

ARTFUL ENCOUNTERS WITH NATURE:
ECOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF MUSIC LEARNING

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous knowledge is preserved, practiced, and passed down in a variety of ways in contemporary societies including supposedly highly modernized places such as Japan. One example from the pre-modern musical realm is the *shakuhachi*, a type of bamboo flute that has recently experienced a new wave of attention both inside and outside Japan. This dissertation offers an in-depth analysis of how contemporary music practitioners/educators interpret, appropriate, and practice the tradition of spiritual music both inside and outside Japan, focusing on how they reframe and embody what I identify as indigenous cultural values in today's educational settings.

I specifically examine the nature of the traditional practice that approaches the *shakuhachi* in a holistic, organic manner: Practitioners of this tradition personally harvest the bamboo and fashion their instruments directly out of nature, taking great care to preserve and appreciate the nature inherent to each piece of bamboo. Their instruments are much less processed and closely resemble the natural state of each piece of bamboo. This type of organic activities through music—hardly introduced and practiced in the educational realm—are observed both inside and outside of Japan where the integrated role of harvester/maker/player still remains. Among the many forms of indigenous and folk music that are practiced and appreciated in the West, the *shakuhachi* merits close investigation because of its practitioners' degree of involvement in the instrument making process.

In this ethnographic project, I focus on groups of *shakuhachi* practitioners in Tokyo (Japan) and Vancouver (Canada) as well as individual practitioners whose approach to the *shakuhachi* is nature-oriented. This is an investigation into how the

shakuhachi is used to strengthen ecological and spiritual aspects of musical practice. These practitioners are situated in contemporary contexts and live typically modern lives. In other words, the context of traditional *shakuhachi* practice, practiced heterogeneously in Zen temples across Japan, is quite foreign to them. What are their learning experiences of *shakuhachi* music like? What does spirituality mean in their learning of music? How does their practice of music inform us of alternative curriculum and pedagogy in which the connections to nature, spirits, and the past play a critical role? By addressing these questions, this dissertation discusses the role of spirituality and nature in music learning.

Data was collected from my extended observations of my informants' *shakuhachi*-related activities within the course of two years. The richness of data was increased through my participation in the North American group's five-week *shakuhachi* study tour across Japan in which I served as a tour guide and language/cultural interpreter. In this journey, we not only took lessons with a variety of teachers but also explored the roots of the *shakuhachi* traditions by visiting temples and experiencing musical offering. We also had several opportunities to harvest bamboo in different parts of Japan: Harvesting bamboo is also part of their exploration of these *shakuhachi* roots (as well as bamboo roots). The North American participants saw the trip as part of their sacred journey as its title "Bamboo Roots Pilgrimage" suggests. Participation in the voyage is essential to their identity as *shakuhachi* practitioners. My close interactions with them, while harvesting bamboo, taking lessons, having meals, bathing in hot springs, and sharing rooms for five weeks, shaped my understanding of their *shakuhachi* study experiences. As was expected (by such scholars as Victor Turner), the experience of sharing a sense of sacredness and collectively deepening spirituality through a pilgrimage

brought about a sense of brotherhood and “*communitas*” while making us deeply connected friends (Turner, 1979).

Data was also generated from frequent individual interviews as well as focus-group interviews with my participants. Whereas conventional social science methods tend to emphasize the objective role of the researcher, there has been a shared understanding that learning and performing music is itself central to ethnomusicologists’ data collection (Hood, 1971; Trimillos, 2004). In my inquiry, participatory observation entailed an active form of participation, not a passive one. I actively joined *shakuhachi* practices and activities. Transcriptions of my interview data and fieldnotes of my participatory observations were analyzed and coded for emergent themes in relation to the conceptual framework discussed above.

This dissertation offers a set of findings and educational implications: First, music experience includes a series of encounters with nature (Chapter 5). When harvesting bamboo, for example, my participants faced the diversity of nature through widely varying sizes and shapes of bamboo because every piece of bamboo is different in size and shape. Given myriad of choices, they selected pieces of bamboo that could potentially become flutes. For experienced *ji-nashi* practitioners, a form of musical thinking began when they were selecting bamboo pieces of the ideal size and shape: They associated a sound with a size and shape of bamboo as well as a certain tune. This image was also associated with their somatic feeling of music that arose when they touched or held a given piece of bamboo. This process of musical engagement suggested that, for them, the encounter with a variety of bamboo was part of their musical decision (Chapter 5).

Second, my participants saw an encounter with nature as a sacred experience (Chapter 4 and 5). In the process of flute making, they experienced a moment of realizing the spirit of the bamboo, especially when they first blew into it and heard the sound it made. It was a moment of “*revealing the voice of a piece of bamboo*” and seeing “*if there's any life in there.*” Because each piece of bamboo carries its own shape and sound, “*every encounter with a piece of bamboo is a surprise.*” It came with a sense of exhilaration, delight, and for some practitioners, awe and mystery.

Third, my participants reported that the player evolves as the creation of the instrument continues (Chapter 4). In the process of flute making, they customized their flutes, especially the longer ones, to suit individual bodies. By playing such flutes, their bodies stretch in conjunction with the sizes of their flute and their playing styles develop accordingly. The result was an embodiment of the flute. This process of growth was viewed by my participants as “co-evolving” with the flute (Chapter 4 and 5). They often stated that they were “nurtured” by the bamboo. This was the reason why and how their flutes became irreplaceable to them.

Fourth, instrument making not only facilitated an embodiment of the instrument, but it also formed a sense of attachment and devotion to it (Chapter 5). For the many of my participants, bamboo was more than an object; it was a living character. Their relationships with the bamboo pieces were akin to those they had with human beings, as though they were all individual and particular to one another. One of the *shakuhachi* learning experiences for them included building and cultivating individual relationships with flutes that bear a distinctive character.

Fifth, my participants saw their instruments as embodiments of varying degrees of nature. They attempted to make flutes in a definitive way, one that preserves the character of each piece of bamboo, to promote a diverse set of individual flute experiences. For them, the diversity of musical experience stems from the array of characters that their flutes bear. As such, they observed that each flute provided a unique experience, something that was not necessarily transferable to playing other flutes.

Sixth, my participants engaged in self-cultivation through playing the *shakuhachi*. Using simple, self-made flutes, they recalled and explored a more primitive, organic part of the self (Chapter 6) and facilitated their relational consciousness to themselves and the environment (Chapter 7). They often played music in offering settings, where the emphasis of the performance is more on the act of playing itself than on musical achievement. What matters in this form of communication is the player's intention to expose his or her way of being, rather than the result of his or her performance, as it might be judged musically. This kind of process-oriented value, which constitutes the opposite of today's music education climate, are acknowledged, cherished, and practiced among the *shakuhachi* practitioners (Chapter 8).

The practice of *shakuhachi* related more directly to Capra's vision of environmental ethics. Capra (1996) argues that the basic principles of teaching and learning should be congruent with the characteristics of ecosystems such as interdependence, sustainability, ecological cycles, energy flows, partnerships, flexibility, diversity, and co-evolution. The practice of *shakuhachi* making, for instance, is interdependent on the natural resources available in each place and cannot occur without a sustainable relationship with the land (Chapter 3 and 5). Diversity of musical practice is

brought about through the various shapes and sounds yielded by different bamboo pieces (Chapter 4 and 5). The natural materials make it possible for practitioners to embody the flow of the earth energy (*ki*) through sound (Chapter 4 and 7). Co-evolution is observed when practitioners yield to the distinctive characteristics of their individual pieces of bamboo as they are, assimilating themselves to them, instead of altering them in favor of functionality (Chapter 4 and 5). They get used to each bamboo segment in time while developing a sense of attachment, devotion, and responsibility (Chapter 4 and 5). With such sensitivity, they enjoy the inherently varied musical qualities of their *shakuhachi* and the resulting individualized music making.

The findings of this dissertation suggested that music learning is place-based and instrument making serves as a process of localizing and personalizing music learning. In order to articulate this integrative, interactive nature of music practice, this dissertation submitted an emerging notion of “self-integration” as a form of actualizing the body-mind, human-nature integration (Chapter 11). If music is a breath of life, then expression may yield on the side of an exhalation, with self-integration or “impression” as an inhalation.

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CHAPTER 1
FRAMING THE INQUIRY

A flute player remarks:

When I practice music in nature, I face one constraint when a breeze hinders my blowing. My choice of a handmade instrument that is less processed and far closer to its natural state gives me another constraint because of these unprocessed, naturalistic features. Rather than using a processed instrument to eliminate constraints, I strive to blow into this natural bamboo to explore the possibilities of the medium for richer expression.

John Dewey (1934/1980) explains the experience that applies to this flute player:

Since the artist cares in a peculiar way for the phase of experience in which union is achieved, he does not shun moments of resistance and tension. Rather, he cultivates them, not for their own sake, but because of their potentialities, bringing to living consciousness an experience that is unified and total. (p. 15)

Bare, natural materials (such as bamboo or clay) do not allow human beings to do what they would like simple, unprocessed objects made from these materials to do. However, once this resistance is overcome, a deep experience may then ensue. Dewey observes that this is how artists create new forms of meanings around works of art. The flute player continues:

In fact, the ideal expression of this unprocessed bamboo instrument is a wind-like tone that embraces sounds in the environment. It resonates well with the songs of the birds, water sounds, and wind. As I continue playing, the earth energy circulates inside and outside of my body. A moment of oneness with nature is achieved....

This flute player comes from a culture in which nature is a source of aesthetic expression and spiritual experience. For him, to play the flute is to experience bamboo itself. He sees each piece of bamboo as inherently possessing its own sound. He lets the spirit of a bamboo vibrate by blowing into it.

Matsuo Basho (1644-94) came from the same culture. He writes:

*Of what a pine tree is, learn from the pine
Of what bamboo is, learn from bamboo*

Today, we assume that pine trees do not speak and that bamboo does understand human speech. We apply scientific method and deductive reasoning to understand (and dominate) nature. We seem to have lost the intuitive approach to nature—so common to human beings long ago—through which people tune into nature’s primordial mode and experience its true essence.

Observing the learning context of the arts in the culture where the flute player comes from, Rohlen and LeTendre (1996/1998) assert that learning is

a process of adapting oneself to the material rather than of controlling or subordinating the material to oneself. Conversely, it may be argued that the learner must first accept his or her subordination to the material, task, or form. The advanced potter says he has learned from the clay. (p. 371)

This dissertation explores what we can learn from the bamboo about music, life, and how we engage in spirituality as educators.

Research Prospectus

Indigenous knowledge is preserved, practiced, and passed down in a variety of ways in contemporary Japan. One example from the pre-modern musical realm is the *shakuhachi*, a type of bamboo flute that has recently experienced a new wave of attention both inside and outside Japan.¹ In this dissertation, I propose to examine how

¹ What is unique about the *shakuhachi* is its international popularity. Like the Indian *tabla* and African *djembe* (Polak, 2000), the *shakuhachi* is broadly practiced and appreciated outside of Japan by non-native people. The semi-annual international *shakuhachi* festival has seen an increasing number of attendants from many countries. This phenomenon was typically observed, for example, at the seminar on Japanese music held at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at University of London in 2006: Whereas most of the invited *koto* and *shamisen* players were Japanese, more than half of the invited

contemporary music practitioners/educators interpret, appropriate, and practice the tradition of “Japanese music” both inside and outside Japan, focusing on how they reframe and embody what I identify as indigenous cultural values in today’s educational settings.

Although the *shakuhachi* is traditionally understood to be a tool of Zen meditation (Gutzwiller, 1984), I suggest that it can also be understood as a representation of local ecology—a point often overlooked in the intellectual realm and thus a focus of my dissertation project. The idea of local ecology relates to the very origin of each individual *shakuhachi* qua instrument: because each instrument is made from a natural element (a single piece of bamboo), each has musical qualities (timbre, pitch, playability) that vary depending on the nature of the bamboo itself and the artist–practitioner who has fashioned it into a *shakuhachi* (Shimura, 2002; Tukitani, Seyama, Simura, & Lee, 1994). The result is an instrument that is individualized and rooted in a particular location and time, and to a particular maker and player. *Shakuhachi* music is a form of Japanese music that is performed and appreciated in accord with, not opposed to, the experience of nature (Kikkawa, 1984). Spirituality and ecology are two key aspects that are crucial to understanding such musical traditions in Japan.

Today, however, the *shakuhachi* is understood and appreciated not only within detached, meditative spaces. Additional contemporary modes of *shakuhachi* practice combine and reinterpret the instrument and its music, often resulting in musical-cultural hybrids and multiple approaches to its spiritual and ecological aspects. In fact, practice of

shakuhachi players were non-Japanese from North America and Europe. Indeed, there are a number of *shakuhachi* players who are not Japanese but highly acknowledged inside and outside of Japan.

the *shakuhachi* in its individualized form is often appropriated by individuals in search of spiritual enlightenment (Keister, 2004). At the same time, many people approach the *shakuhachi* in a naturalistic manner: They personally harvest the bamboo and fashion their instruments directly out of nature, taking great care to preserve and appreciate the nature inherent to each piece of bamboo. Their instruments are much less processed and closely resemble the natural state of each piece of bamboo. This represents a genre of organic activity that is realized through music is commonly observed inside and outside of Japan, if not in the educational realm, where the integrated role of harvester/maker/player remains visible. Among the many forms of indigenous and folk music that are practiced and appreciated in the West, the *shakuhachi* merits close investigation because of its practitioners' degree of involvement in the instrument making process.²

These organic activities are conventionally generally thought to fall under the purview of research on indigenous people (see, for instance, Posey, 1999). The underlying assumptions about native cultures are that they (a) have significant knowledge about the ecology of the ecosystems in their homelands; (b) practice an economy which uses their land and resources sustainably; (c) promote the conservation of their natural environments; and (d) are effectively guided in these and other matters by a profound spirituality in which the environment is respected and treated as sacred (Sponsel, 2001).

It is also assumed that native traditions inherit ecological practices of music making.

Bowers (1995) observes that creative expression in traditional cultures has been “a means

² Not everyone makes the instrument by him- or her-self. Nor does everyone approach the *shakuhachi* in the same way—some consider a great deal of the musical and aesthetic aspects of *shakuhachi* practice over the organic, holistic, and ecological aspects.

of renewing the spiritual ecology which, in turn, serves as the basis of a cultural group's sense of moral order that defines the human's responsibility to plants, animals, and other sources of life" (p. 71). I hypothesize that these values may also be maintained in a renewed form through the arts and cultivated through education in contemporary settings.

In this ethnographic project, I explore groups of *shakuhachi* practitioners in Tokyo (Japan) and Vancouver (Canada) as well as individual practitioners whose approach to the *shakuhachi* is nature-oriented. This is an investigation into how the *shakuhachi* is used to strengthen ecological and spiritual aspects of musical practice. These practitioners are situated in contemporary contexts and live typically modern lives. In other words, the context of traditional shakuhachi practice, practiced heterogeneously in Zen temples across Japan, is quite foreign to them. When this place-based and human connection-based tradition is pursued in modern lives, how are spiritual and ecological aspects of the *shakuhachi* approached, appropriated, and appreciated?

Guiding research questions for this study include: (a) What are the significant aspects of *shakuhachi* practitioners' learning of *shakuhachi* making and playing? (b) In what ways do they perceive nature? What characterizes the ways shakuhachi practice informs their experience of the world? (c) How do the *shakuhachi* practitioners negotiate between "traditional" and "contemporary" values? More specifically, how do they perceive and appreciate the continuity between art and nature as well as the relationship between spiritual and aesthetic values? (d) How would they experience themselves (or others), cultivate themselves (or their relationships with others) through *shakuhachi* making and playing? (e) How—and to what extent—do the *shakuhachi* practitioners transmit traditional values; and how do they verbalize and conceptualize these traditional

values in educational settings? And (f) what does it mean to understand a foreign culture and tradition? What aspects of the tradition are reinforced and disregarded in non-traditional contexts?

These questions propel the inquiry itself into a more educational realm by offering an alternative perspective on education; for example, consider a perspective that construes the manufacture of an instrument as part of music education proper. Currently, instrument making is not thought of as a component of a music education curriculum; this reflects the modern demarcation between those who manufacture instruments and those who play them. Another argument is related to the use of plastic substitutes for genuine folk instruments in the music classroom, a practice that has gone unchallenged in music education. In Japan, music education leaders offer workshops on *shakuhachi* (and other flutes) that are tailor made for instructors, but in most cases they use plastic materials, a practice which reflects the anthropocentric assumptions regarding music and musical instruments. The holistic *shakuhachi* players in this study present a competing view. Findings will lead themselves to the ongoing discussion in music and arts education, holistic education, and “place-based” education in particular—an emerging area of investigation in education—which aims for reclaiming the significance of the local in the global age (Gruenewald, 2007; Upitis, 2007). Insights gained from the naturalistic *shakuhachi* pedagogy help to localize, historicize, and personalize our teaching and learning of music.

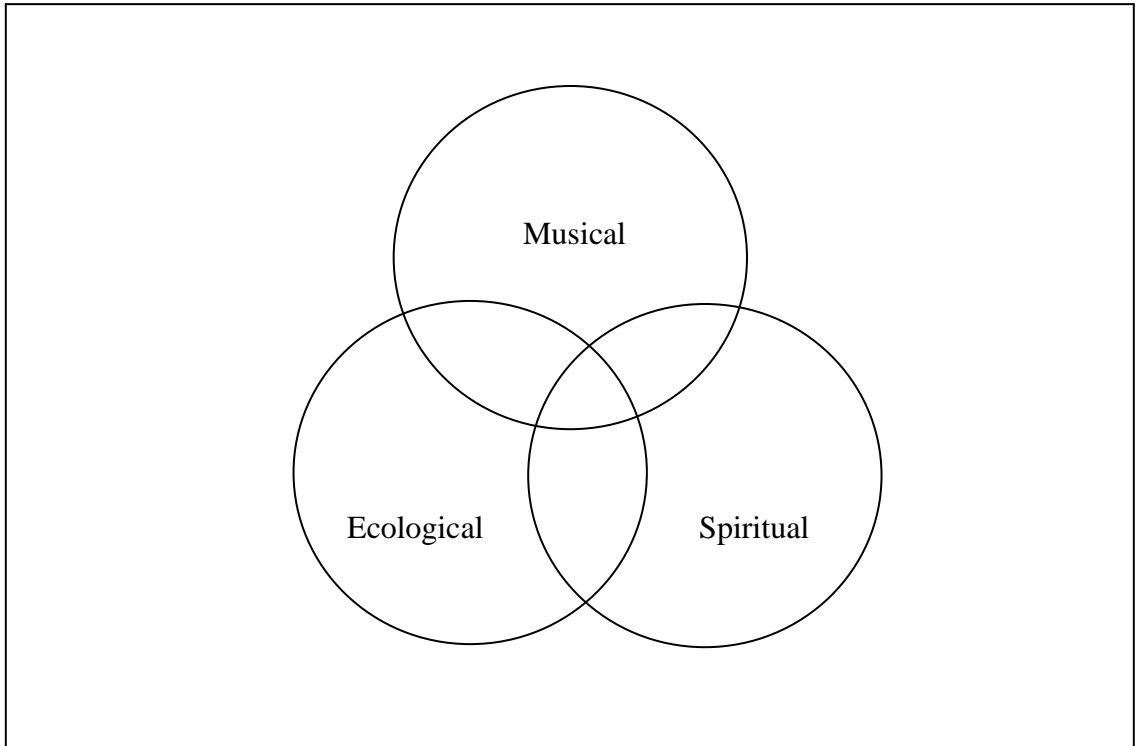


Figure 1. Three circles. An image of shakuhachi activities can be captured through a drawing of three circles, labeled musical, spiritual, and ecological. The bulk of my informants are located in the intersection of the three circles.

Conceptual Framework

In this inquiry, *shakuhachi* practitioners' activities and learning experiences are analyzed from three interrelated perspectives, namely, the musical, the ecological, and the spiritual. An image of *shakuhachi* activities is captured through a drawing of three circles, labeled musical, spiritual, and ecological, as shown in Figure 1. The main body of my participants falls into the intersection of the three circles. Broadly speaking, practitioners of a purely musical orientation create and enjoy *shakuhachi* music for entertainment. Those of the spiritual orientation use the *shakuhachi* to facilitate self-cultivation and deepen their life experiences. The ecological orientation emphasizes the

participants' activities in bamboo harvesting and flute making. In the following sections, the intersections of these three areas are discussed alongside a summary of related literature.

Musical-ecological Overlaps

The prevalent dualistic, anthropocentric paradigm that surrounds us postulates human beings and the environment they inhabit as two distinct ontological entities. Under traditional Western aesthetic theories, nature and culture have been diametrically opposed. Generally, wildness, rawness, and instinct have characterized nature, while control, refinement, and reason have been thought to comprise the work of art (Ellen, 1996). The assumption here is that until an object is transformed by human hands into a work of art, it remains “merely” natural. For example, Eduard Hanslick (1891/1974) posits that the relation of music to nature is most intimately identified in terms of its subject-matter, not with its creation or its intrinsic principles. He claims that “there is nothing beautiful in Nature as far as music is concerned” because “art should not slavishly copy Nature, but *remodel* it” (p. 154). Harry Broudy (1972/1994) echoes this sentiment: “One may hesitate to speak of nature as the Great Artist” (p. 32). This anthropocentric view is perhaps best voiced by Igor Stravinsky (1942/1970) in the following statement:

The murmur of the breeze in the trees, the rippling of a brook, the song of a bird.... These natural sounds suggest music to us, but are not yet themselves music.... They are promises of music; it takes a human being to keep them.... In his hands all that I have considered as not being music will become music. (p. 29)

For these thinkers, the literal portraiture of nature is rather science demarcated from the purview of arts education. The basic framework of today's arts education is strongly influenced by, and indeed based on, their rendering of nature in aesthetics. For these

thinkers, the literal portraiture of nature is something *scientific*, and does not, therefore, fall under the purview of arts education. The basic framework of today's arts education is strongly influenced by, and is based on in fact, their rendering of nature in aesthetics.

However, anthropologists familiar with indigenous cosmologies have countered this dualistic view of art and nature. Broadly speaking, they interpret these metaphysical systems as conceiving of nature as a social and cultural construct (Ellen, 1996; LaFargue, 2001). Nature is not "out there" somewhere, distant from the subject, but is something experienced proximately, much in the same way that the cultural and social worlds are. Rather, the relationship between the cultural and the natural is not a static one, because it is constantly shifting and merging. Sometimes, this distinction seems wholly superfluous. Thus, it is an error to overemphasize the anthropocentric or the cosmocentric, because both tend to sever the interconnectedness between the divine, the human, and the natural (Ellen, 1996).

Anthropologists and ethnomusicologists tend to view the dualistic view of music and nature as an artificial dichotomy. From their perspectives, nature is not merely a tableau that waits passively for a human being to perceive it as an object of appreciation. Rather, it is basic condition of experience. They have emphasized the close relationship between nature and music (Ellen & Fukui, 1996; Yamada, 1997, 2000). An example of this is Steven Feld's (1982, 1996, 2001) description of how the Kaluli people of Bosavi, New Guinea harmonize their music with the sounds of locusts and waterfalls. Feld discusses the context of the rainforest, in which the Kaluli perform their music: Here, there is a constant background din of multilayered dense sounds to which man made sounds are acoustically tuned, a relationship called an *echophony*. The vocabulary and

terms imbedded in the Kaluli's expression of musical ideas are often metaphors representing nature. Specifically, musical terms are often metaphors that represent the motion and sound of water. Feld (1982) reports that the Kaluli conveyed their musical ideas through such expressions as "Your waterfall ledge is too long before the water drops"; "There is not enough flow after the fall"; and "The water stays in the pool too long" (p. 164).

Feld (1982) also reveals that the arts serve as a way for the Kaluli to communicate with spirits. The modes in which they experience birds are especially illustrative: In addition to locating them spatiotemporally, in particular seasons and weather conditions, the Kaluli believe that birds are the spiritual reflections of the deceased. Birds thus become active participants in the construction of aesthetic, personal, and social experiences. Song is inspired by thinking about birds; it is performed in a bird voice; men wear bird feathers to make themselves beautiful and evocative; and dance is patterned as bird movement. When people are moved to tears by musical performance, they are said to have heard "the voice of someone who has become a bird." As Feld (1996) aptly puts it, for the Kaluli, "the music of nature is heard as the nature of music" (p. 62).

A similar principle of music making is identified in Tuvan throat singing. Here, the music duplicates natural sounds such as gurgling water and swirling winds. According to Tuvan animism, the spirituality of nature is manifested through the sounds it produces and experienced through synchronization. Levin and Edgerton's (1999) portrayal of Tuva's musical expression merits a lengthy quote:

Among the many ways the pastoralists interact with and represent their aural environment, one stands out for its sheer ingenuity: a remarkable singing technique in which a single vocalist produces two distinct tones simultaneously. One tone is a low, sustained fundamental pitch, similar to the drone of a bagpipe.

The second is a series of flutelike harmonics, which resonate high above the drone and may be musically stylized to represent such sounds as the whistle of a bird, the syncopated rhythms of a mountain stream or the lilt of a cantering horse.... Such music is at once a part of an expressive culture and an artifact of the acoustics of the human voice.... According to Tuvan animism, the spirituality of mountains and rivers is manifested not only through their physical shape and location but also through the sounds they produce or can be made to produce by human agency. The echo off a cliff, for example, may be imbued with spiritual significance. Animals, too, are said to express spiritual power sonically. Humans can assimilate this power by imitating their sounds. (p. 81)

The aesthetic continuity between art and nature in experience has been discussed and articulated by non-Western artists and scholars. For example, Motokiyo Zeami (1364–1443), who founded the Japanese noh theater and participated in it as an actor, playwright, and choreographer, believed that the commonality between art and nature was that they both led to fulfillment. For Zeami, personal fulfillment was born from intensified experience, similar to Dewey's *an experience*. This form of experience bears three sequential components: *jo*, *ha*, and *kyū*. According to Zeami, these components signify, respectively, the slow, the breaking, and the rapid. *Jo-ha-kyū* is typically identified in the way noh or musical performance is structured and experienced. A noh play, for instance, begins slowly, breaks into a faster pace, and then proceeds rapidly to its conclusion. Zeami held that the rhythm of *jo-ha-kyū* penetrates all things, including human experiences and natural phenomena. He notes:

Thinking over the matter carefully, it may be said that all things in the universe, good and bad, large and small, with life and without, all partake of the process of *jo*, *ha*, and *kyū*. From the chirp of the birds to the buzzing of the insects, all sing according to an appointed order, and this order consists of *jo*, *ha*, and *kyū*. (Indeed, their music surpasses any question of mere skill and represents an unconscious Fulfillment.) Their singing creates a pleasing musical sensation and gives rise to feelings of a Melancholy Elegance. (Zeami, trans. 1984, pp. 137–138)

Zeami believed that those who do not appreciate the aesthetic quality of nature (e.g., the voices of birds and insects) could not be as good artists as those who do. In order to understand the highly sophisticated art of *noh*, actors were expected to observe the rhythm and order of nature, find the *jo-ha-kyū* quality in it, and embody its beauty completely through their movement. Zeami clearly identified the continuity between art and nature in aesthetic appreciation and embodiment. He did not separate the two dimensions.

The significant aspects of *shakuhachi* practice can be understood under Zeami's aesthetic paradigm. In fact, musical demands and expressions in Japanese music borrow many terms from the natural world. For example, *amadare*, which literally means "rain drop," signifies a waterfall motion when used as a *shakuhachi* expression. *Fusei*, literally meaning the "voice of the wind," is a *shakuhachi* expression that means to play with high, piercing sounds. Indeed, the ideal beauty of the *shakuhachi* is attained through wind-like expressions. This nature-oriented tradition testifies that the principle of music making corroborates with the experience of nature.

As these examples indicate, nature has been a driving force of aesthetic expression in Japan. Tremendous efforts have been made to capture and describe natural phenomena through the arts so that people could identify themselves through nature (Hosaka, 2003). In fact, one of the major philosophical and aesthetic concerns of Japanese intellectuals has been the phenomenal world and the ontological experience of nature (Nakamura, 1997; Shaner, 1989). Because nature is through to exist on an ontological par with human beings, humans are not distinct from nature processes. Nature is thus a site or source of spiritual experience, and aesthetic expression is considered to be

a manifestation of one's encounter with and immersion in nature. As such, works of art (literature, visual art, music, poetry, etc.) are filled with descriptions of the environment, showing people's inclinations toward nature (Nakamura, 1997; Saito, 1985; Shimosako, 2002).³

In sum, the above-introduced traditions explored by ethnomusicologists and anthropologists exemplify the aesthetic continuity between music and nature in experience. Clearly, nature is experienced not only in terms of "subject-matter" but also in the process or principle of music making. Nature is experienced through the very practice and making of music. Often, people are engaged in music in ways to maximize their experiences of nature. Because of this intimate relationship between music and nature in human experience, prolific artists in some native traditions are considered as expert zoologists (Feld, 1996) or environmental researchers. Feld suggests that music making in native traditions manifests "the naturalization of music as an ecologically

³ The above-mentioned outlook on nature was part of, and was influenced by, traditional Japanese religions. In Shinto, the indigenous religion of Japan, spirits are viewed as residing in all things. In ancient days people considered all non-human spirits to be divine ancestral gods (Nakamura, 1997). Later, under the influences of Buddhism, this animistic view was elevated to the idea that plants as well as human beings hold the potential to attain enlightenment (Hagiyama, 1992; LaFleur, 1989; Shaner, 1989). As the thirteenth-century Zen priest Dogen declared, "The ocean speaks and mountains have tongues—that is the everyday speech of Buddha... If you can speak and hear such words you will be one who truly comprehends the entire universe" (Dogen, trans. 1975, Chap. 23, "Jippo," Para. 8). Spiritual fulfillment is found in and through nature. Thus, "an image of Buddha is formed from nature... and the voice of Buddha is heard in the wind flowing through pine trees" (Shimosako, 2002, p. 548). This sensitivity became widespread throughout medieval times and influenced Japanese arts and intellectual discourse (Hagiyama, 1992). This view is suitably found in a dozen plays in the *noh* (or *no*) repertoire that feature a flower or tree that achieves enlightenment or manifests itself as the incarnation of a bodhisattva or Buddha (Poulton, 1997).

modeled system and the culturalization of nature as an aesthetic system” (p. 71).

Ultimately, music reveals the unity between the artificial and the natural. This suggests that we need to pay much more attention to how people encounter and negotiate with nature when investigating native traditions of music, a perspective that the conventional framework of music education study has not yet incorporated.

Musical-spiritual Overlaps

The term “spirituality” is distinguished from “religion.” This is what most thinkers in the field of education carefully (and repeatedly) do in fear that the discussion of spirituality may violate the rules on the teaching of religion in schools. The critical point of differentiation between spirituality and religion is that the former is a destination of experience and the latter is a path. One metaphor that turns up repeatedly is a drawing of a tree, with the roots labeled “spirituality” and the leaves “religion” (Hay & Nye, 1998). Various theological traditions represent different paths by which people seek fulfillment and experience the deepest realities of life. But being religious is not necessarily a condition for being spiritual. Spirituality can be discussed without any reference to religion or God. This is very true in a society where people do not refer to “spirituality” and “religion” as interchangeable terms.

Music has been the most powerful media for human beings to express and experience their reflections on spirituality. Some observe that aesthetics is a modern rendition of spirituality. For example, British music educationist June Boyce-Tillman observes that music is the last remaining ubiquitous spiritual experience in many secularized Western cultures. Music has become the highest expression of human achievement (Boyce-Tillman, 2000). In the area of spirituality, “notions of the aesthetic

have replaced God, and notions of healing were replaced by notions of personal individualized enlightenment and amelioration” (Boyce-Tillman, 2004, p. 114). In fact, experience with the arts is often seen as the only venue in the public domain in which the exploration of spirituality is accepted. Often, with this connection to the arts, the word “spirituality” is used in a more “innocuous” way (Hay & Nye, 1998, p. 8). This is because spirituality has been a significant part of artistic expression and experience; it serves to awaken people’s higher levels of consciousness, reaffirms the covenants between human kind and nature, and connects people in different (or the same) times and places. In a modern society, however, the role of the arts has become manifold. Many people feel that, “the arts are reduced to being a commodity providing diversion or entertainment, and their spiritual power is diluted or lost” (Hay & Nye, 1998, p. 35). Spirituality is often used to question the meaning of life and art.

Literature points out that the spiritual, moral, social dimensions of music have been essential part of Japanese music learning (Peak, 1998; Malm, 2000; Keister, 2004). Music learning involves not only learning the art of music but also embodying patterns of artistic and social behaviors as well as moral and ethical values (Matsunobu, 2007c; Keister 2004, Mayuzumi, 2007). Students are expected to learn formal patterns of behavior in the stage manner and forms of interpersonal behavior in the relationship between the master and the student (Keister, 2004). Through embodying spiritual, moral, and social values as well as aesthetic values, the students participate in the community of practice that historicizes and spiritualizes individual practitioners. Lessons are thus ritually structured in such a way that “the ultimate goal may be spiritual rather than musical” (Malm, 1986, p. 24). Keister (2005) observes that whereas North American

practitioners tend to perceive the spirituality gained through Japanese music as a form of sudden epiphany, the sources of spirituality in Japan are social connections in the master-student relationship as well as the aesthetic integration of music with ordinary aspects of everyday life. The difference of spirituality is identified in their individualistic and relational approaches to music; each is distinctively observed in North America and Japan, respectively.

As part of its traditional role as a Zen instrument, the *shakuhachi* has been used for their meditation practices. The ultimate goal of *shakuhachi* playing is often explained through the notion of *ichion-jobutsu*, the attainment of enlightenment through perfecting a single tone. This idea has been traditionally sought after by practitioners in the *Fuke* sect of Japanese Zen who play the *shakuhachi* for a meditative practice, called *suizen* (blowing meditation). The chief goal of *ichion-jobutsu* is not to experience aesthetic pleasure but to achieve personal and spiritual maturity through the realization of the “ultimate tone” (called *tettei-on*). For “in the single tones of the *shakuhachi*, the whole of nature can be heard whispering its secrets” (Blasdel, 1985, p. 16).

Drawing upon the essays of Fuyo Hisamatsu (1790–1845), Gutzwiller (1974, 1984) notes that the practice of Fuke *shakuhachi* is a spiritual exercise of breathing through which a state of freedom from the rational mind is achieved. If the *shakuhachi* is used as an instrument of spiritual exercise, then aesthetic values are reversed: A fine tone is not the goal of *shakuhachi* practice. “Mere musical pleasantries or technical brilliance in the absence of a concomitant spiritual cultivation is devalued as empty mechanical wizardry” (Peak, 1998, p. 364). The quest to produce an ultimate tone or the true sound of the bamboo assumes a function similar to that of Zen sitting. When playing the Fuke

shakuhachi, the practitioner's goal is to experience a meditative state by concentrating purely on the sound through a process of spiritual breathing; this state facilitates a detachment from the dichotomized states of body/mind and subject/object.

In sum, music serves as a tool for spiritual development. Many people still see the practice of the *shakuhachi* as spiritual training. Practice of the *shakuhachi*—known to be the most difficult flute to play—involves rigorous training and discipline. As a result, the *shakuhachi* serves as a medium for spiritual cultivation. In fact, the *shakuhachi* has been practiced for spiritual cultivation by a variety of people: For example, a group of samurai soldiers in *Nezasaha* are believed to have used the *shakuhachi* during the Edo period (1603–1867) as a tool of spiritual training. For these people, aiming at the ultimate level of deep breathing and musical expression is a lifelong pursuit of spiritual cultivation. Musical spirituality gained through the *shakuhachi* practice involves an analysis of both the musical and spiritual dimensions of practitioners' experiences. A more concrete framework of spirituality, one useful for the analysis of musical spirituality gained through the *shakuhachi* practice will be discussed later.

Ecological-spiritual Overlaps

Ecology refers here to a perspective that considers organisms' interdependent relationships to the natural environment. The past few decades have witnessed a plethora of research studies and articles conceptualizing a relational positioning of human lives and the ontological indifference of all beings (Bowers, 1995; Catton & Dunlap, 1980; Cajete, 1994; Ellen & Fukui, 1996; Gradle, 2007; Miller, 1996; Nakagawa, 2000; Posey, 1999; Riley-Taylor, 2002). The emerging ecological worldview posits that human activities, including music making, are part of the processes of nature. For example,

Bateson (1972) and Capra (1996, 2005) have suggested that human mind activities are connected to the ecological patterns of a large system and thus situated in, interrelated to, and dependent on the environment. This acknowledgement, in turn, calls for an alternative pedagogical approach that promotes relational knowing rather than isolated, objective analyses of the world (Bowers, 1995; Riley-Taylor, 2002). Such relational understandings of human nature question anthropocentric approaches to knowledge production in many areas, including music education.

Spiritual experience often derives from one's interactions and negotiations with nature. Hay and Nye (1998) relate that feeling "at one" with nature is an illumination of tuning into the world of the sacred, which is often reported by Western researchers as a form of childhood spiritual experience. Adults can also experience oneness with nature commonly and considered as spiritual in East Asian traditions, as the concept of *ki* (*qi* or *ch'i* in Chinese) suggests. *Ki* is a cosmology that explains the genesis, development, and demise of life (Hall & Ames, 1998; Maebayashi, Sato, & Kobayashi, 2000).⁴ *Ki* refers to autonomous flows of energy that control all the happenings in the universe. The confluence of *ki*, consisting of both passive and active currents (*yin* and *yang*), gives form to life. All living creatures, including trees, insects, animals, and human beings, are regarded as products of self-directed natural movements of *ki*. According to the concept

⁴ The notion of *ki* may be similar to the notion of the Gaia hypothesis that posits "the biosphere is a self-regulating entity with the capacity to keep our planet healthy by controlling the chemical and physical environment" (Lovelock, 1987, p. xii). Lovelock further describes Gaia as "a complex entity involving the Earth's biosphere, atmosphere, oceans, and soil: the totality constituting a feedback or cybernetic system which seeks an optimal physical and chemical environment for life on this planet" (p. 11). He actually posits the existence of a collective living entity in which human beings and all living things participate.

of *ki*, “there are no separable things among the physical and spiritual; there is only the energy field and its focal manifestations” (Hall & Ames, p. 862). Stated differently, all creatures live in the sea of *ki*, and in it, human life is part of the whole universe governed by the flow of *ki*. Tuning into *ki* is a state or process of being and becoming spiritual.

The principle of *ki* penetrates Asian practices of medicine (e.g., Chinese medicine, acupuncture, moxibustion treatment), martial arts (e.g., tai chi, aikido), and aesthetics (e.g., calligraphy, painting, poetry, literature, music). The purpose of such practices is “to balance the flow of the *qi* [*ki*], such that environs and body are productively continuous one with the other” (Hall & Ames, 1998, p. 862). In music, *ki* was traditionally considered as a source of energy from which practitioners gained inspirations and within which basic conditions for artistic expression aimed at the demonstration of the yin–yang relationship were created. The duality of yin and yang is represented, for example, in the basic tonal system of the *shakuhachi*: the negative scale as *insen* and the positive scale as *yosen* (Coxall, 1985).

The Japanese experience of *ki*, explained by Ichikawa (2001), is *shinshin ichinyo*, meaning that the mind and body are integrated into the whole existence of the human being. “As *ki*, the material force, is divided into the body, it takes on subjectivity and becomes the mind” (p. 22). Hence, it represents “a state of total mind-body awareness” (Cox, 2003, p. 90) and constitutes an essential part of the Japanese self (Rosenberger, 1992; Yuasa, Nagatomo, & Hull, 1993). From this perspective, one’s playing of flute music is an act of inhaling the energy through controlled and refined breathing exercises, transforming it into an individual expression, which manifests the state of total mind-body, human-nature oneness represented in his playing.

In the context of *shakuhachi* practice, spirited breathing is called *kisoku*, a word that literally means *ki* and “breath” (*soku*), and signifies a manifestation of one’s spirit and energy. When one’s *kisoku* decays (expressed in the idiom *kisoku-en’en*), he or she is on the edge of death. The role of *kisoku* in *shakuhachi* playing is the same as that of *kiai* in *taiko* performances (as well as martial arts), namely as a means to concentrate and boost participants’ spirits (by shouting) so that *ki* energy is coordinated and edified among the participants (*ai* means “to unite”) (Powell, 2003). *Kiai* is expressed when they are tuned to (or “united” through) the vibration of the earth energy.

The literature introduced above also indicates that, although the intersection among aesthetics, spirituality, and nature has been explored by anthropologists and ethnomusicologists, it has not fallen under the purview of educational research, where emphasis is traditionally placed solely on the aesthetic dimension of music. Ignorance of spiritual, ecological dimensions of music is also observed in many studies in world music or multicultural music education. In this dissertation research, the three interrelated areas of studies provide a useful perspective to highlight multifarious orientations to *shakuhachi* practice. For example, the majority of *shakuhachi* practitioners remain in the “musical” circle. They play varying types of music, including classical *shakuhachi* music (*honkyoku*), classical ensemble music (*sankyoku*), newly created *shakuhachi* music (*gaikoku*), contemporary music (*gendaikyoku*), and music from other cultures such as jazz. The emphasis of their practice is on developing musical ability to express beauty and deep feeling through music. Their breathing exercises, long tone practices, studies of the repertoire, and other forms of everyday practices are ultimately aimed at achieving higher levels of musical results. Their professional value is based on how well they can

play the *shakuhachi* as a musician. Because most practitioners are engaged in *shakuhachi* study through this musical orientation, a significant amount of research on Japanese music has focused on musically surpassing practitioners and their organizations of music in which they play an important role. (Trimillos, 1989; Keister, 2001; Malm, 1986; Prescott, 1997; Wade, 2005). In contrast, little research has been conducted to reveal the ecological, spiritual practices of music in Japan (Asai, 1997; Gutzwiller, 1984). When it comes to research on traditional Japanese music, most studies have investigated *hogaku* (Japanese music) and *hogaku* communities. This research sheds light on the form of music that is practiced outside of the *hogaku* circle as well as the learning experience of practitioners whose musical orientations are spiritual and ecological.

Research on Music Spirituality as Educational Inquiry

Hay and Nye (1998) observe that spirituality, however it is defined, refers to a heightening of awareness or attentiveness. We all have the potential to be much more deeply aware of both ourselves and our intimate relationship with everything outside of us. Hay and Nye highlight five dimensions of such awareness. These points provide a useful perspective for the analysis of spiritual engagement in music.

The first dimension is the “here-and-now” experience. The experience of the here-and-now is a heightened realization of the world that contributes to spiritual cultivation. Here-and-now awareness generally takes form of aesthetic experience, as it involves an intensified perception of the world. Artists have long been trying to capture here-and-now moments of beauty, phenomena of suddenness and transience, and experiences of their own spiritual awakening. In fact, as Hay points out, heightened aesthetic experience is

often “characterized by a sharply focused attention to the here-and-now of one’s experience” (Hay, 1995, p. 19).

Here-and-now awareness has also been major part of a meditation practice. The practitioner learns to maintain a highly disciplined attention to the here-and-now by observing as carefully as possible either the act of breathing or the body’s movements while walking. Hay (2001) illustrates his own experience,

When I pray...I place myself, here-and-now, in the presence of God. When undertaking Buddhist *vipassana* meditation, there is a staying aware of the in-breath and the out-breath here-and-now, or of the movements of the feet during walking. (p. 105)

This “single-pointed” perception is of central importance in the form of *shakuhachi* practice, especially when it is used for meditation.

The second dimension Hay and Nye propose is “tuning.” They draw on the concept of tuning raised by Alfred Schutz who “understands tuning as the kind of awareness which arises in heightened aesthetic experience—for example, when listening to music” (p. 62). Schutz (1971) argues that musical engagement is a social interaction between the listener and the performer (and composer). It is founded upon a shared experience of time through music—whether it is live or recorded music—in which the listener reciprocally shares the Other’s flux of experience in direct inner time. In this sharing, the listener participates in the act of mutual “tuned-in” in which “I” and the “Thou” are experienced as a “We.” Schutz argues that by sharing the same flux of time brings an emergent sense that the participants “grow older together while the musical process lasts” (p. 175). Schutz’s discussion addresses not only the importance of time as generating a sense of mutuality, but also that of physical space, or community of space, in which bodily movements are interpreted as a field of expression. This results in a shared

sense of synchronization into the vivid present. The nature of this relationship is determined largely by variations of intensity and intimacy shared by the participants of music. Applying Schutz's notion of mutual tuning-in as a mode of musical engagement, Hay and Nye argue that heightened aesthetic experience involves tuning-in that is similar to spiritual awareness. They also relate that "feeling at one with nature" is an illumination of tuning. My participants' descriptions of their *shakuhachi* practices are full of moments in which tuning into themselves, others, and nature is highlighted as spiritually meaningful experiences.

Hay and Nye also highlight the dimensions of "flow" and "bodily felt sense" of experience in which the activity is so intense and focused that it is experienced as worth doing in itself. It is the feeling that it is the activity itself that manages the experience and governs the flow of consciousness, not the result. When it is achieved, means and ends, body and mind, self and world, merge into aliveness.

Hay and Nye agree that "relational consciousness" is also a heightened form of spiritual experience. Conversing with ordinary school children before the mastery of religious language, Nye concluded that relational consciousness is a common thread that puts together their spirituality (Hay & Nye, 1998). Such relational consciousness encompasses child-God consciousness, child-people consciousness, child-world consciousness, and child-self consciousness. This is also the case for adults. Hay and Nye believe that we all have a biological need as human beings for being holistically related to the other. We have the potential to be much more deeply in tune with ourselves and our relationship with others and the world. Similarly, Hay (2001) argues that, contrary to his previous assumption and the common cultural belief (in the west) that spirituality is

solitary in nature, spirituality is relational; and relational consciousness of the other is often the precursor of spirituality. Although solitude is often characteristic of much prayer and meditation, it is merely a setting for, rather than the content of, the here-and-now immediacy that constitutes spiritual awareness.

Fritjof Capra's observation of spiritual experience provides a summary of Hay and Nye's discussion of spiritual dimensions of experience. Capra (2002) states:

Spiritual experience is an experience of aliveness of mind and body as a unity. Moreover, this experience of unity transcends not only the separation of mind and body, but also the separation of self and world. The central awareness in these spiritual moments is a profound sense of oneness with all, a sense of belonging to the universe as a whole. (p. 68).

Like Hay and Nye, Capra relates that the corporeal sense of aliveness, the sense of mind-body unity, the feeling of oneness and togetherness with all in the world, are dimensions of spiritual experience.

These dimensions of spiritual awareness (the here-and-now awareness, mutual-tuning, focusing, corporeal feeling, and relational consciousness) provide a perspective for the analysis of spiritual engagement in music. Each dimension is observed when *shakuhachi* students are engaged in diverse forms of *shakuhachi* practice (details are described in subsequent chapters). When we attempt to view spiritual engagement in music as an educationally meaningful and inspiring experience, however, a further understanding is necessary if we hope to capture a people's spiritual activities and those traits of growth and development brought about by enduring practices. In other words, spiritual practice does not necessarily turn out to be educationally meaningful. Many educators including Nel Noddings (2003) are concerned that spirituality is more a selfish inward turn towards private comfort than an impetus towards the public realm.

Spirituality of music can also turn people outward emptily for product-oriented activities without facilitating their inner development. Thus, what is necessary for the exploration of adult music students' spirituality is a working framework that posits that spiritual engagement in music is educationally meaningful. Such a perspective is provided by Van Ness (1996) whose observation of spirituality addresses both the inward and outward dimensions of spirituality. Van Ness (1996) states:

Facing outward, human existence is spiritual insofar as one engages reality as a maximally inclusive whole and makes the cosmos an intentional object of thought and feeling. Facing inward, life has a spiritual dimension to the extent that it is apprehended as a project of people's most enduring and vital selves and is structured by experiences of sudden self-transformation and subsequent gradual development. The spiritual dimension of life is the embodied task of realizing one's truest self in the context of reality apprehended as a cosmic totality. It is the quest for attaining an **optimal relationship between what one truly is and everything that is.** (p. 5) (emphasis added)

Van Ness claims that the spiritual dimension of human existence is hypothesized to have an outer and an inner complexion and that both sides are interdependent and closely related. This framework suggests that spirituality takes an effort to integrate outward and inward dimensions of a life experience; for example, one's effort to strive outward for musical perfection coincides with his or her attempt to engage inward in the process of self-cultivation. For a music performer, musical engagement requires an embodied task of realizing his or her truest self in the context of music practice (toward an image of ideal music performers). Van Ness posits that spirituality is educational because it leads to a project of attaining the *optimal relationship* between one's musical pursuit and enduring self-cultivation. In other words, spirituality is an extended project of life-integration, an effort to transcend the separation of mind and body, self and world,

process and product, musical expression and self-cultivation, which manifests itself in an integrated synthesis of growth and development.

This framework, applied to the analysis of my informants' *shakuhachi* learning experiences, underscores the relationship between their musical and spiritual pursuits through the *shakuhachi* practice as a life integration project. For them, the practice of the *shakuhachi* is a project of their enduring, vital selves that involves self-growth and development. Their pointed effort to balance the inward and outward dimensions of development renders these experiences educationally significant. I will provide more detailed descriptions (in chapter 6, 7, and 8) of how this theme manifests itself in the experience of *shakuhachi* music.

The following chapters highlight these themes of *shakuhachi* practice in different ways while addressing similar issues. For example, chapter 6 highlights those aspects of *shakuhachi* playing that facilitate single-pointed awareness and tuning. Particular attention is paid to the fact that the practitioners depend on their own self-made flutes to feel oneness with nature and restore their primitive, analogue, organic selves. Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 shed direct light on the function of mutual tuning in *shakuhachi* playing that facilitates participants' relational consciousness and awareness of the here-and-now. Their bodily experiences of *shakuhachi* playing are also highlighted in these chapters.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Emergent Research Design

My criteria of selecting participants for this research were two-fold. First, I looked for *shakuhachi* players—teachers who are actively engaged in three types of *shakuhachi* practice: bamboo harvesting, flute making, and music playing. My initial search for informants resulted in identifying two groups of *shakuhachi* practitioners in Tokyo (Japan), and one group in Vancouver (Canada). Among the many groups of active *shakuhachi* players in the world, I located these cases for several reasons.

First, the *shakuhachi* practitioners of these cases are involved in instrument making and bamboo harvesting. They organize workshops for instrument making and tours for bamboo harvesting every year. Every winter, they travel to specific locations to harvest bamboo. This applies to some North American practitioners as well. For example, the practitioners of the Vancouver group make a five-week trip to Japan not only to take lessons with *shakuhachi* masters, but also explore the “roots” of the *shakuhachi* traditions. Harvesting bamboo is also part of their exploration of these *shakuhachi* roots (as well as bamboo roots). They see the trip as part of their sacred journey as its title “Bamboo Roots Pilgrimage” suggests. Participation in the voyage is essential to their identity as *shakuhachi* practitioners.

Second, my interactions with these *shakuhachi* practitioners both inside and outside of Japan made me realize that when it comes to flute making they mostly make the *ji-nashi shakuhachi*. This type of flute is traditionally made out of a single piece of

bamboo with minimal artificial modification in order to maximize the character that the individual bamboo segment naturally bears. Experience of *ji-nashi* flute making and playing is expected to be organic. Since the instrument is much less processed and closely resembles its natural state, the practitioners can incorporate nature into their experience of music. My subsequent search for informants was narrowed down to groups of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practitioners.

Third, there are many *shakuhachi* schools and traditions that provide different orientations to *shakuhachi* playing and practice. I focused on players who are more concerned with the spiritual than the musical. These people are not as prominent and famous as the type of players whose orientation to *shakuhachi* playing is highly musical. Based on my initial visit to Tokyo, I found two vibrant *shakuhachi* players–teachers. These people, plus their students and colleagues, comprise my case(s) in Tokyo.

Fourth, I sought *shakuhachi* practitioners who are situated in modern contexts, such as in places like Tokyo, rather than those who live in remote, secluded places or those who live an austere religious life. This was necessary because my research ultimately aims at drawing implications by incorporating indigenous music into our contemporary pedagogical praxis. Thus, I initially looked at Tokyo as a case. Tokyo is a highly modernized city and is characterized by an abundance of material goods, technological advances, rapid changes, and a dehumanizing living environment. It would make sense if the *shakuhachi* is practiced in ecologically friendly ways in old villages or environmentally rich places where people live close to nature. But Tokyo is never like such a case. My selection of Tokyo resulted from my search for the environment least likely to promote ecologically sensitive musical activities.

In the meantime, I visited Vancouver to join a *ji-nashi shakuhachi* making workshop and found that the teacher and practitioners there are more spiritual in their orientation to *shakuhachi* practice. They are also actively engaged in flute making. I decided to investigate their activities as a case of non-Japanese practitioners' approaches to *shakuhachi* practice. Speaking broadly, I now had two cases, a group of Japanese informants, and a group of Canadian informants. Later, I came across several informants from the United States and the United Kingdom who provided me with great insights.

Overall, non-Japanese practitioners tend to share a common base on which they form their diverse beliefs about *shakuhachi* playing. They gather and share ideas in *shakuhachi* forums, where accredited knowledge and advices are provided by non-Japanese *shakuhachi* players-teachers who have first-hand experiences of studying *shakuhachi* with great masters. Although these experts themselves sometimes argue and debate issues among themselves, the homogeneity of information they share is more identical than in Japan where a variety of beliefs and attitudes toward *shakuhachi* playing are observed. For example, one of my Japanese informant was surprised when he realized that foreign students who had taken lessons with (or just visited) him were all connected and familiar to each other. Although they are scattered around the world, they actively exchange ideas on the Internet through the forums.

These "Japanese" and "non-Japanese" cases are by no means exclusive entities, as more and more people are crossing the cultural borders for the purpose of teaching or learning. Yet, they remain separated by the physical, cultural, language boundaries. This gap was apparent throughout my participation in the North American group's Bamboo Roots Pilgrimage to Japan in 2007, where I served as a tour coordinator and a language-

cultural interpreter. Our interactions with the Japanese teachers and students highlighted differences in learning style and studying context. To illustrate an example, a group of Japanese students in the Western part of Japan were quite surprised to find that one North American student who played well in front of them had been studying the *shakuhachi* for only four years. They kept saying, “*You’ve been playing for only 4 years? You are so good. Our teacher doesn’t correct our mistakes. He lets us play even when we are playing it wrong.*” The North American students responded, “*Our teacher clearly points out when we make mistakes. Otherwise, we wouldn’t tell whether we are playing it right or not.*” A Japanese student whispered, “*I envy you. That’s why you already play so well.*” Different paces of progress may have to do with average age differences of Japanese and North American practitioners (Japanese *shakuhachi* students tend to be older). But in this case, the difference of teachers’ teaching styles can be attributed to a pedagogical difference between Japanese and North American teachers: It is in line with Trimillos’ (1989) observation of Japanese teachers of traditional music: “The teacher seldom identifies the error, but waits until the phrase is played correctly and then expresses approval.... The goal is to perform the piece exactly as the teacher has presented it” (p. 39). Our Roots Pilgrimage was a series of findings and surprises regarding the different orientations of Japanese and North American practitioners toward *shakuhachi* practice.

Bamboo Roots Pilgrimage

The journey was like a drama. During the course of 5 weeks, five of us (three Canadian males, one American female, and myself) traveled to 10 cities in Japan

(Fukuoka, Kumamoto, Saga, Hiroshima, Kyoto, Nara, Osaka, Saitama, Nagano, and Tokyo), took lessons with five teachers, and met and socialized with their Japanese students. We also visited three temples, harvested bamboo at four different sites, visited two professional *shakuhachi* makers, enjoyed cultural events and foods, while backpacking and staying at cheap hotels (often sharing a room with male participants). Every day was full of new encounters and serendipities. I had never spent so much time in the close company of strangers. They eventually became my best friends, a result of pilgrimage participation: According to Victor Turner (1979), the experience of sharing a sense of sacredness and collectively deepening spirituality through a pilgrimage makes initial strangers friends and often produces an elated sense of brotherhood among them. In this sense, they were more like *informants* characterized by a special bond of trust than *participants* to say the least (Schwandt, 2001).⁵ My interactions with them, while harvesting bamboo, taking lessons, having meals, bathing in hot springs, and sharing rooms for five weeks, shaped my understanding of their experiences of *shakuhachi* music. Each moment was a precious opportunity for me to observe closely their first-hand experience of *shakuhachi* study.

On the one hand, this opportunity gave me an external perspective to look at my familiar Japanese culture in fresh ways. On the other hand, my extended exposure to the North American practitioners' experiences of the pilgrimage provided me with rich data as to what it means to practice the *shakuhachi* as foreign practitioners. In theory, their experiences and my interpretations of their experiences would corroborate one another.

⁵ Schwandt observes that, “whereas rapport characterizes the field-worker’s relationship with most participants in a given study, friendship is more likely with informants (p. 127).”

This is because their experiences of the journey were dependent on my translation of foreign culture and language. In fact, given that I was the only translator between the English speakers and Japanese people, I often summarized their conversations and translated the main points. In retrospect, I wished that I could have translated every sentence and better conveyed details of their expressions. In reality, their communications depended on my selective decisions. Thus, my role as a translator put me in the right position to observe, interpret, and reflect on their experiences of the journey.

Another privilege I gained from joining the Roots Pilgrimage tour was to have chances to meet with practitioners from different traditions. There are many different opinions among *shakuhachi* players, and they are often by nature mutually exclusive. Even among *ji-nashi shakuhachi* players and makers, there is a wide range of differences of playing style and belief. These differences have been the source of “tension” among Japanese *shakuhachi* communities. Unlike North American practitioners, who are generally more positive about studying different traditions of *shakuhachi* music with multiple teachers, their Japanese counterparts tend to stay within the boundaries of their own school (*ryu*) and stick to their own lineage. It is not easy for a Japanese person to visit and communicate with people of different lineages and schools, because they expect him to behave in strict accordance to their own norms. I found it liberating to go beyond the boundaries of lineage-based traditions—especially my own school—and meet people from different traditions. Being a researcher enabled me to talk with and interview a variety of people whom I would not otherwise have had an opportunity to meet. In fact, it is me who has been educated as a result of this research.

Our shared experiences of the Roots Pilgrimage trip served as point of reference for our subsequent interactions. We naturally continued to discuss what had happened in Japan. At the end of the trip, I asked the members what it meant to participate in this journey. Their response was something like:

I cannot answer to that question until I go back home. It's kind of like last year it took me months, there was so much going on in the three weeks, and it took me months to absorb it. I was home. Months later, I was still absorbing everything that had happened. .

My understanding of their experiences of the journey owed much to my subsequent interactions with the members in Vancouver. While we were practicing music in a group, having dinner, or meditating together, we referred to our memories of the journey in Japan and renewed our experiences. In fact, my subsequent presence in Vancouver served them as a constant reminder of their memories of the Roots Pilgrimage.

Positionality of the Researcher

Anthropologists distinguished the roles of insider and outsider as providing distinctively different perspectives (*emic* and *etic* perspectives) that serve as a means of generating and interpreting field data. Employing both an insider's and an outsider's perspectives, the researcher engages in the "process of making unfamiliar familiar or making familiar unfamiliar," as is often said. Today, this demarcation has blurred, and the concept of insider and outsider is becoming much more complex. Recent focus, especially in ethnomusicological studies that investigate the researcher's own culture, is placed on the "points of identity" rather than the strangeness of the host culture (Nettl, 2005, p. 187). Trimillos (2004) specifically argues that in a foreign context of Japanese music practice, what matters is one's multiple *positionalities*. Japanese music is practiced

and taught in various settings by different types of agencies—representing cultural bearers, Japanese immigrants, foreign practitioners, and ethnomusicologists—who negotiate their own identities and positionalities within a given context. For example, Trimillos reflects that, when he was teaching in the multicultural setting of Hawai'i, he did not have to think much about his representation of Japanese culture because he himself—a descendant of immigrants from the Philippines—was seen by many Japanese immigrants as a member of their community. So the use of “we” was natural to him in that context. In contrast, he was unconsciously emphasizing the Japanese traditionalism as geared toward “otherness” when he was teaching Japanese music at a white-dominant institution. Trimillos relates that “multiple positionalities are unavoidable” (p. 27) and thus the conflating of the “we” and “them,” the “ours” and “theirs” cannot be avoided in the cross-cultural work.

My positionality as an outsider researcher of a cross-cultural work is explained in several ways. I am a native of Japan who currently residing in North America to pursue my American doctoral degree. I have expertise in both Japanese and Western classical music (piano, trumpet, and the *shakuhachi*) as well as higher degrees in music education. I was not only an insider but also an outsider to the Japanese music community as my enculturation into Japanese music is a temple-based tradition (called *myoan taizan ha*), not the mainstream *shakuhachi* traditions (the *tozan* or *kinko* schools); the former is rarely practiced and has hardly been a theme of research on Japanese music.

Given my background, I used my mixed positionality as a methodological tool. I often used my internal-external positionality tactically, sometimes to solicit agreements and sometimes to challenge disagreements. For example, during the Roots Pilgrimage I

could push the limit of what is acceptable for local Japanese people by using my “foreigner” privilege. In fact, as a group of foreign *shakuhachi* students, “we” had precious opportunities to experience otherwise inaccessible places and unacceptable matters such as asking teachers bold questions, having a chance to offer music at a special room of a castle, and naively playing the *shakuhachi* while waiting for a train in a station. In so doing, I was reminded of the fact that Japanese people tend to become generous, tolerant, understanding, forgiving of unexpected behaviors of foreigners—so called *gaijin (foreigner) privilege* (often dubbed “white privilege”)—which we enjoyed throughout the trip.⁶ This experience was in marked contrast to my earlier experiences. While conducting preliminary research in Japan in Summer 2007, I needed to be careful not to offend Japanese people in each group by challenging their own norm of belief and practice from the perspective of others. I restrained myself from speaking about my own belief about *shakuhachi* practice either, until a mutual trust was established. My participation in the Roots Pilgrimage then “neutralized” and transformed my positionality as a Japanese student to that of an objective yet informed interpreter from North America.

⁶ In *Doing Fieldwork in Japan* edited by Bestor, Steinhoff, and Lyon-Bestor (2003), authors of twenty essays discuss a variety of issues that they have faced in Japan, including “white privilege,” women’s self-effacement and subordination to men, and gaining access to restrictive institutional spaces. Accounts of Japanese descent American researchers reveal that native Japanese expected them, because of their Japanese looking appearances, to behave fully in the Japanese manner, even though the culture and language were no less foreign to these scholars than they were to white American researchers. In the same way, native Japanese expect a native Japanese researcher to naturally understand their intentions without much explanation, while enforcing their own social customs that they would not apply to non-Japanese foreigners. Typically, Japanese social customs seem in the eyes of cultural outsiders to be oppressive, impenetrable, and ruled more by form than content (Keister, 2004). I found this is equally so to cultural insiders.

In contrast, I could express my standpoint as a researcher and my orientation to the *shakuhachi* tradition much more freely in North America, where a syncretism of different traditions to create cultural hybridity is naturally observed, and opposing views are considered positively. Interestingly, I came across one Japanese *shakuhachi* player-teacher in North America who has been in the West for many years. When I told him that I would be meeting with other teachers in town, he reminded me several times that he had been in good relationship with these teachers. As a Japanese person, he was concerned if I would be extra concerned about seeing different teachers in turn. In fact, throughout the Roots Pilgrimage, we were often asked when we would be moving next and where we would be visiting. But we were never asked whom we would be meeting and studying with next.

My positionality as a native researcher was not that of a neutral observer. Coming from an old *shakuhachi* tradition, I unconsciously possessed a sort of tension between the traditional and modern approaches to *shakuhachi* music. Indeed, not only myself but also other practitioners whose *shakuhachi* trainings maintain older styles of practice tended to share a similar feeling, even though the number of these people is quite small (perhaps, less than 5 percent of the whole population of *shakuhachi* practitioners in Japan). I was not ready to face modernization, westernization, globalization, internationalization, or any other force that seemed to be swallowing our old tradition.

Besides, given the literature that reports individualized forms of Zen and the misappropriation of Asian spiritual traditions, I was extra cautious about how the *shakuhachi* is appropriated and approached in the West. The literature points out that many forms of world sacred traditions, including yoga and Zen, are now viewed as

promoting commodification of life in the consumer-driven society. Authors of *Selling Spirituality* Jeremy Carrette and Richard King see the rise of “spirituality” in the market as a means of colonizing and commodifying Asian wisdom traditions and as simplifying “diverse cultural traditions, practices and communities in terms of an increasingly homogenized, sanitized and socially pacifying conception of spirituality” (p. x). They observe that Asian traditions of wisdom are idealized and consumed as long as they satisfy and promote the western image of an autonomous self. Carrette and King argue that, in Buddhist thought, the idea of an autonomous individual self is precisely the problem to be overcome in order to deconstruct the fixed boundaries of the individual self. The kind of hardship and transformation inherent to the training of each tradition is ignored in favor of promoting a positive, healthy self-image. The same probably holds for music: sacred music is transformed and decontextualized to a kind of concert hall music (Bohlman, 1997; Shannon, 2003). The expectation for exotic yet nicely sounding foreign music has created a market of *world music* for production and the consumption of numerous recordings. Steven Feld (2000) observes that “the premise of world music lies in its diversity; however, it is suspended in the spectre of one world music” (p. 181).⁷ Like other forms of flute music, *shakuhachi* music is now grouped with new age, spiritual, healing music in the market of world music.

With this mindset and preconception, I was curious to observe how people in Vancouver and from across North America would approach Japanese music. As indicated above, my actual encounter with North American *shakuhachi* practitioners was so

⁷ Similarly, Nettl (2002) observes that diverse expressions of world music, especially those experienced in schools, often “sound pretty much the same” (p. 39).

positive that I learned much as an educator and *shakuhachi* practitioner. These practitioners were quite serious, often more so than Japanese practitioners, finding Japanese music as part of their identity. They try to learn as many different aspects of *shakuhachi* history and tradition as possible, in a flexible manner beyond the boundaries of the existing schools (Details will be reported in Chapter 9).

In fact, the internationalization of the *shakuhachi* has created an interesting space for inter-traditional and inter-cultural conversations. A professional Japanese *shakuhachi* maker remarked that when he attended the semiannual international *shakuhachi* festival held in New York in 2004, he met people from different traditions whom he had never expected to meet in Japan.⁸ Another professional *shakuhachi* player said, “*When I started the shakuhachi thirty years ago, I never thought that I would end up learning English.*” As a researcher, I also became part of this internalization process of the *shakuhachi*.

My experience with the North American informants instilled in me a critical attitude toward the view of *nihonjin-ron*, often translated as “discussions or theories of Japanese uniqueness.” It is a cultural discourse that focuses on the peculiarities and distinctiveness of Japan and its people from all perspectives (Befu, 1993). The discussions are driven, in part, by the desire of the Japanese to identify their national “self” in relation to the essentialized and ideologized image of the West. Books on *nihonjin-ron* and those celebrating unique characteristics of “anything Japanese” tend to sell well in Japan, satisfying the expectation of a general public that wants to believe the

⁸ In fact, the festival was aimed toward providing “a *diverse* program of classes...from the top teachers and performers of all the major schools and styles: Kinko-Ryu, Tozan-Ryu, Chikuho-Ryu, Ueda-Ryu, Neza-Sa-Ha (Kinpu-Ryu), as well as Dokyoku, Myoan (Meian) Style and pieces played by Jin Nyodo.” (<http://www.bigapplehak.com/bas/festivalhighlights.html>)

country is unique, in its language (Haga, 2004), in its aesthetics (Takashina, 1986), its philosophy (Sakai, 2005), its sensitivity (Minami, 1980), and its way of brain functioning (Tsunoda, 1978). *Nihonjin-ron* thinking, on the one hand, champions the uniqueness of Japanese culture and mentality. On the other hand, it leaves an image that Japanese culture is unique, so much so that it cannot easily be understood by outsiders, and outsiders can never experience the essence of the culture. Similarly, some of the literature on Japanese music emphasizes (or at least suggest) the incompatibility of Japanese music with other forms (e.g., Imada, 2003; Kikkawa, 1979, 1984). My experience of living outside of Japan has convinced me that culture is flexible and able to incorporate aspects from other cultures. This position is the ground on which I stand in this study: North Americans' learning experiences of Japanese music is intercultural and cannot be captured or understood through an essentialist framework.

Informants

During my pilot study, I came across two groups of *shakuhachi* practitioners in Tokyo. The first group was led by Tamio Takagi. Takagi-san⁹ is well known as a *ji-nashi shakuhachi* player both inside and outside of Japan, due largely to his Zen approach to music playing. Unlike those practitioners trained in traditional temple-based contexts, Takagi-san self studied and developed his own version of Zen-inspired *shakuhachi* playing. He does not belong to any *shakuhachi* school characterized by the hierarchical system. For a long time, he was an independent player, only occasionally giving

⁹ Following the Japanese custom, I refer to my Japanese participants by their last names, adding the honorific word *san* to each name.

shakuhachi performances. He started teaching twenty years ago at the request of people seeking lessons from him. Since then, over two hundred people have taken lessons from him. He currently leads a small group of students.

The second group is led by Kentaro Idemitsu. Compared to Takagi-san, Idemitsu-san is not well-known among Japanese *shakuhachi* practitioners. Although he plays well, his aesthetics is different from most players. To put it simply, he intentionally plays unmusically—a way of playing that he and other people in his community believe to be the essence of no-mind *shakuhachi* playing, a key element of self-cultivation (details are explained in Chapter 4). While Takagi-san has his own studio for teaching, Idemitsu-san rents a workshop in an old area of Tokyo where he holds a *shakuhachi* making and playing practice sessions for the public once a week. Because of the location and the antique building of the workshop, many tourists—Japanese and non-Japanese—stop by his workshop during the day. As his workshop faces the road, almost all pedestrians notice his workshop and suspect that “something interesting is going on.” They eventually observe his activities and sometimes experience the *ji-nashi* making. There are about ten men and women who comprise the regular membership of the group, both married and unmarried, but all in their twenties and thirties. In addition to these regular members, there are occasional participants as well, ones who come to the workshop from time to time. The hours of the workshop are from eleven to five. They not only make the instrument here, but play *honkyoku* classical music as well. They also talk about life, eat and drink. Sometimes, an ethnic musician stops by to have a musical session with Idemitsu-san. He also has a place at a community center in another part of Tokyo where

he provides music lessons for those who have become interested in playing the *shakuhachi* at his workshop.

Compared to Idemitsu-san's students, Takagi-san's group is more demographically traditional. The majority of his students are above forty. Many of them have studied (or, to some extent, experienced) other styles of *shakuhachi* music (besides the *honkyoku* tradition) before they took lessons with Takagi-san. They tend to seek a deeper level of spirituality than those in other schools, who study *shakuhachi* for social and communal purposes (Keister, 2004). For example, one of Takagi-san's students encountered a *shakuhachi* performance provided by a *honkyoku* player while he was traveling in India. Greatly influenced by the sound of the *shakuhachi*, he looked for a spiritual approach to *shakuhachi* playing and eventually started taking lessons with Takagi-san. Takagi-san's students also include many visitors from other countries who take intensive lessons for a short period of time. In fact, during our Roots Pilgrimage, we visited him and took lessons with him. We also joined his bamboo harvesting day and music offering night. Besides these North Americans, I also came across student visitors from such countries as Australia, Canada, Spain, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Takagi-san thinks that younger people and foreign practitioners who come to him for lessons tend to have had some kind of deep realization that forced them to reflect on their lives. He said, "*You are one of those people. That's why you are here, isn't it?*"

Both Takagi-san and Idemitsu-san recommend that their students make flutes by themselves and organize bamboo harvesting events. I observed their lessons as well as the *ji-nashi* making process. In the initial stage of my fieldwork, my Japanese data was gained mainly from these two teachers and his students. I interviewed them several times

and had many informal conversations as well. In the meantime, I visited a temple (December 2007) where the office and library of the *Komuso Shakuhachi* Study Group is housed. The monk, president of the Group, introduced me to several people who met my criteria of participant selection. Eventually, I met three of them (Shoji Kondo, Taro Shigemitsu, Toshimi Umehara). I had an official interview with Umehara-san and long meetings with Kondo-san and Shigemitsu-san.

At the same time, I joined as many *shakuhachi* related events as possible, in order to gain a broader view of the field; for example, I participated in the Bisei International Shakuhachi Festival held by the International Shakuhachi Kenshukan (training center) in Okayama, Japan. This event provided me with an opportunity to observe dimensions of the internationalization of *shakuhachi* players. I also joined other groups' activities, such as occasional practice sessions organized by *shihan* licensed teachers in the *tozan* school, university *shakuhachi* clubs of both the *tozan* and the *kinko* schools, and public schools in which the *shakuhachi* had been instructed. These activities helped me understand multifarious dimensions of *shakuhachi* music taught and practiced by different groups of people in Japan. Although their practices and beliefs sometimes contrast with those of my main informants (and do not fit my criteria that look at not only musical, but also spiritual dimensions of the experience), they comprise mainstream *shakuhachi* culture today and are thus worthy of an inquiry that explores their musical and social activities.

My main informants from North America were those who attended the *shakuhachi* making workshop in British Columbia in June 2007 and joined the Roots Pilgrimage later that year. My relationship with them was qualitatively different from the ones I had with my Japanese informants. We remained friends. For example, while I was

in Vancouver, I stayed at one of my informants' places and joined in on long tone practices weekly, as well as weekend outings, where we might play our shakuhachi flutes on a mountainside. We once played together by a mountain river in freezing cold temperature. In the spring, we went out to play by a waterfall. Since the Roots Pilgrimage was such a memorable experience—"a series of serendipities" as one informant described—we spent a lot of time talking about our experiences of the Pilgrimage and what we learned from the trip. There was a strong sense that we were curious learners all the time—learning from each other and being open at each moment to a new experience—rather than being hierarchical and dictating whose knowledge matters most. Emergent themes of my inquiry in such a context were related to the possibility of learning. How we can enrich our daily life through the *shakuhachi*?

In order to gain a broader perspective of what is happening outside of Japan, I also visited New York, Seattle (three times), and Chicago (four times) to meet with local *shakuhachi* practitioners and with people who had attended the *shakuhachi* making workshop. The timeline and significant events of my data collection is listed below. The time frame for data collection inside and outside of Japan was approximately thirteen months, from June 2007 to August 2008. Research into the history, aesthetics, and practice of the *shakuhachi* and spiritual traditions of Japanese music was conducted over a three-year period.

It became clear that there are many practitioners outside of Japan who have had organic experiences through the *shakuhachi*. The editor of the Australian Shakuhachi Society Newsletter discovered my interest and found several practitioners who might be interested in my research. I heard from three of them. I started communicating with one

of them, and our conversations were compiled in the Newsletter of the European *Shakuhachi* Society. Some of the contents were also posted on the *Shakuhachi* Forum. Eventually, I received messages from twelve practitioners. I had no official interview with any of them, but my email communications with them will be introduced in the following chapters.

When	Where	Duration	Significant Events
June 2007	British Columbia	5 days	<i>Shakuhachi</i> making workshop.
July 2007	Vancouver	2 weeks	Taking/Observing lessons; Ro-buki long tone sessions; My first interview with the members
Aug. - Sept. 2007	Tokyo	6 weeks	Visiting Tamio Takagi and Kentaro Idemitsu. First interviews with them.
Nov. - Dec. 2007	Multiple cities across Japan	5 weeks	Bamboo Roots Pilgrimage 2007; Focus group interview with the participants.
Dec. 2007	Tokyo	3 weeks	Participatory observations of the activities; Interviews after lessons; Visiting two schools; Interviewing other Japanese players.
Jan. 2008	Vancouver	3 weeks	Taking/observing lessons; Ro-buki long tone sessions; Informal conversations with the members
Apr. 2008	Vancouver	3 weeks	Taking/observing lessons; Ro-buki long tone sessions; Group performance at UBC Nitobe Garden; Follow-up interview with the members.
May - July 2008	Tokyo	3 months	Participatory observations of the activities; Interviews after lessons. Observing university <i>shakuhachi</i> clubs.
Aug. 2008	Vancouver	3 weeks	Taking/observing lessons; Ro-buki long tone sessions; Informal conversations with the members.
Aug. 2009	Vancouver	1 week	Final confirmation of my thesis

Figure 2. Significant events summary.

Analysis

The main data sources were interviews and participatory observations. My informants' subjective experiences were analyzed and interpreted through qualitative research methods that subscribe to multiple realities and "ethic of caring" as a necessary condition for valid knowledge claims (Collins, 1991; Stake, 1995). In addition to participatory observations and individual interview sessions, I also organized a *focused-group* interview with the participants of the Roots Pilgrimage as an important source of data. I depended my understanding of active interview on Holstein and Gubrium (2002), who suggest that interview is active, collaborative, and creative, which requires the researcher to be an active participant in the interview process.

I also used an ethnomusicological approach to data collection in which the body plays an important role. Whereas conventional social science methods tend to emphasize the objective role of the researcher, there has been a shared understanding that learning and performing music is itself central to ethnomusicologists' data collection. For instance, Mantle Hood and Charles Seeger distinguished between "speech knowledge" of music and performance-based "music knowledge" (Hood, 1971); the latter is explored through the body. The underlying belief is that we may be able to understand other people's experience (of music) better when we experience the event through our bodies. Thus, in my inquiry, participatory observation entailed an active form of participation in music making, not a passive one. I actively joined *shakuhachi* practices and activities.¹⁰

¹⁰ Performance as a data gathering method is probably not widely recognized in the field of education. For example, one of the IRB examiners of the university raised this question to my research proposal: "So what methods of observation will be used if researcher is a participant? Will the researcher observe those activities where he is not a

This stance distinguishes ethno-musicological inquiry, *arts-based* research to use a recent term in social science, from disembodied, "sight-based" research. By reviewing Lincoln and Guba's (1985) position of "naturalistic inquiry," Carspecken (1999) questions the sight-based orientation to fieldwork. He claims that the role of the body is missing in naturalistic inquiry. In fact, the body as a research method as well as a research site was not highlighted in the early development of qualitative inquiry in education. However, this issue is now widely discussed by many education scholars (Powell, 2003; Bresler, 2006). Bresler (2006), for example, argues that narrative is multi-sensory and connection-oriented, like musical communication, and that embodied narrative inquiry as a methodological field is a way to highlight processes and spaces in which people achieve empathetic understanding of lived experience. Researchers bring their verbal, non-verbal, visual, auditory, visceral, multi-sensory sensitivities to the process of communicating research.

The body as a methodological tool is particularly important to the investigation of Japanese music. Highlighted by the notion of *kata* as a pedagogical principle of embodied learning and artistry transmission, Japanese arts, including *shakuhachi* music, have been preserved and transmitted through the embodied form. In the learning of *kata*, verbal instructions and conceptual understanding are intentionally avoided, as they may detract from whole-body grasp of artistry (Hare, 1998; Keister, 2005). It is true that Japanese teachers of traditional music do not explicitly verbalize their pedagogical messages, as illustrated earlier through the conversation between the Japanese and North American

participant?" Clearly, this person possessed an assumption that observation needs to be done objectively, and it cannot be done while the researcher is a participant.

students regarding how their teachers correct their mistakes. Thus, understanding through the body becomes highly important when significant knowledge is conveyed as performance-based “music knowledge” rather than “speech knowledge.”

During my fieldwork, I was exposed to my informants for an extended amount of time. This was especially so when we were on the Roots Pilgrimage. For many days I did not have the alone time necessary to write field notes, as I was occupied 24 hours during the Pilgrimage (except one afternoon when I had a haircut and a five-hour block of free time). I often jotted down brief notes while walking, practicing, or taking lessons. Significant themes emerged while we were engaged in conversations. One difficulty I came across was that I became so close to my informants, especially my North American ones that I sometimes ceased to be a researcher and became a close friend. As a result, my interviews with North American informants often turned out to be less focused than those with my Japanese informants.

Transcriptions of my interview data and field notes of my participatory observations were analyzed and coded for emergent themes in relation to my conceptual framework, as well as to my research questions. Examples of code were “experience of nature,” “playing outside,” “importance of lineage,” “embodiment of the instrument,” “long tone practice,” “music offering,” just to list a few. Often, data overlapped into two or more categories. Japanese data was translated into English only when necessary. Otherwise, I compared Japanese and English data as it is. I constantly did coding, which resulted in a recursive process of changing the emphasis of my analysis. For example, “open-mindedness” was initially a code to describe foreign *shakuhachi* practitioners’ attitude toward different traditions. As I heard my informants’ responses to my question

(what makes them open minded practitioners?) during the focus-group interview, the code was renamed “eclectic attitude” toward different traditions. It was a perplexing question, because “open-mindedness” was not a part of their reality. Three of them responded this way:

Your question reminds me of a very Japanese question. It's a question that comes from a mono culture. I don't think we are terribly open-minded.

It's probably more than being open but recommended. A lot of North American students attended the festival in New York and took lessons with different teachers. Remember Mr. Takahashi (a pseudo name) also went to New York all the way because he couldn't study different traditions in Japan.

Don't forget that our culture is one where we have a lot of Asians living with us, we've got a lot of Europeans and Africans living with us, we've a lot of South Americans, Australians living with us, while look at here, how many packed commuter trains do you need before you see we are not the only non-Japanese here. Basically, the only people we see are Japanese. Everybody is Japanese, Japanese, Japanese. Whereas we do have access to all of these different flavors, different styles, different experts, and different teachers. So we are musically eclectic, culturally eclectic. It's just our nature.

From my personal perspective, this study has been in some sense auto-ethnography in that it revealed and questioned my own values in relation to my informants. While talking to them, I often felt a tension between my Japanese and my Western selves, between my researcher and musician selves, between my traditional and liberal mindsets as a *shakuhachi* practitioner. These were constantly negotiated, contested, and recreated in an attempt to analyze and interpret data. Investigating my experience itself became a site of investigation and provides perspectives for intercultural dialogues. I often juxtaposed my experience with my informants' experiences, and that was a source of our conversations and mutual trust. My informants also found my experience quite interesting, as they were generally interested in a native practitioner's perspective.

CHAPTER 3

CONTEXT OF JI-NASHI SHAKUHACHI PRACTICE

In this chapter, I provide more detailed explanations about the musical, environmental, historical, cultural, and spiritual contexts of the *shakuhachi* practice, drawing on related studies and first-hand accounts of well known *shakuhachi* players. In so doing, I submit a broader picture of the surrounding contexts of my informants' *shakuhachi* practice. This is a necessary task because, unlike practitioners of other forms of Japanese music (such as the *koto* and the *shamisen*), my informant *shakuhachi* practitioners do not belong to any established music organizations, institutions, or major *shakuhachi* schools. This means that the belief system that my informants share has little to do with that of the school-based *hogaku* ("traditional Japanese") music tradition. Yet, research has provided little information about the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice.¹¹ In fact, most ethnomusicological studies on Japanese music have predominantly investigated the system of *hogaku* music and practices in the major *shakuhachi* schools. Similarly, most educational attempts have focused on reproducing the values of *hogaku* music. In what follows, I first provide an array of background information necessary to understand the nature of the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice. Later, drawing on the literature on Japanese artistry transmission, I introduce the nature of *ji-nashi* studies.

¹¹ Exceptions are Keister (2004) and a forthcoming dissertation work by Kiku Day at the School of Oriental and African Studies at University of London.

The Environment Context

Traditionally, *shakuhachi* makers lived in places where bamboo was readily available. These places are called *satoyama* (translated as “land in the foot of mountain”) and have been cultivated over centuries of local agricultural and forestry practices. *Satoyama* contains a mosaic of mixed forests, rice fields, streams, scattered houses, and wild animals. These form a natural environment in which humans and nature coexist in a harmonious way. *Satoyama* also provides biodiversity: A variety of plants, insects, and animals are able to live in healthy, well maintained forests. The lack of maintenance results in an unhealthy, unbalanced ecosystem in the *satoyama* environment.

Today, the nature of *satoyama* has changed. Forests and fields are badly maintained. Bamboo groves are neglected and have become bleak. The inside of such bamboo groves are too dark for any plant to grow. In many places, uncontrolled bamboo groves are causing difficult problems: Because bamboo’s underground roots extend about 15 feet a year in every direction and its stems grow 50 feet in a few months, uncontrolled bamboo can erode the land. Eventually, other plants are killed, and forest floors are denuded and corroded. Unless properly maintained, bamboo groves can easily destroy a local ecosystem.

The Shikoku Shinbun Newspaper reported some observable problems deriving from the decline of the bamboo industry in the Sanuki region (Dec 5, 2004). It reports that the volume of bamboo production in 2002 decreased to only 1 percent from its peak in 1964; and the volume of bamboo shoots produced as food decreased by 90 percents during the last 20 years. Behind these declines was a change in lifestyle: For instance, the traditional house making that used a large amount of bamboo (for walls and ceilings)

have become less popular and have been replaced with western style houses. Coincidentally, western lifestyles that do not depend on bamboo consumption became more popular. In the meantime, plastic products have taken the place of bamboo ones. Imported low-priced bamboo from China is now sufficient to meet Japan's small demand for bamboo and threatens to destroy the domestic bamboo industry in Japan.

While introducing new technology to make use of abundant neglected bamboo groves, the newspaper report introduces alternative products: charcoals, cosmetics, feeds, building materials, natural bamboo vinegar, etc. It also features an interview with a professor of environmental science at a local university. He pointed out that unattended bamboo groves will increase the danger of mud slides and decrease the capacity of a mountain as a water reservoir. According to him, it may take more than a few hundred years before a forest can retrieve its natural state without the intervention of human beings. His assertion is that bamboo groves need to be attended, thinned out, and well kept in order to maintain the healthy state of a forest. If properly maintained by human activities, bamboo can be the most useful of recyclable, environmentally friendly natural resources.

Most people have left *satoyama*, and their urban lives have been isolated from nature. In the meantime, *shakuhachi* makers stopped taking the integrated role of bamboo harvester and *shakuhachi* maker. Today, most professional *shakuhachi* makers buy dried bamboo from specialized bamboo harvesters. In my study, years of search for traditional *shakuhachi* makers who live close to bamboo groves yielded only six cases (including two American makers who live in Japan, as introduced later). However, quite a number of people are still actively engaged in digging and harvesting bamboo, making

instruments out of nature, and finding the greatest joy out of playing their self-made flutes. My informants—who are not professional *shakuhachi* makers or players—are amongst them. Unlike what has been practiced traditionally, they live far away from *satoyama* areas and travel by car for bamboo hunting.

The Ji-nashi Shakuhachi

My participants either exclusively use the primitive type of the flute or both the modern and the primitive types. This primitive *shakuhachi* is called *ji-nashi shakuhachi* (other names of this type are *hocchiku*, *kyotaku*, *ji-nashi-nobekan*, etc.). The *ji-nashi shakuhachi* is traditionally made from a single piece of bamboo with minimal artificial modification in order to maximize the character that the segment naturally bears. Unlike modern *shakuhachi* instruments that come apart into two pieces in the middle, the traditional ones are of a single piece. Whereas the modern type of the *shakuhachi* is made with a filling material, called *ji*, placed inside the bamboo to control the diameter of the inner bore of the bamboo and thus to produce tuned pitches, such processing is not identified with the traditional *shakuhachi*. Hence, the traditional type is known as *ji-nashi*, literally “no *ji*” or “absence of *ji*.” Differences are identified in terms of not only the specific method of instrument making but also the philosophy regarding the extent to which people are encouraged to control nature. The *ji-nashi* is much less processed and closely resembles the natural state of each piece of bamboo.

One of the *shakuhachi* makers who still lives close to a *satoyama* environment is Kyle. He explained in my interview with him different approaches to the modern (called

ji-ari shakuhachi) and the primitive *shakuhachi* (called *ji-nashi shakuhachi*). From a maker's viewpoint, the difference is:

Essentially it's very simple. In the ji-ari, I am going to use a gauge that is patterned after a flute that plays very, very well so I copied that bore profile and shape as closely as I could.... Because you are working by hand, every flute is going to be slightly unique. Even if you use a casting process for that initial bore shape, because of the thickness of the bamboo holes and everything else, every flute is going to sound a little different. You work it up to play as good as you possibly can. But the idea is that you follow a pattern, you follow a gauge. Now, with the ji-nashi, you leave it. The aesthetic is that you leave it as natural as possible but have it play acceptably. So this means some flutes need a lot more work than others. And maybe one in every fifty flutes, I get a flute that I don't have to add anything.... But again the aesthetic is that there is no gauge. You get what you get.

Because each *ji-nashi* instrument is made out of a natural element, each has different musical qualities (timbre, pitch, playability) that depend on the nature of the bamboo and the artist-maker who has fashioned it into a *shakuhachi* (Shimura, 2002). The result is an instrument that demonstrates less standardization and allows for a greater degree of variation because each is individualized to a particular maker and player and rooted in a particular location and time. These unmodified *shakuhachi* instruments allow practitioners to establish their own styles. Thus, a great instrument for one person is not necessarily so to another. The instrument is not universally appreciated because of its "character," but each character attracts and allows the practitioner to develop his or her own relationship (attachment and association) with the instrument (details are explained in Chapter 5).

This unique quality of the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* is essential for the individual practice of the *shakuhachi* as a form of Zen. On the one hand, this feature renders the instrument unsuitable for playing in an ensemble and limits the instrument to a solo performance of the *honkyoku* repertoire. On the other hand, it displays a wide degree of

differences in terms of playability, sound, and intonation. Indeed, *honkyoku*, the classical repertoire of *shakuhachi* music, is often paraphrased by masters as *honnin-no-kyoku*, literally “music of one’s own.” Keister (2004) observes that “With less standardization and a greater degree of variation from flute to flute, the unique quality of one’s own hochiku [*ji-nashi*] becomes desirable for the individual practice of ‘one’s own *honkyoku*’” (p. 111). In fact, many people find this aspect of the *shakuhachi* practice emancipating and liberating. Several voices of *shakuhachi* players are introduced in Keister’s paper. Riley Lee, a *shakuhachi* player based in Australia, thinks finding a good quality instrument is not an issue when playing a *ji-nashi*: “I think developing one’s body (especially the embouchure) in relation to the instrument is most important in hochiku” (p. 111). These players’ voices challenge our conventional notion of what constitutes a quality musical instrument while highlighting its musical and spiritual values.

Repertoire and Diverse Performing Styles

Most *shakuhachi* players today enjoy a variety of *shakuhachi* music, ranging from its classic solo music (called *koten honkyoku* or simply *honkyoku*) to ensemble music (*sankyoku*) and contemporary compositions. Although practitioners of different schools use different names (and the same term may signify a different genre of music), my participants mostly play *koten honkyoku*, a classical *shakuhachi* style practiced by *komuso* monks several centuries ago.

This classic repertoire of *shakuhachi* music has many variations due to its origin. Many pieces are believed to have been formed some hundred years ago in Japan; the oldest piece is believed to have been created by a monk in the thirteenth century who

studied Zen in China.¹² Like folk music, the origin of *honkyoku* music is unknown. Later time, during the Edo period (1603-1867), *honkyoku* was widely practiced, inherited, and transmitted by *komuso* Zen monks who wandered around for spiritual training (and for alms) while playing the *shakuhachi*. Each temple had its own distinctive playing style.¹³ *Komuso* monks from different temples exchanged their own *honkyoku* pieces and taught each other their distinct styles. During the Edo period, musical exchanges among *komuso* monks were commonly observed as their temples exercised control only over monks' moral activities, not how *honkyoku* music should be played (Tsukitani, 2000). As a result, *honkyoku* tunes went through many changes as they were orally transmitted from person to person, temple to temple, region to region, and from generation to generation. The same piece has been played in many different ways in different regions, to the extent that “variations transmitted and practiced in different regions do not seem to have derived from the same piece” (Iino, 1989). This was especially true before musical notation became widely available for *shakuhachi* players. Even relatively new *honkyoku* pieces—those few pieces that were created after the abolishment of Buddhism in 1868 and the following destruction of Buddhist temples—have been played in significantly different

¹² The origin of *shakuhachi* music is unknown. Its origin as an instrument of *gagaku* court music—characterized by the six finger holes—was already found in the eighth century. Soon, however, it was no longer used in *gagaku*. After centuries of disappearance, it revived again in the fourteenth and fifteenth century (during the *muromachi* period) as a shorter flute with no root end, called *hitoyogiri*. A historical text, *Kyotaku Denki Kokujikai*, explains that fuke Zen *shakuhachi* music was disseminated by Hotto Kokushi (or Kakushin), a monk who studied Zen in China, who lived at Kokokuji temple in Wakayama prefecture in the thirteenth century. Today, most people think that the history reported in this document was allegedly created in a later time.

¹³ It is said that there used to be about eighty *komuso* temples across Japan in the eighteenth century.

ways. As such, it is common for today's *shakuhachi* players to encounter many different versions of *honkyoku* music, some characterized by “different pieces with the same title” or “different titles for the same piece,” developed through different schools, regions, and historical periods (Tsukitani, 2000).¹⁴

Today, encountering the diverse playing styles and versions of *honkyoku* music is part of every *shakuhachi* player's experience. An experienced Japanese *shakuhachi* player who had years of intensive training as a *shakuhachi* apprentice in Japan (who now lives in North America) described his first impression of the *shakuhachi kenso-kai* (musical offering event) in Kyoto 40 years ago:

At the kenso-kai, every playing of the honkyoku, even though the same tune, sounded quite differently, to the level that I sometimes couldn't tell if they were playing the same piece.

Since then, he has thought that individual difference is part of how *honkyoku* music is played. Individual difference derives from not only the fact that this type of music has been transmitted in different traditions, but also that it allows each player to embody the music differently. In fact, *honkyoku* music, when played, demonstrates a significant individual style. The rhythm of one's playing is based on the breathing pattern that is acquired and refined through repeated practices with his or her teacher. Because of this

¹⁴ Tsukitani (2000) provides a musicological analysis of aurally transmitted *honkyoku* music and its diverse playing styles—characterized by “different tunes with the same title” and “same tunes with different titles” found in different schools, regions, historical periods. Whereas *shakuhachi* players tend to be drawn to differences of playing styles and transmitted music among different traditions, Tsukitani identifies common elements by which to lump together different titles and playing styles of music that share the same origin. For example, she picks up five versions of the *honkyoku* piece, *koku*, transmitted in different *shakuhachi* traditions and exemplifies that one fifth of the entire part of every piece is identical.

feature, the *honkyoku* repertoire is often paraphrased as *honnin no kyoku*, which means “one’s own music,” as introduced earlier. One of the teachers, with whom we had a lesson during the Roots Pilgrimage, remarked several times: “*You learn this today. But you should forget it tomorrow.*” His intension was not to suggest that we should ignore his advice but to emphasize that *honkyoku* learning allows for individualizing and personalizing the music.

Individualized Style of Playing and Teaching

Individual players’ influences on the *honkyoku* playing style have been enormous. Some *shakuhachi* players, such as Jinbo Masanosuke (1841–1914), are believed to have taught *honkyoku* music while constantly modifying the music itself depending on the level of their students. This resulted in the existence of multiple credited styles of his *honkyoku* music playing (Tsukitani, 2000). Jin Nyodo (1891–1966), another great player in the twentieth century, is said to have taught the *meri* technique (to lower the pitch) in different ways. Those who studied with Jin when he was young tended to execute the deep *meri* only by changing the chin angle against the blowing edge without shading a finger hole. This technique is so demanding that few players, outside of Jin, were thought to be able to execute it. Later in life, Jin became more flexible in regard to the way the deep *meri* was executed. Following the change of his *meri* execution style, his students became more positively accepting the use of finger as an aid to lowering the pitch (by covering or shading a finger hole).

As these examples indicate, one’s teaching of *honkyoku* music can change over time and with different students. Riley Lee (1991) observes,

The inconsistency of interpretation occurs in the teaching method employed in transmitting *honkyoku*, namely where the teacher constantly attributes different meanings to the symbol during different lessons, with different students and/or during different performances, usually with no explanations offered. (p. 33)

A case in point, introduced in Lee's article, is Yokoyama Katsuya's learning experience of the piece *san'an* ("safe delivery") with the legendary player Watazumi Fumon. It took Yokoyama three years to master this particular piece because of the many stylistic changes Watazumi made during the course of lessons. By the end of the third year, the piece was considerably altered. Besides, the performing style(s) that Yokoyama learned from Watazumi over the course of his personal lessons was different from what he had heard and admired in one of his early recordings. By the time Watazumi taught this piece to Yokoyama, it had already changed considerably from the recording (Yokoyama, 1985). This anecdote indicates that for great performers such as Watazumi, *honkyoku* playing was not confined to sheet music. Rather, sheet music was merely a medium of recording the performer's temporary rendition of the music.¹⁵ The actual performance and teaching style may change over time as the player embodies a further relationship with the music. Thus, the gap between notated music and the actual playing is commonly observed in their performances and teaching-learning situations. Lee concludes that "this fascinating element of transmission in the *honkyoku* tradition is related to the concepts of creativity, change, and status (p. 33). Today, many teachers, including Yokoyama's students, instruct *honkyoku* music through sheet music, and sheet music is treated more as

¹⁵ In the context of Japanese artistry transmission, sheet music has been used as a recording medium, kept hidden behind students' reach (as a *hiden* or "hidden" text, Moriya, 1994), served as a source of authority. Only a limited number of people were allowed to access the knowledge by the *iemoto*, or the head of the school. Thus, sheet music was not meant to be used as a medium of everyday teaching and learning.

an authoritative text that students must follow. Still, individualized playing and teaching styles are widely accepted.

Creativity of Imitation

Although many modern *shakuhachi* tunes have been composed in the past hundred years, they are significantly different from *honkyoku* music in style. Much of recent *shakuhachi* music in Japan sounds more like “Western music with Japanese flavor” or “Japanese music in western styles” than *honkyoku* music. In fact, as introduced earlier, there are only a few *honkyoku* pieces that have been “composed” in the past hundred years. Examples are *ajikan* created by Miyagawa Nyozan (1868–1946), *mujushin no kyoku* by Jin Nyodo (1891-1966), and *ukigumo* by Watazumi Fumon (1911–1992). These “modern” *honkyoku* tunes do still sound identical to other traditional *honkyoku* pieces because of their stylistic similarities.

The notion of composition embodied by legendary *shakuhachi* practitioners clearly differs from how it is conceived of today. Put it simply, creating new music is reserved only for the greatest performers—great enough to establish new schools—after decades of training and mastery of *honkyoku* music. The following remark by Jin Nyodo, one of the greatest players of the twentieth century, testified how he approached the act of creating a new song as a natural result of the mastery of existing *honkyoku* music rather than his enduring effort to compose an individual work.

Creating great music is not a result of an individual’s intention and effort. The movement of the universe manifests itself through humans and becomes music. Thus, music is not to be composed but “born.” This is how I see it. I am too busy practicing the classical repertoire of music and I have never intended to compose music by myself. But I have had this hope in mind; that is, someday a piece of music naturally develops out of my life spirit. Interestingly enough, this dream

came true when I was traveling in China. This piece of music, I would say, is not my “composition” (*sakkyoku*) but naturally “born” (*shokyoku*).

The view of composition as “naturally born” is the result of the mastery of the *kata*, or a bodily form of artistry. The mastery of *kata* requires years of practice and imitation of the model through the body, as explained later. Years of practice and embodiment of the model eventually allow the practitioner to be skillful and imaginative enough to represent the model in a personalized way; it can then become a new piece.

This personalizing process is vivid and ongoing for great players, as illustrated by the case of Yokoyama’s study with Watazumi. The fact that Watazumi taught Yokoyama the same piece in different ways at different times represents the evolution of Watazumi’s ongoing embodiment of the piece. Yokoyama was confused by the many changes that Watazumi made. This explains that once the *kata*, the basic form of the piece, is embodied and mastered, it becomes an individualized form, and “one’s own expression” emerges naturally. Creative learning through *kata* is identified here.

Jinbo Masanosuke’s “composition” of *jinbo-sanya* is another example of how a great player renders a piece. It is said that he practiced an already existing tune (a version of *sanya* transmitted in the Echigo area) many times every day, and it became “his own music.” People soon started saying, “*Jinbo means sanya. Sanya means Jinbo.*” Today, *jinbo-sanya* is considered as an independent piece, distinguished from other *sanya* pieces (that are called in different ways: *san’an*, *oshu-saji*, or *oshu-sanya*). The creation of *jinbo-sanya* was a result of Jinbo’s enduring practice of the piece as a model.

In fact, imitation of a model has traditionally been the core of Japanese artistry transmission (Malm, 1959/2000; Gutzwiller, 1974; Trimillos, 1983). Rohlen and

LeTendre (1996/1998) points out that imitation is the highest form of praise in the logic of Japanese culture. They observe,

Whereas Americans relegate imitation to a position inferior to creativity, Japanese culture elevates imitation as a powerful road to mastery. This concept of mutuality does not extend simply to persons. The term “mastery” has meanings far different from our Western sense of domination and rule. Mastery is a process of adapting oneself to the material rather than of controlling or subordinating the material to oneself. Conversely, it may be argued that the learner must first accept his or her subordination to the material, task, or form. The advanced potter says he has learned from the clay. (p. 371)

Similarly, upon observing differences between Japanese and American teachers of the Suzuki violin method, Peak (1998) states,

Japanese teachers, however, do not consider imitation in such a negative light. They believe that in the effort to approximate an ideal model, students will gain the superior qualities of a great performer, rather than lose that which is distinctive about themselves.... “Creative” or merely different interpretations are not valued solely for their distinctive quality if they lack a concomitant excellence of artistic taste and a high level of technical skills. Students are believed to gain such technical control through tireless attempts to approximate a worthy model, and to develop taste by becoming so imbued with the style of an excellent performer that it becomes their second nature. (p. 358-359)

Unique to the *shakuhachi* tradition is a view of creativity as “modification of the old” rather than “creation of something new.” Often, great players add a few notes and/or phrases to already existing songs, instead of composing new pieces from scratch, to make their own music. For example, Higuchi Taizan (1856-1914), who served as abbot of a *myoan* temple in Kyoto, established his own school (*myoan taizan* sect) by editing, modifying, and compiling 33 *honkyoku* tunes. He brought some of these from his home in the Nagoya area, and others he collected from other temples and regions. An example is his rendering of *kumoi-jishi*, a piece that features an introduction and ending added by Higuchi. Some of his school’s repertoire was composed in this way.

Whereas legendary players such as Higuchi changed the original *honkyoku* music so much that some of their rendering of *honkyoku* pieces sounded like their own compositions, Jin Nyodo (1891-1966), who visited *shakuhachi* temples across Japan and collected about a hundred and fifty *honkyoku* pieces in the early twentieth century, tried to preserve the original forms of music as much as possible. He did so by indicating the origin of each piece. Yet, despite his efforts to preserve the original regional styles of *honkyoku* music, his playing of these “preserved” classics was valued by many as much as his own renditions of *honkyoku* music style (Tsukitani, 2000). Because he had his own distinctive playing style, what he transmitted and taught to his students was more like Jin Nyodo’s rendering of *honkyoku* music than the original pieces.

Modifying existing pieces to create new compositions was a recognized form of creativity in the world of *honkyoku* music. Change of the title and ownership was also loosely defined. Tomimori Kyozan (1899–1975), a well-respected *shakuhachi* player and scholar, clearly stated that changing the title is acceptable but playing a piece in a different way without changing the title is problematic:

Today, the piece ajikan is played quite differently compared to how Miyagawa Nyozan [the composer] played the piece. Although the shape is the same, the level of spirit is different. Nyozan’s verve is no longer carried by today’s players.... The reason why many people today play ajikan in such a way is that many people learned ajikan from Tani Kyochiku who used 2.5 long shakuhachi. That’s how it became a dull, dark song. Miyagawa Nyozan played it on 1.8.... Miyagawa’s playing of ajikan actually sounded quite rough. But he had subtle expressions. Nobody could imitate his level of frantic playing.... This is what is missing in today’s performances. Only the shape is imitated. People simply drag the song and extend the form.... Tani Kyochiku’s playing of ajikan also carries some sort of taste and import. However, Miyagawa Nyozan kept saying, “I wonder where he [Tani] learned it [ajikan] from? If it is Miyagawa Nyozan’s ajikan, it would be troublesome.” I think it would be fine to have Tani Kyochiku’s ajikan. But in order to do so, he should have changed the title of the piece.

Tomimori's point here can be explained through the concept of *tai* ("embodied form") and *yū* ("expressiveness" or "taste") used in noh performance. If someone expresses a piece only with *yū* (that is without *tai*), the performance is not considered as a representation of the piece. In other words, it becomes a different piece. The founder of noh, Zeami Motokiyo (1364–1443), elaborated it in this way:

One must know *tai-yū* in Noh. *Tai* is like a flower and *yū* is like its scent. Or *tai* is like the moon and *yū* like the moon-light. If one has a thorough comprehension of *tai*, one should naturally possess *yū*. . . . No one should copy the *yū*, the outer appearance of the performance. Those who know enough see another actor's performance with heart and soul and so copy the work of *tai*. When the *tai* is closely copied, the actor's performance will naturally have *yū* with it. (Sekine, 1985, pp. 117–118)

To explain Tomimori's observation of two different versions of *ajikan* played by Miyagawa and Tani, Tani imitated the *yū* of Miyagawa's performance, but not the *tai*, the embodied form (*kata*) of his playing. Since only the outer form or shape of the music was imitated, Tomimori emphasized, the title of Tani's *ajikan* should have been changed.

This is why we often come across *honkyoku* pieces that sound identical but have different titles. We had a confusing experience during our Roots Pilgrimage. At one temple, one member played the *honkyoku* piece *shingetsu* (heart moon). The monk asked him: "Is it *yamato choshi* (tune from the Yamato region of old Japan)?" We naively answered, "No. This is *shingetsu*." Later, we realized that *shingetsu* is Watazumi's rendering of *yamato choshi*. It is one of the many pieces that Watazumi "composed" by adding his own personal flavor to the existing *honkyoku* pieces. In so doing, he changed the titles of the original pieces.

It was not until the appearance of modern *shakuhachi* players such as Nakao Tozan (1876–1956), who composed music in the modern sense, that new forms of

shakuhachi solo music emerged. Contemporary musicians no longer compose music in the traditional sense—in the same way as those great players did (the modification approach). As Smith (2008) mentions, “Many of...younger [*shakuhachi*] players are striving for originality, as well as leaving their name and their music in the art world” (p. 64). In fact, *shakuhachi* music composed in the twentieth century does not generally incorporate the host of musical features accumulated in hundreds of *honkyoku* pieces.

Pedagogy of Kata

As illustrated above, one aspect of Japanese music and artistry transmission is the primacy of bodily form. It is useful for the subsequent analysis of *shakuhachi* learning to be linked with the literature on this form of artistry transmission. *Kata* is the philosophical principle that underpins this transmission (e.g., Keister, 2004; Powell, 2004; Yuasa, 1987). Traditional Japanese arts have been preserved and transmitted through *kata*, literally “form” or “mold,” through which students learn structures of art, patterns of artistic and social behaviors, and moral and ethical values, all in accordance with prescribed formulae. Central to this pedagogy is the repeated practice and imitation of the model through the body. The acquisition of *kata* is thus a “discipline for shaping one’s body into a form” (Yuasa, 1987, p. 105). Trimillos’ (1989) observation of a Japanese teacher epitomizes the characteristics of *kata* learning: “The teacher seldom identifies the error, but waits until the phrase is played correctly and then expresses approval” (repetition of practice) and “the goal is to perform the piece exactly as the teacher has presented it” (imitation of the model) (p. 39).

Yano (2002) observes that the Western dualism between form and content, each of which traditionally corresponds to the false and the true, dissolves as continuous and interpenetrating parts in the theory of *kata*. *Kata* is content attendant upon form. The creative goal of *kata*-training is “to fuse the individual to the form so that the individual becomes the form and the form becomes the individual” (p. 26). *Kata* is also a social practice in that it involves the body directly into a social setting. Through the correct imitation of formal patterns, students participate in the social embodiment of behaviors. The difference between *kata* and what we are familiar with as “form” (called *katachi* in Japanese) is that the former is a content-attendant, embodied, habitual, contextualized, and value-laden form, whereas the latter is an abstract and empty form. *Kata* historicizes, socializes, and spiritualizes the individual, but *katachi* formulates, abstracts, and standardizes one’s imagination and thought.

Ikuta (1987) discusses the transmission of artistry through *kata*. It inevitably involves a “non-step-by-step” process of learning, which often contradicts the school curriculum in which contents are organized in a sequential manner, from the easy to the difficult. Students experience the whole from the beginning of their learning, not bit by bit or piece by piece, utilizing their entire bodies. The first piece students learn may be as difficult as the last piece in terms of technical demands, though the emphasis on the spiritual value of those pieces may vary. The same is true of the *honkyoku* tradition, in which the first piece that students would learn, *honte-choshi*, is not necessarily easier than other pieces. Although it is short in length, it includes tones of low and high registers. This piece serves many practitioners as a basic form of music, a sort of *kata*, as they practice this piece on a daily basis (details are reported in Chapter 7).

The boundary of *kata* as a historical depository of living artistry is deemed to be something students should master and overcome. When it is achieved, a new form of artistry and school is identified. Minamoto (1989) sheds light on the indigenous notion of artistry mastery in Japan that consists of three steps. *Shu*, *ha*, and *ri*. The stage of *shu* (or “hold,” “keep,” “preserve”) is to follow the traditional method of learning through established *kata*. At this stage, the dominant task of learning is blind imitation of the form. The stage of *ha* (or “break”) involves breaking the traditional form of *kata*. It is in this stage that the personalization of the form is recognized. Once the form is fully embodied by the learner, he or she is allowed to experiment beyond what the tradition teaches—such as learning from other traditions. Finally, establishing a new form or style of practice is achieved by “abandoning the form” and “distancing the tradition” in the stage of *ri* (the meaning of *ri*, or a different reading of the same word *hanareru*, includes “abandoning,” “distancing,” and “exceeding”). The level of artistry, often described as *hanare-waza* (“exceeding artistry” or feat), is believed to be achieved by someone who has mastered the basic form of *kata*, studied maximum possibilities of artistic expression, and established a new form of expression. While *kata*-based learning has been viewed and criticized by those with product-oriented images of creativity as formulaic (Rohlen, 1996/1998), significant aspects of *kata*-based learning, such as the importance of breaking the form and creating a new form, have been ignored. Although only gifted artists are historically allowed to break the *kata* of the tradition and establish a new style, this does not mean that the creative impulse is not part of *kata*-based learning. New traditions of *shakuhachi* playing have been established by those “*kata*-breaking” masters

such as Kurosawa Kinko, Jin Nyodo and Watazumi Fumon whose playing styles were sufficiently distinctive to be recognized as new forms.

Throughout the process, verbal instruction and conceptual understanding are intentionally avoided as they may distract a whole-body grasp of artistry (Hare, 1998). Keister (2004) relates that “with training based on *kata*, there is no artistic content for the performer to cognitively ‘grasp,’ but instead a surface aesthetic that ‘grasps’ or transforms the performer, shaping the artist into the form of the art itself” (p. 103). One thing this bodily orientation to music learning would suggest is that the word *interpretation* is not appropriate to explain great players’ unique, individual styles of music making, for interpretation refers to analysis and mind-centered reflection. It often involves devising ways to construct one’s own individual, unique expression and dig out hidden meanings inherent to music written by someone else. This notion of interpretation as an individual rendition of otherwise formulaic performance runs counter to the idea of “naturally born” musical expression through the trained body. The latter type of music making is gained through *kata*-based, embodied learning in which the student goes through repeated practice of a form and imitation of a model. In this system, individuality develops from an embodied apprehension of the form rather than from interpretation.

The above features of knowledge transmission in the *honkyoku* tradition are identical to those in the *koto* tradition that are summarized by Halliwell (1994): (a) there is virtually no explicit ‘theory’ or teaching of theory as it is known in the West; (b) there are no ‘exercises;’ the teaching of instrumental and vocal technique is integrated with the teaching of musical ‘text;’ (c) there is no explicit conceptual distinction between ‘text’ and ‘interpretation;’ one learns to play following the teacher’s example; (d) there is very

little verbal explanation, either of technique or of musical or expressive content, (e) playing together with the teacher is fundamental, (f) teachers may use *shoga* (oral representation of musical sound), or purely musical means to convey information to the student; and (g) notation, of used nowadays, is nevertheless of relatively minor importance.

Groups of Honkyoku Music Practitioners

Today, the *honkyoku* tradition is largely transmitted and practiced by the persons of the *kinko* and *myoan* schools, as well as by independent practitioners who belong to relatively small groups. The *kinko* school was established by Kurosawa Kinko (1710–1771), the foremost *shakuhachi* player of the eighteenth century. He collected existing *honkyoku* pieces and, for the first time in the *shakuhachi* history, established his own school. In contrast, *myoan* is a generic term to describe temple-based traditions. The name *myoan* came directly from the *myoan* temple in Kyoto. Temple-based traditions were abandoned when the government decided to abolish Buddhism in 1868 in favor of the militaristic, nationalistic stream of shinto. One of the main contributors to the restoration of the *myoan* temple and the temple-based *honkyoku* tradition was Higuchi Taizan (1856–1914), who later became an abbot of the temple. Today, by *myoan*, many people mean this stream of the *myoan* tradition established by Higuchi Taizan (called *myoan taizan-ha*).¹⁶ Another major secular *shakuhachi* school is the *tozan* school,

¹⁶ Other streams of the temple-based tradition also exist; for example, Icchoken temple in Fukuoka, one of very few *komuso* temples currently existent in Japan. Only a small number of people practice the *myoan shinpo* tradition that existed at *Myoan* temple before Higuchi Taizan took office. As *komuso* temples disappeared in time, the *honkyoku* tradition has been practiced and transmitted by the practitioners of the *kinko* school and

established by Nakao Tozan (1876–1956). Tozan founded his own school with a new repertoire of music that combined western notions of rhythm and structure. Major differences between these *shakuhachi* schools lie not only in their religious-secular orientations, but also in the differing styles of *shakuhachi* used. *Myoan* practitioners and independent-minded *shakuhachi* practitioners (e.g., members of the *komuso shakuhachi* study group in Tokyo) tend to use the *ji-nashi shakuhachi*.

Today, each of these *shakuhachi* schools has several streams that share the same repertoire but do not necessarily agree with or support one another. Each stream has its own *iemoto* (“head of household”). The *iemoto* system has been the dominant model of artistry transmission in Japan. Students’ experiences of the arts often revolve around the master-student relationship in the *iemoto* system. Keister (2001) observes that the *iemoto* is the physical embodiment of the tradition, the personification of the musical style practiced by the school, and the symbolized authority that can alone set the artistic standard of the school and grant licenses to teach and perform the art.¹⁷ For this reason,

individual practitioners who formed their own groups outside of the temple-based context; examples of such groups are *nezasa-ha* (established by Yoshizaki Hachiya Kodo (1778–1855) who studied at Ichigetsu temple in Tokyo) and *tani-ha* (formed by Tani Kyochiku (1882–1950)). Today, these groups of practitioners are lumped together and categorized to form the “myoan” school. Although the *myoan* school narrowly refers to a group of practitioners who belong to the myoan temple association in Kyoto (called *myoan taizan-ha*), it remains an abstract concept. Historically, the *myoan* school as a concept emerged from the need to distinguish temple-based *honkyoku* playing groups from the *kinko* and *tozan* schools.

¹⁷ Hebert (2005) observes that the *iemoto* model appears to have immensely influenced on the institutionalization of Western music in Japanese conservatories where “pedagogical lineage” and “authority” are associated with the *iemoto* system of Japanese schools of Western music.

Trimillos (1989) observes that “the status of sensei, teacher, is so high above the student” (p. 39).¹⁸

Independent Practitioners

My participants have weak association with the traditional *iemoto* system. Some belong to loosely associated groups of temple-based traditions. Some have attained a higher level of mastery in the *tozan* or *kinko* school and sought a more profound level of musical spirituality. Some of them are actually self taught *shakuhachi* practitioners whose practice involves sharing knowledge and experience with fellow practitioners at a study group, such as the Komuso Shakuhachi Kenkyukai, a Tokyo-based study group dedicated to the study of *komuso* monks’ unknown activities and the classical repertoire of the *shakuhachi*. There are other groups like this one that hold an annual musical offering session, called *kensokai* (Details are explained in Chapter 8). These practitioners often play the *shakuhachi* for their spiritual cultivation.¹⁹

¹⁸ With its negative association of feudalism, the *iemoto* system has been criticized particularly with regard to its male dominant structure in such areas as tea ceremony and flower arrangement. Although *iemoto* organizations in these areas thrive on a large student base of female amateur hobbyists, the top *iemoto* are predominantly male. Given this androcentric hierarchy, however, some scholars reported that female practitioners who pursue the course of study with no professional aspirations—the main body of hobbyists in today’s “lesson culture” (Moriya, 1994)—find the practice of the art emancipating (e.g., Kato, 2004).

¹⁹ For example, one player kept taking *shakuhachi* lessons with a renowned *shakuhachi* teacher for almost 25 years since the age of 32 by working two labor jobs in order to pay for lesson fees and to buy good flutes. He had but limited hours to practice and sleep after work. This research owes much to my encounters with people like this individual.

Some of the *shakuhachi* students whom I came across during my fieldwork in Japan, especially the younger students, seemed to have found the *shakuhachi* as a way of identifying the meanings of life. A recent trend of *jibun-sagashi*, or “a quest of the true self,” is a phenomenon observed among younger people yearning for the affirmation of their existence in a materialistically rich and relationally poor society. These people often embark on a long journey in a foreign country. Some join a religious group or engage in environmental protection activities. Some sink into self-help, self-enlightenment seminars. Extreme cases are those who join foreign armies and go to war zones to experience the dangers of death firsthand (Hayamizu, 2008).

In fact, the self-discovery desire is part of the force that brings younger people to foreign cultures. During my fieldwork in Japan, I came across three Japanese *shakuhachi* students in their twenties who had experienced life outside of Japan. During their errandries in India, North America, South Asia, and Europe, they realized the spirituality of music and came across the *shakuhachi*. One of them came across a *kyotaku shakuhachi* player in India and had an epiphany. Another person who used to be a band player met a *shakuhachi* teacher in North America. After these life-changing experiences, these students started actively seeking *shakuhachi* lessons as part of their continuing journeys of self exploration. They have a weak sense of commitment to their associated groups and the *iemoto* system. Indeed, they have studied with multiple teachers simultaneously, which is unacceptable in the traditional context. They are more eclectic than those who belong to the major *shakuhachi* traditions, both in terms of their choices of teachers and the degree of commitment to their own groups. These students are exceptional cases, a group of outliers who do not fit Keister’s (2005) clear-cut

demarcation of Japanese and North American experiences of spirituality that posits the Japanese as collective and the American as individualistic.

Who Are the Students?

One distinctive feature of the Japanese *shakuhachi* students is that they tend to be older than students of other instruments. A significant number of even professional *shakuhachi* players started studying the shakuhachi only after they reached the age of twenty. Exceptions are typically those born into *iemoto* families and well known performers. Apart from these exceptions, the majority of *shakuhachi* students tend to come late to music learning. They begin *shakuhachi* lessons at different stages of life: They rarely begin at school ages, but often in college, after getting married, or during retirement. They enjoy music as a hobby and become constituent members of the “lesson culture” (Moriya, 1994). For example, my mother started taking *shakuhachi* lessons when she reached the age of fifty. Yet she was the youngest female *shakuhachi* student in the group. She was later granted a teaching license to serve as an active member in the region. In fact, late starts have long been the norm in the tradition of Japanese artistry transmission. For instance, Motokiyo Zeami, the founder of noh theatrical arts, believed that intensive training of noh singing should begin after the student turned the age of 20 (Sekine, 1985).

The tendency of senior student domination in the population of *shakuhachi* students is much more common in school-based traditions and rural areas. In other words, the same tendency is less common in new traditions such as the International Shakuhachi Kenshukan (training center), led by the students of Yokoyama Katsuya. In the past five

years, we have also seen attractive young *shakuhachi* players on TV who have gained significant popularity. However, the majority of *shakuhachi* students—at least those whom I met in Japan—were senior males. During my fieldwork in Japan, I came across a *hogaku* Japanese festival in the Kyushu area, at which almost all the *shakuhachi* players on the stage were male and above the age of fifty. Interestingly, two performances were given by a group of school children; but they were all *koto* students (and girls), and they were accompanied by senior *shakuhachi* students.

What makes the *shakuhachi* an instrument for adult learners? Is it because the *shakuhachi* has been a tool for spiritual development? Or is it because the *shakuhachi* requires deep breath, and only physically mature people can handle it? It is certain that the experience of *shakuhachi* music, especially the *honkyoku* variety, is often spiritual for many adult students and believed to be too “difficult” for children to relate to its expression. As Kobata Suigetsu (1951) observes,

None of the today’s *shakuhachi* schools are perfect in themselves. You should not be obsessed by just one school but experience a few different schools. Otherwise, you cannot achieve the ultimate way of *shakuhachi* playing. For example, let’s assume this person studies *shakuhachi* in a school in which the emphasis is placed on entertainment *shakuhachi* playing. Reaching a certain age, this person will feel that something is missing in his or her study and eventually get bored of playing the *shakuhachi* itself. Conversely, if a vigorous young person starts fuke zen *shakuhachi* music in his or her youth, he or she would be intimidated by its dark, non-musical nature. This person may draw a hasty conclusion that nothing can be more brutal than *shakuhachi* music. (pp. 29-30)

It is clearly suggested that some types of music are suitable for younger people and other types for more matured people. The general image of *shakuhachi* music—music for meditation, Zen, *komuso* monks—as well as that of *shakuhachi* sound characterized by

muraiki airy quality still leaves an impression in the mind of general public that *shakuhachi* music is for mature people.²⁰

Missing Approach

In his dissertation exploring the features of vintage *shakuhachi* flutes from the Edo period (1603–1867) and performers’ bodily experiences of playing them, Shimura (2002) conceptually distinguished a group of *shakuhachi* practitioners who pass down and practice a repertoire of *honkyoku* music on the *ji-nashi shakuhachi*—those belonging to what Shimura describes as the “first world”—from other practitioners in the “second world” who play a variety of music, ranging from classical music to pop music, using the *ji-ari (ji-nuri, ji-mori)* modern *shakuhachi* (p. 43). In the first world, the meaning of practice is determined and acquired by experiencing the spirit of *komuso shakuhachi* tradition through performing *honkyoku* music. While the emphasis of practice in the second world is often placed on enhancing one’s musicality, the practice of the first world is characterized by its spiritual orientation, often explained through the notion of *ichion-jobutsu* (“one tone, enlightenment”) in which the practitioners play music for their own self-cultivation. Shimura argues that there is no distinction between professional and amateur players in this first world. Nor is there an audience who pay admission for a professional performance. The participants practice from a sense of community; this

²⁰ Methodologically, we need an alternative perspective in order to explore these people’s musical experiences (such as aging, well-being, spirituality): Conventional studies in music education have focused on children’s musical development. Most developmental theories and intelligence theories in the West support children’s early start of music learning (Gardner, 1989, 1994). So do music educators. When it comes to researching adult learners of music, of any form and any genre, spirituality should be a significant part of our concern, as suggested by Hays, Bright, and Minichiello (2002).

compels them to share, acknowledge, and uplift their spiritual experience of music, like how people experience at *kensokai* music offering events (Chapter 8). Often, teachers in the first world possess a strong sense of responsibility to inherit and transmit traditional forms (lineage-based tradition) and thus provide austere lessons. In contrast, the second world consists of institutional, school-based groups of practitioners, in addition to independent-minded musicians, that are characterized by such ranking as *shihan* (teaching license) and *dai-shihan* (great master license). In this world, performing with other established *koto* and *shamisen* groups is also an important aspect of their activities.²¹ Shimura, though quite implicitly, contrasts the epistemological differences of the two worlds and argues that the value system of one world is not easily understood from the perspective of the other.

Shimura demarcates these two worlds in order to underscore the value system of the first world, which is mistakenly labeled as “old” and “unmusical.” He does not focus on detailed explanation of differences among modern *shakuhachi* traditions in the second world. This distinction seems more useful than the separation between the *ji-ari* and *ji-nashi shakuhachi* as a perspective to understand the differences between the musical and the spiritual orientations to *shakuhachi* playing. For many of the self proclaimed *ji-nashi* players, despite their use of *ji-nashi* flutes, actually belong to the second world, in which the musical result is an important determining factor. Besides, their choice of the *ji-nashi*

²¹ Today, this aspect of their activities is viewed, to a greater extent, as an effort to sustain the social and economic status of their schools. When the *komuso* temples were abandoned during the Meiji restoration, many of the *komuso* monks ventured into playing with other instruments that had already been practiced in non-religious contexts. They found this new venue as a way of survival. This further promoted the inclusion of the *shakuhachi* in *sankyoku* ensemble played on the *koto* and *shamisen*.

flute in the second world is often based on functional reasons (e.g., volume, pitch, playability of the instrument) rather than spiritual ones (e.g., deep breath training). The former is associated more with the “external” dimensions of music, and the latter with the “internal” ones (Shimura, 2002, p. 126).

To use Shimura’s framework, this dissertation explores what values current students of the first world are learning through the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice, in which the practitioners actively reinvigorate the connections with nature, the past, and themselves. As explained in subsequent chapters, these practitioners tend to share a desire to “converse” and “negotiate” with nature, not the need to “control” and “dictate” the terms of their interaction with nature in each step of harvesting bamboo, making flutes, and playing *honkyoku* music. For them, the functionality of the instrument is secondary. Musicality is not necessarily the main thrust of their music teaching. What matters to them is the realization of spirituality through musical practice. The practitioners of the first world call for an alternative pedagogy of engaging in music. The positioning of non-Japanese practitioners, which I shall call the “third world,” is discussed in Chapter 9.

CHAPTER 4

NATURE-INSPIRED SHAKUHACHI PLAYING

In this chapter, I introduce two of my main informants who are bamboo harvesters, flute makers, and players. The first case is an example of the more musically oriented approaches to *ji-nashi shakuhachi* playing. The second is an example of a less musically inclined practice. These two practitioners—both residents of Tokyo—contest and disagree with each other regarding the importance of musical elaboration in their practices and playing. However, they collectively highlight the organic aspect of *shakuhachi* playing. Their activities, philosophies, and playing styles fit into the overlapping region of the three circles: the musical, the spiritual, and the ecological. Later in this chapter, I specifically shed light on their “nature-initiated” practice of music making. These practitioners belong to the “first” world of Shimura’s categorization.

Takagi-san’s Shakuhachi Playing

Tamio Takagi is a *ji-nashi shakuhachi* player based in Tokyo. He does not belong to any *shakuhachi* school. As an independent player, he only provides *shakuhachi* performances for small events. Yet he is well known both inside and outside of Japan because of his Zen approach toward *shakuhachi* playing. He started teaching about twenty years ago at the request of several people who wanted to study with him. Since then, over two hundred people have taken music lessons with him. He currently leads a small group of practitioners (including the youngest student in twenties and the oldest student in seventies) who take lessons with him regularly and organize events such as student recitals and *shakuhachi* making workshops. Many of his students have studied

(or, to some extent, experienced) other styles of *shakuhachi* music in mainstream *shakuhachi* schools (such as the *kinko* and *tozan*)—the “first world” to use Shimura’s framework—before they sought alternative ways. Unlike those who play the *shakuhachi* for entertainment and social bonding, these students seek a deeper level of spirituality. One example is a student who came across a *shakuhachi* performance by chance in India. Greatly influenced by the philosophy and the sound of the *shakuhachi*, he looked for spiritual approaches to *shakuhachi* playing and eventually found Takagi-san. Takagi-san’s students also include many visitors from other countries who take intensive lessons. In fact, we visited him during our Bamboo Roots Pilgrimage and took four days’ worth of lessons. During my fieldwork, I came across students from such countries as Australia, Canada, Finland, Spain, and the United States who had worked with him. Takagi-san thinks that these foreign students, as well as some of the younger domestic ones, have had some kind of deep realization of life that forced them to seek lessons with him.

Takagi-san encourages his students to use self-made *ji-nashi shakuhachi*.²² A beginning student typically borrows a *ji-nashi* flute from Takagi-san until she makes her own. She keeps practicing on this borrowed flute for a while. She may or may not eventually own it. In either case, she is strongly encouraged to make her own flute. To provide this opportunity, Takagi-san organizes an annual bamboo harvesting trip and a *ji-nashi* making workshop. It may take several years until she actually makes her own flute and practices on it because bamboo is only harvested in winter. Besides, it normally takes years for a piece of bamboo to dry up enough to become a flute. A new student who just

²² They use the term, *hocchiku*, named by Wadazumi Fumon, to emphasize the *shakuhachi* as a spiritual tool.

started taking lessons with Takagi-san made his own flute within a year and has been playing this self made version since.

Takagi-san believes that *shakuhachi* playing is an art of the breath. If a person is stripped of all their attributes, all that remains is his or her breath. Thus, to cultivate the breath is to cultivate the very core of being itself. For Takagi-san, breath represents the most precious quality of life, and an expression of it carried through the bamboo is the essence of *shakuhachi* music.

It has been said that the ideal expression of the *shakuhachi* is the sound of wind passing through a decayed bamboo grove. Takagi-san puts forth this idea by combining Zen's integrative philosophy. For example, he thinks of two kinds of breath: warm and cold. The former generates a "pure" tone; and the latter is a windy, noise-like sound (or *sawari*). It is the combination of the two that achieves the ideal expression of the *shakuhachi*. In so doing, the state of total human-nature awareness is expressed.

Other binary codes that he incorporates into his playing include the *yin-yang* quality in tone color that is expressed through *meri* and *kari* techniques. For *meri*, the player lowers the pitch of a tone by shading a finger hole and/or changing the chin angle (by facing down) so that the distance between the lip and the mouthpiece decreases and the pitch goes down. For *kari*, the player raises the pitch by looking up. Using this *meri-kari* technique, the player can express two tones in the same (or similar) pitch(es); for example, the pitch of "u" (A flat for 1.8) can be lowered to be the same pitch as "re" (G for 1.8) by the *meri* effect (*Meri* can lower the pitch over a half tone). When playing "re" and "u-meri" continuously, the player can show the change of tone color: a bright *kari* tone of "re" followed by a dark *meri* tone of "u."

Takagi-san's integrative philosophy is neatly interwoven and expressed in his playing and interpretation of *honkyoku* music. For example, the beginning phrase of *hon shirabe* (or *honte-choshi*), which simply goes "tsu-re" (e.g., F-G for 1.8), starts with a breathy tone generated by a mixture of warm and cold breaths (which he calls *sawari*, or "the sound of wind"), then changes into a pure tone played with a warm breath ("an expression of human"), and ends with a quiet sound ("no sound")—all in one breath. This phrasing must create the *yang* quality, which is followed by the *yin* quality of "u" *meri* tone expressed in the next phrase. Then, another "tsu-re" phrase begins. Like this, his playing of *honkyoku* music becomes a series of shifts between the poles in the binary circle.

Idemitsu-san's Shakuhachi Playing

Kentaro Idemitsu is a unique *shakuhachi* player, teacher, and activist. Like Takagi-san, he does not belong to any school. Nor has he formed one. He is perhaps not as renowned as Takagi-san among the *shakuhachi* community. Although he mainly plays the classical repertoire of *shakuhachi* music (*honkyoku*) for his own practice, he also performs music in non-traditional contexts. For instance, he has played the *shakuhachi* with a Mongolian horse-head fiddle specialist by using a long *shakuhachi* flute. He has also played in a band with electric guitar players. In these settings, he plays a long tone to add a layer of distinctive sound (a drone-like sound) to the sounds of the other instruments rather than playing a melody. Unlike other *shakuhachi* players who use the modern type of the *ji-ari shakuhachi* to play in tune with modern scales, he only uses his self-made *ji-nashi* flutes, which are not necessarily in tune with modern instruments. He

believes that the *ji-nashi* creates a denser sound and is thus more suitable for the production of a drone-like effect than the *ji-ari shakuhachi*.

Idemitsu-san has a workshop in an old downtown area of Tokyo, where he holds a *shakuhachi* making and playing session for the public once a week. Because of the location and age of the workshop, many tourists—Japanese and non-Japanese—often stop by, observe his activities, and sometimes experience the *ji-nashi* making (by paying ten dollars for the bamboo and instruction). There are between five and ten regular members of the group, ranging in age from their twenties to their thirties; included among them are both single and married men and women. There are other members as well, occasional participants who visit the workshop from time to time. The hours of the workshop are between eleven and five. Not only do they make the instrument but they also play *honkyoku* music, talk about life, eat and drink. Sometimes, an ethnic musician stops by to have a musical session with Idemitsu-san.

Idemitsu-san also has a studio in another part of Tokyo. Here, he gives music lessons to those who become interested in playing and learning the *shakuhachi* at his workshop. His policy is that anyone can come and play with him.²³ The time is not structured by individual lessons. All the attendees play the same piece together regardless of their experience. They have regular tunes to play (such as *honte-choshi*, *yamato choshi*, *hifumicho*, *tsukushi reibo*, *kyorei*, *hokyo*, etc.), ones taken from the repertoire of *Kyotaku Shakuhachi* (initiated by Nishimura Koku). In the spring of 2008, they gave a public performance in a concert hall as part of a local music festival. The students played

²³ Deu does not charge any lesson fee but only accepts a small amount of donation from the students. Whenever they are ready, they put cash (less than 10 dollars) into a bamboo bank box (made out of a large piece of *moso* bamboo).

two pieces, and Idemitsu-san did a solo performance. Their intention was not only to have an opportunity to present their learning process, but also to “*remind the general public of the old style of shakuhachi music regardless of how the public reacts.*”

Idemitsu-san played a solo piece using a *shakuhachi* flute that he had made one day prior to the event. It produced a less “musical” but “airy” sound, like a howling wind. The audience seemed to be startled by the unfamiliar music and the unusual sound of self-made, still raw *shakuhachi* flutes that often induced unharmonious tones.

Idemitsu-san maintains a close relationship with his teacher. They play outdoors every weekend. They practice regardless of the weather. Thousands pass by the site of their sessions and many of them stop for rendezvous with friends and strangers. For two hours, Idemitsu-san and his teacher play *honkyoku* music while standing by a beautiful, hand-written calligraphy put on the ground. The calligraphy reads:

The Spirit of Classics:

We appreciate the mind state achieved through playing the fuke Zen shakuhachi that is self-made, that has no decoration and unnatural artifices, that is closer to a piece bamboo than a musical instrument, used as a religious tool for self-cultivation (through counting breath, following breath, eliminating external perspectives and thoughts, that promote enlightenment). Enjoy the 700 years of tradition. Feel free to try and blow these flutes.

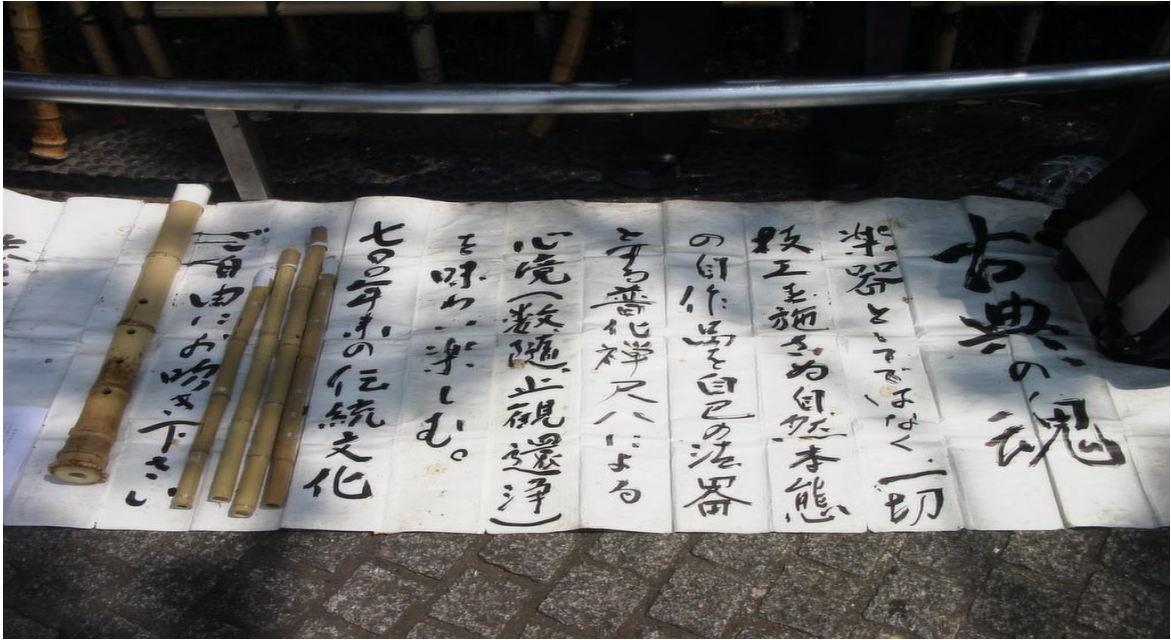


Figure 3. Visual image of the spirit of classics.

These performance often pass unnoticed, unless the listeners come very close to them. Even then it is difficult to hear, because of the noise of the background environment. Clearly, it is not the intention of Idemitsu-san and his teacher to provide aesthetic pleasure through a public performance; rather, it is to expose the public to this otherwise forgotten tradition of music.

Non-musical Orientation

Unlike Takagi-san, Idemitsu-san is not concerned with the expression of silence and the aesthetics of subtleness. Demonstrating the “tsu-re” pattern that frequently appears in *honkyoku* pieces, Idemitsu-san explained that his ideal expression is a bursting wave of sound. The airy sound quality is not intentionally “crafted” (or “contrived”), but nurtured as a result of his daily blowing practice. Rather than playing a long melody with

soft tones using a well-sounding flute that is easy to play, he merely wishes to convey the essence of *shakuhachi* expression through a simple phrase such as *tsu-re*.

Idemitsu-san's beliefs run counter to those Takagi-san holds. A former professional musician, Takagi-san was very particular about his performance being heard as "music" and how his audience would react. For him, musical communication between the player and the audience was the *raison d'être* of his music making as a *shakuhachi* player. Accurate pitch, for example, is one of the determining elements of what makes a great *shakuhachi* performance (other aspects are, as described before, tone color and breathing). He states,

There are many people like...[and my mentor] who played out of pitch; for example, their "chi" [the forth tone from the basic tone] is always higher. But there is a coherence in terms of how far their out-of-pitch tones are from the pitch it should sound. So that is still acceptable. However, in Tanikita Muchiku's playing, sometimes chi is higher and other times not. And the pitches of high register and those of low register do not match. I think that was because he didn't have good ears.

Takagi-san dislikes the performance of Tanikita Muchiku (1875-1957) who served as the 37th abbot of Myoan temple because Tanikita's playing was too far out of tune.

In contrast, pitch accuracy is of secondary concern to Idemitsu-san. He focuses more on increasing the strength of the breath. Results, as manifested in "music," are not his priorities in playing and teaching. In fact, he appreciates, respects, and aims for Tanikita Muchiku's style of performance because "*it carries no ego but only a humble expression.*" He stated, "*I wish I can play like him. It is like it naturally came out beyond human's intention. It doesn't sound like human made music.... So I will just play like that, very simple.*" He often told his students,

Just blow. You can just blow. As you keep blowing everyday, your playing will eventually be good.... That will form your own expression in time. Your playing style will be formed eventually.

When he said that, he did not mean that his students need to go through special kinds of practice or technical training. Rather, he emphasized the importance of everyday blowing practice with spirits.

Idemitsu-san's self-made flutes are not in tune with any modern instruments. The method of tuning he applies to his flute making is called *towarikan*, a term that literally means "one tenth." Applying this method, the distance between the finger holes (between the first and second, the second and third, and the third and fourth holes) is determined proportionally; that is, one tenth of the entire length of the flute (more detailed explanation will be provided in the next chapter).²⁴ The pitches of these *towarikan shakuhachi* flutes are uneven. Due to the variance of each bamboo pieces' irregular inner bore shape, some tones (especially, *chi*, the fourth tone) tend to be sharper and others flatter. Yet Idemitsu-san finds tones of such flutes to be more attractive than those of standardized *shakuhachi* flutes, because they allow the player to "*make one's own sound.*" Each *towarikan shakuhachi* requires the player to accommodate almost every tone with the *meri* (sharpening pitch) and *kari* (lowering pitch) adjustment. He stated,

It is very interesting to play the shakuhachi like this one using meri and kari. It is exactly like how Tanikita Muchiku played. The ha-ro phrase is out of tune and sounds quite brusque. Playing this kind of shakuhachi flute generates more tasks to tackle. Compared to this kind, those that are tuned in scales [ji-ari shakuhachi] are artificial. I wish I could play like Tanikita Muchiku. Accommodating my

²⁴ This method of deciding finger hole positions according to the length of bamboo, rather than the pitches of tones, is often called *seisun*, or "right length," which sees less demand in the market compared to *shakuhachi* flutes in *seiritsu*, or "right pitch." In the latter method of *shakuhachi* making, each tone of the flute is tuned to the pitch determined by equal temperament. (e.g. D, F, G, A, C, for the 1.8 standard *shakuhachi*).

playing according to the bamboo is so much more enjoyable [than playing on already tuned flutes] If I am too concerned about the pitch and if I am stuck with meri-kari things for accurate pitches, my feeling would be quite different.”

Idemitsu-san’s teacher’s standpoint is also in line with Idemitsu-san’s way of playing. He relates that bamboo flutes that are difficult to play provide the player with a much more enjoyable experience than those that are easy to play. A flute that allows the sound to come out too easily, he thinks, does not leave much space for the player to be creative in crafting the sound. The idea behind his approach is that any piece of bamboo has its own way of vibrating, and human beings ought to strive toward it no matter how arduous the task is. He has come to terms with this idea after more than fifty years of *shakuhachi* playing (and many public performances and media appearances). Unlike most *shakuhachi* players who prefer easy-to-play flutes that resonate well with the least amount of effort, Idemitsu-san is faced with a raw piece of bamboo that does not allow him to express easily what he wants to do. Thus, when making the *shakuhachi*, he preserves the original shape of the bamboo in order to maintain its original character. He does not bend or straighten the bamboo for aesthetic reasons. Throughout the flute making process, he tries to converse with the bamboo and listen to its voice. The result is his expression of music. He enjoys this process of “accommodating himself to the character of each flute and playing accordingly”—the idea often expressed by *ji-nashi shakuhachi* players as “blow according to the bamboo” (*take ni awasete fuku*).

Idemitsu-san’s teacher reiterated that one’s skill level does not comprise the essence of *honkyoku* playing. He stated, “*the honkyoku music is not the world of whether you play well or badly*” (*umai heta no sekai deha nai*). The point of *honkyoku* playing, according to him, does not lie in the expressive quality of the music, but in its spiritual

aspect, that is, how the player approaches the music using his or her spirit. Following this idea, Idemitsu-san aims at gathering strength in his playing. He never aspires to become a “good” player. In fact, he wishes not to be good. He criticizes, “*although people say that the shakuhachi expresses the sound of wind or Zen, many people still play it too beautifully as music.*” By this he means that those people—mostly professional players—try to play the *shakuhachi* as musically as possible, as though it were destined to be listened to by an audience as a work of art. In contrast, his idea, inspired by ancestral *shakuhachi* practitioners, is to demonstrate the breathing strength. He remarked,

I wish I remain a poor player. I don't want to develop anything and become a great player. I don't intend to astonish the audience. There will be an expression that I can make as I continue blowing. More musical performance is the business of professional musicians. My role is to providing a case of greatness without being musically excellent. It may be an experiment. But I want to prove that this way is possible and also fine even today. It is another way to be great. I do think it is important to learn the music and fingering technique [to play phrases correctly], but the level beyond the technical level is not necessarily achieved through the musical level.

The emphasis of his practice is to increase the strength of his breath. When he explained his approach to *shakuhachi* playing, he was naturally paraphrasing the idea of *ichion-jobutsu*, “with one tone, enlightenment,” which suggests that the value of *shakuhachi* playing lies in the sound, not in the music, and the depth of *shakuhachi* playing is manifested in a single tone. Thus, when he indicated, “*I don't want to be a great player,*” he meant that he would hope to explore the world of *ichion-jobutsu*, not the world of music.

Idemitsu-san's philosophy of *shakuhachi* playing is most apparent in his studio when he and his students practice *hokyo*, one of the *honkyoku* songs, translated as phoenix's (*ho*) yelling (*kyo*). When playing this piece, they blow into their flutes as

strongly as possible without particular attention to the aesthetics of music. They call this style *kenkabuki*, or “fighting blowing.” The purpose of this practice is to develop breathing strength. They believe that “playing beautiful tones,” which they call *kireibuki*, most likely spoils their breathing strength. His students try to imitate Idemitsu-san’s blowing strength (*fukikomi*) and hold the tone as long as he does, which is a very demanding task. This form of *shakuhachi* practice—unique to his own tradition—exemplifies his desire for *shakuhachi* practice to strive for the physical more than the musical. Unlike other players who seek spirituality as a musical quest, Idemitsu-san shows less interest in executing musical expressions or crafting musical tones.

An experienced *ji-nashi shakuhachi* master explained that there has been a form of playing the *shakuhachi*, called *detanari*, in which the emphasis is placed purely on the act of blowing. Similar to the spirit of *kenkabuki*, the idea of *detanari*, or “as it comes out,” suggests that the practitioner should not be preoccupied with a result of his or her playing as music (pitch, tone color, intonation, etc.), but abide by whatever “comes out” as a result of blowing. Based on this style, excessive concern with musical qualities can become a distraction. One can cultivate the mind-body-spirit by simply blowing into a piece of bamboo. Whether or not the resulting sound is musically beautiful is not an issue for the practitioner. For this reason, the idea of *detanari* is similar to the notion of *ichion-jobutsu*, the attainment of enlightenment through perfecting a single tone. The practitioner of *ichion-jobutsu* tries to reverse the spiritual values of music through the quest for an ultimate tone, or the true sound of the bamboo, rather than trying to play musically. Today, we rarely find players like Idemitsu-san who practice the *shakuhachi* in the *detanari* style. Blowing is the key to their training.

Expression of no Mind: The Sound of Heaven

Idemitsu-san's teacher, Sudo, embodies two kinds of *shakuhachi* playing styles. One is the Jin Nyodo style and the other is the Kyotaku style. The former is played by the students of legendary *shakuhachi* player, Jin Nyodo, who was known for his distinctive playing of *honkyoku* music, especially his delicate *meri-kari* technique. Whereas most *shakuhachi* players lowered a tone (for a *meri* note) by shading a hole with a finger, Jin achieved the same effect by merely changing the angle of the chin, without shading the finger hole. Thus, his students, especially those who studied with him when he was still young, tend to be very particular about the method and accuracy of *meri* technique. Compared to Jin Nyodo, students of Nishimura Koku use longer flutes and play them much more slowly. Musically speaking, the Jin style requires much more technical dexterity, and the *kyotaku* style is much simpler.

Although Idemitsu-san has studied both styles, his main practice involves playing the *kyotaku* repertoire only. Sudo observes that Idemitsu-san's sound is deeply resonant and embracing; it carries a very distinctive quality, one he thinks he himself could never make. He compared his playing to Idemitsu-san's in light of two *honkyoku* tunes: *reibo* and *mukaiji*. *Reibo*, or "yearning for the bell," is believed to represent the feeling of longing for Fuke Zen master. The middle section of this piece, according to him, expresses the feeling of yearning through a bell like phrasing played in high register. This part in particular evokes his emotion. In contrast, *mukaiji* is a tune that carries an image of sun rising from a mystic ocean, as manifested in its title: *Mu* (fog) *kai* (ocean) *ji* (flute). He believes that Idemitsu-san's playing embodies the highly refined and calm taste of *mukaiji*. He stated, "*mukaiji is his specialty, and reibo is mine.*" The reason he feels this

way is that *reibo*, he believes, is an earthly, worldly song, and playing this piece requires human feeling and musical manipulation. *Mukaiji*, on the other hand, is otherworldly and heaven like.

Iroke Mind

The difference between Idemitsu-san's and Sudo's natural musical inclinations highlights the different emphases of *shakuhachi* playing: with or without minds. Sudo studied violin and Western music when he was growing up. He still has a violin student who has been studying the Western musical cannon, including Mendelssohn's violin concerto. He admits that because of his earlier training in Western classical music, he tends to approach music in a musical and analytic way, even though he has been playing the *shakuhachi* for over fifty years. He stated,

On the violin I used to play fast, grandiose types of music to show off. As you become older, however, you cannot play those songs in the same way. What is left to you is your own tone. If your tone is meager, playing songs such as Air on the G String [by J. S. Bach] is probably not satisfying to yourself. I've been doing that for a long time. Then, at the age of seventy I was exposed to the world of Deu's playing. I finally understood that my Western approach to music was not working so well: Eighty percents of what I have acquired can be substituted by a robot. Only twenty percents are mine. For Deu, it's opposite: His performance expresses his kokoro [the whole being]. Mine carries iroke [pretentious mind]. Without iroke, my performance would not be mine.

The word *iroke* in Japanese is translated as “sexy” or “seductive” in English. (*Iro* refers to “color” as opposed to “monochrome” or “boring,” and *ke* means “feeling”). In music, *iroke* suggests that the performance is not plain but fancy, a sort of snappy. Too much *iroke* sounds pretentious, giving an impression that the performance is “contrived.” According to Sudo, *honkyoku* music should be played with no *iroke*, free from pretentious mind. However, many people like to express and hear *iroke* emotions in music. In contrast, there is little emotion expressed in Idemitsu-san's style. Idemitsu-san

himself believes that playing without expressing his emotion works better for both himself and his audience. He stated, *“it’s better to leave the expression up to the bamboo rather than myself trying to express music by manipulation. Many people appreciate bamboo’s sound rather than my sound.”* Idemitsu-san’s teacher stated, *“I’ve tried to teach him detailed musical expressions that I learned from Jin Nyodo in case he also has an iroke mind. But he showed no interest. So I didn’t force him to follow my style.”*

Sudo’s playing style is also influenced by his teacher, Jin Nyodo, who was very meticulous about the accuracy of technical and musical expressions. His memory about Jin Nyodo’s teaching was:

More than half of his teaching was about technical stuff. He was very particular about accuracy of expression, and he didn’t leave much room for compromise. His playing was said to be very “musical” by other shakuhachi players of the time. At the same time, they said his honkyoku playing was essentially not honkyoku like. I can relate to that criticism very well now. Jin Nyodo knew Western music, and his playing of honkyoku was musical performance. So it was away from the spirit of honkyoku playing.

For him, the spirit of *honkyoku* playing is not so much musical as it is spiritual, that is cultivated through the mind of no *iroke* and no pretentiousness.

One difference between playing with or without the *iroke* mind is to play with or without emotion. Popular songs and folk songs with lyrics need to be played with *iroke*. In contrast, *honkyoku* music (especially profound pieces such *kyorei*, *koku*, *mukaiji*) sound better when played with no musical mind, according to Sudo. Another difference lies in the intention of the performer, in what he is trying to instill in the mind of the audience. The performer with the *iroke* mind is concerned with how the audience listens to and judges the performance. Like many musicians, Sudo has been trained, through his violin study, to cultivate his own ears and sense of aesthetic feeling, to listen to his own

performance from the audience's perspective, and to improve his playing accordingly. Such a process of music practice is not what forms Idemitsu-san's playing and what he seems to care about. Idemitsu-san's expression is beyond music. Idemitsu-san stated, "*if I play honkyoku as music with emotion, my expression becomes diminished and stalled.*"²⁵

The notion of *iroke* in the context of *shakuhachi* playing may also be explained in relation to pitch. An experienced *shakuhachi* maker-player in the Shikoku region observes that the *meri* (lower pitch) effect of "tsu" (F for 1.8) and "chi" (A for 1.8) tones normally creates a sensual feeling, especially when the *meri* level is quite deep. He observes that many *shakuhachi* people appreciate deep *meri* notes. He criticizes these players who like deep *meri* tones for their *iroke* expressions. He acknowledges that the performance becomes more musical when played with deeper *meri* notes; however, the same effect cannot be achieved in the outdoor environment because the wind prevents the player from executing the resonate *meri* notes. He believes that *shakuhachi* music has been created, devised, and developed by wandering, traveling monks, and thus pitches should not be their first priority. He called this kind of music, that played with many *meri* notes and *iroke* expressions, *ozashiki* music, which literally means "tatami room (indoor)

²⁵ Another example of the use of *iroke* is found in an online blog by a *shakuhachi* player who attended a *honkyoku* performing (offering) event in Nagoya in 2008. Upon listening to Okuyama Hosui's playing of *kyorei*, he commented:

Okuyama kept playing this song for many years at this *honkyoku* offering event. He is much younger than me but very deep in his approach. He performs only *kyorei* in the taizan style every year. This song is never flamboyant and showy. It doesn't have appealing point for the audience. I am not brave enough yet to play this song in public. There is a fear of playing nothing. Even when I play *honkyoku*, I have *iroke* somewhere in mind and think of how my audience is listening to my playing. Then, I grovel to the audience. He plays calmly using his *ji-nashi shakuhachi* without making a loud sound. His inner strength and courage are extraordinary. His playing is not artful or skillful. But I feel "awe" in his playing. (http://nabitsuma.cocolog-nifty.com/shaku8/2008/03/post_e19e.html)

music.” The aesthetics of *ozashiki* music is not deniable today, he states, but the player should not intend to convey weepy, *iroke* feelings.

Sudo also explained how he sees Idemitsu-san’s playing using a Chinese concept of music that categorizes sound into three types: *jinrai*, “the sound of human affairs,” *chirai*, “the sound of the earth,” and *tenrai*, “the sound of heaven.” He relates that Idemitsu-san’s playing is an expression of heaven with no *iroke* taste, while his own playing is *jinrai*, which expresses human emotions. In China, Taoist philosopher Chuang Tzu identified the existence of the driving force that causes all sounds, including those of human beings and the earth, which he called the “piping of Heaven,” and envisioned music as embracing the power to unify the cosmos (trans. 1968, Chap. 2, “Discussion on Making All Things Equal;” Also see, Matsunobu, 2007). Chuang Tzu wrote that “a sound of a bamboo flute” is the *jinrai* unless it is experienced as “the sound of the bamboo.” The sound of the bamboo is the *tenrai*. But if it is heard as a human expression, it remains as *jinrai*. Idemitsu-san’s teacher believes that few people can appreciate this level of musical expression, especially when they are young. Idemitsu-san’s statement introduced above represents the idea of *shakuhachi* playing as an effort of realizing the *tenrai*. To quote it again, “*It’s better to leave the expression up to the bamboo rather than myself trying to express music by manipulation. Many people appreciate bamboo’s sound rather than my sound.*”

Instrument as Tune Specific

The fact that the stems of most bamboo plants are connected to each other in a grove through the main roots does not mean that they are identical in size and shape. In

fact, they vary to a great extent due to many factors. The amount of sunlight each stem receives affects the thickness of its wall; the flow of water influences the hardness of the stems; and the density of population would affect the growth of healthy stems. Besides, certain bacterium facilitate natural coloring on the surface of bamboo. All of these bring about the unique appearance of each piece of bamboo. The bamboo harvester must decide which stems are appropriate for flute making. Criteria include the age, size, shape, and thickness of the wall, and the beauty of natural coloring. He may be particularly careful about not having finger holes right on the nodes of the bamboo.

The choices of bamboo given to *shakuhachi* practitioners in a grove are musical as well as technical. For experienced *ji-nashi* player-makers, musical thinking takes place when harvesting bamboo. Looking at a piece of bamboo in a grove, they receive an image of sound. For them, the sound of bamboo is associated with its particular size and shape. They may also think of certain tunes in relation to the image of the sound evoked. They undergo a bodily feeling when they hold a piece of bamboo, depending on their previous experiences of making and playing the *shakuhachi*. With a skinny, narrow bamboo piece, for example, they may think of light sound and tunes like *azuma jishi* or *toppiki*. Generally, thick, longer pieces may let them imagine profound tunes such as *koku*, that are played slowly. Takagi-san, for example, sees his encounter with bamboo in two ways:

In some cases, I harvest a piece of bamboo and turn it into the shakuhachi with a concrete image of a certain tune. In other cases, the nature of a bamboo piece determines what tunes I can play. For example, I harvested this piece of bamboo with the image of toppiki, a tune from northern part of Japan, and I made it into this 1.4 [size] short shakuhachi instrument. My 1.5 [size] shakuhachi, however, is made out of a piece of bamboo that was dumped out there when I found it. This bamboo piece is never perfect and in good quality. But there is a tune that can be played on this piece of bamboo. That tune is oshu-nagashi. This piece of bamboo

allows you to play only oshu-nagashi but not other tunes. So the instrument is not perfect in that it is not universally playable. When we make ji-nashi shakuhachi, we don't try to aim for that type of perfection because that's impossible. But we try to make best use of the character of each bamboo piece. That's very important. This is contrasting to the modern type of shakuhachi that is almost the same from one another because it is all processed in the same manner. The sound would be the same. The ji-nashi is different. Each product has a different character. That's why every piece of bamboo is usable. We can find a tune that goes well with that piece of bamboo. [Interview, Nov. 21, 2007]

Takagi-san also changes the size of the flute in the teaching and learning context. The student is expected to use a flute that is in the same pitch as Takagi-san's. Before we visited him during the Roots Pilgrimage, we asked him what sizes of flute we should bring to our lessons. His response was that it depends on the piece we want to study.

Takagi-san stated: *"Each flute has its own identity. In my case, I change the bamboo for each tune, not only for pitch but also for tone color. Every bamboo has a different character."* Then, Takagi-san listed examples of tunes and sizes that apply to his own playing:

1. *Tori kadotsuke hachigaeshi* by about 2.1 (=25 inches)
2. *Betsuden tsuruno sugomori* by about 2.25 (=26.8 inches)
3. *Sinya* by about 2.42 (=28.8 inches)
4. *Shyouganken reibo* by 2.5 (=29.5 inches)
5. *Shin kyorei* by 2.75 or 2.9 or 3.38 (=32.3 or 34.6 or 40.5 inches)

Takagi-san has many flutes in different sizes. He uses a flute that is similar in size and tune to the student's. Often, however, the student has only a few flutes in different sizes. If she does not have a longer flute when studying a certain piece that requires a longer flute, she may use a shorter flute to learn the piece. In this situation, Takagi-san, at some point during the lesson, demonstrates this piece using his own flute that is the right size,

instead of using a flute that is in the same tune as the student's flute. In most cases, students bring one or two flutes to his studio and study one or two pieces.

Other *ji-nashi* makers-players seem to take a similar approach. For example, Dan Shinku, a professional *ji-nashi shakuhachi* maker-player based in west Tokyo whom we visited during our Roots Pilgrimage, explained to us that each of his products has its own character. On his website, he introduces his commercial products with such remarks as: “this 2.4 *ji-nashi shakuhachi* is perfect to play *reibo* because of its fine balance and resonant tones in high-register.” “I turned this straight piece of bamboo into a 2.0 flute with the image of *koku*. I adjusted the details by playing *koku*.” “This piece of bamboo has a large bore shape [around the third and fourth nodes] thus suitable for the performance of *mukaiji*.” He is not suggesting that these flutes are completely unsuitable for other tunes; it is just that these flutes are most fitting for the pieces that he refers to (*reibo, koku, mukaiji*).

These *ji-nashi* specialists agree that inconvenience of the flute is not a “deficiency” but a part of its “character.” They welcome and embrace the unique sound of each flute as part of its character. Takagi-san stated,

The difference between modern approaches to music making and the ji-nashi approach is that either you play music for human convenience or you play music by adjusting yourself to the bamboo's character.... Not many people understand the difference. They simply resist deficiency and inconvenience of the flute. They don't try to embrace it as bamboo's character.

Takagi-san's view, like Dan Shinku's, is that the flute is tune-specific. Each piece of bamboo has its own charm and character and is suited to a certain type of music. The player (teacher) changes the flute depending on the tune he performs (teaches).

The idea of exchanging flutes used for tune-specific images is echoed by other *ji-nashi* practitioners.²⁶ For example, Umehara-san believes that he does not need to have an “elite” flute that fits many tunes. For him, like Takagi-san, the functionality of the flute as the capability to allow the player to perform different types of music and execute a variety of musical expressions is the attribute of the modern type of *ji-ari shakuhachi*. He believes that the *ji-nashi* is tune-specific and context dependent. Because each *shakuhachi* flute bears a unique character and sound, each is used for a different purpose and musical piece. He, for instance, plays *shin-kyorei* (one of *honkyoku* music) on his relatively short flute when he plays outdoors because “*this flute and this tune resonate well and attracts many birds.*” Takagi-san and Umehara-san may disagree with each other regarding the sizes of the flutes best suited to play specific pieces such as *shin-kyorei*; for Takagi-san, a longer flute is better, and for Umehara-san, a shorter flute is more suitable. However, these practitioners commonly suggest that *ji-nashi shakuhachi* players have more than one *shakuhachi* flute—different in size and sounding—for the execution of different musical qualities. They change the size of a flute depending on the tune they play. The idea of using only one flute for every purpose and every kind of music is not prevalent among these practitioners.

Bamboo as Sound Attendant

Takagi-san also believes that the sound already resides in each piece of bamboo. The first business of a player and flute maker is to blow into a piece of bamboo, shake its

²⁶ To be fair, it is important to note that many *ji-nashi shakuhachi* players (especially those in the *myoan taizan* tradition) tend to stick to the regular 1.8 size *shakuhachi*.

spirit, and get the sound out of it. He explained that in older times, wood craftsmen used to make Buddha's icons out of woods with a belief that Buddha's spirit was already inside the wood. As they scraped and chiseled out, they "found" Buddha's image. At least, that was how they believed. They did not think that they "created" the icon. In the same way, the *ji-nashi* player-makers find the spirit of each piece of bamboo in the process of turning it into a flute. In so doing, they reveal the character of each bamboo piece (this point will be elaborated in Chapter 5). Takagi-san also holds the view that a sound already resides in a piece of bamboo and that the world is filled with sounds. He believes that this way of thinking is observed everywhere in the world, expressed through such concepts as the sound of heaven, the sound of the earth, and the sound of the universe. Musical instruments are believed to be medium for human beings to solicit an array of sounds contained in the earth.

This animistic vision of bamboo—bamboo as housing the spirit and its own sounding—is still observed among Japanese *shakuhachi* practitioners. An extreme case of such practitioners was one maker in Japan who called bamboo with an honorific prefix (*sama*) as if bamboo merited our highest respect. When he found out that I had tried to wash the inside of decayed bamboo with chlorine water, he stated, "*You are bullying bamboo-sama too much!*" as if implying bamboo bears a sacred spirit. He wrote to me later:

Your bamboo is too poor. I feel like crying for it. If you continue doing that, you would eventually end up being caught by the bamboo's curse and paying price for it. Your bamboo-sama would never sound well for you.

He surely carries a strong sense of attachment, devotion, and responsibility to the bamboo. Although this person's belief may not represent all makers' views, his expression still seems natural to many people.²⁷

Idemitsu-san also resonates with the idea of music as resounding of the universe, especially when his playing of music is perceived as the sound of bamboo rather than his own music. As explained earlier, Idemitsu-san and his teacher formulate their thinking, like Takagi-san, around the Chinese concept of music (*chirai*, *jinrai*, and *tenrai*). When they talked about *tenrai* (the sound of heaven), they referred to the sound of bamboo and supported the idea of bamboo as containing a sound. In so doing, they incidentally challenged the concept of music as *chirai* (the sound of the earth) or *jinrai* (the sound of humans). This level of music listening is superficial, according to Taoist Philosopher Chuang Tzu (in the 4th or 3rd century BCE) who wrote.

The student: Chirai is a hole of the earth (a flute of the earth). Jinrai is a pipe of bamboo (a flute of bamboo). Then, what is tenrai (a flute of heaven)?

The master: All sounds come from different sources such as holes and bamboo pipes. But they generate sounds according to their own principles. Tenrai is the sound of those principles. You have only heard chirai and jinrai.

Chuang Tzu suggests that *tenrai* is not physically different from the sound of *chirai* or *jinrai*. But people listen to it differently. Listening to the sound of bamboo as *tenrai* suggests that one attends to the principle of bamboo as containing its own sound and appreciates it as it is, not as a crafted human expression (*jinrai*). If a sound is heard as an

²⁷ This is at least so in Japan where people use honorific expressions prefixed to the names of everyday objects. For example, “o” is a prefix used in the case of “o-cha” (the honorific wording of tea) and “o-mizu” (the honorific wording of water). Nakamura (1997) suggests that “we should not regard it merely as an honorific expression, but rather consider it as a manifestation of the way of thinking that seeks a *raison d'être* and sacredness in everything that exists (p. 360).

expression of individual, then it is a *jinrai*. Apparently, when we talk about music in everyday contexts, our vision of music is based on the *jinrai*, that is, a form of human craftsmanship.

The principle of what causes all sounds—the condition of the *tenrai*—is traditionally explained through the concept of *ki* in Japan (Chapter 1). *Ki* refers to autonomous flows of energy that control all the happenings in the universe. The confluence of *ki*, consisting of both passive and active currents (*yin* and *yang*), gives form to life. All living creatures, including trees, insects, animals, and human beings, are regarded as products of self-directed natural movements of *ki*. When this principle of self-directed movements of energy is captured and expressed in sound, it becomes the *tenrai*. If the sound of bamboo is thought to be heard by *ki*, it is the *tenrai*.

The haiku poem introduced at the outset of this dissertation represented Matsuo Basho's nature-centered perception of the world. To put it here again:

Of what a pine tree is, learn from the pine
Of what bamboo is, learn from the bamboo

This poem suggests that humans need to attend to nature in order to understand the principle of nature. Applied to *shakuhachi* practice, this haiku suggests that musicians tune themselves into the mode of nature and experience it as it is, that is, at the level of *tenrai*.

Blow According to the Bamboo

Most *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practitioners are critical about the philosophy behind the making of the *ji-ari shakuhachi*. For example, Takagi-san reasons that modern *ji-ari shakuhachi* flutes, especially those made with a gage, are standardized. The quality of

these instruments is homogenized. Every instrument is “pretty much the same,” he observes. A metaphor he used to explain the nature of standardized *shakuhachi* making is *kintaro ame*. *Kintaro-ame* is layers of different colored pieces of candy sliced perpendicularly, so that the sliced surface looks a cylindrical face. Like “roll sushi,” no matter where it is sliced, the face (of a boy kintaro) will appear because of the coordinated layers of making. From this character, a colloquial phrase “just like a kintaro-ame” indicates “no personality, no character.” Although the *ji-ari* type of *shakuhachi* flutes, especially old ones that were made without the application of gauges, shows a great differentiation in sound and shapes, recently made *ji-ari shakuhachi* are much more standardized. Although individual makers may use gauges that are based on slightly different measurements, the resulting products made by the same maker show a great degree of uniformity and homogeneity of quality.

In contrast, the *ji-nashi shakuhachi*, like baroque instruments in the West, tends to show a wide range of variety in terms of sound and playability. Takagi-san thus believes that the most significant goal of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* playing is to acquire the ability “to blow according to the character of each bamboo piece” (*take ni awasete fuku*). This idea—commonly shared by *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practitioners—suggests the player needs to face the character inherent to each flute, discover the best way to play it, and adjust his playing style according to its character. It is opposed to the use of standardized instruments by which the player applies his or her established playing technique to every piece of *shakuhachi* flute without adjusting himself. Takagi-san stated,

Because each product has its own character, you need to play according to its character. It is not convenient, from humans' viewpoint, if instruments are not standardized. The choice you would make is either tone color or convenience.

During our lessons, Takagi-san often mentioned: "You need to craft your breath" (*kokyu wo tsukuru*) whenever we faced demanding musical tasks. Instead of pointing out our technical problems (such as the lack of rich volume in low register, the unstable quality of high register tones, the unsmooth expression of the *koro koro* technique, and so forth), he emphasized that these problems were caused by our inappropriate breathing craftsmanship. Unlike other teachers who directed our attention to embouchure shapes, fingering, and *meri-kari* techniques, Takagi-san emphasized the importance of one's breathing; it had to be crafted according to the character of each bamboo piece.

Similarly, Satoshi Shimura, the author of *Old Style Shakuhachi and the Characteristics of its Performance*, explains that the essence of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* playing is to explore the "route of breath air" (*iki no michi*) unique to each flute to derive its natural sounding. He claims that the *ji-nashi shakuhachi*, especially old ones made during the Edo period, shows a wide variety of differences. These flutes do not sound resonant unless the player accustoms himself to its character brought by its unique, innate bore shape. The player needs to change his blowing style in the way that the air passes through a uniquely shaped inner space of the bamboo. This process requires months of practice and acclimation.

Another *ji-nashi shakuhachi* expert explains the same idea using a slightly different concept in his book.

The *ji-nashi shakuhachi* is different from one another in terms of inner bore space. The player needs to get used to its own blowing style. Otherwise, the pitch may be inaccurate and the sounding may not be rich. However, as he plays it for some time, he understands the tips of how to blow into it. Because it does not bear a filling material inside the bore, the bamboo fabric may naturally be shaped in time [by blowing air] in a way that it resonates well. This transformation is called "route is paved" (*michi ga tsuku*). (Toya Denko, 1984, p. 6)

Adjustments are not made simply to get used to each flute but also to accommodate each note. One of Takagi-san's students who is now teaching abroad explained:

Because of the individual 'chambers' inside a *ji-nashi shakuhachi* created by the nodes still left inside, the *ji-nashi* very often requires change of breathing at almost every note (with changes of fingering positions). This results in you having to *adjust* to the bamboo rather than the bamboo adjusting to you.²⁸

Not only the bore shape but also the mouthpiece angle requires the player to adjust.

There is also a large range of *utaguchi* angles with *ji-nashi*. This affects both tone and embouchure. That's the reason *ji-ari* players sometimes say *ji-nashi* is "difficult". They are not used to adjusting their embouchure. If you want to switch around between flutes and styles you have to be adjustable.

The need for adjustment is frequently experienced by many *shakuhachi* practitioners.

They take it as part of *shakuhachi* playing. It brings more joy than suffering from adjustment. A Japanese person whom I met in Japan elaborates his adjustment process to his new flute as a joy on his website.

When I first blew into this flute made by Matsumoto Hirokazu, I could not produce a large volume of sound. But I clearly felt that the entire pipe of bamboo was vibrating, and that gave me a magical sensation, something I had never experienced. I felt no other flutes can bring any happier feeling than this flute to me. This flute is not artificially bent and straightened by the maker. The flute carries its original bamboo shape, with no *urushi* coating. The bore inside looks uneven and bumpy. Every time I play this flute, a fresh emotion arises, and I feel as if my breath becomes part of nature. But this flute required me some getting

²⁸ This person continues,

Often we tend to want the flute to be, so we as players have to work as little as possible. So, we get instant gratitude. That is, of course, an acceptable assumption for some types of instruments - especially the instruments that can be mass-produced as the more or less 'best' way of constructing them has been found. This is not the case with *shakuhachi*. And what I find a striking characteristics of *shakuhachi* playing is, that we all desire something VERY different from it. So, what is 'best' for me, is not 'best' for someone else. I didn't find this to be this pronounced when playing Western flute.

(<http://www.shakuhachiforum.com/viewtopic.php?id=1640>)

used to: It took me about two months to acquire the blowing style that this flute requires. The tone color was already very nice from the beginning. But the resonant volume of sound came much later.²⁹

Because of this “getting-used-to” and “self-transformation” process, *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practitioners have experienced an inability to coax sound from others’ flutes. For example, throughout the Bamboo Roots Pilgrimage, when each of us carried our own *ji-nashi* flutes, we came across several *ji-nashi* players and makers who, despite their years of experiences and practices, could not play well using some of our flutes and vice versa. We could not produce any good sound when we tried these people’s flutes. It also happened several times that one of my *ji-nashi* flutes received criticism one day and praise next day from different practitioners. This type of divergence in opinion about individual *ji-nashi* flutes is very common, because the quality of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* flutes is not homogenized. Thus, people—even professional makers-players—often need time to acclimate themselves to others’ flutes.³⁰

Throughout my fieldwork in Japan, I came across several *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practitioners, like Takagi-san, who enjoy the process of exploring each bamboo’s peculiar “blowing route,” as well as the transformation of their own playing styles through their everyday blowing practices. For example, Idemitsu-san’s teacher, Sudo, is

²⁹ This statement is originally written and presented in Japanese on his website: <http://homepage3.nifty.com/ha-245/Shakuhachi/My%20Shakuhachi.html>. English translation is mine.

³⁰ For example, upon trying my 1.8 *ji-nashi* flute made by Myochin Sobin, Takagi-san observed that the bore is too wide for this length and the sound is too diffused. However, at the same time he commented that there should be ways to play on this, indicating that this flute is not his favorite but others may be able to play well on it. After playing a *honkyoku* piece (*tsu ru no sugomori*), he said, “See, now that I’ve been playing this for ten minutes, I am gradually getting a better sound out of it.”

one of those people who appreciate the spirit of *take ni awasete fuku*, or “blowing according to the bamboo.” He finds the great joy in challenging difficult flutes to play. Rather than using a nicely-sounding flute, which he calls an “instrument,” and playing musically, he prefers blowing into a raw bamboo flute that is difficult to play. Unlike most *shakuhachi* players who prefer easy-to-play flutes that resonate well without much effort, he prefers to confront a raw piece flute that resists his efforts to express himself. As long as he can produce a decent sound from a piece of bamboo—no matter how arduous it is—he leaves the bamboo as it is and does not attempt any further to render it more playable. In so doing, he attempts to converse with the bamboo. He simply enjoys the adjusting process in relation to the unique character of each flute. He thinks that if a sound comes out too easily, that piece of bamboo does not leave much space for the player to be creative in crafting tones. For him, *ji-nashi* flute making and playing involves not only encounters with unknown pieces of bamboo, which for him is a manifestation of nature’s diversity, but also a transformation of himself and his relationship to the bamboo. The essential quality of *shakuhachi* playing for him is thus to cultivate individual unique relationships with a variety of bamboo pieces that bear distinctive characters.

My personal experience of trying vintage *shakuhachi* flutes convinced me how important it is to practice “blowing according to each flute’s character.” One day, I visited a collector of vintage *shakuhachi* instruments (called *kokan*). The shapes and sizes of these instruments vary from one to the next, and exhibit significant differences

compared to flutes made in the last 50 years.³¹ He allowed me to play many of his flutes. Unfortunately, I could not make any good sound out of many of the flutes, even after I looked at my embouchure shape in a mirror several times. Then, I heard him say to me:

You need to blow according to each piece of bamboo. To play kokan [vintage] shakuhachi, you need to tailor your breath to the character of each bamboo piece.

He advised me several times on how to blow into large bore flutes. He suggested that I push the tongue forward to make an expanded chin cushion just below and behind the lower lip. That way, the air will not leak from the space between the chin and the mouthpiece of the flute. This worked well for me. He also saw that I could not play shorter flutes with narrow bores. He encouraged me to become accustomed to shorter sized *shakuhachi* flutes (between 1.2 and 1.5). During my stay at his place, he remarked several times, “*you need to blow according to this piece of bamboo. You don’t know much about bamboo yet.*” Behind this statement was a belief that being able to play diverse sizes of the *shakuhachi* is an important component of learning, one I had not yet acquired.

The idea of *take ni awasete fuku* or “blowing according to the bamboo” was shared by many *shakuhachi* players long ago—before the standardization of the *shakuhachi* began in the early twentieth century—when *shakuhachi* flutes still maintained individual’s different styles of flute construction and different regional styles. This traditional sensitivity has almost been lost. The owner of these vintage *shakuhachi*

³¹ Diversity of the *ji-nashi* is brought about by differences of individual making styles, of geographical styles, of historical styles, and most importantly, of a variety of bamboo segments.

and his friend expressed their frustration with the current situation. Many people do not practice the spirit of *take ni awasete fuku*. Besides, they commented:

*What I cannot bear is those who retune vintage old shakuhachi and derogate them just because the pitches of those flutes don't sound good to their contemporary ears. If they want well-tuned flutes, they can just use the modern type of the shakuhachi. A lot of recently made shakuhachi flutes are well tuned.*³²

Embodying the Instrument

The standard size of the *shakuhachi* is 1.8 (55 cm or 21.5 inches). When one begins playing on a longer flute (e.g., the size of 3.0), he or she may find it difficult to hold the instrument, cover the finger holes, and blow straight into the flute. This is because the spacing of the finger holes extends as the length of flute increases.

For this reason, the *ji-nashi shakuhachi*, especially longer flutes, are made in a way to suit individual players: They are tailored to individual bodies through, for example, offset finger holes that are determined by individual player's hand size and arm length.³³ Because longer flutes are often tailored to the owner's reach, other players may

³²They are especially critical about foreigners who retune and sell vintage *shakuhachi* instruments abroad. Among foreign *shakuhachi* practitioners, tuned pitches are an important factor that determines the value of the flute. Generally, *kokan shakuhachi* is not tuned: "Chi," the fourth tone, tends to be sharp, and other tones may also be either flatter or sharper. Yet, because of its natural, mild tone color, vintage *kokan shakuhachi* is also popular outside of Japan. To accommodate these two aspects (pitch and tone color), American *shakuhachi* vendors have retuned many vintage *shakuhachi* flutes. Many Japanese were angered by these vandalizing acts because they feel that *kokan shakuhachi* carries the sounding of the past. The same vandalizing effort was also made by the Japanese during the meiji period when the *shakuhachi* became an ensemble instrument: A lot of vintage *shakuhachi* were retuned and lost the original sounds during this time (Shimura, 2002).

³³ This is not the case for practitioners in the *myoan* tradition who generally dislike offset finger holes due to their aesthetic preference of straight finger hole positions.

not be able to handle them. Unlike standardized flutes, which anyone can play, the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* requires the practitioner to get used to its distinctive character (sound, size, shape, functionality) and transform his or her blowing and holding style to suit that particular flute. The result is the embodiment of the flute. As the practitioner experiences a variety of flutes (longer, shorter), his or her experience with bamboo becomes richer, and the embodiment of the flutes becomes deeper. In other words, the practitioner grows with the flutes. The body extends in conjunction with the size of the flute and the playing style develops accordingly.

My first experience of acclimating myself to a longer flute (2.5 in length) in 2007 was that it took me several months to get used to its extended finger hole positions. Eventually, my strength of holding the flute increased, and my fingers became well stretched. I am now able to play a 3.3 (100 cm or 39.5 inches) with offset finger holes.

The embodiment of the instrument is often felt with the lips (as is often the case with other wind instruments) because this is where the body and the instrument are directly connected. When the air goes through the lips and hits the mouthpiece, the sense of union with the instrument is created. Riley Lee, one of the first-generation foreign *shakuhachi* practitioners and a sophisticated player, observes that,

The shape of the blowing edge/mouthpiece makes it necessary for the performer to become part of the instrument. The performer and the *shakuhachi* literally become one. The result is a rich range of tone colours, subtle pitch variations and dynamics. (http://www.rileylee.net/shaku_thoughts.html)

The process of embodiment of the instrument is also a process of developing a sense of attachment and stewardship to the instrument. My informant described his engagement with his self-made *ji-nashi* flutes.

Your hand-made instruments are like your children. You love them not because they are beautiful, cute, smart, or anything [functional, playable, etc.] but because they are your children. They were born out of you. You must love them regardless of their appearances [sounds].

This “mother-like” relationship with the instrument is one aspect of the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* experience. The sense of attachment becomes even stronger when they harvest and process bamboo by themselves and turn them into flutes. Cultivating, deepening, and renewing their relationships with the flutes is, like parenting, to grow together with children. Thus, their flutes are irreplaceable. My friend in North America explained,

Those flutes [made out of the bamboo] that you [harvested in Japan] gave me are my favorites, part of it is because you gave it to me, and to my ears, they sound the best and I feel the best and the most comfortable because I put the holes where my fingers need to be.... Those instruments are just completely irreplaceable. The situation you acquired them in, the feeling they gave to me, how they sound naturally, all that stuff is no way to recreate.... It's just so rewarding to take a piece of plant and make an instrument that you can carry around for the rest of your life. It's got to be a life-long friend.

Attachment to the instrument coincides with the sense of love, care, and responsibility toward the instrument. The fact that bamboo takes a lot of care to prevent it from cracking requires the owner to pay special attention to its condition. Some of my participants feel a sense of commitment to make every piece of bamboo into a flute because they are the people who took bamboo's lives. Because harvested bamboo pieces are special and contain memories, some of my participants have turned cracked pieces of bamboo into flutes with particular affection toward materials themselves. One of Takagisan's senior students played (and showed to me) a flute that was made out of a cracked piece of bamboo. Because that piece of bamboo was his favorite, he decided to make a flute from it instead of abandoning it.

The idea of cultivating and embodying a personal relationship with an individual flute (through blowing according to its character) is summarized in the following statement of a *shakuhachi* maker who had a chance to work on a unusually large bore, fat, old *shakuhachi* flute.

*Playing this flute was a wonderful awakening. At first, I found that lots of things about this flute didn't work for me as a shakuhachi musician. Mainly, Hi Go was not accessible for me. I wasn't able to find any fingering to make the note. But, after playing it for a half an hour or so I decided to find a piece of music I could play. Turns out, Tamuke doesn't use Hi Go. I was pleasantly reminded that flutes display their personality when applied to a piece of music as opposed to just trying to see if all the notes work. This reminded me of why I play music when tuning and checking my flutes (that's why it's very important for me to study shakuhachi music). Usually, when I play music on a shakuhachi, I feel a collaboration with the flute. It's a give and take relationship. Many fine flutes are very giving. And many do not give much. At least not while you're playing. I found this shakuhachi a little selfish at first. It made me play Tamuke in the way it wanted to be played. I realized that I couldn't, or it wouldn't let me do things I would normally do with this piece. Afterwards, it felt kind've good to succumb to the flute. I realized while playing that the flute was saying, "Listen to me, don't try to force me to do what you want. In the end, we'll both be happy." The realization was quite elucidating and timely. It's a lesson I'm presently learning from my children, who are now at the ages of two and four years.
(<http://www.yungflutes.com/log/archives/2007/08/index.html>)*

In general, *shakuhachi* makers are the ones who encounter several varieties of bamboo on a daily basis. They cultivate and expand their relationships with the bamboo through making and repairing flutes. Their job requires them to embody a variety of flutes' characters. The maker introduced above likens his experience of flute making and playing to parenting, as both involve the joy of learning and co-evolving. The nature of co-evolving with the flute is described by many Japanese players as being “nurtured” by bamboo. One of my informants who is a professional player in Japan stated:

If a flute is made by a maker with a special care and love, it must have some positive charm. Every flute has its own charm. Sometimes I am swayed by a flute and find myself dismayed. When this occurs, I feel as if I am nurtured by the bamboo.

This statement captures the nature of the relationship between humans and bamboo. In this relationship, as Takagi-san puts it, “*humans do not stand on the side of domination: Rather, they are free from the dominance-subordinance hierarchy.*” They try to converse with the bamboo, find its character and charm, and adjust themselves to the bamboo. The result is co-evolution and mutual transformation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the aesthetics of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice was revealed through the views of practitioners who belong to what Shimura categorizes as the “first world.” What characterizes their practice is their nature-centered orientation to music making. They strive to express the image of wind passing through a bamboo grove. To their thinking, their performance is a realization of the innate spirit and sound of the bamboo flute. Rather than expressing human rendering of music (*jinrai*), they strive to reveal the true sound of the bamboo (often expressed through the notion of *ichion-jobutsu* or *tenrai*).

Their flutes are not universally used but tune-specific. They believe that each bamboo flute has its own charm and character suited for a certain tune. Thus, they change the flute, depending on the nature of a tune, to make best use of the character of each one. Some flutes are more suitable to certain pieces than others. For the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* players, the inconvenience of a flute is not a “deficiency” but an integral part of its “character.” For them, deficiency is what they need to embrace, rather than eliminate, and integrate into their musical expressions. Ultimately, the experience of trying and getting used to diverse shapes and sizes of flutes becomes the essential part of their *ji-nashi shakuhachi* learning.

Among the essential aspects of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* study is to learn how to adjust oneself to the character of bamboo (expressed by such phrases as *take ni awasete fuku* or “finding a route of breath air unique to each bamboo flute”), which often requires a substantial amounts of time and practice. Therefore, one of the *shakuhachi* playing experiences for the *ji-nashi shakuhachi practitioners* is to build and cultivate individual relationships with a variety of bamboo flutes, each of which bears distinct characters. Flutes that are easy to play do not engage the practitioners in a process of self transformation as much as those that are more difficult. Each practitioner embodies an individual relationship with each bamboo flute through a series of confrontations and negotiations with its unique character. Thus, their flutes are not easily replaced with other flutes.

The above introduced *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practitioners likened their experiences of flute making and playing to parenting, as both involve the joy of learning and co-evolving. The nature of co-evolving with the flute was described by many Japanese players as being “nurtured” by bamboo. This attitude toward music learning corroborates with Rohlen’s (1996/1998) observation of the nature of Japanese artistry transmission. To quote again,

Mastery is a process of adapting oneself to the material rather than of controlling or subordinating the material to oneself. Conversely, it may be argued that the learner must first accept his or her subordination to the material, task, or form. The advanced potter says he has learned from the clay. (p. 371)

As Rohlen points out, the goal of *shakuhachi* training is not the perfection of music as an end in itself, but the development of the self as a never-ending, lifelong process.

Practice of these *ji-nashi shakuhachi* players inevitably highlights the difference of values regarding the purpose of music making. Their self-made flutes are not

necessarily of the best quality—unlike those made by professional makers—and are thus criticized by professional players and makers who are concerned with the sometimes severe judgments of their audience. In contrast, many of my informants value the spiritual dimensions of the practice over its musical ones. For them, more important aspects of the *shakuhachi* practice are “co-evolving with the flute,” “being nurtured by the bamboo,” and “engaging in self-development as a life-long project.” Their view of *shakuhachi* practice inevitably raises a debate between musical and spiritual values.

CHAPTER 5

ENCOUNTERING NATURE, EMBODYING THE INSTRUMENT

Making and playing your own shakuhachi flute can be an immensely gratifying life experience. For me, there are few things in this world more joyful than making a musical instrument.

-Perry Yung, a shakuhachi maker in New York

One of the distinctive features of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* learning is the level of embodiment of nature through the making and playing of the flute. Since the instrument is made from natural materials and the student is engaged in the very basic process of instrument making, including the actual harvest of the bamboo, the practice of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* music involves a series of conversations, confrontations, and negotiations with bamboo. The result is an acquired understanding of nature's diverse expressions, an attitude to embrace them, and the art of music making in close contact with nature. In what follows, aspects of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* player-makers' activities of bamboo harvesting and flute making are introduced and analyzed in relation to what it means to the practitioners to engage in music and nature.

Living With Bamboo

What does it mean to fulfill the integrated role of bamboo harvester, instrument maker, and flute player? Many of my participants naturally take these three roles and find a great joy in undertaking each one. Their self-harvested bamboo shapes their approaches and making of the flute, and this organic process inspires their flute playing.

Among my informants, Kyle epitomizes the essence of organic engagement in flute making-playing. His life is aligned with the ecological cycle of bamboo that he cultivates on his own property in Japan, where he maintains a sustainable relationship

with the land. I had already known about him before I began this research as he had been a leading *shakuhachi* player, composer, and *shakuhachi* maker in Japan. He has gained a fine reputation in each area of his profession, namely, playing, composing, and flute making. However, it was not until I met him at the Bisei International Shakuhachi Festival in 2007 and listened to him discuss his philosophy of *shakuhachi* life that I became fascinated by his approach. At a symposium of the Festival, he was one of the eight panel speakers from Australia, France, Germany, the U.S. and the U.K. who spoke about the increasing popularity of the *shakuhachi* in their countries. At the end of the symposium, I asked them how they would see flute making activities outside of Japan. As the last respondent, Kyle responded quite passionately. He said, “*I believe that every shakuhachi player should engage in flute making.*” After the symposium, we chatted for a while and exchanged contact addresses. As I talked to him, I realized that he served as a perfect case, one who is able to explain what it means to live with bamboo, be a flute maker, and a musician. What follows here are his responses to my questions during phone interviews.

In addition to the *shakuhachi*, he makes all sorts of drums and flutes from bamboo pieces that he has harvested from his yard for this specific purpose. He asserts that bamboo is a major part of his life and that it constitutes for him a connection with nature.

Often when I explain it [embodiment of nature] I say the bamboo is my connection with nature. It's how I am relating to the cycle of the year. For instance, in the fall that's when I dig bamboo. And so in the early Winter that I am curing and working with that bamboo to process it, and the rest of the year I am working on bamboo that has dried for two years and doing different things with the bamboo. And then bamboo shoots come up then. I am working with the natural forest around my house, and I am fertilizing the bamboo forest. So I am thinning it out so that the grove would be very healthy. I like people know this is my strong connection with the natural environment around me. I am really seriously connected with the bamboo. I feel real lucky.

For him, bamboo is about his life. Bamboo is a source of joy and passion. That is why he does not wish to, for example, use a plastic substitute for the *shakuhachi*. The feeling brought by blowing into a plastic flute is quite different from blowing into a natural material. For him, the bamboo flute is more than a musical instrument; it is sacred connection to nature and an embodiment of the land and the local environment. Thus, what matters to him is more than sound. He explained:

Well, in terms of the acoustics, you can get a plastic flute that would play well because wind instrument is not dependent on the material. It's dependent on the bore shape and the shape of the mouth piece and all that, which means essentially if my best playing flute that I use in concert, if everything was exactly the same in plastic, no one would really tell the difference.... [People would] say why don't you play plastic shakuhachi then? I tell them, from the bottom of my heart and with the deepest sincerity, very simply, I like bamboo. I like bamboo. I like the plant. I like working with it.... I don't want to put plastic flutes against my mouth. I don't want to work with plastic. I want to work with bamboo.

His attachment to the land and bamboo develops through his year-round activities with his bamboo grove.

I am waiting for bamboo to mature so that I can make instruments out of it. I mean, they are waiting for me. I don't feel really bad because in 10 years it's going to start deteriorating any way, and all their friends are getting to be happy because they are getting more juice because I am taking care of the growth, thinning it out, so that the ones that are remaining are healthier.... I like the fact that it grows faster than any other plant in the world, and that you can harvest it after four years instead of waiting for 100 years with a lot of hardwood forest. I like the fact that you can actually harvest it and improve the health of the grove rather than destroy the grove by cutting pieces.

Bamboo is an eco-friendly natural resource because it grows faster than any other wood plant, and it can be harvested in a few years. Because all the stems are connected through the root as a system, cutting a number of bamboo stems does not destroy the entire system. It actually serves to strengthen the plant.

When it comes to his own engagement with bamboo, he is clear that what he appreciates is the uniqueness of individual pieces of bamboo rather than homogeneous qualities. Because bamboo is natural, each piece is unique, and each player's engagement with the instrument is individually tailored. He stated,

I like the fact that each one [bamboo] is different. People are [also] all different. Is this a bad thing? No. No one would suggest that we should all be the same, we all have the same voice. When you work with the natural material like bamboo, each one is unique, each one is a surprise. We all need a surprise. And through that I can connect with the natural world around me. I can't do that with a piece of plastic.

For him, every encounter with bamboo is a surprise because every piece bears its own character. In order to appreciate diverse expressions of bamboo, every *shakuhachi* player, he believes, should engage in the very organic process of bamboo harvesting and instrument making. In this manner, the ways that human beings experience the instrument are diversified.

Kyle is proud of his activities that involve bamboo because it is such an eco-friendly natural material. Besides, his activities are of great benefit to the natural environment.

It's about, of course, our renewable natural resources you can get. And then it's a vegetarian instrument, almost completely. There is this one little tiny piece of plastic that I put in on the mouth piece. I do that because I don't like to promote ivory, and water buffalo horn seems to chip a little too easily. The bug would eat it. So I prefer the acrylic plastic for that. But it's such a small amount, and then urushi is made from the natural urushi tree. So very little unnatural material goes into making the flute. I use some superglue. That's about it.... It's one of the few instruments you can bury in your garden, and it would help fertilize it.

Because Kyle knows the versatility of bamboo as a natural resource, he finds great potential in bamboo, and not only as a material for musical instruments, but for many other uses as well. In fact, bamboo is now used as a material for many types of products,

including carpets, yarns, building components, dishes, utensils, cosmetics, charcoals, just to name a few. Rather than exploiting rain forests (and labor) in developing countries, there are ways, he believes, to utilize bamboo in a way that alleviates the degree of environmental disruption. Kyle observes,

Different kinds of woods are used for wooden instruments. Bamboo has to be the most readily available, renewable resource that is underused in the whole world. In old days they used it for everything. But it's definitely underused now. But there is potential. I think for instance you can make plywood for the concrete form and stuff out of bamboo. But they use hardwood from Malaysia because it's cheaper right? So this is not a good thing. Hopefully, it's not too late people would understand we can use bamboo for that. Little by little it's changing.

Cultivating bamboo farms and making *shakuhachi* flutes are fun activities, perhaps something of a luxury, but their implications and contributions to society extend beyond the realm of hobby because they are a form of social activity and an attempt to protect the local eco-system.

Although the traditional style of living close to nature (in the *satoyama* environment) has decayed in Japan, forms of human lives around bamboo still remain in smaller scales. The availability of modern technology makes it easier to live in a rural area while keeping close connection to distant communities. More people are showing their interest in living close to nature and engaging in the organic process of *shakuhachi* making. Kyle provides us with a view of what it is like to live a life around the cycle of bamboo. Like other *shakuhachi* maker-players introduced in the next section, his musical activities are largely inspired by his encounters and interactions with bamboo. As he stated, each encounter with bamboo is a surprise, and that is a source of musical inspiration for him.



Figure 4. Image of a well-maintained madake bamboo grove.

Bamboo Harvesting

In late fall and winter (November and January) bamboo loses moisture content and is ready for harvesting. People generally avoid other seasons when bamboo contains too much water (especially in spring and summer). Bamboo harvested in these seasons is often worm-eaten or decayed. This is the case for any kind of bamboo, including *madake* bamboo, which is suitable for *shakuhachi* flutes.

Shakuhachi makers normally prefer to work with a piece of bamboo that comes with roots end rather than the upper parts of bamboo, which are typically used for *kendo* swords and laundry poles. Therefore, they need to “dig out” rather than “cut” the bamboo, which takes a long time (fifteen minutes to one hour) and involves much hard work. Besides, it is difficult to find a good quality *madake* bamboo grove (compared to groves of large sized *moso* bamboo) in which the size and length of bamboo stems are

suitable for *shakuhachi* flutes. As a result, bamboo harvesters often spend a day wandering around bamboo groves without finding a suitable piece.

One time I joined a day-long bamboo harvesting outing to a mountainside, along with an experienced bamboo harvester and flute maker in Saga, Japan. From sunup to sundown, we harvested twelve pieces of bamboo—the greatest number I was able to acquire in a single day. During all of the next day, I experienced a pleasurable muscle ache over my entire body.

What follows after harvesting the bamboo is cleaning and trimming the roots that are convolved with soil and small stones, which is, for many people, more tiring and time consuming than harvesting the bamboo stems. Once the bamboo is heated up, the oil comes out, and the color of the bamboo turns to a beautiful light green. The bamboo is kept under sunlight for a few weeks. The color of the bamboo eventually becomes yellowish. It is further kept indoors. In a few months, the weight of the bamboo decreases, sometimes to almost half of the original weight, depending on how much water it originally contained. Many makers wait a few years until the bamboo dries up. Then, they start working on it. It is during this period of time that the bamboo manifests whether it is usable or not for flute making. Half of the harvested pieces of bamboo, on average, develop some type of problem; they shrink, crack, or develop spots of decay.

Not everyone follows the same process. Some of my participants turn light green bamboo into flutes while they are still fresh and soft. These makers believe that the bamboo dries up as they blow into it. Besides, they believe that the sound is best when the bamboo is still fresh and green (according to Takahata Soyu in Kagawa). They are not particularly concerned with the change of bamboo's shapes and its subsequent pitches.

They often referred to a “folk tale” about legendary *shakuhachi* player Watazumi Fumon who is believed to have used a flute that was made out of a fresh bamboo stem or a laundry pole. Watazumi claimed to his audience that he did not care about the condition of the bamboo itself, but could handle any piece of bamboo, be it a raw piece or a laundry pole, for his own music making. This image of spontaneity to embrace raw forms of nature is acknowledged as an ideal attitude toward bamboo by some practitioners—not only Japanese but also foreign *ji-nashi shakuhachi* players who believe the rawer the bamboo the better (Keister, 2004).

The word “root” has a special meaning to *shakuhachi* players. Idemitsu-san, one of my main informants in Tokyo, named his style of *shakuhachi* making and playing the “roots *shakuhachi*.” Root as in “the Bamboo Roots Pilgrimage,” a month-long trip that I joined with my North American informants, contains double meanings, namely, the roots of *shakuhachi* traditions as well as the roots of bamboo. In fact, one of the highlights of the Roots Pilgrimage, besides taking lessons with *shakuhachi* teachers, was an opportunity to harvest bamboo and experience the “roots” of the very organic, physical, ecological underpinning of *shakuhachi* playing and making tradition. Going to a remote bamboo grove with fellow *shakuhachi* students and masters, inhaling the fresh air of nature on a mountainside, digging out the roots of bamboo, and smelling the soil and fresh flavor of bamboo in the beautiful sunlight, are the most effective ways to feel and understand the primitive impulse of ancestors who have created, experienced, and inherited the organic engagement with nature, music, and spirits through the *shakuhachi*.

A few people bring an animistic form of respect and appreciation to the harvest site. An example of such an animistic approach is the offering of sake (Japanese rice

wine) to a bamboo grove. Sake is often used in Shinto, the indigenous religion of Japan, to celebrate the genesis of life and show respect to the deities residing in nature. (Shrine temples are considered as physical embodiments of such spirits). The idea behind this ritual is that a spirit resides in a bamboo grove (Matsunobu, 2007). Under this tradition, in order to deprive a part of the spirit from a bamboo grove, human beings ought to offer sake to the land in respect for its sacredness. This animistic worship of nature is shared and practiced by a few North Americans too. In previous years, the members of the Roots Pilgrimage provided sake offering (called *omiki*) to bamboo groves. Through this ritual, the process of harvesting bamboo became sacred as well as physical.

When we harvested bamboo during our Roots Pilgrimage, we did not bring sake as an offering but prepared some cash in envelopes so that we could give an honorarium to the owners of the bamboo groves. During the trip, we had four opportunities to harvest bamboo at different sites across Japan. We organized two of them ourselves by asking local gate keepers to find bamboo groves and allow us to harvest bamboo. Sometimes, we joined other groups. For example, we participated in Takagi-san's group and went into a mountain side of Nagano (about 150 miles away from Tokyo) on a beautiful Saturday in November. As we parked the cars, each of us was given a set of harvesting tools, including a chisel and hammer that helped us get the bamboo roots out of the ground. As we climbed up the mountain, we saw a huge, extended bamboo grove spread out all over the hill. Unlike unattended bamboo groves, this forest of bamboo seemed well-kept; the bamboo looked healthy and the inside of the forest was bright. Although this forest looked as if there was an endless amount of bamboo there, Takagi-san was concerned

that a group of twenty bamboo harvesters could easily exploit the entire grove year by year. Thus, we were told “not to harvest too many bamboo stems” to save the grove.

The group was a mixture of experienced and un-experienced bamboo harvesters. Experienced people climbed up the hillside and disappeared into the grove in no time. Since the grove was huge, we were scattered around in different, far-away places. This was new to us because in smaller groves we could assist one another. One of our members, Rob, expressed his feeling the next day after we harvested bamboo:

We all went together and we all did our own thing really. When I was selecting bamboo, [my feeling] was still...not really uneasy but uncertain. There were enough tools for everybody. So I dug a piece and brought it to Takagi-san. What do you think? But when I first went up there, I felt like, how am I going to pick up a piece of bamboo?

Getting into a bamboo grove is an exciting experience because it is a veritable treasure land. It is not only a physical experience but also a liberating, transformative experience.

Rob also stated,

But something happened when I walked up that hill with my own tools and my arms: My own space being created. As far as the harvest goes, finding a piece of bamboo, finding a space, was like a medium for long tone [meditation practice]. Within the envelope of this experience perhaps, and with the energy of this group, each carried its own energy. Just such beauty in that energy got me to a different level of mind and body connection. You can't help but [being] affected by that. Walking up there and just going into the bamboo, once I got on my own, I think that's what happened there. We were all on our own. At the same time, we were all connected. It's a very much different thing when you are looking for bamboo on your own waiting to see something you want.

As indicated above, what characterized this group bamboo harvest was the dynamics of energy generated by the healthy spirits of the members. While harvesting bamboo, we had several experienced colleagues who came to see how we were doing and gave us advice regarding how to distinguish good quality bamboo for *shakuhachi* making.

We also had one of the members playing a folk song from far away. It sounded as if the natural perfect sound of bamboo was coming from nowhere in the mountains. This sense of connectedness continued till the next day when we did *aburanuki* (bamboo heating) to expel the oil from the harvested bamboo. We gathered in an open space next to the house of the bamboo grove owner and started burning dried wood. We seated ourselves around the fire and heated up our bamboo while chatting. Some experienced members had more than ten pieces of bamboo (per person) to burn, whereas the members of the North American group including myself, managed to find three to five pieces each.



Figure 5. Image of aburanuki.

The bamboo pieces we gathered became special to all of us. Rob said on the evening of our *aburanuki* day:

It's quite interesting to me to think now how come I felt to that bamboo. I picked that smaller piece as well as fat pieces. They were more than anything. That's what I wanted. Not for somebody to pick one for me.

This statement was made the next day, after we harvested bamboo in Nagano, when his memory of harvesting bamboo was fresh. Like him, other members responded similarly during my focus-group interview at the end of the trip.

Trevor: What makes it different is the flute that is self-made and the flute that you involved from the making and harvesting process.

Rob: Although already I made ji-nashi flutes, I already feel more connection to the bamboo that we have in the balcony (those we harvested in Nagano) than pieces that I bought and have been given to me.

Koji: And you imagine what kind of sound each piece of bamboo can produce.

All: Yeah. Of course!

Koji: You cannot help but think of it.

Rob: Yeah, for most pieces that I harvested. That's why I was attracted to those pieces.

After the Roots Pilgrimage, I remained in Japan. I joined two more bamboo harvesting outings with practitioners outside of Tokyo. Eventually, the total number of harvested bamboo pieces during my fieldwork between 2007 and 2008 exceeded twenty (the picture below). Often, I was so drawn to each piece of bamboo, and I spent a long time just looking at my bamboo collection and imagining the sounds that each piece might make. Once I started touching the bamboo, my mind was occupied by endless thoughts. What would be the appropriate length for this piece? Should I turn this piece into a longer flute or a shorter one (which determined where to make the mouthpiece)? Where then can I put finger holes on this piece? In so doing, hours passed.

Because the process of harvesting bamboo is such a profound experience, the acquired bamboo pieces tend to become very special to those who harvest them. One incident that explains this special relationship was as follows: When Takagi-san saw

Rob's *ji-nashi* flute, he immediately recognized that the flute was made from a piece of bamboo that he himself had harvested years before. He remembered the particular shape and appearance of this piece of bamboo, partly because it had a naturally damaged root end that gave it a distinctive aesthetic quality. He seemed pleased to know that this piece of bamboo was turned into a nicely sounding flute. He asked who made the flute. He came to know that one of his students had made the flute and given it to Rob.



Figure 6. Image of harvested bamboo pieces.

Many people who harvest bamboo for their flute making can probably relate to Takagi-san's experience. They can probably identify their harvested pieces of bamboo, especially those that have distinctive "characters." Their prolonged engagement with each piece of bamboo—its harvest, its burning, and drying it before it becomes a flute—brings about a special feeling of attachment to the bamboo.

As Rob indicated above, the communal process of harvesting bamboo creates a special space in which participants are released from their regular social norm. In a bamboo grove, the teacher and students are not physically faced with each other, unlike

when they are in a music studio during a lesson, where they normally sit straight in the *seiza* style. In a bamboo grove, they are physically independent (as they look for their targeted bamboo pieces on their own), yet connected to each other in spirit. They spend the entire day together (including the time for driving and lunch) and talk of things that are not necessarily about music—contrasting to how they experience a lesson time. In so doing, the relationship between teacher and student may undergo a qualitative change. Experienced bamboo harvester, maker, and player Takahata Soyu explained his memory of going out to a bamboo grove and harvesting bamboo with his teacher. He was most happy when he joined his teacher in bamboo harvesting:

My favorite time was when we [my teacher and I] were harvesting bamboo together. Encountering unknown people [in the mountain side] was a joy. So was finding a great piece of bamboo that would have ended up decaying and becoming soil in a few years if they were undiscovered. I could not think of it as a matter of business but relate my life to it.... Normally, we were surrounded by more than ten people during a lesson time. But when harvesting bamboo and staying outdoors, I could occupy my teacher. He often served tea for me on the spot. He always gave me the best bamboo among other harvested bamboo pieces of the day [for my own study].

It was through these sorts of opportunities that Takahata learned many things from his teacher, including how to live an organic life and how to treat his students. In his case, the shared experience of harvesting bamboo with his teacher clearly strengthened the bond. If the essential source of spirituality in Japan, as suggested by Keister (2005), is the social connection in the master-student relationship, the communal process of bamboo harvesting is a significant aspect of the *shakuhachi* spirituality.

Climate Change

Those who harvest bamboo every year are aware that climate change has been a serious issue for the past few decades. Twenty years ago, people never imagined that they would go out to a bamboo grove in T-shirts in early November and face the fear of active killer bees and snakes. But this is becoming a yearly event. When we harvested bamboo during our Roots Pilgrimage, we also experienced a strange climate. It was unbelievably warm, especially in the first two weeks of November. Since bamboo is only ready to harvest after it has dropped below a certain temperature, we were worried about the condition of bamboo for flute making.

An experienced bamboo harvester whom we met through the Roots Pilgrimage expressed his concern of the climate change and its influence on bamboo growth. He feels that there are no longer any cold days in November, unlike years ago. Even after the new-year celebration season, which is normally the coldest point in Japan, feels like March to him. The bamboo must have been confused, he empathized, about when it can start turning water back to the ground from its stem and roots. He observed if global warming continues, even Hokkaido, the northern part of Japan—a place that used to be too cold for bamboo to grow—will be a bamboo growing land. He pointed out that the bamboo pieces that he harvested in November 2006 were not in good condition; they showed more cracks and crumbling surfaces than other pieces harvested years ago. He then wondered if November was too early to harvest bamboo.

This person lives in the northern part of the Kyushu area (southwest Japan) where the climate is suitable for bamboo. Summer is muggy and hot and winter is cold. The greater difference of temperature between summer and winter is believed to be a

necessary condition for good quality bamboo for *shakuhachi* flutes. Now, summer is becoming unbearably hot and winter is getting warmer. There are people who fear that it is changing from a temperate climate to a subtropical one. If this actually occurs, the area will no longer be suitable bamboo harvesting for *shakuhachi* flutes, and *shakuhachi* practices, because they are dependent on the local environment, would be adversely affected. After hearing this, we became quite worried because his place was one where we harvested high quality bamboo during our Roots Pilgrimage.

Approaches to Shakuhachi Making

Ji-nashi making is simple in theory. The maker fashions the *utaguchi* mouthpiece, hollows out the bamboo by breaking the knots (or nodes) inside of it, opens up five holes (four in front and one in the back), and files the bore for tuning (called nodal tuning). Occasionally, a good-sounding flute can be made within a few days. Normally, however, it takes much longer as with other instruments. Often, there are tones that do not sound as resonantly as others do. Without proper knowledge, he or she may end up filing the bore here and there, adding the filling material here and there; both could result in better or bad soundings.

People approach *ji-nashi shakuhachi* making differently. Some aim to maximize the functionality of the instrument by, for instance, inserting an inlay (made of plastic or buffalo horn) into the *utaguchi* mouthpiece, applying the sharper *utaguchi* angle, opening up larger finger holes, or applying layers of *urushi* natural lacquer to harden the inside of the bamboo (and also to protect the bamboo from the moisture). These are the steps bamboo undergoes to be transformed from the raw to the processed.

At one end of the spectrum there exists the idea of leaving the bamboo as raw as possible. An extreme example of this approach, one well known among *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practitioners, is Watazumi Fumon's *shakuhachi* made from a laundry pole processed by a child. The other direction of *shakuhachi* making allows for a series of procedures that change the nature of the bamboo. *Ji-ari shakuhachi* making has taken the process in this direction. The product that results from this is seen as an "instrument," rather than as a piece of bamboo (or in Watazumi's parlance, *hocchiku*, or a religious tool). Despite a wide range of *ji-nashi* making styles, most approaches fall somewhere in the middle of the scale, between these "rawer-the-better" and "*shakuhachi*-as-processed" sides.

Ji-nashi shakuhachi practitioners tend to distinguish two different types of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* making, especially when it comes to tuning. These two approaches are the "subtracting" and "adding" approaches. The *ji-nashi* is basically made by two processes of subtraction: cutting and filing. By minutely filing each node and controlling the taper angle, the maker tries to acquire his or her ideal image of tone and tuning. The size and position of the finger holes also affects the tone and tuning. Because even the subtlest of alterations in the flute affects its sound, the maker pays special attention to every single action of cutting and filing.

Some people, especially those who appreciate "the rawer the better," make the *shakuhachi* only by subtraction. However, many people add the filling material (called *ji*) to the bore for the purposes of tuning and increasing the playability. In most cases, the natural bore shape of a piece of bamboo does not result in a nicely sounding flute. Some tones may not come out as resonant as others. Thus, many people insert the filling

material to control the bore shape of the bamboo. The flute made by this adding approach is be called “semi *ji-nashi*” or “*ji-mori*” (mori=mounded) *shakuhachi* (Shimura, 2002). This type of the flute is characterized by the dabs of *ji* added for tuning purposes. The existence of the *ji* filling material distinguishes the *ji-ari* (with *ji*) *shakuhachi* and *ji-nashi* (without *ji*) *shakuhachi*.

Philosophically, the distinction between these two approaches—the adding and subtracting approaches—deals with the level of human intervention. Some believe that making a flute out of nature is always a matter of human intervention, no matter how it is made, and the degree of human intervention should be of less concern to them. However, others argue that there is a significant difference between making flutes with and without using the *ji*. The subtracting approach allows for less human control of the original state of the bamboo by limiting how far one can go and where one should stop in the process of *shakuhachi* making. The maker needs to be careful about too much cutting and filing. In contrast, the adding approach is a reflection of human attitude that encourages the control of the bamboo to add to the functionality of the instrument (well balanced octaves, smooth transitions between tones, and tuned pitches).

When and where to stop subtraction is each maker’s decision gained as a result of years of experiences. Umehara-san explained the difference by introducing two ways of *shakuhachi* making. One is to try out every manipulative procedure that the maker can possibly apply to the bamboo so that it becomes a good quality instrument. In so doing, he or she needs the intention of control, the power of will, and the expectation that the more he or she tries the better quality the instrument will be. The second way is to stop whenever the maker is satisfied. This latter approach, which Umehara-san takes, leaves

much of the instrument's quality up to the nature of the original material. Umehara-san explains his learning process this way:

Well, I probably learned gradually by myself as I tried many times. Initially, I was obsessed by the appearance of the instrument, such as the shape of the bamboo and the finger hole positions placed between the nodes, and also by the ideal image of large-volume sound. Later, I came across several flutes that looked ugly but carried very interesting, unique soundings. Then I did a lot of experiments; for example, I intentionally left much of the nodes inside the bamboo, which resulted in a very mild sounding. My experiential understanding of how things work is that: As you file the nodes inside the bamboo and gradually smooth them out, you will probably achieve a point in which the bamboo produces a rather nice sounding, well-balance sounding. This is still before you widen the internal capacity the bamboo. So you still have much of the nodes left. If you are not satisfied with this level, you may continue working further on the bamboo. You will probably smoothen out all the remaining nodes, file the inside of the bamboo, and open up the bottom hole like a trumpet. Then, you may get a sound like "bowooo," a large volume sound, which is a sign of so-called well sounding shakuhachi instrument for many people. But this kind of procedure reduces the voice of each bamboo piece.

For Umehara-san, the preservation of each piece of bamboo's voice is of central importance. His preference is to make a well-balanced bamboo with a character rather than a well-sounding flute with no character. Thus, he stated:

So faced with these two levels of destination, I came to believe that stopping at the first level is enough for me. Those who pursue the level of perfection, like professional shakuhachi makers, probably believe that the second level is the destination: They file the inside of the bamboo over and over again. If they don't like the result, they would file even more and eventually apply the filling material [ji] inside the bamboo. You can start over again. I don't feel like doing that. I don't want to "contaminate" the bamboo by handling too much. So as long as the bamboo gets a well-balanced sounding, I would stop working on it. I may check if it can play the third octave as well. If the third octave comes out okay, it probably means that the way it has been made is fine.

The degree of human intervention does not necessarily match the functional quality of the instrument. Some bamboo pieces may sound beautifully without any human intervention, even though such cases are rare. For example, Kyle explained it this way:

The aesthetics is that you leave it as natural as possible but have it play acceptably. So that means some flutes need a lot more work than others. And maybe one every fifty flutes, maybe I get a flute that I don't have to add anything. I just have to sand more here and there. And then I actually don't need to add any material. But most often I need to add the amount that looks like another fushi [node] on the inside. And so I add as little as possible. And that's the aesthetics for me.... But again the aesthetics is that there is no gage. You get what you get.

Umehara-san echoes Kyle's view. The quality of the instrument, according to Umehara-san, is determined more by the quality of bamboo itself than the maker's technique. He stated, *"eighty percent of the result comes from the quality of the bamboo, twenty percent from the human manipulation."* He has come across pieces of bamboo that sounded well-balanced even before they went through a tuning procedure.

Kyle takes the adding approach, not because he likes adding the *ji* filling material to the inside of the bamboo, but because, as a professional maker, he wants to increase the playability of his flutes. Umehara-san takes only the subtracting approach. For him, the functional aspect of the instrument is less of a concern than the character of each bamboo piece. He believes, like Takagi-san, that each piece of bamboo has its own character and is thus playable for his own uses. He stated,

Bamboo is different from one to another, and that's a very interesting thing. This one [the modern type of shakuhachi flute] is more like a Western flute because it is all controlled and smooth inside. But this type of the shakuhachi shows that each flute has a very distinctive character. Each has its own unique sound. I enjoy the uniqueness of each flute, a very special quality that only that piece of bamboo carries. For example, I would say, this one has a "husky" voice quality. That one has a particular tone range that sounds like wild and frantic.

People like Takagi-san and Umehara-san do not try to change the nature of bamboo by *"enforcing them to sound well and satisfying us."* In contrast, professional makers are responsible for their own products and thus more willing to take the adding approach to control the playability of their products. Rather than waiting for a lucky flute (one out of

fifty) that does not need any added *ji* material, they try to turn every single piece of bamboo into a playable, marketable flute. They are aware that applying too much of the filling material is in tension with regard for the character of the bamboo.

Revealing the Voice of Bamboo

Often, the Japanese are less explicit in their verbal expressions than their North American counterparts. Voices of North American *shakuhachi* practitioners are expressed in the Internet—at individual websites, blogs, as well as *shakuhachi* forums. The Internet has been a medium to share a great deal of information and has been quite useful, especially for beginners and independent learners seeking advice. Here, I introduce experienced American *shakuhachi* makers' narratives of *shakuhachi* making (cited from the *shakuhachi* forum.com). Their *shakuhachi* making experiences are well documented in these personal writings. To a great extent, they epitomize what I think comprises the essence of *Ji-nashi shakuhachi* making. As implied below, their philosophies and views regarding *shakuhachi* making came from, and revolved around, their very first experiences of dealing with bamboo, rather than the established form of cultural practice transmitted from Japan.

First, one maker posted the following note to reveal his approach to *shakuhachi* making:

*I've had experience making both ji-ari and ji-nashi shakuhachi. In my experience, I've found both concrete and philosophical differences between the two which have ultimately influenced how I work. With ji-ari flutes, I notice the precision and control this approach offers. It brings out the **scientist** in me. By concentrating on the negative space of the bore, it is possible to fabricate around this space to find a particular sound desired.... With ji-nashi flutes, there is much less control. The yield of good flutes per batch is relatively low. For me, the focus is on the connection with the material more than the empty space of the bore. It*

*brings out the **artist/philosopher** in me. Instead of fabricating, I'm trying to adjust and nudge as little as possible to make the most dramatic improvement. Although there are exceptions, I generally find more complexity in the tone of ji-nashi shakuhachi. They often play with a raw, unpolished, diffused tone quality. Personally, I find it endlessly fascinating that we are all wired differently, and as a result, approach the shakuhachi in many different ways.*

Another maker explained this way:

*When making the ji-nashi shakuhachi, I listen to the flute to **see what it wants to do**. There are no predetermined bore specs, only the air vibrating in the chamber to tell me what it wants. The finger holes are drilled and adjusted one by one. The utaguchi angles are cut according to the diameter of the bores and how fat the walls are. Sometimes a flute will be perfectly fine with nothing to do in the bore, but this is rare. They often need what I call Spot Tuning to be able to play with balance. When making ji-nashi, I like to use wide bore bamboo. This way, all I need to do is add some material at certain resonance spots to squeeze a weak note. To me, adding is easier than removing..... **For me, making a ji-nashi flute is more about revealing the soul of the piece of bamboo with as little work as possible done in the bore.... Nothing like blowing Komi Buki into a newly opened piece of bamboo to see if there's life in there** I don't want to generalize since each flute is different regardless of style. But, for me, the main difference is that ji-ari making requires the ability (and effort) to follow strict predetermined specs while ji-nashi making requires intuition (built on experience).*

These makers commonly emphasize the importance of “listening to the flute” and “maintaining the character of individual flute,” which requires “intuition” and “artistic” sensitivities. They also highlight the moment of “birthing a sound of bamboo” when they first open up a piece of bamboo and blow into it. It is the moment of “revealing the soul of a piece of bamboo” to see “if there is life in there.” It comes with a sense of exhilaration, delight, and for many makers, awe and mystery. A different maker’s narrative explains the same point:

I find that once opened up initially, the bamboo reveals its individual voice. That's when I realize, "Ah, ok, it's going to be like this." From there, it's a matter of working in the most efficient manner to help that voice along. I'm not interested in changing the voice, but rather adjusting enough to help it reveal its full potential in terms of what I tune into individually as a maker. To me, it's similar to a parent-like relationship with the instrument. When making a ji-ari shakuhachi, I usually have a clearer idea of what type of voice I'm looking to

*create, so I go at it with that in mind. Of course I'm limited in some ways by the size of the bamboo shell, but there is still more control over the voice. Each flute turns out differently and is unique in its own way, but clearly to a lesser degree than a ji-nashi approach. Maybe this is more of a God-like relationship with the instrument?*³⁴

These narratives corroborate the animistic view of bamboo as housing the spirit, an idea shared by Japanese practitioners, as revealed in Chapter 4. The maker strives to reveal a sound inherent in each piece of bamboo. He or she tries to yield to the nature of bamboo rather than applying the golden principle to every piece of bamboo when making a flute. The relationship of the maker with the bamboo is described by the above-introduced American maker as “parent-like” (or artist like) in the sense that he observes the character of each piece of bamboo (child) and listens to “what it (the child) wants to do.” This is contrasting to the “God-like” (or scientist like) relationship in which the maker ignores the character of each bamboo piece by inserting a filling material into a bamboo piece to control its bore shape and size. When making a *ji-nashi* flute, the bamboo is more than an object; it becomes a living spirit. Each relationship with a piece of bamboo is individual and particular, as if it is a relationship with a human being.

The encounter with the spirit of the bamboo begins when the practitioner harvests bamboo. But the moment of realization of the spirit comes about when the practitioner actually blows into the bamboo and hears its sound. In the *ji-ari* making process, this

³⁴ My own experience of making a long, curved, wide-bore *Ji-nashi* instrument was similar to what they described:

Even after penetrating all the nodes of the bamboo to make it into a hollow and crafting the mouthpiece, still I could not get a resonant sound of the bamboo especially in low register. (At this point, there was no finger hole yet. So the bamboo could only have overtones of one basic tone.) Some trials of filing on different spots did not help much. But when I covered up the space between my chin and the mouth piece with my fingers, the sound came out. It was almost like facing a new born baby crying for the first time out of mother's womb.

moment comes much later—after the filling material (*ji*) is inserted and dried up—because only then does he finally blow into the flute and hears its sound. By this time, however, the sound of a flute is not the sound of the bamboo, but that of the negative space shaped by the filling material. In the *ji-ari* making, the experience of “birthing the sound of bamboo” cannot be an unexpected surprise because the maker already knows what kind of sound he or she is expecting to hear from the flute (as documented above). The maker forces the bamboo to meet his or her image of sound rather than allowing the bamboo to speak for itself.

In the *ji-ari* making process, most makers today use a gauge. The sound of the flute is determined by the negative space shaped with the filling material according to the standardized gauge specification. The resulting flutes (made by the same maker) are “almost” identical to one another (in terms of pitch and tone quality), even though the final products are not as standardized as factory made plastic recorders.³⁵ Thus, there will be less of surprise, exhilaration, and delight of renewing experiences as well as an awe and mystery of encountering uncertainties involved in the process of making. In this sense, as explicated above, the *ji-ari* maker needs to be a “scientist” to exert as much influence on of nature as possible and standardize the resulting quality.³⁶ In the *ji-nashi*

³⁵ This uniformed quality is essential to the *ji-ari shakuhachi* as it is used for ensemble playing. However, this is not the case for *Ji-nashi* flutes. I acquired three *ji-nashi* flutes (the length is 1.8) made by the same maker. Although these flutes have much in common, reflecting the maker’s playing style, they look, feel, sound all differently to me because of the variety of bamboo. As I spent more time using these flutes, my experience of playing also became diversified and did not easily allow me to go back to standardized *ji-ari* flutes.

³⁶ This is not to suggest that *ji-ari shakuhachi* makers are insensitive about the nature of each bamboo piece. They are drawn to the appearance and aesthetics of a bamboo piece.

flute making, by contrast, the maker needs to be an “artist” to reveal and appreciate the sound of individual bamboo piece and to embrace the diversity of bamboo’s natural forms of expression. The maker seems like a philosopher who is concerned about the extent of human intervention in the process of flute making.

Why Do They Make Their Own Flutes?

Both Takagi-san and Idemitsu-san recommend that their students make their own flutes and practice on them. At Takagi-san’s studio, a beginning student typically borrows a *ji-nashi* flute from Takagi-san until she makes her own. She keeps practicing on this borrowed flute for a while. She may or may not eventually own it. In either case, she is strongly encouraged to make a flute by herself. Idemitsu-san also encourages his students to make their own flutes. One day, while I was staying at Idemitsu-san’s workshop, we received several visitors, including four female travelers from France, a

In fact, price differences of final products as *ji-ari* instruments, to a great extent, arise from bamboo’s external appearances, even though they sound almost the same. Today in Japan, the differences in the price of contemporary *shakuhachi* have more to do with the appearance of the bamboo (and also the popularity of the particular maker) than the instrument's sound quality. Several determining aspects of the price are the bamboo’s coloring (*wabi-sabi* quality, sesame-coloring, etc.) and shape (straight or curved) as well as the number and position of its different nodes. There is a rigid conception in contemporary Japan of what a *shakuhachi* should look like, and if an instrument does not possess the requisite appearance, then the price goes down. The price of an expensive *shakuhachi* instrument can exceed far over 10,000 dollars. Its determining aspect is again the appearance. Prices of nice-looking *shakuhachi* instruments that are especially tailored for the uses of players in the *tozan* school tends to be higher with a large demand of supply. A professional *shakuhachi* maker whom I have interviewed commented that there is no difference in terms of the sound quality between his 1,000 dollar instrument and 2,500 dollar instrument. Aesthetics matters. This is not the case for old *shakuhachi* or modern *Ji-nashi shakuhachi* flutes.

fifth grade elementary school boy who stopped by on his way home from school, an old lady who was in the middle of laundry, a tourist from the northern part of Tokyo who happened to find the workshop on the way to a neighboring museum, and a young couple who eventually made their own flutes under Idemitsu-san's direction. Most of the visitors who stopped by the workshop showed curiosity and tried out Idemitsu-san's self-made flutes that were on display. In most cases they had no background knowledge about the *shakuhachi*. He stated:

You better make by yourself. That way you will develop a sense of attachment to your instrument. Once you make one here, then you will be able to make more by yourself, arrange things based on your preference.

Some visitors remain at the workshop and eventually make their own instruments. Some revisit the workshop from time to time and become regular members because of the joyous time they had during the flute making process, as well as the acquired connections to their self-made flutes.

In contrast to these practitioners' belief, one of my Japanese informants (outside of the case) who is a professional *shakuhachi* maker believes that *shakuhachi* players should not engage in instrument making but focus solely on music playing; in the same way, instrument makers should not go out to harvest bamboo but focus on the task of making instruments. He strongly believes in the separate role of flute maker and player. He stated,

Those people who refuse playing flutes that are made by others but use their self-made flutes are self-centered. It's just for self-satisfaction. You wouldn't even think about making violins, guitars, trumpets. Because the shakuhachi looks simple, they probably think they can make it by themselves. But your audience only cares how good your performance is: They never appreciate if your flute is self-made or if you are struggling to get a sound out of your poorly made flute. These things are meaningless for your audience. You cannot make excuse every time you play in front of people, saying that: "This is my self-made flute. So the

quality of my performance is going to be poor.” You never expect to hear such things from pianists or violinists. (email conversation)

This maker’s *shakuhachi* making teacher was a well known maker not only for the quality of his products but also as one of the few makers who trained *shakuhachi* students in the apprenticeship environment. Many of today’s leading *shakuhachi* makers studied under this teacher. It was this teacher who taught his students not to do multiple things, namely, making, playing, and bamboo harvesting; instead, he insists that they focus on one role, so that each task is improved by specialization. This teacher’s belief seems widespread among many of his students, some of whom are now leading master makers. Given the rise of more specialized makers and players, we today hardly find traditional practitioners who are both well-known players and makers.³⁷

In the same way, one of the *shakuhachi* teachers whom we came across during our Roots Pilgrimage strongly insisted that instrument making is only a distraction to become *shakuhachi* players because we may attribute their lack of technique to the quality of their self-made instruments. According to him,

The reason why you should not engage in making of the instrument is that you may blame your poor playing skill on the deficiency of the instrument. You may end up spending more time filing the bamboo or changing the shape of the internal bore to get better sounding of the instrument rather than practicing hard to improve your playing. That’s an excuse. (translation mine)

This player believes that, instead of spending time making instruments, *shakuhachi* students should be practicing. Upon having heard that not only Japanese but also foreigners harvest bamboo and make their own instruments, he stated: “I thought they are just crazy.... It’s beyond my imagination. Nobody [non-Japanese student] has done that [harvesting bamboo in Japan to make flutes] yet. They are crazy.”

³⁷ Examples of such cases were Aoki Reibo and Yamaguchi Shiro.

The professional makers and players introduced above—both well respected for their high quality products and playing levels—believe that the discrete role of bamboo harvester, instrument maker, and *shakuhachi* player is necessary to increase the quality of each role. In fact, their products are considered to be excellent, and they are some of the most sought-after players and makers in the *shakuhachi* world. At the same time, given their professional voices, opportunities to learn the “inside and out” of the *shakuhachi*—a holistic way of engaging in music as Watanabe pointed out—have been removed from the experience of today’s *shakuhachi* students. In the modern musical world, where musicians have experienced the specialization and professionalization of their roles, they are barely engaged in the whole musical process, including instrument making, to satisfy their needs and images of music. In a culture where the integrated role of maker-player still remains, those who acquire the inside and out of instrument making may produce a variety of instruments suitable to their styles of music making.

My North America informants are inclined more toward organic activities of *shakuhachi* making and playing. For them, joining a month-long trip to Japan from North America costs over 5,000 dollars—the amount of money enough to “buy” one or two professionally made *shakuhachi* instruments. The fact of the matter is that the quality of their self-made flutes may not be as high as those made by professional makers. Why would they participate in the trip when they can buy high quality instruments? They are of course interested in taking lessons with master players in Japan and gaining a first-hand experience of Japanese culture. One of the primary reasons for their participation in the Pilgrimage, however, is the opportunity to harvest bamboo and acquire raw pieces of bamboo for their own flute making. One participant uttered, after we took a lesson with

Takagi-san: “*What’s the point of buying the ji-nashi?*” His message is that the profound aspect of the *ji-nashi* experience is to engage with a series of organic activities that include digging, cutting, harvesting, and heating bamboo for flute making, which cannot be experienced and substituted with purchasing a professionally made product. An American *shakuhachi* player who lives in Japan put it this way: “*When you have a barbecue party, you don’t buy cooked meats from a rib restaurant. You prepare everything because you want to enjoy the whole process, including the social aspects.*” These people’s collective voices reveal that the joy of being involved in the *shakuhachi* life comes from assuming every role—bamboo harvester, flute maker, and player.

As Idemitsu-san suggested, playing a self-made flute leads to the development of **an attachment** to the instrument. This aspect of the *ji-nashi* practice is experienced by my North American informants. One of them (Liam) stated to me, “*Nothing is more fun than playing a self-made flute, the one that you actually harvested the bamboo is the best.*” It was when we were having a conversation at Takagi-san’s place after taking lessons that he expressed his preference for self-made flute over professionally made flute.

It’s so much nicer to make you own. I don’t want to buy any more.... I just want to make my own. It’s much better. It’s funny. I enjoy even, not even just practicing, but enjoy even taking lessons with my own bad flute more than I enjoy taking a lesson [like] the other way with my professional flute. I try my flute. But I feel like I want to have one ji-ari normal 1.8 just because it’s normal, standard, so I have to buy one. But never again.

We were criticizing the fact that so many students end up buying expensive flutes made by professional makers, which obviously prevents quite a number of people from engaging in music making for financial reasons.

The feeling of joy and satisfaction brought by playing self-made flutes was one of the themes that naturally emerged during our final discussion (or “focus-group interview” from my researcher’s viewpoint) on the last day of our Roots Pilgrimage. A participant from North America (Penny) commented.

I had no interest in making a flute. But when I heard a teacher playing in New York, it was like, “Wow! What a sound!” I liked it. I came to know he goes to Japan, harvests bamboo, and makes his own flutes. I cannot make flutes. I was not that interested in it. No interested at all. But the sound was interesting. I love going to bamboo forests. But how many do I need to make? You guys are really interested doing this, doing that, calculating the proportion, etc. But that’s beyond me. But I was thrown by the ones that I made. Of course I cannot play well. But I actually liked the ones I made. “Wow! I like these!” As you said, the connection to the ones you’ve made is so different, to be honest.

The above-introduced North American practitioners as well as Japanese ones suggest that a series of organic activities, including harvesting bamboo, making flutes, and playing music using self-made flutes, comprise a process of developing a sense of affection and attachment to the flute. It leads the doer to a more profound level of musical engagement. As they recommend, this form of engagement should be part of *shakuhachi* learning, even if students are not interested in flute making or bamboo harvesting. It brings a “prolonged engagement” with music as opposed to an instant undertaking of it.

Negotiating With the Flute

In the previous chapter, I highlighted the idea of adjusting one’s playing style according to the character of each flute. This idea—expressed in the Japanese phrase *take ni awasete fuku*—is further clarified here by a Japanese *shakuhachi* maker. This maker, whom we met during the Roots Pilgrimage, applied the *kuhan-wari* (1/9.5) or *towari* (1/10) proportions when deciding the finger hole positions. This method—a classical way

of *shakuhachi* making—suggests that the distance between the finger holes is 1/9.5th or 1/10th of the entire length of a flute. Suppose the length of a flute is 10 inches, the first finger hole is put 2 inches from the bottom of the flute, as illustrated in Figure 3; the second finger hole is 1 inch above the first hole; the third hole is 1 inch above the second hole; the fourth hole is 1 inch above the third hole; and the fifth hole is put on the backside and 0.5 inch above the fourth hole.

If one of these proportions is directly applied, the result is an unexpected variance of pitches caused by a unique bore shape and size of each bamboo piece. As a result, the gained pitches are not exactly in tune (like D, F, G, A, and C for 1.8): For example, *chi* (the fourth tone from the lowest; A for 1.8) tends to be sharp. Besides, the degree of sharpness of *chi*'s pitch significantly varies depending on the character of each flute. In order to avoid this pitch inaccuracy, most makers today adjust a pitch by either moving a finger hole position (upward for a lower pitch, downward for a sharper pitch) or changing a finger hole size (enlarging for a lower pitch, narrowing for a sharper pitch). Each adjustment may change the tone color.

This maker avoids such adjustments whenever possible. His products, as a result, require the players to adjust themselves. It is human beings that need an adjustment, not the flute. For him, pitch inaccuracy of the instrument is a given condition for the *ji-nashi*, something to be overcome, not eliminated. He explained,

I apply this kuhan-wari (1/9.5) proportion to every single piece of bamboo regardless its differences. This human-made proportion is firm and uniform. But bamboo has a wide variety of shape and size. You never find any single piece of bamboo that is same as others. As a result, you will get flutes that are significantly different. I see these differences as the bamboo's characters.

Among many makers whom I met during my fieldwork, he is one of the few who are strict about appreciating the proportion. For him, each flute's character is brought about by the gap between the human-made principle and each bamboo's nature. He stated,

*You may think, if *tsu* [the second tone from the basic tone; F for 1.8] of your flute is too low, you can simply raise the pitch. But by doing it, you end up breaking the principle. If you break the principle, you would not tell as much of the natural character of the flute as you could tell when following the principle. What you get represents less characteristic of that bamboo.*

He thus believes,

*If you are a *ji-nashi* player, you need to abide by and appreciate the gap. If you cannot, you better use the *ji-ari*, modern type of the *shakuhachi*. That gap is bamboo's character.*

The player faces the gap between what a human wants the bamboo to be and what the bamboo is actually like. In order to fill the gap, the player needs to add *kari* (chin up) and *meri* (chin down) techniques to adjust pitches, depending on the character of the flute. He also mentioned that the tuning work is related to rendering the pitches of all tones within the "zone of acceptance." If the player needs to add a deep *meri* in order to make "ro" (D for 1.8) in the right pitch, then it is almost impossible to play music. But if it takes only a little of *meri* to play "ro," then it is still acceptable. What is most important for *ji-nashi* players, he pointed out, is to widen their zone of acceptance and to adjust their playing styles to fill the gap between the pitch of the flute and the pitch of the sound image they have in mind. For *ji-ari* players, this zone must be very narrow, almost down to a "point," not a zone. In many ways, this maker's flutes are closer to the bamboo's natural state, when compared to other maker's flutes. This was part of the reason why we, the members of the Roots Pilgrimage, found his flutes very difficult to play.

Most makers today are afraid of selling difficult-to-play flutes because customers prefer easy-to-play flutes that require no adjustment. Unlike most makers who are not players, the one introduced above is also a refined player who has released several CDs. His customers can listen to samples of his recordings and get a sense of what it is like to play *honkyoku* on the *ji-nashi shakuhachi*, which requires constant adjustment of pitches while playing.

Conclusion

The indigenous tradition of *shakuhachi* making and playing has evolved around the sustainable, healthy relationship between humans and nature in the *satoyama* environment. Today, the surrounding context of *satoyama* has changed; and only a few *shakuhachi* practitioners live close to bamboo groves and make their own instruments. Kyle was one of the rare players-makers whose life revolves around the bamboo's year circle. These practitioners believe that their activities through *shakuhachi* making and playing are sustainable and environmentally friendly. A *shakuhachi* maker once remarked, "Everything that comes in and goes out of my workshop can be put onto my compost heap."³⁸ For these practitioners, bamboo is more than a piece of wood; it is a symbol of organic life.

Regardless of where they harvest bamboo—either from their own lands or others'—the process of harvesting bamboo involves a deep experience. For them, every

³⁸ This maker is Tom Deaver. He is one of the *shakuhachi* makers who are concerned about environmental issues. He expressed to me his hesitation of using energy and gas to attend the 2007 Bisei *Shakuhachi* Festival in Okayama all the way from Nagano where he currently lives. His statement in the body is cited from Riley Lee's website: http://www.rileylee.net/shaku_thoughts.html.

encounter with bamboo is a surprise because each piece of bamboo bears its own sound. In the process of flute making, they have experienced a moment of realizing the spirit of a bamboo piece, especially when they first blew into it and heard its sound. This moment was captured through such expressions as “birthing a voice of bamboo” and “revealing a soul of bamboo.” It came with a sense of exhilaration, delight, and for many makers, awe and mystery.

In the process of *shakuhachi* making, the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practitioners tended to take a distinctive approach (such as the “subtracting” approach) in order to attend, listen to, and preserve the character of each bamboo piece. This way of flute making was perceived as “parent-like” rather than “God-like” by some makers. For them, bamboo flute making involves a series of conversations and negotiations with the bamboo. In so doing, they engage in the process of “co-evolving” with their flutes.

The findings of this chapter (as well as those of Chapter 4) suggested that the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice involves two types of learning, namely, “learning about the bamboo” and “learning about oneself.” The former aspect is represented in the following remark of my informant:

If somebody asks me if I would prefer genetically modified bamboo so that I can make the best flute out of standardized bamboo all the time? I would definitely say no. To me, every encounter with bamboo is refreshing. Appreciating the variety of bamboo is part of my experience of [flute making]—perhaps, the most important and essential aspect. It’s fascinating. If everything is the same, I would not enjoy it as much as I do. It’s like learning from nature. You wouldn’t expect if that happens with plastic.

As this practitioner (as well as others) suggests, to harvest bamboo and make flutes is to experience the diversity of bamboo’s unique character. The latter aspect of self-transformation has also been represented, for example, in the concept of “blowing according to the bamboo” (in Chapter 4). It has been suggested that instrument making as

part of the *shakuhachi* practice would facilitate self-reflection and transformation of the practitioner in relation to his or her flutes.

The following three chapters continue to explore the latter aspect of *shakuhachi* learning. Together, they suggest that performing the *shakuhachi* can be a form of self-cultivation when it is practiced to highlight practitioners' situatedness in nature (Chapter 6) as well as relational awareness within and among practitioners (Chapter 7 and 8).

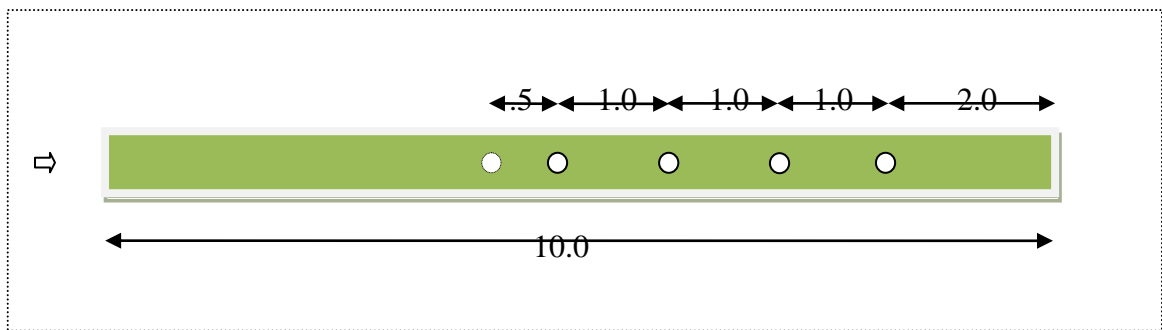


Figure 7: Finger hole positions on the *towari* method.

CHAPTER 6

EXPLORING THE ANALOGUE, PRIMITIVE, ORGANIC SELF

Like other spirited musicians, the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practitioners tend to see the world through their practice of music making. One point of view is that the major part of contemporary life is driven by modern technology that promotes artificial, superficial, and disembodied lifestyles. In contrast, we are missing analogue, primitive, and organic ways of engaging with life. Situated in the modern environment, the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practitioners view their practice of *shakuhachi* playing and making as an act of reviving their “primitive sensitivity,” in modern life. In this chapter, their worldview is discussed through digital-analogue, artificial-organic, modern-primitive binary codes.

Some of my participants perceive that music making (performance and composition) through other media, such as the piano, belongs to the digital world. For them, Western classical music is a well-developed, organized system—like human law—that is governed by many external rules. Music theories are rules that explain music in verbalized, quantified, and abstracted terms. A Canadian student who works in computer science observed that, compared to his *shakuhachi* practice, his computer work and piano learning advance along the same lines because playing piano requires an understanding of many governing theories and abiding by the external rules. He believes that a series of harvesting bamboo, making his own flutes, and playing on them—the “messy, organic” process of musical engagement (in his words)—gives him a relief from his quantified business world in which productivity is judged by numbers and end-results. For these *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practitioners, music is a matter of exploring their organic sensitivities and staying true to their primitive selves.

Restoring the Analogue Sensitivity: A View of a Scientist

What follows is an anecdote of my Japanese informant, Toshimi Umehara, who is a professor of computer science and information systems at a prestigious university in Tokyo. As a serious learner and teacher of *shakuhachi* music, he incorporates the essence of Zen (and Zen-inspired *shakuhachi* practice) into his teaching of science and his interactions with students. For him, the pursuit of scholarship and research is geared toward the completion of individuals as well as the betterment of society, the goal towards which Zen aims. Toward this end, he draws Zen paintings and gives them to his students when they graduate. Similarly, he teaches Zen-inspired *shakuhachi* music to his students who hope to experience it.

Umehara-san leads a group of *shakuhachi* students, called Blowing Zen Study Group, at his university. The members are mostly students from his department and university. They meet once or twice per month. For beginners, Umehara-san teaches popular Japanese folk songs and *shoka* (a repertoire of Japanese songs composed in Western styles during the Meiji era) so that they can develop a good sense of pitches based on their memories of these familiar songs. He then teaches *honkyoku* music. He hopes that they all become able to play *honkyoku* music at *kensokai* (“offering by playing”) or *kentekikai* (“offering by flute playing”) events held by the Komuso Shakuhachi Study Group. Although few of his students have achieved this level, he has seen some, after they have performed in such a setting, changed their attitude toward their practice of music. He stated, “*it was like deepening their connections to the tradition and the people of the tradition, getting out of their own closed world, and getting their mindsets ready for further commitment.*” He identifies that performing at the *kensokai* is a

rite of passage for his students. It serves them to experience what it means to play music as offering. He stated, “*it’s not something that you can find everywhere. They know that it’s very unique, foreign, and particular. They receive a quite big impact when they actually try it.*”

Umehara-san believes that one of the deepest experiences gained through the practice of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* is an awareness of one’s own primitive sensitivity. Faced with simple, bare flutes, his students are reminded that their own primitive, animistic sensitivities are inside of them. His belief regarding this issue is revealed in the following:

Indeed. This way of human engagement [through the shakuhachi] has developed in the chaotic world where human beings are surrounded by plants and animals. In the West, as you know, everything is neatly made, and that has been brought by people’s complete control of nature.... But you see that’s not how people in an animistic society think. Western people have developed this particular way of thinking: Differentiation, segregation, partition, labeling, categorization, ranking, and so on, all necessary in science. I think Eastern and Western orientations to culture and nature are completely different, if not incompatible. Eastern people have lived closer to nature, and that’s part of our artistic expressions. We seem to have inherited from our ancestors this kind of sensibility toward nature and aesthetic feeling. By playing the shakuhachi, we are to encounter these things, which are otherwise noticeable. It is like mining what you already have as part of who you are. What would be other forms of human inquiry that provide us opportunities to confirm that you are connected to the past and that you also have that sensitivity inside you?

Umehara-san’s statement about the East-West demarcation may be overly simplistic and merits further investigation. But his point regarding the kind of sensitivity that can be conveyed and intensified through engaging in *shakuhachi* practice is clear. He believes that engaging in the playing and making of the *shakuhachi* raises an animistic sensitivity and belief: The world is an organic whole, and its occurrence within nature is part of the human artistic expression. Umehara-san observes that most people today have lost this

kind of indigenous sensitivity because of technological development and the modern (“Western” in his view) way of thinking. Umehara-san believes that the *shakuhachi*—an instrument that naturally carries with it the indigenous sensitivity—provides its participants with opportunities to encounter what contemporary people have forgotten. The instrument serves as a reminder of our primitive sensitivity. He suggests that we can find connections with the past by engaging in *shakuhachi* music and instrument making. Furthermore, the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice for Umehara-san is a way to understand the gap between the indigenous and the scientific, the pre-modern and the modern, the East and the West, and the unnatural and the organic.

Another key point of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice for Umehara-san is that it facilitates our understanding of “wholeness.” He observes that opportunities to experience the wholeness of a system are rare in this technology-driven world, where the whole is constantly divided, automated, compartmentalized, and experienced piecemeal, rather than as a whole through the entire body. As a professor of science, he acknowledges that the feeling of disembodiment is a significant problem in a modern society. He stated,

These days, you don't find a world in which you know everything inside out. Like a computer chip, there is always a secret “black box” that handles important things. But you don't know what it is and how it works. You just learn how to use it. You never learn why and how. It is like driving a car: You know how to drive a car, but you don't know why it works. We take for granted the existence of many black boxes in the world. These are made possible by the divided process of work, the ignorance of the entire structure, and too much segmentation and compartmentalization. As you know, the basic way of thinking in engineering or other similar disciplines is that you label a “black box” so that you can “handle” it, even though you don't know what that is. Then, you manipulate operational rules to see how you can achieve the desired result. That's one style of human inquiry. The other style is to bring the black box to light, open it, examine its content, and come to understand thoroughly why and how it works by trying out every possibility. This way is not achieved by combining parts or through

deductive thinking because the target under question is not the sum of the parts but an organic whole. The world of ji-nashi shakuhachi is the latter style of human inquiry.

Koji: Like harvesting bamboo and doing everything by ourselves?

Yes, absolutely. You dig out bamboo out of the ground, clean the roots up, and you burn the bamboo until the oil comes out. You feel very hot while burning. You smell the bamboo. You wait for a few years, and then you make holes and make it a flute. You see if there is any sound coming out of it. After all you play it for yourself. So it is under your control, and you put your creativity and ideas throughout the process of making. We are losing this precious opportunity in this society, which people used to have it.

It is true that we have been trained to become disembodied beings. This was already a concern for people of a hundred years ago. Part of John Dewey's criticism about school education, for example, was geared toward the discrete nature of learning. Following Dewey, progressive educators tried to bring back the organic process of life in schools for children whose lives were already deprived of wholeness (of, for instance, raising animals).

Today, many forms of musical experience, including those provided by music technology, are now dependent on the existence of black boxes. The use of technology in education (applied to music composition, for instance) is in line with the engineering model of thinking suggested by Umehara-san. The organic procedure, as represented by the *shakuhachi* practice, in which the doer experiences every step of the process and comes to know why and how things work, is not a significant part of education. Curriculum has become a package of already prepared materials and compartmentalized knowledge prepared by an unknown someone. Students are expected to consume it as efficiently as possible. School education is often void of the organic process of learning to understand the inside and out. For Umehara-san, what is missing is the experience of

engaging in music in an organic way (not an abstract way), especially given the fact that music learning is also becoming more of a cognitive, abstract matter. Umehara-san believes:

The body is important in physical education. Also in the arts: Artists are working closely with what they are creating. People in these fields still remember how to engage in life in an organic way. In contrast, those who are dealing with abstract symbols and language, like engineers, are controlled by logics and metaphysical thinking. They put labels on black boxes and create rules. They create new labels. This way, the amount of knowledge rapidly increases. You don't really have to understand what it is. But once you understand the rule and language, you feel as if you understand it. That is the essence of "function." That is one of the essences that information carries. You cannot deny it. Music, art, and beauty, are not simply about understanding labels and operational rules but engaging in the entire process of making, expressing, understanding. Both sides are important to human development. But obviously, we don't emphasize one way as much as the other.

Generally, students are not exposed to organic ways of engagement in the world. Even when music is taught, it can be a set of discrete knowledge. Therefore, Umehara-san's message about the organic way of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice seems to strike his university students, as they are only used to the acquisition of disembodied knowledge.

Umehara-san observes:

I often talk about this thing to my students, and they become very interested. They would come to me later [after graduation] and say, "You talked about this at that time, and that has been in my mind. I do relate to what you told us. It was the first time I was told about it and I became sensitive about this issue." Perhaps, they are much more sensitive about this issue than professional educators of music.

Obviously, his organic engagement in *shakuhachi* making and playing extends the scope of traditional music teaching as it has influenced his students in a way that they become highly aware, even critical of, the disembodied, compartmentalized orientation to human life.

Realizing the Animal-like State

Umehara-san's worldview of music and nature and his experience of *shakuhachi* making and playing would strike a chord with many *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practitioners, including non-Japanese ones. Andrew may be one of them. For him, the *shakuhachi* is a reminder of the holistic, organic dimension of life. He stated,

*When I started playing the flute, I realized not only like spiritual benefits but all the different health benefits too. I've been trying to maintain a certain posture, thinking about my breath, thinking about my back, thinking about just letting go about the tension from my body things. That's amazing. It's almost like a kind of **combination of all different things in life you do**. It's an instrument but it has elements that are like yoga. They make you interested in the past, history and all those kinds of things. If you play electronic guitar, you might be interested in Jimmy Hendricks but it's much more immediate. Shakuhachi has this thing. It's like reaching back to the ancient world into a time where there isn't any history.... If you go back to the most basic thing, you go back to the **roots** of everything we have now, so in a way bamboo is the root of computer. If you want to get down to the source of life, start back to the basics. It answers the biggest question.*

Unlike Umehara-san who sees the world from the digital and analogue perspectives, Andrew observes that the organic experience brought by the *shakuhachi* is the root of all other experiences (as he observed that bamboo is a root of the computer). For Andrew, engaging in *shakuhachi* playing is not simply about learning the *shakuhachi* but requires a deepening of his life experiences and a hearkening back to the ancient world. That is why he believes that bamboo makes him realize “the source of life” and can answer “the biggest question” in life.

Andrew believes, like Umehara-san, that indigenous instruments carry sensitivities of native people, those who are more in tune with nature, sensitive to the spiritual dimension of life, and deeply connected with each other, often beyond the constraints of time and space. Playing such instruments, we are reminded of the

primitive, organic dimension of life and to experience it vicariously in the way native people felt. This is why he thinks:

*The real beauty of shakuhachi is that it's a way to directly remind the self of a more **primitive self**. Just by holding it, looking at it, you realize especially when you hear somebody like Takagi-san playing really well. You would tell this guy dedicated his life to such a simple thing, just a piece of wood like this, to blow through, and he has turned it into something much more than a human being or a piece of wood. He turned it into beautiful music that can last forever.*

It is this primitive self that feels the energy and the vibe of creatures, embodies the connection with nature, and senses the source of life. It is this primitive self that appreciates the “animal-like” state in which human existence is felt continuous and being part of nature. This animal-like state, as portrayed in the following anecdote, allows human beings to be in harmony with the environment and fully engaged in the here-and-now.

Vignette

One chilly day in spring, Andrew and I decide to go out to play outdoors. We hit the road around 3 pm. Within twenty minutes from the downtown area we arrive at a park by a lake. As we walk to the lake, a huge scrapped machine—looks like an oil or gas refinery exposed outside—comes into our sight. From the side, its rusty texture and squid-like shape looks like an artwork preserved for appreciation. We further walk to the water. The high-rise buildings of downtown reflected on the water. As we walk, we only run into very few people. To stay outdoors in the first week of April is still too chilly.

We find a place to sit down. It is where a discarded round wood provides comfortable chairs. Sitting in this place, we notice that tall grasses behind us hide ourselves from other places. Faced with the water, we start blowing into our flutes. Motor boats pass somewhere far away. We hear a group of people practicing canoe somewhere on the lake. We quietly play long tones as if we are knitting a cloth. There is no structure and no intention to produce any music, any feeling, or any product. We just blow quietly into our flutes that we both made by ourselves out of the bamboo that I harvested in my home town. Although our flutes were different in size, they sounded quite similar in quality as if they are embracing each other. The doubled tones create a vibration rather than a volume.

As we play, we notice that groups of ducks come closer to us. The flow of water probably brought them to us. As we rest, they also fly away. As we blow, they

come back to us. Some eventually remain in the same place and don't seem to be moving away. They give us a rhythm and sense of repetition in nature. Then, we find a beaver floating and slowly passing in front of us as if he is listening to us. In a while he disappears toward a bush. Enchanted, we talk to each other about what we have seen. Nobody knows that this lake is beavers' habitat. We start blowing again. Time flows into our consciousness. In about fifteen minutes a beaver appears again from the same direction as if she is checking what we are doing. It feels like animals can sense the harmony and peace in our tones.

Now is around six o'clock, and it is getting dark. Our hands are freezing cold. The city is now lit up. The warm orange color of the city surrounds us. This lake now looks serene and exquisitely beautiful especially with the reflection of the color on the water. The mind is also lit up, cleared up, and filled with the joy of being alive. We head into a coffee shop for hot drinks.

Next day we reflected on what we had experienced at the lake.

Koji: I was feeling two kinds of consciousness last night. One was an awareness of myself trying to be part of nature in that beautiful moment when ducks, beavers, and birds came. It was a moment of integrating my own self into nature. But I also felt, through our blowing and our tones, that there was a great harmony between us.

Andrew: It was weird too. I really noticed that when we were heading those moments where notes were combined perfectly and we were really heading a harmony like that, that's when animals would always show up. If we had a few minutes where nothing was kind of discordant and chaotic, there wasn't really anything going on. Animals would have even been kind of relieved. It was really weird because the beaver both times happened shortly after we started playing. But the way we started both time was playing very quietly. We kind of found two notes work together, and we just played long tones. We wouldn't even bend them. As soon as you got to work, just played quietly, steadily, and within five minutes both times, the beaver came along.

Koji: I was wondering if those moments occurred because they naturally happened or we became more tuned into nature and we achieve the animal-like state. We just became quite simple and fully engaged in the here-and-now.

Andrew: Also, when you achieve that kind of state of nothing but love and creation stuff like that, animals are very sensitive to vibe. They may realize that we are not going to do anything to hurt them. Like the duck came and stood right next to us for a long time at the end because he knew that we were not going to kill him. Or maybe he's never seen a gun. But shakuhachi is really a similar thing. Normally being imposed a stick like that, birds would take up immediately. But they can tell just by the tone energy that everything is fine and everything is peaceful. In actually, humans can co-exist with wild animals....

Koji: I remember when we left the lake, once we stood up and started moving, all the ducks escaped from us. They could sense that we started producing a different kind of energy.

Andrew: They went even to every different direction so that we couldn't follow them.

This was not the first time for him to experience such a magical moment while playing the *shakuhachi*.

Andrew: So I was going to see him [my friend] just to do the same thing, basically just playing some long notes. I cannot teach anybody because I can barely play. I don't know any song. I just blow and play and enjoy myself. So I was with him. I brought several flutes. And we were just playing all those flutes on top of each other. Playing anything, playing tones. Then, there was a weird thing. Immediately, the forest became animated like this. Feel all kinds of wild life, birds flew in from every direction, deer came out of the forest and came right up to the twenty feet away. Deer came right out of woods up to us. Such a beautiful day. It was a little bit misty. Completely silence. So haunting strange.

Koji: That also happened to me.

Andrew: It's so strange, isn't it?

Koji: I wonder if it's an illusion or something.

Andrew: I don't think so. There were too many birds. First one, maybe the first three or four came to the trees right around this. We could think it was a coincidence. But by the time we've been playing for half an hour or something, there were birds just chirping around all the trees and visiting each other and making a little noises, cleaning themselves, moving their wings. Quite comfortable.

It was not only the external environment but also our inner state of mind that brought the moment of feeling at one with, and being integrated into, nature. Achieving the animal-like state is not antagonistic to being human. The human aspect of our experience at the lake was recognized by Andrew in his statement: *“It's not about a piece of bamboo. It's nice to have a connection with nature in a way that you harvest your material and play it in nature. It's more about a person.”* He introduced a movie titled *“Into the Wild.”* This

movie is based on a true story sheds light on the human desire to share significant experiences. Dissolute and unhappy in the materialistic society, the main character gives up his path to success as a lawyer from Harvard Law School. Andrew explained,

*There is a very poignant moment at the end of the movie. He was in search of himself and happiness. He writes in-between the lines, something like, very ironic, something like "happiness is only real when you share it." Then, he dies the next day. So he went on this mission to escape from everything, and in this dying moment he realized that his experience...even though it meant something to him, he never got to show his experience to anybody. Real happiness is related to it. That reminded me [of our shared experience at the lake] just because that experience yesterday was very nice. **But one of the things that made it so nice was especially we were together. The sound of two things. And the power of co-creation is one of the essences of being human.** So I've never been interested in going into a cave and meditate for 12 years because it's not the one I want. Of course, every human being wants some affirmation from other people. But it's more a matter of combining energy to make something bigger. The experience can become much bigger than if you are by yourself.*

It was not only Andrew but other *shakuhachi* players that have shared with me this kind of moment—being situated in nature, feeling part of nature, having wild animals close by—as if that is the inherent quality of outdoor *shakuhachi* playing. They would suggest that happiness is not necessarily something special but is part of everyday life; and spirituality does not have to be grand, transcendental, epiphanic, and life-changing, as Andrew implicitly suggests below.

One thing I really reflected on last night after we came back is that again we are interested in trying to get away from the hassles of the city and be able to relax, just be more calm, to have more chances to reflect on everything. But when you see the city like that, it really makes you realize how beautiful and how precious humanity is, even a big city like that with all the brutal grainy workings. From the distance, you cannot see anything but a whole. That can be such a beautiful and magical thing, especially juxtaposing such amazing nature. Here you have a city, skyscrapers, and people are worried about million dollar stuck deals and how the market is going, and just now a beaver stopped by. Quietly just living this life, that's the way, he is always like that. No bother to him.

The World of Less and Less

As Umehara-san pointed out, the amount of information we are expected to consume is rapidly increasing in this technology-driven society (partly because of the engineering model of information production). Faced with this “more-and-more” expectation, many people try to escape from its pressure and live a more natural life. People like Andrew feel that the *shakuhachi* provides a clue for changing his life.

*When I first found out about shakuhachi [as a hip hop musician], that made me think a lot about those things, more **natural life**. One of the problems is life time. I wrote my first email in 2001, the end of 2000, very recently. But already I am stuck on the computer, all day long, at the computer all the time now at work, especially now.... On top of that, just the amount of information we are expected to learn and know all the time, is just higher and higher, in order to keep up with it, everyone is in a state of hyper business, you never have a chance to relax.*

Music making does not necessarily belong to the world of less and less. It is normally the opposite, as Andrew testifies.

It's kind of nice to have a thing that you know would be with you the whole life. I don't have a lot of pressure to learn a bunch of pieces right now and to become an amazing player that everyone knows. With the electronic music, I definitely felt that pressure. In my twenties, my late teens and early twenties, it was a race against everybody else doing the same thing. In order to be marketable and in order to be competitive and make money, you have to be at a certain age, in a certain style, and you have to fit in that homogenized style to do it. I felt a lot of pressure from that when I got 22 or 23. I became so sick that I almost died, and that lasted for a year. I had a hard time even coming to grip the whole situation and recovering from that. A lot of it was probably mental too because of that pressure.

Andrew's description of stressful life may be the experiences of many people who are under high pressure at work in this product-oriented society. The pressure toward more and more is not necessarily imposed externally; but it may be the result of our internal urge to seek more information and more products. He draws on this point:

I probably have told you before, but it's really interesting. It's really true that our need is to produce, just come up with a product. I don't know if that's something that happened in humanity more recently since we became such a consumer-

based society. But I definitely feel very strongly the main driving force, especially with electronic music, to get stuff done all the time because that's directly related to how I make a living and how I have self-worth. My ego and everything tied in. My well-being is generally affected by how well I am producing, even when it's something that is musical and shouldn't necessarily be tied to that. But I am always thinking about product.... Is that what you really want in the end?

Being a musician in this consumer-based society is like being a professor in academia who is concerned about keeping up with latest findings and producing cutting edge knowledge. In this “the more the better” world, many of us are obsessed with productivity. As Andrew mentioned above, his well-being is greatly affected by how well he is producing. At the same time, he feels empty about being in the consumer-driven music industry. Acknowledging the gap, he tries to keep the *shakuhachi* away from the more-the-better world. For him, the *shakuhachi* is about less and less. He never aspires to become a professional *shakuhachi* player. He only hopes to use the *shakuhachi* as a medium to confirm his very organic, primitive feeling gained through blowing into a piece of bamboo. He envisions his ideal life:

Now I feel safe and I could be happy living in a small little house and playing shakuhachi and doing everything by myself. I feel like to be somewhere between being a cave man [like the protagonist of the movie] and a personal computer man [who enjoys modern technology]. One of the easiest ways is to just play shakuhachi. You have the most beautiful and complicated instrument ever created.... There is nothing but just blowing an air flute, a piece of tube, but it makes you think about so many things and makes you reflect on so many things. It's a combination of using your breath. How often in a day do you try to stay with your breath? It produces even just euphoria. Very clean air coming in and out of the body.

Andrew's observation here is that, because the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* is such a simple, primitive instrument, it helps Andrew to learn how to live with less and less. For him, his self-made flute is like a mirror of his mind. Because the instrument is so simple, it reflects the player's mind; by looking at the mirror, he can tell if his primitive self is still alive and breathing. There are many forms of music that fulfill human needs. But they are

like “stained glasses,” to use Umehara-san’s metaphor, because they are decorative (and thus more beautiful) but not as reflective and reverberant as a pure mirror like the *shakuhachi*.

The organic process of *shakuhachi* making and playing for Andrew is an awakening awareness of how much we are expected to produce and consume as well as how little we have experienced our own primitive selves. For this reason, the experience of the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* for Andrew has been totally different from other experiences.

He explained:

*I have been lucky to be an artist to be able to make a living relatively easy, and even with my high-tech job, it's pretty hard to complain because I was given to sit all day in a climate controlled office, free access to Internet, making huge salary. But still, I wasn't happy with that. **Something empty about that too.** I don't know how to really describe it. Just doesn't feel very authentic. No food tastes as good when you buy it from a restaurant as when you make it yourself. Playing electronic instruments I am able to do a lot of things. I can manage huge complicated things by myself. But for some reasons, it doesn't give the same feeling as blowing into a piece of bamboo. I can barely play shakuhachi but I have more rewarding times in a short time with shakuhachi than I can probably have in total with electronic instruments, even though I am pretty much an expert. Now I am working with a guy who programs everything that I ask for. So these programs [of his sampling machine] are tailored for my uses. I am the only person in the world who does that. As far as it goes, I am absolutely an expert. I am one of those people who know inside and out. But at the same time, it doesn't give me the same feeling as the connection with the shakuhachi. Just something different, it's another spiritual level.*

Part of the reason why Andrew was not satisfied by electronic music was that, even though he is a specialist and knows the “inside and out” of electronic music, his complicated electronic instruments did not allow him to engage in the organic procedure in which, as suggested by Umehara-san, the doer undergoes at every step of the process and thereby comes to understand why and how. Unlike bamboo, electronic instruments are too complicated for anyone to create by hand, even though electronic instruments

(including computer music program) are made in such a way that anyone can manipulate and make music without years of bodily training.

If spirituality is defined as a series of lived experiences of self-transformation and subsequent gradual development, Andrew's experience of the *shakuhachi* definitely captures the essence of spirituality. He further stated:

It helped to change my path and life permanently. Shakuhachi doesn't get to play a very big part in terms of the amount of time in a day, but it does play part of mind and hopefully plays a bigger part of my future. Not that it's just an instrument for retirement, but it's probably how I spend the rest of my days.

Andrew's case clearly suggests that spirituality is a life-integration project, as Van Ness (1996) avers, that connects one's actions and quest of life meanings. It is an enduring effort to attain an optimal relationship between one's pursuit of the ultimate value and self-cultivation through music.

The Ji-nashi and Social Problems

The following is my conversation with Takagi-san who spoke most explicitly about social problems highlighted through the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice. Not every *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practitioner in this research mentioned social problems. But they shared a similar view regarding the core issues. For example, most of them raised the issue of human-centered approaches to the technological development and the subsequent environmental disruption.

Takagi-san: Our practice is connected to bigger problems in the society: Environmental problems, globalization, disruptions of local communities, our acceptance of human-centered ways of thinking, and so on. I think it is quite inappropriate to separate these problems from each other and from the shakuhachi practice. It makes no sense to love the world of the shakuhachi if you drive a sport car and don't care about consuming a lot of gas. There is a

possibility that the ji-nashi practice leads us to an awareness of bigger social problems. What can we say about them?

Koji: That also reflects the current system of education. Environmental education tends to focus on environmental issues. Music education has nothing to do with environmental education. Math education is concerned only with students' performance in math. The view that everything is holistically connected and supporting each other is not part of education, at least not in the realm of public education. The ji-nashi embraces many things beyond its sound.

Takagi-san: Many people are gradually aware of the relationship between human beings and nature and the importance of traditional values. Edo city (old Tokyo before the Meiji Restoration) was a perfect recycling society. It was an ecologically-sustainable society. Nothing was wasted. Trash was buried. Feces were purchased by farmers for their fields. People didn't have to produce garbage at all. Today, economic efficiency and convenience matter a lot. Instead of using bamboo and natural materials, our life depends on plastic. We get so much trash and many plastic trays from grocery stores. Human beings suffocate themselves and strangle nature.

Koji: That's not only in Japan but also in North America. The increasing population of ji-nashi lovers has to do with people's awareness of the limit of human activities.

Takagi-san: It was not like that long ago. The power of ethnic music lies in its rootedness and indigenous quality of music attached to a certain place. At one point, Western music took a different route. Today, orchestra is everywhere in the world, and you [a conductor] can travel with a wand and conduct any music. It has detached from the soil. The "ji-ari" shakuhachi is aimed for the same direction. The instrument is standardized so that the music can be played with the same pitch wherever it is played. It is no longer place-based. At the same time, there has been a growing interest in appreciating music played on baroque instruments. The ji-nashi is the same as baroque instruments.

Koji: People didn't have to have a philosophy before modernization. Their native way of living was naturally ecological. They just played flutes made out of bamboo. Today's situation is quite different. We need to have a philosophy to live an ancient life. It's not easy.

Takagi-san: Right. I don't think you have to be a philosopher to be a "ji-ari" player. You buy an expensive instrument, play in an ensemble, listen and represent to accurate pitches. But you don't have to reach back and refer to the edo sensitivity because what you do with the ji-ari shakuhachi is not so different from what you experience through the trumpet in a way. The ji-nashi carries a philosophy of life.

People like Takagi-san cast their frustration in two directions. The first target is the current establishment of *hogaku* music schools in which the integrated role of bamboo harvester-flute maker-player is neglected. In this circle, the edo sensitivity and the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* are no more than foreign remnants from the past. Besides, the establishment of *hogaku* groups is linked to the government's decision of who receive the "national treasure rank" award (selected only from the main stream *hogaku* groups) as well as who can make public performances on NHK TV programs that are under the control of the government. Takagi-san once stated, "*They are like elephants. Compared to them, we are like ants, or smaller than ants.*" As a result, the *ji-nashi* people often feel that they are oppressed and mistreated. They feel hopeless when they try to disseminate their vision of music making outside of their tradition.

Another frustration of the *ji-nashi* practitioners was directed toward the current society itself. They feel that we live in a consumer-driven society in which we are constantly pushed to buy, consume, and dump more and more. The *ji-nashi* practitioners reiterated that this is an "obstruent" situation and that human beings will have to pay a high price if this situation continues. This kind of critical discourse against the society and human life is shared among many *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practitioners. Although many people still see the *shakuhachi* practice as a matter of music detached from social, cultural, environmental problems, people like Takagi-san believe that the organic form of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice contains a clue to changing people's awareness and attitude toward the problems.

Conclusion

In this chapter, two *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practitioners (Umehara-san and Andrew) have been introduced with regard to their organic experiences of *shakuhachi* making and playing. Through the “organic, messy” process of flute making and playing, they acquired precious opportunities to engage with music in such a way that they could integrate their musical experiences into other dimensions of their life.

The anecdotes of Umehara-san and Andrew playing outdoors particularly captured those moments when human existence is felt as something continuous with the rest of nature. They achieved the “animal-like” state, not in the sense of being barbarian or savage, but in that they became in harmony with the environment and fully engaged in the here-and-now. They also felt as if their analogue, primitive, organic sensitivities had been restored. Their simple, self-made flutes made that possible. Their flutes may not be tuned into human-made musical scales, but they are tuned into “nature.”

The power of the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* as a depository of primitive, organic sensitivity is highlighted by a Japanese concept *onko-chishin*, an idiom frequently used by my informants, which literally means “respect a past, create a new.” The emphasis of this concept is placed on keeping a reference to the importance of history or the significance of traditional wisdom as a tool from which to draw lessons for the future. Applied in the context of the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice, this concept suggests that we should learn from ancient people who maintained and facilitated an ecological life style through music making activities. It proposes that contemporary people can recreate their lost sensitivities by engaging the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice. They may experience this

form of knowing as creative and innovative as they are so used to disembodied, compartmentalized knowing.

CHAPTER 7

MUTUAL TUNING-IN AS SPIRITUAL ENGAGEMENT

In Chapter 1, I introduced Alfred Schutz's concept of "mutual tuning-in" as the kind of heightened awareness of connectedness that arises when engaging in musical acts. Schutz (1971) sees musical engagement not only as a form of synchronization into the vivid present but also as a form of social relationship between the composer and the performer and between the performer and the listener. By sharing the flux of time and the space of practice, the doer participates in the act of mutual tuned-in through music in which "I" and the "Thou" are experienced as a "We." In this chapter, I highlight such tuning-in moments as observed among my informants' practices of music. Their tuning-in awareness and relational consciousness of their existence are heightened not only among themselves but also beyond themselves when they communicate with inter-species as indicated in Chapter 6.

Blow According to Your Breathing Pattern

As illustrated in previous chapters, there is a wide variety of repertoires and playing styles developed in different regions and transmitted in different schools across Japan. This is the result of a series of musical exchanges among traveling *komuso* monks and *shakuhachi* practitioners from different schools and regions who taught their repertoires to one another. This tradition still remains. When I first met Idemitsu-san and we played *honkyoku* music together, we noticed that we embodied different styles of *shakuhachi* playing. As introduced earlier in Chapter 4, Idemitsu-san was trained in two different styles, namely, in the *Jin Nyodo* style and the *Nishimura Kyotaku* style, which is

different from my training in the *Myoan Taizan* style. Being trained in one way often restricts the chance to play in other ways. This becomes an issue when people from different schools try to play *honkyoku* together.³⁹ Therefore, the first thing we did was to exchange our playing styles so that we could communicate better musically.

Following the old tradition of *komuso* monks who introduced their own versions of *honkyoku* playing as a greeting, we decided to play *oku* (empty sky), one of the three oldest and most sacred *honkyoku* pieces.⁴⁰ First, we looked for flutes that were about the same size. We both happened to have ones similar in length (about 2.5), which were more or less in tune. Then, we played my version of *oku* in the *taizan* style. Just before we played the first note, he remarked, “*I will play according to your breathing pattern. You may want to play the piece as usual without changing your breathing pattern for me.*” He meant that he would follow and learn how I play the piece by sensing my breathing pattern, including when to take a breath. The way I played the piece seemed a little faster than how he was used to playing. He also resisted the temptation to blow strongly in order to listen carefully to my playing. Although there seemed many differences between my familiar version and his version, he did not care much about the differences. Instead,

³⁹ Not only the music itself but the notation systems are significantly different. This incompatibility is often a source of conflicts among different traditions when it comes to the critical point: “what tradition, style of music, notation system ought to be taught in schools?”

⁴⁰ There is a call-and-response piece that was performed by two *komuso* monks who encountered each other in town. The first part is named *yobitake* (“calling bamboo”) and the second part is *uketake* (“responding bamboo”). Those strolling *komuso* monks wearing deep baskets could not identify each other. For this reason, they communicated through musical performance. Each player was supposed to have a distinctive playing style that served as his musical signature.

he stated, “*there are a lot of similarities. After all, these are the same piece.*” He was unlike many *shakuhachi* players who are drawn to differences of expression among different versions (Tsukitani, 2000). Then, in return, we also played his version of *koku* in order for me to learn his playing style and his version of the piece. We enjoyed our musical self-introduction of who we are as represented and embodied in the different versions of a *honkyoku* piece.⁴¹ In the moment of playing, there was no sense of which version was better merely a sense of mutual respect.

Renkan as a Mode of Spirit Sharing

As this anecdote indicates, the concept of *kokyu ni awasete fuku*, or “blow according to other’s breathing,” serves as a fundamental method of teaching and learning *honkyoku* music. Because the tempo and rhythm of *honkyoku* music are, to a great extent, determined by player’s own tempo and breathing pattern, imitating someone else’s timing of breathing and playing style is considered to be an essential part of music learning. In so doing, the player learns the timing of *ma*, or betweenness of tones, where the spirit of the player is believed to manifests its shade. Many *shakuhachi* practitioners believe that embodying the right timing of *ma* is as important as, or even more important than, being able to play tones smoothly. The learner thus needs to pay attention not only the sound itself but to the breathing pattern as well.

⁴¹ As I had opportunities to play together with my informants and participants throughout the Roots Pilgrimage and my research travel, I became more familiar with other styles of *shakuhachi* playing, and my understanding of different styles and traditions have been expanded.

A related concept of “blowing according to other’s breathing” is *renkan*, a term that denotes a group of more than two people playing together. It does not suggest that the performance takes the form of ensemble playing or of multiple melody lines or duets. Nor does it mean the *shakuhachi* is played with other instruments. As the words *ren* (double or parallel) and *kan* (tube) suggest, the *renkan* is a type of coordinated performance among multiple flute players. In a musical offering setting (called *kensokai* or *kentekikai*), the audience may find groups of people—in different sizes ranging from two to over ten— playing the same melody simultaneously. This is called *renkan* playing. They also use *shakuhachi* flutes of different sizes for a coordinated performance of the same melody. This way of *renkan* playing often generates “disgusting” sounds because of the unharmonious sounds produced by different sized and pitched flutes. This is especially so to the ears of modern listeners whose tastes and musical judgments are greatly influenced by the accuracy of pitches and harmony. Takahata Soyu, a shikoku-based *shakuhachi* practitioner with whom I had months of email and phone communications, elaborated on the meaning of *renkan* playing. In his book, he stated,

In Japan, the basic condition for more than two people to work collaboratively on any shared task is “to coordinate their breathing.” When they look smooth, they are said that “their breathing patterns are in tune.” Even a small lag (or *ma*) between inhaling and exhaling timings becomes so crucial and thus needs to be shared in order to create a harmony; for example, a pair of sumo wrestlers need to match their breath timings in order to start the game. Otherwise, they cannot take the first step forward. The purpose of *renkan* playing of the *shakuhachi* is not simply to have multiple people make louder sounds together; rather it is to put their *kokoro*, or bodies-minds-spirits, together in tune. When it is achieved by those who fully understand this point, their performance sounds as if a unified vital force breathes. Even a silence after a lingering tone is shared by them. (translation, mine).

Takahata’s metaphor of *honkyoku* playing is calligraphy drawing on a blank paper. In calligraphy, the first letter one draws determines not only the size of subsequent letters

but also the composition of the entire work and the flow of the drawing process. In *honkyoku* performance, the blank paper refers to the void of extrinsic rules regulated in outer time (such as steady tempo or meter determined by the composer). Because of this nature, the performer is allowed to play according to his or her breathing pattern. In contrast, playing *sankyoku* music or modern works of music (often westernized in style) for Takahata is like writing letters on a lined and framed paper because the player needs to perform within the defined musical space. Takahata observes that in playing *honkyoku* music, the performer's spirit dictates the flow of music, and this is also the case for *renkan* playing of *honkyoku* music.

Apparently, the same holds true for performance of *taiko*, a Japanese drum, usually played in a group, in which coordinated breathing and *ki* energy are vital to creating a harmony of spirits (Powell, 2004). One of the important aspects of *honkyoku* and *taiko* learning is to get a fine sense of *ma*, the silence between phrases. It is in *ma* that a moment of here-and-now is brought about, a sense of focus and flow is renewed, and a breath in the middle of artful space is taken. "Ma describes neither space nor time, but the tension in the silence and in the space surrounding sounds and objects" (Galliano, 2002, p. 14). *Ma* is thus distinguished from a musical rest. Musicologists and musicians including renowned *shakuhachi* player Yokoyama Katsuya observe that *ma* is the essence of Japanese music (e.g. Shimosaka, 2002; Keister, 2001; Malm, 2000; Wade, 2005). Similarly, Takahata believes that the most important content of learning in *renkan* playing is the timing of *ma*. He thus states that during *renkan* playing, the student should begin the phrase only after the teacher has started and should fade the tone before the

teacher ceases, so that he or she can listen to the teacher's timing of *ma*. For Takahata, *renkan* playing is achieved with moral discipline.

Interestingly, Idemitsu-san used only *renkan* playing as a way of teaching *honkyoku* music, even though his teacher's style of teaching is more traditional: A typical *shakuhachi* lesson went like this: (a) the teacher played and demonstrated a *honkyoku* piece as a model, and the student carefully listened to it; (b) the teacher explained details line by line and gave specific advice while instructing how to read the sheet music; (c) both the student and the teacher played together the piece under study; and (d) the student was asked to play alone, receives further feedback. As this simplified example illustrates, *renkan* playing is normally conducted and practiced when the student is ready to play together with the teacher. Obviously, this was not the case for Idemitsu-san's teaching style at his workshop. Part of the reason for his rendering was that his students mostly practiced a type of *honkyoku* music that was simple in expression, and reading sheet music was not very demanding for them. The students simply followed Idemitsu-san's playing as a means of *honkyoku* learning.

To be specific, *renkan* playing as a learning method of *honkyoku* music should be distinguished from multiple participants playing in group lessons. *Renkan* is a continuous performance of an entire *honkyoku* piece in a group, not a collective study of parts of the music. Once the players began a *renkan* performance, they would not stop until they finish the entire piece, even if they found a mistake. Besides, the essence of *renkan* playing is to share participants' spirits while coordinating the energy. *Renkan* playing is a matter of exchanging spirits in tune with each other in a shared, sacred space, rather than promoting an individual step-by-step learning in a collective way. Thus, the emphasis of

communication is not constrained within the teacher-student relationship. Coordinating the spirits of all the participants becomes a focus of attention.

One of my Japanese informants answered my question about what *renkan* playing means to him and how different *renkan* playing is from just playing:

The main thrust of playing honkyoku music for us is to gather spirits through coordinated breathing. Not many people play honkyoku in a renkan style because they don't like pitch differences. They play honkyoku individually. It seems for them spirituality is achieved only by perfecting the performance itself. They tend to be product-oriented. How well they perform is so important for them.... I wonder if they have a similar sense of spirituality as we do, which arises when they play honkyoku together in renkan.

This player explained that the result of one's performance manifested externally as music does not matter so much in *renkan* playing. The process of playing, which includes sharing the spirit, matters to him. This player also pointed out that there is no standard size of flute in his tradition. Thus, it is unreasonable to expect everyone at a *renkan* performance to have brought the same size *shakuhachi* flute.

When we gather, we may play honte-choshi and other pieces, like at the suizen [blowing Zen] event, depending on how well our playing goes. We try not to use flutes that are too different in size and pitch. But we use whatever works best. Pitch differences don't matter so much. We can deal with pitch differences by doing meri and kari [changing pitches by blowing up and down]. You may end up playing in a kari position all throughout the piece, which is hard. But that's what we do. Of course, in order to do that, you need to practice individually in a daily basis.

Clearly, for people like this player and Idemitsu-san, pitch matching among the flutes is not of primary importance. Rather, they cherish the act of playing together, sharing the space and time, and thus feeling the spirits. The idea of coordinating one's breathing pattern in relation to others epitomizes the kind of relational consciousness built through *shakuhachi* playing.

Honte-choshi

At Idemitsu-san's workshop, a *shakuhachi* practice always started with playing *honte-choshi*, often translated as “basic tune.” This is the first *honkyoku* piece that people normally learn. Playing this piece at the beginning of each lesson and practice session has been a ritual among *shakuhachi* practitioners, even though this ritual is not necessarily observed in all the *shakuhachi* schools today—some schools, like the *tozan*, don't play this piece. It is a short piece; it takes less than five minutes to play. However, *honte-choshi* is traditionally regarded, not simply as a piece for beginners, but as a fundamental work that even experienced *shakuhachi* players need to practice on every day basis.

My own experience of the piece is that *honte-choshi* was the very first piece that I learned, and my teacher's lessons always began with this piece. We played this piece not only during lesson time, but also when we visited temples, shrines, and any sacred places. For us, *honte-choshi* was more than a warm-up tune; it was a piece through which to exchange our hearts. By playing this piece, we could tell how we were doing musically, mentally, physically, and spiritually. It served as a greeting tune when played at the beginning of a lesson. We also played this piece at the end of a lesson to wrap up uplifted spirits. By playing this piece, we adjusted our mental modes, coordinated our breathing patterns, and shared our spirits. The assertion that “*honte-choshi* is the basic piece” did not mean to us that it is a beginner's piece; it rather suggested that the essence of *honte-choshi* penetrates other *honkyoku* pieces that require a caring, sharing attitude for the time and space.

A historical text written by Takahashi Kuzan (1900–1986) elucidates other dimensions of *honte-choshi*. He states that *honte-choshi* is not only an independent piece

played at the beginning and ending of a ceremony but also a prelude performed prior to the three profound *honkyoku* pieces (*koku*, *mukaiji*, and *kyorei*) for the purpose of exercising the scale, adjusting one's breathing pattern, secluding oneself from mundane business, purifying the body and mind, and purging the environment. He believes that *honte-choshi* is the first and the end piece to be studied and practiced, and this piece requires a delicate breathing technique to articulate each shade of phrasing.

This belief was widely shared by Japanese *shakuhachi* players including my informants. Takagi-san, though his lesson is more individualized with no *renkan* playing, thought that *honte-choshi* captured the very essence of his *honkyoku* playing and integrative philosophy expressed through the yin-yang quality of tones and warm-cold breaths (Chapter 4). Although he did not regularly play *honte-choshi* with his students, unlike Idemitsu-san, during a lesson time (unless they requested), his approach to the piece had much in common with how many other *shakuhachi* players approached its essence.

In his workshop, Idemitsu-san and his students played several pieces named *choshi* (such as *honte-choshi* and *yamato-choshi*). They began their lessons by performing these *choshi* pieces one after another. Takahata elaborates the Japanese meaning of *choshi*:

The term *choshi* in music means rhythm and melody. In social life in general, we say that “*choshi* is good” when devices like machines are working well, and “*choshi* is bad” when things are not going well. Thus, playing *choshi* pieces on the *shakuhachi* is to achieve a good condition of one's *shakuhachi* playing, mental state, as well as to create an atmosphere suitable to play the music. *Honte-choshi* is also played for *takuhatsu* training [playing music for alms, often associated with monks' spiritual training]. Thus, one needs to learn and remember this piece at their earliest stage of *honkyoku* study. *Honte-choshi* is not a long piece; however, it captures the essence of *honkyoku* music. We are to play this piece most often (as we study the piece first and play it everyday). But I have

never felt that my playing of the piece became satisfactory. The piece is thus a great work with so many things to learn from it. (Translation, mine)

This aspect of adjusting one's *choshi* (musical, mental, physical, spiritual condition) in relation to a piece of music, as well as to other players, is geared toward self-cultivation. Playing *honkyoku* music such as *honte-choshi* is often perceived by practitioners as a medium of cultivating their hearts and spirits, which is often implicitly expressed by *shakuhachi* teachers in such phrases as *kokoro wo komete fuku* (to play using one's entire heart). This phrase was one of the most frequently heard messages from *shakuhachi* teachers when they advised their students to play in a more musical and profound way. Conceptually, *kokoro*, or "heart-mind-spirit" in Japanese, concretizes the center of one's entire being and embodies the inseparable combination of mental, physical, emotional, aesthetic, and spiritual capacities (Sato, 2004). The spirit of *honte-choshi* may represent this idea in a simplified way: The practitioner plays music to cultivate his or her entire being.

Music Practice as Spiritual Diary

The essence of *honkyoku* practice epitomized by the piece *honte-choshi* is not so different from the principle of *enso* drawing. *Enso* is a calligraphy painting of a circle and is a frequent theme of Japanese Zen calligraphy (Figure 3). *Enso* in Japanese means "shape of a circle," literally, "shape of the mind," figuratively. *Enso* are drawn spontaneously in all kinds of ways, from the top, from the bottom, clockwise, and counterclockwise. The circle is a symbol of one's own boundary. It can be depicted in countless ways, just as the boundary of human mind can be extended, blurred, and ultimately erased. In the act of a simple circle drawing, one's mental state is fully

exposed in the painted circle. For serious practitioners, *enso* drawing is more a form of daily “self-cultivation” than a work of art. They paint the circle every day, as a sort of spiritual diary, just as tea masters make tea each day as part of their spiritual training.

The creative impulse of such practices is geared more toward cultivating inner richness—that is, cultivating the relationship with the tools, instruments, teachers, colleagues, and the practitioner’s own mind. In other words, the goal of spiritual practices is not the perfection of an art object as an end in itself, but the development of the self as a never-ending, lifelong process. Similarly, the practitioner of *honkyoku* plays *honte-choshi* over and over again every day to confront his or her mental and bodily condition of the day. It’s a medium to learn about oneself. The simple form of music serves as a mirror of the player and is used for his or her self-cultivation.

Traditionally, Japanese martial arts and fine arts are considered a lifelong path of self-cultivation (called “*do*” as in *aiki-do*) and are practiced in ways to enhance one’s personality through achieving mind-body oneness (Yuasa, 1987). When engaging in *enso* circle painting, the practitioner focuses on the body as the agency of the action. Because the object is such a simple form, the act of painting allows him or her to concentrate on the action itself. By focusing on the body, he or she puts aside distortions of the mind that get in the way. The person soon becomes in tune with inner desire, emotion, and instinct. The unconstrained facility of the mind springs from the freedom of the body. This way, he or she actualizes a sublime, creative energy latent in the region of the unconscious. Performing *honte-choshi* is expected to bring the same function.

Tuning-in Overseas

The concept of *renkan* playing or *kokyu ni awasete fuku* (accommodating one's breathing to others) did not seem to be widely shared by *shakuhachi* players in North America. In Vancouver, we had an opportunity to play the *honkyoku* piece called *sanya* ("three valleys") in public at an April cherry blossom event. But it was more like a chance occurrence, as we were not prepared for a public performance. We did practice *sankyoku* ensemble pieces for a group performance with a *koto* player. The *renkan* as a method of *honkyoku* music teaching and learning was observed only when the teacher and the student played the piece together at the end of each lesson. The procedure of *shakuhachi* lessons that I observed in North America was almost the same as how I described previously in four steps. At the end of the lesson, the teacher and the student played the piece together in the *renkan* style. The teachers emphasized that their teaching styles and methods are identical to how they themselves were taught in Japan. The pedagogical similarity is a result of these teachers' *shakuhachi* training under well-known Japanese teachers whose styles of *shakuhachi* playing and teaching also influenced non-Japanese practitioners.⁴²

⁴² This does not suggest that non-Japanese practitioners apply the completely same method of teaching inherited from their Japanese teachers in foreign contexts. For example, in response to Paul van den Bos' (1995) paper on differences of Western and non-Western teaching methods drawing on their compatibilities, Gutzwiller (1995) states that some modifications of the Japanese *shakuhachi* pedagogy are also identified in his own *shakuhachi* teaching context in German speaking cultures. Such modifications include a more dominant role of verbal "explanation." The students often need to know why before they actually do. They also seek for a comprehensive grasp of general rules and principles that can explain every musical situation. Gutzwiller observes that given these demands, the *shakuhachi* teachers naturally modify their teaching methods. These aspects of teaching are not part of the Japanese method of music teaching as examined in Chapter 3.

The above observation does not necessarily conclude that *shakuhachi* practitioners in North America do not appreciate relational consciousness building and mutual tuning-in through music performance. While I was staying in Vancouver, *renkan* playing naturally happened. We spent a lot of time just blowing into *shakuhachi* flutes, sometimes playing simple melodies, other times performing entire pieces. Like my experiences with my Japanese informants, listening to each other and blowing to each other's breathing pattern occurred naturally. In fact, with the Canadians, playing together was felt even more strongly as a medium to create a mutual connection. One day, during our Roots Pilgrimage, we went to a restaurant in Saga, inviting two local *shakuhachi* players from different lineages and traditions. Earlier in the day, one of them took us to a bamboo grove, and we all harvested bamboo together. Exhausted but fulfilled, we enjoyed talking to each other, trying out their well-crafted flutes of different sizes, and playing some simple tones together. As we played together, a moment of synchronization arose and created a sense of harmony. Although it was the first day we met, there was a sense of unity—a unity of different nationalities, cultures, and *shakuhachi* backgrounds. This moment was often remembered and repeatedly told by some of the Roots Pilgrimage participants during the trip.

However, playing together and mutual tuning-in are probably not part of what people would expect to happen in North America. One *shakuhachi* student in Vancouver pointed out that he feels natural playing with me in the *renkan* mode. But this did not often happen to him when he plays with other students. Listening to his observation, I came to think that North American students tend to cherish their own musical spaces much more than I do, perhaps because I am trained through a temple-based tradition in

Japan. Whereas I naturally join and follow someone's *honkyoku* playing, that may be perceived as disturbing, if not offensive, in North America. I naturally tend to "ride on" someone's playing, due partly to my orientation to *shakuhachi* practice that encourages me to follow other players. In North America, the idea of *kokyu ni awasete fuku* (playing according to someone's breathing) seems to be shared and practiced only between the teacher and the student, but not necessarily among the students. In fact, I noticed—only after he pointed out—then that I never came across a moment in Vancouver in which everyone naturally followed one song.

Long Tone Practice

My observation above regarding different orientations to group performance does not lead to an assertion that "riding on" others' playing is not acceptable or preferable in North America: Although playing *honkyoku* music together is not altogether conventional, playing long tones together was a commonly identified form of practice.

Among *shakuhachi* players, long-tone practice is known as *ro-buki*. *Ro* is the basic tone of the *shakuhachi* instrument and is played with all the finger holes covered. *Buki* is another way of saying "to blow." Even in an old text about *shakuhachi* practice written in the edo (1603-1867) period, there is a description of *ro-buki* practice. The idea behind this practice is that if one practices the basic tone over a period of time, his or her breathing strength will be extended. The spiritual value of *ro-buki* practice is expressed best through the notion of *ichion-jobutsu*, the very essence of *shakuhachi* practice, which signifies "the attainment of enlightenment through perfecting a single tone." The chief

goal of *ichion-jobutsu* is not to experience aesthetic pleasure but to achieve personal and spiritual maturity through the realization of the “ultimate tone” (called *tettei-on*).

Ro-buki is often discussed in relation to blowing meditation. Meditation in the Theravada and Zen tradition involves highly focused attention to one’s breathing pattern (such as *ānāpānasati*). The practitioner counts each breath either at the beginning of inhalation or at the end of exhalation while assigning more time for each output of breath (say, counting eight for an output of breath and two for an intake of breath). The more thoroughly and quietly he exhales the air, the more quickly he can inhale the air. Through this exercise, the practitioner tries to achieve the state of mindfulness through the body-mind integration. Applied to *shakuhachi* playing, the player plays a long tone and extends his output of breath—as long as he can—then inhales the air. General instruction is given to the posture and correct breathing. Particular emphasis is placed on the *tanden*, a point of the abdomen located about two inches below the navel as a focal point of concentration. When people say, “breathe from the abdomen,” they typically refer to the *tanden*. Traditionally, the *tanden* is believed to be the center of the body and a source of spiritual strength. In order to cultivate their breathing strength, some extreme practitioners use a very long flute—as long as 4.0 (120 cm, 47 inches)—that is crafted to concentrate on deep *ro* playing.⁴³

However, *ro-buki* today carries a significantly different meaning: It is used as a method of acquiring the ability to produce a larger volume of sound. A professional

⁴³ I heard this story from a Japanese maker who received an order of a 4.0 long *shakuhachi* flute that was intended to be used specifically for *ro-buki* practice. This length of flute is almost impossible for most people to play because of its extended size. To concentrate on the blowing of *ro*, the customer requested this flute to have no finger hole so that he could play *ro* only.

shakuhachi player in Japan, Kaoru Kakizakai, who is considered as one of the refined performers, preaches “*ro-buki ten minutes a day makes you a good player,*” to suggest that *ro-buki* practice is essential to the formation of a firm embouchure and muscles around the lips that enable the player to produce refined tones. His sound, in fact, is so loud that my friends once called it “Godzilla blowing.” Many students come to take lessons with him from both inside and outside Japan. When we took a group lesson with him during our Roots Pilgrimage, he also taught us how to practice *ro-buki*. His *ro-buki* tone emerges with a subtle onset, quickly expands to the full range of the tone, and tapers to decay in one breath. “*Ro-buki practice even for ten minutes is easier said than done,*” he stated. When he initiated a workshop at the Summer Shakuhachi Festival held in Okayama Japan by the Kokusai Shakuhachi Kenshukan (the International Shakuhachi Training Center) in 2007, he also focused on *ro-buki* blowing practice. Although there were hundreds of people in the room playing the same tone simultaneously, his *ro-buki* tone stood up and could be heard from the back of the room.

His teacher seems to have recognized and emphasized the importance of each single tone, often saying:

If God asks you to offer just one single tone for him, can you let him listen to your sound? You need to elaborate each tone thoroughly: Ro, Tsu, Re, Chi, Ri, Ro. I was never good. But if God would ever forgive one thing about me, that should be my effort to play each tone with all my best. I got the fullness of resonance on each tone when I played. We cannot depend on skills and dexterity. They won't satisfy people. They won't heal people. If you can ever heal people, that's because your sound is truly remarkable—enough to be offered to God.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ I have heard similar remarks from several students of this teacher. One of them told me that this is this teacher's favorable story to tell. This quote is cited from another student's website: <http://shaku8-ishikawa.com/ishitotake2006.htm>.

This inspiring message—a personalized form of the essence of *ichion-jobutsu* (enlightenment through perfecting a single tone)—is dismissed when people talk about *ro-buki* as a method of forming a firm embouchure and muscle around the lips.

Ro-buki as a method of muscle training may be a modern concept, not so different from what many brass players mean by “long tone” practice as a method of producing refined tones. They may also engage in scale and arpeggio exercises—often detached from real musical, spiritual contexts—for technical development. It is posited that the acquired technique through these exercises becomes useful when it is successfully applied and employed in an actual context of music playing. The underlying assumption is that long tone or *ro-buki* practice is useful for technical development. It is not content-attendant. In contrast, *ro-buki* as a spiritual exercise is conducted with the means and end integrated into the context. In other words, *ro-buki* itself becomes the end of the practice when its goal is to pursue *ichion jobutsu*. It is practiced not for its utilitarian benefits but for itself. This way of understanding the concept of *ro-buki* is not easily shared by many people today either inside or outside of Japan. Most *shakuhachi* method books focus only on technical aspects without explicitly arguing how the suggested exercises lead to a deeper level of enlightenment. *Ro-buki* has become a method of technical practice that is devoid of content.

However, I noticed that the *ro-buki* that is practiced in Vancouver embraces both the modern and original meanings of *suizen* (blowing Zen) meditation. Every Wednesday, *shakuhachi* students in Vancouver had a *ro-buki* practice session in which I occasionally participated. Whereas *ro-buki* practice in Japan was generally conducted in solitude, *ro-buki* in Vancouver was a group activity to which anyone interested is invited.

While in Japan, group activities among traditional *shakuhachi* players were often related to *renkan* playing of *honkyoku* music, such activities were not the main thrust for collective *shakuhachi* practices observed in Vancouver: *Honkyoku* was suitable for solitary practice.

My North American informants believe that *ro-buki* practice strengthens one's lip muscle to form a firm embouchure that brings about a larger volume of sound in a steady pitch. In this sense, their orientation to *ro-buki* practice was the same as what the Japanese teacher Kakizakai envisioned. However, *ro-buki* practice in Vancouver provided a significant context that yielded both muscle training and meditative effects. One member explained to me and demonstrated how this happens. He believes that *ro-buki* can be used as a form of meditation, similar to *zazen*, or sitting Zen, that involves conscious focus on deep breathing. Typically, a *zazen* instruction suggests that the practitioner place the right palm-up hand on the left palm and put the thumb tips lightly touching together to form an oval in the hands. The practitioner needs to pay attention to his or her breathing pattern as well as the space between the thumb tips that are put very close to, but separated from, each other to hold a tension. This space between the thumb tips serves as a focal point of consciousness. In *ro-buki* practice as meditation, according to this member, the sound he produces serves as the focal point of consciousness because the sound reflects his mental state. Technically, the sound is also affected by the space between the upper and lower lips. Therefore, focusing on this space is metaphorically the same as concentrating on the space between the thumb tips during *zazen*. For him, *ro-buki* is often easier than *zazen* sitting for meditative purposes because the point of focus

is identified in the audible sound. In *robuki*, the bodily feeling of breathing is strongly linked to the sound it produces.

This student's case may be exceptional one, as not every member in the group is deeply committed to meditation. But we have had meditative moments during our *ro-buki* sessions. Although we normally held *ro-buki* practice in a community center located in the downtown area for reasons of convenience, we sometimes played outside. In fact, the Canadian students used to do *ro-buki* outdoors more often than they do now. Once, we played in an open space underneath a waterfront road, where we saw cars passing on one side and skytrains on the other. It was a hidden area, and the acoustics there were great.

Six people, including their teacher and myself, joined and played long tones for about one hour. As usual, they started with playing the lowest tone (*ro*) and moved up to higher tones, spending about five minutes on each tone. Six *shakuhachi* flutes created an amazing harmony of the single note. The sounds of the trains also merged with the sounds of six *shakuhachi* flutes. As we played, we naturally added little tricks and ornaments to the basic tone. All of these created a kind of atmosphere from a movie scene. The recording of this *ro-buki* practice, although played individually without any intention to make music, sounded like a type of New Age music (the recording is available). We never expected our flutes to corroborate with the sounds of the surrounding city environment. At one point, there was a sense that we were free and creative in the stream of time, yet remained connected to each other in the act of playing simple notes together. It was such an amazing experience that we listened to my edited recording of our playing, which was never meant to be heard as music. To a great extent,

what we experienced in the moment of group *ro-buki* playing was similar to what I consider the spirit of *renkan* playing of *honkyoku* music.⁴⁵

Tuning Into the Surroundings

Hay and Nye (1998) relate that feeling “at one” with nature is an illumination of tuning, which is often reported by Western researchers as a form of childhood spiritual experience. This is not the case in Japan. The anecdotes introduced below suggest that the experience of oneness with nature is widely shared and considered as spiritual, not only by children but by adults as well. Many of the *shakuhachi* players whom I have encountered shared with me their encounters with, immersions in, and experiences of nature in which their perception was heightened through the realization of oneness with it. What follows is a description of their practices of the *shakuhachi* and spiritual experiences relating to nature.

As explained in Chapter 4, Idemitsu-san appreciates the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* because it allows him to merge with the environment (both natural and city environment). The sound of the *ji-nashi shakuhachi*, he says, soaks into the sound of a water stream in wild nature; it also goes well in the bustle of a big city like Tokyo. Unlike the tone quality of the *ji-ari shakuhachi* that is too “focused” for him, the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* bears multiple layers of tone as well as noise that synchronize with nature. He stated:

Don't you feel that the ji-nashi isn't like an instrument especially when you play outdoors? The sound is special. It contains layers of noises. That's why it blends into the city environment. Of course, it goes well with water sound of a stream.

⁴⁵ For this type of *ro-buki* practice, the members used the standard size 1.8 *ji-ari shakuhachi* to have the tuned pitches.

But it also matches the city sound naturally. That's a very interesting thing. The ji-nashi bears that kind of character.

Idemitsu-san observes that the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* brings a feeling as if “*the sound rides on the existing sound in the environment and the two blend into each other.*” It is not a suitable media to play *sankyoku* ensemble music because the sound does not stand out and pitches are not tuned in the way that allows the player to perform with other instruments. Besides, for the *ji-nashi*, some tones may easily come out, and other tones may require much more effort to make. The sound quality of each tone is not controlled. But it goes well with nature, as if it is tuned in nature rather than on a musical scale.

Idemitsu-san plays with his teacher in a park—just next to a large station in Tokyo where tens and thousands of people pass by everyday—so that they can introduce their music to the general public. This park is more like an open space on a concrete bed rather than a park in wild nature. Often, especially on weekends when they perform, there are multiple events happening, such as jazz and rock music performances, dance and installation performances, and even a secondhand book market. Playing in such an environment, he feels the sound of the *shakuhachi* is part of the environment.

Like Idemitsu-san, other practitioners also appreciate playing outdoors and being part of nature through their music making. For example, Umehara-san's favorite routine is to take a two-hour walk in the woods around his house and play the *shakuhachi* on the way. He combines a light physical exercise with his music practice in nature. As I talked with him, it became clear that, like other *shakuhachi* practitioners, he often plays outdoors and has also experienced moments of being part of nature. During my interview with him, he played a *honkyoku* song called *shin-kyorei*, the piece that he plays outdoors

when he attracts birds.⁴⁶ This music, according to him, carries the *otodama*, or the spirit of sound, most effectively and thus attracts many birds.

One of Takagi-san's students shared with me his experience of playing in a park. He acknowledges the potential of becoming more flexible than distracted when he stays in nature. He stated,

I was playing in a park a while ago. I normally hesitate to play outdoors in places like Tokyo because there are so many people everywhere and also because I can easily stand out with such a long, unusual instrument which people are not familiar with. I don't want to be extra conscious about how people look at me. But today, autumn foliage was so beautiful. So was the flow of wind and movement of leaves. Cats and pigeons were nearby where I played. The sound of my shakuhachi was well suited to that environment. You can never experience that indoors. Curious to say, when you play a tune like honshirabe [the same music as honte-choshi], you feel that there is a beginning and end in a time, whereas you wouldn't feel anything otherwise if you stay in the ordinary state. Basically, there is no beginning and no end. Time just passes by. Then, a human intervenes in the stream of time, breaks the silence, and creates the beginning and end with a sound. You create a swelling in the completeness of a moment. You feel as if you were a falling autumn leaf swaying in the wind, under this blue sky, in that free space surrounded by tall city buildings. The sound carries a sense of unity. If you ask me if that was my subjective consciousness, I cannot tell. It may be just that I inhaled too much air. I cannot tell if I can share that sense with other people. But it was just gorgeous.

This intensified experience, or what Dewey would call *an experience*, was brought about by his sensitivity to sound and silence. He thinks that, by playing music, human beings can create a silence in the environment. By appreciating it, we can create a harmony with nature. Human beings can also break the harmony by ignoring the silence.

⁴⁶ He stated, "You do know that birds would gather and come closer to you when you play outdoors, don't you?" I was a little surprised to hear that, not because the idea of *shakuhachi* playing as a birdcall was novel to me, but because so many people had told me similar stories. He took for granted that as a *shakuhachi* student I must have experienced this kind of incident before.

Many of my informants have talked about their experience of being part of nature while playing the *shakuhachi*. One of them remarked, “*After playing the shakuhachi for a while in my garden, the air feels quite different, so fresh, and strained.*” Another stated, “*You would notice things that you do not normally notice, such as a little cracking sound of wood.*” Such kinds of realization are brought about by playing the *shakuhachi* and appreciating silence. It is achieved when the player is situated as a part of nature, not when he is set against it, through sensing an integration of the man-made sound and the surrounding environment.

As Umehara-san indicated above (and Andrew in Chapter 6), a sense of being tuned is not only shared only among human beings but also sensed among different species (such as humans, birds, deer, and beavers). Many *shakuhachi* players shared with me their mysterious experiences of encounters with animals through the *shakuhachi*. Takagi-san once explained that, when he was playing a long *ji-nashi shakuhachi* at someone’s house in California, a house dog that looked quite old and not interested in Takagi-san’s presence suddenly came very close to him and stayed just behind him while he was playing, as if the dog was patting its body on the sound Takagi-san was producing. One *shakuhachi* maker stated that the chirping of insects becomes louder if the *shakuhachi* is played at night in autumn, and ducks in a pond come closer if he plays in a park. My experience of playing outdoors with Andrew, as portrayed in Chapter 6, is another testimonial of such an integrative moment with animals. It seems that animals are drawn to the softer, natural sounds of the *ji-nashi shakuhachi*, especially the long ones that produce deeper tones.

The point of introducing these anecdotes here is not to claim that the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* carries a magical power that enchants animals. Nor is it to express a wish that these mysterious stories could be scientifically proven. Still, it is worth stressing that many *shakuhachi* players have experienced integrative moments in nature while performing music and shared with me their personal observations in their own terms, which can only be understood phenomenologically.

Nature Experienced as Music

The aforementioned *shakuhachi* practitioners revealed their experiences of playing music outdoors. Their experiences are characterized by the heightened awareness of the environment, the feeling “at one” with nature, the sense of an integration of human-made and environmental sounds, and the self experienced as part of the world. The following anecdote suggests that some of these dimensions may also be experienced indoors. It is about Takemitsu Toru’s experience of Watazumi Fumon’s *shakuhachi* performance.

One day, Takemitsu was in a small room at a Japanese restaurant listening to Watazumi’s rare live performance over dinner. Watazumi used a bare bamboo flute that seemed as long as he was tall. About twenty minutes after Watazumi started performing, he requested Takemitsu to open the windows, despite the noises coming from the outside. He felt that the room was too small for him and lacking *ki* (*qi* or *ch’i* in Chinese) energy. Shortly into Watazumi’s performance, Takemitsu was once again mesmerized by Watazumi’s serene music, so much so that he felt as if the sounds of the *shakuhachi*, the boiling water in a hot pan, and the traffic passing by, all became one in harmony; yet his

sensitized perception captured each sound resonating even more clearly and vibrantly. Watazumi stated after the performance: “You must have been listening to the sound of boiling water.” Takemitsu abashedly told Watazumi that he, indeed, had been listening to the sound of boiling water. Watazumi answered assuredly and unhesitatingly, “That water sound you listened to is my music.” Takemitsu (1995) explains that, because of the nature-like sound of the *shakuhachi*, it merged with the cosmos. The sound of the *shakuhachi* disappeared between the phrases and was followed by a serene silence (called *ma*), in which nature participated and started vibrating musically.

This anecdote signifies that a *shakuhachi* performance facilitated one’s perception of music as combining noises and musical sounds—a point that has been aimed at by practitioners of Japanese spiritual arts in which the main emphasis is placed on engaging in the arts as a quest of “no-mind” (Yuasa, Nagatomo, & Hull, 1993) or “nothingness” (Nakagawa, 2000; Nishitani, 1982) gained through a realization of indifference between subject and object, self and other, mind and body, foreground and background, sound and silence, being and non-being. Following Watazumi, Takagi-san who shares the integrative philosophy of *shakuhachi* playing (Chapter 4) stated,

All sound is music. If a cicada creates noise, that becomes music. Insects’ sound is also music. We don’t distinguish noise from musical sound. That has been part of Japanese sensitivity. Like Watazumi, we don’t separate the sound of the shakuhachi from the environmental sound.

Takagi-san believes that human beings are part of nature. Music is an act of realizing the integration of humans and nature.

For Takagi-san, however, nature does not have to be wild nature or the external environment. For him, the universe is experienced through his practice of spiritual breath as an act of realizing oneness of the *yin* and *yang* qualities that constitute the world, as

introduced in Chapter 4. In fact, Takagi-san mostly plays indoors. He observes that the *shakuhachi*—such a simple, natural instrument—creates a connection between culture and nature, between urban and rural lives, and between one’s modern and primitive sensitivities. The *shakuhachi* is experienced as a path toward and connection with nature. He believes that the point of him living in Tokyo is to create a sacred space where people can feel nature. He introduced the philosophy of tea as established by tea master Sen no Rikyu (1522-1591). Rikyu built his small tea house in the middle of a busy commercial area of the city and served tea for his guests including the *shogun* (war lord) at the time. For him, tea was an act of creating a space where his guests could focus on the here-and-now and appreciate the nicety of humans and nature. Rikyu’s idea of *shichu no sankyo*, or “a mountain hut in a city,” suggests that the essence of serving tea in the city environment is, in fact, to provide a space in which people can feel as if they are in a far distant place, surrounded by woods and birds, and enjoy the feeling of being in nature. Tea is thus an opportunity to appreciate *ichigo ichie*, or literally “one time, one meeting” with the moment in the special space. Takagi-san explains,

People often ask me why I don’t move to a mountain side and play there so that I can stay close to nature and take care of nature. That’s not my way. Playing for bears and squirrels creates no meaning for me. What’s important is that I stay in Tokyo and provide music in this city environment. I cannot travel in a mountain as other people [including his students] do. It is important for me to live in a place where people come and listen to me. It’s the same as tea. Serving tea for animals in nature where no human beings exist doesn’t make sense to me. I do have respect and wish to have a life—like that of Ryokan and Basho who wondered across the country and lived close to nature, but that’s not my style.

Instead of having a solitary life, he prefers to create a space in a city where people can visit him and feel “nature” through his performance. In fact, many people visit him from

both inside and outside of Japan to listen to his playing. One of them anonymously posted a blog of his experiences with Takagi-san's playing:

The beginning sound of his [Takagi-san's] playing was so very quiet that the sound of my blood circulation was felt as a noise. Soon, the sounds of birds and cars coming from the outside all merged and vibrated as music. It was as if unnecessary part of my heart was chipped away and I was becoming nothing. It was the world of a single sound or no sound... According to him [Takagi-san], no sound does not mean that there is no sound. But it means there is no noise in mind. He played a piece called shingetsu [the moon in heart] that requires the most tranquil breath. While I was listening to his playing, I saw a visual image of myself becoming a wind and passing through a wood all the way. Later, he told me that the music is about a wind pasting through a bamboo grove. I was in wild nature in that moment. (<http://www.officek.jp/rom/diary/?20020516#id155>)

Clearly, for this person, Takagi-san's place served the function of a "mountain hut" in a city.⁴⁷

Embodying Nature

The experience of tuning into nature is often realized by the awareness of the *ki* energy. Playing the *shakuhachi* is a series of breathing exercises and the circulation of *ki* energy. It helps "to balance the flow of the qi [ki], such that environs and body are productively continuous one with the other" (Hall & Ames, 1998, p. 862). In fact, the *shakuhachi*, for many people, is

The sound of nature. Like wind, it can fly far away, high and low, strong and weak, vivid and faint, as if it can break a rock. It can also be gentle as if expressing the tranquility of deep blue abyss.... Breathing in and out, taking the *ki* energy of the earth into the body, your body-mind-spirit will achieve oneness along with the tuning of nature. (Kyozan, 1979, p. 2)

Takagi-san supports this explanation of *shakuhachi* playing:

⁴⁷ The descriptions of these *shakuhachi* players' experiences of playing close to nature provide an answer to the question that many of us who live in the city environment would ask: Do we need wild nature in order to be natural?

The bottom line is that bamboo is the main [the subject] and human beings are dependants [the object], not the other way around.... By accommodating ourselves and our breathing to the bamboo, we try to achieve the integration of humans and nature. It is an act of integrating ourselves into nature.

These practitioners clearly identify that *shakuhachi* playing is a series of breathing in and out, circulating the *ki* energy through the body, and achieving the state of human-nature integration. This state of total awareness was experienced by Idemitsu-san who reported:

*As I play for an extended amount of time, I often feel as if I am an extension of the flute, as if I myself am a **pipe**, through which the air naturally goes in and out of my body with no obstacle. Once I achieve this level, it feels so good. I cannot stop but continue blowing forever. It gives a feeling as if how well I play is just a matter of trivial things. Only blowing matters. Probably, my playing sounds better when I am in this state.*

For him, the state of oneness with nature is realized when he feels as if he is a “pipe” in which the air and *ki* energy circulates his body and he becomes an extension of the flute.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the kind of connections experienced by the *shakuhachi* practitioners’ collaborative music making using Schutz’s notion of mutual tuning-in. Although Schutz’s concept of mutual tuning-in refers only to a form of social interaction between the performer and the audience (as well as the performer and the composer), I extended the scope of his concept to address my informants’ distinctive experiences of relational *shakuhachi* playing. My descriptions of their experiences highlighted the heightened awareness of the environment through music making, the feeling of “at one” with nature through the sound of the *shakuhachi*, the integration of human-made sound and environmental sound, and the integration of their bodies into the environment. Many of them have also experienced a kind of elusive interspecific connections with animals

through which they were awakened to their union with the natural world. What distinguishes their music making is their recursive awareness of the self as situated and integrated into the environment—similar to what some of them referred to as “primitive, organic” self in Chapter 6—that further brought about a critical awareness of the part of the musical self that overwhelms the surrounding.

Aspects of their tuning-in experiences through *shakuhachi* playing were analyzed specifically through such concepts as *renkan* (“group playing of the *shakuhachi*”) and *kokyū ni awasete fuku* (“to play with others by coordinating breathing patterns”). In the *renkan* playing of *honkyoku* music, coordinating breathing patterns and sharing the *ki* energy was a requisite to create a harmony of spirits among the participants. In order to achieve this sense of unity, they devoted themselves to the moment, to the piece, and to the relationship. For them, the final product (heard as a musical performance) was not necessarily the defining quality of their experience. Rather, the action itself bore a significant meaning, as suggested by the concept of *ichion jobutsu* (enlightenment through a single tone). For them, *renkan* was a form of learning music and sharing relational consciousness among the participants. All of these ideas are epitomized in the *honkyoku* piece called *honte-choshi* that is, like other *honkyoku* pieces, often practiced by individual practitioners as spiritual diary for their own self-cultivation. The function of playing *honte-choshi* is not only to warm up and exercise scales but also to adjust one’s breathing pattern and purify the body and mind. When it is played in a lesson, it helps the teacher and students to coordinate their *choshi* conditions and connect their spirits.

CHAPTER 8

COMMUNICATING WHO WE ARE

One day during our Roots Pilgrimage, we visited a rural area in Western Japan where an esoteric monk of my generation lives an austere life as a *komuso shakuhachi* monk. We arrived at the temple early in the morning, when the bright, shiny morning sun of November was still shedding light on the aged building and beautiful surrounding landscape. He served us tea and his home-made Japanese apricot pickles. Five of us sat around a small round table on the *tatami* in the hall. Often, a breezy wind passed through wide-open wooden windows. A few times, a buzzing bee came into the hall along with the wind. It took some time for us to get used to this natural environment in which we were exposed to a series of sudden swells of nature.

The monk explained to us what it means for him to have encountered his teacher, Nishimura Koku, and to have studied music with him for about ten years until he passed away. Studying with Nishimura, he emphasized, was more about life learning and becoming a true human being. Even now, after Nishimura's death, playing the *shakuhachi* for him is a reminder of Nishimura's teaching. Most of his talk was about Nishimura and how much he has been influenced by his teaching. We came to know, after further encounters with Nishimura's students, that for many of them, the connection and bonding with Nishimura has been central to their *shakuhachi* learning experiences. While students of other well-known teachers tended to speak of the "musical" influences of their teachers, Nishimura's students revealed that their music-life integration has been achieved by respecting, adoring, and worshiping Nishimura. We were impressed to discover how one person, a music teacher, can make such a deep influence on people.

After hours of enjoyable talk, he played a *honkyoku* pieces for us. Positioned in his regular sitting place in the back of the hall, he asked us to sit in the front of the hall. We all faced the altar. Behind us, he asked us to feel relaxed and meditative. For a few moments, an absence of any human-made sounds continued to highlight the richness of surrounding sounds. Gradually, burned incense surrounded us. Soon, an exquisitely soft, resonant tone filled the hall. He started playing *yamato-choshi* in a loose tempo while maintaining the tension of *ma*. Sometimes, it was felt as if a springy breeze came in and out; other times, as if a nightly wave lapped a shore gently. It came from every direction as if we were in a richly resonant box—like a huge bronze gong suspended in the temple. Everyone, including the monk, faced in the same direction. Because of this sitting position, as well as the resonant vibration of his playing, there was a strong sense of unity between the player and his audience. We simply shared the same moment during his playing and felt a sense of oneness. The depth of his playing and his extended breathing pattern created a sacred space in which our spirits gathered together. He remarked, “*that was my best wishes to your safe and happy journey from here on.*” Beyond his words, his playing touched us, and we felt sincerely grateful. It was clear that his dedicated playing in this moment was heard and experienced as “offering.”

This experience was profound and very powerful, not because it provided a comfortable moment or “body-mind” refreshment, but because it deeply touched our hearts; so much so that that it remained with us throughout the trip. We were reminded of a saying well-known among *shakuhachi* practitioners: When *honkyoku* music is played in the most profound way, it becomes an expression of who we are. *Shakuhachi* training is thus a medium to face and cultivate ourselves. Throughout our Roots Pilgrimage in

Japan, we occasionally came across deeply felt moments and experienced the essence of heart-to-heart communication with other practitioners. Music playing in these moments was heard as sublime, devotional, and venerable.

In this chapter, I explore the role of music playing as offering. But first, let me introduce a contrasting case in order to highlight the nature of music performance experienced as offering.

Communicating Socially

One day before we visited the monk, we joined a *shakuhachi* group in a city that is located one-hour from the temple. Our experience with the group was equally satisfying, heart-warming, but qualitatively different. Our satisfied feeling derived from our gathering as socialization rather than spiritual engagement.

To explain briefly, this group is led by a local teacher who is greatly respected by his students for his remarkable playing ability. The students seemed quite proud of their teacher. They often compared their teacher with well-known players in Tokyo, saying “*Our teacher can produce better tones. He can even teach people from Tokyo.*”⁴⁸ Since we visited the group on a weekday during the day, we saw only eight members. Like typical *shakuhachi* practitioners, they were all of a generation older than mine, probably in their fifties and sixties. When we arrived at his studio, they had already started a practice session. Under the direction of this teacher, we studied *akita-sugagaki*, a

⁴⁸ Another student said, “*the teacher is the best. Other people play the shakuhachi like western flute. But his playing is real shakuhachi music.*” The teacher sitting standing next to us joined our conversation, saying “*those people who begin with the tozan school shakuhachi study would regret for their orientation to shakuhachi playing. Most people feel that way. Initially, they are satisfied. But later, they regret.*”

honkyoku piece, in the *kinko* style. Contrasting to the original style, this version has two melody parts for duet performance. We learned both parts and played in harmony. We found it difficult to follow the music, not so much because the song was difficult to play, but because most of us were not used to the *kinko* notation and playing style. Besides, we could not tell the timing, rhythm, and other details that were not explicitly explained in the sheet music. When the teacher asked us to play without him, we basically followed some of the local students. Although some of us have studied this piece in North America, we had never played as a two part duet, which sounded completely different from the original version. It was challenging and fun.

After the “official” lesson was over, we moved to an *izakaya*, a Japanese style bar, for dinner. The owner of this homey *izakaya* turned out to be a good friend of the teacher. We occupied the entire bar. More students joined only for this event. Those students who were very quiet during the lesson suddenly became quite open. Heavily drunk, they talked endlessly. It was almost as though the language and cultural barriers disappeared. We continued playing the *shakuhachi* over local specialties. People came to us with *sake* and beer bottles and filled our cups and glasses. We probably learned more about the members and their styles of musical engagement during this socializing moment. They treated us like their friends. In fact, one of our members who joined the Roots Pilgrimage in previous years and visited this group before felt that they were feeling much closer to the North American visitors. When we ate raw horse meat, someone said, “*We are no longer strangers to them.*” Their willingness to share local specialties with us seemed like a rite a passage for us to be locals.

The teacher of the group is a wonderful person with a great sense of humor. For him, this meeting was an annual reunion with North American students. A local student explained that the teacher was not expecting any fee or money for lessons but was looking forward to our annual visit to his studio. The last thing he wants to see is a discontinuation of our annual visit. This annual event also meant much to the group. Another local member (who is fluent in English) explained to us that the group members had been excited about our visit and looking forward to this opportunity. They practiced and worked hard so that they could show us their musical improvement. This local member observed that most local members would have stayed within their comfort zone without putting much effort and making musical challenges unless we visited them from North America. His observation gave us the impression that this group's motivation of music making (like other music groups in Japan) is driven more by social interests than revolves around deep human bonding than by musical interests (Keister, 2005). We heard many times the local members repeating, "*please come back here again next year.*"

We also felt a strong bond with this *shakuhachi* group after playing together, sharing food and sake, and sharing so much laughter. We established connections with the local members through musical and social activities. However, compared to our experience at the temple, our feeling arose more from the socializing effects than encounters with someone's pure, bare spirit. This is not to suggest that socialization-driven or bonding-based spirituality—a typical form of spirituality observed among Japanese practitioners (Kesiter, 2005)—is inferior or impure to musicality-driven spirituality. Explicitly observed among my Japanese informants was the teacher-student bonding as a source of spirituality, which was most strongly identified among Nishimura

Koku's students. We admired, and were impressed by, the level of the bonds that seemed to propel their musical activities. Our deeply felt experience derived from our encounters with those practitioners who manifested their profound spirits through their devotional music playing.

Music Offering

Music offering through *shakuhachi* playing can be formal or informal. As introduced in Chapter 7, my *shakuhachi* teacher informally plays *honte-choshi* at sacred places, shrines and temples, as an offering. He may provide a performance at the gate of a shrine, in front of the offertory box, or inside the building. Temples normally welcome visitors and any forms of offering. Within the *shakuhachi* traditions, the act of playing *honkyoku* music as offering is formalized under the concept of *kenso* (offering by playing) or *kenteki* (offering through flute). Today, *shakuhachi* groups and monks may host events dedicated for *honkyoku* music performance called *kenso-kai* (music offering meeting) or *suizen-kai* (blowing zen meeting).

The contexts of music offering through *shakuhachi* playing can be both religious and non-religious. At temple, whether it is at formal or informal, the person first steps forward and offers incense at the altar, like how ordinary Japanese people do at funerals in the Buddhist style. He or she then steps back to the sitting position. Faced with the altar (as described above), he or she begins playing a *honkyoku* piece. It can be a solo or a group performance. Some people use different sized flutes and play the same melody in different pitches. At a formal event, all participants play *honte-choshi* together at the beginning of the event using their own flutes (that are often in different sizes). Then, each

participant proceeds to provide a performance in turn until the last person finishes. They play *honte-choshi* once again at the end of the event as a group offering.

The entire process of music offering at temple can be done bluntly, as it is highly formalized—in the same way a funeral can be performed with no sense of compassion. People may bring different mindsets and feelings to the act of music offering at temple. Some may think of their performance as a form of prayer or offering to God. Other people may play the *shakuhachi* to achieve the state of what is called “no mind” (Hisamatsu, 1987; Yuasa, Nagatomo, & Hull, 1993) or “nothingness” (Nakagawa, 2000; Nishitani, 1982), a realization of a boundless, formless self, as well as the non-dualistic nature of the world.

To take an example, Umehara-san annually plays *honkyoku* music at the *kenso-kai* held by the Komuso Shakuhachi Study Group in Tokyo. In 2007, he offered *tsuru no sugomori*. In the program of the event he explained the style and structure of the piece and how he approached the music. This is a challenging *honkyoku* piece with technical demands such as the *tamaoto* (flatter by tongue) and *tabaoto* (flatter by throat) expressions. He noted,

I've been hoping to work on this piece for a long time.... This song is a happy song, as if it is digesting human life, suited to be played even at wedding. But because it is so demanding, I've been postponing to work on it. Now I am getting close to the retirement age, and time can no longer wait for me.... Among more than 30 versions, I chose the oshu (Northern part of Japan) version.... I've been using longer flutes for my playing at this kensō-kai in the past. But this song is played best with a shorter one. So I am going to use my self-made, skinny 1.8. Please accept my performance as my ongoing project in progress.

He explained to me that playing at *kenso-kai* holds two meanings to him: First, it functions as an epicede for deceased people of the year. By playing in public, he feels his effort of playing-praying for them becomes real. Second, it also provides an opportunity

for him to share his effort of the year-long practice with other fellows. He thinks it is like an academic conference presentation, a sort of public sharing of his research findings with fellow scholars. The difference is that, unlike academic conference presentations, the result of his performance as an offering does not matter as much as his intention to dedicate his spirit to the action. The *kenso-kai* also provides the practitioners an opportunity to contact with each other and see how they are doing (especially physically because *kenso-kai* participants tend to be old). Attending a *kenso-kai* is particularly helpful for younger practitioners, he believes, because it reveals the kind of direction they can aim at in their *shakuhachi* practices and life experiences. He has seen some of his students changing their attitude toward *shakuhachi* playing after listening and performing at the *kenso-kai*. He stated, “*it is like deepening one’s connection to the tradition and to the people of the tradition, getting out of one’s own closed world, and getting one’s mindset ready for further commitment.*” For him, performing in such a setting is part of the rite of passage for his students. “*It’s not something that you can find everywhere. They know that it’s very unique, foreign, and particular. Yet, they receive a quite big impact when they actually see it, especially when they see old players manifesting their aged spirits.*”

What are people thinking while they are performing music as offering? This is a difficult question to answer for many people including my informants. The most common answer was “*you just play with your best. No intention to achieve anything.*” Takagi-san shared with me what he learned from a Zen monk who once said,

The essence of Zen is to engage in the act itself. You eat when you eat. But you don’t think about other things when you eat. You just focus on the task of eating and food in front of you. No mind.

Introducing this story, Takagi-san explained that he is simply focused on the very tone he is producing in the moment of performance, not other things, not even the next tone. This is easier said than done. People like me who are trained as a performer (in my case, through piano) cannot help but think of how an audience would respond to my performance. I always negotiate with my own critical aesthetic judgment coming from a “chatter box” of my head that constantly sends me a series of alarms and criticisms about my playing, a counter-product that I acquired through my piano training. Today, not many people can easily release their minds from this product-oriented approach toward music. Everyone wants to give the best shot at *kenso-kai*. Some may want to show off. Others want to exhibit their commitments to the practice. Whatever their intentions are, overcoming their own worldly, idle thoughts inside their heads is part of the experience that they have to go through during their *kenso-kai* playing.

One of the qualities that people would expect to hear in someone’s playing as an offering is an expression of the mind that is free from ego. An example would be a performance provided by Idemitsu-san, whose playing was heard as an expression of no mind (as discussed in chapter 4). The opposite quality of no-mind expression is that of contrived, pretentious expression, often referred to as too much *iroke* (“sexiness” as illustrated in Chapter 4). I have come across several *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practitioners who criticized a professional *shakuhachi* player who, according to them, has too much show-off intention and lacks humility. Although this player is internationally-acknowledged, his playing as an offering was heard in a negative way.

Expectation for non ego-driven expression may also be shared by non-Japanese practitioners. One of the North American students who had previously joined the Roots Pilgrimage explained his experience of playing at a *kenso-kai*.

I had a very warm experience with a shakuhachi student from [another country]. He is a very seasoned and once acclaimed professional musician, now retired. He had to leave the room. Others thought he was too drunk. He explained to me later that my playing moved him so much that it confused him and he needed fresh air to think and absorb what had just happened. He said he had rarely heard someone play without ego like I had just done. I had been practicing this piece almost daily all year in preparation for that night, that performance. The piece is a mandala; a meditation.

As this example indicates, a musical expression of who we are communicates its message beyond cultural and language barriers. One of the North American participants in the Roots Pilgrimage reflected on his past experience of music offering in a non-traditional context:

There was one older gentleman there [in Nagano] who shied away from us foreigners, I don't recall his name. He does not speak English, nor do I Japanese. Later, during our second day, the day of aburanuki, he was sitting off on his own playing his hocchiku [ji-nashi shakuhachi]. I went over with my hocchiku and sat down beside him. I indicated for him to keep playing, but he indicated for me to play. I announced the name of a piece and played it; then each of us in turn for several pieces. We parted with big smiles on our faces and thank-you's to each other. I have made many friendships with Japanese because of my involvement with the shakuhachi/hocchiku and the musical communities. My trip last year was full of visits and events with my new friends.

Experienced *shakuhachi* practitioners can tell how devoted the player is as a *shakuhachi* practitioner by observing and listening to his or her playing. When I visited Shigemitsu-san's place (where I was advised that I need to blow according to the character of each flute) and was trying out his collection of old vintage *shakuhachi* flutes, his friend yelled at me and said, "*You don't seem serious with your way of playing. I cannot tell what you are trying to achieve here.*" With a strong gesture, he continued:

These precious flutes are not something you can try anytime. Unless you blow with your best, you cannot tell the capacity of these flutes. You can never build relationships with them. Why can you not be more serious? This precious moment never comes back to you again. If you let this time go, that's it. You need to put much more of your spirit into each flute.

He explained to me about his teacher who is a highly respected player. This teacher obviously told his students that the most impressive and touching performance he has ever come across was provided by a unknown amateur practitioner, not a professional player, who was devotedly playing music outside of a temple. He shared this story to emphasize the importance of playing with one's heart and soul in *honkyoku* playing. This was also true of Shigemitsu-san's friend who believes that what matters in *honkyoku* playing is one's heart-mind-spirit (*kokoro*). What one can play or how well one can play is a secondary issue. He intuitively noticed that, when I was playing those vintage flutes, I was too concerned with the quality of my performance. To his eyes, I was not devoting myself fully to my playing. The power of will did not come along with my playing.

In fact, my attempts of playing at *kenso-kai* events manifested the conceptual difference between playing musically and playing with spirit. One time, when I was taken to a temple by Takagi-san's student and had an opportunity to offer *honte-choshi* in front of the altar, I was at a complete loss, despite the fact that I had played this piece many times. My nervousness had already started when I stepped forward to offer incense at the altar. The same thing happened when I tried to offer music at a shrine in Kyoto, imitating what my teacher does at a sacred place. Faced with ordinary people, I simply could not produce regular, vibrant tones but only restricted, unhealthy tones. I found it extremely challenging to play *honkyoku* as an offering in front of people, especially those

who are not necessarily familiar with the *shakuhachi* tradition and not ready to face the sudden change of context brought about by my intrusive performance. Shigemitsu-san attributed my nervousness to the lack of discipline rather than to my shy personality. He pointed out,

Your shyness is part of you. But what consists of you is much more than that. You add so many things to your playing. Your playing manifests in a way how you live your life. If it represents only your shyness, that means you are not making much effort. Of course, it is difficult to play in public when people are around you. But you will get used to it.

My encounter with Shigemitsu-san and his friend, as well as my realization of *honkyoku* playing as fundamentally “offering,” changed my way of playing qualitatively. Inspired by these self-trained practitioners, I came to view it as an act of devoting my spirit to each moment of my playing, as if the encounter with the moment (involving living people and precious flutes) were so special and unrepeatably—similar to the notion of *ichigo ichie*. This Japanese notion, often emphasized and practiced through the tea ceremony, literally means “one time, one meeting” Each encounter, each moment, is unique and special, and it never comes back again. Thus, this indigenous notion suggests that we must appreciate each encounter as if that is the only chance.⁴⁹ This spirit of life encounter has much in common with what I learned from Shigemitsu-san and his friend. They questioned me without actually saying, “*what if the next ten minutes is your last time to play the shakuhachi? Would you play in the same way if this were the last ten minutes of your life?*” The spirit of music offering through *shakuhachi* playing seemed to

⁴⁹ In fact, people in the *shakuhachi* tradition often use the term *chikuen* (bamboo bonding) when emphasizing the power of bonding making brought by the *shakuhachi*. A monk in Kumamoto explained that the encounter with his teacher, Nishimura Koku, was such a precious *chikuen*.

lie in its very essence: playing with one's heart and soul. The result of one's best effort to play music is a manifestation of he or she is.

Playing at *kenso-kai* may be perceived as qualitatively different from playing music at concert. On the concert-hall stage, the emphasis is often placed on the performance as music. Confronted (and physically faced) with the audience, the performer tries his or her best to provide as good of a performance as possible and thereby communicate with the audience. *Kenso-kai* can also be a harsh context, like at competitions or music proficiency exams, in which the performance is criticized by juries of fellow practitioners (at competitions and exams). But there seems to be a different level of engagement and type of assumption regarding what performances are acceptable at *kenso-kai*. Clearly, the emphasis of playing at *kenso-kai* is placed more on the act of playing itself than on musical achievement. To use my ear and judgment cultivated through my western music training (piano and trumpet), some of the performances I have come across at *kenso-kai* were not necessarily easy to appreciate, especially those played in groups on different lengths of flutes because of their flutes' pitch differences. These performances may not necessarily be meant to be heard as music. They were serving as an opportunity of self-realization, not as a public performance of music, as many practitioners indicated. One significant point of playing at *kenso-kai* is that people of different stages and levels with different approaches play in the same venue in turn and simultaneously, which provides a distinctive learning context.

What makes a music performance an offering is probably not so much where we play as how we play. When I visited Umehara-san for the first time and talked about our experiences of playing at *kenso-kai*, we exchanged *honkyoku* playing as part of our

mutual introductions in his university office. It was felt as if we offered music to each other. His playing was extremely powerful with incredibly bright and pure tones. The song he played (called, *shin-kyorei*) carried an impression that he plays each tone with a special attention, as if soliciting *otodama*, or the spirit of sound. Compared to his playing, my playing (of *reibo*) was very immature. In fact, it was far from my usual playing. However, he kindly commented, “*You remember the song. It sounded as if you’ve been playing long.*” I was relieved to hear his comment because, before we exchanged our playing, he stated, “*what mattered to komuso monks was only the sound they produced, that was everything.*” Historically, *komuso* monks wore deep basket hats so that their faces were completely hidden. When they strolled in town, they exchanged greetings only by playing. Thus, their playing served as their signature identities. Although I am not a *komuso* monk, his remark made me think that he could tell everything about me through my playing. No excuse would be allowed for my playing because both of us are supposed to be committed players. I tried to give my best effort and tried to devote myself to my playing. Thankfully, because of our mutual exchange of playing, we felt that we acknowledged each other as committed practitioners. At least, I seemed to have been accepted by him as a serious student, one deserving of his attention. Sharing our playing prepared us to talk and exchange our thoughts. He eventually noted, “*playing the shakuhachi brings people closer. It is bond making, and people become friends quickly. It is not explained in words but only felt through one’s heart.*” This experience made me realize that when music is played as offering, it exhibits who we are, regardless of the context—either at *kenso-kai* or in a casual encounter.

Suizen-kai With Takagi-san

One of the highlight of our Roots Pilgrimage in 2007 was our participation in a bamboo harvesting outing with Takagi-san's group. On a Saturday in November, we left Tokyo at six o'clock in the morning in several cars and headed to Nagano (about 150 miles away from Tokyo). We spent the entire afternoon harvesting bamboo and savored each moment in a beautiful mountainside. In the evening, we refreshed our bodies and souls at a hot spring and then enjoyed local delicacies over dinner. Around eight o'clock, we gathered in a room with snacks and sake bottles where we held a so-called *suizen-kai* ("blowing zen meeting"). Dressed in *yukata* (kimono-like cotton robe), we played and shared our self-selected *honkyoku* pieces in turn. The time was filled with profound *shakuhachi* sounds as well as deep silences followed by laughter.

For this event, we had Takagi-san's regular students (about ten) and five of us sitting in a rather small *tatami* Japanese style room at a hotel. Although we had already spent half of the day together in the bamboo grove and over dinner, we were still strangers to Takagi-san's group members. Takagi-san initiated the playing and then served as a coordinator asking who would be interested in playing next. Although there were bottles of sake and beer on the table, no one seemed to be interested in drinking. (After all the performances have been finished, some people picked up the bottles and started serving others, a way of social communication in Japan).⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Clearly, drinking was not the main thrust for this event, which struck me as the major difference between this event and an after-dinner informal gathering at the 2007 International Shakuhachi Festival held by the International Shakuhachi Kenshukan in Bisei, Japan. I was taken to this event by a professional *shakuhachi* maker. It was a three-day long camp in which over 150 participants joined a variety of events comprising keynote speeches, symposiums, panel discussions, as well as *shakuhachi* playing workshops and concerts, followed by group performances provided by workshop

At Takagi-san's *suizen-kai*, playing in turn served as opportunities to introduce their musical and spiritual engagements, even though they probably did not intend to do so. It powerfully exhibited who they were. It introduced not only how they play musically but also how they approach their own practices. They often explained in words how they came across their pieces of bamboo, how they made their flutes, how they engaged in their practice. Each person had something to say about his playing and flute, and that was part of their self-introduction. Hearing their personal narratives and stories along with their playing, I felt much closer to them. It served much more powerfully than exchanging "hello, how are you" kinds of greetings or exchanging sake drinks.⁵¹

participants. Although this occasion may not be comparable with Takagi-san's *suizen-kai* (due to its different orientation, different size, location, etc.), my experience after dinner was somewhat contrasting: Scattered in different places within the venue (which used to be a school) including classrooms and accommodations, the participants of the festival—both Japanese and non-Japanese—kept talking and playing, often over alcohol. Some continued until next morning. They shared useful information, excitement, and friendship while entertaining themselves. This over-night unstructured gathering was informative, as much as daytime workshops and concerts, especially given that experienced senior players provided informal lessons to a small group of junior students. However, this informal gathering did not strike a chord with me who was trying to explore participants' spirituality. The members of Takagi-san's group seemed different: For example, two of Takagi-san's students—one in his seventies and another in his twenties—were already practicing the *shakuhachi* at 6 am next day. An equivalent self-discipline was not observed at the festival. This student in his twenty happened to be at the festival. He and I agreed that the festival was more commercialized and entertaining than spiritual. He raised a question at the end of a symposium held as part of the Festival and asked the eight guest speakers: "what does spirituality mean in *shakuhachi* playing?" None of them could provide a deep answer.

⁵¹ Interestingly, I found myself drawn more to others' playing than to Takagi-san's probably because I already knew Takagi-san well enough by this time.

For example, one student shared with us his new 3.3 long flute made out of a very thick piece of bamboo that was harvested the previous year in Nagano. He pointed out last year's participants who had referred to that piece of bamboo as an "alcove post" because of its size. He joked about it and said, "*this has eventually become a shakuhachi flute.*" He then played *honte-choshi* with this long piece of bamboo. It sounded as if he was trying to show his achievement through, and struggle with, this large flute. It showed that playing this huge flute has been challenging to him, and it clearly demonstrated that he has been acclimating himself to this flute. We could clearly sense how much effort he had put into performing on this flute. Later, Takagi-san played this long flute and demonstrated its potential. A Canadian student also tried to play it. He had much larger hands, so he found it easier to handle, which made people laugh.

The most profound performance was provided by a 70 year old student, Igarashi, who has been practicing *honkyoku* for thirty years. The piece he played was *musashi shirabe*, a piece that is unknown to many *shakuhachi* practitioners. His reserved yet determined expression through pure, rich tones revealed that he is a devoted practitioner. His playing sounded, to my ears, like that of legendary *shakuhachi* player Takahashi Kuzan (1900–1986) who was called God of the *shakuhachi*. After his playing, he gently started talking:

It was around seven to eight years ago... There is a pilgrimage course in the Musashino (west Tokyo) area consisting of thirty-four temples. This is the piece that I played at each temple. So this is one of my memorable pieces, one of several pieces that are very special to me. I visited those temples on Sundays. It took me about a year to visit all the temples. So this is a very special piece to me. I encourage you also develop a special song that is part of your life.

Someone asked about his flute. He continued explaining.

Yes, this is my self-made flute. It's the one that I harvested five years ago here. It's still new. One day, it fell off from my hand and badly cracked. But the quality of the bamboo is too good to be wasted. So I bound the bamboo and turned it into a flute. The sound is great. It may be too ugly to give it to other people. But it is still good for my own uses.

When he stated, “*this bamboo comes from this land,*” he evoked our admiration. Some members, including myself, imagined that the pieces of bamboo we harvested earlier in the day could sound like his flute in a few years, and that we could play like him eventually. The depth of his playing, as well as his relationship with the music and the flute, demonstrated the importance of working on the same piece over and over again and cultivating a special relationship with the music and the flute. His words were truly profound and echoed with us, especially when he said:

We all make our own expressions unique to each phase of our life. When you have three years of experience of playing, that becomes your playing. You add more years, five years, ten years, twenty years, thirty years...and you see the development of your spirit, mind, and heart. So what's most important is to continue. In three years, you will see a different expression in your playing. You will see another phase. Each person has life, and each person has his own expression depending on how we live.

His playing of *musashi shirabe*, one of his signature pieces, manifested his way of being. That performance vividly conveyed how he lives his life through *shakuhachi* playing as explained later in this chapter.

Not only the Japanese participants but also the North American participants shared their *honkyoku* playing. As each student shared their playing at this *suizen-kai*, we all became curious to know how each person would play *honkyoku* music, what kind of sound he would produce, what he needs to say about how he came across the bamboo and how he turned it into a flute, and most importantly, what it means to each person to play the *shakuhachi*. We felt as if there was a clear link in terms of how we perceived their

performances and how we understood their narratives. As a form of communication that manifests one's life history (e.g., a loss of a spouse), way of being (e.g., participation in a pilgrimage), and style of self-cultivation (e.g., ways of memorizing *honkyoku* music), the power of this type of spirit sharing through music was profound, even compared to our bathing experience in a hot spring before the dinner. As the Japanese often use such expression as *hadaka no tsukiai*, which literally means "relationship built in naked" without any sexual connotation, bathing naked in a public hot spring makes people open and ready to accept each other. Our transitory experiences of driving up to Nagano, harvesting bamboo, bathing together, and eating dinner culminated when we exchanged music offering during the *kenso-kai*. All of these resulted in deepening our mutual bonding. Next day, when we had an *aburanuki*, removing oil from the bamboo on high heat, we already felt as if "*we were all connected in a way that was not so the day before... [thanks to] the knowing or intimacy from sharing the self through honkyoku*" (a voice of a Canadian participant). Another participant commented, "

With all these people, it's much more different than the connection before and after dinner, although everybody was open and friendly. Offering tells who you are, what you want say in the deepest heart, more than words.

Another person said, "*Everybody was touched by each performance. It urged me to thank you to everybody. That feeling still remains today.*" Offering is a profound form of heart-to-heart communication because it manifests who we are. The level of this type of spirit sharing is deeply profound, far beyond what we can expect to achieve through exchanging sake drinks, sharing local specialties and bathing in a hot spring.

Emergent Sense of Connection

My conversation with Rob on the next day of the *suizen-kai* at Takagi-san's group relates to the points of our *suizen-kai* experience. Here, I introduce our conversation as it happened so that his experience of the event corroborates my above description of the *kenso-kai*.

*Rob: It seems very **natural**. It's almost as if it's so natural that it does not even seem extraordinary what happened.... It's not making me feel like excitement. I felt it was so very ordinary and natural as if it should be... It doesn't feel like I am on the outside looking in as an excited observer. I am nearly on the inside. I felt such a sense of **belonging** with all of these people.*

Koji: That's very interesting. A sense of belonging

Rob: Like I am supposed to be there, like it's natural that I am there. So at that moment, I didn't feel as if I was seeking anything. There was a time I think everybody was there. That's the power of connection, whatever the vehicle is.

Koji: Did you feel you belonged to the culture or the community?

*Rob: Yes, community. I cannot say it's strictly to Takagi-san's group, but Igarashi and Takagi's students. Last night, it seemed like it was natural thing together, like family, to be connected with. It was just as deep, honest, relaxed, like sharing myself, sharing themselves. Certainly, excitement was not part of the atmosphere there, but [there was] a sense of belonging, feeling natural, sharing, like everybody was congregating. I felt like everybody belonged there in that moment.... Even today during *aburanuki*, having lunch, the efforts that brought to make that happened at that moment were not underscored but completely unimportant in the most beautiful way.*

Koji: Last night we created a sacred space to accept everything, including our weakness and strength. It was a sacred space because we could share who we are through confession. We had no objective judgment but warm acceptance and mutual understanding. I was an outsider in that group. But then, I felt very close. I felt as if I was part of the group and being welcomed.

*Rob: Very much, very honestly. It was so evident. [There was] the purity of kinship. Because all of us are all the same now, everybody is the same. There was no "I am a man," "you are a student," "you are inferior".... whereas we had a 70 year player sharing *honkyoku*, there was a young person with a 3 month experience sharing *honkyoku*, that we had the same value. No judgment on the analytical level. Of course more experienced people were better. But in that*

context, it's all the same. My tamuke, others playing shinya or banji or kyushureibo, whatever. It's all precisely the same. And all accepted that way. The attention to that 70 year man and a three-month player, the same.

Koji: Since we are sharing who we are, we cannot deny but only respect and appreciate our playing because we cannot deny who we are.

Rob: Because who you are is who you are.

Koji: We cannot just bring any external criteria to judge who you are. Who you are is who you are.

Rob: The value of these honkyoku people seems quite different. It is quite different from the values that are experienced in other worlds. This [Takagi-san's group] is where I can experience it. It's not for me [to think] who judge for some other players who play better. From what I experienced, that's what gets down to, especially this weekend. It was really to see where you are. Although I've touched it before, it really teaches where to seek the precious value, where it is that I can live, like "be alive," and still be playing honkyoku. I am really, truly sharing the true spirit of what the honkyoku is about. That really came alive for me in that moment because part of it could be the action of the day—harvesting and so on, and also I was in a very good accompany. Really, I've actually never felt that connection I had with so many shakuhachi players one time. I felt connection with some [fellow practitioners] after playing long tones, connection with the self after playing long tones for hours. But that's a meditation in a sense honkyoku is all about. But it [the suizen-kai] was more an offering than a meditation. Really, playing honkyoku in that setting was really, truly offering. And it takes a while for that kind of thing to happen. It takes many people to be offering in the same spirit. And [it's] not as a solitary thing but just a combined sharing, like congregation.

As our conversation indicates, the *suizen-kai* provided a sacred space in which our playing manifested, and gave positive meaning to, what we were trying to achieve through the *shakuhachi*. When we played music as offering in such a context, our worldly concerns (such as who are better players) bore little meaning. Our sincere, devotional playing facilitated the formation of our shared sense of belonging to the community. This feeling was deeper than other kinds of connection brought by other media for social communication such as long tone practice as a method of mutual tuning-in (Chapter 7).

Lifelong Self-cultivation Through Music Offering

Iwao Iwakura, the 70 year old practitioner whom we met at Takagi-san's *suizen-kai*, struck me as someone who is deeply committed to his life-long training of *shakuhachi* playing. I wanted to talk with him and hear more of his life experiences with the *shakuhachi* as his presence, his performance, and his talk at the *suizen-kai* were all profound and in line with my image of a devoted *shakuhachi* practitioner. His lifelong experience of playing the *shakuhachi* and being a student of Takagi-san's for over thirty years must tell us what it means to engage in life through music.

He agreed to meet with me on a Sunday. He changed his lesson time with Takagi-san so that he could have the entire afternoon for me. He first took me to Hosshinji, a temple in Tokyo, where *komuso shakuhachi* enthusiasts often gather for *kenso-kai* offerings and group studies. As a gatekeeper, he introduced me to the abbot who has a large collection of *shakuhachi* related books and resources. (This is where I was exposed to many different books and introduced to some of my participants). It was here that I had a chance to "offer" music in front of the altar, surrounded by the two experienced practitioners.

Two of us then moved to a restaurant where I held an informal interview with him. It turned out that he was a full-time carpenter, and Sundays were his only available free time. He talked,

I do my best with my job. I never skip my work. Because I am a craftsman, I want to see the result of my work as satisfying as it can be. Now I am 70 years old. I've been working as a carpenter for almost 55 years. That's my breath of life. Shakuhachi is the same. I give my best. That's my life policy. I give my best to everything. I didn't feel that way while my wife was still alive. She had a stomach cancer, and it spread out eventually to different parts of her body. She had survived for four years and nine months since her first operation. She gradually

lost her spirit and couldn't make it eventually. During that time, I did everything as best as I could. I do the same with shakuhachi.

He was already a devoted worker as a carpenter. But it was after his wife's death that he became even more dedicated and learned the importance of giving his best in his life. His *shakuhachi* practice manifested his life progress.

His dedication to his wife continued after she passed away. In hope of his wife's salvation, he went on the *ohenro* pilgrimage, the 1,400-kilometer route of 88 temples in spirited island Shikoku, which is known as the longest and most demanding pilgrimage course in Japan. The route is believed to follow the footsteps of an eighth-century Buddhist monk Kukai. Iwakura-san explained.

I lost my wife in 1989 about twenty years ago. Since then, I've experienced the pilgrimage four times (he did another one in 2008). Not many people would think of trying the ohenro pilgrimage and praying for the salvation of deceased souls. I couldn't resist but doing something for her. So I go on the pilgrimage with my shakuhachi and play (pray) for my wife. The course can be very harsh if you decide not to use any public transportation but walk through the entire course. You walk everyday, and it takes about fifty days to complete the course.

Considering the Japanese demanding work ethics and shorter vacation days,⁵² completing the full course of the *ohenro* pilgrimage is not easy for anyone unless he or she is retired.

The decision to fulfill the pilgrimage may risk one's job security. Iwakura-san continued,

One time [out of his five completions of the ohenro pilgrimage] I depended on public transportations. But except that time, I walked through. Some temples are located on tops of mountains (as high as 900 meters in altitude). You cannot reserve accommodations when you walk on foot because often you cannot reach the destination by the end of the day you hoped. Besides, many places don't even have a ryokan [Japanese style accommodation]. I often slept outdoors. One time, the wind was very strong, and I could not sleep outdoors. It was in April and still cold at night. So I found a public phone box and slept in it with my legs folded. I

⁵² The average Japanese took only eight vacation days in 2008 whereas the average "European" took 26 days. Besides, only eight percent of Japanese workers used their entire vacation days. Research conducted by Expedia Japan in April, 2009.

experienced many things like this. It's very tough to walk though. But you would experience deep moments. You play at a temple. You receive support from people. You play shakuhachi in return. All of these experiences influenced most on my shakuhachi playing. Whenever I came back from the pilgrimage, my teacher remarked, "Your sound of bamboo [the shakuhachi] has changed." So I could feel that I have gone through several phases of my spiritual development. As I become old, I could feel that. I add a growth ring to my playing, and that manifests itself as I play.

In this narrative, Iwakura-san asserted that his spiritual development manifested its shade in his *shakuhachi* playing, as identified by Takagi-san. Each pilgrimage experience provided him a series of predicaments that helped him reflect on human lives as being connected within and beyond this current world. Facing people's mercy, he played the *shakuhachi* to convey his sincere appreciation. A constellation of unforgettable moments, in which he communicated his pure spirit through *shakuhachi* playing, matured his musical expression manifested in his aged tone.

He further explained how his perception of his playing has changed over the course of his life.

You are absorbed in your playing when you are young. I was too. But it now feels different. It is as if the sound [I produce] comes back to me as I play. I've passed through the stage in which people just play without noticing what they are playing. I never intend to play well in front of my teacher. I am as old as him. I don't get nervous in front of him in the way I used to. Decades ago, I sometimes could not produce good sounds in front of him. But these days, I just play the sound that I have been pursuing. My play has also changed. At the last student concert, I played shin-kyorei with taikyokuken (tai ch'i) dancers. One of them was 88 years old. They really appreciated my slow playing. It usually takes only nine to ten minutes. But I played it for thirteen minutes. They found my tempo and breathing pattern very comfortable and suited to their movements. Probably, that's also the result of my aging.

At the *kenso-kai* with Takagi-san's group, Igarashi emphasized the importance of having a tune that is very special to the practitioner, a tune almost like a life partner. His play of *musashi shirabe* at the *suizen-kai* was the result of his prolonged engagement with

the music throughout his *musashino* pilgrimage endeavor, which took him about a year to complete. His memories and experiences of playing this piece and talking to people at the temples were condensed and expressed in his performance. In other words, his playing of *honkyoku* music has been aged by his life experiences.

Like Idemitsu-san and his teacher (Chapter 4), Iwakura-san also emphasized the importance of focusing on a few pieces to make them one's own *honkyoku*. The essence of this less-is-more approach is to deepen one's relationship with the music and work on the tone quality he or she seeks, not to achieve the broad coverage of the entire repertoire. The reason for studying many pieces is to find favorite pieces that one can work on over and over again. His suggestion to fellow students like me is to pick up parts of a piece that are most favorable.

Focus on the sound. The goal is to produce the sound that only you can produce. You do not have to play in the same way as your teacher does. Once you memorize the piece, you work on your favorite parts. Eventually, it becomes your song. Playing too straightforward is not necessarily good. Details and expressions are also important. Otherwise, no matter how many pieces you study, you can only play in the same way. Three songs are enough. You should have a few songs, even one, that you can play anywhere, anytime, with confidence. I have memorized many songs. But I believe only a few songs are enough. Even if you memorize many songs, you may forget them easily. Just a few songs are probably enough. When I was young, I studied many songs. I learned a lot of things through those songs such as fingerings and tone colors. Younger people can do that. But the goal is to master a few songs and make them your songs.

His daily practice of *shakuhachi* playing has been like this: In addition to hours of everyday *shakuhachi* practice, he sleeps with a flashlight and sheet music by the bed. When he wakes up in the morning before dawn, he sings a song that he is working on. Once he notices a memory slip, he switches on the flashlight and checks his memory against the sheet music. He does this again before he goes to sleep. He has been doing this training for several decades.

It has been believed that memorizing *honkyoku* music is one of the most difficult tasks in *shakuhachi* learning (and thus an essential part of the life-long self-cultivation process in *shakuhachi* practice). Some people (especially those in the myoan taizan sect) contend that memorization is against Zen because playing from memory inevitably activates the practitioner's mind and prevents the practitioner from achieving the state of no mind; thus monks do not memorize sacred texts but only chant them. However, the importance of memorization has historically been proven by wandering *komuso* monks, the real embodiment of the *honkyoku* tradition, who memorized *honkyoku* pieces and strolled in town.⁵³ Often, how deep and spiritual a person is as a *shakuhachi* player is measured by how many *honkyoku* songs he or she remembers and is able to play by heart. Igarashi explains, "*You cannot remember a honkyoku piece only by playing it on the flute over and over again.*" But with the singing exercise (traditionally, called *shoga*), it takes only a few months to remember one song, which, according to him, is much quicker than trying to memorize solely by playing the music on the flute. Combined with his singing memorization training, he continues his daily training to maintain his memory of *honkyoku* music.

His spiritual, musical development of *shakuhachi* playing is also manifested in his relationship with each flute.

I played tamuke many countless times after my wife passed away. I studied the song very hard. I did my best to play it as my offering to her. The flute that I used to practice tamuke is still the best to play that song, even though I've made many flutes in my life that sound good. Each of my flutes carries the memory and feeling

⁵³ To explain more, these people believe that monks generally do not memorize sacred scripts, neither do they have to memorize *honkyoku* music. *Honkyoku* music needs to be played exactly how it is written on sheet music.

of the time I devoted my spirit. They all contain my spirit. My memories are bound with my flutes.

His flutes are the carriers of his memories of and commitments to significant life events (such as his wife's death). For him, what makes each flute special is not so much its length or size as it is his memory of it. His relationship with each flute starts when a piece of bamboo becomes a flute. He waits a few years until a harvested bamboo piece dries up. He then spends at least two years making the flute. He intentionally does not take a quicker process but takes the time to pay great attention to details. He often puts a working flute aside, goes weeks without touching it, and resumes working on it again. By blowing into it many times over a few years, he finalizes the flute. After that, he piles his memories on the flute through his daily practice as well as his experiences of significant events. In this way, his playing of music on his self-made flute manifests the depth of his life experiences as well as his relationship with the flute.

Iwakura-san's experiences of *shakuhachi* playing cannot be separated from his encounters with people.

I cherish encounters and bonding cultivated through bamboo flutes [chikuen]. I've got several people during my pilgrimage times who eventually became very close to me. We often exchange letters and phone calls. The bonding made through shakuhachi playing is the most precious and wonderful thing in my life... [For example], this couple and I met each other during my ohenro pilgrimage in 1998. It was raining very hard, and they asked me if I would have a place to stay. I didn't. Then, they contacted the ryokan [hotel] where they were going to stay and asked if there would be a space for me. The ryokan was full. But they asked me if I would mind staying with them in the same room. We were strangers, but they were very kind. Then, I played koku to thank them, and they were deeply impressed, especially the wife because her father used to play the shakuhachi as a blind massager. She was reminded of those days when she took her father's hand to his customers. Since that encounter, we've been in touch with each other. They come to our student recital every year. This is what makes me feel very worthwhile.

Because of potential encounters, he carries his flutes everywhere. He stated,

*Like you said, people would be drawn to your playing, and you may eventually develop a deep bonding with them. Your bamboo [flute] can explain who you are and your life experience. I visit many places, and I always carry with me my shakuhachi. I normally bring two flutes (2.3 and 2.7) wherever I go. Without the bamboo [flute], you would feel that something is missing, wouldn't you? It's like **a part of you is missing**. It can also console you. For example, this September, I walked through Yamanashi from Chichibu to visit the grave of Takeda Shingen at Enzan Mountain. His spirit was buried at a temple. I was there and dedicated my shakuhachi playing. It was an awesome moment. Then, I headed down to Yamanashi. I passed through Daibosatsu hill and Okutama. This time, I stayed in hotels for 5 days. But it took 6 days to complete the route on foot. I carried my flutes all the way. They are like a media through which my soul comes out.*

I told him that playing in front of people is challenging to me. For the first time, he interrupted my talk and said,

You should play because there are people around you. Wherever you go on the route of the ohenro pilgrimage, you find people. There would be no temples where you find no visitors. You will get used to it. Nobody hates the sound of the bamboo flute. Some people may come closer to you. Others may be waiting at the gate until you come down. Some may talk to you, and other may not. But only when you tried playing music for people, you can have new encounters. You may have encounters with unknown people and encounters with unknown part of yourself.

Iwakura-san related that connection with people is made only when we expose ourselves to them. For him, years of *shakuhachi* playing is filled with experiences of making connections with people and the flutes.

I could think of no better way to deepen one's life experience through *shakuhachi* playing than how Iwakura-san had been going about it. Despite the loss of his wife, Iwakura-san seemed to be having the most fulfilling and fruitful life with the *shakuhachi*. He stated at one point that,

I have three children. They are all grown-up, and I don't have to worry about them. I have seven grandchildren. The oldest one is accepted to a university this year. So I am in perfect happiness now. Although my wife passed away, our children are independent, and our grandchildren are doing well. I am still healthy, and I can still work. Besides, I have bamboo [flutes].

Japanese people, especially those of the older generations, do not normally express their subjective feelings such as feeling happiness in front of strangers. When they do, they really mean it. When Iwakura-san mentioned this to me in addition to his life experiences and musical engagements with *shakuhachi* playing, I could sense how truthful his statement was.

Conclusion

This chapter shed light on the meaning of music offering conducted through *shakuhachi* playing. It involved focusing on the here-and-now, exposing one's bare self, dedicating one's spirit, and thereby manifesting who we are. Toshimitsu Ishikawa, a *shakuhachi* player-teacher in Kyoto whom we took a lesson with during our Roots Pilgrimage, stated that *honkyoku* playing is ultimately devotional. In his belief, *honkyoku* playing involves *messhi*, or “discarding the self”: The player needs to put his ego aside and devote his spirit to the act of playing. The notion of *messhi*—the idea penetrating some of my informants' *shakuhachi* approaches (for the case of Idemitsu-san, see Chapter 4)—seems to capture the spirit of music offering through the *shakuhachi*. It is ultimately a form of self-cultivation.

In the *shakuhachi* traditions, the act of playing *honkyoku* as offering is formalized under the concept of *kenso* (offering by playing) or *kenteki* (offering through flute). In the event of music offering at *kenso-kai*, the player may share his personal story regarding how he got involved in the music and the flute, facilitating both sound-based and story-based communications that are socially inclusive and spiritually emancipating. Emphasis of such a form of music playing is placed more on the act of playing itself than on

musical achievement. What matters in this form of communication is the player's intention to expose his or her way of being, rather than the result of his or her performance judged musically. Often, how musical one is becomes of secondary issue in the context of music offering. In the context of music offering, the process matters over the product, not because the former leads to the latter, but because the process itself is meaningful. This kind of process-oriented value—opposite values of today's musical world surrounding music education—are acknowledged, cherished, and practiced among the *shakuhachi* practitioners.

Iwakura-san's narrative revealed that shakuhachi playing as music offering can serve the practitioner as a form of lifelong self cultivation. Keister (2005) articulates the Japanese sense of lifelong learning through art:

With performance being only the tip of the iceberg, what lies beneath is the individual's experience of a physical and cognitive process that constitutes the unseen, spiritual foundation of art and is expressed verbally in terms that have spiritual overtones. A Japanese person may moderately describe their own artistic pursuit as their "purpose of living" (*ikigai*) or express this more heavily as their "life support" (*kokoro no sasae*). Art is commonly conceived of as a "path" or "way" (*do*) with the goal being to reach the "highest peak" (*kiwameru*), a point that even veteran performers may be reluctant to admit they have reached, for it implies a high goal obtained only at the end of a life time of dedication. (p. 41)

Shakuhachi practitioners introduced in this chapter surely consider their artistic pursuit as their *ikigai* and *kokoro no sasase*. For them, *shakuhachi* practice is an enduring, lifelong path. *Kenso-kai* is a context and opportunity for them to manifest and share their spirituality and ways of being, which may not be otherwise available to ordinary people especially younger people. Thus, it provides a learning context.

CHAPTER 9

JI-NASHI EXPERIENCE OUTSIDE OF JAPAN

Honkyoku seems more popular outside of Japan. Whereas the majority of Japanese *shakuhachi* players drift toward playing Western style music, foreign practitioners of *shakuhachi* music are more into traditional Zen solo pieces (Smith, 2008). Some observations regarding the rising popularity of *honkyoku* music outside of Japan were provided at a symposium of the Tokyo International Shakuhachi Summit in 2002. David Wheeler, an American *shakuhachi* player who received his M.A. in musicology from the Tokyo University of Fine Arts, stated,

Honkyoku is the most popular outside of Japan. I think there are three reasons why the *shakuhachi* has successfully become an instrument that is widespread and used outside of Japan. First, it is easy to carry. Second, it is a wind instrument and requires no understanding of lyrics. Finally, it is linked to Zen Buddhism. Many people are surely attracted to the meditative, spiritual aspect of training, even though the number of those people may be decreasing as people realized that any instrument could be used for the same purpose.... In many cases, people start learning *honkyoku* music after being fascinated by the tone of the *shakuhachi* rather than a melody of *honkyoku* music. (p. 49)

Japanese *shakuhachi* player Mitsuhashi Kifu echoed Wheeler's statement,

I find more foreign practitioners (than Japanese practitioners) being interested in playing the *shakuhachi* for spiritual purposes rather than playing such and such scales and melodies. I think Japanese practitioners also used to be like that long ago: People just blow into a piece of bamboo and simply enjoy its "pshooo" sound. They say, "I don't know why but this feels really good." They don't necessarily learn *shakuhachi* hoping to study *honkyoku*.... Originally, the *shakuhachi* played the same role as chanting. That was the *raison d'etre*. But people have forgotten about it. It would be nice if more [Japanese] practitioners are inclined to the spiritual aspect of *shakuhachi* playing. (Reported in *Hogaku Journal*, 2002, vol. 189 as a symposium report of "Shakuhachi's Future" at part of the Tokyo International *Shakuhachi* Summit, pp. 42-53)⁵⁴

⁵⁴ He also commented that it is getting more difficult for Japanese people to be *shakuhachi* lovers because of the prevalent product-oriented values. He believes that,

Similar observations have been made in other literature. For example, Keister (2005) believes that a key factor in the overseas success of the *shakuhachi* is precisely its historical link to “Buddhism and the ease with which philosophical ideas based on Zen can be articulated or felt through the instrument” (p. 100). According to Keister, foreign practitioners’ attachment to the spiritual aspect of the *shakuhachi* is much stronger than their counterpart *shakuhachi* practitioners in Japan.

In a different paper, Keister (2004) explores some of the ways in which the *shakuhachi* is recontextualized in the West as a tool of realizing Buddhist philosophy. One way to understand this phenomenon, according to Keister, is to look at the acceptance of an individualistic kind of Zen as the basis of appropriation and legitimacy of the instrument outside of Japan. For Western *shakuhachi* players, the romantic notion of Zen that has little to do with the social structure of monastic Zen is a useful strategy to appropriate the practice of the *shakuhachi* as “ours” and overcome the difficulty and awkwardness of learning the instrument in places geographically and culturally distant from Japan. In fact, classical pieces of the *shakuhachi*, called *honkyoku*, have been transmitted from one individual to another and are thus often learned outside of the institutional and conventional contexts, as introduced in Chapter 4. Examples of Japanese *shakuhachi* players who have transgressed conventional social and musical organizations, such as Watazumi Fumon, represent for Western practitioners the spirit of self-development and liberation gained from the *shakuhachi* training. Their individual

Even if they don’t play well, they should be able to enjoy music along with those who play well.... Those who are spiritually oriented may not necessarily be good at technical execution. In this performance-oriented society, they may feel embarrassed to be on the stage.

rendering of *honkyoku* playing manifests the idea of *honin no kyoku* (one's own music), as introduced in Chapter 4, that has a tremendous significance for the appropriation of the *shakuhachi* by Westerners.

This chapter further explores the international context in which individual practitioners invent unique forms of *shakuhachi* practice as opposed to conventional forms of practice. The non-traditional context of *shakuhachi* practice outside of Japan—free from the social, cultural constraints originated in Japan—has prepared a space for non-Japanese practitioners to adopt deconstructed, individualized *shakuhachi* practices. Some aspects of their practice are worth our attention because of their educational significance. The discussion of this chapter addresses one of my research questions: What does it mean to understand a foreign expression of music and culture? In so doing, we first need to understand the non-traditional context of *shakuhachi* learning.

Honkyoku as Universal

The *ji-nashi shakuhachi* seems more popular outside of Japan than it is in Japan, due in part to its image as an organic, earthy sound. The scarcity of *ji-nashi* flutes outside of Japan is overcome by the creative invention of bamboo flutes by non-Japanese makers. One maker in North America named his own *ji-nashi shakuhachi* “earth model” to highlight the more organic aspect of the *ji-nashi* flute (in light of the *ji-ari shakuhachi* that is more of the result of human control, as explained in Chapter 5). Unique approaches are observed not only in making but also in playing of the *shakuhachi*. For example, many Westerner *shakuhachi* practitioners, like my Canadian participants, are drawn to *honkyoku* playing. They find playing *honkyoku* more satisfying and liberating

than playing *sankyoku* ensemble pieces or other kinds of Japanese music. This perspective was expressed, for instance, by Liam, a Canadian *shakuhachi* student, who joined the Bamboo Roots Pilgrimage. We were at Takagi-san's place chatting with Takagi-san and Iwakura-san. It was when we talked about differences of the *ji-ari* and *ji-nashi shakuhachi*. Liam responded:

*Liam: Most Westerners haven't heard it [the ji-nashi shakuhachi]. But immediately when they hear ji-nashi.... This is how I feel, when I hear ji-ari, I relate it more to Japanese folk music and modern music, which, I am not Japanese, so it's not that meaningful to me. Sankyoku, minyo, too. I am not Japanese. It doesn't touch me because I don't have any of the background to understand it. But when I hear honkyoku on ji-nashi, I think it's **universal**. Some Westerners maybe think it's a little weird. But it's natural, it sounds like nature, it sounds like **something that isn't cultural**. It's not a cultural entertainment. It's **someone speaking more from the heart**. So even though I am not Japanese, honkyoku on ji-nashi makes a lot of sense to me. It's obvious that there is **something very primitive, very fundamental** there. But ji-ari and minyo or ji-ari and sankyoku, **it's constructed. It's a complicated construction of men**. I have to be Japanese to understand it better. But I think I can eventually understand honkyoku.*

Takagi-san: You are very smart.

Liam: Ji-ari is artificial. Folk music is artificial. But ji-nashi is natural. Honkyoku is natural. It takes us back down to [the primitive]. The rawer you go, the more people in the world I think would understand it. Russian folk music, I don't really understand it. I'll have to study Russian history and culture. With Japanese folk music, I have to study a lot more Japanese history to understand it. Chinese folk music, I'll have to study a lot of stuff including language. But the most basic—sometimes it's a religious form of music—is easier for everyone to understand. That's why I think at a concert you give [outside of Japan], people can see something, and it doesn't sound Japanese. Maybe it does, I don't know. But it doesn't sound like some cultural, complicated thing.

Like Andrew, Liam thinks that the attraction and the attractive quality of pleasure with playing the *ji-nashi* lay in its primitive nature. It sounds like “*something that isn't cultural*” and “*someone speaking more from the heart*.” For him, the cultural is “a complicated human construction” accumulated on the universal commons that were

already existent before cultures arose. The cultural is thus restricting, he sees, and serves as a hindrance to the access of cultural outsiders. To understand the cultural involves years of commitment to the mastery of, not only the music itself, but also the social and cultural rules. It is as if he needs to learn a “foreign language” and acquire parochial moral values. He sees the *ji-ari* as the “cultural” and the *ji-nashi* as the “organic, primitive, thus fundamental.” These different orientations to *shakuhachi* playing are similar to understanding a foreign religion by perusing scriptures and joining rituals, as opposed to understanding a foreign religion by directly experiencing its spirituality; the latter deals more with inspiration, energy, wholeness, mystery, and an organic engagement with life.

Liam further perceived that the “cultural” of musical expressions often manifests itself differently in a variety of scales and theories that characterize each culture’s expression of music. When he pointed out that *honkyoku*, the classical repertoire of *shakuhachi* music, is less “cultural” but more “primitive,” he meant that *honkyoku* sounds much simpler, so simple that it does not seem to form any scale, theory, or complicated construction of music. Thus, it sounds more tuned to their spirits in a much simpler way. Andrew in particular observed that playing *honkyoku* involves no “rules” and no “restrictions” as defined by the culture. He stated,

As soon as you give up the idea that everything has to be twelve-tone Western scale and you open yourself up to the possibility of just sound, and if you think about sound and nature like rock falling down a hillside or the sound of water, or any of those kinds of things, you realize really how beautiful and how powerful your breath is as a tool of creation. It doesn't have all those restrictions. It can blossom into something that is much more powerful than what the normal music is.

These practitioners' attitude toward *honkyoku* and their inclination toward the primitive over the cultural aspects of musical experience are quite different from how Japanese typically approach the *shakuhachi* music. Takagi-san explained that, for most Japanese, the *ji-ari* is new, modern, with a more focused tone. With it, they can play much more than the classical repertoire of *shakuhachi* music including modern music and jazz. In fact, most of the Japanese *shakuhachi* students only use the *ji-ari shakuhachi*. For them, the *ji-nashi* is old, undeveloped, and primitive in a negative way, with its divergent tones that are incongruent with standard pitches. Westerners may see it in the opposite way: For them, the *ji-nashi* is new, a sort of a postmodern musical instrument. It gives them a "never-heard-of-it" kind of impact. For them, the *ji-ari* sounds more like the Western flute. The *ji-ari* represents an effort of native people striving to modernize, Westernize their own culture. Takagi-san went further to say that for the Japanese, the *ji-ari* is also related to the power structure. *Sankyoku* and *hogaku* groups (as well as any group of Japanese artistry transmission) form their own schools. The *iemoto* (the head of the school) system that these schools have adopted is the "cultural construction" that, while preserving artistic and moral standards, functions to exclude other styles including the *ji-nashi* approach. For the perpetuation of the system, the *ji-ari* is appropriate and useful because, with its nature as a standardized instrument, the *iemoto* can disseminate his school's teaching and musical standards as accurately as possible. Many non-Japanese practitioners with individualized minds see the *iemoto* system as highly hierarchical and institutional, serving only as a system of collecting money and granting teaching licenses. Thus, they are more interested in studying with teachers like Takagi who do not belong to any *shakuhachi* school.

In sum, Western practitioners, such as Andrew and Liam, see *shakuhachi* practice differently (from how typical Japanese practitioners perceive it). One of the notable points of their *shakuhachi* practice is that they are drawn more to the quality of *shakuhachi* experience than the conventions of *shakuhachi* practice that is, to a great extent, defined by the institutional expectation. They are interested in playing *honkyoku* on the *ji-nashi* because it gives a special feeling that is not easily gained through other means. Their interest in *honkyoku* playing is not directly brought about by their interest in “Japanese” music. In fact, they are not looking for the “cultural” but the “universal” that is more primitive, more spiritual, more natural, and thus understandable to anyone, even someone who is not from Japan. In this way, they have added a special meaning to *honkyoku* playing, a form of music making that is otherwise a cultural practice.

No Political String Attached

Some Japanese practitioners saw *shakuhachi* music as politically laden and the cultural system of *shakuhachi* music practice as highly hierarchical (as explained briefly in Chapter 6). Playing the *shakuhachi* for Takagi-san, for instance, was in part a form of activism against the mainstream *hogaku* structure. For him, it was a counter-practice of the human-centered emphasis of music making.

In contrast, the tension between the artistic and the political-social in *shakuhachi* playing is not nearly as observable among non-Japanese practitioners. Their attitude is, to some extent, similar to that of Japanese immigrant *taiko* players in North America. While the *taiko* has been used as a tool to overcome negative stereotypes of Asian immigrants and the resulting self-depreciation and self-denial, its meaning has varied from the first

generation to subsequent ones. This perception most explicitly manifests itself when Terada (2001) explicates the gap between senior and junior players in terms of their first-hand negative experience as Japanese Americans. For young players,

the primary reason for playing *taiko* is the satisfaction of creating music together, physical fitness, and/or individualized spiritual quest. While they find relevance in the fact that *taiko* music derives from Japan, their motives for playing *taiko* are more artistic than political or social, in sharp contrast to those held by early *taiko* players. (p. 49)

The tension between the artistic and the political is not so strongly realized by non-Japanese *taiko* groups because their motive for playing the *taiko* is generally more “physical fitness, spiritual growth, and communalism” than political (pp. 51-52). Similarly, *shakuhachi* music practiced outside of Japan seems less politically driven.

One common feature of *taiko* and *shakuhachi* practices in North America is the popularity among female players: The *taiko* in its original form and context in Japan is normally performed predominantly by men and is commonly associated with masculinity. The biggest difference between the *taiko* and the *shakuhachi* practiced in North America is that while the *taiko* has widely been practiced by Japanese immigrants, the *shakuhachi* has been more popular among non-Japanese practitioners. A clue to understanding this difference is found in Izumi’s work (2001b). She focuses more on the Canadian scene of *Taiko* music and explores the process by which ethnic identity is created and reinforced among Japanese Canadian *taiko* players. Repeated interviews with several *taiko* players in Vancouver led her to findings very similar to those of Terada. Like Terada, Izumi observes that, whereas the *taiko* in Japan is in most cases performed and enjoyed in traditional settings such as *bon odori* festivals, many *taiko* groups in North America are creating their own pieces and musical hybrids that incorporate theatrical movements and

other instrumental sounds. The *taiko* players in her study showed no interests in “re-creating” Japanese culture in an “authentic” way. In sharp contrast, their intention was to express who they are. In her study, one informant remarked,

I started *taiko* because I had been in this band, Kokuho Rose, and we had a lot of trouble. We wanted to be a kind of fusion band. And we originally started with *shakuhachi*. But it’s a melodic instrument. And we had guitars, which is also a melodic instrument. And the scales were different, so they never quite got together. So we struggled with it and we tried to do it and we finally gave up... *Taiko* was a way to combine, to do a fusion easier, because there was no scale. There was just rhythm. So to me, this was the way to get my musical interests joined, with my background which is totally Western, with a Japanese instrument. (p. 43)

A similar observation was identified in Powell’s (2003) work on San Jose *Taiko* group:

At each step of the way, these *taiko* players were encouraged to work with the cultural forms and symbols of *taiko* in ways that would require them to add their own “signature,” to the ensemble, either by creating a solo for a standard song or composing new songs. (p. 41)

The formation of a musical hybrid is confirmed as a means of expressing the multi-cultural positionality of Japanese descendants living in the West. Izumi describes that the physicality of playing the *taiko* includes the wide-open stance, the intensive action of beating a drum with two sticks, and *kiai*, the screaming and shouting. Some female players in her study revealed that the *taiko* is not only a way to connect to their ancestry but also a medium by which they fight against social discriminations, claim their own multi-cultural positionality, and feel true to themselves. Women’s active participation resulted in reclaiming their cultural representation and creating a counter-discourse of Asian women against the dominant view of oriental women as quiet, submissive, and gentle.

Because the *taiko* is practiced in a group, its practice often manifests the members’ social and cultural identity. For this reason, the *taiko* has been researched in

terms of Japanese Americans' collective identity. In contrast, the *shakuhachi* often involves a solitary practice. Although the *shakuhachi* is often played in ensemble with other folk instruments such as the *koto* and *shamisen*, it originates as a solo instrument and has been practiced for individual spiritual training inside and outside of the institutional context.

Compared to the extant research on the *taiko*, very few studies on the *shakuhachi* have been undertaken because Japanese immigrants—the majority of Japanese music performers outside of Japan—were not as actively playing and learning the *shakuhachi* as they were the *taiko*. This is especially so with the second and third generations. Another factor for this difference—as indicated by Izumi—is that, whereas the *taiko* is a rhythm instrument and thus entails group participation that may create a collective cultural expression, the *shakuhachi* is fundamentally a solo instrument. Also, playing the *shakuhachi* is technically demanding and often necessitates a long period of rigorous training before being able to play with other instruments or to give public performances. Executing Western scales with the *shakuhachi*—a sort of requisite for multicultural musical hybrids—requires a great deal of effort. Thus, compared to the *taiko*, the *shakuhachi* does not easily allow for the creation of cultural hybrids due to its distinctive musical qualities. This means that the *shakuhachi* leads more toward the mastery of Japanese music than the creation of Japanese Americans' collective identity. The fact that the *shakuhachi* involves a solitary process of self-training and immersion predominantly into Japanese classical music gives an impression that the *shakuhachi* is too “Japanese.” As such, the *shakuhachi* is actively practiced by white people, rather than by Japanese

immigrants (except for first-generation immigrants), whose orientation to the *shakuhachi* tends to be musical and spiritual rather than social and political.

Feeling Music as Energy

In chapter 6, I introduced the experience of Andrew whose encounter with the *shakuhachi* can be described as a sort of sudden epiphany. We had beautiful, magical, profound moments of playing together in nature. Here, I provide further reflections on what enabled Andrew (and I) to experience the music in such a deep, organic way. His worldview of music including *shakuhachi* playing captures the elements of a more spiritual, more individualized form of *shakuhachi* playing.

Andrew is an experienced musician with expertise in hip hop music. Over the past ten years, he has been active in the West Coast hip hop music scene. What he did for his own music making is “sampling,” which is basically cutting and pasting parts of music borrowed from a variety of recorded sources. Creativity and artistic sophistication are required to find unique sound materials and put them together in a way that is differently from the tastes of the originals. His enduring search for new genres of music and attention-grabbing sound sources has resulted in a large collection of records and a broad knowledge of music. As I listened to his talk, I realized that his experience of music is incredibly broad and his knowledge of music, especially music from the 1960’ and 70’, is incredibly deep. His narrative helped me understand what it means for someone like him to practice the *shakuhachi* and how it can reframe the meaning of music and life.

Andrew’s point of reference is his own experience of electronic hip hop music making. His narrative reflects both his background in electronic music and his

shakuhachi adventure. As expected, electronic music is more of a serious business: As a professional musician, he feels pressured to produce high quality albums. Promotion and marketing are also part of his musical activities in the product-oriented market. In contrast, *shakuhachi* playing is more relaxing; as it brings him a “beginner’s feeling” or the fresh feeling that he developed when he first began to make music.

However, the *shakuhachi* seems to have provided him much more than just “relaxing” and “soothing” feelings. For him, the *shakuhachi* embodies the spirit of freedom. It is a tool to be true to his feeling. He stated,

Everything about the shakuhachi is conducive to just, [and] very in tune with, every feeling, every change of mind. You don’t have anything. You don’t have to add meter. You even don’t have to have that pitch really. You can do anything. You can just make noise. You find a tune to yourself as a human being because it [the shakuhachi] is a vessel for that; music just follows, which is much different than any other instruments. So simple and raw and natural. That’s how you hear the sound.

When used as a tool to explore one’s feelings, the *shakuhachi* need not be a musical instrument. It can only produce the natural sound of bamboo. It becomes an expression of energy rather than of “music.” Andrew explained this aspect of *shakuhachi* experience using his knowledge of jazz. He hears the sound of the *shakuhachi* as expressing no structure, no restrictions, merely tension and energy, which is very similar to his experience of jazz. He stated,

*Jazz is very much like that. It’s more about **feeling** than it is about **rules**. And the best people of the time, Coltrane and Miles Davis, from a technical standpoint, they are sloppy because they surpassed technical things and gone on more to spiritual excellence, more about feeling. That’s what I am more interested in. Definitely, that’s harder to cultivate.*

His background as an electronic music specialist has prepared him to approach *shakuhachi* playing in a way that focuses on the character and meaning of the sound, not on the structure of the music. He explained,

Shakuhachi is a much purer form of Jazz, pretty much contains every element that jazz strives to be because the whole idea of jazz is freedom, free form of music.... That's part of the reason why I really like sampler because it's a blank sheet of paper; it only puts out what you put in and you can put anything in...sounds of trumpet, clouds, whatever. It gives you an ability to compose anything. That's what I really like about it.

This is similar to the experience of Takagi-san who also has an extensive background in Jazz performance. Takagi-san has heard many *shakuhachi* enthusiasts who attended his performance likening it to John Coltrane's playing: Both convey "concentration," "tension," and "energy." It is not that Takagi-san plays the *shakuhachi* in a jazzy way. But his performance sounds like an expression of that is devoid of rules and restriction yet remains full of tension and energy.⁵⁵

In Search of Character

Andrew and I talked about many issues significant to modern life through our experiences of playing the *shakuhachi*. Human beings have made immense efforts launching rockets into outer space, but very little to explore the depth of their own inner world. The issue of technology often took over our conversation. Technology, on the one hand, helps our life but, on the other, serves as a homogenizing force of our life

⁵⁵ Coltrane was also into Zen. *Shakuhachi* enthusiasts in the West may have seen a picture of Coltrane holding a *shakuhachi* flute in his hand. Like John Cage, he was one of the Western musicians who rendered their own music making by incorporating Eastern philosophical concepts, which was much more than just playing Asian instruments or adding some exotic sounds. It was rather an attempt to question the western preoccupation with musical rules and canons. In the wake of this oriental movement, Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu (1930–1996) came as a surprise. His deft crystallization of Eastern philosophies apparent in his compositions captured many Western audiences who looked to alternative expressions in distant traditions. His musical expression, along with Coltrane's and Cage's, provided an anti-discourse of Western music canon: It emphasized the energy of tone over the structure of music.

experiences. His narrative is introduced below and reveals that his experience of *shakuhachi* playing has provided him with a critical perspective that questioned the role of digital technology that has recently brought many people ubiquitous accesses to a variety of music as well as tools to create their own music.

Andrew observes that the convenient, standardized technology now available to many people in the modern world has brought about the disappearance of space and silence. Due to technological invention, we do not seem to be able to avoid hearing “noises” coming from the modern society in which we live. Our data-driven minds are constantly occupied by the desire to seek out more information. Most significantly, this increasingly technological world has also brought about the prevalence of less creative, unique expressions of music. In this increasingly homogenized world, he sees many musicians being influenced by the homogenizing force. In fact, as Steven Feld observes, “the premise of world music lies in its diversity; however, it is suspended in the spectre of one world music.” In sharp contrast, Andrew observes that musical expressions of 1960’s and 70’s were so much more vibrant and creative than what we hear today. The reason, he believes, is that the time was interesting.

*Music is always a reflection of life and reality. Now we are in a time that is much more cookie cutter. Everyone’s experience is **homogenized**, partially due to TV and travel, but mainly due to the personal computer. Everyone can share the information. If your experience is homogenized, your art and music is also homogenized. That’s why all radio music and everything sounds so much the same today. It doesn’t have to be so easily shared. Like me, if you make hip hop music, there is a very narrow definition of what that is. If you do anything just little bit too much outside, you are considered not part of it, you cannot sell very well. You do pretty much what everybody else is doing and try to take a look at chances here and there, trying to make your music a little bit different where you can. Then you would be criticized for that. People don’t like it. It’s much harder to get a living unless you manage to bring yourself up to a high enough position where what you say disseminates into a new homogenized idea.*

Here, he expressed the “most ironic fact in commercial music industry.” In order to be successful musicians, they need to abide by the market’s narrow expectation as well as the expectation of what is being defined “creative” expression, which is essentially not encouraging creativity but conformity. Creative music means marketable music.

Someone’s highly individual, creative expressions can only be accepted if he or she is already an established musician. Ironically, musicians end up making pretty much similar music, identical to each other, despite their desire to be creative and unique. In so doing, they try to look for chances to be marketable.

Given the homogenous force, Andrew decided to go “analogue” in search of “character.” He explained,

*If you completely cast off what’s been done, you learn yourself better. You do exactly what you want to do, what you want to feel. That becomes so inspiring to the cookie-cutter homogenized world. So one of the ways I’ve been able to be successfully doing in my own music, electronic music, is I’ve been using methods that people don’t really use any more, like I frequently still record on four-track tape, even though I have an unlimited-track computer system. I use a sampler that’s from 80’s, that’s much older technology, and that has a very specific sound, it’s 12 bit instead of 16 bit CD quality. As a result, it sounds great. All the music sounds a kind of older, warmer, different. The goal is not necessarily **perfection**, the goal is **character** for me. That’s one of my secrets when my key has had some success there. I wouldn’t try to compete in the world of perfection.*

Here, Andrew provided two perspectives: He is faced, on the one hand, with the technology-based, consumer-driven world; on the other hand, with the organic world in which people look for character. In this world, people’s experiences are diverse.⁵⁶ He has experienced these two worlds through his electronic music making and *shakuhachi*

⁵⁶ Andrew further discussed the issue of perfection versus character. He sees the violin as an instrument that has much in common with the *shakuhachi*. Although many violinists today look for perfection, the instrument, especially bluegrass violin, bears much individual character.

playing, respectively. For him, the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* is a tool to counteract the homogenizing and standardizing force of human experiences. He believes that, because the *shakuhachi* is natural and primitive, our experiences with it can be diverse and rich. He stated that his experience of *shakuhachi* playing has influenced his experience of electronic music:

Actually, it was kind of funny going to that direction from the beginning with my own music. But shakuhachi taught me so much, so many of those ideas for me. I remember like we had a recording album right about the time when I first found out about shakuhachi. So I got my first shakuhachi for the last few months that we were doing the recording. So we were using a bunch of analogue synthesizers for recording. I especially like analogue synths because there are no presets. You turn it on and organically make sounds. Maybe similar things can be created but it is very difficult to create the exact same sound again, whereas the modern digital synths presets, if you switch to ten, then it sounds exactly the same, always. So using the analogue synths really started letting it go with the playing I was doing. We were not necessarily in the same pitch as the sample I used from records. I started to play a lot more loosely and find things based more on just overall feeling and what would be considered the right way to do it. So the album we recorded at that time felt like a kind of big divergence, almost all of that came from the way I was feeling and what I was learning about shakuhachi. Even though I just started, I hadn't learned anything at all. It was a matter of an idea that you play a natural sound, and it's supposed to sound like the way water sounds and the way wind sounds, things like that. If you apply that to electronic music, the same thing. It doesn't necessarily have to have this limitation of being perfectly quantized. You can make a synthesizer sound like water, too, if that's the aim. Shakuhachi, even I don't play well, helped me develop so much.

What is interesting about Andrew's statement here is that he has had only a limited number of *shakuhachi* lessons with his teacher, but he has experienced the depth of *shakuhachi* playing (and making). With it, he reframed his understanding and appreciation of music. He saw the world of the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* on one side and the world of electronic music on the other. Together, these worlds provided him with binary lenses through which he reconstructed the meaning of his life and music. Such binary perspectives that were identified in his narrative were as follows: "the digital—the

analogue;” “the modern–the primitive;” “the artificial–the organic;” “complicated scales–just tones,” “music of restriction–music of freedom,” “music as form–music as energy;” “perfection–character” of expression (and the instrument), and “homogeneous–diverse” expression of music. While many aspects of Andrew’s experience are particularly unique to his own context, some of them are also shared by other *ji-nashi* practitioners.

Drawing the Earth Energy Through the Bamboo

In non-traditional contexts, some aspects of the tradition are reinforced (or disregarded) more fully than in the original, traditional one. As Andrew’s case demonstrates, people outside of Japan may feel, experience, and listen to *shakuhachi* music more as a vibration of energy than a construction of sounds. Pamela is one of them. We had a series of long email communications to discuss our experiences of *shakuhachi* playing. Here, I introduce parts of our discussion. Her writing here highlights the aspect of music playing as forming a connection to the earth and activating the flow of energy.

Pamela has been into sound therapy, *chi gong*, *reiki*, and healing. All of these are related to activating the flow of energy through the body. Speaking more pointedly than Andrew, Pamela stated that the *shakuhachi* is a pipe through which the energy flows, in a similar way that she balances and clears the earth energy in her healing work.

When I play *shakuhachi* I feel a very strong connection to the earth’s energy, especially because of the root-end of the bamboo - I feel that the bamboo is still energetically deep in the earth. As I play, I feel the earth energy is being drawn up through the bamboo and sent out through the vibrations of the sound. In this way, I use my *shakuhachi* for sending healing to those who need it.

When she plays a longer flute, the root-end of the flute is literally attached to the ground. Through the connection with the earth, she feels the energy being “drawn up through the bamboo” and circulates through the body. She clarified,

The longer *ji-nashi* allows me to rest the root-end on the earth as I play. I feel then that, as I produce a sound, the energy comes up from deep in the earth, travels through the instrument and then vibrates out through the sound into the surroundings. This feeling is so much stronger when I play outdoors that I feel certain this must be what is happening.

The *ji-nashi shakuhachi* is experienced to be strongly linked to and grounded in the earth. And this feeling is heightened when she plays outdoors. She feels as if the flute becomes a part of nature, a conveyer of the earth’s energy, as if it is linking her and the ground.

My understanding is that, because the *ji-nashi* is so un-tampered with, energetically it is still linked to the earth. Therefore, when you rest the root-end on the earth the bamboo is still energetically growing from that soil on which it rests. I can extend that too - when I play, I send the sound deep into the earth and, from there, it can extend across the whole planet to encourage balance, harmony and healing.

For this practice, she used the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* in favor of the feeling that the *ji-nashi* provides—a strong connection to the energy of the earth. She thinks that this feeling of connection is brought to her for several reasons:

Firstly, the wider bore [of the *ji-nashi*] means that I can breathe/sigh into the instrument to produce a sound, without feeling that my breath is restricted, or squeezed along its length as with narrow bore flutes. Secondly, I feel that the softer sound emanating from the *ji-nashi* integrates with nature’s sounds, rather than cutting across them. Thirdly, the longer *ji-nashi* allows me to rest the root-end on the earth as I play.

The above statement was made in the context of our email communication, more specifically in response to my following comment:

I have also been asking myself the same question: why does the *ji-nashi* give me a deeper connection to nature. There may be several factors: One of them may be the depth of my breathing enabled by a wide bore flute. Another element may be its natural sound which resolves into the environment. And of course, the

instrument itself is made out of a natural material. So when playing the *ji-nashi*, I often feel as if I am in one with nature, as if the energy circulates in and out of my body, as if the sound of the *ji-nashi* corroborates with nature. I often use the word, 'self-integration,' as opposed to self-expression because I do feel that I am part of the cosmos when I play the *ji-nashi*.

Pamela added that the sound of the *ji-nashi* also overlaps that of nature while one reinforces the other. She stated,

I feel that the natural sound of the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* emulates the sounds of nature far better than any other musical instrument. I am sure this is because it is made by removing only the smallest amount of bamboo necessary. In this way, the bamboo remains in as natural a state as possible, but has gained the added dimension of being transformed into a musical instrument.

We can identify common themes between Andrew's and Pamela's experiences of playing the *shakuhachi*. First, both strongly sense that playing the *ji-nashi* is an act of feeling, embodying, and circulating energy; for Stephanie, the energy is felt as though it were coming up from the earth through the flute, a realization of the *ki* energy. Playing the *ji-nashi* also serves them as a medium through which to connect themselves to nature. Its soft, unpenetrating sound allows them to experience the instrument as an extension of their bodies. Furthermore, they place more value on the single tone (the energy of a single tone) than on "music" as a structure of sounds. In the case of Pamela, this rendering of tone over music allows her to practice distant healing work through the *shakuhachi*. This practice involves sharing and sending energy and healing. The guidelines for this healing work offer details of her practice and the importance of feeling and focusing on sound vibrations (email communication):

1. Close your eyes and take 3 deep, slow breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth. With each out breath, imagine all tension draining from your body and sinking into the earth.

2. Become aware of the room you are in. Imagine that the room is surrounded by a protective bubble of energy which keeps you safe and separate from the rest of the world.
3. Be aware of yourself at the centre of this bubble, calm, still and focused.
4. Reflect on the healing work you are about to do – the sounds you produce set up a vibration in the atmosphere. Your intention will fill these vibrations with healing energy which you will send out through a funnel in the top of your bubble to each of the people on the list.
5. When you feel ready, pick up your *shakuhachi* and take another couple of deep slow breaths to prepare yourself.
6. Fingering Ro, as you start to play, imagine you are bringing the sound up from the depths of the earth.
7. Bring the sound gradually into being – starting with just the whisper/ suggestion of a note (perhaps breath only with no discernable note).
8. Eventually, the note itself will appear and as you play the next note, visualise a funnel opening up the bubble above your head, through which you will send the healing vibrations.
9. Now open your eyes gently, just enough to see the names on the healing list, and read each name in your mind as you continue to play.
10. As you read each name, visualise the healing sound vibrations travelling through the atmosphere to that person, circling around them, mingling with their energy, helping them to heal. If you know the reason for their healing request visualise their specific healing taking place.
11. When you have worked your way to the bottom of the list, gradually fade the sound away to nothing again and imagine it returning to the earth.
12. Place your *shakuhachi* back down in front of you and start to become gradually aware of your surroundings again.
13. Imagine the bubble gradually dispersing into the air. Become aware of the chair or floor beneath you and, when you are ready, slowly open your eyes.
14. Spend a few minutes thinking over your experiences and maybe write them up in a *shakuhachi* healing diary.

Pamela's practice manifested in these guidelines may appear unusual to traditional *shakuhachi* players who play "music," be it *honkyoku*, *sankyoku*, or modern music, in which the value is placed on the organization of sounds rather than on the energy of a single tone. The idea of sound as energy clearly explains many of my informants' experiences of playing and listening to the *shakuhachi*. They often find that the sound of the *ji-nashi* is warm and vibrant, as though it were coming from everywhere. For Pamela, this feeling was explained "as if she is in "a protective bubble of energy" but "aware of herself in the flow of energy, calm, still and focused."

Acknowledging Individualized Approaches

The West has provided a unique context for the development of individualized *shakuhachi* learning styles. In contrast to the majority of Japanese *shakuhachi* students, independent *shakuhachi* learners like Andrew and Pamela have acquired alternative ways of engaging in the *shakuhachi* practice to gain more profound experiences. Their narratives suggested that the spirituality of *shakuhachi* practice is not necessarily gained from studying in Japan or following the traditional format of practice. The power of *shakuhachi* experience as leading the practitioner to a deeper level of spirituality does not necessarily derive from the convention but lies in the nature of one's experience.

The acceptance of more individualized approaches to *shakuhachi* practice does not necessarily devalue the importance of studying the traditional form of *shakuhachi* practice. As discussed in Chapter 3, the pedagogy of Japanese music learning is often shaped by the school and the *iemoto* system through which the artistic, social, moral standards (including the *kata*) of each school are determined. While these standards serve

as teaching guides and learning procedures, they also formalize students' experiences because they more often than not standardize the path of learning. Westerner practitioners are aware of the confining aspects of school-oriented *shakuhachi* study and are often free from the artistic, social, moral, and institutional rules of musical practice defined by the *shakuhachi* schools. My participants have shared with me a variety of *shakuhachi* practices and their educational possibilities. They used the *shakuhachi* as a tool for their own self-cultivation to listen to their inner voices and stay in tune with who they are, often in ways that conventional practitioners in Japan would not recommend. Close observation of these independent *shakuhachi* learners' approaches to *shakuhachi* study highlight different orientations of music learning: One is a *kata*-based orientation, typically observed in Japan, and the other is an experience-first orientation, typically adopted by independent practitioners antagonistic to any institutional restraints.

Andrew took the latter approach. Although he acknowledged the importance of having an appropriate teacher and learning from history and tradition, his approach to *shakuhachi* study became that of a more individualistic sort that is devoid of a teacher-student relationship. Part of this was brought about by a physical inaccessibility to a community of cultural practice. In addition, the traditional *shakuhachi* schools struck him as part of an arbitrary system. He was not interested in acquiring a teaching license and confining his learning experience within the monarchical system. He believed that belonging to a *shakuhachi* school does not warrant any title or license; nor does it satisfy his expectation of *shakuhachi* learning. He reflected,

I've realized that I don't want to be any part of that [the shakuhachi school system]. It seems negative, complete opposite of what shakuhachi is about and my ideal of shakuhachi.... When I first heard of it for the first time on a record, I said I have to learn about this. I read some really beautiful things that other people

said about shakuhachi: what it means to play shakuhachi, what the experience is like. So I based my opinion on those. My idealistic approach is the only way for me to stay interested in this and keep that myself.

Instead of aspiring to a traditional teacher-student relationship, Andrew acquired spiritual teachers in distant places whose knowledge and philosophies are available through their websites, publications, and recordings. He visited some of them and keeps in touch with them.

Certainly, in other parts of North America, I came across a more “conventional” style of learning. For example, a *shakuhachi* teacher in New York had 80 students and granted teaching licenses to a select few. He seemed to have adopted a more traditional approach to *shakuhachi* teaching. The way he taught his student seemed more lineage oriented, school-based, and similar to how Japanese masters organize their lessons in Japan. This teacher explained to me his philosophy of teaching through the concept of *hahagokoro*, or “mother’s love.” For him, the whole process of teaching the *shakuhachi* is a way of cultivating a sort of bonding, emotional connection, mutual trust, and commitment to the school. Like any mother, a teacher of a group is supposed to convey a caring attitude and serve its members as a mentor. This “thick” teacher-student relationship and emotional bonding are believed to be the characteristics of spirituality experienced by many *shakuhachi* practitioners in Japan, as Keister (2005) emphasizes, even though his clear demarcation of the Japanese conventional approach and the Westerners’ individualized approach is not necessarily applicable to every situation.

In fact, it may not be appropriate to assume that, for example, Japanese *shakuhachi* practitioners are lineage oriented, whereas American practitioners are individualistic and free from a student-teacher relationship. This suggested framework

probably works only if the comparison is made between Japanese *shakuhachi* students in more conventional schools and American *shakuhachi* practitioners on the West Coast. There may be many *shakuhachi* practitioners who do not fit into this dualistic view. To illustrate this point, the *shakuhachi* students in Vancouver are probably situated in the middle of this continuum: They are committed to learning their teacher's playing style and his lineage. But they are not necessarily committed to studying only in one school. They tend to study a variety of music that presents multiple traditions and genres to satisfy their interests. This is part of their motivation to make an expensive trip to Japan. In fact, during the Bamboo Roots Pilgrimage, we visited several teachers who represented different schools and traditions. Unlike those *shakuhachi* students who we met in Japan, the students from Vancouver are encouraged by their teacher to take lessons, whenever available, with other teachers who can teach them a variety of playing styles. They are not expected to show their devotional commitment to one school, one tradition, and one teacher. Thus, their choices of which teachers to visit in Japan are more eclectic, a clear point of difference between their pilgrimage trip to Japan and other *shakuhachi* study trips to Japan organized by American practitioners in which they typically visit only teachers of their own lineages. The Vancouver students' choice of the *shakuhachi* tradition for intensive study is not necessarily determined by any affinity for the tradition but is greatly influenced by the availability and accessibility of a teacher. One of the students explained to me that the reason he had been studying the *kenshukan* style of *shakuhachi* playing in Vancouver is that his teacher plays and teaches that tradition (and he truly cherishes and admires his teacher's style). It was not that he "decided" to study that particular style. It was the only available form of *shakuhachi*

music in his place. He observed that he would have studied another tradition if his teacher were trained in a different school.

Differences of Attitude Toward Flute Making

More and more practitioners outside of Japan are actively involved in *ji-nashi shakuhachi* making. They are not necessarily professional makers, like those introduced in Chapter 5. They collect information from the Internet, exchange their experiences through online discussion forums, and make their own flutes. In fact, *ji-nashi shakuhachi* making workshops held outside of Japan (e.g. Vancouver, New York, Germany) have seen an increasing number of participants. For the past few years, non-Japanese participants have also been identified at an annual *ji-nashi shakuhachi* making workshop held at Mejiro flute shop in Tokyo in which John serves as a guest teacher. One of my informants attended the workshop by flying all the way to Tokyo from North America. This workshop is in great demand due to the depth of John's knowledge and communication skills. Participants can purchase dried bamboo pieces from the store and experience a whole process of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* making in two days.

The importance of instrument making was shared not only in places such as Vancouver, where the teacher embodies the organic tradition of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice and encourages students to engage in *shakuhachi* making as part of *shakuhachi* learning; it was also acknowledged in other places where *ji-ari shakuhachi* (over *ji-nashi shakuhachi*) practice is observed. I came across several *shakuhachi* enthusiasts in North America who were actively engaged in *shakuhachi* making, even though their teachers use the *ji-ari shakuhachi* for teaching and playing of all types of *shakuhachi* music. In

search of the kind of information that their teachers do not provide, these practitioners obtain *shakuhachi* making tips through websites and attempt to make bamboo flutes on their own.

The same level of enthusiasm is probably not observed in Japan. Confined to the hierarchical school system, Japanese practitioners are more likely to follow what their teachers preach. They seem to be under the impression that *shakuhachi* making is extraordinarily difficult. Part of their hesitation probably comes from their orientations to school-based *shakuhachi* learning: Most Japanese *shakuhachi* students are followers of one of the two major *shakuhachi* schools (namely, the *tozan* and the *kinko*) that do not embrace instrument making as part of *shakuhachi* learning. In fact, within each of the *shakuhachi* schools and subgroups, there often exist a couple of officially acknowledged *shakuhachi* makers who supply most of the flutes for the students of the schools. These retained makers not only make new flutes but also take charge of repair work.

Outside of the school system, however, there may be a number of independent makers. I have met a couple of such independent makers in Japan. A frequently exchanged message related to this theme is that “until you are conferred a teaching license by your teacher, you had better follow your teacher and buy a flute from your teacher. Otherwise, you would get in trouble.” This indicates that buying a *shakuhachi* from external vendors and makers violates the teacher-student relationship.

Still, the proportion of Japanese practitioners who make their own *shakuhachi* seems small, given the large number of *shakuhachi* practitioners in Japan.⁵⁷ John

⁵⁷ To be accurate, I came across several Japanese *shakuhachi* students who had never tried any “self-made” *shakuhachi*. Upon trying mine, they showed significant interest in making flutes. They asked me how they can start learning and how they can harvest

responded to my question: Why do North Americans seem more active in *shakuhachi* making?

To say that people are not as interested in Japan in making flutes [compared to people in North America] and not as interested in making ji-nashi is only true to the extent that there is a substantial number of people who make their own flutes. I think [it's] much more so especially in America. People quite often have the DIY (Do It Yourself) mentality. Basically, when you want some carpentry work done, most often in Japan you ask a carpenter to do it, the whole idea of "mochi wa mochiya" is very, very much strong. You ask an expert. I don't know very many people in Japan who work on their own cars, for instance, and change the oil, whereas when I was growing up everyone worked on their own cars. [It's] the approach of trying it by yourself and do it by yourself. I think everyone [in Japan] is interested, all the shakuhachi players, but they are growing up in a culture that doesn't encourage that so much, Because there are so many players [in Japan], there are also a lot of people interested.

“*Mochi wa mochiya*” is a Japanese saying that suggests “if you want to have good quality steamed rice cake (*mochi*), you should find a *mochi* specialty store rather than going to a grocery store or making one by yourself.” When applied to *shakuhachi* making, this saying suggests that only specialist makers can make good flutes and lay people should not even try making them. This Japanese *mochi-wa-mochiya* culture is in contrast to the American DIY culture, which encourages everyone to make flutes themselves. This difference of attitude may also derive from a physical constraint: The small Japanese houses may not allow many people to put the idea of “making *shakuhachi* yourself” into practice. As John observes, the whole workshop is much more prevalent in America than in Japan.⁵⁸ Although the idea of DIY is spreading to Japan, the difference

bamboo. For these practitioners, the lack of opportunities was the main cause of the lack of interest in flute making.

⁵⁸ The direct influence of limited physical space on the attitude toward *shakuhachi* making may be less of a matter: I came across several Japanese who live in small apartments in Tokyo but actively make flutes. Similarly, I met a *shakuhachi* maker in New York whose housing was similar to the size of those in Tokyo.

of attitude remains. The difference between the Japanese *mochi-wa-mochiya* orientation and the American DIY orientation to *shakuhachi* making also manifests itself in people's attitude toward instrument repair and retuning. Some practitioners are more reluctant to change the nature of the flute. One Japanese *shakuhachi* master residing in North America stated, "I feel awed [*osore ooi*] with the idea that I can insert a knife into a flute that the maker devoted all of his spirit and energy in order to make it." Although he has years of experience in making the *shakuhachi* (and thus has decent skills and knowledge about *shakuhachi* making), he is not eager to take on any repair work that essentially changes the character of the instrument; he only works on his self-made instruments and occasionally does a bit of binding work on other flutes, not tuning work, to prevent the flute from cracking.⁵⁹ He lamented that American *shakuhachi* dealers purchased many vintage *shakuhachi* instruments and retuned them so that they could sell well in the West. There seems to be a clear difference between people like this master who sees each flute as embracing the maker's spirit and those who treat the *shakuhachi* as products.⁶⁰

For North American *shakuhachi* makers, the choice of either the *ji-nashi* or the *ji-ari* depends largely on their intentions and skills. Some American *shakuhachi* enthusiasts have been identified as *ji-nashi shakuhachi* makers, even though their teachers are *ji-ari*

⁵⁹ Another case is a Japanese *shakuhachi* player living in Yokoyama who also showed a significant level of hesitation toward repairing flutes. The reason was that once he starts working on a flute that he does not feel comfortable playing on, he would endlessly find defects. Instead of improving his playing technique, he would attribute all the technical problems to the flute. He has experienced the spiral of blaming his flute.

⁶⁰ This is not to assert that North Americans never sense the spirit of the flute. Some *shakuhachi* makers expressed their significant concerns with their repair work of old vintage *shakuhachi* flutes as taking the risk of changing the inherent voices of the flutes. through their repair work.

shakuhachi players. In contrast, the Japanese counterparts' decision is greatly influenced by their orientations to the *shakuhachi* schools. They would not make the *ji-nashi* if their teachers are in the *ji-ari shakuhachi* schools. Kyle observes that,

The Japanese method of making a flute is that you do it like your sensei [teacher] does. It's kind of how you learn how you play. So if the sensei is making with the *ji* and uses the gage, then there is a huge process you go, and it's a huge commitment.

One renowned professional *shakuhachi* maker in Japan explained how he started making the *ji-nashi shakuhachi*. He had been predominantly a maker of the *ji-ari shakuhachi* because *ji-ari* making was the only knowledge that he learned from his *shakuhachi* making teacher. Therefore, he had never thought that he could make the *ji-nashi*. He did not even think that the *ji-nashi* could sound well. He explained the incident that changed his worldview: One day, a non-Japanese *shakuhachi* player visited his workshop and found a dried, meager piece of bamboo that was dumped at the door. This player asked the maker if he could turn it into a *ji-nashi* flute. The maker thought that he could at least give it a try. The result was quite remarkable and surprising to him. Since then, he has made *ji-nashi* flutes. Today, he is one of very few professional *shakuhachi* makers who make fine quality *ji-nashi* flutes. Without this worldview changing experience, he would have remained as a *ji-ari shakuhachi* maker. In this case, it was a foreign practitioner who influenced the Japanese maker.

For many years, the secret of *shakuhachi* making has been kept and transmitted through the apprenticeship environment. This generated a sense that flute making was only available for those who are ready for a "huge commitment," as Kyle indicated above. It was once thought that *shakuhachi* making is far too difficult to master and thus beyond the scope of a hobby. Given this context, the popularity of weekly *shakuhachi*

making programs and weekend intensive workshops stems from an increasing demand for hidden knowledge that is now obtained free from the traditional teacher-student relationship. Today, the amount of resources available on the Internet is tremendous. The whole instruction about *shakuhachi* making is introduced on YouTube. Online discussion lists and forums are full of postings and answers regarding the flute making process. Although there are still language barriers between English speaking and non-English speaking practitioners, the Internet has created a definite community of practitioners who hope to acquire the craftsmanship of *shakuhachi* making that was once unavailable outside of the apprentice system.

Convention or Invention

The issue of convention or invention has been a source of debate among Western practitioners of *shakuhachi* music. Keister (2004) observes that the idea of “one’s own *honkyoku*” (*honkyoku* as *honnin no kyoku*)—historically cherished among advanced practitioners in Japan—provides a rationale for Western practitioners to take more individualized approaches. Keister (2005) posits that individualized practices are promoted by practitioners’ yearning for a more spiritual approach to *shakuhachi* playing.

Defenders of the musical aspects of *koten honkyoku* call for a fidelity to the way the pieces are meant to be played according to tradition, e.g., according to the way they learned from their teachers which is, for many students of traditional Japanese music, the correct way to play and accessible only after years of practice. Defenders of the spiritual approach place greater value on the experience the music offers in the moment by objecting to any confines that may be set down by tradition. (p. 49)

To be sure, there is a great degree of freedom in *shakuhachi* playing. As a form of meditation, the rhythm and tempo of performance are loosely determined by one’s

breathing pattern. The idea of “one’s own *honkyoku*” is an expression that indicates that *honkyoku* music allows for highly individualized forms of expression.

Among *shakuhachi* practitioners, there seems to be agreement that convention exists for good reasons. Convention is a depository of knowledge accumulated and refined throughout history. It teaches us the essence of a practice that has been cherished and attended to by generations of practitioners. On the contrary, there is a degree of skepticism about the role of convention shared by Western practitioners. Convention does not necessarily prepare an individual path of spirituality for everyone. It only provides highly formalized and patterned pathways for people with different levels of interest. Often, the institutional nature of convention serves as a hindrance to the achievement of spirituality. Thus, it is more in the foreign practice context than in the original one that individual practitioners invent alternative approaches and follow self-determined, individual paths, ones free from sets of constraints imposed by convention.

As Andrew’s and Pamela’s cases exemplify, non-Japanese practitioners may not necessarily deny the power of tradition: Rather, they seem to “purify” and “heighten” the essence of that tradition by capturing what the tradition is about without taking conventional paths. For example, the depth of their *shakuhachi* playing experiences, which was captured through the concept of *ki* to use the conventional term, was an illustration of how they embodied the tradition. They seemed to have experienced this aspect of *shakuhachi* playing in a very intense way. At least their narratives revealed that they “verbalized” and “emphasized” this aspect of *shakuhachi* playing, which practitioners in the conventional path would not necessarily do. It can be said that they

alternated and modified the convention to seek a more authentic, bare experience of blowing a simple piece of bamboo.

Another example to illustrate their essentializing nature of *shakuhachi* practice is their approach to a single sound, conventionally expressed through such expressions as *ichion-jobutsu*, “one tone, enlightenment.” Although this notion is widely acknowledged among Japanese practitioners, they hardly play only a simple note in the way that Andrew did. Most practitioners (both Japanese and non-Japanese) of the conventional path approach “music” as an array of tones rather than as an expression of energy, contrary to Andrew and Pamela’s conception. In the minds of non-conventional practitioners, the value of “sound” is of greater significance than the value of “music.” Viewed this way, their approach to *shakuhachi* playing can be said to capture the spirit of *ichion-jobutsu* in a more intensified way.

The positioning of non-conventional foreign practitioners also allowed them to invent a type of *shakuhachi* flute, one with a large bore shape, called *taimu*, invented by Ken Lacosse and Brian Ritchie. They invented the *taimu* intending to “*make a flute that is as wide as possible [by] really pushing the limit [to see] how wide it can be, and still have a flute that plays both registers.*” Because of its large bore size, the *taimu* is capable of taking more breath into it, thus creating a deeper sound, which is called “foghorn.” The original idea of this new invention was borrowed from a Japanese maker, Ishibashi Gudo, whose flutes are large bored and lower in pitch than conventional flutes of the same size. They also found similar characteristics in old *shakuhachi* flutes made during the Edo period. Ken and Brian then explored what makes these flutes exciting to play. They decided it was the bore width, not its length, that interested them. They state, “*We are not*

bound by convention. We decided to be bound by physics and just taking this particular concept to the extreme. That's possible. We found it." They emphasize that the ideal expression of *shakuhachi* playing is the sound of wind passing through a bamboo grove. They believe that the *taimu* can create the same or an even greater sound than conventional *shakuhachi* flutes. They further explain that the *taimu* is not a "replacement" for the conventional *shakuhachi*. Rather, it is a "complement." For them, the *taimu* is another way to experience the very essence of *shakuhachi* itself. "*One of the things I love most about shakuhachi is that there are so many ways to experience it.... I think many of us have the desire to get back the basics of sound, breath, music, and nature; that's shakuhachi.*" They continue to say that the kind of people who are into *shakuhachi* playing in the West are generally interested in Buddhism and Zen as well as the type of flute and the kind of music that is suitable for deep breathing. The *taimu* can maximize these practitioners' blowing experiences.

The standard 1.8 sized *shakuhachi*—invented by ancient Japanese people whose body sizes were much smaller than those of contemporary people—cannot satisfy the expectation of foreign practitioners with the mind to use the instrument for their deep breathing exercises. The gap between conventional style and the contemporary demand has been filled by a series of inventions. Western practitioners have been a great force toward this improvement.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we were introduced to cases of Western renderings of the *shakuhachi* tradition and their deconstructed, individual approaches to *shakuhachi*

practice. The first case was Andrew who represented the view that the *shakuhachi*, such a simple instrument, can be used as a tool to explore one's inner world that was essentially experienced organically. He did not play *shakuhachi* music in a conventional sense—performing *honkyoku* or *sankyoku* music—but enjoyed how his self-made bamboo flute sounded by blowing into it and getting some simple tones. Without resorting to the performance of music and actualizing the structure of music, he gained the greatest pleasure out of playing simple tones. The second case, Pamela, signified that the *shakuhachi*, a conveyor of the earth energy, can be used for sound healing. Smith (2008) observes,

It seems that one often-overlooked aspect of music is the meditative, spiritual and even therapeutic role it can play for the musician. Indeed, many non-Japanese players have entered the *shakuhachi* world via this last element. Recently, foreign players such as Dr. Riley Lee or Debbi Danbrook have used the *shakuhachi* in music therapy and as healing music for other people, not only the *shakuhachi* player. Stemming from his training in *shakuhachi* and yoga, Dr. Lee is also giving lectures on deep-breathing techniques. (p. 47)

My informants suggested that spirituality is gained through the appreciation of the spiritual over the musical, the value of single tone (or the energy of sound) over the structure of music, and the depth of *shakuhachi* experience over accredited forms of *shakuhachi* playing, those authorized by the *shakuhachi* schools.

Close observation of my informants' individual approaches and experiences suggests that we need to pay more attention to individualized forms of *shakuhachi* (or any world music) practice as educationally meaningful endeavors. Non-native practitioners in this study revealed ways of engaging in the *shakuhachi* that enabled them to experience the essence of the cultural practice, such as the embodiment of the *ki* energy and the realization of one's primitive, organic, situated self. The depth of their

experiences and the significance of their practices are profound and worthy of our attention. They provide us with some ideas regarding how we can envision teaching indigenous practices of music in foreign contexts and think of its educational possibilities. Here, I provide a list of issues that contribute to the discussion, some of which I will be discussing in the final chapter: (a) Can only experienced players tell what the spirituality of *shakuhachi* practice is about? Or can ordinary people, like Andrew, who could “barely play,” also experience it without years of practice and training? (b) Educators often put less value on individualized, decontextualized forms of traditional music in favor of “authentic” forms of traditional music.⁶¹ Given the context described in this chapter, to what extent should we expect non-native learners of world music to approach the original form of practice in ways similar to how native people do? And (c) how can we interpret the act of realizing and appreciating a single tone as educationally meaningful? How can we locate such an intensified mode of aesthetic engagement in music within the music education curriculum?

⁶¹ Similarly, David Hebert (2008) argues that cultural hybrids of music are less appreciated and taught in schools than “pure” forms of music. This is especially so when it comes to dealing with Westernized hybrid genres: Music teachers feel that their attempts may dilute authentic traditions. On the contrary, Hebert believes that “musical hybridity may generate innovative models of music learning and play a unique role in cultural presentation” (p. 185).

CHAPTER 10

FORAYING INTO THE SCHOOL

This Chapter reports on the current situation of Japanese school education with regard to Japanese music teaching. While the emphasis of previous chapters has been upon adult practitioners' rendering of *shakuhachi* practice, this chapter focuses on how educators envision *shakuhachi* music as a teaching material for school student learners. As discussed in Chapter 3, the *shakuhachi* tends to be perceived of as an instrument for adult learners, given the fact that it has been used as a tool for practitioners' spiritual development. Often, the classical repertoire of *shakuhachi* music (called *honkyoku*) is believed to be too "difficult" and "unapproachable" for children to relate to its expression. At the same time, as Kobata (1951) suggested in Chapter 3, there are other types of *shakuhachi* music that are suitable for younger students. Questions addressed in this chapter include (a) what kind of Japanese music (and *shakuhachi* music) should be taught in schools? (b) how is it taught? And (c) what is the underlying philosophy of Japanese music teaching? Rather than focusing on *ji-nashi* practitioners whose activities are not generally related to K-12 teaching, I draw on *hogaku* practitioners, a body of Japanese music practitioners whose visions and activities are often introduced in schools.

Japanese Context of School Education

Japan is one of the countries that have strongly sought after Western values and promoted industrialization since the late nineteenth century. Japanese school music education has chiefly focused on the instruction of Western music while excluding Japanese music from its curriculum (Imada, 2000; Ogawa, 2000). The results of such

attempts, on the one hand, brought about the production of high quality musical instruments (Tanaka, 1998), the development of significant music teaching methods (e.g., the Suzuki violin or Yamaha method), and the pervasiveness of systematic school music education. Talented musicians and composers have produced great works of music in Western styles while forming unique musical cultures (Hebert, 2004). Creation of school music songs, called *shoka*, was one example of the creation of such a cultural hybrid (Matsunobu, 2007; Okunaka, 2008). What is unique about this hybrid genre of music (in Western styles with Japanese texts) is its continued popularity throughout Japan (Yasuda, 1993). Many people, including music educators, cherish the repertoire of *shoka* and believe that it should serve as the common ground for school music education.⁶²

However, the past few years have witnessed an increasing interest among Japanese educators in teaching traditional Japanese music (*hogaku*). Rather than celebrating the legend of widespread western music, more and more people lament over what has been lost. The revitalization of old values—values shared before westernization and modernization took place—is now appealing to many people. Japanese music

⁶² Westernized music quickly became Japanese own music. Although musical westernization in Japan has provided a fertile ground for new seeds of talent, sensitivity, and creativity, it was a form of self-colonization. Behind the creations of westernized music were traditional values excluded from the public education realm and almost forgotten in the mind of most people. In fact, this rapid acceptance and widespread popularity of Western music in Japan allowed school music to be used by the Japanese government during the period of Japanese occupation as a means for controlling the Asian colonies by supplanting their native values with Japanese values (see Liou, 2005, for a Taiwanese case; Park, 1994, for a Korean case). Indeed, school music education played an important role in unifying the nation and establishing the Japanese nationalistic identity inside Japan (Nishijima, 1994, Okunaka, 2008). In a sense, this westernization of and through music, with its emphasis on the moral cultivation of students, is viewed as a means for (and a result of) the Government to strengthen the nation's wealth and its military against the great world powers of the time (Yamazumi, 1967).

educators are becoming more concerned with their unbalanced inclination toward Western music and hence instigating a reformation of their school music curriculum, pedagogy, and cultural identity (Imada, 2000). In fact, emphasis of the national curriculum of music has shifted from teaching Western music only to promoting more balanced curricula. Music educators are now required (by the national curriculum policy since 2002) to teach examples of “Japanese music,” “traditional music” (e.g. *hogaku*), and “local, community music.” The national curriculum specifies that junior high school students must learn at least one kind of Japanese instrument and have opportunities to experience the Japanese singing style through *minyo* (folk tunes) or *nagauta* (long epic) songs.⁶³

⁶³ The inclusion of Japanese music in the school music curriculum is actually seen as a result of nationalists’ ongoing efforts to edify people’s nationalistic, patriotic sentiment. The reformation of the Education Law in 2006—the first attempt of amendment since the enforcement of the law in 1947—was aimed for promoting “patriotism,” “traditionalism,” and “nationalistic communalism” through public education. The Law now stipulates the need of cultivating students’ attitude not only to “cherish Japanese traditions and cultures” but also to “love the country and home land,” while also developing a sense of “respect for other countries and contribution to peace and progress of the international community.” The political decision toward the reformation of the Education Law has been a source of disputes and battles between nationalists and liberalists, who want to see moral values, including those that led to the war and blind respect to the emperor, as celebratory and who want to release education from the power and control of the authority. Although nationalists’ major concern was to reform Japanese history textbooks and enforce moral education, they also supported teaching traditional Japanese music in schools. A similar kind of dispute and battle is not observed on the issue of teaching traditional Japanese music (*hogaku*) in schools, except when it comes to teaching *kimigayo*, the national anthem. The song has been sung throughout the war time in order to uplift the war sentiment, affirm the militarism, and praise the emperor. The responsibility to teach this controversial song puts Japanese music educators in a double-bind situation (Matsunobu, in press). However, teaching *hogaku* is believed by many to be politically neutral.

In his keynote speech at the Kōten Geijutsu Kyōikusha Seminar (or Teacher Education Seminar on Classical Arts), Hajime Minegishi, the initiator of the music curriculum changes in 2002 as well as the curriculum researcher of elementary and middle school music at the Ministry of Education, emphasized that the curriculum change should promote “the introduction of Japanese style singing and instrumental playing into school education” as well as “the expansion of choices regarding teaching materials from diverse perspectives” (reported in *Hogaku Journal*, 2003, vol. 196, p. 30). Examples of such an attempt, according to him, include introducing the airy, breezy technique of *shakuhachi* playing (called *muraiki*) and the sound of the *taiko* used in a kabuki performance as representative of the image of a nature sound. He said that the emphasis of the curriculum change was not only to introduce Japanese music but also to familiarize students with the Japanese rich culture of, and sensitivity toward, sounds.

When the curriculum policy change was undergoing a tentative, preliminary stage, I was in Japan and had the chance to join several *hogaku* groups’ attempts to teach Japanese music in the Tokyo area. One of the groups was a local *shamisen* (three-stringed sitar) group that visited five elementary schools in town for one-shot *hogaku* workshops. For example, one day we saw three classes of children in grade 5 within two hours. The children were told to sit upright on the floor in the Japanese *seiza* sitting style and given opportunities to learn how to hold the instrument, pluck the strings with the plectrum, and play a cherry blossom song (called *sakura*). The lesson also included behavioral and moral aspects such as how to respect the teacher (e.g. bowing), how to enter the room (e.g., taking shoes off in an appropriate manner), and how to respect the instrument (e.g., understanding its components including cat skin). A series of comments regarding

students' manners highlighted the gap between the culture of school music education—tailored for children—and the assumption of *hogaku* teaching that has developed in the strict master-student relationship of music. At the end of the session, the *shamisen* players performed a *nagauta* song in front of a hundred students, which lasted for about twenty minutes with three major parts. I was reminded of the literal meaning of *nagauta*, which is a long (*naga*) song (*uta*). This series of school visits was made possible by music specialist working at one of these schools who was interested in incorporating traditional Japanese music into her music curriculum. She then started taking lessons with the group after listening to their public performance at a city hall. But she was not confident enough to teach Japanese music herself. Instead of teaching it on her own, she invited the group to the school. Other schools in the district heard about her attempt and asked the group to provide a similar program.

This example indicated that, despite the change of national music education policy, Japanese music teaching at schools was a rather chance occurrence, at least as of 2002. Faced with the increasing demand of Japanese music teaching, Japanese instructors are currently teaching themselves Japanese music and its pedagogy. Given this situation, many teachers express the need for collaboration between school teachers—often specialists of Western music—and external specialists of Japanese music in order for Japanese music to be taught in schools. This is also true for music teachers who do have a background in Japanese music.

Hoping to develop an education program focused on Japanese music instruction, the Nihon Geino Jitsuenka Dantai Kyogikai (the Japanese Association of Performing Artist Groups) conducted a survey in 2002. The emergent issues regarding the promotion

of Japanese music in school music education included (a) the lack of instruments for students' uses, (b) the need for in-service training, (c) the development of teaching materials for teachers, (d) the accessibility of external artist groups of Japanese musicians interested in teaching, as well as budget and time concerns. The report indicated that in the past few years, especially after the national policy change in 2002, a shift in music teachers' attitude toward Japanese music has occurred. Teaching Japanese music is no longer a matter of fear or antipathy among music teachers, but is an inevitable reality that they need to accept. As a result, many music teachers are gradually becoming positive about teaching Japanese music, despite their lack of experience with it.

Survey Reports

A survey conducted by the Ministry of Education in 2002 (in 10,281 junior high schools) revealed that many schools (36.8 percent in the 7th grade, 23.6 percent in the 8th grade, and 43.6 percent in the 9th grade) were not providing any opportunities to learn Japanese music. The number of schools in which Japanese instrumental music was taught as part of regular music programs exceeded the number of schools that did not deal with Japanese music instruction. The amount of time spent teaching Japanese music among the majority of schools (56.7 percent in the 7th grade, 69.7 percent in the 8th grade, and 52.1 percent in the 9th grade) was between one and five hours per year. The percentage of schools that spent more than six hours for Japanese music teaching was 6.5 percent (in the 7th grade), 6.7 percent (in the 8th grade), and 4.3 percent (in the 9th grade), respectively. Popular instruments taught in these schools were the *koto* (40 percent in the 7th grade, 58.6 percent in the 8th grade, and 33.4 percent in the 9th grade), percussion

instruments such as the *taiko* (20.2 percent in the 7th grade, 15.9 percent in the 8th grade, and 16.3 percent in the 9th grade), and then the *shamisen* (7.1 percent in the 7th grade, 8.6 percent in the 8th grade, and 12.3 percent in the 9th grade). Among the least popular instruments were the *shakuhachi* and the *shonobue*. For the *shakuhachi*, the percentage of instruction time was 3.3 percent in the 7th grade, 7.2 percent in the 8th grade, and 5.1 percent in the 9th grade, respectively. Similarly, only 6.7 percent of instruction time was spent on the *shinobue* in the 7th grade, 4.8 percent in the 8th grade, and 5.4 percent in the 9th grade (reported in the *Hogaku Journal*, 2003, vol. 196, pp. 36-38). The same tendency was also reported in other surveys conducted at the district level of Tokyo. For example, half of the 33 schools in the Edogawa ward incorporated a unit of *koto* instruction into the music program, whereas no school dealt with *shakuhachi* instruction. In the Suginami ward, music teachers of 23 schools responded that among available Japanese instruments, the more suitable ones for junior high school students were the *koto*, the *taiko*, and the *shamisen*. The *shakuhachi* was listed as the least favorable instrument. These results also indicated that teaching Japanese music was normally a series of one-shot attempts, often provided through cooperation between local performers and music specialists at school. Japanese music instruction in many schools was still concerned more with listening activities than performance. It has been over six years since these surveys were conducted. The past few years have seen many more projects undertaken in Japanese schools, resulting in Japanese music being incorporated into school curricula in more consistent ways.

Plastic Shakuhachi Making

As indicated in the survey introduced above, the first challenge that music teachers face is the unavailability of instruments. Most schools do not have materials and resources for teaching Japanese music, including instruments. Because bamboo flutes, like recorders, are easily substituted by plastic flutes, teachers who are interested in teaching *shakuhachi* music consider preparing imitation *shakuhachi* flutes made out of PVC pipes for class instruction. Many of them, instead of buying professionally made PVC flutes (which costs 80 to 150 US dollars), learn a method of self-making.⁶⁴ Despite the availability of useful information and resources for plastic *shakuhachi* making on the Internet, many teachers need help and guidance to make plastic *shakuhachi* by themselves.

Tokyo Gakugei University, known for its large teacher education programs in Japan, hosted a day-long *shakuhachi* making workshop for school teachers in 2007 and 2008. The intention of the workshop organizers was to “provide a hands-on opportunity for educators to make PVC *shakuhachi* flutes” (from the flyer). The workshop was led by two professors from two departments: the music education and art education departments of the university. The advertisement of the workshop stated that each participant may bring home two to three flutes at the end of the day for 3,000 Japanese yen (approximately, 30 US dollars). This included the cost of PVC pipes and joints. (Some of the participants eventually made more than five flutes). The announcement was not only

⁶⁴ Unlike Yamaha plastic recorders that are factory made, plastic shakuhachi flutes are still hand-made. Therefore, the prices of these hand-made plastic flutes are still high.

distributed to thousands of schools in the Tokyo area but also advertised in the community through the university's public relations office.

Among twenty nine participants only four of them were music specialist teachers. Some participants were citizens of neighboring areas with special interest in *shakuhachi* and instrument making. Some of them have taken *shakuhachi* and/or *shinobue* classes at the University. Others were school teachers working at a variety of levels and fields; for instance, one participant was a teacher in an industrial vocational high school who, according to himself, loves "craft making and using hands." He had also taken a *shinobue* class at the university. Two teachers were sent from a special school for physically and mentally handicapped children. This workshop seemed more popular among non-music teachers who are interested in craft making.

The workshop started with a brief instruction about *shakuhachi* making. The instruction was clear and simple. First, the participants were asked to attach the joint to the pipe that was already cut into the right size (54 cm) and make the *utaguchi* edge on the mouthpiece using a roller sander. After drilling the finger holes on the measured spots, they finalized the flute by filing the surface using sandpaper.

Most of the school teachers who participated in the workshop, including the music specialists, had no previous experience of playing the *shakuhachi*. Therefore, they needed to consult with the workshop organizers or other participants who had experiences of playing the *shakuhachi* to see how well their flutes were progressing. Some of the participants also came to me from time to time and asked if I could get any sound out of their flutes in progress. However, the construction process itself was simple.

One participant sitting next to me initially found the steps difficult but eventually made one flute within twenty minutes.

I had a chance to converse with one music specialist who teaches at an elementary school in Tokyo. She graduated from a music conservatory with a rare experience of taking a course on Japanese music. She remembered that the conservatory was one of very few higher education institutions at that time where Japanese music study programs were available. Yet, according to her, those programs on Japanese music were more focused on theories and history rather than performances of music. She acknowledged that she is probably among the rare music specialists in her generation who have had a chance to study Japanese music even for one semester. Despite her exposure to Japanese music in college, she had never taught Japanese music in her career. Simply, she did not have any opportunity to instruct Japanese music. Besides, she had an impression that *shakuhachi* music is sort of benevolent and spiritual. Her first encounter with the *shakuhachi* was through her middle school teacher who was not a music specialist but a classroom teacher. This teacher eventually became a monk serving the community.⁶⁵ With this strong impression, not even she thought that *shakuhachi* music was something she could introduce in her classes. Music examples introduced in her schools are normally selected based on a certain specific criteria. Do they promote the aesthetic understanding of music? My presence at the workshop evoked her memory of this teacher because my orientation to *shakuhachi* music is not entertainment-driven but spiritual.

⁶⁵ It was common that monks were junior high and high school teachers because in some Buddhist sects monks were required to obtain a teaching license of social science.

During lunch time, some of the participants found my self-made *shakuhachi* and asked me if I could play for them. They seemed intrigued by the appearance and the sound of a bamboo flute (compared to those of PVC flutes). They said they had never seen this type of self-made raw bamboo flute. I explained that my flute is a *ji-nashi shakuhachi*, which is nothing more than a piece of bamboo, not the *ji-ari* type of *shakuhachi* that is widely used in Japan. One of them commented, “*this is the true sound, very warm, natural, and so different from plastic flute.*” I also tried to explain that the PVC flute is not very different from the *ji-ari* type of *shakuhachi* flute in terms of sound.

As the workshop progressed, the participants acquired several PVC flutes. At the end of the workshop, they had a chance to practice a Japanese folk song *kari kari watare*. Composed of two tones (A and B), this song is often used by *shakuhachi* teachers as an introductory song for beginning *shakuhachi* students. Many participants seemed to find it difficult to play the song. But as a group, their collective playing sounded well. One of the workshop participants commented, “*this airy sound is very much shakuhachi like. Pitch differences [caused by hand-made flutes] are also good. It sounds like Japanese music.*”

One frequent comment from the participants was that “*making a PVC flute is relatively easy and fun, but playing the shakuhachi is another thing.*” They observed that their students would enjoy *shakuhachi* making more than *shakuhachi* playing.

The participants seemed to be satisfied with the workshop, which ended with applause and thank you notes for the organizers. Viewed from a perspective of a *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practitioner, however, the workshop appeared as if it skipped the important process of *shakuhachi* making; namely, the first-hand experience of dealing with natural

materials. One of the workshop organizers was aware of this issue. As an art education professor specializing in woodwork, he acknowledges that the process of handling natural materials is an important part of the craft making experience. He believes that no two pieces of wood are alike. Even pieces of wood taken from the same tree demonstrate significantly different qualities. For him, woodcraft is like “cooking” in which it is important to “*converse with each material and see its own condition*” (his words) before deciding what and how to cook. He thinks living materials are different from one another, and that this variation is a true source of joy in woodworking and cooking. The same holds true, he believes, for bamboo craft making. This PVC *shakuhachi* making workshop struck him as equivalent to eating fast food, which is already prepared and ready to be eaten. Yet, he thinks that this workshop was meaningful for the participants, even if the activities were not organic, because it provided them a chance to taste what it is like to make flutes. This idea coincides with his philosophy of art education, which is to provide woodworking opportunities for as many people as possible regardless of their background and skill level. He considers it his role and responsibility to reach out to everyone—including those who may not enjoy woodworking—by keeping it easy and accessible. He observed that even though the organic aspect of bamboo flute making was not part of the workshop, it could serve as a hook to lead the participants to the organic tradition of bamboo flute making.

A similar compromise was expressed by Sogawa Kinya, a well known *shakuhachi* maker-player in Japan, who also led a PVC *shakuhachi* making workshop for school teachers representing forty eight elementary and middle schools in West Tokyo. Like the art education professor, Sogawa positively sees the use of PVC material. He states,

I tend to like a simple, natural, down-to-earth sound of bamboo, especially when I play *honkyoku*. The ultimate destination of that pursuit is, “Wow! A sound came out of a piece of bamboo when I blew into it. Amazing!” This is the kind of experience that we all had when we were children. This kind of primitive experience propelled us to utter “wow!” What I am saying is that *honkyoku* music is based on our primitive reactions and experiences of “wow.” Japanese people are traditionally good at (and fond of) using simple natural materials and cultivating this kind of primitive sensitivity. Thus, I believe it is important for the students to feel “wow” through the course of playing and understanding Japanese music. To this end, the PVC *shakuhachi* can fulfill its role. Making a flute out of bamboo is much more interesting. But bamboo is not easily available, and the size may vary. As a result, some flutes turn out to be difficult to play. It may not be the ideal material for group *shakuhachi* playing. PVC is easily available, and it’s cheap. You can make two flutes only for 500 yen [about 5 US dollars]. The quality can be standardized. It is suitable to make a large quantity. Besides, it can generate “wow” experience in individual students.
(<http://www.fides.dti.ne.jp/~sogawa/suidoukann.html>)

Another positive perspective about the promotion of plastic flutes is explained this way: Plastic is a modern form of bamboo. Bamboo in premodern Japan was like plastic in modern Japan. People argue that bamboo was the plastic of the time when *shakuhachi* was born.⁶⁶ People made flutes out of bamboo, not necessarily because they strongly believed that bamboo was the best possible material, but because bamboo was the most accessible material, and easy to shape into a flute. Today, plastic is abundant, readily available everywhere (in the form of PVC), but raw bamboo is not. For people living in cities, acquiring a raw piece of bamboo may cost much more than buying a plastic pipe from a nearby DIY store. In fact, a piece of bamboo for *shakuhachi* flute is sold for 200 to 300 US dollars in the market. Besides, seeking raw bamboo pieces may not be as environmentally friendly as acquiring PVC pipes because wild bamboo in most places can be accessed only by car. One of our bamboo harvesting experiences in Japan during the Roots Pilgrimage involved a long drive (about 150 miles) and a consumption

⁶⁶ An example of argument is found in Carl Abbott’s book *Blowing Zen*.

of gas and energy (not only for driving but also for heating up the harvested bamboo). Outside of the *satoyama* context (Chapter 3), making flutes out of bamboo does not necessarily promote a cycle of eco-friendly activities. An interesting case in point is one *shakuhachi* teacher who is believed to have started using plastic *shakuhachi* for teaching—made out of junk PVC pipes collected from an abandoned factory. The choice given to *shakuhachi* practitioners seems not so much of either natural or artificial material as to which is more readily available and more energy efficient.

We will probably see more PVC *shakuhachi* flutes being used in schools in the future. The aforementioned views regarding the use of plastic substitutes for bamboo indicate that PVC flutes can be seen in a positive light, especially if they are made out of recycled materials. If the foundation of the *shakuhachi* playing experience is to face the moment of “birthing sound” out of any material, PVC flutes can fulfill its role as generating a “wow” moment for students. The discussion on the pros and cons of PVC *shakuhachi* flutes highlight the issues regarding substituting instruments used in educational settings, a topic that is further discussed in the final chapter.

School Performances

Given the fact that most music teachers have no experience of playing Japanese music, many attempts to teach traditional Japanese music in schools often result in providing only listening activities based on recorded music. Opportunities to actually experience Japanese music through performance are not widely provided; rather they are limited to selected few schools. Given this situation, many schools are granted resources

to invite guest performers and teachers who collaborate with schools teachers trying to teach traditional Japanese music.

The Foundation Japan Culture Center for Youth and Children is a non-profit organization based in Tokyo. With financial supports from the central government, prefectural governments, and the private sector, they arrange and organize registered performers' school visits, concerts, and workshops. These performers are all sought after professional musicians and performing artists. Their areas of expertise range from western music (e.g., brass quintet performance, opera, violin solo), world music (e.g., Chinese strings, African drums, Peruvian folk music, Brazilian Jazz, French chanson), to Japanese music including *noh*, *kabuki*, and *rakugo* performances that are not readily available in schools. Every year groups are sent to different prefectures to provide a series of intensive performances. Each performer group visits five to ten schools across several neighboring prefectures. Because their programs are highly reputed, many schools apply for the opportunity along with a request for a preferable performance. Only lucky schools (about ten out of fifty) are selected.⁶⁷

Kyle (described in Chapter 5) and his band members provided a series of performances in the Kyushu area. His group, named “Wa You Say You”—a witty rendering of the Japanese saying of “East and West” (*Wayo-Seiyo*), specializes not only in Japanese music but also in jazz and Latin music. The group members included a *koto* player as well as a jazz guitarist and a Latin percussion player—all Japanese. According

⁶⁷ All of this information was provided Ms. Tomomi Nishimura, the youth program manager of the foundation.

to the coordinator of the school visit program, this group is among the most sought-after groups because of their high level of excellence in performance and entertainment skills.

The first piece that they performed was *haru no umi* composed by legendary *koto* player Miyagi Michio in 1921. This ensemble piece for the *koto* and the *shakuhachi* is well known among the Japanese because people frequently hear this piece during the new-year celebration time. This piece is also introduced in school music textbooks as a representative *hogaku* song from the 20th century that manifests both Japanese tastes and Western influences. For many Japanese, this piece is one of the representing Japanese traditional music because it gives a particular impression associated with the image of *hogaku* music. Interestingly, this piece became famous in Japan after French violinist Renne Chemet performed it on the violin with Miyagi in 1932. Today, this piece is played by many musicians on western instruments; for example, Anne Akiko Meyers' latest CD "Smile" (2009) includes this piece played on the violin and the piano. To what extent this piece is "traditional" Japanese music is debatable. But it surely creates in many people's minds the image of Japanese music as distinguished from other kinds of modern music. Therefore, the group's decision to begin the concert with this piece seemed reasonable, especially considering its theme "East and West." Unlike in traditional settings, the *koto* player of the group performed the instrument while standing up instead of sitting on the floor—very unusual for *koto* performance—and the *shakuhachi* player used a microphone to increase its volume.

The second piece they performed was *itsuki no komoriuta*, a lullaby from the Kumamoto region, also well-known. For this piece, Kyle and the *koto* player began the melody, and the other two players (on the guitar and percussion) joined the performance

from the middle point. This changed the flavor of the music completely. Suddenly, it got a taste of light Latin jazz and “smoothened” the atmosphere. To describe other pieces they performed, the third piece was Kyle’s own composition based on his image of his home town in the Chiba prefecture. Next, followed by improvisation, they played *Take Five* by the Dave Brubeck Quartet. While playing this piece, they highlighted the rhythmic pattern of the song and invited the students to join handclapping. They also provided a participatory performance. Together, they played *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*, a very sweet version, through which the students joined the music with their recorders and hand bells. Quite content and absorbed, the students requested it again. The performance continued. The group played *Over the Rainbow*, for which John played its mellow melody on a longer sized *shakuhachi*. At the end, they played *West of the Summer*, during which they invited the students again to count the rhythm pattern. While introducing the other members, Kyle finalized the program.

The overall message of this one-shot school visit and performance was harmony. The idea of a cultural hybrid was expressed throughout the program. As Kyle announced in the middle of the performance, “*Isn’t it interesting? The American [Kyle] teaches Japanese music to you, and these Japanese members here play jazz and Latin music on Western instruments.*” Dressed in a black kimono-like costume with a bandanna on his head, Kyle looked as if he embodied the message of East and West harmony. The positive attitude toward the cultural hybrid was presented from the first piece they performed, *haru no umi*, composed by Miyagi Michio who invented a new horizon of Japanese music with great musicality combined with knowledge of western music. Among many popular songs that are now part of the *hogaku* repertoire, this piece

epitomizes the spirit of a cultural hybrid from its beginning. For many Japanese, this piece sounds very traditional and classic, even with its western influences. Other pieces that the group performed for this event also expressed the idea of a cultural hybrid. They were both Japanese and western music, played on the combination of Japanese and Western instruments, provided by an American playing alongside three Japanese.

Although Kyle is an organic *shakuhachi* practitioner (as introduced in Chapter 5), his philosophy was not explicitly introduced during this program, except when he picked up a very short bamboo pipe (the length was about 3 inches) and played a short melody, saying, “*We can make such a simple flute from bamboo and play a beautiful melody.*” During this concert, he was more like a musician and entertainer than a nature-initiated shakuhachi practitioner. Because of his position taking, this concert turned out to be entertaining. It was greatly appreciated by the participants.

Shakuhachi Teaching in Public School

It is rare to come across schools where Japanese music (especially *shakuhachi* music) is taught as part of a regular music program. As the surveys indicated earlier, most schools do not provide opportunities for the students to experience Japanese music. The aforementioned school that Kyle visited for a one-shot visit and performance did not have a music program for Japanese music instruction. My gatekeeper to that school was a science teacher at this school and had several occasions to introduce shakuhachi music by chance. Most schools either do not provide music programs for Japanese music instruction or, even if they do, they assign only a few hours for it per year. Given this

trend, I found a junior high school (7-9 grades) where *shakuhachi* music is taught by an external *shakuhachi* expert throughout the academic year.

I visited this school in Tokyo where one of Takagi-san's students, Satoshi Kodaira (a pseudonym), teaches *shakuhachi* music for self-selected 9th graders. In this school, elective *tsugaru-shamisen* classes are also taught for 7-9 graders in addition to a mandatory regular music program provided by a music specialist. It was this music specialist who managed to create a special program for Japanese music teaching. He sought volunteer teachers who could teach any kind of Japanese music on a limited budget (only 100 US dollars for a year). When they started the program, the school did not own any *shamisen* or *shakuhachi* instrument. The school did not have any budget to buy instruments. The first year this school's Japanese music program was featured by a NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) morning program. Since then, the school has seen donated instruments coming from all over the Tokyo area. Still, most of them were *shamisen* instruments, not the *shakuhachi*. To start the program, Kodaira-san himself donated plastic *shakuhachi* flutes for the class. Eventually, the Japan Sankyoku Society decided to sell twenty plastic *shakuhachi* flutes with a special discount (for about 40 USD).

This school is one of the very few schools that have continuously provided Japanese music classes over the years. At this school, the *hogaku* program started in 2002. It was featured and reported in several professional journals. In the past two years, the school was designated by the Tokyo Metropolitan government as one of the model project schools. Following this school, another in the region started providing a *koto*

program. Among five junior high schools in the area, two of them now provide opportunities for students to experience Japanese music in some way.

Kodaira-san has put a lot of effort into directing the *shakuhachi* class. Once he started the program, he proudly found that young students can learn very quickly, a realization he had never experienced before. Although he has taught over 2000 students in his life as a leading *minyo* (folk song) *shakuhachi* professional, he had rarely taught students of this age until he started teaching in this school.

This academic year (2007-2008), the class has only five students. They had studied several *honkyoku* songs (e.g. *honte-choshi*, *shingetsu*) and several popular songs. They were also going to study a folk song (*eashi oiwake*) at the end of the year. Although they had only been playing the *shakuhachi* for four months, they had already performed in such events as a municipal *keiro* (“reverence for senior citizens”) festival, a local cultural festival, and a junior high school music festival in Tokyo. For these events, they performed a 2007 hit song *Sen o Kaze ni Natte* and received encouraging comments. Even for adults, playing a pop song on the *shakuhachi* within such a short time is a demanding, because it requires the *meri-kari* techniques (in order to play a modern melody).

The class normally continued for 100 minutes including a ten-minute recess. Instead of sitting in the traditional *seiza* position, the students were seated on chairs in a small meeting room (as the music room is used for the *shamisen* class). They seemed to like using bamboo *shakuhachi* flutes rather than plastic *shakuhachi*. Upon Kodaira-san’s arrival in the room, they gathered around him and picked up their favorite bamboo flutes (owned by Kodaira-san) from Kodaira-san’s flute case. In fact, in previous years,

students could only play on plastic *shakuhachi*. For this year, the students joined a *ji-nashi shakuhachi* making workshop led by Takagi-san with the help of Kodaira-san and made their own bamboo flutes. However, these self-made flutes were not used in the class because of the pitch differences. Some are 1.8 and others are 2.1 in length. They mostly use 1.8 *ji-ari shakuhachi* (either bamboo or wooden made) when they played during the class. One student wanted to stick to using her own self-made *ji-nashi* 1.8, even in an ensemble because she liked how it felt and sounded.

One day, the class began with a warm-up and a long tone exercise. Kodaira-san led the exercise by playing a western scale in both low and high registers. The students followed each time Kodaira-san demonstrated. As part of the exercise, they also played several pieces that they were already familiar with, such as *kokiriko*, which they played as a duet of two groups. They also played their familiar song, *sen no kaze ni natte*, several times in two different keys. Then, they played *sakura* cherry blossom song, an allegedly representative Japanese song, in five different keys, to become familiar with different keys and smooth transitions from one key to another. Although the melody of this song is rather simple, this exercise seemed quite challenging to most of the students because it required them to get used to unusual fingering. Kodaira-san emphasized that they would be able to play *sakura* in different keys smoothly by the time they graduate.

The second half of the class was devoted to the study of *honkyoku* music, such as *honte-choshi*. Although *honte-choshi* is simpler than melodious pop songs in terms of sound organization, the students seemed to find it difficult to play the music, as if they were faced with a completely unfamiliar form of musical expression. Unlike when teaching pop or folk songs, Kodaira-san stopped each line and explained details and

subtle expressions. He paid more attention to details of each tone and phrase, such as subtle changes of tone color than he did to the smoothness of melodic playing. Just going through the entire song took him almost fifteen minutes. It was as if the students lost track of what they were playing—music or notes? However, they seemed to be focused and involved in their learning, especially when it came to the practice “tsu-re,” a distinctively *shakuhachi* like expression that follows a very short, intensified “tsu” note and an extended “re” note that lasts longer. Clearly, they were faced with the difficulty of playing a simple form of expression. But Kodaira-san indicated that the real joy of playing this kind of music would be attained later, stating that “*these honkyoku pieces are for the ji-nashi shakuhachi. It would sound better if you play on yours. For now, we use the ji-ari shakuhachi.*” For these students, reading music seemed less of a challenge, as it was all written with the combination of Japanese *katakana* letters with line. The line signifies the length, volume, and pitch transition of the tone represented by the letter. In fact, music reading was much less of a concern in this class. Kodaira-san did not mention notation at all. Assuming that all the students were following the sheet music, he explained details of expression through demonstrations and verbal remarks, sometimes pointing out specific lines and notes.

This program was made possible by several unusual conditions: First, the *shakuhachi* expert in this case was willing to teach for no payment. Kodaira-san, although quite busy in his own teaching and performing activities, not only spent several hours of his precious time for school teaching every week but also donated his own flutes to the school. For him, teaching *shakuhachi* is ideally a form of public contribution rather than a source of private good. Second, there was a real community of *shakuhachi* practice

outside of the school in which the students could participate after graduation. In fact, one of the students who was in the class three years ago is now a senior high school student taking private lessons with Kodaira-san and Takagi-san. He performed a difficult *honkyoku* tune *tsuru no sugomori* at Takagi-san's group student recital last year. Third, the music specialist of the school was understanding and supportive of the Japanese music program. He visited the *shakuhachi* and *tsugaru-jamisen* classes every week and encouraged the students by saying how lucky they were to have a chance to study Japanese music. Finally, the school itself was supportive and flexible enough to have such elective classes for Japanese music as part of the school curriculum.

Kodaira-san is acquainted with both *ji-ari* and *ji-nashi shakuhachi* playing styles through his extended experience of playing *minyo* and *honkyoku* music. His teaching at this junior high school exemplified the width of his expertise in *shakuhachi* playing, which manifested itself, for example, in his choice of repertoire for teaching that ranged from *honkyoku* to pop music. As a *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practitioner, however, he was also aware that there had been a series of limits—some were institutional—that prevented the students from engaging in the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice: For example, because the basic form of music practice in the school was group playing, students' self-made *ji-nashi* flutes that were not tuned from one another could not be used. Instead, the *ji-ari* type of modern *shakuhachi* or plastic *shakuhachi* that are tuned in D, F, G, A, D were preferred. In addition, since the school curriculum was divided into subject matters, instrument making was not part of the music curriculum. It was only this year that the students could experience the instrument making process at Takagi-san's workshop. The *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice is too holistic and integrative to be taught at schools in which

students are expected to focus on divided subject matters. Besides, because *honkyoku* music—the main area of practice for *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practitioners—is originally spiritual music for self-cultivation, it does not meet the entertainment and performance-oriented culture of schools. These expectations also force the teacher to cover a wide range of musical genres including modern and pop music beyond *honkyoku* and folk music. Given these expectations, school teachers would naturally avoid introducing the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice.

Kodaira-san's choice of *shakuhachi* music genres seemed well-suited for his students, as they were so focused on their learning. Kodaira-san's successful teaching left a message that *shakuhachi* teachers in public schools need to cover a wide range of musical genres. However, this is not always easy because many *shakuhachi* players in Japan specialize one or two genre of music (among *honkyoku*, *minyo*, *enka*, and modern music) defined by each *shakuhachi* school they belong to. This is probably another reason why the *shakuhachi* is the least favorable instrument to be taught in schools.

Hogaku Pedagogy in School

Anyone who is unfamiliar with Japanese education probably wonders: To what extent are aspects of *hogaku* music pedagogy are observable in the public realm of education? The gap between school music teaching and the *hogaku* pedagogy has been reported in previous studies. In his ethnography of Japanese junior high school bands, Hebert (2004) reports that several aspects of Japanese traditional music pedagogy seemed to play an important role in the music instruction of the school band context. These features included, for example, teachers' authority, modeling and strict imitation,

ritualistic rehearsal structure, less use of verbal instruction and conceptual explanation, and less emphasis on notational literacy. At the same time, Hebert reports that a few aspects of Japanese traditional music pedagogy were absent from the school band context, namely, positive reinforcement and feedback throughout the learning process as well as emphasis on spirituality.

Halliwell's (1994) observation of *hogaku* pedagogy, introduced in Chapter 3, provides a useful perspective to the analysis of *shakuhachi* pedagogy. Halliwell pointed out seven points as part of the *hogaku* pedagogy through the analysis of *koto* teaching and learning. According to Halliwell, (a) there is virtually no explicit "theory" or teaching of theory as it is known in the West; (b) there are no "exercises;" the teaching of instrumental and vocal technique is integrated with the teaching of musical "text;" (c) there is no explicit conceptual distinction between "text" and "interpretation;" one learns to play following the teacher's example; (d) there is very little verbal explanation, either of technique or of musical or expressive content, (e) playing together with the teacher is fundamental, (f) teachers may use *shoga* (oral representation of musical sound), or purely musical means to convey information to the student; and (g) notation, of used nowadays, is nevertheless of relatively minor importance.

These aspects of *hogaku* pedagogy were also observed in the context of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* teaching and learning. For example, teaching the *shakuhachi* is an embodied form of artistry defined by the performer's embodiment of music. My informants in particular used the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* that is an embodiment of varying degrees of nature in favor of diverse, individual experiences of flute playing. Because of this character, each flute provided a unique experience that was not necessarily transferable to

playing other flutes. In other words, the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* cannot be taught through standardized curricula or methods. This partly led to the rejection of any explicit “theory” of teaching applied to *shakuhachi* teaching (Halliwell’s first point). Many practitioners of *shakuhachi* music in the original context also avoided conceptual and theory-based approaches to *shakuhachi* teaching and learning. For example, when Idemitsu-san stated,

Just blow. You can just blow. As you keep blowing every day, your playing will eventually be good.... That will form your own expression in time. Your playing style will be formed eventually. (Chapter 4)

he not only rejected the necessity of bringing high-order thinking to his practice and teaching of *shakuhachi* music but also underscored the importance of a bodily acquisition of music that brings about the feeling of oneness with the flute. This Japanese style of *shakuhachi* teaching and learning was brought to light when the Japanese practitioners faced North American practitioners whose *shakuhachi* training was more focused to the task: For example, when my Japanese informants said, “*Our teacher doesn’t correct our mistakes. He lets us play even when we are playing wrong,*” my North American informants responded, “*Our teacher clearly points out when we make mistakes. Otherwise, we wouldn’t tell whether we are playing right or not*” (as introduced in Chapter 2). This explicit, verbal, task-oriented teaching was differentiated from Japanese teachers’ style of implicit, non-verbal *shakuhachi* teaching, an observation that coincides with not only Halliwell’s fourth point but also Trimillos’ (1989) following statement: “The teacher seldom identifies the error, but waits until the phrase is played correctly and then expresses approval.... The goal is to perform the piece exactly as the teacher has presented it” (p. 39).

To refer to Halliwell's other points, there was no explicit or observable distinction between "text" and "interpretation" in the *kata*-based bodily orientation to *shakuhachi* learning (Halliwell's third point): As I discussed in Chapter 3, one's musical expression through the *shakuhachi* was believed to be "naturally born" out of one's trained body rather than made unique by one's mind-oriented reflection and effort to dig out hidden meanings inherent in the music. In the *kata*-based learning, the student goes through repeated practice of a form and imitation of a model. In this system, individual uniqueness develops through an embodied imitation of the form rather than "interpretation" or original rendering of the form. Thus, in the *kata*-based learning, there is no explicit dualism between form and content, or "technique" and "text" in Halliwell's expression (in the second point above). To introduce Yano's (2002) observation of *kata*-based learning, the creative goal of *kata*-training is "to fuse the individual to the form so that the individual becomes the form and the form becomes the individual" (p. 26). *Kata* is content attendant upon form. The realm of form and content dissolving as continuous and inseparable is ultimately expressed by the idea of *ichion-jobutsu*.

Halliwell's fifth point relates to the *renkan* style of group playing as a form of artistry transmission as well as a method of sharing spirits through coordinated breathing patterns (Chapter 7). Playing together with the teacher was clearly fundamental in *shakuhachi* teaching and learning. Halliwell's seventh point is also related to the discussion of Chapter 8 in which my informants, such as Igarashi, provided a view that reading music is less important than memorizing music. They saw memorization as part of their life-long self-cultivation, called *shugyo*, through *shakuhachi* practice.

Some of the aforementioned features of Japanese music pedagogy that were observed in my informants' *shakuhachi* teaching and learning were implicitly evident in Kodaira-san's teaching of *shakuhachi* music in the public school. In this case, strict imitation of the embodied form, or so-called kata-based learning, was observed when he taught *honkyoku* music. Because the students could not depend on their register of musical memory for this unfamiliar music, they needed to listen carefully to and imitate how Kodaira-san substantiated the complexity of simple phrases. Also, playing together with the teacher as the dominant form of learning was evident in Kodaira-san's teaching. Although he did not use the *shoga* singing method of teaching that is often used in the teaching of Japanese music,⁶⁸ the dominant form of his teaching was playing together with a combination of demonstrations and verbal explanations about technical and musical contents. Another evidence of Halliwell's point was his minimal reliance on sheet music. Although he distributed copies of sheet music for teaching purposes, he rarely referred to them. The notation of *shakuhachi* music used in his class was simple enough for the students to read. Generally, the role of sheet music for my participants was of minor importance because of the oral, somatic nature of *shakuhachi* music.

At the same time, the role of "exercise"—absent in Halliwell's observation of Japanese music teaching—was evident in Kodaira-san's teaching when he led the students to practice a western major scale. Although he combined the teaching of instrumental technique into the teaching of music when he taught *sakura* by changing

⁶⁸ The *shakuhachi* part of *sankyoku* ensemble music is often taught through *shoga*. The teacher and student together beat the rhythm on the lap using both the right and left hands interchangeably while singing a melody.

scales and introducing unusual fingering, it was more of an exercise of different scale and technique than a rehearsal of music.

Among the foremost differences between Japanese music pedagogy and school music teaching—as indicated by Hebert (2004)—is the lack of emphasis on spirituality. As discussed in previous chapters, spirituality of music was identified in my informants’ everyday *shakuhachi* practice; for example, when they tuned themselves to the sound and rhythm of nature through a simple *shakuhachi* tone, when they played music in the *renkan* group playing mode to coordinate their spirits and minds, and when they acquired the feeling of oneness with the flute by realizing the life energy. These intensified experiences gained from focusing on the dimensions of spiritual awareness (the here-and-now engagement, mutual-tuning, focusing, corporeal feeling, relational consciousness) were absent in Kodaira-san’s class. The spirit of *ichion-jobutsu* was never shared in the class probably because of its Buddhist connotation.⁶⁹

To summarize, unlike the extra-curricular school band context in which students engage in music practice a few hours every day (Hebert, 2004), *shakuhachi* instruction provided in Japanese schools is still fledgling, often a sort of experiment for both the teachers, who have no experience of playing Japanese music, and the external music specialists, who have no experience of teaching young children in group settings. *Shakuhachi* music has been taught in private settings for centuries and its pedagogy has been tailored to its main group of students, namely, adults. Given the present situation, no

⁶⁹ The Japanese constitution also specifies the separation of state and religion. At the same time, most Japanese schools, following the national curriculum, provides “moral education” as a subject. The contents of moral education classes are greatly influenced by Buddhism and Confucianism.

explicit comparison can be made between *shakuhachi* teaching in public schools and *shakuhachi* teaching outside of schools yet.

One issue that needs to be addressed in relation to the conflict of values between school teachers and *hogaku* music specialists is the tension over teaching musical values and teaching moral, spiritual values. Attempts of teaching *hogaku* music in schools inevitably shed light on this tension because Japanese music instruction traditionally emphasizes the importance of the amalgamation of aesthetic, spiritual, and moral disciplines (Kikkawa, 1979). In Japanese music teaching, moral values are as important as musical ones. One's moral and spiritual lives are thus believed to mature along with one's musical development. There are reports disputing too much emphasis on the moral; for example, one *hogaku* specialist spent half an hour in one class trying to explain ideal behaviors and manners in *hogaku* playing, which was considered by most teachers as excessive and detrimental to students' development of appreciation toward *hogaku* music.

Conclusion

The *ji-nashi shakuhachi* carries the kind of sensitivity that people cultivated and nourished before the Meiji era when people lived close to nature in an ecologically harmonious way. It was after the Meiji period—when the country received a tremendous amount of influences from the West—that the current notion of “traditional music” was formed in relation to Western music.⁷⁰ In fact, many aspects of what are believed to be

⁷⁰ In countries like Japan where importation and syncretism of cultures (including religions, Asai, 1997) have been part of its formation of culturalism and identity, defining what is the tradition is a complex task. Since the eighth century when Buddhism was

Japanese music, or *hogaku*, today are cultural artifacts that have been developed within the past 150 since the beginning of the Meiji era when the country was extensively exposed to the West (Otsuki, 1987). It was also in the Meiji era that the foundation of school education was designed and consolidated. Policy makers of the time, with a strong sense of inferiority to Western music, excluded not only Japanese music from the school curriculum but also abandoned the kind of organic sensitivity transmitted from the past in favor of musical modernization they promoted in the Meiji era (Okunuma, 2008).

Today, as indicated above, students in most schools hardly had the opportunity to engage in the organic process of music making, including instrument making, and to deal with natural materials.⁷¹ Within the traditional school curriculum where subject matters are demarcated, divided, and categorized, the holistic aspects of bamboo flute making and playing were not incorporated into the same category of instruction. Only musical and aesthetic aspects tended to be targeted when teaching in schools. In order to facilitate a group playing and teaching, plastic flutes were the preferred instruments, not bamboo ones, because the latter are not necessarily in tune with each other. The majority of *shakuhachi* players—predominantly *ji-ari* players—seemed to support these schools' choice. For example, a professional *shakuhachi* player expressed his opinion regarding

introduced to Japan along with the writing system and music, Japan has received a tremendous amount of influences from the continent. In fact, what is believed as constituting “Japanese culture” shows significant influences from other cultures. For instance, Japanese court music *gagaku*—originally came from the continent, China and Korea, in the eighth century—is now considered to be uniquely Japanese (Wade, 2005).

⁷¹ Cases of *shinobue* making in schools have been reported in several books including a report of the Elementary and Secondary Music Education Study Group in Saga: Sagaken Shochūgakko Ongaku Kyoiku Kenkyūkai (2002). *Ongakuka no kiso kihon* [Foundations and basics of school music education]. Tokyo: Meijitoshō.

the choice of plastic flutes for school teaching at a workshop hosted by the Ministry of Education in August 2002 and intended to support music educators trying to teach traditional Japanese music: “It is important for students to start with instruments that have no peculiar character, those that are easy to handle” (*Hogaku Journal*, 2002, vol. 188, p. 2).

Most of my informants, however, had no experience to introduce their practice in schools partly because they already knew that institutional expectations would not be aligned with their vision of music making and teaching. A well-respected *ji-nashi shakuhachi* maker and player in Tokyo whom we visited during our Bamboo Roots Pilgrimage expressed his feeling of desperation about teaching in schools. He stated,

I have no idea where to start. Even if I am invited [to school], there is such a huge gap between [the vision of] today's schools and our vision. First of all, people at school may think that komuso shakuhachi is a religious practice and should not be allowed to be brought to school. Second of all, the idea that each flute is different in quality, size, and pitch is not acceptable in school. That's why plastic is so popular. If we teach kids how to make a hole on a piece of bamboo [with a knife], people today would say, "that's very dangerous. We shouldn't let them do." But we need take that level of risk at least. Untamed nature can bring danger. If kids are given no opportunity to hold a knife, to play with nature, to take a risk, that's not a real education. So what can we do [teach] at school? The starting point is different. Kids are confined within germfree, sterilized rooms.

In fact, when he was asked to teach at school, he taught students how to make bamboo charcoal instead of how to play music.

Idemitsu-san has been invited to his daughter's school as a guest speaker on Japanese music. He provided a workshop, not in music classes, but in an informal Saturday meeting organized by the school's PTA. Out of hollow bamboo poles that were already cut (instead of root-end bamboo pieces), he made many pieces of flutes (as long as 10 inches). With the *utaguchi* edge on the mouthpiece, but no finger holes, these

flutes, which he calls *piro-piro*, can make only one or two tones. However, the joy and mystery of making flutes out of natural materials and encountering the “birthing sound” (see chapter 5) were experienced in the moment when the students made these very simple instruments. He questioned which task would be more important, embodying nature or the experience of playing musical scales? In his case, the answer was the former.

The *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice appears almost impossible to be introduced in conventional music classes because of its ecological, spiritual, beside aesthetic, orientation to music making. One way to introduce it is to use the time for integrated teaching that has been secured by the Ministry of Education as part of the educational reform since 2002. Under this reform, chances of more holistic learning being organized and promoted in schools are higher. One particular example of integrated curriculum in the context of Japanese school education is *sogotekina gakushu no jikan* (integrated course), one of the new curriculum areas sanctioned by the Ministry of Education. Typical activities in integration classes at the lower elementary school level are, for example, feeding pigs, planting vegetables, visiting a nursing home, and interacting with distant people through the Internet. In addition to these remnants from student-centered progressive education, four major areas were newly proposed by the government as examples for ideal integrated projects: (a) international education for multicultural understanding, (b) promotion of welfare in human life, (c) information technology, and (d) the environment. Schools’ participation in integrated projects have contributed to the expansion of the traditional scope of school education by incorporating new areas of interest. Such areas potentially include ecology, the environment, peace, gender, equity,

technology, discrimination, globalization, and so forth, all of which have been excluded from the traditional curriculum (Sato, 1996). The scope of music education itself has expanded as well, and now embraces new areas of teaching; for example, so-called “sound education” that is based on Murray Schafer’s idea of soundscape and acoustic ecology that underscores the relationship between living beings and their environment mediated through sound (Torigoe, 1997). In some schools, sound education and environmental education have been provided within music classes as part of an integrative project. The *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice may be taught more effectively in these integrative programs rather than in conventional music programs.

CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL THEORY AND PRACTICE

My descriptions of the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice in the previous chapters have revealed a distinctive way of music making and learning, one that allows its practitioners to explore spiritual, ecological, and aesthetic dimensions of life. In this chapter, I explore the significance of this form of musical engagement by highlighting several thematic points which are relevant to contemporary discussions of educational theory and practice.

In Chapter 1, I presented six guiding research questions that helped navigate my inquiry. To introduce them again, (a) what are the significant aspects of their learning of *shakuhachi* making and playing? (b) In what ways do the *shakuhachi* practitioners perceive nature? What are the characteristics of their experience of the world through *shakuhachi* making and playing? (c) How do *shakuhachi* practitioners negotiate between “traditional” and “contemporary” values? More specifically, how do they perceive and appreciate the continuity between art and nature, as well as the relationship between spiritual and aesthetic values? (d) How do they experience themselves (or others), cultivate themselves (or the relationship with others) through *shakuhachi* making and playing? (e) How—and to what extent—do the *shakuhachi* practitioners transmit traditional values; and how do they verbalize and conceptualize these traditional values in educational settings? And (f) what does it mean to understand a foreign culture and tradition? Which aspects of the tradition are reinforced and which are disregarded when they are imported into non-traditional contexts? Instead of addressing each question one by one, I have organized my findings into themes, so the educational implications will become evident. My attempt here is to follow an ethnographic and qualitative research

tradition in education, which tries to derive more universal lessons from the particulars of local knowledge derived from my analysis of the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice.

Encountering Nature is a Significant Part of Music Learning

My informants revealed that they embodied the tradition of becoming bamboo harvesters, flute makers, and players in their learning path of *shakuhachi* music. In each of these stages, they encountered nature. When harvesting bamboo, for example, they were faced with widely varying sizes and shapes of bamboo, each of which might become a flute. For experienced *ji-nashi* practitioners, a form of musical thinking began when they were selecting bamboo pieces of the ideal size and shape: They associated a sound with a size and shape of bamboo as well as a certain tune. This image was also associated with their bodily feeling of music that arose when they touched or held a given piece of bamboo. This process of musical engagement suggested that, for them, the encounter with a variety of bamboo was part of their musical decision (Chapter 5).

After selecting and harvesting bamboo of ideal size and shape, they continued incubating their imaginations of sound and music that might come out of their bamboo. Their feeling of excitement and the imagined sounds continued to develop until they finally turned the piece of bamboo into a piece of hallow, blew into it, and revealed its “birthing sound” (Chapter 5). It was a moment of “*revealing the voice of a piece of bamboo*” and seeing “*if there's any life in there.*” Because each piece of bamboo carries its own shape and sound, one participant perceived that “*every encounter with a piece of bamboo is a surprise.*” It came with a sense of exhilaration, delight, and for some practitioners, awe and mystery. Some practitioners described the nature of such a sacred

encounter with bamboo as “parent-like” (as opposed to “God-like”) in the sense that they attend to what each bamboo piece (child) wants to say. One of the *shakuhachi* learning experiences for my participants included building and cultivating unique relationships with flutes that bore distinctive characters.

The resulting flute may bear a strong character. In this case, the player is forced to adjust his or her playing style to the character of each flute. Therefore, one of the essential aspects of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* experience was to learn how to adjust oneself to the character of bamboo (expressed such a phrase as *take ni awasete fuku* or “finding a route of breath air unique to each bamboo flute”), which often requires a substantial amount of time. This process of adjustment facilitated self-reflection and self-transformation of the player in relation to the flute. This process of growth was viewed by my participants as “co-evolving” with the flute. They often stated that they were “nurtured” by the bamboo. The result of such a practice was an embodiment of the instrument, not as a result of dominating or eliminating its nature, but of embracing it, even if it brings an “inconvenience” of expression.

This type of organic engagement in music facilitated not only an embodiment of the instruments but also formed a sense of attachment to them. One of my participants described his engagement with his self-made flutes:

Your hand-made instruments are like your children. You love them not because they are beautiful, cute, smart or anything [functional, playable, etc.] but because they are your children. They were born out of you. You must love them regardless of their appearances [and sounds]. (A Japanese participant)

For many of my participants, bamboo was more than simply an object—it is a living character. Their relationships with a variety of bamboo pieces were similar to those they had with human beings—as if they were all individual and particular to one another. This

is how these flutes become so personally important to them, irreplaceable even. This was especially true with longer flutes that had been customized to fit their body sizes. By playing flutes of this size, their bodies stretch to the sizes of the flutes, and their playing styles developed accordingly.

A series of engagements with music through harvesting bamboo, fashioning flutes, and playing them enabled my informants to personalize their experience with the flutes. Also, as they began to embody the flutes, they became a depository of emotionally important memories, ones firmly rooted in particular places and times. Playing such a flute revealed one's spirituality because the flute itself represented one's engagement with music. This was most powerfully manifested when my participants played *honkyoku* music in a *kensokai* (or *suizenkai*) setting. Through their performances and storytelling, their prolonged engagements with their flutes, spirits, and music manifested themselves.

This encounter with nature through this nexus of musical engagements is well illustrated by Dewey's (1934/1980) notion of *an* experience that sheds light on the adjustment process of an artist to embrace nature. Dewey explains the experience of an artist that applies to the *ji-nashi* flute practitioner:

Since the artist cares in a peculiar way for the phase of experience in which union is achieved, he does not shun moments of resistance and tension. He rather cultivates them, not for their own sake but because of their potentialities, bringing to living consciousness an experience that is unified and total. (p. 15)⁷²

⁷² Dewey posits that the tension between the organism (the students) and the environment (soil, clay, etc.) generates a desire that thus seeks equilibrium of the tension. "Equilibrium," Dewey sees, "comes about not mechanically and inertly but out of, and because of, tension" (p. 14). Thus, Dewey's theory of education concerns itself primarily with preparing the environment in which the interaction and tension between the students and objects naturally occur.

Dewey posits that bare, natural materials (such as bamboo) provide hearty resistance to those human beings (artists) who wish to force them to do what they wish unprocessed objects fashioned from these materials would. However, once this resistance is at last overcome, a profound expressiveness emerges. This expressiveness is one that is quite different from a simple discharge of human desire. From this perspective, the expressiveness that the engagement with the the *ji-nashi* flute engenders can be seen as a result of a direct encounter with bamboo, a negotiation with its character, a struggle to overcome its resistance, and a personalization of the making and playing experience of the flute. The *ji-nashi* practitioners enjoy the process of exploring each bamboo's peculiar blowing route (called *iki no michi*) as well as the transformation of their flutes being "paved" by their everyday blowing practice.

Some *ji-nashi* practitioners in this study tried to maximize their experience of nature by challenging their personal limits. They did so by making and playing flutes from bamboo that is very difficult to control. Rather than using nicely-sounding, easily playable flutes, they preferred blowing into bare, natural bamboo flutes that are difficult to play. These flutes did not allow them to execute musical passages as easily as they might hope. However, by conversing with the bamboo (rather than effacing its character by applying standardized measurements), they adjust themselves to it and thereby intensify both the experience and the joy it brings. For them, as represented by Sudo-san and Idemitsu-san in Chapter 4, if the flute is too easy to play, it does not leave enough space for them to be creative in crafting sounds. For them, the lack of playability was not a "deficiency" but a "character." They needed to embrace this so called deficiency, and integrate it into their musical expressions, not eliminate it. For these practitioners, *ji-*

nashi flute making and playing involves not only encounters with a variety of unknown pieces of bamboo, which for them is a manifestation of nature's diversity, but also a transformation of themselves in relation to their flutes.

Dewey's point of aesthetic education that focuses the process of negotiation between the desires of the individual and the constraints of the environment is rarely incorporated in music education. In today's musical world, deficiency brought by nature is considered only as a hindrance of musical expression, rather than a source of tension that leads to *an* experience. Deficiency is simply an obstacle to expression and is thus eliminated from the process of music learning. Not many musicians (and music educators) are willing to deal with this type of tension—"germs and roots in matters of experience" in Dewey's words (p. 12)—because they want to avoid any resistance the medium might cause. They prefer functional instruments that do not require any negotiation between the player and the instrument. My informants, in contrast, reported that the "tension" between their musical desires and the constraints created by the nature of their self-made flutes is a source of great joy.

In sum, encountering nature is a significant part of musical experience. For my informants, "*every encounter with bamboo is a surprise because every bamboo carries its own character*" (Kyle) and "*making a flute is to understand how much nature dictates the shape and sound of a flute*" (Andrew). Encountering nature is also emphasized in their teaching and learning process. They encourage the learner to face and embrace the character of each flute as a manifestation of nature's diversity. It involves a negotiation with and a struggle to overcome the resistance of nature. The learner also needs to adjust

his or her playing style according to its character. The result is personalization and embodiment of the instrument and music.

Experiencing the Past Through Music Learning

Music is posited to be a powerful medium that shapes how people interpret their experiences. The concept of acoustemology or acoustic knowing put forth by Stephen Feld (1996) explains that sound, combined with an awareness of sonic presence, is a reminder of the past. Through his analysis of the Kaluli's acoustic knowing of the sound world, Feld (1982) argues that birds are perceived and experienced not only as living in place, time, season, and weather, but also as spiritual reflections of deceased people through their musical rendering. Birds then become active participants in their construction of aesthetic, social, and spiritual experiences.

My participants have provided a view that the multi-sensory nature of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* making and playing serves as an acoustic knowing of place, time, and people, which are all symbolized in the practice of *ji-nashi shakuhachi*. For example, my informants reported (in Chapter 6) that the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* carries an “organic sensitivity” in itself and that the distinctive learning experience of *shakuhachi* making and playing senses the holistic dimensions of life. For Umehara-san, the *shakuhachi* was a tool to discover and explore the animistic world in which everything was holistically connected. He observed that the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* engagement provided precious opportunities for modern people to experience the wholeness of a system and thereby to realize how knowledge in the modern world is divided, automated, compartmentalized, disembodied, and experienced piecemeal, rather than as a whole. Takagi-san saw the

form of indigenous sensitivity engendered by the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* as derived and inherited from the Edo era, when people maintained an ecological way of life. He observed that, by engaging in the *ji-nashi* practice, we are able to feel that we are connected to the past.

This was also the case for Andrew, a North American practitioner, who is isolated from the cultural center of the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice in Japan. His experiences of *ji-nashi* flute making and playing revealed that a primitive part of the self was provoked by the use of self-made flutes, especially when he played outdoors and was able to feel “at one” with nature. It was this primitive self that induced the “animal-like” state and the conviction that human existence was continuous with nature. He observed that the experience of playing the *ji-nashi* is in tune with the mode of nature rather than tuned in human-made scales. Without resorting to any “cultural” matters, such as Japanese history and language, he gained a deep awareness that everything in today’s world has emerged from a very primitive form of life, that is, bamboo. To quote his statement again,

*If you play electronic guitar, you might be interested in Jimmy Hendricks but it’s much more immediate. Shakuhachi has this thing, it’s a kind of like reaching back to the ancient world into a time where there isn’t any history.... If you go back to the most basic thing, you go back to the **roots** of everything we have now, so in a way bamboo is the root of computer. If you want to get down to the source of life, start back to the basics, it answers the biggest question.*

Among the many educational benefits of learning indigenous forms of music, one is a connection to the past. Indigenous musical practices that developed long ago inevitably carry a sensitivity of the time of origin and remind us of what it is like to engage with music and life organically. In the case of the *ji-nashi shakuhachi*, this feeling of connectedness is gained not only from playing old, vintage flutes that were made in the Edo period but also from engaging in the process of making new flutes out of self-

harvested bamboo. In other words, the *ji-nashi shakuhachi*, of any time and of any maker, is, to a great degree, a depository of primitive, organic sensitivities.

Developing a Sense of Connection

As discussed earlier, the essential content of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* learning is to become “flexible” and “adjustable,” because the “*ji-nashi very often requires change of breathing at almost every note, which results in the player having to adjust to the bamboo rather than the bamboo adjusting to the player*” (Takagi-san’s student in Chapter 4). This side of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* playing was explained through the concept of *take ni awasete fuku*, or “blowing according to the character of each bamboo.” In fact, one’s style of *shakuhachi* practice is not to be fixed, but must be adjusted and accommodated according to one’s relationship with the flute, as the Japanese phrase *ni awasete* (“according to”) suggests.

Adjustments to the teacher and other members were also required. As examined in Chapter 7, my informants often played *honkyoku* music together in the *renkan* mode of group playing in order to acquire the appropriate timing of *ma* (silence between notes), when the focus of practice is placed on coordinating spiritual breaths and thereby adjusting their *choshi* (musical, mental, physical, spiritual conditions) to one other. This aspect of *ji-nashi* learning was expressed through the concept of “playing according to other’s breathing pattern” (*kokyu ni awasete fuku*). The same function was also identified among the North American practitioners engaged in the group *ro-buki* long-tone practice. In these forms of music playing, coordinating breathing patterns among the participants and sharing the *ki* energy served to help bring members together into harmony of spirits.

The sense of connectedness with people and flutes (and the sense of mind-body, human-nature integration) is acquired through the realization of the *ki* energy, according to Japanese cultural discourse. Realization of the *ki* energy is a total body-mind awareness and a feeling of connection with something bigger. Humans can relate to each other while harmonizing the *ki* energy shared between “I” and “the other” (Yuasa, Nagatomo, & Hull, 1993, p. xv). *Ki* is most significantly exchanged through breath, as suggested by the notion of *ki-soku*: a combined word of *ki* and “breath” (*soku*).

The experience of the *ki* earth energy also plays an important role when it comes to the sense of integration with surroundings. The experience of tuning into nature is often realized by the awareness of the *ki* energy. The energy itself was experienced by some of my informants as the vital source of their *shakuhachi* experiences. For example, Pamela stated,

When I play shakuhachi I feel a very strong connection to the earth energy, especially because of the root-end of the bamboo. I feel that the bamboo is still energetically deep in the earth. As I play, I feel the earth energy is being drawn up through the bamboo and sent out through the vibrations of the sound....feel that the natural sound of the ji-nashi shakuhachi emulates the sounds of nature far better than any other musical instrument.

The *shakuhachi* for these practitioners was more of a tool to feel and communicate the energy than of a musical instrument with which they execute musical passages. The realization of the *ki* energy helps “to balance the flow of the qi [ki], such that environs and body are productively continuous one with the other” (Hall & Ames, 1998, p. 862). Such a state of human-nature integration was experienced by Idemitsu-san, for instance, as “being a pipe.” To quote his statement again,

*As I play for an extended amount of time, I often feel as if I am an extension of the flute, as if I myself am a **pipe**, through which the air naturally goes in and out of my body with no obstacle. Once I achieve this level, it feels so good. I cannot stop but*

continue blowing forever. It gives a feeling as if how well I play is just a matter of trivial things. Only blowing matters. Probably, my playing sounds better when I am in this state.

For him, the state of oneness with nature is realized when he feels as if he is a “pipe” in which the air and *ki* energy circulates his body and he becomes an extension of the flute.

The state of oneness is experienced through the *taiko* Japanese drum, as well as the *shakuhachi*. Powell (2003) reports that the drum was not seen by the participants in San Jose *Taiko* group as separate from the body or the mind but realized through *ki* and *kata* toward spirituality with other ensemble members. *Ki* is explained in the context of San Jose Taiko practice as a way of knowing and communicating with other people in the group, embodying the materials, and understanding larger socio-cultural meanings surrounding Asian Americans. *Kata* serves as a means through which members can achieve “oneness” with the *taiko*. She introduced one practitioner’s remark:

“[*Taiko*] has it’s [*sic*] own spirit, and we bring out that spirit, with our attitude and technique. It’s not just an instrument. You, too, are the instrument. We, together (she circles between the drum and herself), are *taiko*.” (p. 289)

This process of embodiment, Powell observes, involved a loss of self and a feeling of unity, similar to how my informant *shakuhachi* players experienced the embodiment of the flute. In the case of *shakuhachi*, this process was explained through the concept of *messhi*, or “discarding the self,” and that of “coordinating the *ki* condition” through *renkan* group playing. Powell claims that *kata* served as a means through which the *taiko* members could achieve “oneness” with the *taiko*.

The significance of musical form that enhances participants’ relational consciousness through collective music making is largely ignored in the field of education. Ensemble music making is often discussed in the context of an effort geared

toward the production of music rather than the cultivation of relational consciousness. The assumption that the latter can be achieved only by the former is prevalent in our conceptions of ensemble music making. This value is also cherished in school teaching contexts as addressed in Chapter 10.

Enhanced Moral, Ecological Sensitivity Through Music

The primitive, organic sensitivity provoked by engaging in the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice is posited to come along with a moral sensitivity. Bowers (1995) argues that creative expression of traditional cultures serve to strengthen people's moral sensitivity and eco-responsibility because it is "a means of renewing the spiritual ecology which, in turn, serves as the basis of a cultural group's sense of moral order that defines the human's responsibility to plants, animals, and other sources of life" (Bowers, 1995, p. 71). Other scholars also relate that art making is a moral act of avoiding too much consumption of natural resources. Abundant production or profligate excess of natural resources is considered "immoral, ungrateful, antisocial, greedy and insulting" (Harvey, 2006, p. 55). Music making becomes an ecological act when it highlights and deepens one's relationship with the environment. A series of experiences gained through engaging in the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice may include a moral significance, as Boyer points out.

The practice of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* relates more directly to Capra's vision of environmental ethics. Capra (1996) argues that the basic principles of teaching and learning should be congruent with the characteristics of ecosystems such as interdependence, sustainability, ecological cycles, energy flows, partnerships, flexibility, diversity, and co-evolution. The practice of *ji-nashi* making, for instance, is

interdependent on the natural resources available in each place and cannot occur without a sustainable relationship with the land (Chapter 3 and 5). Diversity of musical practice is brought about through the various shapes and sounds yielded by different bamboo pieces (Chapter 4 and 5). The natural materials make it possible for practitioners to embody the flow of the earth energy (ki) through sound (Chapter 4 and 7). Co-evolution is observed when practitioners yield to the distinctive characteristics of their individual pieces of bamboo as they are, assimilating themselves to them, instead of altering them in favor of functionality (Chapter 4 and 5). They get used to each bamboo segment over time while developing a sense of attachment and stewardship (Chapter 4 and 5). With such sensitivity, they enjoy the inherently varied musical qualities of their *shakuhachi* and the resulting individualized music making. Not all of my informants entirely embody this vision of organic engagement with music and nature. But some consider each point quite seriously and practice them consistently.

One undercurrent research question of the present inquiry was: “Would people become ecologically sensitive musicians as a result of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* training?” As illustrated in Chapter 5, my participants who took the integrated roles of bamboo harvester, flute maker, and player became sensitive and alert about the ecology of bamboo and the relationship between human activities and environmental changes. Although I came across many ecologically minded *shakuhachi* practitioners during my fieldwork, I did not find anyone who carried out their vision of ecological life in a concrete form. For example, none of them was involved in environmental activities to protect the environment or the local community beyond their environmental activities. They often talked about climate changes and criticized the prevalent human-centered way

of life. Yet, their concerns did not seem to lead themselves to become activists. In fact, the majority of my participants who are *ji-nashi* practitioners struck me as philosophers with a concrete vision of how they should live in the society.

One of the educational significances of involving *ji-nashi shakuhachi* playing and making is the fact that it highlights the relationship between the moral and the aesthetic in music making. Bowyer claims that native forms of art and music making strengthen and enhance their moral, spiritual, and ecological responsibilities—values that were given to people of older times. They became ecologically minded because their life style was nature-oriented and eco-friendly (for instance, the satoyama life introduced in Chapter 5). This is no longer the case in today's world: We are deprived of first-hand experiences that help us question the prevalent anthropocentric form of music making, which excludes nature from of its process. Even developing a critical attitude toward environmental issues is difficult through music practices today. The *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practice was developed in older times when people lived close to nature and led a sustainable life. Studying the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* is thus to be exposed to the moral, spiritual, ecological sensitivities developed in those times.

Role of Spirituality in Music Learning

In Chapter 1, the spirituality framework employed in this inquiry—especially that which was submitted by Hay and Nye (1998)—has provided a perspective useful to analyzing the dimensions of heightened experience. To introduce each point again:

1. The here-and-now experience: a complete immersion into the experience of the present moment, being intensely committed to the immediacy of the here-and-now in its full concreteness;

2. Tuning: a complete “resonance” or “being in tune” with something outside of oneself, such as a musical performance or nature;
3. Flow: a total absorption in the performance of a task, with the feeling that the activity, rather than the performer, is managing itself;
4. Focusing: the “bodily felt sense” of any experience, an expression of the wisdom of the body (Ho, 2001, p. 171);
5. Relational consciousness: a deep-felt sense of connectedness with others and within oneself; person-God consciousness, person-people consciousness, person-world consciousness, and person-self consciousness (Hay with Nye, 1998).

Hay and Nye’s spirituality framework, when applied to the analysis of my informants’ shakuhachi learning experiences, highlighted such moments as: (a) playing simple music in nature that facilitated the formation of an embodied sense of the self merged into the environment; (b) playing in a group as a mode of mutual “tuning-in” and heart-to-heart communication; (c) engaging in a long-tone practice that promoted the members’ heightened awareness of the here-and-now; and (d) performing music as offering in which they revealed who they are and thereby communicating their own spirits.

Another perspective to look at the spirituality of music practice was provided by Van Ness (in Chapter 1) whose claim was that the spiritual aspect of human existence is hypothesized to have an outer and inner complexion. To quote his statement again:

Facing outward, human existence is spiritual insofar as one engages reality as a maximally inclusive whole and makes the cosmos an intentional object of thought and feeling. Facing inward, life has a spiritual dimension to the extent that it is apprehended as *a project of people’s most enduring and vital selves and is structured by experiences of sudden self-transformation and subsequent gradual development*. The spiritual dimension of life is the embodied task of realizing one’s truest self in the context of reality apprehended as a cosmic totality. It is the quest for attaining an *optimal relationship between what one truly is and everything that is* [italics added]. (p. 5)

This framework suggested that spirituality takes an effort to integrate outward and inward dimensions of a life experience; for example, one's effort to strive outward for musical perfection coincides with his or her attempt to engage inward in the process of self-cultivation. For a music performing enthusiast, musical engagement takes an embodied task of realizing his or her truest self in the context of music practice toward an ideal image of music performance. Van Ness posits that spirituality is educational because it leads to a project of attaining the *optimal relationship* between one's musical pursuit and enduring self-cultivation. In other words, spirituality is an extended project of life-integration, an effort to transcend the separation of mind and body, self and world, process and product, musical expression and self-cultivation, which manifests itself in an integrated synthesis of growth and development. This framework, applied to my analysis of my informants' *shakuhachi* learning experience, underscored the relationship between their musical and spiritual pursuits through the *shakuhachi* practice as a life integration project. The vision of spirituality as a life-integration project is exemplified, for example, by Andrew who received such a strong impact through the *shakuhachi* that "*it helped to change his path and life permanently.*" Through the *shakuhachi*, he gained not only musical inspiration but also spiritual, physical benefits.

Viewed from the Van Ness framework, one of the distinctive characteristics of engaging in music through the *shakuhachi* practice—as far as my informants are concerned—was that it facilitated an “optimal relationship” between the practitioners' musical pursuit and self-cultivation through a “simple” media, such as a bamboo flute or a single tone. By intentionally limiting the scope of outward expression, they tried to maximize the possibility of experiencing the inner richness of music. The *shakuhachi*

was suitable for this type of musical engagement because the emphasis of its expression is placed more on the color of each tone than the structure of music (as represented in the notion of *ichion-jobutsu*, or “enlightenment with a single tone”). Some of my informants were inclined to playing simple long tones rather than executing complex musical forms with technical dexterity. Rather than playing so many pieces and so many notes, they played a limited number of pieces and notes; for example, they often practiced *hontechoshi*, one of the first *honkyoku* (classical repertoire) pieces that *shakuhachi* students learn, largely for their own self-cultivation. The function of this simple piece was not only to allow them to engage in warm up exercises but also to adjust their breathing patterns and purify their bodies and minds. Played at the beginning of each lesson, this piece helped the teacher and student to coordinate their mental states and connect their spirits.

The importance of simple forms of expression was emphasized when one participant stated, “*Because bamboo is so simple, we can learn so much about ourselves. With such a simple instrument, we cannot do much. We can only face ourselves. It's not about bamboo but about us.*” If these practitioners are situated on the one end of the continuum, many professional musicians are on the other end. The latter group strives toward the attainment of spirituality by undergoing an arduous training, overcoming the pressure to maximize the efficiency of their practice, and satisfying their desire to achieve the highest level of expression. In contrast, my informants described a different path. They strived to deepen their experience by “minimizing” the scope of outward expression of music and thereby balancing the inner-outer dimensions of experience.

Van Ness' framework captures the inward-outward dimensions of experience and is of great significance in the context of music learning research, because the practice of music, especially when it promotes meditation or self-cultivation, would not be interpreted as a meaningful activity due to the lack of visible external production. My informants indicated that spirituality can be experienced regardless of the level of outward expression. In fact, Andrew's narrative of *shakuhachi* engagement illustrated that, even though he has been a beginning student for many years, playing the *shakuhachi* for him has been a series of life-changing, life-integrating experience. As Andrew repeatedly remarked, "*I can barely play the shakuhachi, I don't know any song.*" He revealed that even playing a single tone can lead to the profound level of spirituality.

The *shakuhachi* practice as a form of spiritual engagement suggests that if the purpose of a music practice is to attain an optimal relationship between the inward-outward dimensions of musical realization, outward expression can be minimized in favor of the depth of experience. In other words, the path of spirituality in music is not necessarily gained through the effort of striving for excellence in performance. It also suggests (in Chapter 9) that not only experienced players but also beginning students can experience what the spirituality of music means through many forms of music practice, including the *shakuhachi* practice, that follow the principle of "less is more."

In fact, the idea of less is more has been the essential aspect of *shakuhachi* playing, as suggested by the notion of *ichion-jobutsu*, "the attainment of enlightenment through perfecting a single tone." For *shakuhachi* practitioners with the spirit of *ichion-jobutsu*, the chief goal of the practice is not to experience aesthetic pleasure or strive for great performance but to achieve personal and spiritual maturity through the realization

of the “ultimate tone” (called *tettei-on*). In fact, traditional *shakuhachi* players are specially trained to perform only repetitions of the entire cycle of so many musical pieces, the ultimate aim of which is to strive toward spiritual maturity. Fuyo Hisamatsu (trans. 1985) goes so far as to say that “39 pieces lie within 36 pieces. 36 pieces lie within 18 pieces. 18 pieces lie within 3 pieces. 3 pieces lie within one piece. One piece lies within no piece. [No piece lies within a spiritual breath.] A [spiritual] breath lies within emptiness and nothingness” (p. 44). This idea manifested itself in Takagi-san’s statement, for instance: “*If every single property of a human is stripped off one by one, the last thing that would remain is one’s breath.*” Cultivating one’s breath is thus to cultivate the fundamental core of one’s being.

The principle of less is more drawn from the *shakuhachi* practice, first, highlights the *means* and *end* balance in music learning. The message is that we can achieve the true end by reducing the scope of means. The end should be an enhancement of life’s meaning. The mastery of skills and connoisseurship should be the means. Aristotle posits in his *Nicomachean Ethics* that a good action has itself as its own end. Such action is so gratifying that people are willing to do so for its own sake, explained as the state of “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Second, the principle of less is more addresses the *form* and *content* balance. If the depth of music is expressed in a single tone, there is no clear distinction between form and content: The simplest form of music bears both form and content. In other words, form becomes content attendant. Thus, in the effort of realizing such a level of simplicity, the practitioner can minimize the possibility of having empty training that is devoid of meaning and maximize the feeling that the activity itself, rather than the result, is meaningful. When music is practiced for practitioner’s self-cultivation

through the less-is-more approach, the activity moves from the level of a more product-oriented quality to that of a more spiritually satisfying state.⁷³

In sum, my informants employed a spiritual approach by minimizing efforts to go outward in an effort to maximize the richness of internal experiences. It is the opposite of what we normally see in educational settings, which are generally aimed toward achieving more and more: more songs, more concepts, more complicated forms, more advanced technique, more creative products, and so forth. We educators are often obsessed with our own self-imposed value to cherish external products and materialistic achievements of music. Findings of this study provide a new way to look at the practice of music from a reversed standpoint, one that is not incorporated in the traditional curriculum. This less-is-more approach is not simply a way of making music learning easier or more accessible. Nor is it only for people at an elementary stage of learning. It involves a different epistemological assumption: the goal is not necessarily to accumulate knowledge, advance technique, or gain a higher level of artistic expression but to deepen one's experience for the artful fulfillment of mind, body, and spirit. Results are measured not by external products but by meanings of the actions to each individual. Emphasis is put on processes over products.

⁷³ Japanese traditions of spiritual art may be process-oriented as typically represented by the spirit of tea ceremony. Keister (2005) observes that “the art of the ceremony is not in the tea, but rather in the careful preparation of the tea, the deft handling of utensils, the graceful manner of movement, and the elegance of conversation” (p. 40). Tea masters do not try to create new objects but seek to create artful minds, bodies, and spirits through heightened perceptions that bring about holistic, intuitive views of the objects (Yanagi, 1989). In so doing, they discover the beauty of objects through the interactions with their utensils.

Common understanding of spirituality leads to an idea that one can experience transformation, or what Jackson (1998) called transcendental experience, only through maximized outward results that involve painful hardship, suffering, and often unhappiness. Nel Noddings observes that glorification of suffering in mortal life in favor of happiness into afterlife—so often found in religious traditions—influences our image of ascetic spirituality practices (as well as our image of spirituality in education). These approaches are too esoteric and far beyond what we can aim at in education. What we need, Noddings believes, is a vision of everyday spirituality that leads to happiness that can be pursued directly without resorting to esoteric pathways. The above discussed issues, including the means and end balance, are some of the significant aspects of everyday spirituality applied to music learning.

Experience of Diversity

My informants used the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* that was an embodiment of varying degree of nature in favor of diverse, individual experiences of flute playing. For them, the diversity of musical experience emerged from the variety of characters that every flute carried. As such, one significant aspect of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* learning for them was that each flute provided a unique experience that was not necessarily transferable to playing other flutes.

This attitude of embracing the diversity of nature is antagonistic to the contemporary idea of music performance that standardized instruments provide. The modern *shakuhachi*, for example, is made in such a way that the internal bore shape is measured and controlled on a gauge so that the resulting flutes are identical to each other

in terms of pitch, tone color, and playability. Although each maker may use a different measurement gauge, the use of a gauge serves as a way of eliminating and homogenizing the character of each bamboo flute (as reported in Chapter 5). In the same line of thinking lies the prevalence of plastic *shakuhachi* currently used in educational settings. Although these hand-made plastic flutes may show some degree of difference from one another, the differences derive more from the ways humans make them out of standardized, factory made plastic pipes than the results of humans' efforts to preserve differences inherent in the material itself.

Standardized instruments generate the homogenizing force that may uniform individual learners' experiences. Such an observation is provided by Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu (1992):

Recently, we have seen plastic *shakuhachi* flutes that actually sound not so bad. Even so, it's quite sad that we are losing good quality of bamboo. The ground of soil from which the tone [of the *shakuhachi*] emerges is disappearing [because of environmental changes]. The same goes for the *biwa*. When the silk industry was still alive, we saw many mulberry trees everywhere. But today, it's almost impossible to get a large amount of healthy, clean mulberry woods. As you know, the body of the *satsuma-biwa* is one piece and cannot be made of several pieces. Boxwood, too, that is used for the plectrum [of the *biwa*].... It's never a pleasant thing that the natural environment that has formed the Japanese tonal sensitivity for centuries is gradually disappearing and that human tonal sensitivities (and sense of timbre) are standardized worldwide [due to the standardized instruments]. (Takemitsu & Kawada, 1992, p. 77)

Takemitsu here observes that the diversity of human sensitivities is brought by nature. Modern technology brings about the homogeneity of human experiences. He also connects the disappearance of lands with the disappearance of human tonal sensitivities. Like Feld and Basso (1996), his argument also supports the view that music making is place-based.

A series of discussions regarding the environment as part of musical expressions and experiences inevitably question the use of plastic instruments as substitutes for genuine folk instruments in teaching and learning contexts, an issue that has generally been unexamined in music education. The use of plastic *shakuhachi*—including hand-made plastic *shakuhachi*—is becoming more popular due to its accessibility and identical sound to the bamboo flute. In Japan, music education leaders offer workshops about plastic *shakuhachi* making tailored for school teaching. My informants in this study submitted a contesting view about the use of plastic instruments. According to them, the experience gained from playing plastic flutes is qualitatively different from that of playing bamboo flutes because, for them, the joy of playing the *shakuhachi* comes from the bodily feeling of blowing into pieces of bamboo. This “earthy” feeling cannot be substituted by playing plastic flutes. From my informants’ perspective, the use of plastic *shakuhachi* as substituting instruments is inauthentic, not merely because of the sound, but also the feeling it provides, as Kyle clearly stated.

[People would] say why don't you play plastic shakuhachi then [if the sound is as good as his concert flute]? I tell them, from the bottom of my heart and with the deepest sincerity, very simply, I like bamboo. I like the plant. I like working with it. I don't want to put plastic flutes against my mouth. I don't want to work with plastic. I want to work with bamboo.

The difference of “feeling” was the reason my participants did not use plastic substitutes in educational settings. For example, instead of using plastic materials, Idemitsu-san brought bamboo poles to his school and let the children make simple flutes. The result was simple, self-made flutes in different sizes and pitches. For him, experiencing nature by touching and blowing into bamboo was at the core of *shakuhachi* experience, not performing nicely sounding music and executing musical scales. The

former can easily be attained, according to him, by producing a simple sound. For these *ji-nashi* practitioners, introduced in Chapter 10, the very essence of music was to experience “a simple, natural, down-to-earth sound of the bamboo” and “wow!” moments. These practitioners also found it difficult to introduce their practice at schools because school music education is restricted by (a) the notion of “music” defined as the organization of sounds rather than the energy of a single sound; (b) the notion of music teaching that revolves around works of music as products, contrasting with the view of music teaching that focuses on the process of music making including instrument making; and (c) the idea that classroom music teaching is provided only through the format of group performance in which harmonious tones are preferred to inharmonious ones generated by flutes that are in different sizes and pitches.

A related issue here is what part we think instrument making plays in music learning. My informants demonstrated that music learning includes bamboo harvesting and instrument making. Currently, instrument making is not thought to be a part of the music education curriculum, reflecting the modern demarcation of instrument makers’ and player’s roles. Observing the world of the *shakuhachi*, British composer Frank Denyer (1994) laments that creativity and musical decisions of musicians, especially composers, hardly go beyond the constraints of available instruments that define an identical set of shared assumptions about music. These constraints, Denyer believes, are released when musicians are engaged in the making of their own instruments. Like Takemitsu, Denyer observes that because of the separated roles of makers and players, “modern industrialised societies are far from being inherently pluralist. On the contrary, they exert powerful pressures that neutralise most serious pluralist tendencies” (p. 47).

The *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practitioners demonstrated that the diversity of expression and experience of *shakuhachi* playing is achieved through embracing the diversity of nature inherent in each flute. They are against the use of standardized instruments, including factory made flutes and those that are made with standardized measurement gauges, because these standardized instruments, as Denyer observed, neutralize their pluralist tendencies to enjoy individual unique experiences of music. They suggest that the pedagogy of *ji-nashi shakuhachi* calls for a localized approach that liberates and individualizes the practitioner because it cannot be taught through standardized methods. This is a significant implication for music education because many of us tend to teach music using standardized curricula. The danger is that we unconsciously impose the standardizing force of experience upon our students.

Biological, Physical, Universal Perspectives on Music Studies

My informants experienced music as a confluence of energy or vibe by blowing into a piece of bamboo. They saw this type of music making as a universal human reaction to sound. How can we interpret this type of reaction to music? How can we locate this mode of intensified musical engagement within the curriculum? The emphasis of conventional music education has been placed on the “musical,” which supposedly represents the “cultural.” In response to this view, DeNora suggests that music studies need to explore more of a set of bodily reaction than that of cultural property.

Thinking about the ways that we attend to and make connections between cultural and bodily music may open new avenues for thinking about music’s role as a social medium in senses that also include its roles as a medium of physiological ordering in daily life. As such, music studies encompass the musical not only cross-culturally, but also biologically, albeit a biology that is understood to interact with culture, custom, and conviction. (DeNora, 2007, p. 802)

DeNora indicates that humans, of any culture and time, would share, to a great extent, similar biological reactions to music. Similarly, Dissanayake (2000) proposes a vision of “naturalistic aesthetics.” Observing human interactions through early rhythmic-modal experiences between mother and infant, she came to a view that all humans share the biological make-up for aesthetic expressions (mutuality, belonging to, finding and making meaning, competence through handling and making, and, elaborating). Like DeNora whose perspective attends to socio-cultural backgrounds of human musical expression, Dissanayake is also inclined to look at universal aspects of human traits.

These types of statements that addresses universal relevance—a return to the desire of a grand theory—provide a different angle to view music as culturally unique. Given the array of discussion in ethnomusicology and music education (Campbell, 1997; Olsson, 2007; Nettl, 2002), there seems to be an agreement that what make each culture unique are differences, not commonalities. Music educators take into consideration these discussions and pay attention to “social-cultural” contexts of music practice, especially when it comes to teaching world music. They claim that music is more than sound phenomena.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ There has been a negative view regarding teaching universal aspects of world music from diverse cultures. Such attempts of teaching universal aspects of world music have been made; for example, by focusing on (a) sound properties of music promoted by advocates of aesthetic education (Haack, 1994) and (b) “functions” of music submitted by Alan Merriam (1964): emotional expression, aesthetic enjoyment, entertainment, communication, symbolic representation, physical response, enforcing conformity to social norms, validation of social institutions and religious rituals, contribution to the continuity and stability of culture, contribution to the integration of society (both positions are summarized by Haack, 1994). Further discussion is also found in Campbell (1997) that reflects on universal aspects of music propose by Mantle Hood (1977).

Some of my participants (especially non-Japanese practitioners) who were serious learners of Japanese music provided a unique perspective regarding the view of music as cultural and music as biological: What makes them interested in *honkyoku* music was not so much “cultural” aspects of Japanese music as “universal” aspects of human experience identified in the case of Japanese music, such as the embodiment of the earth’s energy, the feeling of being part of nature, and the revitalization of humans’ primitive, organic sensitivities. From their perspective, the opposite of socio-cultural approach was not necessarily posited as a sound only approach but a spiritual or physical approach that transcends cultural boundaries. Some of my North American informants had no interest in “cultural” aspects of *shakuhachi* music (as reported in Chapter 9). Instead, they were attracted to the bodily feeling gained from performing *honkyoku* music on the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* because it feels like “*something that isn’t cultural but more primitive*” (Liam). They found the primitive nature of *honkyoku* music as leading more to the fulfillment of spirituality. They saw the cultural as “complicated human constructions” accumulated on the universal commons that were already existent before cultures arose. Thus, for them, the cultural is restrictive and often serving as a hindrance to outsider’s access to the underlying spirituality of world music.

A more balanced discussion may include the issue of Westerners’ appropriation and misappropriation of world spiritual traditions to make them “ours.” Regardless of their intentions, naturalizing unique aspects and promoting universal aspects of world spiritual traditions need to be examined carefully with special attention to native people’s reactions to such rendering. Whether or not we support their rendering of *honkyoku* music as a universal human expression, their desire for more universal, more primitive, and

more organic experiences of music raises a question: When teaching a foreign traditions and expressions of spiritual music, to what extent should we promote parts of the culture that are universal?

Art for Impression: Toward the Art of Self-integration

As discussed above (in the “Developing Sense of Connection”), the experience of “merging into nature” was often observed among the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practitioners. Through blowing a piece of bamboo and sensing the *ki* energy throughout the body, they experienced the self as merged into the cosmos rather than expressed through music. For these practitioners, playing the *shakuhachi* is an intentional effort to revitalize the sense of mind-body, human-nature integration.

Close analysis of my informants’ organic experiences of *shakuhachi* playing leads to an emerging notion of “self-integration.” This amounts to a form of actualizing the body-mind, human-nature integration. It is an antithesis of the prevalent idealization of “self-expression” in arts education that puts emphasis on product-oriented activities and overlooks the interaction between the individual and the environment. Its premise is that nature is a site of communication, creative expression, and emotional sharing. Thus, the practitioners of self-integration try to be part of, and in tune with, nature. They appreciate the inconvenience of expression in favor of relating to the world through each process of bamboo harvesting, flute making, and music making. If music is the breath of life, then expression may yield on the side of an exhalation, with self-integration or “impression” as an inhalation.

The basic condition of self-integration is the existence of a flexible, malleable, situated self, which is often associated to Eastern sense of self and being (Murkus & Kitayama). Rohlen (1996) observes that the Japanese sense of self-cultivation is achieved by adapting oneself to the art form rather than of controlling or subordinating the material to oneself, which contrasts with Western notions of the "mastery" of art (p. 371). In other words, the goal of Japanese artistic training is not the perfection of an art object as an end in itself, but the development of the self as a never-ending, lifelong process (Nakagawa, 2000).⁷⁵ Similarly, the *ji-nashi shakuhachi* is practiced as an intensive mode of engaging in a lifelong project of self-cultivation. The aforementioned indigenous notion *take ni awasete fuku* ("to blow according to the character of each bamboo piece") is in line with Rohlen's observation of the Japanese approach to self-development in that it promotes self-transformation through the bamboo (as discussed in Chapter 4 and 5).

In the West, the work of John Dewey, among many scholars and commentators, resonates with the spirit of self-integration. To introduce again, Dewey (1934/1980) posits that the environment is not a set of static objects but conditions of experience in which a subjective relationship with an object naturally occurs, develops, and even initiates conflict in a way to generate tension from which an expression is born. Thus, Dewey sees expression as manifesting a process of negotiation between the desires of the individual and the constraints of the environment. In other words, expression is grounded and draws on self-integration. Thus, expression for Dewey starts with embodying the

⁷⁵ It is a form of self-cultivation in the sense that it is an exploration of the self. Yoshiharu Nakagawa (2000) observes that "the way of art has nothing to do with creativity in problem-solving. It pays little attention to each problem. On the contrary, it solves the problem of the 'self'" (p. 204).

soil, air, moisture, and smells of nature, or “germs and roots in matters of experience that we do not currently consider as esthetic” (p. 12), not for their own sake but because of their potentialities. For Dewey, nature is not an object that needs to be eliminated in favor of easy rendering of the object. Rather, nature is a source of resistance that is the foundation of human expression. When the artist negotiates with and overcomes the resistance, he or she gains an organic experience.

The practice of self-integration is distinguished from anthropocentric approaches to music and instrument making. For example, progressive music educator Satis Coleman (1927, 1928, 1931) investigated creative music units in which learning began with making folk instruments and developed into such activities as composition, singing, listening, and, later, involved the study of art, folklore, physics, and language. Her educational aim was to encourage students to follow the phylogenetic evolution of music through an ontogenetic approach. Although she acknowledged the creative power of instrument making that leads students to their own music making and improvisation, she posited that instrument making is rather a preliminary activity for students prior to the study of the “real art of music.” According to Coleman, instrument making for students was only a means to explore the dimension of musical life of “primitive” people as distinguished from “modern” advanced people. Most importantly, her use of natural elements for musical instruments was geared primarily toward experimentation, rather than conservation, in order to stimulate students’ own interests and creativity. Its goal had more to do with testing a variety of materials to gain a creative joy than with developing an organic, primitive sensitivity.

Indeed, Dewey's emphasis on a scientific method that calls for reflective intelligence has been interpreted as leading students more toward an acceptance of active intervention and modification of the environment than toward an awareness and fulfillment of holistic relationships with nature. Drawing on Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (1916) rather than *Art as Experience* (1934), John Miller (1996) argues that the inquiry of pragmatism, epitomized in Dewey's scientific method, encourages students to solve problems in original ways, question knowledge that has not personally been tested, and construct their own knowledge. In this situation, the environment serves as a set of tools for intellectual operations rather than as the integrative context. Its potential danger is identified in its human-centered focus that, according to Riley-Taylor's (2002) reading of Bowers (1995), "bases learning on the relevance of the child's own interests and experiences, as reinforcing the anthropocentric cultural beliefs" (Riley-Taylor, 2002, p. 14). Coleman's practice was realized upon these beliefs. In light of the vision of self-integration, the human-centered focus needs to be balanced with the recognition that the processes of human beings and those of nature are inclusively and mutually interdependent.

What is missing in Dewey's theory of aesthetics may be "a sense of awe and mystery" that brings about a heightened awareness of the wholeness of existence and respect toward the wholeness (Miller, 1996, p. 29). As Gablik (1991) suggests,

what we clearly do not have ... is any working framework for a socially or ecologically grounded art—an art that is accountable to the larger whole, in the sense of being contextually rooted in a living connection with a containing organic field. (p. 139)

The notion of self-integration derived from the analysis of those *ji-nashi shakuhachi* practitioners in this study may provide a useful perspective to develop a framework for what Gablik sees as ecologically grounded music.

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Former Fulbright Scholar Koji Matsunobu joined the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign for his Ph.D. study in arts education while completing his doctorate in music education at Tokyo Gakugei University. He sees his musical identity as embodying multiple cultural values: He started his musical training through piano. Later, he studied Japanese music. He has experienced his Japanese and Western selves as constantly contesting and negotiating with each other, serving as a source of intercultural dialogues over human experiences of music. He is currently active as an ethno-educator and *shakuhachi* bamboo flute performer trying to introduce and incorporate non-Western ideas of teaching into Western contexts.

His research interests include multicultural approaches to arts integration, indigenous knowledge production, spirituality in arts education, the pedagogy of world music traditions, and creativity. Recent work, documented in this dissertation, focuses on the interface among spirituality, ecology, and aesthetics in Japanese folk music learning. He also ventured into exploring shared realms of music and art education through the case of Japanese spiritual arts (a chapter included in the NAEA's *New Anthology: Teaching Asian Art: Content, Context, and Pedagogy*).