

A Practice of Musicology-ing*

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Eumagi Joaseo, Eumageul Saengak Hapnida [I like Music, So I Think of Music: About All Things that We Call Music]. By Chung Kyung-Young. Seoul: Gom Publishing House, 2021. 218 p. ISBN 979-11-89327-11-8 (03670)

Musicologist Chung Kyung-Young's new work *Eumagi Joaseo, Eumageul Saengak Hapnida* [I like Music, So I Think of Music: About All Things that We Call Music] (hereinafter *Eumagi Joaseo*) is a book that effectively breaks down the ambiguous boundary in writing for a general audience versus an academic audience.

The author states that the book's content originates from the classes he teaches at Hanyang University, under the title *Humans and Their Musical Imagination*.¹ In the eight chapters of his book, the author weaves together already-existing forms of knowledge along with new concepts and new ways of thinking. The author explores the various cultural and ideological boundaries that music creates by expounding upon multiple music-related concepts, forging new and alternative perspectives, and concluding these lines of thought with humanistic reflections.

In this way, *Eumagi Joaseo* is also a book on the author's practice of 'thinking with music' in both a musical and humanities-related sense. Borrowing from Christopher Small's term 'musicking,' the author is 'musicology-ing' in his own way, through *Eumagi Joaseo*.² Chung pioneers an area in the music curriculum that liberal arts education has yet to explore. Also, the author's work may mark a new beginning for musicology, breaking down the high walls erected by the contemporary academic world and moving into a new mode of communication.

* This book review is a translated version of "Eumakak Hagi-ui Han Silcheon 음악학하기의 한 실천[A Practice of Musicology-ing]," originally published in *Korean Journal of Art Studies*, Vol. 32 (2021): 319-330. Translator: Yuhyun Catherine Park. Proofreader: James M. Milne.

Musicology as a Liberal Arts Subject

In today's tertiary education, there is a tendency to place musicology under the sub-category of culture and art, and within the category of general education (GE) classes. Although the names of the disciplines covered by the culture and art category are slightly different for each university, musicology as a GE course has remained relatively unchanged.³ In particular, universities that open elective courses related to musicology have long favored the traditional title of 'Understanding Western Music,' which deals with the basic theory and history of Western Art Music (WAM). To this day, the subject occupies a central place in elective courses on Western music.

Although 'Understanding Western Music' is a course about learning a unique tradition of music culture in today's diverse cultural phenomena known as WAM, which is 'classical music,' it still seems to be one of the most popular courses among college students. This is because the music of Western art, which is commonly taught in this course, is not only a channel for the students to become acquainted with Western culture but is also one of the mainstays of art education at the undergraduate level.

Eumagi Joaseo approaches music in a fundamentally different way from how music is treated in contemporary elective courses. Simply put, the existing textbooks for elective music courses mainly explain what WAM is and what it contains. In contrast, *Eumagi Joaseo* is unique in that it deals with, as stated by the author, the question of "how to think through music." (Chung, 9) 'Thinking or philosophizing through music' has not been the leading educational purpose of elective music courses. Even if taught, philosophy of music is about the thoughts of great philosophers on music or crossovers between (mainly Western) music and each period's philosophical and aesthetic currents in music history. On the other hand, the author's stream of thoughts in *Eumagi Joaseo* can be said to be closer to 'thinking about philosophizing itself' while walking through the major topics in musicology.

The Politics of Music: Demarcating the Boundaries between the Center and Periphery

In Chapter I, "Are There Dialects in Music?" the author's thinking centers around the elements of music related to political science by exploring various artifacts from Western music history. Here, traditions such as Gregorian chant, major and minor scales, and solmization take center focus. They appear in crucial moments in the construction of Western music history as well as contemporary systems of thought, and the author explores the power relationships that divide the center from the periphery.

For example, the authority of religious power exercised in the standardization process of Gregorian chant and the effect on musicians from the change from modal to tonal music are reconstructed in an intriguing manner, through an analogy of standard language versus local dialect.

At the end of the chapter, Chung connects the processes of standardization, unification, and systematization that appear in some of the scenes from Western music history with a change of mindset regarding the acquisition of ‘universality.’ He also refers to some of the things that have been pushed out from the center to the periphery, to highlight the politics of music inherent to the processes of history. Moreover, it works as a device to expose the violence inherent to the universality that Western art music has long proclaimed. In this passage, readers will be reintroduced to the traditions that had to be excluded in WAM’s process of acquiring centrality status, as in the various expressions of music and other artifacts pushed to the periphery by the WAM-oriented thinking system. Naturally, these discussions flow in many directions, providing a productive and stimulating atmosphere for debate in classroom settings.

Interest in the politics surrounding music continues in Chapter II, “The Politics of Noise.”⁴ In this chapter, the author pays attention to the power relationship that emerges in distinguishing noise from non-noise. The author explains the ‘situation’ that determines sound as either noise or not, defining noise as a ‘sound that has been pushed out, unable to hold the center position.’(Chung, 53) This means that the author is not interested in the physical and psychological factors that divide noise and non-noise. In defining noise, he points to the mechanism of demarcating a boundary line, which he believes is socio-cultural convention.

The author sheds light on interesting examples from musical history. For instance, Edgar Varèse (1883-1965) uses the tuning sound of the orchestra as its material in *Tuning Up*.⁵ He reverses the idea of noise by depicting a noise-sound as a subject. In his musical work, after bringing a noise-sound into the boundaries of socio-cultural practice, the sound is no longer considered noise. In addition, consonant and dissonant intervals, one of the central topics in the history of Western music theory, come under the consideration of demarcating the boundaries between noise and non-noise from the author’s point of view. The author’s point is that appropriate dissonance, i.e., being within the noise category, is ‘an important factor in the making of appropriate music.’ This notion serves as a marker for recognizing the importance of noise-forms that have hovered on the periphery in the politics of sound.(Chung, 56)

The author further introduces the idea of a ‘soundscape’ by Murray Schafer (1932-2021), a critical concept in discussions related to noise.⁶ Given today’s technological and industrial development, the urban environment is filled with the all-encompassing sounds of mass media. Sound is no longer an element representing the identity of a space. Sounds in Seoul are not distinguishable from sounds from Busan, London, or Rio de Janeiro. Homogenized sounds, bereft of identity and life confined to

a particular cultural space, reflect the soundscapes of our present life. In Chapter II, the world of sound, which includes music, provides a foundation for a discourse that will help reconstruct the human past and present from a new perspective.

Questions on Music as Text

In Chapter III, “How Did Bach Become the Father of Music?” and Chapter IV, “Why Did Kimberly Call Musical Score Just Music?” the author writes about so-called great musical works that are deeply rooted in today’s classical music culture, namely, the concept of canon and the concept of musical score as a fixed text. Since both concepts have long been areas of interest in historical musicology, the author can also be said to posit questions on the musicology of the past. This inquiry also poses questions of self-reflection for musicology on the role of traditional musicology within the mythification process of Western art music, and also in relation to the advent of so-called ‘new musicology’ in the late 1990s.⁷ However, how the author deals with this question results in a unique conclusion, differing from other researchers.

There remains a controversial, common-sense notion within the study of music: the general public still refers to Bach as the ‘father of music.’ The author first turns to this subject as a topic of music history. Chronologically, he describes Bach to be the earliest figure in the tradition of German music. Then, he explains step by step that this development results from the appearance of the ‘international style’ in Bach’s music. To illustrate this, he draws from basic concepts such as polyphony and homophony. He also describes the emergence of the German nation, which had previously remained on the periphery of Western music history during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, as the center of Baroque music history, through the emergence of a new style of music such as choral.

Initially, the expression ‘father of music’ did not refer to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach but according to Mozart’s words the music of Bach’s son, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. The author challenges common sense by revealing that the term refers to a new musical style originating from Italian vocal music in the early eighteenth century. By doing so, the author once again astonishes those who have upheld the common notions of musical history. He states that the cultural roots of the German musical tradition, which have long been considered a realm of ‘sacredness’ beyond greatness, originated not from within but outside of Germany.

Furthermore, the author points to the national ideology that operated within the cultural phenomenon that called Johann Sebastian Bach the ‘father of music,’ stripping off the mythical vestments that have limited the experience of musical audiences. The WAM tradition, which has been called ‘classical music,’ is not something hidden under the

veil of the mystery of music but a cultural complex made up historically and culturally.

Chapter IV can be read in a similar context. This chapter touches upon the subject of 'musical score' and regards it not as a simple, fixed entity but as a historical and cultural construct that is fluid and transformative. As the author points out, score has long been recognized as the equivalent of music (or, more precisely, WAM). In addition, musicology began as part of institutional university education and became an independent discipline in the German-speaking world at the end of the nineteenth century, playing a decisive role in establishing the general perspective on music and its written documents. This development, stemming from the work of publishing a critical edition that reflected the composer's final intention, began in the late nineteenth century and was one of the main tasks of musicology. Also, as the author points out in this chapter, the fact that the first German name given to the discipline of musicology was *Musikwissenschaft* (music science) shows what early musicology was aiming for through these works, which is to express faithfully the intention of the composer. The way to establish this method scientifically and objectively was to create a determining text about music, i.e., a musical score. The object was regarded as a source of musical meaning with which musicology has long struggled.

In this way, the author shows how score is not the equivalent to music, reintroducing it as the mode of musical consumption that dominated the market until the advent of the recording era. (Chung, 105) These developments also relate to the varied contexts of distribution of musical works through scores, which are frequently featured in the study of popular music in the early twentieth century. Through this, the author implicitly suggests that the WAM discourse has been hanging on to the issue of music as text and 'the intention of the writer (composer)' in a unique way. The author's view of score as a fluid process and part of various socio-cultural activities related to music, rather than as a fixed object, becomes more concrete and clear in connection to Small's concept of 'musicking.' In the end, the author's thoughts resonate with Small's argument that the meaning of music is not found in the music itself, but is created from the act of making and doing music and the human practice around music.

This line of inquiry eventually leads to the author's reflection on the nature of musical experience and performance. After attending a concert of Franz Schubert's *Die Schöne Müllerin*, he contemplates the various elements of his experience. The beauty of the music, which the author felt throughout the performance, cannot be explained by Schubert's work alone. "The unique skill that the singer employed, the excitement of buying a concert ticket, an evening at an old Chinese restaurant near the Sejong Center for the Performing Arts, and a breeze that touches his face as he came out of the concert hall" also had their roles to play in building up to this entrancing experience. (Chung, 115-116) The

author will never experience the same feeling again unless he turns back time. In other words, the ‘relationship’ between an experience and the author, who is the owner of the event, cannot be reproduced through any other relationship. Through this, the author supports Small’s argument on ‘musicking’ and raises questions about the innate nature of musical experience, continuing deeper into the nature of musical knowledge, all of which has been continuously re-explored in the recent discourses on WAM.⁸

What Music Theory Tells Us

The essence of musical experience discussed at the end of Chapter IV forms the common denominator of the aspects of music theory covered in Chapters V (An Excuse for Music Analysis) and Chapter VI (Music in Form: The Way Instrumental Music Talks). Using Schubert’s song *An die Musik* as an example, the author walks the readers through the contrapuntal relationship between the piano accompaniment and the vocal element, with wit and insight, and without too much musical jargon. Through this, he convinces the audience, who may be reluctant about the idea of ‘analyzing music,’ by showing that there is something to be gained through music analysis. The author believes that analyzing music “does not undermine the original value or music experience, but makes them clearer.” This point reflects the author’s view that music analysis, a highly abstract and professional intellectual activity, is done for the sake of music experience. (Chung, 126)

What is noteworthy is the relationship between the music that the author analyzes and the first-person ‘I’ who listens to it.

A good analysis reaches beyond the object of analysis. It makes me look at the object. It depicts the crossover point between the object and myself and brings out the deep desire inside me that is looking at the object. (...) Through the analysis, music comes closer to me. It becomes something I have a special relationship with, rather than one of many. (Chung, 144)

This thought re-establishes the relationship between Small’s concept of ‘musicking,’ which the author introduced at the end of Chapter IV, and ‘music analysis,’ a long-standing subfield of musicology. Suppose music analysis constitutes an act related to musical works, from the perspective of ‘musicking’ as advocated by Small. In this case, analysis becomes a kind of ‘relationship’ that a subject has with oneself, not a unique social or cultural relationship. And the listener, as the subject of the relationship, creates a relationship with the object through various musical forms, which can be said to be the cultural norms of WAM.

Whether it be vocal music (Chapter V) or instrumental music (Chapter VI), the world inside the music is an excellent place to talk about another dimension of various cultural conventions.

The last two chapters of *Eumagi Joaseo* explore the historicity (*geschichtlichkeit*) inherent to the aesthetic standards of Western music culture. Chapter VII, “Wrong Music,” deals with the historicity of music’s composition, performance, and appreciation. The author begins by saying that certain forms of composition, performance, and appreciation can be said to be ‘wrong,’ according to the aesthetic standards of a given era. However, at the same time, he also talks about the dialectical nature of this question. The collapse of an era’s standards comes when things said to be ‘wrong’ are used creatively. From this, the author turns the problem of ‘right and wrong’ into an issue of ‘taste.’ In the end, the historicity of taste is a question closely related to ‘musical experience,’ which the author repeatedly mentions throughout *Eumagi Joaseo*.

In the last chapter, “When Did the Lights Go off at the Concert Hall?” the author draws the readers’ attention to the historicity of this cultural convention in the ‘concert’ system. He finds the historical origin of this cultural convention in Beethoven’s music itself. The author says that Beethoven’s motivic development demanded a new technique of listening for the audience at the time. In other words, listening to the repetition and transformation of motifs as part of ‘becoming’ a complete musical work required a peculiar way of listening with full attention.

Composition has become a battlefield where materials and composers, conventions and wills, and the past and future fight fiercely. And in the face of that breathtaking battle, the audience stays quiet, focusing and listening to the music without creating a disturbance. Even as the lights fade out. (Chung, 144)

As readers look upon critical eras or events from music history, they recall how the lights at those concert halls are still going down during the performances of today. Such observations will invite the readers themselves to reflect on today’s cultural conventions at classical concert halls.

Concluding Remarks

The eight chapters of *Eumagi Joaseo* feature the multi-layered relationships that the discipline of musicology has with society, culture, history, and philosophy, and without using much music jargon. Readers catch a glimpse into the author’s practice of ‘musicology-ing.’ The author’s ‘musicology-ing’ invites the readers to take on the practice of thinking through music in the classroom setting.

The author emphasizes that the ideas presented in *Eumagi Joaseo* are by no means universal ideas that apply to 'all types of music.' (Chung, 144) Nevertheless, he finds that his arguments, mainly based on WAM, may not be far removed from Korean society in the twenty-first century, using 'modernity' as a lead for his thoughts. Moreover, he believes that by reflecting on modernity, one can find musicology serving as a window into understanding the world and humans. In that sense, the reflection on music and modernity at the end of the book results from the author's practice of 'musicology-ing' and the potentials inherent to his practice.

If this unique, historical concept of 'music' can be called music in the modern sense, then this book can be said to reflect the modernity of music. If the diverse and demanding conditions of the concept of 'music' in the modern sense make our musical experience less free, I wanted to explore the origin and argue that we don't need to be restricted by it at all, even if it is in a small scale. I wanted to leave the wonders of the musical experience behind but strip away the idea that music is an experience only for the specially qualified. (...) It is because [our thoughts on music] will give us the power to get rid of our 'common sense,' reveal the historicity of common sense, and let us freely enjoy the musicality that we all have, through the revealed historicity. (Chung, 209-210)

Notes

1. Chung Kyuon-Young, *Eumagi Joaseo, Eumageul Saengak Hapnida* [I like Music, So I Think of Music: About All Things that We Call Music] (Seoul: Gom Publishing House, 2021), 9.

2. Christopher Small proposes the new concept of ‘musicking’ in his book under the same title. He describes the various relationships of behaviors that occur in the concert hall, a venue where Western music is performed. Through an anthropological examination, Small proposes thinking of music not as a fixed object but as a relationship of practice, hence, in the gerundial form of ‘musicking.’ Christopher Small, *Musicking*, trans. Cho Seon-woo and Choi Yujun, Paju: Hyohyeong Publishers, 2004. For commentary on Small’s ideas, see Choi Yujun, *Christopher Small, Eumak Hagi* [Christopher Small’s Musicking] (Seoul: Communication Books, 2016).

3. Situations differ from university to university. For example, Korea National University of Arts (KNUA) runs GE courses jointly with nearby Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. Given the characteristics of art schools, KNUA’s elective courses are mostly made up of art subjects. The GE courses on musicology are categorized under ‘culture and art’ at Seoul National University, ‘humanity and art’ at Hanyang University, and ‘literature and art’ at Korea University, although no significant differences are found in the specific content of these categories.

4. The author currently leads “Politics of Sound and Listening: A Critical Listening to Culture and Technology,” a research project funded by the National Research Foundation, at Music Research Center, Hanyang University. The project started in 2019 as a six-year program. For detailed information, visit the website at Hanyang University’s Music Research Center (<http://mrc.hanyang.ac.kr>) or Korea Research Foundation’s Korean Research Memory (<https://url.kr/32treh>).

5. This work first appeared as an unfinished sketch by Varèse in 1947 and was completed by Chou Wen-Chung in 1998.

6. R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1993).

7. The adjective ‘new’ seems to have now lost its significance, but this trend arrived in the late 1990s and instilled new potential for musicology as a cultural study. It had a significant impact on academia. Translation of the Anglo-American academic discussion on new musicology can be found in Chae Hyun-kyung (ed.), *Sae Eumakhak: Haeche, Feminism, Geurigo Tonghap* [New Musicology: Deconstruction, Feminism, and Integration] (Seoul: Goongri Publishing House, 2007).

8. In this regard, the author’s view on music experience is in line with what Caroline Abbate described as ‘drastic.’ Abbate argues that the essence of music experience lies in the radical relationship between the sound and listener. Carolyn Abbate, “Music-Drastic or Gnostic?” *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 30, No. 3 (2004): 505-536. This thought-provoking article stirred a debate among musicologists. For a sharply contrasting perspective, see Karol Berger, “Musicology According to Don Giovanni, Or: Should We Get Drastic?” *The Journal of Musicology* Vol. 22, No. 3 (2005): 490-501.

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