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Western Music in Modern Korea: A Study of Two Women Composers

by

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Abstract

The modernization and globalization of Korea during the fifty years since the end of the Korean War have brought a remarkable development in every sphere of Korean society. The emergence of female composers is one of the most interesting of these. This dissertation will discuss the music of two internationally recognized composers, Unsuk Chin and Jiesun Lim. It will do this through an analysis of one piano piece by each, *12 Piano Etudes* by Unsuk Chin and *Spiritual Dance* by Jiesun Lim. In order to understand these pieces and these women, Korean traditional music, the one hundred year history of Western music in Korea, and the changing role of women in the society will be discussed. Part of the analysis includes the performer's perspective and suggestions on how to approach these pieces.
Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Despite the short history of Western music in Korea and an interruption due to the Korean War, during the past fifty years South Korea has produced a large number of musicians who have had significant international careers. While many of these have been performers, including Kun-Woo Paik (piano), Kyung-Hwa Chung (violin), Myung-Hoon Chung (conductor), Young-Wook Kim (violin), Dong-Suk Kang (violin), and Sarah Chang (violin), in recent years a greater number of composers have emerged. As has happened in many other parts of the world, the current trend toward multiculturalism and interculturalism has created a growing interest in Korean culture and has attracted greater attention to Korean music and composers. Even though the current music situation in Korea has been greatly influenced by this development, it also owes much to the rich and well-established indigenous musical culture that has thrived on many levels throughout the country’s five-thousand year history.

However, despite these individual successes, for the last one hundred years musical culture in Korea has suffered from a long list of negative influences including the dominance of Western music as a consequence of Western imperialism, a contempt for traditional music originating in a distorted interpretation of Korean culture promoted by the colonial policy of the Japanese, the narrow-minded Korean nationalism, and the

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1 For example, Baumann, Director of the International Institute for Comparative Music Studies and Documentation, Berlin, instituted a new book series in 1990 entitled Intercultural Music Studies. Currently five volumes have been published representing themes and approaches that are global and/or comparative. For a more detailed discussion of interculturalism, see Chapter 3, page 34.
ideological conflict and confusion stemming from the division of the nation. Therefore, a large portion of recent musical history in Korea can be described as a conflict between Western music (yangak) and Korean traditional music (kugak). Inspired by rapid economic growth as well as the nationalist movement in the 1960s, a new generation of kugak composers appeared in the 1960s, which challenged and stimulated yangak composers to use elements of Korean traditional music in their compositions. As a result of this influence, some contemporary Korean composers, whether kugak or yangak, are now creating compositions that are neither traditional nor Western. Their attempt to embrace both musical cultures and seek out a new musical language is greatly supported by the public. It is often compared to the musical nationalism of Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

While this kind of music recently has attracted the attention of scholars, it is notable that at the same time another group of yangak composers who are not entirely assimilated into the main stream of interculturalism, Korean women composers have also achieved international recognition. The main purpose of this paper is to draw attention these composers, focusing on Unsuk Chin and Jiesun Lim, and to explain the significance of their international success. I will do this by focusing on a recent work for a solo piano written by each woman, 6 Etudes (2003), by Unsuk Chin and Spiritual Dances (2004), by Jiesun Lim. These two composers are representative of a substantial group who address the current musical trends in Korea. Lim is one of the most important composers living in Korea, recognized as both a composer and a teacher. Chin, who lives in Germany, is an internationally acclaimed composer with a significant presence in

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3 Their activities are intercultural but most of their compositions are solely Western.
Europe. These two women have chosen to focus more on establishing an individual musical language on their own terms, rather than just synthesizing Korean and Western musical elements. They have stated that their music, particularly these piano pieces, does not employ any melodic or rhythmic materials found in traditional Korean music; in fact, in interviews I had with each of them, they indicated that their interest in non-Western music is not limited to Korean traditional music. However, their musical ideas are not completely separated from the world of Korean culture, and elements of Korean music may be heard in their compositions, no matter how much they deny putting them there intentionally. Therefore, it is interesting and meaningful to examine how they have established their own distinctive voices.

Helping to create the success of Chin and Lim are the legacy of pioneering women composers and a social and musical situation that is unique to Korea. Since 1980, one of the most remarkable aspects of composition in Korea has been an increase in both the number and quality of women composers who are working within the context of a traditionally male-dominated society. This increasing number of women composers reflects the traditional Korean concept that the study of music is more appropriate for women than for men. Approximately 70-75% of composition students at the majority of major universities in Korea are female, and about 90% of composers in Korea are women. Particularly in the field of intercultural compositions Korean women composers are more recognized than male composers. This phenomenon is unusual, even in Western countries, and it could not have come about without a change in the role of women in Korean society. The third chapter of this paper will discuss in detail these sociological

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and musical implications as they occur in Korea.

While most of the material in this study came from my research and from my analysis of the compositions themselves, my interviews with the composers were essential. Our personal correspondence provided valuable information, such as the reason why they and many other women composers are more recognized in other countries than they are in Korea, why they both felt that they had to do their graduate studies abroad, and in the case of Chin, why she now lives in Germany. The personal history of each composer, provided in chapter four, also reflects the musical situation of the time in Korea. A comparison of these two Korean women composers born in 1960 and 1961, originally trained in their native country but now living on different continents, will illustrate not only their individual approaches but also the many choices available to Korean composers today.

In chapter five, the analysis and appraisal of these compositions from a pianist’s point of view is intended to illustrate their compositional aspects and technical challenges. A compositional profile of each piece is given, discussing the structure, harmonic language, tempo, tonal relationship, meter changes, level of rhythmic complexity, density of texture, and range of register. Technical challenges are analyzed by giving suggestions of hand positions, phrasing, dynamics, rhythm and tempo, and pedaling. Along with these technical approaches, both an overall and local musical interpretation is added whenever needed. It is my hope that this paper will encourage pianists to explore these intrinsically pianistic works.

In the last chapter, I conclude this thesis by discussing several aspects of the current musical situation and by considering several important directions for the future.
Appendix 1 contains an English translation of the actual transcription of interviews I did with the composers. Appendix 2 provides lists of compositions by each composer. Appendix 3 is the score of *Spiritual Dance*, reprinted with permission of the composer, as are all of the excerpts used in the text. All excerpts from Unsk Chin's *12 Etudes* that appear throughout this study are © 1995 by Boosey and Hawkes Publishers Ltd. and are used with the permission of the publisher.
Chapter 2

A Brief History of Western Music in South Korea

The background of Musical Culture in Korea

Music has played a significant role in the lives of Koreans throughout the five-thousand-year history of the dynastic society. But the struggle between music that is a product of Korea’s own society and religion and that of other cultures, at first China, but more recently Japan and then the West, has gone on for nearly that entire time. Even today these same issues are alive and still unsettled. So in order to understand the music of composers like Unsuk Chin and Jiesun Lim, we must begin with a short discussion of Korean traditional music.

The beauty of Korean traditional music is often described as "symmetry of asymmetry" or "balance of unbalance."¹ Traditional Korean music can be classified as belonging to one of two major groups: Jongak or A-ak, music for the ruling class that is often translated as “court music” or “classical music,” and Sogak or Minsogak, “folk music” for the common people.

Today, three types of traditional Korean court music coexist. One is called A-ak and is an imported form of Chinese ritual music; another is an indigenous Korean form called Hyangak; and the last is a combination of Chinese and Korean influences called Tangak. Tangak, meaning "Chinese music," and Buddhist music were imported after 742 from the Tang Dynasty to the Shilla Dynasty in Korea.² These musical styles remained

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¹ This is a common way of speaking about it that I have heard very often since I was young.
² Buddhism was imported into Korea in the fourth century A.D., but documentation of Buddhist music did not appear until the eighth century.
for the ruling class, along with *Hyangak*, a native Korean music.

Ex. 1. Example of Korean *A-ak*\(^1\)

Confucian music, *A-ak*, meaning "elegant music" was introduced in the twelfth century during the Koryo Dynasty and was used for Confucian ceremonies. *A-ak* began its development as modern orchestral court music with the beginning of the Chosun Dynasty (1392-1910). In the Chosun Dynasty, it was played for the entertainment of the royal court as well as for rituals since Confucianism was encouraged during that time. Thus music for the ruling class, *A-ak*, includes both court music and Confucian ritual music.

The most artistic chamber music of the Chosun dynasty was the music heard in

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\(^1\) I provide this through the courtesy of Professor Sang-Jik Chun at Seoul National University.
the gentlemen’s salon. Originally designed for upper-class rulers and to be enjoyed informally, it is often entirely instrumental. It is called Jongak, which means ‘correct music’ - a kind of chamber music. Even though both Tangak and A-ak have a Chinese origin, the musical style of Korean Tangak and A-ak is remote from their Chinese predecessors since they were modified in a Korean way. While Kagok (elaborated lyric song), accompanied by a larger instrumental ensemble, was sung only in the gentlemen’s salons, Kasa (narrative song) and Sijo (three line lyric song) were also performed in the meeting rooms of merchants and craftsmen without instrumental accompaniment.

Music for commoners in Korea includes highly developed art forms as well as simple farmer's songs and lullabies. It particularly bloomed in the second half of the Chosun dynasty and developed to a professional level by middle-class music lovers and certain career musicians from the lower classes. Even though the influence of these professional musicians who spread the regional styles of folk music throughout the country made the geographical distinctions less evident, the styles and types of folk music in the early Chosun dynasty has been an interesting subject for scholars because of its various regional traditions as well as the different contributions made by the individual performers. Thus the nature of folk music in Korea has been appreciated more than Jongak by musicologists and nationalist musicians because of its creativity, professionalism, geographical classifications, and its authentic expression of national identity, in preference to the elite traditions. Nevertheless, it is clear that Korean traditional music is a combination of music made and developed by the Korean people and music that came

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4 This range of musical sophistication still exists today.
from elsewhere.

This type of music includes shaman music, Buddhist music, and folk music. The different kinds of folk music include **Nongak** (farmers’ music using primarily percussion instruments), **Samulnori** (four-man drumming and dancing), and **Minyo** (amateur folk song), and professional folk music including **Pansori**\(^6\) (a very distinctive vocal music in a narrative opera form performed by a solo singer), **Japka** (popular song), and **Sanjo** (virtuoso solo instrumental music either for string or wind accompanied by a drum, **changgu**). Folk music was popular with farmers and often accompanied shamanic rituals that were performed to ensure a good harvest. **Pansori** is believed to have originated from shamanist chants and **Sanjo** was derived from **Pansori** and **Sinawi**\(^7\), an improvisational instrumental ensemble music originally performed to accompany songs and dances in shaman rituals. In particular, professional folk musicians distinctively use the conspicuous alternation of tension and relaxation to express the earthly emotions. In general, music for the upper class is usually described as elegant, correct, profound, and restrained and thus slow, lengthy, and solemn, and it has a complicated melody, while music for the lower class is fast, sentimental, vigorous, and straightforward in its expression of feeling.\(^8\)

According to history, more than 2000 years ago, people in Korea used instruments

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\(^6\) A long song based on dramatic story delivered by a professional singer, accompanied by a drummer. The singer often includes narration and gesture, and uses a fan as a prop.

\(^7\) The music of **sinawi** is often described as “harmonious discord” or “chaotic order” since it is an improvisational and spontaneous ensemble without sounding dissonant.

imported from China along with some native instruments. Both genres of Korean traditional music, upper class music and folk music, include pieces for approximately sixty different kinds of instruments. Among them string instruments such as the keomun-go (six-stringed zither), the kayakueum (twelve-stringed zither) and the ajaeng (seven-stringed horizontal zither), and wind instruments such as the piri (a cylindrical double-reed bamboo oboe) and the daeguem (a large transverse flute), are most widely used. Korean people are particularly interested in the various timbres produced by different percussion instruments. They are classified mainly into two groups: drums and idiophones. Among the Korean drum family, changgo is used for changdan, (rhythmic pattern) which accompanies every form of Korean music except Pansori. Different sizes of changgos are used for different types of music. Members of the idiophone family, range from a small, lipped flat bronze gong, kkwaenggwari, to a large gong, jing. And the bak (wooden clapper), the pyeon (tuned sonorous chime), and the pyeongjong (tuned bronze bell) are also popular percussion instruments.

The music has melody and rhythm but no harmony, unlike Western music. The rhythm of Korean traditional music is usually based on a simple triple rhythm; but in fact, the rhythmic patterns, changdan, are the most complex and interesting part of Korean music. The most distinctive characteristic of these rhythmic patterns is the uneven combinations of groupings found in notation books of Sijo and Kagok. According to Coralie Rockwell, these rhythmic columns are in groups of 16 (11+5) or 10 (7+3) for

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Kagok, and groups of 5+8+8+5+8 for Sijo. She said "such combinations are known as "additive rhythms" in ethnomusicological terminology, in that the meter is formed by adding unit groupings, rather than dividing them into a whole (for example, four beats), as is often the case in Western music."\textsuperscript{12} The form of music is determined by its rhythmic pattern, \textit{changdan}. For example, sanjo consists of several movements or sections with each in a different rhythmic pattern and each section is distinguished by a gradual increase in tempo and change of meter. It begins with a slower rhythmic pattern, \textit{chinyang}, and progresses to a faster one. The first section is \textit{chinyang-jo}, a very slow tempo (dotted quarter note=35) with a 3/8 meter. The tempo increases as the music goes through \textit{chungmori} in 12/4, \textit{chajinmori} in 12/8, and up to a very fast speed (quarter note = 208-230), for \textit{tanmori} in 4/4 at the end. Along with the melodic line, these complexities create asymmetrical patterns such as syncopations and cross-rhythms.\textsuperscript{13}


\textsuperscript{13} Ibid,112.
Korean traditional musicians treat each tone very importantly because the individual tone possesses its own life. Thus almost all Korean musicians believe the heart of performing Korean traditional music lies in the use of special ornamentation techniques, *sigimsae*. Furthermore, this art of ornamentation is very much related to the characteristics of Korean music, flexibility or elasticity, which makes Korean music distinct from other Asian music by permitting musicians to display their personal deviations, variations, and improvisational skills. As the rapidity and timing of *Sigimsae* operates differently in various rhythmic patterns, the sound and timbre differs according

to the genre, region and mode of the music. Professor Man-Young Han describes the importance of ornamentation in terms of pitch variation in traditional Korean music:

The type and position of vibrato (shaking) and glissando (sliding) can determine not only mode, but also whether the music is folk or upper class, and even the musicality and character of the performer. It may not be an exaggeration to say that an understanding of these pitch gradations is an understanding of the essence of Korean music.¹⁷

The general term for vibrating and glissando in a stringed instrument, which produces microtones, is nonghyun. It means to “play with strings.” Basic types of nonghyun include a vibrating sound, rolling sound, strong and short sound, retreating or declining sound, and pushing up sound.

The scales as well as the tunings of the instruments have no relation to the Western equal tempered tuning system (Ex.3).¹⁸ Thus the aural splendor created by ornamentation, combination of modes, tuning, rhythm, mood, and dynamics cannot be reproduced with the same distinctive quality by any instruments other than Korean ones.¹⁹

¹⁸ According to Rockwell, the pitch of instruments (string zither, flute and double reed) is more flexible than the instruments of the Javanese gamelan.
¹⁹ Ibid, 108.
Ex. 3. scales in Korean music

For vocal music, sigimsae is a method to change the tune, timbre and quality of sound from one vocalization. Particularly in the Pansori repertoire, the singer uses the combination of “vocal tones”- tones between the fixed pitches, an extraordinarily husky vocal quality, and the ornaments above, particularly the “breaking” or sharp jabbing sound and the microtonal sliding appoggiatura. Korean music, in short, includes improvisational and nonmetrical characteristics. Even though there were several notational systems, such as chungganbo (Ex. 4), they were only used for pitch indications, mainly for helping the memory of the performer.

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21 Rockwell, 111.
Because of this, traditional musicians were taught aurally, and they also were taught to hone their improvisational skills through imitation of master teachers.

The development of Western Music in Korea

The Western-influenced stage of Korean musical development may be divided

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into three chronological and stylistic phases. The first is the adoption and imitation of 
Western culture from the 1880s up to the 1960s; the second is the assimilation of modern 
Western music in the 1970s; the third is a rebellion against Western music and a renewal 
of the nation's cultural self-esteem from the 1980s up to the present.

Today, most young South Koreans can read English as well as Chinese, and one 
third of South Koreans are Christian. The influences of Christianity and of English after 
Korea was forced to open to the Western world in 1876 have profoundly challenged the 
traditional way of living and self-expression in Korea. Indeed, it has been argued that this 
has been more powerful a challenge than any other culture has experienced in such a 
short period.23 Nonetheless, the major impetus for change in South Korea came from the 
United States. And the most significant influence came from Protestant missionaries. 
Christianity, from the introduction of Catholicism in 1784, followed by the arrival of 
Protestant missionaries in 1884, has become the largest religion after Buddhism in the 
country.24 It also has played a significant part in the development of Western music. In 
many respects, the one-hundred-twenty year history of Western music in Korea is closely 
allied to the rapidly changing social and religious environment of modern Korea.

23 Dae-Cheol Sheen, "Some Westernized Aspects in Korean Folk Songs," in Contemporary Directions: 
Korean folk music engaging the twentieth century and beyond, ed. Nathan Hesslink (Berkeley, California: 
Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California at Berkeley, 2001): 76.
24 Andrew E. Kim, "History of Christianity in Korea: From Its Troubled Beginning to Its Contemporary 
I. The First Generation: the Period of Adoption and Imitation of Western Culture

The Introduction of Western Music in Korea, 1880-1910

There are several theories about the introduction of Western music in Korea. The most widely accepted one is that it occurred around 1885, with the hymns taught by Protestant missionaries. Hymns were originally sung in Chinese and English. Later, several were translated into Korean. The first hymnbook with Korean text was published in 1892.\(^{25}\) The hymns became a distinct genre when Korean texts were added and they quickly gained in popularity.\(^{26}\) Since the missionaries were also involved in education,\(^{27}\) the spread of hymns had a tremendous influence on the formulation of a basis for a Western musical environment in Korea. Even the first Korean national anthem, first sung in 1896, took the melody of a hymn. Music from the West began to permeate Korea’s musical culture with the concepts of major and minor tonality, triadic harmony, and regular rhythm all coming from the hymn style. As a result, the majority of Korean audiences still prefer music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries rather than contrapuntal, improvisational, irregular, or dissonant music.\(^{28}\)

In the late nineteenth century, Korea was in turmoil because of a strong desire for modernization combined with the pressures of imperialism from outside the nation. In

\(^{25}\) Kyong-Hwan Woo, “The Influence of Psalm and Chang-ga upon Korean music” (M.M. diss., Kwan Dong University, 2003), 11.


\(^{27}\) Since the missionary Appenzeller established the first school in Korea, Baejaehakdang, in 1886, Chang-ga was included in the curriculum. The term ‘Chang-ga’, meaning a song, was first used by the Japanese around 1879 in Japan. In Korea, it has been used for a Western style song, as opposed to the songs that had already existed in Korea. The teaching of Chang-ga in school is the beginning of Korean music education. (Woo, 24-25)

\(^{28}\) Kang-Sook Lee, Choon-Mi Kim, and Kyung-Chun Min. Uri Yangak Baeknyuessa (One hundred Years of Western Music in Korea): 27, 34.
the meantime, Christianity propagated rapidly and took its place as a mental shelter for the people. Christian missionaries included those specializing in women's care, medical services, and charity for the poor and orphans. Missionaries established schools for women for the first time in Korea, providing opportunities for education. Thus, Christianity profoundly threatened the Confucian-based dynastic society, or in other words, the class society, by emphasizing the equality of human beings. As a result, a conflict between the nationalists and young progressive Korean intellectuals open to Western ideas and desirous to acquire Western knowledge began to grow. This conflict brought a new phase in the development of Korean history.

The organization of a Western-style national military band established by the Korean royal court as a part of a 'modern' army in 1900 was another important factor in the adoption of Western music in Korea. The band soon became the basic source of Western instrumental music in Korea. German musician Franz Eckert (1852-1916) was invited to be its first conductor. He arrived in Seoul in 1901 and started to teach his players how to notate, compose, and arrange music. This made it possible to notate traditional Korean music on the Western musical staff. The most important contribution of Eckert's military band was to teach people how to play Western instruments, thus producing the first professional instrumentalists in Korea. This band made a remarkable improvement in a relatively short period although they were literally disbanded in 1915.

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30 Before this time, Korean music was mostly notated by *Chungganbo*, a mensural notation using Chinese characters to specify pitch and squares to indicate an approximate durational system. See also musical example 4.
due to financial difficulties after Korea became a Japanese colony.\textsuperscript{31}

**The Japanese Colonial Period, 1910 to 1945**

The Japanese occupation from 1910 to 1945 was Korea’s “Dark Age.” All indigenous Korean musical activities were discouraged as a part of the colonial policy to strip Koreans of their identity. The Western musical activities in this period can be seen as encompassing three spheres.

The first is the colonial policy of the Japanese government. They forced Japanese school songs and military songs into the Korean educational system, particularly elementary schools. They taught Japanese style songs in chang-ga class.\textsuperscript{32} This was part of their policy of “Japanization” through music. Most Koreans became familiar with Japanese songs and sang them without knowing they were from Japan. In *The Collection of Recent Chang-ga* published in 1918, songs of the Japanese style chang-ga in Japanese text and Korean chang-ga are both included. These songs were influenced by Western major and minor tonalities and regular rhythms, but don't sound completely Western because they also included melodic patterns, tonalities, and rhythms more characteristic of Asian music.\textsuperscript{33} In a way, this is primitive type of fusion music.


\textsuperscript{32} See under footnote 24.

\textsuperscript{33} Kang-Sook Lee, 53-56.
Ex. 5. Japanese style *Changga, Railroad song*

The second type of musical activity in this period was that of nationalist musicians at home and abroad who were mostly Christians, or at least had a Christian background. At this time, Western musical education in Korea began with the Christian church, so that was where people who were interested in music started to learn theory and how to play the organ. Before universities were established in Korea, the missionary schools were the place to receive a musical education. There was a strong link between Christians and nationalists in that period in Korea. Since the involvement of Christians in the independence movement of 1919 turned out to be prominent, many Christian nationalist musicians suffered oppression and hostility from the Japanese government. For this reason, many of them went abroad to study.

Among the representative figures that were active abroad were Iktae Ahn, the composer of the Korean national anthem and the first Korean musician to win true international acclaim as a conductor, and Isang Yun, the first internationally recognized

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34 http://www.poemspace.net/study05.hwp, 29.
35 Kyong Hwan Woo, 12,25.
Korean composer. The biographies of these two musicians help us to trace the footsteps of Korean musicians and their participation in the political situations of the time.

Ik-Tae Ahn was born in Pyongyang in 1906 and was exposed to Western music in the Church. He was also involved with the independence movement in 1919 when he was in middle school, so had to move to Japan with the help of the school principal, who was a missionary. In those days Japan was the least expensive place to study. After he graduated from the Tokyo Music School in 1930, he came back to Korea. Due to interference from the Japanese police, he could not perform any recitals. As a result, he went to the United States, where he was the first Asian cellist in the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. He began studying composition at the Philadelphia Music College in 1935. He went to Europe in 1936 and studied composition in Hungary, where he became influenced by the musical nationalism prevalent there at the time. He composed the national anthem of Korea in Berlin in 1936, and the next year he studied conducting with Richard Strauss in Munich and Vienna, becoming one of Strauss's assistants. He had conducted more than 200 orchestras by 1944, performing largely in Spain and other countries in Southern Europe. After World War II, he fled to Spain and became a Spanish citizen by marrying a Spanish woman, Lolita, and became the permanent conductor of the Majorca Symphony Orchestra. He visited Korea frequently, organizing festivals and other performances in 1957 and 1961, but could not resettle despite his wish to do so. He died in 1965 in Barcelona, Spain.36

Yun was born in 1917 and had a prolific compositional life, although he was

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dogged by political oppression and controversy. After studying in Japan, he returned to Korea in 1941, but was imprisoned in 1943 by Japanese authorities because of his part in Korea’s struggle for liberation, which began when Japan entered World War II. After his release he taught at universities in Korea before going to Europe in 1956 and studied composition at the Paris Conservatoire. He later studied with Blacher and Ruffer and moved to West Berlin in 1964. In 1967, agents of the South Korea Secret Service kidnapped Yun and his wife from Berlin. He was brought to Seoul and tortured because of his political involvement. Diplomatic pressure from the international composition community helped to secure his release two years later. He returned to Germany in 1969, becoming a German citizen in 1971. In 1970, he began teaching at the Musikhochschule in West Berlin as a Professor of Composition. He died in 1995 in Berlin. Much of his music, such as his Cello Concerto (1975-76) and Exemplum in Memoriam Kwang Ju (1981), is a reflection of his memories of participating in the political situation in Korea.\footnote{Mark Morris, \textit{A Guide to Twentieth Century Composers}, (London: Reed International Books Ltd. 1996): 273-274.}

The lives of these two composers prove that they were able to stand up on their own feet internationally at a time when the world thought of Korea only as a Japanese colony or as the country where the Korean War took place. The two composers each had to survive the Japanese oppression, and the Japanese colonial government interfered with their educations. Yun, furthermore, was a victim of the political situation of a divided Korea. Despite all of these obstacles, they made remarkable achievements, paving the way for subsequent Korean musicians. They also were pioneers of interculturalism in
Korea since their music represents the synthesis of West and East.\(^{38}\)

At the same time in Korea, there was a third stream of composers who actually continued to work with Western music. Most of them studied abroad and came back home. Their activities were encouraged by the colonial policy: they used Western music to help suppress Koreaness. Under the control of Japanese colonial forces, Korean traditional music languished, merely remaining in existence. Western music in Korea around 1920 was led by such men as Insik Kim, who composed Western-style songs with Korean texts, such as \textit{Chang-ga}\(^{39}\), \textit{Dong-yo} (songs for children), and \textit{Kagok} (Art songs). The Japanese government censored the texts of any songs that had patriotic implications, and the singing of patriotic songs was forbidden.

In the 1930's, more musicians became professionally educated and there was an increase in concert performances and music publishing. Many instrumental pieces were first produced at this time, along with newly established orchestras and choirs. Ewha Women's university, established by a Methodist missionary, created its music department in 1925. It is ironic that the first professional musical education in Korea was provided in the women's university.

**Music after the Liberation and the Korean War, 1945 to 1955**

The liberation of Korea from Japan should have provided an opportunity for the

\(^{38}\) For further discussion, see Chapter 3.

\(^{39}\) Since \textit{Chang-ga} was a Western style song, its musical style is very similar to a hymn. In the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, singing \textit{Chang-ga} stimulated the popularity of Korean patriotic songs. The people sang numerous Korean patriotic songs from then until 1919, the year of the Independence Movement. Among them, 26 songs were known by their publication by 26 songwriters. They used existing Western folk tunes or Hymns for melodies and just wrote the text for them (Woo, 24-36).
rehabilitation of nationalism for Koreans, but instead the political situation around the Korean peninsula resulted in a more extensive importation of Western music. The year 1945 was a significant year in Korean music history, as it was for the rest of the world. After the liberation from Japanese colonial rule, the agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union to participate jointly in the surrender of the Japanese army in Korea split the country into two opposing sides. Even though the restraints and censorship imposed on the creative activities in Korean music were lifted with the defeat of Japan in World War II, the whole nation lay under a peculiar social situation caused by political and ideological pressures. The confrontation between nationalists and Japanese collaborators, and between democracy or advocates for America and communists, created a swirl in Korean society. Even though it was not heeded at this time, there was a critical voice among musicians that questioned why culture should belong to politics when the nation did not demonstrate a clear vision about the world; instead, musicians claimed that culture should lead politics.\footnote{Lee, 212.}

With the liberation, many young musicians studying abroad returned home and joined patriotic groups of musicians. Many of them became leftists, so they were restricted in their activities by the U.S. military government. But the enthusiasm of these musicians resulted in many notable developments in the history of Western music in Korea. The Korean Philharmonic Orchestra, the first orchestra established in an independent Korea in 1945, breathed vital energy into the devastated Korean musical world, and Verdi's *La Traviata*, the first opera performed in the country, in 1948, was a great success. The first Korean opera, *Chunhyangjon*, composed by Che-Myung Hyon, was performed in 1950. However, the Korean War (1950-53) halted these musical
developments, along with any changes in the society at large.

This period represents a phase of enthusiasm for and favoritism toward Western music in Korea. In fact, at this time a music department in a university meant a department for Western music. The establishment of music departments in universities including Seoul National University in 1946 brought to light a new sphere in professional musical education, and Seoul Arts High School was established in 1950 with the purpose of special education for talented artists. In particular, this school produced a great many internationally recognized performers during the last half of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{41}

A department for Korean traditional music is called ‘\textit{kugak-kwa}.’ In 1954, Chang Sa Hun began the first \textit{kugak} education in a university in Duksung Women’s University. Although it was closed in 1959, it became a model for \textit{kugak} education. In 1959, Hye-Ku Lee established a ‘\textit{kugak-kwa}’ at Seoul National University. These attempts of revival of \textit{kugak} created a new musical genre called “\textit{changjak kugak},” new compositions for traditional instruments using Western staff notation.\textsuperscript{42}

After the end of the tragic Korean War, Korea was left in ruins in every respect. Rehabilitation of the economy, which had been thoroughly exploited by the Japanese and then devastated by the Korean War, was the most serious situation the nation faced. Before even reviving the notion of a national identity or removing the last vestiges of Japanese influence from the nation, musicians faced the rushed introduction of Western musical forms from all periods, Medieval to Contemporary, without regard to order. As a result of their colonial education, most Koreans who were educated under Japanese rule

\textsuperscript{41} I went to this school.
came to be embarrassed by their own indigenous forms of traditional culture. Many people eagerly embraced Western culture after the war, especially since foreign aid through Christian agents, particularly from the United States, fueled Korean’s favorable perception of Christianity and Western culture in general. The various social services from Western countries provided material aid, while Christianity gave spiritual guidance to the poor and the alienated class, especially to women. Koreans began to identify modernization with Westernization and regarded their own culture and traditional way of life as backward and embarrassing reminders of a pre-modern past.

Many talented musicians went to study abroad, particularly to the United States, to get more professional training in order to enhance the quality of teaching and concert performances back in Korea. In the mid-1960’s, the quality of performances began to rise as these musicians returned home after finishing their training. These performers lifted the general musical level of Korea and contributed to the setting up of a Western music education system.

The postwar generation in European and American music represents a stylistic transition marked by various innovative experiments, the so-called avant-garde music. This music is often characterized as being depersonalized, abstract and complex, written that way in part as a reaction to the devastation of war. This compositional style strongly influenced the next generation in South Korea, beginning in the mid-1960s, as the majority of composers began to join the mainstream of world music. But in the 1950s, much of Korean composition centered on the creation of lyric songs designed to appeal to the public.
II. The Second Generation: The Assimilation of Western Contemporary Music

Modernization, 1955 to the 1970s

Korean composers gradually began to be involved in the modern compositional styles of European composers, starting in 1955, when Un-Yong Na presented a piano work based on the 12-tone system to the public. The musical situation in the 1960's was very different from the previous periods because of the economic rehabilitation and political stability that was produced by the strong anti-communist government, a government that maintained a solid relationship with the United States. This social stability stimulated modernization both in the society in general and in compositional styles in particular. The new generation, which refused to use the conventional musical materials of the first generation, believed that tonal music was a pre-modern music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For them, musical language needed to change along with culture and society. Thus, an increasing number of composers employed the techniques of their Western contemporaries. The main goal for the second generation was to catch up with the advanced Western countries by changing their compositional resources.

The emergence of numerous musical associations is one of the distinctive characteristics of this period. Unlike musical schools in the West, which were the products of different musical styles, such groups in Korea were organized by political and educational forces. Nonetheless, these associations provided opportunities for performers and composers by creating numerous music festivals, such as the Seoul Music

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Festival and the Pan Music Festival. These provided a venue for the exchange of original compositions among composers from many different countries.

Because of Korea’s growing economic prosperity, there was a remarkable increase in the popularity of Western musical performances. The graduates in performance of the Seoul National University and the Seoul Art High School became more active at home and abroad. Performers from Korea, such as Dong-Il Han (piano), Young-Wook Kim (violin), Kyung-Hwa Chung (violin), Kyung-Sook Lee (piano),\textsuperscript{44} and Nam-Yoon Kim (violin) began to gain international recognition by winning international competitions. They were then invited to give concerts in Korea.

Some of the leading composers at this time were Song-jae Yi, Byung-dong Paik, In-Yong La, Hoe-Gap Chung, and Young-Ja Yi. Although several composers, including Jung-Gil Kim, Suk-Hi Kang, and Young-Hee Park, had been awarded prizes and has received recognition in various international competitions, not many composers had yet reached the international level attained by their performing colleagues. Isang Yun was perhaps the only composer who had been widely recognized internationally at this time. His earlier music was completely dodecaphonic, while his later music combined the aesthetic and philosophical issues of Asian traditional music, including Korean \textit{A-ak}, and Western avant-garde music.\textsuperscript{45} He was often considered as one of the pioneers of Western contemporary music in the World Musical Society.

\textsuperscript{44} She was my teacher at Yonsei University and is still an active performer.
\textsuperscript{45} Mark Morris, 274.
Nationalist Movement, 1960s to 1970s

Beginning in 1960, a new tendency in traditional music was for composers to write music for specific instruments. This was a departure from previous styles. In South Korea, the perception of folk culture as unchanging had been strengthened through a state preservation system, the Cultural Asset Preservation Law, which was promulgated early in 1963. These new composers of changjak kugak also explored and enhanced the playing techniques of traditional instruments, and they began to combine them with Western instruments. A good example is *A Theme and Variation for Kayakum and Orchestra* by Hoe-gap Chung, premiered in 1961 by the Korean Philharmonic Orchestra. Visits to Korea by Alan Hovhaness and Roy Harris for performances of, respectively, “Symphony No. 16 for Strings and Korean instruments” and “Nu Ode,” in which the Korean wind instrument *Piri* was employed, inspired Korean composers to start to consider how to combine Western and Eastern styles.47

However, studying traditional music was not very desirable in many institutions and universities in this period, while the musical training of Western music was accelerated and encouraged in more and more universities. Many universities created music departments or upgraded what they already had in this period. For example, Yonsei University was the first university built in Korea, in 1885. It began the first coeducational system in the nation in 1946, and it upgraded its music department, which once belonged to a missionary school, into the College of Music in 1963. Existing in the disjointed

47 Kang-Sook Lee, 288.
spheres of two musical worlds, a phenomenon of further class division resulted between traditional and Western classical music in Korean society. Westernized, or modernized, parents wanted their children to attend institutions that taught Western classical music. Studying Western music now became a status symbol, and this situation has continued for approximately three decades. Since only relatively wealthy families can afford expensive private lessons in Western music, educating one's children in Western music symbolized the class of the family. Not many musicians were qualified to give private lessons, so the fees went up tremendously as demand grew in the 1970s and particularly in the 1980s. The children of families who were not wealthy enough to be educated in Western classical music attended schools for traditional music. This phenomenon caused many problems. It was after 1980s when traditional musical activities, especially in the field of *changjak kugak*\(^48\) began to appeal to the general public, particularly to those who promoted the democratic movement.

III. The Period of Rebellion: the Democracy Movement and Musical Development in Korea, 1980’s to the present

Late twentieth-century South Korea is characterized by the shifting and blurring of social class categories and prevailing hierarchies, as well as more intense and complex relations with foreign powers (especially the United States, but increasingly with Europe, Japan, and China).\(^49\) As a part of the upheaval in the social structure, the musical culture

\(^{48}\) Meaning newly-composed Korean Traditional Music. It emerged in the 1960s and gradually increased its value by attempting to adopt Western musical elements in an original way. But most of works that appealed to the scholars and public appeared after the 1980s.

\(^{49}\) Nathan Hesselink, “Modernization, Urbanization, and the Re-emergence of the Professional Korean Folk
in the 1980s faced another transitional period. Unlike stylistic changes in modern music in the West, the musical changes in Korea were a consequence of a reaction against an existing state of affairs in society. In particular, the onset of the nationalist movement in the 1960’s began an economic rehabilitation that moved the whole country out of poverty, but its full impact was not apparent until the mid-1980s when it introduced a means to express Korean nationality and provided a basis to formulate one’s own musical ideas. A revival of the traditional performing arts was sparked by the democratic and nationalist movement led by students in the 1980’s, which brought about the emergence of a new generation in South Korea, emphasizing cultural independence. University students criticized the continued U.S. presence in South Korea, which represented an unwelcome political dependency. Musicians have never been an active democratic force in Korea; instead, the young musicians became aware of the dominance of Western musical culture in Korea. On the other hand, this student movement brought a critical halt to university education in the 1980’s. Many students in universities in 1980’s Korea had difficulties achieving individual academic development due to the constant on-campus demonstrations. While many university professors who studied abroad in the 1960’s still taught and wrote dodecaphonic music, the young generation, such as Geon-Yong Lee, Byung-Eun Yoo, Young-Jo Lee, and Tae-Bong Chung, attempted to write music with new approaches. Accelerated by the growth of Korean musicology led by Kang-Sook Lee, an awareness of and appreciation for the wealth of Korea’s own culture revived a cultural pride in the younger generation that was looking for a direction for the future of Korean music. The members of the younger generation who advocated traditional music insisted

that *minsogak*, that is, folk music of the common people, was the most distinctive creative musical activity in Korea, and furthermore they perceived it as a unique art form, one that can provide resistance to and a bitter satire of the ruling class. The problem they faced was that their music could neither go back to a wholly Korean genre, since they had gone too far from it, nor could it continue to be an unquestioning imitation of Western music as it had been for so many of their predecessors. Furthermore, the Western music in Korea of that time was too abstract and difficult for the general public to understand. In fact, it was common to see many Korean musicians composing and performing Western contemporary music without genuine comprehension.

Along with a search for a Korean identity and native musicality, the important issue of how to create music appropriate for this new period arose. This future-conscious generation began to search for original materials that would logically and convincingly establish a national identity. The revival of traditional music is justified by nationalism and the accessibility of music to a larger audience is justified by democracy. This young generation challenged the existing generation, bringing about new issues of the musical language in the 1980's by advocating that music should not exist for a certain class of society. Although this group of composers does not represent all composers, their viewpoint certainly had a great deal of influence.

In the early 1990's, influenced by the globalization of the world economic structure, the establishment of a national collective identity before the start of the next century seemed to be more important than finding an individual identity. A rapid exchange between cultures and the global network opened new, wide vistas to composers. A unifying and compromising mood in the world and a growing interest in other cultures
affected composers from both the traditional camp and the Western one, and they have begun to converge by taking each other’s aesthetic principles in order to formulate their own unique cultural heritage. This has provided a path of possibilities to many Korean composers of either Western or traditional style music. The composers of a new tradition, *changjak kugak*, that is, newly composed Korean traditional music, often use Western instruments in their pieces as well as Western musical forms, while Western style composers have gained fresh sounds coming from the melodic, rhythmic, and timbral complexities of Korean traditional music; and by turning their view toward aspects of traditional culture, they have tried to incorporate in their works principles of Korean philosophy and a Korean sense of beauty. This new genre of music has broadened the range of compositional materials for both disciplines in the twenty-first century.
Chapter 3

The Current Social and Musical Trends in South Korea

Interculturalism in Korea

Over the last several decades, relations and connections -- social, economic, and political -- between nations across the globe have become more intense and complex than they were only half a century ago. Since globalization connects different social contexts and regions, human lives are increasingly played out in the world as a single place.¹ Traditional cultural values, authorities, and ethics have changed over the past fifty years in Korea, and in the early years of the twenty-first century, membership in the global society has emerged as an important value. While Korean society is in many ways changing rapidly, the speed of globalization there is one of the lowest, along with that of Japan, according to the recent research.² Globalization implies a unification of the world and requires interacting with people in other countries, as does interculturalism. Cross-cultural activity is possible when a full understanding of other cultures is set forth as a premise.

A professor in Germany, Martine Abdallah-Pretceille says, “interculturalism can be elaborated from the starting point of an ever-unsteady equilibrium between the universal and the singular.” She identifies interculturalism by its approach. It focuses on

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the relationship between cultures rather than on cultures or individuals considered as fixed or isolated entities. And she observes that in the relationship of culture and the individual, culture has lost its ability to determine an individual’s behavior. She says, “its identity does not disappear, but its way of living and expressing itself becomes more diversified. The individual is no longer a product of his culture; on the contrary, he is a player.”

Cynthia Tse Kimberlin and Akin Euba define intercultural music in several respects.

Intercultural music is that in which elements from two or more cultures are integrated. The composer of this music usually belongs to one of the cultures from which the elements are derived, but this does not necessarily have to be the case. Indeed, this type of intercultural activity is thematic,... therefore, the origin of the composer is irrelevant to the definition. There is another type of intercultural creative activity in which the origin of the composer is the determining factor, ...For example, when an African composer writes a fugue in the style of Bach, in which he or she makes no use of African resources, intercultural activity takes place, but the music itself is not intercultural.

If interculturalism is a philosophy of harmony and accord, and if it endeavors to create new things through the process of interacting, merging, and blending, then intercultural music in Korea must be considered to be a great success.

However, it needs to be examined from a different point of view, namely, one in which interculturalism is perceived as a global phenomenon. In the process of globalization, one of the characteristics of the contemporary world order that is observed by Fiona Robinson is “the legacy of ‘old’ nationalisms and the rise of ‘new’, ethnic

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3 Martine Abdallah-Pretceille, www.comedianetwork.org/glossary/wordtext
nationalisms." And she continues that "the importance of nationalistic sentiments and an increased protection of sovereignty -- especially in the nations that see themselves as 'excluded' from the community of liberal states -- must be recognized as both a part of and a reaction to globalization." In this respect, interculturalism in Korea needs to be understood in its social context, such as a transformation of social structure and as a reaction to globalization.

Throughout the five thousand years of Korean history, Korean traditional music has embraced music from neighboring countries, including it in its own unique musical culture. On the other hand, Korean culture adheres to the traditional collectivist and Confucian traits of harmony, hierarchy, and status. Therefore music from the West, originally imported by force, has caused ceaseless conflict, reflecting the larger social conflict brought about by contact with the West. The friction between the two musical disciplines: kugak, Korean traditional music, and yangak, Western music, still exists even though there has been a great deal of compromise.

Musical traditions in Korea are historically divided into two distinct social classes: A-ak (court music) has been imported by the ruling class and played for them, while the rest of the people formulated sogak (folk music.) But nowadays, court music and folk music are combined into kugak, (traditional music.) Myung-Hee Han, a music critic and former professor, has said that the confrontation between sogak and A-ak went on until the first half of the twentieth century, but in the second half of the century that

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6 Robinson, 82.
7 Ibid, 99
relationship has changed into a confrontation between *kugak* and Western music.\(^8\) With the collapse of the structure of the old dynastic society, Western music has been able to permeate the society in general. The economic rehabilitation begun in the 1960s created a new social class in South Korea, and the influence of Western music has grown along with it. The upper class began to enjoy Western music as a symbol of a modernized society, instead of enjoying traditional court music, which to them represents a pre-modern past. The result is that traditional court and folk music continue to exist only thanks to the government’s protective policy. Western musicians have become a new majority, and the education system in South Korea has focused on training students in Western music.

This class division between Western music and *kugak* is not only caused by Westernization and modernization in Korea. Since the realms of *a-ak* and *sogak* became unified as *kugak*, people have come to identify Korean music only with the humble origins of *sogak* and have perceived it as a low-class music that needs to be improved. Another factor in the reception of *kugak* was the relationship between it and *Kisaeng*,\(^9\) professional female entertainers. The word means skilled person, one who plays

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\(^8\) Myung-Hoe Han, *One hundred years of our kugak* (Seoul: Hyunam-Sa, 2001), 24-32.

\(^9\) Throughout the Chosun Dynasty (1392-1896), *Kisaeng* were a class of women who were chosen from the lower-class by the government for their exceptional beauty and talent, and were given extensive education in poetry, music, the arts, and dance, like their Japanese counterparts, the geisha. They held positions in the court, the high government bureaucracy, and local governments as singers, instrumentalists, dancers, calligraphers, poets, and other artists. They participated in intellectual communities and interacted on nearly equal terms with their male patrons in the Yi Dynasty, the Confucian society where women who wanted to learn were repressed. Thus they possessed the distinct social advantage of being able to converse with men, but some classes of *Kisaeng* were known to have sexual relations with the officials and patrons whom they served. After the Liberation of Korea, they were divided into two groups driven by a reaction against the manipulation and abuse of *Kisaeng* and Korean female sexuality in general under Japanese colonial rule. One is state-supported professional performers and the other consists of prostitutes and escort-entertainers. During the South Korean traditional music revival that began in the late 1960s, professional female performers were symbolically distanced from the *Kisaeng* in their incorporation into national arts institutions as bearers of the artistic roots of Korea.
instruments and songs at parties and private meetings. Because Kisaengs have played kugak until recently, many people have, as a consequence, degraded the whole group of kugak musicians.\textsuperscript{10} Additionally, in modern Korea, in general, the musicians who were occupied in traditional music came from lower class families due to the unfair structure of the educational system.

During the last two decades, however, a successful cultural transition has been achieved by the cooperation of both composers and audiences, more specifically, the general public in Korea. This was possible because of the democratic and nationalistic movements. Traditional musicians now write music for Western instruments, and many Western music composers no longer write music only for a certain class of audience.

At the present time, musicians in Korea are dealing with the opening of a new phase, namely, the prospering of Korean music. A group of composers and musicologists in Korea have become involved in helping to create a new aesthetic understanding, and they have tried to define what "Korean music" is.\textsuperscript{11} Historically, Korean music meant Korean traditional music, kugak. But Western music in Korea has now become more popular, even though it is still called yangak, which means Western music. If traditional Korean music and original Western-style music written by Koreans are to be included in the category of Korean music, then Korean music includes the co-existence of multiple cultures. Indeed, in a broader definition of interculturalism, the majority of Korean composers are now involved in an intercultural activity, including the two women composers discussed in this document.


In this respect, interculturalism in Korea was formulated in a completely different way from interculturalism in the West, which originated from both an intellectual curiosity about other cultures and the practical need for increasing the music business in the global market. Nevertheless, interculturalism in Korea is fueled by constant developments in mass communication, the Internet, and rapid travel. It also cannot be compared with the rise of musical nationalism in the West during the nineteenth century, which was in many ways a reaction against the dominance of German music. Intercultural music in Korea is a consequence of a positive self-criticism of the musical situation in an attempt to understand the problems of contemporary Korean music. Interculturalism in Korea, therefore, is better understood in its social context rather than in a musical one.

However, the actual condition of the current musical situation in Korea shows that very few composers actually write obvious intercultural music by employing kugak elements in their Western-style music. Most Korean composers of Western-style music want to write more refined Western music rather than writing nationalistic or intercultural music. This phenomenon supports the theory that there is a simultaneous devaluing of the role of the territorial state as the role of the international society, such as multinational corporations, transitional social movements, and international organizations, increase in importance.\textsuperscript{12} The global generation depends more on its individual values, which are more appreciated in a global society. Contemporary Korean composers try to embrace all the current styles as they seek to create an individual identity. They do not write music

\textsuperscript{12} Robinson, 82-83.
for the nation or for a certain class of people but for their own ear, as they try to find their own idiosyncratic sound. Since they themselves are intercultural figures, their music itself represents interculturalism. This could not have come without an active adoption of Western music through intensive musical education. This growing individualism and diversity in musical society in Korea is the most recent trend in the twenty-first century.

Observations on the Changing Role of Women in Korea from the 1950s to the Present: Through the Example of Female Western Musicians

Since its independence from Japan in 1945, Korean society, which has historically been based on Confucianism and farming, has gone through a rapid transformation. The family-oriented farming economy has broken down, a division between the home and the working place has begun to take place, and modern humanism has found its place in the society through the spreading of individual rights and equality. Such changes have provided new opportunities for Korean women, who were traditionally marginalized except as wives and mothers and excluded from acquiring economic or social power. Once women in general slowly began to recognize their new roles in society, they began to exert efforts to change society. More and more women are achieving a post-graduate education, and more college-educated students wish to have life-long careers as part of an expression of self-realization, social experience, and economic independence.\(^\text{13}\)

During the last two decades, there has been an increase in the activities of

Korean women in the field of culture; particularly in music, internationally recognized women musicians have already emerged. This is a notable achievement for several reasons. First, the history of Western music in Korea is relatively short, as was discussed in the previous chapter, so it is impressive that so many Korean women have become internationally recognized musicians. Second, and more importantly, the traditional image of women and their social situation in Korea did not allow women to have their own careers. Nevertheless, the image of Western music as it has been received in Korea fits well with the desirable image of women in Korea, so women of a certain class have been encouraged to study Western music, although not necessarily to make music a career. There have been many conflicts and obstacles facing Korean women despite this remarkable change, which demonstrates the strong desire Korean women musicians have for self-realization.

1. Change in the Role of Women Influenced by Social Norms and its Emotional Aspect

The change in women’s status has been analyzed from many different points of view by an increasing number of studies and theses since the 1990’s. The studies show that the status of Korean women in the 1990s has not progressed much from the family-centered norms that were based on the social customs and relationships that traditionally constrained women. In other words, it is just a recent phenomenon that women have begun to actively involve themselves in society beyond the family. These changes have led to the establishment of the Asian Center for Women’s Studies (ACWS) at Ewha Women’s University in 1995.
For instance, a thesis by Eunshil Kim, a female professor of the Department of Women’s Studies at Ewha university, which is titled “Study on the Changing Roles of Korean Women Seen from Emotional Aspects” states that the role of men is still distinctly separated from that of women in Korean society, and the role of men is still superior to the role of women under the conventional patriarchal system. Moreover, because women are often accepted by society only in terms of marriage and child bearing, women who lose feminine attractiveness are apt to be limited to the role of a wise mother and good wife. Thus, men assume the public social and economic roles, while women become burdened with family affairs and the education of their children.  

Yet, changes in child bearing practices due to the population control policy carried out by the government since 1962 and an increase in the demand for an economically active population due to the success of the government’s economic plan have allowed more women to have jobs, so they can help pay for the increasing expense of raising their children. These heightened expectations for women, coupled with increased opportunities for education, have collided with the traditional image of women, thereby resulting in conflicts and disharmony. Despite such developments, the result is that men are still in charge of decision-making roles, while the role of women as mothers still makes up their main identity in society.  

Thus, women of this generation still have many obstacles to overcome in order to

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15 Ibid,
take on new roles, although they are seeking more active social roles due to the recent changes.

2. Change in Women’s Role in Education

Since Korea’s independence from Japan, the introduction of the modern education system, which came alongside the modernization of Korea, has provided an important factor in changing the social role of women. In 1948, Korea became the fifty-fourth country in the world where women’s rights to vote were achieved. In 1953, a law prohibited sexual discrimination in the workplace.\(^{16}\) The thesis of Young-Hae Park titled “Educational and Cultural Status of Korean Women” divides the educational history of Korean women into three stages. She defines the first stage as the period when there was no formal education available for women, the second stage as the period which runs from the beginning of modern education in Korea until the independence from the Japanese occupation, and the third stage as the period when Korea began to provide equal educational opportunities for both men and women. She also claims that the traditional educational policy for women was aimed at teaching them obedience towards men rather than providing them with more academic opportunities.

Even though the Constitution legally eliminated discrimination, and the modern educational system provided the legal basis for an equal educational opportunity for women, women are still discriminated against in every sphere in society, including

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education, employment, politics, and administration. The inequity between men and women has been a big obstacle for women to study music professionally. Because of the familial division of labor most Korean women, even those who have studied music, cannot devote time to careers or further study once they are married. Such a phenomenon makes us reconsider whether education alone can bring changes in the role of women in society.

A survey conducted in 1990 found that while female students make up 77% of Western music majors in Korea -- 79% for composition majors -- the number of female members in the Korean Music Association is only 54%. These figures clearly display the increasing number of women in the field of Western music, reflecting the traditional Korean concepts that the study of music is more appropriate for women; but at the same time, shows that the social roles practiced by women in music had been limited by the stereotypical view of society towards women. Dr. Choonmi Kim, the director of Korea Arts Research Institute, tries to explain the phenomenon from Korea’s traditional ideals, which pressures women to keep their feminine beauty.

That is, the general view coupled with the positive attitudes of Koreans toward Western classical music led to the phenomenon of Korean parents forcing their daughters to major in Western classical music. But studying Western classical music was valued primarily as a way to become graceful and cultured, which is beneficial for marriage, so there are only a handful of Korean women who seriously consider having a career in

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17 Ibid, 5.
music among those who either study music or work in the field. Thus, there arises a strange phenomenon where there are few female music lovers, although many women are active in the field of music.

3. Observation of the Role of Women Based on the Social Class Theory

The theories of Pierre Bourdieu give us another perspective on this seeming paradox. Satbyul Choi of Ehwa Women’s University interestingly finds the role of women in Korean society in reproducing their vested rights through engaging themselves in the field of Western classical music.²⁰ This compels us to come up with a new interpretation of the changing role of Korean women. That is, as Bourdieu’s theory asserts, the ownership of cultural and social assets requires a lot of investment, so it functions as an insurmountable obstacle for those people who hope to climb up the social ladder. Women are given an opportunity to maintain or increase their social status usually through marriage rather than through other means. In the traditional status and role given to Korean women, marriage has been used to reinforce their cultural capital. In Choi’s thesis, the field of Western classical music, which provides a limited educational opportunity, helps to form a culture for the haves, and the women benefiting from such an education play a large role in solidifying the status of the high class where their spouses belong. What Koreans consider as high culture is closely associated with what came from the West, so only the rich are able to enjoy it. Therefore, in sum, associating with Western classical music is a way for Korean women to maintain or elevate their status in society.

Further, it is expensive to buy a classical instrument, so students are often limited by the economic status of their parents. And the special nature of the music industry requires the student to get to know reputable teachers from childhood in order to attend a good school or to have a nice career, so the field of Western classical music is transforming itself into the form of a systematic cultural asset in Korea, one that is much easier for wealthy people to attain. This means that women who major in Western classical music mostly reproduce their high economic and social status through music as cultural capital that is expected to be realized in a high-status marriage. This explains why many Korean women musicians hold dual views towards marriage and career. Although they invest lots of time and money in order to study music, they end up becoming comfortable with maintaining or advancing their social status through marriage rather than pursuing their career.

4. Growing out of the Traditional Image of Women

Through research, I found that current Korean female musicians still face obstacles to participate in social activities because of the remaining traditional customs and social background. Since the 1950’s, the number of female musicians has dramatically increased because of the changing perception of women’s roles as well as the fact that studying music was seen as a virtue for women because is was an "aesthetic" or cultural advantage for marriage. In turn, these women have contributed to an expansion of the foundation of the music population in Korea. However, in addition to this upgraded status of women in Korea, women’s practical activities have broadened
from the 1990’s by their efforts to seek levels of participation beyond marriage preparation. Indeed, many women now study music because they love it, not because it will help them acquire a husband. It is impressive that Korean female musicians have been developing rapidly not only in quantity but also in quality in spite of this social environment.

This female agency can be seen in women's associations in the musical community that are made up of women music professors and college instructors. In particular, women's competitiveness and strong presence in music composition is clear. For example, The Korean Society of Women Composers, founded in 1981 with six women composers from several famous colleges, has encouraged its members by holding an annual publication in addition to other activities. The KSCW has expanded over the past 23 years during which it has hosted 42 regular forums, twice every year, 15 seminars, and 11 association reports, and it has 120 current members as of 2004. Their activities since 2000 are particularly notable since they began to include traditional Korean music compositions in their events and participate in more international activities beyond their yearly activities: the society held many workshops and seminars in conjunction with the Tong-Yong Contemporary International Music Festival in 2001, and hosted an International Conference, “The World Women in Music Today 2003,” in Seoul, Korea, in cooperation with the International Alliance for Women in Music (IAWN). This unique society in Korea, an exclusive organization for women who are relatively disadvantaged individually and socially, has strongly supported its members to keep

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21 Choon-Mi Kim, 282.
22 The Korean Society of Women Composers, http://woman.composers.or.kr
active and focused on internalization. This has recently resulted in many outstanding achievements. However, there are many studies of male composers, but few of female composers despite their large contribution to Korean musical society and their outstanding participation in cross-cultural collaboration. It is correct to say that female musicians in Korea have been relatively underestimated even though they have been more active in the music community. In this contemporary global system, attaining national competitiveness cannot be realized without changing our awareness of women, both socially and nationally, and capitalizing on women’s individual values and contributions.

It has become a new trend in the field of music that more world-renowned Korean female musicians are having successful music careers in the world stage in spite of the obstacles cited above. They have not been free from the restrictions put on them by the societal tradition of their background and upbringing. Despite all that, the particular success of these two women composers, Unsuk Chin and Jiesun Lim, in Korea and on the world stage, make them role models for those seeking a successful break from the traditional role of women in society. They were only able to achieve their goals because they overcame obstacles with their passion for music and their effort for internationalization, particularly in the sphere of composition, the most male-dominated area, even in the West.

If there is a prejudice towards women who study music in Korea nowadays, this may be attributed to the fragmentary prejudice towards Western classical music, which has been established as a cultural asset coupled with the traditional image of women.
Thus, this study suggests the model of success for internationalization in the music industry and proposes new opportunities for women in Korea with regard to their social roles by studying these two women composers as symbols of women who have challenged and exerted a lot of effort in order to find their own role, rather than giving up under the situation allowed to them. This study also shows that these two women composers, as representative composers in Korea, have proven the potential of Korean women musicians, and that the musical situation in Korea has improved. In addition to this study, I send my full respect to these composers and hope to draw suitable attention to them so they may receive the respect they deserve from society.
Chapter 4

The Lives and Music of Two Composers

Jie Sun Lim and Unsuk Chin are two of the composers who showcase and represent the current modern Western music situation in Korea. Jie Sun Lim is considered one of the leading composers in Korea, and Unsuk Chin is a significant composer based in Europe. In many ways, each of their lives and educational backgrounds are rather ordinary; many Korean musicians have had the same experiences. Therefore, coming to understand how they became globally recognized is of considerable significance, given the relatively short history of Western music in Korea as well as the status of woman in the society. Despite the things they have in common, that they are female composers born and educated in Korea up to the college level, their compositional styles are completely different. An examination of their backgrounds, their music, and the ways that they have made careers for themselves will show the changes in Korean culture and society over the last several decades. It will also show some of the current trends in Western music today, such as eclecticism, multiculturalism, and postmodernism.

JIE SUN LIM

Jie Sun Lim is a prominent female Korean composer. She was born in Seoul in 1960.¹ Today, she is a professor in the Department of Composition at Yonsei University

¹ The information below is mainly based on interviews I had with the composer on January 15 and March 8, 2005 in Seoul and on her biography, which she provided. Another source is The Dictionary of Korean Composers. (Seoul: Sigong-sa, 1999), 80.
and Secretary General of the Korean Society of Woman Composers. Since receiving
prizes at the Joong-Ang Music Concours and the Seoul music festival in 1981, when she
was a student at Yonsei University, she has received many awards. These include the
Yoshiro Irino Memorial Prize (1994), Ahn Ilkte Prize (1994), the Korean National Music
Prize Award (1998), and the Korean Composition Award (2004). Since her Echo for
String Orchestra was selected by ISCM and performed in Moldova in 1999, her
compositions are more often played in many nations, including Korea. In particular,
many of her works written for Korea’s traditional instruments are performed to great
acclaim at many festivals. In 2001, she received a grant from the Korean Culture and
Arts Foundation to compose Scenery on the Bridge for soprano and chamber ensemble.
Her music reflects many aspects of the contemporary music scene in Korea today, and as
these commissions and prizes show, she is highly valued in her own country.

Although she took piano lessons as a child, Lim had to stop at the age of 14
because of pressure from her conservative parents. They did not want her to become a
musician. However, she always thought of new melodies while playing the piano, and
she liked to improvise. During this time, when she was in a choir during her junior and
high school years at Jungshin Girls’ High School, a mission school, her music teacher
recommended that she pursue composition. So she began to take composition lessons
three years after she stopped playing the piano. Her teacher was In Yong La, one of the
important second-generation Western composers in Korea. She continued to study with
him at Yonsei University. She recalls that learning harmony was very logical and
interesting.

While at the university, she was exposed to twentieth century music for the first
time. She recalls that it was very new and refreshing. At the time, she listened to Ravel, Stravinsky, Bartok, Schoenberg, Penderecki, Boulez and others. In particular, *Le marteau sans maître* (1954) by Boulez was impressive to her. The way she learned about contemporary music, and how she began to emulate it in her own writing, is just like almost all other Korean musicians of that time. Having attended university in Korea from the end of the 1970’s to the early 1980’s, she lived through a tumultuous period for Korea, indeed, and came to maturity during this very confusing period. At that time, the avant-garde music that had been in fashion in the West during the 1950’s was the mainstream of Korean modern music. Even though Lim composed serial music like others, she still enjoyed listening to Bartok and Stravinsky because she liked their strong rhythm as well as the sense of anxiety she detected in their music.

Even when starting out in composition, she thought of contributing to the Korean music circle by becoming a famous female composer. She knew that to do this she would have to continue her studies outside Korea. She went to Indiana University for several reasons. One reason was that English was the most convenient among foreign languages. Another was that her mentor, Professor In Yong La, had recommended her to do so. But perhaps the most important reason was because she felt that the similarity between the curriculum of a university in the US and that of one in Korea would help her when she returned to teach in Korea. This has, in fact, turned out to be exactly the case.

Unlike in Korea, music education in the United States emphasizes studying music by listening to it. To someone who found it difficult to get access to recorded music in Korea, being able to listen to the music of a wide variety of composers was a major source of stimulation, and increased her sense of curiosity about different styles
and compositional possibilities. Although Lim was shocked by the immense amount of work she was assigned at Indiana, the initiative she took at the time, to study as much new music as she could, became the foundation of her finding her own voice. At Indiana, she met many people who helped and influenced her. The greatest influence came from her teacher and mentor, John Eaton. During every lesson, he would ask her, “is this really the sound that you want.” Sometimes his question would depress her, but she persevered and eventually began to develop her own musical language. Perhaps the most important part of John Eaton’s influence was that he did not insist that she follow any particular musical style or that she join any sort of aesthetic school. As a consequence, her attitude toward music is to be always open to all kinds.

According to Lim, she spent her time from college until she received a D.M.A. from Indiana gaining knowledge and craft by copying Western musicians’ methodologies and musical content. The work that epitomizes her style during that time is the *Tone Poem: The Shield of Achilles* (1994), her Ph.D. dissertation. This piece is written for a big orchestra, and it is music of very complex and thick textures, filled with very modern methods.

After returning to Korea, she focused on finding her own sound, and went into a period of organizing all that she had learned until then. Like many composers of the 1990’s, the music she wrote then was still very difficult and complex. Since modern music was not exactly popular with most audiences, it was customary for the composers to gather together to play and to listen to each other’s music. Observing this, Jie Sun Lim decided that for her, “music exists to be listened to, and I would like to build consensus with the audience within the scope of not losing what is mine.” *Toward the New Sky,*
composed in 1998, was a turning point. This is a work for a large orchestra, and it received the Korean National Music Prize. Since that prize goes to the piece that "best captures the soul of Korea", she used Korean-specific melodies in it.

After the success of that piece, she began to compose music with a melody that could remain in the listener's head even after the piece had ended. However, she continued to compose complex and challenging chamber compositions. A defining moment was when her chamber composition *Nori* was selected for the “Cultural Performance Night” held in 2003 at Washington D.C.’s Kennedy Center under the auspices of the Council for International Exchange Scholars. In *Nori*, a folk tune called “Saeya Saeya” is inserted into a chamber composition of flute, clarinet, violin and piano. Some members of the audience in the U.S. said that this piece was very sad. She composed it when she was in Michigan during 2002-2003 as a Fulbright Research Scholar. At that time, the first Iraqi War was at its pinnacle. Jie Sun Lim, who was watching the war in the US, away from her native land, thought that it was necessary and possible for the Asian and Western cultures to co-exist. This motivated her to compose the *Kayakeum Concerto* in the same year, 2003. Playing a *Kayakeum* with a Western orchestra had never been attempted before. Traditional Korean musical instruments usually appealed to small audiences and were written for small ensembles of instruments. Accordingly, the foremost problem lay in balancing the soft *kayakeum* with the large orchestra. Her solution was to amplify it. The Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra played the resulting work, *Kayakeum Concerto: Clash and Reconciliation in Memory of Vanished Culture*, in Israel. It was very well received.

Lim’s music is characterized by its solid structure. This is partially due to the
fact that she learned about logical development by doing note by note analysis of the
music of Webern. Her music does not deviate from traditional structures and forms, and
she does not include any improvisatory or aleatoric sections in any of it. Her music is
always logical, and both the unfolding of her ideas and their direction to the conclusion
are clear. Thus, it is not hard to perceive the flow of her ideas when listening to her
music. All her music is written with modern expression, but she is no longer interested in
being avant-garde or modern for its own sake.

She imagines the entire piece prior to notating it. She does not compose fast,
either. She needs two months to write a single composition. Thus, she does not compose
if not commissioned. Her musical inspiration derives from daily life. She likes her recent
compositions, Kayakeum Concerto or Whirlwind, a trio for clarinet, cello, and piano, and
others that were inspired by artwork. She expects to compose a piano concerto soon.

After she had composed music that included Korean instruments or melodies, she
studied Korean classical music, although not in a structured manner. But this allowed her
to expand the possibilities of how to play music with these instruments and how to mix
them with Western instruments. As such, she did not hesitate to showcase her Korean
background. Of course, most of her compositions are not remotely Korean. However,
this influence comes off naturally in her music even when she does not utilize Korean
musical elements at all.

*Spiritual Dance* is one of her most recent works, which showcases her style very
clearly. There is a classical structure, great contrast of motives, a clear sense of
development and unfolding, and classical pianistic technique. In particular, although the
piece includes many Korean musical elements, they are not easily perceivable.
Nevertheless, they contribute to its unique atmosphere.

To Lim, the piano is an orchestra. Among her output, surprisingly, *Spiritual Dance* is the only piano solo piece. She says that it is very difficult to compose for the piano; when she was younger, it was even more difficult. However, her ability to compose music for piano improved as she became increasingly familiarized with composing orchestra pieces. An example is her first work for piano, *Suite for two pianos* (1993). This is a piece that was attempted only after composing her Ph.D. dissertation, a piece for orchestra. Since she was thinking of the orchestra while writing *Spiritual Dance*, the textures are often multilayer and the range of expression is diverse and wide. It is not an overtly virtuostic piece. Rather, the performer of must have sufficient technique so that the complexities of both sound and structure emerge without calling attention to its pianistic challenges.

Jiesun Lim is now standing tall as one of Korea’s representative modern composers. However, her musical language is geared towards the world. She has helped to introduce Western audiences and musicians to what is uniquely Korean. Accordingly, her music is both global and Korean at the same time. She considers that the level of Korean modern music composition does not lag behind that of the West. However, she feels that Western compositions receive better evaluations than do Korean ones because the best foreign musicians play them with the utmost devotion, more than is usually the case in Korea. The level of Korean musicians’ performance is already well recognized in the world. If the performers are to play pieces composed by Korean composers with devotion just as foreign compositions are performed, she thinks that Korean compositions will be played and recognized more in foreign countries. Therefore, she thinks that
Korean composers must receive performances in other countries more often.

UNSUK CHIN

Unsuk Chin, born in Seoul, Korea in 1961, learned to read music from her father, a Presbyterian pastor. When she was two, her family acquired a piano, and she learned to play it starting from the age of four. Although she could not receive formal piano lessons, she gained knowledge of the tonal harmony of Western music while playing hymns and while playing along with her sister. She could naturally practice keyboard harmony since she sometimes had to transpose the keys of hymns on the spot. She had a dream of becoming a pianist. However, her parents could not afford to pay for the expensive private lessons needed in Korea to become a professional player, and she began to compose after giving up her dream at the age of 12.

Every day, she says, she listened to music as if out of her mind, and mastered tonal harmony, counterpoint, theory, and so forth by studying on her own. In particular, because she could seldom obtain scores, she borrowed scores from other people and copied them out by hand. (She even copied the entire score of Tschaikovsky’s Pathetique symphony). This was part of the way that she studied composition on her own. At that time, her knowledge of modern music was limited to Stravinsky’s Violin Concerto. She first heard Stravinsky when she was thirteen, and she thought that there was too much brass. Back then, it was difficult to obtain recordings, and they were costly.

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2 This biography was written based on: "Biography of Unsuk Chin" printed by Boosey and Hawkes; Saeri Kim, “Focused Musician” Eumak Chunchu March 2005, 36-38; Jonghee Kim, “Interview with Unsuk Chin” Joy Classic, August 2001, 38-39; and my interviews with the composer on March 18, 2005 in Tong-Yong, Korea.
After failing to be admitted twice, she finally was accepted to Seoul National University’s College of Music in 1981, where she began to study composition with Professor Suk-Hi Kang. Professor Suk-Hi Kang was known both in and out of Korea and had been a disciple of Isang Yun in Germany. He introduced her to Western post-war avant-garde music, including such composers as Ligeti, Penderecki, Stockhausen, and Boulez, and techniques including total serialism. Although their music was difficult for her to understand, she was curious and open to their sounds and methods. Accordingly, her music at that time is very abstract and complex.

During her college years, Unsuk Chin appeared at the Pan Music Festival in Seoul from 1982 to 1984 as a pianist. In 1984, her international success began when her *Gestalten* was selected to the ISCM World Music Days of the International Society for Contemporary Music in Canada and by the UNESCO Rostrum for composers. In 1985, she won the Gaudeamus International Competition with “Spektra,” and moved to Hamburg after winning the German government’s DAAD Scholarship. She began to study with Gyorgy Ligeti, one of the most important composers alive. While working with Ligeti in Hamburg from 1985 to 1988, she began to give up her existing compositional style. In fact, while composing strongly avant-garde music, she agonized over the issue of whether that was truly her sound. However, she could not find any alternatives. Ligeti encouraged her to write music that she could feel with her heart, rather than to just imitate what she had learned intellectually from her study of other composers. This transition was not easy for her. After the performance of her opera *Troerinnen* (*Trojan Woman*), which was the commissioned work for the Heraklion Opera Festival in Athens held in 1986 on the island of Crete, she went into a three year slump.
during which she could not compose any instrumental music.

Ligeti, who considered any type of music as music, encouraged her to become aware of as much world music and music from different historical periods as possible. This led her to Gamelan music, which became a definite turning point that helped her to define her own solid music language. In fact, she became so enamored of Gamelan music, that she even learned to play and copied the music when she visited Bali in 1997. Gamelan music is completely unlike Western music. Debussy, among others, was very influenced by it, too.

She moved to Berlin in 1988, primarily for the opportunity to work in the electronic music studio at Berlin’s Technical University. Since the process of composing electronic music is very abstract and requires a total revamping of how one thinks about music, she decided to totally transform her approach to composition. She cites this experience as a very helpful step toward her being able to compose music that can be felt with the heart, casting away the music that is thought out in the brain with logic. Moreover, her work with electronic music changed the way she thought of acoustic instruments. In particular, after working with the unlimited sound possibilities of the electronic music studio, she began to try to find new timbral resources in acoustic instruments. She therefore began to create works that are very structured and with a rich sense of color -- characteristics which are still very much part of her style.

In 1991, after returning to acoustic composition with Acrostic Wordplay for soprano and ensemble, her aesthetics expanded to accommodate even more diverse styles. She began to combine post-avant garde music, with both electronic music and folk music, still with a focus on timbre, harmony, and rhythm. This post-modern style became
her signature, and the success of Acrostic Wordplay led her to a publishing contract with Boosey and Hawkes. What is most notable about this piece is that she eliminated the distinction between language and music, and that she expanded her musical domain by using microtones. Another work, Xi, composed in 1998 and the longest work among her electro-acoustic pieces, features a mixing of instrumental and electronic sounds.

Unsuk Chin’s first pure orchestra piece, Santika Ekatala (1993) placed first in the Tokyo Composition Competition, and was performed by the Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony. From that time forward, Unsuk Chin has been recognized as a world-class composer, and distinguished conductors such as Kent Nagano, George Benjamin, and Sir Simon Rattle, along with world’s most prestigious ensembles, play her compositions. In particular, Rattle pointed her out as one of the five composers of the next generation who will lead the composition world.

In 2001, she became the composer-in-residence of the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester, conducted by Kent Nagano. Her Violin Concerto, commissioned at this time, was premiered by that orchestra with violinist Viviane Hagner, and subsequently has been played in Seoul, Helsinki, London, Cologne and Stockholm by the BBC Symphony, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the Berlin Philharmonic, among others. In 2004, this piece won the University of Louisville’s Grawemeyer Award for Music, which is considered to be the most prestigious prize a composer can win. Recently, she was selected as the winner of the Arnold Schoenberg Award (March 2005). Presently, she is working on two operas based on Lewis Caroll’s Alice in Wonderland, commissioned by the Los Angeles Opera and Nagano.

Her music encompasses her own unique world rather than what is in fashion in
Europe. She thinks that it is necessary to make new attempts to create a harmonic basis for music, and to compose pieces that have a new chord structure. She says that harmony is more important than some kind of philosophical explanation. When she is composing a piece, she does not do it on piano, but on her desk.

Her music is global, and is not limited by any cultural or any other type of boundaries. Indeed, the titles of her works are written in Sanskrit, Latin, French, Italian, and German, and the sound of her music gives out no hint that she is a composer from Korea. Chin says that, unlike Gamelan music, which has universal qualities, only Koreans can understand Korean music. Moreover, it is difficult to study Korean music in a focused manner since there is not yet a structured pedagogy. The grafting of Korean and European music, already attempted by Isang Yun, Young Hee Park and others, does not suit her, given that they are literal translations of Korean music. She does not want to be bound by her own ethnicity. She utilizes diverse music from many parts of the world and many time periods, and distills them into her own music after a long period of settlement and maturation. Unsuk Chin does not compose many pieces. Instead, she only presents those pieces that she agonized over for a long time. It is not an overstatement to say that each of her compositions sounds new thanks to her strong experimental spirit and continuing curiosity.

Her music is not religious. Although both of her parents are Christians, she is not. She feels that music has to go beyond any religious boundaries. Moreover, she is not interested in traditional Western music. In fact, her interest lies in music from the non-European cultural bloc. Although this is difficult to express in piano music because of the nature of the instrument itself, it appears extensively in her orchestra pieces. She
believes that there is absolute truth in the world, and that the genuine value of music is evaluated with time. Just as most German music of the 1950s is no longer widely played, music that is geared to a specific container cannot be continued. She writes music for all types of people, and believes that good music can be understood by anyone. Although no one can understand everything, she feels that any significance her music lies in speaks to all people on a certain level.

For this reason, although she is now living in Berlin, she is not very well known in the German music community or among other composers. Her music is in fact praised and played outside of Germany because the music that is well known in Germany tends to be that which caters merely to the German musicians. She does not mind this. Her work is promoted and commissioned by Boosey & Hawkes in the U.K.

Unsuk Chin is a Korean. She is still a Korean national, but she expects to gain German citizenship soon. Working in Germany as a Korean was difficult, and was made even more so because she is a woman. She is not promoted or supported by the Korean government. She does not plan to return to Korea since she cannot focus merely on composition while in Korea with the utmost freedom that she enjoys now. Watching her achieve everything on her own while in a remote foreign land, one cannot help question the value Korea places on the notion of culture and Korean artists.
Chapter 5  

Spiritual Dance (2004)  

By Jiesun Lim

Spiritual Dance for piano solo, a suite consisting of four movements, was written in 2004 for the Korean pianist Chul-Hee Yun, who commissioned it to play on his recital. Jiesun Lim says that for her, Spiritual Dance means a process of finding out “I.” The four different movements show different stages of the spiritual journey. This work demonstrates Lim’s profound understanding of many important early 20\textsuperscript{th} century Western musical styles as well as her knowledge of more recent compositional techniques. Nevertheless, it has its roots in Korean traditional music. This discussion of the music will identify the Western and the Korean influences, as well as pointing out some of the challenges it poses for the pianist.

In terms of its harmonic language, in large part this suite shows the influence of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Western European composers, particularly Bartok, Ravel, and Debussy. Even though a piece of music makes obvious reference to techniques of the past, it is still very possible to create a unique sound world if the composer can use them in original ways. The way that Jiesun Lim used existing materials in this piece is similar to the way Ravel recollected Baroque music in his Le Tombeau de Couperin. She makes prominent use of modal, chromatic, pentatonic, and whole-tone sets, and she frequently utilizes progressions of parallel fourths and fifths. All of these show the influence of the languages of Debussy and Bartok. And the way she uses major triads, especially when combined with a major sevenths or its inversion,
minor ninths is reminiscent of late romantic music.

Like these earlier composers, her music leaves space for the contributions of the performer. This is something that is not always found in some contemporary compositions, particularly those that are so full of notes and textural density that the performer is not allowed very many choices. On the contrary, Lim’s music very much depends on the performer’s sensitivity and interpretation.

She plans out her pieces for a long time before she starts to write. This is well represented in this suite. It consists of four separate movements, each with its own characteristic sound world. However, the piece coheres because of her pre-compositional planning: all four movements were written according to a single structural plan, namely, the single extramusical idea of her earnest desire for finding “I.”

Debussy

The influence of Debussy is found mostly in the treatment of texture and harmony. By rejecting the prevailing German romanticism, in which nearly all aspects of form and expression were extreme, highly personalized, and maybe even pompous, in favor of concision and compactness, Debussy created an innovative musical style, which has remained very influential to this day. In Lim’s suite, most of the techniques Debussy employed, such as modality, pedal-point, pentatonism, whole-tone scales, and bitonality, can be observed. Interestingly, this is especially true in places where she employs characteristics of Korean traditional music.

The title, *Spiritual Dance* is perhaps reminiscent of the titles Debussy gave to his *Preludes*: programmatic associations employed to attempt to capture the immaterial
essence, or emotion, of the subject. In this piece, the first stage is an unstable mental state at the beginning of a journey. The struggles and difficulties of this journey come to an end in the last movement, where all the tensions created by the dissonances and the irregular rhythmic progressions presented in the previous movements are released by a succession of triads in the left hand, although Lim added dissonant notes in the right hand. This peaceful calm mood is attained by a strong sense of tonality and regular rhythm.

Prominent use of parallelism and pedal-point is notable in the second movement of *Spiritual Dance*. (Ex. 1) Both Lim and Debussy employ parallelism, as well as chromatic, pentatonic, and whole-tone scales, to minimize the harmonic function, and the sense of direction towards a cadence that results from it. While a significant characteristic of Western common-practice music is its harmonic dimension, that of Korean music is in the construction of melodic expression. Lim employs parallel fifths and octaves, which weakens the sense of harmonic direction and reduces the degree of dissonance. Debussy introduced this in the early twentieth century, but it also fits properly as an expression of the Korean musical style, which does not have a functional harmony or counterpoint but instead is based on heterophony.

The treatment of texture plays a significant role in our perception of twentieth-century music. In general, the texture of this suite is simple and transparent, which gives us a clear reference to the French style represented by the music of both Debussy and Ravel. In keyboard music, the use of a wide range of registers is one of the main factors in creating diverse colors. In the second movement, the widely spaced texture allows the distinctive timbre of each register to be heard. This kind of coloration by multi-layered
texture is easily found in the piano music of Debussy but also of Messiaen. In playing this kind of music, it will be very useful to imagine the performance of chamber music. In this respect, this particular piece can be directly related with a type of Korean performance, *sinawi*,¹ a form of chamber music performance in which every player performs together or individually while improvising within particular rhythmic patterns on different instruments. None of the music they play has coincident melodies or harmonies, but it all fits together because the music is played within a certain range. Sometimes it is played in unison but sometimes on dissonant intervals, which creates the characteristic heterophony. The resultant spontaneous and improvisational performance is very much like that of a jazz ensemble.

¹ *Sinawi* is an improvisational ensemble music that has its roots in the shaman music of the Jeolla province in Korea. Musical instruments include the kayakeum (twelve-stringed zither), geomungo (six-stringed zither), haegeum (two-stringed fiddle), ajaeng (bowed zither), piri (bamboo oboe), and daegeum (long transverse bamboo flute).
Ex.1. Beginning of the second movement

Ravel

The most obvious formal characteristic of this suite is its classical construction. Even though Debussy paved the way for a widespread and successful neo-classical movement, the pianism and sense of construction in *Spiritual Dance* more closely adheres to Ravel’s model. Lim’s music gives a strong impression of being solidly engraved. The music of Ravel, the craftsman and traditionalist, is never composed by chance, not even in a small passage. Lim’s music also shows that tendency. She especially wants to minimize any possibility of variant playing by overtly personal or impulsive interpretation, thus the compositional materials she uses are as classical as possible. In other words, she leaves enough room for the performer as long as it adheres to her style.
We also find a classical cyclic device, similar to that of Debussy’s *G minor string Quartet* (1893) and Ravel’s *F major String Quartet* (1902-3) in terms of using materials from the earlier movements. In the fourth movement of *Spiritual Dance*, the materials from the second and third movements are combined together with new material. This provides a satisfying conclusion to the whole work. In this way, Lim exhibits her outstanding sense of classical beauty of form.

Another good example of classicism is the very beginning of this suite. The first movement contains both a late romantic lyricism and a beautifully constructed classical phrasing. The typical classical musical phrase is in a 2+2+4 measure structure or more likely, short- short - long. Lim has a 2+2+3 (2/4+3/8+4/4) phrase that is repeated twice in the beginning. This gives a strong impression of stability despite the asymmetric expansion of measures. And each movement is basically in ABA form. Lim said her fondness for the classical frame makes this kind of structure unavoidable, especially in short pieces like these. Since she sticks with one idea in each movement, an initial motive always comes back after a development or a contrasting section. This rounds off and wraps up the movement. Lim constructs this piece in the classical framework with a contemporary language.

Ravel’s melodic writing typically has more range and is more direct than Debussy’s, and is more actively involved in motivic development. In the domain of texture, while a vertical acoustic attracted Debussy, Ravel was more interested in horizontal progression. In this respect, *Spiritual Dance* is closer to Ravel. In the first movement, the melody is very direct and thus easy to follow.

This arpeggio figuration contains a melodic line in the bass, one that resembles
many passages in Ravel’s music, such as the first and third movements of the Sonatine. This passage makes use of both the whole tone scale and appoggiatura. The pitch E flat provides a strong dissonance in sections in which the center tone is D.

Lim’s piano writing has a distinct connection to Ravel’s. It is intelligent, accurate, clear, and truthful. Musical objectivity is emphasized more than emotion. All the material is moderate and controlled, but a virtually unlimited space is open for pianists to express their own emotions, unlike in music that is packed with notes and rhythmic complexity. Ravel was a master of orchestration, and when he composed for the piano this appears in the way he was able to bring out a wide variety of tone colors. The two hands often are doing quite different things. Lim’s music is also colorful, and she achieves this in some of the same ways as does Ravel. The first movement is the most obvious example. It requires the pianist to make clear distinctions of colors by bringing out the melody with the left hand while the right hand plays repetitive passages combined with a figuration that employs rotations and stretches of the hand. Clear phrasing, change of tone color according to the change of range in the keyboard, frequent change of pedal, and gradual increase of dynamics in the beginning of this movement will help to express Lim’s classicism and pianism.

Ravel’s music requires a very strong and exquisite technique, which itself followed and expanded the tradition of Liszt. The toccata-like texture and repeated notes in the first movement of Lim’s piece are characteristics of Ravel’s musical style. The use of repeated notes has been one of the most popular technical devices of virtuoso pianist’s repertoire. Perhaps Liszt’s Paganini Etude No.3 La Campanella is the most famous example. It employs this dazzling technique most impressively. But in Lim’s
piece the technical challenge is closer to that of Ravel’s in terms of a repeated-notes technique because it is combined with rotating hands playing successive octaves, as in *Ondine*, *Scarbo* and *Toccata*.

Ex. 2

![Spiritual Dance]

Ex. 3. Ravel *Ondine*
Bartok

Along with Schoenberg and Stravinsky, Bela Bartok is recognized as a composer who explored and expanded the twentieth-century musical language in a highly creative and influential way. One of his most important contributions was to extend the functional harmonic language through the use of certain aspects of traditional Central and Eastern European music. This same sense of an expanded tonality is found in *Spiritual Dance*. Indeed, the compositional style of this suite is perhaps closer to that of Bartok than that of any other composer. The way that the first movement employs a tonal center, uses the whole-tone scale, the chromatic scale, and dissonances consisting of major or minor seconds and tone clusters, the strong accents, contrapuntal writing employing progressions in parallel or contrary motion, the use of the full range of the keyboard, and polyrhythm as well as asymmetrical divisions of the meter, all reflect Bartok’s influence. The suite is atonal but a compositional style with these characteristics has its own version of tonality, as does Bartok’s music.

Lim unifies this piece with a tonal and structural relationship. The four pieces are connected organically in the way that classical sonata movements are: the scheme of this suite is close to the classical Allegro-Adagio-Scherzo-Allegro structure except for the fourth movement. In Lim’s suite the last movement is slow. Although each movement is essentially atonal, they each have a center tone: No.1 – D, No.2 - A flat, No. 3 - A flat, and No. 4 - D. This tritone relationship between the movements in *Spiritual Dance* is another example of the influence of Bartok. He used tritone polarity in much of his music to substitute for the tonic and dominant relationship. Since the tritone divides the octave exactly in half, this polarity allows the composer to construct a clear cycle, one that gives the whole piece a sense of balance and completion. The overall
symmetrical structure of each movement further reinforces this. The characteristic of symmetry and balance in Bartok’s music are best represented in his fourth and fifth string quartets. Both share a similar construction of five movements in the form of ABCBA, while in Lim’s case the overall form is ABBA.

There are other ways that Lim’s style resembles Bartok’s. The formal structure of Spiritual Dance can be compared with that of the Bartok Piano Suite, Op.14. In particular, both composers use a motoric motive in the third movement and a chordal motive including the colored major triads with some dissonant notes in the last. It creates the characteristic of bitonality. In the third movement in Lim’s suite, more Bartok characteristics are added. These include greater contrapuntal writing, changing meters, an emphasis on chromaticism, and asymmetric phrasing. And in the beginning of the second movement, the accelerated repetition of one note resembles the openings of Bartoks’ Fourteen Bagatelles Op.6, No.2. And finally, the transparent texture of the opening of the fourth movement is reminiscent of Bartok’s Four Dirges.

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2 Interestingly, this figuration is very similar with that appears in In-Yong La’s Landscape for piano (1972). He was Lim’s teacher more than five years before she went to United States for further study. La himself studied in the United States in the 1960s, and has taken an important role as one of leading composers in Korea after returning home. If we compare those two we notice that Bartok places this repeated note on top of triads while La’s only employs this single line. Lim uses the interval of the perfect fifth, as a substitute of diatonic chord. This provides no harmonic base, but suggests the richness of the colors of Eastern music.
Ex. 4. Fourth movement, beginning

IV

Korean Influence

In the beginning of the second movement, even though this melodic figuration -- repeated notes and trills -- also can be seen in the music of other traditions, it can be said that it imitates the sound of *Motak*, a round wooden percussion instrument used for Buddhist music in Korea. The long trills halt the harmonic progression, replacing it with an ornamental melody. There are various methods of shaking or turning the melody in Korean music, called *nonghyun* or *sigimsae*.³ The function is equivalent to glissando

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³ *Nonghyun* is a type of *sigimsae* (ornamentation). When *sigimsae* refers to string instruments it is called *nonghyun*, which means “play with a string.” In general, it indicates a technique of shaking a string with the left hand, thereby creating a vibration. There are various ways to shake a tone depending on which instrument is used: it is used on string instruments including the *Kaumungo*, the *Kayakum*, and the *Ajaeng*. Interestingly, this technique is applied to wind instruments such as *Piri* and *Daegum* by flipping over the instrument, controlling one’s breathing, or placing the tongue in a different position. The range of *nonghyun* varies according to the class of music: in general, *nonghyun* in folk music has a wider range
trills or vibrato in Western music, at least in terms of producing microtones, even though it sounds far different. This passage of a succession of trills on different pitches and embellishing figures, measures 8-25, shows that Lim utilizes a combination of the horizontal characteristic of Korean music and the vertical aspect of Western music without losing artistic quality.

In the third movement, the B section is completely different from what precedes it in both style and tempo. This passage seems to be based on the performance style of traditional Korean music in which the *changgo*\(^4\) drum is set against a melodic instrument such as the *kayagum* or *ajaeng*, or a voice. The most representative genre in this style is *sanjo*,\(^5\) which is derived from *sinawi*\(^6\) and *pansori*,\(^7\) thus its form and style is similar to *sinawi*. While *sinawi* is an instrumental chamber music, *sanjo* is a solo instrumental piece in which rhythms and melodic modes shift during the song. In the B section of third movement, while long notes are held, the clusters sound just like what the *changgo* player in traditional Korean music would play.

**Analysis of the Third Movement.**

The structure of the third movement is basically A-B-A-Coda. The A section is chromatic and contrapuntal and the B section is more harmonic and homophonic.

\(^{4}\) A type of drum and the most widely used percussion instrument. It is included in almost every genre except pansori.

\(^{5}\) A virtuoso solo instrumental music created in the 19th century based on musical elements of *Pansori* and *Sinawi*. See also chapter 1.

\(^{6}\) See under chapter 2.

\(^{7}\) A narrative opera form of vocal music performed by a professional singer. It is accompanied by a *yonggo*. (a Korean percussion instrument, meaning a dragon drum.)
Tempo | \( \boxed{\frac{4}{4}} = 132 \) | a tempo | a tempo | a tempo | a tempo
Section | A | B | A’ | Coda
Dynamic | \( pp -ff \) | \( mf - p -ff - p -ff \) | \( ff \) | \( ff \)
Center Tone | A flat | E flat - B flat - E-A | A flat | A flat

The important developmental idea in this movement is that one material does not change but the other one progresses. In the process of composing a motive, this principle is applied: Motive a consists of 5 semi-quaver notes, which does not change through the developments in the A section but motive b always varies. Motive a is sequential while motive b progresses chromatically.

Ex. 5. Third movement, mm1-3.

Inversion

Along with this principle, the movement is highly contrapuntal. The beginning two measures are in unison, but the second measure is the inversion of the first measure. The end of this exposition confirms a center tone, A flat.

The harmonic progression in the next 12 measures is replaced by a diminution of intervals between these two voice lines: from octave or unison- minor seventh- major sixths-minor sixth. (Ex.6) Motive a doesn’t change, but motive b has an added note each
time it is presented. It is repeated three more times. The addition of notes is executed under a rule as found in the music: adding one more note and rest each time. This *added value*\(^8\) technique can be found in the music of Messiaen and many other composers. The rhythmic regulation of this section is more distinct. (Each number below indicates the number of semi-quaver beats per each measure that comprises the phrase.) (Ex. 6)

mm.1-3: 10+10+(1+2 rests)

mm. 4-8: (8+3)+(8+3)+(1+3 rests)

mm. 9-11: 12+12+(1+4 rests)

mm. 12-15: 13+13

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On the other hand, the major third leap between motive a and motive b in the very first measure gets wider systematically so it extends up to a perfect fifth at the beginning of measure 16 in the right hand.

The bridge from measure 16 also shows this expanding progression consistently. Materials in measures 17-18, derive from motive a which is unchangeable material. It is shown as a box below. The components of the bridge material (Ex. 8) are almost the same as the initial motive but the texture is changed. It is now a homophonic texture in terms of melody and accompaniment, thus it belongs to the progressive principle that is
in opposition to the unchangeable principle. There are two kinds of clusters in the bridge: an augmented triad on A flat with an addition of a raised fourth and the diatonic scale fragment: D flat-E flat-F-G flat. These give a strong tonal relationship of A flat (tonic)-D flat (subdominant).

Ex. 7

Ex. 8: bridge from A to B
Again, we see two compositional principles which go together in each hand: while a melodic pattern is repeated in the right hand, sequences in the left hand progress in a circle of fifths from measures 27-33. These descending sequences quickly broaden the range between hands, which had previously been narrowing. Measure 33 breaks this rule in order to have both hands reach an A flat, five octaves apart. The statement of initial material ends the A section.

The center tone in the B section is E flat. As we observe the tonal relationship between sections, A flat (tonic) in the A section, D flat (subdominant) in the bridge, and E flat (dominant) in the B section, this movement is organized according to a clear tonal plan.

Ex.9. Third movement, B section

The B section is homophonic in texture. A melodic line is supported by several harmonic moments, which are semi-quaver clusters derived from the bridge material. But these clusters cannot be understood as a functional harmonic progression. Rather, they should be seen as a texture coming from a form of traditional Korean music, Sanjo.¹

¹See under a section of Korean influence in this chapter and Korean traditional music in Chapter 2, 9 and 11.
Technical challenges

In general, the technical difficulty of this piece is not huge. Anyone who has enough technique to play the music of the early twentieth century would not have any problems mastering its challenges. Nevertheless, there are several places that will test the pianist's skills. One example is the beginning of the first movement. The pianist must constantly play repeated notes combined with playing notes in wide intervals, such as ninths or tenths. This requires a relaxed rotation technique. The technique for extended hands has been one of notable technical devices explored by Bartok. His Etude no.1 and Sonata are good examples. Since these busy figurations are accompaniments, the pianist has to try to play them as lightly as possible (dynamics are \textit{pp}) but clearly, while trying not to cover up the melody in the bass. She must also shape the phrasing well. In measure 31, I suggest playing the E with the right hand to avoid a stretch and focus more on the accents in the left hand. For the rest of the sequences this fingering will also be helpful. This kind of polyrhythmic accentuation is similar to what is often called for in Bartok.
The second movement calls on the performer’s emotions as well as her technique. Playing a succession of trills with ornaments in between is not only technically difficult but it is also hard to maintain the tension for a long time. Since the texture is so transparent in this part of the piece, these trills have to be consistently even and very expressive, especially in the transitions. This unique passage is especially important in this suite since it resembles traditional Korean music. The melodic line in Korean traditional music does not move directly from pitch to pitch as it does in Western music. Instead many embellishing techniques, called _sigimsae_,\(^2\) are involved between the pitches in Korean music.

To express that characteristic, the successful performer should think of these trills and ornaments as one long melodic line, from measures 8 to 28. That will help technically as well. There is only one place to take a break, at measure 15 right before

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\(^2\) See chapter 2, 12-13.
playing the ornaments to the next measure. Lim’s use of parallel progressions can be understood in the same context: a stream of superimposed lines gives a harmonic sense supporting the melody rather than undertaking a harmonic function. Thus the three eighth notes in the right hand in measure 28 should sound very rich and heavy to calm down the increased excitement created by the long phrase. In measure 10 in the second movement, I also suggest playing the D-D flat on the right hand.

Ex. 11. Second movement, mm. 9 - 15

In many ways, the third movement is the most exciting one because of the alternation of contrasting textures and motoric rhythm. Making the contrast between different textures big enough is essential to making this movement successful. The beginning passage should be played exactly the way it was written, especially the rests; they should be played strictly in time. The contrast between the crisp sound of this section and the legato sound of the next section, starting in measure 16, is another aspect to which attention must be paid. Since the left hand takes over the dissonance and the dryness, this cluster would be better played sharply but with full sound. I would use a
short pedal on these clusters each time they appear. That cluster appears again in measure 37, the beginning of the B section, accompanying a single line. In measure 46, I would use a full pedal for the change of each chord to produce a full and rich sound to make more of a contrast with the previous passage and the following passage. Since the interesting part lies in the chord progression under the melodic line, the top notes of these chords should not be over weighted.

The third movement is also the most challenging of the four movements technically and rhythmically. Besides the constant change of meter, it requires both hands to be in perfect accord even though they are doing different things, such as constantly transposing and changing figurations. This technical difficulty can be said to be typical of Bartok’s technique, since much of his piano music requires the complete independence of the left hand. For example, in measure 17 the interval of a minor seventh between hands creates very tricky fingerings. My suggestion is a very traditional one: practice the hands separately until the left hand plays this figuration independently! A light and controlled finger technique is required for this kind of music. In measure 68, the climax of the piece, the pianist must be sure that all the clusters are played equally sharply and fast. This is very difficult after the accelerando. The player needs to practice the transition in order to prepare the clusters.

To express the transparent textures I suggest using a late pedal for each measure in the beginning of the fourth movement. (Ex. 4) The middle section of this movement is the most challenging in the whole piece in terms of rhythmic complexity. It is easier to follow the left hand since it has a more regular pattern. The biggest contrast would be achieved by emphasizing the precise articulation, which is the most important element of
this section. Bach’s keyboard writing will be the right model for the performer in this particular section. Interestingly, this passage is placed right before the coda of the whole suite. It is unique, containing new material as well as the most rhythmically tricky part of the entire suite, especially when it becomes faster through the addition of more notes toward the end. While Lim is largely faithful to the conventional structure of ABA throughout the whole suite, she does not hesitate to deviate from it in order to create a climax or a dramatic moment.

Ex. 12. Fourth movement, middle section

Obviously, Jiesun Lim is not one of the most innovative composers of this century. But her composition shows that she has constantly challenged herself to find her own musical language without departing from a musical tradition. She has created a piece that successfully and attractively builds on her sensitivity to and understanding of early twentieth century Western piano music by adding subtle yet effective infusions of her Korean heritage. While the Korean influence is not overt, to me, a Korean trained in the West, it is quite clear. It helps make the piece special.
Six Piano Etudes

by Unsuk Chin

Perhaps following the example set by Chopin, Debussy, Scriabin, Ligeti, and Bolcom, Unsuk Chin has set out to compose “12 Klavieretuden,” and to date she has completed six. In my interview with her, she indicated that she does not have a plan to complete the remaining six in the near future because of the number of commissions she has, mainly for orchestral pieces. She has composed the piano etudes during a span of eight years, finishing the last one, Toccata, in 2003.

Of the six etudes she has written, Nos. 1 through 4 were revised in 2003 because of their tremendous technical difficulties. Piano Etude No. 1, in C, was written in 1999 and had its world premiere in Neue Musik, Hannover by the Japanese pianist, Hiroaki Ooi, on May 25, 1999. The Chinese pianist Shiao-Li Ding commissioned Etudes 2 through 4. Etude No. 2, Sequenzen, had its world premiere in Berlin by Ding in 1995. Etude No. 3, Scherzo ad libitum, and Etude No. 4, Scales, were both written in 1995. Ding premiered them at the Topeka Public Library, Topeka, Kansas, on February 11, 1996. Etude No. 5, Toccata, which was commissioned by the Tokyo Opera City Cultural Foundation, was written for Hiroaki Ooi, a Japanese pianist who played all six etudes including the world premiere of the revised versions of the first four etudes at the Tokyo Opera City Recital Hall, on 16 December 2003. Etude No. 6, Grains, which was commissioned by the Royal Festival Hall for Pierre Boulez on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday, had its world premiere in London by Rolf Hind in 2000.
If we consider the six movements taken together to be one piece, it is characterized by its free use of diverse textures, extreme virtuosity, a strong sense of organization and a fondness for classical structure, skillful motivic transformation, effective acoustic devices, and rhythmic continuity. The rhythms that she uses are often intricate, as are her meters and textures. Surprisingly and to her credit, while each étude is quite different in terms of motive and musical form, they use a unified language and her distinct voice comes through. This is certainly an impressive achievement. It is obvious that she has absorbed influences from many cultures and many previous composers and has been able to combine them into something that is uniquely hers.

Sound

Since a conventional harmonic musical language no longer was perceived as a viable way to create music in the twentieth century, composers have searched for new musical materials to substitute for tonality, major or minor scales, and functional harmony. Harmonies of seconds and fourths and clusters were developed, and in some cases tone color replaced melody. Modes, pentatonic, chromatic, and synthetic scales made the boundary of harmony and melody ambiguous. Therefore, sound itself became perhaps the primary element in twentieth century composition. Many composers have emphasized the importance of tone color, or timbre, and texture as materials as basic and as structurally important as motive and rhythm. The exploration of new tone color and its relationships came in part from the influence of non-European musical materials and from electronic music. Some composers, such as Ligeti and Penderecki, attempted to draw new sound effects from traditional acoustic instruments. Their accomplishments
have been widely imitated in both Europe and America since the 1960s.

Chin’s work with electronic music extended her horizons in important ways and became the defining trait of her style once she returned to composing instrumental music. In the realm of electronic music, a composer employs new concepts of texture and of stasis and movement, or in other words, an amorphous sound-flow, rather than a metered musical flow. Composers are freed from metric constraints, and timbre and pitch are altered by such technical methods as the superimposing, mixing, splicing, or editing of prerecorded elements. Chin’s distinct sonorities are constructed with tone clusters, complex polyphony, polyrhythms, pointillistic textures, and improvisation. All but the last can be traced to her experience with electronic music.

Her keen sense of “sonorous image” is revealed in the precise use of register. In in C, although a rhythmic progression exists in two layers, a fixed register makes this progression audible. She creates sounds of fear, sorrow, joy, or playfulness by a skillful manipulation of spatial contrast. For example, Sequenzen is dark and intense, while Scherzo and Scalen are playful. In Sequenzen, the overall weight lies in the low register, but in Scherzo and Scalen she uses the low register only for adding a rich sonority to the music. Except for the beginning of the A section, and in measures 83-88, the music always stays in the upper register in Scherzo. Similar things happen in Scalen in which clusters are used to contrast with playful, active and concise scales, and the cluster in the left hand appears almost always in the low register. This is a clear realization of her aural imagery.

2 The term "sonorous image" is used by A. Copland in his book Music and Imagination, quoted in Simms.
Large contrasts are another way that she shows her sense of color and texture.

In the bridge (bars 50-60) of Etude No. 2 (Ex. 14-4), for example, the use of upper register and new materials amplify the contrasting effect of stasis, which is foreshadowed by semi-quaver seconds appearing in the upper register in bars 33-34, 37, 39-40, among others. The disposition of density and register plays an important role in giving distinctive traits of Chin's music.

Intervallic expansion and great speed are other explicit expressions of her imagination. By a sudden intervallic expansion she produces a remarkable change of coloration. In measure 17 of Scherzo, the phrase begins with a minor third E3 and G3 and ends with an interval of over six octaves: F1 and B7. This sudden expansion of intervals within three measures encompasses the whole register of the piano. It is a summary or conclusion of the previous expansions.

Ex. 1. Scherzo mm. 17-19 at quaver=200-208

Rhythm

Chin's rhythmic variation seems virtually unlimited. These six etudes show her wide knowledge of various rhythmic patterns, including ethnic Indian, Romanian, and African, as well as reflecting the influence of Western musical tradition, especially that
handed down from Bartok, Stravinsky and Messiaen. Thus, rhythmic complexity is both obvious and important in all the etudes. Perhaps that is the most difficult obstacle facing anyone attempting to play these pieces. At the same time, rhythmic and metrical exploration is at the heart of all the etudes.

The polymetric counterpoint in No. 5 (Ex. 16), polyrhythm in No. 3, cross-accentuation in No. 1, rhythmic ostinato in No. 2 (Ex. 13-2), asymmetrical (3+3+2) aksak patterns that appear in mm. 28-31 in No. 3 (Ex. 10): all look almost like Ligeti’s music, although Chin never uses an exact ostinato as he does. Perhaps the most interesting device is the "percussive accord" that is produced by playing a cluster or cluster-like figuration at amazingly fast tempo. The best examples appear in No. 6, but they are found in No.3 and No.4 as well. These are some of the representative rhythmic devices that demand exceptional technique from performers; they are truly terrifying.

Ex. 2. Percussive accords, No. 4

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**Influence of Non-European music**

Elements found in music outside the tradition of Western art music are placed at the center of Chin’s music. This is in part due to her Korean nationality and her
fascination with non-European music. Her adoption of percussive sonority drawn from
Korean traditional music appears as a preference for strong repetitive rhythm, and the
intensity that emerges from the continuous use of rhythmic patterns shows the influence
of the Korean percussion ensemble. In No. 4, in measures 99, 102, and in the coda, the
left hand features a figuration that resembles the sound of a Korean gong.

Ex. 3.No. 4, mm. 150

While it can be interpreted as a percussion instrument from any other Asian country,
since she is Korean, it makes sense to say that it comes from Korea.

Her distinctive use of texture is another important factor drawn from non-
European cultures. Heterophony is a kind of complex monophony. In the Korean
traditional music called, sinawi, each instrumentalist improvises in idiomatic manner
around the center melody and embellishes it slightly with vibrato, glissando, grace notes
and the like. Traditional Thai music, the Gamelan music of Bali and Indonesian art
music, which consists of monophony and a drone, can also be heterophonic. Her
treatment of tempo changes recalls the performance style of sanjo, a solo instrumental
music with a percussion accompaniment, which can have three to ten different
movements or sections in one piece. The first section of sanjo begins with a slow

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3 See also under Chapter 2, 9.
rhythmic pattern, *chinyang-jo* in 3/8, later the tempo increases to *chungmori* in 12/4, and by the final sections the tempo increases to a very fast tempo with the change of meter; *chajinmori* (12/8) and *tanmori* (4/4). Chin’s etudes are built around a similar type of changing rhythmic and tempo cycles. Excluding the codas, all of her etudes increase in tempo toward the end.

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The aspect of polyphonic stratification manifested in *in C* reflects the influence of Gamelan music, which has fascinated her for many years. In this etude, each voice plays a distinctive role, just as in Gamelan music. The Gamelan ensemble, all percussion instruments, is divided into three groups. One plays the main melodic materials, the second embellishes it, and the third provides purely rhythmic figures. The distinctiveness of each voice in *Etude No.1, in C* resembles this division. It has four textural strata:

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4 See under chapter 2, 8.
5 Gamelan is a musical ensemble, using gongs, gong-chimes, metallophones, and drums. These are found in Indonesia, Malaysia, Surinam, and scattered places around the Western world. In gamelan, there are fixed-pitch instruments with a range of greater than two octaves (Wikipedia)
The first stratum, the longest and lowest pedal tones, structural notes, ring each of the harmonics, and are held with the sostenuto pedal. Each pedal tone becomes the fundamental of a new overtone series as the music progresses. Interestingly, the low register is mostly empty except when it plays structural notes. The second layer is a series of overtones with relatively long note values based on the note C. They sound in the order c-g-e-b flat-f sharp-d-g sharp (a flat)-g-and so on. They are played with sforzandos, although this stratum loses the sforzandos when the third and fourth strata in the B section take them up. The third layer is the melodic line played in legato in the middle register, and the note values become shorter in the B section. The fourth stratum is the
chordal progression with the shortest note values in the upper register, which frequently reaches to the highest note on the keyboard, and is played with sforzandos. The register of the third stratum gets higher as the music progresses, and when the third interlocks with the fourth, the phrase ends.

**Other Influences**

Even though it is hard to distinguish among the many musical languages that have influenced her because of the way she has integrated them so seamlessly into her own personal language, it is possible to identify some of them.

**Bartok**

Bartok has been a powerful influence in many ways on subsequent composers. His ethno-musicological study introduced new folk music materials containing fresh scalar, metric, and rhythmic materials. Also, much of Bartok’s music is centered on one or more principal pitches. Each of Chin’s etudes also has a center tone: No. 1- C, No. 2-C flat, No. 3- B flat, No. 4- A, No. 5- C, and No. 6 - G sharp. Her prominent use of an overtone scale is a connection to Bartok’s harmonic expression.

**Ex. 5. C overtone series**

![Overtone Scale Diagram]

This scale consists of a series of overtones, which form an “acoustic scale.”
Bartok particularly favored this scale, as did Debussy. At times it is called the "Lydian-Mixolydian" scale since it is a mixture of two modes or a "Bartokian diatonicism" since it is such an important part of Bartok’s melodic and harmonic language.

Bartok was known as the first composer who applied *aksak* rhythm into Western art music. *Aksak* is from the Turkish word for "limping" or "hobbled," as coined and defined by Constantin Brailoiu, a Romanian ethnomusicologist⁶. It refers to a type of rhythm, the pairing of two uneven rhythmic units in the ratio 3:2, and in larger combinations of 3+3+2, 2+3+3, 3+2+3, 2+2+2+3, etc, as found in Balkan folk music. Ligeti adopted this rhythm in his works more extensively, and so does Chin in these etudes.

Chin’s treatment of polyphonic writing reflects Bartok’s in many places. The musical contour of parallel and contrary motion in Chin’s *Scherzo* resembles what is found in the *Scherzo* in Bartok’s *Four Piano Pieces (1903).* Chin’s percussive use of the piano, her employment of toneclusters, chromaticism based on folkmusic, polyrhythm,

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frequent use of interlocking hand position, and large leaps also resembles Bartok.

**Messiaen**

Olivier Messiaen was a composer, theorist, and educator who created a unique world. He did not belong to any school, but he was an important influence on 20th century music. His highly original music was inspired by his study of Hindu rhythm, Greek rhythmic modes, birdsongs, and his interest in the modality of plainsong. His musical characteristics include ametrical rhythms; the use of a personal harmonic language as a pure sound material for coloring, not connected to any structural function; and a sectional form created by combining unrelated sections. All of these traits can be seen in Chin’s etudes, although her distinctive personality comes out in the surface details.

The logical use of register and timbre, discussed previously in this chapter, maximizes the dramatic effect of the music and becomes a distinctive element in Chin’s composition. The use of multiple strata shows the clear influence of both Messiaen and Debussy.
Ex. 7. Music: Messiaen, Regard du Pere in Vingt Regards Sur L’enfant-Jesus

As with Messiaen, the overtone scale in Chin’s etudes becomes a fundamental part of the structure. She explores it in combination with whole-tone scales, and freely mixes in triads and seventh chords. Her treatment of harmony reveals her experiments with creating a new sound effect. For example, her in C is characterized by the interesting sound effect built on an acoustic scale. This etude has a center tone C, and a main compositional material of the whole piece is its overtone series. The first dissonance in the overtone series, F sharp, appears as a second center tone in this piece. (See ex. 4.)

Whether she follows some external logic or her own intuition, her dexterity and craft in this section produces an amazingly rich, complex, and yet concrete sound world.
When we observe the string of the bass notes, C- B flat- C- F sharp-D- B Flat- B- G- F sharp- C- B flat- F sharp- B flat- C. We see they each are all members of the overtone series on C, and each becomes the fundamentals of its own overtone series. Particularly, these 6 notes (C, B flat, F sharp, D, G, B) are the harmonics indicated by the composer at the very beginning. She asks the pianist to depress those notes and to hold them with the sostenuto pedal throughout the piece. Thus when any note of this series is played it will ring out, and it will have a different color especially with an additional use of the damper pedal. Chin even asks the performer to use the damper pedal for the change of some structural notes. This special use of the harmonics and pedals reinforces the “effects of resonance” described by Messiaen as “effects of pure fantasy, similar by a very distant analogy to the phenomenon of natural resonance.”

The function of the figurations playing in the highest register in Chin’s Etude No.1, in C, is an example of superior resonance: the higher register plays the upper partials of the overtone series while the bass rings the fundamentals. As previously observed, Chin’s fundamental harmonic language is based on overtones. The advantage of using overtones as a harmonic structure is that you get a natural resonance. And it makes it easy to select pitches from whole-tone scales, octatonic scales, and chromatic scales without restrictions. Repeating a group of pitches selected from overtones and distributed in rhythmic patterns in which the inner details are too complex to perceive makes the surface sound both static and rich.

Another important structural trait Chin uses is the transformation of a motive by

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8 Ibid, 51.
adding or subtracting notes and by augmenting or diminishing the rhythmic values. This is a process introduced by Messiaen, which he derived from Indian rhythm and from birdsong. In Etude No.3, *Scherzo*, we observe how Chin uses this technique. There is an extension in measure 4 with the addition of one note and one rest in each part. Now the interval between the two parts is very wide: F#6 and G#2. Section B consists of variants of materials in the A section, which is something Messiaen often does in his music. He transforms previous materials by *added values* as well as by eliminating and inverting the notes.\(^9\)

Ex. 8. Etude No. 3, beginning

*Scherzo ad libitum*

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Messiaen’s process of transforming and reconstituting existing materials, which he called a “deforming prism,” lies at the center of the twentieth century musical

\(^9\) Ibid, 16.
language. Messiaen’s technique is rooted in Debussy’s planar structural idea. In his music, themes are connected non-organically; in other words, they are composed by a synthesis of the materials using a more complicated manner such as sectional structure or collage. Messiaen unfolds his musical ideas by a transformation, transfiguration, and embellishment of motives rather than by developing it structurally, since his non-functional and ametric ideas cannot coexist with the organic development model of musical structure.

**Ligeti**

Ligeti’s earliest works are considered an extension of the musical language of his countryman Bela Bartok. But now he is recognized as one of the most ingenious and intellectual composers of the twentieth century. In one of his most astonishing pieces, *Atmospheres*, he completely abandoned melody, harmony and rhythm, using instead only timbre. This is an example of his so-called micropolyphonic works of the 1960s.

Richard Steinitz explains in his book that micropolyphony is “Ligeti’s own term to describe the dense counterpoint in works like *Atmospheres* and the Requiem, in which many parts contribute slightly different versions of the same sequence. In micropolyphonic passages the listener hears not so much a polyphony of individual lines as the textural totality which is their sum. Micropolyphony does not imply *microtonality.*”\(^\text{10}\) According to David Cope, it is "a simultaneity of different lines, rhythms, and timbres."\(^\text{11}\) By the 1980s, his style had departed from that and was inspired

\(^{10}\) Steinitz, 383.
\(^{11}\) A simultaneity is any two or more pitches sounded simultaneously 1) or more than one complete musical
by the music of Conlon Nancarrow, Central African polyphony, and the new mathematics, such as fractal geometry. The music of this time is characterized as the music of complexity and multidimensional polyphony achieved by a new application of “polyrhythm.” His Piano Etudes and Horn Trio best represent this period.

Ligeti was Chin’s teacher from 1985 to 1988. It is not surprising that we can see many similarities between Chin’s Etudes and Ligeti’s. Steinitz described Ligeti’s etudes as music in which “Polyrhythm and cross-accentuation are combined to produce secondary-level accents- ‘supersignals’ he calls them-like holographic images projected three-dimensionally above a two-dimensional plane.” Chin’s etudes in C and Sequenzen are good examples of this particular trait. The divergent rhythmic patterns of in C and complex inner detail of Sequenzen scarcely can be heard by listeners at this speed. The impression of sound is that it is a homogeneous and rich noise but their ears perceive an intense vertical rhythmic flow, with multiple accents.

There is also a more direct relationship between the two composers. Although all of Chin’s etudes start with a simple motive, by either the simultaneous working out of different mechanisms or by transformation of motivic cells, the first impression is soon dispersed. This is also very much the same in Ligeti’s Etudes. For example, Ligeti utilized harmonics in his Etude No. 3, Touches bloquees, as does Chin in No.1, in C; Chin’s harmonics are held by the sostenuto pedal while Ligeti’s are held by the fingers.

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1) Harvard dictionary,
12 Steinitz, 278.
Like Ligeti’s Étude No. 1, in which he superimposed several different rhythmic strata, in Chin’s études in C and Grains, an overall beat or rhythmic organization no longer implies any meaning because of the superabundance of different beats and rhythms. Moto perpetuo and incessant continuum are other words to describe the music of these two composers.

Ex. 9. Ligeti Études, No. 1 & No. 3

In Ligeti’s composition class were many young composers from around the world. According to Steinitz, “concluding that creativity cannot be taught, and not
wishing to interfere in his student’s stylistic choices, he set no exercises and gave no individual lessons, instead presiding over what were effectively master classes in which he and his students met together to play through and discuss their work.” Ligeti’s enthusiastic lectures on analysis and his focus on orchestration and textural color must have made a strong impression on Chin. For example, his concept of the "lamento-bass," on which he spent a whole semester, was reflected in his *Horn Trio* as well as in Chin’s Etudes No. 2, *Sequenzen*, and No. 3, *Scherzo*.

We can observe the compound of *lamento* and *aksak* in Chin’s *Scherzo*, which is used for a more agitated, passionate, and dramatic effect while many of Ligeti’s etudes feature the *aksak* rhythm for the sake of asymmetry and peculiar rhythmic vitality. The best example is found in measures 28–81 in *Scherzo*. She uses this in a similar manner to Ligeti, especially in his No.1 and No. 4.

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13Steinitz, 270.
14 Usually it means an ostinato bass of a descending tetrachord. According to Steinitz, Ligeti established distinguishing features of the *lamento* motif. In its complete form, the *lamento* motif exhibits three or four of the following attributes: 1. It is a three-phrase melody, the third phrase of longer duration. 2. Each phrase descends stepwise in semitones and whole tones, interspersed with upward leaps. 3. Notes of greater expressive significance are intensified harmonically. 4. Different versions of the formula similarly adopt strict rhythmic *talea*. 
Ex. 10. Aksak in Scherzo

Ex. 11. Ligeti Etude No. 4

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Many great composers, including Stravinsky and Messiaen, have used rhythmic ostinato, but Ligeti uses this technique very distinctively and extensively, as if it were his own creation. In the B section in Chin’s Etude No.3, *Scherzo*, the rhythmic figuration in the bass looks very similar to what appears in Ligeti’s *Etude No.4* or the *Horn Trio*. While Ligeti used an exact ostinato, Chin’s etude is constantly varied by permutation without a single literal repetition.

**European tradition**

The most distinctive characteristic of Chin’s music is a natural flow based on the basic motive. Her music looks very complex and is staggeringly demanding of players, though still pianistic, but the listeners have a much easier time. Each etude is very substantial, but Chin refines the abundant information in a relatively traditional way. Formal clarity that is drawn from a complex surface structure is also a characteristic of Messiaen and Ligeti. The result is that listeners can concentrate on the flow of the music and have a single distinctive impression about each piece after listening. Chin achieved this by her logical but imaginative process of construction.

She focuses on a vertical harmonic relationship, so we hear many consonances even though she uses mostly dissonant intervals horizontally. She avoids strong dissonances, using chords that contain the sense of consonances; for example, in No. 1 and No. 5, we hear a strong emphasis on C dominant seventh chords, which are obviously derived from an overtone scale. The prominent use of a C dominant seventh chord shows Chin’s approach toward a quasi-tonal post-modernism. The chord is treated as a motive for those two etudes. Another example is that even though she frequently uses seventh
chords she prefers a diminished seventh instead of a major seventh chord, and she uses it in broken (arpeggiated) form. Thus she gains tritone dissonance but at the same time gives an impression of relatively consonant sound coming from other components. Measure 71 of *Toccat*a illustrates how Chin often arpeggiates a diminished chord.

Ex. 12. Etude No. 5, *Toccat*a

Chin’s original use of the whole-tone scale is presented clearly at the beginning of Etudes 2, 4, and 6 as another way of avoiding dissonance. We also find mixtures of chromatic and whole-tone scales: in measure 4 in *Scales*, she combines a D-E-F sharp-G
sharp tetrachord and a G#-A-B flat-B-C-D flat chromatic hexachord. She often uses whole-tone scales for transitions: in measures 25 and 26 in *Scalen*, the E-D-C-B flat-A flat-G flat-E whole-tone scale is combined with B flat-B-C-C sharp chromatic tetrachord. The scale component of No. 3 is a mixture of C overtones and a whole-tone scale. As it is presented in the beginning, it suggests bitonality, in which the left hand mainly plays C overtones while the right hand mainly plays a varied whole-tone scale with two additional notes, G and A, at the very beginning. Although this kind of division is not audible for very long, since the characteristics soon get blurred in measure 5 and following, clearly Chin considers these two scales to be the main constructive elements of all six Etudes.

The etudes, especially No.2, reflect Chin’s fascination with numerical puzzles and symmetry. Composers who study or who are under the influence of the European musical tradition often apply numerical ideas to a composition. This is often found in the compositions of many influential European composers such as Bartok, Messiaen, and Nono, as well as the Second Viennese School. This will be further examined later in the analysis of *Sequenzen*. (Ex. 13-2)

The structural strength of Chin's music stems from a German tradition that, in the twentieth century, includes Schoenberg, and more emphatically Webern. Chin presents a simple, initial motive at the beginning of a piece and spins the whole piece out of it, which seems faithful to the German tradition of motivic development or developing variation. This reordering of notes and the addition of notes and note values is found in Webern’s music, whose logical method took traditional thematic expansion and conventional forms and genres to new places.
But Chin’s motives are not organically developed. They are deformed and varied, permutated rather than developed. She builds up the piece under a certain, consistent rule of motivic transformation, permutation, and combination, which sounds like an improvisational process. But the process of dissolution is calculated before she starts to deform the order she sets in the beginning of the piece. This becomes clear when we look at the structure of her etudes. They are in symmetrical or rounded forms. Most of the time the length of each section is calculated as well. This fondness for symmetrical structure is also a classical trait.

Ex. 13 Structure of the Etudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>A(1-24)</th>
<th>B(25-48)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. 2</td>
<td>Intro.(1-14), Br.(15-17)</td>
<td>A(18-30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 3</td>
<td>Intro.(1-6)</td>
<td>A(7-19), Br.(20-27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 4</td>
<td>A(1-96)</td>
<td>A'(97-149)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 5</td>
<td>A(1-54)</td>
<td>B(55-76), Br.(77-81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 6</td>
<td>Thema(1-12)</td>
<td>Var.I(13-55)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In No.3, *Scherzo*, a simple, strictly limited motive presented in the very beginning spins out the whole piece. (See Ex. 8) In particular, the six measures of the introduction show the types of progressions that will come next, in step-wise, parallel, contrary, and leaping motions. The abstract and complex quality of her music, however, does not derive only from a search for tone-color; below the surface there is also a logical, systematic order such as that found in serial music, which usually cannot be perceived by the listener’s ear. In this second level of the music, as opposed to the surface level, Chin’s music always exhibits a unified use of rhythmic shape, which focuses on the initial motive.
Analysis of No. 2, *Sequenzen*

**Form**

The form of this Etude shows a symmetrical structure, which Bartok described as an “Arch Form,” referring to the form that he used in many of his works including his *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, third movement.

The form of No.2 is **introduction (1-14)-bridge (15-17)-A (18-30)-B (30-49)-bridge (50-60)-B’ (61-82)-A’(83-91)-Coda.** In the B section, motive a reduces by the diminution of note values and motive b expands with added notes. The B material is composed of two whole-tone scales, although they are not complete. In the B’ section, in bars 63-67, if we listen vertically we can hear repetitions of an 8- semi-quaver rhythmic group and 6-quaver group. After three repetitions, the group of semi-quavers expands by the combining of two groups of those in bar 68. This expansion continues until the end of the B’ section. As the music continues, more and more semi-quavers are added until we hear only a succession of semi-quavers even though the flow intermittently stops because of the additions of single quavers.
Ex. 14-1. *Etude No. 2*, Introduction

**Sequenzen**

Unsuk Chin (1995)
Revision (2003)

Ex. 14-2. A section
E flat - D flat - C flat - A - G - F - (E flat)
Ex. 14-3. B section

Ex. 14-4, Bridge and B’ section
Harmonic language

In the introduction, Chin minimized the degree of dissonances in the low register by using a whole-tone scale: C flat-D flat-E flat-F-G-A. She chose C flat instead of B to make this scale out of it. The order of occurrence is not same as the scale but the result is the same effect, an ambiguous and mysterious atmosphere, which gets much darker in the A section. After two bars of the bridge, we observe added notes to the E flat descending whole-tone scale structure (See Ex. 13-2). The rhythmic ostinato adds intensity to this texture and the composite effect produces an incredible sonority: homogeneous and richly roaring. As discussed before, the coloration and sonority is due to the substance of the materials. This etude includes various textures: polyphony in the introduction, simultaneity and polyphony in the A section, homophonic writing in the bridge, and heterophony in the B section, similar to No. 4 Scales.
Mathematical relationship

The application of a mathematical idea in music was an attraction to many 20th century composers, such as Bartok and Messiaen. Later, pieces such as Eonta by Xenakis, or any other of his works, as well as Lutoslawski’s “String Quartet (1964),” use them. In Etude No. 2, Sequenzen, in bars 18-29 (Ex. 14-2), we observe gradual diminution of values of the outer voices. If we count these by semi-quaver unit, the number of units proceeds as 11-9-7-5. It reduces by a certain rule, and in the A’ section, in bars 83-91 (Ex.14-5) another such pattern emerges: 5-8-12-16, 6-10-14-18-22-26. In the B section, in bars 33-45 (Ex.14-3), we see another numerical phase with a distinctive new ascending figuration. The number of semi-quaver notes expands from 7 to 13

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although there is an interruption; 7-11-13-7-13.

**Technical issues**

According to the composer, the second etude may be the most difficult of the six because of its dense texture and rhythmic complexity. There is a homogeneous rhythmic progression, but the discrepant melodic phrasing between hands in the A section creates technical difficulties. The performer needs to analyze the texture first, then decide how to perceive this rhythmic simultaneity. In this particular passage, thanks to the rhythmic ostinato, (Ex.13-2) there is a relatively easy way to how to figure out how to perform it. Think of all four lines as if they are one part. In other words, determine the composite rhythm. Drawing all the notes in a line in order of occurrence without regard to pitch can be very helpful in playing Chin’s etudes as well as other contemporary works containing similar rhythmic complexity.

Ex. 16. *Sequenzen*, rhythmic ostinato mm. 18 - 26

In the B section, we see an incessant succession of quavers that are many times doubled in octaves. This is not a new figuration to many pianists, but when it must be played at such a fast tempo (dotted quarter =120), it certainly creates a technical problem. It is similar to the Scriabin Etudes, particularly No. 3, because it is combined with large leaps. But for Chin, this is only the beginning. When semi quavers are inserted along with increased dynamics in this succession in the left hand, it becomes tremendously difficult
even before the addition of a new figuration in the right hand.

The contrast of sonority is the most notable feature of this etude. It is caused by the contrast of registers, dynamics and materials. In the A section, a dark and intense sonority can be emphasized by the use of the damper pedal, which makes a bigger contrast to the B section. In the B section, the use of pedal should be restricted to produce a crisp sound. I suggest using the pedal only for the ringing of motive a and in the beginning of bar 44 to help get a bigger sound, "fff". The bridge is another place to bring sonorous contrast. The texture is layered, but the inner detail is in stasis, which contrasts with a mechanical movement in the previous section, and the motoric activity returns right away after this motionless 11 bars. Similar to the introduction, the sound of this bridge is quite mysterious but much more spacious due to the colors of the clusters in upper register and the sustained bass notes far below at the dynamic of "p".

**A Brief History of Etudes and Toccata**

Since the name ‘etude’ first appeared in piano literature around 1800 in the works of virtuoso pianist and teachers such as Clementi and Czerny, it has become a genre in which a particular aspect of performing technique is emphasized. In the nineteenth century, Chopin and Liszt developed this type of piece into one of the major concert staples of the pianist’s repertoire, which means that playing these etudes involves not only dealing with technical matters but also musicianship. In the twentieth century, Debussy, Prokofiev, Scriabin, and Bartok extended the tradition of Chopin and Liszt by adding their own original musical features. It became a demonstration of triumphant virtuosity by exploring more flamboyant technical challenges, as did the solo piano
toccata. The toccata is a genre that has received significant attention from twentieth century composers. After 1750, the term toccata began to mean a virtuoso etude, since Clementi and Czerny used it that way in their compositions. The word toccata first appeared in keyboard literature in 1536 and its style was similar to preludes, in terms of brilliant passage works containing quasi-improvisatory disjunct harmonies, broken chord figuration, and sweeping scales. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, many organ and harpsichord players used this genre as a means to show their great mastery of keyboard virtuosity. The most distinctive characteristic of a toccata is the perpetual motion idiom, which was established by R. Schumann, Debussy, Ravel and Prokofiev. After the 1950’s, a vast number of etudes and toccatas were written, but not all of them have appealed to pianists and scholars in part because of either a lack of musicianship or a reckless technical challenge or both. Among those who established a new aesthetic quality in late twentieth century are George Perle, William Bolcom, and Gyorgy Ligeti. Usually each etude in a set focuses on a single technical problem. However, each of Unsuk Chin’s etudes presents a multitude of technical challenges. These will be a great addition to the history of etudes in the twenty-first century.

Virtuosity

Since these are entitled “etudes” it is natural that Chin emphasized technical challenges, but some parts exceed human possibility. Indeed, none of the tempo markings are realistic. Her simultaneous working out of different mechanisms and an incredibly fast tempo quickly push the simple and innocent initial material into a complex, expansive and chaotic system. An apparent application of polyrhythm is found in No.5.
Ex. 17. Etude, No. 5, mm. 62 - 64, rhythmic complexity

Chin’s melodies are not legato, but are detached and jagged. They are different in length and pattern in each hand. Also, her phrase structures grow wayward, which requires a coordination challenge. A facility of hand independence is a prerequisite to this non-synchronization.

The rhythmic difficulties are the most challenging aspect of the piece. Meters and bar line do not provide any rhythmical base in her etudes. Their normal function is avoided. This removal of the meter and the pulse, the changing bar-lengths, and odd subdivisions creates a wonderful elasticity in the music, but for performers, the counting of fractional tempo relationship is arduous. Since a bar line only helps the player read the music, rather than implying any relation of musical features, performers must calculate absolute values and keep up the pulse throughout the piece. This may not be true for No. 6, in which the composer seems to intentionally insert a pause between the phrases rather than strictly calculated rests.
One of the distinctive rhythmic difficulties in these etudes is playing cross-accentuation. In many places it is shown as a sforzando. An irregular accent in a fast tempo requires an astonishing technical virtuosity, especially when it is not allied with bar lines as found in these etudes. Examples occur in all six etudes.

In terms of accentuation, there is an interesting feature in her etudes: some adjacent notes produce the sound of a cluster when played rapidly and then function as an accent all together. Examples are found in Scherzo, (Ex. 8) and similar effects in mm. 1, 3, (Ex. 15) and many other places in Scalet.
An automatic and mechanistic digital technique is required to play all six
etudes. There are several typical patterns throughout the 6 etudes, which create technical
difficulties.

1. A stretch of hands for the interval of 9th chords or holding more than two notes
simultaneously. This is mostly found in No.1 but playing the clusters in No. 6 also
requires this stretch.

Ex. 19. Etude No. 6, mm.47

2. Playing a succession of patternless chords requires accuracy and endurance.
Measures 70-74 in Scherzo (Ex. 19) are typical of Chin’s chord progressions. They are an
alternation of fifths and fourths, and at times thirds and seconds, at a tremendously fast
tempo. To learn and practice the varied intervals of a succession of chords is laborious
work. But once it is learned, and if a performer is able to play Scriabin Etude No.10 for
thirds and fourths chords and Bartok Etude No.2 for the succession of fifths, Chin’s
Etude should not cause too many new problems. Exercising with Stravinsky’s Etude No.2
may be helpful in playing this kind of passage.

Ex. 20. Etude No. 3, mm. 70 - 78

3. Endurance is one of the most important prerequisites to play No.1 in C and No.5 Toccata, as it is also for playing the toccatas of Schumann, Prokofiev and Ravel since these compositions are perpetuum mobile,\(^{16}\) as are many Chopin etudes. Her use of octave techniques can be understood as a traditional virtuosic feature, particularly descending from Liszt and Bartok.

4. The succession of repeated notes employed in No. 6. Grains resembles Scarbo in Ravel’s Gaspard de la Nuit since both require the same technique. In Grains, the performer even needs to play the repetitions by switching hands; in bar 65, the accent on the fourth note is very helpful when switching hands.

\(^{16}\) A composition in which rhythmic motion, often in a single note-value at a rapid tempo, is continuous from beginning to end.
5. Large leaps occur in each of the six etudes. In *Toccata*, clusters are inserted into the succession of leaps. The leaps are combined with a jagged melodic line, with no particular pattern, at a rapid tempo, and in most cases it moves out in opposite directions in both hands. Quite a challenge!

Ex. 22. Etude No. 5, *Toccata*, mm. 82 - 83

Measures 17 to 19 in *Scherzo* (Ex.1) involve a rapid scale and octave leaps while moving out two arms in contrary motion in a split second and keeping the dynamic "piano". Since this passage requires the performer to shift quickly from the movement of
small muscles to that of big muscles, the performer would have better control on each
note with arms from the beginning. Without a doubt, in this tempo, measures 15 and 18
should be played very lightly with staccato even though the composer marks this as "non-
legato". In measure 17, the interlocking hand position is not very comfortable to play
these sweeping notes. I would begin by placing the left hand thumb over the right hand
since this sweep does not allow the performer to have a second to switch hands in the
middle of measure 17. Everything passes in a few seconds like a mirage. Two older
pieces that might help the pianist play this passage are the Messiaen VI. *Par Lui tout a
ete fait*, one of the most virtuosic among the collection *Vingt Regards sur l'enfant Jesus*,
and the Bartok Etude No.1.

6. Fingering plays a more important role in No. 4, *Scalen*, than in any other
etude. Since Chin uses scales as freely as possible in *Scalen*, it is hard to apply the
fingerings we pianists traditionally employ. Bartok *Fourteen Bagatelles* No. 12 or the
Profokiev *Etude* No. 2 can be helpful before the performer approaches this etude. In bar
25 in No. 3, *Scherzo*, we see an interesting figure in the left hand. Since the thumb holds
the middle C, the second finger crosses over to play the notes D and D flat. Thus, the
suggested fingering for this descending line from D to C flat in the left hand is 2-3-4-2-3-
4-2-3-4.
7. Since the composer is a pianist, almost no places need to be rearranged. But for technical reasons, some rewriting is helpful to give the other hand easier leaps; for example, in bar 24 in _Toccata_ play the note b with the left hand. In places like bar 51 in No. 6, it is easier to play the upper notes of the cluster with the right hand. The performer gets more accuracy and sound by playing the last two notes in bar 72 with the left hand and the first two notes in bar 73 with the right hand. Sometimes the performer needs rewriting to achieve the interlocking hand position in No. 1 _in C_, and also in places like bar 8, playing the note D in the second layer with the right hand projects more sound and is technically easier as well. In bar 17 of No. 3, I suggest putting the right hand thumb over the left hand to play the interlocking scale rapidly.
Rests

Chin molds her inner detail to achieve the effects of growth and stasis. The basic character of her etudes is a continuum. The imperceptible merging of textures is usually accompanied by moments of driving music, which are then abruptly cut off by motionless and sparse texture. But her music rarely has a complete moment of silence, even for a short moment. An example is in the beginning of No. 3, but it is a very short silence since the tempo of the piece itself is extremely fast. There is no moment of complete silence in No. 1 or No. 2, and a rest mark in the left hand part does not appear until the last two measures of No. 2. Musically, the rest is only used for an abrupt change such as halting the movement, changing the texture or rhythmic pattern, or changing direction, usually after an intervallic expansion. Since bar 24 of No. 3 is a sudden explosion right after a calm pp, with a succession of eighth notes in both hands, and since both hands start from a middle register after having had a wide interval between them, the player needs to quickly shift hand position as well as prepare for a huge sound within a very short moment. Only in No. 6 can the rests be more flexible according to pedal usage.

Acoustic sensitivity

Coloring is an important aspect for the performer to consider. For example, the beginning of the second etude is mysterious. The rhythm is not important; thus whenever one note is added it adds more color into the canvas. According to the register, the motive wears different colors, so control of the brightness will be an important addition to the palette. For example, the jagged motive with seconds in Etude No. 2 is the first one that comes into the music with bright colors, thus distinguishing it from the dark coloring in
the left hand. A sharp and light touch will be proper rather than a heavy and deep tone even in f. No. 4 is playful, thus the color is transparent and should not get thicker even in fff until bar 99, where the tones turn rich, as indicated by the addition of tenuto. In No.6, because of the many leaps, the tones can easily become rough, so every touch needs to be refined and precisely controlled to produce the divergent dynamics, thus creating various pointillistic color, although it is very hard at this speed. Even the clusters cannot be played heavily, but the pianist should produce the full sonority in a short moment with a relaxed wrist. Thus a rapid control of tension of the wrist is essential. A coloristic touch of rolling clusters or similar figures is one of the characteristics in these etudes. (In No. 3, No. 4, No. 6, clusters and cluster-like figurations get treated as accents). The crossing voices at the end of Toccata project a very interesting change of color. But for the performer’s hands it is a switching of roles: the right hand takes over the rotation figurations driven by the left hand while the left hand takes over the clusters and chords previously played by the right hand. This crossing-voice ending is similar to that of Bartok’s Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs Op. 20, No. 6

Ex. 24-1. Bartok

Pedaling is another important factor used to create distinctive colors. Chin precisely indicates pedal markings wherever she wants to make a specific effect. The pedaling for the rest of the work is based on the performer’s interpretation. Most of the time, a careful use of pedaling is suggested since the tempo is so fast and the texture is often very dense. Her writing clearly reflects, however, the places where pedals are needed. For instance, bringing out the structural notes, such as in bar 28 in No. 3, bar 97 in No.4, and accents such as in bars 54, 78, and 83 in No. 4 are important ones. In places like bars 82-89, by emphasizing the bass accents in No.3 to contrast with the coda and last measures in No. 5, the pedals can be used for sonority. But they shouldn’t be used in such places as bar 28 and the very last measure in No.3, which should be played strictly without a ritardando as if it were disappearing. In No. 6, the composer suggested enough pedaling.\(^1\)

\(^{17}\) Chin suggested to the performer to use enough pedals on the day of performance. The Etudes No.4 and No.6 had a Korean premiere by Korean pianist Soo-Yeon Lim in Tong Young City Cultural Center on March 18, 2005, the day I had an interview with the composer.
Chin's musical language is a synthesis of the early twentieth century European musical tradition, of Debussy, Bartok, and Schoenberg, with electronic music, non-European materials, such as those explored by Debussy, Bartok, Messiaen and Ligeti, and total serialism. It is modern but not evolutionary. It is abstract and imaginary, but also concrete and detailed. In the same piece, we can find traditional chords and scales combined with the ostinatos and oscillations of small rhythm cells featured in Balinese Gamelan music. And also we hear the performance style of Korean traditional music. Her use of rather diverse compositional styles demonstrates how a composer can integrate seemingly disparate elements of the compositional experiments of the last century and put them to a profoundly original use. Perhaps the most distinctive element of these etudes, as well as her other instrumental music, is her enthusiasm for virtuosity. This results in formidable, indeed, almost overwhelming, technical demands. This shows that her piano writing follows the genealogy of virtuosic piano compositions, from Chopin and Liszt, through Ravel, Bartok, Prokofiev and Scriabin to Ligeti and Bolcom. Just as the music of those composers stretches and increases the technical capacity of the performers, so, too, does this set of pieces.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

This thesis on the recent works of two internationally recognized Korean women composers, Unsuk Chin and Jiesun Lim, will be, I hope, a helpful addition to an understanding of the current musical situation in Korea. By studying their music, we can see several of the important developments of the last one hundred and twenty years. As in many other parts of the world, music in twentieth century Korea has coincided with what are probably the most turbulent social conditions in the entire history of the nation. Since music reflects individual and collective identities as well as social structure, these developments include, but are not limited to, the status of women in Korean society, musical and otherwise, and are the cultural impact of over 120 years of exposure to Western culture.

First, the emergence of women composers represents a remarkable rise of women’s social status during the past fifty years. In 1945, the overall rate of illiteracy was 77%. This was just after the liberation from Japanese occupation, which is when textbooks written in Korean were first supplied to schools. The education of men received the support of society first. At that time, it was not common for women to get an education higher than elementary school. Thus, it was natural that men led every field within the nation. It is more than exciting to see that we can now expect that some outstanding young women musicians will be leaders of the next generation of the Korean musical society.

Second, unlike the nationalist movements in Europe in the nineteenth and early
twentieth centuries, interculturalism in Korea is a phenomenon that is a consequence of the introduction of Western culture and a compromise between coexisting musical cultures. According to the Korean musicologist, Lee Kang-Sook, it had begun as an experimental combination that attempted to reconcile Western and Eastern approaches.¹ Interculturalism has certainly contributed to the expansion of the musical language and has become a stepping stone to the next generation. In the meantime, in the realm of Western music, musicians from Korea have grown to stand shoulder to shoulder with their Western-born counterparts. Although most achievements have until recently been by performers, the foundation is now in place so that composers like Unsuk Chin and Jiesun Lim have been able to become musically sophisticated. They have already been able to lift the compositional level to equality with the rest of the world.

Third, thanks to the interculturalism prevailing in the world, Korean composers now can participate as leaders of the future cultural trend. While it is very true that being a Korean women composer has been a disadvantage in the past, it has now turned into a great advantage, especially in terms of understanding more than one musical culture in this global system. Both of these women, born in Korea, have studied in the West, and their works are true intercultural compositions. In this respect, the success at home and abroad of these composers who write solely Western music without losing their identity, either individual or cultural, is more than enough to draw our attention. But even though interculturalism is the term advocated in numerous studies to describe the current trend in Korea, individualism or eclecticism is really a more accurate and more important way to

begin to understand their music. In other words, they should be understood as individuals and as creative artists, rather than only as exemplars of a cultural trend.

From a pianist’s point of view, since communication with an audience is one of the most important concerns to performers, one of the strongest values of the pieces examined in this paper is their accessibility to listeners. The individual pieces range from moderate to extreme difficulty. But there is a certain quality of musical material and expressive content that can be understood by the listener, whoever it is, even though the pieces might be best understood by the composers’ colleagues, who share the same musical and cultural point of view. Nevertheless, the clear arrangement of the structure, the recognizable motivic development, the control of musical flow, the effective changes of textures, and the distinct rhythmical figuration offer clear means of access to any listener.

The level of expertise in the use of the instrument is another attractive factor to the pianist. It is a great pleasure to play a piece of music written by a composer who fully comprehends the nature and resources of the instrument and who is able, therefore, to write for it effectively. While the music of these composers explores the beauty of the sound and the possible range of the instrument, the quality of the technical challenges in their works shows their mastery over it. It also proves that the teaching of instrumentalists in Korea, in general, has been greatly developed. Whereas some technically difficult contemporary compositions give the performers no more than frustration after all the attempts to convey the music to the audience, this music provides us the pleasure of both exploring new techniques and feeling a sense of accomplishment. In this respect, one of the goals of this paper is to help to further establish the significance
of these works in the pianists’ repertoires.

Furthermore, it is hard to say that their music does not employ some of the melodic and rhythmical attributes of Korean traditional music. Whereas many Korean composers consciously use a "Korean" style in their music for Western instruments, these composers write a wholly "Western music" for the instrument with an unconscious addition of Korean flavor, such as a particular kind of ornamentation, an improvisational heterophonic texture, a consistent change of accents and tempo, or the change of dynamic in a repeated note passage.

The world of twentieth century music might be best characterized by its diversity. An emancipation of existing principles and a modernization of musical expression along with a reaction against the chaos of war have sometimes resulted in depersonalized, abstract, and very difficult music. At the same time, though, many composers have a continuing appreciation of preexisting musical values and materials and are trying to reach a larger audience. If the music of the twentieth century has broadened the domain of classical music, the twenty-first century may be the time for composers to reestablish a place for classical music that exerts a spiritual influence on society despite the declining size of the market. As we have seen in some of the recent tendencies of Western composers, the world is ready to embrace the whole history of music. At the same time, I believe that multiplicity or diversity will still continue to characterize the music of this century. Maybe it will be more emphasized as a reaction to the tendency towards the assimilation of nations or continents. Koreans represent Korea wherever they reside. In other words, the collective identity of a nation is established by the individual’s identity. How to balance the values of individuality, identity, and
diversity along with embracing different cultures and styles, is an important issue left for us. Along with intercultural works, which are a product of this embracing tendency, I hope that these composers, whether they intend to or not, will play an important role in the generation of a new musical tradition in Korea, which will eventually add a Korean identity to the history of classical music.
Bibliography


APPENDIX 1

Interviews with Jiesun Lim on January 15 and March 8, 2005

Where were you born? What was the musical environment there? How did you start music? What was your early musical training in Korea? When and why did you choose to be a composer?

I was born in Seoul in 1960. First, I studied piano but I always thought about new melodies and tried some improvisation. I had to stop piano lessons when I was 14 years old because my parents didn’t want me to be a musician. But the music teacher in my high school (Jung-Shin women high school established by missionaries) encouraged me to study composition. I was also motivated by choir activities. I began studying composition with composer In-Yong La, three years after I stopped piano playing. Studying harmony was very interesting and logical to me.

What was your first impression about contemporary music? Was there a particular piece or person that inspired you to compose?

When I first heard contemporary music in college, my impression about Stravinsky, Bartok, Schoenberg and Penderecki was that they were so new and fresh. Especially, The Hammer Without a Master was very impressive. I liked all kind of atonal music. But what we heard was about 15 years behind the current musical styles so we rarely had a chance to listen to the Western contemporary music of 1970s.

What made you decide to continue your studies in another country? What made you decide where to study, whom to study with?

My dream was to be a famous composer and contribute to the Korean musical society as a woman composer. So I planned to study abroad since my freshman year. My teacher in Korea strongly recommended Indiana University in Bloomington, so I went there. I was lucky to meet a lot of nice people there.

Why the U.S.?

First of all, English is the most comfortable foreign language for me and the curriculum is very similar to Korea. It was a very important reason because I thought it would help when I came back to Korea and taught in a college, and it turned out to be true.

Did your early training in Korea prepare you well for study abroad? And what was the difference from training in another country?
In college we were busy at imitating the sound of Western composers even though there were not many chances to listen to music in class and it was not easy to find recordings. For example, once a student wrote music in the style of a specific composer, such as Stravinsky, and then brought it to its professor and discussed about it. Most professors in universities in late 1970s and 1980s wrote very abstract and experimental music, which was about 15 years behind the current musical styles. My professor In-Yong La was one of them and he always encouraged me a lot. These days much more composers have found their voices and so write in diverse styles as well as in other countries in the world.

I actually developed my own sound after I studied in the U.S. under John Eaton. When I started to study in the U.S., I was shocked due to the amount of the literature of music to study. Therefore listening to a huge amount of music itself inspired me a lot. As I wanted to write music freely, I had to learn how to find my own sound through suffering. My teacher John Eaton encouraged me a lot by asking me, “is this the sound that you really want?” I was frustrated when I heard only that comment in the lessons, but now I thank my teacher for that. And that was my teacher’s intention, to help his students to find their own sound and he did not force his style to the students and never attempt to formulate any school.

*What composers have influenced you? What composers do you like or respect the most? How did you study them? How did they influence you? What pianists do you like the best or have inspired you the most?*

I don’t have any particular composer in my mind but I enjoyed listening to Ravel, Bartok, and Stravinsky. I liked a strong rhythm and intensity of their music. In particular, I analyzed Webern’s music note by note, so maybe I have learned a lot about the logical development of a cell motive from this study. My music never completely departs from the traditional structure. When you listen to any of my music you can recognize the flow of the music. Although they were written in the contemporary language it has never been completely atonal or Avant-garde. I was told my music sounds late romantic. Some in particular have said my 2-piano piece shows an influence from Scriabin.

*Sometimes people gain perspective and insight into their own culture and background by being far away from it; is that true for you in terms of traditional Korean music, as well as for the current Korean Western musical training and society?*

When I was in Indiana, I was too busy with studying, so I have no experience of it. In 2003, at the height of the Iraq war I went back to U.S. as a Fulbright scholar and stayed for about a year. That situation in the other part of the world inspired me to write the Kayakum concerto. I used the instrumentation that I’ve never tried before because I believed that East and West can coexist. The problem of this instrumentation was the balance between the solo and orchestra. But it worked very successfully on the stage although we used a microphone over the solo. It was played in Israel and we’ve gotten a very good response.
Are there any cultural background influences on your music? Do you think your music sounds like it was written by a Korean woman, and if yes, how so? Also, do you explicitly use any Korean folk or traditional elements in your music? If not in this piece, since it's for a piano, which is not a traditional Korean instrument, are there other pieces where you do?

Of course, I have been influenced by Korean culture. But most of my music doesn’t sound anything related to Korean music. Although I have never intended to use any folk material or other traditional element into piano music it is so natural to hear something like that.

Have you learned about Korean traditional music?

No. Only an introduction to it. But I have learned about traditional instruments in the course of composing and rehearsing many pieces for Korean traditional instruments through discussions with performers.

Your writing is very structural and traditional. But I can see through the music, that you restrain yourself from composing more complex one. Can you tell me history of your compositional styles?

When I study in Korea and Indiana, I was busy with learning and imitating music of great composers. During that time I only used new and innovative compositional techniques. A representative composition of this period is Tone Poem: The Shield of Achilles (1994). It was written for a large orchestra that was full of dense texture and tremendous complexity. After returning home, I rearranged everything I learned to find my own voice. The music from this period is still difficult but it contains my anguish about isolation of contemporary music in the society. Almost every contemporary composition performances were managed by the composer’s society and they were the only audience. I had a question what I should do to make my music to be performed. Music exists to he heard. So I tried to communicate with the audience as much as possible within the limit of not losing my own character. I started to make a melody that can be heard and remembered. In 1998, my orchestra piece Toward the New Sky was awarded Korean National Music Prize. It is given to a piece which contains and presents the Korean spirit. Taking that opportunity I started to write music influenced by Korean traditional music. My other chamber music composition, Nori, which was performed in Kennedy center in 2003, contains a tune from a Korean traditional folk music. After the performance in Washington D.C., I knew this music communicated with the audience by their responses.

Are there any difficulties to being a well-established Korean woman composer? What do you think of the Korean woman music society?

When I was looking for a job I felt a bias toward women. In Korea, there are so many women musicians because training music has been considered to be proper for ladies, but in the job market women have a disadvantage just because they are women. Even though there are plenty of opportunities for women composers to present their music and there is
no bias against women in competitions in Korea, -for example, I won the first Ahn, Ik Tae Competition and the first Hanminjok national music festival -there are still very limited job opportunities for them.

What do you think of Korean contemporary music now?

I think our level of composition by Korean composers is by no means inferior to that of any Western musicians. However, while in other countries, many astonishing performers give performances of contemporary music, in Korea, only a few performers are willing to play contemporary music written by Korean composers and in many cases, they give performances without enough practice. Thus when it was presented the quality of performance becomes much lower than those from other countries.

What does the piano mean to you as a composer and a pianist? Does the piano help you to compose other genres of music?

The piano is an orchestra to me. The range of expression is so wide and various. I always imagine the sound of an orchestra when I write piano music, so the layers are multiple and it naturally requires difficult technique to the performer. I rarely write solo piano music because it is too hard. It was even harder when I was young. But it got easier after I wrote several orchestra pieces successfully. For example, I dared to attempt to write the 2-piano piece after I finished the doctoral dissertation about orchestration.

What is the purpose of writing this music? Is it for a special occasion or for a performer?

It was commissioned by a pianist, Chul-Hee Yoon. He premiered this piece in his recital.

How did you decide the title of the music? How do you approach it? What does that mean in this particular piece?

Spiritual Dance represents a process of finding out “I.” I followed a certain sound that comes from my mind. It appears as a struggle sometimes or peaceful triads in the final movement. Four different movements show different stages of the spiritual journey.

Your music required only traditional pianistic techniques like what was need in the music of Bartok, Debussy, or Ravel. Do you have any refuse to contemporary piano techniques, such as arm cluster, or keyboard harmonics?

Innovative techniques brings uniqueness to the piece only when it came out first, but once it is used frequently it loses freshness and people gets sick of it soon. I think there is no new technique these days. And I don’t trust “chances,” which means, when you write music for arm cluster or plucking strings, music can be varied by different performers. I don’t want to give that kind of chances to the performer. Because if I was not there in rehearsal my music could be performed the way I didn’t intend.
What is your writing style? Do you write music in a short time or do you plan it far ahead? How long did it take to write this music?

I planned to write this piece for a long time before I actually started to write. I don’t write music very quickly. It took about two months to finish this piece. I use my vacation time to write new music since I only write commissioned works.

How do you get inspired to write music? What are you planning to write in the future? What piece do you love the most out of all your output? Why? What is the goal of the life as a composer?

I am inspired by books or everyday life. I like my recent pieces such as Kayakum concerto, and a trio for piano, clarinet and cello. That was inspired by an art work. I plan to write a piano concerto in the near future. My wish is to leave one or two pieces that will be remembered forever. And I wish my works were performed more often internationally.
Interview with Unsuk Chin on March 18, 2005

*Where were you born? What was the musical environment there? How did you start music lessons? When and why did you choose to be a composer?*

I was born in Seoul, Korea. My father was a minister in the Presbyterian Church, and my mother was a teacher. My family acquired a piano when I was 2 years old. When I was 11 or 12, my music teacher at middle school was a composer, and one day she advised me to become one. I had an interest in composing, but originally I wanted to be a pianist. Since my parents couldn’t afford to pay for piano lessons I decided to become a composer. Koreans all have been through similar difficult times. I learned harmony and other basic things about the music by accompanying the hymns in church and it was like an exercise in harmony. I was exposed to Western music in that way. I have no time to practice these days but I still enjoy playing the piano.

*What was your first impression about contemporary music? Was there a particular piece or person that inspired you to compose? What was your early musical training in Korea?*

I heard Stravinsky’s violin concerto when I was thirteen, while I taught myself composing. When I heard it, I thought it was strange since there was too much brass. I listened to a lot of music everyday, Western classical music, and I studied a lot of scores by copying them in hands, such as Tchaikovsky’s ‘Pathétique’ Symphony.

*Did your early training in Korea prepare you well for studying abroad?*

I studied with Sukhi Kang beginning in my second year. He was the principal teacher of composition at the University. He provided a lot of information about contemporary music. I heard Bartok for the first time in university and I like him a lot. I also heard Ligeti, Penderecki, Stockhausen, and Boulez. I learned a lot from Sukhi Kang.

*What was your compositional style before you went to Germany?*

I wrote very abstract and complex music. I think I imitated post-serial music, employing the most difficult techniques.

*Any there any other influences on your compositional style other than those such as nationalistic, neoclassical, post modernism, minimalist or eclectic musical styles?*

I think composers cannot tell exactly what kind of ideas they have been influenced by. In other words, those are just being heard from the music they write.
What made you decide to continue your studies in another country?

I won a DAAD scholarship from the German government to study in Hamburg with Gyorgy Ligeti.

Why did you give up writing post-serial music?

It happened after I studied with Ligeti. Ligeti himself abandoned that style before, and I had experienced much conflict while I was writing post avant-garde music. As a result, I couldn’t write any piece for three years from 1986 to 1989 because I was not able to find any thing to replace it.

How was your study with Ligeti?

His highly qualified musical insight influenced me in many ways. It is hard to receive any complements from him even with a quite good composition because he sees the intrinsic quality of music, and his own music world is deep and wide as well. He wanted me to write music that I can feel with my heart, rather than just imitate what I had learned intellectually and logically. For him, all kind of music is music, folk music or anything else.

How did you get interested in non-European music and folk music? Did they give any influences on your music? Have you ever studied Korean traditional music?

Through Ligeti I was exposed various kinds of music. Gamelan was one of them. It was especially attractive to me since gamelan music is very complex and abstract, yet full of vitality. I even learned to play the gamelan instruments and wrote down their music in score when I visited Bali in 1997. Its rhythmic pattern is perhaps based on some mathematical model. It is very improvisational and changes a lot. I think gamelan has universal qualities but Korean music is understood only by Koreans. Furthermore, it is not yet structured so it is difficult to learn intensively. When any one uses Korean material it becomes obvious right away, so I don’t want to use it.

What did you learn from working with electronic music? Has there been any change after that?

Since I had a hard time writing music after I gave up the post-serial music, I wanted to begin with a completely new approach. I started working with electronic music also because when I came to Germany I originally wanted to work in the electronic studio. Since the process of composing electronic music is very abstract and complicated, it requires a total revamping of how one thinks about music. After that, my point of view towards music has changed and I could apply that into my acoustic music when I returned to writing acoustic composition again. It was indeed very helpful for me to find a way to write music with my own voice.
As a Korean woman, have you found any difficulties studying in Germany?

It has been really difficult being Korean in Germany. There are lots of inconveniences to being an active composer with a Korean nationality. However, I, being a Korean, had to do it all on my own, which means I didn’t get any support from the Korean government. It was very frustrating when I compared my situation with other foreign students. They usually have various kinds of support from their own countries. And I was shocked when I saw the news about Sunil Kim. I learned that the Korean government couldn’t even protect its own people. It was really scary. Now I am thinking to gain German citizenship soon.

What does the piano mean to you as a composer and pianist?

The piano is the most difficult instrument to write for. It shouldn’t be either too much nor too less.

Since you are a pianist, you must write music on the piano, right?

I don’t write music on the piano, instead, on the desk. I write music through my aural imagination.

These etudes are very fast and difficult. Do you really think that pianists can play at this speed? How did you treat the technical effects?

I admire virtuosity and these etudes show that. I set the tempo faster than I want because pianists would play them much slower than what I ask. Many pianists said it is too difficult to play my music so some of them cancelled playing and others who played them did not send recordings to me since they didn’t like their playing. I think No.2 is difficult, but No.1 is easier than it looks.

What is the purpose of writing these etudes? Is it for a special occasion or for a performer?

I compose only when I am commissioned. Otherwise, it wouldn’t have a chance to be performed. No.1 is written for Biennale New Music Hannover, No. 2, No. 3, No. 4 for a Chinese Pianist, Shiao-Li Ding, No.5 for Hiroaki Ooi, Japanese pianist, and No. 6 was for Pierre Boulez on the occasion of his 75th birthday.

What composers have influenced you? What composers do you like or respect the most? How did they influence you?

I listened to Brahms, Beethoven, and Mozart early on, and I still admire them a lot. Especially, I love Mozart and Chopin. I also respect Ligeti, Bartok, Ravel, Stravinsky, and Debussy. Recently, I like to listen to unknown composers in Europe. There are many composers who work alone and steadily with their own creativities. It gives me inspiration and fresh ideas. And I enjoy listening to all kinds of non-European music.
What pianists do you like the best or have inspired you the most?

My favorite pianist is Kissin. And I believe he is the only one I know who can control every single note when he actually performs on the stage. I heard him first when he played the Prokofiev concerto with Karajan. He was amazing when he was young, but he is getting more mature day by day. I admire him because his music contains all the fundamental musical substances. Even when he plays Chopin, his music making is not too romantic or personal as many other pianists’ are. Instead he tries to express the genuine qualities of the music. In my opinion, it is hard to find a pianist with that quality these days.

How were you signed by the publisher?

The performance of Acrostic-Wordplay got a good reputation in England, in 1994. That piece is one of the most accomplished ones, which means it came out very close to what I intended it to be.

Why do you live in Germany?

Because I don’t have anything to do in Korea.

How does that effect your music? Sometimes people gain perspective and insight into their own culture and background by being far away from it; is that true for you in terms of traditional Korean music, as well as for the current Korean Western musical training and society? As a foreigner, what was the way you approach Western music?

I stay in Berlin because it is a good place to live for foreigners. It doesn’t have anything to do with composing, but it gives me a freedom to be myself. I am an outsider in Germany. I am much more recognized and almost all of my works are performed outside of Germany. My music is rarely performed in Germany because I have no contact with the musical society in Germany. I prefer it that way. The first reason is because if you are well-known in Germany that means there is no one to recognize you in other countries. German music is not universal even though Germany has an extraordinary musical culture. Their music exists only for the composers from Germany or German culture. They are still very exclusive to 12-tone music. I think Webern is enough. And second, I am Korean so no one cares about it. But there are many ways to establish your career besides through the German musical society. In my case, a publisher located in England promotes my works and I get the commission through it. So there is nothing related to German society.

Are there any cultural background influences on your music? Or religious influences since you have a Christian background? Do you think your music sounds like it was written by a Korean woman, and if yes, how so? Also, do you explicitly use any Korean folk or traditional elements in your music?
I am not a Christian even though both my parents are. None of my music is religious because I am not religious. I believe the musician needs to transcend religion. Messiaen’s music is an exceptional one. He’s met the quality of both sides. I am not very interested in typical Western music. I used to have a lot of interest in traditional music as it is shown on my orchestra pieces. But it is not very possible to show my interest in piano music.

*Are there any difficulties to be a well-established Korean woman composer? What do you think of the Korean woman music society?*

I have no opinion.

*What is your writing style? Do you write the music in a short time? How long did it take to write this music?*

Once I start to write, I finish it quickly.

*What is the goal of the life as a composer?*

I believe an absolute truth exists. The value of music is appreciated as time passes by. The music of some famous European composers in the 1950s is not performed anymore. They had an illusion that their musical language soon would be universal. But it was found after 50 years that it was meant only for Germans. Now I do not have any interest in German avant-garde music. My music doesn’t belong to any school. I want to write music that speaks to all kinds of people: I never write pieces for my composer-colleagues. I write pieces for many different types of listeners. For me, a good piece of music is one in which people from all different groups maybe don’t understand everything but can at least get something out of it. It is very important to me that my music speaks to all of these people on a certain level.
APPENDIX 2

JIESUN LIM
Chronological List of Compositions

*Spiritual Dance for Piano* (2004) Solo piano

*Song of Mother* (2004) Kayakeum and four Heagums

*Concerto for Kayakeum and Orchestra* (2003) Kayakeum and Orchestra


*A Day of Little Angels* (2003) 2 Pianos

*Nori* (2003) Flute, Clarinet, Violin and Piano


*String Quartet No. 3* (2001) String Quartet

*Scenery on the Bridge* (2001) Poem by Jonggi Mah, for Soprano, flute (doubling piccolo and alto flute), oboe (doubling english horn), clarinet (doubling bass clarinet), bassoon (doubling contrabassoon), horn, trumpet, piano, 2 violins, viola, cello, contrabass

*The Depth of the Mind* (2000) Kayakeum and cello

*TWO ART SONGS* (2000) Soprano and piano

*In and Out of Monotony* (1999) Percussion and piano

*String Quartet No.3* (1999)

*Toward the New Sky* (1998) Large orchestra

*Four Phases* (1998) Two clarinets (second doubling bass clarinet) and two bassoons (second doubling contrabassoon)

*In Another World* (1998) Kayakeum (Korean traditional string instrument)

*Echo for String Orchestra* (1997) String orchestra (12/12/10/8/4)
String Quartet No. 2 (1996)

String Trio (1994) Violin, viola, and cello

Tone Poe : The Shield of Achilles (1994) Large orchestra
UNSUK CHIN
Chronological List of Compositions

snagS & Snarls (2003-04) voice and orchestra

Double Concerto (2002) piano, percussion, and ensemble

Violin Concerto (2001)

Spectres.speculaires (2000) solo violin and live electronics

Kalá (2000) soprano and bass soloists, mixed chorus, and orchestra

Miroirs des temps (1999, rev. 2001) ATTB soloists and orchestra

Ma fin est mon commencement Mon commencement est ma fin (1999) ATTB soloists and ensemble

Xi (1998) ensemble and electronics

Piano Concerto (1996 - 97)

ParaMetaString (1996) string quartet and tape

Piano Etudes (1995-)

Fantaisie mécanique (1994, rev. 1997) five instrumentalists

Allegro ma non troppo (1994/98) tape/solo percussion and tape

santika Ekatala (1993 rev. 96) orchestra

El Aliento de la Sombra (1992) tape

Akrostichon-Wortspiel (1991, rev. 93) soprano and ensemble

Gradus ad Infinitum (1989) tape

Die Troerinnen (1986) 3 female singers, women's choir and orchestra
Spiritual Dance

for Piano
(2004)

Tiesun Lim