Breathing Life into Intangible Cultural Heritage: *Wŏnhyŏng* in Korea's *Poyuja* Lineage System and its Implications for UNESCO

Haeley Ahn

In a Tortoiseshell: *Pulling from a diverse set of* ***sources*** *in terms of region, discipline, and medium, Haeley's essay exemplifies not only how to pull from a wide array of sources but how to do so in a* ***motivated****, thoughtful way that skillfully identifies and develops meaningful connections between unconventionally connected source material. Throughout her piece, Haeley carefully incorporates a philosophical lens to reinterpret her visual source material and is able to transition between and bring together both Korean and American scholarship. In this excerpt, Haeley navigates central challenges that often arise for students in source use.*

Excerpt

However, returning to Kang and Yang, the first- and second-generation *poyuja*s[1] of the *T'aep'yŏngmu*,[2] respectively, comparative video analyses reveal that there indeed occurred a betrayal of this supposed "framing" of *wŏnhyŏng*.[3] There is the much disapproved "change of form," not simply for the one downbeat highlighted previously, but consistently throughout the entire performance. A frame-by-frame comparison between Kang's performance of the *T'aep'yŏngmu* in 1998 and one of Yang's performances in 2017 shows that Yang is by no means an exact imitation of Kang, despite having supposedly learnt the *wŏnhyŏng* from Kang, as the next generation *poyuja*. [...] This amounts to a total of two frames out of the sixteen observed, wherein Kang and Yang are executing exactly the same action.

Despite this low frequency, however, Yang has not been accused by her peers of disobeying the "Cultural Heritage Protection Act"[4] and its emphasis of *wŏnhyŏng*. In fact, Yang has been praised by her peers in the Korean traditional dance community as having a "deep understanding

[1] A person that has been recognized by the state as a living form of cultural heritage, due to his or her acquisition of, and subsequent ability to perform or execute an intangible cultural heritage in its "*wŏnhyŏng*."
[2] A traditional Korean dance that was designated as Korea's 92nd Important Intangible Cultural Heritage in 1988.
[3] Literally "original form" in Korean. The "framing" of *wŏnhyŏng* refers to its definition as determined by published scholarly discussions; this definition equates *wŏnhyŏng* to the exact form of a dance as performed by the first generation *poyuja*.
[4] South Korean law code passed in 1962 that established the concepts of *poyuja* and Important Intangible Cultural Heritage.

of the expression and movements of the complex rhythmic patterns of the *T'aep'yŏngmu*" and subsequently has been recognized as a worthy successor to the title of *poyuja*.[5] Such an incongruity can be explained by understanding *wŏnhyŏng* not through how the dance community defined it on paper, but through the lens of Nelson Goodman's theory of notation.

Goodman, an American philosopher, introduced the concept of an art "notation" in his book *Languages of Art*. First, Goodman defines "autographic" and "allographic" art. Art is autographic if there can only be one authentic instantiation of a particular work.[6] For example, painting is an autographic form of art because "even the most exact copies of the Rembrandt painting are simply imitations or forgeries, not new instances, of the work."[7] On the other hand, non-autographic, or allographic, art is that which can be authentically "instantiated independently of the work's history of production."[8] Dance, then, is allographic because Yang's, or anyone else's performance of the *T'aep'yŏngmu*, is not considered a plagiarism of Kang's *T'aep'yŏngmu*; each is considered to be legitimate instantiations of the *T'aep'yŏngmu* (albeit the artificial construct of *poyuja*s has rendered Yang's "more legitimate" than others).[9] What differentiates allographic from autographic art, Goodman argues, is the presence of a "definite notation" that "specifies the essential properties a performance must have to belong to the work."[10] Autographic art, such as painting or sculpture, does not have notations; for example, there is no handbook on "How to Create a Rembrandt Painting." On the other hand, allographic art, such as music and dance, does. The most straightforward example of a notation would be a musical score. The score dictates the "essential properties" of the musical work: the notes, rhythm, tempo, and dynamics. Thus, for an orchestra to have truly played a rendition of Beethoven's Symphony No. 6, it must have executed all of those "essential properties" on the score accurately. A notation is also important, however, not only for what it specifies but also for what it does *not* specify. Goodman argues that variations in aspects that have not been explicitly referred to by the notation are entirely permitted, which leads to a wide variety of performances of the same allographic work.[11]

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[5] Sang-hyun Park and Jeong-eun Kim, "태평무 보유자에 양성옥씨 인정 예고…살풀이춤, 승무는 보류(종합)," *Yeonhap News*, February 1, 2016, http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/.
[6] Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*, (Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1976), 113.
[7] Ibid.
[8] *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* "Goodman's Aesthetics."
[9] While there exists scholarly discussion regarding the hierarchy of "legitimacy" fostered by the *poyuja* lineage system, this issue is beyond the scope of this paper.
[10] Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art,* (Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1976), 212.
[11] Ibid.

I suggest that then, with dance being an allographic art, differences in Yang's and Kang's performances of *T'aep'yŏngmu* prove that dancers of the Korean traditional dance have reframed *wŏnhyŏng* into what resembles Goodman's definition of notation. Returning to the frame-by-frame analysis of Yang and Kang's *T'aep'yŏngmu*, each frame has a clear "notational" element—something that is common between the both of them—and also several "optional" elements, of which Yang and Kang decided to approach differently. [...] Clearly, the Korean traditional dance community as a whole approaches the *T'aep'yŏngmu*, and presumably all other forms of traditional dance, with this more liberal view of *wŏnhyŏng*, in which the term does not encompass every aspect of a dancer, from the tilt of the body to the direction of a sway, but rather serves as the core "notation." This explains why no one has challenged Yang's apparent departure from Kang's form of dancing.

Author Commentary

Haeley Ahn

I wrote this paper for my freshman writing seminar "The Fragmented Past," hoping to explain the strange phenomenon of a widely accepted, yet seemingly "illegal," preservation of intangible cultural heritage in Korea. To fully explore my focus on traditional Korean dance, I synthesized a variety of rather "unconventional" sources, such as video recordings of dance performances, self-conducted personal interviews, and both Korean and American scholarship.

Consequently, the biggest challenge I faced was presenting these sources as clearly to the readers as they were to me. As a dancer of the Korean traditional dance, I am familiar and comfortable with the terminology and choreography I analyze in my paper—yet I recognized that they would be obscure to even non-dancing Koreans, let alone American university students.

To overcome this difference, I dedicated a significant portion of my paper to simply presenting my sources before I used them to advance my argument. This way, readers had a fair opportunity to closely read (and often closely look at) the sources in discussion before they were swept up by my thesis. For example, I had three appendices which included a glossary of all jargon used, as well as side-by-side, frame-by-frame comparisons of videos in which two dancers were performing the same choreography. In the main body of the paper itself, I add explicit written commentary to the visual comparisons in the appendices, so that readers are directed towards what they should be looking for, and why.

Thus, I believe this excerpt is not just representative of an isolated paper, but a paper delicately situated within a larger web of footnotes and appendices geared to facilitate the readers' interaction with my sources. Hopefully, such a structure was able to not only elucidate my argument but also spark a genuine interest in the topic at hand.

Editor Commentary

Danielle Hoffman

A key strength of Haeley's source use can be seen in how the excerpt above relates to her analysis of a single downbeat in the introduction of her paper. The first line of Haeley's paper states, "With the downbeat of the Korean drum, dancer Sŏng-ok Yang pulls her left arm inwards smoothly toward her body [Appendix I]." Then, after providing some necessary contextualization of key terms, she begins her second paragraph by stating, "However, dancer Sŏn-yŏng Kang, the first generation *poyuja* of the *T'aep'yŏngmu* since its designation in 1988 until her death in 2016, never drew in her left arm in a smooth arc at the downbeat. She powerfully flicked her lower arm towards her body, so that her elbows made a sharp turn outwards [Appendix I]."

I want to draw attention to this moment of Haeley's paper for a few reasons: first, it shows how the motivating question framing Haeley's essay arises directly out of her analysis of the primary source she is working with, namely the video footage of the *T'aep'yŏngm* as performed by the original dancer and the first generation *poyuja*. Haeley draws attention to a very specific moment of video analysis so as to get at a puzzling discrepancy that seems to exist between the "written definition of *wŏnhyŏng* and Yang's widely accepted dancing." When working with lots of sources, it can become tempting to go directly to the scholarly conversation and not spend enough time with the primary source to figure out exactly what it is about the primary source that the student is interested in exploring, reconciling, challenging, etc. It is because of her close reading of this source and subsequent ability to articulate an interesting tension between the video footage of *wŏnhyŏng* and its written definition that her paper finds success. Thus, in the excerpt above as well as throughout the rest of her paper, Haeley's close analysis of her primary source sits front and center.

The details of this tension come later in the paper as we can see in the excerpted section. Often students can over rely on their evidence to "speak for itself," especially when dealing with visual sources. However, it is a mistake to expect readers to be able to look at the same materials and glean the same takeaways. Therefore, it is important to not just stick a "see appendix" in the middle of one's essay but rather to elucidate for the reader exactly what it is from that appendix that the writer wants to draw our attention towards. This excerpt from Haeley's essay so skillfully and methodically guides her reader through a frame-by-frame comparative video analysis that is articulated in a detailed but approachable way. And while this detailed approach to source work may seem tedious, it is directly because of Haeley's meticulous explanation of her visual source (and subsequent meticulous explanation of the philosophical lens

she is bringing into the conversation) that her key argumentative move of using a philosophical lens to reinterpret the frame-by-frame source material is so powerful and effective.

Professor Commentary

Dr. Emma Ljung, Princeton Writing Program

What do you do when no one else sees what you see? What can you say when no one has even thought about what you wish to talk about? Under these circumstances, most of us would look elsewhere, or say something we know that others will find relevant. But in research, doing so – settling for the ordinary, the well-known, the comfortable – rarely enables us to do something exciting. Yet, a lot of research depends on the work of others, so even if we are doing something new, we tend to be surrounded by the thoughts and ideas of others. Mark Gaipa's ballroom, no matter which "move" we imagine our research to be doing, is rarely empty, so as scholars, we are seldom alone. For Haeley, however, there *was* no ballroom. The idiosyncrasies she noticed when looking at traditional Korean dance had never been discussed: there were no scholars with whom Haeley could have a conversation. Can you imagine a bigger roadblock? 7 million books in the Princeton University Library system and none of them are pertinent to your topic. But here is the brilliance that permeates Haeley's work. Despite the lack of sources, Haeley was determined to take her personal motive – her own training as a dancer and that initial discovery of *weird* in the primary evidence – and create a new scholarly space for inquiry. For most writers, it is difficult enough to take the step from personal motive to scholarly motive. For most of us, it is nearly impossible to at the same time, also build that ballroom from scratch. To do so as a freshman writer is truly a remarkable achievement. In Haeley's essay, you will see a carefully crafted ballroom that relies on structures imported from heavy-weight UNESCO, but you will also see how a nuanced close reading of visual evidence by means of targeted keywords can help create a space that other scholars will want to inhabit. That visual analysis is crucial for the success of Haeley's paper because without it, she would have no "building blocks" for her ballroom. So, readers, here's the moral of this story: we *can* survive without Mark Gaipa, but it takes a heroic act of visual analysis to do so.

Works Cited

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Bios

Haeley Ahn ’21 is from Seoul, South Korea, and Dubai, United Arab Emirates. She is concentrating in Near Eastern Studies and is especially interested in the intersection of feminism and art in the Middle East. On campus, Haeley is involved in the Princeton University Orchestra and the dance company KoKo Pops. She wrote this essay as a freshman.

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