**Relational Epistemology of the Island: Music Sustainability and Interrelations on Jindo**

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**Introduction**

Place and sustainability represent the core concerns of sound ecology studies. A close study of the interconnectedness of music and social life must precede an assessment of the resilience of any musical system. Today’s presentation cultivates Titon’s ideas regarding the epistemological nature of music making and sustainability within a specific cultural context.

The paper examines the ways by which the residents of a small southwestern Korean island concurrently acquiesce to and defy the economic rationality underscoring an intangible cultural heritage system (est. 1961). On Jindo, economic and social rationalities certainly underlie desires for human cultural treasure designation, and this reality has led to a reconfigured relational epistemology among the small percentage of residents actively engaged in folk arts performance. While government designations have privileged certain individuals and localities over others, examination of environmental and social histories reveals an alternate cultural map, exposing reconstructed relational ontologies (Titon 2013) of musical place and social interrelations.

Drawing on field research data, today’s presentation explores the intricacies of music’s resilience within a community as well as the shifting social and location-based relational epistemologies consequential to an intangible cultural heritage system.

**Claiming Authority**

The Intangible Cultural Heritage Legislation instituted in 1961 reduced Korea’s performing arts heritage to a few key genres. Residents of the southwestern island of Jindo vied early on for recognition within this government system. Historically a socially maligned area due to its distance from the capital, Jindo’s potential as a hotbed of intangible heritage equaled its potential for upward mobility.[[1]](#footnote-1) Efforts to put Jindo on the map culminated in 4 national intangible heritage designations (*ganggangsullae* (women’s circle dance, national designation 1966), Namdo *deulnorae* (southern cultivation songs, national designation 1973), Jindo *ssikkim gut* (shaman ritual for the dead, national designation 1980) and Jindo *dashiraegi* (funeral play 1985)) and six regional designations (3 different styles of Jindo *buk nori* (1987), Jindo *manga* (1987), Namdo *japga* (2001), Sopo *geolgun nongak* (2006), Jodo *datbae norae* (2006) and the making of Jindo *hongju* (1994)). While considered a local success, these designations contributed to decreased local diversity and increased standardization of performance style.

The ‘right’ way to perform a particular folksong, such as ‘Jindo Arirang,’ for example, became very narrowly defined and based on the styles of senior performers (in this case, human culture treasures). Performers may reinforce these ‘official’ styles in public performance contexts, but in more intimate settings (for example, within the borders of a village) individual interpretations and performance of local musical genealogies have become common expressions of musical place. My contention is performances of ‘their’ versions, then, become declarations of nuanced relational realities as well as acts of defiance; wresting performance from government authority and reclaiming a perceived sense of locality.

A wonderful example of this is Bak Dongmae of Inji Village, current holder of Namdo tulnorae and daughter of Jo Gongnye, holder of the cultivation songs until her death in 1997. As a member of Jindo’s Hyangto munhwawon (local culture center)’s performance troupe for years, she has had to concede to the stylistic interpretations of the holder of Namdo japga (southern professional folk song), Gang Songdae. At the end of 2015, Bak resigned from the troupe in order to, “Better honor and preserve my mother’s music legacy.” In an interview, she asserts her authority over local, village-based versions of folk songs inherited from her mother:

[sound] 둥덩이 타령 (17:00), 방애타령 (20:40), **진도 아리랑 (28:50-29:30), 육자배기 (35:00),** 강강술래 (39:38)

In this way, Bak re-situates these songs as specifically belonging to her mother and, thus, her responsibility to carry on as a representative sound of Inji Village.

Entire villages have worked to re-position now-standard repertoire (a combination of ‘local’ and ‘popular’ folk song) as specific to village identity. Going back to the process of achieving designation, it is essential to mention Bak Byeongcheon, who structured local genres to fit government standards of genre form and performance aesthetics.[[2]](#footnote-2). Born of a family of hereditary shamans, Bak saw the system as an opportunity to raise the status of his home village, Inji, and, with the cooperation of many Jindo artists, contributed to a reconfiguration of the cultural map. Though historically insignificant in local cultural developments, Inji received accolades for a once-shared musical territory, particularly for the nationally recognized Namdo teulnrae (cultivation songs(, Dasiregi (funeral play), ganggangsullae (circle song and game) and Jindo ssitkimgut.

The literal re-routing to Inji of genres performed commonly throughout the island led to an atmosphere of friction and distrust with neighboring villagers who had a long history of performing the genres. Particularly because, as Howard noted in his 1989 Jindo ethnography, Inji had remained relatively inactive in the artistic community during the mid-20th century, which made it seem unfair for Inji to receive credit.

Among these neighboring villages is Sopo, a village on the western side of Jindo (Jindo-gun) just north of Inji in Jisanmyeon. Residents have historically made their living through salt harvesting, raising horses and more recently fishing and farming. Sopo Village once served as the primary gateway to Jindo via a ferry running between Jindo and Mokpo on the mainland. Historically one of the largest villages and spots of industry on Jindo, its residents collaborated with *sadangpae* (itinerant performers) to perform *pungmulpae* (economic exchange) to promote local industry.

Land reclamation ushered in changes that affect Sopori villagers to this day.[[3]](#footnote-3) Beginning in 1973 and in conjunction with the New Village Movement, the government began a tide water control and land reclamation project which filled in the salt fields of Sopo Bay and in 1986 blocked boat paths to and from the village. The aim was to create farmland to elevate economic potential on the island. When the Jindo Bridge was constructed in 1984, it signified a new era for Jindo, one of urban flight and an increasingly aging population.[[4]](#footnote-4) Sopo has had to re-shape its identity in order to survive. In the age of intangible heritage, the residents did not have to look far to see opportunity.

Sopo had had a long history of social and cultural exchange with their Inji neighbors, mostly due to the fact that the well-known hereditary shaman Bak family acted as the local spiritual practitioners. Members of the Bak family, including Bak Byeongcheon and his first wife (the mother of current Jindo *ssitkimgut isuja* Bak Mi-ok), had a history of teaching dance, vocal, and instrumental performance to people across the island.[[5]](#footnote-5) The story goes, Bak picked up the *deulnorae* specific to Sopo, rearranged and submitted the reworked *deulnorae* with Inji Villagers for consideration as national cultural heritage [let’s be honest~~no distinguishable characteristics between the two, villagers admitted so to Keith in the 1980s, but many of my friends in Sopo attest to this story]. Although both villages had been a part of the Sopo Bay cultural area, proactive work on the part of Bak (a native of Inji) meant Inji was the first to submit a bid for designation, which they won, sparking an ongoing rivalry between the two villages.[[6]](#footnote-6)

With the honoring of Inji residents as human cultural treasures, Sopo villagers began the work of asserting their distinction from and authority over these traditions. One such action was the establishment of the mother’s singing room (*eomeoni noraebang*) in November 1973. The singing room served as a collective of women seeking camaraderie and as a venue for musical transmission. Local folk song leader Han Namye served as the catalyst to the *noraebang*’s institution, inspired by her long standing love for and connections with singing traditions.

Balanced between the need to preserve a local identity and promote the village, the *eomeoni noraebang* vitalized local performance tradition as it reinvented and personalized it. In 1975, the local government lent support for the establishment of the Sopori Mother’s Singing Room (*Sopori eomeoni noraebang)* as a site of musical transmission and preservation, becoming one of five official village preservation associations. Drawing on much of the government-recognized repertoire of the regional style such as ganggangsullae and heung taryeong, the localized, personalized renderings by the women reterritorialize the songs to be those *of* Sopori. The women of the collective took to public stages, proclaiming performances such as Sopo ganggangsullae. The re-interpretation of cultural practices serves to persuade both the audience and the women of their rights to the performance genres.[[7]](#footnote-7) [VIDEO—GANGGANGSULLAE]

In February 2003, local government granted Sopori official designation as a Traditional Arts Village (*jeontong yesul maeul*), and the village saw the completion of the Sopo Traditional Folk Transmission Center. This brings us to another route for reconstituting the ‘home base’ for local performing arts: the folk transmission center.

**The tale of a song…**

Last night in my dreams/I saw a wild goose/this morning before dawn/ a magpie sat and cried/ By chance, will my love come? / By chance, will a letter arrive? / The light fades as I wait/ in the western sky/ the sun sets over the land/ the moon has risen / When/ I meet my gentleman/ I will release it all/ Such is life...hey...

(sound 01:56) Songdae Gang recalls the hours and days she spent traveling between Jindo Island districts to teach folk songs to fellow islanders. “There was no *jeonsugwan* (training center) in Sibilsi at that time, so we’d meet in people’s homes, or the slaughter house, when it was cold out.” Gang learned from her mother, Geunyeo Lee, who learned from Hwajungseon Lee, an early 20th century pansori master and recording artist. Gang’s version of “Yukjaebaegi” (six-beat song) draws strongly on Hwajungseon Lee’s clear yet heavily-ornamented style. In interviews with Jindo women regarding their musical lineage,[[8]](#footnote-8) nearly all credit Gang with teaching the intricacies of this musical representative of the island of Jindo. From Hwajungseon Lee, to Gang’s mother and onto Gang, “Yukjabaegi” maps her memory, and vestiges of her “Yukjabaegi” remain mapped around the island.

The irony of the song’s story should not be overlooked: islanders seeking training in the performance of songs most had heard their entire lives. When asked why they were compelled to seek such training, most replied, “To know how to sing it right.” The mounting significance of an intangible heritage system framed songs such as “Yukjabaegi” within a specialized landscape within which formal training and performance were increasingly becoming the norm.

**Grassroots Jeonsugwan Mapping the Island**

Government-run theaters and transmission centers, such as the Muhyeong munhwajae jeonsugwan (intangible heritage transmission and education center, 2012) in Jindo Township in 1984, the Namdo National Gugak Center (2004) and the hyangto munhwawon, represent a professionalization and centering of regional music forms.

Folk Transmission centers are grassroots organizations instituted through local petition. The transmission center at Sipilsi, mentioned above, took nearly 15 years to institute as local artists Bak Yeongsu and Kim Ju-ok battled noise complaints and competing petitions to turn the land into farmland or military training grounds. Before that time, Bak, who had worked with Bak Byeoncheong in the development of Jindo buk dance, had begun holding training sessions and rehearsals in the local slaughterhouse, adjacent to his home.

소포: 걸군농악, 강강술래, 닻배노래, 명다리굿 (2002)

지신면 민속 전수관 (이니리): 남도 틀노래, 진다 망가 (1999)

의신면 (돈지리): 진도북놀이 (양태옥류—박정열) (2001)

빗기내 (자천리): 진도북놀이 (박관용류—이츼춘) (2009)

임희 (십일시): (장성천류—김길선 (d. 2015)—김병천)/여성북춤) (1990)

고춘 지막리: 짓봉산 산타령, 토속 민요

진도민속문화예술단 (조오환): 닻배노래, 엿타령, 상여소리, 토속민요

국악협회 (진도읍): 농악, 창악 (1984)

The folk jeonsugwan, while reinforcing ideals of genre establishment, create gathering places wherein local aesthetics can be nurtured and transmitted to community members.

**Conclusion**

The paper makes a case for considering the shifting social and location-based relational epistemologies consequential to an intangible cultural heritage system—including the personal political and economic incentives therein—as vital to the cultural preservation and reconstruction driving cultural production in this southwestern corner of the peninsula.

The cultural weight of official recognition cannot be understated, and, despite an understanding of the diversity of folk song, song traditions remain heavily influenced by the preservation system. Yet, tensions resulting from an understanding of the constructed nature of traditions designated as ‘cultural property’ teamed with a desire for recognition within that very system has granted vitality to musical performance in the region. Debates regarding authentic form and rightful heirs to musical transmission ironically contribute to the vitalization of the tradition.[[9]](#footnote-9)

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1. 송기태. “풍물굿 예능의 소통과 원형 창출: 진도 소포리 풍물굿을 대상으로.” *남도*

   *속연구* 23 (2011): 212; 이윤선. “소포만의 간척기 민속음악 변화연구: 남도들노래, 진도

   만가, 진도북놀이를 중심으로.” *도서문화* 27 (2006): 45 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 이윤선, for example, notes Bak Byeongcheon and scholar Ji Junsang teamed up and ‘exhumed’ (발굴하게 되고) Jindo *deulnorae* for the 1971 national folk performance competition in “소포만의 간척기 민속음악 변화연구: 남도들노래, 진도만가, 진도북놀이를중심으로.” *도서문화* 27 (2006), p. 39 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In 1968, the village was comprised of nine divisions with a population of 1,770 (898 males and 872 females) in 330 farm households. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Currently, the village consists of approximately five divisions with a population of approximately 250. Sopori has recently been designated a ‘green village’ and is known for the production of black rice. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 한남예, Personal Interview, 소포리, 지산면, 진도군, 30 August 2014 and 10 February 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 곽순경, Personal Interview, 소포리, 지산면, 진도군, 17 July 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In 1980, the regional government honored Sopori with the designation ‘Nongak Preservation Village’ (*nongak bojon maeul)* for its continued performance of Sopori *geolgun nongak* with a 38-member troupe. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Referencing my field interviews with women between ages 60 and 90 from the villages of Sopo, Inji, Seokgyo, Hyanggyo and Gwiseong and Jindo Township. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. A similar phenomenon can be seen in Ireland wherein the Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Èireann, the official government organization for music preservation in Ireland, finds itself at odds with individual performers Fleming, Rachel C. “Resisting Cultural Standardization: Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and the Revitalization of Traditional Music in Ireland.” *Journal of Folklore Research*, Vol. 41, No. 2/3, Special Double Issue: Advocacy Issues in Folklore (May - Dec., 2004), p. 227 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)