

“Open door, open door, you ghosts!

As we, men enter into this door, all the blessings of the world will come in with us.”

- Line from Binari, a traditional musical piece performed at the beginning of classical Korean music and dance performances

Body of Faith

Shamanism, Buddhism, Confucianism – as each held sway in Korea, each influenced the beauty and art of Korean dance and music. Whether originally supported by religious institutions or by the former court, whether performed for entertainment or as part of rituals, these classical Korean art forms have come to be seen as cornerstones of Korean faith and identity.

“Korean classical dance” – it is a phrase that conjures images of delicate female dancers poised in elaborate costumes. In truth, it encompasses a vast variety of dances that differ both in context and the manner in which they are performed.

What these dances do have in common, however, is their long tradition and their ties to the spiritual and cultural influences that have shaped Korea. Dances such as the Gyobang evolved within the Korean court while Salpuri and Seungmu are folk dances which can trace their roots to Buddhist rituals and shamanistic rites.

Shamanism in Korea

Shamanism in Korea predates Buddhism and Confucianism. For many centuries, it was the first and central state religion of Korea. Shamans were enlisted by clients to heal the ill, appease spirits and thwart negative forces. They did so through elaborate rites that involved going into a trance, singing and dancing. They would also don deeply symbolic costumes.

These exorcism rites later influenced the development of dances such as Salpuri, which is performed today for entertainment and artistic appreciation. In it, the dancer starts moving to slow-based shinawi music [extensively improvised rhythms using wind and percussion instruments]. He or she then builds up speed, performing in a trance-like state; formalised movements expressing the beauty and sadness of human emotion.

Influences from Abroad

Formalised movements are also found in the traditional dances based on Buddhist rituals, such as the Seungmu. Like Confucianism, Buddhism was introduced to Korea from China.

Seungmu originated as a ritual dance performed in Buddhist temples and then evolved into a dance for the stage. Thus, the costume the dancer dons for the dance is still reminiscent of a monk's robe, laden with religious symbolism. Seungmu is remarkable for its aesthetic beauty; inherent in the dancer's long flowing sleeves, the serenity of her white costume, and her soul-stirring movement.

On the other hand, classical Korean court dances such as the Gyobang evolved fully within traditional Korean culture with no influence from abroad. Performed by ki-saeng, or

courtesans, the dance features a solo dancer teasing the audience with swirling movements and colourful glimpses of her multi-layered skirts.

The Harmonisation of Belief

In many classical Korean dance forms, the relationship between dance and music, between dancer and musician, is particularly significant.

After all, classical Korean musicians occupy a place of honour on stage that is equal to that of the dancer. Frequently, these musicians perform highly stylised movements themselves while dancers play musical instruments.

The music they play, much like the dances, can be divided into two main groups of court music and folk music. Through the years, classical Korean music has always played a central role within religious rituals and ceremonies of the court.

In Uisig: Spirit Of Dance, acclaimed Korean dancer Park Kyung Rang and the Deuneum Ensemble will perform a trio of classical Korean dances and two musical pieces that are linked to occasions of blessing and celebration. Central to the performance are traditional instruments such as the janggu (an hourglass-shaped drum), piri (a cylindrical double-reed pipe) and haegeum (a string instrument resembling a fiddle).

Performers

Dancer:	Park Kyung Rang
Leader of Deuneum:	Park Jon Ho
Janggu:	Park Chong Hun
Piri:	Lee Jae Hyuk
Haegeum:	Won Na Kyung
Dae-geum:	Jeong Kwang Yoon
A-jeang:	Cho Soung Jae
Stage Manager:	Lee Jong Jin
Stage hand:	Yoon Jong Whan
Producer:	Kim Shinah