

Speaking of Yamashika: “the last *biwa hōshi*” and his many voices

Hugh de Ferranti

While researching practices of oral narrative singing with *biwa* accompaniment in Kyūshū, southern Japan, during 1991 and 1992, I spent time with most of the small number of elderly individuals who continued to sing during the last decade.¹ One among their number particularly drew my attention, however, just as he has that of Japanese researchers of various scholarly persuasions, as well as writers, journalists, photographers and filmmakers: Yamashika Yoshiyuki, a 92-year-old blind singer in what is generally called the *Higo biwa* tradition, who has by his own account been unable to perform to his satisfaction for several years now. Nevertheless, since the mid-1970s there has been an ever-increasing flurry of activity about him, culminating in the production of a full-length documentary film, completed in October, 1992, and the publication of articles about him in Japanese national newspapers, as well as *The New York Times* and the *International Herald Tribune* soon thereafter.

1. From August 1991 until July 1992, I carried out fieldwork in Kyūshū as a Japan Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Research Fellow.

As a blind, rural musician, Yamashika has been a peripheral figure in Japanese society most of his life. Notwithstanding, the importance attached by scholarship and in turn the media to his apparent embodiment of the medieval figure of a *biwa hōshi* has prompted his portrayal in many forums, both locally and nationally, and his receipt of several awards for cultural service.² With the Education Ministry's recent approval of the film *Biwa Hōshi Yamashika Yoshiyuki* for use in schools, Yamashika is set to become a kind of contemporary culture hero, known to young people throughout the land as "that cute old fellow, the *last biwa hōshi*," as he is described in one of the film's publicity pitches.³

Whether Yamashika is in fact the last *biwa hōshi*, and whether "*biwa hōshi*" has ever been an accurate designation for biwa singers in Kyūshū, are not questions I will take up in this paper, for it is not my intention here to argue for my own interpretations of Yamashika's identity or of the nature of his musical practice. I want to suggest that both this elusive culture hero and his narrative art have multiple identities within Japan, ones thickly constituted by the many interpretations and commentaries on them in print and on film. This is not to say that all of the many voices which speak of Yamashika have equal authority or persuasive force, for their reception is largely a matter of the extent to which the power to confer cultural legitimacy is vested in the respective "speakers," a power in its turn conferred in accordance with a hegemony which shapes Japanese academic and intellectual discourse. Yet there are other voices besides those of the center in this discourse, and their accounts of Yamashika are significant for the present analysis,

2. *Biwa hōshi* is a general term for blind musicians who play the *biwa*, and is resonant in its associated imagery for any Japanese; its effect is comparable to that of words such as "bard" or "minstrel" in English.

3. The publicity leaflet produced by Ofisu KS, Tokyo, has the following phrase written in a prominent position: "The ordinary life of a *biwahiki* fondly known as grandpa" (*Jittchan to yobareaisarete iru biwahiki-san no futsū no seikatsu*).

which is of the forms and political formation of representations of this one musician by persons within some of the “imagined communities” of which he is a member.⁴ By these I mean texts which address Yamashika chiefly as a member of the national community—Japan as a whole—and those which locate him firmly within the historically distinct regional culture of the area of central Kyūshū formerly called Higo (see Figure 1), the dialect of which Yamashika speaks in a particularly distinctive variant.

Yamashika’s life as an active *biwa* singer has effectively ended, but the struggle for his public identity may be just gathering force, and it behooves us to be aware of all those engaged in it. In the accounts of Yamashika which have been most widely circulated within Japan, his identity is clearly circumscribed in terms which confer a measure of legitimacy by locating him firmly within the established canon of Japanese musical history, as well as in proximity to images of the national past given sanction in popular culture. The *biwa hōshi* is one such potent image. By contrast, some of the accounts which themselves originate at the peripheries of Japan’s political, financial and intellectual power structures—that is to say, accounts of local, Kyūshū provenance—portray Yamashika as an individuated subject whose music has been acquired and performed for the most part in specified and localized contexts, and place no emphasis on its relations to representative historical styles. In the space between such accounts, Yamashika’s identity continues to be highly contested, but elusive and ultimately resistant to simplification.

In this article I shall first present examples from among the many accounts produced by both Tokyo- and Kyūshū-based observers of Yamashika, then consider the political relatedness of positions inherent in them. In presenting a comparative analysis of a number of “intra-cultural” texts, I have two objectives. One is to remind us that representations of individual

4. See Anderson 1983.

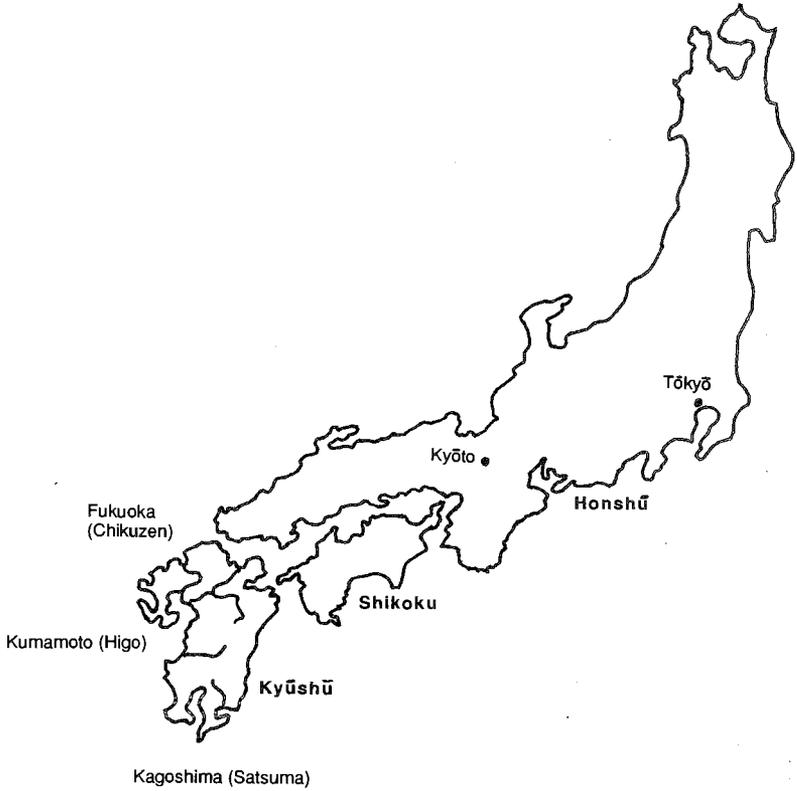


Figure 1: The islands of Honshū, Shikoku and Kyūshū. Edo period names for the regions of modern day Fukuoka, Kumamoto and Kagoshima prefectures are given in brackets.

musicians are always cast for particular audiences, ones which may be within the boundaries of an apparently discrete culture, yet remain separate from one another. A second is to problematize my own position, as a foreign ethnographer and producer of texts on Japanese music primarily for a non-Japanese readership, in relation to the intra-cultural interpretive formations I describe. Some of the implications therein suggest questions about cross-cultural agency in music scholarship, ones that can only be touched upon in this article, but nevertheless are presented out of a sense of their urgency.

1. On *biwa hōshi*, *mōsō*, and “Higo *biwa*”

For most Japanese, the term *biwa hōshi* conjures up an image of a decrepit blind man who looks like a priest and wanders about the countryside chanting doleful tales to the accompaniment of a battered old string instrument. (Figure 2 shows a fourteenth-century image typical of such depictions of *biwa hōshi*.) This is the image of the *biwa hōshi* painted in the one story about *biwa* narrative singing that everyone knows: “Mimi Nashi Hōichi,” which children throughout Japan read in elementary school, in a translation of Lafcadio Hearn’s adaptation from folktale forms of the story (Hearn 1904). In the histories of Japanese literature and music, nevertheless, the figure of the *biwa hōshi* is of central importance. During the *chūsei* or medieval period—roughly speaking, 1200 to 1600 C. E.—*biwa hōshi* are credited with having elaborated and maintained several traditions of oral narrative. Among them were historical chronicles and war tales such as those compiled in the *Heike Monogatari* (“The Tale of the Heike”), whose recitation traditions were later known as *heikyoku*, and the diverse narrative styles thought to be early forms of the *jōruri* traditions of *shamisen*-accompanied recitation.

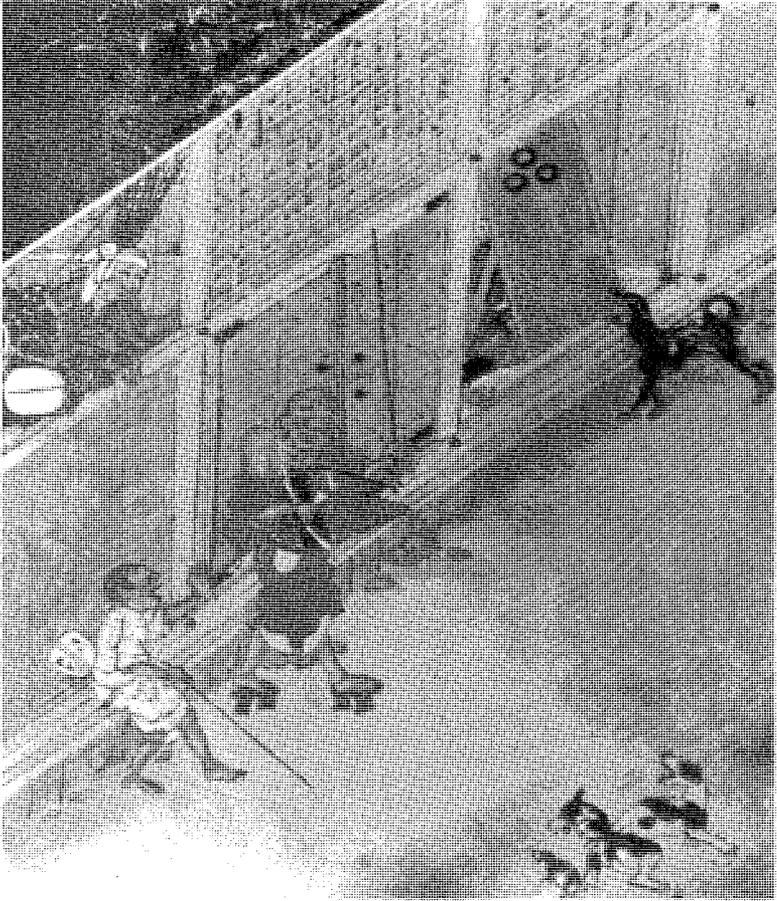


Figure 2: Fourteenth-century depiction of *biwa hōshi*

Japanese scholars have cited no records of *biwa hōshi* who were active after the eighteenth century in any regions of Japan other than Kyūshū.⁵ Priests of the Tendai sect of Buddhism called *mōsō*, who played *biwa* in certain rituals important to folk practice in many areas of Kyūshū, had been established there as early as the seventh century, and it seems likely that many of the *mōsō* also sang historical tales and legends with the *biwa*. By the seventeenth century, the time of the earliest reli-

able documentation, there were many *biwa* singers active in central Kyūshū who were not certified *mōsō*, but in any case were able to make their livings with the *biwa* as both ritual celebrants and entertainers.⁶ These musicians were referred to in historical documents of local provenance—and also by persons in rural Kyūshū until recently—with terms such as *zatō* and *biwa hiki*, but rarely as “*biwa hōshi*.” Most were blind males who traveled far afield for their work, lived in relative poverty and suffered blatant social discrimination as *senmin* (“despised persons”)⁷ in spite of their importance in folk ritual life. They were particularly numerous in the feudal domain of Higo, and they were still active there, in and around what is now called Kumamoto Prefecture (see Figure 1, above) until the 1960s. The practice of these apparent twentieth-century *biwa hōshi* was dubbed “*Higo biwa*” by the first national scholars to study it, in the early 1960s.⁸

5. One of the most commonly cited references to *biwa hōshi* in the northern regions is that by Matsuo Bashō, in his poetic diary of a journey made in the second year of Genroku (1689) *Oku no Hosomichi* (“The Narrow Road to the Deep North”; first published in 1702), wherein he and his traveling companions hear, at a place called Sue no Matsuyama, the sounds of a *mekurabōshi* (“a blind *hōshi*”) singing old tales in a style “quite unlike that of Heike recitation [what is now called *heikyoku*], yet also unlike music for *mai* [dancing].” (Inoue 1989, 142; my translation and glosses.)

6. Among documents of the Eisei Bunko archive pertaining to the civil administration of the Higo fief, held in the Central Library of Kumamoto National University, are records of rules and principles proclaimed by the Edo Shogunate. Records for the years Empo 1 and 2 (1673-74) include proclamations to the effect that there should be stricter separation of the ritual duties of the *mōsō* from the secular entertainments provided by musicians referred to as *zatō*. Decrees of this kind continued to be made throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as part of an ongoing struggle between the *mōsō* and the *Tōdōza*, the powerful guild of blind professionals which received Shogunal patronage until its dissolution at the start of the Meiji era. For an account of this struggle, see Katō 1974, 261-81.

7. For an account of the treatment of blind performing artists as *senmin* during the Edo period, see Katō 1974, 395.



Figure 3: A *yōgomuri* performance by Yamashika Yoshiyuki in a shrine near Yanagawa, Fukuoka Prefecture, in April 1989. The audience consisted of local shrine parishioners, Tokyo ethnographers and the television producer who sponsored the event. (Photo: Hugh de Ferranti)

Yamashika Yoshiyuki is considered to be the last person in Japan to have made a living as both a *biwa* singer and ritual celebrant. To judge from extant recordings, a few other singers who died in the 1960s and early 1970s were perhaps more skilled than Yamashika in their singing techniques, but by the 1980s he alone maintained his *biwa*-playing skills, a strong voice, and a command of a large and varied repertory. Despite the marked deterioration of his technique from about 1988, he was occasionally engaged to perform until as recently as July 1992.

2. Tokyo scholars' accounts

Tokyo-based researchers have given accounts of Yamashika in several kinds of writings intended for a national audience; these include articles on *mōsō* and "Higo *biwa*," reference book entries, and short accounts in books on broader topics. Leading scholars of Japanese music, folklore and literature have each written about him according to the concerns and perspectives of their respective disciplines.

Higo biwa was declared an Intangible Cultural Property by the government's Cultural Affairs Office in 1972, and has space devoted to it in every major book on Japanese music, but to date only one renowned scholar of music, Tanabe Hisao, has visited the Kumamoto region for the purpose of researching and recording the style. Although Tanabe's 1963 visit lasted only a few days, his accounts of *Higo biwa* have since been re-

8. There is some evidence for the use of the term "*Higo biwa*" by sighted amateur enthusiasts of *biwa* narrative singing in Kumamoto City during the first decades of the twentieth century, but living *biwa* singers now claim that the term was not used before the 1960s, and that they first heard it from researchers. (Oral communications, Yamashika Yoshiyuki and Hashiguchi Keisuke.)

ferred to in many musicological texts. Since a number of *biwa* singers whom Tanabe considered to be more skilled than Yamashika were still alive at the time of his survey, he said nothing of Yamashika in his published writings.⁹ What is most significant about Tanabe's approach to *Higo biwa*, however, is that his sole interest was in the secular aspect of the music, which he portrayed as a relic of *kōjōruri*, the early *jōruri* narrative styles which were popularized throughout Japan by *biwa hoshi* and other itinerant musicians in the sixteenth century. Tanabe saw this alone as what made the *biwa* narrative music of the Kumamoto region worthy of study, and by implying as much in his writings of the 1960s, he shaped later accounts of Yamashika's art from a time when most other singers had died. With regard to the blind musicians' sacred activities as celebrants in rites of local faith, his position was that this was work proper to the *mōsō*, to which *Higo biwa* singers had recourse for income only in lean times, when they could no longer command a living from secular narrative performances alone:

...today almost all the bearers of the true tradition have died, and only a very few elderly blind men remain. Moreover these persons have found it hard to make a living from *Higo biwa* in its original form, and have managed only by doing comic recitations and ritual music. For this reason *Higo biwa* has come to be despised by the public. (1963b, 3)

Tanabe published this account in a record anthology which became the major source on *biwa* music for the next decade. It was not until 1975 that another musicologist of stature, the late Hirano Kenji, revised Tanabe's position on the nature of *Higo biwa*. In a second *biwa* anthology's commentary essay he referred at length to Yamashika, who by then was already seen as the last living professional *Higo biwa* singer. While Hirano focused his account on the secular repertory, he emphasized the importance of the *biwa hōshi*'s involvement in religious practice by referring to local rites such as the *kamado barai*, an in-

9. In Tanabe 1963a, however, Yamashika is mentioned several times.

vocation of the fire god Sanbō Kōjin, and *watamashi*, a blessing ceremony for newly-constructed houses, in which it was usual to engage the services of a *biwa* singer. He also linked the secular and sacred aspects of the *Higo biwa* repertory by framing the following hypothesis:

The old local tales of battle can be thought of as having originated in a similar manner to stories in the Tale of the Heike, namely, as accounts of battle which the blind priests performed in ritual incantations to placate the dead warriors' souls. (1975, 37)

Hirano thus reinforced Tanabe's earlier identification of *Higo biwa* as a research topic of great consequence for the study of those oral narrative traditions that have been positioned centrally within the historical canon in accounts of Japanese music of the twelfth to sixteenth centuries. No Japanese musicologist, however, has since taken up this research.

The more recent work of Hyōdō Hiromi, a specialist in medieval Japanese literature, warrants consideration as an innovative fieldwork-based study of oral narrative by a leading literary scholar, and one which has been produced by means of painstaking periods of work with Yamashika and others over a ten-year period.¹⁰ While he has meticulously documented several of Yamashika's ritual performances, and recognized that the *Higo biwa* singers' dual role as itinerant priests and entertainers "allows us to infer the form of the medieval *biwa hoshi*'s existence" (1990, 14), Hyōdō concerns himself only with analysis of the secular narratives, and defines his methodological objectives as

10. Another scholar who has done fieldwork with Yamashika, as well as with Hashiguchi Keisuke, a former *biwa* singer now living in Kumamoto, is Yasuda Munetaka. Yasuda is an academic trained in Folklore Studies who has lived in Kumamoto for the best part of twenty years, and is now Associate Professor within the Folklore section of the Humanities Department of Kumamoto National University. See Yasuda 1991.

...to overcome the "local" concerns of...viewing [this practice] as a regional performing art, and to raise questions from a comprehensive perspective on oral narrative traditions. This sort of study can be thought to provide a certain number of suggestions for gauging the actual distance of the practice of narrative recitation in medieval times from that of what has been called *heikyoku* in more recent times. (1990, 14)

Hyōdō's work with Yamashika, then, is only one part of his work with performers of traditional oral narrative in various regions of Japan, and is theoretically directed by his efforts to frame a theory for the oral composition of the stories of the *Heike Monogatari* and other medieval narratives. Like Tanabe and Hirano, he grants Yamashika's practice legitimacy as a research topic by stressing its significance for furthering scholarly understanding of canonical genres of oral narrative.

3. *Popular accounts for a national audience*

A number of Tokyo-based writers and artists have sought to introduce Yamashika to a wider, non-academic audience through representations that foreground Yamashika's character and lifestyle as being significant to an understanding of his music. These include the actor and self-styled ethnographer Ozawa Shōichi, who compiled a massive anthology of recordings and materials on little-known traditional arts during 1970-71 (Ozawa 1973), the folklorist and essayist Murayama Dōsen (Murayama 1978 and 1986), and several others. I shall refer to the film *Biwa Hōshi Yamashika Yoshiyuki* (Aoike 1992a) as an example of the work of this group because it is the most recently produced of major cultural texts about Yamashika. For years to come it will also be the sole means by which, under the auspices of the Education Ministry, Japanese schoolchildren will

have access to knowledge of Yamashika and his performance tradition.¹¹

The film was made between November 1991 and October, 1992, and has since won national awards as well as the Education Ministry's authorization as a video teaching resource.¹² It is not an ethnographic documentary, for it offers viewers relatively little historical and social contextual information, and says nothing of the filmmakers' interaction with Yamashika and their own agency and effect upon what is seen. Rather, it emphasizes the singularity of both Yamashika's professional life and personal circumstances by interweaving segments of sacred and secular performances with interviews with Yamashika and footage of his daily routine at home.

The director's original intention of addressing the film to the general public, not just to academics and intellectuals, is apparent from a statement he made to the regional press at the time the filming began:

Yamashika's way of life is that of "ordinary" Japanese in former times. I want this film to be more than just an introduction of the last bearer of the *Higo biwa* tradition; I want to put the question "What is a Japanese?"... (*Nishi Nihon Shinbun* 1991)

On the whole, the film was made with minimal staging and manipulation of Yamashika and others who appear in it; but in some respects the director, Aoike, presents a rose-tinted image of Yamashika's life and current situation. Firstly, the locale in

11. I should say here that I was marginally involved in an aspect of the film's production, and am named in its credits as one who provided "cooperation" (*kyōryōku*). I first voiced—in another context—the idea of organizing a 1992 Tokyo performance by Yamashika, and, together with Kimura Rirō, succeeded in gaining Yamashika's agreement. He was thus prepared for a similar proposal, put to him some weeks later by the film's director. The resulting concert performance in the Mokubatei Theatre, Asakusa, Tokyo, constitutes the climax of the film.

12. In March 1993 the film was awarded the documentary prize in the Mainichi Shinbun's annual Japanese film competition.

which he lives is depicted as the remote countryside, a place where there is “a tranquil way of life” (*nodoka na tatazumai*), but in fact the village is located just beyond one of the exits from the expressway which cuts through central Kyūshū—remote from Tokyo and Osaka, to be sure, but hardly a backwater! Secondly, we are not told that some of the performances filmed are of a kind that would not have taken place if not for the film crew’s instigation. In particular, the rite of *yogomori* (see Figure 3, above) inside a local Shinto shrine had not taken place since 1989, and even then it had been sponsored by a Kyūshū television producer.¹³ The June 1992 concert performance in a theater in Tokyo which forms the climax of the film, moreover, was almost unthinkable during the previous winter, when Yamashika’s strength seemed to be rapidly waning. Yet viewers are given no hint that it was both an extremely rare undertaking and a risky one.

One can speculate on Aoike’s reasons for taking poetic license in these matters. First, since the film was a commercial venture which Aoike financed from his own pocket, he had to ensure the public appeal of his final product. More significant, however, is the fact that the film’s construction obscures distinctions between Yamashika’s contemporary and past circumstances within his rural community. In this sense the performances shown can be viewed as illustrations of the director’s images of past practice, rather than as instances that exemplify the current situation. Depictions of the locale as more remote and serene than it in fact is, and of Yamashika himself as, first and foremost, someone “cute and lovable,” serve to project a poetic vision of the past that valorizes the old ways of life in the *furusato*, the traditional rural village.¹⁴ This wistful

13. The film’s voiceover script says that the *yogomori* performance shown was the first one in four years, but does not state that filmmakers had requested and sponsored both the 1989 and 1992 performances.

14. For an analysis of the concept of the traditional *furusato* and its hold upon modern urban Japanese ideals of living environment and community life, see Chapter 1, “Nostalgic Praxis,” of Robertson 1991.

view of the agrarian past has been the norm in Japanese popular cultural texts throughout most of the twentieth century, and expresses a kind of Japanese "pastoral allegoric" response to the onslaught of modernity.¹⁵ It should be recognised that Aoike's responses to Yamashika are complex, and cannot be grossly characterised as "nostalgic," but nevertheless he has consciously played upon this trope in the film and its publicity statements.

4. *Accounts by local folklorists and enthusiasts*

A third kind of representation of Yamashika has been made by individual enthusiasts and amateur folklorists in the Kumamoto region. I shall describe the work of Kimura Yūsho and his son, Rirō. Living in Yamaga, a large town about ten kilometers away, the Kimuras have been able to work closely with Yamashika, using local vernacular speech, over a period of several decades; they have stood in closer relation to him than any others who have sought to document his life and music.

Kimura Yūsho was a Kumamoto radio-play scriptwriter who had studied folklore in Tokyo in the 1930s. From 1951 until his early death in 1965, he recorded oral histories and narrative texts from most of the known *biwa* singers in Kumamoto Prefecture. After his death, some of his writings were edited by his son and published in the bulletin of the Higo Biwa Preservation Society, a group founded under the auspices of the Kumamoto Prefectural Government in 1974. Of Yamashika, Kimura Yūsho wrote in about 1963 that "among living *biwa* singers, he is probably the most orthodox. Even now he performs *wata-*

15. See James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory," in Clifford and Marcus, eds. 1986, 98-121.

mashi ceremonies in the Chikugo region” (reprinted in Higo Biwa Preservation Society 1991, 9).

Yūsho’s son, Kimura Rirō, has known Yamashika since his childhood. He was only in his teens when his father died; he later studied European literature and held jobs in publishing for some years in Tokyo before returning to Yamaga in the mid-1970s and taking a position as a cultural affairs specialist with the municipal council’s education office. He soon took up his father’s work with the few *biwa* singers then still living, but concentrated his energies on Yamashika. In addition to editing his father’s notes and essays, he has transcribed many texts recorded from Yamashika, as well as commentaries on them. Kimura now has well over one hundred hours of taped interviews with Yamashika, and is in the process of writing a life history, most of which consists of transcripts from their talks, altered slightly for ease of comprehension by persons not familiar with the local dialect. This manuscript is in effect a co-authored text, the first of its kind among studies of Yamashika.

The Kimuras offer a quite different profile of Yamashika from that given in Tokyo writers’ accounts. They refer to Yamashika not as a *biwa hōshi*, but always with the local expression “*biwa hiki*.” His significance for constructions of the practice and history of national music genres is hardly mentioned. The secular and sacred aspects of his profession are given equal treatment, and some areas of his repertoire ignored by most other writers are brought to notice; perhaps the most conspicuous of these is Yamashika’s skill in comic routines and richly obscene short songs. All told, it is in the Kimuras’ writings that Yamashika’s voice—albeit in quotation—seems most clearly to cut through those of his interpreters, for they approach him not as a provider of hints to the past nature of classical traditions, nor as an embodiment of essential qualities of the national character, but as a performer whose art had, until quite recent times, a contemporary and immediate relevance to a local audience.

5. *The negotiation of cultural authority through interpretive texts*

Yamashika Yoshiyuki's own living voice is as yet far from stilled, but it is already only one of many which represent him. I have considered examples of three kinds of cultural texts on Yamashika and the recitation tradition known as *Higo biwa*: scholarly writings in reference books and journals available throughout Japan; an independent artist's film which the Ministry of Education has approved for use in Japanese schools; and the work of two Kumamoto folklorists, just a small part of which has been published in a locally circulated bulletin.¹⁶ Several other kinds could have been added—among them, portrayals in national newspapers and magazines, by the Kyūshū media, by Kumamoto-based scholars, and by persons who have undertaken recitation lessons with Yamashika. The few texts I have selected nevertheless suggest important issues in the politics of representation of Japanese traditional performing arts, for they demonstrate contrasts between the concerns of scholars and artists, professionals and amateurs, and also between national and local orientations.

The first point of contrast is that most professional Tokyo-based scholars have approached Yamashika and *Higo biwa* primarily in order to make inferences about major historical oral narrative forms. Through this kind of re-constructive or regressive method, *Higo biwa* has been examined not as a contemporary practice, but as a key to the nature of the medieval practices of recitation of the Heike stories, early *jōruri*, and other central narrative traditions of Japanese music history.¹⁷

By contrast, the Tokyo filmmaker Aoike was concerned from the first to suggest that the figure of Yamashika—"a pre-

16. Higo Biwa Preservation Society 1991 is an anthology of writings from the bulletin of the Society, many of which are by the Kimuras. These writings are supplemented with new essays and documentary research data.

cursor of our times,” as he puts it—bears some crucial lessons for modern Japan.¹⁸ His approach to deriving and presenting these lessons is as an artist, not as an ethnographer or philosopher, but his film clearly addresses *all* Japanese with a slightly didactic tone. While he does not imply that Japanese persons must know more about traditional performing arts such as rural *biwa* singing if they are able to confront the question “what is a Japanese?,” Aoike does subtly link the strength of Yamashika’s art and character with a way of life which he construes as being that of “the ordinary Japanese in former times.” This undoubtedly figured strongly in the Education Ministry’s approval of his film for use in schools.

Kimura Yūsho’s and Rirō’s writings, on the other hand, avoid characterizing Yamashika’s profession in expressions other than those of the local community in which he has lived. Through extensive quotation from interviews, they appear to allow Yamashika to speak for himself, at length and often in the vernacular. When they allude to “the spirit” of the *biwa* singer and his audiences, they valorize a kind of authenticity that is

17. Morse 1990, 164. Morse comments that this was established as a principal method in Japanese folklore studies by Yanagita Kunio in the early twentieth century. I would add that speculative reconstruction of past practices on the basis of modern ones is a common procedure in both folklore and comparative literature research in the West, Parry and Lord’s inference of the “orality” of the Homeric epics from the procedures of Yugoslav singers being probably the most famous instance of its application. It may be that Yanagita’s ubiquitous influence on studies of traditional performing arts (*minzoku geinō*) in Japan, however, meant that retrospective inference became the foremost concern of scholars from many disciplinary backgrounds trained from the 1920s to the 1940s.

18. Aoike stresses Yamashika’s lessons for Japanese of the modern era: At some point we Japanese stopped being fulfilled by dreams, hopes and compassion, and became people who give priority to measuring everything in money. In times like these, someone like Yamashika is liable to look hopelessly out of touch with us. But if that’s the case—then all the more so, in times like these—there are many things we can learn from a precursor of our times, like Yamashika.” (Aoike 1993)

individually and locally felt, not reified at the level of national culture. Their writings have so far only been published locally, and are little known. A life history co-authored by Yamashika and Kimura Rirō might eventually have an impact upon perceptions of Yamashika throughout Japan, but only if it is published and distributed by a major press.

In the struggle for Yamashika's public identity, it is plain that the representations of Tokyo-based scholars have thus far carried far greater weight than those of local writers, by virtue of their being presented in forums which confer authoritative status and are accessible to people throughout the country. In Mark Slobin's terms, we could say that the "superculture," through hegemonic forms of social control such as superior resources and means for public dissemination of knowledge, has authorized particular terms for Yamashika's identity, with little regard for what other terms may be offered from regional or sub-cultural perspectives.¹⁹ The negotiation of authority over "the last *biwa hōshi*," then, is part of a larger arena of struggle for cultural authority over accounts of Japanese performing arts history, social history, and national identity.

In research on traditional performing arts in Japan, the terms of "central" and "peripheral" space are many, but among them is the strikingly literal one of stark disjunctions of both power and opinion between regional and Tokyo-based researchers of performance traditions which, like *Higo biwa*, are thought to be on the verge of ending.²⁰ In the early 1960s, Kimura Yūsho wrote rather bitterly of this disjunction:

In Tanabe's case, *Higo biwa*'s only importance is that it allows us to see "in what form a very old tradition has survived," as he so coolly puts it. In my case, I take as the core of my work the unique spirit (*koko-*

19. See Slobin 1992, 13-20.

20. Yamashika Yoshiyuki has had several students, of whom only one—a sighted amateur *Chikuzen biwa* performer who lives in Osaka and has visited for lessons every few months over the last three years—is willing to perform in public the two short songs which he has learned thus far.

robae”) of the people of this area who made *Higo biwa* a part of their way of life. (reprinted in Higo Biwa Preservation Society 1991, 6)

In the thirty years since Kimura wrote this expression of dissatisfaction with the research objectives of the nation’s most prominent traditional music scholar, there nevertheless has been considerable change in Tokyo scholars’ attitudes toward the importance of regional perspectives on rural performing arts traditions. The 1980s provided some precedents for the research of regional folklorists being published by national presses and finding some acceptance within the central scholarly community; I refer, for example, to the growth of published research on the history and music of the *goze* singers, female counterparts of the *biwa hōshi* who performed narratives and shorter song forms to *shamisen* accompaniment.²¹

In the sphere of *Higo biwa* research, it remains to be seen whether this relative loosening of the exclusiveness of Tokyo scholars’ constructions of regional performing arts will mean that Kumamoto-based perspectives on Yamashika and *Higo biwa* are given fuller consideration in authoritative sources. Hyōdō’s occasional references to the work of local, non-professional writers demonstrate a national literature scholar’s willingness to take note of voices from the peripheries of academic discourse, even while subsuming them in the quest for insights into a representative national genre.²² Yet the writings of the Kimuras and other local researchers deserve greater attention in their own right. It is not that they are inherently more valid representations than nationally-oriented ones; they are significantly different yet *equally* valid representations, although they were originally written only for a local readership. They nevertheless remain virtually unacknowledged in texts produced in

21. Gerald Groemer’s annotated bibliography gives an idea of the scope of research on the *goze* (1990, and revised versions thereafter). At the same time, it must be said that most of these publications appeared before the recent recession in the Japanese economy, which has greatly dampened publishers’ enthusiasm for manuscripts by little-known writers in most fields.

Tokyo. If in this article I have seemed to favor the Kimuras' perspectives on Yamashika, my partiality is in response to the particular hegemonic conditions operative within Japan: cultural texts in any media that have origin in Tokyo and are underwritten by the authority of universities or government agencies are more broadly disseminated than others, and are received by the public as definitive. In the interpretive nexus surrounding "the last *biwa hāshi*," this has resulted in an acute imbalance which renders voices of local origin virtually inaudible among the many which speak of and for Yamashika Yoshiyuki.

6. Agency and reception in cross-cultural music scholarship

In noting the effects of hegemonic agency on the relative status of representations of my "research subject," I have written as if I occupied an empty political space, devoid of agency in the matter of perceptions of Yamashika within Japan, no matter how much I might wish to exercise influence. Yet, is this actually so?

The prevalence of certain representations of cultural phenomena are determined by intra-cultural priorities and political processes, but can ethnographers from outside the culture concerned influence such processes? I expect that most ethnographers would not hesitate to answer this with a resounding

22. It has long been common practice for prominent Tokyo scholars to rely upon the work of regional researchers for much of the data of their studies, but until relatively recently, writings which lacked full attribution and crediting of the sources for such data continued to be common. Tanabe Hisao's accounts of *Higo biwa* are a case in point, for while his research was made possible by the painstaking groundwork carried out by Kimura Yūsho, Hirakawa Atsushi and others (oral communications, Yasuda Munetaka and Kimura Rirō), this is not mentioned in his published writings.

“yes,” and cite cases of non-Western artists and scholars gaining power within their own communities after having been championed by one or other representative Western scholar. Nevertheless, if I consider this question in light of my own studies of Japanese music, and in particular my work with Yamashika Yoshiyuki, it admits of no simple answers.

While living in Kumamoto, I visited Yamashika regularly over a ten-month period in 1991 and 1992. I was shocked to see the deteriorated state of his health when I arrived in August 1991, compared to his condition during my brief visit with him in May 1990. From that time I felt keenly the inequity of power between Yamashika and *all* of his interlocutors. His physical condition was such that it took a great effort for him to play *biwa* and recite, and even to concentrate his attention on our questions for more than thirty minutes at a stretch. In my case, as a foreigner who at first could understand little more than half of what Yamashika said when he was not speaking in standard Japanese, I had to make even heavier demands upon him than other researchers. Nevertheless, I was all too aware that he was most unlikely to refuse to cooperate with a scholar paid by the Japanese Government to work with him (in my case, the Japan Foundation, an organ of the Foreign Ministry). My provisional solution to this sense of inequity was to try to demonstrate to Yamashika both my willingness to persevere in learning a short recitation from him, and my desire that my work should somehow benefit him within his own society. To this end, I spoke about Yamashika in media interviews, wrote articles for newspapers, introduced persons to him whose writings and photographs later appeared in national journals, and participated in organizing performances in both Kumamoto and Tokyo.²³

Of my writings on *Higo biwa* which have been published, only one (de Ferranti 1992a) is in Japanese. Written in response to a newspaper's request for an account of my personal impressions of Yamashika and his art, it includes little actual research data, and no references to extant Japanese research on *biwa* tra-

ditions. While it was probably significant in gaining the confidence of Aoike Kenji to the extent that he subsequently requested that I undertake the English subtitling of his film, the essay could in no way have affected his thinking with respect to the issue of his own authority to portray Yamashika to a national audience. Neither did I directly raise questions of representational authority in conversation with Aoike or Hyōdō Hiromi, for it seemed difficult to do so without my appearing to be attacking their work. I have now, in this English-language article, suggested how their work on Yamashika is situated in an overall imbalance of available perspectives, but I have done so in an effort to explicate the political circumstances of the predominance of certain kinds of representation, not out of a desire to portray their work as invalid or false. In any case, I suspect that this will be of little consequence to them, unless I translate the article into Japanese. As long as I write only in English, I am unlikely to have any agency with respect to representations of Yamashika within Japan.

In a recent review of extant scholarship which will doubtless become a basic reference source for future Japanese music researchers as they begin work in this area, David Hughes broaches the question of Japanese-language publication through his analysis of reactions, within Japan, to the work of the "Cambridge school" of Japanese court music scholarship, that is, the work of Laurence Picken, his former pupils Maret, Wolpert, Condit and Markham, and the late Mitani Yoko. In what he calls "a cautionary tale of relevance to any non-Japanese planning to do research on Japanese music" (1993, 354), Hughes seems to imply that to publish in English without parallel Japanese translation is to court trouble, for he states that

23. See de Ferranti 1992a and 1992b. In retrospect, some of my actions probably produced more problems than pleasure for Yamashika, but all of them had a kind of phatic aspect—to show my willingness to honor him publicly during the relatively short time that I was in Kyūshū—and I believe that he has understood this.

many Japanese music scholars “were able to read only enough [of the Cambridge school’s publications] to detect several shortcomings but not enough to understand the details of the evidence assembled by the writers.” Be that as it may, Hughes’s point is applicable to foreign researchers of any Japanese music traditions: in order that even the possibility of our influencing the nature of representations of those traditions within Japan might exist, we must first contribute to the representations.

The extent to which ethnographers feel a need to make translations and to write articles in the languages of peoples with whom they work will, of course, vary according to many factors, including whether those peoples are literate (and in what languages), and whether there exists an indigenous readership for academic writings.²⁴ As writers or presenters, however, we should be aware when research is presented to indigenous audiences of aspects which are either potentially discordant with cultural values, or are likely to be seen by musicians and music scholars as of little concern, given their own usual frames of reference for the topic in question. In choosing to present such aspects so that they are well understood, then, we must be prepared for outright rejection of them.

The Cambridge *tōgaku* project presents an example of research which in some senses ran counter to cultural priorities relevant to both Japanese performers and scholars: In the late 1970s, Allan Maretz published in quick succession two papers in Japanese which presented core materials from his doctoral work as a member of Picken’s *tōgaku* research team (Maretz 1978, 1979).²⁵ These papers did little to warm Japanese response to the Cambridge school’s project, and Maretz made no

24. It may be that different modes of presentation—verbal explanation and discussion, performance, or composition—are more appropriate ways of demonstrating acquired knowledge and attempting “dialogic editing” (see Feld 1989, 241-4) of our ideas.

25. Because they are in Japanese, these publications are not referred to in Hughes 1993, but they are significant in considering Japanese response to the Cambridge school’s research.

further publications in Japanese.²⁶ Much later, at an international conference held in Japan, he gave a paper in English which suggested possible reasons for the work of the Cambridge school having been “at the very best, ignored by Japanese scholars and musicians” (1991, 135). In short, he saw conflicts between socially prescribed yet historically contingent values which at the time shaped both Japanese musicologists’ methodologies, on the one hand, such that they “felt constrained not to investigate early scores in the tōgaku tradition,” and the Cambridge scholars’ “European authenticist agendas” (1991, 134), on the other. He further suggests that this apparent rejection of the results of the research should in no way be thought of as having rendered it invalid as a cross-cultural text-based study. Rather, the lesson he draws from Japanese response to the work of the Cambridge group is that we should “embrace, rather than flee from, the contradictions that arise when we enter into dialogue with cultures with different priorities,” so as to counteract what is a common reaction to such contradictions:

...flight into simplistic strategies such as the one that states that European music can only be studied according to European priorities and rejects additional meanings that it may have for Japanese, Chinese, or Australians; or asserts that there is no way for Europeans or Americans to come to Japanese music except by totally embracing Japanese cultural priorities. (1991, 135)

26. Maret's transcriptions and articles are not mentioned in the entry on Hakuga (Minamoto no Hiromasa) by Gamo Michiko in the *Encyclopedia of Japanese Music* (Hirano, Kamisango, and Gamo, eds. 1989). The former Imperial Court musician, Shiba Sukeyasu, refers briefly to Maret 1978 in a program note for a 1979 concert of his own “reconstructions” of pieces from early *gagaku* scores, but only by way of a disclaimer that his own approach to reconstructing pieces not in the modern repertory is “of a totally different character” compared to Maret’s (cited in Maret 1991, 133). In a more recent published article on his reconstruction of the piece “Sōrō Kodatsu,” based on the *Hakuga no fue-fu* source version, Shiba makes no reference to Maret’s work (Shiba 1988).

In suggesting both Western and East Asian examples of intolerance toward cross-cultural participation in the study of music traditions, Marett reminds us that the reception accorded the Cambridge group's work is unlikely to be unique. Comparable circumstances may apply to writings on the Western musical canon presented in English or European languages by persons of non-Western origin who have not been educated at Western institutions. Such writings can be thought of as offering "outsiders'" views of the Western musical canon, ones which raise questions about the epistemological status of that category to no less an extent than have Western scholars' writings on non-Western music.²⁷ To "embrace" the contradictions likely to arise from research that is both inter-cultural and inter-subjective, and not fall back upon essentialist, chauvinistic notions of cultural identity, then, we can think of the results of these—of *any*—cross-cultural music researches as themselves constituting material for an area of study that has been little addressed. The unorthodox positions and perspectives that such writings may offer reflect a complex of cultural factors which shape the processes of cross-cultural reception of both music and the ways it is conceived and spoken of. If responses to these researches stem from the consideration not only of the positions adopted, but also of the cultural contexts for their accomplishment, then indifference and outright dismissiveness are likely to be less common; rather, insight may be gained into the

27. The very fact that for this analogy to be complete, the writings would have to be by persons who had little experience of Western music until they were well beyond childhood (as is the case with most ethnomusicologists who have considered themselves "cultural outsiders" with respect to the music that they research and perform), already brings into question criteria for defining cultural outsiders and insiders. Ethnomusicology's continuing concern with the emic-etic debate is evident from its being the theme of a recent issue of the journal *The World of Music* 35, no. 1 (1993).

human capacity for perceiving identical phenomena in radically different terms, according to different culturally-informed value systems and conceptual frameworks.

Clearly, cross-cultural reception of music and ideas about music involve issues the complexity of which I have hardly touched on, as any further discussion would not be germane to the concerns of this article. Probably most important among these is the effect which the political circumstances that obtain between a people and those who write about them has on the negotiation of trust. If this is an important consideration in research on the music practices of persons from within "one and the same" culture, its significance for the establishment of cross-cultural communication in music scholarship is fundamental.

My observations here on cross-cultural music scholarship, as exemplified in the case of *iōgaku* studies, then, are little more than first glimpses, later to be clarified and enlarged in other contexts. I nevertheless feel that it was necessary to raise questions of cross-cultural agency and the reception of ideas about music because of the nature of the material in the body of this article: namely, my readings of texts on Yamashika Yoshiyuki which have presented him and his performance tradition to various Japanese audiences. To make sense of such an exercise in textual criticism, on a topic which is, after all, virtually unknown to non-Japanese readers, I question my own strategies and agency with respect to audiences in both of the cultures which my work necessarily concerns, by virtue of its subject matter, language, themes and methodologies, as the case may be.

Notwithstanding the reception given our work within the cultures which we write about, within our own societies our writings have their own imagined community of readers, and may constitute for them a sole source of knowledge of a particular music. All the more, then, I see our responsibility as being to present all available perspectives, including those of both the performers and the researchers, be they at "the center" or "the

periphery” in the culture concerned. Since the relative prominence or correctness ascribed to these perspectives is a product of political dynamics that may not be apparent to persons who lack living experience within a given culture, and since our English-language writings are directed largely to just such a readership, it would be arrogant of us to argue for particular perspectives as being definitive. Rather, by considering the socio-political and historical conditions associated with the relative prominence of intra-cultural representations, in texts for our own readers and audiences we can give an equal audibility to representational voices, even for cases in which those voices do not achieve parity in indigenous contexts.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: New Left.
- Aoike Kenji. 1992. *Biwa Hōshi Yamashika Yoshiyuki*. 16mm. film produced and distributed by Ofisu KS, Tokyo.
- _____. 1993. “Hokori takaki Meiji no biwa hōshi.” *Nihon Keizai Shinbun*, 17 March.
- Clifford, James and George Marcus, eds. 1986. *Writing Culture*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- de Ferranti, Hugh. 1991. “Composition and improvisation in Satsuma *biwa*.” In Marett, ed. 1991: 102-27.
- _____. 1992a. “Ikite iru katarigei.” *Mainichi Shinbun*, Kyushu edition, 25 April.
- _____. 1992b. “Last of traditional bards keeps art alive.” *The Japan Times*, 21 June.
- _____. In press. “Relations between music and text in Higo *biwa*—the *nagashi* pattern as a text-music system.” For 1994 edition of *Asian Music* to be co-edited by Dwight Reynolds and Scott Marcus.
- Eisei Bunko. 1673-4 (Empo 1-2). *Furejōhikae* (“memoranda of rules and principles of the Higo domain”). Original documents held in the Kumamoto National University’s Central Library.
- Feld, Steven. 1989. “Postscript 1989,” in *Sound and Sentiment*, second edition. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

- Groemer, Gerald. 1990. "An annotated bibliography of materials concerning the *goze*." Unpublished. Since updated considerably (oral communication).
- Hearn, Lafcadio. 1904. *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things*. Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company.
- Higo Biwa Preservation Society. 1991. *Higo Biwa*. Kumamoto: Higo Biwa Hozonkai.
- Hirano Kenji. 1975. "Mōsō biwa no katarimono." Tanabe, compiler, 1975: 35-7.
- Hirano Kenji, Kamisango Yūko and Gamo Satoaki, compilers. 1989. *Nihon Ongaku Daijiten*. Tokyo: Heibonsha.
- Hughes, David W. 1993. "Japan." Myers, ed. 1993: 345-63.
- Hyōdō Hiromi. 1990. "Zatō biwa no katarimono denshō nitsuite no kenkyū (ichi)." *Saitama Daigaku Kiyō*, no. 26. Tokyo: Saitama Daigaku Kyōyogakubu: 13-60.
- Inoue Minoru. 1989. *Oku no hosomichi: kaishaku to kenkyū* ("The Narrow Road to the Deep North: Interpretation and Research"). Tokyo: Furukawa Shobo.
- Katō Yasuaki. 1974. *Nihon Mōjin Shakaishi Kenkyū*. Tokyo: Miraisha.
- Kimura Rirō. 1991. various writings reprinted in Higo Biwa Preservation Society 1991.
- _____. Unpublished. *Higo Mōsō Biwa—Yamashika Yoshiyuki Yobanashi*. Manuscript in progress.
- Kimura Yūsho. 1991. Various writings reprinted in: Higo Biwa Preservation Society 1991.
- Marett, Allan. 1978. "Hakuga no fue-fu togaku-kyoku Banshiki sangun nitsuite." *Tōyō Ongaku Kenkyū* 43: 52-80.
- _____. 1979. "Hakuga no fue-fu no shokifu-hō nitsuite." *Gagakukai* 54: 171-88.
- _____. 1991. "Issues of authenticity and tradition in the interpretation of the tenth century flute manuscript, *Hakuga no fue-fu*." Tokumaru et al., eds. 1991, 131-7.
- Marett, Allan, ed. 1991. *Musica Asiatica 6*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Matsuo Bashō. 1702. *Oku no hosomichi* ("The Narrow Road to the Deep North"). See Inoue 1989, above.
- Morse, Ronald. 1990. *Yanagita Kunio and the Folklore Movement*. The Garland Folklore Library, vol. 2. New York: Garland.
- Murayama Dōsen. 1978. Biwa: wasurerareta oto no sekai." In: *Aruku Miru Kiku*, no. 135. May: 4-35.
- _____. 1986. "Higo biwa denshōshi". In: *Bukkyō Minzokugaku Taikei* 2. Tokyo: Meishisha: 429-63.

- Myers, Helen, ed. 1993. *Ethnomusicology — Historical and Regional Studies*. The Norton/Grove Handbooks in Music series. New York and London: W.W. Norton.
- Nihon Dentō Ongaku Geinō Kenkyūkai, ed. 1988. *Nihon no Oto*. Hōgaku Hyakka Nyūmon Shirizu (set of 5 books, each with cassettes). Tokyo: Ongaku no Tomo Sha.
- Nishi Nihon Shinbun*. 1991. "Kiroku eiga roke hajimaru." *Kyūshū Edition*: 30 November.
- Ozawa Shoichi. 1973. *Nihon no Hōrōgei*. Record anthology and explanatory text. Victor Japan. Victor W. 7011-17.
- Robertson, Jennifer. 1991. *Native and Newcomer - Making and Remaking a Japanese City*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sanger, David. 1992. "Such Stories to Tell, but he's 91 and in no Hurry." *New York Times International*, 16 November: A7. Also published in the *International Herald Tribune* (Paris edition): 16 November.
- Shiba Sukeyasu. 1988. "Azayaka ni Todai no Sei-in 'Soro Kodatsu'." Nihon Dentō Ongaku Geinō Kenkyūkai, ed. 1988, book 5, *Sōgō/Gendai*: 112-9.
- Slobin, Mark. 1992. "Micromusics of the West: A Comparative Approach." *Ethnomusicology* 36, no. 1: 1-87.
- Tanabe Hisao. 1963a. *Higo Biwa Chōsa Hokokushō*. Unpublished report submitted to the Cultural Affairs Agency.
- _____. 1963b. *Nihon Biwagaku Taikei*. Explanatory booklet with record anthology. See Tanabe, compiler 1963.
- Tanabe Hisao, compiler. 1963. *Nihon Biwagaku Taikei*. Record anthology and booklet. Tokyo: Polydor Records Japan.
- _____. 1975. *Biwa: Sono Ongaku no Keifū*. Record anthology and booklet. Tokyo: Columbia Records Japan.
- Tokumarū, Yoshihiko et al., eds. 1991. *Tradition and its Future in Music: Report of SIMS Osaka*. Tokyo: Mita Press.
- Yasuda Munetaka. 1991. "Higo biwa no denshō - Higo biwa no yurai to seiritsu o megutte." In *Minzoku Geinō Kenkyū*, no. 14.