
A STUDY ON ‘ARIRANG’ A KOREAN FOLK SONG THAT IS BEING ACCEPTED WORLDWIDE

Kang-Hyun Kim and Jun-Ki Chung*

*Kwangshin University, Institute for Pietatis Theologia, 36, Yangsantaekjiso-ro, Buk-gu,
Gwangju City, 61027, South Korea*

(Received 14 August 2022, revised 23 December 2022)

Abstract

‘Arirang’ is a Korean song that has been deeply loved not only by the people of South and North Korea, but also by people across the world. Why does Arirang fascinate people all over the world? With respect to this phenomenon, the dominant view attributes it to the activities of unrivalled entertainers spreading Korean popular culture on a global level, such as BTS (Korean male youth art group composed of seven people who dance and sing) and other dedicated musicians who introduce and popularize Korean folk songs in the world. This study acknowledges that these artists’ efforts to spread Korean popular culture abroad have contributed to the globalization of Arirang to a large extent. However, the study does not limit reasons for the globalization of Arirang to such efforts and dedication. Instead, we argue that the ‘specificity’ of Korean culture, as demonstrated by Arirang has a very high ‘universality’, making people from various countries accept and enjoy it without hesitation.

Keywords: folk song, globalization, specificity, Korea, universality

1. Introduction

In South Korea, there seems to be a continuous influx of academic studies related to the traditional Korean folk song Arirang. In particular, studies pertaining to the origins of Arirang and its various stages of development in Korea and abroad are producing considerable academic achievements among researchers. Yu Seok-Geun interprets Arirang as a song used in Jecheon ceremonies (worshiping Heaven) in ancient Korea [1]. In his doctoral thesis, Cho Yong-Ho claims that Arirang was first devised during the transition period from the Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392) to the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910) in the 14th century, and has since established itself as a traditional Korean folk song in various ways [2]. Jeong Woo-Taek claims that Na Woon-Gyu’s film *Arirang* (1926) played a decisive role in popularizing Arirang among Koreans today [3].

*Corresponding author, e-mail: Junkichung@gmail.com, tel.: 82-62-605-1004, fax: 82-62-571-7255

Jin Yong-Seon has explored how the Korean people from Russia and the CIS, China, and Japan have inherited and developed Arirang from the perspective of Korean immigration history [4, 5].

After examining the pros and cons of each aforementioned scholar's argument, this study will provide an in-depth analysis of why Arirang has become popular around the world to turn into an attractive 'Korean Wave' (*Hallyu*) loved by many people. In this study, the phrase 'Arirang Arirang Arariyo' will be the primary focus, which is considered to be the prototype or closest to the original form of Arirang. While acknowledging the contributions of the outstanding artists who are spearheading the current Korean pop culture revolution as the decisive reason leading to Arirang's globalization phenomenon [B. Kim, *BTS' Arirang stage held to commemorate the March First Day*, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sG-nPdxo1w>], we will argue that Arirang is not considered *Hallyu's* core folk song solely through their efforts and contributions. Instead, we will show that Arirang demonstrates the 'universality' principle that transcends individual cultures of each nation. In the realm of this universality of Arirang, we will expose that it has underlying attributes of religiosity, recovery and loyalty of community, love between men and women and sorrow of separation, alleviation of tribulation and loneliness, and flexibility, and a few other elements, making it a popular culture that everyone enjoys while dance and singing

2. Origin and development of Arirang

2.1. Arirang of ancient Koreans

Yu Seok-Geun, a senior Pastor at the Arirang Presbyterian Church which belongs to the largest Protestant denomination (Hapdong) in South Korea, argues that Arirang is a national song that marks the beginning of Korean culture [1]. Ancient Koreans were a devout, religious group that sang praises of God and remained loyal to the idea of monotheism during a time when polytheism was dominant. These were northern Asians who crossed the Pamir Highlands and the Altai Mountains in the distant past and established Gojoseon [Ancient Korea] civilization in Lake Baikal, Manchuria, Siberia, and Mount Baekdu [1, p. 46]. They honoured God, the source of light, and claimed that the land that they had inhabited was a 'bright land' that dispelled darkness. Ancient Koreans were called 'Bakdal Koreans' because it was believed that Koreans were people who settled in 'bak' (shining) 'dal' (earth). This is also the reason why Koreans preferred bright colours and wore white clothes. In the 21st century, Koreans enjoy donning clothes of various colours under the influence of post-modernism. However, at least until the early 20th century, they were very proud to wear traditional white robes, identifying themselves as a white-robe people [6].

What was the meaning of Arirang that ancient Koreans sang? 'Al' is a word used to denote God [1, p. 33]. The ancient Koreans, like Jews, hailed a single God, 'Al' (God), different from other gods. 'El' in Hebrew, 'Alla' in Arabic, and 'Al' in Old Korean all mean one 'God'. On the other hand, 'Irang' means 'with'.

So the song they sang “Al-irang Al-irang Al Aliyo” literally translated to “with God, with God, with God, just God” and “Al-irang gogae-reul neomeo-ganda” means nothing but “accompany with God, I will take over the mountains” [1, p. 44]. However, when singing the actual song, they did not sing ‘Al-irang Al-rirang Al Aliyo’, but rather ‘Arirang Arirang Arariyo’. The reason was the application of the linkage rule of Korean to soften the song and make it livelier.

The next sentence of Arirang goes like this: ‘If you forsake me [God], you will get sick soon’. Here, ‘the one who forsakes me’ refers to a group of atheists who do not believe in God, the Almighty and the loving personal God, and reject Him. If these unbelievers betray God and act for their own benefit, they will get sick very soon when traversing the path of fleeing. This indicates that even before they could run away, their feet will begin to tire and wear out and they can no longer walk. When we first listen to this song, it may seem as though those who have departed from God are subject to a curse that will bestow upon them immense unhappiness. However, this line does not function as a curse and instead, invites people to not leave God’s bosom, and to return as soon as possible to restore a good relationship with God [7, 8]. Thus, the ancient Koreans demonstrated their love for God as well as their sympathy and compassion for the weak who could not fully keep this love. This is similar to the expression of the love of God and love of neighbour in the *New Testament* with the help of pure songs (Matthew 22.37-40) [9].

Yu’s understanding of Arirang is a brand-new interpretation that was never explored before. He proposes understanding the archetypal religious aspects of ancient Koreans by linking them with the legend of humans being born from egg (al) and God (Al). A popular legend in ancient Korean history was stated that Jumong was born from an ‘al’ (egg) and founded Goguryeo (1 BC-668) in the Northern Korea, while Park Hyukgeose, also born from an egg, created a nation called Silla (57 BC-935) in the Southern Korea [10]. It is important to understand that these tales do not truly mean that the Korean people emerged from eggs; but rather, these religious expressions signify that they came into being from ‘Al’ (God). After a Korean person would die, round earthen tomb were created in the shape of an egg to bury the deceased. The religious metaphor underlying this grave is of returning to God following death. Korean funeral culture reminds us of the story of creation in Genesis in the *Old Testament* - a human is born from dust and returns to dust (Genesis 3.19).

Clearly, Yu’s analysis of Arirang is based on the monotheistic religious practices of ancient Koreans, which makes it an interesting argument. However, it can be easily misconstrued as all ancient Koreans were monotheistic. In fact, ancient East Asian people, including Koreans, followed Shamanism, under which various deities were worshipped. These peoples were typically guided by shamans [11-14]. This is because, in ancient times, religion and politics were intricately associated, and religious leaders naturally performed the roles of political leaders [12, 15]. Therefore, his argument has the necessity of presenting primary sources that all historians can agree with. If his argument is correct, the faithful Koreans who embraced Arirang seemed to be monotheistic; and the general public could

be divided into those who believed in Shamanism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and the like [13].

2.2. Arirang in the 14th century

It is practically impossible to find clear evidence that identifies how the ancient Korean Arirang was developed. In this context, Korean literature scholar Cho Yong-Ho claims that Arirang firstly appeared in the 14th century. He argues that Arirang was an encrypted text first created by the patriots of Goryeo against the newly established country called Joseon at the Sarigol temple in Gaegyeong, the capital of Goryeo [2, p. 11]. They developed a folk song called Arirang claiming that ‘A loyal servant cannot serve two kings’. A substantial amount of effort went into ensuring that Arirang did not pose an outright challenge to the new Yi Dynasty. Thus, the loyalists of Goryeo quietly spurred public opinion against the new Yi dynasty through the popular theatre of the time. Arirang was introduced to society in the form of a theme song of the play [2, p. 194]. In this context, Arirang was described as a song detailing the sexual corruption of a fallen monk and a woman.

The prefix ‘ah (阿)’ in ‘Arirang’ was read as ‘a’ in ancient Korea and ‘a’ in the Middle Ages, and was used to denote admiration [2, p. 138]. And the word ‘Rirang’ was referred to a divine goddess [2, p. 81]. This holy divine being took on the colour of a folk song and was transformed to present the concept of ‘lady’ on the ground [2, p. 142]. ‘Arariyo’ meant “Where are you?” [2, p. 160]. In Arirang, this lady unleashed a blitz of her affections to entice her lover, a Buddhist monk, but the latter strongly rejected her advances and left her. At this, the lady lamented her own situation and swore, ‘Soo aval [abusive words], dear monk!’ She cursed him and stated that eventually, he would experience problems with his feet due to his betrayal [2, p. 15]. In this song, the lady who seduced the monk with strong affection was portrayed as a free-spirited, promiscuous and profane person. Arirang symbolically expressed that this woman was a follower of a new dynasty, and that the monk who completely rejected this love and dreamed of the revival of Goryeo represented Goryeo loyalists. This symbolic Arirang lamentably expressed the ruined Goryeo.

The folk song, Arirang, was interpreted in various ways based on the context of the listener. The sentence, ‘Namakanda’ [neomeoganda] has several meanings. A particularly important meaning is “to cross through blue waves” [2, p. 198]. This song reminded listeners of the splendid history of ancient Korea. Jumong, the founder of Goguryeo, crossed the waters of the Yalu River and established a magnificent country in the northern part of Korea, and Biryu, the son of Jumong, crossed the waters of the Han River and established the kingdom of Baekje in the south of Korea. Therefore, Arirang imbibed a sense of mission even within the Goryeo people who were proud to be descendants of Goguryeo, so they could rebuild Goryeo with the spirit of crossing the water. Goryeo loyalists attempted to perpetuate the dream of revival and reconstruction of Goryeo through Arirang. Currently, Korea’s ‘Jeongseon Arirang’ echoes the

sentiments of these Goryeo loyalists who lived in the Jeongseon area in Gangwon Province, dreaming of the revival of Goryeo.

Arirang was also used as a folk song to explicitly point out the problem of 'Gongnyeo' (貢女) system which entailed sending Korean women to the Yuan Dynasty of China during the Goryeo period [2, p. 258]. At that time, the Mongol Chinese Empire demanded certain tributes and women as a condition of recognizing Korea as an "independent country" [14]. This system continued until the early days of the Joseon Dynasty and was inflicted serious wounds that destroyed Koreans' self-esteem and identity. Many Korean virgins got married at a young age to avoid being taken as Gongnyeos [16]. These women were forcibly dragged to the Chinese soil, where they were doomed to marry or serve as slaves to the Mongols. Arirang was the song of farewell that they sang with their families when these women were forced to emigrate to China after leaving their loved ones, hometown, and the Goryeo nation. Cho asserts that 'Arirang Pass' in Arirang is a metaphorical expression of the pain and sorrow of Goryeo in the case of Gongnyeo, and symbolizes a valley of rippling sea waves [2, p. 168], which does not exist in a tangible form, but only within the hearts of Korean people. This is not a concept interpreted by Yu Seok-Geun. Yu describes 'Arirang Pass' as the places visited by ancient Koreans where they undertook challenging mountain marches with immense faith in God [1, p. 46]. According to Cho, when one crosses this pass, they cannot return. Whoever goes there suffers through several arduous moments. Those who survive are aware that the place is extremely tragic and thus, they pray that their loved ones do not attempt to go there [2, p. 161]. Arirang was a song that expressed the longing for those people who were separated, although there was no chance of meeting them again in their lives.

In some cases, such as in the above explanation, the original meaning of Arirang as a secret protest against the Yi Kingdom was lost, and instead, it turned into a passionate and honest confession of love between a man and a woman, and the heartbreak of separation. The general sentiment concerning this Arirang was that one day, when the man she loved crosses the 'Arirang Pass', the abandoned woman expects him to fall sick and return before he goes too far ahead [2, p. 85]. Arirang, at this time, treated love as 'Han' (deep sorrow and desire) or a longing for restoration [14].

Cho's research is a very important case study since it establishes that Arirang was created during the replacement period between Goryeo and Joseon and satisfied the diverse needs of the Korean people [2, p. 260]. His study is particularly significant since if we unravel the secrets hidden in the refrain of Arirang, that is, 'Arirang, Arirang, Arariyo, Arirng gogaerul neomeoganda', we can find the original form of Arirang as well as the various meanings underlying the sentences both before and after.

Are there any problems with Cho's understanding of Arirang? He conducts an in-depth analysis of Arirang in relation to the ancient history of Korea. It is undoubtedly interesting that he perceives Arirang's 'Rirang' as a divine goddess. However, he fails to link this goddess to the ancient religions of Korea and reduces her to an ordinary woman. He does not pay an adequate amount of

attention towards exploring the ‘vertical’ religious realm that interacts with the ‘Divine Reality’ of ancient Koreans and merely focuses his research on the ‘horizontal’ phenomena pertaining to humans and society, limiting the exploration of the fundamental religious ideas of Arirang. The reason he adheres to this position is because there are no direct records proving that Arirang originated from the ancient religious culture of Korea [2, p. 49]. Since there are no documented records to testify this, it can be concluded that Arirang has nothing to do with ancient Korean religions. Although the spiritual and religious colours were significantly evident in the elements of Arirang, he does not specifically delve into this field.

In addition to the goddess mentioned above, there is another example of Arirang’s religious dimension: ‘Arirang Pass’. He argues that among the Koreans, this pass is disclosed as a place that does not exist in this world. He tactfully interprets this pass as a symbol or a metaphor, such as the pain of Korean virgins being forcefully taken to China, the separation between men and women in love, or the loyalty of Goryeo loyalists who resisted the newly established Joseon dynasty. However, underlying these symbols and metaphors are rich religious desires to overcome the impossible realities that the Koreans encountered. The optimism that it is impossible in life, but that it will be possible in the next world is evident in Arirang. When humans acknowledge their incompetence and try to transcend their limits, even without any confessions of religiosity, they are already trying to resolve their problems in the realm of religion, that is, Ultimate Reality or Concern. In order to overcome these limitations of human beings, in ‘Shin Arirang’ (New Arirang), ‘Arirang Pass’ is described not as a tragic place of eternal separation, but as a bridge where humans can go and return freely. Cho also acknowledges this fact [2, p. 162].

2.3. Arirang during the Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945)

In Korea, the most commonly used Arirang is ‘Bonjo Arirang’, and another name for this Arirang is ‘New Arirang’. Bonjo Arirang essentially means ‘the first Arirang’, although this Arirang is not the first Arirang in Korean history. Perhaps the name was established in order to follow the concept of ancient Arirang most faithfully. However, it is important to understand that the content is a new version of Arirang that has been transformed to a large extent based on the environmental context and time. Therefore, it would be fair to call it ‘New Arirang’ to avoid confusing it with the ancient Arirang. New Arirang was made into a film in 1926 and introduced throughout the Korean Peninsula, and was also the theme song of the film, *Arirang*. Just as ancient Arirang brought up feelings of loyalty among Goryeo people in the 14th century through a play’s theme song, New Arirang also envisioned the liberation of Koreans from the Japanese colonial rule and encouraged Korea’s independence through the folk song. The contents are as follows:

(Refrain) “Arirang Arirang Arariyo/
Going over to the Arirang Pass” [Arirang gogaerul neomeoganda].

“Arirang, arirang arariyo
I go over the Arirang hills,
There are many stars in the clear sky,
And many grief in life and in this world
Arirang, arirang arariyo
I go over the Arirang hills,
My lover who abandoned me
Will be footsore before he goes ten li.” [17]

New Arirang was written by Na Woon-gyu (1902-1937), who acted in the movie *Arirang* as the lead, while Kim Young-hwan composed the tune [18]. At the age of 17, Na participated in the ‘March First [Korean Independence] Movement’ in 1919. After that, he tried to work as a soldier for Korea’s independence at Sinheung Military Academy in Manchuria, but gave up on that path due to illness. Instead, he tried to devote himself to Korea’s independence by distributing films. In 1926, the movie *Arirang* was released as a black and white 35 mm silent film at a theatre called Danseongsa in Seoul and was a huge success. Lee Su-ho, who worked at Danseongsa, took over the rights of the movie in 1927 and toured and showcased it in almost all the cities and villages of Korea. The main character of this movie is Young-jin, a college student. After becoming a madman in Seoul, he returns to his hometown, but instead of finding respite at his house, he turns into a bigger trouble maker. He then learns that his sister was sexually assaulted by Ki-ho, a powerful and pro-Japanese Korean in the village. Yeong-jin becomes furious and kills him with a sickle in retaliation. As a result, Young-jin gets arrested by the Japanese police. Young-jin’s appearance as a madman makes the audience realize that the Japanese invasion of Korea led to the insanity of intellectuals of Korea. In the scene of the pro-Japanese Ki-ho’s death, viewers can empathize with the message that the retaliation towards Japan’s invasion of Korea is justified. In the final scene of the movie, when Young-jin is taken away by the Japanese police, the villagers gather around and sing New Arirang for him. Since this movie is a silent film, the narrator sings the New Arirang instead, and Koreans who viewed the film were moved to tears while singing the song along with the narrator. Koreans from around the world who watched this movie could understand the sorrow and hardships of Koreans under the Japanese rule and longed for future independence. Since then, New Arirang has turned into a kind of a national anthem [18]. Because New Arirang is a song of the nation that is sung in both South and North Korea, it is a representation the entire Korean people. Furthermore, because of its nobility that captures the universal joys and sorrows of humankind, “it was registered as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity on 6 December, 2012” [M. Ki, *Bonjo Arirang*, 2022, <https://folkency.nfm.go.kr/kr/topic/detail/800>].

A systematic study of New Arirang is well covered in Jeong Woo-Taek’s paper, ‘A Study of the Canonizing Process of Arirang, a Korean Native Song’ [3]. He has analysed the process of establishing New Arirang as a ‘national song’: “The musical characteristics, the modernistic meaning and function of its words and refrain, its reflection of social realities and the formation of modern media

and the masses and the reflection of the reality of that era in a complex way” [3].

Jeong has rightly pointed out that New Arirang was the theme song of Na Woon-gyu’s movie *Arirang*, but it was markedly different from other types of Arirang. It was understood that the new arrangement was based on both the use of violin and Western music, and has claimed that New Arirang adequately expressed the reality of life separation, a universal tragedy of the nation under Japanese colonial rule [19]. Jeong evaluates New Arirang’s refrain, that is, “crossing the Arirang Pass” as an art form to transcend the present and approach the future [3]. He argues that the New Arirang was constructed by a modern consciousness of time, and it is his accurate diagnosis that Koreans experiencing the imperialist modern civilization under Japanese rule discovered the symbolism of ‘Arirang Pass’, which was distinctly different from the time of the late Goryeo Dynasty. Koreans, who were oppressively exposed to Western modern civilization through Japan sang New Arirang to acknowledge the importance of the nation [Korea] and their mind was in a state in which they could imagine the future and understand the present [3, 20].

There is an outstanding study pertaining to the enormous influence of New Arirang in relation to the period of Japanese rule in Korea. This is “Arirang: How did the folk music promote solidarity during a period of colonization and diaspora” by Yang Jeong-won and Lee Sun-hee [21]. They present detailed data on how New Arirang was extremely influential. They reveal that Arirang was the driving force in overcoming the pain of death even in a desperate situation where Koreans had no choice but to live a miserable life as a victim of Japanese imperialism. For example, Tak Gyeong-hymn, a Korean young man, was mobilized for the Japanese army’s commando operation ‘Kamigaze’ and ultimately ended his life by death. The night before his death, he met a woman he knew - Torihama Tome - while having a quick meal at a Japanese restaurant and he sang Arirang as his last words [21]. He also told her that if she were to witness a butterfly later on, it would be his incarnation. The young man’s last will was Arirang, which is a testament to how much he missed his parents and Korea. For him, Arirang is a constant reminder of his lost country and his parents and siblings, a comfort that soothed his loneliness and sorrow, and ultimately the object of his belief that he could be reborn as a butterfly. In this respect, Yang and Lee have captured the religious power of Arirang.

In another example, as a part of Japan’s colonial policy, the two scholars meticulously track the sufferings of women in Southeast Asia, including Korea. Based on historical facts, they summarize the suffering of a Korean woman in Thailand as a pleasure girl in the Japanese military [21]. This Korean woman was sexually harassed by the Japanese military every day until her beautiful personality and presence had been obliterated. This woman’s life was not a human life. Amid such bad circumstances where death may have seemed more enticing than life, this woman chose a miserable life over her suicide. The power to remain alive did not come from anywhere else, but from Arirang. As she sang Arirang, she could feel the mysterious power illustrating hope for the future. This power is transcendent and cannot be explained by human reason or sensibility.

Although the two scholars do not speak of this power in religious terms, in many respects, they appear to have taken a religious approach.

2.4. Today's Arirang

Due to Japanese colonial rule, many Koreans became a part of the immigration procession rather reluctantly to avoid suffering and maintain a minimalistic life. The Civil War (1950-1953) after liberation made Korea one of the poorest and most underdeveloped countries in the world [12, 22-24]. As a result, Korean immigrants continued to leave Korea and seek a new life. Some Koreans immigrated to Germany as nurses or miners, and there were others, who were medical personnel and workers who emigrated to North or South America [25]. This diverse history of Korean immigrants laid an important foundation for the globalization of Arirang. Koreans, in the past and the present, instinctively sing Arirang whenever they gather for some festival. To elucidate this behaviour convincingly, we must look at Korea's long historical and traditional culture, especially the religiosity of Koreans. As we have pointed out at the beginning of this study, Arirang's original religious roots positively portrayed God, humans, and the Universe. In the 14th century, this positive view of religion was changed to Arirang, which contained various negative contents. Humans cannot deny the reality of history, so the Koreans' Arirang evolved into many Arirangs that could be applied to the people of that time and place [26]. So, in Arirang we can see the ambivalence of positivity and negativity. It is true that many Koreans currently live in foreign lands and experience significant pain and thus, it is reasonable to establish this fact as a culture of 'Han', unique to Koreans. The problem lies in emphasizing the 'one-dimensional' interpretation of 'Han' as loneliness, sadness, and pain [14]. Although this interpretation has some justification, it does not explain the overall nature of Arirang. Jin Yong-sun's efforts to actively promote and study the ambivalence of the positive and negative aspects of Arirang are outstanding in this regard [4, 5]. He continues to contribute to the globalization of Arirang by discovering Arirang that is used not only in Korea, but also in East Asia, Russia, and other foreign countries and by studying its common denominator. Today, Arirang is not just a Korean folk song, but a global song, making it a tool that embraces everyone. In this regard, outstanding artists and musicians such as BTS are expected to perform Arirang for their large number of followers [14, 27].

3. The universality of Arirang

As seen above, Arirang was developed during unique times and spaces in a special country called Korea. Nevertheless, why does Arirang attract people hailing from all over the world? It is logical that, in order for a specific culture of one country to coexist amidst the culture of another country, cosmic universality that can be accepted by other cultures is necessary. Let us analyse the elements of cosmic universality of Arirang.

3.1. Religious nature of Arirang

Arirang has religious elements, making it a hymn or prayer to God. We, as human beings, are fundamentally ‘religious’. Here, religion means that we long for a certain Ultimate Reality or Concern that transcends our own limits [12, 13, 28]. In this sense, all of us have our own religion. Arirang satisfies this universal religiosity of humankind. Arirang’s universal religious view is that the God of love, compassion, mercy, and power is a transcendent Being, but also participates in various events in the human world and establishes personal relationships with human beings. Humans may have a deep communion with this God and simultaneously build a good relationship with their neighbours [8]. Here, the spirit of equal love and consideration of the human community, not violent war or strife, abounds. Therefore, if the song Arirang is sung as a hymn, it becomes a part of reverent worship to God. If we dance and sing Arirang with our neighbours, it becomes a festival where conflicts with neighbours cease and healing takes place. ‘Al or A’ in Arirang stands for God, but ‘ah’ is the eloquence of the humans who look at the beautiful scenery of the world created by God or perceive the chirping of birds as the ecstatic sound of Heaven. Often, the words ‘Al’ and ‘ah’ are both entrenched in the deep human mind and spontaneously uttered unconsciously. Thus, Arirang proclaims to all nations that all human beings have an image of God, the transcendent Being. To put it in another way, Arirang teaches us that all human beings on the planet can communicate with each other through one root of religiosity called ‘divine humanity’.

3.2. Restoration of the community and loyalty to the country

Arirang was used as a kind of military song that reminded the Korean people to restore their national sovereignty after they lost their country to Japanese rule. When Korea was annexed by Japan in 1910, Koreans longed for the independence of their homeland. Many Koreans became independent soldiers and were active in China, Russia or the United States [29-31]. They sang Arirang together on holidays or other special occasions, such as birthdays or weddings of colleagues or relatives, to confirm the spirit of the Korean community and to pray for the restoration of national sovereignty. In the lyrics of Arirang, the historical individuality and collectivity of Koreans accumulated over thousands of years are condensed unconsciously, stably expressing emotional unity, self-esteem and harmony. Understandably, people who lose their country to invaders and live in a foreign country away from their loving parents, relatives, and friends miss their hometown and pray for the independence of their country. Arirang was and will always remain excellent at conveying these universal hopes and dreams.

3.3. Warm love and sorrow of parting

All men and women on this planet universally seek ‘perfect’ love. In general, when a man and a woman feel good about each other, they enter into a

relationship, take care of each other, sometimes sacrifice and make compromises, and eventually get married to start a family. However, the love of all men and women does not always result in such a 'happy-ending'. For example, a woman loved a man with all her heart, but for various reasons the man broke up with her. At this time, the woman who suffered an unwanted breakup went through a very difficult phase because of her intense heartache and wounds [7, 9]. Arirang reflects the pathetic love and parting of the Korean people during the Goryeo Dynasty, when their beloved fiancées were forced to move to the Chinese Yuan Empire ruled by the Mongols. Similar tragic events occurred repeatedly during Japanese colonial rule in Korea. Countless Koreans left Korea to live in Manchuria, Central Asia, Russia, Europe, North and South America. The loneliness and sorrow experienced by Korean immigrants during parting and starting a new life in foreign lands stretch beyond our imagination [32, 33]. Although it is not the same, if a loving man and woman are forcibly separated by an outside force, everyone in this world can connect with those feelings on an emotional level. Arirang has created a space where it is not stingy in sharing this emotional universality with people around the world.

3.4. Arirang's 'dialectic' view of history

Arirang is composed of an amazing 'dialectic' formula. The historical view of dialectic is a holistic and phenomenological view of history that goes through the process of consensus, antithesis and consensus [34]. In Arirang, the emotions of 'Han', which convey the pain and sorrow of Koreans, are excellently expressed. It is not inaccurate to view the phenomenon of 'Han' as composed of negative elements. But it is also not a complete answer. Arirang's 'Han' has two sides. One side deals with the dark side of life - death, separation, loneliness, poverty, war, enslavement and exploitation. When hearing this part of Arirang, the listeners may feel engulfed by the sadness that penetrates into their hearts. The other side entails positive ones - resurrection, restoration, reunion, fellowship, wealth, peace, liberation and sharing. These two sides of Arirang teach us that we should not be overly greedy when things go well, and we do not need to despair when things go bad. It is similar to what Lao-tzu, the founder of Taoism in China, preaches in his 50th chapter of the *Taoteching* (道德經) that "birth is the entrance to death" (出生入死), and that death and life are one [35, 36]. The darkness of death and the lightness of life seem to be not related to each other antagonistically, but if we understand these two aspects in a dialectical way, we can discover the historical phenomenon of totalization that connects the two opposing sides. This is the charm of dialectics, the open philosophy of old-age Taoist thought, and the theology of 'death and resurrection' in Christianity [37, 38]. The wonderful ambivalence of Korean Arirang can be accepted by people all over the world without objection because humans, in most socio-political environments, have all been living in this dialectical view of history, whether we know it or not.

3.5. *Arirang's flexibility*

Arirang has developed steadily in the history of Korea. In particular, Arirang has been freely transformed to meet the needs and demands of the time or place according to the regional characteristics or the historical context of Korea. Therefore, in each region of Korea, there is an Arirang representing that region. For example, 'Seodo Arirang' in Pyeongan-do, 'Jeongseon Arirang' in Gangwon-do, 'Dancheon Arirang' in Hamgyeong-do, 'Milyang Arirang' in Gyeongsang-do, 'Jindo Arirang' in Jeolla-do, 'Bonjo Arirang' in Gyeonggi-do, and so on [H. Jang, *Types of Arirang*, 2013, <https://m.blog.daum.net/hsjang4012/7089670>]. In terms of the Korean ancestry outside Korea, in Manchuria, there is 'Independence Army Arirang', and in Russia's Sakhalin region, 'Sakhalin Arirang' is used. What we need to remember is that one sentence remains consistent in these various Arirangs. The sentence is "Arirang, Arirang, Arariyo, I go over the Arirang hills" [21]. Primarily, this sentence is known as the refrain of all Arirangs, but in the early period of Arirang, it was incorporated at the beginning of Arirang and was regarded as the core idea of Arirang. In other words, if this sentence is omitted, any Arirang ceases to function. Why does this sentence play such a big role? It is thought to express and explain the primal instinct that Koreans began to experience and how they recognized the condition of the Universe and the world from when they were born, which is, their religiosity.

3.6. *Solidarity of Arirang*

In the thousands of years of world history, only humans have created a splendid culture that other animals and plants could not even dream of. Animals and plants also instinctively unite with each other to win the race for survival. But they do not leave behind their achievements of unity and legacy as successfully as humans. Only human beings care for each other on a more mature level than other living beings, forming nations and making cultures blossom. In this process, humans do not always act in a manner that is holy and beautiful. Humans frequently engage in impersonal behaviour wherein the strong group enslaves the weaker group, using a more brutal way of competing for survival than other animals. As representative examples, collective actions between tribes or nations are carried out through force, and people from tribes or nations with weak armed forces walk the path of physical and mental 'slavery' [29, 30]. However, humans also have an instinctive quality to unite with each other in order to overcome these misfortunes. An outstanding 'weapon' that appeals to this unity would be the 'speech', 'writing' or 'song' of persuasive leaders [9, 24, 32, 39, 40]. In 1754, Benjamin Franklin drew and distributed a cartoon depicting a dying snake split into several pieces in a section of his newspaper, *the Pennsylvania Gazette*. The title of the painting was 'Join or Die'. Snakes in fragments are powerless and die, so there was a strong message underlying this cartoon, since all American colonists at the time had to unite to avoid this kind of a death. This message that unless united, the result is a tragic death, served as a very powerful political

ideology that gave birth to the United States today [D. Stone, *Join, or die: Political and Religious Controversy over Franklin's Snake Cartoon*, 2018, <https://allthingsliberty.com/2018/01/join-die-political-religious-controversy-franklins-snake-cartoon>]. Arirang in Korea also promotes this function of solidarity to people around the world. No matter where we live in the world, if we sing only Arirang, we see people with Korean roots gathering and singing the song together. The solidarity that Arirang elicits is beyond imagination. This is because the invisible and powerful force of Arirang, which has been accumulated through Korean history and tradition for thousands of years, is secretly radiated to the external world. Longing for such a power would be the common aspiration of all humankind. So, to all humankind who live together and pursue freedom and independence, Arirang provides universal solidarity.

3.7. Popular culture enjoyed by everyone

Arirang has a warmth that penetrates into the heart and embraces people's minds. Arirang is a song that can be sung freely in high, mid, and low tones. The beautiful melody of Arirang, which is sometimes sung quickly or very slowly, can be felt by anyone who hears it. Indeed, Arirang has a deep and mysterious sound. If we dance while singing this song it births a popular culture that everyone in the world can enjoy. This natural phenomenon is currently being created by BTS. However, what we need to know is that if the unique and cosmic core content of the traditional Korean folk song Arirang is omitted, even outstanding artists like BTS will not be able to capture the hearts of millions of people around the world [14].

4. Conclusions

Arirang is a folk song that was born during a specific historical and cultural context of Korea and has significantly contributed towards establishing the identity of Koreans. Anyone who knows that they are of Korean ancestry would sing this song and socialize with other Koreans regardless of where they live. They sing this song when they are happy or sad. Currently, this 'special' Korean folk song is spreading very rapidly around the world through BTS and other outstanding Korean artists. Although it is true that their dedicated efforts are contributing greatly to the globalization of Arirang, it is important to know that the globalization of Arirang must be attributed to the content of Arirang itself and the power of its cultural tradition. Especially among those people with Korean ancestry living in regions related to ancient Korean history, such as Russia, China, and Mongolia, Arirang is their own folk song and a kind of 'national anthem'. If the day comes when North and South Korea are reunified, Arirang could be selected as the true national anthem of this restored Korea. Furthermore, Arirang will not only encourage fresh spirituality and moral life to everyone in this global village, but also serve as a celebration song for the peace of the human community. Thus, Arirang is this world's intangible cultural heritage.

References

- [1] S.-G. Yu, *Another Chosen People, Al-nation*, Jerusalem Press, Seoul, 2005, 11-448.
- [2] Y.-H. Cho, *A Study on the Original Arirang*, PhD thesis, Soongsil University, Seoul, 2010, 1-277.
- [3] W.-T. Jeong, Daedong Culture Research, **57(1)** (2007) 287.
- [4] Y.-S. Jin, *Chinese Korean - Arirang*, Sumun Publishing House, Seoul, 2001, 1-473.
- [5] Y.-S. Jin, *Jeongseon Arirang*, Jipmundang Press, Seoul, 2004, 1-220.
- [6] U. Kim and Y. Kim, Journal of the Korean Society of Costume, **56(7)** (2006) 1-17.
- [7] J.-K. Chung, *The Spirituality of Autobiography*, Kwangshin University Press, Gwangju City, 2003, 4-265.
- [8] J.-K. Chung, *The Spirituality of Desert Fathers*, Eunseong Press, Seoul, 2005, 13-305.
- [9] M.-J. Jeong, J.-K. Chung, Y.-H. Park, K. Haga, H. Kang and H.-W. Kim, Review of International Geographical Education, **11(8)** (2021) 851-861.
- [10] T. Cho, Hanshin Humanities Study, **2** (2001) 5-38, available at <https://www.dbpia.co.kr/Journal/articleDetail?nodeId=NODE01766083>.
- [11] K. Chang, *Arts, Myths, and Ritual*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1983, 45.
- [12] J.-K. Chung, *A Short History of University Bible Fellowship*, Gospel Culture Publishing Company, Gwangju City, 1992, 12-23.
- [13] J.-K. Chung, *Missiological Critique on Culture*, Saehan Publishing Press, Seoul, 1996, 7-98.
- [14] M.-S. Kang, J.-J. Lee, W.-S. Han, S.-M. Rheem, J.-O. Seok and J.-K. Chung, Psychology and Education, **58(3)** (2021) 789-801.
- [15] J.-K. Chung, *Christian Contextualization in Korea*, in *Korean Cultural Roots*, H.-Y. Kwon (ed.), North Park University Press, Chicago, 1995, 81-104.
- [16] E. Piao, Brit. Lib. OC, **53** (2015) 223-239.
- [17] T. Kim, *Korea's Arirang Culture*, Park Yjung Press, Seoul, 2012, 51.
- [18] T. Atkins, J. Asian Stud., **66(3)** (2007) 645-687.
- [19] J.-O. Seok, M.-J. Jeong, S.-H. Seon and J.-K. Chung, ASTRA Salvensis Supplement, **1** (2020) 167-191.
- [20] M.-J. Jeong, International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation, **23(1)** (2019) 62-77.
- [21] J.-W. Yang and S.-H. Lee, International Journal of Applied Business and Economic Research, **14(15)** (2016) 10599-10609.
- [22] J.-K. Chung, *Theological Conflicts of Korean Protestantism and Issues of Unification*, in *Divided Korea*, H.-Y. Kwon (ed.), North Park University Press, Chicago, 2003, 137-168.
- [23] I.-S. Seo and J.-K. Chung, Natural Volatiles & Essential Oils, **8(6)** (2021) 4965-4977.
- [24] S.H. Seon and J.-K. Chung, *Missionary Sarah Barry*, CLC Press, Seoul, 2021, 35-36.
- [25] H. Kim and P. Min, Korea Journal of Population and Development, **21(2)** (1992) 121-143.
- [26] Y. Kim, *Arirang, the Taste and the Beauty*, Jipmundang Press, Seoul, 1989, 15.
- [27] J.-O. Seok and J.-K. Chung, Psychology and Education, **58(4)** (2021) 750-762.
- [28] P. Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, Harper & Row, New York, 1957, 1-5.
- [29] J.-K. Chung, *Social Criticism in Non-church Christianity in Japan and Korea*, Dissertation Thesis, University of Chicago, Chicago, 1988, 1-175.

- [30] J.-K. Chung, *Social Criticism in Uchimura Kanzo and Kim Kyo-shin*, UBF Press, Seoul, 1988, 1-211.
- [31] I.-S Seo, C.-W. Shin, J.-M. Guk, M.-J Jeong and J.-K. Chung, *Pal Arch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, **18(10)** (2021) 1549-1562.
- [32] M.-J Jeong and J.-K Chung, *Psychology and Education*, **59(1)** (2022) 159-167.
- [33] J.-O. Seok and J.-K. Chung, *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, **6(4)** (2022) 429-438.
- [34] A. Arndt, *Philos. Stud.*, **35** (2008) 265-290.
- [35] Lao-tzu, *Taoteching*, Munye Press, Seoul, 2022, 1-376.
- [36] J.-K. Chung, *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, **9** (1997) 173-178.
- [37] J.-K. Chung, *Evangelical Movement*, Kwangshin Univerity Press, Gwangju City, 1998, 15-78.
- [38] Y.-H. Park, M.-J. Jeong and J.-K. Chung, *International Journal of Health Sciences*, **6 (S1)** (2022) 6546-6559.
- [39] K.-Y. Kim and J.-K. Chung, *International Journal of Future Generation Communication and Networking*, **14(1)** (2021) 299-304.
- [40] H.-W. Kim and J.-K. Chung, *Journal of Positive Psychology & Wellbeing*, **5(3)** (2021) 770-779.