



Deposited via The University of Sheffield.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/238152/>

Version: Published Version

Book Section:

Hannah Chang, H.K. (2024) Listening to Korea: audible prayers, boat songs, and the aural possibilities of the US missionary archive. In: McMurray, P. and Mukhopadhyay, P., (eds.) *Acoustics of Empire: Sound, Media, and Power in the Long Nineteenth Century*. Oxford University Press, pp. 203-224. ISBN: 9780197553787.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197553787.003.0009>

© Oxford University Press 2024. This is an open access publication, available online and distributed under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution–Non Commercial–No Derivatives 4.0 International licence (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0), a copy of which is available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

Reuse

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs (CC BY-NC-ND) licence. This licence only allows you to download this work and share it with others as long as you credit the authors, but you can't change the article in any way or use it commercially. More information and the full terms of the licence here: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

Listening to Korea

Audible Prayers, Boat Songs, and the Aural Possibilities of the US Missionary Archive

Hyun Kyong Hannah Chang

Choson, the Land of the Morning Calm: A Sketch of Korea (1885) offers a corpus of knowledge about Korea.¹ As was common in nineteenth-century European and North American surveys of the non-Western world, this monograph of 530 pages gave an account of a place little known in North America and Europe through the lenses of topography, climate, religion, customs, and history. Its author, Percival Lowell (1855–1916), was a polymath from a wealthy Massachusetts family and a Japanologist with a secondary interest in Korea, a country that was separated from Japan by a strait roughly 100 kilometers wide. For Lowell, who had a lifelong interest in the intersection of ancient religions, planetary science, and the occult, it was only natural to be drawn to the “Far East,” long imagined in the West as a mysterious site of antiquity.²

Lowell’s prolific work on Korea was the result of his three-month foray into the country from one of his trips in Japan in the 1880s. In Lowell’s exposition of Korea, stillness figured as a repeated theme. He was most likely taking a cue from the name of the then-ruling dynasty of Korea “Chosŏn” (朝鮮), which can be translated as “the Beauty of the Morning.” Generalizing this appellation associated with the Korean court, he articulated aural and visual descriptions of stillness, posing it both as an essential trait of Koreans and a metonym for Korea’s condition of lying outside history. He wrote:

The sun rose for them in the peaceful splendor that wraps the morning hours there even to this day, and the sunbeams fell into the valleys between the hills and nestled on the land. “Morning Calm” they called it; and it seemed not so much a name as its very essence. The drowsy quiet of the spot

lulled them to rest, and they fell asleep, passed away. They were in the world, yet it was to them as if it had passed away. And so they slept on for ages.³

Lowell used the emblem of stillness to exclude the Korean people from the trajectory of a supposedly progressing history. In his reading, stillness had impeded Koreans from joining the march of time: “They were in the world, yet it was to them as if it had passed away. And so they slept on for ages.”⁴ Moreover, Lowell maintained that this stillness had become the “very essence” of Korea—or, as he put it in another moment in the book, “pre-eminently the characteristics of the race.”⁵

The recourse to acoustic emblem evident in Lowell’s work was not uncommon in North American accounts of Korea and the larger Pacific Asian world in the nineteenth century. The emergence of such accounts registered expanding North American interests—economic, political, religious, military, and cultural—in the circum-Pacific.⁶ In the case of Korea, the majority of the North Americans who arrived there from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth were Protestant missionaries. By the 1910s, several hundred missionaries were stationed in Korea. As I have written elsewhere, US Protestant missions in Korea unfolded in the particular context of locally experienced imperialisms. Japan’s military aggressions in Korea, starting in the mid-nineteenth century, culminated in Japan’s colonial annexation of Korea in 1910. The sense of crisis that this had caused among Koreans aided the North American Protestant mission, itself part and parcel of US expansionism in the Pacific world.⁷ Japan’s annexation of Korea framed the Anglo-American evangelists as possible allies to the Koreans; the oppression of Koreans under the colonial regime made them highly receptive to Protestant rituals.

Just like Percival Lowell, North American missionaries, too, were fond of using sonic descriptors to explain Koreans to themselves and to the Anglophone world. But what they thought was worthwhile to record was different. Where Lowell noted silence, the missionaries in Korea recorded an abundant acoustic life. In their writings, which I call the missionary archive in this chapter, we find traces of vocalizations of Koreans of various backgrounds—shamans, peasants, laborers, scholars, and children—as well as instrumental music played by street bands and court musicians. These records form an acoustically-attuned archive consisting of published and unpublished sources. Many of these descriptions were passing comments in longer pieces about local life; some belonged to essays written exclusively

on the topic of Korean music. As portrayed in this archive, the streets of Korea were animated by bands whose instruments included a “shrill, fife-like, wailing instrument”⁸; common laborers such as farmers, horsemen, and boatmen sang in ways that “would be impossible to represent with our staff and notes”⁹; boys who gathered in village schools called *sōdang* recited Confucian texts in “a little sing-song melody”¹⁰; mourners at funerals wailed, “not gentle or smothered sobs, but open-mouthed howlings.”¹¹ The night was disrupted by noise as well, whether by women who beat clothes in coordination with wooden ironing sticks, by the shamans who “beat their tom-toms and drums and utter[ed] their peculiar calls,”¹² or by Christians who wept and loudly confessed their sins. In contrast to Lowell’s thesis of acoustic fixity, the missionaries also wrote about changes in local sonic practices, some of which were instigated by the missionaries themselves.

The multiplicity of sonic descriptions in the writings of US Protestant missionaries in Korea signals that these expatriate North Americans had a degree of familiarity with Korea that the likes of Lowell simply did not have. Indeed, given the nature of the missionary profession, many of them had to learn Korean and interact with Koreans on a daily basis. Some female missionaries or wives of missionaries were even privy to the more private domains occupied by Korean women. However, notwithstanding their intimacy with local life, their knowledge of Korea was also mediated by the epistemologies of modern/Western empires, wherein listening played a major role in “the constitution of acoustic ontologies and knowledges”¹³, and by a particular Anglo-American practice of imperialist evangelism. In particular, I draw attention to two different ways of listening to Korean vocalizations that emerged from the missionary archive. One of these involved applying Western-centric imperial dichotomies (such as civilized/heathen, rational/emotional, and correct/incorrect) to Korean vocalizations. This form of listening rested on the conceptualization of vocal practice as an object of conversion and linked authentic Christian faith to the supposed universality of North American culture. Another way of listening, which conceptualized vocal practice as an object of folkloristic analysis, projected romantic and essentialist ideas about Korean alterity onto Korean vocal practice. I argue that both forms of listening, despite their oppositional outlook, were powered by an ingrained practice of listening that assumed Korean vocalization as an audible site of interiority.

This chapter examines the interrelation of listening and knowledge in the archive pertaining to North American missionization in Korea from

the nineteenth to the early twentieth century. It gives a glimpse into what the North American missionaries heard and listened to in Korea, while situating this listening itself in the ideologies of North American imperialism and evangelicalism. To this end, the first section examines the general shape, dynamics, and motivations of this missionary archive. The second and third sections look at a variety of missionary representations of Korean vocalization in the activities of praying and singing, and argue that these representations—what amounted to aurally mediated knowledge of Koreans—rested on assumptions of audible interiority. The construction of the objects of listening involved in this process shaped notions of what is valid Korean Christian vocal practice and what is not. The final section briefly considers the issue of agency regarding Korean voices depicted in the missionary archive.

The Dynamics of the US Protestant Missionary Archive

Writing had long been central to the work of Christian overseas missions, but it was an especially prized activity for Protestant missionaries from the United States in the late nineteenth century. The vast body of texts that resulted from their evangelization around the world belonged to different genres, from minutes of meetings, reports to the mission board, and novellas in English, to dictionaries, grammar books, and secular textbooks in other languages. The missionaries' commitment to writing ran parallel to increasing interest and capacities in publishing sectors in the United States. Their writings were published not only by Protestant organizations and presses but also, depending on the genre, by secular presses such as Fleming H. Revell Company, which was devoted to travel writings and other forms of imperial knowledge at the turn of the century. Moreover, missionization typically entailed setting up one or more printing shops in the "field." This allowed the North Americans to print materials in English for the expatriate community, which also included diplomats and traders, as well as religious and secular materials in local scripts.¹⁴

The missionary archive in Korea comprised three modes of writing, each with its own purpose. First, there were record-keeping documents, such as minutes of meetings and reports to the mission society headquarters. These were primary ways in which the missionary organizations managed themselves, in a manner that Max Weber called rationalization.¹⁵

Second, there were texts that contributed to the documentation of Korea and Koreans. Written by missionaries for Christian or secular publications, these texts supplied cultural characterizations of the Korean people through descriptions of rituals, kinship, and beliefs, or what Ann Laura Stoler terms the “production of social kinds.”¹⁶ Many of them appeared as descriptive essays in English-language journals published in Seoul such as *The Korean Repository* (1892–1898), *The Korea Review* (1901–1906), and *The Korea Mission Field* (1905–1941), while some appeared as ethnographic notes from the field in *The Missionary Review of the World* (1878–1939), meant for globe-trotting American missionaries. The documentation of local life also abounded in single-authored memoirs, surveys, and fiction written for a broader Anglo-American Protestant readership at home.¹⁷ Third, the missionary archive includes Christian literature in Korean vernacular and mixed (classical Chinese and Korean vernacular) scripts for circulation within different groups of Koreans. This literature encompassed multiple projects of translating the Bible and the hymns, initiated at the denominational level as well as by individual missionaries.¹⁸ Bible and hymnal translations were complemented by tracts and pamphlets, such as *T’yöllo ryökyöng* (1895), a translation of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.¹⁹

As a whole, the body of texts that constitute the missionary archive gives us a glimpse into the dynamics of North American knowledge-making in the age of imperialism and imperialist evangelization. This archive is a testament to the ways in which writing served as a technology of selfhood for missionaries. Writing (and publishing) was an affective mechanism through which many missionaries expressed and performed their understanding of themselves, not just as the “civilized” of the world but also as self-sacrificing individuals fighting to save the soul of the pagan world, whether the audience was fellow evangelists, lay readers at home, or the “natives.” In other words, the act of writing was strongly connected to the moral economy of self-affirming humanitarianism that had characterized the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century United States.²⁰ This strand of humanitarianism was powered not only by the Christian belief of salvation but also by the missionaries’ consciousness of the growing secular power of the United States in the world. This consciousness underpinned their unrelenting conviction in the superiority of “American” values including capitalism and their advocacy of these values in foreign lands.

Within the US Protestant missionary archive, self-narration often sat within a structure of moral economy that was poised between the

ethnographic impulse characteristic of imperial knowledge collection and the Protestant epistemology of conversion. In Korea, as elsewhere, this narrative structure was especially visible in expository work that took up the task of explaining Korea to readers in the Anglophone world. Authors of this genre described a range of world-making practices through which they experienced Korea in vivid acoustic and visual detail, from weddings and funeral rites to shamanic rituals and familial drama, only to fold the local teleologically into the Protestant trajectory of “darkness-to-light” transformation. Thus, even when these practices were introduced with striking exactness and portrayed almost with a sense of amazement, they were ultimately cast as local customs to overcome within the tale of “pagan” Koreans becoming “civilized” Christians with the help of self-sacrificing missionaries. For example, Annie L. Baird’s *Daybreak in Korea: A Tale of Transformation in the Far East* (1909), a mishmash of fiction, ethnography, and morality tale, provided detailed, sensory descriptions of commoner women’s experience in a Korean village, including those vilified by the missionaries, such as shamanic rituals.²¹ This evident desire to explain the local for the Anglophone readers is ultimately arrested by the imperative of Christian conversion: the female protagonist “Bo Pai” becomes a Christian as the result of the work of a female missionary (“Mrs. Missionary”); this transformation entails the renunciation of those practices so carefully illustrated by the missionary author.

Beyond saviorism, which was common to both nineteenth-century imperialism and Protestant missions, evangelicalism also drove the penchant for self-expression that characterized the Protestant missionary archive. A powerful ideology within Anglophone Protestantism since the early nineteenth century, evangelicalism privileged signs of personal authenticity and encouraged individuals’ public statements of interior religious convictions in spoken and written forms. As such, it championed the interpolation of the religious into the narratives and textures of secular life more than those Christian missions that traded exclusively in fixed liturgical texts. Crucially, the evangelical demand for an exteriorized account of oneself also explains in part why the missionaries were listening to Koreans: to listen to Koreans was to know the truth that lay in their interior realm.

In sum, the imperatives that structured the missionary writings—the ethnographic impulse to know the local, the urgency of conversion, and the evangelical emphasis on confessional practice—reinforced the assumption of audible interiority within this archive. The missionaries consistently treated listening as a technology for measuring the Koreans’ moral character, innate

attributes residing in the interior domains, and, in the case of converts, the authenticity of conversion. In this sense, listening was one important condition of making sense of Koreans.

Listening to Korean Prayers

The most classic instance of the connection of knowledge and listening involved the missionaries' attunement to Christian Koreans' loud, improvised prayers. These vocalizations became objects of missionary archiving beginning in 1903, appearing in journals such as *The Korea Mission* and *The Missionary Review of the World* as well as reports to the headquarters. At least several dozens of these published items were witness accounts of large congregations of Koreans praying loudly in hopes of forgiveness. Such prayers were parts of revival meetings organized by missionaries in conjunction with emerging Korean pastors, and these events were well-attended not least due to the widespread dispossessions caused by foreign military campaigns in Korea, including the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). One account of Koreans' prayers was penned by J. Robert Moose, a Methodist stationed in Seoul. In this piece from 1904, Moose reports that during a special “ten day meeting in Chat-Coal Church,” an impassioned lecture and prayer by the missionary Robert Hardie led Koreans in attendance to make loud and spontaneous confessions:

This was a most wonderful meeting in which conviction for sin was so deep that it led to many most disgraceful confessions and restitution of stolen goods. Many of our people were brought to know for the first time what sin and forgiveness really mean. . . . Too often it has been the case that our converts to Christianity in this country have had only a conversion of the head, while the heart remained ignorant of the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit.²²

Moose's account presents two refrains in the missionary writing on prayers: spirituality measured by the intensity of speech and the connection of this heightened vocality to the act of repentance.

The archive tells us that what Moose called “the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit” was even stronger in Pyongyang and the surrounding areas in northern Korea, which had become the hub of the US Presbyterian

mission in Korea by the late 1890s. Leading missionaries in this region, including William M. Baird, Graham Lee, James S. Gale, and William B. Hunt, marveled at the outpouring of spoken words that they had witnessed among congregations of Koreans in the 1900s. For example, in a lengthy description of what came to be known as the Pyongyang Revival of 1907, which evidently drew upwards of 1,500 Koreans, Graham Lee wrote, “Man after man would rise, confess his sins, break down and weep, and then throw himself to the floor and beat the floor with his fists in a perfect agony of conviction.”²³ Just like Moose, Lee noted that many Koreans disclosed offenses involving the transgression of property ownership and economic transaction. For example, he highlighted an “Elder Chu,” who “began in a broken voice and could hardly articulate, so moved was he.” Chu “confessed to . . . misuse of funds” among other deeds.²⁴

These representative accounts suggest that the missionaries understood Koreans’ prayers to be a kind of audible portal into the converts’ hearts—that is, a way of knowing what the converts really thought and believed. In this sense, the prayers were a site of discipline and power through which the missionaries sought to confirm whether the Koreans had internalized Christian notions preached at the pulpit. And the ample citations of stealing and the “restitution of stolen goods” in the missionaries’ records of Korean confessions indicate that the benchmark of Protestant conscience for the North Americans was the honoring of private property.

Besides the confessed sins, missionaries thought it worthwhile to observe and record the intense emotionality that manifested in the participating Koreans’ speech and bodily gestures, as the quotes suggest. In particular, those who arrived in Pyongyang and the surrounding northern provinces in the 1890s and 1900s recorded animated qualities that they witnessed in the meetings. These qualities, dismissed as “shamanic” by elite Korean Christian notables²⁵, had much to do with the social history of northern Korea.²⁶ For most of the Chosŏn dynasty period (1392–1897), this region had been characterized by vibrant commoner-centered modalities and rituals, including shamanic prayers and incantations and a weak conformity to neo-Confucian orthodoxy. The Christianity that emerged partly from this legacy—a loud, confessional, and spiritual Christianity—was embraced by the likes of Lee, Baird, and Gale as a very welcome change from the upper-class cultures in Seoul, the national capital. This also explains why these influential missionaries promoted Kil Sun Joo, a Daoist disciple-turned-Protestant and a blind pastor in Pyongyang, as a touchstone of Korean

Christianity in the 1900s. As portrayed in the missionaries' accounts, Kil's sermons, full of theatrical, improvised demonstrations, had the power to incite loud confessional prayers among the Korean congregants. In the words of Graham Lee, Kil made the congregation "cr[y] out with a desire to confess their sins" and "thr[o]w themselves to the floor in a perfect agony of weeping."²⁷

It is not an exaggeration to say that the attraction to an audible confessional religiosity among a number of key missionaries mobilized the notion that northern Koreans were the real subjects of Korean Christianity, over and against Koreans in the capital, who had initially been the targets of proselytization. William Baird, for one, idealized Pyongyang's Christians as a "people enjoying an experimental knowledge of Christ" and suggested that their faith was more authentic than those in Seoul, many of whom were from elite backgrounds. As Baird put it in a personal letter, among this class of Koreans in Seoul who frequented churches and mission schools, "the demand [. . .] is largely for an English education." He refused to play into this notion of Christian education: "It is not my idea of a mission school that its chief work is to train up interpreters and office seekers."²⁸ For Baird and likeminded missionaries, the religiosity that marked commoner-centered churches in Pyongyang was deemed to express "a Korean viewpoint" and was called "vernacular."²⁹

In sum, a number of leading missionaries in Korea idealized an alterity that resonated with their preconceived evangelical ideas of the individual voice, emotional confessions, and audible interiority. For them, fiery speech was evidence of spiritual authenticity that flowed from one's heart. The missionary listening evident here was not an inconsequential element of early Korean Christianity, but rather, as Korean church historians note, the very reason why a religious ethos associated with early-twentieth-century Pyongyang became idealized and eventually came to be considered the hallmark of Korean Protestantism.³⁰

Listening to Koreans Singing

The missionary archive tells us that singing in Korean churches was a more contentious subject than praying. This is because the vast majority of North American missionaries who went to Korea (and elsewhere) held the belief that singing was an indispensable part of Protestant worship and had

a fixed definition of what counted as proper Protestant vocal music. They held strong convictions about the universality and superiority of their worship music, particularly Anglo-American four-part hymns, and were eager to “entrain (auto-)listening and vocal behavior”³¹ among the Koreans so that they could sing in the same way. This reflects a colonial desire which, as Kofi Agawu argues in the context of African musical life, led to the European missionaries’ export of “tonal thinking.”³²

By the 1890s, there were at least three different Korean-language hymnals in circulation, each reflecting the work of different missionaries. The prefaces of these hymnbooks acknowledge the help of Korean assistants, but they were almost never credited by name. The three known hymnals were used in three emerging Protestant epicenters in Korea during this time: *Ch’anmiga* (1892) was used among Methodists in Seoul, *Ch’anyangga* (1894), among Presbyterians in Seoul, and *Ch’ansöngsi* (1895), among Presbyterians in Pyongyang.³³ In all three versions, the lyrics of selected North American hymns were translated and metrically adjusted to form Korean verses. Two of the three editions were text-only publications, in which each Korean-script hymn was annotated with the information of the sourced North American hymn, such as its incipit (e.g., “Praise God from whom all blessings flow”), the name of the tune (e.g., “Old Hundred”), and the poetic meter (e.g., L.M. standing for long meter). Only *Ch’anyangga* included Western staff notation. These editions eventually combined and culminated in a single interdenominational hymnal with staff notation in 1908, *Ch’ansongga*. This authoritative version influenced all subsequent hymnals with minimal challenges or resistance, and as such it offered the archetype of tonal thinking for millions of Koreans who visited the church throughout the twentieth century, whether for faith, food, or friendship.

That translated North American hymns were indiscriminately issued in the first decades of missionization suggests that most missionaries arrived in Korea with little concern that what they called “music” might have been incompatible with pre-existing local modalities of listening and singing. The missionary archive, marked by observations of Koreans “making a noise”³⁴ when singing hymns, imparts patronizing judgments that evaluated the “natives” based on their ability to sing imported hymns. In the words of missionary J. D. Van Buskirk: “If you have been to a Korean church service and heard their enthusiastic but very futile attempts to sing our hymn-tunes, you may be ready to say there is no music in them.”³⁵ For others, the inability of Koreans to sing the hymns was a horrific unpleasantry that they had to bear

in their overseas work. For example, Paul L. Grove described the first time he listened to Koreans sing a North American hymn as follows: “My spirits drooped, and as I looked into the future, I shrank, for I saw there some of the agony that would come to me as a result of enforced listening to, and participation in just such heinous offences against the laws of harmony.”³⁶

However, the archive also tells us that the eagerness to reproduce North American music with Korean lyrics was at times curbed or contested. Several missionaries, especially those who had accumulated time and experience in the field, began to examine their taken-for-granted ideas about what should and could be sung by Protestant Koreans. Thus, we can see in the archive the coexistence of zealous calls for the continued “cultivation of the voice and ear”³⁷ of Christian Koreans with self-reflexive thought on why it was that some Koreans found it undesirable or difficult to sing and listen to Protestant hymns. For example, Grace Harmon McGary recognized that unison singing, the main form of congregational singing that the missionaries attempted to recreate amid Christian Koreans, did not exist in Korean cultural life. She wrote that the only comparable form was the mnemonic songs used in village schools, which boys sang to memorize Chinese characters for the study of Confucian classics.³⁸ Eli M. Mowry, the now-legendary architect of the choral music movement in Korea’s first Christian college, noted how four-part singing, for which there was no direct counterpart in Korean music, could be displeasing to Korean ears: “One man once said after hearing our college quartet that only one of them could sing and that if the rest had kept still it would have been a pleasure to hear it. Another man at another time on hearing a chorus of about 30 voices said that it was a thing worth running away from.”³⁹ It is in these accounts that we see some missionaries starting to pay attention to how Koreans listened to North American music.

Missionary relativism also turned up in commentaries on issues of scale and prosody. For example, more missionaries came to recognize that the pervasive presence of half steps in North American source materials was an impediment for many Koreans. For some missionaries, this incompatibility demanded a more rigorous musical disciplining of Koreans in a range of Christian meetings (e.g., services, Bible study meetings, revival meetings); for at least one missionary (Paul L. Grove), this was a problem that the worship leaders could work around by relying on a handful of melodies in the hymnal that had no or negligible half steps.⁴⁰ Alexander Pieter, a missionary with experience of text-setting in Korean, also raised the problem of iambic meter, the default prosody of North American hymns, placing the accent on

the second syllable. Since “Korean words have the accent on the first syllable,” the use of iambic settings in Korean-language hymnals meant that “the fundamental law of meter has been frequently transgressed” from the perspective of Korean speech.⁴¹

However, the missionaries’ recognition of such incompatibilities was seldom fed back into the repertory. This was not only because Western tonal music was the official stance of the mission, but also because this admission simply came too late: all signs suggest that the hymns with the “imperfect” prosody and scale were already used widely among Korean congregations by 1910, regardless of the question of whether the Koreans were singing correctly or not. Instead, the awareness of particular attributes of Korean songs pivoted toward a romantic idea of audible Korean alterity in the minds of some missionaries. At odds with the image of North American evangelists condemning non-Western difference, this idea considered Korean vocal music to be a site of true Korean identity. In particular, improvised songs by commoners—the idealized subjects of Korean Protestantism, as we saw above—or work songs by laborers such as horsemen, farmers, and boatmen were objects of fascination. Consider, for example, J. D. Van Buskirk’s description of himself listening to horsemen’s songs:

[...] the horseman, who had trudged all day by my side while I rode, struck up an air. It would be impossible to represent it with our staff and notes; it did not have the intervals my ear felt it ought to have, but there was a real tune with weird intervals and long trills and all the strains in a haunting minor key. He improvised his words to make comments on passing scenes or to carry on conversation with his companion horsemen, and they occasionally answered with the same tune. It was very simple melody and poorly sung but it gave utterance to a glad heart in a way that touched my Western “tenderspot.” It is a tune we in Korea all hear and that none of us foreigners can imitate.⁴²

Buskirk’s account demonstrates a mix of judgment and admiration commonly found in exoticism. He felt that the horsemen’s singing was incorrect (e.g., “weird intervals”) and “poorly sung,” but despite this lack of “correct” or “well-sung” qualities (or, because of this lack), he found the singing deeply moving.

Van Buskirk was not the first to listen like a folklorist. Homer B. Hulbert, a missionary-cum-diplomat and one of the most celebrated missionaries

in Korean Church history, defended the way Koreans listened and sang by employing the nature/culture lens that had shaped European colonial encounters with the Other. In an article from 1896, which was one of the earliest treatises on Korean vocal music in the English language, Hulbert invoked “the more artificial western ear” to point to the apparently more natural way in which Koreans listened to their environment. He literally compared Koreans to nonhuman animals: “Why should they ‘keep time?’ There is no analog 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.”⁴³ This move ascribed Korean essence to the Korean body and constructed an immanent link between this body and nature. Here we have one formulation of the modern/Western epistemology of alterity, which, through a claim to aurally mediated knowledge, positioned the other “nearer the passionate origins of speech/song.”⁴⁴

Such romantic ideas of audible Korean alterity were not uncommon in missionary writings, even though they almost never led to attempts to repackage Christianity in the domain of vocal music, given the institutional commitment to North American styles. But we can turn to “Boat Song / *Pae ttö na kanda*” (Figure 8.1) for an example of how Korean alterity was and could be represented in missionary-created Christian vocal music in the Korean language. “Boat Song” was one of several dozens of songs included in *A Book of Songs / Ch’yanggajip* (1915), a collection of secular and religious songs edited by Annie Baird (wife of William Baird) and Louise Becker, two American women who were teaching in Christian schools in Pyongyang in the early 1900s.⁴⁵ All of the songs in this book were in Korean language and carried two titles, one in English and another in Korean. The majority of the songs were borrowings of Euro-American melodies (“Lightly Row,” “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” etc.). Others, like “Boat Song,” were new compositions by Paul L. Grove, who was known in the missionary community for his musical talent. Elsewhere, I have written about the complex conditions surrounding the publication of *A Book of Songs*⁴⁶; here, I emphasize that it was a musical project associated with the coterie of northern Korea-based missionaries who were committed to “vernacular Christianity,” rather than a secular, globalist one. Most likely, it circulated widely in Christian and para-Christian institutions such as churches, schools run by missionaries, and Sunday schools, given the respect that Annie Baird commanded as a pedagogue, author, and translator.⁴⁷

11. BOAT SONG.

Music by Rev. P. L. Grove.

다 세 간 가 나 너 간 가

第十一 배서나간다

다 세 간 가 나 너 간 가

다 세 간 가 나 너 간 가

다 세 간 가 나 너 간 가

- 삼
배마바람분다
에희마바람분다
죽는바다에
에희마바람분다
- 四
문저도갓네
에희문저도갓네
형데즈미들
에희문저도갓네
- 五
바르를빚다
에희바르를빚다
취이홀이들
에희바르를빚다
- 六
어서들가세
에희어서들가세
영성포구로
에희어서들가세

Figure 8.1 "Boat song," *A Book of Songs* (1915), Independence Hall of Korea.

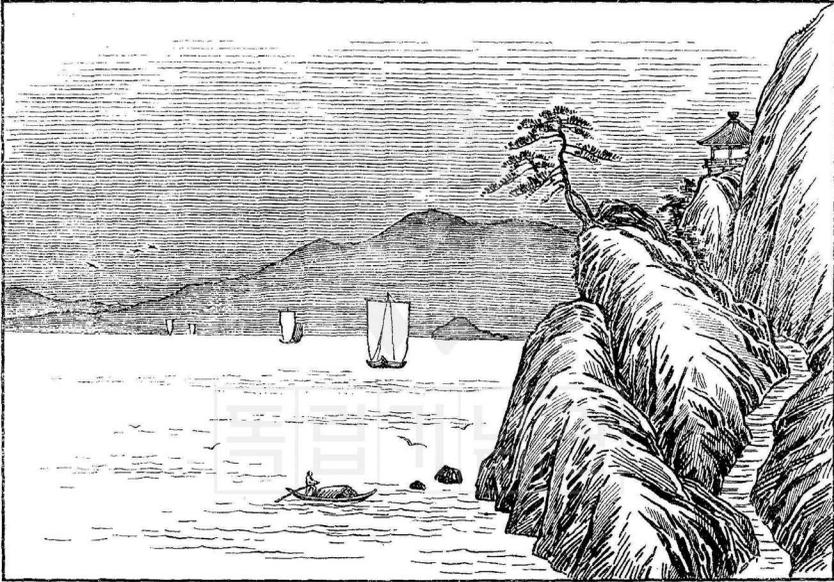


Figure 8.1a

“Boat Song” was an exercise in representing an idealized Korean oral tradition within a North American hymnal style (Figure 8.1).⁴⁸ Boat songs were a type of improvised song sung by boatmen while they transported people and goods in boats, a form of labor that was being replaced in the late nineteenth century with the introduction of modern water transportation by Japanese, American, and British businesses. In “Boat Song,” we can see a medley of strategies of musical orientalism, including some widely used tropes. The song uses a pentatonic melody (with one B-flat in m. 6 falling outside the D minor pentatonic collection) and occasional parallel voice leading (e.g., m. 15), two techniques for suggesting equivalences between distinct cultures in the minds of musical orientalists. Other attributes appear to want to conjure up the speech-like quality of the Korean boat songs: the use of the unison melody in the first four measures; the flourishes in mm. 2 and 4; accents on the first syllable (i.e., trochaic pattern); and the inscription of non-lexical utterances “*ehi*” and “*ehiya*.” “Boat Song” also features regional speech, thereby adding a touch of local color. It uses northern Korean orthography, self-consciously different from that which was used in the national capital, and at least one word—“*mabaram*” in the third verse, which means “south wind”—was drawn from the argot of northern fisherman.

We can even venture to posit a kind of cosmological elision in the making, with the lyrics and the accompanying illustration (Figure 8.1a) evoking sea-crossing, a metaphor for a spiritual journey in Korean Buddhist cosmology.

Translation:

The boat is leaving, *ehi* the boat is leaving

From the port of ruin the boat is leaving

Ehiya our savior is the boatman

When the storms of life rise, there is no worry

Ehi let's trust our lord

“Boat Song,” for all its limits as a song in the hymnal mode, is a rare but marked moment in the archive that casts doubt on the missionary community’s categorical treatment of Western music as the proper object of Christian transmission. It seems that by evoking a local practice, “Boat Song” and a few other neo-traditional musical efforts grappled with the possibility of re-tuning Protestant singing to musically audible “Korean-ness.”⁴⁹ However, given the changing profiles of sonic and acoustic life in Korea from the late nineteenth century (as discussed below), this 1915 experimentation points toward some missionaries’ nostalgia toward what is authentically Korean—that is, a modern folkloristic imagination that linked identity to an origin.

It is worthwhile to note that there is nothing in the Korean-language Christian archives that indicates that songs like “Boat Song” (*A Book of Songs*, 1915) were in fashion among the Koreans themselves. In other words, constructing “Korean” Christian music was a belated preoccupation of some missionaries. On this front, it is interesting to note an announcement in the Christian weekly *Guriseodo Hoebo* (Christian News) from 1913. In it, the missionary creators of *A Book of Songs* ask Korean readers to send in “Eastern” hymns, a request that was most likely made with the songbook project in mind. The missionaries required that Koreans send in verses that “use Eastern poetic form, not Western.” They added: “the melody should be an Eastern one, not Western. You may compose the poetry so that it can be recited in a prosody used in Korea, or you may use a regional dialect.”⁵⁰ The evident intention to divest Western influence suggests the artificiality of “Boat Song” as a “Korean” Christian song. It also suggests that by 1913 many Korean Christians were well versed in Western music and that they were living in a pluralistic world.

Can Christian Koreans Speak?

As I have shown so far, representations of Korean vocalization in the missionary archive were strongly mediated by the ideology of sameness and difference internal to North American imperialist evangelization. In this final section, I ask: how can we, as historians in the early twenty-first century, conceptualize the Korean voices captured in the archive in light of the missionaries' mediation? To borrow Spivak's phrasing: can Christian Koreans speak?

Given the power dynamics inherent in the building of the missionary archive, we might instead move to contemporaneous writings by Christian Koreans as an alternative site in which to search for the voices of Koreans. But this move, too, presents complications. From the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth, Korean-language Christian materials by either Korean or North American authors were curated and printed through missionary publishing houses. In addition to the missionaries' material, financial, and infrastructural sponsorship, this body of materials closely followed the contents and ethos of North American Protestantism. These signs of reproduction make it tempting for us to claim that it is impossible to find Korean voices even within documents penned by Christian Koreans themselves. However, I suggest that this claim holds true only if we theorize the "Korean voice" in the framework of oppositional qualities such as resistance, insubordination, or unique style, which in some sense only extend modernity's binaries. Rather, what we crucially know from the Christian Korean archive is that the interests of Christian Koreans were not always same as those of the missionaries. To illustrate this claim, here are two examples.

First, Korean-language Christian publications suggest that a number of Christian Koreans were interested in repurposing the missionaries' vocal-ritual practices as a tool to convert Koreans into modern national(ist) subjects in the wake of Japan's imperialization. Some early endeavors of this kind unfolded via *The Independent / Tongnip Sinmun* (1896–99). This bilingually-titled newspaper was printed by a Methodist missionary publisher in Seoul and directed by the dynastic official-turned-independence activist Sŏ Chep'il (Philip Jaisohn) alongside missionary advisers. *The Independent* published a number of nationalist verses with minimal reference to Christianity that were meant to be sung to particular hymn tunes in the translated hymnals. *The Independent* also published pieces about mass meetings in which such patriotic hymns were sung. These accounts are notable for highlighting the

expediency of the hymnal genre. For example, in the following report, not only hymns but also the Christian ritual of public prayer are connected to a narrow nationalistic aim, rather than to Protestant piety:

Yesterday at Mohwagwan, Christians in Seoul celebrated the birthday of the Emperor. About a thousand people gathered and sang patriotic hymns [. . .] They prayed for the advancement of learning, knowledge, and the law so that Korea can become like other countries [. . .] [They prayed] for love among the Koreans to deepen so much that if one Korean were to be humiliated or put in trouble by a foreigner, the people of the entire nation would rise to the support of the victimized as if it were they who were mistreated.⁵¹

This kind of secular interest among some Christian Koreans was so persistent that it disturbed and divided the missionary community during its first decades in Korea. Here, recall William Baird, who decided to move out of the capital because he could not stomach the likes of Sō Chep'il.

Second, the Korean Christian archive is marked by a general lack of interest in constructing a specifically *Korean* Christian vocal repertory, an interest that preoccupied at least a subset of the missionary community. On some level, this lack is a symptom of Korean Protestantism's uncritical assimilation of North American universalism and the corollary dismissal of indigenous practices. However, I suggest that we can also take the dearth of interest in a specifically *Korean* form of Christianity as an indication of the widespread transformations that swept many parts of the non-Western world in the second half of the nineteenth century. In Korea, this period was marked by a radical geopolitical unmooring. The Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), fought on Korean territory over the question of Korea's sovereignty, left a cultural void by weakening the country's centuries-long connection to the Sinocentric order that had shaped pre-modern and early-modern East Asia. More broadly, the intrusion of Russian, Japanese, British, and American interests had left many parts of the country in a state of uncertainty. The entry of multiple foreign forces, which generated not only anti-colonial movements but also fluid forms of trans-national affiliation,⁵² heralded a changing soundscape, rather than guaranteeing the continuity of autochthonous sonic traditions. When considering just how much was changing in Korea and Northeast Asia during this time, there is nothing particularly surprising about the embrace and

accumulation of new songs among Korean Christian communities. These songs, the majority of which were in the style of North American songs, encompassed not only the missionary-edited hymns and songs discussed above but an increasing number of adaptations and compositions by Koreans after 1900.

Conclusion

North American missionaries' writings about and for Koreans say as much about the expatriates as they say about the land and the people they sought to know. In other words, their depictions of Korean vocalizations were not the objective narratives that they purported to be. From the missionary archive emerge two apparently opposite ways of listening which were mediated by nineteenth-century imperialist epistemologies. One aural orientation wanted to control, discipline, and re-tune the "native" voices, while another desired to hear Korean alterity. The idea of audible interiority was the linchpin that linked these outwardly oppositional forms of listening. The notion that the voice was an unmediated channel for what lies in people's innermost realm predisposed missionary ears to the sentiment that they could "hear" the essence, identity, and truth of people in distant lands.

It seems that the self-affirming nature of the missionary community did not hurt its chances in Korea. The history of modern Korea tells us that due to geopolitical circumstances, the religion planted by the North Americans became one of the most popular religions in the twentieth century and arguably the most popular one during the post-Korean War decades. Yet, with the exception of Nicholas Harkness's study of the intimate link between European-style classical singing and the aspirations of South Korean Protestant institutions, Anglophone studies of Korean musical cultures have offered very little on Protestantism in Korea.⁵³ The dearth of attention to what turned out to be a vibrant and multifaceted phenomenon speaks to the long-lasting legacy of the very essentialism that I have critiqued. By and large, the objects of Korean music scholarship were assumed to be those that sounded and looked different from the Western ones. While what counts as valid Korean music has been changing in the last ten years or so with the global rise of Korean popular music, notions of authentic Korean traditions had been a strong undercurrent in the study of Korean music in and outside Korea for the better part of the twentieth century.

When we turn attention to the archive of religious and secular documents by Christian Korean authors, we find a wide-ranging body of music and discourses about music that do not align with either the missionaries' double-edged insistence or the tradition-centered legacy of music studies. How do we write about these unmarked materials, which do not contain the kinds of affect and allegiance that would earn them a place in the pantheon of Korean traditions, but which would tell us more about the micropolitics of everyday life? Records of sonic transformation and multiplicity in this corpus highlight the inauthentic beginnings of the twentieth century in imperialist histories of the late nineteenth century. It is within these records that we might find a way to tell stories about the agency of the Korean people.

Notes

This work was supported by the Core University Program for Korean Studies of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the Korean Studies Promotion Service at the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2023-OLU-2250003).

1. Percival Lowell, *Choson, the Land of the Morning Calm: A Sketch of Korea* (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1885).
2. For more on Percival Lowell, see David Strauss, *Percival Lowell: The Culture and Science of a Boston Brahmin* (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). Also, on Lowell and the politics of sonic emblems in the Korean context, see Katherine In-Young Lee, "Dynamic Korea: Amplifying Sonic Registers in a Nation Branding Campaign," *Journal of Korean Studies* 20/1 (2015), 113–147.
3. Lowell, *Choson*, 7.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, 10. The description of Korea as peaceful, asleep, and quiet reverberated with a lineage of early modern and modern Western thought that perceived the "Far East" as mystical and archaic. In turn, this lineage was shaped by associations of the "Far East" with Buddhism, Confucianism, and the imagined ideogrammatic (versus phonetic) time of the Sinosphere.
6. See, for example, David Brody, *Visualizing American Empire: Orientalism and Imperialism in the Philippines* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
7. See Hyun Kyong Hannah Chang, "Singing and Praying Among Korean Christian Converts (1896–1915): A Trans-Pacific Genealogy of the Modern Korean Voice," in *The Oxford Handbook of Voice Studies*, ed. Nina Sun Eidsheim and Katherine Meizel (New York: Oxford University Press), 457–474. Also see Danielle Kane and Jung Mee Park, "The Puzzle of Korean Christianity: Geopolitical Networks and Religious Conversion in Early Twentieth-Century East Asia," *American Journal of Sociology* 115/2 (2009), 365–404.

8. James Gale, *Korea in Transition* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1909), 71.
9. Ibid.
10. E. M. McGary, "Music in the School," *Korea Mission Field* 11/4 (1915), 103–104, at 104.
11. Gale, *Korea in Transition*, 71.
12. Horace Allen, "Some Korean Customs: The Mootang," *Korea Repository* 3/4 (1896), 163–165, at 163.
13. Ana María Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2014), 34.
14. See, for example, Sung-Deuk Oak, *The Making of Korean Christianity: Protestant Encounters with Korean Religions 1876–1915* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 221–270; Hong-Yu Gong, "Hymnals and Hymnody in Late Qing and Early Republican China," *Journal of Music in China* 6/2 (2016), 213–238.
15. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).
16. Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 53.
17. See, for example, Lillias Horton Underwood, *Fifteen Years Among the Top Knots* (New York: American Tract Society, 1904); Gale, *Korea in Transition*.
18. See Oak, *The Making of Korean Christianity*, 221–222.
19. Ibid., 107–110.
20. On this topic, see Julie Ellison, *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Thomas L. Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 1," *American Historical Review* 90/2 (1985), 339–361.
21. Annie L. Baird, *Daybreak in Korea: A Tale of Transformation in the Far East* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1909).
22. J. Robert Moose, "Report of the Seoul Circuit," *Minutes of Annual Meeting of the Korean Mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1904* (Seoul: Methodist Publishing House), 39–42, at 41.
23. Graham Lee, "How the Spirit Came to Pyeng Yang," *Korea Mission Field* 3/3 (1907), 33–37, at 34.
24. Ibid., 35.
25. See Kenneth Wells, *New God, New Nation: Protestants and Self-Reconstruction Nationalism in Korea, 1896–1937* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press), 38.
26. See Sun Joo Kim, ed., *The Northern Region of Korea: History, Identity, and Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010).
27. Lee, "How the Spirit Came to Pyeng Yang," 37. Kil became such an emblematic, beloved, and legendary figure among these missionaries and the larger missionary community in general that he was featured on the cover of the largest Anglophone mission journal, *The Missionary Review of the World*, in 1907.
28. William Baird, "Educational Report," 1899.
29. Ibid.
30. In-ch'öl Kang, *Han'guk üi kidokkyo wa pan'gong chuüi* [Korean Protestantism and Anticommunism] (Seoul: Chungsim, 2007).

31. Nina Sun Eidsheim, "Race and the Aesthetics of Vocal Timbre," in *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship*, ed. Olivia Bloechl, Melanie Lowe, and Jeffrey Kallberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 338–365.
32. Kofi Agawu, "Tonality as a Colonizing Force," in *Audible Empire: Music, Global Politics, Critique*, ed. Ronald Radano and Tejumola Olaniyan (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 334–355.
33. For more details, see Hyun Kyong Hannah Chang, "A Fugitive Christian Public: Singing, Sentiment, and Socialization in Colonial Korea," *Journal of Korean Studies* 25/2 (2020), 291–323, at 294–295.
34. E. M. Mowry, "Korean Church Music," *Korea Mission Field* 11/4 (April 1915), 107–110, at 109.
35. J. D. Van Buskirk, "Old Korean Music," *Korea Mission Field* 11/4 (April 1915), 100–102, at 100.
36. Paul L. Grove, "Adequate Song-Books," *Korea Mission Field* 11/4 (April 1915), 110–113, at 110.
37. McGary, "Music in the School," 104.
38. *Ibid.*, 102.
39. Mowry, "Korean Church Music," 109.
40. Grove, "Adequate Song-Books," 111; McGary, "Music in the School," 109.
41. Alexander A. Pieters, "Translation of Hymns into Korean," *The Korea Mission Field* 11/4 (April 1915), 113–116, at 115.
42. Van Buskirk, "Old Korean Music," 100.
43. Homer Hulbert, "Korean Vocal Music," *The Korean Repository* (February 1896), 45.
44. Gary Tomlinson, *The Singing of the New World: Indigenous Voice in the Era of European Contact* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 14.
45. Annie Baird and Louise Becker, eds., *Ch'yanggajip, A Book of Songs for Social and Other Occasions* (Kyöngsöng: Chosön Yasogyo Söhoe; P'yongyang: Yasogyo Söwön, 1915).
46. See Chang, "A Fugitive Christian Public," 297–307.
47. That a second revised edition of this book was published in 1920 also suggests that *A Book of Songs* was received enthusiastically.
48. This song uses four-part harmony and the standard 16-measure verse-refrain structure of North American hymns. It makes a standard tonal move, starting in D minor, moving to its relative major (F major), and finally returning to D minor.
49. These included Kil Sun Joo's Protestant *P'yongbuk Susimga* (a type of Korean folksong) in 1912 and James Gale's *Yöngyöngjwadam* (Gospel as Sung) in 1923.
50. "Syang ül talgo mojipham" [A contest with award], *Yesugyo hoebo*, January 28, 1913, 1.
51. "Nonsyöl" [Editorial], *Tongnip Sinmun*, September 3, 1896, 1.
52. See, for example, Yumi Moon, "From Periphery to a Transnational Frontier: Popular Movements in the Northwestern Provinces, 1896–1904," in *The Northern Region of Korea: History, Identity, and Culture*, ed. Sun Joo Kim (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010): 181–215.
53. Nicholas Harkness, *Songs of Seoul: An Ethnography of Voice and Voicing in Christian South Korea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).