

# Analysis of Transmission in Japanese Traditional Art Forms: Part 2, A Comprehensive Study of Shakuhachi Lineages

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## Background

In Part 1 of the present study, “Analysis of Transmission in Japanese Traditional Art Forms: Part 1, A Comprehensive Model Based on Fundamental Theories of Art and Tradition,” I outline a model for analyzing the contextual background and the mode of transmission within traditional art forms.<sup>1</sup> In this Part 2, the aim is to investigate the historical background and positioning of one traditional music genre, and how they are presented within various schools – or lineages – within that genre.

As stipulated in Part 1, the main material in this second part centers on the Japanese bamboo flute *shakuhachi*, and the genres to which it relates.<sup>2</sup> This includes the fundamental solo repertoire, *honkyoku*, of the shakuhachi as well as the ensemble music commonly known as *sankyoku*, or more precisely *jiuta-sōkyoku*. However, for reasons of comprehensiveness I focus here solely on the fundamental repertoire. Some lineages only transmit the fundamental solo repertoire, whereas some transmit both the solo and the secular ensemble repertoires. Furthermore, some lineages use modern compositions as the core repertoire, adding older ensemble pieces for more advanced students. The solo repertoire of the Edo-period shakuhachi has connections to Buddhism, since this repertoire developed as meditative pieces by the hands of mendicant monks, so-called *komusō*. The way of transmission has however changed over time, and it is of interest to investigate both into the process of transmission and the authenticity practitioners bestow on their different lineages; this Part 2 thus relates to issues of authenticity and positioning, and I will return to the matter of transmission in a future

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<sup>1</sup> Gunnar Jinmei Linder, “Analysis of Transmission in Japanese Traditional Art Forms: A Comprehensive Model Based on Fundamental Theories of Art and Tradition.” In *Journal of East Asian Identities*, Vol. 1, 2016, pp. 95–116.

<sup>2</sup> All Japanese words are in italics, except for ‘shakuhachi.’ Japanese personal names are written in accordance with Japanese standards, with family name first.

Please refer to my doctoral thesis for details about the shakuhachi: Linder, *Deconstructing Tradition in Japanese Music*, 2012. Available for free full-text download at <http://su.diva-portal.org/>.

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forthcoming Part 3.

## Theoretical Framework

This section gives a brief overview of the model proposed in Part 1 of this study mentioned above, in which I divide the study of transmission within traditional – oral or semi-oral – art forms in “transmission” and “studies of tradition,” graphically explained in Figure 1 and 2 below.

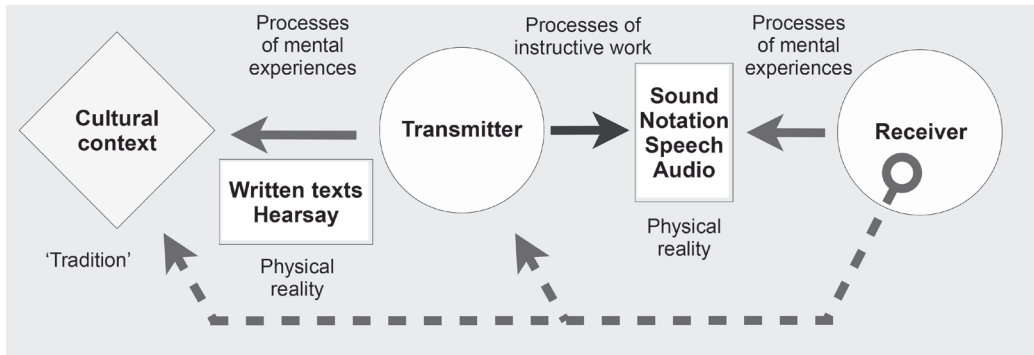


Figure 1 (Figure 4 in Part 1, p. 112): Relationship between transmitter and receiver on the one hand, and transmitter and the complex web of “cultural context” on the other.

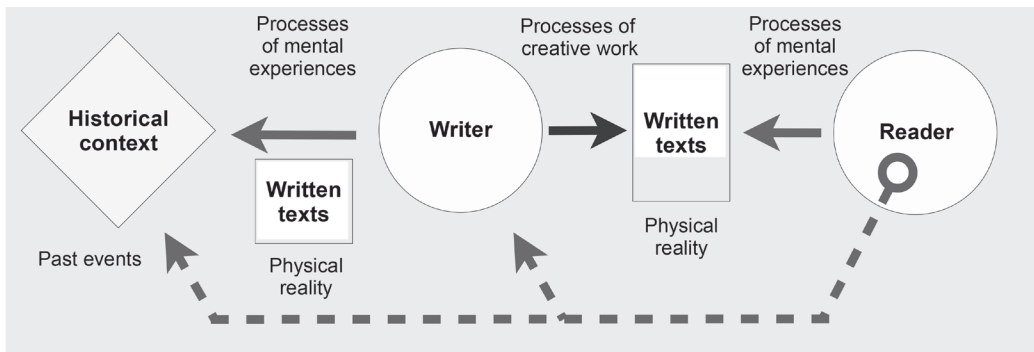


Figure 2 (figure 6 in Part 1, p. 113): Relationship between writer and reader on the one hand, and writer and the complex web of “historical context” on the other.

In the present Part 2, I investigate what or which parts of the context that is presented as background or origin of the art form to the receiver of that art form. In the above two figures, the Transmitter and the Writer may be one and the same person; the Receiver and the Reader may also be one and the same person. In the process of transmission of a tradition, both the physical material of that tradition – be it music, story-telling, theatre, or any other art form – and the background and origin of the tradition in question will in most cases be transferred over to the recipient. That is, the cultural context and the historical context will be one part of the transmission.

Transmission is one aspect of a tradition; another one is performance. The folklore scholar Roger D. Abrahams introduced in his writings a notion of intensified events or enactments. Within any kind of enactment – and Abrahams lists enactments such as ‘performance,’ ‘ritual,’ and ‘ceremony’ – he states that, “expression is designed to influence.”<sup>3</sup> If we regard an act of transmission as an enactment, it is possible to conclude that a transmitter who expresses a viewpoint, regardless of whether it is based on any historical text or on hearsay, this expression would be a means to influence the receiver of transmission. The expression becomes part of the narrative, the story that the transmitter wants to be told.

With reference to the above two figures (Figure 1 and Figure 2), the discussion below is a reflection on what is or may be construed on the left side of the Transmitter/Writer in an envisaged transmission-type of enactment – the right side of the Transmitter/Writer – viewed as one of Abrahams’s intensified events.

## **The Shakuhachi as Implement and as Instrument**

The material for this study is the shakuhachi, which has a background in both music activities and meditative ones. In this section I give a brief introduction of the shakuhachi.

In the seventh and eighth centuries instruments arrived to Japan from the continent, of which a type of flute similar to the present-day shakuhachi – written 尺八 with Chinese characters – was one. As implied by these characters the name stands for the length of the flute: one *shaku* (一尺) and eight (*hachi*) *sun* (八寸).<sup>4</sup> This flute was used in a variety of music genres up to the second half of the seventeenth century, when the shakuhachi became a religious implement by the hands of the mendicant monks, *komusō*, mentioned above. This background was an argument used to receive official recognition of the shakuhachi as a musical instrument in the early 1870s, as explained below.

There are numerous legends about how the shakuhachi came to Japan and how it developed. The most persistent legend, published in 1795, tells about the ninth-century Chinese Zen monk Fuke (普化), or Pu Hua in Chinese, who used to ring a bell he had fastened to his belt as he walked the streets of the town where he was living. A young man wanted to become Fuke’s student but was rejected. Instead of receiving teaching from the wise monk, the young man made a flute on which he imitated the sound of Fuke’s bell. This ‘tradition’ was later transmitted to a Japanese monk visiting China in the middle of the thirteenth century, and he brought the so-called *kyo-taku* (‘empty bell’) tradition to Japan where it developed. During the Edo period (1603–1868), the shakuhachi was supposed to be played only by monks who

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<sup>3</sup> Roger D. Abrahams, “Introductory Remark to a Thetorical Theory of Folklore,” p. 146. Please refer to Part 1 in *Journal of East Asian Identities*, Vol. 1, or Linder, *Deconstructing Tradition ...* (Chapter 1) for a more detailed discussion of Abrahams’s theory.

<sup>4</sup> A *shaku* in today’s measurement is approximately 30.3 centimeters and a *sun* one tenth of a *shaku*.

claimed to be monks of a sect called the Fuke sect of Rinzai Zen Buddhism. The monks took the name *komusō* (虚無僧), 'monks of emptiness and nothingness.' At this time, the shakuhachi was perceived as a religious implement supposed to be played only by the *komusō* and only as part of their religious practices. From historical records we know however that also lay people played the instruments. There are both texts and drawings that indicate that the instrument was played for entertainment as well, both by the monks and by lay people during the Edo period, sometimes in ensemble with vocals and the string instruments *koto* and *shamisen*.<sup>5</sup>

This ensemble genre developed rapidly after the shakuhachi lost its position as a religious implement and was officially recognized as a musical instrument in 1871, the fourth year after the Meiji restoration, in the midst of the modernization of Japan. The repertoire of ensemble pieces, including pieces that were composed up to the middle of the twentieth century, comprises today more than 900 pieces.<sup>6</sup>

During the Edo period a vast repertoire of solo pieces developed, probably counting in the hundreds; today more than 150 of these pieces are still being performed.<sup>7</sup> Most of them carry abstract and Zen-like names, such as "Yearning for the Bell in the Empty Sky" (Kokū Reibo), "The True Empty Soul" (Shin no Kyorei), and "The Empty Sky by Ginryū" (Ginryū Kokū).<sup>8</sup> Other pieces have names referring to nature or animals, such as "Ode to the Twilight" (Yūgure no Kyoku), "The Far Cry of the Deer" (Shika no Tōne), and "Nesting Cranes, Yearning for the Bell" (Sōkaku Reibo). There are also a number of pieces that has strong connections to folk or festival music that were popular at the time, such as "The Dragon Dwelling in the Clouds" (Kumoi-jishi), and "Music to the Falling Leaves" (Sagari-ha no Kyoku).

In the world of shakuhachi today there are basically three what I would here refer to as 'types' of lineages. Firstly, (1) there are some lineages that only or mainly transmit the pieces that were played by the *komusō*, so-called *honkyoku* or "fundamental pieces." Secondly, (2) there are some lineages that transmit both the *honkyoku* and the pieces that are played in ensemble with voice, *koto*, and *shamisen*, and/or modern and contemporary music. Thirdly, (3) some other lineages that were established during the modernization process of Meiji-period Japan transmit ensemble pieces and solo pieces or duets that were composed within these 'new' lineages. The former *honkyoku* (1 and 2) tend to be referred to as *koten honkyoku* (classical *honkyoku*), and the newly composed pieces (3) are referred to as "the *honkyoku* of this or that lineage," e.g., the *honkyoku* of the Tozan lineage that were composed by its founder Nakao Tozan in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century are referred to as the "Tozan-ryū *honkyoku*," or the *honkyoku* of the Tozan school/lineage.<sup>9</sup> The present study focuses on the older 'traditional' *honkyoku*, and investigates how

<sup>5</sup> See for example: Linder, *Deconstructing Tradition ...*, Chapter 4.3, pp.124-131.

<sup>6</sup> This number is from manually counting the pieces compiled in Kubota Satoko, *Jiuta-sōkyoku kenkyū ...*

<sup>7</sup> Tsukitani Tsuneko, *Shakuhachi koten honkyoku no kenkyū*, 2006, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Ginryū is the name of a person whose name means 'The Singing Dragon,' thus creating a word play that translates to "The Singing Dragon in the Empty Sky"

<sup>9</sup> See for example: Tsukitani, *Shakuhachi koten honkyoku no kenkyū*, pp.13-14, and Kamisangō (1974), "The Shakuhachi: History and Development" transl. in Blasdel 2008, pp. 121-124.

different lineages – regardless of when the lineage was established – perceive their origin, if at all explicitly explained in online sources and other text material.

## Discussion

Much has been written about the origins of the shakuhachi and its special position in the society during the Edo period. Most of what has been written are claims to a legendary past, and the legend was created already during the time when the shakuhachi already had become a religious implement, as mentioned above. Still, many performers, teachers, and lovers of the shakuhachi tend to make references to a past, constructed background and the connection between Zen Buddhism and the shakuhachi.

The Danish shakuhachi performer Torsten Olafsson has put a lot of time into disproving statements made in texts about the connection between shakuhachi and Zen Buddhism in books, articles, and online sources. He has in great detail studied texts available on the topic, and finds no reliable source that connects the shakuhachi to Zen Buddhism any time before the tradition was constructed in the Edo period.<sup>10</sup> Basically he comes to the same conclusions that I make in my PhD dissertation that the Zen connection was constructed during the Edo period, and it has been re-constructed since the 1970s until today. The repertoire did come about through the activities of the shakuhachi-playing *komusō* monks of the Edo period, but there are no strong pieces of evidence that they in general were devout Buddhist monks. On the contrary, many *komusō* seem to have been ruffians, and the only people who were able to become *komusō* monks were samurai. As stated in the first clause of one of the often-referred to historical documents, the “Keichō okite-gaki,” the *komusō* constitute a religious sect for the benefit of samurai who wish to find a temporary refuge, that the sect does not pertain to the jurisdiction of the authorities, and that only those from the warrior class were able to enter the sect. This document exists in several versions, and it is believed that the monks were negotiating conditions with the authorities. The last clause in the most recent version, probably from around the mid-1820s or later, states that the *komusō* should learn the appearance of a monk, and display that overtly, but in his heart a *komusō* should strive for the intention and resolution of a samurai. Furthermore it states that a *komusō* should, from the very outset, thoroughly realize that the sect is a sect for martial practice.<sup>11</sup>

As mentioned above, I regard the shakuhachi tradition as consisting of three basic types of lineages, categorized depending on the genres of music transmitted within the lineage. The

<sup>10</sup> Torsten Olafsson, <http://www.zen-shakuhachi.dk/index.html>, accessed in September 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Kurihara Kōta, *Shakuhachi shikō*, pp. 131–143. Linder, *Deconstructing Tradition ...*, pp. 117, 121. “Keichō okite-gaki” means “The Written Regulation of the Keichō Era.” Olafsson translates the characters for ‘okite-gaki’ as ‘jōsho’ which is incorrect (*jōsho* is the Sino-Japanese reading of the characters, but for this word the Japanese reading *okite-gaki* would normally be used). Keichō is the name of the imperial era that lasted 1596–1615, but the document was a forgery of a much later date.

first type, lineages that only transmit the classical *honkyoku*, may generically be referred to as Myōan style (Myōan-ryū). This is however not a formalized style or lineage, but rather consists of several sub-schools devoted to the meditative aspect of shakuhachi playing. A simple search on the internet, using the search word 'myoan shakuhachi' gives a vast array of results. Most of these sites are by lovers of shakuhachi, who gladly refer to and reiterate the legendary origins and the stories around it. Even *The Ashgate Research Companion to Japanese Music* refers to the 1795 story about the monk Fuke as "semi-legendary," thus providing opportunities for interpretation.<sup>12</sup> Other accounts of the instrument, various styles and pieces of music seem however accurate.

The Myōan-ryū of shakuhachi is nowadays often divided in the 'old' Myōan style and the Myōan Taizan-ha. The former comprises pieces from the original Myōan temple in Kyoto, and the latter pieces transmitted by Higuchi Taizan (1856–1914), the second major compiler of *honkyoku* after Kurosawa Kinko I.<sup>13</sup> On one of the Taizan-ryū sites the legends of shakuhachi, its relation to Zen Buddhism, and early appearances of *komusō*-types of lay monks are re-narrated. According to the same site, even though Higuchi Taizan learned ensemble pieces from other teachers such as Araki Kodō II (1823–1908), performances of other than the *honkyoku* of the lineage are not highly evaluated.<sup>14</sup>

Another example of this first type of lineages is the style of Watazumi (1911–1992). This style is normally not referred to as a lineage but as a "Way," Watazumi-dō. The repertoire is not called *honkyoku* but *dōkyoku*, 'Pieces of the Way.' The instrument is not referred to as shakuhachi, but Watazumi coined the term *hotchiku*, or 'Karma Bamboo.'<sup>15</sup> The same name for the pieces are used within the style of Yokoyama Katsuya (1934–2010), and the name of the instrument is used by Okuda Atsuya, both students of Watazumi. Okuda has published two albums, *The Sound of Zen* (2002) and *Bamboo Zen* (2010). The 'Way' is naturally translated to 'The Way of Zen,' just as Japanese poems (*waka*) in general or the Japanese 'short verses' (*tanka*) that relate to Buddhist thought are called *dōka*, and just playing the 'Karma Bamboo' may naturally evoke a feeling of Zen activities. Okuda has a background in jazz, but performs nowadays mainly *honkyoku*. The use of the term *hotchiku* and the titles of his albums indicate a strong connection to Zen Buddhism, which is indicated in the writings of one of Okuda's students, Endō Kenji, who refers to the pieces as *koten-kyoku* or 'Classical Pieces.' Watazumi disclaimed to have had any teacher, and in the official writings of Okuda and Endō there are no references to an older origin. Endō writes that the classical pieces for shakuhachi are "musical, yet they express a projection of nature and cannot be contained within the framework of music," but he also refers to the often heard expression *ichi-on jōbutsu*, becoming

<sup>12</sup> McQueen Tokita, Alison and David W. Hughes, ed. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Japanese Music*, p. 151.

<sup>13</sup> Tsukitani, *Shakuhachi koten honkyoku no kenkyū*, p. 103.

<sup>14</sup> <http://shakuhachi-genkai.com/study-home.html>, accessed in September 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Tsukitani, *Shakuhachi koten honkyoku no kenkyū*, p. 20.

Buddha (attaining Buddhahood) in one sound.<sup>16</sup> The borderline between ‘music,’ ‘nature,’ and ‘Buddhahood’ is however not explicit.

Yokoyama and his students play not only *honkyoku*, which puts this style in the second type of lineages, but the strong allusion to the ‘Way’ is of interest. Yokoyama’s top student Furuya Teruo does give references to an older origin in his explanations of the *honkyoku* pieces taught within this style. The piece “Kokū,” as expounded in the text of 1795, was revealed to the monk Kichiku (later Kyochiku) in the late thirteenth century while he was in meditation. His teacher was Gakushin (also Kakushin; posthumously Hottō Kokushi), the legendary carrier of the shakuhachi from China to Japan in the middle of the thirteenth century. In the explanation by Furuya it says that the piece “is said to have been transmitted since 700 years ago.” As for the explanation of the piece “Reibo” Furuya supplies the connection to the legendary imitation of the bell that the monk Fuke had hanging from his belt.<sup>17</sup>

Within this second type of lineages we also find the oldest formalized lineage, the Kinko-ryū, which developed after the first Kurosawa Kinko (1710–1771), but was not named until the time of his son, Kinko II. The first Kinko traveled around the country collecting pieces from various temples, and he compiled a repertoire of thirty-six pieces. The Kinko lineage was later also given special permission to set up so-called *fukiawase-jo*, studios for teaching shakuhachi to lay people, in the city of Edo.<sup>18</sup> This led to the spread of shakuhachi in the developing urban culture of the Edo period. When the *komusō* (the Fuke sect was never officially recognized by the authorities) were abolished in 1871 many of the ‘laid-off’ monks in the major cities continued their activities as musicians, performing (as they had done earlier) with *koto* and *shamisen* players. The Kinko-ryū later divided in presently four major sub-lineages, all of which put an emphasis on the classical ensemble music. In the official texts on homepages etc., very little is said about the legendary past. For these sub-lineages it seems to be of a greater importance to stress their individual background and future prospects.

This is also true for Chikuho-ryū, a lineage that on their official homepage already name the two next-coming generations. Normally, the numbering of a head of a school is not done until the previous leader of the school has passed away. The present head of the Chikuho-ryū is the third generation, Sakai Shōdō. On the homepage, the fourth and fifth generations are already mentioned, with names and photos: the son and grandson of Sakai III will become Sakai IV and Sakai V. The Chikuho-ryū draws on two lines of shakuhachi; the *koten honkyoku* of the ‘old’ Myōan temple in Kyoto, and the Sōetsu-ryū. In his genealogy Sakai also mentions Kyochiku, the legendary student of Gakushin that is referred to in the document of 1795, thus indicating an older origin of his tradition.<sup>19</sup> In a talk given at the World Shakuhachi Festival in Sydney 2008, which I translated, Sakai said that the piece “Murasaki Reiho” had an origin going

<sup>16</sup> Endō Kenji, <http://otomoribeat.wixsite.com/chikuon>, accessed in September 2016. 一音成仏.

<sup>17</sup> Furuya Teruo, <http://www.geocities.jp/furuya108/honkyoku.html>, accessed in September 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Tsukitani, *Shakuhachi koten honkyoku no kenkyū*, p. 48 and Linder, *Deconstructing Tradition ...*, p. 125.

back to the Rinzaï Zen monk Ikkyū Sōjun (1394–1481), and the same thing was re-iterated in a talk at the Prague Shakuhachi Festival 2011.<sup>20</sup> Ikkyū was a monk that in his writing showed a strong interest for the shakuhachi. We have however no historical evidence of any claim to Ikkyū playing the shakuhachi.<sup>21</sup> Sakai Shōdō has recently (2011, 2013, and 2014) published three CD sets with *honkyoku*. The earlier ones carry titles that refer to the content, i.e., Myōan Shinpō-ryū *honkyoku* and Myōan Taizan-ha *honkyoku*, whereas the most recent one has the title *Komusō Shakuhachi: Sakai Shōdō and The Trajectory of a Performance Tradition*.<sup>22</sup> The very notion of *komusō shakuhachi* is problematic, since we do not really know what this denotes.

In an introductory text from 1974, the Japanese musicologist Kishibe Shigeo writes about the Chikuhō-ryū and the genealogy of Fuke shakuhachi. Kishibe states that from old times music has been considered to be made up by three elements: “truth, goodness, and beauty.”<sup>23</sup> Actually, this saying probably refers to a more general notion of a common value system.<sup>24</sup> In Japanese it is *shin-zen-bi* (真善美), but these words are believed to be translated words from German – *das Wahre, das Gute, das Schöne* – relating to a nineteenth-century neo-Kantism.<sup>25</sup>

Kishibe argues that in music, ‘truth’ is emphasized in religious music, ‘goodness’ in moral music, and ‘beauty’ is mostly emphasized in art music. Even if the concept of ‘truth’ is understandable in relationship to religious music, the idea of moral music is maybe not as intuitive. For Kishibe this is exemplified in music that has connections to Confucianism. For the concept of ‘beauty’ Kishibe states that this is best exemplified with Western classical music from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries.<sup>26</sup> After having re-stated the legend of Fuke and the *komusō* tradition, including using the term *hotchiku* for the shakuhachi, Kishibe concludes that in the rendition of Chikuhō-ryū, by combining the ‘truth’ with the ‘beautiful’ the so-called Fuke shakuhachi becomes a refined form of art music, which at the same time has the quality of something rustic and honest, in a good sense of the word, something simple. The words used here by Kishibe reminds me of the “story elements” that, according to Hayden White, are made into narratives.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Sakai Shōdō, <http://www.chikuhoryu.jp/>, accessed in September 2016. Kondō Sōetsu was a komusō who began notating ensemble music already in the early nineteenth century. Linder, “Kinko-ryū shakuhachi no gaikyoku ni kansuru kenkyū ...”, pp. 17–18.

<sup>20</sup> Talk by Sakai Shōdō in Sydney in July 2008, and at the Prague Shakuhachi Festival in August 2011.

<sup>21</sup> Linder, *Deconstructing Tradition ...*, pp. 136–141, 219–225.

<sup>22</sup> <http://search.japo-net.or.jp/item.php?id=VZCG-8570>.

<sup>23</sup> Kishibe Shigeo, “Fuke shakuhachi to shin-zen-bi.”

<sup>24</sup> *Daijirin* online dictionary, accessed in September 2016.

<sup>25</sup> *Nipponica*, accessed in September 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Kishibe Shigeo, “Fuke shakuhachi to shin-zen-bi.”

<sup>27</sup> Hayden White, “The Historical Text as Literary Artefact,” p. 223.



## Conclusion

Hayden White introduced the term story elements to explain the use of historical facts in what becomes narratives of history. The effect of re-iterating legendary origins and anecdotes is that they become an integral part of the tradition, whether wished for or not. On the recipient end of transmission, the origin of what is learned – the actual pieces – are not elements disconnected from a greater whole. For Abrahams, an enactment is an event that will never reoccur in its entirety, but the repetition of historical “story elements” creates a chain of thought that builds up a tacit understanding of the background to the tradition learned.

The reason for wishing to build such understanding may be multifolded. The authenticity of the tradition is of course at stake; in general terms, the older the more authentic, the more authentic the more true. Truthfulness is of course a value to strive for, and with Kishibe’s words in the text accompanying the Chikuko recording, truth goes with beauty. I interpret the underlying message in Kishibe’s text as referring ‘truth’ to a religious truth, which then has to be related to the development of this religion, which in turn proves the position of the tradition in question.

As far as shakuhachi music in Japan goes, the eyes are also on the reception of the tradition in the West. This has been indicated elsewhere, but I recall a conversation I had with Okuda Atsuya in July 2009. He then told me that the interest shown from the Western world after he began playing *hotchiku* and publishing a Zen-related CD (*The Sound of Zen*) had given impetus to his activities in Japan.<sup>28</sup> By giving what is asked for, the receiver in a way endorses the transmitter, who transmits a pre-conceived or already envisaged and wished for content.

In a forthcoming study I will relate this aspect to the actual process of transmission, that is, investigate the right side of the Transmitter/Writer in the two figures 1 and 2 in the beginning of this paper, and see how the historical background as indicated by the Transmitter, if at all, affects the transmission process.

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<sup>28</sup> Private conversation with Okuda Atsuya at his studio in Tokyo in July 2009.

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