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The Significance and Musical Features of Modern Korean Buddhist Hymns through Baek Yong-sung's Buddhist Hymns

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Abstract: *Chan-bul-ga* (찬불가, 讚佛歌), which in English means ‘songs in praise of the Buddha’, refers to a style of Korean Buddhist hymn that emerged during the modernization of Korean Buddhism. Buddhist hymns—which can be considered to be based on Christian hymns—are characterized by the fact that they can be easily learned by the general public so that they can easily participate in Buddhist rituals together, unlike the existing Korean Buddhist musical styles of ‘*Beom-pae* (범패, 梵唄)’ and ‘*Hwa-cheong* (화청, 和誦)’. The monk Baek Yong-sung (1864–1940), who embraced the function and effectiveness of these new religious music styles as one of his methods of propagation, participated in the independence movement after the 1910 Korea–Japan Annexation Treaty, and he led both the public enlightenment movement and the spread of Buddhism by creating Buddhist hymns. The present study seeks to examine Baek Yong-sung’s social activities and the context in which modern Buddhist hymns emerged. This study also explores the religious, social, and musical meanings of Buddhist hymns while focusing on his works ‘*Wang-seng-ga* (왕생가)’ and ‘*Se-gye-gi-si-ga* (세계기시가)’.

Keywords: Korean Buddhist hymns; Buddhist hymns; Christian hymns; Chan-bul-ga; Baek Yong-sung; Baek Yong-sung’s Buddhist hymns; modern Korean Buddhism



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1. Introduction

Chan-bul-ga (찬불가, 讚佛歌), which in English can be translated to mean ‘songs in praise of the Buddha’, is a style of Korean Buddhist hymn that emerged during the modernization of Korean Buddhism after the Gabo reform. The Gabo reform is an important historical milestone in the modernization of Korea; it refers to a movement of social reforms that began in July 1894 and lasted for about two years. Amidst the rapid societal changes occurring from the end of the Joseon Dynasty to the Japanese occupation, it is important to address the emergence of this new religious music style of Buddhist hymn as a social phenomenon in addition to its religious and musical meanings.

The main musical styles of Korean Buddhism that existed prior to the emergence of Western music-based Buddhist hymns can be categorized into two main types. The first is *Bum-pae* (범패, 梵唄) (Lee 2021, p. 1),¹ which is music that is used in various Buddhist rituals, while the second is *Hwa-cheong* (화청, 和誦) (Hong 1969, p. 15),² which is music that is based on Korean folk-like melodies with Buddhist lyrics added. What these two styles share is that they are both forms of ritual music that can only be performed by highly skilled monks. Due to their musical specialization and difficulty, *Bum-pae* and *Hwa-cheong* are not accessible to the general public, meaning that they cannot use such music to participate in Buddhist rituals together.

Moreover, since the late Joseon Dynasty, Buddhism has not been at the center of thought and culture due to political and social repression, and its role in social engagement has been underdeveloped as a result (Kim 1998a, pp. 52–53). On the other hand,

Western religions, namely, Catholicism and Christianity, actively embraced the demands of modernization and played roles in social engagement by taking the lead in educating women and youth, who were marginalized at the time (Park 2003, p. 39).

On top of these considerations, Korean Buddhism has faced an even bleaker situation due to the fact that, the year after the 1910 Korea–Japan Annexation Treaty, the Japanese Government-General of Korea issued the temple ordinance with seven articles. This gave the Japanese Government-General of Korea control over all aspects of Korean Buddhism, from the operation of temples and property to the management of monks. The temple ordinance ostensibly sought to protect the rights of Korean temples, but in reality, it sought to place Korean Buddhism under the control of the Japanese Government-General of Korea (Kim 2006, pp. 4–11).

In response to these colonial policies, a resistance movement against the temple ordinance was developed by Buddhist reform monks, which gradually took on the character of an anti-Japanese movement with the aim of defending traditional Korean Buddhism (Kim 2006, pp. 11–19).³ These circumstances laid the groundwork for the direct involvement of Korean Buddhism in the independence movement.

In this social context, Baek Yong-sung (1864–1940)—who is a representative figure of modern Buddhist history and independence along with Han Yong-woon (1879–1944)—focused on the effects that the enlightenment movement had on the masses as part of the independence movement and promoted translating Buddhist scriptures into Hangul and distributing them. Baek Yong-sung also founded a Sunday school to propagate and create Buddhist hymns that could be used in various Buddhist rituals (Han 2003, pp. 78–79). Given that the Buddhist scriptures were mostly written in Chinese characters at the time, translating the Buddhist scriptures into Hangul and disseminating Hangul to the public was significant as a movement to enlighten the masses through education. Also, considering that the Japanese Government-General of Korea designated Japanese as the national language of Korea at the time and referred to Hangul as merely Joseon’s letters (Heo 2017, p. 130), Baek Yong-sung’s Hangul movement demonstrated his commitment to the independence movement. Furthermore, the founding of the Sunday school and the creations of Buddhist hymns by Baek Yong-sung can be seen as a viable way of propagating Buddhism, which was hardly present at the time, and the aspirations for Buddhist reform (Han 1993, p. 29).

The present study will examine the historical background and meaning of modern Korean Buddhist hymns as seen through Baek Yong-sung’s Buddhist hymns, which reflected the will of the mass enlightenment movement and independence movement through the new method of propagation in modern times and the utilization of Hangul. This study will also analyze his works to examine their musical features, while it will additionally discuss the influence of Christian hymns of the time on his creations.

2. Modern Korean Buddhist Hymns in Context

After the opening of the Joseon Dynasty at the end of the 19th century, the entry of Japanese Buddhism into Korea was not only characterized by political and military aggression, but also religious aggression. At the time, Japanese Buddhism had established a significant number of missionary offices in Korea, with a total of 68 having been established since the Japanese monk Okumura Enshin (奥村圓心, 1843–1913) founded the first head temple in Korea in 1878 (Park 1988, p. 26). Japan tried to use these temples to win Korean Buddhists to their side and convert them to Japanese Buddhism. This strategy can be seen in the proselytization theory of one Japanese Buddhist sect. The Daegok sect, which was the first Japanese Buddhist sect to enter Korea, listed the following reasons for its overseas expansion in ‘*A logbook of the Fifty years of the opening Japanese Daegok sect temples in Korea* (朝鮮開教五十年誌)’:

“The Bon-won temple of the Daegok sect has as its creed that religion and politics should help each other and aim for the development of the nation. As the Meiji government sought to develop toward China and Joseon after completing

the great work of restoration, we, The Bon-won temple of the Daegok sect, also planned to expand into China and Joseon". ([The Office of the Bon-won Temple of the Daegok Sect 1927](#), p. 18)

The Bon-won temple of the Daegok sect was the headquarters of the leading sect of Japanese Buddhism at the time, and the above accounts demonstrate how the expansion of Japanese Buddhism into Korea can be seen as a consequence of Japanese imperialism. However, during the same time period, Korean Buddhism was also mixed with a friendly view of Japanese Buddhism that conflicted with the wariness toward Japanese Buddhism.

Friendly views of Japanese Buddhism included the following perspectives. The expansion of Japanese Buddhism could be seen as giving Korean Buddhism the opportunity to acquire the advanced culture of Western civilization. In particular, given that Japanese Buddhism was the force that led to the lifting of the ban on monks entering the city, which was a representative repressive policy against Buddhism established during the Joseon Dynasty, it can be said that Japanese Buddhism served as a protective figure as well as an invader for Korean Buddhism ([Kim 2014](#), p. 368)

Against this background, it can be said that Buddhist hymns of the time were created by monks who had relatively more opportunities to experience advanced culture, such as Baek Yong-sung (1864–1940), Kwon Sang-roh (1879–1965), Ahn Jin-ho (1880–1965), Cho Hak-yu (1894–1933), Kim Tae-heup (1899–1989), and others.⁴ It can also be assumed that most monks, due to their lack of musical skills, simply changed the lyrics of foreign songs to create Buddhist hymns, or that they wrote the lyrics and left the music to a professional musician. For this reason, it is common to find melodies in Buddhist hymns of the time that sound like Christian hymns or Japanese popular songs.

For example, Cho Hak-yu mentioned the need for Buddhist hymns in the preface to the 28th issue of 'The Buddhism', published in April 1927, and released a music sheet of Buddhist hymns that simply paraphrased the lyrics of popular Japanese songs of the time ([Cho 1927](#), p. 31). Another example is the Buddhist hymn 'Bom-ma-ji' ([Kwon 1924](#), pp. 2–3). The lyrics were written by Kwon Sang-roh, and the music was composed by Baek Woo-yong (1883–1930), who was the conductor of the 'Gyung-sung Band', a Western-style military band at the time. The song was written in the style of Japanese popular songs ([Ahn 2022](#), pp. 63–64). However, Buddhist hymns from this period should not be discussed simply in terms of their music, but also in terms of how this new style of Buddhist music created by monks helped lead to Buddhist reforms ([Park 2000](#), pp. 400–1).

Meanwhile, the year after the Korea–Japan Annexation Treaty, the Japanese Government-General of Korea issued the temple ordinance. This ordinance placed Korean Buddhism under a strict colonial regime. The articles of the temple ordinance are as follows:

Article 1, Whenever a temple is to be merged or relocated or abolished, the permission of the Japanese Government-General of Korea must be obtained.

Article 2, Temples may not be used for purposes other than preaching, performing Buddhist rituals, and housing monks without the permission of the provincial minister.

Article 3, Each headquarters of the Korean Buddhist temples shall enact and enforce the laws of the temple, but only with the permission of the Japanese Government-General of Korea.

Article 4, The chief monk of a temple shall manage all property belonging to the temple, and shall be responsible for affairs and enforcement of laws, and shall represent the temple.

Article 5, Property belonging to a temple, whether movable or immovable, cannot be disposed of without the permission of the Japanese Government-General of Korea.

Article 6, Whoever violates this shall be punished by imprisonment for no more than two years or a fine of no more than five hundred won.

Article 7, Necessary matters concerning temples other than those stipulated in this temple ordinance shall be determined by the Governor of the Japanese Government-General of Korea.

Additional clause, the effective date of this temple ordinance shall be fixed by the Governor of the Japanese Government-General of Korea.

Despite being a simple seven-article decree, the temple ordinance represents the most visible reflection of Japan's policy of controlling Korean Buddhism. The temple ordinance was primarily enacted for the following reasons. The first was to prevent temples from being used as bases for independence movements. In August 1910, before the temple ordinance was enacted, the Japanese Government-General of Korea issued 'The Order for Restriction of Public Gatherings', which restricted even rallies and concerts that could involve gatherings of large numbers of people throughout Korea (Noh 2004, pp. 65–117). The second was to conform Korean Buddhism to Japan and to use Buddhism to instill Japanese imperialist policies in Koreans. This policy of Japanese imperialism was intended to indoctrinate the colonized people with the ideas of the Japanese emperor and turn them into subjects of the emperor. From the perspective of colonized peoples, this is a policy of ethnic extermination (Yun 1997, pp. 69–70).

According to Japanese historian Takahashi Toru (高橋亨, 1878–1967)'s book 'Buddhism in Joseon', the temple ordinance also had the effect of abolishing Buddhist rituals in all temples (Toru 1929). As a result, even Buddhist rituals that were used as a means of preserving temples were no longer available, and the ritual music that went with them also fell by the wayside. These circumstances led to the emergence of a resistance movement against the temple ordinance that was centered on monks advocating Buddhist reform, and this movement gradually took on the character of an anti-Japanese movement.

Along with Han Yong-woon, Baek Yong-sung was a leader of the Korean Buddhist community at the time who also played a pivotal role in the resistance and independence movement against the temple ordinance. On two occasions in 1926, Baek Yong-sung submitted petitions to the Japanese Government-General of Korea to defend Korean Buddhist traditions and point out the harmful effects of the temple ordinance. However, these petitions were not accepted, and the Korean Buddhist community generally actively disagreed with his cause. This can be seen to have been a trigger for him to become even more committed to the Buddhist reform movement (Kim 2008, pp. 214–15).

Baek Yong-sung led the establishment of the 'Im-je order'⁵ (Kim 1998c, pp. 264–67) to defend traditional Korean Buddhism, and he was at the forefront of both the Buddhist reform movement and the anti-Japanese movement during the March First Independence Movement, as he was one of the 33 national representatives to sign the Declaration of Independence, along with Han Yong-woon. Thus, the character of modern Korean Buddhism can be seen to include a desire for independence.

On the other hand, Baek Yong-sung witnessed the influx and spread of Western religions at the time, and as part of his response, he focused on modernizing and propagating Korean Buddhism. As one example, he translated Buddhist scriptures from Chinese characters into Hangul so that anyone could easily understand Buddhism.

Baek Yong-sung also published a book of Buddhist rituals titled '*The Ritual of Dae-gak-gyo* (대각교의식)', which modified the traditional worship rituals organized by monks so that ordinary people could participate in them together, alongside the monks. During this process, he may have realized the need for Korean Buddhism to have chanting songs that anyone could easily sing to participate in religious activities (Baek 1927). In order to resolve these issues, he produced his own lyrics and compositions to create Buddhist hymns. This was the first case of a new style of worship, Buddhist hymn, being created by a monk in Korea. The specific motivation for Baek Yong-sung's Buddhist hymns will be discussed in further detail in the next section.

3. Baek Yong-sung's Independence Movement and Buddhist Hymns

Resistance to Japanese imperialism erupted in 1919 with the March First Independence Movement. A relevant factor in this movement was the fact that Baek Yong-sung, who was a key figure in the March First Independent Movement, was sentenced to one year and six months in the Seodaemun Prison for his participation in the independence movement ([National Historical Commission 1990](#)). During his imprisonment, Baek Yong-sung rethought the methods of the independence movement and the Buddhist reform movement. In other words, he realized the urgent need to shift from a monk-centered Buddhist movement to an enlightenment movement that included the general public. The following article shows the changes in Baek Yong-sung's mind through his imprisonment.

“For signing the Declaration of Independence, I was sent to the Seodaemun prison in Seoul to experience the harsh taste of life behind bars. The number of people of different religions who came here for the cause of independence was very high. They each requested books of their religion to study and pray. When I looked at them, they were all translated into Hangul, and there were very few books in Chinese characters”. ([Baek 2016](#), p. 449)

As described above, Baek Yong-sung had the opportunity to observe the religious practices of his fellow prisoners from inside the prison. The religious book he was referring to that had been translated into Hangul was likely the Christian Bible. He looked at the Bible translated into Hangul and said the following:

“Who wants to spend decades studying Chinese characters when the world's population is competing with each other for survival and the economic situation in each country is getting tougher by the day? No one will die knowing all the Chinese characters, even if they spend decades studying them, and even if they do, it will be a useless discipline in the future. In the age of modern philosophy, science, astronomy, politics, mechanics, and so on, when there is so much to learn, it would be not only foolish but also an obstacle to the development of civilization to waste decades of life with only one language such as Chinese characters. For us Koreans, the Korean writing, Hangul, would be appropriate. Therefore, when I am released from this prison, I will immediately gather my comrades and devote myself to translating the Buddhist scriptures into Hangul”. ([Baek 2016](#), pp. 49–450)

Before the March First Independence Movement, Baek Yong-sung had mainly aimed to propagate Buddhism in traditional ways, such as by writing about the superiority of Buddhism and teaching meditation ([Baek 1913](#)). However, Baek Yong-sung's experience in prison after the March First Independent Movement made him realize that Korean Buddhism was outdated and far outside the general public's attention.

However, it can be assumed that the rapid spread of Christianity in Korea at that time was often a response to the active relief efforts of Christian missionaries and their social involvement in healthcare, welfare, and education, rather than a clear conviction of a religious absolute. Many Western-style schools were established by Christian foundations, and by 1910, 14 secondary schools for women had been established by Christian foundations since the arrival of Christianity in Korea. Considering that there were no public girls' schools at the time, the Christian church's education of women and youth was a key reason for the success of Christianity in Korea in the modern era ([Park 2003](#), p. 45).

What is important to note here is that Baek Yong-sung clearly recognized the form of Christian propagation during his imprisonment. This led him to focus not on Buddhist thought itself, but rather on the way it is transmitted. Upon his release from the Seodaemun prison in 1921, Baek Yong-sung focused on reforming Buddhism by translating Buddhist scriptures into Hangul. These activities led to the publication of *The Ritual of Dae-gak-gyo* in 1927. He also created seven Buddhist hymns influenced by Christian hymns, which he included in *The Ritual of Dae-gak-gyo*.

Considering that even modern Buddhist ritual books are still written in Chinese characters, the publication of *The Ritual of Dae-gak-gyo* in Hangul was an expression of independence through the use of the national language's letters along with the spread of Buddhism.

Moreover, given that in 1942, the Japanese Government-General of Korea ruled the Korean Language Society's Hangul movement as a violation of the Public Security Act (Jung 2022, pp. 1464–65), Baek Yong-sung's creations of Buddhist hymns can be seen as a reflection of his commitment to the independence movement. The following section will explore the content and musical features of Baek Yong-sung's Buddhist hymns and consider their significance.

4. Contents and Musical Features of Baek Yong-sung's Buddhist Hymns

This section examines the content and musical features of Baek Yong-sung's Buddhist hymn, 'Wang-seng-ga' (왕생가), which can be seen to incorporate both elements of Korean Buddhist music and elements of Korean traditional music. This section also explores the meanings of Baek Yong-sung's work 'Se-gye-gi-si-ga' (세계기시가) by analyzing its musical features, which can be seen to be similar in musical structure to the Christian hymn 'The Gate Ajar for Me'.

4.1. 'Wang-seng-ga'

The Ritual of Dae-gak-gyo, published in 1927 by Baek Yong-sung, contains seven Buddhist hymns that he wrote and composed. Two of the songs, 'Wang-seng-ga' and 'Gwon-se-ga' (권세가), were published with musical scores and lyrics, while the other five, 'Dae-gak-gyo-ga' (대각교가), 'Se-gye-gi-si-ga', 'Jung-seng-gi-si-ga' (중생기시가), 'Jung-seng-sang-sok-ga' (중생상속가), and 'Ip-san-ga' (입산가), were only published with lyrics. The scores for these five pieces were later found in the 'Chan-bul-ga' sheet music collection that was published in 1959 by the monk Kim Jung-mook (Kim 1959). The following photo shows the sheet music for 'Wang-seng-ga' from 'The Ritual of Dae-gak-gyo'.

(Sheet Music-1) Wang-seng-ga (왕생가, 往生歌)

The image displays the sheet music for 'Wang-seng-ga' (왕생가, 往生歌). The top portion shows the musical notation with Korean lyrics written below it. The bottom portion is a title page with Chinese characters and Korean text. The title page includes the chapter number '第十三章' (Chapter 13), the title '왕생가 (往生歌)', and the lyrics '구절 끝마다 「나무아미타불」을 함' (At the end of each line, 'Namu Amida Butsu' is included). The lyrics are written in vertical columns: '구절 끝마다 「나무아미타불」을 함', '불타」를 함', '도 으 시 고 증 명 하 사', '일 심 으 로 념 불 공 덕', and '극 락 인 도 하 옴 소 서'. The page number '一一九' (119) is also visible.

‘*Wang-seng-ga*’, which in English can be translated to mean ‘a song wishes to be born in the Pure-Land’. The song has 29 lyrics, the first and second verses of which are as follows.

Verse 1: Buddha’s Compassion Namu Amitabha/He helps and proves it Namu Amitabha/I’m praying a Buddhist prayer single-mindedly Namu Amitabha/Lead me to the Pure Land Namu Amitabha

Verse 2: The cycle of birth and death is like a house on fire Namu Amitabha/Not being able to leave the six worlds due to karma is suffering Namu Amitabha/Go ahead, go ahead and be enlightened Namu Amitabha/I will go to the Pure Land where the Buddha is Namu Amitabha

The song’s lyrics are in the form of repeated eight-letter sentences followed by the word ‘Namu Amitabha’, which is a Buddhist practice of invoking the Buddha’s name and asking for mercy. Moreover, the musical structure, such as the lyric form above, can be seen as utilizing ‘the call and responsorial form’ found in Korean folk songs. The ‘call and responsorial form’, in which one person calls out a sound and several people answer and sing along, is one of the main features of Korean folk songs.

The *Wang-seng-ga* is in a two-part form. The time signature of the song is six-eight, and the rhythmic system used in the song can be seen as utilizing the ‘*Gutgury* rhythm’ (굿거리 장단), which is a rhythmic system of Korean traditional music. The *Gutgury* rhythm is similar to the waltz rhythm in Western music.

The song has a pentatonic scale with A \flat as the tonic note, which can be seen to utilize the melodic system of traditional Korean music called ‘*Gyeong-tori*’ (경토리). *Gyeong-tori* is a unique melodic system from the Seoul and Gyeong-gi provinces of South Korea that is characterized by a musical composition based on the pentatonic scale ‘sol-la-do-re-mi’. The characteristic closing melodic form of *Gyeong-tori* is a descending ‘re-do-la-sol’ structure, usually ending with a ‘sol’ note. In particular, considering that *Gyeong-tori* is a melodic system that is also frequently utilized in ‘*Hwa-cheong*’, i.e., Korean Buddhist music, it can be said that *Wang-seng-ga* utilizes melodic elements from both Korean Buddhist music and traditional Korean Music. Moreover, the syllabic style music in *Wang-seng-ga* is a distinctive element of Korean new folk songs of the time,⁶ and it can be seen as part of the creator’s intention to make the song accessible to the general public (Lee 2007, pp. 78–79).

Another characteristic of this piece is the utilization of the numbered notation system. This system is a musical notation system that was published in Europe in 1742 by Jean Jacques Rousseau for music education, and it is intended to be an aid to help people read music without difficulty. The numbered notation system spread from Japan to China in the 19th century and is still used today as an alternative musical notation around the world (Son 2017, pp. 183–85).

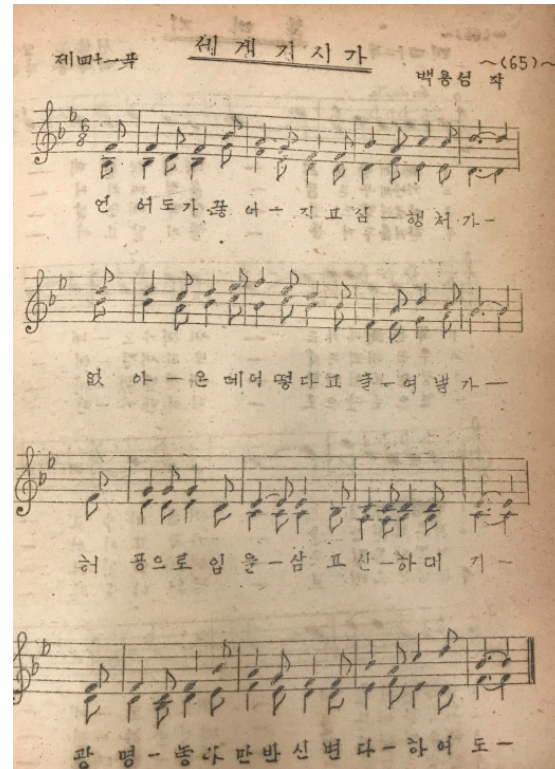
The musical features of *Wang-seng-ga* can be summarized as follows. First, it utilized the ‘call and responsorial form’ of Korean folk songs to induce the Buddhist practice of chanting ‘Namu Amitabha’. Second, it utilized a melodic system called ‘*Gyeong-tori*’ to create the musical characteristics of Korean Buddhist music and Korean traditional music. Third, it utilized syllabic style music, an element of Korean new folk songs at the time, to ensure that it was easier for the general public to sing. Fourth, the numbered notation system was used to make it easier for people without difficulties. Fifth, a total of 29 lyrics were created with a focus on Hangul through Buddhist hymns. However, while these Hangul lyrics are meaningful from an educational perspective, the significance of these lyrics should also be seen in terms of the independence movement through national enlightenment (Kim 1998b, p. 69).

4.2. Musical Similarities between ‘*Se-gye-gi-si-ga*’ and the Christian Hymn ‘The Gate Ajar for Me’

One of Baek Yong-sung’s creations, ‘*Se-gye-gi-si-ga*’, can be seen to be musically similar to the Christian hymn ‘The Gate Ajar for Me’. Before discussing the similarities between the two songs, *Se-gye-gi-si-ga*’s musical features are discussed first. The following photo

shows the sheet music for *Se-gye-gi-si-ga* from Kim Jung-mook's '*Chan-bul-ga*' sheet music collection, which was published in 1959 (Kim 1959, p. 65).

(Sheet Music-2) *Se-gye-gi-si-ga* (세계기시가, 世界起始歌)



'*Se-gye-gi-si-ga*', which translates in English to 'a song about the Buddhist doctrine of karma', has 19 verses in total. The song is in a two-part form, and the time signature is six-eight. It also has a two-voice format, consisting of soprano and alto. The song is in the B \flat major scale.

However, it can be said that the structure of the song gives the listener an almost Christian hymn-like atmosphere. In particular, the melody of the first measure of *Se-gye-gi-si-ga* can be seen as resembling the melody of the first measure of 'The Gate Ajar for Me' from 'Song Life for Sunday School', published by Philip Phillips in 1872 (Phillips 1872, p. 24). The scores of *Se-gye-gi-si-ga* and The Gate Ajar for Me are depicted consecutively in the following.

(Sheet Music-3) *Se-gye-gi-si-ga* and The Gate Ajar for Me

세계기시가	The Gate Ajar for Me
작사 / 작곡: 백용성	Lydia Odell Baxter Silas Jones Vail
♩ = 64	♩ = 64
<p>1. 언 어도가 꿇 어 - 지 고 삼 - 행 처 가 - 없</p> <p>5. 사 - 은 데 어 땡 다 고 그 - 러 뵈 까 - 허</p> <p>9. 공 으 로 이 불 - 삼 고 산 - 하 대 지 - 광</p> <p>13. 명 - 품 나 만 반 신 변 다 - 하 여 도 -</p>	<p>1. There is a gate that stands a jar, And through its por tals gleam ing A</p> <p>5. ra diance from the cross a far, The Sa ior's love re real ing. O</p> <p>9. depth of mer cy! Can it be that gate was left a jar for me? For</p> <p>13. me, - For Me, - was left a jar for me -</p>

The musical similarities between ‘*Se-gye-gi-si-ga*’ and ‘The Gate Ajar for Me’ are as follows. First, both songs are in a two-part form. Second, both songs use six-eight time, and they begin with a pick-up measure of eighth notes. Third, both songs use the major scale. Fourth, the melodies of the first measure are identical in both songs.

Based on the similarities between these two songs, it can be inferred that the Christian hymns of the time were the model that Baek Yong-sung followed. However, it is pointless to make a mere musical comparison between Baek Yong-sung’s ‘*Se-gye-gi-si-ga*’ and the Christian hymn ‘The Gate Ajar for Me’. This is because modern Christian hymns began in Korea much earlier than the Buddhist hymns did (Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs 1996, p. 5),⁷ and because there is a larger number of Christian hymns translated and published in Hangul. Due to various factors, including the presence of Western missionaries with high levels of musical education at that time, modern Korean Buddhist hymns are not comparable in quantity or quality to their Christian counterparts. Instead, the focus should be on the reasons why monks wanted to model Christian hymns and how they created Buddhist hymns.

Meanwhile, it is not surprising that Baek Yong-sung wrote the lyrics to his own creations. However, the question of whether he, as a monk at the time, composed the Buddhist hymns himself is a matter of controversy. However, there are records showing that he taught Buddhist hymns to students in Sunday school while playing the organ himself. This record suggests that composing Buddhist hymns was a natural act for him (Kim 1998d).⁸

Baek Yong-sung created and distributed Buddhist hymns as an extension of the independence and enlightenment movements. However, Baek Yong-sung’s new way of propagation was not easily accepted by monks who clung to traditional Buddhist methods. However, his creations of Buddhist hymns should be seen not simply as the development of a new religious musical style, but rather through the lens of an educational program for the cultivation of human resources based on the enlightenment movement.

5. Conclusions

In this article, we have examined the significance and musical features of modern Korean Buddhist hymns through Baek Yong-sung’s Buddhist hymns. *Chan-bul-ga*, which in English means ‘songs in praise of the Buddha’, is a style of Korean Buddhist hymn that emerged during the modernization of Buddhism that occurred after the Gabo reform. This study examined the value of a new religious music style of Buddhist hymn in the social arena in addition to its religious meaning. This article also examined the significance and musical features of the creations of Baek Yong-sung based on an understanding of the societal changes taking place from the end of the Joseon Dynasty to the Japanese occupation.

The Japanese invasion of Korea began with the entry of Japanese Buddhism into Korea. Simultaneously, Korean Buddhism was falling behind the expanding power of Western religions. Moreover, the temple ordinance issued in the year following the Korea–Japan Annexation Treaty placed Korean Buddhism under a strict colonial regime. However, the demands of the times for independence were expressed in the form of a nationwide movement called the March First Independence Movement, which led to the public enlightenment movement.

Meanwhile, Baek Yong-sung, a monk who led the Buddhist reforms alongside Han Yong-woon, was sentenced to one year and six months in the Seodaemun prison for his participation in the March First Independence Movement. It was during this time that he witnessed the religious practices of people of other faiths who had entered the prison for the same reason. In particular, he was inspired to rethink the direction of Buddhist propagation when he saw the Christian Bible translated into Hangul so that everyone could understand it.

In particular, Baek Yong-sung later translated Buddhist scriptures from Chinese characters into Hangul, and he also published a book of Buddhist rituals, ‘*The Ritual of Dae-gak-gyo*’, in Hangul, so that ordinary people could participate in these rituals together. Given that the Japanese Government-General of Korea designated Japanese as the national lan-

guage of Korea at the time and referred to Hangul as simply Joseon's letters, Baek Yong-sung's Hangul movement demonstrated his commitment to the independence movement. During this process, he may have realized the need to create chanting songs that anyone could easily sing to participate in religious activities. To solve these problems, he composed his own lyrics and compositions to create seven Buddhist hymns in total.

One of Baek Yong-sung's creations, *Wang-seng-ga*, utilized the musical characteristics of Korean Buddhist music and Korean traditional music. This song was intended to be easily learned by the general public by using an element of Korean new folk songs as well as the numbered notation system. Moreover, a total of 29 verses of Korean lyrics were created with a focus on Hangul education and the propagation of Buddhism through Buddhist hymns. Thus, the active utilization of Buddhist hymns and Hangul can be seen as his commitment for the independent movement through mass enlightenment.

On the other hand, one of Baek Yong-sung's works, *Se-gye-gi-si-ga*, can be assumed to be musically similar to the Christian hymn 'The Gate Ajar for Me'. However, a simple musical comparison of Baek Yong-sung's *Se-gye-gi-si-ga* to the Christian hymn The Gate Ajar for Me would not be very fruitful. Instead of comparing the two, the focus should be on Buddhist hymns, which is a new style of Buddhist music created by monks who saw the functions and effectiveness of Christian hymns.

In conclusion, it can be said that a new religious music style of Buddhist hymn called '*Chan-bul-ga*', which emerged in modern Korea, incorporates social values that include the purpose of conveying Buddhist doctrine through song, the enlightenment movement through the Hangul lyrics, and the demand for independence, which captured the desire of Koreans at the time. As such, it can be said that Buddhist hymns, which appeared as a new style of devotional practice with religious values and the needs of the times, revitalized Korean Buddhism, which at the time had been stagnant.

This study examined the significance and musical features of modern Korean Buddhist hymns while focusing on the Buddhist hymns of Baek Yong-sung. However, it is a limitation of this study that it did not cover Buddhist hymns by Kwon Sang-roh, Ahn Jin-ho, Cho Hak-yu, Kim Tae-heup, and others who were active at the same time as Baek Yong-sung. This will be addressed in a future study and a comparative study of these Buddhist hymns will be conducted.

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Notes

- ¹ Bumpae is an interdisciplinary art form utilized in Buddhist rituals that includes both vocal and instrumental music and dance. 'Yeongsanjae', which is designated and preserved as an important intangible cultural property of Korea, is a particularly representative Korean Buddhist art that utilizes Bum-pae (Lee 2021, p. 1).
- ² Hwa-cheong is flexible in its musical structure. For example, each province has its own way of singing Hwa-cheong, with the northern provinces singing it in the form of a northern folk song, the southern provinces singing it in the form of a southern folk song, and the eastern and western provinces singing it in the forms of their own folk songs (Lee 2010, pp. 34–37).
- ³ The Korean Buddhist community's reaction to the temple ordinance was mainly split into two camps: The first believed that Buddhism should be modernized gradually while accepting the temple ordinance. The second resisted the temple ordinance in defense of traditional Korean Buddhism (Kim 2006, pp. 11–19).
- ⁴ In 1907, Baek Yong-sung traveled to Beijing, China, to inspect Chinese Buddhism (Kim 1999, pp. 63–64), in 1917, Kwon Sang-roh went on a three-week inspection tour of Japanese Buddhism (Kwon 2004, p. 157), in 1925, Ahn Jin Ho went on a month-long inspection tour of Japanese Buddhism (Han 2010, pp. 239–41), Cho Hak-yu enrolled in Taisho University in Tokyo, Japan in 1914

and returned to Korean after graduating in 1919 (Lee 2006, pp. 396–98), Kim Tae-heup enrolled in Nihon University in Tokyo, Japan in 1920 and returned to Korea after graduating in 1928 (Kim 2010, pp. 487–88).

- 5 The ‘Im-je order, Founded in 1911, is the predecessor of the ‘Jo-gye order’, which is now the largest Buddhist sect in South Korea (Kim 1998b, pp. 264–67).
- 6 A typical characteristic of Korean new folk songs is that they are syllabic, consisting of one note per syllable, rather than the melismatic style found in traditional Korean folk songs (Lee 2007, pp. 78–79).
- 7 The beginning of Christian hymns in Korea can be traced back to 1887, when members of the ‘Saemoonan Church’, founded in Jeong-dong, Seoul, by the American Presbyterian missionary H. G. Underwood (1859–1916), sang Korean lyrics to Western tunes. “A collection of modern Korean folk songs”, (Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs 1996, p. 5).
- 8 Mrs. Seong, who was born in 1920, stated in an interview with a newspaper that Baek Yong-sung played the organ and taught Buddhist hymns. “I went to the temple to sing for fun” (Kim 1998d).

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