

## Music Therapy in Korea - Past, Present, and Future

### 韩国的音乐治疗 - 过去、 现在和未来

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Music has played a major role in Korean society and culture as seen in Korea's recorded history going back several thousand years. Music continues to help people gain their sense of identity and enriches countless life events in the center of Korean society and culture. The oldest traditions in using music for healing derived from Shamanism and daily life. In modern times in Korea, the first systematic use of music in therapy was when Sookmyung Women's university and Ewha Women's university began offering a Master's degree program in music therapy in 1997. Since then, academic programs in music therapy have bloomed in Korea. A handful of Western-trained music therapists were trying to set the foundation in Korea for this new field within the larger academic and clinical context.

In 2016, there are now over 17 graduate and undergraduate music therapy programs offered in universities all over Korea, and major universities in Seoul have their own department dedicated to music therapy. Graduates from these programs work in diverse settings including schools, hospitals, rehabilitation centers and clinics. There are several professional associations governing music therapy, some of which are part of a larger umbrella organization that includes expressive arts therapy. The Korean government often supports music therapy financially through research grants for those in academia, as well as through government-issued vouchers to provide affordable services at clinics and hospitals. Since its first attempts in Korea to study, research, and apply music therapy, the field has developed rapidly into one of the most promising ones.

Since its initial developments music therapy in Korea has been influenced mainly by Western approaches and methodologies. Most of the first faculty members in the music therapy programs had received their training abroad, mainly in the United States where the first music therapy programs were founded. Curriculum plans were often adapted from and rooted in U.S. academic programs. Korean universities are now just starting to work in innovative ways to build and evolve music therapy education, research, and practice, following Korean traditions and culture. While it may present challenges for scholars and clinicians to develop more culturally fitting ways of applying and using music, I believe it is a necessary step to the development of a more robust and authentic field of music therapy in Korea.

Music therapy in Korea has a unique characteristic in that it is viewed as highly specialized and integrative, which is rare in the fields of therapy in Korea. Also, while some institutions and facilities encourage therapists and other disciplines, ie. Nurses and

doctors, to work together to form integrated treatment plans and programs, most facilities are still developing these. The theory and practice of close communication and coordination among various disciplines to achieve the best clinical outcome is evolving. As much as this inter-disciplinary work is imperative it is equally important to have a unified front in the field of music therapy by establishing a certification process and a governing body for music therapy. Currently in Korea, music therapists are divided into several different professional associations whose origins, perspectives and principles vary slightly. Having one certificating body would work as a stronger tool, thereby enabling the field to grow professionally, independently, and politically.

Korean researchers in music therapy are increasingly working with colleagues in other fields to conduct a broader range of research. It is encouraging that therapists, educators, and researchers are investing more effort into these types of collaborative projects so that they can provide more efficient treatment and evidence-based practices. Music therapy in Korea has grown and continues to grow rapidly, with more well-trained music therapists, this field has a bright future and I look forward to seeing it mature and bloom.

### **About the author**

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