

All for a Song: On Becoming a Korean *P'ansori* Singer

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The progression from childhood to adulthood is often fraught with a variety of challenges and pressures, as one attempts to accept, contest, and come to terms with his or her personal and social identity. In many cultures, music often functions as a tool of articulation for youth as they place themselves within a larger social world. Music, however, plays an even greater role in the lives of youth who dedicate themselves to performance or who are judged to be musical prodigies. In such cases, deep immersion into the world of music, combined with contingent performance expectations, shapes the entire life experience of the child.

This paper investigates the intersections of music and life experience of two Korean *p'ansori* performers. Specifically, it analyzes the direct and indirect influences of traditional music on the life and life choices of two women as they matured into adulthood. When examined, the similarities and differences of the singers' life experiences reveal significant data about class, ideals of womanhood, and the role of traditional music in Korean culture; as well as personal, familial, and social expectations.

P'ansori is a solo narrative art form in which a singer (*kwangdae*), accompanied by a single drummer (*kosu*), relates a long and complex tale through song (*ch'ang*), spoken passages (*aniri*), and corresponding dramatic gestures (*pallim*). Throughout its inception and later development in the mid-eighteenth century, *p'ansori* singers were traditionally men, with only three women known to have been professionally trained before the twentieth century. Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, however, due to social, cultural and economic factors, a transformation began to take root such that today the majority of performers are women. As such, I will concentrate on the

coming of age experiences of female singers. I have chosen the following performers because of their wide popularity, as well as the amount of critical information available about their lives or their accessibility for interviews.

Kim So-hŭi

When I first met Kim So-hŭi (1917~1995) in 1986 at a concert meant to rally and inspire college students before an anti-American demonstration, I could not image that she ever conformed to the stereotypical vision of a demure, shy, passive Korean woman. At the age of nearly seventy and standing barely over five feet tall, Master Kim emanated a remarkable sense of strength and confidence. How is it then, that this woman, born of relatively humble means in the early part of the twentieth century — a time of great political upheaval on the Korean peninsula — became one of the greatest and most highly esteemed performers of *p'ansori*?

According to Kim, she was around twelve years old when she was first introduced to the music that would consume the remainder of her life. Though born near the city of Koch'ang, North Chŏlla Province (home to many nineteenth century *p'ansori* singers, scholars and critics), it was not until she had moved north to the larger city of Kwangju to get a better education, that she first became acquainted with the genre. She explains:

One day as I was heading off for school I saw some people setting up a tent for some kind of musical performance, and during class, I heard a beautiful sound echoing through the neighborhood. On my way home, I realized it was a performance by Yi Hwajungsŏn, one of the most famous *p'ansori* singers of that era Yi Hwajungsŏn's voice was magnificent I was simply intoxicated by her voice. I couldn't move!

After hearing her, I tried singing myself — imitating what I'd heard that day. Why, I was singing all the time. It made my sister [in who's home I was living] so angry. She was constantly scolding me. She wanted me to study, not sing songs, but my brother-in-law intervened on my behalf. He saw that I had talent (Pickering 1994).

Once Kim decided to study *p'ansori* she would not be deterred from her ambitions, even if that meant breaking tradition by going against the wishes of her family. Not all of her family members opposed her dreams, however. Kim told a magazine interviewer that she was “given the name So-hŭi by her maternal aunt and that it was a matter of ‘inevitable fate’ that she follow the path of a ‘So-hŭi’ rather than that of a ‘Sun-ok’” (Pihl 1994: 105). By this she was implying that Sun-ok, the name given at her birth, lacked the elegance and dramatic flare of So-hŭi.

We can draw a few conclusions about Kim and her youthful experiences with *p'ansori*. First, upon initially hearing the songs of Yi Hwajungsŏn, Kim was absorbed by the music; so much so, in fact, that she immediately began trying to imitate what she had heard. Although Kim’s early life was not altogether devoid of artistic enterprises — her father was musically inclined, playing both the *taegŭm* (transverse bamboo flute) and *p'iri* (small cylindrical double reed instrument), and she had taken dancing lessons in her youth — this experience marked a significant changing point in her life and goals. Additionally, as Kim herself noted, the very sound of the music mesmerized her and seemingly dictated the direction of her life. Thus, by the age of twelve Kim realized she was destined to become a *p'ansori* performer, and took the necessary steps to become so.

Kim began studying with Song Man-gap, a direct descendent of one of the oldest and most respected lines of *p'ansori* masters. Kim, even after she herself had been designated a master singer and Intangible Cultural Treasure, continued to demonstrate her piety, by lowering “her voice with respect when referring to her first master, whom she describes as having been ‘the highest-ranked *p'ansori* singer in the country, the King of *P'ansori*’” (Pihl 1994: 105). While studying with Master Song she was often involved in group lessons consisting of twenty or thirty students, although in addition to these group exercises she also studied privately with Song for three hours or more, perfecting what had been taught earlier in the day as well as learning melodic passages not taught to the larger group. She spent several years in this early period concentrating on the learning of the Song of Shim Ch'ŏng — a tale that deals with the filial piety demonstrated by a young woman who sacrifices her own life in order that her blind father might regain his sight. Although Kim also began learning portions of the other stories as well, Song believed that the tales such as the Song of

Ch'un-hyang were inappropriate for an adolescent as it deals with the intimate relationship between a young man and woman. Thus, it was important to Song that Kim maintained the propriety required of a young woman. Later in her training when she did learn the Song of Ch'un-hyang, Kim says that she and other female performers were taught to omit the sensuous passages that describe (in a poetic and obfuscated fashion) the physical relations between the main characters. One of Kim's students, Ahn Suk-sŏn (b. 1948), spoke of this topic and the need to sing with strength while at the same time maintaining a sense of femininity:

It is so important to put strength in your abdomen and open your mouth really wide, even at the expense of showing the inside of your mouth, uvula and all When a woman opens her mouth so wide, to the point where a huge vein stands out on her neck I used to be really ashamed, you know, but I conquered that And the sexual jokes? It is not considered a woman's place to say them before the audience, you know, like Hŭngbo's frequent intercourse with his wife. Skip it, or they'll consider you indecent (Park 2003: 229).

Propriety also played a role in Kim's training in her late teens at the Chosŏn Vocal Music Research Institute in Seoul. She says that civility and morality were emphasized among the co-educated students. In fact, as dictated by Confucian mores, the young men and women were not allowed to interact with one another, nor even speak with one another for fear of being expelled from the school.

By the mid-twentieth century Confucianism no longer dictated governmental policy, however, its ethics still predominated the social and cultural life of Korea. For that reason, it is interesting to look at the lives of Korean female performers because of the dichotomous position they held in society. *Kisaeng* were traditionally born into the low or slave class and were stigmatized as outcasts. However, they also held an ironically powerful position through their association with the noble class. As entertainers for the *yangban*, they were afforded a unique opportunity to become literate — often creating their own masterful poetry — as well as proficient in performing refined songs and dances. A few of them were even designated as 'medical kisaeng' whose position it was to administer examinations and health provisions to women of the noble class (Chang 1986: 253). The training was rigorous

and required a great deal of education, but if successful they benefited from admittance to a society and the luxuries thereof from which they would otherwise be excluded. This is even more significant when one considers that the noble women themselves were not formally educated or instructed in the arts. Because of the prevailing Confucian mores of the day, the majority of women were not only illiterate, but also were discouraged from any pursuits that might distract them from their (male dictated) primary goals — obediently serving their fathers in childhood, husbands during marriage, and sons in old age (Kim, Yung-Chung 1976: 44).

Like the *kisaeng* of the Chosŏn dynasty before her, Kim So-hŭi was able to assert a certain amount of power in a male dominated world. Even in her youth, while maintaining proper respect for her elders, she was also able dictate the path of her own career. Although there were certain restrictions placed upon her by the moral codes and ethics of the day, she also experienced a life that might not have been afforded her otherwise. Kim's adolescent years were predominated by learning, performing, and recording *p'ansori*. This certainly could not be considered a typical life for a young woman of the early twentieth century. Although there were sacrifices inherent in becoming a performer, such as foregoing a formal education and the isolation from family and friends, there were also a number of advantages.

Yi Chu-ŭn

I will now turn to the life and adolescent experiences of a contemporary singer, Yi Chu-ŭn. According to David Feldman (1986) a prodigy is a child who by the age of ten exhibits advanced performance in an intellectually demanding field at the level of an adult professional. Although there are countless gifted children in the world, finding a true prodigy is perhaps a more difficult task. Feldman writes:

It is the fortuitous convergence of highly specific individual proclivities with specific environmental receptivity that allows a prodigy to emerge. This is an infrequent and unlikely event. The convergence is not simply between two unitary, looming giants — an individual and an environment — but between a number of

elements in a very delicate interplay: it includes a cultural milieu; the presence of a particular domain which is itself at a particular level of development; the availability of master teachers; family recognition of extreme talent and commitment to support it; [and] large doses of encouragement and understanding ... (12).

In Korea, there have been a number of youth who have displayed remarkable musical talent, yet there have been only a handful that can qualify for the coveted title of prodigy. As will be demonstrated in the following section, Yi Chu-ün (b. 1972) appears to be one of the few.

Like her predecessor, Kim So-hŭi, Yi believes that becoming a *p'ansori* singer is a fulfillment of her destiny or fate (a point to which I will later return). By the time she was four Yi began displaying a gift for music, which her family hoped to cultivate. The fee for, attending a private music school for young children that taught dancing, singing, and *kayagŭm* playing, however, was prohibitively expensive, so the study of those arts was postponed and she concentrated on *p'ansori* alone. Yi feels that she was born to sing, and her grandmother continuously told her that she was talented, "So," she explained to me, "I lived as if I *was* talented."

She began her training under the discipleship of Kim Hŭng-nam. Because of her youth she was not taught entire passages, but learned each song bit by bit. According to Yi, Kim Hŭng-nam believed that she had the ability, displayed as it was at a very young age, to become a wonderful singer. Because of his constant encouragement she herself came to believe that she had a special talent and worked diligently so as to not disappoint her teacher. As a consequence, she won numerous awards and became a local child star. During her first four years of elementary school, she was already famous in her hometown and easily recognized because she had often been seen on a variety of television shows. She says that her teachers tended to treat her differently than other students, but rather than being jealous, her friends were proud of her accomplishments and relished knowing someone famous. Yi was also proved of her own accomplishments, and at that time, apparently deemed humility an unnecessary attribute. She says that she often looked down on the other children, but now regrets having done so and makes a concerted effort to get along with people her own age. As we shall see, however, her self-indulgence and pride were not simply a figment of her

own imagination. Rather, she was often encouraged by her teachers to openly display her talents and profound knowledge of *p'ansori*.

In 1980, a group of well-known *p'ansori* performers visited the traditional arts center in Yi's hometown of Mokp'o, on the southern coast of Korea. At the request of Kim Hŭng-nam, master singer Shin Yong-hŭi (herself a disciple of Kim So-hŭi) listened to the young *p'ansori* prodigy, and was impressed with what she heard. Later that evening, Shin suggested to Yi's family that the child move to Seoul in order to become her full time apprentice. Her father initially disapproved of the idea of his young daughter moving so far away from home. It was her grandmother, who firmly believed that Chu-ŭn would need a profession of her own when she grew up, who finally persuaded the family to allow Yi to continue her studies. Thus, arrangements were made for her to move 130 km (194 miles) from her home and family in order to live with Shin and study *p'ansori*. While attending the Gifted and Talented Elementary School in Seoul, she studied with Shin, in both group classes and privately for an hour and a half every day. Within just two years she had learned the entire repertoire that she knows today, including four out of five extant *p'ansori* tales whose total performance time equals nearly twenty-five hours. When asked how many hours she practiced each day she replied, "Without rest. Always. Forever!" Other musical prodigies have demonstrated such deep dedication to their art. However, it is certainly not common for a typical child of ten to devote so much time and energy to a single subject. At a time when other youth are normally just beginning to be interested in the music they are exposed to on the radio, but before becoming consumers of recordings (Marks 1979), Yi was mastering songs that had been composed three hundred years earlier.

Yi's study habits, however, with Master Shin differed somewhat from those of the other *p'ansori* performers. Although she did work with Shin daily, it was not always in a one-on-one situation. Yi explains that much of her learning came from observing Shin's other students, including those who were far older, more proficient, and famous in their own right, such as Ahn Suk-sŏn and Pak Yang-dŏk. According to Yi, Shin considered the prodigy a "little genius singer," and thus indulged her in ways that were not conventional to Korean tradition. For instance, normally a young child would not be permitted to speak to an adult, particularly in the middle of a lesson, let

alone correct the older student, but that is exactly what Yi did. She would not only boldly admonish the other students, but would also demonstrate the correct way to sing a given passage when they had erred. She says that even though she was young she was not afraid to speak the truth — she knew what was right and wrong in terms of singing *p'ansori* and she shamelessly said so.

Shin further encouraged Yi's pretentious exhibitions by chiding her other disciples with rhetorical questions such as: "Why does Chu-ŭn know this passage when she is so young, and you do not?" Looking back, Yi acknowledges that this was perhaps not the best pedagogical approach, but it gave her the confidence she needed to pursue her aspiration of becoming a great *p'ansori* singer. When asked how other people responded to her seemingly outlandish behavior, Yi readily admits, "They disliked me, and told me I was too arrogant." However, Shin continued to empower the child, teaching her not only *p'ansori* but also emphasizing etiquette and proper deportment for a young lady outside the world of *p'ansori*. Yi again comments that Shin would often reprimand her for the way she walked or carried herself in public, but when it came to music, Shin never dissuaded Yi from speaking her mind and pushing the limits of her abilities.

Yi Chu-ŭn's life is an interesting blend of conformity to tradition and pressing beyond the limits of that very same tradition. For instance, out of respect for the wishes of teacher, she usually disregards the popular grooming fad of dying one's hair drastically unnatural colors. Once, in 1999, she did rebel ever so slightly, however, by highlighting her normally jet black hair with subtle shades of dark red. Although this was a practice common among Korean youth, it seemed out of place for a traditional musician, particularly since the newly dyed hair would be a noticeably lighter color than the knotted black wig typically worn at the nape of the neck during performances. Chan Park comments on this subject, as well as the conflict between a female performers' desire to sustain the traditions of *p'ansori*'s past and her need to freely express herself:

Just as *p'ansori* unfolds on the modern stage a slice of the past in the form of a straw mat, women in singing religiously wear the *tchok* (women's traditional chignon), a stark contrast to males singers' early abandonment of the *sangt'u* (men's

traditional topknot) and horsehair headband and hat. The fake *tchok* a female singer carries in her dressing equipage illustrates that women are not as free to move away from their role as an 'exhibit' of tradition as men. While adhering to the physical image of the traditional *kisaeng* or female *kwangdae*, women in *p'ansori* also strive to cultivate the cultural image of their new identity as carriers of a revered tradition, as 'artists' and *sōnsaeng-nim* (revered teachers) (Park 2003: 231).

When asked about her hair dying experience at the time of its occurrence, Yi replied, somewhat flipantly, that she had indeed been reprimanded by her teacher, being told that such trends were inappropriate for a conveyer of tradition. Interestingly though, in a 2002 interview, Yi confessed that she now believes it is important to maintain traditional dress standards upheld by *p'ansori* performers, while, as Park mentions, seeking her own identity as a singer and a Korean woman.

Another example of how Yi Chu-ŭn negotiates the traditional values of *p'ansori* in a rapidly changing world, is demonstrated in her somewhat nostalgic desire to return to the days when people complied to the ethical and moral codes of Neo-Confucianism — as displayed in the *p'ansori* tales she sings. Yi believes that although the tales told in *p'ansori*, most of which have their origins and settings dating back at least several hundred years, are to some degree antiquated, they also teach valuable moral lessons of conduct. In a recorded interview she explained:

There are five *p'ansori* tales, each of which teaches it's own ethics — the values of our ancestors. It would be good if we could revive them in the modern world — where Ch'unhyang is loyal to [her husband] to the end, or where Shim Chōng is willing to throw herself as a sacrifice into the sea to show her filial devotion — those are values we should pursue. One cannot sing [the *p'ansori* tales] without really playing into the song in a similar way. One comes to think that, ah, I should be like them [the characters] too.

Yi concludes that the lessons of *p'ansori* are more or less reflected in her real life. She says:

I live with my grandmother Of course, I would not be able to compare my

filial devotion to that of Shim Chŏng, but I really try to be good to her, to respect and serve her. There are so many bad things happening to the relationships between the elderly and youth, but I try to be different. I always try to sympathize with their feelings. I think that is the influence from doing *p'ansori*. It is the same with the teacher-pupil relationship. I believe the genre of *p'ansori* offers many [positive] instructions to those who learn it.

To some degree, Yi's choices and values may seem unnecessary or outdated to her contemporaries, thereby limiting her access to a broader social world. There is no evidence, however, that her adolescent experiences have been hampered by her focus on and dedication to *p'ansori*. Rather, she believes that in the twenty-first century most Koreans have a respect for traditional music and admire her choice to become a performer.

Like her predecessor Kim So-hŭi, Yi Chu-ŭn feels that it was not a choice, but fate that led her to become a singer. She says that there were other things she could have chosen to do, but the circumstances of her life and social conditions fortified her decision.

Since becoming a *p'ansori* singer I have had difficulties, but even though it is hard at times, I enjoy being a singer. That is why I feel being a *p'ansori* performer is my destiny. I try to imagine myself quitting this profession and getting married. If I did that I presume I would have to support my husband, but I want to dedicate myself to my work. If I could do it both ways, it would be great, but I cannot give up my profession because I have already invested too much, and if I envision giving up this career, then I feel as if I might be sick. Again, it is for this reason that I believe *p'ansori* is my destiny.

In Yi's decision, we observe a unique convergence of compliance and defiance to tradition. According to anthropologist Laurel Kendall: "A scan of travelers' account and of ethnography suggest that marriage has been an abiding Korean preoccupation. Cornelius Osgood offers the wry comment that 'Marriage under the old Korean system was almost as certain as death' (Osgood 1951: 103) Kim Eun-Shil, conducting fieldwork in Korea as a native anthropologist and unmarried woman

notes, 'When I asked women why they got married, they laughed at my absurd question and said that they wanted to 'live a normal life' ' (1993: 59)" (1996: 4).

In traditional Korean life, as mentioned previously, women were not educated and were obliged to obey the various male authority figures in their life. A woman also had very little opportunity to participate in social affairs or exert power outside her own home. In terms of marriage, divorce, or inheritances a woman had few if any legal rights. In fact, a female was not officially considered a woman until she was married *and* had a child (preferably a son). "She could obtain social recognition, but only in her capacity as wife of a prominent man or mother of a successful son. When she was given an award, it was not for her own merit, but for her contribution to her son's successful career or to her husband's promotion in his official rank (Kim, Yung-Chung 1976: 50-51). It is not surprising then, that most Korean women (or more precisely, their families) sought out prosperous mates. Although legally and culturally women today have significantly more agency and power, adolescent females continue to desire and plan for marriage — hopefully by their late twenties at the latest. If they do choose a career, it tends to only be a temporary diversion until her "real" goal of marriage can be fulfilled. It is fascinating then, that although Yi Chu-ŭn more readily conforms to a traditional lifestyle than her contemporaries, in terms of marriage — the one tradition that might seem lasting and fundamental to most women — she is willing to remain single for the sake of *p'ansori*.

Final Observations

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, adolescents listen to, consume, and use music for a variety of reasons. For many, it helps them cope with the often turbulent times and rocky challenges presented while maturing to adulthood. In many of these cases, while music plays a paramount role in the adolescent's life, the interaction with the music itself can be described as a passive relationship. That is to say, that though intimately involved, they are not actively producing the music themselves. The *p'ansori* performers I have described herein, however, fall into a different category. It is not only a daily consumption of music that is vital to these

women's lives. Rather, it is a totally immersion into the music, and the traditional lifestyle inherent to the performers of the genre, that makes their coming of age experiences significant.

As stated at the onset, I am not proposing that the live of Kim So-hŭi and Yi Chu-ŭn reflect typical Korean adolescent experiences. Yet, much can be learned from their life histories and perspectives as they strive for greatness as *p'ansori* performers. In her own way, each seeks to find contentment with her place in the world via her destined profession. It is through performance, and in the *p'ansori* narratives themselves that she learns about life, values, Korean national culture and history, and what it means to be a woman.

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노래를 위한 모든 것: 한 사람의 판소리 창자(唱者)가 되기까지

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어린이로부터 어른이 되는 과정에서 다양한 도전을 하며 때로는 난관에 부딪치게 되는데, 그러면서 다른 사람의 의견을 받아들이거나 논쟁을 벌이며 자신의 개인적 사회적 정체성을 형성해간다. 여러 문화 중에서도 음악은 젊은이들을 연결해주는 역할을 종종 담당하며, 넓은 사회망을 형성한다. 특히 연주자로 스스로를 불태우거나 음악 천재로 판명된 젊은이들의 삶에 중요한 역할을 한다. 그리고 음악의 세계로 깊이 몰입하면서 뜻하지 않게 어린시절의 경험이 인생 전체에 영향을 주기도 한다.

이 논문에서는 두 명의 판소리꾼의 인생 경험과 음악의 상호관계에 대해 조사해보았다. 특히 인생에서 전통음악이 끼친 직접 혹은 간접적인 영향과 어른으로 성숙해가는 과정에서의 두 여자의 선택에 대해 분석하였다. 판소리꾼의 인생 경험의 동질성과 이질성을 살펴봄으로써 여성이 품는 이상, 그리고 한국 문화에서 전통음악이 지니는 역할 뿐 아니라 개인·가족·사회의 기대치가 드러날 것이다.

판소리가 처음 생겨 지속적으로 발전한 18세기 중엽까지 판소리 창자는 전통적으로 남자였고, 20세기 이전에는 단 세 명의 여자만 전문적으로 훈련받았다. 그러나 20세기 중엽 사회적 문화적 경제적인 요인으로 근본적인 변화가 일어났고 그 결과 오늘날 창자의 대다수는 여성이다. 그러므로 필자는 여성 소리꾼(김소희와 이주은)의 경험의 세계에 초점을 맞출 것이다.

김소희

그녀는 12세 무렵 처음 음악을 접했을 때 남은 인생을 이 분야에 바치기로 했다고 한다. 광주와 가까운 전라북도에서 태어났지만 더 나은 교육을 받기 위해 큰 도시인 광주로 향했고, 비로소 판소리라는 장르를 알게 되었다. 그녀의 설명은 다음과 같다.

어느 날 학교를 가는데 몇몇 사람들이 음악 공연 같은 것을 하려고 무대를 만들고 있는 것을 보았습니다. 그리고 수업 내내 가까운 곳으로부터 울리는 아름다운 소리의 공명(반향)을 들었습니다. 집에 돌아오는 길에 깨달았습니다. 그 지역에서 가장 유명한 판소리 창자 중 한 명인 이화중선의 공연이었음을 ... 이화중선의 목소리는 놀라웠습니다. ... 그녀의 목소리에 도취되었습니다. 순간 움직일 수 없었습니다.

소리를 듣고 난 이후 그 날 들었던 소리를 흉내내려 했습니다. 왜 그랬는지 온종일 소리를 했습니다. 그래서 함께 살던 언니가 화를 내기도 했습니다. 언니는 끊임없이 나를 꾸짖었습니다. 언니는 내가 소리하지 않고 공부하기를 바랬지만, 사촌오빠가 내 편을 들어 중재해 주었습니다. 그는 제 재능을 알아보았습니다.¹

결국 그녀는 판소리를 공부하기로 결심했으니, 비록 가족들의 소망에 반하며 전통을 어기는 행위였지만 그 패기를 단념시킬 수는 없었다. 그렇다고 그녀의 가족 구성원 모두 반대한 것은 아니었다. 김소희는 모 잡지 인터뷰에서 어머니로 여기는 아주머니에게서 ‘소희’라는 이름을 받았는데 이는 피할 수 없는 운명으로 다가왔고, ‘선옥’이 아닌 ‘소희’가 걸어야 할 길을 따르게 되었다고 말했다.²

김소희는 판소리 계보를 잘 전승한 가장 연륜있고 존경할만한 인물 중 한 명인 송만갑 밑에서 공부를 시작했다. 김소희는 훌륭한 창자가 되었고 무형문화재도 되었지만, 그녀가 ‘판소리의 왕’으로 묘사한 첫 번째 스승(송만갑)을 언급할 때마다 존경이 가득 찬 낮은 목소리로 감사함을 드러냈다.³ 송만갑 밑에서 공부하는 동안 20~30명의 학생으로 구성된 단체지도에 종종 연루되어 연습했음에도 불구하고 그녀는 세 시간 이상 송만갑에게 개인적으로 배우기까지 했다. 그녀는 아침 일찍 배

¹ Picking, 1994.

² Pihl, 1994: 105.

³ Pihl, 1994: 105.

운 것을 완벽하게 소화했을 뿐 아니라 단체지도시 가르치지 않은 선율을 배우기도 했다. 이 기간에 그녀는 집중적으로 심청가를 배우며 몇 년을 보냈다. 그리고 김소희는 다른 소리도 부분적으로 배웠으니, 춘향가가 그것이다. 이 소리를 송만갑은 중요하게 생각했으니, 젊은 여성에게 요구되는 몸가짐을 김소희가 유지할 수 있도록 해 주었기 때문이다. 나중에 김소희가 춘향가를 배울 때, (스승 송만갑은) 그녀 및 다른 여자 소리꾼들에게 주인공의 육체관계를 묘사한 감각적인 부분을 많이 생략하였다고 했다.

단정함은 김소희가 10대 후반에 서울에서 조선성악연구회에 참여했을 때에도 중요한 역할을 했다. 공손함과 바른 품행이 남녀가 함께 교육을 받으면서 강조되었다고 했다. 실제로 유가의 도덕적 잣대에 의해 어린 남자아이와 여자아이는 서로 상대하지 못했고 퇴학 당할까봐 대화를 나누지도 못했다. 물론 20세기 중반에 이르러 유교가 더 이상 국시(國是)는 아니었지만, 유교의 윤리관은 여전히 한국의 사회와 문화를 지배하고 있었다.

이처럼 비록 그 당시의 도덕적 윤리적 체재에 의해 구속되기도 했지만 그녀는 다른 것으로는 얻을 수 없는 인생경험을 했다. 김소희는 청춘 시절에 판소리를 배우고 공연하고 녹음하는 뛰어난 활동을 했다. 이는 물론 20세기 초반에 살았던 젊은 여성의 전형적인 삶의 형태라고 할 수는 없다. 오직 소리꾼이 되기 위해 정상적인 교육과정을 저버리고 가족과 친구로부터 고립되어 지냈다.

이주는

한국에는 뛰어난 음악적 재능을 지닌 수많은 영재들이 있다. 그러나 천재를 선망하는 이들 중 극소수에게만 천재라는 자격이 주어진다. 그 중 한 명이 바로 이주는 (1972년 생)이다.

그녀의 선배격인 김소희처럼 판소리 창자가 되는 것이 그녀의 운명이라고 믿었다. 이주는은 4세 무렵부터 음악적 두각을 나타내기 시작했고 그녀의 가족들은 이를 키워나가길 바랐다. 그런데 어린이들에게 춤, 노래, 가야금을 가르쳐주는 사설 음악 학원 등록비가 비싸서 홀로 판소리에 전념하게 되었다. 이주는은 소리하기 위해 태어났음을 느꼈고, 그녀의 할머니는 그녀에게 재주있다는 말을 지속적으로 해주었다. 그래서인지 “저는 천부적으로 재능을 타고난 것 같아요.”라고 내게 설명하였다.

그녀는 김홍남의 제자로 들어갔다. 김홍남은 그녀의 재능을 알아보고 나중에 훌륭한 소리꾼이 될 것이라고 믿어주었다고 한다. 김홍남의 지속적인 격려에 힘입어 그녀는 자신감을 얻었고 스승을 실망시키지 않기 위해 부지런히 연습했다. 그 결과 그녀는 많은 대회에서 수상했고 영스타가 되었다. 초등학교에 입학한 후 4년 동안에 그녀는 이미 고향에서 유명해졌고, 텔레비전의 여러 프로그램에 자주 출연했기에 사람들이 많이 알아보았다.

1980년에 유명한 판소리 단체가 이주은의 고향 목포의 전통음악공연장을 방문하였다. 이 때 김홍남의 요청으로 김소희의 제자인 신영희가 판소리 신동의 소리를 들었고 감동을 받았다. 그 날 저녁 이후 신영희는 이주은의 가족에게 도제식 교육을 위해 그녀를 서울로 보내라고 제안하였다. 그녀의 아버지는 딸이 집에서 멀리 떨어지는 것에 대해 처음엔 찬성하지 않았다. 그러나 그녀의 할머니가 가족들을 설득하여 서울로 올라갈 수 있었다. 그녀는 서울에 있는 초등학교를 다니는 동안 매일 30분에서 1시간 가량 신영희에게 지도 받았다. 완창을 하려면 25시간 정도 걸리는 판소리 다섯바탕을 포함하여 현재 그녀가 알고 있는 모든 레파토리를 2년 만에 습득하였다. 매일 얼마나 연습했냐고 질문했을 때 쉽없이 했다고 그녀는 대답하였다. 항상. 끊임없이. 다른 음악 천재들에게서도 자신의 예술세계를 위한 깊은 자기 헌신을 찾아볼 수 있다. 어쨌거나 10세 정도의 보통 어린이가 하나의 목표를 두고 그렇게 많은 시간과 힘을 쏟는다는 것은 분명 흔한 일이 아니다. 나중에 레코드 소비자가 될 여느 아이들이 라디오를 통해 겨우 음악에 관심을 갖기 시작할 무렵⁴ 이주은은 300년 전에 만들어진 소리에 능통하였다. 한편 신영희는 이주은을 격려해주었고 판소리 뿐 아니라 꼬마 숙녀가 지녀야 할 예절과 바른 품행도 강조하였다.

이주은의 삶은 전통의 한계에 부딪침과 전통에 순응하는 양면성이 혼합되어 있다는 점에서 흥미롭다. 예를 들면 스승의 바람을 고려하지 않고 새까맣던 머리카락을 검붉게 물들이기도 하였다. 그리하여 건방지다는 얘기도 들었고 전통문화를 전달하는 사람에게는 부적당한 차림이라며 스승으로부터 많은 질책을 당하기도 했다고 하였다.

그러나 이주은은 곧 판소리꾼들에 의해 지속된 전통적인 의상 유지의 중요성을 깨달았다고 했다. 급변하는 세상에서 판소리의 전통적인 가치를 이주은이 깨달은 또 다른 예는 그녀가 판소리를 하며 유교의 윤리와 도덕에 젖어 있었던 시대로 돌아가고자 하는 복고성에서 드러난다. 비록 판소리를 구성하는 이야기의 대부분이

⁴ Marks, 1979.

최소한 수 백년 전의 것이라서 어느 정도 구식이기는 하지만 교훈적인 행동양식이 담겨있다고 믿고 있었다. 그리고 판소리를 하며 자신의 인생을 다소 숙고하게 되었다고 하였다.

이주은의 선택과 가치 기준이 그녀의 세대에서는 구식으로 보일 수도 있고 이로 인해 폭넓은 사회생활의 접근이 제한될 수도 있다. 그러나 21세기를 살아가는 대다수의 한국인들은 전통음악을 소중하게 여기며, 판소리꾼이 되기 위한 그녀의 선택을 칭찬하리라고 그녀는 믿고 있다. 선배적인 김소희처럼 이주은도 선택이 아니라 운명을 감지한 것이다.

앞에서 언급했듯이 전통적인 한국인의 삶에서 여성은 교육받지 못했고 남성들의 다양한 권위적인 모습에 어쩔 수 없이 복종해야만 했다. 또한 여성들에게는 사회생활에 참여하거나 가정 밖에서 능력을 발휘할 기회가 매우 적게 주어진다. 결혼, 이혼, 혹은 상속의 측면에서도 여성들에게는 어떤 법적 권리도 주어지지 않았다. 사실 여자는 결혼해서 아이를 낳기(아들을 선호함)전까지 공식적으로 여성으로 간주되지도 않았다. 여성은 유명한 남자의 아내로써 혹은 성공한 아들의 어머니로만 사회에서 인정받았다. 여성이 상을 받을 경우 그녀 자신의 우수함 뿐 아니라 아들의 성공적인 경력이나 남편의 공적인 신분이 좌우하기도 한다.⁵ 이는 놀랄만한 일이 아니다. 대부분의 한국 여성들은(정확하게 말하면 그녀의 가족들) 잘 나가는 상대를 찾는다. 오늘날 비록 합리적이고 교양있는 여성들이 중요한 직책과 권력을 지니기도 하지만, 어리숙한 여성들은 희망을 안고 20대 후반까지 계속해서 결혼계획을 세우고 결혼하기를 원한다. 혹 그녀들이 일을 선택하더라도 결혼이라는 목표 하에 잠시 유희하는 경향이 짙다. 이러한 삶이 매혹적이기는 하지만 이주은은 현대적인 생활보다 전통적인 삶의 방식을 자연스럽게 따랐고, 대부분의 여성들에게 영원히 필수적으로 인식되는 마지막 전통인 결혼도 접은 채 그녀는 판소리를 위해 기꺼이 독신으로 남아 있다.

결 론

본 논문의 시작에서 언급했듯이 어린 시절에는 다양한 이유로 음악을 듣고 소비하며 활용한다. 음악은 현실에서의 냉혹한 도전과 혼란스러운 시절을 극복하여 어

⁵ Kim, Yung-Chung, 1976: 50-51.

른으로 성숙하는 과정에서 많은 도움을 준다. 많은 경우에 있어서 음악은 유년기에 중요한 역할을 하며 음악과의 상호작용을 통해 수동적인 관계를 드러내기도 한다. 다시 말하면 친밀함을 쌓아가면서도 그들은 스스로 음악을 적극적으로 만들지 않는다는 것이다. 그러나 필자가 여기에서 설명한 판소리꾼들은 다른 부류에 속한다. 매일 음악을 소비하고 마는 것이 아니라 음악은 그녀들의 삶의 원천을 이룰 정도로 중요하다. 전적으로 음악에 몰입하고 선천적으로 음악을 연행하는 전통적인 삶의 형태에서 경험이 중요한 의미를 지니는 시대가 다가오고 있다.

시작부분에서 서술했듯이 김소희와 이주은의 삶이 전형적으로 한국인이 유년기에 체험하는 것이라고 하는 것은 아니다. 그러나 그녀들의 삶에서 많은 것을 배울 수 있고 판소리꾼으로서 노력한 정성을 조망해 볼 수 있다. 그녀들은 나름대로 운명적으로 주어진 직업을 매개로 각자 있는 곳에서 각각 자족(自足)하고 있다. 그녀들은 판소리를 통해 삶, 인생의 가치, 한국의 문화와 역사 그리고 여성이 되는 방법을 배운다.