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The Influence of Western Music and the Wind Band in the Republic of Korea

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Abstract

Beginning with the arrival of American missionaries in 1885, the music of South Korea continues to reflect Western tonality, aesthetics, education, and popular taste. Through this musical and historical evolution, however, the country has not forsaken its traditions, musical imprint, and cultural identity, as will be discussed in the examination of select composers and music compositions.

Keywords: Korean traditional music, Korean culture, Korean classical music, Korean composers, Korean instruments. Korean dance, Korean wind band repertoire. K-Pop, Western music influence in Korea

Introduction

The Republic of South Korea is a thriving and modern society, rich in culture and tradition. As was true in many countries of the time, its post-World War II period experienced a shift in power, politics, and priorities, with the United States having the greatest influence. However, Western influence on this country dates back further than the war. The late 19th century saw American missionaries visiting Korea, with Western influence continuing throughout the post-colonial period to the present, sparking the creation of government agencies to protect and promote traditional performing arts. The United States and the Western countries have had a tremendous influence on the development of classical music in South Korea—including composers, ensembles, performers, and repertoire—and the evolution of its music has often been a fusion of the present with the past, tradition with innovation. The wind band is a product of this influence owing to its close connection with Western military musicians and South Korea and their changing musical tastes towards American popular music, a development rooted in a cultural evolution that began over a century ago.

A Brief Introduction to South Korea

Located between Japan and China and the size of Minnesota, the Korean peninsula consists of over 3,000 islands. The western border of the Korean peninsula is the Korean Bay and Yellow Sea, the southern border is the East China Sea, and the eastern border is the East Sea. The Amnok River separates North Korea from China, and the Tuman River separates North Korea from Russia and China. Between 1910
and 1945, Korea was a colony of Japan, and in 1948, the country was partitioned into North Korea, known as the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, and South Korea, known as the Republic of Korea. The music, culture, and politics of these two nations took differing paths, and, in 1950, civil war broke out between the two blocs. With casualties totaling nearly 10 percent of the Korean population, along with approximately 1.4 million non-Koreans, an armistice was finally signed in 1953 (Kim, 2013, p. 79). The dominant religions during the ancient times were Confucianism, Buddhism, and shamanism, but Christianity and Buddhism are the dominant religions today (Kwon, 2012, p. 26), with 40 percent of South Koreans in 2013 identifying as either Protestant or Catholic (Howard, 2013, pp. 322-324). Currently, North Korea has a population of approximately 23 million, whereas South Korea has approximately 49 million inhabitants.

**Traditional Music of South Korea**

The music of ancient Korea can be categorized as 1) music native to Korea, including court music, that is simple in rhythm and slow in tempo, 2) music imported from China during the T’ang Dynasty (645-668), usually for ceremonies and rites, and 3) classical and jazz music introduced from the West. Court music was known for its simplicity, calmness, and emotional restraint, whereas folk music was more emotional, reflecting the lives of the people (Choi, 2006, p. 26). China influenced Music in Korea. “T’ang-ak” music, for example, from the T’ang Dynasty was introduced to Korea in the eighth century, whereas Hyang-ak is indigenous Korean court music that has been in existence since the fifth century and is associated with dancing and entertainment (Hye-gu, 1977, p. 2). The orchestra of Hyang-ak consists of conical oboes, transverse flutes, two-string fiddles, drums, the pentatonic tone system, and more complex rhythms than those in T’ang-ak. The orchestra for T’ang-ak adds chimes, stone chimes, mouthorgan, and a heptatonic tone system (Hye-gu, 1977, p. 3). The Japanese term “komagaku,” refers to music from the Koryo Dynasty (935-1392) in Korea. Confucian philosophy and ensemble music were for the ruling class, “chong-ak,” and those with high social status outside the Court; the music of the common man was referred to as “sog-ak” (Kang-suk, 1986, p. 159). Originally a Buddhist song that was accompanied by dance, “Chung-a,” or “chamber music,” was for the entertainment of gentlemen but later became solely instrumental music (Hye-gu, 1977, p. 4).
Other music genres include dance music (Samhyon) with instruments; solo music with drum (Sanjo), featuring either a 12-stringed zither or a horizontal flute with an hourglass drum; lyric song (Kagok), featuring professional singers and a six-stringed zither, dulcimer, small oboe, transverse flute, and an hourglass drum; song (Kasa), featuring a solo singer accompanied by a transverse flute and an hourglass drum; lyric song (Sijo), similar to the Kasa; dramatic song (Changguk), featuring a singer with a fan in their hands that takes about two hours to tell the story, making the audience laugh and weep; folk song (Minyo), characterized by triple meters and dotted rhythms, with texts relative to the areas in which they are sung; and rural band music (Nong-ak), featuring percussion instruments and sometimes conical oboes played by farmers along village roads or in open grounds to express their delight in planting or harvesting rice (Hye-gu, 1977, p. 4).

According to the ancient Chinese historian, politician, and writer Chen Shou, in his Record of the Three Kingdoms, music, dance, ritual, and the agricultural cycle have been intertwined since the founding of Korea, with percussion music and dance lying at the heart of this constructive interaction. Village life in South Korea was centered around a tradition of percussion, referred to as “p’ungmul” (wind objects) or “nongak” (farmers’ music). In the past, these dances were usually performed by male villagers playing on gongs and drums, but now the tradition is to have two gongs and two drums, either strapped to one’s body to allow for dancing or held in hand, along with the ancient double-reed instrument, the shawm (Hesselink, 2011, pp. 268-269). The gongs, made of brass, usually came in two sizes—the male being higher in pitch and sharper in tone and the female being lower in pitch and with a more subdued tone. The stick drum is shaped like an hourglass, with a drumhead on each end, and is strapped to the body so that both hands are free to play while dancing. The other drum is barrel-shaped with a drum head on each end (Hesselink, 2011, pp. 270-271). This music is known for its triple division of the beat, whereas neighboring Japan and China are known for their common duple division of the beat (Hesselink, 2011, p. 264). Although capable of changing in both the music and the movement, this music remains roughly the same so that more people have an opportunity to learn it, resulting in a deeper experience both musically and socially (Hesselink, 2011, p. 274). Music was also used to accompany the work of labor teams, reflecting group conformity, a social practice in both the Japanese and Korean societies. As stated by Nathan Hesselink, an ethnomusicologist at The University of British Columbia, this music is highly democratic, owing to
participants with varying levels of expertise in rhythm, dance, and choreography invited to participate to ensure group participation (Hesselink, 2011, pp. 284-285). Through rhythm and folk drumming, Korea most certainly reflects its past (Hesselink, 2011, p. 265).

Dance in Korea was intended to honor ancestors or the gods of heaven and earth to ensure harmony with the spirits (Ankumbura, n.d., p. 30). Korean dances included court dances, always accompanied by singing, performed in elaborate costumes and at a slow tempo to reflect the grandeur of the event and the elegance of the female dancers, all intended to glorify the virtues of the king (Ankumbura, n.d., p. 31). Court dances could also be with male dancers at feasts when outsiders were invited. Unlike court dances, folk dances were lively, fast, and without the restraining movements of court dances (Hye-gu, 1977, p. 6). The farmers’ dance is highly energetic and features male farmers wearing hats with streamers that whirl around with their necks to exciting music by drums and brass instruments. The sword dance began with the male dancer carrying a sword in each hand while performing an animated dance and later became a more elegant and graceful dance by females (Hye-gu, 1977, p. 7). The priest dance was thought to have originated when Buddhism appeared in the country and later became an animated folk dance that calls for the male dancer, at the end, to beat on a drum that is suspended from a frame. The drum dances included the long, slim drum, the Chang-ko, although the acrobatic nature of this dance supersedes the playing of the drum (Hye-gu, 1977, p. 8). Other dances include mask dance dramas (Talchum), of which there are 13 types, and dances with fans (Buchacchum), created in 1954 (Ankumbura, n.d., p. 33).

Ancient instruments of Korea included the Pyen-chorng, consisting of 16 bronze bells; the Teuk-hong, a large bell; the Pang-hyang, 16 slabs of iron; the Un-la, consisting of 10 bronze disks connected with the handle held in the left hand while marching, the nabal, a long, straight brass instrument without finger holes that was used in military music, and the Ja-bara, a cymbal that was also used in military bands along with conical oboes, trumpets, gongs, and drums. The large gongs, with drums, were used in military music, Buddhist temples, and rural bands that included small and large gongs, hand drums, hourglass drums, barrel-shaped drums, stone chimes, the long zither, the Tai-chaing, the smaller version of the Tai-chaing, two sizes of zithers, two sizes of the lute, a two-stringed fiddle, two sizes of lutes,
various sizes of harps and flutes, the conical oboe, the panpipes, and the shell trumpet (Hye-gu, 1977, pp. 9-33).

**A Blending of Cultures**

In addition to its connections with Japan and China, Korea was connected to other cultures through the Silk Road, a trade route dating from 100 BC to 1500 AD. At the end of the Second World War, with Korea having been a colony of Japan since 1910, the Soviet Union occupied North Korea, and the United States occupied South Korea, the division being the 38th parallel. At the end of the Korean War, lasting from 1950 to 1953, an arbitrary border was created and referred to as the Demilitarized Zone. The South became heavily influenced by American culture, whereas the North became influenced by socialist realism and the doctrines of Marx, Lenin, and Mao, in addition to a predilection toward revolutionary songs, military band marches, and programmatic music (Kwon, 2012, p. 17).

Through the National Classical Music Institute (later renamed the National Center for Korean Traditional Performing Arts) in 1951 and the Cultural Properties Protection Law of 1962, cultural preservation grew in order to build a stronger sense of South Korean cultural and national identity, with an emphasis on people-oriented folk genres, the playing of Korean instruments, and the preservation of historic sites and the music genres that were performed there (Kwon, 2012, pp. 30-31). The three organizations in the Republic of Korea created to protect cultural heritage include the Cultural Heritage Administration (CHA), the Intangible Cultural Heritage Division (ICH) of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, and the National Intangible Heritage Centre (NIHC), founded in 2013 and currently with 59 education centers in 45 cities throughout the country that support educational programs of traditional dance and music (Ankumbura, n.d., p. 35). The ICH protects music, dance, drama, games, ceremonies, martial arts, production of food, and the displaying of color as they pertain to being of historically, academically, and artistically great value and also supports performances and exhibitions nationally and abroad (Ankumbura, n.d., pp. 24-26). The NIHC, the National Gugak Centre (established in 1950), and the Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation (CHF) now safeguard the traditional performing arts. The National Gugak Centre consists of four performing ensembles—the Court Music Orchestra, the Folk Music Group, the Dance Theatre, and the Contemporary Gugak Orchestra—who perform music of the royal palaces as well as folk music in
addition to the restoration and reproduction of traditional instruments, the restoring of scores, the creation of audio archives, and the establishment of standards of Gugak education (Ankumbura, n.d., pp. 38-39).

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the youth movement, mostly college-aged students at prestigious universities in South Korea, appeared to favor the simplicity of folk music, such as voice and acoustic guitar, and sing-alongs organized by student and community groups (Kwon, 2012, pp. 162-164). In the 1970s, instrumental music by Korean composers, such as Kang Sukhi and Kim Chŏng-Gil, began to appear in international festivals, often using traditional methods to identify a work as being Korean. In the 1980s, while North Korea was focused on producing music that extolled the virtues of a socialist state, South Korea was undergoing the “song movement” that focused on politicizing popular music to gain support for democracy and eliminating the military regimes that had been in place since 1961. By the 1980s and 90s, new orchestral techniques and sounds were being created, and jazz and popular music were being combined with traditional music to support social movements and gain greater audience appeal (Choi, 2006, pp. 23, 63).

Beginning in the 21st century, there has been a rise in creative experimentation and popular music in South Korea. North Korea, however, has maintained its determination that art and music should serve the people in their revolutionary development, including revolutionary songs and military marches with diatonic melodies in duple meter. In 1982, Kim Jong-il wrote that North Korea must build a national culture in form and revolutionary and socialist in content. He advocated for adapting Korean instruments but adapting them to be competitive with Western and Chinese instruments. For example, the two-stringed, bowed lute was redesigned in various sizes in order to follow the traditional roles of violin, viola, cello, and bass, including four metal strings and a fingerboard for better tuning (Kwon, 2012, pp. 54-55). Percussion bands and dance are forms of folk music that have remained popular in rural areas and villages (Kwon, 2012, p. 71). The shamanist practices have inspired and influenced the many vocal, instrumental, dance, and drama genres throughout the Koreas, often being called on to perform household, memorial, or village rituals to maintain balance and harmony and to act as a mediator between the human and spirit worlds (Kwon, 2012, p. 85). Sinawi, improvised instrumental music that accompanies these rituals, usually includes percussion instruments, zithers, bowed lute, and wind instruments. These musicians
explore the expressive qualities of their instruments using microtonal slides, various timbres, dynamics, and music ornaments, resulting in music that is thick and emotional (Kwon, 2012, pp. 86-87).

**The Influence of Western Music in South Korea**

Music can be divided into two sets of composers—kugak for compositions and instruments of a traditional nature and yangak for compositions and instruments of a Western nature. Not surprisingly, most yangak composers studied in Germany and the United States (Choi, 2006, pp. 1-2). Despite the intrinsic value placed on the traditional music of Korea, Western music rose quickly in playing a dominant role in the music of South Korea. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, thanks to treaties signed by Prince Regent with America and Europe, tonal harmony spread in Korea, beginning in 1885 with the arrival of American missionaries Horace G. Underwood and Henry G. Appenzeller, who introduced Christian psalms and hymns (Sang-u, 1986, p. 166). These missions offered modern schools using an American curriculum, including hymns, accompanied from the 1890s by harmoniums imported from America and Japan. Military band music and children’s songs also became popular, although, during the Colonial Period (1910-1945), it was thought that the Japanese strove to suppress the cultural identity of Koreans (Kwon, 2012, p. 127).

Singing is an important component of everyday life, perhaps the common ground between the two Koreas (Kwon, 2012, pp. 7, 11). Despite their separation, both North and South Korea share the folksongs that were popular in the early 1900s and before, using this music as an inspiration for new compositions (Kwon, 2012, p. 3). The first Korean art song composed in the Western style was, *Bonsung-a (Balsam Flower),”* composed in 1919 by Nan Pa Hong (1897-1941), a composer, violinist, conductor, and educator who studied both in Japan and the United States and proposed a new form of Korean music that would be based on Korean thoughts and emotions but with elements of both Asian and Western music (Choi, 2006, p. 7). With lyrics by Hyeong Jun Kim, the song expresses the sorrow and bitterness of the Korean people under the oppression of Japanese colonialism (Kim, 2019, pp. 2-3). In a questionnaire given in 1990 by Keith Howard, an ethnomusicologist at the University of London, to a group of Koreans to see what they liked about traditional Korean music, or “kugak,” the responses included, “Kugak leads us to examine our inner feelings,” “Kugak explores the emotions and lives of the
people,” “Kugak is owned by all Koreans,” and, “Kugak captures the essence of Korea” (Howard, 2013, p. 338). The popularity of hymns appears to have led to most Korean compositions being vocal. To promote modernization, the Independence Newspaper, established in 1896, published both in English and Korean over the proceeding three years the lyrics of 32 songs (Howard, 2013, p. 325).

Based on Western models and Western music, music education and musicology became established in the 20th century in South Korean universities and conservatories. The mission schools taught music using American models, and music teachers are still trained in predominantly Western music (Howard, 2013, p. 326). During the Colonial Period, there was a push to canonize traditional music, although it was published using staff notation instead of Korean notation systems (Howard, 2013, p. 329). Under Japanese control, elementary and secondary schools in Korea usually did not teach traditional Korean music or include traditional Korean music in new compositions (Kim, 2013, p. 88).

In 1947, musicologist Lee Hye-Ku was hired to teach Western music at Seoul National University, and in 1948, he founded the Korean Musicological Society, formalizing the study of both Western and traditional music; although traditional music, formerly heard only in the Court, did not have the same concert appeal as Western music (Howard, 2013, pp. 329-331). Also, in 1948, the first class of the Music College of Seoul National University graduated and included a string quartet composed by Chong Hoe-gap. An opera appeared two years later, and in 1955, the 12-tone technique was introduced (Sang-u, 1986, p. 167). By 1950, when the Korean War broke out, there were only three institutions of higher education in South Korea that had a school of music, and only one of them offered a program in wind instrument performance (Kim, 2013, p. 88).

Up until the 1960s, many musicians had chosen to study in Japan. Composers in Korea during this time wrote in the Western style in regard to instrumentation, harmony, and form (Howard, 2013, p. 335). Orchestra musicians used to sit on the floor, whereas now they use the seating on chairs of the modern orchestra but with the provision for two-string fiddles, long zithers, bowed zithers, and back rows of winds and percussion (Howard, 2013, pp. 340-341). The first composition for an orchestra of Korean instruments appeared in 1937 with the work *Eternal Imperialism* by composer Kim Kisu, in support of Japanese colonialism. The music
score no longer exists, nor is there a recording of it, but it was composed on a five-line staff, reflecting Western influence (Kim, 2018, pp. 9-11). In the 1980s, children’s songs were promoted by the Society for Korean Music Educators in annual contests, and melodies suitable for children to sing were coupled with Korean instrumental accompaniments (Howard, 2013, p. 343).

The first recordings of traditional music date to 1908, five years prior to the first recordings of hymns, and the first radio broadcasts date to 1927, featuring mostly local performers (Howard, 2013, pp. 333-334). The first public concerts of Court music were presented in 1932, promoted by the Court Music Bureau, which had previously presented concerts only for special guests (Howard, 2013, p. 333). The first Korean orchestra, the Korea Philharmonic Orchestra Society, was established in 1945, although opera and church choirs became the most famous music genres in Korea (Sang-u, 1986, pp. 168-169).

The increased military presence of America during and after the Korean War (1950-1953) had a considerable influence on Korean pop music, especially the creation in 1951 of American Forces Korea Network (AFKN) radio that broadcast American music throughout South Korea. By the late 1950s, other radio stations were playing American music along with television and film through which South Koreans learned American culture and music genres, such as pop, rock and roll, blues, and dance music. Even sister groups, the most popular being the Kim Sisters, modeled after the Andrews Sisters, became popular through their light pop music, as did the all-male groups, but through performing rock and roll. In North Korea, however, popular music was not intended to be a money-making affair but, instead, a way to promote the ideology of the state, including patriotism, reunification, and national heritage (Kwon, 2012, pp. 155-160).

The late 20th and 21st centuries have seen a fusion of traditional Korean music with that of the Western world, with traditional music being presented mostly in the National Center and relying on government sponsorship (Howard, 2013, pp. 334-335). Beginning in the 1990s and proceeding into the 21st century, interest in Korean culture began to sweep China, Taiwan, Japan, the Middle East, Africa, and Eastern Europe. In the 1990s, with the advent of music videos, came the rise of rap, reggae, jungle, and punk (Howard, 2013, pp. 342-343). Popular music and its stars played a vital role in this “wave,” as it was called, in addition to the media forms of television and film. Traditional instruments have been modified, and pop music
is often played in folk ensembles (Howard, 2013, p. 344). Fans appear to be drawn to Korean pop music, or “K-pop,” for its high energy, fast tempi, and high production value of its videos (Kwon, 2012, p. 150). The world-renowned boy band, BTS (Bangtan Sonyeondan--Korean for, Bulletproof Boy Scouts), was formed in 2010 and sings of contemporary issues facing youth, such as mental health, individualism, self-love, and loss. Their recordings have won numerous awards around the world, and they performed in 2022 at the White House. Rap, however, has been difficult for Korean musicians owing to challenges in the Korean language, including rhythmic and rhyming flow, which are so prevalent in this genre (Kwon, 2012, p. 169). The most well-known high schools today for preparing young musicians to study at a conservatory include the Seoul Arts High School and the Sunhwa Arts School (Sang-u, 1986, p. 169).

**The Development of the Wind Band in South Korea**

Korean instruments are categorized according to the ancient Chinese practice of classifying them according to eight natural materials—bamboo, wood, metal, silk, skin, stone, gourd, and clay—all capable of resonating and with elaborate shapes, decorations, and symbolism (Kwon, 2012, pp. 32-34). String and wind instruments were made in Korea and based on models from different countries. For example, in the sixth century, King Kashil of the Kaya tribal federation heard a Chinese zheng zither and ordered instrument maker U Ruk to make a zither, resulting in the 12-string Korean kayagum (Kwon, 2012, pp. 24-25). By the Unified Silla Period (668-935), Korea had developed music for the Court—three string and three wind instruments. The three strings included those from Korea and those found in other countries, whereas the Korean wind instruments were all indigenous to Korea (Kwon, 2012, p. 26). The primary melody instrument in folk and court music is the double-reed bamboo oboe, called the p’iri (Choi, 2006, p. 34), and the use of extreme ranges and various dynamics is common in folk music to express emotion (Choi, 2006, p. 40).

The first record of a European brass instrument being in Korea was in 1880 when a Japanese soldier was invited to teach bugle. Korean musician Undol Lee studied military music in Japan and, upon his return, taught bugle to Korean musicians (Kim, 2013, p. 83). By 1883, bugles appeared in the Korean Court, and a concert was given in 1883 in the Court by the band of the German warship, Leipzig. Military bands fell into two categories—one band which was loud and marched in
front of an important person, playing conical oboes, brass trumpets, cymbals, gongs, and drums, and the other band which was softer and played at the end of a procession, escorting an important person, and playing oboes, transverse flutes, and drums. Military music was played for military processions and on occasions when the gates to military headquarters were opened or closed. In 1888, the military band, the Tuned Bugle Force, was formed, based on the Japanese band model but taught by three Americans (Hye-gu, 1977, p. 3).

In 1886, a Korean diplomat attended the coronation of King Nicholas II and returned wanting to create a Russian-style band. Accordingly, federal funds were used to purchase Russian instruments. The instructor appointed to conduct this band was Frank Eckert, a German conductor, composer, and publisher who had spent 22 years training a military band and teaching at what is now the Tokyo Music School. He arrived in Seoul in 1901 to prepare the band for its first performance, the birthday celebration of the king. Eckert also taught the first modern Korean composers—Kim Inshik, Chong Sain, and Paek Uyong (Howard, 2013, pp. 324-325). Unfortunately, the band was eventually disbanded owing to the increasing tensions of Japanese colonization. Some of the members continued as a private band, while others became band teachers in schools or continued performing in professional venues (Kim, 2013, pp. 83-84). One of the first recordings, circa 1927, was of the Seoul Band and a local chamber orchestra, and by 1928, the radio had formed its own orchestra (Howard, 2013, pp. 334-335).

Owing to visits by American, British, French, German, and Russian naval ships, an array of military bands were introduced to Koreans, and by the end of World War II, Western music was the predominant sound heard on South Korean radio. During the Korean Civil War, the band musicians in South Korea served to boost morale and promote nationalism through giving concerts and serving as a component of military ceremonies. These bands required versatile performers who could play not only military marches but also Classical music, such as transcriptions of operas and popular music of the day (Kim, 2013, p. 80). Military bands in Korea resumed in 1946 following the liberation of Korea from Japanese rule, beginning with the ROK Navy Band; these bands began establishing a relationship with the United States, which had a tremendous influence on them. The number of military bands had grown to 10 prior to the Korean War and expanded during the war to support the growing number of military operations (Kim, 2013, p. 85).
In 1948, the first march composed for the Republic of Korea military band, ‘Ch’ungsŏngŭl Tahara (Devote Your Loyalty Completely), was composed by Hŭijo Kim who continued to write marches during and after the war. Kim believed that it would help Koreans identify “their” marches if they heard familiar music, such as folk songs, art songs, and patriotic music, in the marches. In the trio of, ‘Ch’ungsŏngŭl Tahara, for example, Kim used the Korean national anthem (Kim, 2013, pp. 86-87). Although these marches were considered to be the first display of institutionalized nationalism in the Republic of Korea, the bands continued to also play American military marches to help boost the morale of American troops during the Korean War (Kim, 2013, p. 93). The bands were not allowed, however, to play Russian marches, despite some of the musicians’ enjoyment in playing them, owing to the USSR assisting North Korea during the war (Kim, 2013, pp. 86, 90).

In 1956, the shows at the military camps in Korean territory were taken over by the American United Service Organization (USO), replacing the more expensive American musicians with local singers and instrumentalists who learned US pop, jazz, dance, and country music that they, in turn, spread to their local communities. Military musicians sometimes continued to make music after serving in the military by joining professional ensembles and teaching in elementary and secondary schools and universities (Kim, 2013, p. 95). At present, the military ensembles in South Korea include the Republic of Korea Air Force Band, the Republic of Korea Army Band, the Republic of Korea Marine Corps Band, the Republic of Korea Navy Band, and the Republic of Korea National Symphony Orchestra.

**Select Wind Band Works by American and Korean Composers on Korean Music**

In contemporary wind band repertoire based on Korean music, the best-known in the United States is *Variations on a Korean Folk Song*, composed in 1965 by American composer John Barnes Chance (1932-72), who served from 1958 to 1959 in the US Army Band in Seoul. The theme of this composition is the familiar Korean folk song, “Arirang” (“My Beloved One”), a melody based on the pentatonic scale. The work consists of the “Arirang” theme, followed by five variations. In 1966, *Variations on a Korean Folk Song* was awarded the coveted Ostwald Award by the American Bandmasters Association (Smith & Stoutamire, 1979, p. 46).
Korean composer, conductor, and educator Chung-Gil Kim (1934-2012) wrote works for band, orchestra, music theatre, film, chamber music, and traditional Korean instruments. Kim taught composition at Seoul National University, conducted the Korean Symphony Orchestra, and served as president of the Korean Composers Association, in addition to being the recipient of numerous awards. Having served in the Korean military, Kim’s work for the band included: *Fanfare of the Games of the XXIV Olympiad* (1988) and *Festival Overture for Band* (Kim, n.d.)

Sung Ho Hwang (b. 1955), a Korean composer of works for orchestra, chorus, chamber music, dance, and theatre, established in 1993 the Electronic Music Research Society and taught at Seoul National University, where he served as the first director of the Computer Music Research Institute. Hwang also founded the International Computer Music Festival in Seoul and the Computer Music Contest. As a founding member of the Third Generation, Hwang is committed to using various experimental techniques with traditional Korean music in order to preserve its value, promote social movements, and make music more accessible to the general public (Choi, 2006, p. 15). Hwang has served since 2000 as the president of the Korean Electronic Music Association and is also active in the field of dance music (Hwang, n.d.). He composed *Sea Fantasy* for a wind band.

Korean composer Eun Hye Kim (b. 1956), currently a professor of composition at Suwon College of Music, was born in Seoul and earned a Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees from Seoul National University and a doctorate in musicology from the University of Paris. Her influences include Korean folk songs, literature, fine art, and film. In 2001, Kim composed, *Theme and Variations on “Birds, Birds, Blue Birds”* for a symphonic band based on the melody *Saeya Saeya, Parang Saeya* (*Birds, Birds, Blue Birds*), a well-known melody in Korean traditional music. With the bluebird representing hope, the song was thought to honor Korean general Bong-Joon Juhn, who, in the late 19th century, led a peasant revolt of farmers who revolted against the corruption of the rulers. In turn, the rulers sought help from Japan, which led, in 1895, General Juhn to be captured and beheaded (Hwang, 2018).

Composer and conductor Chang Su Koh was born in 1970 in Japan and graduated from the Osaka College of Music with a degree in composition and entered the Musik Akademie der Stadt Basel. He was awarded the Asahi Composition prize.
and the Master Yves Leleu prize from the 1st Comines-Warneton International Composition Contest. Koh teaches at Osaka College of Music and ESA Conservatory of Music and Wind Repair Academy and is a member of the Kansai Modern Music Association. Composed in 2020, his work, *Eleutheria*, consists of a prelude and scherzo and is based on the ancient Greek term meaning “the personification of liberty.” The work reflects Koh’s interest in polymetric design and was commissioned by Ensemble Libérté, a symphonic band located in Kawaguchi-City, Japan, for its 40th anniversary (“University of North Texas Wind Symphony concert program note,” 2022).

And finally, the young and quickly rising Korean American composer Minoo Dixon (b. 1999) has been recognized by ASCAP and the National Federation of Music Clubs for composing music of diversity for a concert band. He grew up in Georgia (USA), earned a Bachelor of Music degree in composition from New England Conservatory, studying under Michael Gandolfi, and is currently pursuing a Master of Music degree in composition at the University of Texas, studying under celebrated composer Omar Thomas. Dixon was awarded the Donald Martino Award for Excellence in Composition, was the Senior Composition Competition Winner by MTNA, won two NEC Honors Ensemble Composition Competitions, and was a Finalist of the ASCAP Foundation Morton Gould Young Composers Awards Competition. Dixon’s works have been performed in Carnegie Hall, Busan Cultural Center, Berk Hall at Berklee, and Jordan Hall at the University of Texas (Dixon, n.d.-a).

In December of 2023, his work, *The Songs of Shim-Cheong*, premiered at the Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic in Chicago. The work is based on a novel about a Korean mother who passes away in childbirth, leaving behind her newborn daughter, Shim-Cheong, and blind husband, Shim, who devotes his life to raising his daughter. Several years later, a Buddhist monk informs the father that he will be granted sight if he is able to sacrifice 300 sacks of rice to Buddha. Shim-Cheong overhears this conversation, knowing that her father will not be able to meet the demands of the agreement, and makes a deal with sea merchants to sacrifice her life on the ocean if they give her father 300 sacks of rice. She is thrown into the sea, where she is taken in by the Dragon King, who allows her to return to the world to ensure that her father is all right. She is turned into a lotus flower that is given to the young emperor. Once she emerges from the flower, the emperor is taken by her beauty and marries her. He offers a banquet for the blind, at which time Shim-
Cheong is reunited with her father, and they all live happily ever after. The first movement, *Funeral*, is a reduced version of *Funeral Music* (Sangyeo-Sori). The second movement, *Buddhist Monk*, is an interpretation of Pansori music through thin chamber-like orchestration of the ensemble, singing a conversation between the monk and the father, much like how a Pansori singer would tell the story. The third movement, *Thrown into the Sea*, has Korean Fibonacci rhythms, Samul-Nori, and thematic material from other movements intertwined throughout. The fourth movement, *Dragon’s Palace*, is meant to be the most ethereal movement and only loosely borrows from the heritage. The fifth and final movement, *Emperor’s Banquet*, has both Court Music (specifically Daechwita) and Samul-Nori (specifically Kil-Kun-Ak) as the main forefront of the music (Dixon, n.d.-b).

Apart from military ensembles, the contemporary wind band is a young ensemble in Korean culture, and there is clearly a need for the addition of new and challenging repertoire, educational training, and performance opportunities for wind band performance.

**Summary**

The Republic of Korea shares a troubled past with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, yet its ancient customs, music, and dance, including those coming from China and Japan, clearly endure in the hearts and minds of the people. Owing to the Western influence of missionaries in the late 19th century and, of course, additional American influence in the post-colonial period after the Second World War, particularly military and popular music, the Republic of Korea has absorbed Western music notation, harmony, forms, instruments, compositional techniques, genres, and styles. Nevertheless, Korean and non-Korean composers continue to pay homage to the music and culture of their country, fusing the music of ancient traditions with contemporary instruments, styles, and ensembles. Through the noble and ongoing efforts of composers, performers, scholars, ensembles, and government agencies dedicated to the preservation and promotion of Korean culture, the performing arts in South Korea continue to prosper and evolve, proudly sharing their art and culture with the world.
References


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