

# Where did the Old Music go?

## The “improved” musical instruments of North Korea<sup>1)</sup>

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Since the 1960s, the socialist regime of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) under Kim Il-Sung has sponsored a musical instrument institute known as the *Minjok akki kaeryang saǒpkwa* to revise *chǒnt’ong akki* (traditional instruments) and enable them to match *sôyang akki* (western instruments). The resultant hybrids are known as *kaeryang akki* (“improved” instruments), a term in use in both the southern and northern states.

Complex instruments are, by their very nature, élitist, yet *kaeryang akki* are required to respect socialist dogma; the resultant conflicts between state and art, potential or real, are nothing new.<sup>2)</sup> In this paper, after discussing background unique to North Korea, I explore how development is justified. *Kaeryang akki* are meant to retain old sound timbres and hence to reflect the Korean heritage, for this is what *juche*, the state philosophy of self-reliance, demands. At the same time *kaeryang akki* are designed to be “progressive,” duplicating diatonic scales and the flexibility of western models in an exploration and/or accommodation of developments from the world outside. This, together with the modification of

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1) This paper is based on a 3-week visit to Pyongyang in June 1992. I am grateful to staff and students at the Pyongyang Music and Dance University (P'yongyang ūmak muyong taehak), who provide my sound examples and who taught me much about individual instruments.

2) For a survey of such issues, see Perris 1985: chapters 4 and 5.

sound envelopes, is part of an attempt to court popularity amongst the masses.

## Foundations

One of the few contemporary Korean composers with an international reputation is Isang Yun (b. 1917) who, since his 1967 abduction in Berlin and subsequent imprisonment in South Korea, has leaned in sympathies towards the North. In 1992 the Pyongyang [P'yōngyang] Film Studios charted those earlier events in *Yun Sangmin*, the fifth volume in a massive *Minjok kwa ūnmyōng* (Nation and Destiny) project. In the film, a composer is seen writing, conducting, and receiving plaudits for a “symphony,” yet not one note of the film score was actually written by Yun. Yun, we may conclude, does not write the *taejung ūmak* (“music for the general public”) required in North Korea’s socialist realism. Indeed, his 1987 attempt to produce appropriate music, the cantata *Mein Land*, *Mein Volk* (*Na ūi ttang, na ūi minjogiyō*), forgoes his typical serialism and lyricism in favour of loud, brash sound blocks that seem to ably prove the undesirability of mixing music with politics.<sup>3)</sup>

At the other end of the musical spectrum, the youth-oriented *kyōng ūmak* (lit: “lightweight music”) questions the reality of *juche*-led independence. It offers suitable revolutionary sentiments couched in an appropriate philosophy, but prefers a musical style curiously old-fashioned beyond the borders of the North,

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3) Consider the third movement, *Hyōnshil*. A CD, Camerata 32CM-69 (Tokyo, 1988), contains a recording of *Mein Land*, *Mein Volk*. Under the Korean title, the score was issued by the Yesul kyoyuk ch'ulp'ansa in P'yōngyang in 1989. This example notwithstanding, there is composition activity in North Korea which rises above the demands of the state. This occurs in two partially hidden spheres. On one hand there are a young group of composers employed at the *Yun Isang ūmak yōn'guso*. On the other, more tangible, but difficult to find because restricted mainly to study and training rather than concert performances, is solo instrumental and small ensemble music. Compositions for *kaeryang akki* fall into this latter category.

even if this is a style once common to Asian pop. Consider the most popular bands, *Poch'önbo* and *Wangjaesan*, and the 1992 hit *Sahoe chu ūi uri kōya* (Socialism is Ours):

1. We go straight along the path we have chosen  
Though others forsake we remain faithful.

Ch: Socialism is ours, Socialism is ours, Socialism defended by our Party's red flag is ours.

2. We'll never follow others' styles and fashions

We'll be firm wherever the wind blows.

3. Socialism our people have chosen

Is the blissful paradise for our people [sic].<sup>4)</sup>

Conservatism stems from an emphasis on text over music. To quote Kim Jong-Il, the son and chosen successor of the leader for 48 years, Kim II-Sung, "Good words make good music" and "Before good songs can be produced prettily-worded texts are necessary" (from *On the Art of the Cinema*, 1989, and *For the Future Development of Our Juche Art*, 1992). Other comments offer stark contrast. For example, from *On the Art of the Cinema*: "The composer must work hard on a melody in order to create good music... The creation of melody is [his] main artistic task, since it uses the form of music to express the concept...and contributes directly to the ideological and artistic quality of production."

This suggests that a dilemma faces the artist. He must respect two central tenets of state dogma:

—*Juche* [*chuch'e*], the spirit of self-reliance, insists that art must be Korean, yet

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4) Issued on cassette, *Wangjaesan kyöng ūmaktan 4* (Menari 2093, P'yöngyang, February 1992). The demise of socialist regimes elsewhere is dismissed as a temporary blip by the northern regime. For example, *Kulloja*, the magazine of the Central Committee of the North Korean Worker's Party carried a speech by Kim Jong-il in March 1993 titled, "*Abuses of socialism are intolerable.*"

should compete with—and be superior to—anything foreign. From here it follows that art must be faithful to the heritage; it must shine with an indigenous colour.<sup>5)</sup>

—The concept of the people (*minjok*) as controllers of the state dictates that “modernism must reflect the revolutionary spirit of the [popular] masses” (Kim Jong-il). The masses require music that is easy to listen to, readily understood, and memorable. Hence the terms *kyōng ūmak* and *taejung ūmak*.

Revolutionary opera from the *P'i pada kakūktan* (Sea of Blood Opera Company) thus places emphasis on *pangch'ang*, a form of operatic chorus in which orchestral players (and ideally audience) are expected to join in, while the action is suspended on stage. In keeping with this same ideal, complex *p'ansori* (epic storytelling through song) has been abandoned, by order of Kim Il-Sung,<sup>6)</sup> while the nasal resonance and highly-charged emotions of folksongs known as *Sōdo sori* have been ironed out through the introduction of more lyrical, diatonic lines. This, even though *Sōdo sori* were once characteristic of the P'yōngyang region, and are claimed to be the root of contemporary North Korean folksong singing.<sup>7)</sup>

Yet the elimination of élitism is complex. Instruments show this. Some traditional instruments with restricted, coarse sound worlds, and instruments associated with the literati of old (eg, the *ajaeng* bowed half-tube zither and *kōmun'go* 6-string plucked half-tube zither) have been abandoned. Others which existed amongst the folk but were usually played by specialists such as shaman accompanists (*koin*, *ch'aein*, *hwarang*, *kwangdae*), or entertainment girls (*kisaeng*)—the *kayagüm* plucked half-tube zither is an example—, remain. Folksongs which were linear in construction, including the archetypical *Sōdo*-style

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5) “The present slump in artistic creation can be ascribed to the fact that creators do not have a proper attitude towards our nation's cultural heritage... we must adopt neither nihilistic nor restorationist attitudes towards our heritage” (Kim, *For the Future Development of Our Juche Art*, 1992).

6) I was told in 1992 that *p'ansori* is now taught again at the university.

7) See Nam 1991: 89-97. My information also comes from the scholar, Ri Ch'anggu.

*Sushimga* in irregular meter, have been labelled “outmoded”; they are revised within regular stanzaic structures more typical of folksongs from beyond the formative region, particularly the *Kyōnggi minyo* found further south around Seoul. Justification is dutifully supplied: “We must distinguish between what is progressive and popular and what is obsolete and reactionary in our cultural legacy of the past and discard the obsolete and reactionary and retain the progressive and popular” (Kim Jong-il, 1992).

I have now given the customary quotations from Northern iconolatry, so now I can turn to the *kaeryang akki* themselves:

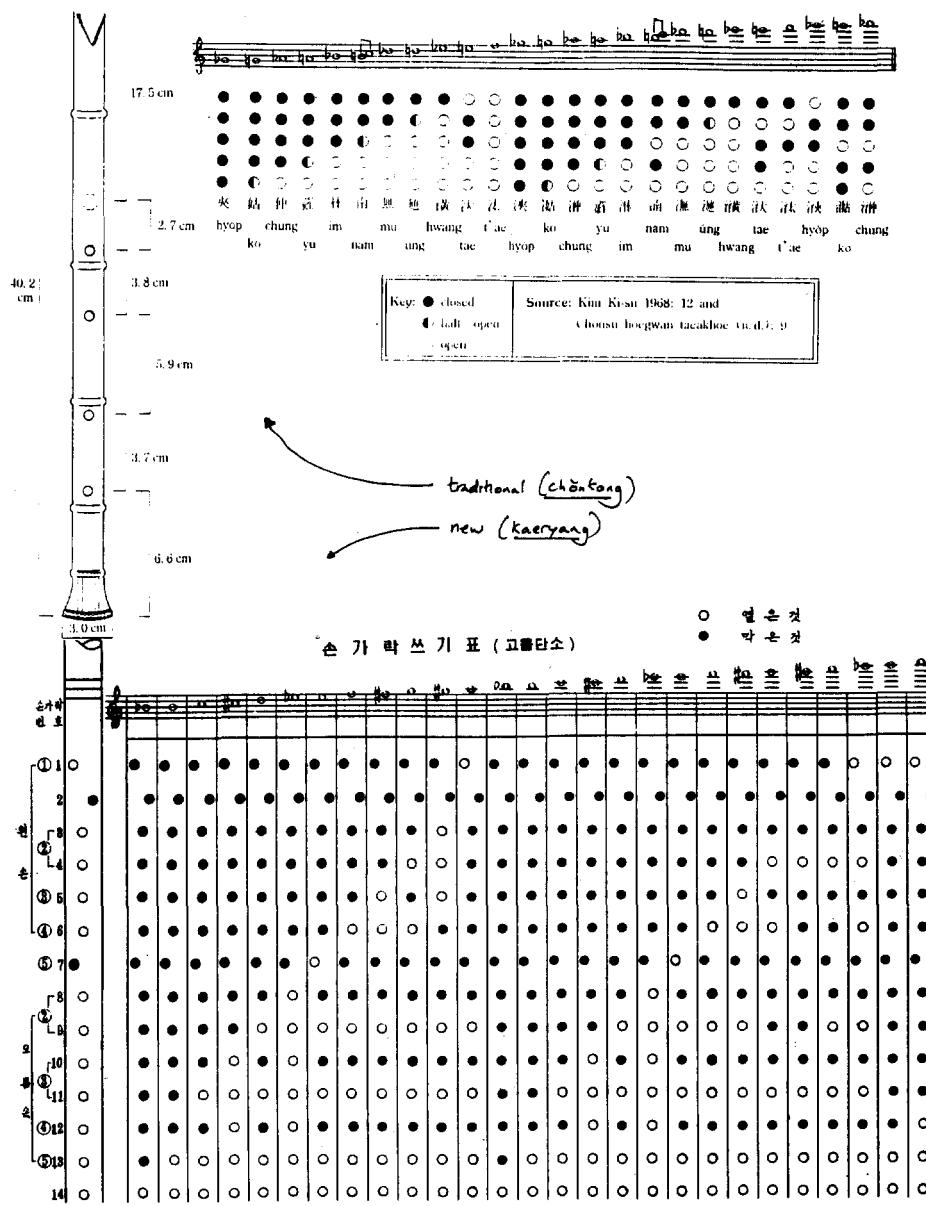
### Should *kaeryang akki* play both old and new repertoires?

The *kaeryang tanso* (vertical notched flute) was once a simple, slightly-conical, bamboo tube with four finger holes and a thumb hole. It is now a cylindrical tube made from acoustically less absorbent hardwoods with six finger holes plus a thumb hole (Figure 1). To enable the production of chromatic rather than the old pentatonic scales it has nickel plated keywork, similar to the simple system of western piccolo,<sup>8)</sup> which cover a further five holes. The result is an instrument with much greater flexibility than old *tanso* over a similar  $2\frac{1}{2}$  octave range (ab'-f'', now written b<sup>b</sup>-g'' ; the old range was theoretically g<sup>b</sup>-ab'''').

Students of the *kaeryang tanso* do study old music such as *Ch'ōngsōnggok*, in South Korea a solo *taegüm* (transverse bamboo flute) piece which evolved from the accompaniment to a lyric song. In playing old music, they retain a number of

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8) The diatonic scale is not duplicated in an identical manner to western flutes. Rather, only one key extends the range downwards (below the bottom open hole). And, like the clarinet and oboe—note that *tanso* are vertical not transverse flutes—, an additional hole to the right can be opened by keys covered by either left or right hand, and an additional hole at the top and to the left is opened by rotating the left index finger laterally.



**Figure 1.** Tanso

traditional characteristics. Vibrato increases as a tone progresses, much as in court music generally. But, vibrato deviates from the basic pitch to a greater degree than old court or literati *tanso* players would have found desirable. Folk music of old, however, tended to exhibit a less regular technique and a more

cavalier attitude to vibrato. So, one could argue that the *kaeryang* technique is more akin to folk praxis, but the characteristics of the chosen vibrato to me suggest empathy with *taegüm* more than old *tanso*. Indeed, many flute players are or have been masters of both *tanso* and *taegüm*.

The basic palette of old *tanso* ornaments included many pre-tone and after-tone complexes, each comprising up to five additional pitches(Howard 1988:94-97). These decorated individual tones. The *kaeryang tanso* shifts from such complex ornaments to simple passing tones and approach tones. These enhance the overall melodic line: contour has replaced the colouring of a single sound as the prime concern. This, along with considerable virtuosity, is evident in modern pieces such as *Ch'oso ūi pom* (The Beginning of Spring). Pom retains something of a Korean flavour, primarily through vibrato and, interestingly, through the use of pentatonicism despite the new instrument's diatonic capability (Example 1).

Since at least the 15th century,<sup>9)</sup> the *haegüm* (fiddle) has had two silk strings tuned with frontal pegs excited by a horsehair bow threaded between them. The bow was tensed by the hand. It had a thin bamboo neck (though in the 20th century some hardwood examples can be found), no fingerboard, and a soundboard of paulownia wood. The structure dictated the musical style: raspy tones with a considerable noise element that lacked precisely tuned, steady pitches. Melodic contours were typically limited in range. This was because, without a fingerboard, it was difficult to shift the hand position quickly along the strings—four finger positions were prescribed, rarely producing more than a fifth on any one string at a given position—and many tones were created by pulling the string towards the instrument's neck in incremental stages.

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9) *Koryōsa* (History of the Koryō Dynasty; compiled 1452) suggests the instrument arrived from the Chinese Song court in 1124. We do not know if this instrument had a horsehair bow until *Sejong shillok* (Annals of King Sejong; compiled 1452-54) and *Akhak kwebbom* (Guide to the Study of Music; 1493) or whether, like the earlier Chinese *xiqin* it used a bow of rosined wood.

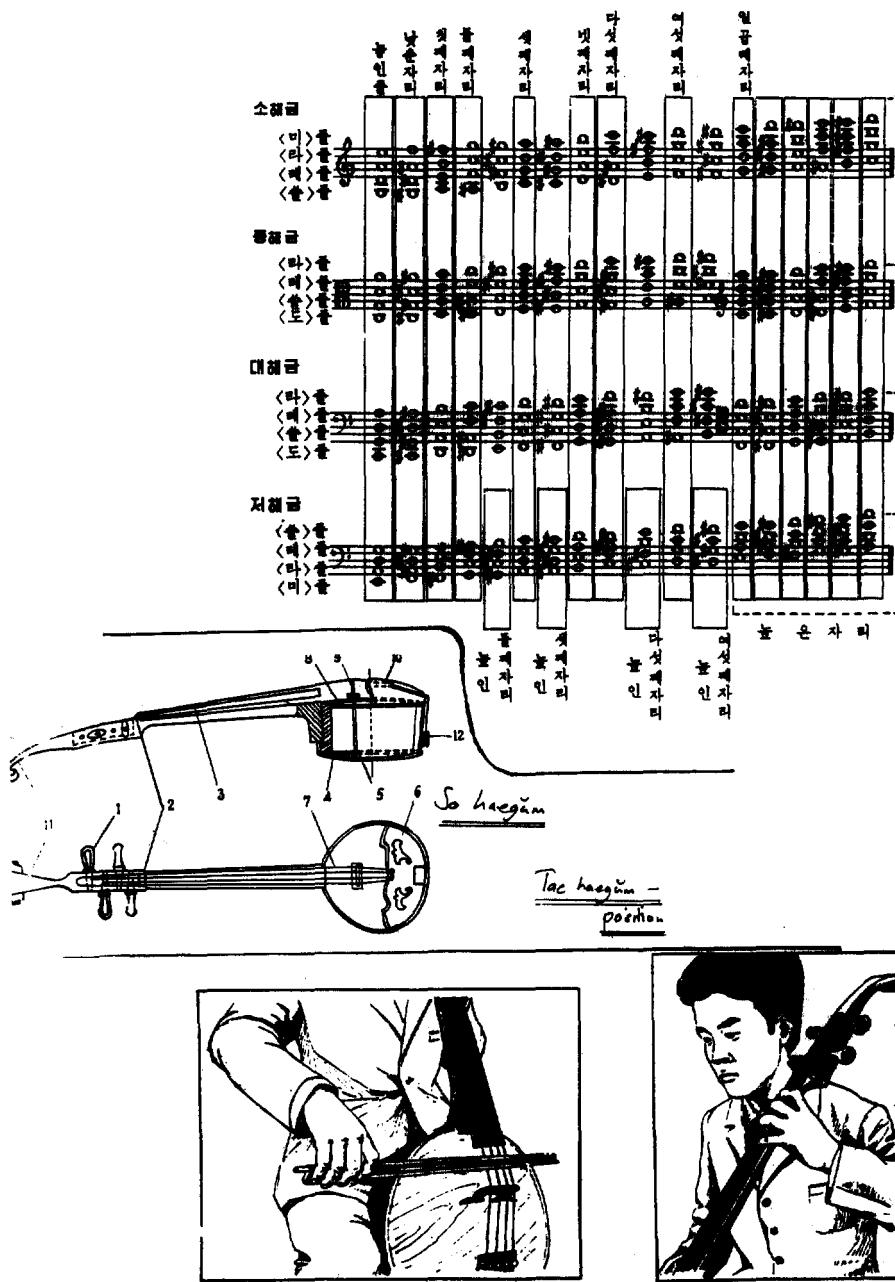


**Example 1-1.** Excerpt From Ch'oso ui pom (The Beginning of Spring) for tanso

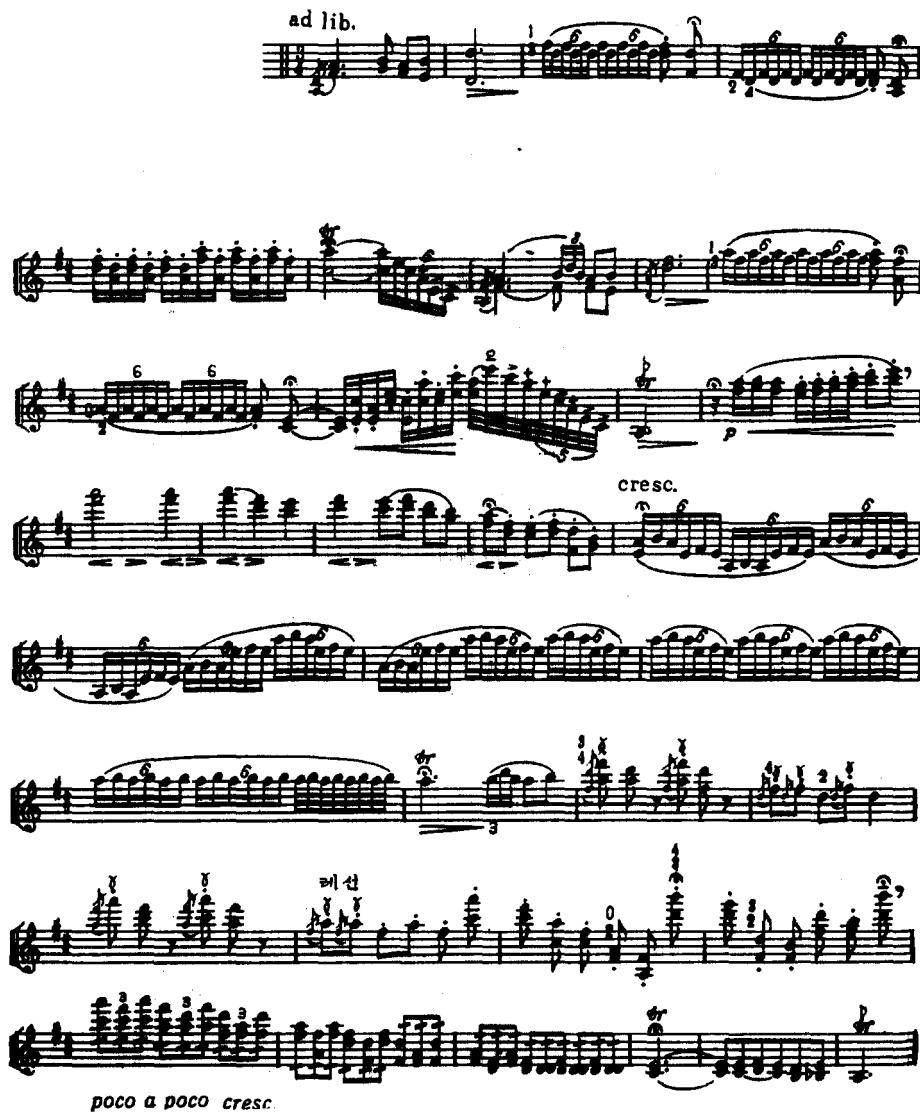
Now there are four *kaeryang haegüm*, which together match the string section of a western orchestra—violin, viola, 'cello, bass (Figure 2). Each has four steel strings tuned with lateral pegs. Bows, taken from the western string equivalents,

**Example 1-2.** Excerpt From Ch'oso ui pom (The Beginning of Spring) for tanso

are tensed mechanically with a metal frog, and pass across and above the strings. Precise pitching is enabled by the addition of a fingerboard: strings are pressed against this, rather than being pulled in mid-air. The soundboard is softwood, but



**Figure 2. Haegum ranges and tuning systems**



**Example 2.** Coda, first movement of "Arirang" concerto, for so haegum

of greater strength than paulownia. The soundbox has hardwood sides and back, closed at the back to reflect sound back. Unlike old instruments, the soundbox has no sound deadening inner coating of earth or paint. There is consequently less acoustic damping. A soundpost connects the front belly to the back, much like a western violin. Indeed, the similar structure indicates that the soundworld need

be little different from western string instruments.

Similarities to western violins are clear in many new pieces. These are typically virtuosic and impressive, evocative of the studies of Kreisler and many 19th century concertos. Example 2 gives the cadenza to a concerto based on *Arirang*, the mostly widely-disseminated Korean folksong. Posture has also been changed. *Kaeryang haegüm* are no longer performed seated on the floor, in the old and awkward half-lotus posture that still means many a South Korean player has to be carried off stage. The two largest versions are supported on the ground with a spike like 'cello and bass. The two smaller instruments sit on the player's lap, a position unlike the chin support of violins and violas but not far removed from 17th century western viols or, for example, Moroccan violin technique.

To retain anything Korean requires the player to impose old sound envelopes on his new instrument. It is impossible to keep the noise element or the lack of steady pitching; contemporary players must content themselves with remnants of a Korean colour in *kköngnün mok* descending appoggiaturas andacciaccaturas, *nonghyön* vibrato, and carefully modulated pitch shading. Contemporary sanjo ("scattered melodies"), initially created in the 1940s for the old instrument but arguably never very popular, now combines the old with the increased flexibility which four strings and a fingerboard brings. It has become a solo étude, combining folksy melodies with long scalic or arpeggiated melisma.

I find it difficult to defend *kaeryang haegüm* from the accusation that they are basically copies of western string instruments. A problem is, however, recognized here, and one member of the Institute, Pak Chöngnam, told me there were plans to remodel the *haegüm*. That, of course, depends on whether the Northern regime survives.<sup>10)</sup>

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10) I note that a number of commentators, including Aiden foster Carter in his regular reports for *The Economist*, now predict a rapid demise for a regime which until the early 1970s enjoyed a higher GNP than South Korea. With several years of alarming

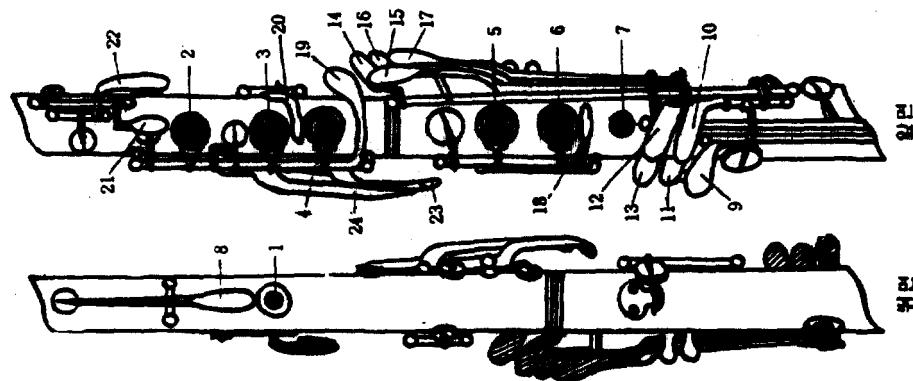
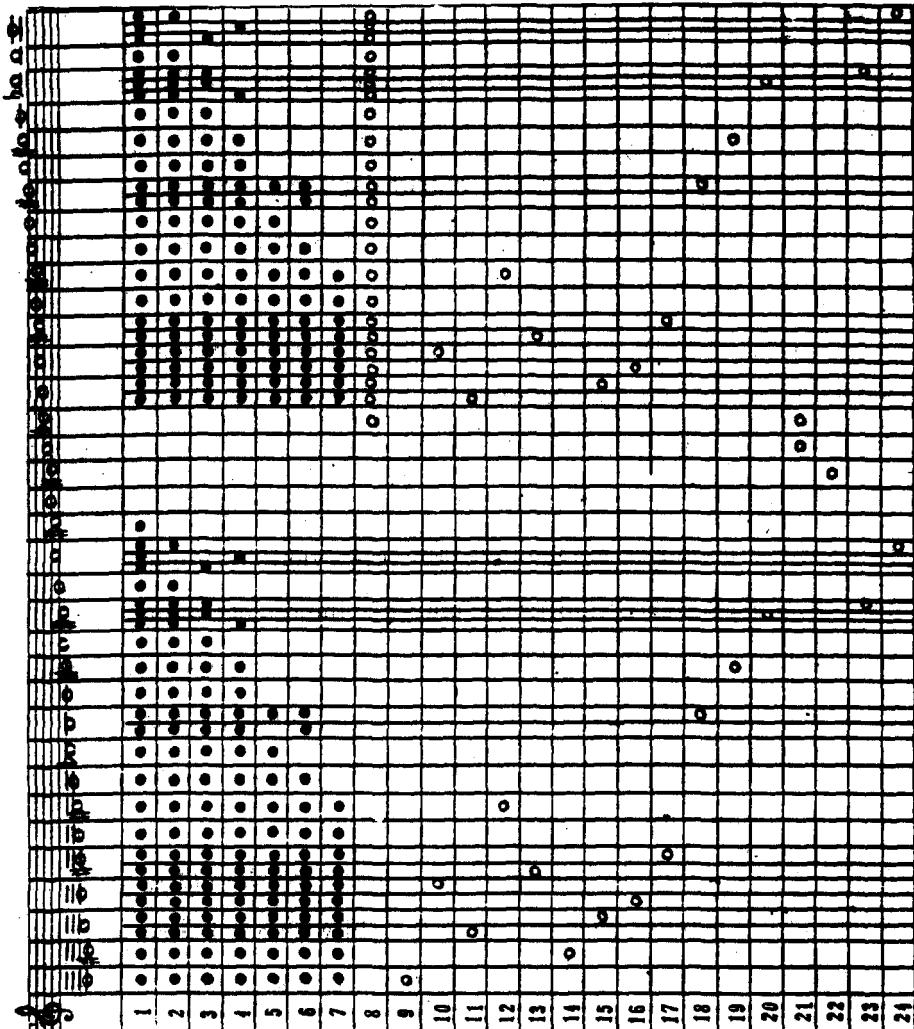


Figure 3. Tae p'iri

## Should old instruments be modernized?

Developments of the *kayagüm* (plucked half-tube zither) suggest some modernization is desirable. The zither has a considerable history. Pottery artefacts dating back to around the 4th century show zithers with prominent “ram’s horns (*yangidu*)” at the base to hold the strings. These are distinct from Chinese instruments. Four *shiragi koto* (zither’s from [Korea’s] Shilla kingdom), survive in the 8th century Shosoin repository in Nara, Japan which typify a court model that survives today. These have 12 strings stretched over moveable bridges (*anjok* or *kirogi pal*) fixed with pegs at the top and ending in loops attached to cords secured to ram’s horns at the base. In addition to this *pöpküm* or *chöngak* court instrument, a smaller instrument, more suitable for fast solo work and known as the *sanjo kayagüm*, has been common since the late 19th century (Howard 1988: 163-177).

In South Korea, the composer and theorist Yi Söngchön developed a 21-string *kayagüm* in the mid-80s. This expanded the old  $2\frac{1}{2}$  octave range to four octaves. Yi barely altered the structure, with the result that low and high tones had less resonance than mid-range tones. More recently, Hwang Pyöngju introduced a 17-string instrument that in tuning combines the characteristics of the smaller folk with the larger court instrument. Hwang’s instrument is now standard issue in Seoul’s KBS Kugak Kwanhyön Aktan (the state broadcasting agency’s traditional orchestra). Several strings are tuned to higher pitches than the strings of old instruments. This is said to provide more versatile or appropriate accompaniments for vocalists. Cords at the base have been replaced: the strings are wound around pegs that simplify tuning. And wound silk has given way to

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negative growth, rumours of food riots, and no access to foreign loans, the many warning signs are made all the worse by communism’s worldwide demise. This does not outwardly seem to concern the regime.

nylon strings. Nylon is effectively a compromise, for it restricts the potential for vibrato. This, in turn, limits the instrument's ability to produce the emotional, slow passages of *sanjo*. Today, *sanjo* epitomizes the old *kayagüm* in South Korea.

In North Korea, the 21-string *kaeryang kayagüm* retains the overall range of old instruments (G-f'') but fills in missing pitches to produce a diatonic range. Again, metal pegs and nylon strings replace fastening cords and silk strings, so there is less vibrato potential. The *kaeryang* instrument was designed in the 1960s, learning from a 1940 development, the *kahyōn'güm*.<sup>11)</sup>

Students still learn *sanjo* but, unlike their southern compatriots, they make little use of gliding or changing pitch after a tone has been plucked (*t'oesōng* or *ch'usōng*). (Nylon, of course, means that these same ornaments are difficult on Hwang's instruments.) In the North, given my earlier observation that the concentration on single pitches has been replaced by an emphasis on melodic contour, this presents few problems. Even in *sanjo*, there is a greater reliance than in Southern schools on fixed, steady pitches, though vibrato (*nonghyōn*) and the flicked *ttuldong* survive. More than contour is involved, since the expanded number of tuned pitches on the strings allows great fluidity of line. Performers favour virtuosity and reject the serenity associated with slow movements in *sanjo* and old court music. New music in the South, defined as a genre as *shin kugak* or *ch'angjak ūmak*, stands in marked contrast to anything in the North: Seoul's composers remain remarkably conservative, backing up the success of Yi Sōngchōn's works for his 21-string instrument with the currently fashionable *Saeul Ensemble*, a trio of bass, tenor and alto instruments.<sup>12)</sup>

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11) This instrument is missing from many accounts in South Korea. In the North, it is documented in Ch'oe Ch'angnim 1989: 38. It was larger than standard instruments, with 13 strings and a range from g to d''. The related Chinese Tang *zheng* and Japanese *koto* have 13 strings, and the *kahyōn'güm* appears to have been taken to Mongolia in the 1950s where it became the model for the revived *yatga*.

12) *Saeul* issued a compact disc in 1992: SKC, Seoul, SKCD-K-0436. Yi's compositions for



**Example 3.** Excerpts from “ch’oso ūi pom” for kayagüm

*Sanjo* does survive in the North. Chöng Namhüi, whose *sanjo* school is generally known in the South as that of Kim Yundök, settled in P'yöngyang during the Korean war.<sup>13)</sup> In the 1970s, Chöng played *sanjo* on the *kaeryang kayagüm*. His mature piece, according to his surviving student in P'yöngyang, Kim Killan, lasted only about 10 minutes.<sup>14)</sup> This fits the “popular” requirement of the Northern regime, for complete pieces in Seoul last for between 40 and 60 minutes. In the North *sanjo* appears to be no longer played in concerts; it is practiced only for university lessons. The demands for performance mean that students exhibit greater proficiency in contemporary solo and ensemble pieces such as *Ch’oso ūi*

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his 21 string development feature on a 2LP collection of his compositions, *Pada / The Sea: Yi Sung Chun Kayakum Works* (Shinara, Seoul, SELRO 187, 1991).

- 13) Kim (1916-1978) learnt from Chöng in 1947-8. Kim’s student, Yi Yonghüi, who worked with him from 1959 until his death, was in 1991 appointed *poyuja* for the *sanjo* Intangible Cultural Asset. Scholars know of the association with Chöng; Yi refers only to Kim in interview, and her pre-appointment performance at the Yeum Art Hall in 1990 was publicized as a *sanjo* performance of Kim’s school.
- 14) I have not heard the piece. Hwang Pyönggi, a composer/performer and professor at Ehwa University in Seoul, was given a tape by Kim Killan in 1990, but to my knowledge has never made this publicly available.

*pom* and *Pada ūi sori* (Song of the Sea). To demonstrate the mix of western diatonicism and Korean music, Example 3 notates short extracts from *Pom*.

### Is Korean identity important?

Several instruments remain closely identified with the rural masses, the *minjok*. The *chang saenap*,<sup>15)</sup> a development of the shawm beloved in the South for its piercing melodies in military music (*chwit'a*) and percussion bands (*nongak*), was lengthened around 1970; this effectively extended the range to a chromatic 2½ octaves (d' -g#” from a<sup>b</sup>-e<sup>b</sup>”). It now has a reed similar to the western oboe. The reed of old instruments was never particularly reliable due, in part, to its minute size. Old reeds also hampered production of the theoretically possible chromatic scale; this did not concern musicians rarely allowed excursions beyond the familiar territory of pentatonic modes. Melodic fluency is no longer a problem; this is further ensured by simple system keywork. The instrument is still considered close to folk culture, and a number of popular folksong arrangements are taught: *Yöngnam kinari* is one of the most complex, switching between *kutkōri* and *tanmori* rhythmic cycles (*changdan*); *Hüng t'aryöng*, *Arirang*, *Nodūl kangbyön*, *Panga t'aryöng* and *Nonbuga*, all well-known songs, are given as exercises in the standard workbook, along with three notated pentatonic improvisations from rural folkbands.

Similar developments mark two additional wind instruments, the *chōttae* flute and *p'iri* oboe. *Chōttae* is a vernacular name for what is still called *taegüm* in Southern literature. In the North, three versions of each instrument have been developed to allow the provision of a broad orchestral texture. The three *chōttae* allow composers to match western concert, alto and bass flutes (the *tanso*

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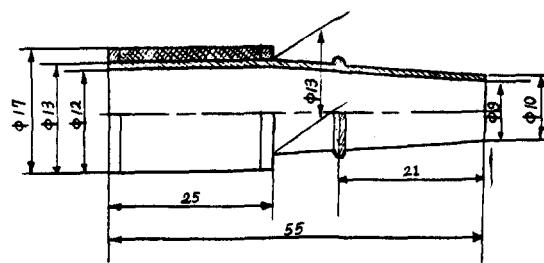
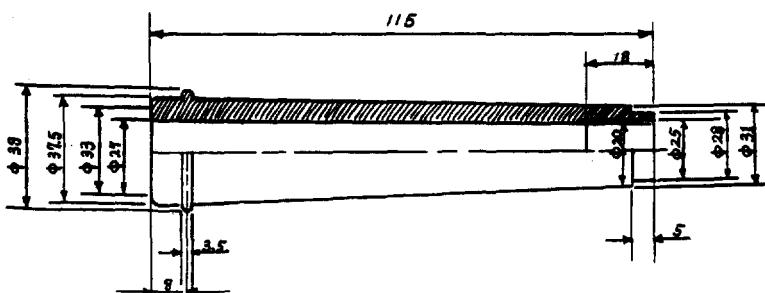
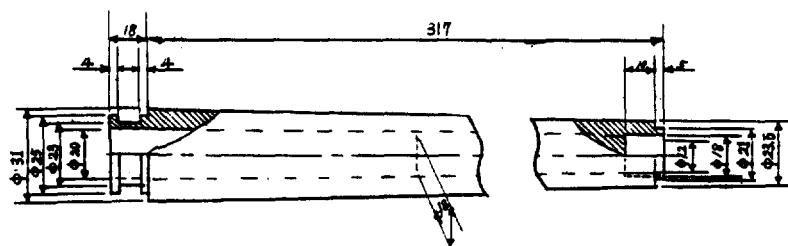
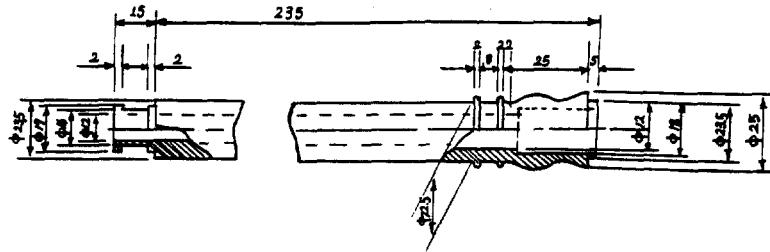
15) This is the contemporary Northern spelling. The Sino-Korean character behind “sae” is *soae*, giving a pronunciation in Seoul closer to *soenap*.

functions as piccolo). There is some historical precedent in the three flute ensemble of ancient Unified Shilla (668-935): *sogüm* (so=small), *chunggüm* (*chung*=middle), *taegüm* (*tae*=big).<sup>16)</sup> The three *p'iri*—so *p'iri* (small), *tae p'iri* (large), and *cho p'iri* (bass)—have a more complex association, reflecting the exigencies of creating a complete orchestral texture, but also respecting their prominence in traditional folk and court ensembles. All three retain oversize bamboo double reeds. The so *p'iri* is a cylindrical tube of birch or rosewood that has replaced what was a bamboo tube described in Northern texts as *chaeraeshik p'iri* (former oboe) and in the South as *hyang p'iri* (indigenous oboe). The limited, almost diatonic, range of old instruments reflected their difficulty in overblowing at the 12th; the so *p'iri* uses overblowing to give a broader chromatic range of just over 2 octaves (c' -d'', from the old ab' -f''). The so *p'iri* is, however, still associated with the tradition, hence the *chang saenap* substitutes for it—taking the role of the western oboe—in orchestras. In contrast, the two larger *p'iri*, both new developments specifically for orchestral use, take the position of bassoons and contra-bassoons.<sup>17)</sup> The *tae p'iri* lengthens the tube to a cylindrical body of hardwood with conical top section, giving an extended range c-bb'' (Figure 4); the *cho p'iri* doubles the tube back on itself to lower the range one octave (Bb'-bb''). Each has a separate metal mouthpiece. Boehm keywork, thumb support, and the

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16) The Northern state prefers a historical perspective which favours the northern Koguryo kingdom. An evolution for the flutes from Unified Shilla is not altogether welcome, given that this latter state was based on a southern kingdom who overran most of Koguryo territory in the 7th century.

17) Operas from the *P'i pada* stable written in the 1970s confirm this. *Ch'unhyangjön* (The Story of “spring Fragrance”—it was in this composition, incidentally, where we are told Kim Jong-il first introduced *pangch'ang*) and *Yönp'ungho* (Gentle Breeze) have similar orchestral requirements: *tanso*, small, medium and large *chottae*, flute, clarinet, *chang saenap*, *tae p'iri*, *cho p'iri*, horn, trumpet, trombone, tuba, percussion *yanggüm* (dulcimer), *kayagüm*, *so haegüm*, violin, *chung haegüm*, viola, *tae haegüm*, ‘cello, *cho haegüm*, contrabass (written top to bottom in this order in the score).



기본장단

$\text{♩} = 50$



연습

$\text{♩} = 72$

Example 4. Kutkori rhythmic cycle

fingering system in the tae *p'iri* closely match the western clarinet, while those of the cho *p'iri* closely the bass clarinet; both also transpose down a tone.

The ubiquitous *changgo* double-headed hourglass drum still provides accompaniment. The structure of the drum seems not to have changed since Koryǒ times (918-1392). Even the bright red colour once associated with the court is typically retained. Two developments have occurred, however, one in terms of manufacture and one purely musical. First, complete drum kits have been devised which include pedalled bass *changgo*, bongo-*changgo* and everything in between. Although each instrument preserves something of the shape and the overlapping skins of traditional model, imitation or at least the creation of an approximation of western kits is apparent. Kits can be seen in staged show. Second, rhythmic structures have evolved. In the past, virtually all Korean music was supported by constantly repeating rhythmic cycles (*changdan*). A cycle, rarely more than a few seconds in length, was characterized by constantly repeated stress and accent patterns. The patterns effectively governed what should be played on left and right drum skins. Northern drummers now offer more strokes on the lower-pitched *changgo* head and give greater emphasis to the overall metric scheme. They emphasize downbeats, but little else, rather as if they want to imitate a snare drum. The difference is one of temporal organization. *Changdan* supported short cyclical chunks of music whereas the new style allows the rhythm to chug along under linear, constantly evolving melodies. This can be seen in Example 4. Western music, one can argue, has since the 11th century Notre Dame school considered rhythm as little more than an extension of melody. Koreans, in contrast, enjoyed something closer to parity and, indeed, melody was very much a secondary concern in the common *nongak* folkbands of rural villages.

## Out with the old?

Other old instruments have been abandoned. Both the *kömun'go* (six string plucked long zither) and *ajaeng* (bowed long zither) have tone colours no longer considered popular. Neither, it is said, is capable of western diatonic tuning without considerable modification. The *ajaeng* came in two sizes. The large (and original) court version had a limited range covering a major 9th while the smaller folk version, a 20th century development, had a wide but incomplete range. Rather like the *haegüm*, pitches apart from those produced on open strings (ie, length defined from upper bridge to moveable bridge) were generated without a soundboard. This was achieved on the *ajaeng* by pressing a given string beneath the moveable bridge to raise the pitch sounded (by tightening the string) when plucked above the bridge.

The *kömun'go* had a much wider 3 octave range, but this was too achieved in a complex manner. Strings were pushed literally along the pitch produced when stopped at a given fret (for examples, see Howard 1988:204-7). This procedure severely curtailed any ambition to play fast passage work. In South Korea, the *kömun'go* and *ajaeng* function as low string instruments in new composition ensembles. To some extent, the recent developments of larger and lower *kayagüm* in Seoul reflect composer dissatisfaction of this arrangement: *kayagüm*, *kömun'go* and *ajaeng* hardly provide a homogeneous string block. In the North, *kömun'go* and *ajaeng* can have no comparable role because the four *haegüm* versions together provide a consonant orchestral string texture.

The disappearance of the *kömun'go* remains curious. A long association with the literati is not denied, for as Song (1986) has documented, the majority of surviving historical notations were written for this zither. This might prove ample justification for rejection. But the *kömun'go* was uniquely Korean, far removed from Chinese models or Japanese developments, while the retained *kaeryang*

zither, the *kayagüm*, is similar to Chinese *zheng* and Japanese *koto*. Further, the *kömun'go* was the zither invented in the northern Koguryō kingdom (trad. dates 37BC-AD668). Koguryō territory was roughly congruent with today's North Korea, and hence it is a kingdom favoured in Northern history texts. The *kayagüm* was in contrast modelled further south in territory subsumed by Shilla. It is not clear why the *kayagüm* has been kept while the *kömun'go* has been abandoned. There are two further possible, but mutually exclusive, potential reasons. One concerns the *kahyön'güm*, for this takes the first syllable of *kayagüm* and an alternative name for the *kömun'go*, the *hyön'gum* (black zither).<sup>18)</sup> Was there an attempt, as far as I can establish now forgotten, to substitute an instrument closer to the *kayagüm* for the *kömun'go*? The other reason is an observation: the *kömun'go*, in line with archaeological records suggesting harp-lute origins, has effectively been replaced by a *kaeryang akki*, the *ongnyugüm*.

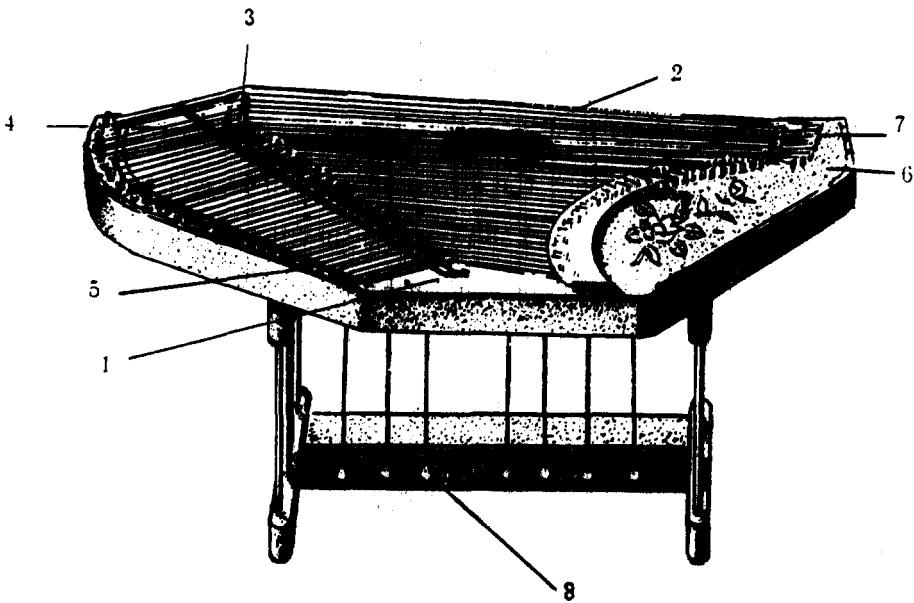
### The need for invention

The *ongnyugüm* is not, despite sundry appeals to the contrary, a totally new invention. It is illustrated in Figure 5. The evolution of the *ongnyugüm* suggests knowledge of the dulcimers of Socialist Europe, for it is used to blend instruments in an ensemble, to thicken and hold orchestral textures together. In fact, an old dulcimer known as the *yanggüm* still exists, still played with two bamboo sticks but now with much greater virtuosity and more aplomb than it has ever been allowed in Southern ensembles. This very virtuosity challenges dulcimers in East Europe and the Middle East.<sup>19)</sup>

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18) From *Hyönhakkäm*, “black crane zither.” The name stems from a legend about the instrument’s introduction, in which black cranes flew into a room and danced as the zither was played.

19) The *yanggüm* is thought to have arrived in Korea from China, where Jesuit priests were the importers, in the late 18th or early 19th century. The *kaeryang yanggüm* is



1—앞판, 2—울림구멍, 3—奚, 4—奚판, 5—줄조임못, 6—변음장치판, 7—  
줄걸이못, 8—변음奚달

**Figure 5. Ongnyugum**

Three *ongnyugum* have been developed since 1970, each succeeding the former. All replace the two courses of strings found on the *yanggum* with a single nylon course that, as if copying the western orchestral harp, has diatonic fifths and octaves marked by coloured strings. There are 32 strings and the range is wide: C-g#". The double-action pedal mechanism on the most recent version is distinct from that of the harp, though it similarly operates on the strings beyond the fixed

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mounted similarly to the *ongyugum* on a trestle above the floor (in the past it was built in a trapezoid box laid straight on the floor). Some recent instruments share *ongnyugum* pedals. As in old instruments, there are two choirs of strings, one set running under a fixed bridge on the left and over a fixed bridge on the right, the second set running in reverse. But the range has expanded, from e<sup>b</sup>-a<sup>b</sup>" to c-g". This range is almost identical to that of the *ongnyugum*. Indeed, the *ongnyugum* makes the *yanggum* redundant, and is more and more taking over the roles of the older instrument. It can, for instance, often be seen in ensembles, and I know no orchestral compositions where the two instruments both take part.

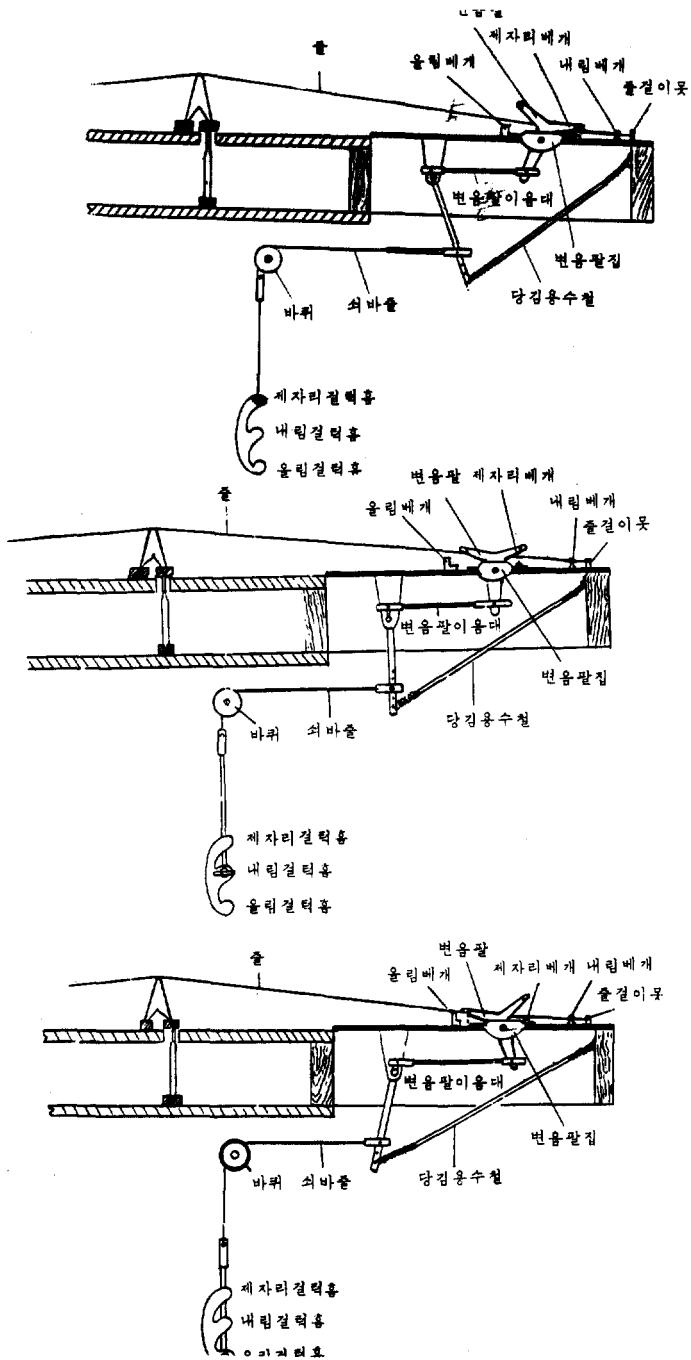
main bridge. The seven pedals, in common with the harp operating on seven diatonic pitches, are connected by a pulley mechanism to the strings above the soundboard. There are three positions: “0” (standard, *chejari koltok hom*), where one arm of a rotating fork stops the string at a small second bridge, “-” (flat, *naerim koltok hom*), where the fork is raised so that the string length increases back to a third bridge, and “+” (sharp, *ollim koltok hom*) where a second arm of the fork stops the string just behind the main bridge (Figure 6). These positions contrast the sequence of pitches produced by harp pedals (i.e., -, 0, +).

Further bridges under each string are shaped like those nicknamed *kirogi pal* (“wild geese feet”) on the *kayagum*. These define the sounding length of the tuned section of the string (to the right). Whereas the bridge on *kayagum* were moveable, those on the *ongnyugum* are fixed. One “toe” is mounted on a fret above the soundboard, while the second “toe” rests on a fret connected to the lower soundboard. The mechanics are still considered unsatisfactory; like the *haegum* it is planned that the *ongnyugum* will undergo further development.

In terms of sound capability, the *ongnyugum* comes close to matching the indigenous with western music. Some common playing techniques such as *nonghyon* vibrato and the ornaments associated with sudden pitch alteration (eg *chonsong*) remain from the past. Other techniques such as tremolo, which had no place in old music, seem to reflect European, Middle Eastern and contemporary Chinese dulcimers. Others still capitalize on the possibilities for bright glissandi and harmonic in-fills beneath melodies. One piece which encapsulates virtually all the current techniques is *Hwanggumsan ui paek toraji* (The White Bellflower on Hwanggum Mountain) (Example 5).

### Concluding Remarks

There is much detail to be added to this cursory survey. Many *kaeryang akki*



**Figure 6. Ongnyugum pedal mechanism**

The musical score consists of five staves of music for the instrument ongnyugum. The first staff shows a melodic line with various note values and dynamics (ff, p, mf). The second staff features a series of eighth-note patterns with a dynamic instruction '빠르고 약동적으로' (Fast and slightly swaying) above it. The third staff contains eighth-note chords. The fourth staff shows a mix of eighth-note and sixteenth-note patterns. The fifth staff concludes the excerpt with a series of eighth-note chords.

**Example 5-1.** Excerpt from Hwanggumsan ūi paek toraji (The white bellflower on Hwanggum peak) for ongnyugūm

have been carefully developed, and combine the old with elements of western instruments. Not all, however, are equally successful, and the institute recognizes that *haegüm* and *ongnyugüm* require further modification. The development of



**Example 5-2.** Excerpt from Hwanggumsan ūi paek toraji (The white bellflower on Hwanggum peak) for ongnyugim

*kaeryang akki* started from an ideological base, and essentially aimed to satisfy domestic concerns. The dogma, consequently, has not sought to address either the elitism of musical skill or the possible incompatibility of Korean and western

soundworlds. This leaves several potential conflicts between philosophy and reality unresolved. Indeed, the very notion of “success” may be chimerical: the opposing soundworlds of east and west suggest that instruments able to support virtuosic or diatonic melodies may only compete with Western music if they are prepared to abandon much of their Korean roots.

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