

Singing in the Life of Grandmother Choe,* a Survivor of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery

Joshua D. Pilzer (University of Chicago)

General introduction

My dissertation is a study of the musical life of Korean survivors of the Japanese “comfort women” system, by which tens or perhaps hundreds of thousands of girls and young women were forced into sexual slavery to Japanese soldiers during the Pacific War. Approximately two hundred fifty South Korean women have come forward and given testimony as former sex slaves.

There are many reasons why I chose this subject: the fact that these women were compelled to learn and perform Japanese and Korean songs in the “comfort station” (see Hanguk jeongsindae 1993, 1995); the fact that they traveled all over the Pacific, East and Southeast Asia and collected together songs of many countries, which, taken together, are a kind of map of the consequences of Japanese imperialism; the fact that many of them were sold or pressured into the South Korean domestic entertainment industry after the war, singing, pouring drinks, and in some cases selling their bodies to American and Korean soldiers and civilians. Much like outsiders such as Jews and Gypsies in Eastern Europe, the former sexual slaves, marginalized in Korean post-colonial society, often took up musical professions. In general, colonial and post-colonial East Asia demonstrate a close relation of entertainment labor to sexual exploitation and violence.

My principal goal is the investigation of these women’s music as a literature of their

*“Grandmother Choe” is a pseudonym.

experience and a process of their suffering and survival. Their case is an opportunity to learn something about the human spirit and how it suffers and endures through musical performance, and an opportunity to learn something crucial about the social functions of music — its role in survival, in defining the self, in connecting that self to others, in remembering, forgetting, and so on. I was inspired by the many music scholars who documented the songs of the survivors of the Jewish holocaust (see Flam 1992).

Research perspective

In the course of the last half of the twentieth century music scholars have variously debated the strengths and weaknesses of musicological research focused on the formal properties of music versus research focused on the social and cultural contexts of music. Those outside of music academia find being forced to choose between ‘music’ and ‘context’ to be a very strange choice indeed, and their instinct is an important corrective to this debate, which is based on false premises. Music has a specificity which allows us to call it music and not something else; but its autonomy varies widely from time to time and place to place, and might not exist in a place where people do not have a separate concept of music. Musical autonomy is always in part a product of musicians and musicologists’ efforts to autonomize music from the social realm, in part through developing a discourse of musical autonomy, in part through institutionalizing music in order to insulate it against social life and social change. Hence, while it is a *real autonomy*, it is a relative autonomy, because it is nonetheless socially produced. Music, like language, or sports, or shopping, etc., is a social activity, produced, distributed and received in a social field that Pierre Bourdieu called *habitus* (1977, chapter 2). Music is vested with such social tasks as ritual, communicating and transforming emotion, giving pleasure, reflecting universal or social harmony, and so on. To not understand the scene of musical performance is to not understand the conditions of music’s emergence, of its making. To not understand music’s social nature is to not understand *why* it sounds a particular way; and, most importantly, it is to fail to understand its aesthetic value, its emotive

content, its power, its effect.

The paper is meant as an invitation to scholars investigating Korean music to pursue a kind of socially engaged scholarship, in order to get at these most pressing questions about the aesthetics and the power of music, and in order to lend a musicological perspective to the investigation of social life and human history. The paper follows one of many possible pathways in the analysis of concrete socio-musical practices and artifacts: an investigation of music in a particular person's experience.

Music and human functioning

[Music] is a means of experiencing oneself in time ... [of experiencing] ourselves as embodied. — Sutton 2002: 35.

As research in music therapy and the evolutionary study of music has long suggested, music, as an activity that coordinates mind and body and that has momentum based on rhythm, melody, and other musical parameters, can be a technique of organizing ones' behaviors into coherent action. The capacity for music is in this sense a gauge of selfhood, and the practice of music is a practice of performing that selfhood. The utility of work and game songs can be understood in terms of organizing the self, often coordinating one's behavior with that of others. Music can be a bridge to the social world, or it can be a means of escaping that world, as in Ophelia's mad singing in *Hamlet*; but it is nonetheless an organization of a kind of self.

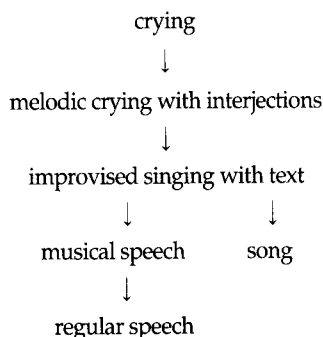
Because music is useful for organizing behavior, it is not surprising (if controversial (see Brown, et al, 2000: 8)) that some scientists believe music to be a precondition for language, because the ability to categorize and order sounds, or phonocoding, is logically a prerequisite for lexicoding, the process of categorizing and ordering sounded meanings (Marler 2000). Whether or not music is the origin of language or other types of social behavior in the evolution of our species, it can be seen to be the origin of language and behavior in many concrete social situations: it often gives us a

power that enables language, and a power to function more fluidly in general. Many children sing before they speak. The popular neurologist Oliver Sacks (1985) describes a patient who was only able to perform tasks such as bathing and eating by singing as he did them. At funerals, when we are carried away by emotion, laments provide a flexible musical structure that carries us along and bears the weight of our sorrow, placing it in a coherent framework that aids in its sublimation, enabling us to carry on with other activities.

Korean folk singing genres and the sung pathways to social functioning

Korean folk music, because of its often improvisational character, has a specific role to play in coordinating and transitioning to types of social action — movement, language, and so on — which are of their very nature improvised to a large degree. This is especially true for singing, which flows in and out of other vocalizations (crying, laughing, sighing, speaking, etc.). There are pathways, in Southwestern Korean folk singing, from tears, to melodic crying, to lamentation, to speech or song. At funerals a crying person is urged to “do *gok* (哭),” musical crying. If *gok* speeds up, and if emotions settle, it may become an improvised patchwork song of woe that some scholars call *heunggeul sori* (Kim 1996, 2000). And as *heunggeul sori* quickens, it can become indistinguishable from the verses of certain folk songs (Kim and Yi 2001: 41). The other pathway, which I have observed in my fieldwork, leads the singer from crying, through increasingly melodic and then texted singing, on into plain speech. Both of the progressions happen as successions of different identifiable vocal genres and in more ephemeral ways that are difficult to categorize as successions of vocal genres.

The two paths or continua under consideration here can be represented as one path that forks at the moment when sound has been sufficiently structured to be both proto-song and proto-speech, as given in the figure below:



The path from crying to language and the path from crying to song share an increase in degree of textual content; but the path to song features an increasing melodic content, and a greater consistency of meter, whereas the path to language witnesses a falling away of melody and a loosening of rhythmic framework at the gradual transition from improvised texted melody to regular speech. This is emphasized in the model by distinguishing a section of musical speech, which will become clear from the example given below. Note also the distinction between *singing*, which includes all forms of improvised musical vocalization (*gok*, *heunggeul sori*, etc.), and *song*, which has relative fixity of *content* in addition to improvisation's degrees of fixity of *framework*. This difference, of course, is one of degree and thus we should bear in mind that the distinction is only made for the purposes of imagining a continuum, and the transformations that the continuum makes possible.

What the two lines of sound development share is a progressive organization of sonic materials out of the relative chaos of crying, and a progressive sense of social participation, in contrast to the solitudes of crying and silence. They are musical processes of emotional transformation, of the sublimation of sorrow; processes which involve a progressive ability to laugh, or to separate oneself from one's own suffering or loss and comment on it, and to eventually move on to other subjects. As *heunggeul sori* gives way to folk song, it is also a means of joining one's personal story to society by smoothly linking one's own crying and musical and textual improvisations with the well-known sounds and texts of folk songs. For all of these reasons, these chains of vocalization can be techniques of vernacular music therapy.²

Grandmother Choe

In the time I spent with Grandmother Choe, a deeply traumatized Southwestern Korean survivor of Japanese sexual slavery, I heard her make use of these techniques of sublimation in their entirety or in pieces, for large and small emotional transformations. But I also discovered the limits of her use of these pathways to sociality. She moved from proto-song to speech, but not from proto-song to folk songs of her home region.

Grandmother Choe is in her mid-eighties, from a poor family in South Jeolla Province. In 1936, at age eighteen, she was dragged off by a Korean male stranger and handed over to a trader who sold her to a Manchurian ‘comfort station.’ She lived as a sexual slave for nine years. She was repeatedly raped, assaulted and beaten by soldiers until the war ended. Upon returning to her hometown she was shunned by her fellow villagers and she lived as a poor outcaste, surviving by doing odd jobs. She was unable to have children, although she married an older man, who died in 1993. She registered as a former sexual slave some years later, and in 2000 moved to the House of Sharing, a rest home for eleven survivors of Japanese sexual slavery that also houses an educational center and a museum (Nanum eui jip yeoksagwan huweonhoe: 146-8).

Grandmother Choe walks with difficulty and is very inactive. At the House of Sharing she is almost always alone; she has one occasional companion among the ladies. Her isolation is a product of her seemingly disassociated state and her habit of lashing out at other women, especially the weaker ones. After such outbursts she struggles to her room and sinks in depression, often not coming out for the rest of the day.

In general Grandmother Choe shows many signs of what psychiatrist Judith Herman calls “Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder,” a psychological condition resulting from “A history of subjection to totalitarian control over a prolonged

² There are countless more transformative continua in Korean socio-musical life: the path from speech into song, or the path from improvised laments of the everyday kind to ecstatic or virtuosic improvisation, for instance.

period”: preoccupations with death, explosive or extremely inhibited anger, compulsive sexuality, a tendency to oscillate between affection and anger, a sense of helplessness, hopelessness and despair, a feeling of complete isolation, and a constant search for rescuers (121).

But despite the depths of this trauma, and the depth of psychological destruction she underwent at the hands of the Japanese and of her own society, Grandmother Choe is extremely resourceful, has a sharp memory, laughs often, and is a notorious trickster. She has a keen awareness of her surroundings, of her possessions, and is wary of others. She has a fighting spirit, and for many years she has gotten up every Wednesday to go to the weekly protest in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul. A close look at Grandmother Choe’s musical life shows how the therapeutic uses of singing mentioned above have a significant role in her ability to bring herself out of her spells of depression and to be a capable person.

Episode 1: From Tears to Singing

One morning seven of the ladies left for sightseeing on Amlyeong Island. Grandmother Choe, who opted out of most trips due to her physical weakness, was left behind again, together with O halmoni, with whom she had fought the other day. She sat next to me on the bench beside the house weeping. At first she cried harsh, high, pitchless sobs, but as her emotions settled, the crying became more like singing, although it was without recognizable rhythm. Her pitch center moved around, but she consistently cried a warbling *appoggiatura* spanning a narrow minor second (90 cents or so) and she settled downward to a tone about a whole step (200 cents) below the low point of the slide: it was an incomplete version of the Southwestern folk *gyemyeonjo* mode. She omitted the low vibrato tone (*ddeoneun cheong* (Paek 38)) of the scale, and the high falling tone a fourth above the central tone; in general, her crying occupied the same narrow range of the central tone and its upper-neighbor *appoggiatura*.



Example 1. Musical transcription of Grandmother Choe's crying.

As her emotions flowed into and dispersed along the stability of musical structure, her weeping became even more musical: ornaments became more consistent, and the tonal center stabilized.

A host of musical research on laments has revealed the close connection between crying and music: Steven Feld's "Weeping that Moves Women to Song" (1982), on Papua New Guinean women of the Kaluli tribe, and Elizabeth Tolbert's discussion of Karelian women's laments (1990) both describe how music emerges from an initial condition of unrestrained weeping. The emerging musical elements of Grandmother Choe's expression of sadness — the scale, the motifs, the increasing continuity of musical form — signaled a move away from less formal expression towards an integration of her thoughts and feelings into a stylized expression of sadness, which is the process of the emergence of *gok*, stylized Korean melodic crying, in a situation of mourning. While her crying was not standard *gok* with its interjections of "aigo, aigo" (oh my, oh my) it was nonetheless musical, and we can see several core elements beginning to emerge. This implied the generative core of a self that was capable of organized action.

Episode 2: From Singing to Speech

One day, following another fight with O halmoni, Grandmother Choe retired to her room in despair. She lay in bed, depressed but calm, singing *heunggeul sori* (improvised laments) to herself for hours and hours, occasionally crying. Her emotions were milder and her music more controlled, and her sobs fell at structural points where they would not disrupt the flow of the music — between phrases, at breathing-points, and so on. In the manner of *heunggeul sori*, she sang more rhythmically; she dropped down often to the low vibrato tone; and she repeatedly drifted down from the high falling tone one forth above the center, all of which she had not done when crying more intensely. Most importantly, her melisma had become an improvised song, with a patchwork text of words and phrases from life and from songs: *eomae* (mother!), *aigo* (oh my), *ureum* (tears), *bulssanghan dongja* (pitiful child). She repeated sections of melody and text, but rarely sang the same phrase in the same way.



Example 2. Excerpt from Grandmother Choe's depressed *heunggeul sori*.

The presence of the low vibrato tone and the high falling tone meant that the important tones of *gyemyeonjo* were all present; perhaps we could say that now Grandmother Choe had crossed the blurry line between crying and song. The increased formality of both the downward sliding appoggiatura and the low vibrato resemble what Elizabeth Tolbert, in an essay on Karelian laments (1994), calls "icons of crying," stylized musical symbolizations of crying, such as *gyemyeonjo*'s low vibrato tone, that can imply a certain distance from sadness necessary to make intentional reference to tears. But in terms of form, the "icons of crying" close the distance between music and crying, making music useful for transitioning between sorrow and other emotional states, or between crying and speech.

Grandmother Choe was in mid-phrase: "*ureume naryae-a...*" when her neighbor, Ahn halmoni, burst into the room, saying "Let's go have dinner!" (jeonyeok meogeuro gaja), trying to rouse her from her depression. Grandmother Choe sputtered to a stop, compelled by Ahn halmoni's rhythmic querying: "*Ung? Ung? Wae?* (Huh? Huh? Why?)" and she ended her singing on the bottom end of the downward appoggiatura a whole step above the central tone (see example three). But when she spoke, saying "I won't eat ...", (on mug eo) she did so musically, dropping down to the central tone, finishing the phrase. She did so twice, the first time microtonally just high of the central tone (as indicated by the arrow in the transcription), and the second time arriving precisely at the central pitch, completing the phrase. Her next vocalization, also a complete sentence, bore the same melodic structure.



Example 3. Grandmother Choe's crossover from singing to speech.

I believe there is a relationship between the completeness of these sentences and the way that their melody completes the melodic exploration of Grandmother Choe's *heunggeul sori*. In this context, *heunggeul sori* can be a mechanism for transcending a debilitating state and transitioning to capable action. At this threshold, Grandmother Choe's improvised singing gave way to the improvisation of speech, as the structure of musical improvisation was mapped onto the similar structures of speech improvisation. Grandmother Choe's singing had already moved closer to speech when she began to sing texts; and now, the singing provided a framework from which spoken expression could emerge and contributed some of the energy necessary for the emergence of speech.

From Crying to Singing to Song

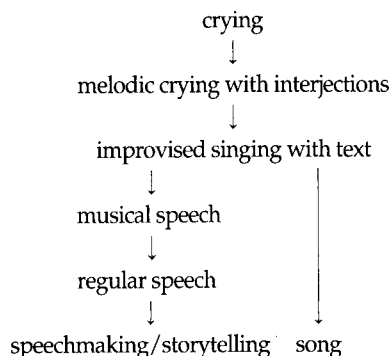
The above sections detail Grandmother Choe's transition, through music, from crying to speech. But I have yet to discuss the possible transitions from crying to singing to song that I outlined above. This is because, in the course of more than a year of spending time with Grandmother Choe, I never heard her moving from the improvisation of *heunggeul sori* to the relative textual and durational fixity of folk songs; I never heard her sing more than short fragments of a Southwestern Korean folk song at all. If prompted to sing at any of the many social events at the House of Sharing, she would reply with "I don't know how to...." Just once, in front of a microphone on Parents' Day, she sang "Arirang," Korea's most popular folk song, in its most popular *sin minyo* (new folksong) incarnation.

There are a number of causes to which we might want to attribute Grandmother Choe's lack of songs. We might assume that she forgot them, as elderly ladies frequently claim. But Grandmother Choe says "I don't know how," not that she's forgotten how; and besides, her memory for other things is sharp. We might also assume that Grandmother Choe doesn't sing because she was deprived of many opportunities to learn folk songs as a victim of colonial dislocation and post-war social

exclusion. But other women who were also abused during the war and stigmatized afterwards sing folk songs, which they learned in youth in their hometowns, in the course of work, or on the radio; and anyway, the “deprived-of-learning experiences” perspective does not explain why Grandmother Choe would not sing popular songs, which are available to anyone with a radio or a television. It also does not explain why she doesn’t dance, or give testimony, or paint, as many of the women at the House of Sharing have been doing for many years under the supervision of an art teacher, or why she doesn’t do *any* virtuosic performative social activity.

As a sexual slave Grandmother Choe was treated as a non-person, an object for sexual pleasure and the pleasures of violence; while some women survived by fighting back, or by extreme resourcefulness and wariness, Grandmother Choe survived the war by becoming that non-person, by passivity and private forms of resistance. Later, her experience in South Korean post-war society as a shunned, poor, childless woman with a past thought shameful (if tragic) reinforced that personality. She developed an instinct against exposure, so she has for long not performed or engaged in virtuosic social activity. As a consequence she struggles with long-range forms such as song or storytelling that one learns in the context of performance and for the purpose of performance. She makes the transition to speech because it remains in the mundane register of social action, but not to the extraordinary realms of song or testimony. She uses vernacular music therapy to carry her to mundane social action but not into performance.

So knowing this, we must redraw our figure to indicate mundane and virtuosic registers of social action in the transition to social functionality:



The Y-axis, moving downward, shows increased social functionality, culminating in different kinds of verbal art. This coincides with the increasing fixity of form, although not necessarily in the case of virtuoso improvisation. Perhaps we could place the fragments of song that Grandmother Choe often sings in between her *heunggeul sori* and full-fledged song.

So Grandmother Choe is songless, not so much because of the general human displacement and cultural loss of the colonial period, the war, and the twentieth century, as because of the particular damage she suffered and the person she became throughout years and years of harsh exploitation and exclusion. This is an important point: it means that this former sexual slave has special traumas about her that are not just extreme versions of the Korean national experience, and therefore she should not be collapsed into the “former comfort woman,” a super-symbol of national exploitation. Her particularity, as I hope to have shown, can be discovered in music through socio-musicological analysis.

Conclusion

The singing and songs that I have been studying are, in my mind, a literature of experience of the survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery, as a body of stories that relate parts of their life experience. But it is a deeper literature than that; for in the minutia of the women’s everyday musical experience lies something of the structure and the affective realities of exploitation, traumas, and survival. As resources for survival, as vernacular forms of music therapy, these singing practices provide a kind of mirror of the obstacles that these women have had to overcome.

Once music, and especially song, is taken to be a literature of people’s experience and a kind of social practice, the amount of collecting, of interviewing, of observing that could be done in South Korea is truly staggering. Colonial-era forced laborers, overseas Koreans, Korean survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, refugees from the north, children, the handicapped, colonial-era independence fighters, the dying, soldiers, activists, prisoners, sex workers around American military bases and in entertainment industry for South Korean males: all have a sung literature of their

experience; and each vests Korean folk and popular songs with the content of that experience. Each has been coerced and controlled through music, and each has musical ways of surviving and overcoming pain and hardship. Ethnomusicologists of Korea have left most of the work of understanding this realm of musical experience to private music researchers and the media. South Korean and foreign scholars of Korean music alike should contribute our efforts to opening up these windows on human experience.

Acknowledgements

I give very special thanks to the Korean survivors of Japanese sexual slavery with whom I worked, and the staff of the House of Sharing 나눔의 집 in Gwangju City, Gyeonggi Province for their friendship and assistance. I am indebted to the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Japanese Military Sexual Slavery 한국정신대 문제대책협의회 for making my project possible. I would also like to thank the Asian Music Research Institute 동양음악 연구회 for inviting me to their 7th conference, at Seoul National University, at which I presented an early version of this paper, the US Institute of International Education for the Fulbright grant which I used for this research in 2002-3, and the Korean American Educational Commission for administering the award and for their generous support. I owe special thanks to Kim Jin-Woo for her patience in conference organizing and in the editorial process, to Saul Thomas, Byeon Sangcheol, Kim Eungyeong, Kim Jeongsuk, Kim Seonju and Kwon Do Hee for their critical readings of the paper, and to Kim Hyejeong and Yi Bohyeong for sharing their expertise with me. The article is dedicated to Grandmother Choe.

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일본군 성노예 피해 생존자 최할머니의 삶과 음악

조슈아 D. 필저 (시카고대학교)

김세중 옮김 (서울대학교)

들어가며

내 학위논문은 한국인 일본군 성노예(‘중군위안부’) 생존자들의 음악과 삶에 대한 연구이다. 연구 주제로 일본군 성노예를 택한 배경은 여러 가지이다. 이 여성들은 ‘위안소’에서 일본과 한국의 노래를 억지로 불러야 했다. 이들은 태평양과 동아시아, 동남아시아를 돌아다니면서 여러 나라의 노래를 듣고 불렀다. 이들 다수는 종전 후 남한 내 향락산업에 팔리거나 끌려들어가 노래하고 접대하고 심지어 미국인과 한국인, 군인과 민간인을 대상으로 성매매에 나서기도 했다. 동유럽의 유대인이나 짐시같은 주변인과 흡사하게 일본군 성노예 생존자 여성들은 한국의 탈식민 사회에서 주변인화되면서 음악과 관련된 직업에 종사하는 경우가 많았다.

연구의 가장 큰 목표는 이 여성들의 음악을 체험의 기록으로서, 그리고 수난과 생존의 과정으로서 탐구하려는 것이다. 일본군 성노예 여성들의 경우는 인간의 영혼이란 무엇인가, 영혼은 어떻게 수난을 당하고 음악을 통해 견뎌내는가, 살아남고 자기를 규정하고 자기를 타인과 관련지우고, 기억하고 잊고, ... 등등의 과정에서 음악의 역할이란 무엇인가를 어렵פות이나마 알 수 있게 해 준다. 유대인 홀로코스트 생존자들의 노래에 관한 여러 음악학자의 선행연구가 자극제가 되어 주었다.

연구의 시점

음악의 자율성이란 시대와 장소에 따라 들쭉날쭉하고, 음악이라는 개념만 따로 뚝 떼어 존재하지 않는 데서는 음악의 자율성도 아예 존재하지 않는다. 음악의 자율성은 언제나, 음악을 사회라는 영역으로부터 자율화하고자 하는 음악가와 음악 학자들의 노력의 산물인 동시에, 음악을 사회적 삶과 사회 변화로부터 고립시키기 위한 제도화의 산물이었다. 그러므로 음악이 정말로 자율적이라 하더라도 그 자율성이 사회적으로 생산된 것인 한 그것은 '상대적 자율성'이다. 음악은 언어나 스포츠나 쇼펄 등등처럼 사회적 활동이며, 사회라는 장(field) 또는 피에르 부르디외가 말하는 '아비투스(habitus)' 속에서 생산되고 전파되고 수용된다. 음악의 사회적 본성을 이해하지 못한다면 '왜' 그런 소리가 나는지 이해할 수 없고, 나아가 음악의 미적 가치, 정서적 내용, 음악의 힘과 효능도 이해할 수 없다.

사회적 삶과 개인사를 음악학적으로 조망하려는 시도로서 이 글은 여러 다양한 길 중에서도 구체적인 사회음악적 실제, 즉 한 개인의 체험 속에서 음악이란 무엇인가를 살펴보고자 한다.

음악과 사람 되기

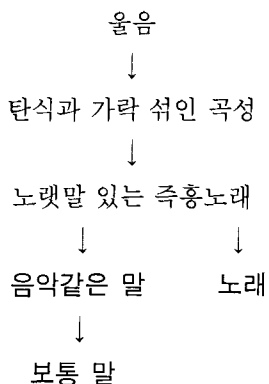
음악요법과 진화론적 음악 연구에서는 오랫동안, 음악이 마음과 몸을 조화시키는 활동으로서 사람의 행동을 일관성있게 조직하는 테크닉이 될 수 있지 않을까 하고 생각해 왔다. 이런 의미에서 음악은 자기임의 척도이며, 음악을 한다는 것은 그 자기임을 연출하는 것이다. 노동요와 유희요의 효용도 '자기 구성'이라는 측면에서, 자기의 행동을 남의 행동과 조화시키는 것으로서 이해할 수 있다. 「햄릿」의 오필리어에서 보듯 음악은 사회라는 세계로 건너가거나 거기서 탈출하는 다리가 될 수 있으나, 그러는 가운데도 음악은 어디까지나 일종의 자아를 조직하는 행위인 것이다.

인간 진화에서 음악이 언어나 다른 유형의 사회적 행동의 기원인가 여부와 무관하게, 구체적인 사회적 상황에서 음악은 말과 행동의 기원인 경우가 많다. 어린이들이 말보다 먼저 노래를 배우곤 하는 것이 좋은 보기이다. 장례식처럼 특정 정서가 사람을 휩쌀 때는 곡을 하는 것이 슬픔의 무게를 견뎌내는 데 도움이 되어 장

례와 연관된 다른 활동들을 무난히 수행할 수 있게 하는 틀이 되어 주기도 한다.

한국의 노래 갈래, 그리고 노래에서 사회적 기능성으로

한국의 민속음악¹은 즉흥적 성격을 갖는 경우가 많고, 따라서 역시 상당부분 즉흥적일 수밖에 없는 동작, 말 등등 여러 사회적 행위로 전이되거나 그것들을 조화시키는 특유의 역할을 한다. 특히 노래가 그러해서, 목소리로 하는 다른 행위(울기, 웃기, 한숨, 말 등등)로 가거나 거기서 오거나 하는 경우가 많다. 장례식에서 마치 가락을 붙인 듯 우는 것을 특히 ‘곡(哭)’이라 하는데, 곡이 빨라지면서 감정도 진정되면 곡이 ‘흥글소리’라는 즉흥 신세타령 노래처럼 되고, 흥글소리가 더 빨라지면 특정 민요와 거의 구분하기 힘들게 되기도 한다. 나의 현장연구에는 울음소리가 점점 가락을 띠어 가면서 노래처럼 되는 듯하다가 도로 보통 말처럼 돼버리는 경우도 있다. 즉 여기서 울음이라는 소리는 원형노래(proto-song)인 동시에 원형말(proto-speech)이기도 한 것이다. 도식화하면 다음과 같다.



흥글소리같은 즉흥노래가 진짜 기성노래로 바뀌면서부터는, 자기의 울음과 이미 알려진 소리 및 노랫말 사이가 자연스럽게 연결됨으로써 자기의 개인사가 사회와

¹ [울긴이] 여기서 ‘민속음악’이란 ‘정악/민속악’ 분류의 그것이 아니라, 음악의 생산과 수용이 전문적(professional), 통속적(popular) 및 상업적(commercial)이지 않은 것을 가리킨다. 따라서 무가나 판소리, 통속민요(창민요)는 이 의미의 민속음악이 아니다. 단, 수용자 차원에서는 어떠한 음악도 민속음악으로서 수용될 수 있다.

맺어지는 ‘승화’를 겪게 된다. 이런 여러 이유로 이러한 목소리내기의 연쇄가 민간 음악요법의 테크닉으로 쓰이기도 하는 것이다.

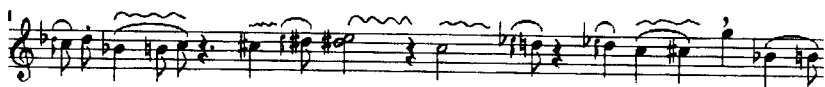
최할머니

80대 중반인 최할머니(가명)는 전라남도의 가난한 집안에서 태어나 1936년 열여덟 나이로 낯선 한국남자에게 잡혀가 만주의 일본군 ‘위안소’로 팔려갔고 거기서 9년 동안 성노예 생활을 했다. 전쟁 후 고향에 돌아왔으나 이웃의 냉대로 가난하게 살며 허드렛일로 생계를 꾸렸고, 나이든 남자(1993년 사망)와 결혼했으나 슬하에 자식은 없다. 몇 년 뒤 성노예 피해자로 등록한 뒤 2000년부터 ‘나눔의 집’에 들어와 다른 성노예 생존자인 열 명의 할머니와 함께 살고 있다. 거동이 불편하고, 나눔의 집에서도 주로 혼자 지내서 가끔 친구처럼 소통할 만한 사람도 한 명밖에 없고 자주 다른 할머니들, 특히 몸 약한 할머니들하고 다툼을 빚는다. 다툼 후에는 으레 침울해져 방에 처박혀서는 온종일 나오지 않기도 한다. 오랜 기간의 억압에 의한 이른바 ‘복합 외상후 스트레스 장애(PTSD)’이다. 그러면서도 과거 기억이 아주 또렷하고 잘 웃기도 하며, 나눔의 집에서는 거짓말로 남을 잘 꿰뚫어주는 할머니로 꼽힌다. 매주 수요일에는 서울의 일본대사관 앞에서 열리는 항의집회에 꼬박꼬박 나가는 최할머니의 일상과 음악을 살펴보면, 최할머니가 억압의 망령에서 벗어나 사회적 존재로 보람있게 살아가는 데 앞서 말한 음악의 치유적 활용이라는 것이 어떤 역할을 하는지 볼 수 있다.

사례 1. 울음에서 노래로

어느 날 아침, 다른 일곱 명의 할머니들은 섬 구경을 하러 나가고, 몸이 불편해 따라가지 않는 날이 잦은 최할머니는 그날도 오할머니와 단둘이 나눔의 집에 남았다. 오할머니와는 전날 다툼 일이 있다. 최할머니는 벤치 내 옆에 앉아 울기 시작했다. 처음에는 거칠고 높은, 음높이가 일정하지 않은 소리로 울다가, 조금 진정되자 울음이 조금씩 노래처럼 되기 시작했다. 아직 리듬이라 할 만한 것은 없었고, 음중심도 오르락내리락하는 가운데, 단2도쫄(약 90센트)의 전타음이 줄곧 들어가면서 장2도 흘러내리는 양상을 보였다. 이른바 남도계면조에서 떠는목과, 중심음 4

도 위 흘러내리는 음만 없는 음구조에 흡사했다. 감정이 차츰 진정될수록 울음은 점점 음악같아져, 장식음이 더 일관성을 띠고 음중심도 안정되어 갔다.



보기 1. 최할머니의 울음

스티븐 펠드(파푸아뉴기니 칼룰리족)와 엘리자베스 톨버트(카렐리)를 비롯, 울음에 관한 수많은 음악적 연구들은 울음과 음악 사이에 밀접한 연관이 있음을 보여주었다. 최할머니의 경우가, 호느끼는 상황으로부터 ‘곡’이라는 한국 특유의 양식화된 ‘가락 붙은 울음’이 생겨나는 과정의 보기이다. “아이고, 아이고” 하는 전형적인 곡성은 아니지만 그림에도 최할머니의 울음은 음악적이며, 이는 조직화된 행위를 할 수 있는 생성적(generative) 자아핵이 존재한다는 것을 시사한다.

사례 2: 노래에서 말로

어느날, 또다시 오할머니와 다투고 나서 최할머니는 침울해져 방에 틀어박혀 있었다. 침대에 누워 나직하게 흥글소리를 지어 부르며, 때로 울기도 하며 몇 시간을 그렇게 있었다. 마음은 한결 차분해지고 음악도 한층 틀이 잡혔으며, 간간이 호느끼는 소리가 있어도 음악이나 호흡을 끊을 정도는 아니었다. 흥글소리같은 리듬이 점점 자리잡아가는 동안, 끼이끼이 울 때는 좀체 나타나지 않던 떠는목이라든가 중심음 4도 위 흘러내리는 음도 자주 나타났다. “어매” “아이고” “울음” “불쌍한 동자” 따위, 일상과 노래에서 아무렇게나 가져온 말들이 즉흥 노래로 멜리스마에 얹히는 양상을 보였다.



보기 2. 최할머니의 낙심한 흥글소리

노래가 완전한 남도계면조 가락을 띠게 됐다는 것은, 울음이 경계선을 넘어 노래 쪽으로 근접하면서 톨버트의 이른바 ‘울음의 아이콘’을 갖게 됐다는 것을 뜻한다.

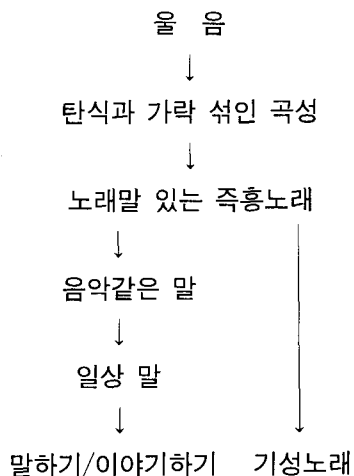
즉 슬픔의 직설적 표현과 거리를 두고, 울음의 영역에서 노래의 영역으로 완전히 옮겨왔다는 징표이다. 이렇게 “울음 나레 아...” 하고 웅얼거리고 있는데, 옆방 안 할머니가 갑자기 방으로 들어오며 “저녁 먹으러 가자!” 하며 최할머니를 달래려고 했다. 최할머니는 잠깐 멈칫 하고는, 안할머니의 이어지는 “응? 응? 왜?” 하는 노래조 물음에 역시 노래조로, 남도 특유의 꺾는음을 살려가며 “안 먹어, 안 먹어” 하고 화답했다.



보기 3. 노래에서 말로

울음에서 기성노래 부르기로

이것은 최할머니의 울음이 노래를 거쳐 말로 옮겨가기도 한다는 것을 보여준다. 그런데 1년 넘게 최할머니와 생활하면서, 최할머니가 흥글소리 즉흥을 넘어 기성 노래로 아주 옮겨가는 모습은 볼 수 없었다. 고향인 전라도 지역 어느 노래의 한 토막이라도 부르는 것조차 보지 못했다. 간혹 모임같은 데서 노래를 시키면 “난 노래 못 해 ...” 하며 빼기 일쑤였고, 단 한 번 어버이날 잔치에서 마이크를 잡고 신민요 <아리랑>을 부른 게 전부였다. 그리고보면 최할머니는 경험담을 얘기하거나 그림을 그리거나 춤을 추는 일도 없었다. 인간이기를 거부당한 성노예 생활을 하면서 최할머니는 인간이 아닌 채로 살아남아야 했고, 전쟁 후에도 가난하고 자식도 없이 냉대받으면서 인간다워질 수 없었고, 그러다보니 남 앞에 나서는 일이나 기성노래 같은 사회적 행위를 본능적으로 꺼리게 된 것이다. 그러니 혼자서는 울다가 노래조로 웅얼거리다가도, 남과의 상호작용 영역에서는 다시 일상 말로 되돌아가는 것이다. 따라서 앞의 도식을 다음과 같이 고쳐그릴 수 있겠다.



세로로 내려오는 축은 사회적 기능성의 증가를 나타내며, 노래와 그냥 말이라는 겉보기에 판이한, 그러나 사회적 상호작용의 극대화이기는 마찬가지로 언어예술로 각각 끝난다. 그러니 기성노래에 관한 한 최할머니에게 노래는 없다고 할 수 있다.

맺음말

성노예 생존자 할머니들에게 노래하기와 노래는 일본군 성노예 생존자로서 경험의 기록이면서, 그 이상이기도 하다. 이 여성들의 나날의 음악체험 순간순간마다 착취와 트라우마, 생존이라는 가슴저린 현실이 배어 있기 때문이다. 살아남기 위한 방편이든 음악요법을 위한 것이든, 노래하기는 이 여성들이 극복해야만 했던 장벽을 비춰주는 일종의 거울이 된다.

음악, 특히 노래가 일단 사람의 체험의 기록이 된다면, 식민지 시절 강제징용자나 해외이주자, 히로시마와 나가사키 생존자, 월남자, 장애인, 독립투사나 운동가, 기지촌과 도회 향락산업 종사자 등등, 한국에서 만나고 조사하고 관찰할 사람과 일의 양은 엄청날 것이다. 한국의 종족음악학자들은 이 분야의 음악체험을 이해하는 작업을 개인의 음악연구와 미디어의 몫으로만 치부하고 있는 듯하다. 이 글을 최할머니에게 바친다.