Issues in P‘ansori Research

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I. Introductory Note

Research on p‘ansori over the last 30 years has amassed results that are well worth our careful attention. Such “p‘ansori-novels”1 as Ch‘unhyang ch‘eon, Sim Ch‘ong ch‘eon, H‘ongbu ch‘eon have been highlighted as leading examples of Korean literature and, at the same time, the performing art of p‘ansori has also attracted the interest of scholars of Korean literature. In addition, other materials relating to Korean oral literature such as folktales, shaman song, and folk drama have also come to light, and, while the value of these materials has been newly appraised, an interest in p‘ansori research has also been increasingly stimulated. Furthermore, some 500 separate items have been published since the mid-1950’s works on genre theory addressing p‘ansori’s artistic nature and style, studies of p‘ansori history illuminating origins and historical changes; and pieces on individual p‘ansori works exploring questions of structure and meaning.

At the same time, there has also been no lack of conflicting scholarly opinions to emerge during this process in which many views have been expressed and a variety of research methods have been attempted.

In this study, we shall confine ourselves to two basic areas as we examine significant issues which have arisen in p‘ansori research: genre theory and p‘ansori history. Most p‘ansori research has consisted of studies of individual works and, moreover, the approach of these discussions has not been

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1 At the end of the Chos‘on-dynasty period (1392-1910), materials derived of the oral narrative tradition of p‘ansori were gathered, fixed, and propagated in a written form, known as the “p‘ansori-novel”
clearly distinguished from studies of individual works of classic written fiction. It is our view, however, that two kinds of scholarship pertain uniquely to the field of p’ansori: genre theory which treats p’ansori as a whole or discussions of historical change in p’ansori. Furthermore, in view of the great number of studies devoted to individual p’ansori works, we cannot properly examine them in the space allotted here. Therefore, we wish to establish at the outset that this study will refer for the most part to works which discuss the general character of p’ansori, per se.

II. Issues in Genre Theory

Works on p’ansori genre theory reflect a distinction between p’ansori as a literary phenomenon and p’ansori as a performing art. These works, therefore, are divided into 1) discussions of genre classification (To which genre should p’ansori be assigned as a literary phenomenon?) and 2) examinations of genre attributes (What is the essence of the performing art of p’ansori and what are its distinguishing features?).

The first scholar to comment on the genre characteristics of p’ansori was Yi Pyŏng-gi (1957). Yi coined the term “dramatic song of Korea” to describe p’ansori: “P’ansori contains many theatrical elements and its structure is closer to drama than to fiction; and its style is that of poetry, not prose,” he pointed out. It can be said that Yi Pyŏng-gi’s comprehensive view of p’ansori’s genre characteristics would assign p’ansori, as literature, to the genre of drama.

After that, Kim Tong-uk (1961) expressed his view on p’ansori, describing it as belonging to “a unique form of narrative poetry that was prevalent throughout the world until the middle ages and remains, even at the present time, as the oral literature of backward societies or as a fossil fixed in written form.”

While p’ansori was being argued in this fashion as being a form of drama or of narrative poetry, research on the so-called “p’ansori-novel” was moving ahead, treating the form as a genre indistinguishable from fiction.

Fundamental discussion of the genre characteristics of p’ansori took place at a symposium, “The P’ansori Genre Question,” sponsored by the Institute of Asian Studies of the College of Arts and Sciences, Seoul National University, on November 1, 1966. Here, the various advocacies were brought forward Yi Nŭng-ŭ’s for fiction, Yi Tu-hyŏn’s for drama, and Kang Han-yŏng’s for “p’ansori as p’ansori.” As evidence for the position that “p’ansori is fiction,” there was the assertion that there are virtually no distinctions between the words of p’ansori and the texts of fiction. These advocates held, for example, that both the p’ansori “Song of Ch’unhyang”
and the p’ansori-novel “Ch’unhyang chŏn” belong to the same genre. As for the position that “p’ansori is drama,” evidence was sought in the assertion of p’ansori as a performing art, involving stage, actors, and audience. Standing in contrast to these was the position that “p’ansori is p’ansori,” which recognized a uniqueness in p’ansori and regarded it as an independent genre not to be integrated with some other genre.

Subsequently, investigation into the genre characteristics of p’ansori reached further depth in the work of Cho Dong-il (1969). He made a taxonomic distinction between generic and specific genre classifications; while p’ansori belongs to the “narrative genre” at the upper level of genus, it must be given independent status as, “p’ansori” at the lower level of species.²

P’ansori is a performing art in which one sings a story. The literary form in which the story is sung is that of oral narrative poetry. Korean oral narrative poetry consists of the narrative folksong, narrative shaman song, and p’ansori. Therefore, it is appropriate to include p’ansori in the narrative mode when classifying it as an upper-level genre and as an oral narrative poetry at the lower level of genre classification (Seo Dae-seok 1979). We must credit the view that “p’ansori is p’ansori” as recognizing a traditional genre that exists amongst all peoples. But we cannot say that it is useful with regard to genre classification.

Debate on the genre classification of p’ansori as a literary phenomenon appears to have resulted in general agreement to establish p’ansori as an independent oral narrative poetry that belongs to the narrative mode and that is neither fiction nor drama.

The genre study of p’ansori does not end with its classification. An even more important task lies in the close examination of the basic characteristics that distinguish the genre we call p’ansori. What is this thing we call p’ansori? What are the structural peculiarities of the p’ansori text? What sort of aesthetic impression does the singing of p’ansori impart to its audience? Such questions have been posed in the course of inquiry into the basic genre nature of p’ansori.

In dealing with the question of “What is p’ansori?” there has been an effort to explicate the meaning of the word “p’ansori.” Kim Tong-uk (1955) saw “p’ansori” as a compound word, consisting of “p’at’i” and “sori.” Drawing upon usages in written sources, he specified the meanings of “p’an” and “sori.” Drawing upon usages in written sources, he specified

² Cho Dong-il is trying to avoid the confusion that results from using the single word “genre” to designate two conceptual levels of classification, both the generic and the specific, to which he applies the German words gattung and art, respectively
the meanings of “p’an” as including 1) a gathering of people, 2) a dramatic scene, 3) a site, and 4) a stage. Therefore, he concluded that “p’ansori” means “sori” (sound) made at a “p’an” (performance). Continuing his research, Kim Tong-uk extracted and analyzed the songs and poetry that are commonly interpolated into p’ansori. “All manner of interpolations can be found fixed in p’ansori like a kaleidoscopic image. fortune-teller incantations, shaman ritual, prayerful supplications, Buddhist invocations, and sutra chanting out of folk culture; verse in praise of nature, Chinese poetry, eulogy, epistle, and formal Chinese prose borrowed from aristocratic literature, stjo and kasa poetry and the songs of professional female entertainers; Korean alphabet songs and Chinese character catalogues, farmer and shepherd songs, and dirges and keens from country songs, and, from folk music, t’aryông ballads” (Kim Tong-uk 1958).

Such observations by Kim Tong-uk clarified the meaning of the word “p’ansori,” set forth formative characteristics of p’ansori texts, and laid a foundation for later p’ansori research.

In other work, Cho Dong-il conducted a structural analysis of the p’ansori-novel Hùngbu chŏn and, on that basis, was able to declare that the text of a p’ansori work can be analyzed as being made up of two systematic aspects: a fixed aspect and an unfixed aspect. He pointed out that the unfixed, or accretive, aspect reflects reality and serves as a vehicle for originality in a work (Cho Dong-il 1968). The expression “fixed aspect” refers to the narrative development of a p’ansori work and “unfixed aspects” refers to such ancillaries as the witticisms and interpolated verse that are introduced into the text. Cho Dong-il’s theory of partial originality in p’ansori further developed Kim Tong-uk’s research on interpolated verse and led into work by Kim Tac-haeng (1976) on the expansion of the p’ansori scene.

The genre characteristics of p’ansori were further organized and clarified in the work of Seo Dae-seok (1979). He defined “p’ansori” as meaning “sound issued upon forming a p’an,” in which “forming a p’an” means arranging the musical elements (i.e., melody and rhythm) to suit the literary text (i.e., story line)Positing the oral-formulaic theory of Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord as a formative principle of p’ansori, Seo Dae-seok then offered a logical extension of Kim Tong-uk’s theory of p’ansori verse interpolation (Kim Tong-uk 1958). The composition of the p’ansori text according to the principles of the oral-formulaic theory was further elucidated by Kim Pyŏng-guk (1982). By virtue of such research results as these, it has become clear that the narrative condition of p’ansori texts was enhanced by the accommodation of such oral-formulaic materials as folk
songs, shaman songs, sutra chantings, sijo and kasa poetry, popular songs, and Chinese poetry that had already been current among the people. It has also become clear that the lengthening and embellishment of p'ansori texts has been accomplished by means of oral formulas.

Meanwhile, Kim Hŭng-gyu (1975) conceived of p'ansori narrative structure as one of alternation between tension and relaxation. That is, p'ansori weaves a serial structure—linking emotional tension with its relaxation, and dramatic immersion with its interruption—through the iterations of ch'ang (sung passages) and aniri (spoken passages) and of poignance and comedy. His research has elucidated the essence of p'ansori's performing art by establishing—from the audience point of view—a connection between p'ansori's narrative structure and the listener's aesthetic experience. Subsequently, he stressed the presence of poignance in the p'ansori text as no less important than that of comedy and also pointed to the growth of poignance in p'ansori, together with the development of the chinyang rhythmic pattern and kyemyŏn musical mode from the sixteenth century onwards (Kim Hŭng-gyu 1980).

Along with this aesthetic approach to the text of p'ansori, investigations of the textual character of the ch'ang and aniri were also undertaken (Kim Tae-haeng 1976, Seo Dae-seok 1979). These studies pointed out that the sung ch'ang are used for scene-setting description, poignant moments, and interpolated verse and that the spoken aniri are used for the introduction of ch'ang, transitions between scenes, comedic moments, and passages of dialogue.

As the general character of p'ansori texts was thus illuminated from a variety of angles, it became vividly apparent that p'ansori possesses independent genre characteristics that distinguish it from fiction or drama.

III. Issues in the History of P'ansori

Research into the history of p'ansori may be divided into origins of the form and its changes over time.

Briefly listed, the various academic theories on the origins of p'ansori that have been brought forward include the following: 1) jongleur farce-play (Kim Tong-uk 1955, 1956), 2) shaman ritual performance (Yi Hye-gu 1955; Cho Sŏng 1968), 3) narrative shaman song (Chang Chu-gŭn 1967; Seo Dae-seok 1969, 1979), 4) folktale (Kim Tong-uk 1965), and 5) Chinese narrative singing (Kim Hak-ju 1973, Chang Chu-gŭn 1981).

3 The chinyang pattern is frequently used together with the kyemyŏn mode in order to produce a particularly poignant effect.
Kim Tong-uk theorized that p’ansori developed out of the alfresco farce-plays of jongleurs and, growing under the formative influence of interpolated songs and forms of fictive description, evolved its basic shape by combining a story-telling form with the primitive solo singing style now uniquely represented by the relic "Rite for Paebaeng-i." That is, as a result of the nation-wide intercourse amongst jongleurs, who gathered in Seoul when called to perform all manner of variety acts under the aegis of the Sandae-togam (stage management) Office of the Chosön court, the northern "Rite for Paebaeng-i" influenced the shape of southern p’ansori. Because this argument confuses the theatrical background of the emergence of p’ansori with the formation of the p’ansori genre, it contains some points that are difficult to accept. The jongleurs’ variety acts consisted of such things as tumbling and tight-rope walking; and witty dialogue did not necessarily accompany their singing. That is to say, the story-singing form was distinct from jongleur farce-palys. Furthermore, even though there may have been nation-wide intercourse amongst jongleurs, there is no evidence that the "Rite for Paebaeng-i" predates the formation of p’ansori. Therefore, while this theory may well be helpful in understanding the theatrical environment in which p’ansori came to thrive, we cannot see it as clarifying the origins of p’ansori, itself.

Yi Hye-gu (1955) proposed that p’ansori originally developed from within shaman ritual and, becoming adapted for entertainment, pleased the audience by embellishing popular legends with music, thereafter, with the refinement of its text, the form came to be welcomed by even the lettered classes. However, this theory is essentially hypothetical, in view of the near absence of an explanation of how and when this form broke the constraints of ritual and was adapted for entertainment.

Cho Sŏng (1968) lends substance to his theory that the origin of p’ansori lies in shaman ritual by making the point that, according to oral tradition, the shaman context for the emergence of p’ansori was confined to miji rites of southwestern Korea (the Chŏlla provinces). Whereas hereditary shamans of the southwest, called miji, officiated at the rites, male shamans, or sani, would assist them as musical accompanists. Since sani with good voices were well received and enjoyed good earnings when they sang at rites, sani worked hard at vocal studies and, as a result, produced many noted singers from among their number. Cho Sŏng’s view garners considerable persuasive power from the fact that p’ansori mastersingers came mostly from the southwest, that the music of p’ansori and that of the southwestern shamans is identical, and that p’ansori mastersingers emerged in great numbers from the family lines of hereditary shamans of the southwest. Although this argu-
ment clarifies the background for the emergence of p’ansori, it does not illuminate the origins of p’ansori as a literary genre.

The argument that the narrative shaman song served as the womb of p’ansori was put forward by Chang Chu-gün (1967). He sought the genre wellspring of p’ansori in the narrative shaman song on the basis of the fact that the narrative shaman song emerged as a genre prior to p’ansori and that both share the common characteristic of being oral narrative poetry that tells a story. However, he did not go so far as a substantive comparison of the two genres. Seo Dae-seok (1969) postulated that the region of origin of p’ansori should be limited to the southwest in view of the fact that most of the singers of p’ansori are natives of the southwest and that the music of p’ansori is the same as the folk music of that region. He went on to compare the oral forms of p’ansori with those of the narrative shaman song and surmised that p’ansori had gone through a transformation from a recitational song to a dramatic song (Seo Dae-seok 1979). As a result of these studies, it has now become a commonly-held opinion that p’ansori arose in the southwestern region, that its most immediate folk background was the culture of the hereditary shaman, and that the seedbed of p’ansori was the narrative shaman song. Nevertheless, there still remain many unresolved questions relating to the origins of p’ansori. Even if we say that there occurred a metamorphosis of narrative shaman song into p’ansori, we have yet to clarify the motivations and social pressures behind the transformation. We must explain why the shaman who sang the lives of spirits at sacred ceremonies would change into a kwangdae (professional p’ansori singer) who sang stories of the people well matched to their earthly interests. And, furthermore, we must explicate in terms of the history of social thought the question of why and when the audience became more interested in p’ansori than the songs of the shamans.

The view that p’ansori developed under the influence of Chinese narrative singing is less than persuasive as a theory of the origin of p’ansori because grounds for positing such influence have yet to be established. The similarities between p’ansori and Chinese narrative singing are nothing more than common features which are characteristic of the genre of oral narrative poetry, as it exists amongst all peoples. Therefore, it would seem that comparative research—from an angle other than the origins of p’ansori—might be of some significance. We would further illuminate the special properties of p’ansori by examining such characteristics as oral form, prosody, and rhetoric in a comparative study of the oral narrative poetry of countries around the world—not just China.

The argument that p’ansori is derived from folktales is more the result of
research seeking the source of materials of individual works than it is an expression of genre origins. Both folktales and p’ansonri are examples of narrative literature. The folktale is a simple literary form that constitutes the most fundamental stuff of narrative literature. Therefore, it is only natural that folktales should serve as the ultimate wellspring of materials for such complex narrative genres as p’ansonri or fiction. Kim Tong-uk (1961) sought out the source tales for the twelve songs of the traditional p’ansonri repertoire and posited a chain of development from the folktale through p’ansonri to fiction. Rather than being a theory of the genre origins of p’ansonri, his position is the result of research, based upon folk sources, into the process by which the material content of individual p’ansonri works took shape.

When one seeks p’ansonri’s genre origins in the folktale, it is necessary to assert that songs were first interpolated into a story-telling literary form and that such a prose telling was then transformed into a versified literary form. The existence of professional tellers of folktales has been confirmed and examples have been found of their interpolation of songs in the course of their stories. The problem here lies in the fact that, if verse had been interpolated into a prose context, the anuri (spoken passages) should occupy a more central position in p’ansonri than do the ch’ang (sung passages). But, in materials known to date, it has been confirmed that ch’ang are central and that anuri serve to supplement the ch’ang. In view of these points, it would appear difficult for the folktale origin theory to enjoy much persuasive power.

Next, we shall examine discussions of historical change in p’ansonri.

The oldest extant p’ansonri document is the 1754 Manhwa edition of the “Song of Ch’unhyang.” This is a full record in Chinese verse of the content of a performance of p’ansonri by a kwangdae, as witnessed by the poet Yu Chin-han (Manhwa, 1711-1791) when he was traveling in the southwest. Through this record we learn that p’ansonri was already being sung in the streets of this region in the middle of the 18th century. Furthermore, this document also confirms that p’ansonri had not yet spread throughout the country at that time.

However, with Song Man-jae’s early 19th century poem, “On Viewing a Kwangdae Play,” we already find reference to several of the eight Mastersingers (Kwŏn Sam-dŭk, Song Hŭng-nok, Mo Hŭng-gap, etc.), that there were then 12 works in the p’ansonri repertoire, and that p’ansonri was by that time flourishing throughout the country and even at court.

Accordingly, we can say that the nation-wide spread of p’ansonri and the growth of its repertoire peaked in the middle of the 19th century but began to contract thereafter. It appears that the p’ansonri repertoire had shrunk to
six works\(^4\) by the time the p’ansori scholar Sin Chae-hyo (1812-1884) was active in the late 19th century. In the area of rhetoric, p’ansori was then reflecting Confucian culture in ways that suited aristocratic tastes while tending to de-emphasize the vivid but coarse language of the common people.

In light of these phenomena, critical opinion amongst scholars is quite mixed, indeed, regarding the p’ansori texts attributed to Sin Chae-hyo.

According to Kim Hŭng-gyu (1979), the 12 works of the traditional p’ansori repertoire began to gradually dwindle in number when aristocrats emerged as an increasingly influential segment, of the p’ansori audience, beginning in the late 18th century and early 19th century. Of the 12 songs, seven became less well transmitted during the second half of the 19th century and finally were lost altogether, leaving only five.\(^5\) And, what is more, the adaptations by Sin Chae-hyo catered to the sensibilities of the aristocratic audience with the result that p’ansori’s original vitality was eliminated in his versions (Kim Hŭng-gyu 1978).

On the other hand, Chŏng Pyŏng-hŏn (1985) offered a more favorable critique. He held that the texts of Sin Chae-hyo’s six p’ansori works, balancing propriety with vulgarity and Confucian refinement with plebian bawdiness, skilfully manifested the basic structure of tension and relaxation through a masterly use of language. He went on to characterize Sin Chae-hyo as a man who had both an aristocratic sensibility and, at the same time, a feeling for the popular mind—a combination that is reflected in his texts and is also consistent with of the duality and conflict that are inherent to p’ansori.

Other, differing critical opinions of Sin Chae-hyo have also appeared, expressing a more neutral point of view toward his work. Sŏ Chŏng-mun (1984) also describes Sin Chae-hyo as a man having both an aristocratic sensibility and a feeling for the popular mind; and he sees both of these two aspects of Sin Chae-hyo’s personality reflected in his p’ansori texts. Using examples from the “Song of the Red Cliff,” he sees Sin Chae-hyo oriented as an aristocrat in his description of the hero K’ŭng-ming but oriented as a commoner in the passages where soldiers complain of their lot.

Critical evaluation of Sin Chae-hyo takes such a central position in the discussion of historical change in p’ansori because his adaptations, fixed in written form, have survived intact today. The scripts or prompt-books of

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\(^{4}\) Of the six songs, only five were then actually being performed.

\(^{5}\) A sixth work, the bawdy “Song of Pyŏn Kang-soe,” was transcribed by Sin Chae-hyo but is not known to have been performed at that time.
the Eight Mastersingers, who actually were active before Sin Chae-hyo's time, are no longer extant. Therefore, we have no way of knowing the original, untouched appearance of early p'ansori texts. Our only way to understand the early shape of p'ansori is by reference to the anecdotes of famous p'ansori singers, passed on in the oral tradition and recorded in fictional form. By reference to such anecdotes of famous p'ansori singers, we learn that the development of the musical forms of p'ansori was nearly completed by the time of Song Hŭng-nok, who flourished in the early 19th century as one of the Eight Mastersingers. Accordingly, we have confirmation that p'ansori had already passed through the developmental process of creating musical patterns, expanding texts, and achieving refinement by the time of Song Hŭng-nok. We know for a fact that, subsequently, the p'ansori active repertoire shrank from 12 to five works but cannot be sure whether this occurred during the period when Sin Chae-hyo was active. As to the reason for this shrinkage, we should rethink the view that materials unsuited to aristocratic tastes were simply just dropped from the repertoire.

The fact that Sin Chae-hyo adapted six p'ansori texts cannot be seen as evidence for the assertion that only six p'ansori texts existed at that particular time. All we do know is that, in his own individual opinion, Sin Chae-hyo judged only six p'ansori works of the time as being worthy of reworking and editing. Furthermore, it would be difficult to reject the possibility that Sin Chae-hyo's edited works became more widely sung and were assured more audience response than other works that had not been edited.

P'ansori is oral literature. Oral literary material bases its survival upon audience response. Therefore, in the background of p'ansori's expansion and later contraction, we would probably find that the tastes and worldview of its audience were, at the same time, in the process of changing and broadening. Considered in this light, the changes in p'ansori should be discussed together with changes in worldview and aesthetic values of Koreans of the late Chosŏn period. Furthermore, it is also necessary to give close consideration to the influence of foreign literature and intellectual trends. Finally, and a phenomenon of special importance, there is the historical change in Korean performing arts brought about by the dramatization of p'ansori with multiple actors that accompanied the development of western-style theatre in Korea.

(translated by Marshall R. Pihl)
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# GLOSSARY

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<td>Sim Ch'ŏng chŏn</td>
<td>沈淸傳</td>
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