Traditional Korean Music: Its Genres and Aesthetics

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Abstract

Traditional Korean music is classified into aak (ceremonial music) minsogak (folk music) and jeongak (classical music) or pungnyubang eumak, in which the traditional aak and minsogak are merged. First, among aak, jongmyo jeryeak expresses the merit and virtue of the successive royal families, and munmyo jeryeak the learning and virtue of the Confucian school. From this perspective, the lyrics, rhythmic structure, and restraint and simplicity of the dance movements expressed in aak embody the doctrine that "great music is supposed to be easy," and clearly reveal beauty of solemnity and grandeur.

Next, jeongak best demonstrates the refined nature of the Korean people. Sujecheon possesses "the beauty of slow continuity" and "the beauty of strength and gentleness" that lead to "the beauty of neutrality," the ultimate principle of the Confucian cultivation of mind. Yeongsan hoesang also demonstrates "the beauty of neutrality," through "the beauty of slow continuity."

Meanwhile, pansori's aesthetics can be found in the various forms of traditional literary art, a dynamic voice, and Confucian moral aesthetic. Also, one cycle (batang) of sanjo as a whole moves from tension to relaxation, but in its relationship to each rhythm or within the same phrase, the contrast of tension and relaxation shows an orderly structure in its own way, spread across several layers.

Keywords: Traditional Korean music, aak, aak (ceremonial music), minsogak (folk music), jeongak (classical music) or pungnyubang eumak, musical aesthetics, aesthetics of content, aesthetics of form, aesthetics of becoming

1. The term aak (ceremonial music) was first used by Confucius (BC 551-479). "Confucius said, 'I abhor the color purple for usurping the color red, I abhor the music of Zheng for throwing aak into disorder, and I abhor sharp-edged words for overthrowing nations.'" "Yanghuo" in Lunyu (Analects of Confucius).
With this in mind, I will first critically examine the existing research on the beauty of traditional music. Then, based on this examination, the aesthetic consciousness manifest in traditional music will be assessed, with reference to Western musical aesthetics. Finally, the paper will examine what significance the beauty of traditional music holds for people of today. This project, which seeks to academically understand the beauty of traditional Korean music, is a fundamental challenge to the study of Korean music, and a question that must be settled in order to establish and pass on the identity and pride of traditional Korean music, as well as to accept foreign music in a subjective manner; furthermore, it is vitally significant in terms of establishing a theoretical basis upon which to promote and commercialize Korean music culture in the twenty-first century, the era of culture. Therefore, although this paper might be taken as nothing more than a preliminary study or an academic exercise, its true import could be much more far-reaching.

**Aesthetic Theories**

Studies of the aesthetic consciousness of traditional music began to sporadically appear in Korea from the 1970s.\(^2\) Some of these studies had titles such as “aesthetic consciousness,” “aesthetic,” or “aesthetics” but they mainly focused on the essence or characteristics of traditional music. To be sure, the inherent aesthetics of Korean music is a part of that essence, but one could not call it a genuine study from a perspective of pure aesthetics. Under such circumstances, an attempt at such was recently made by Han Myeong-hui and Choe Jong-min.\(^3\) Since their discussions encompass the previous research, a critical examination of their discussion can make the beauty of traditional Korean music stand out in more clarity and depth.

**Han Myeong-hui’s Perspective**

First, Han Myeong-hui presents the essence and characteristics of traditional Korean music in relation to cultural ideology and background in his work, “Hanguk eumak mi-ui yeongu” (A Study of the Beauty of Korean Music). Han Myeong-hui’s arguments are clearly different from the previous research: first, in terms of methodology, he defined the characteristics of traditional music in connection with Koreans’ inner world and historical backgrounds, and linked them to the aesthetic phenomenon; second, in terms of content, he categorized the characteristics of traditional music into jeongak and minsogak, drew out the aesthetic consciousness of each category, and examined the aesthetic characteristics common to both.

However, to determine whether the characteristics of traditional music had their origins in cultural structure or historical background unique to Korea requires more stringent academic verification. Views requiring such verification include the view that linear continuity has its roots in a strong sense of nationality, the three-count rhythm in samjae sasang (ideology of heaven, earth and man), the empty space of music in Buddhist ideology, or the view that shamanism, samjae sasang, and the Daoist ideology of immortality are traditional Korean beliefs. Moreover, there is the question of whether determining that the beauty common to jeongak and minsogak are the beauty of liveliness, the beauty of subtlety, and the beauty of harmony, which merges the two, and conveys objective conviction; for the beauty of liveliness, subtlety, and harmony demonstrates his excellent intuition as an artist, but because the concepts themselves are ambiguous and overly compounded, they seem to have degenerated into a private language.

**Choe Jong-min’s Perspective**

Next, Choe Jong-min, in Hanguk jeontong eumak-ui mihak sasang

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The central theme of Western musical aesthetics is undoubtedly the beauty of music. Its essence and value, among others, are the major research subjects of musical aesthetics. Here, we will narrow the focus of discussion to the essence of beauty in music. The first question concerns where the beauty we sense is found with the music, and when do we experience it? There are two different approaches to this question: aesthetics of the musical work (objective standpoint) and aesthetics of reception (subjective standpoint). The former standpoint sees the beauty of music as existing in a work of music, and the latter sees it as depending on the listener subjectively taking in the work.

Thus, from the former standpoint, the elements of form, content, organization, genre, and compositional method of the work, become the major subjects of study. And from the latter standpoint, personal and social circumstances, such as the extent of the listener's musical education, experience, and condition at the time of listening, become the major subjects of study. In other words, the former emphasizes the existential foundation for the beauty of music, while the latter places importance on the process of experiencing the beauty of music.

Next, another question is the essential component of musical beauty between content and form. Here, there are also two different viewpoints: “aesthetics of content” (Gehaltsästhetik) and “aesthetics of form” (Formästhetik). While the former states that music is an art which aims to express a specific emotion or idea, and hence musical beauty can be found in the content of the musical piece, the latter argues that only the form of music itself carries beauty, and not any external factors.4

Could the musical aesthetics created and systematized in Western cultural tradition, then, be applied as they are to traditional Korean music, which came into being in a different cultural tradition? Naturally, this is not the case. First of all, the music presumed in a...
Western musical aesthetics has an independent meaning and sphere as a pure art genre, but in the case of East Asia including Korea, ak as aak differed greatly from music as a pure art until the end of the nineteenth century. For instance, strictly speaking, in traditional music, there is no concept of a “work” created by a single artist or “composer.” However, since aak is created by the absolute monarch, it can be said that musical aesthetics are closely connected to the ruler’s purpose in creating aak. In the case of minsogak such as sinawi, pansori, and sanjo, which are highly impromptu and improvisational, the performer is not simply conveying the intent of the composer, or an “anonymous group creator,” but is in a position to create music: as seen in the performer’s improvisation in sinawi, the singer’s deoneum in pansori, the accompanist’s chuimsae (vocal interjections), the diverse styles in sanjo, etc. Because the audience actively participates in the performance through interjected shouts, facilitating the creation of musical beauty in the very place where it is being performed, the performer and the audience are deeply involved in that beauty. Therefore, among traditional music, aak is closer to the standpoint of aesthetics of the work, but minsogak, in which musical beauty is created through the mirth and excitement of the performer, accompanist, and listeners, cannot be explained either through the aesthetics of the work or the aesthetics of reception. Viewed this way, minsogak can be defined as “aesthetics of becoming.”

Second, according to East Asian musical theory based on “ritual and music ideology,” which has no concept of pure musical pieces, ideology and function outside of the music itself become the content, and since the form is determined by the content, the form itself cannot hold independent meaning and value. Thus, the argument over whether the beauty of music lies in the content or the form cannot really be applied to aak, at least, as it is in the West. This is because the beauty of aak can be found fundamentally in its content. However, sanjo, which emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, is purely instrumental music, and naturally, the musical aesthetics lies in the form. It may be a coincidence that the aesthetics of form began to rise in importance since the appearance of Eduard Hanslick (1825-1904) at the end of the nineteenth century in the West as well.

Hence, aak and jeongak, which are ideologically very closely related to East Asian “ritual and music ideology,” are close to the aesthetics of form; among minsogak, sanjo, pure instrumental music, is close to the aesthetics of form.

When aesthetic consciousness is defined as a subjective attitude toward an aesthetic object, the aesthetic experience can vary greatly depending on status, taste, educational background, and so forth. Thus, it is only natural that there are differences in the aesthetic consciousness—as a representation of Kunstwollen—among the ruling class, the ruled class, and the new middle class of the traditional Korean society.

Aak

Korean aak, which has been in existence since the Three Kingdoms period, is a music (ak) that is very ceremonial in nature, performed by professional musicians at various national ceremonies. Because the function or ideology of the ceremony determines the content of this kind of music, which imposes a definite form upon it, it should be dealt with from the perspective of aesthetics of content, not aesthetic of form. This music is largely divided into ritual music for the dead (jeryeak) and ritual music for the living (uiryeak). Also here, jongmyo

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5. Refers to a part or a work that has become particularly good through new creations or changes made by a pansori singer.
6. An interjection shouted at intervals during Korean pansori. Either the drummer or the audience shouts out phrases such as jota, jochi, jalhanda, eu-i, and eolssigu, in order to flatter and encourage the singer. This shout also plays a great role in triggering the next part, and can bring about an effect that exceeds that of the accompaniment of orchestra in the Western opera.

8. According to written records, aak in Korea has been in existence since the reign of King Yuri (25-27) during the Silla period. Han Heungsub (2007, 317). See “Akji Silla ak” in Samguk sagi (History of the Three Kingdoms).
jeryeak (royal ancestral shrine music) and munmyo jeryeak (Confucian shrine music), both forms of jeryeak, will be examined.

1) Jongmyo jeryeak

Jongmyo jeryeak includes instrumental music (Jeongdaeeop and Botaepyong), songs, and dances performed at Jongmyo (The Royal Ancestral Shrine), which are shrines containing the ancestral tablets of successive kings of the Joseon dynasty. Among the three, the song, or akjang, in particular, plays the essential role in most effectively conveying the meaning of the ceremony through ceremonial music, and music and dance fulfill the role of representing the ceremony. Initially, King Sejong (1418-1450) of the Joseon era created the music himself, as hoeryeak that embodies the wish for a reign of peace in the kingdom, but during the reign of King Sejo (1455-1468), it was modified into and adopted as jongmyo jeryeak. The current version is a collection of eleven Botaepyong songs and eleven Jeongdaeeop songs, a total of twenty-two pieces, and this was two centuries ahead of the Western suite, which had its beginning in the Baroque era of the seventeenth century.

Royal ancestral ceremonies (jongmyo jerye) are similar in form to the ceremonies for worshipping a mortuary tablet of Confucius (munmyo jerye) in terms of performance style, movement, and dance, but their content is completely different. Jongmyo jeryeak is divided into deungga, which is an ensemble performed in the upper part of the terrace, and heonga, which is an ensemble performed in the lower part of the terrace, according to the location of the performance and the arrangement of instruments. The instruments are a combination of those used in aak, dangak (Chinese music), and hyangak (Korean music). In general, aak instruments include pyeongjong (a set of bronze bells), pyeongyeong (a set of stone chimes), and chuk (a trapezoidal box); dangak instruments include the banghyang (iron slabs), janggo (hourglass-shape drum), ajaeng (seven-stringed zither played with a bow), and dangpiri (Chinese oboes); and hyangak instruments include daegeum (Korean bamboo flute) and piri (Korean bamboo oboes). Following the proceedings, the “Botaepyong” is performed, and the master sings eleven pyeongjo songs praising the virtues of the ancestors, accompanied by munmu (dance of civil officials), which is quiet and gentle as befitting literary men. When “Jeongdaeeop” is played, eleven gyemyeonjo (a certain scale that is usually used in playing plaintive music) songs, which praise the military achievements of ancestors, and the mumu (martial dance), which is strong, vital, and befitting soldiers, are performed. In munmu, the jeok (notched vertical flute) is held in the right hand and the yak (notched vertical flute) in the left; in mumu, some hold a wooden sword, while others hold a wooden spear. The sound of the music, which has a soft, warm tranquil resonance that lasts for a long time, and the simple and restrained movements of the parilmu dance, which is performed by 64 people, eight standing in eight rows, creates a grave and somber feeling for the ceremony.

2) Munmyo jeryeak

Munmyo jeryeak refers to instrumental music, song, and dance performed at the Confucian shrine (munmyo), where the ancestral tablets
of Confucius and his leading disciples, such as Yanzi, Zengzi, and Zisi, and Mengzi (Mencius), and Korean Confucian scholars, such as Seolchong and Choe Chi-won, are enshrined. Munmyo jeryeak is rooted in Dasheng yaye (Court Music of Elegance and Splendor), which was transmitted to Korea by Emperor Huizong of the Chinese Song dynasty during the rule of King Yejong of Goryeo in 1116. During King Sejong’s reign, Bak Yeon (1378-1458) compiled fifteen songs based on Seokjeon akbo (or Dasheng yuepu), which was compiled by Ren Yu of Chinese Yuan dynasty in 1289; today, only six pieces are extant. Munmyo jeryeak, carrying on the tradition of the aak of ancient China, has the longest history among existing traditional musical genres, and it is the oldest music of East Asia that has long disappeared from China.

Munmyo jeryeak is also divided into deungga and heonga. Unlike jongmyo jeryeak, it is only played with aak instruments. The song that is sung to munmyo jeryeak is called akjang. It is in the form of Chinese poetry, which consists of four lines and eight phrases. A strain of a song consists of eight tunes, according to the form of the movement, and each tune consists of repetitions of a regular rhythm structure of four notes. Each tune ends with two strikes on the drum. Because this music is in a syllabic style, in which one note is attached to one syllable of the lyrics, the length of the note and the form of the tune are consistent with each other. In addition, the length of each note lasts for about three seconds, with the note rising before the end. This style creates a very dry and solemn effect. There are mumu and mumu, danced in the form of parilmu, in munmyo jeryeak as well; in mumu, the right hand holds a jeok and the left hand a yak, but unlike jongmyo jeryeak, in mumu, the right hand holds a cheok (ax) and the left hand a gan (shield). Parilmu is also performed with simplicity and restraint.

As described above, jongmyo jeryeak and munmyo jeryeak both exist to make the substance and procedure of ceremonies at the royal shrine (jongmyo) and Confucian shrine (munmyo) grave and solemn. The content and form of such music, as combinations of instrumental music, song, and dance, symbolically express certain principles; jongmyo jeryeak symbolizes the merit and virtue of the successive royal families, and munmyo jeryeak the learning and virtue of the Confucian school. In other words, the functions and ideology of these two kinds of music become the content, which in the end determines the form of the music. From this perspective, the lyrics, rhythmic structure, and the restraint and simplicity of the dance movements expressed in these two ritual music traditions embody the doctrine that “great music is supposed to be easy,” the East Asian musical ideal, and through it a solemn and grand beauty is vividly revealed. Would it be an exaggeration to say, as J. J. Winckelmann (1717-1768) of Germany stated, that the tension between the realm of death, which is grave with silence and darkness, and the realm of life, which is magnificent with authority and honor, is condensed and presented as “noble simplicity and quiet greatness (elder Einfalt und stille Größe)?”

**Jeongak**

The word jeongak, which means proper and dignified, is the name of the music that best demonstrates the refined nature of the Korean people. There are two major differences between aak and jeongak. One has to do with whether the music is of a ceremonial nature, and the other has to do with whether dance is included. In other words, the combination of instrumental music, song, and dance that is ceremonial and used as court music is called aak, and the performance of instruments or songs without dance that is not ceremonial and is used as pungnyubang music is called jeongak. Jeongak can be further divided into “court jeongak,” which is a division of aak, and

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13. 大樂必易: “Yueji” Lecture (Record of Music) in Liji (Book of Rites).
14. Originally, there was no term for jeongak in China. The term aak had originated in China, but jeongak is a term that came into wide use in Korea around 1910 as a newly coined word. Yi Hye-gu (1993, 17).
15. This is music that emerged in the 17th century and developed rapidly in the 18th century. It was enjoyed by the nobility and scholars of the wealthy middle class in pungnyubang. It refers to instrumental music, such as “Yeongsan hoesang,” and the vocal music of jeonga, such as gagok (song), gasa (lyrics), and sijo (Korean verse). Kwon (2003, 67-84).
in the first and second movements, a dramatic change in the third movement, and the finish in the fourth movement, but in the method of developing the details in each movement. This is the result of honing by many musicians over the years.17

The last beat of the first, second, and third movements in particular, has a prolonged sound, which is a unique method of developing the melody, alternately using piri and daegeum to play a long, slow tune. Also, each beat has an irregular rhythm, and it is conjectured that this was because the rhythm had to be either expanded or contracted, since it was used as ceremonial music for royal processions of kings and crown princes. Perhaps that is why this music is so slow and stately, without great changes.

It can be inferred from this that the “Sujecheon” people listen to today as purely instrumental music is strongly imbued with the essential nature of ceremonial music performed at the royal court of the Joseon dynasty. This implies that functions external to the music itself constitute the essence of the beauty of music. So the melody and rhythm of this music possess “the beauty of slow continuity,” in which the music plays on despite intervals at which it seems about to stop, and “the beauty of strength and gentleness,” which makes the music strong and gentle at the same time. Through such beauty is expressed “the beauty of neutrality” or “the beauty of suspension,” which describes the ultimate principle of the Confucian cultivation of mind.

2) Yeongsan hoesang

It is well known that “Yeongsan hoesang,” which is considered the best example of jeongak, is divided into three styles called “Pyeongjo hoesang,” “Hyeonak yeongsan hoesang,” and “Gwanak yeongsan hoesang.” It is supposed that the last two of the pieces were altered or transposed from “Pyeongjo hoesang,” and there are differences among the three in the organization of the instruments, musical co-

16. Aak is a branch of court music in which instrumental music, songs, and dances are integrated as a whole. “Court jeongak” refers specifically to an instrumental ensemble, a variation of aak, and it is a new term coined specifically by the author for this paper.


position, and how the music is used.

"Yeongsan hoesang" is a collection of music in which eight to nine small pieces form a larger whole. "Hyeonak yeongsan hoesang" consists of nine pieces, and "Pyeongjo hoesang" and "Gwanak yeongsan hoesang" each consists of eight pieces, excluding the lower-string dodeuri (rhythmic pattern) of the nine pieces.

It is said that "Yeongsan hoesang" was initially Buddhist vocal music in which the seven syllables of "yeong-san-hoe-sang-bul-bosal," now a part of the "Sangnyeongsan," was sung in a grave manner. In the latter part of the Joseon era, the lyrics were done away with, and only instruments were played; and when the music, which used to be played in repetition, went through gradual variations, derivative pieces with similar melodies emerged. "Jungnyeongsan" and "Seryeongsan" were derived from Sangnyeongsan, and three-string dodeuri and lower-string dodeuri are also variations of each other. "Yeongsan hoesang" can either be played in its entirety, or as separate pieces.

As each piece is played continuously without pauses, it is unclear where each piece begins and ends, and similar melodies are repeated without great changes, and speed up towards the end. Greatly enjoyed by Confucian scholars who were economically affluent, this music began with the aim of cultivating the mind and body, but was later transformed into a form of music that sought the beauty of pure instrumentality, with the inflow of elements of minsogak. In the case of "Sangnyeongsan" in particular, which can be considered the original form of "Yeongsan hoesang," the tempo is very slow, and the piece most distinctly demonstrates "the beauty of neutrality," which is the ultimate object of cultivation of the mind and body. Although the beat speeds up towards the end, creating a sense of lighthearted excitement and causing the loss of "the beauty of slow continuity," on the whole, the piece does not lose its "beauty of neutrality." This is perhaps what Confucius meant by "enjoying without over-indulging."21

Minsogak

There is a great variety of minsogak, but among them, pansori and sanjo are recognized as best embodying the spirit of the Korean people. This is because pansori was loved by all classes throughout the nineteenth century, and sanjo throughout the twentieth century. Both were influenced by sinawi music, which is deeply related to shamanism and has in turn dominated the depths of the Korean consciousness for a long time. What, then, are the aesthetic elements that enabled them to garner such wide-ranging affection? In discussing the beauty of pansori, both its content and form should be considered, since it is a dramatic piece with a specific type of content; but because sanjo is a purely instrumental piece, it would be more appropriate to view it in terms of the aesthetics of form. Also, as previously mentioned, minsogak as a whole should be seen from the perspective of the "aesthetics of becoming" (saengseong mihak).

1) Pansori

Pansori is an artistic genre unique to the Korean people, and a similar example cannot be found anywhere else in the world. The most distinguishing characteristic of pansori is that one sorikkun (singer) sings a long dramatic song that lasts for about three to four hours, and sometimes up to eight hours, relying solely on the accompaniment of a single gosu (drummer). How can one singer captivate the audience for such a long time while telling a simple story that everyone already knows? What is the source of fascination with pansori, which held all of Joseon society in its sway during the nineteenth century?

In general, pansori audiences are very familiar with the main sto-
rylines of pansori. So they are focused on how the singer will make that story come to life. In other words, the pansori singers draw the audience into each and every scene by utilizing simple but well-organized narratives that draw upon dramatic tension and a wide variety of musical composition. By doing so, the audience becomes absorbed in the world of pansori created anew and improvised by the singer, and experiences a sense of artistic elevation. This is why pansori aficionados experience artistic pleasure every time, whether they listen to the same repertoire from the same singer, or from different singers, and further, are able to enjoy the subtler points of pansori at a higher level by listening to it repeatedly.\footnote{22}

The central element that makes this possible lies in the dramatic change in narrative, the use of various forms of traditional literary art,\footnote{23} and the dynamic voice that tells the story with feeling. In pansori, performed with modest stage settings by a single person who plays all the key roles in a manner that is both creative and realistic, the pivotal point is how dramatically the singer brings the narrative to life. For this, what is significant is not only aniri\footnote{24} and ballim,\footnote{25} which are of a very impromptu nature, but vocal sound, the method of vocalization, and sigimsae,\footnote{26} which are needed for a deeper sense of verisimilitude (imyeon). This is how various manners of vocalization came into existence: ujo, or horyeongje, is sung with a sense of dignity and boldness; pyeongjo is sung with a feeling of peace, harmony, and cheerfulness; gemyeonjo, also called seoreumjo, is sung with a feeling of sadness; geongdeureum is sung in a lighthearted manner; seolleongje in a vigorous, cheerful, and hearty way; chucheonmok in a pleasant manner; and menarijo in a sorrowful way. Also, different methods of vocalization and sigimsae become essential factors making up the attraction of the vocal sound of pansori. This is the very reason why deugum, or attaining a state of great musical ability, is discussed as the most important requirement for becoming a pansori master.

Further, as is widely known, the five surviving cycles of pansori among the twelve that were handed down consist only of subjects that embody Confucian values. This is attributable to the fact that although pansori originated with the common people, yangban and the new, wealthy middle class (jungin), armed with Confucianism and galvanized by social changes since the late seventeenth century, emerged as pansori appreciators, and then projected their aesthetic desires into the pansori pieces. Thus, combined with the mirth and enthusiasm created by improvisation between the accompanists and audience, pansori’s aesthetics lies in its dynamic representation supported by dramatic changes in narrative, its diverse literary and artistic styles, its dynamic voice in terms of form, and its Confucian moral aesthetics in terms of content.

\footnote{22} Bak (2001, 178-179).
\footnote{23} Traditional literary forms in pansori include the narrative form, such as ancient novel and tale and lyrical forms, such as sijo, gasa, saseol sijo (narrative sijo), hansi (Chinese poem), danga (short lyric), japga (miscellaneous songs), and minyo (folk song). Kim Hyeon-ju (2001, 162).
\footnote{24} This refers to the pansori singer describing a situation in a normal speaking voice, not in a melodic tune.
\footnote{25} Also called neoreumsae, sache, and gwa, it refers to a series of gestures made by the singer for a more lively performance.
\footnote{26} Sigimsae refers to music that enhances the main body of music that makes up the melodym, or short pieces of music. In a broader sense, it means an expressive function bestowed on a piece of music to make the melody flow smoothly and naturally, or for a decorative effect; it is also called sigeumsae. The National Center for Korean Traditional Performing Arts homepage (http://www.ncktpa.go.kr/ncktpa_2006.jsp).
It is said that sanjo first appeared around 1890 when Kim Chang-jo (1856-1919) of Yeongam, Jeollanam-do province composed a gayageum sanjo. However, rather than stating that Kim Chang-jo came up with the musical form called gayageum sanjo all at once, it would be more appropriate to state that a form of music similar to sanjo, in search of the pure beauty of music, emerged around the end of the eighteenth century or the beginning of the nineteenth century and then became more established in its form at the time of Kim Chang-jo, who thereafter led to the popularization of the term sanjo.

Since the twentieth century, sanjo came to be performed with instruments such as geomungo, daegeum, ajaeng, haegeum, and piri. Over a long period of time, the tune became more varied and sophisticated according to the individuality and musical taste of various performers, creating sigimsae in the performance, which resulted in different schools. However, these schools cannot be ranked; they each possess their own beauty and characteristics. Varied schools came into existence because each musician recreated the music through his or her own interpretation, and did not simply reproduce the performance of the teacher or predecessor.

As is widely known, sanjo begins with jinyangjo, which has a very slow beat, and gradually grows faster, from jung mori, jungjung mori, jajin mori, to hwi mori. The transition in speed, which starts out slow and grows faster and faster, is a general characteristic of traditional music. Also, an entire cycle (batang) of sanjo is composed of the contrast between “tension and relaxation.” Such contrast can be found in the structure of the beat or tune. In general, slow parts grow in tension compared to the fast parts, and relatively fast parts become relaxed compared to the slow parts, but sanjo starts out slow and grows in speed towards the end, so on the whole, it moves from tension to relaxation.

If the relationship between tension and relaxation is examined in more detail in terms of rhythm, jung mori can be considered relaxed compared to jinyangjo, and hwi mori compared to jajin mori. Jinyangjo, which starts out with tension, becomes a little relaxed in jung mori and more relaxed in jungjung mori. The first tension is resolved into relaxation; then the second tension begins with jajin mori, and becomes relaxed with hwi mori. Of course, the tension in jinyangjo and that in jajin mori are on different levels.

Next, the relationship between tension and relaxation can also be found in the structure of the tune. Jinyangjo is a case in point. In gayageum sanjo, jinyangjo is made up of four parts consisting of ujo, doljang, pyeongjo, and gyemyeonjo; the part from ujo to pyeongjo, and the gyemyeonjo part each take up about half of the whole, or the latter takes up a little more. Since gyemyeonjo displays a more intense, stronger sentiment than ujo or pyeongjo in general, the tension of jinyangjo can be found in the latter half of the piece. So jinyangjo starts out with a calm feeling, and gradually turns more intense; in other words, it goes from a mode of relaxation to tension. Therefore, on the whole, jinyangjo comes under the tension part of the sanjo, but looked at separately, jinyangjo moves from relaxation in the former half to tension in the latter half.

One cycle (batang) of sanjo as a whole moves from tension to relaxation, but in its relationship to each rhythm or within the same phrase, the contrast of tension and relaxation shows an orderly structure in its own way, spread across several layers. This enables the performers and accompanists, as well as the audience, to experience the “dynamism beauty of tension and relaxation.”

What, then, led ordinary people and people of the pungnyu class to become so deeply absorbed in this “dynamism beauty of tension and relaxation?” The answer can be sought in the social ambience that so

27. The schools that involve relatively well-known instruments include the following: Kang Tae-hong school, Kim Byeong-ho school, Ham Dongjeong school, Kim Yun-deok school, Choe Ok-sam school, Seong geum-ryeon school, Kim Juk-pa school, which are of the gayageum sanjo school, which has the longest history; and the Sin Kwae-dong school, Han Gap-deuk school, and Kim Yun-deok school, which are all of the geomungo sanjo school; additionally, there is the Ji Yeong-hui school and Han Beom-su school of haegeum sanjo.

influenced their lives at the time. It is possible that they gained, in a vivid and candid way, a vicarious experience of their diverse and complicated aesthetic desire through the “dynamic beauty of tension and relaxation” offered by sanjo, in the dreary atmosphere of extreme conflict and anxiety that pervaded the society, as symbolized by the Peasant War of 1894 at the end of the nineteenth century. Too, it is possible that through the dramatic contrast of tension and relaxation in the form of sanjo, they repeatedly found life in death, light in darkness, delight in pain, freedom in oppression, forgiveness in anger, reconciliation in conflict, joy in sorrow, laughter in tears, hope in despair, peace in anxiety, calm in fury, and peaceful stability in violent rebellion, sublimating them all into art.

The term form as in the aesthetics of form does not indicate an empty or aesthetically insubstantial entity. On the contrary, it contains infinite “possibilities of interpretation” or content, and the signification is created anew each moment, according to the situation and the person experiencing it. This is based on the same principle in which a representational painting conveys a single message (substance), while an abstract painting is open to an infinite range of interpretation. This is why such a complex experience is possible through the form of sanjo.

Conclusion

The Joseon era after the seventeenth century was a period of socio-economic changes through which the wealthy jungin (the “middle class”) emerged, ideological changes in which Neo-Confucian ideology of “ritual and music” became somewhat relaxed, and the carefree life and art of ordinary people were actively accepted by the nobility or the middle class. The atmosphere of the era brought with it a new awareness about the world that surrounded oneself, and about one’s life, and was expressed through confident individuality.

The spirit of the era brought about distinct changes in art in general. In the case of Korean music, the music of the aak branch, which originated in the ceremonial music of the royal court and was slow without great changes, gave way to pungnyubang jeongak as an artistic music enjoyed by the nobility and scholars in general. Pungnyubang jeongak was faster in speed and utilized a lot of high notes. Meanwhile, pansori, which used to be sung by jesters of low social status, was elevated into an art that could be enjoyed by all people; the pansori rhythm and tune was combined with sinawi, which is rooted in indigenous Korean shamanism, to create sanjo, the essence of traditional Korean music.

What then is the significance and value of such traditional music, the aesthetic fruit of despotic monarchies of old, for the people of the twenty-first century? First, the beauty of aak grants modern Koreans a sense of cultural self-esteem. Korean aak, an integrated form of East Asian instrumental music, song, and dance based on the “ideology of ritual and music,” is the most symbolic revival of the long cultural tradition peculiar to the region. There is no doubt that the aak of the past era no longer holds musical vitality for today’s Koreans as familiar, everyday music. However, through it, we can glimpse a bygone era, like viewing relics in a museum. In other words, while observing and listening to court music as a combined form of instrumental music, song, and dance, we can experience the solemnity, elegance, and restraint of ceremonial culture, as if having been whisked across the divides of time and space. This experience is a valuable opportunity for experiencing self-esteem as an independent and creative people with a long tradition, as well as to hand it down to generations to come. Further, it will be great motivation for us to creatively contribute to the progress and changes in musical culture around the
world.

Second, the beauty of jeongak allows us to experience the aesthetics of slowness and refinement. The world has entered an era of scientific technology that is changing at the speed of light. As a result, the lives of people who must adjust to a rapidly changing social environment have become a war against speed; consequently, their minds and bodies have become used to such speed, intensity, and directness. In order to counteract this situation, it is necessary to find a sense of balance, leisure, peace, and gentleness, which perhaps is a natural desire of the life force. When such things are sought in music, the Korean jeongak, with its elegance and slowness, can help comfort the pained, desolate soul and elevate it to a refined state. The aesthetic function of jeongak can also be used as healing, therapeutic music, or music for meditation, prenatal care, tea ceremonies, and gi (material force) exercises.

Finally, the beauty of minsogak can be considered a distinct cultural product for a globalized era. The twenty-first century, deemed the era of globalization, is an era of competition among cultural products. Therefore, nations are sparing no expense or effort to plan and develop unique cultural products. Of course, Korea in the past was greatly influenced by Chinese culture, but the minsogak that has been handed down to today’s Koreans most clearly represents Korea’s “unique emotional consciousness.” In short, Korean folk music possesses unique cultural and artistic characteristics that distinguish it from the music of the rest of East Asia, not to mention the music of nations across the world. Minsogak, which best demonstrates the artistic spirit particular to the Korean people, can thus be considered one of the most competitive traditional cultural products that represent Korea. What we must do now, therefore, is revive traditional Korean music in its original form, or recreate it in a modern way, and establish various marketing strategies fit for a global era, by planning, producing, promoting, and performing it with creativity and imagination, so that people around the world, as well as those in Korea, can enjoy it.

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GLOSSARY

ak  樂
aak  鼓樂
ajaeng  梯鼓
akjang  鼓響
aniri  亦尼里
Baekje  百姬
Bak Yeon  巴克炎
ballim  球蓮
banghyang  顔洪
batang  代堂
Botaepyong  博大坪
chek  島
Choe Chiwon  佐知雄
chucheonmok  重興 목
chujinsae  重基塞
chuk  策
daeguem  大鼓
Daeseong akbo  大聖應部
jangak  僧伽
jangpiri  僧伽裡
Dasheng yayue (Ch.)  代善雅樂
Deonum  延極
Deungga  延歌
dodeuri  延德理
jalang  代娘
gan  干
gayageum  伽倻琴
gayumung  伽倻音
gi  吉
Goryeo  高麗
gosu  鼓手
gyemyeonjo  韓頌調
gyeongdeureum  韓德誦
Gwanak yeongsan  韓景山
hoesang  聞相
haegum  愛琴
heonga  好架
heuteun garak  輔人架
hoeryeak  猴禮相
horyeongje  猴令獻
Huizong (Ch.)  胡宗
hwa  和
hyangak  媛楽
hyingpuri  媛樂裡
Hyeyonak yeongsan  嬰樂山
hoesang  聞相
imyeon  裏面
jajin mori  僧靈妙里
janggo  僧鼓
jeok  僧
jeongak  僧伽
jeongcupha  僧龔川
Jeongga  僧歌
Jeotdae  僧代
jeryeak  禮禮相
jinyangjo  猴陽相
jongsong jeryeak  岑松禮相
jungin  倚人
jungjang mori  倚頌妙里