

Open Library of Humanities

Bridging Rhythmic Traditions: Integrating Korean Percussion (*samul nori/p'ungmul nori*) into the Anglophone Music Curriculum

Sunhong Kim, Musicology, University of Michigan, ksunhong@umich.edu

Ethnomusicologists have frequently underscored the importance of building, leading, and innovating world music ensembles in tertiary music education where music of European origin is dominant (Solis 2004). Among Korean musical genres, *samul nori* stands out as a representative Korean genre, as its corporeal engagement not only helps learners grasp Korean rhythms but also makes the form accessible to beginners. The kinesthetic demands of *samul nori*, which involve movements of the head, arms, upper body, and hands, have driven the genre's global popularity (Lee 2018) while also serving as a crucial tool for non-specialists to embody complicated rhythms (Kim 2011). How can both music and non-music students in the U.S. engage with Korean musical elements, particularly when studying rhythms without relying on Western notation? Furthermore, what pedagogical value does Korean musical notation offer these students in a world music context? By examining Korean percussion genres like *samul nori* (a neo-traditional genre for a set of four Korean percussion instruments) and *p'ungmul/nongak* (outdoor percussive performing arts developed by farming and labor communities), this paper explores the application of native Korean music theory to performance practice, the cultivation of musical appreciation, and the structural understanding of rhythmic patterns within Anglophone-centric tertiary programs.



European-based pedagogies continue to dominate across North American primary and secondary schools, as well as in conservatory-style universities in the United States (Campbell 2010; Liew 2021, 83). In response, ethnomusicologists have worked to diversify musical curricula in higher education by establishing world music ensembles that counter Eurocentric hegemony and promote cultural inclusivity (Solis 2004). Pedagogical methodologies aimed at decentralizing European-rooted musical practices range from those embracing cultural sensitivity (Lam 2010) to those drawing on cognitive and analytical frameworks (Becker 2009; Wegner 1993). Recognizing both the achievements and the ongoing challenges of world music ensembles, this paper compiles knowledge, concepts, and ethnographic accounts to forge ensemble-based approaches to Korean percussion—particularly *samul nori* and *p’ungmul nori*—adaptable for use in Anglophone-centric tertiary education.

Building on this body of scholarship, I propose a classroom strategy to enable Anglo-American students to engage with two Korean percussive genres: *samul nori*,¹ a neo-traditional genre featuring four Korean percussion instruments, and *p’ungmul nori* (also known as *nongak*),² a community-based rural performance tradition. By exploring how practitioners transform single-pitched Korean percussion instruments into those that can sound like melodic instruments beyond stress, accent, and stroke, I underline specific performative and musical aspects from two excerpts of a *samul nori* repertoire and from the context of *p’ungmul*. Specifically, my analysis is driven by both the rhythmic theory of Korean music theorist Lee Po-hyŏng [Lee Bo-hyung] and a colloquial description by the late *p’ungmul* master Yang Sun-yong (1941–1995), a former National Intangible Cultural Heritage holder of the Imshil-based village style who played a significant role in passing down the artistic and cultural values of *p’ungmul*. This integration of theoretical and conceptual perspectives for (non-)music majors can underpin the musical sensibility (Kor. *nŭkkim*) and rhythmic knowledge required to appreciate Korean music—expressed through these two genres—and thereby help them gain an understanding of their aesthetic and performative dimensions that bridges boundaries between embodied experience and musical time.

In U.S. music education, the Korean folk song *Arirang* has contributed to increased multicultural awareness; its melodic material has been interpreted by U.S. musicians and composers across a variety of genres, from brass bands to country music.³ With the mobilization of two percussion-based genres to transnational practices and their impetus to the formation of Korean identity within the Anglophone world from the late 20th century onward (Lee 2018; Kwon 2024), I suggest that *samul nori* and *p’ungmul*, with their rhythmic traditions, serve as valuable subjects of study for the purpose of highlighting musical capacity and the development of instrumental dexterity. An expanded discussion among ethnomusicologists and South Korean musicologists about *samul nori* and

p'ungmul nori can generate actionable knowledge for musicological terminology, contemporary performances, and educational practices. Thus, the paper examines how the interplay between performance practices, pedagogical approaches, and theoretical discourses on Korean rhythmic theory can inform effective learning strategies for tertiary music institutions in the U.S. My methodology is grounded in both ethnographic fieldwork and the intellectual discourse on Korean rhythm, including participation in a Korean percussion workshop at the Korean Performing Arts in Chicago (KPAC) in 2023, and two intensive music training camps in the *P'ilbong* village style of *p'ungmul* in South Korea (February and July 2024). Additionally, I will provide an autoethnographic account of mentoring, teaching, and directing Sinaboro (Kor. 시나브로), an undergraduate percussion ensemble at the University of Michigan–Ann Arbor since 2022.

Ultimately, this article aims to offer direction for Anglo–American educators regarding the ways in which their English-speaking students can connect musical terms with contextual meanings in order to appreciate, incorporate, and utilize Korean musical genres in creative activities such as composition, arrangement, and recital presentation. Just as Kang You-yŏng [Kang YouYoung] urges a scholarly community seeking music justice and a musical value system in liberal arts education (2008, 106–7), I seek to include underexplored theory and practical knowledge conceptualized by the highly influential figures Yang Sun-yong, Yang Chin-sŏng and Lee Po-hyŏng in contemporary performance practices in South Korea. This approach exemplifies how technical and intellectual aspects of musical learning can be connected to foster dialogue and collaboration among musicians and composers, thus recognizing the sociohistorical and cultural legacies embedded in Korean percussion practices. The recognition of hereditary legacies rooted in geographical and cultural histories, alongside music theories widely used by South Korean musicians, presents an opportunity to intersect the boundaries of locality, region, and culture within Anglophone academic environments and enrich undergraduate music education in the U.S.

In the following sections, I introduce the two percussion genres (*samul nori* and *p'ungmul nori*) and their core characteristics, discuss the aesthetics and values embodied in those genres, and then present relevant Korean music theories along with practical musical examples. Whereas the musical examples of *p'ungmul nori* are at the basic level, those of *samul nori* are some of the most challenging ones for non-music major students. These examples were chosen deliberately to enable teachers and musicians to better grasp certain advanced elements that are frequently taught orally. Through these choices, the structure of this article is designed to facilitate the effective transmission of Korean percussion's concepts and principles in classroom settings, especially for students unacquainted with its culture, history, and repertoire.

***P'ungmul* Sets *Samul nori* in Motion**

P'ungmul and *samul nori* are two dominant rhythm-centered musical genres within the field of native Korean music (hereafter, *kugak*⁴). *P'ungmul*, regarded as *yŏnhŭi* (lit. performing arts for entertainment), is an outdoor art that intertwines acrobatic performance, dance, ground formations, and drumming with the communal labor of agricultural life. It embodies rural cultures whose diversity mirrors that of South Korea's many regions. In contrast, *samul nori* was performed for Seoul urbanites for the first time in 1978 in concert settings⁵ by skilled musicians from *namsadangp'ae* (an itinerant performance group).⁶ While *p'ungmul* is woven into the quotidian, agricultural life of rural communities, *samul nori* reflects the ambitions of proficient musicians to contemporize tradition for urban audiences, restructuring *p'ungmul*'s rhythmic elements into urbanized, stage-based, and sedentary forms. Accordingly, *samul nori*'s canon is akin to a standard and eclectic language, in contrast to *p'ungmul*, which can be seen as a vernacular tied to its rural origins.

Despite pronounced differences in structure, performance length, rhythmic patterns, and aesthetics, these two genres overlap substantially in the technical aspects of percussion performance. Practitioners at a master level often distinguish between performance techniques based on their teacher's lineage and regional style, especially within *p'ungmul*. However, in practical instruction for beginners, these subtleties of musical elements become less prominent. My own pedagogical experience suggests that, for beginners, it is less productive to draw rigid distinctions between these two musical genres. Instead, teaching should develop students' versatility and independence as practitioners, empower them to make their own musical decisions (regarding musical arrangement and practical techniques), and encourage them to broaden a range of percussion sounds suitable for a variety of audiences, performers, and event organizers alike.

For example, I found that the somatic features of *p'ungmul*—particularly the emphasis on bodily movement—proved worthwhile for teaching efficient and expressive percussion techniques. By contrast, *samul nori*'s concise and well-structured rhythmic patterns lent themselves to classroom demonstration, as these are typically shorter and more digestible than the extended rhythmic cycles of *p'ungmul* (which can last for hours). Thus, mastering the foundational movement vocabulary of *p'ungmul* enhances the acquisition of practical percussion techniques needed for a *samul nori* repertoire.

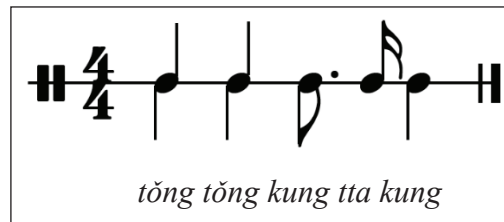
On February 25, 2023, I attended a Korean drum workshop hosted by the Korean Performing Arts Institute in Chicago in the United States and taught by Ch'oe Su-wan [Choi Suwan]. Notably, Ch'oe began not by striking the drums, but by teaching students how to move their arms and upper bodies. This workshop, which formed the centerpiece

of a three-day field trip I organized for Sinaboro members,⁷ aimed to expand the ensemble's repertoire beyond what they had presented at the Korean American Student Association [KASA] Culture Show on April 16, 2022. During the workshop (see **Figure 1**), Ch'oe instructed participants to raise their arms in line with their shoulders and lower them slowly, as if exhaling, likening the motion to a bird folding its wings in flight. Bending the knees at the precise moment the arms came down was stressed as integral to the movement. While the ultimate purpose of the workshop was to teach a *samul nori* repertoire (*Yŏngnam nongak*), Ch'oe explained that the initial focus on bodily movement—drawn from *p'ungmul* practice—was foundational to playing Korean percussion instruments. It takes precedence over the acquisition of musical patterns themselves.



Figure 1: Ch'oe Su-wan's demonstration of bodily movement (raising the arms on the left, lowering the arms and bending the knees on the right).⁸

With Ch'oe's instruction, I realized how important the motion was for playing the instruments. Six months later in 2023, I hosted a ten-week *samul nori* workshop⁹ in Ann Arbor, Michigan. I invited Katherine Lee to be a guest instructor on June 1. Although the workshop's core focus was on *samul nori*, Lee introduced two fundamental *p'ungmul* movements: the shoulder dance (*ŏkkaech'um*) and a knee bend (*ogŭm*) (**Figure 2**). She demonstrated both a deep and shallow knee bend and coordinated them with vocalizations associated with the *yich'ae* (lit. two strikes) pattern, “*tŏng tŏng kung tta kung*” (**Score 1**). She did not provide any written instructions for this rhythmic phrase, instead delivering it verbally. The pattern she taught was as follows: The first two quarter notes are clapped with both hands on their respective thighs. For the third note—a dotted eighth—the left hand moves across to the right thigh. This is quickly followed by a sixteenth note, struck by the right hand on the same side. Finally, the fourth quarter note is clapped by the left hand on the right thigh. The musical score of *yich'ae* in single-staff music notation is shown below:



Score 1: A single-staff notation for *yich'ae*.

In this score, noteheads bearing both upward and downward stems denote clapping with both hands. The upward stem corresponds to the right hand, and the downward stem to the left. Lee instructed participants to vary the depth of their knee bends according to the syllables. Because the first two beats are stronger than the subsequent three strikes, this rhythmic pattern is referred to as “two strikes,” with an emphasis on the initial two beats. When participants sang “*tǒng tǒng*,” she showed them how to bend their knees deeper, then to bend their knees slightly for the “*kung tta kung*” part. The importance of circularity was central to comprehending the rhythms of Korean percussion genres. She stated:

Korean *samul* and *p'ungmul* are very circular, not angular. There is a whole thing where you kind of think about the rhythm. You are riding the rhythm as if it is going on this wheel.

[she extended her arms and drew a circle in the air]

Gravity takes over, right? This kind of movement is common in Korean dance and rhythm.¹⁰

During the thirty-minute session, participants learned to move their bodies and arms more naturally, which directly influenced the quality of sound they produced. Her illustration of rhythmic “circularity”—as opposed to angularity or linearity—was



Figure 2: Bending knees on the left and shoulder dance on the right.¹¹

expressed through participations' bodily movement during the workshop. Following Lee's instruction, participants formed a circle, initiated a ground formation, and alternated knee bends and arm movements in synchrony.

The importance of the kinesthetic aspect of playing Korean percussion instruments is also supported by Donna L. Kwon, who pointed out the aesthetic practices of the *P'ilbong* style of *p'ungmul*—"mouth rhythm" (*ipchangdan*), "shoulder dance" (*ŏkkaech'um*), "breath" (*hohŭp*), and "bending knees" (*ogŭm*)—which she observed at a music training camp in Imshil county (2015, 53–55). In this regard, practicing *p'ungmul* helps develop the technical skills required to perform Korean percussion instruments in an ensemble.

Sounding Virtue in Korean Percussion

P'ungmul and *samul nori* both represent the development of aesthetic intuition, embodied knowledge, and communal ethics. Both genres share a commitment to cultivating not only technical skills but also a collective orientation toward rhythm and participatory music-making. This section elaborates on the intersection of art and virtue in these traditions by drawing upon oral testimony, aesthetic discourse, and pedagogical models rooted in transmission.

Building upon Hwang Byŏng-ki's conceptual theorization of flavor (*mat*) and virtue (*mŏt*) in Korean musical aesthetics in folk and ritual practices (1978, 29–31), Robert C. Provine stresses "*mŏt*" in folk music practices and "*him*" in rhythmic patterns (2001, 851). In the context of *kugak* musical performances, both are colloquial terms: *mŏt* means one's expression of praise for an excellent musical presentation, and *him* is a dynamic energy that encompasses more than articulation and represents the emotional appeal conveyed through variation, expansion, and spontaneous adaptation of rhythmic cycles in response to the moment. These terms extend far beyond mere stylistic or affective characteristics of *kugak* as a whole; they represent a performer's intuitive understanding of rhythmic nuance and emotional expression. Achieving a musically compelling performance as a Korean percussionist requires not only proficiency in playing techniques, but also the ability to express versatility and demonstrate an internalization of rhythms and these aesthetic ideals. These expressions that signal an appreciation for Korean music are commonly observable beyond South Korea. Kim Su-chin invokes these metaphors of "flavor" and "vitality" to illustrate their significance within the practice of *p'ungmul* rhythms in both the U.S. and South Korea (2011, 77–78).

These aesthetic dimensions were apparent when I attended a music training camp for rural, village-based *p'ungmul* from February 22 to 26 in 2024. During the full moon festival, Imshil *p'ungmul* practitioners performed on February 24 as part of the ancestral ritual practices that are regularly enacted at this time of year. The spectators expressed appreciation for the skilled practitioners' *mŏt* and the dynamism (*him*) of the performance. This was evident not only in the vitality of various *p'ungmul* rhythmic arrangements but also in shared moments of excitement, when the spectators initiated dancing and drumming at the end of the *p'ungmul* performance. Once audience members started to walk onto the playing field, the boundary between audience and performer became blurred. The spectators, who wore raincoats due to unexpected rain, began performing the shoulder dance and playing percussion instruments (Figure 3). It was natural for them to join the performance without any hesitation. Although the current National Intangible Cultural Heritage holder of the Imshil style of *p'ungmul*, Yang Chin-sŏng, had decided to begin the final performance earlier than scheduled, the practitioners ended up playing longer than expected as the crowd actively joined in and continued performing *p'ungmul* along with them.



Figure 3: The *p'ungmul* performance at the full moon festival. Photo by the author.

In this sense, the production of flavor and vitality emerged communally in both participatory and stage contexts. The practitioners did not force audience members to join them. Rather, participatory performance was mutually expected from the audience as well as the practitioners. While the sedentary and staged format of *samul nori* creates a clearer separation between performer and audience, the expressive values remain. Here, as Provine and Hwang noted above, musical flavor (*mŏt*) and dynamism (*him*) are conveyed through precise rhythmic articulation and variation, encouraging audiences to become connoisseurs of musical taste in their own right and active participants in creating such taste.

Provine points out that the rhythmic structure of Korean percussion features metric regularity, tempo variation, and moments of improvisation (2001, 876). In participatory settings, performance quality is primarily judged not by technical precision but by a more holistic sense of resonance, atmosphere, and communal cohesion. The term *p’ujida*, literally meaning “abundance,” captures this ethos. As articulated by the late Yang Sun-yong, a performance is regarded as successful when it generates a full and powerful sound that embodies communal unity (Chŏn 2023, 171–76). This aesthetic ideal is illustrated in a recollection by practitioner Yi Sang-baek [I Sang-paek], who described Yang Sun-yong’s exceptional control over the *soe* (a small hand-held gong with a wooden mallet):

He was excellent at that. He had that particular skill, and also the sound of his *soe* was extremely difficult to imitate. What should I say... It was a full sound. It continues [continued] smoothly, at the same time having the feeling it may stop at any moment. And at the same time it is [was] also very powerful. I guess I can verbally express it that way. (Quoted in Hesselink 2006, 46)

This communal orientation is further exemplified in the pedagogical philosophy of the Imshil *P’ilbong* Transmission Center. As Donna L. Kwon (2015) documents, the center prioritizes participatory learning over individual virtuosity. Regardless of prior training, participants undergo intensive sessions where musical knowledge is transmitted through embodied interaction. Intermodal feedback between teachers and students features heavily in this pedagogy, demonstrated not only through verbal instruction but also through gestures, movement, and bodily synchronization in the shared space of the village courtyard. One of the most crucial concepts that emerges from this practice is encapsulated in the expression *habi matta* (lit. all fits together), a term used by practitioners to evaluate rhythmic and collective cohesion. This phrase refers to a collectively held rhythmic sensibility, a precondition for effective group performance

in which all instrumental parts align in time, energy, and intention. The evaluation of a performance, then, depends not on isolated skills but on performers' capacity to attune themselves to others—a musical achievement and cultural consensus.

At advanced levels, expressing rhythmic flow is pivotal to the mastery of *p'unngmul* and *samul nori* to achieve the quality of “melodies,” which “need to be repeatedly *tightened* and *loosened*” (Provine 2001, 851).¹² This melodic elasticity is called *naego*, *talgo*, *maetko*, and *p'ulgo*, translated variously as “produce, stir up, fasten, and unbind” (Lee 2018, 56) or “produce, heat up, tense, stir up, and release” (Hesselink 2006, 116–17). These concepts describe a formal structure through which rhythmic energy is built, intensified, and ultimately released. More than a compositional technique, this flow is an improvisation and affective progression delivered through embodied rhythmic knowledge, often referred to as *nŭkkim* (feeling).

Rhythmic Structure: Meter and *Changdan*

Sachs elucidates rhythm as a significant discipline that shapes music or poetry by elevating it to sophisticated art (1953, 19). Likewise, music scholars such as Lee Hye-ku, Robert Provine, and Paek Tae-ung have emphasized rhythm as a key aspect in the practice of *kugak* performances. To explain this, they have discussed the concept of *changdan* (lit. long and short)—a fundamental Korean musicological term that frames how musicians experience and organize musical time (e.g., temporality) across diverse repertoires of *kugak*. In the *p'unngmul* context, *gut* (lit. ritual) also refers to *changdan*, and *karak* (lit. melody) refers to the rhythmic pattern. It is common for *p'unngmul* practitioners to use *karak*, *changdan*, and *gut* interchangeably to refer to certain rhythmic patterns. Building on these discussions,¹³ Nathan Hesselink refines and expands the definition of *changdan* for the context of *p'unngmul* and other Korean folk genres as follows: “Korean rhythmic patterns are determined by rhythmic models consisting of a series of accented and unaccented strokes or beats, often varying in metrical and repeat structure, use of tempo, and phrase length” (when applicable) (Hesselink 2006, 189).

Rather than treating rhythmic patterns as merely consistent or variable, Hesselink's definition of *changdan* emphasizes the performers' agency to actively shape tempo and rhythmic expression. This approach emphasizes the practitioners' musical competence, demonstrated by their ability to expand upon and vary fundamental rhythmic patterns. Rather than imposing rigid boundaries on Korean rhythm in *p'unngmul*, Hesselink's delineation underscores the musical responsibility and creative agency of practitioners. This understanding also aligns with the qualities of *samul nori* performance, which is often associated with “dynamism” (Kor. *yŏktongjŏk*). Robert Provine previously interpreted this concept using the Korean word *him*, which, in

literal translation, is closer to “strength” or “force.” In contrast, *yŏktongjŏk* implies a condition of constant progress and fluidity. Rather than emphasizing only force or strength, as implied by Provine’s selection of *him* to convey “dynamism,” Lee argues that the flexible, progressive nature of rhythm in *samul nori* represents a musical form that extends beyond the boundary of South Korea (2018). I do not claim that *samul nori*’s rhythms merely result from one-way borrowing from *p’ungmul*. Instead, I adopt Hesselink’s definition of *changdan*, which characterizes the rhythmical examples from *p’ungmul* and recognizes the crucial role of percussionists in determining the tempo and arrangement of the rhythmic patterns.

From this discussion on *changdan*, I now turn to the meter theory of Lee Po-hyŏng, the late scholar who theorized and expanded the conceptualization of *changdan* in folk music (Sŏng 2023, 28). Through Lee Po-hyŏng’s interpretation of Korean rhythm, I explore how this theory has been applied to the system of Korean written rhythmic notation, called *chŏngganbo* (box notation), which has been widely adopted by *p’ungmul* and *samul nori* practitioners. Lee Po-hyŏng’s theory describes *changdan* collectively and grammatically by using the Korean mensural notation system (Sŏng 2023, 38). What is striking about his meter theory is that he suggests the concept of a unit in relation to *sobak* (beat) and *pakcha* (meter) (1995). *Sobak* refers to the smallest unit of a beat, which can be grouped into either duple or triple meters. *Pakcha* refers to a metrical unit, or beat, within a rhythmic cycle. For example, the rhythmic pattern, *chungmori changdan* (Score 2), consists of two sets of two *sobak* and twelve *pakcha*, which would be equivalent to twelve quarter notes within one *changdan*. Although the time signature provided below is written as six quarter notes, a duple meter in a quarter note is understood as *sobak*. In this case, the two *sobak* and twelve *pakcha* are interpreted within one measure of the rhythmic pattern. Whereas there are twelve boxes, which represent each beat in the box notation, *changdan* in the Western single-staff notation style is composed of two measures, as shown below:

The image displays two musical notations for a rhythmic pattern. The top notation is box notation, consisting of a horizontal row of 12 boxes. The boxes contain the following symbols from left to right: a circle with a vertical line through its center, an empty circle, a vertical line, a circle with a vertical line through its center, a vertical line, a vertical line with a dot above it, a vertical line, a circle with a vertical line through its center, an empty circle, a vertical line, a circle with a vertical line through its center, a vertical line with a dot above it, and a vertical line. The bottom notation is single-staff notation, showing a treble clef, a 6/4 time signature, and a melodic line with 12 notes. The notes are: quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, eighth, eighth, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter. The notation ends with a double bar line.

Score 2: A rhythmic pattern of *chungmori changdan*.
(Top: box notation. Bottom: single-staff notation).

With this meter theory describing *sobak* and *pakcha*, the box notation style provides a simpler framework for interpreting Korean rhythmic cycles than the single-staff notation style. The following section details how to read this box notation.

Expressing Melodic Qualities in Rhythms: *T'aryŏng* and *Yukch'ae*

The expression of the *nŭkkim* (lit. feeling) in *p'unngmul* practice is how one delivers the versatile sound of Korean percussion instruments, as well as the expression of the intonation, stress, and accent of the rhythmic phrases. In *p'unngmul* and *samul nori*, such *nŭkkim* can be achieved through the subtle manipulation of rhythm, volume, and dynamics. When I attended a training camp of the *P'ilbong* style of *p'unngmul* for a second time in 2024, the current National Intangible Cultural Heritage holder, Yang Chin-sŏng, who is the son of the late Yang Sun-yong, led a group session on the morning of July 30. He encouraged students to practice diligently in order to elevate a rhythmic pattern to the level of a melody (Kor. *karak*). I later followed up with him to inquire about what he meant by turning a rhythmic pattern into a melodic phrase (*karak*) with percussion instruments. He explained:

In order to make [the rhythm] into melody, there is a condition: the *kochŏ* [high-low pitch] *changdan* should be well harmonized. Every *karak* has a structural frame. However, its [sonic] appearance differs by regions. [...] *kochŏ* refers to volume—strong and soft. *Changdan* refers to length—from slow to fast. Let's take the *kkwaenggwari* as an example. The right hand creates the rhythm, and the left hand produces open and closed sounds. Students often stop at just learning the rhythm, and that's it. But the important part of playing percussion is to make the sound into music. A *kkwaenggwari* player can produce the sound of an oriental scops owl. It's not simply a mimicry of the owl's howling. The player can evoke that sound because they make music.¹⁴

Yang Chin-sŏng's pedagogy as a percussionist focused on how to transform rhythmic patterns so that they could sound like melodies. To describe the development of musical sensibility (*nŭkkim*), he provided the example of a *kkwaenggwari* player. For this instrument, the left hand plays a crucial role in muting the sound—this is what he refers to as the “open and closed” sounds. While the right hand, wielding a wooden mallet, produces the strikes and creates the beats, the left hand, which holds the *kkwaenggwari*, manipulates its sonic quality through muting techniques. Yang's metaphorical comparison of percussion to melodic instruments—through referencing pitch and melody—proposes that his ultimate pedagogical aim is to broaden the potential of percussion instruments. That is, he addresses the perceived limitations of single-pitched percussion by encouraging students to strive for musicality that goes beyond rhythmic accuracy. Although I was not yet familiar with

Yang Chin-sŏng’s aesthetic when I first began directing Sinaboro, his pedagogical approach has since offered a lens through which to reflect on my ongoing teaching practice. This practitioner’s knowledge was in how the mastery of *p’ungmul* and *samul* was connected to the rhythmic flow explored above (*naego*, *talgo*, *maetko*, and *p’ulgo*).

In the development of *samul nori*, the canon is commonly divided into three regional styles: *yŏngnam*, *honam*, and *utdari*. However, as Hesselink remarks, practitioners are not limited to these regional models; he himself incorporated rhythmic patterns from *yŏngdong p’ungmul* as the basis for a new canon (2009). The form of *samul nori* typically begins slowly and gradually accelerates, with the pace steadily speeding up. In “Part 1: Learning Korean (*Samulnori*) Percussion: Pathway Through World Music Pedagogy,” Lim and Campbell provide a musical example of a rhythmic pattern called *pyŏltalgŏri* (two *sobak* eight *pakcha*), which is arranged at the end of the *yŏngnam* regional canon in *samul nori* (2023). Before *pyŏltalgŏri* is played, I added a transition section between *yukch’ae* and *pyŏltalgŏri*. With the articulation of this transition part, the next section will elaborate on how circularity, bouncy rhythms, and meter theory can function as effective concepts for students to embody *nŭkkim*.

As *samul nori*’s structure typically begins slowly and accelerates, I arranged a piece for Sinaboro that combines the first half of the *utdari* canon¹⁵—*buk solo*, *tchŏktchŏgi gut*, *t’aryŏng*, *ch’ilch’ae*, and *yukch’ae*—with *pyŏltalgŏri* from the *yŏngnam* canon. This piece was performed at the KASA culture show in April 2022. While teaching this arrangement to undergraduate students at the University of Michigan from January to April of that year, I found that it took longer to teach than any other piece I had arranged—particularly the *t’aryŏng changdan* and the transitional passage from *yukch’ae* to *pyŏltalgŏri*. These sections required more time for students to master, as each instrument’s part needed to be articulated clearly, and the ensemble had to synchronize offbeat and upbeat strokes across four instruments. Unlike most rhythmic patterns in this arrangement, which underscore the downbeat and involve less separation between instrumental parts, *t’aryŏng* has syncopated rhythms that presented a particular challenge for the students.

From this experience, I developed my own pedagogy around how to teach two rhythmic patterns: *t’aryŏng* and the transitional period between *yukch’ae* and *pyŏltalgŏri*. First, *t’aryŏng* is a rhythmic pattern that is characterized by its polytimbral structure. The transcription below (Scores 3, 4, 5) is based on the recording provided by the National Gugak Center (2018). **Score 3** below shows a mensural notation of it. From the left to right, one box represents each beat, and the empty box indicates the sustained length of the prior note. The size of the circle shows the loudness of each strike, which is divided into strong, moderate, and soft. The smallest circle represents ornamentation. Whereas Western musical notation has time signatures, the length

of patterns in Korean musical notation is given by the number of squares. All four instruments, except *changgo* (a double-headed hour-glass drum), have only a right side upon which to strike. *Changgo* has two sides to hit. A mallet is used to hit the left side, whereas a stick is used to hit the right side. In this way, *changgo* has three symbols in the grid: a circle with a stick inside for both hands, a stick for the right hand, and a circle for the left hand. In the notation for *kkwaenggwari* (a small hand-held gong with a wooden mallet), the black colored circle represents the dampening skill of the left hand, while the right hand hits the drum with a wooden mallet. In the *buk*'s (a barrel drum) notation, the black colored circle indicates that the player should hit the upper part of the *buk* instead of the leather part. At the very bottom of the three sets of this mensural notation in **Score 3**, the sixth beat of the *buk* should place the strike at the right time so that the other instruments will listen to it. The sixth beat of the *buk* will be a sonic indication for the other instrumentalists to strike the eighth and ninth notes.

<i>Kkwaenggwari (K)</i>	○			●		●	○		●	Öl-		Ssu
<i>Changgo (C)</i>	⊕						⊕		·	Öl-		Ssu
<i>Buk (B)</i>	○			●		●	○		●	Öl-		Ssu
<i>Ching</i>	○						○			Öl-		Ssu

<i>K</i>	○			●		●	○		●	Chöl		Ssu
<i>C</i>	⊕						⊕		·	Chöl		Ssu
<i>B</i>	○			●		●	○		●	Chöl		Ssu
<i>Ching</i>	○						○			Chöl		Ssu

<i>K</i>	⋮				●	○		○	○	○		○
<i>C</i>	⋮					○		⊕	⊕		○	
<i>B</i>	○			○			○	○	○			○
<i>Ching</i>	○						○					

Score 3: *T'aryöng*.¹⁶
 (three *sobak* and twelve *pakcha*, and combination of iambic and triambic beats).

The most challenging part of instructing my students in *t'aryŏng* was the final section of the twelve *pakcha*. In particular, the fourth beat of the last section is played on the *buk*, followed sequentially by the *kkwaenggwari* and *changgo*. The strike on the right side of the *changgo* has to be precisely timed to resonate simultaneously with the final eighth note on the tenth beat. In this case, the concept of circularity, as discussed by Katherine Lee, is instrumental in addressing this challenge. Every three beats in these three sections can be counted using a circular or bouncing rhythmic phrase, which can help students embody the timing and better express the feel of the pattern. This *nŭkkim* of the rhythmic pattern also relates to how Kwon describes “the bouncy singsong quality” in the enunciation of the vocables of the two-strikes pattern, which are rendered as the elongated sounds “Tŏ Tŏ—ng Tŏ Tŏ—ng” (Kwon 2015, 48–9).

Second, I examine a transitional passage presented to the Sinaboro ensemble by Ch'oe Su-wan, as well as an example of a rhythmic pattern featuring irregular groupings. This transitional period occurs after the rhythmic pattern *yukch'ae*. The part functions as the bridge, which moves from an iambic meter to a triambic meter. **Score 4** presents the basic rhythmic pattern of *yukch'ae*. The first ten beats can be considered to be two and three *sobak*, which is the complex rhythm, and ten *pakcha*, as the first five beats are composed of two and then three small beats.

After repeating the basic rhythmic pattern of *yukch'ae* or playing its variations several times, the musicians speed up the tempo. When the tempo increases, the musicians must compress the rests indicated by these “empty” boxes. Those “cut-off” beats (top three rows) are shown in the empty boxes in **Score 4**. As the pace quickens, performers move over the empty boxes more swiftly and maintain the number of strikes in the original *yukch'ae*. Finally, the strikes shown in **Score 5** present the triambic meter which is used to connect to the next rhythmic pattern, *pyŏltalgŏri*.

K	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
C	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕
B	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Ching	○																

Score 4: *Yukch'ae* (two-three *sobak* ten *pakcha*).

As the speed of *yukch'ae* becomes faster, the meter of the rhythmic pattern changes. It is important that all four instruments remain synchronized, which will lead to what is called *habi matta*. The transition in **Score 5** features a recurring accent on the first

of every six strikes, functioning as a metrical cue that ensures phrase stability among the ensemble. At this point, the *buk* practitioner plays on every third strike of the *kkwaengwari*, which provides downbeats for the *pyöltalgöri changdan*. By knowing these technical practices along with the concept of *changdan*, I found that my students engaged with practical challenges rather than articulating theoretical knowledge. Producing melody-like sounds on single-pitched percussion instruments was one of the key performative aspects for Yang Chin-söng. This knowledge—including *karak*, dynamism, flavor, and vitality, as observed in scenes of *p'unngmul* and *samul nori*—lays a foundation where *nökkim* can be generated to develop students' musical sensibilities.

K	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
C	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕
B	○			○			○			○		
<i>Ching</i>	○						○					

Score 5: Transition from the combination of iambic and triambic meters to the triambic meter.

Conclusion

Although the musical examples in this article are drawn from my experience teaching non-music major students at the university, my approach bridges the gap between academic insights and the practitioners' perspective. I incorporated various theories of knowledge production developed by theorists ranging from music scholars, such as Katherine Lee, Donna Kwon, Nathan Hesselink, Robert Provine and Lee Po-hyöng, to instructors, such as the artist Ch'oe Su-wan, as well as a former National Intangible Cultural Heritage holder Yang Sun-yong and current holder Yang Chin-söng. This combination of scholarly and artistic perspectives guided my discussion of a practice-based understanding of Korean rhythmic aesthetics. The conceptual and analytical nexus for appreciating Korean rhythm within specific musical genres brings to light how one can become immersed in music culture. This is particularly applicable to the realm of Anglo-American higher education, where teaching and learning diverse music is highly encouraged.

This study investigates strategies for effectively integrating Korean percussion genres into Anglophone music curricula, navigating the limitations of time and space as part of a broader effort to diversify musical traditions within academic contexts. To that end, I have compiled important facets that can be helpful in understanding

the cultural and practical knowledge embedded in performance practices. While Lee Po-hyŏng's theory may appear overly theoretical for the purpose of helping students grasp Korean rhythmic structures, his emphasis on analyzing rhythm through the comprehensive lens of *kugak* and his concentration on Korean box notation are crucial. This allows students to understand that the sustenance of Korean folk traditions relies not only on musical literacy, but also on vernacular linguistic structures and the development of technical skills in Korean percussion. In doing so, the intellectual community that advances the musical knowledge of Korean percussion instruments, genres, and theories will contribute to the diversification of Anglophone academia.

Notes

- ¹ This paper follows the McCune-Reischauer romanization system for Korean. Korean names are given with the family name first, followed by the given name, and are romanized using the McCune-Reischauer system; preferred names appear in brackets when applicable. *사물놀이* (*Samul nori*) is variously romanized as *SamulNori*, *Samulnori*, and *samullori*. The genre originated from a 1978 project by the performance troupe *SamulNori Hanullim*, formed by skilled percussionists to explore and reinterpret Korean rhythms (Lee 2018, 34). Their work led to the establishment of a neo-traditional genre centered on four Korean percussion instruments. For further discussion, see Katherine Lee's *Rhythmic Form and Dynamic Korea* (Wesleyan University Press, 2018).
- ² Translated literally, *nongak* means farmer's music, whereas *p'ungmul* refers to wind and objects. Where the term *p'ungmul* is widely used by its practitioners, *nongak* is a term contrived by South Korean intellectuals and state-bureaucrats, and is associated with the image of Japanese colonialism, particularly given the fact that the nominators of the name of *nongak* were highly influenced by Japan-based institutions and education systems. For a more detailed discussion of this subject, see Nathan Hesselink's *P'ungmul: South Korean Drumming and Dance* (University of Chicago Press, 2006), 15–16.
- ³ Finchum-Sung's article (2013) probes several musical works that incorporate *Arirang* as a motif or compositional element, including John Barnes Chance's "Variation on a Korean Folk Song," Oscar Pettiford's *Ah-Dee-Dong Blues* (Oriental Cello Blues), and Pete Seeger's 1957 album of folk songs and ballads.
- ⁴ Native Korean music, *kugak*, refers to performance practices dating to pre-partitioned Korea. This term has become associated with the institutionalization of traditional music since the formation of South Korea as a state. Bureaucrats, contemporary music education institutions, and the intellectuals of South Korea have all contributed to bringing this term to prominence on the national stage.
- ⁵ For more information on the genesis of the *samul nori* genre as a type of concert music, see Keith Howard's *SamulNori: Korean Percussion for a Contemporary World*, 2015.
- ⁶ For more information about the history of this professional itinerant performance group, see Nathan Hesselink's *Samulnori: Contemporary Korean Drumming and the Rebirth of Itinerant Performance Culture*. 2012, 17–37.
- ⁷ This trip was supported by the Nam Center for Korean Studies at the University of Michigan.
- ⁸ Photos are taken by the author, and I received consent from all participants to use their images.
- ⁹ This workshop was a summer project funded by the center for World Performance Studies at the University of Michigan in 2023.
- ¹⁰ Katherine Lee's interactive workshop on June 1, 2023, in the Stearns Building at the University of Michigan.
- ¹¹ Photos are taken by the author, and I received consent to use the photos from the participants.
- ¹² Quotation marks in the original text are replaced by italics.
- ¹³ This debate is detailed in Nathan Hesselink's book *P'ungmul: South Korean Drumming and Dance*, 185–89.
- ¹⁴ Yang Chin-sŏng, interview by the author, July 31, 2024, at his abode in Imshil, South Korea.
- ¹⁵ For the arrangement, I referred to a YouTube video called "Samullori paeugi: 02. uttari samullori," which was uploaded on February 7, 2018, by the National Gugak Center: https://youtu.be/ZlOK5G2m7lg?si=lnmT_q5_BJOs-i9N. I transcribed these rhythmic patterns for the Sinaboro members.
- ¹⁶ This rhythm is presented by musicians at the Namdo Gugak Center in South Korea. The music score, transcribed by the author, is based on a recording from the YouTube video "Samullori Paeugi: 02. Utdari Samullori," posted by the National Gugak Center on February 6, 2018. https://youtu.be/ZlOK5G2m7lg?si=_ltNPapLEWAesLIK. See timestamp 1' 49".

Acknowledgements

This article would not have been possible without the generous research grants, student participation at the University of Michigan, and invaluable community support in Ann Arbor. The ten-week Korean drum workshop in Ann Arbor was supported by the EXCEL Lab & Career Center in the School of Music, Theatre & Dance, and the Center for World Performance Studies. I am grateful to Christi-Anne Castro for navigating administrative requirements at the Stearns Building, and to Youngju Ryu for her ideas to sustain Sinaboro's activities through her leadership as former director of the Nam Center for Korean Studies. Additionally, Katherine Lee's instruction and to Yang Chin-sŏng's

interview became important sources for this essay. I also thank Ch'oe Su-wan and Byoung Sug Kim at the Korean Performing Arts Institute in Chicago for wholeheartedly welcoming Sinaboro. Lastly, my deepest gratitude belongs to the members of Sinaboro, who have shared my passion and brought this work to life.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

References

- Becker, Judith. 2009. "Ethnomusicology and Empiricism in the Twenty-First Century." *Ethnomusicology* 53, no. 3: 478–501.
- Campbell, Patricia Shehan. 2010. Society for Ethnomusicology, Crossroads Section for Difference and Representation. "S.O.S. to Ethnomusicologists for Diversity in the K-12 Arena." Accessed May 7, 2024. <https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.ethnomusicology.org/resource/resmgr/crossroads/campbell.pdf>.
- Chōn, Chi-yōng. 2023. *Yein Yangsunyong*. Seoul: Book Korea.
- Finchum-Sung, Hilary. 2013. "The Meaning and Role of 'Arirang' in the American Context." *Namdominsok yōngu* 26: 101–41.
- Hesselink, Nathan. 2006. *P'ungmul: South Korean Drumming and Dance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hesselink, Nathan. 2009. "'Youngdong Nongak': Mountains Music, and the Samulnori Canon." *Acta Koreana* 12, no. 1: 1–26.
- . 2012. *SamulNori: Contemporary Korean Drumming and the Rebirth of Itinerant Performance Culture*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Howard, Keith. 2015. *SamulNori: Korean Percussion for a Contemporary World*. London: Routledge.
- Hwang, Byōng-ki [Byung-ki]. 1978. "Aesthetic Characteristics of Korean Music in Theory and in Practice." *Asian Music* 9, no. 2: 29–40.
- Kang, YouYoung [Kang, You-yōng]. "Music and Liberal Arts Education: A Reply to Mark Hijleh, "Reforming Music Theory," *College Music Symposium* 40 (2008): 105–7.
- Kim, Su-chin [Kim, Soo-jin]. 2011. "Diasporic P'ungmul in the United States: A Journey between Korea and the United States." Ph.D. Dissertation. Ohio State University.
- Kwon, Donna L. 2015. "'Becoming One': Embodying Korean P'ungmul Percussion Band Music and Dance through Site-Specific Intermodal Transmission." *Ethnomusicology* 59, no. 1: 31–60.
- . 2024. *Stepping in the Madang: Sustaining Expressive Ecologies of Korean Drumming and Dance*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Lam, Joseph. 2010. "Cultivating Diversity Sensitivities." Society for Ethnomusicology. Accessed May 7, 2024. <https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.ethnomusicology.org/resource/resmgr/crossroads/lam.pdf>.

- Lee, Katherine. 2018. *Dynamic Korea and Rhythmic Form*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Lee, Po-hyöng [Bo-hyung]. 1995. "Ridŭmhyöngŭi kujowa kü kusöngge üihan changdanüi pullyu yön'gu." *Studies in Korean Music* 23: 26–131.
- Liew, Karissa Van. 2021. "Samulnori in Schools: Recontextualizing Samulnori for a Western Setting." *Dance and Theories*, no. 3: 83–114.
- Lim, Namhee, and Patricia Shehan Campbell. 2023. "Part 1: Learning Korean (*Samulnori*) Percussion: Pathway Through World Music Pedagogy." *Journal of General Music Education* 37, no. 1: 14–19.
- National Gugak Center. "Samullori paeugi: 02. uttari samullori." YouTube, February 6, 2018. https://youtu.be/Zl0K5G2m7lg?si=InmT_q5_BJOs-i9N.
- Provine, Robert C., Yoshihiko Tokumaru and Lawrence J. Witzleben, eds. 2001. *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music: East Asia: China, Japan, and Korea*. London: Routledge.
- Solis, Ted. 2004. *Performing Ethnomusicology: Teaching and Representation in World Music Ensembles*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Sachs, Curt. 1953. *Rhythm and Tempo: A Study in Music History*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Söng, Kiryön [Sung, Ki-Ryun]. 2023. "Review of Meter Theory Related to Korean Music." *Studies in Korean Music* 73, no. 6: 27–54.
- Wegner, Ulrich. 1993. "Cognitive Aspects of Amadinda Xylophone Music from Buganda: Inherent Patterns Reconsidered." *Ethnomusicology* 37 (2): 201–41.

