

## Breathing the Earth: Bodily Exploration of Relationality in Eco-rituals and Dances

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This video article is on the body movement, bodily exploration to make relationality with earth. On the body movements in environmental activism, rituals, and dances this article focuses. In spring 2003, the author attended a penance and walking called *Samboilbae*. Ever since, *Samboilbae* has been revered as representative, bodily, non-violent resistance in Korea. It has been recognized as highly sincere quest for resilience in human beings with more-than-human world, This video article tries to tell the participants' bodily efforts and exploration toward embodiment of ecosomatic relationality between body and earth. At the second case, an invented ritual & performance based on old custom *Maehyang*, this article tries to tell ecological relationality embodied through the immersive or embedded matter and bodies in earth. At the last case, an invented ritual & performance based on old custom, *Gaetje*, the participants' dances, ritual behaviors and materials were focused on. Bodily exploration into the forest and ocean for reciprocity, sensing and being sensed between human selves and earth, this article tries to tell.

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**Keywords:** dance; ritual; walking as penance; body; earth; relationality; invention of tradition

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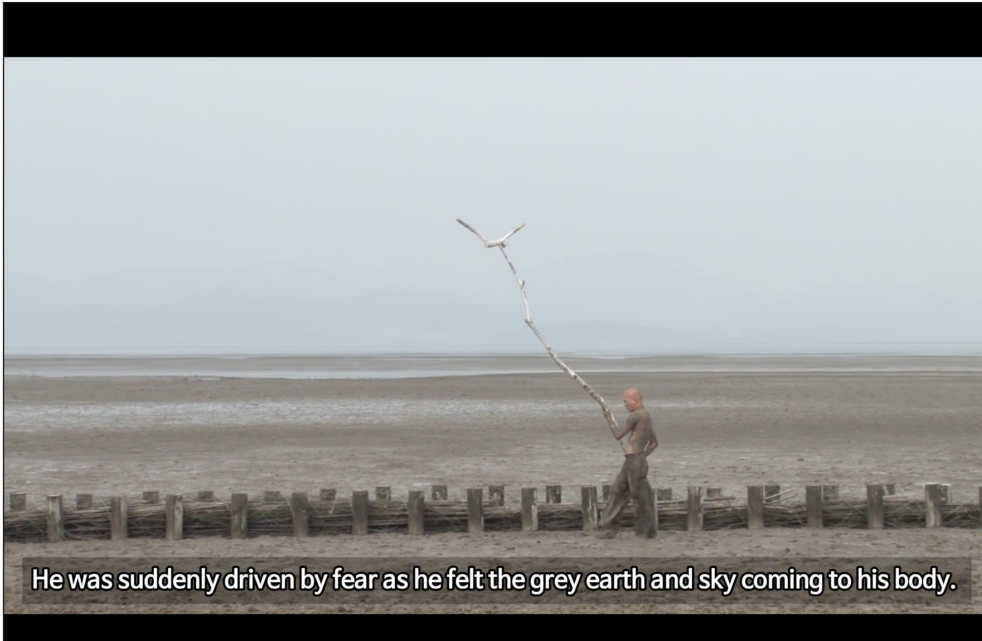
## VIDEO ARTICLE

Available to view here: <https://doi.org/10.16995/jer.9827>.

Available for download here: <https://doi.org/10.16995/jer.9827.mp4>.

## STILLS FROM THE VIDEO ARTICLE





## VIDEO ARTICLE TRANSCRIPT

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Video by courtesy of Bok, Jin Oh

(Save Our Saemangeum – Defending a Korean Tidal Flat, KFEM)

### **Breathing the Earth: Bodily Exploration of Relationality in Eco-rituals and Dances**

Cho, Kyoung Mann (Emeritus Prof., Mokpo National University)

Choi, Haeree (President, Korea Dance Resource Center)

[Narration: Lee Minah, Art Action EARWIG]

[Narrator:]

This video essay is on the body movement, bodily exploration to make relationality with earth. Earth, beyond the meaning of geological entity, means the collective entity of all lives and nature. In many First Nations, the earth is collective representation of people's ontology on concretely embodied entity of all lives and inclusive nature.

Bok, Jin Oh 2003 video documentation footage (personal archive)

'Breathing' is a metaphor for eco-phenomena of interactions between human beings and more-than-human beings in/with earth. In a Korean song there is a phrase telling about a fish's interaction with ocean, 'breathing the cold water'. All lives exist in their ecological niche breathing the niche.

Hwang, Kyoung Hwan 2012, video footage & editing (KDRC archive)

Cho, Kyoung Mann & Choi, Haeree, concept of video documentation

This article is on the relationality quested, sustained, and created in people's bodily exploration into earth as they breathe the niche. The article is composed of three parts. In different situations the three parts manifest people's

breathings, interactions as the eco-phenomena with different themes. But these parts in common, tell about people's bodily access, encounter, sensing and communication with earth.

Hwang, Kyoung Hwan 2018, video footage & editing (KDRC archive)

Cho, Kyoung Mann & Choi, Haeree, concept of video documentation

The article describes common and different themes in people's bodily interactions. For the focus on body reactions, bodily thought and sensing, the article does not use any verbal explanation, sounds, and music except for marking the entrances of parts, except for sounds and musics directly attached at the real fields.

[02:40]

### **Part 1: Body to Earth, Three Steps One Bow**

-65 days in Spring, 2003, from Saemangeum to Seoul-

Bok, Jin Oh 2003 video documentation footage (personal archive)

Cho, Kyoung Mann, concept of video documentation

[Narrator:]

The author Cho, Kyoung Mann had participated as a scholar, conceptor & environmentalist in the environmental activism of 'Three Steps One Bow' (*Samboilbae*, 三步一拜) in 2003. *Samboilbae* was the bodily action and voice. It had the meanings: cutting off human greeds through three steps; surrender and respect to earth & all lives through one bow. The body actions with penance, suffering and respect were done under the eco-phenomenon 'lowering mind', in Korean Buddhist word, *hasim* (하심.下心). People realized the focus on bodily voice, cutting off verbal voices, in Korean word, *mookeon* (묵언, 默言).

On March 29th 2003, 2nd day of *Samboilbae*, at the downtown, Buan-gun. Artists, local NGOs, Reporters and Cho, Kyoung Mann held a spontaneous hosting ceremony.

Bok, Jin Oh, Save Our Saemangeum-Defending a Korean Tidal Flat (KFEM archive)

In Saemangeum tidal flat, located in the southern part of west coast Korean peninsula, we can note huge biodiversity and cultural diversity. Especially estuarine ecosystem deserves to be paid consideration. Tidal flats, reeds and other vegetations of the estuarine ecosystem ensured the food availability of biologically diverse 'marine and river' lives and migratory birds throughout the year. The ecosystem is covered by the

sea twice a day when the tides are at flood, and uncovered at ebb. People have used quite adaptive subsistence patterns like the gleaning shell technology in ebb. But in the late 20th century huge anthropocentric intervention and development destroyed the active ecology of human and more-than-human beings. Saemangeum seawall construction and reclamation are the worldly representative case. At last the seawall, total length 33.9km was completed in 2010.

Cho, Kyoung Mann 2006, Saemangeum Photos (personal archive)

From April 21st, 2006 when seawall basements were finally connected, inner mud flats began to dry. The scenes of the tidal flats in front of Haje-ri village, close to Gunsan City told it. People's living had been seriously endangered. Clam shops stopped. Fishing boats were laid down on drying flats.

Bok, Jin Oh, Save Our Saemangeum-Defending a Korean Tidal Flat (KFEM archive)

This article tells about the people's reaction in early 2000s. Protests were diverse and high. Especially before the seawall basements from both ends were connected in 2006, diverse actions unfolded. Activists threw their bodies at the last spot of connection. Local villagers, students, activists marched. At a huge tidal flat people performed body-to-body link, making 'SOS' sign. *Samboilbae* was the most empathetic one. Beyond protest it made people think about the world and self, made people realize deep ecology. The practice became a pedagogy for activists, intellectuals, and all common people. This video article focuses on the *Samboilbae* in spring, 2003. On body to earth, relationality, and meanings, this article focuses.

Bok, Jin Oh 2003, video documentation footage (personal archive)

On March 28th 2003, Catholic priest Moon Gyu-Hyun, Buddhist priest Sukyoung, Protestant Christian minister Lee Hee-Woon, Won Buddhism priest Kim Kyoung-Il launched a penance march from *Haechanggetbul*(해창갯벌, a tidal flat area in Saemangeum) to Seoul. People walked around Korean totem pole(장승, *jangseung*) site. Buddhist prayer and walking led the launching ceremony. For many years *Haechanggetbul*, especially the place of *jangseungs*, had been the site of gathering, environmental activism, people's pilgrimage, ecological arts and rituals. Here, in early 2000s, the word *mutsaengmyoung* (못생명, all lives) emerged to connote the concept of 'human being and more-than-human beings'. At the time many people had been doing habitual walkings to the ocean at the ends of tidal flats. These walkings would be defined as 'visiting neighbors', and as 'looking after' ... *mutsaengmyoung*.

Four religious priests started 'Three Steps One Bow' from *Haechanggetbul* to Seoul, walked over 320 km way on the road. Vietnamese priest Thích Nhất Hạnh, after his teaching of 'walking meditation', joined the sending off ceremony.

Bok, Jin Oh 2003, video documentation footage (personal archive)

Cho, Kyoung Mann, concept of video documentation

On May 3rd, 37th day, at a breaktime, Cho, Kyoung Mann talked about cultural sharing plans of *Samboilbae* issues. But even at this breaktime the priests did not utter any words. During the penance practices, thoughts were highly restrained. Priests allowed to themselves only pertinent thoughts for this penance, pertinent expressions for this practice. Body movements of walking and bowing down were the main ways for concentration, pertinent thoughts, and actions. Following the Buddhist tradition the priests called this practice 'mookeon'(묵언, 默言) which means 'silence', 'blocking up utterance'.

Bok, Jin Oh 2003, ed., video handout (KFEM archive)

Generally in Korea, *Samboilbae* is explained as resilience through returning to three treasures: Buddha, Buddha's discipline, and priest. For that, three toxins should be cut off: greed(탐, 貪), anger(진, 瞋), blind mind or foolishness (치, 癡).

'What does it mean *Samboilbae*?'. Sukyoung answered with quite simple words. He said 'what I can do is just body to earth'. He meant bodily work is just what he could do... *Samboilbae* is his bodily devotion to earth. With this bodily work he repents of human misdeeds on earth. And he repairs or cures; he said on a day in February, 2003, preparing his body with some exercises. *Samboilbae* in the spring, 2003 was based on the concept 'hasim'(下心) in an ecological sense. The somatic process was in an ecological context; 'body to earth'. With this corporeal thought they walked, followed, bent down their bodies and bowed on the road to Seoul.

Bok, Jin Oh 2003, video documentation footage (personal archive)

Woynarski (2015) talks about bodily connection between subjects, "sensorial/corporeal reciprocity with the world". The priests' *Samboilbae* was reciprocity between subjects, between immersing bodies to earth and earth as inclusive subject. Here the interacting matters are not inanimate or lifeless ones. They are vibrant agencies (Bennett 2010). On May 21st, 55th day. Sukyoung fell down after so long time of suffering. On May 23rd, 57th day. Sukyoung kept on...On a road at Seoul people performed silence. Papers with the signs of 'mookeon' closed their mouths. People said with posters "Remember the voices" of these *Samboilbae* participants. The bodily voices, they meant.

[11:40]

## Part 2: Immersion and Embeddedness

-May 19, 2012, *Maehyang* Ritual in Muan-gun, Southwestern Sea of Korea-

[Narrator:]

The authors Cho, Kyoung Mann & Choi, Haeree had co-worked as directors & dramaturges in the ritual & dance performance of *Maehyang* (매향, 埋香). The authors as directors tried to activate the eco-phenomena; encounter with earth, embeddedness, and immersion of non-human & human beings into the tidal flats. These ritual and dances were newly invented by the villagers and artists following the tradition of *Maehyang*.

Monument for *Maehyang*, (A.D. 1584), Namchon-ri, Muan-gun, Jeollanam-do

Monument for *Maehyang*, (A.D. 1387), Heungsa-ri, Sacheon-gun, Gyeongsangnam-do

Monument for *Maehyang*, (A.D. 1405), Amtae-do Island, Shinan-gun, Jeollanam-do

Engraved record for *Maehyang*, (A.D. 1344), Eomgil, Yeongam-gun, Jeollanam-do

On May 19th 2012 at Yongsan Village, Muan County, Korea, there was a Incense Burial Ceremony. Cho, Kyoung Mann, Choi, Haree, artists, Eco-Horizon Institute designed the whole process of the ritual, which was totally invented to make voices for current environmental, social, cultural situation.

In the past, people buried logs at the places where fresh water stream and ocean met. Tidal flat was one of the places. People might believe, after long, long time these woods could be transformed to precious ones to use. There are no written records on peoples mind and event processes. But some engraved words enable historians to define the custom, beyond the secular story, as the one for social cohesion and resilience. People believed the logs would float after thousand years. Then next generation Buddha called Mireuk(미륵, 彌勒, Maitreya) would come down. New world would open to save suffering people, The custom usually prevailed in the socially unstable time. A kind of millenarianism.

Kim, Hyung Joo 2000, photos in

‘Stewardship for Saemangeum Tidal Flat & *Maehyang* Belief <2>’, Buan 21.

Corresponding to the concept ‘invention of tradition’(Hobsbawm, 1992), people in Saemangeum held new ritual, by creating with adoption of old tradition, to adapt to, and to confront current situations, and to make new cultural ways.



Monument of Gangwha *Maehyang* 2001,

Cho, Kyoung Mann 2007, Gangwha *Maehyang* Monument(2001) Photo (personal archive)

Gangwha Lives & Culture Festival Committee 2007, *Maehyang* Photo

On October 6th, 2001 & October 28th, 2007, environmentalists, villagers, and students performed burials ceremony at a tidal flat in Gangwha Island, west coast of Korea. In 2007 at *Maehyang*, Dongmak tidal flat in Gangwha-gun, we can see the issue of more-than-human beings; 'beyond human rights, let's proceed to the rights of all lives'.

Cho, Kyoung Mann 2012, Muan *Maehyang* photos (personal archive)

The ritual in this article was held at the tidal flat in Hamhae Bay, southwest coast of Korea. For cultural intervention with ecological arts, for empowering ecological relationality, *Maehyang* ritual and performances were created. Toward Yongsan-ri, neighbour Woldu-ri villagers carried the juniper logs. Flags with the words: 'people's lives in mud flats', 'millennial promise', 'scent of mud flats', 'new earth', etc. Elementary school & university students joined as carriers. They closed their mouths to block verbal words. Performers created a purification ceremony for the logs and the carriers.

Hwang, Kyoung Hwan 2012, video footage & editing (KDRC archive)

Cho, Kyoung Mann & Choi, Haeree, concept of video documentation

Woldu-ri villagers and *Getdol* Theater have a long run piece. *Madanggeuk* (open air theater) 'Voices of Mud Flats' (*Bbeolsori*). It is to understand villagers' concept of their lives embedded in mud flats. The villagers are playing the lives in muds. For the villagers 'Mud flat is bankbook', a woman says. 'Bankbook?' others wonder. 'Everytime we need, we can withdraw variety of resources for living'. The analogy of bankbook is familiar discourse in this bay. It tells people's ideas on affluent life embedded in mud flats. A woman pulls out working people's culture; 'after working season, enjoy tour bus trip to Seoul!'. With rubber boots for step on muds, rubber wares for walking in muds, they play the buffoon of body movements, enjoying peer group culture.

Audience carried wood panels. Everybody wrote some words of wishes. It was invented to unite individual efforts for *Maehyang*. On the day, the main issues of sustainability were abstracted in the words 'thousand years'. The logs became to embody the concept of time.

The things and bodies in performing nature (Giannachi and Stewart, 2005) unfold themselves. They are the material and corporeal media. "The body is our general

medium for having a world”(Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The performers at the invented burial in 2012, might dream or perceive interconnecting self and world. Buried logs; embodied with new aspiration for ecological turn to new world, for eternal relationality and sustainability.

[Cho Kyoung Mann:]

Our tidal flats are co-living place with human being. At this time under the theme ‘bodies being buried in the mud flats, human lives in mud flats’, we have considered. We have considered about the dances that could correspond to the theme. We have considered ‘How bodies meet the mud flats, As incense wood meet the flats how it embodies human mind...’.

Dance: ‘Bodies being buried in mud flats, human lives in mud flats’

Korean sacred community pole ‘*sotdae*’ (솟대)

This artifact represents the relationality among sky, earth, and human being. Human bodies in four directions; bodies and landscape meet. Breathing earth and air... dancing the tension between body and mud. The dancers applied typical gleaning actions of villagers by operating steps in sticky muds, bending bodies, and moving forward. Like the gleaning, their bodies here were exploring or scanning the world of mud.

“We experience the sensuous world only by rendering ourselves vulnerable to that world” (Abram, 2010, p. 58).

On experience of body movements, Ji-suk Ahn, male dancer, recalled his feelings after the event. He was suddenly driven by fear as he felt the grey earth and sky coming to his body. By this encounter, he even felt religious awe. He surrendered himself into this aura, sensing muds and sky through his body. Through vibrant, material symbol of human immersion in mud, being connected with earth and sky, they embedded the pole into the mud flat. Following the terms of Fraleigh(2015), the perceptions through ‘soma’ and ‘psyche’ matter significantly. For the male dancer who felt religious awe, ecosomatic perception occurred about all beings’ ontological interconnectedness(Keller and Golley. 2000). The earth, beyond his previously expected ‘conventional stage’, was the ecological theater (Chaudhuri, 1994).

“Ecosomatics can also help us to reawaken to our interconnection with nature” (Bauer, 2008).

Villagers’ creation of ritual ‘seeding clam spats’. It tells their aspiration for sustainability of human subsistence depending upon mud flats and all lives.

[20:14]

### **Part 3: Interaction between Dancing Self and Animated World**

-October 18th, 2018, at Guggyedeung Forest Grove and Beach, Wando Island, Southern Sea of Korea-

Hwang, Kyoung Hwan 2018, video footage & editing (KDRC archive)

Cho, Kyoung Mann & Choi, Haeree, concept of video documentation

[Narrator:]

The authors Cho, Kyoung Mann & Choi, Haeree had co-worked as directors & dramaturges in the ritual & dance performance of *Gaetje* (갯제)

The authors as directors tried to activate the eco-phenomena of reciprocity, sensing and being sensed between human beings and natural beings in the invented tradition & ritual *Gaetje*.

[Cho Kyoung Mann:]

Thus ecological arts are artistic behaviors that build up...all lives. We are now producing this event to express these forest, ocean, marine forest and people in the Wando ecosystem...to define (these beings-authors add) by the various sensual media (in artistic behaviors-authors add). Then we are now producing the event to strengthen local societies, to build up new consciousness toward nature.

Ambiguous Dance Company performers animate their bodies in the forest grove, animating all lives.

Korea Dance Resource Center 2018, video documentation (KDRC archive)

Cho, Kyoung Mann & Choi, Haeree, concept of video documentation

At the forest of village shrine, Seo, Jung Sook, who leads ceremonial dance, distributes bowls filled with rice to the movers. They deliver the bowls to the beach. Artists created the movement path from the forest to the beach for *Gaetje*. New interpretation and transformation of villagers' way. Performers improvise movements on the way to the beach. Sensing the air, swinging in the air, touching the leaves.

Korea Dance Resource Center 2018, photo documentation (KDRC archive)

Cho, Kyoung Mann & Choi, Haeree, concept of photo documentation

*Gaetje* is a ritual to be held at the beach. The main community ritual is held at the forest shrine in Guggyedeung(구계등) on one of first days of January in lunar calendar. *Gaetje* is held after the main one is over. But on the day in October 18th, artists and village elders planned different, quite created one. For the revitalization of the villagers' environmentalism, they focused on the interaction between people and Guggyedeung forest-ocean continuum.

On the day dancers set up the rice bowls on the beach.

Hwang, Kyoung Hwan 2018, video footage & editing (KDRC archive)

Cho, Kyoung Mann & Choi, Haeree, concept of video documentation

Traditionally the offered food and offering processes are called '*heonsik*' (헌식, 獻食). Artists and village elders talked together to make *heonsik* as the one valuing the villagers' precious communal ocean, beach, and forest grove. Thus more-than-human beings became main interactive agencies. At the *Gaetje* Seo, Jung Sook mainly improvised, following bodily perception at the field. She was questing for interaction through sensorial, bodily encounter with forest and ocean. Her actions remind of Rufo's 'reciprocity', 'weaving threads between sensing and being sensed' (Rufo, 2021, pp. 26–27).

Bending curves of fingers and arms are typical complex of expression; introvert orientation toward self and intra-relational inclusiveness. In tradition, winds, sounds, things and their movements are considered as signs of coming in. In rituals a boat appearing at the horizon is considered as spirits coming in.

Substitute entity of spirits, anthropomorphic figure comes in. Choreographed action of hosting (영신, 迎神). Park, Pil-Soo, Artistic Director of *Gaetje*, invites all lives with his voice. Bowing down, soothing, feeding, and feast (오신, 娛神). The elders remember the culture of dancing the figure's body. They are soothing all beings in the figure's body. By this interaction, all lives are connected. Interdependence becomes active. Sending the lives back to the ocean (송신, 送神).

[25:21]

### **Convey: Reinterpretation of *Gaetje***

#### **-Interaction between ocean and performers-**

Korea Dance Resource Center 2018, photo documentation (KDRC archive)

Choi, Haeree as concepter, dramaturge, and director reinterpreted and directed ecological, site-specific meanings for the performance. Art director Park, Eunyoung directed this dance and media performance.

Hwang, Kyoung Hwan 2018, video footage & editing (KDRC archive)

Cho, Kyoung Mann & Choi, Haeree, concept of video documentation

Carrying moon in media lamps.

Carrying moon as a substitute for *heonsik* process.

Human body and dance for ecosomatic processing of interaction.

Swinging between ocean and human place.

All lives' coming in and human beings' moving to the lives.

How to feel the ocean toward me and bodies toward the ocean?

Park, So-jung & Han, Sangryul posed these thematic questions as they proceeded their exploration.

[26:37]

## Performers and Staffs

### 1. Performers

*Samboilbae* Priests: Priest Moon, Gyu-hyun; Sukyoung; Lee, Hee-Un; Kim, Kyoung-Il.

*Maehyang* Ritual & Villagers' Dance; Woldu-ri villagers, *Getdol* Theater & Audiences (students from Mokpo National University & elementary students from Haenam-gun).

*Maehyang* Contemporary Dance: Han, Sangryul; Lee, Boramie; Heo, Hyoseon; Oh, Kyung-suk; Ahn, Ji-suk.

*Gaetje* Dancers: Wando villagers, Seo, Jung Sook; Kim, Boram & Ambiguous Dance Company; Park, So-Jung; Han, Sangryul.

### 2. Staffs

Authors, General Artistic Directors & Dramaturges: Cho, Kyoung Mann; Choi, Haeree.

Artistic Director of *Maehyang* & *Gaetje*: Park, Pil Soo.

Artistic Director of "Convey" in *Gaetje*: Park, Eunyoung.

Editing: Kim, Hyeon Hui (Media Education Cooperative); Jeong, Yeonwoo (SFU).

Narration: Lee, Minah (Art Action EARWIG).

Film Director & Resource Contribution on *Samboilbae*: Bok, Jin Oh (KFEM).

Film Director & Resource Contribution on *Maehyang* & *Gaetje*: Hwang, Kyoung Hwan (Teuloh Production).

Film Documentation: Korea Dance Resource Center (KDRC).

Photography: Cho, Kyoung Mann (Saemangeum & *Maehyang*); Korea Dance Resource Center (*Gaetje*).

Choreography: Park, So-jung (*Maehyang*); Seo, Jung Sook & Kim, Boram (*Gaetje*).

Composition: Lee, Keun Yong (*Maehyang*).

*Maehyang* Ritual Processing: Lee, Su-Bin; *Getdol* Theater; EcoHorizon Institute.

*Gaetje* Ritual Processing: Kim, Jung Sam.

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