

Sonic Constructions of Traditional/National Music in South and North Korea: Exploring Film Soundtracks

남북의 전통음악과 민족음악 소리의 구성 탐구: 영화 사운드트랙을 중심으로

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This article contributes to musicology, cultural studies, and inter-Korean scholarship, within the global Korean Studies community. The soundscapes of place in the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) are constructions (Howard 2020, after Handler and Linnekin 1984). What we hear and see today is the legacy of a divided peninsula, as two states moved apart in the post-Korean War (1950–1953) period. This paper looks at the relatively neglected area of film music to explore consonance and dissonance with elements of tradition in the soundtracks of films. First, to discuss how perspectives of *kugak* or *minjok ūmak* – the first the accepted South Korean term for “Korean traditional music” and the second prescribing “national music” in North Korea – developed and shifted, I look at two early post-liberation films, the South Korean *Yangsando* (Yongsan Province, 1955) directed by Kim Kiyŏng (1919–1998), and *Moranbong*, “*Chronique coréenne*” (Moran Hill, Korean Chronicle, 1959), the sole Franco-North Korean co-production to date, with a screenplay by Armand Gatti (1924–2017). Both soundtracks challenge the dominant understandings of *kugak* and *minjok ūmak*, both incorporating the genres of *p’ansori/ch’anggŭk* and *sanjo* and featuring important, almost legendary Korean traditional musicians – Chŏng Namhŭi (1905–1984), Pak Ch’owŏl (1917–1983), Kim Yundŏk (1918–1978), and Sŏng Kyŏngnin (1911–2008). Second, I consider how the “national folksong,” *Arirang*, has been co-opted into films in both states, exploring the distinct and contrasting ways in which it is used. I will briefly return to the silent film era and reconsider Na Un’gyu’s lost movie, *Arirang* (1926) through the narrated recording by Sŏng Tongho and Kang Sŏgyŏn released around 1930 on Regal Records. Then, I zoom in on three recent films, the South Korean *D-War* (2007) directed by Shim Hyŏngnae (b.1958) and *Arirang* (2011) directed by Kim Kidŏk (1960–2020), and the Chinese-North Korean co-production *Meet in Pyongyang* (2012) co-directed by Xierzhati Yahefu and Kim Hyŏngch’ŏl.