

The Music of the Literati in the Late Chosŏn Period

Hwang Junyon
Seoul National University

The literati was the leading social class during the Chosŏn 朝鮮 dynasty (1392-1910). Many renowned literati were also officials who played important political and social roles. Moreover, as the only intellectual class, the literati developed the culture and arts of the Chosŏn period. At that time, they had great influence on calligraphy, drawing, and music as well as on philosophy and literature of the Chosŏn period. In this paper I will examine the literati's influence on music caused by their philosophy.

The philosophy of the literati is encapsulated by the term *sŏnbi chŏngshin*¹ 선비精神 which literally means the spirit of the literati learned by studying various classics of the Orient. The spirit of the literati is defined as self-cultivation during usual times and the righteousness to save his country during crisis. In other words, the spirit of the literati is viewed from two aspects: In person, self-discipline; and publicly, the idea of governing the country with virtue. The literati's ideas on music must be understood in light of this spirit.

Discussions on music were abundant in a number of Confucian Classics. The crux among them, however, was that music is the representation of virtue. Therefore, since one of the literati's main interests was to accumulate virtue,² music was regarded to be important, and it had to be proper.³ To the literati, music was an essential tool for self-cultivation as well as a must to study. Many of the literati, thus, studied the *kŏmun'go* 거문고(玄琴), a six-

¹First cultivate yourself; then arrange your own household; then rule the state; and finally pacify the whole Earth [修身·齊家·治國·平天下].

²Music is to represent virtue [樂者，所以象德也] (*Li ji* 禮記, On Music 樂記).

³Enjoyment without being licentious, and grief without being heartfully excessive [樂而不淫，哀而不傷] (*Confucian Analects*, Book 3).

stringed zither, to practice music. Such is stated in many old music literatures including *Hyön'gum tongmun yugi* 玄琴東文類記. *Tongmun yugi*, a manuscript edited by Lee Tük-yun in 1610, contains notations of diverse *kömun'go* music which were popular in his time, and also a variety of writings by famous literati that shows their affections for the instrument. Moreover, the existing multitude of *kömun'go* manuscripts prove to the literati's enthusiasm for its music and their belief that playing it assists self-discipline.⁴

As to the *kömun'go* pieces, *Yömillak* 與民樂, *Yöngsanhoesang* 靈山會相, *Pohöja* 步虛子, *Pukchön* 北殿 and *kagok* 歌曲 (including *Mandaeyöp* 慢大葉, *Chungdaeyöp* 中大葉, and *Saktaeyöp* 數大葉) repertoires were popular and commonly performed by the literati. Among the musical pieces, *Yöngsanhoesang* and half of the *kagok* repertory were in *kyemyönjo* 界面調 mode. The term *kyemyönjo* mode first appeared in a fifteenth-century document, and it is reported to have created a sorrowful mood.⁵ The recognition that the *kyemyönjo* mode generates a sorrowful mood is also found in several of the seventeenth and eighteenth century *kömun'go* manuscripts, such as *Tongmun yugi*, *Paegunam k'imbo* 白雲庵琴譜, *Han'güm shinbo* 韓琴新譜, and *Öünbo* 漁隱譜. These manuscripts explain that the *kyemyönjo* mode expresses grief, resentment, the feeling of longing and sorrow.⁶ However, it is questionable whether the literati actually favored sad musical pieces rather than avoided performing them, for they considered music as a tool for cultivating oneself. Was there, in reality, a discrepancy between their ideas and practice of music?

Restored musical pieces in *kyemyönjo* mode of the eighteenth century affirm that the *kyemyönjo* mode actually created a sorrowful mood. Figure 1 is a restored *p'iri* 篳篥 [double-reed pipe] notation based on the *kömun'go* notation of *Yöngsanhoesang* from *Öünbo*, a late eighteenth century manuscript. The melodic line of the *p'iri* creates a sorrowful mood because of the frequent appearances of the minor third interval between the *kung* 宮 [principal tone] and *sangil* 上一 [upper first]. Another restored piece in *kyemyönjo* mode is shown in Figure 2. It is a restored vocal melody based on the *kömun'go* melodic line of *Ch'osudaeyöp* 初數大葉 from *kagok* repertory in an eighteenth-century manuscript. This vocal melody, which is presumed to

⁴*Güm/qin* 琴 [*kömun'go*] means *güm/jin* 禁 [to prevent]: to prevent one's mind from going wrong [琴者，禁也：禁吾心也]."

⁵King Sejo [when he was still the Prince of Suyang] ordered musician Hò O to play *kyemyönjo* on flute. [...] All the people present could not help grieving" (*Sejo shillok*, 1.1b8-9, September 1429).

⁶"界面調者，悲愁怨恨·哀慕感激之謂."

The figure displays musical notation for the piece 'Yŏngsanhoesang'. It is organized into three systems, each with two staves. The first system is labeled with a circled '1' and shows the 'restored' version: the top staff is 'p'iri' and the bottom staff is 'kŏmun'go (Ōinbo)'. The second system shows the 'current' version: the top staff is 'p'iri' and the bottom staff is 'kŏmun'go (Samjuk kumbo)'. The notation includes treble and bass clefs, a key signature of one flat, and various rhythmic values such as eighth and sixteenth notes, along with rests and slurs. The music is presented in a Western staff notation format.

Figure 1. Excerpts from the restored *Yŏngsanhoesang*

be the prototype that existed since centuries before, also creates a sorrowful mood. Furthermore, its descending melodic passage (“*Ch’ŏngsŏk ryŏng ...*”) from the note *sangi* 上二 [upper second] through *sangil* to *kung* resembles

The figure displays two systems of musical notation. The first system includes a restored vocal line and an ŏnbo line. The restored vocal line has lyrics in Korean (청석 령 지나) and Romanized Korean (Ch'ŏngsŏk- ryŏng etc. ji na). The ŏnbo line has lyrics in Hanja (方七 사 덩 디 덩 사 文호 덩 方六 당 당 다 로). The second system includes a current vocal line and a samjuk kŏmbo line. The current vocal line has lyrics in Korean (청석 령 지 다) and Hanja (거 다). The samjuk kŏmbo line has lyrics in Hanja (方七 덩 덩 동 文 덩 다 링 文 거 다).

Figure 2. Excerpts from *Kyemyŏn ch'osudaeyŏp*

that of the melancholic folksong *Menari* 메나리. Thus, until the late eighteenth century, a conflict seems to have existed between the literati's ideas and practice of music.

However, the *kŏmun'go* manuscripts from the nineteenth century, such as *Yuyeji* 游藝志, *Samjuk kŏmbo* 三竹琴譜, *Kŏmhak chŏryo* 琴學切要 and *Kŏmga* 琴歌, no longer offer an explanation of the characteristics of the *kyemyŏnjo* mode. Also, a major change in *kyemyŏnjo* mode pieces began to emerge. During the transitional period from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century, a change occurred in the performance practice of the *kŏmun'go* in *kyemyŏnjo* pieces such as *Yŏngsanhoesang*. The fingering for the note *sangil* began to be deeper, making the note produced higher. Consequently, the notes a minor third higher than *kung* disappeared. Because the creation of a sorrowful mood was mainly due to the minor third, the change in the performance practice deprived *kyemyŏnjo* pieces of

their characteristic sorrowful mood. Instead, musical pieces without *sangil* renders a peaceful mood. For instance, both the current *Ch'osudaeyŏp* in *kyemyŏnjo* and the same piece appearing in the nineteenth century's *Yuyeji* and *Samjuk kŏmbo* have peaceful melodies. This difference of moods in *kyemyŏnjo* pieces can be clearly recognized by comparing those from the eighteenth century's *Ŏunbo* and the current one.

As discussed above, the literati viewed music as the representation of virtue and endeavored to perform proper music. Nevertheless, there was a conflict between the literati's ideas and practice on music during the fifteenth century through the eighteenth century. However, beginning from *Yuyeji* from early nineteenth century, no explanation was given as to the mood of the *kyemyŏnjo* mode as mentioned above. As the mood was no longer sorrowful, the authors/compiler of the nineteenth century manuscripts did not duplicate the explanation of the mood of the *kyemyŏnjo* mode as they would before nineteenth century. The musical practice of the literati started to conform to their ideas, as the *kyemyŏnjo* pieces such as *Yŏngsanhoesang* and *kagok* were modified during the late eighteenth century. Thus, by the structural change in *kyemyŏnjo* mode, the music of the literati showed concordance between their ideas and actual practice of music.

So far, I have been discussing the music of the literati that was not properly studied in the research of Korean music history. In Korean traditional music, there were originally two basic modes, *p'yŏngjo* 平調 and *kyemyŏnjo*, and each had a distinguished mood from each other. The *p'yŏngjo* mode created a bright and peaceful mood, and the *kyemyŏnjo* a sorrowful one. This contrast of mood is retained in today's Korean folk music, *minsogak* 民俗樂. However, the structure of the *kyemyŏnjo* mode was modified in the late Chosŏn period to create a peaceful mood. This change was revealed in musical pieces such as *Yŏngsanhoesang* and the *kagok* pieces in *kyemyŏnjo* mode, both of which had been favored among the literati since the early Chosŏn period. Thus, currently, two different kinds of *kyemyŏnjo* co-exist in Korean traditional music: one is a sorrowful *kyemyŏnjo* mode used in *minsogak*; the other a peaceful one used in *chŏngak* 正樂 [the literati's and court music]. This distinction is fundamental in characterizing the *minsogak* and *chŏngak* of Korea.

To conclude, music reflects the spirit and mind of the human being, and this phenomenon is more evident in traditional music of a long history. In the same vein, the music of the literati of the Chosŏn period has changed to reflect their ideas and philosophy of music. Their ideas on music influenced the structure of the *kyemyŏnjo* mode to generate a peaceful mood. This change caused the appearance of an ideal music to conform to the musical

thoughts of the literati. Thus, along with other cultural activities and Korean Confucian studies, *chǒngak*, the “right music,” can be said to reveal most clearly the spirit and tradition of the literati of the Chosŏn period.

〈요약〉

조선 후기의 선비음악

황준연(서울대학교)

오랜 세월 동안 갈고 닦여서 형성된 한국 전통음악 가운데 특히 정신의 지배를 크게 받은 것이 선비음악이다. 이 글은 조선후기 음악사의 큰 흐름 가운데 지금까지 제대로 조명받지 못한 선비음악의 성립과, 그와 관련한 음악구조의 획기적인 변화 및 그 의의를 탐색한다.

조선조는 선비의 나라라고 할 수 있다. 선비는 당시 정치적 사회적 학문적 중심 계층이며, 조선시대의 문화 예술을 형성 발전시킨 주역이었다. 이들 조선의 선비는 음악을 덕(德)의 표상으로 여겼고, 덕을 실천하기 위하여 현실적으로도 거문고를 학습하는 음악의 실천에도 힘썼다. 그러나 실제로는 오랜 동안 조선조 선비의 이상적 음악관과 그 실천 사이에는 갈등이 있었다. 그 이유는 본래의 한국음악이 여러 감정을 표출하는 것이었기 때문이다.

조선조의 선비음악은 1800년 즈음에 그러한 전래의 갈등을 해소하여 완성되었는데, 그것은 실천에서의 음악의 구조를 변형시키는 방법으로 이룩되었다. 그 결과로 조선후기의 선비음악은 조선 고유의 정신문화와 맥을 같이하는 새로운 이상적인 형태로 되었고, 그러한 전통이 지금까지 이어지고 있다.