

Music of the Whole World

Series 2: presentation # 5 –

Tuesday, June 5, 2007.

Korean Music, the Kayagum, and Western Forces

- study materials

by Moshe Denburg

with bibliographical contributions by Grace Lee.

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Intercultural Orchestration Materials

These materials form part of a larger work in progress (as of 2007) entitled ***Orchestrating the World - a Manual of Inter-cultural Music Making*** by Moshe Denburg. Portions of this work are available for downloading on the VICO website. To download this study guide, and a more complete one for composers and musicians, go to:

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Scope and Considerations

Geography

Korea is a peninsula at a crossroads of East Asia, between the Chinese mainland to the West, and Japan to the East. Historically Korea served as a conduit of culture between China and Japan, and with these two cultures it shares many common origins – musical, spiritual, and linguistic.



Korean Musical Traditions

In Korean music, as in Korean culture generally, symbology and a philosophical background play a prominent part. The South Korean flag itself hints at this, referring as it does to the Confucian text, the *I Ching*, the Chinese Book of Changes, and its philosophy of dualities.



South Korean Flag

The divided circle represents the absolute, the essential interdependence of the yin (female) and yang (male) principles. Examples of the yin-yang duality are heaven and earth, life and death, darkness and light. The four trigrams (three lined figures), directly taken from the Book of Changes, indicate certain universal balances - the three unbroken lines represent Heaven while three broken lines represent Earth; two broken lines separated by an unbroken line symbolize Water while two unbroken lines separated by a broken line symbolize Fire.

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Throughout the various forms of Korean music there are references to extra-musical classifications – beginning with the 5 tones of the basic pentatonic scale, groups of 5 are prominent. Here are some examples:

5 Tones	<i>kung</i>	<i>sang</i>	<i>kak</i>	<i>ch'i</i>	<i>wu</i>
5 Elements	earth	metal	wood	fire	water
5 Colours	yellow	white	green	red	black
5 Tastes	sweet	sour	bitter	hot	salty

Also, the numbers 6 and 12 are significant. Associated with them are the 12 notes within the octave, the 12 strings of the kayagum, the 12 months of the year, and the 6 directions - north, south, east, west, up, down.

Many more symbologies are present as well in Korean musical culture.

The esthetic ideal of Korean traditional, and especially ritual, music is a state of contemplation and delicate feeling. Definite, fixed tones and delineations are eschewed in favour of a more flexible, and one may say 'natural' approach. In nature things are fluid, changing, not fixed, it is a human artifice that fixes things and fastens their definition. This may be necessary in certain human endeavours, such as those based on the principles of science, but art is meant to restore the natural order, an intimation of self which is whole yet flexible.

Korean traditional music, while sharing certain elements with Chinese music, differs significantly in the area of rhythm. In Korean music, triple meter is the norm (measures in 3's, 6's, 12's and so on), while in Chinese, it is duple meter (2's and 4's). Korean music is based on rhythmic cycles called *changdan* - these are meters or time signatures with specific accents and stresses built in. There are many *changdan* which utilize triple meters such as: 6/8, 12/8, 12/4, and so on.

Korean Musical Forms

Over a thousand years ago, a steady stream of music and musical instruments flowed from China to Korea, and thence on to Japan. Over the centuries these instruments and musical forms have been refined and adapted by Korean practitioners, crafting an art distinctively Korean in every respect – the music has developed to express a uniquely Korean esthetic and experience, and in tandem with the music the instruments have evolved. Much the same can be said of the Japanese experience. So that today, even though one can easily identify the origins of many of the musical instruments of Korea and Japan as being Chinese, the forms these instruments have taken, and the techniques of performance that have developed over time, are radically different from that of present day China.

An analogy to this process of adaptation and differentiation is the evolution of language. A language, once borrowed, then utilized by people in a different context and situation than that of its country of origin, will change a great deal from its original construction over time. It will acquire new words, new grammar, and a separate orthography. In effect it will become a separate language.

One can speak of three basic categories of Korean music – folk music, court music, and music for religious ceremonies.

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Folk Music

The term 'folk music' has a different meaning in the Korean tradition than in the Western world. In Korea there are many forms of folk music, some very refined and 'classical', and others more earthy. Here are several categories and their descriptions.

Chongak – this category denotes both vocal and instrumental chamber music of a very refined sort. Ensembles vary according to the repertoire, using strings and winds. In the vocal category there are 3 main subcategories:

Kagok – a long lyric song accompanied by a mixed ensemble of winds, strings, and percussion;

Sijo - a short lyric song, usually accompanied by *changgo* (hourglass drum), though sometimes *Se-p'iri* (soft oboe), *Taegum* (large bamboo transverse flute), and *Haegum* (two-stringed fiddle) may be added;

Kasa – a narrative song with a very long text, often accompanied by taegum and changgo.

Sanjo - this is a solo virtuosic instrumental form, a mainstay of the folk instrumental tradition. First appearing as a vehicle for the kayagum (long zither), the form has been adopted by performers on a variety of instruments.

Nongak - this is the very earthy music of the people, usually presented as part of a large ensemble including singers, dancers, acrobats, and percussionists of all kinds.

Court Music

The court music tradition is comprised of several categories: Confucian Shrine Music, Ancestral Shrine Music, Banquet Music, and Military Music.

Confucian Shrine Music – This is a very ancient tradition, stemming from Confucian ritual and practiced in Korea as far back as the 12th century. It is normally performed in an antiphonal manner by two orchestras, respectively situated on the terrace of the shrine and in the courtyard. According to tradition 8 materials need to be present in these orchestras, namely, metal, stone, bamboo, silk, wood, gourd, leather, and clay. Ritual dance plays a central role in the performance of the music.

Ancestral Shrine Music – This music, known in Korea as *aak* and in Japan as *gagaku*, is performed once a year at the royal shrine, celebrating the royal ancestry. The organization of the performance is similar to that of Confucian Shrine Music, utilizing two orchestras and ritual dancers.

Banquet Music – Most of the music in the Court Music repertoire belongs to the category of Banquet Music. There are two basic kinds: *Hyangak* (indigenous Korean Music), and *Tangak* (Chinese Music derived).

Military Music – Royal Military music is played by two processional bands, one which proceeds the king and the other which follows him. Many strong sounding instruments are utilized in the front band, including brass and conch shell trumpets, conical oboes, cymbals, gongs, and drums. The 'softer' rear band includes cylindrical oboes, transverse flutes, two-string fiddles, hourglass drums and a barrel drum.

Music for Religious Ceremonies

This classification is comprised of two categories: Buddhist Music and Shamanist Music.

Buddhist Music – Comprised mainly of forms of chanting, Buddhist music has been part of Korean musical culture since Buddhism's introduction to Korea in the 4th century. There are two kinds of chanting, a simple chant where most of the repertory resides, and a more elaborate one, which requires training to perform. Ritual dance also may accompany Buddhist chanting.

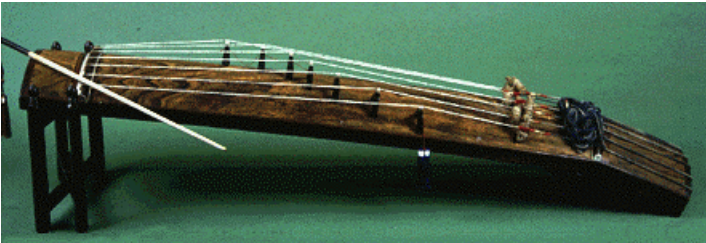
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Shamanist Music – Representing the indigenous religious experience of the Korean people, Shamanist music is the oldest religious music in Korea. The ritual usually entails a female shaman who sings, dances, and intones magic spells. Sometimes this dance is accompanied by instruments, and the performance is prolonged as necessary by the device of improvisation. Shamanist music is an aural tradition, and represents the core of Korean musical experience, handed down by rote from generation to generation.

Korean Musical Instruments

Here are some selected Korean musical instruments and their descriptions.

Ajaeng



The ajaeng is a bowed long zither with seven strings. The body of the instrument, made from paulownia wood, is about 5 feet long and 1 foot wide. The strings are normally made of silk and they are bowed by a long stick of forsythia wood to which pine resin has been applied. The ajaeng is a low register instrument, its sound is dignified though somewhat raspy. It is used in many forms of Korean music, from court music to folk music to Shamanist ritual music.

Changgo



The changgo (also spelled: janggu or janggo) is a two headed hourglass drum highly utilized in many forms Korean traditional music. The 2 heads are made of animal skin, and are fastened with ropes between their rims that lash them to the body of the drum. The tensions, and thus the pitches of the heads can be adjusted by tightening or loosening the ropes. One head, usually the left one, renders a lower tone, while the right head gives a higher pitched sound. A typical method of play is for the higher pitched head to be struck by a bamboo stick while the lower pitched head is struck with a bare hand.

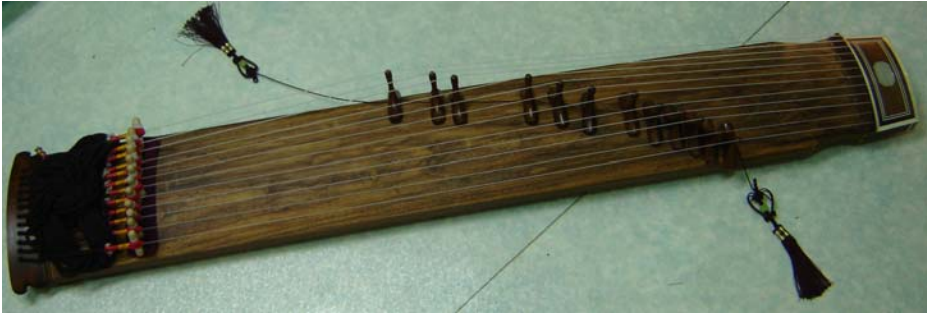
Haegum



The haegum is a bowed two-string fiddle. Its bow, made of horsehair, is placed between the two strings, which are tuned a perfect fifth apart. It has an approximate range of two octaves and is utilized in many ensembles. The sound box, open at the back, is made of a hard wood, such as paulownia. The instrument is played while resting on the performer's knee, in a vertical position. The haegum is a close relative of other Asian fiddles, such as the *erhu* of China.

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Kayagum



A long zither which originated in the southern kingdom of Kaya, the Kayagum has a soundboard made of paulownia wood and 12 strings of twisted silk. The strings rest on moveable bridges each carved in the shape of a crane's foot. It has great expressive capabilities including microtonal shadings, and it is perhaps the most favored of all Korean instruments that are normally performed in a solo capacity.

P'iri



The piri is a cylindrical bamboo double reed instrument. There are 3 basic types: 1. The *hyang piri* is around 11 inches in length and produces a strong dark tone, very useful in large ensembles; 2. The *se-piri* is a smaller and gentler instrument; and 3. The *tang piri*, the Chinese form of the instrument, a bit thicker, and closely related to the *gaunzi* of China. The piri normally has seven holes in front and one thumbhole in the back. Its range is approximately an octave and a fifth, and is a very expressive instrument utilized in many genres of Korean music.

Taegum



The taegum (also spelled: daegum) is a large transverse bamboo flute, indigenous to Korea. It has six finger holes, a hole for blowing near one end, and several open holes towards the other end. Another hole, over which a membrane is stretched, helps to give it its characteristic sound. The taegum is quite long, around 33 inches, and the large spacing of the finger holes makes it difficult to play. It has a range of around 2 octaves and a fourth, and in the hands of a good performer it is a very expressive instrument, much loved by Koreans and utilized both in court music and folk music genres.

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compiled by Grace Lee and Moshe Denburg

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