Analytical Psychological Meaning of Masks in the Hahoe Pyolshin Gut Tal (Mask) Play Dance in Korea

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In this paper, the psychological meaning of the masks (tals) used as symbols in Hahoe Pyolshin Gut Tal mask play dance, which originated in the Andong region in Korea, is explored and analyzed. The dance has been handed down to the present from 800 years ago, and it has received the UNESCO World Heritage designation. The tals (masks) represent problems in Korea. Moreover, they also depict psychological aspects, which are not lived out, to achieve the wholeness of the psyche through their expression in the tals. The mask play dance of the Andong region in Korea, called the Hahoe Pyolshin Gut Tal mask play dance, shares similarities with those in other cultural regions in the world.

Keywords Mask, Tal, Analytical psychology, Symbol, Hahoe pyolshin gut mask play dance

INTRODUCTION

Tal means mask in Korean. Tal also has several meanings other than covering one’s face as with a mask. Other meanings of tal include physical or psychological diseases; troubles in machines or tools; people’s bad habits or flaws; carping, which is an attitude of trying to find flaws deliberately; negative thoughts; complaints; and social problems, conflicts or contradiction (Jang, 2013; Lim, 1999). Therefore, in a tal play dance, problems in the culture and society can be seen as belonging to individuals. None of the shapes of the tals in the Hahoe Pyolshin Gut Tal play dance are complete; all of them have some tals (problems). In particular, the term Pyolshin in the play dance means the disease called Mama god or guest (the names of the smallpox god) (Rhi, 1986) as well as various kinds of tals (problems) existing in life. This means that culture’s, society’s, and individuals’ inner aspects have problems or parts that should grow or be integrated. These are the parts of us that cannot not “speak,” which do not have a real being because they are in existential states (unconscious states) where they exist but do not exist (Landy, 1993/2010).

The Story and Process of the Hahoe Pyolshin Gut Tal Play Dance

The Hahoe Pyolshin Gut Tal play dance begins with an advent gut (a shamanistic ritual) praying for the advent of a god. This is performed in the village deity shrine to pray for possession by the village deity. Shrine bells are hung on the god’s statue, and, if the shrine bells ring, they are considered possessed by the village deity. When the shrine bells are moved to the village deity’s pole, the village deity’s pole is possessed by the village deity, and the tal play dance begins, only in places where the village deity’s pole is located.

There is a legend regarding the beginning of the Hahoe Pyolshin Gut Tal play dance; the history of creation of Hahoe. Long ago, there was a young man named Hur. He received a divine revelation from the protecting deity of his village to make tals in his dream. On the next day, he performed his ablutions, hung a straw rope in front of his house to prevent outsiders’ access to the house, and became completely absorbed in making tals. At that time, there was a girl who loved Hur so much. She waited for Hur many days but she could not see him. One day, she pierced a hole in the window to see Hur. She had violated the law forbidding watching. The young man who
had been possessed by the tutelary deity immediately vomited blood and died.

Thereafter, the girl was tormented by feelings of guilt, and, finally, she died. To console their souls, the villagers raised them to village deities and exorcised for a sacred marriage of the two deities or for reconciliation between them, and prepared a bridal chamber every ten years thereafter (Lim, 2003). The ritual features the artistry of Hahoe tals, and the creativity of the people (pp. 3-52). In particular, to console the girl’s soul, the villagers enshrined her as a tutelary deity, and they have performed a rite every year in her memory (Seong, 1980).

The basic theme in Korean tal play dances is to criticize decadent noblemen, ridicule monks, and shame patriarchism.

Piggyback episode
Gaksi (bride) rides on other’s shoulders. Gaksi tal is an incarnation of the tutelary deity. Gaksi’s frequent begging is to pray to the divinity for enjoying virtues and good luck by paying tributes to the tutelary deity. As an understudy of the tutelary deity, Gaksi rides on other’s shoulders because the deity should not step on soil and should always above humans.

Juji episode

Jujis refer to lions that throw demons and evil things to purify the tal dance site.

Baekjeong episode
The baekjeong (butcher) instinctively knocks down a bull, takes out the heart and testicles of the bull, and taunts the audience with humorous words to satirize the authoritarianism of the ruling class, which does not express sexuality, and thereby induces the audience to laugh and sympathize through liberation from the usual taboo against expressions of sexuality.

Halmi episode
The halmi (old widow) recites a loom song bewailing her lot as a woman who became a young widow when she was 15 years old and lived a life of austerity.

< Loom song >
Chun, Chun, Okdanchun, is Sidanchun of the deity in the shrine to the village deity Chun?

I became a widow three days after marriage, when I was 15 years old. Where in the world would this thing happen again? If I had known this, I would never have gotten married. The sound of hitting with a reed in my hand, patri locality for life, so unfortunate is my destiny.

Jung episode
Bune (flirtatious young woman or kisaeng) suddenly finds a place to urinate and urinates there. A jung (Buddhist monk) sees her and plays with her in dancing because he cannot control his sexual desire, and he is caught by others. This episode satirizes humans’ instinctive conflicts and the state of corruption of Buddhist monks at that time.

Yangban and seonbi episode
The yangban (aristocrat, noble man) and the seonbi (scholar, intellectual) fight with each other to win the Bune who is a kisaeng and begin to fight with their learning and statuses.

Thereafter, they reconcile with each other and dance together with the Bune, and they compete with each other to buy the bull’s testicles from the baekjeong (butcher), who belongs to the lowest class. They are criticized by the halmi, and they scatter when they hear words asking them to pay taxes.

Chorangge, who is a servant of yangban (noble man), uses yangban artfully to get the people to laugh at them.

Wedding episode
Imae’s dancing leads to the wedding episode. When it becomes dark, bedding and straw mats are spread in a field at the entrance of the village to hold a simple wedding, and the process of the first night in bridal chamber is shown. There is a vulgar belief that if a couple sleeps on the bedding used in this episode, they will get a child. This episode has meanings of richness and fecundity.

(Written procedure) bridegroom comes out; bride comes out;
bridegroom on the east, and bride on the east; both bridegroom and bride on the west; bride bows two times first; bridegroom bows once as a response; assister pours liquor; the wedding is completed.

Bridal chamber episode
To form the atmosphere of a bridal chamber, this event is held at midnight. The bachelor unties the coat string of the gaksi; he approaches her, embraces her, and gets her to lie down.

The Meanings and Functions of Individual Tals in the Hahoe Pyolshin Gut Tal Play Dance
The Hahoe Pyolshin Gut Tal play dance reflects the shadow of the people in the lowest class who do not want to be dominated by the noble class any further but rather want to dominate the noblemen. The play dance is somewhat similar to carnivals in the West in that prohibited things can be done in it. The prohibited thing that can be expressed in the Andong Hahoe Pyolshin Gut Tal play dance is a change between the statuses of noblemen and lower-class people. The yangban (nobleman), seonbi (intellectual man), and jung (Buddhist monk) cover their faces with refined personas, but they fail to control their desire and they sexually harass Bune. They try to satisfy their desire without being seen by others, but Chorangee, who is a servant of yangban (nobleman), uses yangban artfully to make people laugh at them and to invoke the people’s jealousy. These are the inner aspects of people that cannot be lived out.

Although the Hahoe Pyolshin Gut Tal play dance has been known to have twelve tals and their roles, only ten tals have been handed down to the present time. The yangban, seonbi, and jung belong to the upper class that holds public offices, intellectuals critical of society, and noble Buddhist monks in the Goryeo Dynasty, when Buddhism was a national religion and when this dance began.

This reflects the persona of the culture of today, which places emphasis on external things such as appearances, cars, houses, social strata, and wealth. The trend of children and youth to make cliques that use the same brand, the phenomenon that makes cosmetic surgery popular, and parents’ abusive acts of enforcing their children’s good scholastic achievement in order to have their children enter schools through which they can have social contacts with the upper class are all reflections of the culture under scrutiny.

Further, the gaksi, halmi, Chorangee, and baekjeong are all second-class citizens. An interesting thing is the Imae tal, which is a tal of the disabled, who always has a smiling facial expression. In Korean, there is an expression, ‘How can it be like this?’ Imae is a word corresponding to like this. As such, there is acknowledgment that our consciousness did not respect but rather ignored something essential. The Imae in the Hahoe Pyolshin Gut Tal play dance plays a role to integrate, contain, and transcend all opposite things.

As Imae tal implies the self containing every opposite in it, tals symbolize archetypal aspects of the human psyche. In the nonliterate as well as in highly civilized cultures, masks are expressions of the presence of supernatural entities. In Mexican, Melanesian, sub-Saharan, and Mediterranean cultures as well as in Korean antiquity, masks make the person wearing the mask feel internally transformed, and the wearer takes on temporarily the qualities of the god or demon represented by the mask (Biedermann, 1994). In terms of this view, the Hahoe Pyolshin Gut Tal play dance can be considered as showing the archetypal function of psyche trying to prevent the splitting of psyche by achieving the wholeness of psyche when tals (problems), such as physical or psychological diseases, have developed or are about to occur. In this way, it serves the function of preventing and controlling serious tals (problems) or god’s anger.

Pyolshin (mama god or guest, that is, the smallpox god) represents diseases that can occur due to external stress and internal readiness conditions (Rhi, 2012, p. 234). “Internal readiness conditions” refer to weakened ego consciousness, a lack of the continuity of ego consciousness, and dangerous emotional complexes in the unconscious, which threaten consciousness (Jang, 2013; Rhi, 2012). On reviewing the processes through which the tal play dance is performed, it can be easily seen that it is related to the existence of gods (Jang, 2013). The Hahoe Pyolshin Gut Tal

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Y: Yangban tal: aristocrat or noble man
S: Seonbi tal: nobleman
B: Bune tal: flirtatious young woman
C: Choraengee tal: hasty scatter-brained servant
I: Imae tal: fool
play dance is performed through processes consisting of a god invocatory rite, god’s play, a fighting rite with a god, a reconciling rite with a god, and a farewell rite with a god (Lim, 2003). The Hahoe Pyolshin Gut Tal play dance is performed in a house surrounded by sacred ropes. Here, persons who are faithful and selected in the village gather to reside there. The stage on which the tal play dance is performed is also surrounded by sacred ropes. The sacred ropes serve the function of protecting the area inside them from the area outside of the sacred rope as well as protecting the outside from the inside (Jang, 2009).

This is because the things that happen in the space of god’s presence, inside the sacred ropes, may be dangerous or harmful to the humans in the outside space (Jang, 2009). Danger is present because the rites or prayer meetings may activate unconscious contents, thus reinforcing the suggestibility of those who participate in them to cause psychiatric dissociation or schizophrenia. Whether archetypes would perform creative actions or destructive actions is determined by the level of the ego’s ability to integrate unconscious contents and the degree to which strong emotional complexes repressed in the unconscious are prepared to be expressed (Rhi, 2012, p. 369).

People prepare for the performance of the Hahoe Pyolshin Gut Tal play dance when somebody begins to complain that there are bad things, tals (problems), in the village or there is an omen of the occurrence of bad things. Originally, the god in this case was the smallpox god, because this archetypal god could do harm to humans if humans did not treat well the souls of people who died unfortunately or unhappily; that is, if they neglect those souls. This is because the people believed that the souls of dead persons symbolize dark and destructive aspects of gods (Lee, 2012, p. 208).

This also means that the ancient Korean people knew that they could not avoid this guest, and thus they accepted the guest, the god, and they waited until the guest passed through rites to console the god.

Although the smallpox god and the souls of dead persons (their role is to work for the god) are different from each other, they have a very strong relation to each other. The smallpox god is closely related to the archetype of the collective unconscious, and the souls of dead persons are related to the individual unconscious or personal complexes. According to Rhi (2012, p. 208), in Jeju Island, Korea, the smallpox god Samseng halmang causes smallpox, and the meaningless sounds of children suffering from smallpox are said to be the sound of the goddess, and the scars on the face are said to be the goddess’s footprints. This means that smallpox passes through the body for a certain period. This is different from the souls of dead persons that possess the bodies of living persons to cause problems. The smallpox god Samsenung halmang is a Great Mother who is a sort of a medical goddess having dual aspects: causing diseases and healing diseases.

Since the souls of dead persons are the souls of those who died before they lived out their full lives under their destinies, the part of psyche that has not been lived out, that is, the part that was not properly integrated into the personality but was repressed, should be consoled and integrated, because, otherwise, they will do harm to living persons. The fact that the souls of dead persons did not go to their place but remained among living persons means that the dead persons have emotions that were not completely resolved when they were living (Rhi, 2012, p. 431).

As in other cultures, there is a relevant common saying in Korean, “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.” The residents of Hahoe village did not want evil spirits bringing illness and bad luck to be set upon them by the dead woman. They held sacrificial rites to appease the soul of the broken-hearted woman and to ask her to protect the village from evil spirits. Therefore, various rituals and taboos for dead persons have an eventual purpose to complete lives that have not been lived out wholly (Rhi, 2012, p. 431). Personal complexes must be separated from the collective unconscious complexes and integrated into consciousness.

The union of the couple in the last part of the Andong Hahoe Pyolshin Gut Tal play can be said to be the preparation of a bridal chamber to compensate for the integration of the couple that could not be achieved when they were alive. This can be said to be a ritual to console the god and unite the couple in order to prevent the tals (problems) that can be inflicted on humans due to the duality of archetypal things that occur when, through the souls of ancestor gods, archetypal things are expressed. This is also related to the first part of the Andong Hahoe Pyolshin Gut Tal play dance in which two Juji tals (that are similar to loins but look ambiguous) appear and show sexual scenes.

Individual tals represent each part that has not been integrated in an individual’s psyche. The Juji tals and the sexual intercourse of the couple in the last scene mean the integration of those parts of psyche that have been fragmented and also that those are archetypal as they are. As with the one-sidedness of the psyche that causes tals (problems) in the psyche, splitting between the members of society causes tals (problems) in society: Pyolshin, guest, Mama god, or the smallpox god is the manifestation of these tals (problems).

The Hahoe Pyolshin Gut Tal play is also a play. German theater educator Urlike Hentschel (referring to Lee Gyeong-mi’s thesis Phenomenological Approach to Drama Therapy) divided aesthetic experiences from a play into five categories. To list three of them, the first is experiences of duality/differences/being between them (Dazwischenstehen); the second is expressing what cannot be expressed; and the third one is expansion of experiential ability/forgetfulness of self. These represent the functions of tal play in the Hahoe Pyolshin Gut Tal play. According to Hentschel (2003), people are faced with dual relation in their roles in a play through tals. He describes this as “a space of interaction, making
what is objective subjective and what is subjective objective." In a

tal play, people perceive different aspects of their life while expe

riencing what is dual, what is opposite, and what has not yet been

experienced even what it should be experienced. A tal play

provides a kind of safe device with which mental aspects that
cannot usually be expressed may be safely expressed while main

taining some degree of objective “distance” from the “fact” ex

pressed by the symbol of tal. In addition, people encounter a sit

uation where they forget themselves by being absorbed in the giv

en roles through the tal play. This enables them to live out what

they did not live out among diverse aspects of mentality, so that

ultimately the aspects can be integrated into an element of per

sonality.

CONCLUSION

This paper presents an examination and analysis of the psycho

logical meaning of the masks (tals) used as symbols in the Hahoe

Pyoshin Gut Tal play dance of the Andong region in Korea. The

mask dance play shows how the subconscious, archetypal, and

conscious aspects in the human psyche interact with each other

and how gaps among them are overcome.

In particular, the Hahoe Pyoshin Gut Tal play dance shows

the themes of disease and death and how the god who symboliz

es archetypal aspects of the human psyche is symbolically con

nected with the themes.

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