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The Dual Career of “Arirang”: The Korean Resistance Anthem That Became a Japanese Pop Hit

E. TAYLOR ATKINS

“Arirang” is known worldwide as the quintessential Korean folk song. Its iconic status in contemporary Korea derives from its perceived role in strengthening Korean resolve to resist the cultural violence of the Japanese colonial occupation (1905–45). A musical “skeleton” capable of countless improvised variations and interpretations, some “Arirangs” explicitly assailed the Japanese and thus were censored by colonial authorities. However, in the 1930s and 1940s, precisely the time when assimilationist pressures in colonial Korea were intensifying, Japanese songsmiths, singers, and recording companies released “Arirang” renditions in prodigious quantities, sometimes in collaboration with Korean performers. “Arirang” became the most familiar song in the Japanese empire: Its persistent theme of loss spoke to Koreans of their lost sovereignty and to Japanese of the ravaging effects of modernity on traditional lifeways. For both peoples, it served as a mirror for self-contemplation and an “ethnographic lens” for gazing upon the other.

WE OFTEN ASSIGN TO music the burden of fostering intercultural communication and understanding. Platitudes galore testify to the unique power of music to bridge imposing gaps between societies, to remind of us our shared humanity. But what, in fact, does music tell us about one another? Does music challenge or reaffirm our stereotypical images of an Other? How is its potential as a “universal language” compromised when musical exchange occurs within relationships not of parity but of inequality and domination? In recent years, ethnomusicologists have been increasingly intrigued by the colonial origins of their own discipline and attuned to the ways in which the European and North American generation of musical knowledge about African, Asian, Oceanic, Middle Eastern, and Amerindian cultures was itself not only an exercise of colonial power but also pivotal in the creation of “orientalist” conceptions of non-Western peoples. Late nineteenth-century British audiences, for instance, embraced “Hindustani Airs” (popular songs based on Indian musical motifs) and operettas about “seductive dancing girls and abandoned *bibis* (native wives),” which constituted “a way of packaging the East for Western consumption, and blurring the hard edges of the imperial enterprise” (Farrell

1997, 11). Colonial musicology likewise “invented African rhythm” to set African music apart epistemologically from purportedly more “harmonic” Western music (Agawu 2003, 55–62). A combination of critical historical and ethnomusicological perspectives thus reveals the contents and contours of the colonialist imagination of essential difference, which was not always curtailed by music’s capacity to foster cross-cultural empathy and understanding.

Viewed from a vantage point informed by both ethnomusicology and cultural history, the folk ballad “Arirang” has much to teach us about how Koreans and Japanese perceived their colonial relationship. Although a song of Korean origin, in the first half of the twentieth century “Arirang” became perhaps the most familiar piece of music in the Japanese empire. “Arirang” frequently expressed prosaic emotions such as lost love and homesickness, but its flexible lyrical and melodic structure made it possible for Koreans and Japanese to adapt it for different expressive purposes. It proved malleable enough to articulate Korean indignation toward Japanese colonial domination, Japanese fantasies of a primordial Korean wonderland, and the ambivalence of both peoples toward the transformative effects of modernity.

There is an extensive literature on “Arirang” in several languages, most of which either tracks down the folkloric and etymological origins of the nonsensical “Arirang” refrain or valorizes the song as a vehicle for Korean nationalist expression (Howard 2001; Kim Shi-öp 1988; Kim and Yamakawa 1992; McCann 1979). Though most scholars detect its roots in folk ballads and work songs dating from the mid- to late Chosön period (1392–1910)—or even as far back as the Unified Silla period (668–935)—others portray it as a quintessentially *modern* song addressing the specific travails that Koreans have experienced in the last two centuries.¹ While acknowledging its older pedigree, I am most intrigued by modern incarnations of “Arirang” (both as song and symbol), which I regard as artistic products of the colonial encounter in Northeast Asia. During the last half of the Japanese colonial occupation of Korea (1910–45), “Arirang” was a medium through which Koreans and Japanese defined themselves and one another, commented on their relationship and their epoch, and cooperated with and struggled against each other. In the absence of the colonial experience, “Arirang” might have been just a national folk song; the colonial experience transformed it into a transnational pop song.

To present it as such is to interrogate the song’s sacrosanct Koreanness. Korean discourse typically depicts “Arirang” as a national archive into which the historical experiences and emotions of the Korean people have been deposited: “*Arirang* is a long-term joint work of the Korean nation,” Kim Youn-gap proclaims, “into which the essence of the Korean mind has coagulated” (1988, 20). My main purpose here is to shed light on the Japanese role in raising “Arirang” to such exalted cultural prominence. Japan provided not only the technological conduits and economic networks by which “Arirang” could trek

¹Origin theories are summarized in Pak Ch’an-ho (1987, 18–19), Miyatsuka Toshio (1995, 188–222), and Kim Youn-gap (1988, 21–25).

the empire as a popular song but also the foil that kept “Arirang” relevant and vital within Korea’s tradition of vernacular resistance.² The song’s current status as an emblem of national identity and a vehicle for remembrance in the public culture of both Korean states and the Korean diaspora is largely attributable to its perceived resilience to the cultural violence of Japanese imperialism. Koreans credit “Arirang” and other folk arts for awakening them to their heritage and nationhood and for protecting their Korean identity from obliteration by Japan’s assimilation (*dōka* and *kōminka*) policies. The Japanese colonial presence thus gave “Arirang” its special resonance for articulating the *han* (indignant sorrow) that many Koreans consider to be a national trait.

For Japanese, “Arirang” served as both an ethnographic lens through which to gaze on the Korean psyche and a mirror for self-reflection. In the context of colonial rule, observations gleaned through the lens might be useful for drafting cultural policy, yet the mirror revealed uncomfortable truths about Japan’s abandonment of traditional lifeways. Indeed, Japanese connoisseurs of Koreana used “Arirang” to articulate their disenchantment with the state of Japanese music and modern life in general. And while the intellectuals, folklorists, and ethnographers mined “Arirang” for cultural meaning, Japanese recording companies issued well over fifty versions of the song between 1931 and 1943, suggesting that its popularity in the burgeoning mass culture of the Japanese empire was substantial.³

The timing of the Japanese craze for “Arirang” and for Koreana in general is significant in a historiographical sense, for it coincides with a period of the colonial occupation that historians typically regard as more aggressively assimilationist than the more liberal “cultural rule” (*bunka seiji*) of the 1920s that followed the March 1, 1919, nationalist uprisings. My ongoing investigation of the imperial Japanese gaze on Korean performing arts and folk culture suggests that, well after the “cultural rule” mandate to “inspect the conditions of the people” and investigate “matters bearing on old Korean customs and manners” had yielded to a less culturally sensitive Japanization campaign (GGC 1921, 18, 70), the Japanese interest in documenting, preserving, and consuming Koreana persisted. Indeed, ethnographic curiosity about Korea surged well after the conventional historiographical boundary of the 1931 Manchurian Incident. Thus, late colonial cultural policy might better be characterized by conflicting assimilationist and curatorial impulses rather than by a single-minded resolve to “eliminate through assimilation any remnants of a distinctive Korean identity” (Shin 2003, 446–49).⁴ In fact, Koreana such as “Arirang” became a prominent element of cultural life in the Japanese empire in

²See Michael Robinson (1999, 65–68) and Hyangjin Lee (2000, 21–22).

³Included as an appendix to this article is a discography of recordings of “Arirang” dating from the colonial period. The discography can also be viewed on my personal Web page: <http://www3.niu.edu/~td0eta1/Discography.htm>. I compiled this discography using Fukuda Shunji and Katō Masayoshi (1994), Miyatsuka (1995), Shōwa-kan (2003), Yi Po-Hyōng (1988), and Pak (1987).

⁴There are several studies documenting the Japanese interest in Koreana (Brandt 2000; Covell 1979; Hosokawa 1998; Janelli 1986; Pai 2000; Walraven 1999; Yanagi and Leach 1972). Hyung-il

the 1930s, reaching the zenith of its popularity in Japan just as colonial policies to obliterate Korean identity intensified.

My analysis reframes “Arirang” as both a product and a means of commentary on the conditions of “colonial modernity.” This term implies that colonialism and modernity were mutually contingent conditions, that colonialism was “part and parcel of modernity itself” (Ching 2000, 11). The overarching imperial presence of the Western powers in East Asia provided both an impetus and a model for modernization in settings as diverse as imperial Japan, semicolonial China, and colonial Taiwan and Korea. Colonialism, then, shaped the forms that modernity assumed in colony and metropole alike, while the technological advantages and developmental mindsets of modernity likewise enabled colonialism. “Colonial modernity” also implies that colonialism brought about an imposed cosmopolitanism that, if not always mutually advantageous to all parties, was nonetheless both a precondition of modernity and a challenge to the integrity and development of nationalist identities. Regarding the Korean case, Shin and Robinson contend that “although the sources of what became modernity in Korea were Western in origin, Korea’s reception of modernity was mediated by a complicated filtering mechanism—a process of translation begun a generation earlier in Japan and one that continued in Korea under colonial rule” (1999, 10).⁵ Though “colonial modernity” is more commonly used to describe a historical condition in colonized areas such as coastal China, Taiwan, and Korea, recent studies suggest that discussions of Japan’s own modernity must “confront the fact of colonialism,” taking into account how the possession of an empire (which was itself predicated on long-standing fears of Western intrusion) shaped Japanese experiences of modern life (Eskildsen 2002, 403; Kawamura et al. 1993; Oguma 1998, 7–9, 628–34; Robertson 1998, chapter 3; Schmid 2000; Shin and Robinson 1999, 10; Young 1998, 13).

The study of “Arirang” and the cultural impact of Koreana in imperial Japan affirms Andre Schmid’s assertion of “the centrality of Korea and the broader colonial realm to Japanese experiences of modernity” (2000, 972) and helps us to appreciate how profoundly intertwined empire and modernity actually were in lived experience. To paraphrase Andrew Jones, “Arirang” also “alerts us to the necessity of grounding our analyses of modern [East Asian] cultural production in a rigorously transnational frame” (Jones 2001, 9; see also Robinson 1994, 59). Though its Korean origins were never questioned, “Arirang” circulated within an emerging cosmopolitan cultural space in East Asia, becoming well known in urban China, Taiwan, Manchuria, and Soviet Asia, wherever Korean

Pai’s scholarship on the contributions of Japanese archaeologists to the preservation and study of Korean prehistory and early statehood is particularly bold and persuasive, if controversial.

⁵See also Tani E. Barlow (1997), Leo Ou-fan Lee (1999, esp. chapter 9), Andrew F. Jones (2001), and Itagaki Ryūta (2004).

or Japanese expatriates settled or Japan’s entertainment industry penetrated. It was subject to manipulation and reinterpretation as a Western-style popular song, arranged as a waltz for European orchestral instruments or American jazz bands. “Arirang” was thus not only emblematic of the Japanese empire’s breadth and multiethnic diversity (Doak 1997, 298; Oguma 1998, 6) but also a demonstration of the power of Korea to contribute in substantive ways to the cultural life of the empire.⁶ The song’s resonance went beyond the exotic appeal of its melody, for it expressed a discontent with the conditions of life in the age of colonial modernity: If, for Koreans, *colonial* rule was the source of misery, for Japanese, that source was *modernity* itself. The result was nevertheless a sense of mutual melancholia that transcended the boundaries between colony and metropole and bound them together.

It is precisely this expressive versatility, or “dual career,” of “Arirang” in the late colonial period that I foreground here in order to provide some balance to the more abundant depictions of the song as target of determined Japanese assimilation policies or as potent vehicle for anticolonial consciousness and action. Public commemorations of “Arirang” and other folk arts in the postcolonial Korean states have emphasized their defiant spirit and nationalist credentials. This is the central message of the Social and Cultural Resistance Movements exhibits at Independence Memorial Hall in Ch’önan, South Korea’s main public memorial to the colonial era, as well as the rationale for the Intangible Cultural Properties system.⁷ Without denying the validity of such representations, I intend to examine other aspects of the “Arirang” story that I think help not only to explain the song’s iconic status but also to restore “some of the density, richness, and complexity of the original ecosystem” to the Korea–Japan relationship during the epoch of colonial modernity (Shin and Robinson 1999, 4–5).

I will proceed with a discussion of the flexible structural characteristics of “Arirang” songs, which made such prolific reinterpretation possible, then move on to review Korean characterizations of “Arirang” as an anthem of national indignation and resistance before describing imperial Japanese appropriations,

⁶“Arirang” is the most prominent example, but danseuse Ch’oe Söng-hüi (1911–?) surely merits mention as well. Known as Sai Shöki in Japan, she trained with the renowned Japanese dancer Ishii Baku (1886–1962) and went on to become one of the most popular celebrities of the wartime era, renowned especially for her performance of newly choreographed works based on Korean folk and shamanistic dances. Karashima Takeshi (1942) lauded her folkloric dance productions as important contributions to the “new order” in East Asia. See Judy Van Zile (2001, chapter 8), Sang Mi Park (2006), and Choi Seunghee: [sic] *The Korean Dancer* (Kultur: KUL-2219, 2001).

⁷According to the Independence Memorial Hall Web site (<http://www.independence.or.kr>), Hall No. 6 “exhibits national culture protection movement[s] which had been developed against deceitful ‘Culture Sovereign’ and ‘National Culture Annihilation Policy’ since 3.1 Independence Movement.” See also Choi Chungmoo (1995); Keith Howard (1986); and Kim Yong-un, “Traditional Folk Music to Celebrate Independence Movement,” *Digital Chosun*, February 20, 2002 (<http://www.english.chosun.com>).

discourses, and policies related to the song and the resulting postcolonial legacies. My discussion of “Arirang” as a Korean nationalist anthem is intended mostly to provide context for an analysis of the less-studied Japanese appropriations of the song, which, in turn, have some explanatory value for the continued relevance of “Arirang” in postcolonial Korea. My broader aim is to identify the interstices of Japanese and Korean history and to contribute to a (re)integration their respective historical narratives.

“ARIRANG” AS SKELETON

I use the singular “Arirang” purely for convenience—there are, in fact, many “Arirangs.” A recent CD, issued jointly by South Korea’s Synnara and Japan’s King Records, compiles fourteen “Arirangs,” seven each from the northern and southern regions. The cover note states, “It is said that ‘Arirang’ will become the national anthem if the Korean peninsula can become one nation.”⁸ But that begs the question: Which “Arirang”? For political reasons, it is difficult to imagine North and South Korea ever agreeing on a national “Arirang” for a future unified peninsular state, but aside from that, there are significant folkloric variations that national consolidation has not effaced.

We should not assume that all “Arirangs” have been duly recorded, but by some estimates, there are around fifty known melodies and more than 2,000 different lyrics (Kusano 1984, 35; Miyatsuka 1995, 57; Pak 1987, 20; Provine et al. 2002, 880–83; Yi 1998, 36).⁹ Japanese ethnomusicologist Kusano Taeko argues that regional “Arirangs” assume the melodic, rhythmic, and linguistic characteristics of other local folk songs. She recounts an epiphany during her fieldwork in Kyŏngju, when some Korean farmers burst into laughter while describing the ways that people in other regions sing “Arirang.” Likening it to the reactions of Ōsakans when they hear Tokyo actors on television trying to emulate Kansai dialect, she concludes that regional “Arirangs” sound strange to other Koreans because differences in dialect, local sensibility, and rhythmic sense are so conspicuous to them, if not to non-Koreans (Kusano 1984, 57–60; see also Kim 1929, 267–68; Ogawa 1980, 513).

With such fundamental differences between versions, it seems better to think of “Arirang” less as a *song* than as a *skeletal framework* for musical and poetic articulation. To qualify as an “Arirang,” a composition requires little more than the refrain “Arirang arirang arariyo” and maybe a nod to the most familiar contours of the melody. But neither the refrain itself nor its placement within the lyric are uniform from version to version. What sparked laughter in

⁸*Kita to minami no Ariran densetsu—Ariran no rŭtsu o tazunete* (Korean title, *Puk, nam Arirang ūi chŏnsŏl*) (King/Synnara: KKCC 3005, 2003).

⁹Scores for seven regional varieties are printed in the special “all-Arirang” edition of *Korea Journal* 28, no. 7 (July 1988): 52–58.

Kusano’s informant was the alternative refrain “Ari arirang, sŭri sŭri rang” from “Chindo Arirang.” Aside from the refrain, lyrics and melodic embellishments could be freely improvised in a call-and-response structure, which itself is arguably the one element that is common to all “Arirang” songs. Some scholars are convinced that “Arirang” originated as a work song in which an appointed laborer would take the musical lead, repeating the refrain, and fellow workers would respond, individually or collectively, with additional lyrics. One hypothesis suggests that “Arirang” began to circulate in a recognizable form among rural laborers from northern Kyŏnggi-do Province who had been snatched away from their fields by the government to rebuild the Kyŏngbok royal palace in Seoul in 1868 (Kim 1929, 266; Kusano 1984, 38–40; Miyatsuka 1995, 57–61).¹⁰

The tale or emotions expressed in each version can stand alone without reference to any particular standards or conditions. “Arirangs” have articulated the sorrow of lovers parting, the injustices of life for common people, the nostalgia for one’s hometown, the disorientation experienced during periods of dramatic change, or the resolve to persevere and conquer oppression. With the mass distribution of recordings and printed music and the increased mobility of people within the peninsula during the first half of the twentieth century, different versions came to be known outside their original locales, and some versions became more widely known than others. Nevertheless, it seems that “Arirang” exhausted neither its malleability nor its efficacy as folk expression. In other words, the existence of “standard” versions in recorded or print media did not suppress regional or individual variations.

The first foreign report of “Arirang,” published in 1896 in an American missionary gazette, gives a fair accounting of the song’s pliability. Methodist missionary Homer B. Hulbert (1863–1949) documented an older version of the song (*kujo arirang*) that predates the “new folk song” (*sin minyo*) so popular in the late 1920s. Hulbert introduced it as “that popular ditty of seven hundred and eighty-two verses, more or less, which goes under the euphonious title of A-ra-rŭng. To the average Korean this one song holds the same place in music that rice does in his food—all else is mere appendage.” He duly noted that “this tune is made to do duty for countless improvisations in which the Korean is an adept.... The verses which are sung in connection with this chorus range through the whole field of legend, folk lore, lullabys [*sic*], drinking songs, domestic life, travel and love. To the Korean they are lyric, didactic and epic all rolled into one.” The author made “a weak attempt to score it” (figure 1), omitting “the trills and quavers, but if you give one or two to each note you will not go wrong.” Once asked during a visit to the United States what the refrain meant,

¹⁰Using musicological evidence, Yi (1988) disputes the Kyŏnggi/Seoul origins of “Arirang,” positing instead that the song’s “original source” comes from Kangwŏn-do.

KOREAN VOCAL MUSIC

A ra runq a ra runq o. ra. ri. o. . . . a. ra. runq

01 --00 paishui o. ra. Hunggyungjai-choipukLoIna

mu. . . . hong. do. kaipang-maingjita-kan. da

Figure 1. Hulbert’s transcription of “Kujo Arirang” (from *The Korean Repository*, Feb. 1896)

Hulbert deftly replied that it approximated the immortal English lyrics “Hei diddle diddle” (Hulbert 1896, 49–51).¹¹

Hulbert’s version (figure 1) differs slightly from the better-known “standard Arirang” (*bonjo arirang*) that emerged in the late 1920s in Seoul (which is why provincial Koreans often “regionalize” it by referring to it as “Kyŏnggi-do Arirang,” distinguishing it from their own local versions). This “Arirang” rose to prominence as the theme song to a film by Na Un-gyu (1902–37) that premiered in the capital on October 1, 1926, and is regarded as Korea’s first cinematic masterpiece and most effective artistic expression of nationalistic fury toward Japanese colonial rule. Recent scholarship suggests that Na was merely attempting to emulate foreign melodramas (Kim 2004), but many consider its tale of an insane youth who commits murder an allegory for the psychological trauma that the Japanese regime inflicted on Koreans (Ahn 1988; Kim 1985, 263; Lee and Choe 1998, 43–53; Lee 2000, 25). This reputation accrued to its theme song, too, Na’s adaptation of the folk ballad he had overheard students singing some years before. A stage singer usually performed the song during the movie’s final scene (in which Na’s protagonist sings it as the police drag him away), and audiences with printed programs were invited to sing along. But even the widespread dissemination of this version throughout Korea seems to have stifled neither the regional varieties of “Arirang” nor the extemporaneous composition of lyrics to fit Na’s familiar melody.

Because of its flexible structural characteristics, “Arirang” easily accommodated changes in mood or sensibility, historical context or social conditions (Kusano 1984, 36). As well as it suited the purposes of Koreans for describing any number of emotions, it also provided an attractive and malleable framework for musical expression by non-Koreans—particularly those non-Koreans whom some “Arirangs” directly assailed, the hated Japanese. The sheer variety of Korean “Arirangs” makes it difficult to accuse the Japanese of somehow distorting the song, though many have done precisely that. To the extent that Korean “Arirang” discourse acknowledges the existence of Japanese renditions at all, most condemn these as outrageous attempts

¹¹See entries on “Arirang” and Hulbert in Keith Pratt and Richard Rutt (1999, 17, 171–72). Hulbert’s transcription was the basis for the first “Arirangs” printed in Japanese and Korean: Shinobu Junpei (1901, 106–7) and Yi Sang-jun (1914).

to distort the “original,” mass-manufactured mutations of a purely national song. More often than not, as described here, Japanese “Arirangs” expressed the sorrow of lovers parting, sometimes against an “exotic” Korean backdrop. But there was no shortage of similarly sentimental (and nonpolitical) Korean versions of the separation theme—though these could have had additional layers of meaning for Koreans, as it was not uncommon for the exigencies of Japanese imperialism to be the cause of separation. Yet to argue, as some have done (Kim Shi-öp 1988, 5, 14; Kim and Yamakawa 1992, 222–25), that the *essence* of “Arirang” is an inherent anti-Japanese nationalism is to conceal the song’s polysemic versatility, the very quality that made it a form of cultural expression that resonated throughout Japan’s empire and the very quality that required suppression in order for “Arirang” to serve the purposes of Korean nationalism.

“ARIRANG” AS UNDERGROUND BROADCAST

In Korea we have a folksong, a beautiful ancient song which was created out of the living heart of a suffering people. It is sad, as all deep-felt beauty is sad. It is tragic, as Korea has for so long been tragic. Because it is beautiful and tragic it has been the favorite song of all Koreans for three hundred years.

—Kim San

Well before the imposition of Japanese rule, the performance art of Korean commoners had developed seditious and bitterly satirical qualities. The Chosön regime prided itself on having exceeded China in the implementation of a Confucian moral order, but actually it created what was arguably the most inflexibly stratified society in East Asia. Although, like China, it had a civil service examination, hereditary status was required to sit for it: Only the sons of male *yangban* aristocrats and their primary wives—not secondary wives or concubines—were eligible. Koreans also placed more emphasis on consanguineous kinship than did the Japanese (Mann 1999, 8), who, in the absence of a male heir, frequently adopted one through marriage to a daughter. Dissatisfaction was rampant among Koreans who were not privileged by this de facto caste system, and it was duly expressed in their arts, particularly their masked dramas (*t’alch’um*), narrative singing (*p’ansori*), and folk songs (*minyo*).¹² “As popular literature,” the late Marshall Pihl remarked, “*p’ansori* rejected the aristocratic assumption of a historical mandate for the social status quo and emphasized the contradictions and inequities of the real world in which the common people struggled to survive” (Pihl 1994, 6; see also Cho 1986, 20). By

¹²See the video *Pongsan Masked Dance Drama from Korea* (Asia Society, 1980) and the Republic of Korea Cultural Properties Administration (2001, 30–33). *Pongsan t’alch’um* has been designated as Important Intangible Cultural Property No. 17 by the South Korean government.

“masking” themselves and their message, literally or figuratively, Korean commoners thus deployed their arts as “weapons of the weak” (Shin 1996, 137; cf. Scott 1985, xvi).

Thus, it is not surprising that they would turn those weapons on the Japanese once the protectorate was imposed in 1905 and colonial annexation was formalized in 1910. The arsenal included a number of “anti-Japan Arirangs” (in Korean, *hangil Arirang*; in Japanese, *kōnichī ariran*). “Arirang,” Kim Shi-ōp avers, was no mere ode to lost love but rather an “underground broadcast beloved by our people,” suffused with “anti-Japanese critical spirit.” “If we regard *Arirang* as an ordinary popular song for amusement expressing love and parting, we are apt to overlook its national and people-based nature.” Noting that the song emerged at a time “of an increasingly shared sense of crisis vis-à-vis the impingement of outside forces,” David McCann likewise argues that “Arirang” “directly confront[ed] the Japanese and castigate[d] them for the damage” they had inflicted on Korea (Kim Shi-ōp 1988, 5; McCann 1979, 53–54; see also Cho 1974; Nahm 1975; Shin 1996, 140–41). Hence, during the colonial occupation, “Arirang” could be recast as a medium for vernacular resistance to Japanese imperialism.

According to Kim Youn-gap, executive director of the Arirang Association (Arirang Yōnhaphoe), Koreans sang the “Arirang” song when they rose up in 1919 to protest Japan’s military rule, in what became known as the March 1 Movement. Kim contends that they sang from sheet music in a 1914 anthology of “vulgar songs” (*sokkok*) adapted from Hulbert’s 1896 transcription.¹³ However, Korean revolutionary Kim San (Chang Chi-rak, 1905–39?) explicitly linked the “Arirangs” that he sang while fighting the Japanese to an ancient, pre-colonial heritage of artistic resistance to injustice and oppression. In his memoir *Song of Ariran* [*sic*] (coauthored by the American journalist Helen Foster Snow, also known as “Nym Wales,” the wife of Edgar Snow), Kim San expressed a romantic vision of “Arirang” that has since become canonical:

Near Seoul is a hill called the Hill of Ariran. During the oppressive Li [Yi] dynasty there was a giant solitary pine at the top of this hill, and this was the official place of execution for several hundred years. Tens of thousands of prisoners were hanged until dead on a gnarled branch of that ancient tree, their bodies suspended over a cliff at the side. Some were bandits. Some were common criminals. Some were dissident scholars. Some were political and family enemies of the emperor. Many were poor farmers who had raised hands against oppression. Many were rebel youths who had struggled against tyranny and injustice. The story is that one of those young men composed a song during his imprisonment, and as he

¹³See Kim Yong-un, “3.1 undō de utawareta Ariran o fukugen,” *Digital Chosunilbo* (Japanese ed.), February 24, 2003, http://japanese.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2003/02/24/20030224000033.html. This assertion revises Miyatsuka, who says that “Arirang” was not printed in Korean until Yi Sang-jun’s later anthology (1929).

trudged slowly up the Hill of Ariran, he sang this song. The people learned it, and after that whenever a man was condemned to die he sang this in farewell to his joys or sorrows. Every Korean prison echoes with these haunting notes, and no one dares deny a man’s death-right to sing it at the end. The “Song of Ariran” has come to symbolize the tragedy of Korea. Its meaning is symbolic of constantly climbing over obstacles only to find death at the end. It is a song of death and not of life. But death is not defeat. Out of many deaths victory may be born.

What is striking about Kim San’s account is that by the time he related it to Helen Foster Snow at Yenan, a scant ten years after it had become a popular movie theme, “Arirang” had already achieved mythic status: Its antiquity, its Koreanness, and its defiant spirit, all core elements of “Arirang” discourse, were in place. Kim San’s autobiography—widely available in English, Korean, Japanese, and Chinese—no doubt contributed to the song’s nationalist luster. He acknowledged the existence of several “popular” versions, and even noted its fame in Japan, but maintained that its essence was the “beautiful and tragic” epic of a nation climbing the Arirang hill “only to find death at the summit” (Kim and Wales 1941, 6–7).¹⁴

Koreans seem to have found solace in songs that described the material and social changes they witnessed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and laid bare the hypocrisies of the “modernization” and “enlightenment” campaigns imposed on them:

There is much rice in a rich man’s granary.
Many beggars fill one street after another

Poisonous grass grows before a virtuous woman’s gate.
A poison flower blooms before a whore’s gate

As soon as a new road emerged, I lost my love.
Automobiles always remind me of my lost love. (“Chindo Arirang”)

A new highway now runs beneath Mt. Samhak,
And all become a playboy in the wind of automobiles (“Ch’unch’ŏn Arirang”)

Though wearing hemp cloth
I stare you down, dandy scamps (“Chŏngsŏn Arari”)

All usable trees were sold as telegraph poles,
All pretty girls as entertainers (“Chŏngsŏn Arari”)¹⁵

¹⁴Kim San was apparently executed by Mao Zedong’s secret police before his memoir was published in the United States, where it became a bestseller (see Kim Young-Sik, “The US–Korea Relations 1910–1945,” <http://www.asianresearch.org/articles/1624.html>).

¹⁵These verses are translated in Kim Shi-ŏp (1988, 6, 9–11). “Ch’unch’ong Arirang” is originally from Kim Sa-yŏp, Ch’oe Sang-su, and Pang Chong-hyŏn (1948, 256).

These lyrics describe a bewildering, topsy-turvy world of ironies, injustice, and disorienting change. On the surface, no one is identified as responsible. But “Arirang” scholars point out that the songs seethe with nationalistic fury, referring obliquely to the predatory imperialists who were responsible for upsetting the order of things.

With varying degrees of poetic subtlety, Koreans assaulted their tormenters with even more “Arirangs.” Kim San’s memoir opens with one example that speaks directly of being deprived of one’s home country:

Many stars in the deep sky—Many crimes in the life of man. ...
 Ariran is the mountain of sorrow
 And the path to Ariran has no returning....
 Oh, twenty million countrymen—where are you now?
 Alive are only three thousand li of mountains and rivers....
 Now I am an exile crossing the Yalu River
 And the mountains and rivers of three thousand li are also lost.
 Ariran, Ariran, Arari O!
 Crossing the hills of Ariran.

Making explicit reference to the “rising sun”—symbolizing Japan—yet another admonishes,

Arirang, arirang, arariyo.
 Friends, wake up from your shallow dream.
 The crimson sun is rising over Arirang Hill,
 With two arms stretched wide.¹⁶

Most of the documented *hangil arirang* songs—which, for obvious reasons, circulated only in oral form until they were collected and published by Korean folklorists after the 1945 liberation (Im 1961–81; Kim, Ch’oe, and Pang 1948; Ko 1949)—seem to fall into one of two categories: “Arirangs” expressing the miseries of peasant farmers and migrant laborers, and Righteous Army (*ũbyōng*) and revolutionary “Arirangs” urging armed resistance. Farmers and laborers lamented,

The fields are wrecked, and will become roads,
 The houses are destroyed for parking lots.
 Arirang arirang arariyo,
 Let me cross the Arirang pass.

Although there are twelve hills of Arirang
 How many mountains of barley were there?
 The hill crossed in pursuit of life,
 Hill of the tears of peasants bound for North Jiandao.

¹⁶These verses are translated in Kim San and Nym Wales (1941, vii) and Kim Shi-öp (1988, 11).

It won't do to hate faraway Japan,
I will die of longing for my bride.

It only carries us [away], will not send us back.
The rendezvous ship, the ship from hell.¹⁷

As armed struggle against the Japanese regime continued throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, martial “Arirangs” urged valor not only among the guerrillas but also among those left behind:

Don't deter those who go,
When they return you will be happier.
Arirang arirang, don't you cry.
On the Arirang hill the flag blazes.¹⁸

Decades before U.S. troops pumped themselves up for battle in Iraq by listening to heavy metal music on their portable CD players, Koreans prepared themselves for guerilla warfare against the Japanese by composing and singing their own hardcore “Arirangs”:

If my parents are looking for me,
Tell them I went to the Kwangbok Army.
Ari arirang sŭri sŭrirang, let's sing the Kwangbok Army Arirang.
A violent wind blows, a violent wind blows.
It blows in the breasts of thirty million Koreans.

[Refrain]
Softly on the sea, a floating ship,
It's the ship coming to carry the Kwangbok Army.

[Refrain]
A drum pounds on Arirang Hill.
The T'aegŭk flag flutters in the middle of Seoul.¹⁹

From Minyo to Kayo: “Arirang” as Pop Ditty

The Arirang Song is now quite famous even in Japan, and since there are some twenty-three Japanese translations, this song is in fact everyone's favorite in Chōsen.

—Koga Masao

¹⁷This is my translation from the Japanese verses in Kim Jon and Yamakawa Tsutomu (1992, 222–23) and Kim So-un (1929, 278–79).

¹⁸This is my translation from the Japanese verses in Kim and Yamakawa (1992, 224).

¹⁹See “Kwangbok kun arirang,” in Pak (1987, 63). See also Kim Shi-öp (1988, 17) and David R. McCann (1979, 51). The Kwangbok army, established by Korean nationalist Kim Ku (1876–1949) in Chongqing in 1940, became the foundation for the South Korean army after liberation.

While Korean guerilla fighters sang these songs, “Arirang” captured the imaginations of some of interwar Japan’s most prominent composers, lyricists, and arrangers, including Koga Masao (1904–78), Hattori Ryōichi (1907–93), Saijō Yaso (1892–1970), Raymond Hattori, and Sano Tasuku (1908–96), most of whom revisited the song several times. Some of Japan’s most beloved pop singers—Sugawara Tsuzuko, Awaya Noriko (1907–99), and Takamine Mieko among them—waxed their own versions of “Arirang,” ensuring its status within the repertoire of Japanese pop songs (*kayōkyoku* or *ryūkōka*). Recordings, broadcasts, and live performances—in both Japanese and Korean—saturated the markets, stages, and airwaves of both countries throughout the 1930s.

“Arirang” inhabited the nexus of three important trends in early twentieth-century Japanese popular music. Within the category of *kayōkyoku*, it was a prominent example of *shin min’yō*, a term designating both songs with an identifiable composer done in a “folkish” style and public domain folk songs adapted for popular consumption and arranged for Western instrumentation. “Arirang” also presaged the “continental melodies” (*tairiku merodi*) boom of 1938–41, which conveyed aural fantasycapes of China and Manchuria (Atkins 2001, 134–39; Miyatsuka 1995, 153–61; Pope 2003; Young 1998, 72).²⁰ Finally, it demonstrated the truly cosmopolitan nature of interwar Japan’s musical environment. Japanese consumers could pick from a rich assortment of genres ranging from opera (Italian or Beijing), French chansons, Argentine tango, and American jazz to Hawaiian hula, Cuban rumba, *naniwa bushi* (Ōsaka narrative ballads), and Russian ballads (indeed, many consider “Katusha’s Song,” from a 1915 production of Tolstoy’s *Resurrection*, to be Japan’s first pop hit). Folk, classical, and popular music from around the world poured into Japan, and among these, “Arirang” was easily one of the most familiar and most frequently recorded. Furthermore, Japanese composers and arrangers used all the musical means at their disposal from this global smorgasbord to refashion “Arirang” in an astonishing variety of ways.

The first Japanese “Arirang” (Nippon Victor 51819B, attributed to Saijō Yaso) hit the stores in July 1931, and it bore a strong melodic resemblance to the popular theme from Na’s 1926 movie. For her debut recording, singer Kobayashi Chiyoko used a pseudonym—Kin’iro Kamen (“yellow mask”)—bestowed upon her at the session by a Nippon Victor executive. Saijō claimed that the name had been inspired by a popular American singer dubbed the “Golden Mask.”²¹ But because this is an

²⁰The CD *Ajian konekushon* (Asian Connection) (Teichiku: TECR-20177, 1995) reissued several China-inspired songs.

²¹Reissued on *Seitan hyakunen kinen Saijō Yaso zenshū* (Nippon Columbia: COCA-10026–41, 1992), disc 3, track 4. The story of the pseudonym is related in the liner notes on p. 87. The sheet music for vocal, piano, and harmonica was published as Nippon Victor Chōtokusen Gakufu 47.

“Arirang,” there are additional layers of significance to the pseudonym. There is, of course, the racial connotation of “yellow mask,” which was not inconsequential at a time when racialized rhetoric was such a prominent aspect of Japan’s colonial discourse. Many Japanese justified the imperial expansion into Asia by arguing that Japan was destined to unify the “yellow race” in preparation for an apocalyptic showdown with the “white race.” The colonial occupation of Korea was premised on ethnological theories that Koreans and Japanese came from the same racial stock; the annexation of Korea in 1910 was therefore a “reunion” of sorts (Hatada 1969, 36–41; Oguma 1998, 161–62). But beyond that, the Chinese ideographs for the pseudonym (金色仮面) used the character 金 for the most common Korean surname, Kim. It is possible that most Japanese consumers (and some Koreans, too, for that matter), knowing nothing of the American “Golden Mask,” would have assumed from this punning name that the singer was Korean, thereby embellishing the exotic allure and authenticity of the recording.

Chanteuse Awaya Noriko (1907–99) and Ch’ae Kyu-yŏp (using the pseudonym Hasegawa Ichirō, 1906–49) recorded “Song of Arirang” as a duet the following year (Nippon Columbia 27066A). This version, composed by Koga Masao and Satō Sōnosuke, is also strongly derivative of the song so beloved in Korea. It is instructive to compare these two Japanese “Arirangs” to two of the best-known Korean renditions, those by Na Un-gyu and An Ik-t’ae (Ahn Eaktay, 1906–65, composer of the South Korean national anthem, “Aegukka”) (see figure 2).²²

NA UN-GYU’S “ARIRANG” (1929)

Arirang arirang arariyo
I go over the Arirang hills.
There are no stars in the clear sky,
In my breast are many thoughts.

[Refrain]
The one who abandoned me
Will be footsore before s/he goes ten li.

[Refrain]
There are many stars in the clear sky,
And many griefs in life in this world.

²²Na’s lyrics come from a 1929 recording (spanning four sides of two 78 RPM records) of *p’yŏnša* Sŏng Tong-ho narrating scenes from Na’s film, with Kang Sŏ-gyŏn singing the theme song (Nippon Columbia 40002–40003). This thirteen-minute performance was reissued on *Kita to minami no Ariran densetsu* (track 15), with a Japanese translation in the liner notes (see also Howard 2001, 150; Miyatsuka 1995, 74–76; Pak 1987, 137). Musical examples are adapted from a facsimile of the novelization of Na’s *Arirang* movie (reproduced in Miyatsuka 1995, 49); An Ik-t’ae (1935, 3–5; lyrics translated by Arthur Y. Park); and Miyamoto Tabito 1938, 34–35. Because of space limitations, I have not included a transcription of Saijō’s “Arirang.” There are only minor melodic differences, not in pitch but in the rhythmic phrasing of the melismatic sections of bars 3, 11, and 15.

SAIJŌ YASO'S "ARIRANG" (1931)

Arirang arirang arariyo
My heart goes over the Arirang hills.
Bloom, flowers, in the hills
Where my tears fell.

[Refrain]
Who can know my heart,
This heart that travels alone.

[Refrain]
The sky is blue, the clouds white,
Home, where the birds sing.

[Refrain]
Why go over alone,
Everyone is sad for love.

KOGA MASAO AND SATŌ SŌNOSUKE'S "SONG OF ARIRANG" (1932)

Arirang arirang arariyo,
I go over the Arirang hills.
Flowers in bloom soaked with tears,
The sky where I leave you.

[Refrain]
Endless worries in my breast,
Knowing not the number of stars.

[Refrain]
The grass also weeps in the evening wind,
We also weep in the evening mist.

[Refrain]
Tomorrow where will I go alone?
I will dream of you my beloved.

AN IK-T'AE'S "ARIRANG HILL" (1935)

Arirang arirang arariyo,
Arirang Arirang Hill there you go.
If I should follow you over the hill,
My heart's desires would be fulfilled.

[Refrain]
Heaven so blue has many a star,
Human lives have many a tale.

Figure 2 consists of three musical transcriptions, labeled (a), (b), and (c), all in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time.
 (a) "Arirang" version by Na Un-gyu: This transcription includes a vocal line at the top and two piano accompaniment staves below. The vocal line starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The piano accompaniment is in a similar key and time signature.
 (b) "Arirang no uta," by Koga Masao and Satō Sōnosuke: This transcription features a single piano accompaniment staff in G major and 3/4 time.
 (c) "Arirang Hill," by An Ik-t'ae: This transcription also features a single piano accompaniment staff in G major and 3/4 time.
 The three versions share a very similar melodic structure, with the vocal line in (a) closely matching the piano accompaniment in (b) and (c).

Figure 2. (a) “Arirang” version by Na Un-gyu (transcribed from original source by the author). (b) “Arirang no uta,” by Koga Masao and Satō Sōnosuke. (c) “Arirang Hill,” by An Ik-t’ae.

While the Korean versions might arguably express a more abstract despair, open to nationalist reinterpretation, more striking are the similarities in lyrical structure, mood, imagery, and focus on lost love. Basically the same melodically, all four likewise eschew the original *semach’i* rhythmic structure (measures of three, three, and four beats, sometimes rendered as 9/8 time) in favor of a

simplified 3/4 (Na, Saijō, and Koga/Satō) or 6/8 (An) meter. It is interesting that the music on the Japanese sessions is more somber than either the sprightly 1929 Korean recording of Na's "Arirang" (Nippon Columbia 40002–40003) or An's arrangement, which calls for *allegretto gioco ben ritmo* (a cheerful, playful rhythm). These early Japanese renditions, then, are strongly derivative of the best-known Korean version, making few significant alterations.

We have no reliable sales figures for Japanese and Korean records in the early twentieth century, but if "Arirang" had not sold, producers and musicians would not have revived it so often. Future efforts sometimes departed dramatically from the canonical melody, mood, and structure or made only passing—yet nonetheless obligatory—reference to the familiar refrain. One thing is indisputable: At the beginning of their respective careers, Saijō and Koga, two of Japan's preeminent composers, took inspiration from "Arirang" and made it a marketable brand name. As the 1930s progressed, movies and theatrical revues adopted the "Arirang" moniker; there was even a singing group known as the Arirang Boys. Japanese travelers to the colony sought "Arirang" souvenir recordings, postcards, and curios.²³ As late as 1943 (the year in which strict Japanese-only language policies were imposed on the mass media), Teichiku released a medley of "classic" Korean folk songs ("Min'yō kessaku shū," T-3455).

Orthodox "Arirangs" appeared on the market until near the end of the colonial period, but songwriters and singers from both countries took such creative liberties that the final products bore the name "Arirang" yet little else to suggest a link to the Korean folkloric tradition. "In the world of popular music," Miyatsuka observes wryly, "'Arirang' was little more than a symbol of [lovers] parting." Archetypal imagery from *kayōkyoku*—namely, bars (*sakaba*), hearts (*kokoro*), tears (*namida*), and girls (*musume*)—appeared even in "Arirangs" composed and sung by Koreans, indicating the influence that Japanese pop formulae exerted on Korean reinterpretations of the venerable "Arirang" motif.²⁴

Because there was such a diversity of musical raw materials available in imperial Japan, artists and producers used "Arirangs" to concoct novel musical fusions: "Arirang Blues" (Columbia 100001A, 1940), "Arirang Kouta" (Columbia 29073B, 1936), "Arirang Bushi" (Rumonde Records 3077A, 1935) "Arirang Lullaby" (Columbia A2232), and my personal favorites, "Arirang Mambo"

²³Nihon Eigashi Kenkyūkai (1995, 113) lists three "Arirang" films from the 1930s in addition to Na Un-gyu's 1926 original *Arirang: Ariran no uta* (Song of Arirang, 1933), a musical (*kouta eiga*) produced in Ōsaka by Takarazuka Cinema; *Ariran tōge* (Arirang Pass, 1936), a historical melodrama (*ninjō jidaigeki*) produced by Chōsen Eiga Sha; and *Ariran* (1939), a contemporary melodrama (*gendai ninjō geki*) produced by Chōsen Kinema Sha. Pak (1987) refers to the musical revues, the Arirang Boys, and a 1935 film titled *Uta no Chōsen* (179, 192, 202, 290, 296); Miyatsuka (1995, 107) discusses "Arirang" souvenirs.

²⁴Kim Pong-myōng, "Ariran suljip," composed by Yi Pu-p'ung and Mun Ho-wōl (ca. 1940–43), and "Ariran musume," composed by Ch'o Nyō-im and Kim Kyo-sōng and recorded by Kim An-na (Nippon Victor A4114B, 1940), Im Tong-ma (Nippon Victor A4114A, 1940), and Paek Nan-a. Pak (1987, 62–63) reprints lyrics for both songs. See also Miyatsuka (1995, 67, 86).

(Victor V41303) and “Arirang Rumba” (Columbia, 1948). Nippon Columbia released versions arranged for guitar and *shakuhachi* (Japanese bamboo flute), harmonica band, and jazz orchestra. A Hawaiian slide guitar stated the melody on one of Sugawara Tsuzuko’s renditions (Teichiku C-3119), while arranger Sano Tasuku hinted at the song’s global stature by inserting “Arirang” into his epic jazz suite of folk melodies from China, Italy, the United States, Hawaii, Germany, and Japan (Atkins 2001, 137; Miyatsuka 1995, 76–77). Clearly, pop “Arirangs” in Japan proved to be just as malleable as folk “Arirangs” in Korea. Likewise, it is obvious that these reinterpretations were usually facilitated by the imperial presence of Western popular music.

“Arirang” and the Colonial Imagination

Some have argued that Koga Masao’s signature melodic style was directly inspired by Korean folk songs; the songwriter himself has been quoted saying that he was “influenced by the reverberations of the *kayagŭm* [Korean zither]” (Pak 1987, 143, 339). This is not surprising, as he grew up in Inch’ŏn, where his widowed mother relocated the family in 1912 to escape the grinding poverty of northeastern Japan. Entranced by a circus performance that he witnessed in Taejŏn, Koga devoted himself to mastering “melodies filled with living emotions, sung by living people.” “I became a composer,” Koga wrote in his autobiography, “but that does not mean I went to music school. Therefore, the basis for my melodies are things that amateurs from Chikugo [Koga’s home prefecture] enjoyed singing” (Koga 1999, 27–28).

“Arirang” must have struck Koga as having similar qualities. Shortly after his version became a hit, he wrote an appreciation of the song for the intellectual journal *Kaizō*. Claiming Korea as his “second home,” Koga confessed that “the reason I got into music and became interested in composing is because of the utterly unforgettable beauty of Korean folk melodies.” For Koga, “an eerie, over-arching pathos” was the defining characteristic of Korean folk songs.

Smoke rising from the *ondol* [Korean floor heating] of the houses at twilight, when the air is veiled as if a thick fog had descended; tiny insects chased by the smoke singing in one’s ears—one often hears of such settings in the lyrics of disconsolate folk songs. Farmers at rest croon these, with a weebegone cow’s voice [*urei ushi no koe*], with an earthly odor—from such [conditions] beloved songs are born and sung. (Koga 1932, 87)

Omitting all mention of the Na Un-gyu film that had sparked the “Arirang” craze in Korea, Koga instead offered a lengthy account of the song’s mythic origins, then remarked on the essential differences between Korean and Japanese folk songs. In his estimation, “Korean folk songs are superior to Japanese folk songs as musical art” (1932, 89).

Koga's words and imagery echo those of others who, though they admired Korean cultural accomplishments, nonetheless viewed Koreans through the lens of colonial privilege. His depiction of a simple, emotionally direct rural populace singing unaffected songs from their guts recalls similar comments about Korean ceramics that Yanagi Muneyoshi (Sōetsu, 1889–1961) published a decade earlier. Yanagi, the spiritual founder of the *mingei* (folk craft) movement in Japan, admired Korean craftsmen for their Zen-like artlessness: "Our common sense is of no use for Koreans at all. They live in a world of 'thusness,' not of 'must or must not.' Their way of making things is so natural that any man-made rule becomes meaningless. ... asymmetry [in lathe work] is but a natural outcome of their state of mind, not the result of conscious choice." "They are quite free from the conflict between the beautiful and the ugly," Yanagi concluded. "Here, deeply buried, is the mystery of the endless beauty of Korean wares. They just make what they make without any pretension" (1972, 122–23). In 1922, Yanagi's colleague Asakawa Noritaka wrote a poem in which he similarly exalted Koreans who "[d]o not know what intention is" and "make things with the pure heart of a child drawing a picture." Characterizing Korean art as "[c]hildren's work made by adults," Asakawa lamented, "One bows the head on seeing the drawings of children / And feels astonished shame of one's own impurity." As Kim Brandt (2000) notes, this last stanza in particular indicates that "the childlike purity of Korea served to highlight the adult consciousness and corruption of a modernizing Japan." Such notions constituted what Johannes Fabian (1983) calls a "denial of coevalness" in the colonial relationship, a belief that Koreans and Japanese essentially inhabited different historical stages of human development.²⁵ Clearly, however, not all Japanese regarded this as unconditionally favorable.

Mingei activists such as Yanagi and Asakawa were among a group of Japanese anthropologists, folklorists, art historians, ethnomusicologists, connoisseurs, and amateur Koreaphiles who positioned themselves as curators of Korean culture. Takahashi Jun, a frequent contributor to the monthly magazine of the Government-General of Chōsen (GGC), worried about the fate of Korean folk songs. "Since the invention of phonographs and broadcasting, the age of further disenchantment with folksongs has arrived," he fretted. "Western folk-song researchers curse urban civilization for this. In no matter which country, if we do not collect folk songs they will all perish." Takahashi feared that with urbanization, the "regional varieties" of Korean folk songs were vanishing (Takahashi 1932, 17).

Such curatorial efforts undermined the GGC's assimilation agenda, in the sense that they preserved that which most required erasure: the most *visible*

²⁵See Asakawa Noritaka, "Tsubo," *Shirakaba*, September 1922, 57, 61, translated in Brandt (2000, 737). Johannes Fabian defines the "denial of coevalness" as "a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse" (1983, 31).

and *audible* signs of an independent Korean identity and a heritage of cultural accomplishment. But curatorial projects thrived, in part, because of Japanese ambivalence toward its own modernity. The desire to curate Korean culture—which had purportedly “stagnated” and been frozen in time—originated in a desire for Japanese self-definition in an era of seemingly constant upheaval.²⁶ These self-appointed curators, many of whom were disenchanting with the disruption of traditional cultures by capitalist modernity, evinced nostalgic longing, even envy, for the supposedly pristine, primordial qualities they detected in Korean rural life. Documenting cultures that seemed destined for extinction allowed them both to discover the originary, foundational cultures of northeast Asia—to recover a lost Japan—and to dramatize the sense of loss engendered by modernization.²⁷ What was being salvaged or curated was not just a doomed Koreanness but also, possibly, a primitive self ravaged by progress. Thus, the preservation of Korean culture was more than intelligence gathering for administrative purposes or an exercise of colonial power, it was also an extended meditation on the fate of primordial identities in the modern age.

Koga’s 1932 thesis on “Arirang” was curatorial in the sense that it spoke from a position of presumed authority about Korean musical culture (based on Koga’s musical expertise and experience living in Korea) and attempted to explain it to a broad audience. However, it also reflected the ambivalence toward modernity that underlay other curatorial projects. The essay appeared at a time when the capitalist technologies of mass reproduction and marketing were fundamentally transforming the experience of producing and consuming music. Though he was himself a pioneer and beneficiary of the industrial production of music, Koga’s idyllic depiction of “Arirang” as an authentic folk ballad, reflecting without affectation or artifice the spontaneous emotions and lived experiences of common people, evinced a tinge of self-loathing; Whatever the technical accomplishments of Japanese music, he declared, the Koreans’ was more aesthetically compelling precisely because of its pure and uncontrived simplicity. Koga would make the creation of similarly sincere and plainspoken music his aesthetic ideal and his life’s work; indeed, some consider his testimony as proof of the “Korean roots” of the *enka* ballad genre that he pioneered (Pak 1987, 339; Yano 2002, 30–31).

Another point of convergence between Koga’s “Arirang” thesis and *mingei* colonial discourse is what Brandt calls the “idea of melancholy as a central aesthetic principle of Korean culture.” Yanagi and his colleagues contended that

²⁶Akiba Takashi (1888–1954), one of the leading academic ethnographers of Korea, explained the value of studying Korean primordial cultures as a basis for understanding modern societies in “Chōsen minzoku no kenkyū ni tsuite,” *Chōsen* 154 (March 1928): 23–26.

²⁷Sonia Ryang makes a similar assertion based on different sources: “There was an anticipation of encountering a replica of Japan, and the travellers were mildly surprised when they had to record differences between the two.” She adds, “their travel, more than discovering Korea or Koreans, was about discovering themselves” (1997, 138).

the prevalence of the color white in Chosŏn ceramics and Korean clothing was evidence of a national despondency. “The people, by wearing white clothing, are mourning for eternity,” Yanagi wrote in 1922. “Is not the paucity of color true proof of the absence of pleasure in life?” (quoted in Brandt 2000, 735–36). Koga similarly characterized all Korean folk songs as suffused with “an eerie, overarching pathos” that was the very essence of the national character. Such arguments, however unwittingly, served colonial purposes by implying that melancholy as a national attribute had preceded the imposition of Japanese rule, that Koreans were just basically an inconsolable bunch, and that colonial occupation itself was not to blame. It is, of course, not uncommon for Koreans to describe themselves as being a peculiarly sad people, evoking *han* as a national characteristic (Grinker 1998, 73–98), but they do not hesitate to assign responsibility for their collective misery to Japan and to other outside powers that interfered in their affairs over the course of centuries.

However, Kim So-un (1907–81), who compiled and translated into Japanese an anthology of Korean folk songs published in 1929, disputed the elemental melancholy of “Arirang.” Kim characterized Korean folk songs as “optimistic” and “lighthearted” and argued that there were too many regional variations to consider “Arirang” one song with a singular essence. Kim wrote of “Kangwŏn Arirang,” “A piece with a completely different form from the Kyōnggi and Sōdo [Western] types, this song brightly expresses a facetious side. If one comes here [Kangwŏn-do], Arirang would never be called the folk song of a ‘ruined country’ [*bōkokuteki*].” “For several reasons having to do with national conditions and national character,” Kitahara Hakushū explained in the anthology’s preface, “Korean folk songs are blessed with a bitter irony and sardonic wit, more so than Japanese folk songs” (Kim 1929, 5, 267, 271, 273, 280).²⁸ If Koga’s Koreans were sad sacks, then Kim and Kitahara’s were sarcastic jokers, both characterizations that unintentionally nourished the stereotype of *futei senjin* (Korean malcontents).

Although on the surface, it seemed to be little more than another pop ditty from overseas, “Arirang” served two distinct, even antithetical, purposes within an imperial Japanese cultural discourse that was struggling with the consequences of colonial modernity. As a reflective mirror, it was a means for critique of modernity itself, which, though it was the very trait that enabled Japanese dominance over Korea, had alienated Japanese from their own heritage. “Arirang” made possible a vicarious connection to the primeval emotions and lifeways for which critics of modernity longed. As an ethnographic lens, it allowed Japanese to peer into what they imagined to be the

²⁸Kim was probably objecting to previous characterizations of “Arirang” as *bōkokuteki* in publications by Shinobu Junpei, Takahama Kyoshi, and others (see Miyatsuka 1995, 131). Kim So-un also wrote on “Arirang” for *Tokyo Asahi shinbun* (July 23, 24, and 26, 1931) and “Chōsen min’yō no ricchō: Arirang no ongaku teki keitai,” *Minzoku geijutsu*, December 1928, 158–63.

Korean psyche. These observers detected in “Arirang” what they deemed key aspects of Korean national character: primordial simplicity, relentless melancholy, and mordacious wit. In the context of colonial rule, these were not necessarily trivial or useless insights.

Censoring “Arirang”

Increasingly aware of the satirical proclivities of Korean vernacular and performing arts, the GGC carefully monitored the content of recordings and performances, eventually prohibiting the use of Korean in song and on stage, screen, and airwaves. Concerned about “bad thoughts,” “disturbance of customs,” and “injuries to public order” emanating from phonograph records, on May 15, 1933, the GGC implemented a multistep process through which manufacturers and importers were required to obtain approval for all sound recordings before they went to market in the colony and a system of fines punishing companies, performers, and their families for noncompliance.²⁹ A decade later, even Korean popular music’s inexorable pathos was itself raised as an issue for colonial cultural policy to address:

Until now it appears that some 2500 records in Korean have been published, and pop songs [*ryūkōka*] tinged with pathos outnumber [all others] by a hundred to one. Even now seventy-eight are published each month, but in these days of the Great Pacific War, it is imperative for both the manufacturers and the censors to fully consider which kinds of records are necessary. . . . At any rate, while courageous military songs cause the hearts of children to dance, it is no praiseworthy sight to see young men eligible for conscription standing around in groups, listening to melancholy songs flowing out onto the streets from the loudspeakers of record stores. (Karashima 1942, 11)

Most Japanese commentators agreed that decisive action on the “national language issue” (*kokugo mondai*) was vital to bringing the Korean performing arts in line with national policy. After 1943, when Korean folk songs were allowed at all, they were to be sung in the “national language,” that is, Japanese.³⁰

Several accounts insist that as assimilation pressures in Korea intensified during the 1930s, colonial authorities banned sheet music of the “Arirang” song, which had circulated widely throughout the Korean peninsula and diaspora in China, Hawaii, Russia, and the United States (Kim Shi-öp 1988, 12, 13–14; Kim and Wales 1941, 7; McCann 1979, 54–55). “Many of these versions are banned in Korea,” Kim San claimed in the late 1930s. “The Japanese are

²⁹“Chikuonki rekōdo no torishimari,” *Chōsen* 217 (June 1933): 118–20.

³⁰Konishi Mitsuo, “Geijutsu kara no naisen ittai,” *Chōsen* 284 (January 1939): 24–25; see also Kim Chol-an (1985, 256), Pak (1987, 326), Andrew Killick (1998, 199–201), and Chan E. Park (2003, 103).

almost as afraid of ‘dangerous songs’ as of ‘dangerous thoughts.’ In 1921 a Communist intellectual wrote a ‘dangerous’ version as he was about to die, and someone else wrote another secret revolutionary version called ‘Moving the Hills of Ariran.’ Middle-school students have been given six months in prison for singing these. I knew one who received this in Seoul in 1925” (Kim and Wales 1941, 7). “New words were added to *Arirang* so often,” Kim Shi-öp writes, “that the Japanese used to mention ‘seditious thought’ whenever their ears caught the word *Arirang*” (1988, 12, 14).

This last assertion is so sweeping as to defy authoritative verification. It is not uncommon for studies of colonial Korea to make passing mention of Japanese policies that suppressed folk culture and performing arts without providing documentary evidence from what is evidently a thin paper trail (Killick 1998, 87, 197–98).³¹ The 1926 film that sparked the modern “Arirang” craze is a case in point about such historiographical laxity. Several historians seem to have assumed that the GGC banned Na Un-gyu’s *Arirang* movie; the fact that the film was produced and shown at all is said to be a tribute to Na’s genius for allegory.³²

However, Kim Ryö-sil’s research in contemporary sources reveals that despite the GGC’s stringent censorship regime, *Arirang* was shown repeatedly throughout the peninsula for several years after its initial release and even won first prize in the silent film category at the *Chosön ilbo*’s 1938 film festival. Not only did Na produce two sequels in 1930 and 1936, but the original *Arirang* proved innocuous enough to be shown on Japanese soil to Korean laborers in Sapporo as late as 1942. Referring to the original novelization of the script (a copy of which was discovered in 1987), as well as to Na’s own reminiscences, Kim provocatively concludes that the film was derivative of foreign melodramas and had no nationalistic intentions. The 1929 recording of Söng Tong-ho (a professional *p’yönsa*, or silent film narrator, equivalent to the Japanese *benshi*) narrating scenes from the film (transcribed and translated in the Synnara/King CD sleeve notes) affirms Kim’s argument: It is not at all obvious that the villainous O Kiho is a stand-in for Japanese imperialists or that the hero Yöng-jin was driven to madness by torture following his participation in the March 1, 1919, demonstrations. The narrative emphasis is rather on filial affection, failed romance, and Yöng-jin’s inconsistent lucidity. However, Söng Tong-ho himself testified that it was common for *p’yönsa* to narrate “two versions,” depending on who was in the audience. Kim thus concludes that *Arirang* acquired a reputation as an “anti-Japan national film” only because *p’yönsa* would

³¹Cursory references to Japanese suppression appear in Kyong-hee Lee (1993, 99); Marshall Pihl (1994, 50–51); Park (1998, 65); Van Zile (2001, 70); Chöng Byöng-ho, “Dance: Ancient—1945,” in Yang (1997, 95); Republic of Korea Cultural Properties Administration (2001, 23, 27, 55, 112); and Shin (2003, 36, 41, 45).

³²Assertions that the film was banned appear in McCann (1979, 54) and Carter J. Eckert et al. (1990, 295). Young-il Lee and Choe young-Chol maintain that Na avoided censorship only by using “a madman character to express national pride, whereas, with a sane character he could not have” (1998, 43).

occasionally insert nationalist commentary when Japanese police were not present. Because no surviving prints of the film have been located, it is impossible to gauge *Arirang*'s intrinsic nationalism today, but the nationalist aura of the film and its theme song seems to derive more from the experience of being in the theater with an exceptionally patriotic *p'yŏnsa* than from the film's content (Kim 2004, 18, 20, 21–22; see also Miyatsuka 1995, 41–42, 119–29).³³ In any case, there appears to be no evidence that *Arirang* was banned by colonial authorities.

By contrast, Pak Ch'an-ho's book on Korean popular music is a notable exception in the historiography, offering visual evidence of the censorship of “Arirang”: a facsimile of a page from the 1931 songbook *Chosŏn kayochip* in which the offending lyrics “If we can fight no longer / Let's set all Creation afire” are blacked out (Pak 1987, 58). From this, we may conclude that censorship of “Arirang” occurred, though it was selective, for discographies show that recordings in both languages were produced until well into the 1940s. This may be indicative of different policies for different media: With more elaborate production processes, perhaps recordings could be more effectively supervised and rendered innocuous than printed versions.

“Arirangs” in Service to Empire

Arirang Arirang arariyo

Know that it is a time of emergency... .

When at the crossroads of peace and its opposite,

The spirit of the Sun illumines the world.

Fly the flag of peace!

—“Emergency Arirang,” attributed to Kim Chi-yŏn, 1941³⁴

Beyond suppressing some Korean “Arirangs,” there is evidence that some Japanese renditions were composed with propagandistic intent. Kim Shi-ŏp argues that Japanese conspired to use bogus “Arirangs” to deepen their colonial hegemony, whereas Koreans struggled to preserve the song's integrity and defiant spirit—to “keep it real,” if you will. Referring to a “Pisangshi [Emergency] Arirang” published in May 1930, Kim writes, “The Japanese bound all our folk songs with the shackles of feudal ethics represented by ‘loyalty and filial piety’ in order to promote their imperialist expansion and strengthen their Fascist colonial rule.... It goes without saying that this is by no means an *Arirang*. It was nothing but a fabrication aimed at obliterating *Arirang* itself.” In Kim's view, even the Japanese pop “Arirangs” are suspect. Exploiting the song's familiarity, the Japanese debased “Arirang” by promoting its more “decadent” aspects: “In

³³Miyatsuka (1995, 30–36), too, had access to the novelization and emphasizes the crucial intercession of *p'yŏnsa* but does not question the nationalistic intentions of Na's film. A 1957 remake of *Arirang*, with a more explicitly anti-Japanese message, further burnished the nationalist credentials of Na's original.

³⁴Lyrics are available in Korean at <http://arirangsong.netian.com/fanta13.html>.

addition to encouraging the publication of vulgar songs, Japanese propagated decadent trends and the Japanese way of life and songs... . They attempted to degrade the whole Korean race” and “thoroughly prohibited songs and folk songs that contained the Korean national identity” (Kim Shi-öp 1988, 13–14).

In some instances, late colonial “Arirangs” took on the characteristics of “continental melodies” (*tairiku merodi*), which Edgar Pope (2003) defines as musical “evocations of continental Asia” (principally China), produced and consumed to create a sense of “exoticism” or “pleasure in the foreign.” Pope does not regard “Arirang” as *tairiku merodi* because “ideologically, Korea was not ‘foreign,’ having been annexed by Japan in 1910” (2003, 3, 31, 178). Then again, among the plentiful Korean-themed pop songs of the late 1930s and early 1940s,³⁵ there are a handful of “Arirangs” that do indeed portray Korea as “exotic” and “foreign.” Pope notes that sheet music of *tairiku merodi* typically featured exotic scenes and peoples on their covers, a characterization that describes the sheet music for Saijō Yaso’s “Arirang” (see figure 3). Here, a Korean woman wearing *hanbok* gazes on a Seoul landscape, identified by what are likely the Namdaemun (Great South Gate) pagoda and Pukhansan mountain. Furthermore, several late colonial “Arirangs” have more in common musically and lyrically with songs like “China Tango” and “China Nights” than with folkloric “Arirangs.”

“Arirang Blues” (composed by Saijō Yaso and Hattori Ryōichi) is a case in point. Hattori, the most revered composer of jazz songs, “Japanese blues,” and *tairiku merodi*, never stayed away from the “Arirang” theme too long: By my count, he composed or arranged some five renditions between 1932 and 1948 and may have done more under a pseudonym. According to one account, he was moved to compose a bluesy “Arirang” after doing research for an extended “light music” suite of old Korean melodies, a three-record set that was popular among Koreans. Saijō is said to have found poetic inspiration in the photo album and stories of Yi Cha-kyōng, the daughter of a Korean millionaire who was studying in Japan and was “a big Saijō fan,” but he also had visited Seoul and P’yōngyang to collect material for *shin min’yō* releases on Victor Records (Saijō 1983, 53). “Arirang Blues” shares attributes with the “scenery song” (*fūkei mono*) type of *tairiku merodi*, which typically evoked “images expressed by noun phrases, rather than complete sentences” to “create loose symbolic frames within which the foreign can be imagined, liminoid spaces where the listener can play with exotic images and sensations.” Clothing, famous landscapes or buildings, “ethnic” implements or transportation (e.g., Chinese “junks”),

³⁵Miyatsuka (1995, 157–61) lists no fewer than forty-four Korea-themed songs recorded for Nippon Columbia alone between 1932 and 1940. Titles include “Taegu March,” “P’yōngyang Is a Great Place,” “Kisaeng kouta,” “Inch’ōn March,” “Ondol kouta,” and “Keijō [Seoul] Dance.” I found references to two additional Columbia releases, “Chōsen Is a Great Place” (28551B, 1935) and “Chōsen Youth Song” (29491A, 1937). Miyatsuka notes that the list would be much longer if releases from Victor, Teichiku, King, and other companies were included.



Figure 3. Sheet music for Saijō Yaso’s “Arirang” (undated, probably 1932).

hairstyles, smells, sounds, tastes—all were potential signifiers of difference in such songs (Pope 2003, 321–22). Like so many other *tairiku merodi*, Saijō’s lyrics drop references to quintessential Korea such as *chōgori* (Korean top-coats) and the Ch’angkyōng-wŏn royal garden to evoke a Korean atmosphere. “Arirang Blues” is a classic Hattori musical mishmash—sauntering two-beat “covered wagon” rhythm (straight out of American cowboy films), violin mimicking the Chinese bowed lute (*huqin*; in Japanese, *kokyū*) (Pope 2003, 323), and delicate celeste—aspiring to be both a blues song and an “Arirang.”

Koreans, too, composed and performed what might be called “national policy ‘Arirangs’” (*kokusaku ariran*, *kukchaek arirang*), which exhibited *tairiku merodi* characteristics and touted GGC policies encouraging Koreans to settle in Manchuria (Pak 1987, 313–15), where “milk and honey flow as oil from the

ground.”³⁶ Another example is “Kangnam Arirang,” composed by Ko Ma-bu and Hyŏng Sŏk-ki and performed by Yun Kŏn-yŏng for a June 1934 Polydor release. The song rhapsodizes Jiangnan in eastern China, which, Pak Ch’an-ho writes, “for Koreans seems at all seasons like a warm, blossoming utopia”:

They say it is like another world, where flowers bloom and birds warble
Arirang arirang arariyo
Arirang, when can I go to Kangnam? ...
They say the stars happily greet you.³⁷

For me, this song captures the “colonial modernity” of “Arirang.” Penned by Koreans, it retains the yearning redolent in folkloric “Arirangs” of hope for what lies beyond the Arirang hill. That yearning was even more poignant at a time when colonial oppression in Korea was intensifying rapidly as Koreans were being mobilized for more Japanese imperial adventures in Asia. And yet we see here the way that “Arirang” itself bears the markings of the colonial encounter. It belongs as much to a song genre—*tairiku merodi*—that expressed Japanese imperialist fantasies as it does to a Korean folkloric heritage. “Kangnam Arirang” is at once an expression of colonial desire for China—Japanese imperialist aspirations conveyed in a “Korean” guise—and a supplication for emancipation from Japan’s tightening colonial grip on Korea. Perhaps unintentionally, it exposes the plight of Koreans who, though themselves victims of colonial oppression, had become complicit, in various capacities, in the colonial subjugation of China and the rest of Asia.³⁸

“Arirang” and the Postcolonial Imagination

Among Koreans, the “street cred” of “Arirang” has remained largely undiminished by its flirtation with the Japanese imperialists. Ko Chun-sŏk’s memoir of his wife, leftist revolutionary Kim Sa-im (1921–50), demonstrates this enduring esteem for the song. Ko had initially dismissed “Arirang” as “just another decadent pop song or sentimental thing.” But for Kim Sa-im, he

³⁶Two “Manchu Arirang” songs (in Korean) are available at <http://arirangsong.netian.com/fanta13.html>.

³⁷Lyrics are reprinted in Pak (1987, 62) and in Korean at <http://arirangsong.netian.com/fanta12.html>.

³⁸Pak lists several other songs by Korean composers and performers that exhibit *tairiku merodi* characteristics and tout GGC policies encouraging Koreans to settle in Manchuria (1987, 313–15). One of the anonymous reviewers of this essay suggested that these songs may also reflect thwarted Korean aspirations for Manchurian expansion. This seems plausible to me, given the ongoing debates between Chinese and Korean historians over the territorial scope and “Korean-ness” of ancient Koguryŏ and Parhae (see Byington 2004) and the historical claims of Sin Ch’aeho and Ch’oe Namson (see Allen 1990; Schmid 1997). I noticed on my 2003 visit to the War Memorial Museum (Chŏnjaeng kinyŏmgwan) in Seoul that, although frequent invasions of Korean territory by Chinese, Mongols, Manchurians, and Japanese were consistently condemned, Korean incursions into Manchuria were depicted as heroic escapades.

writes, “it was ‘our song,’ a ‘Chosŏn woman’s song.’ Perhaps, as well, for the solitary woman in a persecuted nation, living within a society of forced discrimination and anxiety, the singing of such songs—born from a history of persecution—relieved the agony oozing from the bottom of their chests.” “Under the colonial rule of Japanese imperialism,” Ko continues, “the Arirang hills became the hills of yearning for national liberation.... Among the people’s countless, extemporaneously composed forms were many lyrics filled with a desire for independence, with the agony of a persecuted nation. Japanese imperialists responded, forcefully re-tailoring it as a coquettish ballad, so as to extract the nationality from this folk song; but since its nationality lingered, they finally banned it completely.” Realizing that his political contempt was for this “coquettish ballad,” Ko’s disdain evaporated when he recognized its enduring vernacular authenticity. “I’ve come to remember warmly in my heart the melodies sung by my wife. To me, as a Korean living in a suffocating society, the national melodies had the effect of a welcome rain for my thirsty emotions” (Ko 1989, 51–52).

The idyllic tone of Ko’s account notwithstanding, it does seem that Korean farmers and fisher folk, exchange students and migrant laborers, revolutionaries and guerrillas at least matched the Japanese culture industry’s prolificacy for composing new “Arirangs” in response to deteriorating conditions within the colony and the agonies that ensued after liberation. We fret nowadays that beloved anthems such as the Beatles’ “Revolution 9” or Gil Scott-Heron’s “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised” lost their power when they appeared in Nike commercials. “Arirang” resisted such a fate because of its inherent mutability. No matter what pop songsmiths did to it, no one could *own* a song whose very essence was change.

Because of its presumed ties to Korean resistance, “Arirang” has become an important folkloric object of and vehicle for commemoration in both Korean states and in Korean diasporic communities in Japan, China, and elsewhere (see figure 4). One of the display cases in the Social and Cultural Resistance Movements exhibit at Independence Memorial Hall features phonograph records and a 1935 English-language sheet music version of “Arirang Hill” (see figure 5) attributed to An Ik-t’ae.³⁹ The accompanying caption reads, “Many Korean people sang the Arirang song to express their agony and sadness of losing independence[,] while many patriotic songs became very popular among the Korean people.” Along with folk drumming (*p’ungmul*), shamanism (*musok*), and masked dance drama (*t’alch’um*), “Arirang” has become one of the most potent folkloric signifiers of a heroic defiance deemed peculiarly

³⁹A copy of this score (An 1935) at the Newberry Library in Chicago includes a typewritten letter from An in which he responds to questions from an unidentified party (possibly the publisher) about the sources of his music. Asked why he was bringing these songs to America, An replied, “To express particularly Korean character and you may see in my Orchestral work the real Korean spirit and atmosphere will be expressed.”



Figure 4. Republic of Korea’s “Arirang” Commemorative Stamp. Source: <http://www.pennfamily.org/KSS-USA/890327-1559.htm>.

Korean (see Abelman 1996, 62; Choi 1995, 108–12; Provine et al. 2002, 938–39; Shin 2003, 36). Ethnic Koreans living abroad assert their Koreanness by using the word “Arirang” to entitle their memoirs and oral histories and to christen their organizations, events, businesses, and satellite television network.⁴⁰ An “Arirang festival” soothed the North Korean government’s wounded pride at being excluded from the 2002 FIFA World Cup (cohosted by Japan and South Korea), an event concocted to draw tourists away from the main event.⁴¹

Indeed, as one of the few preliberation songs still sung in North Korea (Howard 2001, 151), “Arirang” transcends the ideological and physical demilitarized zone that divides the peninsula, thus rendering a folk song one of the very few commemorative sites both Korean regimes can claim. Even a half century of political division has not thwarted the dominant view that Koreans constitute a homogeneous race of people whose eventual reunification is inevitable (Grinker 1998, 19–48), and sure enough, there are “Unification Arirangs” (*t’ong’il arirang*) expressing this cherished hope.⁴²

Arirang, arirang, arariyo,
 Crossing Unification Hill.
 The thorns who forsake the Fatherland remain,
 Though I am living, such living is revolting.

[Refrain]
 The thorns who forsake unification remain,
 May they receive history’s judgment.

⁴⁰See, for instance, Kim Tal-su (1977), An U-sik (1982), Ko Chun-sök (1989), Pak Su-nam (1991), Song Chang-ho and O Son-hwa (1992), Sin Ki-su (1992), Im Eidai (1994), and Beverly Paik (2002).

⁴¹See “W hai ni taikō ‘Kita Chōsen Ariran sai’ no dai akaji,” *Shūkan shinchō* 47, no. 24 (June 27, 2002): 42–43.

⁴²This is my translation (with the assistance of John Bentley) of *t’ong’il arirang* lyrics from <http://arirangsong.netian.com/tongil.html>.

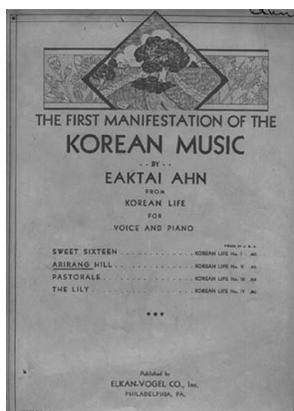


Figure 5. Score for An Ik-t'ae's arrangement of “Arirang”. Source: Independence Memorial Hall website, www.independence.or.kr.

Coda

In this essay, I have attempted to recast “Arirang” as an iconic expressive medium shared by Koreans and Japanese at a particularly intense phase of their relationship, thereby taking a modest step toward an ethnomusicology of colonial modernity in East Asia. So supple was this song form that both peoples used it to reflect on their respective situations, to represent themselves and one another. For Koreans, “Arirang” dramatized their colonial victimhood, expressed the delirium that accompanied rapid modernization, and, in some incarnations, even inspired defiant action against Japanese imperialism. For Japanese, “Arirang” provided not only yet another vehicle for the indefatigable sentimentality of their popular music but also a lens through which to gaze on the Korean soul and a mirror revealing disconcerting truths about Japan’s modern condition. As expressed most evidently in the notorious 1942 symposium on “overcoming modernity,” many Japanese regarded modernity as a “disease” that had “sickened” and “distorted” their national spirit (Harootyan 2000, chapters 2, 5). As a product of Koreans’ alleged primordial communalism and artless poeticism, “Arirang” made plain to Japanese just how much they had given up to be modern. If, for Koreans, “Arirang” alleviated the misery of lost sovereignty, for Japanese, this song extracted from their colony enabled them to reconnect vicariously to a more elemental existence, from which modernity itself had torn them. By creating a space for artistic exchange and mutual melancholy, “Arirang” may then have facilitated the union of metropole and colony (*naisen ittai*) better than any of the draconian schemes Japanese colonial administrators implemented in the empire’s twilight days.

This perspective on “Arirang” raises a number of questions for which I have yet to find satisfactory answers. In the everyday lives of colonial Koreans, what was the relative prominence of *hangil arirang* compared to the commercial pop versions so widely available throughout the empire in the 1930s? Which versions were best known? If, as some have suggested, even the most familiar lyrics

(“The one who abandoned me / Will be footsore before s/he goes ten *li*”) refer obliquely to the Japanese (Kusano 1984, 36), would most Koreans have gotten the joke? How did folk and pop “Arirangs” interact, influence, or negate one another? Did anti-Japan “Arirangs” in the vernacular tradition “signify” on the sentimental “Arirang” love ballads distributed by Japanese media companies?⁴³ Did Japanese and Korean songwriters mine this vernacular tradition to create new “Arirangs” for mass consumption? Future “Arirang” scholarship can address such issues only if it takes seriously the song’s colonial modernity, by which I mean foregrounding the ways in which cultural production and consumption patterns influenced and were shaped by the colonial and imperial relationships at play in East Asia in the early twentieth century.

Awareness of the song’s historical role in Korea–Japan relations may yet progress as the two countries collaborate (with some Chinese participation) toward a mutual understanding of their shared history.⁴⁴ There is some evidence to suggest that music is mediating ongoing efforts at reconciliation in northeast Asia, as the current “K-Pop” boom in Japan attests.⁴⁵ On June 14, 2002, immediately preceding the World Cup finals, a concert in Tokyo conferred belated recognition of the dual career of “Arirang.” Given the continuing tensions over Japanese textbook treatments of colonial history, it was a remarkable event, even more so for its implicit acknowledgment that Korea’s “national song” is shared property. Composers from both Korean states and Japan presented their variations on the “Arirang” theme, interspersed with lectures on the song’s historical significance. A report by the *People’s Korea* generously praised the ten Japanese composers’ contributions, which “seemed to have enriched ‘Arirang’ in different ways to match Japanese culture.” A Japanese woman in the audience conceded that “there are a number of problems yet to be addressed, which include postwar reparation and controversial history textbooks issues.” But, she added hopefully, “We need to reconsider approaches to achieve a true reconciliation and friendship between the two peoples. This is the message the Korean song ‘Arirang’ gave me today.”⁴⁶

⁴³I use the term “signify” in the manner proposed by scholars of African American literature: to describe the appropriation and playful inversion of hegemonic language, symbols, and practices. See, for instance, Gates (1988) and Baker (1984).

⁴⁴See Jae-Jeong Chung, “Korea–Japan Endeavors for Joint History Textbooks,” Conference on Historical Reconciliation in Europe and the Asia-Pacific, July 13, 2004, http://www.unescoapceiu.org/sangsaeng/pdf/ss_11_27_31.pdf; Kim Rahn, “Joint History Textbook Published: Scholars of Korea, China, Japan Write ‘History That Opens the Future,’” *Korea Times*, May 26, 2005, <http://times.hankooki.com/lpage/nation/200505/kt2005052622492411990.htm>; and “Joint History Study,” <http://www.asahi.com/english/Herald-asahi/TKY200506290102.html>.

⁴⁵See “K-Pop Booms in Japan,” *Shanghai Star*, May 30, 2002, <http://app1.chinadaily.com.cn/star/2002/0530/sp32-1.html>; and Paul Wiseman, “Korea’s Romantic Hero Holds Japan in Thrall,” *USA Today*, December 10, 2004 (I thank several colleagues from the Midwest Japan Seminar for bringing this article to my attention).

⁴⁶See “‘Arirang Variations’ by Japanese and Korean Composers Performed; 2nd Anniversary of Inter-Korean Declaration Marked,” http://210.145.168.243/pk/181st_issue/2002061502.htm.

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歌手：Kim Un-Sŏn

伴奏：伽耶琴

「アリラン映画説明」日本コロムビア 40002–40003、1929年

弁士解説：成東鎬 Sŏng Tong-ho

歌手：姜石鳶 Kang Sŏ-gyŏn

「아리랑」日本コロムビア 40070A、2月1930年

歌手：蔡奎（東？）園

「雜歌密陽아리랑」(Miryang Arirang) 日本コロムビア 40226B、1929–31年

歌手：朴月庭 Pak Wŏl-Chŏng and 金仁淑 Kim In-Suk

「アリラン」日本ビクター 51819B、7月1931年

歌手：金色反面（小林千代子）

作詞：西条八十

作曲：文芸部編

『西条八十全集：生年百年記念日』日本コロムビア COCA 1026-36, 1992 (Disc 3,
Track 4).

「アリラン節」アサヒ蓄音機商会 2625A、1927–1931年頃

歌手：阿部秀子

「アリランの唄」日本コロムビア 27066A、8月1932年

歌手：淡谷のり子、長谷川一郎（蔡奎燁）

作詞：佐藤惣之助

作曲：古賀政男

伴奏：明治大学マンドリンオーケストラ

『オリジナル原盤による昭和の流行歌』日本コロムビア COCP 30171-90, 1998
(Disc 2, Track 16).

「アリラン」ポリドル 1215A、10月1932年

歌手：（京城本勞）笑太郎

作詞：植田国境子

「アリランの唄」テイチク 5141A、10月1932年

歌手：横田良一

作詞：歌島花水

作曲：文芸部編

伴奏：テイチク室内楽団

「新아리랑」ポルドール 5月1933年

歌手：金龍煥

江南아리랑 (Kangnam Arirang) Polydor, 1934

歌手：Yun 尹鍵榮

「アリラン小唄」日東レコード 6283B、1月1934年

歌手：東海林太郎

作詞：服部龍太郎

作曲：篠原正雄

「アリラン時雨」ポリドール 1934年

歌手：渡辺光子

作詞：原田貞輔

作曲：原田誠一

「アリラン節」ルモンドレコード 3077A、1935年頃

歌手：島津一郎

「ノクトゥリアリラン」シエロン 1935年

歌手：羅仙嬌

「アリラン夜曲」日本ビクター、4月1935年

歌手：渡辺はま子

作詞：坂村真民

作曲：鈴木静一

「アリラン越えて」リーガルレコード 67234A、9月1935年

歌手：山野美和子

作詞：松村又一

作曲：原野為二

「アリラン」日本コロムビア 40670A、3月1936年

編曲：小倉俊

伴奏：コロムビア尺八・ギター四重奏団

「아리랑」日本コロムビア 40678A、5月1936年

歌手：劉鍾燮 Yu Chon-sŏp

密陽아리랑 (Miryang Arirang) 日本コロムビア 40678B、5月1936年

歌手：張慶順

伴奏：コロムビア管弦楽団

「アリラン夜曲」日本コロムビア 28837B、5月1936年

歌手：松平晃

作詞：西条八十

作曲：江口夜詩

「アリランの唄」日本コロムビア 40692、6月1936年

伴奏：コロムビアジャズバンド

「アリランの唄」テイチク 50344B、7月1936年

歌手：岡蘭子 (李蘭影)

歌詞：島田馨也

作曲：杉田良造

「アリラン新曲」 テイチク 50482A、9月1936年

歌手：岡島貴代子

作詞：島原邦人

作曲：レイモンド服部

「アリラン小唄」 日本コロムビア 29073B、11月1936年

歌手：京城百太郎

作詞：鈴木かほる

作曲：服部逸郎

密陽아리랑 (Miryang Arirang) 日本コロムビア C379、11月1936年

吹込者：権弄仙・鼓韓成俊

伴奏：伽耶琴

「アリラン」 日本コロムビア 40753、3月1937年

歌手：金仁淑

伴奏：韓洋楽

「アリラン夜曲」 日本コロムビア 29262A、4月1937年

歌手：赤坂百太郎

歌詞：高橋掬太郎

作曲：服部良一

「アリランハーモニカ 演奏」 日本コロムビア、8月1937年

演奏：リーガルハーモニカバンド

아리랑 日本コロムビア、1939年

歌手：Chang Ok-cho 蔣玉祚

「アリランの唄」 日本コロムビア 29801、7月1938年

歌手：菊丸

作曲：天地芳雄

伴奏：洋楽器・尺八

「コルマンデアリラン」 日本ビクター 7月1939年

歌手：金龍煥

「月のアリラン」 ポリドール P5063、1940年

歌手：小林千代子

作詞：矢島龍児

作曲：若葉茂男

編曲：倉若晴生

伴奏：ポリドール管弦楽団

『日本の流行歌史大系：ポリドール戦前17』ダイセル化学工業株式会社、1989年

「アリラン娘／アリラン物語」 日本ビクター 1940年

歌手：金安羅

「アリラン娘」

歌手：白蘭児

作曲：金教磬

「アリランブルース」 日本コロムビア 100001A、4月1940年

歌手：高峰三枝子

作詞：西条八十

作曲：服部良一

『服部良一全集』日本コロムビア COCA 10401-07, 1992
(Disc 2, Track 12).

「アリラン娘」日本ビクターA4114A、10月1940年

歌手：林東馬

作詞：若杉雄三郎

作曲：東辰三、三宅幹夫

「アリラン娘」日本ビクターA4114B、10月1940年

歌手：金安羅

作詞：若杉雄三郎

作曲：服部正

「アリラン酒場」1940-43年

歌手：金鳳鳴

「アリラン月夜」テイチクT3184B、8月1941年

歌手：菅原都々子

作詞：島田馨也

作曲：陸奥明

「民謡傑作集-トラジの花、アリランの唄、白頭山節」テイチクT3455B、
10月1943年

歌手：美ち奴、塩まさる

解説：泉詩郎

「アリランルンバ」日本コロムビア、1948年

歌手：服部富子

作詞：村雨まさを

作曲：服部良一

『東京の屋根の下-服部良一僕の音楽人生1948-1954』日本ビクターVICL
61066-7, 2003年

「アリラン哀歌」テイチクC-3430、5月1953年

作詞：島田芳文

作曲：陸奥明

作曲：長津義司

月年未知：

「アリラン」日本コロムビア100641、?年

伴奏：コロムビアオーケストラ

備考：服部良一

「アリラン子守り唄」日本コロムビアA2232、?年

歌手：永田とよこ

作詞：榎本寿

作曲：レーモンド服部

「アリラン」テイチクC-3119、?年

歌手：菅原都々子

作詞：大橋ひさを

作曲：長津義司

「アリランの唄」 太平蓄音機 5 1 1 2B、?年

歌手：横田良一

編曲：服部良一

伴奏：タイヘイ管弦楽団

「アリランの唄」 太平蓄音機 K 2 0 0 6 1、?年

歌手：横田良一

伴奏：キングオーケストラ

「アリラン」 ホーナー (ニッポンレコード) P 2 2 6、?年

歌手：高阪幸子

伴奏：ホーナーオーケストラ

「アリラン」 ホーナー (ニッポンレコード) P 2 2 6、?年

演奏：巴里ムーランルージュ楽員

「アリランの唄」 日本コロムビア A 1 2 2 8、?年

歌手：グレイズ雨宮

編曲：レーモド服部

「アリランの唄」 日東蓄音機 6 0 3 6、?年

歌手：朴景嬉

編曲：篠原正雄

伴奏：N.O. オーケストラ

「アリラン悲歌」 キングレコード C 6 3 1、?年

歌手：津村謙

作詞：宮本旅人

作曲：上原けんど

「アリラン峠」 キングレコード C 7 4 9、?年

歌手：三條町子

歌詞：東條寿三郎

作曲：渡久地政信

「アリラン・マンボ」 日本ビクター V 4 1 3 0 3、?年

歌手：宮城まり子

作詞：井田誠一

編曲：佐野鋤

「アリラン夜曲」 日本ビクター 5 3 3 7 3、?年

歌手：渡辺はま子

作詞：坂村眞民

作曲：鈴木静一

新아리랑 (Shin Arirang) Okeh K1696A

歌手：Ko Pok-Su

아리랑 (Arirang) Regal C254

歌手：Chang Iryöng-hong

長아리랑 (Kin Arirang) Polydor 19039B

歌手：Yi Yöngsan-hong

아리랑 (Arirang) Regal C379

歌手：Kwöñ Nong-Söñ

아리랑의꿈 (Dream of Arirang) Regal C383

歌手 : Kim Jo?

아리랑 Columbia 40440A

南道長아리랑 (Namdo Kin Arirang) Columbia 40561B

歌手 : Kim Kap-Cha (with *kayagŭm* accompaniment)

珍島아리랑 (Chindo Arirang) Victor KJ-1138

Shin Suk, O Pi-ch'wi

珍島아리랑 (Chindo Arirang) Okeh 1728

歌手 : Kim So-Hŭi

江原道아리랑 (Kangwŏn-do Arirang) Regal C198B

歌手 : Yi Ok-Hwa

할미꽃 아리랑 태평5028

歌手 : Paek Nan-a?

꽃망태 아리랑 Victor KJ-1335

歌手 : Kim Yong-hwan?

その他

「朝鮮よいとこ」日本コロムビア 28551B、11月1935年

歌手 : 音丸

作詞 : 野口雨情

作曲 : 江口夜詩

「朝鮮青年歌」日本コロムビア 29491A、9月1937年

歌手 : 中野忠晴、合唱団

作詞 : 田中初夫

作曲 : 大場勇之助

(朝鮮文芸会制定)