

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.

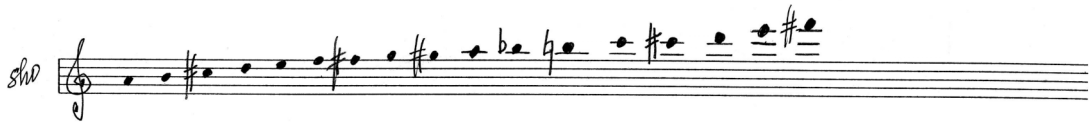
This instrument came from China in 7th Century and kept the same style as which was introduced (Chinese ones are developed and changed thorough many centuries. So we have different instrument today).

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:

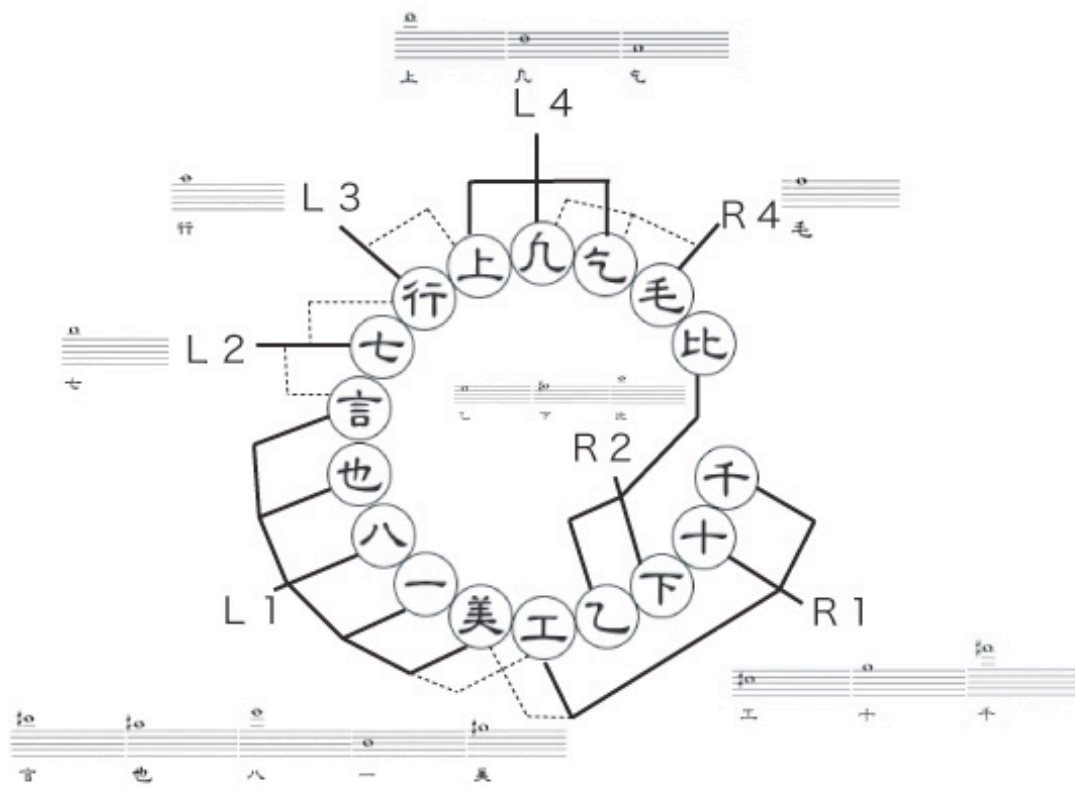
The 2nd finger of the right hand is inside the instrument (sound is *e''*, *f#''* and *c''*).

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

Naomi Sato

Finger Position of Japanese Sho

—— traditional fingering
 alternative fingering



Traditional Chord

Two staves of musical notation showing traditional chords for the notes 乙, 九, 一, 七, 行 and 十, 下, 工, 美, 比. Each note is accompanied by a specific chord structure on a five-line staff.