

Taki's Sho-ka and Yamada's Doh-yoh A Study of Early Japanese Children's Song

by

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The most popular and substantial group of music in today's Japan is western music. Japanese musical enjoyments are apparently centered around the western "Doh-Ray-Me-Fah" sound, even Japanese folk songs are accompanied by western musical instrument such as the guitar, violin and piano. American style jazz bands are frequently used as accompaniments at traditional folk music concerts. Generally speaking, Japan is the country of "Doh-Ray-Me-Fah." The importance of traditional musical art and how to preserve or integrate it in contemporary Japanese music, those are also quite essential but I would prefer to study or discuss them in another forum.

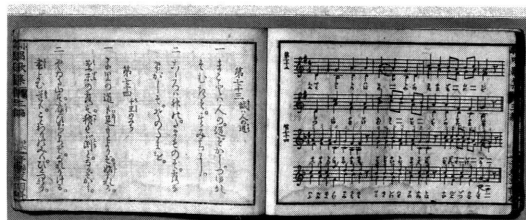
This musical phenomenon in our society took a first step about a hundred years ago, at the time of the Meiji Restoration⁽¹⁾, which was a very important cultural turning point, when there was a transition from Feudal Japan to Modern Japan. Many Japanese musicians are active around the world today. You can easily find Japanese fiddle players in symphony orchestras in the Western hemisphere and many Japanese prima donnas are singing title roles of famous operas other than the ever popular Madam Butterfly.

How can we analyze and understand such a tremendous musical metamorphosis in Japan within approximately a century? It can not be described simply as development. I like to say that the study of early Western music in Japan is fruitful in the study of songs which were composed by Japanese musicians at that time,

for Western music was first introduced by Western folk songs. They were published and taught at elementary schools all over Japan by governmental decree. The first music book of western notation was published in 1881 by the National Institute of Music (Ongaku Torishirabe gakari).



First Japanese music text book



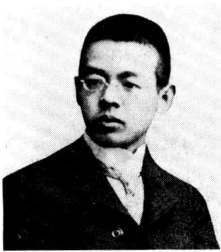
A song in the text, melody from the Opera 'Magic Flute' by Mozart

In the early years of Japanese music history of Western sense, two composers are unforgettable:

Rentaro Taki (1879-1898)

Kosaku Yamada (1886-1965)

They were really the pioneer and founder of “Doh-Ray-Me-Fah” composition in Japan.



Rentaro Taki, in 1898

Kosaku Yamada, in 1918

Rentaro Taki (pronounced Reh-ta-roh Ta-ki) was the first graduate majoring in piano at the Tokyo National Music School (now, the National Fine Art University, Music Department). He continued his study at Leipzig Music College in Germany on a governmental scholarship. He studied mainly music composition here, for he possessed the idea that he would write contemporary Japanese music.

At the age of 19, when he was a student at the Tokyo National Music School, he wrote a song, “Japanese Boy,” which is his oldest existing composition.

日本男児

作曲者 大塚啓祐
編曲者 大塚啓祐

日本男児
大塚啓祐

Japanese Boy, by Taki

The time of this composition was a little after the Japanese victory over feudal China during the Japan-China War (1894-95); the title reflects this. Taki wanted to describe the strength and sturdiness of the Japanese boy.

Taki wrote many simple compositions for nursery songs even before his departure for Germany.

He went to Leipzig in 1901 and qualified as a student at the Leipzig National Conservatory but unfortunately he could not complete his studies. The next year, 1902, he was ordered to return to Japan by the government because of his illness, tuberculosis.

A year later, 1903, he died at the early age of twenty-five.

Consequently, the number of his works is small, some piano pieces, 7 choir pieces and songs, including 17 simple songs for pre-school children.

メヌエット

作曲者 大塚啓祐
編曲者 大塚啓祐

Menuett, by Taki

Kosaku Yamada was only seven years younger than Taki but we need to know that the musical circumstances in Japan during his time were different from those of previous years. In other words, westernization in Japan had accelerated to a high tempo. Several years meant far more than that in the cultural development of that time in Japan.

Kosaku Yamada (pronounced, Koh-sa-ku Ya-ma-da, he preferred to write his name in the French way, Kóścak Yamada) was also a graduate of the Tokyo National Music School, where he majored in vocal music. (After graduation he went to Berlin, Germany, to study composition.)

There were only two courses: instrumental music and vocal. The school's composition course did not appear until the late 1930s.

But Yamada pursued a wide range of studies by himself. He played piano and cello. He was an important member of the school orchestra, the principal cellist. Luckily, I was given the opportunity to listen to his live piano playing when I was a boy. To my ears his skill was professional, and I got quite excited at the live performance of a great master.

He was a fine conductor, too. He appeared on the podium of Carnegie Hall conducting the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in 1918. This was the first time a Japanese musician had so performed.

Yamada's works are numerous and cover many categories of music, from grand opera to piano piece, from art song to nursery song.

His most important stream of the creation is considered songs. Not only did he start the study of music as vocal students but he also is responsible for the first step in the introduction of Western music to Japan, the introduction of western type of songs in the form of school text books.

We needed many good simple songs to suit the prevailing taste for Western music in Japan.

A few Japanese musicians who were barely eligible to compose western style music wrote children's songs.

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I would like to explain more about Japanese children's songs, such songs have an interesting historical background.

Children's song is a straight translation of the Japanese word "kodomo-no-uta" which means song for children.

It is not exactly the same as the word nursery song or nursery rhyme. Nursery rhyme shows a tendency for the songs to be sung by pre-school children or sung to the little child. It means much closer to the word cradle song. If I define children's song as the equivalent of baby's

song, it might be too narrow. Children's song in Japanese has a much wider meaning and is a much more common expression.

As I have mentioned before, Western music was introduced in the course of Japanese cultural modernization about a hundred years ago.

According to the governmental decree of the new educational system, music was apparently one of the elementary school subjects and music was a required part of the culture of sentiment. A school music text book was prepared and published in 1881. This particular book is titled "sho-ka" (a simple translation is "singing song"), and those songs compiled in the book were called "sho-ka" as well.

Although many of those melodies were derived from Western folk songs, the words were original and purely Japanese. The words described traditional virtues, loyalty to the master and the beautiful landscapes of Japan.

Those were the interesting combination of Western folk tune and the conventional ingredients of Japanese words. Educators at that time conceived that the song sung for educational purpose should be taken as serious ones. The words were the slogan of the cultural restoration. (Some of the words and music of the songs in the text book were originally written by Japanese educators of that time.) "Sho-ka" is designed to be sung by children so, "sho-ka" was taken as children's song.

This is the origin of the Japanese terminology "children's song" in the Japanese language. It is quite understandable that the words of school text songs are inclined to be moralistic or square.

About twenty years since the first edition of the music text book was released, around the start of the twentieth century, Japanese poets and educators were beginning to say that, in addition to sho-ka more artistic songs for children were needed, or at least songs with words that children could easily relate to and understand.

Then, the new "artistic songs for children" movement was started.

They called this movement "Akai tori" (red bird) children's song movement.⁽²⁾

The key person in this movement was Mie-kichi Suzuki, a poet. Many composers, poets and writers collaborated under this flag. They called these new children's songs "doh-yoh." Doh-yoh is the Japanese

name for children's songs that have different ingredients from sho-ka.

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I have mentioned there are two different groups of Japanese children's songs.

- #1 Sho-ka, which appeared in the first edition of the school text book.
- #2 Doh-yoh, which appeared in the 1910s. It is the counter product to sho-ka, which is very moralistic or square work.

It is interesting to realize that Taki and Yamada are closely related to each group as composers. Taki to the first, Sho-ka. Yamada to the second, Doh-yoh.

Rentaro Taki composed 17 songs for pre-school children. They were published in 1901 in Tokyo under the title of "Yochi-en Sho-ka" (kindergarten sho-ka).

These are the first Japanese songs with piano accompaniments for little children.

Taki also wrote some children's songs even before this but they were pure melody, there were no accompaniments.



Squirt-gun, by Taki (Kindergarten Sho-ka)

These Yochi-en Sho-ka were commissioned by the Tokyo Women's Normal School Kindergarten (the first kindergarten in Japan).

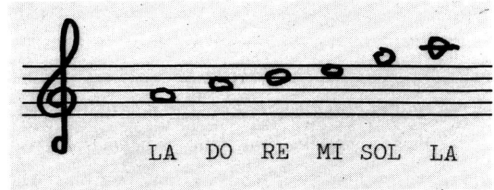
Taki composed these songs very carefully so that they would not be too difficult for kindergarten teachers to play, for usually they are not professionally trained as musicians.

Those are the first original songs for the early childhood of the Japanese. "Nightingale," "Skylark Sings," "Carp Streamer," "On the Ocean," "Momo-

taro (The title of a popular Japanese fairy tale)," "A Frog in a Pond," "Squirt-gun." These titles of Yochi-en Sho-ka show the tendency of the works by themselves.

The content of the words is very different from the Sho-ka published in 1881, not moralistic with more free expression and pure artistic feeling in Yochi-en Sho-ka.

Musically, they are quite interesting too. Fifteen songs out of 17 are composed to pentatonic scale.



Japanese Pentatonic scale

Pentatonic scale (which is based on 6th sound) is quite common among Japanese folk songs.

Almost all traditional Japanese nursery rhymes are set to pentatonic scale.

When considering sound susceptibility, Taki chose the pentatonic scale for writing songs for young children. Some children's games which were originally designed to yohchi-en sho-ka which may reasonably be placed between sho-ka and doh-yoh. Had Rentaro Taki survival longer, he might have added some variety to his children's song catalogue.

He left us too early.

Kosaku Yamada was a versatile composer. He wrote various types of music but we can not overlook his children's song, especially "Doh-Yoh Hyakkyoku-Shu" (100 songs for children) which was published in Tokyo from 1927 to 1929.

When you compare Taki's children's songs to Yamada's, you will see some major differences in composition technique and artistic maturity. Even though the purposes are a little different between the former and the later.

— Taki's works were a kind of pilot presentation during the early stages of Western music in Japan. The simplicity must be appreciated and the game to play with the song must have been appropriate to have them become popular quite rapidly.



Konomichi (This is the way). from 100 songs for children by Yamada

Yamada's works were more mature; he spent a much longer time in Europe developing his technique. He was really able to study the twentieth-century way of music composition.

In other words, Taki studied Mozart and Beethoven whereas Yamada studied Brahms and Wagner.

I have to say that Taki's work came in 1901 and Yamada's came in 1926. During this space of 25 years the Japanese made tremendous progress in familiarizing themselves with and acquiring Western culture. Much bigger than the transition of babies to adults.

As a composer, Yamada was a very good collaborator of the "Akai tori" movement. He has specific ideas when composing children's songs. He wrote in the November 1922 edition of the magazine *Shi-to-Ongaku (Poem and Music)*:

There are two different types of children's songs. The artistic children's song and the song children play with. (game song).

When a song flatters children, it might be possible to create immediate excitement or enjoyment. But there is neither artistic growth nor afterglow and,

of course, no artistic contentment.

Such an excitement will be banished at the next moment. My works are not like that, My children's songs might be a little difficult to children to understand at first but they are important milestones to lead them to the real beauty of music. My works for children may be called educative or humanistic.

His songs for children, over 200 pieces, became not only musical treasures for Japanese children but good models even for artistic songs by the composers who followed after Yamada.

Taki and Yamada are pioneers, whose compositions have been exceptionally important to modern Japanese culture.

Taki acted in the opening role for Yamada, who was able to expand his role as the second contributor tremendously.

In the final analysis, we understand that first, Western music was introduced to Japan as children's song, "sho-ka," in the school text book of 1881. Taki and Yamada built the foundation for modern Japanese musical creation by composing many beautiful children's songs.

It can therefore be said that modern Japanese music and musical life were initiated by children's songs after all.

Notes

- 1 Meiji Restroration, (Meiji Ishin) about 1867, a series of governmental changes from the feudal system to modern system which reflected to modern Japanese life great deal.
- 2 It come from the name of the magazine 'Akai tori' (1918-1936) which stimurated many young poets and writers to create good literatures for Japanese children.

滝の唱歌，山田の童謡
日本の子どもの歌，創成期の研究

服部 公一

(平成6年9月30日受理)

現代日本人は異文化に属する音楽をよく理解して楽しんでいる。
この意味で日本は世界文化史的に極めて興味ある存在である。
日本人の西洋音楽体験は明治初年にはじまったといっても過言ではない。
これが明治政府の施策のひとつであった，という点で特異な姿であった。
その第一歩は〈唱歌〉というかたちの教科書用子どもの歌であった。
日本の作曲家第1号，滝廉太郎は明治唱歌の創作に関わり，さらにそれを止揚するかの
ごとく山田耕作は大正の〈童謡〉運動に関わる—この二人を軸として，日本における初
期の西洋音楽受容について研究するものである。