

**THE ARTS OF THE *GEISHA*:
UNRAVELING THE ARTISTIC TRADITIONS AND THE AESTHETICS OF *IROKE*
THROUGH AN ANALYSIS OF THEIR MUSIC AND DANCE**

by

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University of Pittsburgh, 2016

This dissertation investigates the aesthetic concept of *iroke* (roughly, sexiness or eroticism, but literally, the love-sex atmosphere) through the performing arts practiced by *geisha*: *kouta* (small songs) and *koutaburi* (dance of small songs). Historically, the *geisha*—female performing artists—came into existence by separating the arts (*gei*) from sex (*iro*). However, since they closely worked within the vicinity of theatres and pleasure quarters, they have been misinterpreted as sex workers rather than accomplished multi-talented artists. By studying *kouta* and *koutaburi* under two former *geisha*, Kasuga Toyo Seiyoshi and Asaji Yoshie, I found that such misconceptions are deeply rooted in what *geisha* embody and express through their arts—*iroke*. Drawing on my own experiences of *geisha* arts and through detailed analyses, I illustrate the expressions of *iroke* in *kouta* and *koutaburi* performances and delineate the nature of *iroke* aesthetics. By mastering *iroke* and performing arts associated with *iroke*, the *geisha* were able to pioneer a new field of performing arts as preservers, teachers, and headmasters. Positioning

geisha arts and aesthetics at the core, I explore the meaning and value of arts as well as *geisha*'s *raison d'être* in the modern Japan.

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PREFACE

Growing up, I received artistic trainings in classical piano and ballet that have been considered a standard education in modern Japanese society. Besides taking Japanese tea ceremony lessons in the afterschool program, I did not have much opportunity to learn Japanese traditional music or dance. Only when I came to the United States for my undergraduate studies at Bates College did I realize how important it was to learn and understand my own culture and history. Since I liked watching *kabuki* plays, I picked up a *shamisen*, a three-stringed long neck lute, and began practicing *nagauta* (the long songs), a musical genre used in accompanying singing and dancing on the *kabuki* stage. For my honors thesis, I composed an opera with three acts incorporating elements of Japanese traditional music into Western classical orchestrations. My curiosity towards Japanese traditional music continued to grow and led me to the ethnomusicology program at the University of Pittsburgh.

By taking many of the core graduate courses and learning more and more about the history of Japanese music, I became aware of the *absence* of female voices in the making, performing, and writing of music. Where is “her-story” in Japanese music? While scratching my head, I came across a sentence, “[t]he development of the present-day *kouta* is closely linked to

the participation of women in Japanese traditional music”¹ and “the *kouta* was linked to the *geisha* of the city of Edo (which became known as Tokyo in 1868) and the life of the teahouses”² written by Linda Fujie in the textbook used in the World Music class in which I was serving as a teaching assistant. This was it! But, what is *kouta*? Sadly, I had never heard of the word *kouta* or the sound of *kouta* in my entire life. Moreover, I feel embarrassed to admit that even though I was born and raised in Japan, I did not know much about *geisha* until I began my studies. All I knew before then was that a *geisha* is someone who dresses up so beautifully that many girls long to be like her just for once in their lifetime. Of course, I was one of them.



Figure 0.1 The Author in Apprentice *Geisha* Dress, Uzumasa Studio Park, Kyoto (1994)

¹ Linda Fujie, “Chapter 8: East Asia / Japan,” in *Worlds of Music: An Introduction to the Music of the World’s Peoples*, 4th ed., edited by Jeff Todd Titon (Belmont, CA: Schirmer, Thomson Learning, 2002), 347. Emphasis mine.

² Ibid., 348. Emphasis mine.

I was fourteen when this photo was taken. It took almost three hours to go through all the make-up, hair styling, and dressing up in the *kimono*. What I struggled with the most was to walk on those high-heeled wooden clogs. It was nothing more than a “costume-play” (*kosu-pure*). Yet, all I learned from this experience was that it was tough to move around in this dress. I had no idea that *geisha*’s real profession was to practice all sorts of traditional arts in order to perform them in front of customers in *ozashiki*, a small exquisite Japanese style room found in high-class restaurants, in this very heavy dress. Moreover, I could never have imagined that I would get opportunities to learn *kouta* songs and *koutaburi* dances under two master *geisha* then.

This is a story of my exploration into a world of *geisha* through practicing the arts of *kouta* and *koutaburi*. *Kouta* is a short song form generally composed with one or two verses singing about romantic or lost love. The song is usually accompanied by a *shamisen*, a three-stringed long neck lute, plucked with a fingertip. *Koutaburi* is a short dance form full of mimetic movements accompanied by the *kouta* songs. Both of these artistic forms were developed and preserved by the *geisha* community.

Unlike the notable anthropological work on *geisha* by Liza Dalby, who became and worked as a *geisha* herself in the field,³ my research focuses on the music and dance of *geisha* by studying them closely under two former Asakusa *geisha*, Kasuga Toyo Seiyoshi (1924-) and Asaji Yoshie (1947-); students call them Seiyoshi Shisho and Yoshie Shisho respectively. So, I did not become a *geisha* or work as a *geisha* in *ozashiki*. Instead, I remained a student of these two masters (*shisho*) and positioned myself as a colleague among members of the *kouta* Kasuga school and the *koutaburi* Asaji school.

³ See Liza Dalby, *Geisha* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985).

As soon as I began my *kouta* and *koutaburi* lessons in the summer of 2009, I noticed that both Seiyoshi Shisho and Yoshie Shisho emphasized in my performance the expression of *iroke*, literally, the love-sex atmosphere, but it is roughly translated as sexiness or eroticism in English. When I slightly changed the volume of my singing voice or the angle of my torso in my performance, both Shisho approved. My colleagues who were watching my performance also complimented me that it was good because it possessed *iroke*. So I began to question myself; what exactly is this *iroke*?

In this study, I explore a particular aesthetic concept of *iroke* that is stressed in the performances of *geisha* arts—*kouta* and *koutaburi*. Through a detailed transcription and analysis of *kouta* and *koutaburi* pieces, I investigate the phenomena surrounding *iroke* in an attempt to theorize what it is and why it plays a crucial role in *kouta* and *koutaburi*. To understand the concept of *iroke* and its relationship with *geisha* arts, I examine the history of *geisha* and discuss their performing arts traditions, careers, and culture surrounding their communities in the context of modern society.

Note on Orthography

I have used the Hepburn Romanization system throughout this dissertation. In order to avoid awkward translations, such as “*geishas*” or “*ozashikis*,” Japanese terms are used in their original form without putting the “s” to distinguish it from the singular or plural form. Japanese names are written in the conventional Japanese style, which follows the family (last) name first and the given (first) name last. To make reading easier, I have used the English translations of Japanese terms in the main texts as much as possible and provided transliterations and Japanese

texts in the footnotes as well as in the appendix. All translations and transliterations are by the author unless otherwise noted.

Acknowledgements

I would like to first thank Kasuga Toyo Seiyoshi and Asaji Yoshie for not only teaching me *kouta* and *koutaburi* but also the intricacy of Japanese human relationships—the etiquette, manner, and conversation skills—and most importantly, how to nourish my heart (*kokoro*). Deepest gratitude goes to my advisor, Dr. Bell Yung, who tirelessly helped me organize my tangled thoughts and continuously encouraged me to move on with my research. I also cannot thank enough my advisor Dr. Adriana Helbig who patiently read my papers and gave me thoughtful insights. Thank you, Dr. Richard Smethurst and Dr. Anna Nisnevich, for being my committee members and for giving me kind support and encouragement.

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siblings-in-law, Adam, Beau, and Hope Wright, for sending me hugs whenever I needed them. Last, but not least, thanks to my husband, Bryan Wright, for keeping me happy by sharing his passion for music, and in particular, for playing ragtime piano and early jazz records while he was also working on his dissertation. Indeed, misery does love company.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PRELUDE



Figure 1.1 Sensoji Temple in Asakusa, Tokyo

From *kouta* “Yanagiya Ofuji (The Girl Named Ofuji From Yanagiya Store)”

*Kannon-sama e, gan kakete
sotto miaguru, manazashi wa
Edo murasaki no, fuji no hana
musume senryo, irozakari¹*

After making her wish to the goddess of mercy (Kannon-sama)
She quietly looks up. Her gaze...
just as famous as Edo purple, the flower of wisteria (*fuji*)
at the peak of her beauty.

¹ Music composed by Kasuga Toyo and lyrics by Kobayashi Sakae. Translation mine.

I was on my way home after eight hours of intensive *kouta* (song) and *koutaburi* (dance) trainings. My bag was filled with recording equipment, field notes, scores, and a cotton summer *kimono* robe (*yukata*) soaked in sweat. It was so heavy that I felt like my arm was about to fall off. Although I was exhausted, I turned back, faced the Sensoji temple, and gave a deep bow once more before I headed off to the subway station. Of course, nobody was there to receive my bow. It may sound strange, but I came to acquire this custom simply because I wanted to show my respect and appreciation to the Buddhist goddess of mercy (Kannon-sama) enshrined in this temple, as well as my *geisha* teachers who lived behind this temple and have been tirelessly teaching me their arts.

Behind this temple area used to be a location where the Yoshiwara licensed pleasure quarter once thrived. Many *geisha* worked there. The word *gei* means *art* and *sha* means *person*, so *geisha* literally means an artist. In early Edo period (1600-1868), the term *geisha* referred to *specialists* like doctors, scientists, martial artists, and musicians. By the mid-Edo period, *geisha* came to mean someone who performs singing, dancing, and *shamisen* music to entertain customers in *ozashiki*, a small exquisite Japanese style room provided in high-class restaurants. There, customers enjoyed delicious food and sake. *Geisha* were there to serve as host, pouring sake and making witty conversation to smooth out the personal relationships. In fact, both males and females served as *geisha* back then.² By the 1760s, female *geisha* outnumbered male *geisha*. Since then, the term *geisha* has been exclusively used for females. As such, male *geisha* came to be called a drum-holder (*taiko-mochi*) or a helper of party (*ho-kan*) instead. The *geisha*'s job has

² Mitamura Engyo notes that a male *geisha* came little earlier than a female one. See Mitamura Engyo, *Karyu Fuzoku (Manner and Custom of Pleasure Quarters)* (Tokyo: Chuo Koronsha, 1998), 156.

not changed since.³ She is a professional merrymaker and mood-mediator in *ozashiki*, and first and foremost, she is a talented artist.

Becoming a *geisha* means a complete devotion of one's life to practicing and mastering of the arts. It is a tough job. Dancing, singing, and playing multiple genres of music, such as the small songs (*kouta*), the long songs (*nagauta*), and the narrative music used in the *kabuki* theatre (*tokiwazu*, *kiyomoto*, etc.) on a *shamisen* as well as other instruments like big and small hourglass drums (*o-tsuzumi* and *ko-tsuzumi*), a flute (*fue*), and a stick drum (*taiko*)—all of these arts are just the tip of the iceberg. On top of these, she has to acquire knowledge of calligraphy, poetry reading, flower arrangement, incense ceremony, and tea ceremony. I heard that the *geisha* nowadays also has to be able to play sports like golf, tennis, skiing, and bowling, sing *karaoke*, and play Wii (Nintendo). It is her job to be fashionable, trendy, and versatile in many things—especially in the art of *play* and *game*. This also includes love. She professionalizes the art of flirtation and acts like an old friend or even a lover towards anyone who comes to *ozashiki* in order to create a joyful, intimate atmosphere. So, she is also the artist of love and human relationships.

History records that many girls from poor family were “sold” to the *geisha* house. Technically, it was an indenture system under which the girls were treated as contracted workers to pay back the loans their parents made at the time of her “adoption” into the house. The house provided her room, board, *kimono*, and artistic lessons. In exchange, *geisha* did chores around the house as apprentices and gave the money earned from *ozashiki* performances back to the house. It normally took five to ten years for a *geisha* to be released from the contract. To speed up this process, wealthy patrons, called *danna*, paid up her debt and released her out of the contract instead. In that case, she either married him or became his mistress afterwards. Through

³ See more details on history of *geisha* in the next chapter.

this, some *geisha* ended up marrying powerful men, such as prime ministers or company executives. Some others, who were not so lucky, divorced or became widows and returned to work again as heads of *geisha* houses or continued performing *shamisen* in *ozashiki*, just like my *kouta* teacher did. In either the case, *geisha* was considered one of the first professions that enabled a woman to financially support herself. So, she is also professionalized in the art of business.

Today, *geisha* live in their own apartments and work with the head of a “*geisha* house” as business partners. Since learning multiple arts is expensive, some girls choose the path of becoming a *geisha* because it is the most effective and affordable way to learn as many traditional arts as possible. At the end of Taisho period (1912-1926), there were more than 1000 *geisha* working in the Yoshiwara pleasure quarter. Currently, there are only 25 *geisha* working actively in the area behind this temple, which is now called Asakusa.⁴

When I look at this picture, it almost brings me a sense of *twist* in time and space. During the daytime, this temple square becomes crowded with tourists from all over the world. It becomes very lively when people’s chatter and laughter gets mixed with the sound of unified chants, tolling bells, and rumbling drums coming from the temple. Strong scents of burning incense and savory smell of toasted rice crackers from nearby arcade stores also fill the air. To many visitors, things happen right here, right now. To me, however, this square is a gateway that connects the present to the past—from a world full of modern technologies that enable humans to conquer a limitation of physical space (phones and Internet, etc.) and to capture a fluidity of time (photos and videos, etc.) to a world of *geisha* carrying more than centuries-old history and tradition within oral-aural transmissions.

⁴ Based on the list provided on the Tokyo Asakusa Kumiai (organization) website: <http://www.asakusa-kenban.jp/> (accessed April 25, 2015).

The Buddhist goddess of mercy (Kannon-sama) enshrined in this temple was believed to suffer from hardships just like humans do, but she also has a power to take away such pains and sorrows from us. As the *kouta* “*Yanagiya Ofuji*” sings, the goddess of mercy was also believed to make our wishes come true. There are many stories of *geisha* who went to pray for their unanswered love to be resolved and for their artistic skills to be improved. The serenity of the nighttime temple makes me wonder what it was like in the past century to be standing at the very same spot when the Yoshiwara pleasure quarter was flourishing and how many heartbroken *geisha* walked by here seeking help from the goddess of mercy.

Just like the inside of my heavy bag, things from the past and the present—the cotton summer *kimono* and the Olympus digital recorder—coexist altogether indiscriminately behind this gateway. But because the voice of the present tends to be much louder than the ones of the past, I have been blindly passing by in front of this gateway without realizing what was or is happening behind it.

1.2 BACKGROUND

In the past century, *geisha* have been popularly depicted in literature, theatre, film, and arts worldwide. In such works, *geisha* are often celebrated, on the one hand, as symbols of feminine beauty, and on the other, as tragic heroines, victims of sex slavery, and men’s playthings. Scholars have pointed out that such image discrepancies originated in Western “Orientalized” takes on *geisha*, considering them inferior, small, exotic *others*.⁵ Some Japanese also look down on *geisha* because they associate *geisha* with club hostesses or prostitutes working in the flower

⁵ See Liao 1990, Moeran 1996, and Foreman 2008.

and willow world (*karyukai*), or the pleasure quarter, labeling them as workers in the sex industry (*fuzoku-gyo*).⁶ This is because, sadly, they do not know much about *geisha* since they hardly ever see them in their real lives. Even after more than a century since the West met the East, people around the globe still continue to describe the *geisha* world as full of sexual fantasy, offering both insiders and outsiders a glimpse of Japanese *mysterious* sensuality and eroticism as depicted in Arthur Golden's 1997 worldwide bestselling novel *Memoirs of a Geisha*. Why is this so?

In part, this is because general audiences, both in the West and East, exposed to popular and mainstream media, are unaware of the fact that *geisha*—as the *gei* in the word *geisha* stands for *arts*—devote their lives to mastering Japanese traditional music and dance, offering highly skilled performing arts to their audiences, not sex. It is also because audiences do not understand that *geisha*'s occupation as well their roles in society are derived from *what* they represent and express through their arts—*iroke*.⁷

Anthropologist Liza Dalby observes that *iroke* is “one of those frustratingly untranslatable terms,” and she uses “eroticism” and “sensuality” as close approximations while noting that she does so, “...in a milder sense than the English word conveys.”⁸ Rather than defining the term, Dalby lists specific moments and situations that express *iroke*: “one strand of hair loose in an otherwise perfect coiffure”; “the sidelong glance, exchanged without a word, between a man and a woman”; “playing the *shamisen* with the fingernail instead of the large ivory plectrum.”⁹ These examples show that the essence of *iroke* is understated, and it is detectable with one's senses, not only through the senses of seeing and hearing, but also

⁶ Iwabuchi Jyunko, “*Danna*” to *Asobi to Nihon Bunka* (“*Patron*,” *Play, and Japanese Culture*) (Tokyo: PHP, 1996), 27.

⁷ It is pronounced “ee-low-qe.”

⁸ Liza Dalby, *Little Songs of the Geisha: Traditional Japanese Ko-Uta* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2000), 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

touching, smelling, and feeling along with the moving air. Japanese writers, such as Kawabata Yasunari and Nagai Kafu, often praised *geisha* and their arts because they expressed elements of *iroke*, the beauty, in their works. Just like these authors, Dalby also recognizes the aesthetic of *iroke* and remarks that it is the *geisha* who “best understand and embody *iroke*”¹⁰ and calls for extra attention to be paid to the importance of *iroke* in *geisha* arts, specifically in the music of *kouta*.¹¹

Kouta (literally, small songs) is a short song form generally composed with one or two verses. Most of the lyrics ostensibly describe the scenery of beautiful nature, but in fact, they tell stories of romantic or lost love through cleverly composed words full of metaphors, puns (*kakekotoba*), and double entendres. *Kouta* is usually performed with two performers; one sings and the other accompanies with a *shamisen* plucked with a fingertip instead of a plectrum. Each song lasts about three to four minutes,¹² making *kouta* ideal for performance in front of guests during banquets in *ozashiki*. Initially, *geisha* sang and played *kouta* as part of their musical repertoires to entertain customers in *ozashiki*, but soon after *geisha* also began to perform dance to accompany *kouta* songs. This is called *koutaburi*, the dance of small songs. The *koutaburi* consists of sequences of pantomimic movements that correspond to the words sung in *kouta* lyrics. While much Japanese traditional music and dance was composed, taught, and preserved by male performers under rigid system of schools (*ryu*), *kouta* and *koutaburi* were one of the rare genres of music and dance to which female performers—mostly *geisha*—exclusively contributed as composers, choreographers, transmitters, and even supervisors or head masters (*iemoto*) by establishing their own school. Thus, *kouta* and *koutaburi* developed and thrived very close to the pleasure quarters, specifically in the downtown area of Tokyo.

¹⁰ Ibid., 10.

¹¹ It is pronounced as “co-woo-ta.”

¹² Hirano Kenji, “Kouta,” in *Nihon Ongaku Daijiten* (Tokyo: Heibon Sha, 1989), 553-554.

In the post-WWII era, *kouta*—along with playing golf and the *i-go* board game—was extremely popular among Japanese businessmen (*salary-man*). These three activities were specifically called the “three go-s” (*san-go*) and considered *must-do* hobbies to present one’s gentlemanliness (*shinshi no tashinami*), a quality necessary to climb the career ladder, during the period of rising economy.¹³ This was the very time when teachers of *kouta* and *koutaburi* came to be recognized as masters of *iroke* arts and as respectable figures in the society.

As the popularity of *kouta* and *koutaburi* waned, however, the term *iroke* somehow began to shift its meanings and implications. Today, *iroke* is frequently used to depict something naughty, even overtly sexual, vulgar, and pornographic, representing negative images, especially in the media world. This is partly because the Western (or Judeo-Christian) concept of eroticism influenced the Japanese notion of *iroke*, attaching more negative connotations.¹⁴ Also, it is partly because the Japanese have forgotten the multiple meanings implied in the word *iro* of *iroke* and no longer understand what is *iroke* or how to appreciate *iroke* expressed through the arts. Thus, *geisha*, who were once admired and praised as the ultimate *iroke* possessors, became victims of this conceptual shift wherein the elements that once highlighted and represented their beauty were now distorted, eventually labeling them as *mysterious*, incomprehensible *others*.

Contrary to the “Orientalized” treatment of *geisha* as social outcasts, *geisha* have become powerful figures in contemporary Japan as female headmasters (*iemoto*), organizing a strong teacher-student bonding guild system to control and preserve the art of *kouta* and *koutaburi*. The key element attributed to the rise of their status is, I suggest, *iroke*. The aesthetic concept of *iroke* helped shape *kouta* and *koutaburi* into a noble art form, which led *geisha* to form their own

¹³ Chiba Yuko, *Nihon Ongaku ga Wakaru Hon (Understanding Japanese Music)* (Tokyo: Ongaku no Tomosha, 2005), 227-228. In particular, the period between the late 1920s and 1930s was called the three go-s era (*sango jidai*).

¹⁴ I will explain more on this in the following chapter.

artistic schools—raising their status from private entertainers to teachers to publically acknowledged masters of arts. Just like *noh*, *kabuki*, or tea ceremony, *kouta* and *koutaburi* came to be considered a part of the Japanese traditional arts. Ironically, however, perhaps because of the association with the concept of *iroke*—and with its modern implications—*kouta* and *koutaburi* have been excluded from scholarly discourse, let alone music education, even today.

This dissertation poses the question: what are the intrinsic meanings and aesthetic values of the arts of *geisha*? Specifically, I use *kouta* and *koutaburi* as vehicles to understand why *geisha* created them and have continued to perform them until now. Through a detailed analysis of *kouta* and *koutaburi* transcriptions, *kouta* and *koutaburi* audio and visual recordings, personal training and performance experiences, and teacher-student and performer-audience exchanges, I theorize the aesthetic concept of *iroke* in the context of *geisha*'s artistic achievements. As Kelly Foreman laments in her works, the negative image of *geisha* as prostitutes—she calls it “geisha-girl monster”¹⁵—is still pervasive and difficult to break down even today. Indeed, it is impossible to entirely overcome the imagery of “monster” through my discourse of *geisha*. However, I hope to at least show the roots from which this “monster” originated and how the misconception formed and evolved over time through a careful examination of the core of *geisha* arts, *kouta* and *koutaburi*, and its aesthetic expression the *iroke*. By doing so, I hope to revive a more nuanced figure of *geisha* as well as their arts and to reposition *geisha*'s *raison d'être* in modern Japan.

¹⁵ Kelly Foreman, *The Gei of Geisha: Music, Identity, and Meaning* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 14.

1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.3.1 On *Iroke*

In past studies, scholars focused extensively on Japanese aesthetic sensibilities such as *wabi* (austere refinement), *sabi* (rustic simplicity), *miyabi* (elegance), *iki* (cool), or *yabo* (boorish) to define their meanings.¹⁶ While these studies occasionally used the term *iroke* to explain such aesthetic phenomenon, the concept of *iroke* itself has never been researched in its own light. This is because, I suggest, *iroke* lies in the *geisha*'s physical motions, sounds, and the atmosphere they create—in the world of four dimensions involving time and space—as well as the perceiver's senses—in a “fifth” dimension, the metaphysics—that is difficult to pinpoint or analyze without proper training. I think *iroke* can only be detected and sensed in the context of a particular personal experience, and there is no such standard scale to evaluate the quality or quantity of its aesthetic value.

Take, for example, Kawabata Yasunari's famous novel *Snow Country* (*Yukiguni*, 1947). In this work, Kawabata delicately expresses *geisha* Komako's beauty through careful observations of her movements and posture in the eyes of the protagonist, Shimamura. In a scene where Komako softly shifts her sitting position after performing a difficult *shamisen* piece, Kawabata writes, “*kyu ni iroke ga koborete kita.*”¹⁷ Edward Seidensticker, an eminent Japanese literature scholar, carefully translates this sentence as “[h]er manner quickly took on a touch of

¹⁶ See Kuki 1930, Suwa 1980, Hume 1995, and Marra 2001.

¹⁷ Kawabata Yasunari, “Yukiguni,” in *Kawabata Yasunari Zenshu*, vol. 10 (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1980), 61. Emphasis mine.

the *seductive* and *alluring*.”¹⁸ Komako’s subtle motion triggers Shimamura to, perhaps unexpectedly, realize the beauty in her and change his impression of Komako from an amateur *girl* to a more mature and sexually attractive *woman* full of *iroke*.¹⁹ Here, her shift in body posture is very subtle. However, the effect upon the protagonist—changing his idea—is immense.

Kawabata won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1968, largely for *Snow Country*, with the help of Seidensticker’s translation. The award committee praised Kawabata and his works as:

...a brilliant capacity to illuminate the *erotic* episode, an exquisite keenness of observation, a whole network of *small, mysterious values*, which often put the European narrative technique in the shade. Kawabata’s writing is reminiscent of Japanese painting; he is a worshipper of the *fragile beauty* and melancholy picture language of existence in the life of nature and in man’s destiny.²⁰

In this speech, Osterling analyzes Kawabata’s works as showcasing a world of esoteric Japanese beauty through abstract, painting-like prose unlike anything before it. According to Osterling’s statement, it seems that Kawabata’s arts were evaluated and appreciated based on his unique approach to the aesthetics of “erotic,” “small, mysterious values,” and “fragile beauty”—I suggest these are the qualities specifically possessed in the concept of *iroke*.

Other Japanese authors, such as Nagai Kafu and Tanizaki Jyunichiro, also appreciated these aesthetic elements of “erotic,” “small, mysterious values,” “fragile beauty”—*iroke*—and

¹⁸ Edward Seidensticker, *Snow Country* (New York: Vintage International, 1996), 74. Italics mine. Seidensticker’s translation work of *Yukiguni* was first published under Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. in 1956. I am using the revised version of his original work here.

¹⁹ Since Kawabata’s writing is *implicit* rather than explicit, Shimamura’s change in impression of Komako can be only understood through her action as in: “Komako no longer tried to leave before daybreak when she stayed the night” (Ibid., 75). This particular passage affirms that the fact that Shimamura and Komako had a sexual relationship and openly admitted it, showing Komako’s matured take on her love affair.

²⁰ This is an English translated version of the award ceremony speech by Anders Osterling. Italics mine. From the website of the Nobel Prize in literature: http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1968/press.html (accessed June 26, 2013).

described it quite frequently through the depictions of *geisha*'s movements and gestures in their works.²¹ With their definitions, the beauty of *geisha* is most highlighted when she is performing music and dance. The term *iroke* appears when the subject is in a slight motion, just like Komako's musical performance in Kawabata's work. The viewers or readers, too, perceive *iroke* the most through such performances. In these cases, unlike Golden's negative portrayal, *geisha* is positively viewed *because* of her mastership in the arts of *iroke*. But where, exactly, should we look further into this concept of *iroke*? As Dalby mentioned earlier, the first place we should look for *iroke* is in the music of *kouta*.

1.3.2 On *Kouta*

There seems to be three types of written sources on *kouta*. One type is a compilation of *kouta* songs, such as Nakauchi Choji's *Kouta, Utazawa, Hauta Zenshu* (Complete Works of *Kouta, Utazawa, and Hauta*, 1931) and Liza Dalby's *Little Songs of the Geisha* (2000). Another type is a historical account and explanation of *kouta* songs, such as Sasa Seisetsu's *Zokkyoku Hyoshaku Kouta to Hauta* (Annotation of Popular Songs: *Kouta and Hauta*, 1911), Yuasa Chikusanjin's *Kouta Kenkyu* (*Kouta Research*, 1926), Motoyama Tekishu's *Kouta Nyumon* (Introduction to *Kouta*, 1967), Kimura Kikutaro's *Kouta Kansho* (*The Appreciation of Kouta*, 1966) and *Showa Kouta* (*Showa Era Kouta*, 2003), and Shen Pangeng's Master's thesis *The Traditional Japanese Vocal Music – Kouta* (1998). The last type is a musicological account on *kouta* songs appearing in such books as Kishibe Shigeo's *The Traditional Music of Japan* (1982), Koizumi Fumio's *Nihon Dento Ongaku no Kenkyu* (*Research of Japanese Traditional Music*, 1973), Tanabe

²¹ Nagai Kafu, "Ude Kurabe (Geisha in Rivalry, 1918)," in *Kafu Zenshu*, vol. 12 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1992), 55, 60, 109. Tanizaki Jyunichiro, *Tade Kuu Mushi* (*Some Prefer Nettles*, 1929) (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1951), 120-125.

Hisao's *Nihon no Ongaku* (*Music of Japan*, 1955), and Alison Tokita and David Hughes' *The Ashgate Research Companion to Japanese Music* (2008).

In existing *kouta* studies, scholars have mostly focused on its history and musical style, marginalizing any analysis of *iroke* in *geisha* performing contexts. Japanese musicologists such as Tanabe Hisao or Kikkawa Eishi concentrated on examining *kouta* by analyzing compositional structures and characteristics, locating *kouta* in the stream of style and genre developments in the canon of Japanese traditional music.²² These authors more or less mention that *kouta* songs express certain elements of *iroke*, but they provide little analysis of such elements in musical pieces and the performer-audience perceptions surrounding *kouta* music.

On the other hand, Motoyama Tekishu and Kimura Kikutaro, *kouta* dilettanti and amateur performers, use the term *iroke* to describe a quality of *kouta*'s compositional style or of particular performances by certain *geisha* they have heard, commenting, "this *kouta* possesses plenty of *iroke*"²³ or "these lyrics are accompanied by an *iroke*-possessing melody, thus it's good."²⁴ Such statements show that *kouta* songs are clearly evaluated based on whether or not they possess *iroke* and, further, on the level of intensity that *iroke* is projected through the performance. Yet neither Motoyama nor Kimura—perhaps because they are music critics rather than musicologists—illustrate explicitly what they mean by the term *iroke* in their works.

Several ethnomusicologists have approached *kouta* from the musical analysis perspective by creating *kouta* song transcriptions from existing commercial recordings or by taking *kouta* lessons directly from *geisha* teachers. Despite the fact that they mention eroticism expressed through *kouta* lyrics and performances, they never touch upon the importance of the aesthetic of

²² See Tanabe 1955, Kikkawa 1974 and 1989, Kishibe et al. 1974, Chiba 2005.

²³ Motoyama, 70-71.

²⁴ Kimura 1966, 157, 178, 250, 342.

iroke in their analysis of *kouta*.²⁵ For example, in *Worlds of Music*, Linda Fujie introduces *kouta* as an example of *shamisen* music, describing it as a song form reflecting *geisha*'s "world of beauty and style"²⁶ of which the lyrics "convey romantic or erotic themes."²⁷ Fujie provides a transcription and detailed analysis of the *kouta* song "A White Fan (*Hakusen no*)," which was popularly performed at wedding banquets until the 1980s. As she notes, this song "shows little of the whimsical side of *kouta*"²⁸ and there is hardly any hint of "romantic or erotic" feelings sensed from it—I suggest this is the quality of *iroke*. Unfortunately, Fujie's selection of the song was unsuitable for the analysis of *iroke*, but her article provides useful background information about *kouta* history as well as its association with *geisha* performance culture.

Ethnomusicologist Kelly Foreman's doctoral dissertation *The Role of Music in the Lives and Identities of Japanese Geisha* (2002) and the subsequent book *The Gei of Geisha* (2008) examine in detail the characteristics and historical development of *kouta* as well as other musical genres that *geisha* practice in their everyday training.²⁹ Foreman was the first to shed light on the artistic side of *geisha* culture, brilliantly contextualizing the role of art (*gei*) within the complex economic, political, and sociological web of the *geisha* world. Just as Foreman states, it is true that study of the *geisha* artistic culture has been marginalized because of the exclusive nature of the flower and willow world, which has prevented access by many outsiders, Japanese or non-Japanese alike (including scholars).³⁰ In addition, most of the Japanese traditional arts are known for their training-for-life nature. Mastery requires a tremendous amount of time and effort and no

²⁵ Eloise Cunningham provided the musical analysis of several Japanese short songs in the article "The Japanese 'Ko-Uta' and 'Ha-Uta': The 'Little Songs' of the 17th Century," in *The Musical Quarterly* 34, 1 (1948), 68-83. The songs she analyzed in this work, however, are now commonly categorized under genres such as *nagebushi* or *ryutatsubushi* and are different from *kouta* that I analyze in this research.

²⁶ Fujie, 348.

²⁷ Ibid., 349.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Kelly Foreman, "The Role of Music in the Lives and Identities of Japanese Geisha" (Ph.D. dissertation, Kent University, 2002). Foreman 2008.

³⁰ Foreman 2008, 7.

single dissertation-length research is enough to acquire such knowledge. In fact, the masters of such arts are often unwilling to write or even speak about their arts and tradition. Under these difficult circumstances, Foreman's contributions to the studies of *geisha* arts as well as Japanese traditional arts are as remarkable as they are valuable.

Although neither Fujie nor Foreman go into detailed analysis of *iroke* in *kouta* songs, they provide important foundations for *kouta* and *geisha* studies. Using their works as my base, I investigate the “romantic or erotic” sides of *kouta*, as Fujie mentioned above, through an analysis of *kouta* songs in order to unravel what exactly *geisha*'s “world of beauty and style”³¹ is and what they express through their performances.

1.3.3 On *Koutaburi*

After the *kouta* songs, the next place that we should look for *iroke* is in the dance of *kouta*—*koutaburi*. While many works on *kouta* briefly mention the fact that the *koutaburi* dance style or genre exists and is frequently performed in *ozashiki* or recital halls as an addition to the *kouta* performances, they rarely discuss its origin or historical background.³² In fact, none of the studies on kabuki dance, generally called the Japanese dance (*nihon buyo*), mention the *koutaburi* dance genre in their works. This is partially because *geisha* receive dance training under *kabuki* dance teachers and learn various types of dance repertoires—including *koutaburi*—from them. In such cases, *koutaburi* is not recognized as *koutaburi* per se, but instead it is called *dance kouta* (*buyo kouta*)³³ or more broadly *geisha dance*³⁴ and is treated as a part of the

³¹ Fujie, 348-349.

³² See Tanabe 1955, 232, 326; Kimura 1966, 187, 348.

³³ See Sakakibara 1981.

³⁴ See Ashihara 1964.

conventional *kabuki* dance. However, through my fieldwork on *kouta*, I encountered a *geisha* teacher who specializes in *koutaburi* and has her own school dedicated to *koutaburi*. This demonstrates that not only is *koutaburi* different from the standard *kabuki* dance, as offered through the Hanayagi or Fujima schools, but it is also an autonomous genre, capable of forming an individual artistic institution. Still, *koutaburi* has not yet been explored into details from any scholarly perspectives.

For this study, instead of trying to find more sources on *koutaburi* that may not even exist in the first place, I used sources on Japanese dance, such as Gunji Masakatsu's *Odori no Bigaku* (*Aesthetics of Dance*, 1977), Ashihara Eiryo's *The Japanese Dance* (1964), Nishikata Setsuko's *Kindai Nihon Buyo-shi* (*The Modern Japanese Dance History*, 2006), and Tomie Hahn's *Sensational Knowledge* (2007) as my guideline for the analysis of *koutaburi* pieces.

1.3.4 On *Geisha*

Many of the scholarly sources have approached *geisha* from anthropological, historical, and sociological perspectives. For example, Liza Dalby's *Geisha* (1985) looked closely at the *geisha* lives and community in Kyoto by becoming one and working among them. Besides the autobiographies written by the retired *geisha* like Masuda Sayo (2003), Nakamura Kiharu (1983), and Iwasaki Mineko (2001, 2002, 2004), Dalby's work offers a precious insight on how the world of *geisha* operates and sustains its work environment and artistic community. Sources such as Ishii Ryosuke's *Yoshiwara* (1967), Ethel and Stephen Longstreets' *Yoshiwara: City of the Senses* (1970), Cecilia Segawa Seigle's *Yoshiwara: The Glittering World of the Japanese Courtesan* (1993), Takahashi Mikio's *Edo Iromachi Zuhu* (*Illustration of Edo Pleasure Quarter*,

1997), and Lesley Downer's *Women of the Pleasure Quarters* (2001) look at *geisha* from sociological perspectives, focusing more on the institution and system of the pleasure quarter of Yoshiwara (now Asakusa) in which *geisha* worked. Peabody Essex Museum's *Geisha: Beyond the Painted Smile* (2004) provides an overview of *geisha* history and explains *geisha* as a "living art" by presenting various images from the past and present. This work describes how the misperceived images of *geisha* became the stereotypes in Western culture and attempts to project a more accurate figure of what *geisha* is and what *geisha* does.

Some of the sources explored on the artistic sides of *geisha* included Iwabuchi Jyunko's "*Danna*" to *Asobi no Nihon Bunka* ("*Patron*," *Play, and Japanese Culture*, 1996), Asahara Sumi's *Ozashiki Asobi* (*Ozashiki Play*, 2003), and Tanaka Yuko's *Geisha to Asobi* (*Geisha and Play*, 2007). These works focus more on the concept of play and its role in the context of *geisha* relationship with patrons (*danna*) in *ozashiki*. All of these works mentioned so far provide rich information regarding *geisha* history and culture, but none of them present *geisha*'s contribution to the arts of *kouta* and *koutaburi* and their roles in the world of Japanese traditional performing arts in the context of modern society.

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.4.1 On Aesthetics of Music and Dance

In *The Anthropology of Music* (1980), Alan Merriam stresses the importance of musical studies concerning “the concepts of aesthetics and the interrelationship of the arts.”³⁵ However, such studies involve defining what aesthetic is, and Merriam warns researchers of the complexity of explaining its concept and usage through writings. The term aesthetic is defined in the *New Oxford American Dictionary* as both a noun, “a set of principles underlying and guiding the work of a particular artist or artistic movement,” and as an adjective, “concerned with *beauty* or the *appreciation of beauty*...giving or designed to give *pleasure* through beauty.”³⁶ These basic definitions suggest that the term aesthetic implies some rules or structures inherently possessed by artistic works, and these are tied to the notion of beauty when the viewer perceives it positively. While Merriam was more concerned with whether or not Western aesthetic concepts are applicable to other world societies, philosopher Gordon Graham asserts that “[d]ifferent cultures have different ideals of beauty and these ideals change as time passes,” thus, there seems to be no universal “laws or principles of beauty” that can be applied to *any* arts and cultures at all.³⁷

In fact, Yanabu Akira explains that the Japanese equivalent of the term beauty did not exist in Japan until the late Edo period. The character *bi* (美) was often used to provide a rough

³⁵ Alan Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1980), 259.

³⁶ Italics mine. http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/american_english/aesthetic?q=aesthetic (accessed on July 18, 2013).

³⁷ Gordon Graham, *Philosophy of the Arts: An Introduction to Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 15.

translation of the term beauty, but there was no exact definition attached to it.³⁸ In addition to Yanabu's claim, Saeki Jyunko asserts that, for the Meiji intellectuals, the defining of what is beauty was less important than what to pursue "under the name of beauty." This had served as one of the methods of achieving the civilization and enlightenment (*bunmei kaika*) movement—to create a better and beautiful society just like the ones in the West—during the mid-Meiji era.³⁹ Saeki further explains that the reason Nakae Chomin, a thinker and journalist who was known as the "Rousseau of the East," used "the science of beauty (*bi-gaku*, 美学)" rather than "the science of senses (*kansei-gaku*, 感性学)" for the term *aesthetics* in his translation work of French philosopher Eliseo Verón's *L'Esthétique* (*Ishi Bigaku*, 1884) was to emphasize the term *bi*, the beauty, as an important concept deserving of consideration in academia.⁴⁰

Although the Japanese word *bi* came into existence only a century ago, it does not mean that the concept of beauty did not exist before then. Tada Michitaro confirms that the sense of beauty existed in small fragments of individual sensibilities (*bi-ishiki*) long before the Meiji era, and the study of Japanese beauty (*bi-gaku*) has focused more on attempting to bring these fragments into consciousness rather than questioning what is beauty (*bi*) itself or systematizing such sensibilities into structural organizations.⁴¹ In such processes, Tada stresses, it is better not to rely on the philosophical theories by Immanuel Kant or Theodor Lipps for the purpose of analysis because what supported Japanese human relationships was not the idea of morality or ethics found in Western theology or philosophy but these unique individual aesthetic sensibilities themselves.⁴²

³⁸ Yanabu Akira, *Honyakugo Seiritsu Jijo (Formation of Translated Words)* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1982), 67-68.

³⁹ Saeki Jyunko, "Longing for 'Beauty,'" in *A History of Modern Japanese Aesthetics*, edited by Michael F. Marra. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 42.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 39-41.

⁴¹ Tada Michitaro ed., *Nihon no Bigaku (Aesthetics of Japan)*. (Tokyo: Perikan-sha, 1982), 8.

⁴² Ibid., 7.

Indeed, Japanese drama critic Gunji Masakatsu points out that when scholars attempt to question the essence of Japanese art, they are often compelled to bring in Western theories and methodologies used in arts and aesthetic studies and to try to analyze them from foreigners' perspectives.⁴³ He calls this a “great tragic wall of modern Eastern culture” and warns scholars of unavoidable contradictions waiting ahead in taking such an approach.⁴⁴ In famous treatises on Noh drama, Gunji adds, Zeami does not seek to define *yugen* (refined elegance), but rather he provides detailed explanations on how to acquire such aesthetic sensibilities in performance style through everyday training. Thus, Gunji suggests that in studying Japanese arts and aesthetics, scholars should look first at the surrounding historical context and then the current state in order to understand their characteristics and essences.⁴⁵

Considering all of these claims, I will not attempt to define *beauty* or *aesthetic* in this study. Instead, based on my personal observations of how the concept of *iroke* is treated in *kouta* and *koutaburi* performances and how it serves as an evaluative judgment toward both performers and performances, I first postulate *iroke* as a small fragment of sensibility (*bi-ishiki*)—a type of aesthetic—as Tada describes above. Based on this, I will approach *iroke* by analyzing its semantics and discussing historical aspects of the term, paying special attention to the concept of Japanese eroticism or sex—*iro* of *iroke*—in the religious and cultural context and their connections to female performers and performances in the following chapter. Then, I will further look into how the elements of *iroke* is expressed and represented in music and dance by carefully transcribing and analyzing two famous pieces of *kouta* and *koutaburi*. This will help to pin down the elements of *iroke* into a visual form, which will also help to further theorize this concept. In

⁴³ Gunji 1977, 9.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 10.

doing so, I can investigate why *geisha* have treated the elements of *iroke* so importantly in their performances. This makes it possible to understand why they continue to do so even today.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

1.5.1 Collecting Sources

Not only books and articles covering *kouta*, *koutaburi*, *geisha*, and *iroke*, I acquired news and magazine articles interviewing working *geisha* or covering views of young people towards the occupation of *geisha*. For *kouta* and *koutaburi* studies, I mostly relied on sources from the field of musicology, dance studies, and performance studies. Researching the concept of *iroke* involved investigations of the notion of sex and the status of women and female performers in Japanese society, so I extended my hunt for sources to the fields of Japanese religion, mythology, folklore, women's history, gender studies, sexology, art history, literature, philosophy, and aesthetic studies.

Collecting sources relating to *kouta* was more difficult than I imagined. A particular problem was that the word *kouta* can be written in two ways, 小歌 and 小唄, and many of the old Japanese documents do not distinguish between the two. Even with the former spelling, it simultaneously means several musical genres—a folk song from the Heian period, an accompaniment song to the bamboo flute (*hitoyogiri*) genre from the Kamakura period, and a popular short folk song genre from the Edo period, etc.⁴⁶ The *kouta* I deal with here is the latter,

⁴⁶ Yamaoka Tomohiro, “Ch. 14 Shamisen Sho-kyoku Rui,” in *Nihon no Dento Geino Koza: Ongaku (Lectures on Traditional Performing Arts in Japan: Music)* (Kyoto: Tanko-sha, 2008), 357-368.

小唄, a short song form created at the very end of Edo period and popularized and preserved in the *geisha* community until today.

Finding sources on *geisha* was also troublesome. This was because, in the past, the word *geisha*⁴⁷ has been used differently based on the time and location within Japan. It has been dominantly used for female artists who work in the flower and willow world (*karyukai*) or the flower town (*hanamachi*), the pleasure quarters and entertainment districts in Edo, later Tokyo. In other words, in the old capital of Kyoto, “*geisha*” do not exist. Instead, people call them *geiko* (literally, artistic child)⁴⁸ and *maiko* (literally, dance child, the apprentice *geiko*).⁴⁹ Interestingly, I found more sources on *geiko* or *maiko* than *geisha*. This was because the *geiko* community tends to be more open towards the public because the city of Kyoto has worked closely with them to promote tourism. The Tokyo *geisha* community, instead, is tied more closely to the world of politicians and business executives who prefer secrecy with their affairs so that they tend to keep their doors shut most of the time.

1.5.2 Fieldwork

Much of the data, including sound recordings, videos, and interviews, presented in this study were collected during my fieldwork in Asakusa, Tokyo, Japan, from 2009 to 2014. As mentioned earlier, the Tokyo *geisha* community is harder to approach because of their closeness to the highly secretive world of politics and businesses, so I had a hard time finding my teachers. In fact, the Internet proved to be invaluable. Fortunately, in the mid-2000s the town of Asakusa was

⁴⁷ It is written as 芸者.

⁴⁸ It is written as 芸子 or 芸妓.

⁴⁹ It is written as 舞子 or 舞妓.

beginning to work hard on promoting their local businesses, especially in the fields of traditional arts and crafts. They created a website called “Asakusa E-Toko” (Asakusa Nice Place), which listed the names of performing arts masters who were regularly offering lessons for students in their area.⁵⁰ My *kouta* teacher, Seiyoshi Shisho, was listed there. I phoned her in advance and met her for the first time in June 2009. I met my *koutaburi* teacher, Yoshie Shisho, through Seiyoshi Shisho. In real life, Seiyoshi Shisho is the mother of Yoshie Shisho. They live in the same house about fifteen minutes away from the Sensoji Temple. Both offer lessons two days a week in their lesson studios (*keiko-ba*) in their own house.

In past ethnomusicological studies, scholars have often pointed out the importance of fieldwork as well as versatility in musical training.⁵¹ Bruno Nettl, for example, once noted, “direct study of performance became... an extremely useful vehicle for understanding a musical system,”⁵² and suggested that an ideal ethnomusicologist is to be not only a “talented musician” but also a multi-disciplinary, fluent linguist, audio and visual recording expert, and “outgoing” person.⁵³ Jeff Todd Titon also stated, “[f]ieldwork is no longer viewed principally as observing and collecting...but as experiencing and understanding music.”⁵⁴ Both Nettl and Titon claim that the *making* of and *experiencing* of music in the field helps scholars to understand the complex musical system as a whole. Many notable ethnomusicologists consider musical training and performances crucial in their musical inquiries and become accomplished performers

⁵⁰ <http://www.asakusa-e.com/okeiko/okeiko.htm> (accessed April 27, 2015).

⁵¹ See Stone 2008, Myers 1992, Solis 2004, in particular, Hood’s “bi-musicality” 1960.

⁵² Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Twenty-Nine Issues and Concepts* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 254.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 257.

⁵⁴ Jeff Todd Titon, “Knowing Fieldwork” in *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, edited by Gregory F. Barz and Timothy J. Cooley (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 87.

themselves, offering stage concerts and lessons in both public and private settings.⁵⁵ In fact, many recent scholarly studies are dedicated to the performing side of ethnomusicology, affirming the importance of the scholar's active involvement with singing and playing—the *musicking*—in musical research.⁵⁶

In addition to musical training, dance training is also considered vital to ethnomusicological studies in recent scholarship. In a conversation with Judith Hanna, Carol Robertson remarks, “[e]thnomusicologists often neutralize dance for fear of lacking interpretive knowledge, but dance is often central to what they study.”⁵⁷ Indeed, Hanna stresses that “[i]n many cultures movement reveals the structure and performance of sound; through embodying a people's dance in one's own physicality, one can gain an understanding of their music.”⁵⁸ Hanna's statement resonates with my *kouta* studies immensely. When I first met Seiyoshi Shisho, she said that in order to understand *kouta* music, I must learn *koutaburi* dance because the dance embodies the meaning of *kouta* and *iroke* in their movements. In fact, I decided on taking lessons of *koutaburi* because of Seiyoshi Shisho's advice. Yoshie Shisho also told me after I began taking *koutaburi* lessons that in order to dance *koutaburi* well, I must know the *kouta* lyrics first, and I must also learn the *kouta shamisen* part so that I can better embody the *iroke* and *ma* (pause or rhythm) in my performance. On top of Dalby's statement of *geisha* “best understand and embody *iroke*,”⁵⁹ the conversations with both of my Shisho made me realize how it was vital to my research to not only take *kouta* lessons but also to take *koutaburi* dance lessons

⁵⁵ For example, Emily Pinkerton for Chilean guitarron, Anne Prescott for Japanese koto, and Bell Yung for Chinese qin.

⁵⁶ Barz and Cooley 2008; Solis 2004; Witzleben 2010.

⁵⁷ Judith Lynne Hanna, “Chapter XII: Dance,” in *Ethnomusicology: An Introduction*, edited by Helen Myers (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 324.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Dalby 2000, 10.

in order to better understand how *iroke* is expressed and embodied in *kouta* music and *koutaburi* dance.

In the past two decades, scholars often have discussed a fieldworker's position in a field site, questioning whether to label him or her as an insider or outsider, a native or non-native, and a participant or observer. Since ethnomusicology grew out of close ties with anthropology, the applications of emic and etic concepts (or subjective versus objective perspectives) in the study of music in, or as, culture have also been debated.

In 1993, the debate escalated and led to the publication of volume 35 of *The World of Music*, solely dedicated to this topic. In this volume, Mercia Herndon analyzes her position as a fieldworker studying Cherokee healing music. Although Herndon shares the same ancestral roots with the Cherokees (partially an insider), she does not share the same Cherokee ways of musical thinking because of her academic training in Western music theory (partially an outsider).⁶⁰ Under these circumstances, she realizes that she is neither fully the insider nor the outsider of the field. Therefore, Herndon suggests, rather than dichotomizing the two—insider and outsider—as separate entities, it is best to take a stance of “neither insider nor outsider.” In addition, Herndon points out that ethnomusicologists are prone to borrow methodologies used in anthropology or linguistics in an attempt to demonstrate how “scientific, objective, and quantifiable” our works can be without fully discussing their applicability to our musical studies.⁶¹ Herndon admits that scholars are both “human (=sometimes subjective)” and “fallible (=not totally objective),”⁶² and hence, their works cannot be all objective. Thus, Herndon proposes that scholars present the

⁶⁰ Marcia Herndon, “Insiders, Outsiders: Knowing Our Limits, Limiting Our Knowing,” in *The World of Music*, vol. 35, no. 1 (1993), 69.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁶² *Ibid.*

study of music culture by taking the stance of “I speak as myself”⁶³ and to reconsider the usage of emic and etic concepts in the context of ethnomusicological studies.⁶⁴

Later, Tim Rice expanded Herndon’s idea by using his fieldwork experiences in learning Bulgarian bagpipe performance as a case study. Rice claims that any fieldworkers who put themselves “in front of” musical recordings or musical performances in the field should be aware of the fact that they are neither insider nor outsider regardless of their biological relationships to the people who are making them.⁶⁵ Instead of labeling one’s exact position in the field, Rice takes a stance of “mediation between” the two—both insider and outsider, taking both the emic and etic perspectives—and encourages fieldworkers, as well as the carriers of musical traditions, to write about the music in their own terms. In such a writing process, he suggests that scholars follow Paul Ricour’s idea of “hermeneutic arc”—shifting interpretive gears from the “pre-understanding” stage to the “explanation” stage, and extending further to the “new understanding” stage—to bring our interpretation of music into proper language form.⁶⁶

In 2004, Robert Garfias explained the emic/etic dichotomy in the clearest manner: “*emic* is the internal, culturally defined use of the idea, while *etic*, think of synthetic, is a constructed view of that aspect of the culture from an objective point of view.”⁶⁷ He claimed that the conception surrounding emic and etic is not about which one is better or worse, right or wrong, but they are merely different ways of looking at the objects, equally useful and important tools in the study of music culture.⁶⁸

⁶³ Ibid., 77.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 67.

⁶⁵ Tim Rice, “Toward a Mediation of Field Methods and Field Experience in Ethnomusicology,” in *Shadows in the Field*, edited by Gregory F. Barz and Timothy J. Cooley (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 116.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 117.

⁶⁷ Robert Garfias. “Music: The Cultural Context,” in *Senri Ethnological Reports*, 47 (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2004), 34.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 242.

Through conducting ethnographic studies on *kouta* and *koutaburi*, I became aware of this issue surrounding my fieldwork just as Herndon, Rice, and Garfias mentioned above. My position in the field was fluid, and it has remained so. For example, at the beginning stage of my fieldwork, I was very new to the people in the *kouta* and *koutaburi* schools, so I was a complete *outsider* even though I was, and still am, a native and citizen of Japan—a *legal insider*. As the research progressed, my *kouta* performance skills improved well enough to receive a *kouta* title (*natori*) conferred by the chairperson of Kasuga school, so I became an *artistic insider*, but I still live most of the year in the United States because of my graduate studies at the University of Pittsburgh, which makes me an *intellectual outsider*, so that my time spent taking lessons has been very limited compared to other students. Thus, as Herndon stated, I have been “neither insider nor outsider”⁶⁹ during the course of this research. Using Herndon, Rice, and Garfias’ suggestions as my guideline, I position myself somewhere in between the insider and outsider—taking the perspectives of both emic and etic—in the field and attempt to speak about *kouta* and *koutaburi* artistic culture “as myself” by following the conceptual framework of “hermeneutic arc” in the process of my writing.

1.5.3 Transcription

In order to assess the aesthetic expressions and components of *iroke*, I must first make notational transcriptions of *kouta* music, attempting to fix the sound into a written structural and analyzable representation. As Gabriel Solis states, music transcription is mostly heuristic in nature, which

⁶⁹ Herndon, 77.

used to serve for “the only way many scholars could ‘hear’ an article’s musical examples.”⁷⁰

Luckily, with the rise of digital media (e.g., CDs and MP3s), this is no longer true. Instead, Solis states, musical transcription provides a window into the “transcriber’s analytical understanding” of music, and both the acts of *making* and *analyzing* transcriptions have proven to be useful ways to *interact* with music itself.⁷¹ In other words, by transcribing music into a written format, the readers can *hear* the music closer to the way I hear it.

In fact, *kouta* song already exists in two separate written media—the lyrics in text format and the *shamisen*’s pitch spots (*kandokoro*) in the tablature (*bunkafu*) format. The rest—particularly the vocal melody, rhythm, and the *shamisen*’s rhythm—are passed orally (aurally) to students. This is because, in *kouta* tradition, written texts or tablature notations simply serve as a mnemonic device for performers to use for their private practice purposes but not for the actual performance. Thus, making *kouta* transcriptions allows me to supply these missing parts—both vocal and instrumental melodies—so that I can show the way I *see* and *hear* these parts and how they are interacting with each other in detail.

Creating transcriptions of music, however, is a very tricky business. For example, Charles Seeger reminds scholars of the “three hazards” hidden behind the process of making music transcriptions by using the Western notation system: 1) many aspects of musical elements, sounds, and experiences cannot be adequately written down because of the lack of space, which is fixed in two dimensions on a sheet of paper, and the lack of symbols; 2) many music systems have existed in oral/aural traditions long before any system of notation was created, so the visual images of music should not serve as the *only* reliable source for analytic purposes; and 3)

⁷⁰ Gabriel Solis, “Thoughts on an Interdiscipline: Music Theory, Analysis, and Social Theory in Ethnomusicology,” in *Ethnomusicology* vol. 56, no. 3 (2012), 543.

⁷¹ Ibid.

musical notations are inherently either prescriptive, which is to be used for the performance, or descriptive, which is to be used for the analysis, so that each is serving a different purpose.⁷²

Seeger is particularly concerned that the Western notation system is more prescriptive in nature, that it tends to show the structure of music (i.e., pitch and meter) rather than how to make it sound or how structures are connected linearly with each other.⁷³ Thus, he suggests that scholars create a more descriptive music writing system so that the music can be “written and read with maximum objectivity.”⁷⁴ In fact, in the 1950s, Seeger invented the Melograph for the purpose of music analysis in order for the study of music to be approached with the “maximum objectivity.”⁷⁵ However, as James Reid observed, the Melograph provided “too much unnecessary detail” and was difficult to incorporate it into general musical studies.⁷⁶ Instead, Reid suggested that scholars use a combination of numeric and graph notation systems for the purpose of music transcriptions and analysis and wait for someone to invent a “universal transcription system” that can be used for studies of music from any part of the world.⁷⁷ Yet such a system, unfortunately, has never been introduced or adopted. Scholars have been, and still are, using the most popular and accessible notation system—the Western staff notation system—for their musical studies even today.

Just like Seeger and Reid, many scholars have continuously debated the limitations—such as the usage of bar lines and staves—and validities of the Western notation system in its application to non-Western music in the past.⁷⁸ Among all, Michael Tenzer affirms the

⁷² Charles Seeger, “Prescriptive and Descriptive Music-Writing,” in *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 2 (1958), 184.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁷⁵ A melograph is a mechanical device that transcribes a single melody with a linear line, which almost looks like an electrocardiogram.

⁷⁶ James Reid, “Transcription in a New Mode,” in *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 21, no. 3 (1977), 418.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 431.

⁷⁸ See Hood 1971, List 1974, Nettl 1983.

legitimacy of using the Western staff notation system for the purpose of transcribing non-Western music, considering it as a “neutral tool” and effective way of “imagining, comparing, and emulating sounds and sound-structures.”⁷⁹ Indeed, creating transcriptions of music is one of the conventional and important methods used to critically observe and analyze the music. As Tenzer further explains, musical analysis is the “encounter between the hierarchy-seeking mind and the music-sound event,” and this encounter is made possible with a careful “structural listening” where “musical design and architecture” are brought to one’s consciousness.⁸⁰

Through musical analysis, certain characteristics, patterns, and tendencies will rise up to the surface to be recognized as fundamental structures. These structures reflect compositional guidelines as well as composers’ or performers’ frameworks and perceptions of sounds. Thus, musical analysis is to bring such knowledge—often implicit and hidden—to the forefront in order to understand what composers or performers included, or even omitted, in a particular piece or performance and how they made such decisions through the process of music making. Tokumaru Yoshihiko calls this “invisible music theories” and warns scholars dealing with Japanese music (especially *shamisen* genres) not to be too distracted with scales and tonal systems as used and theorized in Western music analyses.⁸¹ Instead, Tokumaru emphasizes that we should pay special attention to vocabularies used in our everyday conversations with musicians in order to understand their conceptions of music.⁸² Through such conversations, we can learn how musicians choose to play one certain pitch from another, which involves with kinesthetic elements, and how they recognize good performances from bad performances, which

⁷⁹ Michael Tenzer, *Analytical Studies in World Music*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸¹ Tokumaru Yoshihiko, “Towards a Re-Evaluation of Invisible Music Theories,” in *Musics, Signs and Intertextuality: Collected Papers* (Tokyo: Academia Music, 2005a), 211-212.

⁸² *Ibid.* Also see Tokumaru Yoshihiko, *Oto no Ugoki no Bunseki kara Shakaiteki Myakuraku ni Okeru Ongaku no Kenkyu-e (From Analysis of Tone Movements to Musical Studies on Social Context)* (Chiba: Hoso Daigaku Tokumaru Kenkyushitsu, 2005b), 12-17.

involves with aesthetic elements. Rather than focusing on the analysis of a transcription made from one particular performance that relies heavily on sound elements, it is best to include in the musical analysis the information extracted from conversations with musicians regarding the whole process surrounding the music making. Hence, scholars' tasks are to carefully visualize these "invisible music theories" through interacting with the music, musicians, and musical performances.

As Solis points out, recent ethnomusicological works tend to focus extensively on social theory surrounding music rather than music theory or analysis that investigates the "musical sound and musical process."⁸³ Close analysis of the music as well as formulation of the theory, he stresses, is integral to the understanding of music, and such studies will contribute not only to our discipline but also to the humanities and social sciences as a whole.⁸⁴

Based on these claims, I will incorporate the Western staff notation system to transcribe *kouta* music. To accommodate its inadequacy, I attempt to include extra symbols that are outside the range of conventional symbols used in the Western notation system for indicating performance practices, such as microtones and bending notes, etc., wherever possible. In addition, I will add descriptions of how it should or should not be performed based on the instructions I received from my teacher in order to avoid Seeger's "three hazards." Within this process, my primary focus is not so much to ask *what exactly is iroke*, but rather it is to describe the surrounding factors, incidents, and phenomena to illuminate its essence. To be able to see the core of *iroke*, I first look at the periphery by asking *what makes it not iroke*, which in turn will highlight *what makes it iroke* in *kouta* performance. My ultimate goal is to analyze the inherent structure of *kouta* so as to conceptualize the "invisible music theories" as Tokumaru suggested.

⁸³ Solis 2012, 549.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Doing so makes it possible to understand how each singer's or *shamisen* player's performance skill of *kouta* is evaluated and judged by my teachers as well as the viewers.

Unlike *kouta* songbooks or tablatures, I have not yet seen any documented or published *koutaburi* dance notations. I once caught a glimpse of Yoshie Shisho's dance notebook, which contained a sequence of balloon figures which symbolized a face, with arrows indicating which direction to move the body. These figures were accompanied by song lyrics and instructions for movements like "*mae, aruku*" (forward, walk) or "*miageru*" (look up). She mentioned that she was not supposed to show it to me because it should be simply used to rehash her memory of the dance and was not meant to be used as a textbook or for preservation of the technique. Her teacher believed the true dance exists in our bodies, so he disliked the idea of transcribing a dance piece—no notebook or pencil was allowed in the lesson studio (*keikoba*). Thus, Yoshie Shisho told me she made her notes quickly after each lesson outside of the studio just to be used for her personal memory aid.

Dance notation systems like Labanotation or Benesh notations are frequently used to transcribe classical ballet and modern dance pieces.⁸⁵ However, I found these systems unsuitable for notating *koutaburi* because each *koutaburi* movement is very subtle and much smaller scale than those dances so that these notations cannot effectively reflect such subtleties in movements. Some of the existing dance books, like Hanayagi Chiyo's *Nihon Buyo no Kiso* (*The Basics of Japanese Dance*, 1981) and Sakakibara Kiitsu's *Nihon Shin Buyo no Odorikata* (*How to Dance New Japanese Dance*, 1981), showcase a variety of Japanese dance pieces by using still pictures of each step-by-step movement, serving as a practice guide for beginners. While such pictures are useful in capturing each movement from the viewers' perspective and still capable in preserving the *flow* of the dance piece, the dancer's body is hidden underneath of many layers of

⁸⁵ Anya Peterson Royce, *The Anthropology of Dance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 44-50.

kimono, and it is hard to grasp the exact posture and angle of the body parts. Even though these books are meant for the beginners practice use, there are many hidden elements that users are *assumed* to know about, and it is by no means user-friendly for amateur dancers. Instead, Hanayagi's book adds a stick figure (*ningyo-fu*) style notation to supplement inadequacies of still pictures, and I found this very helpful in understanding of each movement of the dance.⁸⁶ So I used it as a model for my analysis of the *koutaburi* pieces.

1.6 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

In this study, I attempt to provide an interpretation of the aesthetics of *iroke* through analysis of *kouta* and *koutaburi* performances as well as social and cultural contexts surrounding the *kouta* Kasuga school and the *koutaburi* Asaji school. Currently, various *kouta* schools, such as Hori, Tade, Senshi, etc., still offer lessons at notable teachers' lesson studios (*keikoba*) in and around the Tokyo area. Due to time and financial restrictions, however, I was only able to take lessons from the two masters mentioned above and to conduct interviews among the members of these two schools.

As with other Japanese traditional arts training, I had to pay the entrance fee of 15,000-yen (approximately \$133 as of April 1, 2016) to both the Kasuga and Asaji schools separately so as to be officially recognized as a pupil (*deshi*). Paying the entrance fee symbolizes my loyalty to the teachers and my devotion to learning the particular performing styles that each offers.

Normally, teachers dislike giving lessons to students who are simultaneously taking the same

⁸⁶ See more details on Japanese dance notation in Tomie Hahn's Ph.D. dissertation, *Sensational Knowledge* (1996), 173-193.

genre of music or dance from other teachers. This is mostly because, while each teacher offers his or her specific style of performance, inexperienced students cannot clearly differentiate one style from another and end up performing a mixture. Teachers call this a “bad habit” since it takes an enormous amount of time and effort for both the teacher and student to correct errant ways to master a teacher’s specific style. Thus, requiring an entrance fee seems to place an extra burden on students, but it is there to prevent them from accepting impulsive students, who may capriciously hop from one teacher to another for lessons, acquiring such “bad habits.” In addition to the many hours required to learn even one style of *kouta* and *koutaburi*, these extra financial strains did not allow me to take lessons from other *kouta* or *koutaburi* teachers offering different performance styles.

It is possible that other styles of *kouta* and *koutaburi* may express *iroke* differently or may not even stress the aesthetic of *iroke* in their performances at all. Since the *koutaburi* is closely related to the Japanese dance (*nihon buyo*) or the *kabuki* dance, it would be interesting to see how *iroke* is expressed and treated in such a genre or to compare the components of *iroke* performed especially by female impersonators (*onnagata*) in *kabuki* performances. But to do so requires entering another school and taking extensive training under the new teacher without bringing in the “bad habits.” Such an undertaking would require an extensive amount of time, effort, and resources, and it is simply impractical within the scope of this research.

1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND CHAPTER OUTLINE

In the following chapter, I will first go over the history of *geisha* to illuminate the relationship between the female and performing arts. Then, I will reconstruct the word *iroke* to investigate how the notion of *iro* relates to female performers and performances and how the concept of *ke* (or *ki*) contributes to the inexplicability of the phenomena that surrounds *iroke* expressions. Here, the main questions I ask are: what is *iro*?; what is *ke*?; and what is *iroke*? In the third chapter, I will first cover the history, characteristics, and performance practice of *kouta* and *koutaburi*, then, I will investigate how the concept of *iroke* is expressed in *kouta* and *koutaburi* performances by making transcriptions of two famous *kouta* and *koutaburi* pieces. There I ask, what makes it *iroke*? Also, what does not make it *iroke*? By drawing upon all of my arguments and discoveries, in the last chapter I will first discuss the position of *kouta* and *koutaburi* performing arts in the context of *geisha* communities and will theorize the meaning of the aesthetic of *iroke* in the context of *geisha* performing arts. There, I ask, what is the role the aesthetic of *iroke* play in *geisha* arts? My primary goal is to investigate the current roles *geisha* play and the position of *kouta* and *koutaburi* artistic culture in modern Japanese society.

INTERLUDE: A SCENE FROM *KOUTA* AND *KOUTABURI* LESSON

Every lesson starts with a bow and ends with a bow along with greetings of “*Yoroshiku onegai itashimasu*” (approximately, please take care of me). Both *kouta* and *koutaburi* lessons are given on a one-to-one basis. Each lesson lasts about twenty to thirty minutes. It requires skills of careful observation, detailed imitation, and quick adjustments.

In the *kouta* lesson, I sit face-to-face across the table from Seiyoshi Shisho, placing my recorder and notebook with *kouta* song lyrics that I transcribed from the Kasuga *kouta* songbook earlier. Seiyoshi Shisho first tunes her *shamisen* into the pitches suitable to my voice range, then she starts singing the song along with her own accompaniment. For the first time through, I simply listen. From the second time on, I join her and sing along with her. We repeat the piece at least a half dozen times. Once she recognizes that I am somewhat comfortable with singing the song, she gradually quiets down her voice, letting me sing alone. We repeat this for another half dozen times.



Figure 1.2 At *Kouta* Lesson (Seiyoshi Shisho on her *shamisen* (left) and myself (right), March 2012)

Once the singing lesson part ends, we move on to the *shamisen* lesson. I borrow Seiyoshi Shisho's second *shamisen* and play along with her by breaking the piece into small sections. We repeat playing each section at least a dozen times.

In the *koutaburi* lesson, I stand at the right side of Yoshie Shisho, positioning myself two steps behind her so that I can still see her movements at the left side corner of my eyes. First Yoshie Shisho gives a cue to the student sitting by the audio equipment to start the music, and we begin dancing together. Just like the *kouta* lesson, she breaks the piece into small sections, and we repeat practicing each section about a half dozen times. Once Yoshie Shisho notes my ease in the order of movements, she sits down across from the dance floor, letting me dance

alone. Whenever I make mistakes or show uncertainty with the choreography, Yoshie Shisho helps me out with hand gestures and a few spoken instructions.



Figure 1.3 At *Koutaburi* Lesson (Yoshie Shisho (right) and myself (left), February 2011)

When the piece ends, I once again go back to the starting position for another round of practice. While the cassette tape is rewinding, I straighten up my cotton summer *kimono* and try to catch my breath. It might seem somewhat outdated to use the cassette tape in this high-tech digital age, but this idling time is very important for the students to pause and reflect on their movements as well as to calm down and get ready for the next practice round.

During the *kouta* and *koutaburi* lessons, both Seiyoshi Shisho and Yoshie Shisho perform the same piece over and over again. Each time, I was expected to carefully observe their performance and to imitate it as closely as possible. For this reason, both Shisho said the learning of art or technique (*gei*) is “a thing to *steal* by *watching* or *listening* (*mite, kiite nusumu mono*)”

rather than to be taught through written texts or the teacher's oral instructions. Normally, it takes three to four lessons, approximately a month, to memorize a piece. Only when I have memorized the piece does the *real* training begin. This is the stage at which Shisho corrects and adjusts the slightest mistakes I make in my performance—usually, for me, taking the *ma* (pause) in singing or shifting the angle of my torso in dancing. At this point, both Shisho only tell me what is bad in my performance. Otherwise, they simply nod to show their approval. It usually takes about six to eight lessons, about a month and a half to two months, to complete one piece and move on to a new piece.

2.0 GEISHA AND IROKE

In the past centuries, *geisha* have often been labeled as sex workers and associated with images full of sexual fantasy. To correct such misconceptions, the connoisseurs of pleasure quarters as well as *geisha* themselves have constantly made statements like “the *geisha* sell arts, not sex.” For example, Edo journalist Narushima Ryuhoku once wrote, “the ones who sell *gei* (art) but not *iro* (sex) are called *geisha*” in *Ryukyo Shinshi*, the *New Chronicles of Yanagibashi Pleasure Quarter*, first published in 1859.¹ More than a century later, Iwasaki Mineko, who was the most famous *geisha* in Kyoto from the mid-1960s to 1980s and was the model *geisha* for Arthur Golden’s *Memoirs of a Geisha*, also emphasizes that *geisha* is a profession which “only sell *gei* (art) and not *mi* (body).”² The expression of “selling *gei* but not *iro*” often appears when talking about *geisha*, and particularly *geisha* themselves stress this point strongly to the public.

This is because, first of all, the *geisha* occupation originated in the pleasure quarters—the world full of *iro* (sex)—where *geisha* worked side by side with the sex industry, so that people who knew little about *geisha* easily misunderstood them as sex workers as well. Secondly, many of the Japanese arts—poems, dances, songs, paintings, etc.—treat *iro* (sex) as a main subject in some ways, and the *geisha*’s arts are one of them that deals with *iro* (sex) but does so in a very stylized and esoteric way—this is the expression of *iroke*—so that people without a knowledge of how to appreciate *geisha*’s arts make wrong judgments towards *geisha*, labeling them as some incomprehensible beings who are “selling sexual arts.” Such misconceptions and misunderstandings are also rooted in the multiplicity of *iro*—it is currently used as colors, but in

¹ Narushima Ryuhoku, “Ryukyo Shinshi (New Chronicles of Yanagibashi Pleasure Quarter, 1859),” in *Shin Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei 100: Edo Hanjyoki, Ryukyo Shinshi*, annotation by Hino Tatsuo (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1989), 350.

² Iwasaki 2001, 12.

the past, it also meant sex, beauty, love, woman, emotions, etc.—which makes it difficult to pinpoint what exactly the expression of *iro* in *iroke* is and what it means in *geisha*'s arts. In particular, the Buddhist and Confucian ideologies of gender inequality have influenced the notion of *iro* as a woman or a lover, lowering the overall status of women in society over many centuries. Christian ideology of sexual desire (*iro*) as sin and virginity as virtue, too, were imposed on women working in the pleasure quarters, degrading them as “fallen women.”

In this chapter, I investigate the relationship between *gei* (art) and *iro* (sex) by first reviewing the history of *geisha*. Then, I further examine the concept of *iro* in order to understand its semantics and associations with the notion of sex, beauty, love, and woman, attempting to situate *iro* in its relationship with *gei* (art) of *geisha*. Once the basic understanding of *iro* is laid out, I then look at the concept of *ke* (or *ki*) of *iroke*—it means air, atmosphere, feelings, spirits, and mind—which is one of the most complex but frequently used terms in everyday Japanese conversation. Covering backgrounds of *iro* and *ke* separately helps to delineate the characteristics of *iroke* and to understand the meaning of its expressions further. To grasp the meaning of *iroke* in a more obvious manner, I look at the spring picture (*shunga*) woodblock prints, a type of erotic art that makes the expression and characteristics of *iroke* visible, in order to show correlations between the visual and performing arts' treatment of *iro* and the pleasure quarters.

It is important to note here that since there is no exact match for terms like *gei*, *iro*, and *ke* in English, I used the closest equivalents—*art*, *sex*, and *air*—so far. If I were to follow this, the word *iro-ke* becomes *sex(ual) air*, but this does not quite express the nature and meanings that the Japanese word *iroke* possesses. In fact, the word *iroke* is closer to the English sexiness or eroticism, but as I discuss in this chapter, the Japanese viewed the notion of sex, eroticism, or

body positively, so that *iro* as well as *iroke* were also conceived as something positive and inherently good, unlike the negative connotations the English words sex and eroticism project under Christian morality. So, I believe that using the words sexiness or eroticism for *iroke* is not quite appropriate here. For consistency, I continue to use the word sex for *iro* in most cases, but I would also like to remind the reader that there are times when I write *iro* to indicate something other than sex, in which case I will put the usage of meaning right next to it. For the word *iroke*, I use “the love-sex atmosphere” as the closest translation for now, but I will further discuss this matter in the following chapters. Ultimately, my goal is to illuminate the connection between *geisha* arts and the artistic expressions of *iroke* in order to reevaluate the meaning and value of such aesthetic sensibilities embodied through *geisha*’s intangible performing arts.

2.1 *GEISHA* ORIGIN

2.1.1 Mythological Beginnings

Tracing back *geisha* origin means going back to the very first text describing the music and dance performances. This leads us to an episode featured in the oldest extant chronicle of *Kojiki*, the *Records of Ancient Matters* (712 C.E).³ Many scholars use this as a starting point of their discussions on the history of Japanese performing arts.⁴ The episode begins with a story of the Sun Deity⁵ confining herself to the Heavenly Rock cave so as to avoid facing problems that her

³ It compiles collection of myths that focus on explaining the origin of Japan and the deities, or *Kami*.

⁴ For examples, Malm 2000, 32; Foreman 2008, 42; Kawatake 1971, 18; Kikkawa 1974, 7; Imaoka 2008, 10.

⁵ Her full name is Amaterasu no O-mikami. Chamberlain translates “the Heaven-Shining-Great-August-Deity,” 50.

brother previously caused (see Figure 2.1).⁶ Without the Sun Deity, the world immediately turned dark and chaotic. At this state of emergency, a female deity named Ame no Uzume⁷ stepped up to offer a ritual in front of the cave. She hopped onto an upside-down bucket, exposed her breasts and genitals, and began stamping her feet widely and loudly. Her maniacal dance induced huge laughter and cheers from the deity-spectators, and this prompted the Sun Deity to peak out and eventually successfully lured her out from the cave.⁸



Figure 2.1 The Heavenly Rock Cave Enshrined at the Amano Iwato Shrine in Takachiho, Miyazaki⁹

Here, it is important to note that her sexually charged body and dance were described as possessing spiritual power that served as key factors in saving the world from chaos. Such

⁶ This episode is known as *Ame no Iwayado* or *Ame no Iwato*, “the Door of the Heavenly Rock Dwelling.” Her brother, the Deity of Sea and Storm, destroyed her rice fields and murdered her servant and horse. Basil Hall Chamberlain, *Translation of Kojiki* (Kobe, Japan: J. L. Thompson & Co., Ltd., 1932), 64.

⁷ Her full name is Ame no Uzume no Mikoto. Chamberlain translates “Her Augustness Heavenly-Alarming-Female,” 68.

⁸ Tsugita Masaki, *Kojiki*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1980), 86-95. For a full English translated story of *Kojiki*, see Robert Borgen and Marian Ury, “Readable Japanese Mythology: Selections from Nihon Shoki and Kojiki” in *The Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese*, vol. 24, no. 1 (April, 1990), 61-97, especially 70-71.

⁹ From the website of Amano Iwato Shrine: <http://amanoiwato-jinja.jp/> (accessed October 11, 2015).

ideologies persisted in Japanese religion and culture by taking a variety of forms, and I will further discuss this matter in the following sections. Scholars consider this episode particularly important because her dance is a type of spiritual possession and is the basis of Japanese dance movements. The upside-down bucket is a type of sound enhancement mechanism that is used in the *noh* and *kabuki* stages, and the laughter is a sort of magical power that drives evil spirits and daemons away and is witnessed in many folk ritual scenes.

Ame no Uzume is assumed to be a prototype of a shrine maiden¹⁰ who belonged to the ancestral lineage of a group of court musicians and dancers¹¹ from the Heian period.¹² Their music and dance is considered the basis of performing arts known as the *noh* or *kyogen*,¹³ and these later became the foundation of a female *kabuki* theatre form, which was banned in 1629. The ban forced these female *kabuki* performers to be in-house dance girls.¹⁴ Since these dance girls were involved with sex businesses, they were frequently arrested and sent to the Yoshiwara pleasure quarter. There were many highly artistically trained courtesans¹⁵ to entertain customers in the pleasure quarter, but their skills declined and became outdated overtime. This is where a *geisha* emerged as a professional musician and dancer to provide artistic entertainment in the pleasure quarter. It is common knowledge that the Japanese performing arts have their roots in religious rituals for the purpose of entertaining the deities. Only later were the receivers of such

¹⁰ It is called *miko* (a maiden of shrine or a psychic medium).

¹¹ The group is known as *sarume* clan.

¹² Abe Masamichi, *Nihon no Kamisama wo Shiru Jiten (An Encyclopedia for Learning Japanese Deities)* (Tokyo: Nihon Bungeisha, 1995), 49.

¹³ The famous *noh* playwright Zeami Motokiyo explains that the *noh*'s origin, called *sarugaku*, can be traced back in to the *sarume* clan's music and dance in one of his works *Fushi Kaden* (1425?). Kanai Kiyomitsu, *Fushi Kaden Shokai (Detailed Explanation of Fushi Kaden)* (Tokyo: Meiji Shoin, 1983), 314.

¹⁴ This is called *odoriko* (literally, dance child).

¹⁵ This is called *tayu*. This term is used to call a highest skilled narrator of Bunraku puppet player, but it began to be used for the highly cultural females in the pleasure quarters. Although they are not technically the same as "courtesans" because they are not "prostitutes," there is no suitable term for *tayu* in English, so I will use "courtesans" here.

entertainments the emperor, then aristocrats, then warriors, and finally the commoners over a long historical period.

In short, *geisha* are considered the descendents of Ame no Uzume, the shrine maiden. In fact, the *geisha* and the shrine maidens share very similar characteristics, and this seems to be the source of confusion on the matter of mixing *gei* (art) with *iro* (sex).

2.1.2 *Miko*, The Shrine Maidens in Ancient Religion

According to folklorist Origuchi Shinobu, the ancient Japanese believed that the deities would come from far away beyond the ocean horizon once a year to bring fortune and prosperity to the village.¹⁶ The deities were originally thought of as invisible spirits, but later they took the form of trees or stones and even a human being. So once a year, a shrine maiden prepared food and sake to throw a banquet¹⁷ and offered music and dance to properly welcome and entertain the deities, which was represented by a villager, in order to bring good fortune and prosperity to the village. Particularly, the music and dance were thought to have powers to revive the deities' exhausted souls¹⁸ and to restore them to their healthy states.¹⁹ Interestingly, the shrine maidens also offered sexual intercourse to the deities on the night of banquet because it was considered a

¹⁶ This particular theory is called *marebito-ron*, a rare-person theory. Origuchi Shinobu, "Reikon (Souls)," in *Origuchi Shinobu Zenshu*, vol. 20 (Tokyo: Chuo Koronsha, 1972), 8-12. Also Origuchi, "Kokubungaku no Hassei: Dai 3-Ko (Origin of Japanese Literature: Third Revision)," vol. 1, 5.

¹⁷ Origuchi thinks that, rather than a solemn ritual that we currently observe at the Shinto shrines, the banquet was the main religious activity at the ancient shrines and suggests that it was the early form of the festival (*matsuri*). Origuchi, "Miko to Yujo to (Shrine Maidens and Playful Women)," vol. 17, 213, and vol. 1, 49-54. More on this matter in Origuchi, "Nenju Gyoji (Annual Events)," vol. 15, 279. It is challenging to read Origuchi's theories because his thoughts tend to scatter around and crossover in multiple essays and articles. Here I try to cite the pages that are closest to my summary of his argument.

¹⁸ This was called *tama-furi*, the soul-shaking.

¹⁹ This was called *tama-shizume*, the soul-soothing. Origuchi, vol. 20, 211-216.

more direct way to transfer the maiden's vibrant soul to the deities' weakened body and soul.²⁰ Since all of these acts resembled how a wife served her husband, Origuchi called the shrine maiden "a one-night wife."²¹

Origuchi pointed out similarities between the banquet customs observed in the ancient shrines and in the Edo pleasure quarters. In both settings, there was a host who provided food, drinks, and entertainments of music, dance, and sex, on the one side, and the guest who enjoyed being entertained by the host's thoughtful arrangements, on the other. Here, Origuchi saw the role of deities as something equivalent to the role of the customers of pleasure quarters. The only difference was that the latter had to pay a substantial amount of money to make this banquet happen, but, indeed, many desired to act like the deities and to be treated like the deities.²²

Origuchi also saw similarities between the shrine maiden and courtesans²³ who worked at the pleasure quarter in the Edo period, and pointed out that both were trained in the performing arts, which included teaching the skills of "a method of marriage" to bachelors. Thus, he considered them both as one-night wives.²⁴ Even though sexual favors were offered to the customers of pleasure quarters, Origuchi pointed out that the customer's main purpose in visiting there was not so much of the satisfaction of their sexual desires but the demonstration of an honorable reputation and title by showing his *gentlemanliness* to the host in *ozashiki*.²⁵

Though Origuchi did not state it specifically, the key concept here is that the host treats the guests—deities or humans alike—so well that it prompts them to participate in the act of *play* in both shrines and Edo pleasure quarters settings. On this matter, Tanaka Hidemichi further

²⁰ It was also thought as a gesture of submission towards the deities. See Origuchi, vol. 1, 76-78, and vol. 7, 305. Also, see Iwashita Hisafumi, *Geisharon (Theory on Geisha)* (Tokyo: Yuzankaku, 2006), 28-29.

²¹ It is called *ichiya-zuma*, a one-night wife. Origuchi, vol. 1, 46-47. This theory came to be known as *kami-no-yome-ron*, the deity's bride theory. Origuchi, vol. 1, 76-78.

²² Origuchi, vol. 17, 214.

²³ They are called *yujo*, literally, playful women.

²⁴ Ibid., 216.

²⁵ Ibid., 214.

explains that this is because people believed that deities were mere reflections of human beings who also endured hard manual labor most of the year so that they were in need of leisure time to recover from their accumulated fatigue, just as humans were.²⁶ Thus, the shrine maiden's offerings of music and dance were all meant to provide enjoyment and relaxation for the deities, and this was the reason the music and dance were called *asobi*, the play.²⁷ This is the reason that the rituals involving music and dance performances were thus called as *kami-asobi*, the deities' play, or *kagura*, the delighting of the deities.²⁸

In addition to the music and dance, Owa Iwao elaborates further upon Origuchi's theory of the shrine maidens versus the courtesans as one-night wives and suggests that sexual intercourse was indeed a significant part of sacred rituals and included under the term *play*.²⁹ The reason for this, people believed, was that after such play, the deities would be fortified so that they would more likely to promise (or be obliged) to bring bigger fortunes and successful harvests in the coming year. Plus, an act of sexual intercourse was thought to induce fertility of land and crops, and therefore it was considered an auspicious act.³⁰ Thus, the deities' play, or *kami-asobi*, meant playful activities including dining, imbibing, performing music, dance, and sexual favors, and these were all important parts of religious rituals. For this reason, the females

²⁶ Tanaka Hidemichi, *Yamato Gokoro towa Nanika (What is Yamato Heart?)* (Kyoto: Minerva Shobo, 2010), 43.

²⁷ Shirakawa Shizuka further explains that the term *asobi* meant the appearance of invisible deities or spirits in front of our eyes and the state that they roam around town. Thus, *asobi* was used to describe the special state and actions caused by or described for the deities. Shirakawa Shizuka, *Moji Shoyo (Rambling Words)* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1987), 8-10.

²⁸ Tanabe Hisao, *Nihon Ongakushi (Music History of Japan)* (Tokyo: Tokyo Denki Daigaku Shuppanbu, 1963), 43. According to Kikkawa Eishi, the *kagura* is consisted with three parts that portray scenes of interactions between humans and deities; one, welcoming the deities; two, playing and dancing harmoniously with the deities; and three, sending off the deities. Kikkawa points out that in the second part, there are some moments that lyrics sing vulgar contents along with the performance of humorous dance movements. He analyzes the reason for including such moments in the performance was that people thought of deities as just like humans, so rather than praising them with words like hymns, people thought it was more effective to please the deities with such humorous words and movements. Kikkawa 1974, 70-71.

²⁹ Owa Iwao, *Yujo to Tenno (Yujo and Emperor)* (Tokyo: Hakusuisha, 1993), 11-15.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 41-43.

who professionalized these acts were called *playful* women (*asobi-me*).³¹ The term *asobi*, Owa adds, did not carry modern implications of *play* such as leisure or recreational activities that we commonly use in a secular context today. Instead, it was closely linked to religious activities, and the term playful women (*asobi-me*) should not be confused with “prostitutes” which often carry negative and degrading connotations.³²

Going back to Origuchi’s theory, the shrine maiden’s expertise included chanting an incantation, making contacts with divine and ancestral spirits through possessions,³³ and delivering oracles³⁴ to the people. He describes that the shrine maiden’s spirit-possessed movements—mainly the circular motions and stamping feet—became the basis of the Japanese dance as seen in the *noh* performing style.³⁵ Adding to this statement, dance scholar Gunji Masakatsu also observes that the act of dancing³⁶ was thought to induce a state of trance, making the dancer susceptible to possession by the spirits, thus, it was considered an effective means of bringing the spirits and the supernatural to this world.³⁷

In addition to the dance movements, spoken words were also thought to possess spiritual power.³⁸ With this belief, people thought that good words would bring fortunes and prosperity, but in turn, bad words would bring catastrophes.³⁹ Origuchi explains that in order to receive divine oracles, the shrine maidens used good and beautiful words to speak out to the deities.⁴⁰

This custom is deeply molded into the *noh*, *kabuki*, and *kouta*, so that the stage opening number

³¹ They were also called *yu-jo*, the playful women.

³² Ibid., 382-383.

³³ It is called *kami-gakari*, the divine attachment.

³⁴ It is called *kuchi-yose*, literally, the mouth calling, which means, the calling of the divine spirits.

³⁵ Origuchi, vol. 1, 66, and vol. 17, 296-298. See more details in “*Mai to Odori to (Mai Style and Odori Style Dances)*,” vol. 1, 237-239.

³⁶ It is called *mai*, the circular-motion dance.

³⁷ Gunji 1977, 39-41.

³⁸ This is called *koto-dama*, the soulful words. *Dama* comes from the term *tamashii*, the soul.

³⁹ Origuchi, vol. 19, 134-135.

⁴⁰ Such recitation acts were called *utae*, to appeal, and later became *uta*, a song or to sing. In particular, the recitation of good words was called *koto-hogi*, literally, the matters to celebrate. Origuchi, vol. 1, 379-380.

is normally a piece that is filled with good and celebratory words. A piece such as “*Sanbaso*” would bring good fortune to all performers and audiences in attendance.⁴¹ Such custom is also seen in folk traditions where several people went around home-to-home, town-to-town, reciting celebratory and auspicious words.⁴²

Based on Origuchi’s theories, dancing, singing, and offering prayers were all important acts that the shrine maidens dedicated to the deities up until the time when the emperor took over the position. As time passed, the shrine maidens, or any females who possessed the ability of spiritual possessions, began to leave shrines or the palace to become itinerant performers, simultaneously serving as fortune-tellers and religion preachers.⁴³ As mentioned, Origuchi thinks that the courtesans who worked in the Edo pleasure quarter were descendents of such female itinerant performers who were, in turn, derived from the ancient shrine maiden profession. Over time, her performances of music and dance, as well as sex, became entertainment for the masses, leaving the religious meanings behind. Ironically, the Edo pleasure quarters were one of the places where they attempted to bring back to life the original religious meanings, such as the courtesan as “a one-night wife” (or “a deity’s bride”), to life.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ibid., 29-32, 183-187. There is a *kouta* version of *sanbaso* piece composed by Kasuga Toyo, and I will touch upon it in the next chapter.

⁴² This is called *koto-hogi*, the eulogy or recitation of good words.

⁴³ Origuchi, vol. 1, 216-217.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 179.

2.1.3 *Yujo*, The Playful Women: Female Itinerant Performers in the Medieval Periods

Medieval historians add more details on the transitions from the ancient shrine maidens to the Edo playful women. According to Wakita Haruko, there were several types of female itinerant performers with some religious backgrounds actively serving in the medieval society. One of the popular types was the “walking shrine maiden”⁴⁵ who strolled around town offering prayers and rituals for people who presented their requests. Another type was the “puppeteer women”⁴⁶ who performed singing and dancing and worked within a group of male itinerant puppeteers and magicians.⁴⁷ Though Wakita points out difficulties in distinguishing between the “puppeteer women” and the “playful women,” she speculates that the playful women came out from the puppeteer women groups and continued to perform singing in the major port towns.⁴⁸ Another type, the “white rhythm women,”⁴⁹ also branched out from the puppeteer women and performed, singing a long stanza of a poem⁵⁰ along with dancing.⁵¹ Wakita notes that the white rhythm women were known to dress up in a male style clothes, but they were simply wearing a formal style for the public appearances, such as the palace court or shrines. This clothing was not recognized as gender-specific at that time.⁵²

⁴⁵ It is called *aruki miko*, the walking shrine maidens.

⁴⁶ It is called *kugutsu-me*, the puppeteer women.

⁴⁷ Wakita Haruko, *Jyosei Geino no Gensyu (The Origin of Female Performers)* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 2001), 66-68 and 71-102.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 104-129.

⁴⁹ It is called *shirabyoshi-me*, the white rhythm women. *Shirabyoshi* was a type of popular dance-song from the Heian and Kamakura periods.

⁵⁰ It is called *imayo*, literally, the style of now.

⁵¹ Wakita 2001, 132-138.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 150-152.

One more type of itinerant female performer, which came after the “white rhythm women” were the “melodic-dance women.”⁵³ They performed chant singing and told stories of shrine and temple origins along with dancing, and wore attire similar to that of the white rhythm women.⁵⁴ Wakita adds that the *noh* playwright Zeami’s father, Kan’ami Kiyotsugu, learned the melodic-dance style from these melodic-dance women who lived nearby and incorporated the melodic-dance style into his plays. This means that the *noh* technically branched out from the melodic-dance style.⁵⁵ At this point, conventionally, the explanation of female performing arts jumps from the melodic-dance women to the women’s *kabuki*, but both Wakita and Hosokawa Ryoichi agree that the women’s *noh*⁵⁶ should be listed in between the two. This was because they found some records showing that the women’s *noh* was highly praised and was as good as Zeami’s. The women’s *noh* seems to have already existed even before the Kan’ami’s time, so Wakita and Hosokawa assume that they must have in one way or another influenced Kan’ami’s and eventually Zeami’s performance styles.⁵⁷

Overall, Wakita observes that the female performers during this period tended to have strong ties with religious activities, offering ritual music and dance or prayers for the deceased or the sick, delivering the oracles and fortunes, reciting the chant, and telling stories of shrine and temple origins, etc. By this time, Buddhism was spreading among the society, trying to bring various folk religions, including Shinto, under its control by either condemning them as old and

⁵³ It is called *kusemai-me*, the melodic-dance women. *Kusemai* was a type of song-dance composed based on the *shirabyoshi* style. The melodic-dance women belonged to the lowest class like homeless beggars, called *sho-moji*, and lived around Kyoto and Nara regions.

⁵⁴ Wakita 2001, 164-188.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 174.

⁵⁶ It is called *onna sarugaku*, the women’s *noh*. *Noh* used to be called *sarugaku*, which is a type of comical acts popularly performed at the temples and shrines in the Heian and Kamakura periods.

⁵⁷ Wakita 2001, 209, and Hosokawa Ryoichi, *Itsudatsu no Nihon Chusei (Deviation of Medieval Japan)* (Tokyo: JICC Shuppankyoku, 1993), 186-190.

indecent practices or by incorporating them as subordinate kinds.⁵⁸ In reality, however, the Buddhist beliefs were only concerned with people's afterlife, and so offered no comfort for people's daily life matters.⁵⁹ What people wanted then was immediate profit gain;⁶⁰ they hoped their wishes would be granted and come true quickly. Such an ideology, of course, was against the Buddhist teachings. Therefore, Wakita speculates that people sought spiritual guidance from these female itinerant performers, who used their ritualistic performances of music, dance, and sex to uplift people's souls. Wakita adds that people recognized these female itinerant performers as having miraculous power, and thus, they saw them as the deities. As a result, Wakita finds numerous folk tales dealing with female deities and female itinerant performers as protagonists during this period.⁶¹

2.1.4 Okuni's *Kabuki* to Playful Women's (*Yujo*'s) *Kabuki*: Female Itinerant Performers in the Early Edo Period

After the women's *noh* came the Okuni's *kabuki*. Okuni was known to be a shrine maiden from Izumo province, and she became famous by singing and dancing in a male costume portraying then famous rowdy Nagoya Sanza on stage in Kyoto in 1603.⁶² Unlike any other performing artist, Okuni based her main characters and storylines in her stage acts on well-known persons and current topics. Takano Toshio states that while *noh* plays deal with an exorcism of evil spirits conducted by Buddhist monks, which tend to take more aggressive and oppressive attitude towards the main character, Okuni's *kabuki* show friendliness towards Sanza's spirit by dancing

⁵⁸ Wakita 2001, 21.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 213.

⁶⁰ It is called *gense-riyaku*, for the good of oneself in this immediate world.

⁶¹ Ibid., 23-24.

⁶² Gunji, 78-81.

with him in the play.⁶³ Takano speculates that this was because Okuni came from the shrine maiden background which allowed her to communicate with the spirits but without any ability to conduct the exorcism.⁶⁴ Based on Origuchi's theory, I believe perhaps it was not a lack of ability, but rather that she was true to her role as the shrine maiden. She was there to entertain the spirit until the spirit was relaxed and satisfied, so her play looked more peaceful in nature than the *noh* play. At any rate, Takano explains that this set her performance style apart from the previous women's *noh* or Zeami's *noh* traditions and made her performances more accessible to the majority of people in the city.

One of the biggest differences between the women's *noh* and Okuni's *kabuki* performances was the usage of the body and the movements in dance. Imaoka Kentaro states that Okuni incorporated then popular dance styles—the flamboyant dance⁶⁵ and the baby girl dance⁶⁶—into her acts. Unlike *noh*'s circular and horizontal dance motions,⁶⁷ these dances emphasize up and down motions⁶⁸ which tend to expose the dancer's body shape.⁶⁹ In addition to Imaoka's statement, Takano also states that Okuni's innovativeness was rooted in finding the “male's *iroke* and charm” into these rowdy characters and expressed them through her body in the dance performances.⁷⁰ Since there are no recordings of Okuni's performances, we can never exactly know what this “male's *iroke* and charm” was like, but it is important to keep in mind that her performance style and subjects portrayed in it began to shift away from the elegant and solemn world of deities to the bald and earthly world of humans.

⁶³ Takano Toshio, *Yujo Kabuki (Playful Women's Kabuki)* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobo, 2005), 25.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ It is called *furyu odori*, the flamboyant festival dance.

⁶⁶ It is called *yayako odori*, the baby girl dance.

⁶⁷ This is called *mai*, the circular motion dance style.

⁶⁸ This is called *odori*, the more active up-down motion dance style.

⁶⁹ Imaoka, 104-110.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 19.

Okuni's performance was well received because of the evocative nature of the dances, which were unlike any before them. Her popularity, however, waned quickly when she left Kyoto to tour around the country and could not continue producing new acts. Taking this as an advantage, all-female performance groups began imitating Okuni's style dance acts and performing them on a portable stage temporary set up by the riverbed of Shijyo. This was called the women's *kabuki* or the playful women's *kabuki*. In fact, most of these female performers belonged to nearby pleasure quarters and worked as the playful women there. Hayashi Mataichiro, who petitioned to organize a government licensed pleasure quarter in Kyoto and became a brothel owner in 1589, led the playful women's *kabuki* performances and used it as an opportunity to *display* the beauty of playful women who worked for him. Indeed, Okuni's sexually emphasized dance acts were perfectly suitable for the playful women to perform on stage because they attracted customers to both the play houses and the pleasure quarters.

The most important difference between the Okuni's and the playful women's *kabuki* was the incorporation of a *shamisen* into the music. Tanaka Yuko observes that all playful women *kabuki* members were clad in rare and newly imported materials—flashy design and smooth surfaced silk kimono⁷¹ fragranced with agarwood or musk incenses—and danced in a circle along with the music played on the newly imported instrument, the *shamisen*.⁷² Their appearances, smells, sounds, and motions—the whole atmosphere the playful women created on stage—was exotic and extraordinary, producing a dream-like world, so that many audiences became absorbed into their performances. Tanaka also states that because the *shamisen* was introduced to the public through these playful women's *kabuki* performances and has been associated with the theatres and pleasure quarters—people called them the two-biggest evil

⁷¹ They are *donsu* or *rinzu* style kimono.

⁷² Tanaka Yuko, *Edo no Oto (Sounds of Edo)* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobo, 1997), 57-60.

places⁷³—as well as female entertainers like the playful women, the sounds of the *shamisen* were labeled an “obscene voice.”⁷⁴ Such sounds were considered to arouse eroticism and bring disorderliness to the people and society. In addition, the *shamisen* instrument itself was commonly called the sexual strings,⁷⁵ thus, there was a strong tie between the *shamisen* and the sexually charged world of *iro*.⁷⁶ This Kyoto-born playful women’s *kabuki* was quickly brought over to the Yoshiwara pleasure quarter in the new capital of Edo (now Tokyo), and the Yoshiwara playful women began to perform it on stage.

2.1.5 *Tayu*, The Courtesan: Female Performers and Yoshiwara Pleasure Quarter in Edo

In the early 1600s, the rapidly growing city of Edo, in great need of heavy laborers such as carpenters, construction workers as well as defense guards, attracted men who sought employment opportunities from various regions of the country. As such, the number of men rose to three times that of women. Men continued to outnumber women for more than a century afterwards. While brothels or bathhouses were scattered around the city, Shoji Jin’emon petitioned to operate a government-licensed pleasure quarter just like the ones in Kyoto, Osaka, and Suruga in 1612. His petition was finally granted in 1617, and the Yoshiwara pleasure quarter opened in the current Ningyo-cho area in the following year.

Along with the pleasure quarter, the Tokugawa government also permitted theatres and playhouses to be built near the Yoshiwara area. By placing these entertainment industries side by

⁷³ It is called *nidai akusho*, the two-biggest bad places.

⁷⁴ She called it *insei* (淫声). According to *Nihon Kokugo Daijiten* (Japan Knowledge online), the character 淫 originally meant “to do something more than enough” and came to mean “licentious” or “sexual desire” later on: <http://japanknowledge.com/library/> (accessed September 30, 2015).

⁷⁵ It is called *iroito* (色糸).

⁷⁶ Tanaka 1997, 62-65. The term *iro* is difficult to translate in English. I will touch upon this further in the next section.

side in its district, the government was able to keep them under their tight watch. In fact, this system provided merits for both sides. For the entertainment business owners, their rights of property, management, and operation were protected in exchange for paying taxes. This meant that they could monopolize this business field against potential “unlicensed” competitors that were mushrooming outside of these districts. For the government, such taxes were a great source for the public finance. The government also received prompt reports from these business owners when criminals visited these entertainment districts, so it helped to keep the city’s security and safety under good control. As mentioned, these two entertainment districts were called the two-biggest evil places since there were handful of people who lost their fortunes by visiting and being absorbed into the *play* that they offered there.

According to Aketa Tetsuo, the highest ranked playful woman in Yoshiwara was called *tayu*.⁷⁷ This was an honorific title used for the best *noh* and dance (*mai*) performers who served as a chief of its artistic clan in the medieval era, and this tradition of calling the playful women as *tayu* began at the time when the playful women’s *kabuki* became popular in Kyoto.⁷⁸ As in its title, Ishii Ryosuke adds, a *tayu*, first and foremost, excelled in dancing the small dance,⁷⁹ singing the long stanza of poem,⁸⁰ and the arts of sex and had a beautiful appearance.⁸¹ In addition, Ono Takeo states that *tayu* took intensive training in the arts of tea ceremony, incense ceremony, flower arrangements, calligraphy, and playing musical instruments and were well-versed in both Japanese and Chinese poems and classic literatures.⁸² Wakita Haruko also adds that they were required to be able to serve tea for the samurai warriors at the supreme court, so

⁷⁷ I used the term *courtesan* to mean *tayu* earlier.

⁷⁸ Aketa Tetsuo, *Nihon Kagaishi (History of Japanese Pleasure Quarters)* (Tokyo: Yuzankaku, 1990), 22.

⁷⁹ It is called *komai*, the small-dance.

⁸⁰ As mentioned, it is called the *imayo*.

⁸¹ Ishii 1967, 13.

⁸² Ono Takeo, *Yoshiwara / Shimabara* (Tokyo: Kyoikusha, 1978), 135.

the title of *tayu* was only given to the ones who were knowledgeable, well-cultured, and capable of entertaining and serving as hosts to the higher class members of the society.⁸³ Just like the ancient shrine maidens that I discussed earlier, the arts (*gei*) that *tayu* offered certainly included sex (*iro*) as well as conversation and social skills. Thus, the sex (*iro*) was still considered as a part of the art (*gei*) itself at this point.

Shiomi Senichiro states that these skillful *tayu* played a leading part on *noh* and *kabuki* stages that were built within the Yoshiwara district. Their performances, Shiomi adds, were so refined and magnificent that they became quickly renowned as the cutting edge entertainment of the day.⁸⁴ Though it became one of the most popular entertainments in Edo, the Tokugawa government banned the playful women's or any women's *kabuki* in 1616, but it did not become completely effective until 1629. Some scholars believe that the reason for banning the female *kabuki* was the indecent nature of their performances. Tanaka Yuko, on the other hand, points out that since the plan of opening the Yoshiwara pleasure quarter was granted immediately after this ban, it was more likely that the government considered the money and power that the female *kabuki* drew from the Edo people as a type of threat to the government, thus, they intervened their operations. In order to better control their activities, it was necessary to separate the place for the sexual arts (*iro*) from the performing arts (*gei*). Thus, the Yoshiwara pleasure quarter was separated from other entertainment sections, and such isolation became a driving force to create a unique world of its own.⁸⁵

⁸³ Wakita Haruko, Hayashi Reiko, and Nagahara Kazuko, eds, *Nihon Jyoseishi (Japanese Women's History)* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 1987), 131.

⁸⁴ Shiomi Senichiro, *Yoshiwara to iu Ikai (Odd Place called Yoshiwara)* (Tokyo: Gendai Shokan, 2008), 80.

⁸⁵ Tanaka 2007, 21.

2.1.6 *Odoriko*, The Dance Girls: Female Performers After the Female *Kabuki* Ban

After the 1629 female *kabuki* ban, some of the female performers were absorbed into the Yoshiwara pleasure quarter to work as full-time playful women, and the rest continued to remain as performing artists outside of the Yoshiwara districts. The latter were called dance girls,⁸⁶ and in fact, they never kept the arts of sex (*iro*) and performance (*gei*) separated. Tanaka states that while the boys *kabuki*⁸⁷ took over the public performance stages after the female *kabuki*, the dance girls continued to entertain wealthy feudal lords and vassals at private banquets hosted at their homes.⁸⁸ In 1657, the Great Fire of Meireki burnt almost half of Edo, including the Yoshiwara district, so the licensed pleasure quarter was relocated and rebuilt in the current Asakusa area, which was often called the New Yoshiwara.⁸⁹

During these years, the dance girls continued to increase in number the Fukagawa area, which was right across the Sumida River from the Old Yoshiwara and developed greatly after the big fire. These dance girls continued to entertain customers with their skills in both sex (*iro*) and arts (*gei*) at restaurants and unlicensed brothels in this area. Tanaka explains that the growth in the number of dance girls was because many daughters of the merchant class began taking lessons in dance and *shamisen* so that they could use such skills to find employment at the samurai warrior houses. This was considered one of the successful career paths for lower class

⁸⁶ It is called *odoriko*, literally, a dance child.

⁸⁷ It is called *wakashu kabuki*, the boys *kabuki*.

⁸⁸ Tanaka mentions that the term *odoriko* was mostly used for young female dancers, but it was also used to mean young male dancers who were members of *wakashu kabuki*. This *wakashu kabuki* was banned in 1652.

⁸⁹ From this point on, the old one in Ningyo-cho was called the Old Yoshiwara (*kyu*-Yoshiwara) or the Original Yoshiwara (*moto*-Yoshiwara).

girls. Tanaka also finds that this was the time when the term *geisha* was first used to refer to the dance girls in Fukagawa.⁹⁰

2.1.7 Appearance of *Geisha*

At this time, the term *geisha* was used to refer to people with specific skills or talents, such as doctors, astronomers, Confucian and Shinto scholars, poets, martial artists, narrative singers in puppet theatre, and musicians, etc.⁹¹ In the *kabuki* theatre, too, the actors were distinguished with two titles; the *yakusha* (actor) who performed comical acts (*kyogen*) and the *geisha* who performed elegant dance (*mai*) or pantomimic dance (*shosa*).⁹² In fact, the occupation of *geisha*—one who worked as an entertainer performing songs and dances for the customers in *ozashiki*—was practiced by both men and women. These were called the male *geisha*⁹³ and the female *geisha*⁹⁴ respectively. As the number of the female *geisha* increased, the term *geisha* began to denote exclusively the female ones.⁹⁵ Since then, the male *geisha* assumed different names and began to shift their artistic specializations to include more comical skits, pantomime, mimic acts, and storytelling.⁹⁶

According to Tanaka, the Tokugawa government had a type of law prohibiting prostitution. Rather than banning all businesses of prostitution, this law was to regulate

⁹⁰ This appears in the *Edo Cultural History from the Kanpo to Enkyo Eras, 1741-1748 (The Kanpo/Enkyo Koufu Fuzokushi)*. Referenced in Tanaka 2007, 32-33.

⁹¹ Ibid., 12-13.

⁹² Iwashita, 64.

⁹³ It is called *otoko geisha*.

⁹⁴ It is called *onna geisha*.

⁹⁵ Ishii 1967, 48.

⁹⁶ They were called *taikomochi*, literally, the drum holder, or *hokan*, the party helper. See more on male *geisha* Taikomochi Arai, *Ma no Gokui (The Secrets of Ma)* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 2001), 16.

“unlicensed” prostitution existing outside of the Yoshiwara pleasure quarter.⁹⁷ As such, any females who were involved with both sex (*iro*) and arts (*gei*)⁹⁸ became the target of arrest.⁹⁹ In 1753, the government made a sweeping roundup of these dance girls in the Fukagawa areas as lawbreakers. Approximately 115 of them were sent to the Yoshiwara after this arrest. Once they were taken into the Yoshiwara pleasure quarter, they began to be called Yoshiwara *geisha*,¹⁰⁰ and were recognized as legitimately licensed *geisha*.¹⁰¹

2.1.8 The Yoshiwara *Geisha*: Separation of Sex (*Iro*) from Arts (*Gei*)

The demand for Yoshiwara *geisha* increased in the 1760s due to a decline in *tayu*’s (courtesan’s) musical skills. According to Iwashita Hisafumi, a *tayu* was just like a “bird in a cage;” she had no access to the outside world of Yoshiwara.¹⁰² For *tayu*, simply going out to see a *kabuki* play in the nearby theatre was difficult since she was required to have a permission paper signed by her employer in order to pass the tightly guarded front gate of Yoshiwara. Since theatre and playhouses were the centers of popular music and dance productions, *tayu* could not keep up with the newest trends in the entertainment culture and were no longer able to satisfy their customers’ requests in *ozashiki*.¹⁰³ By 1764, *tayu* disappeared from Yoshiwara.¹⁰⁴ At this point, some of the Yoshiwara *geisha* were assigned to specialize *only* in the arts of dance and music

⁹⁷ Tanaka 2007, 29.

⁹⁸ They were generally called *shisho* (私娼), the private sex worker.

⁹⁹ Tanaka 2007, 33.

¹⁰⁰ They were also known as *kuruwa geisha*, the licensed pleasure quarter *geisha*.

¹⁰¹ Anybody who worked outside of the Yoshiwara or Fukagawa were distinguished as *machi geisha*, the town *geisha*, or *edo geisha*, the city *geisha*. Ibid., 15.

¹⁰² Ono Takeo explains that Yoshiwara was surrounded by layers of walls and a moat, and there was only one front gate that connected to the outside world. This gate was guarded by the securities day and night, and since 1641, anybody passing through this gate was required to show a special identification. Ono, 20.

¹⁰³ Iwashita, 67-68.

¹⁰⁴ Ishii, 120.

(*gei*) and were required *not* to engage in any kind of sexual acts (*iro*) in order to leave that specialty to *oiran*, lower ranked playful women who appeared after *tayū*'s disappearance. In other words, Yoshiwara continued to offer both the performing and sexual arts to the customers, but they came to be provided by two separate specialists. In a way, *geisha* came into its existence by cutting off one of the arts that female performers like the ancient shrine maidens and the playful women had offered in the past.

It must be noted here that the separation of sex (*iro*) from arts (*gei*) at this time was only limited to the Yoshiwara *geisha*, which meant that any other *geisha* working outside of the Yoshiwara still continued to offer both to their customers. Among them, those who excelled in *shamisen* ceased being *geisha* and became full-time teachers (*shisho*), running lesson houses¹⁰⁵ in town.

The number of Yoshiwara *geisha* continued to increase, but the separation of sex (*iro*) and arts (*gei*) was not strictly enforced. In fear of losing *oiran*'s (lower courtesan's) businesses, the *geisha* registration office¹⁰⁶ was placed in Yoshiwara in 1779.¹⁰⁷ In exchange for receiving official permission to perform music and dance within Yoshiwara through this office, these *geisha* had to sign a written oath promising not to sell sex (*iro*) to any customers under any circumstances. Under this new system, all *geisha* were also required to wear an unornamented hairstyle and a simply designed kimono with a plain color *obi* sash tied at her back so that it was not easily untied.¹⁰⁸ These rules were made so as to easily distinguish the *geisha* from the *oiran* by their appearances. This new *geisha*'s attire and style became quickly the latest fashion, and many girls in town imitated it. One notable difference between Yoshiwara *geisha* and any *geisha*

¹⁰⁵ It is called *keiko-ya*, the lesson house.

¹⁰⁶ It is called *kenban*, literally, the watch station.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 71.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 72-73. As

outside of Yoshiwara was the way they carried their *shamisen*. While Yoshiwara *geisha* stored and carried around her longneck *shamisen*¹⁰⁹ in a long wooden box, other *geisha*, who were technically “unlicensed,” used a three-part folding *shamisen*,¹¹⁰ which could be wrapped in a cloth so that nobody could recognize that she was carrying a *shamisen*.¹¹¹ Thus, the long wooden box became the very symbol of the Yoshiwara *geisha*,¹¹² and this is seen in many *ukiyo-e* prints.

For example, Kitagawa Utamaro, the famous woodblock print artist that I mentioned in the last chapter, depicted a scene in which a *geisha* is assisted by a *hako-ya* (male assistant) carrying a lantern and a *shamisen* box on her way to *ozashiki* (see Figure 2.2). The black *shamisen* box frequently appears to suggest that the character portrayed in the picture is a *geisha* rather than an *oiran*. As mentioned, by looking at the way she is tying her *obi* sash (in this picture, she is tying it at her back) and her less ornate design kimono, it is easily distinguished that she is a *geisha*, not an *oiran*.

¹⁰⁹ It is called *naga-zao*, literally, long neck. I will touch more on this in the next chapter.

¹¹⁰ It is called *tsugi-zao*, literally, the connected necks.

¹¹¹ Mitamura Engyo, *Karyu Fuzoku (Manner and Custom of Pleasure Quarters)* (Tokyo: Chuo Koronsha, 1998), 175. I will explain more details on the construction of *shamisen* in the next chapter.

¹¹² In fact, all Yoshiwara *geisha* was required to store her *shamisen* box at the registration office. When a *geisha* is called to be present for an *ozashiki*, a special assistant (called the “box store,” *hako-ya*) goes to the office to pick up her *shamisen* and delivers it at the venue. The registration office basically uses the *shamisen* box as a type of “timecard” to keep track of each *geisha*’s working hours.



Figure 2.2 *Geisha Walking Through the Snow at Night* by Kitagawa Utamaro (1797)¹¹³

Around this time, Yoshiwara *geisha* were popularly portrayed in *ukiyo-e* prints and *share-bon* books. According to Tanaka, the owners of *geisha* houses in Yoshiwara became wealthy enough to sponsor artists and authors who created works that used the characters and culture of Yoshiwara as the subjects. In doing so, they were able to advertise Yoshiwara to a much wider

¹¹³ From the Metropolitan Museum of Art website: <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/55862?rpp=30&pg=1&ft=utamaro+geisha&pos=1> (accessed October 13, 2015).

audience.¹¹⁴ Many townspeople who had no chance of going to Yoshiwara became familiar with Yoshiwara and its culture through these flyers and publications. Indeed, *geisha* as well as *oiran* (lower courtesans) became the icon of Edo through such works.

2.1.9 The *Geisha* Outside of Yoshiwara: Separation of Sex (*Iro*) from Arts (*Gei*)

In the early 1800s, there were “unlicensed” *geisha* who continued to work in towns like Fukagawa, Tachibanacho, Yagenbori, Yanagibashi, Nihonbashi, and Mukojima where businesses were thriving. But in 1843, under the Tenpo reformation, the government conducted another sweeping roundup of privately working prostitutes and about 2,940 of them were sent to the Yoshiwara.¹¹⁵ By this time, just like the Yoshiwara *geisha*, any *geisha* outside of Yoshiwara also came to be prohibited by law to sell sex (*iro*) in public.¹¹⁶ With this reformation, many *geisha* moved to the Yanagibashi area. At the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned the work of Narushima Ryuhoku, which was dedicated to describing the thriving town of Yanagibashi in detail and made Yanagibashi *geisha*, as well as the Yanagibashi pleasure quarter, more famous than any other.

After the Meiji Restoration (roughly 1853-1877), many of the girls from the formerly privileged samurai warrior class had no choice but to pursue their careers as *geisha*. Losing their family and home due to this political movement, most of them ended up working in the Yanagibashi areas. According to Tanaka, these girls refused to serve the new government officials in *ozashiki* because they were the big part of the reasons why they and their families had

¹¹⁴ Tanaka 2007, 183-184.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 72-73.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 74.

lost everything and had to work as *geisha*.¹¹⁷ So, up until the early Meiji period, Yanagibashi was the most thriving pleasure quarter, but because of the conflict between the former samurai class *geisha* and the new officials (most of them were from the western part of Japan and considered “country bumpkins”), it quickly lost its popularity. By the 1880s, Shinbashi and Akasaka became more popular for politicians and military officers as their *ozashiki* banquet destinations and replaced Yanagibashi.¹¹⁸ By this time, it became a custom to have the young girls to be specialized in dancing¹¹⁹ and the elderly or more experienced ones to be specialized in playing *shamisen*.¹²⁰ This was the time when *kouta* and *koutaburi* were popularly performed in *ozashiki* at the pleasure quarters mentioned above.¹²¹

The history of *geisha* reveals that her root—be it the shrine maidens, the puppeteer women, the playful women, the white rhythm women, the melodic-dance women, the women’s *noh*, the women’s *kabuki*, the *tayu* (courtesans), or the dance girls—was closely tied to female performers who entertained guests with singing, dancing, and playing instruments over food and sake and who served as hosts, providing a pleasurable time. As Origuchi mentioned, this tradition originated in the ancient sacred ritual of the banquet, and these female performers were there to recreate the banquet experience for the deities—as a “deity’s bride”—and humans—as a “one-night wife”—alike. This means that just as the term *play* (*asobi*) included the meaning of performing music, dance, and sexual intercourse, these female performers also *played* a virtual role as a *lover* (*iro*), providing a temporary experience of an intimate, but imaginary loving

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 101.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 102.

¹¹⁹ It is called *tachi-kata*, literally, the standing role.

¹²⁰ It is called *ji-kata*, literally, the ground or sitting role.

¹²¹ I will cover the history of *kouta* and *koutaburi* in the next chapter.

couple relationship. In other words, love, sex, and role-play were all big parts of the *geisha*'s arts (*gei*); arts (*gei*) and sex (*iro*) have closely coexisted for many centuries.

Technically speaking, however, *geisha* came into her existence by separating the arts (*gei*) from sex (*iro*). From this standpoint, both Narushima Ryuhoku and Iwasaki Mineko, whom I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, stated that *geisha* “sells *gei* (arts), not *iro* (sex).” However, it can also be understood why it is difficult to separate the two from *geisha*'s images because, first of all, her background cannot be discussed without touching upon the history and culture of the pleasure quarter and sex trade. Not only that, the term and notion of sex (*iro*) cannot be easily detached from *geisha* because, as mentioned, *geisha*'s dance is considered an extension of Okuni's evocative and sexually charged dance, and *geisha*'s specialized instrument (*shamisen*) has been called the sexual strings (*iroito*) because its sound has a strongly erotic effect. In other words, *iro* is something that is *in* the *geisha*'s dance and music—her physical movements and the sounds she makes—which means that the *iro* is molded within her *gei* (arts). What, then, exactly is this *iro*?

Up to this point, I have been simply using the English word sex for *iro*. In fact, the term *iro* has multiple meanings and has been used in various ways depending on its context and time. In order to understand the relationship of *iro* to *geisha*'s arts (*gei*), I will further investigate the semantics of *iro* in the next section.

2.2 RECONSTRUCTING *IRO*

Since explaining the term *iro* in one word is difficult, I will first attempt to draw some examples as I cover each element. Generally in the modern colloquial settings, the term *iro* means *color* as in *ki-iro* (yellow) or *momo-iro* (pink) and *sound color* or *sonority* as in *ne-iro* (tone color, timbre) or *kowa-iro* (voice color, tone of voice). So, the term *iro* describes something related to both visual and sound effects and the characteristics of such states. *Iro* also appears in the words *kao-iro* (literary, the color of one's face) as in *kao-iro-wo-yomu* (reading someone's faces/moods) to express when our inner emotions come out to the surface in certain forms of behavior or attitude. So, the term *iro* is not only used to describe the visual and sound effects but also the emotional and mental states—the inner feeling effects. The feeling of love is also expressed with the term *iro* as in *iro-koi* (love affairs) or *iro-wo-konomu* (loving the love or sensuality). The physiological form of love such as sexual desire or sexual intercourse as in *iro-ni-oboreru* (drowned by love) or *iro-wo-uru* (selling sex or prostitution) are also expressed with the term *iro*. Though it is not so common today, a beautiful lady, a female lover such as *kyofu* (mistress), and a playful woman (lady of the night) such as *yujo*, as I mentioned in the previous section, or *kyoro* (prostitute) were also called *iro*.¹²² Based on these usages, it can be said that the term *iro* mostly deals with abstract phenomena, which may or may not have forms, that are mainly perceived by human senses of seeing, hearing, touching, and feeling as well as things related to women, beauty, or love.

¹²² *Nihon Kokugo Daijiten*, “iro,” in Japan Knowledge: <http://japanknowledge.com/library/> (accessed October 6, 2015).

2.2.1 Historical Backgrounds of *Iro*

Now, to understand the term *iro* further, I will examine its historical background first. The exact origin of the term *iro* is not known, but the oldest extant chronicle of Japan, *Kojiki*,¹²³ documents the term *iro* in the form of words *iro-se* or *iro-mo*,¹²⁴ which means stepsiblings who were born from the same mother.¹²⁵ Japanese philosopher Imamichi Tomonobu states that the term *iro* in this context implies the meaning of *dear*—to refer to someone with affection.¹²⁶ He suggests that the term *iro* in the ancient Japanese meant the female genitals or the mother's womb so that it was used for expressions closely related to female body or sexual love. In addition to Imamichi's account, Inukai Takashi states that the intention of the *Kojiki*'s author in using the term *iro* for *iro-se* or *iro-mo* was to specifically indicate their lineage to their mother.¹²⁷ By doing so, their family ties are emphasized and the reader is assured that they are legitimate sons and daughters of the ruler and thus heirs to the throne.

Notice that the term *iro* is written 伊呂 in Chinese *kanji* characters instead of 色 in *kanji* or いろ in *hiragana* letters in *Kojiki*.¹²⁸ This is because when *Kojiki* was written, the Japanese had no writing system of their own, so they borrowed *kanji* characters and wrote the entire chronicle with it. Unlike the English alphabet, each *kanji* character possesses both pronunciations

¹²³ *The Record of Ancient Matters* (712 C.E.). See more in Chamberlain 1932 or Borgen and Ury 1990.

¹²⁴ It is written *iro-se* (伊呂兄) and *iro-mo* (伊呂妹).

¹²⁵ These words appear in the episode of Susano-o-no-Mikoto (God of Sea and Storm) claiming himself as *iro-se* (dear brother) to his sister, Amaterasu-no-O-Mikami (Sun Goddess), indicating that they are half siblings who were born from the same mother. *Kojiki* contains stories of how the grandson of divine beings (*kami*) descended from heaven (called *takama-ga-hara*) to reign this world (called *ashiwara-no-nakatsu-kuni*), which is considered the earliest documented forms of Shinto.

¹²⁶ Imamichi Tomonobu, “*Iro wo Meguru Bigaku Dansho* (A Fragmentary Discussion on Iro),” in *Nihon no Bigaku: Iro* (*The Aesthetics of Japan: Color*), vol. 5, edited by Imamichi Tomonobu (Tokyo: Perikansha, 1985), 41.

¹²⁷ Inukai Takashi, *Kanji wo Kainarasu* (*Domesticating the Kanji*) (Tokyo: Jinbun Shokan, 2008), 120-130.

¹²⁸ Japanese letters, the *hira-gana* and the *kata-kana*, that we use today were created modeling after the *kanji* characters sometime in the early to mid Heian era (794-1185). See more history of Japanese language in Yamaguchi Nakami, *Nihongo no Rekishi* (*History of Japanese Language*) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho, 2006).

and meanings, but the ancient Japanese could not keep up with handling them both. So they ended up using each *kanji* character phonetically¹²⁹ while disregarding its connotations. Thus, the term *iro* was written 伊呂 and it did not matter what exactly each character (伊 or 呂) meant by itself.

By the late eighth century, the 伊呂 was replaced by the *kanji* 色.¹³⁰ This time, in addition to the Japanese pronunciation of *iro* and its meanings, Japanese accepted the *kanji* 色 with two different pronunciations—Chinese *shoku* and Korean *shiki*¹³¹—as well as their meanings and cultural backgrounds altogether.

It is not known when the *kanji* 色 originated, but Chinese classics scholar Kato Jyoken suggests that the character 色 originated from the portrayal of a scene of “a man holding a woman on his knees and enjoying it.”¹³² Similarly, Chinese literature scholar Todo Akiyasu states that the character 色 depicts a state where a man and a woman attach their bodies together; hence, it represents sexual intercourse itself.¹³³ Todo adds that the connotation of 色 gradually changed from something related to sex to woman’s beauty, and it further expanded to include the meaning of color or colorful.¹³⁴

Paralleling Todo’s account, Imamichi points out that the similar changes happened to the connotation of ancient Japanese *iro* as well. His assumption is that the term *iro* first simply

¹²⁹ It is called *manyō-gana* writing style.

¹³⁰ There is a passage in *Shoku Nihongi* (797C.E.) “天皇天縱寬仁、慍不レ形レ色。” Here, the term *iro* is used as an expression “慍色” meaning “sulky look.” It translates something like “the emperor is tender-hearted and does not show a sulky look on his surface.”

¹³¹ Just to clarify, this does not mean that the *kanji* 色 is pronounced as *shoku* in Chinese and *shiki* in Korean. These pronunciations simply reflect how the Japanese *heard* it pronounced back then and categorized them accordingly. They are called *Kan-on* and *Go-on* respectively. *Kan-on* is the pronunciations that based on the Northern part of China from Tang dynasty, and *Go-on* is based on the pronunciations from the Southern part of China (now Korea).

¹³² Kato Jyoken, *Kanji no Kigen (The Origin of Kanji)*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1951), 28.

¹³³ Todo Akiyasu, *Kanji Gogen Jiten (The Dictionary of Kanji Origin)* (Tokyo: Gakutosha, 1969), 118.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

meant the female sexual organ or female body. However, as the ancient Japanese found sensual pleasure through touching and caressing such body parts, their attentions shifted to their looks, such as color, form, and texture, and eventually, they found *beauty* through such visual effects.¹³⁵ Thus, the meaning of *iro* expanded from the sexual organ to embrace connotations of visual states, especially beauty. Imamichi analyzes this gradual change in meaning of the word as a cultural paradigm in which the dominant perception shifts from the tactile to the visual—a sign that shows the expansion of human aesthetic sensibilities and capacity. Because of these similarities, Imamichi adds, the *kanji* character 色 was a perfect match with the ancient Japanese term *iro*.

Considering these analyses, the words using 色 with the Chinese pronunciation of *shoku* tend to be something related to color, sex, or appearances such as *gen-shoku* (原色 primary color), *ko-shoku* (好色 lustful), or *yo-shoku* (容色 beautiful looks) in Japanese. Indeed, the *Analects of Confucius*, one of the first Chinese writings that was brought to Japan, includes several passages using the character 色 to mean sex, sexual desire, or appearances.¹³⁶ Meanwhile, the words using 色 with the Korean pronunciation of *shiki* tend to be closely related to form or existence as in *shiki-so* (色相), which literally means the figure and form that can be seen with our naked eyes, stemming from Buddhist ideology.

¹³⁵ Imamichi, 41.

¹³⁶ The passages go “子曰、吾未見好德如好色者也 (Confucius says, I have not seen a man who loves virtue just as much as he loves sex.)” (from 子罕第九), “孔子曰、君子有三戒。少之時、血氣未定、戒之在色。。。 (Confucius says, there are three things you must self-discipline. When you are young, you tend to be impetuous, so try to control your sexual desire...)” (from 季子第十六), and “子張問曰、令尹子文、三仕爲令尹、無喜色。 (Zhuan Sun Shi says, the prime minister Shi-bun (?) served as the prime minister three times, but he did not look happy.)” (from 公冶長第五). Yamaguchi notes that the *Analects of Confucius* and the *Thousand Character Classic* were brought to Japan sometime in the fourth century. Yamaguchi, 18.

2.2.2 The Semantics of 色 in Buddhism and Confucianism

The term 色 (*shiki*) originated from the Sanskrit *rūpa*, which initially meant the human body, but it came to signify all material objects with colors and forms.¹³⁷ Buddhist ideology explains that there are five components¹³⁸ constructing the basis of human beings; the form, the sensation, the perception, the mental formations, and the consciousness. Here, the form (*shiki-un*) means things that have forms or figures, that can be seen, and that can be broken. Namely, they are material objects that can be recognized by the human senses, which include the human body itself. The underlying idea here is that these material objects constantly change their form or state, and eventually, they all disappear in the end.¹³⁹ This ideology is presented in the word *go-un-kai-ku*, which means the five components are all empty.¹⁴⁰

One of the esoteric Buddhist sutras, called *Hannya-kyo*, explains this concept using the expression *shiki-soku-ze-ku*,¹⁴¹ which literally means all things are empty. In addition, it further states that it is also *ku-soku-ze-shiki*,¹⁴² which means the emptiness is all things. In other words, everything around us that we see and exists in a certain form does not, in fact, exist. In turn, it is also true that the things that do not seem to exist do possess a form. The key concept here is that the term 色 (*shiki*) carries connotations of the forms that are sometimes visible and other times invisible, and they are evanescent and disappear easily, but they also exist within the space that looks like it is empty.

¹³⁷ Nakamura Hajime, et al. *Bukkyo Jiten*, under the item “Go-un (五蘊),” (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1989), 261.

¹³⁸ It is called *go-un* (五蘊), and it is consisted with the form (色蘊 *shiki-un*), the sensation (受蘊 *jyu-un*), the perception (想蘊 *so-un*), the mental formations (行蘊 *gyo-un*), and the consciousness (識蘊 *shiki-un*).

¹³⁹ Nakamura 1989, “Shiki (色),” 342.

¹⁴⁰ It is 五蘊皆空. See Kurashima Nagamasa, *Nihongo kara Nihon ga Mieru (Seeing Japan Through Japanese)* (Tokyo: Tokyo Shinbun Shuppankyoku, 2004), 168.

¹⁴¹ It is 色即是空.

¹⁴² It is 空即是色.

This means that in order to fully understand what 色 (*iro*) and 色気 (*iroke*) mean in the *kouta* and *koutaburi* performances, we must look into not only the forms that are sensible—including musical sounds (audible), movements (visible), and texts (both audible and visible)—but the forms that are also not apparently sensible—including silent sounds (inaudible), pause in the movements (invisible), and unexpressed words through reading between the lines (both inaudible and invisible).

Buddhist ideology describes the term 色 (*shiki*) as sensuous things from which all human beings cannot escape. By focusing on the concept of emptiness, it teaches us to remove such illusions—色 (*shiki*)—from our thoughts. Practicing sitting, meditation, breathing (like yoga), the recitation of sutras, etc. are thought to help us in emptying our minds so that we might reach a state of enlightenment. Specifically, Buddhist ideology describes the worlds we live in as three different types, called *san-gai*.¹⁴³ These three worlds consist of *yoku-kai*, the world filled with creatures who are possessed by desires such as eating, sleeping, and sex; *shiki-kai*, the world filled with creatures who have transcended from the *yoku-kai* but are still possessed by materialism and one's body; and *mu-shiki-kai*, the world filled with creatures who have transcended the previous two worlds and live in pure spirituality.¹⁴⁴ *Yoku-kai* is placed at the bottom, *shiki-kai* at the middle, and the *mu-shiki-kai* at the top. Even though the goal of Buddhists is to reach *mu-shiki-kai*, which is the world without desires and materiality, these three worlds—or simply put, our current world—are considered unstable. Because of this instability,

¹⁴³ It is 三界.

¹⁴⁴ These are *yoku-kai* 欲界, *shiki-kai* 色界, and *mu-shiki-kai* 無色界. See Hiro Sachiya, *Nihongo ni natta Bukkyo no Kotoba* (Buddhism Words that Became Japanese Words) (Tokyo: Kodan-sha, 1988), 230.

the expression *san-gai-ni-ie-nashi* (no home within these three worlds) has been known to characterize female status and position in general for many years.¹⁴⁵

The Buddhist view of the concept of 色 as female, female body, or sex is extremely complex. At its most basic, however, Buddhist ideology considers all human bodies impure. By considering our bodies impure, it becomes possible to remove our desires from our mind. Buddhist scholar Ueki Masatoshi explains that, in early Buddhism, both monks and nuns tried to visualize the process of decomposition of our bodies in order to eradicate their sexual desires.¹⁴⁶ This tradition remained, particularly amongst the monks that trained themselves to see a skeleton through a beautiful woman's body¹⁴⁷ in order to be free from sexual desires.

Even though Buddhism began as a protest against a system full of gender and class discrimination as observed in Brahmanism (now Hinduism), ironically, Shakyamuni's plan of bringing equality to all living things did not materialize as he planned. Over the course of history, especially after the passing of the Shakyamuni, his followers incorporated attitudes of discrimination against women into Buddhist ideology. For example, *san-sho*,¹⁴⁸ the “three obediences,” preaches that all females have three men in their lives with whom they must follow and obey—her father as a girl, her husband as a wife, and her son as a widow. Ueki finds that this notion originated in the *Manu smṛti*, The Laws of Manu, the core text of Hinduism, and it was incorporated into Buddhist ideology (then strongly influenced by the Hinayana tradition) by the second century B.C.E.¹⁴⁹ Their society, which was already heavily influenced by Hindu culture, considered all females impure, evil, frivolous, and licentious, and they were treated

¹⁴⁵ It is 三界に家なし.

¹⁴⁶ Ueki Masatoshi, *Bukkyo no Naka no Danjyo-kan (Gender View in Buddhism)* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2004), 236.

¹⁴⁷ It is called *hakkotsu-kan* 白骨観, the skeleton view.

¹⁴⁸ It is 三従. It is sometimes pronounced *san-jyu*.

¹⁴⁹ Ueki, 105 and 162.

merely as vehicles to carry a child.¹⁵⁰ Being surrounded by such attitudes, another discriminatory notion called *go-sho*,¹⁵¹ the “five obstacles,” means that no female can attain the five types of Buddhahood (the state of Buddha), was born in Buddhist ideology. This made it impossible for any female to obtain salvation, closing their path to pursuing the way of Buddha.

In fact, the idea of *san-sho*, the “three obediences,” also appears in the *Book of Rites*, one of the Confucian texts. Though Ueki could not find any proof of the idea of *san-sho* being incorporated into one from the other, he recognizes that both Buddhist and Confucian ideologies have strong traits of discrimination against women, which were intensified over time. In particular, Ueki found that when Buddhist texts were brought over to China and translated into Chinese, some parts of the sentences were altered in order to suit the Confucian-based patriarchal system. For example, a passage describing how a *husband* should serve his *wife*, written in Pali, was transformed into how a *wife* should serve her *husband* in Chinese.¹⁵² On top of the notion of the female as sinful creature, as seen in the notions of the “three obediences” and the “five obstacles” presented in Buddhist ideology, all females came to be required to maintain virginity before marriage. After marriage, they were expected to exhibit fidelity towards their husbands under the rules of Confucian morality.¹⁵³ Thus, as the Buddhist texts traveled from India via China and Korea to Japan, they came to be remolded in such a way as to reflect Confucian male-centered ideology, restricting women’s rights.

Overall, under Buddhist and Confucian influence, the notion of 色 as female or of the female body came to be associated with impurity and inferiority. As observed in *jikkai*, ten religious precepts which are similar to the Ten Commandments, Buddhists forbid 色 (sexual

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 371.

¹⁵¹ It is 五障.

¹⁵² Ibid., 11 and 178.

¹⁵³ See Gi Sokuno, “*Jyuka Bunka no Jyosei Rinri ni tsuite* (About Women’s Ethics in the Confucian Culture),” in *Tagen*, vol. 11, no. 3 (2011).

intercourse) entirely¹⁵⁴ and consider sexual desires, such as *shiki-jyo* or *shiki-yoku*¹⁵⁵ to be afflictions that must be restrained and be removed from their minds completely. Similarly, 色 (sexual intercourse) came to be forbidden for unmarried females following the Confucian notion of “virginity as a female virtue,” and it also became a duty for all females to restrain themselves from sexual desires.¹⁵⁶ Otherwise, females displaying or embodying 色 more than necessary came to be associated with negative and dirty images, ultimately labeling them as “prostitutes,” “sluts,” or “whores.”

As previously discussed, the understanding of the term 色 (*iro*) cannot be achieved without reconsidering notions of female or the female body, sexual intercourse or desire, love, and beauty in Japanese culture and society. In fact, an overview of Japanese women’s history reveals that the Japanese perception of the term and notion of *iro* was more positive before and even some centuries after the arrival of Buddhist and Confucian ideologies. Next, I will discuss the Japanese concept of *iro* as the female or female body from religious and historical perspectives.

2.2.3 *Iro*—The Female Body—From A Religious Perspective

Recalling what Imamichi stated earlier, the term *iro* in ancient Japan meant a female’s genitals or a mother’s womb. In Japanese folk religion, the female genitals (*hoto*) were considered a source of spiritual power. Religion scholar Kamata Toji reports that for centuries religious and spiritual

¹⁵⁴ This is called *fu-in-kai* (不淫戒). Shintani Takanori, *Nihonjin no Taboo (Japanese Taboos)* (Tokyo: Seishun Shuppansha, 2003), 34-35.

¹⁵⁵ They are 色情 and 色欲.

¹⁵⁶ See Kim Dahee, “*Higashi Asia no Kindai to Jyosei, soshite ‘Akujo’* (Women in the Modern East Asia, and ‘Femme Fatale’),” in *Tagen*, vol. 32 (2011), 67-81.

sites have been decorated with naturally-carved *found* stones perceived to represent the vagina as well as phallic¹⁵⁷ shapes, indicating that the Japanese consider the sexual organs symbols of supernatural power that bring fertility and prosperity (see Figure 2.3).¹⁵⁸



Figure 2.3 Vagina and Phallic Shaped Stones Enshrined at the Asuka Niimasu Shrine in Nara¹⁵⁹

Kamata also describes some local Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines that still revere these statues and host religious festivals every year to celebrate the power of the deities in hopes of ensuring abundant progeny and good fortune.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ It is called *mara*.

¹⁵⁸ Kamata, Toji, “*Hoto no Bunka-shi* (Cultural History of *Hoto*),” in *Nihon no Bigaku (The Aesthetics of Japan): Sexuality*, vol. 21 (Tokyo: Perikansha, 1994), 115.

¹⁵⁹ Currently, the website of Asuka Niimasu Shrine is down. Instead, this picture is from the Wikipedia: <https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E9%A3%9B%E9%B3%A5%E5%9D%90%E7%A5%9E%E7%A4%BE> (accessed October 11, 2015).

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

In addition to the genital-shaped stones, caves found in mountainsides or by the seashores are designated as spiritual sites all over the country. Kamata notes that this is because the ancient Japanese considered the caves to be manifestations of the female genitals through which our soul go—the entrance of life and death.¹⁶¹ Walking into a dark cave, worshippers first experience a temporal state of death. As they exit the cave, they also experience a temporal state of rebirth by being surrounded by sunlight again. This ritual act is called passing through the mother's womb¹⁶² and symbolizes the regeneration of one's soul. At these spiritual sites, Kamata reports that worshippers are prone to transform into extraordinary states, such as going into a trance, ecstasy, or even being possessed by spirits. This is because, he explains, the displays of various sex symbols subconsciously arouse the worshipper's sexual and erotic desires, which lead them into such extreme states. Therefore, Kamata theorizes that the Japanese spiritual sites are indeed simultaneously sexual sites.¹⁶³

While Japanese folk religion worships both male and female genitalia as deities, Shinto enshrines the female Sun Deity as the source of life of all living things and symbolically associates her with a cave, the mother's womb, just as we have seen in the episode featuring Ame no Uzume earlier in this chapter. According to Kamata, the cave in this episode is a metaphorical symbol of the life and death of all things. In other words, the cave is a pathway for souls to pass through, and it directly bridges this world to the next.¹⁶⁴ It should be noted that the ancient Japanese applied the character of *kanji* 陰 (Yin of Yin and Yang (陽)) to the female genitals (*hoto*). This *Kojiki* episode suggests that the connotations of Chinese Yin and Japanese female genitals (*hoto*), however, do not necessarily match. While the ancient Chinese principles

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 126-128.

¹⁶² It is *tainai kuguri*, the mother's womb passing.

¹⁶³ He calls the both *seichi*, 聖地 and 性地. Ibid., 115.

¹⁶⁴ Kamata, 124 and 131.

of Yin and Yang clearly differentiate Yin as negative, darkness, moon, and female from Yang as positive, light, sun, and male,¹⁶⁵ Japanese treated the cave, the mother's womb or the female genitals (*hoto*) as the manifestation of both light and darkness, life *and* death—the Yin as well as the Yang—which is a more encompassing meaning than the Chinese concept of Yin by itself. Thus, the image of *iro*—as a mother's womb or female genitals (*hoto*)—reflected something spiritual, sacred, and powerful in the mythical world of *Kojiki*, and such images continue to exist in the form of folk religion.

Going back to the mythical story earlier, Ame no Uzume's body and erotic dance were described as having the power to save the world from chaos in *Kojiki*. Interestingly, Matsumoto Nobuhiro states that under the Ainu beliefs, the female's genitals and female's strip dancing have the power to drive away the evil winter spirits from their village because such acts make the spirits laugh.¹⁶⁶ The act of laughing is an important element in pleasing the deities and spirits in both Ainu and ancient Japanese beliefs. Ui Mushu remarks that the only time the deities or spirits punish humans was when people treated them inhospitably without providing any kinds of entertainment.¹⁶⁷ Thus, many songs and dances performed during rituals involved acts or gestures that induced laughing. These acts included slandering, sexual jokes or erotic movements, comical questions and answers, and mimicry or rebellion against the power—elements that can be observed not only in Ame no Uzume's dance but also in *kagura*, *noh*, *kyogen*, and various folk performing arts.¹⁶⁸

The observation of the *iro*—the female body—revealed that it was tied to the notion of spiritual and sacred power in the ancient and folk religions. Displaying the *iro* was considered a

¹⁶⁵ H. Byron Earhart, *Japanese Religion: Unity and Diversity* (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2004), 59.

¹⁶⁶ Matsumoto Nobuhiro, *Nihon Shinwa no Kenkyu (Research of Japanese Mythology)* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1971), 110.

¹⁶⁷ Ui Mushu, *Nihonjin no Warai (Japanese Laugh)* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1969), 38.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 44-66.

type of dedication towards the deities and spirits, and many ritual performances incorporated such elements into their acts. While the *iro*, particularly the female genitals, was highly thought of in the ancient and folk religious spheres, the *iro*, meaning the female and female gender roles, suffered a decline in societal status in the past. In the next section, I will observe the *iro*—the female—from a social and hierarchical perspective.

2.2.4 *Iro*—The Female—From A Social and Hierarchical Perspective

According to Origuchi Shinobu, there were many villages ruled by powerful clans¹⁶⁹ scattered around the country before the establishment of the Yamato throne. Each of these villages had blood-related male and female leaders at the top. The female leader—normally the male leader’s daughter, sister, or aunt—was a shrine maiden who prayed to the deities, listened to the will of deities, and delivered oracles to the male leader for the purpose of improving life in their village.¹⁷⁰ In order to maintain better communication with the deities, the shrine maiden’s task was to get as close to them as possible through everyday prayer and rituals. As mentioned before, because of her close proximity to the deities, Origuchi describes the shrine maiden’s status as a “deity’s bride.”¹⁷¹ This shrine maiden’s close relationship to the world of deities, he adds, elevated her status to village ruler as seen in the case of Himiko, the ancient queen who served as a shrine maiden and simultaneously reigned over the Yamataikoku kingdom sometime in the third century. Origuchi suggests that there may have been more female rulers like Himiko yet unidentified in the texts of *Kojiki* or *Nihongi*. Thus, religion and politics were closely tied

¹⁶⁹ It is called *go-zoku*, literally, the courageous group.

¹⁷⁰ Origuchi, “*Saiko Nihon no Jyosei Seikatsu no Kontei* (The Foundation of Ancient Japanese Women’s Lives),” vol. 2, 148.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 149.

together as observed in the word *matsuri-goto*, literally, things to feast, which concurrently implies ritual and political conduct, under both male and female rulers.

The rise of the Yamato throne was accomplished by merging these villages together, especially by absorbing each village's faith and religious matters into its own control.¹⁷² Origuchi theorizes that these villages offered their shrine maidens as servants for the deities enshrined in the Yamato court as well as the king (later emperor), the living deity (*arahito-gami*) himself.¹⁷³ According to Komatsu Keibun, each of these shrine maidens were thought to possess spirits of the deities from their home village, and as mentioned earlier, their spiritual power could be transferred to the king through direct physical contact—sexual intercourse.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, the shrine maidens carried the knowledge of ritual songs and dances offered to their own deities back home so that the Yamato court became the place for displaying diverse collections of the sacred performing arts from all over the country.¹⁷⁵ Thus, offering the shrine maidens to the Yamato court symbolized each powerful clan's obedience to the kingdom, and the king's power became stronger by the assemblage of such sacred shrine maidens with full artistic and shamanistic abilities.

The status of shrine maidens, however, began to fall as the court recognized these sacred servants and the oracles delivered through them as “obstacles” to their political affairs. Japanese mythologist Matsumoto Nobuhiro explains that one of the ways to deal with such “obstacles” was to move Sun Deity out of the court shrine in order to separate the religion from the politics.¹⁷⁶ Building a new shrine in Ise province and positioning a shrine maiden specifically

¹⁷² Origuchi, vol. 1, 67.

¹⁷³ Origuchi, vol. 14, 220.

¹⁷⁴ Komatsu Keibun, *Iro no Jiten* (Dictionary of *Iro*) (Tokyo: Bungeisha, 2000), 101.

¹⁷⁵ Terauchi Naoko, “Ch.1 *Nihon Geino no Genryu / Gagaku – Sono Tayosei*,” in *Nihon no Dento Geino Koza: Buyo / Engeki* (Lectures on Traditional Performing Arts in Japan: Music) (Kyoto: Tankosha, 2009), 29.

¹⁷⁶ Matsumoto, 233.

elected from the daughters of the imperial family¹⁷⁷ in dedication to enshrine Sun Deity was nothing more than a political scheme to remove spiritually powerful shrine maidens from the court in order to monopolize political authority. Robert Ellwood calls this transferring of Sun Deity away from the court premises the “patriarchal revolution” because this was the point when Yamato (later Japan) shifted from a matriarchal-based social system to a patriarchal one.¹⁷⁸ Even though the removal of Sun Deity from the court was such a dramatic event, the question remains why the Yamato authorities used Sun Deity, a *female* deity, to unite its country. And she remains the greatest deity worshipped in Shinto even today. Then, how can we claim that the matriarchal system ended with this move?

Scholars continue to debate the reason why Sun Deity was chosen to be positioned above all other deities of the time, especially when the political current was moving away from the female-centered system. However, there seems to be no definitive theory on this issue.¹⁷⁹ Besides this issue, Ellwood states that the shrine maidens lost their spiritual power because their method of delivering oracles was through shamanistic possession, which was considered by this time much more unreliable than the method of “dream-telling.”¹⁸⁰ Not only did the shrine maidens have to face people claiming that her traditions were “outdated,” but their position in the shrine was also targeted to change under the new religious systematization. Nishiguchi Jyunko explains that by the end of the 7th century, the court ordered each shrine to conduct rituals under the supervision of male priests, eliminating the shrine maidens from the center of religious

¹⁷⁷ It is called *itsuki-no-miya*, literally, a girl of sacred servant.

¹⁷⁸ Robert Ellwood, “Patriarchal Revolution in Ancient Japan: Episodes from the ‘Nihonshoki’ Sujin Chronicle,” in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol. 2, no. 2, (Fall 1986), 23-37.

¹⁷⁹ See more in Hayashi 1997; Ito 2008; Wada 2014.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 32. The method of “dream-telling” is that the person who wants to receive an oracle is the one who waits for the deities to descend in his or her dream at night and to receive it directly. This way, the experience becomes much more personal and realistic, and thus, it was considered reliable than *miko*’s oracle-telling through possession.

operations.¹⁸¹ Even after this reformation, some maidens still remained at shrines and continued to offer services of cooking, cleaning, and weaving clothes for the deities as they used to. While these cooking, cleaning, and weaving activities had been regarded as sacred duties to be done by sacred maidens, Nishiguchi speculates that, over time, they somehow lost their sacred meaning so that they came to be looked down upon as tedious chores. As a result, the shrine maidens also came to be viewed as low-ranking workers in the shrines.¹⁸²

The decline of the shrine maiden's religious position seems to have paralleled the female's status in the society in general. According to Umemura Keiko, all females, despite their age or marital status, had the right to inherit property ownership from their parents or spouse up until the late 7th century. However, after the introduction of the *ritsuryo* governmental-based legal codes, ownership became more restricted, affording rights only to the male child.¹⁸³ In addition, Kato Mieko explains that farming, as well as pottery and sake making, were female professions, but after the establishment of the household or family (*ie*) system, these positions were taken over by males, who passed their skills from father to son.¹⁸⁴ Kato states that the imposition of such restrictions on female professions was influenced by the notion of female impurity or pollution (*kegare*).

According to Narikiyo Hirokazu, the notion of impurity only applied to death in the ancient times, but it was expanded to include the blood impurity (*ketsu-e*) caused by childbirth and menstruation so that it came to be exclusively applied to females by the eleventh century.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Nishiguchi Jyunko, "Miko no suiji to hataori (Shrine Maiden's Cooking and Weaving)," in *Taikei Nihon Rekishi to Geino: Tachiarawareru Kami (Compendium of Japanese History and Performing Arts)*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1990), 91-93.

¹⁸² Ibid., 108.

¹⁸³ Umemura Keiko, *Kazoku no Kodaishi (Ancient History of Family)* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 2007), 85.

¹⁸⁴ Kato Mieko, "2-3. Onna Shonin no Katsuyaku (An Active Role Played by Female Merchants)," in *Nihon Jyoseishi (Women's History of Japan)*, edited by Wakita Haruko (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 1987), 101.

¹⁸⁵ Narikiyo Hirokazu, "Kegare (Impurity)," in *Nihon Jyoseishi Dai Jiten (Encyclopedia of Japanese Women)*, edited by Kaneko Sachiko and Kuroda Hiroko (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 2007), 222.

Placing such a discriminative notion against females, he also adds, was one of the political schemes to effectively eliminate females, such as the shrine maidens, from the court so that males could monopolize the authoritative positions.¹⁸⁶ The impurity, according to Ushiyama Yoshiyuki, was considered something temporary that ultimately disappeared after a certain period of time.¹⁸⁷ By the mid-14th century, however, the impurity came to be thought of as something that stuck with females forever. This was because the concept of blood impurity was reinforced by the Buddhist belief that females were cursed with bloodshed, and for that reason, they would fall straight into “the blood pond hell” preached in the *Ketsubon-kyo* sutra.¹⁸⁸ Because of this ideology, all females were considered unsalvageable during or even after their lifetime. In addition to this, Ushiyama adds that the idea of “no-female-entrance” (*nyonin-kinsei*) placed at shrines and sacred sites in the mountains to restrict ascetic trainings to males only came to be associated with the ideology of female impurity. Women were therefore forbidden to step in or to pass through such sites simply because of their physiological sex.

Discrimination against females became more apparent in the ways people depicted deities in drawings. In ancient times, Miyata Noboru explains, deities had no form because people believed that they were invisible beings who came to visit their village at certain times of the year from deep within the mountains.¹⁸⁹ By the roadside from the village to the mountains, people placed stones or planted evergreen trees as markers designating the deities’ pathway.

¹⁸⁶ Narikiyo Hirokazu, *Jyosei to Kegare no Rekishi (History of Women and Impurity)* (Tokyo: Hanawa Shobo, 2003), 204-206.

¹⁸⁷ Ushiyama Yoshiyuki, “Kegare (Impurity),” in *Nihon Jyoseishi Dai Jiten (Encyclopedia of Japanese Women)*, edited by Kaneko Sachiko and Kuroda Hiroko (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 2007), 223.

¹⁸⁸ Ushiyama Yoshiyuki, “*Chi no Ike Jigoku* (Blood Pond Hell),” in *Nihon Jyoseishi Dai Jiten (Encyclopedia of Japanese Women)*, edited by Kaneko Sachiko and Kuroda Hiroko (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 2007), 479.

¹⁸⁹ Miyata Noboru, “*Tachi Arawareru Kami* (Appearing Deities),” in *Taikei Nihon Rekishi to Geino: Tachiarawareru Kami (Compendium of Japanese History and Performing Arts)*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1990), 16-17.

These stones or trees came to be considered signaling objects.¹⁹⁰ People first believed that the deities would descend on them at a certain night of the year and leave from them at the dawn. Over time, people began to believe that the deities resided in such stones and trees, so they became the embodiment of deities themselves.¹⁹¹ As such, the deities began to possess forms. By the time *Kojiki* was written, the deities were described as something that possessed a figure close to a human form. Eventually, people began to believe that the deities and humans were as one. Humans were able to become deities, as well, in a living form—like emperors and empresses—or after death—as in ancestor worshipping. According to Gomi Fumihiko, the deities used to be depicted in a female form, but they gradually shifted their forms to a young boy and to an old man¹⁹² by the 14th century.¹⁹³ Since the deities were considered direct reflections of humans themselves, these deities' transformation seems to represent the shift of sovereignty from female to male just as was happening in society.

Thus, females—*iro*—who used to have relatively high or at least equal status with males, came to be discriminated against in the fields of law, labor, and religion, and were relegated to a lower status in society. Scholars agree that, despite the women's rights movement of the 1880s, and the women's liberation movement of the 1960's, the social status of women remained low until well into the 1980's, and it is still a work-in-progress today.¹⁹⁴ Women's low status, associated with the concept of impurity, was reflected in the image of *iro*, which can be observed in the use of this word as applied to *jyoro* (or *jyoh-roh*), the women of the pleasure quarter.

According to Hiro Sachiya, the word *jyoro* originally meant the highest order of Buddhist

¹⁹⁰ It is called *yorishiro*, literally, a substitute of spirits.

¹⁹¹ For more details, see Asoya Masahiko, ed., *Shinto to Nihon Bunka (Shinto and Japanese Culture)* (Tokyo: Ebisukosho, 2006).

¹⁹² It is called *okina*. *Okina* appears in the *sanbaso*, a celebratory piece often performed at the opening of *noh* and *kabuki* stages, as mentioned in the previous section.

¹⁹³ Gomi Fumihiko, *Nihon no Chusei vol. 7: Chusei Bunka no Bi to Chikara (Middle Ages in Japan vol. 7: The Aesthetic and Power of Middle Ages Culture)* (Tokyo: Chuo Koron Shinsha, 2002), 99-100.

¹⁹⁴ Wakita 1987; Showa Jyoshi Daigaku 2002; Hayashi 1997.

monk,¹⁹⁵ and it came to be used for women of the highest social rank in the late Heian period.¹⁹⁶ By the Edo period, however, the word *kyoro* was used for the women whose professions were to sell sex in exchange for money, the “prostitutes.” Indeed, the images and meanings of *iro* extend over a wide range, from the positive to the negative, and vary depending on the time period and the context. Next, I will look at the word *iro* with the meaning of sexual intercourse or love in the religious and cultural contexts.

2.2.5 *Iro*—Sexual Intercourse or Love—From A Religious and Cultural Perspective

Previously, I discussed how the Japanese considered human sexual organs as something that possessed spiritual power, and that people revered the vagina- and phallic-shaped stones at shrines and temples. Indeed, not only the individual body parts, but the act of sexual intercourse (*iro*) was also believed to have supernatural power that brings good fortune and prosperity.

While Japan’s first chronicle *Kojiki* documented politically charged stories of how the nation of the rising sun was created and united under the female Sun Deity, most of these stories, in fact, revolve around sexual intercourse¹⁹⁷ between the female and male deities and the results of their acts—the offspring.¹⁹⁸ Just as seen in the story of male and female deities, Izanagi and Izanami, who created the land of Japan as a result of their sexual intercourse, the ancient beliefs placed utmost importance in the reproductive act conducted between a pair of male and female

¹⁹⁵ According to Hiro, there used to be no hierarchical system existing in Buddhist groups, because they were supposed to leave such societal ranks and matters behind as they renounced the world to be Buddhist monks and nuns. The only ranking system they had was based on their years of being monks. However, Hiro notes that this system changed over time that it came to be that the ones from aristocratic backgrounds obtained the higher status than others, and there were many power struggles within Buddhist world recorded in the history.

¹⁹⁶ Hiro, 88-89.

¹⁹⁷ It is called *maguwai*, literally, eye meetings.

¹⁹⁸ Basil Hall Chamberlain (1932) was the first to translate *Kojiki* into English. He noted that he was surprised to see so many sexually charged episodes appearing in it so that he first thought *Kojiki* was a pornographic novel.

figures. This is because the humans'—or the deities'—reproductive acts were thought to have powerful influences over agricultural matters. According to Chikamatsu Yoshiyuki, the ancient Japanese believed that a good harvest was the direct result of nature's reproductive acts. To encourage nature, especially rice, to produce more offspring, people performed the scene of sexual intercourse (*iro*) in front of them. In addition, sticking out a big pregnant belly (dressed by girls serving at the shrine) or wagging big genitalia shaped objects towards rice fields were also considered to stimulate and arouse nature's reproductive power. Chikamatsu calls this a “contagious trick (magic)” and that Ame no Uzume's strip dance in front of the cave, as mentioned earlier, carried such meanings and was believed to bring fertility to the land and a successful crop in the coming year.¹⁹⁹

Miyata Noboru claims that this type of belief was deeply rooted first in the small agricultural-based communities, and was later introduced to mainstream society in a variety of forms. For example, one of the esoteric forms of Buddhism, Shingon Tachikawa-ryu, developed in the late Heian period, placed the *Rishu-kyo* sutra from India at the center of their beliefs.²⁰⁰ Unlike other Buddhist sutras, this *Rishu-kyo* sutra accepted human sexual desires positively, and furthermore, it preached that the state of ecstasy reached by having sexual intercourse was the same state as Bodhisattva. Thus, it encouraged its adherents, including monks, to have sexual intercourse in their teachings. Miyata states that the Shingon Buddhists would not have easily accepted such an “outrageous” ideology were it not for the preexisting folk belief that sexual intercourse had supernatural power to bring goodfortune and prosperity.

¹⁹⁹ Chikamatsu Yoshiyuki, *Nihon Bunka no Naritachi (The Origin of Japanese Culture)* (Tokyo: Miki Shobo, 1974), 81-82.

²⁰⁰ Miyata Noboru, *Miyata Noboru Nihon wo Kataru: Onna no Minzokugaku (Miyata Noboru Talks About Japan: Folklore of Women)*, vol. 11 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 2006), 63-64.

In another example, Tanaka Takako explains that the dissemination of Buddhism was accomplished by making these foreign Buddhist deities wed and have sexual intercourse with the native Shinto or folk deities. Many of the shrine origin stories from the middle ages, she states, were about marriages between the foreign and native deities. Through such stories, the foreign deities were connected by “fictitious blood-ties” to the native deities, and as a result, their positions and status were firmly legitimized in Japan.²⁰¹

Around the same time, not only the deities but some Buddhist monks, such as Shinran (1173-1262), Ippen (1239-1289), and Rennyo (1415-1499) from the Jyodo Shinshu school who had previously taken a strict oath not to have any relationships with women, also began to accept the idea of marriage publicly.²⁰² Takeuchi Hitoshi describes an incident in which Shinran, in particular, received a divine message from Kannon, the Buddhist goddess of mercy, in his dream, telling him that she would one day appear as a woman and would serve and guide him to the Western Pure Land (or the Buddhist paradise) at his death.²⁰³ Though Shinran admitted that he was an idiot who could not keep the Buddhist precepts—he had a sexual relationship with a woman, and ate meat and poultry while under the oath—he used his act as an example to claim that the Amitabha Tathagata, the savior of the Western Pure Land (the Buddhist paradise), could salvage even an idiot like him. Thus, he preached to everyone, especially the ill-hearted and corrupt, to recite “Namu Amidabutsu” to seek salvation. It is interesting to see that the monks who had to restrain themselves from many kinds of desire, especially lust, admitted that it was difficult to do so. In turn, they legitimized having sexual relationships with women by regarding women as the embodiment of the Buddhist deity, thus they were having a relationship

²⁰¹ Tanaka Takako, *Seiai no Nihon Chusei (Love and Sex of Japanese Middle Ages)* (Tokyo: Yosensha, 1997), 158-160.

²⁰² Takeuchi Hitoshi, *Satori wo Hiraita 60-nin (60 Monks who were Spiritually Awakened)* (Tokyo: Dobun Shoin, 1993).

²⁰³ It is called *saiho-jyodo* (western pure land) or *gokuraku* (paradise). Ibid., 128-130.

with the “deity” rather than an ordinary woman. Furthermore, they encouraged others to follow this path because the Buddhist deities were generous enough to save anyone no matter how sinful they were. Such a positive attitude towards the concept of sexual relationships (*iro*) seems to reflect the attitude of Japanese folk religious beliefs. In a way, the examples of Shinran and other monks could be considered the “Japanization,” or perhaps, secularization, or even vulgarization of the Buddhist ideologies.

Sasama Yoshihiko reports that throughout the Edo period, carved stones or wood portraying a scene of sexual intercourse were enshrined by the roadside or by intersections as symbols of guardians,²⁰⁴ preventing the invasion of enemies, evil spirits, and disease from outside of the village.²⁰⁵ These were considered deities of love and matchmaking that brought the blessing of children, and at the same time, they were the deities of agriculture that brought a rich harvest (see Figure 2.4).²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ These are called *sae-no-kami*, the blocking-off deity, or *do-so-jin*, the traveler’s guardian deity.

²⁰⁵ Sasama Yoshihiko, *Zuroku Sei no Nihonshi (Japanese History of Sex)* (Tokyo: Yuzankaku, 2004), 181-182.

²⁰⁶ Abe, 15.



**Figure 2.4 Roadside Guardians or Matchmaking Deities found in Takasaki-shi,
Gunma²⁰⁷**

As seen in these examples, the concept of sexual intercourse (*iro*) is often tied to the notions of abundance of food or flourishing of lives, both human and nature, and is considered the source of miraculous power in the Shinto and folk religions. The celebration and admiration of the *iro* can also be observed in the field of artistic creations, such as in songs, poems, literature, painting, woodblock prints, and theatrical plays. For example, there is a historical record of events called *utagaki*,²⁰⁸ in which erotic songs were exchanged between the young men and women of the

²⁰⁷ From a traveler's blog: http://sinshugyokyo.at.webry.info/200906/article_2.html (accessed October 12, 2015).

²⁰⁸ It literally means a song hedge. It is also called *kagai*, the gathering song.

village, taking place once or twice per year. According to Kikkawa Eishi, these youngsters ate, drank, and danced at this fest and found their suitable “mate” through exchanging of their songs, which lead them to have sexual intercourse at the end.²⁰⁹ Just like Chikamatsu’s observation, Kikkawa thinks that this type of sexual orgy was deeply rooted in the folk belief that sexual intercourse is a ritual prayer for a successful harvest. The tradition of *utagaki*, Kikkawa notes, has been passed on to the current summer festival events (*bon-odori*).²¹⁰

Some of the *utagaki* songs were transcribed into the *Kojiki*, and one of them, written by the Emperor Ojin, says, “*michi no shiri, Kohada otome wa, arasowazu, neshiku wo shizomo, uruwashimi omou* (the fact that the maiden from the far away land of Kohada did not refuse to have sex with me, I think, is wonderful).”²¹¹ The song openly describes the emperor’s sexual relationship with the maiden, but in fact, it reveals his satisfaction in conquering the woman (and her land) and that she (and her clan) have become obedient to him with no opposition.

In addition to *utagaki* songs, many of the poems, called *waka* (Japanese poems), documented in *Manyoshu* poem books and other compilations, feature songs with sexually charged content.²¹² Some of them describe the scene of sexual intercourse vividly, but most of them sing about it so discreetly that it is easy to miss its meanings. The tradition of reciting poems has long been an indispensable part of aristocratic activities, and moreover, the learnedness, the skill of playing music, as well as the ability to have sexual intercourse with as many women as possible, called *koshoku* or *irogonomi* (love-sex),²¹³ were all considered a type of “talent” and must-have characteristics for noble men. Amino Yoshihiko quotes a specific

²⁰⁹ Kikkawa 1974, 10-11.

²¹⁰ Nebuta Matsuri in Akita prefecture is the most famous for its outrageous sexual orgy among many festivals around the country.

²¹¹ Translation mine. Tsugita Masaki, *Kojiki*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1980), 218.

²¹² See more details in Amagasaki 1983; Chikamatsu 1974; Kokubungaku Kenkyu Shiryokan 2002.

²¹³ It is *koshoku* (好色) and *irogonomi* (or *irokonomi*, 色好み).

passage written by the Emperor Jyuntoku in *Kinpisho* (1221); “*Koshoku no michi, yugen no gi, suteoku bekarazaru kotoka* (Pursuing the way of *love-sex* has mysterious profundity, so do not leave it behind).”²¹⁴ Amino explains that these “talents” were thought of as the performing arts (*geino*)—the *geino*’s “*gei*” is the same “*gei*” of *geisha* as I covered earlier—as well as the work (*shoku*) that must be pursued and mastered by the noble classmen. In addition, they considered such performing arts (*geino*) to be something that must be written down in their personal diaries so that the skills and knowledge attained could be preserved and passed on to their descendants.²¹⁵ It can be said that, in a way, such performing arts (*geino*)—the learnedness, music, and *love-sex*—were all inherited intellectual properties, preserved through the hereditary system, and observed in later years, particularly in performing arts such as *noh* and *kabuki*.

It must be noted, however, that I temporarily translated *koshoku* or *irogonomi* as *love-sex* above—and earlier in this chapter, I translated *koshoku* as *lustful* and *iro-wo-konomu* as *loving the love* or *sensuality*—because I could not find any other suitable or more direct English translation of these terms. The problem seems to lie in the connotation of the English word *love* and its applicability to the Japanese word *iro*. According to Yanabu Akira, the Japanese did not have a word that was equivalent to the English *love* when it was first introduced to Japan in the late 19th century, so in order to accommodate this issue, the Meiji intellectuals created the term *ren-ai*²¹⁶ to mean *love*.²¹⁷ Before then, the Japanese long used the word *iro*, *koi*, or *jyo*²¹⁸ to mean something similar to the word *love*, but these words always implied sexual intercourse or some kind of physical relationship that the English *love* did not necessary convey. The very

²¹⁴ Translation mine. Amino Yoshihiko, *Chusei Henrekimin to ‘Geino’* (The Arts of Medieval Itinerants),” in *Taikei Nihon Rekishi to Geino: Chusei Henrekimin no Sekai* (Compendium of Japanese History and Performing Arts: The World of Travelers in the Middle Ages), vol. 6, edited by Miyata Noboru (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1990), 19.

²¹⁵ Just like Zeami’s *Fushikaden*, which was meant to be read by his artistic descendents, as mentioned earlier.

²¹⁶ It is 恋愛.

²¹⁷ Yanabu, 89.

²¹⁸ It is *iro* (色), *koi* (恋), and *jyo* (情).

problematic difference that Meiji intellectuals saw in the concept of English *love*, Yanabu adds, was that such feelings or emotions were deeply rooted in one's soul or spirit rather than one's body. In contrast, the Japanese considered that human feelings originated in both one's soul or spirit *and* body at the same time.²¹⁹

Regarding this, Aidan Rankin states that in Japanese religious thought, “the body and sexuality are both held to be valuable, life-affirming and so inherently good” because the concept of sin is absent with regard to the human body and desire.²²⁰ In addition, Julia Adeney Thomas explains that the Japanese treat the mind and body as an inseparable thing because, unlike Christian doctrine, “the pleasures of the body were never in themselves considered a particular source of sinfulness,” so the concept of sexual intercourse is viewed more positively.²²¹ In fact, Boye Lafayette De Mente explains that the concept of “recreational sex as sinful” preached in the Judeo-Christian tradition was a byproduct of political and social control imposed on people—especially on women—and was unrelated to morality or to save “immortal souls.”²²² De Mente adds that the Christian church propagated the idea of the human body as of the earth and therefore untrustworthy and sinful, while elevating the idea of the human spirit or soul as of heaven and so trustworthy and divine. In this process, the body was completely separated from the spirit, soul, or mind. Particularly, sexual desire or lust was considered the Devil's work, so that the body, as well as any sense of physical pleasure, must be negated to allow the spirit, soul, or mind to remain pure and sacred. Therefore, while the Japanese regard *sex* and *love*—*iro*—as both physical and spiritual as a united whole, the Judeo-Christians view *love* as the positive product of the spirit or mind but *sex* as the sinful and negative product of the physical body that

²¹⁹ Ibid., 94.

²²⁰ Aidan Rankin, *Shinto: A Celebration of Life* (Winchester, U.K.: O Books, 2010), 9-10.

²²¹ Julia Adeney Thomas, “The Cage of Nature: Modernity's History in Japan,” in *History and Theory*, vol. 40, no. 1 (February, 2001), 32.

²²² Boye Lafayette De Mente, *Sex and the Japanese* (Rutland, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 2006), 15.

must be restrained and controlled—*sex* and *love*, the physicality and spirituality must be detached from each other at all times. Indeed, the complicated nature of the concept of *iro* may truly lie in its multiplicity of usages and, especially, in the mind-body ideological differences of East and West.

Based on these analyses, the terms *koshoku* or *irogonomi* can be described as the state in which one is absorbed in a positive sexual-love or one falls in “love” with both physical and spiritual pleasures. Some scholars translated these terms as “to have a fondness for carnal love,”²²³ “an ideal of sexual activity in ancient Japanese courtly culture,”²²⁴ “[a] passion in both love and the arts,”²²⁵ or “to have sophisticated love affairs,”²²⁶ but there seems to be no single translation that all scholars would agree upon. I believe that the problem of translating these terms is certainly rooted in the ambiguity of the very term *iro* (色).

Though defining the terms *koshoku* or *irogonomi* is not the focus here, these concepts have been repeatedly treated as the main theme in various literary works, such as *Ise Monogatari* and *Genji Monogatari*, since the Heian period. The stories in such works often dealt with a man of high birth, who was handsome, musical, and cultured, as the main character, and his extensive passionate and erotic adventures. Rajyashree Pandey explains that these stories describe the main character’s romantic relationships as a “refined sport (*asobi*)” in which the poetry played a crucial role as a communication tool to exchange feelings between the two potential lovers.²²⁷ As the poetry readings came to be tied to the notion of sport or play (*asobi*), the pursuit of *koshoku* or *irogonomi* also began to project such images, and later, these activities reflected the ideal state

²²³ Rajyashree Pandey, “Love, Poetry, and Renunciation: Changing Configurations of the Ideal of ‘Suki,’” in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, third series, vol. 5, no. 2 (July, 1995), 226.

²²⁴ Yokota-Murakami Takayuki, *Don Juan East / West* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 77.

²²⁵ Gail Chin, “The Gender of Buddhist Truth: The Female Corpse in a Group of Japanese Paintings,” in *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 25, no. 3/4 (Fall, 1998), 297.

²²⁶ Atoda Takashi, *Kono Issatsu de Yomeru Nihon no Koten 50-satsu (Reading 50 Classics in This One Book)* (Tokyo: Mikasa Shobo, 2002), 114.

²²⁷ Pandey, 227.

of living that all men admired. This admiration of the way of *koshoku* or *irogonomi* living is described in Yoshida Kenko's *Tsurezuregusa* (*The Essays in Idleness*, 1330-1331) as “*iro konomazaran otoko wa, ito so-zo-shiku, tama no sakazuki no soko naki kokochi zo subeki* (A man without a sense of *irogonomi* is just like a beautiful, but bottomless, wineglass that feels indeed unsatisfying).” Ono Jyunichi observes that Yoshida Kenko, with this passage, recognized the notion of *koshoku* or *irogonomi* in Heian literature as an ethical way of living, which is also highly stylized as described with an aesthetic of *miyabi* (courtly or elegant), and one that all men must pursue.²²⁸

In the Heian period, pursuing the way of *koshoku* or *irogonomi* was considered a method to polish one's aesthetic sensibilities through the exchange of poems, and to become a person who is knowledgeable about the subtleties of human emotions through the practicing of sexual-love relationships. It was a privilege for both men and women of the noble class to be absorbed into this lifestyle. In time, such aesthetic sensibilities and lifestyle were accepted as the ideal way of life by the townsmen, and came to be regarded as crucial elements, especially for men, to acquire and to practice. This ideology was passed down and embodied in the love-sex literary genre,²²⁹ such as Ikkyū Sojyun's *Kyounshu* (*Crazy Clouds Compilation*, 1481?)²³⁰ or Ihara Saikaku's *Koshoku Ichidai Otoko* (*Life of an Amorous Man*, 1682). They also continued to develop into the witty books,²³¹ the yellow covers,²³² or the spring pictures²³³ of the *ukiyo*e, the

²²⁸ Ono Jyunichi, *Irogonomi no Keifu* (*Genealogy of Irogonomi*) (Tokyo: Sobunsha, 2002), 266.

²²⁹ It is called *koshoku bungaku*, the love-sex literature.

²³⁰ It is a compilation of poems on Buddhist ideologies and erotic matters written in Chinese poetic form.

²³¹ It is called *sharebon*, the witty books, a type of books dealing with lives and customs of the pleasure quarters.

²³² It is called *kibyoshi*, the yellow cover books, a type of adult comics.

²³³ It is called *shunga*, the spring pictures, a type of “pornographic” prints.

floating world, woodblock prints,²³⁴ the chain songs²³⁵ and the satirical poems²³⁶ of the poetic genres, and the “soaking scene”²³⁷ in *kabuki* plays (see Figure 2.5).



Figure 2.5 “Soaking Scene” between Gonsuke and Princess Sakura from Tsuruya Nanboku’s *Sakurahime Azuma Bunsho (Princess Sakura Letters from the East) Kabuki Play*²³⁸

In the Edo period, the Tokugawa government repeatedly banned these arts for fear of public moral corruption, but it did not have much effect on the creation of art. In the Meiji period,

²³⁴ See more details in Chris Uhlenbeck and Margarita Winkel, *Japanese Erotic Fantasies* (Amsterdam: Hotei Publishing, 2005) and Donald Jenkins, *The Floating World Revisited* (Honolulu: Portland Art Museum and University of Hawaii Press, 1993).

²³⁵ It is called *renga*, the chain or connected songs.

²³⁶ It is called *senryu*, literally, the river willow poems, a type of satirical seventeen-syllable poem.

²³⁷ It is called *nureba*, the soaking scene, portraying lovers’ exchanges and dances.

²³⁸ From the Japan Arts Council website: <http://www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/dglib/contents/learn/edc15/sakuhin/p5/b.html> (accessed October 12, 2015).

however, government officials ordered *kabuki* playwrights, lyricists, musicians, and choreographers to alter the erotic words or even to eliminate “obscene” passages from play scripts.²³⁹ This time, the government’s fear was for the eyes of the Westerners who could potentially be “offended” by seeing such sexually charged scenes, and thus, they thought it would make modernized Japan look “barbaric” and would cause more problems in foreign affairs.²⁴⁰

As I have shown so far, the word *iro* has multiple meanings—color, women, beauty, sex, love, etc.—and the projected image of *iro* varies depending on the time period and the religious, social, and cultural contexts within which the word *iro* was used. It is important to note that, in general, the concept of *iro* was viewed rather highly in the early historical period, but as the Buddhist and Confucian ideologies were imported and disseminated throughout the Medieval and Early Modern periods, it came to be considered something to be looked down upon or to be hidden, and furthermore, as something to be restricted and to be reformed to conform with the influences of Judeo-Christian based cultures in the Modern period. The usage of the term, too, has shifted so that it means *color* more frequently than any other connotation in current usage. In a sense, when people began to replace the term *iro* with words like *onna* (woman), *bi* (beauty), *sei* (sex), and *ai* (love), its intrinsic value began to fade away and instead is only preserved in the arts. In the previous section, I explored the relationship between the sex (*iro*) and the arts (*gei*) and demonstrated that sex (*iro*) is molded in the arts (*gei*) of *geisha*. In particular, the existence of sex (*iro*) in the arts (*gei*) is evidenced in the term and expression of *iro-ke* that *geisha* embody and stress in their performances of *kouta* and *koutaburi*. Before exploring the concept of *iroke* (色気) further, I will briefly cover the semantics of the term *ke* (気) next.

²³⁹ Kikkawa 1989, 450-452.

²⁴⁰ Tsuge Gen’ichi and Uemura Yukio, eds, *Asia Ongakushi (Music History of Asia)* (Tokyo: Ongaku no Tomosha, 2004), 213-214.

2.3 SEMANTICS OF *KE*

Ke (or *ki*, sometimes spelled as *qi*) is another term that has multiple meanings and happens to be one of the most frequently used terms in the Japanese language. Since there are a handful of scholarly works written exclusively on this term and its concept, I will minimize my explanations here.²⁴¹ Simply put, *ki* means the *air*, *atmosphere*, *mind* or *spirits*, *energy*, and *feelings*.²⁴² Todo Akiyasu explains that the character *ki* (気 also 氣) originally meant hot steam that leaked out of a pot when cooking rice, so it described the image of some air escaping from a container.²⁴³ It also illustrated the state in which something was packed and very full at first, but it poured out or burst out from it afterwards. Such basic connotations, Todo adds, are shared by the characters like *ai* (愛 love) or *ai* (哀 sorrow), and thus, they all belong to the same *kanji* family.²⁴⁴

According to Sato Kiyoji, the Chinese created the character *ki* (氣) by observing movements of clouds in the sky, so the words using *ki* are normally related to the conditions of weather or climate.²⁴⁵ Sato states that one of the most important ideologies, Ying and Yang, was first applied to distinguish cloudy weather (陰氣) from sunny weather (陽氣), and later it was expanded to describe the states of earth and humans.²⁴⁶ The basic principle of this concept is that everything changes constantly—the Ying moves to the Yang state, and the Yang moves to the Ying state—that no single state stays the same forever. Sato finds a reference in the ancient

²⁴¹ See more details in works like Akatsuka 1974, Itasaka 1974, Kuroda 1977, Sato 1996, Tatsukawa 2010, and Yuasa 1993.

²⁴² Kojien 2008.

²⁴³ Todo, 705.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 704.

²⁴⁵ In Japanese, the weather is called *ten-ki* (天気), which literally means the *ki* of heaven or sky.

²⁴⁶ Sato Kiyoji, *Ichigo no Jiten: Ki (Dictionary of One Word: Ki)* (Tokyo: Sanseido, 1996), 6-8.

Chinese dictionary *Shakumyo* (釈名) that when the nature breathes *ki*, it becomes the *wind*.

Similarly, human breath was considered the *ki* (気 or 息).²⁴⁷ The *ki* does not have any form or substance, but it fills our body and is the core of all life forms. Thus, the *ki* also came to mean spirits or soul.²⁴⁸

Sato explains that when the character *ki* was imported to Japan, both Chinese *ki* (or *qi*) and Korean *ke* pronunciations came along with it, but the ancient Japanese more frequently used the *ke* pronunciation or its Japanese equivalent, *i-ki*—derived from the verb *ikiru* (to live).²⁴⁹ During the Heian period, the *ki* was Japanized in the sense that it began to appear in words like *mono-no-ke* (literally, *sign* of things), to mean something like evil spirits or sickness that cannot be explained with words, and *ke-hai* (a *sign* or *indication*), to mean something that cannot be seen but can be experienced through one's senses.²⁵⁰ Sato thinks that this *something* that can neither be caught with our hands nor seen but can be *sensed* is exactly the basic connotation of *iroke*.²⁵¹ It was not until the Edo period, when the *ki* began to be pronounced as “*ki*,” that it was popularly used to describe human feelings, emotions, and the power of one's will.²⁵²

Sato further explains that, based on Chinese ideology, the Japanese continued to understand the *ki* as the source of life, health, and vitality that belonged to both the body and the mind and that they were mutually related and constantly affected each other. This is part of the reason why people thought that sickness (or weakened body) was rooted in the *ki*. Interestingly, Tatsukawa Shoji adds to Sato's statements that the word impurity (*kegare*), which I mentioned in the previous section, originated from the description of a state in which the *ki* (or *ke*) withered

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 12.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 63-66.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 67.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 114.

²⁵² Ibid., 72-76.

(*kareru*), and it simply meant *death*. Thus, it was equally used for both men and women and was generally considered something to be avoided rather than being exclusively used to discriminate against women.²⁵³

Overall, the *ke* of *iroke* is associated with the movements of air or energy that are not necessary visible or audible. However, as Todo and Sato mentioned, even if it does not have any visible form or substance, it can still exist around us and its existence can be sensed through the perceptions of our body. It resides within our body and is our mind itself, and it can leak out (or pour out) from our body and continues to change its state (Ying to Yang and back to Ying, etc.) all the time.

2.4 WHAT IS *IROKE*?

The exploration of the semantics of *iro* and *ke* in the word of *iroke* has shown that these two terms have possessed a variety of meanings and complex culturally and historically specific overtones for many centuries. While the concept of *iro* is associated with color, form, texture, female, female body, sexual matters, love, and beauty, the *ke* is associated with air, atmosphere, energy, spirits, mind, and life force. Both of these terms deal with abstract ideas that are difficult to grasp.

When combined in the word *iroke*, the meanings conveyed, according to most Japanese dictionaries, are 1) tone of color, 2) sexual attractions or sex appeal, 3) charm or amiability, 4) sexual interests towards the other sex or sexual desire, 5) femininity or womanliness, and 6)

²⁵³ Tatsukawa Shoji, *Ki no Nihonjin (Ki of Japanese)* (Tokyo: Shueisha, 2010), 107.

interests or ambition towards social status.²⁵⁴ As seen in these definitions, the word *iroke* still relates to color, sexual matters, something that attracts one's attention, and the existence and quality of women.

Among all these definitions, Tatsukawa Shoji claims that *iroke* is commonly used today to mean *sexual attraction* or *sex appeal*.²⁵⁵ He explains that *iroke* is a sexual attractiveness that first comes into its existence as an invisible form of *ki* (air, energy), and when its state is heightened, it shows up in *iro* (form, color); thus, it is something that is initially hidden and is only gradually revealed outside.²⁵⁶ While Tatsukawa describes *iroke* as something visible, Akatsuka Yukio considers it invisible and states, "*iroke* is something that *floats* in the air, and it cannot be grasped."²⁵⁷ Kurokawa Masayuki, too, thinks of *iroke* as a phenomenon that cannot be seen but is *felt* or *sensed* and states, "*iroke* is something that forms out from a person, something that is radiated around the person."²⁵⁸ Kurokawa explains that the Japanese tend to recognize the existence of a person by including the air and space that surrounds the person as a whole.²⁵⁹ In other words, *iroke* is an atmosphere that surrounds a person and fills the space around the person so that the state of air and space around this person also becomes a part of the existence and character of this person. Thus, the person's existence or character, of which *iroke* is a part, is perceived through one's senses or feelings.

Leaving the dictionary definitions and the scholars' explanations aside, my observations of the word *iroke* so far reveal that it is something closely related to the sexual-love atmosphere, feelings, and attractions that reside within both body and mind, something that *leaks out* from the

²⁵⁴ Daijirin 1988, 175; Daijisen 1995, 195; Kojirin 1999, 140; Nihon Kokugo Daijiten 2001, 1420. The oldest record of its appearance was in the *yoruri* puppet show narrative script titled *Yomei Tenno Shokunin Kagami* written by Chikamatsu Monzaemon in 1705. Chikamatsu used the word *iroke* to mean femininity in this script.

²⁵⁵ Tatsukawa, 81.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Akatsuka Yukio, *Ki no Kozo (Structure of Ki)* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1974), 45.

²⁵⁸ Kurokawa Masayuki, *Yattsuno Nippon no Biishiki (Eight Japanese Aesthetics)* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2006), 63.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

body like escaping steam from a rice cooking pot, and surrounds us in the air and space like an aura. As described in the Buddhist notions “all things are empty and emptiness is all things” (*shiki-soku-ze-ku* and *ku-soku-ze-shiki*), *iroke* is a phenomenon that is at one time visible and audible, but other times invisible and inaudible. It is not apparent most of the time, but its existence is certainly sensed through our body. In addition, it is in an unstable state that constantly changes; it is ephemeral.

As the term *iro* simply meant a *human body* in the ancient times, *iroke* was a quality that could be embodied by both men and women. However, since the term *iro* came to mean females or female lovers as the society transformed into a more male-oriented system, the word *iroke* came to be more frequently associated with femininity and womanliness. One important thing to note here is that the *ke* (気) of *iroke* (色気) is pronounced *ke* instead of *ki*. As Sato explained earlier, the connotation of *ke* was something *unexplainable*, like supernatural beings or even disease, so the word *iroke* carries somewhat strange, mysterious, and insecure undertones.

The definition of the word *iroke* appears in many Japanese to English dictionaries as *sex appeal*, *allure*, *sexiness*, *seductiveness*, *eroticism*, or *femininity*.²⁶⁰ In addition to these, scholars use “eroticism” or “sensuality,”²⁶¹ “cool-eroticism,”²⁶² and “an abstract concept of allure”²⁶³ for a close approximation to the word *iroke* in their works. However, all of these English words do not convey the true meaning in Japanese. Thus, to solve the translation problem, this dissertation will attempt to explain what “*iroke*” means in its Japanese context and dispense with the many widely-accepted English translations.

²⁶⁰ Sanseido Dictionary 2000, Shin Wa-Ei-Chu Jiten 4th ed. 1995, Digital Daijisen 2015, etc.

²⁶¹ Dalby 2000, 10-11, and Katherine Mezur, “Undressing the *Onnagata*,” in *Japanese Theatre and the International Stage*, edited by Stanca Scholz-Cionca and Samuel L. Leiter (Boston: Brill, 2001), 193.

²⁶² Alison Tokita, *Kiyomoto-bushi* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1999), 1.

²⁶³ Laurence Senelick, *Gender in Performance* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1992), xi.

2.4.1 What is *Iroke* in the Japanese Context?

The Japanese usage of the word *iroke* is not confined to the visual aspects as the many English translations suggest. As famous novelist Mishima Yukio once stated, “*iroke* is different from the blunt American *sex appeal* that it is sexual attractions that are not only in the human body itself but also melted within one’s emotions, sentiments, atmospheres, personalities, and other miscellaneous compounds, and its concept can be affected by the literatures, arts, and traditional culture that reflect such sentiments and atmosphere.”²⁶⁴ Mishima cites “a hand overflowing out of a kimono sleeve” and “a subtle movement of eyes while opening the sliding door” as examples of *iroke*-possessed expressions. He expressly excludes the “display of gigantic breasts” like the Jane Russell stereotype from the concept of *iroke*. Similarly, kabuki actor Ichikawa Somegoro VII states that *iroke* is neither the display one’s cleavage or legs by wearing revealing clothubg nor something that can be turned on at will, but is something to be “oozed out from inside” by itself without conscious effort.²⁶⁵ Perhaps this is based on the effect observed in the *ke* of *iroke*—leaking steam from a rice cooking pot—as mentioned earlier, that *iroke* is considered to be like invisible air that evaporates from a container, or perhaps a body in this case. Based on Mishima and Ichikawa’s descriptions, it becomes apparent that, unlike American definitions of *sex appeal* or *sexiness*, which places importance on body parts that are deliberately displayed to *sell* their attractions to the targeted audiences through visual effects, *iroke* is something inherent in oneself and is highlighted through one’s movements especially when wearing a kimono.

²⁶⁴ Mishima Yukio, “*Onna no Iroke to Otoko no Iroke (Women’s Iroke and Men’s Iroke)*,” in *Ketteiban Mishima Yukio Zenshu*, vol. 36 (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 2003), 74. This article first appeared in the magazine *an-an* published on March 20, 1970.

²⁶⁵ Ichikawa Somegoro, *Hitomi ni Kihin wo, Kokoro ni Tsuya wo (Have Refinement in Your Eyes and Luster in Your Heart)* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2009), 45-46.

Indeed, while the words *sex appeal* or *sexiness* in the American context mostly concerns the body and youth, Matthew Kuefler states that the Japanese erotic appeal has been in “the mixture of naked flesh and luxurious clothing” and that the naked body itself has never been alone a target of fascination for the Japanese.²⁶⁶ In fact, according to Timothy Clark, the representations of “subtle eroticism” were found in a vivid red color undergarment, a bit of body part, such as a knee or a leg, peeking out of the hem of a kimono, and a “slightly open collar” of the kimono in *ukiyo*e (floating world) woodblock prints (see Figure 2.6). This means that the eroticism resides within the *combination* of a small portion of the body and the kimono together.



Figure 2.6 Kitagawa Utamaro’s *Wakatsuru* from the series *Array of Supreme Beauties of the Present Day* (1794)²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ Mathew Kuefler ed., *The History of Sexuality Sourcebook* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2007), 303-304.

²⁶⁷ From the Museum of Fine Arts Boston website: <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/wakatsuru-from-the-series-array-of-supreme-beauties-of-the-present-day-t%C3%B4ji-zensei-bijin-zoroe-234067> (accessed October 12, 2015).

Laura Miller also reports that for the past two centuries, the only notable eroticized body part for the Japanese has been the nape of the neck, because it is the body part that can be particularly visible when wearing a kimono.²⁶⁸ Miller also says that the nape came to be less appreciated since the 1920s when Japanese women began to wear Western style clothes. Thus, rather than the obvious body parts like breasts, cleavage, or buttocks that are more biologically connected with the functions of reproduction and childrearing, the Japanese found *iroke* in body parts that were not technically concerned with such functions—the nape, hands, knees, and legs. In particular, rather than the state of stark nakedness, these body parts must be in the condition of being covered by layers of kimono and being *slightly*, or perhaps accidentally, revealed between those layers.

According to Kuefler, the naked body used to be commonly witnessed in the bathhouses and other public places before modernization.²⁶⁹ This means that people were less concerned about their bodies, and moreover, the concept of the naked body as an art form, or nudity, did not even exist until it was introduced from the West during the Meiji era. Timothy Clark remarks that “[t]here is no tradition in Japanese art of presenting the completely nude female body for contemplation,” and this is the reason why one of the most well known woodblock print artists Kitagawa Utamaro, whose name has been synonymously with “erotic prints” among art connoisseurs, left only a few works depicting naked women.²⁷⁰ Utamaro’s naked women, Clark observes, were presented naked *because* of the context and theme—bathing or diving—that

²⁶⁸ Laura Miller, *Beauty Up* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 23.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁷⁰ Tim Clark and Asano Shugo, eds., *The Passionate Art of Kitagawa Utamaro: Text* (London: British Museum Press for the Trustees of the British Museum, 1995), 80.

necessitated the unclothed state. Thus, they were “certainly no true ‘nudes’ in the Western sense” of a naked body being presented for its own sake of *being* the naked body in art.²⁷¹

In other words, the naked body did not serve as John Berger’s “an object of vision: a sight”²⁷² or a *site* for *sex appeal*, *sexiness*, or *erotic* expressions in the Japanese ideology. But rather, as Jaqueline Berndt states, these prints dealing with the naked body offered viewers “the sharing of erotic situations” rather than “the admiration of beautifully painted bodies,” and the viewers favored *tactility* aspects more than *visuality* aspects expressed through the arts.²⁷³ To rephrase it, what appealed most to viewers of the prints was how the model’s naked body evoked the sense of touch—the smoothness and warmth of her skin—rather than how it looked—the accuracy of physical size, proportion, or lifelikeness. This means that Japanese eroticism is more situational, contextual, and sensuous.

Tanizaki Jyunichiro, one of the most famous writers from the Aesthetic Movement school, observes that the beauty of Japanese women resides in a touch of their skin—its feeling of smoothness and tightness.²⁷⁴ Tanizaki explains that this is because, just as it was written in the Heian literature, it has been a custom for Japanese men to make love with women under many layers of kimono in the near darkness so that beauty and pleasure were perceived through the sense of touch more than sight.²⁷⁵ In addition to the sense of touch, the sense of smell also contributed to the perceptions of beauty and pleasure, as observed in the old Japanese “*iroha*” alphabet poem:

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1977), 47.

²⁷³ Jaqueline Berndt, “Nationally Naked? The Female Nude in Japanese Oil Painting and Posters (1890s-1920s),” in *Performing Nation: Gender Politics in Literature, Theater, and the Visual Arts of China and Japan, 1880-1940*, edited by Doris Croissant, Catherine Vance Yeh, and Joshua S. Mostow. (Boston: Brill, 2008), 316. See more details on Kuroda Seiki’s painting scandal in this article.

²⁷⁴ Tanizaki Jyunichiro, “*Renai Oyobi Shikijyo (Love and Sexual Desire)*,” in *Inei Raisan (In Praise of Shadows)*, revised edition (Tokyo: Chuo Koronsha, 1999), 138-141. It was originally published in a magazine *Fujin Koron*, April-June issue, 1931.

²⁷⁵ Tanizaki 1999, 140-141.

Iroh(w)a nihoedo chirinuru wo “Colors are fragrant, but they fade away”
Wagayo tarezo tsunenaramu “In this world of ours none lasts forever”²⁷⁶

Though Andrew N. Nelson translates “*iroh(w)a nihoedo*” as “*colors* are fragrant,” this *iro* can be, as I discussed in the last section, body, sexual matters, love, and beauty. Indeed, this poem tells us that the Japanese perceived *iro*, not just through the sight as *colors*, but also through the sense of smell as well.²⁷⁷

Just as *iroke* is not concerned so much with body parts relating to reproduction or childrearing, the lack of emphasis on the visual, as Tanizaki described, also means that *iroke* is a quality that can be possessed regardless of age. According to Tatsukawa Shoji, one of the folk songs from Saga prefecture sings about an old person who still possesses *iroke*.²⁷⁸ In addition, kabuki critic Hasebe Hiroshi states that *iroke* can be more fully manifested after one gets more wrinkles on the face.²⁷⁹ I once heard my *kouta* colleague Mr. Fukazawa, who was then ninety years old, praise my *kouta* teacher, who was just a year younger, as a person possessing an irresistible amount of *iroke*. My *kouta* teacher, too, told me during my *kouta* lesson that my performance did not have enough *iroke* because I was “too young”—at that time, I was thirty years old and was newly married. She explained to me that I would get more *iroke* when I got older and more experienced in love. Apparently, my age and marital status were not sufficient to evince *iroke* through my performance.

²⁷⁶ Translation by Andrew N. Nelson, *The Modern Reader's Japanese-English Character Dictionary*, second edition (Rutland, VT: Tuttle, 1974), 1014. This poem uses the entire Japanese 48 syllables without repeating any of them. It is said that it was composed by Kukai, the founder of Shingon Buddhism sect, but no proof yet exists.

²⁷⁷ Imamichi Tomonobu observes that this poem is in fact explaining about the nature of *iro*, which is ephemeral and empty, and is connected with the Buddhist notion of *shiki-soku-ze-ku* (all things are empty). Imamichi 1985, 36.

²⁷⁸ Tatsukawa 2010, 83.

²⁷⁹ Hasebe Hiroshi, *Kikugoro no Iroke (Kabuki Actor Kikugoro's Iroke)* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunju, 2007), 84-85.

Therefore, unlike the conventional concept of *sex appeal* or *sexiness* projected through mainstream media, which relates to and stresses the body, youth, and visual aspects, the Japanese *iroke* has more to do with an atmosphere surrounding the concept of love-sex that appeals to all of the senses and is considered something that increases with age and experience. Plus, *iroke* is found not so much in the static image of a naked body, but in a slight motion of a body. Such body motions produce sounds and images and leave a trace of existence in one's senses and mind. As discussed earlier, the Japanese tend to recognize the body and mind as an inseparable entity, so in this case, its trace remains in the sensuous-mind.²⁸⁰

As mentioned, many scholars have pointed out that *iroke* is difficult to grasp because it is, indeed, the *atmosphere* of love-sex that has no visible form. It is hidden, understated, unsubstantial, and abstract; it has a non-existent existence. To be more precise, *iroke* is a *sign* of existence, but not the existence itself. It is not *sex appeal* because it is *not* appealing the sex. It is *sexiness* but it is not involved with the reproductive nature of sex. In a way it is a culturally constructed *idea* of sex that almost makes it *not* about sex. Or to rephrase it, it is sex that occurs in the imaginative *virtual* world so that the physicality is completely erased, which only leaves space for a *mental orgasm* (a state in which the satisfaction of one's sexual desire can only be attained in one's mind) rather than an actual orgasm. It is a state of *eroticism* without attaining Eros (sexual love) itself. This is the very reason that I am hesitant to use the word *eroticism* for *iroke*—but rather, I propose the word *iroicism* to refer specifically to such phenomena surrounding the atmosphere of Japanese love-sex.

It may sound contradictory and incomprehensible, but I find this to be the very nature of *iroke* that is observed through *geisha*'s arts—*kouta* and *koutaburi*. Before looking further into details of the concept and expressions of *iroke* in *kouta* and *koutaburi*, it would be helpful to look

²⁸⁰ Here I use *sensuous* to imply the meaning carried by *sensual* (sexual gratification of the senses) too.

at the Japanese visual arts that seem to parallel such *iroke* phenomenon, so I will examine the spring picture (*shunga*) woodblock prints prior to concluding this chapter.

2.4.2 Visualizing the Invisible *Iroke* in Visual Arts: Distancing Sex in the Spring Pictures

As Kuefler and Timothy Clark stated earlier, it is rare to find Japanese art illustrating full nudity as its subject before the Meiji era. Perhaps the Japanese equivalent to Western nude art is the erotic art genre of spring pictures (*shunga*) that Utamaro and many other woodblock print artists produced in the 18th and 19th centuries. Many of these spring picture prints feature scenes of a couple having sexual intercourse.²⁸¹ These couples are mostly clad and covered with layers of kimono while exposing their exaggerated genitalia that are meticulously depicted with hair or wrinkles that look as close to reality as possible. This may sound like a work of “pornography” rather than “art.” However, Shirakura Yoshihiko states that the spring pictures were (and still are) not pornography because such a word and concept did not exist in the Edo period. He speculates that, just as it was the custom in China, the spring pictures were more than likely to be viewed by a couple for the accompaniment of their love making process rather than by a single person for the purpose of masturbation, since finding “closed space for an individual” to accomplish the act was nearly impossible at that time.²⁸²

²⁸¹ This is not limited to heterosexual relationships. Saeki Jyunko mentions that there was no conception to consider heterosexuality as only the normative or “natural” way of life existed before the Meiji era. See more details in Saeki Jyunko, *Ai to Sei no Bunkashi (Cultural History of Love and Sex)* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Gakugei Shuppan, 2008). On homosexuality in *shunga*, see also Mitsuhashi Jyunko, *Jyoso to Nihonjin (Transvestism and the Japanese)* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2008), and Tanaka Yuko and Shirakura Yoshihiko, eds, *Edo Onna no Iro to Koi (Edo Women’s Sex and Love)* (Tokyo: Gakushu Kenkyusha, 2002).

²⁸² Tanaka and Shirakura, 22.

Some scholars claim that the spring picture was a type of tool for masturbation,²⁸³ a comic and parody book,²⁸⁴ a protection against evil spirits and prayer for fertility of the land,²⁸⁵ a protection against arrows and dangers on the battlefield,²⁸⁶ and a sexual education book and a good luck charm for newly weds.²⁸⁷ Since it is nearly impossible to prove how people used the spring pictures in their daily lives, it seems useless to try to latch on to one answer or the other in this list. Instead, as Shirakura points out, people called the spring picture prints *laughing pictures* (*warai-e*), and it is important to keep in mind that the concept of Japanese sex (*iro*) was connected with the act of laughter just as seen in the scene of Ame no Uzume's dance to lure Sun Deity out of the cave in the ancient myth. So, the spring pictures have their spiritual side and also both physically and mentally uplifting sides as observed in the fact that, based on the Chinese Ying and Yang ideology and practices, they were used as a tool for health improvement.²⁸⁸

Sumie Jones explains that the spring pictures were one of the artistic genres that catered to “the educated and affluent” who already knew everything related to sex so that “[i]ts business has little to do with representation of the body or desire” and that “the ‘real’ no longer needs to be ‘represented’” in them.²⁸⁹ Rather than the “real” representation of our bodies, the exaggerated and supernaturalistic genitals depicted in the spring picture instead “turns the viewer’s eye away from the body to its artistic execution.”²⁹⁰ When looking at a spring picture print as shown below for example (see Figure 2.7), it is remarkable how meticulously the bodies and genitals, hair

²⁸³ Timon Screech, *Sex and the Floating World: Erotic Images in Japan, 1700-1820* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 7.

²⁸⁴ Sumie Jones, *Imaging / Reading Eros* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1995), 83-84.

²⁸⁵ Saeki 2008, 8-12.

²⁸⁶ Saeki Jyunko, “*Shunbon, Shunga Kenkyu no Rinkai* (Critical Research of Spring Prints and Books),” in *Bungaku*, vol. 10, no. 3, edited by Ueno Chizuko, Tanaka Yuko, Saeki Jyunko, and Sumie Jones (1999), 121.

²⁸⁷ Shirakura Yoshihiko, “*Shunga wo Do Yomuka* (How to Read Shunga),” in *Ukiyoe Shunga wo Yomu, jo* (*Reading Ukiyoe Shunga*, vol. 1), edited by Shirakura Yoshihiko, Tanaka Yuko, et al (Tokyo: Chuo Koronsha, 2000), 7.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 8-9 and 49.

²⁸⁹ Jones 1995, 83.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 84. Emphasis mine.

style and ornaments, flowing lines and designs of the kimono, as well as background scenery, which often incorporates seasonal flowers or small animals, are depicted.



Figure 2.7 *Fumi no Kiyogaki* (“Clean Draft of a Love Letter” or “Pure Drawings of Female Beauty) by Chokyosai Eiri (1801)²⁹¹

If the purpose of spring pictures was to simply fulfill human sexual desires, particularly if it were to serve for the purpose of masturbation, then these extra details seem to be unnecessary. Or rather, they seem to become obstructions in that process. In fact, according to Jones, these little details, which seem to be peripheral at first, provide “the educated and affluent” viewers important background information on the characters, situations, and stories, and by the end, this information make the bodies, genitals, and sexual intercourse, which seem to be the center of the

²⁹¹ From a website: <http://homepage3.nifty.com/itoti/toku-eiri.html> (accessed on October 7, 2015). It is also listed in the British Museum website: http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=781711&partId=1 (accessed on August 14, 2015).

art, out of focus.²⁹² In other words, it looks like it is about sex, but it is not *all* about sex. Every one of components depicted in this scene creates an *atmosphere* of sex, inviting viewers to *feel* and *sense* the unworldly pleasures that these two lovers are experiencing. Viewers enjoy unraveling these multiple layers of codes and symbols, and that is precisely where the aesthetic pleasures and values reside. So, by the end of looking at the spring picture prints, the viewers become aware of the fact that their experiences, the art, and the location of their pleasures are not at all found in the actual sex itself, but they are rather *distanced* from it. In fact, the act of attaining pleasure from experiencing the *atmosphere* of sex rather than the actual sex was considered noble and became the embodiment of cultural sophistication in the world of the pleasure quarters—this is the key factor that will be observed in *kouta* and *koutaburi* arts in the next chapter.

In this regard, Saeki Jyunko first points out that there are few spring pictures dealing with women of the pleasure quarters as their subjects.²⁹³ If the main theme of spring pictures was only sex and to stimulate the viewer's sexual arousal and curiosity, then it would make more sense to deal with "sex professionals" like the women of the pleasure quarters as their subjects. Strangely, this was not the case. Saeki explains that this is because these women entertained customers by performing arts like music, dance, poetry, flower arrangement, and tea ceremony, so that sex, though it was a part of their arts too, was not the main thing to offer.²⁹⁴

In fact, customers who came to the pleasure quarters seeking nothing but sexual gratification were considered unsophisticated, boorish (*yabo*), and even vulgar. The women of the pleasure quarters, too, were similarly looked down upon if they offered sex only. In other words, these women of the pleasure quarters were not the same as "prostitutes" who sold sex to

²⁹² Jones 1995, 84.

²⁹³ Saeki 2008, 14-15.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 15.

fulfill customers' sexual desires only. Likewise, the pleasure quarters were not the same as Western "brothels" or "bordellos," where sex was the only thing for sale. Ironically, rather than the women of the pleasure quarters, Saeki describes, ordinary women of the town (*jionna*) were considered more erotic because they could engage in reproduction and childrearing initiated by sexual intercourse. Thus, they were the ones who were commonly depicted in the spring picture prints rather than women of the pleasure quarters themselves.²⁹⁵

This means that, for the customers of pleasure quarters, *sexual desire* was not the only—or even the main desire—to be fulfilled at the quarters. By observing the spring picture prints, Saeki refers to a desire to seek pleasures brought from experiencing the artistic activities—music, dance, tea, sex, etc. as a whole—as “*gense ridatsu yoku* (a desire to leave from this world).”²⁹⁶ It seems like a type of escapism or even hedonism, but I believe what Saeki refers to here is that the spring picture's highly decorative (such as kimono designs), fictitious (such as body shapes and narratives), and surrealistic (like gigantic genitals) beauties, as a unified whole, provided viewers a sense of *otherworldly* pleasures, and such pleasures were perceived through not only the senses of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting, but through the *sixth sense* that is more intuitive in nature.

Here, the key question to ask is where exactly this *otherworld* of otherworldly is, to make it possible to better understand the nature of pleasures, desires, and sixth sense surrounding the culture of pleasure quarters. The word *otherworldly* is explained as “detached from the floating world (*ukiyo banare*),”²⁹⁷ so it seems that it is not the floating world itself. According to Donald Keene, the word *ukiyo* once meant “sorrowful (*uki* 憂き)” world filled with “dust and grief” in the Heian period, but it came to be used as “floating (*uki* 浮き)” world to imply “unstable

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 18.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 22.

²⁹⁷ Japan Knowledge.

volatile society” in the 1680s.²⁹⁸ In a religious sense, *ukiyo* meant *this world*, which was considered filled with worldly desires that one should be detached from, as opposed to *the afterlife world*, in which one would reincarnate into some other life form depending on one’s acts during the time spent in this world.²⁹⁹ However, *ukiyo* came to mean a *dream-like* or *illusionary world*, and then a *happy* or *hedonistic world*, frequently used to denote theatres and pleasure quarters in the 17th century. There must have been many factors that played into the changing of people’s world view from a pessimistic one to an optimistic one over such long a period, but there is not enough space to touch upon them here. However, for its basis, *ukiyo* continued to imply elements of evanescence, ephemerality, and uncertainty of the world humans lived in. What is confusing here is that the pleasure quarters that provided *otherworldly* (being detached from the floating world) pleasures came to be synonymously called *the floating world* itself. This means that *the floating world* itself also came to be the *otherworld* of otherworldly.

Saeki’s reference to a desire to “leave from this world” implies moving away from this world to the afterlife world, so that it involves something spiritual and the world of spirituality.³⁰⁰ Interestingly, the words *floating world* also began to imply something relating to love-sex (*iro*) matters as well as the notion of love of love-sex (*koshoku* or *irogonomi*). This means that the world that satisfies physical and earthly desires is now moved away from *this world* and somewhere closer to the world of spirituality. Said another way, desire has now come to be considered something that can be fulfilled in the world of spirituality. This spiritual world, I believe, is not the same as the afterlife world as Saeki suggests. It seems to me it is a world that is unique to itself—the imaginative *virtual* world of lovers filled with love-sex (*iro*) matters, or

²⁹⁸ Donald Keene, *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, vol. 1, edited by Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 434.

²⁹⁹ Miyamoto Keiichi, *Bukkyo Monoshiri Sho Hyakka (Small Encyclopedia of Buddhism)* (Tokyo: Shunjyusha, 1987), 43 and 136.

³⁰⁰ Saeki 2008, 74.

perhaps, simulative love-sex affairs—that exists neither in this world nor the afterlife world, but somewhere in between—a *fifth dimension*—which is not the same as a religiously inclined “spiritual” world or a “ghost” world projected through science fictions and movies. It is an unknown, non-existent, yet irresistible, attractive *drifting* world—in reality, it only exists in the perceivers’ minds, or the world of metaphysics—and this is, I believe, the true sense of the *floating world*.

Earlier I mentioned that *iroke*, or *iroicism*, is more situationally, contextually, and sensuously oriented. It is not only perceived through the sights, but also through touching, smelling, and feeling its surrounding atmosphere. In fact, spring pictures show that sounds also play an important part of *iroke*-possessed expressions. As seen in this picture (see Figure 2.8), the couple is having a rendezvous on a cart outside in the pouring rain.



Figure 2.8 *Hanafubuki (Flowers in Violent Bloom, 1802)* by Kitagawa Utamaro³⁰¹

³⁰¹ From the website of Christie’s The Art People gallery: <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/lot/kitagawa-utamaro-hana-fubuki-picture-5829348-details.aspx> (accessed October 13, 2015).

Here, on the wheel, the text says, “*Shipporito nureta doshi to iunowa kono kotta* (This is what it means to be a *soaking wet* couple).” This sentence seems like it is simply explaining the situation of this couple, that they are outside in the pouring rain, so their kimono and hair are literally soaked from the rain. However, the expression of *shipporito nureru* (soaking wet) also means having sexual intercourse, and this expression appears quite frequently in *kouta* lyrics as well as many poems, songs, and literature.³⁰² Following this sentence, the text continues with a string of onomatopoeic words, “*ah, ii, ii, sousa, sousa, sokoda, sokoda, uh* (oh, good, good, right, right, there, there, ugh).” Shirakura Yoshihiko explains that such added texts provide a *gap* between the seriousness projected onto the faces of the illustrated couples and the comicality expressed through the sound-text, which triggers a laugh in the viewers.³⁰³ He calls this a “double structure” of text-illustration style found in many spring pictures, and this is the reason why these prints were called “laughing pictures” in the past. It seems to me that the written texts, onomatopoeic or mimetic words in particular, are other important elements that help to evoke the exact situation and surroundings that these lovers are experiencing in the minds of viewers. In other words, the elements of *iro* are also in the very *sounds*, and through hearing such sounds, viewers are likely to feel the essence of *iroke*, which leads them to the *floating world*—filled with the sweet imaginary of love-sex matters.

As mentioned, although much of the art deals with *iro* as the central subject or object, the artists created it in such a way that the *iro* is presented in an out-of-focus and discreet manner. Some codes and symbols are hidden and splashed everywhere in the artistic expressions, but they

³⁰² The *kouta* songs that I analyze in the next chapter also treat *mizu* (water) as a theme, and as you can see here, the concept of wetness or soaking is always used as an allusion to *iro* (sexual matters) in many Japanese arts, including *kouta* and *koutaburi*.

³⁰³ Shirakura, 46.

are never obvious—this is the exact characteristic we observed in the expressions of *iroke* earlier and will see in *kouta* and *koutaburi*. Deciphering, detecting, or sensing such hints and meanings, I believe, not only requires using one's five traditional senses; it also demands one's capacity to use the *sixth sense*—like a hunch or intuition—because such hints and meanings are not necessarily physically existent to begin with. Thus, reaching the state of *floating world* can only happen when experiencing art that is both solid (crafts, kimono, cuisine, etc.) and fluid (music, dance, etc.) as a whole, using the five senses and an extra sixth sense. In a way, the person with *iki* (*sui-jin*) or a person of versed (*tsu-jin*), who was a frequent visitor and supporter of the pleasure quarters (many of them became patrons (*danna*) of *geisha*) was the one who had such *extra* sense.

The *floating world*, which is in the unknown *fifth dimension*, can be accessed through experiencing the arts, and through such experiences, the pleasures are perceived not only through the five senses but combined with them the *sixth sense*. Experiences do not simply mean passive reception or observation of the artistic performances; they are more active and participatory in nature. Performing the arts—music, dance, tea, writing, etc.—is the gate to reach the floating world, and the performing arts themselves have also come to be the embodiment of the floating world. I believe this is exactly where *iroke* can be found and *geisha* arts of *kouta* and *koutaburi* are located.

Earlier, Jones explained that the spring picture came to be distanced from sex itself. A similar thing seem to have happened here, that in the process of seeking otherworldly pleasures, or pursuing the *floating world* experiences, artistic and intellectual exchanges with women of the pleasure quarters came to offer a much higher level of satisfaction to customers than sexual intercourse itself. Thus, sex (*iro*), again, was *distanced*, but it came to remain in art in the form

of *iroke*, the atmosphere of love-sex, in the artistic sphere of the pleasure quarters. The arts offered the *possibilities* of sweet and playful love-sex affairs at all times, keeping the possibilities as possibilities (not making it for reality); this may be why they continued to be called *playful* women (*asobime* or *yujo*). This attitude is particularly reflected in the fact that customers who visited the pleasure quarters to only enjoy music, dance, tea, and etc. without having a sexual relationship with any of the women there were highly praised as the *iki* (cool) possessors as well as the *tsu* (an expert or connoisseur) and became the ideal person in the Edo period.³⁰⁴ Thus, in reality, sex came to be *negated* in the culture cultivated in the pleasure quarters.

Throughout this section, I have attempted to explain the phenomenon surrounding the word *iroke* by first comparing its meanings with English equivalents like *sex appeal*, *sexiness*, and *eroticism*, then to clarify its characteristics by drawing examples from literature and visual arts from the past three centuries. Since *iroke* has a nature that is ungraspable, I used the Japanese visual arts of the spring pictures as an example to make the characteristics of *iroke*, as well as its surrounding culture, as visible as possible. In the process, I found that even though the word *iroke* implies the meaning of sex (*iro*), the expression of *iroke* does not necessarily place sex as its center, but rather, it has a nature to *distance* it. This is a particularly important characteristic because I believe this is happening in *kouta* and *koutaburi* pieces. Just like the spring picture prints, *kouta* and *koutaburi* pieces describe sceneries of beautiful nature or small animals, but use them as metaphors. They in fact illustrate scenes relating to the world of love-sex—the *floating world*. Because they are layered with multiple codes, symbols, and meanings, they are not easy to understand initially. In this chapter, I mainly focused on the “what” of *iroke*.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 16.

In the next chapter, I will look at the “how” of *iroke*. I will briefly cover the history of *kouta* and its performance practice, then, I will move on to look at several *kouta* pieces to further analyze how *iroke* is expressed in the music and performance.

3.0 EXAMINATION OF *IROKE* IN *KOUTA*

In this chapter, I will briefly cover the history of *kouta* by focusing on two important figures, Kiyomoto Oyo, a creator of *kouta* genre, and Kasuga Toyo, a founder of Kasuga *kouta* school to which I belong. While Kiyomoto Oyo's *kouta* mostly described a beautiful scene of nature, Kasuga Toyo's *kouta* portrayed stories of *geisha*'s love affairs and lost love as themes. The performance practice also changed between the two from the solo to the duet rendition, and *kouta* came to be particularly favored by the *geisha* and their customers in *ozashiki* during Kasuga Toyo's time. Through taking lessons under Kasuga Toyo Seiyoshi, I came to realize how *kouta* is deeply interconnected with *geisha*'s lives and their artistic culture. In particular, I noticed that in *kouta* performance, expressions of *iroke* are treated most importantly and play a crucial role in judging between good and bad performances. In the previous chapter, I discussed the meaning of *iroke* and used "the atmosphere of love-sex" as its translation. In this chapter, I will analyze two *kouta* pieces in an attempt to illustrate how *iroke* is expressed through *kouta* performances. In fact, the analysis revealed that the *iroke* is not simply expressed through the vocalist's or the *shamisen* player's music, but it is actually embodied through the interactions between the two performers, creating an imaginary lover's affair or play that provides temporal pleasures in the audiences' minds. Based on my detailed analysis and interpretations, I will theorize what *iroke* is and what it means in *kouta* performances.

3.1 HISTORY OF *KOUTA*

In the Heian period, the term *kouta* (small songs) was used to designate short-length songs sung by court ladies to accompany male court musicians' lengthy songs¹ performed at the first festival held after the Emperor's crowning ceremony.² Around the 16th century, *kouta* came to be used as a general term to call short popular songs of the town.³ Some of these songs were labeled as comical small songs⁴ or the Muromachi era small songs⁵ and were compiled in *Kanginshu* (*Quiet Humming Book*, 1518).⁶ From the 1590s to 1610s, Takasabu Ryutatsu (1573-96), a former monk from the commerce town of Sakai (now Osaka), composed his own style of small songs,⁷ and they became popular in the regions around Kyoto.⁸ His small songs were mostly performed with the accompaniment of a bamboo flute,⁹ a small hour-glass drum,¹⁰ or a closed fan beaten against a table or one's palm to provide rhythmic accents.¹¹ It must be noted here that these small songs were generally called *kouta* because of their short nature. In other words, these are essentially *ancestors* of *kouta* from the late Edo period, which I will cover later in this section.

Performance practice of small songs changed somewhat with the introduction of the *shamisen*, a three-stringed lute. Musicologists theorize that the origin of *shamisen* can be traced back to the Chinese *sanxian*,¹² which was first introduced to the Ryukyu Islands in the late 14th

¹ It is called *o-uta*, literally, the big songs.

² Yamaoka, 364.

³ Ibid.

⁴ It is called *kyogen kouta*.

⁵ It is called *muromachi kouta*.

⁶ Kikkawa 1989, 216-218.

⁷ This was known as *ryutatsu kouta* or *ryutatsubushi*.

⁸ Yamaoka, 364.

⁹ It is called *hitoyogiri*, a type of *shakuhachi*.

¹⁰ It is *tsuzumi* drum.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² It is written 三弦, the three strings.

century, and later came to be locally known as a *sanshin*.¹³ Both of these lutes share the feature of a round-shaped sound box covered with a snakeskin, and they use a small pick to play strings on them.¹⁴ It is thought that sometime around the 1560s that this instrument reached the mainland Japan.¹⁵ William Malm states that this instrument was “Japanized” by incorporating a square-shaped sound box and replacing its snakeskin with a dog or cat skin.¹⁶ Malm adds that while the replacement of the skin had more to do with environmental restrictions, the modification of the body shape was ascribed to musical and aesthetical preferences.¹⁷ Kikkawa Eishi also points out that it was the blind *biwa* (a four-stringed lute) minstrels who picked up this instrument when it was first brought to the mainland, and any “Japanization” may have been to alter the instrument in order to make it easier for them to play. Replacing a small pick with a larger plectrum and adding a device called *sawari* (touch) to make a type of buzzing sound are features that seem to parallel the *biwa* instrument and remain as unique characteristics of the *shamisen*.¹⁸

Sometime after 1615, small songs came to be frequently performed with the accompaniment of a *shamisen*.¹⁹ Most of these songs came out of the pleasure quarters²⁰ and

¹³ It is written 三線, literally, the three lines. Kikkawa 1989, 236-241. *Shamisen* is sometimes written as *samisen*. It is also frequently called *sangen*. See more details in Henry Johnson, *The Shamisen: Tradition and Diversity* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

¹⁴ Because of the snakeskin, the *sanshin* is also called *jyabi-sen* (蛇皮線) or *jyami-sen* (蛇味線), the snakeskin strings.

¹⁵ Sugi Masao, *Dento Geino Series 6: Hogaku (Traditional Art Series 6: Japanese Music)* (Tokyo: Kyosei, 1990), 47.

¹⁶ Malm 2000, 214.

¹⁷ Ibid. There is another theory that there was a possibility that the performance practice of using a larger plectrum already came with Ryukyu *sanshin* to the mainland, and the replacement of snakeskin was due to the feeling and sonority it created when such plectrum hit its surface rather than its availability. See more details in Nogawa Mihoko, “Ch. 9 *Jiuta*,” in *Nihon no Dento Geino Koza: Ongaku (Lectures on Traditional Performing Arts in Japan: Music)*, edited by Kojima Yoshiko (Kyoto: Tankosha, 2008), 239-264.

¹⁸ Kikkawa 1989, 239-240.

¹⁹ Yamaoka 2008, 364.

²⁰ Such small songs were the Rosai songs (*rosaibushi*), which are alternate versions of *ryutatsu kouta* composed by a monk named Rosai, the dance songs (*odori-uta*) accompanied to the women’s *kabuki* dance, and the “throwing”

quickly spread around the city and beyond.²¹ The text of these small songs seem to have already established the 7-7-7-5 syllable form, which is a feature commonly found in *kouta* of the late Edo period.²² At this time, six to eight small songs were randomly put together and began to be performed as one piece. Such songs were called set-songs for *shamisen*²³ and mainly practiced and preserved among blind musicians²⁴ in Kyoto.²⁵

By the 1700s, small songs were frequently incorporated into *kabuki* plays, and these gradually became longer in length and came to be called long songs (*nagauta*).²⁶ Simultaneously, the aforementioned blind musicians also composed and practiced some lengthy songs, and they called them long songs (*nagauta*) as well. To distinguish the two, the former remained with the same name,²⁷ but the latter came to be known as local songs²⁸ or Kyoto songs.²⁹ While many of these long songs had records of their composers' names or dates attached to them, there were many other songs that had no such information attached. Such "orphaned" songs began to be categorized as scrap songs (*hauta*),³⁰ and some of these were compiled in *shamisen* songbooks called *Matsu no Ha* (*Pine Needles*, 1703).³¹

This was also the time when, for the first time, the *shamisen* appeared on the *kabuki* stage in Edo. A *shamisen* expert named Kineya Kangoro from Kyoto joined the *kabuki* ensemble

songs (*nagebushi*) that sings about bantering of the pleasure quarter and became popular in the Shimabara pleasure quarter in Kyoto. See more details in Tanabe 1963, 196.

²¹ Kikkawa 1974, 188.

²² Yamaoka 2008, 364.

²³ It is called *shamisen kumiuta*.

²⁴ It is called *kengyo*, the professional musicians who had a special licensure and higher status in the society.

²⁵ Tanabe 1963, 196.

²⁶ Ibid., 198.

²⁷ Sometimes it is also called *edo nagauta*, the city long song.

²⁸ It is called *jiuta*, the local songs.

²⁹ It is called *kamigata uta*, the "upper direction" (appoints to the direction where the royal family lives) songs. Tanabe 1963, 196.

³⁰ It can be also translated as the "cutting-edge" songs.

³¹ Yamaoka, 359.

around 1700 and began performing his *shamisen* on stage then.³² Just like Kangoro, it was customary to bring in excellent singers of the small songs, particularly the Kyoto songs and the scrap songs genres, from the Kyoto or Osaka areas to Edo in order to have them perform on the *kabuki* stages with the accompaniments of the *shamisen* ensemble. By the 1720s, the center of music composition activities transferred to the East where more and more *kabuki* musicians began to compose the long songs that were instrumentally oriented to accompany elaborate dance scenes.³³ Around this time, the narrative music³⁴ used in the puppet shows also began to be incorporated into *kabuki* music.³⁵

Going back, the scrap songs tend to have bright and lively sounds and were popularly performed at *ozashiki* in the pleasure quarters or at people's homes.³⁶ Scrap songs reached their highest popularity in the 1800s, but they were taken over by another type of small songs, called *utazawa*, the slower and more elegant versions of scrap songs, by the 1840s.³⁷ *Utazawa* songs placed importance on the technical aspects of music, but because they tend to be slower in tempo, their popularity shifted to songs that were quicker and more expressive in nature.³⁸ These songs were called *kouta*³⁹; this song genre is the focus of this study.

³² Tanabe 1963, 221.

³³ Ibid., 222

³⁴ It is called *katarimono*, literally, the thing to narrate.

³⁵ These are generally called *kyoruri*, a music style that features a recitation or chanting style singing with a *shamisen* accompaniment. Within *kyoruri*, there are many different styles, such as *katobushi*, *icchubushi*, and *bungobushi*. There are more styles that split from the *bungobushi*, and these are *tokiwazubushi*, *tomimotobushi*, and *kiyomotobushi*. Each of these styles is named after the original creator's (composer / player) name. See more in Yasuda Bunkichi, "Ch. 13 *Kakushu no Jyoruri* (Each Style of *Jyoruri*)," in *Nihon no Dento Geino Koza: Ongaku* (*Lectures on Traditional Performing Arts in Japan: Music*), edited by Kojima Yoshiko (Kyoto: Tankosha, 2008) 333-356.

³⁶ Yamaoka, 359-361.

³⁷ Ibid., 362.

³⁸ Tanabe 1963, 229.

³⁹ It is written 小唄.

A folksong expert, Yuasa Chikusanjin, first called these small songs “fast-tempo *kouta*”⁴⁰ in order to distinguish them from the ones of earlier times, and he compiled them into *Hayama Kouta Zenshu* (*The Complete Works of the Fast-Tempo Small Songs*) published in 1923. Japanese music critic Hanabusa Jyuza, however, pointed out that the characteristics of these small songs could not just be explained by their “fast tempo-ness,” so he suggested that it would be more appropriate to call them “*Edo kouta*” instead.⁴¹ Since Hanabusa’s categorization still left a question of how to distinguish these *late* (or newer) “*Edo kouta*” from the earlier “*Edo kouta*,” which included the scrap songs or the Kyoto songs as mentioned above, musicologist Kikkawa Eishi tried to solve this by using a different *kanji* character for *uta*; *kouta* (小歌) to mean any small songs before the mid-Edo period and *kouta* (小唄) to mean the small songs for *shamisen* that were created by Kiyomoto Oyo, which I will discuss later, in the late Edo period.⁴²

Kouta is categorized as lyric music⁴³ and belongs to a group called the small pieces for *shamisen*⁴⁴ or the vocal pieces for *shamisen*.⁴⁵ It is considered a song style derived from the scrap songs in the 1850s.⁴⁶ A common metaphor describing their characteristics is that the scrap song genre is the mother of the two sister genres, *utazawa* and *kouta*. While *utazawa* is like a gentle and refined older sister, *kouta* is a genuine, lively, and *iki* (cool, stylish) possessed younger sister.⁴⁷ Another comparison between *utazawa* and *kouta* is that, in performance, the former places emphasis on the singing part for 70% and the *shamisen* part for 30%, the latter

⁴⁰ He called it *hayama kouta*, literally, the fast-rhythm small songs.

⁴¹ Cited in Kimura Kikutaro, *Showa Kouta*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Engeki Shuppansha, 2003), 26.

⁴² Kikkawa 1974, 134. He also uses “*muromachi kouta* (室町小歌)” to mean the former. On the other hand, musicologist Tanabe Hisao used to distinguish them by using “*kyu* (old)” and “*shin* (new)” with *kouta* (小唄) in Tanabe 1963, 224-229.

⁴³ It is called *utaimono*, literally, the thing to sing.

⁴⁴ It is called *shamisen sho-kyoku rui*. Yamaoka, 364.

⁴⁵ It is called *shamisen sei-kyoku rui*. Kimura 2003, 26.

⁴⁶ Yamaoka, 364.

⁴⁷ Yamaoka, 365.

places the singing part for 40% and the *shamisen* part for 60%.⁴⁸ From my own experience, however, the singing and *shamisen* parts are of roughly equal importance. *Kouta*'s "mother" is known to be Kiyomoto Oyo, and I will briefly cover her backgrounds first.

3.1.1 The "Mother" of *Kouta*: Kiyomoto Oyo

Kiyomoto Oyo (1840-1901),⁴⁹ a daughter of the headmaster⁵⁰ Kiyomoto Enjyudayu II of the *kiyomoto* narrative music school, is credited as the "mother" of *kouta*.⁵¹ Oyo's grandfather, Kiyomoto Enjyudayu I, originally belonged to the Tomimoto school and performed *tomimoto-bushi* songs to accompany puppet shows, but he split from the school to establish his own Kiyomoto school to pursue his career in performing his own style of songs called the *kiyomoto-bushi*. Both *tomimoto* and *kiyomoto* songs are a type of narrative music⁵² used in the puppet show stages. The *kiyomoto* style songs, however, came to be frequently incorporated into the *kabuki* stage performances instead of the puppet shows, so it also changed its musical style to become more like a lyrical music⁵³ that placed emphasis on the melodic singing part as well as the instrumental music part to accompany dance scenes.⁵⁴ *Kiyomoto* songs are also well known for their lustrous and sensuous musical character.⁵⁵ Because of the 1629 governmental ban on female public performances, Oyo had no opportunity to perform *kiyomoto* songs on *kabuki*

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Her real name is Okamura Yo. Since students of Kiyomoto school receive artistic title (name) of "Kiyomoto" just like Oyo here, it is customary to call each *kiyomoto* musician with their given names. This is true for the Kasuga *kouta* school students too. People put the "o" in front of her name "Yo" to show their respect, and thus, "O-Yo" has been the widely known name to refer to her. From here on, to keep its consistency, I call her Oyo as well.

⁵⁰ It is called *iemoto*, literally, the family or school head.

⁵¹ Yamaoka, 365.

⁵² These are called *kyoruri*, the narrative music.

⁵³ This is called *utaimono*, the things to sing.

⁵⁴ Tokita 1999, 1-6.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 1.

stages.⁵⁶ Instead, she found her performance venues at *ozashiki* in pleasure quarters and devoted her life to teaching *kiyomoto* songs to her students.⁵⁷



Figure 3.1 Kiyomoto Oyo⁵⁸

In the mid-1850s, Oyo began to compose short songs as her hobby. Though Oyo was the daughter of the *kiyomoto* headmaster, composing *kiyomoto* songs was an act only permitted to the headmaster and his first *shamisen* player, so she explored her musical talents in a new territory instead.⁵⁹ At the time, it was customary for *kiyomoto* composers to throw in some scrap songs in the middle of a *kiyomoto* piece specifically to accompany the scenes dealing with love-

⁵⁶ Kimura Kikutaro, *Edo Kouta* (Tokyo: Engeki Shuppansha, 1964), 31.

⁵⁷ Kimura 1966, 33.

⁵⁸ This picture is from *Manke Shozo Gameishu: Ongyoku no Bu* collection, authored by Senda Toyoji and Rissai (Utagawa) Hiroshige published in 1884. The digitized collection is available for viewing under the Ritsumeikan University library website: <http://www.dh-jac.net/db1/books/results.php?f21=1884> (accessed December 12, 2014).

⁵⁹ In fact, Oyo did compose handful of *kiyomoto* songs for the famous playwright Kawatake Mokuami's plays because it was right after the *kiyomoto* headmaster (Oyo's father) passed on. Kimura 1964, 51.

sex matters on stage.⁶⁰ Oyo followed this custom in her compositions, borrowing poems from the early Edo period, some quick and technical musical elements from the *kiyomoto*, and some scrap songs or *utazawa* songs, mixing them all together into one piece. Since Oyo's compositions were very short, they were simply called "scrap songs" during Oyo's time. In the 1920s, about two decades after Oyo's passing, her songs began to be called *kouta*.⁶¹ Since songs performed on the *kabuki* stages tended to be very long, Oyo's *kouta* songs were perfect in length to be performed in *ozashiki* and became popular among *geisha* and customers of the pleasure quarters. Thus, many *geisha* who came to know Oyo through her *ozashiki* performances or *kiyomoto* lessons, began to learn *kouta* from her as well.

One of Oyo's students, a *geisha* named Yokoyama Saki (1863-1919),⁶² became the first to open a lesson house⁶³ dedicated to *kouta* in Shibaguchi in 1915.⁶⁴ Just like Oyo, many of Saki's students were *geisha*. They included Tamura Teru,⁶⁵ Yoshimura Yu,⁶⁶ Hori Kotama,⁶⁷ Tade Kotsuta,⁶⁸ and Iwai Yoshi.⁶⁹ Although Saki never established her own school or became a headmaster,⁷⁰ many of her *geisha* students later did so.⁷¹ Saki also taught male students like a woodblock prints dealer (Murako),⁷² a politician (Mochizuki Keisuke), and a *kabuki* actor (Nakamura Kichiemon I).⁷³ Among the male students, Murako often went out to the various

⁶⁰ Kimura 1964, 68.

⁶¹ It is sometimes referred to *Edo kouta*. Yamaoka, 365.

⁶² Her *geisha* name, Koyoshi of Yoshi-cho.

⁶³ It is called *keiko-jyo*, the place for lessons.

⁶⁴ Shibaguchi is a current Shinbashi area. Kimura 1966, 76.

⁶⁵ Her *geisha* name, Koteru of Nihonbashi.

⁶⁶ Her *geisha* name, Kokane of Nihonbashi, and later became Oyu of Shinbashi.

⁶⁷ Her *geisha* name, Kotama of Mukojima and Shinbashi.

⁶⁸ Her *geisha* name, Kotsuta of Shinbashi.

⁶⁹ Her *geisha* name, Yonekichi of Kagurazaka. Yamaoka, 366.

⁷⁰ Saki held a title in *kiyomoto* and considered herself a *kiyomoto* master, just like her teacher Oyo, than a *kouta* master. Kimura 1966, 489-494.

⁷¹ These are Tamura-ha, Yoshimura-ha, Hori-ha, and Tade-ha. *Ha* means style or group.

⁷² His real name Murata Hisakichi. Murako is his *kouta* artistic name and is commonly used to refer to him.

⁷³ Others include a professional cook Ikeda Kotaro (his *kouta* artistic name Kouta Kobei) and a president of Kaniya biscuit store Nagai Chozaemon. Kimura 1966, 74 and 493.

pleasure quarters in Tokyo to teach *kouta* to *geisha*.⁷⁴ One of his dedicated students was a *geisha* named Kasuga Toyo,⁷⁵ who established her own *kouta* school Kasuga-ha in 1928. This is the school to which Kasuga Toyo Seiyoshi, my teacher, and I belong. I will briefly cover her backgrounds next.

3.1.2 The Disseminator of *Kouta*: Kasuga Toyo

Kasuga Toyo (1881-1962) was born to a Japanese mother and an English father and worked as a *geisha* in Asakusa from the time she was sixteen years old.⁷⁶ At the time, a child of mixed race faced harsh discrimination, so Toyo's mother, who was also a *geisha*,⁷⁷ gave a strict Asakusa-style, or a traditional working-class neighborhood style, education to Toyo so that she would grow up as a full Japanese.⁷⁸ Since her grandmother had a professional title⁷⁹ in *utazawa*, and her mother had titles in *tokiwazu* and the *nishikawa* style Japanese dance,⁸⁰ Toyo received musical and dance trainings from them when she was little.⁸¹ Furthermore, Toyo received training in many other genres of music as well.⁸² When she started her career as a *geisha*, *kouta* was becoming popular among connoisseurs of the arts⁸³ who were frequent visitors to the pleasure

⁷⁴ These include Shibaura, Yanagibashi, and Asakusa (formally known as Yoshiwara) districts. Kimura 1966, 511-512.

⁷⁵ Her *geisha* name Tsurusuke of Asakusa.

⁷⁶ Her real name Kashiwabara Toyo.

⁷⁷ Her *geisha* name Hanasuke of Kasuga-ya.

⁷⁸ Atsumi Seitaro, *Kasuga Toyo*, originally published in 1954 (Tokyo: Kasugakai, 2001), 6. This book was given to me from Kasuga Toyo Eishiba, the head of the Kasuga-kai, at my *natori* ceremony in 2013.

⁷⁹ It is called *natori*, literally, the name holder. I will discuss this more later.

⁸⁰ Japanese dance is called *nihon buyo*.

⁸¹ Atsumi, 10 and 20.

⁸² This includes *kabuki* music of *tokiwazu*, *kiyomoto*, and *nagauta* as well as older genres of *icchubushi*, *miyazonobushi*, *ogiebushi*, and *sonohachi*. Ibid., 21.

⁸³ This is called *tsu-jin*, literally, the person of versed.

quarters, so she also learned it from her mother and her grandmother and took up lessons from one of Saki's students, Murako.⁸⁴

Unlike her mother, who had to become a *geisha* to help her family financially, Toyo chose to become a *geisha* of her own will in hopes of putting her artistic talents in good use.⁸⁵ Toyo states that, at this time, to be a *geisha* was not yet considered an indecent occupation, and it was natural for girls with artistic skills to become *geisha*.⁸⁶ Though Toyo was a good singer and *shamisen* player, she recalled that she was not at all popular in the *ozashiki* due to her looks and snobbishness.⁸⁷ As a *geisha*, it was considered an honorable thing, as well as a smart tactic to spread her name out, to be able to "buy" (financially support) then popular actors or budding actors with good looks and future potential. Such relationships with the actors often led to a rumor of a love affair⁸⁸ and created good publicity, or sometimes a scandal, for both the actor and the *geisha*. To promote her name, Toyo invested her money on several *kabuki* and new theatre school⁸⁹ actors as a sponsor.⁹⁰

When Toyo was twenty-six years old, she fell in love with a man who was an executive at a rubber company. Since he was unaccustomed to the culture of pleasure quarters, he considered *geisha* as an indecent occupation and the *shamisen* as a licentious instrument.⁹¹ As a result, Toyo quit her career as a *geisha*. As her lover commanded, Toyo began taking *noh* chanting⁹² lessons, widely considered to be a more refined and noble genre of music than *kouta*

⁸⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 24.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 36.

⁸⁸ This is called *ukina*, literally, the floating name.

⁸⁹ It is called *shinpa*, literally, the new groups.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 35-36.

⁹¹ People who are not involved with the pleasure quarters are called *katagi*, literally, a staid person. Ibid., 47- 48.

⁹² It is called *utai*.

or any other small songs involving the *shamisen* and its music.⁹³ After three years, she found out that he was cheating on her with another woman besides his lawful wife, so she ended her relationship with him and came back to Asakusa to pursue the *geisha* career once again.⁹⁴ She was then thirty-three years old (1914).



Figure 3.2 Kasuga Toyo⁹⁵

Toyo continued to work as a *geisha* for another six years, but she switched her career to operate a type of teahouse⁹⁶ named Kasuga-ya where customers and *geisha* organized *ozashiki* banquets

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 52.

⁹⁵ This picture is from the Kasuga-kai official website: <http://kasugakai.jp/toyo.html> (accessed April 28, 2015).

⁹⁶ This is called *machiai*, literally, the waiting and meeting place.

in 1920.⁹⁷ At the time, *geisha* businesses were operated by three separate entities⁹⁸—restaurants,⁹⁹ teahouses,¹⁰⁰ and *geisha* houses.¹⁰¹ At this time, Toyo was in love with her *kouta* teacher, Murako, and spent all her time and effort on him. On top of this, the economy was suffering from the depression so that her teahouse business was always in the red and accumulated huge debt.¹⁰² This eventually led her to skip out by night,¹⁰³ which in fact gave her a chance and incentive to start out her new career as a *kouta* professional.

Soon after Murako's death in 1925, Toyo was invited to perform *kouta* on radio.¹⁰⁴ According to Kimura, this was one of the earliest radio broadcasts of *kouta*.¹⁰⁵ Afterwards, Toyo's *kouta* was frequently broadcast on the radio, and she began to receive many requests from listeners to perform and to teach *kouta* at various sites.¹⁰⁶ Since there was no system for relay broadcasting then, Toyo had to take multiple trips to appear on radio stations outside of Tokyo.¹⁰⁷ Such trips resulted in spreading *kouta* and making more fans and pupils of *kouta* beyond Tokyo areas.¹⁰⁸ Around this time, Toyo began composing *kouta* of her own.¹⁰⁹

In 1928, Toyo abandoned her failing teahouse business, and founded her own *kouta* school, Kasuga-ha, taking the name of her teahouse and becoming the headmaster to teach

⁹⁷ Atsumi, 64 and Kimura 1966, 544.

⁹⁸ It was called *sangyo*, the three industries. Nowadays, it is only operated by the restaurants and the *geisha* houses, so it is called *nigyo* (the two industries) instead.

⁹⁹ It is called *ryoriya*, literally, the cooking store.

¹⁰⁰ As mentioned, it is called *machiai*.

¹⁰¹ It is called *geisha-ya*, literally, the *geisha* store. It is a place where *geisha* is provided room and board.

¹⁰² Atsumi, 68.

¹⁰³ Toyo states that she in fact did return all of her debt after she became the headmaster of her *kouta* school. Atsumi, 106.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 72.

¹⁰⁵ Kimura 1966, 544. The very first radio broadcasting in Japan occurred on March 22, 1925 from a Tokyo Hosokyoku (now NHK) studio temporary built in Shibaura. The studio moved to Atagoyama in July of the same year. According to Toyo, she appeared on the show that musicologist Machida Kasho was hosting (the show's name unknown), which was aired from this Atagoyama studio. Atsumi, 72. Kimura also mentions that Toyo's first radio appearance was with her performance of *tokiwazu* and not the *kouta*. Kimura 2003, vol. 1, 82.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 103-104.

¹⁰⁹ Kimura 1966, 545.

kouta.¹¹⁰ While many students came from all over Japan to study *kouta* at her lesson studio in downtown Tokyo,¹¹¹ Toyo continued to travel to teach *kouta* in major cities from the north to the south of Japan.¹¹² In the 1930s, Toyo also recorded handful of *kouta* on 78rpm discs¹¹³ that were released on the Columbia label.¹¹⁴ In May 1930, Toyo hosted a ceremonial concert to present her *natori* students, who were newly given their professional artistic name, at the prestigious concert hall in the Tokyo Imperial Hotel.¹¹⁵ For this happy occasion, the famous novelist Hirayama Roko dedicated a speech and lyrics for a *kouta*, later known as “*Kasugano* (A Field of Spring Sunlight)” that only the *natori* members are allowed to sing on stage. In 1960, Toyo received the Medal with Purple Ribbon¹¹⁶ for her lifelong achievement and dedication to the arts. In the following year, Toyo established the Kasuga-kai, a non-profit organization, and served as the first chairperson. Unlike many music schools in which the headmaster title is passed down from one headmaster to an immediate kin (normally a son), Kasuga-kai does not have a headmaster but democratically elects a chairperson whenever the previous chairperson resigns. Prior to her death in 1962, Toyo composed more than a hundred *kouta* pieces. These are all compiled in the *Kasuga Kouta-shu* book.¹¹⁷

While Toyo’s name certainly appears in musicological writings on popular songs from the late Edo periods to Taisho periods, their focus mostly goes to Kiyomoto Oyo or a comparison of the characteristics of the genres between *kouta* and *utazawa* (and the scrap songs), dismissing Toyo’s *kouta* and her contributions to the *kouta* genre.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, a *kouta* dilettante,

¹¹⁰ Atsumi, 101.

¹¹¹ It was in Nishi Kuromon-cho, the current Ueno area.

¹¹² They were Kumamoto, Osaka, Kyoto, and Sapporo. Ibid., 103-105.

¹¹³ These were called SP-ban, the standard playing record.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 89-91.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 105.

¹¹⁶ It is called *shijyu hoshō*.

¹¹⁷ The book is only sold at the Kasuga-kai headquarter in Ueno Sakuragi-cho.

¹¹⁸ Tanabe 1963, Kikkawa 1974 and 1989, Sugi 1990, Tsuruya 2004, Chiba 2005, Yamaoka 2008, etc.

Kimura Kikutaro,¹¹⁹ notices the importance of Toyo's works and describes Toyo as the one who inherited Oyo's "exquisiteness" of *kouta* through her students Yokoyama Saki and Murako, and thus, he considers Toyo's *kouta* and her performance style a direct lineage in Oyo *kouta*.¹²⁰ Kimura notes that among the *kouta* lovers, Oyo's *kouta* have been labeled as the classic *kouta*¹²¹ while Toyo's *kouta* as the post-classic *kouta*¹²² or the modern *kouta*.¹²³ Perhaps it may be convenient to classify *kouta* based on the time period in which they were composed when talking about the history of *kouta* in general, however, such periodic divisions do not necessarily reflect the compositional characteristics, techniques, or styles of each *kouta*. Rather than being tied with the periodic components or classifications, I would like to simply present characteristics of Oyo's *kouta* and Toyo's *kouta* first.

3.1.3 Characteristics of Oyo's *Kouta* and Toyo's *Kouta*

Oyo was known to compose *kouta* pieces such as "*Chiru wa uki* (Floating Fallen Leaves)," "*Ano hana ga* (That Flower)," "*Shinobu nara* (Secret Meeting)," "*Nushi-san to* (With You)," "*Kirigirisu* (A Grasshopper)," and "*Samidare ni ike* (A Pond with an Early Summer Rain)."¹²⁴ Some of her songs incorporated old poems or lyrics written by her *ozashiki* patrons or other artists like the famous scriptwriter Kawatake Mokuami.¹²⁵ Her very first *kouta* piece was "*Chiru*

¹¹⁹ Kimura was a former representative director of the Nichirei Corporation and actively served as a performing arts critic in the 1940s to the 1960s. He published a handful of books on *kouta* and served as a trustee of Nihon Kouta Renmei (Japan Kouta League) until the early 2000s. Their website: <http://www.kouta-renmei.org/> (accessed on August 24, 2015).

¹²⁰ Kimura 2003, vol. 1, 234.

¹²¹ It is called *koten kouta*, and this covers the years between 1855 and 1923.

¹²² It is called *jyun-koten kouta*, covering 1923-1945.

¹²³ It is called *gendai kouta*, and it is also called the Showa period *kouta* (*showa kouta*). These cover the years 1926-1989. Ibid., 27-33.

¹²⁴ Kimura 1966, 106.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

wa uki (Floating Fallen Leaves),” which was composed when she was fifteen years old (1855).¹²⁶ Oyo used a poem written by Matsudaira Fumai (1751-1818), a feudal lord and a famous tea master who was a good friend of Oyo’s father, as its base and added the last three lines of 5-7-5 syllables to make it long enough for a song.¹²⁷ The poem depicts the beautiful scenery of autumn leaves falling onto a river and their reflections against the shades of the Takao Mountains under the moonlight.

“*Chiru wa uki*” (Floating Fallen Leaves)

Transliteration	Translation
Chiru wa uki	Some float when they fall
Chiranu wa shizumu	some sink when they don’t fall
Momiji ba no	the maple leaves
Kage wa takao ka	of their shadow reflect on the river
Yamakawa no	among the Takao Mountains
Mizuno nagare ni	as the water flows
Tsuki no kage	over the moon shadow ¹²⁸

When Oyo was seventeen, she composed “*Ano hana ga* (That Flower)” (1857).¹²⁹ The song was inspired by the wedding ceremony of a friend, and how beautiful she looked in her wedding gown.¹³⁰ Oyo was not married then, so the song reflected her envious feelings towards her friend.

¹²⁶ Kimura 1964, 77-78.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 41-45.

¹²⁸ Translation mine.

¹²⁹ Kimura 1964, 79-80.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 45-47.

“*Ano hana ga*” (That Flower)

Transliteration	Translation
Ano hana ga	That flower
Saitaso daga	heard it bloomed
Urayamashi	I envy
Satto Ame motsu	Quick rain
Sono toki wa	when it comes
Washi mo ato kara	I, too, later
Sakuwai na	will bloom ¹³¹

According to Kimura, the flower usually implies a cherry blossom, but here, it can be a daffodil to mean a young girl of marriage age.¹³² Unlike the earlier “Floating” song, which simply described the beautiful scenery of nature, this song uses the beautiful flower as a metaphor to reflect her friend as well as Oyo’s status and emotions.

Many of Oyo’s *kouta* pieces were composed for the *kabuki* stage, and these tended to incorporate melodic passages from famous *kiyomoto* tunes.¹³³ Not only the melodic lines, but the performance style also followed *kiyomoto* practice. This means that Oyo performed her *kouta* with a plectrum just like *kiyomoto* on stage so that it projected loud enough to be heard in the large *kabuki* theatre space.¹³⁴ Interestingly, it was a custom during Oyo’s time to perform *kouta* solo—the singer accompanied himself or herself on a *shamisen*.

On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, Toyo began composing *kouta* when she was still operating the teahouse business in Asakusa in the 1920s. This was more than six decades after the time Oyo composed the *kouta* pieces that I introduced above. Toyo’s compositions included “*Oboroyo ya* (A Hazy Moon Night),” “*Muri na shubi shite* (Unreasonable Circumstances),”

¹³¹ Translation mine.

¹³² Kimura 1964, 79-80.

¹³³ Since it is not my focus to compare Oyo’s *kouta* to Toyo’s *kouta* in detail here, I will have to skip the analysis of Oyo’s *kouta shamisen* parts for now and will have to leave it for another future studies.

¹³⁴ Kimura 1966, 104.

“*Uchimizu no* (Sprinkling the Garden),” “*Aitai yamai ga* (Sickness of Longing to See You),” and “*Ume Ichirin* (A Single Plum Blossom).”¹³⁵ Similar to Oyo’s “Floating” song, there is Toyo’s *kouta* called “*Tsukuda*” that sings about a river and moon. “*Tsukuda*” is the name of port town where the pleasure quarter visitors used to take a boat up the Sumida River to the Yoshiwara. Toyo’s *kouta* was composed sometime around 1940.

“*Tsukuda*”

Transliteration	Translation
Tsuki ga teru teru	The moon shines
Jyugoya Otsukisama	A night with a full moon
Matsu no hagoshi no	over the pine needles
Tsuki ga teru	the moon shines
Iki na nejime no	The sound of stylish <i>shamisen</i>
Tsumebiki wa	with fingernail plucked
Suita doshi no	a couple of lovers
Sashi mukai	face-to-face
Shinobi au yo no	A secret meeting at night
Moyai bune	boats moored ¹³⁶

This song starts out by singing about the beautiful scenery of the moonlight shining over the pine needles. Just like Oyo’s “Floating” song, it looks like it is a song about nature first. However, the word *matsu* can be interpreted in two ways—a pine tree or to pine (waiting). The pine needles are also a metaphor for *lovers* because of their shapes; pine needles grow in pairs, and even when they fall on the ground, they do so together as a pair. “The sound of stylish *shamisen*” and “with fingernail plucked” imply a *geisha* performing a *kouta* song, and it is the description often used for the scenery of the pleasure quarters. “Secret meeting at night,” “face-to-face,” and “boats moored” also invoke the image of a couple making love. So, in truth, this *kouta* is describing a

¹³⁵ Ibid., 545. Liza Dalby’s *Little Songs of the Geisha* (2000) includes translations of “*Ume Ichirin* (A Single Plum Blossom)” and “*Uchimizu no* (Sprinkling the Garden).”

¹³⁶ Translation mine.

scene of a rendezvous between two lovers in the moonlight. Toyo's *kouta*, while ostensibly describing the beautiful scenery of nature, in fact tells a story of romantic love through cleverly composed words imbued with puns and double entendres, so it projects a much more sensuous mood than Oyo's "Floating" *kouta*.

The performance practice of Toyo's *kouta* is also slightly different from Oyo's. Just as it reflected Toyo's background as a working *geisha* in the pleasure quarter, Toyo's *kouta* pieces were meant to be performed in a small *ozashiki* room in front of a few acquaintances, so instead of a large plectrum, which was considered more rigid and formal, the *shamisen* was plucked with a fingernail to produce quieter sounds.¹³⁷ Such sounds were thought to create a more sensual mood and intimate atmosphere than the lively and percussive sounds of the plectrum. Rather than solo, Toyo's *kouta* were normally performed as duets—the singer and the *shamisen* player were separate. Such duet performance practice began in the *ozashiki* where a patron enjoyed singing Toyo's *kouta* with the accompaniment of Toyo's own *shamisen*. Many of Toyo's *kouta* deal with romantic love or lost love and the lives of pleasure quarters, describing the sentiments, fragility, and hardships of being a *geisha*.

3.1.4 Context Surrounding Oyo's *Kouta* and Toyo's *Kouta*

As we have seen so far, there was a slight change in *kouta*'s compositional and performance style between Oyo's time and Toyo's time. Looking at history, Westernization was steadily underway when Oyo was actively composing *kouta* pieces. During this time, any music using *shamisen*—especially the music from the theatres and the pleasure quarters—was considered

¹³⁷ According to Kimura, Yokoyama Saki, Oyo's student and Murako's teacher, was still using the plectrum on her *shamisen* when teaching *kouta* to her students in the 1910s. Kimura 1966, 104.

outdated, vulgar, and immoral and was targeted for harsh criticism from the elites who supported the Westernization efforts.¹³⁸ In particular, many of the songs performed on the *kabuki* stage¹³⁹ were required to have altered lyrics. Such changes were made under the reformation of the theatrics movement,¹⁴⁰ and in fact, this helped *kabuki* to break away from an “indecent” form of *play* to a “noble” form of *art*.¹⁴¹

While school curriculums promoted artistic reformations that favored Western ideals, a handful of opponents emerged who challenged such efforts to suppress the *shamisen* or anything else seen as having to do with the theatre and the pleasure quarters.¹⁴² During Oyo’s time, only a small circle of *kiyomoto* performers, *kabuki* actors, *geisha*, and their patrons supported *kouta* compositional activities and enjoyed *kouta* performances. For them, singing or playing *kouta* was a kind of leisure and hobby. However, after Oyo’s death and the ensuing reformation movement, some groups of writers, artists, politicians, and businessmen found value in the artistic culture of the pleasure quarters and used them as a venue to preserve the cool, stylish (*iki*), gallant, good, and old “Edo sentiment.”¹⁴³ Indeed, these members considered Oyo’s *kouta* as an art form embodying just such “Edo sentiment.” Thus, they wholeheartedly supported the artists who were struggling to preserve the art of *kouta*—the *geisha*—working in and around the pleasure quarters.

At first, some of these patrons simply enjoyed listening to *kouta* songs performed by Oyo’s *geisha* students.¹⁴⁴ Later on, however, it became a trend among them to compose their own lyrics and have the *geisha* compose a melody line to it. These members were called *sui-jin*, a person of *iki* (cool and stylish, with cultivated tastes). Some of these patrons even began

¹³⁸ Kikkawa 1974, 361.

¹³⁹ In particular, *nagauta*.

¹⁴⁰ It was called *engeki kairyo undo*.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 362.

¹⁴² Ibid., 362-363. Kimura 1966, 73.

¹⁴³ Kimura 1966, 73.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

composing both the lyrics *and* music by themselves. For them, it was a sort of fashionable thing to teach one's *kouta* composition to *geisha* and have them perform it in front of their friends.¹⁴⁵ These members were called *tsu-jin*, a person with *tsu* (expertise, connoisseurship).¹⁴⁶ Because such songs served for entertainment at the *ozashiki* and tended to be improvisational in nature, most of them were lost.¹⁴⁷ Only a handful of well-composed songs among these survived through oral transmission, and they became standards in the *ozashiki*. Along with *geisha*, the connoisseurs of *kouta* understood the intricacy of *kouta* and its embodiment of “Edo sentiment,” and they all played a major role in supporting the art of *kouta*. Some of these connoisseurs even dedicated themselves to compiling the standard numbers of *kouta* into multi-volume books.¹⁴⁸

Many of Toyo's *kouta* were made during these later periods. Toyo continued to write lyrics about *geisha*'s passionate love, jealousy, and heartbreak based on her own experiences. She also wrote lyrics dealing with customs or annual events that took place in the pleasure quarters as well as famous characters and love scenes appearing in *kabuki* plays. Whenever notable patrons like Hirayama Roko (novelist), Doi Bansui (poet), Kubota Mantaro (playwright), Ito Shinsui (*ukiyo-e* artist), and Yoshii Isamu (scriptwriter) approached Toyo with poems that they wrote themselves, she supplied the melody and *shamisen* accompaniment. Toyo also approached them in order to compose new *kouta* pieces for the celebration of special occasions or to create stage performance numbers including ones to accompany *koutaburi* dance.

As mentioned, Toyo was versatile in many genres of *shamisen* music, and she inserted melodic patterns used in other genres into *kouta* whenever she composed. It is a type of musical

¹⁴⁵ Hiraoka Ginshu, a vehicle manufacturing business owner, and Yoshida Soshian, a plasterer, were notable patron composers. Kimura 1966, 74.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 73.

¹⁴⁸ For examples, Kimura 1964, 1966 and Yuasa 1915, 1926. Thanks to their hard labors, we can learn about *kouta* and still enjoy them.

borrowing or referencing, but such musical patterns never appeared “as is.” Instead, they were adapted to suit the style of *kouta*. Japanese musicologist Tokumaru Yoshihiko calls this “inter-stylistic intertextuality.”¹⁴⁹ From a performer’s perspective, it is no simple task to decipher such intertextuality because it requires a familiarity with knowledge of a vast variety of songs and plays of the past. This is why my teacher once told me, “Everyone comes to *kouta* at the *very end*.” In other words, *kouta* was known to be a musical genre for connoisseurs who had spent considerable time learning *all* of the existing theatrical music and perhaps become bored with them, so they reached out to *kouta* as a last resort because it had all the “juicy essence” from other genres of music.¹⁵⁰ This means that the *kouta* cannot be properly understood without knowledge of *kabuki* plays, puppet shows, *noh*, and many other theatrical and musical genres. As Toyo stated in her biography, “there is no other music genre as difficult as *kouta*.”¹⁵¹

In Toyo’s book, she describes her point of view towards *kouta*, which can be summarized as follows. *Kouta* was born and raised in the *ozashiki*¹⁵² to accompany a drinking party, so it is music to be performed in a small room and not for large stages. This is why it incorporated a fingernail plucking technique instead of a plectrum for playing the *shamisen*.¹⁵³ It is made to be short and quick since it is impractical to perform anything lengthy and complex while the audiences are drunk.¹⁵⁴ Within its shortness, the lyrics depict a snapshot of one particular human emotion, filled with some tastes of irony.¹⁵⁵ To properly deliver the message of the song to the

¹⁴⁹ Tokumaru 2005a, 131-132.

¹⁵⁰ Kasuga Toyo also mentions this in Atsumi’s book, 141.

¹⁵¹ Atsumi, 144.

¹⁵² It is commonly known as *shijyo-han*, literally, a four and a half *tatami* mat room (about 9 ft x 9 ft).

¹⁵³ Ibid., 138. Kimura also mentions that the fingernail playing technique began sometime in the mid-Meiji period when a small group of connoisseurs favored to practice *kouta* with the *geisha* in the teahouse until late at night, and they had to find ways to play it quietly so as not to bother the neighbors. Kimura 1966, 104.

¹⁵⁴ Atsumi, 139.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 147 and 149.

listeners, *kouta* has to be sung clearly without the affectation of local accents.¹⁵⁶ It must be performed stylishly and urbanely. The *shamisen* should lead the voice, but not the other way around. The voice should not exactly follow the *shamisen* line, but instead, it should be dragged by it. The *shamisen* and the voice should be having a *friendly quarrel* as they move forward.¹⁵⁷ The voice should go *between* the *ma* (rhythm, pause) of *shamisen* so that the message can be delivered well.¹⁵⁸ The quality of singer's voice does not matter. It is the *taste* of voice that matters.¹⁵⁹ The *kouta* must possess a quality of Edo style lightness and cheerfulness as well as a sense of coolness (*iki*) against dignity (*omomi*) and *iroke* against refinement (*hin*).¹⁶⁰ These points are particularly important when analyzing *kouta* pieces, so I shall come back to them in the upcoming analysis section.

When Toyo's biography was written in 1954, *kouta* was becoming popular particularly among the businessmen who used the pleasure quarters as a place to entertain their customers with the *geisha* arts in order to smooth out business deals. A decade before then, Toyo states that a decade earlier she could not play any *kouta* or *shamisen* because of the war.¹⁶¹ As soon as the war was over, she went right back to teaching *kouta* and began to give lessons at Gion or Pontocho, the famous pleasure quarters of Kyoto.¹⁶² According to musicologist Kikkawa Eishi, there was a movement to protect and preserve traditional culture and performing arts, and this was materialized with the issuing of the Cultural Properties Protection Law in 1950.¹⁶³ Kikkawa

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 147-149. Toyo fears that when *kouta* is sung with heavy local accents, it immediately “slides off” into a territory of *minyo* (folksongs) and becomes too “rustic” and “muddy” (unpolished).

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 142.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 149.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 142. She adds that a well-trained voice—the voice that received trainings in *tokiwazu*, *kiyomoto*, *nagauta*, and others—is the ideal.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 141.

¹⁶¹ Toyo barely missed the sequence of big bombings in Tokyo in March 1945.

¹⁶² Ibid., 130-131.

¹⁶³ Kikkawa 1974, 461.

states that the *kouta* fad and the folksong fad¹⁶⁴ were generated as a result of that law as well as frequent broadcasts of *kouta* on radio and TV, the release of Japanese traditional music¹⁶⁵ records, and live concerts and government sponsored music festivals.¹⁶⁶

So far, I have discussed the historical sides of *kouta*, focusing specifically on two important figures, Kiyomoto Oyo and Kasuga Toyo, both of whom were composers, preservers, and disseminators of *kouta*. In the next section, I will look at the hands-on sides of *kouta*—the performance aspects of *kouta*. I will first cover briefly the background of Kasuga Toyo Seiyoshi, who taught me how to sing and play *kouta*. I will touch upon her *kouta* coterie—I shall call it the *kouterie*.¹⁶⁷ Following that, I will describe the *kouta shamisen* and move on to a musical and textual analysis.

¹⁶⁴ They are called *kouta boom* and *minyo boom*.

¹⁶⁵ It is called *hogaku*.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 461-467.

¹⁶⁷ In Japanese, the term *coterie* is *shachu* (literally, inside of company, 社中) or *monka* (literally, under the gate, 門下). Some dictionaries translate *shachu* into *troupe* or *monka* into *disciple*, but they do not necessary fit to the nuance that the original Japanese terms carry. Thus, I decided to use *coterie* to imply the group of people who share the same interests and passion and study under the same master. To reflect *kouta*'s whimsical nature, I use *kouterie* to call the group of students who study *kouta* under the same master.

3.2 PERFORMING *KOUTA*

3.2.1 My *Kouta* Teacher: Kasuga Toyo Seiyoshi

Nishimura Miyoko (her maiden name, 1926-) was born in Asakusa as the sixth (and the first surviving) child of Katsuzo and Fuji.¹⁶⁸ Katsuzo, her father, worked at a *geisha* registration office in the Yanagibashi pleasure quarter and was a frequent visitor of the Yoshiwara located nearby their house. When Miyoko was little, Katsuzo occasionally took her to the Yoshiwara, so she became familiar with many beautiful *geisha* and grew up having great admiration for them. She suffered from infantile paralysis and has been unable to open or close her right hand since. Worrying about her future, Fuji, her mother, sent Miyoko to take long song (*nagauta*) lessons when she was six. Fuji herself used to take *kiyomoto* lessons, and she hoped that playing *shamisen* would somehow help Miyoko's hand—a type of rehabilitation. While Miyoko excelled at the *shamisen*, her grades suffered at school.¹⁶⁹ By the time of her graduation, Miyoko had decided that becoming a *geisha* was the only career path suitable for her. Fuji was against the idea of Miyoko becoming a *geisha* because she believed that, as the common saying goes, “*geisha* is unmarriageable.” Despite her mother's concerns, Miyoko decided to become a *geisha* of her own will. With her superb *shamisen* skills, she skipped the customary apprentice stage to debut as a full-fledged *geisha*¹⁷⁰ with the name of Ayagiku from Hatsune-ya. She was fourteen years old.

¹⁶⁸ The following is a digest of her life story that she told me during my fieldwork. She also has a younger sister and two younger brothers, but one of them died with Japanese encephalitis, one of the legally designated infectious diseases in Japan, in the early 1930s.

¹⁶⁹ Her teachers apparently did not understand her condition and kept on punishing her by labeling as a “lazy” student.

¹⁷⁰ It is called *ippon*.

At this time, long songs were the most popular genre to perform in the *ozashiki*. Miyoko continued to practice long songs under the famous Kineya Eizo and came very close to the stage where she was to receive *natori*, a professional artistic name, from him, but it did not materialize because of the war. Miyoko was sent home after an evacuation order was put in place.¹⁷¹ Since her family was originally from Asakusa, they had nowhere else to go. Asakusa was one of the most densely populated areas, and for this reason, it was one of the most frequently targeted areas for air raids. Miyoko's family lost their home four times because of bombing and fires, and they barely managed to escape from stray bullets and incendiary bombs.

After the war, Miyoko married her childhood friend, Hiroshi, and had two children, Yoshie (my *koutaburi* teacher) and Tetsuo. Her happy marriage did not last long. Her husband failed with his business, became an alcoholic (he drank to ease the pain caused by the injuries he suffered while serving in the military during the war), and was diagnosed with stomach and liver cancer. He died soon after. "All he left was children and debt," Miyoko said. By this time, she had five family members (her parents, children, and herself) to feed, so she had to work as a *geisha* once again. This time, Miyoko served as a *geisha* Komiyo and lived in a *geisha* house in Asakusa, separated from her family.

¹⁷¹ She had a five-year contract with Hatsune-ya, but she had to end it before her contract expired.



Figure 3.3 Kasuga Toyo Seiyoshi¹⁷²

Because *kouta* was becoming popular at the *ozashiki*, Miyoko first commuted to one of the highest ranked Kasuga school studios to take *kouta* lessons. However, her teacher there happened to be very popular and busy, and Miyoko did not have many opportunities to learn *kouta* from her. Instead, she studied *kouta* under Kasuga Toyosei and received the *kouta* name (*natori*), Kasuga Toyo Seiyoshi, from her.¹⁷³ At the *ozashiki*, *geisha* must be able to perform any songs that the customers request, so she continued to take lessons in order to increase her repertoire to include old *kouta* as well as the latest compositions of *kouta*. She mentioned that she had the chance to meet Kasuga Toyo, the headmaster of Kasuga school, very briefly, but Toyo was already of an advanced age and bedridden at the time.

¹⁷² She told me that this photo was taken sometime in the mid-1960s at the costume parade occasion.

¹⁷³ As you can see, becoming a *natori* means to receive the name of “Kasuga Toyo” (the founder of Kasuga school) as well as one’s teacher’s *natori* name. So, my teacher received the entire name of her teacher “Kasuga Toyosei” and added the name of her choice “Yoshi.” I will discuss my *natori* name in the later section.

Even as Miyoko continued to serve as a *geisha* in *ozashiki*, she started her own *geisha* house in 1956, Hatsune-ya, the name borrowed from the first *geisha* house that she used to serve before the war.¹⁷⁴ This time, she took in a *geisha* named Seiko-san who already had a *danna* (patron) and was looking to transfer to a new *geisha* house.¹⁷⁵ As the “mother” of a *geisha* house, Miyoko prepared meals, kimono, hair ornaments, and make-up sets for her and taught her not only the music but also the manners and customs of serving as a *geisha* in *ozashiki*. Meanwhile, Miyoko also received a *kouta* master (*shihan*) title and began accepting students at her home studio.¹⁷⁶ Since Miyoko can play *shamisen* even when she is standing, she gradually began to receive requests to perform *shamisen* on TV. At the age of forty, one of her regular *ozashiki* customers, Mr. Toda, offered to be her patron (*danna*). He was already married and had a family then. After his legal wife died, he asked Miyoko to marry him. He was eighty-eight years old and she was sixty-eight years old at the time of their wedding in 1994. Three years later, he died. Miyoko—I will call her Seiyoshi Shisho henceforth—continues to teach *kouta* to more than twenty students at her home studio.¹⁷⁷

3.2.2 Seiyoshi Kouterie

Seiyoshi Shisho offers *kouta* lessons every Tuesday and Saturday from noon to 6pm at her studio located on the second floor of her house. Students receive one 30-minute lesson every week.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ The original Hatsune-ya did not exist at this time.

¹⁷⁵ According to her, the *geisha* have the right to decide under which *geisha* house to work. They also have the right to transfer to a new *geisha* house when problems occur between the *geisha* and the *geisha* house.

¹⁷⁶ She also holds a master title of *shinnaibushi*, a type of *jyoruri* genre, given from Okamoto Bunya.

¹⁷⁷ One of her former *kouta* students, Mure Yoko, is a writer and published two novels telling the Seiyoshi Shisho's life story in *Komiyo Ne-san Karan Banjyo* (*Geisha Sister Komiyo's Flowery / Stormy Life*, 2002) and *Komiyo Ne-san Aien Kien* (*Geisha Sister Komiyo's Love and Twisted Fate*, 2007), Tokyo: Shueisha.

¹⁷⁸ According to Seiyoshi Shisho, she used to offer three lessons per week, and most students came all three days to practice with her. After many of her students began to bring in their recording devices at their lesson, she noticed

Besides these regular lessons, Seiyoshi Shisho organizes several small recitals every year at an *ozashiki* room in a local restaurant. One is in January to celebrate the New Year and another in July to celebrate the summer festival season. About every other year, Seiyoshi Shisho also hosts a concert at a notable concert hall such as Mitsukoshi Theatre or Tokyo Shoken in Tokyo. About a week before the concert, there is a special dress rehearsal held at a concert hall near her house.¹⁷⁹

At the concerts, students usually perform two songs. The first song is called a “throwing number”¹⁸⁰ and is positioned earlier in the program. The second song is a “main number”¹⁸¹ and happens in the latter half of the program.



Figure 3.4 Performing a “Throwing” Number on *Shamisen* at the Seiyoshi-Kai Concert
(Mitsukoshi Theatre Hall, May 5, 2012)

that they could practice at their homes on their own, so she decreased the number of lesson days to offer. I normally went Tuesdays so that I could also take *koutaburi* lesson afterwards.

¹⁷⁹ It is called *shitazarai* or *osarai-kai*, the rehearsals.

¹⁸⁰ It is called *sute-ban*.

¹⁸¹ It is called *hon-ban*.

As seen in this picture, the stage is normally divided into two small performance stages, with the focus alternating from one side to the other.¹⁸² During my performance, the following group was already setting up behind the curtain on my right. This way, the following group can start performing as soon as my performance is done, saving a lot of time. There are a couple of songs, such as “*Kasugano* (A Field of Spring Sunlight)” or “*Kasuga Sanbaso* (Sanbaso of Kasuga version),”¹⁸³ sung all together as a group. These numbers are called the celebration *kouta*¹⁸⁴ and performed only by Kasuga *natori* members. They usually follow the intermission, during which the small stages are taken apart and the whole floor opened for a larger performance stage covered by a red carpet.¹⁸⁵

At these concerts, many of Seiyoshi Shisho’s friends, who are also Kasuga *kouta* masters, join with their own students to perform on stage. This is a good opportunity for students like myself to listen to the many masters and their students from other kouterie, and having them in our program makes the concert very rich and varied. It also means, however, that the concert program sometimes exceeds seventy or eighty numbers, lasting eight or nine hours—a physically exhausting event. The last few numbers are dedicated to *koutaburi* dance. No tickets are sold at these concerts; students pay to participate in these events. It is customary for students to prepare money gifts as a token of appreciation to Seiyoshi Shisho as well as the stage managers, the professional *shamisen* tuners, and the backstage assistants. Thus, participating in these events can be financially exhausting too.

¹⁸² It is called *futayuka*, literally, the two floors.

¹⁸³ As mentioned in the last chapter, *sanbaso* is an auspicious song performed particularly at the opening of the stages. It originated from *noh* performance, but “*Kasuga Sanbaso*” is closer to the *kabuki* version of *sanbaso*. There are many versions of *sanbaso*.

¹⁸⁴ It is called *goshu-gi mono*, literally, the thing for celebrations.

¹⁸⁵ This is called *hitoyuka*, literally, the one floor.

As I have mentioned, Seiyoshi Shisho holds a master title in Kasuga style *kouta* and is an active member of the Kasuga-kai that Kasuga Toyo founded in 1961. All students of Seiyoshi automatically become members of the Kasuga-kai as well. After a couple of years of *kouta* lessons, Seiyoshi Shisho gives a student permission to take a *kouta* name (*natori*). Holding the *kouta* name is significant in that it assures the student's performance quality and skill and becomes an official statement of the student's dedication to the arts. In March 2012, I was granted my *kouta* name, Kasuga Toyo Yoshiyu.¹⁸⁶ My *kouta* name incorporates "Kasuga Toyo," the name of the founder of Kasuga school, at the beginning, followed by "Yoshi," the name of my immediate *kouta* teacher Seiyoshi, and finally my own name "Yu" from "Yuko." Thus, my *kouta* name is simultaneously carrying two *kouta* masters' names on top of my own.



Figure 3.5 *Natori* Ceremony (Front Left to Right: myself, the current chairperson Kasuga Toyo Eishiba, and Kasuga Toyo Seiyoshi; Back: my parents, at the Kasuga-kai hall, March 13, 2012)

¹⁸⁶ It is 春日とよ吉裕.

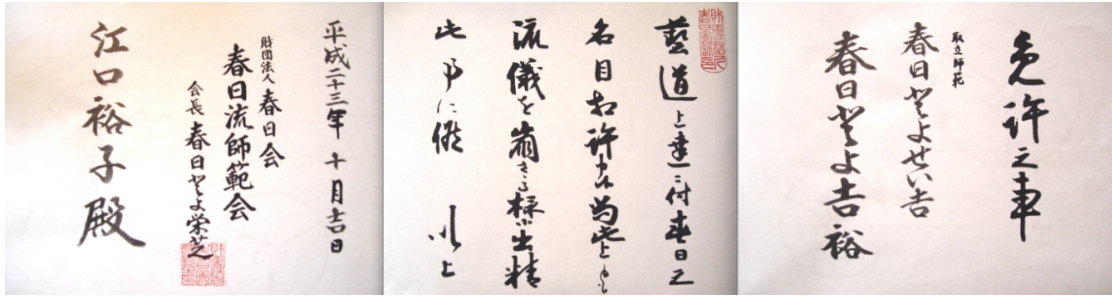


Figure 3.6 *Natori Licensure* (received on March 13, 2012)

After this ceremony, it is customary to publicly announce one's received name on stage. This is called the name announcement ceremony.¹⁸⁷ It is a type of official debut performance. By doing this, all the members of the Kasuga kouterie learn about the existence of the new *natori* member. Following such publicities, the *natori* is officially given the right to perform at public venues.



Figure 3.7 *Nabirome Ceremony* (From Left: myself, Kasuga Toyo Seiyoshi, Kasuga Toyo Yoshihisa, Mitsukoshi Theatre, May 5, 2012)¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ It is called *nabirome-shiki*, the ceremony to publically announce the artistic name.

¹⁸⁸ This stage style is called *hitoyuka*, the one floor.

At this performance, I sang two *kouta* pieces, “*Oboko* (An Innocent Girl)” and “*Suzume no ko* (Baby Sparrow).”¹⁸⁹ Though these pieces were originally written for *ozashiki*, Seiyoshi Shisho decided to add percussion¹⁹⁰ in the background to make it sound more gorgeous, so she hired members of the famous Mochizuki Tazae percussion coterie.¹⁹¹ Since they were located upstage right, behind the curtain, they cannot be seen in this picture. For these special stage performances, Seiyoshi Shisho brings in percussionists, second *shamisen* players,¹⁹² extra dancers, and traditional woodcutter folksingers¹⁹³ to maximize the stage effects.

After the *natori* stage, there is another level called a *shihan* (master). This is an official title that grants the student permission to teach *kouta*. I have not yet reached this level, but according to Seiyoshi Shisho, there will be an exam—to play “*Ume Ichirin* (A Single Plum Blossom)” on a *shamisen* while simultaneously singing—to take in front of the Kasuga-kai chairperson and several other high-ranked Kasuga masters at Kasuga-kai hall in order to pass to the *shihan* level.

3.2.3 On *Kouta* Lesson

Every week during the regular lesson hours, students go in and out of Seiyoshi Shisho’s house without ringing the doorbell so as not to interrupt the lesson in session. Whenever I arrive there for my lesson, I first go straight to Seiyoshi Shisho and give her a quick greeting, then proceed to the waiting room next to the studio.

¹⁸⁹ Here is the video of my performance of “*Oboko*” and “*Suzume no ko*”:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvloQqHuGLQ> (accessed September 1, 2015).

¹⁹⁰ It is called *ohayashi*.

¹⁹¹ Tazae Shisho specializes in the *ko-tsuzumi daiko*, the small hourglass drum. Her coterie members play both big and small hour-glass drums, *taiko* stick drums, bamboo flutes, bells and chimes, and miscellaneous percussive instruments.

¹⁹² It is called *kaede*, literally, an addition or replacement hand.

¹⁹³ It is called *kiyari*. It is considered very auspicious and used to be frequently performed at the wedding banquets.



Figure 3.8 **Seiyoshi Shisho (Spring 2012)**

While waiting, I carefully listen to my colleague's lesson so that I can familiarize myself with songs that I have yet learned. For the first several months, beginners receive lessons of *kouta* vocal parts only. After mastering the vocal part, Seiyoshi Shisho begins to give *shamisen* lessons. Many of the elderly colleagues, particularly male students, consider *shamisen* too difficult to learn, so they only take vocal lessons with her. Normally, the first half of the lesson is dedicated to the vocal lesson and the second half to the *shamisen* lesson.¹⁹⁴ The entire lesson is conducted with both teacher and student sitting in a folded knee position.¹⁹⁵ Any students with leg issues are offered a short cane stool to place in between the floor and their bottom.¹⁹⁶ During

¹⁹⁴ Please see the First Interlude for the *kouta* lesson scene.

¹⁹⁵ It is called *seiza*, literally, the proper way of sitting.

¹⁹⁶ This is called *aibiki*. *Aibiki* literally means a lover's secret meeting. Musicologist Tanabe Hisao mentions that this same stool is normally called a *shiri-ate* (the buttocks placement) in *nagauta* lesson studio. Tanabe 1964, 360. It is interesting to see that many of the items used in the *kouta* space are really playful and erotic.

the *shamisen* lesson, however, students cannot use this stool because the *shamisen* needs to be placed on the flat surface of one's lap.

The *shamisen* lesson usually starts out with the basics—how to sit, how to hold and place a *shamisen* on one's lap, where to push for the pitch spot¹⁹⁷ on the strings, how to tune the strings, and so forth. Just like learning the vocal part, playing *shamisen* requires a careful observation, memorization, and intensive mimicking techniques.

At the beginning of the *shamisen* lesson, Seiyoshi Shisho simultaneously sings and plays one short melodic phrase. At this time, I must memorize the melody and rhythm by ear, but in addition to that, I have to observe as carefully as possible where her fingers go and which fingers she uses to play. Naturally, it is almost impossible to memorize all these details by listening or watching her performance only once or twice.

In the next step, Seiyoshi Shisho slows down and says out loud with which finger and at which pitch spot she pushes on the strings while singing and playing the same phrase. She uses “*tsun tsun*” to indicate plucking of the same string at the same pitch twice, and “*don*” for plucking the low string once. This technique is called the mouth *shamisen*.¹⁹⁸ The terms used in the mouth *shamisen* indicate both the pitch and rhythm of the melodic phrase and the texture of the sound it produces. Seiyoshi Shisho alternatively sings the lyrics and inserts the mouth *shamisen* while playing on her *shamisen*.

After repeating this procedure several times, she then drops the mouth *shamisen* and begins to sing the lyrics along with her *shamisen* melody. When I become comfortable playing the same phrase on my own, Seiyoshi Shisho stops playing on her *shamisen* and simply sings

¹⁹⁷ It is called *kandokoro*, literally, the intuition spots.

¹⁹⁸ It is called *kuchi-jyamisen*.

along with my *shamisen* accompaniment. After repeating this stage a handful of times, she moves on to teach the next phrase by following the same procedure I described above.

Thus, the *shamisen* lesson is not simply about memorizing the melody and rhythmic patterns by ear, but it is also about memorizing them through one's body (fingers, arms, wrists, shoulders, etc.) and body movements (kinesthetic elements that involve learning to control one's muscles in terms of distance, speed, duration, intensity, and angle (dimension)). The latter—I call it “muscle memory”—becomes more prominent in the performance of *kouta* since the form, or *kata*, of playing the *shamisen* is rigidly set so that the player can rely neither solely on her sight nor ear to play the *shamisen*. I will touch more on this matter in the following section.

3.2.4 On *Kouta Shamisen*

In *kouta* performance, a type of *shamisen* called the middle thickness neck is used.¹⁹⁹ The neck and body parts that are made of red sandalwood,²⁰⁰ evergreen oak, or mulberry are suitable for *kouta* since they tend to produce soft and tender sounds.²⁰¹ Normally, the neck can be disassembled into two separate parts, and this is called a connected neck (see Figure 3.9).²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ This is called *chu-zao*. There are two more types of *shamisen*. One is *futo-zao* (thickest neck) type and is normally used for *kyoruri* to produce lower sounds. Another is *hoso-zao* (thinnest neck) type and is used for *nagauta* to produce higher sounds.

²⁰⁰ According to my *shamisen* maker Mr. Shinozaki, the red sandalwood produces the best sound and is most expensive among others. He said that they were imported from India or Myanmar, but because they are designated as one of the endangered plants, it cannot be obtained anymore.

²⁰¹ See more details in Tanabe Hisao, *Nihon no Gakki (Japanese Instruments)* (Tokyo: Soshisha, 1964), 103.

²⁰² It is called *tsugi-zao*



Figure 3.9 The Connected Neck Structure

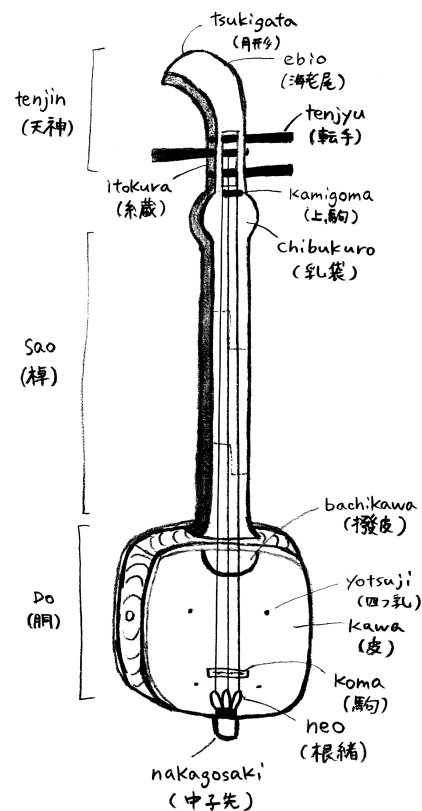


Figure 3.10 *Shamisen* Parts²⁰³

Such construction seems to be adopted from the *biwa*, the four stringed lute.²⁰⁴ This type can be packed away into a 12 x 17 inch case, which makes it easy to carry it around. Seiyoshi Shisho also uses the straight neck type²⁰⁵ and carries it in a long 12 x 40 inch case. Seiyoshi Shisho has said that this long *shamisen* box used to be, and still is, the symbol of *geisha*.

For the body of *shamisen*, cat or dog skins are used to cover the top and bottom surfaces. In general, most *geisha* prefer the sound of cat over dog skin, but it tends to be more expensive than dog skin. Silk strings are also used for the *kouta shamisen* to produce softer sounds, but they are much more sensitive to humidity and temperature changes and easily break compared to

²⁰³ Diagram mine.

²⁰⁴ Tanabe 1963, 195.

²⁰⁵ This is called *nobe-zao*, literally, the solid neck.

synthetic strings like polyester made Tetron or nylon.²⁰⁶ Pegs are made of ebony woods, and they hold three strings, each with a different thickness (see Figure 3.10).²⁰⁷ The thickest string, called the first string,²⁰⁸ rests directly on the surface of the neck. Meanwhile, the mid-thickness string, the second string,²⁰⁹ and the thinnest string, the third string,²¹⁰ rest on the upper bridge²¹¹ made of a metal rod.²¹² According to Tanabe, all three strings used to rest upon the upper bridge, but in the mid-Edo period, the upper bridge was shortened to two-thirds of its length in order to make the first string directly touch the surface of the neck.²¹³ This particular spot where the first string touches the neck is called a *sawari* (touch).²¹⁴ In this very *sawari* spot, there is a shallow cut²¹⁵ to stabilize the string. This cut is there to make sure the first string *digs in* to the surface of the neck (Figure 3.11).²¹⁶

²⁰⁶ These synthetic ones are durable and less expensive, but they are tough on the fingers and do not produce sounds as good as the silk ones.

²⁰⁷ Some other musical genres, like *nagauta*, use ivory for pegs, bridge, and plectrum. Seiyoshi Shisho says that the ivories do not produce good sounds, but they surely look gorgeous at the stage performances.

²⁰⁸ It is called *ichi no ito*, the first string.

²⁰⁹ It is called *ni no ito*, the second string.

²¹⁰ It is called *san no ito*, the third string.

²¹¹ It is called *kamigoma*, the upper bridge.

²¹² The third string (*san no ito*) is more prone to break during the performance because not only it is very thin, but it is heavily used in many *kouta* pieces.

²¹³ Tanabe 1964, 109.

²¹⁴ It is interesting to see that some of musicologist's works do not specify where exactly this *sawari* spot is in their diagrams, but instead, they explain its mechanism, its general areas, and the sound it produces as the *sawari* (Tanabe 1964, 104; Kishibe 1982, 74; Malm 2000, 215). Mr. Shinozaki, the *shamisen* maker, pointed out that the very spot where the upper bridge is missing is the *sawari* spot, and Seiyoshi Shisho too told me the same, thus, I followed their instructions here.

²¹⁵ It is called *kirikomi*.

²¹⁶ In fact, Seiyoshi Shisho often puts a tiny folded paper underneath of the first string at this *sawari* spot because the friction of the first string is too strong to shave off the wood which creates not-so-desired sounds for performing *kouta*.

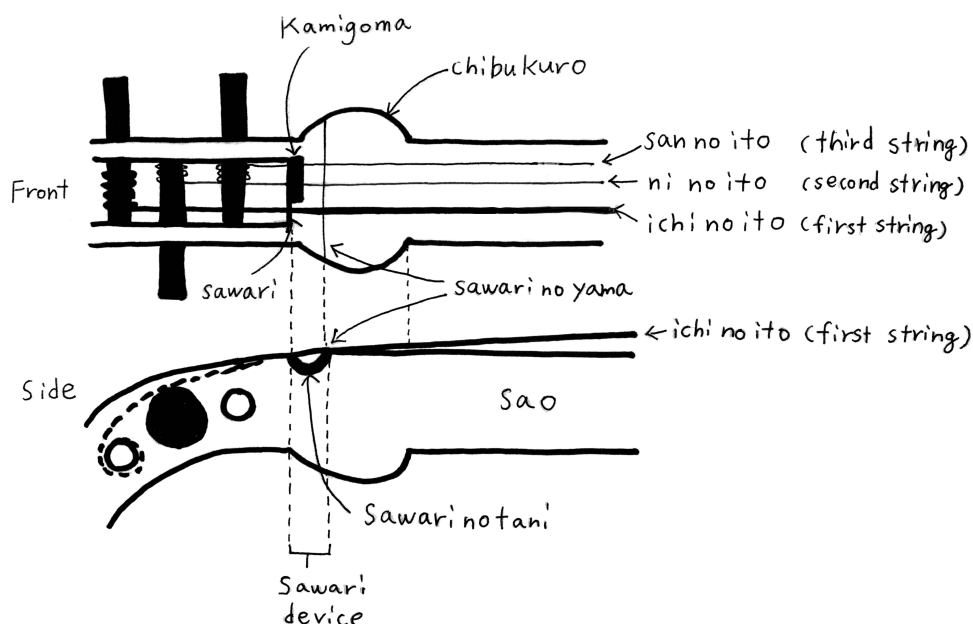


Figure 3.11 The Upper Bridge and The *Sawari* (Touch)²¹⁷

From the *sawari* spot on, there is another spot that the first string touches before it rests on a bridge²¹⁸ on the main body part. This is called the mountain of touch.²¹⁹ Between the *sawari* spot and the mountain of touch spot, the surface is slightly curved so that the first string stays in the air. This section is called the valley of touch.²²⁰ When the first string is plucked, it vibrates up and down within this dented area, slapping against the bottom of the valley. This creates a buzzing sound. Such a buzzing sound is present even when the first string is not plucked. For example, when the second and third strings are plucked in pitches that are in the fourth, fifth, or octave above from the first string, they also vibrate the first string and create buzzing

²¹⁷ Diagram mine.

²¹⁸ This is called *koma*.

²¹⁹ It is called *sawari no yama*, the mountain of touch.

²²⁰ It is called *sawari no tani*, the valley of touch.

reverberations.²²¹ So, the *sawari* creates an interesting sound effect, but having it also makes it easier for the player to tune all three strings. The buzzing sound, the “touch” spot, and the segment between the mountain and the valley are known collectively as the *sawari* (touch) or the *sawari* device²²² and considered one of the unique characteristics of the *shamisen*.

According to Lorraine Sakata, the buzzing sound is caused by the lower harmonics rather than the upper harmonics because the upper harmonics tend to cancel each other out.²²³ She also reports that too much of a buzzing sound cancels both upper and lower harmonics. On the other hand, acoustics scholar Ando Yoshinori reports that the *sawari* device is there to transfer the energy created by plucking the string, creating lower harmonics, to the first string, which now vibrates to create upper harmonics.²²⁴ Such a transfer of energy helps to sustain the upper register sounds, and this is considered the *lingering sound* effect that is similar to the sound cymbals make.²²⁵ Ando also reports that the *sawari* device produces non-harmonic overtones as well. One of the causes is the friction of the bridge against the skin surface of the body, and another is the irregularity of the string’s vibration. The latter happens because when the string is plucked, it first vibrates sideways, horizontally to the surface of the skin, but after awhile, the string begins to vibrate up and down, vertically to the surface of the skin. In other words, when the direction of string vibration shifts from the horizontal to the vertical, the string begins to move in an oval-

²²¹ See more details in Tokumaru Yoshihiko, “*Syamisen and Sawari*,” in *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 1 (1987), 15-17.

²²² It is called *sawari kino*, the touch device.

²²³ Lorraine Sakata, “The Comparative Analysis of Sawari on the Shamisen,” in *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 10, no. 2 (May, 1966), 141-152.

²²⁴ Ando Yoshinori, “*Nihon Gakki no Onkyoteki Tokusei* (Acoustic Characteristics of Japanese Instruments)” in *Nihon no Ongaku, Asia no Ongaku (Japanese Music, Asian Music)*, vol. 5, edited by Gamo Satoaki and Tokumaru Yoshihiko (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1989), 49-65.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

shaped circle, and this creates the irregular frequencies.²²⁶ Thus, the sound of *sawari* is indeed composed of mixtures of complex and irregular vibrations of the strings and the *shamisen* body.

While science helps to explain the mechanism of the *sawari*, it is yet to be answered as to why the Japanese preferred this sound or continued to value it. Though *why* may never be answered, there is proof that the Japanese truly preferred to have the sound of *sawari*, and this can be seen in a type of *shamisen* specifically invented to enhance its effect. This type of *shamisen* has a separate piece of wood molded inside of the *chibukuro*²²⁷ part at the position of the mountain of touch, and this wood can be further pushed out to touch the first string by twisting a small metal screw attached on the backside (see Figure 3.12). This feature is called the eastern touch.²²⁸

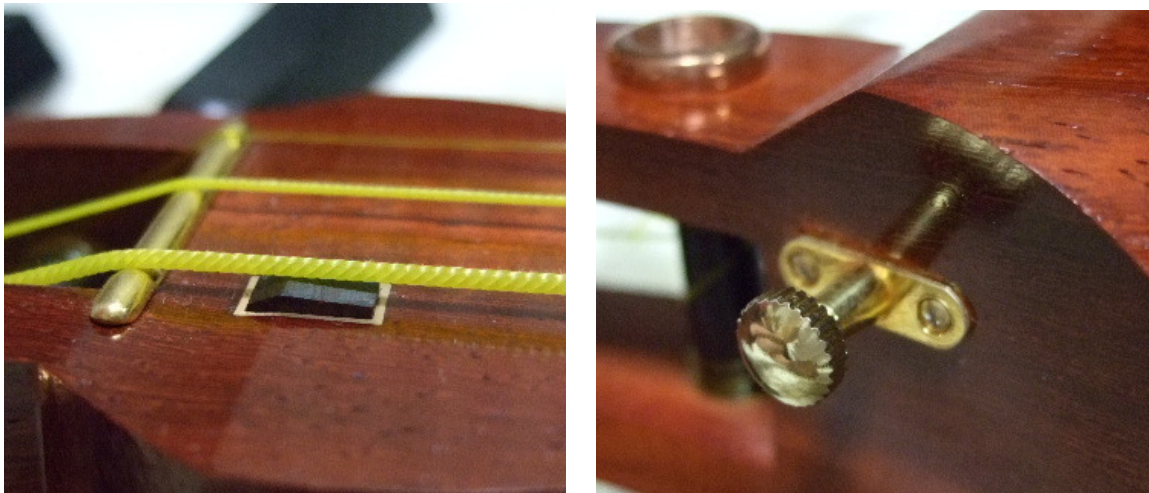


Figure 3.12 The Eastern Touch (Left: the front side; Right: the back side)²²⁹

²²⁶ Ibid., 63.

²²⁷ It literally means the breast bag.

²²⁸ It is called *azuma sawari*. *Azuma* is an old way of calling the eastern part of Japan.

²²⁹ These pictures are from the following website: http://urushi.konjiki.jp/syamisen/20080824_1.htm (accessed August 30, 2015). Since the left side photo is zoomed in so close to the “eastern touch” part, it may be difficult to see all three strings, but they are all there. Also, this photo shows the real texture of the first string, which is made of several silk strings twisted together to make one thick and strong string. See more details on the production of *shamisen* strings in the Marusan Hashimoto Company’s website: <http://www.marusan-hashimoto.com/products/process.html> (accessed October 14, 2015).

This type of *shamisen* is frequently used not only in *kouta* but in other *kabuki* song genres like *tokiwazu* and *kiyomoto*. According to Alison Tokita, the *kiyomoto* school originally created the eastern touch feature in 1893 in order to have better control of the *sawari* sound without worrying about pitches or the tension of the first string upon tuning it.²³⁰ Tokita posits that the *kiyomoto* musicians invented this device because the high-pitched *kiyomoto* singing makes it difficult to obtain the *sawari* effect.

Besides the *sawari* buzzing sound, the sound quality produced by plucking the strings with one's index finger is also an important part of *kouta shamisen* aesthetics. As I have mentioned, Kasuga Toyo remarked that her style of *kouta* is to be performed with a fingernail on the right hand rather than a plectrum. Just as we saw in her song "*Tsukuda*," the sound of fingernail plucking (*tsumebiki*) has become a synonym for a *geisha* performing a *kouta* in the pleasure quarter. However, Seiyoshi Shisho explained to me that it is actually a fingertip playing, in particular, she used the word finger-flesh (*nikubiki*) for this playing technique. This is because, she said, the fingernail produces too much of a "clinking" noise when it hits the string so that it is not preferable. The finger-flesh, on the other hand, makes a mild, soft, and more *sensuous* sound that is better suited to a small *ozashiki* performance setting.

The three silk strings rest on a bridge²³¹ made of mulberry (see Figure 3.13). The thickest first string rests on the deepest groove, which can be seen on the furthest right in this picture. Before playing the *shamisen*, the musician puts a finger hanger²³² on the left thumb and index finger (see Figure 3.14). With this, the left hand can smoothly slide along the *shamisen* neck, which makes it easier and faster to move fingers from one pitch spot to the next.

²³⁰ Tokita 1999, 81.

²³¹ It is called *koma*.

²³² It is called *yubikake*.



Figure 3.13 The Bridge



Figure 3.14 The Finger Hanger

On the topside of the *shamisen* body, a body hanger²³³ and a body hanger rubber²³⁴ is placed so as to prevent the right arm from slipping off the *shamisen*. Also, a knee rubber²³⁵ can be placed on the right thigh so that the *shamisen*'s lower body part stays stable (see Figure 3.15).

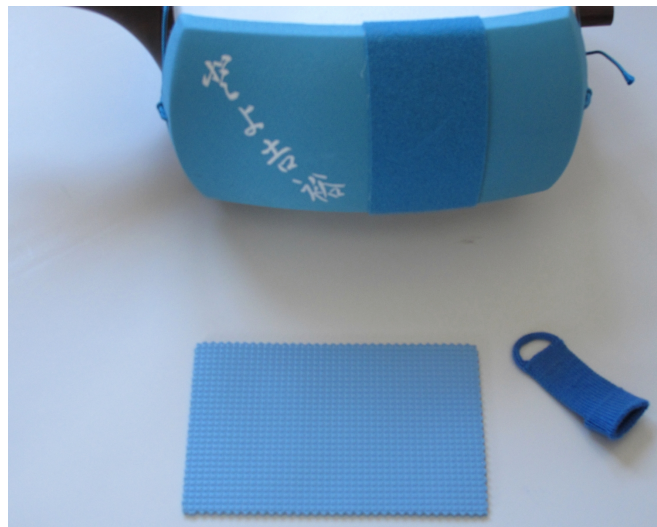


Figure 3.15 The Body Hanger, The Body Hanger Rubber, The Knee Rubber, and The Finger Hanger

²³³ It is called *do-gake*.

²³⁴ It is called *do-gake gomu*.

²³⁵ It is called *hiza-gomu*.

On this body hanger, you can see my *kouta* name “Toyo Yoshiyu” written. It is there to easily distinguish my *shamisen* from others’ at the studio, rehearsal venue, or concert backstage. While students must bring in their own accessories like the finger hanger or the knee rubber, it is optional to bring one’s *shamisen* to every lesson at Seiyoshi Shisho’s studio.

Seiyoshi Shisho provides two *shamisen*, called the lesson *shamisen*,²³⁶ for students to use at her studio. One of them has some markers attached to the location of pitch spots on its neck, and the other is without markers. Since there are no frets on the *shamisen* neck, finding the right pitch spot is very difficult and takes many years of practice. While having the markers on the *shamisen* neck is helpful, the form of playing the *shamisen*, called *kata*, is strictly set—while keeping the back straight, the player’s eyes must be fixed, looking at a 45-degree angle down to the floor. This means that the player is not supposed to look at one’s *shamisen* neck as she plays. This is why Seiyoshi Shisho discourages beginner students from using the markers, even at the start of their training.²³⁷

Without such added markers, the only markers, hardly visible, are seams on the wooden neck. As seen in Figure 3.9, since the connected neck parts form a half-sided zigzag shape, the seam of the first string side and the third string side do not produce a straight line. At the seam located closer to the upper bridge (*kamigoma*), the former spot (first string side) corresponds to the E and the latter (third string side) to the F# in the main key tuning (B-E-B).²³⁸

²³⁶ It is called *keiko-jyamisen*.

²³⁷ It eventually becomes a habit to keep looking at the *shamisen* pitch spots, and such bad habits cannot be easily removed after awhile.

²³⁸ This is called *honcho-shi*. There is another seam located closer to the body of the *shamisen*. With this seam spots, one on the first string side is the E, which is too high to be rarely played, and the one on the third string side is the G.

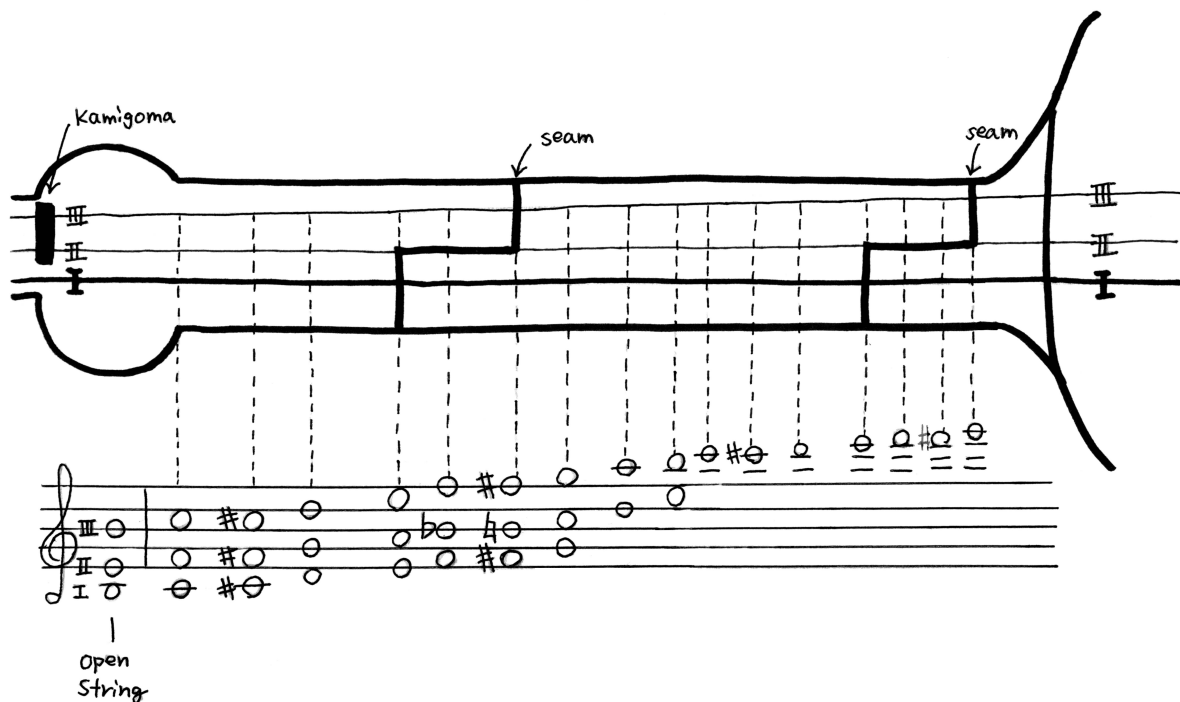


Figure 3.16 The Pitch Spots on The Main Tuning (B-E-B)²³⁹

There are two other frequently used tunings, the raised second²⁴⁰ and the lowered third.²⁴¹ While the main key tuning is set in the order of the first to the third strings with B-E-B (the third string is an octave higher than the first string), the raised second tuning is B-F#-B, and the lowered third tuning is B-E-A.

The pitches used in the main tuning, B-E-B, are relative, not fixed. In other words, when I sing a *kouta* written in the main tuning, B-E-B is too low for my voice range, so instead I use

²³⁹ Diagram mine.

²⁴⁰ It is called *ni-agari*.

²⁴¹ It is called *san-sagari*.

C-F-C.²⁴² This tuning is called *yon-hon* (the fourth) because C is the fourth pitch above the A on a tuning whistle (see Figure 3.17).²⁴³



Figure 3.17 The Tuning Whistle

Kouta songs need not be performed in a single key fixed at composition; the key may be modified to suit the singer's vocal range. The silk strings on a *shamisen* are susceptible to the environment, and this affects the tuning as well. Playing *kouta shamisen*, therefore, always starts with the tuning of the *shamisen*, usually to a tuning whistle. It takes many hours of training to be able to simply tune the *shamisen*.²⁴⁴ When accompanying a *kouta*, the *shamisen* player has to first ask the vocalist which “*hon*” (key) she or he would like to sing in and tune the *shamisen* accordingly. All *kouta* songs compiled in the *Kasuga Kouta-shu* indicate the tuning at the top of each song. Some advanced level songs have a tuning change in the middle of the song, providing

²⁴² My voice range used to be higher that I used the *roppon* (the sixth), D-G-D, key. This meant that I had to tighten up the highest (and thinnest) third string up to its maximum capacity, which made it much vulnerable.

²⁴³ It is called *choshi-bue*.

²⁴⁴ This is the reason why we hire the professional *shamisen* tuner at our *kouta* concert events.

a nice contrast in the mood of the song, but indeed, it is tricky to change the tuning while continuing to play the piece.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the origins of *geisha* by tracing the long stream of female performing arts, focusing specifically on their connections to the pleasure quarters as well as on their sexually charged dances as seen in the myth of Ame no Uzume, the Okuni's and Playful Women's *kabuki*, and the male *kabuki* before the Westernization and Civilization movements in the late 1800s. Moreover, such dances came to be teamed up with the accompaniment of a *shamisen*, and many of the popular small songs, too, used *shamisen* accompaniment and also came out of the pleasure quarters. Earlier in this chapter, I explained that certain aspects of the *shamisen* and *shamisen* performance, such as the sound of "touch (*sawari*)," the finger-*flesh* plucking technique and its sound, the name of *shamisen* parts like the breast bag (*chibukuro*), and the cane stool called "a lover's secret meeting," tend to have names that evoke sensual images, and this is certainly reflected in the images of *kouta* as well as *geisha* that have been deeply associated with the notion of *iro*. This was especially because *kouta* and *geisha* grew out of the pleasure quarters where their purpose was to provide the arts (*gei*) that revolved around *iro* in order for customers to refresh their souls through experiencing the *play* (*asobi*) at the banquet; such custom was rooted in ancient rituals that were meant for entertaining the deities.

We have seen that elements of *iro* are omnipresent in many Japanese arts such as literature, poems, and woodblock prints. The performing arts also followed this convention in that elements of *iro* are molded in their arts (*gei*), particularly in songs, dances, and plays. To demonstrate this point, I briefly used Kasuga Toyo's composition of "*Tsukuda*" as an example to

show that *iro* is engraved into the *kouta* text. In her discussion of the characteristics of *kouta*, Toyo mentioned that *kouta* places importance on a sense of “Edo sentiment”—the sensuous *iroke* quality. Such quality is indeed valued and stressed in performances of *kouta* and *koutaburi* since both of my teachers continued to correct my performance by saying “do (perform) it with more *iroke*.”

The observation of the word *iroke*, however, revealed that while it implies the meaning of *iro*, the expression itself does not always place the *iro* at its core, but rather, distances it. *Iroke* is the *atmosphere* of love-sex, and while it is sometimes visible and audible, at other times it is invisible and inaudible, and it tends to appear when a performer is in slight motion rather than static. To understand what *iroke* is through the sounds and movements of *kouta* performance, I must look at forms that are both perceptible and imperceptible, including silences, pauses, and *unexpressed* expressions. In the following section, I will analyze two *kouta* pieces to observe the “how” of *iroke* in *kouta*.

3.3 ANALYSIS OF TWO *KOUTA* PIECES

There are several types of *kouta*—celebratory *kouta*,²⁴⁵ ceremonial *kouta*,²⁴⁶ theatrical *kouta*,²⁴⁷ *kabuki kouta*, and stage *kouta*²⁴⁸—that tend to be more cheerful and lively in nature and tend to incorporate more than several singers and *shamisen* players for their performance. Many of the *kouta* that I learned from Seiyoshi Shisho belong to the *ozashiki kouta* type. This type of *kouta* is to be performed in a small *ozashiki* room where a *geisha* sings softly as if she were talking to herself. While there are many *kouta* that I would like to analyze and discuss, I have chosen two songs, “*Mizu no Debana* (As the Water Flows)” and “*Uchimizu no* (Sprinkling the Garden),” for the purpose of *iroke* analysis and interpretation. The first song is one of the most popular *kouta* that all beginners learn because of its simplicity, but because it is so simple, it is considered one of the most difficult songs to perform well while fully expressing *iroke* through its performance. Similarly, the second song is equally challenging and is known to be one of the masterworks by Kasuga Toyo, reflecting *geisha*’s beauty, sentiment, and *iroke* in its words and melody.

As I mentioned in the first chapter, written representations of *kouta* exist in two separate media: a lyric sheet for the singer and a tablature sheet for the *shamisen* player.²⁴⁹ These only supply part of the information needed to perform a *kouta* piece, dismissing the vocal or *shamisen* melodies and rhythm. In order to have a better picture of each *kouta* piece, especially to understand the inconspicuous *iroke* expressions in such an ephemeral and fleeting music, I first transcribe the pieces using the Western notation system to make them visible and fixed. In the

²⁴⁵ This is called *iwai kouta*.

²⁴⁶ This is called *shugi kouta*.

²⁴⁷ It is called *shibai kouta*.

²⁴⁸ It is called *butai kouta*.

²⁴⁹ Although the singer is allowed to place the lyric sheet while singing, the *shamisen* player is not allowed to place the tablature sheet.

process of making the transcriptions, I relied on one particular recording of each song sung and played by Seiyoshi Shisho as the basis.

It is important to note, however, that the transcriptions that I present here are not exact renderings of her performances on these particular recordings. The transcriptions reflect the general nature of the two pieces. I made them after hearing multiple renditions of Seiyoshi Shisho's performance of the two pieces, for I came to realize that each recording I was listening to had slight variables (pitch, length of pause, etc.) that depended to some extent on variations in her health or the condition of her *shamisen* (humidity, temperature, etc.) at the time the recordings were made. In addition, after countless times of practicing the pieces on my own, I began to realize that there were some elements that were absent in some of the recordings but which later became apparent when talking to Seiyoshi Shisho during my lessons. As William Malm observed in *noh* and *kabuki* music, "[one] must not regard the notation or transcription of a composition as 'the piece.' Rather, see it as *one version*..."²⁵⁰ Thus, I must point out that my transcriptions reflect my own interpretation of Seiyoshi Shisho's multiple versions of the two pieces, and the finished transcriptions must be taken as *versions* of the two pieces. If I asked Seiyoshi Shisho to play the pieces now, she would more than likely play almost 99% as it is written in my transcriptions, but the remaining 1% may change.

Like Malm in his transcriptions, I have used the conventional *shamisen* tuning of B for the first string as the main tuning. This means that the pitches appearing in my transcriptions do not exactly match the pitches that Seiyoshi Shisho sings in the recordings; her pitches tend to be a whole step²⁵¹ higher since she was trying to sing the songs in the pitches that fit within my vocal range. I used the meter two-four (two quarter notes per measure) to transcribe the pieces.

²⁵⁰ William Malm, *Six Hidden Views of Japanese Music* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 51.

²⁵¹ Or, sometimes it is between a half and a whole step (a three-fourth?) higher.

Doing so makes it easier for me when I discuss a particular pitch or a phrase found in a certain measure, but I must also note that such meter as well as bar lines distract from the fluidity of *kouta*. It should be pointed out that the beat, tempo, and pitches in playing these songs are much more flexible in nature than the way they appear in these transcriptions.

It is also important to point out that the names of *shamisen* playing techniques and the phrases of mouth *shamisen* (*kuchi-jyamisen*) appearing in the next section are all provided by Seiyoshi Shisho. The analyses and interpretations are all based on my own observations. Normally, Seiyoshi Shisho and I practice one small passage of *kouta* repeatedly during a lesson period. At that time, she tells me that “the way you use your voice, it is not right” or “no, do it with more *iroke*” without explaining fully what exactly is wrong with my performance. She sometimes simply shakes her head right and left to send me a signal of “no, it’s not good enough” while continuing to play or sing the same passage. Once I “get it,” she nods while telling me “*So-so* (good or yes)” to show her approval before moving on to the next passage. “Getting it” basically means that my performance is getting close to the way she performs. From this, I learned that imitating or mimicking is a key component of the *kouta* learning process. In addition, Seiyoshi Shisho uses the words *tadashii oto* (correct sounds) or *ii oto* (good sounds) for the performance that expresses *iroke*, and she gives me approval accordingly, so the expressions of *correct* and *good* sounds also signify *iroke*-possessed, beautiful sounds in *kouta*.

Over the past years, I have made countless mistakes singing or playing each *kouta* passage without expressing enough *iroke* during the lesson period. Through such mistakes, I first learned “what *does not* express *iroke*” in *kouta* performance, and this truly helped me to understand and acquire knowledge of “what expresses *iroke*” through *kouta* singing and *shamisen* playing. Readers may find my analysis too specific at first, but because the expression

of *iroke* is mostly so subtle and vague that even knowledgeable audiences easily miss it, I have felt the need to address as many details as possible here. Since there have been no single studies that have attempted to thoroughly explain and analyze *iroke* expressions in *kouta* pieces from the performer's perspective, I use this opportunity to fill such gaps.

3.3.1 *Mizu no Debana* (As the Water Flows): The Text and Context

The composer of the *kouta* “*Mizu no Debana* (As the Water Flows)” is unknown. *Kouta* connoisseur Hoshino Eiji speculates that this song was composed sometime in the late 1810s in Kyoto, and its original lyrics were changed several times before reaching Edo. So, it was considered a type of scrap song, but later it came to be adopted into the *kouta* genre.²⁵² All *kouta* beginners learn this song as an introduction. Seiyoshi Shisho mentioned that this song includes all the basic yet very important techniques in both the vocal and *shamisen* parts.

²⁵² Hoshino Eiji, *Hogakutte Donna Mono: Seigaku-hen (What is Japanese Music?: Vocal Music Edition)* (Tokyo: Engeki Shuppansha, 2004), 332.

“Mizu no Debana” (As the Water Flows)

Transliteration	Translation
Mizu no debana ²⁵³ to	As the water flows
Futari ga naka wa	our relationship
Sekare ²⁵⁴ awarenu	cannot be broken
Mi no inga ²⁵⁵	it is our fate
Tatōe donata no	Even if someone
Iken demo ²⁵⁶	opposes
Omoi	I never
Omoi kiru ki wa	I never give up
Sara ni nai	on you ²⁵⁷

It is written in a typical poetic 7-7-7-5, 7-5-7-5 syllabic verse structure. The first *omoi* (I never)²⁵⁸ in the seventh line merely serves to add emphasis to the eighth line of *omoi kiru* (I never give up); thus, it is not counted. The lyrics are approximated to “our love, which is very strong like the water flows from the spring, withstands the forces that try to come between us. Though others say we should not be together, I will never give up on you (I will stay with you).”²⁵⁹ When I asked Seiyoshi Shisho about this song, she described a scene in which “a young *geisha* is alone in a room longing to see her lover, but because of her fate, meaning that she and her lover are in different social classes, people around them would not allow her to be with him. Even though she faces significant hardships, she will not give up on her love for him.” So, the lyrics project a lonely *geisha* who is suffering between love and duty, agonized by her inevitable fate. In the last chapter, I mentioned that the notion of sex (*iro*) is often tied to images of water or

²⁵³ *Debana* is a tricky term in Japanese. Liza Dalby interprets it as “flowers floating down a stream,” “fragrance of the first brew of tea,” and ultimately “fragrant tea,” but Nakauchi Choji explains it as “it is a state where a young man and a woman at their age of full youth and energy and love each other thoughtlessly attempt to run away with each other.” Dalby 2000, 72. Nakauchi, 126.

²⁵⁴ *Sekare* means “to be interrupted.”

²⁵⁵ *Inga* is pronounced *i-n-ga*, so there are three syllables. There are five syllables for “*mi no inga*” in the fourth line.

²⁵⁶ *Iken* is pronounced *i-ke-n*, so there are three syllables. There are five syllables for “*iken demo*” in the sixth line.

²⁵⁷ Translation mine.

²⁵⁸ The noun *omoi* literally means a thought, love, a desire, and feeling.

²⁵⁹ Approximation mine.

wetness. In this *kouta*, the lyrics use a metaphor of “flowing spring water” as the couple’s ceaseless love. On the surface, it evokes the beautiful scenery of nature. Underneath, however, it is describing a couple that is physically in a deep relationship just like the “soaking couple” in the spring picture in the previous chapter (on page 114). Thus, the concept of *iro* (sex) is deeply ingrained in the lyrics. Next, I will show how the concept of *iro* is expressed—as in *iroke*—through the performance of this song.

3.3.2 *Mizu no Debana* (As the Water Flows): Transcription²⁶⁰

Mizu no Debana
(As the Water Flows)

Hon Cho-shi (B-E-B)

Voice

mp Mi zu no - - - de ba na - to -

Shamisen

V

(o) fu ta ri - - - ga - - - na - ka - - wa

S

V

Se ka - re -

S

V

a - wa - re - - - nu Mi no -

S

@

@

²⁶⁰ Transcription mine.

2 Mizu no Debana

31

V (o) i - n - ga *mf*

S

@

39

V Ta to e - do na ta - no i - ke - n - de

S

46

V mo O mo - i *mf* O mo i ki ru ki - (i) -

S *mp*

@

54

V wa mm - sa ra - ni - na - i - (i)

S

@

V -- right index finger plucks upward
 ♭ -- left index finger plucks downward

@ -- shamisen player's call
 ♫ -- vocalist takes a breath

3.3.3 *Mizu no Debana* (As the Water Flows): Analysis and Interpretation of Voice and Shamisen

The piece starts out with a sequence of *shamisen* octave Es. This is a typical starting and ending phrase of *kouta* and is known as “*chin-ton-shan*” based on the mouth *shamisen* sound.²⁶¹ The voice comes in simultaneously with the *shamisen*’s “*shan*” (the simultaneous octave Es), which is called the *piling up* technique (*morikomi*, which literally means to *pile up* on top of the last *shamisen* phrase).

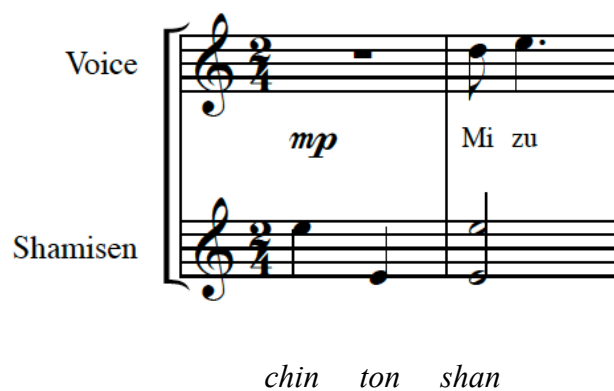


Figure 3.18 The Starting “*Chin Ton Shan*” Phrase and The Piling Technique (*morikomi*) (mm.1-2)

The *shamisen*’s “*chin-ton-shan*” octave Es are there to signal the vocalist’s starting pitch. In fact, the vocalist’s first note *avoids* the E and instead comes in with the D.²⁶² This is a type of *dodging* (*zurashi*) technique. While the *shamisen* player warmly *invites* the vocalist to join in with the Es, the vocalist responds to such an invitation by showing a little *hesitation* to it. It is as if the

²⁶¹ Since many *kouta* starts out and ends with this phrase, the *kouta* songs are commonly referred to the “*chin-ton-shan*” among the musicians. The “*chin-ton-shan*” phrase can also be found in the cadence (mm. 60-61).

²⁶² The leading tone to the E.

vocalist and the *shamisen* player are in love, but they cannot show their affection straightforwardly—just like saying “no” to mean “yes” to one’s lover. Singing and playing in unison does not necessarily convey *iroke*, and thus, the dodging technique is considered an expression of *iroke* and is observed frequently in *kouta* performance.

The vocalist must sing the first phrase, about seven measures long, with one breath. When reaching the A at the end of the phrase in measure 8, the vocalist has to take a breath quickly to prepare for another seven-measure long phrase (see Figure 3.19). Taking a breath in such a short period of time tends to make the vocalist inhale air so vigorously that it ends up producing a noise similar to a hiccup. Making audible inhaling or exhaling noises is considered impolite and represents the vocalist’s physical incapacity,²⁶³ thus, it does not express *iroke*. The vocalist must breathe through her nose so as to avoid creating such noises.

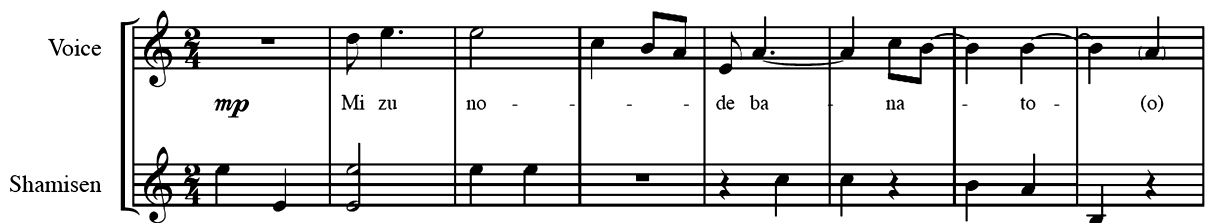


Figure 3.19 The First Vocal Phrase (mm. 1-8)

The A, which marks the end of the first vocal phrase, is a type of temporal leading tone that is not supposed to be sung clearly (therefore, it is in the parenthesis). It is there to make it easy for the vocalist to sing the next phrase. In this first phrase, both the vocal and the *shamisen* melodies

²⁶³ In particular, based on the old saying, the sound of exhaling, or a sigh, is considered a type of metaphorical “plane” that shaves off one’s life (i.e. as seen in the last chapter, one’s breath is long thought as the embodiment of life itself as in the *ki* (or *ke*, 気) of *iroke* for *iki* (息), the breath), thus, it is inauspicious.

follow a descending E-C-B-A sequence, but their melodies have different rhythmic structures, and each pitch comes in at a different time. This is also considered a type of dodging technique.

The second vocal phrase also follows a similar melody as the first phrase, A-E-C-B-A, while the *shamisen* melody provides a somewhat similar melodic contour (see Figure 3.20). When the vocalist sings “*futari-ga* (our)” in measures 9 to 11, the melody follows an A-C-B sequence, but the pitches can be flexible by adding a melisma to each note. When the voice has to reach the high E in measure 12, it tends to come out, though unintentionally, louder. This is considered *not* expressive of *iroke*. It possesses more *iroke* when it is sung with a reserved and well-controlled voice (in terms of both pitch and loudness).



Figure 3.20 The Second Vocal Phrase (mm. 9-15)

For the vocalist, the A played on the *shamisen* in the measure 13 serves as a cue to indicate the pitch on which the vocal phrase will end. It is as if the *shamisen* player is telling the vocalist, “I’m going there,” and then the vocalist replies with “oh wait, I’m coming too!” to reach the destination close to each other. However, once the vocalist reaches such destination, the *shamisen* player immediately heads to somewhere else.

From measures 14 to 20, the *shamisen* takes over to play a phrase similar to the first phrase of E-C-B-A, but this time, it is an octave higher as if it attempts to match the register of the voice, and it goes down to the sequence of F-E at the end (see Figure 3.21). When playing the B to the high E sequence in measure 16, the left index finger on the *shamisen* glides on the third string. Since such subtle gliding notes sound similar to sexual moaning, they are considered to possess *iroke*.

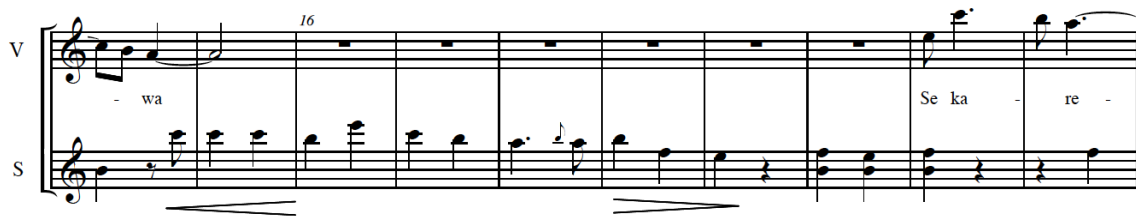


Figure 3.21 The First *Shamisen* Solo (mm. 14-20)

Notice that there is a grace note (B) in measure 18. This is not a simple ornamentation, but in fact, it is a very important note. Right here, while the left index finger continues to push the A pitch spot, the ring finger quickly but softly holds down the B pitch spot. This technique is called the *striking* finger (*uchiyubi*). This B pitch itself comes out almost with an inaudible sound, but it is surely there to add a soft and suggestive nuance to the melody, creating an atmosphere of *iroke*.

In measure 21, the vocal line returns (see Figure 3.22). This time, the *shamisen* gives a cue by playing the E one beat earlier, giving the vocalist a clue as to her starting pitch. In addition, the *shamisen* player calls out “Ha!” or “I-yo!” to indicate when the vocalist needs to start the next phrase (marked with @). It is as if the *shamisen* player has already showed off her

skill in the previous solo section, so here, the *shamisen* player gently invites the vocalist to show her singing skill. The vocalist replies to this challenge in the next passage.

22

V

S

Se ka - re -

Figure 3.22 The Big Leap (mm. 22)

The third vocal phrase starts with a big leap from the E to the high C (this is the highest pitch in the vocal line in the entire piece). For the vocalist, it is a challenging spot as well as a place to *show off* her singing skill. The lyric here is “*sekare*,” which means “to be interrupted.” It is almost as if the melody is “interrupted” by this big leap from the E to the high C. Again, reaching to the high C tends to strain one’s vocal chords and an inexperienced singer may sing it louder than usual. So, to make it sound more *iroke*, the vocalist needs to control the volume to maintain a modest level.

The descending vocal phrase of C-B-A-F-E-D in measures 22 to 25 should be sung with some slight embellishments. The key to singing this phrase with more *iroke* is actually *not* to overdo it.

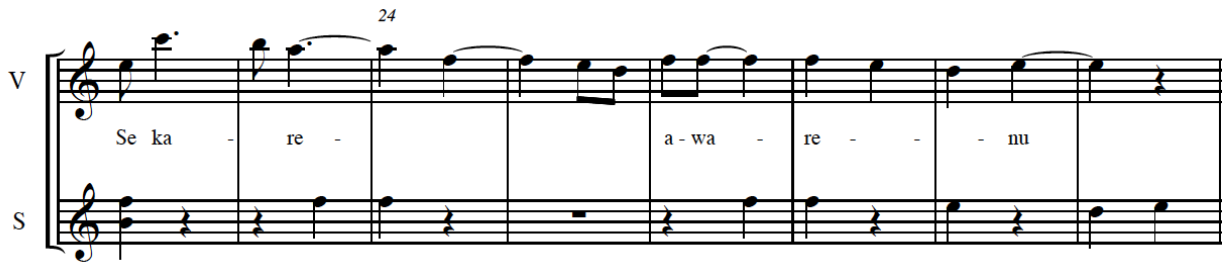


Figure 3.23 The Third Vocal Phrase (mm. 22-29)

Here, the *shamisen* plays the only minimal accompaniment so that the vocalist's melody can resonate well. It is there to provide just enough pitches to keep the vocalist on course melodically. It is as if the vocalist is telling the story and the *shamisen* player is listening, gently chiming in with musical "nodding."

In measure 29, the *shamisen* player can call out "*Ha!*" if the vocalist takes too long to finish the previous phrase (see Figure 3.24).²⁶⁴ The *shamisen* player acts as a conductor to keep the tempo of music in order to create a mood suitable to the piece. Performing the *kouta* too fast or too slow is considered inappropriate, and thus, not expressive of *iroke*. In particular, performance of *kouta* at too slow a tempo is considered sluggish, dull, or lazy (*manobi*) and is to be avoided. A tempo that is somewhere between fast and slow is perfect for expressing the right amount of *iroke*. As seen in the *shamisen* line here, the melody now shifts to an ascending sequence of D-E-F, and this guides the vocalist's melody to a sequence of D-F-E in measures 30 to 31. Again, the *shamisen* and the vocal lines follow almost the same melodic contour, but they are not exactly the same—it is another dodging technique. They *avoid* playing together as if to show a cool attitude to one another, hiding their strong affections and attractions to each other.

²⁶⁴ This is not present in this particular recording, however.

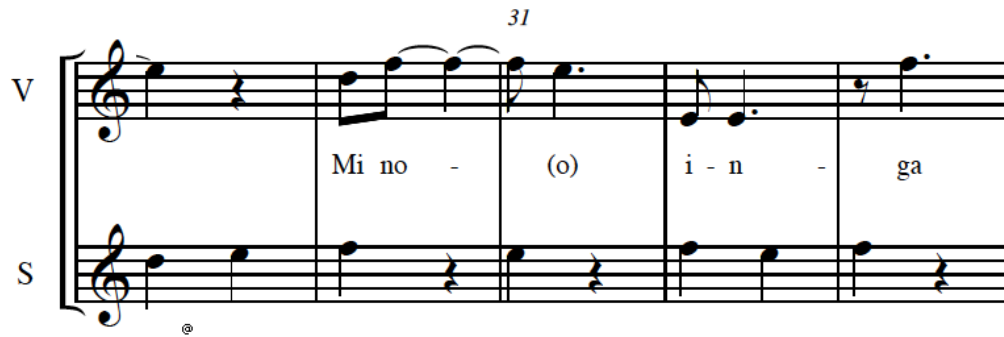


Figure 3.24 The Fourth Vocal Phrase (mm. 30-33)

In measures 32 to 33, the word “*inga*” means fate, sometimes translated as cause and effect. Based on the Buddhist doctrine, cause and effect is thought to come around in cycles. After the sequence of high D-F-E melody in the vocal line of measures 30 to 31, a sudden drop to the low E represents a temporary mournful mood in measure 32. However, the melody comes right back to the high F as if to bring us back in measure 33 to face the reality of *geisha*’s ordinary life that is still full of uncertainty and ephemerality. Such melodic shifts—from the high F to the low E and back to the high F—symbolize the cyclic nature of reincarnation itself. In the context of this song, the *geisha* knows her inevitable fate—that her wish, to be together with her lover, will never come true. She is helpless and simply has to accept her sad fate. With this in mind, the vocalist has to sing the word “*in-*” with the low E by compressing her energy and emotions into the core, but when singing the word “*-ga,*” such energy and emotions have to be released, not gushingly, but quietly and softly, almost as if it is expressing a feeling of resignation. Such moments of tension-release is considered a type of *iroke* expression too.

From measure 34, the *shamisen* now plays a “reincarnation” sequence similar to the one in the vocal line earlier (see Figure 3.25). This time, the high F-low E-high F sequence occurs with a more elaborate melodic contour, adding the extra low F and low D to make the F-E-D-E-

F-E passage that almost sounds like a kind of ornamental “turn.” The *shamisen* melody stays around the low E as if it predicts the *geisha*’s life will be doomed to be stuck in the eternal cycle of karma. Here, the *shamisen* part features two different types of plucking techniques. In measures 34 and 35, the right index finger plucks the strings upward to make much softer sounds compared to the regular downward fingertip plucking, providing a change of timbre. This is called the scooping (*sukui*) technique (which I indicate with the symbol V).

The image shows a musical score for measures 34-38 of the Second Shamisen Solo. It consists of two staves: a vocal staff (V) and a shamisen staff (S). Measures 34 and 35 show the scooping technique (V) on the shamisen staff. Measure 36 shows the flicking technique (♯) on the shamisen staff. Measures 37 and 38 show a melodic line on the shamisen staff. A dynamic marking of *mf* is present in measure 38. A wavy line with a circled cross symbol is at the bottom.

Figure 3.25 The Second *Shamisen* Solo (mm. 34-38)

In measure 36, on the other hand, the left index finger plucks the string downward to play the low E, creating louder, open, and long lasting sounds. This is called the flicking (*hajiki*) technique (indicated with the symbol ♯). Such different plucking techniques provide contrasting sounds, adding some spice to the melody that could be otherwise too simple and bland. They also express musically the unpredictability of *geisha*’s life. Both the vocal and *shamisen* parts reach their lowest pitch (low E or low D) here. Again, the *shamisen* player calls out “*Ha!*” or “*I-ya!*” right before the vocalist is to come back in at measure 38. This call also serves as a mood changer, encouraging the vocalist to forget about fate or karma and to return to this musical

world of *iroke*. The high E and F# remind the vocalist of her starting pitches in the next vocal phrase.

In measures 39 to 43, both the vocal and the *shamisen* melodies follow exactly the same pitch sequences, however, they continue to have different rhythmic patterns and come in at different times (see Figure 3.26). In measure 45, too, the *shamisen* plays the B-E sequence to anticipate the vocalist's ending phrase. Again, the dodging technique is observed here.

The image shows a musical score for measures 39 to 46. It consists of two staves: a vocal staff (V) and a shamisen staff (S). The vocal staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are: 'Ta to e - do na ta - no i - ke - n - de mo O'. The shamisen staff also has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The melody follows the vocal line's pitch sequence but with different rhythmic patterns. A dynamic marking 'mp' is present at the end of the vocal line.

Figure 3.26 The Fifth Vocal Phrase (mm. 39-46)

In measures 46 to 48, the vocalist sings “*omoi* (I never),”²⁶⁵ which is the same word as the beginning of the sixth vocal line (see Figure 3.27). Though this word is not counted towards the 7-syllable verse structure, it plays an important role as a lead-in to the climax (the sixth phrase) of the song. Since the peak of the vocal line comes right after this, this first “*omoi*” has to be sung with a more reserved and moderate voice, which expresses the *iroke*. During these measures, the *shamisen* line is absent. However, this absence can be efficiently used to move the left hand to the right pitch spots to play the high A-B-C sequence in measure 48. Again this sequence anticipates the vocalist's upcoming line, almost creating a lead-in (or a nudge) for the vocalist to open up and unfold her innermost feelings. The vocalist replies accordingly.

²⁶⁵ It literally means *feelings*.

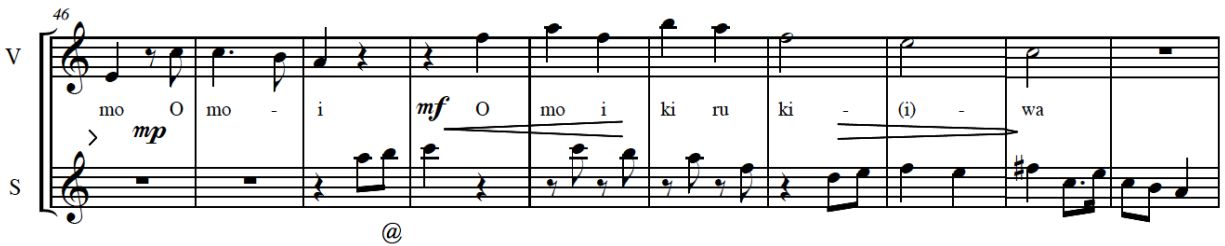


Figure 3.27 The Sixth Vocal Phrase (mm. 49-55)

In measure 51, the vocalist reaches up to the B (the second highest pitch appearing in this song) to emphasize the meaning of the lyrics “*omoi kiru* (I never give up).” This is the climax of the song, and the vocalist is expected to sing this passage relatively louder than any previous vocal passages. The key to sing it full of *iroke* here, however, is *not* to over emphasize it by allowing the volume or the tempo to fluctuate too much. In particular, when singing the word “*kiru*” in such a high pitch (B), the vocalist’s head tends to tilt sideways in order to squeeze out the voice. It is natural for the vocalist’s body to react in such way, however, such movement—indeed any moving or shifting of the body while singing a *kouta* piece—is generally considered not *iroke*. In measures 50 to 55, both the *shamisen* and vocal lines again follow the descending B-A-F-E-C sequence with the dodging style. In measures 54 to 55, the *shamisen* plays a quick descending (C)-E-C-B-A sequence, which seems to be a recurring motif that appeared in measures 3 to 7, 16 to 18, and 41 to 42. It is interesting to note that every time such a motif appears, it becomes rhythmically shorter, which requires a faster and more precise playing technique for the *shamisen* player. In fact, this reminds me of the *jyo-ha-kyu* structure in which the tempo or the density of the piece becomes faster or thicker by going through the beginning (*jyo*), the middle

(*ha*), and the ending (*kyu*) stages. This is frequently observed in the *gagaku* or *noh* performances.²⁶⁶

In measure 56, the vocalist sings “*mm...*” which may be something equivalent to “uh-uh” or “no.” This is inserted there to emphasize the meaning of “never give up” in the upcoming phrase. Singing “*mm...*” seems easy at first, but doing so in a convincing manner is indeed challenging. The key to singing this passage well is to visualize *geisha*’s circumstances and feelings and keep them in one’s heart when executing the “*mm...*” The “*mm...*” is a nonlexical morpheme, however, it carries more meaning than the words themselves. Passages like this are considered very expressive of *iroke*.

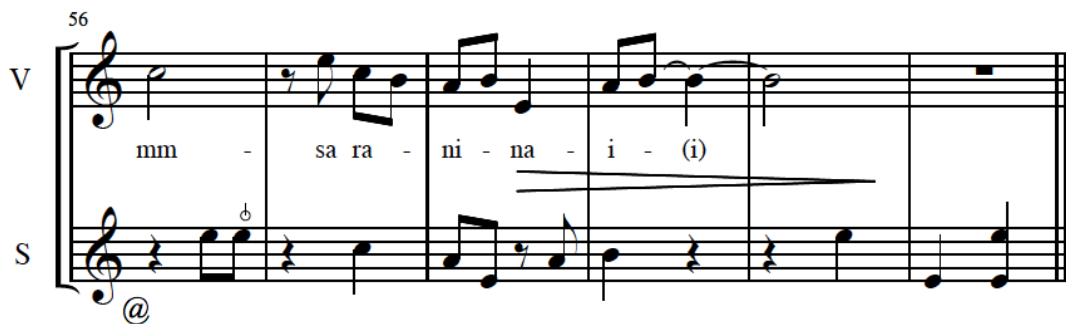


Figure 3.28 The Seventh Vocal Phrase (mm. 57-60)

In measure 56, the *shamisen* gives two Es to signal the vocalist her beginning pitch in the next phrase. Again, the vocal and *shamisen* lines follow a similar melodic contour, but they never match exactly—another dodging technique. It is as if the two surely know each other’s feelings, but in order to show coolness or toughness, they do not give in so quickly. They intentionally

²⁶⁶ See more in Robert Provine, ed., “Philosophy and Aesthetics,” in *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music: East Asia, China, Japan, and Korea*, vol. 7 (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001), 546-554.

miss each other's points and play around each other in order to test the other's feelings. In a sense, two lines are musically *flirting* with each other.

The lyrics here—"sarani nai (not, never)"—carry a strong meaning of absolute negation. Expressing *iroke* through this passage, however, requires singing it without any hesitation or emphasis. In other words, rather than loud, bold, or blatant expressions, the quiet, subdued, and unobtrusive execution of the voice is valued as an embodiment of *iroke*. The piece ends (mm. 60-61) with the *shamisen*'s "*chin-ton-shan*," the same passage as seen in the beginning of this piece. Here, the *shamisen* player pauses for a moment after playing the second note (low E) to mark the end of the song. This pause is also important in that it has an effect of leaving the lingering sound in the musical space and the mind.

3.3.4 Summary of *Iroke* Expressions in *Mizu no Debana*

Expressions of *iroke* (the atmosphere of love-sex) can be observed through the vocalist's well-controlled execution of pitches, volume, tempo, and vocal timbre. Unlike the loud, well-projected, vibrato-laden singing style of the opera stage, *kouta* places importance in a voice that is not too loud, too heavily ornamented, or too fast or slow. *Kouta* vocals should be performed in a restrained and reserved style, and the singer's body must be steady and still. It is as if the vocalist is muttering or talking to herself, projecting a sad, lonely, and somewhat gloomy mood that is more introspective in nature. In particular, the sounds of breath (both inhaling and exhaling) are considered non-*iroke*. Unlike Marilyn Monroe's famous "Happy Birthday, Mr. President" breathy way of singing,²⁶⁷ *kouta* expresses *iroke* through a more quiet and constrained

²⁶⁷ See her performance on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4SLSlSmW74> (accessed October 15, 2015).

way of singing. This means that the elements of *iro* are not embodied through overt expressions that imitate the actual sounds made during the process of love-sex acts (like Monroe's way of breathing), but they are suggested through nonlexical morphemes and are hidden *in between* sounds and pauses in the singing.

In the *shamisen* part, too, expressions of *iroke* are not in the loud and fast playing, but in the subtle and soft execution of pitches: in grace notes, in the gliding scale, and in delicate changes of timbre. Some playing techniques, such as the striking finger, the scooping, and the flicking, are commonly observed in the long song (*nagauta*) or *kiyomoto* narrative music genres, and it seems that the *kouta shamisen* incorporated such plucking techniques from these prior genres.

According to long song specialist Kikuoka Hiroaki, flicking the string (with the left finger) provides three types of sounds—a soft sound, a clear sound, and a strong sound.²⁶⁸ In long song *shamisen* playing, the strings are normally struck with a plectrum while it simultaneously slaps against the surface of the *shamisen* body, producing lively and percussive sounds. In the midst of such melodic sounds, Kikuoka states that the flicking technique provides different timbres, helping to change the mood of the song. It is almost like a violin's pizzicato playing in the middle of a lyrical and melodic movement. The scooping (upward pluck) of the string, on the other hand, normally occurs when the player tries to bring the plectrum back to its original position after he or she has plucked down the string. It never occurs by itself. Combinations of both of these techniques (plucking strings in the order of down, up, flick movements) are mostly used for playing fast tremolo passages, and this is kinesthetically the most efficient way of playing. Since *kouta shamisen*, however, does not use the plectrum, there is not much difference of timbre between the sounds provided by the regular fingertip plucking and the flicking or

²⁶⁸ Kikuoka Hiroaki, *NHK Textbook: Shamisen no Okeiko (Shamisen Lesson)* (Tokyo: NHK Shuppan, 1980), 31.

scooping techniques. However, because *kouta* is performed in a small *ozashiki* room, such small differences in timbre still add tremendously to the changing of the song mood. Thus, these varieties of plucking techniques continue to be used for the expression of emotion, in particular for conveying the sense of *iroke* that guides listeners to reach the state of *floating world*.

In fact, *iroke* is not just hidden behind the vocal and *shamisen* parts individually. It is expressed through the interactions between vocalist and *shamisen* player. As I have shown, the *shamisen* frequently provides the beginning or ending pitch that leads the vocalist's melodic phrase (see, for example, measures 1-2, 13, and 21). The *shamisen* player also gives calls like “*I-ya*” or “*Ha*” to signal the vocalist's entrance (see measures 21, 29, and 38). It might appear that the *shamisen* player is assuming a leading role (“the boss”), and the vocalist is simply following her orders (“a servant”). However, in most *ozashiki kouta* settings, the *geisha* is the one who plays the *shamisen* and her patron (*danna*) is the one who sings the vocal part so that it is actually meant to represent a loving couple's relationship through the performance itself. Looking closely at the transcription, it becomes obvious that the vocalist and *shamisen* player are performing very similar melodic and rhythmic lines. Yet, with the dodging technique, the pitches are not necessarily performed at the same time. The two lines mostly weave in and out to support each other without playing in unison. Musically, the interaction between the couple—the vocalist and *shamisen* player—suggests flirtatious acts and their *potential* love affair, creating a sweet, dream-like atmosphere of *iroke*. The world in which these *potential* loving couples live and their love-sex relationship can be achieved is exactly where the *floating world* is located. Since the two lines are never performed together in unison due to the dodging technique, it can be understood that the music is actually not portraying a scene of unity, or sex (*iro*), itself. It is

simply *suggesting* its possibility, that does not become reality. This is the nature of *iroke*—it is suggestive, but it is not real. It is a type of musical aesthetic *play*.

I will next consider another piece “*Uchimizu no* (Sprinkling the Garden),” which is known as a masterwork of Kasuga Toyo, to see how *iroke* is expressed. I will continue my discussion of *iroke* in *kouta* again after the analysis of the next piece.

3.3.5 *Uchimizu no* (Sprinkling the Garden): The Text and Context

This is a joint work between Sato Ryuzo (1885-1961),²⁶⁹ who wrote the lyrics, and Kasuga Toyo, who wrote the music, and is dated around July 1932. According to the *kouta* dilettante Kimura Kikutaro, this was Sato’s very first *kouta* lyrics composition.²⁷⁰ On July 12, 1932, there was a big scandal that filled the air and the front page of newspapers. A famous pianist, Kondo Hakujiro, and a *geisha*, Chiyoume, committed a double suicide at his apartment. It was reported that a rich patron offered to marry Chiyoume in exchange for paying her debt to free her from her *geisha* contract, and Kondo, her lover, did not have enough money to prevent it from happening. They chose death in hopes of staying together in the afterlife. This story surely resonates with Chikamatsu Monzaemon’s famous play *Double Suicide of Amijima* (1720). Several days after this incident took place, Sato met Chiyoume’s mother by chance at a small restaurant in downtown Tokyo where she worked. The mother told him the details of the story in tears. Upon hearing the story, Sato was astounded that such a beautiful and tragic pure love story could still exist in modern society, and he decided to write a poem based on it.

²⁶⁹ He is an older brother of the famous novelist Satomi Ton, whose works treat lives and customs on the pleasure quarters and was an advocator of the freedom of marriage (against the conventional arranged marriage). Unfortunately, not much is known about Sato Ryuzo himself.

²⁷⁰ Kimura 2003, 388-390.

When Kasuga Toyo first received Sato's poem through a mutual friend several weeks later, she was not aware that it was composed based on Kondo and Chiyoume's double suicide story. In Toyo's recollection, she confessed to one of her students that when she composed this song, she was reflecting upon her brokenhearted experiences with her own lover (and her *kouta* teacher) Murako.

“*Uchimizu no*” (Sprinkling the Garden)

Transliteration	Translation
Uchimizu no	Sprinkling water (in the garden)
Shitataru kusani	on the soaking grass
Hikaru tsuyu	the dewdrops are sparkling
Koi ni kogarete	Longing for love
Naku mushi no	insects are crying out loud
Koe wo aware to	How pitiful their voices
Kiku hodo no	as I listen
Samishii wagami ni ²⁷¹	such a lonely state
Tare ga shita	Who made me this way? ²⁷²

It is written in a 5-7-5-7 syllabic verse structure. The lyrics are approximated to “The dewdrops are sparkling on the grass after I sprinkled the garden. The insects are crying out for love—Who made me this woman so lonely that she even feels pity on crying insects?” The poem ostensibly describes a scene of a beautiful garden, grass dripping pure water, and cute, chirping insects.

Looking at this poem deeper, however, it includes several words that have double meanings. The first is the water (*mizu*) and the soaking (*shitataru*), which imply something moistened, young, and fresh and often used to describe risqué images. The second is the dewdrops (*tsuyu*), which also connote tears or the ephemerality of life. The third is the insects (*mushi*), which represent

²⁷¹ *Sa-mi-shi-i* is technically a four-syllable word, but when it appears in a poem, the last “i” is counted together as in *sa-mi-shii*, so it becomes a three-syllable word. Thus, *samishii wagami ni* in the eighth line becomes a total of seven syllables.

²⁷² Translation mine.

the life of a *geisha*—a small, powerless, lonely, and pitiful woman. Like an insect, no one even hears her when she is crying. While singing of the beautiful scenery of the garden and nature, the song actually addresses *geisha*'s—in this case, Chiyoume and Kasuga Toyo—miserable lives.

From Toyo's perspective, the meaning of this song goes even deeper. Sprinkling water in the garden (or a little stone-paved pathway) is a custom that is done before the arrival of guests, a symbol of purification. This song suggests that her preparation of water sprinkling was in vain because the guest, with whom she was in love and was longing to see, did not arrive. Her love, devotion, thoughtfulness, and kindness—everything was in vain. Her lover is the one who repays her love with his cruelty by not visiting her or by not marrying her. Within such a short song, the lyrics are filled with multiple layers of meaning. Such meanings are hidden so cleverly behind the words that even Japanese natives will easily overlook them.

Interestingly, this song of sorrow and tragedy came to be praised by *geisha* and *kouta* enthusiasts particularly because it sings about the sadness and hopelessness revolving around woman's love. Miyamoto Kenji explains that the Japanese tend to find the essence of beauty in such hopeless situations, stating;

Every human has the fate that one must live towards *death* after receiving one's *life*. Because there is *death*, *life* becomes noble... in that, Japanese find the beauty in rusted, ruined, and the most hopeless situations—in other words, people twist all the negative situations around to take it positively, and in that process, people find the essence of beauty.²⁷³

As Miyamoto points out, true beauty is less likely to be found in a happy story or joyful moments, but rather, it is in the negativity and cruelty of life and reality, and this song indeed embodies such elements in the lyrics and music.

²⁷³ Translation mine. Miyamoto Kenji, *Nihon no Biishiki (Japanese Aesthetics)* (Tokyo: Kobunsha, 2008), 212.

3.3.6 *Uchimizu no* (Sprinkling the Garden): Transcription²⁷⁴

Uchimizu no

(Sprinkling the Garden)

Music by Kasuga Toyo

Lyrics by Sato Ryuzo

Hon Cho-shi (B-E-B)

Voice

Shamisen

mp u chi - mi - zu -

@

V

S

no - (o) Shi ta - ta - ru - (u) -

@

V

S

ku - sa - ni (i) Hi ka - ru - (u) Tsu - yu - - -

V

S

(u) *mf* Ko - i - ni - - - (i) Ko - ga - re - te

@

↑ -- pitch slightly higher ↓ -- pitch slightly lower

²⁷⁴ Transcription mine.

2 Uchimizu no

38

V Na - ku - (u) Mu - shi no - (o)

S

48

V *mp* Ko - e - wo - A - wa - - - re - to - (o) Ki -

S

@

57

V ku - - - ho - do - no *mf* Sa - mi - shi - wa - ga -

S

66

V mi - ni - Ta re - (e) *f* e - - - ga *mp* shi - ta -

S

75

V (a)

S

V -- right index finger plucks upward
phi -- left index finger plucks downward

@ -- shamisen player's call
, -- vocalist takes a breath

3.3.7 *Uchimizu no* (Sprinkling the Garden): Analysis and Interpretation of Voice and *Shamisen*

Unlike “As the Water Flows” which opened with the *shamisen*’s “*chin-ton-shan*” phrase, this song starts out with an elaborate *shamisen* phrase. This is called, literally, the front play (*mae-biki*), which can be translated roughly as the prelude (see Figure 3.29).

Hon Cho-shi (B-E-B)

@

Figure 3.29 The *Shamisen*’s Prelude (mm. 1-5)

In measure 2, the grace note of B is played with the striking finger (*uchiyubi*) technique. As discussed in the analysis of the previous piece, this B is a scarcely audible sound. It is played by the following manner—while the left index finger holds down the A pitch spot on the third string, the ring finger gently touches the B spot on the same string. Since the finger does not pluck the B pitch, it comes out barely audible. Though it is almost inaudible, it is considered an important pitch since it creates a soft, subtle, *iroke*-possessing atmosphere. In measure 3, the second E is played with the flicking (*hajiki*) technique in which the left index finger plucks the string downward (with the symbol ♯). The flicking technique produces a clearer and more vivid sound compared to the regular right hand plucking sound, so it provides a good contrasting

sound here. For the vocalist, these double Es provide a helpful reminder of the pitch on which she will enter. When the melody reaches the F# in measure 5, the *shamisen* player calls out “Ha!” or “I-ya!” cueing the start of the vocalist’s phrase (marked with @) and providing a soft musical conversation (call and response) between the vocalist and *shamisen* player that creates a sweet ambience surrounding the performers.

In measure 6, while the *shamisen*’s F# pitch still resonates, the first vocal phrase starts out a whole step lower on E (see Figure 3.30). As I have shown in the previous piece, this is a type of dodging (*zurashi*) technique; the vocalist does not quite sing in the same pitch as that sounded by the *shamisen*—it is as if each line is trying to maintain and stress its individual character. The vocal line immediately goes up to the F# to match the *shamisen* line, but this time, the *shamisen* plays the F# with the scooping (*sukui*) technique to make it sound quieter (with the symbol V).

The musical score for Figure 3.30 consists of two staves: a vocal line (V) and a shamisen line (S). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. The score spans measures 6 to 12. The vocal line begins in measure 6 with a melisma 'u chi - mi - zu' and then 'no (o)'. The shamisen line begins in measure 6 with a melisma 'u chi - mi - zu' and then 'no (o)'. The shamisen part has a scooping technique (sukui) marked with a 'V' in measure 6. The vocalist part has a cueing mark '@' in measure 6. The score is in 2/4 time and G major.

Figure 3.30 The First Vocal Phrase (mm. 6-12)

The vocalist embellishes the E-F#-E sequence as smoothly and quietly as possible to make it sound more *iroke*. The key to singing this phrase in such a way is not to overdo it. Indeed, it is difficult and takes a lot of effort to control one’s voice precisely to sing this phrase, but it is equally important not to make it appear difficult or troublesome to sing this phrase. Keeping an

“effortless” look is also considered an expression of *iroke*. In measures 6 to 9, the *shamisen* provides the descending F# -C sequence as a guide for the vocalist to follow. From measure 11 to 12, the *shamisen* again uses the striking finger technique to play the high F#, which is inaudible in the recording, but it is an important note to create an *iroke* possessing atmosphere.

In measure 14, the *shamisen* plays three Es and gives a call²⁷⁵ to anticipate the vocalist’s upcoming phrase. It is as if the *shamisen* player is gently nudging the vocalist and asking, “show me what you can do” (see Figure 3.31). In measure 16, the vocalist sings the E-D#-E (“*shi-ta-ta-ru*”) sequence, but this middle D# is a type of bending note that should sound somewhere between the D# and the E (marked with ↑).

Figure 3.31 The Second Vocal Phrase (mm. 15-21)

The word “*shitataru*” means *dripping*, and this bending D# evokes the effect of dripping water from the grass leaves. Such bending notes, and the subtlety of their pitch change, is considered sensuous and possessive of *iroke* just like we have seen in the *shamisen*’s gliding scale in the previous piece. The key to singing it convincingly is to start singing the first two syllables “*shi-*

²⁷⁵ Mostly, Seiyoshi Shisho uses “*Ha!*” or “*I-ya!*” for the calls. But I also heard “*Sore!*” “*A-hoi!*” “*A-choito*” “*Sa-a*” and various others for the calls. So rather than notating the exact calls Seiyoshi Shisho made in these particular recordings into the transcriptions, I chose to simply mark “@” where the call came in.

ta-” quietly while holding in one’s breath as much as possible, releasing only a tiny amount of breath when singing the second “-*ta*” while being careful not to overdo it. In other words, strict breath control is also required for performing any *kouta* with full *iroke*.

Notice that in measure 18, the syllable “*u*” is in a parenthesis. This “*u*” stems from the previous syllable “*ru*” of the word “*shitataru*” (dripping). Because it is sung on such a long note, the vowel “*u*” becomes emphasized and more apparent in sound. This prolonged vowel part is called the *umi-ji*, literally, the “born letter,” but I call it the sustained vowel instead. Another sustained vowel occurs in measure 20 with “*i*” from the syllable “*ni*.” Compared to the earlier sustained vowel “*u*,” this “*i*” should be sung short so that it gives enough time to breathe in and to proceed with singing the next phrase. These sustained vowels are considered important in *kouta* singing technique since they can convey emotions that are not necessarily expressible through visual representations or sounds (words). Thus, they are considered one of the techniques that are capable of portraying *iroke* in the *kouta* singing.

Within these measures, the *shamisen* continues to support the vocal line by playing the descending E-C-B-A sequence using the dodging technique. In measure 20, there is a grace note on B noted after the A. Here, the *shamisen* first plays the A by pushing down the third string with the left index finger, and then, quickly slides the finger up to the B pitch spot while continuing to push down the string. This is a type of portamento and is called the gliding (*koki*) technique. This sound is inaudible in the recording, but it provides an interesting sound similar to the bending note, adding a soft, relaxed, ambience of *iroke* to the song.

In measure 21, the third vocal phrase starts out without the *shamisen* cuing the F, which is unusual for a *kouta* song structure. Perhaps since this new phrase starts immediately after the previous vocal phrase ends, there is not enough space for the *shamisen* to provide the cue; thus,

there is no F in the *shamisen* line there. Looking at the lyrics carefully, however, the word “*hikaru*” (sparkling or shining) evokes the image of a sparkling light shining through the darkness. Just as the light can reach anywhere without the need for guidance, the vocalist comes in without the *shamisen*’s guidance of the F. Here, the *shamisen* melody plays an up and down F-A-B-E sequence twice—one in measures 23 to 25 and another in measures 26 to 27 an octave lower—which is a melodic sequence completely different from the vocal one (see Figure 3.32).

The image shows a musical score for measures 21 to 29. The top staff is for the vocal line (V) and the bottom staff is for the shamisen line (S). The vocal line has lyrics: (i) Hi ka - ru - (u) Tsu - yu - - - (u). The shamisen line has a melodic sequence of F-A-B-E in measures 23-25 and 26-27. The score is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one flat (B-flat).

Figure 3.32 The Third Vocal Phrase (mm. 21-29)

Here the word “*tsuyu*” means tears and represents the ephemerality of life. Normally, the octave Es indicate the end of a phrase or a piece, so having them in measure 25 gives a sense of conclusion or ending, suggesting the *geisha*’s short life. In contrast, the *shamisen* repeats the same F-A-B-E sequence twice there, evoking the Buddhist notion of reincarnation and the eternal cycle of karma just like we have seen in the previous piece. The gliding technique appears once again in the *shamisen*’s second F-A-B-E sequence in measure 26. This time, the B becomes audible because it is plucked after the gliding. Because of the presence of this plucked B in measure 27, the previous gliding note may seem to be unnecessary. It is important to note, however, that such an inaudible sound is intentionally placed there so as to fill the *ma* (the pause or the open space), effectively with a lingering sonority that suits the aesthetics of *kouta*. From

the *shamisen* player's perspective, this gliding note is not there just to serve an aesthetic purpose but also the practical purpose of producing an accurate pitch. Pushing each pitch spot on the *shamisen* neck individually to play each note tends to leave more room for making mistakes. However, by having the gliding note, it no longer requires releasing the left fingers from the string, which actually makes it easier and faster for the player to find the exact pitch spot. From measure 28 to 29, another gliding technique is used to play the D shifting to the E. This time, because the vocal line ends there, the E is easily heard in the recording. Thus, I used a regular quarter note to notate this pitch.

After a short *shamisen* solo, the player again calls out “*Ha!*” to indicate the beginning of the next vocal phrase (see Figure 3.33). As seen in measure 31, the *shamisen* player uses another gliding technique to quietly suggest the first pitch of the vocal line (the B) and then plucks it clearly afterwards to assure the pitch. It is a type of conversation (or call and response) between the two lines, representing an interdependent relationship.

Figure 3.33 The Short *Shamisen* Solo and The Fourth Vocal Phrase (mm. 29-37)

The vocalist comes in with the highest pitch singing “*koi-ni*” (in love) expressing excitement as well as the agony of being in love. This is one of the climaxes of the song. Here, the *shamisen*

provides only a few B, F, and E pitches to support the vocal line. In particular, the pauses in between such pitches, as seen in measures 34 and 35, allow the vocalist's climactic solo to be more exposed, helping to emphasize the meaning of the word "*kogarete*" (longing for).

From measures 35 to 43, Tokumaru's "intra-stylistic intertextuality" occurs. The vocal melody follows the F-E-D-E sequence (in box A) and the D-F-E-E(low)-F sequence (in box B) while the *shamisen* melody follows the F-E-D-E-F-E (the turn) sequence (in box C). In fact, these exact sequences appeared in the previous piece as well. As seen in Figure 3.34, the transcription on the top is the "Sprinkling" piece and the bottom one is the previously discussed "As the Water Flows" piece. There are slight variables, such as the presence of low Es on the *shamisen* line in measures 38 to 40 of the top score and the quarter note to eighth note rhythmic differences in measure 37 of the top score, but it is clear that the melodic sequences follow in almost the same way.

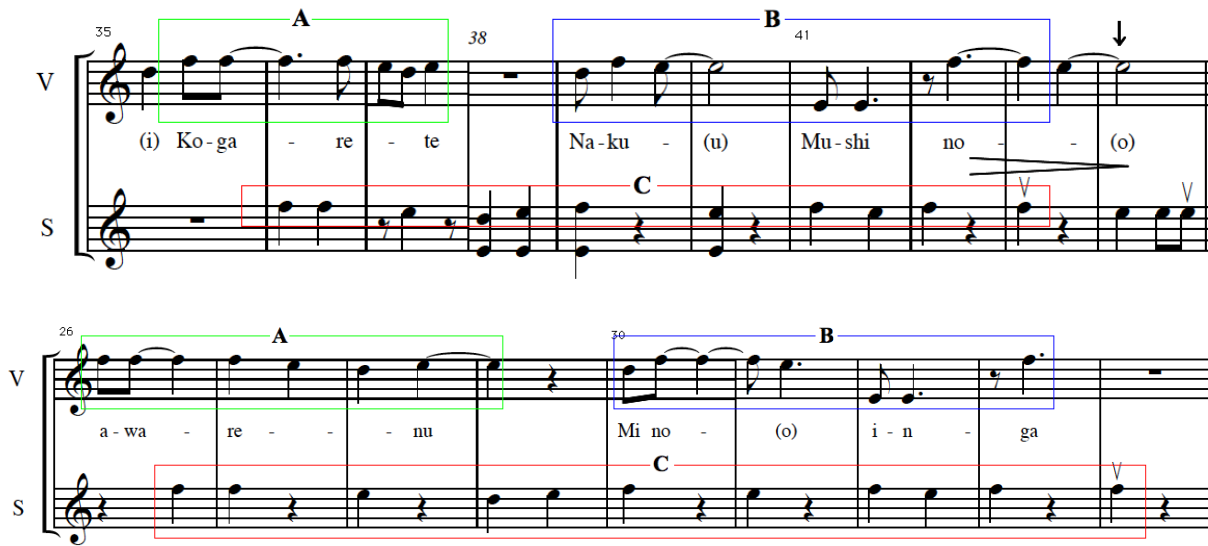


Figure 3.34 The Intra-Stylistic Intertextuality Occurrence between “Sprinkling the Garden” (top) and “As the Water Flows” (bottom)

Earlier I noted that the *geisha* (specifically Kasuga Toyo and Chiyome) is reflected in the image of “*mushi*” (insects). The lyrics “*koi ni kogarete naku mushi*” in this phrase literally mean “the chirping insects that are longing for love.” However, if we look deeper, this phrase carries double meaning that these “chirping insects” are indeed the *geisha* themselves, and the word “*naku*,” chirping, also means *crying* in Japanese. Thus, the *geisha* are the ones *crying* out for the love that is unanswered. Here, it is interesting to see that the low Es of the vocal line on the word “*mushi*” (insects) in measure 41 of the top score exactly match “*in-ga*” (fate or cause and effect) in measure 32 of the bottom score. Such coincidence suggests that the insects, just like the *geisha*, or perhaps any living form on earth, have unavoidable fate—to have a very short life, facing undeniable death at all times. They overlap each other in representing weakness, transitoriness, and futility of existence as well as their helpless situation in which they are doomed to be stuck

into the eternal cycle of karma. Thus, intertextuality adds many layers of meanings, for listeners and performers to unravel. This is exactly where the charm or thrill of *kouta* resides.

In measure 49, the *shamisen* again anticipates the vocal line's new phrase with the gliding E to F# (see Figure 3.35). The vocalist sings “*koe-wo-aware-to*” (the voices so pity) with a bending note (the E) in measure 51, which is considered to possess *iroke*. Just as in measures 34 and 35, the absence of the *shamisen* in measure 52 exposes the vocal line, which emphasizes the meaning of “*aware*” (pity).

The musical score for Figure 3.35 shows the Sixth Vocal Phrase (mm. 50-56). The vocal line (V) begins in measure 50 with the lyrics "Ko-e - wo - A - wa - - - re - to - (o) Ki -". The shamisen line (S) provides accompaniment, with a gliding E to F# in measure 49. The score includes dynamic markings like "mp" and various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and a bending note marked with a downward arrow.

Figure 3.35 The Sixth Vocal Phrase (mm. 50-56)

The last note of the vocal phrase is an elongated B, but as it is marked here (with ↓), it is slightly sliding down to be closer to the B ♭. This tends to happen frequently at the ends of phrases where there is another phrase coming up right afterwards. Here, in order to start singing the next phrase, the vocalist has to exhale and inhale quickly. But, as mentioned, making an exhaling noise (like the sound of a sigh) is considered non-*iroke*, so it has to be done discreetly. As a result, the last “-to” is sung while releasing more than usual amount of breath, which causes the slight lowering of the pitch. Such slight lowering of the pitch is also considered possessing of *iroke* quality.

In measure 56, the vocal phrase starts with a high E and softly slides down to the high C (marked with \uparrow). It is similar to the *shamisen*'s gliding technique (*koki*). Again, such a subtle pitch change is considered expressing *iroke* since it sounds like an imitation of sexual moaning (see Figure 3.36).

The musical score for Figure 3.36 shows measures 56 to 62. The vocal line (V) begins in measure 56 with a high E, indicated by a downward arrow, and slides down to a high C, indicated by an upward arrow. The lyrics are "(o) Ki - ku - - ho - do - no" followed by a measure marked *mf*. The shamisen line (S) provides accompaniment, following a similar pitch sequence. Measure numbers 56 and 59 are indicated above the vocal staff.

Figure 3.36 The Seventh Vocal Phrase (mm. 56-62)

The vocal line reaches its lowest pitch in measure 59 as if it were preparing for the upcoming high-pitched climactic phrase. Here, the *shamisen* almost follows the same pitch sequence as the vocal line while providing additional notes to make an interesting harmony with the vocal line. Such technique is often referred to as the threading among vocal pauses (*uta no ma wo nuu*), meaning the *shamisen* is there to fill the empty musical space provided by the vocalist's melody to keep them together.

In measure 63, the eighth vocal phrase starts out with a high F (see Figure 3.37). The *shamisen* provides a minimal amount of accompaniment here in order to expose the vocal line to emphasize the meaning of "*samishii*" (lonely). Here (mm. 63-67), according to Seiyoshi Shisho, the *shamisen* line plays a phrase that is borrowed from the *miyazono-bushi*, one of the older

styles of small song genres. This is an example that reflects Tokumaru’s “inter-stylistic intertextuality,” bringing in musical phrases from other genres (in this case the *miyazono*) and adding some rhythmic or melodic changes in order to make them suitable to *kouta*’s style.

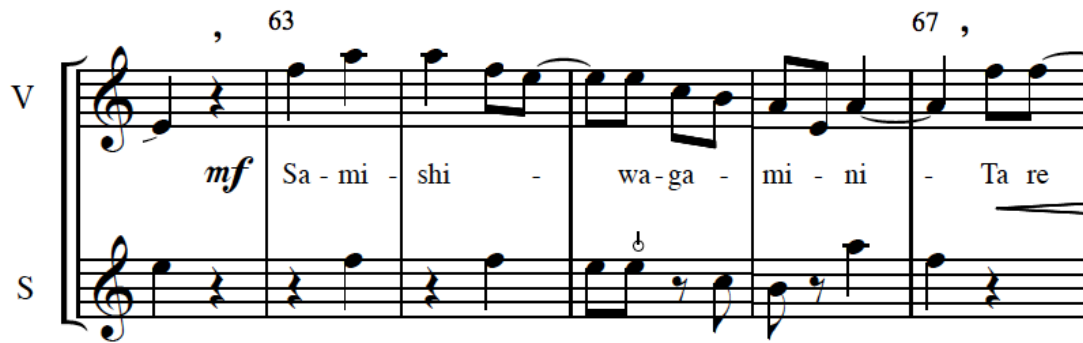


Figure 3.37 The Eighth Vocal Phrase (mm. 63-67)

When Kasuga Toyo composed this song in 1932, she was reflecting upon her own unfortunate love story with her sweetheart Murako who died seven years earlier. In her biography, it becomes apparent that her wounded heart never healed to the day she died. Inserting the *miyazono-bushi* phrase to accompany “*samishii wagami*” (this woman so lonely) reminds us of the time when she was taking lessons of *kouta* as well as other genres of music, including the *miyazono*, with Murako, evoking bittersweet memories between the two lovers.

Such a sorrowful and polysemic phrase reaches to the very last climactic phrase (see Figure 3.38). The lyric “*tare-ga-shita?*” (Who made me (this woman so lonely)?) is a powerful message; it is almost as if the *geisha* were accusing her lover for the pain he caused for her. Here, the *shamisen* simply supports the vocal line by playing the F-A-B-E sequence. The syllable “*re*” of “*tare*” (who) is elongated in measures 67 to 68, but it does not stop there. The vocalist quickly breathes in at measure 69 and continues with the sustained vowel (*umiji*) “*e*” from “*tare*”

(who) while singing from the A up to the highest pitch of B for a total of three more measures. The sustained vowel “e-” in measure 69 has to be sung with a slight tremolo (*kobushi*). Adding the tremolo emphasizes the meaning of the lyrics. In this case, it expresses a type of frustration and resentment as well as a feeling of despair. However, once again, to sing this section with plenty of *iroke* requires not overdoing it. “Overdoing it” means to cry out “I love you!” out loud, which is a state in which one cannot control one’s emotion, and thus, it is considered boorish (*yabo*). Even if the *geisha* portrayed in this song is suffering from the agony of love, she still has her pride. She does not wish to look weak or desperate. So, to show such an emotional state, it is more important to sing the highest B clearly and softly by adding some melisma without showing any hint of hesitation or resistance. This is a way to display her coolness—being detached from earthly matters.

The musical score shows two staves: Voice (V) and Soprano (S). The lyrics are written below the Voice staff. The music begins in measure 67 with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are: 'Ta re - (e) f e - ga shi - ta - (a)'. The 'e' in measure 69 is marked with a tremolo line. Dynamics include 'f' (forte) and 'mp' (mezzo-piano). Arrows indicate pitch changes, with upward arrows above measures 72 and 73.

Figure 3.38 The Ninth Vocal Phrase (mm. 67-75)

In measure 72, the vocal phrase immediately comes back to a much quieter and softer note with “-ga.” Rather than a feeling of resentment, the vocal phrase expresses a sense of resignation here. The lyric “*tare-ga-shita*” (who made me?) is a question addressed to the lover, but to sing the end of the sentence “-*shita*” loudly and strongly makes it sound like an accusation towards the lover and does not express *iroke*. Accusing or questioning someone tends to only drive that

person away. So instead, to create room for sympathy and empathy, the vocal phrase slides softly from C up to E, and this E gradually fades away at the end as if it were to represent that her question is not targeted for him, but it has now become an open-ended one. This particular phrase expresses the *geisha*'s complex and multilayered affections and heartrending emotions. Since this phrase gives the feeling of a musical or emotional roller coaster, it is considered one of the most difficult passages for the vocalist to sing with plenty of *iroke*. That is precisely the reason why many listeners as well as performers enjoy this piece, labeling it as one of the masterworks of Kasuga *kouta*.

In measures 79 to 83, the *shamisen* repeats the elaborate melodic phrase that it played at the beginning of the piece. This is called, literally, the back play (*ato-biki*), which can be roughly translated as the postlude (see Figure 3.39).



Figure 3.39 The *Shamisen*'s Postlude (mm. 79-83)

This time, the *shamisen* inserts a short pause before playing the last F# in measure 83, indicating the conclusion of the piece. This short pause creates the effect of leaving a lingering ambience full of *iroke* in the minds of the listener. From the performer's perspective, this short pause is an important one because it expresses a type of regret and sadness for the ending of the piece—effectively ending the imaginative lover's relationship between the vocalist and the *shamisen*.

player that was happening in the *kouta* musical world. The potential love affair is cut short and is now over with the last F#.

3.3.8 Summary of *Iroke* Expressions in *Uchimizu no*

In this piece, like *Mizu no Debana*, expressions of *iroke* (the atmosphere of love-sex) are emphasized through well-controlled usages of voice and breathing techniques, bending notes, sustained vowels, the lowering of ending pitches, the adding of tremolo, and the maintaining of an effortless look. Again, there are no obvious movements involved in expressing the *iroke*—they are quietly suggested through words and sounds. In the *shamisen* part, too, plucking techniques such as the gliding finger, the flicking, the striking, and the scooping are all effectively used to add changes of timbre which help to change the overall mood of the piece and to evoke images of the surroundings in which the song's main character is situated. In the *kouta* performance setting, each performer—the vocalist and the *shamisen* player—represents an individual who is in fact in love with the other, so each musical line also represents a potential love affair between the two. These two lines, as we have seen, follow a very similar melodic and rhythmic path, but they are not performing the exact same pitches or rhythm at once. Rather, the *shamisen* provides sounds *in between* the vocalist's pauses, so the *shamisen* melody is considered to weave around the vocalist's melodic phrases. Metaphorically, the two lines follow each other and flirt with each other, creating the *atmosphere* surrounding the love-sex. Expressions of *iroke* are scattered throughout the performance, acting as clues to evoke such flirtatious acts. As a result, the *kouta* performance produces a bittersweet loving couple relationship, which lasts only during the period of performance.

3.4 THEORIZING *IROKE* IN *KOUTA*

In “As the Water Flows” and “Sprinkling the Garden,” there are certain techniques used to express *iroke* in both the vocal and *shamisen* parts. For the vocal part, elements possessing *iroke* include the quiet volume, the steady rhythm, the soft bending notes, the slight lowering and raising of pitches (microtones), the understated embellishments or smooth melismas, the light amount of vibrato (*kobushi*), the sustained vowels (*umiji*), and the nonlexical morphemes such as “*mm* (uh-uh).”²⁷⁶ Subtlety and softness are required in performance. In particular, when performing *kouta*, it is important to strictly maintain control of one’s voice (pitch and volume), manner of breathing (without making noises in inhaling and exhaling), and sitting posture (in folded-knee position with one’s eyes in a fixed gaze 45 degrees to the floor). From the audience’s perspective, the vocalist’s body should not shift or move at all. In other words, *iroke* lies principally in both audible and inaudible sounds as well as lexical and nonlexical words, and less so in the visual realm.

Similarly, for the *shamisen* part, *iroke* tends to be expressed through the soft gliding (*koki*) or sliding sounds, the quiet sounds played by the striking finger (*uchiyubi*) technique and the scooping (*sukui*) technique, the similar yet different melodic and rhythmic phrases to the vocal part using the dodging (*zurashi*) technique, and the pauses (*ma*) that highlight the vocal part. Though the notes played by plucking the *shamisen* strings do not last long, the *sawari* (touch) device helps to sustain some of these pitches. Such lingering sounds are valued most when they occur at the moment of the vocalist’s pauses and used effectively, especially at the end phrase of “*chin-ton*-(pause)-*shan*.”

²⁷⁶ There are also nonlexical morpheme of “*are!* (there!),” “*e~* (un...),” and “*ma!* (oh!)” that frequently appear in other *kouta* pieces.

Like the vocalist, the *shamisen* player sits still and uses a minimal amount of body movement when playing, focusing attention on the musical sounds produced. Such a performance style may have originated from blind musician's practices since, as I discussed in the history of *shamisen* section, they were the ones who picked up the *shamisen* when the instrument was first introduced to mainland Japan in the mid-16th century. Unable to see, they relied more on the senses of hearing, smelling, and touching, and they used those senses when expressing themselves through the music of the *shamisen*. These blind musicians contributed to creating new styles of music such as the scrap songs, short songs, and Kyoto (local) songs that are considered the ancestors of *kouta*. In such songs, *iro* is often a central subject, and rather than using visual effects, they express emotions and portray matters relating to *iro* through the musical sounds, the cleverly composed words, the fragrances, and the feelings and mood created through human interactions. In a way, through such processes, *iro*, which used to be more substantial and visible in nature (like woman, sex, color, form, etc.), transformed into *iro-ke*, the *atmosphere* of *iro* that is more abstract and sense-oriented in nature, and came to be appreciated as a unique aesthetic concept. Thus, similar to the vocal part, *iroke* is found in both audible and inaudible sounds of *shamisen*, and in particular, it is in the very timbre and sonority of sounds that the fingertip plucking and the *sawari* (touch) effect make.

In fact, *iroke* resides not only in the individual sounds that the vocalist and the *shamisen* player make, but it is also in their relationship observed in their performance and in the structure of composition itself. First, the vocal and *shamisen* lines follow a similar melodic contour, sometimes two lines *weave in* and *around* each other, crossing pitch ranges, but the two never play the same pitch at the same time because of the dodging technique. Second, when the vocal line is absent, the *shamisen* takes over to play a solo part with elaborate melodies to fill the

empty musical space. Third, right before the vocal line comes back after a brief pause, the *shamisen* plays the same note as the first note of the vocal melody, providing a cue for the vocalist. Lastly, the *shamisen* player provides a call “*ha!*” or “*i-ya!*” to signal the vocalist’s beginning phrases and to help keep the proper tempo of the song.

In an earlier stage of my studies, I observed that the *shamisen* player is the one who serves a primary and more authoritative role in *kouta* performance. This is because, as I have shown, the *shamisen* player provides cues and calls, inserts technically intensive solos and phrases borrowed from other genres, and controls the tempo. When talking to Seiyoshi Shisho on this matter, she first agreed with me that the *shamisen* part is considered more important in performing *kouta* since it sets the pace and mood of the piece. However, she also denied my observation of the power relationship between the vocalist and instrumentalist. She said that the vocal part is considered a “husband,” who leads the piece, while the *shamisen* part is the “wife,” who follows the vocal part. Historically, Japanese society has been patriarchal and the expression of “husband” indicates one who has more power in a relationship. This led me to think that the vocal part is superior to the *shamisen* part. Yet, Seiyoshi Shisho denied it once again and said, “the *shamisen* player has to let the vocalist sing freely to make him or her feel good, but the vocalist still plays the main role,” then she continued, describing the *shamisen* part as “an invisible power that holds the house upright (*en no shita no chikara mochi*).” Thus, to impose a notion of a male-as-dominant and female-as-subordinate power relationship is inappropriate in the analysis of *kouta*. If anything, the roles are reversed.

In the performance of *kouta*, the vocalist (or “husband”) acts ostensibly as a main character, but it is actually the *shamisen* player (“wife”) who controls the important aspects of music making, holding an “invisible power.” In contrast to the mainstream male-dominated

Japanese social structure, *geisha* used the performance of *kouta* as a way to metaphorically reverse culturally established gender roles.

There is another aspect to the relationship between the vocalist (“husband”) and the *shamisen* player (“wife”) observed particularly in compositional structures. As I have noted, the vocalist and *shamisen* player never sing or play the same pitch at the very same time. Their melodic lines are somewhat similar and may sometimes cross each other to reach higher or lower ranges, but they hardly ever match exactly. Even when the *shamisen* plays the same pitch as the vocalist, it tends to happen slightly before or after the vocalist’s line. In other words, both the vocal (“husband”) and *shamisen* (“wife”) melodic lines support and complement each other, sometimes separately (by performing in different pitch ranges) and sometimes together (by imitating each other rhythmically or melodically) but without ever being completely united, or played in unison, to create an appropriate musical atmosphere.

In this scenario, the imaginary husband and wife—the imaginary loving couple—convey their intimate relationship *without* showing the very moment of unity—sexual intercourse (*iro*)—but rather, their weaving melodic lines suggest a potential love affair by entwining or flirting with each other in order to create an *iroke*-possessed atmosphere. In musicological texts, such characteristics of melodic texture are described as heterophony—having two similar melodic lines played together as one. Based on Buddhist ideology, such characteristics relate to the concept of *fusoku-furi*, which means *neither attached nor detached*. Each line has its individual characteristics, so they are not the same. However, they are also similar to each other.²⁷⁷ They are independent, but they are also interdependent. This is exactly the relationship portrayed between the vocalist and *shamisen* player—the imaginary couple—similar to the concept of Ying and Yang, in which each is a different and unique entity, but both rely on the other’s existence.

²⁷⁷ Iwanami Bukkyo Jiten, 692.

The *shamisen* player tunes the instrument to suit the vocalist's voice range, calls out when the vocalist needs to come in, sometimes challenges the vocalist with a technically elaborate passage, and sometimes nudges the vocalist by shifting the tempo. The vocalist replies to the *shamisen* player accordingly. The two are attracted to each other, but they also repel each other. They try to be close to each other while also keeping their distance from each other. The audience is witness to a love game or drama between the two performers. Through such *play* of interactions, it becomes apparent that the key component is indeed the concept of *ma*—pause, rhythm, or space. In order to simultaneously stay close *and* to keep distance between the two musical lines, each performer has to carefully listen to the other's performance, and most importantly, both performers must read between their partner's *ma* (or lines). The expression of “breathing together” is used to describe such a state in which the performers synchronize so that they are melodically and rhythmically both *on* and *off* in an exquisite manner. This is the true sense of the dodging technique (*zurashi*). Such a relationship and aesthetic could not have developed if *kouta* had continued to be performed in Oyo's solo performance style.

Again, *kouta*'s vocal and *shamisen* lines are composed in such a way as to evoke a potential love affair between the two lovers. The words with multiple meanings, the onomatopoeic or imitating words, the nonlexical morphemes, the *shamisen*'s imitation sounds of nature, and the inter- and intra-intertextuality—these are all connected with sounds and evoke images of nature as well as *iro* in the listener's mind. Even though the sounds help to visualize such images, they all happen and stay within the world of imagination. In other words, *kouta* songs describe a *geisha*'s affairs with her lover, and the vocalist and the *shamisen* player create a mood full of *iro*—as it is described in the lyrics—through their musical interactions. If we look closely at their music and performance practices, they are indeed *avoiding* or *distancing iro* (love-sex) from its

core. Lyrics depicting beautiful scenes of nature, motionless bodies during performance, the dodging technique—these are also ways of distancing *iro* and keeping the audience's attention away from *iro* too. All we see or hear is a collection of hints of *iroke*, the *atmosphere* of love-sex, not the actual *iro* (love-sex) itself. Thus, just as we have seen in the spring prints in the previous chapter, *kouta* also *distances iro* from its musical expressions and performance context.

What *kouta* attempts to do is to induce listeners to imagine a warm, *otherworldly* atmosphere through the entangled and weaving vocal and *shamisen* lines as well as the interactions between the vocalist and the *shamisen* player. *Iroke* is expressed not only in the articulations of the voice and the contents of the lyrics, but in the complex melodic and rhythmic relationships between the vocal and *shamisen* lines. The potential love affair between the performers and their performances help to guide listeners to temporarily visit the world filled with *iro*—the *floating world*.

In order to reach this *floating world*, sounds play an important role. As I have demonstrated in my analysis of *kouta* lyrics, words often carry double meanings, describing beautiful scenery and nature on one side, and sad and depressing situations on the other. When simply reading *kouta* lyrics on a sheet of paper, the reader may understand the story or basic meaning of the words, but divorced from the music, the texts cannot in themselves effectively convey the essence of *iroke* to the reader. However, when this short text comes to life through the vocalist's singing, listeners can imagine the songwriter's situation vividly in their minds. The vocalist likely knows the hidden meanings that the songwriter intended, but he or she must hide signs of emotion when performing the song—appearances can contradict what is going on in the texts. In other words, the listener does not physically *see* the essence of *iroke* in performers'

faces or bodies but must understand *iroke* internally when hearing the sound of the singer's voice.

In addition to the sound of the voice, the sound of the *shamisen* also greatly contributes to the performance of the song. For example, there are many *shamisen* plucking techniques and specific phrases to represent the sounds of nature (e.g., water, fire, winds, insects, etc.). As Japanese linguist Kindaichi Haruhiko points out, the uniqueness of the Japanese perception of sound is reflected in its frequent usage of onomatopoeia in the language.²⁷⁸ This means that the Japanese do not necessarily see an object to know what is physically there. Through the sound that an object makes or through a subtle sense of the *atmosphere* surrounding the object, a Japanese understands what the object is. In this context, the expression of “seeing is believing” is not always true—hearing or sensing can be good enough to understand the surrounding contexts and situations as well.

As the Japanese use mimetic words to symbolize objects, the *shamisen* in *kouta* can also mimic the sound of water or human actions in different ways of plucking of the strings, a technique that can be useful in conveying the story. While the vocalist tells the story in words that evoke natural imagery while hinting at multiple meanings, the *shamisen* sets the tone or the mood of this scene with its sound, enhancing listeners' imaginations. Therefore, the *shamisen*'s melodies as well as the player's calls provide cues not only as guidance to the vocalist, but also to lead the listeners into the imaginative *floating world* filled with *iroke*.

So far, I analyzed *kouta* pieces to see how *iroke* is expressed through sounds. In the next chapter, I will analyze *koutaburi* dance pieces to see how *iroke* is expressed in movement.

²⁷⁸ Kindaichi Haruhiko, *Giongo, Gitaigo Jiten (Dictionary of Onomatopoeia and Mimetic Words)* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1978).

4.0 EXAMINATION OF *IROKE* IN *KOUTABURI*

In this chapter, I will first briefly review the history of *koutaburi* in order to investigate the origin of this art form. In the previous two chapters, I noted that the *geisha*'s artistic traditions are deeply rooted in female itinerant performers' banquet entertainments and Okuni's erotic *kabuki* performances. While Okuni's *kabuki*, the playful women's *kabuki*, as well as their successors, the boys *kabuki*, were all banned because of their evocative style of dance, the all-men's *kabuki* (*yaro kabuki*) survived because they *diluted* such sexual (*iro*) elements in their dance. The *geisha* originated in the pleasure quarters (nearby the *kabuki* theatre districts), separating the arts (*gei*) from sex (*iro*), and this resonated well with the men's *kabuki* members. *Geisha* began to take dance lessons under *kabuki* actors and choreographers, and they, in turn, attempted to compose dances for *geisha* that were suitable to perform in the small space of *ozashiki* in the pleasure quarters. Amidst these close relationships and interactions between *geisha* and *kabuki* performers, the dance of *kouta*—called *koutaburi*—was born. Before *kabuki* performers began teaching *koutaburi* (as a part of their vast repertoires), the *koutaburi* dance school did not exist. In the pages that follow, I will describe the background of Asaji Yoshie, my *koutaburi* teacher, who is the headmaster of the Asaji-ryu *koutaburi* school in Asakusa, Tokyo. Following that, I will describe the Asaji *koutaburi* coterie and illustrate the flow of a *koutaburi* lesson. Finally, I will analyze the *koutaburi* piece "*Mizu no Debana* (As the Water Flows)," which is the same piece that I discussed in the previous chapter, as a case study to demonstrate how *iroke* is expressed through *koutaburi*. As with *kouta* pieces, the expression of *iroke* is understated in the movements of *koutaburi* too. Thus, I will pay special attention to the pauses, rests, and subtle body movements in order to make the invisible *iroke* visible.

4.1 HISTORY OF *KOUTABURI*

As I discussed in the history of *geisha* section in chapter two, the origin of Japanese dance can be traced back to the mythological story of Ame no Uzume's erotic dancing in front of the cave, appearing in the *Records of Ancient Matters (Kojiki, 712 C.E.)*. In the ancient times, dance was an important part of the rituals practiced by shrine maidens¹ along with songs and music. Eventually, such ritual tasks came to be performed exclusively by male priests, and the dance came to be considered something to be preserved and performed by male court officials in the Heian period. As such, female dancers like the shrine maidens as well as the playful women² were pushed away from public performance venues, but they continued to entertain audiences with their arts at more private venues.³

In the medieval period, there were various forms of female itinerant performers who specialized in singing and dancing, such as the white rhythm women,⁴ the puppeteer women,⁵ the melodic-dance women,⁶ and the women's *noh*,⁷ and they are all considered predecessors of Okuni's *kabuki* that became popular in the early 1600s. Okuni's *kabuki* incorporated the flamboyant dance⁸ and the baby girl dance⁹ that emphasized the up and down motions¹⁰

¹ It is called *miko*.

² It is called *yujo*.

³ Gunji, 60-62.

⁴ It is called *shirabyoshi-me*.

⁵ It is called *kugutsu-me*.

⁶ It is called *kusemai-me*.

⁷ It is called *onna sarugaku*.

⁸ It is called *furyu odori*. The original form of the flamboyant dance was called the Buddhist prayer dance (*nenbutsu odori*), which first became popular in the late 1200s. Back then, the Mongolian soldiers attacked Japan several times, which scared the people and made them full of anxiety. As its remedy, a monk named Ippen of Jishu sect began to preach people to pray to the Buddha through dancing, and many monks and nuns gathered and danced in circles, jumping up and down while revealing their genitals. Many other Buddhist sects criticized Ippen's dance, but the dance spread around quickly, and many people joined this *dance fever* movement. See more details in Fujita Hiroshi, *Nihon Buyo Handbook* (Tokyo: Sanseido, 2001).

⁹ It is called *yayako odori*.

¹⁰ This is called *odori*.

frequently observed in the folk dance style. Such movements tended to expose the dancer's body shape and were considered sexually evocative.

One important characteristic to note here is that Okuni's *kabuki* dances were generally performed on a raised wooden stage built outside in an open space, which was closer to *noh* performance stage settings. Naturally, such open-air space allowed dancers to move around more freely and actively so that their movements tended to be more exaggerated.¹¹ Another characteristic is that Okuni performed dances accompanied by small songs that told stories of famous rowdies¹² visiting teahouses and flirting with the pretty girls who served there.¹³ Thus, her performances were sexually charged visually as well as thematically.

According to Gunji Masakatsu, Okuni put several short dance pieces accompanied by then popular small songs back to back to perform as a set at her stage shows.¹⁴ This was a time when various kinds of small songs were composed and performed along with dances at the pleasure quarters too. Since there are not enough records describing these dances, it is impossible to know exactly how they looked. However, considering that Okuni's *kabuki* troupe as well as her "successors" (or imitators), the playful women's *kabuki*, were in close connection with the pleasure quarters, it is highly likely that the dances performed in the pleasure quarters were similar to Okuni's *kabuki* dances at this time. From Kyoto, Okuni's and the playful women's *kabuki* were soon brought to Edo (now Tokyo), and the women of the Yoshiwara pleasure quarter began to perform imitations of such dances both on stage and at banquets.

After the ban of female *kabuki* in 1629, boys *kabuki* became a popular attraction in the major cities. Gunji points out that at first they were mostly performing imitations of Okuni's

¹¹ Gunji, 153.

¹² These were called *kabuki-mono*, literally, the flamboyant and eccentric look person.

¹³ Gunji, 81-82.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

kabuki dance style, but eventually they incorporated the *noh* style dance, which emphasized horizontal and circular motions.¹⁵ Suzuki Eiichi explains that this was because the boys *kabuki* group wanted to raise the status of *kabuki* and attempted to present its legitimacy by incorporating the dance used in the *noh*, then considered a prestigious and noble form of art.¹⁶ In 1643, the Tokugawa government banned all female impersonators and their performances from the *kabuki* stage, but theatre owners complained.¹⁷ They ultimately received permission from the government to feature female impersonators on stage, but it was granted on the condition that they permanently assign each actor to specialize in performing one gender role. Thus, this led to a distinction between the female impersonators (*onnagata*)¹⁸ and the male impersonators (*tachikata*).¹⁹

In the earlier stages, such female impersonators specialized in performing a dance called the traveling dance (*michiyuki*). It is a unique form of dance that generally portrays a scene of lovers eloping together or committing double suicides against the backdrop of beautiful scenery that is conveyed in the music.²⁰ From this, a new style of dance called the acting dance (*shosagoto*) emerged, consisting of pantomimic movements that represent the lovers' love-sex relationships (*iro*) as well as human emotions and sensitivities.²¹ According to Nishiyama Matsunosuke, the acting dance emerged amidst fear of another governmental intervention disrupting female impersonators' stage performances. Okuni's style of dance was so evocative

¹⁵ This is called *mai*. Gunji, 86.

¹⁶ Suzuki Eiichi, "Ch. 13 *Buyo: Mai to Odori* (Japanese Dance: *Mai* and *Odori*)," in *Nihon no Dento Geino Koza: Buyo / Engeki* (Lectures on Traditional Performing Arts in Japan: Dance / Theatre), edited by Hattori Yukio (Kyoto: Tankosha, 2009), 343.

¹⁷ Gunji, 86.

¹⁸ It literally means a female form.

¹⁹ The word used for the male impersonator, *tachikata*, literally means a standing person. This was to distinguish an actor, who performs one's role in the standing position, to a musician, who performs music in the sitting position. In *geisha* community, this distinction is still present in that, as mentioned, the dancers are normally called the *tachikata* (the standing person) and the musicians are called the *jikata* (the sitting person).

²⁰ Fujita, 24.

²¹ Gunji, 88-89.

that it had already been banned in 1629. The boys *kabuki*, even though they incorporated *noh* style dance in their acts, was also banned in 1652 because they continued to perform in Okuni's sexually charged dance style, allegedly leading to multiple cases of prostitution and violence. Thus, when female impersonators began to perform on *kabuki* stages in the late 1650s, they avoided dancing in Okuni's style. Instead, they developed a new performance style that mimicked a song's words with less overtly sexually charged displays.²²

Gunji explains that the core of female impersonators' training is the mastering of this acting dance. In such training processes, *female beauty* is the concept seen as embodying the quality of *iroke*. The female impersonators found these qualities in the gestures exhibited by the playful women who worked at the pleasure quarters, and they used these women as models to polish their art of female impersonation.²³ Here, Gunji states that *iroke*, or the beauty that the female impersonators project through their performances, is not the same as actual feminine beauty itself. It is an artificial beauty that male actors discovered and created by themselves and expressed in their movements in order to *hide* the reality—their male bodies and masculinity.²⁴

Theatres, playhouses, and pleasure quarters were built side by side so that the government could keep them all under close watch. This proximity in fact allowed actors, musicians, and dancers to communicate with each other and to frequently exchange the techniques of their arts. For example, the small songs composed in the pleasure quarters were featured on the *kabuki* stages, and similarly, the long songs composed to accompany the traveling dance or the acting dance on the *kabuki* stages came to be popularly performed at banquets in the pleasure quarters. Even after the *geisha*'s appearance in the mid-1750s, communication and artistic exchanges among these performers continued. The worlds of *kabuki*

²² Kikkawa 1989, 281.

²³ Gunji, 156-157.

²⁴ Ibid.

and *geisha* have been in a particularly close relationship since it became customary for *geisha* to take dance lessons under notable *kabuki* dancers and choreographers. There were many cases of a *kabuki* actor marrying a *geisha* or having affairs with a *geisha*.²⁵ Such “hot” gossip or scandals had a type of advertisement effect in promoting new stage productions as well as the performers’ names to the public.²⁶

In 1907, theatre critic and scriptwriter Tsubouchi Shoyo coined the term Japanese dance (*nihon buyo*) to distinguish it from Western dance, such as classical ballet or ballroom dance.²⁷ Initially, this term was all-inclusive in nature and was used for the old court dance (*bugaku*), *noh*, *kabuki* dance, folk dance (*minzoku buyo*), and modern dance (*so-saku buyo*), but it later came to be used exclusively as a synonym for *kabuki* dance. One of Tsubouchi’s criticisms towards dance culture in Tokyo was that it lacked professionalism. At this time, Kyoto was actively organizing dance festivals called Miyako Odori (literally, old capital dance),²⁸ which featured Kyoto *geisha* on stage. Such festivals encouraged tourism. This was the very first time women performed on the public stage since the 1629 ban.²⁹ In addition, a female headmaster, Inoue Yachiyo of Inoue dance school, was tirelessly teaching the Kyoto dance (*kyo-mai*) or the banquet room dance (*zashiki-mai*)³⁰ to *geisha* at the Kyoto *geisha* training school which was founded in 1873.³¹ In Kyoto, it was a legitimate career path for females to perform dance and music

²⁵ Dalby 1985, 15.

²⁶ In the last chapter, we have seen that when Kasuga Toyo was working as a *geisha*, she tried to promote her name by using this tactic.

²⁷ Furuido Hideo, “Ch. 19 *Buyo: Kindai kara Gendai e* (Dance: From Modern Times to Current),” in *Nihon no Dento Geino Koza: Buyo / Engeki* (*Lectures on Traditional Performing Arts in Japan: Dance / Theatre*), edited by Hattori Yukio (Kyoto: Tankosha, 2009), 459.

²⁸ It started in 1872 as a part of exhibition for the first Kyoto exposition. This dance festival later came to be known as the Cherry Dance festival.

²⁹ Takechi Tetsuji, *Buyo no Gei* (*Art of Dance*) (Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki, 1985), 267.

³⁰ Inoue’s dance style is also called the *kamigata-mai* (Kyoto dance). Since their dances consist of circular and horizontal movements, they are called *mai* instead of *odori*, which places emphasis on the up and down motions.

³¹ It is now known as Gion Kobu.

professionally.³² In Tokyo, however, such festival events or training institutions were non-existent, and *geisha* or any females interested in dance had to take lessons directly under *kabuki* dancers or choreographers who specialized in the male style dances made specifically for performing on a large scale *kabuki* stage. So, there were no proper public events, venues, or institutions to preserve the existing dance traditions or to cultivate new dance culture in Tokyo.

In the 1870s, in the midst of such difficult times, *kabuki* actor and choreographer Hanayagi Jyusuke (1821-1903) began to compose dance pieces that incorporated small and delicate movements for female performers. He dedicated these dances to *geisha* who worked at the recently opened Shimbashi pleasure quarter where Meiji government officials gathered frequently.³³ One of his students, Wakayagi Jyudo (1845-1917), also dedicated his talents to composing dance pieces for *geisha* in Yanagibashi by incorporating softer and more nuanced movements. Wakayagi is widely recognized as the first dancer to choreograph to a *kouta* piece (in 1940), “*Mono Omoi* (Lost in Thoughts)” composed by Yoshida Soshian (1875-1946), who was famously known as a connoisseur (*tsu-jin*) of the pleasure quarters and wrote many theatre *kouta* pieces.³⁴ It is not known if Wakayagi was indeed the very first performer ever to dance *koutaburi*, but Kimura Kikutaro reports that *kabuki* dancers like Ichikawa Danjuro IX (1838-1903), Hanayagi Katsujiro (1834-1912), and Onoe Baiko VI (1870-1934) composed *kouta* songs on their own and arranged some dances to accompany them.³⁵

Hanayagi and Wakayagi opened their dance schools in 1849 and in 1895 respectively, and they became widely known as schools offering the dance forms appropriate for all girls to

³² Furuido, 459.

³³ Ibid, 460.

³⁴ Yoshida describes that, at the end of this dance piece, Wakayagi put a tip of handkerchief in his mouth while holding the other end of tip in his hand, stood against a pillar in the *ozashiki* room, sled down along the pillar, and finally sat flat on the floor while still leaning against the pillar. This sequence of choreography became very famous as movements possessing the quality of *iroke*. Hanabusa Jyuza, *Soshian no Kouta Kaisetsu-shu* (Commentaries of Soshian's Kouta) (Tokyo: Edo Koutasha, 1965), 328.

³⁵ Kimura 1966, 187, 248, and 354.

learn as their part of “bridal trainings.” Dance movements were seen as refined versions of everyday gestures and body movements and were considered must-have qualities of attractive girls. Along with the Fujima, Nishikawa, and Bando schools, the Hanayagi and Wakayagi schools make up the five major dance schools, and they work closely with the worlds of performing arts, theatres and pleasure quarters. Just like *kouta*, the world of Japanese dance (*nihon buyo*) is another unique field where many female performers preserve and actively promote their arts (*gei*) as headmasters (*iemoto*), teachers (*shihan*), and artists (*natori*).

As I have shown so far, *geisha* have strong teacher-student relationships with *kabuki* dancers as well as Japanese dance (*nihon buyo*) masters, and *koutaburi* grew from an environment closely related to the theatrical entertainments. There, *koutaburi* was not recognized as such per se, but it was simply known as *kouta* dance (*buyo kouta* or *kouta odori*), *geisha* dance (*geisha odori*), or even *ozashiki* dance (*zashiki odori*). The word *furi* (or *buri*) of *koutaburi* literally means gestures, dance, or acting. It is deeply rooted in the word *tama-furi*, soul-shaking, which used to be the ritual act of performing music and dance practiced by ancient shrine maidens and dedicated to the deities in order to revive their exhausted souls.³⁶ In a way, *koutaburi* is a type of dance dedicated to the customers of *ozashiki* to revive their tired souls too. In *koutaburi*, each movement corresponds to specific words sung in the song so that the story of the song is told through the dancer’s moving body. Unlike the dances composed for large-scale *kabuki* stages, *koutaburi* consists of small and subtle movements suitable for performance in small *ozashiki* rooms.

It is important to note that *koutaburi* dance, which has been favored and preserved mostly within *geisha* communities in Tokyo, places importance in the aesthetics of *iroke* through dance movements and the atmosphere created through such dance performances. On the other hand,

³⁶ I mentioned this in the history of *geisha* section in chapter two.

according to Takechi Tetsuji, the Kyoto dance (*kyo-mai*) tradition, which has been mainly taught and passed down within *geisha* (or *geiko*) communities in Kyoto, prohibits the expression of *iroke* in dance movements.³⁷ Inoue Yachiyo V, the current headmaster of the Inoue school specialized in Kyoto dance, states in that her dance style incorporated many elements from the white rhythm women's dance that was preserved within old court culture, the Kongo school style of *noh* dance, and the movements seen in the puppet shows. Consequently, it is a simple, plain, and reserved style *ozashiki* dance (*mai*), and nothing like the exciting *kabuki* dance (*odori*).³⁸ It is interesting to see that the *geisha*—artists of music and dance—in Tokyo and Kyoto (east and west) do not necessarily share the same aesthetics—*iroke*—in their performances even though they share the same occupational title. So, what is *iroke* and how is it expressed in *koutaburi* dance?

In the next section, I will first cover briefly the background of my *koutaburi* teacher, Asaji Yoshie, who taught me how to dance *koutaburi*. Then, I will describe her *koutaburi* coterie and move on to transcribe and analyze a *koutaburi* piece.

³⁷ Takechi, 270.

³⁸ Akai Tatsuro, *Kyoto Sen-nen: Kogei to Geien (A Thousand Year of Kyoto: The World of Arts and Crafts)*, vol. 10 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1984), 198.

4.2 PERFORMING *KOUTABURI*

4.2.1 Asaji Yoshie: The Headmaster of Asaji-ryu *Koutaburi* School

Asaji Yoshie (1947-, real name Nishimura Yoshiko) was born in Asakusa, the first child of Kasuga Toyo Seiyoshi, the *kouta* teacher discussed in Chapter 3. At the age of seven, Yoshiko began taking Japanese dance (*nihon buyo*) lessons under Fujima Tomoaki (1909-1996), a guardian to the headmaster of the Fujima school, Fujima Kan'emon IV.³⁹ Under his direction, Yoshiko practiced various types of dance accompanied by long songs (*nagauta*), puppet show songs (*tokiwazu* and *kiyomoto*), scrap songs (*hauta*), and the *kouta* popularly featured in *kabuki* stage shows. Just like her mother, Yoshiko knew that becoming a *geisha* was the best career path for her even before she finished the fourth grade because she was very passionate about performing dance, particularly *koutaburi*. When she was fifteen, Yoshiko made her debut as an apprentice *geisha*⁴⁰ from Hatsune-ya, the *geisha* house operated by her mother. She became a full-fledged *geisha*⁴¹ at the age of eighteen (see Figure 4.1).

³⁹ His *kabuki* stage name was Onoe Shoroku II (1913-1989).

⁴⁰ It is called *hantama*, literally, a half ball. While a full-fledged *geisha* receives payment of “one ball” amount for serving one *ozashiki* banquet, an apprentice *geisha* gets to be paid a half of it, thus, it is called a “half ball.”

⁴¹ It is called *ippon*, literally, one stick.



Figure 4.1 Asaji Yoshie⁴²

While she continued to serve as a dancer (*tachikata*) in *ozashiki*, she learned to play the instruments associated with the *kabuki* stage, such as the stick drum (*taiko*) and the big hourglass drum (*o-tsuzumi*), along with tea ceremony and flower arrangement lessons to improve her artistic skills. She also took lessons in golf and bowling and practiced skiing so that she could accompany her *ozashiki* customers to such outdoor recreations.

⁴² She told me that this photo was taken sometime in the mid-1960s when she was just began to be popular in the *ozashiki* world.

When she was twenty-one years old, Yoshiko received the artistic title (*natori*), Fujima Tomoya, from the Fujima dance school. At the age of thirty, she retired from the *ozashiki* business. At the time, this was considered an average age for a *geisha*'s retirement. Her love of dance prompted her to pursue a career in performing and teaching the Fujima style dance, so she took the dance exam and was granted the title of dance master (*shihan*) at the age of thirty-one. For more than two decades, she dedicated herself to teaching students the Fujima style dance in and outside of her studio. However, she realized that her real passion was in dancing and teaching *koutaburi* (a field in which her Fujima master title was not applicable). Meanwhile, the Fujima school was in turmoil, with feuds amongst the Fujima families and school members over the issue of who would fill the next headmaster (*iemoto*) position after the passing of the former one.

In February 2000, disillusioned by the state of her school, Yoshiko returned her artistic title of Fujima Tomoya back to the Fujima school. Four months later, she founded a dance school, Asaji-ryu,⁴³ which is dedicated to teaching only *koutaburi*. At the same time, she became the headmaster (*iemoto*) of the school under the artistic name of Asaji Yoshie. I will henceforth refer to her as Yoshie Shisho. So far, Asaji-ryu is the only school known to specialize in teaching *koutaburi*. Many of her students have been taking dance lessons under Yoshie Shisho even before the Asaji school was founded. Yoshie Shisho recalls that she was worried about switching her school name and its specialization to the Asaji style *koutaburi* because many of her students came to learn dance under the name of Fujima Tomoya of Fujima school. However, she quickly learned that her students had no problems with such changes because they loved dancing and enjoyed taking lessons from her.

⁴³ The "Asaji" was named after the old name of her hometown, Asakusa. It literally means a field with short height Miscanthus.

For the past ten years, Yoshie Shisho has been giving lectures on *koutaburi* at the youth training classes offered through the Japan Arts Council hosted at the National Theatre in Tokyo. In the Asaji school, many students have interesting backgrounds, and some of them are members of other fields of performing arts, such as traditional comic storytelling (*rakugo*),⁴⁴ *naniwa-bushi* recitation (*rokyoku*), classical piano, and theatre and TV acting. Some of her students, particularly the older ones, simply come to take dance lessons at her studio for the purpose of exercising or as a form of rehabilitation or physical therapy (for knee or back pain issues). Yoshie Shisho also serves as the head of the *geisha* house Hatsune-ya and works closely with a *geisha* named Yoshiryo-san, who is a *jikata* (*shamisen* specialist) actively working in Asakusa today.

4.2.2 Asaji *Koutaburi* Coterie

Yoshie Shisho offers *koutaburi* lessons on Tuesdays and Fridays from 1pm to 7pm at her studio located in the basement of her house. Students receive one half-hour lesson every week on the day of their choosing. Besides these regular lessons, Yoshie Shisho organizes a recital called “*Asaji no kai* (A Gathering of Asaji)” on the last Sunday of October every year at a nearby recital hall called Raichu Kaikan in Asakusa. At this recital, students perform two *koutaburi* numbers to

⁴⁴ Lorie Brau mentions in her *Rakugo: Performing Comedy and Cultural Heritage in Contemporary Tokyo* that it is an advantage for the comic storytellers to practice traditional dance because the movements and posture learned through the dance trainings would help advancing their skills of storytelling performances. Brau 2008, 142. During my fieldwork, I attended various traditional comic storytelling shows (*yose*) performed by my *koutaburi* colleagues at the Suzumoto Theatre in Ueno. There, I was fortunate to see a performance of “*Lesson School (Keikoya)*” piece by Kingentei Basho XI, who is one of the eldest students at the Asaji school. This story portrays a comical scene in which a beautiful dance teacher gives a lesson to a clumsy student who cannot focus on the dance because his intention, all along, is to ask her out for a date. Since Basho-san was sitting on the stage with folded knees while performing this piece, he could only move his upper body to portray such dance scene. But, his hand gestures and angle of body were so sophisticated that it evoked the image of the beautiful dance teacher so well. Through this, I learned that the traditional performing arts are intimately connected to each other by sharing the same stories, thematic elements, movements, and expression techniques.

show their achievements over the past year to family and friends. Afterwards, there is a banquet to celebrate everyone's achievements over food and sake, and this is an especially fun socializing time for all since some of the comic storyteller colleagues spontaneously begin to perform their favorite jokes, stories, dances, and tricks in front of the participants.



Figure 4.2 Yoshie Shisho Dancing Her Number “*Fude no Kasa* (A Cap of Calligraphy Brush)” at the Asaji no Kai Recital (Raichu Kaikan Hall, November 1, 2009)



Figure 4.3 My First Public *Koutaburi* Performance of “*Yugure (At Twilight)*” at the Asaji no kai (Raichu Kaikan Hall, November 1, 2009)

As I mentioned in the last chapter, *koutaburi* performances are featured at *kouta* concerts too. At the concerts Seiyoshi Shisho organizes, several *koutaburi* numbers are often added at the end of the program. Most *koutaburi* students see it as a rare opportunity to experience a full-scale dance performance on a big stage (see Figure 4.4).



**Figure 4.4 *Koutaburi* Performance by Asaji Yoshihisa at the Seiyoshi-kai Concert
(Mitsukoshi Theatre Hall, May 5, 2012)**

As shown in Figures 4.2 and 4.3, at the Asaji no kai dance recital, the dancers perform accompanied by a pre-recorded *kouta* tape. By contrast, at Seiyoshi Shisho's *kouta* concert as shown in Figure 4.4, the dancer puts on a full costume of wig, hair ornaments, make-ups, and kimono, dancing to live accompanists who sing and play *shamisen* at stage left. It takes many months of practice to be able to dance comfortably in such a heavy costume and to acquire the proper sense of timing (*ma*) needed to match the accompaniment of live music.

4.2.3 On *Koutaburi* Lesson

Upon arriving at the dance studio, I first give a quick greeting to Yoshie Shisho. As she returns the greeting, she always hands me a freshly baked pastry that she bought from a nearby bakery. Once she told me that many of her younger students come to take lessons straight from school or work with empty stomach. During their lessons, they may quickly lose focus because of their low energy level, so it became customary for her to hand out pastries to the younger students as

they arrived. I thank her for her kindness and go to the room across from the studio to get changed into my cotton summer kimono (*yukata*), then, quickly go back to the studio. There is a waiting space for students to sit quietly and watch other students' lessons in the studio, so I position myself there and carefully watch the student's movements and listen to Yoshie Shisho's comments. Normally, one student sits by a cassette tape player placed next to Yoshie Shisho's desk. The student is there to pause or rewind the music whenever Yoshie Shisho gives the cue. Using cassette tapes may seem outmoded in 2015, but it is actually suitable for dance lessons because the dancer can use the momentary pause provided during the tape rewinding as a time to fix her kimono and to reflect upon mistakes made as well as any comments from Yoshie Shisho.

Koutaburi practice starts by learning the basics—how to sit, stand, and walk properly. In addition, since many *koutaburi* pieces use a large fan (about a foot in length), beginners learn the proper way of opening, closing, and holding the fan. The basic walking form is similar to the one of *noh*, but the direction of one's toes in *koutaburi* is different in the woman's role, in which the toes point inwards like "pigeon toes," while in the man's role, they point slightly outwards like "ballet toes." Mastering the basic walking form (*kata*) is very important and takes many years of practice.

Like the *kouta* lessons, each *koutaburi* lesson consists of practicing the same short segment of a piece repeatedly more than a half dozen times. For the first several times, Yoshie Shisho stands to the left front side of me and we dance the segment together. Once I become comfortable with the order of movements, Yoshie Shisho sits by her desk in front of the stage and gives instructions orally along with some hand gestures. The real lesson, however, actually starts after I have memorized the order of the choreography. This is the stage where Yoshie Shisho begins to give detailed instructions, correcting the angle of my hand, face, eyes, knees,

and torso. The problem I had in many lessons was that when I *thought* about the angles of my body while dancing, my movements became much more clumsy and unnatural. I realized that it takes many years to be able to dance properly because the body needs to first build the proper muscles in order to have the movements come naturally through the unconscious mind. Like *kouta*, *koutaburi* performance requires the building of the proper muscles as well as the “muscle memory” to execute the proper movements. One must achieve the right angles, distance, speed, intensity, and duration through one’s body without constantly using one’s mind.

Besides the fan, there are several props used for *koutaburi* dance: a round paper fan (*uchiwa*), a handkerchief (*tenugui*), an umbrella (*kasa*), a hat (*kasa* or *sugegasa*), and a sword (*katana*). These props are considered an *extension* of the dancer’s body, reflecting the dancer’s soul. Each movement that involves handling these props tells a story of the character as well as the atmosphere surrounding that character through dance. Among these props, the fan is the most versatile since it can represent many things—an umbrella, a sword, a paper, a pair of chopsticks, an oar, a sake bottle, etc.—depending on how the dancer holds it and moves it while dancing. While each dance movement expresses the meaning of the *kouta* text, Yoshie Shisho stresses the expression of *iroke* through such movements and corrects student’s postures based on whether or not they possess the quality of *iroke*. In order to look at this concept further, I will first depict the dance movements in the next section. Then, I will analyze the *koutaburi* movements by addressing what expresses *iroke* and what does not express *iroke*.

4.3 ANALYSIS OF A *KOUTABURI* PIECE

For sake of consistency with my analysis of *iroke* in *kouta* music, I will discuss “*Mizu no Debana* (As the Water Flows)” for the *koutaburi* analysis. As I mentioned in the introduction chapter, I have not been able to find any notations of this *koutaburi* piece. While the video camera is best at capturing the flow of choreography, it does not show the details of a dancer’s actual body angles or torso because they are hidden underneath the kimono. Thus, in order to make each movement as clear as possible to highlight the elements of *iroke*, I have transcribed these *koutaburi* pieces using stick-figure (*ningyo-fu*) imagery, a common technique in *kabuki* dance (*nihon buyo*) instructional textbooks.⁴⁵ Yoshie Shisho choreographed this dance, and I transcribed each movement based on her instructions. During lessons, Yoshie Shisho only told me “no, that is not *iroke*” or “dance it with more *iroke*” without fully explaining what was wrong with my movements. By making countless mistakes, I came to understand what movements express *iroke* and what movements do not possess *iroke*. Thus, the detailed descriptions of *iroke* movements as well as the interpretation of dance movements are all made based on my own observations.

As a supplement, I have uploaded my performance of “*Mizu no Debana*” to YouTube.⁴⁶ In the video, I am dancing to a recording of the piece sung by Ichimaru, an Asakusa *geisha* and a professional singer in the 1930s.⁴⁷ It must be noted here that even though Ichimaru studied *kouta* under Kasuga Toyo, founder of the Kasuga school, her version of “*Mizu*” from the CD reflects her own style of singing (or perhaps she was taking direction from the Victor label’s record

⁴⁵ Such as Hanayagi 1981.

⁴⁶ The video can be viewed through the following link: <https://youtu.be/YRUDusXfStE> (uploaded on September 25, 2015).

⁴⁷ This piece is featured in a CD *Ketteiban Kouta Nyumon* (*The Final Edition of Introduction to Kouta*) produced by the Victor Entertainment.

producers) and is not quite the same as I learned it from Seiyoshi Shisho. Thus, readers should be aware that Ichimaru's rendition as heard in the video does not follow exactly the way I have rendered it in my "Mizu" music transcription.

4.3.1 *Mizu no Debana* (As the Water Flows): Dance Transcription⁴⁸

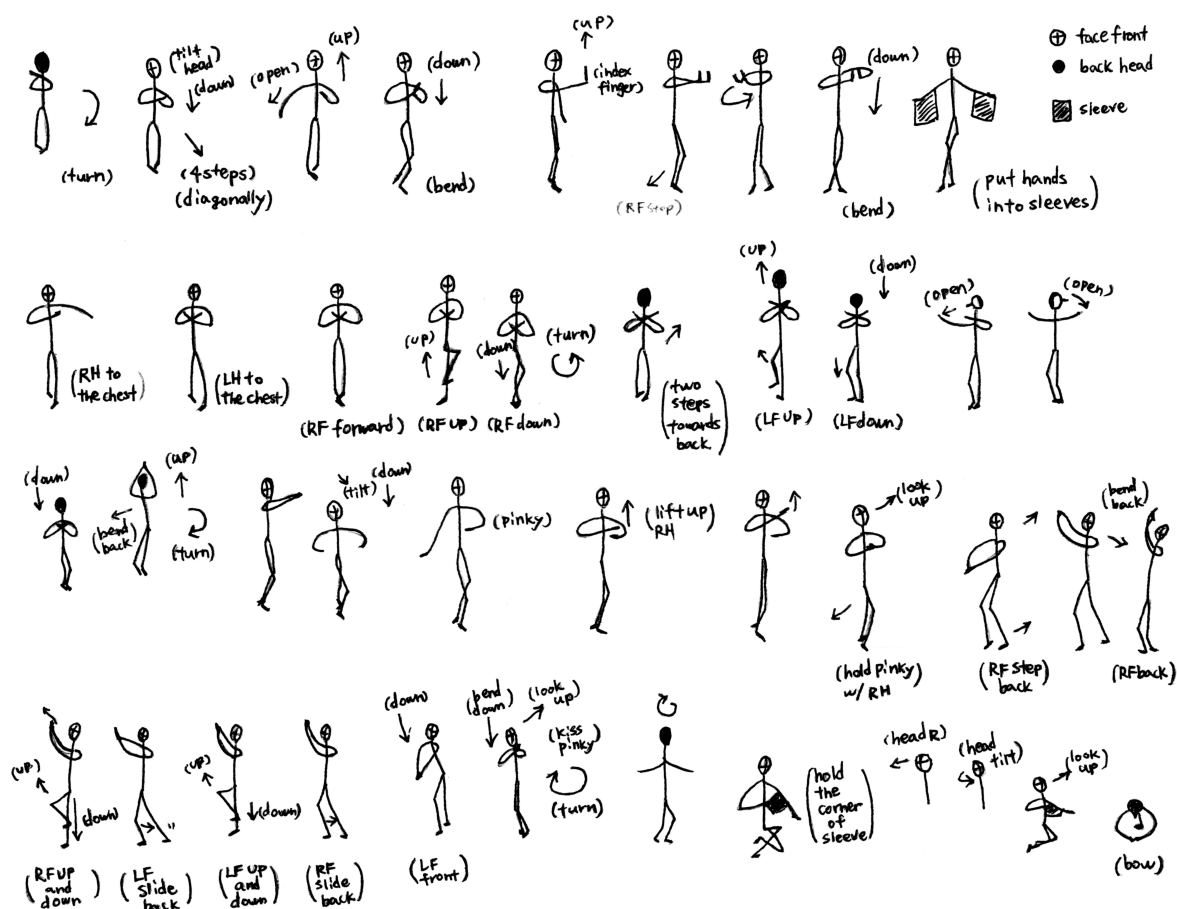


Figure 4.5 "Mizu no Debana" Koutaburi Transcription

⁴⁸ Transcription mine.

4.3.2 *Mizu no Debana* (As the Water Flows): Analysis and Interpretation of Movements

The figure displays a musical score for 'Mizu no Debana' (As the Water Flows) and a corresponding dance sequence. The score is written for Voice and Shamisen in 2/4 time. The lyrics are: 'Mi zu no - - - de ba na - to - (o)'. The dance sequence consists of four numbered steps:

- ①: (turn)
- ②: (tilt head) (down) (4 steps) (diagonally)
- ③: (open) (up)
- ④: (down) (bend)

Video [m:s]: [0:08] [0:11] [0:15] [0:18]

Figure 4.6 First Dance Sequence

① At the beginning of this dance, the dancer stands facing the back of the stage with the left foot positioned a step forward. With the “*chin-ton-shan*” (E-E (low)-E (octave) sequence) as a cue, the dancer turns around, facing the audience.

② At the “*-shan*,” the dancer bends down slightly, almost like a curtsy, while slightly tilting the head to the right. This slight tilt is considered a type of *iroke* expression. The lyrics here are “as the water flows,” but the movements do not necessarily correspond to the words. Rather, it can be considered an introduction or the entrance scene of a charming *geisha*. The dancer makes four steps forward in a diagonal direction. Since this is a female dance, the dancer must keep both knees together and both toes pointing inwards (like a pigeon-toed) when she walks.

③ When opening the right arm, the head tilts towards the left, and the eyes gently follow the direction of the right hand as if the dancer's sight is fixed on the direction where her lover is going.

④ The dancer brings her right hand back to gently touch the left hand, then she makes a curtsy pose again. This whole sequence represents the beauty of the *geisha*, who cannot think anything but her love, her loneliness, and her longing for her lover.

The figure displays a musical score and a corresponding dance sequence. The musical score at the top features two staves, V (Voice) and S (Soprano), with lyrics in parentheses: (o) fu ta ri - - ga - - na - ka - wa. Below the score, the lyrics are further defined: (our) and (relationship). The dance sequence is illustrated with four stick figures, each labeled with a circled number (5, 6, 7, 8) and a video timestamp. Figure 5 shows the dancer with both index fingers extended upwards, labeled '(UP)' and '(index finger)'. Figure 6 shows the dancer with her right foot extended forward, labeled '(RF Step)'. Figure 7 shows the dancer stepping forward to the right and turning to the left. Figure 8 shows the dancer with her right arm bent, labeled '(down)' and '(bend)'.

Lyrics: (our) (relationship)

Video [m:s]: [0:21] [0:23] [0:25] [0:28]

Figure 4.7 Second Dance Sequence

- ⑤ In this segment, the dancer sticks out both index fingers to represent two people as in the lyrics “*our* relationship.” Keeping the fingers high up at eye level shows that the character in this dance is young. If the character portrayed in the dance were an elderly woman, for instance, the arms would normally stay lower than the level of the dancer’s chest.
- ⑥ While staring at her fingers, the dancer puts her right foot out front.
- ⑦ The dancer steps forward to the right and turns to the left while continuing to stick out two index fingers. The dancer must keep the same distance between the two index fingers at all times. This movement and finger position symbolizes the lovers’ strong relationship and closeness that cannot be easily broken apart. The dancer’s eyes are fixed on and beyond the two

fingers. This is to show that her love for him is very strong and her determination towards their future relationship—to be together with (marry) him—is firm.

⑧ With the two fingers still up, the dancer makes another curtsy while slightly tilting her head which expresses *iroke*. While the previous three movements (⑤⑥⑦) are rather fluid in nature, this last movement, particularly the moment of the curtsy, is more static in nature and marks the end of the first phrase. In a way, this short “curtsy pose” provides a *ma* (pause or rest) that makes the contrast between the dynamic (moving) and the static (stopping) more evident. The stopped motion is as important as the fluid movements. It is almost as if the choreography is made in such a way as to provide a “still picture shot” moment with this pose.

The figure displays a musical score and a corresponding dance sequence. The musical score at the top features two staves: a vocal line (V) and a shamisen line (S). The vocal line includes lyrics: '- wa' at measure 9 and 'Se ka - re -' at measure 12. The shamisen line provides accompaniment. Below the score, a diagram illustrates four dance poses labeled 9, 10, 11, and 12. Pose 9 shows the dancer putting hands into sleeves. Pose 10 shows the right hand placed on the left side of the chest. Pose 11 shows the left hand placed on the right side of the chest. Pose 12 shows the right foot stepped forward. Below the diagram, a table provides video timestamps for each pose.

Video [m:s]:	9	10	11	12
	[0:32]	[0:34]	[0:36]	[0:39]

Figure 4.8 Third Dance Sequence

⑨ While the *shamisen* plays solo, the dancer puts her hands into her sleeves. In the sleeves, the index and middle fingers pinch a bit of kimono sleeve to hold it while keeping all fingers extended straight to make the edge of sleeves straight. This means that it is not the wrists or hands but the elbows that must be bent and kept close to the dancer's sides in order to keep both hands and arms inside of the sleeves. The key to dancing a *geisha* role is to always keep the elbows tightly attached to the chest—almost crushing the breasts. Such a posture represents youth, shyness, and charm.

⑩ The dancer gently places her right hand onto the left side of her chest.

⑪ Similarly, the dancer gently puts her left hand onto the right side of her chest. This crossing of the hands on the chest gesture symbolizes the embracement of love. Earlier, the dancer was using two index fingers to represent the relationship between her and her lover. Here, she brings them

closer to her heart, symbolizing her strong determination to keep her love and her lover to herself.

⑫ While keeping such strong affections, the dancer steps forward to show her willingness to take action with her lover (advancing the relationship by, perhaps, eloping together). A slight shift of the torso while stepping forward is considered a subtle expression of *iroke*.

V

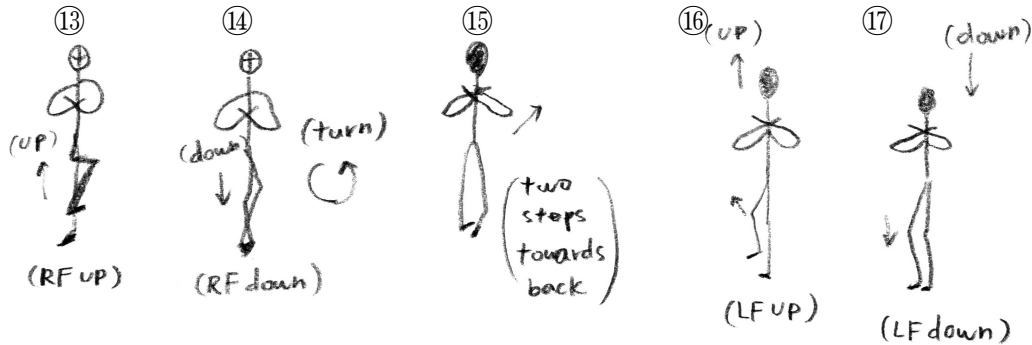
Se ka - re - a - wa - re - nu

S

Se ka - re - a - wa - re - nu

Lyrics: (broken or interrupted)

(cannot be)



Video [m:s]: [0:40]

[0:43]

[0:47]

[0:50]

[0:52]

Figure 4.9 Fourth Dance Sequence

⑬ The dancer lifts up her right foot while keeping the whole body steady. The foot must be horizontal to the floor. The toe and the knee must be pointing inwards to show femininity.

⑭ The dancer sets her right foot down to the floor. The up and down foot motion symbolizes her wish to move forward with her love relationship, however, she quickly realizes that doing so is risky because she still has obligations to fulfill (such as paying her debt). So, it also represents her frustration towards the position that she is in. While the hands crossing in front of the chest represent protection of her love and lover, the lyrics here sing “broken” or “interrupted,” and this is presented symbolically with foot stomping (doing so *separates* the knees that are normally kept together). Realizing that to achieve her love relationship she must to put everything behind, it means she must go closer to her death (perhaps a double suicide), so she hesitates for a

moment and quickly turns around, trying to avoid facing the problem and to move away from feeling the agony.

⑮ The dancer walks two steps towards the back, which symbolizes moving away from this world. Her slow steps express her feeling of torment as well as doubt—“should I walk away from him, or from my life?” When taking steps, the dancer must gently sway her shoulders right and left. This slight swaying of the body represents her affliction as well as femininity, and the viewers perceive it as a pitiful and sorrowful moment, which is in fact considered full of *iroke*. In addition, showing her heels when walking away is also considered an expression of *iroke*.

⑯ and ⑰ Again, the dancer lifts her foot up and down, representing frustration towards her lover and her life. The dancer must be particularly conscious about her back, because the backside of the body is considered more expressive of emotion than the front side of the body and is the very place that conveys *iroke* to the viewers.

	⑮	31 ⑯	⑰	⑱
V				
	Mi no -	(o)	i - n -	ga
S				
Lyrics:	(myself or body)		(fate or cause and effect)	
	⑮	⑯	⑰	⑱
Video [m:s]:	[0:53]	[0:55]	[0:56]	[0:59]

Figure 4.10 Fifth Dance Sequence

- ⑮ Still facing back, the dancer first opens up her left arm.
- ⑯ Then, the dancer opens up her right arm. The opening of arms symbolizes that she is giving in to the problem that she is facing. In other words, she is letting her love and her lover go. However, as she opens up her arm, her eyes remain fixated on her hands—particularly her index fingers, representing her and her lover—and so her gestures are telling the viewers that she cannot tear herself away from this love. On top of this, the lyrics sing “myself” or “body” to suggest that her body and soul are fully open (i.e., available) to the lover.
- ⑰ The dancer puts both palms together as if she were giving a prayer to the deities. Putting her hands together also symbolizes that her wish to keep herself (right index finger) and her lover

(left index finger) together. The dancer bends down to show that she is kneeling in front of the deities.

②① The dancer lifts both hands (with palms together) high up, showing that she is desperate and in need of guidance from the Buddha. While she cannot decide what to do with her love and herself, she realizes that her fate has already been determined from the time she was born and became a *geisha*, so there is nothing more that she can do—all she can do is to simply give up and accept her sad fate. When the dancer is facing the back of the stage, her back tends to look arched from the viewers' perspective, so the dancer must lean back as much as possible to keep her posture looking straight. Also, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, the nape of the neck is considered one of the most *iroke*-possessed body parts, so the dancer must use this opportunity effectively to express *iroke* in her dance.

Video [m:s]: [1:00] [1:02] [1:07] [1:09]

Figure 4.11 Sixth Dance Sequence

- ②② After a quick prayer gesture, the dancer turns around to the audience's side.
- ②③ She opens both arms while slightly tilting her head towards the right. Her eyes were first fixated on her left index finger (her lover), but then she looks up further into the sky, representing her resentment and despair.
- ②④ While the *shamisen* plays a "fate" melody similar to that in measures 31 to 33, the dancer puts her left pinky out in front of her. The pinky represents "fate" and is also used to symbolize the lover. This is based on an old Japanese belief (which is based on a Chinese legend) that the lovers are supposed to be tied together with a "red string of fate," and this string is tied to each

lover's pinky. The pinky is also used for making a pledge (like a pinky-swear), so it represents a "promise" too.

㊥ Here, the dancer lifts up her right hand, which now represents a knife. Because she knows that achieving her love relationship with him means a destruction of both their lives, she decides to cut off her pinky, representing her decision to give in to fate and end her love and relationship with him. Cutting off the pinky used to be practiced in real life when someone broke a promise or an oath (as a punishment) or someone withdrew from a community or group (like the *yakuza*) to show the seriousness the act.

39

26 27 28 29 30

V Ta to e - do na ta - no i - ke - n - de mo O *mp*

S

Lyrics: (even if)

(someone)

(opposes)



Video [m:s]: [1:10]

[1:12]

[1:15]

[1:16]

[1:18]

Figure 4.12 Seventh Dance Sequence

②⑥ The dancer lifts up her right hand (a knife) higher, attempting to cut off her fate and her relationship with her lover.

②⑦ As she is about to chop with the knife, she looks up. This very short moment of looking up represents her strong attachment to him, and she herself cannot believe what she is about to do. Her gaze expresses a hint of surprise as well as resentment and is considered full of *iroke* since it communicates her mind and feelings (her love and agony) to the audience directly. The dancer must use not only her hands, arms, and legs, but her eyes as well to express emotions. The dancer realizes that even though she knows the consequences, she still cannot let him go. So she quickly

throws away the knife (still represented by her right hand), and instead she gently grabs her pinky (her lover) to embrace him one more time.

②⑧ While she holds her pinky softly but firmly as if she is holding her lover's heart, she steps backwards.

②⑨ and ③⑩ The dancer raises her left pinky wrapped by her right hand high up in the air. This represents that nobody can interfere with her love and her relationship with her lover anymore. Raising her pinky high up also symbolizes that their relationship is sacred since it is closer to the sky (the world beyond this life, like a *floating* world).

46

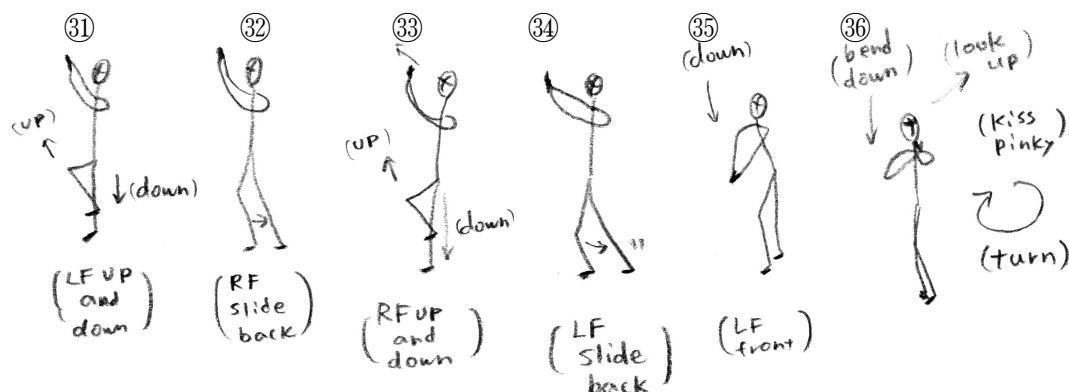
③① ③② ③③ ③④ ③⑤ ③⑥

V *mp* mo O mo - i *mf* O mo i ki ru ki - (i) - wa

S

@

Lyrics: (thought or love) (give up my love)



Video [m:s]: [1:20] [1:22] [1:23] [1:25] [1:27] [1:30]

Figure 4.13 Eighth Dance Sequence

③① and ③② The dancer lifts up and down her left foot, then slides her right foot back while continuing to hold her left pinky with her right hand, which shows her protection of her love and her lover. However, just as we have seen in the earlier movements (⑬⑭), the dancer's stomping feet represent her frustration, torment, and agony.

③③ and ③④ Similarly, the dancer lifts up and down her right foot, then slides her left foot back. This stomping and sliding movement is called *zuri-ashi* (literally, sliding foot). The dancer must keep her posture straight so that she does not lose her balance while standing on one foot. The dancer also has to keep both arms straight up in order to keep her sleeves covering her arms the

whole time. This is very challenging because gravity normally pulls her sleeves down, revealing her forearms—but this is not considered *iroke* in *koutaburi* performance. Again, a slight swaying of dancer's body while stomping her feet represents *iroke*.

③⑤ The *geisha*'s frustration (stomping feet) ebbs from exhaustion, and she lowers her both arms down.

③⑥ The dancer still continues to hold her left pinky with her right hand, and this time, she brings the pinky close to her mouth and gives it a kiss. The gesture of kissing the pinky is matched in the lyrics with “not giving up.” This gesture represents her unchanged love towards him and her strong determination that she will not give up and will pursue her love.

56 ③⑦ ③⑧ ③⑨ ④⑩

V

mm - sa ra - ni - na - i - (i)

S

@

Lyrics: (uh-uh) (I never give up my love)

③⑦ ③⑧ ③⑨ ④⑩

(head R)

(head tilt)

(look up)

(hold the corner of sleeve)

(bow)

Video [m:s]: [1:31] [1:33] [1:35] [1:37] [1:39] [1:42]

Figure 4.14 Ninth Dance Sequence

③⑦ The dancer turns quickly turns around to show a change of mood. It is almost as if the world in which she was dancing was simply a dream so that this quick turn signals her return to the real world—the world of *ozashiki*, the four and a half tatami mat room, in the pleasure quarter.

③⑧ The dancer holds a corner (or edge) of the left sleeve with her right hand and kneels down to the floor, holding the left hand forward. This gesture represents, “here, my heart is placed right in front of you (it is up to you whether to take it or not).” Kneeling down represents her submissiveness towards her lover, and it shows that she is not going anywhere. She will not

escape from reality and the problem. She is there to face it while giving an option for her lover to decide what to do with their relationship.

③⑨ The dancer looks to the right, looks straight, and tilts her head to the left while looking up.

This sequence of head shifting is considered expressive of *iroke*. When she looks to the right, it represents her concern towards the people around her. But immediately afterwards, she looks straight to her lover, which means that she actually does not care about what the people around her say about her and her relationship. As she sticks out her hand and tilts her head, she looks directly into her lover's eyes, as if she is asking him, "what would you like to do?" or "what is your verdict?" Keeping her balance on one knee puts her center off to the side, and this "off-centered" posture is considered to possess *iroke*. Staying in this posture is difficult, especially on the thighs, but it is important to keep it steady and take a moment of pause in it. This very quick frozen moment of *ma* (pause) creates a lingering effect and is also considered to express *iroke*.

④⑩ The piece ends with a deep bow.

4.4 THEORIZING *IROKE* IN *KOUTABURI*

So far, my analysis of this *koutaburi* dance piece has showed that the expression of *iroke* is in the small tilting of the head, the slight swaying of the dancer's body when walking, a subtle shifting of the torso, a kneeling or lowering of the body, and a gazing or shifting direction of the eyes. Rather than big or quick movements, *iroke* is best expressed through small, soft, quiet, and modest movements, and sometimes, it is expressed through *ma* (pause), the stillness of the body, the "non-moving" movements, and the motionless poses as well. Unlike *sexual appeal*, which

implies openly revealing one's sexually attractive body parts in front of viewers, *iroke* does not involve showing one's body at all. Far from it, displaying bare arms or legs during the dance is considered boorish (*yabo*) or even taboo, and it becomes a sign of the dancer's unskillfulness. According to Yoshie Shisho, the body parts that represent *iroke* are the nape of the neck, the heels, the hands, and the eyes (the gaze). This certainly resonates with Mishima Yukio's statement on *iroke* as discussed in Chapter 2. These *iroke*-expressing body parts are not related to reproduction or childrearing like breasts, cleavage, or buttocks. They are not related to any sexual organs at all, but rather distanced from them.

Yoshie Shisho once told me that, as in the word *buri* (*furi*), the *koutaburi* dance incorporates movements and gestures that are a part of everyday life, so the dance consists of pantomiming or mimicking day-to-day motions and activities. While each dance movement is choreographed based on what the *kouta* lyrics say, the character's subtle emotions and feelings are also quietly suggested and expressed through each movement. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the long history of *geisha* and *kabuki* actors' relationships and how their arts were developed and cultivated side by side. Just like Yoshie Shisho, many *geisha* take dance lessons under notable *kabuki* actors and choreographers even today, so it is natural to assume that *koutaburi* is the same as *kabuki* dance. However, in *koutaburi*, the dancer does not move much—she only takes a few steps—and the biggest movements are, at their best, walking, stomping feet, raising arms, and kneeling, but not jumping up and down, flipping, twirling, or changing (taking off) kimono while dancing. Indeed, *koutaburi* movements are much smaller and more delicate in nature than the movements seen on the *kabuki* stage. Thus, as Yoshie Shisho stated, “these movements were created by *geisha* for the *ozashiki* performance, so it is not *kabuki*—it is *koutaburi*.”

In a small *ozashiki* room, there is no space for a *geisha* to move around. There is also no need for the *geisha* to make large and exaggerated movements (after all, her patrons are only a few feet away). A *geisha* must be conscious of her body and movements so as not to break the paper screen or dining sets. In addition, the *geisha*'s costume—including a large hair-wig and long sleeve kimono—restricts the movements she can make. All of these physical restrictions become the basic components in defining the nature of *koutaburi*. With these restrictions, the focus of the dance naturally falls to expressions and emotions through subtle gestures or movements rather than enacting a famous battle scene or a portraying of spiritual possession as seen in *noh* and *kabuki*. As Yoshie Shisho mentioned, a good dance is actually a dance “without dancing,” in other words, a dance “that does not look like the dancer is moving at all.” This may sound like a contradiction, but I believe this is where *iroke* truly resides.

As I have mentioned, *koutaburi* movements are composed based on what the *kouta* lyrics say. Recalling the *kouta* analysis in Chapter 3, the lyrics describe beautiful scenery of nature while telling a story of *geisha*'s love and agony. In between such lines, in fact, the song was quietly suggesting the love-sex (*iro*) scene of the *geisha* and her lover. The words, the sounds of the *shamisen*, and the interaction between the vocalist and *shamisen* player, as a whole, all contributed to evoke imagery of a potential love-sex affair and the relationship between two lovers. Such imagery is hinted at through subtle changes of timbre, sonority, and especially the technique of dodging (*zurashi*, or the concept of *fusoku-furi*, neither attached nor detached) in both vocal and *shamisen* lines. In *kouta* performance, *iroke* expressions are mainly found in the sounds. However, in *koutaburi* performance, *iroke* expressions are mostly in the visual effects—in particular, in tilting, shifting, and swaying of the body. Looking at these movements carefully, it becomes clear that these movements emphasize a sense of *off-centered-ness*, or *zurashi*

(dodging or off-the-course). When lifting a heel, for example, the dancer must lean to one of her sides in order to be able to lift up her heel; consequently her center and balance shifts to the side, creating an *off-center* position. In addition, these movements mostly occur on the *offbeat*—so the dancer is actually *avoiding* or *dodging* the *kouta* beat. Also, just as *iroke* is expressed through the lingering sounds or in-between pauses, *koutaburi* too presents *iroke* through stillness and non-moving movements or poses. Thus, they share the same characteristics as *kouta*'s *iroke* expressions.

Even though *koutaburi* movements are designed to imitate daily activities and motions, they do not always do so literally. Rather, *koutaburi* movements are highly polished and stylized so that they portrayed *refined* versions of reality—akin to the depictions in the spring print pictures in Chapter 2. As I discussed earlier, *geisha* specialize in arts to entertain customers in *ozashiki* in order to provide a moment of relaxation for them just as it was done for the deities in ancient times. The goal of their artistic performance is to create a world that is far away from reality, and in particular, they strive for a world that can be only created through the *gei* (arts) full of *play*—including music, dance, tea, flower, as well as sex (*iro*). Since many Japanese arts revolve around *iro* (sex), the *geisha*'s *play* also involves acting like a lover or a wife—a kind of role-play—to create an imaginary love-sex affair and relationship between her and her customer. Again, *geisha*'s specialty is the *gei* (art), not *iro* (sex), so the essence of *iro* is preserved in their *gei*—this is the very meaning and existence of *kouta* and *koutaburi*. In them, *geisha* create an imaginary lovers' story and love-sex affairs, but since telling such stories in an obvious way is considered boorish (*yabo*), they mask them underneath words, sounds, and visual effects—this is *iroke*. In *kouta* and *koutaburi*, expressions of *iroke* are quietly addressed and hidden behind layers of meanings. The *iroke* is there to suggest a *playful* relationship of lovers, but it is only a

suggestion, which means that it never occurs in reality. The *geisha*'s *refined* version of reality is not the same as reality itself—this is where exactly the *floating world* is located. The playfulness of *play* extends to gender-play too. In *koutaburi*, the dancer's sex does not matter; anybody can dance male-style (like *samurai* warrior) or female-style (*geisha* or princess). The *geisha* is no exception in that she dances both male- and female-style dance so that gender roles are fluid in their artistic world. In a way, the gender is stylized in a highly *refined* manner, so again, they are not true to reality. However, such imaginary portrayals of gender and gendered movements are considered “good” and “beautiful,” so this became the very reason for people to take *koutaburi* and many other Japanese dance lessons.

Overall, in both *kouta* and *koutaburi* performances, what is happening artistically in texts, sounds, and visual effects is the mingling of two *potential* lovers—the *play*. This *play* does not mean that they are having sex or reaching to the point of physical climax. It is *play* because it only creates the *atmosphere* surrounding sex. In other words, *iro* (sex) is *distanced*, and all we see in the *play* is the *iroke*—the atmosphere of love-sex. It is in the *ambiance* rather than the physical forms. This *ambiance* is merely subjective and imaginary. Without knowing where or how to look for it, such *ambiance* cannot be found. Therefore, *iroke* exists only within the eyes of the beholder. With the proper sense and knowledge of arts, *iroke* will take the beholder to the *floating world*, where pleasures are fulfilled in the most refined way.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I attempted examine the “how” of *iroke* based on my personal training in *kouta* and *koutaburi*. In the next chapter, I will investigate the “why” of *iroke* by revisiting the history and context of *geisha* and their performance culture.

5.0 CONCLUSION

My research began with a simple curiosity about women's involvement and contributions to the world of male-centered Japanese traditional music. This led me to the music genre of *kouta* created by Kiyomoto Oyo, the female master of *kiyomoto* style narrative music used in *kabuki* theatres in the 1850s. Because of its shortness and playfulness, *kouta* came to be favored by *geisha* and was popularly performed at *ozashiki* to entertain customers in the pleasure quarters. Asakusa *geisha* Kasuga Toyo further explored this music genre by composing new pieces, and she founded a school to preserve and teach old and new *kouta* pieces to her *geisha* students over the last century. Kasuga Toyo Seiyoshi is one among them who worked as a *geisha* in Asakusa and became a full-time professional in teaching *kouta* to students at her home studio. In Japanese performing arts, it is conventional for music and dance to develop side by side, and this is true for *kouta* and *koutaburi*. Asaji Yoshie also formerly worked as a *geisha* in Asakusa and now teaches *koutaburi* to students at the school she founded, the Asaji school. The basis of my research was first to explore these two artistic genres preserved by two masters, Seiyoshi Shisho and Yoshie Shisho, and to become familiar with the artistic culture surrounding their schools.

In the course of my fieldwork, I realized that learning *kouta* and *koutaburi* meant not only learning to sing, play, and dance the repertoires, but to perform them *well* in such a way that each performance expresses elements of *iroke*, the atmosphere of love-sex. In *kouta*, I found that the elements of *iroke* are to be found in the sounds, the words, the structure of music, and the relationships or exchanges between the singer and the *shamisen* player. I found that there are few *visual* elements, such as movements of bodies or facial expressions, involved in the embodiment of *iroke* in *kouta* performance. The aesthetics of *iroke* in *kouta shamisen* are more prominent in

sounds than visual effects. This includes the *shamisen* player's plucking techniques, such as flicking, scooping, gliding, etc. These performance practices are less visible, and, in fact, often times they are so subtle that they are barely audible.

Looking closely at the structure of the music, the singer's and *shamisen* player's lines weave around each other by performing similar pitch and rhythmic patterns, however, they are actually never performed at the very same time (no unisons). Imagine that each music line represents a character appearing in the piece—in many cases, a man (patron) and a woman (*geisha*). The weaving of each line without having an incident of performing in unison suggests that it is as if these lovers flirt with each other to make a beautiful love-sex atmosphere, but they never show the moment of unity (sex) itself. In other words, through the sounds of two performers make, the listener is encouraged to *feel* the irresistible love-sex *atmosphere*—not the sexual intercourse itself—in the world of their imaginations; this is exactly where one's pleasures and sexual desires reach their level of highest satisfaction.

Simply put, in such an imaginative world, the physicality of sex (intercourse) is quietly suggested, but it is not the focus. In both audible and inaudible sounds, the essence of *iro* is hidden underneath words with layers of meanings, so that sex is *distanced*—even *negated* just as in the spring prints (*shunga*) discussed in Chapter 2. In *koutaburi* pieces, too, movements correspond to the lyrics of *kouta*, and they represent the subtlety of love-sex relationships described in the words through the shifting of legs, tilting of the head, lifting up of the heels, and moving of the eyes. Such movements are so restrained that they almost look like a dance “without dancing.” Unlike Okuni's highly energetic and evocative style of dance, *koutaburi* projects sexual atmosphere through very small, almost invisible body motions so that, again, it looks as if sex (*iro*) is *distanced*, or even non-existent in its choreography. It is up to the audience

to pick up such subtle love-sex atmospheric nuances, and unraveling the meanings hidden underneath such delicate and minimal motions provides a type of satisfaction to them. Indeed, discovering the significance of such vague *iroke* expressions is a challenge and only takes place within the viewer's imaginative world. I believe this is the true nature of the *floating world* where pleasures are obtained by *experiencing* the arts (*gei*), not through sex (*iro*); thus, *iroke*—the *atmosphere* or *phenomenon* surrounding love-sex—is more important than the sex (*iro*) itself. This is the very essence of the arts (*gei*)—the core of *play* (*asobi*)—that *geisha* offer.

While the history of Japanese performing arts records that females have played important roles in conducting rituals by dedicating music, dance, food, sake, and sex for deities in ancient times, it also shows a male-dominated social system that has gradually taken away women's positions and driven them out of the religious and political realms. In particular, female servants who were thrown out of the shrines and temples became itinerant performers, and they made their living by moving from town to town, port to port, selling arts (*gei*) that included sex (*iro*) for many centuries.

By the time the warring period was over, female performers returned to public venues performing new styles of music and dance in celebration of the peace finally obtained. Such female performances, however, quickly turned into a bustling business and became associated with the world that satisfies people's pleasures and desires. The government feared the outbursts of energy that female performers projected in their stage and their affect on audiences in theatres and playhouses. To maintain social order, female performers were banned from public venues and were gradually enclosed into the pleasure quarters built nearby the theatre districts to be tightly watched by government officials. Even though their ability to perform publicly was stripped away, female performers continued to entertain at private venues like teahouses,

restaurants, and the residences of feudal lords and *samurai* warriors. They also became teachers (*shisho*), giving lessons at small local lesson studios (*keiko-jyo*).

By the mid-1750s, the popular song and dance pieces performed on *kabuki* stages became too elaborate for the playful women who worked at the pleasure quarters to perform for their customers in *ozashiki*, so the female professionals who specialized in dancing and playing *shamisen*—*geisha*—appeared. While the playful women continued to specialize in all sorts of performing arts including sex (*iro*) just like their forebears—the ancient shrine maidens and the white rhythm women—the *geisha* separated sex (*iro*) from their arts (*gei*) in order not to undertake the playful women's roles in the pleasure quarters. Separating the arts from sex led to an over-concentration of sexual acts, and eventually, the playful women lost their status and disappeared from the pleasure quarters; in other words, sex (*iro*) could not keep them in business—the arts (*gei*) were necessary for customers to visit the pleasure quarters.

The *geisha*, who “sold arts (*gei*), not sex (*iro*),” continued to work as professional artists to entertain customers in *ozashiki*. As the Edo journalist Narushima Ryuhoku and the famous Kyoto *geisha* Iwasaki Mineko observed, the *geisha*'s status and position was secured as performing artists—selling the arts—so that they had no reason to sell sex in order to make money in *ozashiki*. They were, in a way, a prototype of independent, self-sufficient, career women. Because they did not sell sex (*iro*), the government recognized them as legitimate career women, and the *geisha*, too, took pride in their occupations.¹

In the early 1870s, the civil rights activists Fukuzawa Yukichi and Mori Arinori began to advocate equality of the sexes, monogamy, banning of keeping mistresses, and abolition of legally protected pleasure quarters and sex workers in the name of “civilization” and

¹ Sone Hiromi, “*Geisha-ko* (Thoughts on *Geisha*),” in *Jyenda no Nihonshi (Japanese History of Gender)*, edited by Wakita Haruko and S. B. Hanley (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1994), 421.

“enlightenment.” By the late 1880s, *geisha* came to be looked down upon because of a movement by a group of Christian women (Kyofu-kai and Kyu-sei-gun) to abolish all sex traders. Their intentions were to ban all prostitutes because they were considered “dirty,” to wipe out all pleasure quarters since they were against their Christian morality, and to promote women’s liberation.² Ironically, this movement became the very cause of discrimination against any women who were working in and around the theatres and pleasure quarters, including the *geisha*. They were not simply looked down upon, but they were treated as criminals and there were calls for *geishas*’ civil rights to be forfeited.³ Such criminalization of *geisha* was part of an effort to keep up Japan’s appearance in the West. While Japan denied any legal and financial involvements with sex industries, they in fact continued to collect substantial taxes from them unofficially well into the 1940s—and to ingrain the notion of anything relating to sex as evil and sinful into people’s minds.⁴

In Chapter 2, I explored the Japanese notion of sex (*iro*) and discussed that virginity was not a deciding factor of a woman’s value or something that played a significant role at the time of her marriage prior to the Meiji period. By the 1890s, however, with the strong influence of Christian notions of purity and virginity as they related to women and womanhood, the *geisha*—even though they were *not* selling sex—came to be considered “fallen” women, who were vulgar, indecent, and not suitable for marriage, and they were particularly vilified by housewives afraid that their husbands might be seduced by *geisha*’s “sly tricks” and charm.⁵

² Fujime Yuki, “*Kindai Nihon no Kosho Seido to Haisho Undo* (Modern Japan’s Legalized Prostitution System and Its Abolishing Movement),” in *Jyenda no Nihonshi (Japanese History of Gender)*, edited by Wakita Haruko and S. B. Hanley (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1994), 475-476.

³ Ibid., 478.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 481.

The notion of sex (*iro*), which used to be an integral part of religious activities and the subject of many Japanese arts, thus came to be something to be looked down upon, and anybody or anything related to the world of sex (*iro*)—*geisha*, *shamisen*, and *geisha* arts—became “cheap” and “dirty” under the new nationalistic ideologies and movements.⁶ While there were movements to abolish the *shamisen* and its music,⁷ there were also movements to reform the performance practices of theatre (*engeki*) and popular *shamisen* songs (*zokkyoku*), which involved erasing contents describing the love-sex (*iro*) relationships.⁸ At the turn of the last century, everything related to the theatres and pleasure quarters was under attack.

Amidst these antagonistic movements and discriminations, *geisha* like Kasuga Toyo continued to recognize their artistic value in *kouta*, Toyo devoted her life to preserving *kouta*. A review of Kiyomoto Oyo’s and Kasuga Toyo’s *kouta* compositions reveals that Toyo infused more of the nature of *geisha* lives and the characteristics of love-sex relationships into the *kouta* song form that Oyo created. In such processes, the aesthetic element of *iroke* was polished up and crystallized. Too much emphasis on the sexual elements (*iro*) in songs and dances came to be heavily criticized and even banned. In a way, the inaudibility and invisibility of *iro* as expressed in *iroke* was indeed a key factor in the survival of *geisha* arts during such harsh time periods. After World War II, with the help of preservation of traditional arts movements, *kouta* and *koutaburi* became very popular among businessmen as must-learn and must-have artistic skills in order to win promotion to a higher position in their companies. This was the time when society recognized *geisha* as artists and came to understand the value of the arts they offered. This helped to reestablish *geisha* as professional performers, preservers, and disseminators of

⁶ Saeki Jyunko, *Iro to Ai no Hikaku Bunkashi (Comparative Cultural History of Sex and Love)* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1998), 14-15.

⁷ Kurata Yoshihiro, *Shibai Goya to Yose no Kindai (Playhouses and Vaudeville Theatres of Modern Period)* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2006), 74.

⁸ Kikkawa 1974, 367 and 394.

centuries-old arts. Recognition of their societal status came to be reflected in their titles and positions as teachers (*shisho*) and headmasters (*iemoto*) of artistic schools that had not existed previously. I believe that the reason *geisha* were able to win back their status was their mastery of the essence of *iroke* and its expression in their arts. *Iroke* is truly of the core of *geisha* arts, and this is why Seiyoshi Shisho and Yoshie Shisho continued to emphasize it and to correct my performance accordingly.

Even though *geisha* were able to gradually gain back their status in Japan, they are still misunderstood internationally. Over the past several centuries, there have been three subjects used repeatedly as the ultimate representations of Japan—Mount Fuji (*Fujiyama*), cherry blossoms (*sakura*), and *geisha*.⁹ Social anthropologist Brian Moeran and cultural anthropologist Lise Skov explain that these icons symbolize, to the Japanese, what is “quintessentially Japanese—from transience of life and death of *samurai* to the flowering of feminine beauty,”¹⁰ but non-Japanese have perceived these icons somewhat differently. For example, notable works treating *geisha* as leading characters range from Pierre Loti’s novel *Madame Chrysanthème* (1888), Sidney Jones’ musical *The Geisha* (1896) and Giacomo Puccini’s opera *Madama Butterfly* (1904) to Arthur Golden’s novel *Memoirs of a Geisha* (1997) and its film adaptation by Rob Marshall (2005).¹¹ In these works, the authors describe the *geisha* as a faithful young girl, devoting herself to a lover on one hand, and as a “prostitute(s), held in slavery,”¹² an “alien, an unmarriageable *other*,”¹³ an “irrational (non-)being,”¹⁴ an “ignorant, ingenuous, young bride,”¹⁵

⁹ Cobb 1995, Downer 2006.

¹⁰ Brian Moeran and Lise Skov, “Mount Fuji and the Cherry Blossoms: A View from Afar,” in *Japanese Images of Nature*, edited by Pamela J. Asquith and Arne Kalland (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1997), 195.

¹¹ More comprehensive list on works using *geisha* can be found in Kelly Foreman’s Ph.D. dissertation *The Role of Music in the Lives and Identities of Japanese Geisha*, 33-43.

¹² Stephen and Ethel Longstreet, *Yoshiwara: City of the Senses* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1970), x.

¹³ Ping-Hui Liao, “Of Writing Words for Music Which Is Already Made: *Madama Butterfly*, *Turandot*, and Orientalism,” in *Cultural Critique*, vol. 16 (1990), 32.

and an “exotic little creature,”¹⁶ on the other. Such contradictory images—irrationality over passion, ignorance over innocence—have dominated past media and are still disseminated as general understandings of *geisha*.

In addition to these contradictory images, authors have described *geisha* as “extremely sensual and erotic”¹⁷ or as the “allure of the mysterious East,”¹⁸ offering sexual pleasures and amusements. John Louis DiGaetani explains that this is because *geisha* were the first to welcome foreign visitors, and they often worked not only as hosts to provide room and board, or maids to serve as caretakers, but also as sexual partners when Japan opened its gate to the West in the late 19th century.¹⁹ The notion of *geisha* as “prostitutes” continues to be depicted in Joanna Bailey’s documentary film *Geisha* (2000). Rather than focusing on reporting what *geisha* actually do artistically for their careers, Bailey’s film depicts *geisha* as exotic, alienated, mysterious beings, who are unable to fit into modern society.

The *tradition* of eroticizing and exoticising *geisha* continues in mainstream Western culture as well. For example, American pop-star Madonna amused her audiences by dressing up in a *geisha*-like costume—called Geisha-glam—singing and performing a provocative dance in the music video “Nothing Really Matters” (1999) as well as the concert piece “Nobody’s Perfect” featured in The Drowned World Tour (2001).

¹⁴ Brian Moeran, “The Orient Strikes Back: Advertising and Imagining Japan,” in *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 13, no. 3 (1996), 83.

¹⁵ Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the “Yellow Peril”: Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 78.

¹⁶ John Louis DiGaetani, *Puccini the Thinker: The Composer’s Intellectual and Dramatic Development* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 116.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁸ Downer 2006, 225.

¹⁹ DiGaetani, 117.



Figure 5.1 Madonna in “Nothing Really Matters”²⁰

In these pieces, Madonna enacted stories of domestic violence and suppression of women, on one hand, and women’s hidden strength and power to fight back against men, on the other. Rahul Gairola suggests that while Madonna as *geisha* embodied contradictions of gender and ethnicity by using her natural body as “an ideological canvas,”²¹ audiences—especially Asian and Asian-Americans—simply saw her as a sexy, “white performer,” unrelatable to the “true ethnic subject.”²² Madonna’s portrayal highlighted the image of *geisha* as a conflicted woman, wrapped with sexual attractions, gender-power complications, mysteriousness, and exoticism.

According to Lesley Downer, these notions reflect “Western fantasy” derived from the fascination and curiosity toward *geisha* because there is no comparable profession that exists in

²⁰ From the website: <http://madonnascrapbook.blogspot.com/2010/07/hatsumomo.html> (accessed July 12, 2013).

²¹ Rahul Gairola, “Re-Worlding the Oriental,” in *Madonna’s Drowned Worlds: New Approaches to her Cultural Transformations, 1983-2003*, edited by Santiago Fouz-Hernandez and Freya Jarman-Ivens. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 110.

²² Ibid.

the West.²³ Drawing on Edward Said's theory of *Orientalism* (1978), Moeran suggests that the West used icons like *geisha* and *samurai* warriors to stress Japanese "Otherness" and to distinguish the *Far* East from *other* "Oriental communities" such as the Middle East or India (the *Near* East).²⁴ In these processes, Moeran adds, some misconceived characteristics—smallness, childishness, or inscrutableness—stood out and identified their *style*, representing stereotypical images of Japan.²⁵ On these bases, Japan was, and still is, *imagined* even today.

Ironically, Japanese now employ orientalized notions and imagined representations of Japan to attract global audiences. According to Moeran, Japan uses the same style characteristics and techniques to *reinforce* the image of Japan in the eyes of the contemporary West, transforming the negative images attached to the people of the Orient into more positive assessments for their own benefit.²⁶ Moeran calls such an effect "Counter-Orientalism" and points out that it is evident especially in the advertisements of political and economic campaigns.²⁷ I found an interesting example representing "Counter-Orientalism" in a 2010 promotional banner produced by the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) operated under the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) of Japan. In addition to the rising sun over Mount Fuji (*Fujiyama*) and Hokusai-esque big ocean waves representing the natural beauty, Hello Kitty dressed up in a *geisha* costume elegantly poses amidst windswept cherry blossom (*sakura*) petals (see Figure 5.2).

²³ Downer, 225.

²⁴ Moeran 1996, 79-80.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 95.

²⁷ Ibid., 106.



Figure 5.2 “Yokoso! Japan” (Welcome to Japan!) Tourism Promotion Banner²⁸

In this design, the stereotypical icons of Japan receive a modern makeover—Sanrio’s worldwide best-selling character Hello Kitty as a *geisha*, with a touch of the cute (*kawaii*) comic-chic (*manga*) style painting, and Japanese calligraphic strokes for the English typesetting—as if sending the message of “this beautiful *Japan* is waiting for you to be (re-)discovered” to worldwide tourists. The smallness and childishness are well crafted with the roundish outline of cutesy style designs, giving a positive impression to viewers (encompassing Moeran’s “Counter-Orientalism”). Meanwhile, the inscrutableness—another Orientalised style Moeran suggested earlier—is somewhat erased behind the innocent gaze of Hello Kitty. I suggest that this inscrutableness—an image specifically attached to *geisha*—lies in the physical or sexual attraction projected through *geisha* figures and gestures, often perceived as mysterious and negative to Western audiences. This is, I believe, the quality of *iroke*—the core of *geisha* arts—that *geisha* embody through their demeanors that were only gained through many hours of serious artistic trainings. However, to avoid projecting such incomprehensible or “negative” images, this campaign design substitutes the elements of mysteriousness (or sexiness)—*iroke*—

²⁸ From the website: <http://gotochikitty.com/goods/promotion/yokosojapan/index.html> (accessed September 20, 2012).

with garish cuteness embodied in Hello Kitty—a non-sexual fictional character—to present a more positive image of Japan to the world.

Considering all these points, the aesthetic elements of *iroke* expressed through *geisha*'s performances have been the very source of confusion and contradiction—the mysteriousness and inscrutableness—particularly to Western audiences. This is because, as I have mentioned, the notion of sex (*iro*) was quite different between Japan and the West before Westernization movements. As the Western and American culture, commodities, and ideologies have poured into Japan over the past century, the notion of sex (*iro*) as well as the love-sex atmosphere (*iroke*) began to change too. The term *iro* is no longer used to mean sex in Japanese, but instead, it is predominantly used to mean “color.” In addition, the term *iroke* now frequently appears as *o-iroke*, with the honorific title “*o*” in front of *iroke* to depict something naughty, even vulgar and pornographic. I believe this is because the Western (or Judao-Christian) ideology of sex, sexual desires, and eroticism as sinful, which focused more on the physicality and visibility of bodies, influenced the Japanese notion of *iroke* in such a way that it converted *iroke*'s positive nuances into more negative and degrading representations. Thus, people, in and outside of Japan, who have no idea what *iro* or *iroke* means and have no understanding of the *geisha*'s arts, make quick judgments toward *geisha* and continue to revert to old stereotypical images of *mysterious*, incomprehensible *others*, calling them “sluts” and “prostitutes” even today. All of these misconceptions, I believe, can be dismissed once people take the time to watch the *geisha* arts and learn to appreciate what they have to offer.

“*Geisha* sells arts, not sex”—this was the phrase that the *geisha* in the last century had to continue stressing to the public. Based on my research, I would like to suggest that “*geisha* sells the arts of *iroke*, not *iro* (sex)” as this century's phrase. In order to help eliminate the

misunderstood imagery of the “*geisha*-girl monster” (in Foreman’s words), it is important to first explain the differences in Japanese notion of *iro* and the Western notion of sex—it is not the same as *eroticism*, but instead, it is the *iro*icism. To understand what this *iro*icism is, it is crucial to discuss what *iroke* is and how *iroke* is expressed through the *geisha* arts—*kouta* and *koutaburi*. Learning *kouta* and *koutaburi* will help in understanding the *geisha*’s *raison d’être* in the modern society.

APPENDIX

Chronology

Early Historical Period

Asuka and Nara: 550 – 794

Heian: 794 – 1185

Medieval Period

Kamakura: 1185 – 1333

Muromachi: 1333 – 1573

Early Modern Period

Edo (Tokugawa): 1600 – 1868

Modern Period

Meiji: 1868 – 1912

Taisho: 1912 – 1926

Showa: 1926 – 1989

Heisei: 1989 – current

Glossary of Romanized Terms and Names

<i>aibiki</i>	逢引	a short cane stool used during <i>kouta</i> lessons
<i>aruki miko</i>	歩き巫女	walking shrine maidens
Asaji Yoshie	浅茅与志江	the headmaster of Asaji <i>koutaburi</i> school
<i>asobi</i>	遊び	play
<i>bi</i>	美	beauty
<i>bi-gaku</i>	美学	the science of beauty (aesthetics)
<i>bi-ishiki</i>	美意識	the fragments of individual aesthetic sensibilities
<i>bunkafu</i>	文化譜	a type of <i>shamisen</i> tablature score
<i>bunmei kaika</i>	文明開化	the civilization and enlightenment movement

<i>danna</i>	旦那	a wealthy patron
<i>deshi</i>	弟子	pupil or disciple
<i>fue</i>	笛	a flute
<i>furyu odori</i>	風流踊り	the flamboyant festival dance
<i>futa-yuka</i>	二床	using two small separate performance stages
<i>fuzoku-gyo</i>	風俗業	the sex industry
<i>gei</i>	芸	arts
<i>geiko</i>	芸子／芸妓	same as <i>geisha</i> , but it is predominantly used in Kyoto and Osaka area
<i>geisha</i>	芸者	female artists specialized in various kinds of Japanese traditional performing arts
<i>geisha-ya</i>	芸者屋	the <i>geisha</i> houses
<i>gense</i>	現世	this immediate life or world
<i>gokuraku</i>	極楽	the Buddhist paradise or the western pure land (<i>saiho-jyodo</i>)
<i>goshugi-mono</i>	ご祝儀物	the things for celebration or a tip or a gift
<i>ha</i>	派	style or group
<i>hako-ya</i>	箱屋	a <i>shamisen</i> career who assists <i>geisha</i>
<i>hanamachi</i>	花街	the flower town, another name of pleasure quarters, some pronounce it as <i>kagai</i>
<i>hantama</i>	半玉	an apprentice <i>geisha</i>
<i>hauta</i>	端唄	the scrap songs or the cutting-edge songs
<i>hitoyogiri</i>	一節切	a type of bamboo flute
<i>hito-yuka</i>	一床	using all floor for the performance stage

<i>hogaku</i>	邦楽	the Japanese music
<i>hon-ban</i>	本番	the main number
<i>hoto</i>	陰	vagina, also called as <i>joyoin</i> (女陰)
<i>ichiya-zuma</i>	一夜妻	a one-night wife
<i>ie</i>	家	family or household
<i>iemoto</i>	家元	the headmaster
<i>i-go</i>	囲碁	a board game
<i>iki</i>	粋	cool or stylish
<i>imayo</i>	今様	the long stanza song style popularly performed in Heian and Kamakura periods
<i>insei</i>	淫声	the obscene or licentious voice
<i>ippon</i>	一本	a full-fledged <i>geisha</i>
<i>iro</i>	色	colors, emotions, sex
<i>irogonomi</i>	色好み	the love of love-sex, also <i>koshoku</i>
<i>iroito</i>	色糸	the sexual strings, <i>shamisen</i>
<i>iroke</i>	色気	love-sex atmosphere
<i>jikata</i>	地方	musicians
<i>jiuta</i>	地歌／地唄	the local songs of Kyoto
<i>jyoro</i>	女郎	the women of the pleasure quarters
<i>jyoruri</i>	浄瑠璃	the music used in puppet theatres
<i>kabuki</i>	歌舞伎	the Japanese traditional all-men music, dance, and acrobatic performance
<i>kaede</i>	替手	an additional <i>shamisen</i> melodic line

<i>kakekotoba</i>	掛詞	puns
<i>kagura</i>	神楽	deities play (<i>kami-asobi</i>) or delighting the deities, old shrine and court music
<i>kami</i>	神	divine beings
<i>kami-gakari</i>	神懸かり	the divine attachment or possession
<i>kamigata-uta</i>	上方歌	the Kyoto songs
<i>kandokoro</i>	勘所	pitch spots on <i>shamisen</i>
Kannon-sama	観音さま	the Buddhist goddess of mercy
<i>karyukai</i>	花柳界	the flower and willow world, the pleasure quarter
Kasuga Toyo	春日とよ	the founder of Kasuga <i>kouta</i> school
Kasuga Toyo Seiyoshi	春日とよせい吉	the master of Kasuga style <i>kouta</i>
<i>katagi</i>	堅気	a staid person or a person who is not familiar with cultures of pleasure quarters
<i>katarimono</i>	語り物	the narrative music
<i>kegare</i>	穢れ	impurity or pollution
<i>keiko-ba</i>	稽古場	a lesson studio
<i>keiko-ya</i>	稽古屋	a lesson house
<i>kenban</i>	見番	the <i>geisha</i> registration office
<i>kengyo</i>	検校	the professional blind musicians
<i>ki</i> (or <i>ke</i>)	気	air, energy, atmosphere, breath, spirits, etc.
<i>kibyoshi</i>	黄表紙	a type of adult comics
<i>kimono</i>	着物	Japanese traditional robes
<i>kiyari</i>	木遣り	the auspicious traditional woodcutter folksong

<i>kiyomoto</i>	清元	the narrative music used in the <i>kabuki</i> theatre
Kiyomoto Oyo	清元お葉	the creater of <i>kouta</i>
<i>komai</i>	小舞	the small-dance
<i>koto-dama</i>	言霊	the soulful words
<i>koto-hogi</i>	寿／言祝ぎ	the recitation of good and auspicious words, the eulogy
<i>kosu-pure</i>	コスプレ	costume-play
<i>kouta</i>	小唄	the small songs
<i>koutaburi</i>	小唄振り	the dance of small songs
<i>kuchi-jyamisen</i>	口三味線	the mouth <i>shamisen</i> , onomatopoeic sounds representing the <i>shamisen</i> sound as mnemonic technique
<i>kuchi-yose</i>	口寄せ	the calling for the divine spirits
<i>kugutsu-me</i>	傀儡女	the puppeteer women
<i>kuruwa</i>	廓	the licensed pleasure quarter
<i>kusemai-me</i>	曲舞女	the melodic-dance women
<i>kyogen</i>	狂言	the comical acts
<i>ma</i>	間	pause, rhythm
<i>machiai</i>	待ち合い	the teahouses
<i>mai</i>	舞	dance, emphasis in circular-motions
<i>maiko</i>	舞子／舞妓	an apprentice <i>geisha</i> , mainly used in Kyoto
<i>matsuri</i>	祭	festival
<i>miko</i>	巫女	a shrine maiden or a psychic medium

<i>nabirome</i>	名披露目	the announcement of artistic name
<i>nagauta</i>	長唄	the long songs, used in <i>kabuki</i>
<i>nagazao</i>	長棹	the long neck style <i>shamisen</i>
<i>nagebushi</i>	投げ節	the “throwing” songs, a style of popular <i>ozashiki</i> songs came out of the pleasure quarter in Kyoto
<i>natori</i>	名取	artistic title or performing name
<i>nidai akusho</i>	二大悪所	the two-biggest bad places (theatre and pleasure quarters)
<i>nihon buyo</i>	日本舞踊	the Japanese traditional dance developed from <i>kabuki</i> dance
<i>ningyo-fu</i>	人形譜	a stick figure style dance notation system
<i>noh</i>	能	the Japanese traditional performing arts developed in the medieval period
<i>nureba</i>	濡れ場	the soaking scene, portraying lover’s exchanges
<i>odori</i>	踊	dance, emphasis in up-down motions
<i>odoriko</i>	踊子	dance child
<i>ohayashi</i>	お囃子	the percussion ensembles
<i>okina</i>	翁	an old, auspicious man, appears in <i>sanbaso</i> piece
<i>oiran</i>	花魁	a lower ranked playful women
<i>onnagata</i>	女形	female impersonators in <i>kabuki</i>
<i>onna sarugaku</i>	女猿楽	the women’s <i>noh</i>
<i>o-uta</i>	大歌	the male court musicians’ lengthy songs
<i>ozashiki</i>	お座敷	a small exquisite Japanese style room provided in high-class restaurants
<i>renga</i>	連歌	a type of long and connected poem

<i>riyaku</i>	利益	benefit
<i>rosaibushi</i>	弄斎節	an alternate version of <i>ryutatsu</i> songs created by a monk named Rosai
<i>ryoriya</i>	料理屋	the restaurants
<i>ryu</i>	流	school
<i>ryutatsubushi</i>	隆達節	a type of popular song created by Ryutatsu
<i>sae no kami</i>	塞の神	the traveler's guardian deities or <i>do-so-jin</i>
<i>sango</i>	三ゴ	three must-do hobbies, <i>i-go</i> board game, golf, and <i>kouta</i>
<i>sangyo</i>	三業	three industries that used to support the businesses of pleasure quarter
<i>salary-man</i>	サラリーマン	Japanese businessmen
<i>sarugaku</i>	猿楽／散楽	the old name of <i>noh</i>
<i>sarume</i>	猿女	a group of court musicians and dancers
<i>sawari</i>	さわり	the touched spot on <i>shamisen</i> and the buzzing sound it produces
<i>seiza</i>	正座	sitting in a folded knee style
<i>senryu</i>	川柳	a type of satirical seventeen-syllable poem
Sensoji	浅草寺	the Buddhist temple in Asakusa
<i>sha</i>	者	person
<i>shachu</i>	社中	artistic coterie, also called <i>monka</i>
<i>shamisen</i>	三味線	a three-stringed long neck lute
<i>shamisen kumiuta</i>	三味線組歌	the set-songs for <i>shamisen</i>
<i>share-bon</i>	洒落本	books depicting lives of pleasure quarters

<i>shijyo-han</i>	四畳半	the four and a half <i>tatami</i> mat room, normal size for <i>ozashiki</i>
<i>shitazarai</i>	下浚い	rehearsals, also called <i>osarai-kai</i>
<i>shirabyoshi-me</i>	白拍子女	the white rhythm women
<i>shisho</i>	師匠	master of arts
<i>shosa</i>	所作	the pantomimic dance
<i>shunga</i>	春画	the spring pictures
<i>sui-jin</i>	粋人	a person with <i>iki</i> (cool and stylish with cultivated tastes)
<i>sute-ban</i>	ステ番	the “throwing” number
<i>tachikata</i>	立方	dancers or actors
<i>taiko</i>	太鼓	a stick drum
<i>taiko-mochi</i>	太鼓持	male <i>geisha</i> , literally, a drum-holder, also called <i>ho-kan</i> , a helper of party
<i>tama-furi</i>	魂振り	soul-shaking
<i>tamashii</i>	魂	soul
<i>tama-shizume</i>	魂鎮め	soul-soothing
<i>tayū</i>	太夫	a highly artistically trained courtesan
<i>tokiwazu</i>	常磐津	the narrative music used in the <i>kabuki</i> theatre
<i>tsugizao</i>	継棹	the connected necks style of <i>shamisen</i>
<i>tsu-jin</i>	通人	a person of versed, particularly in arts
<i>tsuzumi</i>	鼓	hourglass-shaped drums
<i>ukiyo</i>	浮世	the floating world

<i>ukiyo-e</i>	浮世絵	the wooden block prints
<i>uta</i>	唄／歌	song
<i>utai</i>	謡	the <i>noh</i> singing or songs
<i>utagaki</i>	歌垣	the erotic song exchanges or the gathering song (<i>kagai</i>)
<i>utaimono</i>	歌い物	the lyric music
<i>wakashu kabuki</i>	若衆歌舞伎	the boys <i>kabuki</i>
<i>yabo</i>	野暮	boorish or not cool
<i>yakusha</i>	役者	the actor
<i>yayako odori</i>	ややこ踊り	the baby girl dance
<i>yorishiro</i>	依り代	a marker for deities to descend on
Yoshiwara	吉原	the licensed pleasure quarter located current Asakusa area, extinct
<i>yujo (asobime)</i>	遊女	playful women
<i>yukata</i>	浴衣	a cotton summer <i>kimono</i>

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