

**Songs of Seoul: An Ethnography of Voice and Voicing in Christian South Korea.** 2014. Nicholas Harkness. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 320 pp.

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In *Songs of Seoul: An Ethnography of Voice and Voicing in Christian South Korea*, socio-cultural and linguistic anthropologist Nicholas Harkness exquisitely guides readers through church, university and concert spaces—multiple sites of vocal production and audition—to help make sense of the voice within semiotically mediated South Korean social life. Expanding upon Peirce’s theory of signs, Harkness defines the voice as “a constant intertwining” between phonic production and sonic uptake, that is, a “phono-sonic nexus.” “Voice” as such constitutes a site of social action and cultural conceptualization, and “voicing” indexes different perspectives within the higher-order social narrative of modern Christian Korea.

The author, himself a classically trained vocalist, takes an interest in the topic while auditioning for voice programs at music conservatories in Berlin. Upon observing the successful auditions and top international competition placements of South Korean opera singers, he arrives in Seoul in 2005 expecting to discover a highly developed discourse of vocal technique and a large listening public to account for Korean singers’ notable accomplishments. Harkness instead finds Christian (a descriptor he uses almost interchangeably with Protestant) belief to be the central discourse that grounds

Korean *songak* (*bel canto*) singers, and notices an audience composed of their institutional (church, school and family) social relations. In 2006, Harkness steadily develops the notion that *songak* is a Christian register of communication, and during his fieldwork year (2008-2009), his ethnographic ear leads him to question the links between the “clean” *songak* voice, Christianity and the grand narrative of ethnonational progress in modern Korea.

The monograph is divided into two parts. Part I (Chapters 1-4) details the discourses linking sound and morality, aesthetics and ethics, which circulate amongst predominantly upper- and upper-middle-class Presbyterians in Seoul. In Chapter 1, Harkness offers glimpses into a conversation with a taxi driver, an interview with an acclaimed opera singer and attendances at several vocal recitals. He claims that the aspirations toward modern progress signified by *songak* exist in opposition to a past perceived as painful, yet persistent. That is, while the *songak* voice indexes joy, cleanliness, wealth and democracy, the voice of the past, characterized by wobbly vibrato and raspiness, indexes suffering, uncleanness, poverty and military dictatorship. The author takes care to situate these contrastive meanings within the informants’ social relationships. In Chapter 2, the author first outlines two conflicting perceptions of Korean historical progress, then demonstrates how these contradictory qualities are dramatized in the sermonic voice. On the one hand, leaders and congregants affiliated with Somang Presbyterian Church, an influential megachurch of approximately 70,000 members, credit Christian insti-

tutions as progenitors of South Korea's positive international political and economic recognition. Through textual analyses of senior pastor Kim Chi-ch'ol's sermons, Harkness argues that Somang, a mainstream Protestant church known to attract an affluent, educated and politically conservative constituency, implicitly sanctifies the presidency (2008-2013) of Lee Myung-bak (who was an elder of the church during his presidential election and tenure). On the other hand, dissenters assumedly outside of Somang protest the Lee administration's policies by emphasizing the historical subjectivity of *minjung* (the masses)—that is, “the people” who are opposed to “the elite” of dominant politico-religious institutions. The *minjung*'s alternative narrative of ethnonational development is, however, disavowed by the ingrained vocal practices of the wealthy Somang Church. Chapter 3 further elaborates upon the relation between *songak* and Christian modernity established in the opening chapters. More specifically, Harkness seeks to highlight a threefold connection between Evangelical Christianity and *songak* semiotics. He first explores *songak*'s historically rooted position between singing and evangelism. Secondly, he delineates how conservatory singers systematically self-identify with *songak*, yet simultaneously preclude embodiment of traditional singing. Finally, the author asserts that churches function as ritual sites that authorize the higher-order emblematic associations between various voicings and the meanings attributed to them. Chapter 4 specifically deciphers ways in which people construct the meaning of the “clean” voice in contradistinction to their frequently mythologized under-

standings of the “unclean” *p'ansori* voice of the so-called past.

In Part II (Chapters 5-7), the author addresses more broadly the sociality of the voice. Chapter 5 demonstrates singers' “tuning” of their voices as they move between the social spaces of church and the music conservatory, two complementary yet contradictory institutional sites that, according to Harkness, are organized around different ideologies of authorized vocal technique. He argues that while the church space is explicitly theorized along the lines of an egalitarian ideology under the Christian God, remnants of neo-Confucian hierarchism persist in music conservatories in Seoul, and thereby circumscribe and restrict the vocalizations of *songak* students. In Chapter 6, he reads the homecoming recital, performed after an extended period of study abroad, as a ritual text in which returned singers transition into their roles as public professionals; the hymn typically sung at the encore subtly links Christian institutions with public art performances, and reinscribes the notion that *songak* singing in Korea is, essentially, a Christian endeavour. Finally, in Chapter 7, Harkness argues that the *maum* (heart-mind) forms a site or locus through which socially understood emotions and communicative behaviours are experienced. A “clean” *maum* attuned to God is reflected in a singer's “clean” voice that brings others into alignment with the divine.

*Songs of Seoul* is a unique, expansive and well-integrated contribution to the study of the voice's relation to social life in modern South Korea. Through his broad understanding of the Korean *songak* voice and ethnographically in-

formed interpretations of its mediating role between phonic and sonic, church and school, past and future, Harkness compellingly argues for how and why *bel canto* singing has come to occupy an emblematic position in Protestant Korea. Here I reiterate that although Harkness treats Christianity and Protestantism almost synonymously throughout the monograph, his intriguing claim that *bel canto* singing symbolizes modern ethnonational progress is best deciphered specifically within the bounds of mainstream Protestantism—a formidable majority within Korean Christianity, to be sure, but certainly not the totality of Christian experience in Korea. While mainstream Korean Protestantism, which tends to be theologically conservative and upwardly mobile, does indeed align nicely with the strand of Christianity represented in Somang, Korean Christianity also constantly undergoes transformation and change as different theological and socio-political agendas come to the fore. A nuanced consideration of, for instance, the intra-religious tensions within Korean Christianity would help qualify and clarify some of Harkness's compelling assertions.

The study particularly benefits from Harkness's professional familiarity with the mechanics of vocal production, which he utilizes to provide clear verbal descriptions linking his informants' conceptions of vocal qualia and the techniques they deploy to articulate those very sounds. This is readily apparent, for instance, in his account of *dusoŋg* (head voice) in Chapter 3 ("Cultivating the Christian Voice," 92-95). Furthermore, Harkness's theoretical framing of the

voice as a phonosonic nexus provides a fresh position that connects ideology to materiality, from which semioticians, communications scholars and socio-cultural anthropologists may reconsider the place and meaning of sound within and beyond Korea. Harkness's prioritization of sound's sociality enables a consideration of both modern Korea and Christianity *in tandem*, rather than a privileging of one over the other. Readers familiar with the aural dimensions of Korean public life and Christian modernity will recognize the inherent value of Harkness's extensive yet subtle critique.

At the same time, however, Harkness treats the topic of Christian modernity primarily from the perspective of a semiotician deploying ethnographic methodology. While an historical narrative suffuses the text and the author references early 20th century writings to connect contemporary Korean Protestant discourses with Western missionaries' understandings of sound, the monograph squarely remains a study of the present. Thus at times the interpretations beg for more historically informed nuances; for instance, while Harkness's implicit problematization of absolute hierarchism in conservatory teacher-disciple relations is valid, one can take issue with the way he characterizes these power dynamics within the framework of neo-Confucian filiality (Chapter 5, "Tuning the Voice"). Although Harkness clarifies in the Introduction his deliberate choice to weave class and gender categories into the broader argument regarding Christianity and *soŋgak* (p. 6), one is left wondering how an explicitly

economic analysis of the elaborate gift exchange system that binds voice students, through labour, to their teachers may have resulted in a more sophisticated treatment of Confucianism. Furthermore, the gendered complexities of Korean Christian modernity remain silent and largely unexplored in Harkness's account.

*Songs of Seoul* achieves widespread scholarly applicability. As Harkness frequently mentions, the portraits provided in the monograph are delimited to Christian Koreans of a particularly privileged class, social standing and political orientation in the heart of South Korea's capital. Yet by building a methodological framework that successfully connects sociality with sound, he establishes a firm position from which future researchers may reconsider the meanings of the various human voices that remain largely disavowed by mainstream Protestant Christianity. The author himself gestures toward these possibilities in the Conclusion to the monograph—what are Koreans leaving behind when they can no longer articulate painful experiences of the “past”?

All in all, Nicholas Harkness's *Songs of Seoul* provides highly original, timely and necessary insights into the role of the voice in mediating modern South Korean social relationships, and the hopes and aspirations expressed therein. Scholars in anthropology, ethnomusicology, communications studies, religious studies and area studies interested in examining Korea through the lens of sound will find this extended scholarly meditation on the power of the human voice a probing and fulfilling read. 🍀

**L'air du temps : Musiques populaires dans le monde.** 2012. Laurent Aubert, dir. Rennes : Éditions Apogée/EPCC Chemins du patrimoine en Finistère. 187 pp, photographies.

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Dirigé par Laurent Aubert et coordonné par Pierre Nédélec, cet ouvrage a tenu lieu de catalogue à l'exposition éponyme accueillie de mai à octobre 2012 par les *Chemins du patrimoine en Finistère* à l'Abbaye de Daoulas (Bretagne), un des cinq lieux de mémoire qu'anime cet établissement public de coopération culturelle.

Le propos, fidèle à l'exposition initiale créée en 2009 au Musée d'ethnographie de Genève, était de montrer que la musique, « comme toute réalisation humaine [...] est à la fois le produit et l'indice d'un lieu et d'un temps donnés, autrement dit d'une société et d'une époque particulière de son histoire » (Aubert : 13). Rien de vraiment nouveau direz-vous, et il est clair que la musique de Guillaume de Machaut n'a plus grand-chose de commun avec celle de Pierre Boulez ! Certes, mais qu'en est-il des musiques de tradition populaire, que les premiers collecteurs issus de l'époque romantique ont longtemps cru venues, authentiques et spontanées, de leur lointain et fier passé, gaulois ici, magyar ailleurs ? « Soumises à l'air du temps », elles ne sont « en aucun cas des expressions figées dans des structures immuables » nous dit encore Aubert (13). C'est à cela, au dynamisme et à la souplesse des musiques issues des traditions populaires,