

SOAS-AKS
Working Papers in Korean Studies

No. 35

The Importance of Korean *P'ansori* for National Identity

Dorothea Suh

<http://www.soas.ac.uk/japankorea/research/soas-aks-papers/>

The Importance of Korean *P'ansori* for National Identity

Dorothea Suh (Martin-Luther University, Halle-Wittenberg)

© 2012

P'ansori expresses dramatic feelings such as happiness, pain, joy and virtue through music, mimicry, movement and words – it is truly one of a kind. Painting a scene before our eyes, it takes us through a journey of different worlds and makes us experience the stories together. It cannot be compared to any Western art form (Yoo Young-Dae, personal interview, Seoul, June 2011).

Introduction

P'ansori is traditional Korean folk music. Performed by a solo singer accompanied by a drummer on the *puk* barrel drum it can be described as an epic song. *P'ansori* is today a refined art of storytelling using folk tales and fables that have been orally passed from teacher to student over generations. The high national and international honors received illustrate the perceived value of *p'ansori*, such as having been proclaimed Important Intangible Cultural Asset No. 5 in Korea in 1964 and a UNESCO Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of in 2003.

The exact origin of *p'ansori* is still an ongoing debate among scholars, but it can be said with certainty that *p'ansori* arose from the working class, the *sömin*, and became popular when it captured the interest of the upper class, the *yangban*. Patronage from *yangban* led to the popularity of *p'ansori* throughout Korea. It is unique that *p'ansori* ascended from being only played and watched by *sömin* to a highly refined performance art loved by lower and upper classes alike.

The aim of this paper is to give an insight into the wide range of *p'ansori* studies while showing the value and need of further research. My paper will describe the core socio-cultural messages of the surviving five repertoires, namely, *Ch'unhyangga*, *Shimch'öngga*, *Hüngbuga*, *Sugungga* and *Chökpyökka*, then will discuss the possible influence of Indian Buddhist Jataka tales. I will then report on a concert given by members of the Korean National Theatre (the Kungnip ch'anggük tan) on 23 December 2011 in Wuppertal, Germany, a special event staged by Achim Freyer, a German artist and director, and performed both in Korea and in Germany. Finally, in my conclusion, I will explain the title of my paper.

Socio-Cultural Issues

The five surviving repertoires each present different themes and, like a kaleidoscope, respectively display all aspects of Korean identity and character. Character traits, like those of rapacious usurers, chaste lovers, dedicated subjects or patriotic warriors are enlarged to ensure a big impact of the story being delivered on the audience.

Ch'unhyangga shows love, a paragon of virtue, faith and chastity. It displays the ideal vision of how women were perceived in Confucian thought and the despotism of authority. Many novels, movies and TV series have been inspired by the story of Ch'unhyang, which emphasizes the love between a woman born into a low rank and an aristocrat. The journey of Ch'unhyang, who is transformed from being the daughter of a courtesan (*kisaeng*) to an obedient wife, is of great interest. Her torture and hardships are a way for her to repent her sins as a free-spirited woman and justify her social advancement as she becomes the spouse of a nobleman. The woman, as a being able to be influenceabled, and receptive to status and money, endures unspeakable pain while she steadfastly holds to a promise made in love and faith. The love is shown from the viewpoint of a woman, and the story illustrates her firm resolve and the trust she places in her lover, Yi Mongnyong. Further, the display of corrupted power and the restoration of the rightful order through obeying the law is equally important.

Hŭngbuga is a humorous yet deeply touching tale which tells how uncalled greed will be punished harshly; it is the only story where money and inheritance is a direct reason for conflict. Unwavering loyalty towards family, especially siblings and the maintenance of the hierarchical system inside the family even in difficult times are part of Confucianism. The family can be replaced by the government; Confucianism teaches how subjects should love and worship the king in the same manner as they would their parents. The set hierarchy cannot be changed or broken and, instead of aspiring to a higher rank, one should accept one's place in society. Another part of the message of *Hŭngbuga* is that good deeds cannot be forced, and that even after doing a noble deed, one should not expect thanks.

Hŭngbuga has a similarity with *Shimch'ŏngga*, namely, the idea of sacrifice. In *Shimch'ŏngga* it is Shimch'ŏng herself who offers her life to save the eyesight of her father, while in *Hŭngbuga* the sacrifice is a matter of caring for others, particularly the injured swallow, even though Hŭngbu and his family are on the brink of starvation. *Shimch'ŏngga* provides an example of how Confucian ideals and Buddhism connect with each other. The blind father, who raised his daughter through hardship, begging for food and even mother's milk, receives the ultimate sacrifice from his daughter to return her gratitude. The duty of children towards their parents, filial piety up to self-abandonment, provides the main theme and is one of the main principles in Confucian teaching (De Bary and Chaggee 1989). Shimch'ŏng is rescued after having been sacrificed to the water god and reaching the surface safely inside a lotus, which can be seen as having been influenced by Buddhism: the rebirth to a better life, as queen, with the lotus symbolizing divine birth and purity, due to her good deeds in her past life, demonstrates the eternal circle of creation.

Sugungga, the only animal fable among the five extant repertoires, employs more freedom as it explores and interprets the story, as I will show below. Finally,

Chökp'yökka offers the ideal display of the spirit of chivalry, and illustrates how honouring the social code will move the enemy. It displays the qualities of worthy men, with their unwavering will and loyalty towards the king. The portrayal of the rough life of soldiers and their morals in time of war directly intertwines with Chinese chronicles, as the title, translating as 'The Red Cliff' indicates. Also, this repertoire resembles *Sugungga* in its portrayal of obedience and dutifulness. In a rather controversial statement, one informant told me that *Chökp'yökka* could not be sung by women because their understanding of male chivalry and bonding would greatly differ from that of men – who would not have to imagine it at all. *Sugungga*, too, is thought to have been performed for men by men due to its crude language.

The five *p'ansori* show different sides of life but are connected through a single topic: risking one's own life for the benefit of someone else. In *Ch'unhyangga* the heroine endures torture and almost gets beaten to death; in *Shimch'öngga* life is offered as a sacrifice. In *Hüngbuga*, the younger brother almost starves to death due to poverty, while in *Sugungga* a hare is threatened with the loss of his life-maintaining liver and *Chökp'yökka* is about war. All, though, have a happy ending; although difficulties make life hard to endure, overcoming obstacles will be rewarded with riches (*Hüngbuga*), love and status (*Ch'unhyangga*, *Shimch'öngga*), and the fulfillment of duty (*Sugungga*, *Chökp'yökka*).

During interviews I was told how there is a chronological order for learning each repertoire. The first to study is *Ch'unhyangga*, followed by *Shimch'öngga*, *Hüngbuga*, *Sugungga* and lastly *Chökp'yökka*. A level of maturity and wisdom, which only comes with age, is said to be needed to understand the meaning behind each *p'ansori*. Some singers, for example, show restraint in teaching young children certain songs before adolescence. The famous song 'Sarangga' from *Ch'unhyangga* is popular with talented child singers, as I observed during the Namwön *Ch'unhyang* Festival in 2011 – on first glance this is a playful song, full of the innocence of first love, but it also can be interpreted as remarkably perverted and daring. This illustrates that *p'ansori* can be interpreted in many ways and, depending on the audience, absorbed in different ways, be it as entertainment for children and the elderly, an escape from hard labour and housework for women, or enjoyment of community in the company of others outside a home for men.

As Heather Willoughby in her 2002 thesis describes, the element of a deep, heartbroken feeling of the Korean *han*, an aesthetic which is hard to translate completely into a Western language, is inevitably linked to performance and the history of *p'ansori*. There are contradicting views regarding *han*. Some state that only Korean can have *han*, and others that one cannot sing *p'ansori* without *han*; others disagree. It can, though, be said that *p'ansori* evokes intense emotion in and through the singer and in the audience, and that singing itself is an outlet to express such feelings. Chan E. Park puts it like this: 'For the ancient working people on the Korean peninsula, singing was not only an integral part of life, but also its reflection' (Park 2003: 36). Singing was, then, a contemplation on existence and the environment.

Because *p'ansori* is an oral tradition, it has been able to quickly adjust to social change, not only modifying its music but also its performers. *P'ansori* thrives on the

ability of a performer to convey contrasting feelings after, ideally, experiencing them firsthand; for that reason, renewal brings new challenges. Park cites her teacher Chŏng Kwŏnjin: 'Fulfill your duty to your parents first. I'd rather you be a good daughter than a skilled singer' (Park 2003: Preface). The ideal comes from the past; in our fast-paced, mechanical world it is impossible to maintain identical feelings or go through the same hardships as singers in the past did. For instance, the concept of 'family' has changed drastically, and family cohesion is not as prominent as it was before. The family is no longer an obligation for survival but a choice; children no longer have a strong sense of duty.

Regarding the importance of experiencing and understanding the required emotions, master singer Song Sunŏp told me in interview in October 2011 that he asks his students to learn Chinese characters, *hanja*, for a better understanding of the *p'ansori* text. To bring the past to life in the right setting he has created his own summer academy in the countryside. And, in his mind, an uneducated *p'ansori* singer is inadequate; his ideal is a well educated singer, well versed in music, aesthetics, literature and philosophy. Cho Sanghyŏn states in interview with Keith Howard: 'Joy, anger, sorrow and pleasure though are all part of life in all its colours through our voice' (Howard 2006: 65). The joy, anger, sorrow and pleasure felt hundreds of years ago differed greatly from present understandings, not least because where in the past one could have felt joy simply listening to a bird's twittering, in the present it is difficult to filter out natural sounds from the noise of the city.

How, then, can a modern artist convey such feelings in a performance if such experiences are based on imitation and imagination alone? Can a modern singer still empathise with old feelings and beliefs? By no means should only the past be idolized and changes discarded, but interpretation during transmission changes, since *p'ansori* was not and is still not something meant to remain always the same. Development, may, then, be inevitable, as not only musicians and their music transform over time but so do the audience and the place of performance. Today's audience tends to be well educated, and except for a few Westerners, the majority will be Korean with prior knowledge of the genre. These come to a concert with high expectations. Previously, *p'ansori* was performed in open settings, such as market places, but today it is performed on the Western concert stage, which creates an invisible barrier that distances performer from audience. The balance between singer, drummer and audience has shifted as *p'ansori* has moved onto stages. This was clear when I visited the Chŏnju *Sori* Festival in autumn 2011. I observed how an elderly man stood up, walked to the front of the stage and danced to the artist's singing. He didn't disturb the audience but within minutes he was escorted away. I saw how he was overcome by his emotions and wanted to express them by dancing, but he was stopped by today's comprehension of how a concert should be appreciated.

The preservation of culture should not result in static and untouchable presentations. Preservation in Korean music is an ongoing debate, as I noted in a 2009 colloquium titled '*Korean Culture and Pansori*' held during the 41st anniversary of the International Cultural Foundation of Korea, and as is clear from Keith Howard's *Preserving Korean Music* (2006) and Nathan Hesselink's edited volume,

Contemporary Directions - Korean Folk Music Engaging the Twentieth Century and Beyond (2001).

The Silk Road Connection

The cultural contact had such influence that Korean culture cannot be interpreted without understanding Indian elements in it. Every aspect of Korean life bears trails of Indian culture (Lee Kwangsu 1998: 48).

Lee's statement led me to investigate the connection between Korea and India. The shared heritage of Buddhism is not only a religious and social connection but involves other areas. As I have researched *p'ansori* for my doctorate, I have encountered similarities and possible relationships between the 547 Jataka Tales and *p'ansori* stories, especially *Sugungga*. Needless to say, the main base of *p'ansori* is Korean myths and folk tales, but additional aspects can be considered. Although few studies address the connection between India and Korea besides their common Buddhist heritage, the connection is mentioned in the *Samguk yusa*, the Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms, when King Suro, who founded the Kaya tribal federation some 2000 years ago married a princess named Hwang-Ok who came from the Indian kingdom of Ayutha. Ayutha is not given any clear description, and so Ha and Mintz erroneously – because it was founded later – suggested that the city was Ayutthia, the former capital of Thailand (cited in Lee 1998: 162). However, Ayutthia was named after Ayodhya in India, known from the Sanskrit epic, *Ramayana*. Before Buddhism was introduced to Korea in the fourth century CE, Sino-Indian relations had been established through frequent trade along the Silk Road, commencing in perhaps the 2nd century BCE (Lee 1998: 23). The exchange of luxury goods, such as silk, incense and gemstones, had been happening long before Buddhist monks arrived in Korea. While it has been suggested that Buddhism found its way to Korea directly from India,¹ most consider came to Korea via China. However, direct communication between Korean kingdoms and Indian monks existed, three of whom visited the Korean peninsula, Ado in 374 CE to Koguryō Maranant'a in 384 to Paekche and Ado Mukhoja in 417 to Shilla (Lee 1998: 31).

Another source names a monk called Sundo, who travelled from China to Koguryō in 372 as the first Indian visitor (Woo 2010: 164). While the exact names of these monks are still the subject of research, original sources are lost. Nevertheless, the impact of Buddhism on Korean society, and on politics and daily life, is unquestionable. Monks and merchants would have carried Indian legends to Korea. And so I come to similarities between Jataka Tales and the Korean *p'ansori* repertoire *Sugungga*.

The 547 Jataka Tales are one of the most important early works of Buddhist literature, retelling the past lives of the Buddha. It can be assumed that Chinese translations would have been introduced to Korea (Pratt and Rutt 1999: 449) and

¹ Santosh Kumar Gupta, 'On the trail of 2 Lost Kingdoms', Korea-India Connection, at <http://kimhaekims.net/On%20the%20Trail%20of%20%20Lost%20Kingdoms.htm> (accessed 22 March 2012),

that these facilitated an exchange of knowledge with India, as Indian monks visited Korea and Korean monks travelled to India to deepen their studies. It is known that much Asian folklore descended from Indian legends, for oral traditions know no boundaries, even though each country possesses its own distinctive culture and folklore. Hence, traces of the Jataka Tales that carry the narrative of *Sugungga* can also be found in China, Tibet, Mongolia and Japan (Grayson, no date: 1). One explanation is that monks used the tales for teaching. To my knowledge, only Korea's version became an epic song.

My assumption is that it would have been easier to teach about Buddhism through memorable fables and allegories rather than by lecturing. Over time, the Jataka stories, where encountered in East Asia, merged with local culture and, in the case of *Sugungga* in Korea, became a unique vocal tradition. I believe that the Jataka influenced the content of *p'ansori* as an oral art form. This, if correct, would provide strong evidence for interculturalism within *p'ansori*.

The widely accepted date for the compilation of the Jataka tales is the fourth century BCE (Warder 1970: 286–7), by when alternate literature like the Buddhist *Cariyapitaka* and the older Hindu *Panchatantra* animal fables already existed. Here, I cite two Jataka Tales as translated by Lord Robert Chalmers (1895) alongside the *p'ansori* repertoire *Sugungga* (The Underwater Palace). The first is *Vanarinda Jataka* No. 57 and the second, *Sumsumara Jataka* No. 208. Note that *Sugungga* is mentioned in the *Samguk sagi*, the historical text about the Three Kingdoms, and appears to have been well known by this time. Back in the Three Kingdom's period, Prince Kim Ch'unch'u of Shilla, later King Muryŏl (602–661), was captured by Koguryŏ forces, but escaped after remembering the *Sugungga* tale of the sharp-witted hare. It seems timeless, though its content has been subject to variation, evolving throughout history as time and social settings changed, and as *myŏngch'ang* master singers passed on their unique versions to their pupils. Also, compared to the other repertoires, *Sugungga* has the most possibilities for religious, political, mythical or humorous heterogeneous interpretation.

Vanarinda Jataka No. 57 has a striking resemblance to the basic storyline of *Sugungga*. It is an animal fable, where the main character outwits its powerful enemy, and, after being deceived, regains freedom through its own merit. The main character is a monkey which, as the reincarnation of Bodhisattva, lived a contented life, but his vitality attracted the interest of the wife of the crocodile, who demanded the monkey's heart. The crocodile prepared to catch the monkey who had to cross a river to return to his retreat. Sensing the crocodile hidden behind a rock, the monkey tricked him into revealing his presence.

(...) he shouted, as though addressing the rock, "Hi! Rock!" And, as no reply came back, he shouted three times, "Hi! Rock!" And as the rock still kept silence, the monkey called out, "How comes it, friend rock, that you won't answer me today?"

"Oh!" thought the crocodile. "The rock's in the habit of answering the monkey. I must answer for the rock to-day." Accordingly, he shouted, "Yes, monkey; what is it?" "Who are you?" said the Bodhisattva. "I'm a crocodile." "What are you sitting on that rock for? To catch you and eat your heart."

The monkey agreed to jump into the crocodile's open mouth, but seeing that with his open mouth the crocodile had to close his eyes, the monkey stepped on its head and made his escape. The defeated crocodile praised the monkey for his cunning and withdrew.

Monkeys are sacred animals in South Asia, portrayed as noble and supportive, as in the epic, *Ramayana*, where the king of monkeys assists the hero, Rama. Animal fables work by the characters being translatable into human form. So, the monkey with his strong features and clever mind stands for the people while the creature of the water, the crocodile, represents a powerful person consumed with greed. Transformed into *Sugungga*, the hare on the land stands for the commoners, the *sōmin* while the residents of the untouchable underwater palace, including the tortoise Pyōlchubu and the Dragon King are members of the upper class, the *yangban*. Where tradition would put commoners at the bottom and the king on top, *Sugungga* reverses this, with the *sōmin* above (on the land) and the *yangban* and king below (under the water). Just as the royal palace was hidden from the eyes of common citizens, the underwater palace represents an untouchable mystery. Just as they were in reality, *yangban* and *sōmin* are shielded from each other. The initial failure of the hare, who got lured to the underwater palace with the promise of promotion to a secretary of state, stands for the reality of the common people who, in a moment of self-conceit, might try to grasp for the unreachable but who would inevitably meet with disaster because it was not their place in society to aspire to a higher position in the neo-Confucian state system.

Both stories also describe a situation in which the subject of desire for the antagonist is the vital organ of the main character, the heart of the monkey (symbolizing power, energy and vigour) and the liver of the hare (representing adventure, bravery and courage). Adventurous, because of the Korean saying, 'You have a big liver', used to describe bold and fearless feats that may not be clever but are gutsy in execution. Although there is no sign of illness in the *Vanarinda Jataka* but there is in *Sugungga*, greed itself is a form of illness according to Buddhism. The incorporation of the crocodile could relate to the hybrid sea creature *Makara* from Hindu mythology, which in Sanskrit means 'Sea Dragon'. Hence, the crocodile from the Indian tale could be split into the characters of dragon king and tortoise (Pyōlchubu) in *Sugungga* due to the fact that it would have been unimaginable in Korea for the king himself to seek out someone from a lower class (the hare).

The key elements that impart meaning to *Vanarinda Jataka* No. 57 remain in *Sugungga*: the monkey lives a decent life; the female crocodile demands his heart out of selfish desire; the male crocodile tries to capture the monkey but gets deceived by the monkey; the male crocodile acknowledges defeat and praises the monkey.

Sumsumara Jataka No. 208 contains the same basic story, altered to give a stronger sense of kinship. In this tale it is no longer a longing that the wife of the crocodile feels, but a matter of life and death for her in eating the heart of the monkey:

So when the Bodhisatta (the monkey) was sitting on the bank of the Ganges, after taking a drink of water, the Crocodile drew near, and said:

"Sir Monkey, why do you live on fruits in this old familiar place? On the other side of the Ganges there is no end to the mango trees, and labuja trees, with fruit sweet as honey! Is it not better to cross over and have all kinds of wild fruit to eat?"

This story is more like the present *Sugungga*, in that the crocodile describes an unknown, yet promising place to lure the monkey into returning with him. The crocodile offers to cross the water together with the monkey on his back, but tries to drown him because his wife wants to eat the heart of the monkey. One part is peculiarly interesting:

"Friend," said the Monkey, "it is nice of you to tell me. Why, if our heart were inside us when we go jumping among the tree-tops, it would be all knocked to pieces."

The monkey points to a fig tree, heavy with fruits, where he allegedly keeps his heart from being damaged during his daily deeds. There is an almost identical scene in *Sugungga* when the hare, inside the underwater palace, tells the Dragon King that his liver is not inside his belly:

"Let me tell you something, Your Majesty. My liver is created by the energy from the moon, so I keep it in my belly before the full moon. But I take it out after the full moon. (...) I wrap it in plantain leaves, (...) and hang it on the top branch of a cinnamon tree in a deep, divine rocky mountain" (Ball and van de Vijver 2005: 189).

Both stories share a similar ending. The Jataka ends with the monkey mocking the crocodile after successfully escaping from him, while in *Sugungga* the loyal tortoise Byeoljubu gets ridiculed by the hare after carrying him back to the shore in a similar fashion. The key elements of the *Sumsumara Jakata* No. 208 are: the female crocodile craves the heart of the monkey, she claims to need it to live; the male crocodile deceives the monkey to get his heart; the monkey realizes his life threatening situation and tricks the crocodile; the male crocodile releases the monkey, who escapes after mocking the crocodile; the male crocodile returns, defeated.

Depending on the version of *Sugungga* it can end differently, but the most common conclusion has the appearance of a supernatural being who presents the tortoise with heavenly medicine in appreciation of its devotion to the Dragon King. In both tales the antagonists, the crocodile and the Dragon King, are not fundamentally evil; external circumstances give the reason for their actions. There is, then, no good or bad involved, as every character fights its own battle – be it to save its own or somebody else's life, or to follow orders. Hence, Pyölchubu receives medicine to cure his king from a sage, because of his commitment to his task, even though he deceived, lied and coaxed the hare to achieve his goal. From a political viewpoint, the Dragon King represents a nation rotten at the core, and the appearance of mystic medicine manifests the hopes and wishes of powerless commoners for a cure for their hardships. The story becomes a metaphor for social criticism at a time when criticism could not be voiced openly – the wish to bend boundaries and outwit the inevitable.

The female protagonist, the wife of the crocodile, disappears from view in *Sugungga*; this might reflect the low status of women in Korean households in the Chosŏn dynasty, who would have little part to play in the pursuit of the hare. They were replaceable, but the king, as the center of the nation, had to be protected to prevent

collapse of the government. *Sugungga*, then, might not have the same motivation to the South Asian tales, but it is surely on an equal footing with allegorical novels such as Orwell's *Animal Farm* or the fables of Aesop. It entertains, and it remains a popular work enjoyed by children and adults alike while simultaneously giving a lesson about morality. *Sugungga* shows how South Asian culture influenced Korean life through Buddhism, fusing with local folk culture, shamanism, and neo-Confucian philosophy.

Bringing p'ansori to Europe: A review of the National Opera Company's concert

Between 21–23 December 2011, the prestigious National Opera Company (Kungnip Ch'anggŭktan) based at the National Theater (Kungnip Kŭkch'ang) gave a guest appearance in Germany of a modernized version of *Sugungga*, titled 'Mr Rabbit and the Dragon King'. This noteworthy performance was made possible by Achim Freyer, a renowned artist and director, and the former pupil of Bertolt Brecht. In blending Korean tradition and belief with European aesthetics and understanding, Freyer created a truly unique combination of drama, staging, costumes and lighting. They performed at the Wuppertaler Bühnen.

Prior to his first contact with *p'ansori*, artist and director Freyer did not know about the form. Even though he encountered a very different kind of music, it captivated him. He stated in interview on 20 December 2011,² that the emotions *p'ansori* conveys shook him. The rough voices, unique melodies and flawless alternation between song and recitation, as well as the use of both courtly and vulgar language, fascinated him. He connected the feelings and language in *p'ansori* with the rough expressions used by German dock labourers. The foundation for 'Mr Rabbit and the Dragon King' was created by master singer Ahn Suk-Sun, who wrote and adjusted the material, and the composer Lee Yong-Tak, who created a new musical score combining traditional and new elements. It premiered on 8 September 2011 in the Main Hall *Hae* of the National Theater in Seoul; it was repeated over three days. Three months later the 68-member team travelled abroad to Germany and gave three sold-out performances. The importance of the production was apparent when the secretary of cultural affairs of North Rhine-Westphalia, the chief of Wuppertal's Bureau of Cultural Affairs, the consul of the Korean Consulate in Germany and the director of the Korean Community Association of Germany and attended the premiere. Korean Communities from other German cities sent representatives but the audience equally comprised German nationals.

The stage was dominated by a high construction at the back, where the narrator 'Madame P'ansori' (Ahn Suk-Sun in the premiere in Korea) stood above the podium, clad in a blue dress with a long trail (at least 3m) that functioned as a grand drape for other performers who seemingly appeared from inside her long dress. It was as if Madame P'ansori was the symbol of *p'ansori* itself, giving birth to the characters and watching the story unfold beneath her. She literally created the world of *Sugungga*, plucking the sun, moon and stars from her dress. The arrangement of her dress and

² WDR, „Von Korea nach Wuppertal“, <http://www.wdr.de/mediathek/html/regional/2011/12/20/lokalzeit-bergisches-land-opernprominenz.xml> (accessed 29 March 2012)

posture reminded me of the Queen of the Night from Mozart's *The Magic Flute* – the comparison is relevant since Achim Freyer is renowned for his productions of *The Magic Flute*. With a ghostly white painted face, similar to a Japanese kabuki dancer, Madame P'ansori's regal movements and stern voice made a powerful impression. She used song (*sori*) and recitation (*aniri*) to comment on the story. Her words were metaphoric and poetic; in some parts it was almost as if she was reciting a literati poem, a *sijo*. She was omnipresent.

The illusion of an underwater world was produced through lighting, with blue, white and black dominating; this was in stark contrast to the common form of *ch'anggŭk*, the staged performances of *p'ansori*, where colors almost explode on stage. The majority of the characters wore clothes painted black and white, and only special characters were more colourful, the king wearing yellow and the executioner red. The performers wore big but flat paper masks, shielding facial expressions from the audience. The mimetic, and dramatic movements (*pallim*), are important in *p'ansori* and *ch'anggŭk*, so not being able to see facial expressions was novel. The direct communication between audience and actors, as in the encouragement and cheering of *ch'uimsae*, did not happen; German texts were, however, provided through perfectly-timed subtitles.

It could be argued that the masks provided a stronger focus on music, but since they also covered the faces of the musicians the sound produced also created challenges. Additionally, the weight of the masks restricted the movements of the performers. This, though, was intentional; as a former pupil of the great German poet Brecht, Freyer did not hold back from citing other theatrical worlds. The masks, however unusual they seemed, resembled Ancient Greek theatre, in their exaggeration and bold painting; indeed, the characters seemed to gain more weight due to the fact that the actors were hidden behind the masks. Their personalities were cloaked, allowing the characters to be fully developed on stage. And, the limited colors and handpainted patterns on costumes made the characters almost seem like caricatures, brought to life through calligraphy.

In Freyer's interpretation, the illness of the Dragon King, residing in his underwater palace happened because of external circumstances, not as a result of his own fault or because of something within the royal household. The sickness was explained as the result of environmental pollution, indicated by dozens of empty water bottles hanging over the stage. The king's subjects also fell prey to dangerous fishing nets. The king was portrayed as a slightly naive old dodderer, who saw his power unravel before his eyes. Pyŏlchubu, the loyal tortoise, was no longer blindly devoted to the king: due to his ability to live underwater and on land, he was chosen to go to look for the hare, but only the promise of money and increased status encouraged him to leave the underwater palace. When he reached the animals on land, a war between them was raging. They fought with martial weapons, over-dimensional swords, heavy machine guns and tanks, indicating the militarism which, together with pollution, is a universal contemporary issue. To end their war the animals decided to elect a king, but they failed, and so the hare got tricked into following the tortoise. Then came familiar scenes from the traditional *Sugungga*; Freyer integrated folk

elements such as a ritualistic dance of the executioner as he prepared to open the hare's belly on the king's order. The ending, however, was different. There was no supernatural being who rewarded Pyŏlchubu with medicine to cure the king; it was the hare who gave his excrement to the tortoise to take back to the king. It was not made clear if Pyŏlchubu ambition for money and rank were the reasons for his deceit of the king, when he could not get the hare's liver. And, the hare did not escape to freedom but, taking from a different and common tale, he vanished into the moon. Where in China the hare then assists the moon goddess in pouring the elixir of life, in Korea the hare pounds delicious rice cakes on the moon. In the moon, the hare laments that the most precious thing is his own life, to which Madame P'ansori, as the narrator, ends the performance with the sentence '*Hurry, go back again!*' Possibly, this was a reference to the circle of life.

The performance balanced music and theatre while honouring the roots of *p'ansori*. Yet, it provided a different view and take on *p'ansori* and *changgŭk*, showing that the language barrier is no hindrance to creativity and that *p'ansori* can sit on an equal footing with Western counterparts. While German newspapers described *p'ansori* as either 'opera' or 'theatre', neither word fully grasps the unique meaning.³ Back in 1966, at a Seoul National University conference, scholars who could not reach a solution for a clearer classification stated: *p'ansori* is *p'ansori*. Indeed, *p'ansori* should be seen as an artistic synthesis and as an independent genre. Freyer, too, gave the impression that he did not want to put a specific label on his production, showing his understanding of the theme while respecting Korean traditions. He successfully transferred the humour, sometimes fun and sometimes vulgar, into a very sophisticated and artful production if less playful than the source material. One of the reasons for the collaboration between Korea and Freyer was to provide a fresh and provocative view of tradition and culture, to question the trend of traditional music getting re-made into parts of popular culture.⁴ In the *Korea Herald*, Freyer talked about the motivation for his work:

"P'ansori talks about our life, dreams, anxieties, fears and beauty. Those are things that all artists talk about, or should talk about. P'ansori has strict rules and forms but I am going to express those features freely."

Conclusion

In this paper, I have travelled far, from the Indian Jataka Tales to Korea and to Germany. This indicates the broad range of possibilities that *p'ansori* has. Some scholars might claim that *p'ansori* research is already exhausted but my paper suggests that *p'ansori* still has great potential. As it is not an overly flamboyant art, further studies are necessary to raise awareness beyond Korea. In terms of national identity, we need to explore the various shades of 'identity', in which culture and music can shape and support the feeling of unity and solidarity. Just as *p'ansori* has

³ Engels Kultur, „Koreanische Weihnachten“, <http://www.engels-kultur.de/koreanische-weihnachten> (accessed 29 March 2012)

⁴ Korean Herald, „Venue to bring „pansori“ to the world“, <http://www.koreaherald.com/entertainment/Detail.jsp?newsMLId=20110329000665> (accessed 29 March 2012)

evolved, so Korean identity is dynamic. It can be created artificially through nation branding, but *p'ansori* keeps tradition alive, and thereby transmits beliefs and the passion ancestors once had while being both entertaining and educative. Korean traditional culture can receive interest and gather new audiences abroad, as the success of the collaboration between Freyer and the National Opera Company showed, revealing that the message carried by *p'ansori* is universal.

Showing many facets of tradition, *p'ansori* can be equally important to contributing to national identity as is Korea's economic power and the popularity of Korean wave (*Hallyu*) music, TV dramas and movies. Korean Traditional Music, especially *p'ansori*, might not be as rapidly commercial in reaching out to the world to promote Korea, but it certainly has undertaken its first steps; one hopes that there will be more innovative projects such as 'Mr Rabbit and the Dragon King' in the future.

References

- Ball, Joseph J., Linda van de Vijver and Hermine E. Engel, eds, *Sugungga Bak Choweol Version* (Seoul: Minsokwon, 2005).
- De Bary, William Theodore and John W. Chaffee, *Neo-confucian Education: The Formative Stage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).
- Grayson, James Huntley, 'Rabbit Visits the Dragon Palace': A Korea-Localised, Buddhist Tale from India (Sheffield: School of East Asian Studies, University of Sheffield, no date).
- Hesselink, Nathan, ed., *Contemporary Directions - Korean Folk Music Engaging the Twentieth Century and Beyond* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 2001).
- Howard, Keith, *Preserving Korean Music: Intangible Cultural Properties as Icons of Identity. Perspectives on Korean Music, Vol.1* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).
- Tae-Hung Ha and Grafton K. Mintz, trans and eds, *Samguk Yusa: Legends and History of the Three Kingdoms of Ancient Korea* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1972).
- Lee, Kwangsu, *Buddhist Ideas and Rituals in Early India and Korea* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1998).
- Lee, Peter H., ed., *A History of Korean Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- Park, Chan E., *Voices from the Straw Mat: toward an ethnography of Korean story singing* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003).
- Pratt, Keith L., Richard Rutt and James Hoare, *Korea: A Historical and Cultural Dictionary* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999).
- Warder, Anthony Kenndy, *Indian Buddhism* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970).
- Willoughby, Heather, *The sound of Han: P'ansori, timbre, and a South Korean discourse of sorrow and lament*, PhD Dissertation (New York: Columbia University, 2002).

Woo, Han Young, *A Review of Korean History, Vol.1: Ancient Goryeo Era* (Seoul: Kyongsaewon Publishing, 2010).

Web References

Engels Kultur, 'Koreanische Weihnachten', <http://www.engels-kultur.de/koreanische-weihnachten> (accessed 29 March 2012).

Korea.net, 'Korean pansori opera makes waves in Germany', <http://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Culture/view?articleId=90736> (accessed 29 March 2012).

Korean Herald, 'Venue to bring "pansori" to the world', <http://www.koreaherald.com/entertainment/Detail.jsp?newsMLId=20110329000665> (accessed 29 March 2012).

KulturKenner Nordrhein-Westfalen, 'Mr Rabbit and the Dragon King in Wuppertal', http://kulturkenner.de/main_pages/mr-rabbit-and-the-dragon-king-in-wuppertal (accessed 29 March 2012).

Lord Robert Chalmers, 'Vanarinda Jataka No. 57', *Sacred Texts*, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/j1/j1060.htm> (accessed 22 March 2012).

Lord Robert Chalmers, 'Sumsumara Jataka No. 208', *Sacred Texts*, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/j2/j2061.htm> (accessed 24 March 2012).

National Theater Of Korea, 'Mr. Rabbit and the Dragon King', http://www.ntok.go.kr/english/en_performance/en_programs/enPlayinfo/programView.do?play_seq_n=946&search_day_v=20110909&returnUrl=dailySchedule.do (accessed 29 March 2012).

Njuuz, 'Korea trifft Wuppertal', <http://www.njuuz.de/beitrag14419.html> (accessed 29 March 2012).

Raftar English–Hindi Dictionary, <http://shabdkosh.raftaar.in/Hindi-Dictionary/Meaning/crocodile> (accessed 23 March 2012).

Santosh Kumar Gupta, 'On the Trail of 2 Lost Kingdoms', *Korea India Connection*, <http://kimhaekims.net/On%20the%20Trail%20of%20%20Lost%20Kingdoms.htm> (accessed 22 March 2012).

WDR 3, 'Mr. Rabbit and the Dragon King: Koreanische Pansori-Oper in Wuppertal', <http://www.wdr3.de/open-soundworld/details/artikel/mr-rabbit-and-the-dragon-king.html> (accessed 22 March 2012).

WDR Mediathek, 'Von Korea nach Wuppertal', <http://www.wdr.de/mediathek/html/regional/2011/12/20/lokalzeit-bergisches-land-opernprominenz.xml> (accessed 29 March 2012).

Wuppertaler Bühnen, 'Mr. Rabbit and the Dragon King: Gastspiel des National Theater of Korea', <http://www.wuppertaler-buehnen.de/index.php?id=1461&performance=138257> (accessed 29 March 2012).

Westdeutsche Zeitung, 'Interview mit Opern-Intendant Johannes Weigand', <http://www.wz-newsline.de/lokales/wuppertal/kultur/interview-mit-opern-intendant-johannes-weigand-1.841952> (accessed 29 March 2012).

Westdeutsche Zeitung, 'Witzige Hasenjagd im Opernhaus', <http://www.wz-newsline.de/lokales/wuppertal/kultur/witzige-hasenjagd-im-opernhaus-1.855057> (accessed 29 March 2012).