Globalization and Music

The term “globalization” refers to the phenomenon of increased interconnectedness and accelerated movement of information, capital, and people around the planet. Advances in technology have resulted in the blurring, and in some instances, the disintegration of national, geographic, cultural, and linguistic boundaries to an extent unprecedented in the history of humankind. As the world becomes smaller and smaller with advances in technology, we have convenient access to information which previously would have been unimaginable. For example, through the Internet, composers can access the sounds of non-Western music simply by visiting websites, and audio recording technology has made it possible for ethnomusicologists to make field recordings for global distribution. Since this convenient technology largely negates the effect of time and distance, there is a natural tendency for composers to feel somehow “closer” to geographically distant musical cultures. In response, or perhaps in a subconscious and natural reaction to, many composers have adopted a cross-cultural approach to composition, creating works that reflect the phenomenon of multiculturalism that characterizes our lives in the twenty-first century. Many scholars anticipate that the the audience base for art music will grow and expand, and that composers will have a new responsibility to educate their audiences rather than simply provide entertainment or distractions from daily life. Along with this responsibility comes the ability to influence the collective social consciousness of many people, using music as a model for cross-cultural interaction and mutual understanding. Personally, I also believe that a multicultural approach to composition will eventually be considered the defining characteristic of early twenty-first century composition.

A ‘multicultural’ or ‘East-West fusion’ composition can be approached in a number of
ways. However, in its simplest form, it refers to any type of music that embodies some multicultural trait and which has some kind of crossover, whether it be an art song which uses a Japanese text, a piece for Western instruments that borrows harmonies and melodic patterns from *gagaku* (Japanese court music), a piece for traditional Japanese instruments which uses textures commonly found in twentieth-century music, a piano piece that uses interlocking patterns similar to Balinese gamelan, or a piece for traditional Japanese instruments based on Australian Aboriginal dreamtime myths.

**Globalization in Japan**

Traditional music in Japan thrived in the Edo Period (1603-1868) until the Meiji Restoration ushered in a new era in Japan's history. Japan opened up its doors to the West after nearly 300 years of cultural isolation, and since then compositional approaches, playing techniques, performing practices, and aesthetics have all been influenced by Westernization.

Music was one tool that Japanese leaders used to modernize the country. European music began to be taught in the schools and Japanese texts were harmonized in the Western tonal system to create choral music for textbooks. Embracing European classical music was a way to prove to the West that the Japanese were a cultured and sophisticated society. The cultural status of European music was high, hence it was way for Japanese to show that their country was civilized and prepared to participate in the global community as a modernized country. Unfortunately, even up to the present day, Japanese music remains secondary to Western music in the society at large.

While this helped to open up Japan's trade doors and marked the road to economic prosperity on a global scale, it had a less positive influence on the Japanese traditional arts. Even

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1 The Meiji Restoration (1868) was a chain of events that led to a radical change in Japan's political and social structure and the end of the Tokugawa Shogunate, the feudal military dictatorship of Japan established by Tokukawa Ieyasu in 1603. It is generally regarded as the beginning of Japan's “modern” period.
today, few Japanese universities at all even offer traditional Japanese music instruction, and it was not until 2002 that the Ministry of Education of Japan decreed that all elementary schoolchildren should have hands-on exposure to traditional Japanese music. Up until this point, their exposure to Japanese music was limited to listening to Tôru Takemitsu’s *November Steps*, a quasi-double concerto for *shakuhachi*, *biwa*, and Western orchestra. This is ironic considering that Takemitsu himself admitted, “in my own life, in my own development, for a long period I struggled to avoid being ‘Japanese,’ to avoid ‘Japanese’ qualities” (Takemitsu 1989: 199).

A New Hope

In 1933, the preeminent Japanese novelist Jun’ichirô Tanizaki published an essay entitled *In Praise of Shadows* where he lamented the passing away of old Japan. Towards the end of the essay he pleads with his fellow Japanese.

> “I have thought there might still be somewhere, possibly in the literature or the arts, where something could be saved... perhaps we may be allowed at least one mansion where we can turn off the electric lights and see what it is like without them.”
> (Tanizaki 1977: 42)

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, as Japan once again struggles to retain her identity against the hegemony of Westernization, a generation of Japanese composers are rediscovering, recreating, and redefining their own heritage by taking an increased interest in traditional Japanese music and instruments. Composers such as Minoru Miki, Akira Ifukube, Tokuhide Nimi, Akira Nishimura, Takashi Yoshimatsu, Jôji Yuasa, Shin-Ichihiro Ikebe, Tadao Sawai, and Somei Satô, among others, in cooperation with performers such as Nanae Yoshimura, Akikazu Nakamura, Reiko Kimura, Keiko Nosaka, Akiko Nishigata, Seizan Sakata, and Kifu Mitsuhashi, have created a new genre of music that combines the most unlikely pair of words: *gendai-hôugaku* (contemporary-traditional Japanese music). These composers and performers
are interested in both tradition and progress/renewal in the music of Japan. There has been a general trend away from imitation of the Western tradition (which was quite popular in the post-Meiji decades) to a more individualized expression that is attentive to the aesthetics of traditional Japanese music. These composers all have impressive international reputations and have been instrumental in disseminating Japanese music and culture to the West. They are, in a sense, keeping the light off for Tanizaki.

Minoru Miki and *Composing for Japanese Instruments*

In 1964, Minoru Miki founded the Pro Music Nipponia, an ensemble of traditional Japanese instrumentalists devoted to creating a new repertoire for Japanese instruments. He took the group on overseas concert tours thirteen times, acting as its artistic director until 1984. In 1968 he met the *koto* virtuoso Keiko Nosaka, for whom he has written a series of pieces, and with whom he collaborated in the invention of the 21-string *koto*. By working so closely with such dedicated performers, Miki established himself as a leading composer for traditional Japanese instruments. In 1996, he published a book entitled, *Composing for Japanese Instruments.* This book is a practical manual with contextual and historical information for composers who wish to compose for traditional Japanese instruments. It comes complete with two compact discs and dozen of diagrams and musical examples. It is has appeared in three editions in Japan and has been translated into Chinese.

From 2000 to 2002 I had the opportunity to study composition privately with Mr. Miki in Tokyo. My early attempts at composing for Japanese instruments were futile. Then one day Mr. Miki asked me to show him the *honkyoku* I was working on. He took the score to this

*honkyoku* and turned it horizontally so that the vertical lines that indicated sustained pitches

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3 The repertoire of ‘original pieces’ for the *shakuhachi* (Japanese end-blown bamboo flute) that have been orally transmitted over the past 500 years within the context of Zen Buddhism - sacred pieces that are considered a kind of “blowing meditation.”
appeared to flow from left to right. Further, the nayashi⁴ pitches that appeared bent towards the left when the score was held vertically now appeared bent downwards. And in a moment I discovered how I could compose for Japanese instruments or even Western instruments and imbue them with a Japanese aesthetic – I had to compose the music without barlines to allow the music to ‘float’ through time. Further, by adopting the graphic ornamentation symbols of the shakuhachi honkyoku, it gave me a means to notate ‘Japanese’ ornaments in Western staff notation.

After returning to the United States I was contacted by Mr. Miki and asked if I would be interested in translating his book into English for publication. I accepted the job and have been working on the translation, publication forthcoming.

As Japanese music becomes more and more popular in the West, certain elements of this music – including timbre, breath rhythm, the use of ornamentation, subtlety of expression, approach to musical time, the notation systems, and general musical aesthetics – have become of great interest to contemporary composers, especially non-Japanese. The Japanese are very interested in how Westerners view Japan. Many of Japan’s most famous composers (including Torū Takemitsu) became well-known in their home county only after developing their reputations abroad. Ironically, it was John Cage who urged Takemitsu to reconsider the value of Japanese culture and to ponder ways that he could incorporate it into his work.

“I must express my deep and sincere gratitude to John Cage.... It was largely through my contact with John Cage that I came to recognize the value of my own tradition. In his own way, John Cage was influenced by Zen through his encounters with with Zen master Diasetsu Suzuki. It doesn’t really matter what came first or who was influenced by whom. What is important in the long run is that it is possible for us to understand each other.”

(Takemitsu 1989: 199)

⁴ A type of portamento produced by changing the position of the jaw.
Using the relationship of Takemitsu and Cage as a model, one can see that Westerners play a surprisingly important role in keeping the traditional arts of Japan flourishing. In what ways have Western composers been assimilating Japanese aesthetics into their work? Certain organizations and institutions like the Ministry of Education and the Japan Foundation have made it possible for non-Japanese students to study traditional Japanese music in Japan. The scholarship administered by the Ministry of Education of Japan allowed several of the most prominent non-Japanese shakuhachi performers (Gunnar Linder, Christopher Blasdel, David Wheeler, Bruce Huebner, and Anne Norman) opportunities to study with world-renown shakuhachi teachers such as Goro Yamaguchi, Kawase Junsuke, and Aoki Reibo at the Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music. Riley Lee was able to conduct extensive research in Japan for his Ph.D. thanks to the Japan Foundation. However, the number of Westerners who have opportunities like this represent just a small percentage of the potential “market” for Japanese music. In short, the most important influences in the transnational flow of Japanese music to the West are:

- Transmission from teacher to student
- Recording technology and worldwide distribution of world music recordings
- The internet
- Published articles, books, and newsletters
- Ethnomusicology programs at American universities
- Conferences and symposiums (ex. Hamilton College)

While ethnomusicologists have been interested in Japan for decades, there exists a surprisingly small number of resources available for composers who are interested in composing for Japanese instruments. This will be remedied to some extent when the English translation of Minoru Miki’s _Composing for Japanese Instruments_ is published. In the meantime, what can composers do to learn how to compose for these fascinating instruments?
Learning to Compose for Japanese Instruments

The idea for this paper came as a result of my experience in Japan learning how to compose for Japanese instruments and the desire to create a kind “roadmap” to help composers navigate through sources in an attempt to learn about these instruments. The assumption is that anyone reading this article is probably not studying in Japan nor has the language skills to work with sources in Japanese.

Out of all of the Japanese instruments which I studied in Japan, I immediately took a liking to the shakuhachi. I was attracted to its rich timbre and wide range of tonal expression. Further, I thought that studying the shakuhachi would be a tool to help me understand Japan’s rich musical history and traditional Japanese musical aesthetics. As a practical concern, I also needed to choose an instrument that could easily be transported back to the United States to continue my studies.

Upon first glance, it appeared to be the easiest instrument to learn. However, I had difficulty even producing a tone for the first three months, and would often feel like I was about to faint after twenty minutes of practicing. Within six months I was able to build up my endurance to the point where I could practice for more than twenty minutes a day. Soon afterwards I started working on my first honkyoku. Living in the hustle and bustle of metropolitan Tokyo and maintaining an active, busy life as a research student, not to mention my training in Western classical music, proved to be a handicap when I tried to play honkyoku. I simply did not have the patience. I used to listen to Katsuya Yokoyama’s recordings and wonder how on earth he could stretch six breath phrases out to perform a four-minute honkyoku. Part of the problem was my lack of breath control, but more to the point – I was always in a rush. Traditional shakuhachi honkyoku speaks of spiritual values in an ancient, unfamiliar language which demands that the performer and listener bring something of themselves to the experience.
In the midst of an aggressively secular age, shakuhachi honkyoku offer an austere and serene piety, asking the performer and listener to concentrate on the beauty of a single tone and allow the ma,\(^5\) or the ‘empty’ space (i.e. the silence) between two musical events, to speak. Through my study of the shakuhachi, I gained exposure to traditional Japanese musical aesthetics.

Assimilating Japanese Music Aesthetics through the Shakuachi, Koto, and Shamisen

Anyone interested in composing for traditional Japanese instruments might start from learning about Japanese musical aesthetics – the importance of space, timbre, the approach to musical time, the connection to song and Buddhist philosophy, and the relationship of music to nature. William Malm’s book *Japanese Music and Musical Instruments* is an excellent general introduction to Japanese music. Although mostly based on dated field work from the 1950s, it was revised and updated in 2000 and now includes a compact disc with appropriate musical examples. I would also recommend Andrew Jupiter’s, *Wabi-Sabi: The Japanese Art of Impermanence*, and engaging introduction to Japanese aesthetics in general.

From there, I would recommend starting from the shakuhachi. There has been a growing awareness of shakuhachi music in the United States since the early 1960s, and today most American composers have been exposed to the sounds of this instrument. The shakuhachi is perhaps the most ‘international’ of all the Japanese instruments. Ethnomusicologist Steve Casano discusses the numerous reasons why this is the case at length in his excellent Master’s thesis *From Fuke Shu to Oduboo: Zen and the Transnational Flow of the Shakuachi Tradition from East to West*. There is no need to discuss this in length here, but Christopher Blasdel’s book *The Shakuhachi: A Manual for Learning* should provide some basic insight. It is divided into two sections: the first dealing with basic shakuhachi technique and aesthetics and the second dealing

\(^5\) An unquantifiable metaphysical space (duration) of dynamically-tensed absence of sound, a distinctive element found in many genres of traditional Japanese music.
with the history of the shakuhachi.

Understanding the checkered past of the shakuhachi makes it easier to appreciate the honkyoku repertoire. Once you have a basic understanding of Japan’s musical past, listen to as many of the shakuhachi recordings on the recommended listening list (see Appendix A) as you can. Riley Lee’s recordings are probably the easiest to obtain. Many of them can be purchased on Amazon.com or through his website. Become familiar with the pacing, the melodic and ornamental patterns, and the use of silence and breath rhythm. When you start to compose for the shakuhachi, the idea is not compose derivative music, but rather to have some sense of the unique idiomatic capabilities of the instrument. As Ralph Samuelson writes:

New compositions for the shakuhachi, by either Japanese or non-Japanese composers, have been most successful when the composer has made a serious effort to achieve a deep understanding of the principles that underlie the shakuhachi.

(Samuelson 1994: 87)

As a Westerner composer, one’s compositional approach is bound to influenced by Western sensibilities, but if one chooses to compose for non-Western instruments one has the responsibility to at least know something about the history and basic technique of the instrument that you are composing for. When you feel ready to take on the challenge of composing for the shakuhachi, I would recommend reading Jeffrey Lependorf’s Contemporary Notation for the Shakuhachi: A Primer for Composers. This article is packed with informative, detailed information about shakuhachi techniques and approaches to notation. To address more philosophical and conceptual concerns, Tania Cronin’s article On Writing for the Shakuhachi: A Western Perspective provides a plethora of ideas. Ralph Samuelson’s article Shakuhachi and the American Composer adopts a similar approach, and includes a comprehensive listing of shakuhachi pieces composed by Americans.

Once you feel comfortable with the shakuhachi, you might want move on to the koto. Begin by listening to Reiko Kimura’s breathtaking compact disk Music for Koto. The recording
was released on the Celestial Harmonies label out of Tucson, Arizona, so it is a fairly easy recording to find. This recording takes the listener on a musical journey through four centuries of koto repertoire, beginning with Kengyô Yatsuhashi’s Midare through to a recent work by an up and coming young Japanese composer named Yoko Sato entitled Poem of the Rain. Also on this compact disk is Teizo Matsumura’s exquisite Shikyoku ichiban (Poem No. 1) for shakuhachi and 13-string koto. I mention the number of strings because tracks four and five feature two of Minoru Miki’s well-known compositions for 21-string koto, Rhapsody and From the East. As far as I know, there is no article in English that deals specifically with composing for the koto. However, chapter 6.2.2 of my Ph.D. dissertation Concerto for Shakuhachi and 21-String Koto: A Composition, Analysis, and Discussion of Issues Encountered in Cross-Cultural Approaches to Music Composition covers basic compositional techniques for the 21-string koto. Studying the scores of Miki’s Ballades for Koto should also help. These piece are included in a comprehensive collection of Minoru Miki’s music for koto published by a Chinese publishing company. The easiest way to obtain this score is probably to send Mr. Miki an e-mail. It also comes complete with two compact discs. All of these pieces however, are for 21-string koto, so I would also recommend Ballades for Koto Solo Vol. 1: Winter, a set of five pieces for 13-string koto. All four volumes of Miki’s Ballades for Koto can be heard on Akemi Yamada’s recording released by Nami Records.

For getting the sound of the shamisen in your ear, contact Tetsuya Nozawa, one of Japan’s youngest up and coming shamisen players, and ask for his three recently released compact discs, Works for Shamisen by Minoru Miki and Works for Shamisen, Vol. 1 and 2. On these compact discs you will find mainly solo and small ensemble pieces that feature the shamisen, including a recording of the Minoru Miki’s sankyoku’ composition Poem in the

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6 SION records, SCD-007, SCD-008, and SCD-009, respectively.
7 Literally meaning “ensemble of three instruments.” Sankyoku refers to the classic Japanese chamber music ensemble of the shamisen, koto and shakuhachi.
Evening. If you are interested in hearing more pieces with shamisen, the 1976 Pro Musica Nipponia recording entitled Japan: Traditional Vocal & Instrumental Music: Shakuhachi, Biwa, Koto, Shamisen can easily be obtained at any online music store.

Performances

Securing performances of contemporary music is a feat in itself, but securing performances of pieces for traditional Japanese instruments is a special challenge. If you want your music performed by Japanese musicians, there is the obvious language boundary. However, there are other options and ways to overcome this.

First of all, try contacting the Japanese Music Institute (JMI) in San Francisco. Shakuhachi performer Masayuki Koga founded the Japanese Music Institute in 1981 to introduce the highest-quality Japanese classical music to an American audience. Since then, JMI has fostered an appreciation and study of both traditional and contemporary musical repertoires, offering both private instruction and ensemble training as part of its curriculum. In addition, JMI presents concerts, and publishes documents and recordings of Japanese music.

Another option would be to submit your piece to a hōugaku (traditional Japanese music) composition competition in Japan. The National Theater of Japan holds a large one each year in which participants receive a world-premiere performance of their work and a monetary prize from $500 to $10,000.

Shakuhachi teachers can be found in just about all of the major cities throughout the United States. The International Shakuhachi Society has a web site with a directly of teachers and contact information.

Why Japanese Instruments Now?

One of the most common themes that runs through discourse in the composition
community is that of our endless search for a universal musical language, a compositional voice that crosses geographical, language, and cultural boundaries. Composers are in a unique position historically. Unlike the modernist agenda that forced itself onto young composers in the 1950s and 60s, we are now in a postmodern transition period, a time where everything and anything is possible, and where we are free to draw upon inspiration from the East and West and from the past and present. In the 1980s, Minoru Miki began to devote considerable thought to “konketsu” (ethnic mixture, or ethnic diversity). The Japanese are close to being a single ethnic group. This parallel to the Nazis was one of the causes which led to the tragedies of the last war. Even after World War II, throughout the world we continue to witness the endless tragedy and conflict between nation and nation, people and people. All this has led me to the conviction that only through “konketsu” can we guarantee peace. Art cannot exist in isolation from society. Even in the field of serious music, ethnic mixture should be an important theme. Of course, if the ethnic mixture is not one of kindred spirits, each of equal artistic merit, the resultant union will be little more than a meaningless exercise.

(Miki 1989: 167)

Music has a magical and psychological power that should not be underestimated. Hearing different musical cultures working together harmoniously leaves a powerful impression on even the average listener, who leaves the concert hall contemplating the degree to which different cultures were able to cooperate in a synergetic union. As a composer, this is the process that we should be interested in – musical experiences that lead to cross-cultural interaction, personal reflection, and mutual understanding. In this sense, music is not an isolated art form, but rather reflects society, culture, and politics and can act as a catalyst for reflection and social change. The traditional musical instruments of Japan offer an alternative to the sounds of Western instruments, and with the coordinated effort of Japan and other Western countries, a transnational flow of Japan’s musical culture to the West has already begun. To deepen and enrich our relationship with this musical culture takes time and patience, but it is an effort that carries great rewards. For those composers who are willing to put the effort in, a heightened
appreciation for timbre, breath rhythm, nuanced ornamentation, subtlety of expression, approach to musical time, and alternative notation systems, will stimulate their musical senses and enrich their compositional approach.

\[8\] In contrast to ontological (i.e. “clock”) time prevalent in Western music, breath rhythm refers to a concept of musical time in many genres of non-Western music, especially traditional Japanese music (ex. gagaku and shakuhachi honkyoku), where musical phrases are given shape and the pulse fluctuates according to the natural patterns of the human breath.
Appendix A
Recommended Listening List

General

Nakanoshima Kin’ichi zenshū [The complete works of Nakanoshima Kin’ichi], Victor SJL 25172-9 (1972)
Japan: Traditional Vocal and Instrumental Music, Nonesuch H-72072 (1976)
Gendai sōkyoku senshū [Collection of contemporary music for koto], Teichiku Records NC-6 (1979)
Mitsuhashi Kifū: Best Take IV, Shakuhachi, Victor 5294 (1989)
Nosaka Keikō 20-String Koto Quintet, CBS Sony (1990)
Sawai Tadao: Gassōdan no sekai [The world of the Sawai Tadao ensemble], Columbia 28CF-2970 (1990)
Taikei nihon no dentō ongaku, Victor KCDK 1125–6 (1990) [Contemporary music for Traditional Instruments]
The Wind is Calling me Outside: Sawai Kazue Plays Yuji Takahashi, ALM Records ALCD-37 (1988)
Sawai Kazue: Three Pieces, Collecta COL003 JASRAC R240180 (1992)
Kuribayashi Hideaki: Kuri First, Koto, Kyoto Records KYCH-2006 (1995)
Aminadab: shōmyō gensō [Aminadab: shōmyō fantasia], Denon COCO-80096 (1996)
Sorin: Kokin Gumi, Sound Castle Yoshizaka SCY-27

Minoru Miki

Danses Concertantes I [Minoru Miki Selected Works I], Camerata 32CM-54 (1988)
John Kaizan Neptune


Riley Lee

*Water Music.* Tall Poppies Label TPO33 (1992)

*Breath Sight.* TPO15 (1992)

*Bamboo Grass.* TP102 (1997)

*Empty Sky.* TP118 (1998)

*Autumn Field.* TP138 (1999)

*Deep Night.* TP151 (2000)

Christopher Yohmei Blasdel


Torù Takemitsu

*November Steps.* Kinshi Tsuruta, biwa; Katsuya Yokoyama, shakuhachi. Toronto Symphony Orchestra; Seiji Ozawa, cond. RCA LSC-7051 (1968)

*Requiem for Strings,* Nippon Columbia CO 79441 (1992)

Somei Satoh

*Sun/Moon.* New Albion Records 69 (1994)

Katsuya Yokoyama


*Japanese Traditional Shakuhachi II.* Ongakunotomosha OCD0950 (1998)

**Appendix B**

**Japanese Music Web Sites and Contacts**

Blasdel, Christopher Yohmei (shakuhachi performer)
URL address: www2.gol.com/users/yohmei
e-mail: yohmei@gol.com

International Shakuhachi Society
URL address: http://www.komuso.com/
Japanese Music Institute of America
URL address: http://www.jmia.org

Lee, Riley (shakuhachi performer)
URL address: www.rileylee.net
e-mail: riley@rileylee.net

Levenson, Monty (shakuhachi maker)
URL address: www.shakuhachi.com
e-mail: monty@shakuhachi.com

Neptune, John Kaizan (shakuhachi performer)
URL address: http://www.pacificsites.com/~jneptune/
e-mail: jneptune@awa.or.jp

Mejiro Shakuhachi Shop
URL address: www.mejiro-jp.com
e-mail: access@mejiro-jp.com

Minoru Miki (composer)
URL address: www.m-miki.com
e-mail: m-miki@mtb.biglobe.ne.jp

Tetsuya Nozawa (shamisen player)
URL: http://www016.upp.so-net.ne.jp/nozawa-kun/
e-mail: noza@jc5.so-net.ne.jp

Bibliographic references

Listed here is a bibliography of resources on Japanese music and Japanese musical aesthetics written in English.


Miki, Minoru. “The Role of Traditional Japanese Instruments in Three Recent Operas.” *Perspectives of New Music* 27, no. 2 (1989), 164-175.


Neptune, John Kaizan. *Shakuhachi*  
Published privately by the author in 1979. A basic manual for those interested in Tozan-style shakuhachi.


**Scores**


