

A Quest of Japanese-ness in the Japanese Music Curriculum

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Since the school curriculum in Japan has been centrally controlled throughout most of its modern history, terms used in the policies of Monbu-sho [the Ministry of Education] (the official English translation since January 2001 is the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) often reflect the intentions and desires of the Ministry at a given time. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the Japanese government's intentions and desires in terms of establishing the identity of Japanese music.

For this purpose, the paper first identifies various terms that have been used in educational policy in order to indicate what music is regarded as Japanese. Then, the paper analyses what type of music is meant by each term and discusses why such a variety of terms has been necessary.

The paper concludes that the variety of terms is necessary because of the lack of a clear Japanese identity and that this lack of clarity is crucial because the music curriculum still needs to remain open to future changes in Japanese musical culture.

The Origin of the Confusion of Japanese Identity in Music

Japan started its modernization drive from the time of the Meiji Restoration in 1868 when the Tokugawa feudal government returned political power to the emperor and Japan as a modern nation state was born. Virtually all systems including political, economic, social and educational systems needed to be modernized on the basis of western models. When the first educational act, Gakusei [the Modern Educational System] was announced in 1872, music teaching was included, being seen as indispensable to the Japanese in the modern era (Uehara, 1988).

Music teaching in school education however, did not start immediately. Before it was started, decisions had to be taken as to what kind of music should be taught and how. The government, unable to decide what kind of music was suitable for the modern Japanese identity, postponed the implementation of music teaching (Uehara, 1988).

By then, Japanese people had developed a complicated musical culture that was divided into many segments based on social stratification, the types of musical instrument and the schools of players for each instrument. For example, there were sophisticated court music gagaku that had been brought in from China and Korea more than a thousand years before and then adjusted to match Japanese taste, nogaku that was basically the music of the samurai warrior class, shakuhachi (bamboo flute) music played by the Buddhist priests of a certain sect, hogaku [country music] that developed in early modern times among the

mass and minyo [folk songs] in various local areas. Furthermore, there were several schools for playing the same musical instrument, and the teaching of instrument playing depended on oral lessons with the help of simple scores that allowed various interpretations by individual players. What was missing was a musical culture that was common to all Japanese people.

Shuji Isawa was sent to the United States in 1875 by the Ministry of Education to investigate American educational system (Tokyo Geijutsu Daigaku Ongaku Torishirabe Gakari Kenkyu-han, 1976). In pursuit of modern Japanese musical identity with Tanetaro Mekata, who was also in the United States as the director of Japanese students, Isawa concluded that music to be taught to the people of Japan in the new Era was not existing Japanese music that was, in their words, either too difficult or too vulgar for school education (Isawa quoted in Tomoda, 1996: 230). Instead, they decided to “create new music by combining the western and Japanese music” and hoped to call it kokugaku [the national music] (Isawa and Mekata quoted in Tomoda, 1996: 231-235). According to Mekata, the national music was expected to be a hybrid of the good parts of Western and Japanese music and something which everybody in Japan, rich or poor, could sing and play (Mekata quoted in Tomoda, 1996: 234-235).

In order to embody the dream to create this hybrid music and raise the standard of Japanese musical culture, Isawa spread the western style music through public education in the form of song books that were full of western pieces with lyrics in Japanese. Later, such songs were replaced by songs written by Japanese composers under contract with the Ministry of Education (Uehara, 1988). They wrote songs exclusively for the Ministry without revealing their names. These songs were called Monbusho Shoka and formed a significant musical category in school education.

The influence of Isawa and Mekata’s decision to transform Japanese musical identity was not restricted to the schools. They also encouraged players of Japanese musical instruments to learn western style musical instruments (Tokyo Geijutsu Daigaku Ongaku Torishirabe Gakari Kenkyu-han, 1976) and tried to improve popular music by changing verses and transcribing its pieces using the western style of staff notation (Uehara, 1988).

The indirect outcome of this educational and cultural policy that emphasized western style music was that yet more varieties of music were added to the already complicated Japanese musical culture and caused a confusion of cultural identity in music. For example, on one hand, Japanese composers wrote pieces based on western musical theory. On the other hand, some players of Japanese musical instruments attempted to modernize their music by importing ideas from western music. Their attempts added new categories such as ‘Shin Nihon Ongaku’ [New Japanese Music] and ‘Gendai Hogaku’ [Contemporary Country Music] to Japanese musical culture. In contrast to the essentially Western works by Japanese composers, the new types of Japanese music were basically Japanese.

Besides the state-initiated transformation of music in the fields of education and art, many types of popular music based on western music developed. They also contributed to creating yet greater complexity in Japanese musical culture.

Despite Isawa and Mekata’s ambition and effort, the creation of a new musical culture was not easily achieved. Their attempt ended up as little more than the promotion of western style music with Japanese verses. Achievement of their aim to create hybrid music that is decent but not too difficult for any Japanese

person to accept, and has equal artistic value as western music while maintaining Japanese features continues to elude Japanese educators and policy makers of music ever since.

Even in this complicated musical culture, certain types of music have been selected by educational policy makers as music that is worth transmitting to the next generation as Japanese cultural heritage. In order to investigate how the selection has been made, this paper focuses on the terms used to indicate the music that is regarded as Japanese in the national curricula for music in the post World War Two period.

Terms used in the Music Curriculum

In Isawa's time, the terminology was rather simple. Since there was no hybrid music, two terms were enough for him: Japanese music and western music. In Japanese music, various types of music that existed in Japan before the Meiji Restoration were included. The third type of music that Isawa hoped to create as the musical identity of modern Japan was expected to be called 'national music.' However, since such 'national music' that was decent but common to every Japanese person, and equivalent to western music but with a Japanese character, did not exist, the term 'national music' did not actually mean anything. Furthermore, since what Isawa actually did was to promote western musical theory as the preferred musical culture, raising the standard of Japanese musical culture could mean the further westernization of Japanese people's sense of music. This belief in the superiority of western music has paradoxically made the establishment of modern Japanese musical identity even more difficult because no matter if Japanese people have acquired western musical culture it will never be internationally recognized as authentic Japanese culture.

Education policy making in the post World War Two period has succeeded this dilemma. What is more, instead of clearly divided 'Japanese music,' 'western music' and the ideal 'national music' in Isawa's time, what contemporary Japanese policy makers must handle is so many types of 'somewhat Japanese' music that lie somewhere between the two polarities of 'Japanese music' and 'western music.' This dilemma is reflected in the national curricula's terminology for music.

The following is the list of expressions that have been used in the primary and secondary school Courses of Study for music announced in 1947, 1951, 1958, 1968/69/70, 1977/78, 1989 and 1998 except for the one for upper secondary school in 1958 (Monbu-sho, 1951; 1977; 1978;1986a; 1986b; 1989a; 1989b; 1989c; 1999a; 1999b; Monbu-sho Happyo Gakushu Shido Yoryo, 1968; 1969; Okura-sho Insatsu-kyoku, 1958a; 1958b; 1970; 1982; 1999). Official guide books for the Courses of Study for primary school music in 1969 and secondary school music in 1959 and 1970 were also investigated (Monbu-sho, 1959; 1969; 1970). Most of the expressions to mean music that has been created in Japan include either 'Japanese/Japan' or 'our country' but some have 'one's native place.' There are also expressions that include 'wa' which means 'Japanese' in the pre-modernization period and 'hogaku [country music]' that is a particular genre of music that developed in early modern Japan among common people.

Expressions that include 'Japan' or 'Japanese'

[children's songs] of Japan from old times

[children's songs] of Japan

songs of Japan

Japanese folk songs

folk songs of Japan

Japanese old song [koyo]

Japanese vocal music

music that is conventionally Japanese

traditional music of Japan

music of Japan

Japanese music

music of Japan (including traditional piece, those of modern and contemporary)

classical music of Japan

music of early modern Japan

music of a given time and a social class of Japan

Japanese-style court music

new music of Japan

Japanese old music [kokyoku]

music of Japan as a whole

Japanese scale

Japanese melody

scales of Japan

musical instrument of Japan

folk musical instrument of Japan

Japanese musical instrument

musical instrument of Japanese music

expressions that include 'our country'

music of our country

folk songs of our country

nursery rhymes of our country

ethno music of our country

valuable musical heritage of our country

songs and folk songs of our country

classical songs and music of our country

contemporary songs and music of our country

contemporary work of our country

classical work of our country

music of our country including So and Shakuhachi
traditional music of our country
traditional singing of our country
contemporary music of our country
music of our country and western music
music of our country and famous composers
musical culture of our country
tradition of musical culture of our country
music of our country and ethno music of other countries
musical instrument of music of our country
musical instrument that has been handed down in our country
songs people are used to singing in our country

expressions that include 'one's native place'

music of the [learners'] native place
songs of the [learners'] native place
folk songs of the [learners'] native place
traditional music of the [learners'] native place
traditional entertainment of the [learners'] native place

other expressions

hogaku [country music]/oriental music
kyu hogaku [former country music]
wadaiko [Japanese drum]
wagakki [Japanese musical instrument]
music of [the learners'] home land
traditional music
traditional music of [the learners'] home land
traditional musical instrument
music that we have
musical instruments that are being used in everyday life in local areas
nursery rhyme that has been handed down in local areas

What type of music is referred to by which term is not clear from the term itself but the suggested works and musical instruments that follow these expressions provide additional information to link the terms and the types of music. Most of the expressions including 'Japan/Japanese' imply reference to Japan before the modernization. In other words, these expressions are used in the sense of 'Japanese music' in Isawa's time.

In some expressions, words such as old, folk, conventionally, traditional, classical, early modern and old

times are added to clarify that 'Japan/Japanese' in the expression means 'Japan/Japanese' before the modernization. Words such as 'folk songs' and 'court music' are particular genres of music but since the genres have existed since before the modernization, they also help clarify that the expression means pre-modernization Japan.

Exceptions are 'music of a given time and a social class of Japan,' 'new music of Japan' and 'music of Japan as a whole.' In these expressions, 'Japan' includes contemporary Japan but in order to make the meaning clear, additional words such as 'of a given time,' 'new' and 'as a whole' are required. In general, when 'Japan' is used, that means Japan before modernization.

The western style pieces composed by Japanese composers after the modernization are not called 'Japanese.' Instead, the expression 'of our country' often appears in order to include such pieces. When the expression 'of our country' is used, the type of music depends on what is written before 'of our country.' If words such as folk song, nursery rhyme, ethno music, classical and traditional are included, the whole expression means music that has existed since the pre-modernization period. The phrase 'handed down' has the same effect. In contrast, if 'contemporary' is used, that indicates music created in Japan under western influence. The absence of either of these indicators includes any music that has existed in Japan. 'Music of our country,' 'musical instrument of our country' and 'musical heritage of our country' are examples.

The third expression 'the native place' limits music geographically and by so doing indicates that the type of music in question is neither court music nor theatre music, both of which are considered to be artistic music, but folk music developed among commoners. Since the Ministry of Education encourages educators to raise learners' awareness of the link between musical culture and music in everyday life, music and songs of the learners' native place have been given particular prominence. In order for dance or other forms of entertainment to be included with music, the word 'entertainment' is also used. Since the type of music meant in 'the native place' is folk music, this expression is considered a subcategory of the expressions with 'Japanese/Japan.'

Among other expressions, 'traditional music' and 'traditional musical instrument' can be regarded as having merely omitted the word 'Japanese.' Among the rest, those with 'local area' can be included in the expressions with 'the native place' because these two expressions basically mean the same thing.

'Music of [the learners'] home land,' 'traditional music of [the learners'] home land' and 'music that we have' are used in the explanation related to the opening address of the International Conference for Ethnic Music in 1952. From this context, it is natural to conclude that the type of music indicated by these expressions is ethnic music that is not westernized. These expressions can be regarded as the variations of expressions with 'Japanese /Japan.'

'Hogaku [country music],' 'kyu hogaku [former country music],' 'wadaiko [Japanese drum]' and 'wagakki [Japanese musical instrument]' do not appear often. 'Hogaku' is a particular genre of popular music developed in early modern Japan as theater music and the range of musical instruments used in the performance is limited. For this reason the expression 'Japanese music' that includes the wider range of music usually is preferred. Since contemporary hogaku players keep improving their music, the word 'kyu [former]' is added to indicate the hogaku before such change while 'contemporary' is added to

the updated hogaku.

The difference in the usage of 'wagakki' and 'Japanese musical instrument' can be found in the Courses of Study for primary school and lower secondary school published in 1968 and 1969 respectively. In the Course of Study for primary school, 'Japanese musical instruments' appears in the expression 'Japanese musical instruments and ethnic musical instruments of the world.' 'Wagakki' appears in the lower secondary school Course of Study with the examples of So [Japanese harp] and percussion. These examples clarify that the term 'wagakki' is used to mean musical instruments handed down from pre-modernization times. This difference suggests that when the term 'Japanese/Japan' is used, the emphasis is on the contrast between Japan and other countries while 'wa' is used to contrast Japan before and after the modernization.

Music, Japanese Music and Music of Our Country

From the discussion so far, it has become clear that when the term 'Japanese/Japan' is used in the Courses of Study and guidebooks, it usually means the types of music that have existed since the time before the Meiji Restoration. Newly composed pieces for these types of music are also included. By contrast, the western style pieces composed by Japanese composers after the Meiji Restoration are not introduced as 'Japanese music.' Such music is referred to as modern and contemporary works or music of 'our country.'

The implication of this difference can be found in the explanation of 'art music,'¹ 'folk music,' 'ethno music' and 'international music' in the guidebook for lower secondary school music in 1970. The explanation can be summarized as follows. All 'Japanese' music is 'ethno music' as opposed to 'international music.' 'Ethno music' can be subdivided into 'art music' and 'folk music.' Music for the Japanese harp and various kinds of theatrical music belong to the former, while folk songs and music for local entertainment belong to the latter. Since 'international music' is synonymous to European music, 'ethno music' usually means non-European music. For example, it is obvious that Bach's work is not called German folk music. It is not even called German ethno music because art music of German ethno music is regarded as 'international music' (Monbu-sho, 1970: 205).

According to the explanation, the term 'Japanese music' is used only for Japanese ethno music that is not international music. The implication is that the expression 'music of our country' is necessary because there are other types of music that do not belong to the category of 'ethno music.' The western style music composed by Japanese composers after the Meiji Restoration is such music and it is considered to be 'international music.' Since 'international music' is actually European art music, music of 'our country' consists of 'Japanese music' and European art music.

The implication is clarified somewhat elsewhere in the same handbook. The explanation of the objectives of the subject goes:

1 Since the Japanese term 'geijutsu ongaku' is used with its English translation 'art music/artistic music' in the guidebook, this paper adopted the official translation. What it actually means is classical music.

The expression ‘music of our country’ tends to be immediately linked with traditional music. Traditional music must be emphasized but based on this, ...new music is being produced by contemporary Japanese composers...including many pieces of art music....It is important to include these works as ‘new Japanese music’ in education. (Monbu-sho, 1970: 7)

Here can be found both the same dichotomy in musical culture and the same hopes on the part of policy makers as those in Isawa’s time: the dichotomy between pre-modernization ‘Japanese music’ and European music imported into modern Japan as a model to follow and the hope of creating a musical hybrid of the two.

As mentioned earlier, Isawa’s attempt to create the hybrid ‘kokugaku’ was not successful. Rather, his attempt led to the westernization of Japanese musical culture. Consequently, modern and contemporary works composed by Japanese composers based on western musical theory have become westernized enough to be included in the category of ‘international music,’ which is often referred to as just ‘music’ because no adjective is necessary for the music that is the global standard. On one hand, Japanese policy makers admit as much by referring to such works as ‘music.’ On the other hand, for music in Japan to merge completely into international music by losing its Japanese identity has not been the final goal of Japanese policy makers. Even if it is difficult to call modern and contemporary composers’ western style music ‘kokugaku’ because it is not really hybrid, there is still the desire to distinguish Japanese composers’ works from those of the western composers.

The desire to give a Japanese flavor to international music can be found in the Lower Secondary School Course of Study in 1998. It describes the desirable materials for singing as:

[Songs] that have been sung in our country for a long time

[Songs] in which [the learners] can feel the beauty of the nature and four seasons of our country

[Songs] in which [the learners] can appreciate the beauty of Japanese culture and Japanese language

(Monbu-sho, 1999b:71)

The description emphasizes the beauty of Japan without mentioning any Japanese features in terms of music. Thus, the beauty of Japan is expected to be found in the lyrics of the songs.

Since the ideal ‘kokugaku’ or ‘new Japanese music’ has not yet emerged, policy makers’ dream of an ‘international music’ that at the same time expresses the identity of modernized Japan can not be realized in sound. The emphasis on Japaneseness in the lyrics is a compromise to insert Japanese identity in an alternative way. The expression ‘music of our country’ reflects such a desire, such a dilemma and even such a compromise in the creation of a modern musical identity of Japan.

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