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# P'ANSORI IS COMING

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The Repurposing of P'ansori in Fusion Music in South Korea



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## Table of Contents

1. Repurposing of Heritage – Insights from Ethnomusicology.....	2
1.1 Theoretical Framework.....	4
1.2 Methodology.....	7
2. How a Pandemic Changes Everything – Postwar Innovation of Korean Music.....	8
2.1 Korean Postwar Popular Music .....	8
2.2 2020 – A Year of Nostalgia.....	11
3. From a Living Culture to Heritage – P’ansori’s Struggle for Survival.....	16
3.1 Three Eras of P’ansori – P’ansori’s Rise and Fall.....	16
3.2 The Postwar Heritagization of P’ansori.....	19
4. P’ansori’s 2020 Comeback Featuring LEENALCHI.....	22
4.1 LEENALCHI’s Usage of <i>Sukungga</i> .....	24
4.2 LEENALCHI’s Presentation – Modern P’ansori Fusion .....	27
4.3 LEENALCHI – Traditionally Korean Yet Modern and Foreign .....	31
Conclusion.....	36
Bibliography.....	38
Academic Literature .....	38
Primary Sources.....	40

## 1. Repurposing of Heritage – Insights from Ethnomusicology

Due to the increasing attraction of Korean music, the Korean Tourism Organization (KTO) is able to work with various world-famous idols to create a video that goes viral and fosters foreign interest in Korea, as it has done before.<sup>1</sup> Yet, for their ‘Feel the Rhythm of Korea’ campaign, the KTO decided to collaborate with LEENALCHI, a band that is still relatively unknown to the foreign public. The videos KTO created present seven dancers dressed in a mixture of Korean traditional and Western clothing dancing in front of Korean landmarks on LEENALCHI’s groovy beats with traditional singing. The first three videos featured landmarks in Seoul, Busan, and Jeonju respectively, but less well-known cities like Andong, Mokpo, and Gangneung have also received their own versions. The five most popular videos on KTO’s channel as of 15<sup>th</sup> of May, 2021, are all from the Feel the Rhythm of Korea LEENALCHI series, beating a 2016 video with Song Joong-ki, one of South Korea’s most famous actors.<sup>2</sup>

Among many innovating Korean music acts, LEENALCHI ironically re-innovates Korean music by returning to one of Korea’s older music genres, namely *p’ansori* 판소리 (pansori, epic chant). P’ansori is a Korean traditional performance art in which a singer and drummer perform an epic story. P’ansori is inscribed as the number 5 on Korea’s intangible cultural heritage list<sup>3</sup>. It is also inscribed in the UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage List as “Pansori epic chant” since 2008 but was originally proclaimed in 2003.

Although regarded as a high-culture folk art, p’ansori has lost much of its status over the past decades. Renowned p’ansori researcher Tong-hyon Choe accurately remarks that the intense efforts of the Korean government to maintain the preservation and transmission of p’ansori paradoxically show that authentic p’ansori is close to extinction.<sup>4</sup> Several problems exist in the pursuit of a career in not just p’ansori, but many folk arts in Korea. John Lie adds<sup>5</sup> that understanding the appreciation of *kugak* 국악 (Korean folk music) is as elusive to contemporary

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<sup>1</sup> Yu-Shan Lin & Jun-Ying Huang, “Analyzing the Use of TV Miniseries for Korea Tourism Marketing,” *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing* 24, no. 2-3 (2008): 223-227; Katarzyna J. Cwiertka, “The Global Hansik Campaign and the Commodification of Korean Cuisine,” in *The Korean Popular Culture Reader*, ed. Kyung Hyun Kim and Youngmin Choe (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 376-377.

<sup>2</sup> “Imagine Your Korea: videos,” Youtube, accessed June 9, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/c/imagineyourkorea/videos?view=0&sort=p&flow=grid>.

<sup>3</sup> “Kukkamuhyōngmunhwajae: P’ansori,” Munhwajaeche’ōng Kukkamunhwayusanp’ot’ol, accessed June 28, 2021, [http://www.heritage.go.kr/heri/cul/culSelectDetail.do?pageNo=1\\_1\\_1\\_1&ccbaCpno=1279900050000](http://www.heritage.go.kr/heri/cul/culSelectDetail.do?pageNo=1_1_1_1&ccbaCpno=1279900050000).

<sup>4</sup> Tong Hyon Choe, “Munhwa Byōndonggwa P’ansori (The Change of Culture and Pansori),” *P’ansoriyōn’gu* 31 (2010): 442.

<sup>5</sup> John Lie, *K-Pop: Popular Music, Cultural Amnesia, And Economic Innovation In South Korea* (Oakland: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 12.

Koreans as understanding the aesthetics of Gregorian chants. Thus, parents do not encourage their children to practice folk music. Indeed, in a nationwide questionnaire in Korea conducted in 2011, kugak was rated to be among the least tasteful music genres.<sup>6</sup>

As Korea is constantly modernizing, traditional art forms are gradually being forgotten. At the same time, however, LEENALCHI's version of p'ansori is going viral. It is important to note that LEENALCHI is not performing the traditional form of p'ansori. Instead, LEENALCHI engages in what is called 'fusion', which usually means music that is a mixture of traditional and contemporary styles. Although p'ansori is a form of kugak, more and more artists are experimenting with kugak to break down the barrier between Korean traditional music and contemporary music. As a result, several new categories of kugak have been created over time, one of which is fusion. Sutton provides<sup>7</sup> a clear explanation of fusion music, in which he argues that an element in fusion is always considered to be Korean whereas another element is not. LEENALCHI's music does also not really fit the *ch'angjak p'ansori* 창작 판소리 (new/creative p'ansori) label. Ch'angjak p'ansori is concerned with contemporary issues and, although texts can be sourced from other, non-p'ansori texts, often entirely new lyrics are written to reflect issues in contemporary society.<sup>8</sup> As this thesis will showcase later, LEENALCHI's texts are completely sourced from the established version of *Sukungga* and, thus, do not fit in this label. Similarly, LEENALCHI also does not fit the broader label of *ch'angjak kugak* 창작 국악 (new/creative traditional music). Ch'angjak kugak is music that combines Korean traditional music with Western classical music. Arguably, fusion could be considered as ch'angjak kugak, but Sutton argues against this<sup>9</sup> as the notion of fusion emphasizes the hybridity between traditional and 'new' of the music in question, more so than its creativity or newness as is the case for ch'angjak kugak. This is why this thesis considers LEENALCHI to engage in fusion music more so than the other new forms of traditional Korean music.

LEENALCHI's form of fusion proves successful. Not only is LEENALCHI promoting for the KTO, LEENALCHI also collaborates with Samsung and creates advertisements for new phones such as the Samsung Galaxy Z Flip, but also a Korean pizza brand called Pizza Alvolo. Thus,

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<sup>6</sup> Su Jung Kim, Hyae Jeong Joo, and SetByol Choi, "Anything but Gugak and Trot: Symbolic Exclusion and Musical Dislikes in South Korea," *Journal of Asian Sociology* 49, no. 3 (2020): 322.

<sup>7</sup> R. Anderson Sutton, "'Fusion' and Questions of Korean Cultural Identity in Music," *Korean Studies* 35 (2011): 12.

<sup>8</sup> Haekyung Um, *Korean Musical Drama: P'ansori and the Making of Tradition in Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2013), 185-189.

<sup>9</sup> Sutton, "'Fusion' and Questions," 11-12.

through LEENALCHI's advertisements for the KTO, LEENALCHI's music is used to advertise a traditional Korean identity. However, through their advertisements for Samsung and Pizza Alvolo their music is able to represent a modern and even global identity. Modern and global, however, is almost the opposite of what Koreans consider p'ansori to be. The aim of this thesis is answer the question of how LEENALCHI is able to repurpose p'ansori and popularize a form of intangible cultural heritage that has been struggling to keep up in relevance while giving a new meaning to p'ansori music. In doing so, this thesis can establish how intangible cultural heritage is able to be repurposed even when preservation seems to become increasingly complicated. By repurposing, this thesis means that projects like LEENALCHI's can give a new purpose to intangible Korean heritage, especially to heritage that is slowly disappearing from the lived experience. Through this repurposing, a form of culture once put through the process of heritagization can once again become part of a lived culture.

Firstly, this thesis will contextualize Korea's postwar music history, attempting to show the constant change as well as foreign influences. It then explains what made 2020 different from the years before. This thesis will then move onto p'ansori's process of heritagization. Historically, p'ansori is a dynamic artform as it became a highly esteemed performance art through Korea's past. Korean modern history clearly shows how Korean modernization made it impossible for p'ansori to survive on its own, without governmental assistance. However, once p'ansori struggled for survival, governmental interference ensured heritagization of the art. Finally, this thesis will analyze LEENALCHI's album and commercials. By doing so, the thesis can answer how LEENALCHI uses p'ansori and, thus, how LEENALCHI is able to turn p'ansori into an art that is both considered to be traditionally Korean yet modern and global.

### 1.1 Theoretical Framework

UNESCO mentions<sup>10</sup> that the inscription of p'ansori is endangering the art as the improvisation needed for p'ansori is being made impossible due to written texts that singers now have to follow. Additionally, UNESCO notes that "contemporary audiences are less receptive to the impromptu creativity and language of traditional Pansori".<sup>11</sup> UNESCO, therefore, acknowledges that p'ansori is facing a crisis of sorts, as p'ansori is slowly changing into less of a lived culture. This phenomenon, however, is discussed in critical heritage studies. Therefore,

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<sup>10</sup> "Pansori epic chant," UNESCO, accessed May 14, 2021, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/pansori-epic-chant-00070>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

this thesis will explain how the slow extinction of p'ansori fits in a larger critical heritage studies theoretical framework.

First, it is important to underscore what this thesis understands heritage to be. In her book *The Uses of Heritage* (2006), Smith proposes an elaborate definition for the traditional form of heritage. In her book, she understands<sup>12</sup> heritage not as a 'thing', "but as a cultural and social process, which engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present". Heritage is a constant process rooted in the present. An object develops into heritage because institutions with authority subject this certain object to a process of management, preservation, and conservation. She thus believes that the idea of heritage itself is a cultural process, as forms of heritage are decided by their reflection of "contemporary cultural and social values, debates and aspirations".<sup>13</sup>

In order for a 'thing' to be turned into heritage, it goes through the process of heritagization. Walsh has first coined the term 'heritagization' in his concept of 'heritagization of space'. He explains<sup>14</sup> 'heritagization of space' to be a process in which images of different pasts are selectively used to reduce real spaces to tourist spaces, "which more often than not contribute to the destruction of actual places".<sup>15</sup> Welsh's term is linked to tangible objects of heritage. However, the expansion of critical heritage studies has resulted in a better representation of intangible heritage. In fact, Smith critically claims<sup>16</sup> that all heritage is intangible heritage as places or sites do not possess intrinsic value and any additional meaning is given through modern cultural processes. Heritagization can thus also be applied to objects of heritage that represent cultural traditions related to cultural practices including music making, dancing, but also culinary culture, and other social practices.

Similar to Walsh's idea that heritagization of a space may lead to the destruction of said space, cultural objects of heritage can evolve from being a lived everyday culture into a form of intangible cultural heritage that are "in need of safeguarding documentation, preservation, protection, sustaining and transmission".<sup>17</sup> The process of heritagization, thus, aids the destruction of lived culture as it goes through the process of conservation in which a mixture

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<sup>12</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 2.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Kevin Walsh, *The Representation of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Post-Modern World* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 4.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Pirkko Moisala, "Heritagization of Tamu Music—From Lived Culture to Heritage to be Safe-Guarded," *AlterNative* 15, no. 4 (2019): 321.

between preservation and presentation becomes increasingly important.<sup>18</sup> The theory of heritagization applies well to the Korean practice of p’ansori. As mentioned above, even UNESCO acknowledges that the inscription of p’ansori on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, meaning p’ansori’s heritagization, damages p’ansori’s spontaneity and, therefore, its lived experience.

Ironically, institutions such as UNESCO, but also governmental institutions which are created to safeguard cultural heritage, often end up harming cultural heritage. This seems especially true for several forms of Korean traditional culture and their heritagization. In the Korean idea of preservation of tradition, Hesselink argues<sup>19</sup> that heritage in Korea is understood to be “stable and static, impervious to changing cultural trends or fads, and frozen in time and space like a museum display”. Authority over the heritage discourse is top-down, meaning that the government makes decisions regarding cultural heritage and practitioners themselves have little to no say on the preservation of the heritage that they preserve.<sup>20</sup>

However, this top-down structure disappears and heritage is given new meaning when considering the creation of fusion music. Korean traditional music fusion is not yet widely discussed in Korean studies or ethnomusicology. When fusion has been discussed in academics, the focus of these researches has been on the globalization and commercialization of Korean identity<sup>21</sup> or the lack of space and opportunity that young students that want to perform p’ansori are given.<sup>22</sup> Instead, this thesis would argue that, after a long period of globalization in its music market, Koreans are now returning their attention towards their own culture and giving it new meaning by essentially bringing p’ansori back to life. As even UNESCO acknowledges the problems that heritagization has brought p’ansori, this thesis would like to show how a fusion band is able to overcome this problem and ensure that p’ansori can once again become a lived culture.

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<sup>18</sup> Keith Howard, “Introduction: East Asian Music as Intangible Cultural Heritage,” in *Music as Intangible Cultural Heritage: Policy, Ideology, and Practice in the Preservation of East Asian Traditions*, ed. Keith Howard (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012), 3.

<sup>19</sup> Nathan Hesselink, “Samul Nori as Traditional: Preservation and Innovation in a South Korean Contemporary Percussion Genre,” *Ethnomusicology* 48, no. 3 (2004): 408.

<sup>20</sup> Hesselink, “Samul Nori as Traditional,” 408; Howard, “Introduction,” 6.

<sup>21</sup> Sutton, ““Fusion” and Questions,” 18-21; Hilary V. Finchum-Sung, “Image Is Everything: Re-imagining Traditional Music in the Era of the Korean Wave,” *Southeast Review of Asian Studies* 31 (2009): 52-53.

<sup>22</sup> Anna Yates-Lu, “When K-Pop and Kugak Meet: Popularising P’ansori in Modern Korea,” *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 51 (2019): 66-67.

## 1.2 Methodology

After having established the theoretical framework that is rooted in critical heritage studies, this thesis will apply its framework to analyze p’ansori’s position in Korea’s music history. By engaging in historiography Korean postwar popular music will be examined. It will then explain the significance of 2020 for a new form of traditional music, such as p’ansori fusion, to go viral. Then, this thesis will narrow its scope to illustrate p’ansori’s transformation from lived culture into a protected inscription on the list of intangible cultural heritage. Both these chapters will make use of secondary academic sources as well as primary sources to create a clear picture of the situation of Korean music and p’ansori. Finally, this thesis will move onto LEENALCHI as an example of Korean fusion music.

To analyze how LEENALCHI has been able to repurpose p’ansori, it will engage with several primary sources. First, this thesis will make use of books published for the Jeonju International Sori Festival and contain several versions of *Sukungga* to compare *Sukungga* to LEENALCHI’s lyrics. This book collection was chosen because of its easy availability as well as its incorporation of six different versions. Then this thesis will analyze LEENALCHI’s television performance on *You Heeyeol's Sketchbook* on October 10, 2020 to understand how LEENALCHI presents their version of p’ansori to the general Korean public. This performance garnered over 9 million views on Youtube and has also been showcased on television, which means that this performance has been important to LEENALCHI’s visibility. Finally, the thesis will analyze some of the advertisements that LEENALCHI has made during 2020, namely the advertisements with KTO, the advertisement of the new Samsung Galaxy Z Flip phone, and the advertisement on Pizza Alvolo. As this thesis will argue later, the KTO commercials have been chosen because of its focus on foreign audiences. The other two advertisements, however, have been chosen because they have been produced for a Korean audience and seem to directly oppose the notions of traditionality and Korean identity that fusion and kugak artists often like to portray, which thus signifies the repurposing of p’ansori.

Due to the scope of this thesis, it is unable to analyze all existing versions of *Sukungga*, all LEENALCHI’s television performances, and all LEENALCHI’s advertisements. However, through the current selection of videos, this thesis can still provide a thorough analysis on LEENALCHI’s ability to repurpose p’ansori.



## 2. How a Pandemic Changes Everything – Postwar Innovation of Korean Music

Before this thesis can focus on the heritagization of p’ansori, a broader review of Korean postwar popular music history can be beneficial in recognizing Korea’s dynamic position in regards to popular music. Naturally, trends change continuously. But the negative development of p’ansori throughout the entire first half of the 20th century juxtaposed Korea’s increasingly innovative and global music industry almost works as a metaphor for the development that Korea managed to achieve during its postwar era. Korea is known for having undergone an extraordinary amount of change throughout the previous century. Having experienced colonization, a war, dictatorship, and unprecedented modernization, the country barely resembles Joseon as it stood at the beginning of the 20th century. The era of big, quick changes during the postwar era has resulted in Koreans adopting what is called a *ppalli ppalli munhwa* 빨리 빨리 문화 (ppalli ppalli culture/chop-chop culture). This ppalli ppalli culture is deeply rooted in Korean society and signifies an obsession with speed.<sup>23</sup> It first emerged in the 1960s right at the start of the Miracle on Han River era and signified the restlessness of Koreans striving for quick change and growth during that period, whereas in present day Korea this cultural aspect mostly outs itself in trying “to do more with less time” in an attempt to not fall behind on others.<sup>24</sup>

Korea’s music history represents how Korea quickly moves from trend to trend. However, as this chapter will demonstrate, the changing of trends stagnated with the introduction of idol music. The year 2020, however, has made quite a difference as the worldwide pandemic created an opportunity for Korean traditional music to return to the spotlight.

### 2.1 Korean Postwar Popular Music

Before this thesis will briefly contextualize the history of the Korean music scene post-Japanese colonial era, there is an important comment to be made. When reflecting back on historical periods it is tempting to think in periodic shifts, but in reality these shifts are much more nuanced. In the case of Korea, not all parts of Korea modernized at the same speed. And, thus, while most citizens of Seoul were able to experiment with new music styles, most areas in

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<sup>23</sup> June J.H. Lee, “Discourses of Illness, Meanings of Modernity: A Gendered Construction of Sŏnginbyŏng,” in *Under Construction: The Gendering of Modernity, Class, and Consumption in the Republic of Korea*, ed. Laurel Kendall (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002), 56.

<sup>24</sup> Stephen C. Rea, “Chronotopes and Social Types in South Korean Digital Gaming,” *Signs and Society* 7, no. 1 (Winter 2019): 121-122.

Korea during the 1950s and 1960s had no electricity and, therefore, barely any access to television and radio. In these areas, pre-Japanese colonial era forms of music, including p’ansori, were still enjoyed and significantly present.<sup>25</sup> The changes that will be discussed here are thus mostly taking place in Seoul while other areas are still catching up to the trends in Seoul.

Foreign involvement in Korea slowly diversifies Korea’s music scene. During the colonial era, *yuhaengga* 유행가 (Japanese songs or Japanese songs directly translated to Korean) had become a popular genre. Yuhaengga was influenced by Korean, Japanese, and American culture.<sup>26</sup> After the Japanese colonization and the installment of American troops, Japanese style music did remain very relevant. Yuhaengga songs that were popular during the colonial era were slowly transforming into post-colonial trot.<sup>27</sup> Due to its resemblance to yuhaengga, trot music is thought to be a descendent of Japanese *enka* music. However, this view is considered controversial among Koreans as enka has technically evolved after yuhaengga and thus can be considered as Korean, especially since it mimics certain singing styles which are also prominent in p’ansori, as well as strong emotions which are also characteristic to p’ansori.<sup>28</sup> After the colonial period, yuhaengga would not just include Japanese songs, but also American songs. Yuhaengga in which American songs would be translated to Korean would stay the mainstream music genre until the 70s.<sup>29</sup>

During the Park Chunghee era of the 60s and 70s, one of Park Chunghee’s biggest goals was to create a nationalist movement that would vilify Japan and North Korea. In order to do this, he pointed to many songs that seemed to have Japanese influences and banned them from the Korean music scene.<sup>30</sup> Subsequently, the American army clubs become important spaces of cultural interaction. Musicians who would later end up becoming the most influential players in the Korean music scene were educated while performing in these army clubs.<sup>31</sup> With more than 150 American army bases around the country, entertaining all soldiers solely by using acts from the USA became increasingly difficult. Thus, the army recruited aspiring Korean

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<sup>25</sup> John Lie, *K-Pop: Popular Music, Cultural Amnesia, And Economic Innovation In South Korea* (Oakland: University of Chicago Press, 2015): 33.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>28</sup> Lie, *K-Pop*, 37; Min-Jung Song, “Young Musical Love of the 1930s,” in *The Korean Popular Culture Reader*, ed. Kyung Hyun Kim and Youngmin Choe (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 256.

<sup>29</sup> Song, “Young Musical Love,” 260.

<sup>30</sup> Lie, *K-Pop*, 39.

<sup>31</sup> Hyunjoon Shin and Pil Ho Kim, “Birth, Death, and Resurrection of Group Sound Rock,” in *The Korean Popular Culture Reader*, ed. Kyung Hyun Kim and Youngmin Choe (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 276.

musicians to fill the void and provide entertainment for the American troops.<sup>32</sup> Among participating entertainers, large show groups were carefully composed and typically included an orchestra, singers, comedians, and other entertainers. Later, several musicians that were part of these groups would find their own singers and break from the group to create their own rock bands, later classified as group sound rock.<sup>33</sup> The amount of bands quickly increased and American troops' need for entertainment started to decline. Thus, many bands started to perform in music cafes, turning rock into an underground scene. Eventually, rock would become a youth counterculture in Korea too, as it was in many parts of the world. However, Park Chunghee took notice of these developments and censored rock songs with too many American influence, labeling it as 'vulgar'. Eventually, this censorship was enough for group sound rock bands to be unable to return to the mainstream as the public now considered them inauthentic. This development ended Korea's group sound rock era.<sup>34</sup> However, among the remaining rock bands, guitarist Shin Joonghyun was able to rebrand himself and create a band that fit Korean tastes and thus re-entered the mainstream, preparing the Korean general public for a future with new rock bands.

One of the most well-known Korean artists of the 1970s and 1980s, and who thus cannot be absent in this contextualization, is rock singer Cho Yongpil. Cho Yongpil is known for experimenting with many styles. However, he has gained his initial popularity by using trot and p'ansori techniques for his music and has even suggested that, after he was caught with marihuana and received a three year performing ban, he had partaken in his version of the p'ansori tradition of *tūkūm* 득음 (gaining of sound) in which p'ansori artists retreat to a forest and essentially destroy their vocal chords by singing loudly and repeatedly in order to make the distinguished sounds that are needed for p'ansori.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, his work was still mostly rock-inspired. Even though his work made use of p'ansori techniques and might thus be counted as fusion, it was not enough to revitalize p'ansori during his prime time as Korean artist.

Finally, the 90s completely transform the Korean music scene. This transformation is started by the television performance of Seo Taiji and Boys in 1992, who participate in a music show for aspiring musicians in front of a jury that awards points. Although the group is awarded with a loud cheer from the audience, Seo Taiji and Boys' mixture of hip-hop, techno, and rap

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<sup>32</sup> Shin and Kim, "Birth, Death, and Resurrection," 277.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 279.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 284.

<sup>35</sup> John Lie, "What Is the K in K-pop? South Korean Popular Music, the Culture Industry, and National Identity," *Korea Observer* 43, no. 3 (Autumn 2012): 344.

accompanied by a b-boy dance does not excite the jury, who calls their chorus weak. Seo Taiji and Boys go home with the lowest score of the evening, but turn into an overnight sensation. The middle-aged jury might have not understood Seo Taiji and Boys' musical composition, but Korea's youth showed that they were longing for a group like Seo Taiji and Boys to diversify the music scene. As Maliangkay notes<sup>36</sup>, Seo Taiji and Boys arrived at a time in which Korea itself was changing too, most families now owned their own color televisions and cars, teenagers suddenly had access to disposable income and pop magazines were created just for them. Even without the internet, the Korean youth was successful in keeping up with foreign trends too, as travel restrictions had largely been lifted and Koreans became more well-traveled. Seo Taiji tried hard to change the Korean music scene and criticize Korean society and politics through his music, even if it resulted in bans from programs. However, he is currently mostly remembered as having created the first K-pop group. After showbiz man Lee Sooman had noticed how much the Korean youth had been waiting for music that they were able to relate to, he created SM Entertainment and debuted boygroup H.O.T. which would rely on their teenage idol status and garner much success.<sup>37</sup> This has resulted in other companies starting their own boygroups and girlgroups in hopes of attracting as much attention as Seo Taiji and Boys had garnered back in 1992. As of now, idols are hugely dominating the Korean music scene, leaving little space for music diversity.<sup>38</sup> To this day, Korea's music industry is still focused around the idol scene.

## 2.2 2020 – A Year of Nostalgia

After contextualizing Korea's music scene and confirming that p'ansori and p'ansori fusion were unable to make a big impact on Korea's music scene before now, it is important to establish why 2020 has brought a change in which p'ansori fusion suddenly had the opportunity to grow. In general, 2020 seems to have been a year in which the Korean music industry saw a return of many former genres and styles. Not just p'ansori has made its comeback, but retro and trot have also returned to the music scene.

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<sup>36</sup> Roald Maliangkay, "The Popularity of Individualism: The Seo Taiji Phenomenon in the 1990s," in *The Korean Popular Culture Reader*, ed. Kyung Hyun Kim and Youngmin Choe (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 297.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Gooyong Kim, "The 90s, the Most Stunning Days of Our Lives: Retro K-Pop Music, Nostalgia, and Positive Psychology in Contemporary Korea," in *From Factory Girls to K-Pop Idol Girls: Cultural Politics of Developmentalism, Patriarchy, and Neoliberalism in South Korea's Popular Music Industry*, ed. Gooyong Kim (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019), 111.

As abovementioned in this chapter, trends come and go at a high pace in Korea. In a study by Kim, Joo, and Choi<sup>39</sup>, the authors describe their large-scale questionnaire which they held in South Korea in 2011 for which the populace was asked to provide their least favored music and rank genres' tastefulness. This research was conducted in order to better understand social exclusion. As the title of the study already tells us, trot and kugak music were awarded the last place in this study. However, although the questionnaire was taken in 2011, the article was only published in 2020. Due to the peculiarity of Korea's music scene in 2020, the authors were unfortunately unable to fully use their data to strengthen their argument without acknowledging the great change that Korea's national music taste had gone through in 2020. They had wanted to conclude that trot and kugak are merely popular with lower and older social classes as they have been downgraded to low culture, resulting in exclusion of the elderly and low class. However, as trot had become a sudden trend the conclusions of the research might have slightly been skewed. Instead, Kim, Joo, and Choi mention<sup>40</sup> that Korea is currently 'suffering' from "trot fever" and explain that audition programs such as *Naeirŭn Misŭt'ŭrot* 내일은 미스트롯 (Miss Trot) (first aired throughout 2019) and then its follow-up season *Naeirŭn Misŭt'ŏt'ŭrot* 내일은 미스터트롯 (Mr. Trot) (which aired throughout 2020) have been the instigators of this social phenomenon, which has created a bridge between the tastes of the older and younger generations resulting in connection, communication, and a shared interest for trot. Due to the mainstream format of an audition show, those who watch *Mr. Trot* and *Miss Trot* as well as the participating artists have become significantly younger than before, and the winner of *Mr. Trot*, Lim Youngwoong, has risen to near idol-status stardom. Other contestants of the show, such as Youngtak, Na Taejoo, and Jang Minho were equally able to garner many new brand deals, television deals, and, in the case of Youngtak, new hit songs. This follow-up popularity is not surprising, as the 11<sup>th</sup> episode of *Mr. Trot* broke all recent Korean television records as they attracted 35.711% viewer rating across Korea.<sup>41</sup> Subsequently, it was difficult to turn on the television in 2020 and not find a trot-focused program playing on one of Korea's television channels. Next to Mr. Trot and Miss Trot, at least 8 other trot-focused television programs were televised throughout 2020. Some were likewise audition shows featuring non-celebrities such

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<sup>39</sup> Kim, Joo, and Choi, "Anything but Gugak and Trot," 322.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 342.

<sup>41</sup> Yoosŏ Jang, "'Misŭt'ŏtŭrot' Ch'oeko Sich'ŏngnyul 35% Kirok... Chongp'yŏn Sae Yŏksa Ssŭnta," *Chosŏnilbo*, March 13, 2020, [https://www.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2020/03/13/2020031300546.html](https://www.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2020/03/13/2020031300546.html).

as *T'ūrot'ūūi Minjok* 트로트의 민족 (T'ūrot'ūūi Minjok), but many shows featured celebrities attempting trot such as *T'ūrot'ūk'win* 트로트퀸 (Queen of Trot) and *Poisū T'ūrot* 보이즈 트롯 (Voice Trot). Other shows featured already established trot singers that have once again found the limelight due to Korea's 'trot fever' such as *T'ūrotshini Ttōtta* 트롯신이 떴다 (K-Trot in Town), in which Korean trot singers perform around Vietnam in order to create a following for trot so that trot might be able to find global success in the same fashion that K-pop did. The trot-trend is very recent and thus the longevity of this trot fever is not to be accounted for. Nevertheless, 2020 can be regarded as the year in which trot has revitalized itself. In 2021 too, we see the continuation of this trend as trot programs, including the next season of *Miss Trot*, are still prominent on Korean television.

However, not just trot has found its way back into Korea's music scene during 2020. Many popular songs of 2020 reached back to familiar 80s and retro sounds. *Nolmyeon Mwōhani? 놀면 뭐하니?* (Hangout With Yoo) has been most influential for this phenomenon. *Hangout With Yoo* is a program in which Korea's most famous MC, Yoo Jaesuk, performs several missions throughout multiple episodes.<sup>42</sup> For the first show segment of 2020, Yoo Jaesuk reveals that he regrets the disappearance of upbeat summer songs performed by mixed groups of the 80s and 90s while ballads have now become the mainstream music genre even during summer.<sup>43</sup> Together with two veteran idol singers of the 2000s, Lee Hyori and Rain, he creates a group called Ssak3 and thus creates two summer hits with a retro style which become big hits in Korea. As a result, Korea's music industry swiftly follows and many 2020 title tracks either feature sounds that reminds one of the 80s, or a music video that features retro scenes. Some examples include, but are not limited to, JYP and Sunmi's *When We Disco*, G-Friend's *Mago*, and even BTS's *Dynamite* which has become a worldwide hit.

Yoo Jaesuk's regret about the disappearance of variety in the Korean music scene almost directly plays into Kim's findings and theory on nostalgia in Korean music. After all, it is not the first time that Korea is longingly looking back at different times and retro makes a comeback. Kim proposes that, at the end of 2014, a year of social unrest marked by the Sewol Ferry disaster

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<sup>42</sup> Notably, Yoo Jaesuk has also debuted as trot singer Yu Sansul to complete a mission for the show in 2019. He did this a few months after *Miss Trot* ended, thus keeping the trend alive.

<sup>43</sup> So-Yeon Yoon, "Music and Television Fans Turn to the Retro Trend for Solace," *Korea JoongAng Daily*, August 26, 2020, <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2020/08/26/entertainment/kpop/Retro-Kpop-BTS/20200826172800348.html>.

followed by dwindling faith in Korean politicians as well as the continuous pressure for Koreans to adapt to speedy modernization, a segment on *Muhandojŏn* 무한도전 (Infinity Challenge), one of Korea's most well-watched television programs, called *T'oyoil T'oyoirŭn Na Kasuda* 토요일 토요일은 나 가수다 (Saturday, Saturday's: I Am a Singer) also known as *ToToGa* invited different famous singers from the 90s music scene who have faded into oblivion to actively recreate the 90s.<sup>44</sup> Although the 90s was supposed to be an energetic and golden era after the democratization movement of the 80s, the Asian Financial Crisis had left a bittersweet taste to the era and, until the start of *ToToGa*, Koreans, thus, preferred to reminisce the 80s. Kim explains that *ToToGa* was able to selectively repackage the 90s and new meanings for the era, misremembering the era as a more bearable time for Koreans, and Kim goes as far as calling it a 90s theme park.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, he explains that many Koreans were tired of the current K-pop idol-scene as opposed to the music scene of the 90s, which was musically diverse and considered much more authentic as big companies were not the ones in charge of their artists.<sup>46</sup> *ToToGa* inspired a trend of retro during 2014 and 2015 too, in which several programs, such as *Radiosŭt'a* 라디오스타 (Radio Star), followed suit with retro themed segments. Interestingly, Yoo Jaesuk is also one of the MCs for *Infinity Challenge* and *ToToGa* too, solidifying his influence on trends in Korea.

In a news article, pop culture critic Lee Youngmee corroborates the same findings and explains that, when retro trends make their comeback, they do so in a time of economic or social hardships. This is because people are less inclined to experiment with new trends as they generally lack courage and hope, reminiscing better times is thus preferred.<sup>47</sup> Kim agrees as he writes that nostalgia can effectively use the past to escape the burdens of the present and is thus a defensive symptom of modernity, but also adds that nostalgia can be used as new inspiration for the future while in dialogue with the past.<sup>48</sup> However, considering the Covid-19 crisis and the economic and social duress that is following, it is no wonder that retro-inspired concepts have been doing extremely well in 2020 and the general public has thus wholeheartedly embraced the revitalization of older music genres.

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<sup>44</sup> Kim, "The 90s," 107-108.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 109-110, 120.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>47</sup> Yoon, "Music and Television Fans".

<sup>48</sup> Kim, "The 90s," 112-113.

As Kim, Joo, and Choi have concluded<sup>49</sup>, the remaining music genre that Koreans consider as a genre for the lower class and older generation is kugak. The inclusion of kugak as a genre and ascribing this as a genre enjoyed by the Korean lower class seems to be a rash conclusion. Kugak generally means traditional music of Korea. The problem of using kugak as a standalone genre is well illustrated by comparing two example of kugak. Kugak includes folk music such as p’ansori which has a high culture status, but also *santaryong* which has historically been regarded as a low status folk genre.<sup>50</sup> Kugak also includes ritual and court music, and is therefore almost unlimitedly diverse, and condensing it to one genre thus seems to be careless at best, and dishonest at worst. Nevertheless, it is unfortunate that the questionnaire did not include p’ansori on its own.

Much like trot has seen a revitalization and transformation that has created a bridge between younger and older generations, this year of collective nostalgia to former music genres might have also opened up a space for the rediscovery of folk music. P’ansori might be able to fill a gap that nostalgia to older music genres has left, and, as this thesis would like to propose, p’ansori fusion band LEENALCHI might already actively be filling this gap with their music. As 2020 has become the year in which Korea nostalgically looks back on the former glory of their music industry, folk music, and especially p’ansori, is given their own place in Korea’s current forgotten-music-genre trend. 2020 was the perfect year for p’ansori to completely revitalize and transform itself and remind Koreans of its cultural belonging as a traditional Korean art form.

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<sup>49</sup> Kim, Joo, and Choi, “Anything but Gugak and Trot,” 340.

<sup>50</sup> Roald Maliangkay, *Broken Voices: Postcolonial Entanglements and the Preservation of Korea’s Central Folksong Traditions* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2017), 89.



### 3. From a Living Culture to Heritage – P’ansori’s Struggle for Survival

Before elaborating on p’ansori’s transformation from living culture to heritage, this thesis would like to give a small introduction on what p’ansori is. P’ansori requires a *ch’ongjung* 청중 (audience), a *kosu* 고수 (drummer) and a *sorikkun* 소리꾼 (vocalist). The *sorikkun* (traditionally called a *kwangdae* 광대 (performer)) will sing one of the five remaining p’ansori tales. These five remaining tales are *Ch’unhyangga* 춘향가 (Ch’unhyangga), *Simch’ongga* 심청가 (Simch’ongga), *Hungpoka* 흥보가 (Hungpoka), *Sukungga* 수궁가 (Sukungga), and *Jokbyokka* 적벽가 (Jokbyokka). Originally, there were 12 p’ansori tales, but 7 of the 12 have been lost in time. The *sorikkun* will make use of *sori* 소리 (song), *aniri* 아니리 (narration), and *pallim* 발림 (body language) which are the three elements of p’ansori.

P’ansori is the compound word for *p’an* 판 and *sori*. Pan means a place where people gather and is derived from *p’annorim* 판놀음 (folk entertainment), which is a type of folk entertainment performed at village gatherings and patron’s country yards by acrobats, clowns, tumblers and other entertainers.<sup>51</sup> Note that in p’ansori, the word *sori*, which in present-day Korea mostly means “sound”, is used here to translate to “song”. This is different from the word *norae* 노래 (song), which is usually translated as song. *Sori* is the word that is used to refer to folksongs and traditional music, which is what p’ansori is categorized as. *Norae*, on the other hand, refers to the type of songs that were usually enjoyed by the upper class and do not include folksongs.

#### 3.1 Three Eras of P’ansori – P’ansori’s Rise and Fall

It is thought that p’ansori originates from shamanic music performed in Honam, an area in the southwest Jeolla province, because the modes of singing between p’ansori and this specific style of shamanic music are very similar to each other.<sup>52</sup> However, those who come from

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<sup>51</sup> Um, *Korean Musical Drama*, 34.

<sup>52</sup> Kee Hyung Kim, “History of Pansori,” in *Korean Musicology Series 2: Pansori*, ed. Yong-shik Lee (Seoul: National Center for Korean Traditional Performing Art, 2008), 3.

different p'ansori schools argue that p'ansori was already sung all around the country and merely the final developments of p'ansori took place in Honam.<sup>53</sup> Although it is still unclear how p'ansori has developed into the performance art that is commemorated today, the most popular theories are those which argue that p'ansori has been a part of *pannorŭm* 판놀음, that p'ansori evolved from shaman music, that p'ansori evolved as musical versions of the myths that had been written down previously, or that p'ansori evolved as musical versions of the folk stories that had previously been passed down orally.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the doubtful origins of p'ansori, its later origins are much better recorded and truly show the dynamism of p'ansori culture. Usually, p'ansori's timeline is categorized in three periods.<sup>55</sup> The first period lasts through the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century and is called p'ansori's formation period. The end of this period is signified by the upcoming of the first recognized p'ansori masters. Choe argues<sup>56</sup> that, no matter the origin of p'ansori, it would have been the lower classes audiences who were the first to enjoy p'ansori. P'ansori was mostly part of events or ceremonies. In these events, p'ansori would not be the main component but rather a side act. P'ansori performers were therefore most likely not paid very well and the level of p'ansori was not exceptionally high either. It is therefore said that p'ansori was rather simple throughout this era.<sup>57</sup>

The second period is known as the period of prosperity. The period of prosperity started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and also marks the era in which p'ansori became very popular. Although p'ansori was rarely appreciated as a sole art during the formation period, the period of prosperity is signified by the middle- and upper-class starting to appreciate and fund p'ansori as an actual type of enjoyment and art, resulting in advancements in p'ansori. However, even if middle and higher classes now took note of p'ansori as well, p'ansori was still enjoyed and mostly inspired by the opinions of the lower-class.<sup>58</sup> The audience of p'ansori did not change, it expanded. The attributes in p'ansori also greatly developed as p'ansori's repertoire was expanded to 12 works. More importantly, as master singers with their own personal singing styles started to emerge, so did *yup'a* 유포자 (schools). *Yup'a* were special p'ansori schools in which family clan, regional

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<sup>53</sup> Yeonok Jang, *Korean P'ansori Singing Tradition: Development, Authenticity, and Performance History* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, INC, 2014), 40; Kim, "History of Pansori," 3.

<sup>54</sup> Jang, *Korean P'ansori Singing Tradition*, 14.

<sup>55</sup> Choe, "Munhwa Byōndonggwa P'ansori," 426; Kim, "History of Pansori," 4.

<sup>56</sup> Choe, "Munhwa Byōndonggwa P'ansori," 428.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 430.

<sup>58</sup> Kim, "History of Pansori," 6.

style, and relationship between teachers and students were the biggest factors that differentiated these schools.<sup>59</sup> The three most important schools were *Dongp'yŏnje* 동편제 (Eastern School), *Sŏp'yŏnje* 서편제 (Western School), and *Junggoje* 중고제 (Central School). Even in this era, Choe does not consider<sup>60</sup> p'ansori to have been an box office art in which people paid a fee to come together and look at p'ansori performers. Although higher ranked p'ansori masters might have been able to earn money with their performances, sorikkun did not perform p'ansori in order to gain a profit but in order for them to become a master.

The third period is the period of decline and lasts from 1902 till 1964. This period is very accurately timed as it starts with the opening of the Heedae Theater (better known as the Hyopyul-sa Theater) in 1902.<sup>61</sup> The theater was opened to hold a special ceremony for King Gojong's 40<sup>th</sup> year on the throne, but the performance was canceled and p'ansori singers began to use the theater instead. Korean theater was previously mostly performed outside or in small rooms, but the Heedae Theater was a Western-style theater with a capacity of around 400 people. Although sorikkun had previously performed p'ansori in small rooms or outside, they were now forced to adapt to a Western-style stage for the first time. Although sorikkun were able to do adapt their art, there was a lot of competition from other artforms and p'ansori thus needed to become more interesting to incite people to come to p'ansori performances. A characteristic performance style of this era that developed as a result of this is *ch'anggŭk* 창극 (Korean traditional opera). Ch'anggŭk is Korean opera performed which is performed as a play but also features p'ansori-style singing. Ch'anggŭk is thus one of the first styles of fusion as a direct response to p'ansori adapting to a Western style theater.<sup>62</sup> P'ansori masters also realized that surviving in the scene on their own would be much harder than forming groups together to support each other.<sup>63</sup>

All these developments greatly changed the course of p'ansori, but the change that had the biggest impact and eventually led to the downfall of the art was the invention of recordings and therefore the commercialization of p'ansori. Choe argues<sup>64</sup> that when p'ansori performers

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>60</sup> Choe, "Munhwa Byŏndonggwa P'ansori," 435.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 436.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 437.

<sup>63</sup> Kim, "History of Pansori," 14.

<sup>64</sup> Choe, "Munhwa Byŏndonggwa P'ansori," 440.

started recording their performances and releasing these records to the public around 1910s, the concept that he calls “a one-time presence” that made p’ansori a performance art was lost.

In other words, people were now able to buy p’ansori music and listen to it over and over in the comfort of their homes or through speakers on the streets instead of experiencing p’ansori in a theater. Famous p’ansori singers were able to sign contracts with record companies and make lots of money. In this way, p’ansori became a commercialized art, which now also had to compete against popular music records from the West. Furthermore, the Japanese colonial period that took place during the 20<sup>th</sup> century made it even more difficult for sorikkun to perform p’ansori. Koreans quickly adapted to listening to recorded versions of p’ansori performances and preferred these over physically going to theater performances. This thus hurt p’ansori’s self-existing power. In 1960, all the groups of p’ansori singers that were created had disbanded because they could not make enough money to continue. P’ansori had failed as a box office performance art and as a commercialized artform. What had once been an artform that was performed for all types of audiences had now become a form of intangible cultural heritage that was in danger of disappearing.

### 3.2 The Postwar Heritagization of P’ansori

The first three periods all run their course without government involvement, however there is one last era. This era is awarded with a much more hopeful name, which is the period of preservation and rebirth.<sup>65</sup> The period of preservation and rebirth starts in 1962 with the passing of the *munhwajae bohopye* 문화재 보호법 (Cultural Properties Protection Law). It signals the start of the Korean government spending money on trying to protect p’ansori and other traditional artforms from disappearing forever.<sup>66</sup> The same year also saw the founding of the National Ch’anggŭk Company of Korea focused on reviving traditional songs and is maintained by the government. From 1964 onwards, the Korean government started to focus more on policies that would support and revitalize p’ansori in specific. Since 1973, the people working for the National Ch’anggŭk Company have been paid by the government directly.

Korea's cultural property system is slightly different from that of other countries. In Korea, it is possible to assign people as important cultural assets. Artists who are assigned to be such assets

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<sup>65</sup> Choe, “Munhwa Byōndonggwa P’ansori,” 426; Kim, “History of Pansori,” 4.

<sup>66</sup> Choe, “Munhwa Byōndonggwa P’ansori,” 442.

are called “*in’gan munhwaje*” 인간 문화제 (“living human treasures”, also known as “holders”) and become the ambassador of their respective art.<sup>67</sup> This intangible cultural heritage system does not only protect intangible cultural heritage practices, but also creates an effective transmission system that ensures that skilled artists are encouraged to transmit their art onto others. Yates-Lu elaborates on the living human treasure system in p’ansori by explaining that holders usually teach p’ansori to new students, resulting in the best students receiving a scholarship that is sponsored by the state to further pursue p’ansori.<sup>68</sup> If students have been a p’ansori student for over 3 years and have received enough recognition from the holder that teaches the student, they are eligible to move onto the next rank as *isucha* 이수자 (graduate). If you attain more recognition during your time as an *isucha*, you can be tested in front of the Cultural Properties Committee in order to become an assistant teacher. The final position is that of a holder.

Once you become a holder, you will stay holder for life. This results in quite some issues. Yim explains that a holder receives around 1,000,000 won (around 1,000 dollars) from the government every single month, combined with free medical treatment, and some additional special treatments.<sup>69</sup> This aids in raising the social status and prestige of living human treasures. However, one can imagine that if the holder and their assistant teachers teach multiple people, the pool of potential holders becomes much larger than the actual amount of available spaces, especially since holders will keep their positions for life. When a holder does pass away or has turned into a “honorary holder” due to old age, there are many artists who want to take their place and deciding who is the most suitable successor can take up to 10 years.<sup>70</sup> After all, no matter how much the government has been pushing the art, earning a sizeable income as a p’ansori performer has become rather difficult. Another option is to enter the National Ch’anggŭk Company, but this is equally hard due to a similar amount of intense competition. The opportunities to earn a stable amount of income are therefore very scarce. As men in Korea are usually still the main breadwinners of the family, pursuing a career in p’ansori for men is often unthinkable as it does not make the amount of money that allows a family to live comfortably. Finding male *sorikkun* therefore increases in difficulty. Thus, although the

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<sup>67</sup> Dawnhee Yim, “Living Human Treasures and the Protection of Intangible Culture Heritage: Experiences and Challenges,” *ICOM News* vol. 4 (2004): 11.

<sup>68</sup> Yates-Lu, “When K-Pop and Kugak Meet,” 52.

<sup>69</sup> Yim, “Living Human Treasures,” 11.

<sup>70</sup> Yates-Lu, “When K-Pop and Kugak Meet,” 53.

government provides an extensive support system for those who want to become a p'ansori performer, it is an extremely difficult and uncertain path to take.

The government's efforts to save p'ansori from its extinction has resulted in a rise of p'ansori's regarded prestige. Currently, p'ansori is mainly enjoyed by students and academics who already take an interest in studying the art of p'ansori or are aware of p'ansori's background.<sup>71</sup> P'ansori's ability to create enjoyment for its listeners has disappeared over time and ordinary citizens find it hard to listen to p'ansori naturally as many feel they need to study before they are able to enjoy p'ansori. Although p'ansori was once enjoyed by audiences of all sorts of backgrounds, the only group of people that is left to enjoy p'ansori currently are academics. Although p'ansori might not have survived the period of decline without government interference, the government's attempts to revive p'ansori have not been beneficial as of now. This means that a different way of preserving p'ansori might prove to be more successful.

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<sup>71</sup> Choe, "Munhwa Byōndonggwa P'ansori," 445.

#### 4. P’ansori’s 2020 Comeback Featuring LEENALCHI

An interesting way to successfully preserve p’ansori and even ensure that p’ansori might return as a living culture, might be through fusion. One such fusion band that has gained attention is LEENALCHI. LEENALCHI is a band that is composed of seven artists, of which Ahn Iho (b. 1980), Lee Narae (b. 1986), Kwon Songhee (b. 1987), and Shin Yujin (b. 1993) are all p’ansori singers who have graduated in traditional music studies and are to be found in the *Kugakpoteol Arirang* 국악포털 아리랑 (Kugakportal Arirang)<sup>72</sup>, an online database that stores information about artists that perform traditional music and informs the public about upcoming performances. Originally, LEENALCHI harbored one more male sorikkun, Park Subeom, who had left the group in 2020 to focus on personal commitments. The remaining three members are instrumentalists, namely two bass players and one drummer. Lee Cheolhee (b. 1970) is LEENALCHI’s drummer. Jeong Joongyeob (b. 1983) is one of the bass players and is mostly known for being a member of the very successful and popular indie rock band Kiha & The Faces who disbanded in 2018. The other bass player is Jang Youngkyu (b. 1968), who is a notorious movie music director and has directed the soundtracks for “Train to Busan” and “Assassination”, two movies that did very well in Korea and abroad, and received the Wildflower Film Award for best music for the movie “My Punch-Drunk Boxer” in 2020. Jang Youngkyu is also the one who created LEENALCHI in 2019 after Jang Youngkyu worked on the animated musical performance ‘Dragon King’, a retelling of *Sukungga*, with the five p’ansori artists. He later decided to keep working as a group and added Jeong Joongyeob and Lee Cheolhee to the group. It is not the first time Jang Youngkyu and Lee Cheolhee work together. Jang has made other project groups, such as the Fisherman Project group which made avant-garde music and SSINGSSING, a group that went slightly viral after performing on NPR with their experimental fusion of traditional and contemporary music. Lee Cheolhee was the drummer for both these two projects as well. Jang is therefore no stranger to fusion music, and has had made several attempts on creating successful fusion bands before.

LEENALCHI’s band name is derived from the name of one of the master singers from the later period of the 19th century, Yi Nalch’i. Interestingly, Yi Nalch’i is known for performing

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<sup>72</sup> “Kwōn Songhŭi,” *Kugakpoteol Arirang*, accessed June 29, 2020, <http://arirangs.com/news/view.php?no=338>; “Sin Yuchin,” *Kugakpoteol Arirang*, accessed June 29, 2020, <http://www.arirangs.com/news/view.php?no=1835>; “An Iho,” *Kugakpoteol Arirang*, accessed June 29, 2020, <http://arirangs.com/news/view.php?no=654>; “I Narae,” *Kugakpoteol Arirang*, accessed June 29, 2020, <http://arirangs.com/news/view.php?no=1204>.

p’ansori in such a way that everyone could enjoy it.<sup>73</sup> While yangban audiences focused more on an elegant and serious sound, the common people were more interested in values such as sincerity, directness, and purity. These values were mostly found in epics that featured humor and tragedy, which Yi Nalch’i focused on.

As the members met while working on a remastering of *Sukungga*, one of the five remaining p’ansori works, LEENALCHI exclusively uses verses from this story. Although most p’ansori works contain a few talking animals, *Sukungga* is special because the story does not include any human characters at all as the entire story takes place in the animal kingdom. The story talks about a sick dragon king who can only be cured by consuming a rabbit’s liver. A terrapin servant faces difficulties such as meeting a tiger and being unsure what a rabbit looks like, but eventually lures a rabbit back to palace. The rabbit realizes what is happening, tricks the dragon king and his servant terrapin, and manages to escape. The story is known to be the most satirical and humorous stories among the five p’ansori stories.

This p’ansori piece lays the foundation for LEENALCHI’s musical inspiration. Their first album called *Sukungga* was released in May 29, 2020 and features ten tracks that are all retelling parts of the p’ansori story, mostly using the original lyrics. Their most successful song is “Tiger is Coming” (“범 내려온다”). As of July, 2020, their two most famous performances of the song have an accumulated view count of over 23 million views<sup>74</sup> on YouTube and their shorter version for the ‘Imagine Your Korea’ KTO campaign which shows famous spots in Seoul has over 46 million views.<sup>75</sup> LEENALCHI’s video has become the most popular video on the Imagine Your Korea channel, and beats the second most popular video on the channel by 1,5 million views even though that video was uploaded in 2016 and features hallyu superstar Song Joong-ki. Not only the Seoul version managed to get a surprising high amount of views, the band made five different versions for other big Korean cities, all using the same shortened version of “Tiger is Coming”. Among the promotional videos done by LEENALCHI, the video with the least amount of views currently sits at 35 million views.

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<sup>73</sup> Kim, “History of Pansori,” 7.

<sup>74</sup> Onsüt’eijiONSTAGE, “[Onsüt’eiji2.0] Inalch’i - Pöm Naeryönda(with Aembigyuösü Taensük’ömp’öni),” *Youtube*, September 19, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SmTRaSg2fTQ>; KBS Kpop, “Inalch’iXAembigyuösü Taensük’ömp’öni - Pöm Naeryönda [Yuhüiyörüi Sük’ech’ibuk/You Heeyeol’s Sketchbook] | KBS 201009 Pangsong,” *Youtube*, October 10, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcrwSWw3bH8>.

<sup>75</sup> Imagine Your Korea, “Feel the Rhythm of KOREA: SEOUL,” *Youtube*, July 30, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3P1CnWI62Ik>.



#### 4.1 LEENALCHI's Usage of *Sukungga*

*Sukungga* is both the name of one of the five p'ansori pieces, as well as the name of the first album by LEENALCHI released in 2020. The album features eleven tracks which are all based on different acts of the p'ansori epic. To better understand how LEENALCHI makes use of the p'ansori piece, this thesis will first provide a short summary of the story.

*Sukungga* literally translates to the Story of the Sea Palace, which is where the story starts. After building the Sea Palace during a hot summer, the Dragon King of the South Sea hosts a very big party and suddenly falls ill. A god comes down to diagnose and cure the Dragon King, but nothing works. There seems to be a disharmony between positive and negative energies in the body of the Dragon King, in which the positive energy has outgrown the negative energy. If the Dragon King does not consume the liver of a hare, he will die. However, hares do not live in the Water Palace and, thus, the Dragon King sends his loyal subject Terrapin to the human world to catch a hare. Eventually, Terrapin meets a hare and tricks Hare into coming to the Sea Palace, where life is perfect and everyone is happy. Hare is arrested after arriving at the Sea Palace. When Hare is presented to the Dragon King and realizes he will die unless he can deceive the Dragon King. He asks the Dragon King to cut open his belly, but that if the Dragon King does so, he will not find a liver there because Hare takes out his liver every full moon. The Dragon King believes Hare and orders no one to hurt Hare, and Terrapin thus has to bring Hare back to the human world. Once they arrive on land, Hare insults the Dragon King. Hare presents Terrapin with his wrapped up feces, promising that it is Hare's liver. Terrapin thus goes back to the Sea Palace. Hare roams free but gets caught in a net by humans. Once again, he manages to escape by deceiving his opponents. He arrogantly boasts about himself and dances, only to be captured again by a hungry eagle. Once again, Hare is forced to outwit his capturer. Hare is able to convince Eagle to bring Hare to his burrow and is able to escape. Eagle threatens to wait until Hare will come out of the burrow, but Hare declares that he will never get out of the burrow again. Instead, he will take care of his grandchildren. Meanwhile, Terrapin serves Hare's feces to the Dragon King, which cures the Dragon King. Terrapin's loyalty has been proven fruitful. In other versions, the Dragon King sends a letter to the mountain gods who recognize Terrapin's loyalty and send the liver of another old Hare to cure the Dragon King, after which he hosts a party for Terrapin. The story concludes that humans should act like these animals, in which listeners are asked to be loyal to their kings, patriotic to their countries, and nice to their parents.

Before analyzing and comparing LEENALCHI's work with the p'ansori piece, it is important to state that there are several versions of *Sukungga*. This thesis will rely on six versions provided by Tong Hyon Choe and translated by Pak Sŭngbae published for the Jeonju International Sori Festival, namely the performances based on the versions Bak Bong-Sul, Bak Cho-weol, Kim Yeon-su, Yu Seong-jun, Jeong Gwang-su, Gang Do-geun, and the version of Jeong Eung-min interpreted by two different singers.<sup>76</sup> P'ansori singers are able to make alterations where they see fit and will not always stick to the versions previously written down. Therefore, LEENALCHI's lyrics and the written p'ansori versions will not be completely identical, as LEENALCHI has made their own alterations and interpretations as well. Yet, this does not mean that comparisons between LEENALCHI's versions of the *Sukungga* verses and those that were previously established are useless, as they are remarkably similar. As a matter of fact, what is most interesting about LEENALCHI's songs, is that they seem to follow the actual lyrics of different acts in the original *Sukungga* with few to no alterations.

LEENALCHI's *Sukungga* album features eleven songs that are all different verses of the actual *Sukungga* epic story. LEENALCHI's album starts with their most well-received song 'Pŏm Naeryŏonda' '범 내려온다' ('Tiger is Coming'), in which a tiger walks towards Terrapin thinking of eating him. The song relies on the repetition of the phrase 'Pŏm Naeryŏonda', which is used in repetition as the first line in the actual p'ansori too. The song features two different yet similar verses. The second verse is repeated several times. These two verses are actually based on two different iterations of *Sukungga*. When comparing the different versions with the two verses, it seems that the first verse is most similar to Jeong Eung-min's version, whereas the second verse is more alike Bak Cho-weol's version. Thus, even though LEENALCHI stays true to standardized versions of the p'ansori piece, LEENALCHI has altered the original versions by their use of repetition and their usage of different lyrical versions through their song. By using parts of the p'ansori act as chorus, LEENALCHI is able to make a modern-style song out of the lyrics of the epic.

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<sup>76</sup> Tonghyŏn Ch'oe, Sŭngbae Pak, and Philip Owen, *Hanyŏngdaeyŏk Sukungga Batibyŏljŏnjip 1* (Jeonju: Munhwach'eyukkwan'gwangbu – Chŏllapukto – Chŏnjusekyesorich'ukchechochigwiwŏnhoe, 2010); Tonghyŏn Ch'oe, Sŭngbae Pak, and Philip Owen, *Hanyŏngdaeyŏk Sukungga Batibyŏljŏnjip 2* (Jeonju: Munhwach'eyukkwan'gwangbu – Chŏllapukto – Chŏnjusekyesorich'ukchechochigwiwŏnhoe, 2010); Tonghyŏn Ch'oe, Sŭngbae Pak, and Philip Owen, *Hanyŏngdaeyŏk Sukungga Batibyŏljŏnjip 3* (Jeonju: Munhwach'eyukkwan'gwangbu – Chŏllapukto – Chŏnjusekyesorich'ukchechochigwiwŏnhoe, 2010); Tonghyŏn Ch'oe, Sŭngbae Pak, and Philip Owen, *Hanyŏngdaeyŏk Sukungga Batibyŏljŏnjip 4* (Jeonju: Munhwach'eyukkwan'gwangbu – Chŏllapukto – Chŏnjusekyesorich'ukchechochigwiwŏnhoe, 2010).

‘Põm Naeryõonda’ is the only song that clearly fuse two different versions of a *Sukungga* piece together. The other songs, however, more or less follow their own respective versions. Although the original lyrics is used for LEENALCHI’s songs, LEENALCHI does not always stay true to the order of storytelling that the original pieces engage in. In ‘*Shinũi Kohyang*’ ‘신의 고향’ (‘You Know Who I Am’), this is very clear. ‘*Shinũi Kohyang*’ starts with the its chorus, which is a beetle’s offer to catch a hare for the Dragon King at the beginning of the story when the sea animals discuss who they will send to the human world during a meeting at the Sea Palace. The first verse that follows, however, skips several acts of the original *Sukungga* as it showcases the part in which an owl scolds a crow when Terrapin first reaches the human world. The song returns to the chorus before starting the next verse. In the second verse, the song is once again situated at the beginning of the story at the Sea Palace, in which now a carp explains why a catfish should not be send to catch a hare. The song returns to the verse in which the owl scolds the crow in the human world before repeating the chorus. The next verse is situated in the human world, in which a deer brags about his old age. The final verse skips ahead in the story once more as Terrapin is now attempting to anger Hare by making him believe he will die in the hands of a hunter in hopes of persuading Hare to come to the Sea Palace. The song ends with the chorus of the song. All portions of this song are direct quotes from different animals throughout the story and does not contain narration. For this song in particular, LEENALCHI is very creative with the narration of *Sukungga* as they continuously switch the setting of the story from the Sea Palace to the human world. So, although LEENALCHI does make us of the actual lyrics of *Sukungga*, they can be very creative in their usage of the source material.

Notable is that LEENALCHI’s *Sukungga* album does not follow the timeline of the actual story. As the retelling of a p’ansori epic could take several hours, it is not surprising that a 46-minute long album is unable to tell the complete version of *Sukungga*. As mentioned before, the first track tells us about the meeting between Terrapin and Tiger. The second track brings us to the moment in which Terrapin reveals Hare to the Dragon King. Then, the listeners are transported to the Sea Palace at the beginning of the story, when the Dragon King chooses a subject to go onto land. The entire album skips around the chronological order of the story in a similar manner. A reason for this might simply be that the album was only sold in digital form until February 2021, enabling potential buyers to not buy the entire album but simply the tracks they enjoy. There is, thus, no coherent story in LEENALCHI’s album and one would not be able to grasp or understand the complete *Sukungga* epic by simply listening to LEENALCHI’s album. Therefore, unlike the classical style of retelling a p’ansori story, LEENALCHI takes certain

excerpts of the source material to turn into songs that are able to be listened to without needing to engage with the original story.

This analysis shows that LEENALCHI makes use of the original *Sukungga* in a way that barely deviates from the established lyrics of the original epic story. By rearranging the source material and designating some portions of the source materials as chorus, LEENALCHI is able to create a modern version of the classical epic. Although sorikkun would originally perform *Sukungga* by adhering to the chronological order of the story, LEENALCHI tends to play with the chronology of the epic in both their songs and the order of their album. Although LEENALCHI's songs make use of the actual lyrics of the epic, one would not be able to understand the entirety of *Sukungga* by just listening to LEENALCHI's album.

#### 4.2 LEENALCHI's Presentation – Modern P'ansori Fusion

Although LEENALCHI's use of *Sukungga*'s narration is useful in understanding how exactly LEENALCHI stays true to the classical way of performing p'ansori, p'ansori is a performance art and, thus, LEENALCHI's performance of their songs is also very important. To further analyze how LEENALCHI makes use of p'ansori and is able to repurpose p'ansori in a way that it engages contemporary audiences, LEENALCHI's manner of presenting their music is valuable to examine.

Before understanding LEENALCHI's presentation of p'ansori, the thesis will once again refer to the three components of p'ansori, namely the sorikkun, the kosu, and the audience. LEENALCHI features several sorikkun, which deviates from the classical one sorikkun that is needed for a traditional p'ansori performance. Instead of a kosu using a buk, LEENALCHI instrumentalists consist of two bassists and a drummer. As p'ansori is originally performed with only one drum, the music used is not necessarily harmonious. Instead of harmony, rhythm is much more important in p'ansori as it constantly changes. In an interview, Jang revealed<sup>77</sup> that, unlike other fusion artists who tend to make use of harmonies to bring traditional and contemporary music together, LEENALCHI only makes use of percussion instruments such as basses and a drum to create a rhythm that is as impressive and susceptible of change as that of original p'ansori. This is indeed a peculiar choice, as Koreans are more likely to recognize

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<sup>77</sup> Hyein Kim, "I Shidaeüi Taensü Myujik, Paendü 'Inalch'i' Int'öbyu." *Indiepost*, July 10, 2020, <https://www.indiepost.co.kr/post/13995>.

fusion when artists make use of traditional Korean instruments due to their distinct and raspy timbre as well as the way it looks on stage.<sup>78</sup>

Therefore, it is not so much the instrumentals that signify that LEENALCHI is a fusion group. More telling are the outfits of Ambiguous Dance Company, the group of dancers who often accompany LEENALCHI in their television performances. Ambiguous Dance Company belongs to the realm of contemporary dance, but does not feel like it should be defined in such straightforward terms.<sup>79</sup> The group aims to communicate through dance, in which they make use of the process of concretization “to expand the artistic sphere of dance and move onto a more linguistic level”.<sup>80</sup> The dancers are dressed in remarkable clothing which are a form of fusion in itself. Several members are wearing a *kat* 갓 (traditional Korean hat) while also wearing contemporary clothing. One member is wearing a modern *hanbok* 한복 (traditional Korean clothing), while another member is wearing an actual hanbok. There is also a member dressed in a red suit with green tie who wears a headdress that looks like a helmet worn by high ranking military officials during the Joseon period. Another member is dressed in a white robe that resembles taekwondo clothes, further signifying Korean identity. As evident from the screenshot of the performance at You Heeyeol’s Sketchbook, LEENALCHI, who are dressed in monochrome and modern clothes, almost disappear behind the members of Ambiguous Dance Company who are dancing in front of the band in bright and colorful clothes. For LEENALCHI’s performances, it is not instruments that signify that they engage in fusion music, nor is it the costumes the band wears. Instead, the clothes of the members of Ambiguous Dance Company become a signifier of LEENALCHI’s pursuit to mix traditionally Korean culture with contemporary Korean culture.

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<sup>78</sup> Sutton, ““Fusion” and Questions,” 14.

<sup>79</sup> “Ambiguous Dance Company,” *Producer Group Dot*, accessed June 29, 2021, <http://producergroupdot.kr/portfolio/ambiguous-dance-company/>.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.



Figure 1: Screenshot from LEENALCHI and Ambiguous Dance Company's performance at You Heeyeol's Sketchbook October 10, 2020.<sup>81</sup>

Unlike Western audiences, an audience that is thoroughly enjoying the epic told by a sorikkun is not supposed to be quiet. The audience would participate actively, oftentimes even exerting influence on the contents of the epic being presented. A good sorikkun is able to help their audiences immerse themselves into the story that the sorikkun is telling. Therefore, during traditional p'ansori performances, both the kosu and the audience would engage in what is called ch'uimsae 추임새 (exclamatory words to arouse excitement). For sorikkun, the interaction of the audience would be a way of confirming whether the audience was enjoying their stage.<sup>82</sup> The act of ch'uimsae developed naturally over time. When audiences came to enjoy the tales told by sorikkun, they would show appreciation by spontaneously adding their impressions or utter exclamations. However, once p'ansori gradually turned into a more stylized art, the reactions audiences gave performers became more stylized too which eventually resulted in the inclusion of ch'uimsae in p'ansori.<sup>83</sup> Examples of phrases that are used in ch'uimsae are *olssigu* 얼씨구 (yippee), *charhanda* 잘한다 (good).

<sup>81</sup> KBS Kpop, "Inalch'iXAembigyuösu Taensük'ömp'öni - Pöm Naeryöonda [Yuhüiyörüi Sük'ech'ibuk/You Heeyeol's Sketchbook] | KBS 201009 Pangsong," *Youtube*, October 10, 2020, 3:11, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcrwSWw3bH8>.

<sup>82</sup> Kyung-hee Kim, "Theory of Pansori," in *Korean Musicology Series 2: Pansori*, ed. Yong-shik Lee, 31-69. Seoul: National Center for Korean Traditional Performing Art, 2008.68

<sup>83</sup> Jang, *Korean P'ansori Singing Tradition*, 26.

Jang remarks<sup>84</sup> that contemporary audiences are not as well-versed in p'ansori and are, therefore, not confident to shout any ch'uimsae. Although a silent audience would have meant a failed p'ansori performance several decades ago, this is not necessarily the same for LEENALCHI. Because LEENALCHI's performs p'ansori in the version of already established songs, it is almost impossible for the audience to interrupt the band to shout ch'uimsae. Similarly, the kosu, in LEENALCHI's case the two bassists and the drummer, do not interrupt to shout ch'uimsae either and do not seem to be part of LEENALCHI's performances. More importantly, LEENALCHI has mostly performed throughout the year 2020 in which restrictions related to the corona virus prevented the coming together of crowds. Therefore, there has not often been an audience present to watch their stages in the first place. Although interaction with the audience is considered an important aspect of p'ansori, LEENALCHI does not interact with their audience.

Yet, it is unfair to regard LEENALCHI's p'ansori as completely unorthodox. LEENALCHI make good use of the three elements of p'ansori; namely song, narration, and body language. LEENALCHI's songs feature both song and narration that are directly taken from the original *Sukungga* story. The element of body language, however, is not necessarily carried out by the members of LEENALCHI themselves. Instead, the element of body language carried out by Ambiguous Dance Company. All necessary elements of p'ansori are thus taken care of by LEENALCHI, even if LEENALCHI's way of p'ansori is different from what p'ansori might have been decades ago.

Because LEENALCHI consists of multiple sorikkun as well as a band, and is often found to be performing with a dance crew, LEENALCHI's approach to p'ansori is far from classical. It even deviates from more well-known fusion styles as they do not make use of any traditionally Korean instruments and signify their fusion-status mostly through the clothing of the dance crew. Another remarkable difference is LEENALCHI's lack of interaction with the audience, but as contemporary audiences are not used to react to p'ansori stages anymore, this might actually work in LEENALCHI's favor. Nevertheless, LEENALCHI makes good use of the three necessary elements in p'ansori. In theory, most of the important aspects that are needed to perform p'ansori are taken care of. Although LEENALCHI's presentation might thus be out-of-the-box, or maybe even unorthodox, LEENALCHI does attempt to adhere to p'ansori traditions as much as it can.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., xvi.

### 4.3 LEENALCHI – Traditionally Korean Yet Modern and Foreign

Since LEENALCHI started to become more popular in Korea, they have participated in several brand deals. As already mentioned in this thesis, the band has worked together with Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) in a campaign called “Feel the Rhythm of KOREA”. There are seven videos taken in seven different Korean cities. Each video features a different LEENALCHI song from LEENALCHI’s *Sukungga* album to which Ambiguous Dance Company dances in front of popular landmarks. The first three videos were released on the 30<sup>th</sup> of July, 2020, and featured Seoul, Busan, and Jeonju. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of October, 2020, the videos for Gangneung, Mokpo, and Andong were released. Finally, the 21<sup>st</sup> of March, 2021, the video for Incheon was released. Although every video features Ambiguous Dance Company, LEENALCHI themselves only make a quick appearance in Andong and Mokpo’s videos. More so than LEENALCHI, the focus of these videos are thus Ambiguous Dance Company. For the Incheon version, the cast of the popular Korean variety show *2 Days 1 Night* are featured as they dance next to the members of Ambiguous Dance Company.

In all videos for this campaign the members of Ambiguous Dance Company are wearing peculiar clothes. However, in most videos the members’ clothes actually do not refer to Korean traditional culture. In the Seoul video, the song that is featured is ‘Pŏm Naeryŏonta’ and thus the dance crew is wearing the exact same traditionally-inspired clothes that they have worn before in different stages of “Pŏm Naeryŏonta”, including hanboks and traditional headwear. The video situated in Gangneung features another mixture of traditional and contemporary clothes in which several members wear necklaces that resemble decorative tassels used for all kind of items in Joseon, and one member wears the upper part of a hanbok. For the other videos, however, the members are wearing suits or overalls. But in their modern clothing, they do dance past traditional Korean sights such as monks at the Haedong Yonggungsa Temple in Busan, a p’ansori performance in the Jeonju Sori Cultural Center, and a traditional mask dance in Hahoe Village in Andong. Therefore, even if the clothes of the members of Ambiguous Dance Company do not signify the traditional Korean aspects of LEENALCHI’s p’ansori performance, the video is able to convey Korea’s traditionality through the landmarks and culture the video is showcasing.





Figure 2: Screenshot of *Feel the Rhythm of Korea: SEOUL* by Korea Tourism Agency.<sup>85</sup>



Figure 3: Screenshot of *Feel the Rhythm of Korea: ANDONG* by Korea Tourism Agency.<sup>86</sup>

The usage of a fusion group for a Korean tourism advertisement is not surprising. Finchum-Sung explains<sup>87</sup> that, as tourism is gradually becoming more important to the Korean economy,

<sup>85</sup> Imagine Your Korea, “Feel the Rhythm of KOREA: SEOUL,” *Youtube*, July 30, 2020, 1:20, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3P1CnWI62Ik>.

<sup>86</sup> Imagine Your Korea, “Feel the Rhythm of KOREA: ANDONG,” *Youtube*, October 13, 2020, 0:57, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2GeUF\\_xm1Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2GeUF_xm1Y).

<sup>87</sup> Finchum-Sung, “Image Is Everything,” 46.

traditional music is increasingly commodified to meet the expectations of foreign audiences in order to build a national image. She continues<sup>88</sup> by coining the term “hallyu effect” in which the refashioning of traditions in Korea is based on the aesthetics and romantic notions of Korean popular media consumed by foreign audiences, ultimately inspiring presently performed traditional arts. This is then used for Korean tourism advertisements in which the hallyu effect decides what visuals would encourage foreigners to come to Korea. A fusion band like LEENALCHI who efficiently blends traditional and contemporary culture is therefore an excellent choice when it comes to promoting Korean culture to foreign audiences.

A collaboration between LEENALCHI and KTO might therefore not be all that surprising, but it has not been the only collaboration that LEENALCHI has done. Further brand deals that LEENALCHI has received include Samsung and Pizza Alvolo, a Korean pizza brand. These collaborations are much more interesting, as a phone signifies modernity whereas pizza signifies globalization. Although tourism advertisements are made to attract foreigners, these advertisements are made to attract Koreans.

For the Samsung collaboration, LEENALCHI is not together with Ambiguous Dance Company. Instead, they are standing on top of a big Samsung Galaxy Z Flip phone while playing ‘Pŏm Naeryŏnda’. However, instead of saying “pŏm naeryŏnda”, which means “Tiger is coming down” they repeat the phrase “p’on naeryŏnda, Z p’ŭllip naeryŏnda”, which translates to “the phone is coming down, Z Flip is coming down”. By slightly changing the lyrics of the p’ansori epic, LEENALCHI is able to sing about the perks of having a Samsung Galaxy Z Flip phone.

For the Pizza Alvolo commercial, LEENALCHI is joined by both Ambiguous Dance Company and star-actor Lee Byung-hun. When Lee takes a bite of a pizza slice, he transports to a colorful world of traditionally Korean-inspired art when LEENALCHI’s ‘Ŏryudogam’ ‘어류도감’ (‘A Fish Map’) begins to play. Similar to Samsung’s advertisement, the lyrics of the song is altered so that LEENALCHI can use their p’ansori inspired song to reflect the ingredients of Pizza Alvolo’s pizzas. At the same time, Lee explores the wonderful traditional Korean world as the members of Ambiguous Dance Company dance around him.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 48-49.



Figure 4: Screenshot of LEENALCHI starring in the Samsung Z Flip phone commercial.<sup>89</sup>



Figure 5: Screenshot of Pizza Alvolo's commercial featuring LEENALCHI's music as well as Ambiguous Dance Company and Lee Byung-hun.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>89</sup> UNFRAME, "Samsung Kaellöksi Z P'üllip 5G\_Galaxy Z Flip 5G X Inalch'I," *Youtube*, March 31, 2021, 0:04, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VS4b6S1e098>.

<sup>90</sup> P'ijaalbollo (Pizza Alvolo) – Alp'ürodöksyön, "P'ijaalbollo TV CF \_FULLpöjön," *Youtube*, June 11, 2020, 0:52, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b51fE9DaBPw>.

As Finchum-Sung has explained<sup>91</sup>, fusion has mostly been used for the outward, trying to appeal to foreigners instead of Koreans. However, these advertisements are used for Korean audiences. Although the advertisements still allude to traditionally Korean symbolism, the products that are advertised are not Korean nor traditional. Therefore, the usage of LEENALCHI's music for phone commercials and even pizza commercials means that LEENALCHI have managed to repurpose p'ansori as both modern and foreign. As the commercials have been broadcasted on several television networks, it can be said that through this repurposing, p'ansori is slowly turning into a living culture once again.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 52.

## Conclusion

This thesis has analyzed LEENALCHI's ability to repurpose p'ansori music from an art form that was close to extinction, to one that has returned as a living culture. After laying down the theoretical framework for this thesis, it provided an overview of Korean postwar popular music before examining the situation of Korean popular in 2020. This showed that, although there had previously not been a real demand for fusion music, 2020 created an opportunity for 'forgotten' music to return to the stage. This thesis then more clearly used its theoretical framework to better understand the heritagization of p'ansori music. The thesis showed how p'ansori music had once been a living culture that innovated itself regularly, to then slowly face heritagization by government institutions as public demand for p'ansori declined. Finally, this thesis moved to its case study in which it researched the paradox that is LEENALCHI. Although p'ansori is not enjoyed as a living culture in Korea anymore, LEENALCHI is able to turn p'ansori into a music style enjoyed by the contemporary Korean audience. By examining LEENALCHI's usage of the narration of *Sukungga*, it is clear that they barely stray from what is considered the 'accurate' form of p'ansori narration and their fusion-aspect is mostly present in the usage of their instruments. However, LEENALCHI's performances and advertisements more accurately show how they reinvent p'ansori so that it better fits the contemporary audience's taste. P'ansori and traditional music is no longer traditional or Korean, as LEENALCHI has shown that it can be modern and international. P'ansori fusion does not seem to have lost its renewed influence on the Korean music scene just yet. Even in 2021, p'ansori has been featured in a hip-hop song called "Põm" "범" ("Tiger") by idol rapper Ravi. This further shows that traditional arts such as p'ansori which were at the verge of extinction can once again become a living culture when correctly adapted to the taste of the contemporary audience.

Before the end of this thesis, it would once again like to come back to Sutton's definition of fusion music; namely that fusion is a music style that mixes an inherently Korean music style with a music style that is considered to be foreign.<sup>92</sup> Fusion is not excessively researched yet, but both Sutton and Finchum-Sung independently conclude<sup>93</sup> that one important function of Korean fusion music is to entertain tourists and create a palatable form of 'traditional' Korean music that foreigners with limited exposure to Korean traditional culture are able to enjoy easily. Thus, so far fusion music is mostly understood to say more about tourism in Korea, and the way that Korea is eager to present itself to foreigners as opposed to how Koreans see themselves

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<sup>92</sup> Sutton, "'Fusion' and Questions," 4.

<sup>93</sup> Sutton, "'Fusion' and Questions," 16; Finchum-Sung, "Image is Everything," 48.

and their own traditional culture. After all, as this thesis has discussed, the interest for traditional music among the general Korean public has been rather obsolete ever since the colonization of Korea. Although fusion music has been able to find its way into Korean pop music every now and then, it has never dominated the scene again.

However, the popularity of LEENALCHI is currently opposing both conclusions. It is true that LEENALCHI is still used to entertain foreign audiences, as LEENALCHI's partnership with the KTO clearly shows. However, LEENALCHI went viral in Korea itself first and is still promoting several products locally. Some of these products, such as pizza, are not even considered to be Korean in the first place. At the same time, promoting new phones for Samsung also shows that, despite its use of traditional music, LEENALCHI's form of p'ansori is modern. Therefore, LEENALCHI is able to repurpose p'ansori. Although it had been a nearly extinct culture before, p'ansori is once again turned into a lived culture. Nevertheless, by doing so, it is also reshaping the way in which Koreans regard themselves and their traditional culture. Further research into how LEENALCHI and the renewed usage of p'ansori might be reshaping how Koreans understand their own traditions goes beyond the scope of this thesis, but might be an interesting follow up to this research.

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