

## **Korean Music 2**

The Keywords: mass game, shaman, Wang Sanak, geomungo (a seven-stringed instrument, "black harp," hyeongeum), Baekjegeum ("Baekje harp"), Ureuk, gayageum, the "three bamboos" (woodwind instruments) and the "three strings" (the geomungo, gayageum and hyangbipa), a ceremony to commemorate the birth of Buddha, a shamanic ceremony honoring the god of the earth, Dangak, Aak, Hyangak, the Daeak Gwanhyeon-bang

### 7. The History of Korean Music

A brief introduction to the history of Korean music is not easy; it is a long and complex history of music covering 5000 years. Also, understanding these historical issues is very difficult for a beginner. Yet it is difficult to understand music without an understanding of its history, and so an outline of music-related events in Korean history is presented here without a critical discussion or analysis.

#### 7.1. Korean Music Before the Three Kingdoms Period (? – ca. AD 0)

Chinese historical documents contain many records of Korean music preceding the Three Kingdoms period. According to these records, ancient Koreans performed a memorial rite to the god of heaven in spring and fall, and music was most certainly used during this rite. Music at this time generally took the form of a combined performance of music, dance and other elements, and it is said that this form was similar to a mass festival. It is known that shamans were in charge of this music, giving rise to the opinion that the origin of Korean music is to be found in shamanism.

It is impossible to know any details of the music of this time, but there are records indicating that the southern regions of the Korean peninsula possessed stringed instruments distinct from those used in China.

#### 7.2. Three Kingdoms period (ca. AD 0 – late 7th century)

We cannot know what music was actually like during the Three Kingdoms period, but it is possible to get a glimpse of the musical features of this time to a certain extent through Chinese and Korean records.

### 7.2.1 Goguryeo (BC 37–AD 668)

A musician named Wang Sanak, who held a position similar to prime minister in Goguryeo, created a stringed instrument called the *geomungo* in imitation of a seven-stringed Chinese instrument. He also personally composed and performed about a hundred songs for the *geomungo*. It was said that he was so skilled at playing the instrument that a black crane flew down from the heavens and danced to the sounds of his music, and so the Chinese characters for the *geomungo* are “black crane harp” (*hyeonhakgeum*), or just “black harp” (*hyeongeum*) for short. This term is still used today, and the term *geomungo* is the Korean rendering of this term. Scholars understand the term *geomungo*, that is, *hyeongeum*, to mean “stringed instrument from the heavens”. This instrument is still used today, and its appearance is almost exactly the same as the images appearing in ancient tomb murals.

The music of Goguryeo using the folk instrument *geomungo* heavily influenced the music of the Chinese Sui (581–618) and Tang (618–907) dynasties. Thus, both Sui and Tang recognized Goguryeo music as a form of official music for the royal court. In comparison, the music of Silla and Baekje did not receive such official recognition.

Furthermore, Goguryeo constantly imported music from China and the countries bordering western China, rounding out its own musical culture. Records of the time clearly reveal that the people of Goguryeo imported instruments in addition to music. Geographically speaking, Goguryeo’s music culture imported from the Asian continent through the north is currently judged to be the most outstanding of the three kingdoms, and Goguryeo music had a considerable influence on the formation of Japanese music.

### 7.2.2. Baekje (BC 18–AD 660)

There aren’t many records concerning the music of Baekje. Also, although murals of Goguryeo frequently show images of music, the same is not true for Baekje. However, Baekje is considered to have developed their musical culture to a certain degree. Baekje music, which adopted the music of southern China, was feminine and gentle in comparison to the masculine, vigorous music of Goguryeo. This can be seen in records of instruments and the general cultural character of southern China.

Although Baekje music was introduced to China, it was not recognized as official music. However, the influence of Baekje on Japanese music was not small, and Baekje passed on to Japan the Chinese art of *giak*, a mask drama and its accompanying music. This instrumental music can be seen in contemporary Korean *talchum* (mask dance), but

many records and artifacts, including masks, remain in Japan. This music was once used to propagate Buddhism, but this character has been more or less diluted in today's mask dance. Baekje also introduced the *geomungo* of Goguryeo to Japan, and the Japanese called it the *baekjegeum* ("Baekje harp").

In addition, there are many songs in the music of Goguryeo and Baekje not mentioned above. The lyrics of some of these songs are still being handed down.

### 7.2.3. Silla (BC 57-AD 935)

Pre-unification Silla was culturally behind Goguryeo and Baekje, and there aren't many records relating to the music of this time. However, Silla's musical culture after receiving the *gayageum* from the Gaya kingdom (?-562) in the sixth century is considered respectable. When Gaya collapsed, a Gaya citizen named Ureuk (6th century) fled to Silla, bringing the *gayageum* with him. The Silla king of that time, King Jinheung (534-576) was a lover of music and treated Ureuk kindly. Three smart children of aristocratic families sent for Ureuk and learned singing, dancing, and music from him.

Ureuk was not just a talented performer, but also an outstanding composer. He composed twelve songs based on contemporary folk songs, and these were regarded as wild and free in their expression. His three pupils, though, simplified these songs and reduced them to five songs with a more restrained mode of expression. Their teacher Ureuk was indignant at first, but it is said that the quiet and clarity of these songs moved him. These five songs became the music of the Silla royal court, and their character is guessed to have been Apollonian. Unfortunately, however, only the names of these five songs and the original twelve, without their music, have been passed down.

Although Ureuk was a genius with *gayageum* music, the *gayageum* is said to have been first made by Gaya King Gasil (?-?) after seeing a *jaeng*, a Chinese 13-stringed musical instrument. However, some contemporary scholars believe that the *gayageum* did not originate in imitation of the *jaeng*, but in the *geomungo* mentioned above.

The people of Silla greatly enjoyed *gayageum* music, and introduced their music along with the *gayageum* to Japan, where it was called the *sillageum*. The *gayageum* used today in court music very closely resembles artifacts from the Silla period as well as *gayageum* of ancient Korea that had been transmitted to Japan.

Silla, which unified the three kingdoms, appropriated the culture of Goguryeo and Baekje as well as Tang China, further developing its political system and culture.

Music was no different. Silla had the *daegeum* ("large bamboo"), *chunggeum* ("medium bamboo") and *sogeum* ("small bamboo")--woodwind instruments which were collectively called the "three bamboos"--and the *geomungo*, *gayageum* and *hyangbipa*--collectively called the "three strings." All of these instruments are indigenous to Korea; the *daegeum* can be compared to a Western flute, the *sogeum* to a piccolo, and the *chunggeum* is held like a flute and falls in between the first two in terms of size. The *hyangbip'a* is a stringed instrument that was played held against the chest like a kithara. Of these six instruments, all but the *hyangbipa* are still in use today.

The people of Silla also had a basic theory of melody suitable for these six instruments, and although there was said to be music for hundreds of songs based on this theory, none of this music remains. Silla also enjoyed the music of Tang China and the Buddhist *beompae*, as well as the songs known as *hyangga*. Of these, the lyrics of a large number of *hyangga* have been preserved.

Silla also particularly enjoyed the music of the *geomungo*, and considered it precious. Records that even the kings had a great interest in the teaching and spread of *geomungo* music confirm this. Because of this, the refined people of Silla enjoyed the music of the *geomungo*, and this tradition was carried on even through the Joseon Dynasty.

It is worth mentioning the foundation of a state music conservatory in Silla, called *Uemseongseo*. *Uemseongseo*, which was in charge of almost all formal and informal music events, was founded in the first half of the seventh century and lasted until the fall of Silla. This tradition was carried on by Goryeo and Joseon. This tradition was carried on by Goryeo and Joseon, and survives today in the National Center for Korean Performing Arts.

One characteristic of Silla, Goguryeo and Baekje music is the fact that they invariably regarded instrumental music, songs, and dance as a single, unified concept. They refused to see music as an independent, separate art form, and this inclination has been inherited to a certain extent by the National Center for Korean Performing Arts, which is not only in charge of music but dance as well.

### 7.3. Goryeo (918-1392)

Little is known of early Goryeo music except for the fact that it generally imitated Silla styles. The only records that remain show that music was used in a ceremony to commemorate the birth of Buddha and also in a shamanic ceremony honoring the god of the earth. Although these two ceremonies were at times temporarily suspended due to the huge financial burden they incurred, they were continued up until the end of the Goryeo period. Hints of Silla style can be seen in the music from these ceremonies.

Goryeo music began to take on its own special characteristics after the mid-Goryeo period. In 1114 and then again in 1116, Goryeo engaged in musical exchanges with Sung China and imported a type of religious music called *dangak*, as well as a type of court music called *aak* that was performed in various royal ancestral memorial services. *Dangak*, *aak*, and *hyangak* (native Korean music) were very clearly distinguished from one another, and these three major divisions persisted until the end of the Joseon Dynasty.

The people of Goryeo loved music and dancing, and they didn't discriminate against the imported music of China. *Hyangak* and *dangak* were both performed in the royal palace, sometimes accompanied by dancing. This fact is clearly illustrated by the inclusion of 32 *hyangak* songs and 43 *dangak* songs in the Goryeo Annals (*Goryeosa*). Of these, the music to many of the *hyangak* songs has been handed down to the present and are still performed today, yet only two *dangak* songs, '*Boheoja*' and '*Nagyangchun*,' have survived. However, it is difficult to find any trace of Chinese *dangak* in these examples, since they have been Koreanized through time; the ability to assimilate and adapt other cultures is one of the characteristics of Korean culture.

The introduction in 1116 of the *aak* vocal style was a major event in the development of Goryeo music. This style was at the time not fully mature, but it nevertheless became the foundation for Korean *aak*. Also, the addition of *aak* to the already popular *hyangak* and *dangak* styles further expanded the realm of music in Goryeo. Aside from these two imported Chinese styles, there are many other traces of foreign influences in Goryeo music.

Along with the introduction of *dangak* and *aak*, new instruments to accompany these styles were also developed. Songs were sung to string accompaniment, and this music greatly influenced the vocal music styles of the Joseon Dynasty. The lyrics of most of these songs described the love between man and woman.

Like Silla, Goryeo established national music institutions. Toward the end of the 10th century Goryeo formed three different government institutions related to music. They were called the *Daeakseo*, the *Gwanhyeonbang*, and the *Daeak Gwanhyeonbang*. Although the names did change slightly, these institutions remained active in promoting music until the fall of the Goryeo Dynasty. Those in charge of these government organs were nobility, but the actual musicians were from the lower classes and handed down their trade from generation to generation. This stands in sharp contrast to the case of Silla, whose musicians were people of relatively high standing in their home towns.

1. What is the origin of the Korean music?
2. What is the common viewpoint on the music in the Three Kingdom period?
3. What are the representative musical instruments in the Three Kingdom period?
4. What is the great change in the history of Korean music through the exchange between Goryeo and Song (China)?