

Brief Communication

The effect of *Yukjabaegi* (six bit song) on overcoming grief through empathy sung by Hyang-ryun An pepped us up on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/04RRMyOGW90>)

Kyung Ja Ko^{1,2}, Sung Yeoun Hwang^{3,*}

¹Department of Pharmacology, College of Korean Medicine, Kyung Hee University, Seoul, Republic of Korea Department of Pharmacology, College of Korean Medicine, Kyung Hee University, Seoul, Republic of Korea; ²Esperamondo (<http://esperamondo.tistory.com/>) of art organization, Seoul, Republic of Korea; ³Korea Bio Medical Science Institute, Gangnam-gu, Seoul, 06106, Republic of Korea

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to argue that Korean music, *Yukjabaegi* (six-bit songs), helps us overcome grief. It is not untrue to say that *Yukjabaegi* is among the greatest types of music in Korea. This is a testament to the prominence of this statue among Han Ak (Korean music, 韓樂). Empathy is an inherent human quality involving all parts of the brain which is also linked to feelings of love. Empathy is created the moment we imagine ourselves in someone else's situation. Moreover, if empathy is good for us, the generation of empathy may actually mobilize our strength. Koreans have superior strength in overcoming grief and difficult situations by singing together. Often Koreans feel that their lives and labors are difficult, they start singing *Yukjabaegi* because they consider grief and anxiety wear on a person more than hard work. Listening to and singing *Yukjabaegi* can cheer up people who feel as limp as a rag after hard labor. Tackling reality and venting the experience via creative expression is bound to be healthy. Under a change of the rhythm pattern, *Yukjabaegi* thus becomes a major form of amusement for those suffering from difficult situations and comes as a true friend to share in our grief with us. Singing together via *Yukjabaegi* is a time to share grief. Thus, this, author believes that it is related to empathy. It helps us overcome grief by means of music therapy.

Keywords *Yukjabaegi*, Hyang-ryun An, empathy, grief, Han Ak (Korean music, 韓樂), music therapy

INTRODUCTION

That empathy is actually an inherent human quality which connects all parts of the brain and which is linked to feelings of love. Empathy is created the moment we imagine ourselves living the life of another; it is healthy for us, and the generation of empathy enhances our strength. Koreans are skilled in overcoming grief and challenges through singing together, and when Koreans feel that their life and labor present challenges, they can sing *Yukjabaegi*. *Yukjabaegi* refers to six-bit songs. It is accurate to say that *Yukjabaegi* is one of the greatest types of music in Korea. This is testament to its status among Han Ak (Korean music) and is related to how Koreans feel that grief and anxiety wear a man down more than hard work can. Listening to and singing *Yukjabaegi* can enliven people who feeling tired due to hard labor. For instance, rice farming is fatiguing, but it is also a symbol of new life and hope for Koreans. The effect of empathy is sufficient to bring us back into a world of encouragement, vivacity, and vitality of the types *Yukjabaegi* conjures. Facing reality and expressing this experience through creative expressions is clearly healthy.

Empathy - the ability to share the feelings of others - is fundamental to our emotional and social lives (Bernhardt and Singer, 2012). Empathic responses are modulated by many factors, including the contexts in which they occur (Engen and Singer, 2013). Empathy is, in part, based on shared representations of firsthand and vicarious experiences in affective states (Bernhardt and Singer, 2012). Empathy is, as mentioned above, an inherent human quality that involves the entire human brain, is also linked to feelings of love. Musical stimuli can also to activate specific pathways in several brain areas (Boso, et al., 2006). Traditionally, songs create and induce emotions and empathy through their lyrics and melodies. Thus, the author feels that relaxing grief through music therapy leads to perceived mildness and affirmative valence. With a change in the rhythm pattern, as a result, *Yukjabaegi* becomes a major source of amusement for those suffering in difficult situations. This is related to empathy. It helps us overcome grief through music therapy. The purpose of this article is to argue that Korean music, *Yukjabaegi* (six-bit songs) helps us to overcome grief.

Who is Hyang-ryun An?

Hyang-ryun An (Fig. 1, 1944 - 1981) was born in Songjeong-ri in Jeolla province in Korea. She died from an overdose of sleeping pills in 1981. By the time she was 11, she established a foundation of p'ansori with the help of her father. In 2000, '*Korean Music Historical and Other Aspects* noted that p'ansori best can be described as a unique Korean style of dramatic folk song belonging to the category of Korean vocal

*Correspondence: Sung Yeoun Hwang

E-mail: kbmsi2009@wellcan.co.kr

Received May 31, 2016; Accepted November 15, 2016; Published November 30, 2016

doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5667/tang.2016.0018>

© 2016 by Association of Humanitas Medicine

This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC license.

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>)

music which was developed by professional folk musicians (*kwangdae*) during the late period of the Choson Dynasty (1392-1910). In 2000, '*Korean Music Historical and Other Aspects*' noted that the voice quality of p'ansori singers can be described by such epithetical terms as husky (*surisong*), clear (*ch'on'gusong*), hard (*ch'olsong*), nasal (*pisong*), and quivering (*pallbalsong*), among others.

She has a powerful and mannish voice about her. Moreover, her voice is energetic, romantic and ladylike with just the right amount of edge. In this way, she has a sweet and husky voice but somewhat like that of a man in certain ways. Thus, it is known for maximizing sorrow. Due to her voice, refined and confident, she was a great comfort to Koreans. She has a touch of genius in her. She cries out the pain and sorrow of humans through her sound, but we grieve anew over her early death.

What is *Yukjabaegi*?

Yukjabaegi is a six-bit song. *Yukja* means six bits and the melody and '*baegi*' means a southern accent, i.e., a 'bit.' This great music style is the pride of the Korean music community and one of the most representative performing arts. In 1978, '*Folk songs of Korean rural life and their characteristics based on the rice farming songs*' noted that the mode of *Yukchabaegi* (*Yukjabaegi*) is basically tritonic- mi-la-si (e-a- b), with 'c' and 'd' appearing as ornaments that fall to 'b' in the characteristic *kkongnun mok* style ('breaking tone') (Howard, 1999). This mode ascribes a specific character to each pitch; the lowest *tonun mok* is sung with wide vibrato; the central tone, *p'yonguro naemun mok*, is given without vibrato; the highest has a downward sliding 'breaking tone'.... (Howard, 1999). It is not untrue to say that it encompasses all genres and regions of the southern province in traditional Korean music. In 2003, '*A method of teaching creation in high school based on the melody and rhythm of the Yougibaeggy tory*' noted that *Yukjabaegi* consists of mi-sol-la-do-re sounds and that the basic note is the la sound, with songs usually finishing with the la sound. The basic note is clearly the la sound. *Yukjabaegi* has a melancholic set of notes in the Jinyungjo part, but the melody becomes more active, lively, positive, and joyful in the semachi-jangdan (rhythmic cycle) part. Specifically, in Jinyungjo a heartbreaking pity in art is sublimated, vigorously capturing our hopes and dreams for the future in semachi-jangdan or yangsando (rhythmic cycle).

Jinyungjo refers to a rhythmic pattern. It means in Korean literally 'very slowly' and is the slowest beat in Korean music. It makes you feel intense sensitivity. In 1996, '*Hangukumaktongron*' noted a rhythm of 24 beats in Jinyungjo, representing 24 seasons. The period of Jinyungjo is four instances of twenty-four quarter notes ($\text{J} = 35, 24/4$). In 1994, '*Uriumak ui mat gwaha sorikkal*' noted that these 24 beats are divided into four parts in sextuple time and that they refer to pushing, heat, fruition, and a solution. There are four phrases in 9/8 time, very similar in part pattern and feel of the semachi rhythmic patterns found throughout Korea in other folk songs and instrumental genres (Hesselink, 2004). According to the tempo, the rhythmic cycle can be divided into the slow and fast types. This cycle is used to accompany songs describing violent and agitated scenes and moods (Kim et al., 2015).

DISCUSSION

Experiences of moving grief were powerfully related to high-trait empathy and emotional contagion (Eerola et al., 2016). Koreans have superior strength in overcoming grief and

difficulty by singing together. Whenever Koreans feel that their situations are burdensome, they can sing *Yukjabaegi*. They feel that sorrow and anxiety wear on a man more than hard work. Listening and singing *Yukjabaegi* cheers people who may be weary after a long day. *Yukjabaegi* sung by Hyang-ryun An is



Fig. 1. Hyang-ryun An.

to undertake grief management based on her experiences. Thus, her song is explosive. We are thrilled with her song through empathy. Her explosive energy makes us energetic. Heartily, we become angry and sad, and sing loudly. Therefore, she suggested that she can 'share grief with you, as a problem shared is a grief halved with song together to overcome grief.' Though rice farming is fatiguing, it is a symbol of new life and hope for farmers. In 2007, '*P'ungmul: South Korean Drumming and Dance by Nathan Hesselink*' noted that as the deep music connection between farmers' bands and folk singing in South Korea was largely severed, melodic improvisers in percussion music arose instead. This was originally the song that Koreans sang when they worked in the rice fields. At most, it became a refined song of professional folk singers. On a positive note, Koreans are trained to say yes to whatever comes their way, be it tragedy, love, death, losses, and even difficult rice farming labor. It has been shown that the entrainment of body rhythms with music increases physiological excitation and sympathetic nervous system activity (Urakawa and Yokoyama, 2006).

In conclusion, listening and singing *Yukjabaegi* can cheer up people who are feeling as limp as a rag due to hard labor. Although rice farming is fatiguing, it is a symbol of new life and hope for Koreans. The effect of empathy is sufficient to bring us back into a world of encouragement, vivacity, and vitality as brought by *Yukjabaegi*. Facing reality and finding an outlet via creative expression is certainly healthy. Under changes of rhythmical patterns, *Yukjabaegi* is valuable source of amusement for those suffering from difficult situations, appearing as a true friend to share in our grief. Singing together with *Yukjabaegi* is a time to share sadness, and this author believes that it is related to empathy. It helps us overcome grief by means of a type of music therapy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

REFERENCES

- Bernhardt BC, Singer T. The neural basis of empathy. *Annu Rev Neurosci.* 2012;35:1-23.
- Boso M, Politi P, Barale F. Neurophysiology and neurobiology of the musical experience. *Functional Neurology.* 2006;21:187-191.
- Engen HG, Singer T. Empathy circuits. *Cur Opin Neurobiol.* 2013;23:25-82.
- Eerola T, Vuoskoski JK, Kautiainen H. Being Moved by Unfamiliar Sad Music Is Associated with High Empathy. *Front Psychol.* 2016;7:1176.
- Kim HY, Ko KJ, Nam SY, Jeong HJ, Kim HM. The sound of a Buk (Korean Traditional drum) Attenuates Anaphylactic Reaction by the Activation of ER- β . *International Archives of Allergy and Immunology.* 2015;167:242-249.
- Keith Howard. *Minyo in Korea: Songs of the People and Songs for the People.* Asian Music. Vol. 30, No. 2 (Texas, USA: University of Texas Press), pp. 1-37, 1999.
- Nathan Hesselink. *Samul nori as Traditional: Preservation and Innovation in a South Korean Contemporary Percussion Genre.* Ethnomusicology. Vol. 48, No. 3 (Chicago, USA: University Of Chicago Press), pp. 405-439, 2004.
- Urakawa K, Yokoyama K. Music can enhance exercise-induced sympathetic dominancy assessed by heart rate variability. *Tohoku J Exp Med.* 2005;206:213-218.