

**Behind the Dance Scene:
Rethinking the Power of Taik-won Cho's Dance**

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In my paper, I will address the power relationship between Korean dance, Japanese colonialism, and Western cultural imperialism, all of which are connected to political changes in Korea during the mid-twentieth century. In particular, I will explore how Korean dance managed its situation in the face of the Japanese and Western cultural influences through examining the dance life and work of Taik-won Cho, a remarkable dancer and choreographer who led Korean dance developments during the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945).

I will first examine how, during the Japanese colonial period, Korean dance and culture had been influenced by the socio-political relationship between Western cultural imperialism and Japanese colonialism. Second, I will suggest that, while the influence of colonialism jeopardized the continuity of Korean dance, Taik-won Cho created a new style of dance, *Shinmuyong*, involving particularities of Korean dance by taking advantages of such socio-political power shifts. Last, I will discuss that how he found a new pathway to sustain his artistic passion for dance and crucial contributions on dance in Korea today, through examining his diverse dance activities in Korea and other countries.

My arguments will be developed on the basis of Edward Said's cultural imperialism, and Michel de Certeau's analysis of power relations with a notion of strategies and tactics.

I. Introduction

The history of the early/mid twentieth century Korean society has a critical value as a bridge between the traditional and modern society of Korea. The socio-cultural changes at that time refer to a traumatic circumstance of Korean people under the Japanese colonialism and, at the same time, a groundwork for serving current development of Korean society. At the turn of the century, Korea opened its national door to other countries and accepted foreign influences, especially from Europe and the United States which maintained political and economic hegemony in the world. But, unfortunately, few years later Korea became a colony of Japan from 1910 to 1945 and many aspects of Korean society such as its government, economy and culture were largely changed by the Japanese influence. Then, during 1950 and 1953, Korea had to experience the Korean War. Along with these dynamic historical situations of Korea, dance had to face extreme changes from the traditional dance. Traditional Korean dance was prohibited by the Japanese colonial policy. New harsh changes, inventions and reconstructions resulting from Japanese colonialism were embodied in Korean dance. Despite the strong Japanese colonial domination, there were still many memorable dancers and choreographers. Taik-won Cho was one of the most influential contributors for constructing foundation of current Korean Creative dance.

Taik-won Cho (1907-1976) is a renowned choreographer who created a unique style of Korean dance, called Korean New Dance (*Shinmuyong*). In this historical era, Taik-won Cho's active dance works left a powerful impact on Korea and Japan. He created a lot of outstanding dance pieces within his Korean New Dance genre and his works have been handed down to the present generation. He is a major figure that changed Korean dance into artistically refined theater art by establishing a new style of dance, *Shinmuyong*, extracted from or based on Korean traditional dance.

At this point, it is important to identify the specifically ideological meanings of Taik-won Cho's dance, what his dance implies, and what significations were buried behind the scenes of Taik-won Cho's dance in Korean dance history. In order to get the answers to these research inquiries, first, I will the changes in Korean dance and the highlights of Taik-won Cho's life and dance. Second, I will socio-cultural values and meanings of Taik-won Cho's dance, *Shinmuyong*, in its relations to the historical circumstances in the mid-twentieth century. Last, I will discuss that how he found a new pathway to sustain his artistic passion for dance and crucial contributions on dance in Korea today, through examining his diverse dance activities in Korea and other countries. In addition, this study will also bring an idea about an inter-cultural relationship of cultural ideology and colonial power between the West and Japan and Korea, which were embedded in Korean dance and culture.

II. Taik-won Cho's Life and Dance

In this section I will examine Taik-won Cho's life and dance in detail and also his major dance works in relations to the cultural identity and circumstances of Korean dance in the mid-twentieth century. Taik-won Cho is one of the most outstanding dance masters and choreographers of the modern era. Taik-won Cho may be considered a hero and a pioneer of Korean dance and his works represent the Korean new dance style during the Japanese colonial period.

He was educated in recognized private schools, *Whimoon* high school and *Boseong-jeonmoon* (currently Korea University). In his autobiography *Gasahojeop*, Cho's life and works are specifically reported.¹ Taik-won Cho was born in Hamheung, Hamkyung-do (Northeastern part of Korean peninsula) in 1907 and spent his young life under the Japanese occupation.² After viewing Simon Park (a Korean Russian)'s *Hopak* or *Gopak* dance (a Slavonic folk dance) performance in 1921,³ Cho learned *Hopak* from Simon Park and began to perform this dance as a part of the theater, "Love and Death" by *Towolhoi*, at YMCA stage in 1924.⁴ Since then, he performed this dance several times at diverse cultural venues including YMCA music concerts.⁵

In 1927, Cho became deeply impressed by a dance performance by Baku Ishii⁶ and in 1928, he went to Japan to study modern dance from Baku Ishii. He learned Baku Ishii's dance in Tokyo for about five years from 1928 to 1932.⁷ Baku Ishii was one of the most influential teachers of Cho. As a superior student of Baku Ishii, Cho performed in his dance concerts in Tokyo many times and also at Kyung-sung Civic Center in Seoul in 1929.⁸ After his teacher Baku Ishii died in 1932, Cho came back to Korea and had his own first performance with a partner, Eiko Ishii, Baku Ishii's sister, in Kyung-sung Civic Center in Seoul in 1933.⁹ He presented several creative dances including, "Poem", "Jak-yul", and

¹ Byung-ok Lee, Ae-ryung Moon, Seon-wook Park, Ki-sook Sung, Seong-han Bae, and Hee-young Lim in addition to many other Korean scholars reported and explored his memorable dance works.

² Taik-won Cho, *Gasahojeop*, Seoul; Seomundang, 1973, 13.

³ *Hopak* is an old Russian folk dance from the Ukraine in which the performer wears Russian traditional costume and mid-calf boots; see Kyung-ae Kim, Chae-hyun Kim, and Jong-ho Lee, *Woori Chum 100nyon (Our dance for the Last 100 Years)*, Seoul: Hyunamsa, 2001, 48-49.

⁴ Ki-sook Sung, *Tradition of Korean Traditional Dance and Creative Continuity of Shinmuyong*, Minsokwon, 2007, 174.

⁵ Cho, 1973, 24-25.

⁶ Baku Ishii is a pioneer of Modern dance in Japan. Baku Ishii learned ballet from an Italian ballet master in Japan in the 1910s, and then he learned the Duncan style dance in Europe and was exposed to the New Dances of Isadora Duncan, Emile Jaques Dalcroze and Mary Wigman in the early 1920s.

⁷ Byung-ok Lee, "Taik-won Cho's Dancing Life and Philosophy," in *Hanguk Keundai-chum Inmulsa*, Seoul; Hyundae Mihaksa, 1999, 57.

⁸ Lee, 1999, 56.

⁹ Cho, 1973, 51.

“*Gasahojeop*”. Most of these choreographies were western modern dance except for *Gasahojeop*. This dance performance was successful and brought a sensation at the time.

After his first performance in 1933, Cho continuously choreographed and performed throughout the world, including Korea, Japan, the U.S., and many European countries.¹⁰ In 1937, he went to France to learn and experience diverse dances and artistic world. His first performance in Paris showed his nineteen dance pieces including his masterpieces such as “*Gasahojeop*”, “*Man-jong*”, and “*Poem*” at Musee Guimet National des Arts Asiatiques in April, 1938. His dance, especially *Gasahojeop*, was applauded and appreciated by the audiences in Paris.

In December of the same year, he also performed at Hibiya Civic Center in Tokyo, Japan. In 1939, he returned from Paris and he became the principal teacher at Baku Ishii’s dance academy in Japan.¹¹ After the liberation of Korea in 1945, some people misunderstood and criticized Cho’s dance as a sort of propaganda of the Japanese colonial policy. He decided to leave for the U.S. in 1947. Although he did not live in exile, he did not come back to Korea until the April Revolution in Korea in 1960.¹²

Since then, his second dance life for touring around the world had begun. He spent about 14 years in foreign countries, mainly North America, France, and Japan.¹³ His first performance in the U.S. was held at Wilshire Ebel Theatre, Los Angeles in April 1948. Then, he performed many times in a number of cities in the U.S. In 1948 and 1949, he performed in American Museum of Natural History in New York and several other theaters in New York.¹⁴ Also, he performed in Honolulu and Hilo, Hawaii several times and five times in several different theaters at Northwestern University, in Evanston, Illinois.¹⁵ He taught Korean dances at Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival in 1951.¹⁶ Then, in 1953, he had about 200 performances in France with a support from UNESCO.¹⁷ From 1954 to 1955, he toured around over 60 cities of many European countries such as Belgium, Finland, Sweden, Portugal and France.¹⁸

¹⁰ Lee, 1999, 59-65.

¹¹ Kim and Sung, 2006, 76.

¹² In Korean modern history, there is April revolution or the student revolution of April 19, 1960, also known as “*Sa-il-gu*”. This is a demonstration that students led mass protests against the oppressive and corrupt *Syngman Rhee* government to achieve the democracy.

¹³ Sung, 2007, 188.

¹⁴ Kim and Sung, 2006, 144-146.

¹⁵ Kim and Sung, 2006, 226, 349.

¹⁶ Kim and Sung, 2006, 152.

¹⁷ Kim and Sung, 2006, 224.

¹⁸ Kim and Sung, 2006, 351.

Taik-won Cho spent the last phase of his life for the foundation and development of Korean Creative dance until he died in 1976. In 1969, he established Korean Folk Dance Company (*Hanguk Minsok Muyongdan*) which is the first professional dance company and a prototype of the current Korean National Dance Company.¹⁹ He taught a large number of terrific students and left his brilliant artistic dances such as *Gasahojeop*, *Sinnosimbullo*, *Choon-hyang jun*, *Wharang*, *The Angelus (Man-jong)*, *Hak*, and *Buyouhoisangok*. He also left a lot of written documents including his autobiography, titled *Gasahojeop*, to Moon-sook Kim,²⁰ his widow and a successor of his dances. Taik-won Cho is regarded as a memorable figure that made a great contribution to the foundation and development of Korean Creative Dance.

III. Taik-won Cho's Shinmuyong and Historical Meanings

Taik-won Cho's Shinmuyong

Within Korean dance history, Cho as a choreographer and dancer is the definite representative of *Shinmuyong* (New Dance) of the mid-twentieth century. Literally, “*Shin*” means new or a new style and “*muyong*” means dance. As a new cultural trend in the mid-twentieth century (mainly from 1920s to 1960s), *Shinmuyong* makes reference to a Korean new style of dance, different from Korean traditional dance. *Shinmuyong* came out of the first performance of Baku Ishii in Seoul in 1926.²¹ The creative dance works of Korean dance masters such as Taik-won Cho, Seung-hee Choi, and Gu-ja Bae, situated *Shinmuyong* within Korean dance history as a new style of Korean dance dating from the mid-twentieth century. There is no unified definition of the term, *Shinmuyong* yet. Many scholars continue to redefine *Shinmuyong* differently based on the fact that dance in Korea absorbed many cultural changes at the turn of the century through the importation of foreign dances such as ballet, modern dance, ballroom dance, and other cultural folk dances.²²

¹⁹ Lee, 1999, 66.

²⁰ Moon-sook Kim is a dancer and choreographer who has created several *Shinmuyong* style choreographies in the 1960's and 70's. Since Cho died, Moon-sook Kim has performed *Gasahojeop* at many events of traditional and classical Korean dances. She plays an important role in continuing and succeeding Cho's works and memorializing his contributions to Korean dance.

²¹ In his essay, “The History of *Shinmuyong* for The Last Four Decades,” the Korean scholar Dong-hwa Cho explains the usage of the term *Shinmuyong* (New Dance). Dong-hwa Cho, “The History of *Shinmuyong* for Last Four Decades” in *The History of Korean Theater and Arts*, Seoul: Seongyoung-munhwasa, 1962, 71.

²² In terms of the definition of *Shinmuyong*, many Korean scholars have various opinions. Although most Korean scholars and dancers agree that *Shinmuyong* is a particular type of Korean dance dating from the transitional period of Korea, the definition of *Shinmuyong* is still argued by some historians—Jei-seung Ahn, Dong-hwa Cho, I-mun Kang, Sa-hun Jang, Chae-hyun Kim, and Ki-sook Sung.+ According to Chae-hyun Kim's synthesis of these historians' opinions, *Shinmuyong* refers to a dance form in the modern era, early/mid twentieth century, which includes Western dance; a new-style dance; a creative dance embracing changes of the culture and society; a unique style of Korean creative movements with a theatrical and artistic dance

This study focuses on *Shinmuyong* related to the masterworks of Taik-won Cho. Taik-won Cho tried to create a new style of Korean dance incorporating Korean traditional dance and cultural themes as well as his Japanese Modern dance experience from Baku Ishii. Unlike other dance masters during that period, he emphasized the importance of a choreographic thoughts, intention, and conceptual meaning which his creative work conveys. He asserts that “most dances are supposed to have a thought or philosophy, thus, dance should be referred to as a dancing idea (*Musang*).”²³ He believes that dance should be a creative expression of thoughts or meanings.²⁴ Based on his dancing idea for a creative work, he wanted to establish his own style of creative dance by employing Korean aesthetics and culture. In this sense, his *Shinmuyong* stresses on delivering unique features of Korean culture, which imply traditional theme and aesthetics. His creative idea has been embodied in his masterpieces such as *Gasahojeop*, *Man-jong*, *Sinnosimbullo*, and *Choon-hyang jun*. Among these dances, *Gasahojeop* is the first and most representative Cho’s choreography referring to mid-twentieth Korean *Shinmuyong*.²⁵ This dance as a re-interpretation of a traditional folk dance *Seung-mu* employed traditional Korean theme, costumes, and dance movements referring to unique Korean cultural elements. These particular elements rejuvenated Korean cultural aesthetics and retained traditional heritages under the Japanese colonialism.

Interpretation of Cho’s Shinmuyong

Taik-won Cho’s *Shinmuyong* including *Gasahojeop* is a cultural metaphor reflecting mid-twentieth century Korean history and cultural contexts, because which was originated within a chaotic historical situation, the Japanese occupation from 1910 to 1945. Cho’s *Shinmuyong* was neither Korean traditional dance nor Japanese modern dance. This characteristic of his *Shinmuyong* has great historical

structure; and a recreation of traditional Korean dance in a modern perspective.⁺ Following the liberation of Korea from the Japanese colonial grip in 1945, the term *Shinmuyong* came into use to refer to the Korean new dance style that was produced specifically under the Japanese colonial period. Judy Van Zile redefines *Shinmuyong*, reserving *Shinmuyong* to identify dances created primarily during the Japanese occupation that merged movements and themes of traditional Korean dance with a modern western-aesthetic.⁺⁺⁺

+ Seon-wook Park, “A Study on the Characteristic Dancing Movement in Korean Dance During a Modern Era”, Master Thesis, Seoul: Ewha Woman’s University, 1993, 17-18. Ki-sook Sung, *Hanguk Muyonghak Yungu eui Jipyung*, (New Approaches to a Study of Korean Dance), Seoul: Hyundaemihaksa, 2001, 110-115 and *Hanguk eui Jeontong-chum Yungu* (A Study of Korean Traditional Dance), Seoul: Hyundaemihaksa, 1999, 287.

++ Chae-hyun Kim, “*Shinmuyong Euimi eui Yuksajeok Wesang*” (The Meaning and Historical Value of *Shinmuyong*), in *The Dance Journal*, Vol. 7, 1992, 131.

+++ Van Zile, 2001, 41.

²³ Cho, 1973, 208. See also *Hankook Ilbo* (Korea Times), April 7, 1974.

²⁴ Sung, 2007, 196.

²⁵ Seong-han Bae, “Research of Cho Taek-won and His Work, *Gasahojeop*,” Master Thesis, Dongguk University, 1997, 44.

value as an archetype for current Korean Creative dance. In this regard, Cho's dance should be considered an artistic embodiment signifying complex socio-political meanings along the changes of international relationships during the mid-twentieth century.

Cho's *Shinmuyong* illuminates Korean culture under the harsh colonial situation. Through his active dance works under the Japanese occupation, Cho tried to develop Korean dance conveying some particularities of Korean culture. At that times, in terms of cultural aspects, a special Japanese colonial policy for eradicating Korean culture—*Minjokmunhwa malsaljeongchaek*—destroyed most aspects of Korean traditions and cultural heritage.²⁶ Performing Korean traditional dance was strictly prohibited.²⁷ Most of the dance masters in that period were forced to follow a Japanese New dance, *Shinbuyo* in that period.²⁸ Japanese colonialists saw Baku Ishii's modern dance—*Shinbuyo*—as a means to penetrate and undermine Korean culture.²⁹ However, though he was a student of Baku Ishii, Taik-won Cho did not simply follow or imitate Baku Ishii's dance—Japanese *Shinbuyo*.

He reinvented and developed his own style Korean New Dance, *Shinmuyong*. He incorporated Korean aesthetics and themes with his diverse dance experiences from Baku Ishii and traditional Korean dances. As his word, *Musang* indicates, Taik-won Cho believed that dance is an artistic metaphor reflecting spirituality and socio-cultural contexts of an ethnicity.³⁰ He tried to reveal Korean cultural uniqueness signifying Korean people's spirituality through employing a socially acceptable cultural form, his *Shinmuyong*.

IV. Cultural Significations of Taik-won Cho's dance

Taik-won Cho's dance in a Socio-cultural Power Relationship

Taik-won Cho's *Shinmuyong* is a cultural vehicle signifying complicated historical and cultural circumstances under the Japanese colonial occupation. As his dance like *Gasahojeop* indicates distinct Korean culture, Cho's dance could be considered a cultural resistance against Japanese colonial occupation. The following section will further discuss meanings of Cho's dance in an inter-cultural relationship with a socio-political power.

²⁶ I-moon Kang, *Hanguk Muyong Munhwa wha Jeontong* (Korean Dance Culture and Tradition), Seoul: Hyundaemihaksa, 2001, 70.

²⁷ Ki-sook Sung, *Hanguk Muyonghak Yungu eui Jipyung* (New Approaches to a Study of Korean Dance), Seoul: Hyundaemihaksa, 2001, 134.

²⁸ *Shinbuyo* is Japanese New dance referring to Baku Ishii's new dance in the early twentieth century.; Sung, 1999, 270.

²⁹ Kang, 2001, 71.

³⁰ Cho, 1973, 452.

Cho's dance within this particular political situation can be reinterpreted drawing from Michel de Certeau's idea of a strategy and tactic. In his book, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, De Certeau explores distinction between strategies and tactics related to space stories and individuals in a city. In his account, "strategies" refer to institutions and structures of power who are the "producers", while "tactics" refer to practical actions and ways to operating within a strategic boundary. In other words, strategies are a planned institutional power for governing entities, while tactics are undefined skills to survive in environments defined by a dominant social order or rule.³¹

Japanese colonialism could be regarded as a strategy and Taik-won Cho's Korean New dance (*Shinmuyong*) as a tactic. Japanese cultural imperialism was a strategy to destroy Korean culture and demonstrate Japanese cultural superiority. Baku Ishii's modern dance was used as a part of Japanese strategy revealing the cultural imperialism. However, Taik-won Cho did not yield to Japanese policy. On the contrary, he used Japanese influence for the development of Korean dance rather than for its eradication. He navigated within the Japanese colonial power—a strategy. He found his own way to survive by creating his own style of dance—a tactic. He used Baku Ishii's teaching to create his *Shinmuyong* to survive under the Japanese colonial occupation. Furthermore, his dance revitalized Korean dance and culture and opened a new pathway to the future.

For instance, his masterpieces such as *Gasahojeop*, *Sinnosimbullo*, and *Choon-hyang jun* implying Korean cultural themes and aesthetics were performed in Korea and Tokyo in numerous times. His version of Korean dance was spread out not only to Japan but also to the rest of the world including the U.S., France, and many other European countries. Also, he became an influential figure in Japanese dance society as the president of Japanese modern dance association. In this sense, although the Japanese colonial strategy employed cultural imperialism for manipulating Korean dance and culture, Taik-won Cho's new dance, *Shinmuyong* worked as a powerful tactic to figure out a way to navigate within this strategy. His dance implies significant meanings as a representation of outstanding Korean culture and as a cultural demonstration against Japanese colonial power.

Inter-cultural Relations in a Double Layered Structure of Strategies and Tactics

Cho's *Shinmuyong* performances may also suggest a successful localization of western dance in Korea. Baku Ishii was the most influential teacher for the foundation of Taik-won Cho's *Shinmuyong*. However, although Baku Ishii was regarded as a pioneer of Japanese New dance, Ishii's dance was

³¹ Michel de Certeau is a French Jesuit and scholar (1925-1986).; Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, 34-38.

clearly not authentic Japanese style dance but rather Western style modern dance. Baku Ishii also was the person who began to introduce the New Dance, *Neue Tanz*, Free dance, to Japan and Isadora Duncan's New Dance to Korea.³² With this regard, the dance which Taik-won Cho's learned from Baku Ishii was not Japanese dance but Western modern dance in Wigman and Duncan style.

More specifically, an example of Japanese cultural domination on Korean dance is not Japanese indigenous dance (*Nihonbuyo*) but ironically Western style modern dance adopted by Japanese colonial policy. Korean dance faced identical confusion and struggle caused by two distinct cultural ideologies, Japanese colonial imperialism and Western cultural imperialism with the western idea of civilizations in Edward Said's account.³³ The winds of change came not only from Japanese colonialism but also from Western cultural imperialism. At the turn of the century, traditional Korean and Japanese societies began to be modernized and westernized with a western perspective of civilizations. Western cultural imperialism penetrated Korean society and culture through employing a vehicle of Japanese colonial culture.³⁴ Thus, in fact, during the Japanese colonial period, Korean dance must deal with Japanese colonial imperialism and at the same time Western cultural imperialism from Europe and the U.S. These inter-cultural relationships might suggest a double-layered structure of a strategy and tactic.

Western cultural imperialism as a meta-strategy might add another layer of strategy on top of the primary structure of a tactic and strategy, which was discussed in the previous section. The Western cultural imperialism as a meta-strategy is veiled under Japanese colonialism. This meta-strategy indirectly affects Korean dance through using Japanese colonialism as a vehicle. Within this double layered strategy, Japanese cultural imperialism and Taik-won Cho's *Shinmuyong* should be regarded as a primary strategy and tactic. These strategies of the double-layered structure dominated Korean dance and culture. Taik-won Cho's dance as a tactic found a way to survive by creating his own style dance, which signifies a successful localization of western culture in Korea. Also, his new dance brings revitalization and development of Korean dance under the Eurocentric and Western cultural imperial ideology. Taik-won Cho's dance as a powerful tactic deals with the meta-strategy, Western cultural imperialism, and passes through a crisis of Korean dance along with the successful localization of Western culture.

³² Tae-won Kim, *Munhwa wa Chum eui Jeonmang* (A Vision on Culture and Dance), Seoul: Hyundaemihaksa 1991, 311.

³³ Edward W. Said, *Cultural Imperialism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1993.

³⁴ Ki-sook Cho also stated about the imports of western cultural influence through Japanese colonialism in Korea in her article, Eurocentrism in relation to contemporary choreography in South Korea.; "Eurocentrism in Relation to Contemporary Choreography in South Korea" in *The Korean Journal of Dance*, Vol. 39, 263-274.

Taik-won Cho brought his Korean dance not only to Japan but also to the west. His numerous *Shinmuyong* performances and teachings in France and the U.S. stress how efficiently his dance navigated and became a more powerful tactic within these double-layered strategies. From 1948 to 1952, his dance troupe toured around many cities in the U.S. including Los Angeles, New York, Washington D.C., Cleveland, and Honolulu. He taught Ruth St. Denise, a world renowned dance master, Korean dance for about two months in 1948.³⁵ He shared his artistic skills and thoughts with Udai Sangkar in 1951.³⁶ In 1950, he also taught Korean dance to American dancers at Jacobs Pillow Dance festival with support from St. Denise and East and West Cultural Association, New York.³⁷ From 1953 to 1955, he performed in many cities in Europe over 400 times.

Although Korean society faced an identical struggle within a chaotic cultural situation, the rest of the world was fascinated by Taik-won Cho's dance. His dance showed unique Korean culture to the West, which implies a complicated international power relationship between Korea and the West in the mid-twentieth century. He played an important role as a cultural ambassador who proliferated Korean culture and dance to the West and put those on a level equal to western culture. He found a new pathway to export Korean dance not only to Japan but also to the West. Taik-won Cho's *Shinmuyong* demonstrated great value of unique Korean culture. His dance as a powerful tactic navigated through the double-layered strategies, Japanese colonialism and Western cultural imperialism.

In particular, Korean cultural elements of Taik-won Cho's dance might be attractive to the western audiences. Some particularities of his dance must be regarded as exotic oriental cultural features. Also these brought a sensational power to make his dance more popular in the West. In this sense, as Cho's dance was exported to many western countries, the oriental exoticism of his dance played a critical role to help Korean dance find its own way to survive under the strong influence of Western cultural imperialism. Ultimately, Taik-won Cho used his dance as a tactic for transforming Japanese colonialism into a beneficial way to develop Korean dance. Taik-won Cho's dance brought a positive result of socio-political power shifts in-between the Western imperial power and its cultural localization in Korea.

V. Conclusion

Dance is an artistically refined conceptual display, symbolically articulating a socio-political meaning in a particular cultural context. Korean dance in the mid-twentieth century signifies the

³⁵ Kim and Sung, 2006, 346.

³⁶ Kim and Sung, 2006, 140.

³⁷ Sung, 2007, 185.

complex power relationships resulted from the traumatic Korean history, Japanese colonial domination (1910-1945). In the mid-twentieth century, this tragic historical situation caused many painful changes and hardships to most aspects of Korean society. In particular, Korean culture and dance were strongly influenced by Japanese colonialism and Western cultural imperialism. Japanese colonial policy eliminated most Korean traditional dances and cultural activities. However, some Korean dance masters during that period invented a new style of Korean dance, *Shinmuyong*, through combining Japanese and western cultural elements as well as some particular features generated from traditional Korean dance. Taik-won Cho, one of the most outstanding dance masters, created many dance in this new style of Korean dance. He, as a founder of this new dance style, achieved a development of Korean dance from the traditional form.

Taik-won Cho was a creative artist who tried to invent something new. He considered dance an expression of an idea, “*Musang*” (dancing idea). He tried to show his thought and philosophy involved in his creative dance work. In addition, he wanted to incorporate particular features of traditional Korean culture in his dance, although his major dance background was western modern dance. He learned diverse western dances from Baku Ishii, who was a pioneer of Japanese New dance. In fact, what Cho learned from Ishii was not authentic Japanese dance but Western modern dance, because Baku Ishii’s New Dance was typical Western modern dance. Baku Ishii was the most influential teacher to Taik-won Cho and performed with him many times in Japan and Korea. However, when he created his own dance pieces, he was aware of the importance of Korean culture and researched what authentic Korean culture is.³⁸

Taik-won Cho created much choreography in *Shinmuyong*, through incorporating special Korean theme and movements with his Western dance experiences from Baku Ishii. His *Shinmuyong* is a primarily created dance form merged movements and themes of traditional Korean dance with a modern/western movement and aesthetic imported during the Japanese colonial period.³⁹ *Gasahojeop* is one of his representative *Shinmuyong* dances, which is re-interpretation of traditional Korean dance, *Seung-mu*. His dance like *Gasahojeop* served as an artistic embodiment of his emotion, philosophy, and thought about his own country and culture, which also specifies the identity of his dance. Although his mother country was colonized by Japan, he did not want to lose his own cultural identity. Along with his new style of dance, *Shinmuyong*, his dance refers to a successful localization of western culture in Korea.

His dance troupe toured around the world and became very popular in Europe and the U.S. His dance was presented in diverse venues in the U.S. and several countries in Europe as well as Japan over

³⁸ Sung, 2007, 200.

³⁹ Cho, 1973, 110, 138.

400 times from 1948 to 1960. He shared his Korean dance with world renowned dance masters such as Anna Pavlova, Ruth St. Denis, and Udai Sangka.⁴⁰ The particular Korean cultural features generated from the traditional themes, costumes, and dance movements might deliver exotic oriental sentiments to foreign/ western audiences. His performances under the title of “Taik-won Cho in dances of Korea” brought a sensation to western societies and left strong impression of Korean culture to them.

Japanese colonialism employed Western modern dance to dominate all aspects of Korean dance, on the contrary, through his successful localization of western culture, Taik-won Cho transformed Japanese colonialism into a beneficial ideology to develop Korean dance. Therefore, the political power dominating Korean dance was not Japanese imperialism but Western cultural imperialism. Moreover, the Korean cultural elements of Taik-won Cho’s dance might be attractive to the western audiences. Some particularities of his dance must be regarded as exotic oriental cultural features. Also these brought a sensational power to make his dance more popular in the West. In this sense, as Cho’s dance had been exported to many western countries, the oriental exoticism of his dance played a critical role to help Korean dance to find its own way to survive under the strong influence of Western cultural imperialism.

This complex structure of inter-cultural power relationships can be interpreted with the notion of a strategy and tactic in Michel de Certeau’s account. Under the Japanese occupation, Japanese imperialism can be regarded as a strategy to control Korean culture. And Taik-won Cho’s *Shinmuyong* means a tactic to find a way to survive within this strategy. However, there is another layered strategy, Western cultural imperialism, which is a meta-strategy concealed under the Japanese colonial imperialism. Thus, these two cultural ideologies creating a double-layered strategic structure affected the Korean society and culture. In this strategic structure, Taik-won Cho’s *Shinmuyong* worked as a powerful tactic to find a way to navigate and survive. His dance as an example of successful localization of western culture demonstrates a proper development of Korean dance with embracing Western cultural imperialism. These inter-cultural relationships show how Taik-won Cho navigated in between Japanese colonial and Western cultural imperialism within a particular Korean cultural context. Although this is a product of Japanese colonial policy and Western cultural imperialism, Cho’s *Shinmuyong* with localization ultimately manipulate an ideological power between the oriental and occidental. Also, Cho’s dance served as a cultural embodiment negotiating with the chaotic cultural milieu in transition from the traditional to the modern society.

⁴⁰ Kim and Sung, 2006, 140-141.

His dance revitalized Korean dance and culture and made a tremendous contribution to finding a new pathway to the future. His dance still owns important historical value as a mid-twentieth century style artistic presentation and as an archetype of the current Korean Creative dance. This close study of dance history reveals far more than details of a dance form. This can tell us a great deal about the ideological context and the socio-political power shift concealed behind the Taik-won Cho's dance scenes.



Picture 1. *Gasahojeop*, choreographed and performed by Taik-won Cho

(Photo by Moon-sook Kim. Courtesy of Taik-won Cho's family.)

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