

Brief Consideration for Japanese Artistic Songs

Though as always, there should be some exceptions, in principal, Japanese artistic songs can be defined with following three points:

- Composed for Japanese artistic poems and/or “Tanka” (Japanese traditional formatted verse)
- Composed in western music method (not in Japanese traditional method)
- Supposed to be sung in operatic vocalization.

I would like to describe the essence of the history of Japanese songs since I believe it enables beginners to understand Japanese songs.

Japanese song history represents the difference between origin of western songs and Japanese songs clearly. The knowledge of the difference will lead you to understand various authentic approaches which can be taken for Japanese songs.

Also it is partially based on our reflection of our way of learning western music in Japan. Japanese tended to only focus on mastering singing and composition techniques of Western music. In other word, we had not prioritized to learn its history and background, which is one of the most important influencers on the Western music.

Needless to say, it is very important to learn each of songs and of composers, as well as how those composers developed the songs. It would be a great We have substantial number of songs in Japan. I hope you will learn each of those when you would like to sing a specific Japanese song.

Essence of Japanese music history to understand

Japanese songs

1) Music and songs from ancient times of Japan

From ancient era, number of Japanese music has been developed. Followings are some examples of Japanese music genres.

- Folk Music:
 - Folk song
 - Lullaby,
 - Music for folk performing art
- Artistic Music:
 - Gagaku (court music)
 - Kumikyoku (Japanese instrumental music)
 - Music for Noh & Kyogen (Traditional masked dance-drama)
 - Jiuta
 - Heikyoku
 - Nagauta
 - Joruri
 - Danmono (Music for Koto without singing)
- Religious Music:
 - Sho-Myo (Buddhism chanting)
 - Buddhist Song
- Traditional Popular Music
 - Rokyoku (Stories of loyalty and human feeling accompanied by the Shamisen)

There are various genres of music and each of the genres is totally different. Above are just a part of them. What is notable about Japanese music is that **most of them are songs; they consist of voice music or story-telling music.** There are some exceptions such as Gagaku, Kumikyoku and Danmono. Those are pure instrumental music, however, origin of those instrumental music are usually songs.

It is worthwhile to understand that from ancient time, songs develop music more than pure instrumentals in Japan.

2) Japanese compulsory education and songs

Japanese new government started compulsory education in 1867 after Meiji revolution. New government thought that it needs the education system uniform and open to the general public as those in European countries.

Western music compulsory education is started in 1872 for elementary school when educational system was promulgated in 1872. It is the first law to establish modern schools. The music subject is called “Shoka” which teaches singing of officially recommended western songs.

The fact that western music education in Japan started from “singing” is essential for Japanese music history since it reveals that Japan value singing in music.

3) The beginning of music subject “Shoka”

As you can imagine, at Meiji revolution era, there were neither teachers nor textbooks for teaching Shoka, a subject of learning western songs. In order to organize Shoka, The Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture established Ongaku Torishirabe Gakari (the predecessor of the Tokyo University of the Arts) in October, 1879. The credit goes to Shuji Izawa (1851-1917), who was dispatched to the United States to learn Western music and musical education.

To prepare music textbooks, Shuji Izawa invited Luther Whiting Mason (1818or1828-1896) as a teacher for Ongagu Torishirabe Gakari. Shuji and Luther have developed the first music textbook in Japan, called Shogaku Shoka-shu (the official recommended songs for elementary school) in November of 1881.

One of the characteristics of songs in this Shogaku Shoka-shu is that **Japanese lyrics (not always translations) were adopted for Western folk songs and popular songs.** Of course there were a few songs composed by Japanese, although foreign songs with Japanese lyrics had been sung more often.

Though, over time, for some songs, their titles or lyrics changed from original,

those “Japanised” songs have been sung by successive generations even today, for 100 years.

The characteristic of Japanese songs is partially defined by this origin. It is the subject of elementary school compulsory education and Japanese learn songs which developed as the combination of pure imported western music with Japanese lyrics.

4) Europeanization policy and the development of Shoka

It can't be helped to accept the criticism that Japanese music education right after Meiji revolution is blind imitation of western music. The music education in Japan is forced to start from the absolute ground zero because it eliminated traditional Japanese music. One of the reasons of it is because lyrics of those traditional songs are usually depicting popular topics and targeting for adults. Lyrics. Because of the theme of the Lyrics those are labeled as vulgar music from the new government. That said, in principle, Japanese government forced to learn only western music in compulsory education because it is aligned with national policy, rapid Europeanization.

Based on that national policy and contents of the music subject of compulsory education, Music education gradually started to mean only western style music education and the word definition of music for Japanese became western music. Ongaku Torishirabe Kakari became to Tokyo Music University (the predecessor of the Tokyo University of the Arts) and established as a center of the music education where to “train music teachers and music masters”. It mainly taught western music until 1907. As Tokyo Music University is the head of the music education, the policy of value western music led all school to think music education is equal to import western music. Nevertheless, since founded, one of the most important Ongaku Torishirabe Gakari tasks was “combine eastern and western style to create new music”. The task accomplished first by two text books, “Jinjo Shougaku Tokuhonn Shoka” (textbook of songs for elementary school student) published in July 1910, and “Jinjo Shougaku Shoka” (songs for elementary school) which consists of six volumes (one volume for each grade from 1 to 6). They were long-awaited textbooks.

Songs on these books were all composed by Japanese. There is a discussion that the composition technique and lyrics written in literary style may not be appropriate as compulsory education text book (I will discuss it later). However, we shall not forget that after 20 years of “Shougaku Shoka Shu” creation, foundation of music education in Japan was established by songs developed by Japanese composers and lyricists. From this foundation, Japanese music and song world started its endeavor in various ways.

5) Progression from Shoka I ~the birth of Japanese artistic songs

The concept of Japanese artistic songs emerged around 1900.

The origin of Japanese song (and it was also the first Japanese artistic song) is “Kojo no Tsuki “(The Moon over the Ruined Castle) composed by Rentaro Taki, composed 10 years before “Jinjo Shougaku Tokuhonn Shoka”. In later 1890’s, songs composed by Japanese were eagerly anticipated because critics surged for unnaturalness toward early stage Shoka songs which forcibly applied Japanese lyrics to western songs.

Rentaro Taki also thought it was deplorable to apply Japanese for western songs. He especially thought that only plugging Japanese words in the songs corrupt the beauty of the original songs. To solve the issue, Rentaro first decide the lyrics, and then compose melody by applying appropriate sound for the words and the content of the lyrics.

Lyrics of “The Moon over the Ruined Castle” written in Shichigo Cho (Japanese ancient format of poetry, seven and five syllable meter. It is repeating units consist of opening seven syllables and consecutive five syllables.) Rentaro had composed it in Western scale (seven note scale) based on his study and belief, to the poetry written by Bansui Doi. “The Moon over the ruined castle” is the stunning first Japanese artistic song which successfully blended proper technique of western music and distinctive Japanese sensibility. The song clearly shows the high artistry achieved by integrity of lyrics and melody that no songs in Japan ever had.

The first appearance of “The Moon over the Ruined Castle” was in “Chugaku Shoka (songs for junior high schools, edited by Tokyo

University of music)” published in March 1901. However, it might have been composed in 1900 because this song is composed for commissioned lyrics from Tokyo University of Music in the year. Tokyo University of Music offered composition publically to develop “Chugaku Shoka”. Hence the song should have been composed in 1900. Rentaro also composed “Shiki Suite” consists of 4 songs of solo, duet and quartet, with accompanied by piano and organ. This suit applied quite innovative method at that period.

Also In 1901 March, “Chugakkorei Shiko Kisoku” (Enforcement Regulations for Junior High School Ordinance) was published which included a word “Japanese songs” in the section explaining the purpose of Shoka subject in its statement. It is as follows:

Purpose of teaching Shoka is to learn the skill of singing Japanese songs, cultivate sense of beauty, acquire nobility, as well as foster virtuousness

(Ministry of Education article 12, chapter one, No.3 of 1872)

This is also a good evidence to know that the concept of Japanese songs started its development from around 1900.

From this point of view, we believe Japanese songs originated in 1900.

6) Progression from Shoka 2~Doyo (children’s songs) movement

Lyrics adopted for shoka, described in above section, are mostly in literary style written by poets related to Ministry of Education or the Court. The lyrics themes are mainly ethics, praising nature like landscape paintings, and supporting Japan to be a mighty nation.

Doyo movement, which calls for reformism of children songs, was originally proposed from poets who questioned narrative and moralized theme of shoka.

The belief of the poets supporting Doyo movement is “Songs for children need to unlock colorful expression of children such as joy and sorrow instead of binding them by stereotyped songs in textbooks”

In 1918, Miekichi Suzuki (1885-1942) launched the premier issue of children’s literature magazine “Akai Tori (Red Bird)”. This considered as the

starting point of Doyo movement.

Many top ranked creators agreed to the motto of “Akai Tori (Red Bird)” written on the opening page of the first issue,

“To protect and develop children’s genuine pureness, we would like to gather sincere efforts of top artists of modern era, as well as welcome young talents for young children.”

Hakushu Kitahara(1885-1942) who was in charge of the section for Doyo (children’s song) of “Akai Tori (Red Bird)” defined Doyo as

“True Doyo has to be written in simple words that children can understand, and sing emotion of children, while provide profound meaning even for adults.”

This definition means Doyo pursued from poem. The first song of Doyo is “Kanariya”(composed by Tamezo Narita[1893-1945], lyrics by Yaso Saijo[1892-1970]) which appeared on March issue of “Akai Tori (Red Bird)” in 1919.

In 1919, “Kin no Fune sha (Golden Vessel company)” founded by Sajiro Saito (1893-1983) launched Doyo magazine “Kin no Fune (means Golden Vessel, renamed to “Kin no Hoshi” means Golden Star in 1922).” Ujo Noguchi (1882-1945) was nominated for the first chief editor. Ujo published songs such as “Jugoya otsukisan (Full Moon),” “Nanatsu no ko (Seven Children),” “Aoime no ningyou (Blue-Eye Doll)”(composed by Nagayo Motoori [1876-1947]) and “Shoujouji no Tanuki Bayashi (Raccoon Music & Dance at Shoujoji Temple)”(composed by Shinpei Nakayama [1887-1952]).

Doyo is often separately discussed on literature aspect and music aspect.

Tatsuyuki Takano (1876-1947), one of the compilers for Ministry of Education Shoka textbook (thus, he could be critical to Doyo movement)

expressed his personal thoughts toward Doyo poetry in his book

“Minyo/Doyo-ron (Idea of Traditional Japanese Music and Children’s Music, published by Shunjuu-sha/1929)” as followings.

Doyo’s literature advantage is “Fresh themes and relevant wording” however, since as it takes free form style for poem, “the flexibility make it difficult to compose” to the poems.”

For the composition method for Doyo poem, Tatsuyuki pointed “(Though Lyrics are in Doyo style,) I doubt the method is in Western folk children’s songs, further to say, it applies Shoka style which Doyo composers would like to exclude.”

I have been asked “What is the difference between Shoka and Doyo?” for quite many times. Basically the difference is that Shoka is regulated by the government and Doyo is a counter to Shoka. However, even I, the researcher of Japanese songs, think there is only very vague difference in the style of composition. Thus, we, Japanese may not be able to clearly recognize the difference, and the definition may be able to stay in vague.

From my point of view, it is more important to be aware that “Creation for children songs” such as Shoka and Doyo has played a significant role in the Japanese songs and Japanese music history. This is tremendous difference between western and Japanese music history. In Japan, children’s songs development preceded artistic songs and pure instrumental music development.

Consequently, I consider Doyo movement provided a trigger for poets and composers to be **conscious about their own creations**, compared to the previous times when Shoka was composed in a council system.

7) History of Japanese Artistic Songs

Japanese artistic songs were born in 1900 as I previously defined. In parallel with Shoka and Doyo, Japanese artistic song genre began to be clearly established by Kosaku Yamada (1886-1965) and Kiyoshi Nobutoki (1887-1965), both of them learned music in Berlin, Germany.

I will leave the subsequent history to other articles which explain each composer and music.

Two elements influenced Japanese artistic songs deeply. One is German song composers who apply poetry of Romanticism literature as Lyrics for their songs. Another is Japanese tendency which values belletristic literature. As a result, main stream of Japanese song is to deal with emotions by music and

lyrics. From this starting point, which depicts emotion as main theme of songs, lyrics of Japanese song are developed and influential enough to alter Japanese pronunciation and writing method. Composition techniques are also developed by applying French composition technique and attempting the fusion of Japanese traditional music and western music.

In the end

I wonder why there were almost no Japanese composers who dedicated to compose instrumental in genesis era of western music composition in Japan. This may be quite unique compared to other countries.

One the one hand, it is natural outcome as the direction of the government to start western music compulsory education to begin with songs. In addition to the government direction, Japanese mentality that prefers standard (or me-too-ism) might enhance the tendency to value songs.

However, I believe we centered song because of our origin, our tradition from ancient era. We developed Waka, traditional formatted poetry, and read them loud with melodies from nearly 1300 years ago. (Unfortunately it's phonetic or music records are very limited.)

It is a big challenge to spread Japanese songs because the song is deeply integrated with Japanese culture, environment, history, and Japanese sensibility. However as I know excellent members of Foster Japanese Songs project correctly understand what Japanese song is. This project does not work with the simple minded philosophy such as "music has no border". It tries to overcome the high hurdle of language and cultural barrier and provide the heart of Japanese songs to the world.

I truly hope that numbers of songs developed by Japanese, the people "born with songs", will penetrate to the world with its center core, and gather the support to Foster Japanese Songs.

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Additional Notes:

Efforts to develop masterpieces of Japanese Songs

Followings are the representatives of Japanese artistic songs masterpieces

Book

1. “Nihon no kakyoku 1900-1964” (Japanese songs 1900-1964)

Published by Nihon Victore in 1964

- Contain total of 86 songs by 45 composers and 49 poets in 6 LP records.
- Include solo and chorus music.

CD with Book/Sheet Music

2. “Nihon kakyoku zenshu” (collections of Japanese songs)

Published by Victor Ongakusangyo/Ongakunotomsha in 1991

- 32 volumes of CDs and sheet musics with 603 songs
- Original product was 23 LP records. CD version is developed by enhancing with new recording to the original LP record version which won Record Academy Special Award for masterpiece, selection and planning
- Handbooks which explain each songs and composers are attached
- Special feature CD is added to the original. This CD is performance of virtuoso and composers themselves
- Volume of “Renbataro Taki” includes two piano solos and a suit called “Shiki” (include styles other than solos) since it is the origin of Japanese songs and to grasp the conditions of music of his era.

CD/Event

3. “Nihon-no uta, 90 nen-no keifu” (Japanese songs, its 90-year history)

CD released by Sony Record

- This is a live recording of a performance called “Japanese songs, its 90-year history” conducted by Agency of Cultural Affairs October

16th in 1991 at Suntory Hall, Tokyo

- The Performance planned to oversee Japanese song 90-year history from its first appearance at one night. The performance is conducted in the style of “Hyakunin Isshu (Hundred Poems by Hundred Poets)”, the traditional Waka selection way to select one song from one composer. 40 songs were performed in order of the composers’ year of birth, starting from Rentaro Taki to Akira Miyoshi.

Sheet Music

4. “Nihon-kakyoku zenshu” (collections of Japanese songs)

Published by Ongakunotomoshia in 1993-1994

- Separate sets of “Nihon-kakyoku zenshu” mentioned above, but some songs are added. 46 volumes.

It is such a very unfortunate that these recordings and publications introduced above are mostly out of print and no longer available. As it is not a “past stuff”, I hope those will be reduplicated in near future.

Introduction of Mr. Ryosuke Hatanaka (1922-2012)

I cannot condone Mr. Ryosuke Hatanaka for his contribution for Japanese Songs research. Mr. Hatanaka participated all of above masterpieces not only in planning but also structuring and supervising. Mr. Hatanaka dedicated himself to promote Japanese songs while conduct research for Japanese songs to organize them. He started his devotion when he compiled “Shinsen Nihon Lied Shu (New selection of Japanese Lied)” published by Kawai Gakuhu in 1960.

As you can see from the performance which I described in “Nihon-no uta, 90 nen-no keifu” (Japanese songs, its 90-year history), Mr. Hatanaka is willing to strive to realize complete works at that moment. His effort also can be seen from planning of a concert titled “Nihon Kakyoku Hyakunen no Tabi (Japanese songs 100 years of journey)”

With a hope that Foster Japanese Songs project will take a significant role in history of Japanese song and its research, let me conclude

with the article written by Mr.Hatanaka in “message from supervising editor” in the handbook of “Nihon kakyoku zenshu” (collections of Japanese songs) in 1991.

“It has been less than 100 years since the birth of Japanese songs (*this article is written in 1991). However, there already are many excellent artistic songs composed by Japanese equal to those of Schubert, Schumann and Brahms. I cannot help wishing to highlight those new masterpieces in the years ahead.

Those songs which Japanese composed for Japanese, and have been sung by Japanese have already started crossing the border of Japan. Wit sincere prayer, I long for a day that Japanese songs will be loved by the world...”

Ryosuke Hatanaka

References

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1998 Bungeishunju

Tomiko Kojima “Nihon-no ongaku wo kanngaeru”
1976 Ongakunotomoshia

Tomiko Kojima “Nihon ongaku-no koso”
1982 Shunjusha

Hiroo Sakata “Doyo-no tentai”
1996 Shinchosha

Ikuma Dan/Fumio Koizumi “Nihon ongaku-no saihakken”
1976 Koudansha

Yuko Chiba “Doremi wo eranda nihon-jin”

2007 Ongakunotomosa