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KOREAN SOCIAL AND FOLK MUSIC RECORDINGS, NOTES AND PHOTOGRAPHS

By John Levy

Korean writers describe all that is not Court Music as folk-music (*minyo*), but this, at least in translation, is not quite satisfactory, because it includes the three varieties of Lyric Song (Korean Court Music, Lyricord . . . LL 7206), which are highly urbane, and the instrumental *sanjo*, all of which I therefore dub Social Music. Even the regional *chapka* (miscellaneous songs) and folk-songs proper, some indeed being derived from occupational songs, have none of the art-less quality which the early 20th Century collectors so relished, perhaps as a reaction against refined music and also because the recognition that in Europe there was a popular tradition of authentic music introduced a breath of fresh air into the hothouse classical tradition. In the countryside, these Korean folk-songs do in fact have the desired ruggedness - I have heard it - but when performed as in this album by well-trained musicians of the entertainer (*kisaeng*) class, it is wholly absent. And this is not a modern development at all. For the sake of simplicity, however, I shall retain the use of the term folk-song to describe all these, Minstrelsy (*P'ansori*) and the ancient Farmer's Music (*nong-ak*), an example of which I shall give in another album.

A word about the *kisaeng*. They are akin to the Japanese Geisha generally associated by the ignorant with prostitution. At the bottom of the scale, this may be true. But some *kisaeng* are said to have come from noble families: and all over the East, there exists a class of cultivated courtesans who have in many cases, as in Korea, carried on a highly developed tradition of music and poetry and whose purpose it is to give

refined pleasure. All the musicians, male and female, who perform the music contained on this record, are of this entertainer class, the men being the husbands and the sons of *kisaeng*; and all are highly esteemed.

(Recordings made in Seoul, S. Korea)

Recorded by John Levy

INTRODUCTION TO TRACKS 1-4

The Korean *Sanjo* (lit., free form), an instrumental improvisation, has a framework of three basic rhythms, to which others may be added. *Sanjo* used to be played only on the *kayagum* (or *kayakko*), a long-zither with twelve strings; and then, about fifty years ago, the *komungo* (or *hyongum*) *sango* was introduced by a famous player. More recently, players of other instruments have found in this form a perfect vehicle for displaying their musicianship.

The *komungo*, another long-zither, has six strings of twisted silk, the second, third and fourth being stretched over sixteen fixed frets, the other strings each having a single, movable bridge. The first string (E) serves as a drone, the melody is played on the second (whose second fret is tuned to B flat), the third (the third (whose sixth fret is also tuned to B), while the fourth (B flat), and the sixth (B flat at the lower octave) are struck successively to end the music. This unusual way of tuning the instrument is probably due to the fact that the left-hand ring and middle fingers are kept pressed to the second and third strings all the time, so that these are never played open. Only the forefinger and the thumb move freely. The effect of vibrato and slur is produced by a lateral push of the string to raise the pitch, unlike the downward push used by *kayagum* players. A short stick held in the right hand is used to pluck the strings. Both those instruments – purely Korean, so it is claimed – have a long history, dating back at least to around the beginning of the 7th century.

A complete *sanjo* on either of these instruments would have filled one side of the record, and therefore, with reluctance, since the player is a remarkable musician, I give here only part of the first movement of a *komungo sanjo* (in a future album, I hope it will be possible to give the piece *in toto*), and one complete and much shorter *sanjo* played on the *ajaeng* (lit., scratch zither). This is a bowed long-zither, introduced from China into Korea during the Koryo Dynasty (918-1392); it is said to have a Mongolian origin. The *ajaeng* had seven twisted silk strings, tuned to A flat, B flat, C, E flat, F, A flat, B, ascending. The bow is a plain stick of Forsythia wood, about three feet in length, rubbed with resin.

Every *sanjo* is accompanied by a large hour-glass drum, the *changgo*, with a history as old as that of the two long-zithers. The left-hand skin is struck with the palm of the hand, the right with a stick towards the periphery. As he plays the drummer utters

words to encourage and applaud the soloist: they are part and parcel of any performance and are quite audible here.

And in order to display another drumming technique, and another rhythm, part of the first movement of a *hojok sanjo* is included. *Hojok* (lit., barbarian pipe) and *nallari* (an onomatopoeic word) are the common names of this conical oboe, properly called *taep'yongso*. Similar to the Chinese *sona* it is also derived from the Persian *surna* and was introduced from China into Korea in the 15th century for use in military and other kinds of outdoor music.¹

Finally, there is included a famous piece, a song accompanied by a *komungo* and a *changgo*, a soldiers' complaint.

TRACKS:

1. KOMUNGO SANJO. Ist movement. (Part)

Played by Sin Kwaedong, *changgo* accompaniment by Han Ilsup.

This first movement is, as usual, in *Chinyangjo* (24/4), lasting c.6'36'', though it is not possible to give it all here. The other movements correspond to those played in the *Ajaeng Sanjo*, Track 2.

According to the player, the piece begins in Ujo (U-mode): this last for 1'50'', when there is a bridge section lasting 9'', and then the mode changes to *Kyemyonjo*, in which it remains for the rest of the excerpt. In the course of the whole improvisation, which takes nearly 22 minutes, there are a few more of these alternations of mode, though *Kyemyon* predominates. I understand that the modes used in *sanjo* differ in various ways from those similarly named in Court Music (see my album on Korean Court Music, Lyrichord LL7206) and in view of the fact that the musicians consulted in Korea were not always in agreement as to whether such and such a passage was in this or that mode, my vagueness in this matter will be excused!

Mr. Sin Kwaedong is one of the finest *Komungo* players.

2. AJAENG SANJO, played by Han Ilsup, *changgo* accompaniment by Sin Kwaedong.

The *sanjo* has the same four movements as the *komungo sanjo*, namely, *Chinyanjo*, *Chungmori* (12/4, beginning approximately as 2'44''), *Chungjungmori* (12/8, beginning at c.5'10''), and *Chajinmori* (6/8, beginning at c.6'24'') — it is difficult to give precise timings since the changes from one rhythm to another are in the form of bridge sections).

¹ See Korean Buddhist Music, Vogue LVLX-253, Paris.

The improvisation begins in *Kyemyonjo*, changing to *Ujo* at 21", which lasts for c.1'2": it then returns to *Kyemyon*, which continues until the end.

3. HOJOK SANJO (Part of the 1st Movement), played by Han Ilsup, *changgo* accompaniment by Sin Kwaedong.

The *sanjo* is in *Kyemyonjo* throughout and has only two movements, in *Salp'uri* and *Chajinmori*. The drummer strikes the right hand skin with the stick at the center and not, as elsewhere, on the periphery.

4. SAE T'ARYONG, the Bird Song, song with accompaniment (*pyongch'ang*), sung by Sin Kwaedong, who also plays *komungo*, *changgo* accompaniment by Han Ilsup.

This is a soldier's complaint, from the *Chokpyok-ka* (song of the Battle of *Ch'ih-pi* (Kor. pron. *Chokpyok*). The battle of *Ch'ih-pi* is an incident in the Chinese novel "Annals of the Three Kingdoms" (*San-kuo-chi*), which has been the subject of repeated songs and stories in Korea, where the original Chinese novel remains a favorite. The historical events underlying the story took place in A.D. 208. These notes and the following translation were kindly made possible by Father Richard Rutt, now Anglican Bishop of Taejon, S. Korea.

THE BIRD SONG

The mountains are rugged and trees are thick. When the snow is piled in ten thousand ravines and the wind blows upon a thousand peaks, when the parrots and the mandarin ducks are not to be seen and there are no fruits on the trees, why are the birds yet calling? The warriors who died in battle before the Red Cliff (*Ch'ih-pi*) have turned into ghost birds and now are calling, blaming the Prime Minister Ts'ao. On every branch and every twig they mourn the souls of the fallen soldiers for whom there has been no chance in many years to return to their homesteads and their families. The sadly hooting cuckoo mourns the failure of the rations and the plundering of the land. "*Sot'aeng, sot'aeng*", the famine-bird cries: "A million soldiers in their pride, and how were they defeated here today?" "*Pik-pik-chuk, pik-pik-chuk*" the *pitchuk*-bird is the self-styled hero with no place to rest, for all his clever ruses he fell into the enemy's trap. The oriole cries: "*Sururuk*", the oriole cries: "*Sururuk*", hates the plain and goes deep into the hills. "*Kiakkaok*", caws the crow: "Pity, pity. The generals and the soldiers all will starve in the cold." "The *suk-kuk*-bird calls: "*Suk-kuk*". The weapons are good. Chicago Liao took up a bow, but there were no arrows. Weep not, they are on their way." "*Sururuk*", the ruddy kingfisher, hovering high in the heavens calls: "Shall I stop the South East Wind? The windshield has fluttered off its grille, but I'll help you, grenadier, so don't despair."* "*Nogojiri, nogojiri*", the lark: "Hwang Kai in his cowardice has put on again the red robe he had disgarded. When the laughter was finished the terrified generals and soldiers saw the ambush and fled in disorder." Fluttering hither, fluttering thither, all the

time talking, the chattering wagtail is the general of the defeated grenadiers of the *Ch'ih-pi* battle. He has laid aside his golden armor, struck by arrows, pierced by spears, exhausted by cold and hunger, his spear broken, his arrows snapped, his warhelm buckled and slid over one eye, and now he goes crying for his home and hearth.

*Don't despair" — the kingfisher is still addressing the grenadier who needs a windshield to ignite his fire-missile.

INTRODUCTION TO TRACKS 5-7

Two kinds of song are given on this side of the record, *P'ansori*, which means Minstrels' Song, and *Minyo*, Folk-Song. Each province has its own distinct *minyo*. *P'ansori* is said to have evolved from Shaman rites (I propose in another album to give examples of present-day Shaman rites and of more *minyo* from other districts) but later developed into the art of story-telling, sometime in the middle of the Yi Dynasty (1392-1910); towards the end of this period, it was turned into musical drama (*chang-kuk-jo*) on the model of modern Chinese opera. Fortunately, a few traditional *kisaeng* have retained the older form, with a single drum accompanying a single singer, and so it is given here. From a repertory of twelve stories the number was reduced to six during the nineteenth century and finally reduced to five stories at present to be heard. A performance of *p'ansori* is normally preceded by a short piece (*tanga*) but space does not allow the inclusion of an example here.

Coming now to *minyo*, rather than give a medley of several different provinces, I thought it better to give a few representative songs from two single areas. Korean folk-songs are divided into two categories, according to whether the singer is seated (*chwajang*) or standing (*ipchang*), in which case the accompanying *changgo* is carried by the singer over the shoulder. All the songs recorded here were done in the seated position, but this may have been a matter of convenience, since what was originally a village to village affair with wandering singers (though in fact the *p'ansori* singers always stand, holding a fan in their right hand), has now become domesticated and refined.

Especially characteristic of the *Sodo Minyo* (North-Western) are the regional variations of *Nanbong-ka* which means "a dissolute man", and it seems that all these songs express the anguish of a woman whose lover is unfaithful. Characteristic of the *Kyonggi Minyo* (Central) are the variations of *Arirang* songs. *Arirang* is a refrain of the 'falala' type and countless theories have been advanced to explain their origin. One prevalent theory is that it has something to do with the forced labor that took a husband away from his wife (in order to repair royal palaces — one theory takes this back to the building of the Great Wall of China!), others suggest that it was lament of a woman abandoned by her lover, another that it was the name of a popular Princess of ancient time, and others that it became an expression of the misery caused by the Japanese occupation in the early years of this century, with words suitably altered. In every case, whichever the province, since

originally these songs used to be sung by wandering musicians where the words were often spontaneously made up, a refrain in which all could join in was a necessity, and this remains.

Apart from these two special classes of song, there are songs of Shamanist and Buddhist origin, some that are occupational, and in the case of *Kyonggi Minyo*, songs that have their origin in classical forms.

5. P'ANSORI, CH'UN-HYANG-KA, Song of Spring Fragrance, sung by Mme. Pak Chowol, *puk* (barrel-drum) accompaniment by Han Il-sup.

In the town of Namwon, a young student, Li Mongnyong, whose father was the local magistrate, fell in love with a beautiful girl called Ch'unhyang. Her mother Wolmae, a retired *kisaeng*, was determined that her daughter should not exercise this sometimes shaming profession; and as naturally the boy's family would not hear of his marrying into such a *milieu*, and two were married secretly. The boy then went to Seoul to complete his studies, not returning for years until he had passed his State examinations. He then returned to Namwon as a secret Government Inspector and called at Wolmae's house disguised as a beggar. In this short excerpt, the mother is lamenting her own and her daughter's lot (because of the long absence of Li Mongnyong) when the "beggar" knocks at the door and after a time is recognized. Some Koreans see in this story a protest against the evils of feudalism and social injustice.

Mme. Pak Chowol, in spite of her advancing years and husky voice, is nevertheless considered to be one of the most gifted of *p'ansori* singers, with great dramatic powers. The accompanying *puk* is a large barrel-drum struck with the hand on the left side and with a stick on the right.

2. SODO MINYO, NORTH WESTERN FOLK-SONG, a group of four typical songs, sung by Mme. Li Chungyol, *changgo* accompaniment by Li Changbae.

The characteristic of *Sodo Minyo* is sadness. This is expressed by the constant *tremolo* in the singing.

a. KINARI, sung by women while gathering sea-shells, is in a free *tempo* and unaccompanied. The words are:
"Catch shell-fish to make a relish
And hold the parting one to dip him in my affection".

b. CHAJINARI, a farmer's song, sung when working in the fields, known also as Kamnaegi (ploughing song).

It is in three stanzas, in the form of a love-song, where the girl, anxiously awaiting her absent lover, says: “Why don’t you stay sleeping in the fields, instead of bothering to come?” The absent boy is made to reply “I came to your house and found all the doors closed. If you are going to sleep a ‘butterfly-nap’ (like a baby lying on its back with its arms stretched out), why ask me to come?” Upon which the girl expresses her distress, saying, “Even the wind cheats me – this and other sounds made me think he had come.” This song also has no fixed rhythm.

c. SUSIM-KA, Song of Heartbreaking Sorrow, also in a free rhythm. The author is said to have Puyong, a famous *kisaeng* of the 17th century, and it is a lament of the transience of human life.

“Let’s be merry while we are young,
Let’s be merry as much as we like.
When we become old and the hair turns grey,
We shall enjoy our lives no more.”

d. CHAJIN NANBONGG-KA, Song of a Dissolute Man, in which Mme. Kim Oksim joins in the refrain. The rhythm is *kutkori changdan* (12/8).

3. KYONGGI MINYO, CENTRAL PROVINCE FOLK-SONG, a group of four typical songs, sung by Mme. Kim Oksim, *tanso* (small notched flute) and *changgo* accompaniment by Li Changpae and Mme. Li Chungyol.

The characteristic of *Kyonggi Minyo* is its lightness, though no Korean folk-song is ever without underlying sadness.

a. NORAE KARAK “Jade Green Stream, you should not boast,” one of several songs in the classical style, borrowing their words from *sijo* (lyric poetry, see my album on Korean Court Music), whose metrical pattern is 5-8-8-5-8. These songs started life as parts of a Shaman ritual, but gradually became changed either into drinking songs or else ordinary folksongs. This one presumably is a drinking song.

b. AIRIRANG, in the rhythm *Semachiil Changdan* (3/4).

A lady musicologist from a well-known North American university who heard this tune thought it was too good to be true and that it showed, because of the $\frac{3}{4}$ rhythm, the influence of Western missionaries. In case any other learned musicologists have the same idea, let me tell them at once they are wrong. This rhythm is very prevalent in Korean folk-song and I have several other examples from a remote province where no missionary has ever put his nose.

“He is leaving me, he is going.
 Before he has gone ten *li*, his feet will be sore.
 Arirang, arirang, Arirang, going over the hill.
 Many the starts in the blue sky above,
 Oh, many the cares that burden my heart.
 Arirang, etc.
 Let’s go, let’s go, let’s get on the way.
 The sun is sinking on Paektusan’s brow.
 Arirang.....etc.”
 (Paektusan is the White-headed Mountain of North Korea, sacred as the birthplace of the nation).

c. IBYOLKA, Farewell Song, accompanied only by a *tanso*, in a free rhythm.

“Peony Peak may crumble, the Taedong River run dry,
 But the love that is between us shall never fade away.
 Push out the boat, push out the boat!
 Over the myriad emerald waves, push out the boat!
 Now we must part, now we must part;
 I and my beloved, now we must part!

d. CHONGSON ARIRANG. *Chongson* is a town in the mountains of Kangwon Province.

1. In Kangwon province, in the Diamond Mountains’ twelve thousand peaks, where the right reed huts and nine hermitages are, behind the Hall of the Law in the Temple of the Elm-tree Mountain, they meet at the shrine of the Seven Stars (of the Great Bear) and beg for sons and daughters not provided for in their horoscopes. Remark the devotion of the one who prayed for a hundred days, and despite not the lonely among the visitors from afar.

Arirang, arirang, arario; arirang, take me over the hill.

2. Up the steep rocky slopes of T’aesan, forcing a path through the thistles that are enmeshed in the creeping vines, turning back through the valleys where the streamlets meander, not more than a thousand *li* I struggled, out of breath and panting, to seek you; but even if I saw you I’d turn my eyes as though I saw you not, and pass by without stopping to speak.

Arirang, etc.

3. Naively longing to see my beloved, and not daring to forget him, at least I'll see him, at least I'll see him if I sleep and dream; but the moon shines bright and the lamp burns dim, and sleep is hard to come by. I face the lamp along, I toss and turn and cannot sleep, try as I will, asleep will not come. How can I still this seething heart?

Ariing, etc.

TRACKS:

1. Komungo (Zither) Sango (5:42)
2. Ajaeng (Bowed Zither) Sanjo(7:54)
3. Hojok (Oboe) Sanjo (2:33)
4. The Bird Song (Komungo accompaniment) (6:57)
5. Minstrel's Song, Pansori (2:18)
6. Four North-Western Province Folk Songs (9:18)
7. Four Central Province Folk Songs (11:06)



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PO Box 1977 Old Chelsea Station
New York, NY 10011 Ph: 212 404 8290 Fax: 212 404 8291
email: nick@lyrichord.com Web: www.lyrichord.com

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