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DILEMMA OF MUSIC EDUCATION:

JAPANESE MUSIC EDUCATION IN TWENTIETH-FIRST CENTURY

音楽教育のジレンマ：日本における21世紀の音楽教育の存在価値

By Yoko Shayesteh

シャイヤステ榮子

Japan has faced two major social changes in the last 145 years. The first event was in 1868 when Japan reopened diplomatic relation with western countries after 260 years of isolation from the rest of the world. The second event was in 1945 when Japan lost World War II to the United States. Both events shared two common points—foreign force to change the Japanese political system and awareness of industrial superiority of the Western countries. Accordingly, the education system and educational policy radically changed in order to overcome the national crisis. Education required the citizens of Japan to become a strong working force to rebuild the nation's economy.

Educational reforms included music in the curriculum. The first educational reform recognized music as a moralistic subject to nurture patriotic spirit along with a strong body in the militaristic nation. In the second reform, the government emphasized the musical experiences which helped to established a democratic society. This educational reform was supervised by the Education Department in General Headquarters of the United States Military in Japan. Since this 1947 reform, the Japanese government has promulgated eight policy statements about one every ten years. The latest statement was in 2008. All the statements concerned music as a part of aesthetic education. The primary educational goal of the first three statements was to develop aesthetic sensibility. But in recent years the non-aesthetic goals have begun to overshadow the primary role of music education.

As the twentieth-first century had come, music education needs to re-establish the its true value in public schools. This philosophy paper will discuss the perspective of music education in the year of 2011 by defining music and education as well as analyzing current music education in Japan.

What is Music?

It is very interesting how people distinguish music from noise or speech. The concept of music gradually develops soon after birth. Without any pre-education, the child is able to recognize music as music. Music, noise, and speech share the same characteristics, such as the range of dynamics and different tone quality. Music and speech have rhythm, but some noises also have rhythm. Noise and speech may have texture; sometimes they take on the texture of monophony, heterophony, or polyphony. Some speech may sound like musical melody. Some noises may be in Rondo form. The elements of music which a music teacher teaches to children are not only attributes of musical sound. What makes music different from noises (including the sounds of nature) is fixed pitches. The sounds of nature including noise constantly change frequencies and amplitudes of frequencies instantaneously. To perceive the sound in the possible oral form, the sound must sustain constant frequencies, which are called fixed pitches. For musical sound, fixed pitches are necessary to construct melody and harmony.

Melody, rhythm, dynamics, harmony, tone color, texture, form, and fixed pitches are attributes of music. However, twentieth-century composers developed new kinds of music which do not fit into the previous definition. The sounds of nature or noise in everyday life were used as elements in tape music and ambient music, and some electronic music presents non-fixed pitches as its major sound construction. Such music is barely involved with the elements of nineteenth-century music.

Furthermore, a completely new kind of music appeared. A pianist showed up on the stage, sat on the chair for four minutes and thirty-three seconds without playing the piano, and then left the stage. The title of this piano piece is "4'33", composed by John Cage. There was no sound of piano, but only the noise and yells of the audience in the music hall. The music critics accepted his piano music as a major work of John Cage, his so-called silent music. Even though there was no sound of the piano, the critics accepted the intention of the composer. The ideas of Zen buddhism influenced John Cage. He applied the unification of nature, God, and humans into the presentation of his work. His idea was to create new music by interacting with the audience. He intended the audience to be involved with the music making with a pianist and a composer, a unified group.

The definition of music has apparently changed from time to time. From the middle of the twentieth century to the present, music has meant that combination of sounds and/or silence combined by humans with intention, and the intention must be supported by certain people such as music critics who can give a place (function) to the

music in the society.

What is Education?

Man and a woman are social animals. Their education begins as soon as a baby is born. The new-born baby will be continually educated until the end of life in many ways. Education in life goes through four stages; education to become a member of a family and a neighborhood after the birth; the formal education from elementary school to junior high school; the higher education from high school to college; and life-long education until death or adult education.

The primary goal of education for the first stage is to become a human. The basic behavior of human beings, such as the skillful use of hands, walk with legs, and, most importantly, speaking ability, will be developed by family members along with social behavior of how to associate with other members of the family and neighborhood. As the child enters the public school, the school provides the curriculum to become a member of Japanese society. The mandatory education (elementary through junior high school) is directly managed by the Ministry of Education and supervised by each city schoolboard and the administration of the prefecture office of education. Even though kindergarten and senior high school are not obligatory education, they became a part of the program under the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry of Education is a part of the Japanese governments system which is indirectly elected by a majority of the Japanese people. Therefore, the Japanese taxpayers' consensus is considerably reflected in the policy of Japanese government. The Ministry of Education organizes the committee consisting of education experts from kindergarten to university in addition to government officers for every educational statement. Under the new curriculum, the textbook companies make texts which satisfy the requirements of the Ministry of education. All the textbooks used in the public schools must have governments approval.

The Japanese government establishes what education Japanese citizen must have to become an ideal member of the society to assure prosperity of the nation. In a democratic country, however, education should not be limited by government policy. The freedom of ideas and rights of the individual person must not only be taught by teachers in the school as mere knowledge but also practiced by the children in their life. Those human rights will enrich the individual person's life. Furthermore, the education must develop the child to have self-esteem. The self-esteem leads a child to become independent. And, most importantly, the child will eventually achieve self-actualization to direct his life toward the future. The education should continue after

the institutionalized education either in the form of adult education or self-directed learning in the society until the end of life. The greatness of human beings is that everyone possesses potential. This democratic society allows everybody to develop their potentiality as far as they wish. School education is also responsible to bring up the child's potential according to their developmental ability.

What is Music Education at Present?

The latest statements of Japanese education principle takes note of social and economic change in both domestic and foreign affairs. In the last sixty years, the development of science, technology, and the economy have provided a richer materialistic life for the Japanese people. However, the escalation of the importance of the entrance examination to high school and college has isolated children from their classmates, and parents have forced the children to perform well at school. In the new family unit (parents and children), the children have lost the mental support which they used to get from their grandparents and neighbors. As a results, violence in schools and homes has increased, and cruelty among the child has led to a rapid increase in the suicide rate among teens. Children have become very much self-centered and competitive. In addition to what has been happening in the school and at home, mass-communication has introduced a vast amount of information along with diverse values through television, radio, magazines, and so forth.

The economic growth of Japan has encouraged Japanese people to associate with other countries more than ever. The internationalization of Japan has become a big issue of government policy. In contrast to the current prosperity of the nation, the dropping birth rate (1.37 children per family) and the increase of the old-age population (due to the improvement of life style and medical care) have begun to change the social structure. The government is faced with a new style of education, adult education.

Those social changes have influenced the 1989 statement of educational goals. The education committee announced four principles: (1) children should develop a strong and enquiring mind to live through life; (2) children should be able to adjust themselves to rapid social change and to motivate themselves to study; (3) children should develop basic knowledge and skill as a Japanese citizen along with nurturing individual uniqueness; and (4) children should learn how to live in international society and develop attitudes to respect own cultures and traditions.

The application of those principles to music education began with the teachers' education programs at universities before this new decree took effect. Some course works were added to the required courses to receive the teacher's education.

Ethnomusicology and the history of Japanese traditional music became a main concern of teacher's education. Emphasized areas on music education became clearly indicated. Learning the traditional Japanese music is a part of knowing the Japanese cultural heritage. The study of the world's music helps us understand the culture of other countries. Music has become tool to understand our own country and other nations. It does not differ from social studies. A misunderstanding of what music can do for children is that music allows a person to develop a rich and good personality. This decree expects music education to be responsible to do this under the name of aesthetic education.

The value of music in the school is also in the statement. This continuous entrance-examination system has turned music into leisure or entertainment time. The children need more time to study for entrance-exam subjects; therefore, the music-class hours for the eighth grade are reduced to one hour a week by this decree. There was no protest from any educational and civilian organizations except for the National University of Music Conference. The lack of understanding of school music education among the children, parents, and even among colleague teachers has made music a worthless subject. In today's society, music has become a part of the children's life. Music is everywhere. They do not need to go to school to learn music. They can even take private music lessons. The children know what kinds of music they like and when to listen to certain kinds of music. They have their own radio, CD, television, and MD in their room. They get up with music and study while listening music. They like to sing with karaoke with their friends. They can have a computer keyboard to compose their own music without knowing musical notation. If there are so many music activities that they enjoy in their private life, why should they learn music in school? What can they gain at school? What can school music offer them?

What Should Music Education Strive to Become in the Future?

A positive response to resolve the needs of the society and nation is a part of the educator's duty. The current problems have already suggested some goals and objectives to music teachers. However, teaching world music and Japanese traditional music merely provides information about music of the world. Learning world music must give an opportunity for children to understand how people of different cultures present music in its forms, what their music is expressing, and how music is used in that society. Each society contains its own value. Music reflects the value system of the society. Children should realize the different values, respect the differences of each culture, and then enjoy the differences and uniqueness of each culture. Children will

benefit from learning world music not only by expanding their ideas of music but also by changing their ideas of different values.

Music is one of the best subjects to unify people. The Japanese children who rise in the highly competitive society have achieved their own performance goals. By achieving their goals, they have acquired self-confidence. Performing and practicing with their classmates provide them an atmosphere of togetherness (a feeling of sharing the same experience) without even exchanging a word. They gain responsibility and self-respect as a member of the performance group and cooperate with and respect other members of the group. Excellence of performance is also one of the objectives of the music program, but participating in the music activities nurtures the social behavior which the children must acquire as members of society.

Besides the fulfillment of social requirements, the educators must pursue their own beliefs in their teaching. It is very important for the children to develop self-actualization. Knowing what you are comes from life-long learning. School education will be able to help build the self-actualization. Music education is the best way to achieve this educational goal by developing the individual potential of perceiving music.

To perceive the expressive quality of music, children must develop five stages of music-perceptual ability. Children should not be music idiots. They must know how to respond to music. At first, they may receive music as background music or entertainment. Next, the children will be able to respond to the music emotionally. This response needs to be developed through musical experiences within a culture because each culture presents its emotional experiences in a different form. The third level is where the knowledge about music helps the children to understand music better, such as the life of the composer, his or her philosophy, and the historical value of the composer's period. The fourth stage is the analytical ability of music. Analyzing the structure of music is more like reading the sentences of a foreign language. To understand a sentence, the child must know the meaning of each word and must understand grammar. Music learning also requires knowing how the elements of music (melody, rhythm, dynamics, harmony, tone color, texture, and form) are organized. Through analysis, the child will develop the ability to look at the music carefully, to evaluate, and to make judgements of the music. Unfortunately, this judgement of the music is not a true understanding of the music. It is still a process toward the final step. At the last stage of the musical experience, the children will be able to find the "THEME", what the composer expressed in the music. This is a similar process to finding the theme in a novel after reading it. However, the difference between music and a novel is that music offers a more complicated and abstract theme.

That is why music is the art of non-verbal communication.

Experience with music can be also compared with the Japanese tea ceremony. The tea ceremony is a part of Zen discipline. The disciples must master every step of the ritual procedure until their movements of the tea serving become natural. When they reach that stage, they will be able to concentrate on the ceremony without being conscious of what they have to do next; they call this “make themselves empty” , like the inside of a bamboo tree. Now they are ready to have “enlightenment” , the stage of knowing the truth of nature. Music is able to offer the same kind of experience. After the fourth stage, when children understand music, they will achieve enlightenment by experiencing the human potential to create such a great work. This is the aesthetic experience. Good music contains a lot of dimensions to be appreciated by different people; such as different musical experiences, ages, genre, cultures, and various life experiences.

At the very least, school music education should be able to offer an introduction to aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experience will be improved by enriching musical sensitivity which will be acquired through the five learning stages. The ultimate goal of all education is the search for the reason of human existence and of potential. Music educators should be proud of their profession.

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