An Analysis of Form:
The Concept of kata
in Japanese Traditional Music

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Abstract: In this article I attempt a partly new way of analysing the clusters of sound that constitute the building blocks – *kata* – of the fundamental repertoire of the Japanese bamboo flute shakuhachi. These *kata* can be perceived as structural entities of the music, but some Japanese scholars regard them as intangible prescriptive entities that are implicit in… any of the traditional art forms that exist (or have existed) in Japan. I challenge the notion that these *kata* should be seen as motifs, and suggest a new terminology that I find appropriate for describing the musical events that occur in the sound clusters.

Introduction

Background

The *shakuhachi* (尺八, see Plate 1) is a vertical end-blown bamboo flute, possibly with roots in the *ney*, an ancient flute made of reed. The *ney* is a commonly used instrument in Central Asia, and it has a history that goes back to the third millennium BCE.[1] The *ney* is probably related to the Chinese *xiao*.[2] In Tang dynasty China (618–907) the most commonly used flute was the *chiba*, the Chinese reading of the characters 尺八, and the supposed ancestor of the Japanese shakuhachi.[3] The name of the instrument refers to its standard length: *shaku* (*chi* in Chinese) is a mensural unit of length, and *hachi* (*ba* in Chinese) means 'eight,' referring to 8 units of length *sun*, which is a tenth of a *shaku*; the standard length is thus one *shaku* and eight (*hachi*) *sun*,[4] which in today's measures is approximately 54.5 centimetres. This corresponds to a tuning in D. Even though the name asserts a length of 1 *shaku* 8 *sun*, the shakuhachi is available in various lengths, from 1 *shaku* 3 *sun* up to 3 *shaku* or longer, each with a different pitch and timbre. The pitch changes half a step with each *sun*, up to approximately 2 *shaku* 2 *sun*, but the actual length for any given pitch may vary also depending on the thickness of the bore and other aspects.[5]

The shakuhachi has a long history in Japan; it is historically proven that it came to Japan in the eighth century by way of the Korean kingdom Paekche.[6] Some later sources indicate that it may have entered the country already in the sixth century, but the *chiba* seems to have been revived from an older instrument in the early Tang dynasty China, probably around the 630s. In Japan the shakuhachi was used at the court, as an instrument in the court music ensemble for around 150 years, but even after that it seems to having been played – typically – by male members of the court. In medieval times it may also have been used by mendicant monks, but this cannot be substantiated until the early sixteenth century. It was employed in music forms preceding the Nō theatre, but it was not included in the ensemble of this stage art. In 1512 the shakuhachi is mentioned in a treatise on court music, some 700 years after it was abolished from the court music ensemble. In

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[1] Oxford Music Online, at http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/: *ney*, March 1, 2011.

[2] In Japanese *shō*, *xiao* (簫), or *dōshō*, *dongxiao* (洞簫), not to be confused with the mouth organ *shō* (笙). It is believed that the *xiao* came from the west to China as a reed flute. NIPPONICA: *shō*, March 21, 2011.

[3] Oxford Music Online, at http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/: *xiao*, March 1, 2011.

[4] The text *Shichiku shoshin-shū* indicates that the *hachi* could be either *sun* (寸) or the shorter measure *bu* (分), where 1 *sun* is equivalent to 10 *bu*. (Nakamura, *Shichiku shoshin-shū* (1664), 1974, 4).

[5] Regarding the making of the shakuhachi, I have consulted a recorded conversation with the shakuhachi maker Nomura Godō in 1986, and a personal communication with the American shakuhachi maker Monty Levenson, on September 19, 2011. Please refer to Monty Levenson's site for further information about the relation between pitch and length: http://www.shakuhachi.com/Y-ShakuhachiPitchChart.html.

[6] A kingdom from 18 BCE to 660 BCE; J: Kudara. (百済).

this treatise, the author claims that the shakuhachi should not be regarded as a popular music instrument, but rather as a court music instrument.[7] The shakuhachi is, however, most widely known as an instrument used by a certain group of Zen monks, who were officially acknowledged as such in the late seventeenth century. The present study examines the repertoire that began to develop by the hands of these monks – the so-called *komusō* – and attempts a new approach to the analysis of phrases in this music.

The music for the shakuhachi can be divided in two major groups: the true or fundamental repertoire that developed during the Edo period (1603–1867), so-called *honkyoku,* and other 'outer' styles of music, so-called *gaikyoku*. The 'outer' repertoire comprises a vast array of music, from the chamber music of the Edo period (commonly referred to as *sankyoku*, but a more precise term would be *jiuta-sōkyoku*), to modern compositions and ensembles with instruments from other music cultures. In this article, however, I will concentrate on the fundamental repertoire, the *honkyoku*, since it is a repertoire of mainly solo music for the instrument.[8]

Today there are a number of lineages or schools of shakuhachi playing, most of which began to develop as formalized styles during the late nineteenth century. The oldest extant of these styles is the Kinko-ryū, where the word *ryū*, literally meaning 'stream' or 'flow,' stands for a certain line or lineage. This style developed after the first Kurosawa Kinko (1710–1771), and its repertoire was canonized in the early nineteenth century.[9]
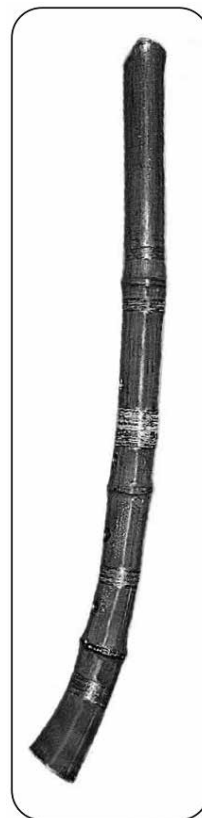

Plate 1:
The shakuhachi
used by the author

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[7] Toyohara Sumiaki, *Taigen-shō* 体源抄 (1512), Chapter 5, Shakuhachi. Kamisangō, "Shakuhachi-gaku no ryakushi: ..." (1974), 1995, 72.

[8] The *honkyoku* consists of a specific set of pieces, strictly defined within each lineage or even sub-lineage. In the case of *gaikyoku*, on the other hand, the definition is broader. Among practitioners of pre-Meiji-period music it is normally defined as the repertoire of chamber music, originally composed for vocals and the string instruments koto and shamisen. For practitioners of new or contemporary music it is often defined as 'that which is not *honkyoku*.' The term *sankyoku* refers to a performance practice including three instruments (koto, shamisen, shakuhachi or the bowed instrument *kokyū*), and the term *jiuta-sōkyoku* (地歌箏曲) refers to the lead instrument of the performed pieces: local songs of the Kansai area accompanied by the shamisen as the lead instrument (*jiuta*) and pieces where the koto is the lead instrument (*sōkyoku*).

[9] See Linder, *Deconstructing* Tradition *in Japanese Music*, Chapter 8, 2012.

Aim and Limitations of the Present Study

There are several sub-lineages even within the Kinko-ryū. In the present study I analyse the style of Yamaguchi Gorō (1933–99), with whom I studied from 1985. The *honkyoku* notation that he used is the so-called Miura notation, written in 1928–29 by Miura Kindō (1875–1940), a student of Araki Kodō II (1823–1908), the leader of the Kinko-ryū as it passed over from the feudal society of the Edo period to the 'modern' times of the Meiji period (1868–1912). During this transition the position of the shakuhachi in society changed from that of religious implement to its (re-)acknowledgement as the musical instrument it had been at least until the late seventeenth century.

Japanese researchers indicate that the smallest melodic units of *honkyoku* are musical motifs, ideally played in one breath. In my PhD thesis I challenged this understanding of the *honkyoku* repertoire, at least in the interpretation of Yamaguchi Gorō, and here I further expound my perception of motifs and phrases in this musical genre.[10]

In this article I firstly suggest a structural approach in analyses of the constitutive parts of the sound clusters that are the building blocks of the music, and secondly I suggest an aesthetic approach when analysing larger sections of the pieces, in contrast to the musicological analyses of tetrachords and nuclear tones as are perhaps more common amongst Japanese scholars.

The Notion of Form (*kata*), and its Relation to *Motif* and *Phrase*

Nishiyama Matsunosuke, an important historian of Edo-period culture, expounds in detail his notion of prescriptive forms as the very basis for traditional arts. He holds that the Way of Art, *geidō*, is something that differentiates Japanese traditional art forms from those in all other countries or cultural areas.

The prescriptive elements of an art form are presumed to be contained in a number of stylized forms, *kata*, which are what a student will learn. The *kata* prescribe the bodily movements inherent in the art. Nishiyama argues that *kata*, the prescriptive forms, exist as intangible forms but not as physical patterns. He argues that *kata* can be seen in Zeami's notions of various levels of mastery of the Nō art: they constitute a certain principle of action, which each individual has to find for him- or herself.[11] By repeating the *kata*, one has to discover one's own principle of action, in accordance with the *kata*.[12] This would, of course, imply that one's own principle of action is not by necessity exactly the action prescribed by the *kata*, but rather an action that is to a certain degree in accordance with the *kata*, yet at the same time not inconsistent with one's own natural way of acting out

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[10] Ibid., Chapters 8 and 9.

[11] Nishiyama enumerates the terms *an'i* (安位), *ran'i* (闌位), and *shigoku no kyō* (至極の境), which according to him are the quintessence of mastery of the Nō art. (*Geidō to dentō*, 1984, 46).

[12] Nishiyama, *Geidō to dentō*, 1984, 46.

the *kata*. I believe that this idea is crucial for a more open or varied perception of phrases or motifs in *honkyoku*. I return to this issue in the analyses below.

To learn the forms of an art is, however, not the only thing that is required. Nishiyama holds that within the *kata* there is also *kokoro*, i.e., 'heart,' 'spirituality' or 'mindfulness,' which makes the *kata* come alive, in order to become great art: "[T]he *kata* actually contains also *kokoro* at its depth. If one really masters the *kata*, the *kokoro*, together with the *kata*, will be in one's own bodily possession."[13] Nishiyama does not specify how and when the spirituality or artfulness, *kokoro*, of the art develops, and I assume that it would be a question of sensitivity and aptitude for the art, and much less of the ability to learn the patterns that are prescribed. Nishiyama holds that one of the advantages with *kata* is that, by learning the intangible patterns, anyone will be able to bring forth a minimum requirement of a fair reproduction of the piece, play, or whatever art form it is. Nishiyama discusses the notion of *kata* in relation to Nō, but he concludes that irrespective of the Way of Art – the *geidō* – in question, the principle is exactly the same even if there are differences in regard to names and ways of doing it.[14]

The well-known musicologist Kikkawa Eishi holds that the system of *kata* is a unique feature of Japanese arts, but his notion of *kata* differs from Nishiyama's: Kikkawa views *kata* as a structural element, which has kept the form of the music and other kinds of art intact. Tsukitani Tsuneko, another musicologist and an outstanding scholar of shakuhachi, also uses the term *kata* in her analyses of shakuhachi *honkyoku*, and in Tsukitani's writing the term seems to denote structural patterns that coincide with motifs. I believe there are strong similarities in the way Kikkawa and Tsukitani employ this term in relation to the structure of a piece. Kikkawa, however, places emphasis on *kata* as an unchanging element, whereas Tsukitani's conception of *kata* does not seem to go beyond the factual existence of patterns in the notated score.

Tsukitani discusses *kata* on the level of motifs, as well as representative *kata* for a complete piece. She holds that the formation of motifs is related to how these phrases are performed, in terms of rhythm, tempo, and dynamics, i.e., in my understanding on a level of what we may refer to as 'sound phrases.'[15] The canonization of the repertoire within the various sub-divisions of schools that began to develop from the 1870s included major changes in how the pieces were performed. On the other hand, the structural elements of the pieces, in the way that they were notated, are not prescriptive *per se*; the structure indicates identity, but a discrete realization of a piece is part of an enactment of that piece, and as such, it is dependent on the surrounding context.

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[13] Ibid. (その「型」というものは、実はその奥に「心」が封じ込まれている。だから「型」をほんとうに体得すれば「心」は「型」とともに、躬をもって所有することになる。).

[14] Ibid., 47.

[15] Tsukitani, *Shakuhachi koten honkyoku no kenkyū*, 2000, 145.

Kikkawa gives a large number of examples of *kata* in Japanese music, ranging from court music and Nō to the popular art forms of the Edo period, for example, the music in Kabuki and the puppet theatre.[16] Since the present study is centred around the instrumental shakuhachi music, I omit his discussion of order of performance in Nō, the vocal parts of recitation in Nō, the order in which music and dancers appear in the court music, and so on. In direct relation to music, Kikkawa asserts that there are identifiable *kata* in the melody lines of the song and the instruments. For example, in the epic genre *gidayū-bushi*, there are forty to fifty different kinds of *kata*. From this limited number the composer would "select and arrange the *kata*" so that they blend musically with the instruments and the vocal lines. The performer should attempt to merge him- or herself with the *kata*, and "what should be respected is not the outer form, but the spirit of the *kata*."[17] Even if this statement sounds similar to the word *kokoro* used by Nishiyama (see above), Kikkawa's generic discussion of *kata* relates to the research on shakuhachi music conducted by Tsukitani Tsuneko.

Tsukitani uses the term *onku* to denote what she considers to be the smallest melodic unit. She differentiates between these *onku* and the larger units *gakku*. The latter is a common musical term in Japanese, denoting a musical phrase. A *gakku* can consist of one or several *onku*, where each *onku* is ideally performed in one breath.[18] In her analyses, Tsukitani at times implicitly uses the notion of 'form' or 'pattern,' and also at times talks about *kata*. For example, she states that:

> In Kinko-ryū … the number of different individual sounds and variation of pitches within a motif is small. Occasionally there are *sound patterns* that contain a greater number of individual sounds, but even in these cases the *sound patterns* are divided in performance into several [smaller units] (by adding breathing spells), and the whole piece will sound as a succession of motifs of equally long duration.[19]

Additionally, she refers to patterns at the end of pieces, in which case she also uses the word *kata*.[20] It seems as if she envisages units, sound patterns, that are larger than motifs (*onku*), but smaller than phrases (*gakku*), although sometimes it seems that the terms 'sound patterns' and 'motifs' are used more or less synonymously.

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[16] Kikkawa, *Nihon ongaku no seikaku*, 1980, 155–160.

[17] Ibid., 167. (その型の選択と配列／尊重すべきは、型の外形ではなく、型の精神なのである).

[18] Tsukitani, *Shakuhachi koten honkyoku no kenkyū*, 2000, 128. (*onku* 音句 ／ *gakku* 楽句).

[19] Ibid., 133. Emphasis added. (琴古流では … 音句内の音数も音高の種類も少ない。時たまたくさんの音数を持つ音型があっても、それらはいくつかに分割して（息継ぎを増やして）演奏されるので、全曲が時間的に平等な音句の連続と聞こえる。).

[20] E.g., Tsukitani, *Shakuhachi koten honkyoku no kenkyū*, 2000, 135.

Based on my own learning process and practical performance experience I have come to believe that it would be musically interesting to define explicitly 'intermediate size units' in the music, units that are smaller than Tsukitani's 'motifs.' I believe that these smaller units are an important aspect when analysing the transmission of the *honkyoku* tradition, and that furthermore they make an important contribution to the understanding of the music. I also believe that 'motif' is a somewhat misleading concept since it has a more rigid definition in Western (art) music, and I am not convinced that this term is directly applicable to the *honkyoku*. What Tsukitani refers to as *onku* (motifs) are complete sets of sounds. The word *on* refers to a 'sound,' and *ku* refers to a 'phrase' or a 'clause,' and I would prefer to refer to these *onku* as 'sound phrases' or simply 'phrases.' In traditional music the word *fushi* is commonly used to refer to a complete set of sounds, and I find this to be an alternative term.

Tsukitani's thorough and comprehensive research indicates the existence of a limited number of 'sound phrases.' Analysing thirteen of the thirty-six Kinko-ryū *honkyoku*, Tsukitani found a total of 1,078 sound phrases, consisting of 356 different kinds. That means that, on the average, one in every third phrase was of the same kind. The number is greater than the forty to fifty *kata* to which Kikkawa referred as being used in *gidayū-bushi*, but the idea of arranging a number of fixed forms in a certain order is the same.[21]

Kikkawa and Tsukitani seem to regard *kata* as structural and tangible elements that constitute the building blocks of an art form, and here I firstly and primarily regard *kata* as structures in music. The music is created by arranging a limited number of *kata* in a certain order. The order in which the *kata* unfold is of course the structure of the music, giving a certain piece a context-independent existence. However, a certain form should be performed in the way that the transmitter/teacher prescribes. If we assume that the word *kata* has a definable meaning, and if we regard – as does Nishiyama – the *kata* as intangible entities that implicitly contain certain prescriptive elements, then the structural elements – such as *onku* in Tsukitani's terminology – are not *kata*.[22]

The following section is an attempt to analyse the actual sonic and notation material, to see if we can reach such a conclusion. Conversely, if Tsukitani's *onku* are synonymous with *kata*, then there seems to be no room for the prescriptive elements that Nishiyama perceives as being implicit in the *kata*.

[21] Ibid., 133–134. Because of the relatively limited number of kinds of sound phrases, it is almost impossible to ascertain, simply through hearing, what piece, or what part of a given piece, is being performed at any given moment, something that Tsukitani also concludes. I believe that this is also a reason why the pieces tend to be long: it takes time to create the right atmosphere of the piece with the relatively limited number of building blocks.

[22] For a thorough discussion of the process of transmission, see Linder, *Deconstructing* Tradition *in Japanese Music*, Chapter 8, 2012.

Analysis

About the Study

The main audial materials used in the following analyses of sound clusters are listed below. The material consists of three different recordings of Yamaguchi Gorō performing the piece "Hi-fu-mi Hachi-gaeshi no Shirabe," the first piece in the Miura notation and the first piece normally taught within the Kinko lineage. As an addition to these three recordings I have also utilized a recording in which Yamaguchi is singing the notation in the typical style of shakuhachi solfeggio (*shōfu*). To illustrate certain points I have also used parts of other pieces; these cases are explicitly indicated. All recordings are by Yamaguchi Gorō except for one in which I compare him with his father and teacher Yamaguchi Shirō (Figure 14).

The shakuhachi covers three tonal registers (octaves). On a standard shakuhachi (D), one can actually produce a D♭ and a C below that by lowering the chin. The open hole notes are: D, F, G, A, and C. With half-holing and by varying the embouchure and chin-position it is possible to create half tones and microtones. These half tones and microtones become breathier and have a more rough texture than the open-hole tones. The third register is not complete: D♭, D, E♭, E, G. With certain techniques it is also possible to create an F.

The quoted parts of the recordings are supported with the Miura notation, and a transcription into Western staff notation. The structural sounds, the notated tones, are indicated by white notes, and any tone or tonal interval before, after, or between the structural sounds are indicated by black notes. Duration is important to the understanding of the division of sound clusters; the staff notation is therefore written graphically, in order to indicate more accurately the actual time intervals. The latter are measured with the software GarageBand '08 (4.1.2). The transcriptions of the shakuhachi notation into staff notation were done by one of my shakuhachi students, composer Kristofer Svensson, using the software Sibelius 6.2. Half-tones ought to be notated as flats, partly due to the quality of the tone and partly due to the fact that they are notated as 'lowered' tones in the shakuhachi notation, but when there is a glissando (e.g., from D♭ to D), the D♭ is notated as C♯ in order to provide a better graphical representation of the sound. All measurements and transcriptions were carried out in June 2013.

Recording 1   Colombia Records, 1975
Recording 2   Undated radio broadcast
Recording 3   Victor Japan, 1992
Recording 4   shakuhachi solfeggio, Victor Japan, 1992.
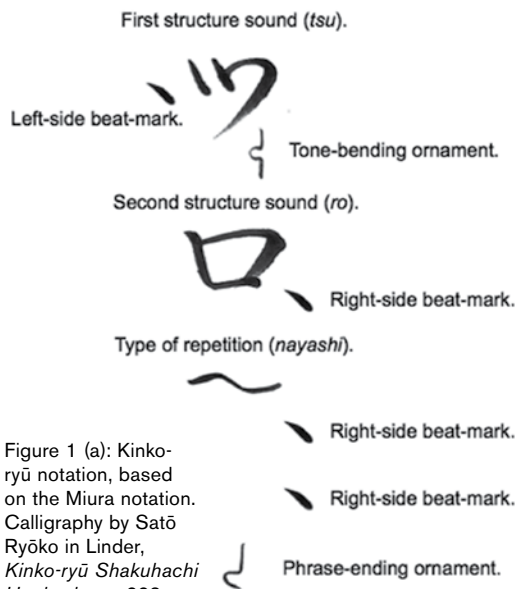   Shakuhachi played by Takemura Kōmei.

Phrases, Patterns, and Forms

1. What is a Phrase?

I will commence this discussion by giving an example of how the sound clusters I analyse are built. To begin with I will assume that each 'package' of sounds can be referred to as a 'phrase,' such as the one in Figure 1 (a), as already mentioned above. For those who are not familiar with shakuhachi notation I have added some comments indicating how this phrase is constructed.[23]

Firstly, the shakuhachi notation is rudimentary; it constitutes a simplified representation of the basic structure of the piece, for example, the two syllabic characters pronounced *tsu* (E♭) and *ro* (D) in the example to the right.[24] Secondly, apart from this basic structure, notated with the syllabic characters, repetitions are marked with auxiliary symbols, for example, a tone-bending repetition (*nayashi*) as in the example (the wave-like symbol). Thirdly, the Miura notation is one of the more detailed, and some ornaments are notated, such as passing microtonal ornaments and phrase ending ornaments: here we have a tone-bending ornament between the two structural tones, and a tone-bending ornament at the end of the phrase. These ornaments are not always played by Yamaguchi as they are written; at times they may be excluded, or exchanged for other ornaments. Even if there is no ornamental mark, Yamaguchi would, at times, add an ornament. Fourthly, the rhythm is notated with dots on the right and left side of the vertically written notation, and the time elapses from side to side, like a pendulum.

In this example, the phrase begins on the left side, where the tone with the fingering for a lowered *tsu* is played. The tone is held, while adding a pitch-altering ornament, until one reaches the right side. On the right side the tone with the fingering *ro* is played. Each right-left or left-right move represents half a beat.

First structure sound (*tsu*).

Left-side beat-mark.

Tone-bending ornament.

Second structure sound (*ro*).

Right-side beat-mark.

Type of repetition (*nayashi*).

Right-side beat-mark.

Right-side beat-mark.

Phrase-ending ornament.

Figure 1 (a): Kinko-ryū notation, based on the Miura notation. Calligraphy by Satō Ryōko in Linder, *Kinko-ryū Shakuhachi Honkyoku*, p. 223.

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[23] For a more complete discussion of various techniques used in shakuhachi playing, see Linder, *Notes on Kinko-ryū Shakuhachi Honkyoku*, 2011.

[24] This *tsu* represents an F on a standard-length shakuhachi, but by default this fingering is played ♭♭, which is referred to as *meri* (lowered). There is a symbol to indicate a lowered pitch (メ), but this is often omitted as is the case here.

The next symbol represents a type of repetition called *nayashi*, where the pitch is lowered half a step on the left side beat mark, and then the pitch is returned in a glissando.

In the example there is no mark on the left side after the second right-side mark, which is positioned immediately to the right of the *nayashi* repetition. In such cases a virtual left-side mark is imagined, the pendulum swings to the left side and then flows back to the right side.

The phrase ends on the left side, after the third and last right-side beat mark. A phrase ending ornament is notated, indicating a bending of the tone: the pitch is dropped and the tone is cut off.

The first tone is articulated with a finger attack. A breath is taken before the *nayashi* repetition, but the phrase obviously continues and ends with a typical ornament where the pitch is dropped.

Assuming that each beat has an even time value, the phrase would look something like this in Western notation:

Figure 1 (b): Western notation, based on the Miura notation.

In actual realizations of this phrase the situation is, however, quite different. Figures 2–4 show three different performance enactments at different stages in the development of Yamaguchi Gorō's art, and Figure 5 displays an enactment for transmission purposes.
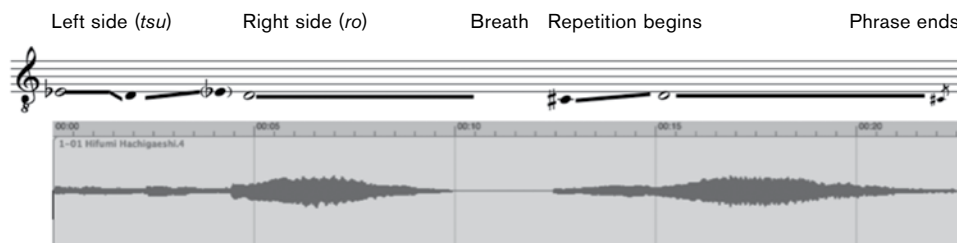

Figure 2: Analysis of the example phrase. "Hi-fu-mi Hachi-gaeshi no Shirabe," Recording 3.

The first half beat, from the left side to the right side, is four and a half seconds long. The second half beat, from the first right-side beat mark to the unmarked left side (the virtual left-side beat mark), has a duration of five and a half seconds. There he takes a breath for two and a half seconds, and begins from the unmarked left side to the end

of the phrase. The phrase ends on the left side, after the last right-side beat mark. The whole phrase contains ten half-beat counts, and is twenty-two and a half seconds long. In an older recording, Recording 1 (Figure 3), the same phrase looks like this:

Figure 3: Analysis of the example phrase performed. "Hi-fu-mi Hachi-gaeshi no Shirabe," Recording 1.

As we can see here, the time interval is similar, but the whole phrase is four seconds shorter. On the other hand, the total time is slightly more than twenty-four seconds in the radio broadcast, Recording 2 (Figure 4).
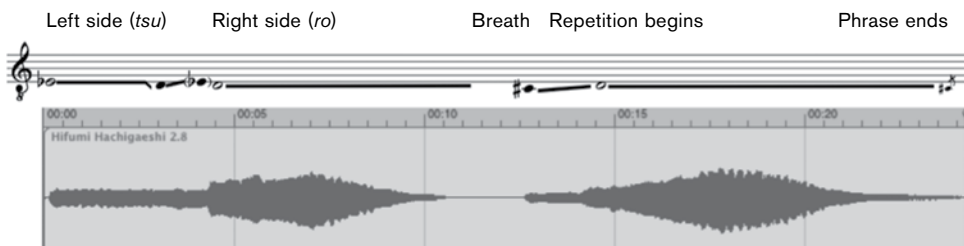

Figure 4: Analysis of the example phrase performed. "Hi-fu-mi Hachi-gaeshi no Shirabe," Recording 2.

Finally, the recording from the "lesson" where Yamaguchi is singing the notation:
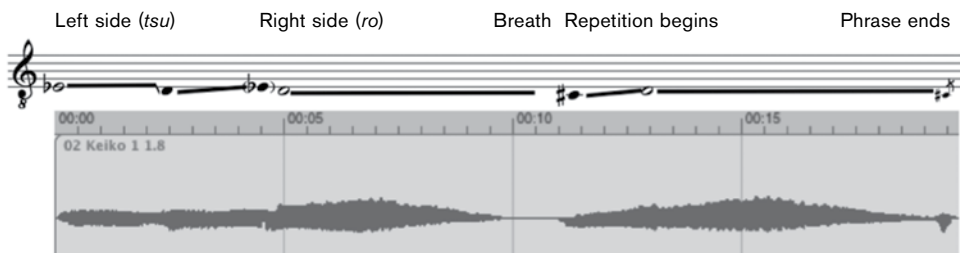

Figure 5: Analysis of the example phrase taught. "Hi-fu-mi Hachi-gaeshi no Shirabe," Recording 4.

The breath is circa one second, which is remarkably short compared to the performance enactments in Figures 2–4, but the total length is similar to Figure 3. Figures 2 and 4 are similar, and both are longer (22–24 seconds) compared to Figures 3 and 5 (18–19 seconds).

The phrases that appear in this piece are approximately between eight and up to thirteen or fourteen seconds long if there is no breath prescribed within the phrase. In the example we have just seen, and generally in the style of Yamaguchi, there is normally a breath before a *nayashi* repetition, except in a few pieces with a more accentuated rhythm and faster tempo. Other phrases contain breathing intervals as a formalized pattern. Phrases that include a breath – or in more rare cases two or more – tend to be around twenty seconds or longer. The point I wish to make here is that the length of the sound clusters, the subtle and detailed ornamentations, their marked beginnings and ends, all make such 'clusters' eligible to be called phrases rather than motifs. Before proceeding to the integral parts of these phrases I will present two more examples in Figures 6 and 7 below, one shorter and one longer phrase.
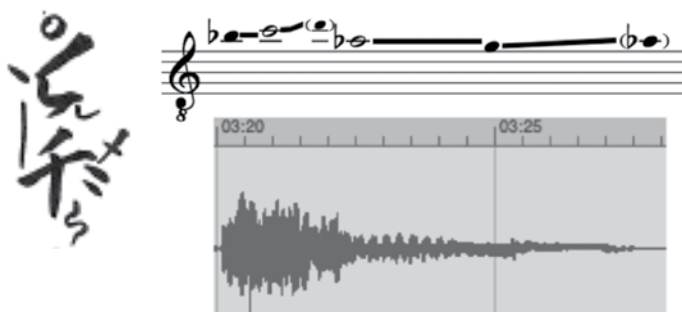

Figure 6: Example of a short phrase. "Hi-fu-mi Hachi-gaeshi no Shirabe," Recording 3.

This phrase consists of two structural sounds, as in the first examples (Figures 2–5) above. The phrase is articulated with a strong and rather long grace note (B♭) and an attack before reaching the C.

The grace note comes from below, but the attack adds almost like a grace note above the C.[25] A portamento-like slide is added, aiming towards D before reaching the A♭. This final tone is first lowered and then returned to its original pitch. Even if this phrase is shorter, less than half the length of the above examples, it is complete in itself with a distinct beginning and an obvious end.

Let us now examine the longer phrase, which measures some thirty seconds. It contains a series of *nayashi*-like repetitions, and therefore includes breathing intervals.

[25] The attack is generated by quickly opening and closing the rear hole, which creates a very short un-notated D.
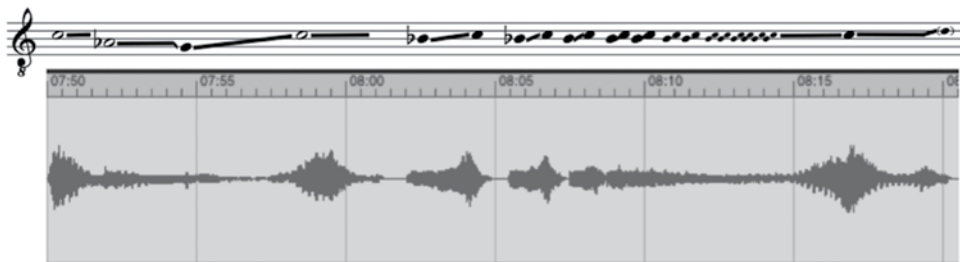
Figure 7: Example of a long phrase. "Hi-fu-mi Hachi-gaeshi no Shirabe,"
Recording 3.

This whole phrase circles around the C, with a short drop to an
A♭, and then the gradually quicker glissandos between B♭ and C.
Since the phrase is in the low register, following on from two subtle
phrases from E♭ – D, and E♭ – G, the beginning is not strongly
accentuated, and it ends with a long and soft slide up towards a D.

The examples above indicate that the sound clusters that are
building blocks in the music are complete packages of sound –
"phrase-like" of their own accord – and I think it is possible here to
draw a preliminary conclusion that these clusters could be under-
stood as musical phrases. Whether they also may be regarded as
kata – in one way or another – is yet to be investigated.
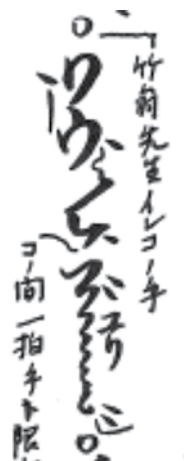
2. What Makes Up a Phrase?

The similarities that we find in all the recordings relate to how the ornamental techniques
are used. The phrase in Figure 1 begins with an attack. Between the initial *tsu* (E♭) and
the following *ro* (D) there is a *meri-komi*, consisting of a sudden drop in the pitch and
a gradual return before moving to the *ro*. These aspects of *meri-komi*, the quick drop
and the slow return, are characteristic elements of this technique, which functions as
a passing-note-ornament. There is an attack when arriving on the *ro*, and the phrase ends
with an *ori-keshi*, a quick drop of the pitch, following which the tone is cut off.

This phrase is normally performed in the same way whenever and wherever it appears
in a piece. Sometimes, however, it may happen that the attack on the initial structural
note is left out. The attack on the second structural note may be stronger or weaker. The
microtonal *meri-komi* ornament between these two structural notes is always present, but
with subtle variations in pitch, and the 'return' to the original pitch may be slightly longer
or shorter.[26]

[26] The terms 'narrow' (*semai*) and 'wide' (*hiroi*) are applied, for example, to the *tsu no meri* (E♭) to indicate
slightly lower or higher pitch.

We may now examine a similar phrase, such as the one in Figure 8:

Figure 8: Example from the piece "Taki-otoshi no Kyoku."

The circled part is the same as in Figure 1, but here the phrase continues. What should be noted, however, is that the attack on the initial structural note, the microtonal ornament, and the attack on the second structural note are the same or very similar. Again, it would be possible to leave out an attack, but the microtonal *meri-komi* ornament between the first two structural notes will not be omitted. Therefore, I find this ornament to be a recurring *pattern*, whereas the attacks are more left to the will of the performer. The timing and the execution of a pattern may vary to some degree, but the pattern itself is always there, normally as part of the ornamentation of the phrase. Figure 9 shows an example of a standard phrase that can be executed in different ways. In Figures 9 (a) – (d) I give examples of four different patterns used together with the same structural notes, and I would regard them as four differently patterned executions of one and the same phrase.

Figure 9: Example from "Hi-fu-mi Hachi-gaeshi no Shirabe," Recording 3.

As an example of how these patterns can be interpreted in different ways, below I explain four possible ways of actual performance of the phrase in Figure 9.

Figure 9 (a)

The *tsu* (E♭) is held for a longer period. A deep and extended microtonal *meri-komi* ornament is added between the *tsu* (E♭) and the *re* (G). This pattern creates a heavy

atmosphere; there is plenty of time to reflect over the initial E♭, and the intermittent F may be shorter or longer in order to impart a weaker or stronger sense of anticipation of the G. The tempo is slower over the whole phrase, and a slightly longer breath is taken before the *nayashi* repetition.

Figure 9 (b)

The *tsu* (E♭) is held for a shorter period.. A shallow and swift microtonal *meri-komi* ornament is added between the *tsu* (E♭) and the *re* (G). This pattern also allows for reflection on the initial E♭, but it creates a less heavy sensation. The intermittent F is not sustained for too long, since that would hinder the forwards movement, towards the G.

Figure 9 (c)

The *tsu* (E♭) is held for a longer period.. There is no microtonal *meri-komi* ornament added between the *tsu* (E♭) and the *re* (G). This pattern creates a strong feeling, but without the *meri-komi* there is no sense of stopping or reflecting; with a strong attack on the intermittent F, it creates a sense of a dynamic forward movement, towards the G.

Figure 9 (d)

The *tsu* (E♭) is held for a shorter period. There is no microtonal *meri-komi* ornament added between the *tsu* (E♭) and the *re* (G). This pattern is the lightest of the four. A less accentuated attack on the intermittent F compared to pattern 9 (c) imparts an energetic and light, almost cheerful, touch.

Figure 10 is an example of how the different patterns described in Figures 9 (a) – (d) can be used in combination. This section is from the piece "Kyūshū Reibo." Personally, I would here use the patterns 9 (a), 9 (b), and 9 (d) for the tonal interval E♭ – G. The last phrase is the same as in Figure 1 (apart from the extra repetition after the *nayashi*), and has the function of concluding this set of phrases. The transcription is from Yamaguchi

Gorō (Victor, 1999), and he is using the patterns I suggest, but with a less deep drop of the E♭ pitch in 9 (a). All in all, a soft and gentle transition is enacted through the first two phrases, becoming slightly more vivid in the third phrase where the whole passage peaks on the A♭. The entire section finally reaches its conclusion in the last phrase (E♭ – D). The duration is almost fifty seconds.

Figure 10: Example from "Kyūshū Reibo." Yamaguchi Gorō, Victor Japan, 1999.

From this I believe we can reach a preliminary conclusion that patterns constitute a formalized application of ornamental techniques, and as such they are prescriptive in character. However, patterns are applications of technique, which means that they are not discrete units. We can analyse a technique, for example *meri-komi*, and state that *meri-komi* means that you abruptly drop the pitch approximately half a step, and then gradually return the pitch to what it originally was. As a performance technique it is a discrete entity. However, in actual performance enactments the patterns need something to be applied to, namely a phrase. A phrase is made up of one or more structural notes, which makes it a structural entity and as such it has an outer form.

To recapitulate the notions of *kata* among the Japanese scholars mentioned in the introduction: My understanding is that they have quite different definitions of the word *kata*. Tsukitani looks at motifs and counts them as they appear in the notation. Kikkawa also counts *kata*, but he also admonishes us to respect the spirit of the *kata*, not their outer form. At the same time he finds *kata* to be the unchanging element of Japanese-made traditional art forms. Finally, Nishiyama views *kata* as intangible prescriptive entities that lead us to the correct bodily movements, and as such, it is they that constitute art, and not the physical objects that are the result of these movements.

If we transfer these ideas to my preliminary discussion above about what phrases and patterns are, I believe we can reach a more final statement: Patterns are formalized ways of applying certain performance techniques to existent phrases, which are structures with an objectively definable outer form, consisting of one or more structural notes. Patterns therefore constitute *kata* in Nishiyama's and maybe also partly Kikkawa's apprehension, and phrases constitute *kata* in the way I believe that Tsukitani uses the word. The notion of *kata* seems to dissolve into two essentially disparate meanings.

3. Phrases as Patterns

In rare cases it seems that phrases can appear as patterns within longer phrases. I will give one example, in Figure 11, the four opening phrases of "Kyūshū Reibo."

Figure 11: Example from "Kyūshū Reibo." Yamaguchi Gorō, Victor Japan, 1999.

The first phrase, which consists of the structural notes B♭ and C, is played for eleven and a half seconds. The second phrase, which consists of the same notes but with a slightly varied timing, is played for six and a half seconds. Then the third phrase consists of the same tonal material, repeated five times with a gradually increasing tempo and a ritardando on the final note. Finally the same phrase is played once more, similar to the first phrase, but this time for approximately ten seconds. I think it is fair to say that the third phrase consists of a *repeated pattern*, which in itself appears as phrases 1, 2, and 4, with slightly varied timing and intonation. It is rare that a phrase appears as a pattern within a larger phrase, but the same thing occurs, for example, in the opening of the piece "Shizu no Kyoku," nevertheless with different tonal material: C – A♭ – G.

4. Phrases and Larger Sections

Tsukitani's analyses of larger section – phrases (*gakku*) in her terminology – are based on the relation between "nuclear tones" located a fourth apart (Figure 12). It is not within the scope of this article to explain her classification, and I will suggest a different approach to analyses of larger sections in *honkyoku*.

Figure 12: The *miyako-bushi* scale with tetra-chords.

As in many other of the Japanese traditional music genres aspects of intonation, dynamics, tension, and tone-colour are central to an understanding of the music. Figure 13 is an example from "Hi-fu-mi Hachi-gaeshi no Shirabe." I use my own understanding of the word 'phrase' in the following discussion. The section consists of four phrases.
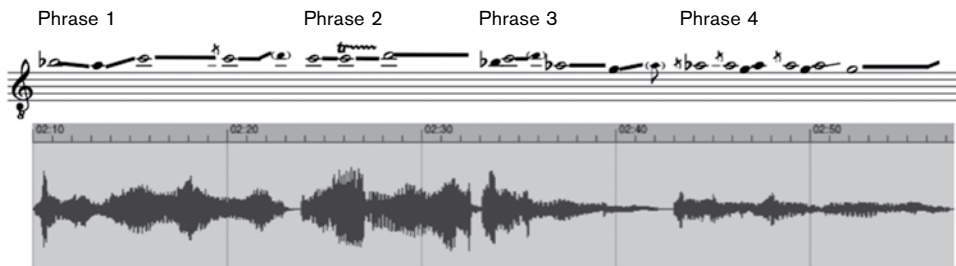

Figure 13: Section from "Hi-fu-mi Hachi-gaeshi no Shirabe." Recording 3.

The entire section is almost forty-eight seconds long, and it constitutes an excerpt with an obvious beginning and a soothing end. It comes after a two minute long section almost entirely in the low register, and with its dynamic opening it signals something new. The piece "Hi-fu-mi Hachi-gaeshi no Shirabe" is two pieces joined together ("Hi-fu-mi-chō" and "Hachi-gaeshi"), and this section constitutes the opening of "Hachi-gaeshi." The section that follows directly after it consists of one phrase – in my definition of the word – consisting of E♭ and D in the third octave, and that phrase is followed by a section that is almost identical to the section in Figure 13, except for the articulation of the initial C.

Phrase 1 is intonated with a very powerful attack on the B♭, which then slides up to a C. Phrase 2 aims higher, and moves from the C up to a D in the third octave after a longer trill. The first two phrases thus exhibit a strong upward movement. The third

phrase begins the downward movement, going from a dynamic C down to an A♭, which has a coarser texture than the crisp and clear tones of the two first phrases. This phrase fades out slowly, but the same pitch is taken up in the next phrase, in which the rough texture of the tone is kept intact. The A♭ of the final phrase is followed by a G, which fades out in a way that is similar to the previous phrase, but with a slightly rising pitch at the end, as a recollection of the previous tone. The G is here played with a fingering that requires a lowered chin-position, resulting in a breathier sound (*u meri*).

Another example of analysis of a larger section is that in Figure 10 above. The section that precedes the example is played in the low register, and consists of a number of phrases with subtle changes in tone colour and texture. Its ending phrase is the same as that of the example, in the low-keyed voice of the tones E♭ – D. The three phrases that follow all describe an E♭ – G pattern, which creates a sense of upward and forward movement. The section proceeds from stronger and slower to lighter and (slightly) faster, ending with the concluding E♭ – D pattern again. Each of the three E♭ – G phrases begins with a rougher texture (E♭) and goes to more clarity (G), since the half-holing that is required for the E♭ – by its very nature – results in a sound that lacks in clearness, with a rather rough edge. The G is here played with an open-hole fingering (*re*), different from the G (*u meri*) mentioned above, resulting in a more clear tone. The A♭ is also on the coarse side, but less so with the fingering used here (*chi no meri*); there is another fingering that will give a more subdued sound (*u*). In the third of the four phrases, a breath is taken before the final G, which means that the sound of A♭ fades out before a rather powerful G, played with an F as a grace note. The texture of each phrase in this section thus moves from rough to more clear, from quiet to loud, and the three-fold repetition of the E♭ – G pattern enhances a sense of moving or starting up.

The sections described here are what Tsukitani refers to as 'phrases,' but to me these larger sections sound more like statements, or episodes; sections with a beginning and an end, stories told in approximately 60 seconds.

5. Patterns and Idioms

Finally, yet one more aspect of the phrases needs to be addressed. The examples shown in Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5 are different (re-)occurrences of the same phrase in the same piece. The timing is slightly different, the dynamics alter, and the attacks may be weaker or stronger. All these aspects are what I prefer to call idiomatic expressions or idiosyncrasies of the individual performer in different iterations of the material. Tsukitani asserts that anybody who listens can hear the phrases – Tsukitani's 'motifs' – divided by breathing spells, and anyone can rely on the breathing marks in the notation to divide the melody, but these breathing marks are not absolute, and this creates problems when analysing *honkyoku*.

She states:

> ... [D]ifferences between lineages have existed from the past, but you can find differences also within a lineage, and even the same person may play differently in different concerts, so these divisions [between phrases] are absolutely nothing that is firmly fixed.[27]

This possibility of differentiation is what I would include in the idiomatic or idiosyncratic aspects of patterns, phrases, and episodes. It is also where I believe that changes in the tradition occur, changes that eventually may be subsumed under the prescriptive elements of the art form, but these elements of performance on an individual level are not what a receiver of the tradition necessarily has to, or even is able to, adapt to; however much I would like to sound exactly as my own teacher, it is virtually impossible to be a perfect copy. Maybe it is not even something to strive for. A copy will always be a copy, and the possibility of hearing something that is not always the same is what gives life to the music.[28]

As an example of how a change may occur I will give an example from the piece "Yūgure no Kyoku" (Figure 14 a-c). The shakuhachi notation of the opening two phrases of the piece is shown to the right, and Figure 14 (a) shows this phrase "as it is written" in the Miura notation, including Western rhythm indication.

Figure 14 (a): The first two phrases of "Yūgure no Kyoku."

Figure 14 (b) is a transcription of a performance by Yamaguchi Shirō, the father and teacher of Yamaguchi Gorō, whose interpretation of the same section is shown in Figure 14 (c).
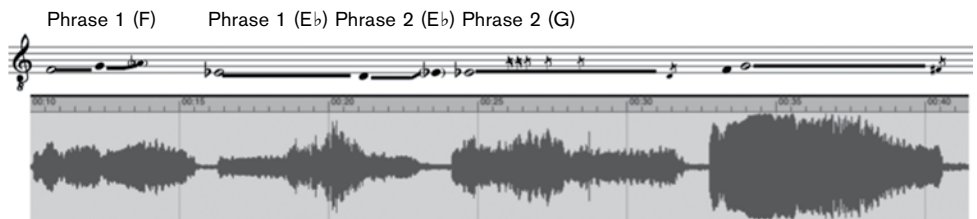

Figure 14 (b): The first two phrases of "Yūgure no Kyoku" performed by Yamaguchi Shirō. Unknown date.

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[27] Tsukitani, *Shakuhachi koten honkyoku no kenkyū*, 2000, 146.

[28] This opens up for the question of what "the piece" actually is; if a performance is a representation of an objectively existing entity, or if it is a presentation of something. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss that issue further, but I touch upon the problem with the ontological status of pieces in my PhD thesis.

The main difference between father and son lies in their respective ways of interpreting the first phrase. Yamaguchi Shirō takes the F up to a G, which is not even notated as an ornament. Yamaguchi Gorō, on the other hand, uses a rather unusual downward glissando (*suri-sage*) when moving from F to E♭.

Figure 14 (c): The first two phrases of "Yūgure no Kyoku" performed by Yamaguchi Gorō. Victor Japan, 1999.

The difference in the first phrase is remarkable. Here Yamaguchi Gorō extends the glissando to more than five seconds, with a heavy vibrato added that ceases as he reaches the E♭. The phrase ends with a prolonged *meri-komi* that concludes with a portamento-like slide upwards. The timing of the drop and return of the pitch is also quite different in these two enactments.

One could argue that the instruments have changed to facilitate the subtle ornaments and extended tone in the Yamaguchi Gorō recording, but the instrument he was using was made by Yamaguchi Shirō. It seems likely that Yamaguchi Gorō's way of playing these two phrases was more a matter of taste. An older undated recording exhibits the same patterns.

These patterns are the way Yamaguchi Gorō would teach as being correct, and this is what I learned. He himself must have learned the way his father played, so somewhere along the line he made the changes that now have become the 'standard' way of playing. This is indicative of the presence of something we could call 'idiosyncrasies.' An idiosyncrasy may become the hallmark of a performer, and from this a set of idiomatic expressions develops. The idiomatic expressions then become part of the patterns used in various phrases, and eventually a new *kata* appears.

Concluding Discussion

The aim of this article has been to suggest ways of analysing, perceiving, hearing, thinking about, and talking about the pieces performed in the shakuhachi *honkyoku* tradition. I have used only one of many extant lineages, one that is known as a refined, highly formalized and heavily ornamented style, but which in my opinion is one of the most abstract and dry interpretations of *honkyoku*. Regardless of its dryness, as with any musical genre, an analysis is not merely a matter of structure, and not merely about the content that we

experience as listeners, but a mixture of the two. I believe, therefore, that a full analysis in fact requires a deeper understanding of the cultural context, the background of a piece, the performer of a piece, as well as of the piece's sonic aspects.

The structural analyses conducted by Tsukitani are extremely thorough, but in my opinion not fully in accordance with the musical content. This does of course not mean that Tsukitani did not have the necessary knowledge of the contextual and cultural background. On the contrary, she was one of the most knowledgeable scholars of shakuhachi.

It is nonetheless my belief (and understanding) that the musical motifs that she regards as the smallest melodic units can and should be further analysed. Smaller parts of the same units – what I refer to as patterns and idioms – are also important in a more organic understanding of the music. They carry musical relevance. Furthermore, in my understanding of the music, each of Tsukitani's motifs are more complete 'statements' than the word 'motif' suggests; they are of such length that I find the word 'phrase' to be more suitable.

I believe there is a need for a terminology that better reflects the complex structure of phrases in shakuhachi *honkyoku*, and by using the Japanese language as the fundament for the terms required I will suggest a set of words that can be used to indicate the different elements of the music that I have discussed above.

The Japanese word *ku* (句) means a 'phrase,' a 'clause,' or an 'expression' consisting of two words or more. In that respect *onku* (音句) would translate as 'sound phrase' as mentioned above in the Introduction. The word *fushi* (節) is already commonly used in traditional music – mainly vocal music – with the meaning 'melody,' but it roughly corresponds in length to the motifs in Tsukitani's nomenclature, i.e. a part that is sung or played in one breath, and I find this to be an alternative term in Japanese.

The patterns that I discuss above in the Analysis section describe almost graphically the outer shapes of the sounds; glissandos up or down, a type of portamento of sliding tones, sudden drops, and so on, and as such the words for 'sound' (*oto* 音) and 'form,' 'shape,' or 'pattern' (*katachi* 形) seem most appropriate, thus *onkei* (音形) for 'sound patterns.'

The idiomatic expressions are more problematic in Japanese. An interesting term would be *kuse-ne* or *heki-on* (癖音), which directly translates as 'habitual sound.' The idiomatic expressions are so typical for the individual performer that it in many cases is possible to tell with which teacher a certain performer is affiliated, thanks to the idioms of the performance. These idioms constitute "the way" the performer/transmitter 'speaks'; they are almost archetypical for a lineage or a sub-lineage, and could therefore be regarded as a 'mode of expression' or *kankō hyōgen hōshiki* (慣行表現方式).

I tend to believe that the larger sections of a *honkyoku*, which I have referred to as 'episodes' above, are more complete musical statements. Sometimes whole sections are repeated within a piece, and sometimes they appear only once, but they feel akin to 'themes.' The Japanese word that comes to my mind is *gakusō* (楽想), which consists of the words for 'music' (*gaku*) and 'thought,' or 'idea' (*sō*): thus, 'a musical thought.'

Finally, we have the performance techniques needed to produce the idioms, patterns, and phrases, which are something I have not discussed to a great extent in this article. The term is not a crucial aspect in the analysis of structures, but the common designation that comes to mind is *gikō* (技巧), where *gi* (技) stands for technique, and *kō* (巧) relates to the dexterity of applying the techniques. The word *gikō* translates as 'art' or 'skill,' but also 'technique' in the execution of art. Such performance techniques contain, of course, prescriptive elements, and to master them is a requirement in order to be able to express anything more than individual sounds.

List of suggested nomenclature for structural analyses of shakuhachi **honkyoku**:

	Linder		Tsukitani	
Smaller ↓ *kata* ↓ ↓ ↓ *kata* ↓ *kata* ↓ Larger	Individual Sounds	*oto*	Individual Sounds	*oto*
	Performance Techniques	*gikō, yubi-zukai*, etc.		
	Idiomatic Expressions	*kankō hyōgen hōshiki*		
	Patterns	*onkei*		
	Phrases	*onku, fushi*	Motifs	*onku, onkei*
	Episodes	*gakusō*	Phrases	*gakku*

As indicated in the left column, both patterns and phrases may be regarded as containing prescriptive elements. The word *kata* is ambiguous, as indicated in the above analysis, and if any similar word should be applied to the non-prescriptive, purely structural elements, I believe that *katachi*, another word for 'form' denoting an outer shape, is more appropriate.

The ideas presented in this article are, of course, capable of further elaboration and development. I trust, nevertheless, that they provide a consistent basis for the analysis of honkyoku, and possibly for other genres of Japanese music as well.

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