

Traditional Musical Instruments of Korea

The Korean nation, with a 5 000-year history and time-honoured traditions, has created countless treasures in the musical and artistic field. Among them are traditional musical instruments embodying the people's wisdom, talent and emotion.

These instruments are diverse, numbering a few hundreds of kinds—*tanso*, *jottae*, *thungso*, *saenap*, *phiri*, *kayagum*, *yanggum*, *janggo*, *puk*, *jing*, etc. Many of them have two to three, and more than ten at the most, variants each.

Some of the instruments date back to the years before Christ. In the period of Koguryo (277 BC-AD 668), the first feudal state of Korea there appeared a complete set of wind, stringed and percussion instruments for orchestral music and march music.

Every one of these instruments has its peculiar timbre.

The woodwind instruments like *tanso* and *jottae* have clear and distinctive timbre, and the stringed ones such as *kayagum* and *haegum* have soft and elegant timbre. *Jottae* has an enchanting tone; *tanso* sounds as clear and beautiful as the chirping of birds; and *saenap* produces an elegant sound and arouses a blend of feelings. In particular, *kayagum* is widely known for its elastic and soft timbre. The orchestral piece *A Bumper Harvest in the Chongsan Plain*, played by peculiar-sounding traditional instruments, is one of the Koreans' special favourites.

The traditional instruments have now been improved, and they are contributing to the development of traditional music. In particular, *oungum* and *okryugum*, newly invented to highlight the peculiar timbres of Korea's traditional music, are unique and varied in playing methods, so they play an important role in creating various forms of music like solo and ensemble.

The playing of traditional instruments can be heard everywhere in the country—factories, farms, schools and houses, to say nothing of professional art troupes.

In the capital city of Pyongyang there is a factory specializing in the production of traditional instruments.





Products of the Pyongyang Traditional Instruments Factory



Korean artistes play traditional instruments.



Traditional instruments are used by folk dancers.



Korean children learn how to play traditional instruments.



The Koreans resident in other countries like playing traditional instruments.
(Scene from a performance given by Chongryon's Kumgangsan Opera Troupe)