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Kyotaku Denki (1640s?)

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II. Text of Kyotaku Denki Kokuji Kai

Kyorei ("false bell"), a musical piece, was originally named Kyotaku ("false bell"), because it imitated the sound of a taku (to in Chinese, a hand-bell with a clapper). Consequently the instrument [the bamboo flute on which the piece was played] was called a "false bell," and so was the piece.

Since the taku and the rei (ling in Chinese) are similar, in later ages people mistook the latter for the former and coined the name kyorei ("false bell").

Then is it not a great mistake to assume that, just because the instrument is usually called shakuhachi, "kyorei" is nothing but the name of a piece?¹

Fuke-zenji (in Chinese, P'u Hua Ch'an Shih) was a Zen Buddhist priest of great learning in the T'ang dynasty.² He lived in Chen Province and was pleased with his uninhibited Zen spirit.

Ringing a taku, he would go to town and say to passers-by: Myōōrai myōōda, antōrai antōda, Shihō hachimenrai (ya), senpūda, Kokūrai (ya), rengada.³ "If attacked in the light, I will strike back in the light. If attacked in the dark, I will strike in the dark. If attacked from all quarters, I will strike as a whirlwind does. If attacked from the empty sky, I will thrash with a frail."

One day, a man named Chō Haku (Chang Po in Chinese) of Ho Nan province, heard these words and revered the priest Fuke for his great virtue. He appealed to the priest for permission to follow him, but the priest did not accept him.

Haku (Chang Po) had previously had a taste for playing pipes. Having listened to the sound of the Priest's bell, he at once made a [bamboo] flute and imitated the sound. [Thereafter] he played the sound untiringly on the flute and never played other pieces.

Since he made the sound of the bell on his flute, he named the flute "kyotaku." This tradition was handed down in his family for sixteen generations. [From Chō Haku to Chō Kin, his son, and to Chō Han, his grandson; Chō Ken, the son of Chō Han, had the pseudonym Tai-Ryō. Then, to Chō Ryo, Chō Riku, Chō Chū, Chō Gen, Chō Shi, Chō An, Chō Tan, Chō Ren, Chō San, Chō Shō, whose pseudonym was Shi-Sō, Chō Yū, the fifteenth generation, and Chō San, the sixteenth generation.] The descendant named San (Chō San) had already mastered the tradition in his thirties.⁴

Since he was a devout believer in Buddhism by nature, he went to the prefecture of Hsü-Chow (Jo-shū in Japanese) to study Zen Buddhism with a priest at the temple Hu-kuo-ssū (Gokokuji in Japanese) of Ling-Tung (Reitō in Japanese).

[At the same time] Gakushin,⁵ a Japanese Buddhist priest, was also staying there to study Zen. Being companions in their studies, Gakushin and San had much in common and became good friends.

One day, during a quiet talk, the conversation turned to the story of the kyotaku tradition, which had been originated by San's ancestors and transmitted down to his time. San then tuned the instrument and played it. The strains from the flute were captivating.

Gakushin was impressed [by the sound] and expressed great admiration, saying excitedly: "Wonderful! Exquisite! From the various flutes of the world I have never heard such pure sounds or such beautiful music. This is music to be admired and cherished. I beg you to teach me one piece so that I might introduce this exquisite sound to Japan and pass it on to posterity." Then San performed on the flute again for Gakushin and let him learn the music.

Gakushin studied the art of the kyotaku. As the days passed, he went to the heart of Zen philosophy and attained proficiency in the kyotaku; finally he took leave of San [to return to Japan]. Gakushin left Hsü-Chow for Ming-Chow, where he unmoored his ship. It was in the second year of Pao-Yu in the reign of Emperor Li-Tsung of the Southern Sung Dynasty that he returned to Japan, where it was the sixth year of Kenchō,⁶ in the reign of Emperor Gofukakusa. Thereafter, Gakushin confined himself in a mountain temple at Kōyasan, sometimes visiting the capital [Kyoto].

Years passed, and he founded a Buddhist temple named Saihōji in the province of Kishū,⁷ where he established his permanent abode. Because of his great virtue, Gakushin became known by the title Dai-zenji ("Great Master of Zen"), and the number of his disciples increased day by day.

Among his numerous students, there was one called Kichiku. The more earnest he became in his devotion to Zen Buddhism, the more ardent was his admiration for his master. Gakushin also took a more kindly interest in him than in other students. One day Gakushin told Kichiku: "When I was [studying] in the country of Sung, I was instructed in the kyotaku and I perform on it well even today. I would like to initiate you in this flute in the hope that, as my successor, you will pass this art on to posterity." Kichiku, dancing for joy and expressing his gratitude, received instruction in this music and attained proficiency in the instrument. He took delight in playing it everyday untiringly. There were

four more students--Kokusaku, Risei, Hōfu and Sōjo--who also learned this flute well. They were known to the world under the [collective] title Shikoji ("Four Devoted Men").

Later, having a desire to practice itinerancy, Kichiku asked the master for permission to take his leave. He wished to play this flute in the streets and at every gate, and to let all the world know this exquisite music. Gakushin said, "Well! What a fine ambition!" Kichiku departed Kishū immediately and before long arrived at the shrine of Kokūzō-dō, at the top of Mt. Asamagatake in the province of Sei-shū.⁸ Having confined himself in the shrine, Kichiku concentrated strenuously on his devotions, praying deep into the night.⁹ When he was about to fall asleep, he had a vivid inspired dream: Kichiku was poling a punt, alone on the sea, admiring the full moon. Suddenly a dense fog covered everything and the moonlight, too, grew dim and dark. Through the fog, he heard the sound of a flute, desolate and sonorous. The beauty of the sound was beyond description. Shortly the sound ceased. The fog got thicker and thicker and became a dense mass, from which the wonderful sound of the flute emerged [again]. Kichiku had never heard such an exquisite sound.

In his dream he was deeply inspired and wished to imitate the sound with his kyotaku. Then suddenly he awakened from the dream, and found no trace of the mass of fog or the punt and pole; but the sound of the flute still lingered in his ears.

Kichiku thought it very wondrous. Tuning his kyotaku he tried to imitate with it the two strains of music in the dream. Eventually he succeeded in reproducing the sound on his flute.

He immediately returned to Kishū and told Gakushin, his master, about the dream and the music he learned from it. Then Kichiku asked the master to name the two pieces.¹⁰ The master said, "That must be a gift from the Buddha! What you heard first shall be called Mukaiji ("Flute in the Foggy Sea"), and what you heard next shall be named Kokūji ("Flute in the Empty Sky").

Thenceforth, as he went to and fro on the road, Kichiku played kyotaku, [the piece] which he had learned first; and when he was requested to perform something novel, he played the two newly acquired pieces.

Monks in later ages have become ignorant of this matter, and play the latter two pieces indiscriminately; they always take kyotaku for the name of a musical piece and never consider it to be the name of the instrument [as well]. Furthermore, confused by the two similar bells taku and rei, they have

turned the name into kyorei. Thus, the name has lost its original significance. Besides, every one of these monks has made up something novel. There are thousands of tunes and tens of thousands of techniques, and everyone plays the flute at his own pleasure. It is deplorable that the initial intention of Chō Haku has vanished completely.¹¹

In the concluding years of his life, Kichiku lived in the east of Kyoto and occasionally went about in the capital city. Eventually he taught this music¹² to Jinsai. This heritage was handed down from Jinsai to Gihaku, from Gihaku to Rinmei, from Rinmei to Kyofū, and from Kyofū to Kyomu. Kyomu is identical with Kusunoki Masakatsu,¹³ who was descended from the Emperor Bitatsu. The Southern Dynasty was at a low ebb and all its adherents were doomed. No matter how ardent his chivalrous spirit, no matter how brave his will, Kusunoki realized what the times had wrought, and shut himself up [in Yamato, instead of raising an army in vain]. [One day he left in secret for Gōshū.¹⁴] There he met Kyofū, from whom he learned the tradition [of the kyotaku].

Kyomu did not take the tonsure or wear canonical dress. He wore everyday unpatterned clothes. He hung a kara¹⁵ from his neck, carried a bein¹⁶ and covered his face with a dome-shaped basket-hat.¹⁷

Rambling about castle towns, he sounded the kyotaku from door to door. For a long trip, he braced himself with a shukin¹⁸ over his clothes and wore a pair of gaiters and straw sandals. With a large wrapping cloth (of five feet square) he covered the fukusu,¹⁹ stretched it with a piece of board called kenkonbari²⁰ and tied it all up in the middle with a rope called nakayui.²¹ Packing all the needs for his journey in the fukusu, he wrapped it with the cloth and carried it on his back.

Kyomu was dressed this way when he met Kyufū, who asked suspiciously about his unusual appearance: "Hey, what a crazy-looking friend! May I ask you why you are so oddly dressed?" Kyomu responded: "Once, Fuke, the late great Zen master, wandered about ringing the taku in towns, like a possessed man. I would like to emulate his virtue."

"In addition," Kyomu continued, "I have made a new ordinance: the basket-hat is to be called tengai ("canopy"); it shall be irreverent for a man engaged in these religious austerities to take off the basket-hat. His face must be covered with it when he meets others. The idea is to assume a life of seclusion even in town. When a fellow-priest [of this sect] dies, he must be seated on his fukusu covered with a large piece of cloth, tied with a rope [nakayui] and buried. His tombstone is to be made of the board called kenkonbari."

The kyotaku will be performed as the funeral service. This ritual will be the single highest wish for a priest dying in his itinerancy. What do you think about this ordinance?"

Kyofū was highly impressed by Kyomu's idea and said, "It is quite reasonable and sensible." Then Kyofū took his leave.

Thereafter, Kyomu made a tour around the Five Home Provinces²² and the Seven Districts²³ of Japan, playing the kyotaku. When people inquired, "Who and what are you?" he would answer, "I am a monk called Kyomu." Hence the name "Kyomuso"²⁴ came to be used to designate monks of this sect. The number of disciples modelling themselves upon Kyomu increased in various provinces. Some eccentric fellows wore an iron-chain around the head,²⁵ visors,²⁶ and a long sword²⁷ or a dagger.²⁸

Returning to Gōshū, Kyomu resided for a while in the neighborhood of Shiga and passed on the tradition [of the kyotaku] to a disciple named Gidō. Gidō handed it down to Jitō. Passing through eight generations from Jitō, the tradition reached Chirai.²⁹ [The eight monks of the eight generations: Jitō, Kashō, Kūrai, Jikū, Echū, Ichimoku, Fumyō and Chirai.]

By that time, the name kyotaku had been forgotten. Only the name "Kyorei," as the title of a musical piece, was known. In both China and Japan the flute has commonly been called shakuhachi.³⁰ Nobody knows who gave it that name.

Chirai taught the tradition to the present writer [Tonwō], who handed it down to Mufū. However, Mufū later studied the flute with other teachers and played in innumerable styles.³¹