

# The Spectrum of Aesthetic Issues in the Modern Development of the *Joseon* Literati Genre *Gagok* (歌曲)

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To Korean people by the end of the 19th century who had previously enjoyed only traditional music genres, the music introduced by the hands of the missionaries must have been very new and unfamiliar. One hundred and a few decades since the meagre beginning of the meeting between the two has now passed, Korea has transformed into a modernized society where all kinds of music are performed and enjoyed, among which Western classical and popular music exist with considerable weight. In the course of the development, there were constant exchanges between Korean traditional music and Western music. Korean traditional music has been subject at one end to defensive modification under the motto of transmission and at another end to aggressive destruction of some core aspects of the tradition under the motto of re-creation. This phenomenon creates important aesthetic issues in this study deals with the spectrum between the two ends drawn up by the traditional vocal genre, *gagok*. | *Keywords: Pungryu* (風流), *Sijo* (時調), *Poetry Song* (詩歌), *Heterophony*, *Korean Cultural Treasure*

## 1. Introduction

At the end of the 19th century, music introduced by Christian missionaries must have been very new and unfamiliar to Koreans, who had until then enjoyed only their own inherited music genres. More than one hundred years on since the first encounter, Korea has transformed into a modernized society in which all kinds of music are performed and enjoyed, but chief among them are now Western classical and popular music genres.

More recently, Korean traditional music has been supported and protected by the government against the influence of Western art and popular music genres. It has been a subject of both, at one end, defensive modification under the motto “transmission,” and at other, aggressive destruction of some core elements of tradition under the motto “re-creation.” These contrasting

phenomena have engendered various reactions by both artists and audiences, and raised important aesthetic issues.

The fact that *Joseon* Dynasty (1392~1910)'s literati enjoyed the poetry song (詩歌) genre *gagok* until the early 20th century makes us wonder at the factors in its current obsolescence. This paper tries to answer the question by examining the status of its current existence. It also attempts to summarize its theoretical heritage by examining its musical and aesthetical features. I will review various contemporary performance reproductions and critically diagnose what elements were kept and which were disposed of.

## 2. Hold Fast to Traditional Performance Styles or Pursue Modern Audiences?

Hoping for Korean traditional music to be fully revitalized, Korean traditional music has been supported through government policy. Currently, the vitalization of *gugak* (國樂 literally "National Music") has become a noticeable phenomenon in our society. However, this paper asked if the result is not simply only quantitative? The number of concerts, performing groups, broadcasting frequency, and percentage of Korean music materials in textbooks etc. has increased, but what is happening to the music itself?

It seems that the performance culture of Korean traditional music has moved only toward polarized ends, with little in between. On one side, the institution of the cultural treasure system, which designates only one or two "treasures," and emphasizes preservation, has led to fossilization of the included genres. At the same time, on the other side, *gugak*, as "national music" for the 21st century, is expected to be newly created music for the future. As a result, preserved traditional music has been antiquated and newly created music remains obscure. Modern *gagok* performance practices also lie along the spectrum from fossilized to be disqualified.

*Gagok* best exemplifies Korean music's aesthetics, we have believed. It is a genre with melody, rhythm, tempo, texture, form, structure, and organization, all of which are unique. These elements are in harmony with each other, accomplishing a particular musical totality of sound.

*Gagok* appears, however, very strange to modern Koreans familiar mainly with Western or popular music. To them, the melody is too windy, the rhythm too complex, the tempo too slow, and the texture and harmony either too simple or aesthetically beyond one's comprehension. Such domestically "foreign" qualities in all these elements often block an audience's ability to perceive the form and structure, and its aesthetics of the music.

The description and traditional scores are difficult to comprehend. Of the various Korean traditional music genres, *gagok* is now the most avoided and least understood genre by contemporary Koreans. It is ironic because the genre has received the most serious academic attention from scholars. It has become a highly researched area, producing significant results. Some of the fruitful result of their research on the uniqueness of *gagok* will be shown below.

### 3. Traditional Performance Styles of *Gagok*: its Identity and Uniqueness

#### 3.1 What is the Poetry Song Genre, *Gagok*?

There is a long history of its creation, development, & ascendancy, during the Joseon (Yi) Dynasty (1392-1897). We have nearly 100 music manuscripts and 150 song collections through which its history may be constructed. Research has divided in two ways by scholars of music and literature, the former the music, the latter the lyrics. Music scholars treat this as a music piece; literature scholars approach it mainly as a poetry *sijo* (時調).

The singing poetry genre is difficult to deal with seriously because of its dual identity. The final product of it is not to be read but to be heard. Its final channel is the performance not the paper. While the aspect of the sound in the genre is, a crucial element, it is often excluded from its due treatment. While the division between music and lyrics seem clear, but certain tonal or rhythmic prerequisite of the lyric poetry may belong to the realm of music. Recitation or ballad in poetry genre, and rap or recitativo in music genre are actual fill-ins between the artificially drawn differentiating areas of poetry versus song. However, the dualistic genre identity must have not been easy to maintain, finally settled into two divided disciplines. Pro and con debate on the division appeared actively around in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. *Gagok* is currently viewed as a music genre. Its basic text, earlier *sijo*, has transformed now as a literary piece. *Sijo* became a representative Korean literature. On the other hand, *gagok* is a rather a well-finished art, a musical masterpiece, considered as a cultural treasure. The situation makes us wonder what its modern version look like. Would modern *sijo* writer write a new piece with expectation ever to sing to any of *gagok*'s song-type? Would any modern composer create any new song-type, let alone a new performance set?

#### 3.2 Performing Identity of *Gagok*: its Construction and Characteristics

Most of the song collections provided information on what kind of song-type (曲調) is to be sung in order in a performance, and in addition to each song-type, what *sijo* piece may be sung. The structure of a *gagok* as a full cycle performance was gradually build up historically as new variant song-types were added one by one dove-tailing to the original or existing song-types set. Since no further accumulation took place at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and there are three song-types set, proof materials of the original, which appeared in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century's music score, the tradition shows its concrete flow of 300 years. Meanwhile in addition three performance versions (according to singer's identity) evolved, one each for male and female, and for male and female in alternation. Eventually in result, about 66 variant song-types developed to cover the three performance versions. During these times, thousands of *sijo* poems were produced and collected with information to what song-types they are made to sing to.

In the early *Joseon* Dynasty, *gagok* was thought to be the music to cultivate moral culture based on the idea of Confucianism by the ruling class and Confucian literati (Figure 1). By the middle of the dynasty, changes occurred so

that the middle-class people joined into the *gagok* performance culture with expressions mainly of their city life. Such change is clearly engrained as shown in the structure of the full cycle of *gagok* performance. While in the beginning and end the slow earlier song-types of a dignified and noble class dominate, the middle is filled with fast ones with various atmosphere expressing the joys and sorrows of middle class' life. The slow song takes about ten minutes, while the faster songs in middle take about three to four minutes each.



Figure 1. Sin Yun-bok (no date) *Sangchunyaheung*. *Gagok* Performance Scene in 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

It depicts the scene of a banquet held at the patronage of a noble family on a spring day when azaleas started to bloom. By the red belt worn over the coat of arms, the protagonists seem to be nobles with the class of the dang-sang. Two gisaeng (妓生) and three musicians were called for the banquet.

The full-fledged scale of a *gagok* performance takes hours to perform without a break. It became a full-day amusement. All the songs in the performance are introduced by the names of the song-type, not by individual titles nor the incipits of their *sijo* poems to which the music is set, although these may seem sometimes used as a secondary title.

Performers of *gagok* songs are one or two vocalists, and six to eight instrumentalists (Figure 2). In the stage, the vocalist(s) sit in centre front, behind whom sitting instrumentalists in a line (Figure 3). The vocalist and accompanying ensemble together<sup>1</sup> perform a constant flow of polyphony. The ensemble play the same melody as the vocalist but provide spontaneous

<sup>1</sup> There are four chordophones, three aerophones, and one membranophone: *geomungo* (zither with frets), *gayageum* (zither with bridges), *sepiri* (oboe), *daegeum* (flute), *haegeum* (bowed lute), *yangeum* (dulcimer), *danso* (flute) and *jangu* (hourglass drum).

deviations idiomatic to each instrument. The interaction between accompanying ensemble and voice create a rich heterophonic texture that is characteristic of Korean traditional music. In addition to playing with vocal melody, the ensemble undependably provides prelude (大餘音 before or after of each song-type) and interlude (中餘音 between its 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> part).

*Gayageum Haegeum Daegeum Sepiri Janggu Geomungo*



*Namchang gagaek* *Yeochang gagaek*  
(Male singer) (Female singer)

Figure 2. Typical Stage Scene of *Gagok* (歌曲) Concert



Figure 3. Layout of Accompanying Instruments

### 3.3 Tonality and Tone Management

The melody of *gagok* is based on two types of mode, *ujo* (羽調) and *gyemyeonjo* (界面調), and *ujo* is a pentatonic scale in Sol mode, *gyemyeonjo* a tri-tonic scale in the La mode. *Ujo* expresses a magnificent and peaceful, whereas *gyemyeonjo* the sadness or pleading mode. The modal structure of the full version of *gagok* performance starts with an *ujo* at the first song-type, and in the middle, turns into a *gyemyeonjo*, and again back to *ujo* and finally returns and end in the *gyemyeonjo* song-types. The main notes of the scales are the tones that the player articulates on while in singing the melody, the technique of

controlling those tones between and around is a unique element in *gagok*. It can be discussed within the broad framework of tone-management or vocalization, and it is expressed as *sigimsae* (飾音 technics of fluid use of tones, especially of various and delicate timbre).’ Of particular, importance is a specialized technique for the ensemble’s tone management, the methods of variously trembling (*yoseong* 搖聲 ‘vibrating sound,’ *teoseong* 退聲 ‘sliding down sound,’ *chuseong* 推聲 ‘pushing up sound,’ *jeonseong* 轉聲 ‘stamp sound’), and particularly for singers the unwinding the vowels in vocalization.

### 3.4 Forms Individual Set up for Poetry and Song

The text of *gagok* is the poetry genre *sijo* with three lines of four feet (音步) each. This three line/four feet form was not used with the musical treatment of the *sijo*, interestingly. Instead, the first line of *sijo* was divided into two separated musical phrases and second line became the third musical phrase. The third line of *sijo* was not cut in half but oddly divided into first foot and remaining three feet. From a poem with a similar length of three lines of four feet each, five parts of long and short phrases (長短句) were conceived, and the climax of the shortest passage was nailed in the fourth part, prepared by the third part’s dense accumulation and thus finalized in an amazing new poetic structure for a musical treatment (Figure 4).

(詩) Poetic Form: 3 lines (行): 3 lines with 4 foot each	Syllable meter
初章: (이려도) 太平聖代 저려도 (태평)성대.	3 4 3 4
中章: 堯之日月 이요 舜之乾坤 이로다.	4 2 4 3
終章: 우리도 태평성대니 놀고놀려 하노라.	3 5 4 3
(歌) Music Form: 5 parts (章): 5 parts of long and short phrases	Syllable meter
1 장 (이려도) 太平聖代.	3 4
2 장 저려도 (태평)성대로다.	3 4
3 장 堯之日月 이요 舜之乾坤 이로다.	4 2 4 3
4 장 우리도.	3
5 장 태평성대니 놀고놀려 하노라.	5 4 3

Figure 4. Forms of Poetry and Song in Comparative Format of *Taepyeongga* (太平歌)

#### Transliteration of *Taepyeongga*

1st line: (I-ryeo-do) tae-pyeong-seong-dae jeo-ryeo-do (tae-pyeong-) seong-dae ro-da.

2nd line: yo-ji-ir-weor i-yo sun-ji-geon-gon i-ro-da.

3rd line: u-ri-do tae-pyeong-seong-dae-ni nol-go-nol-yeo ha-no-ra.

#### Translation of *Taepyeongga* (National Gugak Center, 2018)

Here is the great peace of the age of the sages, and there, too, the age of the sages,  
Yao's sun and moon, Shun's heaven and earth  
We too live in the great peace of the age of the sages, so we will play, and play.



Figure 5. *Namnyeochang Gagok, Kyemyeonjo Taepyeongga 'I-ryeodo'* (9:00).

*Taepyeongga* is the last song-type sung in every gagok performance version and is the only male/female duet song-type. The song title is often used as such but its official song-type is *Isakdaeyeop*, and its mode is *kyemyeonjo*.

In the video subtitles, you can find information on singer, mode, the title of the song-type and incipit of the sung poetry *sijo* in Korean-style quotation marks (<...>). See (Namnyeochang Gagok, 2013).

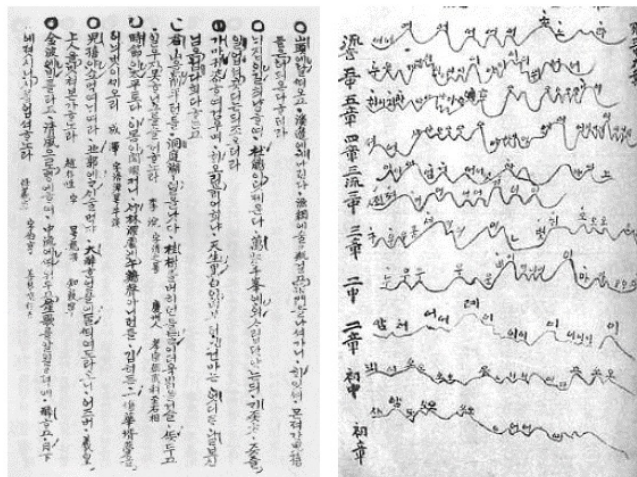


Figure 6. Notations of the *Gagok* with various musical symbols *Yeoneumpppyo* (連音標) (Left) and *Supabo* (水波譜) (Right) (Sin, 2008, p. 149).

The left is a notation that adds a symbol indicating the intonation, pitch, length, and other musical expressions of the tune to the melodic transcription of a vocal piece such as *Yeoneumpyo*. The right is a water wave notation that expresses melodic progression. There were the two types of music scores for the Joseon Dynasty's songs: in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, "Supa-type" scores were mainly used, and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, "*Yeoneum-pyo*" scores were mainly used.





### 3.5 Rhythmic System and Laying out the Text

The rhythmic aspect is highly complex. It is very difficult to follow since its repetitive base is not typical 2 or 3 beats but 3, 3, 2. Most of the song-types in the *gagok* genre are performed to a 16-beat rhythm cycle (*jangdan* 長短) with the typical grouping, 3, 3, 2, 3, 3, 2, which may appear odd to someone used to Western music. Expressed as a fast tempo, the result would be syncopated with many off beats and thus easy to perform. However, in a slow tempo it is very difficult to sing. In the 16-beat cycle, the important percussion strokes occur on the 1st, 4th, 7th, 9th, 12th, and 15th beats. Over this mysterious frame, the syllables of the lyrics are laid mostly on the 1st, 2nd, 4th, 6th, 12th, 13th, and 15th beats. For the fast kind of song-types usually found in the middle of the cycle, such as *Nong-Nak-Pyeon* (弄·樂·編, lit. “Playing with, enjoying, and remaking”), a 10-beat condensed rhythmic cycle has evolved.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
●			○					○			●			○	
											태			평	
			성		대										
저			려		도						성		대	로	
			다								요	지		일	
	월		이		요						순			지	
			건		곤	이		로			다				
우			리									도			
											태			평	
성			대		니						놀			고	놀
			려								허			노	
			라												
(3)	(3)	(0)	(9)	(0)	(5)	(1)	(0)	(1)	(0)	(0)	(8)	(2)	(1)	(7)	(1)

Figure 8. *Taepyeongga's* Text Laying over Rhythmic Frame (Typical grouping, 3, 3, 2, 3, 3, 2 in 16-beat rhythm cycle (長短)).

The types of information in the table is as follows. First line: beats in the set of rhythmic cycle. Next line: percussive beats of *janggo*. Next block of lines: steadfast notes on which text syllable laid. Last line: statistics of text laying beats.

### 3.6 Aesthetics of Gagok Performance: From the Perspectives from Modern Viewers versus Traditional conventions of the Its Performance Culture

As discussed above, *gagok* is a genre with an outstanding musical style that is unique in its melody, rhythm, form, texture, dynamic structure, etc. and the resultant totality is nowhere else to be found in the world. In line with that

substantial quality, *gagok* performance culture has cultivated appropriate aesthetic concepts and developed a tradition that communicates between and binds together both performers and appreciators. It is a monumental art work taken 300 years to arrive at its final shape. Unfortunately none of the characteristics of Western music and aesthetics are very helpful in the *gagok*'s introduction. It is not a song cycle, not a variation, not a suite, not a sequence, not a canon, not multi-movement, even though all of these terms appear in descriptions of the music in dictionaries, etc.

Attempts to describe it tend to dwell on what it is not and thus feel unfair. It goes mostly negative command of expression as below:

- Total seven to nine voices move and intermingle with one melody
- Not homophony with chord progression
- Not polyphony with imitation
- No change in texture in the middle of a song or a performance
- No use of repetition for stress or relief
- Meaning of the text not easily catchable by the breaking up the vowels in singing.
- Foreign tone management, especially in vocalization and timbre
- Unplayable rhythmic frame of 332332,
- Not the triple or quadruple repeated rhythmic base
- Not a composition written by a composer

In spite of all that, I consider it the most beautiful genre among Korean traditional music. Is it not a wondrous but archaic monument? However, for these negative elements of “foreign-ness,” modern Koreans mostly Westernized also do not understand the music.

Previous generation of these modern Koreans must have enjoyed grappling with its aesthetical values. Since while *gagok* performance culture was gradually grown and established, aesthetic discussions on *gagok* had also become core contents in many song collections and manuscripts as critical activities related to the performance.

Most of all there two important concepts, *pungnyu* (風流, lit. ‘wind flow’) and *pungdo* (風度, lit. one's appearance and attitude) were covered frequently. While the concept of *pungnyu* had applied and discussed almost all over and around the Korean culture, *pungdo* was specifically focused on *gagok* performance culture. *Pungnyu* is “a native Korean ideology, embracing the foreign philosophies such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, that is East Asian Cultural base, had become the profound duty for young to achieve, *Hwarangdo*, during the Silla Period (BC 57 – AD 935). It further continued its tradition through the literati ideology during the Joseon Dynasty. In his fifth chapter of “Aesthetic Significance of *Pungnyu* Thought” Min ju-sik insists that the *pungnyu* is an equal concept of East Asian aesthetics (東洋的美로서의 風流) (Min, 1986, p. 18).

In line with this basic quality, *gagok* was cultivated with appropriate aesthetic concepts to stimulate the tradition. Many notable song collections had dealt with the aesthetic affairs as *Gajipungdo Hyeongyong* (歌之風度形容 literally, 'Adjective of song's expression and meaning'). More specifically, *pungdo* of each song of *gagok* was expressed in a condensed form of Chinese couplet of four characters: it has metaphorically described the theme of a song, and its musical atmosphere, and the dramatic emotional state or feeling of the singer. The *pungdo* of the above dealt song-type *Isakdaeyeop*, considered as the representative of *gagok* genre's music style, was described in 19<sup>th</sup> century song collection, *Gagokweollyu* (歌曲源流 Sourcebook of *Gagok*),<sup>2</sup> as follows: '杏臺說法 雨順風調' which can be loosely translated as "Confucius Message at Apricot Rostrum, Rain is Soft and Wind is Harmonious" (Mun, 2004, p. 115).

Given the premise that the *pungdo* adjectives described songs individually as well as their group in the songbook and were ultimately the result of a performance enjoyed at this particular site and time, the performers and viewers must have enjoyed on the spot the diversity and dynamics of *gagok* as a cycle and its songs.

The composition of a *gagok* as a full cycle was historically formed as new variant song-types were added one by one and woven into the original or existing song-types. Since no further accumulation took place past the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and proof materials on the original's first existence were dated as the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the tradition showed a concrete flow of 300 years (Jang, 1975, p. 8). Eventually in result, 20 or more various song-types were evolved to sing as a few performance cycles. During this time, thousands of *sijo* poems were collected giving information on what types they are to sing. The diversity of song-types gives a new base and taste while expanding the aesthetic ground of *sijo* singing. Even though all new song-types were born from one existing basis, new song-types added were original not only in new lyrics, but in also such music elements as melody, rhythm, harmony, timber, form and expression, etc.

Considering only the reality of such a thing, it is a work of art that is recognized as a magnificent artificial tower that has grown over 300 years, or well over 500 years considering the developmental stage (Kim 2005). It seems unlikely it would have been enjoyed for so long with creative input continuously if it were just a music or literary genre. It seems this history must be based on the uniqueness of a convergent poetry/song genre. The *gagok* is now defined by the perspective of an outsider with a negative identity no more than one of the variations made by a composer. The *gagok*, central to scholarly discussions in the past of nature and philosophy of life, is now likely to be briefly introduced as just an art song category. It may now face light treatment as an individual item on stage that has lost its original aura as an imposing artistic tower of cultural history.

<sup>2</sup> *Gagokweollyu* 歌曲源流, Pak Hyo-gwan and An Min-yong ed. 1876 contains *sijo* collection of 856 pieces. Also included is <*Gajipungdohyeongyong Sibojomok*, Style characters of 15 song-types> is included as a preface.

#### 4. Spectrum of Contemporary Performances of *Gagok*: From its Museum Showcase to its Disintegration and Disqualification

There are varieties of common descriptions that critics and audiences have use to describe *gagok* performance. Expressions such as slow, simplicity, luxurious, elegance, beauty, esoteric, show that positive values toward *gagok*. These frequently are seen along with phrases and ideas such as taste for the arts, affection, scholarly, intangible heritage, etc. On the other hand, springing from the opinion that *gagok* is weird, boring, and just not fun, there are some views showing dislike or reluctance or even aggressiveness. Now in the modern performance stage, *gagok* is commonly performed as one or a few individual songs. As samples of contemporary response to such performances, the following comments were reviews of audience who listened the various *gagok* concerts.

*Gagok* remains the most secretive genre in *gugak*. This is because the expression or technique is so unique and extraordinary that only a few viewers encounter it easily. [...] Anyway, overwhelmed by too aristocratic a relaxation and posture, our ordinary viewers had to gaze at the stage with the feeling of an empty vacuum without even breathing properly. The feeling when the light was back on after the performance is like the moment when patient who has just finished dialysis in bed sits back and returns to everyday life again. (lee0who, 2011)

*Gagok* is [...] a vocal genre. I introduce it here to show that such slow music exists. *Gagok* [...] uses the *saseol* [辭說 song text] of a short length, *sijo* and as you see, it proceeds long enough not to know how many times you are going around your neighbourhood only to sing a few syllables. (no1biggold, 2013)

Reading such viewer's comments on the performance, some will ask why *gagok* be staged so rigidly and solemnly as to be seen as so far outdated. This performance is a type of 'fossilization.' The Joseon Dynasty ended around 1910 when Korea became colonized by Japan. After the liberation from Japan in 1945, Korea pursued Westernization without much longing for her past. In the course of time, due to strong support by Korean government for Korean heritage, modern Koreans are being asked to change their attitude to the traditional Korean music as well. However, it can still be difficult to current audiences being presented with the form of an antiquated and snobbish entity as something to enjoy.



Figure 9. Park Min-hui, No Longer Gagok (2017) *Four nights* (3:00)

At the other end of the spectrum from ‘fossilization’ is what we might call ‘disqualification.’ In fact, the word was derived from young *gagok* performer Park Min-hui’s performance series, titled *No Longer gagok*, two concerts in the series being, ‘Four Nights (2012),’ and ‘Room 5 (2014).’ She explained the series as ‘disqualifying the statuses of *gagok*. Literally, it was the declaration “I inherited *gagok* but it is now without any use facing paradoxical fate.” Lee So-young wrote a critical essay about the ‘Four Nights’ concert,

*No Longer Gagok: Four Nights* is a story about the anxiety of a *gagok* singer looking at it in the process of disappearing, yet hoping to live as a singer [...] This is because although *gagok* has already lost its ‘persona’ since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, even when its role is no longer relevant, the original *gagok* is dried off and twisted in the back corner still without taking off its mask. (Yi, 2014, p. 111)

Description of the performer Park Min-hui show her firm directional change. Her activities are described as carrying out ‘multi-genre experiments,’ dismantling music as ‘an avant-guard,’ ‘interdisciplinary artist,’ crossing over the boundary of art and “moving forward to the aesthetic exploration containing her own artistic desires.”



Figure 10. Tori Ensemble (2013) *Isacdaeyeop* 二數大葉 *Beodeureun* (12:03).

This video is a performance of *Isacdaeyeop*, *Beo-deur-eun*, a recording of Tori Ensemble, i.e. one singer, and *geomungo*, *daegeum*, *janggo* players. When clicking on the video, there is a comment by the *geomungo* player while he keeps talking with the singer about the first entry of *Isakdaeyeop*. As the performance started soon no single element remained of the original identity and setting of the song.

‘Beodeureun siridoego’ [The willow tree becomes threads].  
 “kkoekkorineun bug-idoeeo,” [Nightingale becomes a loom shuttle]  
 “kusipsamchun chanaeneuni, nausireum,” [For the ninety days of the  
 three spring months, weaving my sorrow] “nuguseo nogeum  
 bangchoreul,” [Who said the season of green shade and fragrant  
 grasses] “seunghwasira hadeungo.” [is better than the season of

flowers]. It's a love song. The singer will sing only the first phrase, to "sirideogo, today." "But then sometimes she goes further to 'kkoe-kko-ri-neun'. O My! Did men of old times sing a love song so slowly? Exhausted while over listening, those coming will stop and gone. It is an extremely slow song. We tried making it with 'our own colour.'<sup>3</sup>

She is saying that the ensemble will perform only one-sixth portion of the original. This means that out of 3 lines of the *sijo* (that is 6 phrases), the singer will sing only the first line and continue something new. After her comment, she starts a lone geomungo melody over which is then joined by the singer singing the word of three syllables *Beo-deur-eun* in extremely slow tempo, even slower than the original. As the instrumentalists join to play, they do what they please. None of them follows authentic melodic lines as expected. Over pop-like constant rhythmic flow of the drum, and the arpeggio patterns of the zither, extremely slow singing linger for a while. Finally the singer jumped into bizarre sound, not onomatopoeic, but shouting all the way down to the end.

Have they done their best so that the audience might be free of the burden of enduring the extremely slow movement of the original song, by putting in new melodic and rhythmic fillers? Was 'the song long enough to turn the neighbourhood many times round' 'adjusted' not to feel long at all by putting in 'all unaccustomed sound so that the audience may endure the song'? Would the implication here be that the audience has no capacity, or perhaps no patience to listen to such lengthy and slow unacquainted music? The full length of the original piece was around 9 minutes, but their performance was stretched further as covering the first line of text only. The performance reminded us of Hwang Byeong-gi's modern composition for *gayageum* (Korean zither) *Maze*.<sup>4</sup>



Figure 11. Park Min-hui (2013) *Kyemyeonjo Urak Baramyeun* (The Wind Is) (6:50)

- <sup>3</sup> The poetry text of this song is three line with 4 foot. The full versions is as follows.  
<sup>4</sup> A sharp, chilling and terrifyingly haunting *gayageum* piece with assisting vocals. Known for its use in the psychological horror game *White day* (Hwang, 2012).

Above video, *Urak Baramyeun* by Park Min-hui, is to celebrating, KBS Gugak Grand Prize Award in 2012 Park Min-hui's song sounded unusually plain and indifferent, while players of *haegeum*, *piri*, and *daegeum* did not supply skillful heterophonic melodies to the singer's but just doubling ones or not well matched ones, so they were not blended with each other. Heterophonic continuity was broken by the repetitive rhythmic short pattern of *janggu* and accompanying arpeggio of 24-string *gayageum*, providing plain triple subdivision of rhythmic cycle instead of 332 set. With such instrumentalists and players' low level of authenticity, it seemed there is no way for Park Min-hui to reveal noticeably long expressive phrases and proper formal and rhythmic structure, especially in dealing with the climax of the 4th part. Gugak Grand Prize in 2012 seems to be given to a very unauthentic performance. The ground for winning the prize was expressed as "She has narrowed the distance between *gagok* performers and the public with various activities and attempts by taking away the formality and applying a new color."

The following clip is a record of a performance by the well-known Gagok Ensemble Souljigi. The *Eonyagi neujeo gani* (As the Promise is Delayed) video, was awarded the grand prize at the 2014 '21C Korean Music Project'. The group consist of three female singers, instead of one as in the traditional group, and three instrumentalists with a synthesizer, 24-string *gayageum*, and *shengwhang* (mouth organ) featured. All three are harmonic instruments.



Figure 12. Jeongga Ensemble Souljigi (2014) *Gyemyeonjo Isacdaeyeop Oeonyagi* (As the Promise Delayed) (4:36).

Here, *Isakdaeyeop* as sung by three female singers certainly intends to create 3-part sound. The most distinctive feature of the performance is its melodic character, which not at all long and windy, but straightforward with clear skips. The text has expanded to show clearly the message of the original. In some poetic lines, one singer took a lead with the first phrase, and then all following phrases were sung in harmony with the other singer. In other lines, following phrases entered in a contrapuntal manner. They seemed to try to reset the song by a compositional technique.

Original vocal excerpts seem randomly laid over the whole piece. The first phrase of the poem keeps the original tempo and slow windy melody, but from the second phrase on the song quickens and is clearly articulated as if it tried to condense the *gagok*'s genre character into it. In addition, 16-beat structure and heterophony are abandoned, and of the long melody of *gagok*'s unique vocal style, only a trace is left.

The commentator of the award giving ceremony commented on the performance as follows:

By creating a new song with sound or sigimsae (tone management) used in *gagok* [...] they expected people to listen to traditional melodies through a unique attempt at mixing tradition and creation.

Is this an attempt to fill the gap that does not ever seem to be filled between the original/characteristic *gagok* style and that familiar to average modern audience?

## 5. Conclusion

Through the discussion of various modern renditions of *gagok*, we have seen how the style of *gagok* is broken and dismantled. In addition, we can clearly see how the Western expression, its stylistic characteristics, performance and compositional techniques, and modern and postmodern concepts were mobilized and how Western and popular aesthetic thinking has spread and permeated in modern Korean society. Perhaps the most critical phenomenon under this change seem to be the concept of creating a "work," which obviously came from Western concepts of "composing" and "composer," thus would justify joining the esoteric flow of modern music of the West.

Now, some *gagok* performers receive new songs from composers that are far from traditional *gagok* style. There come 'works' that are contrived and difficult to perform, unfamiliar to audience, and hard to digest for performers and viewers. There are even attempts to instigate declarative acts sending messages, such as that the *gagok* genre is dead. Some performers on the other hand either create the soft or simple style of Western classical or light music with harmonic progression, or pop oriented texture with the multi-layered, repetitive and driving rhythm.

When Korean *gagok* genre won an award as UNESCO World Heritage in 2010, the National Center for Korean Traditional Performing Arts held a feast for five days. All five days programs were free to audiences. Even though the occasion was to celebrate the *gagok*'s newly earned identity, only a two-day program was centering on the traditional *gagok*, and those were not even the complete cycle of *gagok* performance, instead the number of *gagok* songs in each program was only four. Who of our ancestors of 150 years ago would have been satisfied when they are accustomed to listening to a whole set of 27 songs in one event of *gagok*? The other programs in the feast included the royal ancestral rites music, pansori and some new Korean compositions. In addition, even the specific *gagok* items seemed selected in the program to assist the audiences hearing in concert trading on the empathy of other arts, that is,



pictures, poetry reading, stories, commentary, etc. It is as if we are forgetting that music has a value in itself just by listening to it.<sup>5</sup>

Now have we lost our ability to devote ourselves to and understand *gagok* on its own? Perhaps it is very difficult to feel the beauty of *gagok* style from either authentic or modern performances carried out while sitting in an audience, gazing at a far off stage. Moreover, will dismantling something out from *gagok* and filling anything instead with popular and familiar or disparate elements ever be satisfactory? The audience who has never acquired a taste for the traditional style and form cannot even enjoy or 'disqualify' the *gagok*. Confronting the claim that the current song is important and thus old version must inevitably disappear, we should make an effort to find a space in some corner so that form can exist and be enjoyed as a unique and orthodox art itself. Without its existence through live performances, it will disappear immediately, as those performances end, and its digital records cannot replace its existence.

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<sup>5</sup> "By adding visual effects to songs that can be boring due to their long and slow sound, they plan to enrich the performance without being boring." (Yuneseuko Muhyeogmunhwayusan deungjae Chukha Gagok Hanmadang, 2011)

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