

On the Comparative Study of African American's Blues and Korean's Arirang

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Abstract

There are diverse cultures which have been expressed and sublimed into the form of art when we look into the world history. When it comes to African American culture and Korean culture, African American's blues, spirituality, and Korean's Arirang have been in the deep ideological root of the two nations. Under unilateral dominance and colonization, African Americans and Korean nations needed something that could embrace and burst out their agony and sadness. It was the African-American spirituality, blues, and Arirang that sometimes became their mother, their partner and their social company, consoling their despair. Although the early African-American spiritual and blues and Korean's Arirang didn't have any specific musical form, they were the reflectors of the two nations' emotion and culture. It is a legacy that best reflects the sentiment of two nations. The analysis on blues, Black spiritual and Arirang in this paper will be looked into the same viewpoint of Ayana Smith and J Rhee who claimed that African American' and Korean's positive power was originated from their singing of blues and Arirang. This paper will unceasingly try hard to analyze the traces of their positive identity through their history and their life story. Blues and Black spiritual were sung anywhere of their life to express their true story. Arirang and other folk songs were also sung anywhere Koreans scattered to burst out their anger, sadness and joy. Likewise, the examination of the history of blues, Black spiritual and Arirang let the readers face up African American's and Korean's real life in the form of art. The finding in this paper will supply people with more understanding of blues and Arirang for African Americans and Koreans who were in unique historical and cultural situation. This paper will look into how the musical foundation of these two nations could become the cornerstone of rebuilding up their positive identity in the harsh reality. It will be researched and analyzed in the view of Ayana Smith and J Rhee. This study will explore and analyze the history of blues, Black spiritual and Arirang, which played a crucial role in establishing the positive identity of the two peoples.

Keywords: Arirang; Blues; Spirituality; Identity; Positive power.



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1. Introduction

There are diverse cultures which have been expressed and sublimed into the form of art when we look into the world history (Ameer, 2017; Celik *et al.*, 2017; Chou *et al.*, 2017; Dewi *et al.*, 2017b; Dewi *et al.*, 2017a; Garland, 1969; Li, 2017; Misbah *et al.*, 2018; Omar and Khamsa, 2017; Reza *et al.*, 2017; Rezaei, 2017; Sejera, 2018; Suharti and Pramono, 2016; Sylvia *et al.*, 2017; Wu, 2017; Yazici, 2016). When it comes to African American culture and Korean culture, African American's blues, African-American spirituality and Korean's Arirang have existed in the hub of their nation's deep root. Under the reality of the White dominated America and under Japan's colonization, African American and Koreans needed something that could embrace and express their agony and sadness. It was the African-American spirituality, blues, and Arirang that sometimes became their mother, their partner and their social company, consoling their despair. Although the early African-American spiritual and blues and Korean's Arirang didn't have any specific musical form, they were the reflectors of the two nations' emotion and culture. It is a legacy that best reflects the sentiment of two nations.

For the concrete research of it, this paper will follow the theory of Ayana Smith's analysis of signifying tricksters of blues for the foundational search of African American's emotion and identity. And for the comparative research with Arirang, this paper will also apply J. Rhee's theory of the analysis of national narratives of South and North Koreans to examine the deep influence of Arirang on Koreans' emotion and national identity.

For African American people who didn't receive any normal education and have any human rights, African-American spirituality and blues were the way they could express the voice of their soul. Brown (1953) For the colonized Koreans, Arirang was the way they could pursue their identity and bond together with their family and brotherhood under the circumstances where they were not allowed to use their mother tongue. Oliver (1972) Blues, African-American spirituality and Arirang didn't need any technical forms, and they were present to them as they were under any circumstances. They could hum the soothing melody of blues and Arirang anywhere they were and their wounded souls could be healed for a moment. Blues and Arirang were the breakthrough for those two nations to tell the truth.

Regardless of the special and specified musical form of Blues and Arirang, both music helped African Americans and Koreans share their frustration and despair from the reality with their brothers and sister scattered all over the world. Blues, Black spirituality and Arirang won't be absolutely understood by anyone who hasn't experienced racial discrimination, the hatred and despair, directly. Charters says that "Adversity, it is the very blues." Handy (1926), The ordeal included in blues, African-American spirituality and Arirang tells us the history of

their democracy and their culture. Likewise, Blues, African-American spirituality and Arirang have been the way African Americans and Koreans could express their true life and simultaneously the way they could keep the distance and stability from the harsh reality.

This paper will look into the long journey of those two nations' historical, political and cultural conflicts through the examination of the positive power of blues, Black spiritual and Arirang. For this research, first, this paper will examine blues and Arirang reflecting each nation's unique custom, conventions and emotion. It will dig up the power of the music making African Americans and Koreans have a little freedom under the environment of the helplessness and fear. Second, this paper will look into how black spirituality lets African American share the message each other to move forward for the future. For this research, it will apply Locke's theory to it. Third, this paper will approach more essential study through the analysis of blues. In the course of examination of blues, this paper will more focus on African American's personal life and their emotion as Jones and Baraka argue. With the analysis of some representative blues, this paper will try to define the basic nature of African American experience. In addition to it, the symbolic meaning of blues for African American's positive identity will be researched with the view of Finlayson. Fourth, Korean's cultural circumstance having very similar historical and political experience will be examined with the view of H. B. Hulbert. It will be proceeded through the analysis of the representative folksong, Bongseonwha and Arirang. Like J Rhee insists, Arirang is the best reflector embracing Korean's emotion on frustration, sadness and even the beacon of hope in the colonized reality.

Lastly this paper will try to solve out the basic question on how totally different two forms of national folk music could reflect on those two nations' culture, history and their national emotion with the view of Ayana Smith. Likewise, this paper will focus on examining the process of the growth of Blues, Black spiritual and Arirang in their life and its positive power which let African Americans and Koreans resurrect and regain their self identity as who they are.

2. The Music as a Reflector of African American's and Korean's Life

When we say 'the culture', it embraces a nation's unique customs, conventions and their national color. That culture is expressed and sublimated into different forms of art according to its colorful trait. For African Americans and Koreans, that culture was formed into the type of blues, Black spirituality and Arirang (Ames, 1960; Osra, 2017; Suharti and Pramono, 2016). Music was the perfect reflector for embracing their frustration and despair of their reality. It was also the best way for those people scattered all over the country could be connected one another and it was a cornerstone they could use to regain their brotherhood and identity (Du Bois and Marable, 2015; Weng and Yang, 2016; Yazici, 2016).

Until Koreans and African Americans got accustomed to the unexpected circumstance, they could not but be unstable and distracted. One day they were exposed to new a environment with their identity destroyed. They were not ready to face up to the harsh reality. Fear conquered their identity. They were mentally and physically weak and even abused in different ways. Regardless of the age and the sex, they were exploited and violated. They were forced to remain lethargic and unable to express their intentions. They were only vulnerable slaves. They were not allowed to think with their free will and act on their decisions. Their lives were completely dark. There was no beacon of hope for the future.

For these mournful African Americans and Koreans, blues, Black spirituality and Arirang sometimes became their mother, their lover and their social comrade. They furnished these two nations with warm consolation. They could beat the absolute loneliness and despair with the melody of blues and Arirang. They didn't require singers to follow any concrete musical form and system. Through blues, Black spirituality and Arirang, African Americans and Koreans could advocate their rights as human beings by using the voice of their soul. Smith (2005) Having no specifically fixed lyrics, the melody of these blues, Black spirituality and Arirang were passed from their ancestors down to descendants, from fathers to sons, from mothers to daughters, from laborers to laborers in an oral form (Locke, 1936; Yildiz, 2016).

African Americans and Koreans embraced the pain and the voice of resistance they lived in the reality in the melody (Oliver, 1972). This paper aims at analyzing the ground of blues, Black spirituality and Arirang in the category of politics and culture. The process of this research will track down on the cornerstone of the positive identity and positive power of African Americans and Koreans through digging up their blues, Black spirituality and Arirang.

3. African-American Spirituality Embracing African American's National Emotion

Many critics say that "African-American spirituality basically includes a social color" (Locke, 1936). African-American spirituality, sometimes called black spirituality was a slave's music. It was aimed to deal with the inhumane problems African Americans faced at that time and it naturally had no choice but to have a social tendency. It was the strong and soft resistance against the social system which gave them a social position as a slave regardless of their will. But they didn't start to move as a political group. Because it was not even imaginable.

Western white men dominated society never allowed the Blacks any possible hope or dream for the future. Some critics say that some of the African American people dreamed of some religious territory where they could seek their dream or hope around that time. They meant a place they could escape from the harsh reality. Fisher claims that African-American spirituality made African Americans pursue a transcendental reality of another world.

However this paper does not agree with the above critics who thought that African Americans only sought the surrealistic world to forget their situation in the reality. Rather, this paper has the same opinion with Sterling who thought Black spirituality was likely to embrace the social reality. It emphasizes African American's riot against the slavery through their soul music. They say African-American spirituality includes their basic attitude to resist the social restriction which suppressed them in different ways. For African Americans at that time, men had to be separated from their family and be sent to the working place to avoid being lynched. Women also had to be separated from their family even from their babies to feed the white women's baby and abused as a sexual partner. They were not human beings to the white.

Under this gloomy circumstance, African Americans began to move slowly to seek for their dream. The first little step they took was the little humming. They were whispering to themselves first wherever they were. Their voice started to get a little bigger and bigger. It was naturally conveyed to their brothers and sisters and spread to one another. It was the starting point of Black spirituality which was usually sung by slaves in the cotton fields or the places of lynching. This little humming, having no specific musical form or fixed lyrics, began to grow up to the real songs they could share together. Through the music, they could share their devastation, frustration and anger with one another. It tied African Americans into one wherever they were and whatever they were forced to do. In this way, African-American spirituality played a significant role for African Americans making their way toward freedom (Ford, 2010).

W. E. B. Dubois says, "African-American spirituality is the most beautiful music reflecting the true experience of humankind" (Evans, 1982). He relates it to African American's cultural history prevailed with oppression and contempt. He also mentions that Black music is the expression of the most beautiful human experience born in the Atlantic ocean, and he calls it the music of sadness. Because it is the music of the miserable people, the music of despairing sons and daughters, the music directing the way of a hidden path and foggy vagabond's path and the music including an aspiration of their shouting about the pain and truth.

This following song conveys the message that African Americans wanted to tell at that time.

You, vagabond don't be afraid
 Follow the road back to your hometown
 My body is soaked with the night dew
 Follow the road back to your hometown
 The starlight in the morning told me
 Follow the road back to your hometown
 You, vagabond keep walking
 Follow the road back to your hometown
 Singing away
 Follow the road back to your hometown
 With slow steps on the end of the road
 Follow the road back to your hometown (Work, 1940)

At that time, African Americans were stuck in a dumped destiny thrown out to the dead world. This horrible reality made African Americans sing their lives.

However, as we can recognize through the song above, African-American spirituality begins to include African American's hidden revolutionary emotion within this melody. It does not look impatient anymore. We can see not just hopelessness, but the beacon of hope. It is the wind of change. They are not so scared as they used to be. Even though this change would be slow, it would be okay for them in the long run. They are determined to make a change although it is not a big step. It could be connected with the movement toward African American's positive identity, which made an opportunity for them to look at their inner-self objectively.

When the White enslaved African Americans, their intention was to deprive their historical identity and forfeit their future possibility. The White made a mockery of African American's mythology which was passed down from African American ancestors and annihilated their customs and culture on purpose. The White wanted to define a human being from the European's point of view, and they committed atrocities in the name of civilization. However, the white people in Europe didn't succeed. African Americans didn't stay in a passive attitude while the White suppressed them. They broke out the rebellion against the White in many ways, and pursued the ideological resistance. In some ways, African American's culture is the record of the White's failure.

Likewise, African-American spirituality was the national song representing African American's joy, sorrow, history and life. It is the truth. It is the history and truth that cannot be concealed with anything. It is the song telling about how closely African Americans were united and fought for altogether. One more characteristic we can find out in the beauty of Black spirituality is the affirmation of life. Although there was definitely pathos in African-American spirituality, hope was beginning to sprout in it. Even if they had to live a persecuted life just because they were black, African Americans had a belief that someday they would be judged by the soul, not by their skin color. In this way, African-American spirituality, the icon of hope and freedom for African Americans grow to be the seed of their positive identity (Smith, 2005) This was a great help to them in the future.

4. Blues Embracing African American's Emotion

The historical background of the birth of the blues goes back to the time when African Americans started their life as slaves in the new world of America. The folk songs of the African Americans in the era of slavery contain deep skepticism (Charters, 1967). The lyrics of the blues embraces the existential tension and the truth of the African American's experience. Blues lets the listeners hear the African American's harsh fate, their cold and wretched

reality. Blues reveals a strong sense of rejection to seek a solution to a real problem from another world, not their own life. It shows the delight and grief of life at the same time. Some African American music commentators like Elijah Wald distinguish the trait of blues with that of soul music. "African-American spirituality tends to have a religious image but blues has a thoroughly worldly image and sing about each individual's exhaustively bearing disillusion." (Wald, 2010). African-American spirituality is said to have originated from the church but blues is said to show up in the routine of daily life.

When looking into the background of blues, its vibe is related to Black spirituality. People say that the blues and Black spirituality began to spread out from the same ground. Both of them embrace African American's human nature. Black spirituality tells about the historical reality before the Civil War. The slaves living their life in the period made and sang the songs. But the blues was formed after the Civil War. The blues reflects their experiences, such as, the life of emancipated slaves and the political situation of racial separatism. The blues started to be sung by the emancipated African Americans and they officially were free. Even though the reality African Americans were facing was still confusing, they were revealing their emotions through the blues. As LeRoi Jones mentions, "blues thoroughly focuses on the individual's life story unlike Black spirituality." (Jones and Baraka, 1963)

The blues is said to be the basic factor defining the nature of African American's experience. In order to understand it, it is important to grasp the essence of blues. Floyd in Memphis insists that "All the blues is sincere. It synthesizes art and life, poem and experience, symbol and reality, and it is truthful". The blues is an artistic reaction to the chaos of life. Therefore singing the blues means experiencing their real life in person. The blues includes the despair of some man who lost his wife and couldn't do anything. This is the reason some critics say 'nobody can sing real blues'.

The experience reflected in the blues is the one African Americans experienced in the white-led American society. It was a very unusual experience. They had to recognize their identity by the wrong social values. Therefore, it is said that the blues is the best reflection of the real life of black people who had to survive at that time (Finlayson, 2012). They say that "Becoming African American is to be a blues man."

I was always walking with blues

We were walking with this blues holding our hands together through the whole night

Blues snuggled into my heart like a real man (Handy, 1926).

The blues lets African Americans seek for the meaning of life, although it is packed with the inconsistency and irrationality. Aunt Molly Jackson from Kentucky argues, when African Americans were not paid enough to live on and could not solve many of the mountain's problems, they sang the blues. This kind of experience was always connected with the reality of their life. The life was always packed with the ordeal, the agony, the wound and the persecution. Likewise, through the blues, African Americans could create another level of world and it led them to open a new chapter of their life. The blues is the music making African Americans renew themselves.

The blues is the reality. It is the grief and pleasure at the same time. It is bitter and sweet, and interesting and uninteresting (Finlayson, 2012). The blues contain emotional appeals rather than expressing something in the tune itself. African Americans expressed the despair when a lover was leaving and the joy of a lover was returning singing blues. It was the true part of their life. For African Americans who were destined to live as destroyed, the blues was the only way to break the chain of fate for them.

Blues is nothing but a sadness

A laborer feels.

It is the most painful sadness

A poor man ever felt (Oliver, 1972).

The blues has been existed as a specific human being, not as an imaginary being for African Americans. The blues has been the concrete part of their daily life. The blues can never be understood separated from the racial segregation, the reality of hatred and the adversity of African Americans. But the blues makes African Americans reveal their lives rather than be overwhelmed by the pain of reality. This is the great contribution of the blues to African American society. The blues also reflects the true image of their lives (Ellison, 2011). This process restores African Americans' wounded identity and restores their positive power.

Like some critics mention, the talent of the greatest blues singer is the very trial. That is the solution to the problem. The blues singers can express their genuine feeling of sincerity through the ordeal they go through. They sing what happened to them. The pain in a blues singer's song was a special experience that only they were born black. It includes the history of African Americans and the struggle they fought together.

The reality of African Americans was full of contradictions and irrationalities, and they were eager to break away from these absurdities and open a transcendent horizon for new life. The blues provides African Americans a physical distance and a mental stability from the reality and lets them feel an emancipating catharsis.

5. Arirang Embracing Korean's Emotion

Arirang is the best reflector which embraces Korean's emotion. Koreans went through Japanese colonization and the Korean war. While they were going through these two painful historical events, especially the Japanese colonization, Koreans were at the crisis of losing their identity. The Japanese used atrocious ways to render Korean's culture and language obsolete. They didn't allow Koreans to use their mother tongue and tried to wipe out their cultural heritage. Under this thorough suppression, they became mentally exhausted and physically lethargic. It was a dark era for Koreans.

In this period of despair, they started to speak by singing. It didn't have any official musical form and specified lyrics. From here and there, a group of boys and girls, a group of men and women began to sing their devastation,

their mournfulness. This song below telling about a weak flower was even personified to symbolize Koreans' emotion at that time.

You, Bongsunwha, standing under the fence look miserable.
 In the long summertime, when you bloom beautifully
 Pretty girls were glad of you.
 In the meantime, summer passes and autumn wind blows into gently,
 And invades a beautiful flower.
 Your leaves are all gone, you are old and you look miserable.
 Even if the cold wind blows away your shape,
 Here is your soul that dreams of peace,
 Hope you'll come back to life in the sunny spring breeze (Rhee, 2009)

This song was sung by Koreans who were barely dreaming of peace and hope. This song consoled scattered Koreans here and there. Koreans personified their sadness and hardship with the pale image of a garden balsam sprouting out under the fence. These folk songs like Bongsunwha started to spread out across the country embracing Korean's frustration and despair. All the songs singing by people were including the despair of those days.

Arirang had more power to bring Koreans together physically and mentally. In the vibe full of national sadness, the representative national song, Arirang was sung and spread all over the country, which represented Koreans' emotion. They sing, "Arirang, arirang, arariyo, the man who is going over the hill. The man leaving me, will come back to me. With a sore foot, he will not go in less than ten miles." (Ford, 2010). The lyrics of this song implicates Koreans' frustration and at the same time hope of reuniting with their brothers and sisters, and to regain their sovereignty. When they say the hill, it implicates the pain of their husbands and brothers who were drafted and taken back into the battle or the sisters who were taken away by the Japanese military sexual slavery under the Japanese colonization. It embraces Koreans' little wish for their brothers and sisters to come back to them even due to the illness. (Rhee, 2009)

When Arirang originally was formed, it didn't have its own specific form or characteristic. Arirang began to be sung in the form of each region's agricultural work song at first, and a refrain of words came along to represent the feelings of the local people. Arirang had a prime time from 1920s to 1940s. A movie director, Na Woon Kyu's movie, "Arirang" was a big hit and the title music for it, Arirang was in perfect form and sung by lots of people. The native Arirang started to be transformed into a popular song. With the development of mass media, new types of ballads were sprouting out. Arirang was the song that sang the realistic life of the colonial people and it was created and manipulated for various purposes.

Arirang had a slump in decline from the 1940s and the Pacific war, the Japanese colonization and Korean war through the 1960s. Under Japanese colonial rule, Arirang was prohibited to be sung by Koreans. With the turmoil of the Pacific war and Korean war, the songs focusing on ideological issue became widespread. Arirang couldn't be sung freely in the atmosphere of the times. However, it always had the initiative as the national song. If a song is created and it is recognized by many, it gradually becomes independent as it is. Then that song can have a distinct personality or special character. Arirang is the most representative song having those traits. In this way, Arirang gained its individuality extending the common sense with the nations in the process of surviving. It is the very Arirang. Finnegan says, "Oral literature is much more flexible than written literature and relies on social context." (Atkins, 2007). The personalities of Arirang may also be shaped by the thought and the singers at that time.

H. B. Hulbert says about the periodical record of Arirang.

We can hear this song anytime and anywhere. - In my personal opinion, this song has been maintained for 3520 days, it gained more popular affection in 1883. - The refrain of words are still sung like this. Arirang, arirang, arariyo, arariganatnae (Rhee, 2009).

Likewise Arirang was sung in Korean's routine life more than as a special genre of music. Arirang, which has the characteristic of laborers' song, has been sung by the public in various forms along with the historical changes and political trends, and became an identity of a community and a country. A lot of people could shake off the pain of their life, satire the contemporary reality, resist the contradiction between the world and themselves. Arirang reflecting various repertoires of history is the source of oral literature and the collective unconsciousness of Koreans. Arirang is the good example of understanding Korean's national emotion. Their national emotion of frustration, devastation, anger and hope is appropriately melted and condensed in Arirang. There is "han", the pain of parting, resignation, overcome, joy, sorrow and hope in it.

The sunset is over and my journey is a thousand.
 Hold on to the reins, and you cry out.
 My parents are looking for me
 Then tell them, I went to become the Independence army
 The drums were beating in the hill of Dongsilryung
 The Korean flag is flying in the middle of Hanyang castle (Rhee, 2009).

Likewise, Arirang is the lyrical and epic song of Koreans embracing the message of hope and resentment in its entirety. Koreans have expressed their self, the other, love, missing, joy, sorrow, separation and meeting, hope and despair, desire and accomplishment through Arirang. Aspects of the hopeful methodology about bursting out Korean's 'han' and the desire for truth are expressed through the song, Arirang.

6. Conclusion

African Americans and Koreans at that time didn't have any social or political power to reveal the injustice they suffered from. If they expressed their anger, they must have been endangered to be killed. In that situation, they chose the cultural device of art. Like it is mentioned before, African Americans and Koreans could sustain their identity through music. Art, such as, blues, African-American spiritual, and Arirang was the thing they have had as their own territory even in the harsh reality.

The culture and the art of blues, African-American spirituality and Arirang tell the readers about African American's and Korean's sad history and truth. This paper has examined the history of African-American spirituality, blues and Arirang in the category of their historical and political transformation. Their life and their history were devastating and frustrating. However, the art that grew out of it was beautiful and powerful. It presents the two nations with a positive vision to dream of the future.

In this study, this paper has compared and analyzed the characteristic of blues, African-American spiritual and Arirang based on Ayana Smith and J. Rhee's theories. This paper could reach the conclusion that Arirang and blues were born in totally different land, but they were exposed to very similar historical and political environment. That similarity tied them up in the similar circumstances. African Americans and Koreans shared their devastation and sadness with their nations by singing the most common song scattered here and there around them. It was the very blues and Arirang. It finally became the cornerstone to establish the positive identity. It became the power for African Americans and Koreans to restore their self identity. Blues and Arirang could be the weapon for riot, but at the same time, could be the beacon of hope for their survival and freedom.

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