

An Overview 解説

Basic Knowledge about Pure Hogaku, Traditional Japanese Music

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The Schools of *Hogaku*

There are several types of traditional Japanese music and the word *hogaku* is used as a general inclusive term for this traditional music. This term is actually considered to be an abbreviation of *kinsei hogaku* (*hogaku* of the modern age), with *hogaku* being an abbreviation of *honpo ongaku* (music of our nation). In its broader definition, *hogaku* includes the ancient *gagaku* and *shomyo* music forms and the *Noh-Kyogen* or *Heike biwa* music of the middle ages, but in general use the term *hogaku* refers to traditional Japanese music born during or after the Japan's Edo Period (17th to mid-19th centuries), including music for shamisen, koto, shakuhachi flute, biwa, etc.

Each of these music traditions has had various patron groups in each era. For example, *gagaku* was patronized by the imperial court or the shrines and temples, and *noh* music and *Heike biwa* music and other *biwa* and *shakuhachi* music was patronized by the samurai class (by high society after the Meiji Restoration of 1868), while *shamisen* music was supported by the common citizens in the Edo period (general public after the Meiji Restoration). It can be said that the diversity in musical expression and taste resulting from the different eras in which the traditions developed and the different social groups supporting them is one of the reasons that several different traditional art forms of music and performance have continued to exist simultaneously in Japan.

The Classification and Development of Shamisen Music

When we speak of *shamisen* music we are actually speaking about a tradition that is divided into numerous *schools*. There are also a number of ways that these schools can be classified. Figure 1 shows a classification of shamisen music by where it is performed. In this case, the divisions are made between music that is part of a theater performance (the music for kabuki performances is classified as different from the music for puppet plays), music that is not part of a theater performance (purely for musical enjoyment) and other categories like music played as an accompaniment to work songs. Here, it is important to note that there are many cases of music that began as theater music and eventually came to be performed in non-theatrical scenes as time went by.

Furthermore, *shamisen* music can be classified as a branch of music sharing the same lineage with a family of musical traditions (including *Joruri* (dramatic ballads) and *Hayari-uta* (popular songs) that existed before the *shamisen* was imported into Japan in the mid-16th century via Ryukyu (today's Okinawa) from its origins in China [Fig. 2]. Since it is music sharing a common lineage, the melodies tend to be similar. However, as the music evolved over time in accordance with the tastes of the different patronizing groups, slight differences began to emerge. Today, it is these differences, often so slight that only a specialist can identify them, that give the different schools their unique identity.

In Japanese, "schools" of music are referred to with the term *ryuha*, and further distinction is made between the *ryu* (schools) as used in

figures 1 and 2, and the *ha* (branches) that exist within each school as smaller groups usually led by famous families of musicians in which a certain style is handed down from generation to generation.

Differences in Repertoire Pieces

In both the shamisen and *koto* traditions, the schools are so numerous that we sometimes hear stories like those of disappointed students who began studying the *koto* with the dream of someday being able to play the famous piece *Haru no Umi* (Spring Sea), only to find out later that the piece was not part of the repertoire of the particular school they were studying under. And, unlike in the Western music tradition, there are often cases where new pieces commissioned by one school from a particular composer, or pieces composed by a musician of a particular lineage, are not allowed to be performed by musicians from other schools. In other words, even the most famous pieces belong to the repertoire of only one school, and even if there is a piece by the same name in another school's repertoire it, the music will be different. In the case of the performers themselves, it is also very unusual for a musician to have pieces from two or more schools in his or her repertoire. So, for example, it is very rare to find a performer who can play the *Echigo Jishi* of the *naga-uta* (long epic songs) tradition and also play *Tsugaru* style shamisen.

Differences in Performance Format

Since different types of music have different purposes, they are naturally performed in different ways. In the case of *naga-uta*, for example, it is a form of music that evolved with the kabuki theater, where its role was either as accompaniment to the kabuki actors' dance or to provide what might be called background music for the play. Kabuki adopts many elements from the older Noh-kyogen theater tradition of the middle ages. One of these elements is the *hayashi* instrument ensemble consisting of flute, drum and the large and small hand-held *tsuzumi* drums. This is why *naga-uta* is most often performed with a combination of voice [the epic narrative], *shamisen* and *hayashi* ensemble. In short, *naga-uta* evolved as the only music form in which these three parts are performed together on stage, while other *shamisen* music is only for voice and *shamisen*. Also, the number of voices and *shamisen* performing together at once will differ with the different schools.

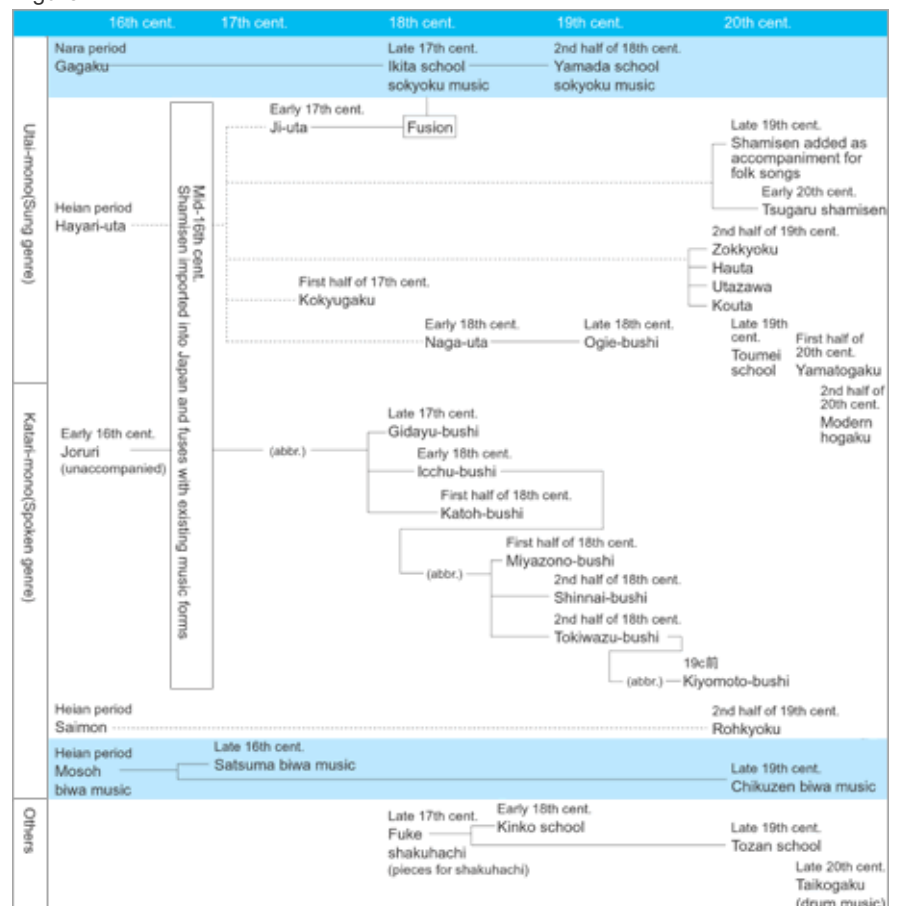
The *shamisen* music falling within the theater music tradition is performed with the musicians sitting on a separate platform from the stage where the play is acted out, and this is meant to show that the music and narrative come from a different world than that of the actors on stage. This same style of performance is used when the music is performed separately from the kabuki play. In contrast, the *koto* music called *ji-uta sokyoku* music is originally what one could call chamber music, performed in tatami rooms. That is why it is now performed with the musicians sitting directly on the stage floor (or on a slightly raised platform). *Hogaku* continues to abide by rules of performance format and staging like these that are based in the way the music was originally performed. As a result, these rules by which the music is performed and things like the shapes of the music stands used can tell us today where the origins of the music lie.

Figure1

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|-------------------|---|
| Theater music | Naga-uta.....Kabuki Gidayu-bushi.....Puppet theater (Bunraku) Kabuki Tokiwazu-bushi.....Kabuki Kiyomoto-bushi.....Kabuki |
| Non-theater music | Ji-uta sokyoku Ogie-bushi Hauta, Zokkyoku, Utazawa, Kouta Toumei school Yamatogaku |
| | Icchu-bushi Katoh-bushi Miyazono-bushi Shinnai-bushi } Originally theater music |
| Others | Minyo (folksong) shamisen Tsugaru shamisen |

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Figure2



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Understanding the Figures

The solid lines in the chart show music genres that are considered direct descendants of the oldest traditions (to the left) in the genealogy of traditional Japanese music, while the dotted lines show genre rooted more generally in the preceding genre. All the names shown in the chart are of schools that still exist today. It should be noted that the division between "utai (sung)" and "katari (spoken)" traditions is based on a historical perspective and not on the actual contents of the music. As for the *joruri* genre, it began to divide into many branches in the early Edo period after the introduction of the *shamisen* and, as a result, includes many schools today.