

## Korean Music 3

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### 7.4. Joseon (1392-1910)

Joseon was founded on Confucian principles, and music was considered important as a necessary means of ruling the country. Confucian thought of the time held music to be just as important as proper etiquette, and very important for practical political applications. Of particular importance was *aak*. This ideology stressing both proper etiquette and music is called *ye-ak sasang*. Although Confucian Joseon rejected the Buddhism that Goryeo had embraced, they accepted the music of Goryeo as is. Much of Goryeo *aak*, though, focused on the love of men and women, so the music was generally left untouched while the lyrics were changed to reflect Confucian principles. Joseon musicians also further developed *aak*, a style that was still imperfect at the end of the Goryeo period. Thus, they changed many of the lyrics to pure Korean songs and also organized *aak*. The *aak* of King Sejong (1397-1450) are the most exceptional of these.

King Sejong ordered Park Yeon (1378-1458) to organize the collection of *aak*, and these songs were used at most royal events. This Korean *aak* was more mature than its Chinese predecessor, but unfortunately it has all but disappeared in the 20th century with the disappearance of palace events and royal memorial ceremonies. The only remaining *aak* is the *Munmyojeryeak*, which is played at memorial ceremonies for Confucius. This particular work is well known and valued as being the oldest of its kind.

King Sejong's contributions to the development of music were not limited to simply organizing *aak* songs. He also takes credit for having a number of musical instruments developed and for having published various works on musical composition and performance theory. He himself was an avid reader of such publications. For these reasons, modern scholars consider King Sejong to be responsible for laying the foundation of musical studies in Korea. In fact, King Sejong even excelled at composition, and the musical scores for many of his works have been handed down and are still performed today. Some well known examples of compositions by King Sejong that are still performed are '*Yeomillak*,' '*Botaepyeong*,' and '*Jeongdaeop*.' He was also

dissatisfied with the imperfect musical notation system used in Goryeo and early Joseon, and he originated the convenient and easy to use *jeongganbo* system.

As was mentioned above, *jeongganbo* is still in use today, and is the first true musical notation system in Asia. Aside from creating this notation system, actively composing works, organizing the *aak*, and publishing the works that have become the basis of musical studies in Korea, King Sejong also collected folk songs and produced the tuning pipe that became the basis for the tuning system of Korean music and became the cornerstone of musical organization in Korea. In addition to his exceptional musical talent, he is also the most highly respected Korean king for his accomplishments in other areas such as politics, culture, and the military.

King Sejong's son Sejo (1417-1468) was relatively weak in political terms, but like his father he too left behind a cultural legacy in which music played a great role. He further simplified the *jeongganbo* system to make it easier to use, and he rearranged the music of '*Botaepyeong*' and '*Jeongdaeop*.' These two pieces were used by successive generations as memorial music for kings, and they are now still performed practically unchanged from 500 years ago.

The ninth Joseon monarch, King Seongjong (1457-1494) also made great contributions to music. He published *Akhakguebeom*, an encyclopedia of music, and this book was considered by future generations to be an absolutely essential guide to music. This book, which is indispensable to the study of Joseon music, was later republished many times.

Beginning in the 16th century, Joseon began to experience much political turmoil, and its court music began to lose its brilliance. In particular, during the period of about forty years at the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century, when Joseon suffered the Japanese Invasion of 1592 and the Manchu War of 1636, many instruments were broken, many musical books were burned, musicians were scattered in all directions and Joseon music was in a state of chaos.

During the reigns of King Yeongjo (1724-1776) and King Jeongjo (1752-1800) there was something of a revival in court music, but there was no returning to the golden age that lasted from King Sejong's reign in the early 15th century to King Seongjong's reign in the late 15th century. When Korea was deprived of national sovereignty by Japan, court music became insignificant. After the Japanese Invasion and the Manchu War, though, new changes began to occur in Joseon music. These changes can be seen in Chinese *dangak* songs like *Boheoja* and *Nagyangchun* becoming fully Koreanized, and in the appearance of a new tuning system for the *geomungo*. These internal trends within Joseon music were not artificial, but natural progressions in the

development of music. Korean music of this era, when Chinese music was Koreanized and the tuning system for the *geomungo* was changed, also developed new techniques for playing stringed instruments, and the music became more artistically beautiful.

The Joseon Dynasty's national music academies were established in 1392, the year that the dynasty itself was declared, and this early establishment allowed the continuation of traditions from previous eras. In contrast to Silla and Goryeo, the Joseon Dynasty had three different institutions for handling various musical affairs, though these merged into one in 1469. Though this combined musical institution, called the *Jangagwon*, underwent a few minor changes through the years, it continued to exist until the end of the Joseon Dynasty and was in charge of all musical affairs. The *Jangagwon* even survived Japanese colonization and the confusion following national liberation, and in 1951 it became the National Music Academy.

In the second half of the Joseon Dynasty, the world of music was energized by a newfound interest in folk music even as court music was in decline. Of course there had always been folk music, but it first clearly appeared in records during this era.

First there was the appearance of songs and verses from the aristocratic class of the *yangban*. This music, whose roots are sometimes considered to be in the *hyangak* of the Koryo era, became prominent in the second half of the Joseon Dynasty and has continued to develop down to the modern era. Scholars of the time dabbled in music in their free time, and their influence can be seen in music for the *geomungo*. Numerous *geomungo* scores were produced in the second half of the Joseon Dynasty. Among these scores a great many record vocal parts, and as such they are valuable materials for the study of Korea's musical history. These scores, which differ from those scores produced by the government, have no real systematic unity and thus allow a comprehensive view of the music of the time.

Next is the emergence of *pansori*, which holds an important place in Korean vocal music. *Pansori*, which is known to have originated roughly during the reign of King Yeongjo, was enjoyed by the common people, unlike *gagok*. *Pansori* required outstanding vocal skill, and each passing era saw the emergence of more and more *myeongchang* (exceptionally skilled singers). *Pansori myeongchang* cultivated their artistry through a rigorous training regimen unheard of in other types of music. *Pansori* began as music enjoyed by the common people, but when it began receiving the patronage of the *yangban* aristocrats the number of people involved in *pansori* increased dramatically, and accordingly it sealed its place as an artistic musical form. The most famous *pansori* patron was the Daewongun (1820–1898), and the period when he was in power could be called a *pansori* paradise. After Korean sovereignty was stripped away by Japan, though, *pansori* barely managed to survive. There were originally twelve *pansori* works, called *madang*, but only five survive to this day.

With the influence of drama, *pansori* gave birth to *changgeuk* in the early 20th century. Unlike *pansori*, *changgeuk* used one singer for each role and also used a set on stage. At one time it was tremendously popular, but today it survives only in the performances of the National Changguk Company. *Pansori* and *changgeuk* are both vocal music with exceptional artistry. However, because most of the singers were uneducated people, it is very difficult to find any historical record concerning either art

form. In particular, there are no musical scores to be found, except those that have been recreated by listening to the music, and only books containing the lyrics can be found here and there.

Finally there is *sanjo*. As was mentioned above, *sanjo* began with shamanic music, along with *pansori*, and originated as impromptu solo performances about one hundred years ago. *Sanjo* was originally performed with a *gayageum*, but as the music was developed by various masters it expanded to include forms performed with other instruments, such as the *geomungo*, the *haegeum*, the *daegeum* and the *piri* (Korean flute). This music, which demanded of a performer outstanding technique and the ability to perform impromptu, began as a form of folk music, but today it is recognized as an exceptional artistic form of music. However, the only scores for this music are also those which have been recreated recently.

Many other forms of music appear in the history of Joseon music in addition to *pansori*, *sanjo* and *gagok*.

In 1939, the first musical score was produced using the Western style of musical notation, with five horizontal lines divided into measures. Since that time, hundreds more Western-style pieces have been produced. These works, which sometimes use traditional techniques and sometimes use Western or avant-garde techniques, belong to a completely different musical world than the world of traditional Korean music. If they are composed for Korean instruments, though, they are treated as Korean music. This sort of music uses the Western-style arrangement of instruments and features a conductor wearing a tuxedo. Just like Western music there are duets and concertos, and the instruments are played along with Western instruments. This method of composition is taught at universities, the performance of such newly composed music is a required subject.

In conclusion, having had such a history, Korean music finds itself in a much better situation now than ever. The National Center for Korean Performing Arts, which has inherited everything from the tradition of court music to folk music, is the most important national agency to the preservation and popularization of Korean music. Each university is actively engaged in researching and popularizing Korean music, making the future of Korean music very hopeful.

Unfortunately, though, music education in schools in the twentieth century centers on Western music, and society also places primary importance on Western music, so it must be said that interest in and comprehension of Korean music is still insufficient.

## 8. Instruments Used in Korean Music

At present, there are about 60 types of traditional Korean instruments, but not all of these are still used. The remaining instruments are classified according to the type of music--*aak* instruments, *hyangak* instruments and *dangak* instruments--and also according to type of instrument--percussion, wind instruments and stringed instruments. There are also sometimes classified according to the Curt Sachs system, as chordophones, aerophones, idiophones and membranophones.

There are eight different materials used in the making of Korean instruments:

metal, stone, wood, string, gourds, leather, bamboo and earth. In Korean music these are called the "eight sounds," and instruments are sometimes classified according to them. Instruments of the "eight sounds" have a deep, Eastern philosophical symbolism.

Now let us experience through audiovisual materials the shapes and sounds of instruments used in Korean music.

## 9. Appreciation and Practice

We have so far taken a brief look at the theories, characteristics and history of Korean music. Lectures based on the literature are a necessary to understand music, but this understanding is of little value if we don't come into direct contact with music itself.

### 9.1 *Munmyojereyak* (Munmyo Memorial Music)

*Munmyojereyak*, as mentioned above, is music for the memorial rites performed in honor of Confucius. These rites, however, are not performed only for Confucius, but also for Confucius' eminent disciples, outstanding Chinese Confucian philosophers and Korean Confucian philosophers. These rites are performed twice a year, in early spring and early autumn, and are accompanied by dance as well as music. This dance is called *ilmu*, and it is performed by 64 dancers in eight lines of eight dancers. Strictly speaking, this is Chinese music, and shows the essence of Chinese *aak*. Each musical phrase is composed of four tones, and the beginning and end of the music are quite distinctive.

### 9.2 *Jongmyojeryeak* (Jongmyo Memorial Music)

This music is performed during memorial rites for the successive kings of the Joseon Dynasty. As mentioned above, the music was composed by King Sejong and arranged by his son, King Sejo. Long ago these rites were held four times a year, but now they are held once at Jongmyo on the first Sunday in May. The music was influenced by Chinese *aak*, but it has a mysterious atmosphere that captures a distinct Korean flavor. The music consists of wind and stringed instruments and a song called *akjang*, and it is also accompanied by an *ilmu* dance performed by 64 dancers.

### 9.3. *Sujecheon*

This is considered to be the greatest of all Korean *aak* compositions. It was originally a

vocal piece with lyrics, but today only the instrumental music is performed. The lyrics were written during the Baekje period, but the music is from the Goryeo period. It was used for events in which the Crown Prince took part, and has an irregular *jangdan* rhythm.

#### 9.4 *Boheoja*

This music was introduced from Song China during the Goryeo period, but it has now been completely Koreanized. It was generally used when the Crown Prince left the palace, and it was also used as an accompaniment to dance.

#### 9.5 *Gagok*

This is a vocal music with an accompaniment of wind and stringed instruments, and it was enjoyed by the *yangban* from the mid-Joseon period on. *Gagok* had a prelude, an interlude and sometimes a postlude, and it is sometimes sung separately by men and women and sometimes sung with a man and woman alternating.

#### 9.6 *Pansori*

*Pansori* involved one singer who sings a long narrative tale augmented with motions, and is accompanied by a *gosu* (drummer) who kept the *jangdan* rhythm. The three elements of *pansori* are the singing itself (*sori*), the spoken narration (*aniri*) and the motions (*ballim*).

#### 9.7 *Sanjo*

This is an impromptu instrumental solo music accompanied by a drum, and it displays the most difficult techniques in all of Korean music. It consists of a variety of *jangdan* rhythms, such as *jinyang*, *jungmori* and *jajinmori*, and it goes from a slow to fast tempo. It is performed without pauses between *jangdan*, though, and the first *jangdan* is always performed without variation.

#### 9.8. *Sijo*

*Sijo* has lyrics like *gagok*, but there is no musical accompaniment. In that it is an

amateur musical style, it differs in form from *gagok*. Also, while *gagok* is composed of five lines, *sijo* is composed of three lines.

1. How Korean music was influenced by the establishment of Joseon?
2. What kind of musical achievements are there in the early Joseon period?
3. Discuss the musical changes in the latter Joseon period.
4. Select a favorite music and appreciate it.