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Historical Changes in the Objectives of Japanese Music Education

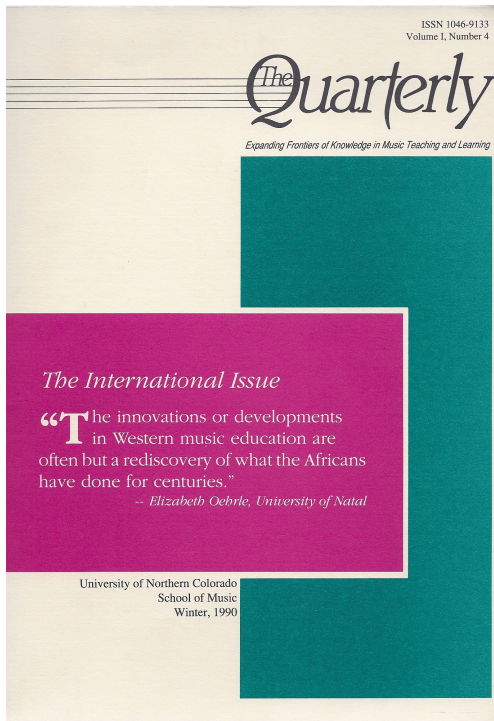
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It is with pleasure that we inaugurate the reprint of the entire seven volumes of The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning. The journal began in 1990 as The Quarterly. In 1992, with volume 3, the name changed to The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning and continued until 1997. The journal contained articles on issues that were timely when they appeared and are now important for their historical relevance. For many authors, it was their first major publication. Visions of Research in Music Education will publish facsimiles of each issue as it originally appeared. Each article will be a separate pdf file. Jason D. Vodicka has accepted my invitation to serve as guest editor for the reprint project and will compose a new editorial to introduce each volume. Chad Keilman is the production manager. I express deepest thanks to Richard Colwell for granting VRME permission to re-publish The Quarterly in online format. He has graciously prepared an introduction to the reprint series.

Historical Changes in the Objectives of Japanese Music Education

By Atsuyasu Kitayama

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Abstract: Within the ancient and durable culture of Japan are embedded a number of powerful beliefs about the role of music and music education. In this article, the author describes and discusses these beliefs and the ways in which they have been manifested during the various educational reforms of Japan's recent history.

Japan has had a tradition of accepting and assimilating various assets of foreign cultures throughout its long history. In ancient times, such influences came from the continent of Asia, in the Middle Ages from European countries, and in the modern age from the United States. Furthermore, it is notable that Japan has changed them by so-called "Japanization," without merely copying them. It is only natural that school education should be no exception.

In the 1980s, *Monbusho* (the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture) embarked upon a program of educational reform to improve the country's internationalization, individualization, and its increasingly information-oriented society. The new course of study was announced in March, 1989.

It is true that Japan's educational system is very well-organized. In particular, the level of scholastic achievement at the elementary and secondary levels is admired by all the world, and is a tribute to Japan's diligent teachers. This system, however, also has its problems, and a number of criticisms have been raised against the present state of education in Japan.

This paper addresses the present state of music education in Japan from the perspective of the historical changes of objectives in

music education and the educational ideas that are deeply rooted in the Japanese culture.

The Meiji Restoration to World War II (1867-1945)

In 1867, the Tokugawa Shogunate fell, and imperial rule was restored to Japan. This rapid change was brought about by economic failure and political instability resulting from the prolonged period of feudalism and by military pressure from foreign countries demanding that Japan be opened for trade.

These urgent threats prompted the Japanese government to adopt a number of new policies. Among these was the rather ambitious Fundamental Code of Education. Promulgated in 1872, it aimed at rapid modernization by making education available to a wider range of people than ever before.

Before the Meiji Restoration, education was the privilege of upper-class people only, but the Fundamental Code of Education provided equal opportunity in schooling for all and declared an eight-year period of compulsory elementary education. The Fundamental Code of Education was adopted from the French educational system, but influenced by American education as well.¹ In developing the code, the Japanese government researched not only these two countries but many other European countries as well.

The Initial Stage of Music Education

One of the first policies for modernization was that of Westernization. This was promoted by sending students abroad, by translating textbooks, and by inviting foreign teachers to visit Japan. Shuji Izawa (1851-1917), who rendered remarkable service during the initial stage of music education of

Japan, studied music in the United States under Luther Whiting Mason (1818-1896). The written report submitted by Izawa in 1878 while he was in the United States moved the Minister of Education of that time to establish in 1879 *Ongaku Torishirabe Gakari* (The Research Institute for Western Music) in Monbusho. Izawa was appointed to lead Ongaku Torishirabe Gakari soon after he returned to Japan. In 1880, Monbusho invited Mason to Japan and asked him to research with Izawa the subject of music education.²

At this early stage of music education in Japan, Izawa proposed the following three projects:

- to arrange a compromise between Eastern music and Western music,
- to train musicians who would promote Japanese National Music in the future, and
- to attempt music education in school and examine if it works.³

Shogaku Shoka Shu (A Songbook for Elementary School) was published in 1882 as the first music textbook compiled in Japan. One of the main works which Ongaku Torishirabe Gakari struggled to complete, it was modeled on two American textbooks, *The National Music Chart* and *The National Music Reader*, both written by Mason. It is believed that Mason brought them with him when he came to Japan.⁴ Most of the songs in *Shogaku Shoka Shu* were originally European folk songs and children's songs contained in Mason's volume, with new Japanese words emphasizing morality and praising the beauty of nature.

After Mason returned to the United States in 1882, Izawa and the staff of Ongaku Torishirabe Gakari compiled another *Shogaku Shoka* (A Collection of Songs for Elementary School) in six volumes. This time, however, the authors did not begin with Western music. Instead, they compiled many songs based on *Yo-na-nuki* scale⁵—a kind of pentatonic scale on which Japanese traditional music is based: *do-re-mi-sol-la-do* as the major scale, and *la-si-do-mi-fa-la* as the minor scale. In this way, pupils progressed step by step into Western music as they advanced to later volumes.

At this initial stage of Japanese educational development, American and European ideas

were predominant over Japanese ideas. In the case of music education, however, it is possible that Japanese educators were unable to absorb the Western ideas and teaching methods because they believed in an unshakable Japanese objective for music education: the cultivation of morals.

Many educational regulations of the Meiji period note that *shoka* (classroom singing) is inseparable from *shushin*. *Shushin* is the subject that cultivates patriotic morals by teaching the virtues of loyalty and filial piety in order to enhance the authority of the nation and society. And *shoka*, during the Meiji period, was intended to reinforce the teaching of these virtues with the words of songs. In the cradle of the modern nation, music education was seen as an effective means of controlling the moral development of the people.

In 1872, *shoka* was redefined according to the models of Western school systems. But the Fundamental Code of Education temporarily shelved the implementation of *shoka*⁶ because the new educational system was immature. The Restoration period was a time when teaching materials and teacher training were becoming more organized. *Shoka*, after its temporary suspension, began to be accepted among Japanese schools throughout the country.

Music Education During the Taisho Period

About 40 years after the Meiji Restoration, the educational system had been nearly perfected. During this time, the Taisho period, when World War I came to an end and the basic national construction was over, Japan enjoyed a business boom and a peaceful atmosphere. This era saw a remarkable advance in thought, culture, and education based on liberalism and democracy. "Cultivating morals" was still regarded as one of the most important objectives of music education, although pedagogical methodologies were becoming more refined.

The phrase "cultivating morals" meant, in practice, a cultivation of patriotism, a concept prevalent during the Meiji period, although it was sometimes disguised as "character building." Whatever the phrase, music education

was used as a means of thought control.

At the same time, music education expanded with the creative movement, and new types of children's songs were composed. With the prosperity of Japan, criticism arose against the *Shoka* education, and it seemed that "cultivation of morals" might be put aside as an objective of music education. Music education, however, was forced to change direction by the rise of militarism early in the Showa period.

Music Education During the Military Period

With the rapid changes in politics and economics during the 1930s, Japanese ideas, culture, and education became involved in the area of militarism. Music education was also incorporated into the growing concern for militarism.

In 1941, the National Elementary School System was inaugurated "in order to aim at basic training for the nation . . . under the (Japanese) Empire."⁷ Music education in elementary schools came to be called *Geino-ka Ongaku* (Music in the Performing Arts Courses) rather than *shoka*, and it began to play an important role in school education.

The main objective of *Geino-ka Ongaku* was to implant the thought of ultranationalism and militarism in children's minds, using the words of songs. Basic training for perfect pitch assumed great importance, for this was expected to make a contribution to national defense. Specific goals of this training were to distinguish the roar of planes at the battlefield and to discriminate the sounds of machines in armament factories. The results of perfect-pitch training are doubtful, but implanting military thoughts through the songs yielded considerable results.

Generally speaking, music education during this time of militarism was controlled by the government. This was also the period when the objective "cultivating morals" was cleverly replaced by "unification of the national character," based on fascistic education. During this military period, music education played a greater part in education than at any other time in Japanese history.

After World War II (1945-Present)

Music education in Japan completely

changed direction after the nation's defeat in World War II. The philosophy of music education underwent a remarkable change: "Its emphasis was no more laid in comparison with that before the war."⁸

In 1945, Monbusho publicly announced the establishment of peaceful policies, by which the government sought to establish a peaceful nation by wiping away the thought and policies based on militarism.⁹ This was embodied in a new educational system by the American Occupation Office. The Fundamental Law of Education of 1947 extended compulsory schooling to nine years (elementary and junior high schools), and the 6-3-3-4 schooling system was adopted. In the same year, Monbusho released the first "Tentative Course of Study" under the leadership of the Civil Information and Education Section (CIE, 1945-1952). This "Tentative Course of Study" stated, essentially, that the main objective of music education was to cultivate aesthetic sentiments and fertile human minds by appreciating the beauty of music.¹⁰

A Change for the "New Education"

In the 1950s, music education took another direction based on the philosophy of the "New Education." Ideas, culture, and education were changing as the postwar democracy gradually developed.

In the international setting, conflict between capitalism and socialism surfaced with the collapse of the united front against the former fascist powers. The Japanese government adopted new policies in every field—politics, economy, military affairs, ideas, and education. This attitude was reflected in the schools by a renewed tendency to emphasize moral education in support of building the character of children.

As a result, in 1951 the "Tentative Course of Study" was revised and broadened to include the following objectives for music education: the cultivation of the aesthetic sentiments and human minds of school children; the development of harmonious personalities within them; and enhancement of children's cultural knowledge so that they may become desirable members of the society through experiences in music.¹¹ Thus

the goal of music education shifted back to the moral development of citizens and somewhat away from the appreciation of the beauty of music.

Legalization of the “Course of Study”

At this time, the “Course of Study,” which had been revised twice, was again revised in 1958 and made statutory as part of the School Education Law. The subject “moral education” returned to Japanese classrooms, as in prewar Japan.

In the general rules of the “Course of Study” the following is expressly stated: “Moral education in school must be provided throughout the educational activities. Therefore, teaching morality should be conducted at every opportunity in school activities, not only as the specific subject of moral education but also as a part of every other subject, special educational activities, school events, and so on.”¹²

The general objective of music education, however, was stated as follows: “To enrich children’s musical experiences, to develop their sense of music, and to cultivate their aesthetic sentiments.”¹³ “Common teaching materials” for singing and music appreciation were also specified. Therefore, the basic concept of music education in the late 1950s came to have the same character as that of the Meiji period.

Music Education Emphasizing “Fundamentals”

Japanese education confronted another national demand as the nation experienced rapid economic growth in the 1960s: to train students as capable workers who would be wanted by the industrial world. In 1968, the “Course of Study” was revised again, and the overall objective of music education was stated as follows: “To cultivate children’s talent for music, elevate their aesthetic sentiments, and to develop fertile, creative minds in children.”¹⁴ Four supplementary objectives were added, the second of which most clearly defined the outstanding characteristic of this version of the course of study: “To develop their sense of music, increase their ability to appreciate music and to read and write notation, and thus to deepen their understanding of notation.”¹⁵ These “funda-

mentals” became the focus of music education under this document.

Although the development of basic knowledge of music was emphasised, instruction in these fundamentals was, in practice, apt to lapse into mere drills of solfeggio. This eventually resulted in making many children dislike music class. Soon, this system was criticized for placing too much emphasis on academic achievement in music education.

Simplification of the “Course of Study”

In the 1970s, the status of Japan as an international power created rapid progress both in economy and in culture. The diversification of social values, the harmful effects of an overworked society, and continued overemphasis on intellectual training in school were criticized in every quarter. In order to deal with these criticisms, the Japanese government proposed educating students so as to develop individual talent rather than to merely cram their heads with knowledge.

In 1977, the “Course of Study” was revised to avoid the harmful effects of the overemphasis on intellectual training in school. The new “Course of Study” emphasized the necessity of moral education and physical education while readjusting the content of each subject area and the number of school hours required for each. According to this new document, music-class hours per week were reduced from 13 to 12 (from the first grade to the sixth grade) and from six to five (in the seventh grade to the ninth grade in junior high school).

The overall objectives of music education were changed as follows: “To help pupils cultivate fundamental musicality through activities in musical expression, encourage a love for music, and enrich students’ sentiments.”¹⁶ In addition, fundamentals were selected more carefully. For example, “To sing following live or recorded model performances” was emphasized through all the grades, but the skills related to sight singing were treated lightly.

In fact, most teachers have not taught sight-singing since this revision. According to a questionnaire conducted by *Nihon Hoso Kyokai* (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) in 1981, 29 percent of children ages 10-14

answered “yes” to the question “Can you sing just by seeing notation?”¹⁷ This percentage coincided with the percentage of children from the age of 10-14 years who were taking private lessons in piano. It may be inferred from these data that children’s ability to sight sing depends much on their education outside school.

This version of the “Course of Study” has significant meaning in the progression of postwar thought about music education in Japan. It attempted to correct the belief that cultivating children’s ability was the first priority of music education, but its abstract objective, “to encourage a love for music,” was criticized because it did not sufficiently promote the teaching of the essentials of music education.

Music Education in the Present Educational Reform

In 1985, Prime Minister Nakasone established the Ad Hoc Committee on Educational Reform to handle the problems such as excessive competition for entrance examinations, a rapid increase of school violence, and complicated international situations. According to the report by the committee, Monbusho extended educational reform to improve Japan’s “internationalization,” “individualization,” and its “information-oriented society.” The new “Course of Study” was announced in March, 1989, and is now in a period of transition.

The notable feature of this “Course of Study” is the emphasis on moral education. This is expected to serve as a special remedy for violence and bullying in school, which is one of the most serious social problems. Moreover, the report emphasizes that moral education should be provided through all school activities, without exception, because the development of the Japanese patriotic spirit is indispensable to the goal of “internationalization.” On the other hand, many people criticize it as a revival of nationalism, because prewar moral education, *shushin*, also emphasized cultivating patriotic spirit. There are, however, some amendments in the overall objectives of music education: “To help pupils cultivate fundamental musicality through activities in musical

expression, to encourage a love and a sensitivity for music, to and enrich their sentiment.”¹⁸

In pursuit of the idea of “education to develop children’s individuality,” the elective subjects in junior high school were expanded. As a result, music class hours per week were reduced from five to four in the junior high schools.

Problems and Prospects for Japanese Music Education


“School songs have never gone out of the gates of the schools.” This stereotyped expression, often used by Japanese music educators since the Meiji period, means that music education has been a part of moral education throughout Japanese history. There is an inconsistency between educational ideas based on traditional morality, which have supported the economic development of Japan, and “internationalization and individualization” that are now said to be the pillars of the present educational reform. Japanese educational circles must solve this apparent discrepancy.

As has been described above, the objectives of education have fluctuated along with Japan’s domestic and international situation. It is certainly difficult to make an abrupt about-face in a nation’s ideas about education, because the educational ideas of each country are deeply embedded in the culture of the country. This proposition has been demonstrated by the several changes in the course of study since 1947.

It is now time that Japanese music educators returned to the spirit of the first “Tentative Course of Study” of 1947. They should reconsider the prospects for the future of Japanese music education by reaffirming the central purpose of music education: cultivation of aesthetics through an appreciation of the beauty of music.

Notes

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4. Toyama, Bunkichi. 1976. *Shogaku Shoka Shu to Shoka Kakezu (A Songbook for Elementary School and Singing Chart)*. Ongaku-Kyoiku Seiritsu e no Kiseki (*The Formation of Japanese Music Education*). Tokyo: Ongaku-no-Tomo Sha. p. 115.
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