

## SPIRITUALITY THROUGH THEATER FOR HEALING THE BROKEN-HEARTEDNESS

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### I. Introduction

This paper is developed from a Korean girls' juvenile reformatory which I ministered. Broken-heartedness is the *han* in Korean. I will use the terms, *han* and broken-heartedness interchangeably. By healing, I mean a process where a person's sense of agency is restored along with a sense of wholeness. In this sense, the person's situation is transformed. The broken-heartedness of the girls is related to their trauma caused by personal, social and cultural factors. I analyze the broken-heartedness as a personal, social and cultural wound through the lenses of Korean psychology, psychoanalysis and social psychology.

This paper is composed of two parts: analytical part and constructive part. Because of time constrains, analytical portion will be shortened for this presentation.

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### IV. EXPLORING HEALING AGENCY OF "HAN"

#### A. *Ancient Korean Women's Healing Spiritual Dance: Kanggangsulae*

The lives of ancient Korean women were the *han* within the *han*. Under the Confucian ideology of the Chosun Dynasty, Confucian feminine ethics such as *samjongjido* (obedience to three men) and *chilgugiak* (seven evils)<sup>1</sup> forced women to be silent. Submission, obedience and sacrifice were the feminine virtues of an ideal woman. The space of women was limited to the home, and if women should go out, they must cover their face with cloth. In such an environment, women's *han* was amassed and broke their hearts to the degree that women could not contain the *han* any more.

However, ancient Korean women were not always the victims of the *han*. They were also agents of the *han*. They showed wisdom in dealing with the *han* in the following ways. They released complex webs of the *han* through songs, dances and rituals within communal gatherings. The process of releasing the *han* was called *hanpuri*. *Kanggangsulae* song and dance was one of *hanpuri* channels for ancient Korean women. On Chuseok, the Full-Moon festival, Korean foremothers clothed in new dresses came out of their houses and assembled in

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<sup>1</sup>“Disobedience to the parent-in-law,” “failure to bear a son,” “adultery,” “jealousy,” “hereditary disease,” “garrulousness,” and “theft.”

open places that were usually reserved only for men. Women danced to a song called *Kanggangsulae* under the full-moon light.

The lyrics of this dance had the salient theme of women's *han*. There were no special lyrics to the music. The refrain, "*kanggangsulae*" was the exception. The lyrics were improvised spontaneously directly from women's real lives. The lyrics arose from the participating women's empathy. If a leader (anyone could be a leader) in this group dancing spoke out women's *hanful* stories, the rest of women participants respond by singing the refrain, "*kanggangsulae*" in unison.

The basic pattern of *kanggangsulae* dance is a circle which shapes the full-moon. Participating women joins hands, forms a circle and walk in a circle while singing. In the beginning, the walking movement is very slow. As music gets faster and faster and a leader call out sister women's *han*, walking movements of women participants are changed into skipping. According to the improvised story and the direction of the leader, the direction of the circle is changed, entangled or untangled, symbolizing the solidarity of women's *han* and *hanpuri*.

This dance for healing the *han* of Korean women demonstrates three therapeutic rhythms. The first rhythm is **building a communal space** that physically and emotionally connects *hanful* women and forms solidarity by gathering in the open space and calling other sister women. The second rhythm is **speaking and listening** by improvising their real *han*-ridden life stories. The final rhythm is **releasing and reconciliation** through wild bodily movement. **Building, Speaking and Releasing & Reconciling** are the elements of the transforming dance called *kanggangsulae*.

*Kanggangsulae* helps the *han*-ridden women to continue to survive the reality of the *han* by ascertaining their solidarity, psychologically releasing the oppressed emotions and spiritually experiencing the ecstasy. However, when the dance is over the women have to go home. They return to the reality of the *han* which can destroy their humanness. Without the change of the oppressed reality surrounding the girls, the true sense of transformation would not happen apart from their experience of empowerment and transcendence of the dance. Western theater practices will be a complementary agent to this healing pedagogy.

### *B. Theater Application*

Because of time constraints, I will skip this section. But, it is directly used in the following section of "Spiritual Pedagogy for Healing."

## **V. A SPIRITUAL PEDAGOGY FOR HEALING THE HAN**

### *A. Building a Space of Jeong*

Koreans have a strong sense of "we-feeling" in an intimate group and it creates the unique Korean emotion of *jeong*. The space of *jeong* (情) is neither that of "I" nor of "you," but of "we." In this *jeong* space, the individual units of "I" and "you" turn into one unified unit of "we." From the perspective of *jeong*, human relations are understood as an attempt to achieve personal solidarity.<sup>2</sup> In the space of *jeong*, ancient Korean women experienced the healing of the *han*. The first pedagogical step of *Kanggangsulae* dance is to establish the space of *jeong*. In the

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<sup>2</sup>Soo-Won Lee, "The Cheong Space: A Zone of Non-Exchange in Korean Human Relationships," in *Psychology of the Korean People: Collectivism and Individualism*, ed. Gene Yoon and Sang-Chin Choi, 85-99 (Seoul, Korea: Dong-A Publishing & Printing Co., Ltd., 1994), 85-93.

space of *jeong*, there is no distinction between leaders and followers, between actors and spectators, and care-takers and care-givers. There is one body, mind and spirit in solidarity.

The significance of the space of *jeong* for healing the broken-heartedness is buttressed by James W. Fowler and Archie Smith. From a psychoanalytical view, Fowler states that the healing of the broken-heartedness takes place in the grace of God and in grace mediated through the love and acceptance of humans.”<sup>3</sup> Smith, from a social psychological view, suggests a “therapeutic community” for individuals, families and groups who are relatively powerless and politically oppressed so that they build trust, struggle together and support one another until an effective change is realized. Thus, it is prerequisite for healing to build the space of *jeong* in which the broken-hearted girls can feel solidarity, trust and love with care-givers as well as with one another.

As *kanggangsulae* attempts to integrate body, mind and spirit through physical movement, I use theatrical games and plays in building a space of *jeong*. The effectiveness of the integration of movement through games and plays is demonstrated by Augusto Boal, a theater practitioner, and D. W. Winnicott, a psychoanalyst and psychotherapist. From a scientific approach, Boal contends that one’s physical and psychic apparatuses are completely inseparable. Ideas, emotions and sensations are all interrelated and interwoven. In order to bridge the gap between feeling and touching, and to awaken the sensitivity of body and mind, Boal suggests a series of plays and games including bodily movement.<sup>4</sup> From his clinical experiences, Winnicott maintains that play not only facilitates human growth and health, but also leads to group relationships. In this context, play can be a form of communication in psychotherapy that builds the potential space of trust between the caregivers and the caretaken.<sup>5</sup>

In this vein, theatrical games and plays will play a significant role in creating a therapeutic space of *jeong*. From my experiences in the workshops of *Hae*, a Korean drama therapy group, I select theatrical plays and games which will bring about physical contact, but are not competitive, and activate the participants’ senses, emotions and feelings. I suggest the theatrical games such as “transformed football game,” “circle of trust,” “log board game,” “closing eyes and opening mind,” and walking while looking in the eyes.” Because of time constraints, I will introduce only one of these games in today’s presentation.

***Walking with looking in the eyes:*** The participants are broken into pairs. Many pairs can do this activity at the same time. The pairs stand against a wall opposite one another and look into each other’s eyes. They walk toward the center and meet at some point in the middle. Then, they pause for a moment and walk back but they must still maintain eye contact. According to Jihyang Noh, the director of a theater group, “Hae,” many participants cry during this activity. They report that they go through emotional collapse and at the same time experience purification. This exercise aims to have participants empathetically feel their own pain and suffering through the eyes of sister participants, and at activating the feeling of compassion for one another.

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<sup>3</sup>Fowler, *Faithful Change* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 90.

<sup>4</sup>Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, trans. By Adrian Jackson (London and New York: Routledge, 1992; Reprint, 2003), 49.

<sup>5</sup>D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York:Tavistock Publications, 1971), 41, 51.

### B. *Speaking and Listening*

By the time the girls at the reform school and care-givers are in solidarity with trust and love in a space of *jeong*, they are ready to move to “speaking and listening.” As in *kanggangsulae*, “speaking and listening” takes place in the form of improvisation and its lyrics arise from the *han*-stricken women’s real life stories, the stage of “speaking and listening” focuses on encouraging the girls’ telling their life stories. In a psychoanalytical view, the developmental aspects of personality and the decisive role of the early years of infancy and childhood are emphasized. From his clinical experiences, Joseph Berk holds that when patients are free to speak about whatever occurs to them, their symptoms diminish or disappear, and their lives tend to become less chaotic. In this process, quality listening which is very attentive, nonjudgmental and highly sensitive to nuance of feelings and thoughts are emphasized.<sup>6</sup>

Since the stage of “speaking and listening” follows the stage “building a space of *jeong*,” where sisterhood and the feeling of trust is established, the girls will be free to disclose their stories. In real life, we have tendency to manage our impressions and disguise our true feeling and emotions, but a space of *jeong* will help the girls to unravel the past stories as they are. The stage of “speaking and listening” is composed of two degrees of movements.

The first degree of movement imitate the movement of *kanggangsulae*. The girls form a circle by joining hands. Walking together clockwise or counterclockwise according to a leader’s direction, the girls respond to the leader’s calling out the lyrics in a refrain of *kanggangsulae*. The lyrics will be selected from what ancient Korean women sang, but is revised for their context. The following lyric is an exemplar lyric.

Cloud goes and rest/ *kanggangsulae, kanggangsulae*  
Migrating birds sit on a branch and rest/ *kanggangsulae, kanggangsulae*  
Our mother who visited me once and has gone, never visit me again/  
*kanggangsulae, kanggangsulae*  
Among a family of nineteen, only I am a bitch, not a human/  
*kanggangsulae, kanggangsulae*  
Although I do not pick up and eat a pear, they blame only me for doing so/  
*kanggangsulae, kanggangsulae*  
If ever a persimmon leaf falls, they blame and scold me/ *kanggangsulae, kanggangsulae*  
I cannot live any longer because of vexation and resentment/  
*kanggangsulae, kanggangsulae*  
I decide to suicide myself/ *kanggangsulae, kanggangsulae*  
I drink a mouth of bitter soybean source like a cherry/  
*kanggangsulae, kanggangsulae*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Joseph Berke, “Psychoanalysis and Kabbalah,” *The Psychoanalytic Review* 83 (December, 1996), 851.

<sup>7</sup>Hae-Sook Suh, “Kanggangsulae Yeonku (A Study on Kanggangsulae),” *Kanggangsulae* 2 (Seoul: Uri Madang Teoh, 2004), 223.

Most of the Korean girls at the reformatory love and desire that their parents visit them, but parents rarely visit them. Whether in family, in school or in society, they are stigmatized as at-risk juveniles. To some degree, this lyric epitomizes their situation. As the girls dance to the lyrics, the rhythm gets faster and faster. Any girl is invited to call out any felt anger and resentment according to their movement. The rest of the girls respond in a refrain, *kanggangsulae*. By the time the rhythm arrives at the peak point, the movement gets slower and slower and comes to an end.

The second degree of movement imitates the rhythmic dynamic of *kanggangsulae*. The leading part and the refrain part are dramatized. Each girl take turns speaking about their life stories which are related to the broken-heartedness. The rest of the girls improvise in pantomime.

The second stage of “speaking and listening” aims at emotional release by remembering, reexperiencing and releasing past painful life experiences. However, as Bertolt Brecht states, purification without empowerment and critical awareness tends to have the oppressed remain in their taken-for-granted *status-quo* and are deprived of the will to change.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, it is an important task for the oppressed to break their silence, and to ascertain innate transforming power so that they may liberate themselves from the *han* of oppression. The third stage focuses on awakening the subjectivity of the self.

### *C. Activating the Agent of the Self*

Brecht and Boal believe that human beings are not only a social, historical and economical products, but also have the power to transform reality through critical consciousness. They are convinced that theater can be an agent to change individual persons and the world by awakening critical thinking, which is innate human beings but buried by contextual oppression and by transforming submission into agency. As a way to raise critical consciousness via theater, Brecht introduces the concept of the “alienation” of actors and spectators from characters. Although actors play the roles of characters, they do not identify with characters and maintain distance. The spectators are also not absorbed in characters and they approach characters with the critical mind.<sup>9</sup> Boal illustrates Brecht’s concept of “alienation” as the notion of the subjectivity of spectators-- spec-actors.

Brecht and Boal’s understanding of human being coincide with social psychological views of human beings. In the social psychological view, Smith argues for the “relational self.”<sup>10</sup> According to his concept of the “relational self,” we are born into a world that has already been woven by lived experience and given meaning by our predecessors and the world forms the individual self (the objectified self). The self is influenced, modified and changed through interactions with the others who share the individual person (reflexivity). We also contribute our own meaning to the flow of lived experiences (the subjective self).<sup>11</sup> Smith names the subjective self “narrative agency” which can exert transforming and creative power to liberate the self and society.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theater: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. by John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 87.

<sup>9</sup>Brecht, *Brecht on Theater*, 71-72.

<sup>10</sup>Smith, *The Relational Self*, 59.

<sup>11</sup>Smith and Riedel-Pfaefflin, *Siblings by Choice: Race, Gender, and Violence*, 38.

<sup>12</sup>Smith, *Siblings by Choice: Race, Gender, and Violence*, 38.

In Smith's view, the agent of the self has the capability to produce meaningful changes in one's self and in the social world. The person, as a social and historical being, is capable of inner conversation, self-authorship and self-transcendence through role taking. Because the self is relational and reflexive, people internalize the role of another, return to the self, name it through language, synthesize experience in thought, and imaginatively construct new possibilities. Smith defines this process as an "interior dialogue."<sup>13</sup>

Boal's "theater of the oppressed," building on Brecht's theoretical foundation, contributes to activating the agency of the self and the will to change by maintaining distance between characters and actors/spectators and visualizing the process of "Interior dialogue" which Smith suggests, practicing the process of reflexivity and exploring new possibilities for transforming individual persons and social world. The third stage focuses on activating the subjectivity of the self through reflexivity as a preparatory stage for practicing transformation.

In order to awaken the girls' reflexivity by taking the role of another person, the third stage of "activating the agent of the self" utilizes Boal's theatrical technique of "Making the Body Expressive."<sup>14</sup> The girls select the life stories which they want to present from those which they share in the previous stage. Two persons become a pair and each person takes each role: parents-daughter; teacher-student; trafficker-girl; policeman-thief; judge-girl etc. Through the role-play and reflexivity, the girls learn how to react and resist their unjust reality. Therefore, I name this process as "activating the agent of the self." After activating the subjective self, the girls are ready to act for transformation.

#### *D. Practicing Transformation*

Smith suggests that the transformative and creative power of the subjective self through the process of reflexivity and reaction. Brecht and Boal believe that theater can transform the individual person and the society by stimulating spectators to critically interpret and analyze the historical and social reality of the world. In order to transform spectators into spec-actors, Boal suggests the "Theater as Language" which is composed of three degrees of "Simultaneous Dramaturgy," "Image Theater" and "Forum Theater." The stage of "practicing transformation" focuses on having the girls become aware of their innate transformative power, breaking the silence of dehumanization and practicing the power to transform their reality. I utilize Boal's two degrees of "Simultaneous Dramaturgy" and Image Theater."<sup>15</sup>

As an instrument for practicing transformation, the girls select a script from the stories which they told in the second stage of "speaking and listening" and that they think should be presented. The girls who are selected as actresses improvise the selected autobiography. Of course, the author of the selected story can be an actress for this play. When the play gets to the point at which the main problem reaches a crisis and needs a solution, the director of the workshop stops the performance and asks both actresses and spectators to offer solutions. The actresses improvise immediately all the suggested solutions. In case a spectator who suggests a solution is not satisfied with an actress' performance, she can join the performance or replace the actress. In this way, the first degree of dramaturgy in the stage of "Practicing Transformation" aims at the girls raising critical consciousness by coming back to the past experiences, taking alternate roles, interpreting the reality, and exploring solutions.

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<sup>13</sup>Smith, *The Relational Self*, 66-78.

<sup>14</sup>Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, 130-131.

<sup>15</sup>Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, 131-139.

The second degree of dramaturgy is in confirming their innate transformative power by practicing transformation within the theater. Boal's "Image Theater" is used as an instrument of transformation. The spectator-girls choose a certain theme of common interest that they want to discuss. They may select the theme of oppression, exploitation or dehumanization in family, school or society. A sculptor-girl is asked to express the chosen theme by using the bodies of the other girls without speaking. The spectator-girls discuss and modify the statues until every girl agree that the shown image expresses the given theme well. Boal names this first grouping of image "*actual image*."<sup>16</sup>

Then the spectator-girls are asked to show the "*ideal image*"<sup>17</sup> which is how they wish the given theme to be changed. Finally the spectator-girls are asked to show *transitional images*<sup>18</sup> which will visually demonstrate transformation or change. The process of making transitional images transforms the passive spectator-girls into active spect-actors. When a series of grouping from *actual image* to *ideal image* are shown, the girls can visually confirm their real transforming power. The stage of "Practicing Transformation" aims at leading the girls to praxis.

#### *E. Visioning*

Thus far the girls have gone back to the *hanful* stories, reexperienced it by taking roles, raised critical consciousness by reflexivity, confirmed their innate transforming power by activating the agent of the self, and practiced transformation by constructing solutions. As Erik Erikson maintains, hope is the most indispensable virtue inherent in the state of being alive and the enduring belief in the attainability of fervent wishes.<sup>19</sup> The stage of "Visioning" aims at the girls' hope for future. I will utilize the technique of affirmation in Rhodessa Jones's Medea Project. The girls who participate in this project are invited to affirm their future by filling the blank in the following passage: "If I live and do not die, I hope \_\_\_\_\_." Each affirmation can continue to be changed as this project makes a progress.

## CONCLUSION

The project of "Spirituality through Theater for Healing the *Han* has an advantage to prevent caregivers from burn-out by going through the healing process together in the space of *jeong* in which caregivers and caretaken is in solidarity. "Spirituality through Theater" is a culturally embedded healing pedagogy, but it could be adapted and used for at-risk juveniles or the marginalized people who struggle with communal pain and suffering in other cultural contexts.

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<sup>16</sup>Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, 135.

<sup>17</sup>Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, 135.

<sup>18</sup>Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, 135.

<sup>19</sup>Erik H. Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility* (New York: Norton & Company, 1964), 115, 118.