Enhancement of Understanding East Asian Music through Technical Innovation of the EMDB (Ewha Music Database)*

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Abstract

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I. Introduction

The Ewha Music Research Institute (EMRI) worked on a project, Establishing a database for music education materials of East Asia in modern era, since November of 2011. The project produced the database, Ewha Music Database (EMDB) as a result and the EMDB’s web site, eMUSICdb.info opened to the public as of November 1, 2014. As the EMDB is a repository of music education materials of East Asia in one place, it has become a useful tool for researchers. It is preliminary, yet allows users to draw a comprehensive picture of how Western music entered the region and how it was transmitted during the modern era.

The nations in the region of East Asia constituted one cultural unit, often called “Chinese character cultural sphere” (in linguistic terms, Sino-sphere), for they all used Chinese characters in their written words. These three nations, geographically situated in the Northeastern part of Asia, have shared the much connected experience of political as well as societal changes throughout their history. At the turn of the nineteenth century, they were more intertwined as the West became an another crucial sociopolitical factor in the region: Japan’s Meiji restoration in 1868, the conflict between China and Japan starting in 1894, known as the first Sino-Japanese War, and the Russo-Japanese War during 1904–5, which Korea was deeply involved with and was a possible cause for the World War I in 1914, all had changed the lives of people not only within but beyond the region. People at that time might not have realized how deep and permanent the influence of the west in the region was. In fact, the resulting changes, which are often called ‘modernization’ or ‘westernization’ had a serious impact on the daily lives of the people in the region ever since, even to the present.

The reason our Institute dedicated the past three years to establish a database for primary music sources of East Asia is that there has been no database for modern music available until this point. As the three nations have many shared political and societal changes throughout the history, music not only has reflected and but also anticipated those changes with its unique qualities. Consequently, their cultures have become deeply intertwined and the music data of the three nations has likewise become inseparable. Understanding modern music of East Asia as a unit, we now discover a variety of hitherto unknown facts that