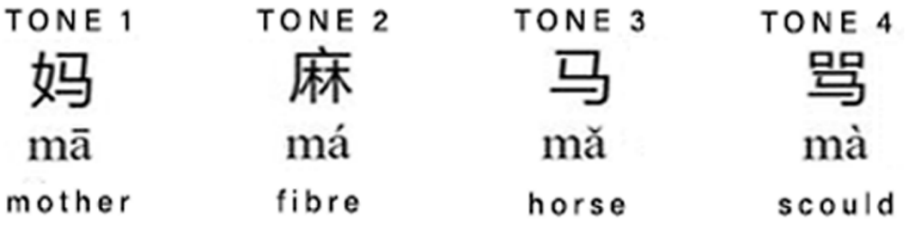
Glyphs that reflect various patterns of flowing water are used to indicate the pitch of successive words, i.e. the melody of a Japanese style religious chant. The 'Melodic Eko' which can be seen on the SERVICE ORDER page @ www.shinbuddhistfellowship.uk is a good example. The same piece is also stored on the shinbuddhistfellowship.uk/dharmaarchive page. Each of those pages also includes an mp3 audio clip of the chant. A reduced size copy of the same chant is shown herein as Fig 4.

To understand these flowing water glyphs, we should first appreciate all the languages derived from Chinese, including Japanese, are tonal. This means that differences in pitch or tone change the meaning of words.

Mandarin has four distinct tones, and a neutral tone. A famous example is the four Mandarin words that are translated as 'mother', 'fibre', 'horse' and 'scold'. They are pronounced in exactly the same way, but when tones are applied, they describe four different -and un-associated things.



TONE 1 is high and level. **TONE 2** starts low and ends high. **TONE 3** starts in the mid-range, dips very low, and then goes back up again. **TONE 4** starts high and ends low.
NUTRAL TONE: To make a question, "ma" is added at the end, but it is kept very soft, short and level.

Fig 2

Diacritical Marks: In phonetics (the study of speech sounds), a diacritical mark, a glyph—or symbol is added to a letter to alter its sense, function, tone and/or pronunciation.

Fig 1 shows conventional diacritical marks above the "a" in four renditions of "ma".

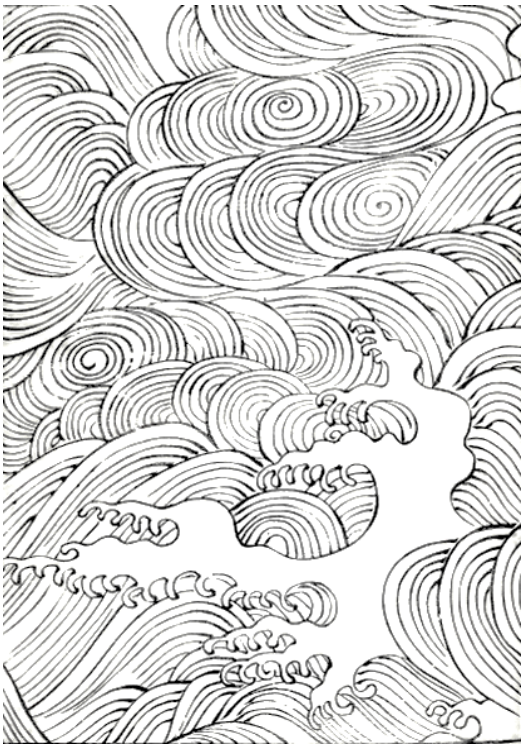
Fig 2 shows a simplification of those conventional marks. In this simplified form, these marks are usually called 'glyphs. A glyph is a diagram that imparts information.

Fig 3 (next page) shows the first line of the 'melodic Eko' – with the Japanese style 'flowing water' tone indicator glyphs fixed above the text.

Fig 3

The first four glyphs are identical; therefore, each are chanted in the same way. We might now note that the shape of this glyph is very similar to that shown as TONE 1 in Fig 2. The shape of the fifth glyph is likewise very similar to TONE 3 in Fig 2. It starts at the same pitch as the preceding four glyphs, and then it dips, and then goes back up again.

Japanese waves and clouds pen drawing



When we glance at a picture, we scan it left to right, i.e. in the same way we read our written language. Most of the Mandarin languages read right to left. This can make a great difference in our perception of the image.

The shape of the chanting glyphs likens the sound of each syllable of every word to forms of flowing water. Sometimes it flows steady and level (see 'GA-N NI SHI KU'), and sometimes obstructions cause it to change course (see 'D-O KU').

Fig 4

The flowing water glyphs convey all the needed information with a minimum of strokes, and with just a little practice one becomes able to simply 'see it and sing it'. It is an intuitive system.

On the other hand, the standard western system of music notation is complicated -and unsurprisingly, those that can read it are in the minority! There is no shame in that. It is a thing that ranks very low in most peoples need-to-know list!

Fig 5

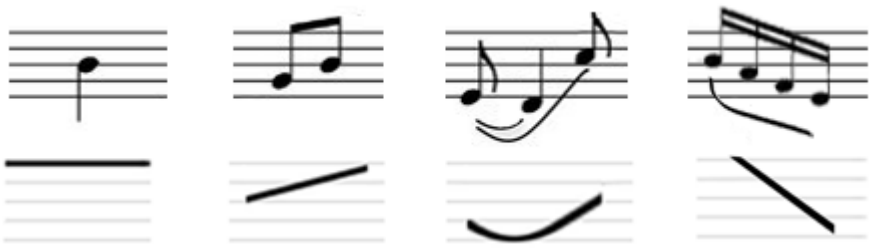


Fig 5 shows the correct western style notation for the four basic Mandarin linguistic tones (shown earlier as Fig 2). This simplified method involves a stroke-count of four; just one stroke for each of the four tones, yet it tells us all we need to know. Conversely, the western notation requires twenty-eight strokes, and it is overloaded with detail indicators.

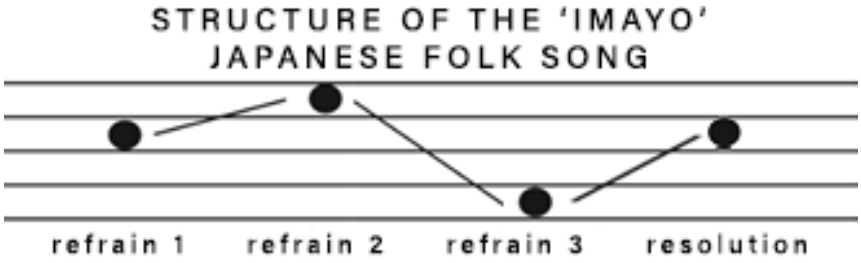
Before concluding, a few words regarding the lines that the two examples sit on (Fig 4). They each show symbols sitting on five lines. However, the range each covers is different.

The Stave or Staff: Western notation sits upon what is known as a stave, or staff. Every line or space represents a white key on the piano. Appropriate music symbols are placed on the stave according to their corresponding pitch or function. Higher and lower notes may be added beneath and above the stave on extra 'ledger lines', if necessary. The singer Adele's vocal range is about three and a half octaves. That's more than 20 notes or tones. The average person's range is no more than about 12 notes.

However, traditional Japanese music is based on pentatonic (five tone) or heptatonic (seven tone) scales. **All of these notes fit easily within the standard western stave, with no need for ledger lines above or below.**

Finaly, we zoom out from the detail of individual strokes and examine the overall structure of a traditional chanted Japanese folk song.

Fig 6



Ultimately, the only way we can fully appreciate the subtleties of any sound, is to hear it. If we listen to it over and over, we *will* learn it. So, in the hope it deepens your appreciation of the structure of a Japanese religious chant, I conclude this study with three audio clips.

AUDIO 1: 'Tendai Nembutsu'. A digital remastering of a cassette recording made circa 1988 at home of the late Venerable Enshin Saito. Enshin Saito was Rev Ganshin Rock's Master. Ganshin-san was the person who introduced me to Jim Pym. 2min19sec.

AUDIO 2: 'Tonal Commitment'. Digital remastering of an original piece, which is based upon the melodic structure we hear in audio 1, illustrated above as Fig 6. 3min22sec.

AUDIO 3: 'Comparing Commitments'. 4min57sec.

LINK TO SUPLIMENTAL AUDIO FILES
@WWW.SHINBUDDHISTFELLOWSHIP.UK