

An Analysis of Guitar Performance Techniques in Sakura Theme and Variation by Yuquijiro Yocoh

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Article Details	ABSTRACT
Article History Received mm dd, yyyy Revised mm dd, yyyy Accepted mm dd, yyyy	This study aims to describe the classical guitar playing techniques in Yuquijiro Yocoh's <i>Sakura Theme and Variations</i> and to explain their application and supporting factors, with a primary focus on these techniques in this work. This study is divided into seven sections: Introduction, Theme, Variation 1, Variation 2, Variation 3, Variation 4, and finally Coda. These sections feature several techniques, including guitar-playing techniques for the right and left hands. The right-hand techniques include appoggiando, tirando, pizzicato, tremolo, and strumming. The left-hand techniques include slur, barre, and harmonic.
Keywords Technique, playing, Guitar, classical, Sakura Theme and Variations, Yuquijiro Yocoh	
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1. INTRODUCTION

The classical guitar is a musical instrument capable of producing beautiful sounds for its listeners (Filasya, 2016). To play the classical guitar well, proper technique is required so that the pieces played can be performed perfectly. Various virtuosos have produced outstanding works for the guitar, including: Francisco Tárrega with "Capricho Árabe," Gaspar Sanz in the form of suasita (Suita), Roland Dyens through "Tango en Skai", Kaspar Mertz with a composition titled "Unruhe", Dionisio Aguado who created "Rondo in A Minor", and many more (Wicaksono, 2009). The word "guitar" comes from the name of an ancient plucked musical instrument that existed in the Persian region around 1500 BC, known as the citar or sehtar. This musical instrument then developed into various models of ancient guitars, commonly known as tanbur. Around 300 BC, the Greeks developed the Persian tanbur, and six centuries later, the Romans also developed it (Handoko, 2022). In 476 AD, the Romans brought this instrument to Spain. There, the instrument then developed into two main types: (1) Guitarra Morisca, designed with a wide, rounded back and several sound holes, generally used to play melodies, (2) Guitarra Latina, with a flat back and narrower neck, intended for playing chords. About three centuries later, the Arabs introduced a type of gambus guitar, called the al-ud, to Spain (McCrea et al., 1982). Popular music and Western music presented in the media are forms of culture (Dewi, 2019).

Yuquijiro Yocoh was a Japanese classical guitarist and composer, born in Hita, Ōita Prefecture, in 1925, and died on December 25, 2009. He was an influential 20th-century classical guitarist and composer. One of his famous and popular works among modern classical guitarists is *Sakura Theme and Variation*. This repertoire is often performed by renowned guitarists from around the world, including Manus Noble, John Williams, Anna Vidovic, and others. However, only a few guitarists can perform this repertoire well. This is due to the complexity of the technique and the harmonisation that must be mastered to perform the piece optimally. One of the unique aspects of this repertoire is the use of the Hirajoshi Scale, a traditional Japanese scale, which is played in a distinctive harmony (Lynch, 2015). In addition, this work includes various

challenging guitar techniques, such as the Pizzicato technique, which is used throughout, and the Tremolo technique, which requires great hand speed and strength to produce clear, beautiful notes. These techniques present their own challenges for guitarists in creating the right interpretation of the work.

According to Sakura Theme and Variations is one of the famous compositions by Yuquijiro Yocoh, a classical guitarist from Japan. This work gained tremendous popularity in its time and is often considered an important achievement in classical guitar music. The uniqueness of this work lies in the use of the *Hirajoshi* scale, a pentatonic scale typical of Japan. Yatsuhashi Kengyō originally developed this scale from shamisen music for koto tuning, a traditional Japanese musical instrument. The *Hirajoshi* scale is a Japanese pentatonic scale consisting of five notes with the following intervals: 1, 2, b3, 5, b6. Using C as the tonic note, the scale is: C, D, Eb, G, and Ab.

This piece uses a 4/4 time signature and consists of 114 bars. The main theme appears in bars 20-30, then is repeated in several variations. Each variation showcases different right-hand and left-hand fingering techniques, as well as utilising economic movement in the interpretation of classical music for guitar. Because of its harmony and melodic patterns, Sakura Theme and Variation should be played at a slow tempo with emotional expression (Arrangement & Krisnerwinto, 2020).

Based on a study of Sakura Theme and Variations, understanding and knowledge of classical guitar playing techniques are very important for guitarists. Several guitar-playing techniques have been identified in various studies. Based on (Wicaksono, 2009), “the technique of producing notes in classical guitar playing is influenced by several factors, namely the fingernails of the right hand, the position of the left hand pressing the frets, the position of the right hand when plucking, and of course the quality of the instrument itself” (Nugroho, 2017).

Guitar-playing techniques include hand positions, as well as how to sit when playing the instrument. In this study, the primary focus is on describing the guitar-playing techniques of the right and left hands. This attracted the researcher's attention to an in-depth analysis of the guitar-playing techniques in the work Sakura Theme and Variations. The research question raised is: What techniques are used and how are they applied in Yuquijiro Yocoh's Sakura Theme and Variations repertoire?

2. METHOD

In this study, the researcher used a qualitative approach. This approach focuses on understanding, explaining, and interpreting qualitative data presented as text and images. This approach is not intended to produce conclusions, but rather to provide a comprehensive and in-depth picture of guitar-playing techniques and their application in the Sakura Theme and Variations repertoire.

The research subject refers to the object, thing, or individual that is the source of data or research variables and is the focus of the research problem (Zigana & Taryadi, 2023).

In this study, data were collected through non-participant observation. This means the media being observed were not actively involved in the study; the researcher was the one observing. The media used included the Sakura Theme and Variations musical score, video recordings, and several supporting books (Sugiyono, 2016).

In addition to observation, there were also literature studies, documentation, and interviews. Data collection through interviews was conducted indirectly (Sugiyono, 2016). Unstructured interviews were conducted freely with Danang Sandy, S.Pd, M.Pd, a song arranger at UNESA. Data collection through observation, interviews, and the researcher's documentation was intended to answer the research questions and produce conclusions. The methods section explains in detail how the research was conducted, including the steps taken. The tools, materials, media, and instruments used must also be clearly explained. If necessary, examples of instruments or materials can be attached to help readers better understand. Data validity is achieved through triangulation of time, sources, and data collection techniques (S. Rizal & Ervina Dewi, 2023).

If statistical formulas are used in the research, commonly used formulas do not need to be written down (Pasyah, 2023). If the researcher has specific provisions for collecting and analysing data, these must be explained in the methods section. Authors are also advised to include references that underlie the methods used.

3. RESULT

Based on the review of classical guitar techniques in Sakura Theme and Variations described earlier, the author divides the results of this study into two parts: the techniques used and their application in the Sakura Theme and Variations repertoire.

1. Guitar playing techniques in the Sakura Theme and Variations repertoire

Classical guitar techniques in *the Sakura Theme and Variations* are categorised into two techniques: right-hand and left-hand techniques.

I. INTRO

Figure 1 Introduction Section
Sakura Theme and Variations repertoire

In the opening section (intro), the first and second bars use the barre technique on the left hand, which involves pressing several strings (two to six) with one finger of the left hand. Meanwhile, in the third and sixth bars, there are chords played using the tirando plucking technique on the right hand, where the plucking is done without resting on the following string. In the seventh bar, there is a series of 1/16 and 1/8 notes presented through the pizzicato plucking technique by the right hand. Pizzicato is a guitar-playing technique in which the right hand plucks the strings, producing a shorter, sharper sound. This technique provides a distinctive rhythmic effect and is often used across various musical genres. The application of this technique is tailored to the characteristics and needs of each instrument, resulting in different sound effects (Zigana & Taryadi, 2023).

In the introduction, specifically in bars 8 to 16, an eighth note is played with a right-hand strum, with the fingers moving across some of the strings simultaneously to produce sound. The finger movement during strumming is usually performed at a regular rhythm and is almost perpendicular to the guitar strings (Larsen & Knoche, 2017). In the opening phase, measures 17 and 18 feature 1/8- and 1/4-note plucks with the right hand using the pizzicato technique. Subsequently, in measure 19, the E7sus4 chord is presented by applying strumming with the right hand.

ii. THEME



Figure2Theme Section
Sakura Theme and Variation repertoire

In the theme section, there are melody and bass notes or bass figures that can be played with the right hand using the tirando picking technique. Then, in bar 30, the Esus4 chord is played with a right-hand strum. The use of these two techniques gives the theme section its distinctive dynamics and tone colour.

ii.

I. VARIATION 1

1^a variación

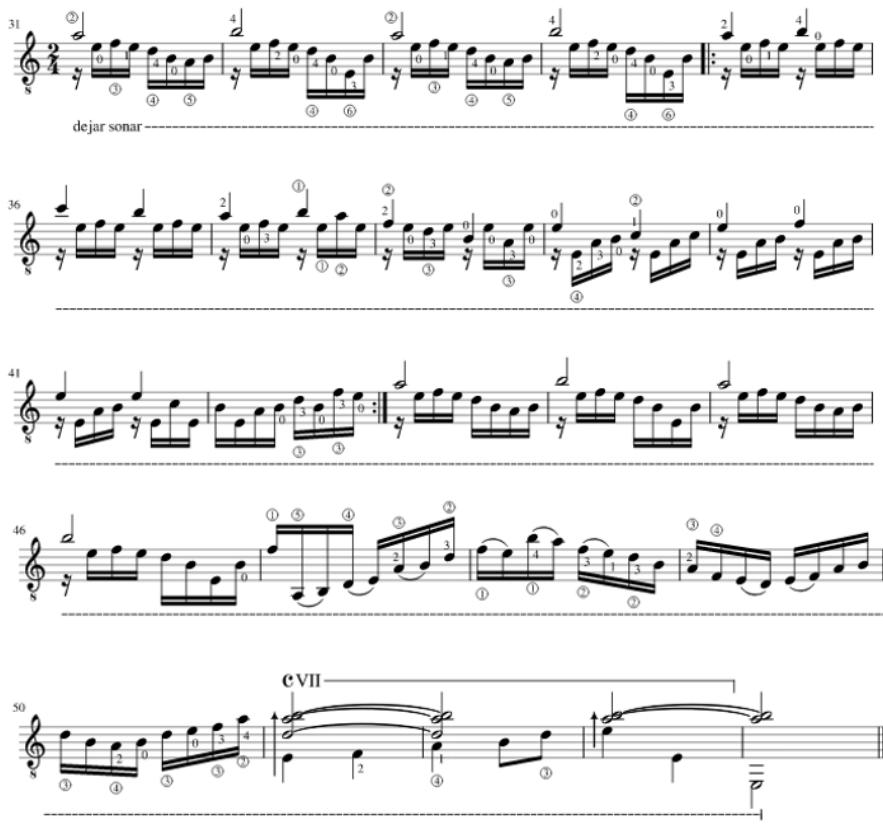


Figure3Variation 1 Section
Sakura Theme and Variation Repertoire

In variation 1, measures 31 to 46, the notes marked with a circle should be played using the apoyando picking technique because they are the main melody of this repertoire. This technique is necessary to give a stronger accent than other melodic variations or bass figures. In measures 47-49, a slur technique is applied to

the left-hand fingers. Furthermore, in measures 51-53, the barre technique is used on the left hand for several measures.

ii. VARIATION 2

2^a variación

Lento

armónicos artificiales y naturales

55

59

63

Figure4Variation 2 Section
Sakura Theme and Variation Repertoire

In variation 2 of Sakura Theme and Variations, specifically in bars 55 to 66, all eighth notes are played using the harmonic technique. In classical guitar playing, harmonic technique is divided into two types: octave harmonics and natural harmonics. These two techniques produce different sounds and give the playing a distinctive colour.

iii. VARIATION 3

3^a variación

67

69

71

75

eVII

XII

VII XII

Figure5Variation 3
Sakura Theme and Variations Repertoire

In variation 3, measures 67-70 of Sakura Theme and Variations, melodic notes and a number of bass notes are played using the apoyando picking technique. Next, in measures 71 and 72, there is a sequence of 1/16 and 1/8 notes covering the melody and bass figure, which should be played with the right hand using the tirando picking technique. In measure 75, a chord is presented melodically using the left-hand barre technique. Then, in measures 76 and 77, the melody is played using the harmonic technique.

iv. VARIATION 4

4^a variación
Adagio

78 e V e VII e V

81 e VII e V

84

87

90 e V e VII e V

93 e VII

96 ① ①

Figure 6 Variation 4 Section
Sakura Theme and Variation Repertoire

In the fourth variation, bars 78 to 98 of Sakura Theme and Variations, the melody and bass consist of a sequence of 1/32- and 1/8-note pairs. The melody and bass are played with the right hand using the tremolo

technique. Next, in bar 99, there is an E flat four chord played using the strumming technique with the right hand.

v. CODA

Figure 7 Coda Section
Sakura Theme and Variations Repertoire

The coda section from measures 100 to 114 of the Sakura Theme and Variations is a repetition of the intro section from measures 5 to 19. Therefore, the notation and guitar playing techniques are the same as in that section. In short, measures 100 to 114 use guitar-playing techniques such as barre, tirando, pizzicato, and strumming.

1. How to Use the Guitar Playing Techniques Identified in the Sakura Theme and Variations Repertoire

The following is an explanation of how to use the various guitar playing techniques found in the Sakura Theme and Variations repertoire:

- **Apoyando** (right hand)

Apoyando is a picking technique in which the right-hand fingers pick the strings by resting on them. In this technique, the finger uses the nail and is positioned parallel to the string when plucking. After plucking the string, the finger rests on the following string, creating a stronger and richer sound effect, especially on bass notes or accents. This technique is used to produce a thicker sound and to emphasise certain parts of the repertoire (Kristianto, 2005).

- **Tirando** (right hand)

The tirando plucking mechanism involves the finger used to pluck the string (usually the index or middle finger) pressing down on the string first, then gently pulling back toward the outside of the string, allowing the finger to move freely without being obstructed by the following string. This technique creates a lighter, cleaner sound and provides smoother speed when playing melodies or arpeggios. Tirando picking is often used in sections of the classical guitar repertoire that require delicacy and lightness (Dewanto et al., 2024). An arpeggio is a series of notes from a chord played one after another in sequence (DaSilva, 2022). This technique is often used to build melodies.

- **Pizzicato** (right hand)

In violin playing, pizzicato (pizz) is a technique of plucking the strings with the fingers, rather than with a bow (Banoe, 2003). On the classical guitar, the pizzicato technique uses the thumb (right hand) to pluck the

strings, while the right hand dampens the vibration behind the bridge with the palm. This technique produces a slightly muffled and short note.

- **Tremolo (right hand)**

The mechanism for playing and presenting this technique is to pluck the strings sequentially and quickly using the p (thumb), a (ring finger), m (middle finger), and i (index finger) fingers using a tirando pluck. In this technique, the p (thumb) is usually used to pluck the bass notes, while the a (ring finger), m (middle finger), and i (index finger) are used to play the melody notes (Poerwadarminta, 1966).

- **Strumming (right hand)**

To play two or more strings simultaneously on a guitar, use one finger, either the thumb (p) or index finger (i)—depending on the rhythm pattern, speed, and desired tone character. Strumming is a technique in which the fingers cross several strings rhythmically to produce sound. The finger movement during strumming is typically performed at an angle nearly perpendicular to the guitar strings (Novrizal et al., 2023).

- **Slur (left hand)**

This slur technique involves the movement of the left hand, which is very important in producing a smooth sound. In a descending slur, the left hand fingers release pressure on the string and pull the string slightly, allowing the following note to sound without being plucked. Conversely, in an ascending slur, the first note is pressed with the left-hand finger, and the following note is played by tapping the string using the next finger on the left hand, creating a smooth transition between the notes. This technique allows for quick and smooth note transitions, often used in arpeggios or flowing melodies (Nabila, 2020).

- **Barre (left hand)**



Figure 9 Left Hand Position Full Barre
Documentation by Gabriel Ricky
Sukrido



Figure 8 Right Hand Position Half Barre
Documentation by Gabriel Ricky Sukrido

Barre technique involves pressing several strings (two to six) with just one finger of the left hand. If the index finger presses all the strings on one fret, this technique is called a full barre. However, if the index finger only presses some of the strings, while the other strings are played with other fingers or left open, this technique is called a half barre. Full barre is typically used to form chords across the entire fret, while half barre is more commonly used for chords that do not require pressure on all strings, providing flexibility in classical guitar playing (Ibrahim & Handra Kadir, 2022).

- **Harmonic (left hand)**

Two types of harmonic techniques are found in guitar playing: natural harmonics (armonicos) and octave harmonics (armonicos octavados) (Darmansyah, 2021). Based on the octave harmonic technique, the left hand's middle finger () places pressure on the string at the correct fret to produce the desired note, while the right hand's index finger (i) touches the string just above the fret that is an octave above the note pressed by the left hand. Then, a finger on the right hand plucks the string using the tirando (unrestricted stroke) technique, while the natural harmonic is played on the open string at the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 7th, 9th, 12th, and 19th frets. To play it, lightly place the tip of the left-hand finger on the string, right above those frets, without pressing the string completely (Purbolaran, 2013). After that, pluck the string using the right hand. This technique produces an unmistakable, melodious sound with a brighter tone and a ringing quality. Natural harmonics are often used in various classical guitar repertoires to add variety to the sound.

The supporting factors discussed explain the training methods and techniques for playing difficult components or sections of Sakura Theme and Variations, taking into account five main aspects: speed, power (sound strength), tone colour, economic movement (efficient movement), and physical endurance.

4. CONCLUSION

The Sakura Theme and Variations repertoire is divided into seven parts: intro, theme, variation 1, variation 2, variation 3, variation 4, and finally coda. As mentioned in the introduction, the author analyses the guitar playing techniques used and how they are applied.

Based on observations, literature studies, interviews, and documentation, the classical guitar techniques used in this repertoire include several right-hand techniques, namely:

- Apoyando picking technique
- Tirando picking technique
- Pizzicato technique
- Tremolo picking technique
- Strumming

Meanwhile, left-hand playing techniques include:

- Slur
- Barre
- Harmonic

The following are sections of the repertoire, along with the guitar playing techniques used.

Intro, using the Barre, Tirando, Pizzicato, and strumming guitar techniques. The theme uses only the Tirando and strumming guitar techniques. Variation 1 uses the picking techniques of apoyando and barre. Variation 2 uses harmonic techniques. Variation 3 uses the most techniques, including apoyando, tremolo, tirando, strumming, barre, and harmonic. Variation 4 uses the tremolo and strumming guitar techniques. Finally, the Coda section uses the Barre, Tirando, Pizzicato, and Strumming techniques.

In addition to guitar-playing techniques, there are supporting factors to consider when playing this repertoire, namely speed, power (sound strength), tone colour, economical movement (efficient movement), and physical endurance.

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