



Chapter III
Pansori Master Singers

Heather Willoughby

Introduction

As has been demonstrated in the preceding chapter, any discussion of the history of *pansori* is ultimately a description of the performers, and what they have brought to the genre. Such divisions of time are known as the Era of the Eight Early Masters (early 19th century), Era of the Late Masters (late 19th century), Era of the Five Masters (late 19th century to early 20th century), Era of the Masters after Liberation (mid to late 20th century), and Era of the Contemporary Masters (late 20th to early 21st century).

As was also noted in the previous chapter on the history of the genre, *sorikkun*, or *pansori* singers, created a highly descriptive and critical vocabulary to distinguish between the various skills and social status of the performers. The categories included the following, among others: *jaedam gwangdae* (one accomplished at the subtle humor or puns found in *pansori*), *aniri gwangdae* (a singer who focuses on the dramatic speech portions of *pansori* rather than on the more demanding melodic passages), and most importantly for our discussion, *myeongchang*, or Master Singer.

The process of mastering the art of *pansori* is long and arduous and few there are that truly meet the standards requisite to be called a *myeongchang* (master singer). Rather than reiterate the historical aspects of those who have been designated as master singers, the focus of this chapter will be a discussion of the aesthetic practices of *sorikkun* in their quest to become a master singer. We will begin by analyzing a poem entitled ‘*Song of the Gwangdae*’, because the author, Sin Chaehyo makes reference to the specific qualities that a *pansori* singer (*gwangdae*) must possess in order to be considered a master. The next section discusses the steps that are commonly taken by *sorikkun* on the road to greatness, followed by examples of the life and accomplishments of five singers in relation to the traditions and transmission practices of *pansori*, and the eventual transcendental potential of the music as one transforms himself/herself into a master singer.

‘*Song of the Gwangdae*’

Sin Jaehyo(1812-1884), who was influential in promulgating *pansori* in the 19th century and in shaping the development of the genre for subsequent generations, not only edited and purged the *pansori* tales of vulgarities, but was also known to have collected and to have written a number of *danga* (short song), used as a means to warm the voice before a longer performance.¹ Of particular note is the ‘*Gwangdaega (Song of the Gwangdae)*.’ In this piece, Sin not only extols the greatness of the genre to which he has dedicated much time and energy, but also provides for the listener a description of the qualities of a master singer and the resultant beauty when performed properly. A portion of the poem/song reads as follows:²

How delightful the way of the *gwangdae* life!
 But the life of *gwangdae* is truly difficult.
 Good features [*innmul*] are the first requisite of a *gwangdae*’s qualifications.
 Excellent talent for narration [*saseol*] is the second,
 Musical talent [*deugeum*] and dramatic action [*neoreumsae*] are the third.
Neoreumsae means to be full of gusto and grace:

Multifarious changes in a moment
 Now a fairly, now a ghost;
 He'll make his audience laugh and cry – romantics and gallants, men and women, old and young
Neoreumsae is indeed the most difficult of all.
Deugeum means the musical talent to distinguish the five tones
 To manipulate the six pitches, and
 To sing by means of vocalization from the body
 This too is a difficult thing to do.
Saseol is to narrate a story clearly like fine gold and beautiful jade,
 To make the story beautiful by adding flowers to embroidery,
 As if a pretty lady made up with the seven treasures emerges from a screen,
 As if the full moon appears from behind a cloud.
 To make the audience laugh with his eyes.
Inmul is inborn.
 And it cannot be changed.
 These are the requirements for pansori singers.

'*Song of the Gwangdae*' is not only an academicians's poetic musings about the art of *pansori*, rather even today many of the aspects address therein serve as the means whereby mere singers are distinguished from master singers. It is therefore, worth analyzing the four major characteristics of a master singer as outlined by Sin.

***Inmul* – Good Features**

Sin Jaehyo sets a precedent when he places the concept of *inmul* at the head of the list, which he contends to be an innate quality that cannot be gained through practice, or even necessary improved upon by one who is lacking in this regard. Song Bangsong's translation gives the impression that *inmul* (good features) refers only to the physical appearance of the singer. Other scholars (cf. Park 2003:72-75) agree that this is in fact the most accurate meaning of the term, emphasizing imperfections or physical flaws might prohibit a person from even being able to learn pansori, or negatively affect an audience's reception of the performer. A more inclusive view of the term, however, includes not only the general character and talent of an individual, but also, as Marshall Pihl uses the word, stage presence (1994:98). This stage presence can be seen to incorporate the entire theatricality of *pansori*; it is the role of the solo singer to entertain an audience, sometimes for hours at a time, encompassing and distinguishing between an entire breadth of characters and emotions. It becomes necessary, therefore, for a *pansori* performer to become larger than life when entering the stage, mastering and controlling every aspect of their performative universe.

***Saseol* – Narrative**

It has been said that music without sound is dead; so it is with the *saseol* (narrative) of *pansori*. That is to say, although *pansori* texts have been written and studied as literature, in the case of performance, if the words are merely recited or even sung melodically, they will never capture the

essence of the tale. A master singer must master the words, fashioning them clearly so that they become ‘like fine gold and beautiful jade.’ Sin further brings to life the importance of the *saseol* when he declares in his own poetic profundity that the text is akin to the flowers – colorful and vibrant – of a piece of embroidery; to seven treasures accessorizing an already beautiful woman; to the glory and brightness of a full moon emerging from behind clouds.

What is important in terms of becoming a master singer is that the text cannot merely be recited, it must be experienced, felt, and then expressed as if it were the performers own life story they were relating. In 2008, Yi Jueun performed a full-length version of *Heungboga* (*Song of Heungbo*). In the program notes, she spoke of the need to come to a personal understanding of the text in order to master the performance of the song. The following is an excerpt of her comments:

I love the *Heungboga* because its message contains a whole range of emotions and experiences: suffering and pleasure, hope and compassion, and *jeong* (affection). Despite the hardships described herein, there is always a generous attitude of laughter that can be found in the sharing of this message. One is always mesmerized by this story, which makes us reflect on our own, personal experiences.

I have practiced incessantly for this concert. The process of practicing for a performance is the same for all singers, irrespective of the genre; it requires that we endure daily training. But it occurred to me that the *Heungboga* is a mirror of our inner being and life, and this has had an impact of my life.

The story contains examples of typical Korean parents who sacrifice endlessly for their children and yet still feel the need to provide more. In the story we also see that life does not always go as planned, but that people have to try to overcome their difficulties by smiling, even when they don’t feel like it.

In my twenties, I think I did not fully realize the real life lessons portrayed in *Heungboga* because I thought I had expended enough energy to learn to sing *pansori* according to the dictates of my heart and had already perfected the art of *pansori* that my Master Teacher [Sin Yeonghui] had taught me. In other words, I concentrated primarily on the skills, sound, and performance practices of *pansori* without internalizing the story’s deeper and genuine meaning.

In my thirties, however, I realized that I had experienced all of the same trials and joys that the characters in the *Heungboga* had endured. Thus, all the situations in the story have come to life for me; their profundity moves me and brings me to tears.

As we can see, the tales told and retold in *pansori* performance are far more than idle fairy tales. The characters in the tales may be fictional, but their experiences and emotions are presented as being real. A master performer, therefore, needs to go beyond portraying the events and dialogues in a

realistic manner; through a process of sublimation they must also become reified within their own lives.

Deugeum – Attaining the Voice of Pansori

Like many words used when discussing *pansori*, there is not adequate translation in English for the term *deugeum*, and yet it serves as a core attribute as one strives to become a master of *pansori*. In the simplest of translations we can determine that *deuk/deug* (得) derives from the Chinese meaning to ‘gain’, whereas *eum* (音) means sound. The *Yonsei University’s Dictionary of the Korean Language* defines *deugeum* as: ‘The state in which one’s ability or singing of Korean music reaches the point of being beautiful.’ Although this definition capitalizes on the aesthetic nature of the concept, a definition of greater depth and breadth is necessary. As we read above, Sin states that,

deugeum means the musical talent to distinguish the five tones
To manipulate the six pitches, and
To sing by means of vocalization from the body

But *deugeum* is about far more than tones and pitches, it is, in essence the very mastery of sound requisite for one to become a master singer. Marshall Pihl, at times quoting Gang Hanyeong, describes the significance of *deugeum* in this manner:

In the matter of ‘vocal attainment,’ Sin Jaehyo asserts that the singer must ‘strive to distinguish the five tones, employ the six pitches, and then manipulate and draw forth sound from deep within the viscera.’ . . . Gang Hanyeong expands on Sin by stressing that color and tone must be based on realism and that words and music must be matched to each other, not only in the outer forms but also in emotional content. Vocal attainment, he adds, demands that the modal *jo* (*pyeongjo*, *ujo*, *gyemyeonjo*, etc.) and schools (*Dongpyeonje*, *Seopyeonje*, etc.) match the images of the libretto, concluding, ‘There can be no ‘vocal attainment’ without an understanding of the words’ (1994:97-99. cf. Gang 1978:55-56).

From Sin Jaehyo’s poem and Gang Hanyeong’s exegesis we can surmise that the aesthetic value of *deugeum* was appreciated very early on in *pansori* criticism, and that the only way a singer can attain the voice of *pansori* is through the realization of the texts, being careful to use the appropriate tone color and vocal production.³ Chan Park adds that *deugeum* is the perfect melding of melody, rhythmic cycles, pitch, tone quality, tonal variation, resonance, articulation and the principles of aesthetics (Park-Miller 1995:245).

Neoreumsae – Dramatic Gesture

Closely connected with the other qualities outlined in Sin Jaehyo’s ‘*Song of the Gwangdae*’ is the notion of dramatic gesturing. Bringing a text to life is not only accomplished with the voice or through the simple recitation of the text; a master singer of *pansori* must also control every motion and movement of his/her body in order to distinguish between the myriad of characters, events and objects portrayed in a *pansori* tale.

Because a performer uses only a fan and handkerchief as props, he/she must be very adept at visually transforming those simple tools into a variety of objects. For instance, a fan splayed and held upside-down can be swayed back and forth in a cutting motion to represent the saw used by Heungbo and his family to open the gourds filled with treasures. Often the fan is spread out to represent a book that is being read. Or, the fan could be embraced and caressed to imitate Blindman Sim holding his newborn daughter. Fans are also used, not to represent an object, but to add to the aural landscape of the performance: by opening and closing the fan in a dramatic gesture, emphasis is given to a word or phrase.



<Figure 1> An Sukseon reading, with the fan serving as a letter or book in *Chunhyangga*. Photo: Heather A. Willoughby © 1999.

Although generally speaking the performer is free to devise her/his own actions as desired, in contemporary performance practice many of the gestures have become conventionalized. For instance, in scenes depicting lamentation, the performer might extend their arms skyward as if calling out their pleas to the heavens, (Figure 2) or kneel on the floor, hitting the ground with their fan (Figure3).



<Figure 2> Yi Jaram sings from the *Chunhyangga*. The title character is about to be beaten by a lascivious magistrate, but she expresses her resolve to remain loyal to her husband. Photo: Heather A. Willoughby © 1999.



<Figure 3> Yi Jueun sings a lament in the *Heungboga*. Notice the intensity in the interaction between the singer and the drummer. Photo: Heather A. Willoughby © 2008.

As Sin Jaehyo reminds us in the ‘*Gwangdaega*,’ a master singer must master the ability to not only change quickly between characters and scenes, but, as with the other qualities, must always do so with a sense of realism in mind. One of Sin’s students, Kim Sejong, described the theory behind the practice of *neoreumsae* in the following manner:

In the performance of *pansori* the singing is central, and also one must apply regulation to the words, the structure, and to the rhythm and musical inflection. But one must not neglect the descriptive movement and gesture. That is to say, to the extent that *pansori* is vocal theater, one must not lose the awareness of theater.

Suppose that one is to cry. At that moment he should realistically cover his face with a handkerchief and, depending on the situation, fall forward to cry, or cry with loud wailings. Whatever he does, he should show the action of crying realistically. If the singer remains composed and displays no sad emotion at all but simply sits absentmindedly without movement, making only the sound of a lament, he will have failed in his craft and divided singing from theater. Has not the vocal theater lost its spirit when the audience feels neither moved nor sympathetic? (Jeong Nosik 1940:63. Translation in Kim Wuk 1980:113).

As Kim Sejong, who is considered one of the great masters of *pansori*, explains, a performer would fail in their attempt to display the emotions of a character without the proper utilization of *neoreumsae*, and thus be unable to attain the coveted status of master singer.

The Sounds of *Pansori*

After enumerating the basic qualities that a master of *pansori* must possess, Sin Jaehyo continues to describe the breadth and grandeur of sounds produced in a *pansori* performance. The significance of this portion of the poem/song is the realization that a true master singer must be able to produce each and every one of these sounds in any give performance, and, just like the dramatic gestures mentioned above, must be able to rapidly change between the various tones depending on the demands of the text and emotions being portrayed.

The *daseureum* of the first movement of *Yeongsanhwesang*⁴ sounds like a clear stream flowing under ice.

The singing voice in high register is like a boat floating with a fair wind.

Gradual changing is curious [like a stream] that runs around the peak and changes its way.

The lifting voice is like a lofty peak soaring,

The rolling down voice is like the sound of a waterfall,

Long and short, high and low, endless changes.

The weaving technique of the *aniri*⁵ is like a pretty swallow's talk or a lovely parrot's song,

Singers freely improvise *jungmori*, *jungheori*, *heoseong*, and *jinyangjo*.⁶

A clear rolling voice like the crying of a phoenix on Mt. Cimmarbar,

A clear floating voice like the whooping of a crane in a clear sky,

A murmuring voice of grief like the pipa sound by Nuo Huang and Nü Ying,

An infinite variety of technique, a sudden bouncing voice seems to be a peal of thunder.

A loud command seems to shake Mt. T'ai.

A rapid changing voice is like a desolate cold wind among bare trees;

Recalling the *Ch'u-sé-ch'u* by Wang Chao-chün and the Huang-ku-ko by Madame Ch'i.

The audience changes color and shed tears – Such art of the *gwangdae* is truly difficult.

Although a detailed analysis of the numerous vocal techniques, registers, ornamentations and colors is beyond the scope of this paper, it should be noted that master singer have developed remarkably descriptive terms to distinguish between the various nuances of sounds produced while performing *pansori*, such as those mentioned above (i.e. lifting voice, rolling voice, clear floating voice, murmuring voice, etc.).⁷

On the Road to Becoming a Master

Becoming a master singer of *pansori* is, in reality, similar to the process endured by other musicians or artists throughout the world wanting to master their art; it takes years of dedication, sacrifice, and incessant practice. However, *pansori* singers and Koreans in general seem to have taken a great interest in describing and portraying the process of mastering *pansori*. This is evident in the early writings about the genre, in the biographies that are included in concert programs or recording liner notes, as well as in novels and motion pictures. It is, therefore, difficult at times to distinguish between the actual road taken by *sorikkun* of the past and present, and the *idealized* path that has so often been depicted. Nonetheless, all master singers seem to have followed in principle the four basic steps of becoming a master singer as described by the Gochang Pansori Museum, namely Introduction to Pansori, Learning from a Master, *Dokkong* (attaining *deugeum*), and Rebirth as a Master.

Introduction to Pansori

For some, becoming a musician is a matter of innate talent or a keen interest in a particular type of genre. For many *pansori* singers, however, there seems to be a very deep, spiritual bond to the music and experience of *pansori*. As with Korean charismatic shamans, most master singer describe their life

as a performer as being their inescapable destiny. As will be described in greater detail below when discussing master singer Kim Sohui's first encounter with *pansori*, singers often have remarkable experiences the first time they hear the genre. The music is said to literally captivate them, to the point that they are unable to forget the experience, which eventually leads to a transformation of their lives. It is at this point that the often young musician will seek out a teacher from whom they will begin to learn the art of *pansori*.

Learning from a Master

Pansori has always been an art passed down from master to disciple in an intimate, personal setting. According to Jeong Nosik (1994[1940]), in his biographical descriptions of *pansori* masters, a singer generally begin his/her training in early youth, usually with a family member or neighbor. There are many accounts of individuals who, in the 18th to early 20th centuries, descended from a long line of performers or shamans. 'During this first stage, the novice learned the basic techniques of interpretation and performance but did not necessarily develop the characteristic vocal quality of the mature *gwangdae*' (Pihl 1994:104). It is interesting to note, however, that it was often in the early stages of learning that novices would acquaint him/herself with the vast amounts of *pansori* libretti. That is not to say that there were written documents available, allowing the novice to memorize the text through reading. Rather, all lessons centered on rote learning, followed by individual practice. Although the written texts are now readily available and distributed to students, the tradition of oral transmission remains prevalent today.

This pedagogical approach to learning is key to *pansori* transmission practices, and ultimately to the process of becoming a master singer. In the initial years of learning, the novice is admonished to imitate and reflect the sounds and movements of the master. For many years a student practices in such a way as to closely replicate the performance style of their teacher. However, this is only the beginning of becoming a master. After years of intense study, a potential master singer must then take what they have learned and perfect their own vocal traits and idiosyncrasies. Only through the process of building upon the past and perfecting individual self can one become a master of *pansori*. Nevertheless, the idea of lineage is of prime importance to *pansori* singers; novices and master singer alike will always refer to and pay respect to the genealogical line of their musical forbearers.

Today there are few performers who follow in his/her literal ancestors' footsteps, but one individual of note is Jeong Hweseok, a fourth generation *pansori* performer. Born in 1963, Jeong studied under his father Jeong Gweonjin, who in 1970 was designated by the government as an Intangible Cultural Treasure for his performance of *Sugungga* (*The Song of the Underwater Palace*). Although the younger Jeong studied a variety of instruments and singing styles during his formal education at the Korean Traditional Music Middle and High School and Seoul National University, his primary vocal training came through family associations. Jeong's great-grandfather, Jeong Eungmin learned *pansori* directly from a disciple of Pak Yujeon, the father of the *Seopyeonje*, although he eventually established his own style of singing, *Boseong sori*, named for the town in which he lived, which is known for its harmonious blending and intensification of the sad and feminine sounds of

Seopyeonje and the stronger masculine sounds of *Dongpyeonje* (Jeong Hweseok 1999 and 2000).

Throughout the processes of training, students of the past and present alike need to dedicate hours to the mastery of the sounds and performance practice of *pansori*. Additionally, in all stages of *pansori* mastery the singer must learn the correlations between their own life experiences and those of which they sing. In discussing the connections between sound aesthetics and *pansori*, Yu Yeongdae commented that the training procedures that a *pansori* singer must endure are often excruciating and he emphasized that students often sing for up to twelve hours per day, which leads to the development of a particularly raspy tone color known to be the core timbre of the genre. ‘The sound must contain the life and sorrow of the *pansori* singer. It must particularly contain a person’s experience, his life, his strength, and his sorrows. That is what the singer learns; they cannot be a master for twenty or thirty years – that is how experience becomes contained within the sound’ (Yu Yeongdae 1999). Thus we are reminded once again that to become a master singer one must not only learn to master particular vocal qualities, but must also experience life in all of its extremities so that the emotions can then be portrayed through the sounds.

Dokkong (Attaining Deugeum)

According to the Gochang Pansori Museum, the third step in becoming a master singer is that of *dokkong*, a word specific to the nomenclature of *pansori* whose meaning implies a habit of practicing in a cave or before a waterfall in order to sufficiently strengthen one’s voice until a state of *deugeum* has been attained. As one will recall, *deugeum* is one of the four primary qualities that a *pansori* singer must possess according to Sin Jaehyo’s ‘*Gwangdaega*.’

Baek Daeung, a Korean *pansori* scholar, provides us with a further definition of *deugeum*. As he explains it, *deugeum* constitutes the final stage of a *pansori* singer’s training. In other words, it is the ultimate goal. He goes on to say that if one has reached the point of *deugeum* one is able to freely command the voice to express naturally anything in nature. By nature he infers both natural sounds, as well as the emotions that naturally are found among human beings and which find their expression in the *pansori* texts. Finally, he explains that the process of training is culminated in the attainment of the perfect voice, a process which often takes place in the mountains (Baek Daeung 1996:249).

One of the important aspects of *deugeum* that Baek mentions is *how* one attains the voice. Namely, he mentions the fact that singers will often practice in the mountains as a means to their vocal attainment. As mentioned above, mountains, and the act of sequestering oneself within a secluded mountain environment have long been part of the training process of a master singer. After his/her initial training under the tutelage of a famous master singer, the *sorikkum* would cloister him/herself in the mountains.

This... period of study, physically the most demanding, would typically last as long as five years. This was a period of deprivation, of punishing efforts to acquire a ‘voice,’ one of the major elements on which his professional reputation was to depend. Jeong Nosik’s biographical sketches frequently tell of learners who not only sang themselves hoarse, but who vocalized in the wilderness or challenged the sound of a waterfall to produce voices of great power, often pushing themselves to the point of spitting up blood in the process. (Pihl 1994:104-105)

Although the thought of calluses on one's vocal chords would make a Western singer cringe, it is this very process that enables the *gwangdae* to produce the harsh and raspy tones peculiar to the genre of *pansori*.

The idea of segregating oneself in the mountains in order to perfect one's art is not necessarily unique to the *gwangdae*, though the habit is perhaps taken to extremes at times. A cultural ideal has been established in Korea, as well as much of East Asia, that if one has a great talent, the only way to reach a higher plane of performance, or indeed truth, is by separating oneself from the cares of the mundane world while concentrating solely on art. The ultimate goal is one of transcendence (as will be addressed later). By secluding oneself, specifically in the mountains (with their references to both shamanistic and Buddhist practices, rites, and beliefs), one is able to complete a mental, physical, and spiritual journey to the mastery of one's art. In Korean a popular idiom, *doreul dakkda* (moral cultivation) is used to indicate a person who has mastered his or her talent. The concept of *deugeum* and the need to study alone in the mountains is thus closely related to a broader Korean ideal. (Willoughby 2002)

Although not common today, in the past after the periods of learning from a master singer and of mountain seclusion a *pansori* singer would often lead the life of an itinerant performer. During this time he/she would participate in various competitions and festivals, while attempting to make a name for himself/herself, thereby enabling him/her to enter the final stage of life as a master singer – establishing a home base where he/she could attract students and continue the propagation of the genre (Pihl 1994). Today, although every performer takes a somewhat different, and perhaps less arduous route to the mastery of *pansori*, each is still required to attain the voice and all of the skills required of this demanding art form.

Of particular interest is the need to not only master the voice and body, but also the ability to properly and completely convey the moral and emotional messages imbued within the *pansori* tales. According to Korean music scholar Yi Bohyeong there is a direct correlation between particular sounds produced in *pansori* and the emotions that are being expressed in the text.⁸ It is often during the process of reaching a state of *deugeum* that a master singer perfects this fundamental principle.

In discussing the intersection between emotion and music Professor Yi Bohyeong and other scholars refer to a Chinese resource that attempts to draw direct correlations between sentiment and sound. During the Joseon period of Korea (1392-1910) the Confucian Classic *Li chi* [禮記 Book of Rites], which contains a section on music entitled *Yüeh chi* [樂記, or *akki*, in Korean], was occasionally used as a reference for philosophical justification for theoretical procedures in music (Provine 1988:71). Within the *Yüeh chi* there is a brief section which equates particular sounds to states of the mind or heart.⁹ It says:

When the heart feels sad, the emergent sound will seem hoarse and will be low and weak.
 When the heart feels delighted, the emergent sound will be abundant, large and slow.
 When the heart feels joyful, the emergent sound will ascend, will be rapid, and not serene.
 When the heart feels angry, the emergent sound is harsh and intense.
 When the heart feels reverent, the emergent sound is straight and hard.
 When the heart feels love, the emergent sound is peaceful and mellow.

Yi Bohyeong emphasizes that although this is an ancient Chinese text, similar correlations can still be found today in Korean music performances. Particularly in *pansori*, a singer must be able to match particular sounds to the dramatic situation, and that according to the specified text the singer will use a variety of vocal techniques and ornamentations in order to best portray the underlying meaning of the situation. ‘A *pansori* singer is always thinking about the dramatic situation and altering the ornaments, and melodic and rhythmic modes according to the hidden [or inner] meaning (*imyeon*). The singer will change their sound according to whether a character is a man or a woman, are young or old, and depending on whether their emotions are peaceful or congested’ (Yi Bohyeong 2000). Yi Bohyeong further explains how characteristic sounds became dominant and how certain vocal qualities used by *pansori* singers came to be understood as referring to various emotions. Because *pansori* was originally sung out of doors, singers had to learn to project their voices and eventually created an aesthetic for a particular sound quality, one that is raspy and where a great deal of pressure must be exerted from the abdomen.

If a song is lyrical then the sound will be softer, but if it is dramatic, then the sound will be extremely harsh. Eventually singers chose this as an aesthetic quality; this unique sound, including the significant role of the overtones, is of utmost importance to the genre. You cannot use the same rhythms, [melodic] modes, or vocal qualities as you do in other arts. Therefore, if a singer is not able to produce the necessary sound qualities, then they will never become a master singer. A person who can only produce a single singing style is not considered a good singer. You might, for instance, sing a children’s song in a particular way, but if that song was inserted into a *pansori* tale, and was part of a dramatic situation, then the song would have to be sung in an entirely different style, the quality of the song would change to fit the situation. (Yi Bohyeong 2000)

Rebirth as a Master

Once a performer has perfected the voice of *pansori* and has reached a state of *deugeum* they can earn the title of master singer. Yet, their work is not complete. Korean *sorikkun* tend to perform throughout their lives and as such are forever striving for excellence. This requires continual practicing to enable the voice to remain supple so that the performer is able to sing the requisite broad range of notes and variety of sounds. There is also a notion among many *pansori* performers that while there is a need to experience and reify the entire breadth of human emotion expressed within *pansori*, many times the indigenous ethos of *han* (resentment, suffering, lament) becomes emphasized. (Willoughby 2002)

Chae Sujeong, a *pansori* performer and professor at Ewha Womans University, remarked that there is a collective aspect to *han*. In explaining why Koreans developed an aesthetic for a husky voice in *pansori*, she said: ‘I think it is because people have experienced *han*. *Han* is also a personal, internal experience – an experience of difficulty from birth. There is a proverb: *seng-ro-byeong-sa* [生努病死, literally, birth-endeavor-sickness-death]. This is the experience of life, one accumulates sorrow throughout life – everyone does, all throughout the world. But in Korea’s case there is another aspect to *han*. The life and way of practicing for a *pansori* singer is extremely lonely and utterly exhausting.

You study and study, trying to become great. You are always striving for a higher artistic state (*gyeongji*). But you cannot climb to that high state without loneliness. And so you must live alone. That is the sound of *han*. You cannot stop practicing, or what you have obtained will fade away. If you obtain that artistic state, then you have to practice in order to maintain it, or the (proper) sounds won't come out' (Chae Sujeong 2000).

Although many singers have the potential to become master singers, and in fact may be remarkably gifted performers only a relatively few have actually been acknowledged or designated as 'true' master singer. As was demonstrated in a previous chapter, the history of *pansori* can be divided into various periods, each of which centers around specific performers. The life and accomplishments of a few of these masters will be covered in the following section. In addition to the division of *pansori*'s history into eras of masters, it is important to note that beginning in the 1960s the Korean government began to designate certain tangible and intangible properties as significant representations of Korean traditional culture.¹⁰ *Pansori* as a genre and *pansori* master singer were among the first to receive such distinctions.¹¹

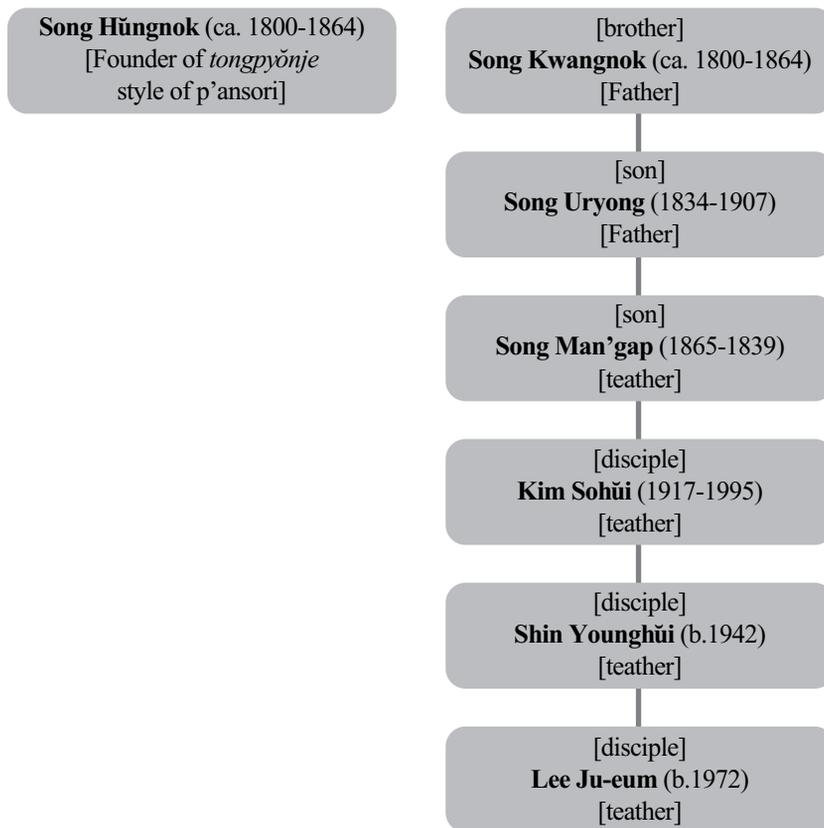
Tradition, Transmission and Transcendence

Because the history of *pansori* can be characterized as a history of performers, and because the genealogy of each master singer plays a significant role in his/her own performance practices, the following section will investigate five master singers. Much could be said about each individual, but the focus of this section is to try to briefly expound upon a heritage of tradition, transmission, and the ultimate goal of transcendence.

Although any number of talented *pansori* performers could be studied, I have chosen Kim Sohui as the focal point of my discussion, in part because of the number of sources that are readily available concerning her, her progenitors, and her disciples, and because my first introduction to the world of *pansori* was a performance by Master Kim in 1986, thus I have developed a special affinity for her and her music.¹² Kim Sohui was an outstanding female performer who had a significant impact on Korean traditional music. She legitimized the authenticity fundamental to the genre, but was also remarkably innovative and inspirational, due to her own innate qualities as well as those she garnered from her lineage. Her heritage is somewhat unique in that she studied with several teachers. Indeed, she studied both *Dongpyeonje* (Eastern) and *Seopyeonje* (Western) *pansori* styles and her renditions of each of the five *pansori* narratives can be traced back to a number of master singers. She learned various parts of *Hungboga*, *Jeokbyeokga* and *Simcheongga* in the style of *Dongpyeonje* from Song Mangap and his descendents, Kim Jeongmun and Pak Nokju. From masters Pak Dongsil and Jeong Eungmin she learned the *Seopyeonje* version of *Simcheongga*, whereas Jeong Jeongryeol, among others, taught her *Chunhyangga*.

Kim Sohui's first teacher was Song Mangap, and although in some respects she adopted and perpetuated the singing styles of subsequent teachers to a greater degree, I will concentrate on Song Mangap's heritage, beginning with his grandfather's eldest brother, Song Heungnok, followed by a more in-depth discussion of Kim Sohui and two of her prodigies.¹³ This is done for two reasons: first, it

is more productive to focus on the details of a few, prominent figures than to provide only scant information on numerous performers. Second, as both Sin Yeonghui and Yi Jueun claim to perform *Dongpyeonje pansori*, it is best to begin with the father of that school. For ease of understanding relationships, both familial and teacher/disciple, the following is a chart of the individuals discussed in this section:



Song Heungrok (ca. 1800-1864)¹⁴

When speaking of the history of *pansori* and of the genre's master singer, the significance of Song Heungrok cannot be overstated. He is not only numbered among the Eight Great Early Masters, but is also considered the founder of the *Dongpyeonje* school of *pansori*. Born into a musically inclined family, Song Heungrok was considered a child prodigy, not specifically for his talents in the art of *sori*,¹⁵ but rather more generally for his academic prowess, which was cultivated at a local village school near his hometown in the Namwon district of Jeollabukdo. He became acquainted with *pansori* at an

early age when his father, Song Cheomji played the drum for singer Kweon Samdeuk (who is considered by some to have been the first great and publically acknowledged master singer), and who later became a singer himself.

At the age of twelve, Song Heungrok retreated to a small Buddhist temple and embarked upon a journey that would have a significant impact on the remainder of his life and musical pursuits. Under the tutelage of Zen master Weolgwang, Song Heungrok studied classical learning and *pansori*. As was to be expected, Master Weolgwang integrated the philosophies of Buddhism with the study of music, and in so doing passed along a profound understanding of the potential depth of *pansori*. Among other lessons, Master Weolgwang taught:

Sori is the sound of all creations in the universe. It is the acoustic reflection of joy, sorrow, love, pleasure; of the four pains, birth, aging, illness, and death. It is the sound of the ocean that unifies into one salty tub all water flows. Every sound in this world is a worthy subject for study. *Sori* exists outside of *sori*, and *jangdan* [rhythmic pattern] exists outside *jangdan*. (Translation in Park 2003:62)

Master Weolgwang also provided other instruction regarding the use of attractive *neoreumsae* (dramatic gestures) and the ability to precisely distinguish the five tones and acoustic properties employed in *pansori* and emphasized that true craftsmanship requires a singer to suitably match the emotions and sounds of *pansori*. Significantly, he also admonished the young Song Heungrok to seek for perfection in his art by attaining a state of *deugeum*, which he is said to have done after ten years of dedicated, sunrise to sunset study.

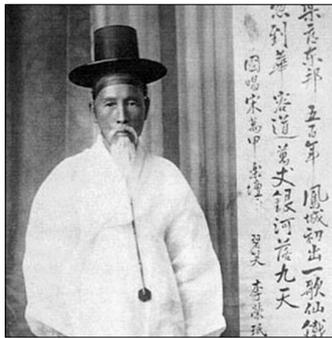
It is apparent, then, that Song Heungrok was an astute student and took to heart all of the instructions handed down to him by the Zen master. Although still a relatively young man in (his early twenties) when he descended from the mountains, Song Heungrok had already aspired to a level of transcendence, an important step in the process of becoming a master singer, as we shall come to greater understanding when discussing the other *pansori* performers in this section.

Upon leaving the confinement of the temple, Song Heungrok earned the distinction of being the ‘talk of the town’ and was soon recognized as one of the greatest *pansori* performers. Said to have an aesthetically pleasing voice that was particularly rich and abundant, he was also known to have a pleasing and commanding presence about him. There are many intriguing stories of his life and accomplishments that could be told, but suffice it to say that his achievements gained him much fame and wealth and were regarded highly enough to garner designation as a ‘*tongjeong daebu*’ (a civil officer title, in this case honorarily bestowed by the King).

Among the innovations made by Song Heung-Rok were his compilation and refinement of the *saseol* (lyrics/narratives), inclusion of classical *sijo* and *gagok*, as well as folk and farming songs. He was also known to possess the ability to penetrate the very heavens with the peal of his voice. He was

known to have concentrated on the *jinyangjo jangdan*, which is characteristically slow and used in conjunction with texts that express deep anguish. He was a master of pathos, and in particular, his rendition of the ‘Ghost Song’ and ‘Prison Song’ from the *Chunhyangga* was known to make audiences shudder in fear and bring them to tears, respectively.¹⁶ And as the father of the *Dongpyeonje* school of *pansori*, he passed to succeeding generations a bold and vivacious method of singing that can be heard in the voices of his descendants.

Song Mangap (1865-1939)



<Figure 4> Song Mangap, a master singer of *pansori*

Song Mangap is an interesting character because on the one hand he is considered the third generation and last direct descendent of Song Heungrok, and thus extolled as the binding link in the *Dongpyeonje* lineage, and yet, on the other hand, he was disregarded by his own family for failing to properly replicate the sounds and performance practices inherent in that very same tradition. What is important in this discussion, however, is that he most certainly forms the link between the beginnings of *Dongpyeonje* and the contemporary performers we shall discuss hereafter.

Song Mangap’s father (Song Uryong) is the son of Song Heungrok’s younger brother (Song Gwangrok). He began his studies at the age of seven under the tutelage of his father due to his natural disposition and talent for the art of *sori*. Even by the age of thirteen he was considered a young master. As alluded to above, Song Mangap followed in the family footsteps, but was also deemed a rebel by his father, who considered his renditions of the *pansori* tales unconventional and adhering too closely to the trends of the day. As a result, it is said that Song Uryong attempted to kill his son with poison, but in the end resorted to expelling him from the family home.

In some regards, his expulsion worked to Song Mangap’s advantage as he was then free to travel throughout Korea, seeking audience with and lessons from the best teachers and performers of the day. Such diverse tutelage broadened his performance skills and honed the mastery of his voice. As a result, although he certainly carried on the traditions of his forbearers, he at the same time became an innovator in the art of *pansori*. According to ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl:

In most societies, music lives in oral tradition; that is, it is passed on by word of mouth and learned by hearing live performance. It is often assumed that such a form of transmission inevitably causes songs to change, as each person who learns one develops his or her own variant, lacking the control of notation. Societies differ, however, in their attitude toward musical stability; to some it is important that a song remain stable and unchanged, while others individual singers are encouraged to have their personal versions. (2001: 10)

As has been discussed previously, in *pansori* a standard has been set wherein a performer is expected to replicate the sounds of their master teachers in their youth, while establishing his/her own unique characteristics as they mature musically and physically.

Song Mangap is numbered among the Five Great Masters of the late 19th/early 20th centuries. Along with Kim Changhwan, Yi Dongbaek, Kim Changryong, and Jeong Jeongryeol, Song Mangap led the way in bringing *pansori* into the 20th century, although ironically, that sometimes meant abandoning traditions of the past for more popular modes of entertainment of the day. Among the most significant changes that occurred was the presentation of *pansori* tales in a theater setting, with various characters being played by individual performers (rather than a solo singer delivering the entire story alone). This new style of performance, in which Song Mangap played a part, came to be known as *changgeuk*.¹⁷

As popularity of *changgeuk* later began to wane, Song Mangap, along with others of the Five Great Masters, formed performance troupes that would tour the country, occasionally enabling even isolated villagers to experience the finesse and mastery of one of the county's greatest performers. During this time, the general populous also was able to partake of the sounds of the masters with the advent of the gramophone and radio programs. Of equal importance among Song Mangap's other accomplishments was the establishment of the Joseon seongak yeonguhwe (Korean Vocal Music Association) in 1933 in conjunction with other master singers, which provided the means for performances, as well as an institution of learning.

Kim Sohui (1917-1995)



<Figure 5> Kim Sohui, a female master singer of *pansori*

Kim Sohui began her musical training at a relatively early age, although not as early as one might imagine considering the fact that she was born near the city of Gochang, Jeollabukdo in southwestern

Korea, considered by some to be the heartland of *pansori* as it was home to many 19th century singers, scholars and critics and today boasts of an extensive *pansori* museum. She was raised in a family with some degree of musical interest, her father playing both the *daegeum* (transverse bamboo flute) and *piri* (small cylindrical double reed instrument), but her initial draw to *pansori*, at the age of twelve, was spurred by the hearing of a remarkable performance by the female singer, Yi Hwajungseon (1897-1943), with whom, incidentally, Kim later performed and recorded. She explains her first encounter with *pansori* in this way:

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 Hwajungseon, one of the most famous *pansori* singers of that era. ... Yi Hwajungseon'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 whose 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 1994:58)

Soon after her introduction to the genre, Kim Sohui's brother-in-law introduced her to Song Mangap. She studied in group lessons of twenty to thirty students, and also privately for three hours or more per day, learning melodic passages not taught to the larger group (Pihl 1994). As with her musical ancestors, Kim Sohui moved to a Buddhist temple at the age of sixteen to live in seclusion and there devoted two years to deepening and broadening her knowledge and perfection of *pansori*, as well as to begin the ascent to transcendence.

Although the study of *pansori* certainly dominated her life, Kim Sohui's immersion into other arts was far more eclectic than her 1964 designation as a Human Treasure of *pansori* might suggest. For example, she mastered not only folk song (*namdo minyo*), but also elite vocal genres such as *gagok* and *sijo*, which require completely different vocalization techniques. She also pursued the study of *gayageum* and dance as well as calligraphy and Chinese classics.

Kim Sohui was clearly not a typical Korean woman of the early 20th century, nor, in some ways, even a typical female *pansori* performer. Although she had sacrificed a formal education and experienced isolation from family and friends for the sake of the genre, she gained unusual advantages. Kim had a certain amount of power in a male-dominated world. Even as a relatively young woman, she had been able to dictate the path of her own career while maintaining the requisite respect for her elders. Although she was restricted by moral codes and ethics of the day, her profession enabled her to travel throughout Korea and to parts of China – behavior not possible for most women of her generation. Later in life, she also traveled extensively in the United States and Europe where she performed *pansori* for foreign audiences. This freedom set a precedent for her disciple which has been expanded upon to this day (Willoughby 2006:129).

Sin Yeonghui (b. 1942)



<Figure 6> Sin Yeonghui, a female master singer of *pansori*

Unlike Kim Sohui, Sin Yeonghui was born into a family of performers, however, like her predecessor, it was her own determination and perhaps even obstinacy that enabled her to pursue a career as a professional performer against her parent's initial desire. Born in 1942 in Jindo, Jeollanamdo, Sin Yeonghui was the daughter of a well-known *gwangdae*, Sin Chiseon. Owing to the hardships engendered by the life of a *gwangdae*, the elder Sin was adamant in his determination to bar his children from following in his footsteps. Sin Yeonghui, however, took great interest in her father's art and would often eavesdrop on the lessons he taught to students in their home. Thus, her initial learning was done covertly. In her own words she describes one of her earliest experiences singing before her father:

One day when I was about nine years old, after finishing school, I found my friend's father at our home, struggling to learn *pansori* from my father. He couldn't follow my father's teaching very well. Having heard his song, I started to imitate my father, and I was definitely much better than the middle-age guy even though it was my first *pansori* trial without any practice. I think that day was the first time my father discovered my natural talent. But he was worried, rather than being proud of me, because those days life as a *pansori* performer meant hunger, disregard. My father didn't want me to become a *pansori* performer, however, my mother did. My mother consistently persuaded my father, and my father finally agreed. When I entered the *pansori* world, I was ten years old (Sin Yeonghui 2006).

Thus, with the encouragement of her mother, and the blessing of genuine talent, Sin Yeonghui eventually convinced her father that she would be a worthy student, and subsequently began her formal training. After her father passed away when she was sixteen Sin Yeonghui spent the next several years studying under a number of well-known master singer. However, it was not until her early thirties that she moved to Seoul at the suggestion (or, perhaps, insistence) of Kim Sohui.

By the time Sin Yeonghui had begun her tutelage with Kim Sohui she had already established her professional career and won many prestigious awards. Nonetheless, Master Kim's influence was still profound, both in terms of singing technique and the instillation of philosophical and ethical values – a point to which I will return later.

Yi Jueun (b. 1972)

<Figure 7> Yi Jueun, singer in the National Center for Korean Traditional Performing Arts

Like her predecessors, Yi Jueun believes that becoming a *pansori* singer is a fulfillment of her destiny or fate. Most children in Korea attend a preschool before entering elementary school in order to learn the basics of the Korean alphabet, etc., but because Yi Jueun could read on her own by the age of four her family, particularly her grandmother who was determined that the talents she observed not go to waste, wanted her to become a famous artist. The fee for attending a private music school for young children that taught dancing, singing, and *gayageum* playing, however, was prohibitively expensive, so the study of those arts was postponed and she concentrated on *pansori* alone. Yi Jueun 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’ (Willoughby 2006:130).

She began her training in the *Boseong sori* style of *pansori* under the tutelage of Kim Heungnam. Because of her youth she was not taught entire passages, but she learned songs piece by piece. Master singer Sin Yeonghui visited the traditional arts center in Mokpo, Yi Jueun’s hometown, where she heard the then eight year-old singer practicing. Sin Yeonghui suggested to Yi Jueun’s family that the child move to Seoul in order to become her full-time apprentice. Arrangements were thus made for her to move 130 km (194 miles) from her home to Seoul in order to continue her study of *pansori* in earnest. While attending the Gifted and Talented Elementary School in Seoul, she studied with Sin Yeonghui, both in 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. When asked how many hours she practiced each day she replied, ‘Without rest. Always. Forever!’ After her first two years of training she returned to Mokpo to attend junior high school, but came back to Seoul to continue her *pansori* training under Sin Yeonghui and to attend the Seoul High School for Traditional Arts (Willoughby 2006:131-132). After graduation she attended college at Seoul National University and completed her Master’s degree in 1999, while at the same time working full-time as a *pansori* singer for the National Center for Korean Traditional Performing Arts (Yi Jueun 1999b), where she is still employed.

Traditions of Training: Lessons from a Master Teacher

Although much more could – and should – be said regarding the lives of each of these remarkable master singer, let us now concentrate on what we can learn about the training process of a *pansori* singer – both in terms of generalities and specificities – from their experiences.

As is to be expected, it is imperative to learn from a master singer if one hopes to pursue a career as a professional *pansori* performer, as the lives of these women profess. In an interview, Sin Yeonghui bemoaned the state of training among many young singers today. She claims that although some students appear to be fairly serious about their desire to study *pansori*, few are willing to become an active, dedicated apprentice of a master teacher. Yet, Sin Yeonghui believes, it is only through such devotion and sacrifice that a student can eventually master the art.

As indicated above, Kim, Sin and Yi spent their early years training with male master singers. In fact, the former two spent most of their youth, as well as adulthood with male mentors, while Yi Jueun is the only one who has been a disciple of a female master throughout the majority of her life. Sin Yeonghui explains that such training was important in her formative years as she was taught to try to imitate or more precisely obtain a ‘male voice.’ By this she means that it is vital to develop a voice that is capable of singing with power and interior strength, utilizing the husky vocal timbre that is pervasive in the genre throughout the entire, broad vocal range required in a *pansori* performance.

According to Sin Yeonghui, ‘Kim Sohui’s sound is a more feminine sound while mine is a more ‘male-like’ sound, which is rough. As a minor difference, for example, Kim beat the drum softly, while I beat drums hard. . . . [Nevertheless,] my *pansori* singing style is based on Kim Sohui’s style. One of the greatest aspects of her singing is her accurate rhythms and tone, her clear pronunciation during singing. I learned that sense of rhythm, absolute pitch, and clear pronunciation from her. For example, people can clearly hear our pronunciation through our CD recordings. Our personalities are alike. We both are very straightforward’ (Sin Yeonghui 2006).

Yi Jueun likewise emulates her master teachers in many regards. As noted above, despite having to move far away from her family home at a young age, it was imperative to become a full-time apprentice of Sin Yeonghui if she wanted to learn the same sense of rhythm, pitch and pronunciation, among other qualities, necessary in becoming a master singer in her own right. Although there are certainly similarities between her voice and that of her predecessors, there are also distinct differences in their sound qualities as well. Most notably, Yi Jueun does not display the raspiness or ‘male-like’ qualities of Sin Yeonghui. When asked why her voice, although powerful and well-controlled, lacks much of the characteristically harsh timbres associated with the genre, Yi Jueun explained that her mentor recognized the legitimacy of a variety of vocal qualities in *pansori*. Sin Yeong-Hui explained to Yi Jueun that many of the great masters of the past were not known for having a husky voice, but rather were lauded for the use of a clear spring voice. It is said, in fact, that only a few *pansori* performers have been able to master both qualities (cf. Yu Yeongdae 1995). In this case, not only have the singers perfected their own unique vocal qualities, but all three performers have also mastered the art of characterization; not an easy task considering the fact that any given *pansori* tale consists not only of a narrator, but potentially dozens of different characters, both male and female, of various ages, each with distinct personalities that must be accurately communicated through subtle vocal articulations as well as facial and bodily expressions.

Becoming Well-rounded Performers

Another important factor in each performer’s training is a habit instilled by Kim So-Hui as well as

her ancestors. Namely, that it is crucial to become a complete, well-rounded performer, and not merely a ‘singer,’ as attested to by her own background and training. As noted above, Kim acquired the ability to play several instruments and was well-known for her graceful and sublime performance of *salpurichum*, among other dance genres. Such mastery had a profound effect on her disciples.

Sin Yeonghui is likewise accomplished in a variety of instruments and vocal styles. In particular, she has demonstrated her penchant for acting and singing as a proficient performer of *changgeuk* just like Song Mangap before her. Additionally, although not directly related to music, in the late 1970s-80s she also honed her diverse performance skills as a popular television comedian, entertainer, and even chef. By extension, she has even published her own cookbook specializing in the cuisine of Jeolla Province (Sin Yeonghui 2001).

Yi Jueun, like her teachers, has many musical and non-musical talents. She is said to be an accomplished *gayageum byeongchang* performer, and while first perfecting the sounds and practices of traditional *pansori*, she has also worked to extend the boundaries of performance by participating in certain pieces of *changjak pansori* (newly-created *pansori*).

In a recent interview, Sin Yeonghui stated that she believes it is imperative that a performer learn not only the songs embedded within the *pansori* tales, but also the entire gamut of traditional and contemporary Korean folksongs. She indicated that although many of the *namdo minyo* (folk songs originating in the southern portion of the Korean peninsula) are similar in nature to *pansori*, there are also subtle differences that must be mastered to become a consummate and complete performer. Her three albums of folksongs attest to her conviction that these songs are vital.

Transmission

The transmission of sound and performance practices varies according to culture and genre. As demonstrated previously, in *pansori*, a young disciple must first learn to imitate the sounds and actions of the master singer. In time, however, if a singer does not learn to develop his/her own style and vocal qualities, he/she will never be considered a master singer. However, what is transmitted from master to disciple is far more than musical pedagogy alone. Like her progenitors, Kim Sohui was known to instill within her disciples a very strict sense of morality and her philosophical understanding of life and ethics. At times these lessons came rather harshly at the end of a ruler, but Sin Yeonghui concludes that this was necessary to comprehend the depth of Kim’s teachings, and in order to become an upright citizen in all facets of life. Thus, not only is a music disciple expected to learn the elements of performance from the master teacher, she is also schooled in a much broader way of life. According to Sin Yeonghui,

Pansori singers should have their own [performance] style. For example, my sound is based on Kim Sohui’s sound, but our style is different. If students just followed their teachers like [Japanese] *noh* or *kabuki*, the attractiveness and values of *pansori* will disappear. As everyone has his or her appearance and personalities, *pansori* performances should have their own style. This is the feature of traditional music.

I teach not only the *pansori* skills but also the proper character to become a *pansori* performer. The five main *pansori* [tales] contain moral lessons: love, justice, order, and faith. Great *pansori* performers should have these virtues as well as good sound. *Pansori* performers should respect themselves first, and should be of a pure character. Also their sound should have weight, it shouldn't be light. Teaching proper virtues and character is more important than teaching just skills (Sin Yeonghui 2006).

Such ideals certainly affected the life of Yi Jueun under Sin Yeonghui's tutelage. Sin mentored the child beyond the world of *pansori* by emphasizing etiquette and proper deportment for a young lady. Yi Jueun reports that Sin Yeonghui would often reprimand her for the way she walked or carried herself in public, but when it came to music, Sin never dissuaded Yi from speaking her mind and pushing the limits of her abilities, as certified by the fact that normally a young apprentice is not permitted to speak to an adult in the middle of a lesson, let alone correct an older student, but that is exactly what Sin Yeonghui allowed Yi to do in her youth. Yi Jueun would not only boldly admonish other students, (including those who were far older than her and master singer in their own right, such as An Sukseon and Pak Yangdeok), but would even demonstrate the correct way to sing a given passage. Even though she was young she was not afraid to speak the truth – she knew her art well and did not hesitate to share her knowledge (Willoughby 2006:131).

Despite her confidence in performing, as has been noted above, Yi Jueun has assimilated the humility and moral lessons of *pansori* into her daily life, as instructed by Sin Yeonghui. She said:

There are five *pansori* tales, each of which teaches its own ethics – the values of our ancestors. It would be good if we could revive them in the modern world – where Chunhyang is loyal [to her husband] to the end or where Sim Cheong 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 *pansori* 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....

I live with my grandmother.... Of course, I would not be able to compare my filial devotion to that of Simcheong, but I really try to be good to her, to respect and serve her. So many bad things happen in relationships between the elderly and young, but I try to be different. I always try to sympathize with their feelings. I think that is the influence from doing *pansori*. It is the same with the teacher-pupil relationship. I believe the genre of *pansori* offers many [positive] instructions to those who learn it (Yi Jueun 2002; Willoughby 2006:133).

It is apparent, therefore, that at least these three generations of *pansori* singers have not only mastered the performance aspects of *pansori*, but have also become masters of their own lives and moral values because of their schooling in the art. An interesting aspect of this moral training is perhaps that pain, suffering and endurance are part of internal messages of *pansori* – not only in the tales themselves, but in the lives of those who dare to transmit them from generation to generation – it is arguable, then, that this ethos of *han* is the gateway to transcendence.

Transcendence

Transcendence begins with a triumph over the societal bounds and stringent Confucian norms that still dominate Korean society to some extent. Through bravery and diligence Song Heungrok, Song Mangap, Kim Sohui, Sin Yeonghui and Yi Jueun (among others) have all faced the challenge of maintaining tradition while at the same time pushing social boundaries that have existed for centuries. Tradition has not simply been discarded, but has been carefully woven into the fabric of their lives and greater contemporary society. The exemplary men and women described herein were and are able to accomplish this through their vigilant tenacity combined with artistic integrity.

Kim Sohui exhibited remarkable strength of will and even defiance against societal norms to achieve success in a male-dominated society and musical field. Her respect for her master teachers combined with her fierce, unremitting pursuit of her destiny is an inspiration for today's young students of *pansori*. According to Kim's daughter, Pak Yunjo, herself a contemporary master singer, *pansori* singers must inevitably sacrifice many of the normal pleasures of life – dedicating their time and talents to the pursuit of excellence. She noted that her mother in her mid-seventies, in preparation for what would be her final concert, spent at least four to five hours per day practicing. It was this willingness to devote her life to *pansori*, even at a time when others might have been enjoying the leisure's of retirement that enabled Kim Sohui to be designated as one of the truly great masters of the art. Pak adds that what *pansori* musicians gain, not in terms of renown, but rather in terms of understanding the depths of human experience and emotion is well worth any sacrifice that might be paid (Pak Yunjo 2005).

Sin Yeonghui was trained in the pedagogical lineage of Kim Sohui and who in turn has taught and raised Yi Jueun. Both reflect the elder performer's tenacity in fulfilling her destiny as a *pansori* performer. Although they have not necessarily made the same type of sacrifices as Kim, both have simultaneously embraced and flouted tradition from an early age for the sake of *pansori*. And both claim that fate led them to become a singer, although they had other life and career alternatives. In this, then, they have transcended the mundane and become masters of a great art.

Perhaps it is bold to say that *pansori* can lead one to a state of transcendence, to experience what has been called the experience of profundity, but, on the other hand, transcendence does seem to be the aim and achievement of the singers discussed herein. According to Bennett Reimer (1995), there are different levels at which one can experience profundity in music, including cognitive, emotional, transcendental and developmental. 'In the 'Emotion' feature, there is a range from positive feelings (pleasure, enjoyment, love, peace, euphoria, ecstasy, the most common being a sense of happiness) to negative ones (grief, anxiety, anger, horror, panic), although there were relatively few [reports] of these. In the 'transcendental' feature there are reports that the experience transcends ordinary life and reality, taking on a 'religious' or 'spiritual' dimension. In the 'Personal Development' category, a sense is gained of new insights, new possibilities, of a mental and physical purification and of a sense of being 'healed'⁵. As a way to engage in each of these levels of profundity, singers of old ascended to the mountaintops to find themselves in the heart of their art. It was said to be there, in the depths of serenity, surrounded by the majesty of nature, that one was able to find, obtain, or perhaps create *deugeum*.

Kim, Sin and Yi have spoken privately and publicly of some of the ways in which they have personally experienced the profound in music. There is no doubt that they each owes much of their personal development to the art of *pansori*, not only in terms of becoming a master singer, but for the ways in which the genre and its performance has shaped their moral conduct. Additionally, each speaks of the joy, pleasure and euphoria associated with performance, as well as the grief and pain that comes from the music itself, as well as the struggle to become a master performer. For example, although Yi Jueun leads a life of relative physical ease and has a great deal more formal education and freedom than the majority of her predecessors,¹⁸ it is apparent that she has dedicated her life to the study of *pansori*, with the ultimate aim of attaining *deugeum* no matter what sacrifice or amount of suffering are necessitated. Today, most young *pansori* singers do not live and train for extended periods of time in the mountains or other secluded regions as did singers in the past. Nonetheless, even if a singer no longer resides for years in such an environment, the imperative to prove one's dedication to the art of *pansori* still dictates that she literally and metaphorically ascend to the mountain to attain the voice of the genre, and such has been the experience of Yi Jueun in her pursuit of becoming a master singer.

Thus, performers today, whether in the mountaintops or in the midst of a chaotic and technologically advanced city of millions, still seek to reach a personal state of transcendence and *deugeum*. It is still the ultimate goal of the genre and those who dedicate their lives to its perfection. Perhaps it is only due to a relatively few Koreans that have become so lost in the grandeur of *pansori* that it has literally transformed our lives. Nonetheless, through tremendous sacrifice and diligence, these *pansori* masters have done far more than merely improved upon an innate talent, or learned to entertain the masses. Rather, they have eclipsed the ordinary in their perfection of sound and thus have experienced not only profundity in music, but a true sense of transcendence.

Conclusion

By observing the life and accomplishments of various gifted and well-established *pansori* performers, we are able to observe the reification of the four characteristics that Sin Jaehyo claimed were necessary for each and every master singer to possess in his song/poem 'Song of the *Gwangdae*.' Namely, good features (*innmul*), excellent talent for narration [*saseol*], musical talent (*deugeum*) and dramatic action (*neoreumsae*). There is no doubt that those individuals discussed herein have mastered those qualities.

Through the elucidation of scant glimpses into the lives of Song Heungrok, Song Mangap, Kim Sohui, Sin Yeonghui and Yi Jueun the final portion of this paper has attempted to not only expand the biographical material available about Korean *pansori* master singer, but has also meant to serve as a lens through which we can observe and analyze the art of *pansori* in terms of tradition, transmission and transcendence. Each of their experiences, at some level, are typical of the men and women who pursue lives as professional performers, and yet their profound and binding ties to one another and the tradition of *pansori* itself has given them, and by extension us, insight into the sacrifices necessitated by dedication to the genre. They have mastered not only the sounds of *pansori* but also the moral conduct manifest within the tales themselves. In their tenacity to proliferate what some once feared was a dying art, they have approached the performance of *pansori* in a profoundly intellectual and emotional manner. Allowing themselves, and all who hear and learn from them, the opportunity to engage in the

profundity of *pansori* and experience the life and art of a master singer.

Interviews

Chae Sujeong. 2000.

Personal Interview. July 20, 2000.

Jeong Hweseok. 2000.

Personal Interview. July 4, 2000.

Yo Jueun . 1999a.

Personal conversations and singing lessons with author. May-December 1999. Seoul, Korea.

_____. 1999b. Recorded interview with author. September 27, 1999. Seoul, Korea.

_____. 2002. Interview with Kim Jinwoo. October 2002. Seoul, Korea.

Pak Yunjo. 2005.

Personal interview with author. March 3, 2005.

Sin Yeonghui. 2006.

Recorded interview with author. November 11, 2006. Seoul, Korea.

Yu Yeongdae. 1999.

Personal Interview. October 10, 1999. Personal conversations and communications. July 1999 - August 2000.

Yi Bohyeong. 2000.

Personal Interview. July 7, 2000.

¹ See Chan Park, this volume.

² Due to its ease of access and convenience to the reader, Song Bangsong's translation of *Gwangdaega* has been used here. Please see Song 1976 (pages 25-27).

³ Pihl translates Gang's text as being 'color and tone,' however, the Korean eumsaek gwa balseong can also be rendered 'tone color and vocal production.'

⁴ *Yeongsanhwesang* is the title of a well-known classical piece of Korean music for instrumental ensembles.

It is said to encapsulate the aesthetic sensibilities, the refinement and beauty of the aristocratic class.

⁵ The dramatic spoken passages of *pansori*.

⁶ Rhythmic patterns commonly used in a *pansori* performance.

⁷ For detailed descriptions of these terms see Willoughby 1999, Hae Kyung Um 1992, and Chan Park 2003.

⁸ For a detailed analysis of the correlations between sound and sentiment in *pansori* see Willoughby 2000 and 2002.

⁹ Gweon Odon's Korean translation of the *Yüeh chi* uses the indigenous term *maeum* (heart, mind, or spirit) for the Sino-Korea *sim* [心], meaning heart. I consulted Gweon's text for my translation into English.

¹⁰ It is again beyond the scope of this paper to give an adequate or detailed explanation of the positive and negative aspects of the controversial program. For a thorough study of Korean Cultural Properties see Howard 2006.

¹¹ See Kim Gihyeong's article in this volume for details on the process.

¹² Unless specifically noted, in this section when I speak of a genealogy, a heritage, ancestors and progenitors, or descendants, I am speaking not of literal family ties, but of the pedagogical lineage that is passed down from master teacher to student, irrespective of blood relations.

¹³ Portions of the bibliographic information provided in this section can be found in my 2002 Columbia University

Ph.D. dissertation, *The Sound of Han: Pansori, Timbre and a South Korean Discourse of Sorrow and Lament* as well as ‘Destined for Greatness: Coming of Age as a Korean Pansori Performer’ in *Musical Childhoods and the Cultures of Youth*, edited by Susan L. Boynton and Roe-Min Kok. Additionally, portions of this section were published in the Korean journal (*Music and Culture*) Volume 17 (2007), pp. 99-116, under the title

김소희: 한국 판소리 예술의 전통, 전수, 그리고 초월성.

- ¹⁴ Unless otherwise noted in the text, all bibliographic information is based on Jeong Noshik’s *Joseon Changgeuksa* (1940). The majority of the contents of the book are based on oral histories, which, although they cannot be verified by other written documents, prove to be a useful and rich source of *pansori*’s early and influential performers. Additional information was gleaned from the sometimes more in-depth accounts found on the Koch’ang Pansori Museum website < <http://pansorimuseum.com/>>.
- ¹⁵ In the majority of the early bibliographic accounts the terms *sori* is used broadly to indicate a song or sound, and more specifically to indicate the genre we now designate as *pansori*, though historically it was not called as such.
- ¹⁶ Although too lengthy to be included here, the story of how Song Heungrok perfected the sounds necessary for a convincing *Ghost Song* and *Prison Song* is among the most intriguing of all *myeongchang* experiences. For a detailed account in English, please refer to Chan Park 2003:62-65.
- ¹⁷ For more on the development of *changeuk*, see Andrew Killick’s article in this volume
- ¹⁸ Kim Sohui, for instance, never finished her formal high school education, which was a great disappointment to her. She explained to Han Myeonghui: ‘Even today it is a matter of lasting regret that I really couldn’t study. Even after achieving some success through *pansori*, I still continued to lament about my schooling while touring around giving my performances. Then, one day, an educator who heard me said I should look into correspondence lessons. And so, with those lessons, I finished my high school studies’ (*Ajikdo changchang sorikkun*’p.21 in Pihl 1994:249 n. 44).