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Author(s)	Tang, Shuhua
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Reevaluating Jo, Ha, and Kyū: Are Contemporary Definitions of Gagaku Musical Terms Suitable for Medieval Japan?

Tang Shuhua (Theater Studies, D3)

1. Introduction

The three movements *jo* 序, *ha* 破, and *kyū* 急 are commonly used in the suites of *gagaku* court music in Japan. In contemporary *gagaku*, *jo*, *ha*, and *kyū* represent a slow introduction, a normal-speed development, and a rapid conclusion, respectively. A defining characteristic of *jo* is the presence of irregular rhythmic cycles¹, which impart a relatively free rhythm, while *ha* and *kyū* are characterized by rhythmic cycles of consistent length.

However, the applicability of contemporary definitions for understanding *gagaku* from the late twelfth to the fourteenth century remains in question. Some studies (Wolpert, 1985; Terauchi [Kumada],² 1996 and 1999) focused on *gagaku* rhythms during this period. Notably, Terauchi examined the meanings of several rhythmic terms used at that time, including *jo*, and proposed a method for analyzing rhythms in the old tablature notations. The first part of this presentation—the meaning of *jo*—draws heavily on Terauchi's work.

However, these studies did not specifically analyze *jo*, *ha*, and *kyū* and thus a comprehensive examination of these terms remains unexplored. For instance, Terauchi (1999) analyzed several tablature notations from this period, summarizing symbol distribution patterns in compositions with different rhythms and exploring how these patterns correspond to certain rhythmic terms. However, her study did not address the terms *ha* and *kyū*.

Building upon the existing literature, this presentation explores the historical understanding of *jo*, *ha*, and *kyū* from the late twelfth to fourteenth centuries, arguing that it aligns with contemporary interpretations.³

1. Jo

Studies on musical score collections from the late twelfth century, *Sango Yōroku* 三五要録 and *Jinchi Yōroku* 仁智要録, have found that all *jo* movements include irregular rhythmic cycles (Terauchi, 1999:68).

For example, the first section of the *jo* movement in the *Toraden* 団乱旋 suite begins with irregular rhythmic cycles, transitioning into a regular rhythm from the second section onward. This transition is reflected in the *Toraden*'s tablature: in Figure 1, the appearance of the *hyaku* 百 marks seems irregular,⁴ whereas in Figure 2 most *hyaku* marks and the small dots appear regular.⁵

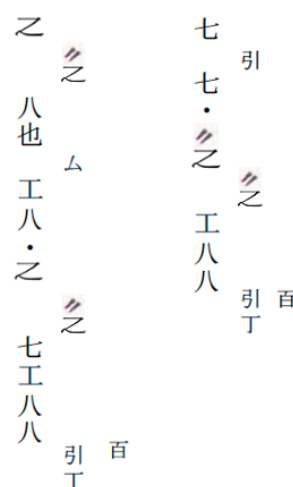


Figure 1. The beginning of the first section of the *jo* movement in the *Toraden* (*Sango Yōroku* 188)

¹ In this presentation, the translations and their corresponding terminology in Terauchi (1999) are measure 小拍子, punctuational dot 句点, rhythmic cycle 拍子/太鼓周期, section 帖, movement 楽章.

As Wolpert (1985) and Terauchi (1999) mentioned, two notation systems were used to record *gagaku* rhythms after the late twelfth century: the system using punctuational dots and the system using measures and rhythmic cycles. Figure 1 provides an example of the former, while Figure 2 illustrates the latter.

² Kumada is Terauchi's previous surname 本姓 (Terauchi, 1996: copyright page).

³ Unfortunately, studies have concentrated on *tōgaku* 唐楽, one of the two main categories of Japanese court music, which is largely based on music derived from or transmitted through China. Meanwhile, the meanings of *ha* and *kyūin komagaku* 高麗樂—the other main category, mainly derived from or transmitted through Korea—remain underexplored. Because of the length limitations of the proceedings, I cannot discuss the latter cases, but I plan to address them in future research.

⁴ The term 'irregular' used here is based on a simple observation of the tablature. However, even though the rhythmic cycles have inconsistent lengths, they are believed to have strong connections with cadences. The *taiko* is always struck together with finals and subsidiary finals (Picken, 1981:20).

⁵ For a precise interpretation, in Figure 1, the sign *hyaku* 百 marks the *taiko* stroke as well as the end of a rhythmic cycle. The small dot (・), known as the punctuational dot, divides each rhythmic cycle into smaller sub-units. However, the usage of the punctuational dot remains a topic of controversy in present-day studies. The signs *hiku* 引

The question arises whether twelfth- and thirteenth-century musicians regarded irregular rhythmic cycles as a defining characteristic of *jo* movements. As Terauchi (1999:72) observed, the term *jo-hiki* (序弾 or 序引), meaning “to perform stringed instruments in the *jo* style” or “to extend the tone in the *jo* style,” appears in the descriptive texts of *Sango Yōroku* and *Jinchi Yōroku*. Furthermore, a similar term, *jo-buki* 序吹 (“to play wind instruments in the *jo* style”) is found in the thirteenth-century musical book *Kyōkunshō* 教訓抄 and is used to interpret the first section of the *jo* movement in the *Tōraden* 団乱旋 suite as below:

The entire first section of the *jo* movement is a dance performed with the accompany of wind instruments in the *jo* style (*Kyōkunshō* 35).⁶

By comparing the descriptive texts and the musical scores (e.g., the text quoted above and Figure 1), Terauchi (1999:72) argued that the terms *jo-hiki* and *jo-buki* not only mean “to perform in the *jo* style” but should also be precisely understood as “to perform with irregular rhythmic cycles.” Terauchi suggested that the adverbial use of *jo* in these terms originated from the defining characteristic shared by *jo* movements: irregular rhythmic cycles. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that musicians had observed the rhythmic characteristic of *jo* movements by the late twelfth century and knew how to develop new terminology based on it.

With regards to the recognition tempo of the *jo* movement, it could not have been fast because of its free rhythm. This is apparent to seasoned musical performers, which may explain the scarcity of surviving records that interpret the tempo of *jo*. Nevertheless, one clear example can be identified in the musical book *Zoku Kyōkunshō* 続教訓抄 (the continuation of *Kyōkunshō*), compiled in the fourteenth century.

Kobe no Kiyochik

a stated that *jo* sections in music are generally never performed quickly, and among them, the *jo* section of the suite *Kōtei* should be performed especially slowly (*Zoku Kyōkunshō*, Vol.1: 4).⁷

In conclusion, by the fourteenth century, the characteristics of *jo* were largely understood in the same way as they are defined today.

2. *Ha* and *Kyū*

Among the surviving literature, a thirteenth-century musical score collection titled *Kofu Ryōritsu-no-maki* 古譜呂律卷 began using the specific terms *nobe byōshi* 延拍子 and *haya byōshi* 早拍子 to describe the tempo of compositions.

In *Kofu Ryōritsu-no-maki*, because neither *nobe* nor *haya* is used to describe the rhythm of irregular rhythmic cycles from the *jo* movements, they seem to only describe regular rhythms. Furthermore, since *nobe* literally means “extend” and *haya* means “quick” in Japanese, *nobe byōshi* likely features a relatively slow tempo, while *haya byōshi* is characterized by a rapid tempo.

Table 1 shows that, except for the complex situation in *Ōjō*, the other suites follow the rule that *ha* adopts a slow tempo as opposed to the rapid tempo in *kyū*.

In addition, a musical book titled *Shinsen Yōki-shō* 新撰要記抄, also compiled in the thirteenth century, adopted another descriptive system involving the terms *hiku* 弓 and *ka* 火 to indicate composition tempo. Because *hiku* and *ka* are also symbols

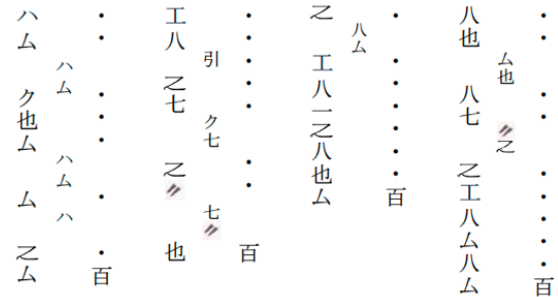


Figure 2. The beginning of the second section of the *jo* movement in the *Tōraden* (*Sango Yōroku*: 191)

and *tei* 丁 instruct the performer to extend the last tone and to stop, respectively. The other symbols indicate fret-positions on the *biwa* 琵琶 (four-stringed lute), representing specific tones. The larger fret-position symbols combine to outline the main melody, while the smaller ones represent ornaments or passing tones. Figure 1 reveals significant variations in the number of symbols used to create the main melody within each rhythmic cycle, suggesting inconsistent cycle lengths.

It should be noted that Figure 2 uses a different method from Figure 1 to indicate its rhythm. Here, the small dot represents a measure, serving as a subsequent unit following the rhythmic cycle. The *taiko* stroke is marked by the sign 百. Each measure corresponds to one fret-position symbol from the main melody. Additionally, except for the first rhythmic cycle (the first line from the right in Figure 2), most subsequent cycles contain eight measures, indicating that both the measure lengths and rhythmic cycle lengths are generally consistent.

To make the rhythmic cycles easier to read, I have distributed the symbols belonging to different cycles across separate lines. The modern tablature *Meiji Senteifu* 明治撰定譜 typically places the *taiko* stroke mark on the fifth measure within a rhythmic cycle. However, *Sango Yōroku* describes the suite *Tōraden* as follows: 'The first rhythmic cycle is composed of ten measures. From the second to the tenth cycle, each cycle is composed of eight measures.' Figure 2 adheres to the description in *Sango Yōroku* rather than the modern convention.

⁶序一帖、ミナ序吹舞ナリ。

⁷戸部清近云、凡物ノ序ハ、早ハ那美、就中皇帝ノ序ハ、克延テ可吹也トテ。

used in tablatures to instruct the performer to “extend the tone” and “accelerate,” respectively, *hiku* appears to represent a

comparatively slow tempo, while *ka* is characterized by a rapid tempo. In Table 1, except for complex situations (gray squares), most suites adhere to the rule that *ha* assumes a slow tempo compared with the rapid one in *kyū*.

The correspondences between *ha* and *nobe*, and *kyū* and *haya* indicate that musicians around the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries had recognized the defining features of *ha* and *kyū*. This conclusion is further supported by textual records. A musical book titled *Yōshino Kissui-in Gakusho* 吉野吉水院楽書, compiled around the thirteenth century, records the general recognition of tempo changes in an entire composition.

In general, all compositions should begin quietly and gradually accelerate toward the end (*Yōshino Kissui-in Gakusho* 267).¹²

3. Conclusion

Generally, the historical understanding of *jo*, *ha*, and *kyū* in *gagaku*—at least, in *tōgaku*—from the late twelfth to fourteenth centuries and the contemporary understanding of them are largely the same. To estimate the meanings of *jo*, *ha*, and *kyū* in this period lays a foundation for further studies on the origin and development of the aesthetic term *johakyū* 序破急 in Japanese performance art history.

The conclusion of this presentation suggests that in some specific cases, such as those involving *jo*, *ha*, and *kyū*, the definitions have perhaps undergone no changes. Nevertheless, as the musical history is continually evolving, some other musical theory terms may change in meaning over time, care should be taken when using their definitions in a historical context.

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In'en. *Shinsen Yōki-shō*, compiled in the thirteenth century. This presentation refers to the version collected in *Zoku Gunsho Ruijū* 続群書類従 Vol. 531. Tokyo: Keizai Zasshi-sha, 1912.

Koma no Chikazane. *Kyōkunshō*, compiled in 1233. This presentation refers to the version collected in *Kodai Chūsei Geijutsu ron*

Table 1. Tempo comparisons between *tōgaku's ha* and *kyū* sections within the same suites

Suites	Movements	<i>haya</i> or <i>nobe</i> in <i>Kofu Ryoritsu-no-maki</i>	<i>hiku</i> or <i>kain</i> in <i>Shinsen Yōki-shō</i> ⁸
<i>Sandai</i> 三台塩	<i>ha</i>	<i>nobe</i>	<i>hiku</i>
	<i>kyū</i>	<i>haya</i>	<i>ka</i>
<i>Ōjō</i> 皇饗	<i>ha</i>	<i>nobe</i> ⁹	<i>hiku</i>
	<i>kyū</i>	<i>haya</i>	-
<i>Yōjō</i> 勇勝	<i>ha</i>	<i>nobe</i>	<i>hiku</i>
	<i>kyū</i>	<i>haya</i>	<i>ka</i>
<i>Jissuiraku</i> 拾翠楽	<i>ha</i>	<i>nobe</i>	<i>hiku</i>
	<i>kyū</i>	<i>haya</i>	<i>ka</i>
<i>Sokō</i> 蘇合香	<i>ha</i>	<i>nobe</i>	<i>hiku</i>
	<i>kyū</i>	<i>nobe</i>	<i>hiku</i>
	<i>kyū</i>	<i>haya</i>	-
<i>Katen (ichikotsu-chō)</i> 賀殿 (壹越調)	<i>ha</i>	<i>nobe</i>	<i>hiku</i>
	<i>kyū</i>	<i>haya</i>	-
<i>Katen (sōjō)</i> 賀殿 (双調)	<i>ha</i>	<i>nobe</i>	<i>hiku</i>
	<i>kyū</i>	<i>haya</i>	-
<i>Karyōbin</i> 賀陵賓	<i>ha</i>	<i>nobe</i>	<i>hiku</i>
	<i>kyū</i>	<i>haya</i>	<i>ka</i>
<i>Shinriryō</i> 新羅陵王	<i>ha</i>	<i>nobe</i>	<i>ka</i> ¹⁰
	<i>kyū</i>	<i>haya</i>	<i>ka</i>
<i>Keibairaku</i> 傾杯楽	<i>ha</i>	<i>nobe</i>	<i>hiku</i>
	<i>kyū</i>	<i>haya</i>	<i>ka</i>
<i>Taiheiraku</i> 太平楽	<i>ha</i>	<i>nobe</i>	<i>hiku</i>
	<i>kyū</i>	<i>haya</i>	<i>ka</i>
<i>Goshōraku</i> 五常楽	<i>ha</i>	<i>nobe</i>	<i>ka</i> ¹¹
	<i>kyū</i>	<i>haya</i>	-

⁸ The symbol “?” means no record exists regarding the tempo of the movement in *Shinsen Yōki-shō*.

⁹ Since there are two variations of the ninth section of the *ha* movement in *Ōjō*—one adopting a slow tempo and the other a rapid one—*Kofu Ryoritsu-shō* marks the tempo of the ninth section as both *nobe* and *haya*. However, the other sections in *Ōjō's ha* movement are marked as *nobe*.

¹⁰ Because of the loss of the performance of *Shinriryō's ha* movement in contemporary *gagaku*, further exploration must be conducted to understand why its tempo is recorded as *kain* in *Shinsen Yōki-shō*.

¹¹ In contemporary *gagaku*, the *ha* movement in *Goshōraku* uses *haya, ya-hyōshi* 早八拍子, while *kyū* uses *haya, yohyōshi* 早四拍子. Although both assume a rapid tempo, the latter is livelier.

¹² 惣テ何ノ楽モ、ハジメハ静ニシテ、ヤウ／＼末ザマヲ次第ニ少シジ、ハヤカルベキ也。

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