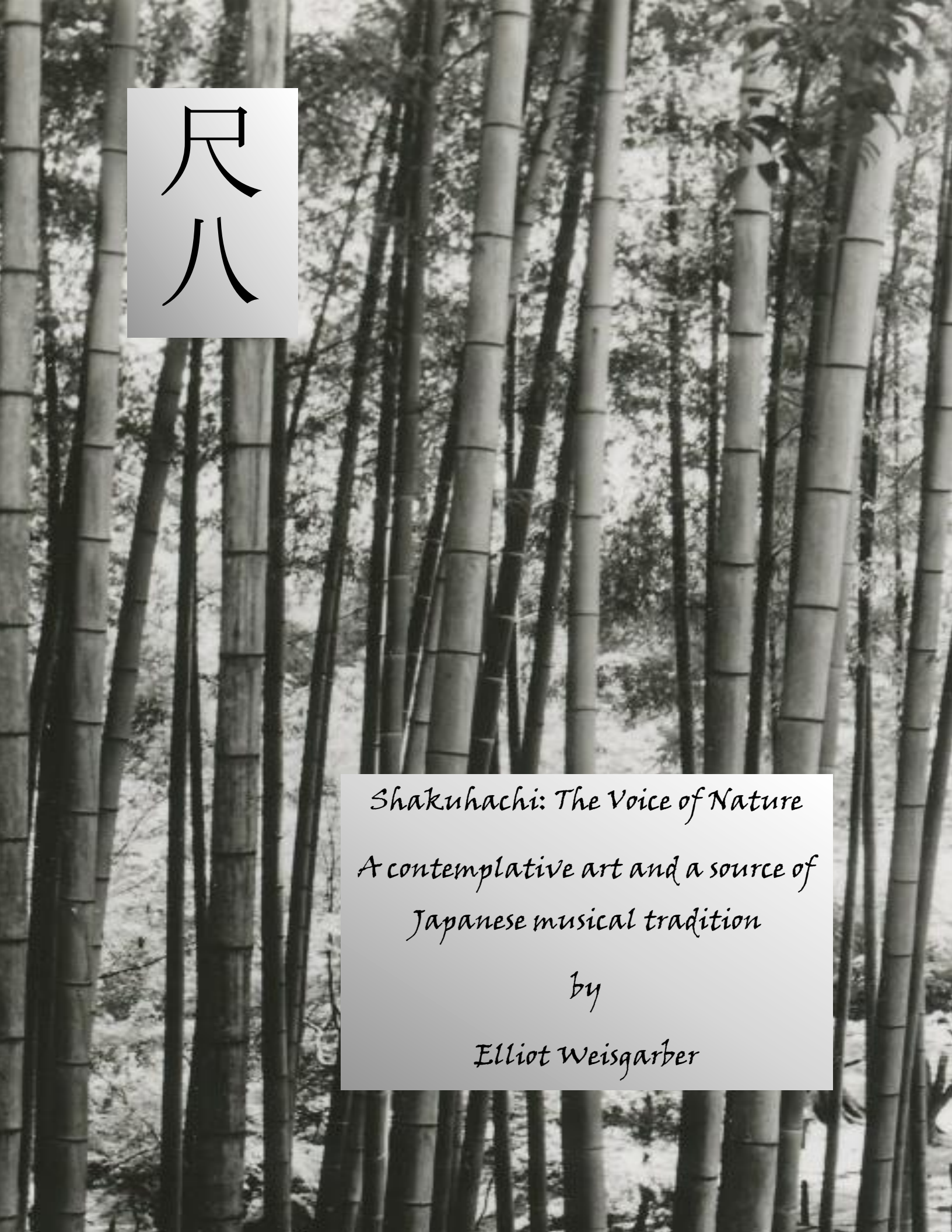

Shakuhachi: The Voice of Nature

A contemplative art and a source of Japanese musical tradition

by

Elliot Weisgarber

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in recognition of the 100th Anniversary of Elliot Weisgarber's birth

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Cover Photo: Bamboo in the garden at Saihō-ji (Koke-dera), Kyoto

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GUIDE TO JAPANESE PRONUNCIATION

Pronunciation of Japanese names and words is easily and predictably represented by Roman letters. Note that ALL letters are sounded (e.g. sake = "sah-keh"; Fuke-shū sounds like "Foo-keh shoo"). A line above a vowel indicates that it be held for a longer time. (A long "o" is sometimes, although rarely, written with an "h" (e.g. *noh*). Consonants are sounded very closely to the way they are spoken in English; a double consonant indicates that vocalization is stopped briefly on the consonant. "Sesshū" = "Sesh (hold the 'sh')-oo". A "t" followed by "ch" results in the tongue being held briefly in the "t" position (e.g. "Itchō" = "ee (hold the "t")-chō".

Vowels are pure with no diphthong: a = ah e = eh i = ee o = oh u = oo

Acknowledgments

This book could never have come into existence without the assistance and support of many individuals and organizations on both sides of the Pacific Ocean. I shall forever be in their debt, and to all of them I offer my deepest thanks. For their continued financial assistance during the years spent preparing the manuscript I am grateful to both the Canada Council and to the President's Committee on Research of the University of British Columbia.

In the United States, Tatsuya Araki (Araki Kodō V) of Seattle, Robert Garfias of the University of Washington, and William P. Malm of the University of Michigan were especially helpful at the outset of this project and encouraged me with their continued interest as it progressed. In Vancouver, Sadayoshi Aoki and Keiko Takahashi rendered assistance in checking my translations of old documents.

In Japan, Shigeo Kishibe of Tokyo University, composer and koto performer Shinichi Yuize, Abbot Eun Hiraizumi of the Meian Temple in Kyoto, Masayuki Asada of Matsudo City, Akira Matsuda and Michiko Tsuda of Kyoto, Messrs. Okuda, Uemura and Hirano of the Ōbaku-san Dōjō, Mr. H. Wakahira, Historian for Uji city and Tatsuya Ishiguro of Kyoto: all gave generously of their time and help.

Although I am not a member of the Tozan school, no group of individuals could have been more generous than the leaders of that large and famous school of shakuhachi playing. Tozan Nakao II of Kyoto, son of the great founder of the school, took an interest in this book from the outset and made available to me many important documents. He also introduced me to numerous other individuals to whom I could turn for information and assistance. I am particularly indebted to Yamamoto Hozan of Tokyo for teaching me a few of the Tozan school's original pieces. Takahira Dōzan of Kobe, Miyoshi Genzan of Kyoto, and the late Hoshida Ichizan of Osaka also were unsparing in their time and knowledge.

To Ueda Kōichirō, professor emeritus of Kyoto University, I am deeply indebted for having taught me much about the nature of bamboo, the material from which all shakuhachi are made. It was also Dr. Ueda who introduced me to Kitahara Kōzu, a

distinguished maker of Tozan shakuhachi. Mr. Kitahara and his assistants generously opened their workshop to me, allowing me to observe and photograph the complicated processes involved in the making of a shakuhachi. Iida Sesshū II, one of the few great remaining makers of Kinko-school shakuhachi also permitted me to watch him at work and to photograph, step-by-step, a shakuhachi being made.

In a special category, indeed sharing in the dedication of this book, I must include my long-time friend and mentor Tanaka Motonobu (Yūdō), without whose help, faith, and tireless instruction I could have done nothing. Takafuji Emo of Kyoto cheerfully gave me lessons in playing the shakuhachi of the Meian tradition and also recorded for me many of the Komusō pieces. I am deeply indebted to him, as I am to Hayakawa Ikutada for his friendship and his willingness to share with me his encyclopaedic knowledge of Japanese culture. To Mrs. Hiroyuki Ōkubo (née Keiko Kodama) I owe measureless gratitude for her help as translator, for her tact and skill in keeping an absent-minded man's schedules in order, and most of all for her belief in my work. She helped me in every conceivable way.

Finally, to my wife Beth I owe perhaps the most of all. She endured my long absences while I carried out my research in Japan. She read the many drafts through which this manuscript passed, offering invaluable criticisms and suggestions. And she attended the birth pangs that accompanied the writing of this book with unfailing patience and understanding.

Elliot Weisgarber

EDITOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are no words to adequately express my gratitude to Edward Fowler, retired professor of Japanese Literature at the University of California, Irvine and Yukari Fowler, his wife. These two wonderful and knowledgeable people spent hours going over this manuscript correcting errors and providing many insights and suggestions. Without their help my father's work would still continue its long sleep in dusty boxes.

Additionally, I owe a deep debt of thanks to their friend Kōjirō Umezaki, Associate Professor of Music at the Claire Trevor School of the Arts, University of California, Irvine. As well as freely giving of his knowledge of the shakuhachi world he assisted me in tracking down several pieces of important reference material.

Karen Suzanne Smithson, editor & daughter of the author

Forward to the 2019 Weisgarber Centenary Edition

Better late than never; so the saying goes. Nearly fifty years have passed since Elliot Weisgarber penned this lovely tribute to the instrument and art with which he fell in love in his middle years.

To see the completion of this project had been an important goal, and the eventual failure of the book to go to press was one of the biggest disappointments of his life. It had been in the works since at least 1968 when his scholarly article "Shakuhachi Music of the Kinko-ryū" was published in *Ethnomusicology, Journal of the Society for Ethnomusicology, Inc*. Bolstered by the international recognition this article received he set out to share his discoveries about the shakuhachi in its context of Japanese art and life in a less technical way for musicians and interested lay persons. He engaged the Tokyo publishing house of John Weatherhill, Inc. to produce a book.

In 1971 when the editing of the manuscript was underway the publishing company put forward the idea of creating a three-part boxed set consisting of a book (originally entitled *The Flute Music of Zen*), a collection of transcriptions of shakuhachi music playable by western instruments, and a recording of the works mentioned in the text. Sadly, this was not to be, nor was the work to appear in any form at all.

In January 1975 after several months with no word, Weisgarber received a letter from Weatherhill detailing the financial constraints under which the publishing company found itself, the root cause being the skyrocketing inflation which had struck Japan. Caught between runaway costs of production and the impossibility of charging

commensurate prices for its finished books, the company was simply unable to sustain the production of such a specialized publication.

It was a stunning blow administered with apparently no warning. The evidence of Weisgarber's years of dedicated effort toward the production of this book — three complete manuscripts in various stages of editing, many envelopes of photographs, drawings, charts, and musical transcriptions (all returned to him by Weatherhill at the end of May 1975) — were consigned to a box and stored in his basement.

After my father's death at the end of 2001 I embarked on a new life's work, to make sure that his creations were made available to the public. For the better part of sixteen years I focused my attention on his musical compositions which comprise a catalogue of nearly 450 works. In the summer of 2017, with fire raging in the forests of British Columbia and smoke filling our usually pristine air, I was jarred into the realization that my very perishable house was filled with my father's even more perishable papers. I decided to take an immediate break from the musical scores (most of which exist elsewhere in multiple copies) and begin work on his literary achievements. I have been richly rewarded with a visit to my own childhood memories in addition to discovering and rediscovering my father's profound love and knowledge of his subject.

In the decades that have passed since Weisgarber completed his book, time has marched on in Japan just as it has everywhere else. Much of what he describes as "today" is long, long gone. This book should be regarded as a "time capsule" of what was taking place in the Japanese artistic world in the late 1960s and early '70s. It is also the observation of but one man. Others may have seen things differently. Readers who know Japan well and have been there in more recent years may enjoy determining whether or not Weisgarber's predictions for the "future" of Japanese music have proved true.

At the time my father was writing, there was little available in English on his subject. Now there are books and websites galore. Without a doubt these contain more comprehensive shakuhachi fingering charts and better photos and illustrations than

those supplied here. The great value of this work is in the depth of the personal experience that underpins it, rendering it an autobiographical snapshot of the study undertaken by a pioneer in the field.

Notes on Style and Formatting

Aided by a suggested "Table of Contents" apparently created by the editor at John Weatherhill, Inc., this 2019 "Weisgarber Centenary" edition of *Shakuhachi: The Voice of Nature* was created from an amalgam of the final two drafts of Weisgarber's work.

My task to date is solely the presentation of the book's printed text and illustrations. The twenty-four *honkyoku* transcriptions into western musical notation have not been included here but the music may be found (under the title *The Flute Music of Zen*) at the Archives of the University of British Columbia. Recordings to accompany the text were never made but some of the music discussed can be found on commercial recordings and on the Internet. Use of these resources will greatly enhance the reader's experience.

In the near half century that has elapsed since the writing of this book, Western society has become accustomed to the practice in many cultures (including the Japanese) of placing a family name prior to an individual's given name. As this fact was not so well-known at the time of his writing, some of the names mentioned in Weisgarber's book were originally given in Western style. To avoid confusion, I have altered these so that all Japanese names now appear with family name first. (An exception is made in the Acknowledgments and Dedication.)

The suffix "*ji*" attached to certain proper nouns means "temple". The first appearance of this term in Chapter 1 is written redundantly as "Seiryō-ji Temple". I have omitted the word "Temple" in all subsequent mentions of temples.

Japan and its culture, arts, and language have become much more familiar to the world in the years since the early 1970s. It will seem odd to read, for example, about the language being written in "characters" when the Japanese word *kanji* is now well known.

This book was written with a lay-person in mind; nonetheless some technical aspects of the instrument are presented in Chapter 6. Those who peruse the charts will be introduced to some basics of Japanese musical terminology and will have an opportunity to learn and memorize some of the symbols that are used in Japanese musical notation. The charts have been transcribed as faithfully as possible from Weisgarber's manuscript originals which were often difficult to read. In addition, the hand-written notation style was not possible to reproduce. The notation is presented in the charts here solely in printed style. Examples of cursive script can be seen in the musical examples in Weisgarber's hand which follow later in Chapter 6.

While Japanese words and terms (other than proper names) are generally italicized throughout the otherwise English text, the word "shakuhachi" is never italicized due to its centrality as the primary subject of the work.

The photographs that sparsely illustrate this text were originally meant to be supplemented by photos from the publisher's library. Those used here were selected (and captioned) by me from amongst the dozens taken, specifically for the book, by Weisgarber and by Tanaka Yūdō. Those not included can be found at the UBC Archives.

The current presentation is but a shadow of what was originally intended by its author. Be that as it may, I think he would be delighted that it has, at last, come to light. As the person who handled Weisgarber's manuscript for the final time before being made public I take full responsibility for any errors that remain.

Karen Suzanne Smithson, editor, & daughter of the author

Kelowna, B.C., Canada, March 2019

明暗

Myóan or Meian?

References are made throughout this book to the Kyoto temple that was home to the shakuhachi-playing sect of Zen monks known as the *Fuke-shū*. The name of this temple is written 明暗寺 in Japanese and can be rendered in Roman letters either as "Myōan-ji" or "Meian-ji." There is some disagreement in regard to which pronunciation should be considered correct, or if, in the end, it is simply a matter of personal preference.

I have been advised that any appearance of the kanji 明 in association with Buddhism would almost invariably be pronounced "myō." But I have also heard [see myoanshakuhachi.blogspot.com/2015] that "myō" is simply an older reading, "mei" having been adopted at a later time.

During the 1960s and 70s when Weisgarber was immersed in his shakuhachi study he corresponded with numerous Japanese musicians (shakuhachi players among them) who wrote to him primarily in English. As far as I have been able to determine, wherever the name of the temple is mentioned in this body of correspondence it appears as "Meian."

Nowadays, although both usages are seen, there seems to be a return to a preference for "Myōan", the older, possibly more authentic, reading of the *kanji*. Nonetheless, I have chosen to retain Weisgarber's usage of "Meian" since it is by this name that he came to know the temple and its music in his day.

K.S.S., editor

A Retrospective Preface

This small book has been written with the hope of sharing a beautiful, remote, and seldom visited corner of the world's music. It has been a labour of love, for it has grown out of feelings of identification with a place full of historical and personal memories. It is the result of a deep and intimate adventure in an alien culture, an adventure not lacking in loneliness and frustrations but one of inestimable value and reward.

The shakuhachi and its music occupy a very special place in the hearts of Japanese people. Indeed, learning to play the instrument offers the outsider a fine starting point for a journey into the world of Japanese aesthetics, for the shakuhachi is rich in all kinds of references: natural, musical, and poetical. In the deepest traditional sense, every gesture in Japanese art and life can be seen as some kind of symbolic representation. The shakuhachi has attained a position of great symbolic significance, an indication of just how profound is the evocative, Orphic quality of Japanese music.

At one time in my life, I made my home in Kamakura, an ancient Japanese city about twenty-five miles south of Tokyo. Commuting almost daily to the capital, I would ride on the Yokosuka Line train that serves Kamakura and other towns on the Miura Peninsula. Its tracks pass today through a region of unbroken industrial horror. Steep, once forested hillsides have been brutally sliced away to accommodate the ugly concrete apartment houses that seem to sprout daily to defile the landscape. Factories and refineries spew their poisons into the atmosphere, and rubble litters the banks of the few remaining rice paddies. The clear streams that once flowed down the hills to water the paddies have been transformed into clogged, open sewers. One's eyes search in vain for a single redeeming feature. Can such a landscape hold any place for the tranquil, sylvan quality evoked by the sound of the shakuhachi?

Yet, often I would find myself in conversation with the man sitting next to me on the train, one of the middle-aged gentlemen who commute regularly between the residential towns around Kamakura and their offices in Tokyo. Whenever I mentioned that I was interested in shakuhachi music and could even play the instrument I would see my

companion's eyes suddenly light up. He was surprised, of course, for any foreigner who would take the time to learn one of the native arts — and especially one so uniquely Japanese as shakuhachi playing — is indeed an object of curiosity. There may also have been a twinge of national pride as well. But in the reaction of these chance acquaintances I began to detect something that transcended mere curiosity or nationalistic feelings. Perhaps it was my imagination but our conversation about shakuhachi seemed to jar my traveling companion into a momentary confrontation with his own past and that of his culture, setting in motion in his mind a long train of associations.

Other musical instruments in the Japanese tradition would doubtless have much the same effect, but for some indefinable reason the shakuhachi seems to possess particularly strong evocative powers. In unguarded moments, even younger Japanese, who often confess that they know nothing of their traditional arts, will admit to a special feeling for the shakuhachi not unlike that expressed by my older companions. I remember well a young Japanese business executive I met in Canada telling me that the thing he was most homesick for was the sound of a shakuhachi being played somewhere in the neighbourhood as he walked home from the station in the evening.

Much of the shakuhachi's appeal is due, no doubt, to its long association with Buddhism. Indeed, the Japanese find qualities in the sound of the instrument that evoke a sense of the fleeting transience of worldly existence and a perception of the essential sadness of all things. And, it may well be that yet another part of its appeal lies in what the Japanese feel to be its remarkable "naturalness", another ideal deeply rooted in the Japanese aesthetic tradition.

Out of a love of simple, plain things (outwardly simple, perhaps, but how profoundly complex!) has emerged the wide range of Japanese arts — arts which seem to deny themselves by their very artlessness and yet encompass a sense of total awareness of nature. Architecture, garden design, dwarf-tree culture, music, ceramics, the tea ceremony, and many other arts — all these diverse elements have been brought together to form a splendid expression of unity. It is this sense of the oneness of all, of Man at peace with himself and his environment, which is the main premise of the Japanese aesthetic view of

the world. Unfortunately, the depredation of the Japanese landscape in recent years often obscures the fact that there has always been a reverence for the natural world deep in the Japanese spirit.

A dichotomy and a question: modern life consumes and destroys the earth while traditional life reveres and preserves it. Far in the past there was a profound sense of unity of man and nature; the primitive religious impulses of the Japanese (later embodied in Shintō) peopled rocks and trees, rivers and mountains, with benign spirits. Are any such feelings still alive in Japan today?

Here rests the myth of the shakuhachi.

The music of the shakuhachi can never be studied successfully in a carrel hidden away in a corner of a library or in a record room with headphones clamped over one's ears. Even in Japan this would be impossible. There, too, historical documents become quite superfluous in a place where (despite the modern environmental damage) the past lives in the present, and time and space are one.

Strolling through the back streets of Kyoto, one can learn more in a walk of a quarter-mile than all the carefully documented tomes can ever teach. On such a walk the careful observer will encounter sights, sounds, and gestures as real today as they were eight hundred years ago.

And so it is with the old shakuhachi *honkyoku* (the original compositions preserved intact and practiced by the various schools of shakuhachi) and with the music of *noh* and *gagaku*, to name but a few styles. There is no need of a musical archaeology, no need to pick over the dusty remains of a dead past in a diligent attempt to piece together a mute performance practice in the way we, in the West, try to reconstruct the music of the Middle Ages. Instead, one approaches the ancient arts of Asia in the dimension of a living present, not of a long extinct past.

However, this, too, is changing. The nature of present-day life in Japan, plus the highly exclusive manner in which the traditional arts are imparted, have steadily limited their practice (although both *gagaku* and *noh* continue to show amazing vitality). Their

popularity could increase should the present indications of renewed pride in the Japanese past swell to greater proportions in the future. The prospects for shakuhachi music, however, do not seem so promising: the priestly tradition of the *Komusō* which fostered shakuhachi playing in Japan almost from the beginning, appears to be nearing its end and the *Kinko* school exists mainly as a highly exclusive association. Perhaps mine is an overly pessimistic view, but it seems quite possible that the practice of both Komusō and Kinko *honkyoku* will have disappeared from Japan by the end of this century.

In the sort of paradoxical situation that has grown quite familiar in the realm of cultural exchange between East and West, shakuhachi *honkyoku* are beginning to be heard outside of Japan with increasing frequency, particularly in North America. In 1969, a shakuhachi recording of two Kinko *honkyoku* performed by Yamaguchi Gorō was released in the United States under the title *Bell Ringing in an Empty Sky* (mis-translated from the title of one of the pieces, *Kokū Reibo*). It has proved amazingly popular.

Such interest is on the increase in the West. I must confess that, at first, I attributed the phenomenon to the current fascination of young people all over North America with elements of the occult, as well as with Zen Buddhism. Indeed, the bestselling *Last Whole Earth Catalogue* contains a long advertisement-cum-article on certain shakuhachi-like instruments made by a young man in the San Francisco Bay area. In Berkeley, another young man showed me some real shakuhachi he had made which were quite pleasurable to play despite the lack of depth and subtlety so characteristic of the Japanese prototype. More significant is the fact that these instruments seem to be enjoying wide sales.

Yet something is missing. The shakuhachi is, after all, a Japanese instrument. It "speaks" a Japanese musical language; none other. But here we encounter another of the paradoxical situations which continually plague us. Wherever I play the old *honkyoku* before large audiences of non-Japanese, the enthusiastic response never fails to astonish me. What I first feared would be rather exotic and heady fare turns out to be surprisingly accessible to Western listeners.

A week seldom passes without my receiving letters and telephone calls from people of widely scattered locations and varied occupations who express interest in shakuhachi

music. Invariably, they want to know where they can obtain instruments and music written in Western notation; many flutists and recorder players ask for shakuhachi music to try playing on their own instruments. To me, such positive response is an indication of the universal appeal at the heart of shakuhachi music. This is something that the Japanese themselves have never really considered.

*[**Editor's note**: The following two paragraphs have been preserved but the transcriptions themselves are no longer included in the appendices. Perhaps one day there will be an opportunity to publish them also. Please see "Editor's Forward".]*

In an appendix to this book may be found transcriptions of a representative body of Komusō and Kinko shakuhachi music. These are intended as performance editions for the modern flute or recorder. It is hoped that they will convey something of the spirit of a great musical culture. They have been realized in the crucible of performance and they stem from a deeply felt belief that the ***practice*** of an art is, in the words of Robert Frost, far more salutary than ***talk*** about it.

During the years spent learning the music transcribed in this book, I was often frustrated by the feeling that everything was being seen as if through a heavy mist or through the eyes of a swimmer deep under water. At times it seemed unthinkable to try to bring up into the clear sunlight the wonderful things I had found in the depths, for I feared they might wither and die upon exposure. This book was begun, dropped, and begun again as I was plagued by many moments of self-doubt. Yet my conviction of the value of the music itself ultimately overcame all my doubts, and the transcriptions are the result.

In any traditional medium, the native Japanese performer experiences few difficulties. Perfecting his skill may require the greater part of his lifetime, but initially, at least, the Japanese art he is beginning to learn seems as natural to him as his language. The foreigner, however, brings to his study of Japanese music all his experience in a culture where values are under constant pressure and are in the midst of the turmoil of violent change. I knew as I worked on this book, that I could represent only partially and brokenly the truth as it is seen by Japanese musicians. Still, I must be content with this inescapable imperfection.

Looking back over several years of involvement with shakuhachi music and particularly while reviewing the pages of this manuscript, I realize that many things have been omitted. I trust that my Japanese readers will forgive my neglecting the music of the *Tozan* school, especially the *honkyoku* composed by its founder Nakao Tozan. I ask the same indulgence for omitting the music of the *Ueda* school, the *Chikuho* and *Kikusui* schools, and the music of other smaller, local groups and sub-schools. With the exception of the four Tozan *honkyoku* I have learned, I have not had the opportunity to learn the music of the other schools. One cannot do it without a teacher … and life is brief.

Having worked with the music of both the Kinko school and the older Komusō priestly tradition, it has been my privilege to live close to the very roots of a very special culture. In the world of the shakuhachi, these two traditions form the foundation for all the elaborations and deviations that followed after them.

Aside from the need to provide context for the reader, in the melange of history, aesthetics, musical analysis, and personal experience which comprise this book, I have tried to keep the focus on shakuhachi music itself as far as possible. To most Western readers a deluge of detail and terminology would only create confusion and would probably be quickly forgotten; hence, much has been pared away. What remains is, I trust, a glimpse of a particular way of thought and idea of beauty, accompanied by an opportunity to experience a music that offers peace and solace in a troubled world.

Elliot Weisgarber

Vancouver, 1973

To the shakuhachi masters of Japan.
In a troubled time, may their
quiet voices endure.

Equally, this book is dedicated to
the memory of Kenji Ogawa
(1914-1970)
late professor of Japanese Language
at the University of British Columbia
and a true friend.
Without his faith and support
this book would not exist.

~ Elliot Weisgarber

CHAPTER I

THE POETICS OF JAPANESE MUSIC:

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE SHAKUHACHI AND ITS MUSIC

The Old Pond Revisited

Rain falls silently; and over the hills rising beyond the town, mist gathers in the thinning line of cedars that stride over the crest of Mount Atago.

Raindrops form ever widening circles in the muddy pond, gently rocking the drift of a few fallen petals. It is spring. The golden back of a carp flashes for an instant, disturbing the surface of the pond, and then is gone.

On the rain-circled surface, the reflection of an old temple crumbling away its years, already old by half a millennium when Columbus first sighted the "new" world. Along the long veranda leading from the temple's main hall to the living quarters, an old nun, head shaved and dressed in gray robes, glides slowly —ever so slowly — over the smooth wooden floor. She will not come this way much longer.

The rain, the mist on the mountain's crest, the drifting petals in the old pond, the quick flash of the carp: transient things — lost and gone. The crumbling temple, the aged nun — the old, the faded, the remote.

From beyond the weathered, towering Chinese gate a steam locomotive wails at a tunnel entrance. The lively songs of children at play in the kindergarten next door poignantly recall life's brevity. And to a lonely, displaced man far from home? His childhood, his past life — vanished like the sudden twist of the carp.

Standing there in the weed-grown courtyard of Seiryō-ji Temple in Saga, one is conscious of the endless web of history in which this place is caught. It is tied to all of Asia by the stretched threads of time reaching back through China, Mongolia and Tibet, to India and to the Alexandrian Greeks of Bactria.

Nowadays, one hears the shouts of schoolboys playing baseball in front of the weather-beaten old pagoda; and from the distance comes the high, sweet song of little girls in yellow straw bonnets, carrying school knapsacks as they troop along a path close by emperors in their eternal rest.

A time-haunted place.

Aesthetics

In my reminiscence I have tried to capture those states of feeling from which Japanese music — and poetry (its companion) — are seldom removed. A single word may convey a universe of illusion. One solitary tone can hold within its resonance a limitless world of meaning. In a word, these are the classic states of Japanese feeling.

Few Japanese are ever satisfied with a foreigner's definitions of their own aesthetic vocabulary. Indeed, representations in words in the Japanese language are also inadequate, for the concepts are understood tacitly, without verbalization. Yet, in spite of the difficulties of translation, there are ways of expressing the Japanese concepts in terms of their universality.

One term, critical to the Japanese aesthetic vocabulary is *mono-no-aware* (物の哀れ) meaning sadness or pathos — the "ah-ness" of things — like the catch in the throat at the glimpse of a beautiful girl in a crowd or the call of a favourite bird in a quiet lane, or when a fragrance stirs a beloved memory. The transient nature of things is a deeply felt Buddhist notion; the ineffable sadness all men have felt but could not name.

Then there is *sabi* (寂び). This term carries us into a richly complex world of meanings and allusions. One of the more detailed and unusual ideograms used to represent it (閑寂) suggests profound quietude and simplicity; another representation (古色) means "rust, patina, or the appearance of natural ageing."

As I write these words, the image of the quiet garden of Jakkō-in passes across my mind. I see the little convent hidden in the hills above Ōhara, north of Kyoto. The graying timbers of the ancient buildings are shaded by maples that grow thickly up the slopes from

the tranquil valley of rice fields below. There — in a stillness broken only by the gentle murmur of a miniature waterfall, the splash of a carp, or the drone of insects on a summer day — stands Jakkō-in, the Temple of Solitary Light, locked in time by the memories of its own poignant story.

After the epoch-making sea battle at Dan-no-ura where the Heike Clan was defeated by the Genji, the only survivor of her family was Kenreimon'in, a daughter of the great Heike leader Kiyomori. Born in 1155, she was the widow of the Emperor Takakura who died in 1181, and was the mother of the infant emperor Antoku who perished in the waves of Dan-no-ura. Kenreimon'in was brought back to Kyoto by the victors and at the age of twenty-nine she entered the Chōraku-in convent. When this holy place was destroyed by an earthquake a few months later, she went north into the hills to Jakkō-in. There, in a place that is hardly changed from those days eight centuries ago, Kenreimon'in lived out her remaining years.

I write all this because it serves to point up the richness of allusion contained in a single word in a culture based on feeling. *Sabi* suggests quiet, loneliness, the peace of death. The same characters can also be read "*jaku*" (寂) in which case it refers specifically to the death of a Buddhist priest. It is the first character in the name of Jakkō-in(寂光院). At the same time, this melancholy meaning merges easily with the other meaning of *sabi*: the quality of age, a faded, rusty patina. If there is any boundary between the two realms of meaning it is very dim. Everything interlocks. There are no separations or exclusive definitions here. When the Japanese think of the feeling suggested by *sabi* or see one of its characters written on a page, they are assaulted by related associations in an endless web of historical and cultural overtones.

Related to the double meaning of *sabi* is yet another quality — *wabi* — a taste for things plain and subdued as well as an intuitive sense of the loneliness of a human being in nature. *Wabi* is a concept pervading much of traditional life and culture.

Finally, we come to *yūgen*, perhaps the strangest and most elusive of all Japanese aesthetic qualities. In the dictionary, its definitions refer to the mysterious, the occult, the

subtle, and the profound. For the Japanese, the *noh* drama is the quintessential realm of *yūgen*. For them, the word defies definition in Western terms. It seems to signify the power contained in a single word, sound, or event, a power that can reveal a world of experience beyond experience. Perhaps it is this that is at the very heart of all the wordless power of music to move men's souls.

The arts of a civilization do not exist singly or in isolation from each other. Nor can they be dissected, their component elements investigated and analyzed, without first placing them in the context of the culture which gave them birth. Following a purely objective path, asking only the questions "How?" or "What" will lead only to a very partial answer. We may often have the opportunity to examine one or another detail of a culture, making perceptive, often valuable, observations and generalizations. But, for the most part, that is as far as we can go in understanding or evaluating the entire culture on the basis of one, isolated element within it. It is rather like trying to comprehend the vastness of the Pacific Ocean by testing a few drops of its water in a laboratory two thousand miles from its shores.

But we can also ask a very different sort of question: "Why? Why does a culture choose one particular set of aesthetic symbols and not another?" There may be no precise answer forthcoming, but now, at least, we are asking the proper question. We are on the right road, and it brings us to an entirely different region. We have opened a gate and have passed through toward a vantage point overlooking an endless panorama of dreams, of myths, of racial memories — things which even the ablest of us, even the most analytical, are incapable of understanding fully.

The Western mind has long been driven by a need to classify and to analyze everything it encounters. This motivation has led to some of the finest products of Western civilization as well as to some of the worst. Since Aristotle, there has been a preoccupation with an objectivity that scrutinizes the arts of man as if they were palpable things, things easily investigated and susceptible to rational explanations. A kind of Puritan guilt seizes us when we find ourselves unable to perform the job. Unwittingly, we find ourselves stricken with a paralysis of intuition — the affliction which once made all ideas conform to

theological dogma, or to rationality at a later time, or, in a still later age, to political ideology. In the West, music has moved farther and farther into a world of its own where unique systems of aesthetics developed and expanded. But now, in an era of cultural crisis, the West is rediscovering the East and it is becoming possible to believe that the intuitive processes may once again assume their lost part in our lives.

The Japanese musician offers to his counterpart in the West an alternative perception. In sharp contrast to the traditional Western view of music as something essentially abstract, intellectual, and removed from the world around it, is the view expressed by a man like Tanaka Motonobu (Yūdō), shakuhachi master of the Kinko school. "We play the shakuhachi differently from a Westerner playing his instrument," he says. "The instrument, the sound, and the player all return to nature." Such an attitude suggests a unity of nature, a oneness so deeply felt that it allows an instrument like the shakuhachi to evoke images of wind blowing through groves of bamboo and pine, or distant waves breaking on cliffs, of the stillness of a moonlit night in a remote mountain valley.

"When I play late at night," Tanaka continues, "or somewhere deep in the mountains, I fall easily into nothingness. When this happens, I ask myself, 'Why do I remain here? Where is my home?' My mind wanders in the universe and I do not know that I am here on this earth." This direct, moving statement is the very essence of the art of shakuhachi playing and of all the other Japanese arts that are contemplative, Buddhist in nature, and shaped by the artist's life experience.

Again, it is Tanaka who says, "We are natural beings and the sound we make from such material as bamboo is inherently natural." What does he mean? Surely, the pine and maple used in the construction of a Stradivarius violin is no less "natural" than the bamboo of a shakuhachi. Indeed, what could be more "natural" than a horsehair bow drawing sound from gut strings? He is speaking of an entirely different order of "nature", of concepts about the Universe, of a religious faith utterly unlike our own, of a vastly different aesthetic outlook; and he is speaking from a system of ethics and aesthetics shaped by a totally different social experience.

The gentle pessimism and willing poverty expressed in *mono-no-aware*, *sabi*, and *wabi*, along with the inter-stellar spaces of the mind suggested by *yūgen*, are concepts born of the Buddhist spirit. Although such pessimism is not necessarily a native Japanese attitude, and although the Japanese have always preferred a simpler form of Buddhism to the highly esoteric sects imported from China and Korea, the mark left on the national character by the Buddhist outlook remains very strong.

The early religions born on the plains of India evolved out of a world at the mercy of natural forces beyond the control of Man. In a region dominated by the monsoon, where natural disasters brought about by famine and pestilence were matters of course, it is not hard to understand why there developed religions that sought ways leading to acceptance of a difficult lot, religions to help Man endure all hardship. It also seems natural that there was not created an all-powerful God cast in Man's image, but rather a concept wherein Creator and Destroyer were one and the same being. Man was viewed as trapped in endless cycles of existence, which was represented as a monstrous wheel, forever revolving and forever in the process of rebirth into hopelessness. Man is born and perishes and civilizations rise and fall in endless cycles of growth and decay. Stars burn and explode; galaxies wheel about for a time before being lost in the Void. All the life of Man — his past, his present, and his future — is but a tick on the clock of Eternity.

Gautama Buddha recognized a way of escape from the dilemma of endless rebirth: Man must learn to free himself of his desires and passions. Having attained the enlightenment that comes with such supreme freedom, he could dissolve finally into the peace and quietude of Nothingness — Nirvana. When the player of the ancient works of shakuhachi music speaks of falling into Nothingness, ignorant of his position on earth, he touches upon the very heart of this concept. All this — the time-haunted sense of the impermanence of things, the knowledge of life's brevity and of the inevitable vanishing of the world — rests deep in the Japanese experience.

Thus the roots of shakuhachi reach profoundly into the soil of Buddhist philosophy. And deep as these roots go, they are forever entangled with other music inseparable from Buddhism. The prime musical source is *shōmyō*, the great body of chant nourished by the

Shingon and Tendai sects, which were the two most influential Buddhist groups during the Heian Period (794-1185). Deriving directly from *shōmyō* are narrative styles with *biwa* (lute) accompaniment, based on the tragic events of the twelfth century civil war. Later, during the Muromachi Period (1338-1573), the dramatic medium called "*noh*" produced a musical style in which elements of both *shōmyō* and its offspring in *biwa* music (see below) were assimilated. It was also at this time that the chant-based music of the Komusō —the iconic shakuhachi-playing mendicant priests — is believed to have originated.

Cultural Context

Music in Japan, as in other cultures, was subject to the shifts of social and political patterns. During the centuries of feudalism that followed the Genji victory at Dan-no-ura in 1185, the imperial court — once the source of all artistic achievements — faded into political insignificance and cultural decay. At the lowest point in the decline of the Kyoto aristocracy even emperors were forced to sell their calligraphy and poems in order to obtain meagre support for the impoverished court. Court music was dead, having lost any creative impulse that it once had, and survived only as a formalized accompaniment to prescribed rituals. The new elements which entered the stream of Japanese music after the Heian Period were no longer aristocratic and were developed away from the capital.

Most important of these new elements is the music derived from the narrative chanting and *biwa* playing by wandering priests. There are two primary sources for music played by the four-stringed lute called "*biwa*". One is the use of the *biwa* in the orchestral music associated with the imperial court known as "*gagaku*". It was the large *gagaku* lute which played a major role in the courtly life of the Heian aristocracy. There are numerous references to the *biwa* in Lady Murasaki's great novel *The Tale of Genji* and its use is depicted in the scroll paintings that illustrate *Genji* and other contemporary literary works.

The other source of the *biwa* tradition is far removed from the life of the court. In the remote Satsuma Peninsula at the southernmost tip of Kyushu a group of priests known as "Mōsō" (blind priests) carried on a long established tradition of *biwa* playing. In addition to their priestly functions, the Mōsō were known in the region as worthy magicians and

shamans. The magical powers of their music were in constant demand to drive away plagues, evil spirits, and inclement weather.


Biwa Player, by Hayakawa Ikutada

No consideration of the nature and the poetics of Japanese music can be complete without reference to the *biwa* style that derived from the music of the Mōsō. The chief use of the *biwa* during the feudal centuries was as accompaniment to the narrative chants relating to the fall of the Heike. The origins of the *Heike-biwa* style of performance are unclear, but during the thirteenth century it appears to have achieved a widespread popularity in Japan that transcended class distinctions. Different schools of performance arose in response to the differing tastes of various audiences. No doubt, the *Heike-biwa* chanters held the attention of their audiences during this period of political chaos and military upheaval by the pessimism underlying their tale of the tragic consequences of human pride.

Little *Heike-biwa* music remains today, and not much is known of its classical manner of performance. But as a purely Japanese art, devoid of any influences from the Asian continent, its powerful appeal to the Japanese imagination may still be seen in the plays of the *noh*, *kabuki* and *bunraku* repertoires as well as in countless independent poems in which music plays a part.

Toward the end of the sixteenth century when Japanese traders were engaged in commerce along the south China coast and the island chains of the southern seas, a curious new three-stringed, plucked instrument made its first appearance in Japan. Later coming to be known as the "*shamisen*" it was probably imported from the Ryukyu Islands by Buddhist priests of the "blind priest" *biwa* tradition. First regarded as a novel toy at best, the new instrument rapidly took hold of the popular imagination. It was not long before its shape was altered from the short-necked fingerboard and snakeskin-covered box of the Ryukyuan original to the long-necked, larger, cat-skin box of the familiar Japanese *shamisen*

that is still widely played today. Both necessity and aesthetics determined these changes in design; except for a small, poisonous variety found in the far south there are virtually no snakes in Japan. Moreover, the snakeskin box of the Ryukyuan model would not stand up under the steady impact of the large plectrum (called "*bachi*") that the *biwa*-playing priests carried over to the *shamisen* from their instrument. Indeed, the *biwa* influence over the adaptation of the *shamisen* appears to have been a matter of conscious choice. The new instrument was constructed in such a way as to preserve the characteristic buzz of the *biwa* tone, especially on the *shamisen*'s lowest string. The *shamisen* thus preserved the sonic memory of the older instrument that it came to supplant.

It was not long after its importation that the *shamisen* was passionately embraced by the energetic, merchant society that had emerged in the large cities of Edo, Kyoto, and Osaka. Forced to the bottom of the artificial social scale imposed by the Tokugawa shogunate and totally sealed off from the sources of political power, the merchants turned their huge wealth toward the creation of a lively urban culture. If wealth (which the merchants were amassing in quantity) was useless in achieving social status or political power, it could be converted into entertainment, amusement and physical comfort. In the lowly but rich world of Japan's seventeenth-century cities a wide range of new arts sprang into existence, and the *shamisen* became one of the most colourful voices of the flourishing urban society.

The centre of the new arts of the Japanese urban culture was the *irozato* or "pleasure district" in which developed a complex world of entertainment ranging from the *kabuki* and *bunraku* theatres to houses of prostitution. The seventeenth century saw the development of several types of *shamisen* performance associated with the theatre, as well as many types of accompaniment for shorter lyrical songs. The complex theatrical uses of the *shamisen* demanded enormous virtuosity on the part of the performers, recalling the powerful passage work that was a distinctive feature of the older *biwa* styles. In *bunraku*, for example, a single *shamisen* usually carries the entire burden of musical accompaniment, paralleling and supporting the many voices and emotions taken on by the single narrator. In the less taxing lyrical uses of the *shamisen*, particularly in *ko-uta and ha-uta* (genres of

short *shamisen* songs), the instrument was called upon to suggest the evanescence of life and the transitory quality of things that lay at the heart of these songs.

The transient nature of things was the obsession of rootless, volatile inhabitants of the *ukiyo* or "floating world", the allusive metaphor by which the society of the pleasure districts came to be known.[1] Many of the finest wood-block prints of the Edo Period (1603-1867) capture this quality of impermanence and were consequently called *ukiyo-e* ("pictures of the floating world"). The *shamisen* is the wood-block print in sound.

The poetry sung to *shamisen* accompaniment also catches much of the restless, rowdy, erotic spirit of the floating world. Almost every word of the poetry, as in other types of Japanese verse, sets in motion a complex series of allusions like the overtones set off by a resonating body. These allusions are often highly erotic. The following English translations[2] may serve as examples:

Waking Sounds (Ne-mimi)

Alone. Awaking suddenly, beckoned from sleep by the
Sound of the river flowing.
Is it the sea or the mountain?
Or is it the white thread of the waterfall
Splashing into its rocky bowl?

With even the deepest compassion,
With the depths of the heart's feeling;
Though we are one, is it not useless?
Your inconstancy makes all my hopes
Mere foam, floating on the wave's surface,
And, like the world, perhaps a dream.

Lingering Fragrance (Sode Kóro)

Spring night, in the wonder of the darkness,
The thatched roof is hidden by plum blossoms.
And, even now, the fragrance of aloe,

[1] Ed. Note: The word *ukiyo* (浮き世) written with different *kanji*(憂き世) is a homonym for a Buddhist term describing this sad, dismal world.

[2] Translations are by the author assisted by Keiko (Kodama) Ōkubo.

Lingers still in the sleeves worn by my lost love.
Oh! willow tree, green leaves, or crimson flowers:
they all wither, and the wild geese depart.

Sleeping in a Boat (Kajimakura, lit. "oars-pillow")

Spray drips from the oars, and on the shore
Stand bamboos, silent and unbending.
(Oh! loneliness and pain in that place!)

On this boat, how many nights
Have we spent here, our bodies clutched
Tightly to each other?

My sleeves — how wet they are!
The water that I wring from them,
Is it the morning dew dripping through the thatch,
Or spray flying from the oars,
Or tears?

Without speaking the sadness and loneliness in my heart
I live only to wander
Floating here on water.

Oh, beloved! Distant though our happiness be,
May our love endure as the motionless pine!
Oh, let us pledge ourselves
Forever to each other!

Then, then at last, I feel you close.
And fastening my heart in your hands,
I hold you for eternity.

In Japanese music there is an inseparable connection linking it with its medium. There is a fine sensitivity to sound quality, the nature of instrument construction being a constant reminder. Of course, this is true of Western music as well, but the infinitude of subtle expression has been explored in Asia to a degree not known by us. Each attack, each beginning of a tone, each ending, is an event summoning the full aural sense to awareness. In the case of the *shamisen*, for instance, the large tortoise-shell plectrum plucking the string in either direction produces an unforgettable variety of effects. When combined with the left-hand pizzicato, a whole world of sophisticated rhythmic activity results. Other effects include the slur produced by sliding the index finger of the left hand as it moves up

or down the fingerboard shifting from one point to another; or the lovely tone created by stopping a string without a stroke of the plectrum. No complicated factors like counterpoint distract the listener's attention from the immediacy of the sound.

The music of the *koto* (an instrument sometimes likened to the Western harp) offers yet another wealth of sound to be experienced and savoured. The *koto*'s strings are set in motion by ivory or plastic extensions of the fingernails of the thumb and first two fingers of the right hand. Plucking the strings results in an effect as impressive as the plectrum stroke on the *shamisen*, but different. When *koto* and *shamisen* are combined in the customary, quasi-unison, slightly out of tune (to the Western ear) texture, the resulting tone-colour has no comparable sound in any other music. On the *koto*, essential tone-colours and subtle rhythms are further enhanced by various methods of depressing or pulling the vibrating string with the left hand. Perhaps the most compelling of all *koto* effects takes place when the extended nail of the index finger begins a desiccated scratching on one of the higher pitched strings, followed by a sweep downward revealing the full resonance of the tuning, pre-determined by the placement of the moveable bridges.

It must be said here that it is not only sound that plays an important role in Japanese musical poetics; the visual element sometimes appears to be of equal importance. Indeed, the procession of bridges striding across the surface of the *koto* in the design created by the desired tuning is a lovely sight in itself.

Perhaps the most cogent example of the heightened Japanese sensitivity to sound (as well as to the visual appearance of music making) is to be seen in the remarkable quartet of instruments that makes up the *noh* ensemble: a short transverse flute and three drums. The *noh* flute produces strange and remote sounds, using an indefinite pitch that gives the music a quality perfectly appropriate to the unique dramatic style of the *noh* performance. The *ko-tsuzumi* (small, roped drum of hourglass shape) is held on the right shoulder and struck with three fingers of the right hand. Five sounds, ranging from a thin wavering tone to a rather sharp crack, can be obtained from the small drum, and all are used in *noh* music. The *ō-tsuzumi* (larger hand-drum, also of hourglass shape) is roped and capable of three remarkably different sounds. Finally there is the tightly roped barrel-

drum, the *taiko*, which is struck with two sticks whose tips are bevelled. Only three basic sounds are obtained from the *taiko*.

In addition to the sounds of the instruments, the traditional calls of the musicians (called *kake-goe*) give the music a hypnotic counterpoint. Finally, even the stage itself is "tuned" in order to take advantage of certain aural qualities. It is made of highly polished planks of the finest quality pine. Placed beneath it at several strategic points are large tubs of water that act as resonators for the stamping of the actors' feet.

A similar sensitivity to sound qualities is to be seen in the processions of festival dances associated with shrines all over Japan, in the music and chants heard at temples, and in the extraordinary ensemble of percussion instruments, bells, and flutes that produce the offstage musical accompaniment (known as "*geza*") in the *kabuki* theatre.

Turning now to the nature of musical structure, we must first examine the functioning of Japanese music within that essential dimension shared by all music: Time. Japanese music is punctuated by moments when all activity ceases and when sounds are allowed to die away, merging with silence. At such moments, it is the silence that becomes "audible". Anyone who has experienced a *noh* performance amidst the solemnly resonating surroundings of a classical *noh* theatre cannot have missed this phenomenon. It is an essential element in the shakuhachi *honkyoku* ("original pieces") of the Kinko school as well. Only relatively recently has such a use of silence found its way into Western music. Some of the writings of the American composer John Cage carry this natural Eastern concept to its extreme limits, even to the point of nonsense. Cage himself would no doubt agree. But in our music, silence has been employed in a rhetorical sense. Beethoven's use of silence, of pauses, is a good case in point. In Japanese music, silence is a matter of crucial concern to the poetics of the art, for it is used in a positive way as much as an absence of sound. Perhaps this feeling for silence in music is a natural outgrowth of Zen attitudes. Here, we can begin to see how music based on such an aesthetic can relate to the natural world that surrounds it.

The Japanese concept of musical time is expressed by the word "*ma*". Used in other contexts, the same word means "interval" or "period of time" and in a spatial context it

means “space, “room”, or “gap separating two objects”. But in music *ma* embraces all aspects of time: tempo, rhythm and metre, phrase structure, the attack and fading away of sounds, the opening out into the silence surrounding music.

This attitude toward musical time is related to another called “*jo-ha-kyū*”. Defined as “artistic modulations” the term refers to the process by which a musical thought begins slowly, gathers momentum through the use of connective passages of constantly increasing speed, and finally slows again.

It can be constructive to make a comparison between East and West in attitudes toward tempo within their respective eighteenth and nineteenth-century classical traditions. A movement of a Western classical symphony and a movement in a Baroque concerto, although differing in style, are grounded in similar aesthetic principles. Both will, for example, assume a particular tempo at the outset and will generally adhere to this initial tempo throughout, allowing for the natural variations and relaxations of speed that are found in any sensitive performance. But the tempo of the Edo-period piece depends upon radically different principles. Very different forces are in operation to control the course of the Japanese piece of music.

The Edo work will probably begin very slowly. After a reserved opening passage, the music begins to move — at first so gradually as to be almost imperceptible — faster and faster. As the pace steadily accelerates the music seems to ride along on its own momentum. Indeed, the word *nori* (riding) is used to describe this phenomenon. Then, as mysteriously as it gained speed, the tempo slows as the piece approaches its cadence. By this point, the music seems to have taken control of the performer, quite different from the case of Western music where the performer remains always in command.

Few experiences will illustrate for the Western musician the differences between Eastern and Western approaches to music as clearly as a rehearsal or private lesson of Japanese music. When he encounters a difficult passage, either while practicing alone or in an ensemble, the Western musician will work at it intensively until he has solved all the problems. The Japanese musician, however, will go back to the beginning of the piece and run through the whole once again rather than concentrating on the difficult passage.

Unable ever to escape my Western background and training entirely, I have frequently driven myself to exasperation trying to iron out a particular technical problem by constant repetition. The Japanese traditional musician rejects this method of practice, claiming that it only destroys the "feeling" of the music.

There are many reasons for this refusal to work intensively on isolated passages of a piece of music, and "feeling" is only one of them. More basic, perhaps, is the fact that the Japanese musician does not read notation in quite the same way as the Western musician. Written music is almost unnecessary to his training because most of what he has learned was taught to him by the traditional rote method. Melodic patterns are quite standardized, recurring again and again throughout the body of a particular musical style. Rhythmical patterns are designated by special sets of recited syllables. In addition, the succession of strong and weak accents at times becomes completely lost. This is especially true in *ji-uta*, the classical chamber music involving *koto*, *shamisen*, shakuhachi, and voice.

Japanese music exists within a special framework of limitations. The same can be said about all traditional music, of course, but compared with the music of Korea, for example, Japanese music seems particularly inhibited. The fixed, rhythmic patterns mentioned immediately above offer a good illustration. Recently, a set of my compositions for classical Japanese instruments was performed at a concert in Kyoto. Throughout the set, with the exception of one piece, I adhered rather closely to traditional practice. In that one piece (and elsewhere whenever any of the stereotyped rhythmic patterns were altered) the performers immediately had difficulty, although the more orthodox passages offered them no problem whatever. Their difficulties were cleared up with characteristically diligent rehearsing and my works were marvellously performed in the concert.

Paralleling the tendency to prefer restrained colours in art and design, Japanese choices of musical timbre are similarly restricted. Timbre tends to seem monochromatic. And yet, within a highly limited range, there exists a limitless world of subtleties.

Japanese music manages to get along with an astonishingly small amount of melodic material. The same, or very similar, elements recur almost to the point of boredom. And yet, again, this modest array of musical vocabulary is subjected to the most ingenious sort

of rhythmic treatment. What seemed monotonous at first turns out to be tremendously alive and varied.

In that Japanese music employs so restricted a range of choice, it is directly related to the way in which all the arts of this culture utilize their materials. Strict limitation in art and music are characteristic of a people who have learned to make do with — indeed to create beauty out of — very little. A musical composition may use only a few, small, basic elements in much the same way that a fine traditional meal (although elegantly served) may be composed of many dishes derived from one basic substance. A painter may spend his entire life painting only fish, just as the dedicated shakuhachi performer will be content to play only the highly circumscribed repertory of his school for years on end. In food or architecture, music or painting, the perspectives are limited. In other societies, in other geographical settings, things developed differently. Reflected in the arts of Japan are the limitations which the nature of the place, of time, and of the circumstances of life, imposed upon the patterns of the culture.

Ideally, Japanese music is meant to be heard in a quiet time and place — a time and place tranquil enough that the interstices of the music might be filled with other sounds of the natural world: the rustle of bamboo leaves in the wind, a distant bird call, the soft drip of rain falling on moss-covered stones. This is music to be heard not in an imposing concert hall but in a small building designed to blend with Nature, part of and sharing in its external surroundings rather than blocking them out. One searches in vain for such a place in modern Japan — or anywhere else.

Westerners attending concerts of traditional music for the first time are often shocked by the behaviour of Japanese audiences. People mill about while the concert is in session. Children run up and down the aisles. Clinging to their rose-coloured preconceptions, “Japanophiles” try to comfort themselves with the thought that it all must have been different in former times. But illustrations of the arts and amusements of the rowdy merchant world of the Edo era contradict their imaginings and reveal what was probably the truth. Food and drink vendors circulated freely among spectators at theatrical or musical performances. Members of the audience are pictured in varying stages of

inebriation or in boisterous conversation, appearing to ignore the efforts of those on stage who seem just as oblivious as them. Scenes like this should be familiar to us when we think of the audiences of Shakespeare's London and remember that attending concerts or the theatre was not always the solemn affair that it often is today.

Japanese traditional music bears the attentive listener into a world of deep but suppressed feeling. It is the emotional expression of an emotional people. Life has never been easy for the Japanese and they have been taught to accept things as they are. Growing up in a world controlled by the harsh morality of obligation, where hierarchies of status are sharply defined, they have learned to keep their emotions under careful control and not to allow them much overt display. Perhaps it is this very suppression that helped create the distilled intensity of feeling in Japanese music and drama.

Despite all the appalling evidence to the contrary, the peculiarly Japanese cult of the natural continues to survive in the modern world. Despite the rape of their once beautiful countryside by the forces of unbridled industrialism, there remains in the hearts of Japanese a sensitivity to Nature unequalled anywhere else in the world. But theirs is a view of Nature far removed from that of the West. Lacking entirely the exultation in the face of the great chaos of the natural world that underlies the Occident's view of Nature (expressed so exuberantly by our Romantic poets), the Japanese view Nature with very different eyes.

Nature is formalized — in a manner bearing no resemblance whatever to the geometric formalization of the Englishman's garden — and it is put into a box. The wildness of Nature is reduced to human scale and is brought into Man's back yard. In a single *bonsai* (miniature stunted trees planted in shallow trays and often placed in the vestibule of a Japanese house) may be found the same sort of concentrated evocative power suggested by the sound of a shakuhachi or *koto*. Japan's crowded cities with their postage-stamp-sized residential lots present a depressing vista to the Western observer. But the tenant does not feel himself impossibly restricted. He makes a tiny garden of moss, a few stones, some gravel, and a tiny, twisted pine — reminders or symbols of something wild and remote, far beyond the bamboo fence that blocks the ugliness and mutes the

nerve-jangling racket of the street. His garden may be tiny but it is only a smaller manifestation of the same spirit that created the serene moss garden of Saihō-ji or the strange, tumbled rocks of the Daisen-in garden in Kyoto. In both these temple gardens, the ingredients of the non-human world have been carefully and subtly balanced in an aesthetic environment of superb originality and eloquent expressiveness.

This sensuous bond between the Japanese and Nature comes from a time far more remote than Buddhism and the other imports from the Asian continent. This element in the Japanese character was never concerned with the endless cycles of growth and decay, the pessimism, or the vast cosmology of Buddhism. It recognized Man, at home on the earth, as fundamentally good, living gratefully in the midst of a bountiful world. Every sight and sound, each rock, tree, river, and mountain, bound him to his ancestors and to all the gentle, lovely world.

So much has been written about Zen and its connection with and influence on the arts of Japan that I hesitate to add more. But little or nothing has been written in the West concerning the relationship between Zen and Japanese music. In the case of the shakuhachi, that connection is a direct one. The great series of compositions constituting the fundamental repertory of the Kinko school is rooted firmly in the soil of Zen beliefs and attitudes.

That we have not given much thought to the relationship of Zen and music is due, perhaps, to the fact that the first wave of interest in Zen to sweep the West was confined to literature and the visual arts. Unfortunately, in the West the arts have come to occupy separate, sharply distinguished realms. Of course, music is always a particularly difficult subject to write about meaningfully. For these reasons, it remains Japan's least known art.

Zen's position has always been essentially anti-scholastic, emphasizing instead the value of direct experience. It seems far removed from the dark, awesome cosmology of esoteric Buddhism, and it seems unconcerned with matters of Heaven and Hell or with the remote Nirvana where the human spirit would merge, after many rebirths, into Nothingness. The major concerns of Zen involve the Here and Now and full awareness of

each moment and all that is in it. The arduous discipline of meditation was developed to focus the human soul on enlightenment, inner serenity, and the essential unity of all things.

The seeds of Zen, implanted by Chinese monks in the special soil of Japanese culture flourished and produced an extraordinary artistic harvest. Fresh influences from the continent merged with attitudes toward beauty and Nature that were natively Japanese, and a unique creativity resulted. Whatever had been the Chinese or Korean properties of Zen when it first came to Japan inspired arts that were wholly Japanese in character.

During the centuries of cultural assimilation when the arts and manners of the continent were being transformed, the Japanese courts of Nara and Heian saw a steady refinement of all the pristine, native Japanese feelings about Nature. During Heian times it was the fashion for courtiers to compose terse, highly stylized poems that revealed some aspect of nature and related it to a human emotion. Such sensuous experiences as moon-viewing, flower-viewing, firefly-watching, and incense-sniffing were favourite pastimes of the court, and though they tended to take on a quality of affected preciousness, parties were held to celebrate these activities. Poems were written on these occasions, and music also played an important role in heightening the senses. This was another of the foundations on which Zen was able to build its world of rarefied arts. It was an effort, an eminently successful one, to tame nature, to arrange its materials for the pleasure of man, while at the same time retaining a pure, natural, and un-tampered quality.

The moss garden at Saihō-ji on the western outskirts of Kyoto offers a perfect example of random elements of man-arranged sound producing a purely natural music. The garden itself provides the ideal setting: hushed and subdued, soft light filtering through lacy leaves to cast shimmering shadows on its old pond and on the thick, soft moss that covers the entire surface of the garden. The noise of traffic from the nearby road is muted by the trees and by the surrounding wall. The laughter of children on outings hangs in the silence. Sight and sound merge in a faintly gurgling stream that flows into the pond. A carp breaks the water's still surface sending out concentric ripples. A bird calls, and a distant carpenter's hammer knocks hollowly.

Simple, natural sounds — casual things, always different, never the same.

But the designer of that garden long ago was not content to leave the spell cast by the place entirely to Nature. He united all the random sounds and endowed them with meaning through the installation of a simple but effective device. In a miniature brook, at two spots in the garden separated by a grove of trees, he placed bamboo tubes, rigged with simple see-saw fulcrums. Spouts were shaped at the end of each tube. Water from the rivulet flowing out of the pond fills the tube to a point, and then its weight tips the tube downward to spill out the water. As the empty tube swings back to right itself, its hollow end strikes against a carefully placed flat stone producing a resonant "thlock". The sound penetrates for an instant the quiet of the green foliage, skimming over the surface of the pond, shooting into the mind of any listener a sudden shaft of awareness of the silence surrounding him. The two bamboo tubes are set to sound their "thlocks" a few seconds apart, intensifying the effect. Again, the rhythmic principle of *ma* is at work, creating an awareness of the silence that is as strong as the perception of the sound itself.

Day and night, year after year, this pattern continues. The wind rustles the leaves. Other sounds punctuate the pattern — contrapuntal elements woven into the texture of bamboo, wind, and the gurgle of water.

Testimony for the native Japanese instinctive sense of unity between Heaven, Man, and Earth are to be found everywhere. In remote, un-urbanized areas, traces of this consciousness still exist in primitive, but powerful, forms. On a rocky headland with surf crashing at its base, one is almost certain to come upon a small weathered shrine, the dwelling place of a local *kami* or nature spirit. Men bring offerings of rice and *sake* and place them in tiny dishes before the shrine's ancient sagging doors. Or in the pitch-black of a rocky cave carved out of rock by the pounding of the sea, one may find a similar shrine, lighted by a single sputtering candle left by a recent pilgrim. Along the coastline of Japan's many jagged peninsulas and promontories, the traveler finds tiny islets, some hardly more than bare rock, some crowned with a single, gnarled, pine tree. Often on these rocks there is perched a small gray shrine, or just a simple straw rope tied around a tree or rock to denote the presence of a *kami*.

Such tiny shrines, and the hundreds of other larger ones, are reminders of an ancient but undying sense of the beauty and the mystery of Nature. Long before Buddhism arrived in Japan — and persisting below the over-layers of Buddhist philosophy ever since — are these mystic feelings that made Nature a religion for the Japanese. Their roots extend far back to the earliest inhabitants of the Japanese islands, long before the attempt was made to systemize them as a religion called “Shintō”. This native religion is the path that leads man away from the artifices of his world, transforming him, and uniting him with all of life and with whatever universal power there may be.

One asks what has this to do with music. In the East: everything. In the West: we are just beginning to learn.

CHAPTER II

THE SHAKUHACHI'S PLACE IN JAPANESE HISTORY

Long ago, when Kamakura was still the headquarters of the ruling military government, it is said that a certain famous Zen monk was invited by a Kyoto nobleman to visit the old capital to lead a discussion on the nature of Zen. The new religion, still little understood in Japan, had come not long before from China and had taken root in the harsh, military life of Kamakura. There, on the slopes of the rocky hills which rim the little plain and its crescent beach, shaded by thick groves of tall, silent cryptomerias, the great temples of Engaku-ji and Kenchō-ji flourished. As far away as Kyoto, the Zen sect's strange, radical, philosophical attitudes had begun to attract the attention of the aristocrats, once so powerful but forced now by their warrior underlings to while away their days in wretched inactivity and impotent frustration.

And so the venerable monk made the long, arduous journey from Kamakura, following the rugged coast, crossing lonely mountain passes, arriving finally at the capital. There, one evening when the nobles had gathered to hear him speak, someone asked the inevitable question: "Master, what is Zen?"

Without hesitation (we are told) the Kamakura monk pulled from its silken wrapping a shakuhachi and brought it to his lips. After blowing a single, sustained note he looked up at his audience and said, "That is Zen."

He replaced the instrument in its wrapper, rose slowly to his feet and, to the astonishment of the assembled guests, silently took his leave.

* * *

For more than three centuries the shakuhachi-playing Komusō monks drifted in and out among the events of Japanese history. Today however, they have all but disappeared into the realm of legend and drama. The Komusō are no longer to be seen on the streets of Japan, but their exploits frequently form the material of fiction and drama. The mysterious

figures — faces hidden beneath a basket, and a shakuhachi tucked into their *obi* — appear frequently on the *kabuki* stage and in film and television costume dramas.

It is difficult to determine precisely when the Komusō first appeared. Although there is evidence that the Fuke-shū (the Zen parent-sect of which the Komusō monks are one branch) was transmitted to Japan from China around the mid-thirteenth century, the history of the Komusō themselves most likely extends no further back than the fifteenth century. They did not become truly active until the early Edo era, around the beginning of the seventeenth century.

During the latter half of the sixteenth century, Christianity began to flourish and a number of *daimyō* (military warlords) embraced the foreign faith together with their retainers. The westernmost Japanese island of Kyushu was the center of Christian activity, Francis Xavier and other Jesuit missionaries having made converts there since 1549. The Christians were first viewed with respect and admiration, but by the end of the century such feelings had changed to fears that the missionaries might be serving unwittingly as the vanguard for later conquest by European military powers. Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the great warlord who unified Japan after more than a century of civil war, issued in 1587 the first of a series of decrees proscribing Christianity and banning further missionary activity.

At first unenforced, these decrees increased in severity after the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1603. Successive waves of anti-Christian persecution culminated in the Shimabara Rebellion of 1637-38 which was brutally crushed thereby ending, for all intents and purposes, any Christian presence in Japan.

The development of the centralized Tokugawa government reduced the power of the local landowners along with their hired warriors (*samurai*) who were now

unemployed. Since few of them owned land or had agricultural training (and since the *samurai* ethic condemned commercial activity) many of these master-less *samurai* (called *rōnin* or "wave men") found themselves forced to turn to banditry, roaming the countryside as outlaws. Others took Buddhist orders and became monks. The serene world of the temple offered them escape from the violent world of battle for which their bodies and spirits had been trained, as well as refuge from the suspicious eyes of a government bent upon suppressing all thought or action opposed to the policies of the Tokugawa house.

Monument at Meian-ji, Kyoto, commemorating Fuke-zen, the legendary founder of the temple

By the end of the third decade of the seventeenth century a number of such *rōnin* had formed a Fuke-shū group in Kyoto. Well aware that their lives depended upon having some sort of sanctioned protective organization, they petitioned the Tokugawa government in Edo for permission to establish a temple. The Edo authorities replied with a request for solid documentary evidence of the group's legitimacy as a religious order, justifying its right to a charter for a temple. The group then claimed to possess papers certifying its lineage from an almost legendary Chinese priest of the T'ang Dynasty called, in Japanese, Rōsai. Further, it announced that it held a letter written before his death by Tokugawa Ieyasu, founder of the shogunate, promising that he would grant a charter for a temple. As might be expected, the Edo authorities immediately demanded to see these documents. The group in Kyoto sent back a dismayed reply that only a few nights earlier a fire had destroyed the building which housed the precious papers.

The authorities were not fooled for they had known from the outset that the Fuke-shū group were imposters and that none of the legitimizing documents really existed. Curiously however, they chose to go along with the Fuke-shū preferring, no doubt, to have the *rōnin*-monks on the side of the government rather than against it. Thus, in 1642, a

charter was granted and a temple bearing the name "Meian-ji" was established. Later, this temple became part of the sprawling Tōfuku-ji Zen temple located in the southeast section of Kyoto. Today, near the small austere temple building, there stands a large stone marker commemorating the founding of Meian-ji[3] and the shakuhachi tradition that it fostered.

Throughout most of its two hundred and fifty year history the Tokugawa government was an absolute dictatorship, rigidly controlling all human and social activities. Under such conditions, the Fuke-shū was obliged to pay for its charter by agreeing to serve the *bakufu* (the Tokugawa government) as a type of spy agency. Wandering about, faceless and anonymous, their task was to eavesdrop wherever they might be and report to the *bakufu* any suspicious conversations they might catch. Hidden beneath their baskets, playing soft, discreet melodies as they walked through the streets begging, they must have been the most picturesque spies in the history of espionage. As additional insurance that the Fuke-shū would not increase its numbers dangerously, the *bakufu* established a divisive regulation, splitting Meian-ji into several branch temples which were later further subdivided.

The earliest Meian-ji branch temples probably included Reihō-ji in the Musashino region west of Edo, Ichigatsu-ji in Shimōsa (modern Chiba Prefecture) directly to the east of Edo, and Itchō-ken near Hakata in Kyushu. A list of other Komusō temples is found in Appendix II.

Meian-ji, Kyoto

The Zen monk in the fable that opens this chapter blew his single mystifying note on a shakuhachi. More likely, it was a *hito-yogiri*, a rather thin-walled bamboo tube cut from a single section of the stalk. This smaller flute was probably a Japanese improvement on the

[3] See p. xi for more about the name.

Chinese vertical flute called *tung-hsiao* (*dosho* in Japanese). Documentation is very sketchy but it is believed that the earliest Zen flute music in China was played on the *tung-hsiao*. If, indeed, the priest in the fable had played on a *hito-yogiri* he, no doubt, was playing original Japanese music of a very different nature from the music imported from China.

The six-holed *tung-hsiao* was tuned to the Chinese pentatonic scale: D', E, G, A, B, D". The *hito-yogiri*, on the other hand, was calibrated so that its finger holes produce the basic Japanese folk scale: D', F, G, A, C, D". There were other Japanese modifications: the blowing edge was equipped with a deeper notch and the angled "slice" at the top was cut in an outward angle whereas on the *tung-hsiao* it was sliced inward toward the rear wall of the tube. These changes produced a greater variety and flexibility of both pitch and tone-colour.

The actual origins of the *hito-yogiri* are unclear and shrouded in legend. Some musicologists trace the instrument no further than China, but others find antecedents as far away as Southwest Asia. The search is complicated by the fact that vertical flutes of related construction are found in many places. But whatever its origins, the *hito-yogiri* had appeared by the fourteenth century on the streets of Japan being played by wandering monks. These monks, before they received the dignified generic name "Komusō" (monks of emptiness and nothingness) were called "*komosō*" (rice-straw monks) after the rice-straw bedding they carried about with them.

In time, the high sweet tone of the *hito-yogiri* gave way to a taste for a sound at once more solid and more austere. To accommodate the new taste, changes gradually came to be made in the design and construction of the instrument: a heavier type of bamboo with thicker walls was used for the tube and the length of the instrument was extended, resulting in a lower-pitched flute with a more powerful dynamic range. The design of the type of shakuhachi in use today was probably perfected by the beginning of the seventeenth century.

The design of the instrument changed for practical reasons as well as aesthetic ones. It will be recalled that many of the priestly members of the Fuke-shū were *rōnin* or master-less *samurai*. Once free of their lords, these *samurai* relinquished their right to bear arms, but being covertly in the espionage service of the government they were constantly in need of a weapon. What more practical weapon for a spy than a beautiful musical instrument which could double as a bludgeon? By constructing the instrument of the heavy root section of the bamboo rather than the slimmer, lighter, upper portion used for the *hito-yogiri*, the shakuhachi served its double purpose superbly. The root portion of a thick-walled bamboo stalk terminates in a gnarled, knobby butt, and it was this heavy bottom section that turned the lovely flute into a formidable weapon. In addition to its often-demonstrated effectiveness as a weapon, the rough appearance of the instrument had a strong aesthetic response among warriors who had, for centuries, cultivated a taste for the sturdy and austere.

Iida Sesshū, Modern-Day Komusō

Within their temples, the Komusō of the early Edo era lived a Spartan existence. Their discipline was based on principles of a harsh morality and a dedication to meditation. Contemporary documents list stringent codes regulating their relations with other temples and sects as well as stiff rules ordering their daily activities. Despite the secular demands made upon them by the Tokugawa government, the Komusō were dedicated to an austere way of life in which discipline and meditation led toward enlightenment.

In tracing the history of shakuhachi playing through the Edo period, it is difficult to separate fact from fiction, myth from reliable data. It does seem clear, however, that *samurai* as well as Komusō were cultivating shakuhachi playing as a meditative practice by the middle of the eighteenth century. This appears to have come about largely through the efforts of Kurosawa Kinko (1710-1771), a *samurai*-priest who founded the school of shakuhachi that bears his name.

Perhaps because of its aristocratic and elitist origins, the Kinko school of shakuhachi remains small today, numbering only around ten thousand members. The Tozan school is far larger, claiming more than a half-million members, and is solidly middle class both in its constituency and in the nature of its music. It was founded in 1906 by the Osaka musician Nakao Tozan, who was born in 1876 and died in Kyoto in 1956. A composer of sensitivity, he developed what has come to be regarded as a totally new concept of shakuhachi sound. Much of the music he composed attempts (not always successfully) to combine Japanese and Western elements, and this tendency continues to be characteristic of new Tozan music written since his death.


Garden of the Home of Nakao Tozan (a bust of Tozan at right)

Tozan shakuhachi began as a regional school in the Kansai area (Kyoto-Osaka) where it continues to retain its largest following. Nearly all of its *honkyoku* have been recorded and Tozan shakuhachi can be heard daily in frequent performances by popular and folk musicians on radio and television. Tozan music is the only shakuhachi music known to most Japanese.

In addition to Kinko and Tozan, there are also a number of smaller schools or sub-schools of shakuhachi. The Ueda school, founded in 1918 by Ueda Hōdō, and the Chikuho

school (founded at the same time by Sakai Chikuho) both originated in Osaka but have built up small followings all over Japan. In Kyoto there are several more sub-schools.

Shakuhachi music today presents an uneven and somewhat depressing picture, afflicted, as it is, by the same lack of genuinely creative vitality that has been suffered by the music of other traditional Japanese instruments. When attempts are made to write for them, the result usually falls far short of being either Japanese or Western in character. Reflecting the widespread identity crisis that the whole of Japanese culture is undergoing, Japanese composers appear uncertain of their ability to work in either of the musical vocabularies they are trying to use.

The shakuhachi is not a Western flute or recorder. Yet increasing numbers of Japanese musicians tend to treat it as such, neglecting the fact that the particular aesthetic ambience of the shakuhachi has little to do with the Western flute toward whose foreign traditions it is turning. Paradoxically, as modern shakuhachi playing tends more and more toward the West, recent developments in flute technique make it quite possible to play old shakuhachi music on the Western instrument in a way not far removed from the Japanese tradition.

It is essential that Japanese musicians and composers attempt again to understand the most profound aspects of their own musical traditions. Indeed, certain composers today are moving in this worthwhile direction. The work of Takemitsu Tōru reveals the process of rediscovery taking place on a very sophisticated level. His many film scores are testimony to his deep understanding of his country's musical aesthetic, and in the hauntingly beautiful *November Steps* (written in 1969) he achieves a meaningful fusion of musical cultures by mixing shakuhachi and *biwa* with a Western symphony orchestra.

With the musical richness of the Japanese tradition coupled with the intelligence and sensitivity of Japan's artists, it is impossible to conceive of further explorations not occurring. We must only wait for the emergence of modern masterpieces from an ancient tradition of great beauty.

CHAPTER III

THE SHAKUHACHI AND JAPANESE LIFE

On my desk is a document whose Chinese characters read: “Not to pass outside the family.” It is a private document prepared and presented to me by Tanaka Yūdō. Its contents: details pertinent to the execution of the music patterns making up the material of the *Kinko-ryū* (school) *honkyoku*. It is a catalogue of professional secrets and should remain confidential.

When I set out on my study of the shakuhachi I crossed the Pacific Ocean filled with hope that one day I might be able to transcribe and help preserve this valuable music. To my deepest dismay, at my first lesson I was asked to promise that, under no conditions, would I ever show the notation given me to members of any other school. I was asked not to divulge any of the “secret” performance techniques I learned. I left that first meeting with a profound emptiness and the feeling that my long trip had been a fruitless waste of time.

But I was not so despondent as to not return for my scheduled session a week later. When the day arrived, I found that, to my delight and amazement, everything had changed. I suspect that various telephone calls to key individuals had been placed and that the conversations may have dealt with my peculiar position as a foreigner. Moreover, I was a foreigner with an obviously genuine interest in this music. I stood well outside the restrictive traditions so alien to me and they must have realized this. My position became acceptable and, before long, the information I had hoped to obtain began to flow in my direction at a generous and steady rate.

Relating this experience at this point in my narrative will serve, I hope, to illustrate the curious dichotomy in Japanese culture between seemingly intractable tradition and apparently innate flexibility. To thoroughly explore this duality it would be necessary to delve far more deeply into the complexity of Japanese social and cultural history than is within the province of this little book. What follows here must be briefer than might satisfy

some readers but, at the same time, I hope to avoid the accusation of over-simplifying the subject.

To the many business men who travel there from North America and Europe, or to the casual visitor on a tour which hurries him through the country at something approaching the speed of light, Japan may appear to be a thoroughly westernized country. But the outward manifestations of that great industrial nation are too frequently taken at face value. The vitality of its industry is present almost everywhere and a somewhat distorted impression is very easy to acquire. But if one can become acclimatized, it all begins to appear as a reflection on the surface of a very deep pool.

Two worlds co-exist in Japan, the old and the new. The older world supports the new, infusing it with many characteristics out of its ancient traditions. At the same time, it might appear that the new world is doing its best to avoid the influence of the old. Yet, my experience both musical and personal (it is difficult for me to always separate the two) has produced little evidence that the Japanese have abandoned their past. A close and dear Japanese friend once said to me, "We Japanese cannot know our present day life without deeply understanding our past." Tanaka Yūdō, commenting on the tragic public suicide in 1970 of Mishima Yukio[4] said, "His action expressed our deepest thoughts. It is what most of us feel and are afraid to express."

In the death of a man of such acclaimed genius, Mishima's self-sacrifice expressed an affirmation of ancient values which appear to many as having been lost in present-day Japanese life. In a far less dramatic way, Takemitsu Tōru's deep concern for the aesthetic properties of old Japanese music indicates a similar feeling, a welling up of affection and loyalty for, and to, the values of the past.

The traditional arts are part of the legacy of the ancient Japanese society whose original unit was the patriarchal family or clan with its members claiming descent from a common ancestor. The clan was religiously united by common ancestor worship of the

[4] Mishima Yukio was one of Japan's most celebrated 20th century authors. He was also a political activist with a nationalistic agenda. He formed his own right-wing militia that attempted to stage a coup in order to re-establish the Emperor's pre-war powers. The coup failed and Mishima committed ritual suicide by the traditional *samurai* method of *seppuku* (disembowelment).

family god, the *Ujigami*. Clans were divided into two classes of patriarchal families: Great Clans (*Ō-uji*) and Little Clans (*Ko-uji*). Within these groupings were many subject-classes and many different grades with specific names denoting one's status.

The Tokugawas attempted to weld the clans into a national unit but they were able to hold them together only by strong compulsion. It was a feudal system where loyalty to one's immediate lord was the compelling force, but it was a feudalism which, as Lafcadio Hearn said, "…resembled European feudalism only as a tree fern resembles a tree."[5]

Again we are faced with one of the paradoxes so common in Japanese life. One would think that with all the coercion, both inner and outer, all life would be the same. But as Hearn also wrote, "…. In every patriarchal civilization ruled by ancestor worship, all tendency to absolute sameness, to general uniformity, is prevented by the character of the aggregate itself, which never becomes homogeneous and plastic ….. each one of the multitude of petty despotisms ….. most jealously guards its own particular traditions and customs, and remains self-sufficing. Hence results, sooner or later, incomparable variety of ….. small detail, artistic, industrial, architectural, mechanical."[6]

Right down to this day, in the arts, professions and in politics, these clan-like patterns may be seen at work. Small factions, each with its leader surrounded by a nucleus of followers are common throughout modern society. In the traditional arts, such an arrangement developed naturally into a complex system of "schools" each with its own particular system of learning, each with its own set of secrets.

This is precisely why the closed method of teaching and the existence of secret societies are readily accepted still by the Japanese people, who remain, as a whole, stubbornly conservative in the face of change no matter how cataclysmic.

Yet homogeneity underlies it all. To study one Japanese traditional art is to study all the arts. The foreigner interested in pursuing the study and practice of any one of the arts

[5] *Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation*, by Lafcadio Hearn, 1904.
[6] ibid.

will soon realize that it is fruitless to approach them as if they were isolated things, removed from the warp and woof of the Japanese life fabric.

It can only come as a surprise to sympathetic foreigners just how very little the Japanese school system has done to promote the appreciation and cultivation of traditional music, to name but one art. Since the Meiji period (1868-1912), musical training in the secondary and primary schools has been entirely Western.

The modern educational system from elementary school through university is designed to transmit modern theoretical and applied knowledge. It would appear that the home and the family have been left the task of passing on traditional values. This is completely in line with the customs of the ancient social system. But the pressures of the modern world are creating tremendous stresses on the old, traditional household which is changing the nature of family life very rapidly.

Yet there are mitigating conditions. Despite the modifications brought about by rapid changes in the economy (and, in part, by the American-dictated constitution of 1947), the family system remains a dominant force in the national psychology. The traditional arts belong to that system. Indeed, they are operated much like a clan in the real sense of the word. The traditions which they maintain are supposed to be traceable directly to the founder of the "school" no matter how far back in time he may have lived. The founder's name, or at least a part of his name, will be carried, generally speaking, by all those members who attain professional status. As secret societies, each school possesses elaborate and arcane paraphernalia along with rules of ethics, teaching methods, provisions for the granting of teaching licenses and the succession of leaders of the school. If it is concerned with music, each school will "own" a body of music. Only this music is transmitted — nothing else.

When the Japanese speak of such an organization, they use the term "house" (*ke* or *ie*). Similar to English usage, these words also signify "family" as does the character read "*mon*" (門; ordinarily meaning "gate"). The other term frequently used is *ryū* (流) meaning "style", "fashion", or "school", among many others.

Should a member of such a system initiate a new idea, it may not necessarily be taken up by his professional family. Should he persist, it then becomes necessary for him to leave his parent *ryū*. Having done this, he will form a new or sub-school which, once established, will have its own traditions and professional secrets. They will be just as jealously guarded as those of his old school.

A system such as this creates a formidable obstacle for the foreign student of Japanese music. If, as in my own case, he actually becomes a *ryū* member he will continue to feel on the edge of things — an outsider — a participant in rituals quite alien to his own experience and background. Internally complex, a *ryū* operates in an involved network of horizontal and vertical obligations which are symbolized by exchanges of gifts and other ceremonial gestures — a manifestation of the ancient tradition of *on* and *giri*, the bestowal of benevolence on one hand and the rigid obligation of indebtedness on the other. Both are still ruling forces in Japanese life.

Family traditions will frequently dictate to which teacher and *ryū* a student will go. When a young woman is urged by her family to study *koto* (a skill still considered by traditional families to be a valuable social asset when considering a marriage), the school of *koto* she will follow will be determined by her family's traditions in such matters. There will be little choice. She will study through one of the two principal *ryū* of *koto* — Ikuta or Yamada. Even the region she happens to live in will be a determining factor. Whatever the school, she will learn only a limited number of pieces. More than likely she will evince little curiosity about the other works to which she will not be introduced.

The social history surrounding the *koto* is of great interest. Sadly, almost none of its music played in the Heian court survived the years of civil war. From the rich legacy of Heian literature we know that a lively *koto* (and *biwa*) tradition existed, that it had great social and aesthetic significance, and that it was played by women. The revival of *koto* playing in the seventeenth century is owed to the importation of the *shamisen* whose musical traditions it followed.

Since every aspect of Japanese life became stratified and categorized under the Tokugawas, the *koto* came under severe restrictions. Composition and performance of *koto*

music were reserved for blind, male musicians upon whom was bestowed the honorary title *Kengyō*.

The separation of the sexes characterizing Japanese life down through the centuries is a tradition running strong in Japanese music. It is very important as to what sex plays what instrument despite the tendency toward relaxation of old restrictions in recent years. In the *kabuki* and *bunraku* theatres, for instance, the *shamisen* is reserved for male performers. Yet, if one goes to a tourist attraction like Gion Corner in Kyoto, *geisha* may be heard performing some of the same music. Many women individually study these genres and others, performing in public outside the professional practice of the theatre. *Noh* is another interesting case in point. It is a male domain. Nevertheless, many women study drumming (notably *ko-tsuzumi*) and singing.

Since the shakuhachi's traditions originated in the temple (later becoming associated with the Zen traditions of the *samurai*) it was quite natural for it to continue as a domain of men. It might be added that there are also some deep and ancient currents of phallic symbolism flowing here too.

There is something else fundamental to the way traditional music is taught in Japan. Deeply ingrained in Japanese life is the relationship between master and apprentice. An apprentice will often stay for many years with a single master, much of that time merely watching his master at work. The apprentice does little more than hand the master his tools or run errands.

By just going down the street to the barber shop, one can see the system operating as it has done for a thousand years. The barber's apprentice stands behind his boss, handing him whatever he needs. The apprentice applies hot towels, draws water for the shampoo and sometimes is allowed to massage the customer's head, neck and shoulders. While the master is at work, the apprentice stands back and silently watches.

This is a part of an ancient system known as "*uchi-deshi*" in which the apprentice lived in the home of the master. Under such a system, the apprentice learns as he watches. This method is called "*mi-narai*" (see-learn). To the Westerner, quite understandably, this

appears to be a painfully slow learning process. Yet there is something more here than meets the eye. Such a method deals with things far beyond the mere acquiring of technical skill. It is concerned with a philosophy of life.

I recall a leading performer of *koto* and *shamisen* telling me at a lesson that in her relationship with her teacher (who was blind and paralyzed from the waist down) the simple act of washing her teacher's dishes or scrubbing her back in the bath carried profound value for her.

It is a wordless thing. In such a circumstance, the student is bathed in an intangible emotion radiating from the personality of the teacher. In some arts an apprentice can spend easily ten years in which, whatever the medium might be, he learns absolutely everything right down to the minutest detail.

It is difficult to escape the knowledge that *uchi-deshi*, to a greater or lesser degree, prevails across a vast field of Japanese learning. The Westerner can easily lose patience with the slow process of Japanese traditional music teaching. The repertoire, no matter what the medium, is severely limited. This bothers no one in Japan. A Japanese musician may well counter the impatience of a foreigner by asking, "What's the hurry, anyway?" He might even add, "You know, we are quite content to do a few small things well."

On numerous occasions over the years I have had many opportunities to attend classes consisting of a group of shakuhachi players who gather faithfully each week in a large city in the Kansai area. There they meet with a distinguished and devoted teacher to play music which they have been studying for years, music from the *gaikyoku* (pieces borrowed from the repertoire of other instruments) and *honkyoku* repertories of the Kinko-ryū.

Most of them are professional men: doctors, lawyers, business men, merchant-marine officers, university professors, and occasionally a student or two. They enjoy this rare interval of leisure, sometimes at the end of a ten or eleven-hour day, in the cultivation of an aristocratic art. Each player takes his turn with the master while the others listen in silence. During the lesson few words are exchanged. Seldom is there any criticism. Outside,

automobile horns honk angrily somewhere in a traffic jam; trains roar over a nearby viaduct. To the men in the *tatami* room it is unimportant, unheard. Their attention is directed in other ways.

How much longer will such activities continue? No matter how strong the tradition, music is a very perishable art form. This is particularly true when the chief method of transmission is the memory. In shakuhachi music the notation is skeletal at best. Perhaps, indeed, it is headed for extinction; and should the patterns of tradition become even more modified in the future, this could well be the case.

The old shakuhachi music has been maintained in arcane isolation, known at present by really very few people in Japan. It is true that a few recordings are appearing and the music is beginning to be known beyond the borders of Japan. But, typical of so many beautiful things of the spirit which the Japanese genius has produced, it seems to meet with more enthusiasm and understanding abroad than it has enjoyed at home.

In the land of the world's fastest trains, and skyscrapers sprouting seemingly overnight, in the midst of the feverish activity and confusion of its economic miracle, the survival of such old, secret musical practices is an even greater one.

CHAPTER IV

THE MUSIC

Some Basics of Japanese Music Theory

All essential aspects of Japanese music theory were derived from Chinese origins. It was in the sixth and seventh centuries, during the period when the Japanese islands were swept by wave after wave of cultural influence from the continent, that Chinese music was brought to Japan.

By the ninth century almost three hundred years had elapsed since the adoption of Buddhism by the Japanese court. It had become a regular practice for Japanese monks to make pilgrimages to the great Chinese monasteries to broaden their knowledge and deepen their faith. After making the hazardous voyage to China, they would remain in a monastery, usually located deep in remote mountains, studying the profound mysteries of Buddhism and learning from Chinese, Tibetan, or Indian monks the proper recitation of the sutras. When they returned to Japan they brought back, not only the fruits of their religious instruction, but a vast amount of related cultural knowledge including music.

Music was, without question, one of the great achievements of T'ang Dynasty China (618-907). Politically, Chinese rule had been extended to the farthest reaches of the Asian land-mass, the T'ang capital of Ch'ang-an being the seat of a cosmopolitan culture that had sources in all parts of the far-flung empire. The vicissitudes of history and the cultural attitudes imposed on China by succeeding dynasties have smothered all vestiges of the T'ang musical culture in China itself, but remnants of its once opulent orchestral tradition are still to be found in Japan and Korea. In the Japanese *gagaku* and the Korean *aak* is still to be heard the music of T'ang China, for in both these countries further development of the musical forms ceased a thousand years ago and the music has been frozen in much the same form that it was received from China.

Yet, despite the sharing of basic musical theories and the preservation in Japan of an ancient Chinese musical form, the music of the two countries do not sound alike any more

than do their languages. While it is true that the predominating music of both the Nara and Heian periods (eighth to twelfth centuries) in Japan was Chinese, this condition was due primarily to the pervasive influence over Japanese culture of the court and the Buddhist priesthood.

However, this imported music of the aristocracy and the priesthood did not in any way extinguish the native Japanese musical tradition whose chief manifestations were rooted in the ancient, animistic nature-worship that came to be called "Shintō" (The Way of the Gods). It is in seeking further connections with the native Japanese musical tradition that similarity with Chinese music ends. Although T'ang music theory recognized the twelve-tone octave (see Example 2), the music of China was to later become solely based on pentatonic (5-note) scales of the *anhemitonic* variety (containing no semi-tones whatsoever). Japanese music, on the other hand, is based on pentatonic scales that ***do*** contain semi-tones (*hemitonic*). (See discussion and examples below.)

Ancient Chinese music was built on the same foundation of an un-tempered, twelve-tone chromatic scale that serves as the basis of the tonal structure of Western music. Out of this material, the Chinese theorists constructed scales of seven tones which, in turn, were permutated into eighty-four modes. By the time of the T'ang Dynasty, particularly in the case of *gagaku* there remained only two basic scale forms —called *ryo* and *ritsu* — plus a small modal system of six scales. It was this system that was imported from the mainland to Japan.

Japanese monks returning from the Chinese monastery of Yü-shan ("Gyo-san" in Japanese) are generally credited with bringing to their native islands the type of Buddhist chant known as *shōmyō*. Although the ultimate sources of *shōmyō* probably are to be found in pre-Buddhist Vedic chant, its long years of practice in China had thoroughly transformed it. Close analysis reveals that its theoretical basis had become identical to that of *gagaku*, the only difference being that it was less complex.

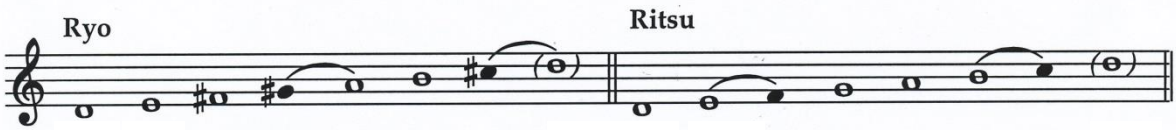
In both *shōmyō* and *gagaku*, the two scales, *ryo* and *ritsu*, form the basis of the musical structure. Each has five principal tones plus two auxiliary tones. The auxiliary tones, called *hen'on* (literally, "altered tones"), are used in modulation. In the *honkyoku* of

both the Komusō and Kinko shakuhachi traditions, they play an important part in the formation of the tonal structure, notably at the cadence.

The prefix *hen* indicates the lowering of a principal tone by a half-step while the prefix *ei* indicates the raising of a principal tone by a half-step. The *hen'on* and its principal tone are bracketed together in each case.[7] Example 1 shows the two scales with the names given to each note in terms of its position in the order.

***ryo**: kyū, shō, kaku, henchi, chi, u, henkyū;* ***ritsu**: kyū, shō, eishō, kaku, chi, u, eiu*

Example 1: The Ryo-Ritsu System

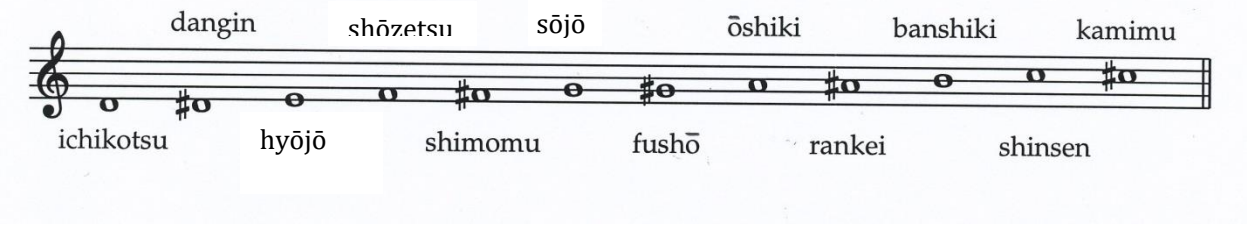


There is a third pattern called *yuri* which is common to both scales and is a very important part of *honkyoku* performance. Basically, it is a swinging back and forth between principal tone and *hen'on*.

Example 2 presents the twelve chromatic tones of the Sino-Japanese music system, with the proper Japanese name for each. From bottom to top they are: *ichikotsu*, *dangin*, *hyōjō*, *shōzetsu*, *shimonu*, *sōjō, fushō, ōshiki, rankei, banshiki, shinsen* and *kamimu*. In ancient Chinese music the scales constructed on each one of the steps of this system were arranged in groups of seven tones, similar to the modal scales of Western music. Furthermore, as indicated earlier, each scale constituted a modal system in itself. Each of the seven tones within it is capable of serving as the basis for a separate mode with its own peculiar melodic characteristics. Simple modulation results, as mentioned above, in the astonishing potential total of eighty-four modes.

[7] The relationship of *hen'on* and principal tone is the basis of the important shakuhachi technique called *meri-kari* which will be demonstrated in Chapter VI.

Example 2: The Twelve Tones of the Sino-Japanese System



However, as mentioned, in the *gagaku* performed in Nara and Heian Japan, only six of the modes deriving from the parent system of twelve tones were utilized. These consist of three *ryo* scales built on *ichikotsu*, *sojō* and *hyojō* (or *taishiki*) and three *ritsu* scales built on *hyojō*, *ōshiki* and *banshiki*. One other basic principle of Japanese music theory which should be introduced is that of *in-senpō* and *yō-senpō*. The character 陰(*in*; Chinese *yin*) represents the negative or female principle in the *yin-yang* dichotomy, embodied, in Japanese musical aesthetics, by the *ryo* scale. This tonality influences nearly all the music of the Edo period and its strength is felt even today in popular Japanese music. In contrast, the *ritsu* scale exhibits the positive or masculine principle of 陽 (*yō*; Chinese, *yang*) and was the source for the pentatonic scale upon which all Japanese folk music is based.[8]

[8] Our primary subject being the shakuhachi and its music, the origins and systems of non-Buddhist musical arts of purely Japanese origin are not addressed here. These are, of course, of equal importance to the culture as a whole, and perhaps even more characteristic of the Japanese musical personality over all. Various song styles associated with *gagaku* are evidently of purely Japanese origin. This includes songs classified as *saibara*, *rōei*, and *Yamato-uta* as well as the sacred songs of *mi-kagura*. The complete seven-tone form of the scale utilized in these styles seems identical to the Phrygian scale of European folk and liturgical music. The nature of such music as that sung in *mi-kagura*, the most exalted form of Shintō ritual music, suggests some very important things concerning the continuity of a native Japanese musical tradition. *Mi-kagura* is charged with melodic patterns consisting of the fall of a whole tone followed by a skip of a major third and terminating with the fall of a half-tone to a cadence point (B – A – F – E). The formula is important for it is basic to Japanese music. It is a type of scale structure which appears to be widespread among the island chains off the east coast of Asia. It crops up in the closely related musical traditions of the Ryukyu Islands and is not far removed from the famous *pelog* scale of Indonesian music.

The Music of the Komusó

The body of music fostered by the temple of Meian-ji is called "*koten shakuhachi honkyoku"*, or "classical, original shakuhachi music" and includes all shakuhachi music of the Komusō priestly tradition. What is often referred to as the Meian "School" is not a school in the true sense of the word. The music originally nurtured by the parent temple was dispersed when the Tokugawa shogunate subdivided the temple, and thereafter each new temple seems to have developed its own distinctive style of shakuhachi playing. Some temples have even contributed their own original *honkyoku*.

Whatever its origin, the body of music known as *koten honkyoku* offers a rich repertoire to the shakuhachi player. Within the severe restrictions imposed by the nature of the instrument itself and the precepts of tradition that have developed around it, the range of expression is still remarkably wide. So are the technical demands that this repertoire makes on the player.

The music teems with life — all of it — from the simple, basic melodies of *Meian Chōshi* and *Yamato Chōshi* (which establish musical patterns that are found in all *honkyoku*) to the complexities of such pieces as *Akita Sugagaki*, *Ajikan*, or *Ōshū Reibo* (which extend shakuhachi technique to its very limits and tax the powers of even the strongest players). Works like *Kokū* and *Mukaiji* go to the hidden depths of the human spirit; other pieces are drawn from the light-hearted music of street festivals. Certain pieces evoke the dark, incense-laden atmosphere of Asian Buddhism, while others speak in the simpler, more straightforward language of the Shintō tradition.

The well-loved *Akita Sugagaki* offers an example of how a variety of interesting musical material can come together in a single piece. It opens with a common austere motif that seems to link it to *shōmyō*, the ritualistic chant of Buddhist worship. But halfway through, there is a change of pace. The metre shifts from the expected duple metre to a three-beat scheme, a metre that is hardly ever found in Japanese music but is frequently heard in that of Korea. Shortly afterward, the music breaks into a lively passage in duple

metre that is redolent with the quality of flute music that is heard at shrine festivals. (A more detailed analysis of this fascinating work appears below.)

Diverse popular elements like this crop up unexpectedly in many shakuhachi pieces; apparently the wandering Komusō priests deliberately incorporated such passages as a means of making contact with the common people.

Since this music flows from the same sources that fed *gagaku* and *shōmyō*, one quickly senses its relationship to older continental systems. No less than *gagaku*, shakuhachi music has preserved, intact, certain aspects of the music of ancient China that now no longer exist in the land of their origin.

Moreover, just as the roots of shakuhachi music extend back into a dim past, they also spread over a wide range, cross-fertilizing with old *biwa* music, with *noh*, with shrine music, with court music, and with music sung and played by the common people. The same roots nourished the many musical forms that developed during the Edo Period. Covering so wide a range, it is curious that such music could die out or be "lost", but today hardly more than a handful of Japanese people are aware of the existence of the shakuhachi *honkyoku*.

As a subject of modern musical scholarship, the formal medium of *koten honkyoku* remains virgin territory. As is usually the case, a wide gulf separates the scholar from the traditional performer. To the person playing the *honkyoku*, formal analysis of them is unnecessary. He has learned the pieces from his teacher. He accepts them as they were handed down to him and he understands them implicitly. Perhaps it is because I am a Westerner that I am compelled to try to analyze the shakuhachi pieces even as I play them. But while I appreciate the need for rational scrutiny and explanation of this music, I am also aware of the dangers of over-analysis. I hope that in attempting to explain the music I will not isolate it from its environment and distort its importance in the whole scheme of Japanese music or its relation to the patterns of culture that lie beneath it.

Soon after beginning my study of Kinko *honkyoku* I realized that all the music in that small body of works was, in a sense, but a single composition with certain basic motifs appearing and reappearing in various permutations and combinations. Then, as I moved

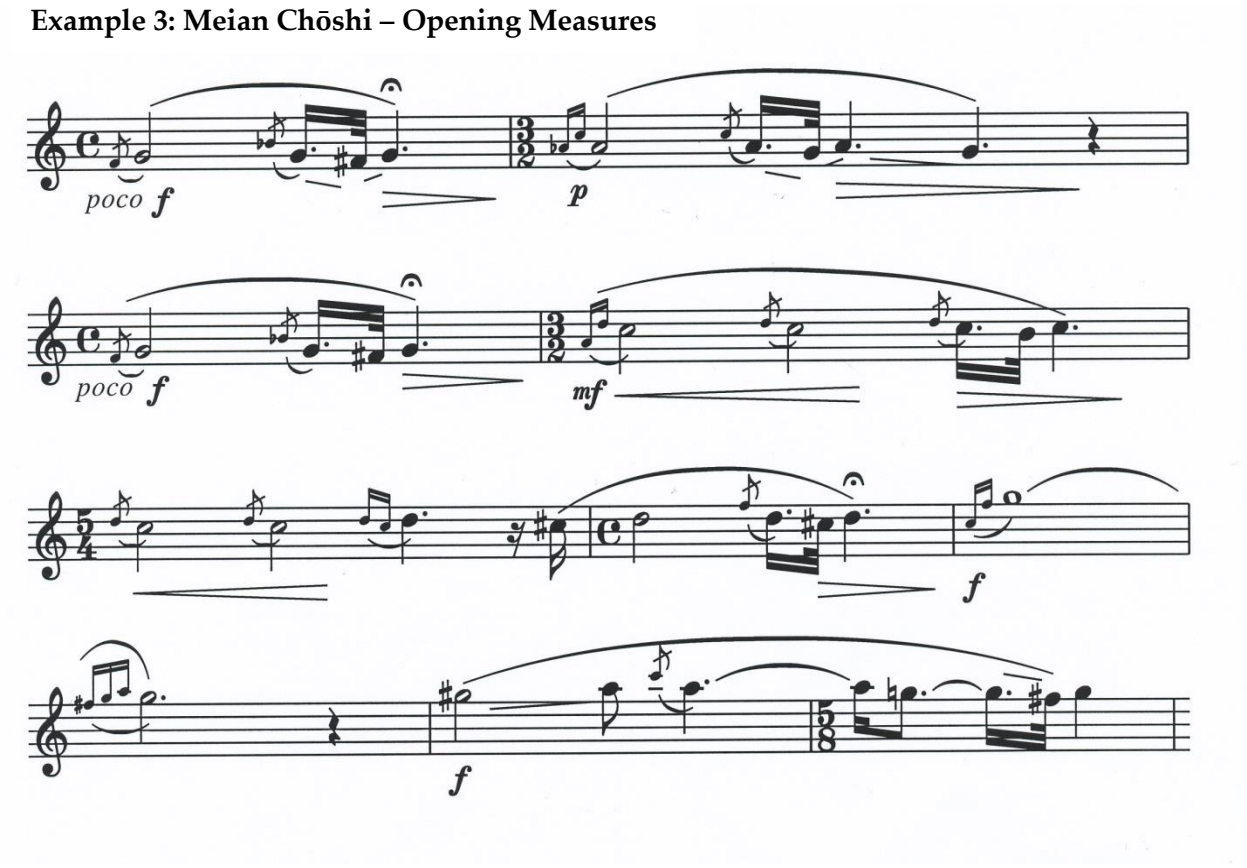
into the world of the pure Komusō music, I discovered similar principles at work. This older body of composition contained the same permutations and combinations of motifs that appeared in the later Kinko tradition. All the music, both *koten honkyoku* and Kinko music, seemed to be flowing from a common source. That source I eventually came to identify as a group of three great Komusō compositions: *Kokū* ("Empty Sky" or "Emptiness"), *Mukaiji* ("Flute Over the Misty Sea"), and *Shin Kyorei* ("Reality-Unreality"). The common belief that these pieces were brought from China in the thirteenth century may well be true. In their peculiar turns of phrase and in most facets of their musical contours, they are inseparable from Buddhist chant. It is very old music indeed.

I recall vividly the singing of a wrinkled old priest sitting with me under a gnarled ancient oak one evening on the Korean island of Cheju-do, surrounded by the Yellow Sea. Despite his age, the man's voice was clear and strong, and in it — there they were — the same lonely cadences that are heard in the *honkyoku*. Here, still intact, is the timeless music of the ancient world.

Analysis and Transcription of Koten Honkyoku

The first of the *koten honkyoku* transcriptions contained in this book is *Meian Chōshi*, a greatly truncated version of *Kokū*. Just as in the longer, more complex make-up of its great parent, *Meian Chōshi* consists of only a few austere patterns drawn from *shōmyō*. From the desolation of the opening statement, a profound music is born.

Example 3: Meian Chōshi – Opening Measures



What you see on paper is, of course, only an approximate representation of the sounds that are played. In reality, music is the sum of many parts, only one of which is the original concept of the composition as it was born in the mind of its creator. In performance and transmission it gathers upon itself the nature of the performer's personality, his instrument, his environment and his personal relationship to his cultural tradition.

Koten honkyoku are learned through a process that is largely aural. What manuscripts are used are handed from teacher to student who then copies them into an

album in a calligraphic hand usually more distinguished for its linear beauty than its legibility. If one does not first know the music, he cannot hope to be able to read it. In Japan, adherence to tradition is important and musical training within the aural tradition is no exception. Once the student has learned a certain pattern it stays learned. But to complicate things, *koten honkyoku* are largely sectional in their formal dimensions and the repetition of basic elements is important to their structure. When repeated they are never quite the same; there are subtle changes both in melody and rhythm. This seems to be the rule rather than the exception. Similar variations of rhythm are to be found in *gagaku*, *shōmyō*, *Heike biwa*, and *noh*. Although difficult to define precisely, they seem bound up with breathing and the beating of the heart.

All of this poses fascinating, though often frustrating, problems for the transcriber. An "exact" transcription of such delicate, changeable material is impossible to achieve, and without personal experience in performing the music no transcription should even be attempted. In setting down the transcriptions contained in this book I often had to rely on my instincts as a composer.

No two shakuhachi performances of the same piece are ever alike. To be sure, this is also true of Western music, but renditions of *koten honkyoku* by different players can vary to a remarkable degree. One player may possess a set of notations quite different from those belonging to a colleague, or he might be governed by very different feelings. These factors must be taken into account by the transcriber, but how much can he truly and effectively indicate on paper?

In my transcriptions for this book I have tried to preserve a particular performance by a particular shakuhachi player. There seemed to be no other way to set the *honkyoku* down on paper in a form that Western musicians could read and comprehend. Therefore, in these pages I have "frozen" the performances of my consultants Takafuji Emo (*koten honkyoku*) and Tanaka Yūdō (*Kinko honkyoku*), but have tried to do so in such a way that the innate freedom and iridescent qualities of each piece would not be destroyed.

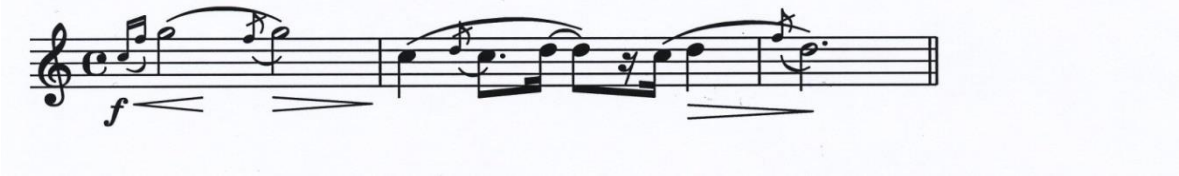
On the following pages I have broken down an extended piece into its separate sections in order to point out certain distinctive features of shakuhachi music. I have

chosen *Akita Sugagaki* rather than one of the three "basic" *honkyoku* because of the interesting appearance in it of popular elements (noted above) which add to the textural complexity of this strong music.

Little is known of the origins of this piece. Kinko documents indicate that it may have been learned from a priest named Baio, resident at the Futai Temple in Akita Prefecture. Baio's source is unknown but it has been said that this composition is the only *honkyoku* by a group of Komusō from the Tsugaru region (north of Akita) that called itself the *Nesasa-ha* ("Bamboo-Grass Group"). *Sugagaki* (or *Sugakki* in Kinko usage) carries the sense of "gathering" or "convocation". But beyond this, little is known about this fine example of Komusō music.

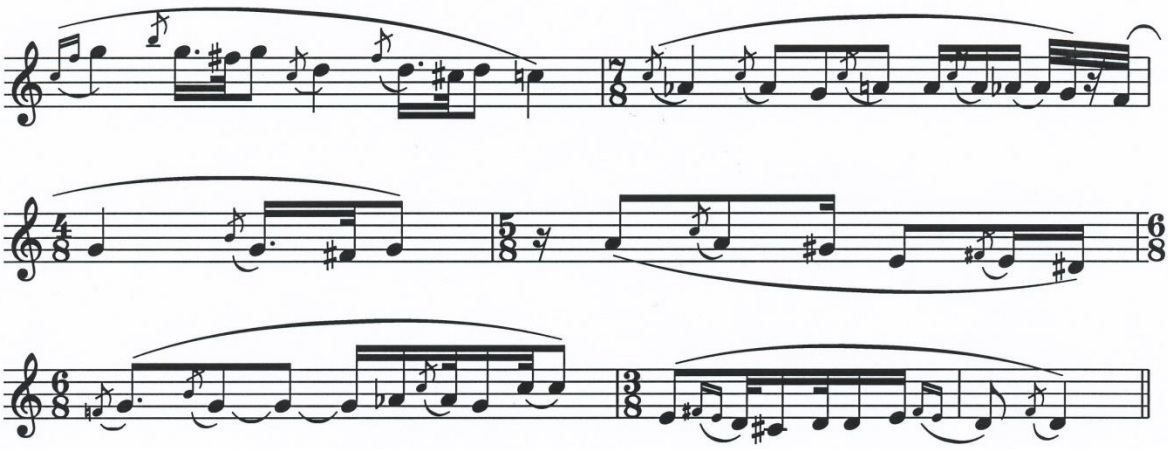
Akita Sugagaki falls into two large parts ("movements" for lack of a better word) which are subdivided into three sections and five sections respectively. The first four sections all begin with a version of the same "theme", one of the most important motifs in *honkyoku* of both the Komusō and Kinko traditions. The sense of musical function is powerful and sure. Whoever the composer may have been, he was most assuredly a highly sophisticated musician.

Example 4: Akita Sugagaki, Section I, Opening Motif



Immediately following this opening is an "expansion" that spreads over two phrases and brings the first section to its conclusion.

Example 5: Akita Sugagaki - Expansion of Opening Motif

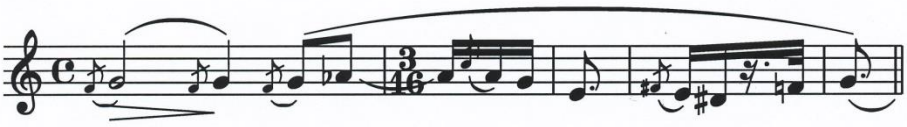


The second section begins in the same way except that the first measure of the opening motif is played twice as fast. The second phrase takes almost the same form as it did earlier, while the third is considerably modified in rhythm.

Example 6: Akita Sugagaki - Section II, Opening Measures

Opening with a new version of the basic motif, the third section proceeds somewhat differently from the previous two. It contains new turns of phrase which will be familiar to the listener who has heard other Komusō pieces, for they echo throughout the repertoire.

Example 7: Akita Sugagaki - Section III, Opening Measures

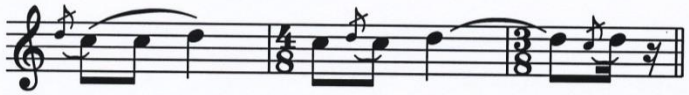


After a sustained G', a new element appears which — like the opening motif — is one of the basic "themes" of both Komusō and Kinko *honkyoku*. It is an example of the *yuri* principle touched on earlier in the section on theory. *Yuri* is an alternation between a principal tone (C) and its lower neighbour (B).

Example 8: Akita Sugagaki - an Application of "Yuri" in Section III

Section three, and the first of the two "movements" of *Akita Sugagaki*, come to an end with a brief *codetta*.

Example 9: Akita Sugagaki - Codetta to First "Movement"



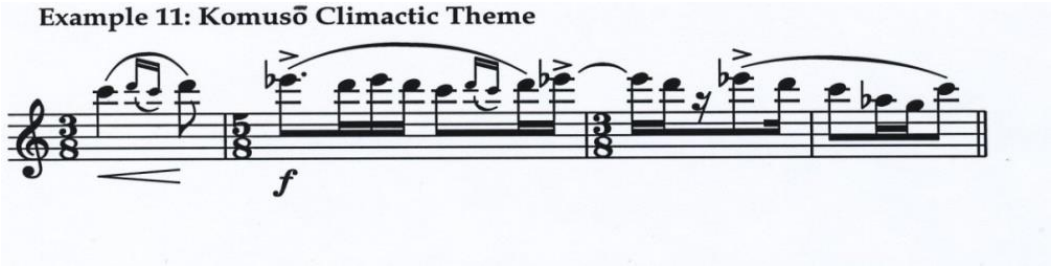
The quiet, austere phrase just heard is broken by the interpolation of an active passage which comes to assume increasing importance as the piece progresses. (It will make four additional appearances, with certain variations, just before the *codettas* that conclude sections V, VI, VII and VIII. It will also be heard as the opening passage in the final section of the entire work.)

Example 10

The second "movement" of *Akita Sugagaki* begins (Section IV) with an almost exact reiteration of section III.

In the second measure of Section V there appears for the first time another important Komusō theme. It always appears at climactic moments in shakuhachi pieces of both the Meian and Kinko schools. In *Akita Sugagaki* it is heard once again in slightly modified form, between the eighth and tenth measures of Section VI.

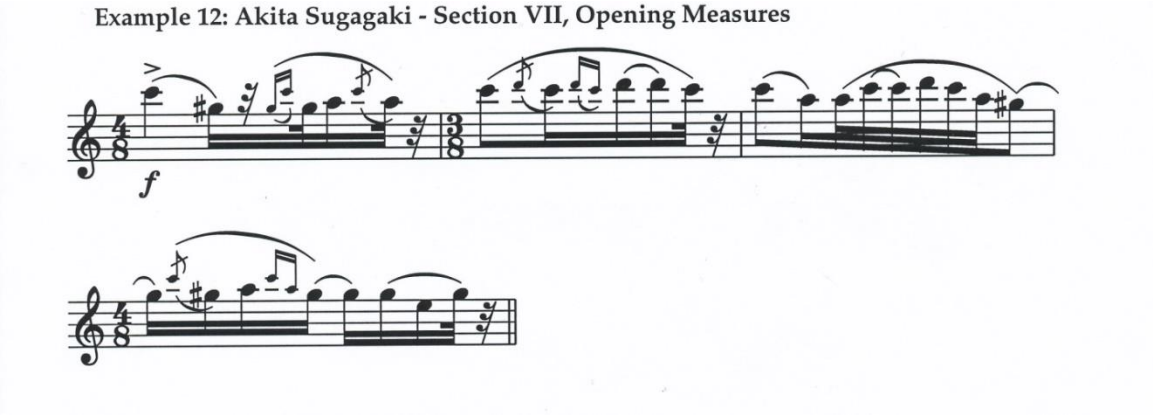
Example 11: Komusō Climactic Theme



After opening with the familiar two-part codetta, Section VI takes up a modified repetition of material heard previously in Sections III and IV. Its length is extended by a rhythmically altered restatement of the melodic line from Section V shown in Example 12. As usual, a short codetta concludes the section.

The first four measures of Section VII offer a marked change of pace and mood. The strongly pulsating quality of this new music could only have been based on *hayashi* so close is it in rhythmic and melodic characteristics to that ensemble of flutes, drums, and bells that is heard at shrine festivals.

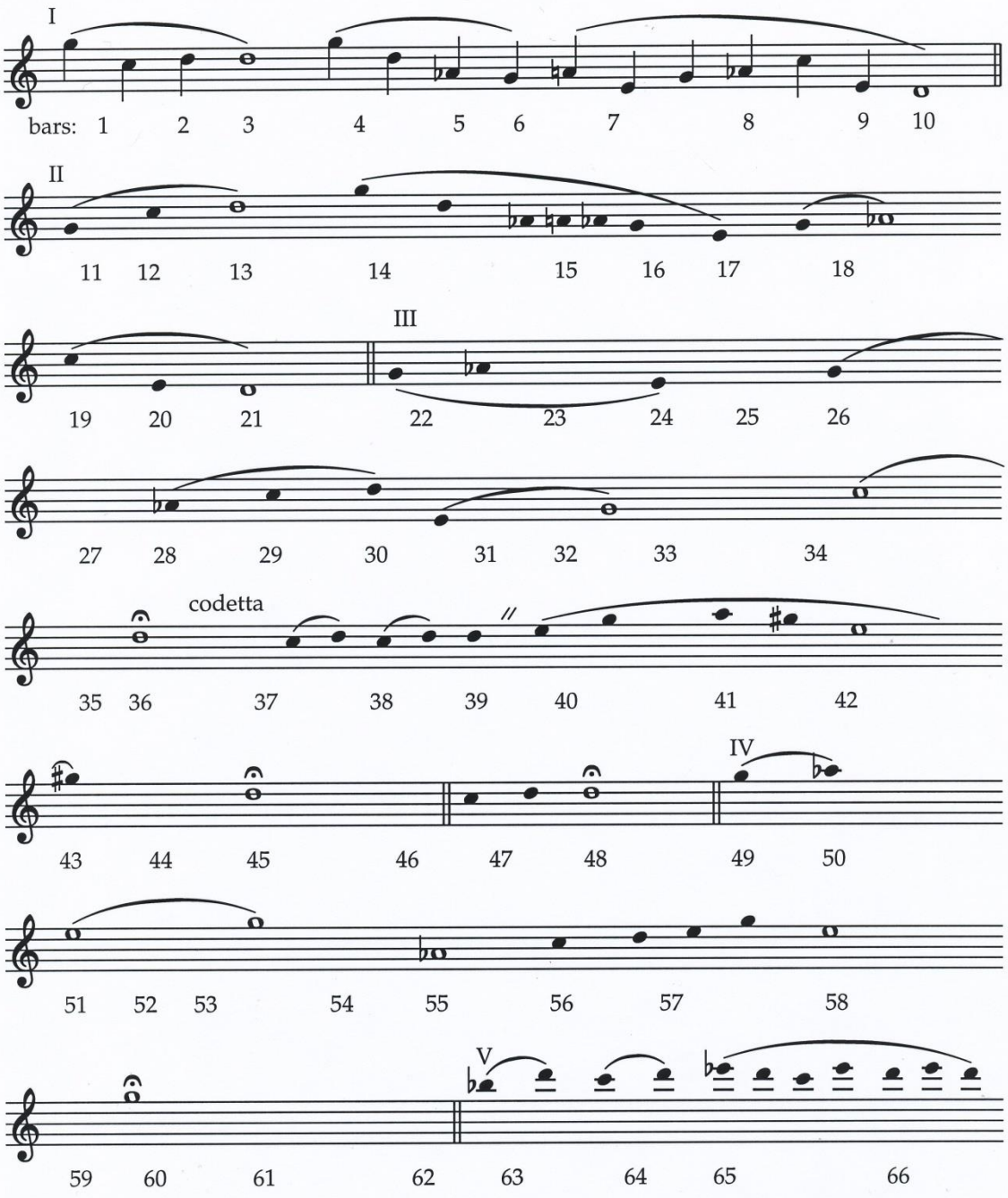
Example 12: Akita Sugagaki - Section VII, Opening Measures

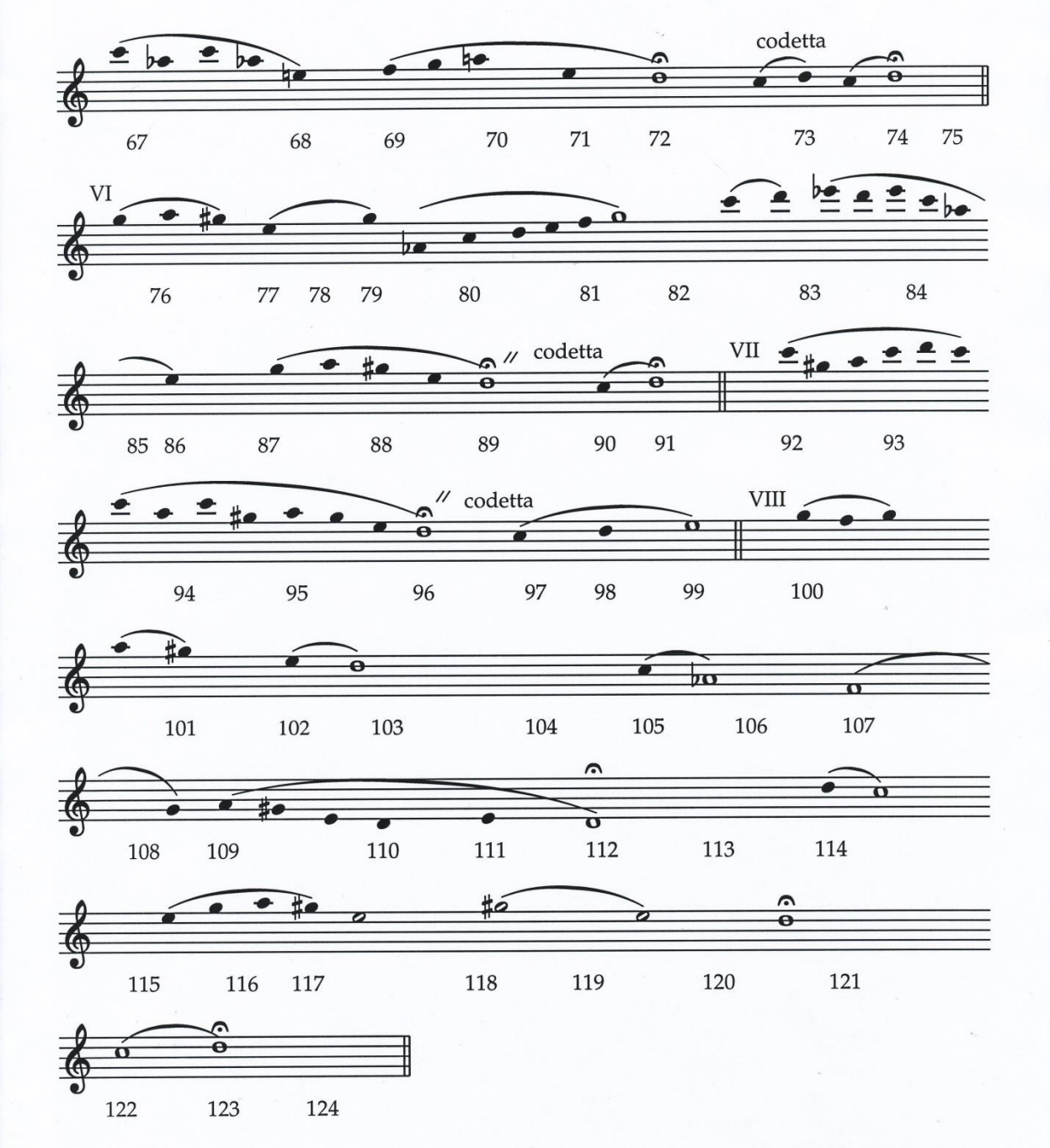


There follows a repetition of the *codetta* pattern which leads into the final *coda* section. This is in a small three-part design in which the phrase interpolated between the *codettas* in Section III alternates with what was the third phrase of the opening section. The piece is concluded by one last replaying of the *codetta*.

An outline of the tonal architecture of *Akita Sugagaki* illustrates in the simplest terms the general contour of its melody. The following example will reveal, also, the phrase-by-phrase, section-by-section organization of the piece as a whole. The important cadence points are indicated in whole-note values.

Example 13: Tonal Architecture of Akita Sugagaki





The foregoing analysis of a piece that may be considered typical of the *koten honkyoku* is based on the performance style practiced in Kyoto at the Meian Temple. The Meian manner is characterized by a plain tone largely devoid of vibrato or other such coloristic additives. It must not be forgotten that this is but one style of shakuhachi playing.

With the Japanese penchant for specialization, the many sub-temples of the Kyoto parent have fostered very different performance styles that are uniquely their own. Some differ quite markedly from the Meian model presented here. The Komusō monks of Futai-ken near Sendai, for example, developed a technique in which "flutter tonguing" played a major role. As the number of Komusō diminishes year by year (for the order has been "dis-established" since the Meiji Period) these variant performance styles are being lost. At one time, however, there must have been an extraordinary variety of styles in which the same piece was played.

Komusō monks, seldom to be seen in Japan today, were once a common sight on the roads throughout the country. Their temples were scattered in every region of the main islands, except for Hokkaido. The names of the old regions, the towns and the temples, all conjure up images of a world remote in time and space from the present, a world where violence and tranquillity were commingled and where the voice of Nature had not yet been silenced.

A list of those places which were once centres of the Komusō tradition is contained in Appendix II. This list, which comprises sixty-four temples, indicates their particular density in certain areas and reveals something of the political function of the Komusō during the Tokugawa Period. Twenty-four of the sixty-four temples were located in or near Edo (present-day Tokyo) where the Tokugawa shogunate had established its headquarters. Several others were to be found in what is today Ibaraki and Tochigi Prefectures, slightly to the northeast of Edo, and on the Izu Peninsula to the southwest. As has been mentioned earlier, the Komusō served the Tokugawa authorities as *metsuke* or "local spies", who could infiltrate communities easily and unobtrusively. Their prevalence in the Edo area seems a clear indication of the firmness of Tokugawa control of that region. It also indicates how quickly the centre of Japanese culture was shifting eastward from the Kyoto district after the beginning of the seventeenth century.

The Kinko Tradition

A sense of place is of particular importance in Japan. Poetry, fiction, drama, and music are dotted with place names, and writers can count on their evoking certain associations in the popular imagination. This may seem a curious phenomenon in a land as tiny as Japan and in one that — at least at a glance — produces so strong an impression of homogeneity. But anyone who takes the trouble to look beneath the surface will find such homogeneity to be illusive. Japan has always sheltered a cultural variety that can only be considered incredible in a land mass so small, and it is this variety that is reflected in the importance of place associations to Japanese literature.

The old culture was peripatetic. Within the framework of travel strictures imposed by the various governments holding power in Japan, a wide variety of individuals — scholars, poets, priests, masterless *samurai* — were able to move fairly freely about the country. The *haiku* of Bashō and other footloose poets, as well as the ribald, picaresque stories of the Edo Period, attest to a national penchant for wandering. And the tradition has continued into the present. Trains are always packed with people going to visit relatives or the family shrine, company groups on an outing, or individuals journeying just for the fun of it. The songs they sing, especially when the *sake* is flowing, resound with place names, names that are so deeply imprinted on the Japanese consciousness that the mere mention of the place will often cause faces to light up even if the listeners have never been there.

Out of this travel tradition were born the Kinko shakuhachi *honkyoku*. Little is known of the life of Kurosawa Kinko, founder of the Kinko-ryū[9]. He was born in 1710 into a family of retainers of the Kuroda clan of Chikuzen, now part of Fukuoka Prefecture in northern Kyushu. At an early age he apparently separated himself from family and clan attachments and spent most of his life wandering about Japan, ultimately taking the orders of a Komusō. He became a priest at Ichigatsu-ji, a famous Komusō centre in what is now Chiba Prefecture. Later he moved to Reihō-ji in the then tranquil region of Musashi, west of Edo.

[9] *Ryū* is usually translated "school". Literally, it means "stream" and is used to indicate a personally transmitted artistic tradition. The Japanese word will be retained in this case as the English translation is inadequate.

It is assumed that Kurosawa Kinko began his systematic collecting of *honkyoku* while traveling throughout the Tokugawa world. Doubtless he visited many of the temples listed in this book as sources of shakuhachi *honkyoku*. Some documents maintain that it was Kinko himself who determined the thirty-six pieces that are the basis of the Kinko-ryū and that he imparted them to his disciples before he died. However, a document attributed to his grandson Gajūrō, born in Edo in 1772, lists thirty-five Kinko-ryū *honkyoku* and credits his grandfather with having collected seventeen of them. The other eighteen Gajūrō claimed to have learned from his own father Kōemon (1747-1811), who, as son of the original Kinko, received the title Kinko II. Kōemon was also a priest at Ichigatsu-ji and Reihō-ji. Thus there is some doubt as to which of the early Kurosawas collected precisely which *honkyoku*.

Kinko I is reported to have distinguished himself as a maker of shakuhachi and there remains a legacy of fine instruments attributed to his hand. He died in 1771 and his ashes repose at Shōzan-ji at Yotsuya in what is now Tokyo. His *homyo*, the name assigned a priest upon his death, is "Zengan-in Zenshu Kinko Koji".

Although all honour is paid to the name of Kinko I, it is not clear who it was that actually transformed the old Komusō music into the lean, lonely, and austere music of Kinko shakuhachi. Both his son and grandson are also regarded as ancestors of modern shakuhachi music and training, and indeed, the grandson Kinko III operated a school for the study of shakuhachi in Edo. Kinko IV, the younger brother of Kinko III (some say he was his son), appears to have been uninterested in carrying on the musical tradition of his predecessors and was cast into disgrace.

The question of who was responsible for the transformation of Komusō music matters less than the music itself and the supreme artistic achievement it represents. The Kinko *honkyoku* is a body of music that could have been wrought only by an artist of profound imagination, and only the most refined aural sensibility could have launched such a journey into the micro-cosmos of subtleties contained in this music.

Old Komusō music contains broad melodic sections separated by occasional rapid passagework that makes considerable demands on the dexterity of the performer.

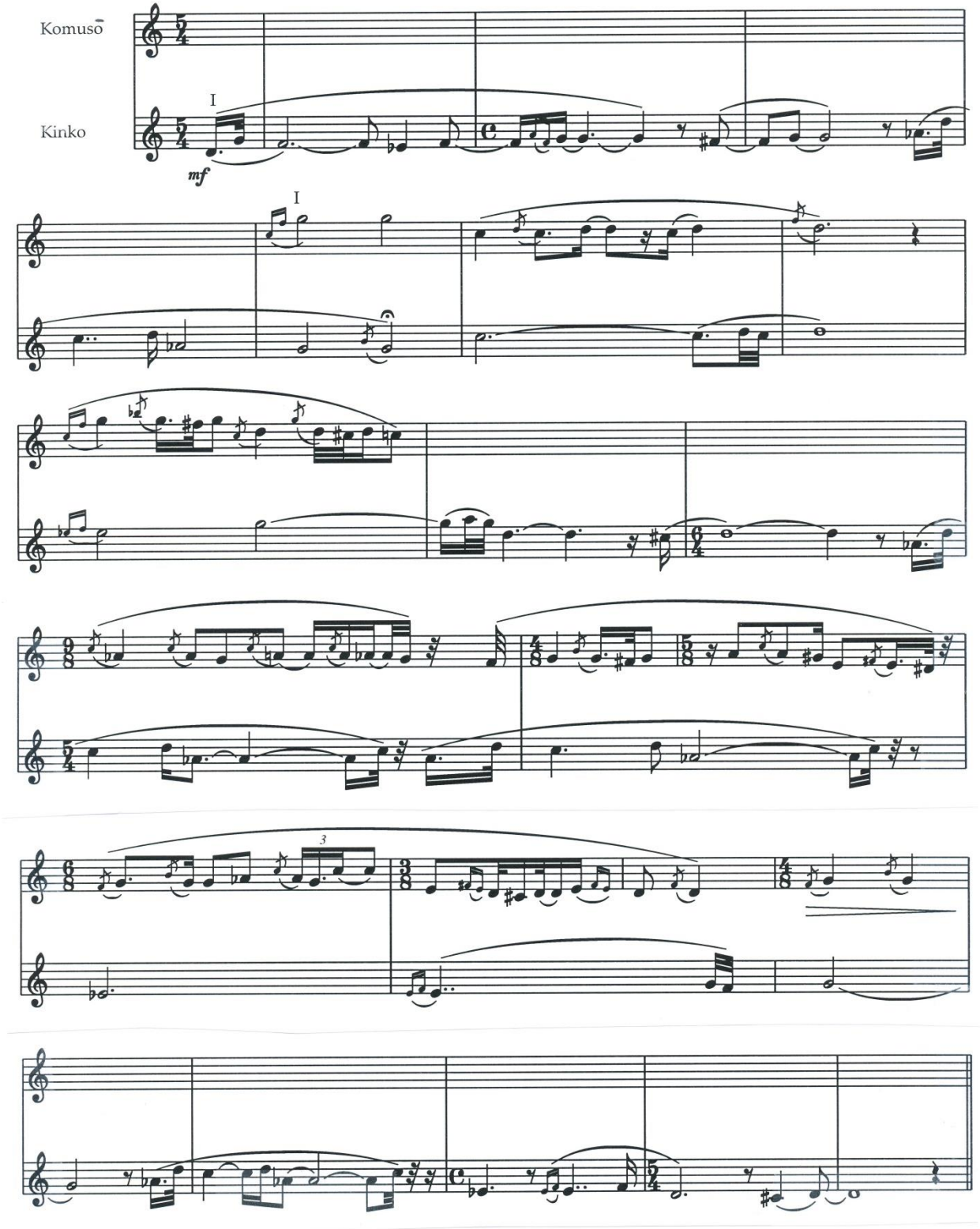
Somewhat differently, Kinko music seems to drift in a timeless world where pulses of strong beats alternating with weak are submerged in a less clearly defined background. So it seems; but one soon realizes that this is a deceptive impression. The deception is reinforced in those moments when all motion seems to be arrested, as in similar moments in *noh*. But underneath there beats an inexorable pulse.

Kinko *honkyoku* share the same tonal landscape as the older Komusō music. In terms of larger, formal design the Komusō elements of repetition and alternation of motive and thematic material is maintained in the Kinko music as well. Then what is the difference between the two types of shakuhachi music? The distinctions are real, but they are vague and seem to lie in the indistinct region of feeling and emotional attitudes, a region that resists analysis.

At the outset of my study of Kinko music, I assumed that since it was a direct outgrowth of Komusō music and even shared the same compositions it would be very similar in sound and technique as well. My surprise was enormous, however, when I first heard *Akita Sugagaki* performed in the Komusō manner after already learning the piece in its Kinko form. It might be well to consider them two different compositions derived from the same source. This piece will serve as a convenient vehicle for comparing the two types of music and exploring the musical landscape they share. The music transcribed here is given on two staves. When they differ, the Komusō version occupies the upper staff and the Kinko transformation appears on the lower staff.[10]

[10] Ed. Note: For the complete transcription that was meant to accompany the text, Weisgarber used a version for two shakuhachi. He did so to illustrate a type of polyphony which began to appear in several areas of Japanese music during the eighteenth century.

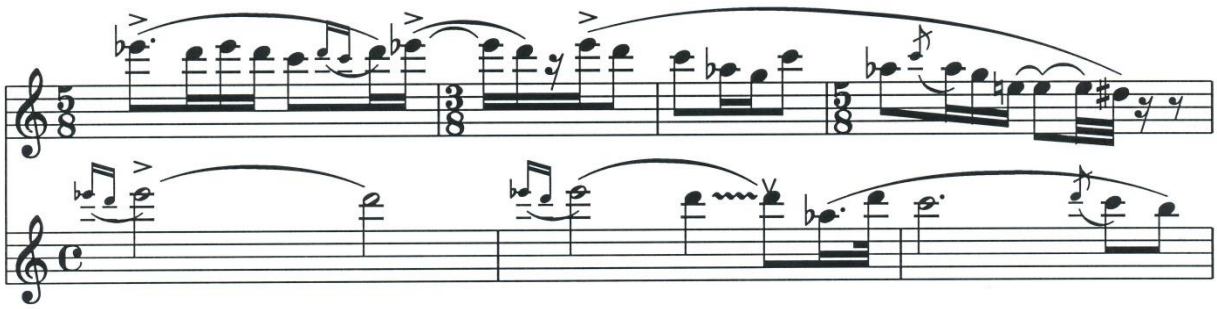
Example 14: Akita Sugagaki - Comparison of Kinko and Komusō Versions



This complete quotation of the first section of *Akita Sugagaki* clearly reveals marked differences between the two versions of the piece. The Kinko version is pared down to the basic, essential tones and the florid lines of the older version are reduced to single sustained tones at many points. Such sustained patterns are by no means entirely absent from Komusō music, but they may undergo extensive modification as they reappear within the same piece. As I have already indicated, there is great variation in the style of Komusō playing. This is not the case with the Kinko *honkyoku* where every pattern has taken on a traditional and orthodox manner of execution, with seldom any variation in performance.

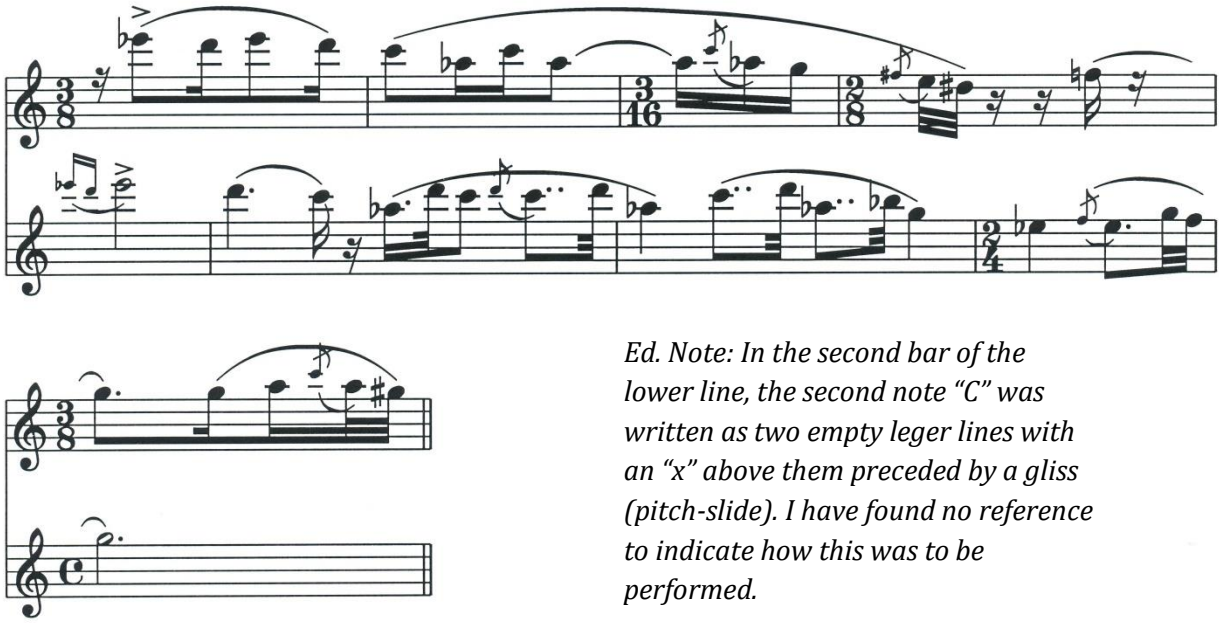
At the point in *Akita Sugagaki* where the highest level of pitch is attained there is a passage common to both Komusō and Kinko traditions. It appears in similar form in other Komusō pieces but with notable rhythmic modifications. In the many times it occurs in Kinko *honkyoku*, however, there is little or no modification at all. In *Akita Sugagaki* it appears twice in both versions. *[Ed. Note: Weisgarber's hand-written example was difficult to read. The "V" attached to the note in the second bar of the lower line may have been an "x" above the second leger line without a note-head. If so, I do not know how this was to be performed. According to the author's article in "Ethnomusicology" (see Bibliography) the "V" indicated a "meri" (see Chapter 5). The "glissando" indicates a pitch slide.]*

Example 15a: Akita Sugagaki - Highest Level of Pitch (Both Versions)



At this point, the Kinko version repeats the last two measures of the pattern — a traditional function. Note when the passage appears the second time, however, the up-beat to the final measure in the Kinko version is frozen into one of the basic patterns while in the older version it is subjected to greater variation.

Example 15b



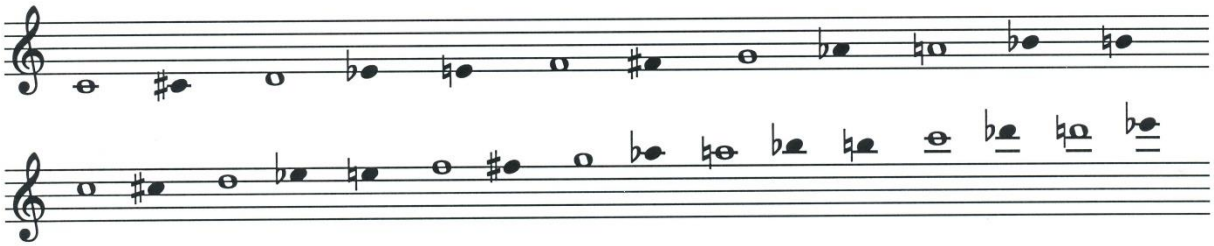
Ed. Note: In the second bar of the lower line, the second note "C" was written as two empty leger lines with an "x" above them preceded by a gliss (pitch-slide). I have found no reference to indicate how this was to be performed.

From these brief comparative fragments drawn from *Akita Sugagaki* (and they are quite typical) it may be concluded that Kinko *honkyoku* move in much slower note values than the older music. In fact, any Kinko piece does have a far longer duration than its Komusō ancestor.

What the early Kinko masters appear to have done is to probe deeply below the melodic surface of the Komusō music. They penetrated to the bedrock, to the tonal resources that are common to *gagaku*, *shōmyō*, *noh*, and the old shakuhachi *honkyoku*. From this bedrock music they extracted the most significant tones, treating them as the supporting structure of their whole musical system. These critical tones and their respective relationships thus became the basis for the complex interactions of cell-like patterns which were organized into what is known as the Kinko *honkyoku*.

The following example illustrates the spectrum of *honkyoku* melody. The "white notes" are the tones of the *ritsu* scale, the foundation of the Japanese tonal system.

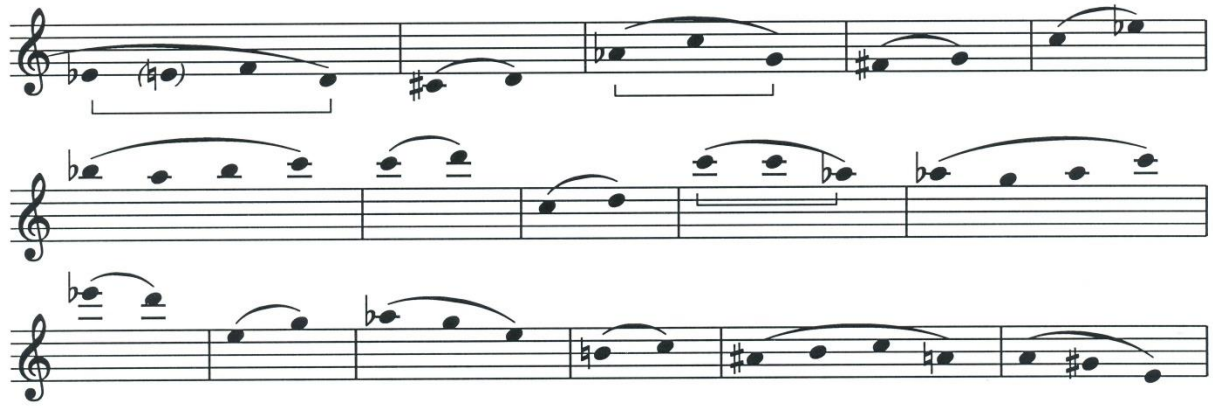
Example 16: The Spectrum of Honkyoku Melody



From the matrix of tones, a large number of note-groupings, or patterns, were created. In the case of the "shakuhachi scale", the C# and F# *hen'on*, and their frequent association with those tones one half-step above, form an important category of cadence patterns called *nayashi*, deriving from the *yuri* principle already mentioned. *Nayashi* appear with other tones as well.

Below are the important note-groupings that form the motivic material of Kinko *honkyoku*. They are the essential groupings. Add to them the shaping force of rhythm and they become full-fledged patterns.

Example 17: Essential Note Groupings in Kinko Honkyoku



In a culture that tends to classify all things, in life as well as in art, and where order is achieved through clearly defined hierarchical structure, it is natural that the music of Kinko shakuhachi should reflect a high degree of order and discipline. By the beginning of the Meiji Period, *honkyoku* had been divided into a system involving three major categories: *honkyoku shoden* or "basic pieces", *honkyoku chūden* "middle pieces" and

honkyoku okuden or “advanced pieces”. These terms have nothing to do with any particular level of difficulty. Rather they express the degree of initiation into the art which the music reflects. *Okuden*, for example, means something like “the innermost tradition” and denotes secrecy and exclusiveness, qualities encountered frequently in the world of Japanese arts. These “secret pieces” include *Shika no Tōne* (“Distant Sounds of Deer”) and *Hōshōsu* (“Illustrious Young Phoenix”).

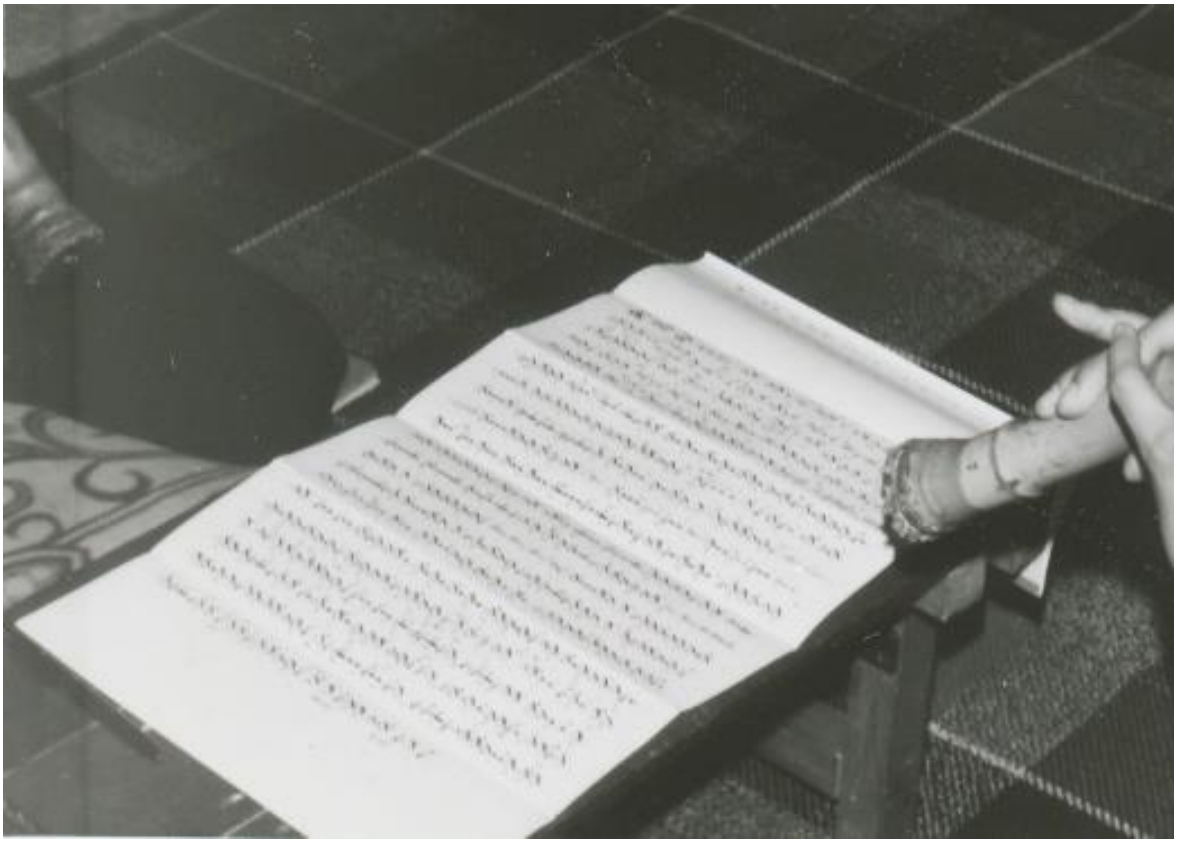
It is perhaps natural to assume that those pieces assigned to the *shoden* category are the easiest. Actually, nothing is further from the fact. They are termed “basic” or “beginning” pieces because they include the very oldest sources of shakuhachi music: *Kokū*, *Mukaiji*, and *Shin Kyorei*. Basic these pieces may be, but easy to play they are not.

The very first piece in the *shoden* category is called *Hi-fu-mi Hachi-gaeshi* (“One-two-three: Returning the Bowl”).This curious title is probably derived from the bowls for alms-begging that the shakuhachi-playing Komusō monks carried with them on their wanderings. It is believed that the music of the opening *Hi-fu-mi* section is based on a *gagaku* prelude, while the latter *Hachi-gaeshi* section has roots in *shōmyō*. The piece’s position at the very head of the catalogue of Kinko compositions indicates its primary importance to any student of Kinko *honkyoku*. It contains twenty-three patterns that form the very foundation of this type of shakuhachi playing. Any real understanding of Kinko music depends upon an initial mastering of the technical details of these patterns. In the transcription produced for this book, the twenty-three patterns have been numbered consecutively, offering the reader or performer some insight into the internal structure of all the Kinko *honkyoku*.

Within the three main categories, *shoden*, *chūden* and *okuden*, Kinko *honkyoku* are further classified into the following sub-categories: *shirabe*, *kyorei*, *kokū*, *su(ga)gaki*, *shishi*, and *hi-kyoku*.. The distinctions between these different categories appear arcane to say the least, and the subtleties distinguishing them have never been fully explained to me. I suspect that the original functions of these categories have been lost and the reasons for them have vanished.

Performing Kinko *honkyoku* is an adventure in a world of infinite subtlety. When compared to the notation texture (the density of notes and rhythmic complexities) of the older Komusō music, Kinko music may, at first, seem flat and static. But nothing could be further from the truth. Beyond the twenty-three basic patterns of the first piece in the Kinko repertoire lies a vast realm of unparalleled subtleties where new patterns burgeon in infinite variations of the basic material. Words cannot begin to describe the rich variety of this music. It must be experienced.

Music for "Izu Reibo", Kinko-ryū Honkyoku



Student of Tanaka Yūdō Plays Honkyoku

CHAPTER V

THE INSTRUMENT AND THE TECHNIQUE

There are few ways for a musician to make more direct contact with the music of another culture than by examining one of its instruments. The Western musician need only take a Japanese instrument into his hands to become instantly aware of the vast differences between Japanese music and what he is accustomed to. Everything is different: the "feel" of the bamboo, paulownia or sandalwood of which the Japanese instrument is made; the unfamiliar sizes and positions of finger holes on wind instruments; the utterly strange calibrations of the fingerboards on stringed instruments; the peculiar response and resonance of Japanese drums. One need not even produce a single sound to realize that very different ideas about music are being encountered.

And so it is with the shakuhachi. Although I had long played Western wind instruments, the moment I first picked up a shakuhachi I was aware that the instrument possessed characteristics vastly different from anything I was accustomed to and that playing it would involve unfamiliar principles that ranged far beyond mere technical matters. For contained in the lovely, slim bamboo form of the shakuhachi is the whole culture out of which it developed, a culture in which music served very different functions than in my own. The instrument was more than an object for the making of beautiful sounds: it was a vehicle for the practice of meditation.

Shakuhachi playing is a state of mind. In an earlier chapter of this book it was described by Tanaka Yūdō as "falling easily into Nothingness". To be sure, this "Nothingness" is not the nihilism of the West, but the profound Asian concept of a state of Nature where all things communicate with each other. Attaining this state requires infinite patience, subjection to severe discipline, development of an ear tuned to minute details, and the training of the memory to retain them.

In a culture where bamboo serves myriad functions, this supremely versatile material has also come to symbolize man's kinship with the natural world. The visual appearance of the thick-walled tube from which a shakuhachi is made is peculiar to

Japanese sensibilities. The more gnarled and ancient its appearance, the better. Standardization, as we know it in the making of Western instruments, is not a goal of the shakuhachi maker. Instead, he lavishes great care and attention on the selection of proper bamboo stock and cherishes a variety of shape and texture in the pieces he will make into instruments. Certain makers prefer a rough, natural appearance on their instruments and go to extremes to achieve it. One instrument in my possession was painstakingly bent by the application of heat and long, constant pressure in order to give it a uniquely lopsided appearance.

The tone quality sought in shakuhachi playing is also vastly different from that desired from Western wind instruments. A certain roughness that is, in a sense, analogous to the appearance of the instrument itself is an element that fine shakuhachi players preserve in their performance. Sound is produced from the shakuhachi, just as from the flute, oboe, clarinet, or bassoon, by setting the air column within the instrument into vibration with the human breath. But while the Western instrumentalist strives to refine all breath sound out of his tone production, the shakuhachi player never allows it to disappear. Breathing is, after all, the most natural of human actions, and breath sound is an integral part of shakuhachi technique, blending with the naturalness of the instrument and of the music itself. Yet another example of the timeless Japanese taste for the simple and the natural.

The name “shakuhachi” is an abbreviation of *isshaku-hachisun* (or *isshaku-hassun*), the measure of length of the standard instrument: one *shaku* (the traditional Japanese “foot”) plus eight *sun* (the Japanese “inch”). This standard length is equivalent to 54.54 centimetres. The instrument has only five finger holes, and when it is blown with all holes stopped the resulting pitch is D', or one whole stop above middle C (C'). This lowest pitch is indicated by the syllable *ro* and is written with the symbol 口 . In ensemble music, *ro* is used as a tuning note, just as A is employed in Western music.

In addition to the standard shakuhachi, there are a variety of other tube lengths in use. They are still called shakuhachi despite their deviation from the *isshaku-hachisun* standard. The *ro*-pitch varies according to the length of the instrument. Four types of

instrument of less than the standard length are called *tankan* ("short pipes") and four of longer length are called *chokan* ("long pipes"). Their lengths and *ro*-pitches are listed below:

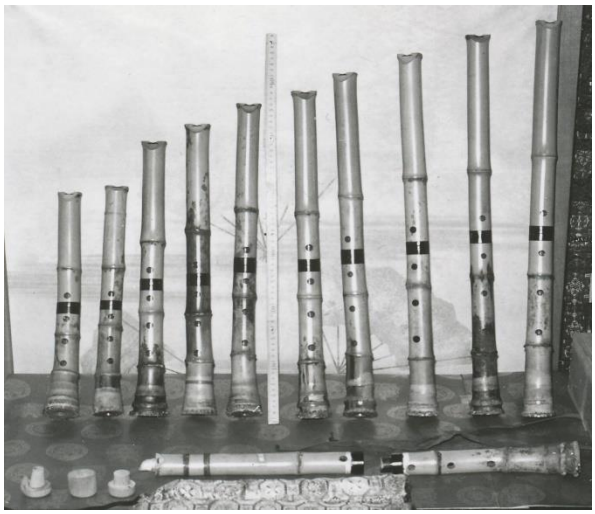
Tankan (short pipes)

1 *shaku* 3 *sun* (39.39 cm)	*ro*= G'
1 *shaku* 4 *sun* (42.42 cm)	*ro*= F#'
1 *shaku* 5 *sun* (45.45 cm)	*ro*= F'
1 *shaku* 6 *sun* (48.48 cm)	*ro*= E'

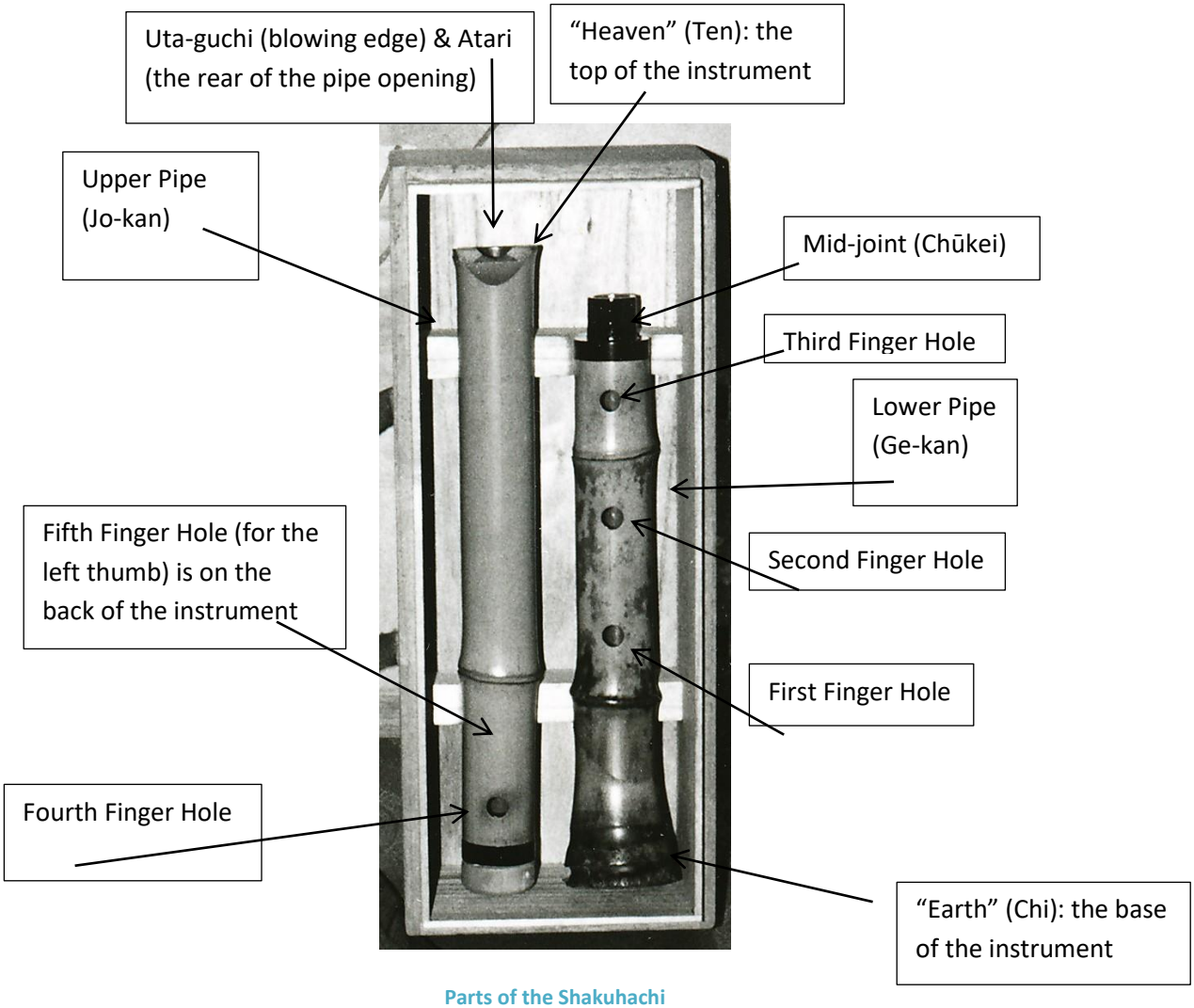
Chokan (long pipes)

1 *shaku* 9 *sun* (57.57 cm)	*ro*= C#'
2 *shaku* (60.60 cm)	*ro*= C'
2 *shaku* 1 *sun* (63.63 cm)	*ro*= b
2 *shaku* 3 *sun* (69.69 cm)	*ro*= a

Today, shakuhachi are frequently used to accompany performances of Japanese folksongs, and it is not unusual to see the shakuhachi player of a folksong ensemble carrying an entire consort of shakuhachi of various lengths to accommodate the vocal ranges of the singers.



Shakuhachi of Various Lengths



Parts of the Shakuhachi

Playing the Shakuhachi:
Breathing and Posture

Anyone learning to play the shakuhachi draws near to the ways of thinking that lie deep at the roots of Japanese aesthetics. Perhaps most essential is the feeling of purity that must accompany any attempt at playing the instrument. As Satō Hisao has noted in his instruction manual for Kinko School shakuhachi, "… there must be a feeling of spiritual purity. This is especially true in the matter of breathing. There can be no perfection when one's heart is in disorder and when one's conduct is confused. Then the breath fluctuates erratically and rhythm and pitch are chaotic." Proper posture is equally important, and all the shakuhachi instruction books go into considerable detail explaining how the performer should kneel or sit or stand while playing. Kneeling is the traditional posture while playing

the shakuhachi indoors. Again, I quote Mr. Satō's instructions: "When the performer is kneeling, his chest will expand naturally; both knees should be separated a little, the feet also separate and parallel to each other. ….. The spirit serene, no disturbing forces entering the body, a calm bearing maintained."


Tanaka Yūdō (Front View)

Holding the Instrument

It hardly needs to be said that the basic principle in holding the shakuhachi is that the hands be thoroughly relaxed. Finger muscles, palms, and wrists should never tighten, remaining always loose and pliable.

The thumb and middle fingers of the right hand support the instrument. The middle finger rests in a stationary position between the first and second holes. The thumb, on the underside of the pipe, supports the lower joint directly below the second hole. The second hole is covered by the index finger and the first hole by the third finger.


Hand Position from Right Side

The middle finger of the left hand rests in a stationary position between the third and fourth holes. The left third finger covers the third hole and the index finger covers the fourth or topmost hole. On the underside, the left thumb covers the fifth hole. The little fingers should rest lightly on the instrument, their movements following those of the third fingers. The little fingers should never be allowed to slip under the shakuhachi as "false"

supports.

Mr. Satō offers an intriguing suggestion for maintaining the proper position of the arms and elbows: “As for the elbows, they should not adhere to the torso, but should extend slightly outward. To achieve just the proper degree of natural position, try placing an egg under each arm and hold them there while playing.”

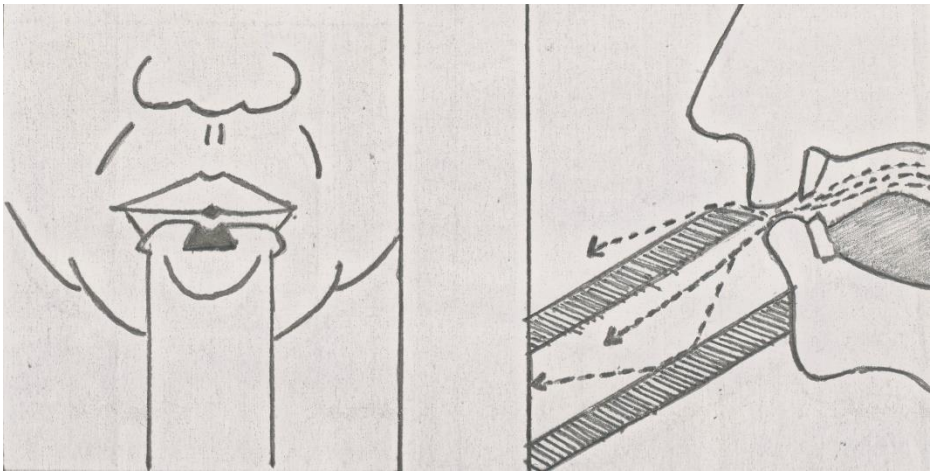
Tone Production

Kubi furi sannen. (“Shake the head for three years.”) This often quoted saying attests to the legendary difficulty of learning to play the shakuhachi. Perhaps most curious is the manner of head shaking involved. This refers to the constant movement of the head in order to produce pitch changes and the various types of vibrato essential to shakuhachi style. It may not take the prescribed three years to produce a good sound, but in the first stages of instruction producing any sound at all may be unexpectedly difficult. Before even picking up a shakuhachi, the beginner would do well to practice tone production by blowing across a bottle opening. A beer or soda bottle will serve the purpose nicely. First, place the rim of the bottle just under the lower lip, holding the bottle at slightly less than a forty-five degree angle to the head. Stretch the corners of the mouth outward, forming a small aperture through which a fast air stream should be directed downward, glancing off the opposite rim of the bottle opening. When a steady tone can be held by blowing in this fashion, one has grasped the initial blowing principle of the shakuhachi. Practice on a bottle should continue until the tone can be maintained effortlessly without any change of pitch.

Next, still using a bottle rather than an actual shakuhachi, the beginner should try lowering his head while continuing to blow until he manages to produce a note pitched a semi-tone lower than the original sound. The angle of the bottle should not be changed as the head is lowered. This technique is called *meri* or *meru*. Then, without breaking a continuous long breath, try lowering and raising the head first to lower the pitch a half-tone and then to raise it again to the original note. This must be done by the head alone, without shifting the position of the bottle.

Now, beginning on the original note, raise the pitch by gradually raising the head. This technique is called *kari* or *karu*. The combination of lowering and raising pitch in this way is called *meri-kari* and serves as the foundation of all shakuhachi technique. This crucial device must be mastered from the outset.

Finally, once *meri-kari* can be managed with some ease, it is time to try these blowing techniques on a real shakuhachi. This may prove surprisingly difficult since the bore of the shakuhachi is wider than the bottle opening. Nevertheless, the principles remain the same. In addition, the notch cut into the top of the outer portion of the shakuhachi tube contains an element more sophisticated than the bottle opening and makes the creation of a tone harder to manage at first. Into this notch a sliver of ivory, bone, ebony, or plastic (in less expensive, modern shakuhachi) has been inserted. This is the sharply–honed blowing edge. Beyond it, the bamboo is sliced away at an oblique angle.



Blowing into the Shakuhachi (artist unknown)

The above drawings should make clear the proper lip position for blowing into the shakuhachi. The *atari* portion of the shakuhachi (the rear of the opening) fits snugly into the angle of the chin, the lower lip almost — but not quite — touching the *uta-guchi* (the blowing edge at the front of the opening) and serving much the same function as the block on a Western recorder. The crucial point in lip position is finding just the proper distance between the lip and the blowing edge. Once found, the lips must "memorize" this position so as to be able to find the proper blowing distance immediately.

As an initial exercise, hold the shakuhachi with either hand about half way between the top and the fourth hole. Raise it to the lips and attempt blowing with all the holes left open. Mr. Sato advises the beginner to "… blow as if awakening the coals of a charcoal fire, a thin column of breath issuing from the aperture between the lips." When the breath is on the point of exhaustion, inhale quickly and quietly through the nose and mouth.

Care of the Shakuhachi

Before embarking on the complicated subject of shakuhachi notation and reading music, a few paragraphs on the handling and care of the instrument are necessary. Basically, the thick-walled bamboo tube is a strong and durable object, strong enough to have been used as a weapon of defense by unarmed Komusō. If treated properly, a good shakuhachi should not suffer from age or fairly rough handling, but it is susceptible to irreparable damage from excessive moisture or dryness. Prized instruments taken from Japan to drier climates have been known to crack.

In a shakuhachi, as in any wind instrument, water condenses in the bore and must be wiped away. This is done with a special Japanese drop-swab called *tsuyu-otoshi* made of a piece of soft cloth with a small weight attached. Since the *uta-guchi*, the sharp blowing edge, is of critical importance to the quality of the shakuhachi, the greatest care must be taken when dropping the weight into the pipe. As the swab is fed into the tube, the *uta-guchi* should be shielded with the thumb of the left hand. When the instrument is not being used, the *uta-guchi* should always be protected by a special leather cap.

Shakuhachi are usually stored in bags specially fitted to each instrument. If an instrument is to be stored for a long time, it should also be wrapped in plastic together with some sort of humidifier to prevent the drying out and cracking of the bamboo tube. A slice of apple serves as an effective humidifier.

When assembling a shakuhachi, the two parts should be fitted together about halfway into the mid-joint. Holding the upper pipe with the left hand, the lower should be pushed upward from the base of the shakuhachi. The mid-joint fitting should never be twisted. If the joint fittings are dry, a light lubrication of Vaseline may be applied.

When taking the instrument apart, again the mid-joint must not be twisted. Instead, the shakuhachi should be grasped at the joint with the left hand. Then, when the left hand is struck lightly in a sort of “karate chop” with the right hand, the instrument will readily come apart. It must not be forced.

CHAPTER VI

NOTATION AND FINGERING

The reader who is not planning to learn to play the shakuhachi (or is planning to do so but has not yet acquired one) may wish to skip this chapter. It will consist of a series of elementary charts and commentary that will make the most sense if the reader has a shakuhachi in hand.

Chart 1: Ordinary Notation & Fingerings

This, and all subsequent charts, should be read from the top down and from right to left in Japanese fashion.

In Japanese music, "notes" are written as *katakana* symbols, *katakana* being one of the two syllabic systems used alongside "Chinese characters" (*kanji*) in the written Japanese language. The top row of Chart 1 shows, from right to left, the symbols for the basic notes of the shakuhachi's scale. The first column (on the far right) gives the names and symbols for each of the five finger-holes, numbered from the bottom. The five columns/rows to the left show the fingering for each note. A darkened circle indicates that a finger must cover the indicated finger-hole. An empty circle indicates that the hole must be left uncovered.

The row below the fingerings gives the Japanese names of the pitches represented by the symbol in the top row. Below that is the corresponding English name for the same pitches.

The shakuhachi has three "registers", high, middle and low. The character 大 (*dai*, "large") denotes the highest register (called "*daikan*") of the shakuhachi, the highest note on the instrument being D'''. The middle register (from D") is designated by 甲 (*kan*), while 乙 (*otsu*) and/or 呂 (*ro*) are the symbols for the lowest register of the instrument. Fingerings may differ depending on the register in which a note is played. The register symbols appear in the next row.

Chart #1: Ordinary Notation and Fingerings

Open hole = ○ Closed Hole = ●

ハ 二 四 五	ハ	ヒ 五 (イ)	ヒ	ヒ 五 (イ)	リ	チ	レ	ツ	ロ	Notation Symbols in Katakana	
○	○	○	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	5 Go 五	Finger Hole Numbers
○	●	○	○	○	○	●	●	●	●	4 Shi 四 (Yon)	
●	●	○	○	○	○	○	●	●	●	3 San 三	
○	●	○	○	●	●	○	○	●	●	2 Ni 二	
●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	●	1 Ichi 一	
Ni Shi Go no Ha	Ha Go no Ha	Go no Hi I	Hi	Go no Hi I	Ri	Chi	Re	Tsu	Ro	Name of Pitch in Japanese	
C2	D3	D3 D2	C3	D2	C2	A2 A1	G2 G1	F2 F1	D2 D1	Western Pitch	
乙	大 甲	大 甲	甲	甲 乙	乙	甲 乙	甲 乙	甲 乙	甲 乙	dai kan otsu	Register

Chart 2: Traditional Uses of Meri (メリ)

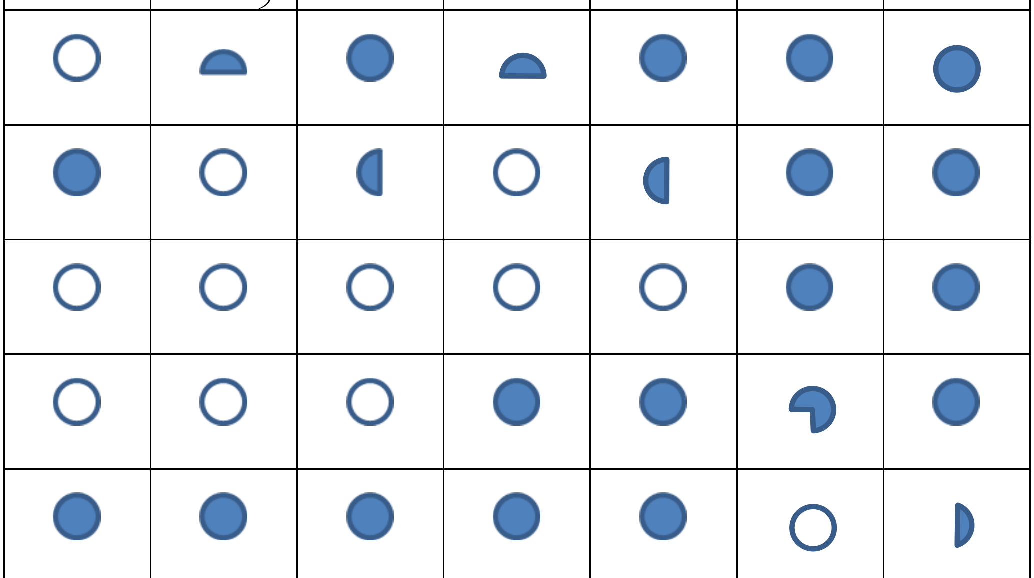
Chart 2 shows the auxiliary pitches roughly corresponding to the Western sharps and flats. The rows and columns are organized in the same way as for Chart 1. Circles with a flattened bottom indicate that 1/3 of the hole remains uncovered.

ハ 三	ヒ メリ 五	ヒ メリ	リ メリ	チ メリ	ウ	レ メリ	ツ メリ	ロ メリ	ロ 大メリ	
										5 五
										4 四
										3 三
										2 二
										1 一
San no Ha	Go no Hi Dai-meri	Hi Meri	Ri Meri	Chi Meri	U	Re Meri	Tsu Meri	Ro Meri	Ro Dai-meri	
D#/Eb	C#/Db	A#/Bb	A#/Bb	Ab	Low Ab	F	D#/Eb	C#/Db	C	
大	大	甲	乙	甲	乙	甲 乙	甲 乙	甲 乙	乙	
One octave higher than Tsu-meri.					Lower head a little.	Lower head.		Lower head.	Lower head greatly.	

Chart 3: Fingerings for Chú-meri (中メリ)

The fingerings in the *chū-meri* classification constitute the most sophisticated notation encountered so far. Great care must be taken in gauging the pitch properly. Pitches are normally a semi-tone below the principal tones.

ハ四	ヒ五 甲中メリ	ヒ 中メリ	ヒ五 中メリ	リ 中メリ	レ 中メリ	ツ 中メリ



Shi no Ha	Go no Hi Kan Chūmeri	Hi Chūmeri	Go no Hi Chūmeri	Ri Chūmeri	Re Chūmeri	Tsu Chūmeri
E3	C#/Db3	B2	C#/Db2	B1	F#/Gb2 F#/Gb1	E2 E1
大						
甲	甲	甲			甲	甲
			乙	乙	乙	乙

Chart 4: Further Difficult Fingering Techniques

The material in Chart 4 (p. 80) consists of a category of specialized, highly idiomatic fingerings which should be explored only when the reader has become familiar with the material in the previous three charts.

The fingering technique illustrated in the sixth column from the right in Chart 4 is one of the four most important in this category. This technique is called *ru* (ル). As an example, using *re* (レ) as the principal tone (in either the *kan* 甲 or *otsu* 乙 registers) the *ru* is executed by a quick "tap" (*utsu* 打) on hole #1 followed by a rapid opening and closing of hole #3. The latter device is called "pushing" (*osu* 押). It is of great importance in all music of the Kinko-ryū. This technique is written as follows:

甲　又　乙
レ㊀打
ル㊂押

As a further example with *chi* (チ) as the principal tone (in 甲 or 乙 registers or as メリ) the *ru* (ル) is executed by a quick *utsu* (打) on hole #1, followed by a rapid *osu* (押) on hole #4. This is written as follows:

甲　又　乙
チ㊀打
ル㊃押

This same sequence occurs when *u* (ウ) is substituted for *chi* (チ) as the principal tone.

Next, we find one of the more unusual devices in Kinko-ryū music. The third finger of the right hand moves slowly in a counter clock-wise direction, finally closing — for just an instant — hole #1. On paper it looks like this:

甲　又　乙
ツ メリ
ル

This results in the following pattern:

ツメリ　ル　ツメリ
Eb　Db　Eb

ヒ カラ	ル	レ 三 五	ハ 四 五	ハ 四 五	ウ 一 三 メリ	ウ
●	●	●	○	○	●	●
○	●	○	○	○	●	●
○	●	●	●	●	○	○
○	●	○	○	●	●	●
連打	打	○	●	●	○	●
Hi Kara	Ru	San Go no Re	Ni Shi Go no Ha	Shi Go no Ha	Ichi San no U	San no U
	F2	G3	Bb3	Bb3	G2	Bb2
		大	大	大		
甲	甲	甲	甲	甲	甲	甲
	乙					
Several 打 on open hole #1	打 (utsu) = strike or tap the open hole	Use “Chimeri” as starting point.			“meri” position	

Chart 5: Cadence Pattern — Ha-ra-ro (ハラロ)

The execution of the fingerings in the chart below will give the following result. [Note: the symbol ">" is used to denote a repeated pitch.] In written notation the pattern appears as:

ハ
ラ
ロ

ハ ラ ロ
ha ra ro
C#2 > D2

ロ	ラ	ハ 一 二 四 五
●	○	○
●	○	○
●	●	●
●	打	○
●	●	●
Ro	Ra	Ni Shi Go Ha
D2	C#2	C#2
甲		
	乙	乙
	Rapid 打 on 2nd Hole	Ha Meri

Chart 6: Koro-koro (コロコロ)

Koro-koro is one of the loveliest effects in shakuhachi music. It is played with a lightly supported air stream and a quiet alternation between the first and second finger holes. Care must be taken to see that holes #4 and #5 are not opened too much. The pattern is written as below. It has similarities to a trill in Western music.

コ
ロ
>
>
ロ

口	口	コ
●	◡	◡
●	◡	◡
●	●	●
●	○	●
●	●	○
Ro	Ro	Ko
D2	D2	C2
甲		
	乙	乙

Fingers should not move rigidly. A sort of "popping" sound should be the result.

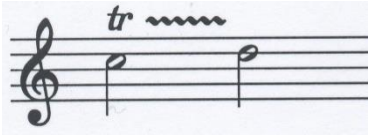


Chart 7 (a) & (b):
Substitute fingerings and fingerings used in modern shakuhachi music

Many of the tones resulting from the fingerings in the two following charts are extremely difficult to produce. Indeed, many of them are best avoided until a great deal of

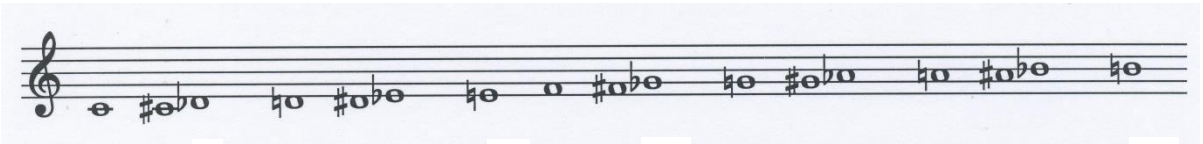
experience has been acquired. Fortunately, most tones indicated here occur rarely, and then, for the most part, only in recent music.

ハ 二五	フ	ヒ 二四	ヒ 四	リ 四	ウ 二三	ハ 皆明	ホ	レ 二斗
○	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	●
●	○	○	○	○	●	○	●	●
●	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	●
○	●	○	●	●	○	○	●	○
●	○	●	●	●	●	○	○	●
Tsu no Dai-Kan	Fu					Minna-Ake	O-Ro	Ni-Bo Kari
D#3/ Eb3	B2	C2/C3	B2	Bb1	Bb2	C(#)2-D2	C2 - Db2	F#1
大								
甲	甲	甲	甲		甲			
		乙		乙		乙	乙	乙
Same as ハ 二四五	Same as リ 中メリ and ヒ 中メリ.		Same as ヒ 中メリ.	Same as リメリ.	Same as ヒ 中メリ.	Normal position produces ロ; メリ produces リ = C#2 (O – Ro).	Alternation of Holes 1 & 2 produces C2-Db2 trill (similar to ヨロヨロ).	Same as レ 中メリ.

ヒ 大	イ 大	ハ 大 四五	ヒ 大四	レ 三五	レ 大	ツ 大	ツ 大 中メリ
●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●
●	○	○	○	○	●	●	●
●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●
○	○	●	●	○	○	●	●
●	●	●	●	○	○	○	◗
C4	B3	A#/Bb 3	A3	G#/Ab3	G3	F#/Gb 3	E3
大甲	大甲	大甲	大甲	大甲	大甲	大甲	大甲
"Hi no Daikan"	"Go Hi Chūmeri"						"Tsu Chūmeri no Daikan". Lower head.

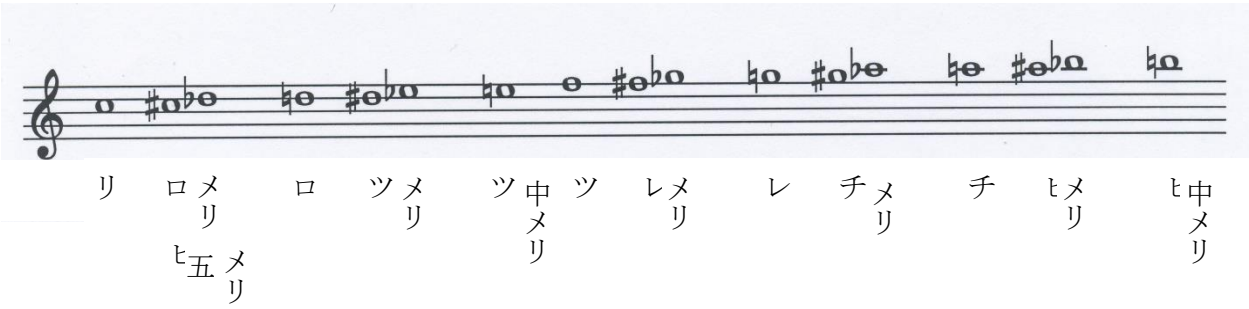
Chart 8 a), b), & c): the Full Range of the Shakuhachi in Both Japanese and Western Notation

otsu 乙

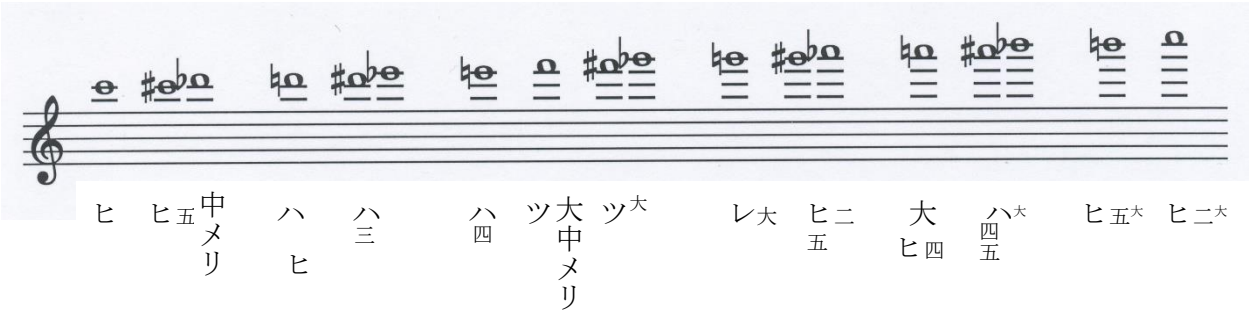


因 ロ メリ ロ ツ メリ ツ 中メリ ツ レ 中メリ レ ウ チメリ チ リ メリ リ 中メリ

kan 甲



daikan 大甲



Essential Ornamentation

In Western flute-playing, the tongue plays a major part in matters of articulation. Quite the reverse is true in traditional shakuhachi music. In recent years, however, there has been a tendency to adopt some of the Western flute techniques, including those of tonguing. In my opinion, they have not been very successful. The instrument is simply not suited to them.

Without a real tonguing technique, how is articulation accomplished on the shakuhachi? This question has been answered by the manner in which the Kinko-ryū musicians approach the execution of two successive notes of the same pitch.

The techniques of *osu* (押) and *utsu* (打), already introduced, are involved. Their usage constitutes one of the distinctive characteristics of Kinko-ryū music.

When *ro* (ロ) is played, “push” 2

When *tsu* (ツ) is played, “push” 2

When *re* (レ) is played, “push” 4

When *chi* (チ) is played, “push” 4

When *u* (ウ) is played, “push” 4

When *ri* (リ) is played, “push” 5

When *hi* (ヒ) is played, “push” 5

When *go-hi* (ヒ五) is played, “tap” 5

When *ha* (ハ) is played, “tap” 2 & 3

When *san-ha* (ハ三) is played, “tap” 2 or 3

When *shi-ha* (ハ四) is played, “push” 4

When *go-hi chū-meri* is played, “push” 1

If several notes on the same pitch occur, they may be written in two ways.

1) ロ or 2) ロ

ロ >

ロ >

ロ >

Nayashi, Yuri, Oshi-okuri, and Muraiki

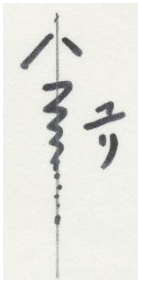
We are never allowed to forget that the aesthetic attitude involved in shakuhachi playing centres around a different ideal of sound than that of Western music. This feeling is transferred very naturally to all shakuhachi technique of a traditional nature.

The next four devices are perfect illustrations of just how deep such feelings go in the shakuhachi world. They carry the *meri-kari* technique to its ultimate point.

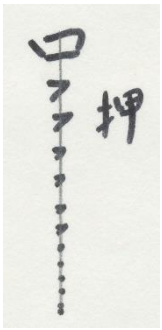
Nayashi is the simplest. It serves as an important cadence formula on the principal tones of the system, associating (it would appear) with the *hen'on*. I give as an example, *Ro-nayashi*. It may be written in two ways:  or 

Moving slowly, the principal tone is left by dropping a semi-tone or sometimes even a whole-tone by way of a very deep *meri*. Without interrupting the breath, the principal tone reappears.

Yuri is more difficult to describe. It consists of two or three *nayashi*, each one a little faster than the first. The differences here rest in the fact that from the principal tone, one rises via a *kari* to a pitch a whole-tone above. This is continued in an ever quickening motion, the sound becoming nearly extinguished, finally terminating on a *meri* and a marked and rapid increase in volume. It returns to the principal tone. In *honkyoku*, *yuri* are found in "chains".



Single Yuri



Oshi-okuri

The ***oshi-okuri*** pattern involves a succession of *osu* beginning slowly but rapidly increasing the speed. It terminates with a way of playing called *tsuki-yuri*. *Tsuki-yuri* is executed by a series of rapid up and down motions of the shakuhachi against the lips. This interrupts the breath, extinguishing the tone. It should be noted that *oshi-okuri*, like *yuri*, end frequently with a *meri* followed with a return to the principal tone. This is called *meri-komi*.

The ***muraiki*** is perhaps the most spectacular effect in Kinko-ryū shakuhachi. It is created by an explosive release of the air-stream into the pipe. It begins with a powerful motion of the head in a quick downward movement and repeated several times, always with a continual lessening of the sound, ending with *tsuki-yuri – meri-komi*, fading into nothingness. Here is an example of its notation:

Muraiki

Note on Playing in the Kan (甲) and Otsu (乙) Registers

In general, persons who have had experience in Western flute technique will have no difficulty in making the shift from one register to the other. The principles are exactly the same. In *otsu*, the lips are relaxed and a slow, "round" breath sets the pipe into vibration. In *kan*, the lips are more closed, the aperture smaller, and a "narrow" but fast breath enters the pipe.

Japanese notation lacks the kind of precision which characterizes Western notation. Indeed, in the notation of shakuhachi music some confusion can take place, particularly where the *kan* and *otsu* registers are in question.

Here are typical Japanese rules governing their usage:

1) If a passage is marked *kan*, all notes in that passage are played in the *kan* register.
2) If a passage is marked *otsu*, all notes in that passage are played in the *otsu* register.
3) In *otsu*, if the note following *Ri* is *Ro* or *Tsu*, the latter will be played in *kan*.
4) In *otsu*, if the note following *Ro* is *Chi* or *Tsu* and is succeeded by *Go-hi Chū-meri*, the remainder of the passage is played in *otsu*. The symbols are omitted. Whenever there is an exception, the *kan-otsu* symbols will be indicated.

As a word of caution, I should point out that the latter will not always be true; the clarity of the notation differs considerably between teachers and editors of shakuhachi notation.

This brings us to the final problem: notation of rhythmic patterns and the general rules governing time values. For the Western student, this can be somewhat of a nightmare. Coming as he does from a culture where notation clearly defines duration, he can find himself lost amid a situation where tradition, not notation, determines how long a note will last.

In such a culture, the music is based on many standard melodic formulae, each a known quantity where rhythm is concerned. It has all been transmitted by word of mouth and by example. Everything is predictable. There is no real need for a precise notation in the Western sense of the word.

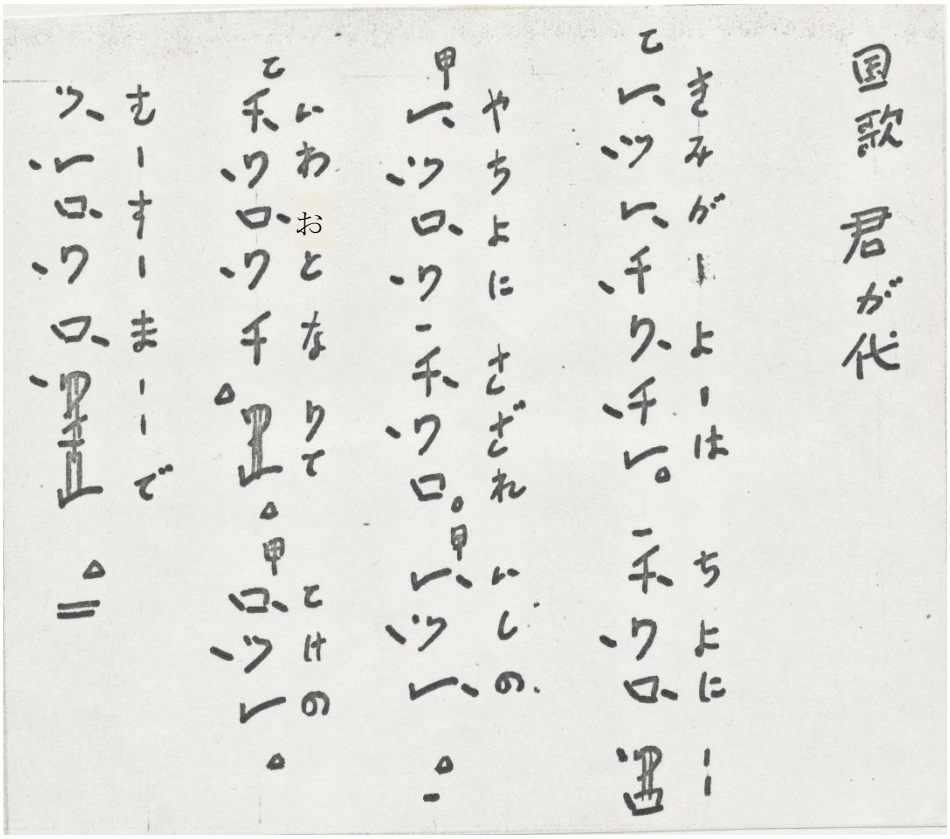
With the release of the shakuhachi from its restricted function under the Tokugawas, a notation which might be generally understood began to appear; but to this day, even within the Kinko-ryū, there are many variances in notation forms. In what follows I will try to present some clarification.

On the following page is a piece written with the simplest form of Kinko-ryū notation. The melody is *Kimi-ga-yo*, the National Anthem of Japan. As in all cases, it is read downward and from right to left.

The line of syllables in *hiragana*[11] to the right of the main column containing the shakuhachi notation is the text of the song. Down through each column of shakuhachi notation runs an imaginary line. On either side of the line, dots or strokes are placed. On the right they represent the **strong** accents (*omote-byōshi*) while on the left side they represent the **weak** beats (*ura-byōshi*). Where phrase endings occur, the final notes are indicated by the symbol Δ, indicating that those final notes are sustained for two pulses.

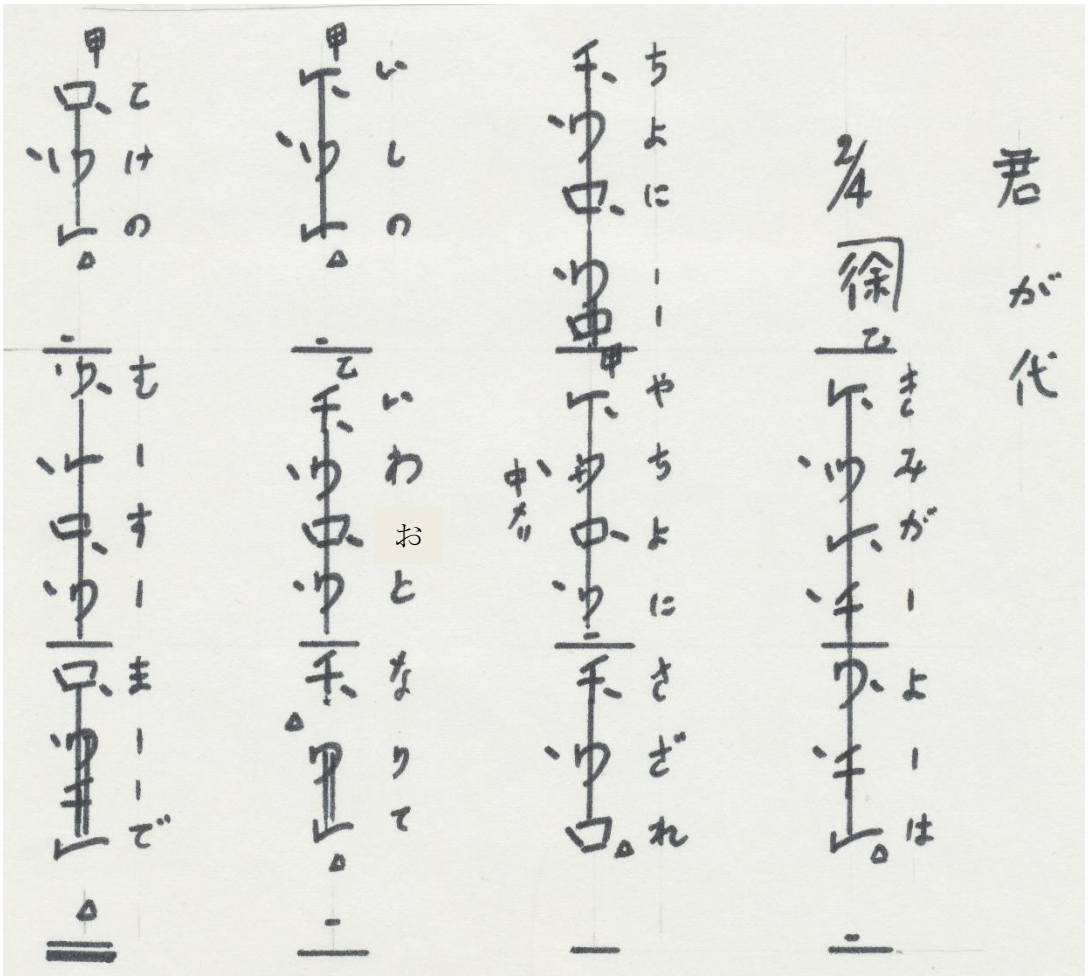
[11] *Hiragana* is the other (besides *katakana*) of the two Japanese syllabic writing systems. Ed. Note: There were a number of small errors in Weisgarber's transcription of the song texts as well as inconsistencies involving the use of pre- and post-war orthography. These have been corrected; the changes are easily seen.

Kimi-ga-yo
(Simple Kinko-ryú Notation)



Written in a more modern style, taking into consideration the influence of Western style metric notation, *Kimi-ga-yo* can look as follows: (It could be written in either 2/4 or 4/4.)

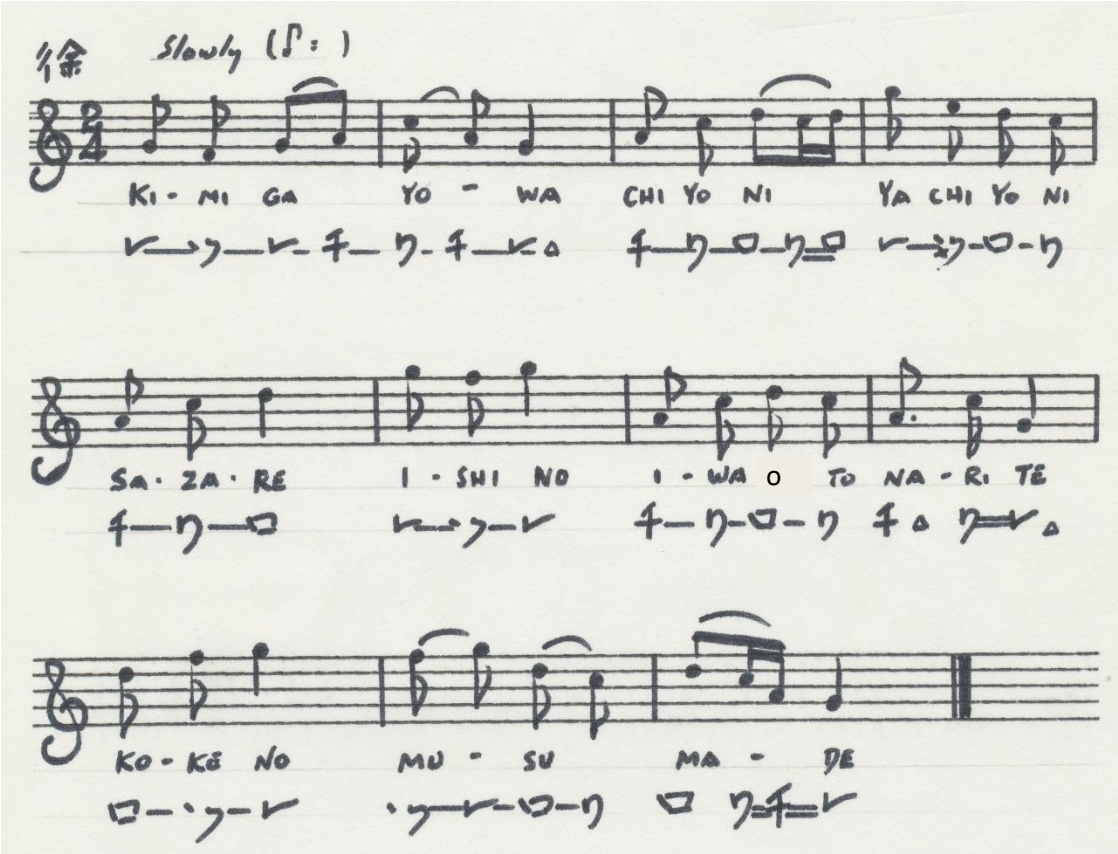
Kimi-ga-yo
(Modern-Style Notation)



Next we see *Kimi-ga-yo* expressed in Western notation. It will be easy to compare the rhythmic notation patterns of the original with those of the staff notation. [Note: the *Tsu-chū-meri* in the fourth measure is the only tone outside the natural fingerings.]

Kimi-ga-yo

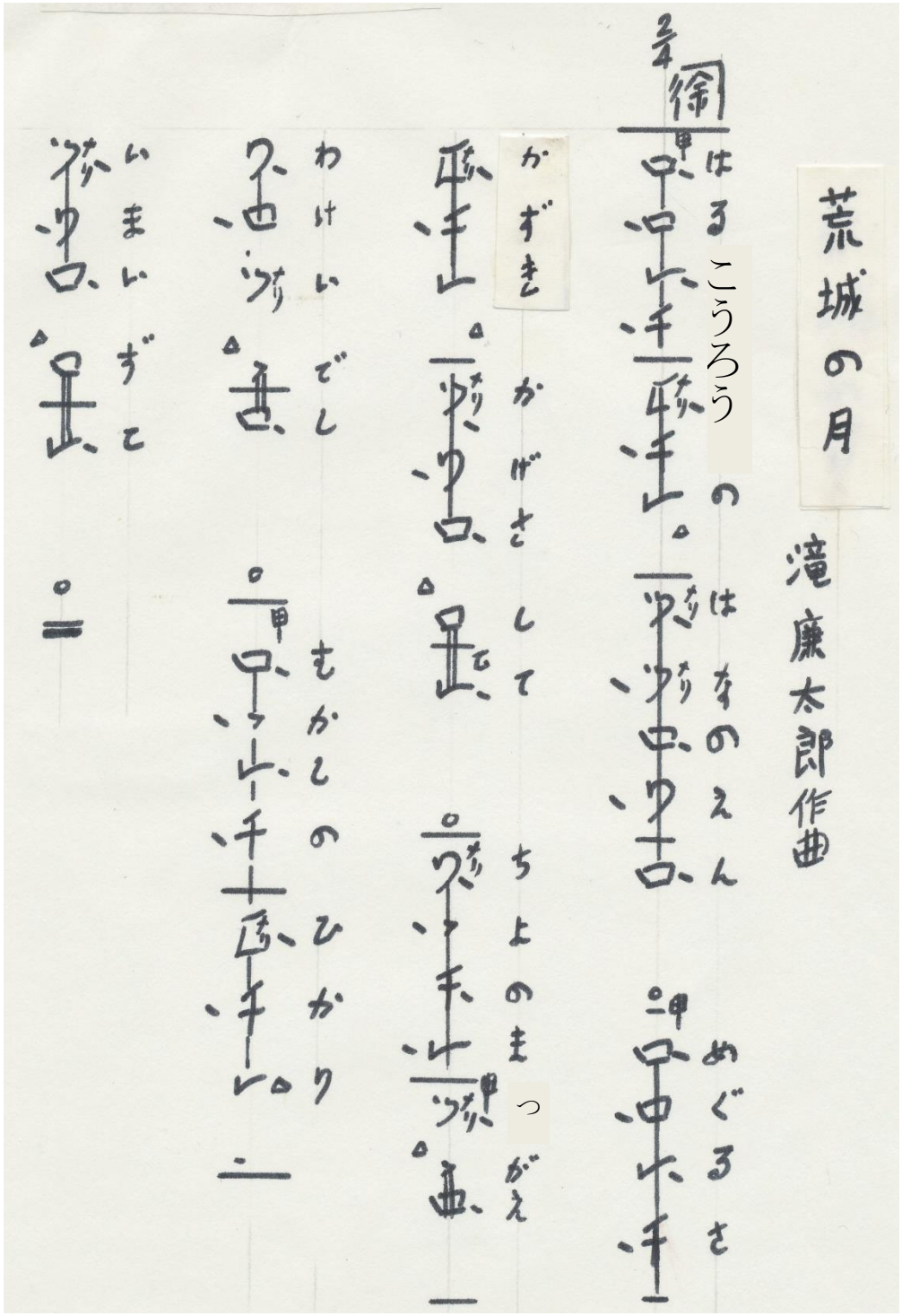
(Transcription into Western Notation)



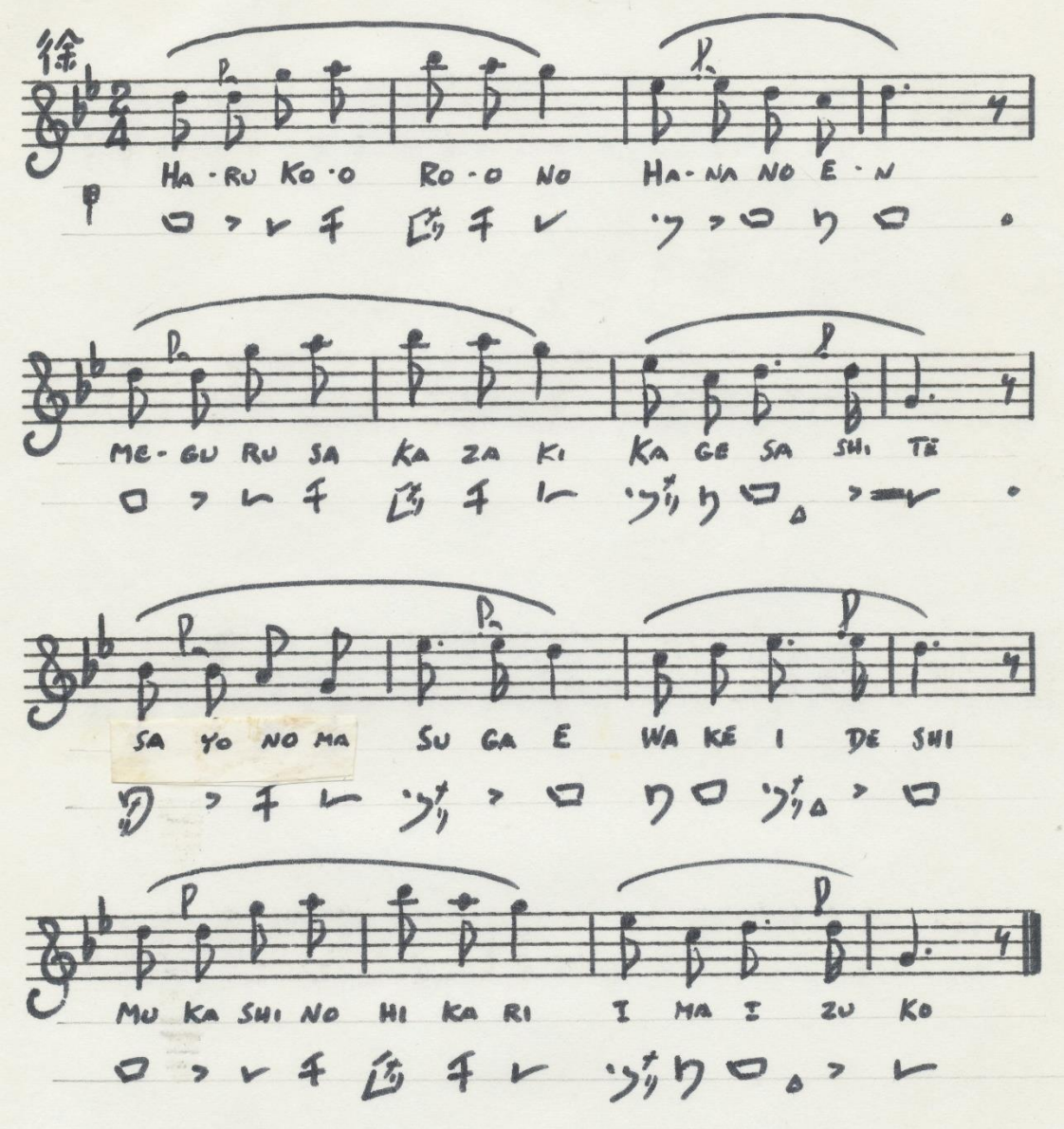
The next melody, *Kōjō-no-Tsuki* ("Moonlight on the Ruined Castle"), written by Taki Rentarō, has long been elevated to folk-song status. It furnishes us with an excellent vehicle for the notation of dotted rhythms, *osu*, and for the use of *hi-meri* and *tsu-meri*.

Kójó-no-Tsuki

(Japanese Notation)



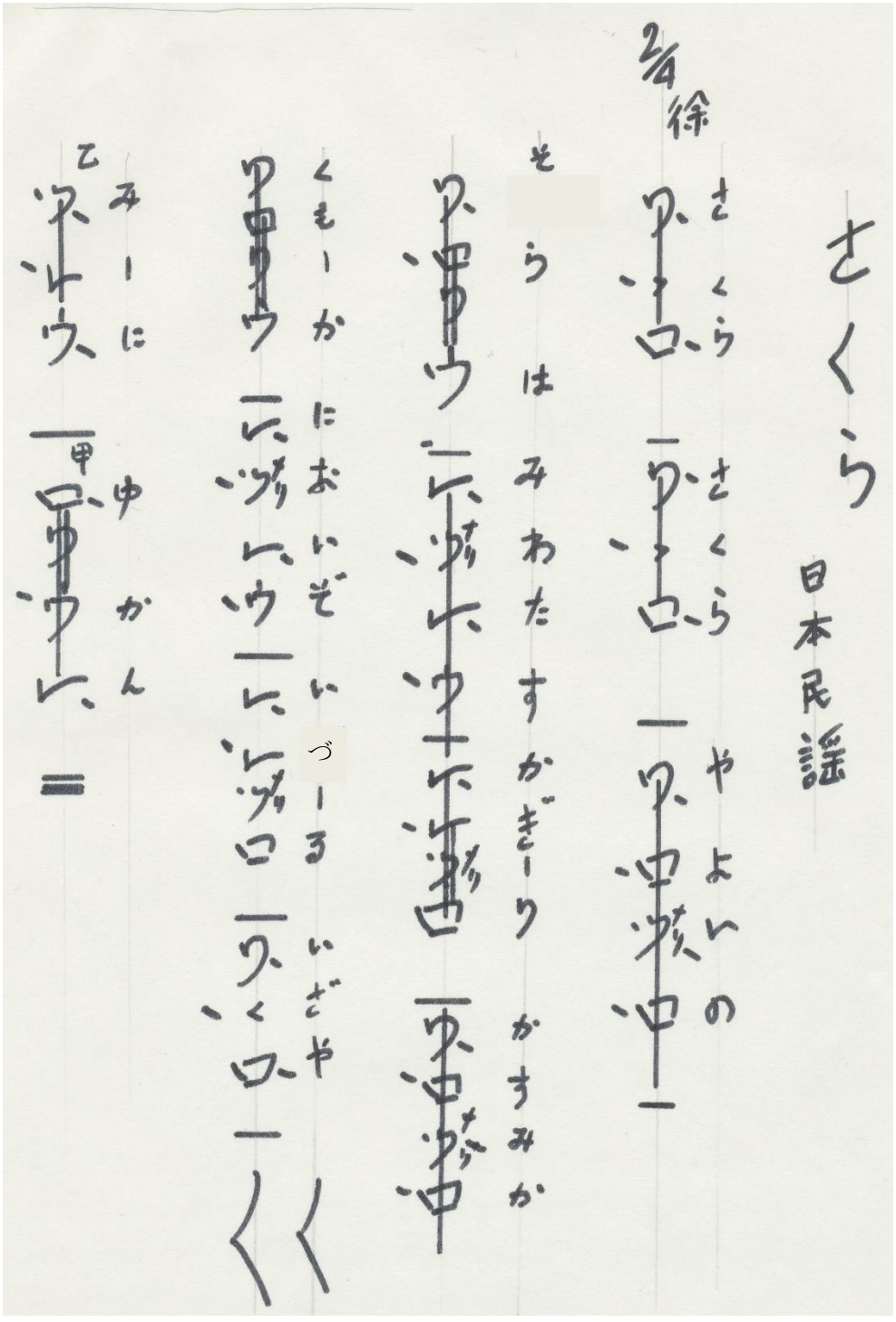
Kójó-no-Tsuki
(Transcription)



On the next page appears *Sakura* ("Cherry Blossoms"), perhaps the best known Japanese folk-song outside Japan. It offers a fine chance for the study and use of the tone *U* as well as *Tsu-meri* which appears several times.

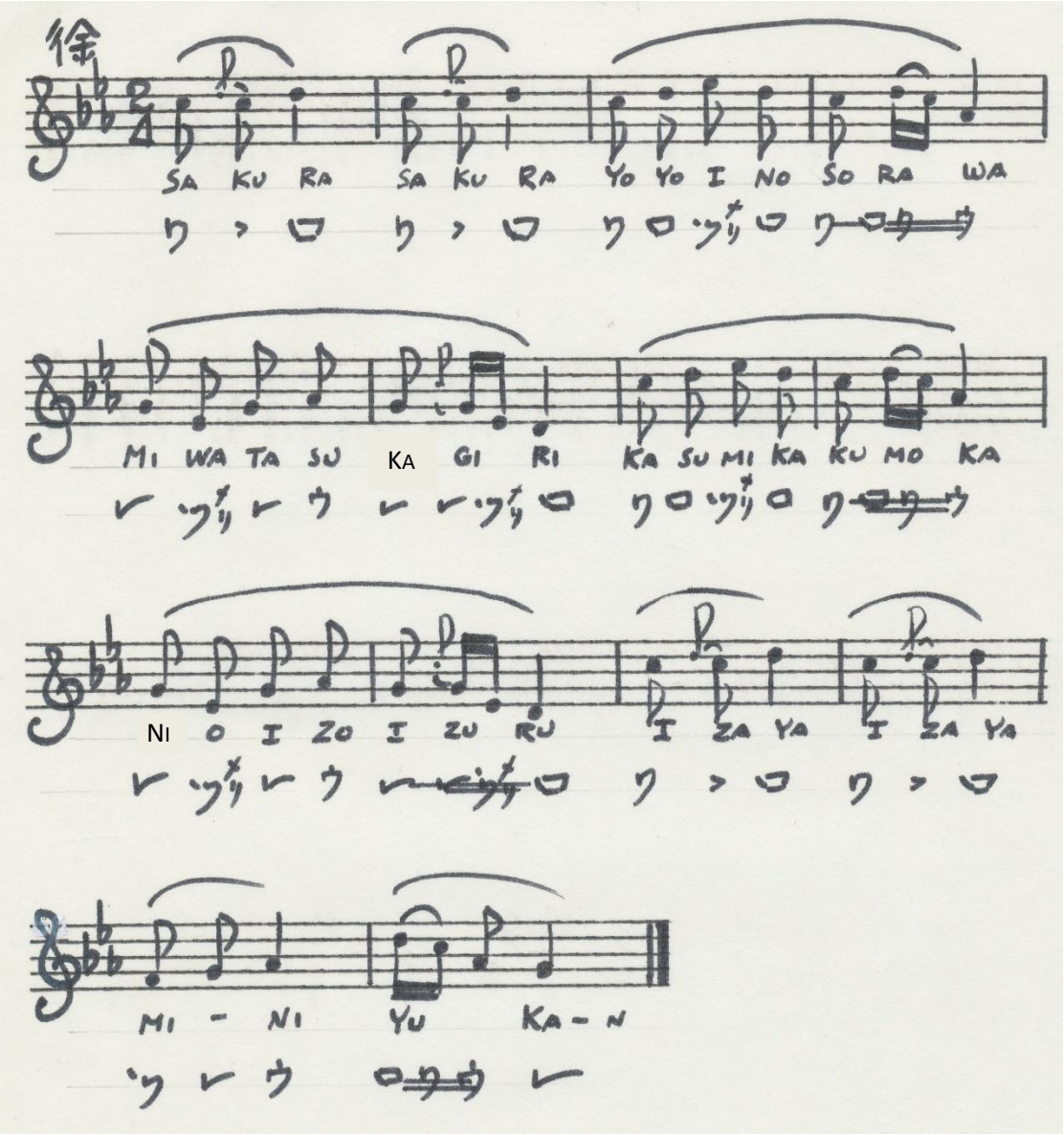
Sakura

(Japanese Notation)

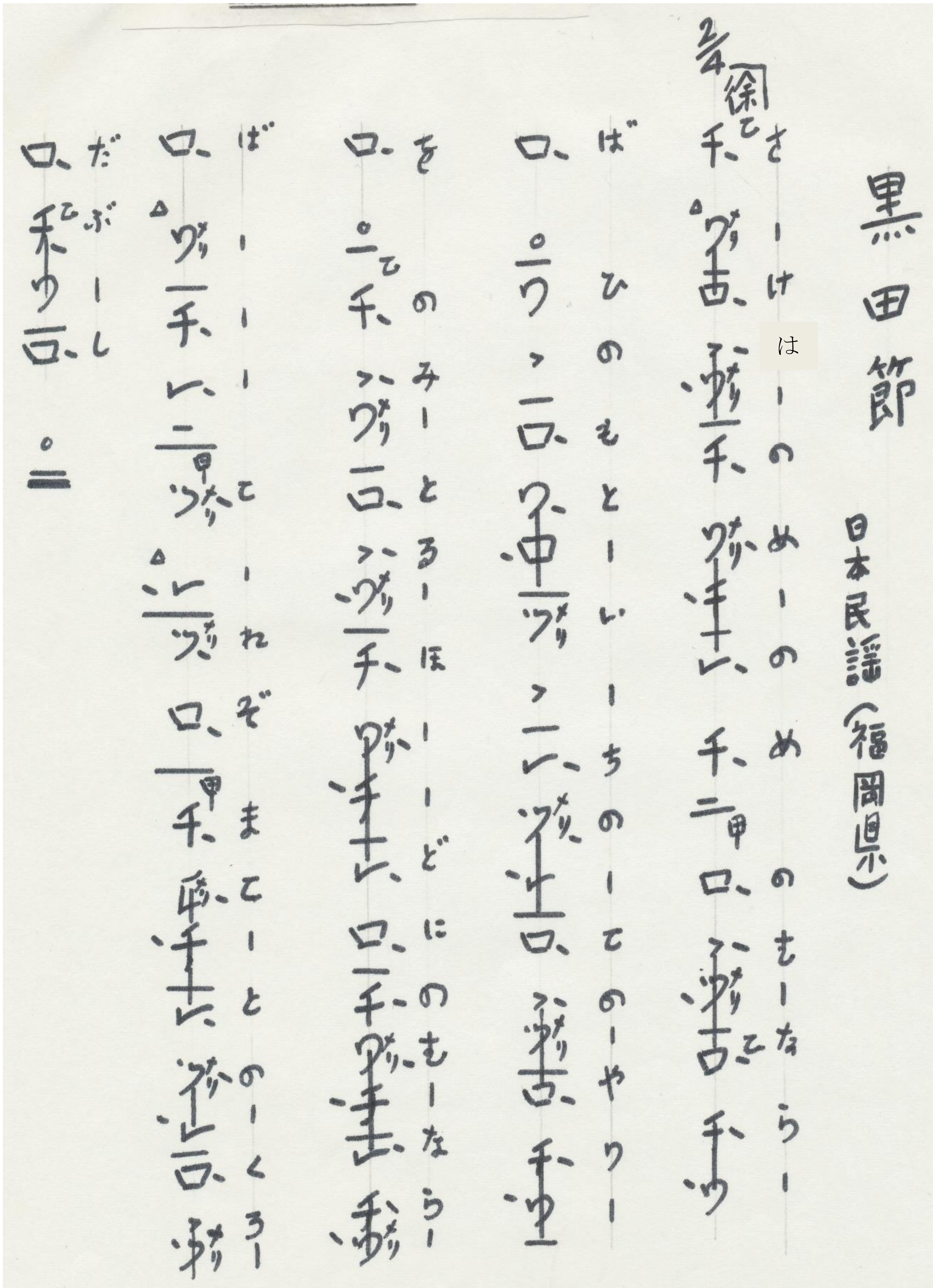


Sakura

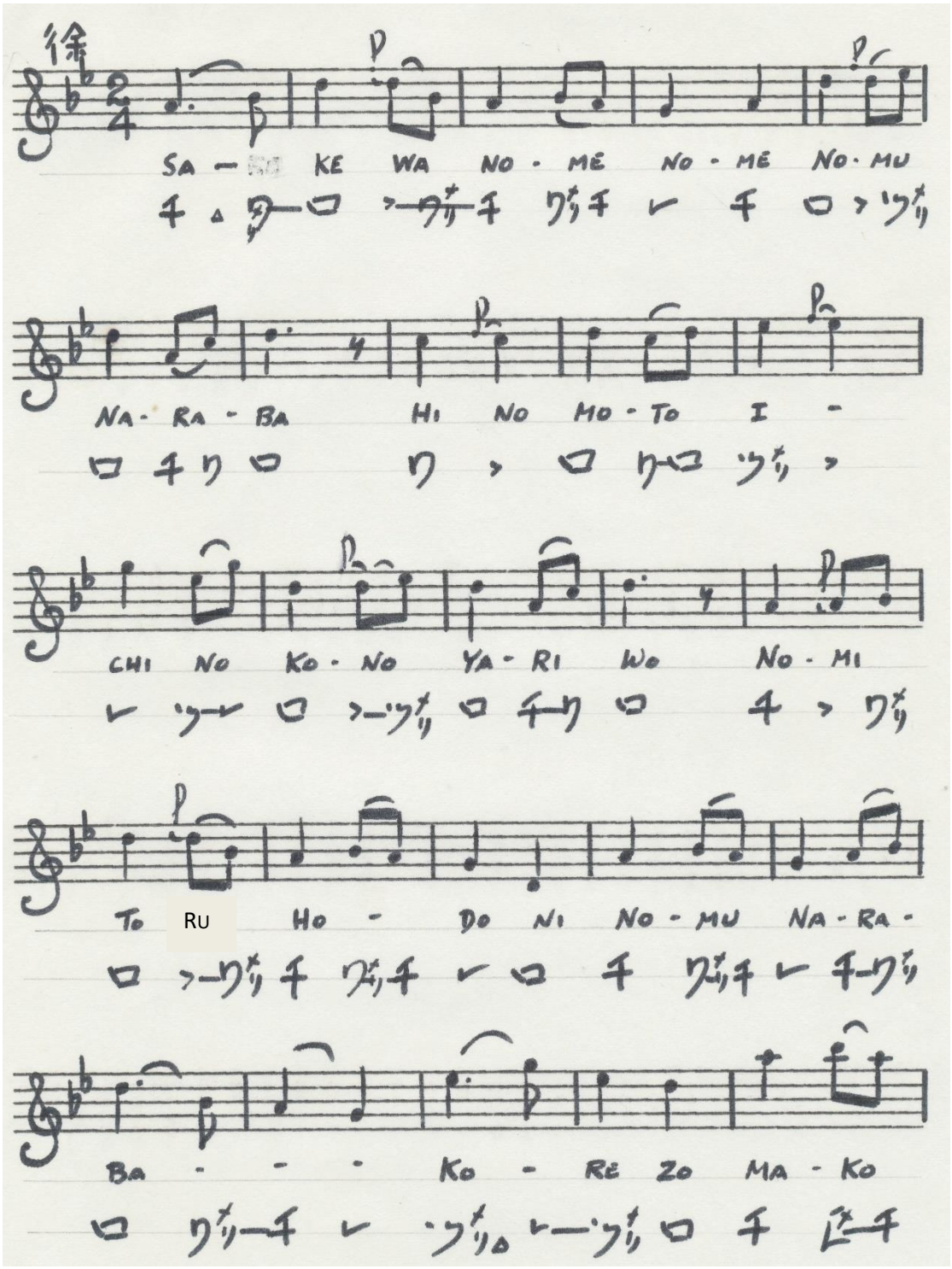
(Transcription)

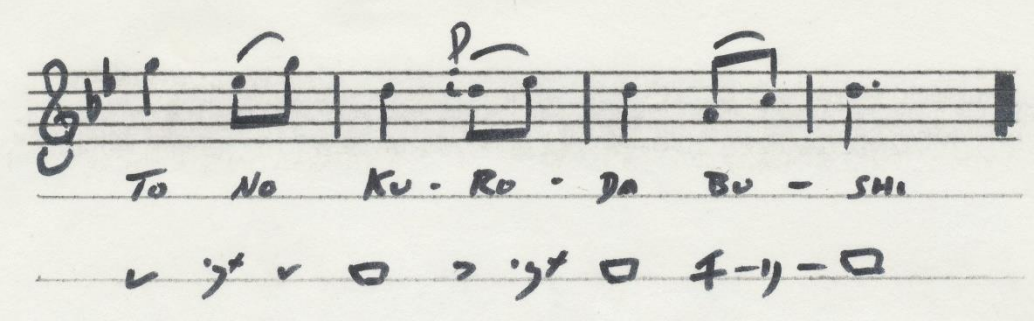


The final notation is the famous *Kuroda-Bushi*, a drinking song from Fukuoka Prefecture in Kyushu and sung everywhere in Japan. It offers ample practice of *Hi-meri*, *Ri-meri* and *Tsu-meri*.


黒田節
日本民謡（福岡県）

Kuroda-Bushi
(Transcription)





Between these simple melodies and the complexities of *honkyoku* stretches an enormous distance not easily bridged except with these slender materials of a common, monogenous culture. I cannot presume to have introduced more than a fragment of technique of the shakuhachi. Only the rudiments are here and only a handful of examples have been chosen from a great wealth of this gentle and popular music. Yet each one is a microcosm of the Whole. From this point on, one adds layer upon layer of experience.

The shakuhachi is mastered as one masters the Japanese language: through patience, agonizing discipline and most important, through the subtle process of absorbing a culture as well as being absorbed by it.

Trying to explain the technique of such an instrument with words is difficult and makes for awfully dull reading — except when we remember its sources and the life it has lived so long at the heart of a glorious culture. Always, the natural setting was its true domain: the secret behind the exquisite details of its technique.

Personal experiences … unforgettable moments come to mind: Standing alone at twilight in the deserted garden of an isolated, obscure temple listening while the tranquil line of an old Meian *honkyoku* drifts through the darkening green foliage, punctuated fitfully by a bird call. … My own playing in solitude seated on a rock beside a mountain path, sensing the sound being absorbed into the rustle of the wind and distant roar of a waterfall ….. or playing as the shadow of branches in the moonlight moved in silhouette against the *shoji* of an old inn . …..“ ….. and the instrument, the sound and the player … all come back to nature.”

Chapter VII

Shakuhachi Makers — Some Construction Methods and Philosophy

Iida Sesshū II lives and works in a cramped little house situated at the end of a narrow passage leading off a teeming shopping arcade in Mikuni, an Osaka suburb characterized more by its dinginess than by its beauty.

It would be impossible to find the address were it not for the pleasant, small, elderly woman who stands waiting at the entrance of the passage-way on the lookout for the expected foreigner. She leads the way, and as the visitor steps into the *genkan* of the tiny dwelling, the first thing he notices in the umbrella stand is a single stalk made from the root portion of the bamboo used in shakuhachi making. It has been cured, but part of the wild tangle of small roots at the base has been preserved — a silent symbol of what goes on in that house.

Eight years ago, Mr. Iida's father Sesshū I, one of the great master craftsmen of Kinko shakuhachi, passed away leaving a legacy of superb instruments to his widow and a son who was engaged in the Osaka business world. Having observed his father at work since childhood, absorbing the delicate technique required in shakuhachi building, the young man gave up a promising career to assume the lonely, solitary existence of a shakuhachi maker. There, in surroundings which affirm the frugality of so much in Japanese life, some of the finest modern examples of present-day shakuhachi-making come into being.

Iida Sesshū at Work in His Kitchen

Sesshū works in a very simple way. For his workshop, he uses the narrow little kitchen of his home. It is devoid of chairs or work-

bench. There would be no room for such luxuries. Accordingly, Sesshū works on the *tatami* in the traditional manner.

His mother, a woman of gentle humour, shares naturally in her son's feeling for bamboo and its tradition. Through her, her son shares directly in the vast knowledge of the late husband and father. Those traditions are kept alive, it seems, by her active participation and interest as each new instrument takes shape throughout its many stages of creation.

No symbols of the world of automation and mass production can be found in that tiny kitchen. Yet just a few steps beyond the doorway is a neighbourhood which could only be termed a waste-basket, a trash-heap of a world hideously over-industrialized.

But the Iida home remains an austere, yet pleasant place: a back-water of the quiet Past. His working materials in a well-used tool chest include saws, files, chisels, special drills, chunks of tortoise-shell for mouthpieces, and some crimson-stained lacquer-pots. In a corner, a few lengths of cured bamboo stand against the wall. Nothing more.

Iida Sesshū and His Tool Chest

But one knows that there is something other than materials and technique involved here. As a craftsman making a musical instrument, Sesshū, in the same manner as a master violin-maker in the West, must rely on the soundness of his eye and ear, ever remaining in harmony with his mind and heart. He seems possessed by the totality of his tradition, filled with a deep, innate love for the work itself and the materials of his craft.

Watching him at work is akin to observing the swiftness of a master calligrapher, the lightning fall in a Sumo wrestling match, the quiet grace of a lovely woman arranging flowers.

In contrast to the small, austere setting of Iida Sesshū's workplace is the atelier of the well-known maker of shakuhachi for the Tozan school, Kitahara Kōzu. The Tozan school, as I have pointed out, is the largest of all the schools of shakuhachi in Japan. With its large membership and well-structured hierarchy, it operates as a very prosperous business enterprise. Instruments designed for use in its discipline are in general demand. This would denote the necessity of some kind of mass production process in the making of many of its instruments. Compared to the rather solitary methods of Sesshū, this is true.

Kitahara Kōzu at Work

On a recent visit to the Kitahara atelier, the application of the prime coat of lacquer was in progress. Five people were at work: Kōzu himself, his assistant and three young apprentices, each one responsible for a particular part of the instrument which was passed from hand to hand, the two joints being worked on separately. At the end of the process, the shakuhachi was placed on a growing stack of instruments racked and piled like cord-wood. Small-scale mass production to be sure; yet the same spirit of dedication noticed in the work of Sesshū II remained exactly the same.

Bamboo is a religion in the life of Kōzu. In fact, he now foregoes the eating of any food made from bamboo, a delicacy he has always liked. His family is famous throughout the shakuhachi world, his brother Kitahara Kōzan being one of the best known and most widely respected artist performers of the Tozan school. To own a master instrument made by Kōzu is to possess a valuable asset.

Kitahara's Assistants Lacquering the Bore

Despite the fact that vertical flutes are found all over the world and that the origins of the shakuhachi and its music came originally from China, the shakuhachi remains a purely unique Japanese manifestation. Its character became determined eventually by the qualities found in the long-jointed bamboo which grows in a wild state in Japan. Of course, there are many varieties of bamboo flourishing throughout the country, but only a limited number of them are suitable for the making of shakuhachi. Two varieties, especially, are desirable: *madake* and *yamadake*. Sesshū II prefers the former while Kōzu prefers the *yamadake*. *Take* or *dake* (竹), sometimes read in the Chinese fashion as *chiku*, are words meaning "bamboo". With the exception of the design of the ring at each joint, they seem very much alike where shakuhachi construction is involved. The number of joints in a length of bamboo is important to the maker who feels that there should be no fewer than six joints, with eight as the limit. A length of seven joints is regarded as ideal.

Stack of Completed Shakuhachi

Both *madake* and *yamadake* appear to embrace a good balance of qualities concerned with flexibility, density, and strength. If one looks at a cross-section of bamboo it is possible to see the tiny circular ends of the fibres which run the full length of the stalk. In both *madake* and *yamadake* those longitudinal fibres are close together and very minute. In

both varieties, the distance between the joints is perfectly suited for the proper spacing of the finger-holes. As the bamboo stalks are cut when they are about three years old, the size of the *madake* or *yamadake* is most appropriate for shakuhachi making. At this point the thickness of the stalk lends itself to that indefinable "feel" which has so much to do with balance and weight in the hands of a sensitive performer.

Madake and *yamadake* grow wild and without any cultivation. In the case of *madake*, the stalks are covered with spots and blot-like patches which are especially prized for their old and rough-looking appearance. These blemishes are acquired through the accumulation of dirt and clay, and from the action of bacteria present during the period of growth. Any stalks which are bent outward at the root are also treasured.

Wild Bamboo Grove – note the horizontal "joints" which are clearly visible

Harvesting takes place between the beginning of autumn and March. At the end of that period, the stalks which are chosen for shakuhachi making are uprooted. By February, the roots of *madake* have attained the size of one's thumb. These are the small roots extending out from the central root which is the base of the future shakuhachi — a tangle of heavily matted, long and shaggy tendrils. All this is taken from the ground and wrapped carefully. This prevents any two closely-growing stalks from possible damaging abrasion.

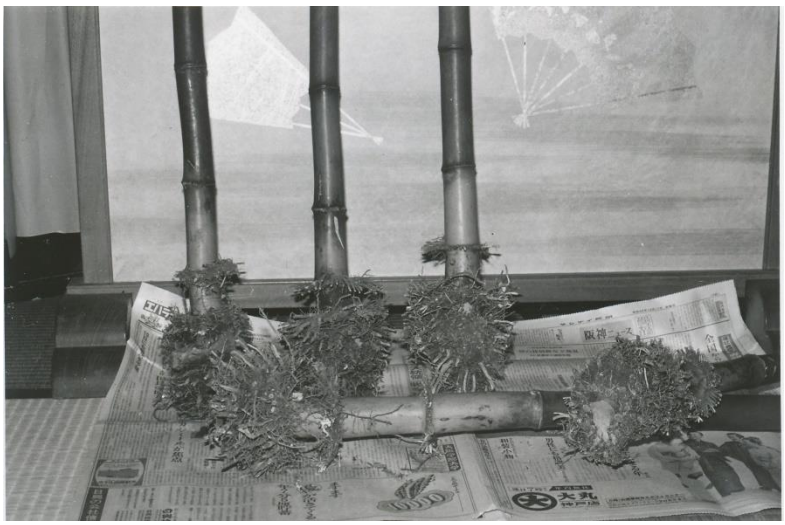
What is the basis for making a choice of what stalks in a grove will be chosen? Aside from the quality of the *madake* or *yamadake*, it appears to be based on the spacing of the joints. This is done by *setsu-kubari* ("eye-measurement") alone. According to Tanaka Yūdō who makes a limited number of fine instruments in a year, less than ten per-cent of the

madake harvested will be found suitable for shakuhachi construction. Of that, less than five per-cent will qualify as material for a first –class instrument.

The qualities of *madake* and *yamadake* are naturally determined by the immediate environment — its climate, the mineral content of its soil, and its drainage. Indeed, the search for fine, rare material is a source of delight in itself to the master craftsman. He does not remain idly in his atelier while his men seek out the bamboo. Instead, he is out in the hills with them, mattock in hand, making the final decisions.

Tanaka Yūdō Measuring Bamboo

After harvesting, the accumulated mud, gravel, and shaggy root systems are cut away and the shakuhachi's base is revealed. Secretions of oily liquid are removed and the root is dried by charcoal fire. Once the oil secretions are removed, the natural colour of the root appears. This process, according to Mr. Tanaka, inhibits any damage by insects or harmful bacteria.



Bamboo Roots

At this point, the process by which the base is shaped to the taste of the maker begins. All this is done before the pithy core at the base of the tube can

solidify. If the length of bamboo is in any way too misshapen, it is straightened at this time by the application of heat and pressure. (See Chapter 5.)

The bamboo is now ready for drying and it is placed out in the open air and sunlight for about ten days. During that initial drying process, the green colour fades and the characteristic golden hue of the shakuhachi is brought out. At the conclusion of the drying period, the bamboo is stored, taking careful precautions now to see that it remains protected from sunlight. It remains in that state for two years.

At the end of that long period of seasoning, the bamboo length is cut in two. The pith cores at the nodes are cut away and the bore at the base of the stalk is opened out to a greater width than the existing natural bore. At this point, a rough measurement of the over-all bore's diameter is taken and the fitting for the *naka-tsuki* (the mid-joint) is constructed. This intricate arrangement appears to have come into use around the middle of the eighteenth century, during Kurosawa Kinko's lifetime.

Mid-Joint Construction Awaiting Completion (Kitahara)

The base from which the shaggy root system once extended is now sanded, rubbed and polished and any imperfections removed.

While visiting the workshop of Sesshū II, he built a shakuhachi for me from the ground up, so to speak, to the point where it could be played, if just a little roughly. This

was for the purpose of the photographs which illustrate the process.[12] For purely economic reasons, he chose a length of bamboo which can only be described as modest, but the process in which he was involved was no less painstaking than if the making of a master instrument were at stake. Every step was carried out instantaneously as if with a single gesture. In the blink of an eye, so it seemed, the pith forming the node at the top of the pipe (the location of the mouthpiece called *uta-guchi*) was knocked off and the rough edges smoothed.

With a single stroke by a small chisel, and with only eye-measurement, the angle for the blowing edge was sliced. Then, with the skill of a magician, the complex fitting was cut and shaped where the piece of tortoise shell, the heart of the *uta-guchi* (and, indeed, of the entire instrument) would be inserted. Picking up a long, thin piece of the tortoise shell, he fashioned one end into a sharp wedge, driving it into the delicately fashioned grooves which he had prepared. With one blow of mallet and chisel, the upper portion of the shell was severed off flush against the pipe's outer wall. Now housed in its dry fitting, the inserted wedge was filed to its concave shape with a razor-like sharpness. This is a very critical moment and there are no second chances. If it fails, the instrument has to be rejected.

Iida Sesshū Inserting the Tortoise Shell

As a final touch, the part of the tube which rests in the cleft of the player's chin (called *atari*) was rounded and shaped. The basic pitch of the shakuhachi is now tested.

[12] [Editor's Note: Only the photographs that contained sufficient visible detail to illustrate the text have been included.]

The pitch of the shakuhachi is determined by its length in terms of the Chinese "foot" or *shaku*. By cutting a length of bamboo so that it exceeds a *shaku* by one Chinese inch (a *sun*), a pitch one semi-tone lower results.

To see how the pitches of the shakuhachi family are derived, we will imagine a stalk of bamboo cut to the length of one *shaku*. This will produce the pitch B-flat'. By cutting another bamboo pipe one *sun* longer, we obtain the pitch A'. This process can continue until we reach the pitch G'. This is the basic pitch for the note *ro* of the highest-toned shakuhachi in current use. The standard shakuhachi's *ro* is D' and the tube length is 54.5 centimetres, i.e. one *shaku*, eight *sun* (*isshaku-hassun*) or "shakuhachi". The entire consort extends over a minor seventh downward to the longest instrument, two *shaku*, three *sun* in length (*ni-shaku, san-sun*). Its *ro* sounds as "A" in the small octave. [See photo on p. 67.]

In the construction process, only the finger holes remain to be aligned and bored. This is yet another critical point as the calibration must be absolute. As with the creation of the *uta-guchi*, if there is one false step, the entire instrument is lost. Nothing can be done to correct the error.

To watch Sesshū during this stage, one would never realize the critical nature of the task. With an impassive face, he soaked a plumb-line in black *sumi* (charcoal ink) and, holding the line at the edge of the *uta-guchi*, allowed the weighted string to fall to the base of the pipe. Then the calibrations made with a millimeter rule were done rapidly, the centres of the diameters marked. Holes were bored with a drill consisting of two rotating knife blades. At this point the instrument can be said to be in a first state of completion. Nevertheless, it is only the beginning of a long and patient process.

Reaching this stage, the application of many successive coats of *urushi* (Chinese lacquer) begins. Through this patient method of application followed by a drying period, the ultimate tuning of the instrument's scale is brought about. This process is not without its problems, especially where the health of the master and his apprentices are concerned — the fumes of the lacquer are quite noxious. When the lacquering process is underway, the workshop is heavy with the sickish-sweet odour. Even after the lacquer has dried, those with certain allergic conditions have been known to fall ill with *urushi-kabure* (as the

illness is known). During the lacquer-drying process, temperature and humidity must be carefully controlled and if the temperature becomes too high the lacquer will not dry naturally. Also, at this time, there must be protection against the accumulation of dust.

Following the application and drying of the final coat of lacquer, the bore is polished and construction is complete save for the finishing of the outer surface. This is done with the use of varying grades of sand paper and abrasive stones. After this has been carried out to the satisfaction of the maker, the surface is further polished with soft charcoal (*Yoshino sumi*) and a mixture of deer-horn powder, mud, and rape-seed oil.

From the first step following the selection of a length of bamboo after the two-year drying period, the span of construction of a single instrument can take up to as much as three months.

Iida Sesshū Tests Weisgarber's Shakuhachi

No two shakuhachi can ever possibly look, or sound, alike no matter how superbly built. Once again, human construction bows to the will of the natural world.

In the hands of different players of equal skill, the same instrument can show great variation in the nature of its sound. So much hinges on the player's strength, particularly where the "speed" of his breath is concerned. But again, the power of an instrument and its volume of sound can depend upon the size of the finger-holes which the maker has chosen to bore. It would appear that the larger the diameter of the finger-holes, the greater the volume of tone.

Of a far more subtle nature is the matter of "timbre" or "tone colour". Here much depends on the quality of the bamboo used, the relative thickness or thinness of its walls, the density of the tiny longitudinal fibres within the walls, and the extent and effectiveness

of the drying process. A thin-walled instrument with a narrow bore will tend to have a brighter sound than a shakuhachi with a wide bore and thick walls. The latter tends to produce a tone of a dark, serious nature. Such an instrument is regarded as being especially suited for the performance of the old *honkyoku*.

In the final analysis, the entire range of tone quality (and it is very wide, indeed) depends upon the ear and imagination of the maker and on his understanding of his musical culture. It also depends upon his technical sense and skill in dealing with the variations in the size of a bore which always differs because of the nature of bamboo which is made to flare slightly at the top, is cylindrical for most of its length and flares again considerably at the base.

A great shakuhachi is probably as rare as a great violin; but for even the greatest shakuhachi, its life span is brief when compared to that of a comparable Western instrument. It is apt to stand the test of time for not much longer than a century, according to Tanaka Yūdō. I wonder if it is not just another manifestation of the brevity and fleeting quality of life which is the essence of understanding pervading the art of Japanese culture.

In a little essay on the making of shakuhachi written for me and which forms the core of much of the information in this chapter, Mr. Tanaka writes, " … Even in Japan not more than ten people can make a master instrument. Such people we should treat as human treasures. I think of the instruments made by my later teacher Ikeda Kodo or the ones made by Sesshū I and I come to realize just how valuable they are and why they are so widely appreciated. When one possesses such an instrument, one made through the old traditional Japanese processes, that instrument must be carefully treated and always with the deepest respect. It is unfortunate that people in general cannot watch the process involved in making a shakuhachi beginning with the uprooting of the bamboo to the finished product. Even if the instrument is of modest appearance, it nevertheless remains a work of art which cannot be duplicated, representing as it does the mind, heart and love of its maker."

Shakuhachi making, no less than any other of the arts and crafts of a deeply traditional culture, represent a philosophy — an attitude — toward life. Indeed, I have met

and talked with few men deeply involved in their traditions who do not express such a way of thinking. In the *ato-gaki* (post-script) to his essay, Mr. Tanaka expresses some interesting views which often reveal a subtle, allusive, remote and involuted world.

His thought roams considerably beyond the matter of the building of an instrument as he thinks about the nature of music, of matters dealing with the continuity of cultural patterns. It is what one comes to expect in a place in which everything seems to blend, where the plane of existence is being constantly touched and penetrated by an unlimited number of subtle *continua* of feeling.

Music, he feels, is something far more than an aural experience. He views it as a pathway leading to things infinitely profound, beyond the ability of words to express. In his opinion, it is timbre or tone colour which is the vehicle in which one travels this road. He regards the amount of human involvement in its production as of paramount importance.

In the playing of shakuhachi the total human control involved is, for him, the highest form of musical attainment. Looking toward the West, he regards the violin as another supreme example of musical involvement on its highest level.

His attitude toward the piano is interesting. This ultimate creation of Western musical culture he regards as an inferior instrument. Its complex mechanism, he feels, is an obstacle in the way of direct human involvement, a barrier shutting out "the deeper realities". I think that this is a peculiarly Eastern view. Mr. Tanaka fails to realize that it is that very great difficulty of the piano medium with all its technical impediments which has raised piano playing to such a high art: a distinctly Western achievement, yet not really far removed from the overcoming of obstacles in the Zen sense of the word.

Turning once again to the shakuhachi, Mr. Tanaka looks upon such a minute subtlety as the "finishing tones" which occur at the end of phrases in Kinko-school shakuhachi (I call them "echoes of echoes") as being very particular examples of the power and magic of the instrument. He finds in what he regards as the "mystery and fantasy" of the shakuhachi an ability to evoke so much with one single tone. Does the reader recall the meaning of *yūgen*?

Tanaka writes, “It is most important that we not try to understand the sound of the shakuhachi as being a specific musical concept, but that we try to view it as Enlightenment itself. This is the ultimate Enlightenment of Zen — an expression of the mind in Emptiness. It is the inner energy of human beings. It is the explanation of music and its relation to *satori*. And all the essentials of Japanese music such as *ki-ai*, *ma* and *jo-ha-kyū* are a part of that inner energy and rhythm of the spirit.”

Expressing concern over the state of traditional music in Japan, Mr. Tanaka writes, “ . . . There is a responsibility to remain faithful to the expression of the old values in music if they are to endure as a part of the legacy of a world culture. Where the preservation of such a cultural legacy is concerned, there is no room for any compromise whatsoever.”

This statement was prompted, he says, by a talk I made in Japanese on NHK-Radio on November 29, 1968. In a broadcast-interview with the NHK music commentator Ōmiya Makoto I made the statement that I did not believe that music is a universal language any more than I think there is a spoken language in existence which might be considered as being universally understood. Music, like language, arises out of basic cultural patterns peculiar to its place of origin. I expressed my feeling that Japanese composers who follow strictly Western approaches to music while turning a deaf ear to their own deep musical and aesthetic traditions can never hope to attain true international stature as composers. Only when an artist draws deeply from the well-springs of his own culture can he truly hope to contribute to the wider field of world culture.

Haven’t we moved far afield from the subject of shakuhachi making? A traditional musician-craftsman would doubtlessly answer that we have not. In Chapter III I quoted a close Japanese friend who once said to me, “We Japanese cannot know our present day life without deeply understanding our past.” Mr. Tanaka concludes by saying something very similar: “Looking into the past, we perceive that there is the old within the new, the new within the old.”

Furuki wo tazunete	*Seeking out the old*
Atarashiki wo shiru	*One knows the new.*

More Photographs of Shakuhachi Construction

Washing the Root (Tanaka)

Further Trimming of the Root (Tanaka)

Cutting Off Small Roots (Tanaka)

Cutting Off the End of the Root (Tanaka)

Drying the Roots Over Charcoal Fire (Tanaka)

Altering the Bamboo's Colour with Oil over Charcoal Heat (Tanaka)

Final Touches (Tanaka)

Epilogue:

The Insect Musicians

Not far from Arashiyama and very near the famous moss garden of Koke-dera (Saihō-ji) is a modest, very small, Zen temple of the Rinzai sect. Situated on the slopes of the low escarpment of hills verdant with maple, *sugi* and bamboo, the little temple is by-passed by the large crowds hurrying on to its more renowned neighbour just a short distance up the road.

Hidden away among the trees and shrubs of its garden, it seems a little lost and forlorn. Yet it has its claim to fame; and a sign at the entrance prepares the visitor for it.

The temple's name reads *Suzumushi-dera* (鈴蟲寺) — "The Temple of the Bell Crickets." And the sign, in charming and simple language, invites the wayfarer to pause for a while to share a modest repast served by the priests and to contemplate the song of the *suzumushi* in the quiet of the garden.

Indeed, standing there on a day in full summer, the sound of a million, high-pitched little bells impinges delicately on the ear.

Shoes are removed at the *genkan* (the vestibule), and walking softly along the polished pine floor one enters the main room where other guests are seated at long, low tables on the oil-cloth covered *tatami*. One hardly realizes it, but the room is alive with high tintinnabulations coming from lighted glass cages lining one wall.

"*Ri-ii-ii-ii-*

in."

(The Japanese rendering of the *suzu*'s sound.)

"*Ri-ii-ii-ii-*

in."

(Thousands of closely spaced canonic voices in *stretto* imitation.)

I thought to myself, “Surely this is the zaniest Zen temple of them all . . .!”

Later I came across a little essay called “Insect Musicians” in which Lafcadio Hearn in his 1898 book “*Exotics and Retrospectives*” writes, “ . . . and at night the noise made by multitudes of *suzumushi* in certain lonesome places might be easily mistaken, — as it has been by myself more than once, — for the sound of rapids.”

In that little essay, Hearn also includes some poems on the *suzumushi* from Heian times, from the Engi Period (901-922).

Yes, my dwelling is old: weeds
on the roof are growing;
But the voice of the suzumushi —
that will never be old!

The tinkle of tiny bells, — the
Voices of suzumushi
I hear in the autumn dusk and
think of the fields
of home.

Hark to those tinkling tones, —
the chant of the suzumushi!
If a jewel of dew could sing, it
would tinkle with such
a voice.

Heard in these alien fields, the
voice of the suzumushi, —
Sweet in the evening dusk, — sounds
like the sounds of home.

And I remembered: music — poetry — nature: they are all one.

The reader may recall that there is a category of Kinko-ryū *honkyoku* called *Reibo*(鈴慕). The first character is also pronounced *suzu* and signifies the small hand-bell used in the Buddhist service sometimes as a symbol of the passing of things. The second character, *bo*, means “yearning”. There is another *honkyoku* called *Reibo Nagashi* (流し). *Nagashi* is a word meaning “the sound of flowing water”.

One evening Tanaka-san and I were talking together in a little *sake* shop operated by one of his friends in the Motomachi section of Kobe. We talked of many things: music, nature, our common enjoyment of Chinese characters, and always of his beloved Japan. I happened to mention that I had visited Suzumushi-dera recently.

"*Ri-ii-ii-ii-*

in." He was singing.

Getting his shakuhachi he started to play a familiar passage. He stopped and said, "In the song of the *suzumushi* is the true essence of *honkyoku*." He paused. "And now you know the real meaning of *Reibo Nagashi*."

It was the *honkyoku* we had played together that very day.

Appendix I

Transcriptions of Shakuhachi Honkyoku

[Editor's Note: I remind the reader that it was not possible to include in this edition the transcriptions described here. What follows are Weisgarber's brief notes on each work he transcribed. Readers who are interested in seeing/playing the transcriptions may contact the University Archives at the University of British Columbia and request access to "The Flute Music of Zen".]

Introduction

Elsewhere in this book I have written of the difficulties which are faced when one attempts to transcribe material from one musical culture to another. Confronting this problem, I have tried to remain as close to the musical truth of *honkyoku* as is possible in such a situation.

The settings in Western notation make available to flautists everywhere a wide range of music heretofore untouched and unheard. Nearly all the effects described in Chapter VI may be executed on the modern Western flute with ease, especially if it is open-holed. The only one I can think of (and for which I have been unable to find a workable substitute) is *koro-koro*. (See Chapter VI.) In this case, a simple C"-D" trill seems the best solution.

But the great shakuhachi *honkyoku* has an appeal, an immediacy —indeed, a universality — which transcends cultural barriers. It is, in fact, a kind of ultimate flute music. At the same time, it is Japanese to the core. And using Western notation, playing it on a Western instrument, could be like eating *sashimi* (sliced raw fish) with a knife and fork. The taste will be there, but that unnameable ingredient — a part of the Japanese experience — will be missing. Reluctantly, those who cannot play the shakuhachi must accept this limitation, recognizing the far greater fact of the music's intrinsic beauty and power.

As shown in Chapter IV, the transcriptions fall into two categories: (1) the music of the Meian-ji tradition (*koten shakuhachi honkyoku*) and (2) the *honkyoku* of the Kinko-ryū. Within each main category they have been further subdivided into my own interpretation of musical types.

I. *Koten Shakuhachi Honkyoku*

(1) Buddhist Music

Meian-chōshi
Yamato-chōshi
Takiochi-no-kyoku
Kyūshū-reibo
Kyorei
San'ya
Yoshiya
Ajikan
Ōshū-reibo
Mukaiji
Hōkyō (Ryūgin-koku)
Tsuru-no-sugomori

(2) Special category in which elements of *kagura* appear

Akita Sugagaki

(3) *Kagura*-based Music

Azuma-jishi
Kumoi-jishi

II. *Kinko-ryū Shakuhachi Honkyoku*

(1) Buddhist Music

Hi-fu-mi Hachi-gaeshi
Shinkyorei
Shimotsuke Kyorei
Akita Su'gaki (Kinko-ryū rendering of Sugagaki)
Sayama Su'gaki
Banshiki-no-shirabe
Kokū-reibo

(2) *Kagura*-based Music

Sagariha-no-kyoku
San'ya Su'gaki

The *honkyoku* of the Kinko-ryū is one vast and homogeneous world. Employing a limited number of cell-like patterns with minor variants, musical mosaics of great complexity and length were constructed. Time and space limitations do not permit me to present more than a representative selection of this great music.

Commentary on the Music

Meian-chōshi: This short, eloquent composition remains one of the best vehicles for understanding the musical style of Komusō music. In its brief duration, it presents a wealth of concentrated musical material, the patterns on which an entire tradition, both Komusō and Kinko, is based.

Yamato-chōshi: I possess no specific information concerning this short, lyrical composition.

Takiochi-no-kyoku: Although this work is one of the better known pieces played by the Komusō and later arranged by Kurosawa Kinko, it has been difficult to find any substantial information concerning its origin. There is some opinion expressed (Tanaka Gi-ichi) that it existed at one time as a melody for the *noh* flute. In the Meian tradition its principal feature of construction consists of a set of variations. Why it is called "Waterfall" (*Takiochi*) is not clear.

Kyūshū-reibo: No information is available except that it originated at the Komusō temple in Hakata, Itchō-ken. Many aspects of the work, particularly the opening measures which reoccur later, indicate a strong relationship to the performance style of the *ryūteki* and *hichiriki* in *gagaku*.

Kyorei: This is considered to be one of the three pieces originally owned by the priests at Meian-ji.

San'ya and ***Sayama***: These *honkyoku* titles appear in both the Komusō and Kinko repertoires. Both represent Japanese readings of the Sanskrit *samaja* which means a "gathering" or "assembly". It appears that they were used as ceremonial pieces in the past, particularly at Buddhist ceremonies at Meian-ji in Kyoto. Such *honkyoku* appear to have

been employed at ceremonies centred around the worship of the Buddhist saints known as Bodhisattva (*Bosatsu*).

Yoshiya: This remarkable work, like many others, has had different titles at one time or another. It apparently derives from the Sanskrit word *yajina* and has been known as *Hō-ya*, *Kamba-tani* ("Valley of Fragrance") and *Zenzai*, meaning "Well Done!" It is highly coloured with references to *shōmyō* and appears to have functioned at memorial services and for prayers before the tombs of important priests and Buddhist saints.

Ajikan: This *honkyoku* has long been an important composition in the repertoire of the Komusō. The meaning of its title is difficult to define, coming as it does from the Sanskrit *adyanupada* which seems to have something to do with existence/non-existence. It has been suggested to me that the Chinese characters 非 (*hi* — a prefix meaning "un") and 無 (*mu* — "nothing") could best describe the term. But its actual meaning is so vague that one writer (Fujita Tōnan) feels that it is the finest expression of Shingon Buddhism. Whatever its meaning, it serves as a fine connection with the dim, remote world of the old esoteric Buddhist practices.

Ōshū-reibo: This work derives its title from the old name for the region around the city of Sendai in northeast Japan where Futai-ken, a famous Komusō temple, is located. It appears to have been composed by a priest known as Shinpo, a member of the Nesasa-ha (The Bamboo Grass-Roots Group) which was a part of the Tsugaru clan. It is a strong composition containing many virtuosic passages which evidence a rather advanced state of shakuhachi playing at Futai-ken.

Mukaiji *("Flute Over the Misty Sea")*: Little information is available on this work which is supposedly one of the three original pieces brought from China. Typical of what one finds generally in reference to music such as this is expressed in a single line devoted to this composition in the book *Gendai Sankyoku Tenbō* ("A View of Modern Sankyoku") privately printed by Tanaka Gi-ichi. In English it might be said that this melody "was played in an improvisatory fashion while viewing the Gulf of Ise from atop Mount Asama."

Hōkyō or ***Ryūgin-koku*** "The Cry of the Phoenix": This appears to be a *honkyoku* from Ichi-gatsu-ji, the Komusō temple at Toke in Chiba Prefecture. Kurosawa Kinko I seems to have learned his version from a priest of that temple called Ryūgin. In former times, the piece appears to have been played on the small shakuhachi, the *isshaku yon-sun* (*ro* = F#'). Later it became customary to perform it on the *isshaku kyū-sun* (*ro* = C#'). *Hōkyō* was played in the mode of *kami-mu* (C#) while *Ryūgin-koku* appears to have been played in the mode of *shimo-mu* (F#).

Tsuru-no-sugomori: Loosely translated, the title suggests a crane, that ever-present symbol in Japan, protecting its nest. Accordingly, this *honkyoku* has been regarded as being symbolic of *oya-ko* ("parent and child", i.e. "family love"). The piece has also been regarded as being an expression of a Zen proverb:

Zen-gai ni kai naku
Kai-gai ni Zen nashi

"Outside Zen there are no precepts —
Outside precepts there is no Zen."

Akita Sugagaki: (See the extensive treatment of this work in Chapter IV.)

Azuma-jishi: The single thread of information found on this work that I've been able to find is in a privately printed book by Fujita Tonan called *Mei-kyoku Kaidai* ("A Synopsis of Famous Music"). The author points out that Azuma is a variation of a *kagura* melody originally played on the six-string *koto* called "*Wa-gon"* or "*Azuma-goto"*.

Kumoi-jishi: Although I possess no substantial information on the background of this work, it is very clear that, like *Azuma-jishi*, it is musically based in the *kagura* tradition. It appears in a Kinko version under the title of *San'ya Su'gaki* or *Kumoi-san'ya*.

Hi-fu-mi Hachi-gaeshi ("One-two-three, Return the Alms-bowl"): Also known as *Hi-fu-mi Shirabe*, *Hatsura* or, simply, *Hachi-gaeshi* it appears in the Kinko-ryū tradition as a single composition, one of the most famous melodies of the Komusō. The opening section (*Hi-fu-mi*) is regarded as having been derived from a *gagaku netori*, the prelude or "warming up" period before a main composition. In former times, this piece could be heard as the itinerant priests walked through the streets crying, "*Ho! Ho! Hatsura!*" ("Alms!

Alms!") This was the ceremony of *takuhatsu* ("alms-begging"). As in the case of most *honkyoku* of the Kinko tradition, the patterns of this composition are firmly rooted in *shōmyō*.

Shinkyorei *("Reality-Unreality")*: one of the three "original pieces". Kinko-ryū records indicate that Kurosawa Kinko I learned it from a Nagasaki priest by the name of Ikei in 1729.

Shimotsuke-kyorei: The slender information in my possession indicates that this may have been a *honkyoku* of Ichi-gatsu-ji and that Kurosawa Kinko II may have acquired it from a priest by the name of Shūkyoku.

Akita Su'gaki: (See the extensive treatment of this work in Chapter IV.)

Sayama Su'gaki: Like *Shinkyorei*, Kurosawa Kinko I appears to have acquired this piece from the priest Ikei of Nagasaki.

Banshiki-no-shirabe: This *netori*-like composition may have been based at one time on the old *gagaku* mode called "*Banshiki"* (beginning on B in the old chromatic system described in Chapter IV). Although it appears as a separate piece in Kinko tradition, it is also used as the opening music of the profoundly beautiful "secret piece" *Shika-no-tōne* which, unfortunately, I am unable to reproduce at this time.

Sagariha-no-kyoku: Learned by Kurosawa Kinko I from Matsuyama, priest at Meian-ji in Kyoto. Again, this is a piece based in *kagura* tradition. There is evidence that the melody was once used in the Gion Matsuri, the famed Kyoto festival which has been held every July for nearly a thousand years. It may have also been performed occasionally as *noh* flute music.

San'ya Su'gaki (See Kumoi-jishi above.)

Performance Guide to the Transcriptions

[Editor's Note: Although the reader may not have the actual transcriptions at hand the following may be useful for general performance practice.]

Special instructions for shakuhachi may be found below the staff notation. As for performance on the Western flute, specific instructions are omitted which deal with the shakuhachi technique. Each flautist, will be able to discover for himself the fingering or the method of "shading" the tone in producing the effects of *meri-kari*, *yuri*, etc.

Shakuhachi fingerings are presented in Chinese numerals. They indicate the finger-holes of the shakuhachi which are left ***open***. They are written as follows:

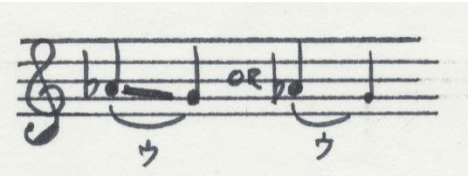
一 (*ichi*) = 1; 二 (*ni*) = 2; 三 (*san*) = 3; 四 (*shi*) = 4; 五 (*go*) = five

Whenever a closed hole is "pushed", the character 押 (*osu*) is associated with the finger-hole number.

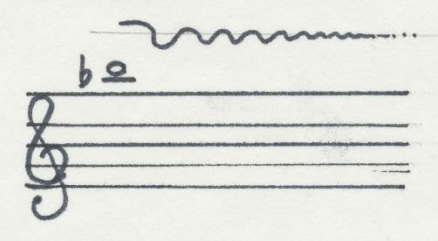
Whenever an open hope is "tapped" or quickly struck, the character 打 (*utsu*) is associated with the appropriate finger-hole.

Here are a few other basic fingering and blowing techniques:

(1) A line drawn between two notes or a smaller note-head following one of normal size will indicate that the second tone is produced without change of fingering.

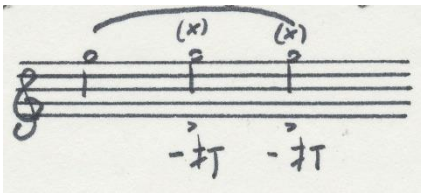


(2) A wavy line indicates an undulation between a written principal tone and a pitch a semi-tone below. It also indicates roughly the speed of the pattern. This is known as *yuri*.



(3) A finger slide (glissando) is indicated by the  symbol .

(4) Appearing countless times in *honkyoku* is the technique called *ichi-utsu* (一打). It is an articulation created by a rapid striking of the first finger-hole accompanied by a breath accent. It is indicated by (一打) or by the symbol "x".

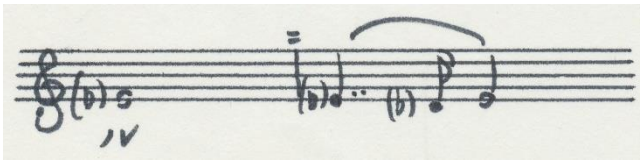


(5) The next three patterns represent a common type known as *ru* (ル) and are found throughout *honkyoku*, particularly those of the Kinko-ryū.

(a) This one is produced by a rapid 打 of 一 and quickly alternating by an equally rapid 押 of 四. This same fingering is used when ル is associated with チ(A)チメり (Aflat), and with ウ(A flat-G).

(b) A rapid 打 of 一.

(c) This is a highly subtle effect created by slowly rotating the first-hole finger around the rim of the aperture in a counter-clockwise fashion. The principal tone is finally reached with a quick grace-note.



Appendix II
List of Komusó Temples

[Ed. Note: It is my belief that the publication of this book was abandoned before Appendix II had passed through the hands of the original editor. The presentation of the lists on the following pages contained many errors. With the assistance of retired Japanese literature professor Edward Fowler, his wife Yukari, and music professor Kōjirō Umezaki, the lists have shed many of their problems. However we have been unable to determine from what source Weisgarber derived these lists. The closest we have come was the discovery of two lists in "Iemoto no Kenkyū", a work by Nishiyama Matsunosuke, published by Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, Tokyo in 1982. Published a decade after Weisgarber did his work, "Iemoto no Kenkyū" cannot have been his source but, quite likely, both men had access to common source material. Both authors list the temples according to region. Nishiyama provides two lists, one of 92 temples and one of 88 while Weisgarber gives a single list of 64. Nishiyama's lists are probably from the late Edo Period. It is possible that Weisgarber's list may reflect the distribution of temples at an earlier date before further proliferation had taken place. Regardless, my associates and I recognize that questions still exist and we suggest that this Appendix be considered "a work in progress".]

When we consider the native Japanese feeling for the natural world and for the characteristic environments of various regions of the country, it is not surprising that local landscape and customs would have an effect on the art of shakuhachi. The branch temples of the Meian/Komusō traditions indeed reflect exactly such an influence as evidenced by the unique melodic and performance styles of the music produced in each locale.

Each branch temple had its own identifying *reibo*, a type of *honkyoku* found in both the Komusō and Kinko-ryū repertoire.

The first syllable *rei* is represented by the same character as *suzu* (鈴) referring to the small hand-bell used in Buddhist services. The second character *bo* is more difficult to translate. It can be written two different ways: 法 which refers to "law" or "regulation" or 慕 which means "to yearn". The latter is the most common. Whatever the meaning, *reibo*

was performed to the punctuated accompaniment of the hand-bell as the itinerant priests made their rounds of alms-begging.

The following is a list containing the name of the *reibo*, its region or town, and the temple where it originated. *[Ed. Note: Weisgarber's reasons for listing these pieces in this order are unknown. Unlike the list of temples which follows, it is not geographical.]*

Reibo	**Place**	**Temple**
Izu	**Izu**	**Ryūgen-ji**
伊豆	伊豆	瀧源寺
Kyūshū	**Hakata**	**Itchō-ken**
九州	博多	一朝軒
Ashihara	**Ōme**	**Reihō-ji**
	青梅	鈴法寺
Akita	**Akita**	**Futai-ji**
秋田	秋田	布袋寺
Ōshū	**Sendai**[13]	**Futai-ken**
奥州	仙台	布袋軒
Miyagi	**Sendai**	**Futai-ken**
宮城	仙台	布袋軒
Kyō	**Kyōto**	**Meian-ji**
京	京都	明暗寺
Murasakino	**Kyōto**	**Meian-ji**
紫野	京都	明暗寺
Kitaguni	**Echigo**	**Echigo-Meian-ji**
北国	越後	越後明暗寺
Shimotsuke	**Toke**	**Ichigatsu-ji**
下野	土気	一月寺

[13] Ed. Note: The exact location of the Futai-ken temple is in the former village of Masuda which, since 1955, has been a neighbourhood within the city of Natori. Natori is the immediate southeastern neighbour of the much larger city of Sendai.

The sixty-four temples listed next are the result of the Tokugawa policy of dividing and sub-dividing institutions in order to maintain the controls of power. They are an indication of the vastness of the Komusō network. Their density in Central and Northeastern Japan tells us much about their political position in the Tokugawa world. The list begins in Kyūshū, in the Nagasaki-Hakata region and extends eastward and northward all the way to Mutsu, the Aomori region. *[Ed. Note: regions = names of the old provinces]*

Region	Modern Prefecture	Town	Temple	Parent Temple/Affiliation
Hizen	Nagasaki	Nagasaki	Shōju-ken	Reihō-ji
肥前	長崎	長崎	正壽軒 ??	鈴法寺
Chikuzen	Fukuoka	Hakata	Itchō-ken	KyōtoMeian-ji
筑前	福岡	博多	一朝軒	京都 明暗寺
Chikugo	"	Yanagawa	Kōgetsu-in	Ichigatsu-ji
筑後	"	柳川	江月院	一月寺
"	"	Kurume	Rinseiken	"
		久留米	林棲軒	
Yamashiro	Kyōto	Rakugai	Meian-ji	Honzan Kyōto Meian-ji
山城	京都府	洛外	明暗寺	本山京都 明暗寺
Ise	Mie	Shiroko	Fusai-ji	Kyōto Meian-ji
伊勢	三重	白子	普済寺	京都 明暗寺
Tōtōmi	Shizuoka	Hamamatsu	Futai-ji	Ichigatsu-ji
遠江	静岡	浜松	普大寺	一月寺
Suruga	"	Gamagōri	Muryō-ji	Saikō-ji
駿河		蒲郡	無量寺	西向寺
Izu	Shizuoka	Ōdaira	Ryūgen-ji	Buan
伊豆	静岡	大井平	滝源寺	武安
Kai	Yamanashi	Otoguro	Meian-ji	Reihō-ji
甲斐	山梨	乙黒	明暗寺	鈴法寺
Echigo	Niigata	Nakanohara	Meian-ji	Honzan Kyōto Meian-ji
越後	新潟	中野原	明暗寺	本山京都 明暗寺

Kōzuke	Gumma	Takasaki	Jijō-ji	(Ju)Gokadera-kumi [???]
上野	群馬	高崎	慈常寺	五ケ寺組
"	"	"	Seikai-ji	"
			清海寺	
"	"	Numata	Madomuro-ji	"
			[Enhō-ji ???]	
		沼田	円宝寺[円法寺]	"
"	"	Ōta	Riko-ji	Buan
		太田	利光寺	武安
"	"	Shiroi	Jōsui-ji	(Jū)Gokadera-kumi [???]
		白井	浄水寺	五ケ寺組
Musashi	Saitama	Fukaya	Fukushō-ji	"
武蔵	埼玉	深谷	福正寺	
"	Tokyo	Meguro	Tōshō-ji	Saikō-ji
	東京	目黒	東昌寺	西向寺
"	"	Ōme	Reihō-ji	Honzan-furegashira
		青梅	鈴法寺	本山触頭
"	"	Fuda	Anraku-ji	Reihō-ji
		布田	安楽寺	鈴法寺
"	"	Hachiōji	Takusui-ji	"
		八王寺	沢水寺	
"	"	Hon-Machida	Daitaku-ji	Saikō-ji
		本町田	大択寺	西向寺
"	"	Ōtani	Nashō-ji	"
		大谷	南松寺	
"	"	Kamimine	Shōgen-ji	Buan
		上峯	松源寺	武安
"	"	Ogawa	Kōen-ji	"
		小川	幸円寺	

Sagami	Kanagawa	Isehara	Jingū-ji	Reihō-ji
相模	神奈川	伊勢原	神宮寺	鈴法寺
"	"	Miura	Ryūzan-ji	Saikō-ji
		三浦	龍山寺	西向寺
Kazusa	Chiba	Toke	Seigan-ji	Ichigatsu-ji
上総	千葉	土気	清岸寺	一月寺
"	"	Ōtaki	Origami-dera[??]	"
		大多喜	折紙寺 **or** 析紙寺	
"	"	Taninaka	Shoken-ji	"
		谷中	松見寺	
Awa	"	Kaizuka	Eifuku-ji	Seshi (Origami)[??]
安房		貝塚	永福寺	折紙 **or** 析紙
Shimōsa	"	Kogane	Ichigatsu-ji	Honzan-furegashira
下総		小金	一月寺	本山触頭
"	"	???	Kannen-ji	Saikō-ji
"	"	**???**	観念寺	西向
"	"	Funabashi	Seizan-ji	Ichigatsu-ji
		船橋	清山寺	一月寺
"	"	Sawameki	Tōyō-ji	Reihō-ji
		沢目木	東陽寺	鈴法寺
Hitachi	Ibaraki	Obuse	Eirin-ji	Mito
常陸	茨城	小生瀬	永隣寺	水戸
"	"	Kamitetsuna	Kansha??	"
		上手綱	勘車??	
"	"	Furugo[14]	Anraku-ji	"
		古郡	安楽寺	
"	"	Shimotsuma	Shingetsu-ji	"
		下妻	心月寺	

[14] Ed. Note: If the *kanji* given here are correct it is possible that they have been read incorrectly.

"	"	Katano 片野	Koan-ji 光安寺	"
"	"	Tsukuba つくば	Kotsū-ji ?? 古通寺 ??	"
"	"	Edozaki 江戸崎	Daihi-ji 大悲寺	"
	" "	Yūki 結城	Chōzen-in 長全院	"
Shimotsuke 下野	Tochigi 栃木	Kanuma 鹿沼	Jusen-ji 住泉寺	"
"	"	Takō [??] 多幸 ??	Seiun-ji 清雲寺	"
"	"	Yakushiji 薬師寺	Seishin-ji 清心寺	"
"	"	Kaminokawa 上ノ川	Eifuku-ji 永福寺	Jūgo-kumi 十五ヶ寺組
"	"	Senbon[??] 千本??	Reishaku-ji 鈴鐸寺	"
"	"	Enomoto 榎本	Kanun-ji 観雲寺	"
"	"	Motegi 茂木	Baisen-ji 梅川寺	"
		Utsunomiya 宇都宮	Shogan-ji 松岩寺	"
Mutsu 陸奥	Fukushima 福島	Hanawa 塙	Buon-ji 武音寺	Jūichi-kumi 十一組
"	"	Sōma 相馬	Kiraku-an 喜楽庵 ??	"

"	"	Ueda 植田	Kōgan-ji 光岸寺	"
"	"	Fukushima 福島	Renhō-ken 蓮芳軒	"
“	Miyagi 宮城	Natori 増田	Futai-ken[15] 布袋軒	“
"	"	Kannari 金成	Kannari-ji 金成寺	“
"	"	Yoneoka 米岡	Sanseki-an[??] 三夕庵	"
"	"	Shiroishi 白石	Buen-ji 武縁寺	"
"	Iwate 岩手	Hanamaki 花巻	Shōgan-ken 松巌軒	"
"	"	Yamanome 山ノ目	Reishaku-ji 鈴釋寺	"
Dewa 出羽	Yamagata 山形	Yamagata 山形	Garyū-ken 臥龍軒	"
Ugo 羽後	Akita 秋田	-	Futai-ji 布袋寺	?
??	??	Kanda 神田	Seian-ji 正安寺	"

[15] Ed. Note: This is the temple described as “near Sendai” on p. 54. Natori is the town bordering Sendai on the southeast. See Note 13, p. 130.

Appendix III

Komusó Codes of Conduct (1677 & 1852)

[Editor's Note: The source of the material in this Appendix was evidently Tanaka Gi-ichi (田中義一)*'s book Gendai Sankyoku Tenbō* (現代三曲展望)*("A View of Modern Sankyoku"), Mae-gawa Shuppan-sha, Osaka, 1964, listed in the Bibliography. The Codes of Conduct found there were translated into English (according to an undated letter in Weisgarber's files) by Michiko Tsuda of Kyoto with the assistance of a Mr. Nakao. Weisgarber left a note with his materials that says, in part: "The documents from Edo times which transmit what limited information we have concerning the lives of the Komusō, their codes of ethics, the establishing of their temples, and their music, are difficult to read even for a Japanese of our time. When all the obsolete, classical Chinese characters have been decoded, even when some words in English . . . have appeared in the translation, it is still difficult to make much sense of it. One feels . . . in the midst of a dark, secret world, reeking with intrigue and haunted by danger . . . hidden just beneath the surface of the slow, formal language."]*

Perhaps the best means at our disposal to learn something about the Spartan lives of the Komusō will be found in the regulations for entrance and the rules governing the behaviour of the *deshi* ("novices") of Reihō-ji and its branch temples. The main temple of Reihō-ji is in the town of Ōme which is now located within the Tokyo Metropolitan District, but was once a part of Musashi Province.

The rules which follow were posted in the Sixth Month of the Fifth Year of Empō (1677).

- Everyone is expected to observe strictly the rules of this temple. All violators shall be disciplined.
- All public laws are to be obeyed.
- No sanctuary will be given those violating national laws.
- *Deshi*, without shirking their duty, will diligently be taught the old laws and traditions.

- In the event of the total destruction of this temple, rebuilding will be financed by donations from believers from all ten points. Any new construction shall avoid ostentation.
- Postulants desiring to enter this Komusō order will not be permitted through any infraction of the established conditions of entry. In exceptional cases, agreed upon by master and *deshi*, the postulant must produce a guarantor.
- When being accommodated at an inn, an itinerant *deshi* will not indulge in drinking and gambling, nor shall he indulge in noisome behaviour.
- (For self-defense) *deshi* shall carry both long and short swords. Should another group of Komusō accost them, they should be held and reported to the master of the temple.
- Komusō of this temple are not to form into groups with the purpose of aggression, nor are they to engage in unseemly business enterprise.
- When a *deshi* returns from distant places after a long absence, he shall be interrogated as to his intentions and reasons for returning. Those found to be without suspicion may remain.
- When a person of another sect arrives, he shall be questioned in detail before he is allowed to remain.
- If a Komusō from this temple should enter Edo playing shakuhachi, he will be questioned as to whence he came and shall be turned away.
- When going out into the neighbouring vicinity, all *deshi* will wear their stoles (*kesa*), will keep their hair (*uhatsu*, "unshorn hair") tied and will carry shakuhachi.
- Temple property shall not be pawned, nor shall extravagant living be indulged in. Any temple treasure so pawned must be redeemed.

- Infractions of these rules shall be documented and forwarded to the main temple where punishment will be decided.

The following is a list of rules signed by an officer of Meian-ji in 1852.

- Komusō are not permitted to play, with the exception of temple precincts, in the area between the east side of Kamogawa-Gojō and the boundary of Fushimi.
- In the Fushimi and Daigo areas, Komusō are permitted to play only within temple precincts. In order to play in other places they may be permitted under a playing licence issued by Meian-ji.
- Komusō are forbidden to play under roofed mud-walls, at the homes of noblemen, in the environs of Nijō Castle, and at the residences of government officers.
- Komusō are prohibited from playing in Shimabara or other prostitute quarters. They also should refrain from playing in crowds of people.
- When Komusō encounter government officers in the street, they should also refrain from playing.
- When playing is prohibited by order, a Komusō must refrain from doing so.
- Should a Komusō find himself in difficulties with anyone, he should act according to principle and try to reach an understanding with that person. If such an understanding cannot be reached, he should report it to his superior and try again to reach agreement. A Komusō should not behave rudely to lay people.
- When both layman and Komusō violate any laws, a Komusō (who is a witness) should escort the offender to his temple and report the offense.

- In associating with laymen, a Komusō should refrain from any concern with money matters.

Appendix IV

In Search of the Komusō World: Two Travelogues

If you want to seek out the old Komusō temple of Reihō-ji in the Musashino region west of Tokyo you take a Chuo-line train traveling for miles through dense suburban areas, one large city after another. But as the train rushes westward, one gradually realizes that there was once a lush, green countryside here. Even now, the modern industrial world begins to give way to rural agriculture.

After changing trains at Tachikawa and passing the huge air base, hills begin to appear and on a sunny day in spring the ridges of the higher mountains can be seen retiring into the distance, their dark outlines set against the haze, their far heights all but invisible. This is the region known as Okutama, close to the source of the Tama River, that once lovely stream now serving as one of the great drainage ditches of the Tokyo area. Nevertheless, it is lovely in Okutama. Indeed, as I stepped down from the train in Ōme I felt as if I had arrived in a country town hundreds of miles from the vast metropolis.

Hiraizumi Eun, Abbot of Meian-ji, early 1970s

When I visited Ōme I went really not knowing whether or not Reihō-ji existed. I carried a card from Abbot Hiraizumi of Meian Temple introducing me to Mr. Naruse Ryōdo. It bore the gentleman's address; that was all. I had half expected that it might be at the temple itself. At any rate, after considerable discussion among several taxi drivers at the station (all of whom proved to be exceedingly helpful) I was finally taken some distance where I was deposited before a large house on a ridge overlooking a deep valley surrounded by the quiet green hills. No temple was in sight.

My visit was one of those spur-of-the-moment things and I was completely unexpected. But the door

was answered by an elderly lady who invited me to enter after I had produced my cards and the general letter of introduction from my publisher which I always carry with me. I was shown into a pleasant *tatami*-floored room covered with the materials for shakuhachi-making. Tea was brought and while I was eating the sticky, sweet, spring-time confection known as *sakura-mochi* the lady of the house placed a telephone call after which she returned to tell me that *Oji-chan* (an endeared "uncle") would be there shortly. Indeed, in a few minutes, a handsome old gentleman appeared. He was dressed in *kimono* and I judged him to be somewhere in his eighties.


Naruse Ryōdo

Mr. Naruse Ryōdo is well-known as an authority on the history of Reihō-ji. After trying several nearly completed shakuhachi he motioned to a pile of books stacked helter-skelter in a corner. For an hour or so we bent over the little collection of books, drawings and maps — items from the Edo Period — all that is left of Reihō-ji. In its day, the old temple was located in what is now the Shin-machi section of Ōme, its site now consisting of open fields punctuated by the blue-tiled roof-tops of new tract housing. A busy highway bisects it and there are no reminders of what once was there.

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A few miles to the southeast of Kyoto is the small city of Uji, a centre of considerable interest in the history of Japanese culture. In Uji there is an old, weed-grown cemetery. It looks like an insignificant place, bordered as it is on one side by a tea field (with its huge, sheltering straw covering so characteristic of the region's tea fields) and on another side by a cramped suburban housing tract. Just above its upper boundary run the tracks of two railway lines while below there is a busy street beyond which rise several of the

standardized, concrete-block apartment buildings which symbolize a new kind of family life in the modern world of industrialized Japan.

Abandoned Komusō Cemetery, Uji

But for those few Japanese who are still interested, this forgotten plot of land holds great meaning. Near that place — and before the time that the Zen priest played his single note for his astonished audience — stood the first temple which sheltered the flute-playing sect of the Fuke-shū. Now only the remotest of memories, its name known only in the region's local histories, Kyūko-an once stood on the south bank of the Uji River where it flows in a slightly northwest direction toward its confluence with the Katsura River.

In none of the books in my possession, nor in any reference work, had I ever found the name of Kyūko-an. The first I heard of it was one evening at a gathering of shakuhachi players in Kobe when one of the men said to me, "You know, there is a Komusō temple in Uji. You ought to go and visit it." He wrote down its *kanji* at my request. Naturally, with my curiosity in high gear, I subsequently asked a friend in Kyoto, who possessed a large collection of regional histories, what she knew of Kyūko-an. Throughout her professional life as a leading teacher and performer of *koto* and *shamisen*

Abandoned Komusō Cemetery, Uji

she has had a close connection with the shakuhachi world and its history, yet the name Kyūko-an was unfamiliar to her.

In her characteristically direct way she called the telephone exchange in Uji and asked the operator if she could get the temple's address, if not its telephone number. During the ensuing conversation there was time to convey a brief record of my career as a musician interested in Japanese music. This dialogue went on for nearly fifteen minutes during which the Uji operator contacted various individuals who might know. Finally the answer came back: the temple had not existed for over three hundred years!

The operator advised my friend that, while the temple was no longer there, there were some very interesting things in and around Uji including a shakuhachi *tsuka* (a "memorial mound" or "barrow") in the cemetery which I have just described. The operator put us in touch with the Director of the Seminary run by the Ōbaku Zen Sect which maintains impressive headquarters[16] not far from the cemetery. My two subsequent visits to the Ōbaku Seminary began the process of bringing to light some fascinating history.

According to the scattered histories of the time, Kyūko-an was built sometime late in the life of its founder Kyōchiku Zen-shi who died between 1294 and 1298. Kyōchiku, his priestly name, appears to have been a Chinese, one of the very first Zen priests who came to Japan from Sung Dynasty China. Prior to this, another Zen priest by the name of Shōichi Kokushi, seems to have led the first group of Fuke-shū to Japan in 1254. This would establish a direct connection with Chinese musical tradition as far as vertical flute music in Japan is concerned.

The very spotty documentation shows Shōichi Kokushi as a professional ancestor of two important figures in the old world of vertical flute music. The first was the famous Hotto-kokushi. He, in turn, was followed by his pupil Rōan, certainly one of the most prestigious names in the history of the shakuhachi. Rōan founded the now vanished Enon-ji which was located close to Kyūko-an. In trying to decode the fragmented facts, it appears that Rōan resided at Kyūko-an itself which seems to have been a kind of chapel for Enon-ji.

[16] Ed. Note: Manpuku-ji, also known as Ōbaku-san

Rōan regarded the shakuhachi (we shall consider the term “shakuhachi” as being synonymous with whatever vertical flute they used) as a means of educating the common folk in the principles of Buddhist philosophy, the instrument acting as a commentary accompanying the chanting of the sutras. Thus Rōan contributed significantly to the development of shakuhachi tradition.

Enon-ji and Kyūko-an were destroyed in a flood during which the then unpredictable river (now contained within high dikes) changed its course. Later Kyūko-an was rebuilt in a new location in the area and continued to function until the early seventeenth century.

The Uji region was once rich in places associated with the distant world of the Fuke-shū and their adventures. Even now, some can be found. Walking toward Uji City along the narrow street leading away from the cemetery, one comes shortly onto another narrow street which leads off to the right. Ultimately it takes the traveller to the north bank of the Uji River. The street is little more than a lane, and on turning into it a change of atmosphere takes place. The noisy street is left behind and many of the ugly buildings vanish from sight. The road winds on past the walls of old, prosperous farm houses, their roofs topped with new tile. There was a tile-maker in the neighbourhood, I noted, who still designs his product along traditional lines.

Although the odd small truck presses the walker to the edge of the stone-lined ditch there is none of the frenzy experienced on the main roads. The daily work goes on, but these are farming folk and their lives seem unhurried. From a nearby workshop a radio is mutedly playing Japanese popular music. A few old women are at work in the tea-field and others are wading in the muck of a rice paddy. The chirp and trill of birds are carried on the air of the bright spring afternoon. Somewhere a raven caws and deep pink azaleas bloom beside the road.

Beyond the river, a little to the northwest of Kyoto, the unmistakable outline of Mt. Atago rises above Saga and the deep valley of Kiyotaki. To the south, the vista of meadows and straw-covered tea fields (along with the occasional factory) is webbed with power lines and the shining checker boards of rice paddies shimmering into the afternoon haze

and smog creeping up from the Osaka region. Looking back in the direction from which he came, the walker can view the still lovely range of hills standing above Uji with their myriad shades of green in the bamboo, sugi and maple — the delicate variety of colours perhaps reflected in the subtle patterns of the shakuhachi music that was played and developed in these environs so many centuries ago.

The end of the road is reached at a little temple gate. The darkening pine board over the entrance has three characters written across it: 円福寺 Empuku-ji — The Temple of the Circle of Happiness/Prosperity. Sunlight falls on the modest garden with its solitary stone while on the left of the gateway stands the tiny chapel containing the precious *Kannon* ("Goddess of Mercy")to whom this temple of the Jōdo Sect is dedicated.

As I walked into that little courtyard, all was still but for the sound of birds and a gentle wind, a note of laughter from the nearby tea-field and a snatch from somewhere of the lilting local speech. Walking to the entrance of the living quarters I opened the sliding door, at the same time calling out "*Gomen kudasai*", the expression used when seeking permission to enter a household. There was no answer so I waited a moment and then decided to take a few pictures and return another day.

Having done all I could I put away my camera equipment and was preparing to leave when a tiny, elderly woman (presumably a nun judging by her shaved head) emerged from the main building. She was wearing *monpe*, the standard polka-dot blouse and baggy trousers worn by women engaged in outdoor labour. After I introduced myself and presented my letter of introduction, she read only the first couple of lines and broke into a smile exclaiming, "You'll want to see the *Kannon*, of course!"

She invited me to enter the small building. She moved a sliding door allowing the afternoon sunlight to enter the miniscule chapel barely revealing a small gilded statue of the Goddess of Mercy, black with age and almost invisible in its dark recess. We knelt in silence for a few moments. Then I asked her if the temple possessed any old writings, scrolls and the like which might be of interest to a historian. Immediately the old lady arose, bowed to the altar, then turned and bowed to a small shelf from which she produced a small, dark, oblong, wooden box which contained the sum total of the written treasures of

this place. All the original documents of Empuku-ji were destroyed by one or another of the Uji River's many floods. Only copies, created from memory, remain.

Few people come this way, and foreign visitors are virtually unknown. So exceptional was the occasion that the nun (for that is, indeed, what she was) apologized for her dress and excused herself to change into her robes. I was left alone with the *Kannon* and the unreadable documents written in the flowing calligraphy of old classical Chinese. She returned shortly to invite me into the main building for tea which was served in a sunny room overlooking a straw-covered tea field. Her name was Shinji Jōnyū. Now in her seventies she had lived at Empuku-ji for half her life and acted as the *rusu-ban* ("caretaker") of the temple. Sitting there in that sunny room, its *tokonoma* housing an old religious scroll, we looked out over the quiet fields at the line of hills bending away to the southeast beyond Uji City where dingy factory buildings and smoke-stacks cluttered an otherwise lyrical scene. She spoke of her temple and its special connection with the shakuhachi .....

Not only had Shinji Jōnyū heard of the mysterious Kyūko-an but she was intimately familiar with her temple's connection to it. The Empuku-ji *Kannon* in whose presence I had spent some minutes in contemplation not long before, had once actually belonged to Kyūko-an but has been housed with Empuku-ji for many centuries and is considered a guardian deity of the Fuke-shū. Each year on the 27th of May, Empuku-ji hosts a ceremony presided over by the Abbot of Meian-ji in Kyoto during which a number of men who continue to practice Komusō music (but who are not themselves Komusō) gather at the cemetery to commemorate the life of Kyōchiku-Zenshi. A *honkyoku* is played at the rocks which mark the *tsuka*. Following this, they walk through the countryside to Empuku-ji where a short service, again with *honkyoku*, takes place before the *Kannon*.

I couldn't believe this serendipitous piece of luck since the 27th of May was only days away. I made arrangements to attend. On the day of the occasion the weather could not have been worse. A leaden sky hung well below the crest of the hills and a heavy mist was falling. When I arrived, the cemetery was still deserted, but the long grass which had nearly obliterated the stones on my first visit had been cut. Flowers had been placed before the *tsuka* and some sticks of incense were burning. Shinji Jōnyū was there, again wearing

monpe, busy tidying up the decrepit grounds, having apparently come on her bicycle which was leaning up against the wall. A little later she retired to one of the *danchi* across the street to change clothes and while she was gone the Abbot, dressed in his robes with *geta* under his bare feet, arrived with a group of fourteen men, all of them dressed in business suits and carrying umbrellas. In the small shelter at the cemetery entrance they each unpacked a shakuhachi and walked in single file to the *tsuka*. There the Abbot intoned a chant and, to the accompaniment of the hand-bell (*rei*), the men played *Meian Chōshi* together.

After that, all of us walked together to the temple, several of the men often pausing to discuss a roadside flower or to look at the occasional shrine, the inscriptions on the stones nearly worn away by time.

Komusō Commemorative Monument, Komusō Cemetery, Uji (the notation of Kyōrei appears at the top; at the bottom is a list of notable shakuhachi players living in 1915)

At the temple they assembled directly in the chapel. The rain meanwhile had abated and a watery sun was trying to break through. A small bell rang delicately, and before its reverberations died, the Abbot began the *jo-ha-kyū* pattern on the hollow-sounding *moku-gyo*, a fishhead-shaped wooden drum. This blended into the intoning of a brief sutra after which the men played *Kyorei* in unison, and a chanted benediction concluded the brief service.

Then all of us moved into the main building where we ate *bentō* (the traditional boxed lunch of various kinds of rice balls with fish and pickled vegetables in the centres). Large bottles of *sake* appeared and a session of conversation and unabashed merry-making ensued, a typically Japanese "fraternal" institution. While all this was going on, different pieces of *honkyoku* were being played by various groups scattered about the long room.

. . . . . Although the buildings of Empuku-ji are of recent vintage the institution has been in or near this location for many centuries. Several books dealing with Kyoto's history make occasional reference to this modest place, always identifying it with the Komusō but never, to my knowledge, telling us much about the nature of the connection. Fortunately, it has its own gracious and able spokeswoman in the form of its humble *rusu-ban* whose solitary life of tranquility and meditation has only strengthened a warm, out-going personality. Anyone who is prepared to listen can learn from Shinji Jōnyū more than all the historical treatises can ever hope to convey.

In the old days (she says), Empuku-ji was a place of refuge that always enjoyed a unique relationship with the Komusō. When we consider the stringent rules under which they lived, the severity of their lives as wandering beggars, as well as the dangers posed by their strange careers as government spies, the solace of a sanctuary such as Empuku-ji was essential. The temple offered the chance of an occasional escape into a world of gentleness and peace. It still does.

About the Author

Elliot Weisgarber (1919-2001) was born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. He studied at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York where he received both his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in composition as well as his Performer's Certificate in Clarinet. For many years he served on the faculty of the University of North Carolina in Greensboro until being invited in 1960 to join the newly formed music department at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver. His enormous interest in Asia was well-nourished on the Pacific coast and led him to spend a number of years of partial residence in Japan where he made a profound study of Japanese music, particularly that of the *shakuhachi*. His study and research, supported by the Canada Council and by UBC's Committee on Research, led to the expansion of UBC's single ethnomusicology course into a full-fledged program of study at the University. Many of his compositions from the mid-1960s onwards exhibit a strong Japanese influence, evidence of the remarkable impact which Japanese culture had made upon his life. His *Catalogue of Works* includes several for Japanese instruments.

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[Does not include terms mentioned only in figures, captions or charts]

[For individual pieces of music, see listings under Kinko-ryū and Koten shakuhachi honkyoku]