

## A Response to Professor Burnett

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Prof. Burnett's recent article contains some very useful material. His discussion of the analytical importance of the fifths rather than the traditional tetrachord-based analyses seems long overdue, although this understanding of the fifth implicitly underlies many earlier analyses (including both his and mine). His careful readings of the texts of the vocal works and his insightful interpretations of their musical realizations makes one wonder how some misguided souls still cling to the oft-discredited idea that tone painting occurs only in Western music. Despite these and some other admirable aspects, I nonetheless find considerable areas of disagreement with some of his other observations and conclusions. He asserts the existence of a *cantus* (never really defined) as essentially represented by the *sangen* part. He discusses at some length the beginning of *Nana Komachi* by Mitsuzaki with a *koto* part added by Yaezaki. As Burnett points out, Yaezaki held great power in his lifetime, but could hardly have exerted much influence afterwards. At present, the fact that many players perform, publish, and record *koto* versions of *jiuta* works without *sangen* parts strongly suggests that these performers do not share Burnett's view that the *sangen* represents an indispensable *cantus*.

Unfortunately he did not further explore the unusual connection between these two very important composers. Mitsuzaki studied with Yaezaki from 1821, so Yaezaki's arrangement of *Nana Komachi* represents an arrangement of a work by his own student, suggesting something far beyond the typical Japanese teacher-student relationship (The late sixteenth-century

relationship between Tallis and Byrd seems an apt analogy). Mitsuzaki must have studied most or all of his teacher's *koto* arrangements, and this led in 1834 and 1836 to his very important compositions *Godanginuta* and *Akikaze no Kyoku* written only a few years after the composition of *Aoyagi* (the work which Burnett discusses at length) as *koto* pieces without parts for *sangen*. Clearly if these two works have anything like a *cantus* it would appear as the *koto* part. But given the amount of ornamentation idiomatic to the instrument, anything like a *cantus* would necessitate substantial reduction. In fact these two pieces began a trend of *koto* pieces in the *jiuta* tradition extending through and beyond the *Edo* period.

While the Mitsuzaki works might be the earliest *jiuta* pieces without *sangen*, I would argue that trends were moving in that direction earlier. Certain aspects of some *sangen jiuta* betray a *koto* influence. In *tegoto* sections one occasionally finds rests which in ensemble versions are filled in by a different instrument in a dialogue.

Burnett (322) mentions that transpositions upwards to the dominant occur more often than downwards to the subdominant (I find his sudden usage of Western harmonic terminology inappropriate). I would point out that from a technical standpoint, neither transposition offers particular difficulties for the *sangen*, but for the *koto* the upward ones are much easier, requiring the stopping of only one string whereas the downward transpositions require raising two strings (*kakeoshi*, a notoriously difficult technique requiring considerable strength and challenging the production of accurate intonation). Thus the greater difficulty in an assumed *koto* part might well have served as a disincentive for downwards transpositions when not considered absolutely necessary.

Burnett refers briefly to *Yugao*, yet another piece arranged by Yaezaki. The *koto* version contains an especially poignant instance of tone painting in measures 131–132 of

the *tegoto*, which relies on techniques available only on the *koto*. In the *sangen* original nothing of a programmatic character occurs at that point.

Burnett (327–328) claims that scholars, including myself, have misread the nature of the scale system used in *koto* repertoire. I would suggest that the misreading here, like the proverbial beauty, lies in the eye of the beholder. His note refers to my analysis of *Midare* from 1976. He disregards the fact that *Midare*, indisputably composed as a *koto* piece around 1670, predates even the earliest *jiuta* by about a century.

Burnett (276) refers to the multiplicity of Chinese scales which all derive from a single set of pitches, and he certainly knows how Western scales and modes derive from a similar rotation. Why should this not hold equally true for *jiuta*? We have a clear precedent in the multiple modes of *gagaku*, a genre which exerted considerable influence on *jiuta*. This has led him to deny multiple interpretations of the *koto* technique of producing a fifth by striking the two lowest strings. His dismissal of any strong tonal implications in works which use this technique rarely seems plausible, as I had indicated earlier (1976, fn. 41). But such dismissal seems highly suspect for a work like *Midare*, which is barely a third the length of *Aoyagi*, but which has about 200 places where these fifths appear. They appear so pervasively in the earliest *danmono* repertoire that I have chosen to designate them as 'drone fifths' which routinely denote tonic and fifth where they occur in Western and non-Western music.

Burnett, in his discussion of the *sangen* tunings, correctly notes that in the *san-sagari* tuning either the second or third string can function as the tonic. Doesn't that weaken his monolithic approach? Even if one could somehow agree with his totally rigid conception of tonality in *jiuta* repertoire, that would not automatically justify the same approach to a very different kind of repertoire, composed much earlier, and in his view, conceived entirely for a different instrument.

Two other works offer insights into how Japanese composers themselves regarded such fifths. In the piece *Shinjoudouseiji* by Ishikawa (with a *koto* arrangement for once not by Yaezaki!) composed in the same era as the *jiuta* pieces discussed above, an unusual tuning results in having a minor seventh between the first two strings. Ishikawa never uses them together, but in measure 83 uses the second a third in a similar manner obtaining a perfect fourth. The Seiha edition uses the symbol normally reserved for hitting the bottom two strings but then indicates (2, 3) afterwards. This suggests that the use of these strings produced a tonally meaningful perfect fourth or fifth, avoiding other intervals which might produce the sort of tonally meaningless sound which Burnett's argument implies. *Saga no Aki*, a work by Kikusue from about fifty years later, has two parts for *koto* with different tunings. The lower part has a fifth between the two lowest strings which the composer uses from time to time, while the higher part has a minor sixth between the first two strings which he never uses together.

#### REFERENCES

Loeb, David. 1976. "An Analytic Study of Japanese Koto Music." *The Music Forum* 4: 335–93.