

## ON THE PREVALENCE OF THE WUXIAN, FIVE-STRINGED LUTE

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The *wuxian* (Japanese, *gogen* or *gogenbiwa*: a five-stringed lute) is widely understood as a musical instrument associated with the Shōsō-in. The origin of this lute is in India, and it is characterized by its pear shape, straight neck, five strings, four frets and one partial fret for a single string. This study is intended to further understanding of this instrument by considering its prevalence. The following points were addressed in this study.

The *wuxian* has been thought to have been widely popular from the 6<sup>th</sup> century in Qiuci (Kucha). Nevertheless, it seems in fact to have popularly been played there prior to the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

It is said that the *wuxian* was introduced into China in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. However, on the basis of the example seen in one of the caves of Yunan and the descriptions in the official Chinese histories, it actually seems to have been introduced into China in the 5<sup>th</sup> century at the latest. Then, it became widely popular after the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

It is said that Zheng Yi (540–591) of the Sui dynasty (581–618) employed the *wuxian* in an attempt to establish a new theory of music. Yet, he actually appears to have used the *quxiang*, also known as the *Qiuci-pipa* (the lute of Kucha) or the *hu-pipa* (the lute of the barbarians), and consulted Indian musical theory in an attempt to reform the confused state of Chinese music at the time.

During the Sui and Tang (618–907) dynasties the *wuxian* was not used in the official repertoire of court music for rites. On the other hand, it was often played at court banquets. It is likely that it was also used in *faqu*, the variety of music given the greatest cachet by Emperor Xuanzong (r.712–56).

It appears that the *wuxian* died out in China after the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In contrast, it seems to have been played widely through the first half of the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910) after its introduction to Korea in the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. It is known to have been played from the 8<sup>th</sup> century through the 9<sup>th</sup> in Japan.

The following points were also made.

During the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the *quxiang* became widely popular in the northern dynasty in relation to the rise of Buddhism. By way of contrast, it appears that nothing of the sort occurred in southern China. Thus in terms of music, disparate Buddhist cultures were established in north and south.

According to the *Jiaofangji* (Records of the Court Entertainment Office), the *sanxian*, three stringed instrument or the prototype of the shamisen, was played in the Court Entertainment Office of the Tang. However, the record of the use of the *sanxian* was a misprint that seems to have originally been written as *wuxian*.

In regard to its popularity in Korea and Japan, the problem of how the expression *wuxianqin* (five-stringed harp or lute) seen in the official Chinese histories should be read may become an important factor in future considerations of the *wuxian*.