

Reflections on Japanese Folk Music

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Japanese folk music consists of *warabe uta* (children's folk songs), *minyo* (folk songs), and the music used in the folk performing arts. These three types of music share a number of common characteristics, but each has its own particular traits. These differences have become more distinctive as the recent concentration of population in the cities has broadened the urban culture and caused rapid change in folk music. Nevertheless, these differences have not yet been closely studied. This report examines the differences between *warabe uta* and *minyo* in terms of their supporting population, creation, transmission, change, diffusion, and temporal continuity.

The following is my conclusion. Whereas most Japanese take a role as supporters of *warabe uta*, most Japanese, especially those living in urban areas are reluctant to take this type of role in regard to *minyo*, showing a strong preference for artistic music instead. If we call those people who take part in the support of folk music, *kyomin* ('ordinary people'), then the majority of Japanese are *kyomin* with regard to *warabe uta*. However, quite few people living in the cities are *kyomin* with regard to *minyo*. In other words, *kyomin* does not signify a specific static stratum of Japanese society.

Besides, some characteristics of *warabe uta* are stated in this paper. *Warabe uta* have had to be maintained and modified by children themselves in their play since children's songs had never composed by professional musicians before the Meiji Restoration, and after then those songs imposed in official music education at school have neglected basic structure of *warabe uta*. Furthermore, the life-span of each piece of *warabe uta* is very short comparing to that of other folk music. The plausible reason is that *warabe uta* have to adapt to changing circumstances since they are still vividly alive in children's life.