

# The Soundscape of Korea in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

SHEEN Dae-Cheol (Academy of Korean Studies, Republic of Korea)

## I . Introduction

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century of Korea was the age of convulsion. The undesirable politics by in-powers of Joseon (朝鮮, 1392~1910) Dynasty had opened the door of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and it soon became one of the major sources for the decline and fall of Dynasty. The undesirable politics by in-powers had exerted an evil influence upon diverse sides of Korean society of those days.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century of Korea was also the age of never ending social unrest, poverty, conflict and strife. So many peasant resistances, national isolation, oppressing Roman Catholicism, compulsory open port, high reaching sense of crisis based on the Eastern penetration of Western powers, instability of domestic affairs, the influx of Protestant Christianity, Donghak-hyeongmyeong (東學革命, farmers' revolutionary resistance led by a leader of newborn Korean religion based on the idea of farmers' desirable life), the Sino-Japanese War, gaining power of Japan, enlightenment movement, various political changes, the start of Korean Empire and many righteous army movements prove the situation so well. According to all these complicated situations, it can be called that the 19<sup>th</sup> Century of Korea was politically, socially, economically and culturally completely unstable age.

It is said that any kind of musical activity cannot be separated from human beings' everyday life. Human beings do not stop singing songs and playing musical instruments even in the worst living environment and situation. Korean people also did not stop singing and playing music in any kind of environment and situation. What genres of music had been performed in the convulsion age of 19<sup>th</sup> Century of Korea then?

The music of 19<sup>th</sup> Century is very important for Korean music history because many pieces of then had contributed making up traditional Korean music of today. How it drew a musical landscape or soundscape of those days? It draws a special interest of mine so that I would like to draw a soundscape or musicscape of those days for a better understanding of music then in this study. However, all kind of folk music including folk song, shaman music, farmers band music, Buddhist music and other miscellaneous music except for *pansori* and *sanjo* (散調) will not be included in this study.

## II. Court Music

The court music tradition of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century was completely alive in the Korean court of 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The court music continually performed for many occasions in the court of Royal Palace even in the worst convulsive situation of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Many court ceremonies had been performed regularly and irregularly, and the court music had also been performed in the frame of court ceremonies' processions because usually music had been accompanied for court ceremonies. What genres of music had been performed for court ceremonies in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century then?

### 1. Ritual Music

Even if every situation was not good in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the tradition of diverse court ceremonies had been continued in the court of Joseon Dynasty. Quite a few kinds of court rituals and music for those rituals had been performing continually in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century as the previous century.

Among those rituals and music, the ritual and music for 'Land God and Grain God (社稷)' and 'Royal Ancestors' Shrine (宗廟)' were the most important. The music for the former was imported Chinese *aak* (雅樂, elegant music) and the latter native Korean music called *hyangak* (鄉樂) composed by Sejong the Great (世宗大王, reigned 1418~1450), arranged by his son Sejo (世祖, reigned 1455~1468) in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. The former arranged by Sejong the Great in the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century continually had been performed at the ritual for 'Land God and Grain God'. Arranged and started to be used as the music of the ritual for 'Royal Ancestors' Shrine' by Sejo in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, the latter continually being performed in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century even though there were several musical changes.

The ritual for 'Confucian Shrine (文廟)' and the music, *aak*, arranged by Sejong the Great, for it had being performed as well. The ritual and music, *aak*, for 'Wongu (園丘 Celestial Altar)' was added to the existing court rituals and music in 1897.

### 2. Court Party Music

Birthday party music for kings, queens and king's mothers had been performed by court musicians at the Royal court yard. Mainly or usually native Korean music, *hyangak*, and Chinese *ci* (詞) music called *dangak* (唐樂) in Korea were the main repertoires for those

occasions.

The most popular repertoires for the upper mentioned court parties were native Korean music Yeomilnak (與民樂, enjoy with people) composed by Sejong the Great, Sujecheon (壽齊天, everlasting life as the heaven) historically originated in Baekje Kingdom (百濟, BC 18~660), Chinese *ci* music Boheoja (步虛子, walking in the empty sky) and Nakyangchun (洛陽春, spring in Luoyang) imported from Chinese Sung (宋, 960~1279) Dynasty in the early 12<sup>th</sup> Century. Boasting of their typical musical beauties, Yeomilnak, Sujecheon, Boheoja and Nakyangchun have been transmitted until today and they are very popular among Korean music lovers.

Especially not a few illustrated documentary records on court parties, their music and dance with repertoires of music and dance, musicians' name, instruments and others were published in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

### **3. Royal Processional Music and Military Band Music**

The Royal Processional Band called *gochwi* (鼓吹), composed of only court musicians, led kings, queens and the crown prince when they go out of his/her offices and move to other places in the court yard or parade in a sedan chair on the street of Hanyang (漢陽) now called Seoul. This tradition had been continued from Goryeo (高麗, 918~1392) Dynasty until the fall of Joseon Dynasty in 1910.

The music by the *gochwi* was called *gochwi-ak* (鼓吹樂) and it is completely differentiated from the military band and its music. Many repertoires of the *gochwi-ak* were the same pieces as the court party music *hyangak* and *dangak* such as Yeomilnak-man (慢) and Yeomilnak-ryeong (令), Boheoja and Nakyangchun.

Military band and its music, called collectively Daechwita (大吹打), were added to the royal processions in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century when kings go out of Hanyang, and its tradition had been continued in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Originally the music for Daechwita is not court music as Yeomilnak, Sujecheon, Boheoja and Nakyangchun but military music. Daechwita, its music, its instrumentation and the authorities which handled all the affairs of it were completely different from those of *gochwi*. All the affairs of the former were handled by the military organizations and the latter were by a Royal government office for music called Jangak-won (掌樂院). Accordingly, it is natural that the musicians for the former were military band musicians and for the latter were the court musicians.

## **III. Literati Music**

Educated people of Joseon Dynasty, including the people of middle class, loved music so much. Especially they loved six stringed zither, *geomungo*, music. They not only enjoyed music but also created unique their stylish music called 'literati music' or '*pungyu* (風流)'. Many pieces of their music have been transmitted in the notation until today. Only some of their musical pieces, however, have been transmitted and performed until today.

### **1. Yeomilnak**

Around the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century court musical piece Yeomilnak composed by Sejong the Great jumped over the wall of Royal palace and became a piece of the literati music. Originally the Yeomilnak was a vocal piece of ten movements with Chinese text and dance, and it had been performed to a big orchestral accompaniment in the court. It had been continually being performed by the literati in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. However, the last three movements of it were omitted and the first movement of it had not been performed for a while by the literati of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century because of its too slow tempo.

### **2. Yeongsan-hoesang (靈山會相, A Meeting on the Spiritual Mountain)**

Exactly when a piece of court music Yeongsan-hoesang became a piece of the literati music was not known, but it is inferred that it became a piece of the literati music around the second half of 16<sup>th</sup> Century with the Yeomillnak as well. Originally the Yeongsan-hoesang was one movement vocal music performed with a text, '*Yeongsan-hoesang Bul-bosal* (靈山會上佛菩薩, Mass to the Buddha on the Spiritual Mountain)', to the accompaniment of orchestra in the court.

Several variations of the original Yeongsan-hoesang started to appear by unknown literati musicians since the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and 9 pieces of a suite of today was completed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Usually the Yeongsan-hoesang is called a piece of Buddhist music, however, the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> pieces of it have nothing to do with Buddhist music. Now Yeongsan-hoesang is one of the most loved popular pieces by Korean music lovers.

### **3. Boheoja (步虛子, Walking in Void)**

It is inferred that the Boheoja became a piece of the literati music around the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century as well and it was called Boheosa (步虛詞). Four variations (two

Dodeudri, *Yangcheong-dodeudri* and *Ujo-garak-dodeudri*) had been appeared by unknown literati musicians between the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The original Boheoja was a piece of Chinese originated vocal music with orchestral accompaniment and dance. The Boheoja of the literati music called Boheosa and four variations of it had been completely Koreanized until the 19<sup>th</sup> Century since their appearance.

#### 4. ***Gagok*** (歌曲), ***Gasa*** (歌詞) and ***Shijo*** (時調)

There were three kinds of art song, *man-daeyeop* (慢大葉) • *jung-daeyeop* (中大葉) • *sak-daeyeop* (數大葉), and those have been called collectively *gagok* and enjoyed by the literati. The *man-daeyeop* was not sung in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century because people did not like to enjoy it since its tempo was too slow, but the *jung-daeyeop* was still sung and enjoyed by the literati in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Among three kinds of *gagok*, the fastest one *sak-daeyeop*, now called *gagok*, is the most important. Total 40 pieces of vocal suite *gagok* was formed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, 26 pieces for male and 14 pieces for female. Female singers started to sing *gagok* around the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century. The appearance of female *gagok* singer in Korean music history can be said one of the most epoch-making and important landmarks.

*Gasa* and *shijo* were enjoyed by the literati, but a set of 12 pieces of *gasa* had not been completed until in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

## IV. ***Pansori*** and ***Sanjo*** (散調)

### 1. ***Pansori***

A large number of *pansori* maestros were active in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It can be said that the *pansori* was one of the most loved popular art music by the populace. It can be also said that it was loved by all Korean people of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century except for the people of only some particular areas.

Kings and a Grand Prince loved *pansori* so much and they invited *pansori* maestros to their palaces, enjoyed *pansori* music and supported *pansori* singers. They bestowed the invited maestros of *pansori* generous rewards and honorary government posts as prizes according to their artistic abilities. Several provincial governors also invited *pansori* maestros to their offices, enjoyed its music and supported them as well. The supports of the Royal family and several provincial governors became a powerful energy for the

prosperity of *pansori* in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

The first female *pansori* singer had begun to sing *pansori* since 1867 a little later than the appearance of female *gagok* singer. The appearance of the female *pansori* singer was one of the most epoch-making and important landmarks as the appearance of female *gagok* singers, and it can be evaluated as one of the most important primary factors to flourish the *pansori* in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and next century.

## 2. *Sanjo*

One of the most popular traditional Korean pieces of today, *sanjo*, was started by a famous *gaya-geum* (伽倻琴, twelve-stringed zither) maestro, KIM Chanjo (金昌祖, 1865~1919), at the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Ensuring its fans and enriching the musical repertoire of those days, the *sanjo* soon aroused music lovers' interest and started to be diffused nation-wide. As the first appeared improvised solo piece in traditional Korean music, it soon affected the creation of several different *sanjo* for other instruments such as *geomungo*, *daegeum* and others, and finally it became one of the most beloved and popular traditional Korean music in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

## V. Western Music: Hymn of Protestantism

Several simple explanations on the theories of Western music such as clefs, #, b, syllable names and others are found in several Korean musical documents of the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century or the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It means that basic theories and knowledges on Western music were already introduced to Korea before the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century. However, only several learned scholars knew about those theories and knowledges. Generally speaking, it is known that the Western music in Korea was started from the Protestant Christianity.

It is said that officially Korean Protestant Christianity was started by two missionaries for the Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church in 1885. They started their official missionary works on the Easter, 5<sup>th</sup> of April, of 1885. However, there were already several Korean Protestants in Korea before the two missionaries started their spiritual works. Korean Protestant Christianity and its music were going to be spread in Korea very fast even though the Roman Catholic Church and its music had been flowed into Korea a long time ago.

Protestant churches taught their congregations hymn, and the first hymn sung by Korean Protestants was 'Jesus Loves Me, This I Know' composed by an American composer

W. B. Bradbury (1816~1868) in 1862. The hymn rapidly spread out to the general public and affected Korean society and music education of those days.

A new genre of vocal music, called *changga* (唱歌), was created by its influence. The *changga* was selected as a subject in the regular school curriculum in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The first Korean Protestant hymnal was published in 1892, but there were only Korean texts. The first Korean Protestant hymnal with four parts was published in 1893.

A hymn melody with Korean text to praise the king, the same melody of British national anthem, 'God Save the Queen', was sung for celebrating the birthday of the King Gojong (高宗, reigned 1863~1907) on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September, 1896. A Scottish folk song 'Auld Lang Syne' had been sung by Korean people as Korean national anthem since the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century until the Japanese colonial era (1910~1945) because its five tone scale musical flavor is very similar to Korean five tone scaled called *pyeonjo* (平調). So many pieces of *changga* focused on loyalty and patriotism had been composed since the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century until the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

## VI. Conclusions

Court music, literati music, *pansori*, *sanjo* and military band music called Daechwita, except for many kinds of folk music, were the main traditional repertoires of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Korea. In others words, native Korean music, Chinese *ci* music and *aak*, *gagok*, *gasa*, *shijo*, *pansori*, *sanjo* for *gaya-geum* and Daechwita were main traditional pictorial elements in the soundscape or musicscape of 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Korea.

Western music, especially Protestant hymn was added to the upper genres of music to draw a new soundscape, musicscape, of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Korea. Adding newly created *changga* by the influence of Protestant hymn to the upper soundscape, the soundscape of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Korea created new musical harmony between the East and the West to become more picturesque, and it opened a way to start a new musical era, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century of Korea was in a state of confusion. The political and social chaos based on the internal and external state of affairs was so severe. Almost all Korean people, except for only a few privileged classes, was in absolute poverty so that their discontent and dissatisfaction were soaring into the sky. So many kinds of uprisings by the farmers had been continually broken out here and there until the end of the century. A few Korean historian called the 19<sup>th</sup> Century of Korea as 'an age of insurrection by the people' for reason of many popular uprisings.

It can be said that cultural activities including musical activities would be very difficult in the upper mentioned political and social chaos. There were, however, very vigorous cultural and musical activities in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Korea. Especially court and literati musicians, *gagok* and *pansori* singers including female singers for these two genres, a *gaya-geum* maestro, Christian missionaries, the early Korean Christians of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and those who love to sing *changga* faithfully drew a unique soundscape or musicscape of those days and sincerely transmitted it to the next generation of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.