

# Folk music: from local to national to global

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## 1. Introduction: folk song and folk performing arts

When the new word *min'yō* – literally 'folk song' – began to gain currency in Japan in the early twentieth century, many people were slow to grasp its intent. When a '*min'yō* concert' was advertised in Tokyo in 1920, some people bought tickets expecting to hear the music of the *nō* theatre, since the character used for *-yō* (謡) is the same as that for *nō* singing (*utai*); others, notably the police, took the element *min-* (民) in the sense given by the left-wing movement, anticipating a rally singing 'people's songs' (Kikuchi 1980: 43). In 1929 a music critic complained about the song *Tōkyō kōshinkyoku* (*Tokyo March*), which he called a *min'yō*. This was, however, not a 'folk song' but a Western-influenced tune written for a film soundtrack, with lyrics replete with trendy English (Kurata 1979: 338). The idea that a term was needed specifically to designate songs of rural pedigree, songs of the 'folk', was slow to catch on. In traditional Japan boundaries between rural songs of various sorts and the kinds of popular songs discussed in the preceding chapter were rarely clear. The 'folk' themselves had a simple and ancient native term for their ditties: *uta*, 'song'; modifiers were prefixed as needed (for example *taue uta*, 'rice-planting song').<sup>1</sup>

The modern concept of 'the folk' springs from the German Romantics. The term *Volkslied*, coined by Herder in 1775, appeared in English as 'folk song' in the mid-1800s and reached Japan by around 1890 as *min'yō* (with the attendant intellectual baggage of Romanticism). The word is a Sino-Japanese compound, written in Chinese characters (*min* 'folk, the people'; *yō* 'song') – the equivalent of English neologisms made from Latin or Greek elements, and with a similar scholarly flavour. Various terms for folk or rural song have existed over the centuries, but only *min'yō* survives.

Today the concept of 'folk music' is covered by two terms familiar to most Japanese: *min'yō* and its partner *minzoku geinō*, generally translated as 'folk

1 For further detail on all matters discussed in this chapter, see Hughes 2007, *Traditional folk song in modern Japan*.

performing arts'. Although the latter term emerged only around 1958, the concept of a unified class of folk performing arts dates from the 1920s and the birth of the field of folklore. A common cover term used in those days was *kyōdo geinō*, 'rural performing arts'.

## 1.1 Definitions

In defining *min'yō*, Japanese scholars have generally drawn on criteria similar to those used to define 'folk song' in the West (with the same problems), and these are primarily non-musical. Asano Kenji felt that the following typical definition should be adequate for most purposes and also reflected the condition of 'current *min'yō*' (1966: 41–3):

[*Min'yō are*] songs which were originally born naturally within local folk communities and, while being transmitted aurally, [have continued to] reflect naively the sentiments of daily life. [emphasis added]

'Naturally' (*shizen ni*), wrote Asano, implies that *min'yō* are not the product of specialist lyricists or composers but spring up 'like nameless flowers ...' 'Local' (*kyōdo*) signifies that local colour inheres somewhere within every *min'yō*; if it is lost, the song 'has fallen into the lowest class of popular song (*hayari-uta*)'. 'Naively' (*soboku ni*) was a compliment, for Asano felt that 'in naïveté lies the essence of *min'yō*'. Needless to say, artless simplicity is a romantic notion: as elsewhere, many Japanese folk songs were carefully and consciously crafted.

Similar emphases on oral transmission and communal creation or selection are found in early Western definitions of 'folk music' (for example Cecil Sharp in 1907, the International Folk Music Council in 1955). The concept of oral/aural transmission (*denshō*) as distinct from written transmission was European, little remarked in Japan until the Meiji period since virtually *all* traditional Japanese musics had been transmitted primarily aurally.

Despite European influences, some aspects of Asano's definition reflect specifically Japanese attitudes. Most important, the stress on the 'local' nature of folk song relates to the highly valued concept of the *furusato* or native place – literally, 'the old village'. A stock phrase since around 1950 is *Min'yō wa kokoro no furusato*, 'Folk song is the heart's home town'. Much more than in the West, the Japanese link their folk songs with a small district or indeed a single community. This focus is not recent: many of the *hayari-uta* discussed in Chapter 11 take their titles from their assumed place of origin, as with *Itako bushi*. Ironically, though, this stress on local identification seems to have increased even during the emergence of a strong, relatively homogeneous national culture in the Meiji period. As the accelerated population shifts associated with modernization carried songs to new localities, it became common to tack a place name onto the front of the original title in order to assert pride of ownership, to attract tourists or merely so scholars and performers could distinguish, say, the 'Wedding Song from Miyagi Prefecture' (*Miyagi nagamochi uta*) from the one from Akita. Today, most well-known *min'yō* have titles beginning with the name of the community, prefecture or pre-modern

province of origin; this may be followed by an old-style name based on lyrics or function, or simply by a word such as *uta*, *bushi* or *ondo*, all basically meaning 'song' or 'melody'. A song from the old post-town of Oiwake in central Japan was called *Oiwake bushi*, but after migrating to Esashi in the far north it was eventually renamed *Esashi oiwake (bushi)* as that town claimed possession of its new version. (Such titles, however, disguise intralocal variation.)

As for *minzoku geinō*, different subtypes vary considerably in musical and other features. Allowing, therefore, for numerous exceptions, a definition embracing most varieties would include the criteria given above for *min'yō* but add others, still extramusical:

1. *Minzoku geinō* are often connected with religion in the broad sense.
2. Performances occur at fixed times and places, on traditionally sanctioned occasions.
3. Participation is often linked to criteria such as residence, family, age, class and gender.
4. The performance must be presented exactly as it 'always' has been.
5. And yet, practice sessions are held only during the weeks immediately preceding the event, virtually guaranteeing alterations over the years.
6. Aesthetic considerations are secondary to correctness of performance.
7. Ties with the past are maintained through tangible items such as costumes, instruments (often clearly dated), scrolls and genealogies.
8. The performers/transmitters are amateurs.

Although *min'yō* is often treated as a subclass of *minzoku geinō* – one in which song is particularly central – the majority of what are today called *min'yō* lack most of these traits. Given the musical differences as well, these two genres are treated separately below.

Ironically, even as the term *min'yō* has gained currency, and as a genre of that name has taken discrete form during the past half-century, fewer and fewer Japanese are familiar with their rich heritage of folk song. *Minzoku geinō* have fared rather better in some ways. Reasons for these developments are discussed below.

Tracing the early history of Japanese 'folk music' would be an unhelpful diversion in this short chapter. In any case, in pre-urban times virtually all music outside the imperial and shogunal courts was folk music by some definition. With the rise of major cities such as Ōsaka and Edo (Tokyo) from the seventeenth century, the distinction between urban and rural genres becomes somewhat clearer, though still obscured by frequent interactions between town and countryside. For ease of exposition, we will assume that rural Japan from, say, the seventeenth to the nineteenth century presented a fairly uniform 'folk' music life which had changed only incrementally over preceding centuries: the word 'traditional', however flawed, will indicate this world. In some ways the changes triggered by modernization and Westernization since the Meiji period have been less in terms of musical elements than in performance context and extra-musical significance. For example, folk song and the folk performing arts in 1800 could hardly have served as a focus for nostalgia or nationalism as they might in more recent times; nor would there have been a need for 'preservation societies' for work songs that had lost their original

function; nor was folk music much involved with tourism. Let us now attempt to characterize the world of traditional *min'yō*.

## 2. The nature of 'traditional' folk song

The traditional rural community needed music for many occasions. The richer landowners' daughters might study the *koto*, and in exceptional cases villagers even performed *nō* or *kabuki*, but the typical resident of an agricultural, fishing or mountain village instead sang what we now call *min'yō*: work songs to coordinate efforts or simply to distract from the exertion; dance songs for the ancestral (O-) Bon festival; songs for relaxation in the evenings over *sake*, for weddings or other special occasions.

As villagers travelled – for pilgrimages, seasonal labour migration, even for tourism – they carried songs back and forth. Professional itinerant musicians also brought new songs. Thus the village repertoire was in constant flux. And since lyrics were rarely written down, and melodies never, oral transmission and natural creativity led to continual variation as well. Songs such as the *Haiya bushi* family have been traced all over Japan, carried and varied by the above processes (Machida 1965). Folk lyrics (not significantly different in nature from those of the West) sometimes give us hints about contexts of transmission. A verse from a precious 1825 text collection of 'farming songs' from Awaji (*Awaji Nōka*) exults: 'I learned it! I learned *Shonga bushi* last year, in Tsukue, at the construction site.' *Shonga bushi* was a *hayari-uta*-turned-*min'yō* which the singer learned from co-workers while working away from home. Those who could afford it also learned songs in geisha houses on their travels. The geisha often added *shamisen* accompaniment to village songs and otherwise dressed them up; their contribution to today's *min'yō* repertoire is often undervalued or decried by purists.

As village singer Itō Moyo (1901–2002) stressed to me, a good voice was not required for work songs in particular: what mattered was that someone or other could muster enough songs and verses to pass the time, until suddenly the sun had set and your workday was over. Instrumental accompaniment was also not necessary, though welcomed when available. Renowned singer Asari Miki (b. 1920), who travelled with professional troupes from the mid-1930s, recalled that in her impoverished northern region most villages had one or two people who could strum a *shamisen* to at least keep the beat; in more prosperous areas near large cities, more talented players abounded. Drums and bamboo flutes were common, *shakuhachi* less so.

As in most cultures, attitudes toward musicians were ambivalent. One who spent too much time performing was seen as a *dōrakumono*, a pleasure-bent wastrel. Feudal lords too were ambivalent: singing kept the peasants happy – even protest songs might defuse tension – but too much song and dance could distract from productivity and lower tax revenue; thus one lord forbade any but the richest residents to dance during the transplanting and harvest seasons (Seshaiah 1980: 67).

As late as the 1980s, I found that older countryfolk often felt that the word *min'yō* – which had come from outside – only described folk songs from *outside* their community: their own local songs were just 'songs' (*uta*). The creation of a self-conscious 'folk song world' (*min'yō-kai*), with local songs increasingly treated almost as art songs, is the theme of our next section.

### 3. Folk song modernizes: social and contextual changes

The state of affairs described above faded gradually from the 1890s to the 1950s, giving way first to a 'folk song world' of artists and aficionados and finally to a fully-fledged national industry. The re-opening of long-isolated Japan to the outside world in the mid-nineteenth century led to a frantic period of modernization and Westernization. By the mid-twentieth century, a country that had recently been 90 per cent rural had become 80 per cent urban, and Japanese for the first time could easily see themselves as citizens of a nation-state united by the media, a common education system and various national symbols. At the same time, many urbanized Japanese have clung to, or rediscovered, the benefits of belonging to a smaller-scale community. Today, though, even the local community may have to be 'imagined' (in Benedict Anderson's sense) and constructed, so that people can be 're-embedded', relocated in a comfortable and comforting 'place'. Japanese now call this process *furusato-zukuri*, 'constructing a native place' (see Robertson 1991). Folk music has a role to play in these processes, with both traditional and 'new' folk songs and performing arts being mobilized in the construction of community and identity at both local and national levels.

Unlike Western-style jazz, pop and classical music in Japan, decisions in the folk song world owe little to transnational forces – to the impact of Appadurai's new 'scapes': mediascape, technoscape, ethnoscape, finanscape, ideoscape (1996). We shall touch on processes of globalization in the final section, but the developments discussed directly below are, despite considerable outside influence, basically of domestic origin.

Here are listed some of the more significant developments impacting Japanese folk song in the past century. Many of these relate directly to the removal of *min'yō* from their original contexts.

1. Deracinated new urbanites often turned to songs from their *furusato* for solace, thus giving much greater importance to one traditional function of *min'yō*.
2. Urbanization also led to *min'yō* being much more often heard in the cities than in the countryside. As people from various regions met in the city, regional distinctions weakened, creating a sizeable common consumer base of rural origin for *min'yō*.
3. Cut off geographically from their roots, rural songs found new performance contexts in the cities: in theatres, folk song bars and so forth. Freed from specific traditional uses, *min'yō* began to be looked at more as a kind of classical music whose primary function was entertainment.

4. This led to the birth of a new profession: the folk song teacher. A renowned singer could become the self-designated head (*iemoto*, *sōke*) of a new 'school' (*ryū*) of *min'yō*, modelled on the transmission structure of more respected genres (Chapter 1, §4).
5. This in turn led to standardization and to a certain degree of notation (at least for instrumental accompaniment): after all, if there were no 'right' way to perform, what could a teacher teach?
6. A new profession was recognized, freed from itinerancy: *min'yō kashu*, 'folk singer'.
7. Leading artists gathered in the cities, the loci of the recording and broadcast industries which increasingly provided work for them. (Commercial recordings date from the start of the twentieth century, radio from 1926.)
8. Full-time specialization, enabled by the commodification of *min'yō*, led to increased virtuosity and complexity of accompaniment. Soon there were 'schools' for folk *shakuhachi*, *shamisen*, percussion, even for backup singers.
9. To gain respect, performers strove for dignification, to overcome the traditional image of the professional musician as a *dōrakumono* wastrel. Bawdy lyrics and performing while drunk, both once common, were now frowned upon. Wearing formal traditional dress when performing was encouraged.
10. *Min'yō* contests became common, and judges came to expect considerable standardization of interpretation. Contestants thus were further driven to teachers.
11. Several of the above factors combined to reduce elements of local colour such as dialect pronunciation and specific instrumentation. A professional might now have a repertoire of hundreds of songs from all over Japan, rather than a few dozen mostly local songs.

All of the above developments were linked to urbanization, although they also affected rural communities to some degree. Meanwhile, back in the countryside, mechanization made most work songs redundant: there was no longer any need to coordinate group movements, and anyhow you could not hear yourself over the machinery. Thus such songs could only survive, if at all, in new contexts, as we will see in §5.

#### 4. Musical elements of *min'yō*

Traditional *min'yō* performances (finances, expertise and context permitting), and modern-day stage performances as well, draw on a small range of instruments, mostly described in previous chapters. For stage performances, all of these accompanying roles are likely to fall to specialists.

- The *shamisen* takes numerous forms in *min'yō*. A robust, heavy-bodied 'thick-necked' (*futozao*) version is widely found in *min'yō* today (see Figure 12.1) but perhaps best suits the powerful styles of northern Japan. It is often called *tsugaru-jamisen* (*-jamisen* = combining form of *shamisen*), being particularly



Figure 12.1 Folk song bar Yoshiwa in Osaka, with typical ensemble – from left: *taiko* (behind screen to reduce volume), *shakuhachi*, two *shamisen*. This singer is a professional, but customers also take turns singing with the ‘house band’. Photo Gina Barnes 1978

favoured to accompany the powerful songs of the old Tsugaru region of Aomori Prefecture in the far north; a solo *shamisen* genre of this name has spun off from such accompaniment, of which more below. Differences from the thick-necked instrument of *bunraku* puppet theatre include, for example, a lighter and lower bridge and thinner-tipped plectrum (to facilitate the rapid, highly ornamented plucking of the northern style) and a much thinner treble string (giving a delicate sound contrasting with the thundering bass string). The ‘thin-necked’ (*hosozao*) variety of the geisha or *kabuki nagauta* is also widely used in *min’yō*, especially for songs more associated with the geisha. The intermediate-size *chūzao* provides a useful compromise. Tuning is as for other genres.

- The *shakuhachi*, little used in village contexts, is now common and indeed is the only accompaniment for most songs in free rhythm (for example © track 25). It shadows the vocal line and provides interludes. Professionals today may carry ten or more *shakuhachi* tuned a semitone apart, to suit each singer’s range (transposition being difficult).

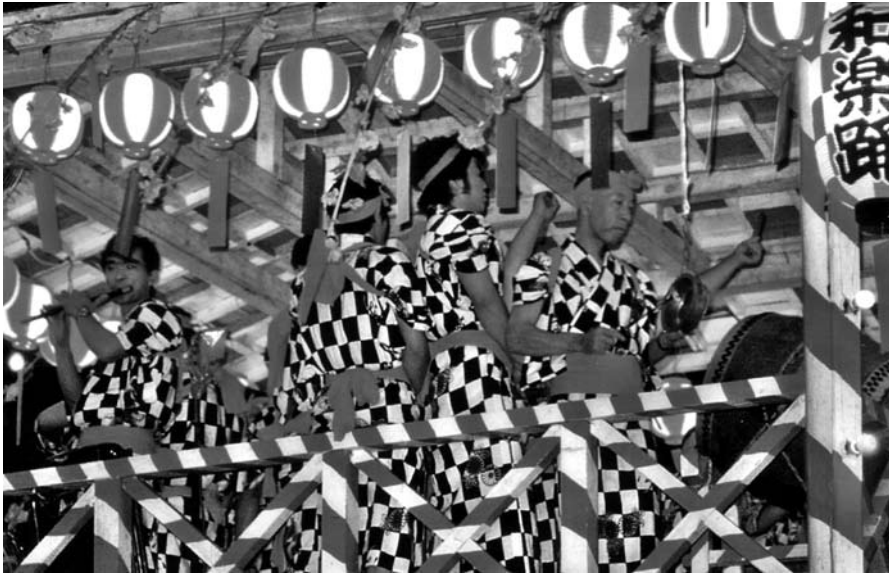


Figure 12.2 Musicians for Bon dance *Nikkō waraku odori*. Instruments: left: *shinobue* flute; right: *kane* hand-gong, with *taiko* drum behind. Photo D. Hughes 1980

- The transverse (side-blown) flute *fue* (more formally called *shinobue* or *takebue*, ‘bamboo flute’) is generally favoured over *shakuhachi* for dance music, especially for the songs of the Bon festival (see Figure 12.2).
- Several kinds of *taiko* barrel-shaped stick-drums are common. The laced-head *shimedaiko* is similar to that of *nō* and *kabuki*, but with thinner sticks. The *hiradaiko* is a shallow tacked-head drum resembling a less elaborate version of the *tsuri-daiko* of *gagaku*, played horizontally for stage performances. Larger tacked-head barrel drums also occur, particularly for Bon dance tunes. A small hand-gong, *kane* or *surigane*, is also common (see Figure 12.2).
- Other instruments crop up occasionally, often linked with particular songs, styles or regions: the bowed *kokyū*, *kotsuzumi* hand-drum, *binzasara* clappers and yet others.

Further vocal support is provided by *kakegoe*, rhythmic but non-melodic shouts crucial to a song’s feeling, or by *hayashi(-kotoba)*, melodic refrains (© track 27).

Musically, several features of *min’yō* deserve mention:

- Metre: 2/4 predominates, but a sort of 6/8 appears especially in dance pieces, in the form of long-short-long-short. Triple metre is virtually absent. Free rhythm is, however, very common for songs that do not accompany rhythmic activity; today such songs are often called *takemono*, ‘bamboo pieces’, as



*shakuhachi* is their standard accompaniment. Certain tunes from Tsugaru have *shamisen* rhythms with more complex durational ratios, vexing scholars using staff notation (for example *Tsugaru aiya bushi*, ◉ track 28).

- Traditionally, *min'yō* were sung solo, in unison, or by a leader with a responding group. The choice usually depended on context; thus, rhythmic work songs generally had a single lead singer (who might be absolved from working and might even be paid), with a responsorial part for the workers, who might be too winded to sing constantly anyhow. In modern stage performance, however, there is always a single soloist, with two or three backing singers as necessary.
- Heterophony (Chapter 1, §6) is the rule, with all melodic parts following the vocal closely; the *shamisen* part may diverge somewhat, mostly due to coping with the fast decay of a plucked note. There are three principal exceptions. First, the *shamisen* part may feature passages of drone-like chords (for example sections of ◉ track 27). Second, there may be a *shamisen* counter-melody as well; the song *Yasugi bushi* regularly features this. Third, the *fue* may repeat a short phrase throughout, unrelated to the vocal; this is quite common in Bon dance songs. The famous *Sado okesa* combines three different melodic lines at once: the vocal; a repeated *shamisen* motif; and a longish flute line that may or may not be in the same mode and key as the others but is otherwise melodically independent.
- Voice quality varies with function, context, mood and alcohol consumption. Intimate, wistful songs of the geisha parlour contrast with more boisterous dance ditties of the same context; group work or dance songs needed a powerful voice. Rough edges were traditionally welcomed: fans still often cherish a voice that is *tsuchikusai*, 'reeking of the earth'.
- *Min'yō* fans take great pride in intricate ornamentation (*kobushi*, 'little melodies') – scorning Western folk song for supposedly lacking this. *Kobushi* are given fullest rein in free-rhythm songs and in northern songs.
- Text setting is quite free. Amid much diversity, the most common structure is four lines of 7, 7, 7 and 5 syllables. Verses of non-narrative songs tend not to follow in fixed order and can thus often move freely between songs. Japanese is neither tonal nor stress-accented, meaning that lyrics can fit into a new tune with little concern for pitch or rhythm.
- Pentatonic scales/modes dominate (see Chapter 1, §6 for general discussion of scales and modes). No folk terms exist, but what scholars call the 'folk song scale' (*min'yō onkai*), sometimes called the *yō* mode, is common in *min'yō* and rare elsewhere in Japan. It has roughly the same intervals as the black keys on a piano. Various scale degrees might assume prominence as cadential pitches – there is no single 'tonic' and thus no single mode. The same intervals characterize the *ritsu* mode, also common in *min'yō*, which is more clearly defined as to nuclear pitches. The 'urban tune scale' (*miyakobushi onkai*), sometimes called the *in* mode, is less common; its semitones sometimes produce a sadder, darker, 'minor' feeling.

However, flexible intonation of subsidiary pitches makes classification thorny. What all of these modes have in common (Chapter 1, §6) is a structure of linked

fourths with a variable infix; that is, two pitches a fourth apart form a relatively fixed frame, and one other, auxiliary note of variable pitch occurs within that fourth. (As in the Western melodic minor, this auxiliary may take two clearly distinct forms in ascent and descent.) Linking two such frameworks disjunctly forms an octave scale. As in other genres, folk musicians tend towards precise intervals between the framing pitches, but variation of the auxiliary tones means that a single song as sung by two singers in a village, or even different passages of a single rendition by one singer, may seem to veer between *ritsu* and *miyako-bushi* or *min'yō* or indeed fall somewhere in between. Today's professionals, raised in an age of Western music influence, tend to follow Western intervals closely, except that the downward leading tones of the *in* mode are, as usual, often flattened somewhat.

## 5. Folk song today

The past half-century has seen several so-called 'folk song booms' (*min'yō būmu*). The most recent major one was launched in 1978 by the NHK-TV programme *Min'yō o anata ni* ('Folk song for you') and its vibrant young stars Kanazawa Akiko and Harada Naoyuki. Aiming at the widest possible audience, the programme presented *min'yō* in a variety of forms, three of which are described below: what are often called 'traditional', 'stage' and 'new' folk songs. Additionally, the programme often added dance-band accompaniment supplemented by a few traditional instruments. Crucially to the 'boom', Kanazawa, an attractive and perky woman of 20, often performed in blue jeans rather than kimono, while the suave Harada sometimes wore a casual Western jacket and tie, showing young people that *min'yō* was not ineluctably old-fashioned.

### 5.1 'Traditional' (*dentō*) folk songs

By this phrase I mean those that are still performed largely as they might have been before modernity. This would include many Bon dance songs: one or more singers plus accompanists perform atop a short tower (Figure 12.2) while the community dances around them. Often the only significant change is the addition of amplification. Accompaniment might be only a single drum or just the dancers' handclaps. These songs survive because the context survives: O-Bon is a major national holiday, and dancing is its central feature.

However, many songs that largely preserve their sonic aspects have lost their original function. A work song that survives in something like its original form does so only through the conscious efforts of a 'preservation society' (*honzonkai*). These proliferated especially in the latter twentieth century, largely in response to folkloric nostalgia or to more active fears that traditional values are dying in the face of Westernization and modernization. Most *honzonkai* are community-based and 'preserve' only one cherished local song.

In Hokkaido in the far north, several towns or villages have formed *honzonkai* to pass on a suite of songs which accompanied stages in herring fishing in the days

before mechanization: rowing, manual net-hauling and so on. Each community's version is slightly different. One song in the suite is commonly known as *Sōran bushi* after its primary vocable *sōran* (Example 12.1; ☉ track 26; see Hughes 2001a). Its only 'accompaniment' was the sound of the wooden handles of the large hand-nets striking the ship's gunwales. *Hozonkai* members strive to capture the original vocal style, in aid of which they may act out, with gestures and perhaps some props, the original herring-netting process (now a half-century gone).

Another *min'yō* from the same far northern region is *Esashi oiwake* (☉ track 25). Its recent history encapsulates many of the trends in the *min'yō* world (see Hughes 1992). *Esashi* was once a booming fishing and shipping port, its population swollen by seasonal labourers. When the herring vanished from the area with startling finality in 1900, even as a new railroad line for freight and tourists bypassed the town, *Esashi* officials were desperate to attract domestic tourists to regain some of the lost income. It was decided that *Esashi oiwake*, always popular with visitors, could be used in an unofficial countrywide advertising campaign. Blinded by Japanese and Western classical music practice, the officials decided that it was first necessary that the most famous singers agree to sing only one standard version, since surely there had been only one version in the golden past! This profound ignorance of the 'folk process' had its effect over several decades. Since 1963 the town has hosted an annual national contest in which hundreds of contestants each sing *Esashi oiwake* as identically as possible, down to the number of notes in a trill. This rigid standardization (taught via a unique notation; see Figures 12.3–4) has led many to call this a *koten min'yō* – a 'classical folk song' – or to deny that it is a *min'yō* at all. Nonetheless, the entire *min'yō* world has followed its lead: standardization of individual songs has become the rule. Moreover, there are now over a hundred single-song national contests hosted by communities around Japan to attract tourists and build local pride; often two nearby communities 'preserve' and champion their own competing variants of a song.

Even these 'traditional' songs have, of course, changed over the years along with society as a whole. Most notably, sexually explicit lyrics are now taboo (in public, that is), and improvisation has virtually vanished except for the selecting of verses from pre-existing lyrics. But the basic musical parameters of mode, metre, ornamentation and so forth survive unchanged.

## 5.2 *Sutêji* (stage) *min'yō*

This widely used phrase is perhaps misleading, as it describes the performance practice not only of professionals in concert but also of the typical amateur student, who may only sing on the small platform at the front of a folk song bar (*min'yō sakaba*; Figure 12.1). The term implies a specific mode of presentation of 'traditional' songs which is by far the most likely form in which *min'yō* are heard today and thus a model for aspiring singers. All 'stage *min'yō*' are accompanied according to a standard format. Metric songs feature *shamisen*, supplemented in most cases by *shakuhachi* (or *shinobue* for Bon dance songs) with percussion as needed. Free-metre songs use *shakuhachi* only, perhaps joined by the shaking of small horse-bells for

Example 12.1 Verses from three versions of *Sōran bushi* by local amateurs (from CD set *Fukkoku: Nihon min'yō taikan*, Hokkaidō II, tracks 10, 12, 13). M1 is from Mikuni, T1 and 3 from Tairo, F1 and 2 from Furuhiro. Verse lyrics are omitted. Originals were sung a minor 7th to a major 9th lower. Transcriptions by David Hughes and Jane Alaszewska



Figure 12.3 Teaching *Esashi oiwake* at the Esashi Oiwake Kaikan museum. Photo D. Hughes 1998

a pack-horse driver's song, or by a device to imitate the creaking of an oar in its housing for a rowing song. A solo singer stands centre-stage, with backup singers behind if necessary.

Little attempt is made to match a song's stage style to its original function or context. A given singer wears the same clothes and uses nearly the same vocal quality for songs of any type from anywhere. For *Esashi oiwake*, the traditional and stage versions are virtually identical, save for the enforced standardization. *Sōran bushi*, however, like other work songs, underwent major changes (© track 27). It is now, as are all songs, performed by either male or female singers, though women were banned from the herring boats and thus also from today's preservation societies. And of course it is always accompanied, by *shamisen*, winds and percussion. It is re-arrangements such as this that cause some to claim that there are no *min'yō* anymore, no true folk songs.

*Hozonkai* members often resent the modifications wrought on their treasured local songs by professionals. The latter, meanwhile, sometimes speak scornfully (or defensively) of *hozonkai min'yō*, implying that preservation society renditions are less than skilled or interesting.

### 5.3 'New folk songs'

This translates the phrase *shin-min'yō*. Obviously all *min'yō* were once new, but the conscious production of new pieces in a folksy mood dates from the early twentieth



Figure 12.4 Opening of *Esashi oiwake*: official notation; sonogram; staff transcription. (From Hughes 1992: Figure 5)

century, under Romantic inspiration (Hughes 1991; CD *Tōkyō ondo*, 1997). The older style, flourishing during the 1920s and '30s, was mobilized for social engineering (see below), for local pride and rivalry, and for tourism advertising. Hundreds were produced, most commissioned by a local community or perhaps a railroad company. Thus the lyrics – usually by urban-based poets – touted local products or scenic spots. Both lyrics and tunes were relatively close to traditional dance songs, using a simple 2/4 or 6/8 metre and traditional modes. Vocal style was relatively traditional, although sometimes a singer trained in *bel canto* would be hired to imitate a folk-style voice (this is better imagined than heard!). Accompaniment mixed traditional and Western instruments, suiting the evolving musical tastes of a new Japan. Some of these songs are integrated into today's standard *min'yō* repertoire – such as *Chakkiri bushi*, ironically the only well-known *min'yō* from Shizuoka prefecture – but most are never heard.

Since the 1970s, we find a second wave of 'new folk songs'. Accompaniment and vocal style are little altered, but two major changes have occurred. First, the traditional musical modes have been replaced by the 'pentatonic major' and occasionally the 'pentatonic minor' (Chapter 1, §6), which sound superficially traditional but

♩ = 126

F

ma - ru - i chi - kyū ni su - mi - na - ga -

C7 F B<sup>b</sup> C7 F B<sup>b</sup>

ra shi - ka - ku - ba - ru no wa wa - ru -

F d

i ku - se se - ka - i ko - ku - jū ga mi - na to - na - ri

F a B<sup>b</sup> C7 F d C7 F

u - chū ryō - kō mo yu - me ja na - i [ha - na no ni - - - ppo - -

d C7

n ha - na no ni - p - po - n sa no yo - i yoi Shō - wa O - n -

F d C F

do de yo - yo - i no yo - yo - i - no sa no yo - i yoi

Example 12.2 *Shōwa ondo* (transcribed from Japan Victor 45 rpm disc; music Yoshikawa Shizuo, lyrics Yoshida Masashi)

have placed their ‘tonic’ so as to allow easy Western-style harmonization. Second, whereas almost all early *shin-min’yō* started their titles with a place-name, this new wave overwhelmingly bore titles that could embrace all Japanese and even perhaps position them in the world community, appropriately to their new self-image: *Peace Song, Happiness Song, Young Folks’ Drum*. Lyrics teem with a new vocabulary of modernistic optimism: peace, hope, world, spring, young, prosperity, future, tomorrow, cheerful, dream. An example is *Shōwa ondo* (© track 29; Example 12.2). Recorded in 1981 (during the Shōwa era), it uses the pentatonic major and – as for virtually all recent *shin-min’yō* – a danceable 6/8 metre. Verse 1 reminds Japanese that they must have an international, indeed universal conscience: ‘Living on this round earth, it’s a bad habit to be a ceremonious square. All nations of the earth are neighbours – even space travel is not a dream.’ By the final verse, however, national identity has re-asserted itself via potent clichés: ‘Mt Fuji, cherry blossoms, you and I, all those unforgettable moments. This is the country where we were born and raised – let’s all keep the lamp of hope burning!’ These lyrics express perfectly the dilemma of Japanese today. The music does the same, striving to be both Japanese and international (that is, Western).

This second wave of *shin-min'yō*, however, are virtually never sung live again once recorded: they are heard only via recordings played at the ancestral festival, added to or replacing the traditional Bon dance songs, and at folk dance classes for middle-aged women (where the music is the least important factor). Folk singers have not embraced them.

Despite the best efforts of *min'yō* supporters, young folk-inclined Japanese have gradually given up *min'yō* for the genre called *fōku songu* – the English word 'folk song' pronounced *à la japonaise*. Accompanied by Western folk instruments such as guitar and banjo, this style descends directly from professional American performers of the 1950s and after. The *fōku songu* world in Japan, unlike in the West, has absolutely no overlap of style or personnel with traditional song: it appeals to the more Westernized Japanese who find *min'yō* hard going, old-fashioned and irrelevant.

A degree of social engineering is found in the folk performing arts. Space allows only a few examples.

1. In the 1700s the government encouraged the spread of the festival music *Kasai-bayashi* in order to reduce juvenile delinquency (Honda 1964: 19).
2. Since 1914 a copper refining company in the city of Nikkō (Tochigi Prefecture) has sponsored a Bon dance for its employees to increase morale – and productivity (Figure 12.2).
3. Some of the first *shin-min'yō* of the 1920s were commissioned by textile factory owners to provide their young female employees with more morally suitable songs than the bawdy ones they had brought from home.
4. After the Second World War, the *Sankei Shinbun* newspaper and the Kinkan insect-bite salve company began independently to sponsor *min'yō* contests and concerts, because their presidents believed that *min'yō* could contribute to Japan's spiritual revival in the difficult postwar years in ways that other musics could not. Sorting out moral considerations from financial self-interest is difficult in such cases, of course.

## 6. Modern-day folk performing arts

The scholarly term *minzoku geinō* covers a huge range of performance types. Performance settings are also diverse: before Shinto altars, in Buddhist temple courtyards, in rice paddies, on temporary stages, even door-to-door. In Kuryūzawa hamlet, Iwate Prefecture, in 1981, I observed the *hibuse matsuri*, a ceremony involving a 'lion dance' being performed door-to-door to protect newly built houses from fire. Four of the five dancers were children, who had to be bribed into participating by their parents, in the interests of preservation of tradition. Figure 12.5 shows a 'deer dance' (*shishi odōri*) from the same hamlet, with the dancer-drummers attractively scattered over the rice fields for a television broadcast (note the artificially posed daffodils in front of the announcer).

Honda Yasuji, from 1960 onwards, developed a typology followed by most scholars (summarized in Thornbury 1997: 14ff.). *Kagura* are performances entreating





Figure 12.5 *Shishi odori* being televised, Kuryūzawa, Iwate Prefecture. Photo D. Hughes 1981

native deities to grant prosperity and long life; many items in this large and diverse category present stories from Shinto mythology. *Dengaku*, 'rice-paddy music', covers events linked to rice agriculture, from re-enactments of the entire annual cycle to guarantee a good crop, to music for ritual transplanting of seedlings (for example © track 30; example also at the end of the film *The Seven Samurai*). *Furyū* are mostly large-scale events held in summer (including Bon dances), again asking or thanking the gods for assistance; many festivals (*matsuri*) centre around them. Others of Honda's subtypes encompass local versions of classical music-theatre and so forth. However, his categories are not watertight, particularly in terms of musical elements.

Most *minzoku geinō* employ some of the following instruments, though names vary locally: transverse flutes (*shinobue* type, rarely *nōkan*); various stick drums (*taiko* of diverse types, *okedō*, *daibyōshi* and so on); and either cymbals (*chappa*) or hand-gongs (called *kane*, *chanchiki* and so on). *Shamisen* is rare, *shakuhachi* rarer. Other percussion may occur, such as *binzasara* clappers and *surizasara* scrapers. Compared with *min'yō*, variety seems endless; the 36-CD set with book, *Fukukoku: Nihon no minzoku ongaku*, gives examples of all types. Several of each type of instrument may be used in a single performance, whereas in *min'yō* only the *shamisen* is normally thus treated.

As in *min'yō*, 2/4 and 6/8 metre and heterophony predominate; free rhythm is far less common. Pentatonic modes are usual, with *ritsu* much in evidence and *in*

uncommon except where urban influence is strong. However, intonation is far less standardized than *min'yō*, let alone other Japanese musics. This is partly because most folk flutes are locally made, often with holes spaced equidistantly. Whereas *shakuhachi* finger-holes are also often equidistant, players generally adjust certain pitches by embouchure; folk flutists do not do this. Since many pieces lack vocals (unlike *min'yō*), all that matters is that the flutes in one group are roughly in tune. Especially in *kagura*, any lyrics may be nearly inaudible except to the gods.

*Minzoku geinō* were once so crucial to community life that performance might be obligatory among certain categories of people determined by factors such as genealogy, age and gender. Almost all performers were amateurs, often uninterested ones, who practised only for a few weeks prior to the event, limiting the likelihood of high artistic achievement. Among exceptions is *Edo sato-kagura*, a genre of shrine masque of the Tokyo area, and its related instrumental genre *matsuri-bayashi* (☉ track 31), long perpetuated by skilled semi-professional troupes paid to perform at dozens of shrines (Fujie 1986; Malm 1975).

Today, however, the religious significance of *minzoku geinō* is largely replaced by treatment as folkloric and touristic arts, transmitted by 'preservation societies' and often sustained by national or local systems for the protection of 'cultural treasures' (*bunkazai*) – plus government encouragement of 'the era of the regions' (*chihō no jidai*) and *furusato-zukuri* (§3 above), to counter over-urbanization. Some local groups now perform for profit or prestige on stages far from home (see Lancashire 1998, 2006). Professional or semi-professional groups of young folk, mostly urbanites, such as the Warabi-za and Kodō have learned *minzoku geinō* from several parts of Japan; residents of the source communities, although flattered, generally bemoan the loss of control of their local treasures.

Given the ritual and folkloric pressures towards conservatism, significant musical innovation is rare. However, a major new phenomenon is the popularity, especially among the young, of large ensembles centred on stick-drums, creating since the 1960s a new tradition generally called *wadaiko*, 'Japanese drums' (see Alaszewska 2001). The most famous such group, Kodō, drew much of their initial repertoire from regional traditions, then added compositions by themselves and by professional composers, often involving non-Japanese instruments. In communities throughout Japan, such ensembles vie for members with the local *minzoku geinō*, from which they often borrow rhythmic patterns for local colour and pride.

## 7. The future of Japanese folk music: *taiko* and *Takio*?

As recently as 1978, just *before* the last *min'yō* boom, 24 per cent of Japanese named *min'yō* as their single favourite music, second only to 31 per cent for *enka*, a sort of fusion of Western-style popular song with Japanese *min'yō* or *kouta* style (Chapter 15). Western-style symphonic music stood at 8 per cent, rock at 6 per cent (Masui 1980: 169; see also Chapter 1, Table 1.6). But Westernization marches on. What does the future hold for these art forms that most Japanese consider old-fashioned? As in most music cultures, there will be those who continue to favour the relatively

pure preservation of folk music and dance in their 'authentic', 'traditional' forms. But they will run into the usual problem: Which form, of which period and place, is authentic and traditional? Is 'stage *min'yō*' becoming the symbol of authenticity?

In any case, we may expect a continued decline in participation in *min'yō* and *minzoku geinō*. The *min'yō* boom of 20 years ago is long gone: numbers of broadcasts, concerts and recordings have plummeted. The number of performers – professional and amateur – has dropped more slowly, but will surely never boom again. Even participation in Bon dances is fading.

*Minzoku geinō* are now more commonly mobilized in the interests of local identity, tourism and large-scale festivals, which gives them an edge over *min'yō*. Continuing ritual relevance also aids their survival. The music played on the floats of the Chichibu Yomatsuri festival in Saitama Prefecture each December – with rival groups from different sections of town – will survive for these reasons, but also because this music for flute, drums and gong is wonderfully lively and engaging. This is why it has been picked up and arranged by professional *taiko* groups such as Kodō: it is deemed worthy of presentation as an independent stage art. Some of the Chichibu groups, however, have felt forced to offer their own stage versions to regain control of their local treasure.

One important trend, seen worldwide, is fusion with international pop music styles – what is often called World Music. Pop star Hosono Haruomi opened his 1989 CD *omni Sightseeing* with an arrangement of *Esashi oiwake*, sung by a 14-year-old folk singer he had seen on television – but he submerged her voice almost totally under synthesizer, accordion and Turkish *kanun* zither! Japanese tradition is otherwise absent from this album. In one short track, Hosono seems to have got his identity statement out of the way: 'I am Japanese (sort of).'

Aside from pop musicians ingesting dollops of *min'yō*, a few *min'yō* singers have incorporated pop. The prime example is Itō Takio, who has released compelling, idiosyncratic CDs of *min'yō* accompanied by jazz trio and by various mixes of traditional and Western instruments. His widely loved arrangement of *Sōran bushi*, modified repeatedly until by his 1997 CD *Ondo* it had been renamed *Takio's Sōran bushi*, not only mixes instruments but takes wonderful liberties with melody, tempo and dynamics while preserving a *min'yō* voice. A Japanese pop music scholar told me that the only *min'yō* performances he had ever intentionally listened to were Takio's; surely he is not alone. Takio, like many Japanese today, was raised bi-musically: he loves *min'yō*, he loves the Beatles. His fusions are sincere, not (primarily) a calculated commercial gambit.

Still, debate rages: is Takio the saviour or the executioner of *min'yō*? But *min'yō* has always interacted with other genres. Following *Sōran bushi* through the twentieth century (Hughes 2001a), we also encounter, for example: *Sōran rumba*, a 1950s jazz version; *Sōran koiuta*, a 1996 *enka* which, as do so many, uses *min'yō* as a link with the *furusato* for lonely urban migrants; and the songs of the Yosakoi *Sōran* Festival. This new festival was created in 1992 by young folks of Sapporo City, near the heartland of *Sōran bushi*. Over 300 large teams from different areas dance through the streets in wild costumes, to various disco/'club'-style arrangements of *Sōran bushi*. On the CD of the 1999 festival (*Dai-8-kai*, 1999), one track begins

with an *a capella* doo-wop chorus: 'Dooo-wah didit dooo-wah!' This is joined by a full rock band with funk bass, then a refrain in English: 'Mitsuishi ladies' – the dancers are young women from Mitsuishi Town. Finally a male rock voice sings the first verse of *Sōran bushi* ('Have the herring come? ...') in Japanese, but in a drawl imitative of Mick Jagger imitating American blues singers, and culminating in the English line, 'Gotta keep on movin' on!' At festival's end, professional folk singers perform the standard 'stage' version of *Sōran bushi*.

But back to the future of Japanese folk music. Only three genres seem to find fairly widespread appeal among today's Japanese: *Wadaiko* (described above), *tsugaru-jamisen* and Okinawan music. *Tsugaru-jamisen* is literally the *shamisen* style of the Tsugaru region of northern Japan (§4). What was once a powerful accompanying style (⊙ track 28) became during the twentieth century a dynamic solo tradition. Four features at least increased its popularity among the young: its romantic early links with blind itinerants such as the charismatic Takahashi Chikuzan (Groemer 1999b); its sheer power; the fact that (as with *wadaiko*) no singing is necessary; and the strong improvisatory element, now lost from most other Japanese musics. National contests reward improvisation within strict stylistic limits. Outside of the contest context, these limits can be pushed – for example by a pair of young brothers, the Yoshida Kyōdai, whose lightning speed, punk hairdos and musical innovations have made them major stars (see Peluse 2005).

Okinawan folk song (Chapter 13) finds even greater resonance with young Japanese than does 'mainland' *min'yō*. I dare to suggest that one important reason is that its predominant mode resembles a slightly simplified Western major mode; thus many Okinawan melodies sound somewhat Western and are easily harmonized pop-style. There is also Okinawa's exotic image as a subtropical paradise of sea, sun and sand, which has led to its folk songs, especially its 'new folk songs', being proudly called *shimauta*, 'island songs', rather than *min'yō*. For the same reasons, Westerners also seem more drawn to Okinawan than to 'mainland' *min'yō*, and many have collaborated with Okinawan artists.

Some recent *min'yō*-linked ensembles even throw in all three of these – *wadaiko*, *tsugaru-jamisen* and Okinawan music. See the website of the 'neo-*min'yō*' group Chanchiki (<http://www.chanchiki.com>), whose album *Gokuraku* exemplifies the new directions young Japanese may take. Their site's English page states: 'Featuring traditional singing and playing with Japanese instruments, updating the aspect of rhythm by adding a variety of percussion and freely grooving electric bass, they have incorporated Rock, Jazz, Funk, Boogie, Caribbean, Latin, African music, and etc. On the other hand, they have visited the places where Minyo songs were born in, engaged in active exchanges with local musicians, and conducted field research. They are always conscious of respect for the root of Minyo in the conduct of composition.'

Is all of this simply post-modern Japan at full speed? Even the Michinoku Geinō Matsuri (Northern Japan Performing Arts Festival), founded in the 1970s to gather *minzoku geinō* groups from all over the north, was by the 1990s starting its opening parade with a Tokyo-based Brazilian samba team. Clearly the 'folk' of Japan, who once identified primarily with a small-scale local community, found

themselves drawn increasingly into a national culture during the twentieth century and have now – inevitably and naturally – become entangled in global cultural trends. Japanese folk music will live on, but its forms and meanings will continue to change.

## 8. Research history and important sources

Many important sources have already been cited above. Western-language writings on Japanese folk music are still sparse, but the works by Hughes, Groemer, Thornbury and Lancashire in the Bibliography are good starting points, each listing many Japanese sources.

As for Japanese-language sources, at least five useful encyclopaedias (Hoshino and Yoshika 2006; Nakai et al. 1972, 1981; NMGJ 1976; Asano 1983) give details of individual items of repertoire as well as describing many of the historical primary sources.

The single most important source on *min'yō* continues to be the 9-volume anthology *Nihon min'yō taikan* (NHK 1944–88), which was re-issued (*fukkoku*) in 1992–94 with an incredible 90 CDs of field recordings from all over Japan. Songs are transcribed (in staff notation), annotated and classified by prefecture and function. Several brief scholarly studies are included, for example on the history of the song 'Sōran bushi'. The CD selections are not necessarily linked one-to-one to items in the books, but the value of these recordings cannot be overstated.

For *minzoku geinō*, a resource of incomparable value is a set of 36 CDs with book-length notes by Honda Yasuji: *Fukkoku: Nihon no minzoku ongaku* (1998, originally 1975–76 as LPs). There are, however, no transcriptions.

Many other sets of recordings with extensive analytical booklets are of great value (see discography in Hughes 2007). For example, Machida 1965 traces the history and countrywide migration of two famous folk song tune families, while Motegi 1999a (with 1998 CD) analyses the *sake*-making songs of one region of Niigata Prefecture in both musical and social terms.

Alas, no such research-orientated sets of recordings have Western-language notes. For CDs with useful English annotations, see King's *Japanese dance music*, *Japanese work songs* and *Music of Japanese festivals*; Nimbus's *Min'yō: folk song from Japan*; and Smithsonian Folkways' *Folk music of Japan, Traditional folk songs of Japan* and *Traditional folk dances of Japan*.

Video resources are becoming more common. Japan Victor/JVC has issued a set of 14 videotapes (*Oto to eizō ...*) including numerous folk performing arts, but these are not available as DVDs.

Among the best overviews of the social history of *min'yō* are the myriad works of Takeuchi Tsutomu (for example 1969, 1981, which retain their value despite their age). Takeuchi rarely touches on musical detail (though he has overseen many recordings) but traces song migration, song texts, changes in function and so forth. His works are very human if occasionally over-opinionated. His vast output is further discussed in Chapter 1 of Hughes 2007, which also lists 24 full-

length books by Takeuchi in its bibliography. Here I can only mention the *Min'yō no kokoro* series aimed at today's aficionados rather than at scholars: it gives guidance on learning to sing and competing in contests. His 1985 book on these contests proved so attractive to competitors that it was re-issued in 1996. Kojima Tomiko has produced some useful small-scale studies of particular aspects of the modern period, such as changes in transmission and the creation of 'new folk songs' (for example 1970, 1991, 1992).

The works of Fritsch (1996) and Groemer (1999b) on blind itinerant musicians point to a wealth of Japanese-language work in addition to the astounding Groemer 2007.

Hundreds of studies of individual local folk performing arts (including studies of their transmission) are found in specialist journals such as *Minzoku Geinō Kenkyū*, *Geinō no Kagaku* and occasionally *Tōyō Ongaku Kenkyū*. A few monthly magazines for folk song and dance aficionados contain much of value to scholars. The best, (*Gekkan*) *Min'yō Bunka*, carries detailed staff notations of vocal parts using a system similar to but more precise than that in Figure 12.4.

Song text research (*kayō kenkyū*) has long formed a separate stream. Its modern point of departure was the *Riyōshū* (1914), a lyrics collection resulting from the Ministry of Education's orders that each prefecture should collect and research its local folk songs. Scholars such as Takano Tatsuyuki (for example 1928) have continued this stream to the present.

The serious researcher fluent in Japanese might access the Japanese sources above via institutions such as the Nihon Min'yō Kyōkai, Waseda University, Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music (Tōkyō Geijutsu Daigaku) and Tōkyō Kokuritsu Bunkazai Kenkyūjo, all in Tokyo, though contact must be made in advance of a visit. The last-named institution holds, in principle, copies of all major works resulting from the Emergency Folk Song Survey (Min'yō Kinkyū Chōsa), a nationwide project conducted around 1980 by local researchers, under the auspices of the Cultural Affairs Division of the Ministry of Education (see Hughes 2007: ch. 1; Groemer 1994b). The major sources might also be found in libraries of non-Japanese universities with specialists in Japanese music.