

## 総説

# The Tin Whistle and the Shakuhachi: a Comparison and Contrast of Two Flutes from the Opposite Ends of Eurasia

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## Abstract

The shakuhachi and the tin whistle are two aerophones which have developed independently in cultures at the opposite ends of Eurasia but which share certain characteristics such as being end-blown flutes predominantly associated with the traditional music of their respective countries, have long historical associations within their cultures, and have both become increasingly popular instruments worldwide in the last several decades. Both flutes come from musical traditions where they are played solo as well as together with stringed instruments, and a flute in the key of D is the one most commonly used in both cultures. Both come from countries where music traditions have often been handed down within particular families and share similar playing techniques. In recent years longer flutes of both varieties have been increasingly used. In addition to similarities, differences in areas such as embouchure, flute materials, music genres and the contexts for traditional music in each culture make for an interesting contrast between the two instruments.

Keywords: hitoyogiri, miyogiri, shakuhachi, tin whistle, penny whistle, flageolet

## Introduction

The tin whistle and the shakuhachi are two flutes that have developed independently of each other at the opposite ends of Eurasia. Today the tin whistle is predominantly associated with the music of Ireland and the shakuhachi with that of Japan. Initially one might ask if there is any basis for comparison of the two flutes as the instruments come from societies that are quite distant from each other in terms of culture and geography. At the least one can say that the tin whistle and the shakuhachi are both end-blown aerophones (flutes) strongly associated with the traditional music of their respective island cultures and that they have become increasingly popular instruments worldwide over the last several decades.

Though both instruments are most often identified with the traditional music of their respective cultures they are also played in other contexts. Both flutes have a tradition of being played solo and together with stringed instruments: the shakuhachi with koto and shamisen, and the tin whistle with fiddle and harp. The standard length and most commonly played instrument in both cultures is in the key of D (the note sounded with all the flute holes covered), but both flutes have been and are cur-

rently being made in keys other than the standard one, with longer flutes of both instruments being made and played more frequently in recent years. Both flutes have origins outside of their current cultures, with the shakuhachi originally coming from China, and prototypes of the tin whistle coming from the European continent and England. In addition to similarities, there are also significant differences between the two flutes, the musical genres they are used for and the contexts in which they are played as one might expect considering their different historical and cultural contexts.

## 1. The physical instruments

The name for the Japanese vertical bamboo flute, “shakuhachi,” refers to an Edo period (1600-1868) unit of measurement called *shaku*, divisible into 10 *sun* and as the term *hachi* in Japanese means “eight,” shakuhachi refers to the standard length of the instrument, about 54.5 centimeters. In its original form the shakuhachi was a six hole vertical air reed flute which made its way from China to Japan in the 8<sup>th</sup> century along with other instruments which became part of the Japanese court orchestra. According to music scholar William T. Malm, *gagaku*, the style of music associated with the early shakuhachi in Japan, was the “earliest significant instrumental form” in Japanese music (William T. Malm, p. 102, 2000)

The shakuhachi has throughout its long history

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largely been a vertically held notched flute constructed of bamboo though in the Shosoin, the Imperial repository in Nara, there are eight 8<sup>th</sup> century gagaku shakuhachi, three of which are made of jade, stone, and ivory, and which bear artificial nodes carved where bamboo nodes would normally be found. These flutes, which were gifts from China, are from about 34-44 centimeters in length and are straight flutes with three bamboo (or carved) nodes; they all have six finger holes; five in the front and one at the back.

The shakuhachi most often played today is referred to in an academic context as the Fuke shakuhachi, after the name of the Zen sect that played it in the Edo Period; it has only five finger holes with the four holes in the front separated from each other by about a tenth of the total length of the flute and a thumb hole at the back of the flute at a distance slightly higher up the flute than the uppermost front hole. Today's shakuhachi is made of a thicker bamboo and has a larger internal and external diameter than the "archaic" shakuhachi of the 8<sup>th</sup> century; it is also characterized by its flared root-end, which is sometimes given a slight upward curve (Fig 1). The Fuke shakuhachi has three central nodes that correspond to those of the 8<sup>th</sup> century flutes but also one at the utaguchi (mouthpiece) and several at the bottom end of the flute (seven is the aesthetic standard). Today most shakuhachi are hand crafted from bamboo but there are machine produced wooden flutes and inexpensive plastic flutes made to look like bamboo.



**Fig. 1. Fuke shakuhachi with flared root ends. Notice the red or black lacquer interiors of the flutes.**

Ireland's tin whistle's name comes from the material it was originally made from though that is often a misnomer nowadays as many 'tin' whistles are vertical flutes made of cylindrical brass tubing with a molded plastic mouthpiece. The conical tin sheet metal flute with a wooden stop is the second most widely used variant of the whistle, with six holes, usually in slightly different sizes, all cut through the thin metal at the front of the flute. There are also whistles of other material such as

nickel silver, aluminum, wood or plastic (see photo 2). Like the original shakuhachi, the tin whistle is a vertically held flute with six holes but of a shorter length of about 30 cm; the tinwhistle is also referred to by other names such as penny whistle and *feadan* (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2. Tin whistles. The top tin whistle is a conical flute with a wooden stop (not visible), while the other two have plastic mouthpieces. The flute in the middle is cylindrical.**

## 2. The history of the two flutes

Players of the *cuisle* or pipe, thought to be a possible progenitor of the modern tin whistle or penny whistle, are mentioned in Irish literature as being present at various festivities including events at the King of Ireland's court. The scribes of the late 14<sup>th</sup> century Yellow Book of Lecan drew a sketch of the imagined royal banqueting hall of Tara which included *cuislinnaigh* (pipers) seated next to schoolteachers, both granted the shin portions of a pig. In the same sketch, players of the *crúit* (harp) were given the shoulder portions of the animal, a sign of higher status (Ann Buckley, p. 751, 2005). Players of flutes are portrayed in Irish literature as providers of entertainment who often played together with string players. Ireland had an established reputation for instrumental music in the Middle Ages and several writers claimed that they were taken from Ireland to Wales for the express purpose of training Welsh musicians; this appears to be corroborated by foreign enthusiasts of Irish music such as the Welsh-Norman visitor Giraldus Cambrensis who noted the cultural relationship between the two regions in the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Buckley, p. 759). At the same time period in Japan members of noble families as well as wandering beggar priests were playing instruments that were progenitors of today's shakuhachi.

The Irish Gaelic terms "cuisle" and "feadan" refer to a "pipe" or "tube," and early flutes were created by boring out the stalks of plants such as cane or elder so the Irish vertical flute like the shakuhachi may have started out as a flute cut from a plant growing in the wild. There was also the Gaelic term "cuisach," for a flute made from reeds or cornstalks (Gray Larsen, 2004, p. 59). Though

the *cuisle* is commonly referred to in Ireland's early literature there is little solid evidence available to determine whether it was a straight pipe similar in shape to the tin whistles of today, a kind of bagpipe, or a combination of those two varieties of flute (Sean Duffy, 2004, p. 347) though there are medieval ceremonial crosses which appear to show musicians playing single and triple pipe instruments. In addition to being the name for a flute, the Gaelic term *feadan* was also used to describe a whistling sound. Bone whistles made from the wing bones of swans and other large birds have been found in archeological excavation in Ireland, principally from excavations of 12<sup>th</sup> century Norman ruins in Dublin, pointing perhaps to a Viking origin for some of the early Irish flutes (Fig. 3). According to Ann Buckley, some of these flutes were probably duct or fipple flutes, operating on the same principle as today's tin whistle (Buckley, p. 775). Duct flutes have a mouthpiece with a duct or air passage that serves to guide one's breath to the instrument's voicing edge, thus making them far easier to play than a notched flute such as the shakuhachi where one must direct one's airstream over a sharp edge.



**Fig. 3. Bone flute from excavation of 12<sup>th</sup> century Norman ruins. In The National Museum of Ireland (sketch by Luca Ribble).**

Though flutes, pipes, or whistles of various sorts were played in Ireland in medieval times there is no unbroken tradition of one or more flutes which we can clearly trace from those times to the present day. In contrast, the shakuhachi is an instrument that can be traced back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century when it was part of the *gagaku* orchestra that performed at Japan's Imperial Court. By the mid-tenth century the shakuhachi had vanished from the *gagaku* orchestra but it is mentioned in various texts as still being played by members of various noble families in Japan (Chamber Music for Syakuhachi, by Simura Satosi, p. 701). By the 13<sup>th</sup> century, however, it had become an instrument used for genres such as *dengaku* and *sarugaku* (early Japanese theatre) and was being played by other classes in society such as blind beggar priests called *mekura hoshi*; it is thought that they may have performed solo pieces on the shakuhachi before nar-

rating war tales accompanied by the biwa, or Japanese four string lute. At the same time in Ireland bards or keepers of tradition narrated historical tales accompanied by a harp, the brass wire strings of which the musicians played with their long fingernails. Pipers also played at festivities, perhaps at many of the same occasions the harpers performed for but it seems that the players of the two instruments had a different status in society, with harp players being much more venerated.

The *Taigen Sho*, a musical encyclopedia of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, written by the musician Toyohara no Muneaki (1450-1524) in 1512 notes that shakuhachi of various lengths were played in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and contains the first graphic representation we have of five hole bamboo flutes, instruments pictured as being made from pieces of bamboo with a single joint; in later years these flutes made from a single bamboo joint would be referred to as *hitoyogiri*, literally "single section cut," and were about 1.1 *shaku* in length (about 34 cm) with smaller holes than the shakuhachi of today (Yuko Kamisango, p. 89, 1988). There was also a flute called the *miyogiri*, for the three nodes (*miyo*) of bamboo that composed it and which was perhaps closer in form to that of the modern shakuhachi. In the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, the *hitoyogiri* and *miyogiri* were both played by beggar priests called *komoso* (from *komo* — "straw mat," and *so* — "monk"), named for the straw mats they carried as their bedding, as well as by various wanderers referred to by names such as *boronji* or *boroboro* (Tsuneko Tsukitani, 2008, p. 151). *Komoso* in paintings or drawings from this period are shown with long hair and wearing straw mats around their waists.

The player of Irish whistles or flutes was also commonly a member of the more destitute classes of society and with regard to other musicians and entertainers, his status was low (Duffy, p. 347). A much higher status seems to have been reserved for players of the harp until the 17<sup>th</sup> century and then for players of the bellows-blown uilleann pipes, an Irish form of the bagpipe which took their present form in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and were originally known as "union pipes." One of the various historical names for the tin whistle, the "penny whistle," seems to have entered the historical record from the streets of Dublin in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as an instrument favored by vagabonds and beggars.

### 3. The history of names for the instruments

The name 'shakuhachi' can be traced back to its ancient Chinese equivalent "chiba," a Chinese term for the instrument which also refers to its length. The term "tin whistle" is much more recent, perhaps dating back to the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century but possibly earlier. In

19th century Ireland, the tinker, or person who worked with metal-ware and sold and mended pots, pans, and kettles, was held in low repute, and the use of the term ‘tinker’ was synonymous with “gypsy” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, Volume XI, p. 54, 1970). The tinker may have played a role in disseminating music as he or she traveled throughout the country and perhaps the name “tin whistle” developed out of this context. At certain times in history both shakuhachi and tin whistle were played by classes that were considered to be at the bottom of society with the difference that that some of the Japanese words for shakuhachi player such as *komoso* had religious connotations as well as denoting mendicancy.

In the Edo Period, the shakuhachi underwent further modification, becoming a thicker walled instrument with a larger diameter and a curved root end that became associated with the samurai class, and it is theorized that members of that class may have altered the form of the the flute and changed the term *komoso* (“straw mat monk”) to *komuso* (“monk of emptiness”) in order to distance themselves from the earlier *komoso*, the beggar priests or ‘straw mat’ monks. This new shakuhachi, played by the Fuke sect of wandering Zen monks, was limited to members of the samurai class, and is the instrument most players of shakuhachi perform on today.

#### 4. The further evolution of the flutes

From the Meiji Period on, in addition to its being constructed from the thicker walled bamboo called *madake* which had been adopted back in the Edo Period, the shakuhachi was often given a smooth inside coating composed of polishing powder and *urushi* (lacquer), in order to give it a more accurate pitch and a louder tone for playing ensemble along with the Japanese stringed instruments the koto and shamisen. This lacquer mixture, referred to in Japanese as *ji*, hardens and affects the vibration of the air column in the flute. Generally red or black *urushi* (lacquer) is inserted in several layers to create a narrower bore midway down the flute which then widens out further down (Tokumaru Yoshihiko, p. 71, 1994). Shakuhachi constructed without this inner coating are called *ji nashi* flutes, which in recent years have again become popular for playing the *honkyoku* -- literally “original music,” the repertoire of *komuso* pieces dating from the Edo Period.

According to shakuhachi master Yokoyama Katsuya, the best shakuhachi for the Japanese classical repertoire of honkyoku is a shakuhachi that keeps the bamboo nodes and is “cut out of a larger piece (of bamboo) with the mouthpiece just a simple slash across the bamboo at an angle, and the insides just hollowed out” (Yoshihiko, p. 71). Today the majority of flutes

made are still *jiari* flutes. It is thought that making flutes with *ji* began sometime around the beginning of the Meiji Period and later became a standard practice; it is not exactly clear who began the practice of using *ji* in shakuhachi but it seems likely that several members of the Araki lineage of the Kinko school of shakuhachi players were the first to seriously work with it in shakuhachi construction, in particular the maker and player Araki Kodo III (1879-1935) (Senryu, 2009) (Fig 4). The “notch” of the modern shakuhachi is fairly wide and shallow and the thin blowing edges of the instruments have been reinforced since the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the insertion of a thin piece of water buffalo horn or deer antler in one of several shapes into the *utaguchi* (mouthpiece) of the flute: trapezoidal for the Kinko guild and crescent shaped for the Tozan school of shakuhachi playing (Fig. 5). Since the Meiji Period, the majority of shakuhachi have been two piece flutes connected by a middle joint piece though in recent years there has been something of an increase in demand for pre-Meiji style one piece flutes referred to as *nobekan*. Today’s shakuhachi has a pitch range of about two and a half octaves, with some virtuoso players able to reach the remaining notes in the third octave.

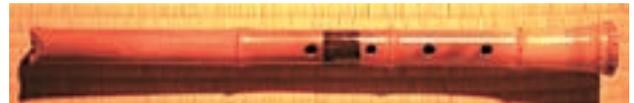


Fig. 4. A bamboo flute made by Araki Kodo III (used by permission of Justin Senryu).



Fig. 5. The shakuhachi on the left has a Tozan school crescent shaped *utaguchi* (mouthpiece) insert while the one on the right has a Kinko style trapezoidal insert.

The Irish tin whistle as we know it today is either conical or cylindrical in shape with a plastic fipple mouthpiece (nowadays often detachable) or a wooden or ceramic stop inserted into the wider end of a conical flute to make the mouthpiece, and has a pitch range of two octaves. Fipples were at one time made of lead but are now usually plastic.

The tin whistle appears to have had its most recent

origins in the French flageolet, a small vertically held wind instrument of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, having a mouthpiece at one end, four holes in front and two on the back; it reached its height of popularity during the Renaissance and Baroque periods and later was revived in the late 1700s and early 1800s, when it was often used for playing quadrilles, or French dances that were popular during the reign of Napoleon I (the recorder, an instrument with origins in northern Italy in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, gradually took the place of the flageolet as the amateur musician's favorite instrument). It is thought that the curious arrangement of the holes, with two in back arose in connection with the small size of the flageolet, as six holes in the front would have been too close together to play comfortably. In France in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the flageolet was an amateur player's instrument.

The first known tunebook for the instrument was published in England around 1661 and titled *Thomas Greeting's Pleasant Companion for the Flageolet*, which gave popular tunes in a tablature of six lines and symbols (Denis Arnold, ed., 1983, p.684) The flageolet was made of wood turned on a lathe (in the latter quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century many beginning shakuhachi players in Japan started out on lathe-turned wooden shakuhachi) and flageolets ranged in size from about 12.5-35 centimeters. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, William Bainbridge of London began making 'English' flageolets, different from the French flutes in having six holes in front and one in back. Flageolets were also made in Dublin and Limerick by the early 1800s (Grey Larsen, p. 59).

Later in the century, the Clarke whistle, a flute perhaps based on a flageolet prototype but with six holes in front and no thumb hole was developed in England in 1843 by Robert Clarke and made of sheet tin rolled around a mandrel. It was later exported to Ireland and from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century on, various sorts of tin whistles were manufactured in Ireland. Considering that the flageolet is an ancestor of the tin whistle, and that it was often used in playing Baroque music, it is interesting that in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a baroque flute maker (Rod Cameron) and a shakuhachi maker (Monty Levenson, a well known shakuhachi maker outside of Japan), worked together to develop a laser tracker device which was used in producing precision mandrels for their shakuhachi and baroque flutes, in order to accurately reproduce the bore dimensions of historical flutes.

## 5. The music played on the tin whistle and the shakuhachi

As was mentioned earlier, in both Irish and Japanese music traditions today the most commonly used flute is in the key of D, though the base note of the tin whistle in

D is an octave above that of the 1.8 length shakuhachi. As the number of holes on the two flutes and the placement of the holes differs, the pentatonic scale used by the shakuhachi is D, F, G, A, C, and the other most common tetrachord used in playing the traditional music of the flute is the *miyako bushi* (scale), consisting of D, E flat, G, A, B flat while two pentatonic modes common in Irish music are the Ionian – D, E, F#, A, B and the Dorian – D, E, G, A, B. Though the base notes of both flutes are the same, the scales most commonly relied on are quite different.

In addition to being identified with Irish traditional music, the tin whistle is also played in Scottish and English folk music, folk rock, and is the lead instrument for a jazz inflected South African music genre called *kwela*, while the shakuhachi in recent decades has been featured in genres such as jazz, rock, "New Age," ambient music and a large number of Hollywood soundtracks. The tin whistle is more of a ubiquitous instrument than the shakuhachi due in part no doubt to its inexpensiveness, the Irish diaspora, and the worldwide popularity of Irish music; the intensive craftsmanship necessary to produce a shakuhachi and the scarcity of *madake* bamboo outside of East Asia makes the shakuhachi less readily available, but the Japanese bamboo flute seems to be used in a wider variety of musical contexts than the tin whistle perhaps due to its lower pitch and difference in embouchure, which allows for greater expressivity on the part of the player. The tin whistle seems more well suited however for the fast paced dance tunes such as jigs or reels featured in Irish music as least with regard to the standard shakuhachi, and in Japan the transverse flute (*fue*) or shinobue is much more commonly used for Japanese dance and festival music than the shakuhachi.

The primary physical difference between the two flutes besides that of material and the number of finger holes is that the shakuhachi's blowing edge is cut diagonally outwards and away from the player and to make a sound the player needs to blow across its bevelled edge whereas the tin whistle makes use of a fipple or plug at the mouth of the metal tube, which serves as a conduit for the player's air stream.

Today the tin whistle is the most common instrument featured in Irish traditional music. Though the koto is the most commonly played traditional instrument in Japan -- in the 1990s there were over 200,000 registered koto players in Japan compared with about 40,000 shakuhachi players, the shakuhachi is by far the most common traditional Japanese instrument played outside the country, due in part to the instrument's ready portability and the growing availability of instruments and shakuhachi instructors outside of Japan (Elizabeth Falconer, 1990). As for other reasons for the shakuhachi's growing

popularity outside of Japan, musicologist Jay Keister points to the Western identification of the shakuhachi with Zen Buddhism, noting that the persistence of the spiritual identity of the shakuhachi “has contributed to the internationalization of the instrument in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its relative independence from the protective and controlling culture of the traditional Japanese music world.” (Jay Keister, p. 100, 2004). Today one can take shakuhachi lessons with master teachers in various cities in the United States attend shakuhachi summer schools in Colorado or in several nations in Europe, and even complete advanced university degrees in shakuhachi in Australia.

## 6. The increasing popularity of plastic models

Mass production of the tin whistle in the 19<sup>th</sup> century made it cheap and readily accessible and while the shakuhachi is still largely made by hand in a labor intensive process, there are plastic models such as the yuu flute, an ABS plastic flute developed by Nagase Kenji which has become popular with beginning players -- and even those more advanced -- around the world in the last decade, as it has the approximate shape, weight, and sound of a bamboo flute along with a low price-tag. One can also purchase tin whistles made of ABS plastic; Susato penny whistles are two-piece plastic flutes which are pitch adjustable. Plastic whistles are not only played by beginners; Irish tin whistle maestro Sean Ryan often plays in formal and informal contexts on a plastic whistle. While bamboo flutes remain quite expensive, going for \$1000 or more, with high quality flutes usually selling for twice or three times that amount, the yuu plastic model can be purchased for less than one hundred dollars.

Although most shakuhachi are made of bamboo, there are areas of the world such as Australia where makers use other materials; flute maker David Brown specializes in hardwood flutes due in part perhaps to the dryness of the climate and the lack of madake, the type of bamboo used to make shakuhachi in Japan. Some of the shakuhachi sold by Mr. Brown have a connection with the tin whistle as they come with interchangeable shakuhachi and tin whistle type mouthpieces. On another Internet site one can buy the yuu ABS plastic shakuhachis with a fipple type attachment so that one can make a sound and work on the fingerings before having to worry with the traditional shakuhachi embouchure, which has a reputation for giving difficulties to beginning players -- who sometimes have difficulty getting a sound out of the flute -- as opposed to a fipple style mouthpiece where the player's airstream is easily guided through a fixed channel to create a sound.

## 7. Metal shakuhachi and low whistles

There was once a serious attempt to make a shakuhachi out of metal, though not of tin. In 1920s Japan inventor Okura Kishichiro (1882-1963) created a metal vertical flute named the Okuraulo which combined the shakuhachi's mouthpiece with the key mechanisms of the modern Boehm silver flute (developed in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century); luckily, perhaps for the future of the traditional shakuhachi, this invention did not catch on, in part, perhaps, because of the high cost of the instrument.

Interestingly, the Boehm flutes did not made headway in Ireland in the early years following their invention (1847); rather, Irish musicians took up traditional simple system wooden horizontal flutes which had been developed in France in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century at a time when classical musicians on the European continent were discarding them in favor of the Boehm flute. The simple system cross-blown flutes used the same fingerings and playing techniques as those used in playing the tin whistle, and both instruments were used in playing the Irish traditional music of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, though the use of the tin whistle in Irish traditional music is thought to have begun prior to the adoption of the horizontal simple system flute. The simple system wood flute is often referred to by Gaelic speakers as the *fheadog mhor*, or big whistle; its price range is quite similar to that of shakuhachi, with antique flutes going for over \$5000 (Brad Hurley, 2004, p. 22)

While today the standard tin whistle has six holes and the shakuhachi has five, in the 1920's in Japan, there were attempts to vary the number of holes in the Japanese flute; seven and nine holed shakuhachi were experimented with and though the nine holed shakuhachi did not survive the test of time, the seven holed vertical flute remains popular in some shakuhachi circles and is the flute of choice for a number of performers who primarily play modern pieces. There are also players who bore an extra small hole near the area of the middle joint of the flute and so play a six hole shakuhachi in order to play modern pieces with more ease.

In regard to the traditionally inexpensive tin whistle, there are now makers producing considerably more expensive brass, silver, and wooden whistles. Both shakuhachi and tin whistle are played in various lengths (standard shakuhachi usually can be found in lengths ranging from 1.6 to 2.4 shaku) and in recent years longer shakuhachi, referred to as 'chokan', are being favored, especially outside of Japan. A new variation of shakuhachi called *taimu* has been developed by shakuhachi maker Ken LaCosse and, player and collector of Edo Period shakuhachi Brian Ritchie in San Francisco, a wide bore flute made in lengths from 2.0 --2.8 or longer

and advertised as having a “foghorn” sound;” perhaps not a description one would have heard in old Edo but the flutes are modeled to a degree on longer Edo Period shakuhachi (LaCosse, 2009).

The popularity of longer tin whistles is also gaining in Irish traditional music; these flutes are usually referred to as low whistles. The use of the low whistle in the modern era dates back to the late 1960s when English whistle maker Bernard Overton made a 60 centimeter flute for an Irish whistler and flute player named Finbar Furey who was in desperate need of a flute to replace one in need of repair (apparently a bansuri, hence the need for a longer length flute, which leads to speculation on the use on the bansuri in playing Irish music - outside the scope of this paper except to note that new instruments or new traditions of playing may come from such forays). Now over twenty varieties of low whistle are manufactured and they are played in places as far from Ireland as the island of Shikoku, Japan (Phil Brown, 2007). In the last several decades the music of both shakuhachi and tin whistle has continued to gain in popularity in countries other than the home countries of both flutes and the number of players utilizing longer instruments from both traditions – the chokan (shakuhachi longer than about a 2.1) and the low whistles -- has steadily increased.

## 8. The transmission of the music

Regarding the music which is played on shakuhachi and Irish tin whistle, both instruments come from an oral/aural tradition where beginners may find it difficult to learn the flute tunes from a book and play them in an authentic manner. The solo *honkyoku* (literally ‘original music’) pieces played on the shakuhachi today were passed down orally among wandering Zen monks for hundreds of years while Irish tunes were also passed down from skilled exponents to aspiring players. Today in Japan learning shakuhachi often still involves direct transmission of the music from a teacher to a student, in many cases where the teacher and a student sit opposite each other while playing. The flute student learns aspects of flute playing such as proper breathing and phrasing, articulation, and correct pitch and tone quality by observing and playing pieces together with the *sensei* (teacher). Initially pieces are sung and the rhythm of the pieces beaten out by hand before they are played on the flute.

In Irish traditional music once pieces are mastered whistle players sometimes introduce variation into their “airs” (vocal melodies encompassing a wide range: often Gaelic tunes in AABA form). Sometimes the instrumental pieces are patterned in imitation of the more ornate styles of singing. In a 1997 interview well known

Irish simple system flute player Matt Malloy said “You have to put your own particular stamp on it,” a sentiment echoed by some shakuhachi masters when they are discussing *honkyoku*, or the traditional wandering monks’ pieces (Mat Malloy, 1997).

There are shakuhachi masters who emphasize performing without notation; reknowned shakuhachi master Yokoyama Katsuya stresses the importance of memorizing the traditional *komuso* pieces and playing them without notation in order to truly know them. In the beginning, however, members of Yokoyama Katsuya’s shakuhachi school start out reading a modified *katakana* script tablature while learning the pieces. Other shakuhachi schools such as the main branches of the *Kinko ryu* (style) and *Tozan ryu* generally continue to rely on written scores though eventually the script may become just an aid to memory. Masters of Japanese *honkyoku* emphasize the importance of making a *honkyoku* piece one’s own through varying the ornamentation while keeping to the original spirit of the piece

The oldest record we have of shakuhachi notation is *hitoyogiri* notation for a work called *Tanteki Hidenfu* (1608) which uses syllabic *katakana* characters such as *ya*, *ta*, *ho*, and *ro* to represent fingerings (Tsukitani, p. 164) while today’s most common shakuhachi tablatures (for *Tozan* and *Kinko*) utilize a modified *katakana* script first devised by *komuso* Kurosawa Kinko in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with characters for sounds such as *ro*, *tsu*, *re*, *chi*, *hi*, and *ri* (Fig. 5). In shakuhachi music there are techniques used which are not expressed in the music notation but which have to be learned in person from the shakuhachi *sensei* (teacher). Traditional players of Irish music sometimes make use of simplified notation, in numeric or alphabetic script, when first learning pieces but abandon these when playing in front of an audience.

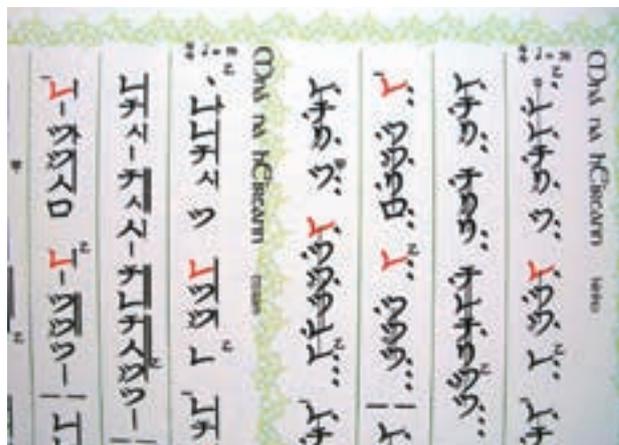


Fig. 6. An example of Kinko and Tozan school tablature for a traditional Gaelic tune from *The Alder Bough: Celtic Airs for Shakuhachi*; the Kinko tablature is on the right (used by permission of author Larry Tyrell. Copyright, Moonbridge)

## 9. Similarities and differences in playing techniques

Both Japanese and Irish flute traditions make use of similar techniques such as trills, half holing, glissando, and a kind of portamento ornamentation, which in shakuhachi playing is referred to as *suriage* – sliding up to the next semitone, or *surisage* – sliding down to the note below. In Irish whistle playing there are techniques such as tonguing, used occasionally for emphasis, and rolls --where one plays a group of three descending grace notes, the second of which equals the pitch of the main note -- which are used in traditional Irish music but which are used rarely or not at all in Japanese traditional music though they are sometimes utilized in more modern styles or pieces, and shakuhachi techniques such as *muraiki* --expelling the air in an explosive charge through the flute, which are not possible on the tin whistle due to the difference in embouchure. Hurley says about Irish ornamentation that “ornaments should be played so quickly that listeners don’t hear the note, but rather the articulation effect” (Hurley, p. 23) and one could make a similar statement about shakuhachi ornaments; players generally don’t linger on them. Hurley also notes that many Irish flutists use glottal stops more frequently than tonguing. In playing traditional shakuhachi music tonguing is never used but either the tongue or glottis is used in a tremolo effect technique called *tamane*.

One technique which is unique to the playing of the five hole shakuhachi and which is a major part of much of traditional shakuhachi playing is called *meri*, and involves the lowering of the pitch of the instrument as much as a minor third through a combination of partial holing and/or lowering of the chin. Notes played in *meri* tend to be quieter than the *kari* notes (natural or sharp notes; those played without lowering the chin) and the differences in tone color resulting from *meri* or *kari* and other techniques such as using alternate fingerings for certain pitches forms an important part of the shakuhachi aesthetic. In tin whistle playing there is partial holing but there is little changing of the angle at which the air stream is generated through head movement.

The folk styles in Ireland demand an abundance of grace notes and vibrato made by shaking fingers over the open holes of the flute and shakuhachi playing also has these characteristics though the shakuhachi player usually produces various types of vibrato through chin or head movements, such as *yoko yuri* – moving the chin from side to side, *tate yuri* – moving the head up and down, or *mawashi yuri* – moving the head in a circular movement.

## 10. Music traditions in which the flutes are played

Both flutes are used in solo as well as ensemble music in their respective traditions, with the tin whistle and the “big whistle” (the horizontal simple system flute) being used to play slow, melodic airs originally taken from songs but now played as instrumentals while the shakuhachi is used for playing the solo honkyoku, literally ‘original’ music which are meditative solo pieces, often with titles related to the natural world – “The Call of the Wild Deer,” Falling Leaves,” “The Nesting of the Cranes” - which were played by wandering Zen monks doing *takuhatsu* (begging for alms) in Edo Period Japan.

Irish traditional music contains love songs, lullabies, humorous songs, religious songs, drinking songs, songs of parting, and ancient laments and heroic lays, the latter often sung in Gaelic. Larry Tyrrell, a professional shakuhachi player in the state of Oregon, has put together a book of Irish airs (vocal melodies) written out in the katakana script notation used for shakuhachi, and refers to the airs as “Irish honkyoku.” Some ornamentation techniques characteristic of Irish tin whistle such as rolls can be readily played on shakuhachi. The “slow airs” were taken from songs and are played mainly for listening but the more prevalent dance tunes for song forms such as jigs or reels played at fast tempos are not as readily played on the standard five hole shakuhachi as they are on Irish instruments such as the *feadan* or the *fheadog mhor* (“big whistle”).

Other traditional Japanese music genres where shakuhachi are played are *gaikyoku*, also called *sankyoku* (music for three instruments), which is ensemble music for koto, shamisen, and shakuhachi, and *minyo*, literally ‘folk music.’ The *gaikyoku* or “outside pieces” were/are songs originally composed for koto or shamisen, some dating back to the Edo Period, where the bamboo flute plays a melismatic version of the koto or shamisen part in ensemble with the koto and/or *sangen* (shamisen) and voice. There are various divisions of *gaikyoku* from the koten or Edo Period “classical” pieces to the *shinkyoku* pieces of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the *gendai hokagu* or post World War II pieces which often use techniques from Western music.

The shakuhachi is used in *minyo*, literally “folksong,” a term which entered Japanese vocabulary in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and which Asano Kenji has defined as “songs which were originally born naturally within local folk communities and, while being transmitted aurally, reflect naively the sentiments of daily life (David W. Hughes, 2008, 283).” *Minyo* usually refers to songs that originated in rural Japan and were written by anonymous nonprofessional musicians. Types of *minyo* include work songs

-- rice planting songs, logging songs, net-casting songs, packhorsemen's songs, sake-making songs, and others, songs associated with religious festivals or celebrations including dance songs for *obon* (midsummer festival) and *kagura* (Shinto shrine related festivities), lullabies, and children's songs. The shakuhachi is not used for all types of *minyo*, and is probably played more for standardized versions of work songs than the other categories, which are usually accompanied by transverse flutes, if accompanied by flutes at all. In *minyo* the shakuhachi follows the vocal line and also plays interludes and this form of shakuhachi playing is probably the closest to the role of the tin whistle in Irish traditional music as the melody the tin whistle plays in traditional contexts is usually the equivalent of or a variation on the tune being played by the other instruments in an Irish music ensemble.

In the majority of Irish traditional music pieces the whistle plays the same melody as instruments such as harp, horizontal simple-system wood flute, uilleann pipes, fiddle, and concertina, though in recent years harmony and percussion have been added with instruments such as guitars, bodhran (a single-headed frame drum played with a short stick), and bouzouki. Additional percussion is sometimes played on spoons or bones. There are *minyo* tunes played on shakuhachi with taiko (Japanese drum) accompaniment in addition to ensemble pieces with shamisen and koto, though taiko are played more often with *shinobue* or *takebue* (transverse folk flutes). The addition of the bodhran to the Irish musical ensemble is also a relatively new development, with the frame drum becoming widely used for accompanying other Irish instruments from the 1950's (Stanley Sadie, ed., p. 565, 2001). Both shakuhachi and tin whistle are played along with traditional folk music in their respective countries, but whereas in Ireland the folk tunes are the main repertoire for the tin whistle, in Japan *minyo* is just one of several distinct genres where shakuhachi is commonly used.

While many of the most popular Japanese *minyo* come from work songs related to themes such as agriculture or fishing (and the lyrics in *sankyoku* pieces often have references to the seasons, birds, flowers, or specific places), Irish traditional music in comparison seems to have relatively few work related tunes but often has historical references to battles or famous personages and events (themes perhaps more in common with the narrative traditions of the Japanese *biwa*, or short necked lute). An air named "Callino" in a lute book from the last quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century is the earliest notation we have of an Irish melody (Stanley Sadie, ed., p. 561). Centuries old religious laments and Norman dance songs have both left traces in Irish music but the traditional music played

in Ireland today largely dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and includes songs both in Irish Gaelic and in English, with dance forms such as the reel and hornpipe having been introduced from England several centuries ago. Many instrumental airs played on tin whistle today were often originally played on the uilleann pipes in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century just as the role of the shakuhachi in the chamber music of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century had originally been filled by another instrument, the three stringed bowed *kokyū* (a long necked lute) before it was largely replaced by the shakuhachi after the demise of the Fuke sect and the consequent secularization of the bamboo flute.

There are pieces in the Japanese tradition, both *honkyoku* and ensemble pieces for koto, shamisen, and shakuhachi such as *Rokudan no Shirabe* ("Investigation in Six Sections") that date back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and most of the *honkyoku* played today were collected and written down in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, so the pieces commonly played in both traditions date from a similar time frame. One key difference between the type of pieces played in both traditions is that the *honkyoku* pieces are unique in being solo instrumental pieces unconnected to a song tradition, whereas the Irish melodies played on the tin whistle are pieces which come from Irish and British airs and dance tunes, some of which have come from songs which were originally sung *sean nos* (with no instrumental accompaniment). There are Irish flute instrumentals that originated from solo singing, but no tradition of Irish flute instrumental pieces which developed independently of song.

In connection with the Fuke sect of Zen Buddhism, the shakuhachi was once considered to be a *hoki*, or religious instrument, rather than a *gakki*, or musical instrument, though that status was largely lost at the end of the Meiji Period while the tin whistle has always been used as a purely musical instrument, without any religious connotations, though some Irish traditional music has or has had religious significance (laments) or supernatural and mythic overtones. Both traditions attribute early pieces to legendary origins, with some of the old Irish Gaelic tunes being attributed to fairies, from whom the Irish musicians allegedly stole tunes. Several of the earliest Japanese *honkyoku* pieces, "Mukaiji" ("Flute on the Misty Sea"), and "Koku" ("Flute in the Empty Sky") were said to have been first heard in a flute player's dream.

## 11. Handing down the music in both traditions

Despite the differences in music styles traditional music in both Ireland and Japan has often been preserved and handed down to succeeding generations through a kind of guild system that has often been associated with particular families. In Japan following the banning of

the Zen Fuke sect in 1871, various schools of shakuhachi playing developed which continue to pass down their own particular techniques and pieces. In shakuhachi playing and in other traditional arts in Japan the importance of lineage is emphasized and in some cases particular families have kept the traditions going for centuries. In medieval Ireland this was also the case; “the professions of the lawyers, musicians and healers were kept within certain families and passed from one generation to another” states medieval scholar Michael Richter in regard to 15<sup>th</sup> century Ireland (Michael Richter, 1988, p. 185). In medieval Ireland as far back as the 12<sup>th</sup> century various families were considered masters of music, and even in regard to more recent times Irish flute Matt Malloy player says of his childhood in the 1950s that families that were interested in the traditional music “associated with families that were of a like mind.” (Matt Molloy, 1997)

In the often family run *iemoto* (“headmaster”) systems in Japan today one generally learns the shakuhachi pieces by imitating one’s teacher as closely as possible and in Ireland today there is also the idea of letting “the tradition sing through you rather than originality” and the idea of keeping personal emotion to a minimum, (Terry Eagleton, 1999, p. 125), a sentiment which would probably be echoed by many Japanese traditional music schools.

## 12. Performance and place in both cultures

In both Ireland and Japan today, traditional music is largely the music of non-professionals who often receive some of their training from professional players. In Japan the *iemoto* of each school of shakuhachi and often his top students are professional players who head a pyramid style hierarchical organization composed mainly of amateurs. In Ireland the playing of traditional music has been more informal in context though since the 1950s competitions and a focus on group instrumental playing have been strongly emphasized originally under the sponsorship of the musicians’ organizations such as Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century competitions increased the interest in traditional music among young people and players of various traditional instruments including the tin whistle began to gather in so-called pub sessions combining music and socializing, a tradition that continues to this day. Concerning the places where traditional music of both cultures is performed, Irish performers on tin whistle can be often seen playing in the context of a pub whereas shakuhachi players in Japan are more often seen in a concert or community hall setting though there are exceptions on both sides -- with noted Irish flutist James Galway being known to play tin whistle in a formal concert context.

Though *minyo* bars where folk shakuhachi tunes may still be heard still exist in certain areas of Japan, in the last decade or so the number of *minyo* players and supporters seems to have declined rather precipitously; there are far more young Japanese devotees of Western style folk songs playing guitar or harmonica but infrequent mixing of the two “folk” genres, though there is at least one well known *minyo* musician, Ito Takio, who mixes *minyo* with Western instruments. Another exception is Kochi prefecture’s Yosakoi festival, where the *minyo* tune *yosakoi bushi* is appropriated into rock, jazz, samba and various other styles of music during the dancing days of the annual summer festival, In Japan traditional music performances tend to be very organized, with even the *minyo* groups maintaining a strict standardization of songs; in regard to the Japanese classical music genres of *honkyoku* and *gaikyoku* the various shakuhachi guilds hold annual recitals in prefectures throughout the country, and there are now several annual traditional music competitions for younger shakuhachi players in both Kanto and Kyushu.

Generally speaking, there have been changes in Irish traditional music from a focus on unaccompanied singing, informal solo instrumental music, and impermanent groups of two or three musicians before WWII to more specialized performances of larger groups of instrument players in venues open to the public; from pubs and informal sessions to more organized performances and more competitive music festivals, largely due to the influence of classically trained composer Sean O Riada who orchestrated new traditional instrument combinations and musical arrangements in the 1960s.

A considerable difference between the two worlds of Irish and Japanese traditional music is that from several decades ago Irish traditional music became the most popular form of entertainment for foreign tourists visiting the country, with the result that Irish traditional music is probably more under the sway of commercial forces than traditional music in Japan. Though there may be more conflicts over intellectual property rights in Ireland in the relationship between traditional music and corporate sponsorship there are continuing commitments to tradition as well as to innovation in both countries. In the 1990s there was a further increase in young peoples’ participation in Irish traditional music activities in music sessions, summer schools and study programs at high schools and universities ( Gearoid O h’Allmhurain, p. 182, 2004) Irish traditional music groups such as the Chieftans, originally affiliated with Sean O Riada, and groups with a stronger rock or jazz orientation such as Planxty or Clannad have helped place Irish traditional music in a similar position to other music genres in the world of popular entertainment.

Though there has been some new interest in traditional instruments in Japan with the recent popularity of artists such as the shamisen playing Yoshida brothers and the continuing interest in taiko groups such as Kodo (though taiko group drumming is actually quite a new tradition in Japan, having started in the 1950s) there has not been a comparable revitalization of traditional music in Japan over the last several decades despite a recent change in governmental policy regarding Japanese traditional music. Beginning in April 2002, a change in the status of traditional music in the country has been in effect with an educational policy that has required that all junior-high school students to spend some time learning a traditional Japanese musical instrument; however, as in many cases there are no qualified instructors available at the schools and little or no funding to hire outside instructors, it is questionable as to whether this “rediscovery” of Japanese music will have a significant effect on the music being played or listened to in Japan. Most Japanese associate Japanese traditional music with the new year or special festivity days; familiarity with traditional music in everyday life has been lost among many or most segments of society in contrast to Ireland, though perhaps it was never as familiar to the average Japanese in comparison to Ireland where traditional music seems to be much more frequently encountered in daily life. In Japanese society traditional music remains largely the province of specialized groups.

### 13. Different perceptions of the two instruments

There are also differences in perceptions of the two instruments, with the shakuhachi having a reputation in Japan as quite a difficult instrument to play - a famous saying associated with this is “kubi furi san nen,” or, “it takes three years to learn to shake your head” – while the tin whistle, according to Grey Larsen, was until recently viewed as an introductory instrument for pipers just beginning to play or a musical instrument more suitable for children until the Irish traditional music revival of the 1960s and 1970s when the musical expressiveness and innovative playing of skilled tin whistlers was given more recognition (Larsen, p. 60). While the difficulty of the shakuhachi has probably been exaggerated, possibly even by shakuhachi players themselves, the tin whistle, though it may look like a toy, is not something that one just picks up and plays proficiently without the requisite hours of effective practice. Both traditions have a long history of playing solo pieces, and though the type of pieces played by tin whistle and shakuhachi are often quite different there are pieces such as slow Irish airs and Japanese *minyō* tunes which can be comfortably played on both instruments.

### 14. Summary

In summary, both tin whistle and shakuhachi are end-blown flutes with long, colorful histories in their respective cultures, traditions of playing solo and with string instruments, and both utilize some similar techniques such as finger slides from one note to the next, trills, and vibrato. A key difference between the music played on the two instruments is that Irish flute music comes from a sung tradition as does the shakuhachi music of *minyō*, but the oldest repertoire of the shakuhachi (*honkyoku*) comes from a strictly instrumental tradition associated with a Zen sect of Buddhism that had no connection with song (though some claim an indirect influence of *shomyō*, or Buddhist chant, on *honkyoku*; Sawada Atsuko, 20001, p. 617).

Exponents of Irish traditional music and some masters of shakuhachi emphasize the importance of internalizing the pieces by memorizing them though this seems to be practiced more consistently by Irish pipers who along with other Irish musicians do not use written notation when playing in front of an audience. This may be related to the fact that many Irish pieces have a clearly defined melodic structure, often repeated in an AABB pattern while Japanese *honkyoku* can be more free form and quite lengthy (anywhere from five to thirty minutes) and many *sankyoku* and *honkyoku* follow the Japanese aesthetic of *zyō ha kyu*, (introduction, development and then a faster tempo rush to the end of the piece) in a completely linear structure: *sankyoku* pieces can also be quite long, to more than twenty minutes for some pieces, and as they put more emphasis on rhythm than melody they may sound rather unmelodic to an ear accustomed to Western music; these factors don't seem to prevent a large number of Japanese koto players from memorizing the pieces but shakuhachi players in Japan generally rely on written notation.

Flute players in both Ireland and Japan have both at times been concerned with collecting and preserving their pieces. Traditional musicians have traveled their respective countries collecting music pieces from various regions. In regard to the shakuhachi Kurosawa Kinko is perhaps most well known for this; Kinko was an 18<sup>th</sup> century *komuso* who wandered Japan collecting *honkyoku* from the various Fuke sect temples and rewriting many of the pieces; today his collection of 36 *honkyoku* form the core of the Kinko shakuhachi guild's *honkyoku* tradition. The oldest existing manuscript collection of Irish tunes also dates from the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Looking at more recent times, in the middle of the last century one of the most prolific collectors and dispersers of Irish music, a master piper named Seamus Ennis, went all around the west of Ireland by bicycle,

equipped with only a pen, a bag of music sheets, and a tin whistle to write down tunes, which he was able to do on first hearing; he used a tin whistle to verify all his transcriptions), and after a five year stint under the Irish Folklore Commission, had collected over 2000 pieces, more than any predecessors in his field (O h'Allmhurain, p. 139, 2005). In more recent years in Japan master shakuhachi players such as Akikazu Nakamura have traveled south to Kyushu and north to Tohoku to collect and learn *honkyoku* from those areas.

In Japan even rural prefectures such as Kochi have their monthly meeting of players of Irish music at an Irish pub and while the number of shakuhachi players appears to be in stasis in Japan the number of shakuhachi players and makers in a number of other countries has been increasing due to the increased availability of instruments, teachers, workshops and other educational opportunities, and to the development in recent years of Internet forums and other shakuhachi related groups outside of Japan, such as the European Shakuhachi Society, created in 2006. Let us hope that the traditional music of both cultures continues to thrive.

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