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THE KOREAN REPOSITORY.

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KOREAN VOCAL MUSIC.

IN spite of the evidence to the contrary borne to our ears on every summer breeze, Korean music is not a myth. The sounds seem peculiar and are far from pleasing, because we do not know or *feel* what they are intended to express and we bring to them not the Korean temperament and training but the more artificial western ear. We say they do not "keep time," which is as just a stricture as it would be to say that Shakespeare's verse does not *rhyme*. Why should they "keep time?" There is no analogy for it in nature. The thrush does not keep time; and the skylark, that joy of Korean waste places, cares naught for bars and dotted notes. As a pure expression of feeling, music should no more be hampered by "time" than poetry is by rhyme There are occasions, to be sure, when both time and rhyme are necessary adjuncts; and I shall show that some Korean music is not lacking in that rhythmic succession which we call "time."

Koreans like our music as little as we like theirs, and for the same reason—they do not know what we are "driving at." The same difficulty often confronts us in our own music. Haydn's *description of the fall of the spirits in "Creation" loses all meaning* except as we hold the key.

So I beg you to suspend your judgment of Korean music until you can listen to it, so to speak, with Korean ears.

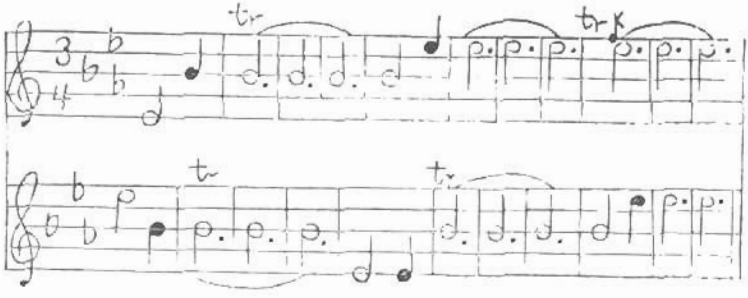
Korean vocal music is divided into three classes; the *Si Jo*, or what we might call the classical style, the *Ha Ch'i* or popular style and an intermediate grade which we might call the drawing-room style—with the drawing-room left out.

Let us begin with the *Si Jo* or classical style. It may be characterized as extremely *andante* and *tremuloso*, and is *punctuat-*

ed with drums. This means that the accompaniment consists mainly of a drum which is struck once in a while to notify the singer that she has hung on to one note as long as the patience of the audience will permit and she had better try another, which advice is invariably taken.

The progress is extremely slow and compares with our music as travel on a spavined Korean pack-pony compares with the "Empire State Express." It takes as much time for your Korean virtuoso to get out of sight of the signature as it does for only a medium fast western singer to render a three-verse song and respond to an encore. The trouble is not that they take too much time about it—we do not care for undue haste—but it is that they put *too much time on one note without taking breath.* So as you lie in bed and listen to some distant songster trill a note for ninety seconds, if you do not know that it is classical, you will get all tied up in a knot as you do when you listen to a croupy child and speculate on its chances of getting the next breath.

This style is often attempted by the uninitiated, and in the days to come when the "funny paper" reaches Korea they will have to substitute this for amateur piano practice in making up their stock jokes. It is this handling of the classical style with "unwashen hands" that has brought it into disrepute with us. The Koreans say that it requires long and patient practice, and is sung to perfection only by the dancing girls, not because the sentiments are more properly expressed by them than by more reputable people, although this is not unusual, but because they are the only ones who have the leisure to give to its cultivation. The following is a crude attempt at scoring a few bars of this style, but it must be remembered that the classical style scorns bars. I only score the music for the first four words. A complete song would fill this number of THE REPOSITORY.



Tuis is barren and unprofitable enough and I shall by no means attempt to defend it. It is *classical* and quite beyond me: but I understand the words that go with it and they must make their own plea for the tune.

Like many songs of this class, it has three stanzas, called respectively the Ch'o jang, Ch'ung jang and Ch'ong jang; in other words, a drama in three acts. The Korean is as follows:—

청산아무러보자고금ᄉᆞ를네알니라
영웅호걸들이몃몃치지나더냐
일후에뭇ᄂᆞ니잇거든나도함께

If I have caught the spirit of this song as well as the letter, it conveys to the Korean mind a meaning similar to that which the following conveys to a westerner.

I

O Mountain blue,
Be thou my oracle. Thou stumbling-block to clouds,
Years have not marred thee, nor thine eye of memory dimmed,
Past, present, future seem to find eternal throne
Upon thy legend-haunted crest. O Mountain blue,
Be thou my oracle.

II

O Mountain blue,
Deliver up thy lore. Name me, this hour, the name
Of him most worthy—be he child or man or sage—
Who, neath thy summit, hailed to-morrow, wrestled with
To-day or reached out memory's hands toward yesterday.
Deliver up thy lore.

III

O Mountain blue,
Be thou my cenotaph; and when, long ages hence,
Some youth presumptuous shall again thy secret guess,
Thy lips unseal, among the names of them who claim
The guerdon of thy praise, I pray let mine appear.
Be thou my cenotaph.

Here we have a purely Korean picture—a youth on his way to attend the government examinations, his life before him. He has stopped to rest upon the slope of one of the grand mountains of Korea, and he thinks of all who must have trodden this same path to honors and success, and as he gazes up at the rock-ribbed giant, the very spirit of poetry seizes him and he demands who those successful ones have been. Between the second and third verses we imagine him fallen asleep and

the mountain telling him in his dream the long story of the worthy ones. As the youth wakes from his dream and resumes his pack he turns and asks that his name may be added to the list of those of whom he has heard. In what more delicate or subtle way can he ask the genius of the mountain to follow and give him success, for if his name is already added to the list then surely the mountain must see to it that he becomes worthy of it.

Another song that is unfortunately branded with this same tune may be placed in that much maligned category of "spring songs," whose annual deprecation nets the comic papers another handsome sum. My rendering of this is somewhat more literal than of the last and yet not so close to the original that a college boy could pin his faith to it in the class-room.

이달이삼월인지버들빗프르럿다
괵고리깃다듬고호졉펄펄셧겨난다
으히야거문고를골너라춘흥겨워

The willow catkin bears the vernal blush of summer's dawn
When winter's night is done;
The oriole, who preens herself aloft on swaying bough,
Is summer's harbinger;
The butterfly, with noiseless *ful-ful* of her pulsing wing,
Marks off the summer hour.
Quick, boy, thy zither! Do its strings accord? 'Tis well.
Strike up! *I must have song.*

The Korean is your true lover of spring-time. The harshness of his winter is mitigated by no glowing hearth and cozy chimney corner, such as make the howling blast outside a pleasure to you. Winter means to him a dungeon, twelve by eight, dark, dirty, poisonous. Spring means to him emancipation, breathing space, pure pleasure—animal pleasure, if you will—but the very voluptuousness of Spring affects him to the finger-tips and makes his senses "stir with poetry as leaves with summer wind." It shows the imperiousness of music in his nature—"I *must* have song." No surer would the skylark burst with melody than he. In some respects the Korean is nearer nature's heart than we give him credit for. He takes his draughts of nature from the living spring. We get much of ours from the illustrated journals. Take for instance any of those beautiful winter forest pictures. Have you ever compared them with the original? Have you ever learned the delight of sitting in the midst of a snow-laden forest in mid-winter in utter silence? The Korean has.

Another branch of Korean classical music deals with convivial songs. This does not sound classical, but then if Hogarth's *paintings are classical surely a convivial song may be.*

Here is one taken at random, and while it is a drinking song it is the saddest I ever met.

술먹지마자ᄒᆞ고밍세ᄅᆞᆯ지엇더니
술보고안주보니밍세가허ᄉᆞ로다
ᄋᆞ히야쳥념이어ᄃᆡ믹니저건너힝화촌

I

'Twas years ago that Kim and I
Struck hands and swore, however dry
The lip might be or sad the heart,
The merry wine should have no part
In mitigating sorrow's blow
Or quenching thirst. Twas long ago.

II

And now I've reached the flood-tide mark
Of life; the ebb begins, and dark
The future lowers. The tide of wine
Will never ebb. 'Twill aye be mine
To mourn the desecrated fane
Where that lost pledge of youth lies slain.

III

Nay, nay, begone! The jocund bowl
Again shall bolster up my soul
Against itself. What, good-man, hold!
Canst tell me where red wine is sold?
Nay, just beyond that peach tree there?
Good luck be thine, I'll thither fare.

We have here first the memory of the lost possibility of *youth, then the realization of to-day's slavery and, lastly, the mad* rush for that which will bring forgetfulness Not an exclusively Korean picture, surely.

But I must leave the classical style and venture within the precincts of the popular. And here I must tread carefully, for *every word has two meanings and one needs Korean wooden* shoes to keep out of the mire

The first and most conspicuous of this class is that popular ditty of seven hundred and eighty-two verses, more or less, which goes under the euphonious title of A-ra-rŭng. To the average Korean this one song holds the same place in music that rice does in his food—all else is mere appendage. You

hear it everywhere and at all times. It stands in the same relation to the Korean of to-day that "Ta-ra-ra boom-di-ay" did to us some five years ago. But the *furore* not being so great, the run is longer. To my personal knowledge this piece has had a run of three thousand five hundred and twenty odd nights and is said to have captured the public fancy about the year 1883. Its "positively last appearance" is apparently as far off as ever. I would not have anyone suppose that the above figures accurately represent the number of verses for they are numberless. In fact, this tune is made to do duty for countless improvisations in which the Korean is an adept. The chorus however is invariable and runs as follows:—

아르랑 아르랑 아라리오
아르랑 얼스비 띄어라

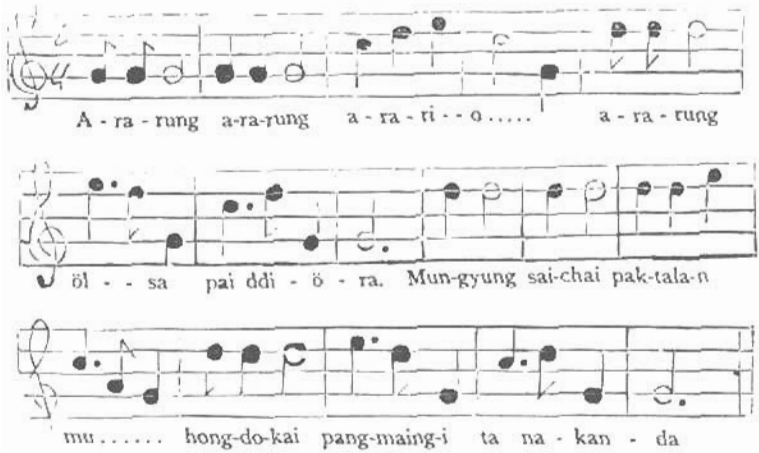
License is allowed in substituting, for the last word, 다나간다 or some other equally pregnant phrase.

While in America I was asked to translate this chorus and answered that the meaning was the same as is contained in the opening words of that English classic which begins—

"Hei diddle diddle."

I have asked many Koreans to give me the exact significance of the words, but have always met with the same incredulous smile. If any response was elicited it was of so vague a character as to be unintelligible. One man came very close to me and whispered that the 아르, being the beginning of the Korean word for Russia, was prophetic of the influence of that empire on the destiny of the nation! Another said that the characters were the Korean transliteration of certain Chinese characters which apprently mean "I love my husband, I love my husband. yes, I love you, I love my husband," and the line finishes with "Good! Let us launch the festive boat." This refers to the Korean custom of feasting in boats on the river, a favorite form of entertainment with them, but dangerous, I should judge, for people of highly convivial tastes.

The verses which are sung in connection with this chorus range through the whole field of legend, folk lore, lullabys, drinking songs, domestic life, travel and love. To the Korean they are lyric, didactic and epic all rolled into one. They are at once Mother Goose and Byron, Uncle Remus and Wordsworth. Here is a very weak attempt to score it. I have left out the trills and quavers, but if you give one or two to each note you will not go wrong.



Here we have the chorus first and then the following :-

On Sai Jai's slope in Mun-gyung town
We hew the *pak tal namu* down
To make the smooth and polished clubs
With which the washerwoman drubs.
Her masters clothes.

And by a swift turn of thought we have an Amazonian stanza :-

I cannot from my good-man part.
To say good-bye will break my heart.
See here, I have him by the wrist.
However he may turn and twist
I won't let go.

And again a quick forsaking of the realm of the practical and a dash into Titania land :—

I asked the spotted butterfly
To take me on his wing and fly
To yonder mountain's breezy side.
The trixy tiger moth I'll ride
As home I come.

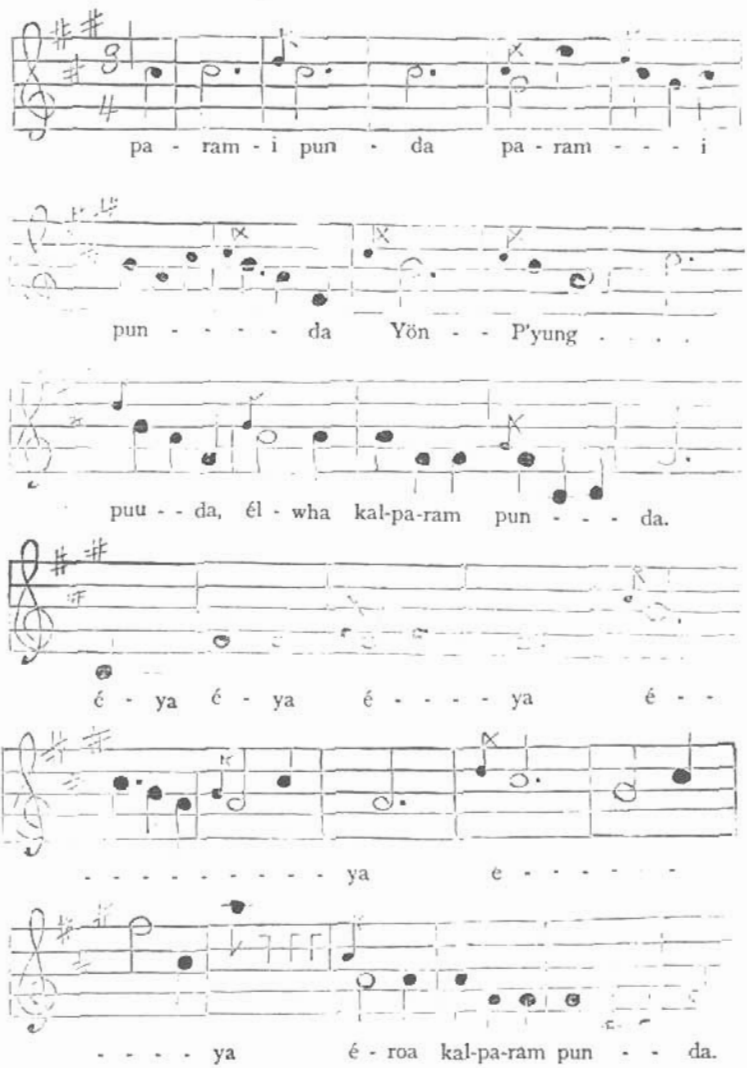
And finally a sentiment which is all too true to Korean life.

The good-man lingers long away.
My heart is sad. I fear—but nay,
His promise, sure, will hold him fast.
Though long I wait, he'll come at last.
Back ! fruitless tears.

This is all sad doggerel when put into English. The Korean flavor is gone, the aroma dissipated ; but you can see, from

them, some of the lines along which the Korean fancy sports itself; and if we compare it with much of our own popular music we see that human nature is the same and the same feelings find expression, though clad in different garb.

The following is a sample of the intermediate style. It does not rank with the *Si Jo* but is much in advance of the *Ha ch'i*.



We fain would put this in the category of yachting songs; but it would be an insult to the yacht to compare it with the square-ended craft which pass for boats in Korean waters. It consists mainly of the nautical "heigh-o," for which Koreans substitute "é-ya." This, together with the Korean "The wind blows free," forms the bulk of the song; but a little local coloring is thrown in by the reference to the "Yŏn-pyŭng pa-da," a particularly nasty stretch of water off the coast of Whang Hă province. This matter of local coloring is characteristic of Korean songs. They seldom speak of the "lofty mountain," the "shady dell," the "breezy upland" or the "wind-swept sea" without telling what particular mountain, dell, upland or sea is referred to. At first thought this would seem to detract from the poetic quality of the song by introducing geographical details which we of the west prefer to leave to the imagination; but on the other hand it seems to me to be the very charm of Korean music. In the first place, these names are euphonious and easily lend themselves to the uses of music. In the second place, Koreans as a people are remarkably well acquainted with the details of their country's geography. Every Korean has been at some time a traveler, and the local references are such as can appeal to him personally. Again, the names themselves are highly poetic — as Păk Tu, "The White Headed;" Kang Wha, "The Glory of the River;" Nak Wha, "The Fall of the Flowers;" Să Jă, "The Bird Pass;" Song Do, "The Pine Tree Capital;" and many others which from a poetic point of view compare favorably with our "Mauch Chunk," "Devil's Dike," "Pike's Peak," "Pilot Knob," "Magillicuddy Reeks" or "Rotten Row." The last, to be sure, is a striking case of alliteration but it would take Shakespearian genius to make poetry with them.

HOMER B. HULBERT.