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in South Korea**

Hyunseok Kwon

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## Nationalism and the contemporary song genre of *Kugak Kayo* in South Korea

Hyunseok Kwon (SOAS, University of London)

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*Kugak fusion* is a contemporary genre of music combining elements of non-Korean music and traditional Korean music that is designed to appeal to the general public. *Kugak kayo*, a genre of popular song, was its first incarnation, beginning to appear in the mid-1970s. This paper aims to illuminate in a historical context the momentum which allowed *kugak kayo* to emerge.

### Conception

The genre of *kugak kayo* can be said to have its roots in the latter part of the nineteenth century when Western music was first introduced to Korea. The dominant perspective has it that the introduction of Western music came in the form of mission hymns in the initial period during which Protestant missionaries were active (Ahn Choong-shik 2005: 5–18; Chang Sahun 1974: 171–82; Yi Sangman 1976: 339–52; Yi Yusŏn 1985: 33–9). Along with Japanese *shōka* (children's songs; *ch'angga* in Korean), mission hymns had a major influence on the formation of music based on Western structures and ideas in Korea. This influence was exercised within the educational system through a music textbook produced and used within the frame of an education policy based on Japanese practice, which was carried out according to the Chosŏn Education Ordinance during the colonial period, from 1910 to 1945.

The textbook was named the *Pot'ong kyoyuk ch'anggajip* (Collection of *Ch'angga* for Elementary Education) and was issued by the *Taehan cheguk hakpu* (Korean Empire Ministry) in 1910. So, both the Japanese *shōka* and mission hymns formed students' perceptions of music from that time onwards. Furthermore, the musical features of Japanese *shōka* contributed to the formation of *yuhaengga* (literally, songs in fashion), a genre of Westernized songs which began to emerge outside the educational system in the 1920s and developed into *t'ŭrotŭ*, a genre that used the Japanese *yonanuki* C-D-E-G-A pentatonic major scale, were in 2/2 or 2/4 time, and were based on the 'Pyonko' fox-trot rhythm that gave a sense of the

music hopping along (Song 2007: 643).

While the education policy remained in place, since anti-Japanese music and at some points Korean-language music was not allowed in school, traditional Korean music and pieces composed by Korean composers were pushed out of schools (Song 2007: 647). We cannot exclude the possibility that music used during this period ultimately had a great effect on students' perceptions of what 'music' was.

Outside the educational system, under the same influences of Japanese *shōka* and mission hymns, compositions based on Western idioms emerged. These can be further divided into pieces composed by Kim Inshik (1885–1962) and Yi Sangjun (1884–1948), anthem-style songs used within a patriotic movement in opposition to Japanese control, and *yuhaeng ch'angga* sung by the general public. The latter form the predecessor of the aforementioned *yuhaengga*. These three types developed into music for the nation, dividing into *shin minyo* (literally, new folksong), and *yuhaengga*.

### **The 1930s: Formation of *shin minyo* (New folksong)**

*Shin minyo* refers, literally, to new folksongs, and hence, to newly-composed songs. Folksongs were, of course, transmitted before *shin minyo* appeared, while the new genre had named lyricists and composers (Song 2007: 596) such as Yi Hayun (1906–1974, lyricist) and Kim Haesong (composer). Both types have similarities, though, since their lyrics deal with life in Korea. Since Polydor Records first used the term *shin minyo* (Ch'oe 2000: 33) it has been used as a term to indicate this type of music. However, after the mid-1980s, the term *shin minyo* effectively made room for the new term *kugak kayo* (Yi 2000: 78), which Kim Youngdong (b. 1951) contributed to forming, as I will show below.

Given this, what was the motive that led to the creation of *shin minyo*? It can be argued that it was nationalism, in that traditional elements were prohibited strictly within the educational sector, and relevant musicians tried to recover a sense of Korean identity through using nationalistic lyrics and traditional elements. Specifically, the lyrics chosen are based on what these days is called '*pa'tang chōngshin*' ('people's fundamental spirit') (Kim 2000: 90), a term embracing people's emotions during the colonial period. At the same time, as in the new folksong '*Pommaji/Greeting spring*' as well as most poems written in the period, the terms 'winter' and 'spring' were used symbolically – 'winter' to indicate the occupation and 'spring' to mean liberation (Kim 2000: 91). At the same time,

although Western instruments might be used in the accompaniments, traditional folksong elements such as the five-tone scale similar to that of *Kyŏnggi minyo*, the folksongs native to the central region in Korea (Song 2007: 596), and compound rhythms, are crucial, allowing new folksongs to have a feel of the older folksongs.

### **The 1950s – 1960s: Challenges to new folksong**

New folksongs struggled to maintain popularity in the 1950s and 1960s. This can be explained in terms of the perception of music amongst the general public – who had gone through the educational system imposed by Japan, and who had not learnt Korean traditional music, but instead Japanese-style Western forms. Certainly, new folksongs based on traditional music began to become estranged from the general public. A second aspect was the cultural environment, in which Western pop was more fully introduced after 1950, the year that the Korean War broke out. There were three important channels through which Western pop culture was experienced. The first was AFKN, which put out the first AM radio broadcast in Korea; it was intended to encourage American soldiers stationed in Korea but became the medium through which Western pop was introduced to Koreans. The second channel was the so-called *Mip'algun sho* (American Eighth Army Shows), live shows arranged at army camps and clubs nationwide, using many Korean artists to cover American pop. The third channel was local theatres.

By the 1960s, Western pop culture was firmly established. The changes of the 1950s saw the emergence of the major heptatonic scale and harmonic triads appear in Korean pop music, while in the 1960s a genre of 'easy listening' (Yi 1997: 139) emerged, becoming the roots of the so-called 'pop ballads' and what became known as 'folksong' (*p'okŭsong*) in the 1970s and local rock in the 1980s. In this situation, there was little space for the 1930s style of new folksong. Its thread of life was barely maintained by popular musicians, despite the support of the media. We can take as an example the case of the private DBS (Donga Broadcasting Station). Along with the government-run KBS (Korean Broadcasting System), DBS played an active role in promoting music related to Korean traditions, through the DBS campaign of '*Nŭllili*' that aimed to arrange existing folksongs in a new way which potentially could have provided the basis for the development of new folksongs. Developed mainly through the radio programme, '*Nillido hŭnggyŏpkke*' for 18 months beginning in October 1965, this led to arrangements of approximately 1,000 songs (Kim 2005: 137). These include the well-known song '*Kaptoriwa kapsuni*/*Kaptori and Kapsuni*', which derived from '*Ondolyahwa*', a new

folksong composed in the 1930s, and was sung by Kim Serena, a representative figure amongst new singers in the 1960s and 1970s.

### **The 1970s: Mass Cultural Movement and *kugak kayo***

A major turning point came. Politically, the Park Chung Hee authoritarian regime provided a stimulus for the formation of a counter-culture amongst young people. The regime of Rhee Syngmann had collapsed with the April Revolution in 1960 – a nationwide popular uprising – and the Second Republic emerged based on a cabinet system. However, a military coup led by Park seized power in May 1961, whereby the Park regime (1963–1979) emerged. In the cultural sector, the so-called ‘Culture of youth’ (*Chǒngnyŏn munhwa*) (Nam 1974) triggered the emergence of an alternative culture. The Culture of Youth were the young people of the 1970s belonging to a post-war generation, a generation born after the Korean War. As political struggles had developed amongst students after the April Revolution, they took a sceptical view of the values of the older generation, seeking their own identity. However, as their culture was often symbolized by blue jeans, draft beer and hippie-like long hair (Hwang 2006: 39) and the acoustic guitar (*t’ong kit’a*), their identity involved receiving Western pop culture as it was.

It was with a mass cultural movement known as the *minjung munhwa undong* and based around university campuses that emerged as both a counter-culture and an alternative culture. In this, the ‘masses’ indicated the general public in so far as they were the ordinary people who were controlled by a ruling class. The movement can be summarized as a movement in which the masses aimed, ultimately, to search for and realize their social identity through traditional folk arts. At first, it emerged in opposition to the regime as a counter-culture based on populism in an original sense – that is, grassroots democracy. However, before it could emerge in that way, a search for identity had to take place. If identity is a sense of belonging to a community, people were suppressed by the authoritarian regime and so needed to awaken a mass identity, hence a sense of belonging to the masses intensified. In the meantime, people needed a mechanism which maintained and realized their identity, and they found it in traditional folk arts, recreated these in new forms to be enjoyed by the masses.

The mass cultural movement was mainly developed by college students and folk clubs, and emerged all over the country. This is observed easily in *madang kŭk*, the initial and most representative example of the movement. ‘*Madang*’ contains various meanings such as an open yard, an occasion, and a place, but here

indicates a meeting place in a traditional sense – a place in a village where the ordinary people once shared their lives through recreation, in a supposedly ‘communal consciousness’. The place, then, did not have a specific boundary separating performers and audience. In this sense, it can be seen as the equivalent of what Victor Turner calls ‘communitas’ (1969: 131). From this, *madang kūk* can be summarized as outdoor dramas developing in a new way but based on traditional folk arts such as *t’alch’um* (masked dance), *p’ungmul* (percussion bands), folksongs, and *p’ansori* (epic storytelling through song). Actors and audience were not divided (Kim 1997: 9), and a call and response was expected. The form derived from a folk drama study club that grew in Seoul National University in 1965 (Kim 1997: 7), and from here it was copied by other college clubs all over the country. The development of *madang kūk* can be seen to have grown outside and within an institutional sector that centred on the Minye Theatre (Yi 2001: 52-53). Outside this, the majority of *madang kūk* functioned as a counter-culture expressing criticism of society and taking on issues of the nation, the countryside, current affairs, and history. Inside institutions, however, artists made a new type of drama in an attempt to combine elements of existing forms with traditional folk arts, beyond the theme of social criticism, and for the stage. This became an alternative way to popularize traditional arts amongst the general public to the more formal attempts of government bodies and agencies.

What interests me is that an alternative culture movement based on nationalism grew from a counter-culture movement based on populism. Although *madang kūk* tended to criticize the authoritarian regime in its initial stages, it was still a new traditional drama based on a communal consciousness. That is, while artistic activities were involved, and although at the time Korean popular culture was being Westernized, *madang kūk* gave the opportunity to think again about the sense of Korean community. As it did so, the general public’s identity emerged and was strengthened, beyond the idea of a counter-culture. At the same time, artists needed mechanisms to realize this identity, which they found in *madang kūk*, developing their artistic expressions in an attempt to make forms which were able to be enjoyed by the general public. This is clear in the music accompanying the drama ‘The Life of Hanne’ (1976) composed by Kim Youngdong, which grew into the form of *kugak kayo* in the 1980s. The drama deals with the tragic life of a woman named Hanne, utilizing elements of traditional folk arts such as traditional story-telling, percussion band music, masked dance drama, and village rituals. Kim was a *taegŭm* flute performer; he studied *taegŭm* at Seoul National University and graduated in 1975. While he was at college he played an active role as a member of

the association 'Handure', part of the mass cultural movement, and began to compose. In 1976, he became associated fully with popular culture, when he received an award for his music at the Korean Drama and Movie Awards for 'Life of Hanne'.

Kim made great efforts to compose easy listening popular songs, using traditional Korean instruments in order to popularize *kugak*. And so it was that *kugak kayo* emerged, latterly through musical exchanges with the ensemble Seulgidung which was established in 1985. Kim explained the background to *kugak kayo* as follows.

In the 1970s, there was no remaining power for popularization of *kugak*. Actually, I thought that popular art was very important. I thought, it would be appropriate for Western instruments to take charge of the accompaniment, and for Korean traditional instruments to be in charge of melodies, and through this it would be great if many people could be given opportunities to listen to the peculiar timbres of traditional instruments. With this in mind, I worked on *kugak kayo*. At the initial stage, I first used compound rhythmic cycles such as *chungmori*, thinking these would be important, and my initial pieces are based, mostly, on such cycles.

## Conclusion

In my introduction, I asked what the momentum was which allowed *kugak kayo* to emerge. Following analysis of the historical context, I can conclude with the comment that it was nationalism, which grew within the frame of *madang kŭk*, a new drama used for a mass cultural movement for an alternative culture. It was ultimately part of the way that musicians came to realize their Korean identity. The nationalism underlying *kugak kayo* in its first iterations helps us understand that the emphasis in composition was more on the use of traditional musical elements rather than on artistic combinations between Western and Korean forces, and that music became a medium for generating a shared Korean identity amongst the general public. In this light, *kugak kayo* can be seen as a popular song genre, having an important meaning that sits beyond the genre just being easy-listening music.

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