

REINTERPRETATION OF TRADITIONAL CULTURE BY DEVELOPING A REAL-TIME COMPOSER WITH PATTERN AND SOUND -BASED ON SYMBOLISM OF KOREAN TRADITIONAL PATTERN

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ABSTRACT:

Traditional culture expresses in itself changing into various contents through various ways and new media. It also represents the identity of the nation transmitted from generation to generation. Society changes rapidly, but it continues to require an original tradition in its culture. Because demand and supply for it is substantially different, traditional culture becomes a stuffed specimen. This circumstance leads this study to start with the topic: "How should traditional culture be designed in a contemporary style?" I want to construct a new point of view on traditional culture in this study. For this purpose, I will conduct a project to maximize the expression Korean traditional

patterns by music. The traditional patterns connote “Emotional Bond” formed in a group, and transmit from generation to generation. The expression for the project will be visualized with metamorphic letters of “Su” and “Bock”(It is one kind of 8 Korean patterns symbolizing good fortune, and used in present.). The visual of the project “real-time composer” is developed with Photoshop, Max/MSP+Jitter, Illustrator, and MicroKontrol(a compact MIDI controller of Korg Co.) to control sound and image on real time. The visual effects will be controlled to embody various performances in real-time using keyboard note, 16 touch pads, 8 sliders, 8 knobs, joystick, etc. There are some merits in this study. First of all, it is to maximize the expression value and the emotion value for the performer. Second, it is a piece of equipment to reinterpret fossilized traditional culture as in a contemporary way, and to play a bridging role in exploring future contents design. Moreover, this study will be continued as a development of the project. I hope it is a new suggestion as a form of trans-media because it is highly possible that various contents can be developed in this project.

1. INTRODUCTION

There have been a lot of discussion and diverse opinions for tradition, but the majority of people have defined it as ‘identity’ or ‘transmission’. There are a few people who construe tradition as ‘Original form’, and it has to be expounded as “An Original model or type after which other similar things are patterned” or “An ideal example of a type”.

I define tradition in my thesis “The general idea and value of cultural Archetype in contents design¹” as follows. Tradition is handed down over several generations, designates tangible and intangible features of life, and implies peculiar characters of the psychological and physical worlds of a group. It is the same as cultural mediation with psychological and physical worlds of the ancestor. It is a thoroughfare of time and history connecting the past, the present and the future. The tradition of a generation comes to be the basis of a new type or an original model after which similar things are patterned in the next generation. The archetypes of each generation become to be elements of ‘Cultural mediation’ for oncoming generations, and are recreated in contemporary culture of the reflected new methodology, media and ideology. In each period, regardless of the

¹ Ji-Ae, Han, “The general idea and value of cultural archetype in contents”, Korean Society of Design Science, Korea, 2004

identity of a group or its culture can be weak or strong, a kind of sympathy is inherited through these regular archetypes.

As a way to reinterpret tradition keeping coherence for it with the contemporary system, I suggest a variation system which is a real-time composer using MicroKontrol(a compact MIDI controller of Korg Co.). Through this development, I want to suggest re-designed a traditional pattern, which has fossilized for a long time, and creating a new one to meet present demands. First of all, I consider the meaning and role of tradition, and define 8 pattern types symbolized good fortune in Korean traditional patterns. I select a part of them, the characters “Su” and “Bock”. Re-acting these traditional patterns with MickroKontrol, I consider reinterpretation of tradition in contemporary viewpoint.

2. CONTEMPORARY TRADITION

2. 1. THE MEANING OF TRADITION

The culture of a group or a nation contains not only the physical but also the psychological worlds surrounding it. The spirit or the unconscious of a generation shows concrete features of life in various ways. It forms a part of the material culture or the spiritual culture as it spreads among the members of the group or nation over time. The culture forms ‘emotional bond’ that distinguishes groups or collective bodies from one another.²

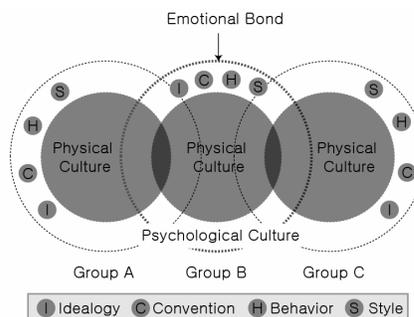


Figure 1: Notion of tradition and Emotional bond

² Ji-Ae, Han, “Observation of brand Characters of “blessing pattern” used in ancestral household utensils in Korea”, Korean Society of Design Science, Korea, 2005

Passing from generation to generation in various ways, such a 'Emotional bond' is adhered to unique type or distinguished a group by peculiarity from other groups. It gets to be the character of the group, and comes to express national identity. The identity of a nation or a group is expressed through its ideology, custom, mannerism, behavior, or thinking inherited over several generations. This is called tradition. It is sometimes designated limitedly as 'cultural heritage' having historical vitality, in other hand, used in daily necessities which are useful and meaningful in present life.

According to a dictionary, tradition contains not only the general ideas which we think with commonly but also more comprehensive meanings: "The action or process of handing down something in this way" Tradition includes not only ideology, style, custom or story passed from generation to generation but also a series of processes handed down. In the case of art or inventions, it is defined as "the continuous development of a body of artistic, literary or musical principles or convention" It indicates that tradition contains also the process of continuous development. It is handed down and revised continually in tangible and intangible life.

2. 2. THE ROLE OF TRADITION

There are three main roles of tradition. The common notion of tradition is the same as the 'identity' of a group. Differences and peculiarities distinguish each group in terms of features which symbolize it. Si-Hwah, Jung, who is a Korean design theorist, defines the notion of tradition as the beauty of form, difference and repetition.³ Each culture has a unique beauty of form for the nation or group. It has good influences created by human beings. The beauty of form gets denser as it is conveyed and used repeatedly. As he explains, the common role of tradition is to define a group in terms of its peculiarity what is fixed from difference to features.

The second role is to create a lifestyle. It is a little bit similar to the first role, but it focuses on the process of creating lifestyle. I want to call the role as 'culture making'. Raymond Williams, a literary critic from England, defines tradition as 'a process of cultural creation': in which unique

³ Si-Hwah, Jung, Cultural identity in visual art, <Korean life and future residence>, Yeonse University millennium environment institute, 2003

images of the past are formed through a relation with the specific situation of the present social system. He defines it as the cultural phenomenon of showing one's ability in the present, not as simple things in the past. Like his thought, tradition is autogenous and metamorphoses constantly. It is a consequence and a content of life for a group which continues across generations.

The third role of tradition is to act as a 'mediator' between the past and the present. This role is an expansive notion of the first and the second one. The first and second roles focus on 'life style or pattern'. The third role focuses on bridge-building connecting the past, the present and the future. Ji-Hun, Jo distinguishes between tradition and convention, and defines tradition as a source, method, subject and value to create novelty. He explains, "Tradition is the lived past created in history, but it has real meaning for the present and prospect for the future, not the past ... Tradition is source and method of novelty, subject and value of new creation." He emphasizes to re-create tradition in contemporary ways.

In this viewpoint, Herskovist insists in his work 'Cultural Dynamics' that tradition is a process. The process means in which existing meaning changes by incorporating new elements or new values making the cultural meaning of the old diversify into novelty. He explains the process acts to unify into accepted culture while it has handed down from generation to generation and worked.⁴ It means tradition changes or invents new elements after it is unified into new culture.

In his view, the goal and feature of tradition is 'invariance', and tradition is to be renewed by the social demand of the group or community. He calls it "Invented tradition", and suggests two reasons for inventing culture. The first is rapid changes in demand and supply. When there are rapid changes in cultural demand or supply, a new tradition emerges. Because it is impossible to apply 'Old-fashioned' tradition in present society any more, society's members look for a novelty or new culture. The second is 'inconsistence', because it is so hard to apply the new in the old or use both of them at the same time. He catches hold of the relation between humans and the past through invented tradition, and explains that a tradition not in sufficient demand disappears and a new one is invented because it brings 'emotional bond'. So, almost of the invented or continued traditions keep 'the continuation between the past and the present' and satisfy rapid demand with contemporary ways.

⁴ Hobsbawm, E.J./ Ranger, The invention of tradition, Cambridge Univ Pr, 1992

2. 3. REINTERPRETATION OF TRADITION

To create an “Invented tradition” as defined by Hobsbawm, we should think about how to reinterpret tradition. First of all, we should choose one between ‘the continuation of tradition’ and ‘the reinterpretation of tradition’. If we focus on the first role ‘identity’ too much, we will obtain results that are inappropriate for the times. Sometimes, we are partial to follow in the steps of the old. The blind imitation of old-fashion is a form of ‘the continuation of tradition’. On the other hand, if the second role, ‘the process of creation’, is focused on excessively, a thing of unknown nationality will get mad on the slightest provocation through ‘reinterpretation of tradition’. When ideology is applied to other cultures in an excessively out of context or diversified manner, the essence of the culture will be lost. As Raymond Williams insists ‘selective tradition’ not tradition itself, we should understand tradition and culture in the context of the present. Moreover, we should choose one having a common denominator with the present culture, take over it and transform it.

For the ‘selective tradition’, I select the ideology of good fortune(I call it “Desiring fortune”;KuBock in this paper.) and patterns symbolizing it implicitly in the present culture. It has been used in many daily necessities, and implied emotion for users. In view of ‘the continuation of tradition’, I use the patterns as the source of variation system. I call the system “Real-time Composer” that responds to the controller and sound. It is to recreate appropriate source for the present media, not to reuse old-fashioned patterns. The system “Real-time Composer” is a way to reinterpret tradition.

3. SUGGESTING A REAL-TIME COMPOSER

3. 1. SOURCE; KOREAN PATTERNS SYMBOLIZED GOOD FORTUNE (KUBOCK)

With reference to the ideology of good fortune in Korea, Ja-Young, Jo(who is an investigator of Korean folk stories) defines Korean drawings as ‘folk pictures’. He explains the pictures are animated evidences expressed of the lifestyle and thought. He organizes the folk pictures in terms of 6 kinds of fortune and 2 ideologies for expelling evil and cherishing the nation. Unlike his division, I organize them in terms of 8 kinds of fortune. The 8 kinds of fortune are “Longevity”,

“Fortune of couple”, “Fortune of offspring”, “Fortune of property”, “Fortune of status”, “Fortune of soul”, “Fortune of virtue”, “Good omen”.⁵

Division for fortune	Meaning	Symbol
Longevity	Desire to live for long time without sickness	Eternal life, Longevity
Couple	Desire to keep love forever between wife and husband	Lucky couple, Connubial Bliss Sexual harmony
Offspring	Desire to have many Children and to bring up them well	Fecundity, Childbirth, flourishing posterity, Having sons
Property	Desire to not worry about food, clothing and shelter	Property, Wealthy, Prosperity
Status	Desire to rise in the world and to gain fame	Reputation, Scholarship, Success
Soul	Desire to be tranquil	Peace, Happy, Pleasure
Virtue	Desire to have morality	Human affection, Charity
Good Omen	Desire to occur good things	Human happiness, Lucky

Table 1: Meaning and Symbol of Good Fortune in Korea

The above is a table showing the meaning of the symbols of good fortune(KuBock) in Korea. All of them refer to everything in the desire for good things to occur. Old people use various images to express their thoughts and make utensils. They went so far as to believe that good thing will be happen to them due to the pattern or utensils. So, they gave close acquaintances some presents drawn unique figures symbolizing good fortune. The following table is a summary of the figures representing each fortune.

Division for fortune	Meaning
Longevity	Sun, Cloud, Deer, Pine tree, Turtle, Water, Stone, Bamboo, Crane, Herb of eternal youth, Peach, Bat
Couple	Mandarin Duck, Lotus flower, Wild goose, Duck, Fish, Iron pot
Offspring	Butterfly, Pomegranate, Hot pepper, Melon, Bat, Grape, Rabbit
Property	Padlock, Peony, Toad, Grape, Mountain, Lotus flower
Status	Ink Stone, Feathers, Apricot blossom, Dragon, Willow, Tiger, Carp, Swallow, Deer
Soul	Ume flower, Chrysanthemum, Peony, Crane, Wild goose, Vase
Virtue	Phoenix

⁵ Ji-Ae, Han, , “Observation of brand Characters of “blessing pattern” used in ancestral household utensils in Korea”, Korean Society of Design Science, Korea, 2005

Good Omen	Magpie, Swallow, Sun, Orchid, Butterfly, Chrysanthemum, Lotus flower(+water bird), Star One hundred letters for good fortune and longevity
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Table 2: A kind of Patterns for each fortune

There are about 80 kinds of patterns. Some of them are used to mean two or three different things. In particular, ‘One hundred letters of good fortune and longevity’ are representative patterns. They express the desire for longevity and good fortune of all kinds. They are composed of one hundred metamorphic characters “Su” and “Bock”, so they are possible for them to diversify. That’s one of the reasons why I choose these patterns. Another reason is “the universality”. They are used now commonly and are used in diversified styles. This paper will use a basic and metamorphic character among 200 letters as sources for ‘real-time composer’. The characters are used to make reactive graphics in this development.



Figure 2: Metamorphic letter of “Su” and “Bock”

Researching on the value of the ideology and pattern of fortune based on the folk pictures, I discovered some values. The ideology and the patterns reflect a way of looking at the world, faith, the collective sensibility of the people at the time. The people express their thought, emotion, faith on the various things with patterns. They are formed to ‘emotional bond’, and it becomes a source for making new culture.

3. 2. RE-DESIGN OF TRADITION;”REAL-TIME COMPOSER”

I make an experimental example, “real-time composer” which control prior metamorphic characters by MicroKontrol, in this paper. The characters are reacted to embody on real time by MicroKontrol(a compact MIDI controller of Korg Co.) including keyboard note, 16 touch pads, 8 sliders, 8 nob, joystick, etc. Still images designed by tools for figures become source in max/msp+jitter, they are diversified by 8 filters (Brightness, Hue/Saturation, Roy, Rota, Wake, etc.), and can be controlled at the same time. These 8 filters are connected 8 each touch pads, they are controlled by 8 nob and 8 sliders for performance. Joystick is to control the effect of sound, keyboard is to select sound and images. Each keyboard in left two octaves is linked prior metamorphic characters. Whenever a performer plays it, each character is reacted and sound is played at the same time. Two black keyboards(C# and D#) in right octave are linked two songs in this experiment. The right keyboard can be linked more songs.

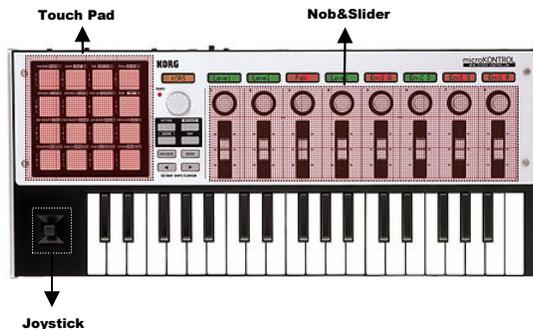


Figure 3: MicroKontrol connecting sound, image and filters

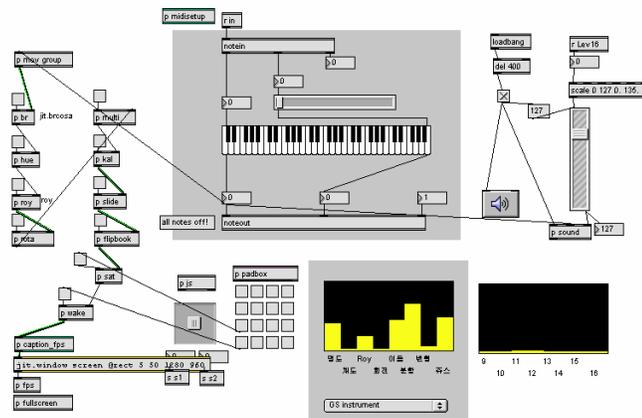


Figure 4: Programming of “real-time composer”

The above is a picture showing the programming of the “real-time composer” with Max/Msp and Jitter. The bellows are still images of the experimental output of the “real-time composer”. They are just examples of the metamorphic characters “Su” and “Bock”. The images never are same. The images react on different styles by filters, sound, and performer.

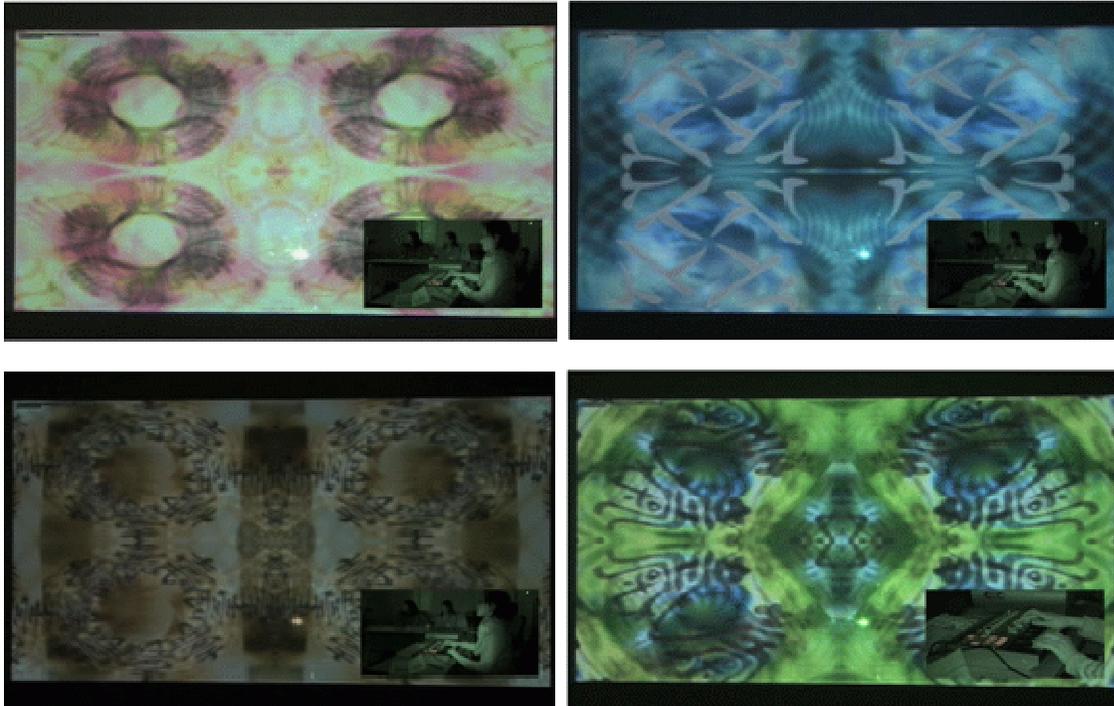


Figure 5: Still images of “real-time composer”

3. 3. THE MEANING AND VALUE

In view of the contemporary reinterpretation of tradition, this project has several implications. First of all, watching this output makes Koreans feel a sense of homogeneity, because it make use of traditional elements of ‘emotional bond’ such as “Desiring fortune”. It is appropriate in the present context where multimedia contents are common, because it diversify images or sources. In view of ‘the continuation of tradition’, old patterns are applied in new ways. It is possible to make use of various sources to create multi-media contents, because it is suitable for the present media reacting on music and moving type.

Besides, it is meaningful due to easy application in various media concluding off-line. It is a system to maximize expression values and sensibility values for performers and users. Users can

control the pictures with sound and his mind, and insert other pictures or images. Whenever user controls it, different images are shown every time. Only the characters “Su” and “Bock” are used in this paper. But there will be derivative images and stronger effects, when many kinds of patterns symbolizing the 8 “desiring fortune(KuBock)” are incorporated into this system. Moreover, energy of reinterpretation and this system show different visuals formed with preexisting ones. It moves with the user. This system suggests a form of trans-media because using this system to develop various contents is highly possible.

4. CONCLUSION

Many studies on tradition have been conducted, but have not escaped limit of simple mimicry for old things. In this paper, I consider the meaning, role and reinterpretation of tradition, and seek how to reproduce tradition. The balance between “Continuation” and “reinterpretation” is the kernel of the question. I select the eight “Desiring fortune”, especially the characters “Su” and “Bock” which mean longevity and good luck, to keep the continuation of tradition. At the same time, I create a variation system “real-time composer”, using MicroKontrol and Max/MSP + Jitter, to reinterpret tradition. The experimental image shows various metamorphic pictures and responds to sound and controller of the performer.

There are some merits in this study. First of all, it is a piece of equipment to reinterpret fossilized traditional culture as something contemporary, and to play a bridging role in the exploration of future contents design. This study is an attempt to express national identity in new content on the basis of traditional cultural symbolism. Second, it is possible to maximize expression value and emotion value for the user, because this system has wide metamorphic possibilities. Moreover, whenever the performer controls by MicroKontroler or changes the music, the pictures change in unspecified ways. Above all, this study will go on as a development of the project. It is used for displayer for music player or game, etc. I hope this is a new suggestion as a form of trans-media because it is highly possible that various contents can be developed in this project.

Further studies will be suspected through this paper, and a lot more derivation effects repercussion are expected. Reaction project or sound design like this project may cause immense effect in fields such as edutainment, displayer for ubiquitous environment or performance in media art field. Furthermore, it will be applied widely to digital toys, games, interactive animation,

some technology connected with systems like sensors or core projects with the web, exhibitions space like “science world” and science museums, etc. I consider that this paper is relevant research to design concept, which provides the symbolism and identity to similar projects in future.

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