

The Four-Woman Concert in *Genji Monogatari*:  
A Window into Heian Musical Performance and Teaching

by

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## ABSTRACT

Japanese literature of the Heian Era (794-1185) abounds with references to musical instruments and episodes of performance. This thesis provides some insight into that music by translating sections of the “Wakana II” (Spring Shoots II) chapter of the early 11th-century novel *Genji monogatari* 源氏物語 (*The Tale of Genji*). It explains the musical references and shows how, in the context of the novel, musical performance, musical teaching, and interpersonal relationships were inextricably intertwined. Detailed appendices provide background on traditional Japanese musical instruments, musical theory, and related subjects.

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## INTRODUCTION

On this occasion, to have the usual admirable sound of the *koto* combined with the sounds of the *sō* and *biwa*, I'd like to have a women's concert.<sup>1</sup>

So the character of Genji says in the “Wakana II” (“Spring Shoots II”) chapter of the early 11th-century Japanese novel *Genji monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*), and so begins one of many scenes of musical performance in that novel. *Genji monogatari* is a novel written around 1000 C.E. by Murasaki Shikibu, an attendant of the Empress Shōshi. As the novel traces the adventures of the main character, Genji, it paints for us a portrait of the life of aristocrats in the Heian Imperial Court. An important part of that life was the performance of music. This thesis centers on one such performance, particularly interesting because of the characters involved and their relationships.

The organization of the thesis is as follows. First, an overview of Heian aesthetics highlights the role of music in the lives of the court aristocrats. Next, the traditional instruments appearing in the translated excerpt are briefly described. A precis of the story and characters sets the scene. The main section is an original translation of and commentary on a section of the text, focusing on details of the musical performance. This is followed by a discussion of performance and teaching as they relate to the novel.

### *Heian Aristocratic Artistic Sensibilities*

About a hundred years before *Genji*<sup>2</sup> was written, poet and author Ki no Tsurayuki, in his famous preface to the poetic anthology *Kokin wakashū*<sup>3</sup>, made the case that the

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<sup>1</sup> NKBZ, p. 183.

<sup>2</sup> *Genji*, in italics, is an abbreviation for the name of the novel; Genji, the main character.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A.



creation of poetry and music was an expression of a connection with nature. He opens with these words:

The songs of Japan take the human heart as their seed and flourish as myriad leaves of words. As long as they are alive to this world, the cares and deeds of men and women are endless, so they speak of things they hear and see, giving words to the feelings in their hearts. Hearing the cries of the warbler among the blossoms or the calls of the frog that lives in the waters, how can we doubt that every living creature sings its song? Not using force, it moves heaven and earth, makes even the unseen spirits and gods feel pity, smoothes the bonds between man and woman, and consoles the hearts of fierce warriors—such a thing is poetry.<sup>4</sup>

Tsurayuki makes little distinction between poetry and music; they are both “song,” two sides of the same outpouring of feeling. By the time Murasaki Shikibu was writing, the high value placed on poetry and music as arts essential to the refined aristocrat was well-established. It is even clear that Murasaki Shikibu was familiar with Tsurayuki’s words, because he was mentioned by name in *Genji*. From the text of *Genji* one can infer that poetry and music were among the most valued arts in the world of the Imperial court.

In speaking of the aesthetics of the period, authors usually focus on poetry rather than music, because words are easier to describe than pure sound. The same qualities ascribed to poetry, though, were shared by music. Donald Keene proposed that four key headings under which Japanese aesthetics might be discussed are suggestion, irregularity, simplicity, and perishability<sup>5</sup>. Without going into them in detail, it is clear that each of these, with the possible exception of perishability, might apply to music. The notion of perishability—for example, the short life of the cherry blossom as an analogy for the ephemerality of human life—is more difficult to express with music. Even here, though, it is possible to talk about the linking of certain musical pieces with seasons of the year,

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<sup>4</sup> Shirane 2007, pp. 148-49, translated by Lewis Cook.

<sup>5</sup> Keene 1969, p. 294.

and the linking of those seasons with feelings of perishability: cherry blossoms falling in the spring, maple leaves falling in autumn.

As LaMarre has said, “At the Heian court, poetics permeated all aspects of life.”<sup>6</sup> The arts of poetry, calligraphy, and music are found everywhere throughout *Genji*. To be considered cultured and refined, a person associated with the court had to cultivate and, if possible, excel in all three. A striking characteristic of the novel is the way that Genji, other characters in the story, and even the narrator herself pass judgment on the rank, quality, elegance, the very worth of the people who execute these arts. It is often pointed out that courtship relied on the sending of poetry between the would-be lovers. There are numerous examples in *Genji* of the personality of the writer being judged from the style of calligraphy, the aptness and cleverness of the poetry, the kind of paper used, and even the flower or branch attached to and accompanying the poem. The style of playing of music, too, is used as a key to the personality of the player. It is not unusual in *Genji* for a male character to hear a few distant notes played on a *koto* and conclude, “I would really like to meet that woman.” The most interesting aspect of this part of Heian court culture is not the use of poetry or music as a medium for courtship; these arts have been used to woo the opposite sex for centuries. It is rather the explicit *judging* of another person’s character that occurs repeatedly in the novel.

### *Musical instruments*

Because the narrator refers so frequently to musical instruments in *Genji*, it is useful for the reader to keep clearly in mind what they look and sound like and what modern

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<sup>6</sup> LaMarre 2000, p. 13.

instruments they resemble. What follows is a list of just the instruments mentioned in the translated section. More complete descriptions are given in Appendix D.

*Koto*. The closest modern Western equivalent is the zither. There are three varieties, all closely related: the *koto*, which refers to the six-foot, thirteen-string version; the *wagon*, about half the size of the *koto* and with seven strings; and the *kin*, the smallest version, with six strings. The large *koto* is sometimes called a *sō no koto*. These instruments are tuned by placing a bridge, one per string, under each string and positioning it so that the string on the right-hand side of the bridge sounds the proper note.

*Biwa*. This looks very much like the medieval European lute, and in fact was derived from the same instrument, via China from the Middle East. It is played with a large, hard plectrum.

*Flutes*. There are quite a few varieties of flute, differing mainly in their length and the purpose for which they were used. Flutes were made of bamboo, were keyless, and had six or seven holes. They were held transversely, like the modern concert flute, and played in a similar way by blowing over a hole in one end.

*Hichiriki*. This is an ancient version of the oboe, a double-reed instrument.

*Shō*. The *shō* is unique in both appearance and sound. It is a kind of mouth organ, with a sound-producing mechanism similar to the harmonica, but there the resemblance ends. I urge the reader to consult Appendix D to see a picture of the instrument and read its description.

### *The story*

*Genji* tells a vast, sprawling story—one modern translation is over a thousand pages long<sup>7</sup>.

Just the chapter from which I translate excerpts involves over two dozen characters.

Rather than summarizing the plot of the entire novel, or even the whole chapter under consideration, this section explains the situation in the novel at the point the translation begins and gives a brief description of the players.

Genji, the main character of the story, is the exceptionally handsome and talented son of an emperor and one of his concubines. True to the character of the high-born person with Imperial ties, Genji has mastered the requisite fine arts: poetry, calligraphy, and music. In keeping with his exceptional nature, he has not only mastered them but he excels in each of them, far above the talents of anyone else. By virtue of these talents, his good looks, his wealth, and his privileged position, he finds it easy to attract women. Furthermore, in the Heian court men had virtually absolute power and women had almost none, so in addition to his ability to attract women, Genji could, and sometimes did, simply take them.

By the time the present chapter begins, Genji has installed four of his favorite women in wings at the four corners of his Rokujō<sup>8</sup> mansion, each living a relatively secluded life, hardly interacting with or even seeing the other women, let alone the outside world. In the spring wing<sup>9</sup> is Murasaki, the most important and valued of Genji's women. Trained and groomed by Genji from childhood to be his idea of an ideal woman, she is considered to be a principal wife (*kita no kata*). In the winter wing is the Akashi

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<sup>7</sup> Tyler 2001.

<sup>8</sup> An area in what is now Kyoto.

<sup>9</sup> Each wing is named after a season.

Lady, who bore Genji a daughter. Complicating the relationship between these two women, Genji has given the daughter to Murasaki to raise as her own. In the summer wing is Hanachirusato (literally “the village of falling flowers,” but sometimes translated as “the lady of the orange blossoms”). Genji began to fall in love with this woman when he was passing by her house and heard her playing the *koto*. The autumn wing is the sometime residence of Akikonomu, once imperial consort and now Empress. These latter two women appear in the current chapter, but not in the translated section. Frequently visiting the Rokujō mansion is the young Third Princess, the Emperor’s third and most beloved daughter.

When our scene begins, Genji has gathered together four of these women—Murasaki, the Akashi Lady, her daughter, and the Third Princess—to perform a concert in honor of the fiftieth birthday of the Emperor (not Genji’s father). The relative ages of the women have some significance: Murasaki and the Akashi Lady are in their 30’s, the Third Princess is in her early 20’s, and the daughter of the Akashi Lady (whom I refer to as the Akashi Princess) is in her teens. Tension exists between the older, and more senior in Genji’s affections, Murasaki, and the younger Princess, as will be shown below. Keys to the dynamics of the scene are the lack of interaction these women have had up to this point, and the rivalry which we can suppose exists between and among the women for Genji’s time and affection. Fueling this rivalry is Murasaki’s feeling that Genji has been spending an inordinate amount of time teaching the Third Princess music, while ignoring her own instruction.

Other significant characters in this scene include Tō no Chūjō, one of Genji's oldest friends; Kashiwagi, Tō no Chūjō's oldest son; and Yūgiri, Genji's son by his first and now deceased wife.

## THE FOUR-WOMAN CONCERT, TRANSLATED AND ANNOTATED

What follows are selections from the “Wakana II” chapter of *Genji*. The source text in all cases is *Nihon koten bungaku zenshū*, which I abbreviate as NKBZ. With just one exception, translations are my own. I strive to represent meaning rather than to produce beautiful literary prose.

Any of dozens of scenes of informal musical performance could be chosen for explication. This scene is representative in that typical instruments are played, the narrator providing her usual commentary on the expertise of the players and the effect of the music. It is special, though, in its gathering of so many of *Genji*’s women at the same place and time for a cooperative venture. Much could be said about the ten pairs of relationships in this scene—*Genji* with each of his women, and each of the women with another. Here I focus mainly on the music.

調べことなる手二つ三つ、おもしろき大曲どもの、四季につけて変るべき響き、空の寒さ温さを調へ出でて、<sup>10</sup>

The knack of different tunings, two or three of the elegant large-scale pieces, the way to tune in order to show a change of season, the cold or warmth of the air...

*Taikyoku* are large-scale *gagaku* pieces. According to Malm, this may refer to the number of men required to perform the accompanying dance.<sup>11</sup> *Shunnōden*, which I mention in the section on *wakan rōeishū*, is an example of a *taikyoku* from the *tōgaku* (Chinese) repertoire, and *kotoriso* 古鳥蘇 an example of *taikyoku* from the *komagaku* (Korean) repertoire.

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<sup>10</sup> NKBZ, p. 181.

<sup>11</sup> Malm 1959, p. 102.

For the characters in *Genji*, a key way of looking at and valuing music was with regard to its power to evoke seasons and weather. The reference to this power here is one of hundreds in the novel.

「昼はいと人しげく、なほ一たびも揺し按ずる暇も心あわたたしければ、夜々なむ静かに事の心も染めたてまつるべき」とて<sup>12</sup>

In the daytime there are many people. Just when you have the leisure to try some vibrato, you get flustered. Evening is better. I should come when it's quiet and you're at peace.

The vibrato here, expressed by the verb *yusuru* 揺する (to shake or vibrate), is effected by exerting and releasing pressure with the left hand on the portion of the *koto* string to the left of the bridge. In *Utsubo monogatari*, the verb is also used to describe the fluttering up and down of a note on the flute<sup>13</sup>. “Vibrato” covers both of these phenomena. The root meaning of *an* 按 is a massaging, a laying on of hands. *Anzu* 按ず is the right-hand—that is, the melodic—fingering of any *koto*-family instrument<sup>14</sup>.

Compared to practicing on one's own, performing before others introduces a very different dynamic. When the art being practiced is understood and valued by everyone, and one is acutely aware that those listening or watching are judging the elegance and stylistic appropriateness of one's execution of that art, it is natural under these conditions to be nervous.

対にも、そのころは御暇聞こえたまひて、明け暮れ教へきこえたまふ<sup>15</sup>

He begged leave [from Murasaki's wing], and taught her night and day.

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<sup>12</sup> NKBZ, p. 182.

<sup>13</sup> Shogakukan 2012, *Utsubo monogatari*.

<sup>14</sup> Uehara 2001.

<sup>15</sup> NKBZ, p. 182.



“He” is Genji; “her” is the Third Princess. This early mention of Genji as teacher says only that he concentrated his attention on instructing her. As yet there is none of the pride and self-aggrandizement he will demonstrate later.

女御の君にも、対の上にも、琴は習はしたてまつりたまはざりければ<sup>16</sup>、

To neither the Akashi Princess nor to Murasaki had he taught the *koto*

At this point in the story Genji had not spent much time with the Akashi Princess, so it is understandable he might not have had the opportunity to instruct her. Why, though, with the care and attention he had lavished on Murasaki, raising her and teaching her calligraphy and poetry, had he not given her a single *koto* lesson? Such instruction, for either woman, would represent standard cultural training in the same vein as teaching them calligraphy, reading, and writing. He teaches the Third Princess, though, with a specific goal in mind: to ensure that her performance does not disappoint the Emperor. We can infer that such disappointment would also reflect poorly on Genji.

かかるついでにかくおもしろき夜々の御遊びをうらやましく、などて我に  
伝へたまはざりけむとつらく思ひきこえたまふ<sup>17</sup>

She was envious of such wonderful nights of playing, and thought, “Why didn’t he teach me?”

The narrator says that Murasaki is jealous of the playing (*on-asobi*), but what she is really jealous of is Genji’s focus on the Third Princess. All the time Murasaki has known Genji, he has not given her a single lesson, and here he is spending “night and day” teaching another woman. Since the ability to play the *koto* is such an integral part of the

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<sup>16</sup> NKBZ, p. 182.

<sup>17</sup> NKBZ, p. 182.

accomplishments expected of these characters, it would also be natural for Murasaki to feel a kind of disappointment, and perhaps even shame, that she has not had the opportunity of developing this skill.

Her “Why didn’t he teach me?” is evidence that such teaching, from husbands to wives or from fathers to daughters, was common and expected.

冬の夜の月は、人に違ひてめでたまふ御心なれば、おもしろき夜の雪の光に、折に合ひたる手ども弾きたまひつつ、さぶらふ人々も、すこしこの方にほのめきたるに、御琴どもとりどりに弾かせて、遊びなどしたまふ<sup>18</sup>

Different from other people, Genji deeply appreciated the moon on winter nights. In the light of the snow on beautiful nights he would play appropriate melodies, and he would have the attendants play a little on the *koto*, too.

This is one of many identifications of a particular seasonal or weather-related scene with “appropriate” music—that is, appropriate to the season. Surely the Heian reading audience would know which melodies were meant, but unfortunately they are not mentioned in the text. The “attendants” here, *saburau hitobito*, are likely the women who surround him. The implication is not that Genji is playing music in concert with his attendants, but rather that he gives them (*hikasete*), perhaps one at a time, the opportunity to play.

この対に常にゆかしくする御琴の音、いかでかの人々の箏、琵琶の音も合はせて、女樂試みさせむ<sup>19</sup>

On this occasion, to have the usual admirable sound of the *koto* combined with the sounds of the *sō* and *biwa*, I’d like to have a women’s concert.

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<sup>18</sup> NKBZ, p. 183.

<sup>19</sup> NKBZ, p. 183.

This sentence, said to the Third Princess by Genji, begins what I call the Four-Woman Concert section of the story. It is the occasion of the Emperor's fiftieth birthday, and Genji is seeking to entertain him, to delight him with the accomplishments of his (the Emperor's) beloved Third Princess, and to show off his own teaching talents.

ただ今の物の上手どもこそ、さらにこのわたりの人々の御心しらひどもに  
まさらね<sup>20</sup>

The talent of people nowadays doesn't compare with the people here.

Genji is talking about the residents of his Rokujō mansion. He is either bragging about the musical ability of the members of his retinue, or boasting of his own teaching talent, or saying this to the Third Princess to bolster her confidence. She is, after all, the youngest of the four women who will be playing.

はかばかしく伝へとりたることはをさをさなけれど、何ごともいかで心に  
知らぬことあらじとなむ幼きほどに思ひしかば、世にある物の師といふか  
ぎり、また高き家々のさるべき人の伝へどもをも残さず試みし中に、いと  
深く恥づかしきかなとおぼゆる際の人なむなかりし<sup>21</sup>

My learning was superficial. I wanted there to be nothing that I didn't know. I've thought this since my youth. I studied with the great teachers of the world, and with appropriate people of the best schools, but there are no examples among them of people who impressed me as very deep.

Genji once again asserts his own talent, and the trouble he has gone to cultivate it. It is natural for a young person studying a new discipline to want to know everything that can be known about it. What is not natural is for an adult to be so audacious as to assert his superiority over the "great teachers of the world" and "people of the best schools." This bold self-confidence bordering on arrogance is a central part of Genji's personality. Such

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<sup>20</sup> NKBZ, pp. 183-84.

<sup>21</sup> NKBZ, p. 184.

an attitude is consonant with the narrator's description of Genji as being superior in everything he does.

その昔よりも、また、このころの若き人々のされよしめき過ぐすに、はた、浅くなりたるべし<sup>22</sup>

But compared to former times, today's young folk don't take it seriously. They just play at being musicians, and are certainly are shallow.

Genji compares his own intense study of music with what he thinks is a superficial approach taken by modern students.

琴、はた、まして、さらにまねぶ人なくなりたりとか<sup>23</sup>

And the *kin* in particular—there are no people who study it.

Genji is training the Third Princess on this instrument, so it is fitting that he focus on it as an example of the lack of *kin* students.

この御琴の音ばかりだに伝へたる人をさをさあらじ<sup>24</sup>

There are probably not many people who have learned to make such a sound on this *koto*.

Still speaking to the Third Princess, Genji means: such as sound as *you* can make. Again he explicitly praises and encourages the Princess, while implicitly bragging of his teaching prowess. As mentioned in Appendix D, *kin* and *koto* use the same character and can refer to the same instrument or to varieties of the instrument. The reading of the character is not always clear.

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<sup>22</sup> NKBZ, p. 184.

<sup>23</sup> NKBZ, p. 184.

<sup>24</sup> NKBZ, p. 184.

御供に、我も我もとのゆかしがりて、参上らまほしがれど、こなたに遠きをば選りとどめさせたまひて、すこしねびたれど、よしあるかぎり選りてさぶらはせたまふ<sup>25</sup>

Her attendants, vying with one another, all wanted to go, but even among the ones who were a little more mature some remained unchosen. He chose ones with talent.

I say “he chose,” but it is not clear whether it is Genji or the Third Princess who does the choosing. Two modern English translations disagree on this point: Seidensticker says “she selected” and Tyler says “he picked.” Since Genji is intent on having this concert be as impressive and as perfect as possible for the sake of the Emperor and his own reputation, I assume it is he doing the choosing of musicians. “A little more mature” could refer to either or both age and years of musical study.

廂の中の御障子を放ちて、こなたかなた御几帳ばかりをけぢめにて、中の間は院のおはしますべき御座よそひたり<sup>26</sup>

They removed the sliding doors, and here and there they hung curtains, and in the middle they put a seat for Genji.

This indication of the physical layout of the surroundings has been interpreted in a number of pictures. For example, in a *Genji monogatari emaki* (picture scroll) done some time in the 1650's we see Genji holding a fan with his hand extended, possibly marking time with the rhythm. At his left facing away from us is the Akashi Lady with her *biwa*. Facing us are the Third Princess, the Akashi Princess, and Murasaki, though it is difficult to tell who is who. The *koto* family instruments, too, are not sufficiently distinguishable; they all seem to have the same number of strings, which was not the case. Outside the

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<sup>25</sup> NKBZ, p. 185.

<sup>26</sup> NKBZ, p. 186.

curtains are two young male accompanists, one with a *shō* and one with a flute<sup>27</sup>. That Genji is the only male allowed to be in the presence of the women is a demonstration not just of his interest in the performance, but also of his power and influence over the women.

A later picture, this time from the early 1800's, interprets this scene in a similar fashion by showing Genji seated between and slightly apart from the women, two of them on his left and two of them on his right, the pairs of women facing each other and forming a rectangle. At one corner is the Akashi Lady with her *biwa*. Even though we can't count its strings, the length of the instrument at the opposite corner suggests that it is a thirteen-stringed *sō no koto*, which would mean that its player is the Akashi Princess. In this picture each of the women is separated from the others by a curtain. As before, the accompanists sit just outside this structure.

今日の拍子合はせには童べを召さむとて、右の大殿の三郎、尚侍の君の御腹の兄君笙の笛、左大将の御太郎、横笛と吹かせて、簀子にさぶらはせたまふ<sup>28</sup>

He had two young people set the tuning, the third son of the Minister of the Right [Tamakazura's eldest] on the *shō* and the eldest son of the Left Commander [Yūgiri] on the transverse flute. They sat outside the curtains.

The wind instruments, *shō* and flute, are used to set the pitch for tuning the stringed instruments, similar to the way a modern orchestra uses the pitch of the oboe, which is fairly constant, to set the pitches for the rest of the orchestra. Disregarding minor variations of pitch caused by temperature and humidity changes, the pitches of both the

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<sup>27</sup> The scroll is owned by *Tōkyō daigaku bungakubu kokubungaku kenkyūshitsusō* 東京大学文学部国文学研究室蔵, the archives of Tokyo University's national language research lab. They will not allow reproduction here.

<sup>28</sup> NKBZ, pp. 186-187.

*shō* and the flute are determined solely by the fixed length of the pipe and which finger holes are covered.

内には、御茵ども並べて、御琴ども参り渡す。秘したまふ御琴ども、うるはしき紺地の袋どもに入れたる取り出でて、明石の御方に琵琶、紫の上に和琴、女御の君に箏の御琴<sup>29</sup>

Inside the curtains, cushions were lined up and the stringed instruments presented. The ones Genji kept to himself, he took out of grand dark blue bags: the Akashi Lady's *biwa*, Murasaki's *wagon*, and the Akashi Princess's *sō no koto*.

These are apparently valuable and magnificent instruments, the ones Genji uses himself. For this occasion he lets his ladies use them. The cushions are for the instruments; the women would have already made themselves comfortable on the floor. In the two pictures described above the instruments are shown lying directly on the floor.

宮には、かくこととしき琴はまだえ弾きたまはずやとあやふくて、例の手馴らしたまへるをぞ、調べてたてまつりたまふ<sup>30</sup>

As for the Third Princess, she had probably not played on such a splendid *kin*, so Genji tuned for her the instrument she usually used.

When initially confronted with a first-class instrument, a musician naturally feels a sense of awe and even intimidation. The Third Princess is young, has been extremely sheltered, and has not yet played in public, so her reluctance to use Genji's beautiful *kin* is understandable. Although Genji has been instructing her, the little instrument she has been using was apparently more for practice than for show.

箏の御琴は、ゆるぶとなけれど、なほ、かく物に合はする折の調べにつけて、琴柱の立処乱るるものなり<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> NKBZ, p. 187.

<sup>30</sup> NKBZ, p. 187.

<sup>31</sup> NKBZ, p. 187.

The *sō no koto* doesn't loosen, but when you tune it and play in a concert, sometimes the bridges go awry.

When a classic *koto* is strung, its strings are pulled fairly tight and attached underneath with a kind of knot. There are no tuning pegs. Rather, each string has its own little bridge, which before a performance is positioned under a string so that the right-hand portion of the string is tuned to the correct scale note. Taking into account the length of the *koto*—the longest instruments are about six feet—and the fact that it has to be fairly easy for the performer to adjust the position of the bridge, the tension of the strings is quite loose when compared to, say, a modern zither or dulcimer. Since there are no tuning pegs, during a performance the strings cannot really loosen, but under the influence of the vibration of the instrument and exuberant plucking of the string it is possible for a bridge to shift slightly or even to fall over.

よくその心しらひ調ふべきを、女はえ張りしづめじ<sup>32</sup>

Women usually don't pull the strings as tightly as they should.

This refers to the initial stringing of the instrument, before the bridges are put in place. The strings may not be stretched as tightly as with a modern instrument that uses tuning pegs, but they still have to be installed with enough tension to allow the appropriate pitches to be reached. We can assume that pulling the string tightly enough and tying the knot at the right place required quite a bit of strength.

なほ、大將をこそ召し寄せつべかめれ<sup>33</sup>

I'm going to call Yūgiri.

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<sup>32</sup> NKBZ, p. 187.

<sup>33</sup> NKBZ, p. 187.



So, have a man string the instrument. Remember that Yūgiri is Genji's son. Why would Genji not tighten the strings himself? Is he above such menial tasks?

この笛吹ども、まだいと幼げにて拍子ととのへむ頼み強からず<sup>34</sup>

The ones playing the wind instruments, they are still quite young and we probably can't rely on them to keep things in order decisively.

*Totonou* (here in the form ととのへ) means keeping things in order. It is not clear whether it refers here to tuning or to rhythm. Initially, before the performance, the two young men use the wind instruments (*shō* and flute) to set the pitch for tuning the stringed instruments. During a performance, it may be that the wind instruments are relied on for setting the rhythm. It is clear, at least from modern, unamplified performances that the sounds of these wind instruments is typically louder than those of the stringed instruments.

明石の君を放ちては、いづれもみな棄てがたき御弟子どもなれば<sup>35</sup>

Excepting the Akashi lady, all these women are valued students [of Genji]. The players—Murasaki, the Akashi Princess, and the Third Princess—are *sute-gatashi*, literally “difficult to discard.” This points up both the close relationship between Genji and each of the women, and the pride and concern that Genji takes as a teacher in their performances and the effect they will have on the audience.

御心加へて、大将の聞きたまはむに、難なかるべくと思す<sup>36</sup>

He was concerned that Yūgiri should hear no faults.

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<sup>34</sup> NKBZ, p. 187.

<sup>35</sup> NKBZ, pp. 187-88.

<sup>36</sup> NKBZ, p. 188.

Genji's focus as a teacher is not only on his students, but on his audience, particularly his son. Why should his son's opinion of this concert be so important to him? Possibly because it has been established that, despite his protestations to the contrary (see below), Yūgiri is also an accomplished musician.

和琴こそ、いくばくならぬ調べなれど、あと定まりたることなくて、なかなか女のたどりぬべけれ<sup>37</sup>

The wagon has no set way of playing it; women have to work at it.

This sentence might refer to tuning as well as method of playing. Even though the scale to be used is determined by the piece to be performed, there are no fixed positions on the body of the instrument where the bridges must be placed. Placement is done by ear. Further, the right hand may pluck a string differently (delicately, firmly, and so on), and vibrato or pitch bend may be introduced by the left hand in a number of ways. It is not clear why women would have any more trouble playing these instruments than men would. Rather than this remark being due to chauvinism, it might be a reflection of the fact that it takes a certain amount of pressure with the left hand to produce the proper pitch bend, and tension with the right hand to pluck the strings properly—although modern female *koto* players do not seem to have any trouble.

春の琴の音は、みな掻き合はするものなるを、乱るるところもやとなまいとはしく思す<sup>38</sup>

He worried about the sound of the string instruments in spring, all being played at the same time, going awry.

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<sup>37</sup> NKBZ, p. 188.

<sup>38</sup> NKBZ, p. 188.

As in other places, I translate *koto* or *kin* sometimes as the instrument itself, and sometimes as string instruments in general. “The sound of the spring *koto*” makes little sense; there is no instrument used specifically for a given season. “The spring[-like] sound of the *koto*” might be more appropriate, implying the playing technique or tuning used to convey the idea of the season—*richi* mode was associated with autumn, *ryo* with spring. Alternatively, this may be a reference to the humidity of springtime, which would affect the tuning of all the strings.

軽々しきやうなれど、これが緒調へて、調べ試みたまへ<sup>39</sup>

It’s impertinent of me to ask, but would you stretch the strings, and try it out.

Genji asks this of his son, Yūgiri. The narrator has established that Genji thinks a woman might have trouble exerting enough tension on the strings.

壺越調の声に発の緒を立てて、ふとも調べやらでさぶらひたまへ  
ば<sup>40</sup>

He tuned the tonic string in the *ichikochi* mode, but did not immediately try to play it.

“He” here is Yūgiri. *Ichikotsu* or *ichikochi* is one of the six tunings used in *gagaku*. It is considered the main tuning. It corresponds to a major pentatonic scale, which we may write as C-D-E-G-A. Although there does not seem to be any way to verify this, according to Malm<sup>41</sup> the tonic pitch was D. That would create the scale D-E-F#-A-B. In any case, the bright, happy major sound could very well be the characteristic that lends

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<sup>39</sup> NKBZ, p. 189.

<sup>40</sup> NKBZ, p. 189.

<sup>41</sup> Malm 2000, p. 114.

this scale its “spring-like” quality. See the section above on *gagaku* tunings for descriptions of other tunings.

なほ掻き合はせばかりは、手一つ、すさまじからでこそ<sup>42</sup>

[Genji says to Yūgiri:] Go ahead, play an appropriate melody. Have a little fun.

Notes in *Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* notes explain 掻き合はせ as 調子合せの曲ぐらい. Tyler says “modal prelude,”<sup>43</sup> but that idea does not appear in the sentence. The idea is more like “Play a little something to put us all in the right mood.”

さらに、今日の御遊びのさしいらへに、交じらふばかりの手づかひなむおぼえずはべりける<sup>44</sup>

I probably don’t have the technique to participate in today’s concert.

Yūgiri says this out of modesty, even though the narrator praises his music elsewhere. In fact, we know that the women have been rehearsing, but Yūgiri, not having been party to the rehearsals, could very well feel unprepared.

さもあることなれど、女楽にえ言まぜでなむ逃げにけると伝はらむ名こそ惜しけれとて笑ひたまふ<sup>45</sup>

Genji laughed. “That might be. But it would be regrettable if you should shirk this women’s concert and people talk about it.”

Genji is bantering here, playfully shaming his son into performing at least one little piece.

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<sup>42</sup> NKBZ, p. 189.

<sup>43</sup> Tyler 2001, p. 640.

<sup>44</sup> NKBZ, p. 189.

<sup>45</sup> NKBZ, p. 189.

調べはてて、をかしきほどに掻き合はせばかり弾きてまゐらせたまひつ<sup>46</sup>

The tuning finished, he played it quite well, then gave it back.<sup>47</sup>

御琴どもの調べどもととのひはてて、掻き合はせたまへるほど、いづれとなき中に、琵琶はすぐれて上手めき、神さびたる手づかひ、澄みはてておもしろく聞こゆ<sup>48</sup>

The stringed instruments all tuned, when they all played together, sounding out from among them was the *biwa*, played quite skillfully, solemnly, and serenely.

Why does the sound of the *biwa* rise above the sounds of the other instruments? Is it simply that the sound of a *biwa* is so different from the sounds of the *koto* instruments that it is easily identified in concert? Could it be a simple matter of resonance? The strings of the *biwa* are shorter than those of the various *koto* instruments, and therefore presumably under greater tension, which could imply greater volume of sound. Does the hollow body of the *biwa* amplify its sound better than the *koto* does? I prefer to think that the clarity and assertiveness of the *biwa* here is due to the age and experience of the person playing it. This concert involves three relatively young women on *koto*-type instruments, but the older Akashi Lady, the Akashi princess's mother, plays the *biwa*. It is possible she is simply more assertive in her playing.

和琴に、大將も耳とどめたまへるに、<sup>49</sup>

Yūgiri listened particularly to the wagon.

Remember that as far as we can judge from the description of the physical arrangement of the scene the women themselves and their instruments were not visible to the listeners.

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<sup>46</sup> NKBZ, p. 189.

<sup>47</sup> Seidensticker has "...and pushed it back under the blinds." This is extrapolation.

<sup>48</sup> NKBZ, p. 190.

<sup>49</sup> NKBZ, p. 190.

Nevertheless, with only four stringed instruments playing, despite the clarity with which the *biwa* was being played, a listener could probably focus on the sound of a particular instrument. The text implies that the sound of the *wagon* could be discerned in the mix.

なつかしく愛敬づきたる御爪音に、掻き返したる音の、めづらしく今めきて、さらにこのわざとある上手どもの、おどろおどろしく掻き立てたる調べ調子に劣らず、にぎははしく、<sup>50</sup>

The poignant, charming sound produced by her use of the plectrum in her left hand, the sound of her strumming the strings back to front, her talent surprisingly was not inferior to the best performers of today.

In a footnote, Tyler mentions the “touch both of her left hand (*tsumaoto*) and of her right (*kakikaeshitaru ne*),”<sup>51</sup> but doesn’t explain these terms further.

The *tsumaoto*, literally “nail sound,” is not in fact produced with the nails, but is the word applied to the sound of the *kotozume* 琴爪 (plectrum) plucking a string. Today this is not the large flat plectrum used to strum a shamisen—that is called a *bachī* 撥. Rather, it is a small pick that fits over or around one’s fingers, and is used very much like a guitar pick. *Tsumaoto* does involve the left hand, but it is the use of the plectrum in the hand that is being described.

*Kakikaesu*, literally “scratch-return,” is the sound, produced either by *tsumaoto* or *bachī*, of strings being strummed back-to-front—that is, from high note to low. The arpeggio thus produced is one of many characteristic sounds of the *koto*.

大和琴にもかかる手ありけりと聞き驚かる<sup>52</sup>

“Such talent on the *wagon*!” he said, quite surprised.

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<sup>50</sup> NKBZ, p. 190,

<sup>51</sup> Tyler 2001, p. 640.

<sup>52</sup> NKBZ, p. 190.

This is probably Yūgiri's opinion, because a few lines back, it mentions him listening closely to the *wagon*.

深き御勞のほどあらはに聞こえておもしろきに、大殿御心落ちゐて、いと  
ありがたく思ひきこえたまふ<sup>53</sup>

Genji could tell that she had put a great deal of work into it, and was quite thankful for that.

Again we have the pride of a teacher shining through.

箏の御琴は、物の隙々に、心もとなく漏り出づる物の音がらにて、うつく  
しげになまめかしくのみ聞こゆ<sup>54</sup>

The *sō no koto*, its sound not clearly being heard, masked by the other instruments, could be heard particularly beautifully and charmingly.

Even though the *sō no koto* is the largest of the instruments, and has the longest and largest number of strings (thirteen), when played without electronic amplification its tone is soft and gentle. This compares to, for example, the harsher sound of the *biwa*, which is due to the large relatively hard plectrum used to strike its strings. Part of the softness of the sound of the *sō no koto* may be due to the relative looseness of its strings, as mentioned above.

琴は、なほ若き方なれど、習ひたまふ盛りなれば、たどたどしからず、いとよくものに響きあひて、<sup>55</sup>

As for the *kin*, it was being played in a youthful manner, but since she had been practicing, she blended its sound with the other instruments without difficulty.

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<sup>53</sup> NKBZ, p. 190.

<sup>54</sup> NKBZ, p. 190.

<sup>55</sup> NKBZ, p. 190.

This is a comment about the playing of the Third Princess. She is still young (Tyler says “mid-teens to early 20s” at this point in the story<sup>56</sup>), and the most inexperienced of the women, at least in terms of performing on an instrument. The *kin* is quite small (see photo, page 84), and its seven short strings restrict its range and volume compared to the other instruments. The fact that the Princess successfully brings out its sound and blends (*hibiki-aite*) with the others is a strong compliment.

優になりける御琴の音かなと大将聞きたまふ。拍子とりて唱歌したまふ<sup>57</sup>

“That is certainly a superior sound for the *koto*,” said Yūgiri, as he marked the tempo and sang along.

There are a number of interesting things happening here. First, Yūgiri refers to the *koto* using an honorific prefix, *on-koto*. This might be a gesture of respect toward the Third Princess. Second, the narrator uses this word variously to mean either the *koto* specifically, or it and related stringed instruments in general. Yūgiri could thus be commenting on the sound of the ensemble, or on one of the instruments. Since the previous sentence refers to the Third Princess’ playing, he is probably talking about her. Next, the narrator says he is singing. Nowhere in this section is the name of the piece mentioned, but we can assume that the melody is familiar to the audience, and certainly to Yūgiri, who we know plays these instruments.

Elsewhere in *Genji*, when lyrics are involved they are stated explicitly. Here, there is no hint of lyrics. The supposition—and the meaning of *shōga* 唱歌 (sometimes read *shōka*)—is that Yūgiri is singing along with a kind of “fa la la” nonsense-syllable

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<sup>56</sup> Tyler 2001, p. 626.

<sup>57</sup> NKBZ, p. 190.



accompaniment. Tyler, in a footnote<sup>58</sup>, says he “sings the names of the notes (solfège).” Solfège is the Western name for singing the notes of the scale as do, re, mi, fa and so on, and *shōga* closely approximates this phenomenon. It is an assignment of names to the notes, originally used as a memory aid in lieu of printed music to teach melodies. The names used, however, differ from instrument to instrument. The tradition is that the note names mimicked the sounds of the particular instrument<sup>59</sup>. For example, in modern teaching the syllables *ta, pu, po* echo the sound of the small *kotsuzumi* drum, *don, tsu, chon* the sound of the large *taiko* drum, and *o, hya, raa, ho* the sound of a flute. Exactly what syllables Yūgiri is singing is not known, but the effect would be as if, for example, we sang “so so la so do ti” instead of “Happy birthday to you.”

院も、時々扇うち鳴らして加へたまふ御声、昔よりもいみじくおもしろく、  
すこしふつつかにもものものしき気添ひて聞こゆ<sup>60</sup>

Genji also occasionally marked the time with his fan and added his voice. Even more beautifully than when he was younger, his singing sounded dignified and more rich.

Apparently both Genji and Yūgiri are singing *shōga*, but we can infer from the author’s use of *mo* here that they are also both beating time with their fans, even though that is not explicitly said in the previous sentence about Yūgiri. As usual, the narrator lauds Genji’s talent. Is he competing with his son? Or is accompanying playing with *shōga* a standard, accepted act of audience members, in an intimate setting such as this?

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<sup>58</sup> Tyler 2001, p. 640.

<sup>59</sup> Malm 2000, p. 136.

<sup>60</sup> NKBZ, pp. 190-91.

大将も、声いとすぐれたまへる人にて<sup>61</sup>

Yūgiri also was a person with a great voice.

Whether or not father and son are competing, it is clear that both have beautiful voices.

心もとなしや、春の朧月夜よ。秋のあはれ、はた、かうやうなる物の音に、  
虫の声より合はせたる、ただならず、こよなく響きそふ心地すかし<sup>62</sup>

It feels a little uneasy, this hazy moon on a spring night. The deep emotion of autumn is [produced by] the voices of insects intertwined with this music. It is an unusually pleasant resonance.

Here we have again the intertwining—*ori* is from *yoru* 縊る (to twist)—of man-made music and the sounds of nature, a theme which recurs frequently in *Genji*, and which echoes the sentiment of the *Kokin wakashū* preface mentioned in the Introduction.

大将の君、「秋の夜の隈なき月には、よろづのものとどこほりなきに、琴  
笛の音も明らかに、澄める心地はしはべれど<sup>63</sup>

Yūgiri said, “On a night in autumn when no part of the moon is hidden, nothing obstructs anything, and the distinct sounds of the strings and flutes feel equally clear...”

The equation of man-made music and nature continues. Here it is more abstract than a sound equivalence. It is the feeling inherent in a glimpse and experience of a particular natural moment, a bright moon clearly illuminating the landscape under an autumn sky. The seasonal reference implies certain kinds of plants to be in bloom, and conversely others to be absent. Temperature, likely cool or cold, is also implied. These features and others specific to the season are just under the surface of the words, and no doubt clear, if subconsciously, to the Heian reading audience.

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<sup>61</sup> NKBZ, p. 191.

<sup>62</sup> NKBZ, p. 194.

<sup>63</sup> NKBZ, pp. 194-95.

春の空のたどたどしき霞の間より、朧なる月影に、静かに吹き合はせたる  
やうには、いかでか<sup>64</sup>

How can you compare that to the sounds of flutes under the silhouette of a hazy  
moon in the nebulous mist of the sky in spring?

Here is an appropriate place to say a few words about music criticism, the art of talking about music. The Heian cultural characteristic of equating music and nature is one of many ways of describing music. (Of course, one might also say that nature is being described by equating to music.) Music is abstract. Unlike a word or a picture, a note played on an instrument has no intrinsic meaning. How, then, are we to describe the sounds we hear, and how they make us feel? One musicologist reminds us that “problems of balance, contrast, expectation and fulfillment”<sup>65</sup> are central to the phenomenon of music. These properties, particularly contrast and expectation, are also inherent in the Heian view of nature, which calls for a continual and acute awareness of the difference between seasons, the way the appearance of plants, landscape, weather (rain, snow, frost, mist), clouds, and especially sky and moon change. Given that music embodies contrast, via its ability to vary volume, rhythm, and instrument pitch and voice combinations, and expectation, via the audience’s prior knowledge of melodies and standard musical devices, it is natural to transfer these qualities and the emotions they produce in the listener to analogous (if not similar) qualities in nature.

笛の音なども、艶に澄みのぼりはてずなむ<sup>66</sup>

Furthermore, something like the sound of a flute probably does not rise up in a captivating manner [on such a night].

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<sup>64</sup> NKBZ, p. 195.

<sup>65</sup> Dean 1980, p. 45.

<sup>66</sup> NKBZ, p. 195.

This might be a reflection of the effect that extremely humid air (the haze, *kasumi*, referred to before) has on sounds, tending to dull them. On the other hand, it could be more a statement of the Heian listener's association of flute sounds with particular kinds of weather or season.

物の調べ、曲のものどもはしも、げに律をば次のものにしたるは、さもあ  
りかし<sup>67</sup>

Comparing them, in terms of the mode, truly *richi* is a lower status, I guess you could say.

Now we have a clear comparison of music and season. Here it is not the sound of a particular instrument, but rather the tuning or scale that is equated to the season. As discussed in Appendix G, there were two main tunings, *richi* or *ritsu* 律 and *ryo* 呂, which corresponded loosely to our concept of major (*ryo*) and minor (*richi*) scales. As Tyler points out<sup>68</sup>, there was an association as follows: *richi* = autumn = Japanese; *ryo* = spring = Chinese. The fact that there is some argument, or at least passionate discussion, taking place in the story suggests that these associations are important to the listeners.

上りての世を聞き合はせはべらねばにや、衛門督の和琴、兵部卿宮の御琵琶などをこそ、このころめづらかなる例に引き出ではべめれ<sup>69</sup>

I am sure that the Defense Gate Commander's *wagon* and the Soldier Prince's *biwa* are the equals of any talents of today.

The Defense Gate Commander is Kashiwagi, Tō no Chūjō's oldest son. The Soldier Prince is Hotaru, Genji's brother. Yūgiri is speaking about extremely close relations here. Kashiwagi is about the same age as Yūgiri, the son of his father's best friend, and Hotaru

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<sup>67</sup> NKBZ, p. 195.

<sup>68</sup> Tyler 2001, p. 642.

<sup>69</sup> NKBZ, p. 196.

is his uncle. Yūgiri does not claim to be an expert on all things musical, but he is quite familiar with the talents of those closest to him.

げに、かたはらなきを、今宵うけたまはる物の音どもの、みなひとしく耳  
驚きはべるは<sup>70</sup>

Truly, there is no comparison, but I am surprised by tonight's music.

Yūgiri is saying, either completely truthfully or politely out of respect, that the music of the four women is as good as the two players he just mentioned. Given the story's focus on Genji, it is probable that Yūgiri remark is more a compliment of Genji's ability and success at teaching than praise of the women's playing. His next remarks lend force to this idea.

なほかくわざともあらぬ御遊びと、かねて思うたまへたゆみける心の騒ぐ  
にやはべらむ、唱歌などいと仕うまつりにくくなむ<sup>71</sup>

Maybe I was not prepared for such an unplanned performance, but singing along with it was difficult.

The performance is “unplanned” (*waza to mo aranu*, “not intentional,” therefore “casual”) in the sense that it is not one of the regularly-scheduled larger *gagaku* events that accompany rituals and holidays. Even though he clearly knows the piece(s) being played, Yūgiri was not party to the rehearsals, which involved only the women. Here again “singing along” is *shōga*, the singing of nonsense syllables.

和琴は、かの大員ばかりこそ、かく折につけて<sup>72</sup>

As for the *wagon*, Tō no Chūjō alone has such skill at bending the notes...

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<sup>70</sup> NKBZ, p. 196.

<sup>71</sup> NKBZ, p. 196.

<sup>72</sup> NKBZ, pp. 196-97.

*Ori* 折 means bend or fold, and is used in the same sense as our modern “bending a note” (on the guitar, for example). It is also executed in the same manner: pushing, pulling, or otherwise exerting pressure on a string to change its pitch. The bending of notes on a *koto* or *wagon* is a fundamental technique for producing the characteristic sounds of these instruments.

琵琶はしも、ここに口入るべきことまじらぬを、さいへど、物のけはひ異なるべし。おぼえぬ所にて聞き始めたりしに、めづらしき物の声かなとなむおぼえしかど、その折よりは、またこよなく優りにたるをや」と、せめて我がしこにかこちなしたまへば、女房などは、すこしつきしろふ。<sup>73</sup>

(Genji says:) “Especially concerning the *biwa*, I have not involved myself there, but it somehow sounds different. When I first heard it in that far-off place, I admired its unusual tone color, but since then it has remarkably improved.” The women nudged each other at this bit of braggadocio.

The “far-off place” is the Akashi Lady’s home. Genji has concentrated on teaching the zither-like instruments, *koto*, *wagon*, and *sō no koto*. The text says nothing about him teaching *biwa*, although we can assume that he is as expert on that instrument as on the others. What is interesting here is his bragging. He does not directly say that he is responsible for the improvement in her (the Akashi Lady’s) playing, but he strongly implies it. Even more interesting is that, contrary to her usual unblinking praise of all of Genji’s actions, the narrator here paints him in a less than exemplary light, showing us that Genji’s self-image does not necessarily correspond to the image in the minds of those around him. Here she is virtually making fun of him.

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<sup>73</sup> NKBZ, p. 197.

よろづのこと、道々につけて習ひまねば、才といふもの、いづれも際なくおぼえつつ、わが心地に飽くべき限りなく、習ひ取らむことはいと難けれど<sup>74</sup>

When you go down the road of studying anything, regarding talent, you come to understand that there is no limit, and that no matter how much you study, difficulties remain...

This idea has not changed in a thousand years. Developing musical or any other kind of talent requires hard work and long hours. A true musician is never satisfied with her current level of accomplishment. For example, pianist Seymour Lipkin was 85 years old when he decided to re-record Beethoven's incredibly difficult *Hammerklavier* sonata. An interviewer with the Philadelphia Inquirer wrote, "Lipkin, though, thinks he can improve over the recording he made roughly a decade ago. 'My perception of the thought process has deepened.'"<sup>75</sup>

琴なむ、なほわづらはしく、手触れにくきものはありける<sup>76</sup>

The *kin*, in particular, is quite troublesome and difficult to play.

"Play" here is *tezaware* 手触れ, literally "touch with the hand." There are three points of difficulty in playing this instrument. First, the tuning of the strings of the instruments of the zither family (*kin*, *wagon*, *sō no koto*) is a delicate procedure. A tiny fraction of an inch error in the placement of a bridge (*ji* 柱) makes the string out of tune. Second, as with any plucked instrument, the speed and force of plucking and the angle the finger, nail or plectrum makes with the string all subtly affect the sound. Third, the bending of notes produced by the left hand pressing on a string on the other (untuned) side of the

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<sup>74</sup> NKBZ, p. 197.

<sup>75</sup> Stearns 2012.

<sup>76</sup> NKBZ, p. 198.

bridge is a fine art. It is not just rote instruction but one's musical sensibilities that determine which notes to bend, when, and how much.

この琴は、まことに跡のままに尋ねとりたる昔の人は、天地をなびかし、鬼神の心をやはらげ、<sup>77</sup>

Truly, people who deeply studied the *kin* subdued heaven and Earth, mollified demons and gods, and made heaven and earth submit...

Notice first of all that this statement is almost a direct quotation from Tsurayuki's *Kokin wakashū* preface (see page 2). From Heian times to the present day, the *koto* and its ilk have been revered and treasured as powerful cultural icons. This sentence is an indication of just how powerful the instruments were considered to be. The sound of these instruments is as much a symbol of Japanese culture as the sound of the banjo is of American culture. Today, *koto* music strongly conveys a nostalgic image of traditional pre-Meiji Japan.

この国に弾き伝ふる初めつ方まで、深くこの事を心得たる人は、多くの年を知らぬ国に過ぐし、身をなきになして、この琴をまねび取らむと惑ひてだに、し得るは難くなむありける<sup>78</sup>

Before they began to teach how to play it in our country, people who deeply studied it passed many years in foreign countries, not even thinking of themselves, but even though they went through a great deal of trouble to try to learn the *koto*, it was difficult to get the hang of it.

This provides background supporting the idea that the instrument is hard to play. The reference to spending time in foreign countries possibly comes from, and is certainly echoed in, the slightly earlier *Utsubo monogatari*, sometimes translated as “Tale of the

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<sup>77</sup> NKBZ, p. 198.

<sup>78</sup> NKBZ, p. 198.



Hollow Tree.” In this story a Japanese man, Toshikage, spends time abroad (possibly in Persia) studying the *kin*.

げにはた、明らかに空の月星を動かし、時ならぬ霜雪を降らせ、雲雷を騒がしたる例、上りたる世にはありけり<sup>79</sup>

Yes, it clearly does move the moon and stars in the sky, bring down frost and snow out of season, and stir a tumult of clouds and lightning, as many examples from early times attest.<sup>80</sup>

This continues the praise of the instrument.

かく限りなきものにて、そのままに習ひ取る人のありがたく、世の末なればにや、いづこのそのかみの片端にかはあらむ<sup>81</sup>

[These days] people who study it so deeply are rare. Perhaps it is because we are in the waning days of Buddhism. Where will we find people like that today?

*Genji* is replete with references to *yonosue* 世の末, literally “the end of the world,” the Buddhist concept of *mappō* 末法, “the last stage of the law.” Buddhism talks of a three-stage time line that describes a falling away from the teachings of Buddha. First is *shōbō* 正法, the “right law.” Next is *zōhō* 像法, “image of the law.” *Mappō* implies widespread moral corruption, and is frequently invoked by characters in Heian literature, and early Kamakura era literature such as *Heike monogatari*, to explain immorality or degeneracy in people’s actions.

されど、なほ、かの鬼神の耳とどめ、かたぶきそめにけるものなればにや、なまなまにまねびて、思ひかなはぬたぐひありけるのち、これを弾く人、よからずとかいふ難をつけて、うるさきままに<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> NKBZ, p. 198.

<sup>80</sup> Tyler 2001, p. 643. I can neither amend nor improve his translation.

<sup>81</sup> NKBZ, p. 198.

<sup>82</sup> NKBZ, pp. 198-99.

Nevertheless, this matter of catching the attention of the demons and gods, since [expert playing] makes them want to hear it, it is equally true that people playing it poorly and with difficulty found it simply annoying...

Here is the other side of the issue. If playing the *kin* properly is so difficult, then playing it poorly must be easy.

今はをさをさ伝ふる人なしとか。いと口惜しきことにこそあれ<sup>83</sup>

Nobody studies it today. It's really regrettable.

If the *koto* is so culturally iconic, of course it would be regrettable if expert playing died out.

琴の音を離れては、何琴をか物を調へ知るしるべとはせむ<sup>84</sup>

Apart from the *kin*, what instrument lets one learn tuning?

Here is an interesting use of *kin* to mean both the instrument (or instrument family), and “instrument” in general. Also, “learn tuning” is somewhat inadequate a translation.

*Totonou* 調ふ conveys the idea of completing, assembling or arranging correctly. With instruments it almost always applies to tuning, but on the *koto* *totonou* takes on two aspects. Not only is the correct placement of the bridges important, as mentioned before. There is also the appropriate choice of the sequence of pitches assigned to the strings—that is, the mode, *richi* or *ryo*, equally as important as the tuning of each string.

げに、よろづのこと衰ふるさまは、やすくなりゆく世の中に、一人出で離れて、心を立てて、唐土、高麗と、この世に惑ひありき、親子を離れむことは、世の中にひがめる者になりぬべし<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> NKBZ, p. 199.

<sup>84</sup> NKBZ, p. 199.

<sup>85</sup> NKBZ, p. 199.

Really, in this world where everything is decaying, you'd think it's wrong for someone want to leave and go wandering off far away to a place like China or Korea, leaving one's parents and children.

The narrator continues to refer to *Utsubo monogatari* and its main character. The “world where everything is decaying” likely refers to the Buddhist concept of *mappo* 末法, as described above. Here China is *Morokoshi* (or *Tōdo*), literally “the land of the T'ang [Dynasty].” Korea is *Koma*, the traditional ancient name for that country.

調べ一つに手を弾き尽くさむことだに、はかりもなきものなり<sup>86</sup>

You can never exhaust the playing of even a single mode, and there are many of them.

Here 調べ is not *toto(u)* but *shira(be)*, with the emphasis on the scale rather than the tuning of a single string. The point is that, given one specific tuning, there are still matters of melody, touch, ornament, rhythm and so forth to master.

いはむや、多くの調べ、わづらはしき曲多かるを、心に入りし盛りには、世にありとあり、ここに伝はりたる譜といふものの限りをあまねく見合はせて、のちのちは、師とすべき人もなくてなむ、好み習ひしかど、なほ上りての人には、当たるべくもあらじをや。まして、この後といひては、伝はるべき末もなき、いとあはれになむ<sup>87</sup>

Needless to say, there are a great many modes, and quite a few troublesome melodies. I was eager to study these, all kinds of things in the world. I examined every piece of music that had been handed down here, but I cannot measure up to those famous people of the past, and there is no one to follow me.

Genji, while bragging about the amount of study he has done, at the same time is aware that even his mastery is incomplete. Furthermore, none of his pupils has his skill, so what will the future of *koto* playing be?

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<sup>86</sup> NKBZ, p. 199.

<sup>87</sup> NKBZ, p. 199.

この御子たちの御中に、思ふやうに生ひ出でたまふものしたまはば、その世になむ、そもさまでながらへとまるやうあらば、いくばくならぬ手の限りも、とどめたてまつるべき<sup>88</sup>

If any among these Princes becomes an adult in the way I'd like, if I have a long life, to the extent that I have skill I can teach them what I know.

The bragging continues, but also Genji's wish for the tradition not to die out.

女御の君は、箏の御琴をば、上に譲りきこえて、寄り臥したまひぬれば、あづまを大殿の御前に参りて、気近き御遊びになりぬ<sup>89</sup>

The Akashi princes gave her *sō no koto* to Murasaki and lay down to rest. Then Murasaki placed her instrument before Genji, and a [more] intimate kind of performance began.

The second part of the concert, unplanned and informal, is about to begin. The participants are exchanging instruments in a kind of cyclic manner, each passing hers to the next person, and Murasaki giving hers to Genji (*azuma* is another name for the wagon, an abbreviation for *azuma-goto* 東琴, "eastern *koto*"). There are two implications here. The first is that the ladies are equally trained on all the instruments in the *koto* family. The second is a kind of deference and respect each person shows to the next, and particularly the attitude Murasaki maintains towards Genji. He is the *koto* master, and he is also *her* master.

葛城遊びたまふ。はなやかにおもしろし<sup>90</sup>

They played *Kazuraki*. It was beautifully elegant.

*Kazuraki*, now a town in Nara prefecture (read *Kazuragi*), was the name of a *saibara*, a song performed by members of the Imperial court, accompanied by instruments. The

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<sup>88</sup> NKBZ, p. 200.

<sup>89</sup> NKBZ, p. 200.

<sup>90</sup> NKBZ, p. 200.

name literally means “kudzu castle.” The melody continued to be used for centuries: later, there is a Noh drama of that name attributed to Zeami<sup>91</sup> (1363–1443). What is significant here is that the music is clearly written for voice and instruments, rather than being purely instrumental. Instead of singing nonsense syllables, now the participants can sing meaningful words to which they can add color and nuance. The sense of the lyrics and the emotion expressed while singing add layers of meaning and intimacy to the performance.

大殿、折り返しうたひたまふ御声たとへむ方なく愛敬づきめでたし<sup>92</sup>

Genji’s voice, as he sang and sang, was incomparably attractive and wonderful. The sentence says that the attractiveness (*aigyō*) of Genji’s voice is *tatoemu kata naku*, “there is no one to whom it can be compared,” but it is not clear whether anyone else is singing.

箏の琴は、女御の御爪音は、いとらうたげになつかしく、母君の御けはひ加はりて、揺の音深く、いみじく澄みて聞こえつるを<sup>93</sup>

The touch of the Akashi Princess on the *sō no koto* was quite adorable and charming, with a touch of her mother’s manner, the deep bending of the notes sounding extremely clear.

It is natural that this woman’s playing style would have been influenced by her mother’s.

The “bending” here is again *yu* 揺 (shake), the pressing on the left-hand portion of a string to raise its pitch slightly. She might be bending a single note, or by repeatedly exerting and relaxing pressure, produce a vibrato.

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<sup>91</sup> Shogakukan 1998, *Zeami*.

<sup>92</sup> NKBZ, p. 200.

<sup>93</sup> NKBZ, p. 201.

この御手づかひは、また、さま変はりて、ゆるるかにおもしろく、聞く人ただならず、すすろはしきまで愛敬づき、輪の手など、すべて、さらに、いとかどある御琴の音なり<sup>94</sup>

Murasaki's playing, on the other hand, seemed different. It was unhurriedly charming, and people listening could not repress their feelings. It was marvelously moving--her ringed hand, her whole way of playing, these produced the sound of a talented *koto* player.

We can only imagine the differences between Murasaki's playing and that of the Akashi Princess. The text refers to Murasaki's "ringed hand" (*rin no te*), or possibly "the touch of her rings [*tsume* or plectra]." In today's performances, *tsume* are worn on the player's right hand thumb, index, and middle fingers, and one plucks the strings only with these *tsume*, which are in the shape of rings around the fingertips with extensions like long nails.

返り声に、皆調べ変はりて、律の搔き合はせども、なつかしく今めきたるに、琴は、五個の調べ、あまたの手の中に、心とどめてかならず弾きたまふべき五、六の発刺を、いとおもしろく澄まして弾きたまふ。さらにかたほならず、いとよく澄みて聞こゆ<sup>95</sup>

At the change of mode, everyone changed their tuning. Playing in a minor key, charmingly and fashionably, the *kin* [of the Third Princess], the tuning of five pieces, from among a number of ways to play, she took great care with her plucking of the fifth and sixth string, which were played quite beautifully and clearly.

*Kaerigoe* 返り声 in *gagaku* is the change of mode from *ryo* (major) to *richi* (minor), or *vice-versa*. We could tell in which direction the change went if we knew the original mode of *Kazuragi*, but there is no need for supposition because the next phrase says that the change is to *richi*, or minor mode. Notice that "everyone" changed their tuning. All the performers on instruments of the *koto* family had to stop and move bridges so that

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<sup>94</sup> NKBZ, p. 201.

<sup>95</sup> NKBZ, p. 201.

their instruments now produced the proper scales. This process takes a few minutes; on the thirteen-stringed *sō no koto*, more than two octaves is covered, and five or six of the strings (two or three notes per octave) might have to be re-tuned.

A note in the source text<sup>96</sup> attempts to explain the reference to “five pieces.” According to ancient annotations, the pieces were said to be *Kaide* 掻手 (plucking [of strings]), *Katatari* 片垂 (one side hanging), *Suiubyō* 水宇瓶 (water-eaves-bottle), *Sōgaiha* 蒼海波 (blue ocean waves), and *Ganmei* 雁鳴 (the cry of the wild goose), but modern scholars are unclear on these. There is also an explanation that these are related to a famous melody *Koka* 胡笳, “the foreign flute.” Incidentally, playing *Koka* on the *koto* is mentioned in the *wakana-ge* chapter of *Genji*, in a section preceding that chosen for the translations. The phrase used is *koto wa koka no shirabe* 琴は胡笳の調べ (tuning the *koto* for the song *Koka*).

The significance of the fifth and sixth string is possibly that they are farthest from the performer, and therefore require a slightly more awkward hand position to play them. It may also be that the notes on those strings figured prominently in the melody. In the minor-mode tuning for the standard 7-string Chinese *qin* (closely resembling the *wagon*), these two notes would have been the third (flatted) and fifth notes of our scale. Unfortunately, we have no evidence of exactly what the tuning would have been in Japan at this time.

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<sup>96</sup> NKBZ, p. 201.

春秋よろづの物に通へる調べにて、通はしわたしつつ弾きたまふ<sup>97</sup>

They played in a mode suitable for all the phenomena of spring and autumn.

Remember that modes are associated with seasons. This sentence is a corresponding idea to the previous mention of “the way to tune in order to show a change of season, or the cold or warmth of the air.” The “phenomena” (*mono*) here are weather-related. I believe the implication is not that the new mode, *richi*, is suitable to express all seasons, but rather that the performers in this case always choose the appropriate mode for the season that corresponds to the melody or words.

心しらひ、教へきこえたまふさま違へず、いとよくわきまへたまへるを、  
いとうつくしく、おもだたく思ひきこえたまふ<sup>98</sup>

Genji thought that the care [with which the Third Princess played] did not differ from the way she had been taught. It was very beautiful and credit-worthy.

*Omodatashi* is “honorable” or “credit-worthy.” Is Genji here crediting the Third Princess for her performance, or himself as a teacher? The first part of the sentence could imply either interpretation, or both.

宮のおはします御几帳のそばより御笛を奉る。うち笑ひたまひてとりたまふ。いみじき高麗笛なり<sup>99</sup>

From the princess’s curtain, he [Genji] was offered a flute. He smiled and took it. It was a very fine Korean flute.

The flute is a *komabue*, the smallest of the flutes used in *gagaku*. Tyler points out that the flute has six holes, but in fact all *gagaku* flutes—*kagurabue*, *ryūteki*, the more modern *nōkan*, and this one—have six holes.

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<sup>97</sup> NKBZ, p. 201.

<sup>98</sup> NKBZ, p. 201.

<sup>99</sup> NKBZ, p. 201.



すこし吹き鳴らしたまへば、皆立ち出でたまふほどに、大将立ち止まりたまひて、御子の持ちたまへる笛を取りて、いみじくおもしろく吹き立てたまへるが、いとめでたく聞こゆれば、いづれも いづれも、皆御手を離れぬものの伝へ伝へ、いと二なくのみあるにてぞ、わが御才のほど、ありがたく思し知られける<sup>100</sup>

Genji played it a little. Everyone was getting up to leave, when Yūgiri stopped, picked up his son's flute, and played it quite wonderfully. Genji had taught each one of them, and he thought that there was no one to compare with them. He felt quite grateful that he had so much talent [as a teacher].

This is further evidence that the narrator is emphasizing Genji's vanity, rather than his excellence in all things.

道すがら、箏の琴の変りていみじかりつる音も耳につきて、恋しくおぼえたまふ<sup>101</sup>

On the way, the unusual, marvelous sounds of the *sō no koto* echoed in Yūgiri's ears, and he did not think of her dispassionately.

Previously Yūgiri had enjoyed the *kin* playing of the Third Princess. Here, though, he is thinking fondly of Murasaki.

The musical references in this chapter continue on for many pages, and similar examples can be found in many other chapters. The foregoing is a representative view of Murasaki Shikibu's portrayal of music. Musical performance is woven into the very fabric of the story—the culture, the values, the *zeitgeist*, and especially the relationships.

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<sup>100</sup> NKBZ, pp. 202-203.

<sup>101</sup> NKBZ, p. 203.

## PERFORMANCE

At the root of the word *performance* is the meaning *to do* or *to carry out*. This root meaning allows the word to be used with two widely differing connotations. One sense is evident in the phrase “job performance.” The sense that is relevant to the subject at hand, though, is “public performance”: doing something, most frequently of an artistic nature—here, making music—for the sake of an audience.

Schechner<sup>102</sup> has examined in detail, from a sociological point of view but always with one eye on theatrical acting, the characteristics of different kinds of performance. For example, he compares and contrasts play, games, sports, theater, and ritual, and finds the commonalities as striking as the differences. In common is the idea that all these activities can be considered “non-productive”: they produce pleasure, rather than goods. A significant difference would be the presence or absence of an audience. Theater almost always requires spectators, play requires none, and the other types of performance might or might not need them.

Musical performance in *Genji* at times resembles play, when a lone person plays an instrument for his own amusement and there is no audience present. At other times it is ritual, the highly-regulated public performance of *shintō* music and dance. Most often, though, it is a kind of theater, whether a small chamber group or a large gathering of many players, with an audience deeply involved and the players keenly aware of themselves, the other players, and the audience. A few characteristics of these performances as they pertain to *Genji* are:

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<sup>102</sup> Schechner 2003.

- Who is playing? What is their age, gender, and social status?
- If there are multiple players, what are their relationships?
- Where is the performance?
- What is the reason for the performance?
- Who plays what instruments?

All these questions might be subsumed under the one question, “What is the *meaning* of the performance?” That question cannot be answered, though, without addressing at least the aspects listed above. Of course, many other aspects could be investigated, such as how performers are dressed or what postures they assume. *Genji* goes into great detail about dress and some detail about posture, but I do not address those features here.

Each of the performers has somehow learned to play that instrument. How they have learned and how they have been taught will be examined in the next section, *Teaching*.

### *Who is playing?*

If descriptions of the sound of just a few notes being blown or plucked on an instrument are excluded and performance is considered to be any scene of extended or focused music production, then there are well over fifty such performance scenes in *Genji*.<sup>103</sup> Examples can be found in *Genji* of music being performed by people of almost any age, and by either gender, although certain instruments are more frequently played by one sex, as described below.

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<sup>103</sup> Nakagawa 2007, p. 239.

The characters in the novel are virtually all members of, or relatives of members of, the Imperial court, so the social status of these performers is usually high. Within this upper class, though, there is a range of roles and statuses, from people low in the court hierarchy all the way up to the Emperor himself. Further, there are instances of performances by people outside the court. For example, the young woman Akashi, who eventually becomes one of Genji's women, is initially described as a miserable country girl, and her father is simply a *nyūdō* 入道, a lay priest. In the *Akashi* chapter, Genji and the *nyūdō* exchange both actual performance and thoughts on performance.

The idea of “professional musician” in *Genji* differs from the modern idea. These were not musicians who went around the city or country making their livelihood by playing, but rather members of the Imperial court specifically trained to take part in these rituals and provide the music. Besides the many instances of ritual music performed by these usually unnamed people, the musical scenes in *Genji* usually involved Genji himself as the main character, either as a performer demonstrating his talent on an instrument, as a teacher, giving advice to or lecturing a student or referring to a previous or future episode of teaching, or as an audience member, enjoying the playing of one or more of the other important characters—typically his women, his son, his closest friends, and so forth.

*If there are multiple players, what are their relationships?*

In a concert—that is, two or more performers—the lead players were always key characters in the novel. For example, in the translated excerpt, the four string players are

women close to Genji. The accompaniment is provided by unnamed young people, certainly members of the court but not central to the story.

The existence of an intimate relationship between two, or among three or more, of the performers adds depth and complexity to the bare fact of producing music. The concert under examination is interesting in this regard. A musician always has a primary concern with playing the music correctly and appropriately. Here, though, there are additional concerns layered upon the primary one, and they all have Genji at their core. The reader might imagine the women having thoughts such as: “Does Genji approve of the way I am playing? If so, can I play well enough to induce him to spend more time with me, at the expense of his other women? Are any of the other women jealous of my playing, and if so, what will they do about it? Are they jealous of the time Genji spent teaching me?” and so on. These concerns might at first glance seem vain, but they are the kinds of worries the female characters in *Genji* constantly exhibit.

### *Where is the performance?*

There are two main settings for music, with some notable exceptions. Larger public ritual (shintō or celebratory) performances take place on the palace grounds or before a shrine. Informal, intimate performances could occur anywhere, but most are in or close to the various ladies’ chambers, since the ladies almost never left those locations. The distinction between public and private is echoed in the size of these spaces, the large rituals being in the open and the private ones frequently being in small, enclosed areas.

A seeming exception occurs in the *Suma* chapter of *Genji*, where Genji plays the *kin* far from palace and city. Compared to the landlocked city (Kyoto), Suma is wild,

wide open, the sound of wind and the waves constantly present. At first reading one might say Genji is doing a private performance in a public space. Closer reading reveals that, from Genji's point of view, the space is narrow: not only is he indoors when playing, but he is emotionally hemmed in by the exile, his detachment from the city and friends and family.

*What is the reason for the performance?*

In a poem, 17th-century English author William Congreve famously said, "Music hath charms to soothe a savage breast." Music has a great many more properties, and many of these are exhibited in *Genji*.

In a concert—again, two or more people playing—there is always an audience, even if it is only the performers themselves listening to the other performers. The reason for solo playing differs depending on whether there is an known audience or not. When a character in *Genji* plays an instrument alone, with no acknowledged audience, it is always for one of two reasons. First, the character may be practicing. Second, and most commonly, the character is expressing what Nakagawa calls *koshū no hitorigoto* 孤愁の一人琴 (solo *koto* in lonely contemplation)<sup>104</sup>. The power of music to give form to inexpressible feelings is a frequent component of the *mono no aware* or *yūgen* of a scene, as when we read of Genji's performance in exile, especially when coupled with the untamed sound of wind and waves.

In *Genji* there are organized picture competitions (*eaawase*) and poetry competitions (*utaawase*), but nothing like a musical competition. The point of a

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<sup>104</sup> Nakagawa 2007, p. 108.

competition is to demonstrate mastery of an art form. The reasons for a musical performance such as the four-woman concert described above are many-layered. On the surface, it is associated with a rehearsal for a birthday performance in honor of the Emperor. Underneath, and explicit in the text, it is an opportunity for Genji to glory in the results of his teaching, and to arrange for (one might almost say force) his women to cooperate closely. Chamber music, of which this is an example, provides an opportunity for a small group to relax and enjoy themselves in the production of music. In this scene, though, implicit in the text is a tension present in some of the women, most especially the Third Princess in her nervousness about playing correctly, and in Murasaki as she wonders why Genji has not spent more time teaching her.

*Who plays what instruments?*

The only instrument which has a strong gender bias in *Genji* is the flute: played as a solo instrument in “lonely contemplation,” it is always played by men. In concerts where the flute player or players are explicitly mentioned, it is also always one or more male characters. Lack of proof is not proof of lack, but in the novel we have only the text from which to judge, and the text gives no evidence of female flute players.

## TEACHING

In the Heian era, music was taught by rote, hands-on, experientially, personally. There were two main reasons for this. First, for no instrument was there anything analogous to the modern staff-based musical score, which accurately shows pitches and time durations. At most, there was a kind of tablature for some of the instruments. The holes of a flute, the strings of a *koto*, the frets of a *biwa*, these had individual names that for some pieces were written down in the correct sequence, usually alongside the lyrics to a song. Not only did such notation not accurately show the duration of the notes, in reality it did not indicate notes, but rather holes or strings. It was the sequence of these--holes closed, or strings plucked--that determined the song, not the absolute pitch or duration of the notes produced.

Second, it was simply tradition for a musician to learn directly from another musician. Just as one learns calligraphy by imitating a teacher's model, one can learn an instrument by closely following the teacher's playing. It may be difficult to imagine a modern piano teacher, for example, sitting next to her student and asking the student to mimic what she does with her hands, but that is essentially how instruction was carried out. In fact, this is how instruction on the traditional instruments is still carried out. The student learns the *shōga* (solfège) names of the notes of his instrument, and practices without the instrument, singing those syllables, until the piece is memorized. The teacher demonstrates the how the syllables relate to the blowing or plucking of the instrument. Then the student practices producing those same sounds on the instrument, while the instructor sings the syllables, sometimes beating the rhythm at the same time.



In appreciating the musical literary themes of *Genji*, it is not as important to understand the exact methodology of teaching as it is to understand what teaching tells us about characters' relationships. The translation is replete with comments showing that Genji did a great deal of teaching, had ability as a teacher, and took pride in the results, basking in the glow of their accomplishments, which become his accomplishments. Husband instructing wife or lover is not, however, the only mode of teaching in Genji.

### *Parent teaching child*

When talking about Genji's relationship with the young Murasaki, then still a child, the narrator says he “gave her all sorts of lessons.”<sup>105</sup> This is an example of a parent teaching a child, although the girl will eventually be one of Genji's wives and lovers. Another example occurs in the chapter *Hashihime* 橋姫 (Maiden of the bridge). A prince (Hachinomiya 八宮, the Eighth Prince, younger brother of Genji), distraught because his wife has died, withdraws emotionally from the world. He longs to end it all, but has two beautiful daughters he must care for. Despite his hermit-like behavior, he takes time to teach his daughters music in addition to poetry, and calligraphy:

Sutra text in one hand, he now chanted the scriptures and now sang them their solfège. The elder had a *biwa* and the younger a *sō no koto*, and they were so used to playing together that they did not sound bad at all; in fact, they did very nicely.<sup>106</sup>

“Very nicely” might be an understatement, judging from a later remark by a Monk living nearby who hears them:

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<sup>105</sup> Tyler 2001, p. 137.

<sup>106</sup> Tyler 2001, p. 831.

“...when his daughters play together against the noise of the rushing river, one cannot help thinking of Paradise.”<sup>107</sup>

The river, by the way, is the Uji River, south of Kyoto. A few years later, Kaoru (ostensibly Genji's son by the Third princess, but really the son of Kashiwagi) visits and hears the daughters playing together:

He found it when he entered to be a *biwa* tuned to the *ōshiki* mode. The quite ordinary playing sounded unfamiliar in this setting, and the notes struck on the return of the plectrum were beautifully clean. The *sō no koto*, which came in now and again, had a touching, graceful tone.<sup>108</sup>

The father's teaching has apparently been quite thorough; the daughters are talented and able. This chapter makes it clear that the father is talented, too:

“His Highness began plucking the *kin*, to profoundly moving effect; no doubt the wind through the mountain pines sustained his music.”<sup>109</sup>

Some notes on this little scene are appropriate. First, the last quotation alludes to a *rōei*:

琴のねこ峰の松風かよふなりいづれのをよりしらべそめけむ<sup>110</sup>

In Rimer and Chaves' translation:

At the sound of the koto  
The pine breezes from the mountain peaks  
Begin to sound;  
From which string, which summit  
Do these echoes begin?”<sup>111</sup>

The *ōshiki* 黄鐘 mode refers to a *ritsu* scale thought to have begun on the note A.

Teaching is not restricted to male-to-female; examples of male-to-male influence, if not direct teaching, are common. In the Takekawa 竹河 (Bamboo river) chapter, we

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<sup>107</sup> Tyler 2001, p. 833.

<sup>108</sup> Tyler 2001, p. 836.

<sup>109</sup> Tyler 2001, p. 843.

<sup>110</sup> *wakan rōeishū* 469.

<sup>111</sup> Rimer and Chaves 1997, p. 143.

hear Tamakazura say to Kaoru, regarding his playing of the wagon, “They say that you have His Excellency the late Chancellor's touch.”<sup>112</sup> That is, he plays like Tō no Chūjō, Kaoru's grandfather. There is a hidden irony here: at this point in the novel, neither Kaoru nor Tamakazura know that Tō no Chūjō is Kaoru's grandfather.

Kaoru was raised in the same environment where both Tō no Chūjō and Genji lived. It has already been established that those two are expert musicians. No doubt Kaoru's playing was influenced by them, if they did not teach him directly. Lending credence to this is another comment of Tamakazura's a few lines later: “It is extraordinary how this young man reminds me of the late Intendant, and his touch on the instrument is just the same.”<sup>113</sup> The Intendant is Kashiwagi, Tō no Chūjō's son, Kaoru's actual father.

In the “Wakana I” chapter preceding the translated section, the narrator makes this comment about Kashiwagi's playing of the wagon:

[He] indeed played it very nicely--in fact, hardly less well than his father. Everyone was deeply impressed, because although a son may indeed inherit his father's skill, it hardly seemed possible to do so to that degree.<sup>114</sup>

The comment implies that talent may be inherited—that is, passed down via a blood relationship, rather than being directly taught.

It is also clear that male associates, growing up in close proximity and often performing music together, influenced each other's playing. In the same chapter, Genji plays a *kin*, his friend Tō no Chūjō plays a *wagon*, and his brother Hotaru hyōbukyō no miya 螢兵部卿宮 (Firefly Prince of War) plays a *biwa*: “Genji found His Excellency's

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<sup>112</sup> Tyler 2001, p. 809.

<sup>113</sup> Tyler 2001, p. 809.

<sup>114</sup> Tyler 2001, p. 591.

[that is, Tō no Chūjō's] music very fine and moving indeed, perhaps because they had been playing so long together.”<sup>115</sup>

An example of female-to-female teaching is found in Tokonatsu 常夏 (Pink), where we learn this tantalizing tidbit about Tamakazura: “. . . she had learned to play only in her distant province, from an ancient woman who claimed a vague connection with the City and with the imperial house, . . .”<sup>116</sup>. An even clearer case, not mentioned explicitly in the text but easily inferred since both mother and daughter are shown to have talent, is the instruction we can imagine the Akashi Lady giving to her daughter.

These examples illuminate the one-on-one, personal way in which teaching was accomplished, but even more so, with few exceptions, show the close relationships that existed between teacher and student. Parent to child, husband to wife, friend to friend, lover to lover—any of these relationships could be, and were, behind the transmission of musical knowledge and ability.

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<sup>115</sup> Tyler 2001, p. 606.

<sup>116</sup> Tyler 2001, pp. 470-71.

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APPENDIX A  
FICTIONAL SOURCES



This section looks at a number of Japanese writings, pre-dating *Genji*, which discuss or involve music and with which it can be assumed that Murasaki Shikibu was familiar.

### *Kojiki*

Japan's oldest chronicle *Kojiki* 古事記 (ancient matters chronicle), dating from the early 700's, a major source for its foundation myths, has perhaps the first significant reference to music and its power to move the spirit. In a key episode Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess, hides in a cave, creating darkness throughout the land. Hundreds of deities assemble and try to figure out how to lure her from the cave. Various symbolic items are hung around the entrance of the cave, but what finally induces the Goddess to emerge is *music*, specifically the bawdy dance of Uzume (full name Ame no Uzume no mikoto 天宇受売命):

Overturing a bucket before the door of the Heavenly Rock-Cave, she stamped thunderously and, becoming divinely possessed, exposed her breasts and pushed her skirt band down to her genitals. Then the Plain of High Heaven shook as the eight hundred myriad deities laughed at once.

At this time, Amaterasu, thinking this strange, opened a crack in the door of the Heavenly Rock-Cave and said from within, "...Why is it that Uzume, Heavenly Woman-with-Hair-Piece, sings and dances and all the eight hundred myriad deities laugh?"<sup>117</sup>

There are three noteworthy features of this episode. Rather than use conversation to persuade the Goddess to come out, the deities' first recourse is to resort to music. In this case the instrument is the voice, accompanied by the rhythm of dancing, although we could consider the overturned bucket to be a kind of a drum, amplifying the beat of Uzume's feet. Next, the reaction of the deities to this dance is to laugh. It might be assumed that the cause of the laughter is the bawdiness of the dance. Elsewhere in *Kojiki*,

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<sup>117</sup> Shirane 2007, p. 29, based on translation by Donald Philippi.

though, there are numerous references to genitals, but these mentions are not accompanied by laughter. I would like to think that here the laughter is being generated by the combination of the effect of the music and Uzume's performance. That is, simple exhibitionism on her part would not have produced the same effect. Finally, notice that she dances as "divinely possessed." There is a long tradition, stemming from at least ancient Greek times, of viewing true musical artists as divinely inspired, and music as being able to inspire the audience. A document written in the Middle East at about 300 A.D. says that "by some tunes the Bacchic frenzy is aroused,"<sup>118</sup> Bacchus (or Dionysus) being the Greek god of ecstasy and ritual madness. To dismiss Uzume's divine possession as routine simply because she is already a kind of goddess is to ignore the extraordinary transcendent state that music can induce in both performer and listener.

Outside the purely mythological stories, there is even mention of specific instruments in what is intended to be a historical context. References to the *koto* and the *biwa* abound. For example, this passage associates the playing of a *koto*-like instrument with the context of the Imperial court:

The emperor was playing the cither [zither], . . . in order to seek the divine will. Then the empress became divinely possessed . . . "This is a dreadful thing. My lord, continue to play the cither!" Finally, then, he drew the cither to him and began to play reluctantly. After a while, the sound of the cither stopped. When they raised the lights, they saw that he was dead.<sup>119</sup>

I say "*koto*-like" because the word in the text is 琴, which may have meant any of the string instruments of the *koto* family.

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<sup>118</sup> Clarke et al. 2003, p. 139.

<sup>119</sup> Philippi 1968, pp. 257-58.

In the next passage, which occurs in a section about Emperor Nintoku 仁徳天皇 (313-399), the lute—a *biwa*—and its sound are mentioned, and are likened to the sound of plants rustling in the water.

. . . So the tree was cut down and made into a vessel, and a very swift-going vessel it was. At the time, this vessel was called by the name of Karanu. So with this vessel the water of the Island of Ahaji was drawn morning and evening, and presented as the great august water. The broken [pieces] of this vessel were used [as fuel] to burn salt and the pieces of wood that remained over from the burning were made into a lute, whose sound re-echoed seven miles [off]. So [some one] sang, saying: "Karanu was burnt [as fuel] for salt; the remainder was made into a lute; oh! when struck, it sounds like the wet plants standing rocked on the reefs in the middle of the harbour, the harbour of Yura."<sup>120</sup>

*Man'yōshū*

*Man'yōshū* 万葉集 (collection of myriad leaves) is a Nara Era (8th-century) collection of over 4,500 Japanese poems, most written in the 7th and 8th centuries.<sup>121</sup> It contains numerous references to instruments, particularly *koto* and flute. Here is one such poem:

琴取者 嘆先立 盖毛 琴之下樋尔 孀哉匿有<sup>122</sup> (original)

琴取れば嘆き先立つけだしくも琴の下樋に妻や隠れる (*kundoku*)

When I take the *koto*, sobs break forth.  
Can it be that in its hollow space the spirit of my wife is hiding?

*Kundoku* 訓読 is the Japanese reading of the original Chinese-style poem. *Koto* here probably refers to the *qin*, the Chinese instrument on which the *koto* was based, and whose name is the origin for the Japanese pronunciation *kin*.

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<sup>120</sup> Chamberlain 1919.

<sup>121</sup> Shirane 2007, p. 60.

<sup>122</sup> *Man'yōshū* 1129.

*Wakan rōeishū*

Compiled around the time *Genji* was written, but, like *Manyōshū*, using source text dating as far back as hundreds of years prior, *Wakan rōeishū* 和漢朗詠集 is a collection of Japanese and Chinese verse. Its title means “Japanese and Chinese Poems to Sing.” The *rōei* is a kind of verse for chanting or singing, about which more is said below.

A typical poem in this collection that mentions the *kin* is a Japanese translation of a poem by Chinese poet Po Chū-i or Bai Juyi 白居易 (Japanese *Hakukyōi*), 772-846:

林鶯は何れの処にか箏の柱を吟ずる、墻柳は誰が家にか麴塵を曝せる<sup>123</sup>

One modern translation is:

The forest warblers, where are they singing  
like bridges on a zither?  
The wall-topping willows, at whose house do they expose  
their yellow “dust of malt?”<sup>124</sup>

Explanatory notes in Kawaguchi’s edition<sup>125</sup> say that this poem refers to an old *koto* song, *Shunnōden* 春鶯囀, which I translate as “The Song of the Spring Warbler.” *Ji* or *kotoji* 柱, literally “pillar,” is the usual name for a *koto* bridge. The implication of the poem is not that bridges themselves produce a bird-like sound. It is rather that the reader should be reminded of that song, and the way it sounds when played on the *koto*.

The *Wakan rōeishū* poems were widely known in Heian times. As Rimer explains<sup>126</sup>,

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<sup>123</sup> *Wakan rōeishū* 102.

<sup>124</sup> Rimer and Chaves 1997, p. 51.

<sup>125</sup> Kawaguchi 2011, p. 87.

<sup>126</sup> Rimer and Chaves 1997, p. 1.

Compiled in about 1013, the *Wakan rōei shū* still served some four hundred years later . . . as a central sourcebook for dramatists. Indeed, the *Wakan rōei shū* was memorized, memorialized, and used as a text for calligraphers, poets, and artists in every period until the early years of this century [the 1900's], giving both pleasure and service for virtually a thousand years.

The continued popularity of this poem and others through the ages lends credence to the argument that music was an integral part of the culture and mindset of the Heian aristocrat.

### *Kokinshū*

This early 10th-century collection of poetry is distinguished by its famous preface by Tsurayuki. As mentioned in the section above on Heian aesthetics, he provides a hint of the strong link between music and nature that threads its way through *Genji*.

### *Utsubo Monogatari*

Of interest because the theme of a large part of its story is the transmission and acquisition of musical knowledge and ability is *Utsubo* (sometimes read as *Utsuho*) *Monogatari* 宇津保物語, the longest surviving piece of Japanese fiction<sup>127</sup> before *Genji*. It is referred to in *Genji*, and is thought to have been written in the late 10th century<sup>128</sup>. The title is sometimes translated as “Tale of the Hollow Tree,” which refers to an episode in the story.

The first part of *Utsubo* relates the story of child prodigy Kiyowara no Toshikage 清原俊蔭. On a trip to China he is diverted by a storm to the “shores of Persia,”<sup>129</sup> where he meets the Buddha, who gives him a gift of thirty beautiful *kin*. Buddha predicts that

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<sup>127</sup> Cranston 1969, pp. 289-90.

<sup>128</sup> Kodansha 1983. *Utsubo monogatari*.

<sup>129</sup> Cranston 1969, p. 289.

Toshikage's family will prosper through music. When Toshikage returns to Japan, he has become an accomplished musician. He marries, has a daughter, and—key to the influence of this story on *Genji*—passes on the secrets of his art to her. Later, this daughter has a son, Nakatada 仲忠<sup>130</sup>, who turns out to be a musical genius, too, and the implication is that he is taught by his mother. A main theme of the story is the supremacy of art, in particular *kin* music, over commonplace worldly concerns.

There are at least one clear and a number of implied references to this story in *Genji*. The clear reference is the mention (see page 36) of going abroad to China or Korea to acquire musical knowledge. The implied references are the repeated statements about Genji training the women closest to him on the various instruments. He is described as expert on all the instruments he plays, and it is safe to assume that he “passes on the secrets of his art” to these women.

### *Ochikubo monogatari*

This story, thought to be written in the 960s or 970s<sup>131</sup>, has parallels with the European story of Cinderella. *Ochikubo monogatari* 落窪物語 means “The Tale of the Lower Room,” referring to the quarters in which an adopted and persecuted daughter lives. According to Malm<sup>132</sup>, that daughter mentions regretting not having learned to play the *qin*, the Chinese ancestor of the *koto*.

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Kodansha 1983, *Ochikubo monogatari*.

<sup>132</sup> Malm 2000, p. 194.

*Makura no sōshi*

Its title usually translated in English as the Pillow Book, *Makura no sōshi* 枕草 is a famous example of *zuihitsu* 随筆, part diary, part narrative, part random jottings. It was written just before *Genji* by Sei Shōnagon, a woman with similar standing in the Imperial court as Murasaki Shikibu. It is clear from her diaries that Murasaki Shikibu was familiar with this work. *Makura no sōshi* is replete with musical references that show us how valuable and what an integral part of court life musical performances were. I provide a translation of one such reference in Appendix E.

## APPENDIX B

### NON-FICTION WORKS



### *Gakusho yōroku: a Chinese musical digest*

In the year 735 the Japanese scholar Kibi no Makibi 吉備真備 returned from China with a ten-volume work, *gakusho yōroku* 樂書要録 (musical writing, main records) compiled under the auspices of Chinese Emperor Sokuten Bukō 則天武后 (in Chinese, *zetian wuhou*). This work is said to have had a large influence over the development of *gagaku* musical theory.<sup>133</sup>

### *Genji monogatari-specific works on music*

The most comprehensive study I have come across that deals specifically with Heian Era music is a 1934 work, reprinted in 1978, by Yamada Yoshio 山田孝雄 entitled *Genji monogatari no ongaku* 源氏物語の音楽<sup>134</sup>. Yamada examines the text of *Genji* from a literary point of view, explaining the literary effects that the author achieves by way of depiction of musical performances. He discusses just about every passage from the novel that deals with music, and analyzes them with regard to the instruments used, the modes, the songs, and so forth. Unfortunately, this work has not yet been translated into English. This thesis is compiled independently of and with little reference to that work, and covers only a small fraction of the territory explored by Yamada.

One fascinating conclusion he reaches is that, according to his research, the events in the novel take place fifty to one hundred years earlier than the age in which it was written. He bases this inference on the use of instruments and the kind of music played.

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<sup>133</sup> Britannica 2012, *gakusho yōroku*.

<sup>134</sup> Yamada 1978.

For example, he says that *imayō* 今様 and *rōei* 朗詠, both popular types of songs in Murasaki Shikibu's time, are not explicitly mentioned. As far as instruments are concerned, he claims that the *hichiriki* 篳篥 (an oboe-like instrument) and the *shakuhachi* 尺八 end-blown flute are described in *Genji*, but that they had fallen out of use by the time of Emperor Murakami 村上天皇 (926-967)<sup>135</sup>. If Yamada's theory is correct, *Genji* takes place while Tsurayuki is still alive and actively writing. This lends force to the argument that Murasaki Shikibu's characters' attitudes toward poetry and music could have been strongly influenced by Tsurayuki, especially his *Kokin wakashū* preface.

There are later works focusing specifically on the music of *Genji*, but none of them is as comprehensive as Yamada's. Here is a description of some of those works.

Nakagawa Masami 中川正美, *Genji monogatari to ongaku* 源氏物語と音楽 (2007)<sup>136</sup>. This book includes chapters such as "The musical sensibility of the Heian nobility," "Music in *monogatari* before *Genji*," "From *kin* to *wagon*" (describing a shift in emphasis on the more Japanese of the zither instruments, a shift that Yamada also claims as part of his thesis that the events in *Genji* occur earlier than previously thought), "Banquets," "Instruction, intimacy, and the solo *koto*," "Dance," and "*Saibara*" (vocal music accompanied by instruments). She has an interesting discussion of how music relates to the main themes of *Genji*, and includes an appendix with a chart of the main musical events in the novel.

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<sup>135</sup> Yamada 1978, pp. 478 and following.

<sup>136</sup> Nakagawa 2007.

Hinata Kazumasa 日向一雅, *Genji monogatari to ongaku* 源氏物語と音楽 (2011)<sup>137</sup>. This book somewhat overlaps the content of Nakagawa's, but its focus is different. For example, the author goes into some detail about the use of *tōgaku* (formal court music of specifically Chinese origin) in *Genji*. He has a long chapter about the musical themes in *Utsubo monogatari* and how he thinks they influenced *Genji*. Another important and interesting chapter on earlier influences is entitled *Hakushi Monjū kara mita Suma-kan no ongaku* 「白氏文集」から見た須磨巻の音楽. *Hakushi* is the Japanese reading of the poet Bai Juyi mentioned above.

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<sup>137</sup> Hinata 2011.

APPENDIX C  
FORMS AND USES OF HEIAN MUSIC

This section describes the genres into which the music of this era is usually classified.

*The Public vs. the Private: Hare and Ke*

Heian music can be handily divided into the Public and the Private realms. Public music included ritual occasions and celebrations. Private music was personal music, which could involve just one or a small number of people.

LaMarre talks about the useful concepts of *hare* 晴 and *ke* 褻, first appearing in late Heian discussions of poetry<sup>138</sup>. These terms loosely correspond to formal vs. informal. *Hare*, literally “clear,” was applied to such things as Chinese poetry and court rituals; *ke*, literally “dirty” or “hidden,” to native Japanese poetry and verses exchanged by lovers. *Hare* was official, *ke* unofficial. LaMarre writes:

*Hare* and *ke* also came to refer to the organization of the Heian residence. *Hare* designates the main entrance and the quarters where visitors were received. The practice of cloistering noble women confined women to the wings of the residence, far from the eyes of suitors or interlopers, and the wings were designated as *ke*. The elaborate, choreographed stealth of courtship brought men to the *ke* wings of residences under the cover of night, where they would attempt to woe [*sic*] their way past a series of barriers (screens, blinds, ladies-in-waiting); they would attempt to prove themselves with a series of poetic performances and encounters, the success of which depended on the quality and intensity of their music, dress, calligraphy, perfumes, poems, and passions.<sup>139</sup>

*Hare*—the public and formal—and *ke*—the private and informal—are useful words to distinguish the two realms of musical performance evident in *Genji*.

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<sup>138</sup> LaMarre 2000, p. 148.

<sup>139</sup> LaMarre 2000, p. 153.

## *Gagaku*

The oldest known continuous orchestral tradition in the world<sup>140</sup>, *gagaku* 雅楽 (“elegant music”) is the generic name for all the music of the Heian Imperial court. It comprises music from three sources: *tōgaku* 唐楽 (T’ang Dynasty music) from China, *komagaku* 高麗楽 (Korean music) from Korea, and native Japanese music, used mainly in religious (*shintō*) rituals. There is also a class of music used in Buddhist ceremonies, but it is primarily vocal and percussive—using bells, gongs, drums, etc.—rather than melodic, and will not be discussed further. The majority of *gagaku* pieces are Chinese in origin. Many of the pieces labeled as *tōgaku* or *komagaku* in fact came to China or Korea from other countries, but it is convenient to ignore those details and view them from a Japanese point of view as simply *tōgaku* or *komagaku*.

*Tōgaku* can be further subdivided into orchestral music—*kangen* 管弦 (winds and strings), and dance—*bugaku* 舞楽 (dance music). *Komagaku* consists only of dance music. The designations “left music” and “right music” were sometimes applied to *tōgaku* and *komagaku* respectively.

Song, as a category of music, does not fit neatly under the head of *gagaku*, but some of the melodies to which words were sung were derived from *gagaku*. There were three popular types of vocal music. *Rōei* 朗詠 (serene recitation) were chanted Chinese poems, the text of which is preserved in the *wakan rōeishū* mentioned above. *Saibara* 催馬楽 (urge horses music), were Japanese folk songs set to *gagaku* melodies. A third kind

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<sup>140</sup> Togi 1971, p. 5.

of song was *imayō* 今様 (the present fashion), that is, “modern” songs, what we would call popular music. *Imayō* used the same melody for many different songs.<sup>141</sup>

*Shintō* music has a number of subcategories, the most significant one being *kagura* 神楽 (*kami* music), *kami* being the native word for the divine force resident in certain natural objects, animals, and sometimes people<sup>142</sup>. *Kagura* is sometimes called *mikagura* 御神楽, the honorific prefix being used to show that this was music performed in the Imperial court, as opposed to local folk music. By the way, Uzume’s dance, mentioned above, is considered to be the origin of *shintō* music. Other kinds of religious song and dance music include:

- *yamato uta* 大和歌, which we might translate as “native Japanese song”
- *azuma asobi* 東遊, “eastern entertainment”
- *onaibiuta* 大直日歌, evening *kagura* songs in preparation for the next day’s ceremonies
- *ōuta* 大歌, “big songs”
- *ruika* 誄歌, “condolence songs,” funeral songs
- *kumeuta* 久米歌, palace guard songs, primarily dance accompanied by *wagon* (see below), no lyrics. *Kume* is evidently a family name.
- *tauta* 田歌, “field songs”

Two features of the Japanese handling of this music are particularly fascinating. First, unlike today’s modern Western classical music standard staff-based method of

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<sup>141</sup> Malm 2000, p. 101.

<sup>142</sup> Kodansha 1983, *kami*.

notating music, common to most instruments, the Japanese used different kinds of notation for different instruments. Second, original Japanese compositions leaned more toward and imitated the *komagaku* style. In fact, music by Japanese composers was not valued, and was not considered worthy of performance in the Imperial court.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Malm 2000, p. 99.



APPENDIX D  
GAGAKU INSTRUMENTS

The influence of China, in particular the T'ang Imperial court, on the development of Japanese music was huge. All the instruments and even their combinations used in *gagaku* have their origin in Chinese court music. Precursors of Japanese instruments can be found in Korean instruments, but these too were borrowed from and modeled after those from China.



Figure 1. String instruments. From left to right, a *biwa*, a 7-string *kin*, a six-string *wagon*, and a thirteen-string *sō no koto*. (Photograph in the public domain, from Wikipedia)

### *Stringed Instruments*

There were two types of stringed instruments, the lute-like *biwa*, and the *koto*, a family of instruments resembling the zither.

#### *Koto*

If you ask a Westerner to describe the characteristic sound of Japanese music, they will very likely mention the breathy, eerie, shifting tone of the *shakuhachi* (end-blown flute) or the twang of the *shamisen*, the three-string guitar-like instrument. These, however, are relative newcomers to the Japanese musical scene, the tradition of playing the *shamisen* dating from the 16th century, and the *shakuhachi*, although it had early origins, having fallen out of use during the Heian period and only revived later.<sup>144</sup> To modern Japanese, the sound that most strongly evokes a sense of the traditional and the ancient is that of the *koto* 琴.

*Koto* is both a general and a specific word. In general it refers to a family of zither-like instruments (see photograph, Figure 1). It can even refer to “string instruments,” including the *biwa*. Specifically, it is one member of this family. Both *koto* and *kin* are pronunciations of the Chinese character *qin* 琴, *koto* being a native Japanese word and *kin* being the Japanese way of saying *qin*. Depending on the number of strings, their layout, and the shape of the instrument, it is given different names. The *kin*, which confusingly uses the same character as *koto*, is considered to be the oldest of this family. It is small, and has seven strings arranged in a spreading pattern. Because of its size and the number of strings, its sound is not loud and its range is small. Notice that the

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<sup>144</sup> Kodansha 1983, *shakuhachi*.

instrument in the picture has no bridges. According to the entry on *kin* in the Shogakukan Daijisen<sup>145</sup>, the Chinese instrument had no bridges, but Malm maintains that the bridged version became the one popular in Japan.<sup>146</sup>

The instrument we now call the *koto*, also referred to as the *gakusō* 楽箏 (especially when used in *gagaku*), *sō no koto* 箏の琴 or sometimes just the *sō* 箏, is the version of this instrument which survives and is still played to the present day. It has thirteen strings and is about six feet long, is made of paulownia wood, and its relatively thin curved top encloses a large resonant chamber.

All these instruments were typically played on the floor, the performer kneeling before the instrument and plucking notes with the right hand. Today there are a number of differing traditions (called “schools”) determining the exact manner of playing, but if one can judge from the few ancient references to playing technique, a reliance on the thumb and first two fingers has not changed. Sometimes plectra, called *tsume* 爪, “nails,” were used, but sometimes the strings were plucked by the naked finger. On a bridged instrument, the left hand was used to press down on the portion of the string to the left of the bridge to modulate its pitch. This kind of modulation or introduction of change of pitch might have only been appropriate for solo or chamber (small group) performance; according to Malm, the strings past the left-hand side of the bridge were never pressed on in *gagaku*.<sup>147</sup>

What does it mean to say that the *koto* is a quintessentially characteristic Japanese instrument? It is simply traditional, meaning that its use extends far back in history?

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<sup>145</sup> Shogakukan 1998, “琴”.

<sup>146</sup> Malm 2000, p. 194.

<sup>147</sup> Malm 2000, p. 105.

Certainly *koto* music has a long and continuous history, dating from pre-Heian times to the present day. There is more involved here than tradition, however. The *koto* and its sound have symbolic meaning in Japanese culture, meaning that identifies the instrument and the sound with the essence of what it means to be Japanese. Its sound has come to be a kind of signifier of an earlier, simpler, refined, elegant, well-ordered world, an evocation of an idealized past.

Gluck has explored the construction and manipulation of national myths in Japan, focusing on personalities, social institutions, and conditions in late Meiji Japan (late 19th-early 20th-century) and how these forces shaped ideas such as the current view of an unbroken line of emperors extending back to mythological times.<sup>148</sup> Of course foundation myth writings such as *Kojiki* talk about this, but the general acceptance of such a view is relatively recent. In a similar way, although *koto* music itself has a long history, the modern valuation of it as expressing a kind of inner, ineffable quality of the Japanese character is more recent. It is in some sense a constructed myth—a selective filtering of history and literature, and at the same time a yearning for those earlier, seemingly simpler, more beautiful times.

Japanese culture has always had an emphasis on a long continuance of tradition and convention, the idea of *dentō* 伝統, and this concept is much more conservative than the same idea in the West. A strongly conservative tradition serves as a point of group identification, in this case national identity. If one is Japanese, one hears *koto* music and cannot help but think, “that is *my*, and *our*, national music.”

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<sup>148</sup> Gluck 1985.

No instrument in Western culture can be traced back so far. The United States has certain characteristic musical sounds that almost anyone in the world can immediately place as ours, and which evoke images just as strongly as the *koto* does for the Japanese. For example, the steel guitar, when played in a certain way, is inextricably linked with country music, which itself resonates with symbolic references such as the South and the blue collar worker. This instrument's history only extends back to the 1800's, in Hawai'i. The banjo, another characteristic American sound, is found as early as the 17th century. With the *koto* we are talking about an instrument with an astonishing 1300 years of history, at least. More importantly, its playing and the art and culture surrounding it have been being written about for at least that long. People continue to read, talk about, and write about *Genji*, itself a thousand years old and a prime source of references linking *koto* playing with the aesthetics of the court nobility of its day.

The *koto* has many different possible tunings. What is useful to keep in mind when reading about its use in *Genji* and visualizing how it might have been played is that it has thirteen strings whose pitch rises uniformly, with one exception, from the string farthest from the player to the string closest to her. The farthest string was usually tuned in unison with the fifth string (counting from the far side). Figure 2 shows some typical *koto* tunings.

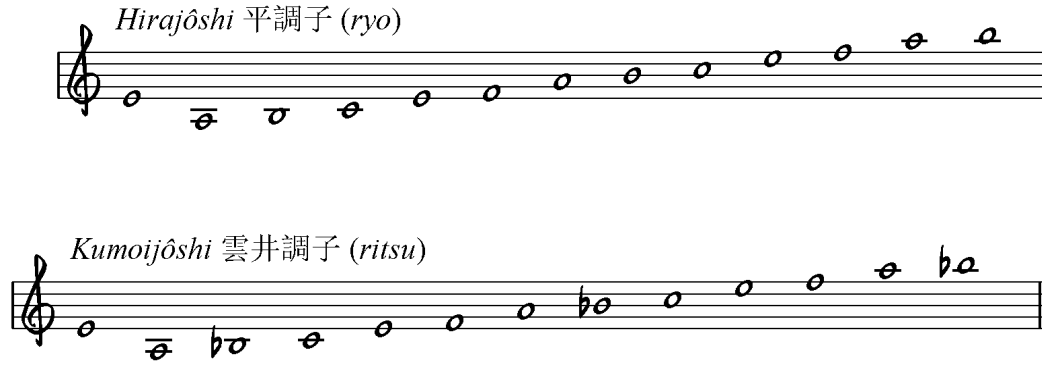


Figure 2. Typical *koto* tuning.

### *Kin*

In China there was a bridgeless seven-stringed zither called a *qin* 琴<sup>149</sup>. This instrument is probably the one the hero of *Utsubo monogatari* was instructed on. It may have been adopted directly by the Japanese in its Chinese form, and the Chinese name used (*kin* is the Japanese pronunciation of Chinese *qin*). Unfortunately, there is a serious source of confusion. The Japanese use the same character, 琴, pronounced *koto*, to mean the instrument we know as the modern *koto*, or, ambiguously, any instrument of the zither family, or even more ambiguously, any stringed instrument at all. To make matters worse, in the *Shōsōin*, the Imperial storehouse, there is a seven-stringed zither that resembles the *qin*, but it has holes for its strings like a *koto* and tuning pegs like a *biwa*<sup>150</sup>.

### *Wagon*

Although the *koto* is today considered the emblematic instrument of Heian times, symbolic of a native Japanese artistic sensibility, the *wagon* 和琴, also called the

<sup>149</sup> Malm 2000, p. 194.

<sup>150</sup> Malm 2000, p. 195.



*yamatogoto* 大和琴, is one of the only instruments that may have actually been developed in Japan at that time. The names mean “Japanese *koto*,” or perhaps more accurately “Japanese *qin*”—that is, the Japanese version of the Chinese instrument. A cursory glance at the *wagon* (see Figure 1) shows that it is derived from the *qin*, or from a Korean version of the same instrument. Compared to the *kin*, its strings are parallel to each other, the instrument is longer, providing more resonance, but its range is even narrower.

The *wagon* has only six strings and no frets, so without altering string tension while playing, it can only produce six notes. Unlike the *koto*, whose strings are tuned sequentially, rising in pitch as they near the player (except for the first string), the strings of the *wagon* are in a non-sequential order. See Figure 3. This tuning made it easy to play commonly-used arpeggios (sequences of notes strummed across the strings).

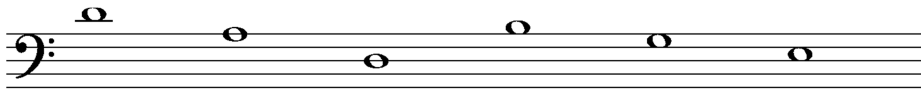


Figure 3. *Wagon* tuning.

## *Biwa*

The *biwa* 琵琶, the third stringed instrument used in *gagaku*, is a four-string lute (left-most instrument in Figure 1) derived directly from the Chinese instrument whose name uses the same characters (*pípá* in Mandarin), which in turn was derived from instruments in India. Its resemblance to the European medieval lute might not be accidental—references to lutes can be found as early as the fourth century BC, in Greece<sup>151</sup>, and similar instruments were known in Egypt—but the precise origin, evolution, and migration of the instrument are not known. In Heian times, the playing of the *biwa* was a social grace virtually equal to that of playing the *koto*. Like that instrument, references to *biwa* playing abound in *Genji* and other coeval literature.

Today the *biwa* strongly evokes the era of the *biwahōshi* 琵琶法師, blind *biwa* players who most famously played and sang the *Heike monogatari* 平家物語, the story of the 12th century battle between the Taira (the Heike) and the Minamoto clans. The rise of the *biwahōshi*, however, occurred after the period of *Genji*. During Murasaki Shikibu's time, the *biwa* was predominantly a chamber orchestra instrument, frequently used in small groups with *koto* and flute.

The *biwa* is played with a large plectrum. In *gagaku*, where it is called a *gakubiwa* 楽琵琶, it is predominantly a rhythm instrument, its sharply-defined notes being used to keep the beat. The structure of the fingerboard and frets is interesting when compared with the modern guitar. There were four frets (later, five or six), each of which

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<sup>151</sup> Higgins and Winnington-Ingram 1965, p. 62.

was quite high. Unlike the guitar, where a string can be pressed down to the fingerboard between frets, the *biwa* had to be fingered directly on a fret.

Original tuning of the *biwa* is not known with certainty today, but there is evidence from musical scores in the following centuries that the four strings were tuned something like today's cello, viola and violin. Instead of a rising sequence of open fifths, though, the first two notes appeared to be an open fifth, and the second two notes repeated these an octave above, as in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Possible *biwa* tuning.

Four frets would be just enough to produce typical scale notes from one string to the next. A modern transcription of the ancient song *Etenraku* 越天楽 shows the *biwa* playing rising arpeggios of open fifths beginning with the low E indicated in Figure 4, the top note sometimes varied by using a fret.

The fact that there were blind players raises the issue of transcription, or the lack of it: how were these performers taught? I touch on that issue in the section above on Teaching.

### *Wind Instruments*

In a *gagaku* orchestra, the winds were analogous to the string section in the modern Western orchestra. That is, they produced the main melody and the characteristic harmony.<sup>152</sup> There were three types of wind instrument: *hichiriki*, flute, and *shō*.

#### *Hichiriki*

The *hichiriki* 篳篥 (fence flageolet) is an ancient cousin of the modern oboe (Figure 5). It used a double reed, much larger and thicker than that of the oboe, giving it a similar nasal tone but much louder and richer. The original instrument had nine holes. An interesting characteristic of the *hichiriki* is that the embouchure, the way the player held the mouthpiece in his mouth, was quite loose compared to the oboe embouchure. Whereas the modern oboe is valued for its perfect constancy of pitch, which is the reason it is used in the orchestra to play the reference pitch to which other instruments tune themselves, the *hichiriki* embouchure allowed the player to produce microtonal—slightly off-key—variations in the notes.<sup>153</sup> This sliding or bending of the notes is characteristic of the sound of this instrument and of *gagaku* music.

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<sup>152</sup> Malm 2000, p. 106.

<sup>153</sup> Malm 2000, p. 109.



Figure 5. The *hichiriki* (right) and its double reed mouthpieces. Two holes on the underside are not visible in this photograph. (Picture from *Wikipedia*, public domain.)

## *Flutes*

There were three main varieties of flute, differing in length, number of holes, and country of origin. See Figure 6, on the next page. These were all simple transverse wooden bamboo tubes, played in a manner similar to the modern transverse keyless flute. When *gagaku* music was used as *shintō kagura* music, the flute used was called the *kagurabue* 神楽笛 (the flute used for *kagura*). It was also called a *yamatobue* 大和笛 (Japanese flute). It had six holes. The *ryūteki* 竜笛 (dragon flute), also simply called a *yokobue* 横笛 (transverse flute), had seven holes, was of Chinese origin, and therefore was used primarily to perform *tōgaku* pieces. The later *noh* flute resembles the *ryūteki*. The third variety was the *komabue* 高麗笛 (Korean flute), which as is obvious from its name was used to play *komagaku*. It had six holes and was the smallest instrument in the flute family.



Figure 6. Flutes. From top to bottom, *kagurabue*, *ryūteki*, and *komabue*.

## *Shō*

All the winds have close analogs with Western instruments in manner of sound production. The *shō* produces sound via free reeds like an accordion or harmonica; its shape, however, derived from that of a similar Chinese instrument, is unlike any that of any Western instrument. It is used to produce complex chordal note clusters.

The *shō* has a set of seventeen reed pipes set in a circular configuration (see Figure 7). Both its sound and its shape were said to mimic those of the mythical phoenix bird. The player blows into the mouthpiece, the large circular opening at the bottom, while closing holes in the various pipes. The *shō* was used mainly as a harmonic, as opposed to a melodic, instrument. Its repertoire consisted of standard “chords” (Figure 8) whose sound is difficult to describe in Western musical terms. I put chords in quotation marks because some of them are simply a single note, and the remainder are what we would call tone clusters, harmonically quite complex.



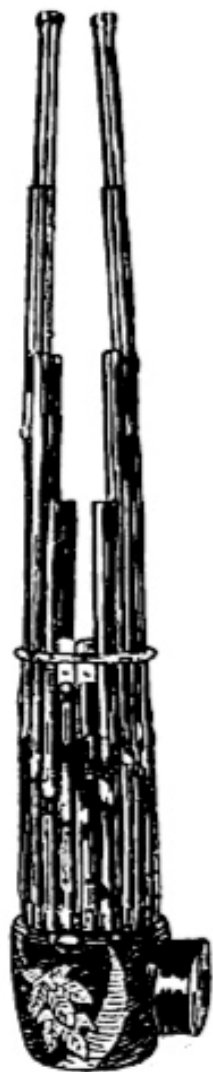


Figure 7. The *shō*.

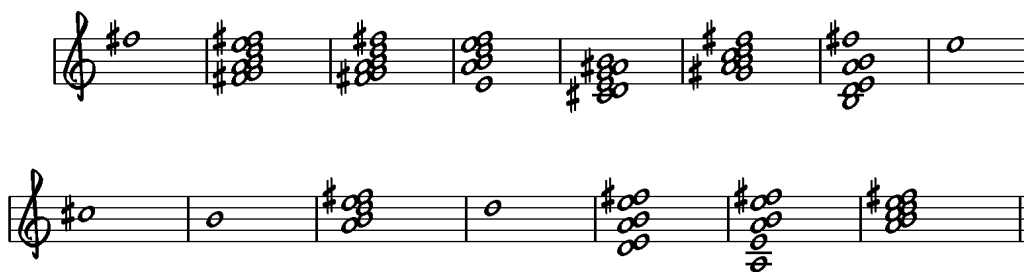


Figure 8. Chords played by the *shō*.

## Percussion

Drums of varying sizes were a standard part of *gagaku*, although they were never used in intimate or chamber music performance. The largest of the drums was the *dadaiko* 大太鼓, literally “big fat drum.” This drum was situated so that the striking surface, the skin, was vertical to and facing the performer. With its large, elaborate rim (not part of the drumhead), it could be taller than a human being. Its sound is loud, deep, and impressive. As Malm points out, “The musical tone of this drum is nil, but its psychological effect is tremendous.”<sup>154</sup> Its use was confined to *bugaku* dance.

The *taiko* 太鼓, “fat drum,” was much smaller, so much so that it could be carried in a parade. For stage performances it was suspended from a frame. Where the *dadaiko* was used for emphasis, surprise, or attention-getting, the *taiko* was the standard percussive rhythmic instrument.

A drum featured in *tōgaku* is the small *kakko* 鞆鼓 or 羯鼓 (barbarian drum), a small horizontal drum with two heads, the skins oriented vertically. The leader of a *gagaku* orchestra was the person who played the *kakko*, similar to the function of the Western orchestra’s first violinist. In *komagaku* the leader played a drum somewhat comparable to the *kakko* but of Korean origin. It was the *san no tsuzumi* 三ノ鼓 (third drum). Instead of the cylindrical shape of the *kakko*, the *san no tsuzumi* was hourglass shaped. It may have been played with the bare hands.

Another rhythmic function was performed by a bronze gong called a *shōko* 鉦鼓 (bell drum). It came in three sizes, depending on where it was used. The *taiko* and *shōko*

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<sup>154</sup> Malm 2000, p. 103.

cooperated to mark rhythmic units, the drum marking the larger units and the gong breaking those units up into single beats.

Finally, there is the *shakubyōshi* 笏拍子 (little baton-clap thing), a type of wooden clapper. It was simply two sticks struck together. During *gagaku* vocal pieces it was used by the chorus leader to mark time.<sup>155</sup> This practice has a parallel in *Genji* where a character will mark the rhythm with a fan, probably against his palm, as he follows a song.

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<sup>155</sup> Malm 2000, p. 104.

APPENDIX E  
NAMING OF INSTRUMENTS

Some Heian literature, particularly *Genji* and *Makura no sōshi*, reveal an intriguing aspect of the way musical instruments were valued, a way that to some degree still exists among musicians: the assignment of specific personal names to unique instruments. We know that today there are, for example, certain famous violins that sport interesting and exotic names, such as Ex-Vieuxtemps, The Hammer, The Red Mendelssohn, and Kreutzer Strad<sup>156</sup>. American blues guitarist B.B. King has a guitar he calls Lucille. So, too, in the Heian Imperial court, there were instruments valued so highly that they rated names. What follows is my translation of a chapter of the *Makura no sōshi* that specifically talks about this phenomenon.

*A Chapter of Makura no sōshi: Naming of Instruments*

Someone said that the Emperor had brought the *biwa* (a four-stringed lute) called “No Name.” We looked at it and touched it, but nobody played it. I plucked a string and asked the Empress, “What about its name?” “It’s quite useless, it has no name,” she replied, which seemed quite wonderful indeed.

Her majesty’s younger sister came by, and while chatting happened to say, “By the way, I have a splendid *shō* (a type of mouth organ). My late father gave it to me.” Her brother, the Buddhist priest Ryūen, said “Would you be so kind as to give it to me? At my place I have a wonderful *koto* (a long thirteen-stringed zither). Would you exchange the *shō* for it?” She did not comply, but instead continued talking about other things. Trying to get her to answer, he said this a number of times, and when she still didn’t say anything the Empress offered, “She’s thinking of the flute called ‘No Exchange’”. How

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<sup>156</sup> Ding 2013.

immensely delightful for her to say this! But the priest didn't know the name of this flute, and to me he appeared to be simply resentful. I think that this was when Her Majesty was in the Empress' office. I believe the Emperor had a flute called "No Exchange."

The Emperor had both zithers and flutes with wonderful names. I heard names for *biwa* such as Mystery Above, Pastured Horse, Dam, Wei Bridge, No Name, and so forth. I have also heard of six-stringed *kin* called Rotten Eye, Salt Kiln, and Tool. Water Dragon, Little Water Dragon, Buddhist Priest Uda, Nail Hitting, Two-Leaves—I heard of many others but have forgotten their names. As the Middle Captain was in the habit of saying about these instruments, "They're for the number one shelf in the Imperial Treasure Room."

#### *Naming of Instruments: Explanation*

The names of these instruments are all written with *kanji* (Chinese characters). In a way, this lends a kind of exotic or formal overtone to the names. *Makura no sōshi* was created at a time when informal, flowing, script-like syllabic *kana* writing was being used to write literature, particularly by women, as opposed to the more rigid and complex *kanji* used primarily by men. Although there is no exact equivalent in English to this phenomenon, I imagine that the difference to a reader of that time between words expressed in *kana* and words expressed in *kanji* might have been something like the difference to us between words of Anglo-Saxon origin and words from Latin. Latinate vocabulary, with its more complex, longer words, might correspond loosely to Japanese expressed in *kanji*.

The “Imperial Treasure Room” mentioned in the selection is likely the *shōsōin* 正倉院, a storehouse for ancient artifacts associated with the Tōdaiji temple in Nara. It still houses musical instruments from the Heian era, and although one cannot enter the building, some of its instruments are occasionally displayed at neighboring museums. The Japanese Imperial Household Agency maintains a web site specifically devoted to the *shōsōin*, and there is a searchable database complete with photos of the instruments<sup>157</sup>. Size, shape, construction materials, and approximate ages of the instruments are given, but there is no mention of instrument names.

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<sup>157</sup> Shōsōin 2013.

APPENDIX F

SONGS



If the length of the history of the *koto* exceeds that of our most traditional Western instruments, it is also true that there are Japanese musical pieces which survive from the Heian era, to which in Western music we can find no equivalents. One of the oldest melodies in European music, still sung today with what we think is the same melody, is *Greensleeves*. Old as it is, the first records of it date from the 16th century. On the other hand, many modern Japanese are familiar with the melody called *Etenraku*, which dates from at least as early as the Heian era.

### *Rōei*

As mentioned above, *rōei* 朗詠 (serene recitation) were chanted Chinese poems—that is, either originally Chinese poems, or texts imitating the Chinese literary style. It is not clear whether this chanting was actually singing—that is, using different pitches for different words—or simply monotonal droning. According to Harich-Schneider, the word in Chinese originally meant “to sing joyfully with a loud voice.”<sup>158</sup> Unfortunately only a small number of *rōei* survive; fortunately, they have been part of the *gagaku* repertoire since Heian times, and their tradition of performance may preserve many characteristics of the early music. Of course, a thousand years is a long time to maintain a playing or singing style; we can be fairly sure that the modern interpretation of these pieces, if it does reflect features of the early music, is no more than an echo of the original.

References to *rōei* are found throughout Heian works such as *Genji* and *Makura no sōshi*. For example, in *Makura no sōshi* we can read this anecdote:

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<sup>158</sup> Harich-Schneider 1965, p. 1. Much of what follows is adapted from this work.

One moonlit dawn of thick mist, some of us ladies went out walking in the garden. Her Majesty heard us and rose too, and then all the ladies came out with her, and the dawn brightened around us as we wandered the garden together. ‘Let’s go and see the Gate Watch Office!’ I suggested, and others enthusiastically joined me, but when we set off we suddenly heard the voices of a large number of senior courtiers chanting that Chinese poem about the voice of autumn—so we rushed back and hurried inside, and conversed with them from there.<sup>159</sup>

The “voice of autumn” in this poem refers to a *rōei*, reprinted below in its Japanese form, that we can find in the *wakan rōeishū*. Many other examples can be found in the text.

池冷やかにして水に三伏の夏なし  
松高うして風に一声の秋あり<sup>160</sup>

The pool is chilly, the water has nothing of the dog days of summer; the pines are tall, the wind has a sound that conjures autumn.<sup>161</sup>

Both professional musicians and members of the aristocracy sang *rōei*. Though it was sometimes a group activity, spontaneous solo performance was common. There were fixed patterns for performance, but flexibility and even improvisation was possible. These patterns were simple, so that non-professionals could perform them, but the fact that they allowed variation and nuance would have appealed to virtuosos.<sup>162</sup>

### *Saibara*

*Saibara* 催馬楽 was a kind of song quite popular with the Heian aristocrats. Their texts were derived from local (Kyoto and Nara) folk songs, and used *gagaku* melodies. They were usually performed at court gatherings, and considered to be songs of celebration. The standard instruments that accompanied these songs were *shō*, *koto*, *biwa*, and flute.

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<sup>159</sup> McKinney 2006, p. 64.

<sup>160</sup> *Wakan rōeishū* 164

<sup>161</sup> Rimer and Chaves 1997, p. 65

<sup>162</sup> Harich-Schneider 1965, pp. 9-10.

The topics of *saibara* were not lofty: they dealt with everyday scenes and common emotions, such as love. As opposed to *rōei*, which were based on Chinese poems, *saibara* were native Japanese compositions.

*Saibara* were mentioned in literature as early as 901, in the work *Sandaijitsuroku* 三代實録 (third generation true records) written by Fujiwara Tokihira 藤原時平.<sup>163</sup> The titles of a number of chapters of *Genji* are also the opening words of *saibara*, among which are *Ume ga e* 梅ヶ枝 (Plum branch), *Takekawa* 竹河 (Bamboo river), *Agemaki* 総角 (Trefoil knots), and *Azumaya* 東屋 (Eastern cottage), showing the popularity of this genre during the time the novel was written. Some other *saibara* titles were *Anatōto* 安名尊 (Peaceful distinguished noble?), *Mushiro da* 蓆田 (Straw mat field), *Yamashiro* 山城 (Mountain castle), *Minoyama* 蓑山 (Raincoat mountain), *Ise no umi* 伊勢海 (The sea at Ise), and *Koromogae* 衣更 (Changing clothes [ for the season]). Here are the lyrics to *Koromogae*:

*Koromogae – sen ya sha kindachi*  
*waga kinu wa*  
*no hara shi no hara*  
*hagi no hana suri – ya sha kindachi ya*

The syllables after the dashes are not exactly words, but more like “heave-ho” type of filler. *Kindachi* is an abbreviation of *kimitchi*, “you all.” Most Japanese poetry of this time uses lines of either five or seven syllables, and the *saibara* is no different: notice that the number of syllables per line, apart from the filler syllables, is 5-5-7-7. An approximate translation of the verse is:

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<sup>163</sup> Harich-Schneider 1952, p. 399.

Let us exchange our garments  
This silk of mine  
Free field, bushy field  
Autumn clover pressed its form<sup>164</sup>

### *Imayō*

*Imayō* 今様 ([songs in the] present fashion) were a type of vocal music. They had two sources. One was *wasan* 和讃, simple hymns created by evangelical Buddhist priests for their missionary work.<sup>165</sup> A second source was the layering of a poem on a piece of orchestral music. Melodies were taught and learned by singing solfège (a kind of do-re-mi nonsense syllable), but the rhythm and phrasing of a melody might easily have suggested a poem whose words would fit it. Doing so would have eased the burden of learning, and in the process produced a new song using an old melody. In this way a number of different songs using the same melody but different poems became *imayō*.

### *Song accompaniment*

The rhythmic accompaniment for *rōei*, *saibara*, and *imayō* was usually a wooden clapper, the *shakubyōshi*, instead of a drum. The melody sometimes was played on the *shō*.

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<sup>164</sup> Harich-Schneider 1952, p. 400.

<sup>165</sup> Malm 2000, p. 100.

APPENDIX G  
MUSICAL THEORY

To the untrained Western listener, traditional Japanese music sounds simply alien. One reason for this is the use of instruments which differ greatly in range, tone, and manner of playing from the instruments we are used to hearing in Western orchestras or bands. A second reason, just as significant in terms of lending this alien quality to the music, is Japanese musical theory—that is, the Japanese conception of scale, tonality, and harmony. Each of these differs from the analogous Western (European) concept.

A complete treatment of Japanese musical theory would occupy volumes. The Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians devotes eight complex figures and almost 3,000 words to just the Japanese concept of “mode.”<sup>166</sup> Mode is closely allied with the idea of scale; the distinctions are not critical here. What is valuable to know for the purpose of reading and understanding references to this word in translations of *Genji* is that the difference between the two modes called *ryo* and *richi* (or *ritsu*) corresponds loosely to the difference between Western major and minor scales.

### *Melody and Transposition*

One fascinating property about the perception of these scales by the Heian audience is that transposition of a melody is considered to produce a different melody. This is quite different from the Western conception of transposition. For us, a tune remains the same no matter what key it is sung or performed in. A melody is characterized by the time duration of each note and, given the first note of the song, the pattern of interval jumps from one note to the next. Part of the reason Western melodies are more or less immune

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<sup>166</sup> Powers 1980.

to key change is our use of the well-tempered chromatic scale, which causes identical intervals to sound the same no matter what notes they begin from.

It may be going too far to claim that Heian musical theory deems the difference of starting note, given the same sequence of intervals, to signal an *entirely* different melody. Nevertheless, their theory is much more sensitive to change of key than ours is. It would probably be more accurate to say that the combination of starting note plus mode is more recognizable to the Heian ear than our change of key is to us. I say “is” because this phenomenon still exists in modern-day performance of *gagaku*. This may be due in part to their use of perfect, as opposed to well-tempered, tuning, which results in identical intervals not having the same sound. It may also reflect on the way “melody” is defined. Consider a *koto* melody, for example. Rather than focusing on the starting note and proceeding by interval jumps—what the melody *sounds* like—a *gagaku* melody is defined instead by the pattern of strings plucked—that is, what the performer physically *does*. Changing the *koto*’s tuning, but plucking the same sequence of strings, produces what to us is a slightly different melody, not just transposed but possibly with some notes changed. Again, it is not the notes but the mechanical sequence of strings plucked which define the tune.<sup>167</sup> The “same” piece starting on a different note—using a different tuning—is called a *watarimono* 渡り物, a piece that has “crossed over.”<sup>168</sup> Incidentally, scales may be changed within the set of three *ryo* modes or *richi* modes, but are not changed across those sets. This makes sense in light of considering *ryo* and *richi* to signify major and minor. The Western ear hears essentially no difference in, say, a

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<sup>167</sup> Powers 1980, p. 445.

<sup>168</sup> Malm 1959, p. 102.

minor-key melody if it is transposed to another minor key, but playing it in a major mode would sound entirely wrong.

Thus when we see a reference in *Genji* to *ryo* or *ritsu* (also read as *richi*), we cannot be sure exactly what scale was being used, but we can get a sense of a musical quality that we should think of as something like major versus minor. We should keep in mind, though, that the connotations of these distinctions is quite different in Western music. We tend to think of major scales as happy, bright, positive, and minor scales as gloomy, dark, and mysterious. Such associations did not exist for the Japanese.

#### *Structure of Pieces: Jo-ha-kyū*

Western music, especially classical music but also modern song, and in fact much of Western literature, is frequently analyzed as a three-part structure. The *sonata-allegro* form has been popular since the classical (late 1700's) period. This form considers a piece of music as having an *exposition*, a *development*, and a *recapitulation*. The precise definition of these terms is not important here; the fact that music is seen to have a tri-partite structure is what is of interest. Loosely speaking we can say that there is an introduction, followed by a development, and then a closing section. Literature, including movies and plays, frequently use a three-act structure which mimics the sonata-allegro form. Roots of this structure can be found in Aristotle's *Poetics*, where he describes a plot as having a beginning, a middle, and an end. The three-part "song form" is very common in European and American popular song and opera.

A similar tripartite concept was developed independently in Japan. Though its most famous exponent was Zeami, in his *Fūshikaden* 風姿花伝 (written around 1400),



the idea of *jo-ha-kyū* 序破急 had its roots in *gagaku*. The characters mean approximately “introduction, breaking, hurry.” The phrase is most often applied to the structure of drama, but it applies equally well to musical structure.

The *jo* section in typical *gagaku* orchestral music might literally begin with an introductory piece, a *netori* 音取, which sets the mode for what follows.<sup>169</sup> Instruments would enter, one by one, each playing their melody or rhythm. It is a structural piece which serves somewhat the same purpose as much more individual tuning-up done just before a performance by a Western orchestra.

The main body of the piece, the *ha* section, might open with a solo flute plus percussion. This would be followed by the rest of the winds, with the flutes and *hichiriki* playing the same melody. There were fixed points in the music, certain beats of certain measures, where standard events happened: arpeggios were played, or certain instruments came in with their melodies.<sup>170</sup> Because this central section was longer than the introductory *jo* or the closing *kyū*, it could itself be considered as having its own *jo*, *ha*, and *kyū* sections.

A characteristic of *gagaku* that strikes the Western ear is its general lack of harmony. By this I do not mean that the music was discordant, although chords played on the *shō* might be described this way. Rather, the melodic line is played in approximate unison, varying according to the idioms of the individual instruments.

Ethnomusicologists refer to this sort of texture as “heterophony.”<sup>171</sup> Even without harmonized melody, though, the tonal quality was rich, partly because of the loudness

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<sup>169</sup> Malm 2000, p. 116.

<sup>170</sup> Malm 2000, p. 117.

<sup>171</sup> Cooke 1980, p. 537.

and overtone production of the instruments and partly due to the complex tone clusters of the *shō*.

The third section, the *kyū*, usually did involve a literal hurrying as the speed of the piece increased. There was a coda—a final section—called a *tomede* 止手 (or 留手), played by the lead musicians. The tonal richness would gradually reduce as instruments dropped out, the *shō* playing only a few single notes rather than tone clusters, until finally just the *biwa* and *gakusō* (*koto*) would play a pattern reiterating the mode. The last note, the tonic, would be struck by the *gakusō*.

APPENDIX H  
FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

During my study of this music I thought of two questions that I did not see addressed anywhere, at least in the works in this bibliography.

First, what was the relationship between *rōei* and music? Were the words actually sung, in the sense that we think of singing today, or chanted in a monotone and in strict rhythm, or vocalized some other way? According to Harich-Schneider, the earliest copy of *roēi* with musical notation of any kind attached was written in the Kamakura Era (1192-1333).<sup>172</sup> The notation was derived from that used to record Buddhist *shōmyō* 称名, the chanting of the name of Buddha. The problem is that there was no indication of absolute pitch, only relative indications of the rise and fall of melody. Also, *shōmyō* was rhythmically rigid, a series of beats of identical value. Harich-Schneider claimed to have reconstructed melodies for the existing *rōei*, based partly on these notations but also based on how they were sung centuries later. To do so requires a critical assumption: that we can extrapolate the melodies used many centuries later *backward* in time with any degree of confidence.

Second, why did nothing we would call a brass instrument develop in Japan? By this I mean not one literally made of brass, but rather one in which the vibrating medium is the human lip, used to excite vibrations in a tube. Elsewhere, in other cultures, such instruments developed quite early. The Hebrew Bible frequently mentions the *shofar*, a ram's horn used in a way similar to our bugle. Exact dating is difficult, but this would indicate that such an instrument existed perhaps 1500 years before the Heian period. Other cultures used animal horns or conch shells in a way similar to the bugle. A trumpet-like instrument existed in both ancient Greece (the *salpinx*) and ancient Egypt

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<sup>172</sup> Harich-Schneider 1965, p. 19.

(the *buq*, meaning “mouth”). There are clear indications that other instruments, such as the *biwa*, migrated from the Middle East to India, then to China, and finally to Korea and Japan. Why did no trumpet-like instruments make that trip? It would be interesting to see if early Chinese travelers left any record of a conscious decision *not* to borrow such an instrument. To ask why it did not develop spontaneously in Japan would, however, be almost impossible to answer.