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## QUANTITATIVE METRE IN NŌ

Ivan R. V. Rumánek

**Abstract:** *The hiranori rhythm, unique for the nō drama, combines the asymmetrical (7–5) syllabic metre of the Japanese poetry with a symmetrical 8-beat rhythm of the nō melodic singing (fushi). The study discloses its resemblance with the Greek quantitative metre of hexameter and seeks to explain the presence of quantitative prosody, otherwise atypical for Japan, through tracing back the origin of the hiranori rhythm on the Japanese soil and in the Buddhist chanting practice which, the study hypothesizes, might show a historical link with the Hellenistic cultures of Central Asia and their Greek heritage.*

**Key Words:** *nō, kabuki, jōruri, hiranori, ōnori, chūnori, syllabic prosody, quantitative prosody, tanka, waka, shirabyōshi, kusemai, kuse, Shinran, wasan, Iroha uta, Homer, hexametre, spondee, dactyl, Tocharoi, Yuezhi, Kushan Empire, Alexander the Great, Hellenistic culture, Greek influence on Buddhist sculpture, Gandhara.*

I would like to dedicate this paper to my dear colleague Professor Zdenka Švarcová with whom I have spent many an enjoyable hour discussing nō and all its enigmas, including the one treated below.

Among the elements which link all the classical Japanese dramaturgical creation – *nōgaku*, *jōruri* and *kabuki* - there is one which is relatively inconspicuous yet all the more enduring. It is also one of the few elements of nō that remained unaffected by great transformations in its structure after its adoption as the “official performance” (*shikigaku*) of the Tokugawa shogunate. This element is the rhythm, including the syllabic metre underlying the poetic passages of dramatic texts consisting of “seven-and-five” syllables.

### 7-5 syllabic “ku”

In *Naniwa Miyage*, a 1738 record of Chikamatsu Monzaemon’s thoughts taken down by Hozumi Ikan, Chikamatsu is recorded as saying: “Thus, while verse is generally written by arranging long and short lines in order, the jōruri is basically a musical form, and the length of the lines recited is therefore determined by the melody. If an author adheres implicitly to the rules of metrics, his lines may prove awkward to recite. For this reason I am not concerned with metrics in my writings.”<sup>1</sup> In spite of Chikamatsu’s approach, Edo-period drama does contain passages which are marked by these metrics and Kawatake Toshio points out that “this meter is invariably used

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<sup>1</sup> Keene 1955: 387.

in climactic, highly emotional scenes and forms thus a musical and lyrical characteristic of Tokugawa period drama.”<sup>2</sup> It is the 7-5 syllabism typical of *nō* and inherited by the new early modern dramatic genres with “this agreeable effect of the rhythms of lines which is found in almost all the pieces [in kabuki].”<sup>3</sup> Its place in the Edo-period drama was in the rhythmical chanting. A sung part of the fourth act, scene 3 of Chikamatsu’s *jōruri Futago Sumida-gawa* is as follows: *haru ni sakidatsu. / fuyu ume wa. / yuki wo ugachite / kanbashiku. / tsuma ni okururu / adashi mi wa. / goke tote tatsuru / ie mo nashi. / [...]*.<sup>4</sup> The syllabic rhythm of alternating 7-syllable and 5-syllable lines seen here represents a direct heritage from *nō*. In *nō* theory, the syllabic line combination 7+5 is termed as “*ku*” (= a specific line combination, “a stanza”). This *nō ku* is the fundamental building block for all syllabically bound passages and has a long history of close connection with the unique musical rhythm in *nō*, *hiranori*.

### **Hiranori rhythmical pattern in *nō***

The *hiranori* rhythm is designated as specific for *nō*. Out of the three rhythmical patterns used in *nō* – *ōnori*, *chūnori* and *hiranori* – the last is the most common. It is often stated that the specificity of *hiranori* consists in the fact that seemingly incongruous elements are put in harmony by it – that of odd syllabic rhythm (seven, five) and even musical rhythm: this latter because the basic *nō* time is generally described in terms of an eight-beat bar (*yatsubyōshi*). It comes from the Buddhist chanting based on the 8-beat rhythm to which the length of the verse was freely set, prolonging the syllables as necessary. However, it is often more useful to conceive of the 8 beats as 16 halfbeats, as will be shown below. The three kinds of rhythm in *nō* are characterised by how many syllables of the text fall on one beat. In *ōnori*, it is one syllable per one beat (8 syllables per bar). In *chūnori*, it is two syllables per beat (i. e. one syllable per halfbeat – 16 syllables per bar). In *hiranori*, the rhythm is, unlike the previous two, asymmetrical, consisting of a unique combination of alternating two-halfbeat syllables with halfbeat syllables in a pattern designed to match the *nō* stanza to the 8beat bar.

*Hiranori*, with its fundamental odd-numbered asymmetry, effectively contrasts with the other two rhythms, the strictly regular even-numbered *ōnori* and *chūnori* passages. These latter two have a special role in the play; they are endowed with a *semantic function*. *Ōnori* is relatively rare and signals awe-inspiring passages when a non-human being is going to appear on the stage. It can also stand at either side of a dance scene. *Chūnori* is very rare indeed; its aim is to evoke a hectic atmosphere accompanying lines depicting the suffering of characters who were originally hu-

<sup>2</sup> Kawatake Toshio 1971: 35.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 71.

<sup>4</sup> (*sung*) In late winter, the plum (*ume*) is the harbinger of spring, with its sweet blossoms peeking through the melting snow. Left alone in this fickle world after the death of her husband, (*cadence*) Karaito is a lonely widow, without even a home to take care of.” (transl. Gerstle 2001: 105).

mans and are now spiritual beings. It is also used for lines expressing the emotion of *urami* – spite, anger or hatred – that during their life remained unresolved, urging the character to reappear in this world in the form of a spectre or ghost. *Chūnori* is additionally used in fighting scenes of living human beings. These characteristics are relevant to the topic of this thesis because these rhythm patterns represent further continuities between *nō* and Edo-period drama, where they are used *in similar scenes and situations*.

The rhythm I am going to deal with, however, is *hiranori* because of its unique characteristics. Let us take a concrete *ku* of *hiranori* as an example. The following is my own research based on my recording of the performance (*shimai*) of the *kuse* section of the *nō Yamamba* at the Hōshō Nō Theatre, Tokyo, in autumn 2008. This is a typical regular *ku* from the *kuse* (narrative dance song) of *Yamamba*:

*sato made okuru*

*ori mo ari*

(“she may even accompany them down to their village at times”)

It is sung:

sa-Ato ma-aDE oKUru-U oRI mo a ri x

The syllables that are worth two halfbeats (i. e. the actual drum beat falls on just one of its halves) are underlined and their vowels united by a hyphen to show they are one syllable (sa-A, ma-a). The times on which the beats of the drums fall, are indicated by bold type: **BOLD CAPITALS** for the “larger handdrum” *ōtsuzumi*, **bold small** for the “smaller handdrum” and **BOLD ITALICS** for both. The last beat (x) falls on the time right after the last syllable. The *ku* can be rhythmically analysed and the times numbered in this way:

sa-**A** to ma-a **DE** o **KU** ru-U o **RI** mo a ri x

.-...1.-...2....-...3...-...4...-...5...-...6....-.....7.-...8

Although in this particular *ku*, the 8-beat structure comes out very clear and evident, in most cases it is not so. There might be lack of some of the concrete beats, like in the *ku* immediately preceding the above-mentioned. It sounds like this:

tsu ki mo-o ro to **MO** ni-I ja **MA** o i de x

.-.1.-...2....-...3...-...4...-...5...-...6....-.....7.-...8

Regularities can be observed for both these *ku* – what the both illustrations share is that the beats 2, 7 and 8 are on the smaller handdrum while the 4, 5 and 6 on the larger handdrum; yet beats 1 and 3 differ as to whether actually being beaten (on larger drum in the first-mentioned *ku*) or remaining silent (in the second mentioned *ku*). This six-beat-per-stanza variant is termed *kataji* in Japanese musical theory (Hirano 1989 p. 463).

The *ku* immediately ensuing after the above-mentioned two has still more irregularities:

ma ta a ru **TO ki wa o ri hi me mo X**  
 -.1.-.2.-.....3.-.4.-.5.-.6.-.7....-.....8

The common points with the preceding two ones is the smaller drum beating on beats 7 and 8. The four-beat-per-stanza variant is termed *tori* (ibid.).

Despite these actual dissimilarities in the correlation between syllables and drum beats in these three *ku* in the Hōshō performance that served for the above research, the usual way of characterizing hiranori in Japanese musicology looks very neat and is termed *jibyōshi* (ibid.), and indeed Bethe states the three above-mentioned *ku* stanzas as appearing in this regular pattern (Bethe 1977 p51):

(“===” indicates the continuation of the syllable through more than one halfbeat)

.....1...-.....2.....-.....3...-.....4.....-.....5.....-.....6.....-...7.....-.....8  
 57. tsu==ki. mo. ro===to. mo. ni===ya. ma. o...i.....de...\*  
 58. sa===to. ma. de===o...ku...ru===o...ri...mo. a...ri...\*  
 59. ma==ta...a...ru===to...ki...wa===o...ri...hi...me...mo...\*

We can simply think that this is no more than just a regular alternation of long and short syllables and that it is the simplest and most basic way how to prevent monotony of a passage being declaimed – four beats are distributed among the prolonged and short syllables in such a way that the first two beats will be taken by a long syllable and the second two beats will be two short syllables. Nevertheless, the rhythm does not remain as monotonous as this: the second part of a *ku* stanza does not use this rhythm of alternating one long and two shorts, but unlike the first half of the stanza, the second consists of three shorts following one another.

### Quantitative element in *nō* chanting

Although neither Old Japanese nor, most probably, medieval Japanese had a distinctive phonological feature of vowel quantity, this rhythm clearly counts with syllabic length and reminds of the *quantitative metre* as extant in ancient Indoeuropean poetries. If we tentatively use the terminology of this metre, each hiranori stanza in the regular *jibyōshi* rhythm is interpretable as composed of three successive *dactyls* followed by three light (short) syllables. These dactyls are, of course, purely musical, not phonological, since the syllables would be equally long in natural speech, the initial strong beats only made so by musical rhythmical prolongation.

If compared with how the stanzas were performed in the Hōshō performance, the discrepancy comes out clearly:

tsu ki mo== ro to mo ni== ya ma o i de x  
sa== to ma== de o ku ru== o ri mo a ri x  
 ma ta a ru to ki wa o ri hi me mo x

The first two lines preserve (at least some of) the prolongations (though not always in the same place, e.g. “ma== de” in the stead of “ma de==”), but the last one does not show any prolongation at all. The discrepancy may be due to differences of performative practice in the 5 schools of *nō* chanting, the rhythm shown in Bethe being based on a school different from Hōshō, but it may well be the discrepancy between the theoretical pattern and the actual modern *nō* practice. There were, indeed, even in the Hōshō performance some stanzas in which the basic *jibyōshi* rhythm was acoustically very distinct, yet they were rather scarce. The Japanese musical theory has terminology for these variants; the first two stanzas can classify as the “*mochi o kakusu*” variant and the third as the “*mitsu jiutai*” variant<sup>5</sup>.

According to a revealing project carried out in 2002 at Yokohama Nō Theatre under the guidance of professors Takemoto and Takakuwa, called “*Hideyoshi ga mita nō*” (*Nō as Toyotomi Hideyoshi might have seen it*) and trying to recreate the form a *nō* performance could have had at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, this shift probably occurred during the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>6</sup>. Even today, one often experiences at a *nō* performance that due to the volume level of the accompaniment, the speech of the actor, especially if he wears the mask, is hard to perceive, often utterly inaudible. The presentday system of *hiranori* (*gendai no hiranori*<sup>7</sup>) is believed to have come about in an attempt to avoid to some extent the coincidence of the beating of the drum and the start of the syllable: in it, three out of the seven drum beats fall on the second half of a prolonged syllable, so only the five short syllables remain coinciding with the drumbeats:

sa..a..to..ma..de..e..o..ku..ru..u..o..ri..mo..a..ri..x

The original, pre-1600 pattern (*Edo jidai made no hiranori*<sup>8</sup>) is considered to have all the seven drumbeats falling on the beginning of the syllables:

sa..to..o..ma..de..o..o..ku..ru..o..o..ri..mo..a..ri..x

Despite this rhythmical halfbeat shift, the basic quantitative characteristics remained unchanged, because the new long syllables arose from original short ones which preceded the long ones, at the expense of the latter’s length. By means of this new prolongation the following drumbeat fell on the second half of the prolonged preceding (originally short) syllable, while the start of the following (originally long)

<sup>5</sup> Hirano 1989: 463.

<sup>6</sup> Takakuwa 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Hirano 1989: 463.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



syllable avoided this beet by being shifted right *after* it, so to be more audible, and thus the original long syllable was only left with a half of its original time, its length superseded by the length of the previous syllable.

As can be seen, despite the shift, the *three-dactyl* structure was clearly present in the old system of hiranori rhythm too, only with something which in the quantitative metre could be defined as an *iambic* start to the verse: “sa..to-o”.

Besides these practical performative concerns, there might have been another reason to the shift, connected with a *kōwakamai* piece called *Yuriwaka daijin* studied by Tsubouchi Shōyō. James Araki<sup>9</sup> thinks that the Greek epic *Odyssey* could have been introduced to Japan in 1550 by João Fernandez, a skillful linguist fluent in Japanese who worked as guide to Francisco Xavier, the first Christian missionary in Japan. Araki writes that Francisco stayed in Yamaguchi in 1550, hypothesizing that Fernandez could have recited *Odyssey* there, which could have inspired some *kōwakamai* performer to compose a new piece – *Yurikusawaka*. The thing is that the first part of the name would correspond to the Latin name of the epic – *Ulyxes*, which would be perceived as *Urikuses* by the Japanese people, being thus transformed into a euphonic *Yurikusa*, to which the name ending –*waka* was added. This was later shortened to *Yuriwaka*, which is the name of the piece as is best known to later generations. This occasion, Araki points out, might also have been the time when the Japanese had the direct acoustic experience with classical European quantitative metre in its hexameter form. Its similarity to the *nō* recitation rhythm might have caused the shift from pre-Hideyoshi recitation rhythm to post-Hideyoshi recitation rhythm which consists of, so to say, classical Greek dactyls.

The introduction of quantitative metre terminology might seem incongruous when talking about Japanese performing arts and Japanese poetry for which this way of producing acoustic rhythm is not typical. It is even contradictory to it, what with the characteristics of the pre-modern Japanese vocalism consisting of short vowels. The Japanese poetry had always been syllabic and when recited aloud, it was traditionally chanted in a distinct pitch modulation characterizable as melody but without a specific rhythmical pattern in terms of regular beats. Where did, then, the unique combination of syllabic *ku* stanza with quantitative metre come from? The answer to this question must, most probably, be sought in other sources, musical rather than literary.

### Sources of the combination of syllabic and quantitative metre

The sources are generally looked for in the *kusemai* dance, a song and dance performance of which very little information is known except references by contemporary observers who were outsiders not belonging to the *kusemai* tradition. One of the earliest references date back to 1349. It is known that Kannami, founder of the classical *nō*, had around 1370 studied *kusemai* with Otozuru, representative of the female line of *kusemai* in the Nara region. He himself composed *kusemai*, and gradually, this form found its way into the structure of his *nō* plays as the *shōdan*

<sup>9</sup> Araki 1978.

called today by the abbreviation of its predecessor – *kuse*. Except for often being an *epic* (narrative) dance piece, the *kuse* of *nō* seems to have only little in common with the scanty yet distinct characteristics of what *kusemai* is known to have been like.

There are various references suggesting that it was the rhythm that was *kusemai*'s most conspicuous feature, along with a specific kind of music: “the beat in the dance defies description, being strange in the extreme”<sup>10</sup> and “the retired emperor Go-Komatsu [(r. 1392–1412) said, IR] that it was the music of an age of turmoil”<sup>11</sup>. Zeami was strongly preoccupied with *kusemai*'s connection to *nō* because his father Kannami was the one who had adopted it and started the process of its appropriation to the needs of their family art. Zeami wrote that “*kusemai* are sung with the beat as the main consideration, the words are carried along by the beat”<sup>12</sup>, and “as they have been sung in more recent times in a softened form, with a mixture of Ko-uta style, they have a very great appeal”<sup>13</sup>. *Kouta* was the melodic song form on which the *nō* melody was based, and this latter note of Zeami's is valuable as proof that *kusemai* had been undergoing a change of style, adopting the *kouta* singing style too. This means that previously, *kusemai* had been more rhythm-based than melody-based. “Now, when the *Kusemai* style of singing is softened and approaches that of the Ko-uta (...)”<sup>14</sup>. About the appropriation of *kusemai* in “*sarugaku*” (= *nō*), Zeami said:

“*Sarugaku* was wholly in the Ko-uta style, with *Kusemai* quite distinct. But ever since Kan-a sang the *Kusemai Shirahige*<sup>15</sup> in *Sarugaku*, both styles have been sung. Since it consists only of a rising and falling [of the voice, ours] is not a thorough-going *Kusemai* style, for it has been softened down”<sup>16</sup>.

Zeami's words seem to implicate that *kusemai* used to be of a coarser nature, less melodic and more distinctly rhythmical. The “softening down” of this notorious *kusemai* coarseness might be exactly the process that eventually led to the scarcity of distinctly audible *hiranori* rhythm the present-day *nō* performance is characteristic of, because it is exactly the *kusemai* rhythm that is generally believed as the predecessor to the specific *nō* rhythm of *hiranori*.

*Kusemai* is, in turn, mentioned in close connection with older song-dance forms *shirabyōshi* and *sōga*, with which its rhythm had probably a lot in common, thus the origins of *hiranori* can be further traced back along this line.

*Shirabyōshi*, dating back to the Heian period, was in Japanese Middle Ages one of the most universally accepted forms of musical entertainment, and because this and *kusemai* are often mentioned together in works of the Muromachi period, it is fairly

<sup>10</sup> *Go-hōkōin-ki*. In O'Neill 1958: 43.

<sup>11</sup> *Tōyashū kiki-gaki*. In O'Neill 1958: 43.

<sup>12</sup> *Ongyoku kuwadashi kuden*. In O'Neill 1958: 49, underlined by IR.

<sup>13</sup> *Ongyoku kuwadashi kuden*. In O'Neill 1958: 49, underlined by IR.

<sup>14</sup> *Ongyoku kuwadashi kuden*. In O'Neill 1958: 55.

<sup>15</sup> *Shirahige* was the first *kusemai* that Kannami had composed as an independent dance-song. It seems it was only later that he started incorporating a *kusemai* into his new plays as an innovative element.

<sup>16</sup> *Sarugaku-dangi*. In O'Neill 1958: 55; the note in brackets O'Neill's.

certain that *kusemai* stemmed directly from *shirabyōshi*. The latter performance would consist of several numbers, starting with an introductory song, followed by other songs, and the second half was characterized by being in a quick tempo marked by stamping. Similarly to *kusemai*, *shirabyōshi* dance was also criticized, by the music theoretician Fujiwara no Moronaga in the 12<sup>th</sup> century when the art must have been relatively new, for its music and the turning movements of the dancer. Later years, however, brought respectability to *shirabyōshi* and their songs in the 7-5 metre, even at the imperial court, and came to be popularly known as *imayō* (“modern songs”).

O'Neill mentions that the *shirabyōshi* rhythm might have been similar to the like-named rhythm in *shōmyō* Buddhist chanting and the *tadabyōshi* rhythm of *bugaku*. As Moronaga was *shōmyō* theoretician and musician, the usage of Buddhist rhythm in such secular performance might have stood behind his critical opinion.

A little later than *shirabyōshi*, *sōga* (fast songs, also called *geniya-saba* or *ririura*) songs are known to have been popular in the Kamakura period as banquet entertainment for both courtiers and warriors. Among their topics were *mono tsukushi* (list of items joined by common theme) and *michiyuki* (a travel song).

What is important is that both these forms had their verses in the basic 7-5 syllabic structure – the later *nō ku* we have seen above. The irregularity seen in *nō* was known here too, with the common practice of having occasionally one or two syllables more (*ji amari*) or less (*ji tarazu*), similarly to the classical poetry. *Sōga* singing was probably accompanied by beats with the folding fan and sometimes by the *shakuhachi* flute. Its rhythm resembled the *hiranori* rhythm in many features and that is why it is supposed that some kind of connection must have existed between *sōga* and *kusemai*.

Although the syllabic metre was common to the various genres of poetry and songs, the 7-5 *ku* differed distinctly from the metre of the classical poetry which always started with the shorter verse of five: *tanka* (*waka*) consisted of two stanzas (*ku*), both of which can be interpreted as originally having this ascending rhythm – the upper *ku* of 5-7 and the lower *ku* of 5-7-7 (a later, classical division of the *waka* was 5-7-5 : 7-7, in which only the upper *ku* was ascending); the more ancient forms which had nearly got extinct by the 10th century, included *sedōka*, equally with the ascending rhythm of 5-7-7 : 5-7-7, and the long epic *chōka* which was virtually a prolongation of *tanka* by an unlimited number of upper stanzas of 5-7 ended by one lower stanza 5-7-7).

### **Buddhist practice of the 7-5 *ku***

On the other hand, the *descending* syllabic metre starting with the longer verse of seven was the domain of Buddhist poetry. The 7-5 *ku* form is known from the Heian period, appearing after Japanese had established itself as a literary language which started to be used also in Buddhist poetry (*wasan* “hymns in Japanese”), thus emulating Chinese and sinicized Sanskrit which were until then the exclusive media for Buddhist poetry. One of the earliest examples of this Buddhist syllabic metre is

the well-known *Iroha uta*, an encapsulation of Buddhist doctrine into four Buddhist *ku* stanzas. It is traditionally ascribed to Kūkai (774–835), the prominent monk of the early Heian period. The connection with Kūkai, the venerated founder of *hiragana*, is chiefly seen in its being the alphabetical poem comprising all the syllables of the Japanese syllabary, but there is no evidence of the poem existing at such an early period, that is why more realistic estimations put its composition to a date a century or two later. What is known positively, is that this Buddhist syllabism of 7-5 was used at the latest by the prominent Buddhist novator Shinran (1173–1262), founder of the True Pure Land sect (*Jōdo Shinshū*) of Amidism. He established the double stanza form (7-5-7-5) of Buddhist verse identical with the rhythm of the *Iroha uta*. It was this *ku* form that got adopted by secular singers including *shirabyōshi-imayō* and through them, over a century later, became the standard *nō* stanza.

Shinran's 7-5 rhythm could originate from the Amidist *nenbutsu* mantra: in various sources, like Izumo no Okuni's *nenbutsu* chant (after 1600) as well as in *nō Sumidagawa* (after 1400), it is found in the form *Namu Amidabutsu - Namu Amida*, with the syllable count seven-five. If this was the formula in which the *nenbutsu* was actually sung in some branches of Buddhism in repetition like mantra chanting, the rhythm (and melody) provided a pattern for further textual alterations which, however, matched the syllabic count, and this could have given the Amidist poetry the basic 7-5 model. Nevertheless, it can be regarded also in the opposite way – that the *nenbutsu* formula was only additionally fitted into a previously existing pattern.

Could it be assumed that the Buddhist syllabic metre of Shinran (or even Kūkai) had also anything in common with what would in the future become known as *hiranori* rhythm? The fact is that the Buddhist stanza, including the ancient *Iroha uta*, can be easily chanted in the regular *hiranori* rhythm, and what is more, it also fits perfectly when recited in a full quantitative dactyl metre (dactylic tetrametre). If recited to a rhythmical music based on the eight-beat rhythm it leaves no space for in-breath, yet for a Buddhist chanting it can be imagined that several monks would chant the successive stanzas in turn, so no breathing break was necessary. Indeed, Zeami's mentions about breath shortages at the end of the *ku* might refer to the full-fledged dactyl declamation of the *ku*, and the adjustment of the final syllables might be a later development, or one in the female *kusemai* line of Otazuru with whom Kannami had learned this art. The quantitative rhythm might have shocked the period arbiters of taste when used to the traditional syllabic declamation of poetry, yet adopting acoustic elements of Buddhist art might have been fashionable in late Heian and early Kamakura periods – the *biwa hōshi* singing in the Buddhist *shōmyō* tones the episodes of the Genpei war and *shirabyōshi* singing in the Buddhist stanzas: the rhythm of their later offspring, the *nō ku*, suggests that the original rhythm might have been straight quantitative dactyl and it might come from the Buddhist practice too, as the quantitative dactyl and the Buddhist stanza fit perfectly.

## Central Asian connection

In the Japanese culture, rarely a completely new thing comes about without some particular connection with the existing status quo. That is why close connection with the preceding context should be sought for the appearance of *hiranori*, too. If the secular female singers indeed builded on the preceding Buddhist tradition, they needed a pause for inbreath in the rhythm of their songs, and this is exactly what might have led to the contrivance of turning the fourth dactyl into three short beats - the fourth beat would be left free and provide a moment for inbreath. This adjustment of the final part of the stanza would also have provided the desired *henka* – variation: for the solemn Buddhist chanting, the dignified succession of unceasing dactyls would be the ideal rhythm, but an entertainer needed something more lively, allowing a shout or inflexion at the end of the stanza. Some of the *shirabyōshi* singers might thus have adjusted the final syllables of their stanzas, mostly sung in the quantitative dactylic manner, and formed what was, by some conservatist contemporaries and connoisseurs of Buddhist chanting, judged as the wild and disruptive music. The alternative iambic start, that eventually prevailed, might have been another innovation, nourished from both iambic and dactylic traditions, which it combined together. These traditions might have been of continental origin and would have been brought over by Buddhist monks along with other Buddhist traditions. In the light of the legends about Kūkai and his two year stay in China (804-806) during which he is reputed to have acquired an immense amount of what was going on in the amazingly rich cultural life of Chang'an, it is not inconceivable that he brought this singing rhythm to Japan himself.

The establishing of an untypical syllabic descending metre in the Buddhist tradition might be connected with the fact that it fits perfectly with quantitative dactylic metre. What can be the explanation for the presence of a typically Greek rhythm in Japanese drama, except a sheer coincidence? If we put aside (for lack of evidence of any connection) other conspicuous similarities of *nō* with Greek counterparts (like the presence of the *chorus* both in *nō* and the Attic tragedy), one of the possible explanations could be a hypothetical link connecting the roots of *hiranori* with Hellenistic cultures of Central Asia. The thing is that quantitative dactylic metre is present not only in the Japanese art but also in Buddhist recitation on the Continent. I heard it in Tibetan mantra chanting, too. One can presume that, transmitted to Japan, this rare and exceptional rhythm was preserved in *kusemai* and finally got into *nō* where it underlied the 7-5 syllabic stanza.

Although quantitative metre is a very atypical element in terms of Japanese prosody, certain quantitative properties have been suggested for classical Chinese poetry with its regular patterns alternating 平 (ping2 – “even”) and 仄 (ze4 – “broken”) syllables, with the 平 ones possibly being longer than the latter.<sup>17</sup> The origins of this quantitative metre in China, including some currents of the Buddhist tradition, might be sought for in connection with either Indian or Hellenistic heritage in Central Asia. One of the possibilities that comes to mind would be the ancient Indian Sanskrit quantitative

<sup>17</sup> Wang Li 1957 cited in Lomová 1995: 15.

metres which might be inherited from generation to generation in the Buddhist community along with the spread of Buddhism from India through Gandhāra (eastern Afghanistan) to China.

### **A Hellenistic link?**

However, the repetition of dactyls would, in my opinion, rather indicate the Greek tradition. The expansion of Alexander the Great introduced figural sculpture in Central Asia and its influence upon the Mahayana Buddhism which later penetrated into these regions is generally acknowledged as giving birth to the Mahayana practice of Buddhist images. The Hellenistic dactylic tradition could have penetrated the Buddhist ritual in a similar way, remaining, however, less conspicuous, indeed hidden away.

In the combination with the spondee (two long syllables), the dactyl (long + two shorts) is the rhythm known from Homeric epics as Homeric hexameter. Nevertheless, one of the oldest material attestations of the hexametric quantitative rhythm comes from the wine pitcher oinochoe no. 192. exhibited in the National Archeological Museum in Athens. This vessel was the prize for the best dancer in some festivity and its manufacture is dated to c. 740 BC<sup>18</sup>. Being just about the time when Homer might have composed his epics, this illustrates a more general use of the hexametric rhythm beyond the realm of Homeric epic poetry. Moreover, besides the great epics, Greek religious hymns (such as the so-called Homeric hymns) were composed in this metre too. Alexander the Great is known to have carried with him his beloved Homer anywhere he went on his conquest, and he certainly was not alone; the Greek soldiers who settled in the conquered regions of Central Asia, most probably introduced the singing hexametric rhythm as well, as an integral part of the establishment of Hellenistic culture there. With the introduction of Greek religious practice, the rhythm of Hellenistic ritual singing must have found home in Central Asia just in the same manner as did the practice of sculptural impersonation of gods and heroes. And it would not be surprising, then, if the rhythm would get adopted by the new coming Mahayana Buddhism, possibly enriching the already inherited Indian tradition of quantitative metre.

There can even be seen a direct parallel between the pre-1600 *nō ku* ending in two short syllables, and the ending of the ancient Greek verses in a two-syllable foot (mostly spondee), both in the Homeric (Ionic) hexameter and Sapphic (Aeolic) strophe:

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<sup>18</sup> Exhibition table in the National Archeological Museum in Athens.

Homer<sup>19</sup>: AU-ta-rho / GYM-nō- / THE-rhake- / -ŌN poly- / MĒ-tis o- / DYS-seus

Sappho<sup>20</sup>: POI-ki-LOTH-ro-NĀ-tha-na-TĀ-phro-DĪ-TĀ

Unlike the Greek **two longs** at the end of the line, the nō ku is ended in two *short* syllables. This final figure, whether a truncation of a dactyl or a shortening of a spondee, could have been an adjustment devised by dancers like shirabyōshi and kusemai: as mentioned above, this provided a rhythmical pause enabling both an inbreath and a space for an effective performative move – a dance round, a climactic gesture or a solo beat by the folded fan against the dancer's thigh.

The spread of Buddhism from the Gandhara region across Central Asia to China and Japan was a process covering several centuries. Equally long, perhaps accompanying it, could have been the eastward shift of the specific quantitative rhythm; once it reached Japan, it did not matter that Japanese did not possess naturally long syllables – any syllable can, in singing, be prolonged to any long time. The Japanese people just learned to sing the melodies of the Buddhist chants from their continental masters and later used their rhythm for Buddhist hymns written in Japanese, without having any idea of its quantitative origin. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that Zeami acknowledged himself in his first treatise *Fūshikaden* that *monkey plays* (*sarugaku* = nō) have their roots in China and Yuezhi – the name of the Tocharoi tribe who first lived in the Tarim Basin (probably different from the later, medieval people of the Tarim Basin who spoke what is called the A, B and C Tocharian of the 6th to 9th centuries CE). Later on, these Tocharoi, after being conquered by the Huns (*Xiongnu*), moved to Bactria, and then perhaps even further south, taking part in the Kushan page of Indian and Mahayana history. In this way, the quantitative metre in nō's *hiranori* rhythm might represent a deep streak of link between Japanese culture and the rest of the world.

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<sup>19</sup> *Odyssey* X. 1st line.

<sup>20</sup> Sappho Fr. 1. V., 1st line.

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