

1. *Gagaku*

Gagaku, literally “elegant music”, is a term originally used in contrast with *Zokugaku* (popular music) and denotes classical music. *Gagaku* in this sense existed in China and Korea, but differed from Japanese *Gagaku* in the music itself.

Gagaku in Japan covers the whole of its most ancient, classical music and dances, perfected generally in the 10th century A.D., on the basis of or under the influence of native Japanese songs and dances and instrumental music and dances of countries on the

Asiatic Continent.

It has been performed mainly at the Imperial Court, in aristocratic society, and at important shrines and temples.

The *Gagaku* transmitted by the Music Department of the Imperial Household Agency now sets the standard.

1. **Kinds of *Gagaku***

There are the following three kinds of *Gagaku* according to places of origin and routes of introduction: *Kuniburi-no-Utamai* (native-style songs and dances); *Gaku-bu* (music and dance) of continental origin; and *Utai-mono* (vocal pieces).

(1) *Kuniburi-no-Utamai* (native-style songs and dances, e.g. *Kagura* and *Azuma-Asobi*)

These are vocal pieces and corresponding dances perfected in the Mid-*Heian* Period (10th century A.D.) and based on early songs or dances of ancient Japan. Among them are *Kagura*, *Azuma-Asobi*, *Yamato-Uta* and *Kume-Mai*. They are also referred to as songs and dances of ancient times, or native songs and dances of Japan. They had evolved into their present form in the 10th century. They were also influenced by music and dances of continental origin. It is especially to be noted that *Hichiriki*, an oboe-like foreign wind instrument, was introduced in the accompaniment.

(2) *Gaku-bu* of Continental Origin (*Tōgaku* and *Komagaku*)

It consists of *Tōgaku* or Chinese music, and *Komagaku*, or Korean music. They comprise instrumental and music and dances fully developed in the 10th century, based on music and dances of Continental countries such as China and Korea and introduced to Japan over a period of approximately 400 years from the 5th to the beginning of the 9th century A.D.

During the *Yamato* Period (300-710 A.D.) through the *Nara* Period (710-794 A.D.) various kinds of foreign music and dances were performed in almost the same

manner as when first imported. During the *Heian* Period (794-1191 A.D.), they were gradually rearranged and Japanese.

They came to be classified, according to their origins, into the Left School (*Sahō*) and the Right School (*Uhō*), which differed from each other in the arrangement of instruments.

The Left School, called *Tōgaku* (Chinese music), is based on music and dances originating in China, Central Asia and India. The Right School, called *Komagaku* (Korean music), is based on music and dances originating mostly in Korea, and Manchuria (Northeast China).

They were also classified into *Kangen* (wind and strings) and *Bugaku* (dances and music), which differ from each other in the form and technique of musical performance.

Moreover, foreign instruments were adopted or discarded, so that the organization of the ensemble developed into that of small-scale chamber music. While such a great evolution of the imported music and dances was taking place, an increasing number of compositions and arrangements came to be made by Japanese, and thus was perfected Japan's own highly refined and elegant "*Gagaku*".

(3) *Utai-Mono* (vocal pieces, *Saibara* and *Rōei*)

These are vocal music, composed under the influence of continental music in the *Heian* Period (794-1191 A.D.) and sung to the accompaniment of Chinese instruments. They comprise *Saibara*, with words of Japanese folk songs, and *Rōei* (recitation), with words of Chinese poems chanted in their Japanese reading.

Furthermore there is *Uta-no-Hikō*, the chanting of *Waka* poems (as performed e.g. at the New Year Imperial Poetry Party), which was perfected in the same period as *Rōei*. It is not included in *Gagaku*, since it has no accompaniment of instruments.

3. Forms of Performance of *Gagaku*

There are three forms of performance of *Gagaku*, corresponding to the categories mentioned above: *Kangen* (wind and strings), *Bugaku* (dances and music), and *Kayō* (songs and chanted poetry).

(1) *Kangen* (wind and strings)

It is a performance with *Gagaku* instruments of continental origin, namely, three wind instruments, *Shō* (mouth-organ), *Hichiriki* (oboe), and *Rhūteki* (seven holed Chinese flute), two string instruments, *Biwa* (lute) and *Sō* (koto), and three

percussion instruments, *Kakko* (drum), *Taiko* (drum) and *Shōko* (bronze gong). Today, *Tōgaku* is mainly performed.

In *Kangen*, the wind instruments play the main part. *Hichiriki* plays the main theme, *Rhūteki* plays the same, but somewhat ornamentally, and *Shō* provides the chord. The percussion gives the rhythm, as do the strings.

The instruments are played slowly and delicately. In *Bugaku*, described below, they are played vigorously.

Saibara and *Rōei* of *Kayō*, described below, are occasionally performed as part of a *Kangen* programme.

(2) *Bugaku* (dances and music)

In this form, dances are performed to the accompaniment of music. The dances are divided into three kinds: *Kuniburi-no-Mai* (native style dances), *Sahō-no-Mai* (Left-School dances) accompanied by *Tōgaku* (Chinese music) and *Uhō-no-Mai* (Right-School dances) accompanied generally by *Komagaku* (Korean music).

1) *Kuniburi-no-Mai* (native style dances)

The dances are elegant and dignified, though the costumes and dances are plain and simple.

Songs are accompanied by Japanese and foreign instruments.

2) *Sahō -no-Mai* (Left-School dances)

As a rule, costumes are in the red line. The dancers come on stage from the left side as seen from front and dance to the tune of the wind instruments.

The accompaniment is played by the three wind and three percussion instruments, and the string instruments are not generally used.

3) *Uhō -no-Mai* (Right-School dances)

As a rule, costumes are in the green line. The dancers come on stage from the right side as seen from front. The accompaniment is unlike the Left-School dances, the *Shō* (a wind instrument) is not generally used, and *Koma-bue* (a six holed Korean flute) instead of *Rhūteki* and *San-no-Tsuzumi* (an hourglass drum) instead of *Kakko* are used for accompaniment. The string instruments are never used.

Dances are performed to the rhythm of the *San-no- Tsuzumi* and the Taiko Drum.

(3) *Kayō* (songs and chanted poetry)

They include *Kuniburi-no-Uta* (native-style songs) based on early Japanese songs, *Saibara* and *Rōei*, influenced by music of Continental derivation.

1) *Kuniburi-no-Uta* (native-style songs) are accompanied by Japanese instruments, such as *Wagon* and *Kagura-bue*, and instruments of foreign origin, such as

Hichiriki, *Ryūteki* (sometimes in place of *Kagura-bue*) and *Koma-bue*. *Shō* is never used. They are sung in a refined manner to the beat of the *Shaku-byōshi* clappers.

2) *Saibara* is a form of singing accompanied by the three wind and two string instruments. The songs are popular Japanese folk songs sung to the rhythmic beat of the *Shaku-byōshi* clappers.

3) *Rōei* (chanted poetry)

The accompaniment is played by the three wind instruments only while elegant Chinese poems are chanted in their Japanese reading to no marked rhythm.

In all these forms of *Kayō* (vocal music), the opening lines of the songs are sung solo and thereafter all the members of chorus join in union. The wind instruments are each played by the principal player alone. *Shō* plays the melodic line in the case of singing, while it only plays the chord in the case of *Kangen* and *Bugaku*.

4. *Gagaku's* Cultural Value

Gagaku has a history of well over 1000 years, and has great historical value as the oldest living tradition of orchestral music in the world. In 1955, *Gagaku* performed by the Court musicians of the Music Department of the Imperial Household was designated as an Important Intangible Cultural Property of Japan. Since then the Court musicians have been collectively designated as holders of Important Intangible Cultural Property, a designation that is commonly referred to as "living national treasure". In 2009, *Gagaku* performed by the Music Department of the Imperial Household was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in accordance with the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. *Gagaku* was thus recognized not only in Japan but also internationally as Japan's traditional culture that should be transmitted over generations, and as such *Gagaku* has a potential to develop and expand by itself and to influence other types of music and dance as well.