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BY HISAO TANABE

In " America Japan "

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THE ACME OF ASIAN MUSIC CONSERVED IN KOREA

By HISAO TANABE

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THE greatest development of Asian music, and also its oldest Far Eastern forms have been conserved in the Yi household, formerly the Royal House of Korea. This classical music is widely different from the popular Korean music of today. The Imperial Japanese court music called " Gagaku " represents only a small part of the grand Chinese Korean art, while China has lost it almost entirely. And yet the ancient Chinese civilization gave birth to this greatest form of Asian music long before the time of Confucius, who flourished in the fifth century B. C. The Sage encouraged music as one of the six accomplishments for gentlemen, i. e. the governing class, the six being in the order of importance, ceremonials, music, archery, horsemanship, literature and mathematics. Tradition has it that a Chinese refugee, who fled to Korea as early as the time of the rise of the great Chou dynasty in the twelfth century B. C., introduced Chinese music into the country of his adoption. Taut as " Korea " in those days meant vaguely a region to the northwest of the Yalu river, and later extended to the borders of the Chili Province, we can easily understand how it happened that the Great Chinese music developed in the Chou period came to be more carefully conserved, elaborated and improved in a region remote from the destructive influences so frequently in evidence in China. The illustrious Chinese civilization of the seventh century A. D. under the Tang dynasty, however, still retained a good deal of this art. It was then that the classical music was adopted by the Japanese court, but it was not until after the Yi dynasty of Korea was established in 1393 that this ancient music was restored and developed by Korean court musicians working quite independently.

This Chinese music is essentially Asian. The Chinese guitar or viol, which is called *biwa* in Japanese, was an ancient Bactrian instrument. A bamboo flute, the Japanese *shakuhachi*, and the Chinese flageolet, *hichiriki* in Japanese, which were in use during the Han dynasty, i.e. immediately before and after the beginning of the Christian Era, came from India and Scythia respectively. The Chinese lute or harpsichord, which became a thirteen-stringed instrument called *koto* in Japan, must have originated among ancient Chinese. Thus the music of China once represented the music not only of ancient Asia, but also of the old world in general, as European music is now the music of the modern world. Even the Korean court, which became the sole custodian of this great art, has had to leave it to gradual decay during centuries of political and financial difficulties, so that it is feared that the music itself and what now remains of a once remarkable Eastern orchestra are both doomed to extinction in the near future. My deepest gratitude is therefore due to the Keimei Kwai Foundation for Scientific Research (endowed by Mr. Tetsuma Akahoshi), to the officials of His Highness Prince Yi's household, and to the Japanese Government General at Seoul, all of whom this last spring in every possible way facilitated my investigations. Since my return to Tokyo, the results of my field study have been made public by lectures and magazine articles with a view to arousing general interest in

the matter of the restoration and conservation of this remarkable Asian music. The object of the following remarks is to describe briefly the nature and composition of this music and its relation to Japanese instruments and music.

The court music handed down from generation to generation in the ruling house of Korea falls into two categories, namely : the classical, religious or semi-religious part of court ceremonies and the more popular music used at state banquets. This latter is quite distinct from the popular music of the people outside the court. The classical music of our Imperial court was originally derived from the ancient Chinese music of the second category, although the surviving Korean court musicians claim (without any scientific foundation for so doing) that all the popular music of the Korean court originated from Korean sources. A third category, the ancient military music, is also described in the Korean literature on court music but it is entirely out of use now. If we apply the epithet *profane* to the music of the second category, the first category may be designated as *sacred* music, for it contains two kinds of religious music: the first is used in worshipping the royal ancestors, while the second is used in worshipping the Sage Confucius. All other forms of the classical Chinese music, it seems, have become extinct, even in Korea. Ancestor worship takes place four times a year, while the Confucian festival is held twice every year. On both occasions "military" and "civil" dances are performed to different classical airs, but this military dance is in no way related to the obsolete military music. These dances were originally rendered by sixty four dancers, eight rows of eight dancers each: they are now performed by thirty six dancers in six rows. In the military dance for ancestor worship drawn swords are held by the dancers, while an axe and a shield are held by each dancer in the military dance at the semi annual Confucian festival. On both occasions a civil dance is rendered by dancers with a flute in one hand and plumes in the other.

The classical or sacred music itself is subdivided into two groups according to the places where it is rendered. One orchestra was placed "under the eaves" inside the main gate of the Palace or the Temple, and the other performed in the Palace or Temple "after an ascent of the steps." In both, however, the variety of instruments used and the number of musicians are nearly the same. Among the instruments used, there are some very rare primitive Chinese forms which are now found nowhere outside the Korean court. The musicians are organized into two separate bands, which originally consisted of more than one hundred men each. Now the number does not much exceed twenty and they have to change their seats going from one place to another even in the midst of an imposing ceremony. The minimum number of musicians required to make up two separate bands would be one hundred and twenty. Of musical instruments there are altogether fifty one varieties used for classical pieces (twentyfour for popular pieces) by the court band of Korea. According to the ancient Chinese classification, these instruments can be arranged under eight heads, namely : seven varieties of *metal* instruments, two varieties of *stone* instruments, seven varieties of *stringed* instruments, nine varieties of *bamboo* instruments, three varieties of *gourd* instruments, two varieties of *earthen* instruments, sixteen varieties of *leather* instruments, and five varieties of *wooden* instruments. One of the most curious of these instruments bears the Chinese name *king*. It is represented in Korea by sixteen big slabs of stone arranged in accordance with the musical scale and beaten with a plectrum of horn. This and some other instruments can be heard from a great distance, so that the ancient Chinese had to invent a special instrument for the purpose of stopping the band. This is a wooden instrument carved in the shape of a large recumbent tiger, with twenty seven notches along its back. When a rod is rapidly drawn over it, a tremendous hissing sound ensues which is the signal for the other instruments

to stop. It is called *yu* in Chinese and the character for it signifies "to stop the music."

To start the band another ancient instrument is used. It is called *chuh* in Chinese and is made like a tub with a handle in the middle. One of the earthen instruments, known as *huen* in Chinese, is shaped like a big egg shell with six or eight holes; it makes a whistling sound when blown through the apex. But a large majority of the fifty-one varieties are bells and gongs (metal,) lutes and guitars (stringed), flutes and reed organs (bamboo) and variously sized and shaped drums (leather). In contrast with the Chinese origin of the instruments used for the religious court music, however, most of those used for the popular court music are either Korean in origin or are what the ancient Chinese called "barbarian instruments" which they had derived from neighboring foreign states. Even similar instruments bear quite different names, while no gourd instrument is found among the twenty four varieties of the popular court instruments. Prince Yi's court, moreover, does not at present use more than two thirds of the seventy five varieties of instruments mentioned above. The compositions for the religious band, in like manner, are mostly classical Chinese pieces or improved Korean forms of them, introducing alterations or restorations. Compositions for the popular band are, however, a mixture of genuine Chinese pieces and very old or comparatively modern pieces. All the arts of peace were sedulously cultivated and encouraged by the Yi rulers, especially in the first part of their sway which lasted for some five hundred years, so that the vulgar or voluptuous music of the dynasty immediately preceding has greatly disappeared. The foundations of the restored and conserved court music of Korea were laid in the first half of the fifteenth century, and the greatest Korean treatises on music appeared in the second half of the same century. Soon afterwards a licentious king came into power, and court dancers began to vitiate the hitherto refined popular music.

The female court dancers were called "official singers," but instead of singing, which was done by men even in the popular court music, they only danced. The origin of this institution is said to be that the Emperor Wu of the great Han dynasty in China began the practice of getting women into his camps to entertain the soldiers while away from their families. It was introduced into the Korean court very early in its history, and survived the protests and exhortations of faithful subjects for many centuries. Only recently have financial difficulties finally put an end to it. Something of the costumes and the dances of the court dancers are now represented by the *Kiisang* girls, who are nearer to the Japanese *geisha* than to any respectable class. The Korean court danseuse, even at the height of royal patronage, had no recognized place in the bureau of music; she belonged to the medical office of the royal household, apparently in the nominal capacity of a sick nurse. If one pays a visit to the bureau of music in Prince Yi's palace, there one will still notice large shelves on which various drugs are arranged, as if to tell the visitor the historical relationship of the two institutions. When some popular court dances were given for my benefit, therefore, the only surviving expert dancer had to coach a number of *Kiisang* girls for the particular pieces chosen. This old dancer also trained a number of ex-dancers, who had been dismissed from the court and had largely forgotten their once professed art, to dance with those still retained for court functions.

Much of the ancient Chinese Korean court music of this popular category, as has been already pointed out, came to the Imperial court of Japan between the time of the Empress Suiko and the early years of the Imperial regime at Nara, which was the capital up to 710 A. D. A distinguishing feature of this ancient peculiar music was the preponderance of stringed instruments of the lute, dulcimer, and guitar types. Among them we may find the originals, or what seem to be such, of our thirteen stringed *koto*

or four stringed *biwa*. Specimens of many of those obsolete instruments are kept in the Shoso in and other museums and shrines at Nara and Kyoto. Almost all of what we call Japanese instruments seem really to have been brought over from Korea, China and other neighboring countries. Only, big or heavy instruments could not be reproduced or brought here, evidently from difficulties of transportation or through scarcity of materials such as the proper stone and metal. This may have been the reason why the more imposing religious music was not copied by our ancestors. Two kinds of dancing masks were also introduced into Japan in those early days from Korea and China. A Korean mask is used in what is known as the Korean dance in our Imperial court. It is an ordinary mask covering the face. The other kind of mask covers the entire head and face and is found in common use in India, Tibet and central Asia. The dances with large masks of this kind, therefore, presumably originated outside China or Korea. The opening dance to a theatrical performance, which we call *Sanbaso* in Japanese but which is now very seldom given on our stage, closely resembles a Korean court dance credited by the peninsular people to a northern tribe, not to ancient China.

Another point to be noted is that some of our dances, whether of Chinese or of Korean origin, are rendered without singing passages. This strange omission becomes intelligible only when we realize the fact that while their originals have accompanying words to sing, our ancestors could neither translate nor imitate the strange tongue. To interpret rightly what we have learnt from Chinese and Korean musicians or to restore it in its early fulness, further scientific study of the court music of Prince Yi's house is urgently needed. Such a study, furthermore, may result in conserving a great ancient art for demonstration to people of the present day.