

The Ins and Outs of Japanese Music Research

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Defining the Research Discipline

Considered from the outside, Japanese music means pre-modern music, any musical genre which originated in the pre-modern era; it is studied within the discipline of ethnomusicology, alongside other non-Western music, such as the music of Korea, China, Indonesia, Africa, Australian Aborigines. Viewed from inside Japan, however, it is the National Music (*hōgaku*), in contrast to Western music (*yōgaku*). At the Tokyo University of the Arts, Japanese music (*hōgaku*) and ethnomusicology (*minzoku ongaku*) are separate disciplines. *Ongaku*, on the other hand, is Western (usually classical) music. It could be said that *hōgaku* is in fact an embarrassment to the Japanese, a lacuna in Japanese cultural identity. They try not to think about it. One rarely gets the feeling that the Japanese want to disseminate their indigenous music throughout the world, in contrast to the efforts of South Korea in recent years.

Editing the *Ashgate Research Companion to Japanese Music* (2008) with David Hughes, we knew we wanted to be as comprehensive as possible, and to include in the scope of “Japanese Music” all the usual indigenous genres (*gagaku*, *shōmyō*, *heike*, *jōruri*, *koto*, *shakuhachi* etc), as well as Western classical music composed by Japanese, and also folk, contemporary and pre-modern popular music, and the music of ethnic minorities (Ainu and Okinawa). We strove for a balance between Japanese and non-Japanese contributors, to provide multiple perspectives. We neglected to include *naniwa-bushi*, however. Interestingly, there are many new Japanese-language books on the market introducing Japanese music these days, to provide accessible materials to those teaching in middle schools, made mandatory since 2002. One authoritative anthology, *Nihon no ongaku*, issued by the National Theater of Japan in 2008, is reasonably comprehensive, but unfortunately excludes folk music, music of ethnic minorities and popular music.

Removing My Blinkers

Typical of non-Japanese researchers and performers of Japanese music, for many years I entertained the naïve question: why don't the Japanese know their own music? I blamed Japanese people for neglecting their musical traditions. In my devotion to the study of *katarimono* (musical story-telling or sung narratives) over a period of more than thirty years, I tended to systematically avoid contact with Western music in Japan.

In the past ten years or so, however, I have started to remove my blinkers and have been drawn into the study of piano and Western style art song in the process of Japan's modernization. For the latter I was the recipient of a Japanese Government *kakenhi* grant, 2015–2018.

During a year's sabbatical period spent at Nichibunken in 2008, I was engaged in the Australian Government-funded project “Music and modernity in Osaka in the interwar years (1918–1938)” led by Hugh de Ferranti with Hosokawa Shūhei as collaborator. My contribution included the study of piano as a symbol of modernity. This compelled me to confront what was

a blind spot in my appreciation of Japan's musical culture, as I sought to explore the reasons why Western music became such an important part of Japan's contemporary culture. Subsequently I developed the art song project.

Such research opens up the issue of tradition and its significance in the modern age, and the tension between tradition, Westernization and modernity in the East Asian context. Eventually, I believe, Japanese music research should position Japanese music in an East Asian cultural context, and also a global context, not just a binary comparison with Western music.

Traditional genres also modernized in the age of modernity, developing new repertoire, "improving" the instruments (making them bigger and louder), new ensemble formations, new instruments even, and detailed notation systems. The impact of new media, from print to electronic to digital, has been felt in all traditional genres.

Furthermore, new traditional genres were born in the modern age: *satsuma biwa*, *chikuzen biwa*, and *naniwa-bushi* (*rōkyoku*), and a number of new lineages or schools (*ryūha*). There is very little musicological research on these modern traditional genres. The first major study of *enka* was by American anthropologist (Yano 2002). *Naniwa-bushi* is now being intensively researched by musicologist Kitagawa Junko (Kitagawa 2016 is just one of her many publications), and I have been the co-recipient of a Japanese government *kakenhi* grant for researching *naniwa-bushi* (2012–2014). I also directed student fieldwork on *naniwa-bushi* at Doshisha University in 2013 (Tokita 2013).

The crisis of Japanese music education in Japan is often of great concern to the outsider scholar, who expects the Japanese in general to be knowledgeable about their own music, and is disappointed to find that the Japanese are more steeped in Western music. The discourse of bimusicality is called on to overcome this situation. Cannot both Western and Japanese music be taught in schools so that students acquire knowledge and some competence in both systems?

Japanese vision is blinkered too: it is often limited to Japan and the West. If the field of vision includes the neighbouring countries of East Asia, it becomes clear that those countries are equally focused on achieving world status in Western music, but they are doing more to sustain their traditional music cultures through music education. Regional understanding has the potential for fruitful collaboration.

The outsider tends to want traditional music to remain unchanged, and therefore authentic. It is impressive and laudable that Japan began to set up systems for preservation of traditional genres from the late Meiji period, and from the 1950s a comprehensive system to honour and preserve at local, prefectural and national levels. Japan has also taken advantage of UNESCO initiatives to have several traditional genres listed. The danger with preservation schemes is that traditional music is not allowed to deviate from the way it was when designated; it may fossilize or atrophy due to this restriction and fail to grow and change naturally. This is the dilemma of preservation and change.

Communication Problems

As in any field of Japanese studies, even though music is an auditory art form, it is essential for the musicologist to acquire Japanese language, including reading competence. However, those

who are prepared to commit to study Japanese must wait for years before they can fully utilize the resources of a dedicated research centre such as the Research Centre for Japanese Traditional Music (Kyoto City University of Arts). Even the audiovisual resources are difficult as the catalogue is all in Japanese and even most commercially produced recordings are only in Japanese.

To conduct research in Japanese traditional music there is in addition a clear need to acquire sociocultural competence appropriate to academic situations. Those who persevere with language study may continue to have difficulties when communicating with Japanese researchers in their field because of different patterns of interaction and communication. For the outsider researching Japanese music takes the approach of ethnomusicology, a branch of anthropology. Taking lessons in their chosen genre becomes their “field work”. In the *process* of acquiring knowledge, cultural competence is as important as the end product.

By studying for an extended period in Japan, one becomes more adept at being part of the academic and performance culture, and learns to communicate at a social level as well as a research equal. Most commonly, after an extended period of study in Japan, one returns to one's country to finish the degree and hopefully to get a position. So one returns to the Western research and academic culture. One returns to Japan occasionally and is welcomed as a special visitor, but the outsider status is not challenged.

If one remains in Japan (because one is “never finished”), one may get closer to the elusive goal of assimilation into the research community but...

Different Approaches to Research

It is necessary to understand the academic framework, concerns, aims of research in Japan. The subtlest problems of communication are due to the differences in academic background, different expectations of research, and hence the difficulty of conveying one's research aims and one's ideas.

While studying at the Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music as a beneficiary of a Japanese Government Research Scholarship in 1978–1979, I was unprepared for the encounter with teachers and researchers who valued highly the study of historical documents and historical musicology. This approach was very challenging for the level of Japanese reading skills I had, and it was also not compatible with my desire to understand the contemporary performance through musical analysis. Of course, I also acquired essential concepts and research tools such as the structural analytical model developed by Yokomichi Mario for *noh*, and the extensive research of *shamisen* music by Machida Kashō. These formed a foundation for my musical study of *katarimono*.

In order to get one's work recognized in Japan the importance of translation into Japanese is obvious: one should publish in Japanese, since Japanese music researchers are rarely going to read one's work in English. (Similarly, of course, Japanese researchers should publish in English or other languages.) If it is read in Japanese it may be appreciated as a fresh outsider's perspective. However, a problem is that often outsiders do not handle *shiryō* (original documents) directly but rely on materials already published by Japanese researchers. It is not uncommon for the primary sources of the outsider to be the secondary sources of the Japanese. Therefore, it may not be of

much interest to the Japanese reader.

Whereas Japanese researchers tend to stick to one genre, this is not acceptable in Western universities. An ethnomusicologist must have fieldwork experience in at least two cultures. A Japanese studies person must have a broad understanding of Japanese society and culture and probably also teach Japanese language. It is necessary to venture into new research topics in order to get grants and hence promotion.

In the field of *katarimono*, which includes many genres, I set a precedent with cross-genre research, trying to overcome the different terminology and research frameworks used by researchers of different genres. The most generic term for melody, *fushi*, was called variously *kyokusetsu*, *kyokusetsukei*, *senritsukei*, *daisenritsukei*. The word for section was *shōdan*, and some other terms.

The use of cultural theory is prized in Western academia. Discovering original *shiryō*, publishing them in modern type, and translating them is less valued than interpreting them in the framework of any cultural theory. “What is your theoretical framework?” is the mantra of supervisors. In extreme cases, it is as though a Japanese musical phenomenon is merely a case study to throw light on a theoretical issue of cross-cultural relevance. In my case, I drew on narrative theory as developed by structuralists such as Gérard Genette (1930–2018), and especially on the oral narrative theory that was formulated by Parry and Lord (see Lord 2000 [1960]), in addition to the then conventional musical transcription and analysis of non-Western musics.

Area Studies versus Musicology and Ethnomusicology

In my main field of *katarimono*, so many genres in Japan itself need comprehensive comparative research: *heike*, *kōwaka*, several types of *jōruri*, *naniwa-bushi*, *satsuma biwa*, *chikuzen biwa*, *goze uta*, *zatō biwa*, *Ainu yukara* and more. I was privileged to be able to lead a fruitful cross-genre and interdisciplinary team research project in 1998 at Nichibunken. In this project, I was able to develop and confirm my earlier insight that the missing concept in understanding *katarimono* was that of musical substyle, in addition to formulaic section and formulaic phrase. Another insight of mine is that *heike* influenced *kōshiki* rather than the reverse. However, Japanese researchers do not accept this.

Eventually, my research adopted a global comparative perspective, looking at some of the large number of musically-performed narrative / *katarimono* genres around the world: Korean *pansori*, Chinese drum songs and *tanci* (*pingtan*), and others, whose study can throw light on the wide variety of Japanese narrative genres. I developed a model of three types: stichic, strophic / stanzaic, and prosimetric to enable comparison with *katarimono* in other countries. Interestingly, a recent publication in the field of *heike* literary studies, has argued that *The Tale of the Heike* is World Literature (Kusaka 2017).

Three years ago, I was contacted by a researcher from the Geneva Conservatory (Haute École de Musique), Francis Biggi, about comparative research for his interest in Italian sung narratives. This has been most productive. In particular, it gave me the opportunity to investigate the strophic type that his work exemplified. This led to comparative research with

Biggi, and he shared the platform at the Research Centre for Japanese Traditional Music (RCJTM) public lecture-concert on February 11. We held a *katarimono* week for him and his colleagues in February, with a series of presentations on several *katarimono* and related genres. This was a follow-up of a week-long intensive course in Geneva in 2016, a workshop on *noh* in Sarrebourg in 2017, and in March 2017 a workshop on *heike* narrative in Corsica. Such “outreach” (*hasshin*) requires English to function.

The Role and Value of the Outsider Researcher

It is surely desirable to make Japanese music accessible to the world. Translation of Japanese musicological research and presenting findings in English is a task for which the outsider is often contacted, especially the translation of an abstract for a journal or a conference. In the Research Centre for Japanese Traditional Music, of which I was Director from 2014 to 2018, the documentary research focus is prominent, but performance is also valued, and a large part of the Centre’s output is in the form of community outreach (required to justify the taxpayers of the City of Kyoto), so is made quite accessible, but still conducted only in Japanese. Non-Japanese would often contact the RCJTM, and seek information and deeper knowledge about aspects of Japanese music, but usually they could gain little. The Centre was not equipped to reach an international constituency. I tried to rectify this situation by the intensive three-day course on Japanese music, “Pendulum” that I ran three times, 2015 to 2017.

It is usual for a Japanese researcher to focus almost exclusively on one genre. Hopefully the outsider will have a broader perspective, and will avoid discourses of Japanese uniqueness which crops up all too easily if the focus is always on Japan vis-à-vis the West. The outsider should be able to offer an international perspective to the study of Japan which challenges Japanese perspectives. And within Japan, the outsider would do well to not focus exclusively on one genre as is very common among Japanese researchers, but to develop cross-genre, cross-*ryūha* research, without fearing criticism of shallowness.

The outsider’s research can act as a stimulus for change. As it happens, the catalyst for Francis Biggi to contact the RCJTM was a young Japanese woman who was studying renaissance keyboard at the Geneva Haute École de Musique, when she was asked to provide information about Japanese musical epic; on doing a search in Japanese she found my work and our Centre.

To conclude, I will introduce two cases where the stimulus of the work of outsiders has caused a paradigm shift in Japanese research.

First, Laurence Picken (1909–2007) and *gagaku*. His field was zoology and Chinese music history. Searching for the lost melodies of the Tang court in Japanese *gagaku*, he had the insight on reading Eta Harich-Schneider’s article in 1953 that the notations of the *shō*, *biwa* and *koto* were the original melodies, while *hichiriki* reed instrument and *ryūteki* transverse flute were extended embellishments. Modern *gagaku* performance sounded nothing like the melodies in that score, largely as a result of the tempo having become several times slower over centuries of transmission, giving rise to the elaboration of the reed and flute melodies and the obscuring of the melodic role of the other instruments. In 1972 Picken travelled to Japan and acquired copies

of old manuscripts of the various instrumental parts, and found five talented doctoral students with the necessary language abilities to carry out the analytic work to support his insight. The results, first published in 1981 (Picken et al. 1981–2000), started to become known in Japan in the mid-eighties, and met with stony hostility.

Japan's leading historical musicologists often felt that any conclusions were automatically premature until all known primary and secondary sources had been consulted; various Picken School errors in historical or linguistic detail led some scholars to cast doubt, irrelevantly, on the more musicological claims; and a mistaken nationalistic belief that *tōgaku* was transmitted without break since the eighth century—the world's longest continuous orchestral tradition—made it awkward to accept the major changes claimed by the Picken School. These various reasons, having nothing to do with the validity of the major claims, allowed too many scholars to dismiss the Cambridge team's work. (Hughes 2010: 235)

Thirty years on, the core of his ideas have become the new orthodoxy among new generations of scholars. His insights, though not entirely new, were reached independently from Japanese research. Already such a theory had been foreshadowed in Hayashi Kenzō's work and were included as obvious in Masumoto Kikuko's book on *gagaku*. However, the historical music establishment did not adhere to those positions. Finally it was an outsider perspective that carried the day.

Secondly, Kenneth Butler and *heike* narrative. Not a musicologist but a literary scholar of *Heike monogatari*, he studied in Japan in 1967, having read Lord's path-breaking book on oral narrative, *The Singer of Tales* (Lord 2000). In three seminal papers he applied this model to the *Heike* arguing its oral origins (Butler 1966a, 1966b, 1969). His research was taken up by Yamamoto Kichizō (Yamamoto 1977, 1978, 1988), and split the field of *heike* scholarship into two camps. Even now, there are two camps but not so extremely divided.

I would like to think that, albeit on a smaller scale, my approach to *heike-jōruri* will eventually accepted and cause a slight paradigm shift, at least in the concept of the substyle, if not of the primacy of *heike* over *kōshiki*.

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