

Traversing the Crossroads : Voice and Music of Song Myōng-Hwa and The Artistic Troupe *Kūmgangsan kagūktan* In Japan's North Korean Community*

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Abstract

Kūmgangsan kagūktan titles itself "Chosŏn troupe in Japan." Founded in Tokyo (1955), the company is composed of 50 artists working on dance, song and music, referring specifically to the aesthetics of North Korea with which the troupe has developed a close relationship since its birth. The paper examines the vocal techniques practiced by a female singer of *Kūmgangsan kagūktan* in the frame of sound, song and rhythm while tracing various aspects of North Korean vocal techniques, the process of transmission and adaptations the company singer makes for the Japanese stage. I suggest, the singer trains herself not to reproduce a particular stylized form and/or method but open herself, traversing crossroads, following her own artistic path, so to speak, finding a negotiated voice involved in a process I describe as the *aesthetics of differentiation*.

Key words : *Kūmgangsan Kagūktan*, *Minyo*, *Minsŏng*, *Changdan*, Koreans in Japan, Ethnoscenology in Korea

* First, I do not define the names of the two Koreas in this paper; we will use "South Korea," "North Korea" and also, "Chosŏn" to indicate North Korea. Secondly, translations from Korean to English or from French to English are my own, any misunderstandings are my responsibility.

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1. Introduction

In this paper, a singer of *Kūmgangsan kagūktan* is examined by tracing her vocal techniques provides insights into an artistic practice maintained and developed for close to sixty years since the birth of the company. The company founded in 1955 in Tokyo first started their trainings, mentored by North Korean artists, in 1959. Artists referenced in this chapter are the vocal singers and composers within the company. Their vocal teachers were North Korean artists who chose, modified and elaborated existing Korean songs for the newly born socialist society. The North Korean mastersingers and their pupils, who themselves developed into mastersingers, continue training the singers of the company today.

It was the fifties and sixties when North Korean musicians embarked on an exploration of music on the peninsula determined to establish *Chosŏn* music. Yet, those North Korean musicians had been working as artists well before the division. Singers were singing distinctly regional songs in all parts of the peninsula before being labelled North Korean or South Korean artists. The division of the peninsula resulted in a choosing one of two Koreas. As a consequence, each side of Korea could no longer listen, share nor be exposed to more than half of the regional songs. Still, singers continued to practice on both sides following their own development in isolation.

Today, Song Myōng-Hwa, a singer of *Kūmgangsan kagūktan*, regularly visits each year Pyongyang to learn *minyŏ* translated “song of the people” or more precisely *sōdo minyŏ*, a North Korean regional song type, from North Korean masters. After a one to three months residency in Pyongyang, she returns to *Kūmgangsan kagūktan* in Tokyo and practices the learned *minyŏ* with her colleagues to introduce the song into the company repertoire. If the song is positively received by board members of the company, the *minyŏ* becomes part of their annual performance and occasionally may be presented at a solo concert in Japan. Song Myōng-Hwa has worked this way for roughly twenty years and is designated *sōdo minyŏ* singer in Japan. Some time ago, while continuing to sing *sōdo minyŏ* with *Kūmgangsan kagūktan*, she began to learn *namdo p’ansori* and *minyŏ* from a South Korean master residing in Japan: what did make her seek out and study South Korean *p’ansori* and *minyŏ* and especially what she did gain

from the process of learning South Korean *namdo p'ansori*, a song form originally absent during the period of establishing *Chosŏn* music in North Korea?

Following her answers and observing her individual vocal practices, the vocal techniques for *minyŏ* in *Kŭmgangsan kagŭktan* were displayed. Still her vocal practice and studies, though part of a cohesive, well structured company, often take on a unique and personalized process. It appears that through the trainings of learning and unlearning, Song Myŏng-Hwa finds her voice emerging and eventually her desire is to reunite and harmonize the various techniques. An individual singer like her seems to accept various vocal techniques as complementary rather than incompatible, attempting to incorporate the given forms into the body. This study suggests that the vocal technique is related to social, historical and cultural factors and the singers train themselves steering among these influences towards discovering their voices in terms of a *negotiated voice* involved in a process I describe as the *aesthetics of differentiation*.

a) Encountering Song Myŏng-Hwa

My first meeting with Song Myŏng-Hwa occurred during the 2010 fieldwork in Tokyo, Japan. She had organized a *sŏdo minyŏ* public workshop, scheduled for two hours per day from 13:00 to 15:00, July 29 to 31. This practical instruction was followed up with a more extensive time with her during my second fieldwork May 2012.

Song Myŏng-Hwa, born in 1976, joined the company in 1995 as a singer. She is first *chosŏnjok*, second has a Japanese “special permanent resident” status and third possesses a North Korean passport. She started singing in her elementary school period at one of the Korean schools in Japan run by The General Association of Korean Residents in Japan, abbreviated in Korean, *Ch'ongryŏn*, a Korean organization in Japan institutionally related to North Korea, that offers students various extra- curricula activities. She shared, given her situation as a Korean descendent born in Japan, her almost obsessive childhood questions revolved around who she was and why she was in Japan. At school and at home she learned and heard the histories and stories but they did not satisfy and she continued to ask:

The questions on my existence didn't stop. Many Koreans in Japan had two names - one Japanese and the other Korean. I chose not to. Our existence was already so complicated. I felt like a splitting of myself by having two names so I stuck to the one Korean name. But, also in the period I was growing up, it was possible to have only a Korean name in Japan. Living like in a rootless condition without concretely touching the earth I felt like floating, a lack of something important, always dissatisfied... I wanted to find my place in Japanese society.

She studied piano at the age of four and loved singing. There were numerous popular Japanese songs yet, she was not interested in them despite her love of singing and she wondered why.

Through the student activities at her Korean school in Japan, she encountered Korean songs. North Korean songs stirred her love of singing and she started venturing into the way of the artist. Through the song lyrics she "fell in love with Korean words, the language." As a high school student, she went to Pyongyang during summer vacation participating in the program of "Pyongyang distance education." There, she began learning *sōdo minyo*, from the professors of the Pyongyang University of Music and Dance and she participated every summer for three years in the program. The desire to continue her *sōdo minyo* studies grew: "When I sang these songs, I felt my feet finally touch the ground. All questions disappeared, only one fact ... I was singing and this made me happy and satisfied." She resolved to make song the way of her life. After graduating from high school, she auditioned for *Kūmgangsan kagūktan* entering the company in 1995. Since then, she practices and performs as a singer of *sōdo minyo* in Japan.

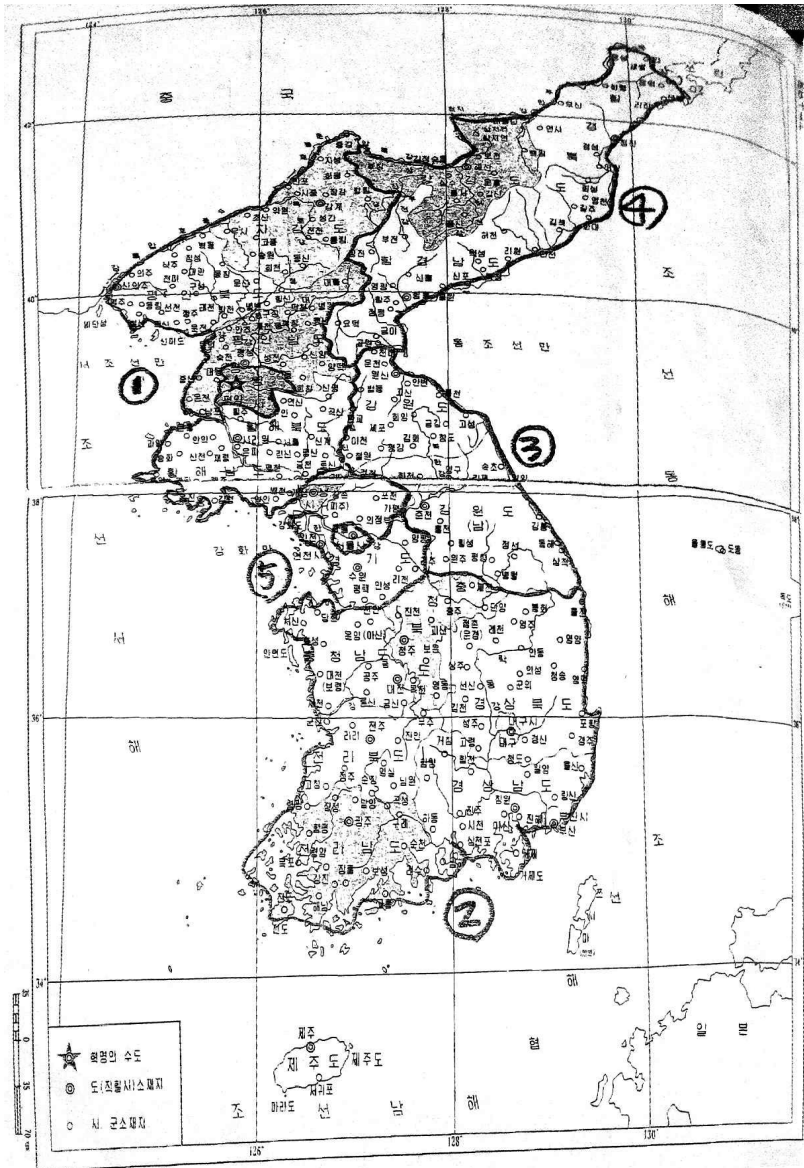
2. Sound Qualities

It is important to examine the vocal terms used by the company before further discussion on the vocal practices of Song Myōng-Hwa. *Sōdo minyo*, one of North Korean regional songs, is part of *minyo*. Broadly, *minyo* is developed on the peninsula according to the geographic region, the dialect and the residents. It is

organized within five territorial areas of the peninsula with the two Koreas differing in classification. According to the North Korean perspective, *sōdo minyo* is found precisely all along the *Taedong* River, passing vertically through Pyongyang and the regional areas above and under *P'yōngan* and *Hwanghae*, the area of circle number 1 in the Figure 1. Due to its origin, *sōdo minyo* belongs to the North Korean regional songs and it is known for a particular high and flowing quality of voice (Yu, Chi-Suk 2007, 4).

The specific vocalism for singing this *minyo* is called *minsōng*, translated “sound of the people,” combining the word *sōng* (sound) to the word *min* (people). *Minsōng* is characterized by “using the head resonance supported by chest and abdominal breathing.” The vocal technique used to sing other contemporary songs is called *yangsōng* translated “Western sound” for its technique is derived from the *bel canto* vocalism. The term *bel canto* is often used in the “generic and familiar sense” to discriminate it as an operatic sound without any further relevant distinction (Jean Cabourg). This is the terminology used and understood among the singers of the company and transmitted by North Korean masters. The practice of using *yangsōng* to indicate the *Western* sound of *bel canto* vocalism, despite its perhaps imprecise and generic sense, is accepted as used by the singers of the company.

In *Kūmgangsan kagūktan*, Song Myōng-Hwa mainly practices two types of song. One is *sōdo minyo* using *minsōng* learned from her North Korean masters. The other is *yangsōng* used for the contemporary songs created primarily by North Korean composers and even sometimes by Koreans in Japan. The company’s audience are predominantly Koreans as well as Japanese. The singers of the company attempt to merge their various musical demands with the heterogeneous audience preferences resulting in both *sōdo minyo* and contemporary songs mixed in the concert repertoire. Singers have their own vocal part such as soprano, alto or tenor whether *minyo* or contemporary song. Songs include vocal harmonies often sung as a group. The singers must master and perform *minsōng* for *minyo* and *yangsōng* for contemporary songs.



Minsŏng and Yangsŏng

Song Myōng-Hwa is assigned the dominant responsibility for *sōdo minyo* and often sings solo. However, her vocal part is alto and as all singers in the company, four female and four male who actively perform, she contributes to the harmonies creating an ensemble with the other singers. When she sings *sōdo minyo*, she explains, “I take the melody part even if *minyo* requires high soprano.” She also notes “*sōdo minyo* is supported in vocal harmonies by other singers with other vocal parts.” This concept of “*minyo* in harmonies” is contrary to the *minyo* in South Korea, sung in the form of call and response, never having vocal harmonies. The use of harmony is, in fact, one of the characteristics of *Western* music. “*Minyo* in harmonies” may be one of the essential characteristics of *minsōng* vocalism to be explored later.

I watched Song Myōng-Hwa train herself practicing both vocal techniques of *minsōng* and *yangsōng* according to the given songs. Kwōn O-Sōng, South Korean professor of music, describes “the vocalism of *minsōng* in North Korea is an adaptation or incorporation of *minyo*, compromising between the existing conventional vocal technique of Korean music and Western classic vocalism” (Kwōn, O-Sōng 2006a, 197-212). If *minsōng* is a compromised vocalism, as Kwōn claims, it suggests “conventional” Korean vocal technique for *minyo*, that is, a singing sound extended from talking and fully supported by abdomen, is mingled with “Western classic vocalism,” referred to as *bel canto*. The North Korean vocal technique for *minyo*, thus, does not conflict with *bel canto vocalism* that is at odds with the South Korean *minyo* singer’s incompatibility practicing *bel canto*. This North Korean *minsōng* vocalism is “compromised” allowing singers to sing each distinctive song type without much trouble. This explains how Song Myōng-Hwa can project the sound of *minsōng* and *yangsōng* in the way each song demands.

a) Choice of Sound

One of the elements defining the vocal technique of *minsōng* is the choice of the sound. The timbre, meaning sonic colour and texture, reaches towards a “soft, delicate and clear sound” (Kang, Si-Jong 1974, 121). This choice of sound is related to *sōdo minyo* that practices a high and lithe sound. Establishing *Chosōn*

music, Kim Il-Sŏng, in 1951, comments on *minyo* as a “genre close to the people” (Kim, Il-Sŏng 1967a, 2-5) and again in 1964, he specifically mentions *sŏdo minyo* for exactly this quality of sound (Kim, Il-Sŏng 1968, 11-18). Kim Chŏng-Il supported these proclamations confirming the way of “singing *sŏdo minyo* is not a narrow concept according to geographical distribution but a comprehensive North Korean way of vocalism for *minyo*, created after the liberation” implementing the construction of *Chosŏn* music (Kim, Chŏng-Il 1992, 13).

Opposed to these “soft, delicate and clear” qualities is *p’ansori*, another vocal form on the peninsula. *P’ansori* is generally one singer accompanied by a single percussionist sharing a long dramatic story through a narration, song and action (Han, Yu-Mi 2012). *P’ansori* was not appreciated in North Korea due to the hoarse and husky sound, which Kim Il-Sŏng considered “unnatural and doesn’t comply with our emotions” and he proposed a “mild, clear and more limpid sound” (Kim, Il-Sŏng 1968, 11-18). *Minyo* was chosen not only for this sound quality but also in terms of *ideology* for the newly developing socialist society of the time. Building *Chosŏn* music, the criteria for how and what to select among the existing songs on the peninsula lay “in the state and condition of the proletariat” (Kim, Il-Sŏng 1967b, 2-3).

Minyo, are relatively short and repetitive and considered originally to be sung by common people expressing amusement, enhancing ceremonial occasions or stimulating working actions and not composed by a professional musician (Kwŏn, O-Sŏng 2006b, 215-224). Workers sang *minyo* during their work, for example nurturing collaboration of a working group whether in the agricultural field or on a fishing boat. The original creation and transmission of *minyo* are thus known by the collective anonymity as “song of the people.” In this way, North Korean singing *sŏdo minyo*, sung with the “soft, delicate and clear ” *minsŏng* vocalism, was the sound of the “proletariat.”

b) Finding Sound

Song Myŏng-Hwa’s goal has always been to emulate the “soft and clear sound” she learnt from her masters in Pyongyang and she strives to find “her sound, using

techniques fitting her voice.” Her masters in Pyongyang are An Pyŏng-Guk, Kim Kwan-Bo and Kye Ch’un-I. Mastersingers like Kim Chin-Myŏng and Kim Kwan-Bo were singers before the division and are known for following an *old-style* of singing, meaning without any influence from *bel canto* vocalism.

For Song Myŏng-Hwa, since the time she has studied *sŏdo minyo* in Pyongyang (1992), the *bel canto* vocalism was used for basic vocal trainings and the tone of *sŏdo minyo* was high. She exclaims that perhaps the higher sound may be explained by North Korea being geographically a northern colder province but also “a glittery and colourful sound is required more today than previously in North Korea, as if reaching for higher and higher notes distinguishes a singer more ...” On the other hand, to perform on the Japanese stage she suggests, “too high a tonal sound is not welcomed.”

Song Myŏng-Hwa described that the aim is not to learn *bel canto* vocalism but to “polish, cultivate and refine the vocal paths” in her body. To sing *sŏdo minyo*, *bel canto* vocalism is not used as is but, according to her, is “borrowed for its strong breathing which supports the sound and opens the vocal paths to ameliorate the power of sound.” She finds *bel canto* technique enriches her vocal training more than only practicing *sŏdo minyo*. She works with the piano to maximize opening body resonances, enlarging her scale ranges and honing the soft and clear sound with precision reproducing exact notes from the piano.

Singing *sŏdo minyo*, she delivers a dense, gathered, concentrated and neatly tightened sound rather than a spread out sound. She solicits a quality that is like a thin and sleek thread resonating from the upper body, more precisely the head, as if pulling it up towards the front through the forehead. The sound is light and bright in colour, precise in tone and delicate in ornament. For Song Myŏng-Hwa, if the sound is “too thick, too high or too low, the taste or the beauty of *sŏdo minyo* cannot be expressed or touched.” To express *sŏdo minyo* she builds solid “vocal paths” that are always in development.

Participation in Song Myŏng-Hwa’s *sŏdo minyo* workshop in 2010 involved learning numerous songs including *Yangsando*, *Nodŭl gangbyŏn* and *Chosŏn p’algvŏngga*. Song Myŏng-Hwa distributed music notated song sheets and sat in front of the Korean percussion *changgu* with a piano beside her. She used the

piano from time to time verifying pitch or tone and sang accompanying herself with *changgu*. I was surprised, in all my previous experiences this Western style of music notation and playing the piano for vocal tuning were very foreign. That workshop with Song Myōng-Hwa and my accompanying surprises demanded further research into Western music influences, not only on voice training but also the *aesthetic* choices of song and song type.

3. Western Music Influences

Minyo was originally transmitted among workers expressing their joy, sorrow and work ethic and was not formally written down in anyway. The necessity for musical notation is found during the Japanese colonization period (1910-1945) and this may be the period, which triggered a *national sensitivity*, a craving to grasp a sense of *Korean-ness* from a social environment threatened by the colonizer's culture and a fear that Korean culture may be annihilated. The interest in the musical notation of *minyo* occurred at the crossroads when *Western music* arrived on the peninsula. If we consider since 1900, the period related to Japanese colonization, No Tong-Ūn, South Korean professor in music, explains the three routes (No, Tong-Ūn 1995, 394-398, 478-493; Ch'oe, Chōng-Min 1986, 183). One of the routes of *Western* music influence was the military music band led by Franz Eckert, German composer who for twenty years directed Japanese military music and who arrived at Seoul in 1901, to train a Korean military music band (Yi, Se-Ra 2008, 3). He is the composer of both the Japanese national anthem *Kimigayo* (Lie, John 2001, 67) and the Korean national anthem of the time *Taehan cheguk Aegukka* (Yi, Se-Ra 2008, 5).

Another route were the schools established by Christian missionaries in early 1900. *Yōnhūi* College and *Ihwa* Women College are prime examples (No, Tong-Ūn 1995, 399; Yi, Se-Ra 2008, 2-9; Kwōn, Ha-Kyōng 2001, 13-14). In these mission schools, *Western* classic music was taught and religious hymns were used as textbooks (Yi, Kang-Suk, Kim, Ch'un-Mi and Min, Kyōng-Ch'an 2001, 67). A third route were the Korean intellectuals who studied music abroad and

promulgated *Western* classic music on the peninsula. An Ki-Yŏng, tenor singer and composer, who chose to stay in North Korea after the division of the peninsula, could be considered one of these intellectuals. He deserves our attention for he was the one who proposed the *Western* musical stave to notate the *minyo*.

In 1931, An Ki-Yŏng debated the necessity of notation for *minyo* in the Journal *Tonggwang* (An, Ki-Yŏng 1931, 66-68) writing: “Regardless of the countries, *minyo* is transmitted from mouth to mouth resulting in a somewhat musically incomplete form.” To remedy the situation of *minyo*’s threatened decline due to the oral transmission, he proposed “to preserve *minyo* permanently it must inevitably be transcribed into musical stave notation.” He continued arguing, *minyo* is better accompanied by piano than the Korean percussion instrument *changgu*, which he considered “a primitive instrument unable to sound melodies” or even the Korean string instrument *kayagŭm*, which “plays melody only one note at a time, unable to sound chord harmonies.” He went further to rearrange the standard *minyo* five-tone scale into the seven-tone harmonic scale. He declared, “Orchestral music is the best way to accompany *minyo*.” Moving to North Korea, in 1951, he became professor at Pyongyang University of Music contributing significantly to the establishment of *Chosŏn* music. The musical experimentation in North Korea, during the fifties and sixties by other musicians, consistently followed the direction An Ki-Yŏng set forth.

Song Myŏng-Hwa learned *minyo* from her masters in Pyongyang with the accompaniment of piano, five-lined musical stave notation and a vocal technique derived from *bel canto*. These characteristics suggest a *Western* influence on the present day music of the company *Kŭmgangsan kagŭktan*.

4. Negotiated Voice

a) Returning to *Changgu*

The complexities and specificities that belong to Korean *minyo* are nurtured and sustained by the artists. Song Myŏng-Hwa had, in 2012 while interviewing, spoke

of a time when she followed a central question based on a “feeling,” a “lack of something inexplicable in her *minyo*.” In the process of searching for different qualities, she found, or more precisely, rediscovered the sound of *changgu*. This Korean percussion instrument proved to possess a remarkable attraction. She instinctively returned to *changgu* the instrument rejected by An Ki-Yŏng. She speaks:

My voice is not soprano. At first, I unquestionably followed the way I learned despite the high tones unsuitable for my voice. I forced myself and it was hard and unsatisfying. I felt my *minyo* didn't have a flavourful taste, lacking a quality of something simple but charming in depth. I missed the feeling of abundance in the song and wanted to hear that fullness once again. One day by chance I heard Ha Yŏng-Su, percussionist in the company, practicing *minyo* with *changgu* and the sound stopped me. It was so powerful. I thought perhaps I could sing *minyo* better if I learned to play *changgu* and let the rhythm enter my body so that, my body could naturally react to the sound of the *changgu*. So, I asked him to teach me and I started learning to play the *changgu*.

She now practices *minyo* with *changgu* using the piano only for tuning. Her instincts questioned what had the *minyo*, rearranged and composed for piano, lost by turning away from the original *changgu* accompaniment. If the percussion rhythms created differences in the body of a singer, how does the piano tone and tempo influence the voice and song? The standardization of *minyo* might have been necessary for a particular moment in history as An Ki-Yŏng argued, yet the results denied an essential *aesthetics* of *minyo*, which is what we have examined so far, an *aesthetics* recognizing differentiation according to place, time and singer, that is, an *aesthetics of differentiation*. Feeling an “inexplicable lack of something,” Song Myŏng-Hwa sought a sound *minyo* itself demanded and was perhaps encoded in its birth, a sound responding and reacting to the working body in rhythm. Listening to the piano imitating a sound originally produced by the *changgu* set different limits to rhythm. Returning to the percussive *changgu* accompaniment, Song Myŏng-Hwa actively practised *aesthetics of differentiation*, reintegrating

minyo back to a specific time and place she negotiates her voice with her Pyongyang masters, her company in Japan, and the people to whom she sings.

b) Negotiated Voice

Song Myōng-Hwa's decades with *Kūmgangsan kagūktan* constantly tests the "flexibility and adaptability of *minyo*," modifying her tone and lyrics to the Japanese stage: "I lowered my pitch finding a sound fitting my voice and a quality I deem pleasant to the ears of my diverse audience in Japan." Her development and negotiations are paramount: "In Pyongyang, *minyo* are always accompanied by large orchestra." She continues: "rich and colourful instrument sounds can debilitate the vocal basis of a singer. The song follows the orchestra." She is now experimenting and changing her practices with only the acoustic response between her human voice and *changgu* percussion. There is a fine distinction between creative development and the negotiation. On the one hand, this practice of *minyo* with *changgu* could be viewed as her personal creative development. On the other hand, amending the lyrics for Japanese audience could be considered a negotiation.

Changes in the song lyrics are a careful negotiation specifically adhering to the norms of the local audience. Many of the *minyo* lyrics are amended for the Japanese stage. For example, the words "soldier or military" are altered to "friend" and "returning from the war" changed to "on the way coming back home." A concrete example is *sinminyo Moranbong* taught during the workshop with the following lyrics:

"... Our Pyongyang is delightful,
Construction of socialism is delightful..."

Song Myōng-Hwa modifies to:

"... Our Pyongyang is delightful,
Construction of capital city is delightful..."

The lyric, “socialism” becomes “capital city.” Of course, these altered lyrics are company decisions for the Japanese stage yet Song Myōng-Hwa is aware how this changes her consciousness. Pronouncing Pyongyang, a capital city of half the peninsula she points out, she sings, “thinking of the entire peninsula.”

Performances we do in Japan we know we represent *choguk* (North Korea) but we have developed and have accepted many more things since we live in Japan. Now, rather than being only a part of *choguk*, we are maybe something distinct as an overseas artistic troupe ... What we learned in Pyongyang, we re-modify according to *our* sensibilities, the sense of Koreans in Japan. Koreans living in Japan are not solely content with something *Chosŏn* as it is or something Korean as it is for I am also one of the Koreans living in Japan.

Recognizing “her” body, “her” rhythm, “her” place in Japan, the question reverberated with what new sensibility does she listen to the sound of her voice in the songs. Her *minyŏ* practices now clearly respond to the rhythm of *changgu* and the percussion sound calls to her body transforming her voice. Reflecting on the vocal techniques of song *Yangsaldo*, practiced by Song Myōng-Hwa, allowed penetration into the specifics of her *negotiated voice*.

5. *Yangsaldo*

When sounds are produced in series, our ears hear the development and our imagination translates the series into melodic quality. A vocal sound with reference to pitch, length, quality and strength, creates music of unique characteristic (Shen, Yu Fen 2008, 106). What makes the vibrating sound of the vocal ornaments of *sŏdo minyŏ* unique? Sŏ Han-Bŏm, South Korean professor on Korean music, studied the characteristics of North Korean *minyŏ*. He explains Korean *minyŏ* are generally composed of two elements, main tones and musical ornaments (Sŏ, Han-Bŏm 2007, 55-78). He continues describing main tones are simple, containing three or five notes, and the musical ornaments are tools to create melodic variation.

The musical ornaments use a certain vocal technique to enrich the texture and are the distinguishing vocal characteristics of *sōdo minyo*.

The studies of Sō Han-Bōm are based on *sōdo minyo* practiced in South Korea and South Korean terminologies present problems in any analysis of North Korean song. During the Workshop, Song Myōng-Hwa taught techniques demonstrating vocally rather than introducing terminology. In South Korea, singers also shy from terminology preferring to teach by demonstration, listening to correct and often articulating vocal movement by hand gestures. However, under the direction of professor Sō Han-Bōm a graduate student Kang Hye-Jōng, born and raised in China, learning North Korean *minyo* at The Arts School University of Yanbian in China, wrote a masters thesis introducing new terminology for North Korean *minyo* (Kang, Hye-Jōng 2006). Her terminology provided suitable language for our explication of *Yangsando*.

What deserves full attention in *Yangsando* sung by Song Myōng-Hwa are the four types of selected vocal ornaments: *kullim* (rolling sound), *rongsōng* (vibrating sound), *hwigi* (bending sound) and *ch'aegi* (snatching sound). The ornamentation is further complicated by sometimes beginning before a main note, a decoration moving towards the note suggesting finding the main note and sometimes an ornament decorates after as embellishing or extending the main note with a flourish. There are several melodic characteristics in *minyo Yangsando* demanding particular vocal skills. These techniques are not necessarily written in the musical notation. They are transmitted orally and depend greatly on personal commentaries. Song Myōng-Hwa lowered the tone of *Yangsando*, an adjustment for the Japanese stage, which preferred the lower tone, as a result, her practice of vocal ornaments became more flexible as she accepted the deeper weight of the sound.

a) *Kullim*, Rolling Sound

First is the expression *kullim*, a rolling sound dominant in *Yangsando*. Three consecutive notes are connected creating a “slow vocal elasticity” (Kang, Hye-Jōng

2006, 21). Song Myōng-Hwa stressed a nimble, smooth sound, each note precise and accurate in sequence. In the Example 1, the number $\boxed{1}$ is expression of *kullim*. In all these *kullim*, the first note is the same as the third note with only the second note either higher or lower sounding a gentle undulation in the voice. The image of the vocal movement could be represented as ($\overset{\frown}{\smile}$). *Kullim* is an essential vocal ornamentation - a sinusoidal vocal thread reconnected efficiently and repeatedly. When the type of *kullim* appears attached at the end of a long note demonstrated in the Example 1, the *kullim* gives the impression of a vocal accent as if completing the vocal thread of that measure creating an effortless flowing sound by adding a vocal change.

Example 1.



b) *Rongsōng*, Vibrating Sound

Song Myōng-Hwa, in her workshop, introduced a voluntarily trembling up and down she called *rongsōng*. The width of *rongsōng* may be varied offering different musical ornaments. Sō Han-Bōm invites the listener to visualize the vibrating sound as bouncing on a trampoline (Sō, Han-Bōm 2007, 63). The sound jumps up and down in continuous repetition. This vocal form, he continues, “creates a dynamic sensation of a forceful movement full of energy.” He adds that the narrower the width of vibration the greater the “dramatic effect” stimulated by the vocal tension.

Number 2 in the following examples, points to *rongsōng* sound. The examples present two widths of *rongsōng*: a deeper one and a shallower one. The deeper

vibrations are heard in the Example 2 and 3. For this *rongsǒng*, Song Myǒng-Hwa does not hesitate to borrow from the South Korean sound: “the deeper *rongsǒng* may be similar to the thick vibration found in South Korean *p’ansori*.” For the deeper *rongsǒng*, Song Myǒng-Hwa produced a deep vibration clearly trembling twice. The image of the vocal movement could be represented as (ω).

Example 2.

mf 2
E ru hwa

Example 3.

1 2
ken ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ne ~

In the narrower *rongsǒng*, the vibration moves narrowly and quickly up and down the vocal width presenting the vocal image (~~~~~). Song Myǒng-Hwa alerted, “to produce this *rongsǒng* the trembling sound should be maintained and sustained on the note not dropping to descend to the note. It is essential the vibration constantly pushes the sound up as soon as it returns to the main note.” If compared to the “bouncing trampoline,” the directional impulse of the vibration is from bottom to up moving the sound to float up.

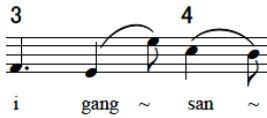
c) *Hwigi*, Bending Sound

Hwigi is the technique of producing a sound sometimes dragging down and sometimes lifting up smoothly connecting to the next note or for a vocal accent. Notes marked number 3 notate this bending sound. In the Example 4, the *hwigi* sound – lifting up – accents lyric (Yang) on one continuous lyric (e). The sound (Yang) starts lower than the main note (c#) and then lifts up to the main note. The vocal image could be represented as (↗).

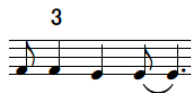
Example 4.

e ~ ~ ~ Yang dōk

The dragging down *hwigi* are found in the Example 5, 6 and 7, lyric (i), lyric (nūn), and lyric (kam), all these on the note (f#). Song Myōng-Hwa starts on the main note and then bends the sound bringing it down to the next note. Establishing a smooth connection to the next note, the sound bends down in advance, creating a vocal image (↘).

Example 5.

i gang ~ san ~

Example 6.

na nūn mok ka ~

Example 7.

kam do ra ~

d) *Ch'aegi*, Snatch Sound

The last vocal ornament to elucidate is *ch'aegi* - a snapping and fluttering sound. For this technique, Song Myōng-Hwa mixes the resonance between head and throat. Notes marked number 4 are those of the *ch'aegi* snatching sound. In the Example 8, Song Myōng-Hwa starts from the lyric (cho) with the head resonance and then quickly slithers up changing into the throat resonance and as soon as the sound returns to the main note, she changes back to the head resonance. The vocal action occurs swiftly and lightly as if making a light node with vocal sound. The vocal image could be as (○).

Example 8.

cho k'u - na - ~ ~ ~

After presenting each technique separately: *kullim* (rolling sound), *rongsǒng* (vibrating sound), *hwigi* (bending sound) and *ch'aegi* (snatching sound), we explore how these techniques may fit together to give a dynamic character to the song.

Example 9.

E he ~ i ~ e ~ ~ ~ Yang dok maeng san ~ ~ ~

In the above Example 9, the lyrics (e) expresses *ch'aegi* with another vocal layer – to push the sound, which is not a vocal ornament but considered a main sound. To sustain the main note (c#) and lyric (e), a pushing sound is utilized. The push is a vigorous forward vocal movement like a reaching out or projection without any trembling or a soft ornament. Song Myǒng-Hwa creates a sometimes soft and elastic sound using this vocal ornamentation and other times creates a vigorous straight sound adding strength. The vocal image for this example 9 would be:

Figure 2. E he ~ i ~ e ⊖ ——— → Yang ⊖ dok ⊖ maeng san ~ ~

Singing *sōdo minyo*, as amply demonstrated in *minyo Yangsando*, involves a multitude of diverse vocal qualities, manipulating timber, intensity and resonances

with complex vocal ornaments. The North Korean *minyo* is generally soft and moderate careful to avoid radical and strong vocal movements. The sound follows the musical direction of *Chosŏn music* in North Korea. Kim Chŏng-Il spoke: “The melodies should be gently flattened removing any intense up and down vocalizations” for he felt radical melodies brought “the exaggeration of the meaning or intonation of the lyrics” and “the destruction of a harmonious combination” between melody and lyric (Kim, Chŏng-Il 1992, 26). Adding the *bel canto* vocalism, Song Myŏng-Hwa mixes the resonances of head, chest and throat releasing more vocal flavours. Even though her sound is particularly soft and gentle, she does not hesitate to add a “South Korean deeper sound” heard in the vibrating sound, *rongsŏng*.

6. Searching Balance

During the years studying with North Korean masters, Song Myŏng-Hwa also had chances to encounter various South Korean musicians in Japan and in South Korea where the company was invited to perform. Especially during the period known as the *Sunshine Policy*, she heard different uses of the voice. For her:

After the division, the two Koreas went to extremes. North Korean song is getting higher and South Korean song is getting huskier. If the vocal sensibilities, well, I mean, if North Korean song is a little more like South Korea and South Korean song is a little more like North Korea, that would be the sound before division when the two sounds most resembled each other. After learning the two sounds, I would like to re-find the middle sound and sing that song.

She heard from some Koreans in Japan, although born in South Korea but of North Korean political orientation, they preferred South Korean songs. The high tone of North Korean songs unnerved them. She sought a vocal balance respecting their sonic sensibility. Find a sound between the “two extremities,” she thought. This led her to a South Korean teacher in Japan and an apprenticeship on *namdo*

p'ansori and *namdo minyo*. She has been learning a few years now acknowledging some vocal changes:

The tonal basis of South Korean *minyo* is low and deep. The same gently rolling tone of *minyo* I learned in Pyongyang is the thicker and deeper vibration South Korean *namdo minyo* requires. Yet, it is very different and my voice isn't trained for it. If I raise the pitch, I can produce the stronger sound but then, it's too high and if I lower the sound, then, my voice is just soft and gentle and not strong enough. But I hear, the more I practice the more my voice is trained.

She knows a long-term apprenticeship is necessary to perceive another vocal sensation. Losing her voice when she intensely practices South Korean *namdo p'ansori* and *minyo*, demands she pace her training according to the performance schedule. To sing North Korean *sŏdo minyo* she knows the voice must not be husky but still she should not stop practicing South Korean *namdo minyo*. Choosing the moment when her voice is strong, she practices *namdo minyo* to just before losing her voice. It is not an easy matter how the vocal techniques are embodied and concretized.

I learn *sŏdo minyo* and *namdo minyo* separately for the moment. There is no short and fast way. Learning is a process and troubles are part of the process. Unnecessary physical and vocal tensions sometimes hurting the voice should be released in the end. During the process of learning and training, the precious lessons will stay with me. I can't expect to grasp all immediately at the beginning.

Song Myŏng-Hwa practices South Korean *namdo* vocal technique sometimes contrary to the teachings of her North Korean masters. The learning and unlearning to relearn, she informs; "I am searching for my voice and my song as a singer of Koreans in Japan." This is not all. With the South Korean *namdo p'ansori*, Song Myŏng-Hwa learns to play 12-stringed-*kayagŭm* from a South Korean master in Japan. There is a *kayagŭm* player in *Kŭmgangsan kagŭktan* but her colleague plays the 21-stringed-*kayagŭm*, coming from North Korea, modified for the seven-tone

scales and designed for playing orchestra harmonies. This 21-stringed-*kayagŭm*, has a modified instrument body to produce, following *Chosŏn* principles, the “gently flattened” sound and softer harmonic balance suited for the Korean-occidental orchestra. She wishes to sing *chosŏn sŏdo minyo* playing 12-stringed-*kayagŭm*. She expresses, “practicing both, the techniques are united in me, in my body. *Namdo minyo* and *sŏdo minyo* exist separated for the moment, however, if I sing them as one technique on a single stage, I hope the two sounds come closer.” One further step, “if the spectators feel through my song, ah ... South and North are one Korean people, I would appreciate this greatly.”

During my fieldwork and interviews, I observed in Song Myŏng-Hwa a musical thirst but also an unspoken confrontation. After twenty years of vocal apprenticeship from Pyongyang, she was unable to comprehend her confusion. In her own words “she was blocked.” More than anything else, she had a devoted and respectful relationship with the masters in Pyongyang and treasured her regular Pyongyang visits. As an artist, “it is precious that someone sincerely cares about my singing and guides my artistic improvement.” This is what her masters in Pyongyang offer her. At the same time, she cannot stop her curiosity of South Korean vocal practices, feeling a necessity to expand her learning. To find her voice it seems inevitable to broaden out to the possibility of song in South Korean *minyo* and even to experience *p’ansori* despite its rejection and disappearance from North Korea.

She desires a sound from the peninsula before division when the sounds were not isolated from each other and perhaps sounding in a mutual discourse of harmony. Re-inscribing South Korean *namdo* sound into her body and re-negotiating her voice she feels some confusion for the sonic-rhythmic structure is different than North Korean *sŏdo minyo*. This confusion could be a cause of her “blockages.” On her behalf, I conclude with an examination of *changdan* as an answer to her confusion.

When transforming Korean *minyo* into Western musical frames, where lies the *aesthetics of differentiation*? Can Korean *minyo* be successfully transposed into a Western musical frame? Even though the North Korean musicians have experimented and developed new techniques of instrumental music to establish *Chosŏn* music, is there something untranslatable? I suggest understanding *changdan* is indispensable to a full comprehension of *minyo* on the peninsula.

a) The Breath of *Changdan*

Changdan is translated as rhythm, beat or tempo. All *minyo* follow a distinct *changdan*. *Changdan* transmits not only the speed and mode of the song but also emotional feelings. Han Yǒng-Ae, North Korean music scholar, defines *changdan*, “a certain rhythmic loop that has its own emotional and affective characteristics, inherent in the sequence of musical tones or manifested in the musical structure of the accompaniment” (Han, Yǒng-Ae 1989, 146-147). South Korean music scholar, Paek Dae-Ung, studies *Changdan* including not merely the rhythm, beat or tempo but also the accent of beat, the length of the rhythm, the change of tempo, breathing, flowing and logical transformation of the rhythmic repetition (Paek, Dae-Ung 2004, 209-216). *Changdan* is primarily played by *changgu*. There are about a dozen *changdan* used in North Korea and Song Myǒng-Hwa introduced four commonly used for singing during the workshop.

Changdan, explains South Korean musicologist No Tong-Ŭn, is one of the basic principles of Korean music. He comments on Korean music in general, all *minyo* and *p’ansori*, “expresses everything through a single tone, unlike western classic music that expresses through the relationship between the tones, that is, harmony” (No, Tong-Ŭn 2008, 1-12). It is maintained the vocal technique of Korean music is an extension of speech vibration and not different from the singing voice. It is as if speaking in rhythm becomes music for Korean *minyo* and *p’ansori*. No Tong-Ŭn articulates, “a single note is independent and autonomous manifesting all the dynamics of vocal movements.” To embrace the vocal dynamics within a single sound, he explains, “Korean music has developed various vocal ornaments.” It becomes evident, as was detailed in the previous section examining *minyo Yangsando*, to focus on a main sound diminishes the rich, complicated and diverse vocal ornamentation. When a vocal sound flows as a song, according to him, “Koreans hear a sonic undulation vibrating from oneself to others and to the Universe.” He continues:

In order to make the interval between ‘I’ and the ‘Universe’ into one, in order not to separate ‘I’ and ‘You,’ one should breathe through the corporeal openings, ‘inhale

and exhale' the energies through the ten openings of the body, that is, two of the ear-hole, two of the eye-hole, two of the nose-hole, a mouth-hole, front and back the bottom-hole and the pores of sweat. Each distinct opening is a breath and act of respiration whose energies are specified by numbers, and that is *changdan*. Based on *changdan*, tone is created and that is Korean music. (No, Tong-Ŭn 2008, 4)

Sound connects “I,” “You” to the “Universe” and sound is made by breathing through the corporeal openings meaning “respiration of the energies.” What does he mean by “energies”? Though he does not define precisely, *The Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* definition might provide a clue:

The concept of energy (*energeia*= ‘strength’, ‘efficacy’, from *én-érgon*, ‘at work’) is a concept both obvious and difficult. We associate it with external impetus, with an excess of muscular and nervous activity. But it also refers to something intimate, something which pulses in immobility and silence, a retained power which flows in time without dispersing in space. (Barba, Eugenio & Savarese, Nicola 2005, 81)

In Bali, energy is defined using the term *bayu* (‘wind’), in Japan, theatre term used is *ki-hai* (‘spirit’, ‘breath’), in theatre anthropology, the term *animus* (Latin for ‘air,’ ‘breath’) is used. (Barba, Eugenio & Savarese, Nicola 2005, 79)

“Energy” could be understood as a life force respiration. No Tong-Ŭn, studying writings from early 15th century Korea, uncovers music on the peninsula was defined as a sonic “vibration aspiring to activate the blood circulation system of the body” and connected to “having a clear mind” (No, Tong-Ŭn 2008, 6-7). Following his understandings, the vocal vibration ultimately channels itself through the vibrating movement of five viscera and six entrails. He postulates the inner organs are connected with the blood circulation system through the ten body openings. Song is a vocal vibratory movement generating body “energies,” carried through breathing and organized by the numbers called *changdan*.

7. Returning to Song Myōng-Hwa

Song Myōng-Hwa generously shared her experiences, practices and her stories. During our conversations her open attitude and disposition was always energetic, determined and optimistic. At the last minute in the last interview as I turned off the recorder, she hesitatingly spoke about her confusion, speaking to me as a fellow artist, confiding she was blocked. It was evident her searching effort for the sound on the peninsula before division was not talk but a practice, a labouring and visceral practice of love. Learning South Korean vocal technique, switching accompaniment from the piano to *changgu* percussion and learning 12-stringed-*kayagum* did not mean a simple change in her song. It signified an active contemplation around questions artists forging a future and paying homage to history, traverse. Her voice has survived throughout the turnings and contradictions as a corporeal contemplation obsessive, persistent and tenacious.

This writing is an answer on my part to Song Myōng-Hwa on her musical thirst. North Korean *minyō* was rearranged by accepting *Western* music notation and technique. Despite the musical achievement in North Korean *minyō* developing according to their society, Song Myōng-Hwa's thirst is now to accept and respect herself as an artist of *Kūmgangsan kagūktan* and discover her place in Japan. She may be destined instinctively to search for a sound of the peninsula and by doing so approach South Korean *minyō* or her search may take her in other directions. John Blacking, British ethnomusicologist states:

There is a difference between music that is occasional and music that enhances human consciousness, music that is simply for having and music that is for being. I submit that the former may be good craftsmanship, but that the latter is art, no matter how simple or complex it sounds, and no matter under what circumstances it is produced (Blacking, John 1974, 50).

The musical thirst of Song Myōng-Hwa is necessary and leads to a song that “enhances human consciousness.” What remains essential is her ceaseless

investigation to sing her song as the “artist” traversing crossroads. She traverses the crossroads embracing the *aesthetics of differentiation* in all its manifestations of vocal techniques, elaborating, uniting, learning and unlearning to find harmony in her own body.

A rendering of *changdan* principles was required for a fuller comprehension of the particularities of the music on the peninsula especially those not entirely translatable into the *Western* musical frame or even worse lost in translation. The principles of *changdan* might be considered a lodestone into Song Myōng-Hwa’s instinctive practices, her search for a song that could transmit the full *aesthetic wisdom* beyond geographic and political division. Jerzy Grotowski, one of the most significant theatre directors in the twentieth century, has worked on the old songs describing his interest to “seek the primary energy, the appearance of the song, one’s heritage, and one’s human ties” (Slowiak, James & Cuesta, Jairo 2007, 59). He spoke to his pupil:

... there was a way to sing in which the searching never died. Even though you knew the melody by heart and did not alter it, you always approached it like a friend whom you don’t completely know: another being. You go forward into the song, asking it to reveal its secret to you. (Richards, Thomas 2004, 86)

Song Myōng-Hwa goes “forward into the song”. Re-tracking *minyo*, she questions her “heritage” and her “human ties.” She transgresses political boundaries. Perhaps the instincts of the *sōdo minyo* singer in Japan will bring to light the “untranslatable” *changdan*. The negotiated voice of an active practitioner of a music rooted in *aesthetics of differentiation* will approach “like a friend” the music on the peninsula. Korean *minyo* will “reveal its secret” to a *Kūmgangsan kagūktan* artist traversing the crossroads.

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Appendix

1. Korean lyrics of *Yangsando*:

에루화 좋구나 아니 못가겠네
이강산 두고서 나는 못 가겠네

1. 에헤이 에 ~
양덕 맹산 흐르는 물은
청류벽으로 감돌아 든다

후렴) 에루화 좋구나 금수라 강산
실버들 실 실이 봄빛이로다

2. 에헤이 에 ~
쳐다보니 모란봉이요
흘러서 감도니 룡라도로다

후렴) 능수나 버들엔 피꼬리울고
꽃속의 나비는 쌍쌍이 춤이로다

3. 에헤이 에 ~
물어보자 네 어디 사니
이 강변 좋아서 나 여기 산다

후렴) 에루화 봄철아 가지를 말아
아까운 청춘이 다 지나간다.

2. English translation of *Yangsando*:

Refrain) Eruhwa (sound of interjection), good! I can't go
Leaving these rivers and mountains behind, I can't go.

1. Ehei e ~ (sound of interjection)
The flowing water at *Yangdök maengsan*
Swirls around to enter into *Ch'öngnyubyöök*

Refrain) Eruhwa, good, magnificent rivers and mountains!
Of weeping willow, trailing branches are spring colours.

2. Ehei e ~
What is looked at is *Moranbong*
Where to flow swirling around is to *Rüngnado*

Refrain) On the Weeping willow, the oriole sings
In the flowers, the butterflies dance in courtship.

3. Ehei e ~
Let me ask where you live
Loving the banks of the river, I live here

Refrain) Eruhwa! Spring season please don't go
Precious youths all pass.

3. The following music stave of *Yangsando* is provided by Song Myöng-Hwa, which I have romanised according to the McCune Reischauer system, adding numbers for clarity of illustration.

Yangsando

Joyfully (*Changdan Yangsando*)

mf 2. 4. 1. 4. 1.

E ru hwa cho k'u - na - - - a ni mok- ka - - -

Vo. 2. 1. 2. 1. 3. 4.

ken - - - - - ne - - - - - i gang - san -

Vo. 1. 3. 1. 2.

tu - - - - - go- sō na nūn mok ka - ken - - - - - ne -

f 1. 1. 4. 3. 4. 4. 1.

E he - i - e - - - - Yang dōk maeng san- - - -

Vo. 1. 2. 1. 2. 1.

hū - - - - - rŭ - nūn - mu - - - - - rŭn- - - - -

Vo. 1. 3.

Ch'ōg - nyu - byōk - ũ - - - - - ro kam do ra -

Vo. 1. 2. *mf*

tŭn - - - - - da - E ru hwa cho k'u - na - - - -

Music recopied by JEONG AeRan followed by the Workshop Guide 2010 SONG Myōng-Hwa, Kŭmgansan kagŭktan
Lyrics Romanized following the McCune-Reischauer system