

# Japanese Traditional Instrumental Music

## An overview of solo and ensemble development

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<http://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/japan.htm>

### Introduction

Although Japan is obviously the most Westernized country in all of Asia, Japanese people are known as being great guardians of tradition. When it comes to music and all other forms of art, traditions are firmly and safely preserved, yet, as in all Asian countries, there is a decline; the youth being more interested in pop and rock music than their own traditions. Modernization is surely a threat; but the sense of tradition in Japan is so strong that their traditional music will continue to thrive and, to a small extent, with the help of the West.

Japanese music is extremely diverse: solo music, chamber music, court music, festival and folk music, different types of theatre music, percussion music, epic singing, and many more. This article presents a general overview of Japanese traditional solo and how it evolved into ensemble music. I will start with describing the most important principles in Japanese aesthetic, principles which are used in all forms of art. It will be followed by a section on the traditional teaching of music. I will then move on to music itself; its historical beginnings, its evolution into solo music and then into ensemble music. The conclusion will briefly present today's situation. I also include a list of suggested CDs for those who want to investigate further into Japanese music.

### Aesthetics

Traditional Japanese music is basically meditative in character. Its performance is highly ritualized, as much in the music itself, as in the composure of the musicians when performing it. Japanese chamber and solo music have a slow meditative pace. Westerners obviously discern melodies and musical structures, but ones which do not have much in common with Western music.

The performance of Japanese music has traditionally been of a spiritual character, similarly to martial arts and other art forms of arts such as the tea ceremony and calligraphy, for example. The musician works on an inner strength in mastering of his or her instrument, more than simply perfecting a technique of some sort and providing entertainment. Audiences are looking for this self-mastery in musicians. For this reason, among many, this music has become highly ritualised. Musicians must show this spiritual self-mastery in their performance and composure.

Traditional Japanese music uses concrete elements which serve to represent natural sounds and the sounds of life. Contrary to Western music, the musician's self-expression is minimized through the ritualistic and contemplative use of these concrete sounds and effects. Many Westerners feel there is not much emotion in Japanese music. This important distinction in their aesthetic of music is important for Westerners to understand, and for the appreciation of Japanese traditional music. Although composers were signing their works during the Nara period (553-794 AD), much earlier than the Europeans, composers and writers alike did not consider they had intellectual and individual rights over their work (though this has changed since the 20th century following Western influences). There are apparently two reasons for this. First, music, as well as theatre and poetry, are based on strict forms and patterns of composition, which are strictly followed. The concept of individual rights, thus, did not apply in this context. The second reason is that for the Japanese mind, the social and collective ego has precedence over the individual ego. So, when a musician writes a new musical work, it is done in the spirit of the school of which he or she belongs, and it is considered part of the repertoire of that school first and foremost. In this sense, tradition and the

tradition of the school one belongs to have precedence over one's individuality. In this line of thought it is even accepted for another musician, member of a school or not, to adapt and modify a piece from another musician according to the style of their own school. Many pieces have different versions according to a musician's or a school's style.

For Japanese, the basic principle governing the universe is not God or man, but time - a time which is a primordial flowing energy, through which everything evolves and becomes. The concept of *naru*, meaning becoming, is very important in Japanese traditional music and all other Japanese forms of art. It is even considered a natural law. All art evolves through its own temporal movement and flow. This includes as well the movement of the painter or the sculptor in creating their works, the musician performing a piece of music, a poet reciting a poem or an actor performing in a play.

One of the most important aesthetic principle in Japanese music follows from this concept of *naru*. This principle is called *jo-ha-kyû*, which means roughly introduction, development and conclusion. It is a temporal aesthetic principle on which music is based, from a single note to entire pieces. It regulates the flow of time in a piece of music so that all notes, words and parts flow flawlessly between each other. *Jo-ha-kyû* manifests the flow of nature in temporal arts.

There is another principle which is very important in Japanese arts: the *ma*, which is generally translated as space; but it is not a physical space but it is more a sensory space, which involves physical space as well as the space of time. In music, it is felt through the silences between musical phrases or single notes, or through the *jo-ha-kyû* while playing a single note or a phrase. In a flower arrangement, it is felt through the arrangement of the different flowers, branches or leaves. Or, in a Japanese tea room, one might see a beautiful kimono hung on a corner. The *ma* is felt not through its physical place in the room, but through what a kimono evokes in one's mind when notices it: the beauty of wearing such a beautiful kimono. The *ma* is sensory in relation to what is evoked in a person's mind when experiencing something.

#### Teaching in Japanese Music

In Japan, a 'school' does not refer to a specific institution as is generally meant in the Western world, but refers more specifically to a style of playing. The Japanese school system is comparable to our Western guild system. When a school is created by a well-known musician, students become his followers and thus learn a technique and style of playing typical to that musician, and which differs from other schools of that instrument. There are schools for single instruments as for ensemble music. Schools always bear the name of their founders. When a musician brings a development of some sort in the playing of his instrument, he will create a school to promulgate his new or different style of playing. This will go as far as a student who disagrees with his master over some technical aspects. He might leave and create his own school according to the change in style he created. There are a number of schools, but few only a few remain popular and influential. Schools come and go. The school system is still extremely strong in Japan and the competition can be fierce at times between competing schools.

The traditional teaching of music in Japan is considered intuitive, in the sense that the teacher does not say much; he goes straight into the music. In fact, it is not considered good for a student to ask too many questions, or the teacher to talk too much. In Japan, too many questions distract from the real goal of learning music. The student must observe and intuitively feel what the teacher wants him to learn. Most of the time the teacher plays with the student. The role of the student is to play while observing and intuitively feeling what and how the teacher is playing. It is this intuitive understanding that teachers want their students to learn.

Traditionally, a teacher would not make a specific schedule for his or her students. The teaching is traditionally done on a basis of first come, first served. Today, a time is given for each student, but some of the older teaching ideas are still kept. For example, it is common for the teacher to force his or her students to wait a certain period of time for his turn. The students are generally waiting in the room where the teaching is taking place. A good student is the one who is attentive to the lesson given to the other student; he can learn as much watching another student's lesson than during his or her own lesson. The learning process is thus a lengthy one; and the students must be

patient. There are scores which differ from one instrument to the other (a *shakuhachi* player will not be able to play on his *shakuhachi* a *koto* or *shamisen* score, for example, because of how each score is written). These scores are playing aids; most of the learning is rote learning. As a pupil, the student must respect and follow his teacher and the style of playing of his teacher. He is not allowed to study with a teacher from other schools. There is a strong sense of in-group and belonging. It is even the teacher who decides if and when a student is ready to play in a concert.

After years of study, a student can get his titles, such as the *jun-shi-han*, which allows the student to teach his instruments, the *shi-han* or master title, or great master title or *dai-shi-han*. All Japanese art forms follow pretty much this pattern. It can take years to receive one's *shi-han*. This is one among many reasons why there has been a decline in interest by young people in the study of traditional art forms. Some teachers have been adapting their teaching to a more Western style, with a shorter time span of learning.

#### A Short Historical Background

Archaeologists were able to trace back life on the Japanese islands to around 3,000 years BC. Yet, the first true records historians can rely on start somewhere around the 4th century AD, at a time when Japanese monks were sent to China to study; bringing back among other things, writing and different spiritual and philosophical teachings, in particular Buddhism and Confucianism, new social views, which were fully embraced by the new government. The first historic period of importance in Japan is the Nara period (553-794). The first officially established government tried to impose a social and intellectual order based on the Chinese one. At that time, Japan society was then based on clans, as it has pretty much been the case until wars finally stopped with the Tokugawa *shoguns* in the 17th century.

These monks also learned, brought and then taught different art forms, and in particular, musical instruments and styles of music unknown in Japan at the time. The main style of music brought is known by the Japanese name of *Gagaku*, meaning elegant or refined music. It entered Japan around 612 and quickly became the privileged music of the court. Besides being foremost a music of Chinese origin, during the then Tang Dynasty, *Gagaku* had important influences from Korean as well as Indian music. When in China, the monks were in fact taught by Chinese and Korean musicians. Up until around the 10th century the repertoire and the ensemble itself were adapted to suit Japanese taste; and new pieces were even composed. But since the 10th century, the repertoire as well as the way this music has been performed has remained almost exactly the same. It is believed that the sound of a *Gagaku* ensemble and its style of playing are almost the same today as it was a thousand years ago.

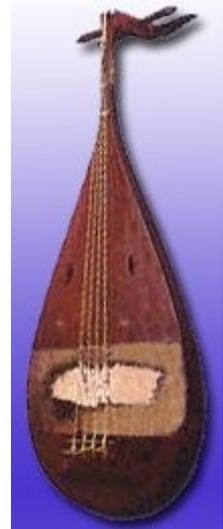
The instruments forming a *Gagaku* ensemble at its beginning in the 7th century were of three types: percussion, string and wind. Among the percussion instruments, we find different sized drums, such as the enormous *da-daiko* or the *ninai-Daiko* drums, the design of which is indicative of their Korean origins (a design still kept today). There are some smaller drums, gongs, cymbals and other smaller instruments. We find three stringed instruments: the *wagon*, a 7-stringed table zither<sup>\*1</sup>, the *gaku-so*, a 13-stringed table zither, the ancestor of the *koto*, and the *gaku-biwa*, a 4-stringed lute. Among the winds, we find the *hichiriki*, a short double-reed instrument, with a very distinctive sound, the *sho*, a mouth organ, as well as three different transverse flutes: the *kagura-bue*, the *koma-bue* and the *ryuteki*. At the start, the *shakuhachi* was also part of the *Gagaku* orchestra, but was removed around the 9th century.

These instruments were among the first foreign musical instruments to reach the Japanese shores. Some of these instruments attracted more the attention and interest of music lovers and took a path distinct from the orchestra while still remaining part of it in one way or another (more specifically, the *gaku-so*, the *gaku-biwa* and many percussion instruments), while others have been used, up until today, only in *Gagaku* orchestra (more specifically, the *sho*, the *hichiriki* and a few of the percussions). As for the *shakuhachi*; after having been removed from the orchestra, it did not attract anyone's attention for at least another 200 years.

Three of today's best-known Japanese traditional instruments were introduced in Japan at that time, i.e. the *biwa*, the *koto* and the *shakuhachi*. The other major Japanese instrument is the *shamisen*, a three-stringed lute, which came to Japan in the middle of the 16th century. These instruments went of course through changes and adaptations to suit Japanese musical tastes, evolving differently than their Chinese ancestors, as much in their fabrications, styles and techniques of playing as in their repertoires. \*2

### The Biwa

The *biwa* is a lute. Its true ancestors is the Arabic Ud, which reached China during the time of the Silk Road from Central Asia, during the Han Period (206 BC-220 AD). It came to Japan during the Nara period (553-794) from China, as well as a smaller and similar lute which came from India. Like all lutes, the *biwa* has a pear-shaped body, with four or five strings and four or more wooden frets. The strings are plucked with a quite rather large wooden plectrum, called a *bachi*, which is held in the palm of the right hand. One of the particular sound characteristics of the Japanese *biwa* is a buzzing resonance, called *sawari* or rattle; an effect produced between the strings and the frets. The strings are made of silk or gut and are thus very elastic.



We find *biwa* in different sizes, for different uses, and with different names depending on their uses. In *Gagaku* music, the *gaku-biwa* was used. It also developed as well as a solo instrument by the courtiers of the late-Nara (553-794) and Heian (794-1185) periods. Around that time, blind priests in the south of Japan started to use a smaller *biwa*, called the *moso-biwa*, of Indian origin, which felt suited to accompanying the singing of *sutras*. At least two other versions of *biwa* existed at that time.

In the 12th century, the blind-priest *biwa* players went through a decline, while, at the same time, a narrative tradition was created to recount a famous historical battle between the Heike and the Genji clans, called the *Heike Monogatari* or The Heike Story. The *biwa* created for this new narrative tradition has been called the *Heike-biwa*. But when the *shamisen* came to Japan in the 16th century, the *biwa* went into a decline. Yet, some musicians found ways to create new styles to keep the instrument alive up until today.

Overall, the *biwa* has been and is still used today to accompany narratives and storytelling. The patterns played by the singers on *biwa* are not always melodic, depending on the types of instrument used and the style. Patterns, melodic, rhythmic or otherwise, are used; in the 19th century, a more melodic accompaniment started to be used. Previously, the *biwa* was used as a kind of percussion instrument between the melodic phrases of the singers. In the 19th century, it came to accompany the singer. After World War II, some composers tried to modernize it, based on Western ideas, without much success.

### The Koto

Since its introduction, the *koto* has been the most praised instrument by the Japanese court, the nobility and, later, the rising commercial class. Similarly to the piano in Western country, the *koto* has been, and is, played by well-educated girls.



Of Chinese origin, the *koto* is a table zither, approximately 2 meters long. It is one of the few musical instruments originally created in China. There, we find two main forms of this table zither: those with bridges and those without. The *koto* is developed from the one with bridges. Originally, the word *koto* meant all types of plucked instruments, which included at the beginning the *biwa* as well. Later it came to mean the Japanese table zithers. During the Nara period, there were two instruments of that family: the *gaku-so* with 12 or 13 strings, and the *wagon* with 6 strings. The *gaku-so* was used in the *Gagaku* ensemble and was plucked by three finger plectra, or *tsume*. There even existed a *nigenkin* with 2 strings and an *ichigenkin*, with one string. The latter is still played

today by a few rare musicians. There exists today also a 17-stringed *basskoto*, and other versions with 20, 25 and even 30 strings.

No much is known about the early centuries of *koto* music, except for some legends that can not be confirmed and several mentions in *The Tale of Genji* and the *Heike Monogatari*. The first official records that have been kept on the *koto* are from a 16th century school, Tsukushi-goto, founded by a priest. But that music was considered vulgar, i.e. popular, and was not endorsed by the court. One student of that school, after being expelled from the school and created his own school which was then endorsed by the court, from which were created three of the best-known and most important pieces of the *koto* solo repertoire: *Rokudan*, *Hachidan*, and *Midare*.

In the 17th century, the *koto* started to be used to accompany dances and became part of ensembles.

A new repertoire was created out of the *shamisen* repertoire. In fact, it was at that time that the music we call chamber music was created by a musician named Ikuta Kengyo. Up until then, the *koto* served as accompaniment for the singer - the same with the *shamisen*. The instrumental part became more important. At the end of 18th century, another musician, Yamada Kengyo, created a new style, also based on narrative *shamisen* forms, putting an emphasis back on the vocal part.

In the 20th century, attempts were made to modernize *koto* music based on Western principles. The most notable name is Michio Miyagi (1894-1956), who became blind at since the age of six.

Another musician credited for modernizing *koto* music is Tadao Sawai (1937-1997). He brought to *koto* music a whole new perspective, especially a sense of rhythm never heard before.

#### The Shakuhachi

The *shakuhachi*, an end-blown flute, came from China with *Gagaku* music. At that time it had 6 holes. In the 9th century, it was removed from the orchestra. Around the same time, a monk tried to introduce a 5-hole version which did not attract the attention of musicians. It was around the 10th century that four Chinese monks were invited to teach the *xiao*, the ancestor of the *shakuhachi*, to Japanese monks, and slowly attract their interest. But it was not until the 13th century that monks of the Fuke sect thought of using it as a way to replace Buddhist *sutra* chanting. This new way of chanting the *sutras* was then called *suizen* or 'blowing zen'.

During the Edo period (1615-1868), the *shakuhachi* went through major changes. Up until that time, it was a thin and long flute, similarly to the Chinese *xiao*. In the 17th century, makers started to use a thicker bamboo found in the mountains of Japan's southern island of Kyushu, maintaining its original 5 holes. Instead of having a straight flute, four rows of roots were used at the bottom of the flute.

The embouchure also became larger. The name *shakuhachi* refers to a measure, the *shaku*, which is approximately a foot long, and *hachi* is the number 8.

*Shakuhachi* literally means 'one shaku eight', which came to be used as the generic name for the flute. The standard 1.8 *shakuhachi* is in D. Different lengths are produced, from 1.4 to 3.4, each half a tone apart.

During the Edo period, the new *shogun* was able to unify the country and finally bring peace after centuries of wars. *Samurai* did not have much to do since they could not find any more fighting. Many became *ronin*, i.e. *samurai* without masters, and joined the ranks of the wandering monks of the Fuke sect. These monks, called *komuso* or monks of nothingness, were begging while playing *shakuhachi*. They were wearing a basket on their heads to signify their detachment from worldly matters. Disguised as *komuso*, the *ronin* became spies for the *shogun*, using their *shakuhachi* as fighting clubs. There is a rumour suggesting that the use of a thick bamboo and the four rows of roots to make the *shakuhachi* is due to these *ronin* to protect themselves because, as monks, they could not carry their *katana* (their sword).

The principal style of music that is played on the *shakuhachi* is called *honkyoku*, meaning original music. It is the name of the original style of playing of the Fuke sect monks. There are other styles as well. Originally, it was mainly a repertoire of solo pieces. Only a few pieces have been written for two *shakuhachi*, including some to which a second part was added to an originally solo piece.



Another style of playing is the *gaikyoku*. This is the name of the *shakuhachi* part in Japanese chamber music.

In the 20th century, the *shakuhachi* went through some other changes. At the beginning of the century, a new style of playing was created, called *Tozan*, a style of playing greatly influenced by Western music. At the end of the 1950s a seven-hole *shakuhachi* was created in the hope it could be used to play in a more Western way. It did not catch on, except for playing folk songs.

*Shakuhachi* players continue to maintain, up to this day, their preference for the traditional 5-hole instrument. But one event of importance of the second half of the 20th century is the growing interest by Westerners in learning to play the *shakuhachi*. It is estimated that somewhere around 2,000 Westerners are currently learning the *shakuhachi* and that there are around 300 who have got a master's title, or *shi-han*.

#### The Shamisen

The *shamisen* is a 3-stringed lute with a resonance box covered either with cat or dog skin. Apparently, it came to Japan around 1562 from Okinawa, called at the time called the Ryukyu Islands. Like its Chinese ancestor, the Okinawan *shamisen* is covered with a snake skin and is called *jamisen*. It was in use at the Okinawa court. Because the *shamisen* came to Japan during the Edo Period (1615-1868), it was the time of a growing merchant class as well as a *samurai* class that did not have much to do since war was over, except entertain themselves. It quickly became popular as the best instrument for entertainment. At the start, people did not find the instrument very interesting. But when *biwa* players started to pluck and play it with a *biwa bachi* (or plectrum), the sound and tone of the instrument were greatly improved, and even more so when once covered with cat skin. This gave the instrument a totally new sound, more pleasing for to the Japanese ears. Cat skin is more durable than snake skin; dog skin is used in cheaper models. A number of different *shamisen* were created for different occasions, with differences in sizes. This instrument quickly became the instrument of choice for the then new developing social life of a Japan without wars.



The *shamisen* has no frets. A number of different effects can be produced, but one most particular characteristic for the *shamisen* is what is called *sawari*, similar to the one produced on the *biwa*. It is a buzzing sound produced only on the first string. The first *shamisen* players were *biwa* players. So the first repertoire for the *shamisen* was narrative music. But later, because of its growing popularity, to the demise of the *biwa*, numerous styles and schools of playing were created. There are two major styles: *katarimono*, which refers to narrative singing, while *utaimono* refers to songs and melodies. The *shamisen* came to be used for all types of occasions: theatres, geisha houses, festivals, folk music and much more. The *shamisen* quickly became the instrument of choice for many theatre forms, in particular the well-known *Kabuki* theatre and *Bunraku*, the Japanese puppet theatre, both of which were created during the Edo period (1615-1868), at the same time of which the *shamisen* appeared.

Another instrument closely related to the *shamisen* is the *kokyū*. It is an upright *shamisen* played with a bow and can have two, three or four strings. Some are suggesting that it is related to the Chinese *kokin*, a 2-stringed fiddle, but its construction is entirely different from this Chinese instrument. A theory suggests that it was created following the first encounters in Japan with Western instruments - at the time the Portuguese were visiting Japan, bringing along string quartets. Someone apparently had the idea to create a bowed instrument using an upright *shamisen*.  
\*<sub>3</sub> This idea has not been confirmed and is not mentioned in the literature. The *kokyū* was popular mainly during the Edo period (1615-1868). Today, only very a few rare musicians play the instrument and will accompany *koto* ensembles.

#### Ensemble Music

The advent of what can perhaps be called chamber music in Japan came late in its musical history. It was not until the second half of the 17th century that the idea of putting together different instruments in the form of a small ensemble appeared. Citing again the theory mentioned above, it

is again suggested that it is from listening to a Portuguese string quartet that some musicians thought of bringing together different Japanese musical instruments. Again, no mention about this is made in the literature.

This idea of creating this type of small ensemble music is credited to a *koto* player name Ikuta Kengyo. At that time, the *koto* started to be used to accompany dances and being used in special ensembles. It was toward the end of the century that a form of chamber music in the true sense of the term was established, of which the *koto* was the main instrument. This ensemble consisted of the *koto*, the *shamisen* and the *kokyū*. The ensemble was called *sankyoku*, which means music for three instruments. Gradually the *kokyū* was replaced by the *shakuhachi* and it was in the second half of the 19th century that the *kokyū* was entirely set aside. It appears that the *biwa* was not selected as a possible candidate to be part of this traditional Japanese chamber music.

Interestingly though, the repertoire that Ikuta Kengyo selected for his *sankyoku* ensemble was taken from the *shamisen* repertoires, in particular from the *jiuta* style. Originally, the *jiuta* style referred to the *shamisen* music played in Kyoto. But later on, the term *jiuta*, or more specifically *jiuta-mai*, came to refer to the new style of *koto* music played by the new *sankyoku* ensemble. As well, many pieces of the regular *koto* repertoire have also been arranged for the new trio. The main innovation in this new style was that the instrumental part came to have precedence over the vocal part. And for the first time, the *koto* could play a leading role.

From this time on, the development of Japanese ensemble music has been closely linked to the development of the *koto*. For example, at the end of the 18th century, a new *koto* school was created, called Yamada. Although the Yamada school brought an emphasis on the vocal part, the instrumental part remained on an equal footing with the vocal. And in some new pieces, no vocal part was written. Later on, at the beginning of the 19th century, a master of the Ikuta school added a second *koto* part to many pieces of the repertoire, which plays a melodic line different from the main *koto* part.

In the 20th century, *sankyoku* music took a modern direction, which has been greatly influenced by Western music and compositional techniques. For example, previously scores did not use what can be call measures. Each instrument has its own particular notations written from top-down, left-right. Composers started to use boxes to refer to measures, as well as lines to represent rhythms similarly to Western music.

*Jiuta-mai* music does not have much in common with Western chamber music. We do not hear three distinct parts, with different melodic lines and a harmony of some sort. On the contrary, the three instruments play almost exactly the same melodic line, with two exceptions, the vocal parts and the melodic line of the second *koto*, when a second *koto* joins the ensemble. The melodic lines of the *shamisen* and *shakuhachi* are based on the *koto* line and are arranged here and there according to the particularity of both instruments. Otherwise, it is the same. The only real ensemble effect that is used is what is called *kake-ai*, which is a short melodic response between two instruments.

For this reason, every part of a *jiuta-mai* piece can be played separately from the two other parts. For example, the well-known piece *Rokudan No Shirabe*, which has no vocal part, can be played individually by each of the three instruments, or in duet (e.g. *koto* and *shakuhachi*, the most commonly heard version, *shamisen* and *shakuhachi*, or *koto* and *shamisen*). And, of course, it can be performed with the three instruments, and with the second *koto* part.

The *jiuta-mai* pieces contains parts alternating between instrumental and vocal parts; sometimes three, sometimes up to six parts. When a piece is in three parts, there are:

a fore song, or *maeuta*

an instrumental interlude or *tegoto*

an after song or *atouta*

A piece like *Chidori no Kyoku*, probably the second most popular and well-known piece of the *sankyoku* repertoire, is divided in five parts. It starts with an instrumental introduction, followed by a fore song, an interlude in two parts (the parts called *nami-nobu* and *chidoi-nobu*), and the after song.

In the 20th century, there appears to have been a decline in the writing of *sankyoku* pieces. There has also been a decline in the interest by Japanese themselves and musicians and composers alike regarding their traditional music and instruments. After World War II, up until the end of the 1960s, not many *sankyoku* pieces had been written. We have been seeing a renewed interest at the beginning of the 1970s. What stands out with these 20th century pieces is that the majority of them appear to have been written for *koto* and *shakuhachi*. Yet, some composers have been writing pieces which include the *shamisen* as well as the *biwa* - as well as writing pieces which include Western instruments.

#### Conclusion

The situation of traditional music has greatly changed in Japan, due obviously to Western influences. Although traditional arts remain alive, there has been a decline of interest by young Japanese people, and this, mainly following World War II. One of the reasons appears to be how long it takes to become a *kabuki* actor, for example, or a *shakuhachi* master. It is said that many young people would take up traditional arts if the learning period was shortened. Is this the case? Unfortunately I do not have an answer to this question.

As already mentioned, there is also a strong movement of modernization of traditional arts based on Western music, in particular with the *koto* with such composers as Michio Miyagi and Tadao Sawai. Some composers are doing the same with the other instruments, performed solo or in chamber music ensemble.

There are a good number of new pieces written for *koto* and *shakuhachi* or for *koto* ensembles and that are available on CDs in the West. Some of them are avant-garde pieces, some others are semiclassical; that is to say, they are avant-garde or melodic in the Western sense of the terms. Yet many composers are able to maintain in their compositions a typical Japanese character.

Additionally, there is a growing interest by Westerners about in Japanese music. Also as mentioned earlier, many people are learning to play the *shakuhachi* and getting their *shi-han*. We find *shakuhachi* teachers in major cities all around the world. A much smaller number are learning the *koto* and *shamisen*. We find chamber music ensembles in many cities in Europe and North America. A few Japanese musicians have now moved to Western countries.

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#### Suggested List of CDs of Japanese Music

This list offers a pertinent overview of different types of Japanese music: *Gagaku*, *Kabuki* and *Noh* theatres, solo *shakuhachi*, *shamisen* and *biwa*, chamber music, as well as folk songs.

*Gagaku*: Japanese Traditional Music, World Music Library, 2001, 1994.

Katsuya Yokoyama, *Japon, L art du Shakuhachi*, Katsuya Yokoyama, Ocora, Radio-France, C560114, 1997.

Kôhachiro Miyata, *Japan, Shakuhachi The Japanese Flute*, Elektra Nonesuch (Nonesuch) , 9 72076-2, 1991 (1977).

Yoshio Kurahashi, *Kyoto Spirit*, Sparkling Beatnik Records, SBR0007, 1999

Yoshio Kurahashi, with Wu Man on pipa, *Aki no Yugure*, Sparkling Beatnik, SBR0026, 2001.

Kinshi Tsuruta (biwa) - Katsuya Yokoyama (shakuhachi), *JAPON*, OCORA, C580059, 1994.

Yukio Tanaka, Mari Uehara, Shisui Enomoto, Kôgo Tateyama, *BIWA, Japanese Traditional Music*, KING Record, KICH 2004, 1990.

Junko Ueda, *Japan: The Epic of the Heike*, VDE, CD-650, 1990.

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#### Notes:

[1] The Japanese table zither is sometimes called the Japanese harp because its sound is similar to the Western harp. Of typically Chinese origin, it can be found in Viet-Nam, Mongolia, Korea and Japan. It is a long instrument that is placed either on the floor or on a table. The musician plays it by putting plectras on three fingers of the right hand. With the right hand, the strings are plucked, while with the left hand, the strings are pressed either to change the pitch of a note or create different effects, such as a vibrato.

[2] An interesting point to mention is that the name for these four instruments is written with the same characters as in China.

[3] This anecdote was given to me by Mr Henry Burnett, a master player of the *shamisen*, who studied for a number of years in Japan.