

# A PRELIMINARY APPROACH TO THE ANALYSIS OF HONKYOKU, THE SOLO REPERTOIRE OF THE JAPANESE SHAKUHACHI

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## INTRODUCTION

Up until the opening of its borders at the end of the Edo period (1603-1868), the Japanese had not developed any clear means for analytical art discourse. The majority of Japanese arts were influenced by Zen Buddhism, which asserts that the intellectual and analytical mind should not be “trusted”. Consequently, artists were not prompted to develop an analytical understanding of their art. With traditional artists, the same remains true today.

One of the aims of the Meiji (1868-1912) government in Japan at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was to bring Japan up to an equal footing with the West. This specifically involved sending groups of intellectuals, politicians, etc., to study abroad, and inviting Western scholars to come to Japan. The former were to learn, and the latter were to teach Western theoretical, philosophical and political principles, among other things. Japanese scholars and students had to deal with new fields of study as well as

with unfamiliar ways of understanding the world. Several European concepts were not known in Japan at the time; words and expressions had to be created and adapted to the Japanese way of thinking.<sup>1</sup> As for music, Japanese musicologists relied on European analytical methodology to make sense of their music, which traditional musicians did not feel the need to theorize.

Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and even more so after WWII, a number of books and articles have been published concerning the theoretical background of traditional Japanese music. Two main theories have been put forward: the first is that their music is based on modes, the second that it is based on motivic patterns of three notes within the interval of a fourth, i.e., a triad(4). The debate over the best framework for understanding traditional Japanese music continues through the present. As a non-Japanese *shakuhachi*<sup>2</sup> player, I am neither a musicologist nor an ethnomusicologist. I am more of a musician deeply involved in performance and aesthetic study of *shakuhachi* (尺八) music.

The *shakuhachi* is an upright bamboo flute whose playing was restricted to monks belonging to a Zen Buddhist sect during the Edo period. Even without any clearly defined theoretical framework, musicians over the centuries have been able to compose music that follows basic rules from which modern musicologists have been able to extrapolate these two theoretical viewpoints.

In this paper, I submit my personal understanding of these theories as a musician, and seek a means of applying them to the solo pieces of *honkyoku* (本曲, lit. original piece), the name given to classical repertoires of *shakuhachi* music. To accomplish this, I begin by succinctly presenting the conclusions of six authors (four Japanese and two non-Japanese) who have studied and analyzed traditional Japanese music. Although the four Japanese authors do not analyze

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<sup>1</sup> For a good example of this problematic of European aesthetic concepts, see [Marra, 2001, p.1–22 (“Introduction”)]. In most instances, these newly created terms were not translated directly from the European concepts, but adapted them to the Japanese way of thinking. These Japanese terms have usually a meaning wider than their European counterparts do.

<sup>2</sup> More generally on *shakuhachi*, see [Berger and Hughes, 2001 ; Keister, 2004b].

*honkyoku* as such, they do provide important clues on the melodic structure of the music. The second section gives an overview of the traits that distinguish the melodic structure of *honkyoku* pieces from other forms of Japanese music. I next provide an analysis of pieces from two distinct *honkyoku* repertoires: first, a piece written in the traditional style at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by *shakuhachi* master Jin Nyōdo (1892-1965), and second, a well-known traditional piece in its modern version, adapted by Katsuya Yokayama (1934-2010). In order to propose another model for understanding this unique music, I expand on the six aforementioned authors' proposals. In the final section, I show that some of these six authors' conclusions do apply to *honkyoku* music, while others do not. I show that, although the authors present a relevant understanding of the melodic structure of *honkyoku*, there is more to it than they suggest, specifically highlighting two important aspects of this music that they miss.

In this article, I put forth not a typical methodological analysis of this music, but an understanding of it from the perspective of the musician and performer rather than the musicologist or ethnomusicologist. For example, an article entitled “*Shakuhachi Honkyoku: Motivic Analysis of Sokaku Reibo*”<sup>3</sup> was recently published by clarinetist and musicologist Amy Simon on the AAWM Journal online. Her analysis is basically about pitch and rhythm cells. She provides a methodological sound analysis of the piece from a typically Western musicological standpoint. Although she refers to the work of two of the Japanese musicologists and of two non-Japanese ones I will be presenting below, her analysis does not take into consideration the fact that traditional music, and more so *honkyoku* music, is not based on the notions of pitch and rhythm current in musicology, as I will try to show in this paper, but more on tone-colors and variation in them. In this article, I opted to follow the approaches of Japanese musicologists.

Finally, what I am proposing below cannot be applied to all repertoires of *shakuhachi honkyoku* pieces. Still, I hope it sets forth a preliminary

framework for understanding how the music was composed.<sup>4</sup>

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Although the pieces of *honkyoku*<sup>5</sup> solo repertoires for *shakuhachi* can be considered as having melodies, they do not have melodic lines as defined in Western music, *i.e.*, a pleasing succession of musical tones. The rhythmic structure of most of these pieces is not measured, although some may have a pulse that is played without clear respect to rhythm. According to Swiss *shakuhachi* player Andreas B. Gutzwiller, the pieces of the *honkyoku* repertoire were originally composed based not on theoretical concepts or abstract rules, but on playing rules.<sup>6</sup> The monks of the Fuke sect who composed them considered their flute a *hōki* (法器), a spiritual tool to reach enlightenment, rather than a *gakki* (楽器), a musical instrument, a fact that influenced how the pieces were composed. The central figure in Japanese music is not the composer or the theoretician but the player.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, as Allison McQueen Tokita indicates, very few genres of music in Japan have any basic theoretical discourse, the main being *gagaku* (雅楽, Japanese court music); the majority do not. She indicates that although the modal terminology of that particular music was applied to other genres, it did not really give insight about them. Consequently, over the centuries, no relevant theories have been developed that would give us today an historical understanding of the theoretical evolution of traditional Japanese music. As mentioned earlier, it is

<sup>4</sup> Most composers writing for the *shakuhachi* today show a clear influence of Western music in their style. Using Western notation software, they transcribe afterward their pieces mainly into the notation system of the Tozan School, a notation that has been influenced by Western notation.

<sup>5</sup> Today, the term *honkyoku* refers to all styles of solo pieces for the *shakuhachi*, including the modern ones composed in the spirit of the original repertoire. Since 1970, the expression *koten honkyoku* (古典本曲, classical *honkyoku*) is used to refer to the traditional pieces from the Edo period.

<sup>6</sup> Gutzwiller uses the term “performing” rules, instead of “playing”. Because these monks were not giving concerts or performances of any kind during the Edo period, his use of “performing” is misleading – see [Gutzwiller, 1974, p. 86–89].

<sup>7</sup> This applies as well to the *kabuki* theater, for example, in which the actor is the central figure. For a long time, the author of a play was not even advertised, only the actors were.

<sup>3</sup> [Simon, 2017].

at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with influence of Western scholarship, that we see an analytical outlook on Japanese music begin to develop. However, Japanese musicologists have mainly been using Western terms, without thoroughly pondering if and how they apply to their traditional music. For example, they have not been consistent in their use of terms such as scale (*onkai*, 音階) or mode (*senpō*, 旋法).

Most of these researchers have been using them interchangeably as if they are the same, though scale appears to be the preferred term. As Tokita suggests, the reason is that a mode is not conceived of as a tonal system within which scales can be defined, as in European music or other music such as the music of the Arabic or Persian worlds.<sup>8</sup> For example, the view of the two known Japanese musicologists I review below appears to be that modes are more of a grouping of notes from which a pattern or motive can be created, rather than a scale with a differentiated internal structure (i.e., a modal scale as defined by Amine Beyhom).<sup>9</sup> The most important characteristic of Japanese modes is not the internal structure of the tones but the intervallic relationship between them, as we will see below.

Stemming from the above understanding of a mode as a grouping of notes from which patterns or motives are created, Japanese traditional music does not appear to be based on tones, notes or pitches, but on tone-colors and their relationships. In fact, the authors I cite here do not clearly define what they mean when they use the terms “tone” and “note”. I am somehow forced to propose a definition that might be unsatisfactory for musicologists. As I suggest in the final section, Japanese music is based on tone-colors. Tones in a melody are not tones as we currently define them in the field of musicology – as a steady periodic sound considered with reference to its duration, pitch, intensity, tone-color, source, etc., for example. By analogy, the concept of a musical tone follows the Buddhist notion of dependent origination, i.e. that just as the flame on a candle cannot exist without the wick and wax, things in themselves are devoid of their own, independent existence, existing only in relation to one another. Likewise, a musical tone is understood not as

having its own, independent (objective) existence, but in relationship to other tones. More precisely, it is understood in terms of its intervallic relation to another tone. A tone is musical because of the presence of other tones. But more specifically, under the influence of Zen Buddhism with its distrust of the analytical mind, modes and tones in Japanese music should not be viewed as concepts but as percepts. This is, in all probability, one of the primary reasons why Japanese musicians have not developed a theoretical discourse, as Tokita indicates.

A major figure in the study of traditional Japanese music is Uehara Rokushirō (1848-1913), who was also a *shakuhachi* player known as Uehara Kyodō. He studied the music of the Edo period, which he called urban music, *miyako bushi* (都節, song of the urbanite), distinguishing it from country or folk music, *min'yō* (民謡, folksong), which he did not study. He was influenced by the Western distinction between minor and major mode, considering that urban music was using the *in* (陰) scale (or *miyakobushi* 都節), and folk music outside of urban centers used the *yō* (陽) scale (or *ritsu* 律) (Fig. 1). According to Gutzwiller, Uehara's usage of the terms *in* and *yō* is also based on a tradition that relates phenomena in opposing principles, largely influenced by the Chinese principle of *yin* and *yang*, terms which are translated as *in* and *yō* in Japanese.<sup>10</sup> Uehara considered Japanese music to be based on modes that are built on what he calls two conjoint “tetrachords,” or triad(4)<sup>11</sup>. The main particularity of these two modes is that the upper triad(4) differs between its ascending and its descending forms, something which is of course not unique to Japanese music. For Uehara, these modes are structured not

<sup>10</sup> See [Gutzwiller, 1974, p. 42].

<sup>11</sup> Uehara is the first musicologist to use this term to designate a trichord or a triad on the fourth (triad(4)). Other Japanese musicologists, following Uehara, have been also using “tetrachord”. This is an example of the use of a non-Japanese term employed without validating it with respect to European terminology. While triad(4) refers to the number of pitches, this use of the term “tetrachord” pertains to the interval of a fourth that is constant, while the pitch of the intermediary note within it is movable. A musician might not always play exactly in tune as specified by a triad(4); that is, for the intermediary note, a half-tone can be played as a full tone without any contradiction. To be in line with the current musicological European terminology, I use triad(4). I still have to use the Japanese terms on some occasions since it is used by the four Japanese authors I refer to.

<sup>8</sup> See [Alison McQueen Tokita, 1996, p. 1–3].

<sup>9</sup> See [Beyhom, 2013].

around a tonic but around two nuclear notes, the interval of which form a tetrachord, *i.e.* an interval of fourth. The single intermediary note within this

triad(4) does not have a fixed tone, for this reason it cannot be defined with a clearly structured scale or mode.

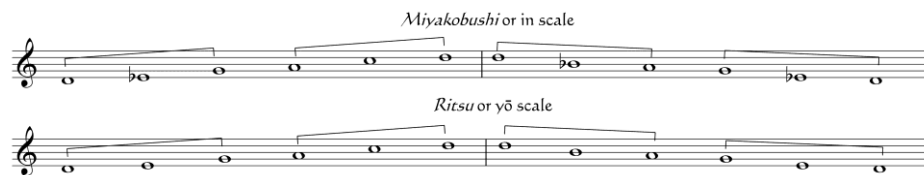


Fig. 1 The *ritsu* scale is recognizable by the presence of tones, while the *miyakobushi* uses half-tones. Each scale is made of a “tetrachord repeated” twice, a tone apart.

The most important figure in the study of traditional Japanese music is Koizumi Fumio (1927-1983). According to Tokita, Koizumi was analyzing music more from an ethnomusicological, emic perspective rather than a musicological one; his theory came to supplant Uehara’s. Yet, following up on Uehara’s footsteps, he also viewed Japanese music as being constructed on “tetrachords,” *i.e.*, triad(4). According to him, traditional Japanese music is based on four triad(4) that form four different scales which are not based on the octave or forming a tonal center (Fig. 2). The notes are defined relatively to what he calls *kakuon* (核音, nuclear notes),<sup>12</sup> each triad(4) containing two nuclear notes, which give 4 *kakuon* of equal importance within each mode. For Koizumi, the nuclear notes form a stable framework of pitches upon which melodies and phrases can be composed.<sup>13</sup>

Among the articles and books analyzing some aspects of the traditional Japanese music by Western ethnomusicologists, only a few are dedicated to the *honkyoku* repertoire for *shakuhachi*. There is an article by Elliott Weisgarber<sup>14</sup> who has studied *shakuhachi* in Japan. He suggests that the pieces of the *honkyoku* repertoire have been composed based on melodic patterns and cells. His article presents a pattern analysis of three pieces. Without making any references to Uehara’s work, he suggests that what

distinguishes the music of the *shakuhachi* is the *in/miyakobushi* scale and its half-tones, but he does not analyze the melodic structure of these cells. He also uses terms such as “leading tonic” and “dominant tones,” terms used in Western music which cannot be applied directly to Japanese music. Although this point might suggest a possible link with the notion of *kakuon*, Weisgarber does not say anything about Koizumi’s work. His reference to a series of predefined common patterns or cells from which these pieces are composed is valid. For example, the main songs in *kabuki* (歌舞伎) theater, called *nagauta* (長唄, long song), or in *shōmyō* (声明, Buddhist chant) chanting, are composed in such a manner. The dance movements of *nihon buyō* (日本舞踊) are similarly based on formulaic patterns.<sup>15</sup> Weisgarber is one of the rare to suggest that the melodies of *honkyoku* music are formulaic.

The melodies of the *honkyoku* pieces have not been composed as melodic lines *per se*, as in *min’yo music*, for example. They sound, at times, more like a “patchwork” of predefined motives and patterns than a melody *per se*. In particular, obligatory breathing marks fragment the flow of the melody into well-defined and clear-cut phrases, so the player can take his or her breath, the length of which is not rhythmically determined. However, Weisgarber did not develop his theory well enough to give a relevant understanding of how these motives are melodically structured internally and in relation to each other.

<sup>12</sup> Even the translation of *kakuon* as “nuclear note” is misleading since it refers not to pitch but to sound, *on* meaning sound or noise.

<sup>13</sup> One reviewer suggested that the term “phrases” can be problematical in the context of the unpitched melodies found in *shakuhachi* music. As will be shown in the analysis of the two pieces below, the pieces of the *honkyoku* repertoire are based on phrases clearly delineated by breath marks.

<sup>14</sup> See [Weisgarber, 1968].

<sup>15</sup> For *nagauta*, see [Alison McQueen Tokita, 1996; Keister, 2004a; Tokumaru, 2000]. For *shōmyō*, see [Alison McQueen Tokita, 1996]. For *nihon buyō*, see [Hahn, 2007].



Fig. 2 Each scale is formed by combining the same triad(4) twice, a tone apart. Whole notes indicate the *kakuon*. (See [Koizumi, 1977, p. 76])

In his 1974 Ph.D. thesis, *shakuhachi* player Andreas B. Gutzwiller discusses the question of the breathing marks that delineate the phrases of *honkyoku* pieces. According to him, these phrases form indivisible and clearly defined musical units. The player must take a breath at each of these marks, playing each phrase within a single breath. However, he does not say anything about the possible formulaic character of the music. He pays closer attention to the melodic structure of these phrases that are based, according to him, on a central note around which gravitates what he calls “moving notes” that are not tonally or modally defined, and are thus constantly fluctuating. However, he does not make any reference to Koizumi’s theory of “tetrachords” and *kakuon*, or that there could be more than one central note in a phrase, although he did study with this musicologist.<sup>16</sup>

Two Japanese researchers who have recently been debating the issue of modes vs. “tetrachords,” in French, are composer and historian Akira Tamba<sup>17</sup> and musicologist Yosihiko Tokumaru.<sup>18</sup> Tamba’s work is in line with Uehara’s views, and the bulk of his analyses are on modes, although he says just few words about him. As well, he mentions Koizumi’s name on two occasions without presenting his work, though he states that Japanese music is based on the “tetrachord”. In his book, Tamba presents first the theory of Chinese music (chapters 1 & 2),<sup>19</sup> and the extent of its influence on Japanese music.<sup>20</sup> According

to him, *gagaku* music from China brought the notion of modes and fixed pitch to Japan. However, sometime between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, Japanese musicians started to show a strong preference for one particular mode, the *in* mode, using it in particular in *biwa* music (琵琶, the Japanese lute), *nō* (能) theater, *shōmyō* Buddhist chanting, and *kagura* (神楽) *shintō* singing and ceremonial dancing. The use of modes as a fixed pitch scale did not have much influence on the music of the commoners. Before the advent of *gagaku* in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Japanese music was already based on the triad(4), though they were conjoined (as the example shows in Fig. 3). It would only be around the 13<sup>th</sup> century that disjoint triad(4) would be brought together to form octavial scales, as Uehara and Koizumi are suggesting (see Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). Tamba even suggests that although a melody could be based on a mode, when a transposition occurs, it is based on the triad(4). Although a melody appears to be related to a fixed pitch mode, because of the importance of the triad(4), the “weight” of the triad(4) is stronger, thus attenuating the role of the mode in that melody.<sup>21</sup>

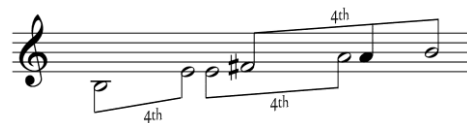


Fig. 3 Example of conjoint triad(4), in Tamba’s analysis of a *nō* theater song titled *Kagekiyo*.<sup>22</sup>

Yosihiko Tokumaru is a clear advocate of Koizumi’s “tetrachordal” theory. He analyzes the melodic structure of *shamisen* (三味線) music, particularly *nagauta* songs, beginning his analyses with Koizumi’s

<sup>16</sup> [Gutzwiller, 1974, p. 98–126].

<sup>17</sup> See [Tamba, 1988].

<sup>18</sup> See [Tokumaru, 2000].

<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, chapter 3 is dedicated to Greek music in regards to Chinese and Japanese music.

<sup>20</sup> Tamba mentions that Chinese mathematicians calculated the tempered scale around 1596, while it was calculated in Europe in 1692 [see also [Beyhom, 2016]: “Equal temperament was already mathematically established by Chu Tsai-yü in 1584 in China, and for the first time in Western musical theory by Flemish mathematician Simon Stevin roughly (and, most probably, independently though inaccurately [...]) at the same time; the latter’s division of the octave remained however unpublished (and unknown) until 1884”]. The Chinese found that scale musically

→ unpleasant (see [Tamba, 1988, p. 60–63]). In Japan it was also calculated in 1692 (see [Tamba, 1988, p. 90–94]).

<sup>21</sup> For example, in an analysis of the well-known classical piece *Rokudan no shirabe* (composed sometimes in the 18<sup>th</sup> century), Tamba shows that, although this piece is based on the *in* mode, the transpositions of its melodic patterns are based on the first or last note of the main triad(4), not the mode as such. See [Tamba, 1988, p. 167].

<sup>22</sup> See [Tamba, 1988, p. 143–144].



theory. We learn that the tuning of the *shamisen* is based on the *in* mode. Interestingly, however, he indicates that *shamisen* players believe these melodies to be based neither on that mode nor on the triad(4). According to him and to Tokita,<sup>23</sup> the melodies of these songs are based on predefined patterns that are ordered and reordered for the needs of the song being created, thus lending credit to Weisgarber's suggestion that it might be the same with *honkyoku* music. Tokumaru dedicates a full chapter to how *nagauta* melodies are composed from predefined melodic patterns, idioms or motives which are within the triad(4). Furthermore, reordering these motives to create a new melody also involves rearranging the links of the Koizumi's *kakuon* between patterns. In this sense, according to Tokumaru, melodies are formed not according to a mode or a scale, but according to the structural ties between their *kakuon*.<sup>24</sup>

## MELODIC STRUCTURE OF THE MUSIC OF THE SHAKUHACHI

The *shakuhachi honkyoku* repertoire is distinguished from all other genres of Japanese music in that it is possibly the sole genre not composed for voice, particularly narratives or storytelling, that holds significant historical value with respect to Japanese arts. When the *biwa* found its way out of the *gagaku* ensemble, it was used to accompany the recitation of Buddhist *sutras* or the narration of legends, myths or tales.<sup>25</sup> When the *shamisen* reached mainland Japan in the 17<sup>th</sup> century from the Ryūkyū kingdom (Okinawa), it was primarily used as an accompanying instrument for entertainment in pleasure quarters and the newly developed *kabuki* theater, as well as the *bunraku* (文楽) puppet theater, among others. The only other instrument for which there was a solo repertoire during the Edo period is the *koto* (琴), the Japanese table zither, which was still used mainly for accompanying the voice.

As for the *shakuhachi* (Fig. 4), the flute was originally part of the *gagaku* ensemble; of Chinese origins, it had 6 holes. However, at the end of the

9<sup>th</sup> century, it was removed in an effort to streamline the ensemble.<sup>26</sup> Around the 11<sup>th</sup> century, a small straight flute appeared, the *hitoyogiri* (一節切) (length: approx. 33,6 cm); it had 5 holes and was played by wandering monks. This flute is considered the ancestor of the *shakuhachi*.<sup>27</sup>



Fig. 4 Illustration of a *shakuhachi*. This flute has 4 holes in front and 1 in the back. © Jean Laplante.

These *shakuhachi* players were a hodgepodge of monks from different religious backgrounds, some being considered “half-monks”. Some among them were called *komosō* (薦僧, straw mat monks). They carried straw mats on their backs. Later, from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onward, they came to be known as *komusō* (虚無僧, monks of emptiness), a name with more religious overtones. However, it is not known precisely when the change of name occurred. Documents from the 17<sup>th</sup> century mention that these *komusō* were monks of a Zen sect called Fuke, considered a subject of the Rinzai sect, and that they played the *shakuhachi* to attain enlightenment, although they were independent of Rinzai authority.<sup>28</sup> They did not meditate, nor did they chant the Buddhist sutras; they did not even shave their heads, as did all other Buddhist monks. Thanks to an edict from the *shōgun* (將軍), they could travel freely all throughout Japan.

<sup>26</sup> See [Tamba, 2015, p. 27–28].

<sup>27</sup> In [Tukitani et al., 1993] it is indicated that the “mode” of the melodies played on that small flute was the *ritsu* mode, the mode mainly used in folksongs, and that the rhythmic structure of these songs was regular. While the *shakuhachi* as we know it today appeared at the beginning of the Edo period, the aesthetic quality of the *in* mode was preferred by the monks of Fuke sect, with a free rhythmic structure (also cited in [Lee, 1993, p. 59]).

<sup>28</sup> [Sanford, 1977, p. 412].

<sup>23</sup> See [Alison McQueen Tokita, 1996].

<sup>24</sup> See [Tokumaru, 2000, Chapter IV].

<sup>25</sup> See [Ferranti, 2009].

The edict stipulated that the members of the Fuke sect had to be from the samurai class, most of them being *rōnin* (浪人, masterless samurai), and that they were the only ones granted permission to play that flute. Many of these *rōnin*, disguised as *komusō*, were in fact gangsters and crooks, some of whom served as spies for the *shōgun*, travelling and playing the *shakuhachi* with a straw basket on their head, thus hiding their identities.<sup>29</sup>

The Fuke sect had a number of temples around Japan where the *komusō* could stay, with two head temples around Tōkyō and one in Kyōto. The role of the Tōkyō temples was more political than anything else, while the Kyōto temple, Myōan-ji, was for the more spiritually inclined of these *rōnin*-monks. Being despised, the sect was abolished in the Fall of 1871, following the collapse of the Tokugawa *shogunate* in 1868. The monks then began teaching *shakuhachi* to the general population and giving concerts to survive, which was something entirely new for most of them, though some, mainly around Tōkyō, had already been teaching for a number of years outside of their ranks. A few of them created their own schools with their own styles, writing new pieces or rearranging existing ones. Their temples were either destroyed or moved to other locations, taking different names, and losing any links with the Fuke sect. Myōan-ji in Kyōto was not destroyed and is still active today. Musicians, Buddhist monks and amateur *shakuhachi* players have been gathering at the temple twice a year since 1952 to perform traditional *honkyoku* pieces. A group of practitioners still maintains the temple's traditional repertoire.<sup>30</sup>

In the *shōgun* edict, it was stipulated that the *komusō* of the Fuke sect were not allowed to play popular songs or *min'yō* (民謡, folksong), but only their own music, although this rule was not always strictly enforced. It is only after that sect was banished in the Fall of 1871 that the *shakuhachi* started to find its way into other genres of music, including *min'yō*. Though these mendicant monks were playing in front of people

while begging, these were not performances. They were not constrained by having to compose melodies to please a public, though they were obviously influenced by the music they were hearing at the time, including the ones they heard in the pleasure quarters.

The *shakuhachi* as it is known today appeared sometime within the 17<sup>th</sup> century or perhaps the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is made of young *madake* bamboo. It is unclear who decided to start making it with that particular type and size of bamboo, and when. One anecdote suggests that a *rōnin* thought that a bigger and heavier flute could be used as a club to fight when needed.<sup>31</sup>

With regard to the structure of the *honkyoku* pieces, we find in traditional Japanese music an important aesthetic and structural principle called *jo-ha-kyū* (序破急),<sup>32</sup> which has been used since the 7<sup>th</sup> century when *gagaku* came to Japan from China. *jo* can be translated as “introduction,” *ha* as “breaking apart” or “exposition,” and *kyū* as “rushing to the finish” or “denouement”.<sup>33</sup> All forms of Japanese music and theatre (including the martial arts) use it as an aesthetic structure not only for an entire song or a full play, but also for an act, a single scene, and even for each individual movement the actors perform on stage. In *honkyoku* music, entire pieces as well as the phrases that comprise them follow this structure; in a phrase, the *ha* might take more the form of a culmination than an exposition. This structure does not divide each piece into equal parts. The *ha* might occur early in a piece, or toward the end. As for each phrase of a piece, it is up to the player to place it where he feels it fits during a piece's performance, though he must make clear that the phrase unfolds out of silence (from the *jo*) and return to it (with the *kyū*).

In modern musicology, a “musical phrase” is most commonly defined as the division of a melodic line. The pieces of the *honkyoku* repertoire obviously have musical phrases, but with a major difference both from other genres of Japanese music as well as from those of other cultures: the phrases are separated by silence defined by breath marks clearly indicated on the score.

<sup>29</sup> See [Lee, 1993], [Johnson, 2014], [Deschênes, 2017].

<sup>30</sup> There is a particular school in the town of Hirosaki, in the northern prefecture of Aomori which developed a unique style of *shakuhachi* playing. Its practitioners were not monks or *rōnin*, but active samurais. The banishment of the Fuke sect had no influence on them.

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed history of the *shakuhachi*, cf. [Lee, 1993] and [Johnson, 2014].

<sup>32</sup> See [Tamba, 1988] and [Malm, 2000].

<sup>33</sup> See [Malm, 2000, p. 115].

The player must obligatorily play each phrase within a single breath, followed by silence. In Japanese music, silence is not some sort of void; it can be viewed as the “seedbed” of sound.<sup>34</sup> Silence in these pieces do not mean an absence or an interruption of sound, but that sound unfolds from silence and returns to it. From that point of view, this silence is as important as the sounds themselves. Breathing becomes an integral part of the piece’s performance, as it prepares the phrase to come, thus becoming part of its aesthetic character. The aim of these pieces is to express a state of mind that can be spiritual; the silence must express it as much as the notes played. The duration of these silences will differ from phrase to phrase, musician to musician, school to school, and even between a musician’s performances.

Although the *honkyoku* repertoires are obviously influenced by the *in* mode, with its extensive use of the half-tone,<sup>35</sup> their melodic lines are not based on that mode. One reason for this is that, since they were not composed with the voice in mind or with an aim to create pleasing melodies, it may have been deemed unnecessary to compose them with a sustained melodic line. It must be added that this flute is extremely difficult to play, requiring the player to take long, deep breaths. The pieces were composed with that particular constraint in mind, forcing them to incorporate clear pauses and silences between phrases. The monks that crafted these pieces had a flexibility that they would not have had were they composing regular melodies. A phrase does not necessarily follow the preceding ones on the basis of a sustained melodic line. At times, a phrase might drastically break the flow of a possible melodic line by inserting a motive that does not express any obvious continuity with the preceding one(s).

It is quite common in *honkyoku* music to hear phrases with a single note, suggesting that there is no *kakuon*. Let’s take for an example the first few phrases of *Daiwa gaku* (Fig. 5 & Fig. 6), the first of the two

pieces I analyze in the next section. As can be seen in Fig. 5, the first two phrases have only a single note, while the third phrase has 2 notes, which are the same as the previous ones. In both cases, the interval is a fourth. In these first 2 phrases, it can be suggested that the *kakuon* are not within a phrase, but between them. In Fig. 6, phrases 4, 5 and 7 have 2 *kakuon*, while phrase 6 has only one. The *kakuon* of phrases 4 and 6 lead to phrases 5 and 7. Although phrases can be independent from one another, split by breathing marks, there can be a grouping of *kakuon* between them.



Fig. 5 *Daiwa gaku*: phrases 1 to 3

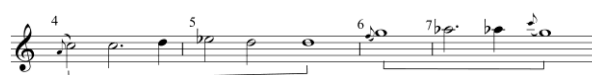


Fig. 6 *Daiwa gaku*: phrases 4 to 7

The notion of *kakuon* as proposed by Koizumi is, I believe, most pertinent in analyzing the *honkyoku* repertoire. However, his emphasis on the fourth and of having two or more *kakuon* within a phrase is somewhat too restrictive.

As I hope to show in my analysis in the next section, the melodic motives of the phrases in the *honkyoku* repertoire are based more on the intervals linking the *kakuon* together than on the *kakuon* themselves. These linking intervals occur between phrases as well as within them.<sup>36</sup>

## ANALYSIS OF TWO HONKYOKU PIECES

The background for my analysis of the melodic structure of the phrases in *honkyoku* music is twofold.

Firstly, it is based on the points raised in the two previous sections, particularly Koizumi’s notion of *kakuon*.

Secondly, it relies on my personal study of the music from a *shakuhachi* player’s point of view.

<sup>34</sup> Similarly to Japanese painting in which a space or a background is purposefully left blank. That empty space has as much meaning as everything else on the canvas.

<sup>35</sup> I am using “half-tone” for the sake of clarity for the reader. It is not at all the tempered half-tone or even the natural one. Being difficult to produce because of the use of partial opening of holes on the *shakuhachi*, the player is never really able to play it the same each and every time. From one performance to another, a half-tone within a piece will never be exactly the same interval.

<sup>36</sup> Japanese *shakuhachi* masters do not say anything about the structure of the melodic lines of the pieces they teach their students, nor do they discuss the *kakuon* or any other theoretical constructs. They usually elude such questions.



My primary aim is to understand these pieces so to better perform them.

We will begin with the following corollaries:

1. Phrases in *honkyoku* pieces usually have 2 nuclear notes, although on many occasions there is only a single note, thus a single *kakuon*. Some pieces composed or rearranged by 20<sup>th</sup>-century musicians may have phrases with more than 3 *kakuon*, while the ones in traditional pieces generally have 1 or 2 *kakuon*.
2. The *kakuon* within a phrase form an interval within a triad(4), while intermediary notes can have intervals whose span sometimes exceeds an octave.
3. *kakuon* are never simply 2 notes that structure a phrase. Their relation forms what I call *nuclear intervals* (which would become in Japanese *kakuontei* (核音程), *ontei* being a musical interval). These intervals give a melodic form to each phrase. Though Koizumi and Tokumaru acknowledge the importance of intervals, they do not develop that point.
4. The most common *kakuontei* are: the fourth, the half-tone, the major second and the minor third. The major third appears, but not as frequently as the other intervals.
5. A phrase should be viewed as a melodic “trajectory”. The intervals are not simply a distance of some sort between tones or two *kakuon*, but a motion from one to another, a motion that musically structures each phrase. This intervallic motion between *kakuon* forms the melody structure of a phrase or a motive, not the *kakuon* as such.
6. As Weisgarber suggests, phrases are formed of motives. In traditional pieces, a phrase has usually a single motive. However, in modern pieces there can be more than one within a phrase.
7. A phrase must be performed within a single breath. The silences between phrases are an integral part of the aesthetic character of *honkyoku* music.
8. Lastly, the two pieces I am analyzing in this section are from two different schools, or *ryū* (流), and styles of *honkyoku* music. The first one, *Daiwa gaku* (大和楽, “The Great Peace”),

is a piece from the repertoire assembled from different areas throughout Japan at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by *shakuhachi* master Jin Nyōdo (1891-1965).<sup>37</sup> The second piece, *Shika no Tōne* (鹿の遠音, “The Distant Cry of the Deer”)<sup>38</sup> is among the most known pieces of the *honkyoku* repertoire, and one of the few pieces originally written for two *shakuhachi*.<sup>39</sup> Most *shakuhachi* schools perform this piece, arranging it to their respective style while maintaining its overall structure, so as to allow *shakuhachi* players from different *ryū* to perform it together. The version I am analyzing here is from the *dokyoku ryū*, the *shakuhachi* school and style of the late Katsuya Yokoyama (1934-2010).<sup>40</sup>

## Daiwa gaku

*Daiwa gaku* is a beginner’s piece and is the first *honkyoku* piece taught to students of the Jin Nyōdo school. The following points can be observed (see Fig. 9):

- As we saw above (Fig. 5 & Fig. 6), the notes of the first three phrases introduce two fourths. A third fourth, with the same notes, does not appear until phrase 17, toward the end of the piece.
- 8 phrases out of 19 have a single *kakuon* (1, 2, 6, 11, 13, 15, 18, 19).

<sup>37</sup> I learned part of this repertoire with Ronnie Nyogetsu Reishin Seldin (1947-2017), an American *shakuhachi* master based in New York, as well as with Kurahashi Yōdo II, a *shakuhachi* master from Kyōto, whose father, Kurahashi Yōdo I (1909-1980), was a disciple of Jin Nyōdo. Seldin was a student of Kurahashi Yōdo I.

<sup>38</sup> This is possibly the most recorded piece of the entire *honkyoku* repertoire, especially by non-Japanese *shakuhachi* players.

<sup>39</sup> The original piece is much simpler than the one we hear today. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the piece was adapted to a more virtuoso style of playing. There also exist a number of different versions that cannot be played together.

<sup>40</sup> We find today three major schools of *shakuhachi*. The Kinko School is considered the traditional school, which has a number of affiliated schools. The Tozan School was created at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the style of which has been modeled in part on Western music. It has few branches. This is the most popular school among Japanese students. A third school is the *dokyoku* school established by *shakuhachi* master Katsuya Yokoyama in the 1960s. It is popular among non-Japanese players. There are also other lesser known or popular schools.

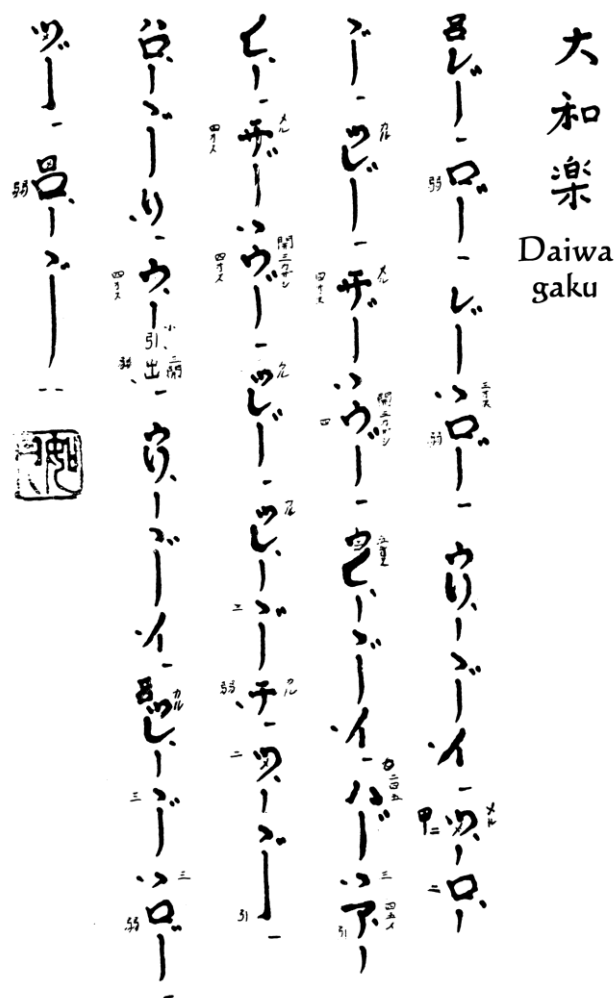


Fig. 7 Score of *Daiwa Gaku* in Japanese notation, calligraphy by Kurahashi Yōdo I. Used by permission, Kurahashi Yōdo II.<sup>41</sup>

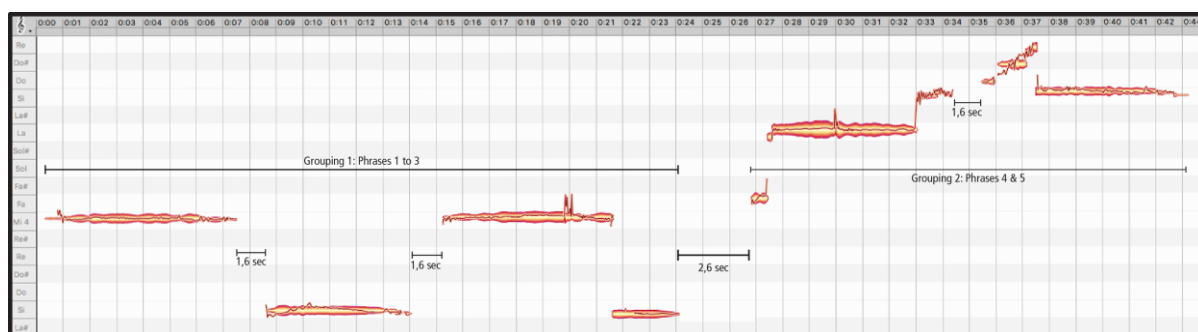


Fig. 8 Annotated (and modified) image of phrase 1 to the first note of phrase 5 of *Daiwa gaku* (see Fig. 9 and Fig. 9), showing lengths of silences between phrases for the recording accompanying this article. Analysis using MELODYNE software.

<sup>41</sup> The characters used in the *shakuhachi* notation do not refer to tones but fingerings. Some tones can be produced with different fingerings, thus giving different tone colors. These characters are from the *katakana* syllabary (one of three writing systems) and are used for foreign words and onomatopoeia. Each school has its own notation based on this common set of characters. Some notations can be very sparse, while others are quite detailed, though not to the extent of European notation.

# Daiwa Gaku

*Honkyoku* piece from  
the Jin Nyōdo school

Fig. 9 Transcription in Western notation of *Daiwa Gaku*. The breath marks are represented by short bar lines. The numbers at the beginning of each staff indicate phrase numbers. The brackets indicate the *kakuontei*. This piece is performed on a 2.1 *shakuhachi*,<sup>42</sup> while the transcription is based on a 1.8 *shakuhachi*, the standard and most common length for the flute. The transcription is mine.<sup>43</sup>

# Daiwa Gaku

Fig. 10 This example shows the groupings I use for my performance of *Daiwa gaku*. It can be grouped differently depending on the musician.

<sup>42</sup> The name *shakuhachi* refers to the length of the standard flute: 1 *shaku* 8, *shaku* being a unit of measurement and *hachi* being the number 8. The length of these flutes can be between 1.2 and 4.0 *shaku*, though the ones from 3 *shaku* on are extremely difficult to play.

<sup>43</sup> To hear my performance of the piece, click [here](#) (for the pdf version – duration: 2:34).

- 2 of the single note phrases have the note repeated (13, 19).
- 5 of them have a single intermediary note (6, 11, 13, 19) thus 2 *kakuon*, and one with a windy sound (15), called *muraiki* (ムラ息, a type of windy sound).
- 7 phrases use either a minor 2<sup>nd</sup> (5, 7, 10) or a major 2<sup>nd</sup> (4, 8, 12, 16) as *kakuonte*. There are no minor or major third *kakuon* in this piece.<sup>44</sup>
- Only one phrase has three *kakuon* (9).
- Phrases 4, 8, and 16 are the same, except for phrase 8, which is an octave higher than the two others.
- The piece begins and ends with nuclear intervals of a fourth. The minor second of the last two phrases (18 & 19) is, I would suggest, a “collapse” of the final fourth into a minor second.
- No two successive phrases have the same nuclear intervals.
- Phrases 4-5 and 8-9: a major second in ascending motion is followed by a minor second in a descending motion.
- As the culminating point of the piece, 8-9 is a recurrence of 4-5 an octave higher, with an extra note at the end of phrase 9.
- Phrases 6-7 and 10-11 express the same pattern, but in reverse order.
- Melodic structures are formed by groupings of 2 or 3 phrases such as: 1-2-3; 4-5; 6-7; 8-9; 10-13; 14-15; 16-17; 18-19, as shown in Fig. 10.
- The *jo-ha-kyū* structure of the piece is as follows: *jo*, phrases 1-5, *ha*, phrases 8-9, and *kyū*, phrases 10 to 19.

One obvious particularity of this piece is its simple, unsophisticated melody. Except for phrase 9 which has 3 *kakuon*, the melodic structures of all the other phrases are unadorned, having only 1 or 2 *kakuon*. This type of melody is common among traditional pieces with a melodic line that is not continuous in character.

One aspect of this melody that Weisgarber and Gutzwiller do not mention in their analyses of

*honkyoku* music is that phrases can be *grouped*. These larger phrases exert an influence on the flow of the piece, the duration of breathing between phrases, and the performance of a piece.<sup>45</sup> These groupings are neither structural nor theoretical. *Shakuhachi* players do not simply play the phrases of a piece one after the other, interspaced with silent breathing; they create larger melodic structures by grouping phrases together, with groupings that could differ from one musician to another.

The concepts of nuclear intervals (*kakuonte*) and groupings that I propose here provide a new avenue in the analysis of the *honkyoku* repertoire, one that has not been proposed up to the present, at least not by the authors I reference in this article. As the article is intended as a preliminary discussion, I will not go into any further detail than putting forward these two proposals. My aim is to raise an issue that has not been previously proposed and still needs to be comprehensively studied.

A follow-up would be to extend my analysis of these two new concepts to a number of pieces from different repertoires and styles, and, in particular, to see how they are applied by different musicians, both Japanese and non-Japanese, in their performance of these pieces.

## Shika no Tōne

Before presenting my analysis of this piece, I need to provide a few comments about both transcriptions. For *Daiwa gaku*, I transcribed the original Japanese score precisely as-is. For this second piece, I added in red some unwritten stylistic devices that can be optionally played, depending on the player or the school. Also, the *dokyoku* notation uses jagged lines that produce notes with up and down movements of the head. I transcribed these notes with smaller note heads, as in the G following the A<sup>b</sup> in phrase three. The note values of all the pitches (in both pieces) are relative, not fixed. Their duration and even the pitches themselves will differ between the two musicians playing that piece.

<sup>44</sup> My use of minor and major has no direct reference to these concepts in European music. I use it for the sake of clarity in presenting these *kakuonte*, knowing that these intervals will differ from one player to another.

<sup>45</sup> The breaths between the phrases within a group might be shorter than between two groups.

The following points can be observed about *Shika no Tōne* (see Fig. 13 & Fig. 14).

#### STRUCTURE

*Shika no Tōne* appears to have the following structure: A'-B'-C'-D'-E'-A''-F'.<sup>46</sup>

- Section A' includes phrases 1-7; section B', phrases 8-16; section C', phrases 17-26; section D', phrases 27-32; section E', phrases 33-9; section A'', phrases 40 to 45; and section F', phrases 46 to 57.
- In section A', the players play similar phrases, except for the first phrase that is played by the first player.
- B' and C' are two sections where both players repeat the same phrases alternatively.
- Section D' is the only section where both players play dissimilar phrases.
- In section E', we hear 2 short phrases played alternatively in ascending and descending order. A'' is similar to A', except that the second phrase is missing. The players have been switched.
- In the last section F', phrases are alternated between the players, except that at the end, phrases 53-56 appear as the only ones where both players play together.
- The *jo-ha-kyū* structure could be as follows: *jo*, sections A' and B', *ha*, C', D' and E', and *kyū*, A'' and F'. C', D' and E' could also be viewed as being structured according to this tripartite structure.<sup>47</sup>

#### PHRASES

This piece clearly comprises groups of phrases (between two and five phrases) that are played alternately by the two players. At times the second player repeats what the first one played; at other times, it is reversed. Section D is the only one in which they do not play the same phrases. Phrase grouping plays a crucial role in the performance of the piece.

- The phrases of section A' are played by the first player, and those in A'' by the second.

<sup>46</sup> The reason why I say “appears” is that this structure is debatable, being dependent on how the player views and makes sense of the piece. Again, it can differ from one school to another. For example, a single phrase in one school could be divided in two distinct phrases in other schools.

<sup>47</sup> This too is debatable.

- There is only one phrase that is not repeated (phrase 12).
- There is a group of phrases (section E') that are played alternately, but in reverse melodic order (33 to 39).
- There is only one phrase that is played by the same player when repeated, that being phrase 1 of section A' which recurs as phrase 40 of section A''.

#### KAKUON AND KAKUONTEI

The melodic structure of *Shika no Tōne* differs greatly from that of *Daiwa gaku*. The former has much greater complexity, and is composed for two *shakuhachi*.

The brackets on the Western transcription show the nuclear notes only for the first occurrences of phrase groups.

- This piece makes use of *kakuonte* that are constrained within a triad(4), supporting Koizumi's theory of *kakuon*.
- Numerous phrases have three *kakuon*, thus two *kakuonte* (phrases 1, 3, 5-6, 21-23, 27-29, 31, 33-41, 43-44, 48, 53); and sometimes more.
- The phrases with two *kakuon* employ only three intervals: the fourth, the minor second and the major second.
- When there are three *kakuon*, the most frequently recurring interval is the major third. The first and third *kakuon* form what I consider to be a primary *kakuonte*, with the nuclear intervals between the first and second, and the second and third *kakuon* being secondary *kakuonte*.
- The first phrase of *Shika no Tōne* is a case in point, having three *kakuon* and two *kakuonte*. It starts with an *E<sup>b</sup>*, ascends to a *G*, making a major third, and ends with a fourth on *D*. The primary nuclear interval between the first and third *kakuon* is a minor second.
- Although the major third is clearly stated, its structural importance as a nuclear interval is diminished due to the phrase's trajectory towards the fourth. The fourth and the minor second are melodically and structurally more important as both intervals end on the third *kakuon*.



- repetitive “echo” of the first one than a distinct nuclear interval. Further, this phrase can be performed inserting a short silence right after the first nuclear interval, suggesting that it might be considered as two separate phrases.

- Phrase 30 starts on a  $B^b$  in the upper octave, followed by a *muraiki* (windy sound) on C in the lower octave, then returns to the original  $B^b$ . This structure is unique to this phrase. All other occurrences of *muraiki* occur at the beginning of phrases.



Fig. 11 Score of *Shika no Tōne* for two *shakuhachi*, calligraphy by Furuya Teruo, master *shakuhachi* player of the *dokyoku* school. Used by permission.

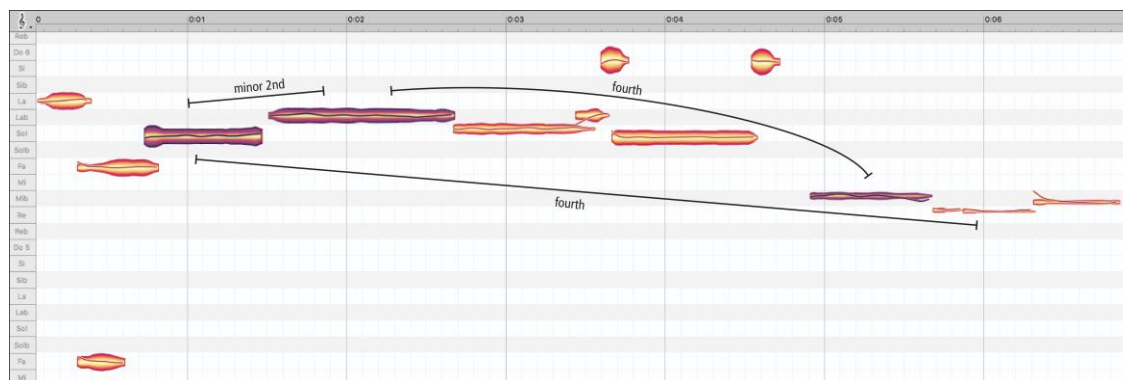


Fig. 12 Annotated image of phrase 3 of *Shika no Tōne*, showing the 3 *kakuon* (in a darker red) and their *kakuontei*. I do not consider the consecutive repetition of a note a new *kakuon*. Although the last intermediary note is not a *kakuon*, it could be considered a secondary interval with the first *kakuon*. Analysis using MELODYNE software.

# Shika no Tōne

for two shakuhachi

Traditional Japanese  
honkyoku piece for two *shakuhachi*

Shaku-hachi 1

Shaku-hachi 2

1 A'

4th (\*)

Minor 2nd 4th

Major 3rd Minor 2nd 4th

Major 3rd

4th

4

Major 2nd

4th

Major 3rd Major 3rd

3

Major 3rd

4th

7 B'

Minor 2nd

4th

Minor 2nd

3

11

Minor 2nd

Minor 2nd

Minor 2nd

Minor 2nd

3

16 C'

Minor 2nd

4th

Major 2nd

Major 3rd

Major 2nd

Major 3rd

4th

Major 2nd

3

19

Octave

3

Major 3rd

4th

3

22...

...22

(\*) The bar lines refer to the breathing marks on the original score.

Fig. 13 Page 1 of the transcription in Western notation of *Shika no Tōne*, for two *shakuhachi*. The breath marks are indicated by shortened bar lines between the staves. The annotations, such as 22... and ...22, indicate that these phrases start at the end of a system and continue on to the next system. This piece is played with two standard (i.e. 1.8) *shakuhachi* of the same length.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>48</sup> To hear a performance of the piece, click [here](#) (for the pdf version – duration: 7:20). Recording taken from the CD [Matsu Také Ensemble, 2017], by a Japanese music ensemble based in Montreal of which I am the artistic director. The second player is Michel Zenchiku Dubeau.

Fig. 14 *Shika no Tōne*: page 2 in Western notation of *Shika no Tōne*. The transcription is mine.

- Phrases 17 and 18 (repeated as phrases 23 and 24) are worth mentioning, too. Phrase 18 can be viewed as an extended variation of phrase 17, which presents a single iteration of a pattern that is repeated several times in phrase 18, extending the melodic trajectory of phrase 17. Although

there is a jump of a 9<sup>th</sup> between the first and second nuclear notes, this primary interval, i.e. *F* to *G*, should be considered a major second rather than an octave jump.

- Phrases 33 through 39 differ from the others. They have three nuclear notes whose primary

*kakuonte* is a minor third. We hear melodic patterns in which the players alternate between an ascending phrase played by one and a corresponding descending phrase mirrored in response by the other.

#### GROUPING

Phrase grouping occurs in three ways.

- The first grouping occurs when a group of phrases played by one player are repeated unchanged by the other. For example, phrases 17-21 are repeated as phrases 22-26. The *shakuhachi* players have to play these phrases as a group rather than simply as individual phrases. When a player repeats a group of phrases, he is doing so in response to the other player. The quality of the performance depends on the musicians' grouping of the phrases. As the title *Distant cry of the Deer* suggests, this duet represents two deer, unseen to one another, that call and respond to each other in the forest.
- The second grouping occurs in section D' from phrases 27-32. This is the only section where the players do not play the same thing while responding each other.
- The third grouping occurs from phrases 33-38. This grouping includes both players, rather than only one followed by the other.

#### Comparison of Daiwa gaku and Shika no Tōne

Finally, I compare both pieces to point out stylistic differences between the more traditional Jin Nyōdo style and the more modern *dokyoku* style. Each *shakuhachi* school makes use of stylistic devices that are generally not written down in the scores of their respective pieces. Some of these devices are common among all schools. Some may be found in some schools and not in others, while others might be unique to a particular school.

For example, the motive on phrases 6, 15 and 18 in *Daiwa gaku* can be played in four different ways (the *F-G* motive, the *F* being the intermediary note): 1) as is, with no extraneous device; 2) the intermediary note can be played in the lower octave with a *muraiki* sound and the main note in the upper octave; 3) the intermediary note can be played with a quick snap of

the finger on the fourth hole for emphasis; or 4) it can be played by bringing the finger down on the fourth hole more slowly, resulting in the addition of an extra grace note, as shown in red in phrases 2 and 3 of *Shika no Tōne*. In the last case, the first of these notes is played in the upper register, the second note (which is the intermediary note, *i.e.* *F*) in the lower register, then the *kakuon* is played back in the upper register. In order to emphasize the intermediary note in case 1, 2 or 3, the second, third, or the fourth hole may be hit, depending on the school or the player. However, in north-east Japan, north of Tōkyō, the second note (*i.e.* the *G*), not the intermediary note, is hit for emphasis, thus giving a fifth way to play this particular motive. As these are stylistic devices, it is considered good taste not to overdo it.

Interestingly, the *dokyoku* style of Katsuya Yokoyama uses the fourth device above only in *Shika no Tōne*, not in other pieces. The reason for its use in this particular piece is to allow students of the *dokyoku* school to play it with players of other schools. As for the melodic two-note cell starting phrase 15 of *Daiwa gaku*, it is a common motive that can be found in all styles of *shakuhachi*, including in the *shakuhachi* part of the ensemble pieces of *sankyoku* (三曲, meaning music for three instruments) for *koto*, *shamisen* and *shakuhachi*.

The intermediary note, which is a *C*, is always done with a particular fingering giving it a unique tone-color, though the fingering can differ from school to school. However, phrase 16 of *Daiwa gaku* is not found in *dokyoku* pieces since it uses a fingering that the *dokyoku* school does not employ. The jagged lines found in *Shika no Tōne* are mainly used in the *dokyoku* notation.

#### A MUSIC OF TONE-COLORS

To the notion of “tetrachord” and *kakuon* put forward by Koizumi and expanded by Tokumaru, I have added the notions of *kakuonte*<sup>49</sup> and phrase grouping. Although both Koizumi and Tokumaru consider the intervals important, they put a greater importance on the *kakuon* than the intervals. I suggest

<sup>49</sup> Although it is most uncommon for a non-Japanese native to create a Japanese term.

that the primary aspects that structure melodic lines in any *shakuhachi* piece are not the *kakuon* as such, but how they relate to each other to form intervals. These *kakuonte*i give form to the flow of each phrase and, consequently, to the motives of these melodies, they provide a flow that finds its full meaning in performance, as Gutzwiller emphasizes.

The half-tone interval that is emblematic of the Japanese *in* mode and heard across a wide spectrum of Japanese musical genres is not a theoretical construct *per se*, but is more an auditory effect, a tone-color, an aesthetic as well as a performing imprint, obtaining its musical meaning in the act of being played and listened to.<sup>50</sup> When the monks of the Fuke sect were composing their solo pieces for the *shakuhachi*,<sup>51</sup> the basis of their rationale was in all probability the aesthetic and tone-color impressions they were hearing in the music surrounding them during the Edo period, including the pleasure quarters that some of them were visiting. They were imprinting their music with the musical conventions that existed at the time.

Even though they did not give performances of any kind, and were not composing songs, their music was influenced by that in their surrounding environment. The intervals in *honkyoku*, being half-tones, minor thirds, or fourths, among others, should not be viewed as components of some theoretical constructs, but as auditory tone-color impressions that the *shakuhachi* player brings to life when playing. In this line of thought, Koizumi's *kakuon* should not be viewed as pitches or tones, but as tone-colors that end up being sensed as musical tones. That is, what the ear senses first is the quality of sound, which then becomes, for the listener, a musical tone<sup>52</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> According to musicologist Yoshihiko Tokumaru, the attraction of Japanese musicians to Western instruments at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was about their tone-colors which was unknown to them – cf. [Tokumaru, 1991, p. 91–92]. Similarly, Henry Burnett suggests that the importance of tone color in traditional Japanese music is such that a musicological analysis of any piece does not have meaning for Japanese musicians – cf. [Burnett, 1989, p. 80].

<sup>51</sup> I of course refer to the monks in the Fuke sect who use the *shakuhachi* in hope of reaching enlightenment, not the *rōnin* who, under the cover of the sect, served as spies for the *shōgun*.

<sup>52</sup> And sometimes not. For example, the *muraiki* (windy sound) can have a pitch of some sort, but usually does not, though it can be added to a pitch.

Again, the *kakuonte*i should not be viewed as intervals in the theoretical sense of the term, but more as shifts or alterations in tone-color in the *shakuhachi*'s sounds. In this sense, the pieces of *honkyoku* repertoires are melodies formed not by pitches, but by shifting tone-colors. The quality of a sound precedes its pitch perceptually, and not vice-versa.

In all traditional Japanese arts, the way in which something is done is more important than what is being done. To give but one example, ethnomusicologist Jay Keister mentions in his book *Shaped by Japanese Music* that his *shamisen* teacher told him that he should not worry about the quality of the sounds he was producing, but just focus on form; with proper form, the proper sound comes over time.<sup>53</sup> This type of comment is quite typical of all traditional Japanese arts. How to play or perform a piece of music has precedence over the music itself, including its theoretical underpinnings.

This applies as well to *honkyoku*: the forms of these pieces, of their phrases, of their motives, including how their sounds are produced and their relationships to one another, rather than their theoretical constructs, give meaning to the melody.

The silence between phrases underlies an important aesthetic concept in traditional Japanese arts called *ma* (間). This term can be translated either as a distance in reference to the space between two objects, or as an interval of time between two events.

It is particularly applied in architecture, garden design, theater, dance, and even martial arts, in reference to the space between oneself and what one perceives in the world, or between actors, dancers, or martial arts practitioners.

*ma* is not about a calculated space or interval of time, but about how that space or time interval is felt when perceived or sensed; it is a quality that is experienced. In theater and dance, it will refer to how an actor or dancer feels other peoples' presence while acting or dancing. In *nō* theater, the pauses, empty moments, and silences are also called *ma*.

<sup>53</sup> For *shamisen*, see [Keister, 2004a, p. 42]. The same can be said of traditional dance of *nihon buyō*. For *nihon buyō*, see [Hahn, 2007].



These are just as important, and sometimes even more important than what the actor does while performing. In other words, the unspoken and unexpressed tells as much as what is explicitly performed. If silence is not merely the absence of sound but in actuality the source of all sounds as mentioned before, a phrase should not start and end abruptly, but should arise out of one's breathing and silence, then return to it again, both aesthetically and musically. Each silence prepares for the phrases to come. And here too, as in *nō*, the silence is just as important as the tones produced.

There is one interesting particularity of *honkyoku* melodies that distinguish them from many other genres of music in that they can be played on flutes of different lengths, hence changing their tone-color.<sup>54</sup> When playing a piece on flutes of different lengths, the pitches of the melodies will differ, while the form of each phrase and the piece as a whole remain the same.

The aim in using flutes of different lengths is not to transpose a melody, but to create a change in tone-color while using the same melodic form. Today, most *shakuhachi* players choose a *shakuhachi* for any piece they perform that has the tone-color they feel will best express what they envision musically and aesthetically for the piece. They might choose a flute with a softer or brighter tone, seeking the flute with the most appropriate tone-color.

Moreover, there are no strict rules requiring a player to play a piece on a flute of a certain length,

though there are a few pieces that are usually played on a particular length of *shakuhachi*.<sup>55</sup>

In this sense, pitches in *honkyoku* melodies are not “stated” but “inferred” as an outcome of their tone-color, as well as from their shifts from one tone-color to another – shifts that our ears perceive as intervals and distinct pitches. For this reason, among others, accuracy in tuning is secondary.<sup>56</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Uehara and Koizumi's “tetrachord” theory is not entirely adequate for the *honkyoku* repertoire, because they refer to tones in the Western sense of the term, while these melodies were not written from that point of view.

The modern preference for perfect tuning when making and playing *shakuhachi* is a result of influence from Western music.

The view among most Japanese *shakuhachi* masters I have met is that a tone is never static, but is in constant tone-color fluctuation; the pitch is an outcome of this fluctuation.

Most well-known Japanese *shakuhachi* masters I have met say that playing *shakuhachi* has to do first and foremost with tone-color, not pitches. The melodic quality of each phrase and each piece is more in the melodic forms and contours created by the *kakuontei* and the *kakuon* than it is in the pitches.

<sup>54</sup> The *shakuhachi* is still made by hand today. No two flutes from the same maker will have exactly the same tone-color, with even greater variation for flutes from different makers. One reason for this is that no two pieces of bamboo have exactly the same shape and bore size. As well, the same flute played by different musicians will also sound different. More and more makers are finding ways to make modern *shakuhachi* so that they are in tune with Western instruments. Lately, this has also come to include the *jinashi shakuhachi*, which is considered the traditional *shakuhachi* of the monks of the Fuke sect. Traditionally, these flutes were made by the monks themselves; they did not bother with tuning. The professional *shakuhachi* maker did not appear until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>55</sup> For example, the piece *Hi-fu-mi hachigaeshi* is normally played on a 1.8 *shakuhachi*.

<sup>56</sup> The authors I mention, at least in the literature reviewed in this article, do not say anything about tone-color.

## Glossary

- *biwa* (琵琶): Japanese lute.
- *bunraku* (文楽): Japanese puppet theater.
- *gakki* (楽器): Musical instrument. The monks of the Fuke sect did not consider the *shakuhachi* to be a musical instrument.
- *hoki* (法器): Refers to the *shakuhachi* as a spiritual tool to reach enlightenment.
- *honkyoku* (本曲, original piece): the name given to the repertoire of pieces composed by the monks of the Fuke sect. It includes the traditional pieces as well as the modern ones.
- *in* (陰): When used to describe a scale, refers to one with half-tones. Also called *miyakobushi* (都節).
- *kabuki* (歌舞伎): Japanese classical drama.
- *kagura* (神楽): Shintō singing and ceremonial dancing. Shintō is a native religion of Japan.
- *kakuon* (核音): Nuclear notes.
- *kakuontei* (核音程): Nuclear intervals.
- *koten honkyoku* (古典本曲): Classical *honkyoku*. *koten* is used to distinguish these repertoires from more modern ones.
- *koto* (琴): Japanese table zither.
- *min'yō* (民謡): Japanese folk music.
- *miyako bushi* (都節): Urban music.
- *muraiki* (群息): A type of windy sound unique to the *shakuhachi*.
- *nagauta* (長唄): Long songs of the Kabuki Theater.
- *nihon buyō* (日本舞踊): Japanese traditional dance.
- *nō* (能): A traditional Japanese theatrical art.
- *onkai* (音階): Scale.
- *shakuhachi* (尺八): An upright bamboo flute that was played by the monks of the Zen Buddhist Fuke sect during the Edo period (1603-1868).
- *senpō* (旋法): Mode.
- *shamisen* (三味線): Japanese three-string lute.
- *shōmyō* (声明): Japanese Buddhist chant.
- *yō* (陽): When used to describe a scale, refers to one without half-tones. Also called *ritsu* (律).

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