

Oral tradition in the transnational pedagogy of Korean literature

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*A kite is hanging, a kite is hanging,
it is caught in the juniper tree.
Gentlemen of Samch'ôngdong, would you free it?*

.....

*The Samgak mountain of Seoul, I ask you.
You've been here a long while,
How many talents and beauties have you birthed and lost?
Still the town is brimming with beautiful guys,
Isn't that nice? Isn't it cool?
Ôlssiguna-----!¹*

What national or ethnic ethos does an oral tradition reveal, in what form or style? How much of the indigenous narrative or lyrical consciousness could be communicated or lost in translation? Are these verses, being of a category historically denigrated, less poetic than “poetry”? In the conventional definition of literature built around written and/or published text, orally transmitted materials have largely been pushed to the margin. An attempt to blur the center-margin, written-spoken-sung division, the upcoming *Columbia Anthology of Premodern Korean Literature* includes a chapter on Korean oral tradition with three translated excerpts from the *P'ansori Obat'ang*, “the classical five narratives.” The aim is to impress within the transnational literature study a performative dimension of Korean narrativity involving musical storytelling. An inter-discipline of music and literature by birth, p'ansori narrative offers a rich generational accumulation of the poetic and narrative imaginations of the average Koreans of the past. Until a century ago, the long-held Confucian social hierarchy blocked sharing of literacy beyond the elite families of the *sadaebu* gentry. Insulated by a Neo-Confucian sociopolitical system, only the legitimate male heirs of aristocratic households were allowed access to literary scholarship requiring fluency in *hancha*, “Chinese characters.” Literature as an artistic exercise was being politicized as an esoteric means to ensure inaccessibility of privilege for the rest. Limiting access to literature translates to limiting vision in literature. The philologist-king Sejong's fifteenth-century promulgation of phonetic *han'gûl* made possible wider access to literary communication, but Korean intellectuals rebuked it during much of the five centuries that followed. As the saying, ‘if you don't have teeth, you live with your gums’ goes, outside the exclusive chronology and organization of privilege, oral tradition sustained the folk literary life rhizomatically and nomadically.² Generations of creative minds and talents accumulated not only poems and stories but artistic conventions of deliverance, garnished with regional flavors and worldviews. In Korean oral tradition, woman's sentiments and feelings were included and savored, unlike in the male-dominant written literature.

*My love is fair as a flower, firm as the fruit,
many as the branches, deep as the roots.*

¹ Verses from *Namdo minyo*, folk song tradition of the southwestern provinces, anonymous.

² In describing the oral nature of emergence and transmission of oral tradition, I borrow from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari their philosophical conceptualization of the nomadic pattern of growth of the botanical rhizome. See *A Thousand Plateaus* (tr. Brian Massumi, London and New York: Continuum, 2004), Vol. 2 of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Unlike the monolithic centrality of written literature by a privileged few, oral tradition may be viewed as a rhizomatic multiple emergence.

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*Alas, I miss him, but can't see him,
What could be the matter?*³

Folk singing developed as a poetic outlet for average Koreans. Songs accompanied fishermen at sea, farmers in the fields, workers at building sites, and vendors in marketplaces. Women, whose lives were a series of never-ending domestic labor and prayer for household welfare, were particularly passionate singers of life. Folk music served as key inspiration for many of the salient repertoires of the Korean performance tradition currently preserved as Korea's intangible cultural assets. At twentieth century's entrance, the Korean performative culture encountered an influx of Western forms. The labor songs from worksites, outdoor *kwangdae* plays, and *kisaeng* house entertainments were reframed into "genres" for the modern stage *mise en scène*. Inheriting the stylistics of southwestern folk and cleansing ritual singing, the art of p'ansori singing developed as an epic-novel sung narrative. Starting from early 1960s, prominent styles and singers of p'ansori one by one became designated as Korea's intangible cultural assets. In the field of Korean literature, the narratives of p'ansori came to occupy a central position in the areas of Korean *kubimunhak*, oral literature. In 2003, p'ansori singing was anointed as UNESCO's Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible World Heritage of Humanity. Hence the question for preservationists and researchers of *p'ansori*: how this art form can be a meaningful heritage or practice for the world.

P'ansori performance was discovered in mid-eighteenth century in a southwestern provincial marketplace. The oldest written text about the art is *Kasa ch'unhyangga ibaekku* (The two hundred lines of the Song of Ch'unhyang) included in *Manhwajip* (1754), a literary collection by Yu Chinhan (1711-1791).⁴

In *Kajông mun'gyôn nok* (Records of family experiences), Yu's son relates how his father experienced the regional culture and arts while stationed in Ch'olla provinces and then returned home to reconstruct in writing, in 1754, "The Song of Ch'unhyang" with mature plot development and detailed action. For recording a literary version of an oral narrative so "prurient," his son continues, Yu "became the target of slander among his scholarly contemporaries."⁵

If the 2800-Chinese character quatrain capturing the plot and highlights of the love, separation, and reunion of one of the most famous females in Korean fiction ushered p'ansori narrative into the domain of print, the art of its deliverance has persisted in the culture of orality as the primary medium. Every learner today is equipped with writing/printing and recording technology for aid, and they use them all: take dictation in notebook of a few lines the teacher orally gives during every lesson, or study with the printed narrative bound for teaching and learning; record every lesson. The standard avoidance of sheeted and reprocessed p'ansori into staff notation--Korean academia has been producing through their graduate musicology channels--aims at a transmission of *sori*, singing, least mitigated by a musical literacy from another world. The heart of *sori* stoically stays within the parameter of *kushim-jônsu*, 'pass down from mouth to mouth'. Shin Wi (1769-1847) in *Kwan'gûk ch'ôlgu shibi-su* (Twelve seven-character quatrains on viewing a play, 1826) extols four great singers of his time: Mo Hûnggap (born ca. 1800), Yôm Kyedal (born ca. 1800), Song Hûngnok (born ca. 1790), and Ko Sugwan (born ca. 1800). Many more including Kwôn Samdûk (1772-1841), Kim Sôngok, Song Hûngnok, Shin Manyôp, and Chu Tôkki helped make the nineteenth century a heyday of p'ansori. Prominent singers of late nineteenth century include Pak

³ Another anonymous verse from the Namdo minyo repertoire.

⁴ Customarily referred as *Manhwabon Ch'unhyangga*.

⁵ Chan E. Park, *Voices from the Straw Mat: Toward an Ethnography of Korean Story Singing* (University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 56.

Yujôn 1835-1906), Chông Ch'unp'ung, Pak Mansun, Yi Nalch'i, Kim Ch'anôp, and Kim Sejong.⁶ A set of obscure names in history, the songs and styles they had innovated are still being transmitted today.

Till the end of Chosôn, the mainstream Confucian elitists staunchly prohibited the “likes of actors, puppeteers, performers of shamanic music, masked dancers, acrobats, anyone selling wicked words and skills.”⁷ The shrillness of the tone targeted, for example, on Yu Chinha introducing for the first time the Ch'unhyang narrative in writing may have been a reflection of fear the cultural foundation sustaining their hegemony was being challenged by the growing interest in the culture of the folk: the wall separating the two domains was permeable. The singers were also seeking venues with enhanced financial and artistic reward: solo story-singing gigs trimmed of variety group settings, and the “inherent frugality of storytelling required nothing more than a throat and a drum.”⁸ Elevated visibility and patronage catalyzed gentrification of the art. A petty bureaucrat with a literary background, Shin Chaehyo (1812-1884) of Koch'ang county of South Chôlla is known to have rendered many talented singers his editorial savvy. From the existing pool of twelve or more, five narratives were selected to form a canon of *P'ansori Obat'ang*, “the five narratives,” representative of the five Confucian cardinal virtues: *Ch'unhyangga* (Song of the chaste wife Ch'unhyang), *Shim Ch'ôngga* (Song of the filial daughter Shim Ch'ông), *Hûngboga* (Song of the good brother Hûngbo), *Sugungga* (Song of the Underwater Palace), and *Chôkpyôkka* (Song of the Red Cliff). “Hereditarily outcast from the Confucian social orbit, the singers took pride in their position as copropagators of Confucian moral paradigms. With utmost devotion they strove to vocalize loyalty and filial piety (*ch'ung-hyo*) as the two-part truth for all.”⁹ The nineteenth century also saw entrance of the female gender into p'ansori singing. The first was Chin Ch'aesôn, Shin Chaehyo's beloved protégé. “At the July 1867 inauguration banquet for the reconstruction of Kyônghoeru pavilion at Kyôngbok Palace, Chin made her debut as the first female kwangdae ever... He (Shin Chaehyo) was offering two of his greatest innovations: the colorful eulogy and the cherished protégée Ch'aesôn.”¹⁰

Elements of p'ansori performance

Etymologically, p'ansori is made up of two words: *p'an*, performative occasion or venue, and *sori*, the singing voice. Accompanied by drummer (*kosu*) on barrel-shaped drum (*puk*), the p'ansori singer weaves between spoken passages (*aniri*) and sung passages (*sori*). The “timekeeper through all the singer's transformation,”¹¹ the drummer adds his own by “sympathizing, encouraging, rebutting, countering, coaxing, consoling, conjuring, provoking, grappling, and sparring... the two arts merge into a single flow,”¹² henceforth the saying, *Il-gosu i-myôngch'ang* (First the drummer, second the singer). In singing, the poetic aspect of storytelling waxes, as music and language more intimately describe one another. *Imyôn*, “picture within,” is an *emic* term for a deeper poetics within singing: the singer should not settle with a flawless execution of the music but be able to deliver in his voice the semantic interiority. *Sôngûm*, “music of the voice,” refers to a vocal prowess capable of painting the inner dimension of singing. The voice is weighted by what moves or un-moves the heart, and the goal of a p'ansori singer

⁶ The anecdotes of the lives and art of some of these singers are included in Singers and Patrons: The Nineteenth-Century Hall of Fame,” in Chan E. Park, *Voices from the Straw Mat*, 60-76.

⁷ In Kim Hûnggyu, “P'ansori ûi sahor chôk sôngkyôk kwa kû pyônmo” (P'ansori's social characteristics and change), 115, in Chông Yang and Ch'oe Tonghyôn edited *P'ansori ûi pat'ang kwa arûmdaum* (The characteristics and beauty of p'ansori) 102-136. Seoul: Indong, 1986; Also cited in Chan E. Park, *Voices from the Straw Mat*, 58.

⁸ Chan E. Park, *Ibid.*, 59.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 71. “The colorful eulogy” refers to the *Kosach'ang*, “Song to Bless the Auspicious Building” Shin Chaehyo dedicated to the newly-renovated pavilion.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹² *Ibid.*

should essentially be no different from that of an actor striving for a truthful deliverance of his lines. P'ansori singing employs several distinct rhythmic cycles (*changdan*) that respond to the changing mood or context of storytelling: the slow 6-beat *chinyang*, medium 12-beat *chungmori*, faster 12-beat *chungjungmori*, syncopated 4-beat *chajinmori*, urgent duple *hwimori*, and the 10-beat *onmori* exuding the feeling of asymmetry in its 2-3-2-3 sequence. Melodically, p'ansori is sung in several distinct modalities (-*cho*): the magnanimous *ujo*, the peaceful and calming *p'yongjo*, and the sad *kyemyonjo* most frequently. The basic qualifications for a singer, according to Shin Chaehyo in his *Kwangdaega* (Song of the Kwangdae), are *inmul* (appearance, person, or presence), *sasol* (narrative composition), *tugum* (vocal attainment), and *norumsae* (accompanying gesture).¹³ "Appearance" may be undercutting the centrality of the art, while "person" or "presence" captures the primary importance of the artist's personality. As exemplified in the cases of *Tongp'yonche*, *Sop'yonche*, or *Chunggoche*, prominent schools of singing formed around exceptional singers and their vocal styles (-*che*), and continue to be succeeded by their heirs.

Prior to the main p'ansori, singers customarily do a warm-up *tan'ga*, "short song," "The singer tests his or her voice, the folding and unfolding of the fan, and the set of gestures; the drummer checks the deftness of his hands and fingers, the drum's tautness and suppleness, and his *ch'uimsae* (*ch'wimsae*), stylistic cries of encouragement."¹⁴ Anchored to the twin towers of Confucian virtues, *ch'ung* (loyalty for king) and *hyo* (filial piety for parents), the theme of *tan'ga* loosely fluctuates through observation of beauty in nature, impermanence of season, inevitability of death, and historical lessons on humanity:

*White pines on Namsan, its forest dense and luxuriant,
Han River leisurely flows, boundless and triumphant.
May His Majesty, like these mountains and that river,
live forever and ever,
till these hills flatten and that water dries.
For eternity,
enjoy peace and prosperity!*

.....
*When you reach your mid-life,
Abandon the lures of wealth and fame.
Give them to those who want them.
Take a trip, anywhere.
When you find an auspicious site
by a great mountain and water,
build a tiny shack there.
Gather your soul friends,
Together enjoy music and poetry!*
(From *Chin'guk myongsan*)¹⁵

*My dear youths!
Waste not your days,
do what you have to do.
The root of all human conducts is*

¹³ More on this, generally referred to as "a tetrad of principles, the golden rules of p'ansori theory," is included in Chan E. Park, *Voices from the Straw Mat*, 72.

¹⁴ Chan E. Park, 2.

¹⁵ Translatable as "The auspicious mountains bring peace to our nation": patriotic tone, Taoist in nature, eulogizing the *p'ungsu* (*fengsui*) of the surrounding mountains of Seoul; transmitted from Chông Kwônjin.

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none but love for your country and parents, is it not?

.....

*Another ancient named Kwakkô (Guo Ju),
whenever he had a special dish prepared for his parents his own child would eat it,
so to bury his child away,
was digging a site when a pot of gold he found,
all to better serve his parents.*

.....

*Foolish Chinsihwang¹⁶
who had the Great Wall built,
sat high on the Abanggung (Epang) palace,
sought to live forever.
But he, too, became the ghost of Yôsan.¹⁷
The rich and dainty food given to us in death
Is not nearly as tasty as a cup of crude wine we drink while living.
Enjoy life while living.*

(From Hyodoga, "Song of Filial Piety")¹⁸

Story of Ch'unhyang:

During the early reign of King Sukchong the Great (1674-1720), in the township of Namwôn, Chôlla Province, a young, handsome, and dashing scholar by the name of Yi Mongnyong, son of the new magistrate from Seoul, was staying. One fine spring day, Mongnyong, tired of books, was touring the township of Namwôn with the court servant Pangja as guide. At the scenic Kwanghallu pavilion, he saw in the distance the beautiful maiden Ch'unhyang on swing. It was love at first sight. That evening, Mongnyong visited Ch'unhyang's house and persuaded Ch'unhyang's mother Wôlmae, a retired kisaeng, to let him have her. The two exchanged nuptial vows. Time flew. Mongnyong's father the magistrate was promoted back to the central government in Seoul and, as a good filial son, Mongnyong had to accompany his parents. It was also unthinkable for a son of nobility to take a lover before passing the state examination and marrying a girl from a noble family with due ceremony. Pledging their everlasting love, they sadly parted. An official by the name of Pyôn Hakto, having heard of Ch'unhyang's beauty, successfully petitioned to be the succeeding magistrate of Namwôn. The new magistrate orders Ch'unhyang to serve him, but Ch'unhyang refuses, saying she was already married. The infuriated magistrate ordered her torture and imprisonment. Her execution was planned to take place as the highlight of the magistrate's birthday banquet. In Seoul, Mongnyong immersed himself in his study, and won the first-place honor in the state examination. His Majesty entrusted him with a royal insignia to serve the state in the capacity of royal inspector general incognito. He led his secret police forces to Namwôn, righting wrongs along the way. On the eve of Ch'unhyang's execution, Mongnyong arrives in Namwôn. That night, Mongnyong visits Ch'unhyang in prison...

The *Columbia Anthology* includes translations of three excerpts: *Songs of Underwater Palace, Hûngbo, and Ch'unhyang*. The version of Ch'unhyang included is based on the sung version credited to Kim Sejong, late Chosôn singer: Kim transmitted it to Kim Ch'anôp and Chông ũngmin; Chông

¹⁶ Qin Shi Huang (260-210BC), king of Qin, conquered all the Warring States and unified China in 221BC. Later in life, he became famously obsessed with power and immortality, to be cited in literature as an example of the impermanence of life and eventuality of death.

¹⁷ Lishan mountain, located 30 km from Xi'an.

¹⁸ Transmitted by Chông Kwônjin.

transmitted it to Cho Sanghyôn, Sông Uhyang, Sông Ch'angsun, and his son Chông Kwônjin. My translation is based on the versions of Cho Sanghyôn, Sông Uhyang, and Chung Kwônjin. I present in this paper two songs particularly rich in cultural fibers: Ch'unhyang's aria upon Mongnyong's return, "Sôbangnim's Here!", and "Inspector General Incognito Is Here!"

Ch'unhyang's aria: Sôbangnim's Here! (tr. Chan E. Park)

Chungmori:

"Last night in my dream, I saw him,
I now see him in reality, how unreal!
Hyangdan, bring the lantern closer.
He who appeared so anguished in my dream,
I have to see him in reality."
Raising and moving the long end of her cangue out of the way,
she lifts her harrowed legs with both hands
struggling to endure the pain,
"Aigo! Aigo! My legs! My back!"
Crawling, sidling, and inching forward
she grabs the column of her cell door
and raises herself with great difficulty,
"My darling, why have you come so late?
Were you in the clear waters of Yôngch'ônso river
bathing with Sobu and Hôyu?¹⁹
Or, were you with the four old white-haired and browed hermits
of Sangsan mountain playing *paduk*?
'Spring water fills up the lakes everywhere,'²⁰ goes the saying,
and you had to wait for the water level to rise?
'No one bedridden with illness could fulfill his duty,' they say,
and were you ill all this time?
When you were here in your study, you were such a beautiful youth,
You're now the handsomest of men!"
Seeing this, Ch'unhyang's Mother laments:
"Alas, he returns as such spectacle,
and she instantly falls under his spell, look at her."
"Mother, just what are you saying?
He's mine in success, and still mine in failure.
I envy neither a high official husband nor his fat salary.
You approved him as my husband, Mother,
so how can you dispute that?"
The Royal Inspector thrusts his hand between the slats of the prison door
to hold Ch'unhyang's hand,
"Ch'unhyang, I'm here.
Your hand once soft and tender is now all skin and bone.
What has happened to you?!"
"Sir, I'm in this position due to my own fault,

¹⁹ Two legendary scholars during the reign of Emperor Yo (Yao), in rejection of worldly power entered the Kisan mountain to stay clean.

²⁰ Phrase from *Hwanggyesa* (Song of the Brown Rooster), one of the 12 *kasa* poems of late Chosôn anonymously composed, anthologized in the collection, *Ch'ônggu yôngôn* (Green hills and everlasting lyrics, 1728, compiled by Kim Ch'ânt'aek).

but dearest sir, what misfortune has befallen you?”
“It, too, is my lot.”
“Tomorrow at the end of the magistrate’s birthday banquet,
when the order for my execution is handed,
could you walk me by holding up the top end of my pillory?
When you hear that I have expired,
swiftly retrieve my remains while posing as a hired hand,
bring me to the Lotus Flower Room where we made love first,
lay me down and take my undershirt off me and with it,
shout out my name three times to wish me a good journey,
have Hyangdan let her hair down and mourn loudly for me,
then you my lord take off your coat you’re wearing
and drape it over me for a funeral shroud.²¹
As for the burial, find a clean and unobstructed spot,
dig deep to lay me in.
On my tombstone have the following eight characters carved:
*The Grave of Chaste Ch’unhyang Who Died Unjustly.*²²
I would then rest without regret.”
The royal inspector is sorrow-stricken:
“Yes, My Ch’unhyang, do not cry.
Tomorrow at daybreak,
whether you’ll ride a funeral bier or a luxury sedan no one knows,
but surely ‘the sky may tumble, but there’s a way out.’
There should be a way out.
Don’t cry, I say don’t cry.”

In translation, I strive to capture as vividly as possible the physical and psychological picture of Ch’unhyang confined in her prison cell. Her use of metaphors when reproaching Mongnyong for his lack of communication is eloquent. Her instruction for Mongnyong for her final hour and rest is sadly moving. It also provides readers with a detailed education on the funerary conventions of death, burial, and memorial: what Koreans held dear in life and in death.

Royal Inspector General Is Dispatched! (tr. Chan E. Park)

Chajinmori:

All of a sudden a court servant
flies into the office complex and affixes the sign,
“Royal Inspector General Is Dispatched.”
All six departments into a whirl of to-do.
The magistrate’s birthday banquet,
does anybody still care about that now?
The officers waste no time preparing
for the coming of Royal Inspector:
Has the housing chief arranged lodging for the Inspector?
Lay a silken mattress over a bamboo mat,
surround the mat with white cotton drapes.
Have the manager of housekeeping line up the palanquin bearers,

²¹ Ch’unhyang’s instructions for her death and funeral are personal and intimate, while procedurally follows the Korean traditional funerary convention.

²² Su-jôl-wôn-sa-Ch’un-hyang-ji-myô (수절원사춘향지묘, 守節冤死春香之墓).

inspect the ropes for the sedan, place a tiger skin on the seat.
Deacon, Prepare a new set of official attire for the Inspector.
Traffic Officer, bring out the flags!
Chief Officer, line up the soldiers!
Make sure the Crier has the message and when!²³
Warn the messenger to watch the timing of his appearance.
Instruct the butcher to start on a fat plump cow,
also to make several supersize candlesticks with the beef tallow.
Granary Officer, bring out the tables for his soldiers.
Staff Assistant, add several more tables
to be ready to feed extra numbers.
Let's not forget the post horses and drivers.
Have the tax collector thoroughly review the land-use files.
Military Supply Officer, where is the list of the infantry?
Did they duly receive cotton for pay?
Prison Warden, any disturbances or disputes?
Weaponry Manufacture Department, is the welding up to standard?
Bring all documentations,
and set up an executive review committee of three or four members.
Chief of Performance and Ceremony,
discreetly instruct the head *kisaeng*,
that judging from his demeanor the Royal Inspector is from Seoul
and must take the affairs of *kisaeng* seriously.
Prepare them in courtesies and performances to minimize mishaps!
As all this is going on,
the lord of Koksông from his seat rises with an excuse:
"I have shakes,
maybe I'm coming down with malaria,
and it happens to be my malarial day,²⁴
I really should go home."
The Royal Inspector responds.
"I have spent a lot of time in the countryside
and familiar with prescriptions for malaria.
Kiss a cow on the mouth, you'll get over it immediately."
"That is not a very common prescription, but I'll try it."
"I'll come by your home soon,
may I expect your hospitality for doctoring you?"
The lord of Unbong rises with an excuse:
"I, too, have matters to oversee in my jurisdiction.
I barely made it here, I must return without delay."
The royal inspector quips.
"It must be a pain to go only to be back soon."
"Wh..., why would I be back here??"
I may, only if I am to be the master of ceremony
for the October Kwanwang Shrine Memorial."²⁵

²³ *Kûpch'ang*, title of the job, had the responsibility of crying out public messages in timely fashion.

²⁴ *Chingnal*, in Oriental medicine, is "the day when one has an attack of malaria," where the symptom gets worse.

²⁵ Shrine for the Late Han warrior Guan Yu (162? – 219), a major character in the historical Chinese *Romance of Three Kingdoms*. In East Asian nations with shared history and philosophical foundation including China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan, Guan Yu came to be worshipped as a godly hero of warfare.

“Are you so sure of the affairs of the personnel?
Are you that sure you won’t be here again tomorrow?”
The Inspector was foreshadowing
there would be the official prosecution of the magistrate of Namwôn the next day.
The magistrate himself is still clueless.
The governor of Sunch’ôn gets up:
“My wife is really sick, I shouldn’t have come,
I need to get back to her without delay.”
Without giving the magistrate the opportunity,
the Royal Inspector plays host.
“Sir, you must adore your mistress to death.”
“Who would not love his concubine?”
“Wouldn’t there be at least one among us?
I’ll visit you soon, if you promise to give me a tour
to the famous Hwansônjông²⁶ pavilion.”
The Sunch’ôn governor is worried
he may indeed be visited by this Inspector General-suspect,
so responds in his best and most amicable manner.
“Once I served as inspector general east of the Kangwôn provinces,
I saw many gorgeous pavilions of the Eight Famous Scenic Sites,²⁷
but there was none like Hwansônjông!
Please pay us a visit,
it’ll be my immense pleasure to accompany you.”
The Inspector General checks the hour.
‘*Uh-huh*, at this pace we may lose them all
before we start the main show.’
Stepping forth on the wooden parlor,
The Inspector General spreads his fan and claps his hands,
the secret police officers
earlier dispersed among spectators ,
gather like a swarm of bees.
With their six-sided cudgels slung over their shoulders,
they shout in a chorus of booming voices:
“The Inspector General Incognito is here!
The Inspector General is here!
The Inspector General Incognito is here!”
The sky tumbles, the earth sinks,
the crowd of several hundred disperses
like a stonewall collapsing,
like ocean waves dissipating.
Would the commanding voice of Chang Bi²⁸
have been more frightening than this?
When a summer wind sweeps in frost,
who wouldn’t tremble?

²⁶ A famous pavilion in Sunch’ôn.

²⁷ They are: Ch’ongsôkchông in T’ongch’ôn (currently in North Korea), Ch’ôngganjông in Kansông, Naksansa in Yangyang, Samilp’o in Kosông, Kyôngp’odae in Kangreung, Chuksôru in Samch’ôk, Mangyangjông in Ulchin, and Wôlsongjông in P’yônghae.

²⁸ Zhang Fei (165-221), one of the three heroes, Yu Pi (Liu Bei), Kwan U (Guan Yu), and Chang Pi (Zhang Fei), from the Chinese *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

All the guests frantically run for cover,
 and where are their servants?
 Several, covering their heads with their master's tall hats,
 are looking for their masters!
 The court servant, unable to locate the encased seal of governance,
 is carrying a watermelon in his arms!
 The chef, instead of his master's spoon and chopsticks holder,
 is carrying a flute case!
 The footman packs the dish washing tub
 in place of his master's face wash basin!
 Another picks up a *yanggûm*²⁹
 thinking it is his master's extra clothing box!
 The foot-soldiers are lifting a wicker dessert tray
 in place of their master's sunshade,
 and the horseman is loading a chaff sack
 instead of rice sack!
 Seeing the sedan carriers bring the ropes but no chair,
 the magistrate loudly berates them.
 "Worthless sons of bitches, you bring only the ropes,
 what am I supposed to ride?"
 "Sir, can you really lay down the law at this hour?
 Spread your legs and rest them on the two ropes
 like the tightrope walker...,
 I'll carry you on my back, hurry!"
 "Stupid jackasses! I'm not a cripple!"
 The food dishes are trampled and trashed under the scurrying feet,
*Taaang! Dunk! Puk*³⁰ and *changgo*³¹ cracking and smashing!
 The hoops of the *changgo* snap in the waist
 and roll into the rolling barrel drums, *dông-ttak!*
 altogether making a wonderful music.
 The fiddle strings snap, the bamboo flute cracks
 under the soles of the running feet!
 A *kisaeng*, her hairpin nowhere to be found,
 fixes her bun with a fire poker.
 The trumpeter without his trumpet
 sings through his two fists, *honga-e-ng, hongae---ng!*
 Not remembering where the cannonries were,
 the artillery man shouts on top of his lungs, *Kkuuung!*
 Heads butting, foreheads colliding,
 noses bleeding, feet dragged into the traffic,
 people falling on the floor and weeping, *Aigo, aigo!*
 Even those who have nothing to fear
 simply run back and forth for no particular reason.
 "Uh-huh, what's happening to our town?!"

²⁹ Trapezoidal-shaped zither with 14 steel strings, originated from Arabian Dulcimer or Santir from Caucasus. According to a Chosôn document, it was transmitted to Ming China by Mateo Ricci, and introduced to Korea during the early reign of King Yôngjo (r. 1724-1776).

³⁰ Barrel-shaped drum.

³¹ Hourglass-shaped drum.

Chanpark 11

The secret agents and police officers are lined up.
“Where is the Chief of Housing?”
Scared out of his wits,
the Chief of Housing crawls forward
with a quilted winter jacket and dog skin covering his back,
and a rolled up quilted winter comforter under his arm.³²
Hudakttak! An officer lashes him.
“*Aigo*, I’m the only son through five generations,
let me live!”

“Damn you! That doesn’t help!”
The officers ruthlessly hand the punishment.
Everywhere, the screams of *Aigu! Aigu!*

In conclusion, beyond the range of revelation in writing, an oral tradition, its lyrical, narrative, and performative deliverance, altogether is a treasure trove for anyone interested in graphically enhanced representation of Korea in the past. Korean oral tradition is a “folk” museum acoustically exhibiting verisimilar situations and thoughts of average Koreans of the past. Every song is an installation of rare period artifacts contextualized within the storytelling reality. Further, the performative dimension of oral tradition fuels our imagination about the stories and storytelling from remote times, places, and consciousnesses.

³² Not clear why the Chief of Housing are carrying these items. He could be either disoriented or trying to hide in them.