

LOTUS : SYMBOL OF REBIRTH AND RESURRECTION

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Abstract: *This paper contemplates on the image of a lotus which started from my art work. I looked at the symbolic meanings of lotus in Korean culture and Korean folk tales, as well as cultures, religions, and myths throughout the world. Through the study on the symbolic meanings of lotus, I came to understand that the image of a lotus from my art work that has been engraved deeply in my mind signifies breaking out of the past and being reborn, at a time when my life's journey required change. In short, it signifies a rebirth and regeneration.*

Keywords: *Pedagogical Artistry, Creativity, Educational Activities*

INTRODUCTION

We often encounter symbols that represent us in our dreams. Symbols, however, exist not only in dreams but also as symbolical thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and situations (Jung et al., 1964).

Symbols try to convey something that belongs to the unconscious, the uncharted world, clearly to the conscious. When we say a symbolic meaning, we assume that it has an unknown meaning. The major characteristic of a symbol is that some part of the meaning is always left unexplained, even though we try our best to express the unknown part. Jung says a symbol carries a meaning (Lee, 2006).

According to Jung, a symbol is an image that represents the archetype of the collective unconscious and cannot be understood or defined through empirical and conscious language. For Jung, a symbol is something that has a meaning but its meaning cannot be fully explained in words. (Jung, 1964)

Symbols make people see a totally different aspect of things through familiar images. Familiar images are mental contents in our mind. As a result, a symbol incites people to think and interpret the implicit meaning. It is the content that has yet to be revealed clearly as it resides in the unconscious, but tries to be revealed in connection with the primary meaning of the symbol (Lee, 2006).

In Jung's analytical psychology, mythology, folk tales and dreams affect the individual's conscious life. In particular, mythology and folk tales are considered to help the subject of primitive mentality to acquire consciousness as human beings and to live a conscious life. This is because Jung believed that our consciousness is not something that is given to us, but something that we acquire from the collective conscious and repeats differentiation and growth therefrom.

Therefore, I'd like to take a look at a symbol of lotus in Korean culture as well as culture, religion, and myth throughout the world. Also, I would discuss the characteristics of lotus and its meanings for me that my experiences imply.

Out of many things to which I felt attracted to without knowing why, and which suggested significant meanings to me, lotus came to me as I was preparing for this paper.(Fig. 1).

I first had a meaningful encounter with lotus about 6-7 years ago at art therapy workshop. Lotus was the very first image that appeared during the art activity with Jung's active imagination technique applied. I drew a picture of a boy drawing a flower out of pond as my first image. At that time, I was not aware of the fact that the flower was a lotus; I simply thought it was any flower. After that, I drew a few more pictures of lotus during active imagination activity. Since then, as time passed by, lotus left me a strong impression. Several years later, in 2008, I came to meet lotus again during the sandplay therapy workshop. This time again, lotus came to me with a boy.

Culture, created by human beings, goes along with symbols. Symbols have a lot to do with our lives, and thus are signals for communication.



Fig. 1. Lotus

Symbol comes from a combination of two Greek words, 'Sym' - meaning, 'together' - and "Ballein" - meaning, "to throw". Therefore, the word means 'to be together, to connect, to match', or 'combination' and 'two becoming one'. When two certain themes and an image which represents those themes the best are 'thrown together', the symbols can represent autonomous meaning (Jacobi, 1968). In his book, *An Essay on Man*, Cassirer(1956) said, 'symbols are mental energy that internalizes mental meaning into specific signs'. On the other hand, Tunnner defined symbols with historical and social meanings as 'something that is considered to represent certain things by similar characteristics everyone agrees to, or by link between fact and thoughts'. From his point of view, symbols are things that possess similarities between media and contents in a certain culture.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LOTUS

Lotus has its roots in the dirt, and its stem grows out of the water surface. Its flower blossoms as sun comes up and closes as sun goes down - very noble indeed with blue, yellow, red, and white colors (Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation, , 1996). Ha-flower has its stem rise high above water and has big leaves, while Yeon-flower has its leaves float on the surface - Koreans usually refer Ha-flower to lotuses (Kim, 2004). During the one-year growth cycle, sprouts, grows leaves, blossoms, bears fruit, grows lotus root, and then takes a rest. The noticeable characteristic of lotus is that it has its leaves grow first, then blossoms - also, flower and leaves grow together. It grows well in organic soil and flowers in July and August, which do not blossom at the same time but rather blossom in a row over several months.

The shape of petals are round but pointed, and petals show several veins. Lotus has several stamens and as it flowers, it bears fruit at the same time. Also, one study showed that lotus is a higher vegetation which can control its own temperature (Han, 2006). This flower is well known for long vitality, and even though it lives in dirt and water, it does not get wet or dirty, but stays clean and beautiful. Due to such purity and elegance, they call lotus 'the noble of flowers'.

LOTUS IN KOREAN CULTURE

In Korea, lotus is not common; yet, it is not difficult to be found.

Korea has varieties of lotus festivals from late June till August. Lotus blossoms even in the dirty water, thus people have praised it as clean and noble flower. Also, its beautiful and noble appearance reminds people of transcendent realization. Therefore, the flower is known for containing Buddhist doctrine as well as truth of Buddha. On the contrary, some compares lotus to people in confusion and delusion. It is

said that Buddha thought of human beings as lotuses in a pond. Some are in the dirt, some are trying to get out of it, some barely have their heads out of water, and some are struggling to blossom. I would discuss more significance lotus has in terms of Buddhism as I talk about its symbolical meanings from religious point of view.

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- Lotus as a symbol of rebirth and resurrection

Two famous Korean fables in which lotuses appear are 'Shim Cheong story' and 'Kongjee and Patjee'.

To begin with, below are the summaries of the two stories

ShimCheong story

[Once upon a time, Mr. Shim, Hak-kyu who was a blind was married to Mrs. Kwok, and they did not have a child. They prayed days and nights at Buddhist temple for a baby, and one day gave birth to a daughter whom they named as 'Cheong'. Mr. Shim's wife passed away 7 days after giving birth to Cheong, and as he was poor, he went from here to there to ask for milk for his daughter. Cheong was a truly dutiful, filial daughter and did everything to support her father.

One day, as she was late from her work, Mr. Shim went out to look for her, and made a false step into a puddle. He was saved by a monk, who told him that he could open his eyes if he dedicates 300 bags of rice. Mr. Shim, out of impetus, made a contract that he would; yet without any money to purchase that much rice, he suffered gravely. Cheong prayed to God days and nights and finally one day, an old monk appeared in her dream. The next day, she made a contract with a sailor who was looking for a girl as a sacrifice to the sea and received 300 bags of rice as commission, and dedicated those to Buddha. Then, she told her father what she did and left for the sea. And 15-year-old Cheong fell into Imdang water.

In the sea, or Imdang water, she was saved by maids at sea palace. Sea King told her about her previous, present, and future lives. After spending one day at the sea palace, she came back on the surface of Imdang water, being wrapped inside a big lotus, and was found by seamen who gave this lotus to the King as a present. The king and Cheong got married. Cheong, now a queen, threw a party for blinds to find her father and on the last day of the festival, she met Mr. Shim, and deeply touched, he finally opened his eyes.]

Kongjee & Patjee

[In Jeonra province, there was Mr. Choi who had a happy family of his wife and daughter named Kongjee. Then one day, his wife passed away and he remarried to a widow. She gave birth to a daughter whose name was Patjee; yet, Mr. Choi loved Kongjee more out of pity since she lost her mother. This led the wife maltreat Kongjee all the time.

One day, she told Kongjee to fill a jug that had a huge hole with water. Of course, it was never filled no matter how hard she tried. Frustrated, she was crying and a toad helped her by blocking the hole. And one day, there was a party that the family was invited to. The stepmother told Kongjee that she would go to the party with Patjee, and Kongjee should weave and then pound three seoms of rice. Overwhelmed with loads of work, she was crying when an angel came down, weaved for her, and gave her beautiful clothes and shoes. Then, birds came by and pounded rice for her. With beautiful clothes from an angel on, Kongjee went out for the party. When she was near a brook, a bell rang, notifying a parade of an official. She was surprised by the sound of a bell, and missed her shoe in the stream. The official found one beautiful shoe in the water, and was looking for its owner back in town.

At first, Kongjee's stepmother said it was her shoe, only to be badly punished. Kongjee, even though she was quite embarrassed, went to find her shoe. When she met the official, she told him about the story of her lost shoe and how she was maltreated by her stepmother. He had no wife, and being attracted by her wise and graceful beauty, got married to Kongjee. The stepmother and Patjee were so jealous of Kongjee that they made a plan. Patjee lured Kongjee to join her for a lotus picnic, then pushed her into a pond to drown. Then, Patjee pretended to be Kongjee and became the official's wife.

One day, the official picked some lotuses and put them in a vase. Those lotuses tore Patjee's hair every time she came into the room, so she burnt the flowers.

Right then, a neighbor visited the official's house and discovered a sparkling gem in a furnace, and took it. The gem turned into Kongjee and she told the neighbor that Patjee killed her, and told her to invite the official. Invited, the official was about to have his meal, but found out that his pair of chopsticks did not match. Right then, some voice spoke behind the screen, saying, 'You notice the mismatch of the chopsticks, and yet cannot tell your partner is not the right one'. Deeply surprised, he was about to go home, and then, Kongjee appeared in front of him and told him how she died. When he called Patjee to account what happened, she confessed how she killed Kongjee at a pond. The official had people to drain the pond, and found Kongjee who was not still alive. He took her home again and killed Patjee, put her in a jug and sent it to Kongjee's stepmother. When she opened the jug, she passed out, and never awoke again.]

These two stories have been transmitted by words of mouth, and rooted deeply into our traditional culture and people's religion.

The stories share some similarities. Both main characters lost their mothers at early ages and had stepmothers (which, according to Jung's theory, represent negative femininity), and after hardships and falling into water, re-appeared within or as lotus.

Shim Cheong and Kongjee passed through rites of passages symbolized as water, and resurrected with lotuses. By falling into water, they went through the world of unconscious and returned to life as lotuses. Rebirth signifies that a real self of personality, or 'Self', is represented as the center of personality by including consciousness. In other words, rebirth represents self-actualization and harmony of whole mentality. In order to achieve this, one must go through death first. In the story, Kongjee's specific age is not known, but considering the fact that Shim Cheong fell into the water when she was fifteen, this holds a meaning of rite of passage. It seems to let us know the whole process of achieving self-actualization through the harmony of life of consciousness and that of unconsciousness. In other words, consciousness becomes separate from collective unconscious, develops, and regresses back to the origin of mentality.

The first half of life is a period of giving birth to physical child, while during the latter half of life, mental child is born. Individuation during the first half of life is a period during which conscious becomes separate from unconscious and strengthens itself while the latter half of life is a process which strengthened self during the first half experiences and conceptualizes the unconscious, and ego which represents the conscious approaches self archetype which represents unconscious. As Shim Cheong and Kongjee resurrect within or as lotuses, mental be(Choi, 2008).

Another example of lotus symbolizing rebirth and resurrection can be found on the decoration of hearse; Lotuses imply the dead will get vitality from the lotus and be reborn in the better world. (World of Symbols of Koreans, 2002)

The first time lotus pattern was used in Korea is Three Dynasty period in which Buddhism was introduced. The very first design is found in a cave painting during Koguryo dynasty. Since then, lotus pattern was widely used in kiwa, flower pot, window bar, various porcelains and craftworks, attires and paintings throughout different periods and fields. In terms of Korean architectures, it was most widely used in wa-dang and dan-cheong (*wa-dang is the round, end part of ki-wa and dan-cheong is the decoration on the buildings). Mostly, lotus patterns can be found in the circle of Soo-mak-sae (a kind of wa-dang) (Figure 2. Soo-mak-sae).

In terms of dan-cheong, lotus patterns were widely used both for temples and for buildings in general. Also, window bars were often decorated with lotus patterns (Figure 3). (World of Symbols of Koreans, 2002)



Figure 2. Soo-mak-sae



Fig. 3. Dan-cheong

Besides, lotus was extensively used on cave paintings, incense burners, and ki-was. Also, lotus, along with jem, represent rebirth, immortal and eternal life, and perfection not only in Korean symbol system but also throughout the world. (World of Symbols of Koreans, 2002).

In Egypt, lotus was recognized as a holy flower with 'symbolical meaning of birth and rebirth just like phoenix' due to its characteristic of wildering as the sun goes down (Korean Culture Symbol Dictionary, 1992).

Considering these symbolical meanings of lotuses, the latter half of Kongjee and Patjee which shows death and rebirth of Kongjee represents peoples' dream of immortal and eternal life and their hopes for self-actualization to become perfect. In the first half of the story, Kongjee overcomes her hardships with helps from a cow into which her mother's soul transformed and other helpers and earns unexpected lucks. However, she was too weak and naïve to protect her happiness against evil side. She grows into an

independent person who can confront and deal with risks in her life only after going through harsh rites of passages represented by water and fire.

The end of kiwa is blocked by arc form if it is a concave roofing tiles, and by circular form in case of convex roofing tiles. Those parts are called pyung-wa-dang or won-wa-dang, and have been known as am-mak-sae and soo-mak-sae. The purpose of dan-cheong is to decorate or to paint the face of chief priest when they hold memorial service for God. It gives off mysterious aura, driving away ghosts, and represents dignity and authority.

SYMBOLICAL MEANING OF LOTUS IN CULTURE, RELIGION, AND MYTHS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

Lotus, along with jem, represent rebirth, immortal and eternal life, and perfection not only in Korean symbol system but also throughout the world. Usually lotus is considered as a typical symbol of Eastern religion such as Buddhism. However, even before Buddhism was established, lotus was religiously significant in ancient Egypt. Egypt had three kinds of lotuses, and out of those three, *Nymphaea cerulea* was the holiest of all (Figure 4). In Egypt, lotus was recognized as a holy flower with 'symbolical meaning of birth and rebirth just like phoenix' due to its characteristic of wilting as the sun goes down (Korean Culture Symbol Dictionary, 1992). Ancient Egyptians considered lotus as a flower of Gods, and its symbolical meaning of authority and abundance was derived from this context.



Fig. 4. Priestess at the Lotus Pool 1

(www.patriciapapps.co.uk/html/lot...ool.html)

During the night, lotus closes its petals and sleeps under water, and in the morning it rises above the surface and blossoms. Therefore, ancient Egyptians regarded the flower as sun, or a symbol of creation and resurrection. According to creation myth of Hermopolis, a city in Egypt, huge lotus rose above the Original Sea and created the world. Also, as lotus has something to do with resurrection and creation, it represented Osiris, or God of resurrection in Egyptian myth, and also represented sovereign power and authority, being a holy flower of God Horus, a son of Osiris and the most superior God in Egyptian myth. In addition, in terms of Adongra, God of Thebes, lotus can be considered as sun, but in terms of Goddess Hator, it is related to moon. As a symbol for Goddess Isis, lotus symbolizes fecundity, purity, virginity, and virgin mother god (World Culture Symbol Dictionary, 1992).

Lotus appears in the story of Buddha's birth. It is said that Buddha was born in Lumbini foothills, and as he made his seven footsteps, wheel-like lotuses flowered. In Buddhist scriptures, lotus appears. In a book called <Kwan-Moo-Ryang-Soo-Kyung>, a bodhisattva is shown to be sitting within lotuses, and in other scriptures, lotus represents enlightenment. It also symbolizes heaven, or after-death world, and sometimes known as bodhisattva, or an ideal human being in Buddhism. Clear, and subtle smile of Buddha and bodhisattva is described as lotus. Last but not least, since lotus blossoms beautiful flowers

even when it lives in the dirt, lotus symbolizes continuous devotion and commitment and leading to enlightenment even in this world of suffering. Lotus petals in wide bloom symbolizes universe itself or the completion of enlightenment, and its stem represents the central axis of the universe(<http://cafe.daum.net/jjnd/HJWP/136>).

Eight petals signify four Buddhas and four bodhisattvas. In relation to this, "Pagoda on the Sajabinshinsa site" has four lions on the base, and in the center sits Dae-il Buddha. On his head, fully flowered lotus is carved, and the position Buddha is sitting is the very center of the lotus. "Three story stone pagoda supported by four lions" in Hwa-uhm temple also has eight-petal lotus. Four lions are supporting the pagoda, and above their heads lie eight-petal lotuses, and there is another lotus relief above the head of monk in the center of pagoda. This eight-petal lotus has the same meaning as that in "Pagoda on the Sajabinshinsa site". Lotus is a national flower of India, the birthplace of Buddhism, and thus appears in ancient myth of India. Before Buddhism was established, Brahmanism in ancient India had a myth of Narayana (incarnation of Vishnu) that lotus appeared out of belly button of the God who always sleeps under the water of chaos. From this story, an idea of "World lotus flower" was established, and lotus became to be considered as creation and formation(<http://kr.blog.yahoo.com/yangwon50/3570>).

An Indian myth says Brahma created universe within the lotus. Also, lotus signifies passive side of visible world, the best formation of the earth, fecundity of immortal substances, moving on the surface of water, self-generation, self-birth, flowering, permanent rebirth, superhuman birth, purity, beauty, long life, health, fame, and especially good luck for sons and daughters. Lotus is the mother being of sun, and plays a role of chair for God Brahma who was born from sun. Agne, God of Fire was also born in lotus. Lotus as representation of sun symbolizes Surya the God of Sun, and Vishnu, and as representation of moon, it symbolizes Goddess Padma(Cooper, 1978).



Padma



Vishnu

CONCLUSION

Because the lotus flower looks so clean and pure against the background of the dirty pond, it has been used to represent purity and beauty in Buddhism and Hinduism, respectively. The ancient Egyptians scholars observed that in the night-time the lotus closed its flowers and sank into the water, only to reemerge in the morning. Hence association to rebirth and the Sun, as well as life and death became prominent. In

Buddhism the lotus is known to be associated with purity, spiritual awakening and faithfulness. In Hinduism the lotus flower is beauty, fertility, prosperity, spirituality, and eternity.

A lotus rises with the sun at daybreak and falls with the setting sun. It symbolizes creation, regeneration, rebirth, immortality and every step of life, including the past, present and future.

Symbols deliver meanings and power to people. Symbols present not only the representative meanings but also the power within. Symbols play the role as a bridge that connects the two separate dimensions. In other words, symbols connect the unknown and known, and the conscious and unconscious.

In addition, symbols let us recognize certain facts. Symbols emerge from figurational and non-speculative psychic functions, not from logical and speculative ones. Thus, the image of a symbol calls for an intuitive and instant recognition.

Thirdly, a symbol signifies something more than itself. It not only directs people to an intended meaning but also opens the door for a corresponding dimension of soul.

Lastly, symbols have a function of modification, which is one of the most important functions of symbols. According to Jung, symbols do not arise from thinking but from the thoughts awakened by imagination that presents subjective motives. In other words, a symbol can carry multiple meanings in a image, depending on the semantic relevance (Kim, 2001).

Considering that a symbol is the archetype that is brought to consciousness (Meslin, 1973), symbols are a complex product of the archetype and environment at a given moment (Theodore Apt. 2008). Also, archetypes appear across cultures and time periods, leading people to perceive and experience the world in a specific way (Lee & Dokomo, 2017).

A primitive human condition that can produce the fundamentally same patterns inside the human psyche is the so-called archetype of Jung. When the archetype is expressed as an image, it is called an archetype image (Booyoung Lee, 2009) and the image becomes a symbol. A symbol carries meanings and is the best possible expression for something unknown, which cannot be fully explained in words (Jung, 1951).

Through contemplation on the symbol of a lotus, I came to understand why the image of a boy drawing a lotus flower out of a pond was engraved deeply in my mind. I came to understand that I drew such painting at a time when I had a developmental task of breaking out of the past self to be reborn as a new self.

I would like to conclude the paper with the following poem.

Lotus

-By Younghee, Jung

*Seeing your always
drenched-like mind,
you are a lotus.*

*Even though you are smiling,
stretching out your reddish face on the water surface,
standing on your toes,
on the floor of a deep pond,*

*How can I
be unaware of the struggling
you are going through?*

*I will be your shower
on a summer day.*

*Let out all your
deep resentment and sadness.*

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