

Seoul National University Department of Musicology and  
Korean Society for Music Theory Invited Symposium



서울대학교 음악학과  
Department of Musicology  
Seoul National University

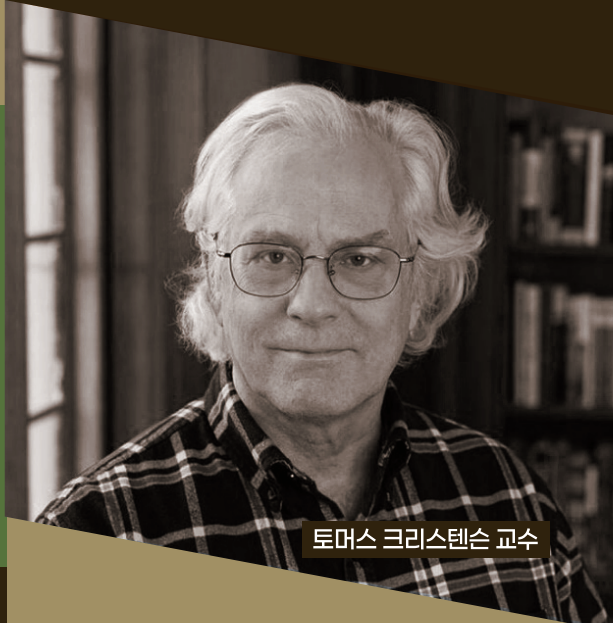


KOREAN  
SOCIETY FOR  
MUSIC THEORY  
한국서양음악이론학회

Opening and Gathering:

# Global Music Theory, East Asia, and Korea

열림과 어울림:  
글로벌 음악이론, 동아시아, 한국



토머스 크리스텐슨 교수

4.11 2026  
Sat 12:30 PM

Room 203, Bldg. 220, Seoul National University



로버트 프로버트 교수

## | President's Greeting

I still remember Professor Thomas Christensen's visit to Korea in July 2022. At the publication celebration of the Korean edition of *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, for which he served as general editor, he delivered a lecture titled "The History of Music Theory: Today and Tomorrow." His lecture offered a telling example of the shifting landscape of "Global Music Theory," a development that has ultimately led to the forthcoming publication *Thinking Music: Global Sources for the History of Music Theory* (2027).

If one traces its scholarly origins, one arrives at Global History. This marks an expansion in the scope of the historical discipline since the 1990s—a historiographical approach that does not confine itself to nations, civilizations, or regions, but instead takes the entire globe as its field of analysis. In one strand of Global History, the so-called "cultural turn" has been identified as a key to explaining the historical and social transformations of the late twentieth century; through the concept of "glocalization"—one of the central ideas of twenty-first-century scholarship—a "glocal turn" across various disciplines has also been discussed.

In this era of the "Global Turn," the international musicological community has likewise begun to adopt new ways of thinking. Across various dimensions—such as research objects, methodologies, and aims—new work in global music history and global music theory is being actively pursued.

In this context, it is of great significance that we have invited Professor Robert Provine, a world-leading authority on the history and theory of Korean traditional music, as another speaker. We are sincerely grateful for his lifelong dedication to researching and introducing Korean traditional music to the international scholarly community.

It is a great honor and a true pleasure for all of us to hold this conference with these two distinguished scholars. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to the presenters and panelists—Hyejung Im, Sejoong Kim, Hee Seng Kye, Hae-jun Kim, and Changseong Lee—as well as to the chairs, Hyunree Cho and Yi Eun Chung, and to Senior Vice President of KSMT, Moonhyuk Chung, for delivering the closing remarks. Finally, I extend my sincere gratitude to the Academic Board of KSMT for organizing this excellent conference.

**Jeong Eun Seo**

President, Korean Society for Music Theory  
Chair, Department of Musicology, Seoul National University

## | Program

12:30	Registration	
1:00	Opening Remarks	서정은_Jeong Eun Seo, President
<b>I. Keynote Lectures</b> Chair: 서정은_Jeong Eun Seo		
1:10-1:50	토머스 크리스텐슨 Thomas Christensen	“음악이론은 얼마나 ‘글로벌’한가?” “How Global is Music Theory?”
1:50-2:30	로버트 프로바인 Robert Provine	“ <i>Thinking Music</i> 의 한국 항목을 준비하며: 1493년에 이미 이룬 것을 2025년에 다시 행함에 관하여” “Preparing a Korean Entry for <i>Thinking Music</i> : Doing in 2025 What was Already Done in 1493”
2:30-2:50	Coffee Break	
<b>II. Research Papers</b> Chair: 정이은_Yi Eun Chung		
2:50-3:15	서정은 Jeong Eun Seo	“기호, 상징, 도상, 지표: 글로벌 음악이론으로서 기보의 기호학을 향하여” “Signs, Symbols, Icons, and Indices: Toward a Global Music-Theoretical Semiotics of Musical Notation”
3:15-3:40	임혜정 Hyejung Im	“음과 국가: 글로벌 음악학으로 재고하는 한·중·일 전통음악의 음에 대한 음악적 사유” “Sound(音) and Nation: Musical Thought on Pitch in Korean, Japanese, and Chinese Traditional Music in Global Musicology”
3:40-4:05	김세중 Sejoong Kim	“따로 또 같이: 동아시아 악률이론의 두 번의 도약” “Separate But Equivalent: Two Leaps in the Developments of Temperament Theories in East Asia”
4:05-4:20	Coffee Break	
<b>III. Roundtable Discussion</b> Chair: 조현리_Hyunree Cho		
4:20-5:00	All Keynote Speakers and Presenters 계희승_Hee Seng Kye 김해준_Hae-jun Kim 이창성_Changseong Lee	“다중심 세계와 음악이론의 재구성” “Reframing Music Theory in a Polycentric World”
5:00	Closing Remarks	정문혁_Moonhyuk Chung, Senior Vice President

# | Keynote Lecture I

## How Global is Music Theory?

**Thomas Christensen**

In my keynote address, I want to explore some of the problematic questions raised by our forthcoming publication: *Thinking Music: Global Sources for the History of Music Theory* (Corpus: The University of Chicago Online Press, 2026). Perhaps the first question we might ask is how “global” is music theory? Is this a discipline that is recognizable around the globe, even in cultures with mainly oral musical traditions and little or no documentation? As I will show with selected examples from our anthology, a truly global music theory needs to be flexible so it can accommodate cultures with widely differing notions of what it means to “theorize” music. The challenge is exacerbated when we try to reconstruct the historical musical thought of cultures long past whose only evidence today might be organological, iconographic, or perhaps some report of colonial missionaries.

Complicating this question—though perhaps also enriching it—is that of Western music and its concomitant theories that are seemingly hegemonic in many parts of the world today. When the tonal languages of Bach, Chopin, Duke Ellington, or the Beatles are found heard on the playlists of listeners internationally, let alone whose music might be intensely practiced by young pianists in, say, Korea, China, or even East Africa, we can ask to what extent capital globalism has disrupted the historical meaning of indigenous music and its theories?

Rather than ending my talk on a pessimistic note, I would like to conclude by suggesting that the pluralism we see in music around the world today may help us understand better—and accommodate—the diverse musical and theoretical ideas of past historical cultures. Music theory invites us to imagine multiple ways music might be made, organized, and sounded, what its many differing meanings and significance could be for its players and listeners. Thus, the historical study of global music theory might have more relevance to us today than we might have ever thought.

## | Keynote Lecture II

### Preparing a Korean Entry for *Thinking Music*

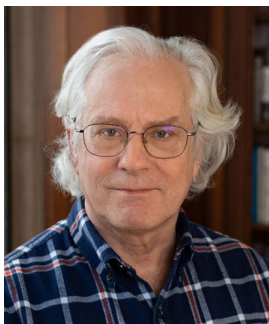
Doing in 2025 What was Already Done in 1493

Robert C. Provine

The history of Korean music is richly documented, so for the *Thinking Music* global history of music theory, it is appropriate to translate some historical texts. One such entry I prepared concerns the 1493 *Akhak kweböm* 樂學軌範's presentation of the *p'yōnjong* 編鍾 set of 16 tuned bells. In this lecture, I try to show the remarkable complexities involved in dealing with what might initially seem to be merely a straightforward translation of a rather short passage.

One basic problem is deciding how much and what kind of data to supply when constrained by a word limit and writing primarily for a non-Korean readership. The constant question in the process is determining what is significant or important about the Korean material a) for the global readership, or b) for the modern Koreans' own concerns with *kugak*, or indeed c) for the concerns of the compilers of the *Akhak kweböm* in the fifteenth century. It appears that the compilers themselves went through a similar process, with a length limit and difficult decisions to make about what to include in their information about the *p'yōnjong*.

Some questions: from what earlier sources did the Korean compilers get their information, how did they compress the information to an appropriate size, what decisions were made in advance, what points of musical theory are evident, and what, for various reasons, was simply omitted or intentionally not included?



**Thomas Christensen** is the Avalon Foundation Chair of Music and the Humanities at the University of Chicago, where he has taught for the past 27 years. A scholar of the history of music theory, Christensen has attempted in his writings to situate the many intellectual frames, arguments and linguistic models used by music theorists in the early modern period deeply within cultural discourses. Hence, his 1993 monograph on Jean-Philippe Rameau attempts to analyze the Frenchman's music theory as a complex response to both empirical as well as synthetic values of Enlightenment science. *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory* that he edited in 2003 was the first comprehensive survey of Western music theory published in English (and also translated into Korean in 2024). Other articles over the years have concerned the writings of such theorists as Vincenzo Galilei, Marin Mersenne, Seth Calvisius, Johann Mattheson, and Anton Reicha. Additional studies focus on music theory of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, thorough-bass theory and practice in the 18th century; problems in the historiography of music theory; and the history and social aesthetics of playing piano transcriptions in the 19th century. Christensen's research has received support and recognition over the years from a variety of academic associations and funding agencies, including residencies from the American Academy and Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin Germany, as well as fellowships from the Fulbright, ACLS, and Guggenheim Foundations. His most recent book concerns the concept of tonality as first elaborated by the Belgian music scholar, François-Joseph Fétis, and its reception in the 19th-century (*Stories of Tonality in the Age of François-Joseph Fétis*, University of Chicago Press, 2019). He is currently co-editing a major anthology of some 250 source readings and essays in the history of global music theory to be published by the University of Chicago Online Press in 2027. For the 2026-27 academic year, Professor Christensen will be a research fellow at the Hamburg Institute for Advanced Studies (HIAS).



**Robert C. Provine** is Emeritus Professor of the School of Music at the University of Maryland. Holding a B.A., two M.A. degrees, and Ph.D. from Harvard University, he researches the music of East Asia, with a particular focus on Korean traditional music. He taught from 1978 to 2000 at the University of Durham in the United Kingdom, where he rose from Lecturer to full Professor and Chair of the Department of Music. He has served as President of the Association for Korean Studies in Europe (1993-95) and as President of the Association for Korean Music Research (1996-2000). He contributed the country article "Korea" and numerous shorter entries to the second edition of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2001), plus 75 entries on Korean and Chinese musical instruments to *The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments* (1984), and he is the author of *Essays on Sino-Korean Musicology: Early Sources for Korean Ritual Music* (1988), plus many articles in varied academic journals.

## | Abstracts

### Signs, Symbols, Icons, and Indices

#### Toward a Global Music-Theoretical Semiotics of Musical Notation

#### 기호, 상징, 도상, 지표: 글로벌 음악이론으로서 기보의 기호학을 향하여

Jeong-Eun Seo

Global Music Theory can be approached from a variety of perspectives. This presentation examines notation systems as one point within its multidimensional theoretical space. Across diverse cultural contexts, humans have long transformed sounds into visual signs. Conceived as musical notation, this practice suggests the possibility of both shared features and culturally specific differences.

Given that semiotics encompasses not only language but also music, film, photography, and other forms of signification, this presentation examines Western and Korean traditional notation systems from a semiotic perspective, drawing on C. S. Peirce's concepts of sign, symbol, icon, and index.

Since the 1970s, the interdisciplinary field of Music Semiotics has developed considerably. Yet it has predominantly addressed meaning in music itself, rather than examining notation systems as primary and immediate musical signs. In other words, the emphasis has been on "semiotic music analysis"—the search for semiotic meaning within music—rather than on the essential nature of notation as a sign system. For example, V. Karbusický (1986) and R. Monelle (1992) applied Peircean concepts of icon, index, and symbol to music; however, their analyses concerned the semiotic meaning of music itself, not that of notation. Moreover, as demonstrated in the works of Jean-Jacques Nattiez (1976, 1990), Eero Tarasti (1994, 2012), Kofi Agawu (1991, 2008), and Robert S. Hatten (1994, 2020), music semiotics has largely functioned as a methodological framework for music analysis.

Research in Music Semiotics along these lines presents several constraints. A semiotic interpretation of music's (expressive) meaning tends to encounter difficulties in attaining universality or global validity. For example, while emphasizing the significance of his semiotic study of Beethoven, Hatten acknowledges that his research concentrates "on one style." As he explains, "because theories of musical meaning must be stylistically constrained to have validity" (1994, p. 3), thereby presupposing that music-semiotic inquiry requires distinct approaches depending on musical style. Moreover, insofar as its methods, perspectives, and objects of inquiry have been largely restricted to Western classical music, existing music semiotics faces structural constraints in positioning itself within the domain of Global Music Theory.

Thus, just as discussions of general semiotics are not confined to any particular cultural region, what is needed is fundamental, universal, and extensive research into how humans visually signify musical sounds beyond the boundaries of any specific culture or musical genre, and into the commonalities and differences among diverse notation systems.

While previous research on notation has often focused on historical development or particular characteristics within specific periods or instrumental contexts, this study investigates the intrinsic attributes of representative Western and Korean traditional notation systems.

## | Sound(音) and Nation

### Musical Thought on Pitch in Korean, Japanese, and Chinese Traditional Music in Global Musicology

음과 국가: 글로벌 음악학으로 재고하는 한·중·일 전통음악의 음에 대한 음악적 사유

Hyejung Im

The analysis of pitch organization and the evaluation of musical characteristics based on it reflect not only acoustic structures but also intellectual approaches to music. In the traditional music of Korea and Japan, particularly in court music and music associated with intellectual elites, ideas about pitch were historically shaped by Chinese scale theory before the modern period.

Since the modern era, however, attempts to identify national musical originality in forms believed to be less influenced by Chinese theoretical systems began in Japan and later spread to Korea and China. In this context, folk songs came to be seen as important sources for identifying national musical identity.

Interestingly, contemporary scholarship on folk music in Korea, Japan, and China reveals a shared conceptual framework regarding pitch organization. Folk melodies are frequently interpreted as being structured around a small number of principal tones—often two or three—while other tones are regarded as flexible or improvisatory. This framework has been widely used to explain musical originality not only at the national level but also within smaller regional and social communities.

This study asks why a similar model of pitch interpretation has emerged in the musicology of Korea, Japan, and China. Rather than treating this framework as a purely musical discovery, the paper suggests that it reflects broader musicological discourses shaped by modern academic trends and changing power relations among nations. By examining the concept of pitch in East Asian traditional music, this study seeks to reconsider the formation of musical thought on sound (音) and nation from the perspective of global musicology.

## | Separate But Equivalent

### Two Leaps in the Developments of Temperament Theories in East Asia

#### 따로 또 같이: 동아시아 악률이론의 두 번의 도약

Sejoong Kim

It is well-known that the temperament theories in both East Asia and Europe moved from the Pythagorean system to the equal temperament, without any direct and manifest influence. Also significant is that the worldviews in both areas moved from metaphysical to more rational ones.

The transition, which was completed by the sixteenth century, was more based on the mathematical precision than on the accumulation of empirical knowledge. The Pythagorean stage was a metaphysical one based on numerological thoughts, where the ratios between small numbers counted, among which the numbers 3 and 2 were crucial. The discovery of Pythagorean comma triggered the inner collapse of the old numerology.

Whether one adapts the harmonic system or not, the comma disturbed the old system that divided an octave into 12 pitches. Between the octave equivalence (frequency ratio 1:2) and the pure fifth (2:3), both East Asia and Europe chose the simpler—the equal temperament. East Asia was quicker in thought experiments but there is no evidence of their use in practice; Europe was more practical from the first, if a little later.

The presentation calls the discovery of the comma and the invention of equal temperament the “two leaps” in the developments of temperament theories in premodern East Asia. Paradoxically they are instances where the discoveries of “irrational” numbers brought about “rationalization” of theories. And both areas were still to wait for the third leap which was to open the modern acoustic science—the discovery of gases.

## | Biographies

**Hyunree Cho** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Music at Changwon National University. She received her B.M. and M.M. in Musicology from Seoul National University and completed a Ph.D. in Music Theory at the University of Chicago. Her research focuses on the relationships between music and meaning, discourse analysis, and Beethoven studies. Currently, she is working on a paper exploring intermediality and virtuality in music-theoretical paradigms.

**Yi Eun Chung** received his B.A. and M.A. in musicology from Seoul National University, and later completed an M.Phil. in Musicology at University of Cambridge. As a recipient of the Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme, he earned his Ph.D. in Musicology from The University of Hong Kong with a dissertation on temporality in the late music of Franz Schubert. From 2021 to 2025, he participated as a full-time researcher in the “Politics of Sound and Listening” project, funded by the National Research Foundation of Korea and hosted by the Music Research Institute at Hanyang University. He currently teaches musicology and music theory at Seoul National University, Dongduk Women’s University, Yonsei University, Korea National University of Arts, and Hanyang University.

**Hyejung Im** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Korean Traditional Music at the College of Music, Hanyang University. She studied Korean traditional music theory at Seoul National University and received her Ph.D. in Korean Musicology from the same institution. Her research focuses on the music of samhyeon-yukgak ensembles used as accompaniment for mask dance dramas, ritual performances, shamanic rituals (gut), and court dances (jeongjae), as well as the transformation of Korean traditional music into performing arts during the early twentieth century and the development of Korean traditional orchestral music in the late twentieth century. Previously, she served as a senior researcher at the Institute of Asian Music, Seoul National University, and was a recipient of the JSPS Postdoctoral Fellowship for Research in Japan. Her publications include *Music of Korean Mask Dance* (『한국 가면극의 음악』) (2019) and *Miryang Arirang Diaspora: East Asia* (『밀양아리랑 디아스포라-동아시아편-』, co-authored, 2024), as well as several articles on Korean and Japanese traditional music.

**Haejun Kim** is a Ph.D. candidate in Music at Seoul National University. They earned a Master’s degree in Musicology from the same university, with a thesis on how musical rests influence listeners’ metric perception. Their research interests include the temporal aspects of music, as well as the epistemological and discursive elements of music theory. They are currently focusing on the bodily metaphors embedded within 20th-century metrical theories.

**Sejoong Kim** (Gim Sejung) graduated from the Department of Public Law at Seoul National University. After years as a journalist, he got an M.A. in Korean Musicology at SNU. Assistant Professor at Graduate School of Performing Arts, Hongik University, he is also the author of *Two-Way Tianziwen* (『두길 천자문』, 2023), *The Music Theories of Jeong Yak-yong* (『정약용의 음악이론』, 2023), “*Ne-naissance: Rethinking the Aak Reforms by King Sejong and Bak*

Yeon" (1999), "A Critical Reconstruction of the Building of Pitchpipes in Sejong Era" (co-authored, 2025), and others.

**Hee Seng Kye** is Associate Professor of Musicology and Director of the Music Research Center at Hanyang University in Seoul, Korea. He studied composition with Milton Babbitt at The Juilliard School (B.M.) and completed an M.A. at Queens College, City University of New York, before earning a Ph.D. in musicology from The University of Hong Kong. His research addresses music theory, analytical methodology, and the ethics of musical listening. His work is forthcoming in the *BACH: Journal of the Riemenschneider Bach Institute*, the *Routledge Handbook on Music and Posthumanism*, and other venues. He is completing a monograph on music in relation to disease, disability, and death.

**Changseong Lee** graduated from the Department of Composition (Theory Major) at Seoul National University and completed the M.A. coursework in Music Theory and Musicology at the same institution. He wrote the column "Play Game & Music" for the magazine *Auditorium* (『객석』) from 2023 to 2025 and previously worked as a producer and writer at KBS 1FM (Classic FM). He currently serves as a teaching assistant in the Department of Musicology at Seoul National University.

**Jeong-Eun Seo** studied composition at Seoul National University (SNU) and the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik Freiburg, and music theory at the University of Sussex, before receiving her Ph.D. in Musicology from SNU. She is currently Professor of Music Theory at SNU. Recent Publications include "Borders or Relations between Sound and Notation: Some Preliminary Notes on Musical Graphemics" (2021), "A Preliminary Note on Musical Graphemics in Korean Traditional Notation: Comparison with Western Traditional Notation" (2022), "Temporal Asymmetry in Eonmori Jangdan: Comparison with Asymmetrical Rhythms in Other Musics" (2022), "From Chords to Sonorities: Another Interpretation of Brahms Klavierstücke Op. 119, No. 1 'Intermezzo'" (2023), "Soundless Song of Schumann's *Humoreske* Op. 20" (2023), "Perpetuum mobile of Unsuk Chin's Piano Etude No. 5 'Toccata'" (2023), "The Open Text and Its Interpretations: Analyses and Performances of Chopin Mazurka Op. 17, No. 4" (2023), "Between Non-isochronous and Isochronous Timing: Rhythmic Analysis of 'Tiger is Coming' by Leenalchi Band" (2023). Her book *Harmonic Theory and Analysis: Riemann and Post-Riemann Functional Theory Revisited* (『화성이론과 분석: 리만·포스트리만 이론 다시 읽기』, 2019) was awarded as an Outstanding Academic Books by the National Academy of Sciences of Korea.



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