



# Reading Yi Kwangsu's *The Heartless* in the Context of Benefit Concerts around 1910

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## Abstract

*This study aims to analyze the characteristics and significance of the Samnangjin (三浪津) benefit concert in Yi Kwangsu's novel The Heartless (Mujeong) from the cultural and historical context of benefit concerts around 1910. First, benefit performances and concerts held in Korea before The Heartless was published are listed and their trends studied. The Heartless was published at a time when benefit performances and concerts from the West and Japan began to increase in Korea. At the time, the logic of benefits—that one should develop a good character and contribute to society—was combined with the modern performance culture of concerts to stimulate the sympathy of the Joseon people. Though based on the popularity of benefit concerts at the time, the benefit concert illustrated in The Heartless differs from these in some respects. The features of the novel's benefit concert, i.e. its amateurism and sense of solidarity among the performers who are students and female entertainers (gisaeng), the unusual location of the waiting room at Samnangjin station, the freedom to listen to music without admission fees, and the diversity of music from classical music to Korean music, go beyond the culture of that time. And these features allowed the benefit concert to embrace the entire audience. The Heartless shows the author's belief that the cosmopolitanism of concerts could lead to the civilization and unification of the Korean people without opposing Japanese colonialist logic.*

**Keywords:** Yi Kwangsu, *The Heartless* (Mujeong), benefit concerts, Samnangjin station, sympathy, solidarity, unification, cosmopolitanism

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### Raising Questions about the Benefit Concert in *The Heartless*

Yi Kwangsu's *The Heartless* (*Mujeong*) was published serially in the *Maeil sinbo* from January 1 to June 14, 1917. Its popularity was such that it was advertised as "the only book in Korea to sell more than 10,000 copies."<sup>1</sup> The novel portrays a love triangle in which a teacher, Hyeongsik, is torn between choosing a gisaeng, Yeongchae, and a student, Seonhyeong. Hyeongsik begins to feel affection for Seonhyeong, the daughter of Elder Kim, while giving her private English lessons, when Yeongchae, the daughter of his benefactor, Bak Jinsa, suddenly appears before him as a gisaeng. Because of her feelings for Hyeongsik, Yeongchae attempts suicide after her virginity is taken by the principal of Gyeongseong School; she leaves a suicide note for Hyeongsik. However, after meeting Byeonguk, an international student in Tokyo temporarily back in Korea, she decides to study in Japan. Meanwhile, Hyeongsik proposes to Seonhyeong and prepares to leave for the United States to study.

About to begin a new chapter in their lives, the characters coincidentally meet on a train and are in conflict. However, after seeing the plight of the Korean people suffering from flooding in the town of Samnangjin, they hold a benefit concert and arrive at a juncture where their common conflict might be resolved. This scene has been analyzed as a narrative that emphasizes the importance of education as part of the ideology of national enlightenment then popular (Y. Kim [1999] 2001, 581; Y. Seo 2004, 79; A. Lee 2005, 71; Choi 2018, 683). Additionally, the sudden change in the novel's narrative following the Samnangjin flooding, has been criticized by scholars as a problem stemming from "unreality" and "contingency" (Hyeonsuk Kim 1986, 169; M. Kim 2005, 54; Jang 2007, 142; Hatano 2008, 385). Was the benefit concert scene abruptly inserted into the novel, and is the supposed lack of realism of this scene one of the novel's limitations?

Kim Dongin, who has always been a harsh critic of Yi's literary works,

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1. See the advertisement in the inaugural issue of *Joseon mundan* (Korean Literary World), November, 1924.

terms the scene of the flooding in Samnangjin “the only ‘appropriate insertion’ in his entire body of work” (D. Kim 1935, 212). Considering Hyeongsik’s personality, Kim Dongin merely questioned the continuity of the emotions raised by Samnangjin concert, while saying there was nothing doubtful or implausible about the scene. It is noteworthy that Kim, who was Yi’s contemporary, praised this flood scene, which harmonizes the emotions of the four characters in their love for their nation. Considering the temporal context of the novel’s opening—actual chronic flooding in Samnangjin, and the period social value of benefit concerts—the narrative development of *The Heartless* might be interpreted differently.

Although *The Heartless* was first published on January 1, 1917, the novel opens in sweltering heat—“sweating in the June sunshine.” It is no exaggeration to say Yi Kwangsu developed his novel to climax with the Samnangjin flooding in accordance with narrative time, which commences prior to the rainy season. Additionally, in the context of benefit concerts or performances held in Korea before *The Heartless* was published, the attitudes of the characters are surprising but not new, as many performances or concerts were held in Korea in the name of charity around the year 1910. However, the benefit concert portrayed in Yi’s novel differs from benefit concerts held in Korea at the time. The literary value of the last scene of *The Heartless* must be found in its sociocultural context.

With the developments of modernization, the function of music in Korean culture also changed. Around 1910, music was used as a tool for religious or cultural enlightenment. This trend was introduced to Korea via Japan, which had adopted Western music culture. In Japan, benefit concerts were actively held in schools, churches, youth associations, women’s associations, nursery schools, etc. even as early as the 1890s. Information on such performances was fairly plentiful, filling the pages of newspapers and magazines, performance guides, reports, and reviews, and so readily transmitted to society (Matsumoto 2019, 197). *The Heartless* and its benefit concert appeared at a time when more and more of such concerts were being sponsored by women’s associations, schools, gisaeng unions, and theater companies in Korea.

To date, several studies have focused on the benefit concert portrayed

in *The Heartless*. Michael D. Shin referred to the four characters that stage the benefit concert for the Samnangjin flood victims as “a nascent artistic community” (Shin 1999, 283). Shin’s nomenclature allows for a focus on the performativity and solidarity of the characters who played instruments and sang impromptu songs for the victims. Yim Taehun mentions how “sound” could convey a sense of modernity and that this was an ideology that should be understood as “meaning,” according to Yi Kwangsu (Yim 2008, 63). From this perspective, the benefit concert for the Samnangjin flooding already has a sense of modernity embedded in its mechanism of stimulating sympathy (*dongjeong*) through music. While previous studies have focused on the modern sensibility of the novel, So Yeonghyeon and Yun Daeseok focus on the event of the benefit concert itself. They discovered a “Korean-style moral” (So 2008, 94) in the combination of charity and performance and in how ideas about ethics and enlightenment were awakened through the benefit concert, a “performance that creates its subject through the symbolic overcoming of hardship” (Yun 2008, 117).

However, existing studies have not examined *The Heartless* in the context of the benefit concerts held in Korea during the period. Charity, increasingly seen as a quality of civilized people, and attending concerts, the popular measurement of sophistication, were cultural phenomena of the early modern period. Thus, it is necessary to examine why music had to be combined with charity and the effects thereof, the similarities and differences between actual benefit concerts and the concert in the novel, and the uniqueness of the Yi Kwangsu’s method of describing the concert, which reveals his intentions. All this can be done only by studying the phenomenon of benefit concerts in Korea prior to the appearance of *The Heartless*.

Because of the influence of Christian culture and the relief policy of the Japanese Residency-General, the meaning of charity, which had referred to an individual’s good character, expanded to refer to dedicated acts or projects done on behalf of society. Emerging as a new way of thinking about the relationship between self and others, and imagining various possibilities for this relationship, this mode of charity required institutionalization. It was then that charity began holding hands with the modern event called

concerts.<sup>2</sup> “Sound and ways of hearing were used to regulate, create, and arrange social hierarchies and define and extend sociocultural authority” (Smith 2007, 46–47) through catering to musical taste, level of sophistication, and by offering differentiated classifications of concert tickets. Benefit concerts are the result of the combination of this sense of differentiation and the ethics of the period. These two combined cultures of music and charity elevated both the performers and the audience, who all wished to become civilized people.

At the time, the Korean people had no easy access to music outside the mediation of musicians. Because of the scarcity of Western-style musicians and their elevated social status, musicians and audience formed a subject-object relationship of enlightenment. Such enlightenment refers to the conceptual and practical experience of the Korean people’s limitations and the possibility of overcoming them. Thus, musicians were established as elites via the equation *performance equals enlightenment equals charity*. Many Koreans who accessed music through gisaeng and theater companies, rather than through Western musicians, had to justify the cost required; in other words, they had to justify their consumption. On the other hand, period society demanded banquet halls because of “the duty to practice public interest.”<sup>3</sup> As such, the imperative of musicians, audiences, and performance halls was recognized through the combination of charity and music amid the inflow of Western music in the culture of consumption of the early modern period.

This study analyzes the characteristics and significance of the Samnangjin benefit concert in *The Heartless* from the cultural and historical context of benefit concerts around 1910. To this end, benefit concerts held in Korea before the publication of *The Heartless* will be listed and their trends examined. Additionally, through an analysis of the characteristics of

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2. *Charity culture* grew rapidly after 1907 with the emergence of the Japanese Residency-General’s relief policy and private women’s charity associations like the Jaseon buinhoe and Jahye buinhoe. Musical concerts, especially charity concerts that introduced Western music, appeared only after 1913.
  3. “Hyeoksindan-ui gongik uimu” (Public Duty of Hyeoksindan), *Maeil sinbo*, April 6, 1912; Bipyongsang, “Dokja gurakbu” (Readers’ Club), *Maeil sinbo*, July 18, 1913.

the benefit concert portrayed in Yi's novel, this study aims to demonstrate that the concert's cosmopolitanism could be used to develop the subjectivity of the Korean people without opposing the Japanese colonial ideology that promoted the civilization of Korea. Finally, the study discusses why Yi placed the Samnangjin benefit concert as the novel's climax.

Content and Characteristics of Benefit Concerts around 1910

Benefit concerts were held in Korea even before 1910. Concerts held in the name of charity became more frequent from 1907, coinciding with the increasing activities of such groups as charitable women's associations. Articles about the opening of benefit performances and concerts were printed in newspapers. These articles included details on an event's time, location, organizer, purpose, and program. The following table is a summary of articles related to benefit performances and concerts published in period newspapers published in Korea.

Table 1. List of Charity Performances and Concerts from 1907 to 1917

Year	Date	Performance name	Location	Sponsor/Host	Purpose and program
1907	June 1-2	Benefit performance	Gamugijwa 歌舞技座 (theater), Jingogae	Kumagai Yoritaro 熊谷頼太郎	Supporting Korean orphanages; 1 won for first-class ticket, 50 jeon for second-class.
	November 26-28	Benefit performance	Gwangmudae (theater)	Gyeongseong goawon (orphanage)	Supporting Gyeongseong goawon
1908	May 23-25	Benefit performance	Hyeomnyulsa (theater)	Jaseon buinhoe (women's charity organization)	The latest play
	July 13	Benefit performance	Jangansa (theater)	About a hundred gwangi (female gisaeng employed by the government)	Supporting construction costs for Gyeongseong goawon (orphanage)

1908	December 19 (for a week)	Benefit performance	Yeonheungsa (theater)	Bomyeong Girls' School	Various artistic performances
1909	April 23–25	Benefit performance	Yeonheungsa	Hunger camp	Raising funds for camps to feed the hungry
	November 5	Concert	Inn Beob-in out of Saemun	Foreign ladies and gentlemen	Supporting Korean orphans and girls' school for the blind; first-class ticket is 2 <i>hwan</i> , second-class 1 <i>hwan</i> , and third-class 50 <i>jeon</i> .
1910	April 13 (for a week)	Benefit performance	Wongaksa (theater)	Hanseong gisaeng johapso (Seoul Gisaeng Guild)	Supporting Gyeongseong goawon (orphanage)
	June 10–11 and June 13	Benefit performance	Jongno Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Hall	Hanil buinhoe	Supporting Sungmyeong godeung yeohakgyo (girls' high school)
1911	October 10–14	Benefit performance	Yeonheungsa	Gisaeng johapso (Gisaeng guild)	Supporting midwife training center
1912	February 24–25	Benefit performance	No information	Churok bohohoe	Supporting Churokbohohoe (Association for Released Prisoners)
1913	February 27	Benefit performance	Yeonheungsa	Cheongnyeonpa	Supporting Cheongnyeong hagwon and Oseong chinmokoe
	March 27 (for three days)	Benefit performance	Danseongsa	Kwanggyo gisaeng johapso (Kwanggyo Gisaeng Guild)	Supporting midwife training center
	April 7	Midwife training center performance	Jangansa	Master singers	Supporting midwife training center
	May 8 (for two weeks)	Shigok gisaeng performance	Jangansa	Sigok gisaeng johapso (Sigok Gisaeng Guild)	Raising funds for a guild supporting a midwife training center
	May 15–16	Benefit concert	Jongno YMCA Hall	Gwak Hanyeong and others (19 persons)	Supporting Maengawon (Organization for Blind Children) located in Baejae hakdang in Jeong-dong

1913	August 25	Performance	Gwangmudae	Manager of Gwangmudae Theater, and others	Supporting midwife training center
	August 31	Performance	Gwangmudae	Same as above	Supporting Dongchang hakgyo (School)
	September 12	Mandolin benefit performance	Gamugijwa, Incheon	Association of Residents Kagoshima-hyeon	Donations to Jahye byeongwon (hospital) in Incheon for the poor
	September 20–21	Daeheungdan benefit performance	Yeonheungsa	Daeheungdan of Yeonheungsa	Supporting midwife training center
	November 12 (for a week)	Benefit performance	Jangansa, Dong-gu	Bae Eung-hyeon and others	Supporting midwife training center
1914	February 6–8	Benefit performance	Jangansa	Kim Pongmun, Hongdo, and others.	Charity performance to relieve victims of Kagoshima 櫻嶋 volcanic eruption; supporting the charity organization Gyeongseong guhohoe and Jesaengwon Maengabu (department for the blind at Jesaengwon hospital)
	February 11–14	Sigok gisaeng benefit performance	Danseongsa (theater)	Changsin gisaeng johapso (Changsin Gisaeng Guild), Gyeongseong (Seoul)	Relief for bad harvests in Japan's northeastern provinces and relief for victims of the Kagoshima eruption
	February 16	Benefit performance	Gwangmudae	Bak Seungpil and others	Aiding victims of the Kagoshima eruption
	March 8 (for five days)	Kagoshima eruption performance	Namseongsa (theater)	About 20 <i>changgi</i> (a type of female entertainer) of Bun-dong	Aiding victims of the Kagoshima eruption
	March 13	Benefit performance	Chukhangsa (theater)	Hyeoksindan	Raising money to clothe 25 beggars in Incheon
	March 22–24	Benefit performance	Gwangmudae	Gwanggyo gisaeng johapso (Gwanggyo Gisaeng Guild)	Expenses supplement of midwife training center
	May 4–5	Benefit performance	Gaeseong	Hyeoksindan	Raising money to clothe beggars



1914	June 18–20	Benefit performance	Yeonheungsa	Dadong gisaeng johapso (Dadong Gisaeng Guild)	Supporting midwife training center
1915	May 1	Belgium relief concert	Concert hall, Chosun Hotel	About 10 persons, including Belgian consul general and the chief editor of <i>Seoul Press</i>	Aid for war victims; about 90 participants, to include domestic and foreign high officials, famous business people, missionaries, members of nobility
	November 22	Benefit concert	Jongno YMCA Hall	Religious chapel, Ebweot Young Men's Association	To enlarge and develop the workers' school for Christian young men; ticket price 10 <i>jeon</i>
	December 4	Sympathy performance	Jongno YMCA Hall	Wives of foreign consuls and Japanese ladies in Gyeongseong	Collecting relief funds to help widows and orphans in Belgium who were brutally injured by German soldiers
	December 23	Grand concert for celebration	Jongno YMCA Hall	Gyeongseong chanyanghoe (praise group)	Providing relief expenses
1916	March 10	Korean classical music performance	Jongno YMCA Hall	Jongno YMCA	Supporting a workers' night school
	March 18 (for a week)	Benefit performance	Danseongsa	Gwanggyo gisaeng johapso	Supporting private midwife training center
	March 17	Concert	Chapel	Jonggyoyebaedang Chapel	Fire disaster relief for Yangwon yeohakgyo (girls' school)
	October 20	Cheongnyeonhae grand concert	Jongno YMCA Hall	Jongno YMCA	Supporting a workers' night school
	October 30	Benefit concert	Jongno YMCA Hall	Yu Gyeomcheol and others	Supporting Gyedong gongnip hakgyo (Gyedong school)
	December 5	Benefit concert	Sungui yeojunhakgyo (girls' middle school)	Women's hospital in Pyongyang	Expansion of charity work
1917	Several days from May 28	Benefit performance	Danseongsa	Gwanggyo gisaeng johapso	Donations for a midwife training center

1917	June 5–8	Benefit performance	Danseongsa	Dadong gisaeng johapso	Donations for midwife training center
	June 13	Benefit concert	Sungsil junghakgyo (middle school) auditorium	Methodist Church, Pyongyang	Donations to a relief association for victims of a fire disaster in Kanazawa 金澤, <sup>4</sup> Japan
	October 13	Sinchang johap performance	Danseongsa	Sinchang gisaeng johapso	To express sympathy for victims of storms in Japan
	November 9	Benefit concert	Baejae hakdang (school) auditorium	Baejae godeung botong hakgyo (school), young men's association	Construction expenses supplement of Seobinggo Church; first-class ticket price 50 <i>jeon</i> , regular-class ticket 30 <i>jeon</i>
	November 28 (for a week)	Benefit performance	Danseongsa	Hannam gisaeng johapso (Hannam Gisaeng Guild)	Assist victims of flooding in Japan

Sources: *Hwangseong sinmun*, *Daehan maeil sinbo*, *Maeil sinbo*.

The above table shows benefit concerns held in Korea for the decade 1907–1917, along with information on their names, programs, venues, organizers, and purposes. Benefit concerts of the early modern period were also called “sympathy performances” or “relief concerts.” Around 1910, music events held in the name of charity used the term “performance” (*yeonjuhoe*) rather than “concert” (*eumakoe*). Thus, displays by professional entertainers acting in plays or performing *pansori*, though not playing musical instruments, were collectively referred to as performances. Additionally, benefit performances were held in theaters such as Hyeomnyulsa, Jangansa, and Danseongsa. On the other hand, benefit concerts (*eumakoe*), besides traditional Korean music, also usually consisted of performances of Western musical instruments, piano solos, vocal solos, and choral performances. These concerts were held in the Jongno Young Men’s Christian Association

4. However, according to another article in the *Maeil sinbo*, the conflagration occurred in Yonezawa 米澤 on May 22, 1917, not Kanazawa. See, “Maenghwa Mitaeksi-reul jeonsoham” (Large Fire Burns Down Yonezawa), *Maeil sinbo*, May 24, 1917.

(YMCA) Hall or the auditoriums of modern schools. This shows how the terms “performance” and “concert,” used interchangeably today without differentiating traditional Korean from Western music, were used differently in early 20th-century Korea.

In terms of duration, the events varied from single shows to extended performances that could last two weeks. The organizers of benefit concerts were usually groups, such as women’s associations, schools, churches, youth associations, gisaeng unions, and theater companies, or organizations such as hospitals or orphanages, rather than individuals. The performances or concerts held in Korea before *The Heartless* was published usually included gisaeng, actors, or musicians performing on stage. Benefit concerts organized by gisaeng unions accounted for the majority, and the number of concerts organized by Christian groups gradually increased. The fact that people from various countries also organized or performed in the benefit concerts shows that they were not aimed at Korean people alone. The understanding of modern music and the ethical consciousness of the Korean people were formed through their coexistence with such events.

Benefit performances and concerts were usually held to finance orphanages, midwife training centers, famine shelters, unions for the protection of rehabilitated prisoners, and schools. Activities supporting the socially disadvantaged, such as women and children, or those that required training, such as released prisoners or students, were the result of practicing the discourse of enlightenment in the early modern period. Further, the Japanese organized performances to support Korean orphanages, and from 1914, concerts were held for the relief of victims of volcanic eruptions, fires, and floods in Japan. This indicates that the target of charity was expanding. It also shows that the typical benefactor-beneficiary relationship could be reversed, so that instead of Japan to Korea, it became one where the Korean people benefitted the Japanese.

Studies related to benefit performances and concerts have also included information on ticket sales. Considering that a laborer’s daily living expenses in the 1910s amounted to 3 *jeon* (Kang 2004, vol. 1, 223), the usual admission price between 10 *jeon* and 2 *won* (100 *jeon* made 1 *won*) were quite expensive. In addition to admission fees, donations were also collected from

those who attended the event.<sup>5</sup> Aside from their original purpose of fundraising, benefit concerts also attracted attendees seeking a social activity and to increase their sophistication. Concerts held in schools served as a cultural experience for students, their parents, and faculty. Moreover, purchasing tickets and enjoying music was not limited to merely sharing artistic tastes but led to natural encounters with the upper classes or specific groups. Examples of this are a charitable women's association's participation in a performance to support an orphanage or Korean and foreign dignitaries gathering for a concert to raise money to be sent to Belgium or to help fund public schools. As such, some concerts played a key role in the social institutions that assisted people in forming and maintaining relationships (Watanabe [2004] 2006, 24).<sup>6</sup>

News articles on benefit performances or concerts commonly detailed the spontaneity of the organizer, the circumstances of the target charity, and the need for "sympathy,"<sup>7</sup> even if the organizer's intentions and the audience's purpose for attending were not in alignment. In newspaper articles promoting benefit performances at theaters, the common interests of gisaeng or actors and the sympathy of the audience formed a mutually responsive structure. For example, Daeheungdan (an acting troupe), which reaped popular success at the Yeonheungsang theater, held a performance for a charity project, donated the proceeds from two days of performances, and commanded the sympathies of the general audience.<sup>8</sup> One newspaper also quoted actors at Jangansa theater saying they intended to donate half their wages.<sup>9</sup>

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5. "Gyeongseong goawon jaseon yeonjuhoe suipgeum gwanggo" (Income Notification about Charity Performance for Gyeongseong Orphanage), *Hwangseong sinmun*, June 11, 1907; "Gyeongseong goawon geumbeon jaseon yeonjuhoe-e gibuhan sinsa-wa buin-i dayu iondae" (Many Ladies and Gentlemen Donated to Gyeongseong Orphanage at this Charity Performance), *Hwangseong sinmun*, November 8, 1907.

6. These kinds of charity concerts in Korea are very similar to those in the West, where early concerts functioned as a social space.

7. "Jaseon eumakoe" (Charity Concert), *Maeil sinbo*, October 29, 1916.

8. "Daeheungdan jaseon yeonjuhoe" (Daeheungdan Charity Performance), *Maeil sinbo*, September 13, 1913.

9. "Jaseon yeonju-wa gasang baeu" (Charity Performance and Praiseworthy Actors), *Maeil sinbo*, February 8, 1914.

Performance groups such as Hyeoksindan and groups of musicians such as the Gyeongseong Choir showed interest in charitable work and asserted their own social roles. All of this indicates that organizers and performers also wanted to project an image of themselves as being more interested in public welfare than in commerce.

For the audience, attending benefit performances had considerable value, including cultural privilege. In the early modern period, when Western culture created mainstream trends, mere exposure to such culture could contribute to cultural stratification (J. Kim 1999, 171). Further, those who paid admission fees to attend the benefit concerts were able to fulfill their desire for modernization by participating in events in which they could enjoy music, make contributions, and achieve community unity. As such, a charity event, which hosted various music events in colonial Korea, was an important arena for enlightenment discourse, that is, the overlap of imperialist and nationalist narratives.

### **Media Strategy for Emotional Expression and the Symbolism of Samnangjin Station**

As shown in Table 1, benefit concerts were held in early 20th-century Korea to collect contributions for the victims of the 1914 eruption in Kagoshima and the Kanazawa (or Yonezawa) fire in May 1917. The Korean daily *Maeil sinbo* actively reported the events held in Korea to provide financial support for these twin disasters in Japan. In these reports, the Korean people's sympathy and philanthropy were emphasized. While this was glorified as charity that transcended borders, it was actually a media strategy to improve the relationship between Japan and Korea. These articles show how politics and the economy were expressed through the concert culture.

Reporting on the Sigok Gisaeng Benefit Performance at Danseongsa theater focused on the audience rather than the performance. In fact, one newspaper article contained a photograph of the audience looking at the camera. It embodied the gaze of the reporter observing the gisaeng, who were the subjects of the performance, and the audience, who were the

consumers. Then why photograph the audience rather than the stage? This performance was held to support the Japanese victims of the volcanic eruption of Sakurajima in Kagoshima in 1914. The protagonist of this performance was the audience, who were the benefactors. Ultimately, the *Maeil sinbo* journalist brought along a camera crew, who photographed the whole audience because as it was a Korean benefit performance to assist Japanese victims.

The benefit performance to help the victims of Sakurajima was held at several venues over several days, and the *Maeil sinbo* published daily reports on it. In March 1914, when performances for the Sakurajima eruption were held, one article that noted that gisaeng were processed at “police stations in that jurisdiction.”<sup>10</sup> As such, although benefit concerts were socially encouraged at the time, it was an event that required permission from the authorities regardless of the organizer or recipient of the charity. Events at which many Koreans gathered were noted in advance to monitor crowd movements.

Against this background, Yi Kwangsu portrayed the benefit concert set in Samnangjin as an important event. Yi stated in *The Value of Literature* (1910) that literature created through “the close observations and deep imagination of an author who has studied the static state of life and its changes” will dominate the ideals and thoughts of the people (Yi [1971] 1972, 546). Additionally, in *What is Literature?* (1916), published just before *The Heartless*, Yi stated that literature should not be created for the purpose of promoting certain morals or encouraging poetic justice but must lead to the “satisfaction of the emotional faculty (*jeong*)” by realistically portraying actual thoughts, feelings, and lives (Yi [1971] 1972, 549–550). For Yi, the emotional faculty (*jeong*) must be harnessed to the voluntaristic disciplining of the population, replacing the existing strategy of forcibly enchainning them to responsibilities and morals (J. Lee 2005, 90). And sympathy (*dongjeong*) was not only the narrative principle, but also the central element in the reader’s reading and Yi’s creating *The Heartless* (Hyeonju Kim 2005, 184–185).

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10. “Bun-dong changgi ijae yeonjuhoe” (Gisaeng Performance to Aid Victims in Bun-dong), *Maeil sinbo*, March 10, 1914.

In this context, Yi's placement of the Samnangjin flood and the benefit concert at the novel's climax is a literary strategy serving to heighten the reader's engagement with the novel and maximizes their awareness of reality and the manifestation of sympathy. In Yi's novel, disaster captures the dramatic change that occurs within a human being and serves as an opportunity for a new "change in direction" that allows individuals to voluntarily seek solidarity (E. Seo 2012, 11). In *The Heartless*, Yi illustrated an actual disaster that occurred in Korea and the damage it caused, presenting how solidarity and sympathy might overcome hardship.

Reading *The Heartless* against the social trend of charity benefit concerts held in Korea sheds light on certain aspects of the novel. Repeated flood disasters, the protagonists' voluntary benefit concert for this disaster, the police chief and stationmaster who authorized the event, the police officers actively assembling the audience, and reporters' perspectives on the event, were all familiar phenomena in Korea of the period. In *The Heartless*, Byeonguk goes to the police station and asks for the chief's "permission" to hold the concert and seeks his "support" (Yi 1917, episode 122; A. Lee 2005, 337).<sup>11</sup> The police chief, who has been "considering relief plans" because "the floods happened so suddenly," accepts Byeonguk's request, negotiates with the stationmaster, and decides to use the waiting room at the station as the performance hall. Additionally, he sends police officers to nearby inns and into the streets to promote the event. Useon, a reporter who is Hyeongsik's friend, decides to write about this benefit concert for the newspaper.

When *The Heartless* was being published, the stationmaster of Samnangjin station was Japanese.<sup>12</sup> The police chief was as well. However, Yi wrote the conversations between the police chief and Byeonguk and the opening speech by the police chief at the benefit concert in a way that readers would be unable to tell whether Japanese or the Korean language was being used at Samnangjin. Yi boldly excluded any elements that might

11. This article will use the English translation by Ann Sung-hi Lee (2005) and provide the original episode number and page numbers.

12. The stationmaster was Nakazawa Kenji 中澤謙治, who was appointed in January 1916. "Sanrouzin ekichō koutetsu" (Replacement of the Samnangjin Stationmaster), *Busan ilbo*, January 13, 1916.

distract Korean readers' empathy, and the story develops smoothly until the beginning of the concert. The proactiveness of the police chief, the stationmaster, and the police officers demonstrates the power of the modern state that dominated the politics, economy, and culture of Samnangjin. Yi depicts this government power not as an agent of fear or surveillance, but as an agent that is moved by the purposes of the concert and is determined to use the collected donations to "help the flood victims" (Yi 1917, episode 123; A. Lee 2005, 340). The police, who managed, controlled, and guided the colonized people, are portrayed as *compassionate guardians* at the benefit concert.

This method of characterization can be understood as an exchange of values. Within the common goal of relieving the victims of the Samnangjin floods, Byeonguk and her group of friends have achieved self-awareness as subjects and Koreans. Further, the police chief and the stationmaster are able to use the concert to silence the complaints that would have erupted about the flooding. There is a subtle discrepancy between Korea and Japan surrounding the benefit concert. The benefit concerts at the time were the most enlightening and economic means for Korean and Japanese people to practice their respective ideals. This is also why Yi included the concert scene in the novel serialized in the *Maeil sinbo* and why the newspaper editor was able to accept it.

In Korea, concerts to relieve victims of flood or famine were not actively held until the 1920s. Even though one article in a local correspondence column detailed a benefit performance to collect donations to be sent to the Hamhung region in northern Korea, which had suffered from a great fire.<sup>13</sup> However, compared with the details in articles reporting on the active response of the Korean people to the disasters in Japan, such articles were quite sparse. In this context, the meaning of the benefit concert in *The Heartless* becomes even clearer. Articles in the 1910s show that flood disasters were an annual occurrence in Samnangjin, with newspapers reporting on the damages, railway traffic interruptions, and victims.<sup>14</sup>

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13. "Gujae yeonju" (Disaster Relief Performance), *Maeil sinbo*, June 9, 1914.

14. "Gicha bultong" (Railway Disruption), *Maeil sinbo*, September 7, 1910; "Nakdonggang-ui



Because of this, articles also reported on flood relief measures. However, there were no articles about charity benefits to help victims.

Concerts to raise funds for flood victims, which had not been held in Korea prior to the publication of *The Heartless*, began to appear following its publication. This phenomenon is not unrelated to the popularity of *The Heartless*. The fact that Samnangjin was selected as the first location for “A Pilgrimage to Renowned Locations in Literature,” planned as an article in the first issue of *Samcheolli* in 1929, also reveals the novel’s popularity (Chogong 1929). Chogong observed that Samnangjin station was longer, wider, and taller than other stations and that it was indeed sufficient to serve as “a concert hall that could accommodate about 100 people.” He also highly praised the “descriptive power” and the characterization of the “youth of early Korea” in *The Heartless* and wrote about the strong impression that Samnangjin made in the novel. As the author Chogong’s words attest—“I could not help but think about *The Heartless* as soon as I disembarked at Samnangjin” (Chogong 1929, 45)—Samnangjin’s symbolic power in the novel made a deep imprint on the minds of contemporary readers. The status and narrative intensity of the characters, who achieved reconciliation and solidarity through the concert held for the disaster victims, and the significance of the setting, which strengthened the determination of Korean youth, the future national leaders, to become educated, were such that Samnangjin came to be labeled a holy land by the writers and readers of Korea.

Considering the social mores of the time, it is surprising that domestic and international students and gisaeng would collaborate to hold a benefit

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beomnam” (Nakdong River Flooding), *Maeil sinbo*, July 23, 1912; “Nakudoukou no daihanran” (Nakdong River Flooding), *Busan ilbo*, September 11–13, 1915; “Dakuroukatyū no tetudou rensen” (Along the Railway Line in the Muddy Whirlpool), *Busan ilbo*, June 26, 1916; “Hou-wa cheoldo pihae” (Heavy Rain and Railroad Damage), *Maeil sinbo*, September 8, 1916; “Sanrouzin no zousui” (Flood in Samnangjin), *Busan ilbo*, July 8, 1917; “Sanrouzin zousui zyō kyō” (Flood Situation in Samnangjin), *Busan ilbo*, July 10, 1917. One article in the *Busan ilbo* (September 11–13, 1915) reported that 24 Japanese houses were flooded while many Korean houses were lost in Samnangjin. Another *Busan ilbo* article from 1916 (June 26) reported the scene of ignorant Koreans fleeing in fear while spreading rumors that the river flooded due to heavy rainfalls the previous year.

concert to help flood victims. This is particularly so because benefit concerts served as venues for cultural experiences and socializing by the financially affluent, while also being of commercial or public interest to gisaeng and musicians. Moreover, examining the venues of benefit performances or concerts, which typically were schools, Christian youth centers, and hotels, Samnangjin station is indeed a quite unusual choice. Yi recognized the contemporary trends in benefit concerts, but he selectively adapted them to his novel. In *The Heartless*, he focuses on the organizers and the method of charity rather than the charitable action itself. He reminds readers that the determination for self-improvement, compassion for others, and the belief that art can be a tool to save society are qualities that younger generations in the modern era should possess.

### **Fictional Adaptation of Benefit Concerts and the Civilization of Sound**

The purpose and details of the charity performances summarized in Table 1 demonstrate that benefit performances in the 1910s were frequently held to support midwife training centers, relief organizations for pregnant women and newborns. At the time, articles covering benefit performances emphasized the creation of jobs for women, support for mothers, the assistance of women's societies, and authorities giving permission for midwife training centers.<sup>15</sup> Gisaeng unions in particular held several benefit performances to help fund midwife training centers.<sup>16</sup> Special charity performances by gisaeng always met with great success.

For gisaeng of the period, benefit concerts were public acts that they could undertake for society. Several examples of such concerts include a theater performance held at Danseongsa to support orphanage maintenance

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15. "Jaseon gigwan-gwa jaseon yeonju" (Charity Organizations and Charity Performances), *Maeil sinbo*, November 12, 1913.

16. "Josambu yeonjuhoe seonghwang" (The Success of Performances for Midwives), *Maeil sinbo*, June 20, 1914.

fees and a musical performance held at Wongaksa for famine relief. Newspaper articles covering these events would reveal the names of the gisaeng or highlight their social activities by stressing that benefit performances were the duty of all gisaeng in Hanseong (Seoul).<sup>17</sup> “Gisaeng public service”<sup>18</sup> played a role in altering how society regarded them. Through such things as gisaeng unions, gisaeng served as the subjects of the performances within the structure of benefit performances, charity donations, and social contributions. The media also elevated the social status of gisaeng using the mechanism of sympathy, highlighting the role of women in society and the possibility of solidarity through the relationship between gisaeng and midwives.

Against this background, the occasion of the benefit concert and the characters who led the concert in Yi's *The Heartless* hold special meaning. First, let us consider the benefit performances held several times to support the costs of midwife training centers in the 1910s. This must be regarded in parallel with the scene containing the decisive moment when Byeonguk, Yeongchae, and Seonhyeong decide to hold the benefit concert. The three women escort a woman in labor to an inn in the pouring rain and help her give birth. Then, Byeonguk heads to the police station to propose the plan for the benefit concert.

Byeonguk tells him [the police] how some of the flood victims are sick, and about an expectant mother and women with infants. She tells him of the pitiful sight of these flood victims shivering in the rain and without a hot morning meal. She relates how she could not bear the sight of infants crying because their mothers' breasts have no milk; the mothers themselves had not eaten, and therefore could not nurse their children. Since the train to Pusan [Busan] had been stopped because of the rains and would not leave until the afternoon, Byeonguk proposed holding a

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17. “Yeonhui-ro gibu” (Donations by the Performance), *Daehan maeil sinbo*, June 30, 1908; “Gisaeng-ui uimu” (Duty of Gisaeng), *Daehan maeil sinbo*, April 17, 1909; “Yeonjuhoe-e gibu” (Donations by the Performance), *Daehan maeil sinbo*, April 20, 1910.

18. “Hwaryugye-ui gongiksim” (The Spirit of Public Service in the Pleasure and Entertainment Quarters), *Maeil sinbo*, March 27, 1913.

concert to raise money to give the flood victims some hot soup and rice, and she asked the station chief for his permission and support. (Yi 1917, episode 122; A. Lee 2005, 337)

In her realization of the truth of the Korean people's struggle with ignorance and poverty, Byeonguk and her friends discover the possibility of charity. The subsequent benefit-concert trend to protect mothers and children is closely related to these details in the novel.

Further, the key characters of the benefit concert represent social and cultural phenomena of the time, embodying Yi's desire to overcome them. A period *Maeil sinbo* editorial highlighted the charitable activities by referring to gisaeng and actors as people of the lower class. However, Yi makes Yeongchae, a gisaeng, the star of the concert, and she builds solidarity with an international student, Byeonguk, and a regular domestic student, Seonhyeong. The gisaeng in the novel differ from those of the time who performed in many benefit performances as members of gisaeng unions. Byeonguk, an international student in Tokyo, is the main agent who directs the concert in Yi's *The Heartless*. Inspired by Byeonguk's drive, Yeongchae sings at the concert. Yi utilizes the element of a benefit concert, which were popular at the time, but maintains the enlightenment structure through the relationship between the international student, Byeonguk, and the gisaeng, Yeongchae. In other words, Yi realizes the ideal benefit concert through solidarity between people from the upper and the lower classes.

Focusing on the difference between the benefit concerts of the time and that in the novel clarifies what Yi was trying to emphasize. For instance, we can note charity work being done by individuals rather than by specific for-profit groups like gisaeng unions, the use of a waiting room rather than a commercial venue like a theater, and the direction of enlightenment from Byeonguk to Yeongchae to the audience. Though benefit concerts at the time were enjoyed by those with social skills, sophistication, and financial power, Yi expands the narrow possibility of sympathy created therein to all passengers. As the train passengers consisted not only of Japanese and other foreigners in the first- and second-class cars, but also Koreans in the third-class cars, the proliferation of emotions felt because of the concert was not

limited to certain nationalities or classes.

Yi likened modern civilization to a “civilization of noise.” Yi referred to the “sounds of the city,” such as the sounds of trams and rickshaws, as the “sounds of civilization.” He criticized “people who wore white clothes” because they did not know the meaning of such noise (Yi 1917, episode 104; A. Lee 2005, 300). In his novel, Yi writes that the audience included “a few third-class passengers dressed in white” (episode 122; A. Lee 2005, 338), which he has thus drawn into the concert. Yi then describes the concert scene in a hallucinatory manner, as though the characters were speaking only to the Korean people, though many first- and second-class passengers are likely present as well. The tension and crisis immediately before the concert are resolved through such hallucinations.

Further, Yi portrays Byeonguk and Yeongchae as “second-class passengers dressed in white” and continues to emphasize this in episodes 103 and 104. Passengers who “looked strangely” at their clothes heard the choir’s lyrics depicting the sad reality of the Korean people and responded with resounding applause and contributions. Yi draws the readers into this hallucinatory world and shows how the concert’s symphony of emotions can serve as a tool for civilization that transcends nationality and social class. The scene in which Byeonguk and Yeongchae, who are wearing white, are able to stir up the emotions of the passengers and the police chief, is significant in three ways. First, they represent the Korean people. Second, they allow the Korean people from the third-class cabin to attend the concert. Third, they disrupt the colonialist stereotype that “Korean people are ignorant and poor,” and reverse the direction of influence, which was typically from the Japanese to Koreans, but now switches to the Korean people influencing the Japanese.

In the novel, Yi emphasized that music is heard with one’s “ears,” not seen with one’s “eyes.” As is illustrated in Byeonguk’s grandmother’s expression, that she “listened with her eyes” (Yi 1917, episode 101; A. Lee 2005, 295), for the older generation, listening to music was more about watching performers perform. However, for people of Byeonguk’s generation, listening to music is closer to the act of “listening to the inward voice, driven by the emotional stratum of musical expression” (Smith 2007, 50).

Yi describes in detail the crowd gathered at the concert becoming engrossed in the significance and atmosphere of the music and becoming greatly moved by it. The audience members listen to a tragic melody from *Aida* performed by Byeonguk, and they feel like they “want to weep.” When Yeongchae sings the hymn “When I Think of the Past, I Am Ashamed,” a hymn she learned from Byeonguk, the audience is mesmerized by her voice, which “causes tears to rise in their eyes.” Finally, when the three friends sing a song that Yeongchae wrote in Chinese characters and which Hyeongsik translated, the tune “brings tears to the eyes of the audience” (Yi 1917, episode 122–123; A. Lee 2005, 338–339). Byeonguk’s performance intensifies the audience’s feelings of sympathy, creating an auditory image that evokes the pain of reality, while the narrative in Yeongchae’s song visually illustrates the suffering of the victims. This flow connects romantic sympathy with daily compassion.

In the selection and arrangement of music from *Aida*, which is a tragic love story, the “hymn,” which embodies self-reflection, and the “translated song,” which commemorates the Korean people who lost their homes in the flood, it can be assumed that editing was needed to develop the perception of sound. It has a structure that targets every passenger from first to third class. The concert embodies a relationship of enlightenment centered on sound: that is, the relationship between the teacher and the learner or, more specifically, the relationship between those who discharge the sadness of the disaster through music and those who participate in the circumstances of this emotional control. This relationship to the music that surrounds them is why the repetition of passive predicates stands out in the description of the crowd gathered for the concert.

What also stands out about the Samnangjin benefit concert is that the three characters drive the audience into a sorrowful mood amidst the disaster, rather than sympathy between organizers and audience progressing to a responsive structure. The audience is able to recognize the circumstances through the sentiments expressed and to feel sympathy for the Korean people who are in crisis. Yi’s development of the concert is based on the amateurism of Hyeongsik and Byeonguk’s friends. The author dismantles the idea of the *authority of professionalism* that benefit concerts

had at the time, which doubles the audience's emotional response. Further, after the concert ends, the stationmaster asks the three women their names, but they remain silent. The contributors of the approximately 80 *won* collected at the concert are also unknown. The anonymity of the concert is ideal in that it does not cause an emotionally subordinate relationship between the benefactor and beneficiary—a relationship of superiority and shame that is inevitable in the mechanism of charity.

At the end of the novel, Yi projects the ideal of reinforcing the nation by education through the characters' overseas studies. After the concert, Yeongchae plans her future life. This differs from the reality of gisaeng at the time, who ultimately fulfilled their social obligations through benefit performances. For Yeongchae, the benefit concert is the decisive opportunity allowing her to go to Tokyo to major in music. The benefit concert opens Seonhyeong's eyes to the miserable reality of the Korean people and influences the path of her education. For Byeonguk, the benefit concert makes her more certain of the emotional aesthetics and social value of her major, music. Through the novel's concert scene and the three women who leave Korea, the readers see that music was regarded as an important channel for personal awakening as well as for the unity and civilization of the nation.

After the concert highlighted in the novel, Byeonguk's and Yeongchae's musical worlds consist of the pursuit of musical pieces that must be earnestly appreciated, meaning high-class Western music. The globality of "the strategy of distributing and consuming sound as a taste" (Yoshimi 2005, 45) naturally leads the characters in the novel to Japan and Germany. As such, Yi chose a special means for combining cultural, civilizational, and nationalistic discourses in his fictional adaption of the benefit concert, a social and cultural phenomenon of Korea in the 1910s. Yi's project, *the civilization of sound*, which attempted to unite various social classes in Korea, illustrates that Yi's ideas about education went beyond the Korean language and novels and was connected with the sense of hearing and sound.

## Conclusion

Yi Kwangsu's *The Heartless* was published when the frequency of benefit performances and concerts from the West and Japan was gradually increasing. This study closely examined the logic and perspective of those who accepted the culture of benefit concerts, and it attempted to identify the meaning they held for them. The logic of *charity*, that one must develop a good character in order to contribute to society, was combined with the modern performance culture of concerts, invoking the sympathy of the Korean people. Yi adapts the culture of benefit concerts, which were popular in Korea at the time, and adorns the climax of his novel with it.

People attending performances in order to immerse themselves in a masterpiece in a quiet concert hall is the product of changes to the social structure in the 19th century. Such performances were justified by an “ethical” perspective based on aesthetic ideas of the time, which sought to separate “high-class” music from “vulgar” entertainment (Watanabe [2004] 2006, 67). Around 1910, Korea's music culture was characterized by the coexistence of performances by gisaeng and actors and concerts by Western musicians. This phenomenon continued when benefit concerts increased rapidly after 1907. In *The Heartless*, Yi transcends the dichotomy of high-class and low-class music and portrays the benefit concert as an important event, completely engaging readers and highlighting the sociocultural value of concerts.

While the benefit concert in *The Heartless* was based on the popularity of benefit concerts at the time, the two are clearly different. The features of the benefit concert in the novel go beyond the period Korean culture in terms of the amateurism and sense of solidarity exhibited by the performers, students, and gisaeng; the unique venue of the waiting room of Samnangjin station; the freedom to listen to music without paying admission fees; and the variety of music, from classical to Korean, that embraced all passengers. By imagining the victims' pain using auditory imagery and narrative, the music aimed to intensify listeners' sympathies. These traits in the novel are connected to the literary criticism that Yi published prior to writing *The Heartless*, in which he discussed the relationship between “satisfaction of the



emotional faculty (*jeong*)” and “ethics.” Therefore, the scene of the benefit concert at Samnangjin station, which has been criticized by previous studies as being unrealistic, is actually a cultural adaptation and a narrative strategy for inducing sympathy and awakening readers in the context of the benefit concerts that occurred in Korea in the 1910s.

For concerts centered on Koreans of the early modern period, the social function was greater than the aesthetic function. Benefit concerts today are held on the premise of empathy on the part of audience members, who understand the meaning of the reputation of someone who has become an icon in the art world, as well as on the pure meaning of art itself. The musicians, too, maintain their honor and anticipate the artistic value of music through benefit concerts. The issue of sophistication and expertise involved here is also presented as a utopia at the end of *The Heartless*. An ideal of *global music* is already present when the narrator delivers the news to readers that, according to a Berlin magazine, Byeonguk, who went to Germany to study, “is a brilliant new performer in the Berlin music world” and that Yeongchae, who went to Japan to study, has performed in concerts covered by “various Tokyo newspapers.”

In the 1920s, criticism of the lack of “concerts for music’s sake” amidst the popularity of concerts began to appear.<sup>19</sup> Hong Nanpa lamented the reality that concerts are held “while lectures and debates have become obsolete.” This was a warning to the music world, which was losing its artistic nature, being overtaken by the enlightenment movement and commercialism. Against this background, the audience gradually shifts from the idea that they must attend the ethically proper concert to the desire to encounter art by masters. It can be said that the art for art’s sake of Min Taewon’s fictional work *Concert (Eumakoe)*, published in the 1920s, was predicated upon the final scene of *The Heartless*.

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19. Hong Nanpa, “Akdan-ui dwi-eseo eumakoe-reul juchoehaneun jessi-kke” (To Everyone Who Hosts Concerts behind the Band), *Dong-A Ilbo*, July 7, 1924.

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