

# The Value of Korean Contemporary Performing Arts History\*

Bang-song Song / Emeritus Professor, Korea National University of Arts\*\*

*Gugak Myeongin Myeongchang 100-nyeon Sajinjip* [Korean Traditional Music Master 100-year Photo Collection], Jaemyeong Ro, Seoul: Chaeryun, 2017, 331pp.

## 1. Introduction: Background of Book Review

Every life begins with encounters. This has made me live with great respect for each encounter and each relationship. At the beginning of 2018, the meeting with Seo Chaeryun, the president of Chaeryun Publisher, again reaffirmed the importance of this relationship to me.

By the end of the year of 2017, I was celebrating the joys of reunion with many people in the field of Korean music at the event held by the National Gugak Center to commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the relocation of its headquarters to Seocho-dong and also the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of Gugak Archives. During the event, I met president Chae again and I was unexpectedly asked if I have any manuscripts on the topic of Korean music that were available to be published.

As soon as 2018 started, I visited president Chae to discuss the contents of two books that I had prepared. During the visit, I received four books published by Chaeryun Publisher which turned out to be a pleasant surprise. Especially, Ro Jaemyeong's *Gugak Myeongin Meyongchang 100nyeon Sajinjip* [Korean Traditional

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\*\* **Song, Bang-song** is Emeritus Professor of Music at Korea National University of Arts. Song earned his Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology in 1975 at the Wesleyan University and has become a household name within Korean music circles, both in Korea as well as abroad. He has served as the President of the Society for Korean Historico-Musicology and Director of the National Gugak Center. Song also was awarded the 25th Bang Il Young Gugak Prize, an award presented to the first-rate musicians/scholars in Korea.

Music Master 100-year Photo Collection] (2017) which immediately caught my attention, as within it I found rare photos of Korean musicians which I could not find when I had previously published a biographical dictionary of musicians.

My first encounter with Ro Jaemyeong traced back to the Society for Korean Discology's conference. Ro was also the grateful young man who, together with professor Lee Jinweon, planned the exhibition of 'Song Bangsong Library' opening held by the National Library of Korea in 2008. To repay my debt and to promote a valuable photo collection to the field of Korean music, I decided to write a book review on his recent publication. Similar to Lee Bohyeong (the president of the Society for Korean Discology) who has enriched the field of Korean music despite many difficulties, Ro Jaemyeong is also a well-known figure in the field and is noted for his founding of the Korean Classical Music Record Museum. Therefore, prior to the book review of the 100-year Photo Collection of Korean Traditional Musicians, it is necessary to introduce Ro's accomplishments and contributions to the field.

Following the introduction, I shall discuss the contents of the photo collection and examine its strength - one being the originality of the book - and evaluate its logicality, accuracy, and verification.

## **2. Author's biography (scholarly activities and accomplishments)**

The author has served several positions including an invited professor at Seoul Women's University, a committee member of Arts Council Korea, a member of the planning committee of Naraeumak-keunjanchi (National music festival), a program developer of Jeonju International Sori Festival, an art director of Chungnam Arts and Culture Foundation and the Korea Kukak Festival, and a director of the Society for Korean Traditional Performing Arts.

From 1986 to the present, Ro has been the largest holder of Korean music records by collecting and organizing over 63,000 Korean music records. In addition, he established the Internet database for collecting Korean music for over 28 years. For 20 years from 1986 to 2005, Ro has also published a total of seven volumes of *Korean Traditional Music Record Dictionary* (a total of 3,000 pages per each genre) and continued to publish a series of *pansori* journals titled *Pansori myeongchang* (2005~present, *pansori* virtuosos).

Ro's works—including 39 books he either edited/co-edited—represent his 30-year effort collecting and researching Korean phonograph records. “No pain is no gain” is a fitting expression here. A woman can never taste of the joy of breastfeeding a child before experiencing the birth pain. How can farmers enjoy the joy of harvesting without the trouble of watering droughts, furrowing in the rainy season, and plowing the fields? This explains why Ro's academic attitude stands out through his works.

### 3. Contents and Originality

Before examining the contents of the book, I would like to cite some of Ro's words in his own introductions which shows the author's intention and motivation to publish the photo collection.

In traditional society, the Korean traditional music field was often not treated the correct respect despite its excellent artistry. Especially in the case of folk music, compared to the case of *jeong-ak* (court music), most of the musicians were treated even worse, undocumented in history. Only scarce data has been accessible even in the past 50 years.

Traditional musical materials such as oral records, recordings, videos, photos, and costumes are very rare, so therefore, I would like to organize photos of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Korean traditional music collected for 32 years to keep them in history. Over 500 photos of masters and scenes are categorized and introduced by genre and name, and collection numbers, names of musicians, general data, and descriptions are also provided in each photo.

Just as the author pointed out, Ro's book contains over 500 rare photos that were almost forgotten and unnoticed in the history of Korean traditional music. This also explains why I first compared Ro to Lee Bohyeong at the beginning of this book review as they both have paid particular attention to unnoticed and neglected subjects and continued their research, despite encountering difficulties and academic indifference.

*Korean Traditional Music Master 100-year Photo Collection* has three sections: “100-year of photos of Gugak masters,” “The 36<sup>th</sup> Korea Kukak Festival” in 2017,” and “Deep analysis of record: Collection of masterpieces of Joseon Vocal Music.”

The first chapter includes various genres such as *pansori*, *byeongchang*, *gyeonggi minyo*, *seodosori*, *tosok minyo* (Chungcheong, Jeonra, Gangwon, Gyeongsang, Jeju, and Hamgyeong provinces), *jeongga*, *jeong-ak* (court music), *minsok-ak* (folk music), dance, *minsok-nori*, theater, *pungmul*, and Korean religious music. The second chapter discusses the 36<sup>th</sup> Korea Kukak Festival in 2017. Finally, the third chapter examines 14 *pansori nundaemok* (most famous and interesting excerpt of *pansori* songs) records, mostly recorded in the 1930s.

In Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910), the first draft of the historical record written by the officials who compiled the memories of the kings is called *sacho*. Also, when describing the history, materials such as documents, records, paintings, and architectures are called *saryo* (historical materials). In this regard, I claim that *Korean Traditional Music Master 100-year Photo Collection* can also be considered as a creative *sacho*. The reason for this evaluation is that the author's work is not based on other's work and he compiled a collection of photographs and created historical materials of Korean contemporary performing arts. That is why I put the title of the book review as "The Value of Korean Contemporary Performing Arts History."

Considering the importance of *sacho* or *saryo* (historical materials) in studying Korean contemporary performing arts, the collection of photographs of musicians and performances in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Korea is particularly significant because it proves the book's originality and thus can be considered as original *sacho/saryo*. As an old proverb says, "A picture paints a thousand words." The second reason that highlights the book's originality and importance is that, like this old saying, the century is well-presented through over 500 photos and readers can directly recognize and witness moments that have been captured forever.

I was also aware of the power of photograph. Therefore, I tried to publish as many photos as possible when I worked as a journal editor of the Society for Korean Historico-Musicology since 1988. Also, in 1977, when I was working on the manuscript of the encyclopedia, I had to publish the book without any photographic evidence of artists in Korean contemporary music history as I could not find any. For that reason, photos presented at the beginning of this book of a variety of important people were not included in my book, *An Encyclopedia of Korean Musicians* (2012). People such as: Kang Namjung, Kang Dokeun, Kang Jangwon, Gong Daein, Kwon Geumju, Kim Dongjun, Kim Nokju, Kim Myeonghwan, Kim Sejun. If this photo collection was available at the time, then I feel that my

encyclopedia could have been more completed. But I suppose as another expression goes, hindsight is a beautiful thing and in that respect I should be proud of my achievements.

A photo of Kim Byeongseob (1921-1987) who presented in this collection as a master *seoljanggo* performer of *woodopungmul-gut* in Honam region recalled my own personal memories. Whilst I was studying toward my Ph.D. at the Wesleyan University (1973-1975), during my fieldwork research, I learned *seoljanggo* melodies with Robert C. Provine in master Kim's place. I later included two pictures of Kim Byeongseob in my book, *The Sanjo Tradition of Korean Komun'go Music* (1986) and Dr. Provine published his transcription as *Drum Rhythms in Korean Farmers' Music* (1975). Besides Kim Byeongseob, I also included pictures of master performers – Kim Changjo, Baek Nakjun, Shin Quaedong, Han Gabdeuk, Kim Yundeok, Sim Sanggeon, Kim Myeonghwan – in my published works. Unfortunately, none of the above-mentioned photo materials were included in *Korean Traditional Music Master 100-year Photo Collection*. My wish is for all of the photos contained in my English books to be widely used as academic materials, or in other words, I strongly encourage Ro to collect and use photos of the above-mentioned artists I had previously presented.

The third chapter which examines the record collection presented by the Korean Classical Music Record Museum again serves to highlight the originality of the publication. To clarify in detail, the author created a record collection of 14 pansori *nundaemok* (most famous and interesting excerpt of pansori songs) mostly recorded in the 1930s, examined it in detail, and appended them at the end of this photo collection. These phonograph records are essential in studying and analyzing the music of the Japanese colonial period. However, the sources are not open to everyone and many researchers often face difficulties during their research. In this regard, I would like to applaud Ro Jaemyeong for his decision to include a CD record without any cost. In short, the CD album, together with photographic materials presented in the book, verify its originality and value. Based on sound source and photos, I hope that the width and depth of traditional performing art history during the Japanese colonial period will be looked into with great interest.

## 4. Shortcomings and Concerns

The stepping stones that lead to the convenient and quick use of the historical materials are the index. This is why well-indexed texts are critical elements of academic books. Unfortunately, the first concern regarding *Korean Traditional Music Master 100-year Photo Collection* is the lack of such indexes.

The subject index represents the author's academic accomplishments and becomes the foundation for further research. For instance, one of my books, *Euigwaesokeui woori chungwa eumakeul chajaseo* [Searching for our dance and music in the Royal Protocols of the Joseon Dynasty] (2008), which includes Korean translations of 18 *euigwae* (royal protocols) and *Jeongjaemudoholgi*, becomes the foundation of *jeongjae* (Korean court dance) research. In addition, to publish the revised version of *Hanguk Eumak Tongsa* (1984, Korean music history), completing subject indexes (music) in *Joseon Wangjo Sillok* (Annals of the Joseon Dynasty) took almost five years. The index book, titled *Joseon Wangjo Sillok Eumak Gisa Chongsaekin* (Music related index book of the Annals of the Joseon Dynasty) was published in 1991 by the National Gugak Center.

The reason I put a long explanation for my previous works was to emphasize the importance of the index, or in other words, explain why the lack of an index in *Korean Traditional Music Master 100-year Photo Collection* matters.

After the fall of the Joseon Dynasty, court dance and music of the royal music institute Jangwak-won were maintained by the performers from the Aaksaeng Yangseongso of the Iwangjikaakbu (the Royal Music Institute during the Japanese colonial period). *Yeoewi* (doctress) or *chimseonbi* (seamstresses) who took roles in court dance, however, had to transmit the court dance tradition in the *gisaeng* (female entertainers, courtesans) association in the 1910s: it was a part of the tragic history of Korea. From this point of view, the second concern regarding *Korean Traditional Music Master 100-year Photo Collection* is that photos of *gwonbeon* (association of *gisaeng* in the 1910s) were not included in this photo collection. Since a part of court music dance and most parts of folk music were transmitted and performed by *yegi* (female entertainers) of *gwonbeon*, the history of *gwonbeon* needs to be highlighted.

The most representative work of *gwonbeon*, which includes photos of *yegi* and their performances, is *Joseon Miyin Bogam* (1918, Beautiful women of Joseon) published by the Joseon Yeonguhoe. For example, the book presents four *yegi*

of Hanseong Gwonbeon and Daejeong Gwonbeon, including Kim Chunwaechun, Kim Dangye, Kim Chundo, and Kim Chuwol's backgrounds and profiles. Their portraits are particularly valuable. Again, if these photos were included in *Korean Traditional Music Master 100-year Photo Collection*, the book would have been more complete.

As for academic research, there are a number of requirements such as: originality, logic, accuracy, consistency, and verifiability, and I discuss the consistency of the book based on the following two cases:

<Case 1-1> Kang, Namjung (photo abridged), **photo collection of the Korean Classical Music Record Museum**. Photo of Kang Namjung, a master performer of *seopyeonje pansori*.

<Case 1-2> Kang, Jangwon (photo abridged), **photo collection of the Korean Classical Music Record Museum MIPHOTO-05104**. Photo of pansori master Kang Jangwon (1909-1962). Kang is a disciple of pansori master Lee Dongbaek.

In terms of its consistency, differences between the above two cases are whether it includes 1) document management number; 2) birthplace and/or birth and death date; and 3) additional explanations.

In "Ga (G or K) section" of the book, Gong Daeil, Kwon Geumju, Kim Deoksun, Kim Rokju, Kim Myeonghwan, Kim Sohyang, Kim Sohwa does not have document management numbers. Other performers, however, have its document management numbers: Kang Dogeun (MIPHOTO-00843), Kim Dongjun (MIPHOTO-5288), Kim Sejun (MIPHOTO-05102), and Kim Yeoran (MIPHOTO-05792).

In addition to whether it has its document management numbers, the book does not provide how, nor on what criteria, the management number was assigned. In addition, it is also unclear whether the photo without a management number is an original photo taken by the author or a secondary source. Moreover, the indication of birth/death date is also inconsistent (Case 1-2). According to *An Encyclopedia of Korean Musicians* (2012), following performers' birth/death dates were verified: Kang Namjung (1897~), Kang Dokeun (1918-1996), Gong Daeil (1910-1990), Kwon Geumju (1903-1971), Kim Deoksun (1918-1996), Kim Dongjun (1925-1990), Kim Rokju (1897-1932), Kim Myeonghwan (1913-1989), Kim Sejun (1894~), and etc. Further explanations of the performer, if it is available, should be provided. For instance, Kang Namjung is a disciple of pansori master Kim Changhwan and Kang was famous for his *bak-taryeong* performance.

Considering above mentioned information, <Case 1-1> and <Case 1-2> can be revised as:

<Case 1-1, revised > Kang, Namjung (photo abridged), **photo collection of the Korean Classical Music Record Museum MIPHOTO-???**. Photo of Kang Namjung (1897~), a master performer of *seopyeonje pansori*, famous for *bak-taryeong* performance.

<Case 1-2, revised > Kang, Jangwon (photo abridged), **photo collection of the Korean Classical Music Record Museum MIPHOTO-05104**. Photo of pansori master Kang Jangwon (1909-1962). Kang is a disciple of pansori master Lee Dongbaek.

Lastly, the list of references also needs to be thoroughly reviewed. For instance, *An Encyclopedia of Korean Musicians* (2012) was published in Seoul, not Paju, Geyonggido.

## 5. Conclusion

For those who have a clear goal in their life, time simply does not go away. This saying is proven in Ro's work, *Korean Traditional Music Master 100-year Photo Collection*. Just as Park Gyeongli's *Toji* is a novel version of Korean modern history, Ro Jaemyeong's *Korean Traditional Music Master 100-year Photo Collection* is a photo-version of Korean modern history of performing arts. Through his work, Ro shows the true value of academic life.

The minor flaws that I mentioned above can never compromise its academic value. And with that quality, value, significance, and originality in mind, I would most certainly recommend this book to scholars and students of Korean studies and to academic institutions. Scholars and students in Korean history and Korean musicology also need to pay more attention to Ro Jaemyeong's academic mission as a scholar and his accomplishments.



## References

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