

Kowata Suigetsu (小幡水月)

Preface

Resurrecting the Shakuhachi Kokinshu by his son, Wada Shingetsu, second generation, San-in shakuhachi dojo. Heisei 19 [2008]

The author of this book, Shakuhachi Kokinshu, is my father Kowata Suigetsu. He was born in 1901 and died March 21, 1983, aged 84. He was the fourteenth generation of the Kowata family from Izumo. He lost his father at the age of 9, and he subsequently became the head of the family. Following the end of World War two he suffered much difficulty as a consequence of being purged by the occupying US forces. Losing the war created many changes within the land system, and many rice fields and other lands that were traditionally inherited were taken away or deeply taxed. There is an old word called takenoko, 'bamboo shoot life': meaning the land owners and landlords had to sell what they had in order to live and to eat. Many land owners disappeared from society.

The way my father navigated these hard times was fabulous; he opened up his huge house to guests, and turned it into a ryokan (inn), Yakumo sō, (which was later designated as a national cultural asset) and the drawing room was used as the San-in shakuhachi dojo, where he taught shakuhachi. My father studied shakuhachi with Jin Nyodo when he was a student at Waseda University. His shakuhachi playing became very polished. After the war, my father became very well known.

People recognized him as Kowata Suigetsu of San-in, Totori Shimane (the West coast region, which encompasses several prefectures). This Shakuhachi Kokinshu was a series of essays published in the monthly magazine: 'Shakuhachi' from the Showa 26 Feb issue (1951), in ten installments. I was at Shimane university at the time, studying shakuhachi with my father and I remember very well that my father had his own shakuhachi philosophy. I clearly remember one event during this essay publication. My father was very severe in expressing his opinions and shakuhachi players from other lineages began to boycott the Shakuhachi magazine as a result. The publisher had a difficult time as a consequence. [note: apparently the magazine ceased publication as a result of being boycotted by so many players]

For Jin Nyodo, with whom both my father and I studied, there is a memorial service at the Myoanji temple in Tofukuji each year. But this year we made a little change, considering Jin Nyodo's son Jin Nyoseishi. Forty-one years have passed since Jin Nyodo died. After playing for the usual dedication, we added a little talk by people who had known Jin Nyodo. First was myself, then Takahashi Kyodo from Tokyo. While he was talking about Jin Nyodo, he mentioned the Shakuhachi Kokinshu. I was surprised and also impressed that people still talked about the Kokinshu and my father. Following this, we had a party as usual. All of a sudden I was approached by Koide Kyofu of Hiogo prefecture. He gave me a stack of old duplicated papers, which I saw was the Shakuhachi Kokinshu by my father. Koide-san told me he had read the Kokinshu many times. Several days later, a newly copied Kokinshu was delivered to my house and I read it in depth. I was impressed by my father's passion for shakuhachi and I could feel

his breath, so I wanted to re-publish it. Value systems have changed since his time, but I thought his ideas and philosophy should be kept alive. His original writings are often difficult to follow, so I did some editing to make them more accessible. It's been more than half a century since this was written. Japanese people and their culture have changed considerably since then. If readers can experience this man from the Meiji period and his indomitable faith in shakuhachi, that would be my utmost pleasure. Heisei 19. [2008]

SHAKUHACHI KOKINSHU by Kowata SUIGETSU

Chap 1 The Global Nature of Shakuhachi

In Showa 20, just after the war, when I was living in Shimane prefecture, the occupying US army moved in and a Lieutenant-Colonel, a lawyer, came to visit me to see this old house and to experience traditional Japanese culture. I gave him a woodblock print and I entertained him with my shakuhachi. He wanted to try to blow, so I let him...to no avail. He looked inside the bore, checking here and there. I found it funny to watch and I later wrote a little essay about his visit

and submitted it to the local paper. Someone commented on this foreigner being impressed by the beautiful sound of the shakuhachi. I said, he seemed to think it was mysterious but he did not necessarily think it was good. He was impressed by the simple structure of the flute but he did not seem to be impressed by the tasteful and mysterious sound. It might have been that my blowing level was not good, but he did not seem to like the sound, which is, in a way, very gloomy and quiet. It did not interest him as a Westerner.

After the war, it was popular for many Japanese people to re-examine their traditional culture. They enjoyed looking at traditional culture from a global viewpoint and often judged Japanese painting or music to have no future. Some people tried to paint in an oil painting style, using the traditional mineral pigments, or tried to play Western music on a shakuhachi, or copied orchestral music. This was short-lived. Anything which becomes quickly popular does not last.

These days there is a new appreciation for the traditional music. It is becoming popular to mix East and West, but when it comes to art, it cannot be separated from race, culture and the climate which produced that particular art. For example, ink painting from China, or Fuke shakuhachi is hard to appreciate if you are not from that culture. Like sumi-e painting, which is so expressive with its fading tones, dark and light, so Fuke shakuhachi would find its true nature in sound quality, not volume. Focusing on one sound and holding millions of voices in no-sound.

Japanese music is linear music. It is wrong to call it monotonous and immature. Oil painting with a lot of paint does not necessarily surpass Eastern ink painting. Sometimes that simplification can express true beauty. Prince Shōtoku blew a 6-hole shakuhachi 1300 years ago. This later became a five-hole instrument, and in the Taisho period, seven and nine-hole shakuhachi appeared for a short time. With a five-hole instrument, meri notes became necessary

and give the flute its mysterious sound. Meri technique is difficult, so seven-hole, nine-hole, even ten-hole and twelve-hole flutes provide access to those pitches, but then the resulting flute resembles a Western instrument. Playing Westernized music on a five-hole shakuhachi is an improvement, but foreigners may laugh at that 'immaturity'.

Shakuhachi is by nature very quiet and yin. So, it does not go well with yang, lively and sunny nagauta music, for instance. However, some shakuhachi lineages still try to make nagauta shakuhachi scores. This does not work.

In the Kinko-ryu from Meiji 1 to now, the shakuhachi compositions for jiuta mostly follow the shamisen line. One might think it timid to compose this way, but this, played simply and unembellished, shows a high level of artistic understanding. If the jiuta shakuhachi parts could be composed with even less embellishment and greater simplicity, with less movement in the melody, this would be even better. Tozan-ryu style has too many of these embellishments, and string players and listeners alike, don't like this style. If shakuhachi makers can move from using a lot of ji to less ji then playing styles will change accordingly.

The thirty-six Kinko honkyoku transmitted today all sound the same. There is no zen taste, no interest, and they are meaninglessly long with little to appeal to one's heart. So, playing these pieces as though they are divine is just funny. Kinko-ryu sensei should throw out everything except Shika no tone, Hachigaeshi and Yugure, and study Fuke shakuhachi as their classical training, otherwise there is no future.

But some Fuke players treat shakuhachi as a dharma instrument, chanting 'ichi on jobutsu' . This is all self-indulgence and I don't think that even one young man in a thousand would want to follow that way. Some Myoan-ryu people say, if you play ensemble pieces, honkyoku deteriorates. That's because these players cannot play the two genres differently.

So, Fuke myoan is like the graduate school of shakuhachi. It is necessary first to pass through elementary school. Simple entry level pieces, and then two or three ensemble pieces would suffice. Tozan Ueda does not have a classical repertoire, so players in their twenties and thirties may be fine, but when they get beyond fifty years old they may regret not having a classical repertoire. All shakuhachi lineages are incomplete and one has to study multiple lineages to truly follow the way of bamboo. Teachers usually try to keep their students within their own lineage, so it's a bit of a problem.

There are many new lineages. They do not understand that shakuhachi is to calm one's mind. They try to create a cheery, loud sound, when shakuhachi is all about linear sound. They do not last long. Shakuhachi was used in large concert settings, but it may have made the music shallower as a consequence. Fuke shakuhachi used very delicate lip and breath techniques but we do not see that in the Kinko and Tozan modern shakuhachi playing. Shakuhachi technique might even have gone backwards.

A player's character and personality seems to be appreciated in the Japanese performing arts. When people gather to watch a famous kabuki actor, it is to enjoy and observe their art, not the story of the drama. That's what they pay money for. Shakuhachi is the same. People will listen

just because it is Kodo's Nanakomachi or Muchiku's Koku or Nyodo's Muju shin kyoku. They will listen to their particular flavor.

Forty or fifty players with jiari instruments playing together will not impress anyone. This is calisthenics on stage. The music becomes monotonous.

1. I wish this year (Showa 26), that more study of the classical pieces can happen. Only the Fuke shakuhachi has this very delicate breath and finger movement, producing the zen taste and wabi taste which is not in the Kinko or Tozan playing. This should be studied more.
2. It is better to remove meaninglessly lengthy classical pieces.
3. Do not add any Western elements, only play pure Japanese music.
4. Shakuhachi has to touch the modern sensibility. It has to be alive.

All music and art all over the world are now painted by globalization. Shakuhachi should be Japan's own music. As long as Japanese people eat rice and pickles, there will be a demand for things Japanese, and there will be a unique, developing culture. I wish that a new classical repertoire can be created.

Globalization is like a shiny alloy. When foreigners come to study with you, do not try to please them. If someone does not have talent, refuse to teach them.

Chapter 2 Bamboo to blow and singing bamboo

As with anything, amateurs and professionals have differing viewpoints. Shakuhachi is the same. Consider a shakuhachi which is so heavy that when you lift it, it will tire your shoulders. Its nakatsugi joint is like a ring on the finger of a huge Buddha statue and when you look through the huge bore there are seven nodes, all properly lined up. Its root is beautiful, like a gear cog. Shakuhachi like this, which amateurs love to get hold of, rarely have a beautiful sound. On the other hand, shakuhachi which are featherweight, with an uneven bore and shaven root, (which may look like a bamboo blowing tube for a fire), are often very good shakuhachi.

You can't see the depth of a shakuhachi from outside. A good shakuhachi is usually made from rounded bamboo. Really round bamboo is rare. Bamboo shoots will grow into round bamboo, but after 2-3 years they get pushed by the wind and they endure the weight of snow. They become either flat or oval, or sometimes square or triangular, just like human beings. Flat bamboo has a good otsu sound, but kan is not so bright. Oval bamboo kan is good but otsu is not so good. However, round bamboo is very well balanced between otsu sound and kan sound.

Old shakuhachi did not have root ends like those of today. These days, there is a really strong root presence called kenkan dake (bamboo to fight with). Towards the end of the Edo period, komuso culture deteriorated and monks started using shakuhachi as weapons. During the Meiji

and Taisho periods, merchants tried to elevate the monetary value of shakuhachi by making beautiful strong root ends.

In the old days, even when a bamboo root end had beautiful roots, they would shave it, because, unless you shave it, the root end becomes too thick and the balance is not good between the root and the body of the flute.

Nowadays they make this lime powder (ji) bore, so all of the wall is thick, and it doesn't matter if the root is weighty. But when you make thin-walled shakuhachi, then a big root is not good. Miura Kindo also pointed this out.

The shakuhachi wall has to be an even thickness, but the inside wall cross-section should reflect the outside wall shape. A round interior is easier to control but does not yield a tasteful sound.

Araki Chikuo made several thousand shakuhachi. He used saojika, (small male deer). Two of his favorite shakuhachi were fushinashi (no roots) and a one fushi, five node flute. They were fabulous shakuhachi. They proved that shakuhachi quality should be based on sound, not appearance.

Good shakuhachi making is a gift. It's not something you can make in quantity, nor can you acquire quality by simply desiring it. It is hard to make an ideal shakuhachi. So people who are touted as master shakuhachi makers may spend a huge amount of time making their one 'ideal' shakuhachi. They spend a lot of time adjusting it from day to day. In the morning it sounds good, in the evening nothing comes out. At that point one should realize that the blowing person himself is a living thing, but players want to have a shakuhachi that blows well at any time, under any circumstances, thus they will never find their ideal shakuhachi in their entire lifetime.

From antiquity, what is called a good shakuhachi is not a shakuhachi which will play easily no matter who blows it. Those easy to play shakuhachi have a 'tweaked' character. You have to please difficult shakuhachi, then you can make a beautiful sound. That is where the fun of playing lies. It is associated with the difficulty. When someone picks up another's flute, they may comment about the tuning or the qualities of the flute. That is really stupid. So is criticizing other lineages' music.

No matter how excellent a shakuhachi is, there are always very good notes and other notes which are not so good. This is the shakuhachi character. When a shakuhachi is tuned perfectly, it's like drinking plain hot water instead of tea. Any historically famous shakuhachi has its own character. Loud shakuhachi are not usually found amongst the famous good flutes, just as you can't find a good dog within a pack of barking dogs.

Straight shakuhachi have a graceful, open and cheerful sound. A bent root end creates a contained, nuanced sound. Really good sounding shakuhachi should have uniform wall thickness along the length.

Only a small percentage of shakuhachi players can actually blow shakuhachi. Players who play from the area of their throat appear to make a loud sound, but it does not travel any distance. If you blow from the lower abdomen (hara), the sound travels far.

Kosone sensei in Kyushu used Hisamatsu Fuyo's shakuhachi, 'ishingai' (moon man). It looked like a 'fire blowing stick' but the resonance from that bamboo was amazing. During the Taisho and Showa periods there were many big concert halls, and concerts were held for the general public. They tried to use 'loud' shakuhachi...lots of ji and ten people playing together. But then a solo shakuhachi played by a true master player created a sound that was bigger than those ensembles.

Microphone and amplifier techniques are getting better these days, so maybe this 'military band' loud shakuhachi with ji will not last too long.

A good, old shakuhachi used by a master player, has the player's spirit, thus good sound emerges. But if a lesser player picks up that flute, it will not respond in their hands. Particles of bamboo are arranged when a master player plays, thus creating good sound. But if a poor player plays the same flute, the particles of bamboo are disturbed and only poor sound will emerge. This is analogous to iron particles arranging themselves within a magnetic field.

Chapter 3 One person, one ryu

Talking of ryu-ha, or lineages: lately the shakuhachi world has so many more iemoto and they all act like kings. Someone mentioned that there are as many as thirty iemoto currently, increasing probably to fifty. Well, the world of flower arranging has maybe one hundred iemoto, so thirty is not so many. In Noh theatre there are only five lineages with 600 years of tradition and history. In ikebana (flower arranging) after World War II there were so many new iemotos. The props for ikebana are easily available and it is casually accessible. There is less modesty and self-reflection and everyone wants to become king of the kingdom. This is something that is shared with the shakuhachi world.

Before the Meiji period the shakuhachi was a dharma instrument of Fuke zen and nobody was allowed to play shakuhachi other than komuso monks. The komuso menjo called 'honsoku' was published by the Fuke main temple, (so we could call it the iemoto), but even this temple did not have a developed organization. Good players in different komuso temples at different times composed pieces with regional tastes and personalities. If we talk about different schools, maybe they can be organized in terms of regional flavors or fragrances. So, pieces often had titles beginning with Mutsu...or Kyo.....These were regional names, not ryu, or schools.

Araki Kodo Chikuo signed himself as 'tōto shakuhachi teacher'. (Tōto is an Eastern capital). The old masters did not call themselves iemoto. Araki Chikuo, with Kurasawa KInko's transmission, cooperated with Uehara Kyodo to create the Kinko-ryu gaikyoku dot method sheet music. Because this style of sheet music prevailed, the lineage which uses it is generally called Kinko-ryu.

Kurasawa Kinko the first, did not call his style Kinko-ryu two hundred years ago. At the beginning of the Showa period, there was some talk of organizing the various Kinko lineages as one, but this idea failed because there was no consensus on who should become the iemoto.

A third party is entitled to call a group, 'ryu'...it is not for an individual to call themselves an iemoto. If you are not a good player, nobody should follow your teaching. So, maybe it was not a sensible idea to try to organize several lineages within the Kinko-ryu into one. Jin Nyodo, who presided over Nyodo-kai, or Kaneyasu Dōdo who established the very first shakuhachi school, did not call themselves Kinko-ryu, even though they used Kinko sheet music. They both believed in the idea of shakuhachi having one big path or route. Yoshida Seifu, who came out of the Kinko-ryu and then created a new Japanese music, did not call himself Kinko-ryu.

All this shows that the essence of shakuhachi is within each individual and has not much to do with lineages or schools. Kyoto Myoan-ji's Higuchi Taizan, who revived the Myoan-ryu, called it Myoan Taizan-ryu, but after his death his Taizan heritage was called simply Myoan-ryu. The present thirty-seventh roshi, Muchiku, calls it Myoan-ryu, but actually the content is Taizan-ryu, and he deeply respects the original teacher, Higuchi Taizan's heritage of sound, an attitude for which I feel most respectful.

Many people consider Muchiku's Koku to be divine, and people visit Muchiku-an to study this piece. So once again, we see that the shakuhachi path is attached to an individual.

In all of the Japanese performing arts, the idea of one person-one ryu is prevalent. Even within a school, if you dedicate yourself to playing at a high level, naturally people will congregate around you and naturally this forms a kind of ryu (school). After death, so dies the ryu. However the excellent player disciples will form their own nucleus. The good players will survive, the lesser players will disappear. A ryu is a form of agreement. One ryu may use a sword, another a spear. It is all up to the individual to decide what to do with these approaches. The score represent the blueprint, but the blowing method is up to the individual.

Chap 4 The diminishing value of the menjo

The music score is an iffy thing, and if you can read a score and play the music correctly then there would be no point in training. It is also a ridiculous idea to try long distance learning with shakuhachi. Shakuhachi has very many minute and delicate techniques which cannot be expressed on the score...it's all oral transmission and takes time. This applies to honkyoku and gaikyoku. To truly master one piece is not easy. Back in the old times, when transportation was limited, monks in Fuke temples played only a few pieces their whole lives. So their performance had substance. It was the real thing. Transmission of a piece did not happen unless you had an appropriate person to transmit to. Even when they taught, they might have only transmitted one part of a piece. Jinbo Masanosuke, who taught Jinbo Sanya, Jinbo Sugomori etc, would sometimes transmit the pieces differently, depending on who was receiving them. Pieces were greatly respected, but sometimes they were treated as 'secret' pieces and thus did not become popular. Some people say this was a feudal roadblock in the Japanese performing arts.

Just as with piano and violin, effective teaching is still one-on-one: ear-to-ear. The score does not constitute the music....the heart of the piece is outside the score. Modern shakuhachi players and teachers put more importance on the score book than the teaching, and also the menjo is valued more highly than the score. A piece is taught in two or three lessons. You pay your lesson fees and work through the pieces in the book, moving through certificate levels, shoden, okuden, etc. At the appropriate time, the lineage head will come and administer a test, and most likely, everyone passes. A disciple who passes the test now feels like he is a great shakuhachi master. One day a young player, who can play Rokudan and Chidori from memory may come up to this substance-less master, who then would not know what to do with him. It's a tragic comedy.

So, a jun-shihan may pass his test but still cannot play Rokudan in four different choshi (tunings), or cannot play Chidori correctly. A jun-shihan is like a graduate of elementary school. It is not a good idea to have elementary school graduates teaching elementary school students. As a consequence, the shihan title also becomes devalued.

Chapter 5 The Nature of the Single Tone

Suppose we have ten people who know nothing about shakuhachi and we bring a master player and ask him to play a piece from his repertoire with his best shakuhachi. At the same time we also invite a retired barber shop owner with his home made shakuhachi, to play minyo pieces. Ten out of ten times the retired owner's minyo will be better. This proves that a simple shakuhachi played by someone who plays only a few pieces, can present better tasteful sound than a certified master playing a big shakuhachi with lots of ji in it. It could be that the listeners were not trained in shakuhachi, but I think that Japanese people have a preference by nature for the single tone. They have a preference for tasteful sound.

Western musicologists accused Japanese music of being too simple, too primitive, too quiet. But now, that musical era is recognized and they started to look at the unique nature of Japanese music. Japanese people's preference is shown for single instrumental tones, and the time delay between singing and instrumental sound is appreciated. It is difficult to perform, but Japanese people consider singing in perfect unison with an instrument to be immature.

Hisamoto Genshi's compositions for shakuhachi and koto, which have the flute chasing the koto, do not have the essence of a tasteful sound. Examples are Sandan no shirabe and Hiaku.

Tozan players add a lot of unnatural embellishment to jiuta sankyoku and they don't realize that they are hated by string players. The composers of Kurokami and Yuki did not write those pieces with shakuhachi accompaniment in mind. Since the Meiji period, shakuhachi came into the ensemble music and it is not tasteful if the shakuhachi plays too loudly. Miyagi Michiyo wrote shakuhachi accompaniment for jiuta. Sometimes it is appropriate to do so.

Kinko-ryu honkoku is like a skeleton of the score. They made a mistake in the transmission of blowing technique, and the individual pieces do not have any character, or unique personality. They all sound the same. There are no brights or darks in the sound, and they are boringly long.

They do not have any light. They call some pieces uragumi. Long and short shakuhachi play the same melody with different transpositions of the same piece. That is why Kinko honkyoku is boring to blow and boring to listen to.

Tozan players do not take care of sustained or fading sounds. They do not put enough control into the single tone. It's like beer without the bubbles. They put out a series of korokoro and karakara. It sounds like a kid playing a toy flute. That's because the composer was spiritually lacking.

Koto and shamisen players bend and sustain the tones, and shakuhachi does the same thing. When shakuhachi became popular and mass production started, the resulting flutes could not make the subtle sustain and diminuendo. Yes, jiri shakuhachi can more easily be tuned to a standard pitch, and twenty people can play in unison together, but the flavor of the sound coming from these shakuhachi is nothing more than a tofu vendor's horn. They don't pursue tasteful sound, they don't pursue the ends of sounds.

Fuke shakuhachi, for the sake of zen spirituality, pursued the single tone essence, and some shakuhachi players dismissed this, saying it was too old-fashioned, and advocated complex sound structures with a lot of movement, calling this 'progress'. They also tried to make complex and more compound sounds, including harmony. It is hard to get a harmonious sound with a five-hole shakuhachi.

Fuke shakuhachi started at different places and yielded different regional colors. Each piece has its own fragrance and taste, and it maintains the depth of shakuhachi, the Way of shakuhachi. That's because zen shakuhachi respected the single tone nature of the instrument and the sustained resonance of the sound, yo-in (the sound which remains).

Chapter 6 Shakuhachi to look at and shakuhachi to listen to.

It is incorrect to think that music is a listening experience only, so appearances do not matter. A beautiful shakuhachi and a proper blowing posture make for a beautiful listening experience. The real value of shakuhachi lies in its simple structure and simple appearance, all from natural bamboo. Each shakuhachi has a different shape and surface pattern, and this causes the owner to have a pride of attachment, so they do not want to introduce too much artificiality. The utaguchi can be cut off cleanly and the kanjiri (root) also, in one saw cut. That is where the beauty is. If the utaguchi is only sudake (bamboo) it wears out quickly, so we have to insert some water buffalo horn. If we just open the bore through the node walls and play it that way, the bamboo will crack, so we cannot help but lacquer the interior with urushi to seal it. Some players would decorate the surface with urushi. Also rattan binding was added to respect its natural shape thus there was harmonious consideration. But, after Meiji, new shakuhachi lineages rushed to make shakuhachi popular, and ji was used to line the bore. Sometimes, silver was used to line the nakatsugi joint to please low taste people, so shakuhachi's essential graceful beauty which came from nature was destroyed.

Compared to Noh or Gagaku musicians, shakuhachi players seem less graceful because they have less taste. Graceful instruments are played gracefully by graceful players. Ungraceful instruments played by an ungraceful person will produce an ungraceful sound. Playing posture is very important, whether in the West or the East, but especially in Japanese music. Beautiful music comes from pure posture. Visually beautiful playing and audibly beautiful sound are required to come together. Japanese people are always sensitive to the beauty of a performer's posture.

There is a book about Gagaku that says to not move your body during playing. Playing posture is important, even when you are playing in the mountains. Since shakuhachi is a blown instrument, blowing affects your facial expression. It is inevitable that your face will look elongated. There are many faces that people can make, looking as if crying, or frowning or looking worried. Some players sway their body from side to side. Some people move their knees to count the beats.

When a Western score stand is used, some self-claimed major players stare intently at the score, moving their flute up and down or left to right as if the score is their lifeline. At the passage that they know by heart, they close their eyes. If a breeze takes the score off the stand, they have to stop playing. When Kinko-ryu players use a score stand of their lineage style, the shakuhachi root end becomes an obstacle to seeing the score, so the flute is moved to the side. Or, if the player bends forward to try to see the score, it's as if the Hina Emperor doll is resting his jaw on his scepter and dozing off. In the Araki Kodo lineage, they open up the score on the floor, sometimes moving their body from side to side.

Kinko notation has the right and left beat marks. Some players follow the beats by swinging their flute. In the fast chirashi sections, they can't move fast enough to keep up with the music. Sometime ago there was a concert by a new lineage of shakuhachi players. Someone said, "Let's go see it". He laughed at his own words. Instead of saying "hear it", he said "see it" because that particular lineage was very dramatic, and just for show, they did a lot of dramatic movements. It was thought to be low taste and the lineage relocated to the Kansai area.

There are three shakuhachi postures: kneeling, standing and using a chair. Kneeling is best. Standing is acceptable, and depending on how your feet are grounded, you can still find strength in your hara. But, sitting in a chair is of no benefit. Wearing kimono is best. A nickel or silver colored score stand does not match this clothing. Having a conductor wearing a kimono also looks funny. Some shakuhachi lineages use scores all the time. It's funny. They have lost the spirit of hogaku.

The commercialism of shakuhachi and shakuhachi teaching has resulted in players who only play from the score. So, memorization is important. That is how you get to the heart of a piece. The third generation Araki Kodo was well known to do his evening practice facing the wall or facing a mirror, where he could correct his posture. I saw him playing, and even if I heard no sound from his flute, seeing his fingering was in itself, art. I visited Kaneyasu Dodo at his dojo, Nihon hogaku Gakk-on in Kyoto, where they had a dress mirror which they used to correct playing posture.

Chap 7 Ichion- 'one sound, lifetime'.

'One sound, lifetime' looks like the motto of the shakuhachi world, but age seems to take its toll. In one's twenties and thirties, one would practice hard, even by cutting down time to eat. During the Emperor's funeral, they prohibited the making of any kind of music whatsoever. Shakuhachi players were arrested by the police for playing late into the night. Thus was the players' enthusiasm. The police sirens or the tofu vendor's horn...all sounded like shakuhachi!

After receiving one menjo after another, the player begins to practice less. Approaching his fifties, the player practices only for concerts. Aged sixty, one stops practicing for various reasons. The artificial teeth are not fitting well, the utaguchi was chewed up by insects, etc. In short, one loses one's enthusiasm. This is not limited to amateur players. Professional shakuhachi players also have a tendency to play less as they get older. Most of the shakuhachi masters who are not living from shakuhachi, when life becomes hard, their shakuhachi is given less time. When masters are like this, it's not a positive factor in the shakuhachi world.

In the world of kabuki, or Japanese dance, bunraku, or jiuta shamisen we see many masters older than eighty years and active. In the kabuki world, Uta Emon was a famous actor. Towards the end of his life he could not even stand up straight due to lead poisoning, but he kept on acting. Another famous actor, En Jaku, kept acting in a sitting position. We see the same phenomenon in jiuta shamisen, for example, Kawase Satoko, and Tomizaki Shunsho. They were old but they kept on teaching and performing. The shakuhachi world has very few truly old masters. I wonder if this means that there is a lack of rigor in the shakuhachi world. Of course there are exceptions such as Araki Chikuo. He was playing aged ninety. As soon as he appeared on stage the sound from his bamboo overwhelmed a packed theatre. Katsuura Shozan, touted as the last komuso, kept playing into his eighties. Noda Rogetsu of Kumamoto and Tanikita Muchiku of Kyoto kept playing and teaching until a very old age. Their bamboo sound and resonance got better as they got older.

I don't think there is one single independent lineage in the shakuhachi world that is complete and perfect, so don't get bound up by one lineage. Two or three lineages should be studied hard, otherwise one cannot reach the essence of shakuhachi. A young person who studies popular shakuhachi music may find that when he gets older, this becomes boring to him. Equally, a passionate young player might be playing Fuke shakuhachi and may move away from this style because the sound is too dark and primitive and brutal. My thought is that each lineage's structure might have some defective element. One lineage might not have much depth, another may be old-fashioned. Each person is his own lineage. It does not matter how many lineages there are. If you choose lineages carefully and study within them, then you can find a lineage which suits your taste and you can entrust your whole life to it.

Imagine there is a row of stores...normally, you would check them all before choosing where to buy. In Fuke shakuhachi there is a saying, 'ichi on jobutsu', which means that if you are engaged with one sound for a lifetime, you can reach buddhahood. It can be said as 'ichi on shōgai', 'one sound-one lifetime'. So if one blows shakuhachi, one has to blow for a lifetime. It is understandable that when one gets older, there is less breath, and therefore less volume. But the tastefulness of the sound is not affected by volume. An old man's shakuhachi sound has a touch

of rust, and it is well known that it has its own good qualities. It is not true that In the world of performing arts, as one gets older, one is 'less than a lame horse'. I knew of a Fuke player, Maruyama Seikyo in Matsue City, who died in Meiji 32 at the age of seventy-six. He was a buddhist monk who loved shakuhachi and making shakuhachi. He even purchased a bamboo forest in order to maintain a good supply of bamboo. Komuso from other regions would visit him. He would pick up a shakuhachi and do call and response with them. They would either leave, or humbly ask him for his teaching. When this monk picked up his shakuhachi and played his 'secret' piece, the sparrows would gather and listen. I was able to receive several shakuhachi made by Maruyama Seikyo and they were very good. I could see that he was a great shakuhachi maker. I saw his photo when he was more than seventy, showing this grey-haired old man playing shakuhachi and putting all his life's energy into it. A great image. His passionate devotion teaches us silently to follow him. Whenever I see this photo, I renew my feeling that shakuhachi players should play until death.

Chapter 8 **Becoming familiar with the past, getting to know the new.** **A dialogue between Suigetsu and his students**

Student: You say whatever you want to say in your Shakuhachi Kokinshu and some of your comments are quite strong. We don't hear of any counter arguments. We students understand you saying how important the essence of bamboo resonance is, but in a large hall, I don't think that type of sound reaches all the corners.

Suigetsu: In the old days it was understood that this shakuhachi sound carries further and sounds better at a distance than in near proximity. Poor sound gets better when you listen to it from afar.

A loud shakuhachi sound had value because from the second or third row in a hall, it was a good sound. If someone living in a small space continually blows a big sound, his wife and children would leave. This person sacrifices his family, practicing for the one annual concert. Some stupid shakuhachi commentators would call this loud sound an 'advancement'. To service this way of thinking, the 'trumpet' shakuhachi was made. Advancing microphone designs can now easily carry shakuhachi sound to all the corners of a large hall, so 'trumpet' shakuhachi are unnecessary. A mountain is not respected because of its height, but because it has many trees.

The beautiful essence of the sound is more respected than its loudness. Microphone technology has helped this to be recognized. Those who cannot differentiate between a big sound and a beautiful sound should use a big cannon instead of a drum, or blow a siren instead of a shakuhachi.

Student: Sensei, you recommend old classical shakuhachi instruments. How do you evaluate contemporary shakuhachi?

Suigestu: Shakuhachi design has regressed with time. Just because something is popular does not mean that it is good. That is a very childish way of thinking. Often, the popular has a low

grade content. The great poet, Bashō, talked about this popularity. He said, do not be swayed by popularity. Jazz music which is shallow in nature, will have a short life.

Players in the past played shakuhachi with their belly, for example, the komibuki of the Kimpuryu, or shiori, as in in Reibo. That is the technique. Playing with the tongue and lips appears in such techniques as tamane, tamabuki, etc. Modern players play shakuhachi with the tips of their fingers. They go crazy about 1/16 notes or 1/32 notes, but shakuhachi played with the fingertips cannot produce a resonance from the belly. So, classical shakuhachi is like classical Japanese dance.

Modern shakuhachi playing is calisthenic and is simplified in order to gain popularity. The diversified use of the shakuhachi is thought to be an improvement. If you use a low grade shoyu and try experimental cooking, the food will not be tasty. Modern shakuhachi is like this; tasteless shoyu is used to cook Western food. It is like writing romanized characters with a brush, or making suits out of kimono fabric.

Student: Don't you think that modern shakuhachi has widened its usage by using harmony, chordal support and making duo and trio music?

Suigestu: Shakuhachi's true value lies in its unique, tasteful tone color coming from the bamboo. The primary factor is the examination of sound quality and the experiencing and acquiring of taste. To control pitch and volume is problematic with bamboo. When one tries to change the response to that of a more Western style instrument, the unique tonal flavor of the bamboo itself is killed. It's like killing an ox to get at the horn. If harmony is just a small part, for example the yobikaeshi duet of Shika no tone, or Sugomori's jibuki, which came from kokyū, that is fine. But if I hear five people playing re or ten people playing ro, in so-called harmony, I want to cover my ears. This is nothing but self-indulgence on the part of both the composer and the players. If they want to pursue Western music so much, why don't they put down shakuhachi and pick up a Western instrument?

Student: Do you mean that the classical repertoire should be preserved? Is it not necessary to try to improve shakuhachi?

Suigestu: No, I am not saying that. I'm pointing out that modern shakuhachi practice has thrown out all the merits of the classical repertoire. One has to hold and understand shakuhachi's own true value by examining the spirit and beauty of the classical repertoire. Then you can put a new, fresh breeze into it. It is important to introduce that era's sense...the path of the performing arts will change with time and will change with people, but change is the truth of performing arts.

I think these points can be guidelines for the future of shakuhachi:

1. Shakuhachi's true nature is quiet, yin and mysterious. It is self-reflective. Shakuhachi composition should pay attention to that nature. Modern shakuhachi's biggest error is that it

ignores the shakuhachi's true nature and tries to make lively, magnificent pieces. If shakuhachi plays a cheerful waltz, dancers would sit on the floor.

2. Stop playing shakuhachi with the fingertips, but promote playing from the hara.
3. Throw out lesser compositions from the classical repertoire. Unnecessarily lengthy parts can be re-structured, i.e., shortened. Sections in poor taste can also be re-written.
4. Recreate the classical shakuhachi spirit and technique and put more of a sense of time into it and create new honkyoku.
5. Compose honkyoku with some flexibility, so that they can be blown in shin, gyō or sō depending on the environment and mood, and not locked up in form only. This can be a mixture of classical and secular pieces. We can use these for the general public.
6. For ensemble with sangen and koto, stop using morite (embellishments) and betatsuke (following the string line) and write something akin to the shinobue flute in nagauta, that kind of effect and technique.
7. Write pieces for shakuhachi as the primary instrument and then add sangen and koto as accompaniment.

Student: Since you have this shakuhachi dojo, San-in, many sensei come from other dojos.

Suigestu: As long as I have this dojo signboard up, not only do I teach you students, but I also invite great players from elsewhere, so that shakuhachi lovers in this region can hear their great sound, and so I can educate the people of this region. If you become satisfied with being king of a small region outside of Tokyo, then the shakuhachi world will not improve, so I invite sensei who are better than myself.

By contrast, sensei, when they *elect* to come to see me, are not as good as myself, especially those who come from the cities. Cities are big, so there are many grades of sensei, some of whom cannot play Rokudan well. Those who studied with a first class sensei in the city, would have the illusion that they are good, so I play a trick on these substance-less sensei. I ask them to play Shin musume dodoji or Shiki no nagame with no sangen, only koto. They don't have any substance, so they cannot do anything much without the support of the sangen.

Sometimes I see and hear komuso going from door to door without tengai or kesa. Their sound is often very good. There is a proverb, saying that komuso wearing better clothes will play shakuhachi much less skillfully. If a player lives in the middle of a city and listens to real master players and does not get better, that player has no talent. Often lesser teachers try to copy Western-style music or play very lively honkyoku. They are poisonous. In the old days shakuhachi masters were often from the countryside, not Tokyo. From the Taisho and Showa periods, transportation was developed, so masters from the countryside began to gather in Tokyo. True mastery has nothing to do with time or environment.

Ch 9 The Yin and yang of sound

Kari, where one sticks out the jaw, is yang. When you pull in the jaw for meri, that is yin, (going inside). Of course, it is a matter of fact that shakuhachi sound has both yin and yang, but a lot of people are indifferent to it, especially meri sound. Often, you partially cover the hole, so when it comes to meri notes, they sound different to what other instruments call a half-tone. When you play Western music on a shakuhachi, or with Western instruments, this meri sound becomes a negative factor for shakuhachi. Seven and nine-hole shakuhachi were invented because of this.

Meri kari is quite challenging and is one reason why shakuhachi is not more popular. Modern shakuhachi lineages and schools try to widen the sound range, and for them, discovering dai kan is like conquering the world, though they also ignore the sound quality. Tsu-chu-meri (E) is still a yin sound. When a composition is made ignoring the yin and yang of sound, concentrating only on pitches, it does not have any more nuance than a pre-school song and becomes dry and tasteless. Meri sound is produced by jaw and finger manipulation. Sometimes only the jaw is used. In this case the volume is louder but the sound is more yin.

In the Oshu Tsugaru region (N. Japan), the Kinpu-ryu, who started the Nezasaha style, have a characteristic sound called sugi-iro, meaning 'connecting sound'. Hole one is fully open, the jaw is pulled down deeply and tsu-meri is blown. Then hole one is shaded to bring the pitch down to a 'ro' pitch.

This is to express a very mysterious, tranquil quality. They also use a dai-meri of ro, coming down to a ha pitch. They use a variety of difficult techniques, pursuing a yin sound rather than a yang sound. The old master players focused on the yin and yang of sound. 'U-no-dai-meri' is played to the pitch of 're'. In Ajikan, Kyushu transmission, they use a lot of yin yang techniques. 'U' and 'tsu-no-dai-meri' and 'hiki-on' (pulling note) are all examples of the pursuit of yin sound. In the Oshu version of 'Reibo' and the Echigo version of 'Sanya' their essential parts are the pursuit of yin sound and manipulation. Some people say that shakuhachi's essence is the yin sound.

Kari-on was initially called 'hari' (tension, pulling up, elevating) and later became 'kari'. The jaw is pushed out and the emotional tenor of the player goes along with it and it becomes a real kari sound. Hari became kari. Meri was meru (depressed). Hari means fresh, rich, powerful.

The meri kari technique of pushing out the jaw should work better with holes that are placed nearer to the utaguchi end, because of the structure of the shakuhachi. So, using hole no. 1 (tsu kari) near the root is harder compared to hole no 4 (ri kari). You have to push the jaw more forward to get the tsu pitch. Beginners, who often go flat on tsu-re kari, don't understand this principle and perhaps some teachers also do not know this. Some players are indifferent to kari, even though they are concerned with meri. Some would think all notes are kari, unless one plays meri. One has to be conscious of kari otherwise it is not a true kari. For that, you have to raise the fingers as high as possible off the flute. You can see that master players, no matter how fast they play, their fingers are raised off the holes so high that they are almost bent backwards.

The higher the fingers, the faster will be the fingering action to open and close the holes. This is easily explained but difficult to do in practice.

When you listen to your own shakuhachi sound through a microphone, you will observe faulty points of playing that were previously unnoticed, especially with meri-kari technique. It is like immature pronunciation. Through a microphone, forceful blowing which is indifferent to the yin and yang of sounds, resembles the horn of the tofu vendor. This increasing loudness occurred during the Meiji and Taisho periods, when shakuhachi performance was at a low level. When in a small room, forceful shakuhachi sound is too much. In a large concert hall, it is not loudness that is important, but the yin and yang of sound.

There was an old legend about a master koto player named Hakuga who had only one true listener who could understand the qualities of his sound. His name was Shoshi. When Shoshi passed away, Hakuga went into despair that nobody could now hear his koto, so he cut all the strings on his instrument and never touched the koto again. It was reputed that Shoshi could hear one-hundredth of a half step pitch difference within the twelve pitches. So, twelve pitches are simply an artificial scale description. It is not the scale that one should focus on when playing shakuhachi, but the sound quality: how to use, appreciate and express the quality of sound.

Ch 10 The Good and bad of utaguchi design

In the past, the blowing end was called kyōguchi. The indentation is specifically called an utaguchi. Collectors of old shakuhachi can tell the maker and the age by the type of utaguchi. The oldest flutes just have a shaved plain bamboo utaguchi with no insert. This is clear from the shakuhachi kept in the Shōso-in, which are more than 1000 years old, and hitoyogiri of 5-600 years of age. Of course, shaved bamboo alone will wear quickly, so makers started to use an animal bone insert. Cow horn was used most commonly, as was deer horn in some regions. Cow horn is subject to infestation by insects. Deer horn will not be eaten by insects, but the sound will become hard and stiff.

Water buffalo horn is nicely soft and it has some flexibility. It is the best for sound quality. At the end of the Edo period, into the Meiji period, ivory and tortoiseshell started to be used. Shakuhachi look nice with these utaguchi materials, but the sound becomes hard and stiff and cannot be called an improvement.

The oldest form of utaguchi was the rectangular, boxy shape. But soon it was changed to the 'Mount Fuji' shape to match the shaved surface of the bamboo. This is Kinko-ryu and Seien-ryu style and is a very beautiful, graceful shape.

In the Taisho and Showa periods, shakuhachi makers tried too hard to show their prowess. They widened the bottom length of the insert, making the lower edges very sharp, like an upside down bachi (plectrum) used for jiuta shamisen. This is not a good, authentic shape. It is improper because the maker is trying to insert a triangular shape into a rounded piece of cut bamboo. The excessively sharp angles can cause the bamboo to crack.

The rectangular insert changed to become more curved, and also the indentation changed to become more like a kimono obi shape. This you will see in antique Kyoto myoan flutes. In the Meiji period, Tozan-ryu also copied that style. Later on, shakuhachi makers showed off their technique by leveling both shoulders of the utaguchi insert. This is the current Tozan style. It is a shingetsu, (new moon) shape. I think it is improper because it tends to cause the bamboo to crack. If we are to appreciate a natural bamboo sound, no insert at all would be best, but if we are to inset the utaguchi at all, then the myoan obi shape is better than Kinko style. Either way, any insert should be minimized.

Itō Kogan (died Taisho 10) made Kyoto myoan shakuhachi with ornate utaguchi, by making a complex, two tier utaguchi insert shape, but they do not look graceful. From the late Taisho, it became popular to add a gold or silver lining to the utaguchi. I think this is in really bad taste, just like having a gold crown inserted on a tooth. Shakuhachi sound depends on the utaguchi quality and shape as well as the shaved angle. If the shaved face is broader, less sharp, then the utaguchi becomes thick. Also the shaved face has a little mound shape called hamaguripa, (clam blade), so called by antique shakuhachi collectors. The sound is very mysterious and gives a lot of antique resonance.

As time went on, the utaguchi became thinner, because players became more impatient. They wanted ease of blowing and they blew using the tip of their mouth. A thin utaguchi creates a lightweight, insubstantial sound: 'chirimen buki' (crepe blowing). Some makers make razor sharp utaguchi. All lineages suffer from students with these flutes. They are not good players, they try to manipulate the utaguchi. Eventually these people would ruin good shakuhachi.

Shakuhachi is not blown from the utaguchi, it sings from a good balance within the cylindrical bore shape. The shakuhachi utaguchi is the equivalent of the wooden bell hammer, shimoku. What makes a good bell sound is the quality and thickness of the metal. The bell hammer adds to the color of the sound. Soft bamboo shakuhachi make a softer sound; hard bamboo produces a harder sound. The utaguchi's thickness will produce a difference in the sound, but mostly the tone color is determined by the player, not the shakuhachi. In the past, I read in some scholar's book that shakuhachi music, especially koten honkyoku, is closer to vocal music than instrumental music and I thought that is so true. Players are singing their heart through the shakuhachi. The cylindrical bore has the blood of the player flowing through it.

Just like in Noh theatre, the actor's mask becomes human. The shakuhachi is a living thing. Shakuhachi as an instrument is simple; it has little expression of its own. Scholars who have studied shakuhachi, looked at the instrument, but have not considered shakuhachi's 'living heart'. Research may produce easy to blow instruments but this kind of study does not help us make good sounding instruments. I pursue flutes which can produce good sound. I cannot ask scholars to do that. One has to understand the heart of shakuhachi first.

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