

Folk Traits in the Buddhist Chant of Korea

Hahn Man-young
Seoul National University

Buddhism was imported into Korea in the fourth century A.D. from India, but documents on Buddhist music did not appear until the eighth and ninth centuries¹⁾. The contemporary Silla (57 B.C.-935 A.D.) Buddhist chant was well documented in the book of a Japanese monk Yennin²⁾, who stated that there was one Korean temple called Choksan-won 赤山院, in Tungju on the Shantung peninsula 山東半島 in China, where T'ang, Korean and Japanese-style Buddhist chants were all used³⁾.

The fact that Korean-style Buddhist chant existed at that time indicates that Buddhism was already Koreanized. This chant is still sung today as the *hossori* chant of contemporary Buddhist ceremonies, and the scale of this chant is identical to that of folk songs of the eastern part of Korea, originally Silla territory.

Ex. 1 *hossori*; Halhyang

The three principal tones appear in the transcription as C#, F# and A--a fourth plus a minor third, the typical tonal framework of the eastern folk song region, though the vocal mannerism is more elaborate and formal than the folk song.

Ex. 2 Folk song of the eastern part of Korea

From this it would seem that the people of Silla adopted the music of the foreign into

(1) In an epitaph at Ssanggye-sa temple, it is written that the monk Chingam went to China (T'ang) in 804 A.D. and learned Buddhist chant there, returning to Korea in 830.

Also King Kyongdok of the Silla kingdom, in the 19th year of his reign (760 A.D.) saw two suns appear in the sky, and called for a Buddhist chanter to banish one of them but failed to meet a chanter. The king met a Buddhist monk who could sing nothing but native songs, and one song in particular was called *t'osolga*. (*Samguk yusa* vol. 5)

(2) Yennin went to T'ang China in 838 A.D. and returned to Japan in 847. He wrote a book entitled "Journey to T'ang to Learn Buddhism."

(3) Lee Hye-ku. "Buddhist Chant of Silla," *Studies in Korean Music*, 1957.

their own folk music. Japanese-style Buddhist chant was probably imported from central Asia, and is closely related to present-day *chissori* chant of Korea, and the chants of Tibet and Mongolia.

Buddhist chant (pōmp'ae 梵唄) is sung at temples primarily during the rites. In a narrower sense, pomp'ae has two forms; *chissori* (grand, elaborate tone) and *hossori* (simple tone). But in a wider sense, it has four; *chissori*, *hossori*, *anch'aebisori*⁴⁾ (*yōmbul* 念佛 or recitation), and *hwachōng* 和請. The texts of the former three use Chinese verse, prose and Sanskrit, which are very difficult for common people to understand. Using the easily comprehensible texts in Korean, the chanter sings *hwachōng* either during or more commonly, after the ceremony, to honor the person holding the rite. The texts bless the recipient, praise the graces of his parents, and give the Buddhist teachings.

The people participating in the rite hear the chants for an extended number of hours, though not understanding the meaning of the texts, with a pious and formal, yet sullen attitude⁵⁾. However, once *hwachōng* is heard, they enjoy, laugh and become animated.

Chissori and *hossori* have the musical style of unaccompanied, unmetered unison, melismatic and slow tempo, while *hwachōng* employs a syllabic, distinctive rhythmic cycle with fast tempo.

Hwachōng has two derivative forms; *hwachōng* and *ch'ugwon-hwachōng*. *Hwachōng* is a solo song accompanied by a large gong (T'aejing) with a measure of 10/8 (2.3.2.3). Every phrase is marked by striking the large gong. The scale is identical to that of the folk song of the northwestern region: a fifth joined to a minor third, e.g., G A c d f g, among which the three pitches, G d f are principal.

Ex. 3 hwachōng

The measure of 10/8 is occasionally seen in the folk song, and more often in the shaman songs.

Ch'ugwon-hwachōng is another version of *hwachōng*, accompanied by the large gong

(4) *Anch'aebi-sori*, literally meaning "inside musician's song," generally has texts of Chinese prose, cited rapidly in the manner of Western operatic recitative.

(5) The largest scale rite lasts about three days. However, the ceremony most commonly performed lasts approximately one day.

with a measure of six beats, in the same manner as in *hwachŏng*. The anhemitonic pentatonic scale with cadence on sol is characteristic to this music. This scale is identical to that of the folk song of the central region⁶⁾.

Ex. 4 Ch'ugwon-hwachŏng

Hwachŏng is often confused with Buddhist-shamanist narrative songs, such as *hoesimgok* (song of conversion), because of (1) the content of the texts which evoke blessings upon the persons holding the rite, (2) musically narrative and recitative styles, and (3) the singers of both songs are hardly differentiated.

Originally, *hwachŏng* was sung only by professional Buddhist chanters while *hoesimgok* was sung by professional shamanistic singers for exorcism, money or rice-raising, or pure entertainment. Until the first half of the twentieth century, *hwachŏng* was occasionally sung by professional shamanist singers for the same purposes as *hoesimgok*, who were mistakenly regarded as quasi-Buddhist monks. On the other hand, Buddhist chanters occasionally sang the repertoires of the shamanist singers for fund-raising on village tours in order to build or repair temples. Under certain pressing circumstances, such as a famine or flood, Buddhist chanters and shamanist singers would perform together in order to obtain money or rice⁷⁾.

Ex. 5 Hoesimgok

Buddhism as a religion was adopted by the nobility when it was first imported to Korea, and because the nobility fostered and appreciated the performance of court music, certain Buddhist elements were bound to be incorporated into the genuine shamanist music. This also shows that court music reflected the thinking and way of life of the intelligentsia. However, that such folk music styles as *hossori* and *hwachŏng* exist in Buddhist chant even today shows shamanism and Buddhism have merged to some extent. As a further

(6) Hahn Man-young. "Folk Song," Survey of Korean Arts; Traditional Music, 1973.

(7) Hahn Man-young. "*Hwachŏng* and *Kosa-yŏmbul*, a Buddhist and Shamanistic Songs," Articles on Asian Music; Festschrift for Dr. Chang Sa-hun, 1977.

example of the incorporation of shamanist characteristics into Buddhist tradition, one discovers a “Mountain Spirit House” 山神堂 and a “Heavenly Spirits’ House” 七星閣, both directly shamanistic, on the grounds of Buddhist temples in Korea.

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