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**Songs in the Lives of Three Korean Survivors of the Japanese
“Comfort Women”: Introducing *Hearts of Pine***

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Songs in the Lives of Three Korean Survivors of the Japanese “Comfort Women”: Introducing *Hearts of Pine*

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Introduction

In 2000, while a graduate student in ethnomusicology at the University of Chicago, I read a book of testimonies drawn from among the small number South Korean survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery, the so called “comfort women” system by which between 50 and 200,000 girls and young women from across the Japanese empire were forced to provide sexual services for the Japanese military during the Asia-Pacific War (1930-1945). After the war, few of the surviving Korean women were able to return to their home country, and the few who did were afraid to speak out in South Korea’s Cold War era of authoritarian government, new atrocities and state-sanctioned amnesia about the details of Korea’s colonial past. But rumors circulated about the sex slave system and became a vaporous “public secret.” In the early 1990s, with the gradual democratization of the country, a protest movement began to seek reparations and apology from the Japanese government, and women began to come forward to testify to their experiences. The book I had found (Howard 1995, and english translation of Hanguk Jeongsindae...1993) was one early collection of these testimonies.

As I read, I was surprised to find that almost all of the women sang during testimony or made reference to singing in the sex camps where they were imprisoned. Hoping to discover why, in 2002 I began dissertation research by visiting many of the 130 government-registered and supported survivors who live throughout South Korea. That research eventually led to the book I introduce to you today, published by Oxford University Press: *Hearts of Pine—Songs in the Lives of Three Korean Survivors of the Japanese ‘Comfort Women’* (Pilzer, 2012). I spent most of my time at the House of Sharing, a rest home in the South Korean countryside where nine survivors currently live.¹

At the outset I felt like an odd sort of person to write a book about song in the lives of elderly Korean female survivors of war and sexual violence. As a relatively young, white, man from the American South then studying for a PhD at an elite North American university, I was radically separated from these elderly Korean women survivors of

¹ www.nanum.org.

sexual violence and war by gender, generation, culture, class, and experience. Frankly, I thought the project would be impossible.

But over two years of living in South Korea and now ten years of intermittent fieldwork with the survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery, as I spent time with the three women who feature in this book and many others, my fears lessened somewhat. For one, I had begun to learn about the survivors' archetypalization in public culture, the public cultural cooptation of the women's faces, voices, and wounds to be part of a story of South Korean national victimization and resurgence. The women were, in many ways, silenced by this vigorous and highly nationalized mass-mediation in South Korean public culture. Korean and Euro-American bourgeois altruistic paternalism—the idea that 'we' need to do something for 'pathetic people,' often also makes it difficult to hear the voices of survivors. So I began to feel that our radical disjunctures of experience could be an advantage—as a kind of complete non-identification, a state of what literary theorist Dominick LaCapra (2001) calls "empathetic unsettlement" that compelled me to *listen*.

So from 2002 until the present, the women have been my teachers—of music, but also of life, ethics, love, the social and gendered natures of violence, and so on. During that time I have recorded an anthology of about 400 songs and stories about songs, in many languages, from many different eras of the women's lives. I discovered many reasons why singing had shown up so often in the testimonies: the women were compelled to learn and perform Japanese and Korean songs in the "comfort stations" (see Pilzer, forthcoming); the women were taken all over the Pacific and continental Asia, and remembered songs from these places which they held onto for various reasons; many of the survivors were sold or pressured into the South Korean domestic entertainment industry after the war, where they were expected to sing, serve drinks, and in some cases sell their bodies to American and Korean soldiers and civilians. Perhaps most importantly, as with other elderly Korean women, song was nearly ubiquitous in the survivors' lives because many of them sang as a forum for reckoning with traumatic memory, for forging social selves and making and sustaining social relations. During the long era of public secrecy about Japanese military sexual slavery, survivors had made use of veiled expressive forms such as song to reckon with their experiences and forge social selves without exposing their already opaquely public secrets. The "referential opacity" (Quine 1960) of folk and popular songs—their ambiguity with respect to the relations between performer and composer, performer and subject matter, and (of course) subject matter and the world, enabled this public performance of the secret.

In the 1990s, in the era of the gradual democratization of South Korea, the women began to speak. They became part of a political movement to win justice for themselves vis-a-vis the Japanese government, and to rid the world of sexual violence, exploitation and slavery in all their forms. But they are still singing, learning songs, making songs, to console themselves and enjoy themselves, to forge relationships with each other and feel part of social world. After years of isolation and ostracization, they sing to bind themselves in a community of survivors which has coalesced since the

movement began, which is a critical part of their efforts to come to terms with their pasts and to become full-fledged members of South Korean society. And they sing as they assume prominent roles in the movement, as they stand before the media and South Korean public culture, trying to both remain themselves and carry the weight of the powerful symbolic roles given to them. They sing against the single, rarified mask of the victim that threatens to subsume them all, despite the efforts of activists and others, as they are assimilated to the pantheon of post-war victim archetypes that feed South Korean nationalism. They cling to songs like talismans of their unique identities and experiences. And, in the face of governments and other entities that would pretend that Japanese military sexual slavery is a fabrication or a past, “historical” issue, they sing to remind the world that they are alive, and that the crime of military sexual slavery by the Japanese imperial government is real and goes unpunished. So in the era of the movement, the new normative constraints of this role provided the women with many reasons to keep singing, expressing taboo sentiments and continuing the work of self-making behind the veils of song and in the glare of the national spotlight.

In this essay, I introduce the three survivors who form the core of the book in order to describe some of these myriad uses of song. First, I consider song as a means of survival and self-making in the wake of traumatic experience, in efforts to understand those experiences, reconstruct selves and forge connections with Korean society. Secondly, I discuss the place of the women’s songs in public culture. Thirdly, I discuss the way that women use songs to project beyond the identities as victims, survivors, and activists that the South Korean public sphere overwhelmingly has expected of them. In this inquiry we discover neglected histories of musical composition and performance that are also histories of reckoning and overcoming, which speak to the general significance of song in post-colonial Korea. These histories, which the women have meticulously constructed over the course of their post-war lives, are illustrations of the human consequences of traumatic experience; and hence they ask us to rewrite the history of the “comfort women” from the perspective of the victims, rather than the perspective of nationalist or any other historiography; at the same time, they ask us to rewrite the history of Korean music as a history, not of genres or ‘culture,’ but of people and their musical resourcefulness in the face of modern life. And so my larger goal here is to demonstrate how much can be gained from a sociomusicological approach—one that focuses on the unfolding of music as within a larger array of social practices—to song and music in Korean life.

1. Mun Pilgi, song, and traumatic experience

Mun Pilgi was born in 1925, to a poor family in Southeastern Korea, like the majority of Korean survivors. She worked in the fields, at the spinning wheel and the loom from the age of eight.² She wanted to go to school, but her father forbid it, and so she never

² Biographical data was assembled by cross-referencing a published transcription of Mun Pilgi’s testimony (Han’guk jeongshindae...1993/Howard ed. 1995) with our conversations. The full text of her 1993 testimony can be found in Appendix B of my dissertation.

learned to read or write. In 1943, when she was seventeen, she left home secretly, following a Korean man from her village working in conjunction with the local Japanese police. He promised her an opportunity to study and make money, but instead he sold her into sexual slavery, and she was taken to Changchun, Manchuria. She was forced to serve around ten soldiers a day on weekdays and between forty and fifty a day on weekends. She was beaten and cut when she resisted.

Two years later, the war ended. Soviet troops, rifles drawn, stormed the sex camp and tried to rape the women. Mun Pilgi escaped and jumped a train to the Yalu River, on the Chinese-Korean border. From there she walked, for several hundred miles through the mountains of Northern Korea, until she finally reached Seoul. At Seoul Station she caught a train to her hometown in the Southeast.

When she returned home, her mother tried to marry her off, but she had developed an aversion to men and she refused. She left home and wandered alone; as was the case for many other survivors, she found herself working in drinking houses, where she continued to be molested by men. In the drinking houses she sang and danced with male clients, learning much of the vast repertoire of Korean ballads that was part of her expressive universe. She told only a few select friends of her experiences as a “comfort woman.”

Mun Pilgi lived alone for many years, periodically tormented by a recurring nightmare of sexual assault in the “comfort station”; so in the late 1970s she brought her sister’s grandchild home to raise as her own. In the early 1990s, she registered with the state as a survivor of Japanese military sexual slavery, and moved into a new apartment with support from a South Korean government fund for survivors. When her adopted grandson left for the army, she was alone again, aside from the occasional neighbor, reporter, activist or volunteer visitor. Once a week, she went out to the weekly Wednesday protest in front of Seoul’s Japanese embassy, where she and other women have now been going every week for fifteen years; and she participated in the activities of the movement, going abroad—to Japan and North Korea—to testify, and going on vacations sponsored by the movement. Her life thus oscillated between the movement’s spotlight and the relative isolation of her apartment.

About six months after we first met at a protest, I and a few friends went out to Mun Pilgi’s home for the first time. Her apartment was an upper floor studio in a giant complex of identical hi-rise buildings, which are common in Seoul and throughout South Korea. Her door was flanked by *onggi* clay pots that stored *kimchi*, soybean paste, soy sauce and other essentials. She greeted us and we squeezed through the door carrying machines and gifts into her one little room, settling on the warm *ondol* radiant-heat floor.

As we chatted about her apartment and her life there, Mun Pilgi laboriously put a tape into a small portable radio-cassette player. The tape was of Tae Jina, a Korean pop singer who debuted in the 1970s and was famous for “Salangeun amuna hana” (Love Isn’t for Everyone, 2000), which Mun Pilgi had been memorizing recently.

A prior visitor had put a large green sticker on the play button of the boom box and a red one on the stop button to give Mun Pilgi, who was farsighted, large visual cues about how to operate it. We listened through to the end of one side; she turned the tape over and pressed play. Engrossed in a story about her parents, she didn't turn the tape over when it ended. Pausing and acknowledging the quiet, Mun Pilgi began to speak about loneliness, and we all fell together into silence; the only prominent sound was the low hum of the refrigerator.

Mun Pilgi: I'm...every day...
a lonely soul, a lonely soul.
(pause)
It's so quiet here!
(Amy and I: inexplicable laughter)
It's quiet, right?
'Cause I've got nowhere to go-

Josh: Don't you like the quiet?

Mun Pilgi: No, I don't like it-
and so I turn on the TV, or I turn on the radio,
gung, gung, gung...

I'm so lonely,
so I turn on the TV, or turn on the radio,
gung-jjak, gung-jjak...
that's how I live,
'cause I'm lonely—
I'm bored, you know."

In her narrative Mun Pilgi described the generative process by which her social world took shape out of the quiet in her everyday life. Cassette music and television were her windows onto the social world, and she organized their sights, sounds, and songs into a social being that was a foil to her loneliness.

She spoke her line about the television and the cassette player twice, elaborating it the second time. Each time she mimicked the sound of rhythmic music issuing from the boom box, but she progressively elaborated the rhythm. A simple "*gung, gung, gung*" became "*gung-jjak, gung-jjak,*" rhythmic vocables similar to an onomatopoeic name of her beloved genre *teuroteu*, which was also called *bbongjjak*. These rhythmic mnemonics were a popular means, together with clapping, by which *teuroteu* devotees vocalized instrumental accompaniment while singing or listening to others; they also often appear in recorded song.³ They evidence a cross-pollination of music and language in the genre, which has many uses that I discuss throughout the book.

³ "Da hampge chachacha" (Everybody Cha-cha-cha), "Cha-cha-cha Rock & Roll," etc.

But now I want to focus rather on how Mun Pilgi uses the onomatopoeia in the genre to make music out of *quiet*. Quiet, of course, can be many things: it can be a condition of peace; or a state of terror; it can be a figure of nothingness or a *tabula rasa* on which memories are inscribed, and so on. Mun Pilgi told me that her quiet was not a state of repose, but a state of loneliness and trauma, in which she repeatedly dreamed of the sexual violence she suffered during the war. The quiet brought with it a kind of social silence, a state in which she had no agency.

There was much, then, at stake in the transition from silence to music. So when the quiet gave way to a simple sound, “*kkong...*,” and it became a pulse, “*kkung, bbong, bbong,*” it became a new regime of time, a heartbeat, a humanization of experience. This then became the *kkunjjak kkungjjak* rhythmic accompaniment of a song. That song—“Cry, Guitar String,” “One Night’s Puppy Love,” “Anyway, the One Who Left,” “Tears of the Faithless Child” or any of her other favorites—was an occasion for her to perform her social competence; and it channeled different kinds of togetherness—the togetherness of fandom, group performance, and so on. It was the medium in which Mun Pilgi could form and perform a whole array of social relationships, and mold South Korean sociality to her purposes as it molded her to itself. She set this social network against her recurring nightmares.

One day, on a sightseeing excursion organized by the movement, we rode together on a bus with a large number of survivors. As the women passed the mic and sang songs in turn, Mun Pilgi clapped and vocalized. Here, together with many other women, she accompanies Yi Yongsu, who sang 1989’s “A Person Like the Wind.” The rhythmic vocalization allowed Mun Pilgi and other women access to a number of different social solidarities—the fandom of Korean balladry, a community of women critical of men and male power, and a community of survivors reckoning together with similar aspects of their experiences.

2. Pak Duri and the Public Life of Survivors’ Song

In the 1990s the women became celebrities of the movement and focusing symbols for South Korean nationalist ideologies of woundedness (or wounded attachment, to borrow a phrase from feminist theorist Wendy Brown[1995])—wounded nationalism is another way of putting it, to borrow a phrase from Han Hongkoo (1999) and Maria Chang (2001). The evolving, archetypal “comfort woman grandmother,” as she is often called, has an evolving, generic story. Public culture and media circulate these archetypes via canonical and generic images and edited and published testimonies. Through the 1990 and most of the 2000s the archetypal comfort woman grandmother was broken—her innocence and sexuality and social power had all been destroyed by colonial violence, and any power she had stemmed from the immutable energy of the “Korean spirit” and its *han*. She was rendered as an extreme example of Korea’s colonial victimization by Japan, her body identified with the national body (as Partha Chatterjee points out is so common for the figure of woman in post colonial places). As her pain

became a generic post-colonial one, her pain is presented as shareable, and it is distributed via the channels of modern South Korean sharing culture.

The advantage of this is that many of the survivors feel themselves validated and a part of a South Korean public culture that had long shunned them. But at the same time, the particularity of each woman's experience—the textures of traumatic experience that trauma theorists and therapists hold must be acknowledged and digested for the process of traumatic recovery to take place—are sacrificed to the generic story. The movement on behalf of the women has gone to great efforts in recent years to transform and pluralize this archetypal image of the "comfort woman grandmother," but it still holds tremendous sway.

The pressures of the public sphere have dramatic consequences for the women's expressive lives as well, including their singing practices, all of which impacts the women's work of recovery and self-making. I turn now to a discussion of Pak Duri, an energetic activist survivor whose singing—in public and private—differed dramatically from her public life as an expert witness to the experience of Japanese military sexual slavery.

Pak Duri was born in 1924 near Miryang, in the Southeast,⁴ into a relatively prosperous carpenter's family; but her father and her uncle womanized and squandered the family's estate, and the family grew destitute. So she left in 1940, at sixteen, when a group of Japanese and Korean men came to her village recruiting young girls to work in factories in Japan.

But rather than sending her to Japan as promised, the men took her to Busan and put her on a boat to Taiwan, where she was forced into sexual slavery for the Japanese military. She lived in this place for just under five years. She was beaten often by the "comfort station" staff and unable to leave without military escort.

When the war ended in 1945 the proprietor left Pak Duri and the other women in the "comfort station" alone. Allied troops arrived, and assuming the place to be a brothel, they kept operating it for about three months, before sending the women home. Pak Duri came back in 1945 and became the second wife of a polygamous farmer, who later took a young concubine as well. She gave birth to one son and three daughters; two of the daughters died of diseases as children. She told no one about her experience of Japanese military sexual slavery.

Her husband died in 1975, and the family was left with no income. So Pak Duri moved to Busan, where she sold vegetables and fruit in an open-air market. Her son died at thirty years of age when he suffocated accidentally on coal fumes, used to heat houses; and she was left with only her youngest daughter. In 1992, alone and unable to

⁴ The following biographical account is summarized from Pak Duri's edited testimony *Han'guk jeongshindae yeon'guhoe* and *Han'guk jeongshindae munje daechaek hyo'muihoe* 1997 (pp. 31-42), which I have translated and included in this dissertation as Appendix B.

survive on her earnings from the market, she moved to the House of Sharing, then in Seoul, and she lived there until her death in 2006.

Pak Duri lived a life from start to finish of violence, death, and suffering, and she cultivated an extreme personality in defense of herself and her loved ones. She protected her own with tactical brilliance and ferocity, and she oscillated between bitter sorrow and fantastic joy. Unsurprisingly, Pak Duri was drawn to the love and cruelty of Korean folk song. Before her hearing failed in 2003, she would sing and dance whenever given a forum. She was a composer and improviser of folk song, making up songs on the spot and cultivating, over the long decades of the post-war, her many renditions of the “Ballad of the Entertainer” (Changbu taryeong, a Central Korean folksong popular in the Southeast). One, from a documentary about the House of Sharing by alternative filmmaker Byeon Yeongju, filmed in 1996, demonstrates Pak Duri’s dramatic and sexually explicit tactics of reckoning and self-making:⁵

*Load up some water
Bring it to the house on fire
Load up some widowers,
And spread them around the House of Sharing*

If one truck is too much,
we’ll share them around, OK?

Byeon Yeongju (film director): Mm.

*Oh time and tide, as you go on by,
You should go back alone.
Why did you take with you
The regretful, pitiful spring of Pak Duri’s youth?*

My heart is still fifteen years old...but somehow I’m 73—what happened!?!

Byun Yeongju: You say your heart’s still fifteen?

Pak Duri: My heart, here inside of me, is still as it was at fourteen, so how have I ever come to be seventy-three? Why did I grow old like this? What for does my age keep rising?

*Hey dog, dog, you black dog,
You blurry, fuzzy, shaggy dog
When I scraped that leftover rice for you
Do you think I gave it to you because I was full?
In the midnight my extra lover is coming, you know...
So I fed you to shut you up.*

⁵ The scene is a small drinking party that the young film crew and a staff member of the House of Sharing have put on for her. In between verses, Pak Duri keeps up a running spoken commentary on their meaning.

Isn't that right?

Byun Yeongju: That's right.

Scholars and clinicians have long known that the articulation of sexuality is a critical part of the process of recovering from the traumas of sexual violence (see Choi 2001: 403, Herman 1992). Reckoning with the subject of sex, a survivor of sexual violence lays claim to her body, which had been rendered as an object, and has become the locus of trauma; this process is necessary for imagining the self as subject, and for incorporating one's experience of sexual violence and one's body into a coherent sense of self. Pak Duri's sex jokes were such a project of reclamation, in which she turned a lifetime of suffering at the hands of men upside down. Pak Duri became a perpetrator, ordering a truckload of men, and meeting other men while her husband slept. But her audience's laughter at the impersonation of male dominance signaled and affirmed a kind of community—here a community of female listenership, and elsewhere a community in which male listeners such as myself were cut down by her magnanimous sexuality.

The three verses move in a dialectical pattern that we find throughout Pak Duri's songs. Verse one is a joke about life and sexual union; verse two is a realization of and a complaint about the cruelty of life's transience; and verse three returns to the theme of sexual union, transforming the sorrow of the realization into collective laughter. So in proper dialectical fashion, life (the joke in verse one) is negated by death (the lament of verse two), and (in the last verse) life's cruelty and the fear of death are negated by sexual pleasure and laughter. For Pak Duri, then, the reclamation of sexuality was a labor of overcoming traumatic experience, reimagining a coherent self, and imagining a coherent vision of life unafraid of its end. That coherent self was a conglomerate of a borrowed masculine subjectivity and the pleasure and humor of parody and impersonation (Butler). She shared all of this with her select cohort. She also brought this competence out into the sphere of testimony and political activism.

Paradoxically, however, public culture expected her and other survivors to be competent speakers precisely in order to give voice to brokenness. Pak Duri thus lived a double life, pulled between poles of an intimate sphere of tears, laughter, and ongoing healing, and a public sphere of the competent performance of brokenness. Her spoken expressions of suffering in the context of the movement contrasted dramatically with the humorous and ribald transformations of suffering found in her song play. Wounded nationalism insisted on the persistence and the preservation of the wound and asked for infinite encores of the performance of suffering. The song world persisted as a social space in which healing was a possible goal, which the pressures of public cultural life continued to inspire.

The following example illustrates the myriad ways that the ribald nature of Pak Duri's song world were kept paradoxically both in and out of the public eye, while allowing the competence she cultivated in song to be harnessed to her political activity. In *The Murmuring* (1995), the first film of Byun Young-joo's documentary trilogy, Son Panim, a fellow survivor, is trying to get Pak Duri to go to a protest event. Pak Duri says

she won't go if she doesn't have to, because she is not confident in her speaking ability. Son Panim tries to cajole her into going by quoting her familiar verse from the "Ballad of the Traveling Entertainer," and another woman steps in to enforce the line between Pak Duri's two worlds:

- Son Panim: Big sister, you go there
 and then do something like this.
 "Water, water, load up some water
 Take it to Pak Duri's room" . . .
 What was that...
 "Take it to a place that's caught on fire. . . ."
- Pak Duri: What're you telling me to do? Over there...
- Son Panim: Hahahaha.
- Pak Duri: What, over there . . . you tellin' me to go there?
- Son Panim: "Load up a truck of widowers, and
 bring them to Pak Duri's room!"
 That, that's what I mean.
- Kim Sundeok: All these things you're saying
 come out here [in the movie].
 They all come out, these things you're saying...
- Son Panim: So what if I say that?

The English subtitles of the scene provide a further layer of intimate insulation that allows the scene to pass unnoticed:

- Son Panim: I want you to go.
 Get the compensation money.
 You take the money
 back to your room . . .
 "take it somewhere
 or share with the needy.
- Pak Duri: What for?
- Son Panim: Load the money in
 a car and take it back.
- Kim Sundeok: Stop the nonsense.
 This is filmed.
- Son Panim: I don't care.

Pak Duri went to the protest, and spoke eloquently—with controlled hot and cold expression of immense sorrow and suffering. She was the image of competent brokenness, so much so that her face adorned the home page of the largest South Korean activist organization until just this year. In recent years there are plentiful signs

that the movement, at least, is changing its orientation towards survivors, acknowledging their strength and wisdom in ways that were hard to come by several years ago, and generally 'brightening' the movement priorities. This represents, in part, a larger reorientation of the South Korean public sphere to its past. Unfortunately, Pak Duri's song world never saw the full light of public cultural recognition, and her roadmap through the darkness only remains in the traces of it she left behind. Perhaps, though, the fact that through mechanisms such as those I have just discussed it retained an undiluted intimacy in its public life—in her performances, in documentary films, on television, and so on—was one reason why Pak Duri found so much solace, expressive freedom, and joy in song.

Bae Chunhui and Sociality Beyond Culture

Although survivors certainly sing as a means of reckoning with traumatic experience and negotiating public expectations, they generally have alternate identities and other life concerns beyond their public roles as victims and survivors, and they may engage with music and other arts in ways they feel have gone beyond or have nothing to do with their traumatic experiences. They may consider themselves to be singers, musicians, actors, storytellers, orators and so on; and so the study of the survivors' songs should investigate the ways in which survivors' identities, social lives, moments and experiences exceed their traumatic experiences and may outlive their identities as "victims," "survivors," and so on. This perspective is essential if we are to grasp the full significance of the songs, but also if we are to truly grasp the character of survivors' experiences; furthermore, if we are to have any hope of seeing beyond Korea's twentieth century traumas, we might be wise to look to those survivors who have spent a lifetime doing just that.

One such woman who lives simultaneously with and beyond trauma is Bae Chunhui. She grew up in Southeastern Korea. She spent four years as a sexual slave in Manchuria. After the war she remained in Northeast Asia, working and singing in restaurants through the Soviet occupation of Manchuria and the rise of the Chinese communist state. She relocated to Japan in 1951 and sang spent several decades as a professional singer in the booming post-war cabaret scene. She dressed in Korean costume, played the *changgo* hourglass drum, and sang Korean and Japanese folk and popular songs in two shows a day to entertain the postwar Japanese business classes. In 1981 she fell ill and was visited by the Buddha in a dream. He told her to return to Korea, and she went back that year, after thirty years in Japan. She moved into the House of Sharing in 1996.

Bae Chunhui sings and speaks in Korean, Mandarin, Russian, and Japanese, and is every bit the consummate cosmopolitan professional that you might expect her to be. Her cosmopolitan professionalism had been a technique of survival, as a collection of competencies that kept her employed as a professional singer. It is also her badge of

sophistication and distinction⁶; and it was a means of expressing her sense of foreignness wherever she went. It was also, critically, a technique of reconciling different aspects of her experience and her self to a coherent identity and a vision of the world. She had made a lifetime of violent international experience into a rich cosmopolitanism with music at its center. In this gesture, she also transformed her self from a victim and a survivor to a professional singer—a diva, actually.

The songs were Japanese, Chinese, Russian, North and South Korean popular songs, children's songs, film songs, revolutionary songs, courtesan songs, folk songs, and a host of other melodies—Turkish, American, and so on—that had made their way into Japanese and Korean popular culture. In all I recorded around 250 of her songs, but have since heard many more. Drawing from this vast repertoire of pieces, she strung together songs, like beads on a necklace, into epic medleys. Ten songs about rivers. Six songs about gangsters. Folksongs of the world. Songs about cities. Songs from Japanese-occupied China.

Most importantly, Bae Chunhui rendered the magical world as a sociality at the song parties, where she brought disparate cultural elements, songs, stories, and most importantly people into spheres of shared understanding and enjoyment. It was October of 2002 and we were having a party for Mario the Japanese photographer, who had been visiting the House for two weeks and was returning to Japan, with plans to return to the House of Sharing as a staff member in January of the coming year. Bae Chunhui was singing a medley of Korean folksongs, following on a Northwest Korean folk song that I sang, with her drum accompaniment. She sang each of the songs in Korean and then translated parts of the lyrics for Mario, narrating Korean traditional culture to her Japanese guest and to me. She then moved to Japanese folk songs, and translated the lyrics for the Korean staff, the museum director and social worker Kim Jeongsuk, whom the women at the House called “our Office Girl.” From there she moved to Korean songs that had been translated into Japanese, and sang, in a long stretch, two verses of a Japanese translation of the popular new folk song (*shinminyo*) “Arirang,” which had been melodically Japanized by lowering the “neutral”⁷ third above the central tone from the source song, giving the melody a minor pentatonicism reminiscent of many Japanese folk songs. She reproduced this modal transformation carefully and accurately.

(Korean) *Arirang, arirang, arariyo*
Crossing over Arirang pass.

⁶ She had developed a view of culture, she told me, that set her apart from the other women in the House. “Everywhere you go there are good people and bad people. People are the same everywhere. Japan too. There’s lots of great people and stuff in Japan. All the other women around here think that Korea is the greatest country in the world, Korea this, Korea that—but I’ve lived in many places, you see. I’m an international person. So I know, y’know?”

⁷ A third that lies between Western major and minor tonalities. In this case, the pitch is about twenty cents (1/10 tone) shy of a Western major third.

(Japanese) *When we're far apart and wish to meet*
I wish the moon would become a mirror

Bae Chunhui emphasized that the basic ideas of Korean and Japanese versions of “Arirang” “are all the same.” The museum director marveled at the beauty of the Japanese lyric. The song spoke of two lovers separated by a tremendous distance, but it united a (Japanized) Korean melody and a Japanese lyric to express this longing. To me, the song thus acted like a mirror, and longed to realize the union it accomplished in its privileged domain. In the original colonial version this song was sung as if by a Korean woman singing to a Japanese man, and the longing for union that willed the moon to be a mirror was a fantasy of colonial domination and empire. But Bae Chunhui utterly transformed the song’s mirror beyond its structures of domination. She transformed it into a dialectical process of friendship beyond culture. The whole course of her long performance had a mirror form to it, as she went back and forth between Korean and Japanese, resolving in Japanese versions of Korean songs. The Korean folk songs were the Japanese participant’s moment of unknowing, uncertainty, an encounter with the Korean other that was not in itself intelligible. The Japanese folk songs were the same moment for the Koreans who were listening. Then the last section of Korean folk and popular songs in Japanese achieved a dialectical resolution of the two cultures in the present moment, in a moment of amazement, amazing not because of the songs themselves but because of the harmonization of selves and others the songs wrought in this moment of play. Of course, much of the amazement focused on Bae Chunhui, who made all this possible. On this, and countless other such evenings, the world-creation that Bae Chunhui was constantly involved with hence had a palpable social reality, in this temporary union of her international cohort. She connected the participants in the drinking party and their material culture together like a mirror that made it possible for them to see something of each other.

In the everyday context of the House of Sharing and the movement, the Japanese, Chinese, and Russian songs were in part means by which Bae Chunhui expressed her sense of foreignness at the House of Sharing and in South Korea; but in the context of these international song parties, these songs were part of a multicolored social world, in which their surrogate alienness was omnipresent in a faded background. It remained as a quiet reminder that Bae Chunhui and her sociality were at odds with South Korean national identity, some within the “comfort women grandmothers movement,” and many of her contemporaries at the House of Sharing. She was shuffled off to the side as a Japanophile, despite her articulate political opinions—she was highly critical of both the Japanese and South Korean states, and believed firmly, and not particularly quietly, in the importance of a formal Japanese apology to the victims of the “comfort women” system. So at the song parties, Bae Chunhui made herself a home.

This singing and socializing was Bae Chunhui’s work of reckoning with her own experience, and of making a suitably complex identity (which had many uses as we have seen). But the sociality of Bae Chunhui’s music is also the stuff of reconciliation that has evaded Northeast Asia ever since the Asia-Pacific War. It was a roadmap to reconciliation for other survivors of sexual violence and colonial domination, and for

nation states as well. All of the women had such roadmaps; and all of them lived to varying degrees in and out of music because they were to varying degrees unwelcome elsewhere. This was particularly so for Bae Chunhui, because in the same gesture as she cultivated an identity for herself beyond trauma and beyond victimization, she unsettles the comfortable categories of “Korea” Korean identity, history, and music as well. Her musical universe asks us to think beyond what we call “Korea,” Korean culture,” and “Korean music,” and to acknowledge that each of these concepts is born *in* the traumas, circulations, and utopian strivings of modern Korean experience; furthermore, she reminds us that when we invoke “culture” as a social scientific or a political act, we ought to include these processes, their casualties, and the subjectivities that survive them.

Conclusion

Hearts of Pine is about music as a resource for Korean survivors of the comfort women system in their daily lives and in their life histories, and so it is about people and their music, not music and its people. The study of ethnomusicology has often put people, who are the producers of music (in myriad senses) and the conditions of its possibility, second to music, and evolving methods of study devoted to ‘music and its people,’ rather than ‘people and their music.’ As the result of this there are myriad worlds of musical practice in Korean life that have yet to be explored because of the overwhelming concerns in our field with the “traditional,” with professionalism, and with genre. Of course all of these things—genres, traditions, professionals—can and should be studied. But it is in the human origins of music and in the interaction and opposition of genres, of professionalism and amateurism (highly contingent categories of course), of the ‘traditional’ and overlooked vernacular practices, that we discover the utility of music in Korean life. A perspective on music as part of the fabric of everyday Korean life experience also reveals new histories of the everyday, new histories of modern Korean life, which are not otherwise available. And as we rewrite Korean history, we are compelled to revise our ideas about what counts as Korean music as well—‘low’ culture like Mun Pilgi’s *bbongchak* vocalization, threshold genres like Pak Duri’s song-speech genres and the quotation of song in conversation, and international repertoire like Bae Chunhui’s cosmopolitan song universe are all part of the story, as each of them is an example of the human musical struggle to make selves and societies work.

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