

Research Article

The Dominance of Gamelan in South Korea in a Discursive Perspective

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Abstract.

This article provides a genealogical investigation through a postcolonial perspective about gamelan discourses in South Korea. Gamelan is known as a traditional orchestra representative of Indonesia, especially in academic circles. Whereas Indonesian culture is still not well known in South Korea, Indonesian traditional instruments are not limited to gamelan. There are also a great many other traditional instruments on each island and among different ethnic groups in the nation. How and why has gamelan come to be seen as such a representative Indonesian musical instrument within South Korea? Knowledge of gamelan or Indonesian music is a more recent issue in South Korea where there has been no long history of Indonesian musical discourse. The aim of this article is therefore to understand how gamelan was decontextualized from its origin through orientalism and colonial era research into the performing arts, and how this led to it becoming a representative Indonesian traditional music form in South Korea through Foucault's theory of discourse. To do this, historical data was investigated using genealogical methodology. Gamelan was one of the popular objects during the colonial era for Western musicians and musicologists. The popularity of gamelan has been parallel with the development of ethnomusicology, and it has flown into South Korea with increasing Korean students who study in the West and through interactions between musicologists in the ethnomusicology field.

Keywords: Korean gamelan, Indonesian music, colonialism, postcolonial, ethnomusicology

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1. Introduction

In decade, programs about Southeast Asian culture have increased by mass media companies and social media content makers in South Korea. Also manufacturing industry have built factories in Southeast Asia therefore interest of Southeast Asian cultures have been increased in South Korea. However, Southeast Asian arts are still less interested

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in research field and public. Kim (2001) criticizes Korean people are less interested in Southeast Asian arts due to Korean people are already common with Western art (Kim, 2001, p. 47). Despite this background, at least, some Southeast Asian arts have researched in academic field in South Korea. Although Southeast Asian arts are still not popular, gamelan seems bit remarkable than other arts of Southeast Asian arts in music field and academic institutions in Korea such as university and museum. National Folk Museum and Seoul Art Company have a set of gamelan Gong Kebyar from Bali, and World Instrument Museum has a set of gamelan Angklung from Bali. Seoul Institute of Arts bought Sundanese gamelan in 2017, and it is the first institution which officially opened gamelan class in South Korea. Meanwhile, it is difficult to find other Indonesian traditional instruments except gamelan.

There were few books in South Korea that address world music include Indonesian music¹. Interestingly gamelan is representative of Indonesian music in these books. The first intensive published book about Indonesian music in public is *Music Culture of Indonesia* (2017) by Kim. The title of this book denotes general Indonesian music and culture however, it only

discusses about gamelan and gamelan music (*karawitan*). This book is problematic because it represents knowledge of researcher that Indonesian music as gamelan music even though there are lots of traditional music in Indonesia. In addition, articles about Indonesian music in South Korea are also mostly about gamelan with ethnomusicological perspective² or popularly study about Debussy's music *Pagode*³. Almost writers wrote gamelan musical terms such as name of instruments, titles with English pronunciation. It represents those writers have not efforted to learn Indonesian language or fieldworks. Knowledge of gamelan or Indonesian music is a more recent issue in South Korea, where there has been no long history of Indonesian musical discourse. This background requires the question that how gamelan became representative Indonesian traditional music in South Korea. According to this question, my assumption is that the construction of knowledge about gamelan in South Korea relates to colonial discourse and inflow ethnomusicology.

The first time gamelan was introduced out of Indonesia archipelago during the Dutch colonial period. Also, gamelan had been researched with comparative musicology which is early paradigm of ethnomusicology during colonial period. The important point here is decontextualization of gamelan since it was introduced in West and researched as an object in Western musicological perspective.

During the colonial exposition, lots of non-western cultures were displayed by colonial power. This historical background represents unequal power relationship that was constructed by colonialism (Lussier, 2020, p. 27). In the research about poetics and politics of ethnography museum by Lidchi (2013), subjectivities of local objects were decontextualized by colonial power then they were classified by institutional power and discursive knowledge. Lidchi argues anthropological discourse did not reflect the real state of the cultures it exhibited so much as the power relationship between those subjected to such classification and those promoting it (Lidchi, 2013, p. 163). One of example in Lidchi's research is colonial exposition in orientalism perspective. What she mentioned that the link between visibility and power is rendered most compelling when one considers human subjects and in particular the great spectacles of the colonial period. It is represented well at colonial exhibition between 1850-1925 (Lidchi, 2013, p. 167). In this exhibition, western and non-western were separated by oriental ideology. Since colonial period, gamelan also has been popular object in ethnomusicology include in South Korea. So that this paper aims how gamelan was introduced in West and how ethnomusicology flew into South Korea until gamelan became a representative Indonesian musical object in South Korea.

2. Method

This paper is a genealogical investigation through a post-colonial perspective, to understand how gamelan was decontextualized and formalized from its origin through orientalism and colonial-era research into performing arts, and how this led to it becoming a representative Indonesian traditional music in South Korea.

Hall (2013) commented about Foucault's discourse formation, meaning and meaningful practice is constructed within discourse (Hall, 2013, p. 29). Also Foucault emphasized in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), discourse is based on what already said rather than not said in every moment of discourse in its sudden irruption in history (Foucault, 1972, p. 25). According to Foucault's theory, Saukko (2003) explained genealogy investigates how certain truths have their roots in specific political and social agendas. She suggested two approaches of genealogy that is historical approach and analyzing the connections between different discourses (Saukko, 2003, p. 133-134). According to this method, this paper will analyze history; 1) since when gamelan was formalized as an

object of performing art; 2) how gamelan became popular object in ethnomusicology field; 3) how ethnomusicology flew into South Korea.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Decontextualization and Formalization of Gamelan during Colonial Era

During colonial period, some western countries, mainly England, France made several expositions to enhance trade, promote new technology, educate middle class and state Political position. As a result, intention of these expositions was to show developed industry and nation identity to public (Park, 2019, p. 93). These expositions characterized as economic cooperation or competition whereas included colonial exposition (Lussier, 2020, p. 27). They tried to prove superior of economy, technology and culture of West (Park, 2019, p. 104). To that end, colonial countries also presented local culture in a manner similar to a zoo which is native villages, as if displaying unique animals to the public. This human displaying was based on a dualistic classification between the “civil” and the “primitive”, it connotes ambition of colonialism and justification of imperialism by West to East as concept orientalism by Said (Said, 1979, p. 2).

1879 was the first time gamelan was introduced in abroad. Some professional musicians from Mangkunegaran palace was invited to perform gamelan (Cohen, 2010: 10). Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1889 was one of expositions that represented foreign culture in oriental perspective (native villages). One of popular display was Javanese village (*le village javanais*) in Dutch colonial section. Javanese village represented Javanese culture with real local people and show their life (Parker, 2012, p. 2). One of Javanese cultures in art category was live gamelan and dance performance (Young, 2008: 349). Excepting these expositions, gamelan musicians from Surakarta, Yogyakarta and Sunda had been performed in other exposition such as exposition in Amsterdam (1883), Paris (1890), and Chicago (1893) (Cohen, 2010: 10). In addition, World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893) was the first gamelan performance in United States America (Miller & Lieberman, 1999, p. 146).

What the gamelans have in common in these expositions is that they are decontextualized as objects of the performing arts from local context such as ritual, royal ceremonies or folk ceremonies, and enjoyment of societies in Java and Bali. This was represented by the knowledge of Westerners at the time who regarded music as a

aural art by art discourse. In addition, gamelan performance could be seen from not only the exhibitions, but also the performances facing the audience in a space such as concert hall or theater. Here we can see gamelan is formalized as art object with Western performing art phenomenon. It is also noteworthy in these expositions that not only gamelan was performed at that time, but other instruments such as angklung were also performed. However, the limited data at the time show that Western musicians showed more interest in gamelan.

Claude Debussy who were fascinated in gamelan often visited Java Village at the exposition in Paris in 1889, and was inspired to compose the piano piece *Pagode*. This music becomes one of the most famous gamelan-influenced Western music a century later (Parker, 2012, p. 4). As a result, just as Debussy's position in the Western classical music is large, gamelan becomes an unavoidable object for those who have studied Dubussy. Also, this interest in gamelan naturally led to study of gamelan, and gamelan also began to be studied as a relative object of Western music.

3.2. Gamelan in Ethnomusicology Discourse

The early paradigm of ethnomusicology was rooted in an orientalist perspective which is called comparative musicology. It classified Western and non-Western music and non-Western music was comparatively researched in Western musicological perspectives. Rice (2014) mentioned early ethnomusicologist's principal issues of comparing music was 1) the origins of music; 2) musical evolution; 3) understanding the distribution of musical styles and artefacts around the world; 4) musical style analysis and comparison; and 5) the classification and measurement of musical phenomena. These principles were based on question of music's origin (Rice, 2014, p. 17). For instance, with *Music in Java* (1934) by Jaap Kunst, he used Javanese notation and Western notation to represent gamelan music, also he used acoustic method to measure cent of gamelan.

The concept of comparative musicology was proposed to be renamed as ethnomusicology by the Kunst (Nettle, 2015, p. 7). Then, in 1953, musicologists and anthropologists Charles Willard Rhodes, David McAllester and Alan Merriam began to use the term ethno-musicology. In 1964, ethnomusicologists had a broader concept due to Merriam's *Anthropology of Music* (1964) (Nettle, 2015, p. 14). Since Merriam, new disciplines are moving toward the study of music as a culture. Ethnomusicology programs were first opened at the graduate programs of Indiana University, University of California, Los

Angeles (UCLA), and University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (Rice, 2014, p. 20-21). Currently, the United States has the most ethnomusicology program in the world. A total of 45 universities in the United States have courses in Ethnomusicology⁴, and 8 universities offer the same major in Canada⁵.

The person who first opened a gamelan program in the United States was Mantle Hood (Cohen, 2014, p. 231). Hood earned his doctorate under Kunst's guidance. He then made a gamelan program at UCLA. After UCLA opened its gamelan program, other universities began teaching gamelan in ethnomusicology program which in turn increased the popularity of gamelan.

Playing or working with immigrants, students and artists from Indonesia also contributed to the growing popularity of gamelan in the United States. Miller & Lieberman (1999) argue that composers who contribute to the gamelan repertoire often have very different perspectives and interests in ensembles regarding the influence of composers from the United States on gamelan development. For example, from their work in percussion, instrument making, or tuning systems, or perhaps a desire to make fusion types of compositions (Miller & Lieberman, 1999, p. 147). Currently (2021) in the United States there are more than 140 gamelan sets. This number shows that gamelan is more dominant and popular than other instruments in Indonesia. The popularity of this gamelan is also not only in the field of ethnomusicology, but also for people who play gamelan as a hobby outside of academic institutions.

As discussed earlier, ethnomusicology initially developed from comparative musicology with Western and non-Western music. This knowledge is based on orientalism in colonial times in power relations. These days, many non-Western people also get degrees in ethnomusicology and some *Gugak*⁶ researchers also analyse *Gugak* and other music in ethnomusicology program in Western universities especially in the United States, Canada and England because still there were no universities that had ethnomusicology programs in South Korea. The author also studied gamelan for the first time without any instructor training and earned a degree in ethnomusicology.

3.2.1. Inflowing Knowledge of Gamelan in South Korea

Before 1990, gamelan was virtually unfamiliar to the Korean public. However, at the very end of the 20th century, some music researchers brought knowledge of gamelan to Korea. An interesting thing to note is that this knowledge rarely came directly from

Indonesia, but generally from the West. This is linked with the increasing number of Korean students studying in Western countries.

According to survey from United Nations (UN) in 2018, number of Korean students in United States is 67,326 that is third biggest population after amount students from China and India. In Kim’s research (2015), the reason that Koreans study in United States is the gap between universities in United States and South Korea. Kim argues three facts of preference of Korean students to study in United States are structure, facility and culture.

TABLE 1: Comparing different between universities in United States and South Korea⁷.

	Universities in United States	Universities in Korea
Structural Factor	- World’s top research-focused universities.	- A short history of the university.
	- Global dominance of English.	- Poor tradition of modern science.
	- The best research productivity and impact in the world.	- Poor finances.
	- Traction force to attract talent	- Position as a latecomer in academics.
Organizational Factor	- Functional differentiation.	- Difficulties in using English.
	- Excellent facilities.	- Lack of advanced research facilities.
	- Support to focus on research.	- Vision culture of research organization.
	- Continuous verification of faculty based on academic leadership.	- Department structure with small faculty.
	- Differential rewards for excellent researchers.	- Conflict between research - oriented and education-oriented.
	- Giving social recognition in various ways.	- Work system that mass-produces administrative chores.
		- Culture that favours young and promising scholars.
Cultural Factor	- Reasonable, open and competitive culture.	- Collusion in faculty societies that do not verify skills.
	- Weak academic racism.	- Academic racism
	- Weak factions.	- Male supremacy.
	- Efforts to adhere achievement.	- Closed factionalism.
		- Confucian hierarchies.
	- Unverified experts.	
	- Academia where symbolic violence is rampant.	

Kim (2019) added, the phenomenon of Koreans choosing to study in the United States was also influenced by a historical and social context after United States Army Military Government in Korea, especially between 1950-1960 (Kim, 2019, p. 191). In addition to material factors, such as compensation after studying in the United States, this happened in a complex manner, such as dominant discourse, social atmosphere, and environmental reactions (Kim, 2019, p. 191).

For a period following the Japanese colonization in Korea, many Koreans preferred to study in Japan, which was regarded as a center of high technology and culture. However, after World War II, the paradigm gradually shifted, and Korean students increasingly preferred to study in the United States and other Western countries. Kim discussed the change in hegemony from Japanese university alumni to American university alumni in South Korea. At the beginning, alumni from United States universities did not immediately gain power in government, however alumni from Japanese universities gained positions in the academic field therefore alumni from the United States did not have many chances to get high positions. In fact, public also knew that United States universities give degrees more easily than Japan (Kim, 2019, p. 198). However, the hegemony of Japanese alumni changed with educational assistance from the United States in the 1950s. Kim explains that 1) the value of studying in the United States has objectively increased; 2) the method of providing funding (scholarships) made studying in the United States; 3) Japanese alumni were also studying in the United States and many United States alumni are constantly reproduce the social discourse that the need to study in the United States as a public obligation for the development of the country (Kim, 2019, p. 212).

Since the transition of hegemony until present, many Koreans have studied in United States to get academic degrees and also shift had an impact on *Gugak* musicians. *Gugak* musicians also go to Western countries to get master's or doctorate degree with *Gugak's* research in ethnomusicology programs. The context of this phenomenon is similar to the discourse discussed by Kim. They also began to research *Gugak* through ethnomusicology programs in the West, because *Gugak* is also became one of research objects in ethnomusicology because it is also regarded in world music category as gamelan. As a result, some foreign ethnomusicology programs began to open courses in Korean music. This allowed them to fulfil two purposes at once: studying music, while also getting a powerful degree and learning English. This shift naturally opened communication between Korean musicians and ethnomusicologists from around the

world, include Korean musicians and Indonesian musicians. Some lectures who learned gamelan through ethnomusicology program began to teach the history and theory of gamelan in universities in South Korea. Due to this historical fact, the popularity of gamelan in South Korea has been increased and influenced by the Western conception of gamelan as an object of art, via colonial era research.

4. Conclusion

Previously, we looked at the historical flow of gamelan knowledge flowing into Korea along with ethnomusicology from the colonial period. Of course, it is true that gamelan is more popular than other Indonesian music or instruments, and Korean musicians have many opportunities to encounter gamelan in ethnomusicology field and media. However does that make Korean people get interest in gamelan? Why Korean and Western musicians and researchers has shown curiosity and interest in gamelan? Also, why did Western musicians show more curiosity in gamelan during the colonial period? Without resolving this questions, it may be inconsistent to view it as a simple Western influence. Although this study focused on ethnomusicology and colonial discourse, there was insufficient analysis on why Westerners and Koreans were interested in gamelan. It can be seen that the Korean gamelan is regarded not only by the ethnomusicology but also by the Indonesian government. Indonesian government also seems regards gamelan as representative Indonesian music. This can be seen not only in South Korea but also in Indonesian embassies of other countries, where gamelan are set and opened gamelan class. In addition, academic institutions such as Institut Seni Indonesia using the term *karawitan* to represent Indonesian traditional music,

and Indonesian researchers and government inscribe gamelan as a UNESCO World Heritage. This phenomenon can create a stereotype that Indonesian music is gamelan. This can lead to marginalization of other Indonesian music that has same historical and cultural value, and this distorted knowledge might be taken root.

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