Japan in New Zealand: Taiko, Authenticity, and Identity in Transcultural Context

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Introduction

New Zealand has a number of active taiko (drumming) groups, each of which has distinct links to Japan. This article introduces taiko in New Zealand in connection with the notions of authenticity and identity construction in transcultural context (i.e., connecting with two or more cultures – e.g., Kostogriz and Tsolidis 2008; Pratt 1992), for both Japanese and non-Japanese. The taiko settings under study are transcultural in that they are in New Zealand on the one hand yet inseparable from taiko's real or imagined homeland of Japan on the other. The research focuses on the creative settings of musical performance and explores the various ensemble taiko groups that are especially active in New Zealand. While investigating the ways identity is constructed for players, questions are asked about the local setting and the context of migration, and how these factors might influence the construction of transcultural identity in New Zealand. A range of social and cultural influences offer a number of examples that show cultural flows, musical adoption, and identity construction for different reasons and in diverse case-study settings.

As traditional Japanese musical instruments, Japanese drums (*wadaiko*) have been explored in various ways in Japanese scholarship, especially in connection with their supporting role in music, theatre, and other performing arts. The contemporary phenomenon of ensemble taiko performance (*kumidaiko*), however, has received some attention in Japan (e.g., Oguchi 1987; 1993), but in non-Japanese scholarly thought there is much work that covers diverse topics, including gender, identity, ethnicity, and tradition (e.g., de Ferranti 2006; Fujie 2001; Hennessy 2005; Izumi 2001; Johnson 2008; 2011; 2012; Tsuda 2016; Wong 2004; 2005; Yoon 2001). In this paper, I draw on ideas from some of this literature, and bring together some of the various strands of my own research on taiko in New Zealand (e.g., 2008; 2011; 2012).

The theoretical influences in this paper are from global cultural flows (e.g., Appadurai 1996), musical adoption (e.g., Eisentraut 2001), and identity construction (e.g., Hall 2003). In this context, the notions of authenticity and identity are interconnected in terms of perceptual tensions between tradition and change. That is, in a context where a real or imaginary taiko community may share culture and identity (Anderson 1983), "cultural identities come from somewhere, [and] have histories. But, like everything that is historical, they undergo constant transformation" (Hall 2003, 225). It is here that the connection between global taiko performance and the idea of authenticity demands further inquiry. For instance, in a recent book on Japanese American ethnicity, Tsuda (2016) includes a discussion of ethnic heritage, performance, and diasporicity with a focus on taiko in the United States with the embracing of homeland culture in the diaspora setting aimed at recovering ethnic heritage in an age of globalization. While focusing on the notion of "performance authenticity" (Tsuda 2016, 231), Tsuda notes that "if traditions never remain the same but are always in flux, the issue of cultural authenticity arises" (2016, 225), but, he asks, "are certain taiko traditions more authentic

than others?" (2016, 225). If one considers "authenticity as genuineness or realness of artifacts or events" (Steiner and Reisinger 2006, 299; see also Erickson 1995), and "always defined in the present" (Handler and Linnekin 1984, 286), then, as noted by one US taiko player, modern-day taiko groups give "the *illusion* of getting in touch with your roots" (Tsuda 2016, 226), and such performance practices are in fact recently invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). In New Zealand, taiko groups are a recently invented tradition that create culture and identity for their performers and audiences alike. In the present day, they offer representative and significant sites for the study of authenticity and identity in transcultural context.

For the purposes of this paper, the discussion is structured around three key themes: cultural flows; musical adoption; and identity construction. The first of the themes looks at the flows of taiko performance within and from Japan, where it has been part of a process of cultural and social dissemination and reveals diverse forms. The second part explores taiko in New Zealand in terms of musical adoption. Over the past three decades a number of taiko groups have been established and the adoption of this performance art form is studied with regard to Japanese, global, and local factors. The last part of the article concerns identity construction. Having been a part of global cultural flows and adopted in New Zealand, taiko is shown to help construct a musical identity for its players who transmit and create culture in social groups that have a distinct local purpose.

Cultural Flows

The term taiko means "drum". More specifically the two *kanji* used for the term mean literally "fat drum". There are other terms used for drums, such as *tsuzumi*, and numerous local and regional names for specific types of drum. Traditional Japanese drums (*wadaiko*) are made in many shapes and sizes, and used in a variety of sacred and secular settings. In Shintō and Buddhist ritual, drums are sometimes used as sound-producing tools or as instruments to accompany chant. In traditional performance settings, drums are found in the theatrical performing arts such as *noh* and *kabuki*, and in numerous festival contexts. There are also a number of drums used in arts connected with the Imperial Court, such as in court music (*gagaku*) where they range from small hand-held drums to gigantic drums that tower above the other instruments and adorned with spectacular designs.

Ensemble taiko performance consisting of a number of drums and sometimes two or more drums played by the same player is a more recent Japanese phenomenon. Sometimes referred to as *kumidaiko*, this style of drumming entered a period of innovation and growth from the 1950s and especially after a 1964 performance at the arts festival at the Tokyo Olympics by taiko drummer Oguchi Daihachi (1924–2008). A new type of performance that utilized traditional drums and sometimes other traditional instruments was created. Oguchi formed the taiko group Osuwa Daiko in 1951 and by the end of the 1960s several other inspirational groups were formed, including Sukeroku Daiko and Ondekoza (splitting in 1981 to form Kodō).

Nowadays, there are thousands of similar taiko groups all over Japan. They are found in all levels of schooling, universities, communities, and as professional groups who tour nationally and internationally. Taiko making has expanded to other countries in Asia and also to locations such as the US, Australia, and New Zealand. But what is important to note is that there are many different types of drum and types of performance practice. Some groups focus on preserving the drum styles of

local performing arts, while others are influenced by such ideas as choreography, African rhythms, and new music. When referring to taiko groups, therefore, it is essential to remember that they come in all shapes and sizes, but share a commonality of ensemble performance using traditional Japanese drums and sometimes other traditional instruments such as flutes, *shamisen* (lute), and other percussion.

As well as social flows in terms of the movement of people, there are cultural flows that have much global influence. Appadurai (1996) notes of five dimensions of global cultural flows: ethnoscapes; mediascapes; financescapes; technoscapes; and ideoscapes. While the first of these involves primarily the movement of people, the others might include people or other influences. The dimension of mediascapes in particular is one that has had much influence in terms of the cultural flows of taiko. For example, the world music industry has included taiko as a part of its cannon of global musical consumption for several decades; taiko groups such as Kodō spend much time touring the world and promoting their music to new audiences; and visual media such as movies or pictorial imagery might include taiko as a way of presenting an authentic type of Japan through stereotypical images. Within such spheres, taiko is further disseminated to Japanese and non-Japanese consumers who may come to see such imagery as representative of Japan and inspire an interest in taiko as a part of global culture more broadly.

In this context, taiko performance is both an ancient and a new tradition of cultural performance (Japanese and non-Japanese). With the new tradition, however, the use of traditional drums and cultural attire gives the impression that it is an old tradition, when in actual fact it is a recently invented tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). As Tsuda notes, in the U.S., taiko "appears to be so quintessentially traditional" (2016, 208). Further, with such a new tradition, which has an array of different types of groups and music, drums are often placed in performance settings where they are framed or staged as a performance event that foregrounds the drums in ways that are far removed from their more traditional accompanying role. As Tsuda has commented in connection with his experience of taiko in the U.S.: "For me, taiko was associated with traditional Japanese festivals and ceremonial rituals, and I had never heard taiko performed in concert halls, and especially not in the United States" (2016, 198).

Taiko was transmitted to New Zealand with the establishment of its first taiko group in 1990. The group, Kodama, was established at the International Pacific College (IPC)[1] in Palmerston North as a result of a Japanese student studying there who brought with him knowledge of taiko performance and was supported by the college (Johnson 2011). Kodama has had much influence on taiko performance in New Zealand, having taught members of other groups some of their repertoire and with several former players continuing to play in other groups (e.g., Narukami Taiko). At the time Kodama was established (initially calling itself Korejji ["College"]), IPC was a tertiary institution solely for visiting Japanese students. However, the college later began to accept other international students as well as New Zealand students. The emphasis on Japan, however, continues as part of the college's international network to this day, which has meant that Kodama was a taiko group made up of Japanese students in New Zealand, but later was able to include non-Japanese. For Kodama, members are able to stay connected to Japan in the New Zealand setting. While some students may have prior knowledge of taiko, most have first learned the performing art when in New Zealand

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[1]   In 2015, IPC changed its name to IPU New Zealand Tertiary Institute (IPU stands for Institute of the Pacific United).

during their studies. Members continue a taiko tradition in an educational context outside Japan and offer cultural authenticity in terms of the Japanese links that some other taiko groups in New Zealand, who are mainly non-Japanese, have looked to when establishing their own repertory of pieces. After Kodama, other taiko groups were formed in various locations around New Zealand, each with different influences and circumstances (table 1; fig. 1).

Group	Location	Year Established
Kodama	Palmerston North	1990
Taikoza	Wellington	1991
Mukume	Kapiti Coast (Wellington)	1995
Wai Taiko	Hamilton	2000
Haere Mai	Auckland	2004
Rotorua Racco	Rotorua	2005
Raijin	Nelson	2007
Tamashii	Auckland	2007
Takumi	Christchurch	2008
Narukami Taiko	Wellington	2014
O-Taiko	Dunedin	2010
Kagutai Taiko	Edgecumbe	2013
Kumo Taiko	Auckland	2016

Table 1. New Zealand's taiko groups.
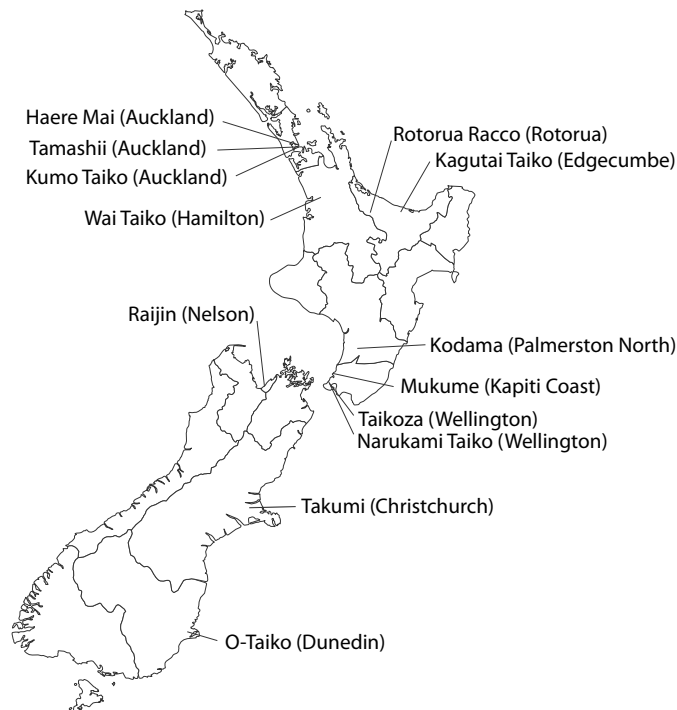
Figure 1. Geographic location of New Zealand's taiko groups. Modified version of a map by FreeVectorMaps.com.

Musical Adoption

The process of musical adoption might be the result of a number of social or cultural influences. Eisentraut (2001) offers a distinct example with a study of samba in Wales "in which members of a particular community adopt a musical style with which they have apparently no historical connection whatever" (p. 85). Central to Eisentraut's discussion is that by playing samba in Wales a community is formed that has special meaning in the Welsh setting. For taiko in New Zealand, the various groups certainly establish musical communities that offer a sense of identity both as a group and as a focal point to which players will relate. There is also a sense of being a part of a New Zealand taiko community in that there have been two New Zealand taiko festivals (2008 and 2015) and some collaboration amongst groups for inviting Japanese taiko players for workshops. For New Zealand, one difference to Eisentraut's point is that amongst the taiko groups there are varying degrees of connectedness to Japan, or rather taiko playing in Japan. In this context, therefore, musical adoption might take several forms: adoption through the process of Japanese or non-Japanese establishing groups in New Zealand, and each having a different *raison d'être* in terms of how and why they were formed in the first place.

While taiko in the United States has been influenced by drum groups comprising Japanese Americans as a result of migrants or their descendants being able to form their own taiko groups, where taiko has been described as being "everywhere in the Japanese American community" (Tsuda 2016, 200), in New Zealand, migration has had a degree of influence in slightly different ways. Undoubtedly, there are some taiko groups in New Zealand that have Japanese migration at their core, and others that include Japanese players as a result of migration to New Zealand. For example, as well as the Japanese roots of Kodama as discussed above, the taiko group Takumi comprises mostly Japanese or Japanese-related players, and the group itself was founded in a Japanese supplementary school in Christchurch by one of the short-term Japanese teachers who was on placement in New Zealand and brought knowledge of taiko with him.

There are a number of other taiko groups in New Zealand that were either founded by Japanese or include Japanese players who have migrated to New Zealand, either as short-term students or long-term residents, although these groups do not have Japanese as the majority of players. Indeed, with such groups, members have been inspired to play taiko in one way or another, and some Japanese and non-Japanese players have only ever played taiko in New Zealand.

In an age where travel is very much part of rapid cultural flows, some taiko groups in New Zealand have been established as a result of their founders or members having travelled to Japan and learned or experienced taiko in its "home" culture and have been inspired to continue playing taiko in New Zealand. For example, the group Wai Taiko was established in 2000 as a result of its two founding members being short-term exchange high-school students in Kyoto, Japan, at Tachibana Girls' High School, where they joined the school taiko group. On return to New Zealand they formed Wai Taiko and started out playing on drums made by one of their fathers out of old wine barrels.

Identity Construction

For taiko players in New Zealand, musical identity is influenced by such factors as authenticity, ethnicity, and creative practice. With the international cultural flows of taiko from Japan from the

1960s in the form of localized ensemble performance in the United States, and to New Zealand from the 1990s, the notion of authenticity might be considered in terms of the nexus between what is performed outside Japan and what is performed inside Japan. Such a concept, although subjective and based on a perspective from the present day, brings to the foreground a sense of taiko in Japan being a true representation of the style. In this context, authenticity generates a politics of national, cultural, and ethnic connection, which serves to create a centre—periphery model that operates in a mode of cultural comparison. The existence of taiko groups all over the world is testament to the nature of contemporary global flows that help shape modern-day culture in many locations. When taiko groups are compared, it would be very difficult to refute the theme of relating to a Japanese home culture that permeates the ontological foundation of such ensembles. From using the term "taiko" in the name of a group to such attributes as music, performance practice, or attire, the phenomenon of taiko performance in many locations exhibits inherent traits that are emblems of ("traditional") Japanese culture.

Across national and cultural borders, taiko groups belong to an imagined community (Anderson 1983), both in the sense of transcultural identity and in local, regional, or national connections. The indexing of Japan through cultural practice establishes a sense of the home culture as the authentic, the one that offers the true ideal of taiko performance. While such links might be helpful when replicating cultural performance, where one taiko group wishes to represent Japanese culture as accurately as possible, it equally points to less localization of creative practice and instead to cultural simulacra. That is, cultural replication serves as a type of hyperreality that presents culture as though it were real, or in this sense authentically Japanese (Baudrillard 1994). On the one hand the performance is real, but on the other it is hypereality in that it offers an imagined Japan that is removed from its authentic home, paradoxically the one that it strives to represent.

In 2013, there were 14,118 people in New Zealand who self-identified as Japanese (Statistics New Zealand 2013). This number represents less than one percent of the total population of the nation, although increasing by 18.6 percent on the 2006 census (Statistics New Zealand 2013). Of this number, nearly half live in Auckland, and 29 percent on the South Island (Statistics New Zealand 2013). As noted above, the connection with taiko and diaspora has been the topic of scholarly discourse in the North American setting where performance has been shown as an expression of transnational or diaspora identity. In New Zealand, however, there have been some similar influences in the establishment of taiko groups, although there are other influences too, such as in the mediascape (Appadurai 1996).

Within taiko performance, creativity is practised in several ways. While the notion of authenticity has much to do with the presentation and representation of the musical artefact, which might be determined according to ethnicity or cultural context, within the musical process there is much creativity that contributes to any particular taiko group's identity. Well-known pieces in the taiko repertoire are interpreted by groups so that any given performance will undoubtedly offer a distinct interpretation vis-à-vis that of other groups. While some famous taiko groups may offer a standard of musicianship or performance practice to which other groups aspire, creativity can nevertheless be a distinguishing factor of any performance. Taiko groups may offer new pieces of music composed by group members or others. Such music adds to the international repertory of taiko music and contributes to a global dynamic of creative practice. For example, the O-Taiko in Dunedin

plays several original pieces of music that were composed especially for the group by players who first learned taiko in Dunedin. A similar situation exists for several other New Zealand taiko groups.

With global taiko groups, there is a dichotomy between Japanese and non-Japanese. This might be perceived as a home culture (i.e., Japan) versus other culture (i.e., non-Japanese) division, or viewed through the lens of home representing an authentic culture to which other taiko groups may aspire. While such divisions are undoubtedly a part of the epistemology of many global taiko groups, it should be remembered that in Japan there are in actual fact many different styles of drumming. Even the ensemble style (*kumidaiko*) that is part of world of neo-traditional Japanese drumming is replicated in many ways the world over, and more specific to Japan one can find many differences in performance practice, instrumentation, and context of performance. Likewise, authenticity in creative practice in global taiko performance can be identified in many ways.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed Japan in New Zealand through the perspective of the impact that taiko has had over the past three decades. Focusing on authenticity and identity in transcultural context, I have discussed the impact of taiko on New Zealand in three spheres of thought: cultural flows; musical adoption; and identity construction. While such a performance phenomenon might be approached in a number of different ways, by highlighting these areas I have been able to show some of the distinct ways that interconnect Japan and New Zealand. In this paper, such connections are through transculturalism and are realized through social and cultural flows that are localized in the New Zealand setting.

The process of global cultural flows has been the starting point for the localization of taiko in New Zealand. Japanese influences on New Zealand have been shown to be inherent in taiko performance in several ways, through people, culture, and media. Taiko has been adopted in New Zealand by a range of different people with an array of backgrounds, influences, and objectives, each operating in a transcultural perspective of one type or another. Within this real and sometimes imagined community within and across national borders, identity is constructed through music and creative performance practices. In New Zealand, therefore, taiko groups have inherent transcultural parameters; they create culture in local settings; and they offer a performance phenomenon where the notion of authenticity can have multiple interpretations.

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