

# Holy Land of Korean Traditional Music

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## 1. About the Course

These places were constructed with the purpose of carrying on the legacy of Korean traditional music.

Have you heard of Korean “*pansori*” before? *Pansori* is one of the types of folk music native to Korea. It comprises songs that provide a narration while weaving in the stories of a long script and sounds matching the drum-beat of a drummer, aided by their gestures.

Namwon is especially famous for being the home of *pansori*, and it is setting for the renowned works such as “Song of Chunhyang” and “Song of Heungbu”. Also, the region is the birthplace of *dongpyeonje*, which is a singing style of *pansori* popular in the eastern area of Jeolla-do. In addition to this, various genres of Korean traditional music from long ago have been studied and passed on here.

This is the place for Korean traditional music with all kinds of things to see and activities to try. Shall we go and have a look?

## 2. The Resting Place of the Masters of Korean Traditional Music

Firstly, we are going to visit the graveyard where the ancestors of Korean traditional music lay sleeping. Do you see the circular stage? If you go past here, up the steps, and through the door, you will see the Akseongsa Shrine commemorating Korean traditional musicians. In the shape of a traditional Korean building, this place is home to the ancestral tablets of the resting traditional musicians. An ancestral ceremony is performed here to honor their souls.

The front side of the tomb is in the shape of a drum, which is a musical instrument that accompanies *pansori* performances. There are five tombs here, all of which inform you about the masters of Korean traditional music.

## 3. Acquiring Sound through Personal Battle

This area is especially devoted to *deugeum*, a *pansori* singer’s most important challenge. *Deugeum* literally means “to acquire the vocal sound”, and refers to the intensive training that singers have to go through to attain the perfect stage of the superior, advanced quality of vocalization techniques. Here is the special area devoted to this training. These rooms can be used by anyone, and was designed to reflect the image of musicians who perfected their sound alone in the mountains or alongside waterfalls or other natural spaces. Also, visitors can first-hand experience the training methods of the master singers. How

about trying out the sound for yourself?

#### **4. Folk Songs and Instruments**

Inside this stylish building, right in the center of the precincts, you can experience exhibitions and activity programs about Korean traditional music. The first place that we come to is the Folk Music Pavilion. A wide variety of items related to Korean folk songs are exhibited in this hall, and you might notice that the folk songs have slight regional differences in tone and the atmosphere that they create. We hope that this is a chance for you to listen to whichever songs you like best and for you to discover what Korean traditional folk music really is. In addition to folk music instruments, primitive instruments such as dried sticks, bells, and water containers, along with Korea's traditional stringed instruments are on display here.

#### **5. Everything about *Pansori***

You can find out here exactly what *pansori* is, and how its history unfolded. *Pansori* is an art form combining the harmony of the drumming and verbal sounds of a drummer, and the songs, descriptive speech, gestures, and foot movements of a singer. If you take a good look around, you will learn all kinds of information about the origins of this performance, its formative elements and the twelve *pansori* pieces. There is even an introduction to the master singers of each generation.

Have you ever heard of the terms *dongpyeonje* and *seopyeonje*? Chances are, anyone interested enough in Korean traditional music to visit this museum should have heard of them. Additionally, there is a famous Korean movie called 'Seopyeonje' which is quite well known to foreigners. *Dongpyeonje* and *seopyeonje* are types of *pansori* music from the southern regions of the Korean Peninsula. The former is a singing method commanding emotional restraint, while the latter could be described as a very decorative and technical singing style. There is a corner here where you can hear the songs of master singers, so we hope that you can spend a little time listening to the music.

#### **6. About Five of Twelve *Pansori* Pieces**

There were originally twelve *pansori* pieces, however only five survived. All five are songs based on famous Korean stories which have been passed down through the generations.

In keeping with the flow of the stories, a *pansori* performance is divided into many parts like chapters. Singing a whole story all at once from start to finish is called *wanchang*, and it can take from two hours

for a short version to over 7-8 hours. So there aren't many complete performances for the general public, and usual practice is to choose and perform only the most popular chapters.

## **7. Korea's Cultural Heritage, Registered by UNESCO**

Shall we go and see the 2nd floor?

On the right, belongings and keepsakes of the Namwon master singer Kang Do-geun are proudly displayed. You can see items such as the props and instruments that he used, his performance costumes, and certificates of various awards.

On the left, examples of decorative, traditional dancing costumes are on display. These costumes are extravagant and very colorful.

The objects displayed here will inform you about the history of Korean court music. In particular, there are many items associated with the Royal Ancestral Ritual Music which was performed at Jongmyo, the royal shrine of the Joseon Dynasty. This extends to the singing and dancing which praise the good deeds of Korean ancestors, while performing with an instrument in a style in keeping with each part of the ceremony.

This ritual music is the first intangible cultural heritage of Korea which was selected as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2001. *Pansori* was also selected by UNESCO in 2003.

## **8. Time to Try Singing a Part like a Master Singer**

Here you can learn more about Korean traditional music firsthand. You can learn a part of *pansori* and learn to move in time to the rhythm of Korean traditional percussion music called *samul nori*. Also, you can try making a small *jangu*, an hourglass-shaped drum. Of these activities, dancing to the tune of the drum while wearing a traditional hat decorated with long ribbons can be especially appealing to people from other countries. You might have seen this kind of dancing from any videos promoting tourism in Korea.

Learning *pansori* is also very popular. You can learn the most popular part, and although it might be a little hard to keep up with the rhymes in Korean, feel free to have a go!

In making the mini hourglass-shaped drum, you'll be given the same materials used to make a real drum. It will sound like a real drum too. It'll just be smaller. Making a mini drum can be a fun activity particularly for families and children.

If the weather permits, you can also participate in various activities outside.

## 9. Performance Hall

This is the Performance Hall. There is a regular concert held here every Wednesday, but you must make a reservation in advance. If you are visiting in a large group, then it is possible for you to see a performance on days other than Wednesday too.

The performers are from the Namwon Municipal Traditional Music Orchestra. Here on the stage, they show various elements of folk music including the playing of instruments and singing, dancing, and *pansori*. In order to develop a closer intimacy with the public, some of their traditional music is infused with modern elements as well. The performance is about one hour long, but time will fly.

*Pansori* performers try to communicate with the audience during their performances. Listen closely and follow the points in the middle of the performance when Koreans in the audience call out. You can call out too! *Eolssu!* This short word of encouragement spurs the performers on into giving a really exciting performance.

## 10. The Sound Still Remains Where the Master Singers Lived

This is the birthplace of the master singer Song Heung-rok. The exterior of the building looks like a traditional Korean farmhouse. If you go inside, there is a sculpture to the left of the entrance. Made from stone, the 24 large and small orbs represent the teardrops of the audience listening to one of his performances.

In spite of already being famous, he had to put much time and effort into his practice in order to become a master singer. He is also known for being one of the founders of the *dongpyeonje* type of singing. His achievements were praised by the king and government.

Have you seen the statues in the center of the house? The statues show him performing *pansori* with his drummer.

## 11. Park Cho-wol's Thatched House

In the birthplace of Song Heung-rok, there is also the restored, thatched house of the master singer Park Cho-wol, who lived here when she was young. She was the leading female master singer of *pansori*. Her singing ability was so great that she had already made a clean sweep of the prizes at many singing competitions before she had even turned 16.

She learned from several master singers, and her ability had been acknowledged in performances in both Seoul and Japan before she was twenty years old. In the early 1930s, she entered the 'Joseon Society of Singing', and became known as the lead female performer there. Additionally, she struck a chord with many as she travelled all around the country with her accomplished singing and acting. She was a pop star of those days.