

Reflections on the Challenges of Musical Representations of Korean Historical Texts in Cord Meijering's *Marsyas for Percussion Solo Symphony* (2018/19)

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Abstract

This article explores Dutch-German Composer Cord Meijering's (b. 1955) intercultural translation practices in his piece *Marsyas for Percussion Solo Symphony*, which premiered in Darmstadt in 2019. This work is based on Greek mythology and the history of the Korean Independence Movement with Eastern and Western percussion. The above-mentioned premiere occurred on the 100th anniversary of the Korean Independence Movement and received intense acclaim from the international audience. However, although Meijering interprets Korean history using a comparison with a Greek myth, he produces a cultural jetlag by replacing the relationship between the dominant and subordinate with the relationship between God and humans. He supplements his understanding of Korean history during the compositional process in cooperation with Korean percussionist Eunbi Jeong. By thoroughly discussing the text of the Declaration of Independence with her, applying traditional Korean percussion instruments, and performing techniques, I argue that Meijering has been able to produce a piece which delivers the spirit of the Korean Independence Movement to an international audience. By reviewing the audience's reception of the piece, I present how Meijering searched for the modern history of Korea, apart from the influence of his Western cultural roots, and how he represented Korean historic-political events within a Western symphonic form by advancing Korean traditional music. In contemplating the potential of reflexive globalism, this paper raises questions regarding how he in exploring Korea, reevaluates non-Western cultures with a reflective consciousness, acknowledging and respecting the values and heritage inherent in this culture.

In the present era of internationalization, the relationship between Western art music and traditional East Asian music is active, in line with animated discussions on postcolonialism, globalism, and interculturalism.¹ While Western composers' exploration of Japanese and/or Chinese music began in the early twentieth century, their encounter with Korean music² only commenced in the late 1950s.³ At that time, Korea was amidst the turmoil of the Korean War and under the restrictions of an autocratic military government.⁴ Composers from the West first visited Korea to record, transcribe, and conduct

¹ Christian Utz, *Neue Musik und Interkulturalität: von John Cage bis Tan Dun* (Franz Steiner Verlag, 2002); Yayoi Uno Everett, "Intercultural Synthesis in Postwar Western Art Music: Historical Contexts, Perspectives, and Taxonomy," in *Locating East Asia in Western Art Music*, ed. Yayoi Uno Everett and Frederick Lau (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 1–21; and Hee Sook Oh, "Threnody and the Aesthetics of Interculturality in Twenty-First-Century East Asian Composition," *Acta Musicologica* 89, no. 2 (2017): 195–213.

² "Korean music" is defined slightly differently by ethnomusicologists at home and abroad; in this article, "Korean music" will primarily be used with the same meaning as "traditional Korean music." Here, "Korean music" refers to musical practices, or products that have inherited the materials, methods, and sounds of traditional music in Korea. Robert C. Provine et al., "Korea," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie, London: Macmillan Press, 2001, 801–19.

³ Christian Utz, *Musical Composition in the Context of Globalization: New Perspectives on Music History in the 20th and 21st Century*, trans. Laurence Sinclair Willis (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2021), 249, <https://doi.org/10.1515/978383839450956>.

⁴ Utz, *Musical Composition in the Context of Globalization*, 249.

ethnomusicological research on traditional Korean music while also trying to compose music using traditional Korean elements and ideas.⁵ Representative American composers of this period include Lou Harrison (1917–2003) and Alan Hovhaness (1911–2000). While staying in Korea, these composers studied and explored traditional Korean music and composed musical works for Korean instruments.⁶ Their works presented a fusion of Western art music with their interest in Chinese and Japanese culture, before exploring Korean music from the perspective of American experimental music. Since their exploration of Korean traditional music was in its early stages and delved into a limited area of Korean culture, their level of exploration was less loaded.⁷

With the start of the twenty-first century, as the internationalization of Korean music increased and cultural exchange with Western cultures intensified, information and knowledge about Korean music accumulated.⁸ In this context, Western composers began to explore more deeply into Korean music.⁹ For example, composers such as Sebastian Claren (b. 1965),¹⁰ Jared Redmond (b. 1986),¹¹ Michael Timpson (b. 1970), and Cord Meijering (b. 1955) explored unfamiliar, local, and indigenous cultures other than the widely-known representative culture of Koreans seen abroad. The above composers searched for the theoretical principles of Korean music, learned about Korean instruments from Korean musicians, and even recognized subtle differences in the pitch and rhythms of Korean music.¹²

One notable composition from this era, by the Dutch-German composer Cord Meijering, is *Marsyas for Percussion Solo Symphony* (2018/19). This piece, inspired by the history of the 1919 Korean Independence Movement, primarily features instrumental elements while also incorporating moments where historical documents are recited as lyrics. During the 90-minute musical work, by using percussion sounds, musical instruments, gestures, and vocal messages, Meijering unfolds Korean history. This piece reflects the composer's considerable efforts to draw out modern Korean history and a unique Korean sound with his attentive attitude.¹³ Despite the cessation of concerts due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this piece has already been acclaimed by international audiences in Germany and Korea.¹⁴

⁵ Hee-sun Kim, "Cultural Cold-War Politics, Asian Music Research in the US and Korean Traditional Music during the 1960s." *Journal of Ewha Music Research Institute* 23, no. 3 (2019): 121–64, <https://doi.org/10.17254/jemri.2019.23.3.004>.

⁶ In doing so, he composed *Moogungwha: Sharon Rose for Korean Traditional Ensemble* (1961), *Prelude for Piri* (Korean traditional flute) and *Mouth Organ* (1961), and *Quintal Taryeong for Danso, Tungso, and Janggu* (1961).

⁷ Songtaek Kwon, "Beyond the Boundaries: Elements of Korean Music in Lou Harrison's Music I (1961–1962)," *Musicological Society of Korea* 10, no. 3 (2007): 69; Hee-sun Kim, "Music at Crossroads: Alan Hovhaness's *Symphony No.16 for Korean Gayageum, Percussions and String Orchestra*," *Music and Culture* 22 (2010): 89, <https://doi.org/10.17091/kswm.2010..22.79>.

⁸ Hee-sun Kim, "Globalization of Korean Traditional Music-Focusing on Overseas Performances in the 2000s," *Performance Culture Study* 27 (2013): 357.

⁹ Mingyeong Son, "Western Composers' Encounter with Korean Traditional Music: With a Focus on Compositional Aspects and Musical Aesthetics in the Global Era," PhD diss., Seoul National University, 2021, 69–96, <https://doi.org/10.36364/IMT.38.4>.

¹⁰ Claren thoroughly captured the various playing methods and subtle changes in the sound of the traditional instrument *daegeum* and implemented it in his music. His considerations are evident in his piece *Today, I Wrote Nothing (Vol. 1) for Daegeum* (2016).

¹¹ Redmond wrote a new piece based on *jeongganbo*, a Korean traditional notation, for a deeper representation of the indigenous sound of the Korean instrument *daegeum*, which was based on his research of old Korean scores. Jared Redmond, "The Effects of Music Education on Contemporary Art Music Notation for Gugak Instruments," *Hanguk Gugak Gyoyuk Yeongu* 12, no. 1 (2018): 257.

¹² Mingyeong Son, "Western Composers' Encounter with Korean Traditional Music," 38.

¹³ Interview with Meijering, August 29, 2020.

¹⁴ So far, it has been performed more than four times in Germany (Darmstadt [performed twice], Winsen a.d. Luhe, and Berlin Elisabeth Kirche) and one time in Korea (Tongyeong [canceled because of COVID-19], Chuncheon [LG livestream], and Seoul National Museum of Korean Contemporary History [canceled because of COVID-19]).

It is quite challenging for Western composers (and presumably some Korean composers) to deeply understand and interpret the differences in the cultural distance, time, and space of Korean history and to express those differences through music. For composers with relatively little experience in the internal context of Korean society and texts, this can lead to a lack of in-depth understanding of the culture and history of Korea's political situation. Musicologist Heekyung Lee notes that the Western use of Korean music might be linked to neo-exoticism, representing an imagined Asianness that is significantly removed from reality.¹⁵ She suggests that despite such cultural representations by Western composers seeming to be a fresh combination, actual cultural representations are rooted in the methods of past Orientalists.¹⁶

In this article, I pose the following question: is it still valid to apply pre-existing power relations to Meijering's representation of Korea in *Marsyas* without examining his process of cultural exploration and dialogue with the history of Korea and his use of traditional Korean music? I insist that in the process of decision-making and composing music, Meijering presents an intimate relationship with other cultures by exploring the detailed content of Korean history with careful conscientiousness through inter-communication based on respect for the cultural other. In his work, the most fundamental factor in narrowing the cultural gap between his Dutch identity and Korean culture lies in fostering intercultural understanding through a reflective attitude. Musicologist Christian Utz's concept of interculturality supports this perspective, highlighting the diverse approaches adopted by contemporary Western composers when exploring other cultures.¹⁷ It emphasizes the considerate and hybrid use of shared cultural realms, transcending mere cultural combinations, to create new intercultural aesthetics.¹⁸ This perspective challenges the notion that Western engagement with Korean music is solely based on power relations between Eastern and Western cultures, suggesting that there are evolving approaches to cultural exploration.

To explore the historical elements and expressions in his music, I first examine the composer's understanding of the historical texts of Korea, following which I analyze the musical structure of the piece and Meijering's method of composition. Furthermore, I discuss socio-historical meanings in the work, as well as his understanding of the context of the modern history of Korea, which can be observed in the composition and performance of this piece from various angles. By reviewing the audience's reception of the above-mentioned piece, I present how some Western composers, in exploring Korea, reevaluate non-Western cultures with a reflective consciousness, acknowledging and respecting the values and heritage inherent in this culture. This study posits that among Western composers, Meijering has been influenced by the idiomatic sound of traditional Korean music, and his detailed work may find a new direction, that is, toward the reflexive globalization of the cross-cultural environment.

Meijering's Encounter with Korean History

Cord Meijering studied composition and guitar at the Akademie für Tonkunst in Darmstadt and learned composition in the Master Class of Hans Werner Henze (1983–1986) in Cologne. Following this, he completed his compositional studies as a master's student at the East Berlin Academy of Arts with Hans

¹⁵ Heekyung Lee, "Tradition, Nationalism, and Locality: A Study on Identity Discourses in Korean Contemporary Music," *Journal of Society for Music and Korea* 59 (2020): 8–26.

¹⁶ Heekyung Lee, "Tradition, Nationalism, and Locality," 8–26.

¹⁷ Christian Utz, "Musical Composition in the Context of Globalization," 249.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Jürgen Wenzel (1990–1992). He demonstrated a high level of activity in composing music, to the extent that his pieces were performed across Europe, the United States, and Korea.

Owing to his many Korean students who studied in Germany, Meijering had the opportunity to learn about the characteristics of Korean musical culture and its general impact on mainstream Korean culture. During his tenure as dean of Akademie für Tonkunst in Darmstadt, which began in 2005, he further advanced his knowledge of Korean musical culture through his friendships with ethnomusicologist Jocelyn Clark and Korean composer Geonyong Lee. He visited Korea several times for masterclasses, performances, and seminars, and cordially increased his interest in Korean socio-political issues.¹⁹

Meijering's interest in Korean sociocultural issues extended to the history of Korea's Independence Movement, which he learned from percussionist Eunbi Jeong. During the period spanning 1910 to 1945, Korea was under Japanese colonial rule. On March 1, 1919, thirty-three national representatives proclaimed the Declaration of Independence and promoted the Independence Movement. This day became known as the "March First Movement." Koreans protested Japanese rule, declared the nullity of the Korea–Japan Annexation Treaty, and launched a nonviolent movement aimed at achieving national independence.

Meijering's efforts were focused on two aspects of his quest to comprehend the intricate and unfamiliar history of Korea. Firstly, he aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of Korea's history by engaging in constant communication with the Korean performer. Secondly, he actively searched for historical documents related to the March First Movement and independently interpreted their contents. Initially, Meijering continued his study of Korea's history through ongoing correspondence with percussionist Jeong, the aim being to understand the meaning of Korea's Declaration of Independence and Korean history. As the composer worked on constructing the composition, he attentively listened to the ideas expressed by the Korean performer, who had a closer connection to the relevant cultural background. In meticulous detail, the performer explained the origins and progression of the March First Movement in Korea and shared the thoughts, spirits, and emotions of Korean independence activists with the composer. Meijering and Jeong maintained communication for about a year, which helped Meijering deepen his understanding of Korean history. Through this experience, he expanded his comprehension of Korean history and gained insight into the overall historical context of the Korean March First Movement during the Japanese colonial period. Furthermore, Meijering was driven by a strong motivation to utilize music as a medium for conveying a message of remembrance for the victims who were intertwined with the history of the Korean independence movement.²⁰

¹⁹ With special exchanges with Korea, he was particularly interested in Korean socio-political issues such as the Sewol Ferry disaster, Korean comfort women, and the division of Korea into north and south, and he used to compose these ideas into music. For more information, please refer to the following homepage. <https://www.meijering.de/>.

²⁰ Interview with Meijering, September 24, 2023.



Figure 1: Meijering's Collaboration with Percussionist Eunbi Jeong

It is important to note that Meijering approached Korean history in connection with Greek mythology from distant times and cultures to supplement his understanding of Korean history. In particular, he intricately linked points akin to the Greek myth of Marsyas, including politics and tragic elements, to gain a profound understanding of the history of the March First Movement in Korea. In Greek mythology, Marsyas was known for making the most beautiful music and challenging Apollo—the god of music. This story tells us of Marsyas's pride in playing great music, as well as how he became arrogant, and the tremendous cruelty and unimaginable suffering he endured as a result of challenging Apollo. Indeed, Marsyas was defeated after competing with Apollo, and as punishment Apollo ordered that his skin be peeled off, used to cover a hollow tree, and made into the world's first drum. The Greek myth of Marsyas constructs an extensive musical narrative in connection with the history of the Korean Independence Movement, and in doing so it conveys a message of a memorial to victims.²¹

Meijering's Marsyas presents a transcultural musical connection through conceptual ideas, although his analogical link between history and myth may raise doubts regarding his comprehensive understanding of Korean history. These concepts require careful cultural crossover work which acknowledges temporal and spatial limits. According to the composer's program note, quoted below, his work links the confrontation between Apollo and Marsyas with the conflict between Japan and Korea, and within the piece Apollo's flaying of Marsyas is associated with Japanese oppression and cruelty toward Korea.

Both Korea and Japan have an abundant and great culture and art. Their cultures are based on millennia-old Chinese culture. In this sense, Korea and Japan are siblings. The Korean

²¹ The background of the creation of *Marsyas* is very accidental. He was commissioned to compose a piece for the closing ceremony at one of the historic German contemporary music festivals in Darmstadt. He conceived of writing a solo percussion, so he contacted the Korean performer Eunbi Jeong. However, the performance date was set for March 1, 2019. She politely said no, because the day is the 100th anniversary of March 1 in Korea, so she was anxious if there was a performance related to the Republic of Korea. Nevertheless, the composer expressed his large interest and said, "Then I will compose music related to Korea with the subject of 'the March First Movement.'" He willingly researched the Declaration of Independence and Korean history, and his symphony *Marsyas* was decided to put on the stage in Darmstadt, Germany, to commemorate Korean ethnic heritage and historical events.

Proclamation of Independence of March 1, 1919 is filled with awe for independence. However, Japan behaves toward Korea as Apollo did toward Marsyas. Instead of respecting and working with the beauty of the other culture, the Japanese murdered innumerable Korean protesters in response to the proclamation.²²

According to this note, the composer views the intersection of Greek mythology and Korean history, which are distant in time and space, as a political situation characterized by domination and conflict. He interprets Apollo's oppression of Marsyas as being comparable to Japan's oppression of Korea. In other words, when combining Western and Korean cultures, he obscures the differences in time and space and begins to approach the individual history of Korea. This can be interpreted as an endeavor in cultural translation, bridging a familiar culture with an unfamiliar one, as pointed out by cultural theorist Peter Burke.²³ The relatively familiar and universal story from Greek mythology is connected to the unfamiliar and lesser-known history of Korea's Independence Movement.

However, the process of translation which connects the composer's cultural time and space raises several questions. To begin with, his cultural links bring up questions regarding whether the god-human is smoothly replaced by the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, Japan and Korea, despite the fact that the process of this translation bears similarities to the keyword "pain." Moreover, Marsyas was defeated due to arrogance and competing against a god, but Korea was sacrificed for the legitimate demand for independence through an official declaration to the international community. This correlation may be misleading in terms of the cause of Korea's suffering and victimization. Additionally, the relationship between Apollo and Marsyas—reason vs. sensibility, Platonic vs. Dionysian, balance vs. moderation, classical beauty vs. freedom, euphoria vs. romantic beauty—extends this profound and symbolic meaning. Placing the aforementioned relationship between Japan and Korea on the same line raises doubts about Meijering's work. The composer's program note also notes that "Korea and Japan were virtually brothers" and "(they) were based in the Chinese culture area," thus implying that Meijering understood Korean culture in broad categories such as East Asian and Chinese cultures. This description raises doubts about his understanding of the individual and local cultural attributes of Korea itself. Some might question what Meijering understood by connecting the culture of "Korea" itself with Chinese or Japanese culture. In this respect, cultural jetlag occurs in the process of cultural translation, which gives rise to questions regarding whether the composer has a closer understanding of the history of Korea.

Secondly, Meijering dedicated himself to a thorough exploration of Korean history over an extended period, taking great care to avoid any potential misunderstandings. As part of his ethnomusicological research, the composer independently delved into relevant historical documents. During this process, he examined the Declaration of Independence, containing both old Chinese characters (*hanja*) and the old Korean alphabet (*hangeul*), and meticulously interpreted the entire text on his own. This suggests that he went beyond simply acquiring information and put effort into deeply understanding Korean history through in-depth explorations, which involves directly searching for data. While conversations with Jeong enhanced

²² These program notes were originally written in German. The translation into English was made by the author. Here is the composer's note for the original text. Sowohl Korea als auch Japan haben eine reiche, wunderbare Kultur, eine großartige Kunst. Die Kultur beider Länder basiert auf der Jahrtausende-alten chinesischen Kultur. In diesem Sinne sind Korea und Japan eigentlich Geschwister. Die koreanische Unabhängigkeits-Proklamation des 1. März 1919 ist voller Schönheit im Gedanken, in der Sprache und in der Freundlichkeit. Jedoch, Japan verhält sich gegenüber Korea so wie Apollo es Marsyas gegenüber tat. Anstatt Respekt vor der Schönheit der anderen Kultur zu haben und mit ihr zusammen zu arbeiten, ermorden die Japaner als Antwort auf die Proklamation unzählbar viele der koreanischen Demonstranten.

²³ Peter Burke, *Cultural Hybridity*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 90.

Meijering's comprehensive understanding of history, analyzing the original text himself also contributed to his ability to develop detailed insight. Although an English translation of this document already existed, deciphering the original text was his overriding priority.²⁴ In other words, his objective was to scrutinize the circumstances and thoughts of individuals in modern Korean history by personally seeking the original text of the Declaration of Independence and translating it. It was indeed a challenging task to understand meaning by reading *hanja* and *hangeul* without reading English or German translations or simply summarizing information. The following is the original text of the Declaration of Independence.²⁵



Figure 2: Original Text of the Declaration of Independence

This text, which contains more than 1,200 Chinese and old Korean characters, conveys beliefs based on justice and guidance in the spirit of national self-determination and independence.²⁶

The significance of Meijering's approach to history is that, while he is a foreigner, he still managed to complete the reading by deciphering Korean texts and committed to studying the history of Korea. Over the course of several weeks, he tried to develop a thorough understanding of the nuances and meanings of the original text while referencing a dictionary of Chinese characters to decode the words, while he also looked for each letter one by one.²⁷ Through this process, he became fascinated by what he described as a mature consciousness and attitude toward independent activities throughout the declaration text.

Specifically, Meijering's understanding of the relationship between Korea and Japan in the Declaration of Independence was also revised. One of the lines in the declaration mentioned that "we simply wish to set

²⁴ Interview with Meijering, August 29, 2020.

²⁵ The collaboration between the performer and the composer took place for a year. Although the two had different backgrounds musically, they had shared common musical directions in terms of aesthetics. Although Korea and Germany/Netherlands had very different cultural backgrounds, the composer's youthful experience as a pop band music player gave him a sense of freedom to communicate with Korean musicians with the characteristics of folk music. In particular, he said that he and Jeong had a common view of music called "expression of universal energy" through the physical tapping of musical instruments. (Interview with Meijering, via Zoom online, August 29, 2020.)

²⁶ Korean History Dictionary Compilation Society, "The Declaration of Independence [獨立宣言書]," *Korean Modern and Contemporary History Dictionary*, 2005.

²⁷ Interview with Meijering, September 24, 2023.

right this unjustified reality, in which we were sacrificed for the ambition of Japanese politicians for their outdated ideas and outdated forces, and to restore it to a natural and rational state.”²⁸ After translating the Declaration of Independence, Meijering came to recognize that Koreans were ruthlessly deprived of their freedom and subjected to prosecution under Japanese imperialism. He also realized that, while Koreans were suffering greatly under Japanese colonial rule, they did not respond with hostility toward the Japanese government. He also discovered that the writing of the Declaration of Independence was not emotional in content, but instead a rational statement; its authors justified Korean independence by asserting that it is a legitimate right for every nation to experience freedom and equality in accordance with the principle of democracy. Indeed, during an interview, Meijering expressed admiration for the determination and pride inherent in the non-violent movement striving to attain Korea’s freedom, justice, and peace as outlined in the Declaration of Independence.²⁹ This was a turning point, in that he progressed from a fragmentary understanding of Korean and Japanese relations to a deeper realization.

However, since Meijering focused on interpreting the details of this declaration, he may have had a simplistic and naïve understanding of the broad history of international relations regarding the progression of the Korean Independence Movement and U.S. President Woodrow Wilson’s self-determination for the nation.³⁰ In the interview, Meijering stated that he spent most of his time interpreting the declaration and made little mention of international relations related to the Independence Movement.³¹ Nevertheless, the task of finding a dictionary and translating each word is extremely challenging and requires great tenacity and passion. This attitude reveals the composer’s sincerity when it comes to understanding the history of Korea in depth—a sincerity which was further exemplified when he translated the content of the original text of the Declaration of Independence and empathized with its deep spirit.

The Musical Structure of *Marsyas*

Inspired by the patriotism displayed during the history of the Korean Independence Movement, Meijering composed a symphony for solo percussion called *Marsyas* in collaboration with Korean percussionist Eunbi Jeong. This piece incorporates over 40 different types of percussion from both Eastern and Western traditions. *Marsyas* follows a classical symphonic form with four movements, each depicting extra-musical content. Meijering establishes a subtle connection between the historical event of March 1, 1919, in Korea and ancient Greek mythology. The first and second movements highlight materials of Greek mythology, focusing on the artistry of *Marsyas*’s music (The Art) and his confrontation with Apollo (The Challenge). The third movement (The Flaying), inspired by the scene where *Marsyas* is defeated and his skin is turned into a drum, intertwines with Korean history, specifically the Declaration of Independence. The fourth movement (Catharsis) explores the longing for purification from pain and cruelty. To convey these themes, Meijering employed various musical gestures, bicultural instrumentation, and extra-musical text and voice. Through the four movements, the piece transitions from the realm of Greek mythology to

²⁸ Korean History Dictionary Compilation Society, “The Declaration of Independence [獨立宣言書].”

²⁹ Interview with Meijering, August 29, 2020; September 24, 2023.

³⁰ The March First Movement arose in reaction to the repressive nature of colonial occupation under the Japanese Empire and was inspired by the right of national “self-determination,” which was proclaimed by President Woodrow Wilson at the Paris Peace Conference in January 1918.

³¹ Interview with Meijering, August 29, 2020; September 24, 2023.

the history of Korea’s independence movement, becoming a profound narrative that honors the memory of its victims.

Meijering composed an intercultural combination including traditional, nuanced Korean sounds containing myth-history narratives in the classical form of a four-movement symphony. When designing the structure and format of the music, he referred to the grand atmosphere of the giant symphonies produced by the late nineteenth-century Western composers regarding instrumentation. Simultaneously, he incorporated elements of Korean percussion and vocal texts, and each movement reveals this aspect in a different manner.³²

Mov.	Title	Time	Characteristic
1	The Art	~00:25:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Drums’ polyphonic playing - Mysterious/ meditative atmosphere
2	The Challenge	00:25:00~00:40:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Various performance techniques with only the bass drum: scraping, tearing, hitting, rubbing - Reflecting inner consciousness, monologue sounds
3	The Flaying— To the memory of the victims of March 1, 1919	00:40:00~01:00:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recitation of the Declaration of Independence - Performing <i>gutgeori jangdan</i> as a shamanistic instrument - Evoking a peaceful atmosphere while describing sounds of nature - Beats of a <i>jukbi</i> (bamboo clapper, a Buddhist instrument) and calling each member of the 33 national representatives
4	Catharsis	01:00:00~01:30:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meditative and static atmosphere - Performing <i>jinyangjo jangdan</i> related to <i>han</i> (恨) in traditional Korean music - Conjuring of the sound of “purification” with the ocean drum - Encounter with the Statue of Peace

Table 1: The Structure of Meijering’s *Marsyas*

Each movement within *Marsyas* has a musical element which stands out among the techniques and styles of Western artistic traditions and traditional Korean music. The first and second movements mainly consist of European musical traditions (artistic elements and techniques with percussion), whereas the third and fourth movements contain Korean musical elements and the Korean text of the Declaration of Independence as lyrics. Table 1 lists the myth-history narratives and intercultural elements of each movement.

The first movement, “The Art,” unfolds with the mysterious sounds of a combination of Eastern and Western percussion instruments, creating a polyphonic texture that adds to the overall beauty of the piece. The Western instruments used include two timpani tuned to D and E, while the Asian instruments which feature in the piece include seven Thai gongs, nine cymbals, and eight tom-toms consisting of four pitches (B, C, C#, and D). Eastern instruments are renowned for their ability to produce microtones, which are

³² I analyzed by referring to the following video: <https://www.youtube.com/live/IdmZOvp6OhI>. The time for each movement was also entered according to this video.

itches that fall outside the Western equal temperament system. These microtones contribute to the creation of unique and heterogeneous tones and such sounds are particularly aurally compelling. The melodic lines of the Western and Eastern instruments form a horizontal resonance, consisting of a major second, a minor second, and a minor third when calculated using the temperament system. Moreover, these instruments' intertwining of asynchronous and simultaneous sounds creates a mysterious aural effect. This expression implies Marsyas's outstanding musical talents and the beautiful sound he was able to produce with various instruments.

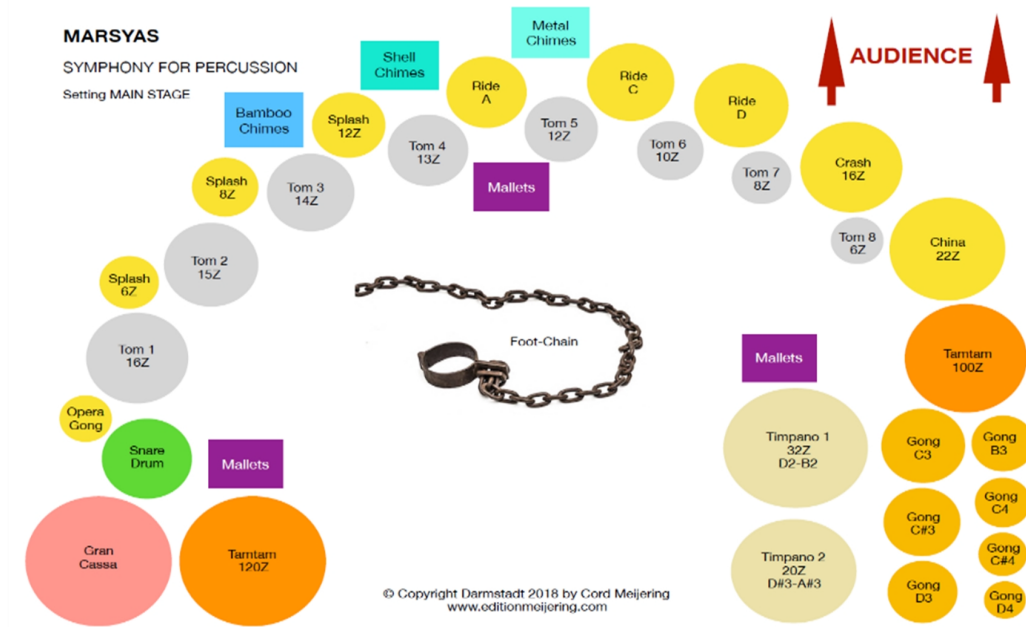


Figure 3: Percussion Placement for *Marsyas* (diagram provided by Meijering)



Figure 4: The First movement (mm. 1–12) of Meijering's *Marsyas*³³

³³ The percussion instruments used in the first movement are yellow and gray in a half-moon shape in the middle of the picture above.

In addition to the above, the first movement evokes a mystic atmosphere with a combination of pitches of Eastern and Western instruments, creating a vertical resonance that adds to the overall atmospheric quality. When these percussion instruments are played simultaneously, specific intervals occur (such as BD, BC#, CD, BC, etc.), thus creating a polyphonic sound (with three voices) with acoustic beats, including contrary and oblique motion. The aforementioned polyphonic sonic layer, characterized by soft dynamics (*pianissimo*), creates a meditative mood while maintaining the bass as the central note (D). The mood is further strengthened as the various rhythmic senses with syncopated notes intersect and oppose each other, based on the subtle harmonies of Eastern and Western percussion instruments. Rhythmic intersection and syncopation are intertwined with the above-mentioned polyphonic layer. Although the functional harmonic textures of Western music are applied, this polyphonic resonance is mixed with the context of Eastern percussion instruments so that the audience can hear the beauty of cultural, hybrid music.

The second movement portrays the scene where Marsyas and Apollo have a musical competition, that is, “The Challenge,” and it expresses various playing techniques and gestures with a faster tempo. Unlike the first movement, which encompasses a diverse range of intercultural percussive playing, this movement focuses solely on the sound of the bass drum and the musician. While the score may not explicitly indicate “Korea” in detail, the Korean performer’s distinctive passion, dedication, groove, and virtuosic gesture are incorporated to enhance the multifaceted quality of the piece. This is reminiscent of the fierce atmosphere of the musical duel between Marsyas and the god Apollo. With detailed playing instructions, experimental and avant-garde techniques are applied when playing the drum, which results in the creation of various dynamics, articulations, and timbres. For example, the player beats the drum with her fingers, rubs the drum with her palms, scratches it with her fingernails, and so on. The *Marsyas* percussion symbols in his notation program contain not only the various types of mallets or hitting tools required for percussion, but also symbols for the player’s gestures.

MARSYAS PERCUSSION FONT

key	meaning	meaning	key	symbol	meaning	key	symbol	meaning	key	symbol	meaning
a		bell stick	h		mallet marimba	o		normal ride	v		wipe up
b		bell tip	i		mallet medium	p		rim position	w		wipe up down
c		bowed	j		mallet soft	q		wipe circle	x		wipe up straight
d		brush metal	k		mallet superball	r		wipe down	y		wipe up up
e		brush rod	l		mallet timpani	s		wipe down down			
f		drum stick	m		mallet vibraphone	t		wipe down straight			
g		mallet hard	n		muted completely	u		wipe down up			

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Figure 5: *Marsyas* Percussion Symbols by the Composer (image provided by Meijering)

2. 도전

The Challenge - Die Herausforderung

Cord Meijering

The musical score for the second movement of Meijering's *Marsyas* consists of three staves. The top staff is for the Bass Drum right hand and left hand, starting at a tempo of 52. It includes markings for *f.t.*, *rit.*, *a tempo*, *legg.*, *wipe*, and *simile*. The middle staff is for the Bass Drum right hand and left hand, starting at measure 7, with markings for *wipe*, *legg.*, *f.t.*, *wipe*, *wipe*, *f*, *pm.*, *f.t.*, and *p*. The bottom staff is for the Bass Drum right hand and left hand, starting at measure 13, with markings for *kn.*, *f*, *mf*, *pp*, *mf*, and *pp*. The score uses various rhythmic notations, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and includes performance instructions such as 'wipe' and 'kn.' (knocking).

Figure 6: The Second movement (*mm.* 1–16) of Meijering’s *Marsyas*

In Figure 5, the instructions from “a” to “m” (keys of the font) are for the bell/brush/stick/mallet type while playing the percussion instruments, and “n” to “y” are instructions for the player’s gestures (circling, rubbing, hitting, wiping from top to bottom or bottom to top, etc.). Overall, according to these symbols, this movement requires greater use of the player’s hands and gestures than the tools used to play percussion instruments. The audience might hear the numerous different tones of the drum, produced by various hitting tools and physical gestures, which demonstrates the possibility of symphonic polyphony. This expresses the diversification of playing methods and meters with only limited instruments. The lines in the drum create a parallax of different meters, such as 2/4, 5/8, and 3/8. This formulates multiple metric layers by aligning diverse non-pitched notes that interlock vertically and horizontally. In terms of note length, the first movement consists of eighth notes, quarter notes, and sixteenth notes, whereas the second movement consists of short notes of eighth and sixteenth notes; indeed, this increases the sense of speed. Moreover, a sense of beat is formed by the use of strong dynamics, frequent accents, and various articulations including tremolo and staccato. This rhythmic foundation is influenced by Korean performer’s physical motion, contributing to the formation of a pronounced sense of beat. As this passage becomes faster and harsher, it implies that the competition between Marsyas and Apollo is sharply contrasted and challenging.

The third movement, the pivotal movement of the symphony, references the history of the Korean Independence Movement and plays a role in bridging the gap between Korea and Greek mythology. This movement, “The Flying—To the memory of the victims of March 1, 1919,” naturally transitions from the scene where Marsyas is flayed after losing the competition with Apollo to the scene of the Korean Independence Movement. In this movement, the percussive flow is accompanied by the sole inclusion of Korean historical text lyrics and the performer’s vocals. The lyrics of the Korean historical text consist of a recitation of the entire text of the Declaration of Independence, three chapters of pledges, and a list of thirty-three national representatives. This highlights the composer’s intention to faithfully reflect the entirety of the Declaration of Independence. The Korean text is delivered by the Korean performer, Jeong, who adds a dramatic effect by portraying an independence activist through her costumes, gaze, and gestures. Her braided hair, white jacket, black skirt, facial expressions, and gestures evoke the memory of Gwansun Ryu—a martyr and prominent independence heroine who played a crucial role in leading the March First

Movement during the Japanese colonial period. Through her outfit, actions, and overall aura, the performer gradually reinforces the context of Korean history, aiming to achieve theatricality.

In this composition, traditional Korean percussion instruments are employed alongside a rhythmical ambiance that complements them, showcasing the intercultural aspects within the symphonic structure. As the third movement unfolds, the atmosphere undergoes a transformation into a shamanistic setting, characterized by the vibrant and captivating sounds of the *kkwaenggwari* (small metal gong) and *jing* (metal gong). Gradually, the introduction of Korean historical text is accompanied by the performer's vocalization of "ohhhh" with a sustained pitch of C#4 and the recitation of the first verse of the Declaration: "We hereby declare that Korea is an independent state and that Koreans are a self-governing people (오등(吾等)은 자(玆)에 아(我) 조선의 독립국임과 조선인의 자주민임을 선언하노라)." This recitation takes on the quality of a Korean shaman song (*muga*) as the performer simultaneously shakes the shaman's instruments, including a wood bell and metal bell, with both hands. The performer's recitation and playing of instruments bear resemblance to the rites (*gut*, 賽) conducted by a shaman, encompassing ritualistic practices aimed at establishing a connection with a transcendent deity. As the piece progresses, the Korean character becomes more pronounced, highlighting composer Meijering's deliberate efforts to engage with shamanistic elements. This approach distinguishes Meijering from other composers who may depict Korea as a remote and exotic Asian culture, relying on Orientalist clichés or pentatonic scales. Meijering's method reflects progress by adopting an inter-Korean perspective rather than a simplistic East-West dichotomy, highlighting the unique and idiomatic cultural characteristics of Korea in contrast to other East Asian cultures.



Figure 7: Playing Shamanist Instruments in the Third Movement of *Marsyas*
(photos provided by Meijering)

According to the composer himself, this movement puts the performer in the role of a shaman, communicating with the divine world and actively revealing traditional elements through Korean vocal and instrumental music.³⁴ With his direction, the atmosphere of this movement seems to have exerted influence on the expansion of traditional Korean texts and sounds into a ritual form.

In fact, the Declaration of Independence lacks any religious content and is devoid of influences, including shamanism or superstition. The composer's attempt to link shamanism with the Declaration of Independence leads to a subtle cultural time difference. This is because Korean independence activists and shamans have different existences, and the performer's attire, as well as the content of the text, closely

³⁴ Interview with Meijering, August 29, 2020.

resemble those of an independence activist, rather than a shaman. At this point, it is necessary to undertake a careful diagnosis of the composer's consciousness toward Korean shamans and the intercultural linkage between their own culture and music.

Meijering's music adds a shaman's belief and the possibility of communicating with the spiritual world based on the desire for independence in the real world, which plays a role in enhancing the practicability of the Declaration of Independence. Shamans, as intermediaries between humans and gods, hold a special role in summoning and communicating with the divine while tending to the needs of human souls. Such a strong desire for independence, to the extent of praying to a supernatural god, is also reflected in the text of the proclamation: "This (independence) is the will of Heaven (天) and the spirit of our time, and it springs from the rights all humans deserve."³⁵ In other words, the setting in which the shaman proclaims the Declaration of Independence unveils an atmosphere in which Korea desperately desires independence to the extent that it asks the gods.

During the reading of the Declaration of Independence, one of the traditional Korean rhythmic patterns, *gutgeori*, is actively expressed in a Korean musical context with a vivid movement and strong spirit. As the performer delivers her recitations, she quickly and loudly beats the Korean rhythm on percussion instruments including the *kkwaenggwari* and *jing*. In Korean traditional music, these instruments were crafted not just for pleasant sounds but also to connect with the gods controlling the weather and for communication.³⁶ Each instrument holds a unique meaning based on its sound; The *kkwaenggwari* symbolizes thunder and lightning, while the *jing* represents the wind.³⁷ These instruments, alongside *buk* (drum) and *janggu* (hour-glass drum), hold significant roles in shamanic practices, and when communicating with celestial deities.³⁸ The juxtaposition of rapidly intersecting strong and weak beats in the rhythmic grooves creates a striking contrast. This heightens the tension and draws attention to the Korean victims' desire for independence, and as a result, the composer presents the traditional sound within an intercultural perspective of music, incorporating it into the musical composition based on the staff system.

In the latter part of the third movement, Meijering skillfully captures the spirit of the Declaration of Independence in symphonic form from an intercultural view, placing a particular emphasis on the political role of music. As the performer recites the key phrase, "Long live Korean independence! (대한독립만세)," a resolute and determined voice fills the concert hall. Like the martyr Ryu, who sacrificed herself for the independence of the nation, the performer Jeong announces independence with a determined voice and percussion playing, and the core message of *Marsyas* is delivered. After reciting the Declaration of Independence, the performer revisits the *gutgeori* rhythm pattern and sings the first verse of the Declaration. The climax is reached as she forcefully shouts out the last verse, "*seon-eon ha no ra*" (I declare), with a powerful fortissimo sound, leaving a profound impact. This climactic scene resonates even with international audiences who may not understand the Korean language, fostering empathy for Jeong's intriguing voice and performance abilities. The music also contains a nationalistic feature, and the longing for Korea's prosperity and independence, free from foreign pressure, is strongly embodied. Jeong immediately strikes the thunder sheet behind her at high speed, rings a traditional percussion instrument (the *kkwaenggwari*—a metal plate with an extremely high pitch and sharp timbre) and a *gong*, and plays

³⁵ Korean History Dictionary Compilation Society, "The Declaration of Independence [獨立宣言書]," 2005.

³⁶ Young-kwon Kwak, *Samul nori iyagi*, Uri munhwa kurimchaek:1, 2001, preface.

³⁷ Kwak, *Samul nori iyagi*, preface.

³⁸ Kwak, *Samul nori iyagi*, preface.

other percussion instruments with high intensity; all of this gives a strong impression. This scene is presented very realistically, as if a Japanese soldier were aiming a gun at a Korean who is desperately resisting the Japanese with persistence and longing for independence. The spirit of the Declaration of Independence is realistically directed through music, resonating with people worldwide across time and space.³⁹

The fourth movement has a calm and static atmosphere, with the subtitle “Catharsis” used to comfort the Korean victims of Japanese domination. In this section, traditional Korean music is delicately interwoven with percussion instruments, specifically utilizing the soothing and slow rhythm of *jinyangjo*. Expressed in the meter of 12/8 or 6/8, this rhythmic cycle resonates with a sense of moderate reconciliation, evoking a desire for healing. In Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the word catharsis is the meaning of healing and purifying complex emotions in the mind by seeing tragedy.⁴⁰ One traditional Korean rhythmic cycle, *jinyangjo*, which is the slowest tempo in *sanjo* or *pansori*, is similar to catharsis, as it purifies intricate thoughts, finds mental and emotional stability, and heals complex minds.⁴¹ Yet, in Meijering’s handling, it is differentiated in the sense of appeasing and comforting souls who have died in an unfair way in the context of Korean shamanic music. This reveals a form that is slightly different from the original meaning of catharsis when compared to the actual musical implementation.

Nevertheless, the composer uses the consoling sounds of *jinyangjo* to emphasize the essential concept of the Korean identity known as *han* (恨). *Han* in Korean, written with a Chinese character, refers to a psychological phenomenon, encompassing intense feelings of deep sorrow and resentment. This choice is related to the composer’s exploration of one of the unique emotions that Koreans have in their culture during the time he spent studying their traditional music. Ethnomusicologist and traditional Korean music performer Jocelyn Clark also argues that Meijering’s use of *jinyangjo* is closely related to expressing the sentiment of *gyemyeonjo* (one of the traditional Korean musical modes).⁴² Clark states that when Meijering studied Korea’s special and deep historical sociocultural background, he realized that Korean *han* encapsulated sentiments of profound sadness and frustration accumulated over an extended period, often described as “deeply fermented sorrow.”⁴³ Meijering’s other pieces also unravel one of the particular emotions Koreans have, and thus it is no surprise that in *Marsyas*, Eastern and Western percussion instruments are used to create a calm and meditative atmosphere that soothes and mitigates the pain of the victims.

³⁹ However, there is a raised issue from the perspective of translation even in the part from the third movement to the fourth movement. Rather than trying to unfold the complex historical problems of the two countries, the composer focuses on solving them promptly and reconciling them. With the introduction of “resolving conflicts” in the fourth movement, the nuances of the Declaration of Independence and the message of the spirit of independence in the third movement have changed slightly. In other words, it is trying to establish a peaceful and moderate context by responding with “purifying” to the unresolved time and conflict that was not resolved in the third movement. This representation is one of the somewhat regrettable parts that have not been fully translated. This is because this political issue must be watched by Korea and Japan even today; the pain and wounds are still indelible and unresolved, which are the remains of conflicts due to the Japanese colonial rule.

⁴⁰ It is based on the definition of Chapter 6 tragedy in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. In Aristotle’s *Poetics*, catharsis means purification and excretion.

⁴¹ *Jinyangjo* is the first *jangdan* that appeared when playing the *sanjo*, creating a very slow and lyrical atmosphere; it also maximizes the emotion of *han* in a long breath. Not only that but it is also connected to the context of the former shaman in that it is widely used in shamanic music such as *ssangim-gut* and *namdo* folk songs and *sinawi* music. Bang-song Song, *The Hankyoreh Grand Dictionary of Music* (Seoul: Bogosa, 2012). However, Meijering’s connection between *jinyangjo* and catharsis in some parts needs to be explored more from the perspective of cultural translation.

⁴² Meijering got this idea from Jocelyn Clark. (Clark, “Duende and Han,” in *Lara Contemporary Korean Style Music Magazine* no. 16, January 22, 2015, <http://hellolara.com/?p=56054>.)

⁴³ Clark, “Duende and Han,” 2015.

In general, this movement appears very quiet and static, taking a semi-improvisational form without melodies, although it is not based on the “Imaginary of the Orient” that can often arise when Western composers represent the distant East in music. This movement makes use of instruments that the composer obtained while visiting Korea and is noteworthy because the original sounds and playing methods were realized through consultation with the local Koreans. (With the largest number of percussion instruments used among all movements, the fourth movement includes several domestic instruments.) For example, the composer visited Korea to find a percussion instrument resembling the sound of the Korean *daegeum* (Korean traverse bamboo flute), and he explored a bamboo percussion instrument with similar properties, integrating it into his work. This use can be seen as a simple alignment of idiomatic timbres on stage, but considering Meijering’s intention and considerate exploration of Korean sounds, his Korean colleagues verified his approach as sounding sincere. He was also inspired by the sound of a broom sweeping a *hanok* (a traditional Korean house) and incorporated it without alteration. Additionally, Meijering faithfully applied the sound produced when he used the *moktak* (木鐸, a wooden percussion instrument used for chanting by Buddhist monks). Moreover, observing the movement of chimes in actual Korean temples (where they hang outdoors at the end of a curved roof, producing sound through the wind) helped him create a work that embodies the sentiment of being in a Buddhist temple (see Figure 8). These instruments manifest the mood of nature by recreating the atmosphere and background in detail, using a specific Korean musical instrument. His process and use of Korean elements are significant in that they are not based on the composer’s vague imagination but on his personal experiences in Korea.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ However, it is necessary to examine the translation of the Asian context from the perspective of shamanism or Buddhism when converting catharsis into music in the fourth movement. The translation of catharsis into shamanism or Buddhism is somewhat different from its original meaning in the West. The Western concept of catharsis means resolving the negative thoughts and emotions accumulated in the mind by seeing the tragedy. However, the Buddhist perspective of it is key to gaining “realization” by emptying the anguish in the mind through the performance of silence and meditation. In addition, shamanism believes in the existence of spirits in nature, so it encompasses a different point from Western catharsis in the sense of washing away the humans’ bad energy in a state of “ecstasy” through dynamic interactions with the gods.



Figure 8: Percussion instruments used in the fourth movement, *moktak*, and a temple bell (photos provided by the composer)

In the fourth movement, “The Catharsis,” Meijering draws a more concrete and realistic message that relates to current Korean society rather than simply ending with a musical “solution, purification.” It is important to note that the Statue of Peace occupies a central position on the stage, serving as a powerful symbol representing sorrow, *han*, and suffering endured by the “comfort women.” These were Korean women who were forcibly taken by the Japanese military during the colonial period (1932–1945) for sexual slavery. The statue is situated at the front of the stage throughout the work, but in the fourth movement, it is repositioned to the center and illuminated. The performer, who plays a percussion instrument at the front of the stage, stares at the Statue of Peace while circling it (see Figure 9). Her sight is concentrated on the statue girl, and during the second half of the performance, she carefully sits in an empty chair next to the statue and holds its hand. Finally, she fixes her gaze straight ahead for a few seconds with determined eyes as if having made a decision, and then the lights dim, bringing the symphony to an end. This performance suggests that the issue of “comfort women” remains an ongoing and complex international concern, substantial enough to be directly portrayed in the artworks of European composers. The tensions within East Asia stemming from this matter are complicated, serving as a reminder of the essential requirement for support and cooperation from the international community. This setting does not stop at simply embodying artistic catharsis, as it causes the audience to contemplate contemporary social and political issues in Korea, along with the conflicts and responses between neighboring countries.



Figure 9: Stage Layout in *Marsyas*: Percussionist Jeong and Instruments, and the Statue of Peace in Front of the Stage⁴⁵

The Statue of Peace on the stage, symbolizing the controversial issue of comfort women, reflects the desire for the national spirit of the March First Movement to be passed down through generations.⁴⁶ Thus, *Marsyas*, as a piece of work, expands to the social realm by illuminating the history of Korea and conveying the unresolved political issues of Korean society to this day. Some would raise the question of whether displaying the Statue of Peace unfolds the feminized Orient, representing the victims of the Japanese colonial era. However, in this work, the performer remains prominently positioned on the stage, projecting a resolute and courageous demeanor akin to a female hero, which further emphasizes the spirit of the March First Movement. Meijering states that “artists’ social participation through music is necessary, and composers should fight for human rights. *Marsyas* is a condemnation of colonialism and sexual slavery.”⁴⁷ It reveals the artist’s purpose in composing this work, recalling the historical realities of the Japanese military sexual slavery issue, and asserting solidarity with Korea through criticism and resistance against it. When this piece premiered in Germany, fundraising activities took place to establish the Statue of Peace with the aim of addressing the ongoing wartime sexual violence that persists globally.⁴⁸ This demonstrates his unusual historical awareness of other nations and his commitment to social engagement as a foreign composer.

⁴⁵ Photo source: YouTube video screenshot.

⁴⁶ The statue is of a girl, who is sitting barefoot with her short, irregularly cut hair, holding her hand tightly on the chair and raising her heels slightly. On the left shoulder of the girl is a bird sitting, and on the floor where the statue of the girl is located is a shadow of her grandmother’s appearance. There is an empty chair next to her statue. Short-haired hair signifies disconnection from parents and hometown and bare feet with heels raised to signify the wandering of victims who could not settle down after the war. The bird is a medium that connects the victims who have passed away and reality. The empty chair next to the girl’s statue is a seat for all victims who have passed away or have not been revealed to the world. It contains the meaning of joining in the pain of the grandmothers. Encyclopedia of Korean Folk Culture, “The Image of the Statue of Peace [少女像 of 平和],” *Central Research Institute of Korean Studies*, 1992, accessed August 23, 2020, <http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/>.

⁴⁷ GutentagKorea, “In-depth coverage of *Marsyas Percussion Symphony*,” GutentagKorea, January 15, 2020.

⁴⁸ Not only is it unusual to have the Statue of Peace on the stage and performed with a performer, but according to the composer, when performing in Germany, a fundraising concert was also carried out to establish the Statue of Peace. GutentagKorea, “In-depth coverage of *Marsyas*, 2020.

The composer's comments are reminiscent of German philosopher Theodore W. Adorno's understanding of the term "mimesis," due to his focus on sensitive issues of society through contemporary art.⁴⁹ Adorno's understanding of mimesis emphasized art's capacity to reflect, critique, and transform societal realities by going beyond simple imitation and engaging with the complexities and contradictions of the world.⁵⁰ This reveals the terrible truth of the matter and draws on the audience's critical reflection on the social conditions being portrayed and actively practical participation. Mimesis, often translated as "imitation" in ancient Greek philosophy, means not simply a "sensory" representation of an existing phenomenon for Adorno, but a "mental" aspect which resists its painful inner order.⁵¹ Adorno insists that true art is a mimesis of the harsh state of society, and at the same time it should be able to contain even the rejection of a cruel life.⁵² Indeed, such an approach means that the audience actively asks questions about the status quo and is encouraged to participate in art that illuminates the dark reality and harsh and painful truths. The aforementioned uncomfortable truth has realistically come upon us behind the sublime spirit of the March First Movement, exposing the hidden aspects and the truth of an issue, while encouraging audience participation. In this sense, the aesthetic significance of the artwork *Marsyas* transcends mere artistic expression and encompasses socio-political implications.

Audience Reception and Criticism of *Marsyas*

Overall, *Marsyas* presents not only a huge orchestral sound with Eastern and Western percussion, but also conveys, to the audience, a specific social message regarding Korea as a nation. This piece premiered on the 100th anniversary of the March First Movement (March 1, 2019) at the contemporary music festival Zeitströme (Darmstadt, Germany), run by the Akademie für Tonkunst. So far, it has been performed more than four times in Germany (Darmstadt, Winsen, a.d. Luhe, and Berlin) and Korea (Chuncheon). After the premiere, several audience members, even though the local German audience did not understand Korean, were deeply touched by the meaning of the Declaration of Independence and the melodies of commemoration for the victims of the March First Movement.⁵³ According to interviews with the German audience, "it wasn't boring for a second" [Karola Obermüller], "even though the Declaration of Independence was a hundred years old, it still had the same powerful effect. The tension and explosive power have not disappeared at all even now" [Frank Hekel].⁵⁴ This work was applauded not only for its musical significance, but also for informing Europeans of the historical scene in Korea centuries ago.

The work was also praised by the audience at a subsequent performance in Winsen an der Luhe. According to Kim's report, many of the audience members at the performance in Winsen declared that they only learned about the painful history of Korea as a colony of Japan. Others were also learning about the March First Movement for the first time.⁵⁵ The audience was thrilled by the sense of urgency and power in

⁴⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 96. Although the term mimesis is not unique to the philosopher Adorno (other philosophers Eric Auerbach and Walter Benjamin also mentioned it), I assert that what Adorno mentioned is closely related to the core message of this work.

⁵⁰ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 96.

⁵¹ Hee Sook Oh, "6. Adorno and Music," in *Music in Philosophy* (Seoul: Shim Seoldang, 2006), 225.

⁵² Hee Sook Oh, "6. Adorno and Music," 225.

⁵³ Un-kyung Kim, "March 1st Movement Becomes Percussion Symphony in Germany," KTV National Broadcasting, August 2, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXc46vRupvk>.

⁵⁴ Un-kyung Kim, "March 1st Movement Becomes Percussion Symphony in Germany," KTV National Broadcasting, August 2, 2019.

⁵⁵ Un-kyung Kim, "March 1st Movement Becomes Percussion Symphony in Germany," 2019.

the Declaration of Independence, and all of the audience members stated, in unison, that it was “wunderbar” (wonderful) and they were “sprachlos” (speechless). The spirit of independence, which moved the hearts of Koreans over a period of 100 years and revealed to the world their willingness to resist Japanese imperialism, was sublimated into music beyond time and space and resonated in the hearts of Europeans.⁵⁶ Performer Jeong stated, “I was worried that the audience would not understand because of the different languages and cultures, but I was impressed by both the Germans and the Koreans who appreciated it enthusiastically.”⁵⁷ Indeed, the actual performance of *Marsyas* and the audience’s reaction proved that the desperateness and historical sincerity of the March First Movement could be communicated with music.

In Korea, there have been more in-depth evaluations of foreign composers’ work engaging in Korean history and music. Reporter Soonhee Lee wrote that “The performer was drenched with sweat as if performing a sacrifice to appease the souls who lost their lives, and the audience was speechless for a long time as they gave a standing ovation.”⁵⁸ Despite the familiarity of Koreans with the history of Korean Independence Movement, this work provided an opportunity for them to re-examine the spirit and pride of the Declaration of Independence. Although most of the performance was well-received, some critics argued that the performer’s passionate eyes and gestures seemed slightly belligerent, which could promote political propaganda in Korea–Japan relations. This comment implies that more detailed communication between the composer and the performer was needed, particularly concerning dramatic shaping and character realization beyond the stages of composition and performance. Nevertheless, Korean audiences, known for their sensitivity and critical attitude when foreign composers’ superficial use of Korean music and culture, paid attention to and positively responded to Meijering’s work. The foreign composer’s utilization of Korean music and traditions, combined with substantial effort and hard work to intertwine them with Korean history and political reality, evidently left a distinctive impression on local Korean audiences, as conveyed through his artistic endeavors.

Considering both national and international responses, this composition has transcended language and cultural barriers, while also incorporating historical elements into the artistic expression, allowing for a deeper exploration and reflection of the social aspects of modern Korean history through the music. Meijering’s work distinguishes itself from the twenty-first-century compositions of other Western composers who have utilized Korean music by virtue of its unique ability to illuminate the intricate relationship between “politics” and culture within modern Korean society while exploring past Korean history. This is distinct from the focus of orientalist composers who tend to concentrate exclusively on “culture” (e.g., Buddhism and shamanism). Through research on Korean history, Meijering contemplates the ongoing political conflict between Korea and Japan and informs the international society. Notably, he brought up Korea’s modern history and the continuing controversy surrounding the comfort women issue in Korean–Japan relations, and informed the international community. He did not ignore the suffering of comfort women, but rather used music to convey their pain and sorrow to the audience. Despite being a foreigner, Meijering’s attitude and mindset align with that of a Korean patriot and nationalist.

Meijering’s combination of politics and culture in his use of Korean music sets him apart from other past and contemporary composers (Harrison, Hovhaness, Claren, Redmond, Timpson, etc.). Due to the emphasis on the distinctive elements of Korean traditional culture and the examination of its musical theory

⁵⁶ Un-kyung Kim, “March 1st Movement Becomes Percussion Symphony in Germany,” 2019.

⁵⁷ Sehee Kim, “The Declaration of Independence Written by Western Musicians . . . Composed for the Victims of the March 1st Movement,” KBS News, August 11, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Pn_cPOZaH4.

⁵⁸ Soonhee Lee, “The Review of the Performance MARSYAS for Percussion Solo Symphony,” Uri-news, July 11, 2019.

and practical comprehension, allocating sufficient time to explore social and political aspects beyond the realm of music would have been a substantial undertaking. For example, when American composer Harrison ventured into the composition of the first art music for traditional Korean instruments, he delved into *yin-yang* philosophy and other Eastern ideologies, applying them to Korean traditional music. However, he faced criticism from Koreans for “associating it with Chinese and Japanese music in a pluralistic context” rather than exploring the distinct sounds of traditional Korean music.⁵⁹ Hovhanness, inspired by Korean landscape paintings, diligently explored the unique sounds and playing techniques of the Korean *gayageum*. However, due to constraints in time and research materials, he ended up identifying the *gayageum* as a Western instrument, the harp, raising skepticism about the extent to which his work “reproduces a remote Asia.”⁶⁰ In comparison to European-American composers who have made strides in exploring and musically reproducing Korean traditional music since the 2000s,⁶¹ Meijering stands out for his distinct approach to social and political aspects. Notably composers, like Redmond, incorporated non-musical elements such as Korean poetry and literature; Claren, studied *daegeum sanjo* and delicately realized even the microtones of the instrument’s sound; and Timpson, drew inspiration from Korean contemporary society for his compositions, yet the level of social critique was relatively weak.⁶² Meijering, however, distinguishes himself as a composer actively engages with society, addressing political themes, and promoting social participation by highlighting present-day social contradictions and conflicts. His composition serves as a medium for expressing the political voice of modern Korean society, fostering awareness and active engagement.

Conclusion: Toward Reflexive Globalization

The position of Korean music in contemporary Western art music has often been relegated to the periphery, as it has been haunted by stereotypes of minorities and the Other. Many Western composers have exercised power by collecting, borrowing, and appropriating traditional Korean music, including that of other East Asian cultures, in order to find new sounds and broaden their musical horizons. However, Meijering chooses a distinct and demanding route. This decision conveys a cross-section of the musical representation of the cultural Other in the global era by illuminating Meijering’s willingness and action in exploring Korea’s traditional instruments, culture, and historical texts as a Western composer. He collected relevant historical data and conducted thorough research to access unfamiliar historical documents in Korea. Through continuous interaction with the performer, he recontextualized his historical understanding and exploration of intercultural music. As a result, the performance went beyond a mere intellectual understanding of historical texts, with the music encapsulating the spirit and passion inherent in them, evoking a profound emotional response from the audience. Thus, as the degree of his exploration of Korea

⁵⁹ Songtaek Kwon, “Beyond the Boundaries,” 69.

⁶⁰ Heesun Kim, “Music at Crossroads,” 79; and Chou Wen-Chung, “Asian Concepts and Twentieth-Century Western Composers.” *The Musical Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (1971): 220.

⁶¹ Mingyeong Son, “Western Composers’ Encounter with Korean Traditional Music,” Introduction.

⁶² Among composers who have explored Korean culture and music, Claren presented an elaborate exploration of “*Sanjo*,” a traditional Korean instrumental improvisation, with precise transcription of the score. However, the social message behind the search for sound was unclear. Similarly, Redmond explored traditional Korean literature from a modernist perspective to express the modern value of music. However, his work was criticized for being distant from the reality of Korean society. Timpson’s work, which freely connected Korean traditional music with American jazz and bebop melodies, aimed to increase accessibility to the audience, but it blurred the traditional identity of Korea by creating a hybrid cross-over of various musical genres.

intensified, his activities raised questions regarding the dynamics and musical practices of the West and Korea.

However, a critical review of his translation process revealed an unstable grasp of the Korean historical text. This raises questions regarding his schematic narration of Korean independence history, since he compared it with Greek mythology, as well as his shamanistic musical interpretation of the Declaration of Independence. These aspects imply an incomplete aspect of the composer's fundamental investigation and a need for further research on Korean historical texts.

Nonetheless, Meijering's use of Korea as a unique subject is substantially more appropriate than lumping it into a generic East Asian paradigm that merges Korean, Chinese, and Japanese culture. While acknowledging the early explorations of Korean music by composers like Lou Harrison and others in the past, Meijering ponders how historical facts can be closely linked to music so that political and social messages can be conveyed effectively to the audience. He traces the history of Korea in an ethnomusicological way, delving into original primary sources in detail rather than relying on a superficial understanding of the subject or secondary literature or translations. He successfully links the historical text outside of music to the real world of music, internalizing real sounds and exploring the history with Korean traditional sounds that he has studied for a long time.

Another notable aspect of Meijering's work is his collaboration with the Korean percussionist Jeong. He engages in conversations about Korean culture and history with the performer before conceptualizing the piece. Even after writing the piece based on that context, he continuously communicates with the performer to correct any misunderstandings. Meijering's collaborative approach involves listening to and accepting the musician's opinions with an attitude of humility and 'reflection' that respects the other person's culture. His works are different from those used by Korea as an object of curiosity. Meijering explores "Korea" itself and illuminates the history and culture of the country in-depth, which highlights his method's distinctiveness. This aspect is supported by the composer's spirit of challenge and reflective consciousness based on a serious exploration of Korean history.

Meijering's reflection is not just a mere phenomenon of individual music, but also reflects the changing trends of the times and cultural background. His exploration of culture stems from a close consideration of the contemporary music community and the global environment to which he belongs. His performance implies that globalization is moving from the circulation and spread of Western culture, which holds domination and power, to the discovery and investigation of minority cultures that have been silent. Scholar Tobias Janz has noted that empowering indigenous cultures and local traditions in the periphery is a phenomenon of decentralized modernity in the global era, which implies a critical reconsideration of traditional methods imposed by hegemonic powers.⁶³ This music-making places balanced attention to both the sounds and ideas of composers and performers through the creation of music instead of assuming a conventional musical structure in which composers hold strong authority. His covering of Korean historical texts alludes to the West's changing attitudes as interactions between different cultures are advanced in the global era, implying "a reflexive globalization."⁶⁴ This concept further implies a reflection on Westernization associated with a top-down cultural current, containing a reflective attitude on the Eurocentric view and the West's dominant attitude in which Western subjects deal with non-Western and Eastern cultures.⁶⁵ By

⁶³ Tobias Janz, and Chien-Chang Yang, eds. *Decentering Musical Modernity: Perspectives on East Asian and European Music History*. Vol. 33. transcript Verlag, 2019, preface, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839446492>.

⁶⁴ Christian Utz, *Musical Composition in the Context of Globalization*, 33–36.

⁶⁵ Christian Utz, *Musical Composition in the Context of Globalization*, 33–36.

approaching the unique identities of other cultures and listening to their voices, the concept challenges the dichotomous and hierarchical relationship between the East and West that has long been discussed in academia.

Meijering's distinguished sensitivity towards other cultures is evident in his rigorous exploration of Korean music, which he approaches with a keen appreciation of its unique features, rather than resorting to exoticism or Orientalist clichés.⁶⁶ Meijering's longstanding commitment to uncovering and amplifying the voices of cultures that have been marginalized is evident in his work, which stands in sharp contrast to the Western tradition of appropriating and assimilating other musical practices and systems. As musicologist Hee Sook Oh has suggested, the relationship between different cultures is entering a new phase of interculturality, which emphasizes dialogue and mutual understanding between equals, rather than the imposition of one culture upon another.⁶⁷ In this context, the notion of 'hybridity' has gained currency, as cultural exchange and interaction increasingly blur the boundaries between different traditions.⁶⁸

However, Meijering's contribution extends beyond simply creating cross-cultural intersections and transitions from an intercultural or hybrid cultural perspective. He brings a reflective consciousness to his engagement with other cultures, occupying a unique position by adding a 'political' dimension to his compositional work. Meijering's interculturality therefore implies a socio-cultural transformation of art, and combined with his compositional aesthetics' open attitude toward other cultures, it addresses the core issues of decolonialism.⁶⁹ As an outsider to the culture, Meijering emphasizes the significance of Korean local histories and socio-political contexts embedded in musical conventions, which are often closely tied to the lived experiences of indigenous communities. Thus, Meijering's practices open up new possibilities for conveying historical-political messages across global and local boundaries.

Discography

Meijering, Cord. "Marsyas Performance video." Uploaded March 1, 2020. YouTube video, 1:30:42. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdmZOvp6OhI>.

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⁶⁶ Orientalist clichés related to Korea can manifest in oversimplified and stereotypical portrayals of the culture, such as reducing it to traditional symbols like *arirang* (traditional folk song) or pentatonic scales. They may focus solely on the ancient aspects of Korean society, without acknowledging the dynamic and modern dimensions. Additionally, it could also involve exoticizing Korean music by perpetuating the idea that it is solely mystical or mysterious, or using superficial elements of Korean culture for decorative purposes without understanding their deeper significance.

⁶⁷ Hee Sook Oh, "Threnody and the Aesthetics of Interculturality," 212–13.

⁶⁸ Hee Sook Oh, "Threnody and the Aesthetics of Interculturality," 213.

⁶⁹ Shzr Ee Tan, "Decolonising music and music studies," In *Ethnomusicology Forum* 30, no. 1, 4–8. Routledge, 2021.

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