

## About the Sho

**Sho** is a Japanese traditional instrument used in Gagaku music.

It is a mouth organ which has 17 bamboo pipes. The player blows into a hole in the mouthpiece, which sends the air through bamboo tubes which are similar in design and produce a timbre similar to the pipes in a western organ. It can produce chords as well as single notes.

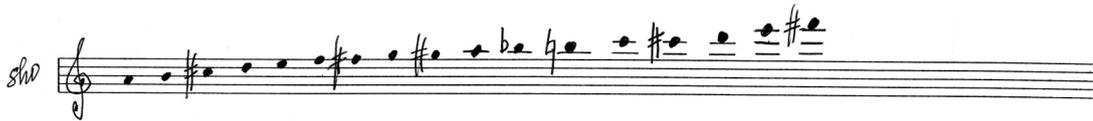
This instrument came from China in 7<sup>th</sup> Century and kept the same style as which was introduced (Chinese ones are developed and changed thorough many centuries. So we have different instrument today).

**Gagaku** music is the Japanese Court music, it is performed only in Court and for religious reason until World War II. Also this music was succeeded by only special families before the War.

After 1945, Gagaku is opened for people in general and was discovered by western music composers.

## Tuning

The tuning of the 17 pipes is almost "pythagorian and based on a':



## Technique of Japanese Sho

The instrument makes the sound by inhaling and exhaling breathing.

It has 17 bamboo pipes and each bamboo has small holes.

When the player closes the hole, the pipe makes sound (look the finger position).

Right (R) and Left (L) thumb might reach (close) 2 holes which are next to each other at the same time, but usually one finger can close only one hole at once.

Choose one note for each finger and make a combination of sound when you make a chord

## Dynamics

Possible from pp to ff, but it is very difficult to have exact attack in soft dynamic. Especially when it is a chord and in soft dynamic, most of the times the all notes don't start to make sound at the same time.

## **Notation**

In G clef with an 8ve sign above. The written pitch starts from *a* below the staff and finishes on *f sharp* on the top line of the staff. Sounding pitch: *a'* in the middle of the staff to *f''' sharp*.

## **Special Techniques**

Most of contemporary music techniques for wind instruments are possible.

## **Advise**

The most important thing to keep in mind when writing a piece for the instrument: the Sho has only fingering positions. If the connection between the fingering is OK, then most of the things are OK.

About the positions:

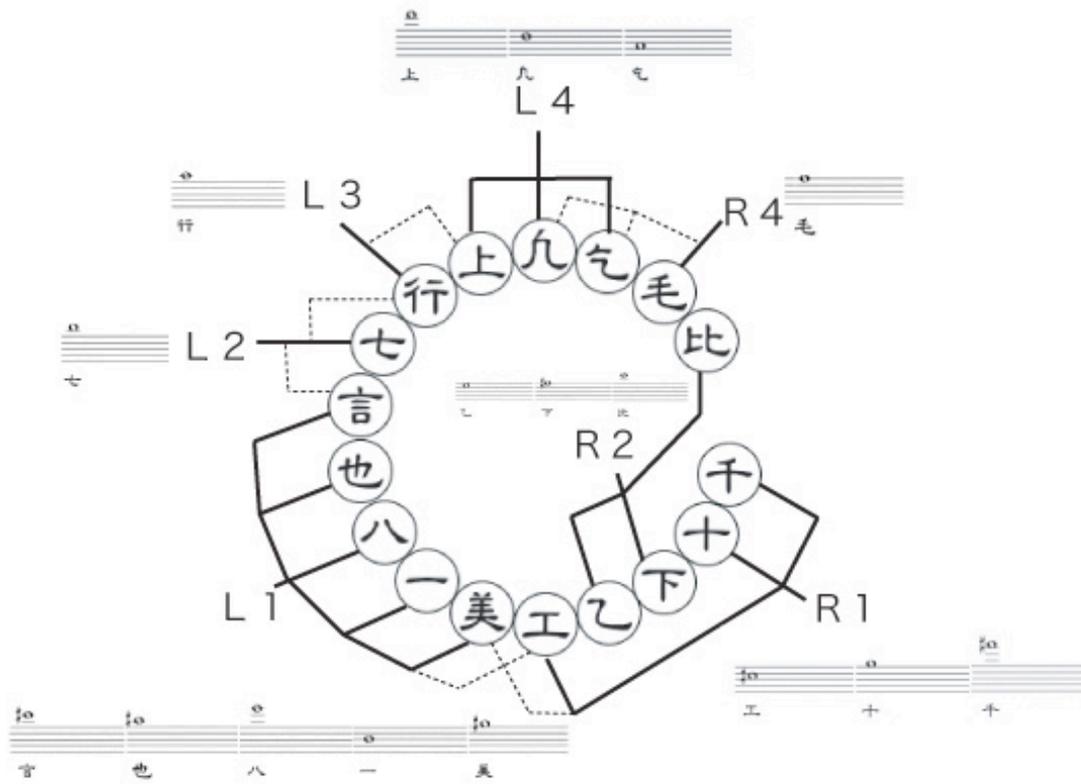
The 2<sup>nd</sup> finger of the right hand is inside the instrument (sound is *e''*, *f#''* and *c''*).

The 4<sup>th</sup> finger of the right hand (which plays *f#''*), the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of the left hand (*h''* and *a''*) have higher positions than the other fingers. Their holes are about 2cm higher than the others.

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# Finger Position of Japanese Sho

—— traditional fingering  
 ..... alternative fingering



## Traditional Chord

The musical notation shows two staves of music. The first staff contains five chords corresponding to the characters: 乙 (bottom), 九 (top-right), 一 (left), 七 (left), and 行 (left). The second staff contains five chords corresponding to the characters: 十 (right), 下 (bottom-right), 工 (bottom), 美 (bottom-left), and 比 (right). Each chord is represented by a group of notes on a five-line staff.