

Comment

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Physical Techniques and Ritual Performing Arts

1. “Physical Techniques of the Yao Ethnic Group (China) Related to Religious Rituals” by ZHANG Jin Song

Mr. Zhang explains the various physical techniques (bodily expressions) of the Yao ethnic group's shaman. He explains that this religious dance by the shaman is a form of dance unique to the Yao ethnic group, and is made of combinations of symbolic dance movements. He introduces prescribed hand formations (signals made by movement of the hands) and leg formations (signals made by movement of the leg), Zifu (or Ziling, written charms), divinations, and ritual acrobatics (such as climbing blade-rung ladders), and points out that the common objective of these actions is for the shaman to communicate with the gods, and to serve as a bridge between the human and divine worlds. This religious dance is also focused on the turning movement in the five directions – east, west, north, south, and the center – and I think it may be interesting to compare them with the turning movements in religious dances of other ethnic groups in China, or with Shinto dances in Japan.

2. “Physical Techniques Displayed by Divine Characters in Korean Mask Dramas” by JEON Kyung-Wook

Professor Jeon discusses the interesting correlation between the origin of divine characters in Korean mask dramas and the physical techniques displayed in these dramas.

Firstly, the professor speaks of the divine characters that originate from traditional rites. Kakshi asks for donations while blessing villagers, and Janjamari imitates sexual activity to pray for a bountiful harvest. Sisiddagddagi, an evil god in black linen robes with wide sleeves and carrying red sticks, retrieves Somaegakshi from her aristocrat husband, Yangban (though this merely seems to be a recounting of the Zhongkui legend).

Secondly, the divine characters that originate from Narye are as follows. Obang Sinjang, who succeeds the dance of five directions in Narye, is a divine character who chases away evil spirits. Yeonip and Nunkkumjeoki, each representing “killer star of heaven” and “killer star of earth”, appear with their faces covered, because people die when they are seen scowling. The mask of Nunkkumjeoki has mechanisms in its eyes allowing them to blink, which is reminiscent of the Pangsangshi mask. The Namgang Old Man, also called Namkeuk (“South Pole”) Old Man, is the god who determines the length of man's life, which probably equals the South Star Old Man seen in Narye performance. Chwibari, a drunken monk in a red mask and brandishing a willow branch, is similar to the Cheyenne seen in Narye in the late Koryo period. Meokjung also takes after the Narye, and slaps another Meokjung with a peach branch to chase him off.

Though the analyses on the origin of the divine characters and their nature were convincing, personally

I was unable to gain a thorough understanding of the relationship between these physical techniques and their origins. What struck me as significant was the way the report categorized Korean drama into two large groups, one stemming from traditional rites and one from Narye, originally from China, which signifies the great importance of Narye among the rituals that originated in China and passed into Korea. It is also of great significance that an emphasis was placed on the tools used by the divine characters. The suggestion that the Somu (Somaegakshi), which originates from Somae, the sister of Zhongkui, may be linked to the Japanese belief in Zhongkui, seems to be an interesting issue that can be discussed from the aspect of “Narye culture” disseminating throughout East Asia.

3. “Analysis of Physical Techniques through *Kashira* Puppets: A Comparison of Japanese and Chinese Puppets”

by OHYATSU Sanae

Professor Ohyatsu takes up the issue of the *Sambaso* puppet, comparing it to the *Shikisamban* of *Noh* theater. The *Sambaso* puppets invariably have structural nodding methods, whereas the *Senzai* or *Okina* puppets do not always have such nodding structures. The *Sambaso* puppet is made so that it may turn its eyes and crack its mouth open, and is also painted in a reddish color. These three characteristics are unique to the *Sambaso* puppets, and are not seen in the *Shikisamban* of *Noh* theater (the *Senzai* and *Okina* added later on), and hence the *Sambaso* is indicated to originally have been a religious puppet. The physical techniques especially seen here are the stamping actions, the reddish hue, turning eyes and opening mouth, and the upward nodding movement of the head. Of these four physical techniques, the nodding movement holds an especially important meaning in Japanese puppets.

It was of great significance that the issues of the five-directional turning movements in religious dance and the comparative study of the tools (red stick, the turning mechanism of the eyes of *Sambaso* puppets) in relation to the physical techniques of religious dances were pointed out in the three presentations. In China, there is a theory that the Zhongkui is a fictional character originating from the “Zhongkui” which is the Chui chasing away evil spirits (the pronunciation for Chui is quite similar to a shortened pronunciation of Zhongkui). The tools used in the performance are powerful material evidence of how religious ceremonies developed into public entertainment.

From the standpoint of the “comparison within a continuum”, as stated by Professor Kawada Junzo, the significance of making comparisons on the effects made by Chinese Narye throughout the entire east Asia region becomes more prominent. However, I feel that the reports did not go far enough beyond pointing out individual movements and gestures of religious rites and performances, and ventured little into in-depth analysis of the “implicit knowledge” hidden within these superficial actions. Issues for future studies remain, including the problem of how to perceive the scope of the term “physical techniques”.