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Lyrical Reinventions: Negotiating Koreanness through Song

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This paper demonstrates how a group of young people explore their ethnic identities through traditional musical forms and how they embrace and transform one folk song, *Jindo Arirang*, to create a Korean American identity. Ethnic identity formation is a process that is very much dependent on cultural practices that are inscribed by notions of heritage and of tradition. By looking at how a traditional folk song is adopted and adapted, this paper demonstrates mutability of language where Korean and English are mixed in song lyrics to form new expressions that create in-group boundaries. The use of folk songs will also show how cultural competence and identities are expressed through shared experiences in the oral tradition of song.

Introduction

Ethnic identity formation is a process that is very much dependent on cultural practices that are inscribed by notions of heritage and of tradition. Often, the family is the milieu in which ethnic identities are co-constructed and negotiated through rites, customs, languages, and histories that exemplify the in-group boundaries of ethnicity. Observing and celebrating specific holidays, learning and speaking parents' language(s), identifying and feeling proud of historical figures, practicing rites, and so on are all example of how cultural practices figure in ethnic identity formation. Beyond the family, venues such as language schools, college student groups like Korean student associations, museums, cultural camps, and cultural troupes provide similar environments in which knowledge, experiences, and practices of ethnic heritage are taught, learned, and shared.

As anthropologists have demonstrated, many ethnic and cultural heritage practices are transmitted from generation to generation through oral traditions such as music, song, and storytelling (Geertz 1973; Levi-Strauss 1966; Malinowski 1961; Mead 1928). These earlier Eurocentric studies dubbed such methods of transmission "primitive," but even after codification of many traditional customs, rites, and practices (not always by the bearers of these traditions and often by anthropologists and colonists) these traditions persisted. Today, there is a marketplace for

these oral traditions in which young people can pick and choose the contexts for learning these traditions as well as the particular aspects of tradition in which they engage themselves.

This paper will demonstrate how a group of young people explore their ethnic identities through traditional musical forms and how they embrace and transform one folk song, *Jindo Arirang*, to create a Korean American identity. These young people are members of a Korean cultural troupe called *Mae-ari* that specializes in *poongmul*,[1] traditional Korean farm music. Singing folk songs is an integral aspect of *poongmul* and often performed as part of the repertoire of the cultural troupe. *Jindo Arirang* is one of the first folk songs that *Mae-ari* learned together as a group and has become a major part of the troupe's repertoire and, as we will see below, a key element in performing Koreanness and creating their identities as Koreans in the United States. This study emerges from a three-year ethnographic study with the cultural troupe.

This paper contributes to the understanding of language as an important aspect of ethnic identity formation. Sociolinguists (Auer 1998; Fishman 1989; Rampton 1995, 1998) have shown the close relationship between heritage language maintenance and ethnic identity formation. A wide use of language mixing, code-switching, and bilingualism has been attributed to the internalization of language as a way of expressing one's ethnic identity. Through an ethnographic study, this paper seeks to show how language and culture is taught, learned, and expressed in everyday contexts to perform one's ethnic identity. Also, it will attempt to show the mutability of language where Korean and English are mixed in song lyrics to form new expressions by the members of the cultural troupe to create in-group boundaries and to demonstrate how cultural competence is expressed through shared experiences in the oral tradition of song.

Theoretical Framework

Ethnic identity formation of Korean American youth is a timely and salient topic in Asian American Studies. Although the centennial of Korean immigration was celebrated in 2003, most Koreans immigrated to the United States after the Immigration Act of 1965. In addressing the issue of language learning, especially of second generation Korean Americans, researchers have paid some attention to traditional academic settings, such as college language classes, Saturday schools, church schools, after-school programs, etc. Little attention has been given to how language learned within these contexts are used and transformed in other settings.

Moreover, the above-mentioned programs not only teach language and literacy, but in the process of teaching the language, issues of culture,

[1] Korean folk art that involves drumming, singing, and dancing. The history of *poongmul* is not well-documented, but it is considered to be about 2000 years old and originated from farm musical traditions that were performed during festivals and harvest.

traditions, and customs are taught and learned as well. For instance, one way of learning language is through learning and singing traditional folk songs. In learning the song, one not only says the words, but one learns the meaning of the words, the implications of the lyrics, the contexts in which these songs were sung, and also how they relate to their heritage culture. The song becomes the vehicle by which language and culture are taught and learned, and the use of the song outside of the pedagogical context becomes the expression by which young people perform their ethnic identity and Koreanness.

Current studies on ethnic identity formation of Asian Americans, and Korean Americans in particular, have followed two trajectories: immigration studies (Kibria 2002; I. Kim 1981; Portes & Rumbaut 1996) and educational research with special focus on the model minority myth (E. Kim 2002; Kim & Rohner 2002; Lee 1996). While both kinds of research trajectories have included ethnic identity formation as a component of the research, the process of ethnic identity formation itself has been the domain of the humanities. In other words, the role that ethnicity, as an analytical category, plays in immigrant and immigration issues and in academic achievement have been widely discussed, but the ways in which ethnic identity is formed have rarely garnered center stage in social science research.

The above theoretical considerations about ethnic identity formation point to the need to reassess the ways in which ethnicity and ethnic identity formation has been deployed by Asian American Studies. Ethnic studies have often been plagued by primoridalism (Barth 1969; Geertz 1963) that fixes ethnicity as biological and lineal. While birth is one way of claiming heritage, I propose that the performance and expression of ethnicity are the acts that confer viability to the claims of ethnic heritage. In other words, I propose that it is not enough to claim ethnicity by virtue of birth, especially in diaspora where multiple influences intersect to form one's identity; it is necessary to outwardly demonstrate knowledge in and familiarity of the markers of ethnic heritage. These markers of ethnic heritage, or what I will call "Koreanness," is tacitly taught and learned in settings that have concentrations of Koreans, such as the family unit, that participate in activities that marks ethnic heritage to keep alive a sense of ethnic and cultural affiliation with Korea and its customs. In the absence of communities such as these to learn Koreanness, ancillary organizations are formed to take over the role of teaching those who desire to learn "how to be Korean." These organizations take many forms: museums, ethnic clubs, performing arts groups, cultural camps, language schools, libraries, churches, and enclaves. While the settings provide different services and interpretations of Koreanness, the one common element is that there is an underlying notion that ethnic identity can be taught and learned in both formal and informal educational settings.

Sociolinguists have investigated this phenomenon by looking at children's language use in bilingual classrooms (Shin 2005) or among co-ethnic peers (Rampton 1995) or in larger studies that encompass multiple sites of language use (Zentella 1997). Not surprisingly, Shin, Rampton, Zentella, and others have found that young people who grow up in bilingual settings use a variety of strategies to delineate boundaries, create connections, and express their identity as ethnics. In the context of the United States where English is the language of power, young people who grow up speaking their heritage language at home end up having to learn English when they enroll in school. Often, as in the case with the 1.5 generation and second generation Korean Americans, many parents encourage their children not to maintain Korean in the hopes that they will be able to assimilate better into the mainstream, English-speaking society (Danico 2004; Kim & Yu 1996; Shin 2005). In looking at ethnically diverse cities like Los Angeles, Lopez (1996) found that compared to Latinos, Asian Americans experience a rapid intergenerational language shift to English monolingualism.

The above sociolinguistic studies on multiple language use focus especially code-switching, or other variations of language mixing, such as code-mixing and code-alternating in everyday settings, or even language shift to monolingualism. The primary context in which the participants of these studies teach, learn, and use language is their immediate families and friends. This study adds another dimension by looking at young adults as they learn both language and traditional music and express both in everyday life.

Finally, young people engaged with ethnic cultural production create a "third space" (Bhabha 1990) where new interpretations of ethnic identities, cultural heritage, cultural expressions, and performances are formed. *Poongmul* as played in the United States is a decontextualized folk art form that has been uprooted from its place of origin, the Korean countryside, and adopted by some young people of Korean descent who reside in the United States as a way of engaging with their ethnic cultural heritage. Similar to the way that *bhangra* music has found a following among second generation South Asian Americans (Maira 2002) and British Sikh youth in Leeds (Hall 2002), *poongmul* has become a way of expressing a link with the "ancestral home." Keeping in mind that multiple cultural and social influences affect youth identity formation, the "third space" created by Korean youth engaged in *poongmul* in the United States is a constant negotiation to find the relevance and meaning of Korean farm music in urban American settings and in how understand themselves in relation to this juxtaposition.

Arirang and Korean Identity

Arirang is often evoked as the national song of Korea (S. Kim 1988; Y. Kim 1988; McCann 1979; Yi 1988). Unlike the national anthem, which was composed during the Japanese occupation in a Western, symphonic style as a way of asserting Korea's independence, *Arirang* finds its roots in agricultural culture and folk traditions. The exact origin of the song is not known, although numerous scholars have conjectured as to the meaning of the word *Arirang*.

Even without a clear history, most Koreans and scholars of *Arirang* agree that the song reflects Korean identity. As David McCann (1979) writes:

> "Arirang" is the national folksong of Korea. Like "Yankee Doodle," "Arirang" both expresses and symbolizes a national spirit. Distinct in kind from national anthems, or such American songs as "America" or "Hail Columbia," which were written by identifiable authors to affirm or express national identity in terms of existing symbols—amber waves, spacious skies, and so on—"Arirang" and "Yankee Doodle" both became national symbols through a process of transformation in which quite unassuming elements took on an order of symbolic representation of the national character. (McCann 1979: 43)

Unlike Yankee Doodle, however, *Arirang* is sang in a variety of occasions, especially communal events like farming, drinking, rites, birthdays, and so on. *Arirang* also has regional variations and literally hundreds of known verses. There is no equivalent English translation for *Arirang*, or even a meaning in Korean. However, it is generally recognized as a song of heartbreak that contains *han* (deep set hatred, lament, and grief that cannot be resolved). *Han* is believed to be shared by all people of Korean descent, in Korea and in diaspora (E. Kim 1999; S. Kim1988).

Jindo Arirang, one type of *Arirang*, is from the Jindo region of Korea which is in the Southwest corner of Jeolla Namdo Province and it is believed to be about a love triangle. According to legend, a young man from a small village in Jindo left his betrothed before their wedding day, and became a servant in a nobleman's household. He and the nobleman's beautiful young daughter fell in love, but when her parents found out, he had to flee with her back to his village. His parents were excited that their daughter-in-law was of high social class. His betrothed had waited all these years, and on seeing him return with a new bride, she began singing the teary song that is *Jindo Arirang*.

Although the lyrics are sad, the tempo itself is a lively, fast beat rhythm conducive to dancing. Much like the American blues, the song is structured in a call-and-answer pattern. One person sings the main lyrics, or the call, and the entire group joins in the chorus, or the response. There are two variations in the melody line and they usually alternate, although this is not strictly applied. Below is the structure of *Jindo Arirang*:

Chorus: *Ari- Arirang, Sseuri-Sseurirang Arariga na-at nae-e-e-e*
Arirang, Eung-ng-ng, Arariga natne

Melody: *Moongyung sejeneun wen go-o-genga*
Gubuya-a gubugubuya noonmul iroguna

The chorus part cannot be translated or explained in Korean. In jazz musical lingo, it is somewhat equivalent to scatting, although unlike scatting that imitates musical notes, *Arirang* embodies profound emotion. The second line can be loosely translated as follows:

> Moongyung Seje [name of a mountain] is such a hard hill to climb
> Tears are falling down my face [Gubuya-a gubugubuya suggests the movement of the tears bending down the face]

Also, in the tradition of singing *Jindo Arirang*, participants are encouraged to ad-lib their own lyrics. During festive occasions like Lunar New Year celebrations singers often make up lyrics that are relevant to the event or to the participants present. Therefore, while *han* may not necessarily be part of the theme, the important factor is that the lyrics are about shared culture, experiences, and friendship.

Methods

Data Collection

As a participant observer in this three-year ethnographic study, I have been able to experience and document how the troupe members of *Mae-ari* mobilize around Korean folk music and performances to make sense of their identity as Koreans. In fact, one of the mission statements of the group is to "re-discover our identities and our roots as Koreans in America" through engagement with folk music and traditions.

The data were collected using ethnographic methods, such as field notes, interviews, open-ended questionnaires, videotaping, artifact collection, and participant observation. The data for this paper were collected primarily from field notes, emails, questionnaires, interviews, as well as some personal communications. The video footage of the members singing a Korean folk song, *Jindo Arirang*, was taken at a farewell party. The video footage was later transcribed and shared with the participants for their reactions and input on their (impromptu) performance. Other instances of singing and language mixture were used to show that while the performance at the party was singular in some ways, it was not an unusual form of communication for the members of *Mae-ari*.

Setting and Participants

In this paper, I look at a cultural troupe called *Mae-ari* that plays *poongmul* music. The troupe is based in a large urban city in the East Coast of the United States. *Mae-ari* consists of 6 to 8 core members and 4 to 6 practicing members whose ages range from 18 to 34. All the members joined

the cultural troupe on their own volition, that is, the members are participating by choice and not because it is part of a required course at college or their parents made them attend. Skill levels on the instruments vary widely, depending of previous musical experience, previous *poongmul* experience, and length of time spent in the group. Finally, the immigration and citizenship status of the members run the gamut of non-immigrant student visa holders, to green card holders, to 1.5 generation and second generation Korean Americans. One member is an adoptee, and another is "mixed [his definition]."

Korean and English language competence vary widely as well. Some members were born in Korea and speak Korean as their first language. Some members were born in the United States, and while Korean is not their first language, they had some experience studying Korean language in schools either when they were young or when they went to college. Although second generation members are not fluent in Korean, they understand most day-to-day conversational Korean. Others do not understand Korean at all, but may know a few words learned in summer cultural camps, Korean-speaking friends or family members, or other settings in which they met Korean speakers.

Teaching and Learning Jindo Arirang

The first time I learned *Jindo Arirang* was when I was about ten years old. My mother taught in a Saturday Korean school where I attended for six years. As part of the curriculum she taught Korean folk songs. She played audio recordings of Korean folk songs from time to time, and even had musical scores so that I could learn the tune on the piano. While I knew that there were numerous lyrics to each variation of *Arirang*, including *Jindo Arirang*, I had not known that singers could compose or ad-lib their own lyrics. Therefore, although I was familiar with some Korean folk song traditions, I learned some new aspects of my cultural heritage when I joined *Mae- ari* in October 2001. Composing or ad-libbing personal lyrics later proved to be an important part of creating in-group boundaries as well as co-creating and affirming Koreanness as part of our identities.

As part of the beginners' class curriculum, we learned some basic *poongmul* rhythms, history of Korea, history of *poongmul*, and Korean culture in relation to Shamanism, which were all integral to the mission of the group of "re-discover[ing] our identities and our roots as Koreans in America." The first time folk songs were introduced to the curriculum was when we started preparing for the Korean Lunar New Year's celebration.

Since *poongmul* is an ancient form of Korean farm music all the rhythms and instruments have Korean names. The musical instruction itself is not in Korean, since there are equivalent translations of musical lingo in English. However, the leader of the group, Scott, often included

Korean nouns in his instruction. For instance, he would say: "We are going to learn a new *garak* today" instead of "We are going to learn a new *rhythm* today." This kind of code-switching occurred quite often during instruction, performances, and even during interaction among the group members. Due to the frequency of code-switching, even the group members who spoke no Korean eventually were able to understand and use these specialized words, at least in the context of learning and playing *poongmul*.

With varying competences in language, the troupe's learning of *Jindo Arirang* provided some challenges for the members who did not know much Korean. Scott himself is a second generation Korean American who is much more fluent in English than in Korean. While his comprehension of Korean is quite good, his vocabulary and grammar in Korean is not as good as that of his first generation Korean American wife, Yuna. He prefers to speak English in most social settings, and he does not like to speak Korean addressing large audiences. Teaching Korean folk songs in this context may not have been easy for Scott and learning Korean folk songs without understanding the language may not have been easy for those who had no context for understanding the meanings and significance of the song's lyrics.

To teach the song, Scott painstakingly wrote out the Korean lyrics phonetically. This was necessary because although some of the members spoke a little Korean they were not familiar with reading the Korean alphabet. He also spent a lot of time, at times with help from his wife, translating each word and line, explaining their meanings, and talking about the history and significance of the song. Initial forays into learning the song mostly involved imitating the sounds of the words followed by an explanation of what was just sounded.

After teaching us *Jindo Arirang* for about three weeks, Scott assessed that we should be able to compose our own lyrics to the song in English or Korean. It did not matter, however, as none of us really felt comfortable creating our own lyrics. We did not express our trepidation during class, but the new members talked amongst ourselves after practice about how we felt about the making the leap from learning a new song (at least for some) to making up our own lyrics.

There were several reasons for our reluctance. In my case, the difficulty was composing lyrics to fit the rhythm. Also, since I am bilingual, I faced the dilemma of deciding whether to compose the lyrics in Korean or English. Should I use Korea for the sake of authenticity to the history of the song, or should I use English so that even those who did not speak Korean could understand what I was saying? For some, the difficulty was in the language. We had learned *Jindo Arirang* phonetically in Korean. Korean competency for many of the group members was enough to understand simple conversations but not enough to fully translate the implied meanings of the lyrics. Without fully understanding the implications of the song, many members felt uncomfortable making up lyrics. Finally, there was a degree of self-consciousness of publicly performing and sharing one's own compositions. During practices, Yuna kept broaching the topic about creating lyrics but our own lyrics never materialized. In fact, for that year's Lunar New Year celebration, Yuna was the only one who ended up composing new lyrics.

Jindo Arirang and Audience Participation

In April of that year, we were invited to perform in a public panel commemorating the tenth anniversary of the L.A. Riots. At that time, Yuna wrote out a short description of *Arirang* and lyrics to *Jindo Arirang* and distributed it to the participants in the hopes that the audience would participate in singing the song and also composing their own lyrics. The audience was racially diverse, although most of them were from the local progressive activist community. One or two audience members who did not belong to *Mae-ari* were Koreans while about half the audience was Asian American. Many of the audience members had seen previous performances by *Mae-ari* and knew our repertoire and heard the song before. In spite of Yuna's best efforts, what ended up happening instead was that the audience participated by dancing and "giving shout-outs" about racial harmony. Subsequent attempts to engage audience participation in composing their own lyrics failed and eventually, we gave up on the idea.

The turning point was in the 2004 Lunar New Year's celebration. The owner of one of the restaurants that we visited made up some verses in Korean to *Jindo Arirang*, while *Mae-ari* played the rhythm on the drum and sang the chorus. She sang several verses about how she wanted the coming year to be prosperous for her business and for all of us, and how her husband was good to her. As she sang, we cheered her on, drinking the rice wine she provided for us, and joining her in singing the chorus. This was the first example that the members of *Mae-ari* saw of someone who was not part of the troupe knowing the song and composing lyrics to verbalize her wish and her story. It was also the first real life example of "how it is supposed to be done" that Scott and Yuna described about ad- libbing verses during out practice sessions.

Making Jindo Arirang Our Song

The Tuesday after the 2004 Lunar New Year's celebration, we had a dinner in Chinatown to celebrate a successful event and also to say goodbye to one of the members, Dee, who was leaving for China to teach English for several months. After dinner at the restaurant, we gave Dee a few gifts and wished her well. Mina then took out a notebook and started singing *Jindo Arirang* with made-up verses about Dee, especially about drinking with her. She sang two verses and we joined in the chorus and clapped, drawing some curious glances from our neighboring tables. The lyrics were a mixture of Korean and English. Then Wonseok announced

that he had one and he composed a verse on the spot in Korean. His verse was about Dee's penchant for turning red and singing when she had too much to drink. Later that evening, Dee text messaged Mina with thanks and wrote an email to the group listserv entitled "thank you habnida [*habnida* is usually added at the end of sentences to indicate the honorific]" and addressed it to "Sarang-ha-neun *Mae-ari* (and friends) eh-geh [translated: To my dear *Mae-ari* (and friends)]" In it, she also translated Wonseok's verse from Korean to English:

> When you have one drink (han jang)
> Your face is on fire,
> When you have one drink (han jang)
> Ni~ naaaaa~ nooooohhhhhhh~[2]
> Hmmm. That sounded a helluva lot funnier in Korean!

Code-switching in the text message and email was done with humor rather than out of necessity, since Dee could have just written the entire message in English and everyone would have been able to understand her. Her decision to translate Wonseok's Korean lyrics was done on in the same spirit. Dee's text message and email use of code-switching has a dual purpose. On one hand, she code-switches for the sake of humor, as we are wont to do when we hang out together for practices, performances, and socializing, and to show her appreciation for the impromptu serenade. On the other hand, by using this particular method of expression to show her appreciation, she is creating an in-group boundary, so that only the people present at the dinner and hence privy to the context and people who are familiar with *Jindo Arirang* are able to appreciate the joke. Her ending comment, "Hmmm. That sounded a helluva lot funnier in Korean!" also indicates Dee's Korean language competency. Dee is a second generation Korean American who understands Korean a lot better than she can speak it and very rarely speaks in Korean. By translating the verse, she demonstrated that she comprehended the contents of his lyrics although she is unable to actually repeat the lyrics in Korean in the way Wonseok said them. Moreover, Dee made an error in translation. She wrote in the email that "one drink" was "(*han jang*)" but the accurate translation would have been "*han jan*" since "*han jang*" means "one page." This further reveals that while Dee was competent enough in Korean to understand simple communication, she may not be sensitive to subtle pronunciations that could change the meanings of words.

That Saturday, Mina, Miyoung, Wonseok, Won, Mark, and I went to a farewell party at Hyuncheol's friend's house, because he was leaving for Korea at the end of the week. When we arrived, the party was in full swing; everyone was drinking white zinfandel, beer, and cider, and eating pizza that was going cold. We drank, ate, chatted, and got to know

[2] *Ninano* is a Korean folk song. The word has no meaning.

some of Hyuncheol's friends outside of *Mae-ari*. Hyuncheol's friend, who was hosting the party, and his roommates were all White, and many of the invited guests were White as well. About half the people at the party were of Asian descent, and as we got acquainted with them we also found out that most of them were of Korean descent.

As the evening wore on, the members of *Mae-ari* migrated into the kitchen away from the other guests. I was sitting at the bar chatting with Mark and Dee, while Wonseok and Mina joshed with each other. Wonseok and Dee started singing *Ninano*, a folk song that Dee has a penchant for singing when she is drunk. This prompted us to talk about Tuesday night and Mina's and Wonseok's performances at the restaurant. Mina started singing the chorus to *Jindo Arirang* and dancing. Dee had composed a verse for Hyuncheol, much in the same way Mina and Wonseok made tribute to her on Tuesday, but she could not remember. While Dee was trying to remember, Mina sang:

> I am Dee and I forgot today's verses
> Ari-arirang sseuri-sseurirang arariga natne

Dee then remembered what she was going to say, and after a few false starts in attempting to sing, muttering "I need to write this down," she talked them out:

> When you go to Korea chicks are off the heazy
> Don't bother going to Japan girls there are too easy

Wonseok, Dee, Mina, and I started singing the chorus, and Won joined in as well. Mark, who was familiar with the song but did not know the lyrics, watched us as we sang, danced, drank, and clapped. Dee pointed to Wonseok and asked him to sing the verse he sang on Tuesday; Wonseok was happy to comply:

> Hanjan meokeumyun eolgool-ae boolna
> Hanjan deo meokeumyun nina-a-no
> [When you drink one glass your face is on fire
> When you drink one more glass [you sing] nina-a-no]

This prompted another verse from Mina that was unintelligible. Hyuncheol came in, and Dee repeated the verse she had made up for him. Hyuncheol clapped and sang the chorus with us. Two of his other Korean friends walked through the kitchen to the back porch where the beer was but did not join in the festivities. In fact, they were crouching as if to dodge bullets. All the *poongmulpae* members at the party were in the kitchen now singing at the top of our voices. Mina followed with two other verses with the rest of us joining in the chorus:

Mina: Don't know why they will be so much more easy
Miyoung thought that you'll be thrown off the heazy
All: Ari-arirang Sseuri-sseurirang arariga natne-e-e-e
Arirang Eung-ng-ng arariga natne
Mina: Cause you look like off the Seinfeld Kramer
You are better than all of them cause you are not lamer
All: Ari-arirang Sseuri-sseurirang arariga natne-e-e-e
Arirang Eung-ng-ng arariga natne

Wonseok added a verse in Korean addressed to Hyuncheol about going to Korea, but he burst out laughing before he could finish. That did not stop the chorus from coming in raucously. Miyoung, who had written her verse on a piece of paper, sang:

Hyuncheol you are going to the homeland
Careful of all the *ajoomah*[3] and their *pama*[4]

After singing the chorus, dancing and clapping, Mina started to vocalize the rhythm of the small gong, the lead instrument in *poongmul*, to the beat of *Jindo Arirang*. Won joined in with the vocalization of the barrel drum that was the rhythm section, and was soon joined in by the others who vocalized melody section of the hourglass drum, with Wonseok vocalizing the large gong that indicated the beginning of each rhythmic phrase. The members of *Mae-ari* vocally recreated the orchestrated rhythms of *poongmul* music through their voices, just like we supported the restaurant owner while she sang her made-up verses of *Jindo Arirang* just the week before.

Expressing Koreanness through Jindo Arirang

The versions of *Jindo Arirang* that were made up by Mina, Wonseok, Dee, and Miyoung do not reflect the *han* that is typical of traditional *Arirangs*, but maintains some aspects of the conventions, like ad-libbing verses that create a narrative in context and maintaining the general melody and structure. What is clearly apparent, however, is that in this group of performers, who play *poongmul* and have learned this folk song together, singing *Jindo Arirang* and ending with a vocalized *poongmul* rhythm represents a final tribute performance for the departing members by evoking a shared experience.

What is poignant about these performances is that while *Jindo Arirang* is indeed a shared experience, it also indexes Koreanness and a common heritage that, in some ways, supercede experience alone and is rooted more deeply in Korean identity. Elaine Kim (1999) calls this *han*. While

[3] *Ajoomah* means "auntie" in Korean and it is often used to addressed middle-aged married women.
[4] *Pama* means "permanent curls" and it is derived from the English word "permanent." Pama is the stereotypical hairstyle of middle-aged women in Korea.

these particular contexts were festive and fun, the intangible bond of identification, in my opinion, drew the group to offer *Jindo Arirang* as a tribute. The members were drawn together by their desire to learn *poongmul*, but also to learn something that cannot be mistaken as anything other than Korean.

The members of *Mae-ari* have diverse interests in music, ranging from death metal to hip hop to classical composition. Almost all of us have had some degree of musical training, especially in playing instruments like the piano, violin, or saxophone. Familiarity with music may have attracted us to learn *poongmul*, but the engagement with music that is Korean, and not of any other culture, was the primary impetus for the members. Unlike some other *poongmul* groups, *Mae-ari* only recruits people of Korean descent to join the group to create an environment where people of Korean descent can explore their own heritage and history. Outside of practice, members socialize in a variety of ways, like drinking coffee, going to movies, and attending parties. Often in social contexts where the majority of the people present are members of *Mae-ari*, members plan to do "Korean" activities, like going to a Korean-owned bar, or playing Korean snooker, or drinking Korean liquor, or watching Korean movies. Therefore, in possible reasons for singing *Jindo Arirang* in public are to index common interest as well as affirm common heritage.

The issue of ownership of Korean culture is a contentious one. In the monthly meeting in January 2004, there was a long discussion among the members regarding people who are not of Korean descent playing *poongmul*, in this particular case, at the Lunar New Year's celebration. Opinions were split on this: some members expressed their concern about "others" co-opting Korean traditions, while some argued that part of making non-Koreans aware of Korean culture was educating them about it through activities like *poongmul*.

The split in opinions regarding who should and should not play *poongmul* is circumscribed by past experiences with race and ethnicity as well as individuals' thoughts on how best to learn about "our" culture and educate "others" about it. All group members describe themselves as Korean, in one way or another. Hyuncheol describes himself as "mixed": his father is Korean and his mother is white. He writes

> Growing up mixed, when I was with my mother, who is white, I thought of myself as 'American', when with my Korean father I thought of myself as Korean. Now, however, I am used to being thought of as Asian in a group of white peers and as white in a group of Asian peers. I have settled on identifying myself as mixed, though if forced to choose I would identify myself as Korean. (Questionnaire, February 16, 2004)

In this group, however, Hyuncheol can explore his Koreanness with other young people of Korean descent through learning *poongmul*. Even

though he considers himself "mixed," and even "white" among Asians, while he is part of *Mae-ari* he can identify himself as Korean and in turn be identified by others as Korean.

The interchangeability of English and Korean in singing *Jindo Arirang* demonstrates the hybridization of the folk song in its vocal production. In other words, the traditional Korean folk song that is *Jindo Arirang* has been morphed into a Korean American folk song through the use of both English and Korean in the lyrics. Dee, Miyoung, and Mina are second generation Korean Americans with limited Korean language fluency. Although they understand Korean, they prefer to communicate in English. Wonseok, on the other hand, who is an international student from Korea is just now becoming conversant in English, and is most comfortable with Korean. When they compose their own verses in the language of their choice, the members show that they internalized the song and transformed it. Miyoung, who now uses a lot more Korean on a regular basis due to her work in a Korean American non-profit organization, includes some Korean words in her verse with words like *ajoomah* and *pama*. The words were understood by the participants, but even more importantly, the cultural references are understood as well. Typically, *ajoomahs* who have *pamas* are middle class or working class women. Certain characteristics are attributed as well, such as nagging, asking young people when they are going to get married, trying to match-make, and so on. Therefore, following the other verses about Hyuncheol's potential luck with women in Korea, Miyoung is implying that he also needs to watch out for middle-aged Korean women trying to match him up with single young women.

Perhaps the stronger indicator that *Jindo Arirang* has become an integral part of our identities is the use of slang in the lyrics. Dee, Mina, Miyoung, Won, and Hyuncheol grew up in urban areas and are very much influenced by urban culture. They listen to hip-hop, watch music videos, keep up with current urban trends including attire and dance moves. I have lived in Philadelphia for over ten years, and while slang is not usually in my own language use, I understand what most phrases and words mean, how to use them appropriately, and some of their origins. Wonseok, who has been in the United States for just over a year, is learning how to speak slang from other group members, but mostly Mina. Hip-hop lingo is part of daily conversations, and the phrase "off the heazy" is often used to describe something or someone that is "great" or "awesome." Therefore, when Dee sang "[Korean] chicks are off the heazy" the implications are clear to those present.

An interesting aspect of Dee's verse is the contrast she creates between Korean women and Japanese women, especially in playing with the stereotype by Koreans that Japanese women are loose. Attitudes towards Japan and Japanese culture and people are not always favorable in this group. For instance, Yuna says she spells Korea as "Corea" because she

had learned that the spelling was changed during the Japanese occupation so that in the English alphabet Korea would come after Japan. Also, certain words are often corrected, because they are Japanicized words. For example, when I was growing up, sweet radish pickles were called *dakkwang*, or daikon. I have been corrected and told to say *danmooji*, which is "sweet radish pickles" in Korean.

Finally, Mina's last verse:

> Cause you look like off the Seinfeld Kramer
> You are better than all of them cause you are not lamer

was composed in reference to Hyuncheol's hair which was curly and high and looked a lot like the hairstyle made famous my Cosmo Kramer of the hit sitcom, *Seinfeld*. This reference to an iconic popular cultural show of the 1990's presupposes that the participants understand and share a common popular cultural reference point. Just like the use of urban slang, using a popular cultural reference point shows that cultural indices that are part of daily repertoire are emerging in this performance of *Jindo Arirang*. I would argue that the melding of these cultural references demonstrates transformed ethnic identities that bring together Korean and American cultures.

Expressing and Affirming Koreanness through Traditional Music

While all the members in the group point to biology as one indicator of the fact that they describe themselves as "Korean" as opposed any other ethnicity, the cultural practices that are recognizable and recognized as of Korean ethnicity secures the authenticity of ethnic identity. In this case, identity is manifested in singing a folk song. This assumes that identity is changeable, and that there is a process to "becoming" ethnic. These songs and rhythms are not part of everyday life, at least not consciously, for most people in Korea much less in the United States. Popular culture, such as hip-hop culture, television, slang, and so on, will more likely influence daily living and interactions than *poongmul* and folk songs. However, when traditional cultural practices are incorporated into social events, like a house party or going out to dinner, I argue that this indicates a transformation of identity that embraces ethnicity. This suggests that identity is changeable and that there is a process to "becoming" ethnic.

Chan E. Park (2001) a scholar and artist of *pansori*, which she describes as "a solo-singer art of story-singing" (Park 2001: 121), adapted her performance to make this traditional Korean story-singing more accessible to English speaking audiences. While maintaining the rhythm she translated the main story line of "The story of Hungbu and Nolbu" into English. As *pansori* is an oral tradition, the power of the music lies in the shared experience of the story with the audience. Hence, by translated parts of

the story into English "The story of Hungbu and Nolbu" travels beyond its traditional Korean border to a more transnational sphere.

In this particular case, the group members created new in-group boundaries while transcending others. By creating English lyrics, they were able to access the essence and mutability of the song that had not been previously available to them due to their lack of facility with Korean. Adding popular cultural images and stereotypes in both Korean and American culture in the lyrics produced the transnationality that Park created in her *pansori*. Much in the same way that Korean resistance movements created lyrics to *Arirang* to unify Koreans against Japanese occupiers, the ways in which Park and other performers of Korean traditional art forms reconfigure language and rhythm in subtle ways to cross national borders, and the ways *Arirang* has been transformed by numerous people over the centuries to establish the status of the national song of Korea, the members of *Mae-ari* found a way of paying tribute to their common experiences as Koreans in the United States and exploring their identities in this context through their own form of *Jindo Arirang*.

Conclusion

This is a preliminary study and analysis of a broader topic exploring how young people mobilize around objects to teach and learn about their Korean heritage, the object here being *Jindo Arirang*. Since the events that I have described here are results of several years of interactions and learning the *poongmul* and folk songs, it is difficult to pinpoint the times or the particular instances of teaching and learning. However, in over the last two and a half years, there has been a transformation in interactions among the members of *Mae-ari* where there are more references to Korea and Korean culture, and an increased incorporation of Korean language in everyday conversations.

The *Jindo Arirang* verses created by some of the members of *Mae-ari* locate these young people within the "third space." The hybrid music that they have created can only be understood if you have competencies in both Korean and English languages, as well as both Korean folk traditions and American popular culture. In expressing Koreanness through lyrical reinventions, these young people have also created a uniquely Korean American identity.

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L2 English Morpheme Acquisition Order: The Lack of Consensus Examined From a Case Study of Four L1 Chinese Pre-School Boys

Melisma Cox

General consensus seems to exist about the L1 English morpheme acquisition order among native speakers. Conversely the same kind of concurrence is not found for L2 English morpheme acquisition. This may be due to a lack of consistency in the methodology used to measure acquisition. This article examines the morpheme acquisition order of four Chinese-speaking pre-school boys to demonstrate that certain criteria for measuring morpheme acquisition are more illustrative than others. This in turn affects the usefulness of a particular criterion in evaluating morpheme acquisition that affect methodological consistency necessary to make a comparison. By means of this case study, this article highlights methodological inconsistencies among L2 English morpheme studies that inhibit a legitimate comparison. The educational implication is that it is thus more difficult to identify atypicalities in L2 English acquisition to then be able to provide appropriate intervention.

Introduction

Studies show that for L1 English morpheme acquisition order, there is general consensus concerning when learners acquire particular morphemes; however, the same cannot be said for L2 English morpheme acquisition orders. A closer examination of these studies reveals that L1 English researchers employ consistent methodology when measuring acquisition, whereas researchers of L2 English do not necessarily. The review of the literature will divide previous studies into three categories depending on the criteria used to measure morpheme acquisition; the categories will be termed Mastery, Graded and Emergence.

The goal of this article is to consider to what extent methodological inconsistencies contribute to the lack of consensus among L2 English

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