

# Orality and Performance in Classic Japanese and Korean Poetry

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In the literary history of Japan and Korea, poetry written in classical Chinese and that in the vernacular are termed differently: *shi* 詩 was reserved almost exclusively for the former and *kaluta* 歌 for the latter. This difference came from the ideological bias and cultural elitism of the literati, who espoused the Confucian and official Chinese literary canon, and through their alliance with the court and the ruling class exercised power in Japan and Korea respectively. The labeling of vernacular poetry as songs can, however, be interpreted not merely as pejorative but as suggestive of multiple other implications, even as indicative of an understanding of orality and performance in their poetry.

The names of most native poetic genres in Japan and Korea contain the graph *ka* (song) or its cognates (*yo*, *cho*, and the like in Korea). Did this designation of vernacular poetry as *kaluta* have other reasons than to distinguish it from poetry written in classical Chinese? What was the relations between *shi* and *kaluta* throughout the literary history of Japan and Korea? Was performance the distinguishing characteristic of vernacular poetry in Japan and Korea? In this archeological and cultural study, I will attempt to trace these issues by examining some texts in East Asia with an observation that the performance aspect of poetry came to be less prominent in China and Japan while it became a single most significant feature of vernacular poetry in traditional Korea.

The *poem* articulates what is on the mind intently, *song* makes language last long. ("Canon of Shun," *Book of Documents*)<sup>1</sup>

The poem is that to which what is intently on the mind goes. In the mind it is "being intent"; coming out in language, it is a poem. The affections are stirred within and take on form in words. If words alone are inadequate, we speak them out in sighs. If sighing is inadequate, we sing them. If singing them is inadequate, unconsciously our hands dance them and our feet tap them. ("The Great Preface" to the *Book of Songs*)<sup>2</sup>

Both these canonical passages provide the canonical system of definitions involving intent (*chih*), heart/mind (*hsin*), words/language (*yen*), and poetry (*shih*). Where the mind/heart goes is the intent, and when the intent goes to the language it becomes a poem. "Intent" occurs because one is "stirred by something in the external world";<sup>3</sup> it is "tensional, yearning for both resolution and external manifestation." That is, whenever one is moved by something

and wishes to express it in language, a poem comes into being. It is sufficient to express one's intent in language, not necessarily in writing. Song "makes language last long" or "prolong[s] the words in chanting."<sup>4</sup> "Last long", obtained by dividing the graph to "intone" into "prolong" and "language," points to its capacity to be "preserved, carried afar, and transmitted," as pointed out by Owen.<sup>5</sup> Poetry is involuntary, one is so moved that one must express. It is natural to human beings — anyone who is stirred can and does make a song and sing it.

The formulaic style and straightforward diction, with other coding, indicate that many (if not all) songs in the *Book* were composed orally and performed. For example, "It is my heart's sadness/That makes me chant and sing," says the misunderstood official (109:1); "I make this song to accuse you," avers a woman to an unfaithful man (141:2); ". . . I made this song/To tell how I long to feed my mother," says a son (162:5). In 199:8, perhaps a woman accuses another unfaithful man, "I have made this good song in order to express to the full my restlessness." And "a gentleman made this song/ That his sorrow might be known" (204:8), says a conscripted soldier. "So I have put together many verses/ To make this song," says one to praise another (252:10). At least in three instances, the singer states his name: "Kai-fu has made this song" (191:10 作誦); "So Chi-fu made this song" (259:8 作誦), and "The palace-attendant Meng Tzu/Made up the words of this song" anticipating a transmission of his song (200:7 作爲此詩).<sup>6</sup>

An incontrovertible proof of the oral and musical origin of these songs is twelve melodies in pitch-pipe and flute notations that survive, thanks to the efforts of Chu Hsi, who obtained them from the Sung scholar Chao Yen-su, whose source dates from the K'ai-yün period (713-42) of the T'ang. These melodies are strictly syllabic (one note to one word) and ascribed to two heptatonic modes, although the modal structure is pentatonic.<sup>7</sup> Generally, in the *Book of Songs*, *shin* designates song texts; *ko*, a song or singing to a set melody or with musical accompaniment; *yao*, singing without a set melody or without musical accompaniment; and *sung*, recite or intone. A gloss following song 109 makes the distinction between *ko* and *yao* explicit,<sup>8</sup> and the use of two words *sung* and *shih* does the same in 259:8: "So Chi-fu made this song/metrical composition (*sung*), and its text (*shih*) is very grand."

Songs in the *Book* were performed, witness for example, Confucius comments on the concluding music of the *Ospreys* [poem 1], "... what a grand flood of sound filled one's ears" (*Analects* 8:15).<sup>9</sup> However, already from the Spring and Autumn periods (722-481 B.C.), it became fashionable to recite rather than sing the poems as the Monograph on Literature in the *Han shu* defines the term *fu-shih* 賦詩: "to recite without singing is called fu."<sup>10</sup> As a part of ritual greetings, princes and high officials at diplomatic meetings recited a whole poem or a stanza of a given poem from the *Books of Songs* as a "veiled means of displaying one's own intentions or sounding those of a fellow diplomatist."<sup>11</sup> When the Chin prince Chung-erh met the Duke Mu of Ch'in, for example, the former recited poem 222 and the latter 227.<sup>12</sup> From the first stanza of poem 222, which reads in Waley's English, "Long, long was our march to the south;/But the lord of Shao has rewarded it," the prince praises the duke of Ch'in for his kind hospitality by comparing him to Lord Shao, while the latter with the first stanza of poem

227, "The prince have come to Court;/ With what gift can I present them,/ Although this is nothing to give them,/ It shall be a great coach and four," hints at a gift of a carriage to his guest.<sup>13</sup> The practice of detaching a stanza from a given poem and reciting it for expedient means, and attaching whatever meaning the speaker wishes to that detached part, tended to disregard the poem's original purport and meaning. The practice of "breaking off a stanza and taking its meaning"<sup>14</sup> 斷章取義 continued as the classics indicate; and the poems began to be read and taught more and more in this manner leading to the didactic/allegorical reading of the poems.

The continuity of oral and written poetry may be seen in the "Nine Songs" of the shamanist origin in the *Ch'u Tz'u* anthology, probably performed by masked shamans or singers. Anonymous folk songs from the Han, collected by the Music Bureau (est. 120 B.C.), some with lines of irregular length, are called the *yüeh-fu* songs/ballads and deal with the lives of the common people (they may have been created by the people to express their grievances against the government or to express their emotions). About 500 surviving songs dating from the 4th to the 6th centuries also concern the personal feelings of the common people. The literati *yüeh-fu* written from the late Han commingle the folk and the literati tradition. Ancient quatrains (*chüeh-chü*) were sung as *yüeh-fu* from the Southern dynasties (420-589) till the first half of the T'ang. With the creation of the new *yüeh-fu*, for example, by Po Chü-i (772-846), we note little formal relation to earlier examples.

Another popular song form, *tz'u*, lyric meter consisting of lines of unequal length, were composed to fit Chinese and Central Asian tunes (as Tunhuang songs seem to attest). Colloquial and moving love songs associated with the name of Tzu-yeh, a singing girl of the 4th century, flourished in the Southern dynasties. The activities of the Palace Music School under Hsüan-tsung, the dispersal of musicians and singers at the time of the An Lu-shan rebellion (755), their eventual resettlement at such cities as Yangchow, Soochow, and Hangchow in the lower Yangtze region, and frequent visits of officials and poets to places of entertainment to befriend singing girls skilled in poetry and music<sup>15</sup> contributed to the rise of the *tz'u*, which was influenced by folk songs. Wen T'ing-yun (813?-870), regarded as the pioneer poet of *tz'u*, Wei Chuang (836-910), Li Yü (937-78), Liu Yung (fl. 1034), an accomplished singer who introduced the longer *tz'u* form from the popular song tradition, and Su Shih (1037-1101) whose knowledge of music was, however, inadequate, all contributed to the development of the form. Under Su Shih's influence the *tz'u* became a literary creation, dissociated from the original musical setting. Only a handful of musical notations for the *tz'u* are extant.

## JAPAN

Some songs (*uta*) recorded in such early Japanese chronicles as *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters, 712), and *Nihon shoki* (720) may have existed as popular songs before they were incorporated in a given context to amplify or embellish a given narrative, as evinced by the

identical examples in the *Kinkafu* (Songs for Zither Accompaniment; comp. 981 and discovered 1924).<sup>16</sup> It appears that Japanese gods before the appearance of historical rulers preferred to talk rather than sing: only 8 out of 113 songs in the *Kojiki* and 6 out of 131 in the *Nihon shoki* are attributed to them. This suggests that the singing voice is characteristically human, lodging in “the silence of the body.”<sup>17</sup> These songs in their earlier forms, like oral songs elsewhere, probably were composed, performed, and distributed by oral means.

To the Man'yo poet, song was “the heart and soul of life capable of establishing a rapport among gods, nature, and people of the past and present.”<sup>18</sup> It is also noteworthy that 2,013 songs, about one half of the corpus of the *Man'yōshū*, are anonymous. When folk and popular songs were set down by means of Chinese graphs used for their phonetic values, as in the *Kojiki*, and for their phonetic and logographic values, as in the *Man'yōshū* (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves), their essential musical and popular qualities are inevitably lost, isolating and highlighting their independent value as written poems.<sup>19</sup> But in spite of the adoption of Chinese culture and its writing system, the habit of excluding words of foreign origin in the *waka*, from a belief in the *kotodama* (word spirit), contributed to making the *waka* quintessentially Japanese. As long as “writing” meant writing in Chinese, the *kotodama* represented an exclusive domain of the speaking human voice.<sup>20</sup> Thus orality and performance aspect of the *waka*, at least in theory, was preserved.

As for the question of how to distinguish “song” from *waka*, *Kojiki*, *Nihon shoki*, and *Man'yōshū* all use the word *uta* or its verbal forms (*utahishiku*, *utani ihishiku*, *kaku utahite*, etc.), but the *Kinkafu* suggests that the song was “recited to fluctuating rhythm.”<sup>21</sup> “Up to the second half of the Ancient Age,” comments Konishi, “*waka* were orally presented and heard. Although reading increased with the passage of time, it never managed to reverse the ascendancy of oral delivery and aural reception.”<sup>22</sup> The standard dictionary of Japanese assigns no fewer than five graphs to the verb to sing (*utafu*), 歌, 謠, 唄, 謳, 唱 meaning “sing a song to a tune” or “compose a song or recite.” *Yumu* has two graphs 讀, 詠 meaning either “to read aloud” or “compose a song or recite.” This lack of specificity, contrary to the Chinese and Korean usage of the graph 歌, adds to our difficulty.

In the kana preface to the *Kokinshū* (Collection of Ancient and Modern Poetry; c. 905), Ki no Tsurayuki (c. 872-945), the principal compiler, says: “Japanese poetry has the human heart as seed and myraids of words as leaves. It comes into being when men use the seen and the heard to give voice to feelings aroused by the innumerable events in their lives. . . It is song that moves heaven and earth without effort, stirs emotion in the invisible spirits and gods, brings harmony to the relations between men and women, and calms the hearts of fierce warriors.”<sup>23</sup>

*Yamatouta* (Japanese song), the first word in that preface, distinguishes poetry written in Japanese from that written in classical Chinese (and also from properly Chinese poetry). Born from a passionate wish to place *waka* on an equal footing with *shih* as a premier art, “two practical steps were taken [by the compilers] to achieve this goal: transcribing *waka* in the *hiragana* syllabary, and limiting *waka* expressions to Japanese vocabulary.”<sup>24</sup> *Waka* should be

as prestigious as Chinese poetry, but attain its prestige by other means. Waka's decline caused by the rising popularity of *shih* composition, especially in the first half of the ninth century, should be arrested and the two genres attain, at least equality. This could be done, however, only by establishing a Six Dynasties style of elegance and wit in waka,<sup>25</sup> Tsurayuki and his circle thought. However, Tsurayuki believes that the word *mana* has the power to "move heaven and earth without effort, stir emotions in the invisible spirits and gods. . ."

Waka was orally delivered at poetry matches (*utaawase*), where participants competed on set topics, and at poetry parties (*kakai*). At the poetry match, a poet composed and recited a verse to the scribe (*shuhitsu*) who, after confirming it with the master, in turn repeated it from memory, wrote it down, and chanted it.<sup>26</sup> At the poetry party, the reciter (*kōji*) "chanted each verse [written by the participants] aloud for the delectation of all present". . and thereafter the participants "might all chant each poem several times."<sup>27</sup>

We should also mention the role of vernacular poetry in religious rituals throughout Japanese history. "The way of poetry has been from the beginning the *dharani* of Japan," said Shinkei (1406-75). Credited with miraculous powers, *renga* was considered a ritual performing art, served such functions for the samurai as a kind of meditative practice, as it survives so to this day. It is unclear, however, whether *renga* and *waka* on these occasions were chanted or recited.<sup>28</sup>

## KOREA

The performance of oral songs in the religious life of the ancient Korean peoples in the north (Puyô 夫餘, Koguryô 高句麗, and Ye 濊) and in the south (Mahan 馬韓, Pyônhan 弁韓, and Chinhan 辰韓) is vividly recorded first in the *Wei chih* in the *San-kuo chih* (comp. 285-297), followed by the *Hou Han shu* (comp. 398-445). According to the descriptions in the *Wei chih* and *Hou Han shu*, at such state assemblies as Puyô's *yônggo* 迎鼓 in the first month, Koguryô's *tongmaeng* 東盟 and Ye's *much'ôn* 舞天 in the tenth month, and Mahan's ceremonies in the fifth and tenth months, the high and low worshipped Heaven, invoked gods and spirits, offered thanksgiving for a good harvest, and made prayers for continued prosperity and protection. On those occasions the people ate, drank, danced and sang for days on end. "Old and young, they [the Puyô people] all sing when walking along the road whether it be day or night; all day long the sound of their voices never ceases."<sup>29</sup> "Their [Koguryô] people delight in singing and dancing. In villages throughout the state, men and women gather in groups at nightfall for communal singing and game playing."<sup>30</sup> In their tenth month worship of Heaven, the Ye people "drink, sing, and dance day and night."<sup>31</sup> "Coming together in groups they [the Mahan people] sing and dance; they drink wine day and night without ceasing. In their dancing, several tens of men get up together and form a line; looking upward and downward as they stomp the ground, they move hands and feet in concert with a rhythm that is similar to our [Chinese] bell-clapper dance."<sup>32</sup> "By custom they [Pyônhan people] take delight in singing, dancing, and drinking wine. They have stringed zithers (*se*)."<sup>33</sup> "The [Chinhan] people delight

in singing, dancing, and drinking wine. They have drums and stringed zithers (*se*).<sup>34</sup>

What struck the Chinese then and strikes the modern reader as well is the Korean people's love of singing and dancing. At these assemblies, the chief officiating ritualist told the story of the divine origin of the founder, as evinced by foundation myths of these peoples, and his extraordinary deeds in war and peace. Even nowadays on Cheju island a shamaness chants the origin of a village god. Recited narrative was interspersed with primal songs (*norae*) which not only welcomed, entertained, and sent off gods and spirits but also moved the mountains and set all nature dancing in harmony.

The first recorded short song used as a means of incantation occurs in the first century A.D. In the section on the Karak 駕洛 state in the *Samguk yusa* 三國遺事 (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms),<sup>35</sup> we are told that during the third month of the year 42, nine chiefs and 200 to 300 people climbed Mount Kuji to greet the sovereign, dug a hole at the summit of the mountain, and sang in joy the *Kuji ka* 龜旨歌 (Song of Kuji). The incantation was a prayer for King Suro 首露王 to descend. Iryōn's 一然 account reads:

They [the people] and their nine chiefs heard  
the voice but could not see the speaker.  
The voice asked, "Is anyone here?"  
The chiefs replied, "Yes."  
"Where is this place?"  
"This is Kuji."

The voice continued, "Heaven commanded me to come here to found a country and be your king, so I have come. Dig the earth on the peak, sing this song, and dance with joy to welcome your great king:

O turtle, O turtle.  
Show your head!  
If you do not,  
We'll roast you and eat you.

"Show your head" in line 2 gave rise to the king's name Suro, meaning "show[ed] his head." The turtle, according to one reading, symbolizes life. A threat to roast the turtle, which usually lives in the water, was intended to urge it to make strenuous efforts to appear. The whole tone is coercive, but it seems to have worked. Hence another title of the song, *Yōng singun ka*, or "Song of Welcoming the Divine Lord." This song, or spell, was not composed in writing, but it comes to us transcribed into Chinese. It was probably sung by a nameless and unlettered shaman.

Nevertheless the "Song of Kuji" was probably not in and of itself an independent song, but part of a larger piece. Some parts known as the "Song of Kuji" appear again in the *Haega* (Song of the Sea), this time sung by the common people when Lady Suro 水路夫人 was abducted by a dragon in the early eighth century. The lady is the wife of Lord Sunjōng, on his way at the time to his post as governor of Kangnūng.

After two days, the lord's party was again lunching at the Imhae Arbor,

when the sea dragon suddenly emerged and kidnapped [Lady] Suro to his underwater abode. The lord stamped his feet but could not devise any plan for her rescue. Again, an old man appeared and said, "An old saying has it that many mouths can melt even iron. Even the sea monster is bound to be afraid of many mouths. Gather the people from the area, compose a song, and strike a hill with sticks. Then you will regain your wife."

The lord followed his advice, and the dragon reappeared and returned the lady. When the lord asked his wife about the bottom of the sea, she replied, "The food at the Palace of the Seven Jewels is delicious, fragrant and clean, unlike our own." Her dress exuded a strange fragrance hitherto unknown in the world of men. Being of peerless beauty, Suro would find herself snatched away by divine beings whenever she traveled through deep mountains and along large lakes.

The song sung by the people goes:

O turtle, turtle, release Suro!

How grave the sin of taking another's wife!

If you go against our will,

We'll catch you in a net and roast and eat you.<sup>36</sup>

This song, issuing from the mouth with phonic and rhythmic richness, with immediacy and transparency of the text, proclaimed through voice an urgent message. This collective performance reaffirms the "mythic value of live voice" and the belief that song can move gods and spirits.

The first record of Silla songs occurs in the *Samguk sagi* 三國史記 (Historical Record of the Three Kingdoms), though the *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* adds other information to the subject. When King Yuri (24-57) 儒理王, the third king of Silla, made a tour of inspection of the country in the eleventh month, A.D. 28, he happened to see an old woman dying of hunger and cold in the open. He reproached himself, saying that it was his fault, as king, if the old and the young had so little to eat and suffered to this extreme. He covered the old woman with his own coat and gave her food. He further ordered the civil authorities to find all those who could not provide for themselves, including the widowers and widows, the destitute, and the old and sick, in order to give them food and shelter. When they heard this story, many people from the neighboring provinces came to Silla to praise the king. That year the grateful people composed the *Tosol ka* 兜率歌 or *Turinnorae* (Song of peace and repose).<sup>37</sup>

Making reference to the same song, the *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* comments that the song is in the *ch'asa sanoe* 嗟辭詞腦 style (*kyôk* 格). If the *ch'asa* refers to interjections, then its form resembles the ten-line *hyangga* 鄉歌 the ninth line of which begins with an interjection. But because the song is described as the first new music accompanied by song, *ch'asa* might have been a kind of refrain used to keep tune with the music. That *sanoe* is a comprehensive term covering many poems is indicated when King Kyôngdôk, in a conversation with Master Ch'ungdam 忠談師, refers to the "Ode to Knight Kip'a 讚耆婆郎歌," one of the ten-line *hyangga*, as a *sanoe* 詞腦 song. Also Great Master Kyunyô 均如大師 (923-

973) who wrote eleven poems for people to chant and memorize, refers to his eleven devotional poems with the same term, as does the translator of his poems into Chinese, Ch'oe Haenggwi ("The poems are called *sano*."). And the biographer of the Great Master Kyunyô glosses *sano* by saying, "it is called *no* because its meaning is more refined than its diction." *Sano ka* means vernacular poetry and covers both the *turinnorae* and twenty-five other poems transcribed in the *hyangch'al* 鄉札 system. The name *sano ka* was translated into Chinese as *hyangga*, meaning vernacular poetry, opposed to poetry written in classical Chinese, and it is by this name that these songs have subsequently been known.

Like all subsequent vernacular poetic forms in Korea, the songs belonging to the first vernacular poetic kind, the *hyangga*, were sung. The forms and styles of Korean poetry therefore reflect its melodic origins. The basis of its prosody is a line consisting of metric segments of three or four syllables, the rhythm that is probably most natural to the language. In the ten-line *hyangga*, the ninth line usually begins with an interjection that indicates heightened emotions and a change in tempo and pitch, and also presages the poem's conclusion. Musical notations indicate that the musical divisions of each popular Koryô song, signaled by an interjection followed by a refrain, are different from its poetic (stanzaic) divisions. Later in Korean literary history, the interjection preceding a refrain in Koryô songs or eulogies may have developed into the first word in the last line of the *sijo* 時調, where it appears as an interjection or form of address that indicates a shift to subjectivity. Furthermore, the association, if not to say identity, of verbal and musical rhythms can be seen in the refrain of Koryô songs. Nonsense jingles or onomatopoetic representations of the sounds of such musical instruments as the drum attest to the refrain's musical origins and function.

In referring to the fourteen extant *hyangga* in the *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*, the compiler Iryôn uses two graphs to indicate the song (ka 歌 and yo 謠; 作歌 "made this song" eight times), three for the verb "to sing" 唱, 歌, 賦<sup>38</sup> and three for the song texts —歌, 詞, 辭. Although only four times it is clearly noted that both the composer and performer are the same person, as, for example, in the "Song of the Comet," 彗星歌 "Song of Sôdong," 薯童謠 "Song of Tusita Heaven," and "Song of Ch'ôyong," 處容歌 one can assume from the context and the circumstances that other songs were also performed. We know the social context of performance and the nature of the audience and can conjecture the personality of the performer (all but two songs are attributed to the named composer) and the style of the performance itself. Those recognized for their talent in composing included five named monks, a nameless old man, a blind boy, a disappointed official, and Ch'ôyong believed to be a son of the Dragon King. And some songs were performed and transmitted until the time of Iryôn in the 13th century: for example, the *P'ungyo* 風謠 (c. 635), an anonymous song to praise the eminent monk Yangji 良志 was popular in Iryôn's day and was sung when performing repetitive tasks such as pounding rice and constructing buildings. Unlike other vernacular genres with extant musical notations, however, no musical settings for *hyangga* are extant, nor are multiple renditions of the same song text, as in, for example, the *sijo*.

The characteristic songs of Koryô 高麗 were all performed and transmitted orally until the 16th century when music books such as the *Siyong hyangak po* 時用鄉樂譜 (Notations for Korean Music in Contemporary Use; text of 26 songs preserved), recorded them for the first time in the Korean alphabet. The survival of Koryô song texts is owed to the adoption of accompanying music for use at court from the beginning of the Chosôn dynasty. The eulogies compiled to celebrate the founding of the new dynasty were sung to the tune of popular Koryô songs, because no other music was available at the time. For example, the “Song of Nayacu” 納氏歌 was sung to the music of “Song of Green Mountain” 青山別曲 and the “Song of the Pacification of the East” 靖東方曲 to that of “Song of P’yôngyang” 西京別曲. Other songs were also used for other court music repertory. Whether they are all orally composed is uncertain, but there was an interaction between oral and written forms and between the high and low as, for example, waterfront prostitutes and roaming actors and jugglers (*kugutsu*) played an important role in transmitting popular songs of medieval Japan.<sup>39</sup> Some of the court pieces originated from popular songs, while others may have been conceived, written down by the literati, only later becoming popular.

The musical notations, set down in the Korean mensural notation, for the Korean text of the *Songs of Flying Dragons* 龍飛御天歌 (1445-7), in four complete settings, are preserved in *Veritable Record of King Sejong* 世宗實錄. With them, the music for cantos 1 through 4 and canto 125 of the Chinese version is also appended. *Sijo*, the most popular vernacular poetic genre, was sung, taking usually over two minutes for a 3-line regular *sijo*. Dynamics, were considered by some to be the genre’s unique feature. Some *sijo* were simultaneously composed and performed, but others written to be sung by female entertainers or servants. *Kasa* 歌辭, the fourth vernacular poetic genre, was recited or chanted; but the twelve shorter *kasa* were sung. And finally the *p’ansori* has traditionally been sung and narrated by a professional singer of tales, with mimetic and conventional body movements and gestures, and accompanied by a single drummer.

The expressive strategies of vernacular songs in Japan and Korea include frequent parataxis — juxtaposition of elements without subordinating them; the recurrence of such textual elements as formulas; parallelism; repetition (one of the simplest forms of rhythm); refrains; and nonsense jingles. All these stylistic and prosodic features are present in most of the vernacular poetic types of East Asia whose origins lie in orality and performance. The language of most vernacular poetry, except for some archaic and obsolete words and allusions, is simple, straightforward, if not transparent, shorn of rhetorical devices associated with other written texts. This too indicates that the composer/singer has studied the traditional patterns, themes, and vocabulary.

In Korea, as elsewhere, the gradual deemphasis of the performance aspect of vernacular poetry has to do with the place of performance in society and the low social status of the performer. Those who were associated with performance in Korea chronologically, for example, included the shamans, Buddhist monks, members of the elite corps of *hwarang* (the two last constituting the most educated members of Silla society at one time), female slaves

and entertainers, musicians, servants of both sexes, and professional singers, who acted as composer/singer/interpreters from the eighteenth century. Occasionally there were rulers who personally loved music and song and encouraged performance, for example, Emperor Hsüan of Han and his son in China, the cloistered ruler Goshirakawa (r. 1115-58) who ordered the compilation of the *Ryōjin hishō* (The Secret Store of Marvelous Songs, rediscovered 1911) in Japan, and King Sejong 世宗 and the Regent Taewōngun 大院君 (1820-98) of Chosōn Korea.

But records indicate that those entrusted with performance were members of the lower classes, such as female entertainers, shamans, servants, and artisans. It was deemed below dignity for the members of the ruling and literati class to perform. In Japan and Korea, the principal role of singing, distributing, and transmitting vernacular poetry was almost exclusively performed by women, who were often marginalized and persecuted by the Establishment. Famous performers include Otomae (1085-1169), a *kugutsu* singer of *imayō* songs and teacher of Goshirakawa in Japan, and Hwang Chini 黃眞伊 (c. 1506-44) of Korea.

Receptive to the expectations of the audience, the singer/performer was recognized for his/her talent and role, but, unlike the shaman in earlier times, he/she did not claim the ability to exercise power over nature. Although "all poetry aspires to being *made* voice, to *making* itself heard one day,"<sup>40</sup> Confucian decorum and morality prevented the literati/composers from having their works made voice, and instead had to rely on others to make them heard. But as long as there were such singers of songs and tales, the performance aspect of poetry continued to play an important social role.

Even the Korean literati who wrote mostly in classical Chinese were not far away from literary orality. Classical education in traditional Korea consisted of recitation, reading aloud of Confucian classics, histories, and literature, and students recited a given text until they both understood and memorized it. Poetry writing was also accompanied by voice — often the writer hummed, recited, or chanted a given piece to himself or to his friends. But seldom did the Chosōn poet perform except from the 18th century, with the rise of a society of professional singers from the middle and lower classes.

Performance, it is claimed, enables us to imagine the ritual, ludic, festive, or commemorative uses of song in the past and helps us to relate ourselves to the past singers hundreds of years ago. At the time and place of performance, it provokes emotional response from the audience regardless of size. Speaking a language common to all classes, performance reaffirms our place in tradition and evokes a sense of cohesion, solidarity, and harmony. The topics chosen by the poet/singer reflect some of the perennial concerns of the time, and the singer's sensitivity to his/her audience might require minor variations in performance. The listener, in turn, needs to know his/her tradition fully as well as the poet/singer does, for the latter has assumed this knowledge on the part of his/her audience down to the present day.

"An oral poem," avers Ruth Finnegan, "is an essentially ephemeral work of art, and has no existence or continuity apart from its performance."<sup>41</sup> From the time of their emergence to their first transcription, *hyangga* were orally transmitted for about 400-600 years; Koryō songs, about 300 years; *sijo* and *kasa*, 300 years; and *p'ansori*, about 100 years. This fact seems to

prove that it was performance which helped preserve and maintain classic vernacular poetry in Korea. Keenly aware of the importance of preserving the art of singing songs and tales, the Korean government since 1962 has played a major role in protecting and continuing the performance aspect of vernacular — now only national — poetry: for example, the famous singers are designated as “intangible national treasures” and subsidized; the School of National Musical Arts has trained the younger generations of professional singers; the annual competition in *sijo* and *p’ansori* singing is held for students; and the musical education in primary and secondary schools will also increase the coverage of the national music. It appears that only such an official act can preserve the traditional art from the inroads of urbanization and industrialization (and the idolization by the young of pop singers from within and without). Because in their early history the East Asian people valued voice so highly, it is fitting that the government should try to revive the performance of classic vernacular poetry, the cultural and political consequences of which will be considerable.

### Notes

By oral I mean, with Zumthor, “any poetic communication where transmission and reception at least are carried by voice and hearing,” and by performance, “the complex action by which a poetic message is simultaneously transmitted and perceived in the here and now.” Paul Zumthor, *Oral Poetry: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), pp. 23, 22.

- 1 Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992), p. 26.
- 2 Owen, pp. 40-41.
- 3 Owen, p.28.
- 4 James J.Y. Liu, *Chinese Theories of Literaturh* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 69.
- 5 Owen, p.29.
- 6 Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1954), pp. 308, 65, 151, 140, 184, 291, 135, 316; and Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Odes* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1950), pp. 70, 89, 105, 156, 210, 134, 228, 152 respectively.
- 7 Laurence Picken, “Twelve Ritual Melodies of the T’ang Dynasty,” *Studia Memoriae Belae Bartok Sacra*, ed. B. Rajeczky et al. (Budapest: Acad. Scient. Hungaricae, 1957), p. 148; idem, “The Shapes of the Shi Jing Song-texts and Their Musical Implications,” *Musica Asiatica*, ed. Picken (Oxford: Oxford Music Department, 1977), pp. 85-109.
- 8 *Mao-shih chu-shu* (*Ssu-pu pei-yao* ed.) 5:4a.
- 9 Waley, *The Analects of Confucius* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1949), p. 135.
- 10 *Han shu* (Hong Kong: Chung-hua shu-chu, 1970) 30:1755.
- 11 Waley, p. 335.
- 12 *Kuo yü* (*Ssu-pu pei-yao* ed.) 10:9a-10b.
- 13 Waley, pp. 186 and 130, and Aoki Masaru, *Shina bungaku shisushi* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1948), pp. 36-37.
- 14 See David Schaberg, “Calming the Heart: The Use of *Shijing* and *Zuozhuan* Narrative,” *Papers on Chinese Literature* 1 (Cambridge, 1993): 1-20.
- 15 Kang-i Sun Chang, *The Evolution of Chinese Tz’u Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 12-13.
- 16 Ichiko Teiji, ed., *Nihon bungaku zenshi*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Gakutosha, 1978), pp. 170, 168. For the translation of songs from early chronicles see Edwin A. Cranston, *A Waka Anthology*, vol. 1: *The Gem-Glistening Cup* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1993).

- 17 Paul Zumthor, *Oral Poetry: An Introduction*, p. 5.
- 18 Ichiko, p. 203.
- 19 Ibid, p. 397.
- 20 Konishi Jin'ichi, *A History of Japanese Literaturh*, vol. 1: *The Archaic and Ancient Ages* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984), p. 211.
- 21 Konishi, p. 287.
- 22 Konishi, p. 291.
- 23 Helen C. McCullough, *Kokin Wakashu* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1985), p. 3.
- 24 Konishi, *A History of Japanese Literature*, vol. 2: *The Early Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1986), p. 142.
- 25 Konishi 2: 108-109, 214-215.
- 26 H. Mark Horton, "Renga Unbound: Performative Aspects of Japanese Linked Verse," *Harvara Journal of Asiatic Studies* 53:2 (1993), 443-512, esp. 448.
- 27 Horton, p. 469.
- 28 Gary L. Ebersole, "The Buddhist Ritual Use of Linked Poetry in Medieval Japan," *The Eastern Buddhist*, n.s. 16:2 (1983):50-71.
- 29 *San-kuo chih* (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü 1959; abbreviated as *SKC*) 30:841; *Hou Han shu* (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü 1963; abbreviated as *HHS*) 85: 2811.
- 30 *SKC* 30:844; *HHS* 85:2812.
- 31 *SKC* 30:849.
- 32 *SKC* 30:852; *HHS* 85:2819.
- 33 *SKC* 30:853.
- 34 *HHS* 85:2819.
- 35 Iryŏn, *Samguk yusa* (Ch'oe Namsŏn ed.; Seoul: Minjung sŏgwan, 1954; abbreviated as *SGYS*) 2:109.
- 36 *SGYS* 2:79.
- 37 *SGYS* 1:46.
- 38 *SGYS* 2:98 (唱); 2:228 (歌); 5:222 (賦).
- 39 Barbara Rush, "The Other Side of Culture in Medieval Japan," *Cambridge History of Japan*, 3: Medieval Japan, ed. Kozo Yamamura (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 500-543.
- 40 Zumthor, p. 127.
- 41 Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977), p. 28.