



Three Strands of Asia
Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat Lecture Series

Lecture Three

Court Music of China, Japan and Korea
May 20, 2014

Court Music of China, Japan and Korea

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The third lecture of the Three Strands of Asia dealt with the history of exchange and unique development of the court music of China, Japan and Korea. The lecture was delivered by Professor Song Hye Jin of Sookmyung Womens' University on May 20. In her lecture, Professor Song explained similarities and differences of court music of China, Japan and Korea which suggest the vibrant exchange of music in the region throughout long history.

Introduction

China, Japan and Korea have developed similar yet distinctive cultures of court music through vigorous interchange within the common Northeast Asian cultural sphere. Evidences of musical archeology and old paintings illustrate the vibrant exchange of music among the three countries from ancient times. This exchange coincided with the introduction of Buddhism and the development of the Silk Road. Traditions of eastern music established until the 12th century provided a basis for the trilateral court and folk music culture. Multifaceted modalities of the trilateral music culture have been formulated throughout long history, and vary along different historical periods. Thus it is difficult to discuss the universality and peculiarity of the music cultures of China, Japan and Korea. Yet in this lecture, I am going to examine similarities and differences of the trilateral music cultures focusing on 1) the way of performance, 2) band structure and 3) features of the music pieces of the court music of China, Japan and Korea.

Eastern culture puts importance on music because of its great influence on human emotion. 'Proper music', a peaceful and calm music without much emotional irritation, was believed to be an effective way of governing people. Ancient Zhou music was considered as a model of 'proper music', and was called 'music to govern the universe', 'music of elegance', 'right-minded music' or 'beautiful music'. On the other hand, music of ancient warring states were considered as the opposites, and thus was called 'music of turbulent age' or 'music of a ruined country'.

For the encouragement of 'proper music', many eastern countries established a national music institute to train musicians, and play music for rituals and banquets. Music was performed during the major ceremonies of the New Year's Day, Winter Solstice, and king's birthday. Other important occasions include rituals for the nature (heaven and earth) and ancestors, royal events, banquets for foreign envoys, ceremonial walk and military ceremony. Formal music

was played along with dance during these occasions to enhance the dignity of the country and royal family. According to the types of occasion, court music is divided into four categories: 1) ritual music, 2) music to summon vassals, 3) banquet music, and 4) military music. It can also be classified differently according to the features: so-called 1) elegant music (Chinese *Yayue*, Japanese *Gagaku* and Korean *A-ak*), 2) music from the Tang court (Chinese *Tangyue*, Japanese *Togaku* and Korean *Dang-ak*) and 3) nation's music. Korean court music encompasses three categories of *A-ak*, *Dang-ak*, and the local music of *Hyang-ak*. On the other hand, Japanese court music is categorized as *Togaku*, a form of *Gagaku* called *Komagaku*, and the local music of *Kuniburino-utamai*. Called in different names, China, Japan and Korea share the concept of 'elegant music' and 'music from the Tang court'.

'Elegant Music' and 'Music from the Tang Court' of the Three Countries

In this common musical tradition, China, Japan and Korea laid stress on the concept and performance of 'elegant music'. In Japan, *Gagaku* includes all the imperial music. In China, *Yayue* which sometimes called *Zhonghe Shaoyue* (beautiful music of medium melody) was played in major rituals and liturgies until the Qing Dynasty. *A-ak* of Korea refers to a branch of national ritual music of the Joseon Kingdom. Symbol systems and theories of trilateral 'elegant music' were originated from Zhou. There are three symbolic groups of performers, two groups of band symbolizing 'heaven and earth' and dancers symbolizing 'humankind'. The band consists of instruments made of eight materials, some of which are allocated along the theory of *yin* and *yang*. For example, *Chuk*, a wooden percussion to start the music, symbolizes *yang* and is located in the East, while *O* is located in the West because it is a wooden percussion representing *yin* and ends the music. The way of 'elegant music' performance also determines the number, costume and props of dancers.

In China, *Yayue* originated from Zhou was passed on to Qing Dynasty. The tradition was cut off along the collapse of the Qing Empire, and came alive in the commemoration of Confucius at his hometown *Qufu* in the late 20 century. Now the music, which follows the form of Qing, is performed in Confucian shrines and palaces in different parts of China.

Ancient *Yayue* was introduced to the Goryeo Kingdom during the 12 century from the Northern Song, and passed on to Joseon. King Sejong, the fourth ruler of Joseon, stressed the importance of *A-ak* and tried to restore the music of Zhou Dynasty. He reconstructed theories, music pieces, and instruments of *A-ak* and encouraged performances in important national rituals. The music is still performed at Confucius shrines in Korea. It is notable that *A-ak* preserves the classic formality of the eastern music by the restoration of the Zhou music during the 15 century, and was succeeded without much break from the tradition. Chinese *Yayue* and Korean *A-ak* share many similarities yet there are differences in band structure, mode of performance and costume.

On the other hand, court music originated from Zhou was not introduced to Japan. Yet Japanese court music is classified as *Gagaku* in a sense that it is the 'proper music' for national performance. *Gagaku* is divided into 1) the music from the continent such as *Bugaku* and

Kangen, 2) newly composed songs of the 10 and 11 century, and 3) *Kuniburino-utamai*, music for the Shinto ritual.

‘Music from the Tang court’ is another common category of court music in Japan and Korea. The name seems to indicate the music played during Tang Dynasty, yet the contents of Japanese and Korean music are somewhat different from that of Tang. Japanese *Togaku* and Korean *Dang-ak* are also distinguished from the music and dances of the Tang court performed in contemporary China. *Togaku* encompasses songs and dances of Persia, India, Vietnam and China introduced by China, and consists of eight kinds of string instruments with dance. It is the oldest form of music from the Tang court established in the 10 century.

Korean *Dang-ak* is a comprehensive performance of Song Dynasty with large scale band and dancers. It was popular in the 12 century, and went through localization during Joseon Dynasty. This tradition of Song Dynasty can be found in many court dances performed in contemporary Korea.

Music and dances of Tang Dynasty performed in China nowadays are the representations of the folk tradition in *Xian* and historical records including *Dunhuang* Fresco.

Features of the Court Music in the Three Countries

The tradition of Chinese court music survives even today. In this tradition, the music of different dynasties were intermingled and had influences on folk music, making it difficult to define the ‘original’ features of the court music of each country. Yet historical records suggest that Chinese court music is graceful, and decent. When combined with lyrics, each character corresponds to one note. The melody is plain and gentle because each instrument modulates similar melodies. On the other hand, Japanese court music is made up in three parts of *Jo-Ha-Kyu* which are roughly translated to ‘introduction’, ‘break’ and ‘rapid’. It is very simple in its structure with a small scale band. Korean court music shares similarity with that of China and Japan in slow and gentle form of music. Korean *A-ak* boasts moderate beauty in decoration and technique, whereas *Hyang-ak*, the local music features big scale band with rich ornamental melodies, expressing grandeur and solemnity.

Q&A

1. From your lecture, I found that slow, repeated melodies without much change in tone is a unique musical culture common in China, Japan and Korea. Is this type of music exists only in the three countries, or in other parts of the world?

The court music of the three countries are definitely distinguished from that of Europe. It is unique in a sense that it was developed in close connection with the court rituals. This type of music still exists in neighboring countries of China, especially in Vietnam. Vietnamese court

music was once endangered due to the war but through the UNESCO, Japanese musical scholars have helped preserving its musical tradition by training young musicians.

2. Some people in China, Japan and Korea find their musical tradition boring. What are the ways to enjoy 'elegant music' in contemporary society?

I think it is very difficult to enjoy 'elegant music' nowadays. Even in the old days, I personally do not think that people 'enjoyed' this music because it was composed to serve deliberate purpose of the court rituals rather than for fun. Yet we can still listen to this music out of respect because it is sincere music which musicians perfected for centuries. Thus, once you pay attention to this music, you will be surprised at all the details from costume to the harmony of different sounds. Although the music does not please people immediately, people can listen to it with their discernment for new discovery.

3. Are the music scores of China, Japan and Korea are the same?

As for Chinese court music, each Chinese character of the lyric corresponds to one note. Because the length of sound is already decided by the number of characters, the music score mainly describes the pitch of the notes. The rhythm in Japanese court music does not change much. It is why its music score is similar to that of China.

On the other hand, Korean music does not have such correspondence between the number of characters and that of notes. It is because the rhythm in Korean traditional music is quite volatile compared to that of China and Japan. Thus, a score that describes the length and pitch of the notes was invented by King Sejong of Joseon. The Korean music score named *Jeongganbo* uses squares that indicate certain length of rhythm. This type of music score became popular from the 16th century.

4. How can the pitch of sounds be defined in Eastern musical tradition?

For weights and measures, China, Japan and Korea used grains. For example, the length was measured by arranging certain amount of grains in a row. In Korea, there was a special ruler named *Hwang Jong Cheok* made in this way. The sound of this ruler provides the pitch sound which is slightly higher than sound of C (or Do).

Lecture Three at a Glance

Similarities of the Court Music of China, Japan and Korea
1) Importance of music for its great influence on human emotion - Emphasis on ‘Proper Music’: a peaceful and calm music without much emotional irritation 2) Establishment of national music institute to train musicians and play music for rituals and banquets - ritual music, music to summon vassals, banquet music, military music 3) Sharing common concept of ‘elegant music’ and ‘music from Tang court’ -Elegant music: Chinese <i>Yayue</i> , Japanese <i>Gagaku</i> , Korean <i>A-ak</i> -Music from the Tang court: Chinese <i>Tangyue</i> , Japanese <i>Togaku</i> , Korean <i>Dang-ak</i>

Differences of the Court Music of China, Japan and Korea			
	Korea	China	Japan
Elegant Music	-Branch of the national ritual music of the Joseon Kingdom -Reconstruction of ancient <i>Yayue</i> tradition by King Sejong	-Music played in major rituals and liturgies from Ancient Zhou to Qing Dynasty -Tradition cut off after Qing and revived in modern times	-Refers to all imperial music -Tradition of ancient <i>Yayue</i> not transmitted to Japan
Music from the Tang Court	-Comprehensive performance of Song Dynasty with large scale band and dancers -Went through localization during Joseon Dynasty	- (Contemporary version) Representations of the folk tradition in <i>Xian</i> and historical records including <i>Dunhuang</i> Fresco	-Encompasses songs and dances of Persia, India, Vietnam and China -Oldest form of music from the Tang court of 10 th century
Features of the Court Music	- <i>A-ak</i> with moderate beauty in decoration and technique - <i>Hyang-ak</i> with big scale band with rich ornamental melodies	-Graceful and decent -Combined with lyrics, each character corresponds to one note	-Made up in three parts of <i>Jo-Ha-Kyu</i> -Simple in structure with a small scale band



Professor Song Hye Jin is the representative and art director of Sookmyung Gayaguem Band which gained popularity in Korean society by the fusion of Eastern and Western music. She is also well known MC for various traditional musical performances including ‘Saturday Classics’ by National Gugak Center and ‘The Morning of Changgyung Palace’ concert. By these various attempts for the popularization and modernization of traditional music, she wishes to enhance the understanding of Korean tradition and preserve it for the future generations.

Three Strands of Asia Overview

	Date	Theme	Speaker
Lecture One	2014.2.13	Written Scripts	Professor Emmanuel Pastreich Kyung Hee University
Lecture Two	2014.3.13	Housings	Mr. Kim Kyung Eun Editor of Kyunghayng Shinmun
Special Lecture	2014.4.14	The Making of Northeast Asia	Professor Kent Calder Johns Hopkins University
Lecture Three	2014.5.20	Court Music	Professor Song Hye Jin Sookmyung Womens' University
Lecture Four	2014.6.25	Implication of Confucianism	Professor Shing Jung Geun, Sunkyunkwan University
Lecture Five	2014.7.17	Tea Cultures	Ms. Muramatsu Kanako Chief Representative, Urasenke Seoul Branch
Lecture Six	2014.9.23	Calligraphy	Mr. Ye Xin Board member, Chinese Culture Center at Seoul



Three Strands of Asia is the monthly lecture series by the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) started from February, 2014. This lecture series brings together experts of China, Japan and Korea to explain various aspects of the cultures and societies of the three countries from a comparative perspective. This event is aimed at encouraging balanced and thoughtful understanding of the three countries by investigating similarities and differences.

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