

Bands, Songs, and Shamanistic Rituals

Folk Music in Korean Society

Keith Howard

INTRODUCTION

There is a lack of publications about Korean folk music in English and, amongst established Korean music scholars, there has been considerable work done on the analysis of music sound, but a virtual avoidance of musical context—details about the places where music was performed, who performed it, and what occasions they performed it for. At the other extreme, Korean folk scholars have begun to assemble an impressive data base about oral culture, witnessed in the now-defunct *Chōnt'ong munhwa* and *Madang* magazines and the publications of the Academy of Korean Studies (*Han'guk chōngshin munhwa yon'guwōn*). Folk scholars tend not to consider musical sound. To people familiar with the development of social anthropology or comparative musicology, when "fieldwork" once involved a social scientist living in a community recording the minutiae of daily interaction, and when a musicologist interpreted recordings resulting from this study in some distant university, the Korean situation may sound all too familiar. I believe that music is a social fact and needs to be studied in a way that considers both context and sound, that is, both process and product (after Blacking 1969). In this study I consequently attempt to bridge the gap between folklore and music. I am an ethnomusicologist, and so this is a book about music, not a book of music.

The Korean term for folk music, *minso* *umak*, encompasses far more than just the local, largely oral genres of folk songs and folk bands. It applies equally to *p'ansori* (epic storytelling through song) and *sanjo* (lit., "scattered melodies", for solo instrument and drum), genres which epitomize professional or semi-professional "art" musics that have for a considerable period been performed before a paying, non-participating audience. Such music is attractive for study because it exudes a surface complexity that is simultaneously both exciting and fascinating. This study only touches briefly on these largely urban specialized genres and, in considering rural styles, I seek not to talk in generalizations, but to keep to specifics. The specifics follow since I am concerned with the

place of traditional music on Chindo, an island county that lies to the extreme southwest of the Korean peninsula. In isolation, the evidence of one geographical area might be suspect, so I bring in data from elsewhere in the peninsula to support or to question how Chindo musicians performed, or how Chindo informants talked about music. The generalizations beloved by simple and often journalistic accounts tend to break down when one examines an individual situation; here my analyses work outwards from specific local performances and from specific local perceptions of musical events. Whether the theories I propose based on Chindo music culture are appropriate for the whole of the Korean peninsula will not be known until more detailed comparative material is available.

If the roots of Korean culture lie with the Korean people (rather than their powerful neighbours in Japan and China), then folk music studies have an important part to play in establishing a national heritage. The culture of the masses, the so-called *minjung munhwa*, has now regained a popularity until recently threatened by the onslaughts of Westernization and modernization. The promotion of folk culture, initiated by the government under the auspices of the Intangible Cultural Asset system, but now also supported by university clubs closely involved in protest against their political masters, has proved extremely successful where so many countries around the Pacific rim have failed. Today in Seoul or many other urban centres, it is possible to see sanitized performances of regional folk music in hotels (perhaps here best described as ‘airport art’) and to visit theatres and outdoor *Nori madang* where local groups are regularly invited to perform. Unfortunately, traditions until recently considered old fashioned, boring, and heathen, tend to have undergone restructuring to package them more appropriately for the new world. There is an increasing danger that scholars, both native and foreign, will study the restructured forms, perhaps without leaving the comfortable surroundings of Seoul, and will pronounce upon them as if these represent the contemporary manifestation of a tradition stretching back several thousand years. The mechanics of restructuring, whether as revival or re-invention, are little understood as yet, and here I attempt to explain how they have worked in respect to Chindo music. It will quickly become apparent that the past tense is usually more apt than the present; while much of the material which sees the light of day continues to regard

folk song and folk band activities as current, traditional lifestyles have broken down, leaving few regular work or ritual contexts for performance.

My initial contact with Chindo musicians came during October 1982. I spent a period of sixteen months carrying out intensive fieldwork between 1982 and 1984, and have since met Chindo musicians and returned to the island on three occasions. Most of my fieldwork was sponsored by the British Economic and Social Research Council as part of my doctoral program at the Queen's University of Belfast. My thesis was submitted in October 1985. A selection of my fieldwork tapes is housed at the archive of the Korean Culture and Arts Foundation (*Han'guk munhwa yesul chinhungwŏn*) in Seoul and at the National Sound Archive in London. Over 200 hours of interview tapes and some 80 hours of music recordings were made.

After a mere 30 months studying Korean music in Korea I can hardly claim today to be an expert in the same way that senior native scholars are. Outside Chindo, I have received invaluable assistance from Lee Hye-Ku, Lee Chae-suk, Song Bang-song, Kwŏn O-sŏng, Yi Po-hyŏng, and Han Man-yŏng at Seoul National University, Hanyang University, and the Office for Cultural Assets (*Munhwajae kwalliguk*). I was taught specific musical instruments in Seoul by Yun Ch'an-gu, Ōm Hye-gyŏng, Kim Pyŏng-sŏp, Kim Chung-sŏp, and Pak Hwan-yŏng, all of whom were patient with a trying student. Much of my musical initiation took place at the National Classical Music Institute (*Kungnip kugagwŏn*) in Seoul. I am indebted to over 200 Chindo informants, all of whom are listed in my doctoral thesis (1985c: 726-733). Some, particularly Cho Kong-nye, Ch'oe So-shim, Sop'o's band members, Hŏ Og-in, and ritual specialists, spent much time talking to me, teaching me to sing and to play instruments. In keeping with their desire for anonymity, I have given names only where I feel informants would not object. Ritual specialists have been disguised by giving simply a surname and a number, that is, Pak1, Pak2, Pak3, and so on; my reasons for this will become obvious in later chapters.

Since my initial fieldwork, on subsequent trips to Korea, and at conferences of musicologists and Koreanologists in Europe, much interest has been expressed in my work. I have therefore been encouraged to publish a volume based loosely on my doctoral thesis, and have been able to prepare the manuscript while working as a British Academy Post-

doctoral Fellow in Ethnomusicology at the University of Durham. Dr. Cho Sung-ok of the Korean National Committee for UNESCO and the Publications Committee of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society have graciously subsidized publication costs to allow this volume to appear.

I would like to think that my study of Korean folk music is only just beginning; there is much to be done and, at present, too few people work in the field. I hope that my meagre study will both initiate some debate and stimulate more people to visit the Korean countryside to search out folk music in rural society. Here, instruments are dealt with only briefly. I have given classification codes in accordance with the Hornbostel and Sachs system (1914, trans. by Anthony Baines and Klaus P. Wachsman 1961: 3-29); my justification for using this system, and more details on particular instruments, can be found in my *Korean Musical Instruments: A Practical Guide*. I hope soon to publish articles that deal with specific aspects of rituals and with music analysis that will complement what I have included here.

Korean terms are romanized according to the McCune-Reischauer system (anon., 1961: 121-128). Where a publication includes an author's name romanized differently, their preferred spelling has been kept and the McCune-Reischauer version follows in square brackets. Further, since the Korean government adopted the system, they have altered several conventions. I have followed their preference for "sh" rather than "s" in "shin," "shi," "shinwi" and so forth (rather than "sin," "si," "sinawi"). Chinese terms are romanized according to the Pinyin system and Japanese terms follow Hepburn. Space has prevented the inclusion of lists of informants and archive tapes. The texts I have incorporated for folk songs and bands are by no means straight translations; I have attempted, rather, to capture the essence of the original. Six Korean proverbs, *soktam*, are used, four as titles for sections written within quotation marks and two in chapter 7 to add clarification to my consideration of legends. The Korean texts for these proverbs are given in Appendix II.

During my doctoral work, Prof. John Blacking acted as my supervisor. Dr. R.C. Provine offered much useful advice and, more recently, my wife Paek Inok has proved invaluable. I wish to thank Prof. Eckart Dege for kindly allowing me to use the map which appears as Map 3, and Schott

B. Söhne, Mainz, for permission to reproduce Musical Example 3, which I previously published in German within their *Welt Musik: Korea* (1985b: 137-138). Parts of chapter 9 were given at the 1985 conference of the Association for Korean Studies in Europe at Chantilly, France, and in 1988 at the Academy for Korean Studies.

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June 1988

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