</i> (military belt)	<i>Hyeopsu/dongdari</i> (coat)	<i>Gwaeja/jeonbok</i> (long vest)
Sword dance costumes				
	<i>HeonjongMusin JinchanUigwe</i>	<i>HeonjongMusin JinchanUigwe</i>	<i>HeonjongMusin JinchanUigwe</i>	<i>HeonjongMusin JinchanUigwe</i>
Military costumes				
	Chang Pudeok Memorial Gallery. (1999). p.76	National Folk Museum of Korea. (2005).p.270	Korea University Museum. (2008).p.116	National Folk Museum of Korea. (2005).p.138

hwangchosam (yellow silk coat).

Comparison with Military Costumes

How significant is the resemblance of female dancers in male military costumes for the sword dance? A comparative evaluation is made from the paintings and pictures to answer this question. Figure 9 and Figure 10 are the enlarged sword dance costumes from Figure 2; in addition, Figure 11 shows another scene about the military costume from the same painting. The sword dance costume is composed of *jeollip* (military hat), *jeonbok* (military long vest), *jeondae* (military belt) over the *jeogori* and skirt. However, the military costume is made of *dongdari* (different color sleeved coat) first with similar costumes underneath that indicates that the inner wear of *jeonbok* was different. The length of *jeonbok* shows the differences, shorter female ones and longer male ones. Though we cannot see their shoes, they put only socks as in Figure 1 and Figure 3 (or had green pumps). Green pumps are without protruding necks and completely different from the black *suhwaja* (military long boots) in Figure 11.

Figure 12 is a picture of a double sword dance performed by female entertainers in the early 20th century. Figure 13 shows a military costume in the same period. From these two black and white pictures we cannot tell anything about the colors of the costumes. They share *jeollip*, *jeonbok*, *jeondae* in common. Female



Figure 10. Sword Dance Costume (Right), Banquet to Welcome New Governor of *Pyeongando* Province (1745) National Gugak Center. (2001). p.196.

dancers, however, banded their belt (*jeondae*) behind just like the method of female dancer's red silk embroidery belt. Figure 13 is bound together in the front and the remaining portions are hung down.

Comparisons are tried between the composite items of the female sword dance with the military costumes remaining. Table 1 indicates that *jeollip*, *jeondae*, *hyeopsu*, *gwaeja* of the sword dance costume correspond to the *jeollip*, *jeondae*, *dongdari* (*hyeopsu*), *jeonbok* (*gwaeja*) of the military costume. *Boksikdo* (the Drawings of Costumes) of the *Uigwe* shows only the general outline, we can understand the actual pictures in reference to the paintings and relics from the past. *Jeollip* (military hat) has a 360 degree shade decorated with a top ornament, red tassel, and peacock feather. *jeondae* (military belt) is made with blue silk piece suspended at 45



Figure 11. 18th Century military costumes Banquet to Welcome New Governor of Pyeongando Province (1745) National Gugak Center. (2001). p.194.



Figure 12. Early 20th Century Sword Dance Costume Choi, S. R. (1994). p.187.



Figure 13. Early 20th Century military costume Choi, S. R. (1994). p.46.

degrees and winding it in spiral. *Hyeopsu* is a narrow sleeved coat with the short red additions at the end part of the sleeve. This red portion seems to be longer in the later period. *Gwaeja*, often known also as *kwaeja*, is similar to *Jeonbok* in its features. It is shaped like a long vest with a front center that overlaps each other and in the form of a parallel opening. Remaining military *jeonbok* relics show that the surface fabric is black and the lining is red (Figure 1).

Meaning of the Changes in Sword Dance Costumes

In the *Wonhaeng Eulmyo Jeongni Uigwe* of 1795 we can see the painting of sword dance, but *Boksikdo* (the Drawings of Costumes) does not mention anything about it. We are able to ascertain that there was no special sword dancing costume at that time, thus using the same costume they used for the occasion of the ordinary royal court banquet. The changing trend of costume pictures in the seven *Uigwe* from 1829 to 1901, which carry the scenes of sword dance (Table 2). The orange gold colored *hyeopsu* (narrow sleeved coat) is omitted from the pictures and records of 1829. It is probably because *gwaeja* was put directly over *jeogori* and skirt until that period and later *hyeopsu* (narrow sleeved coat) from the male costume was added. There were no particular changes from 1848 to 1901, with some changes in colors. The color of *gwaeja* was purple-red in 1829 and in 1848, but the color changed into blue black after 1877.

The mask sword dance, which had been prevalent from the Three Kingdoms through the Goryeo period, seemed to have been forgotten in the earlier Joseon times, but became well performed in the later Joseon years. According to *Nogajae yonhaeng ilgi* (the Travelogue of China by *Nogajae*) Changeop Kim in the reign of King Sukjong (1661-1720, r. 1674-1720), "Sword dance was seldom seen when we were young. But it became gradually popular for the past few decades and now it became prevalent throughout the eight provinces of Korea." (Ahn, 2011) Therefore the sword dance became popular throughout Korea in the eighteenth century, which we can witness from folk paintings and writings of the period. It became a part of royal court banquet performances in the reign of King Jeongjo (1752-1800, r. 1776-1800).

What was the reason for the rather sudden surge in popularity of the sword dance? First, sword dance was performed without lyrics, thus demonstrating strongly the character of the dance. Therefore

Table 2. The Changes in Sword Dance Costumes written in Uigwe

Year	1829	1848	1877	1887	1892	1901	1901
Reference (Uigwe)	<i>Sunjo Gichuk Jinchan Uigwe</i>	<i>Heonjong Musin Jinchan Uigwe</i>	<i>Gojong Jeongchuk Jinchan Uigwe</i>	<i>Gojong Jeonghae Jinchan Uigwe</i>	<i>Gojong Imjin Jinchan Uigwe</i>	<i>Gwangmu Imin Jinyeon Uigwe</i>	<i>Gwangmu Imin Jinchan Uigwe</i>
Boksikdo (Drawings of Costumes)							
Color of gwaaja (long vest)	purple (jajeok)	purple (jajeok)	blue black (acheong)	blue black (acheong)	blue black (acheong)	blue black (acheong)	blue black (acheong)

it was more interesting with a rapid tempo and intensity; however, most other performances of the period were in a slow tempo (Cho, 2009). Second, costumes and other props also served as attractive elements of performance. The dance of young lady in the male costume with the sword in their hands was enough to attract the attention of audiences with the disharmony of the performance. Instead of *hwagwan* (coronet) they wore a male *jeollip* (military hat). They wore military *hyeopsu* (narrow sleeved coat) and *gwaaja* (long vest), in place of *hwangchosam* (yellow silk coat) for female dancers. Their belt was blue *jeondae* (military belt) instead of female dancer's red silk belt with gold embroidery. Female dancers with swords in their hands instead of flowers or silk balls were enough to arouse popular curiosity in the period. It was a demonstration of androgyny with the mixture of male military costumes on top of basic female *jeogori* (upper garment) and skirt.

Costumes are tremendously influential in the creation and demonstration of the gender images. Human physical sexuality can be disguised through the medium of costumes (Lee, 1999). The sword dance of the Joseon shows the cross dressing phenomenon through the female performers in male military costumes and switching the sex roles. Through androgyny has aroused visual interest and concern, and with dynamic dance movements the sword dance became widely popular in the late Joseon Dynasty.

Conclusions

In the patriarchal Confucian Joseon society, sex roles for the males and females were firmly decided in accordance to the Yin-yang theory and the distinctiveness of the costumes. This study is intended for the search of meanings in the sexual values with the analyses of cross-dressing in sword dance performances. For the purpose all the relevant materials in the old relics, paintings, pictures, and documents were examined to search for composite items in the sword dance with a comparison to military costumes in its historical context. The results are as follows.

First, the 18th century folk paintings show the sword dance costumes as the basic female costume of *jeogori* (upper garment) and skirt, with military costume of *jeollip* (military hat), *jeonbok* (military long vest), *jeondae* (military belt). When the sword dance was attached to the royal court banquet performance at the end of the 18th century the sword dance costume remained similar. With the basic composition of *jeogori*, skirt, and silk shoes, military parts of *jeollip*, *hyeopsu* (narrow sleeved coat), *gwaaja* (long vest), *jeondae* were overlaid.

Second, when we compare the contemporary female sword dance costumes with the military, it was clear that the female

dancers borrowed *jeollip*, *dongdari*, *jeonbok*, and *jeondae* from military costumes. The basic costumes and shoes indicate some differences and the details of clothes; in addition, the methods of wearing demonstrate slight changes. The basic costume for the military was male *jeogori* and skirt for the sword dance the basic costume was female *jeogori* (upper garment) and skirt. As for the shoes, sword dance was performed in green silk shoes or white socks without shoes; however, the military shoes were black boots with high-neck. For the sword dance *jeonbok* (military long vest) seemed to be shorter than the military and *jeondae* (military belt) was sometimes bound in the backs instead of in the front, with two loops.

Third, there was no special costume for the sword dance when it was incorporated into the royal court banquet performance in the Joseon Dynasty, performing their dance in a regular dance costume with only their swords in hands. Gradually military features include *jeollip*, *gwaeja* (*jeonbok*), *jeondae* were introduced, and also added *hyeopsu* (*dongdari*), with more military colors absorbed. The sword dance costume was female with overall additions of male costume to express an androgynous image.

Cross-dressing phenomena in the sword dance of the Joseon Dynasty was not intended for the pursuit of sexual pleasure. Under the strict separation of men and women, female performers were often attired in male costumes to play males. In the parties for ladies female performers were in charge of music and dance, while in the parties for men, boys played the role of females and female dancers played the male role in the male costume.

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