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Zainichi Korean Identity and Performing North Korean Music in Japan

Sunhee Koo

Of the approximately eight hundred thousand Koreans currently residing in Japan, the majority are descendants of people displaced to Japan as economic migrants, military servicemen, and World War II laborers during the Japanese colonization of Korea (1910–1945). With the partitioning of the Korean peninsula, diasporic Koreans in Japan were split into two camps supporting the competing regimes in the North and South. Although almost 97% of them originated from southern Korean provinces, the majority took the North Korean side, and subsequently associated themselves with pro-North Korean organizations including economic and educational institutions. This paper examines the complexity of identity among Koreans in Japan, especially those who associate themselves with North Korean national music. Focusing on the music and musicians of Tokyo-based North Korean performance troupe Kūmgangsan Kagūktan, I demonstrate how these diasporic Korean musicians in Japan navigate their identity by internalizing and negotiating the cultural divisions between North and South Korea, through imagining and relating themselves to a pre-modern ethnic Koreanness. The performance of North Korean music in Japan is not the mere manifestation of one's ideological, cultural, or political affiliation. Rather, it is the expression of flexible citizenship and diasporic cultural agency rooted in creative desires and practical considerations while transcending social and political boundaries as necessary.

Keywords: North Korea, Music, Identity, Koreans in Japan, Migration, Diaspora

Introduction

The Tokyo-based North Korean performance troupe Kŭmgangsan Kagŭktan¹ was established in 1955 as Chaeil chosŏnin chungang yesultan (Central Arts Troupe of Koreans in Japan).² The troupe is sponsored by Ch'ongnyŏn, the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan, whose mission is to unify Koreans in Japan around the leadership of the North Korean government (Ryang, 1997). In this paper I adopt the term Ch'ongnyŏn to introduce Korean residents in Japan who have associated themselves with North Korea through Ch'ongnyŏn membership, as distinct from Mindan, in reference to those sided with South Korea.³ Most, if not all, Kŭmgangsan Kagŭktan members learned Korean music as students in Korean schools established by Ch'ongnyŏn. Well aware of the effectiveness of music and dance in marking, reinforcing, and constructing identity, with its schools Ch'ongnyŏn emphasized education in Korean music and dance through *sojohwaltong* (after-school music club activities) where students could learn a variety of Korean instruments as practiced in and fostered by the North.

This paper examines the complexity of identity among diasporic Koreans in Japan, focusing on those who associate themselves with North Korean national music, as do the members of the Kŭmgangsan Kagŭktan performance troupe. Based on ethnographic research conducted in Japan over the winters of 2015 and 2017, I illustrate how the performance of North Korean music in Japan delineates the intersection of nation, ethnicity, and diasporic citizenship. In these competing conceptual terrains, the boundary between the two post-partition Koreas is simultaneously articulated and transcended while the expression and construction of diasporic identity is given greater significance than the manifestation of a pro-North Koreanness, especially by younger-generation Zainichi Koreans (lit. Koreans in Japan) who prioritize their careers as contemporary musicians based in Japan. In this paper, I argue that performing North Korean music in Japan is not merely a manifestation of ideological, cultural, or political affiliation but rather one of migrants' agency and identity as diasporic Koreans in Japan who have the choice between North and South Korean nationhood, in their process of establishing themselves as resilient members of a neoliberal society.

Koreans in Japan

During the Japanese colonial period (1910–1945), millions of Koreans were displaced to Japan as students, military servicemen, and cheap

laborers. Before the end of World War II, all Koreans—whether they were at home or in Japan—were subjects of the Japanese empire. Even if they were treated as second-class citizens, Koreans were Japanese nationals and had some access to social rights and benefits such as schooling, welfare, and employment (Ryang, 1997).

From 1945, when World War II as well as Japanese colonial rule over Korea ended, all Koreans in Japan were required to register as Chosŏnjŏk (Jap. Chōsen-seki), thus reclassifying them as Korean foreign nationals, under the assumption that their post-World War II residence in Japan would be temporary. The category of Chosŏnjŏk was thus created as a convenient means of distinguishing post-colonial Koreans in Japan from Japanese citizens or other foreign nationals in the post-World War II environment (Ryang, 2000). Japan had calculated that most Chosŏnjŏk would return to the peninsula within a few years of the war ending. However, although more than 1.7 million of them did indeed return, about 600,000 chose to remain in Japan for various reasons (Lee and De Vos, 1981; Ryang, 1997, 2000, 2009; Oliver, 2016).

The political partitioning of Korea drove the split of Koreans in Japan into two camps associated with one or the other of the regimes on the Korean peninsula. Although almost 97% of Koreans in Japan originally came from the peninsula's southern provinces, for reasons that were ideological and practical the majority associated themselves with Ch'ongnyŏn. For Koreans in Japan at the time, maintaining their Korean heritage and sustaining themselves as a social minority in hegemonic Japan was primary concern, and an association with the North was seen an effective means of achieving these. From the mid-1950s, Ch'ongnyŏn received robust financial and cultural support from the North, which was then an economically better state than the South. Much of Ch'ongnyŏn's budget was used on establishing and providing support for Zainichi Korean businesses and financial institutions and on running hundreds of Korean schools throughout Japan. In these schools, the North Korean school curriculum was adapted for Zainichi Korean children and taught in Korean (Ryang, 1997; Bell, 2019). In this way, the North cultivated Zainichi Koreans to be familiar with North Korean cultures and also embedded them, as students and graduates of Ch'ongnyŏn schools, in various transnational social fields that were linked with the North.

When the South Korean government established official diplomatic relations with Japan in 1965, a number of Zainichi Koreans—members of Ch'ongnyŏn and Mindan alike—applied for and acquired South Korean citizenship and upon so doing were granted permanent residence status in

Japan.⁴ If North Korea and Ch'ongnyŏn offered practical benefits and cultural resources to Zainichi Koreans during the early formation of the post-colonial Korean community in Japan, gaining South Korean citizenship was appealing as it led to permanent residence status in Japan, allowing easy international travel as well as access to a wider range of social and welfare benefits in Japan (Ryang, 1997, 2000). If they are North Korean citizens, they are not acknowledged as such because Japan continues to disprove North Korea as an autonomous state. It was not unusual for Ch'ongnyŏn members to acquire South Korean citizenship, in some cases dissociating themselves from the North and leaving the organization and in others holding on to their Ch'ongnyŏn membership. Not a few Zainichi Koreans have been engaged with both Ch'ongnyŏn and Mindan, but their dual membership status often commercially or practically driven.

For Koreans in Japan, naturalizing as Japanese was not an easy option since it not only was difficult to achieve but also posed an ideological dilemma for a people formerly colonized by Japan. Given that, some other Zainichi Koreans chose to remain Chosŏnjŏk on the basis that their ethnic home lay not in either of the split Koreas but rather in the unified Korea from which they or their parents had emigrated, even if that Korea had been under the Japanese colonial rule. The Chosŏnjŏk category continues to exist in Japan today and applies to identify Zainichi Koreans who are (or are considered) stateless: that is, they have not gained South Korean or Japanese citizenship in maintaining their North Korean nationality or acknowledging deceased Chosŏn as their state of affiliation. Unlike those who acquired South Korean citizenship, it was only in 1982 that Chosŏnjŏk were granted permanent residency by Japan—thus gaining the social benefits this status implies—but officially they remain stateless (Ryang, 2000).

The fact that large numbers of Chosŏnjŏk are associated with North Korea through their involvement with Ch'ongnyŏn schools or other Ch'ongnyŏn institutions has contributed to the impression in Japan that all Chosŏnjŏk are North Koreans at heart or pro-Communist. This is a problematic assumption given that these affiliations—not insignificantly—overwhelmingly have a practical rather than ideological basis. Similarly, it is easy to presume that those who have acquired South Korean citizenship have done so because they feel a sense of belonging to South Korea, and to overlook that it may be because of the degree of privileges this comes with. Yet the Korean community in Japan is complex in terms of the multiple possibilities in configurations of national identity and citizenship between the two Koreas, Japan, or none of them. Considering that nationhood and

citizenship are inherently different in that nationhood is about voluntary association and participation whereas citizenship is about legal stipulation and governmentality (Kashiwazaki, 2000; Reyes, 2014), whether Zainichi Koreans hold South Korean or Japanese citizenship may have little bearing on their sense of national belonging. Among the many competing definitions and conceptual slippages of the concept of *nation*, one of its most widely recognized characteristics, and one which has attained stable academic currency, has been that it is created as an *imagined community*, a process wherein people voluntarily participate in the nation by connecting themselves to myths, cultural traits, tools of communication, and behaviors or ideas that are believed to be shared among those members of a nation (Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 2006). Viewed from this perspective, the concept of nation in the case of Koreans in Japan is complex and manifold since some identify themselves with pre-partition Korea—the Chosŏn which no longer exists today—and others with one or the other of the post-partition Koreas, whose cultures diverged progressively through the second half of the twentieth century as they developed their respective national cultures. Consequently, even some cultural traits that are viewed as representing Korean cultural heritage, such as specific musical instruments or performance repertoires, have been emphasized, interpreted, and adapted differently in each of the two states according to their respective state ideologies and interests. Moreover, in transnational spaces, representations of national culture take on new meanings for people who do not live in the homeland at the culture's origin and are recreated as those people interject them with their own stories, particularly their experiences as migrants. If so, what seems to be more intriguing to explore in the study of Zainichi Koreans and their performance cultures is not so much how loyal they are in participating in the North or South's nation-building projects or those countries' dictation of national cultures but rather how they construct and express diasporic identity out of their association with the North and/or South and their negotiation between the two Koreas and their Zainichi Korean experience and reality.

Performing Diasporic Agency, Citizenship, and Identity

Aihwa Ong's (1999) concept of flexible citizenship has been instrumental in explaining the practical value and meaning of citizenship for migrant people whose loyalty to the nation is not necessarily altered or reduced in the process of acquiring citizenship in their new state but is strategically

deployed with a symbolic form of new or additional governmentality which might positively contribute to their diasporic life and their support for the national home. Given that, Ch'ongnyŏn Koreans' association with the South or Japan is not necessarily indicative of any changing loyalty or dissociation from the North on their part but rather must be considered a sign of *diasporic strategy*, that they perform embedded in Japan, one of the world's most developed capitalist societies.

Ong defines flexible citizenship as “the cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions” (1999:6). The lives of Koreans in Japan, whether allied with North or South Korea or naturalized as Japanese, are embedded in a capitalist society where Koreans can socially assert themselves or shift their status by flexibly and fluidly accessing and responding to the various forms of capital available to them. Perhaps, in many ways, it is rather hard for Ch'ongnyŏn Koreans not to take those forms of capital offered to them by South Korea or Japan into practical consideration, especially since, in the present political-economic climate surrounding North Korea, not doing so and sticking with the North cannot do much to contribute to a comfortable life in Japan.

In terms of Zainichi Korean music, diasporic Koreans have access to another form of capital: that of expressive culture. In a politically reconciliatory climate between the two Koreas, Ch'ongnyŏn musicians, particularly those of Kŭmgangsan Kagŭktan, which itself is a generator of substantial capital in supplying its members with symbolic, financial, and cultural resources, were invited to give performances in South Korea in the early to mid-2000s. Through these cultural exchanges Zainichi Korean musicians forged musical friendships with South Korean musicians and have produced collaborative performances across Japan and South Korea. Even if their stateless status prevents some Ch'ongnyŏn musicians from physically crossing international borders, their music and dance performance abilities—within a Ch'ongnyŏn performance culture derived from the North but shaped uniquely in Japan—enable them to be transnational. Some Ch'ongnyŏn musicians have even moved to the South and established musical careers there, finding that their training in North Korean instruments, which are rare in the South, has earned them special status and created demand for their skills.

The power of social agency in the process of social formation, during which social agents make themselves over and are made “within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society” (Ong, 1996:737–738) is evident among Zainichi Koreans: whether officially categorized as North

Korean, South Korean, Japanese, or stateless citizens, Koreans in Japan are exposed to an expansive pool of cultures originating from the North, South, or pre-partitioned Korea or created as a diasporic construction—not to mention from Japan and other foreign countries. With this multicultural background, Zainichi Koreans flexibly form and re-form their relationship to states and nations, and shape their own citizenship as diasporic Koreans in Japan.

In the case of Koreans in Japan, the issue of identity can be fraught since they need to navigate their relations to other Koreans, to the host society, and to other ethnic minorities in Japan, as colonial, post-colonial, and naturalized citizens. The negotiation and permeability of identity is central to the experience of migration since the movement and displacement of people articulates and intensifies the sense of Self and Other and incites migrants to contemplate and figure out who they are, where they belong, and their relations with others—within the migrant community, to the host society, and to the ancestral homeland from where they moved. Fredrik Barth (1969) states that identity ascription is founded upon the perception of difference, and Adelaida Reyes echoes and extends Barth in her assertion that “that perception sets off the interplay between human actors who enact their differences and, in so doing, create a boundary between Self and Other, between belonging and non-belonging. The *Self* is thus defined through differentiation from an *Other*, in an *environment* or a *context* in which their perception of each other as different is articulated, communicated, and enacted” (Reyes, 2014:106; italics in original). However, in the case when the line between Self and Other is not always clear or can be manipulated as a *tactic of diaspora* which I mean something similar to what Gilroy articulates, “diaspora allows for a complex conception of sameness and for versions of solidarity that do not need to repress the differences within a dispersed group in order to maximize the differences between one ‘essential’ community and others” (2000:252). Given that no essential or unified Korean “ethnicity” has been envisioned by Koreans in Japan, unlike with many other diasporic communities elsewhere (such as Koreans in China or in North America where the division of the two Korean nations is less distinctive at a community level), cultural diversity resulting from the polarization of two different national cultures in the peninsula might be seen as diversification per se, but it is *not really* because it constantly overlaps with an “essentialist” view of cultural ingredients that exist across North and South Korea. In the case of Koreans in Japan, Self and Other in the context of ethnic diaspora become intrinsically complex since the line between the two is constantly

being articulated and trespassed among themselves and against hegemonic Japanese.

Music in the Context of Migration

When music and other cultural traditions migrate, they carry new meanings for the performers, audiences, and communities who practice and value them. In the context of migration, not only is national and/or ethnic culture used as a means of marking one's own or one's group identity, it also provides a significant context for negotiating and shaping new meaning, that is, a unique diasporic identity as a group or an individual who went through particular experiences of migration (Reyes, 1986, 1989, 1999a, 1999b, 2014; Baily, 2005; Ramnarine, 2007; Koo, 2016; Bell, 2019). In her study of musical performances in diasporic contexts, ethnomusicologist Tina K. Ramnarine points out the contradictions that ethnomusicologists have had to resolve between “asserting the historical specificities of diaspora and avoiding the rigidities of diasporic essentialisms” (2007:1). According to Ramnarine, while diaspora is intrinsically tied with “history” since it articulates with “historical sensibilities and postcolonial politics, offering perspectives on the legacies of empires, historiographies, and modes of cultural representation” (2007:2), it is also as much about “newness”—“new performance spaces and new musical sounds” enacted and practiced by diasporas. Ramnarine's emphasis on “newness” parallels with Adelaida Reyes's concept of “migrancy,” which she argues is different from “migration,” which refers to “the movement of people, their goods and their ideas” (1999a:206). “Migrancy” instead highlights the phase of migration, “a state that grows out of and develops both as consequence of and as part of that movement. . . . Migrancy directs the observer's attention not just to where migrants have gone and where migrants have been but, perhaps more importantly, to the *emotional, psychological, and creative behaviors* that are the products of those moves” (1999a:206; emphasis added). Reyes's idea of “migrancy” effectively explains and highlights the significance of cultural changes in the context of migration as well as “new” and “creative behaviors” that members of a diaspora undertake in their migration and settlement process. Moreover, it implicates how a performance culture, as an example of a *creative behavior* that most effectively affects and embodies the migrants' emotions and psychology, can provide deep insight into the experiences of migration.

In the following section, I introduce the Kūmgangsan Kagūktan troupe and its affiliated musicians and examine how their performance of North Korean music embodies their feeling, vision, and creative behaviors as Zainichi Koreans who have access to a variety of music that includes traditional Korean, contemporary North and South Korean, Japanese, and Western music. Despite this variety, the troupe and its affiliated members have been explicitly linked with the music and dance that has been particularly cultivated in the North as a symbol of the state and which was subsequently promoted at a transnational level in order to link the North to Zainichi Koreans. I investigate how Zainichi Korean musicians reconcile their association with North Korean emblematic culture with their own diasporic identity—or whether they even need to reconcile them.

Kūmgangsan Kagūktan and Its Musicians

North and South Korea have each developed their own national musics since partition. In the North, many aspects of traditional Korean performing arts were reconceptualized according to a dogma of cultural progression strongly promoted by the Communist government, in a manner largely influenced by the Communist reshaping of music in China and the music aesthetics of the former Soviet Union. The South Korean government, for its part, has embraced and celebrated cultural remnants from dynastic Korea as national heritage and a symbol of Korean ethnicity.

Kūmgangsan Kagūktan, the North Korean performance troupe based in Tokyo, Japan, presents the Korean music developed in North Korea in conformance with and in support of North Korean Communism. Established in 1955, the troupe began with only eighteen members, all trained in Western classical music. In the 1960s the troupe gradually incorporated into its ensemble Korean instruments brought in from North Korea. In 1974, when the troupe visited Pyongyang for the first time, the then Chairman, Kim Il-Sung [Il-sŏng], greatly appreciated their performance, granted the troupe the name Kūmgangsan Kagūktan, and charged it with learning and performing a North Korean revolutionary opera, *The Song of Kūmgang Mountain* [*Kūmgangsan ūi norae*], for Japanese audiences in Tokyo, which it did five months later (Kūmgangsan Kagūktan, n.d.). However, since this one-off performance, Kūmgangsan Kagūktan's main repertoire has focused on smaller-scale solo and ensemble works from North Korea or composed by Zainichi Koreans (Ha Yōngsu, personal communication, December 1, 2015).



Fig. 1. Kūmgangsan Kagūktan complex, Tokyo, Japan.

The early members of Kūmgangsan Kagūktan learned North Korean music from musicians on North Korean boats that regularly anchored in Niigata, Japan, to repatriate Zainichi Koreans to North Korea from 1959 to 1984 (Morris-Suzuki, 2005; Pak, 2011; Bell, 2018). These boats each arrived with a group of North Korean musicians and dancers tasked to perform for those moving from Japan to North Korea. Since North Koreans could not land in Japan officially at that time, and Koreans in Japan could not freely commute between the North and Japan, the only way for Kagūktan members to learn Korean music and dance was either by boarding the boats to gain access to these visiting performers and then getting off again before the boat sailed, or by relying on the published materials supplied from the North (Pak, 2011).

Beginning in the 1950s, Kim Il-Sung, strenuously emphasized the significance of music in inspiring nations to a revolutionary spirit (Howard, 2006). In particular, the nation's folk music was promoted under the notion that the vernacular arts are the best representation of the commoner's spirit and aesthetic inclination. However, despite the privileged status of existing folk music traditions, changes to them were inevitable to accommodate the dogma of "unitary ideology" (*yuilsasang*) on which Kim Il-Sung sought to firmly ground his state so as to perpetuate his rule endlessly as the absolute figure of authority (Howard, 2006:157–158). Around this time, the notion of *chuch'e* (self-reliance) began to appear as another ideological underpinning in North Korea, promoted as "something new, emancipating, and scientific" but that in reality presented a rhetoric similar to that of "unitary ideology," basically reinforcing Kim's power and authority by projecting an antipathetic view of foreign and Western hegemonic influences on North Korea (Howard, 2006:158). The pervasiveness of self-reliance ideology (*chuch'e sasang*) and the rhetoric of the state that all arts in the North should be uniquely North Korean led to the reshaping, through the second half of the twentieth century, of all music and arts in the North by fusing traditional Korean cultural forms with socialist content. With this musical reformation conducted in the North, the styles of Korean music practiced and preferred in North and South Korea have diverged distinctly.

The reshaping of traditional Korean instruments in the North focused on expanding pitch registers by adding strings and increasing the size of instrument bodies for a louder sound. In addition, to increase the durability of the strings, the traditional twisted silk cords were replaced with nylon or metal strings or a combination of both. For ease of modulation, metal keypads were added to the wind instruments. If the musicians of traditional Korean ensembles played sitting on a mat, all North Korean musicians sat

on chairs when playing ensemble music. Ironically, in the design of a unique North Korean music that was anti-foreign and in the spirit of self-reliance ideology, Korean music in the North was diverted away from its own pentatonic traditions and emphasis on linearly progressing melody with addition of characteristic microtones, and the instruments reformed to be able to incorporate heptatonic scales, key modulation, and three-part harmony, all of which are well-known conventions of European Classical music. If earlier North Korean music in Japan drew on newly created compositions from North Korea or reworkings of well-known folk melodies, since the 1970s the distinction between North and South Korean music has been further marked by Ch'ongnyŏn and Kagŭktan musicians' adoption of new and re-formed North Korean instruments, as opposed to visiting South Korean or Mindan musicians' preference for performing Korean music on traditional forms of Korean instruments.

By the 1970s, Kŭmgansan Kagŭktan was being steadily supplied with musicians with decent skills in North Korean music and instruments, which they had learned in Ch'ongnyŏn schools. Accordingly, the Kagŭktan was not only able to expand its membership but also improve its performance quality by being more selective in recruiting performers through annual auditions, attracting graduates from Ch'ongnyŏn schools around Japan. As full-time employees of the Kagŭktan, performers were provided with a monthly stipend, and if they were single, they could be provided with free dormitory-style room and board in the Kagŭktan building complex (Ha Yŏngsu, personal communication, January 10, 2017).

Once in the early 1990s, the Kagŭktan had grown to a large organization of almost three hundred members. Today it has about seventy members—consisting of third- and fourth-generation Zainichi Koreans—which includes performers, instructors, choreographers, composers, arrangers, and administrative staff. Within the troupe there are a number of committees responsible for performance programs and other matters. The troupe performs in North Korea every year as the state's sole overseas performance troupe. Not a few individual members of the Kagŭktan have won prizes at national performance competitions held in Pyongyang. The troupe tours Japan every year, from Hokkaido to Okinawa, under its primary mission of enabling Korean cultures to be widely accessible in Japan for both Korean and Japanese audiences. So far, the Kagŭktan has performed at least seven thousand times in and outside Japan ([Kŭmgansan Kagŭktan, n.d.](#)).

The Kagŭktan's performance programs continue to predominantly feature pieces and choreographies from North Korea, although minor modifications have always been necessary to adapt to local audiences in

Japan. The troupe also increasingly strives to include compositions by Zainichi Korean musicians, arrange collaborative performances with traditional Japanese musicians as well as Japan's own symphonic orchestra, and include popular songs of North Korean and Japanese origin sung in Japanese. In the 2000s, when communication between North and South Korea opened up, the Kagŭktan visited South Korea and did several collaborations with South Korean popular musicians such as the Yoon Do-hyun Band [Yundohyŏn paendŭ] (also known as YB). Although the Kagŭktan's repertoire continues to be centered around North Korean works, which the troupe's leading members learn when they visit North Korea early each year, there has been an growing effort to incorporate a wider range of repertoire to increase their appeal for local audiences.

In the following section, I profile three Kagŭktan members—Kim Yŏngsil [Yŏngsil], Ha Yŏngsu, and Song Myŏnghwa—all of whom are recognized as leading Zainichi Korean musicians in both North and South Korea, as well as Japan. All are third-generation Koreans in Japan whose families come from southeastern provinces in present-day South Korea. All learned Korean music as students in Ch'ongnyŏn schools and completed the three-year *r'ongsin'gyoyuk* (distance learning) music program offered by North Korean government through Pyongyang University of Music and Dance (renamed as Kimwŏn'gyun myŏngch'ing ūmak chongaptaehak <Kimwŏn'gyun Pyongyang Music University> since 2015). Since 1984, the University has offered a distance learning program for overseas Koreans who want to specialize in North Korean music and dance. Students are selected via annual auditions and invited to come to Pyongyang for a period of time to study on site. During their time in the *r'ongsin'gyoyuk* program, each of the three musicians stayed in Pyongyang for at least six consecutive months and studied music with renowned North Korean teachers (Pak, 2011).

Kim Yŏngsil

Kim Yŏngsil (b. 1980), the sole *kayagŭm* player in Kŭmgangsan Kagŭktan, specializes in the twenty-one-string North Korean version of this Korean zither. At the age of sixteen, after six years studying *kayagŭm* in Japan, she visited North Korea for the first time, studying music at the Pyongyang University of Music and Dance under Kim Kiran, Pae Kŭmok, and Kyŏng Namch'ŏl, all of whom are recognized musicians in North Korea. After returning to Japan, she completed her music education degree at Chosŏn

University (also known as Korea University), the sole university in Japan run by Ch'ongnyŏn. Currently, she serves as a *kayagŭm* instructor at her alma mater as well as working full-time for the Kagŭktan as a musician. She performs at least twenty times per year with the troupe, in addition to thirty or so other solo or ensemble performances in large and small performance venues (Kim Yŏngsil, personal communication, January 16, 2017).

As a musician whose training in *kayagŭm* stayed very much within the performance practice of North Korean music, Kim Yŏngsil identifies with the twenty-one-string North Korean *kayagŭm*. As mentioned earlier, North Korea developed different versions of the *kayagŭm* with nineteen to twenty-one strings through the 1970s, replacing the traditional Korean instrument with new instruments and repertoires. However, she states that she also values learning the older Korean repertoire even if that aspect of Korean culture is not highlighted in the North. While the traditional twelve-string *kayagŭm* has silk strings, is played sitting on the ground, and is used for traditional as well as new compositions, the newer designs prevail in both North and South Korea for the performance of modern compositions heavily influenced by the Western compositional method and idiom, with the instruments mostly set on stands and the musician sitting on a seat. In the South, where traditional Korean music as well as older forms of Korean instruments are emphasized in the name of maintaining Korean heritage, *kayagŭm* musicians play a traditional or modern *kayagŭm* according to the performance repertoire, whereas in the North, the twenty-one-string *kayagŭm* is used almost exclusively for all repertoires.

Regarding this difference between North and South Korean performance practices, Kim Yŏngsil feels that her twenty-one-string North Korean *kayagŭm* is suited to any kind of Korean music, modern or traditional. The sound of a *kayagŭm* with twelve silk strings might differ from that of Kim's *kayagŭm* with twenty-one steel-coiled strings, but that does not mean that she neglects the value of traditional Korean music. She points out that although North Korea has not favored the maintenance of traditional sound aesthetics, its musicians can grasp what pre-partition Korean music sounded like in learning conventional Korean genres in the North—as Kim did—such as *sanjo*, a traditional solo instrumental music hailed by South Korean musicians and scholars as one of the most important genres in the history of Korean music (Kim Yŏngsil, personal communication, January 16, 2017). However, as North Korea has promoted music that is ideologically programmed and easily appreciated by ordinary people, abstract art music like *sanjo* receives little attention, and even when performed it is given new titles and reformatted. Instead, in the

North various instrumental arrangements of Korean folksongs are thought to embody Korean cultural heritage as well as the spirit of the masses. Even these folksong arrangements are often given new names. Almost all musicians of North Korean music, who I have met in Japan and South Korea, categorically stated that abstract music in general holds little favor in the North due to its artistic esotericism and historical association with the aristocracy and noble patronage. For this reason, in the North it is vocal music that is prevalent and privileged.

Growing up, Kim Yǒngsil was considered a *kayagŭm* prodigy, winning gold twice at Japan's national Korean Performing Arts Competition. As a result of this success she felt reassured in her competence on her instrument. However, at the 2.16 Soloist Competition, one of the most prestigious annual music competitions in North Korea, she lost twice in her twenties, finally winning third prize in her thirties. One of the major criticisms she received as a young adult musician was the weak foundation of her *kayagŭm* techniques in terms of her finger position and movements on the instrument, a criticism she had never previously received from any of her teachers in Japan or North Korea. And so she decided to improve her foundational skills by focusing on traditional music such as *kayagŭm sanjo*. She recollected that her *kayagŭm* training at Ch'ongnyŏn schools predominantly centered on contemporary compositions from the North, only later finding out that traditional performance repertoire, and specific techniques for playing it, was taught in North Korea and would have been available to her if she had proactively asked for it. Thus in her contact with Korean music in the North in her defeat at the competition, Kim resolved to expand the scope of her music to embrace a wider range of styles (Kim Yǒngsil, personal communication, January 16, 2017).

It seems quite odd that Kim never came across traditional music such as the *kayagŭm sanjo* in her Japanese training or in her three-year Pyongyang distance studies, and that no one ever encouraged her to study it. Kim recollects when she asked for feedback about competition results, her North Korean teacher responded that no North Korean musician has taken *sanjo* as a core skill for some time, but especially, because Kim would be returning to Japan after a limited stay in Pyongyang, her lessons would have had to focus on core and virtuoso pieces representing the North rather than on foundational skills on the *kayagŭm*. In the last two decades, North Korea has been reviving some older forms of traditional Korean instruments. Though they are not frequently or publicly performed yet, some North Korean musicians have performed *kayagŭm sanjo*, as did Kyǒng Namch'ol—one of Kim Yǒngsil's North Korean teachers—in 2005 at a

concert commemorating the centennial of the birth of Chŏng Namhŭi's (1905–1988), a renowned *kayagŭm sanjo* master who moved to the North during the Korean War and died there in 1988 as a revered artist. According to another Zainichi Korean *kayagŭm* player, Pak Sun-A, a former Kagŭktan member who is now based in Seoul, Zainichi Korean musicians' interest in more traditional music styles like *sanjo* in fact led to a resurgence of *sanjo* among contemporary musicians in North Korea even if it continued to be rarely performed there at public or international venues (Pak, 2011).

Kim's 2015 solo album, *Tōburō [With]*, produced in Japan, features thirteen *kayagŭm* pieces including six Korean folksong arrangements, two solo instrumental pieces with *changgo* accompaniment excerpted from an early twentieth-century *kayagŭm sanjo*, and six compositions by contemporary North Korean musicians. In the liner notes and also in her interview with me, she emphasized the wider scope of her music, with her concept of Korean music including not only the contemporary repertoire of the North but also older Korean music such as *sanjo* and various arrangements of folksongs. Although she may scarcely perform her *sanjo* as part of Kagŭktan's main program or in the North where *sanjo* is rarely performed in public, regardless of her affiliation with the North and being based in Japan she felt the need for her music to include a wider range of *kayagŭm* repertoire practiced in both North and South Korea. In her twenties she felt motivated to learn to play *sanjo* out of a desire to strengthen her qualifications as a renowned performer on the instrument (Kim Yŏngsil, personal communication, January 16, 2017).

The album's liner notes highlight “Korean ethnicity” and the old, original quality of Kim's music by rigidly maintaining “unchanged ethnic melody” (original text in English):

It has passed 25 years since I met *kayagŭm*. This instrument is the contemporarily improved one which has 21 strings. Unlike the old model, it has a larger body and can [give] a louder sound [,] so its tones may be different from the old one. But, I play unchanged ethnic melody with it. Even if the shape and figure of the instrument will change as time goes by, I want to hold the spirit of Korean ethnicity and express it forever.

Dressed in *hanbok* (traditional Korean attire), the musician attributes at least two ideas to her music stemming from her use of the new *kayagŭm*: maintenance of original melody in Korean music and holding on to a Korean ethnic spirit. Kim's idea of “unchanged ethnic melody” is unspecified and ambiguous, especially as her album comprises contemporary North Korean as well as older or traditional Korean music repertoires.

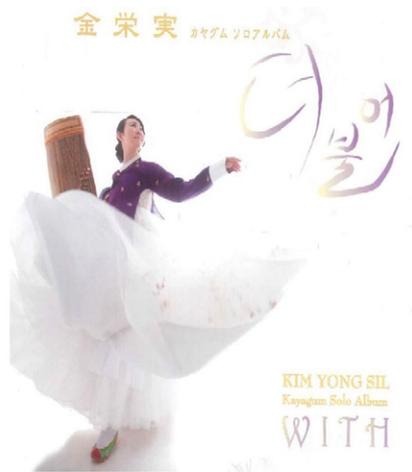


Fig. 2. Album cover for Kim Yongsil's *Toburo* [With].

Perhaps in her view none of her music, whether of pre-partition Korean or North Korean origin, is altered, all remaining loyal to the culture of its origins. Given that modifying existing versions of traditional Korean music is not unusual in its native context—both in the North and South—it seems that in her emphasis on “unchanged ethnic melody” Kim expresses her desire for her own music to be legitimized as authentically Korean even if she relies on the modern twenty-one-string North Korean instrument and is herself a diasporic musician.

As Ramnarine points out:

While diaspora has something to do with ‘history’ it is also about ‘newness’. Ethnographic research has encompassed both modes, . . . The former mode reminds us that diasporas are historically specific and that the past shapes a sense of diasporic identity while the latter prompts us to question the rigidities and essentialisms of ‘diasporic identity’. The politics of diasporic identities often articulate with the politics of national, postcolonial and/or minority identities, leading to fresh sets of specificity and rigidity in thinking about diaspora. (2007:2)

Kim Yongsil’s association of her music with a modern North Korean instrument and Korean heritage can be interpreted in relation to what Ramnarine calls “the politics of diasporic identities,” articulating with Kim’s training in and association with North Korean music as a Zainichi Korean aligned with the North, and yet also as a musician of the Korean diaspora who intends to broadly capture a Korean musical essence that includes its older tradition. While her relationship with the North, which

was shaped by the history of the Korean diaspora in relation to the two Koreas and Japan, is manifested in her specializing in the North Korean instrument and familiarity with its repertoire, Kim's transnational accessing of wider musical scenes beyond what is mandated and practiced in the North not only makes her music flexible and fluid but also highlights that she constantly reflects on what to do with her music in ways that diverge from that performed and practiced on the peninsula.

Ha Yöngsu

Like Kim Yöngsil, Ha Yöngsu (b. 1969), program director and chief percussionist with Kūmgangsan Kagūktan, takes an eclectic view on Korean music even if he has been engaged with the Kagūktan and North Korean music for more than thirty years. Senior to Kim Yöngsil, Ha began his musical study in brass and then took an interest in Korean wind and percussion music, joining his school's after-school music club to practice it. Ha joined Kūmgangsan Kagūktan in 1992 as a percussionist and has played a range of different instruments including *changgo* (hourglass-shaped drum), *kekwaenggwari* (small bronze gong), *swaenap* (also known as *ŭaepyöngso*, conical double-reed aerophone), *changswaenap* (a longer version of the traditional *swaenap*), and *kömun'go* (six-string zither).

Ha's broader interest in Korean music is evident in his dedication to the *kömun'go*, another emblematic stringed instrument of Korea, but one gradually marginalized in the North due to its strong connection with the aristocracy in feudal Korea. Although new *kömun'go* compositions were produced through the 1960s, the instrument almost disappeared from the national music scene in the North. Nevertheless, Kūmgangsan Kagūktan has always included *kömun'go* since at least the 1960s, partly due to Ha Chunhong, Ha Yöngsu's father, who was an early Kagūktan member and played the *kömun'go* as a second-generation Zainichi Korean musician. In South Korea, Ha Chunhong was considered an important cultural resource, having introduced post-partition *kömun'go* music from the North to South Korean musicians, while his son, Ha Yöngsu, is credited for bringing to the North the South Korean practice of the *kömun'go*, its traditional and contemporary repertoires, and the ancient instrument preserved in the South when North Korea recently began to revive older forms of Korean instruments (Yun, 1998).

Like Kim Yöngsil, Ha Yöngsu states that despite the official privileging of the reformed socialist version of North Korean music and of recent

compositions, some North Korean musicians are interested and knowledgeable in the older sound of traditional Korean music. Interested in *nongak*, Korean farmers' band music, he visited rural villages in North Korea whenever possible and tried to establish contact with village musicians who still remember this music, pointing out that his learning of *nongak* in the North by seeking out living folklore resources is no different from what South Korean musicians were doing in the South (Ha Yöngsu, personal communication, December 1, 2015). As early as the 1980s, Ha Yöngsu and his school friends attended a *samullori* concert in Tokyo by the Kim Deoksu [Döksu] Samullori Band. Then a young percussionist learning to play Korean drums and gongs at a Ch'ongnyön school, Ha already sensed that there was little difference between North Korean and South Korean music when it comes to their folk cultures. Even if traditional music and repertoire is de-emphasized and rarely performed publicly in the North, both Kim Yöngsil and Ha Yöngsu suggested that there are unofficial scenes in North Korea whose focus differs little from what is emphasized in the South in relation to ethnic heritage. Ha admitted that his status as a visiting diasporic musician enabled him to see another side of the North and be flexible with his music in Japan despite his engagement with the Kagüktaŋ, the official North Korean performance troupe resident in Japan.



Fig. 3. Ha Yöngsu's performance with Haktari Nongaktaŋ, an Osaka-based Korean farmers' music band. Photo by the author.

When I sat down with Ha Yöngsu one afternoon, he stated that his life as a Korean musician in Japan has two sides. As a program director and chief percussionist with the Kagüktaŋ, he performs music that is institutionally mandated in style and content. However, when it comes to his own predilections, he listens to what his gut says, following what makes his heart sing and provides him with a sense of fulfillment. He wants to be creative and have fun when performing outside the troupe, and so he plays the *swaenap* in farmers' band parades in Tokyo and Osaka, which provide opportunities for Zainichi Korean musicians to get together free of their affiliations with the Ch'ongnyön or Mindan (Ha Yöngsu, personal communication, November 28, 2015). Ha often de-emphasizes the difference between the North and South when it comes to Korean folklore cultures, though admitting that there is a difference between the official music scenes that represent and are constructed as the markers of the two respective Korean state identities. As a committed member of Kümgangsän Kagüktaŋ and Ch'ongnyön, he complies with the cultural mandates of the North, yet as a diasporic individual he performs his agency away from Kagüktaŋ stages by collaborating with a broader group of musicians who play together for the sound of Korean folklore heritage and to enact an emerging inter-Korean music milieu in Japan.

In an interview with *Lara*, a South Korean magazine featuring traditional Korean music, Ha Yöngsu also emphasized the need for creating a unique Korean sound that captures Zainichi identity in Japan. He states that Kümgangsän Kagüktaŋ strives not just to present [North] Korean music to Korean as well as Japanese audiences but also to shape its own unique performance culture as Koreans in Japan, especially as self-sustainability is an issue for many troupes in Japan in the present economic climate (Yu, 2012). This vision of Ha Yöngsu's is well reflected in his musical creations, both as part of and independent from the Kagüktaŋ. Currently, he directs an instrumental ensemble, Hyang, formed in 1997 and existing under the Kagüktaŋ. *Hyang* in Korean can mean five different things in Chinese: 鄉 (place or hometown), 香 (fragrance or incense), 響 (resonance or ring), 享 (enjoy), and 向 (direction or heading to). This name for the ensemble was deliberately chosen so that it resonates the emotion and experience of Zainichi Koreans evoking a hometown that could have been never visited, but even if so, it can be sensed through scent and sound, and that is a source of happiness and a path to enjoyment.

Hyang performs both as part of and separate from regular Kagüktaŋ performances. Consisting of relatively young Kagüktaŋ members, Hyang combines various kinds of Korean and Western instruments. The group

has been especially known for its collaborations with non-Kagŭktan musicians, both South Korean and Japanese (T'ak, 2004). Ha Yŏngsu's musical career and experiences as a Zainichi Korean musician—embracing everything from *kŏmun'go* to *samullori* and the Kagŭktan to the Yoon Do-hyun Band—complicates his identity, especially with the fact that he has spent two-thirds of his life as a Kagŭktan member and internationally represented North Korea. Yet ironically, in this process, as the musician invokes his own diasporic agency and the cultural commonalities between the two Koreas, the North is de-essentialized, and Korean music is in turn re-essentialized: “Although in the South, Korean farmers’ band music is identified with specific localities and specific regional names, Korean percussion music in general has been shaped, to a large degree, by cross-regional and cross-village influences. Thus, my comprehension of Korean rhythm, arrived at by visiting rural villages in the North and studying with North Korean teachers, is not very different from what musicians in the South do and say about Korean music” (Ha Yŏngsu, personal communication, December 1, 2015; my translation). In Ha's mind, whether a musician learns farmers’ band music in the North or South, there are certain degrees of similarity as well as differences that together make up Korean music.

Song Myŏnghwa

Slightly younger than Ha Yŏngsu, Song Myŏnghwa (b. 1976) cites Ha's influence on her vocal music through a challenging period finding her own voice as a leading singer of Korean folksongs in Japan while also a full-time employee of the Kagŭktan. In performing North Korean folk or contemporary songs, Song Myŏnghwa did not always feel comfortable within the officially promoted national singing style with its high range and silky texture, especially with Korean folksongs accompanied by the piano (Jeong, 2015). When Korean Canadian scholar Jeong Ae-ran interviewed Song Myŏnghwa in 2012, the singer stated:

I felt my *minyo* [Korean folksong] didn't have a flavourful taste, lacking a quality of something simple but charming in depth. I missed the feeling of abundance in the song and wanted to hear that fullness once again. One day by chance I heard Ha Yŏng-Su, percussionist in the company, practicing *minyo* with *changgu* [or *changgo*] and the sound stopped me. It was so powerful. I thought perhaps I could sing *minyo* better if I learned to play *changgu* and let the rhythm enter my body so that my body could naturally react to the sound of the *changgu*. So, I asked him to teach me and I started learning to play the *changgu*. (Jeong, 2015:118)

Like Kim Yöngsil and Ha Yöngsu, Song Myöngghwa resists being dictated by the protocols of North Korean music, instead finding her own voice so that she may feel comfortable and aesthetically satisfied as a singer. She also experiments with different options for instrumental accompaniment. Jeong Ae-ran describes the artistic fulfillment that Song Myöngghwa experiences as an *aesthetics of differentiation*—“an aesthetics recognizing differentiation according to place, time, and singer” (2015:118). In recognizing and reacting to her need for an aesthetics of differentiation, the singer addresses her feeling of something lacking in her folksongs.

Like Ha Yöngsu, Song Myöngghwa asserts differences between the North Korean music practiced in the North and in Japan:

Performances we do in Japan we know we represent [*sic*] *choguk* (North Korea) but we have developed and have accepted many more things since we live in Japan. Now, rather than being only a part of *choguk*, we are maybe something distinct as an overseas artistic troupe . . . What we learned in Pyongyang, we re-modify according to our sensibilities, the sense of Koreans in Japan. Koreans living in Japan are not solely content with something *Chosön* as it is or something Korean as it is for I am also one of the Koreans living in Japan. (Jeong, 2015:120; italics in original)

This excerpt from Jeong’s interview with Song encapsulates the dilemma of this Zainichi Korean singer as a national, diasporic musician who is creative and whose mind and life are entangled in multiple social relationships. Nevertheless, in her process of negotiating between North Korea’s self-reliance voice and the traditional performance aesthetics and styles of Korean folksongs, Song Myöngghwa indeed hopes to express with her singing her own understanding of Korean music and artistry as a diasporic Korean musician in Japan.

Discussion and Conclusions

All three musicians introduced in this paper express or perform their diasporic agency as Zainichi Korean musicians who are affiliated with a nation-specific musical group (Kümgangsan Kagüktaŋ), yet who have had far greater cultural and social flexibility than their counterparts located in North Korea. All of them identify with the North in relation to their music and careers while simultaneously working to reshape their understanding of North Korean music to reflect their vision as creative individuals or their experiences as members of the Korean diaspora in Japan. In order to

achieve this, they negotiate their music by adapting or highlighting traditional Korean music and its aesthetic components so that their performance of North Korean music becomes a distinctively Zainichi Korean musical experience. Kim Yöngsil has emphasized the traditional aspects of her music through her *sanjo*, a genre which has been de-emphasized in the North as a matter of policy. Ha Yöngsu's interest in Korean folklore and his family's lineage with an instrument that has fallen out of favor in the North distinguishes him, in addition to his versatile musicianship encompassing a range of different instruments and his active production of cross-cultural performances. Song Myöngghwa, on the other hand, thirsts for a more solid cultural grounding, having trained in North Korean singing, which is far removed from traditional Korean aesthetics. As a leading Zainichi Korean singer, Song wants to find her own voice as a Zainichi Korean musician. Ironically, in the midst of shaping themselves as Zainichi Korean musicians and dissociating themselves from the stereotypes of North Korean music, what these musicians have done in turn is demarcate their diasporic-ness in which nation, trans-nation, tradition, cross-culturalism, and flexible citizenship converge.

The performance of Korean music in Japan might seem correlated with the political bifurcation of the peninsula. However, informed by the performances of Kümgangsán Kagüktañ and its members, the cultural identity of Zainichi Koreans, in its complexity, does not conform to binary-based social and cultural discourses. From a point of view that privileges how the exercising of governmentality affects and shapes social members, the acquisition of official citizenship may be taken as revealing of one's personal affiliation with a state. However, since *imagined nation*—one's sense of national belonging, and nation of citizenship can be completely different and exercised separately, citizenship in a neoliberal social context can be understood as a form of capital that can be manipulated and reified by agents who want to use it to fulfill practical needs. The concept of the nation might seem to have more substance than practicality and governmentality, as it contains “myths, legends, forms of expressive culture, and received histories that a people believe to be its common legacy and the source of its peoplehood” (Reyes, 2014:109). Through these signs, the nation fosters a sense of belonging; the sign perceivers believe there is something that is “nationally shared.” However, although the nation might seem more resilient or persistent than fragile state boundaries—such as those around the former Soviet Union, whose break-up led to the (re)birth of numerous independent nation-states in Europe—identification with the nation is as *malleable* as any other type of identity, constantly written and

rewritten by people as they gain new experiences, along with shifting social conditions and situations. Like any other identity and even state boundaries, national identity is never fixed but ever emergent. Even if Zainichi Korean musicians are associating themselves with North Korea and North Korean music, their enactment of North Korea is not solely about loyalty and state/nation belonging: perhaps it is more about themselves and their history, experiences, and lives specifically shaped in Japan all the while forming a cultural relationship with the North.

Third- and fourth-generation Koreans in Japan, who constitute the majority of Kagŭktan members, have no direct memory of partition and less clear reasons to affiliate with either side. They might be linked with the North more strongly for practical and creative reasons, the music in their schools being of North Korean origin and the school curriculum being generally socialist, differing from that of the South, as mentioned earlier. Their interest in Korean music was perhaps more culturally and artistically grounded than politically driven. As the North provided cultural and educational support for Koreans who were situated in post-colonial and post-World War II Japan, the symbolic status of Kŭmgangsan Kagŭktan in Japan has been quite high as the largest Zainichi Korean music troupe, employing full-time musicians and providing them with a salary and room and board. As noted with the three musicians in this paper, after they had established their careers and reputations, they were able to expand the scope of their artistic knowledge, freely exploring new resources in search of artistic and cultural fulfillment as Zainichi Koreans.

Almost all Ch'ongnyŏn Koreans whom I met in Japan saw their motherland (*choguk*) as the North and their ancestral home (*kotheyang*) as in the South, but Japan is where they feel most comfortable and want to live. With this paper I have aimed to show how all three have constituted and shaped the musical identity of the North Korean troupe in Japan and its members. Despite the cultural affinity and institutional affiliation of these Zainichi Korean musicians with North Korea, as Ch'ongnyŏn Koreans they enact their own voice in infusing their performance of North Korean music with a level of freedom and flexibility as members of a neoliberal capitalist society, whether they live in Japan as "North Koreans," South Koreans, stateless Koreans, or naturalized Japanese.

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Notes

1. As a rule, the spelling of Korean words in this paper follows the McCune–Reischauer (M–R) romanization system, though with several exceptions, especially in the case of personal and regional names where alternative spellings have been previously known: in these situations I adopt the former spelling, adding the M–R spelling in brackets on first appearance in the text.

2. The Chosön dynasty was Korea's last (1392–1910). As North Korea's adoption of this precolonial dynastic name as its official name—Chosön minjujuüi kongwaguk (Democratic People's Republic of Korea)—the main organization for Koreans in Japan, which has sided with the North, incorporated chosön in its name, Chaeilbon chosönin ch'ongnyönhaphoe. I refer to this organization as Ch'ongnyön for short. The Japanese government, for its part, has also applied the term *chosön* or *chosönin* (people of Chosön) much more broadly, identifying all Koreans in post-World War II Japan as Chosönjök (lit. people having Chosön origin). In spelling 총련 Ch'ongnyön, a range of renditions are found in the literature: the spellings Chongryun, Chongryon, and Chongryeon are not rare. Some authors also refer to this organization by its Japanese name, Sören (or Chösören), an abbreviation of Zainichi chösenjin sörengokai.

3. Mindan is a contraction of Chaeilbon taehanmin'guk mindan (Association of Overseas Koreans of South Korea) which incorporated South Korea's official name, Taehanmin'guk (Republic of Korea).

4. Here, I sometimes use the terms nationality and citizenship interchangeably to mean one's official state affiliation. I am, however, aware that citizenship can be explored not just as an official affiliation but also as something achieved culturally and socially as migrants settle and adopt local norms.

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