

Voicing Christian aspiration: The semiotic anthropology of voice in Seoul

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Abstract

This article proposes some analytical and methodological approaches to the urban ethnography of the human voice. Drawing on research among Protestant Christians in Seoul, South Korea, I consider the voice along three semiotic dimensions: the relationship between body and sound, the relationship between speech and song, and the relationship between the literal voice and more metaphorical understandings of voice (as perspective, political position, personhood, style, etc.). By focusing on Seoul's rapid postwar urbanization, the growth of Protestant Christianity, and the intersection of these two phenomena in the suppression and erasure of signs of struggle and hardship by a certain population among the city's Christians, I demonstrate how a focus on the human voice has the potential to illuminate important issues in the urban ethnography of newer Asian 'megacities.'

Keywords

Seoul, Korea, Christianity, voice, urban ethnography, semiotics

Introduction

This article describes an ethnographic approach to studying the human voice as a meaningful channel of social mediation in urban environments. Based on fieldwork conducted in churches and schools of music in Seoul, South Korea, since 2005, I discuss an analytical, and hence methodological, approach to investigating the human voice via its multiple phenomenal manifestations (e.g. sound and body, speech and song, etc.). Specifically, I focus on how the human voice serves as a qualitative emblem of ethnonational advancement among members of a particular

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stratum of Christianity in Seoul. Although I discuss the findings of my study in detail elsewhere, I take the opportunity here to discuss in more programmatic form my ethnographic approach to this theme and its significance for social scientific research in cities (see Harkness, 2014). I show how ethnographic practice and semiotic theory come together to allow the researcher to 'hear' urban aspiration in the human voice.

I first discuss briefly how I arrived at an ethnographic study of the voice in Seoul, emphasizing the specificity of vocal practice and ideological reflections on the voice for a study of urban aspirations in South Korea.¹ I follow this with a discussion of the Christian settings in which this voice emerges and is evaluated according to the ethics and aesthetics elevated by Korean Christian ethnohistory. Then I discuss in detail certain analytic concepts developed through a semiotic approach to social practice, which allow the ethnographer to draw on and integrate multiple kinds of data in order to locate and theorize specific sites that serve as cultural anchors for sociality. I begin with some general, non-technical statements about the ethnographic and historical context and then proceed to discuss via key technical terms some of the ways in which I carried out my ethnography of the human voice in a particular stratum of South Korean urban Christianity.

Seoul, song and Christian modernity

It is sometimes said that in order for a city to be seen as global, modern, and cosmopolitan, it must have an opera house. Often what takes place in that opera house – what is sung, who it is sung by, and who listens to the singing – is of less importance than the mere architectural sign of the institutionalization of this elite, European genre of artistic performance. Whereas for some cities, the opera house emerged as a site for the celebration of living and present artistic activities, for others, opera houses serve as signs of a specific form of urban aspiration, offering a glimpse of the city as some think it should be, perhaps more so than it actually is.

When I lived and worked in Germany in the early 2000s, I was astonished by the number of Korean singers studying opera in conservatories and performing as soloists on professional stages there. In some cases, well over half of those auditioning for German conservatories were from South Korea. This trend continued well after I left: for example, in the first round of the 2007 auditions for the voice department of Berlin's Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler, 104 out of 164 applicants were from Korea.² These singers were not merely impressive in their numbers; they were also extremely good, and usually were awarded many coveted spots. However, when I travelled to Seoul to study the sociocultural life of operatic singing in South Korea, I was surprised by the fact that, despite the numerous performances of European-style classical singing (called *sōngak* in Korean) throughout the city, the concert halls were generally empty. And, as I later found out, the vast majority of those in attendance had some first- or second-degree relation to the singer. They were family members, friends, institutional acquaintances, school relations, or members of the singer's church. There were few 'fans'.

For 12 months of ethnographic research from 2008 to 2009, I joined the choir of a large, wealthy, Presbyterian megachurch in the fancy Apkujŏng neighborhood in Seoul's Kangnam area and attended voice classes at one of the most elite music programs in the country. Nearly all of the classically trained singers that I interviewed and sang with in Seoul – students, professors, professional singers, and other teachers – were Protestant Christians. And nearly all of them understood *sŏngak* singing to be dominated by their kind. While there were quite a few Catholics and the occasional Buddhist or unaffiliated person, the Protestant numbers were overwhelming in a country of around 50 million that is only about 20 percent Christian. For the committed and enthusiastic Protestant, this posed no problems; these Christians repeatedly stated that evangelical activity in Seoul could and should be carried out in the church as much as on the concert stage. These singers spent many of their stage hours singing Christian music in an operatic style for the congregants at their churches. And, as I would find later, most vocal recitals in Seoul ended with an encore in the form of a Christian Hymn (Harkness, 2012). Others, however, often characterized the *sŏngak* scene as a fortress that could only be penetrated by the performance of Christian personhood. In Seoul, access to the seemingly urban, secular modernity of European classical singing – opera, art songs, and even choral music in many respects – was often regulated by institutionalized Christianity on a massive scale. Recall that Seoul is home to Protestant churches claiming some of the largest congregations in the world: the Yoido Full Gospel Church is reported to have more than 800,000 members; Myungsung Presbyterian Church more than 90,000; Sarang Presbyterian Church more than 60,000; and Somang Presbyterian Church, where I conducted fieldwork in 2008 and 2009, a similar number.

Since the Korean War (1950–3), Seoul has been a primary site of South Korea's aspiration to ethnonational advancement. From the 1960s to the late 1980s, South Korea went from being one of the poorest countries in the world to being one of the richest, from an almost totally rural population to an almost totally urban one, from a military dictatorship to a democracy (Cumings, 2005; Lie, 2000). The common term in Korean studies for this rapid transformation of politics, economy, and society over just a few decades is 'compressed modernity' (Chang, 1999). According to the World Bank, in 1960, the annual GDP per capita was \$155; by 1990, it was \$6,153; in 2012 it was \$22,590. The urbanization rate is also staggering: the country went from 28 percent urban in 1960, to 75 percent urban in 1990; and while the population grew from 25 million to nearly 44 million during this time (a 74% increase), the urban population more than quadrupled, rising from 7 million to just over 32 million (Lee, 2010: 88). According to the World Bank, in 2012, approximately 83.5 percent of the population lived in urban areas.

During the first decades of this rapid urbanization, shantytowns sprang up throughout the city. So widespread were shantytowns that some have estimated that as much as 20 to 30 percent of the South Korean population lived in slums and squatter settlements during the 1960s and 1970s (Ha, 2004: 124). These settlements came to be known as '*p'anjach'on*', i.e. villages made of boards or planks (*p'anja*),

or simply ‘*pinminch'on*’, i.e. villages of the poor. Settlements in the low-lying hillsides of Seoul – land which, until this time, had been more or less uninhabited – were called *sandongne* (mountain villages) or, more romantically, *taltongne* (moon villages). But just as quickly as these settlements emerged, they were razed in the name of development and beautification. Millions were evicted from these neighborhoods on official grounds. Some common reasons given were lack of sanitation, over-crowding, lack of drinking water, and fire danger. As the sites from which people moved were redeveloped into high-rises, with apartments far too expensive for the evictees to purchase or rent, many former tenants moved from demolished ‘substandard’ or illegal housing to even shoddier quarters called ‘vinyl house villages’ (*pinil housŭ ch'on*) south of the Han River – many in an area of town that once was mere farming fields and riverbanks, now known as Kangnam.³ Leading up to the 1988 Seoul Olympics, the city systematically evicted inhabitants of squatter settlements. Between 1985 and 1987, an estimated 720,000 squatters were evicted and had to seek living quarters in other poor, crowded areas.⁴

Advancement, understood in part by looking back at and contrasting the present to the suffering and struggle of the 20th century, continues to be a pervasive theme in talk about South Korea. This was made clear in former President Lee Myung-bak’s inaugural speech on 25 February 2008. As mayor of Seoul, Lee, a Christian and elder at Somang Presbyterian Church, once dedicated the city to God. As a newly elected president, he said:

Toum ūl pannūn nara esō pep'unūn nara ro olla sōssūmnida.
Ije sōnjin'guktūl kwa ōkkae rūl naranhi hal su itke toeōssūmnida.

[Korea] has risen from [being] a country that accepts help to [being] a country that gives help. Now we have become able to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with advanced countries.

The Christian narrative of ethnonational advancement is a story of suffering, striving, and stability.⁵ And for many of these Christians the cultivated voice of a classically trained singer is the voice of emotional stability, even of ethnonational maturity, absent the rough and painful sounds of Korean’s suffering past (sounds that these Christians say they still can hear, for example, in *p'ansori* singing, a form of Korean story singing). For a particular stratum of Christians in South Korea the cultivated, trained, European-style classical voice serves as a qualitative emblem not just of a prestige art form or high-class cosmopolitanism but also, and more significantly, of the transition from the suffering of the 20th century – the Japanese colonial annexation of Korea (1910–45), the Korean War (1950–53), military dictatorship (1961–87), rapid urbanization and sociocultural transformation – to the grace of the 21st century. Combining the opera house and the megachurch, a certain kind of voice has come to serve as a Christian sign that South Korea has arrived.⁶

The voice in situ

Everything I have said up to this point is essentially a summary of interview data and widespread discourse, linked with other sources in the historical and ethnographic record. That is, it lines up explicit reflections on South Korea, Seoul, Christianity, and particular practices of the human voice in an overarching narrative of ethnonational advancement. While this is valuable, such syntheses of interviews and broader discourse, as basically a more detailed enactment of a sociological survey, are only one dimension of ethnographic fieldwork. For an anthropological object as elusive as the human voice – at once body and sound; internal and external; a medium for other semiotic systems (e.g. language and music) and a site of significance itself; a concrete manifestation of the speaking/singing individual and trope of political position, power, and authenticity – summaries of the regularities of native accounts, both elicited and spontaneous, take us only so far in understanding the sociocultural role of this pervasive, ubiquitous feature of human communicative sociality.

In what follows, I go beyond summaries of interview data to discuss how I link ethnographic method and ethnographically informed theory to analyze the specific way in which the human voice emerges as an emblem of urban Christian advancement in Seoul.

Immanent chronotopes and the deictic anchoring of narrative

A narrative – (auto-)biographical, institutional, regional, ethnonational, global – is narrated from some ‘point’ in time and space. There is what we call a deictic *origō* from which the perspective of narration emerges in indexical relation to that which is narrated. The here-and-now of the event of narration is established in relation to the there-and-then of that which is narrated, performatively revealing one as a perspective from which to view the other. Mikhail M. Bakhtin long ago termed the intersection and interweaving of spatial and temporal deixis in narrative a ‘chronotope’ (time-space), pointing to the importance of viewing temporality and spatiality as intersecting axes of signification in the construal of events, actions, and persons in discourse.⁷ Of course, Bakhtin was referring to literary works of narration, but the concept has proven extremely productive in ethnographic studies of the way in which any narratives immanently frame human behavior as cultural models of space, time, and person.

My Christian informants narrated the various social, cultural, material, economic, and political transitions that they encountered or observed in their country as a transition from suffering to grace. These accounts generally also included an emotional or affective dimension; not only was there more money, political stability, better living, better sanitation, better food, etc., but there was the overall feeling – or there *should* be the overall feeling – of the happiness and joy that comes with the blessings of God. These informants could still hear the sounds of past suffering and sadness, especially in the voices of singers of traditional Korean music, whose raspy voices suggested to them a lifetime of suffering and

the cultivation of *han*, a Korean cultural concept of unavenged injustice, resentment, inner torment, and lament.⁸ For the Christians with whom I spent time and whose voices I studied, the European classical voice, with a focus on sonic 'cleanliness', phonic efficiency, and the prevention of damage or fatigue, stood as an emotional and aesthetic opposite to the sad voices of Korea's past. To sing with such a voice was to invoke the very immanent narrative of Korea's Christian transformation that they had been describing. To sing in this manner was to locate oneself, performatively, in the here-and-now of ethnonational advancement, differentiated in sound, body, and affect from the painfulness of the past.

Such narratives of Korea's rise from the ashes of war are widespread in everyday discourse. Although there are disputes over how and by what means Korea emerged as it did, the common framework stipulates that there was a 'miracle' of some sort on the Han River. The Christian version of this story, which treats Korea as a new spiritual center, an *axis mundi* even, finds its sites of authorization and instantiation in churches throughout the city. Take, for example, Somang Presbyterian Church Head Pastor Kim Chi-ch'öl's statements (3 August 2008, sermon titled 'Why do you labor?' (*Ötchihayō sugo hanūnya?*)), linking Christianity to Korean ethnonational advancement.⁹

Uri nara nūn kwagō e irōn tongnyōk ūl irūk'ilmanhan chōngsinjōk igo yōngchōk in chiju ka ch'wiyak haessūmnida. Sumanūn usang sungbae ūi nara yōssūmnida. Kwisin ūl sōmginūn syamōnijūm ūi nara yōssūmnida. Öryōpko himdūn il man saenggimyon chōmjip ūl tūnadūrōttōn saramdūl i suōpsi manassūmnida. Kūrōnde Yesu Kūrisūdo ūi pogūm i uri paeksōng ūi kasūm sok e p'agodūrōssūmnida. Kū sok e yōngjōk in mongmarūm i issōssūmnida. Kidokkyo in'gu ka pae ka toeō kyohoe ka sōngjang haessūmnida. Sahoejok in pyōnhwa ūi kach'i rūl chudo hanūn kyohoe ka toeōttōn kōt i 20-segi ūi il iōssūmnida.

In the past in our country, the mental and spiritual leadership was too weak to generate this motivational power. It was a country of a lot of idol worship. It was a country of ghost-worshipping shamanism. There were countless people who frequented fortunetellers whenever hardships and difficulties arose. But the Gospel of Jesus Christ penetrated the hearts [*kasūm*] of our people. Inside them was a spiritual thirst. The Protestant population doubled and the church grew. The churches developed to lead in the promotion of the values of social change in the 20th century.

Consider also, in the following example, how Pastor Kim characterizes the church as a catalyst in the liberation of Korea from Japanese colonialism and a defender of democracy and human rights:

Samil Undong ttae Kidokkyo nūn ōnū chonggyo poda minjok chonggyo rosō k'ūn yōkhal ūl kamdang haessūmnida. Igōt ūn pogūm undong i kot minjok undong, tongnip undong kwa manmullyō issūmūl al su issūmnida. Isūrael paeksōngdūl i aegupttang esō haebang toeō chayū rūl hyanghan Ch'uraegup Undong i kot Taehan Min'guk ūi tongnip chayū

undong im ūl Kidokkyo chidojadŭl ūn kip'i insik hago minjok undong e tongch'am haessŭmnida.

At the time of the March 1st movement, Protestant Christianity played a more significant role as a national religion than any other religion. It indicates that the movement of the Gospel was interrelated with the nationalist movement and the independence movement. The Christian leaders took part in the nationalist movement, deeply understanding that the independence and freedom movement of the Republic of Korea was equal to the Exodus movement of the Israelites who aimed for their liberation from Egypt and the freedom of the people.

The chronotope of ethnonational advancement through Christian enlightenment is told not only in terms of spiritual transformation and political emancipation, but also through the qualitative transition from the sufferings of the past to the blessings of the present as Korea emerges from global periphery to spiritual center:

Ŭi rŭl wihayŏ uri sŏnjodŭl i kot'ong ūl padŭn kŏt innida.

Our ancestors endured pain for their righteousness.

Uri sŏnjodŭlŭi hananim e taehan sarang, minjok e taehan sarang, chayu wa chilli wa p'yŏnghwa e taehan sarang ttaemune padŭn konan ūro malmiama uri ka ch'ukpok ūl padassŭmnida.

We received blessings that arose from the hardships that our ancestors endured for their love for God, love for the Korean people, and love for freedom, truth, and peace.

Within the ritual space of a place like Somang Church, the chronotopic framing of this narrative transformation from past aspiration and striving and marginality to present grace and stability and centrality in Korea is both invoked and made explicit in sermons, songs, and prayers. All three of these communicative genres make use of the voice, not only as a medium for denotational or musical text, but also as a site of significance itself. That is, the qualities of the voice become performative of precisely what is being communicated verbally. Attendants at Somang Presbyterian Church attribute their attraction to the worship style to the soft, solemn liturgy, the calmness of the pastor's voice, the cleanliness and refinement of the singing, and the whispered way in which they carry out their group prayers. In all of these dimensions of communicative Christian practice in ritual worship, the perceived qualities of the voice become intimately linked to the narratives of Korea's Christian transformation from suffering to grace. As a medium for speech and song, and as a channel-emphasizing phatic site of social contact, the voice becomes, for these Christians, qualitatively like that to which it points.

During fieldwork, I combined interviews and participant observation with other techniques designed to explore how a chronotope of ethnonational advancement through Christian enlightenment framed the use of the voice among my informants. One of these techniques was a close analysis of how vocal variation 'in time' could illustrate idealized vocal change 'over time'. For example, I analyzed the voice qualities used in a sermon of a Korean Presbyterian pastor, in which he quoted and pitted the voices of the Pharisees against the voice of Jesus. For his performance of the Pharisees and their criticisms of Jesus, he squeezed his throat and produced almost a kind of whine (which I call the ventricular voice). When reciting the words of Jesus, he expanded his pharynx and produced a stern, darker sounding, admonishing response (which I call the faucalized voice). By adjusting the qualities of his voice across the different allegorical speakers (a process I call *qualic tuning*), the pastor set up a duality of positions, social types in a social universe that members of the congregation would be able to experience as real. The congruent alignment of the voice qualities and the voicing structure of the pastor's reported speech positioned the perspective of the narrator (the pastor) within a social world of competing perspectives. By manipulating the qualitative features of his voice in his performance of these different perspectives and by reducing the prosodic differentiation between his own sermonic voice and one of the narrated voices (i.e. in his normal sermonic voice he sounded more like the Jesus he performed than the Pharisees he performed), the pastor was able to align his own perspective with that of one of the voices he is narrating (Jesus) – and thereby instruct his congregation to do the same. The different allegorical voices in his sermon were identifiable by informants according to the qualitative attributes of these voices. These attributes were linked to different moral perspectives, and these moral perspectives were linked to different points of advancement within a narrative of Christian enlightenment.¹⁰ The synchronic variation of voice qualities 'in time' in the sermon served as a model for diachronic change of perspective 'over time' – a real-time intersection of socio-semiotic synchrony and diachrony, of variation and change.

Another way in which I investigated how the voice could cue up an immanent Christian chronotope of advancement was to focus on the qualities themselves as perceived by certain listeners. Specifically, I circulated recordings of various vocal performances, including of traditional Korean music, European opera, pop music, flamenco singing, and other genres to informants and asked them simply to describe the sound and evaluate the technique of sound production. The results were quite striking. Not only did my informants consistently characterize the voices along a continuum of 'clean' to 'unclean', they mapped these qualities onto a time axis of advancement, with the clean voices described as more mature, advanced, and developed, and unclean voices as more immature, backward, and undeveloped. Furthermore, they added an affective layer to their interpretations, hearing in the so-called clean voices happiness, joy, and health, and in the unclean voices sadness, suffering, and bodily strain.

If in the pastor's sermon the Christian chronotope of ethnonational advancement through spiritual enlightenment was invoked by the qualitative differentiation

of allegorical voices in a Bible story, in the listening exercise the same chronotope was invoked by the aural apperception of qualitative difference across different musical genres and singers. In sound and body, as well as speech and song, the ideologically loaded narrative that I elicited through interviews and summarized from other discursive events became manifest in the ethnographically observable real-time social practice of my informants. Speakers both heard and produced vocal sounds as a practical model of aesthetic and affective change over ethnonational time.

Voice and voicing: From phonosonic nexus to perspectival alignment

Now that we have departed from a purely summarizing account of interviews and discourse to sketch ethnographically the way the human voice is anchored to authorizing institutional centers such as the church, linked by ritual to speech and musical genres, and situated within and productive of a chronotope of Korean ethnonational advancement through spiritual enlightenment, we are faced with three key problems. First, we have left unspecified what exactly we are talking about when we refer to 'voice'. Second, how does the voice link up with metaphors of 'voicing' that often refer to perspective, position, personhood, and power? And third, how do the qualitative dimensions of the first kind of voice link up with the second kind of voice? Let us consider these three problems in turn.

Theorists of voice from Roland Barthes to Simon Frith to Steven Feld, Aaron Fox, Thomas Porcello, and David Samuels have maintained that the voice is more than just sound (see Barthes, 1977 [1972]; Frith, 1998; Feld et al., 2004). It is, as Feld et al. put it, 'among the first mechanisms of difference' (2004: 341). That is, when we speak of the voice, we are referring to a sonic phenomenon that is taken up in all sorts of human communicative action and differentiated from other sounds in the world, while at the same time we are speaking bodily processes and the shaping of the physical surfaces of the mouth and throat. The voice that is heard as such is linked both to fairly stable 'physiognomic features' as well as real-time bodily manipulations of the larynx, pharynx, jaw, tongue, and lips.¹¹ Aesthetic regimes of vocalization – how to speak or sing, as it were – contain both an ideology of sound as well as an ideology of phonation or sound production by the body. Among the classically trained Christian singers and singers-in-training that I sang with and observed in Seoul, the overarching aesthetic framework of the *sōngak* voice corresponds to an ethics of the body – culturally conceptualized as healthy, unforced, efficient, and relaxed anatomical practice. The sounds of the suffering past that these Christians reported hearing among the elderly, the lower classes (and correlated both to specific Protestant denominations and church congregations), and singers of Korean traditional music serve as both a sonic and a phonic opposite to that which best represents the voice of advanced, mature Christianity.

In my research, I have addressed the sound-body problem by viewing the voice as a *phonosonic nexus*. This concept accounts for the way in which sound is both

produced and organized as well as taken up and categorized among sounds in the world. In Seoul, the qualities of voices are linked by my informants to specific social spaces and the persons who inhabit them. The loud, harsh, sometimes abrasive voices that these Christians link to the troubled past they also link to contemporaneous sites of urban activity. These spaces, and the qualities of the voices, are signs of a kind of past, with respect to the sanitized spaces one finds all throughout the city, such as Italian restaurants, coffee shops, and upper-class Presbyterian churches. In these latter spaces, voices are considered to be softer, smoother, and to display fewer of the features that would invoke feelings of past torment or suffering. In these spaces, clean sounds indexing healthy bodies are interwoven through phonosonic processes of speech and song, which are then associated with or differentiated from other sounds in the city. There is obviously a class dimension to this distinction, but I want to emphasize the extent to which class, the city, and the chronotope of ethnonational advancement are intertwined. By linking phonosonic forms to urban spaces, voices become valuated within the same cultural narrative of advancement that frames the city more generally, i.e. from the shantytowns of 20th-century, postwar urbanization to the 'Kangnam-style' high-rise cosmopolitanism of the 21st century. In semiotic terms, the different voices become *indexical icons* of these different spaces and their populations, at once pointing to these spaces as well as exhibiting within them some ascribed quality or property of the urban space.¹²

This linkage brings us to the next question: how does the voice, as phonosonic nexus, relate to 'voice' as a common trope for political position, perspective, personhood, or power? To connect this question to the relationship between the human voice and urban social space, let us consider Miyako Inoue's study of the emergence of 'schoolgirl speech' in urban spaces in Meiji-era Japan. Inoue asks how Japanese Meiji male intellectuals came to hear the speech of schoolgirls – a new phenomenon in public spaces where young women congregated on the way to and from school – as a form of language rather than mere 'inarticulate noise, undifferentiated from other elements in the sonic landscape' (Inoue, 2006: 38). The voices of these girls, as an urban, historically specific sociolinguistic form locatable in the public spaces of urban Japan, were heard as 'low, vulgar schoolgirl voice', marked by verb ending forms such as *teyo*, *dawa*, or *noyo*, as well as prosodic features that were described as 'fast', 'contracting', 'bouncing with a rising intonation', and 'sugary and shallow' (Inoue, 2006: 37). These qualities became, for the Meiji male intellectual, a sign of Japanese urban modernity and, to some extent, Japanese degradation (the irony being that these forms eventually became associated with timeless and essential Japanese middle-class 'women's language').

Central to Inoue's analysis is the fact that these schoolgirls were *overheard* and *reported*, even *quoted*. Bakhtin again is helpful here, in his analysis of the way in which reported speech and reporting speech intersect in narratives.¹³ Specifically, his notion of 'voice' refers to the way in which discursive forms index speakers – whether social types or specific individuals. 'Voicing', then,

becomes the semiotic relationship between and interpenetration of different identifiable voices, whether by extreme distantiation at one end of the spectrum, or overlap and even 'breakthrough' on the other (e.g. the way a character's voice might be 'heard' – sincerely or sarcastically – in the narrator's voice). This phenomenon is achieved through different forms of reported speech, from clear direct reports that differentiate perspectives indexed by speech (e.g. 'He said, "I will go to the store".'), to indirect reports (e.g. 'He said [that] he would go to the store'.), to free indirect style (e.g. 'He would go to the store. Yes he would.'), which collapses the narrating voice and the narrated voice. To 'have a voice' in the political, literary, or more generally social sense is to be engaged in forms of voicing, in Bakhtin's sense, that are taken up in a wide 'social domain of recognition' (Agha, 2005: 45). Inoue's account of schoolgirl speech demonstrated the way in which voicing via reported speech contributed to the immanent narrative of Japan's modernization – from the barely intelligible speech of schoolgirls in Meiji Japan to the highly formalized and ideologically saturated 'women's language' of the contemporary Japanese middle class.

This form of voicing, in Bakhtin's tropic sense of the term, is significant for the cultivation of Christian personhood in the churches of Seoul. As I mentioned above, Christianity itself invokes a triumphalist narrative of ethnonational development through spiritual enlightenment, which characterizes Christian conversions as a theory of social change in South Korea. In the specific stratum of Presbyterian Christianity where I spent the majority of my time during ethnographic research, the chronotope of Christian advancement and prosperity framed the qualities of the *sōngak* voice – whether heard aurally via the ears or felt proprioceptively via the body as sung – as reflecting the qualities of a clean, healthy, joyful city in which they are heard, and of God's blessings more generally, over ethnonational time. Likewise, the voicings of personhood that emerge in certain forms of vocal behavior – from singing to preaching to praying – are construed in the same manner. To sing, or speak, or pray a certain way, with a certain kind of voice, is to be a certain kind of modern, Christian, urban subject, invoking, calling on, and citing certain socio-historically authorized social voices. Voice, as phonosonic nexus, and voicing, as discursive alignment to perspective, are linked one to another within the deictic framing of a chronotope that is ritually reinstated in the church.

One of the most striking ways in which voice in the phonosonic sense and voicing in the tropic sense intersected was in singing practices of students as they moved between the church and the college of music. These two institutional sites, while at first seemingly complementary, turned out for reasons summarized below to be in tension with one another. As I spent time moving back and forth between these two sites – participating in vocal classes and lessons with students at school, and then singing with many of them in the church choir – it became clear that the voices themselves were sites of tension for the various voicings that they had to engage in to 'fit' appropriately into these two urban sites.

The school provided the credentials and authorized individuals to sing; the church provided the audience and authorized the performance events.

Despite this complementary relationship, there was an enormous contrast between the two institutions for singers who attempted to 'tune' their voices accordingly as they moved between them. At church, singers were expected to be disciples of Jesus Christ, exemplifying Christian service and modeling Christian personae through their voices in praise and worship, as well as in nominally secular classical music. At school, in contrast, singers were expected to be disciples whose vocalization should always be performed in emulation of and deference to their professors. At church, then, they cultivated what they considered to be the God-given voice as Christian service; at school, they emulated the voices of their teachers as a kind of filial servitude. Although school ostensibly was where singers were transformed into specialists of voice, the impetus to sing classical music usually came from the church. And although the school was the authoritative site of European-style classical singing, its pedagogical framework was considered to be backward and destructive for singing – more focused on teachers' status and income than on students' personal development. As students and professionals moved between these competing and complementary sites of social interaction, their voices became key loci of contestation.

While moving between these two structures of discipleship, the nature of their personal relations shifted. Two students with a hierarchically inflected relationship at school (e.g. a second-year student and a fourth-year student in a voice department) might have a somewhat different relationship at church, where the second-year student might be the primary soloist in one choir and the fourth-year student might be the backup soloist in another. And whereas a student in the context of school might feel 'beneath' a teacher and 'behind' a long line of more senior students, that same student could find himself or herself a leader in the church, giving private lessons, helping to conduct a choir, and setting an example that inspires his or her Christian brothers and sisters, even those who are decades older. Whereas the singer's position in the school was perceived as relatively fixed (the school as an institution of training is organized around this fixedness), in the church the singer moved much more freely, inhabiting many different roles and contributing to the social life of the church in many different ways. And these different discipleship positions, expressed as voicings of personhood in relation to the institutions where they were located, were empirically manifest in the phonosonic voice itself. Singers reported, and I documented, numerous instances when, within the context of the school, voices were strained, coarse, and fatigued – signs that my informants interpreted as standing for the destructiveness of past social and affective states. In contrast, the church often became the place where their voices seemed most free, healthy, agile, and clean – proof for them of the more natural, beautiful, and advanced ethical and aesthetic grounds of Korean Christian aspiration.

In this way, the chronotope of ethnonational advancement through spiritual enlightenment that one can distill from interviews and other genres of discourse can actually be empirically documented in the practices themselves, made present through the institutional anchoring of the human voice. For my informants in

Seoul, the tuning of their voices between school and church expressed and embodied competing institutional identities and ideologies and reproduced in social space a temporal narrative of progress that linked a seemingly corrosive past to an idealized, aspirational future.

Conclusion: The voices of Seoul

This reflection on ethnographic method and analysis has sought to elucidate the process by which we can ‘hear’ a culture of urban aspiration in a pervasive site of expression and embodiment: the human voice. I have attempted to show how a chronotope of ethnonational advancement through spiritual enlightenment as a deictic framing of the present allows sounds to be heard as relatively advanced or backward, clean or unclean, even moral or immoral. It is not a just-so story of the modernizing force of westernization that gives specific vocal sounds – opera, for example – their sociocultural ‘punch’ for my informants. A dynamic social world is presupposed in and entailed by every event of vocalization, and these presuppositions are linked to a specifically Christian culture of urban and ethnonational aspiration.

Sōngak belongs to the explicitly Christian semiotic genres that are part and parcel of church sociality in Korea (e.g. praise and worship, missionary activity and evangelism). Linked to particular kinds of churches and their self-anchoring narratives, *sōngak* also serves as a means by which individuals can position themselves in time and space. For most singers of *sōngak*, the Korean present – the spatiotemporal *origō*, or deictic anchor point, from which they sing, so to speak – is an outcome of Christianity’s role in the country’s dramatic social, cultural, political, and material change. The aestheticized qualities of the vocal channel serve in the performance of a contemporary Korean Christian identity: a modern Korean Presbyterian who has moved beyond the suffering and hardship of the past to celebrate the health, wealth, and enlightened stability of Korea’s Christian present. To sing *sōngak* in Korea is to present oneself as a certain kind of person. To have this kind of voice is to give voice to precisely that ultimate goal of urban aspiration for these people: an advanced, stable, graceful Christian nation leading the world in the present. For some, not only were suffering and sadness a thing of the past; striving itself, that basic setting of Korean aspiration emerging from the waves of urban migration after the war and continuing up to the present, had become marked as a thing of the past. Just as the ideal *sōngak* voice should disguise all of the traces of labor that contributed to its cultivation, Seoul, in many ways, seeks to disguise the labor that contributed to its ascendancy as a global city, an emblem of advancement, and, for Christians, spiritual target and example of God’s grace.

But the array of Christian churches and Christian voices in Seoul is much wider and more differentiated than the picture that I have sketched here. The postwar growth of Protestant Christianity in Korea is intimately linked to Seoul’s urbanization. Whereas in 1960 approximately 5 percent of the country was reported to be Protestant Christian, by 1990 the number had grown to around 20 percent.¹⁴

It was during this time that the country transformed from a mostly rural population to a mostly urban one. Likewise, it was during this time that Korea saw the emergence of institutional forms that would come to define and dominate the present image of Korean Christianity: the evangelical megachurch. From a congregation like Youngnak Presbyterian Church, established by North Korean refugees in Seoul in 1945 after the demarcation of the Soviet and US areas of control for Japanese surrender, to the Yoido Full Gospel Church, established after the Korean War in a shantytown tent in 1958, to the numerous megachurches established by charismatic leaders in the late 1970s and early 1980s as Seoul expanded south of the Han River, the history of Seoul's rapid urbanization during the second half of the 20th century *is* the history of the rapid growth of Protestant Christianity and its churches – and vice versa. To this day, the voice in these churches communicates via explicit ideologies and liturgical styles the different points in urbanizing Seoul's time and space during which they were established and grew to prominence.

For a medium such as the human voice, which is held up in these sites as a medium of socialization with humans and deity alike, variation in practice and ideology across these different institutions can tell a very rich story of how personal, urban, and ethnonational perspectives align with one another. Far more than revealing mere sociolinguistic variation and change, a study of the human voice in cities and their institutions can become, with the proper analytical and methodological tools, an ethnographic study of the history of the materialization of social relations enacted in emulation of and opposition to changing communicative norms. Through the institutionalization of voice, the city itself 'speaks' and 'sings' from different points in its own history, offering different perspectives from which to view the urban. For an Asian city like Seoul, which has grown rapidly, where there has been much social mobility, and in which urban development and beautification projects have sought to erase the signs of fairly recent states of poverty and hardship, the human voice's place among the sounds of the city can tell a story unavailable through other means. When others signs of an urbanizing past might have disappeared, the voice continues to infuse ideologies of communication and social interaction with the habituation of the body. As a medium of communication, an object of cultivation, and a target of reflection, the phonosonic nexus as both produced and heard can invoke cultures of urban aspiration projected from specific points in time and space – some of which may no longer be seen.

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Notes

1. See Bunnell and Goh (2012) on the particular conceptualization of 'aspiration' that has prompted the papers in this special issue.

2. Email communication from Dr Ute Schmidt, Akademisches Auslandsamt, Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler, 23 March 2007.
3. 'Most of vinyl house occupants are poor tenants who were forcibly evicted from the housing renewal areas or the homeless. Vinyl house squatters settle in vacant hillside areas or public open spaces without any rights to land ownership nor with building permits' (Ha, 2004: 127).
4. Ha (2004: quoting Murphy, 1990; UNCHS, 1996). See also p. 126: 'Although the original intention of the partnership between homeowners and construction companies was indeed noble, it was estimated that less than 20% of the original residents were able to purchase an apartment unit that they could identify as their dream home.' See Kim Davis (2011: 588): 'One international study showed that around 100 sites were redeveloped between 1982 and 1989 (ACHR and Third World Network, 1989: 5). It stated that between 1983 and 1988, 48,000 buildings housing 720,000 people were destroyed (ibid.: 23).'
5. On Christianity and modernity in South Korea see Choi (2009); Chong (2008); Jang (1999); Lee (2010); Wells (1990, 2006).
6. See Keane (2007) for a study of the semiotic ideology of Christian modernity.
7. For Bakhtin (1981: 84–258), the chronotope (literally, 'time-space') referred to 'the intrinsic connectedness of the temporal and spatial relationships in literature' (p. 84), providing the 'organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel' (p. 250). In anthropology (Basso, 1996; Gal, 2006; Silverstein, 2000, 2005), the chronotope has come to refer to a cultural model of time, space, and person, immanent in discursive interaction and in terms of which the discursive production of, and stance taken in relation to, semiotic material becomes pragmatically contextualizable and interpretable.
8. See Grinker (1998: 73–98) and Willoughby (2002: 85–96) for literature reviews on the Korean concept of *han*. See also Pilzer (2012).
9. Based on Isaiah 55:1–5. See Kendall (2009: 1–33) on the treatment of shamanism as superstition (*misin*). See Keane (2007) and Robbins (2004) on missionaries and narratives of conversion. See Beidelman (1982: 16) and Keane (2007: 133) on the process of conversion as a theory of social change. See van der Veer (2001: 25) on 19th-century Christian missionary 'attempts at conversion through education that affirms a higher morality and a stronger conformity with natural science than the practices and beliefs of the unconverted'. See also van der Veer (1996).
10. In a classic example, Sapir (1927: 895–6) observed how the qualities of voice come to stand for a type of person within a social system of typifiable personae: 'A man has a strained or raucous voice, let us say, and we might infer that he is basically "coarse-grained." Such a judgment might be wide of the mark if the particular society in which he lives is an out-of-doors society that indulges in a good deal of swearing and rather rough handling of the voice.' This is an instance of 'downshifting' (Parmentier, 1994: 18–19) of the metonymical to the metaphorical, an effect of what Gal and Irvine called iconization (1995: 973) and later rhematization (Gal, 2005: 35n5). In such events, an indexical relation is interpreted as an iconic one. Through this process, a type of voice comes to stand for a type of perspective by some perception of qualitative similarity.
11. See Jakobson and Waugh (2002 [1979]) on physiognomic features in speech.
12. An indexical icon is a sign that is both indexical of (i.e. signaling by virtue of a perceived contiguity, or relation of causality with) and iconic of (i.e. signaling by virtue of

- perceived formal similarity to) its object (Peirce, 1997: secs 5.71, 8.122; Silverstein, 2000: 117–18, 133n22; Tambiah, 1985: 156).
13. See Bakhtin (1981: 275–336) for a foundational theorization of voicing in novelistic discourse and reported speech. Bakhtin's use of the term voice referred to the semiotic presentation of perspective of a character or social type vis-à-vis other identifiable positions in the text, whether in the narrator's universe or the universe of narration. This concept comes from the terminology of musical polyphony, in which any given voice (an internally coherent musical part or strand) in a composition is always positioned in relation to others both melodically (i.e. 'horizontally' or syntagmatically) and harmonically ('vertically' or paradigmatically). In this formulation, utterances in the sociolinguistic world operate in a manner similar to the voices of musical compositions: one musical voice can respond to (and be positioned in relation to) another by repeating it, repeating it in a different harmonic mode, altering it melodically, inverting aspects of it, embedding it in another musical form, or diverging from it altogether. This is not an exhaustive list of compositional techniques, of course. The distinctive characteristics of denotational voicings are revealed by the metapragmatic (index-regimenting) function of the calibration of deixis (Silverstein, 1993, 2000) between the narrated event and the event of narration. The collapse of deictics comes across as one voice 'breaking through' into the discursive space of another, bringing with it its generalized attributes and social-indexical relations (Harkness, 2011).
 14. See Lee (2010) and Baker (2006) for numbers of Christians in Korea from the first Protestant missionary churches in the late 19th century until the contemporary period.

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