Chapter 147
Zen Buddhism and Music: Spiritual Shakuhachi Tours to Japan

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147.1 Introduction

This paper deals with organized tours to Japan for players of the shakuhachi—a Japanese vertical, notched, oblique bamboo flute, which from the seventeenth to the late nineteenth century was played by komuso monks of Fuke sect, a subsect of Rinzai Zen Buddhism. The instrument was used by the monks as a tool for spiritual training and for begging (takuhatsu).

The tours discussed here are arranged by North American shakuhachi “authorities,” both of whom studied in Japan during the course of their shakuhachi training. The aspect that is particularly interesting is the link to religion and spirituality, which are important points of attraction for both of the tours. The tour we examine in greater detail is the “Shakuhachi Roots Pilgrimage” led by Alcvin Ramos (USA/Canada), which has been a yearly event since 2003 (Shakuhachi Roots 2013a). Ramos meditates and considers himself a Buddhist, although he is not an ordained Buddhist monk. The other tour to be discussed, albeit in less detail, is the “Annual Japan Tenri Tours,” a 17-day trip to Japan, which has been organized yearly by Ronnie Nyôgetsu Reishin Seldin (USA) since 1980 (Nyogetsu 2013). Seldin is a member of the Tenri kyô or sect, a religion closely related to Shintoism (although monotheistic), which was established in the nineteenth century (Jansen 2000: 712).

The reason for focusing on Ramos’ tour is that religion and the experience of spirituality is explicitly at the heart of the “Shakuhachi Roots Pilgrimage,” whereas the “Tenri Tours” are more of a leisure trip, within which spirituality is only one of several focal points of visiting Japan as a shakuhachi player. Both tours take participants to
Japan and provide them with experiences, including public performances for Japanese audiences, that connect them with the homeland and the history of their chosen instrument.

The music played and studied while on tour is discussed only briefly below, as generally speaking it consists of traditional honkyoku (original or fundamental pieces) music and has been widely documented. The term refers to the solo pieces played by komusō monks, who have roots in the Edo period (1603–1868), used for spiritual training or religious mendicancy.

The performances and the journeys themselves possess strong ritualistic elements. Here I explore how the participants utilize the performances as strategies of resistance in order to manipulate and modify a priori attitudes towards ethnical ownership and authenticity of shakuhachi music. Through their performances they authenticate their connection to an esoteric Buddhist music tradition.

147.2 Brief History of the Shakuhachi

Scholars now widely agree that the shakuhachi was introduced into Japan from China via the Korean peninsula during the Nara period (710–794) as one of the instruments in the gagaku (court) ensemble (Tsukitani et al. 1994: 105). The earliest extant examples of the shakuhachi are found at the Shōsōin, a repository built in 756, which contains eight shakuhachi used in the ceremony performed for the consecration of the Great Buddha of Tōdaiji temple in 752 (Tsukitani 2008). These shakuhachi have five finger holes in the front plus a thumbhole and produce a heptatonic (seven note) scale as probably used contemporaneously in China. When the gagaku ensemble was reorganized in the mid-tenth century, the shakuhachi fell into desuetude and no references to the instrument appear in surviving historical documents until the thirteenth century, by which time it had become a five-holed flute. During the early seventeenth century, shakuhachi-playing monks organized themselves within an institutional setting under the Fukeshū or Fuke sect, a subsect of Rinzai Zen. The monks of the Fuke sect were termed komusō or “priests of nothingness.” The sect was granted special privileges by the Tokugawa government (the de facto rulers of Japan during the Edo period) in the seventeenth century, including monopoly rights over the use of the shakuhachi and passes that allowed them to travel to any part of Japan (Berger and Hughes 2001). According to the rules of the sect, the shakuhachi was to be used exclusively as hōki, or sacred tool, for the purpose of spiritual training and for takuhatsu (religious mendicancy). This served as the legal basis for establishment of the Fuke sect, which only admitted men of the samurai (military nobility) class and rōnin (samurai with no master to serve) as members of the order (Takahashi 1990).

In all, Nakatsuka Chikuzen lists 77 Fuke temples scattered around Japan during the Edo period. Three of the most important were Myōanji in Kyoto and Ichigetsuji and Reihōji in the Kantō region, the area around Edo (present-day Tokyo). Each temple developed its own corpus of music, which together comprise the repertoire
of approximately 150 honkyoku from the Edo period known today. Interaction among the temples, including musical exchange, took place by means of komusō monks who wandered from temple to temple (Shimura 2002). Music other than honkyoku was referred to as gaikyoku (outer pieces) or rankyoku (disorderly pieces).

The Edo government was overthrown in 1868 and replaced by the new Meiji government (1868–1912), which abolished the Fuke sect in October 1871 and prohibited begging between 1872 and 1881 (Takahashi 1990: 127). These two political measures completely transformed the shakuhachi world in Japan.

### 147.3 Shakuhachi and Spirituality Today

According to Tsukitani Tsuneko and Shimura Satoshi, after the abolition of the Fuke sect, the shakuhachi was to follow two distinct paths, one secular and one religious (Tsukitani 2008: 152; Shimura 2002: 705). The shakuhachi entered the stage as a music—a ther—then a religious instrument played not to achieve enlightenment, but to entertain the public. The instrument began to be played as a hobby and in ensembles. It was also used to accompany min'yō (folk songs).

Today, the Tozan and Kinko schools, the schools that are descended directly from the Fuke-sect tradition, dominate the world of shakuhachi in Japan. Both schools are secular and begin teaching new students with gaikyoku or ensemble pieces, and—in the case of the Kinko School—only accomplished players are allowed to enter the realm of honkyoku. The Tozan School, the largest school of shakuhachi in Japan, does not teach honkyoku at all, although the term is used; the so-called “honkyoku” taught at the Tozan School are pieces composed mostly by the founder of the school.

Thus the transmission strategies and teaching methods that came to dominate Japan not only differed from those of the monks of the Edo period, but also from those of the Myōan players, who continued to play shakuhachi as a spiritual praxis and therefore only played honkyoku. This loose grouping of players, who followed the heritage of the komusō monks, became utterly marginalized in the hōgaku (Japanese traditional music) world as religious eccentrics and musical amateurs.

The construction of the instrument itself changed and skillful makers began to make shakuhachi with a rebuilt and lined bore, which enabled better pitch accuracy and larger volume (Maru 1922). Strong counter-reactions to these changes arose, as in the cases of two of the most charismatic figures in the shakuhachi world, Watazumi Dōsō (1910–1992) and Nishimura Kokū (1915–2002), both players of the unlined shakuhachi who regarded their playing as a means of spiritual training in the traditional manner (Keister 2004: 107). They called their instruments hotchiku and kyotaku, respectively, in order to differentiate them from the modern mainstream shakuhachi. During the twentieth century, these two players became increasingly well known outside Japan. Watazumi Dōsō became an icon of Zen Buddhist followers in avant-garde milieu—not least in the U.S. Watazumi travelled to the United States several times. He was invited to teach at the Zen Mountain Monastery and at the Creative Music Studio in New York, where he met other musicians, including John Cage, Steve Lacy, and Pauline Oliveros.
In Volume One of *The Annals of The International Shakuhachi Society*, published in 1990, a chapter with several subchapters is devoted to each of the two main schools of shakuhachi Kinko and Tozan. Another chapter is devoted to Chikuho ryū or school, and all four subchapters are written by Riley K. Lee, an American who happens to be a player of this school. In the last chapter, titled “Miscellaneous Shakuhachi Schools” one subchapter is devoted to Watazumi, an edited transcript of a lecture / demonstration at the Creative Music Studio, Woodstock, N.Y. in 1981 (Mayers 1990: 189–191). The short bibliographical note explains:

> Watazumido-so Roshi is a leading Zen Priest who specializes in his own style of Honkyoku, played on Shakuhachi of enormous length and diameter. A unique character who defies classification and whose spiritual theories are expressed in forms difficult to comprehend. (Mayers 1990: 191)

However, in Volume Two, published in 2004, the whole first section, which comprises some 8.9 % of the entire volume, is devoted to Watazumi, which reflects the enormous increase in knowledge and interest in this particular player and his Zen philosophy which had occurred in the meantime. Watazumi, his lifestyle, and his playing (which is not considered music but spiritual praxis) are described in terms such as “Zen only happens when the tool and the person cannot be divided,” “To attempt to do Zen immediately does away with Zen.” “The attitude of NO ZEN is the beginning of facing in the direction of Zen,” and:

> The intellectual playthings that people attempt as Zen have nothing to do with Zen. They are only specious (that which is false though appearing deceptively true–pseudo). It may sound like Zen, feel like “blowing Zen,” or be the cute splashes of ink on paper, these are all ZERO ZEN. (Karhu 2004: 14)

The editor of *The Annals*, Dan Mayers writes: “Watazumido epitomised Zen, and faced the same problem as did Confucius in the need to form a personal philosophy. In this he succeeded, as anyone who associated with him will attest” (Mayers 2004a, b: 25). In the eyes of these non-Japanese shakuhachi aficionados, Watazumi was elevated to the status of a Confucius.

Nishimura Kokū’s playing disseminated via very different channels, probably partly due to his less extravagant and sensational philosophy and personality. Many came into contact with Nishimura’s concept of kyotaku at Osho International Meditation Resort in Pune, India, where several of Nishimura’s senior disciples were regular visitors (personal conversation with Noiri Kyosui, Darcy O’Byrne and Tilo Budach) as they were followers of Osho (Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, 1931–1990). Nishimura’s CD, “Kyotaku” has become iconic partly due to his photo on the CD cover (Fig. 147.1), where he resembled an old hermit or sage with a long white beard, playing on a long kyotaku.

In the CD sleeve, Nishimura’s life as a komusō, his founding of the Tani sect of flute players, woodcarver, painter, and a black belt six dan in karate is described. The story of shakuhachi playing going back to the Zen Master Fuke, which today is known to be a myth, is described as historical fact. The difference in the instruments is explained as following:

> When the shogun-epoch came to an end around 1868, the shakuhachi began to change. It became more like the flutes in the Western world. The shakuhachi was made smoother and
more symmetrical on the inside and could now be disassembled. These developments in the structure of the instrument affected the way in which the flute was played. It has become more and more difficult to find original kyotaku flutes. The original kyotaku flutes are played by breathing, rather than blowing, to get the desired sound. Today only the bamboo flutes made by Kokū Nishimura may be called “kyotaku.” Each kyotaku made by the master receives his special stamp of authenticity. (Nishimura 1998: 3)

The myth building in English-language sources surrounding these two figures, who remained marginalized in Japan, created a great interest in them among non-Japanese shakuhachi players, which also helped promoting the shakuhachi as a spiritual instrument among people in the West interested in Zen Buddhism. And it is intriguing to note that while Nishimura and Watazumi’s playing styles and philosophy differed greatly and have been propagated via very different channels, they were both eventually embraced by Westerners seeking spirituality.

147.4 Shakuhachi Tours to Japan

Emphasis on the spiritual aspect of shakuhachi on the part of non-Japanese players has without doubt influenced the itinerary of the tours. Both tours visit sacred sites and provide experiences of a sacred Japan “off the beaten track.”
The analysis presented here is based on theories of rituals and performance as applied to material available and gathered online and in the course of telephone, Skype conversations, and email interviews with both the leaders of and participants in the tours. I also address the psychological importance that the deep connection most of the participants come to feel with the bamboo, the soil of Japan, and shakuhachi history and lineages during the course of the tours plays for their music, and how it enrich the lives of those who take part in them.

147.4.1 Tour 1: The Shakuhachi Roots Pilgrimage

The Shakuhachi Roots Pilgrimage is extensively documented online. It is packaged, promoted and sold on the Internet as a spiritual tour to the homeland of the shakuhachi. Ramos, the organizer, writes on his website, blog, and on shakuhachi fora on the Internet. He posts promotion before the tours, descriptive posts while on tour, and provides links to photo reportage. Among the target groups for the performances on tour are thus those who follow the tours online on blogs, websites, and web fora.

The Shakuhachi Roots Pilgrimage visits temples—with or without a shakuhachi connection—worships at temples, shrines and holy sites, performs Buddhist and Shintō rites, visits people who work within or cultivate traditional arts, and performs retreats at Buddhist temples such as Eiheiji temple, Tekishinjuku or Rengejōin. A large part of the trip is dedicated to bamboo harvesting and the making of one’s own shakuhachi—just as the komusō monks used to do during the Edo period or as Nishimura and Watazumi did in the twentieth century.

On 9th August 2006, Ramos posts the following on the shakuhachi forum regarding the schedule of the tour (Andersson 2006):

…visit Musashi Miyamoto’s cave, experience the onsens (hotsprings), visit the newest Komus temple in Kumamoto, and meditate at the Komus Temple, Saik-ji (Hakata Ichoken). Then we will also participate in our obligatory visit to Tsukuba Shinto Shrine in Mie prefecture to offer shakuhachi to the gods of music and entertainment and do waterfall purification as well as visit shakuhachi maker and kyūd master, Taro Miura. Then we’ll visit Koya-san, center of esoteric buddhism…

The attraction and admiration felt by non-Japanese shakuhachi players towards rōnin such as the famous Miyamoto Musashi (1584–1645), known for his excellent swordsmanship, is intriguing, given the fact that they have a negative image among most Japanese as ruthless troublemakers. After the visit to the cave (Fig. 147.2), the offering of shakuhachi [music] at the Shinto shrine Tsukuba, is named, followed by a Shintō rite—waterfall purification or misogi. The misogi is a firmly established event on Shakuhachi Roots Pilgrimage, having been performed on each tour. And finally, kyūdō or archery and Koyasan, which Ramos connects with esoteric Buddhism. The eclectic character of the Shakuhachi Roots Pilgrimage where Buddhism, in the shape of esotericism and the Fuke sect are mixed with Shintō rites and Japanese fine arts associated with Zen Buddhism, is worthy of attention; it is clear
that the tour does not accurately present the shakuhachi’s history and current situation, but rather offers a broad experience of a particular and to some degree imaginary aspect of Japan.

On Ramos’ new website, which was relaunched in January 2013, the tour is described as follows:

Fig. 147.2  Alcvin Ramos conducting the Shinto rite misogi (Photo courtesy of Darren Stone, used with permission)

This trip is different than most other tours of Japan in that you will be entering the experience already with the spirit of Japan within you, being a shakuhachi player. It is geared mainly for shakuhachi players and other musicians of Japanese music living and studying outside of Japan with the intention of deepening one’s practice by connecting with the root culture and experiencing the spiritual and artistic traditions of Japan… It is a very special trip for a very specific group of people; and it is this connection to shakuhachi that will be the key to opening doors in Japan that no ordinary person can access.
From the above, it can be seen that which religion of Japan the participants of the tour experience is of secondary importance, so long as they have a spiritual experience of traditional Japan—or rather of their imagined traditional Japan. It is a tour for selected participants who already physically embody Japan through breathing when playing *shakuhachi*. As Ramons puts it: It is a “3-week journey into the heart of Japan… It is a true pilgrimage, where one has the opportunity to visit sacred sites, study with master teachers” (*Shakuhachi Roots* 2013b). As the Japanese ethnomusicologist Seyama Tôru observes, “Playing the *shakuhachi* is…playing the history of the instrument” (Seyama 1998: 76). And indeed the Shakuhachi Roots Pilgrimage is to no small degree about experiencing the spiritual history of the instrument. As playing and experiencing the history of the *shakuhachi* are well documented online, I find it reasonable here to view the music played by the *shakuhachi* players on tour in Japan, the tour itself, and the context within which the travel takes place as performances—the ritualistic aspects of which enable the players to occupy a space within the history of *shakuhachi*. Performance is a concept that defies definition. Here we are talking about a postmodern performance practice, a broader concept than that of theatrical or music performance (Schechner 2005: 4–6): a “communal activity set apart from the everyday through varying degree of formalism and performativity” (Harris and Norton 2002: 1) and which can include both secular and religious or sacred activities. I view the activities such as *misogi* and playing in Myōanji temple in front of *shakuhachi* ancestors as performances which seek to negotiate a space within the spiritual world of *shakuhachi* for the performers (Fig. 147.3). The audience is not merely defined by the Japanese people present during these activities, as the largest audience is, in fact, to be found on the Internet worldwide.

![Darren Stone playing shakuhachi facing the altar where the statue of Kakushin (1207–1298), the founder of Fuke sect at Myōanji temple (Photo courtesy of Darren Stone, used with permission)](image)

**Fig. 147.3** Darren Stone playing shakuhachi facing the altar where the statue of Kakushin (1207–1298), the founder of Fuke sect at Myōanji temple (Photo courtesy of Darren Stone, used with permission)
In an interview conducted with Ramos in 2006, he describes the aim of the Shakuhachi Roots Pilgrimage as giving the opportunity to others to connect more deeply with Japan through the *shakuhachi*. When asked what makes Shakuhachi Roots Pilgrimage a pilgrimage, Ramos answered that his own *shakuhachi* experience has been a religious experience, which made him want to explore its roots. And as Japan is the root of *shakuhachi*, it, too, is considered sacred. As holy places are visited in order to play the *shakuhachi* as a sacred religious practice, the tour thus becomes a pilgrimage. However, he emphasizes the sharing of experiences with the participants as the main goal and this sharing makes the tour experience as a pilgrimage even stronger for Ramos himself. Doing *taketori* or bamboo harvesting is also in Ramos’ terms “a deep *shakuhachi* experience,” and he explained that the tour is demanding for body, mind, and spirit, and is to be regarded as a kind of *shugyō* or religious practice (Fig. 147.4).

### 147.4.2 Tour 2: Annual Japan Tenri Tours

The Annual Japan Tenri Tours, led by one of the North American grandfathers of *shakuhachi* Ronnie Nyōgetsu Reishin Seldin from New York City is more a leisure trip with a duration of 17 days. The participants here take lessons with, in addition to Seldin himself, such players as Kurahashi Yōdō, the son of Seldin’s teacher, and Aoki Reibo (Living National Treasure). They visit temples, shrines, museums, soak in hot springs, watch a *kabuki* (Japanese traditional theatre) play their instruments.
and dine well (the tour costs US$3,400 all inclusive except air fares and 1-week Japan Railway pass). They also visit and play at Myōanji temple, so important in the history of the *shakuhachi*, and also perform elsewhere depending on the year. One interesting aspect of Annual Japan Tenri Tours is, as Seldin himself is a member of the Tenri Kyō sect, the participants listen to several *besseki* lectures lasting 90 min, which cover the basic teachings and narratives of the Tenri sect. The *besseki* is viewed as a preparation, after which a person may receive the sacrament of the *sazuke*, a divine intervention to relieve pain caused by illness. Thus, although spirituality and religion is not the main focus of the Annual Japan Tenri Tours, it is nonetheless an important aspect through the performance at Myōanji, the visits to temples and shrines, and the *besseki*.

147.5 The Role of Religion and Spirituality

As we have seen, in the context of the Shakuhachi Roots Pilgrimage, the *shakuhachi* is spiritual. Simply playing it is a spiritual act. However, it is not only the *shakuhachi* that is spiritual—as the whole experience of Japan becomes spiritual due to its being the root or origin of Ramos’ sacred instrument of choice. During the tour, this spirituality is experienced at first hand by the participants. Below are two descriptions of tour stops from the Shakuhachi Roots Pilgrimage 2006, the first from the Shinto shrine where *misogi* is conducted:

The Tsubaki Grand Shrine in Suzuka… [was] established in 3 B.C. (in the 27th year of 11th Emperor Suinin)—is one of the oldest and most prestigious shrines in Japan. Tsubaki Daihogu is famous for its Konryu-Myojin waterfall where *misogi* (a waterfall purification) is practiced…

The feeling was quite magical as we walked under the giant torii and into the temple grounds down a long gravel road lined with candle-lit lamps leading to the main shrine. The wind was still blowing wildly through the ancient trees which added to the mysterious atmosphere. Iwasaki-san the Shinto priest led us through the front of shrine… into changing rooms where we changed into our minimal *misogi* outfits (fundoshi [loincloth] and hachimaki [headband—a symbol of perseverance]). Then we all met in front to the waterfall where we all did a kind of warm up composed of various calisthenics and chanting to prepare our bodies and minds for the coming experience. After the warm-up we followed Iwasaki-san down the torch-lined staircase leading to the waterfall. After ceremonially spraying salt and sake into the air Iwasaki entered the water and under the waterfall. Then it was my turn. After clapping two times and slicing the air with my fingers, I entered the roaring waterfall, while chanting Shinto mantra, positioning my body so that the water hit my upper back and shoulders. After about 30 s I heard Iwasaki-san’s signal to exit the fall. Everyone took turns to experience the waterfall then we all changed back into our clothes and met in the main hall where we sat in meditation for several minutes.
The following passage describes a stay in the Zen Buddhist dōjō (training center) in Musashi Koganei, Tokyo:

... Adam instructed us to clean the dojo before meditation. We swept the floors and tatami [floor] mats, towed down the floors and wiped all the windows clean. Then the head teacher instructed us in their particular form of meditation. Before we actually meditated, the regular dojo members did 30 minutes of a special misogi training for advanced students. Then we all went up to the second floor where the meditation hall was, took cushions, folded them under us, and sat on the cushions in half lotus or full lotus position. We sat for 1 hour in the austere cold of early morning. Then we followed the senior students to the kitchen where they prepared us a breakfast of green tea, miso soup and rice... After the break, was our next meditation session. Before sitting we all were handed bokuto (wooden swords) and took our places in the meditation hall and everyone did 1000 strokes of the sword as each person took turns counting to 100. Then we sat again for an hour. Afterwards we... went out into the yard where we swept and raked leaves for a few hours. Then it was lunch time. We had soba, umeboshi, and tea. Meals were a solemn affair. We were supposed to follow every movement of the senior students as close as possible. Very minimal talking. Only seiza [position sitting on one’s heels] sitting is permitted.

These examples throw the participants and reader into exotic and unfamiliar situations which require courage, and offer an authenticity which cannot be experienced by simply visiting Japan. Here we receive an image of an exclusive and deeply spiritual Japan available only to the few. Although the activities described above have nothing directly to do with the shakuhachi, experiencing a spiritual Japan seems to be one of the key points of the tours and provides the participants with a feeling of a deep connection with the instrument.

147.6 Analysis of the Shakuhachi Tours

147.6.1 Tours as Experienced by People

The participants always described Shakuhachi Roots Pilgrimage as having been extraordinary and according to some, even life-changing experiences. “The trip was great because it was both off the beaten track and behind closed doors,” as one of the participants wrote (email correspondence, June 2006).

The two most important experiences for the participants on the tour seem to be bamboo harvesting and learning from Japanese teachers in Japan. As Darren Stone, who has participated in the Shakuhachi Roots Pilgrimage several times, wrote:

The single biggest thing to connect me to my hocchiku (and subsequent ones I’ve made) was to see and touch and participate in the bamboo harvest. Seeing my bamboo go from in-the-ground, to cutting it, cleaning and burning, sunning, watching the colors change, and finishing them into several poorly-tuned (but personal and playable) flutes just 8 months later... This was really important to me. (email correspondence, Feb. 2006).

Learning from a Japanese teacher in Japan—even if Kurahashi Yōdō, for example, has taught more students in the U.S. than in Japan—is much appreciated by the participants. It makes them feel that they have learned from “the real thing,” which
they regard as an important aspect of their shakuhachi studies. In the course of the interviews, participants indicated the feelings of authenticity they experience when learning from a Japanese teacher rather than the teacher they had in their respective countries.

All of the participants explained that they have had a long-time interest in Japanese culture, and in particularly Zen Buddhism and martial arts such as aikido. It was through these disciplines they encountered the shakuhachi.

When asked about what they expected from the tour, most answered they had no expectations and tried to remain open to new experiences. However, a few were disappointed by what they saw as “westernization” in Japan.

147.6.2 Spirituality and Shakuhachi in the West and Japan

Meditating at a Zen Buddhist dōjō, misogi, attending a secret ceremony commemorating the famous Zen Buddhist monk and poet, Ikkyū Sōjun (1394–1481), performing kyūdō, and experiencing Koyasan (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) all add to the drawing power of the tour and render it an authentic Japanese experience. Zen Buddhism, as it is known in the West, has been branded as an authentic, pure, rational, and individualistic spirituality that enjoys a commonality with modern scientific discourse. Mainly due to the works of Suzuki Shunryū (1904–1971), it has been transformed from a religion in Japan to a spiritual movement in the West, not least in the U.S. The spirituality that the tour seeks to find in Japan is one that has been transformed in the West. As Jørn Borup (2013) notes “Zen” has become an icon, a floating signifier through the use of the concept as “be Zen” or “find your Zen.” Here, it is no longer just a religion, but also a state of being or something one possesses. Borup furthermore points out that in Japan, there are basically no associations between Zen Buddhism and spirituality. In Japan Zen Buddhism is rather an institutionalized religion or, for the majority of the Japanese, a funerary institution. Zen Buddhism as an individual spirituality is a Western interpretation.

For shakuhachi players the individuality of (their version of) Zen connects well with the stories of highly individualistic persons such as Watazumi and Nishimura. Most shakuhachi players in the Western countries have no larger group of which to be a part. Although they may identify themselves with a larger school in Japan, the fact is that most would never become an equal member of such a group. Thus players are often isolated figures with a special interest, and rebellious individuals such as Watazumi become iconic figures with whom they can identify themselves.

The Western interest in Japanese religion, in particular Zen Buddhism, and arts have led to a coupling of these two aspects to the degree that they have become almost inseparable (Yamada 2009: 214). In Yamada’s view, the Japanese feel flattered when non-Japanese people express an interest in their culture, despite it being a Western-appropriated view of Japanese culture. As a result of this feedback from the West, knowledge of the raw and less refined shakuhachi of Watazumi and Nishimura has increased in Japan during the past decade. The Myōan group of
shakuhachi players is no longer as isolated as before and is invited in to festivals and other larger events, although it remains a curiosity.

Returning to Seyama Tōru’s thesis that “playing the shakuhachi is...playing the history of the instrument” (1998: 76), it can be seen that, due to the fact that participating in the tradition and history of the shakuhachi and in Japanese culture in its entirety is of such importance, the ritualistic aspects of the performances permit participants in the tour to claim a place in the history of shakuhachi; the participants perform for the ancestors of the shakuhachi lineages—the komusō monks. By praying to the shakuhachi ancestors as if they were their own, the participants signal that they are, indeed, heirs to this tradition. Thus the negotiation of a multi-cultural shakuhachi lineage has begun. The music itself serves as the vehicle which enables the rituals—and with the online documentation of the rituals, the negotiation takes place. Indeed, I view the shakuhachi offerings to the ancestors as one of the key factors that serve to make the tour as a whole into a performance, due to the heavy online coverage through the materialization of photos, daily blogs, and descriptions of the tours.

On the Roots Pilgrimage 2005 blog Ramos discusses playing at Myōanji temple, the most important of the shakuhachi temples, which he regarded as playing a crucial role in the continuation of the tradition inherited from the komusō monks:

After placing a monetary offering in an envelope upon the altar, and bowing deeply, we all played the piece Tamuke as our honkyoku offering to the spirits of the shakuhachi ancestors... Our vibrations will merge with the ancestors who are watching us and playing with us, guiding us on our Path...

Tamuke is not dissimilar to the Western requiem, as the piece is often played for newly departed souls. Playing and thereby offering shakuhachi music to the shakuhachi ancestors within the Japanese tradition of visiting the family grave to make offerings to the ancestors, can be viewed as participants in the tour linking themselves and the spirits of the shakuhachi past—Japanese players, the komusō monks of the Fuke sect—into one great shakuhachi family. Visits at Shinto shrines are described in the following terms: “We offered shakuhachi honkyoku within the inner sanctuary of the Honden after offering tamagushi (sacred branch offering of the Yu tree) to connect more with the Kamisama (God)” (2005 blog, accessed Sept. 26, 2006).

Connecting Shakuhachi Roots Pilgrimage participants to shakuhachi ancestors and Shinto Gods seems analogous to the authenticity process that the Meiji emperor (1852–1912) had to perform when he became the head of state after the Tokugawa regime was overthrown. He performed pilgrimages throughout Japan and prayed at old graves, assumed to be the tombs of ancient emperors, in support of his claim to a direct imperial rule due him as the heir of the Gods (McClain 2002: 198). By performing a pilgrimage around Japan to pay tribute to the ancient emperors, he signaled to the inhabitants of the country that he was indeed the direct descendant of these mystical figures. In the case of the Shakuhachi Roots Pilgrimage tour, the private act of playing the shakuhachi for one’s own enlightenment or spiritual transcendence (which was partly the aims of the komusō monks) has changed
into a public one, carrying new meanings not only for the players, but also for the international shakuhachi community which is watching online.

Membership in the shakuhachi tradition depends on how successfully one can define oneself as an insider or outsider to the tradition. Riley Lee writes that the definition of an ‘insider’ most likely would begin with membership in the instrument’s original ethnic group, meaning being Japanese:

One is either inside or outside. Since one is a Japanese only if born a Japanese, people who are gaijin [foreigner] are by definition complete and permanent outsiders. Gaijin shakuhachi players are likewise never ‘insiders’ to the shakuhachi tradition in the minds of many Japanese. (Lee 1992: 16)

Be that as it may, playing for the shakuhachi ancestors can be viewed as an initial negotiation of that emic/etic status. The use of Japanese religious rites can be viewed as a means to negotiate an inclusion into an emic stance in the shakuhachi world. However, as the Internet world is highly separated into English-speaking shakuhachi players on the one hand and Japanese-speaking ones on the other, the question becomes among whom is the negotiation taking place and for which audience?

Another aspect of the performance is the experience of playing in Japan in front of a Japanese audience or in temples, which participants reported in interviews to be a sacred gesture. I see this as something of a rite of passage. Many of the interviewed answered that performing in Japan was an important step to them. Here I sense a feeling of having crossed a borderline. It is almost as stepping into adulthood when one has dared to play with or in front a Japanese audience—not Japanese people living in North America, but with “real” Japanese in Japan. As one participant explained:

I have played with Japanese musicians in the States; but in doing so, they have often tended to adopt Western rehearsal habits and mannerisms. So, to play with musicians in their native land, and in the land to which the music is native, is quite different—more authentic.

The tours thus enable the participants to take a big psychological step. Were a shakuhachi player to go to Japan on his or her own, it would require serious involvement with a shakuhachi school and religious institutions, and a much longer stay to attain this degree of involvement. As seen by North Americans, the shakuhachi tour is a convenient way of opening the door into the spiritual world of Japan—a spiritual world, however, which has been appropriated by the West.

147.7 Conclusion

As rituals have the capacity to restructure time, the participants experience—through the rituals they participate in on the tour (both religious and secular)—a collapse of the spatial and temporal boundaries obtaining between the shakuhachi and themselves. By bonding with the shakuhachi ancestors and gods of Japan, through their rituals of playing, donating offerings, and praying, they transcend the limitations of the present and secure for themselves a “past” as a member of the shakuhachi lineage, thereby transforming both past and present and their futures as
authenticated shakuhachi players. Rituals also encompass control of a space and have the ability to restructure space and mark out a new space of belonging; thus the participants make the space of the “homeland of the shakuhachi” their own. In this manner the rituals serve to connect the participants both physically and spiritually to the land of the shakuhachi and the bamboo and to its sacred places. The rituals are conducted with seriousness, care, and respect. The Shakuhachi Roots Pilgrimage is a pilgrimage and the participants pilgrims; on Ramos’ blog each new participant is entered as a “new pilgrim” after signing up for the tour (http://alcvin.ca/japantrip/hello-world, accessed 10.03.13).

By incorporating vigorous religious practice, not performed by most Japanese players, Shakuhachi Roots Pilgrimage, in my view, can be seen as “investing old ritual forms with new meanings” (Jones 1999: 33). The rituals transform a priori attitudes of ethnic ownership of the music. By participating in ritual acts in Japan, the players challenge the boundaries of authenticity and resist being excluded due to ethnic categorization. By performing far more rituals than most Japanese players, they manifest themselves as insiders in a tradition which was once highly exclusive. They therewith transform the realm of the shakuhachi into an internationally open tradition and create a new sense of community as one big shakuhachi family.

The shakuhachi tours are closely linked to images of the Other. The participants possess a strong sense of the Japan that they desire to see and not to see, and thus they invent their own image of “Japan”—although during interviews most participants said that they tried not to have specific expectations with regard to the tour. However, most of them had, in fact, studied Buddhism and ancient Japan before taking the tour, thus inevitably constructing their own images of the Japan they were to experience. It is striking, for example, to see how important the images of traditional Japan are for the participants:

I live in Manhattan. I try to bring back old Japan. I play the shakuhachi. My apartment reflects Japanese lifestyle: There is not too much technology [sic!]. I keep it simple! I keep objects that I brought back from Japan or that remind me of Japan.

However, the image of Japan as traditional, secret, and mysterious is a Western-constructed image, promoted, not least, by the transformation of Zen Buddhism in the West. Participating in a shakuhachi tour not only acquaints players with the history of the music, but also with a lost exotic Japan, exemplified by the komusō, their wanderings from temple to temple, far from lives of contemporary Japanese (Fig. 147.5).

The difference in focus between these the Annual Japan Tenri Tours which has continued with the same leader since 1980 and Shakuhachi Roots Pilgrimage which commenced in 2003 shows, in my view, the changes in the approach to the shakuhachi among non-Japanese players. While both shakuhachi tours emphasize visits to such sacred places as temples or shrines, in Shakuhachi Roots Pilgrimage, which started 23 years after the Annual Japan Tenri Tours, the role of the shakuhachi as a religious instrument and experiencing spirituality is far more emphasized. And the spiritual aspect of the tour is clearly based upon a Western-appropriated Zen Buddhism and spirituality.
The Shakuhachi Roots Pilgrimage is packaged, promoted, and sold on the Internet as a spiritual tour to the homeland of the *shakuhachi*, in which rites are performed for those who follow the tours online on blogs, websites, and web fora. No matter how we interpret the tours, it is certain that they enrich the participants’ lives and that they return inspired.

References


