

## **Nation Building of Folk Dance Festivals and Competitions : The Cases of Israel and South Korea**

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The article has examined the nation building of folk dance and pondered upon the format of folk dance festival/competition as a way to construct national identity, with the cases of Israel and Korea. Given the apparent effort to excavate and construct folk dance for newly formed nation-states, I analyzed the representative platforms for folk dance in both countries: the Dalia Festival in Israel and *Jeongukminsokyesulkyeongyeondaehui* in South Korea. Examining the origin and operation of these platforms in each country's sociocultural context, I argue that folklore is it reflects the society's desire for folklore in nation building. The comparison between Israel and Korea in the way folk dance is represented reveals that it is not the format itself but the desire beneath the festival or the competition that defines and shapes what folk dance is.

Keywords: folk dance, festival, competition, nation building, Dalia Festival

### **Introduction**

As an embodied practice, folk dance is a powerful means of building a collective identity. Happily dancing together in colorful ethnic costumes, folk dancers create the image of a united and prosperous community. While viewed as being originated in its indigenous culture and transmitted by its members, folk dance is more often than not intentionally re-invented for the purpose of building communality.

This study approaches folk dance as a means of nation building and examines the role of folklore/folk dance festivals and competitions in constructing folk dances. Nation building is a

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term used by anthropologist Robert J. Foster referring to “the self-conscious production and dissemination of national consciousness and sentiment—of a felt sense of national identity” (Foster, 2000, p.3). The premise of this statement is that the nation is an imaginative construct. From this constructivist viewpoint, the discourse of folk dance can provide diverse issues to discuss in terms of building the nationhood.

To discuss folk dance as a means of nation building, this study compares the cases of Israel and South Korea. As newly established nation-states, Israel and South Korea have much in common with each other. Both countries underwent the colonial era before being established as modern states in 1948 after the World War II. Much needing cultural symbols to solidify its people, folklore, including folk dance, was actively sought after for nation building. Folk dance is important to physicalize and embody the nation identity that has undergone the harsh political suffering and abrupt modernization. Both countries had various initiatives to excavate, revise, and present folk dances and render them as cultural practices, national properties, and tourism goods.

Yet, the way that folk performances, including folk dances, were excavated and re-presented to its people differed in both countries. The most representative platform to present folk dance in Israel was Dalia Festival (1944-1968), while that in Korea was *Jeongukminsokyesulkyeongyeondaehui* [national folklore art competition](1958- ). Festivals and competitions are not just platforms to discover and present folk dance, but institutions that shapes what is presented. Especially considering that competitions are regarded incompatible with folklore, one wonders how the platform functions in each country and what are the consequences of the choice. Considering that both countries share with each other a similar social context as a newly independent nation-state that needed folk tradition to anchor upon, the differing choice of the platform for creating and presenting folk dance is intriguing. Thus, this study aims to trace how institutional platforms of festivals and competitions functioned to shape the discourse of folk dance in each country.

Moreover, this comparison inevitably involves the evaluation of the platform itself, asking what format is more suitable for presenting folk dance. This question is crucial to the case of Korea, as *Jeongukminsokyesulkyeongyeondaehui* was transformed to a festival in 1999 in response to the continuous criticism on its competition format (Lim Jae-hae, 1996; Shin Eun-Hee, 1998). However, the format of the festival cannot be assumed to be ideal for presenting folk dance, either. We can say neither that the Israeli way of folk festivals has no conflict in presenting folk dance, nor that the change into the festival automatically solves the problems intrinsic to folklore in Korea. Thus, examining the Israeli case can offer a balanced and nuanced scope that either support or undermine the discourse of folklore in Korea.

Moreover, another purpose of this study is to introduce Israeli dance scene, in general, and

the context of its folk dance, in particular, to Korean dance scholarship. Israeli dance is quite influential to Korean dance field, as the world-renowned Israeli dance troupes and their choreographers, such as Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company (Rami Be'er), Jerusalem Vertigo Dance Company (Noa Wertheim and Adi Sha'al), Yasmeen Godder Dance Company (Yasmeen Godder), Batsheva Dance Company (Ohad Naharin), Inbal Pinto & Avshalom Pollak Dance Company (Inbal Pinto and Avshalom Pollak), frequently visit Korea. Also, *Mayim, Mayim*, a Israeli folk dance is frequently featured in physical education textbooks as an example of foreign folk dancing according to the National Curriculum of Korea. Compared to this presence, little is known on Israeli dance in Korea. In fact, the social presence of dance, especially folk dance, in Israel is remarkable. Dance scholar Florence Freehof titled her book "Jews are a dancing people", while dance researcher Dina Roginsky emphasizes the centrality of folk dance in Israel while saying that, "In Israel you cannot avoid Israeli folk dancing activities" (Freehof, 1954; Roginsky, 2011: 316). Thus, this study can provide understanding of Israeli dance scene.

This study is a textual analysis, analyzing the first and second documents on Israeli and Korean folk dance scenes. Given the scant literature on Israeli dance in Korea, source materials are quite limited. Thus, internet materials and websites were used to supplement the argument.

The significant of this study lies in that it sheds light on the social platforms as festivals and competitions on which folk dance is presented, shaped, and consumed. Against the essentialist approach that views folk dance as an integral entity, it views folk dance as a social construct that is created via social drive and desires. With the comparison of two countries, it aims to suggest that nation building via folk dance is a practice that is highly specific and contingent.

## **Folk dance in the Modern World**

The concept of "Volk(folk)" was first conceptualized by the German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder in the middle of the 18th century. Herder conceptualized "folk" as the natural, uncorrupted safe keeper of the nation's authenticity and soul (Friedland 1998: 29). As a container for the way of life, folklore has been perceived as an integral part of the people's lives in a regions that are populated by long-term residents. In pre-modern times, these groups were viewed as a unit that shared a common history, distinct geographical boundaries, and a shared culture including a common language, religion, rites, rituals and festivals. Among the various aspects of folklore that characterize a group, folk dance is a formidable practice embodying the group's identity and coherence.

In a modern, metropolitan, and industrialized world, however, folk dance has lost most of its

traditional features and characteristics, and been revised or appropriated as physical spectacles. Extracted from regional identity, folk dance displays and validates the cultural identities of national, ethnic, or religious groups of people. A particular folk dance form is not only conducted by its indigenous group of people in their communal events, but also on stages, in classrooms, and in the streets performed by professionals or amateurs all over the world. Regarding this heterogeneous existences of folk dance, ethnomusicologist Felix Hoerberger proposed to distinguish its “first existence” and “second existence.” If the former refers to dances that is an integral part of a community, the latter refers to the reinvented forms of the former (Hoergerber, 1968). The distinction indicates the inevitability of the change in the way folk dance inhabits, especially in the modern, deterritorialized world.

The danger of losing the first existence of folk dance drew attention in excavating and preserving the dances before completely losing it. This is aligned with what anthropologist James Clifford refers to as “salvage paradigm (Clifford, 1989).” Discussing the Western practices of “art-and culture-collecting,” Clifford argues that the West subjugated the “savages” while rescuing their artifacts and tribal cultures. While Clifford’s critique targets the duality and hypocrisy of anthropology, the same concept can be applied to the modern society’s nostalgic attitude toward, and distancing from, its own tradition and its communal, pre-modern lifestyle.

While the first existence of folk dance has become the object of preservation and nostalgia, the second existence of folk dance has been generally negated in terms of authenticity and commercialization. Above all, the concept of “fakelore” that Richard Dorson suggests referring the artificial creation of folklore for public edification obviously reveals the critical attitude toward the invention of tradition (Dorson, 1976).

However, more and more scholars began to pay attention to this “fakelore” phenomenon, drawing more dynamic and even positive meanings from it. This discursive turn has to do with the critical discourse of history and tradition, particularly represented by Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagination (1983)” and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s concept of “invention (1983).” Both terms argue that an ethnic group is not born but socially constructed, and that many of the traditions which we think of as very ancient in their origins are comparatively recently invented. The modern nation-statehood depends on the ideal of unitary identity, particularly on ethnic identity. Yet, as Robert J. Foster argues, the job of naturalizing connections between culture (nationality), people (nationals), and place (territory) is more and more considered unnatural than usual (Foster, 2000, p.2). Due to this shift in the view of the nation-state, the discussion has shifted from the essence of the nationhood to the processes and means by which people create and circulate certain images and ideals.

The view of the nation as an imaginative construct has tremendously shifted the discourse of folklore, from which folk dance is not an exception. If the “second existence” of folk dance was formerly regarded unauthentic, it has now been interpreted as an active arena of nation building. Considering that dance is physical and embodied practice that is also ephemeral and intangible, the issue of fixing, representing, and literally building communal identity via folk dance has become crucial. Notably, dance scholar Anthony Shay suggests the concept of “parallel traditions” that acknowledged layered existence of folk dances, such as dance in the field, and those performed by the professional folk dance ensembles and immigrant communities (Shay, 2002). Moreover, with the rapid growth of cultural tourism and heritage tourism all over the world in recent years, folk dances are reconceptualized as lucrative commodities in the global tourism market.

The current discourse of folk dance has also shifted from a dance’s authenticity to its function in nation building, especially in formerly colonial states or modern states that comprised of heterogeneous agents. However, the job of nation building via folk dance is neither simple nor perfect. In fact, nation is an “imaginative construct that constitutes persons as legitimate subjects of and in a territorial states (Foster, 2000, p.5).” Nation building occurs not only in metaphysical realms, but also in the realms of materials and commodities. In other words, the nation is never singular, and therefore, folk dance that is selected, revised, and represented can never completely signify the nationhood. This is why Elke Kaschl refers to folk dance as “a performance of nationalism (Kaschl, 2003, p. 14)”, as it implies the continuous practices of effort and struggle rather than a product or outcome. According to Kaschl, a locally derived tradition is translated into Western concepts and introduced as ‘folk dance’ into the global discourse of nationalism, which sometimes causes intricate problems of cultural appropriation and ownership between neighboring countries. In this procedure, heterogeneous agents and agencies are involved with plural intentions and desires. Via public displays and performances, folk dances invent and physicalize shared traditions and identities and render particular aesthetics, ethics, gender roles, and social hierarchies inherent to its community. Thus, the re-invention of folk dances is highly selective and political, which is influenced by the ideological agendas of political elites guiding the very re-invention (Rowe, 2011) This invites us to view folk dance as a fierce battlefield of hegemony, instead of treating it as a euphoric heritage that is undoubtedly primordial and linearly transmitted from a generation to the next generation.

## The Platforms for Folk Dances in Israel and Korea

### Israel

Israel is a new country declared a state by David Ben-Gurion in May 1948, yet the movement for Jews to gather at Palestine to settle has begun in the 1880s during the British Mandate (1917-1948). Jewish communities in the Diaspora are generally categorized into three, the *Mizrahim* (Arab and Persian), the *Sephardim* (Spain), and the *Ashkenazim* (Catholic, Western Europe). Constituted of Jews from various cultural background, the newcomers, who called themselves the *Yishuv*, was more secular and idealistic than those who were heavily influenced by the Judaism. Reviving Hebrew as a daily language, creating kibbutzim and agricultural lifestyle, their romantic vision fostered the creation of folk dance movement in *Eretz Yisrael*, which literally means the Land of Israel.

Immigration to Israel is seen by Zionist ideology as “going up,” while the newcomers are considered “those who ascend.” Ayalah Goren-Kadman (2009) contends that this same perception places the indigenous Israeli cultural creation at the center of the cultural endeavor at the expense of acknowledging imported cultures from neighboring countries. It resulted in that, despite the fact that Israel is a land of immigrants, there formed a negative attitude toward cultures imported by the Jews from their native lands in the Diaspora. Jewish diaspora’s immigration into a newly found country causes a huge task of defining the Israeli identity out of these culturally divergent Jewish populations. For this task, Israel people searched for historical precedents and traditions as a basis for building a contemporary collective identity. Nicholas Rowe argues that it was a particular urgency amongst those who have experienced collective traumas such as war, exile, colonization, or other political and natural disasters. Dislocated and threatened by those for a long, especially right after the massive massacre of the Holocaust, they excavated, revived, and even created elements of the distant cultural paste as a shared tradition on which they can build cultural bonds and networks again (Rowe, 2011). Thus, Zionist movement in Israel sought ancient Hebrew culture to define their communal identity while distancing from the heterogeneity caused by the Diaspora. Hebrew dance, Hebrew song, Hebrew literature and lifestyle was meticulously sought for the building of the new identity of Israel. For this goal, dance also inevitably contributed to this overarching social drive for nation building.

Then, in what context did dance engage with the project of nation building? Nina Spiegel (2013) argues that embodied public culture in the form of dances, parades, festivals, and social gatherings are important in forming a political state. Viewing that culture is intentionally and distinctively physical, she identifies four major events that shaped the Hebrew national public

culture: 1) beauty contests for Queen Esther in Tel Aviv (1926-1929); 2) the first Maccabiah Game or “Jewish Olympics” in Tel Aviv (1932); 3) the National Dance Competition for theatrical dance in Tel Aviv (1937); and 4) the Dalia Folk Dance Festival at Kibbutz Dalia (1944 and 1947). Among these, I focus only the latter two, and examine how folk dance festival contributed to the nation building in Israel.

The most representative characteristics of Israeli culture might be kibbutzim. Against the long history of diaspora all over the world, the *Yishuv* reclaimed territory, on which kibbutz help to connect people with nature. Aaron David Gordon, who established the first kibbutzim in 1911 claimed that people must be at one with nature. The idealistic views of nature and of the agricultural, communal life in it was expressed via various agricultural festivals. Whereas the traditional Jewish rituals and Passovers were heavily religious events usually filled with *Haggadah* reading, new festivals were more communal and lively. Although dance has been integral to the life in individual kibbutz, transforming dance from the regional/communal level to the national level can be traced to a few seminal festivals and competitions in the 1930s and 1940s.

First of all, the earliest dance competition can be identified as the National Dance Competition held in Oct. 20th, 1937. Held at Mugrabi Hall, a well-known theater and cinema in Tel Aviv. The competition drew leading professional dancers and students under the banner of “discover[ing] *davca*, the Hebrew, *Eretz Israeli* dance” while each participant was to represent “original *Eretz Yisraeli* dance” (Spiegel, 2011, p. 71). This indicates that the competition is a strategy to clarify its whole new Israeli identity amongst the confusing mixture of Middle Eastern, European, Arab and Jewish identities. Therefore, the participants’ performances were judged upon the criteria of authenticity, no matter how the concept itself is precarious.

However, the competition was not a folk dance competition *per se*; rather, it was specifically designed to “foster professional dance on proscenium stage, and performed by professional dancers” (Spiegel, 2011, p.72). In other words, it aestheticized folk/ethnic dance. Here the dichotomy of low culture and high culture operates. Considering that Middle Eastern and Arab cultural artifacts were considered folksy, low art, and Western European ones were viewed high arts. This is the reason why the first prize went to Yardena Cohen, a dance trained in German expressionism dance, *Ausdrucksanz*, who was exclaimed to make a balance between the dichotomy. Yet, the hierarchical dichotomy is not as simple as it might appear, because the seemingly inferior elements are also those that can endow historical authenticity and legitimacy. Spiegel indicates that “whereas the high culture was valued, the low culture was interpreted as being genuine and in this way desired”(Spiegel, 2011, p. 84). Middle Eastern and Arab identities and their folk culture in general were used to authenticate their artistic explorations.

Intriguingly, the participants were judged not by critics but by the audience vote. Considering that this voting conflicts with the art-oriented approach, it can be explained that the underlying ideology for this event was a socialist-Zionist ideology. Pursuing to create a Jewish homeland in the Land of Israel, they also sought for the socialist equality. Yet, Spiegel (2011) points out that the democratic idea of audience vote is already incongruent with the socialist equality, which can be further conflicting with the format of competition and the pursuit of art dance.

Another major event that shaped the Israeli folk dance is the Dalia (Daliyyah) Festival that lasted between 1944 and 1968. Dalia Festival at Kibbutz Dalia is a historic folk dance festival, marking the beginning of the Israeli folk dance movement. The First Dalia Festival was organized by Gert Kaufman in 1944, an enthusiastic dance teacher and writer, and attended by a huge numbers of the people. Although there had existed dances created for celebrations in kibbutz before, this festival in 1944 was unique in that it expanded the scale into nation-state, and named it as “folk dance.” Since newly created repertoire was scant, less than ten, several types of dance were performed including:

- 1) Folk dances from other countries, popular among the *Eretz Yisraeli* Jewish population;
- 2) Newly invented “Israel folk dance”;
- 3) Traditional dances typical of the Yemenite Jewish community and the Eastern European Jewish community (Roginsky, 2011, p.316)

Based on it, folk dance became a national project, fostered and managed by national authorities for the sake of the nation building. Although the festival was held right before the World War II, its huge success lead to the establishment of the Folk Dance Section in 1952, only four years after the inauguration of the new country.

Dalia Festival was not an annual event; with the first festival in 1944, the second festival was held in 1947. The next two festivals in 1958 and 1968, which were the 10<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the country, respectively, was directed by Kibbutz theatre director Shulamit Bat-Dori. Despite the irregular occurrence, the festival drew a huge number of participant/spectators, leaving a great influence on Israeli folk dance. The second festival was held in the natural amphitheater with several hundred dancers participated, while the 1958 festival featuring 1,500 dancers and the 1968 festival featuring 3,000 dancers attracted thousands of audience members from all over the world (www.wikipedia).

Besides the Dalia Festival, a number of festivals devoted solely to ethnic dance were organized from the 1960s onward. With the encouragement of the Project for the Preservation and Fostering



of Ethnic Dance, and in conjunction with the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Tourism, folk dance festivals presented various ethnic troupes in various cities in Israel (Goren-Kadman, 2009). Judith Brin Ingber points out that national festivals in Israel were organized not by nation-state governments but by quasi-governmental institution, due to its history under the rule of the Ottoman Turks and the British Mandate. Rather, organizations such as the Teachers Council for the Jewish National Fund played a significant role in organizing festivals. Folk dances in those festivals were created by professional dancers who were trained in European concert dance forms.

Also, the Project for the Preservation and Fostering of Ethnic Dance was inaugurated by Gurit Kadman in 1971 as part of the Center for Culture and Education of the Histadrut Labor Federation. The Project's goal was to preserve and nurture ethnic communities' heritage via festivals and ceremonies, for which it encouraged the formation of performing ensembles of the various ethnic groups within Israel. The Project also organized courses for folk dance teachers and trained them as researchers who can collect data in the field. This continuous effort made folk dance to become an integral part of regional, national and international gatherings and festivals in Israel and abroad.

From the Dalia Festival, there established the Inter-Kibbutzim Committee for Israeli Folk dances in 1948, which became the Folk Dance Section in 1952. The role of the Folk Dance Section can be summarized as popularizing folk dance in the daily lives of Israeli people in various sectors, controlling and regulation the features of Israel folk dance, and fostering the folk dance choreographers. Dina Roginsky identified *Hora* and *Mayim, Mayim* as folk dances of the 1920s and the 1930s, respectively. But, since then the number of Israeli folk dance dramatically increased to the extent that there exist more than 6,000 folk dances (Roginsky, 2011). As the realm of Israeli folk dance has been very much lively, dramatic, and constantly evolving, the shape and focus of dance has also evolved over time. In fact, a small number of folk dance choreographers were put forward and celebrated as the pioneers, including Gurit Kadman, Rivka Sturman, Tirza Hodes. The apparent creation via festivals and competition, and the institutionalized fostering of choreographers indicates that Israeli folk dance operates in the paradigm of art dance, rather than that of folk dance.

*Hora* and *Mayim, Mayim* are the most representative, and relatively old folk dances in Israel. However, both dances are stepping aside the stereotypes of folk dance. *Hora* is a collective robust folk dance originated in Eastern Europe and highly popular among Jewish immigrants, danced at Jewish weddings and social gatherings. Although it is a foreign dance, it has become the most integral part of their lives, much closer than any other form of dances.

Meanwhile, *Mayim, Mayim* is a dance emerged in the 1930s. Illustrating the movement of

drawing water from a well, this simple round dance expresses the joy in finding water that revives the desert. It was first introduced to the national level at a water festival at Kibbutz Na'an, 1944, and enthusiastically received and dispersed to all over the country in Israel especially with its presentation at the first Dalia Festival. Although it is highly regarded as "a real Kibbutz creation of the new Jewish Palestine" (Kaufmann, 1946), and although it is generally considered anonymous folk dance, it is a dance created by choreographer Elsa I. Dublon. Ingber argues that the dance became intentionally anonymous in order to "legitimize it in the eyes of foreign folk dancers" (Ingber, 2011, p.110). This shows that the dance's intended anonymity might contributed the constructed authority and authenticity amongst thousands of newly created folk dances in Israel.

What these Israeli folk dances aim to represent as the identity of Israel? Spiegel (2011) argues that Israeli folk dance reflects the larger schemes of building coherence among Jews from diverse cultural background and differentiating their new country both from Europe and the Middle East. Also, against the old prejudice on Jews being "people of the book," the new country promotes the *Eretz Yisraeli* as being young, positive, athletic, fit, corporeal and communal people living in a simple and idealistic way.

Despite the nationalist aspiration, however, Israeli folk dance is highly interconnected with the diverse cultures in Europe, Middle East, and Arab. Besides *Hora* that is the most popular dance in Israel with foreign origin, a case in point is the distinction between *dabkeh* and *debkah*. *Dabkeh* is an Arab village folk dance event found in weddings and social gatherings around the Levant, while *debkah* is a created Israeli folk dance that Zionist leaders made after *dabkeh*. Modeled after *dabkeh*, *debkah* became one of the representative folk dance in Israel and means of national identification for Israeli Jewish citizens in the newly founded state. As Elke Kaschl argues, *dabkeh* and *debkah* are interconnected, although they are often regarded as having unbridgeable differences from each other (Kaschl, 2003). Nicholas Rowe also argues that the rural folk dance *dabkeh* found within Palestine/Israel area has been appropriated and reinvented by Zionism, pan-Arabism, and Palestinian communities as a tradition in order to construct their respective identities (Rowe, 2011).

What needs to be mentioned is that the folk dance field in Israel has undergone a large change since the 1990s. According to the statistics done by Dina Roginsky, the total number of the folk dance was rapidly increased from 1 in 1920s to 4,678 in 2005 [Table 1].

Table 1. Change in Number of Israeli Folk Dances (Roginsky, 2009, p. 319)

Decade	1920s	1930s	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000-2005	Total
Number of Dances	1 ( <i>Hora Agadati</i> )	1 ( <i>Mayim, Mayim</i> )	73	133	185	460	940	1,672	1,213	4,678

Also, she points out that the fundamental formats of Israeli folk dance has shifted from circle dance to line dance, symbolizing the shifted emphasis from communal collective to individualism and solo virtuosity. Roginsky attributes the rapid growth and the formal change to the gradual diminishment of the authority of the Folk Dance Section since the 1980s. However, the rapid growth of number of folk dance repertoires and the formal changes to show off individual technique indicates that the Israeli folk dance has gradually changed into a participatory practice to a presentation.

### South Korea

Perhaps it seems more radical to say that folk dance is invented in modern nation-states in South Korea than in Israel. Unlike Israel which has no territorial anchorage for its nation until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Korea has relatively stable lineage of culture, despite the harsh Japanese Colonial Occupation and the rapid modernization during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although some of indigenous dance forms and documents have been transmitted, much of folk dance repertoires that are known today, including *ganggangsullae*, *talchum*, or *buchaechum*, are modern inventions that are revised and re-interpreted according to the discourse of nation building against the flux of Westernization, modernization, and political sovereignty. Discussing the modernization and aestheticization, we must mention the effort of individual pioneers such as Seong-Jun Han who made a huge influence in translating folk songs and dances into Western concept of art. However, in this chapter, I will confine my discussion to the emergence and functions of the social platform that became the hub of folklore performance today.

In South Korea, many folk festivals had emerged during the period of 50 to 80 years as the government of the Republic of Korea was established after the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945). Thus, the main goal of these festivals was to establish national legitimacy and promote national culture. However, folk festivals are traced back to the Occupation era. The fact that the Japanese colonial administration supported and even encouraged Korean folklore suddenly adds complex

layers to the discourse of folklore in Korea. According to Keun-Woo Nam (2009), a few folk festivals existed in the 1930s. For instance, *Joseonhyangtomuyongminyodaehui* [Joseon Folk Dance and Song Competition] was hosted by *Joseonminsokhakhui* [Joseon Folklore Association] in May, 1937. Despite the title of “competition,” it only presented *Bongsantalchum* [Bongsan mask dance], which the Japanese government acknowledged as a “superior recreation” for the colonized people’s condolence and edification. The approval and support of the colonial power in the production and consumption of folk practices indicates that the effort of reviving and bequeathing folk tradition is highly political, despite of disparate subjects and contexts involved with. Since the success of this first event, a few competitions ensued in the Colonial era. Two major newspaper companies at the time, *Joseon Ilbo* and *Donga Ilbo*, hosted folk art competitions in 1938 and 1939, respectively. These competitions were entitled as “competitions”, despite the fact that it was closer to a simple presentation of a particular folk performance rather than a proper competition between multiple participants.

The predominance of competitions over festivals continued after the Liberation in 1945. The most representative folklore competition is *Jeongukminsokyesulkyeongyeondaehui* [national folk art competition], which began in 1958 as part of the 10th anniversary celebration of the government. Presenting its 58<sup>th</sup> event in this year, it has excavated more than 400 folk performances, among which 36 were designated as National Intangible Cultural Assets and 103 as Intangible Cultural Assets of municipal and provincial governments.

Since 1999, the title of the event was changed into *Hangukminsokyesulchukje* [Korea Folk Art Festival], reflecting the critique of the overheated competition between regions. Despite the change in the title from competition to festival, the format of competition continued, forming a double structure of “competition as festival.” The competition was categorized into the fields of *nongak* [farm music], folk drama, folk play, folk dance, and folk song. In the early days, mask plays played a larger role, but the proportion of folk plays and folk songs increased. As a result of the new folk arts being excavated every time, the scale of the contest as well as the elements of creation continued to increase.

The consequence of “folk art competition” is much discussed by scholars, which Kim Ki-Hyung (2009) summarizes as follows: In a positive perspective, 1) the discovery, preservation and succession of the disappearing folklore contributes to the development of national culture, 2) the representative folklore of the whole country can be seen in one place, and 3) regional residents’ community and self-esteem consciousness are strengthened. In a negative perspective, 1) it distorts the original appearance of folklore and transforms it into a “fakelore,” 2) excessive competition deters the true meaning of festival, and 3) general public is marginalized from the

event, instead of becoming the active subject.

The format of competition inevitably results in what can be called “aestheticization of folklore” (Nam, 2009). The competition endows the Presidential Prize and the Prime Minister Prize, which are the two highest governmental prizes in Korea. When awarded, local folklore suddenly becomes a national treasure, widely recognized and celebrated in public domain. Moreover, since the enactment of the Cultural Properties Protection Act in 1962, the number of events awarded by this particular competition has been designated as an Intangible Cultural Asset, which has also contributed to the overheated competition. The cases of *Hahoemyulsingut* [Hahoe Village Ritual] and *Bongsantalchum* [Bongsan Mask Dance] illustrate the impact of the competition. As the recipients of the Presidential Prize at the first and second year, respectively, *Hahoemyulsingut* and *Bongsantalchum* became known nationwide, and registered as Intangible Cultural Assets. The cultural prestige and dignity given to local folklore, in addition to administrative support and financial subsidies, arouses excessive competition amongst participating teams from all around the country.

Despite the celebratory and beneficent attitude of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism that supports the event, the artificiality and excessive fabrication of folklore urged scholars to fundamentally scrutinize the identity and purpose of *Hangukminsokyesulchukje*. Among others, Lim Jae-hae (1996) is very critical of the format of “folk art competition” in the first place, while asking whether “folk art” and/or “folk” can be the realm of competition, whether competition can be aligned with the nature of folklore, whether the competition fulfills the alleged function of finding, preserving, and transmitting folk materials, and whether the judgement of competition is fairly and properly done. From the perspective of functionalism, Lim denies the premise of folk competition, in the belief that folklore has whatsoever meaning only *in situ*. Also, from the perspective of cultural relativism, he also argues that culture cannot be compared and hierarchized. Acknowledging his idealistic and purist view of culture and witnessing the proliferation of the folk competition, he manages to accept the possibility of folk art competition in a sense that artistic accomplishment based on folklore can be evaluated and hierarchized.

Yet, as many scholars point out, the competition of *Hangukminsokyesulchukje* is not confined to “folk art” but expanded to the larger realm of folklore such as mass play, planting rice sprout, and tug-of-war. Even more, lifestyle or labor is transformed into “folk”, becoming objet of spectacle. For instance, among the participants at the competition in 2017, Jeju island team presented *Sotgupneun Yeoksi* [the work of making pots], which performers literally cast pots in 30 minutes. Most of the works presented were agrarian-themed, including labor songs or instruments, having recourse to the pre-modern image of agrarian society. Here, rural lifestyle

is rendered art, spectacle, regional goods, and national cultural property that can be itemized, judged, and commercialized.

## **Discussion**

Focusing on folk dance as a means of nation building, this study compared the cases of Israel and South Korea. I particularly focused on the fact that institutionalized platforms, such as festivals and competitions, played a crucial role in identifying, re-inventing, and re-presenting indigenous practices into national symbols. Examining the emergence of folk dance scene in both countries, the previous chapter discussed that folk dance in Israel centers around festivals while that in Korea centers around competitions. Witnessing the disparate choices in the way of presenting folk dance in each country, this chapter will discuss the influence of festivals and competitions in the discourse of folk dance.

First of all, we can summarize the issues into two questions: 1) What are the characteristics of festivals and competitions when it comes to folk dance as nation building? 2) Can we make a hierarchical evaluation between the two formats, and consider one as the alternative to the other?

In Israel, the format of festivals has been dominant, since the participation of everyone in song and dance was important in building a new Jewish identity. Making distinctions from traditional and conservative Jews of Judaism, the socialist Zionist Jews emphasized the corporeal, muscular, agrarian, and festive mode of lifestyle. In fact, kibbutzim are the perfect backdrop for folk dance, as it celebrated rural and communal life of peasants with diverse activities of songs, dances, and spectacles within each kibbutz. (Spiegel, 2013). This festive and participatory mode of corporeal occupation of the land is still dominant in Israel.

Meanwhile, in Korea the concept of folklore was specifically uttered as “folk art” in the competition format. Considering that the term “folk” and the term “art” are usually binary concepts, the term “folk art” indicates the desire of dignifying and “aestheticizing” folklore that has been neglected during the colonial era and the rapid change of modernization, Westernization, and industrialization. The “folk art competition” was a strategy for excavating high-quality folk repertoires and quickly transforming them into national properties. Yet, it is also harshly criticized by folklore scholars for producing “fakelores” that are specifically tailored for the competition criteria. The format of competition, with its heavy material and non-material rewards, caused many problems, such as fairness in evaluation, power imbalance, and overheated competition. Scholars indicates that these are not the fault of some people, but the structural issue of the proposition that folklores are evaluated and hierarchized (Lim, 1996). Considering that most of awarded works

at the folk competition are large-scale and spectacular, the format of competition shapes what kind of folk performance is possible in the first place. Thus, the format of festivals was suggested as an alternative to competitions, alleviating the side effects of competitions. This is why the competition was changed into the festival, although the competition itself is maintained within the framework of the festival. Then, is the festival more suitable and desirable for presenting folk dance than competition in general?

This question becomes complex, given that Karmiel Festival, the successor of Dalia Festival in Israel, has vastly shifted from the Kibbutz-centered festivals. Presenting hundreds of dancers from all over the world, it features various dance genres including folk dance, contemporary dance, flamenco, and popular dances. Here the ideal of Kibbutzim was replaced by the metropolitan sentiment of World Fair. Also, Karmiel Festival incorporates two major dance competitions within it. These are Asheri Hever Folk Dance Competition and Eyalben Yehoshua Choreography Competition, both of which are named after famous choreographer/dancers in the genres. According to Ruth Eshel who saw the event in 2009, the two competitions drew more and more attention as being moved to larger venues in order to accommodate the increased interest. Observing 12 participating teams to the folk dance competition, however, Eshel complained that the folk dance done here are just “a mix of different compositions of the same familiar folk dancing lexicon of movement, only becoming more complex as “the requirements of the state for frontal observation” (Eshel, 2009). From this critique, we can see that folk dance in Israel became more observational than participatory practices.

Despite this blurring between Israeli mode of festivals and Korean mode of competitions, I can discern subtle differences between two countries. In Eshel’s criticism, she identified the roles of the choreographer, the musician, and the costume designer for each participating work. Here, folk dance is apparently viewed as a “creative realm.” However, visiting the homepage of the Korean Folk Art Festival (<http://www.kfaf.or.kr/2017>), the participating works selected from regional leagues are suggested as something indigenous and historical, while excluding the process of re-invention by contemporary individuals. Here, the competition becomes a match for regional pride, eliminating individuals’ creative rendering. Moreover, due to the competition’s close tie with the Cultural Properties system, the competition becomes politically and economically influential to the prosperity of the region.

Then, does the shift from the competition to the festival alleviate these conflicts? The shift was realized on the level of governmental subsidy. Participating works at *Hangukminsokyesulchukje* are selected through a regional festival. Thus, regional festivals become the preliminary rounds of the national competition. With the general shift from competition to festival, regional

governments gradually reduced the disparity between the prize money and even eliminated the prize money and replaced the equal amount of compensation fee for each participating organization. Analyzing a regional festival, Park Mi-Hyun (2009) estimates that an average of 60 people practicing a work for 1 ~ 2 months, making small props, and participating in one or two nights at the festival, which cost about KRW 30 million. However, the participation fee of KRW 1 million is insufficient to compensate even the bus rental fee to the festival venue, not to mention of the whole cost, failing to stimulate the residents to be passionate about the experience. Park argues that, if the highly graded prizes caused an overheated competition in the earlier competitions, the egalitarian and idealistic approach burdens and discourages local participants.

It should be fundamentally reconsidered whether the competition/festival fulfill its initial goal of excavating, preserving, and transmitting the archetype of folklore. For this goal, the competition set the criteria as 1) tradition and authenticity, 2) artistry, performance, and contribution to culture 3) residents' participation and the audience response, and 4) etc. (Kim, 2009, pp.30-33.). However, scholars indicates that the tradition and authenticity cannot be easily judged on site when the work curtailed into a 30-minute performance is presented in the stadium (Lim, 1996; Kim, 2009). If the first criteria becomes bracketed, the rest of the criteria are geared toward more performativity and creativity, as seen in the confession of a producer interviewed in Kim (2009) who produces the work according to the taste of the jury each year and includes dynamic movement and the climax. Lim (1996) even argues that the goal of excavating and preserving the archetype of folklore can be better done with ethnographic/folkloric fieldwork rather than this artificial performance *ex situ* at an empty stadium.

In sum, the platform of festivals and competitions seems blurred in Israel and Korea. Yet, their attitudes toward the event is still distinguishable from each other, as the utmost goal of the events differs. I would argue that the distinction between the cases of Israel and Korea alludes the Elin Diamond's concept of performance as simultaneously a "doing" and a "thing done" (Diamond, 1996). Performance as a doing as well as a thing done acknowledges that performance is not just an embodied act which takes place in a specific time and space, but also the event which is past, finished, completed (Kaschl, pp.11-13). Unlike the festive mode of Israel, the competition in Korea is closely tied with the Cultural Asset system that immediately renders folklore a property to which dignity, heritage, and authority can be attached in the name of the nation-state.



## Conclusion

The article has examined the nation building of folk dance and pondered upon the format of festival/competition as a way to represent folk dance, with the cases of Israel and Korea. Given the apparent effort to excavate and represent folk dance for newly formed nation-states, these two countries seem to acknowledge the invented nature of folk tradition. Yet, the platform through which folk performances, including folk dance, is excavated and performed was different between the two countries, as the representative platform in Israel is the Dalia Festival, while the representative platform in Korea is *Jeongukminsokyeosulkyeongyeondaehui*. Examining the context from which these events emerged and functioned, I argue that it reflects the society's desire for folklore in nation building. However, confronting the fact that Israeli festival's successor Karmiel Festival adopts the format of competition while Korean competition's title was changed to festival, we can discern more blurring of the platform that reflects the cosmopolitan and global aspects of the events. In sum, the comparison between Israel and Korea in the way folk dance is represented reveals that it is not the platform of the festival or the competition but the desire beneath it that defines and shapes the what folk dance is for.

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