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PRIZE LECTURE (FULL TEXT)

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My Mission in Search of a Grammatical System for Korean Music

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In 2010, the Korean Music Award from the Choson Ilbo Newspaper Company was given to me, an unknown person. At the memorial lecture, I said: "I have told myself that the mission of my life is searching for an unknown but precious thing and devoting myself to it, because I was born in a nameless place and lived a nameless life. So I have made my life's work collecting and arranging various sources related to traditional music that the villagers used to play in my childhood."

I was born in 1935 in a small seaside town about 20km removed from the station. At that time the town was the Korean tradition itself: people were working their farms wearing traditional costumes, playing band music (*nongak/pungmul*) and singing folk songs. Sometimes shamanistic rituals were held, and master musicians and singers were hired for performances, so I was naturally and sufficiently familiarized with traditional music in my adolescence. Such experiences in my youth have made traditional music my musical mother tongue.

When I learned Western music composition from Prof. Na Un-yeong at Yonsei University, I experienced a severe conflict between my own musicality and Western musicality. That was the reason why I changed my mind and decided to privately collect sources of traditional music that I listened to and that I was brought up with. As a result, more than 10,000 items of discs and field-recording tapes were accumulated in my studies.

Probably because my work in collecting sources were recognized, I was appointed as a full-time researcher to the National Institute of Cultural Properties and since then I

have been engaged in traditional music research for a long time.

At the time it was most regrettable that folk music heritage originating from the base of Korean culture was vanishing, whereas no field research or recording was carried out. Another difficult task was overcoming the Western-influenced musical theory for describing Korean traditional music and making up a new theory more suitable for it. Since then I have contributed to constructing a grammatical system of Korean music. Here I would like to introduce some examples of the results.

Korean musicians count meters of *dongsalpuri jangdan* (*jangdan*: circular rhythmic pattern) as 4 beats, and *eochungmori jangdan* as 6 beats. Western musicians would do similarly. However, Korean musicians count meters of *jajinmori jangdan* as 4 beats and *dodeuri jangdan* as 6 beats, while Western musician would count them as 12 and 18 beats respectively.

This means that there is a difference in cognition of levels of beats between Western and Korean musicians (and theorists) when they think of Korean rhythm. So I made up a new theory representing a hierarchical construction of Korean rhythm using such concepts as "small beat", "normal beat", "big beat", "big big beat" and so on, in order to make a distinction of layers of beats.

Rhythm-division theory is employed in Western music: a whole note is divided to two half notes, and they are divided again to four quarter notes. This type of theory is inadequate for explaining a generative principle of some Korean *jangdan* constructed by mixtures of different units of beats, such as *eotmori* (2+3+2+3)/8 or *cheongbae* (3+2+3+3+2+3)/8. However, Koreans already invented a mensural notation system (*jeongganbo*) in the early Joseon period, which can describe both a normal layer of beats (*jeonggan*) and an upper layer (*daegang*) simultaneously. It means that they had a kind of grouping theory of rhythm.

Triple meter is one beat longer than duple meter, so we can say that an assembly of notes on a lower layer constitutes an upper layer. So I have proposed a grouping theory of rhythm.

When I noticed that recent theorists of Western music such as L. Meyer abandoned a division theory and proposed a grouping theory, I was convinced that my theory was right.

There are dozens of different *jangdan* in Korean music. How is a rhythmic cycle of a *jangdan* determined? In order to solve this problem I have proposed a theory that formal rhythmic elements constitutes a hierarchical structure, and the structure generates a hierarchical metrical structure. According to my theory, a grouping of

several notes that have different lengths and accents constitutes the lowest formal elements, and these elements make up the lowest level of meter. Similarly, an upper level of meter is constituted by a grouping of the lowest level of meter. It follows that grouping of elements belonging to two layers constitutes a meter, and grouping of those elements belonging to three layers constitutes *jangdan* rhythmic cycle.

The Western principle of metric explanation is totally different from this one: a beat is a minimal component, beats are combined together to create a meter, meters are combined to create a motive, and motives are combined to create a phrase. However, it would be more adequate to think that hierarchical metric structure is made up from grouping structure of constituent elements.

Now I would give another example. Regional styles of Korean folk songs and shamanistic songs, which are referred to as *jo*, are sometimes difficult to discriminate from each other when (Western or Chinese-derived) modal theory is employed. So I proposed a new theory for discrimination of those songs' stylistic features (*tori* in Korean traditional terminology), considering the melody's intervals, intervals between main notes, ornamentation (*shigimsae*) and melodic idioms. This concept of *tori* is somewhat similar to that of *chiang-diao* (腔調) in Chinese folk song or that of *hoi* in Vietnamese folk song. I believe that Prof. Koizumi gave up a modal theory and constructed a tetrachord theory for analysis of Japanese folksong, resting on the same reason as mine.

I have published more than 200 papers on traditional music, discussing cognition of *jangdan*, rhythmic expansion and reduction of *jangdan*, typology of syllable names, origin of musical key (*cheong*) and so on. However there is still a long way to go to construct a grammatical system for Korean traditional music. I would like to continue to contribute to this area of study.

I met Prof. Koizumi once when he visited Korea in the 1960' s.* Whereas his predecessors such as Hayashi, Tanabe and Kishibe were all historians, Prof. Koizumi devoted himself to constructing a new musical grammar based on his fieldwork of folk traditions. So I thought that Prof. Koizumi was like F. Saussure in modern linguistics. Strongly impressed by his clear theory and his graceful looks, I felt that he was an unreachable person to me. So I never imagined that I would be given the chance to be awarded the honorable Koizumi Prize. Thank you so much.

Note: It is highly likely in 1973 (by Y. Uemura).