

## Nyokai-An Dojo

# Shakuhachi fingering chart (Kinko notation)

This document is intended to satisfy two basic needs.

First, the *BASIC NOTES* section offers beginners a simple, clear guide to the common non-meri notes without any extraneous information.

Then, the more thorough charts that follow present a full range of common fingerings and notations with some additional explanations, starting from the lowest note and extending up into the third octave.

### **What I have left out:**

I have restricted myself to common Kinko notations – I have not incorporated any specially modified characters used in particular schools. I have also left out the often confusing “slash” notation for meris and chu meris.

I do not include any of the notations used in special techniques such as “ka ra” or “ko-ro-ko-ro.”

I do not differentiate, graphically, among different amounts of partial hole covering on meri notes. This will vary from flute to flute and school to school, so I have opted to use one symbol – a hole half covered – for all situations.

Shakuhachi is a microtonal instrument, meaning that the traditional music often calls for pitches that fall in between those we commonly use in Western music. I have left out explanations of the actual sounded pitches, choosing simply to indicate the rough approximations in Western “ABC” notation. A more precise chart would require explanations such as “Tsu meri is often played at least 20 cents flatter than a Western E-flat” etc. etc. As actual pitches vary hugely from school to school and player to player, I have only occasionally used a minus sign (-) to indicate a usually flatter-than-Western pitch.

**For more instructional material, or to take shakuhachi lessons, please see <http://nyokai.com>**

# BASIC NOTES

|        |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 口      | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | D |
| ツ      | ● | ● | ● | ● | ○ | F |
| レ      | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | G |
| 子      | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | A |
| リ      | ● | ○ | ○ | ● | ● | C |
| イ or 五 | ○ | ○ | ○ | ● | ● | D |

乙  
(otsu, low)

|        |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 口      | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | D |
| ツ      | ● | ● | ● | ● | ○ | F |
| レ      | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | G |
| 子      | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | A |
| ヒ      | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ● | C |
| イ or 五 | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ● | D |

甲  
(kan, high)

(More complete chart starts on the next page.)

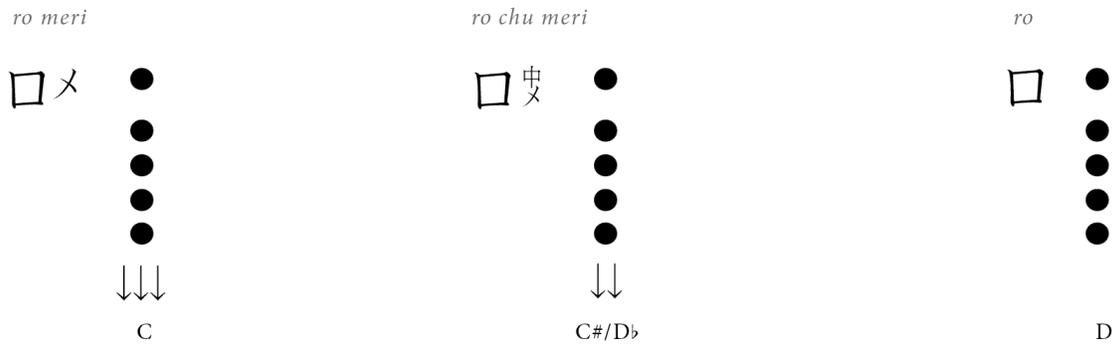
**General note on meri notation:**

In some scores, a meri is indicated by a small slash mark crossing the basic character. Often this slash is used to indicate a full meri, whereas at other times it is used to indicate a chu meri as distinguished from a full meri. Because this form of notation is inherently unclear, I have chosen to avoid it in the following charts.

I have used down arrows to indicate the approximate degree of lowering using the head, with three arrows indicating the most meri position and one arrow indicating the least.

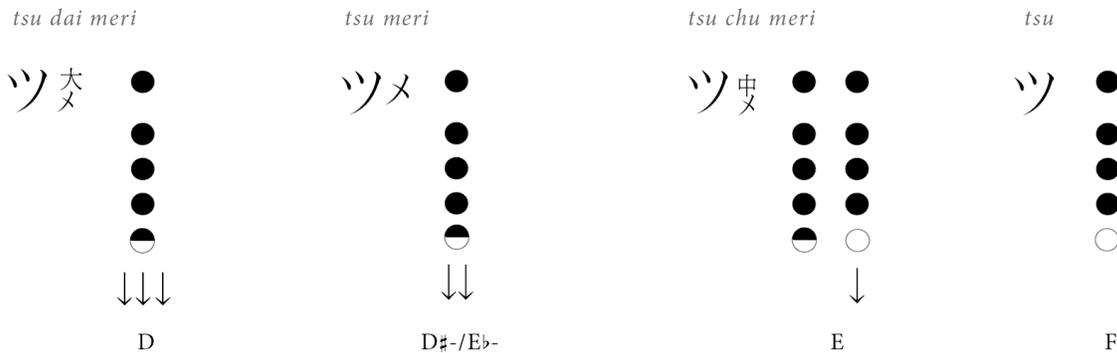
A minus sign (-) after a Western pitch equivalent indicates that the note is usually played slightly flatter.

**I. Lowest octave**



NOTES:

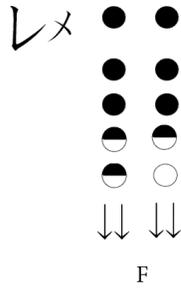
1. Some schools consider C# a ro meri and C a ro dai meri (大メ).
2. In many schools, ro often repeats using the second hole (from the bottom of the flute); in some schools it repeats more customarily using the bottom hole.



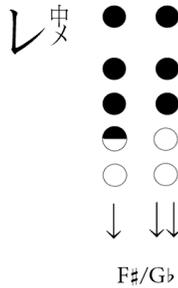
NOTES:

1. Tsu chu meri may also be played with both the bottom hole shaded a bit and the head lowered.
2. All tsu customarily repeat with the second hole.

*re meri*



*re chu meri*



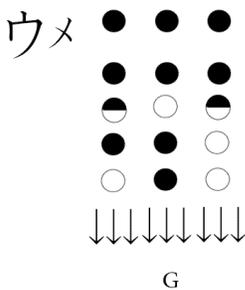
*re*



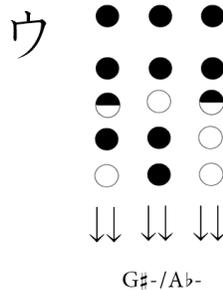
NOTES:

1. Rarely, some schools consider re meri to be F# rather than F.
2. Partially covering the bottom hole on a re meri makes it easy to descend to tsu chu meri, a common pattern.
3. Re notes may repeat with hole 4, 3, 2, or even 1 depending on the context. If no hole is indicated, 3 is most common in honkyoku.

*u meri*



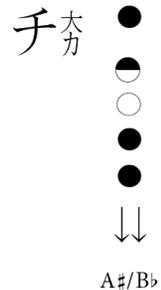
*u*



*chi*



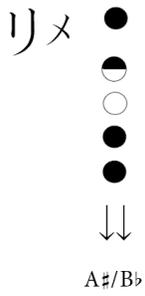
*chi dai kari*



NOTES:

1. Occasionally a chi meri may occur in the lower octave (instead of u). This would simply be played like the third listed fingering for u.
2. On some flutes, especially antiques, it may be possible and even desirable to play chi dai kari (A#) simply by fingering a regular chi and lifting the head up from neutral kari position.
3. U and chi customarily repeat with hole 4.

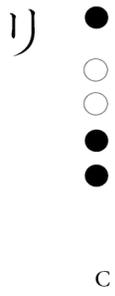
*ri meri*



*ri chu meri*



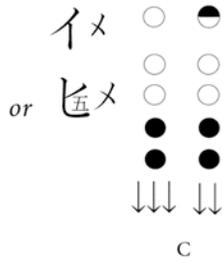
*ri*



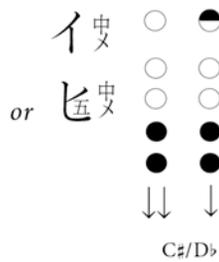
NOTES:

1. Some schools of honkyoku, while using essentially Kinko-based notation, follow the Tozan usage of ha (ハ) instead of ri (リ). This is very common!
2. Ri notes generally repeat with hole 5.

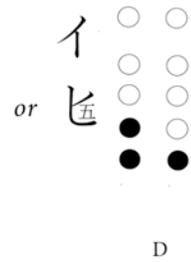
*i meri or go ho hi meri*



*i chu meri or go no hi chu meri*



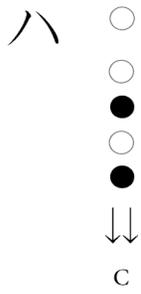
*i or go no hi*



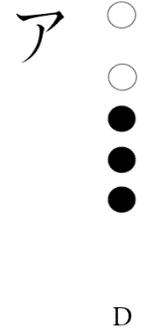
NOTES:

1. Though this is technically a low octave note, the hi character is often used in this context.
2. Some notation uses i meri, instead of I chu meri, for an approximate C# pitch.
3. These notes are usually repeated with the thumb, by quickly hitting the hole.

Before moving on to the second octave, there are a few low octave straggler fingerings to cover:

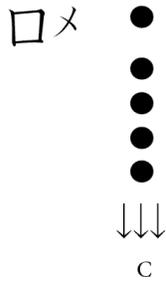
|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><i>ni shi go no ha</i></p>  | <p>This is usually seen as a grace note played before a second-octave ro, as in the common pattern known as “ha ro.” In a few honkyoku it appears on its own.</p> <p>Repeats with third hole.</p> |
|---|---|

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><i>go no ha</i></p>  | <p>This appears on its own in some honkyoku and gaikyoku, notably followed by a ri meri.</p> <p>Generally repeats with fourth hole or third hole.</p> |
|---|---|

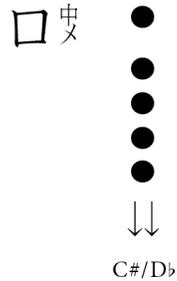
|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><i>a</i></p>  | <p>This substitute for second octave ro has a much airier sound.</p> |
|---|--|

## II. Second octave

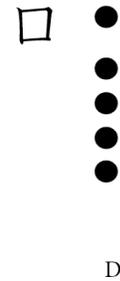
*ro meri*



*ro chu meri*



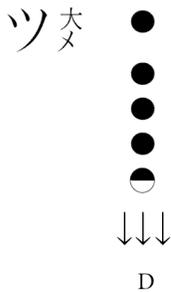
*ro*



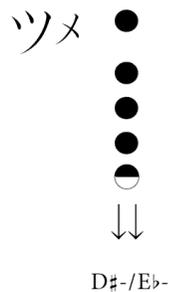
NOTES:

1. Some schools consider C# a ro meri and C a ro dai meri (大メ).
2. In many schools, ro often repeats using the second hole (from the bottom of the flute); in some schools it repeats more customarily using the bottom hole.

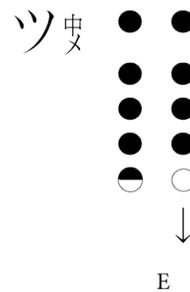
*tsu dai meri*



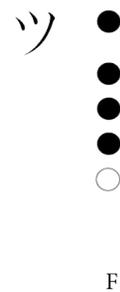
*tsu meri*



*tsu chu meri*



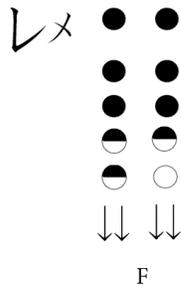
*tsu*



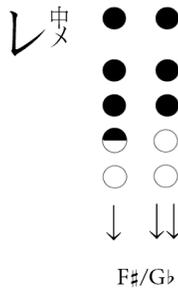
NOTES:

1. Tsu chu meri may also be played with both the bottom hole shaded a bit and the head lowered.
2. In many schools, tsu meri is lower than a Western D#.
3. A D# / Eb pitch may also be played as a ro kari (□カ) with only holes 4 and 5 open and head raised high. This results in a fuller louder sound than tsu meri.
4. All tsu customarily repeat with the second hole.

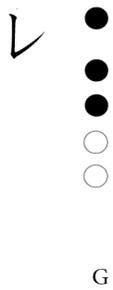
re meri



re chu meri



re



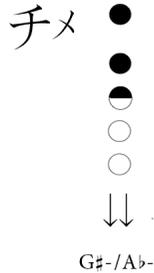
NOTES:

4. Rarely, some schools consider re meri to be F# rather than F.
5. Partially covering the bottom hole on a re meri makes it easy to descend to tsu chu meri, a common pattern.
6. Re notes may repeat with hole 4, 3, 2, or even 1 depending on the context. If no hole is indicated, 3 is most common in honkyoku.

ichi san no u



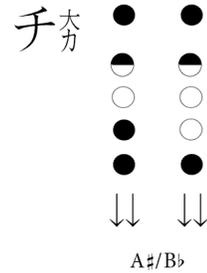
chi meri



chi



chi dai kari



NOTES:

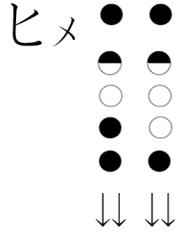
1. In some schools, an ichi san no u is called a ru (ル). This should not be confused with the use of ru in Kinko notation to mean “hit the first hole.”
2. On some flutes, especially antiques, it may be possible and even desirable to play chi dai kari (A#) simply by fingering a regular chi and lifting the head up from neutral kari position.
3. Chi customarily repeats with hole 4.

*san no u*



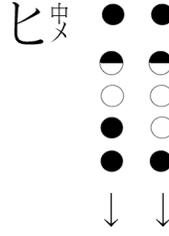
A#/B♭

*hi meri*



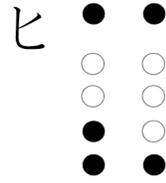
A#/B♭

*hi chu meri*



B

*hi*

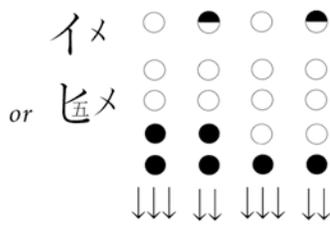


C

NOTES:

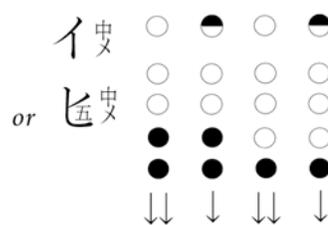
1. Hi in all its forms generally repeats with the thumb.

*i meri or go ho hi meri*



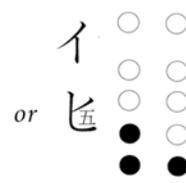
C

*i chu meri or go no hi chu meri*



C#/D♭

*i or go no hi*

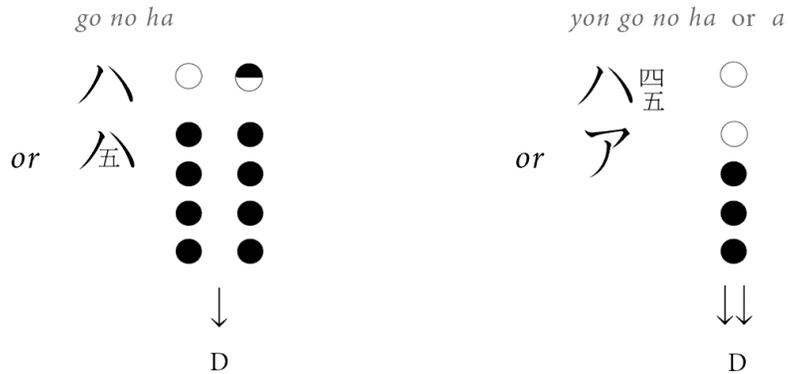


D

NOTES:

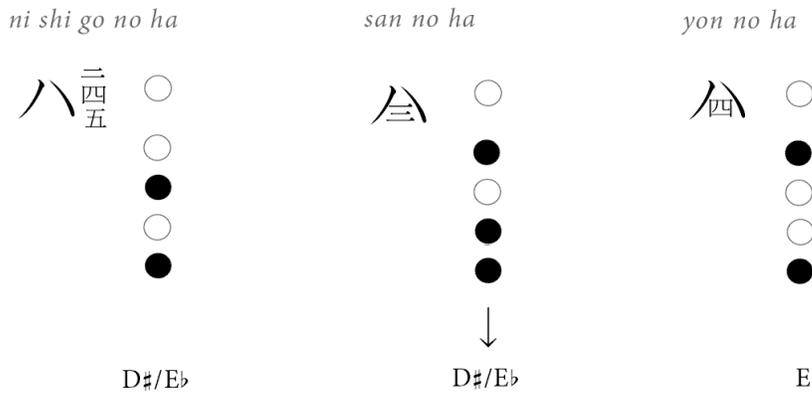
1. Some schools use i meri rather than i chu meri for an approximate C#.
2. Regular non-meri go no hi (i) generally repeats with the thumb; meri uses the thumb if it is not partially covered. If the thumb hole is partially covered, in some pieces go no hi meri and go no hi chu meri may repeat with a push of the breath.

### III. Third octave



NOTES:

1. Head position (degree of meri) varies quite a bit from flute to flute.
2. Both notes often repeat with the third hole.

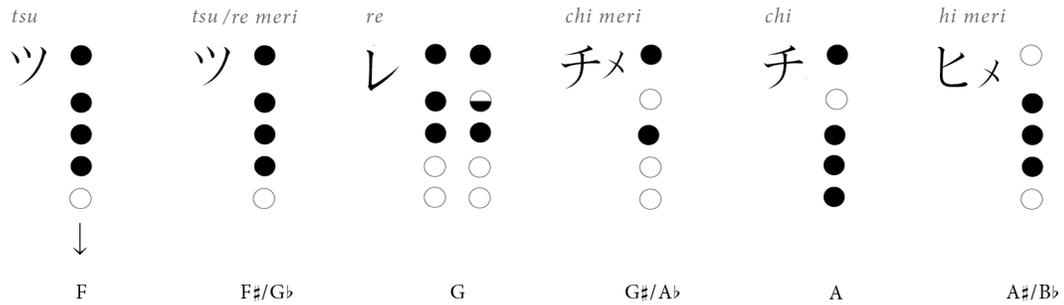


NOTES:

3. Head position (degree of meri) varies quite a bit from flute to flute.
4. Both Eb notes often repeat with the third hole; san no ha sometimes repeats with the second or fourth; yon no ha often repeats with the fourth.

And now, the rest of the most common dai kan notes.

大  
甲



NOTES:

1. The dai kan characters sometimes appear to the right of the note.
2. Fingerings may vary considerably from flute to flute.
3. Note that on the alternate fingering for re, the fourth hole is partially uncovered from the top rather than the bottom.
4. Tsu repeats with the second hole and re repeats with the fourth, third, second, or even first. If unmarked in honkyoku, use third hole for re repeat.
5. No standard repeat fingerings on highest few notes.