The Present Situation and Prospects of Performing Arts Business Which Uses “JongmyoJeryeak”

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"JongmyoJeryeak is the most famous traditional music in South Korea. It is a kind of worshipping song for the kings and queens of the Joseon Dynasty. JongmyoJeryeak was registered as South Korea’s first intangible cultural asset, also registered as the first of South Korea’s World Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO. Since 2010, JongmyoJeryeak has been performed not only at an annual ceremony but also at special performances with explanations and dramas at the Jongmyo Shrine. This performance has two concrete aims. First, it is held so that both the public and young people can easily access JongmyoJeryeak, a traditional Korean treasure, which is rarely seen in person. Second, it is designed to inspire pride in traditional culture and promote the beauty of JongmyoJeryeak to tourists who visit Jongmyo Shrine. This performance attracts about 60,000 viewers over the past ten years. It means that the public impact of this performance is enormous. This case is a very pertinent example of the developing performing arts business, especially with respect to the world intangible cultural heritage in South Korea. Also, this performance contains dramatic elements that include explanations for the general public, and is therefore very compatible with the trend toward popularization. So, we will try to analyze the present situation of this performance and seek to better understand how coexisting aspects of this performing business inherit or develop this modernized traditional heritage.

Keywords: JongmyoJeryeak, Gugak, performing arts business, South Korea, intangible cultural heritage

Introduction

Intangible Cultural Heritage is both a traditional culture and a living culture. UNESCO introduced “the oral and intangible heritage masterpiece system” in 1997 to raise the international community’s attention to the importance of the world’s intangible cultural heritage and to maintain cultural diversity. Since designating 90 events in 70 countries over four years starting in 2001. And in 2003, UNESCO adopted the Convention on the Protection of World Intangible Cultural Heritage, as the international community grew more aware of the importance of intangible cultural heritage. The country has registered 508 events of World Intangible Cultural Heritage in 117 countries until 2018.1

Currently, a total of 20 events are listed as UNESCO World Intangible Cultural Heritage in South Korea. As many as 13 of the traditional music related events are considered to be significant in the preservation of

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1 Refer to the UNESCO homepage; http://heritage.unesco.or.kr
traditional Korean culture. Among the 13 events, the most notable is the JongmyoJeryeak: Royal ancestral ritual music in the Jongmyo shrine. The reason is that JongmyoJeryeak is designated as the number one intangible cultural asset of South Korea and the first Korean intangible cultural heritage to be listed as a UNESCO World Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Figure 1. JongmyoJeryeak

Introduction of JongmyoJeryeak

JongmyoJeryeak is a kind of worshipping song for the late kings and queens of the Joseon Dynasty centered around the Jongmyo Shrine located in Seoul. It is held every year on the first Sunday of May and the first Saturday of November.

I think JongmyoJeryeak is the most famous Korean traditional music in the world. However, the actual music of JongmyoJeryeak is less famous than the name. This is because the symbolism and formality of the music makes it difficult to create an emotional response in the listening public. If you ask someone if they can sing JongmyoJeryeak, most of them will answer, “No, I can’t.”


3 https://m.post.naver.com/viewer/postView.nhn?volumeNo=7048374&memberNo=36555640&vType=VERTICAL
Since 2008, I have been trained in various percussion instruments that are organized in National Intangible Cultural Property No.1 Jongmyo Jeryeak as a learner called “jeonsu-ja”. After four years of intensive education, I have been participating in various national events as a master called “isu-ja”, performer of Pyunjong, Pyunkyung and Banghyang. Since 2012, I participated in various events and I began to think more seriously about the preservation and succession of Jongmyo Jeryeak. Furthermore, I came to think about the Jongmyo Jeryeak with an objective viewpoint. In the meantime, attention has been paid to the performance projects that can solve the problems of the Jongmyo Jeryeak, that is, the gap between fame and musical recognition.

In this paper, I would like to examine the present situation of performing arts business which uses the World Intangible Cultural Heritage focused on Jongmyo Jeryeak. Furthermore, I will analyze the present situation and discuss the business prospects of this traditional art form. In order to do so, a simple understanding of Jongmyo Jeryeak is needed.

Jongmyo Jeryeak consists of Botaepyeong which praises the achievements of the former kings and Jeongdaeeop which praises the king’s military achievements. They are well known to be created by King Sejong the Great who is recorded as the greatest king in Joseon Dynasty. The lyrics of Jongmyo Jeryeak called “akjang”, describe the purpose the rite, how former kings of the Joseon Dynasty devoted themselves to the protection and care of Korean people, the king’s contribution to the peace of the nation, and the prayer for the prosperity of descendants in detail.

Today’s Jongmyo Jeryeak involves instruments such as Pyunjong, Pyunkyung, Banghyang, Chook, Eo, Bak, Dang-piri, Daeguem, Haeguem, Ajaeng, Janggu, Jing, Taepyungso, Julgo, Jingo and so on in the musical groups for ‘Deungga’, the upper musical group and ‘Heonga’, the lower musical group. ‘Ilmu’, the ritual dance of Jongmyo Jeryeak is performed by 64 dancers, in 8 lines of 8 people. The props they hold in their hands are called “euimul”. When dancing munmu, dancers hold Yak, a type of instrument in the left hand and Jeok, the

4 “Pyunjong”, “Pyunkyung” and “Banghyang” are idiophones that can play 16 different notes. These instruments play the main melody in Jongmyo Jeryeak.
5 Donghee LEE, Basic Theory of Korean Traditional Music that finishes without a break, Music and Life, (2020), p. 44.
feather of pheasants, in the right hand. But during the *mumu* dance, the first four rows of dancers hold a sword and the last four rows of dancers hold wooden spears while dancing.

*JongmyoJeryeak*, which is a little slow and rigid, has very complex melismatic melody style. And many tones and ornaments are put to one syllable. Also irregular rhythmic patterns of percussion instruments are one of the features. Various instruments play a similar melody at the same time with heterophony, which is based on the sound percussion instruments such as *Pyunjong*, *Pyunkyung* and *Banghyang*. To the music, dancers hold *yak* and *jeok*, and dance *munmu*.

**Present Situation**

*JongmyoJeryeak* was created in the early Joseon Dynasty and has been continuously performed until now, so legitimacy is highly important. Also, when the music and dance accompanying the rite are performed, it must be performed in a formal manner that adheres to various criteria such as musical groups, number of people, arrangement of musical instruments, sequence and repetition. And 600 years later, it is still held with the memorial service. Of course, in the late Joseon period and the Japanese Colonial Period, rhythm, the order of composition, the length of a musical note, the organization of musical instruments and other elements were known to change. But it has been the most enduring of the existing Korean traditional music. This is why *JongmyoJeryeak* was designated as the National Intangible Cultural Property No.1 in South Korea, and the UNESCO also designated *JongmyoJeryeak* as South Korea’s first intangible cultural heritage. As the original form is preserved and handed down as much as possible, it is necessary for the performing arts business to be carried out in order to close the gap between fame and musical recognition.

A full-scale performance project using *JongmyoJeryeak* started in 2010. It was only ten years ago that *JongmyoJeryeak* was performed for popularization and modernization in conjunction with other parts of music. The *JongmyoJeryeak* performance project in 2010 was started as part of the ‘Listening to Korean Music in the Palace’ hosted by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Korean Traditional Performing Arts Foundation and the National Gugak Center. The festival features various kinds of Korean traditional music at Gyeongbok Palace, Deoksu Palace, Jongmyo Shrine, and Changdeok Palace. The purpose of the project was to become a tourism resource by linking traditional art contents with the royal palace, which is a tangible cultural asset. Among them, "*JongmyoJeryeak* with a commentary" was held at Jongmyo Shrine. The performance introduced musical instruments, dances and songs through an easy and interesting commentary to understand the deeper meanings of our ancestors’ dream of peace for both Korean people and the nation. (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2018)
As a result, the attendance for these performances reached full capacity each time and it was clearly popular among those ‘Listening to Korean Music in the Palace.’ So in 2011, “JongmyoJeryeak with a commentary” was separated from the “Listening to Korean Music in the Palace” project to become a tourism resource for UNESCO’s intangible cultural heritage. The first purpose of the project was to create an image as a tourist attraction for foreigners by reproducing the ritual and traditional music. Second, the development of new contents combines the historical meaning of a place with performing arts. Third, it is the contribution of the citizens to raise their self-esteem and change their positive perceptions toward Jongmyo Shrine. (Korea Traditional Performing Arts Foundation, 2011) The project, which used the weekend of spring and autumn which was a good time to have a picnic, lasted until 2014.

From 2015, “JongmyoJeryeak with a Story” was first performed following its predecessor, “JongmyoJeryeak with a commentary”, as part of a project for the Tourism Resources Business that deals with the world’s intangible cultural heritage. While the existing JongmyoJeryeak performance project was aimed at providing easy and interesting explanations, “JongmyoJeryeak with a story” was designed to help the audience visit various places within Jongmyo to enjoy JongmyoJeryeak along with plays, storytelling, and various traditional music. In other words, the main purpose of the performance is to provide the public with easy access to JongmyoJeryeak. To do so, a new method was established using non-musical elements of the play. The play was conducted by the famous actor Minwoo LEE. And the story of the new Joseon Dynasty that King Sejong the Great dreamed of, the story of the independent Joseon Dynasty, and the background of King Sejong the Great’s attempt to create the JongmyoJeryeak easily attracted audience participation. Also the JongmyoJeryeak appreciation was structured to follow story telling. This performance project includes all the objectives of the existing “JongmyoJeryeak with a commentary”, but it will be used to develop traditional culture contents by actively utilizing various facilities in the Jongmyo Shrine. In addition to enhancing the understanding of the Jongmyo and JongmyoJeryeak with the experience of the audience participating in the performance, it was further emphasized to expand the opportunity for the audience to enjoy the culture.

“JongmyoJeryeak with a commentary” and “JongmyoJeryeak with a story” attracted a total of 60,000 viewers over the past ten years. In other words, it shows that the audience has already appreciated the modernized version of the JongmyoJeryeak. This case is a very pertinent example of the developing performing arts business, especially with respect to the world intangible cultural heritage in South Korea. Also, this performance contains the historical and speciality of a place, explanations for the general public and dramatic elements, so it is therefore very compatible with the trend toward popularization.

Specific results of this performance project are as follows. First, the public has easy access to JongmyoJeryeak, which is difficult to access. Second, it induced a positive change in people’s perception of our cultural heritage, especially JongmyoJeryeak. Third, an elegant traditional culture program was developed and established that embodies the historical and spatial characteristics of the site. Fourth, it induced visitors to revisit the program through a popular performance program that included elements other than music. Lastly, it helped foreigners who visited Jongmyo Shrine to better understand Korean traditional culture and to improve tourist satisfaction.

Also, I would like to introduce some more representative performances based on JongmyoJeryeak. In order to enhance the public’s understanding of JongmyoJeryeak from a decade ago, the Cultural Heritage Administration has placed commentators and announcers on the grounds of the Jongmyo rite. During the ceremony, the entire process is explained in detail to the audience, helping them understand easily. In 2009, the National Gugak Center restored and staged the splendid JongmyoJeryeak of the Joseon Dynasty, which was composed Gayageum, Geomungo, Bifa, Nogo and Nodo, according to the records of the 15th century.8 In

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7 https://blog.naver.com/gingoba2/220897373797
addition, from 2015, the Korea Cultural Heritage Foundation has been holding a night performance of JongmyoJeryeak, where people can enjoy music with the night view of Jongmyo Shrine. The project begins at 8pm near the actual time of the ceremony, and it is meaningful that the event can focus only on the performance itself, without involving the ceremony.

Figure 5. Restored JongmyoJeryeak according to the records of the 15th century⁹.

Figure 6. A night performance of JongmyoJeryeak¹⁰.

¹⁰ https://blog.naver.com/royalculture/220987256028
Another Example

Now, let’s take a look at representative examples of the world’s intangible cultural heritage projects, other than JongmyoJeryeak. First, in addition to the “JongmyoJeryeak with a story”, the Korean Traditional Performing Arts Foundation has organized “Sherlock, Find the Lost Arirang” and “Sherlock, Find the Lost Cheoyong”. These were performed on the lawn of the National Assembly as part of a project for the Tourism Resources Business of the world’s intangible cultural heritage since 2015. This performance, which attracted 35,000 visitors in total for three years, was an excellent intangible heritage-related performance project that brought about popularization and modernization by combining Arirang and Cheoyongmu registered as UNESCO’s intangible cultural heritage with the world famous Sherlock Holmes character. Second, the Cultural Heritage Administration promoted joint projects for the events listed as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage starting in 2012, and selected 6 events such as Pansori, NamsadangNori, Cheoyongmu, Gagok, Arirang and Ganggangsullae for reinterpretation and presented as a performance. Third, since opening in 2014, the National Intangible Heritage Administration has been holding special performances by utilizing 19 events of South Korea designated as UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage and even other country’s intangible heritages. Like this, the world’s intangible cultural heritage project is being tried in various forms in various institutions. However, the active conducting of the performing arts business is mostly based on events in which the prototype itself is fully capable of reinterpretation and reconstruction. So, the context of the performing arts business is different from that of JongmyoJeryeak which has been strong preservation.

Figure 7. Sherlock, Find the Lost Cheoyong

https://blog.naver.com/hohosm/221033087891
Conclusion-Prospects

In conclusion, the various performances related to JongmyoJeryeak, mentioned earlier, all have things in common. And this is different from other world intangible cultural heritage-related performing art business projects. The original features of JongmyoJeryeak were not altered for the purpose of the performance, but were preserved as much as possible or even restored to a more ancient form. Of course, in many cases, some changes were made to the arrangement of musical groups, order of performance, number of performers, and so on to help the public understand, but the preservation of the music itself was maintained. This is a factor we must consider when carrying forward a new performance project using the JongmyoJeryeak.

JongmyoJeryeak still lacks musical recognition when compared to its fame. But, when appearing in public through various forms of performing arts business over the years, it showed great likability and caused a positive change in perception. So, I think that the prospects for the upcoming performing arts business which uses JongmyoJeryeak will be positive. Based on the analysis of the status quo, the performing arts business utilizing JongmyoJeryeak should be developed in the following directions in the future. First, various modernized contents should be developed in order to enhance the public’s musical awareness and positive recognition of JongmyoJeryeak. In other words, in addition to the theater, description, and spatial

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characteristics, it is necessary to try to combine them with other than music such as movies, dramas, media art and so on. Second, we should refrain from modifying or reinterpreting the original form to preserve the inherent nature of JongmyoJeryeak. It was created in the early Joseon Dynasty and continues to the present 600 years later, and should never be overlooked when forming a performing arts business.

We remember the distinction between performing arts business related to JongmyoJeryeak and other world’s intangible cultural heritage, and always think about how coexisting aspects are inherited and developed within this modernized traditional heritage. Also, we should prepare a more active performing project to continuously change the public’s perception of JongmyoJeryeak, the world’s intangible cultural heritage that represents South Korea.

References

