

Creating Communities

Preservation, Promotion and Revival of Tradition in Pansori Performance

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Abstract English

Drawing both on historical research and performance analysis, this paper discusses the changing role of tradition and community in different forms of concurrent *pansori* practice. A phenomenologically founded comparison of three types of performances (orthodox, touristic, experimental) helps to evaluate how different approaches towards tradition evoke communal experiences, offering new insights about the future prospects of *pansori* and other transmitted performing arts in Korea and abroad.

Pansori, a highly interactive genre of music theatre performed by a solo singer-storyteller and a drummer, is considered one of the most iconic Korean traditional performing arts. Historically, the appeal of *pansori* was based on its power to strengthen existing communal bonds among its participants, who participated in the performance with rhythmic calls of encouragement. The fading importance of tradition in everyday life, however, rises the issue of how to address heterogeneous groups of spectators not necessarily familiar with the conventions of *pansori*. Recent governmental aspirations of “globalizing” Korean culture further add to this dilemma: How can *pansori* reach contemporary audiences?

Stately-sponsored concerts by high-ranking singers primarily aim at the preservation of a “national cultural asset” in its original form. These “orthodox” performances rely on the concerted participation by an informed audience to temporarily evoke communal feelings through the collective re-staging of a lost past. Because of the small number of potential spectators for this rather elitist format, various efforts to popularize *pansori* have been made, falling mainly under two categories:

First, fragments of *pansori* are presented in spectacular potpourri-like performances that promote a digestible, unified tradition. These “touristic” shows succeed in reaching broader audiences but tend to discourage active participation, running the risk of commodifying *pansori* into a mere showcase of a distant, exotic tradition. Second, against this trend a new generation of singers writes new pieces based on current social issues, often employing a critical stance, to revive *pansori* as a inherently contemporaneous culture. Substituting a shared cultural heritage with shared opinions on Korean society as the basis of communal experiences, the satirical content of these “experimental” performances is difficult to convey in oversea productions.

Although the concrete success of these different approaches varies from performance to performance, the comparison clearly shows that the audience, whether conceptualized as transmitters, consumers or creators of tradition, is a force that cannot be neglected. From the spectator's perspective, it is the moments of communal activity that make *pansori* worthwhile, both in Korea and abroad.

공동체 형성에 대해: 판소리 공연에서의 전통을 보존, 홍보, 재생산에 관한 연구

본 논문에서는 판소리의 역사학적 연구와 공연분석론을 바탕으로 다양한 사례를 통해 동시대적 판소리 공연에서의 전통과 공동체가 어떤 역할인지 논의한다. 세 가지의 판소리 연출방법(정통적으로, 관광적으로, 실험적으로)을 현상학적인 측면에서 비교하므로 전통을 접근하는 다양한 방법들이 어떻게 공동체의식을 나타내는지 파악하고자 한다. 그리고 판소리를 비롯해 한국과 외국의 전승연희의 전망을 모색하고자 한다.

판소리란 단독의 소리꾼과 북을 치는 고수, 그리고 관객간의 상호적인 것을 말하며 가장 대표적인 한국 전통공연예술 중 하나로 여겨진다. 역사적 측면에서 판소리의 매력은 율동적인 추임세를 외치는 청중들이 공동체적 관계를 강하게 경험할 수 있는 것에 기반을 두고 있었다. 하지만 본 연구자의 관점은 현재 판소리의 전통적인 관습을 모르는 일반적인 관객에게 판소리를 어떻게 대중화시킬 수 있는지에 관한 문제에 주목한다. 최근의 한국정부에서 촉진하는 “한국문화의 세계화”가 있어서 이 문제가 쟁점적이다: 현재 사람들이 어떻게 판소리를 즐길 수 있을까?

국가의 후원을 통해 명창들이 나오는 완창공연은 판소리가 “문화재의 원형”으로서 보존된다는 의미를 가진다. 이런 “정통적”인 공연을 통해 일시적이지만 사라졌던 과거를 재형성하는 공동체의 느낌을 떠올려줄 수 있지만 판소리를 잘 아는 관객들이 많지 않아서 판소리의 대중화를 확대하는 다양한 대안이 필요하다. 이 노력의 대부분은 두 가지 범주로서 다를 수 있다:

첫 번째는 화려한 옴니버스 공연을 통해 수용하기 편리한 전통을 생산한다는 것이다. 이런 옴니버스식 “관광적”인 공연은 더 폭넓은 관중의 호응을 얻을 수 있지만 관객의 참여를 막는 경향 때문에 이국적인 전통으로 박재화되어 진열되고 상품화 될 위험도 있다.

두 번째는 이 추세에 대안을 모색하는 젊은 소리꾼의 세대는 기본적으로 현대적인 예술로 판소리 문화를 위치짓게 하기 위해 비판적인 태도로서 현재 사회현상을 바탕으로 새로운 판소리 작품을 만들고 있다. 하지만 다분히 “실험적”인 공연 형식과 풍자적인 내용을 현재 한국 사회에 대한 공통의 의견을 바탕으로 공감을 형성하고자 하기에 해외공연에서는 (한국 현재생활을 잘 모르는 관객에게) 의미 전달하기가 어려울 수도 있다.

어떤 연출방법이 성공하는지는 구체적인 공연에 따라서 다를 수도 있지만 위의 비교연구를 통해 전통의 전승자나 소비자, 아니면 창조자든지 중요한 것은 무조건 판소리 관객이라는 사실을 알 수 있다. 관객의 입장에서 판소리 공연이 불 만한 것이라는 이유는 한국이든지, 해외이든지 공동체적인 활동이라는 것이다.

1. Introduction

This paper deals with different kinds of *pansori* performances and the ways they can evoke communal feelings – both in Korea and abroad.¹ While *pansori* is generally considered a “traditional performing art” rooted in the past, I am interested in its effects on audiences today. Three types of staging strategies can be found in contemporary practice: orthodox, touristic and experimental *pansori*, each one based on a different concept of tradition and catering to a different kind of audience. As a result, each approach stimulates communal feelings in different ways. A comparison of concrete performance practices will not only clarify the concurrent meaning and value of *pansori*, but also promises new insights about its future prospects. Before I analyze the various ways of creating communities, I will briefly introduce *pansori*, present my argument and provide the theoretical background of my research.

What is pansori?

Pansori is performed by a solo-singer who is accompanied by a single drummer. Speaking, singing and acting, he or she tells a story to the audience. In a successful performance, the audience interacts with the singer and the drummer – *pansori* is an art that demands active participation rather than detached contemplation (Kim DH 2000, 14). This is the basic structure of a *pansori* performance, but details can differ widely, as an overview of the most common staging strategies shows.

In the most prestigious performances, long stories that last up to eight hours are told. Classically, these stories are drawn from a transmitted repertory that includes pieces familiar to most Koreans such as the story of the girl Chunhyang who bears all kinds of sufferings waiting for her lover (as in *Chunhyang-ga*), the story of the girl Simcheong who is willing to sacrifice her life for the eyesight of her father (*Simcheong-ga*) or the story of the two brothers Heungbo and Nolbo (*Heungbo-ga*). The audience, knowing the plots by heart, responds to the performance with rhythmical calls of encouragement, so-called *chuimsae*. Common expressions include “*eolssigu!*” (something like wow), “*johta!*” (good), and “*jal handa!*” (well done). I call this performance format “orthodox *pansori*”.

But as this ‘art of listening’ is fading away in modern society, the stories tend to be cut into fragments that are presented together with other genres of traditional music in omnibus-style. Because these showcases of tradition tend to address the audience as a passive collective of consumers, I call these performances “touristic *pansori*”.

In contrast to the rather elitist orthodox recitals and the touristic potpourris, a young generation of *pansori* singers plays with established conventions and creates new stories. While these performance use a variety of methods, they have a common goal: telling stories that are closer to contemporary everyday life, thus making *pansori* more approachable for general audiences. Therefore I subsume these different creative activities under the label “experimental *pansori*”.

Featuring characteristics both of elite and folk culture, literature, music, and drama, *pansori* is regularly highlighted as a representative part of Korea's cultural heritage – some scholars even consider it to be a genuine “embodiment of the Korean folk mentality” (Kim WO 1980, 1). Long before *pansori* was turned into a national asset in 1964,² its appeal lay not only in the engaging stories told or the affective singing and acting style. Above all, it was its power to transform the audience and evoke communal feelings – a power which served to re-affirm and strengthen existing communal bonds in the context of pre-modern rural village life (cf. Suh 1997, 13-16).

1 For the transcription of Korean terms I use the Revised Romanization, except for the spelling of proper names that follow common usage or, if known, the author's preferred spelling. All translations from Korean and German are mine, except when noted otherwise. When talking about post-war Korea, the term refers only to the Republic of Korea.

2 More recently, *pansori* has even been registered as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO (Howard 2006, 19)

How well does *pansori* do today, in an environment as thoroughly industrialized, urbanized and individualized as South Korean society? The argument I want to propose is that, although performance practices have been changed and diversified, the “transformative power of *pansori*” – reaching a state of unity through participation (cf. Kim DH 2000, 28) – still persists today. As different staging strategies are employed, the communal effects likewise differ in quality, intensity and consistency. They are the target of this paper.

Although there is an abundant corpus of research literature on *pansori*, accounts of contemporary performance practices are rare. Most of them take a pessimistic stance, telling a story of decay and consider the current state of things merely as “depressing”, as the *pansori* that might survive the onslaught of Western music will not be traditional anymore (Choe TH 2011, 447). Also, while the approaches towards *pansori* have broadened considerably in recent years, the classical paradigms “*pansori* as literature” and “*pansori* as music” still dominate the field. Although nowadays most studies of *pansori* acknowledge the importance of participation, collective activity, and transformative experiences of the audience, detailed studies of concrete casefiles are largely missing.³

To analyze the activities that take place during concrete performances of *pansori*, my theoretical framework draws mainly from performance studies, but also includes ideas from the sociology of art and folklore studies. Concerning communality in performance, I will focus on “we-moments”, intense situations of collective experience. Apart from the concrete activities in performance that lead to we-moments, I will also include the contexts that frame these experiences, different forms of “art worlds”, as well as the audiences they attract and cater to.

We-moments and the autopoietic feedback-loop

Performance inevitably produces collective experiences. Gathered in the same room, even the slightest activity of any spectator becomes part of what Erika Fischer-Lichte calls the “autopoietic feedback-loop” (cf. Fischer-Lichte 2008, 47). This loop is constantly fed by the ongoing actions and reactions of all people present and structures the course of the event. While in some performing arts the feedback-loop is kept as unilateral as possible by separating stage and auditorium (e.g. theatre in the naturalist tradition or Wagnerian opera), *pansori* traditionally strives on multilateral interaction that is reflected by a dense feedback-loop oscillating between singer, drummer and audience.

By contributing actively to the loop, spectators can feel agency and a sense of togetherness can arise among them. These feelings that emerge when the spectators’ bodies resonate, move, and sound in consonance with each other culminate in what Jens Roselt calls “we-moments”: “performance situations in which a group of spectators experience themselves as a ‘we’” (Roselt 2008, 328).

In this paper I will limit my analysis of we-moments only to those that are the result of bodily interaction between the performers and the spectators. Among the most visible and “contagious” forms of interaction are laughing, clapping one’s hands, cheering, singing along and – the most conventionalized and stylized means of participation in *pansori* – rhythmical calls of encouragement, so called *chuimsae*. While a dense and multilateral feedback-loop is neither necessary nor sufficient for communal feelings to arise, it can be considered a strong indicator for we-moments. Therefore I base my following discussion of we-moments in performance on the assumption that the activity of the feedback-loop bears a positive relationship to the probability of communality.

Art worlds and audiences

Neither theatre nor music takes place in thin air. Every single performance is embedded in various artistic and social contexts. While the outcome of a performance cannot be fully determined by its

3 For theoretical accounts of *pansori* as performance, cf. Kim ID 2003, Im et al 2004, Kim HJ 2011.

contexts, what happens outside the theater, before or after performance, nevertheless exerts an important influence both on the actions on- and off-stage.

Social scientist Howard S. Becker considers “art as collective action”, carried out by various actors that include, beside the artist him- or herself, producers, suppliers, marketers, critics, as well as consumers. Proposing a functional theory of art production, he calls this “cooperative network” of those who perform “all the activities that must be carried out for any work of art to appear as it finally does” (Becker 2008, 2) an “art world”.

In the performing arts, the audience plays a crucial role in the functioning of the art world and in the success of every single performance (214). The members of the audience support the artist(s) monetarily by paying an entrance fee or by buying an art work, as well as aesthetically by “understanding and response” (54). The latter function of the audience is made possible by conventions, the glue that holds art worlds together: “Only because artist and audience share knowledge of and experience with the conventions invoked does the art produce an emotional effect.” (30)

In relation to their familiarity with the conventions of the respective art world, Becker distinguishes three types of audience (42-54):

- “Occasional members of the audience” are basically “well-socialized members of society” who are familiar with the artistic conventions only insofar as they are part of the general conventions of society at large.
- “Serious audience members” are part of the art world without being professionally affiliated. Besides providing “a solid base of support”, their knowledge of the inner conventions of an art world allows them to “collaborate more fully with in the joint effort which produces the work each time it is experienced.” (48)⁴
- “Students of the arts” are the “inner circle” and know “the technical problems of the craft and the difficult problems [...] of utilizing technical means and abilities to provoke an emotional and aesthetic response from an audience.” (54) They know what is happening on stage for what reasons and often (especially in small art worlds such as the world of *pansori*) know people standing on stage personally.

When analyzing the effects of different forms of *pansori* practice, I will keep in mind the influence both of institutional integration and the composition of the audience. While the supporting network does not fully determine what happens in performance, it still sets the stage for possibilities to get realized. In contrast, members of the audience can directly intervene in the performance although no one is in full control of the situation. Taking these more tangible aspects of an ephemeral event into account helps to grasp the transformative power of *pansori* in its context.

Tradition today

The term “tradition” has become highly suspicious in recent times, especially if used in a sense that includes a claim of authenticity. According to folklorist Henry Glassie, “tradition is the creation of the future out of the past.” (Glassie 1995, 395) Although directed towards the future, anything considered “traditional” also bears a strong relationship to the present, concretely the present interests of those who use the term “traditional” and create things in its name.

In other words: What we consider traditional might say more about our contemporary condition – including the needs for reliable roots – than about actual practices of bygone days. This is especially true in the case of traditional performing arts, which necessarily imply a restaging with

⁴ While in the fine arts the term “collaboration” serves merely as a metaphor, it is very real in the performing arts where production and reception of the “work” – the unique single performance – take place simultaneously (cf. Erika Fischer-Lichte 2008).

current means. Any performance is unique and unrepeatable, therefore any performance even of a traditional art is an ephemeral event located in the here and now. (Cf. Finchum-Sung 2008)

What interests me is therefore not in which ways contemporary *pansori* performances correspond – or deviate – from earlier practices, i.e. the authenticity of current *pansori* practices.⁵ Rather, when discussing concrete performances, my focus lies on the role of the audience that is implied in the concept of tradition employed.

The remainder of this paper is set out as follows: First, I will discuss the three categories of contemporary *pansori* practice established above – orthodox, touristic, and experimental *pansori* – with regard to their capability of producing we-moments, their integration in an art world, and the way they conceptualize tradition. On the way, I will provide various examples – mostly performances I have attended myself – to clarify my argument. After comparing how these three forms of *pansori* practice work in a Korean context, I will take a look at *pansori* performances outside of Korea. If my thesis about the relation between staging strategy and communal effect proves to be plausible, it can be expected that, as audience conditions and conceptual foundation change, the forms of communal experience will change likewise.

2. Pansori in Korea

Orthodox pansori

Orthodox performances take place in well-established venues, mostly on classical theatre stages. A piece from the canonical repertory is performed in full-length by a high-ranking singer. In other words, *pansori* is staged as a high art in the Western sense, both through the setting – the theatre stage that quite literally rises the performers above the audience – and the full-length format that stresses the unity of the piece.⁶ In other words: A premodern cultural performance is re-invented as an autonomous work of art.

Orthodox *pansori* is a product of governmental cultural policy. It is deeply embedded into an art world that was established under the Park Chung-hee government in the 1960s, both in order to preserve Korea's cultural heritage and to legitimate an authoritarian regime as a keeper of tradition. Like its economic backbone, the Cultural Property Preservation Law (Munhwa-jae Bohobeop, promulgated in 1962; cf. Yang 1994, 49-51; Howard 2006,6-15), orthodox *pansori* employs a concept of tradition that focuses on the preservation and promotion of an “original form” (*wonhyeong*).⁷ According to Yang Jongsung, the designation as an Important Intangible Cultural Asset (*pansori* became number five in December 1964) initiates “the shaping and reshaping of cultural properties to become symbols of national culture” (Yang 1994, 89).

Both performers and academics have criticized this focus on a supposed original, not only in the preservation of *pansori*, but also of other Intangible Cultural Assets. Common points of criticism include a lack of creativity and performative flexibility due to too close adherence to fixed pieces, maybe best exemplified in the derogatory term “photo-singing” (*sajinsori*, i.e. “singing in exactly the same way as one's teacher”, Choe 2011, 443) or “taxidermization” of a living art (Saeji 2012, 110)⁸ Another important point is the inevitable decontextualization that renders many conventions meaningless (Park 2003, 107).⁹ Although these points are legitimate (especially when considered

5 There are many studies on the changes that *pansori* pieces undergo during transmission, e.g. Chun 2004.

6 Some scholars and singers have expressed doubts about the historical accuracy and performative efficacy of the full-length format, with was established as the de-facto standard for representative performance by Park Dong-jin in the late 1960s (Park 2003, 107)

7 On the inherent tension between preservation and promotion cf. Howard 2006, 35ff.

8 Interestingly, this criticism is also included by UNESCO in the entry on *pansori*: “Although Pansori remains one of the most prominent genres among traditional stage arts, it has lost much of its original spontaneous character. Ironically, this recent evolution is a direct result of the preservation process itself, for improvisation is tending to be stifled by the increasing number of written texts.” (UNESCO)

9 Chan E. Park compares staging full-length *pansori* performances in the enclosed space of the Western theatre to “staging the leisurely duration of ‘back porch music’ without the leisurely reality of the back porch.” (107)

from the artists' perspective), that does not mean that the performance of a "taxidermized" piece of *pansori* in a context very different from a rural village in the early 19th century (or a yangban's home some centuries later) makes participation impossible. While *pansori* as a "symbol" might serve to represent a nationalist agenda, it also functions as an "icon of identity" (cf. Howard 2006), concretely spawning individual appreciation, participation, and communal feelings in performance.

I could experience this myself on several occasions at the National Theatre. The monthly "Wanchang Series" represents orthodox *pansori* at its best: Every last Saturday of each month, master singers present full-length performances of the canonical pieces on one of the smaller stages of the National Theater, from three o'clock in the afternoon until seven, eight o'clock or later in the evening. Here, the dialectics between conservation and participation can be observed in real time: On the one hand, the framing of the event – extended introductions by academics on the schools of transmission (*yupa*) presented in performance, an anthological yearbook-style program book that features the complete lyrics – stresses the historicity and the historical continuity of the performance. On the other hand, given that the Wanchang Series is a gathering point for *pansori* aficionados who enjoy the rather rare occasion of listening to full-length performances, loud and precise *chuimsae* are a constant reminder of the presence of an expert audience.

As the audience consists to a large part of other *pansori* singers, students and "serious members" in Becker's sense, the conventional proceeding is almost guaranteed by this "audience of experts". By calling out correctly placed *chuimsae* together with other members of the audience, expert spectators align themselves with the flow of the performance and effectively add their own voice to the collective rhythm. By giving feedback, they keep the feedback-loop alive and multi-lateral. While the dense flow of shouts can produce a sense of alienation among those who do not participate, it bears a strong potential of evoking we-moments among those who do.¹⁰ It is the openness of the feedback-loop that allows the audience to become an essential part of the performance.

However, for this communal atmosphere to arise, orthodox *pansori* depends on the presence of an "audience of experts". Not only do members of this audience consider the canonical stories "shared sites of collective memory" (Howard 2008, 7), they also have the internalized ability for concerted interaction with singer and drummer.¹¹ If they collectively re-stage an imagined past by expressing appreciation and support with well-placed *chuimsae*, we-moments are not too far at hand. The long duration of full-length performances and the enclosed venue of the theatre provide a concentrated setting for this rather exclusive form of temporal community.

In many cases of orthodox *pansori*, the audience can be actually considered part of an already existing "community of aficionados" – the *pansori* art world – that is re-affirmed by means of performance. This became very clear to me when attending another event: This winter in Daejeon, master singer Go Hyang-im performed *Sugung-ga* ("Song of the Underwater Palace") in the local style of *Dongcho-je*.¹² The event was hosted by the local division of the Korean Association for the Preservation of Pansori (Hanguk Pansori Bojonhoe) and it seemed as if a majority of the about one hundred fifty people present seemed to know each other in one way or another.

With an audience mostly composed of either singers or students of *pansori* themselves or members of the respective cultural circles of Daejeon, the performance by Go Hyang-im – where participation was tremendous – can be considered a gathering of colleagues, friends and family, culminating in shouts like "*Uri seonsaeng-nim choegoya!*" (Our teacher is the best!). In this sense, the existing community of *pansori* aficionados was revived and reaffirmed in performance. Of

10 Chan E. Park postulates an "absence of *chuimsae* in today's auditorium except as a conscious reconstruction" (Park 2003, 234 f.), an observation which I cannot share. As part of the feedback-loop that is co-created by all participants, *chuimsae* have an effect that does not depend on whether they are exclaimed "unconsciously" or with intention. Indeed, most forms of participation are only to a certain extent controlled individually – they are rather the result of collective action. Laughing together is a good example for this "double-sidedness of the spectator" (cf. Roselt 2008, 334-336).

11 Spectators that excel in this knowledge and ability are also called 'master singers of the ear' [*gwi-myeongchang*]." (Kim DH 2000, 24)

12 *Dongcho-je* refers to a genealogy of transmission related to the famous singer and compiler of *pansori* Kim Yeon-su (1907-74) who used the stage name "Dongcho".

course, events such as this inevitably include congratulatory flower gifts placed in the lobby, the shooting of group commemoration pictures, as well as a *dwipuri* (“after-party”) that lasted until late at night and effectively prolonged the communal event beyond the performance proper.

In sum: Despite the musealizing tendencies that fit its preservationist governmental agenda, orthodox *pansori* has a strong potential for we-moments, provided there is an audience of experts large enough to keep the feedback-loop flexible and keep the flow of *chuimsae* going. However, as large an appeal these long performances might have for a series audience – their openness to occasional audiences is rather limited.

Therefore efforts have been made to broaden the audience appeal of *pansori* in order to reach spectators outside of the art world. These staging strategies fall largely into two categories: touristic and experimental ones.

Touristic pansori

Touristic approaches try to make *pansori* more accessible for general audiences not acquainted with its conventions. The target audience is not limited to actual tourists from abroad, as many Koreans have become alienated with Korean traditions – or at least shy away from participating in the expected ways –, to the point that Chan E. Park describes them as “tourists on their own soil” (Park 2003, 235). The often diagnosed reluctance of these “occasional” members of the audience (Becker) can be attributed to the fact that there is a gaping discrepancy between the conventions of *pansori* and those of everyday life, but also of other, more familiar arts. A common complaint is that contemporary urban audiences “enjoy *p’ansori* silently, adopting the Western practice of showing appreciation by clapping after the performance.” (Jang 2001, 108)¹³

In order to accommodate occasional audiences, touristic performances promote *pansori* as part of a easily digestible, unified tradition. In line with this low-barrier approach, these performances often take place at popular sightseeing hotspots that evoke the informal performance spaces of earlier days, such as recreated folk villages or ancient palaces. Touristic *pansori* usually take the form of a potpourri-show: Highly skilled performers, master singers or their aspiring students present short highlights from the *pansori* repertory¹⁴ alongside other genres of traditional performing arts. The various short acts are often barely related, such as in the case of combining court music or religious dances with *pansori*.

For example, the weekly “Saturday Premium [Myeongpum] Performance” series of Korean music and dance, shown at the National Center for Korean Traditional Performing Arts, features a changing program of short (10-15 minutes) performances taken from various various folk, court, and religious genres.¹⁵ The “Deoksugung Pungnyu”, likewise a weekly series, is held in an open-air pavilion on the premises of the Deoksugung Palace in central Seoul during the summer season. Renown performers as well as students present short pieces of folk dance and music, including *pansori*.

Depending on the stage setting and the audience attendance, interaction and, as a result, the likelihood of we-moments can vary greatly. The Saturday Premium Performance takes place in a darkened theatre, each act separated by light changes, which discourages interaction by making feedback almost impossible. The Deoksugung Pungnyu, in contrast, takes place on an flat-levelled open-air stage in the early afternoon and is hosted by an MC. This setting creates a much more

13 Chan E. Park goes further and explains this phenomenon as a dilemma of identity: “Where a performance of *p’ansori* is treated as the Korean counterpart to a Western classical musical recital, loud cries of encouragement are regarded more as excessive exhibitionism warranting disapproval than as legitimate response. [...] Seated in the semidarkness of the auditorium distanced from the stage, a Korean thus feels tormented between authentication of the past and representation of his or her modern self.” (Park 2003, 243 f.)

14 This fragmented “piecemeal”-style is called *tomaksori* (lit. “broken-pieces-singing”), a term whose use coincided with the proliferation of the *wanchang* (“complete-singing”) format (Park 2003, 107)

15 “Since the Saturday Performance can last for only ninety minutes, and variety must be achieved, the lengths of the pieces are carefully regulated. No piece in the program may last more than ten minutes. Because of this time constraint, many vocal and instrumental pieces are offered as excerpts. Pieces that normally take a half hour or longer to play are drastically shortened.” (Kim JW 2002, 140 f.)

casual, non-hierarchical atmosphere where people talk in-between (or during) numbers, give screams of appreciation as well as occasional *chuimsae*, and laugh loudly at the jokes of the MC. Sometimes a performer even addresses specific members of the audience, as did Jeon In-sam when pointing at a woman sitting right in front of him in the first row while singing about “Heungbo’s wife” on August 16, 2012, much to the enjoyment of the audience. This way, the feedback-loop keeps turning, although not necessarily in the conventional manner.

Audience composition is also an important factor: At Deoksugung Pungnyu the mixture of what seemed to be tourists, local residents of all ages and students of *pansori* and other traditional arts (possibly friends of the performers), makes light-hearted interaction more probable than “an audience primarily of foreign adults and Korean schoolchildren” at the National Gugak Center (Hesselink 2012, 5).

In touristic *pansori* the focus on short excerpts, the resulting lack of context, as well as the varying knowledge of conventions on part of the casual audience poses limits to the experience of temporary community. Touristic *pansori* tries to facilitate the consumption of a foreign (or distant) tradition by a occasional audience. Authenticity or possibilities for interaction are generally sacrificed in order to present promotable imagery or “cultural content” with best efficacy. The tradition showcased here is one detached from everyday life – something to gaze at rather than to be a part of.

That said, participation is still possible, particularly if the venue provides a casual atmosphere and sufficient members of the audience are willing and able to interact, whether by calling out *chuimsae* or in other ways. However, as the main goal of touristic *pansori* is clearly the promotion of traditional imagery, not participation in a performance, possible we-moments are incidental – they arise despite the staging strategy employed, not because of it.¹⁶

Experimental pansori

In contrast to the “official” strategies of orthodox and touristic *pansori* that depend on the existing structures of the same art world (including venues and renown performers), experimental *pansori* is a low-key approach by young singers, mostly in their 20s and 30s and often still in training. Generally speaking, these singers aim at a revival of *pansori* as a popular, living art, focusing especially on the communal aspect.

Consider an excerpt from the Declaration by the National League of Ttorang Gwangdae (“small time entertainers”). Signed by twelve young *pansori* singers, as well as 90 supporters, this manifesto has been published on the internet in 2004:

“The purpose of our league is to regain the spirit and life of *pansori* as a living art. ... *Pansori*, which used to speak for the masses, is now so detached from the life of the people it has become fossilised. ... In order for *pansori* to be revived as a live and living art form, it is imperative that *pansori* speaks about our modern time and way of life ... We *ttorang gwangdae*, as progressive artists, will initiate this task of creating and disseminating *pansori* art that continues to be relevant to our changing world.” (Ttorang Gwangdae Jeonguk Hyeobuihoe 2004, translation follows Um 2008, 42 f.)

This document echoes the critique of “ossificating” tendencies as a result of official preservation politics (i.e. orthodox *pansori*), as well as earlier attempts of “reviving” *pansori* in the 1980s, that time as an adequate means for grassroots social protest in the context of the Minjung Movement (cf. Lim 1990). Although drawing on a similar concept of tradition – something that “speak[s] for the

16 Public contests, where numerous high-ranking singers present short parts in front of highly skilled spectators (often joined by the contestants themselves after their part is done), pose an interesting challenge to the contrast between orthodox and touristic *pansori*: While orthodox in spirit, this format formally consists of brief performances interrupted by the announcement of the next contestant, thus closely resembling touristic performances. As the atmosphere can be highly interactive, thanks to the great number of expert listeners, like in orthodox performances a re-affirmation of the gathered *pansori*-community seems plausible. In these cases, the engagement of the audience tends to override structural characteristics of the setting.

masses” –, unlike the Minjung activists the new revival movement of the 2000s is interested not so much in concrete political goals, but rather in a revival of relevant *pansori* as a goal in itself.¹⁷

The major characteristic that distinguishes experimental *pansori* from other staging strategies is the use of newly-created stories that deal with “our modern time and way of life” (see above), that is with contemporary South Korean society.¹⁸ The stories generally feature a simple everyday language, including up-to-date references and puns, and a wide range of topics, including “family-friendly” folk stories and fairy tales, pop culture, as well as comments on contemporary politics and social problems.

As a result, the potential communal experiences in experimental *pansori* are based not so much on a common consciousness of a shared cultural heritage, but rather on the understanding of these new stories told. While the canonical stories are well-known by (almost) all spectators in orthodox *pansori* – and not that important in touristic *pansori* –, actually following the plots consciously becomes essential for enjoyment in experimental *pansori*.

This can be observed in a performance of the piece *Jwiwang-ui Mollakgi* (“The Fall of the Mouse King”) by Choe Yong-seok, member of the ensemble Badak Sori. The song chronicles the career of current President Lee Myung-bak, beginning in his time as a mayor of Seoul. Everything takes place in “Animal Country” (*dongmul nara*) and Lee is depicted as a mouse – in fact a well-established satirical image of him, used by his opponents for example in political caricatures.¹⁹ The following passage from *Jwiwang-ui Mollakgi* describes the mouse king’s rise to presidency, mixing fairy tale language with a polemical comment on recent Korean history:

[spoken:] Once upon a time in Animal Country, there was a mouse king. This mouse king has turned the Animal Country into another country. That’s what his career is all about.

[sung:] Hear about the career of the mouse, hear about the career of the mouse. Originally, mice had the trust of the other animals for being wise and gathering food diligently. That said, a mouse named Jwi-bak became the mayor of the capital of Animal Country. As a mayor, he exhumed a small stream, using his teeth like a bulldozer, and created Cheonggacheon, the ‘stream of blue dogs’. Also, he baptized his policy of redevelopment ‘New Town Project’. As the already high land prizes skyrocketed, the animals who owned land begged ‘bulldozer’ Jwi-bak to become their king. So he left the poor animals without power, the common people, behind and became king of Animal Country.” (Choe YS 2008)

To enjoy this series of puns, word plays, and allusions to real-life events, knowledge of the conventions of *pansori* is not necessary. Rather, one has to be acquainted with the political situation in South Korea²⁰ – a positive attitude towards the criticism expressed helps, too. Consequently, as can be seen on video recordings, the main form of interaction is laughter and applause, rather than *chuimsae*. It can be safely assumed that we-moments that emerge during performance are based not so much on the status of *pansori* as a shared cultural heritage, but rather on a shared agreement with the satirical story told.²¹

Besides newly created stories, more flexible venues allow for spontaneous participation in experimental *pansori*. This holds true especially in outdoor performances that attract accidental audiences, for example at the “Insadong Street Soripan”, a series of performances by the ensemble Badak Sori that took place in the “Culture Street” of Insadong (cf. Kim KH 2003; on Insadong cf.

17 Although sometimes criticized by traditionalists along the lines of “more pop than *pansori*”, scholars of traditional Korean music tend to be sympathetic towards experimental *pansori*, “arguing that truly Korean music has never been static and always contingent on performer and performance context.” (Finchum-Sung 2008, 58)

18 Therefore, experimental *pansori* is usually called *changjak pansori* (“newly created *pansori*”) in Korean.

19 The piece has been presented in various contexts, including a nationwide tour and performances in smaller venues such as a book store or a basement theatre. A short excerpt has also been presented in popular podcast “Na-neun Kkomsuda”, famous for its criticism of Lee Myung-bak (28th installment, Nov. 12, 2011).

20 A youtube video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=myL6XJ6UALU) illustrates the allegorical song with media images that relate to the lyrics, making the message obvious even to those who do not know details. Still, the satirical meaning of the song might be missed without some knowledge in recent Korean politics.

21 However, collective interaction follows its own dynamics. Therefore, we-moments can occur even without the “right” political attitude, as these ephemeral experiences of communality “are not based primarily on intellectual agreement, but rather take place as physical being-together.” (Roselt 2008, 329)

Yun 2011). Operating outside the established *pansori* art world, experimental approaches bring *pansori* to prospective audiences, both with regard to conventions and to venues.

Another means to foster participation is the active confrontation of the audience, which can lead to spontaneous reactions.²²In the program notes to the recent production *Comic Variety Pansori But:too* by the ensemble Gugak Nuri, a link is drawn from pre-modern *pansori* singers to contemporary entertainers:

“*Pansori* singers were the best singers, comedians and MCs of their times. In our terms, they were comparable to [the hip-hop duo] LeeSsang or [the group of comedians] Keoltu. In this performance, we want to bring out the humour and musicality, both characteristic of *pansori*, and maximize them.” (Gugak Nuri 2012, 4)

The piece tells the humorous story of a police detective and a “noble thief”, impersonated by Kim Bong-yeong and Lee Sang-hwa. Performing at times solo, at times together, these two present a *pansori* show that is close to TV comedy programs, often addressing the audience directly, either with jokes or call-and-answer songs. For example, at one point Lee Sang-hwa shouts out (in English) “I say ‘Eolssi’, you say –”, in anticipation of the “– ‘gu’!”, which the audience promptly delivers. In some scenes the singers enter the auditorium, singing to specific members of the audience, and at one point even drag a young woman on the stage to serve as a co-actor in a short scene. Also, the audience sings and claps along to several simple songs, such as the opening number “Uri Batu” (“We are But:too”) which is repeated several times throughout the performance.²³

The piece *2002 Woldeukeop Itallia-jeon* (“2002 World Cup Italy Story”) by Yoo Su-gon combines a current story (this time without relations to politics) with explicit engagement of the audience: Yoo retells the quarter-final match between South Korea and Italy during the World Cup of 2002, a “story” many spectators will be familiar with, as winning this game allowed the South Korean team to enter the semifinals for the first time in history. During the performance, again and again the audience joins in with choruses of “Daehan Minguk! Daehan Minguk!” (“Republic of Korea!”), a cheering tune that dates back at least to 2002 and can still be heard all over Korea whenever the national team is playing soccer (cf. Willoughby 2010, 205-214). At the same time spawning a sense of shared nostalgia by reviewing an emotionally loaded recent event, this strategy of involving the audience provokes participation in a way an occasional spectator might feel more comfortable with than shouting out *chuimsae*.

These examples cover only a small spectrum of experimental *pansori* practice. They show, however, that using popular and highly contemporary forms of expression such as political satire, rap, or comedy, can be an effective means to address audiences not acquainted with the conventions of *pansori*. Although these performances mostly take place outside of the art world, many characteristics of *pansori* – from stylistic forms to allusions to classical pieces – are preserved or creatively transformed. However, a general shift can be noticed from virtuosity of voice, most dominant in the concert hall setting of orthodox *pansori*, to wit and idiosyncrasy in storytelling, which also includes a more dynamic acting, sometimes bordering on slapstick, as well as the active involvement of the audience in alternative ways.

22 According to Ruth Mueller, the official efforts of preserving *pansori* (which form the basis of orthodox performances) in many ways mirror “aristocratic” *pansori* practices of the late 19th century, while experimental approaches seek to revive an earlier model, that of “folk” *pansori*. Simply said, aristocrats gathered to enjoy the technical virtuosity of the good-mannered singer, rural folk performances put storytelling, satirical punchlines and expressive acting into the center of attention. Among other reasons, this difference accounts for the large number of female performers in stately-sponsored *pansori*, as well as for the more balanced male-female ratio in newly-created experimental *pansori*, as gender stereotypes that inform performance practice conform to this pattern. (cf. Mueller 2012) Seo YouSeok describes the difference between these two modes in the dichotomy of “art” (*yesul*) and “performance play” (*yeonhui*) (Seo 2011b).

23 The interpolation of popular songs into existing *pansori* pieces, in order to allow the audience to sing along, has precedents in earlier times, when “inserted folk songs” (*sabip minyo*) provided this effect. (Cf. Yi 2006)

3. Pansori abroad

What happens to *pansori* when it is taken out of its “native” context in Korea and performed abroad? It should have become clear that both the social context of a performance and the composition of the audience have a major impact on the forms and the intensity of interaction and thus on the possibility for communal feelings. Oversea performances are confronted with a double-dilemma: While even in Korea “serious audiences” are not that common, outside of Korea any familiarity with the stories and the conventions of *pansori* cannot be expected at all – in this sense, overseas audiences are occasional by necessity. Furthermore, *pansori* does not serve as a common – albeit distant – locus of identity for the majority of possible spectators.²⁴

I will discuss how, by whom, and to what ends *pansori* is performed outside of Korea, as well as the resulting potential for communal experiences. While staging strategies tend to follow either the orthodox or the touristic model, there are some important gaps. I will begin my discussion with touristic *pansori*, followed by orthodox *pansori* and the few cases of experimental *pansori* presented abroad.

Touristic pansori abroad

Spectacular events that showcase Korean tradition, often in the wake of diplomatic events, generally feature *pansori* as a small mosaic piece in the colorful spectrum of Korean culture. These “hotchpotch shows” (Maliangkay 2007, 49) are generally aimed at non-Koreans and – like touristic shows in Korea – do not encourage participation. On the contrary: The preference for large stages at representative venues and compressed programs of short numbers hinder interaction.

Consider “The Sound of Millennia”, a gala show celebrating South Korea's admission into the United Nations in September 1991. The show, announced as a “music and dance extravaganza”, was held at Carnegie Hall to be attended by the UN diplomatic corps and coincided with an officially proclaimed “Korea Week” and events all over town.²⁵ The show featured over 100 high-ranking musicians, some of them as legendary as Hwang Byung-ki (*gayageum*), Kim Duk-soo (*samul nori*) and Ahn Sook-sun (*pansori*).

A preview show took place at Los Angeles. The reviewer for the *Los Angeles Times*, describes his impressions of the *pansori*-section as follows:

“Two excerpts from the *pansori* repertory showed some of the range of this form of people's opera. Without supertitles or program translations, a narrative duet scene was left largely incomprehensible to non-Korean speakers, but both the musical and physical imagery of a rowing song from ‘Shimchongga’ quickly bridged linguistic and cultural gaps.” (Henken 1991)

In fact, according to Hae-kyung Um, the latter piece was not *pansori* but its “traditionesque” derivative *changgeuk*, a form of music theatre performed by several *pansori* singers (Um 2001, 223; on *changgeuk* cf. Killick 2010). Obviously, the objective was the promotion of Korean culture and nation branding, not so much cultural understanding.²⁶

Because large-scale spectacles like “The Sound of Millennia” that involve countless people are tremendously expensive, the majority of overseas performances of *pansori*, as well as other traditional Korean performing arts, take place as smaller performance series by single artists or

24 Oversea Koreans can be an exception to this point. Indeed, most performances of *pansori* or other traditional Korean music outside of Korea I attended featured at least a certain percentage of audience members with a Korean background. For an ethnographic account of “Korean migrant rituals” in the course of a rock concert see Fuhr 2010.

25 The gala has been recorded and published on video by the Korea Foundation, an organization associated with the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its mission is “to promote the image of Korea as a cultural nation and cultivate a positive perception of it among people in the global community.” (www.kf.or.kr).

26 Indeed, as noted in an announcement, “[t]he Ministry of Culture designed the program to demonstrate to the nations of the world the breadth and depth of Korea's culture, and to correct the entrenched image of Korea as purely an economic power.” (Korean Cultural Center Los Angeles 1991, 31)

small groups. These are often subsidized by the Korean government, but mostly organized by local partners.

Orthodox pansori abroad

Most of the times, these tournées introduce *pansori* as an aesthetically appealing art, thus operating in the orthodox mode. However, the target audience, while eager to appreciate something new, is for the most part completely unfamiliar with *pansori*. Therefore translated subtitles are a standard, in most cases didactic material such as program guides with translations of the lyrics are prepared, too, and fringe events such as lecture-concerts, introductions or roundtables provide further opportunities to gain insights into the aesthetics and the history of *pansori*. This abundance of educational support seems adequate, as the target audience consists of interested concert-goers that tend to make good use of these opportunities. I will briefly discuss two examples, one from Germany and one from France.

In June 2009, renown *pansori* singer Wang Ki-seok and drummer Lee Wonwang presented several full-length performances of *Sugung-ga* (“Das Lied vom Unterwasserpalast”) in different German cities. Matthias R. Entreß, who organised the tournee (as well as several others), states his curatorial intentions in his essay on “Die Klassik der Anderen” (“The Others’ Classics”):

“[I wanted] to present parts of a traditional non-European musical culture in all its depth and complexity in an appropriate way. [...] [Therefore] only a few pieces and groups of works are presented, those however as complete and tonally authentic as possible [...] to give the members of the audience the possibility to understand [the music] in their respective way” (Entreß 2011)

All three performances were hosted by educational institutions: a music school in Karlsruhe, a folk museum in Hamburg and the City Museum in Munich. Simultaneous subtitles were projected above the stage, “so that every detail of the plot, every impulse of the singer can be understood instantaneously.” (Entreß 2010) At the Music Academy Karlsruhe *Sugung-ga* was shown as part of the two-day event “Apropos Korea” that also featured chamber concerts of music by modern and contemporary Korean composers (Isang Yun, Unsuk Chin etc.) and a workshop on *pansori*. Presenting *pansori* as an autonomous art that needs understanding in order to be enjoyable, these performances all address a serious audience in a general sense, although one not acquainted with *pansori*.

Like Matthias R. Entreß in Germany, Han Yumi and Hervé Péjaudier have organised various concerts of *pansori* in France, most of them in full-length and surrounded by additional events that provide context for better understanding.

Most recently, Min Hye-Seong and drummer Kwon Eun-Kyeong performed a full-length version of *Heungbo-ga* (“Le dit de Heungbo”) at the festival “Made in Asia” (Toulouse, Feb. 2011). According to the program notes, the festival pursues the “decryption of contemporary Asia through its evolution, its tendencies, its transformations.” This educational agenda was further stressed by an academic lecture by Han Yumi as well as the screening of *pansori*-related movies by Im Kwon-Taek.

These fringe events not only contextualize the performance. Also, over the course of the festival, they create a communal atmosphere among the members of the audience who spend time together – which in turn might substitute for the lack of a heritage-based relation to *pansori* and practical unfamiliarity with its conventions. Seeing various performances together in a relatively short time frame, an effect peculiar to the festival setting, can also help to create temporary bonds outside of the performance proper that might transpose into performance.²⁷

²⁷ On the “concentration of time” at festivals cf. Elfert 2009, 157-196. Festivals also offer the possibility to present *pansori* to broader audiences of art aficionados in general, i.e. spectators not specifically interested in Korean or Asian art and culture. Recent examples include the avant-garde music festival “Codes” in Lublin (2011), the world music festival “Urban + Aboriginal” in Berlin (2004) and the Edinburgh Festival (2003).

Experimental pansori abroad

Experimental pieces of *pansori* have been rarely performed abroad. Could it be that because of their ostentative contemporaneity these pieces are not considered “representative enough” of Korean culture to receive official funding? Also, to understand and appreciate the numerous references as well as the critical social comments, an up-to-date knowledge of life in Korea would be necessary. Therefore even if subtitles were employed, it seems dubious that the humor most experimental works rely on would translate well.

An exception are Lee Jaram's “Brecht-Pansori”-pieces, large-scale *pansori*-style adaptations of so far two dramas by Bertolt Brecht, *Sacheon-ga* (2007, based on *The Good Person of Szechwan*) and *Ukchuk-ga* (2011, *Mother Courage and her Children*). In recent years, *Sacheon-ga* has been successfully shown in France, Poland, Japan, the USA, and the UK.

Combining *pansori* techniques with Western drama tradition, *Sacheon-ga* can work as an interesting “alienation” of Brecht’s play, both in Korea and abroad. However, while providing a bridge for understanding, the Brechtian theatre-frame might at the same time strengthen “Western” forms of interaction, as this comment on a guest performance in Paris suggests:

“Although the communication with the audience that Lee Jaram sought didn’t take place – it is not that easy to shake off one’s occidental habits –, the performance created a strong, delightful, and distinct impression and received endless applause.” (Karminhaka 2011)

What Lee Jaram’s Brecht-*pansori* accomplished in Korea – fusing *pansori* practice with epic theatre, with neither tradition dominating the other (cf. Creutzenberg 2011) – seems to drift toward the theatrical pole in a European context.

4. Conclusion

As my comparison has shown, orthodox *pansori* has a rather limited audience-base – most spectators of full-length performances seem to be “experts” in one way or another, singers, students, researchers, or “serious” spectators, in short: members of the art world familiar with its conventions. Touristic and experimental staging strategies try to broaden the audience-base by either staging performances that do not rely on the knowledge of conventions (touristic *pansori*) or by using different conventions that are closer to everyday life (experimental *pansori*). In touristic *pansori* the drawback is a discouragement of participation – the feedback-loop tends to be unilaterally fed by the performers –, thus the potential for communal experiences is lowered. In experimental *pansori*, while participation in non-traditional ways is kept alive, the reproach of being more pop than *pansori* (Um 2008, 44) is quickly at hand.²⁸

When *pansori* is performed abroad, the absence of an audience of experts poses problems to an orthodox approach. But I agree with Roald H. Maliangkay who notes that “it is wrong to suggest foreign audiences may never fully appreciate a form of art. They may simply appreciate aspects other than those valued by Koreans.” (Maliangkay 2007, 58) Also, the unavoidable gaps in full understanding are not necessarily a bad thing. Maliangkay argues that, in order to avoid boredom by over-explanation, “audiences must be left with some things to explore on their own.” (Ibid., 61) Of course, there is only a thin line between an aesthetically challenging performance and an event that allows no active engagement whatsoever for lack of access points. In the end, these are problems only cultural brokers like Han Yumi, Hervé Péjaudier, Matthias R. Entreß and all the others who try to stage *pansori* for foreign audiences, can solve on location.

One thing should have become clear: Whether a performance follows orthodox, touristic or experimental staging strategies, the audience remains a variable that needs to be taken into account. After all, despite more abstract aims such as the preservation of a performance tradition, the promotion of a national image, or the revival of a popular practice – in any case the concrete

28 Of course, this argument can also be turned on its head – after all, *pansori* was a popular art at some time.

goal of creating a memorable performance experience should be the first goal. Trying to make moments of communality possible seems like a good method to reach this goal.

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