

Traditional Japanese Gagaku Music for Contribution of Human Wellness

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Abstract

Among Japanese long history and culture, Gagaku has been attracting attention as traditional Japanese music. The word Gagaku is composed of Ga (elegance, grace) and Gaku (music, good feeling). Author has performed the activity and taught younger generation at Tokyo University of the Arts. In Hoshino Resort HOSHINOYA Tokyo, we played Gagaku for opening ceremony broadcast on live and successively regular "pleasant evening for traditional art culture" activities for playing Gakubiwa (musical instrument similar to lute or guitar). Gagaku can contribute wellness and happiness of people. Further development of gagaku will be expected from psychological and social points of view.

Keywords: Gagaku; Tokyo University of the Arts; Hoshino Resort; Gakubiwa; Imperial Household Agency

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Commentary

Japan has a very long history and maintained a high level of artistic culture, language and society [1]. Among them, traditional Japanese art culture has been attracting attention in recent years [2]. One of the reasons would be that fascinating charm exists in Japanese art and culture with characteristic philosophy [3]. Some differences are present in Western vs Eastern countries, where the perspectives of digital vs analogue concept are observed, respectively. According to Japan Arts Council, traditional Japanese art cultures have included some well-known categories, such as Kabuki, Nogaku, and Gagaku music [4].

Gagaku has been an old-fashioned traditional Japanese music play. It is a synthetic art of music and dance, which has persisted long history of more than 1000 years [5]. The word Gagaku is composed of Ga (elegance, grace) and Gaku (music, good feeling). For decades, the author has been involved in Gagaku, where we have various occasions and places for presenting the play and also teaching to the younger generation at Tokyo University of the Arts [6]. Our team has continued to develop Gagaku and enlighten traditional art and culture broadly across the world. In this article, several activities associated with some discussions and perspectives are described.

Gagaku has been originated from ancient Japanese dances and songs, and developed with some influences of from China and Korean Peninsula. Generally, almost current play style was completed in the middle of Heian period in Japan (794-1192 AD). This music art has been inherited by the Imperial Household Agency, Japan and also played regularly at large shrines and temples in local societies of Japan [7]. It seems to be extremely

rare and significant in the world that ancient music play has been passed down for more than 1000 years that would be a valuable cultural heritage.

Traditionally, gagaku presentations have been used for imperial ceremonies, special artistic activities, and community entertainment [8]. It has been rather rare for the general public people to come into contact with the experience of Gagaku. Our group has been expanding innovative activities in a new era to disseminate the charm of gagaku broadly.

Among them, we have continued gagaku activity at traditional Japanese luxury inn (Ryokan). Hoshino Resorts is one of the most famous ryokan companies in Japan [9]. They built a traditional HOSHINOYA Tokyo in the center of metropolitan Tokyo. The concept is to provide state-of-the-art comfort and genuine "hospitality (omotenashi)" in a Japanese-style beauty space where tradition and modernity exist in harmony [10]. In fact, the exterior design of the building blends comfortably with the surrounding office district. When taking a closer look carefully, one can notice for the first time that it contains a Japanese atmosphere with the fine motif design pattern in Edo period (1603-1868 AD).

At the ceremony to commemorate the opening of the business, we played ancient Japanese gagaku music. In the previous conventional business ceremony, fanfare music by trumpet in Western music was usually used [11]. However, Hoshino Resort asked the author to present ancient Japanese gagaku, because of Japanese traditional inn. Bamboo trees grow thick in front of ryokan, where a congratulatory music was performed with several ancient Japanese musical instruments [12]. A series of the ceremony was broadcast live on TV and distributed at World

Business Satellite (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Opening ceremony of HOSHINOYA Tokyo Gagaku music was performed by Gakubiwa, Hichiriki, Kagura-bue and Sho, Which are similar to flute, oboe, flute and harmonica, respectively.

It included a series of greetings, countdown, opening a ceremonial sake barrel and a gagaku fanfare (Choshi). When handing out festive sake, congratulatory festive music (Katen) was presented. This performance was highly evaluated, and then regular activity schedule of gagaku in HOSHINOYA Tokyo was

decided and continued until now.

Gagaku play has been regularly performed 3 times in weekend in HOSHINOYA Tokyo, throughout the year (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Activity of the evening for traditional art culture, in Hoshino resort Tokyo

It is played by young musicians of Tokyo University of the Arts.
A young musician is playing the gagaku Biwa. It is similar to a

guitar or lute with four strings and the shape has not changed for 1300 years (Figure 3) [13].



Figure 3: Gakubiwa It is one of the main musical instruments in Gagaku music.

The activity is called as “pleasant evening for traditional art culture”. By author’s management, graduates and students of Tokyo University of the Arts can work for every music stage [14]. Hotel guests can listen to ancient Japanese music as they like. They can experience Japanese hot spring bath, relax freely, listen to the music and take precious sake (Japanese alcohol) using Heian period sake set made of earthenware (small glass for drinking whiskey, Kawarake). Such supreme hospitality would be priceless space and time.

In summary, Japan has precious music and culture for long period as Gagaku. It can contribute wellness and happiness of people [15]. Further development of gagaku will be expected in the future from psychological and social points of view.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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