

# Uzagaku: Ryūkyūan Court Music

The official music of the Ryūkyū court, which had roots in Chinese Ming and Qing Dynasty court music, was classified into two categories. The music that was played during outdoor processional parades was called *rujigaku* and the music played indoors was called *uzagaku*. *Rujigaku* featured wind instruments, such as the *kuhan* (vertical flute) and *tsuona* (double-reed horn), and percussion instruments such as *kū* (drum) and *tonrō* (gong). *Uzagaku* performances used these same wind and percussion instruments with the further addition of string instruments, such as the *chansuen* (four-stringed instrument) and *sansuen* (three-stringed instrument). *Uzagaku* was performed at Shurijō, the royal palace of the Ryūkyūan king, as well as before the shogun at Edo Castle, when companies of musicians would accompany envoys from the Ryūkyūan king to celebrate the occasions of the succession of a new king or new shogun. In 1872 (Meiji 5), with the abolition of the Ryūkyūan kingdom, the transmission of *uzagaku* performance also was suspended for a time, but with the support of Okinawa prefecture, an initiative including a survey of surviving instruments and an attempt to reconstruct the original pieces of music and how they were played was begun in 1993 (Heisei 5).

The Ryūkyūan instruments that have been passed down in the Owari Tokugawa family consist of a full set of instruments that were presented as a gift from the Shimazu clan of Satsuma in 1896 (Kansei 8), which have been passed down together with a *nagamochi* chest dating to the same period when the instruments were sent from the Ryūkyūan royal government to the Shimazu family.



No.88  
Chest for Ryūkyūan Court Music Instrument  
Gold painted inscription:  
"Musical Instruments of the Ryūkyūan Royal Court."  
Ryūkyū (Okinawa), 18th c.

## THE REPRODUCTION PROJECT OF RYŪKYŪAN COURT MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

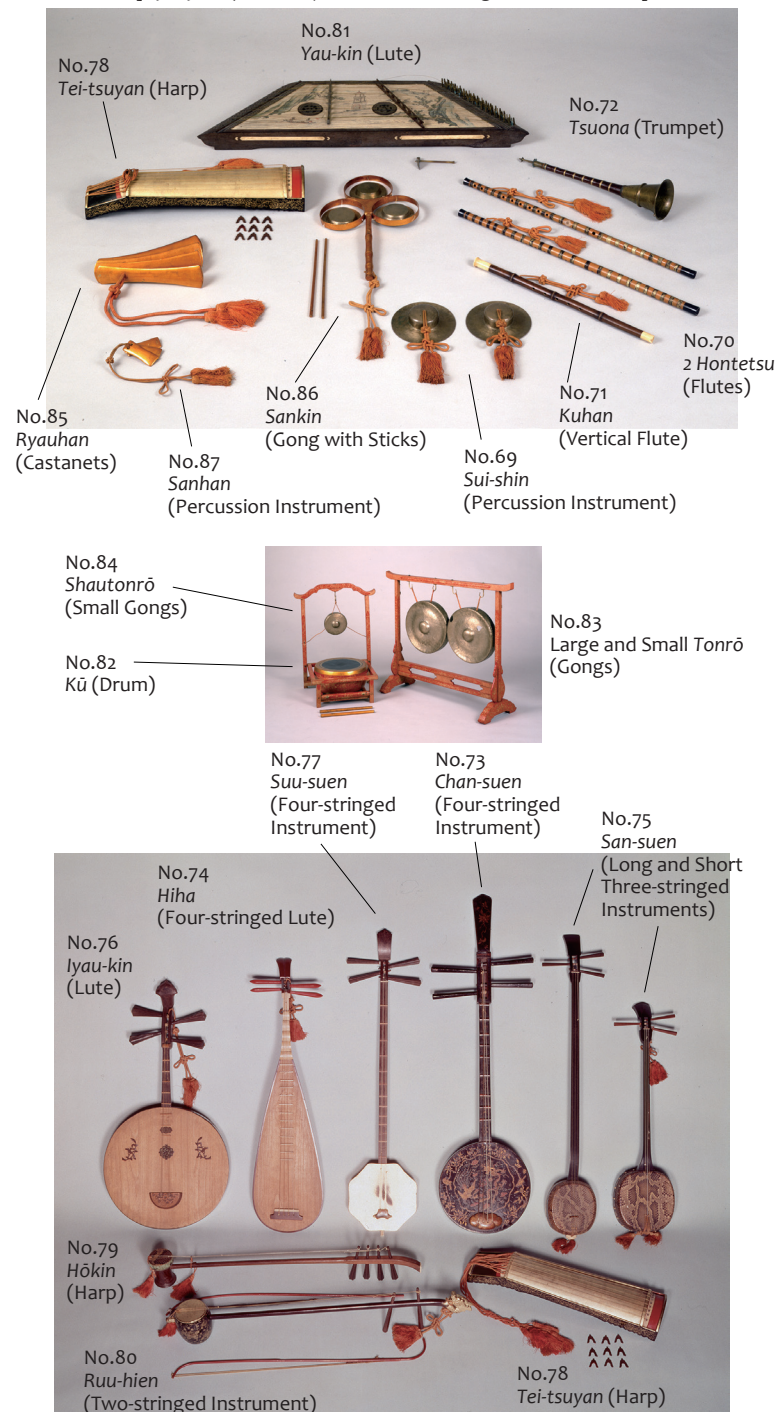
Reproduction project of the Ryūkyūan court musical instruments, based on the collections of the Tokugawa Art Museum, was undertaken by the Okinawa Churashima Foundation (Shurijō Castle Park) during 2001-2006. After careful researches using X rays and so on, together with the assiduous work to collect necessary rare materials, the project was completed and the reproduced instruments were exhibited at the Shurijō Castle.

Having seen the tragic fire of Shurijō Castle on October 31, 2019, the donation box is now placed at the museum shop to help restoration and recovery of the castle as soon as possible.

We do appreciate your cooperation.

## INSTRUMENTS FOR RYŪKYŪAN COURT MUSIC

[Ryūkyūan(Okinawa), 18th c. / The Tokugawa Art Museum]



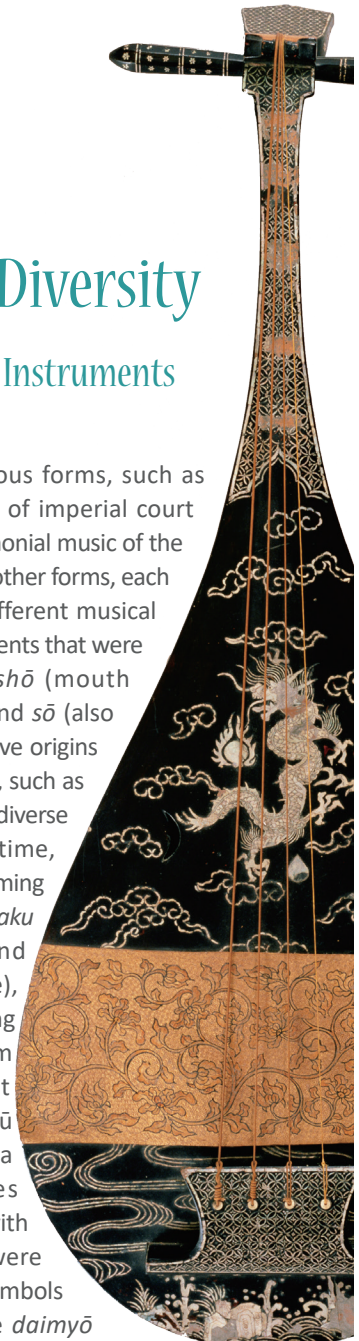
\*English text is translated by Maiko Behr and the curatorial staff of the Tokugawa Art Museum.

## Thematic Exhibition

From: November 16 (Sat.) 2019  
To: January 31 (Fri.), 2020  
At: Hōsa Library Exhibition Rooms 1 & 2

# The Beauty and Diversity of Classical Japanese Musical Instruments

Classical Japanese music includes various forms, such as *gagaku*, which is the ceremonial music of imperial court ceremonies; *nōgaku*, which was the ceremonial music of the warrior class; Heike *biwa* storytelling, and other forms, each of which utilized a variety of different musical instruments. Among the instruments that were used—such as the *shō* (mouth organ), *biwa* (lute), and *sō* (also *koto*: zither)—some have origins in India, and Persia, while others, such as flutes and drums, evolved into a diverse array of different forms with time, increasing in numbers and becoming widely used. In addition to *gagaku* instruments and the *shō* and *shamisen* (three-stringed lute), which were used for educating women, and instruments from the Ryūkyū kingdom that were sent by the Ryūkyū kings, the Owari Tokugawa collection also includes instruments associated with the Noh theater that were considered essential symbols of cultivation for the *daimyō* lords of the Edo period, and a truly wide variety of diverse instruments that have been passed down. This exhibition presents the full range of various kinds of musical instruments passed down in the Owari Tokugawa family together under one roof and examines the evolution of Japanese music through this assortment of musical instruments.



No.31  
Biwa Four-stringed Lute (front and back sides)  
Dragon and cloud design  
Mother-of pearl inlay and black lacquer  
Ryūkyū (Okinawa), 16th-17th c.  
[The Tokugawa Art Museum]



## Kuniburi no Utamai: Musical Offerings to the Gods

*Gagaku* is classical court music that is said to have arrived in Japan from continental Asia, including China and Korea, sometime around the Asuka to Nara periods (around 6th-8th c.), and the various performing arts that existed in Japan before that time are collectively known as *kuniburi no utamai* (indigenous song and dance). Traditions such as *mikagura*, which traces its origins back to the *Ama-no-Iwato* legend of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, and *Azuma-asobi*, which originated as a native performing art in eastern Japan, trace their beginnings to ancient, legendary times. However, over the long course of history, influence from continental music was not insignificant, manifesting in various ways, including integrating *Gagaku* instruments and adopting its tonal scales. *Kuniburi no utamai* was primarily performed at sacred festivals held at the imperial court or ceremonial rites held at large temple and shrines, so the performances themselves were considered offerings of song and dance that were presented to the gods.

## Gagaku: Melodies of the Imperial Court

*Gagaku* is a collective name for the music and dance of continental origins that came to Japan through China and the Korean Peninsula. From the Nara period to the beginning of the Heian period (around 8th-9th c.), numerous instruments and compositions came to Japan, and gradually those that best suited the tastes of the Japanese people were selected and took root. Advanced music theory from China was also transmitted and had a great influence on Japanese music in later times. In addition to their role in dance and ensemble music made up of wind instruments, percussion, and stringed instruments that was performed ceremonially at the imperial court and at functions at major temples and grand shrines, wind and stringed instruments were also studied among the nobility and passed down over long periods of time as an important part of their cultural education, along with poetry and *kemari* kickball.

In the Owari Tokugawa family, the first- and second-generation heads of the family, Tokugawa Yoshinao and Mitsutomo, were both interested in *Gagaku* court music. When they constructed a Tōshōgū shrine in honor of Tokugawa Ieyasu inside of Nagoya castle, they invited musicians from Kyoto to play there and further ordered their own retainers to learn the *Gagaku* instruments and dances. For these reasons and also thanks to the deep ties the Owari family had with imperial and aristocratic families in Kyoto through people like the Empress Tōfukumon'in and the Hirohata family, various kinds of *Gagaku* instruments have been passed down in the Owari family.

## Heike Biwa: Echoes of Impermanence

The *Heike biwa* is a musical instrument that was used to accompany chanted narrative performance known as *heikyoku*. The lute-like instrument is almost the same shape as the *gagaku biwa*, however, since most performers of the *Heike biwa* were itinerant monks, smaller sized instruments were preferred for portability, especially since the intimate performances of narrative accompaniment also did not require particularly loud volume. The *Heike biwa* features a larger plectrum with a wider tip compared to the *gagaku biwa*. According to legend, the *Tales of the Heike* were first chanted to musical accompaniment by a monk named Shōbutsu around the beginning of the Kamakura period and this type of performance became widely enjoyed from the Muromachi period onward.

The Edo shogunate designated Noh theater and the *Heike biwa* as official ceremonial performing arts, and in Owari, the first-generation head of the family, Tokugawa Yoshinao, was also fond of the *Heike biwa*, so various objects connected with the *biwa* have been passed down in the family.

## The Noh Orchestra: Quartet of Profound Elegance

Noh is a type of musical theater perfected by Zeami in the Muromachi period that is the most representative performing art of Japan's medieval era. The musical accompaniment to Noh is comprised of four instruments: the *nōkan* (transverse flute), *kotsuzumi* (small shoulder drum), *ōtsuzumi* (hip drum), and *taiko* (large drum). Together, they are also sometimes called the *hayashi* (accompaniment) or the *shibyōshi* (four time-keepers). Noh is built around a poetic song and dance by the actors and chorus at its center, so the instrumental performance—with the exception of the music accompanying the dance by the protagonist in the second act—plays a major role in setting the scene and indicating the moods of the various characters through its sound effects.

From the medieval period onward, playing music on these four instruments was a favorite cultural pursuit among samurai and upper-class families, and in the Owari Tokugawa family Noh was also performed at auspicious events and for annual functions. As a result, instruments for Noh performance as well as Noh masks and costumes have also been passed down in the family.

## Hitoyogiri: The Illusive Vertical Flute

The *hitoyogiri* is a vertical flute cut from a section of bamboo with a single node (*hito*=one, *yo*=node) that is said to be the predecessor of the *shakuhachi* (*Fuke shakuhachi*). In contrast to the *shakuhachi*, which is cut from the root end of the bamboo, the *hitoyogiri* is made from the middle part of the bamboo stalk, making it narrow and of thinner construction than the *shakuhachi*. At about 34 cm, it is also somewhat shorter in length than the *shakuhachi*, which is

about 54 cm. Together with the *nōkan* (transverse flute), it was used in the *noh* orchestra and was beloved among the samurai and upper classes, but with the spread of the *shakuhachi*, which had a wider tonal range and louder sound, the *hitoyogiri* ceased to be played from the Edo period (1603-1868) onward, and knowledge of techniques for playing it were lost.

The *hitoyogiri* that were passed down in the Owari Tokugawa family are believed to have come into the Owari Tokugawa family by the beginning of the Edo period, while it was still actually being played as a functional musical instrument.

## Sō and Shamisen: Cultured Pastimes for the Ladies

The *sō* is the thirteen-stringed instrument more familiarly known today as the *koto*. It came to Japan from China at the end of the seventh century as one of the wind and string instruments used in *Gagaku* performance. From the Heian period (from the end of 8th c. through to the end of 12th c.) onward, the *sō* was counted among the desirable cultivated refinements for women, along with *waka* poetry and calligraphy, and was learned by women of the upper classes.

The *sō* that was learned by most women in the Edo period was different from the *sō* music associated with *Gagaku*, and instead was frequently played solo or in ensemble with multiple instruments playing together. The three-stringed Ryūkyūan *sanshin* was also brought to Japan and the modified version that took root as the *shamisen* also became counted as one of the three standard musical instruments that were learned by women, along with the *sō* and the *kokyū* (a vertical stringed instrument played with a bow). Such instruments that were enjoyed by women has also been passed down in the Owari Tokugawa family.

## Chinese Instruments: Ceremonial Music of the Cultured Gentleman

In ancient China, rites and music—*liyue*—were respected as the model standard for everyday life. It was believed that rites (*li*) offered a means toward correct conduct based on discipline and order and music (*yue*) brought moderation and calm to the mind through sound. These principles were considered very important and were placed first among the Six Arts of the cultured gentleman. Music was also emphasized in Confucian rites, such as the important *shidian* ritual, and interest was paid to the instruments that were used for performance.

As Confucianism was transmitted from China to Korea and then to Japan, the instruments that were used in the rites were transmitted along with it. Since the Edo shogunate considered Confucianism (Neo-Confucianism) as the fundamental philosophy underlying a peaceful reign, the first Lord of Owari, Tokugawa Yoshinao, also held Confucian rites and the instruments used at such festivals have been passed down in the family. It is also believed that the musical instruments that were used at the Meirindō, a school where the children of the Owari clan retainers studied, were also later appropriated by the Owari Tokugawa clan.