

## **Searching for a Musical Identity: The Changing Values of Contemporary Shakuhachi Players**

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*Supported by the Honjo International Scholarship Foundation*

### **Individual and Collective Identities of Shakuhachi Players**

The media often provide us with the image of an artist, such as Picasso painting in solitary until his masterpiece is completed, or the image of Mozart alone at his piano writing is reworking the notes until they form a beautiful composition. What we often do not see are all of the behind-the-scenes negotiations and social networking that must take place in order for an artist to be recognized. But it is the romanticized "lone wolf" that appeals to people, and not the fact that artists often have social motives for choosing a musical or artistic career.

Identifying socially with a certain musical atmosphere, group, or mentor is extremely important, even an essential factor in optimizing musical and artistic development (Manturzewska 1990; Ruud 1997, Juslin & Sloboda 2001). Howard Becker (1982) built a theory around *art worlds* and explained how art operates as the result of collective work efforts--in contrast with the idea of the uniqueness and genius of the individual artist. Others have also researched the area of isolationism about the artist:

There is a real philosophical question as to whether anyone—any individual human being--can really be considered isolated or "alone." If the answer is "no," then we have to consider whether any creative process can occur without any form of interaction or social influence. For example, can there really be such a thing as a "lone" genius? Even if somebody works in physical isolation, is she or he not part of a larger discourse, and a social creature, working with a socio-historical context and tradition? Would the concept of a "genius," lone or otherwise, even exist without "others"? (Montuori and Purser, 1995, p. 4)

The point is that nothing can be created without the interaction of others. The world of *hogaku*, traditional Japanese music such as the *koto* and *shamisen*--but more specifically the *shakuhachi*, a Japanese bamboo flute--is no different. The fact that the shakuhachi world is smaller than classical or jazz worlds means that shakuhachi musicians must willfully seek out peers and others who will support them.

The shakuhachi world is divided up among various schools (*ryu*), most commonly the Tozan ryu, Myoan and Kinko schools. The Tozan ryu is built on a pyramid like structure called an *iemoto*, with the head of the organization defining the values and styles of the school. This school, founded in the early 1900s, has been greatly influenced by western notions of rhythm and structure. Another type of ryu, Myoan is associated with the Fuke Zen sect. This falls on the other side of the spectrum, which is much more spiritually, rather than musically, oriented. Myoan players often consider their playing *suizen* (blowing meditation) and focus on the *honkyoku* (solo traditional Zen pieces). The Kinko ryu falls somewhere in the middle of the two previously mentioned schools and the Kinko players play a combination of both the *komuso* (wandering flute playing monks) related honkyoku as well as modern music. The majority of shakuhachi players are associated with one of these types of styles, which dictate their informed values, practices, and rituals, which in turn all help shape the player's cultural identity.

What is it that motivates a person to perform? Essentially what makes people choose the career of a musician is a gratification of needs, including: "(a) certain emotion evoking qualities in the music itself; (b) the potentially positive feedback of the musical setting; (c) a means to explore devouring and aggressive impulses by the specific motor skills involved in playing an instrument; and (d) a degree of exhibitionism and voyeuristic impulses" (Persson 2001, p.276). To Nagel [Nagel citation] and Persson's list we can add the sheer joy of the music itself. Playing the music can feel good, both physically and spiritually. Many players are drawn to the shakuhachi through its traditional spiritual/Zen music. Early supportive relationships, such as with one's

sensei (teacher) and sempai (elder students), also play an important role. Artists often seek someone to look up to and emulate, someone who becomes for them a role model.

There is a remaining desire for both the need to express one's individualism and also feel the security of some type of collective group. A musician's identity ultimately resides in both of these areas, creating a balance that enables them to create. Some artists consider this area a safe place where they may freely express themselves; others consider it as a place where collectivism and individualism clash and foster an essential tension for truly creative art to come about. It seems that balance is a key element to maintaining a musician's identity.

For the shakuhachi musician, a final element should be added, an element that may indeed set the hogaku artist apart from most other musicians. This is the desire to explore a meditative spirit. Historically, shakuhachi music was associated less with performance and more with personal spirituality and emotional tranquility. It seems that one often-overlooked aspect of music is the meditative, spiritual and even therapeutic role it can play for the musician. Indeed, many non-Japanese players have entered the shakuhachi world via this last element. Recently, foreign players such as Dr. Riley Lee or Debbi Danbrook have used the shakuhachi in music therapy and as healing music for other people, not only the shakuhachi player. Stemming from his training in shakuhachi and yoga, Dr. Lee is also giving lectures on deep-breathing techniques.

Even though this meditative role is personal by nature, this does not negate the need for collective interaction. The meeting of like-minded people, such as other players and teachers, is a form of motivation and identity reinforcement (Blumer, 1969). Commercially speaking, if the player reaches an amateur or professional level, this collective network will also support that player financially through concert attendance and CD purchases.

Through personal interviews, participant observation, and an original reading of Japanese historical shakuhachi texts, this paper explores younger shakuhachi players in relation to group versus individual identities, as well as the intersection of the traditional image of the shakuhachi player and their changing art worlds. Drawing from the concepts of Howard Becker's (1982) *art worlds* and Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) *habitus* and *fields*, we will see how the social networks of younger players today are creating a new value system. This is forever changing the path of this traditional Japanese art.

### **Individuality and Individualism**

There seems only a subtle difference between the words "individualism" and "individuality," but herein lays a key difference when looking at the debate on collective society versus individual society. Self-assertiveness and freedom are associated with individualism. In Japanese, the equivalent of *Kojinshugi* implies juvenile behavior and selfishness (Oxford, 2001). On the other hand, individuality (*kosei*) is a "distinctive quality or character" (Oxford, 2001). I believe the positive aspects of the Western notion of individualism lay in the word *kosei* in Japanese. "This means that the Japanese are in effect denying that there is any good at all in Western individualism and that *kosei* is in fact entirely original and hence 'uniquely Japanese'" (Moeran, 1994, pp. 262-263). I don't necessarily agree with Moeran though because a growing number of younger players are placing a higher value in individuality, and often look to the west's "individualism" as a desired form of freedom.

From childhood we begin forming group identity and building *cultural capital*. Bourdieu (1984) has stated that a person begins obtaining cultural capital at the earliest stages in life and that younger people's opinions and values stem from "definitions that their elders offer them" (p.477). There are outside sanctions for those children who do not participate in the group, thus developing an appropriate group identity and learning at times that group needs come before individual needs and wants. Children are learning the accepted values of the group. They are not actually losing their individuality, but their strengths are used to the advantage of the group, so that

success is given to more than just individuals. This shows that group identity and individuality are mutually interdependent categories.

How do these previous concepts affect players of traditional musical instruments? Yokoyama Katsuya (1985), famous player and leader of a shakuhachi school, has mentioned that he stopped playing shakuhachi for a period of time because other children in the neighborhood picked on him for playing the shakuhachi and being the son of a shakuhachi player. If an adolescent played a traditional instrument, it was probably through the family influence, so there may not be a group beyond the family to identify with yet. The majority of junior high school and high school clubs are predominantly focused on western instruments. Until university time, the practice of the shakuhachi may remain more of a private activity. In university, there are more chances to meet other young people interested in traditional instruments. The club, with its relationship between sempai and *kohai* (younger students), shapes the field with its rules. However, these are often less formal than a strict iemoto setting.

From my participation and observation of university clubs, the majority of Japanese players who start in their college years seem to have the stability of a group, which can make the bond and a justification of playing a stigmatized traditional instrument in these modern times that much stronger. However, many professional performers started playing when they were very young. Group identity would probably be with the family that was supporting these activities rather than outside influences, such as a school club and sempai. In these situations a young player is learning at home, essentially carrying on a family tradition. The child would absorb a traditional playing style and his cultural identify formation would be interdependent on the family. As in Yokoyama Katsuya's case, most players have probably had a conflict with their inner and outer groups due to the nonmainstream nature of the shakuhachi. This may also be true for any young people playing an instrument if the parents have pushed them to do it. Some rebel and never come back to the music world; others may take a break, explore, and go on to become great professionals.

## Individuality within Tradition

There is no real meaning in either mere tradition or mere individuality (Ooka, 2000). In an excerpt from *Utage to koshin*, Ooka defines an artist's creativity as a clash of two conflicting themes. It is in a coexisting sphere of opposites that artists can truly express themselves:

If that [*awase*, or bringing into accord] alone were sufficient to bring forth works, nothing would be simpler. But in reality, awesome works were created only by people who, in the midst of a setting created for the sake of bringing people into accord, became painfully aware of the necessity to return to solitude, like it or not. Furthermore, strange to say, when people withdrew completely into solitude, their works lost color. Only when the will to bring oneself into accord with others and the will to return to solitude were pulling against each other did the work of a poet or writer exhibit true brilliance... What must be kept in view is the point at which the tension between these conflicting pulls hits a maximum; at that juncture we have neither a strict adherence to tradition nor an emphatic assertion of individuality. There is no real meaning in either mere tradition or mere individuality. But the area where the crests of these two waves strike each other always arouses interest, tension, and excitement (Ooka, 2000).

Ideally, through this conflict, some inner peace allows us freedom from traditional restriction; while at the same time prevents us from being forced into expressing our individuality. According to Ooka, one without the other is not where true art resides. A degree of both solitude and socialization may at times strain a person's identity, but this combination is an essential part of the creative process and a key element of a musical identity. Tradition at times may feel constraining. However, if freedom is not the norm, pure freedom leads to a state of anomie. Here is an excerpt from an interview with a famous American shakuhachi player in New York City, Ronnie Nyogetsu Seldin:

Interviewer: My experience of Japanese arts is that they are very highly structured - with a very strict hierarchy. As Westerners, we can tend to be very strong individualists. How did you find that with learning the shakuhachi?

Ronnie: Where in the West they say "Make this your own, put your own spirit into it" -- a revolution where you turn a thing on its head -- in the East they look for evolution -- a gradual, natural change. This sort of change will happen naturally when you try to imitate. You try and imitate as close as you can, in dance or

shakuhachi, but a slight change will always come in, and this is the beauty of how the art evolves over the years.

Interviewer: So how do you maintain your own sense of creativity within these structures?

Ronnie: You can't help but do it, because you find the music living. In a way, it's not that different from a classical pianist who plays Bach, or Baroque music all the time. They probably find as much creativity in expression and interpretation within the music as I do. I cannot pick up the shakuhachi for one day without having learned something. (McCoy-Eller, 2001)

In order to express individuality, musical artists need to embrace this traditional art and its basics, and then allow their culturally informed values to collide and expression will come about naturally. In translation, imitation is simply used to describe the learning practices of many traditional Japanese arts. But an essential aspect of this, as Seldin points out, is that we need to make the music living, not something stuck in the past but relevant to modern day people. And this can only be done by putting oneself, which is not a fixed entity to begin with, into the music. Because identity is not fixed, a person can never play a song exactly the same way twice. Anthony Giddens (1991) has argued that, because of the changing global society that we live in, our identities have become more diverse. One's mood, the environment and the audience are always changing; therefore the music also changes. We have an ever-changing concept of ourselves that when combined with our fixed version of a piece will never produce the same musical interpretation.

With the solo-focused honkyoku making use of the concept of *ma*, or *the space between something*, there is a freedom and space to put one's own individuality into the music. In order to make the songs interesting, the artist must express himself in these solo pieces without deliberately changing the tradition. This may be another reason why foreigners seem to prefer honkyoku rather than the ensemble music associated with koto and shamisen. But in the Japanese shakuhachi world, to be considered a musician, one must often be able to play both types of music. Learning the traditional Japanese notion of rhythm and other musical concepts such as *Jo-ha-kyu* (beginning slowly, speeding up, then ending swiftly) brings the shakuhachi player into

the arena of collectivism in the context of playing with other ensemble members, yet another level in a player's world. Learning to play with other instruments and remain in sync is another essential skill for the player. In essence, an individualistic and a collectivist identity must be formed if a person is to be considered a shakuhachi musician in Japan.

The following section explores how these social networks of tradition and modernity affect younger players today. Many younger players are creating a different set of rules to make a name for themselves. Likewise, long-established rules are being recreated.

### **Younger Players, Their Search for Identity, and the Future**

Globalization and a hybridization of music genres have affected the shakuhachi world. Elements of competition, efforts toward uniqueness, and the quest for a new musical identity that sets one player apart from another have become essential values. Meanwhile, the media have put pressure on the shakuhachi world to produce a type of player who can be "sold" to the consumer public.

The following section focuses on several younger players and their current values, asking the questions: Where do they want to take this music? And what role does tradition continue to play in their identity construction? I suggest that with changing values younger players today are now playing in two worlds. They still have a relationship with the traditional world, but they also have a free space to develop their own styles and genres of shakuhachi music. This leads to a changing definition of collectivism in Japan. It seems that with the younger players playing outside of the traditional group and their established rules, traditional schools are accepting a lower amount of participation. The following cases are examples of players grounded in tradition but exploring new musical genres with the shakuhachi, and they represent a growing number of shakuhachi players. I have come in contact with these players and periodically see them in traditional music magazines.



## Hanya Teikoku

Hanya Teikoku is a shakuhachi trio comprised of three young players, (from L to R) Motonaga Hiromu, Kominato Akihisa, Iwata Tetsuya. This picture from their website ([http://www.geocities.jp/hannya\\_teikoku/](http://www.geocities.jp/hannya_teikoku/)) depicts both their modern wild side (wearing western clothes with unbuttoned dress shirts and long gazes into the distance) as well as their formal and traditional Japanese side (shakuhachi in-hand and wearing *hakama* displaying their family crests).

Iwata commented on the kind of mood they want to create: “We want to heat up the situation. It doesn’t matter if we make mistakes, we want to touch the audience’s heart with an aggressive performance” (Tanaka, 2005, 3. the author’s translation). They state their goal as performers, to offer a clear distinction from performers of different generations. Older players may not make a statement such as Iwata has made. More seasoned players may want the audience to be moved, but they might not go so far as to value an aggressive performance regardless of mistakes. Kominato said: “I want young people to say, ‘Hey, those guys are really cool!’ In our case, we play songs with many interchanging parts and we want to show how interesting that kind of music is” (Tanaka, 2005, 2. the author’s translation).

It also seems that Hanya Teikoku is definitely playing for a younger audience. Wa-On is a bar-type setting where they used to perform. From their comments, one gets the feeling that they aren’t playing too many retirement homes and hospitals. Hanya Teikoku is comprised of young members who have a sense of what young people want and what moves them. Lastly, Motonaga mentions their future plans: “We are expecting to play abroad more. About 40 years ago there was a famous group called the Shakuhachi Sanbon Kai, comprised of three great young players Aoki Reibo, Yamamoto Houzan and Yokoyama Katsuya who were responsible for creating a

shakuhachi boom. It's Hanya Teikoku who is now creating a boom with the ladies" (Tanaka, 2005, 3. the author's translation).

This group and others like them often, are forced to compare themselves to the great players and the Living National Treasures, people who are recognized by the government as being important cultural treasures to the country for maintaining an ancient tradition. As they carve out their own niche, Hanya Teikoku is focusing on a club atmosphere with the target audience being younger people, especially women.

Richard Chenhall is a player from Tokyo's Sofia University's traditional music club, where Motonaga is a teacher. He explained an aspect of Motonaga's appeal:

In this setting while (Motonaga's) outward appearance is as a young trendy musician which he definitely encourages, especially as the majority of the 25 shakuhachi players are young women between 18 and 23 his legitimacy comes from being able to play honkyoku (very well). The main teacher does not play honkyoku so (Motonaga's) access to this 'traditional' music enhances his legitimacy. He is thus not only very cool (which does encourage young women to start playing the shakuhachi here) but he has access to the 'real' shakuhachi tradition. (R. Chenhall, personal correspondence, Nov. 2007)

Motonaga is a perfect example of the modern player who is balancing and utilizing two different social worlds. In this case, it is precisely because of his traditional affiliation that he is able to spread the shakuhachi through performing and teaching, shaping more young players who are also potential fans as well. The fact that he is fashionable is an added advantage that helps create an interest in traditional music with other young people, especially women.

Modern society and its values have altered the goals of players from the time of the komuso, wandering shakuhachi-playing monks associated with the Rinzai sect of Zen, to the current players. Signs of the times can also be seen in the marketing of younger male hogaku players as symbolic playboys, similar to hosts in a club vying for female fans. Recently a new hogaku unit was formed called ASH-Roty. It is comprised of Iwata from Hanya Teikoku and another shakuhachi player, four Japanese taiko drummers, and two tsugaru shamisen players. They were formed and first played

together at a hotel club similar to a host club geared towards female customers only. They played many of their own songs and also catchy songs like "Hey Jude" that got everyone moving. Imitating a real host club, they even started a membership system, a website, and 30-minute DVDs for their customers. In November 2006, they had a dinner show at the Prince Hotel Club EX that also included dancers, and for New Year's hosted a countdown special live performance.

With the growing number of younger pop/hogaku groups like ZAN and RIN, it's obvious that someone is trying to make a profit by opening up the music market. Pop music sells because it is made for the masses. As Adorno (2002) wrote, there is a necessary process of standardization. There are many great advantages to learning an instrument from a very young age, which the industry hopes will lead to a pro career at a younger age. The music industry will sell more music if the person is younger and has a good look, but will the hogaku/pop industry in Japan start to sacrifice quality music for a young star "symbol"? The Yoshida Brothers, a younger shamisen duo, come from a strong traditional core. They have succeeded professionally, but how many in the future will also be willing to patiently wait for their time to come?

The media's push for younger marketable players may lead to promotion without the required training and skill level. Without this traditional base of techniques and familiarity with various genres of shakuhachi music, players may experiment early in their musical education and create something they believe to be unique, but in actuality may actually have been done many years ago.

RIN, an all-female hogaku trio, has at times been criticized for not creating or blending traditional music with pop, but instead merely playing western pop music and adding a repetitious, simple rhythm while using Japanese instruments. Reading into this, what the critics are saying is that the younger generation lacks Japanese roots. Instead, musicians are playing the music that they know – western music – because it is prolific in modern Japanese society, thus disregarding tradition rather than upholding it.

This begs the question, “Whose tradition is it anyway?” If a person grew up without any traditional music, or even if his parents were not exposed to it, can he really be expected to uphold an unfamiliar tradition? In the traditional music world in Japan, the answer is usually yes. In Japan, most people interested in traditional instruments usually find themselves in the middle of an *iemoto* (pyramid) type of school, with a top-down structure of rules that shape that player’s field. One may teach and perform publicly only after having learned properly and paid his dues.

Theoretically speaking, the concepts of fields and art worlds are not exactly interchangeable. I find that Bourdieu’s concept of *field* fits better when I am referring to past players and players who are engulfed in the strict *iemoto* system. A player’s field tends to be more structurally organized through the various systems of power that come into play. Becker’s concept of world seems to have a looser, unlimited, area of social compromise. Younger players in the *shakuhachi* world have more freedom to make choices depending on the perceived responses, as opposed to some outside pressure or power. However, because these different worlds of tradition and modernity overlap, both concepts are relevant.

What is happening and is likely to continue, is that more young people will experiment and perform more freely, defying traditional rules in the process and expanding their worlds. This is due both to pressures from the media to produce marketable young performers and to the trend of younger Japanese searching for and expressing individuality through their music.



### **Obama Akihito**

Obama is a good example of a younger player who is balancing two worlds -- that of still having access to the collectivist traditional world where his established field exists, while also maintaining a place outside of the *sempai/kohai* and teacher relationships, which allows him the freedom to develop his own musical identity.

At Doshisha University Obama's sempai, Matsumoto Hirokazu, introduced him to Kinko ryu shakuhachi teacher Ishikawa Toshimitsu. Come junior year when others were job hunting, Obama decided to pursue the shakuhachi as a career. His undergraduate degree was in philosophy, and he believes that the shakuhachi is composed of three essential areas of music, religion/philosophy, and culture. In order to be completely familiar with the instrument, one needs an interest in all three areas.

When he told Ishikawa sensei of his desire to play the shakuhachi as a career, Ishikawa sensei recommended that he enter the NHK Ikusei kai, as he had also done. This is a year-long weekly course on hogaku and learning to play in an ensemble. It is often a desired credential for many aspiring hogaku musicians with solo ambitions. Hence, this is another step in forming a collectivist identity.

Obama says he had fun and made friends, many of whom he still often sees around the shakuhachi scene. During that time he even shared an apartment with another shakuhachi player, Sunagawa, who went on to join the group ZAN.

More than his time spent at the Ikusei kai, however, Obama attributes his current social network more to his part-time job that he had at Wa-on, a recently closed traditional music live house where many amateur musicians gathered. He performed there often. Many of the younger popular groups, such as ZAN and Hanya Teikoku got their first starts here.

A new structure of social-networking is taking place in Tokyo and other large cities in Japan. We can't say these new structures are replacing the old iemoto system, but shakuhachi players have more choices now. This reflects how Japanese society in general is loosening its grip on tradition and allowing for individual expression. The traditional concepts of the sempai/kohai relationship and group membership remain, but the desire to express one's originality and the public's desire to see and hear it are also apparent, something not previously tolerated in Japan. These younger players are now living in two collectivist arenas, their traditional groups and the group of new

experimental musicians that they foster for support. Participation in both arenas is a balancing act.

Obama believes that there is a power and a unique quality to honkyoku that should be preserved. When he plays abroad, honkyoku is the main form of music that moves the audience. Every country has its folk songs, so there is some form of connectedness underlying such music, but it is the uniqueness of honkyoku that most people are drawn to. On a daily basis, Obama is balancing modernity with historical tradition, city life with rural memories, and various opposing genres of music and their target audiences. It may sound like a conflicting, hectic lifestyle that could lead to an identity crisis. However, Obama takes comfort in it as a balance that he needs in order to lead a successful life as a modern player of a traditional art. This seems to be the tension or conflict that Ooka mentioned, a tension that is essential in creating inspirational music.

Even in these modern times, many players are trying to continue their tradition. However, the constraints of tradition are lessening, leading to multiple and broader identities. Are these multiple identities and ethics a contradiction? For many players, no. They can weave in and out of various social webs, adjusting values and ethics along the way. If the player is striving to hold rank in an Iemoto school, the social web is often very limited. But for the many up-and-coming players who are young and interested in creating something never heard before, this extended web of connections is desirable.

### **Female Players**

Another sign of change is the number of female players today. Traditionally only men of samurai lineage and those connected with the Fuke-sect Zen temples could become komuso monks and play the shakuhachi. In general, more young people are becoming interested in the shakuhachi, as can be seen by the increasing number of professionals in their 20s. Also, the number of university students who join shakuhachi clubs at school is increasing, with 2005 marking the year with the greatest number of

students (57) who participated in the yearly National Student Hogaku Festival in Kyoto (Tanaka, 2005, p. 44). Just like many younger male shakuhachi players, female players are also getting their start in university clubs.

Many foreigners are drawn to the shakuhachi via Zen and see it as a tool for meditation. But why has the shakuhachi become more popular with Japanese women? From interviews with players from various universities and participant observation in the hogaku club at Osaka University, I find two recurring reasons for the increase in this instrument. The first being that a family member had played, often a grandfather and they remember that sound/feeling and want to continue it. The second often-cited reason is the shakuhachi's uniqueness. At Sophia University, some women say they "enjoy the freedom that comes with their unique status playing shakuhachi as women, compared with playing koto, which in their minds reinforces many of the cultural stereotypes of Japanese women. By playing shakuhachi they are perhaps accessing a more dominant male voice" (R. Chenhall, personal correspondence, Nov. 2007).

Deliberate or not, more women are crossing the once strictly enforced of sex roles boundaries. I have observed that Japanese players and teachers on the average are very accepting of and encouraging to female players. However, it is general society that at times seems a bit slower in accepting the breakdown of these stereotyped roles. Perhaps this acceptance and collectivism within their shakuhachi world gives more women the confidence to claim their uniqueness to general society.

A great increase in the presence of female players has been noted at international shakuhachi events, as well as local events, such as the past two years of the Kyoto Summer Concert and the International Shakuhachi Training Center's summer gathering in Bisei, Okayama. More group songs are being performed, widening the audience's often limited perception of the shakuhachi. The following example of female players shows the media's desire to yet expand the market of traditional music. They have definitely set a precedent for other up and coming female groups.



## RIN and Tomoca Nagasu

The pop/hogaku group RIN was comprised of All-Japan Hogaku Contest winners and graduates of the Tokyo University of Fine Arts. Yoshinaga Mana, Nagasu Tomoca and Arai Chie-- who have played music since childhood -- first met as students at Tokyo's National University of Fine Arts and Music. United by their love for timeless Japanese instruments, as well as for western stars including Destiny's Child and John Lennon, they formed a group soon after graduating. "The thousand year spirit in our instruments," says RIN, "has a soul that needs to be heard" (Helsel, 2006, online magazine).

Again, the RIN musicians were selected because of their authentic talent stemming from a traditional music background and contest winnings, as well as a cute look that was marketable. They have brought a little sex appeal to the traditional music world that can now market itself to the general public and collaborate with pop stars of different music genres and countries. For the first time, groups like ZAN and RIN are making music videos aired on regular music television stations. RIN's first single "Anti-Hero" in the third album "Inland Sea" features American pop singer Lisa Loeb on vocals.

RIN is trying to take make it big in the US as well as Japan: Their U.S. debut album "Inland Sea" -- featuring guest vocals from Lisa Loeb and Leigh Nash - - was released on L.A.-based Domo Records ... Now, the girls are embarking on a series of Stateside showcases at some of the country's hottest clubs, leading with dates in Los Angeles and New York that feature Loeb and Nash, respectively, to help celebrate RIN's first-ever U.S. tour (Helsel, 2006, online magazine).



Nagasu Tomoca is the shakuhachi and biwa player in RIN. She has studied traditional music at some famous places with some famous people. She is much more in the media spotlight

because of her social network in Tokyo and the certificates of authenticity that she has earned along the way. She graduated from both the NHK Ikusei Kai program for biwa and the Tokyo University of Fine Arts majoring in shakuhachi. She has been playing Kinko ryu shakuhachi and Satsuma biwa since the age of 10. She also won the All-Japan Hogaku contest in 2003 for biwa. She has even studied shakuhachi under the late National Treasure Yamaguchi Goro.

Although Nagasu is still a member of RIN, she recently also released her debut solo CD. Even though she has established herself as a shakuhachi player, she did not get very good reviews for her solo CD. Similar criticisms were made about RIN, in that there was too much pop in the music. People said that it is basically western pop music using traditional Japanese instruments. Critics also have said that although she is a good player, the CD lacked creativity and originality that hopefully will be explored more in her future endeavors.

Nagasu is another younger player who has strong roots in the traditional world, but she is now stepping into uncharted territory. In the RIN project, she has the support of two other like-minded women, but she must have felt the need to express her individualism even further with the release of her solo CD. There is no way to be certain, but if most of her efforts are centered around fostering a social network of modern musicians and creating new music, her traditional ties may be weakening. There is only so much time to dedicate to the various collectivist groups.

### **Foreign Female Players**

Kiku Day is a leading female performer who currently resides in London. She specializes in playing ji-nashi (un-lacquered shakuhachi) and has organized a section on her website showcasing other female professional players such as Viron Pironique (<http://nipponflutes-actualite.blogspot.com/>), and Bronwyn Kirkpatrick ([users.bigpond.com/bronwyn.kirkpatrick/](http://users.bigpond.com/bronwyn.kirkpatrick/)), among others. At the end of 2006, 15 women with photos and short biographies were posted on her website. One point I

noticed was that most of them had a musical background, often having studied classical western flute or ethnomusicology.

In 2004, a large shakuhachi event was held in New York City. Many professional performers and teachers from around the world gathered at the New York Shakuhachi Festival for workshops, lectures and panel discussions. One original idea was that of a panel discussion entitled "A New Perspective: International Women Shakuhachi Masters, a Panel Discussion and Concert." The festival's website (<http://www.bigappleshak.com/bas/festivalhighlights.html>) described the discussion this way:

Historically, up until well after World War II, women were not permitted to play the shakuhachi. Fortunately this is no longer true, and many women have entered the world of the shakuhachi. In the present day the level of accomplishment of female shakuhachi masters has become truly remarkable. We are proud to have a panel discussion by twelve women shakuhachi masters from six countries around the globe. (New York Shakuhachi Festival, 2004)

Kiku has been a leading force in the field of ji-nashi, both musically and scholarly. Players of ji-nashi are in the minority when it comes to the shakuhachi world, so this makes Kiku's case even more interesting. She was on a grant and studying at Osaka Fine Arts University in Osaka in 2007, where we both participated in Shimura Zenpo Satoshi's class on classical ji-nashi and had some exciting fieldwork experiences. Her finesse with very long, unlacquered shakuhachi, in both traditional honkyoku and modern pieces, shows that she is not bound by any traditional idea of a woman's place in the traditional Japanese music world. Kiku represents the situation of the West now setting new standards and values in the modern shakuhachi world.

### **Conclusion**

Many younger players are adding new directions to the shakuhachi tradition. So far, there seems to be a continuing respect for historical aesthetic values, rituals and ways of passing on a tradition. Nakamura Akikazu is one such player who has made it his lifework to continue some of the dying traditions.

Many of the komuso are getting older – they're 75 or 80 – so I feel it's not only the people but the music that is passing away, and so I would like to record the memories and the music," Nakamura says, sitting in his basement studio in Western Tokyo. "Some of the [komuso] sects in Japan are very small now, just two or three people who have the repertoire. (Jackson, 2006, 1)

Some younger players are taking on the responsibility of continuing a tradition. However, as can be seen by the increase in pop/hogaku groups, the media are applying pressure to the shakuhachi worlds to supply talented, good-looking, younger players who are willing to play music geared to the general public. Aside from such media pressure, most young performers are happy to do nontraditional music as well. They have been brought up on western styles of pop and rock, so playing this type of music is not foreign to them. Interestingly, western music and style has influenced Japan toward an ironic phenomenon: the majority of Japanese shakuhachi players drift toward playing western music, whereas foreign players trend toward traditional Zen solo pieces.

In Japan, Nakamura says, the proportion of players in the komuso shakuhachi tradition is very small compared to the more mainstream Tozan and Kinko styles. Perhaps only 2 or 3 percent. But the reverse is true when considering the proportion of komuso shakuhachi players overseas, he says. The komuso style is less like western music and therein lies its attraction abroad, he explains. (Jackson, 2006, 1)

The self cannot be defined as a single entity. It is many identities merged into one that may change form from time-to-time and place-to-place. It has both properties of individualism and collectivism. A shakuhachi player's identity is created from various established relationships, with people in both traditional and modern settings. No matter how much of a traditional world people create for themselves, they cannot escape modern society. Likewise, no matter how modern and unique musicians may think their playing style is, it has been built upon a rich tradition and its sound lies within its historical roots. Trying to neglect one or the other is defeating the purpose of creating music with a traditional instrument; it is like trying to deny a part of oneself which in the end will only end up constraining a person.

Being able to play in a place that is not ruled by a traditional pyramid-like structure, many younger players are exploring their individualism and legitimizing a new genre of music. Their identities have been built upon various traditional collectivist activities. However, with the establishment of new genres, which are proving profitable, their individualism and those newly established social networks may be further freely explored.

I find that many of these younger players would fall somewhere in between Becker's concept's of integrated professionals and mavericks. As original and free as many of the players perceive themselves to be, they do not fully meet the definition of a maverick. Most of them have been traditionally trained and are striving for uniqueness, bending and breaking traditional rules and ancient structures along the way. But Becker (2000) reminds us that *mavericks* "remain unknown, and their work is not preserved and disappears along with their name" (p.246). Many of these younger players are striving for originality, as well as leaving their name and their music in the art world. They are leaving their names in the shakuhachi world, but it remains to be seen if their names will last in the broader genres they are also striving for. Likewise, integrated professionals in the shakuhachi world "stay within the bounds of what potential audiences and the state consider respectable" (Becker, 2008, p229). Partly due to their age, they are often not yet seen as being fully reliable to play any traditional ensemble standard, as a fully integrated professional would be. They are both trying to satisfy their particular art world and expand in new worlds at the same time.

Many of the foreign players could possibly fit into Becker's theory of naïve artists. One of the main reasons for categorizing these players as naïve artists or grass-roots is that – unlike a player in an ordinary shakuhachi world – these players often lack the guidance of a professional teacher. The language barrier also plays a role in distancing them from the members of the Japanese shakuhachi art world, admittedly the base from which this music tradition stems. Another characteristic is that of working in

isolation. There is a large English shakuhachi forum where many of these players gather and share ideas, but ultimately many of them are returning to their practice places with the fact that they are the only player in that whole country, or that there is no teacher near them. Modern media technology is definitely bringing teachers and students together via the Internet, but it is still not an easily understood and accepted concept in a tradition in which the teacher-student relationship is so vital and important for both musical and cultural reasons. Becker alludes to the terms of grass-roots and naïve artists as being one in the same, although he chooses to use naïve artists. Given the nuances the words have I would prefer to use the term grass-roots. However, for the sake of sticking with Becker's terminology I use naïve artists.

It is not my intention to sound condescending with Becker's term of naïve. I believe there are definitely positive aspects of this category of artists which are definitely being made use of.

Its makers work in isolation, free from the constraints of cooperation which inhibit art world participants, free to ignore the conventional categories of art works, to make things which do not fit any standard genre and cannot be described as examples of any class. (Becker, 2008, p260)

Free from many of the inhibiting constraints of the traditional world, many foreigners are creating their own style and contributing new music to this ever-expanding shakuhachi world.

Where the music will be taken is a mystery. However, this is an expanding industry crossing into other various music genres. With more interest in the shakuhachi among women and foreign players, the traditional image of a shakuhachi player also is changing, as are the cultural values and beliefs that schools and individual players hold. Due to the weakening of cultural restraints, Japanese players are now also provided a much wider smorgasbord of identity options to choose from. Even though shakuhachi music maintains a repertoire of traditional music, with the combination of the importation of foreign music and styles in Japan, and the deportation of this music abroad, we are seeing this traditional art form expanding in new directions. With this

expansion come new social networks developing and more collaborative relationships building across various genres of music and other art worlds, enabling the growth of this music to continue. With the creation of new such genres the "Lone Wolves" are increasing. However, we are never truly alone in our production of art.

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