

Cultural Transmission in Childhood Activities

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(平成2年10月11日受理)

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The development of the mass media continues to bring about changes in life-style and cultural preferences. The present paper is an inquiry into transmission of traditional culture through the medium of children's daily life and play, with a view to finding out ways to develop elements of traditional festivals into creative activities for kindergarten.

I : Case Study

§ Festival Amusement and Children

Amusement is both part and parcel of daily life and also an essential function of culture in society. It may be defined as a voluntary action or activity perceived as something distinct from ordinary daily routine.⁽¹⁾ Festivals also may be thought of as one form of amusement. Festivals, in which the tendency to rely on the power of language in performing ritual acts finds its most authentic outlet, are activities which create a substitute reality in imagination through dramatic expression in words or otherwise.⁽²⁾ Festivals in Japan have traditionally served as points of reference for the orderly passage of time in people's lives throughout the year. The social changes which have altered life-styles and living environment, however, have also left their mark on Japanese festivals, since the old social basis of festivals—a stable local population belonging as parishioners to a particular shrine—can no longer be taken for granted. For children, however, festivals still mean a release from the restrictions of daily life and an opportunity to be themselves freely without any restraint in the fictitious world of amusement created by the festival.⁽³⁾

During the *Ennichi*, the particular period consecrated to a Shinto or Buddhist deity, children are allowed to spend their pocket money freely without any control by their guardians. In discussing what to do with their elders, they temporarily assume an equal footing with the adults. Through this type of unhindered activity, youngsters can give lively expression to their true nature as children.⁽⁴⁾

Bon Festival dancing performed annually in the middle of either July or August is rooted in Buddhism and retains some of its original religious significance. From the late seventeenth century, however, attitudes toward the Bon dance changed gradually, and it

began to be held for the simple entertainment of the general public. For the dancing, people put on Japanese clogs and casual summer kimonos of cotton. The dancers often move in circles around a temporary platform.⁽⁵⁾

§ Applying Festival Activities to Education

The kindergarten where the present case study was made has for years held an annual summer event called *Evening Festival*. The program of this event calls for imitation hawkers' stalls like those on festival days and for Bon dancing and fireworks, all on the kindergarten grounds. The children can enjoy a play form of *Ennichi* at the imitation hawkers' stalls by and trying their luck at scooping up crawfish, tossing rings, or drawing lots. After this amusement, the children, their parents and their teachers make a circle around a tall platform where the type of big drum customary at festivals has been set up. They dance in accordance with choreography the children and one of the teachers have created complete with music.

Through the *Evening Festival*, the children are able to enjoy in the form of play various experiences associated with traditional festivals, and the children, parents, and teachers all gain from an opportunity to strengthen mutual contacts. Originally, these kinds of events and experiences had been available through the activities undertaken by the local community as a whole. The weakening of community ties characteristic of Japanese industrial society, however, makes it necessary to find a new focus for festive events. In the case of the *Evening Festival* a function of the local community has been taken over by a school district with little local character, since the kindergarten in question is part of a school affiliated with a university and draws its pupils from many different localities of the city. This example is part of a trend in which kindergarten and day care centers are emerging as setting for festivals of their own.

1 : The Bon Dance as Occasion for Children's Creative Activities

Teachers begin well ahead of time to get their charges interested in the *Evening Festival* each year by having them each make a Japanese fan. The project of making a fan is one of the curriculum activities in the summer. At the same time, the teachers let the children listen to the music and put them in the mood for dancing. Next, the children get to move spontaneously using their own fan in time with the music. A teacher encourages them to create their own unique movements, from among which she chooses elements to fit together into an organized dance sequence. After she puts the final touches on the choreography, the teacher has all the children of different age groups practice it together. In this way the stage is set for an event in which parents, teachers and children will all participate.

2 : Analysis of the Music for the Bon Festival Dance

Three pieces of music were used for the dancing in the year under study. In each case the source of the music was a TV cartoon program : *Oba Q*, *Ampman* and *Kyonshi*. The theme song from one program, *Oba Q*, is available as a dance number with the name *Oba Q Ondo*. In its normal usage *ondo* the conductor's role in leading a musical performance, but

in this case the word was used to refer to many people dancing together to the music.⁽⁶⁾ The following is an analysis of *Oba Q Ondo* which draws on the views of the late Fumio Koizumi, a music ethnologist and authority on Japanese traditional music whose theories on the scale structure, melody, and rhythm of Japanese music have gained wide acceptance. (1) Melody : All traditional Japanese folk music and children's songs, or *warabe-uta*, are based on the five-tone scale, and this is the scale utilized in *Oba Q Ondo* and *Kyonshi*, though not in *Anpan-man*. The five-tone scale is made up by omitting the fourth tone and the seventh tone of the European major or minor scales, which have seven tones and were brought into Japan about one hundred years ago. The five-tone scale may be considered a variation of the European scales which corresponds to the Japanese traditional scale.⁽⁷⁾ The five-tone scale based on the European major scale turns out to be the equivalent of the old Japanese *Ryo-scale*, which antedates western influence and is important in Japanese *Gagaku*, or court music.

オバ Q 音頭

採譜 森 きみえ

Q Q Q の Q Q Q の Q おば Q おんどで Q Q Q
 そらははれたし ホイおば Q なやみはな いしホイおば Q
 こころうきうき おつむもかるやか ホイおば Q クルクルー
 そらにQの字の そらにQの字の ちゅうが えりちゅうがえり
 おばけだ けだまけだーた まけだっ た のくーるくる

There are many fundamental principles of melodic movement in *warabe-uta*. One of the rules is that “a sequence involving two notes separated by a full tone is stopped on the upper note, and three notes in a melody in sequence are stopped on the middle note.”⁽⁸⁾ One could find example of this rule at several spots in the song under consideration. However, a sixth-interval with skipping rhythm (ㄱ) appears at several spots, and at the end of each phrase the melodies have a half cadence or a perfect cadence. Such characteristics indicate that the theme song in question was composed combining a European style of composition

and elements of *warabe-uta*.

(2) Rhythm : The principle governing the relationship between word and rhythm in *warabe-uta* is that each syllable of a word is, in general, assigned to one note. The Japanese seem originally to have had a feeling for two-beat rhythm, and typically, whether spoken or sung, a word in a song will be distributed to coincide with such a beat⁽⁹⁾ devices for matching syllables to two-beat rhythm include an initial pause before the lyrics join in and the repetition of a syllable or word.⁽¹⁰⁾ It is also possible to stretch out a short vowel into a long one.⁽¹¹⁾ Such devices are found at six points in *Oba Q Ondo*. The word *chūgaeri*, for example, has four syllables. The first syllable is long and is accordingly emphasized very effectively in the melody. In the case of the phrase *Hoi Oba Q!* the five syllables are assigned to two-beat rhythm by dividing them into two groups of two syllables (*Hoi*) and three syllables (*Oba Q*) respectively, a type of division very common in *warabe-uta*.⁽¹²⁾ To mark the beginning or end of a phrase, a note can be held longer at these points in *warabe-uta*,⁽¹³⁾ and this characteristic, too, is to be seen at the ends of phrases in *Oba Q Ondo*.

One of the important features of traditional Japanese folk songs is the absence, or very nearly so, of skipping rhythm.⁽¹⁴⁾ At times in a *warabe-uta* each syllable has an equal length in rhythm. When, however, singing is accompanied by movement, one natural result can be to alter the equal length of beats into something like skipping rhythm. This phenomenon can be found in, for example, songs for bouncing a ball, for tossing a beanbag, for jumping rope or for playing *jaken* (the game “scissors, paper, stone”).⁽¹⁵⁾ When confronted with a Japanese springing or skipping rhythm like (ㄱ), have tended to change it into (ㄴ) to sing or dance.⁽¹⁶⁾ The kindergarten children considered here love a skipping rhythm, so the *Oba Q Ondo* song would have the first note in a group of two emphasized and the first note would be held longer than the second one.

The points mentioned above make it reasonable to conclude that the song *Oba Q Ondo* possesses the characteristics of *warabe-uta*, with a basis of Japanese traditional music overlaid with some European influence.

3 : Analysis of Children's Dance Movements

Generally speaking, the fundamental gestures and postures, movements of hands, feet and bodies in traditional Japanese folk dance and performing arts have been adapted from the motions of farming. The movements of the hands and feet on one side of the body tend to be the reverse of those on the other side. If, for example, the right hand and the right foot are moved forward simultaneously, the left hand and the left foot are pulled back and take a position behind the right hand and foot.⁽¹⁷⁾ This is the sort of motion a farmer would make hoeing in the field, and it would also be seen when a samurai raised his sword and stepped forward.⁽¹⁸⁾ Furthermore, in Japanese dancing a shuffling motion is quite common, but running or leaping movements are rather rare.⁽¹⁹⁾ This feature also has its origins in motions of farming since a farmer in an irrigated rice field has to walk slowly and slid his feet along in the water. One other typical movement in Japanese folk dance is to extend the arms forward parallel to the ground or at an angle to it and to flutter them.⁽²⁰⁾

It is instructive to compare the traditional traits of folk dance outlined above with the movements of children dancing in the *Evening Festival*. These movements do show the Japanese habit of moving arms and legs on the same side of the body in unison in one direction while the limbs on the other side go in the opposite direction. Shuffling motions, however, are not very pronounced. The hands and arms are very active, stretching forward straight or at an angle, moving up or down, rising above the head or shifting to either side for clapping. The rhythmic pattern (γ | ♪ | ♪) made in the introductory section by the performer's hand tapping is a popular pattern in Japanese folk dance. The children are fond of tapping out this rhythm, which helps foster a sense of group togetherness when performed in unison.

Children are by nature energetic and active. Even when they are hampered by the accessories of dancing like the kimono, the clogs and the fans, they manage to incorporate in their performance such movements as jumping with both legs and skipping or kicking softly. In particular, such motions of theirs as turning on their axis, or gradually stooping down and then standing up are noteworthy because they are not found in traditional Japanese folk dance.⁽²¹⁾ These movements are valuable reminders of childrens' potential for unique, creative expression.

The traditional appurtenances of folk dance allow the children to assume a new role, one which strengthens their sense of ethnic identity. The kimono itself impresses this role on the children through visual stimulus, and the music through aural stimulus and motion. The heightened sense of ethnic identity in turn motivates the children for creating dance movements. The accessories of dancing thus perform an important service in inducing the children to dance.

II : Transmission of Traditional Culture

Generally speaking, not many children sing and play either the *warabe-uta* or traditional Japanese folk songs these days. The reports of music ethnographers, however, show⁽²²⁾ children still sing and play the *warabe-uta* outside in the street or on the playground in moments when parents or teachers don't observe their playing. According to Koizumi, the *warabe-uta* have kept some of the oldest elements and styles of Japanese traditional music, though their words, melodies and rhythms have been altered as children hear and sing them with no conscious attention to the melodies, rhythms, and meanings of the words in detail.⁽²³⁾ Concerning the scale and tonal structure, it would seem that older elements of the thirteenth through the nineteenth century remain in about 85% of *warabe-uta*, and about 15% of *warabe-uta* show the influence of European major and minor scale from the last one hundred years.⁽²⁴⁾ It is the commonly held opinion that the unique identity of the Japanese people has been preserved in Japan's folk music, *warabe-uta*, folk performing arts and ceremonial music and dance.⁽²⁵⁾

III : Conclusion

The multilayered nature of Japanese culture, the coexistence within it of different historical elements, is a fact often remarked on. Traditional music has been handed down as folk music, which conceals within itself very archaic forms. New music has thus been created not by destroying previous forms but by adding to them and superimposing upon them elements of imported culture.⁽²⁶⁾

One scholar has stated that “the existence of what can only be called trans-historical archetypes — or embedded patterns within the deepest levels of Japanese culture seems indisputable.⁽²⁷⁾ In the field of education Japanese teachers have to find ways to develop the trans-historical archetypes while at the same time creating a new culture. One of the ways to accomplish both these ends is to draw on festivals with a long history and on traditional performing arts, and to recreate them in the framework of music education from kindergarten on through the various levels of compulsory education to the end of junior high school.

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