

Everyday life as portrayed in the music of the early Shōwa period With emphasis on works of art music

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Introduction

歌は世につれ、世は歌につれ (*Uta wa yo ni tsure, yo wa uta ni tsure*).

“Songs follow the world, the world follows the songs.” According to this phrase, songs change with the society, and society changes with the songs: music always reflects the life and culture of the time of its creation. Following this thought, it should be possible to trace reflections of the society during a certain time period in the music of that particular time and place. What can music tell us about the society it has been composed in?

In this paper, I will provide a glance over what kind of everyday life was reflected in the music of the early Shōwa period Japan, namely from 1926 approximately until the beginning of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937. The type of music that this paper focuses on is European-style composition, studied in Japan since the Meiji restoration of 1868. Considering the theme of everyday life as portrayed in music of this kind, the early Shōwa period is of particular interest for the reason that a stark contrast between compositional styles began to emerge both in art music and popular songs, namely the conflict of Japanese and Western compositional styles. The two contradictory approaches resulted in music of great variety and, interestingly, advocates of both styles criticized the other for similar reasons: for the inability to portray Japanese life via music or compose music in truly Japanese nature. This naturally raises the question of what kind of music is “Japanese” in style and how should everyday life be portrayed musically. Or, is it even possible to trace any connection to everyday life in music?

This paper examines the subject of everyday life in early Shōwa period Japan as portrayed in art music, that is, music written by Japanese composers but based on the European art music tradition. The music arguably most representative of everyday life is the music enjoyed by most of the population, and, according to Kikuchi’s (2008, 1) view, popular songs reflect the ideals and mood of the society. In this sense, popular music aimed for the masses might be more natural subject of choice for examination. Moreover, art music composition lacks the participation of the common people and thus portrays, in a sense, everyday culture defined in purely theoretical terms. However,

scholars such as Mita (1967) and Kikuchi (2008), among others, have already provided presentations on the subject in the case of popular music. In this paper, I would like to propose an approach of broadening the examination to the world of Japanese art music – a subject rather seldom encountered in studies related to social themes in Japan. I will also touch on popular songs, but only when comparing the phenomena of art music and popular music with each other.

While I do not seek to give an absolute answer to the question of how everyday life was or is portrayed in Japanese art music, I aim at giving some ideas on how the subject not much studied can be approached in the first place, what might be considered to be portrayal of everyday life in art music, and what musicology perhaps has to offer to Japanese studies – and vice versa. I will begin this paper by defining what kind of musical elements can be thought of being representative of everyday life in the early Shōwa period. Based on these remarks, I will discuss various kinds of approaches represented by certain Japanese composers as examples. Finally, I will discuss the everyday culture of the period as portrayed in the music beyond intentional level.

Everyday life portrayed in music and the issue of compositional style

Before discussing the everyday life as portrayed in art music composition of the early Shōwa period, it is necessary to define the concept of musical portrayal of everyday life. This becomes particularly fundamental when dealing with art music composition, perhaps generally not thought of particularly connecting to everyday life. Moreover, art music containing no lyrics or even no program becomes a rather complicated subject of study in its relation to culture, especially if we are to locate any notion of everyday life portrayed solely by musical expression. Alongside with studying musical works, then, I would first like to suggest two approaches to be necessary when locating portrayal of everyday life in art music. Firstly, we have to examine the views of the composers and search for hints that they give towards the meanings carried by their musical works in their writings. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Secondly, the general discussion on the subject during the time period of interest needs to be taken into account. Music is inseparable from the surrounding culture, and these approaches broaden the discussion from merely examining musical works to studying also cultural views around the topic.

When examining the general discussion concerning everyday culture as portrayed in art music of the early Shōwa period, there is one theme that is constantly

brought up: discussion over a Japanese compositional style as portrayal of contemporary Japanese life. “Japanese compositional style” in this context refers to musical expression with Japanese qualities as interpreted by the composer. In most cases, this stood for taking influences from the genres of Japanese music existent prior to the Meiji restoration (Lehtonen 2015). This style of composition is here called the “national school of composition” after Galliano (2002, 72).

I would like to stress that in the present paper, influences from traditional Japanese music are regarded as elements consciously adopted by the composers – that is, they are not dealt with as indications of unconscious “Japaneseness”, automatically resulting from the cultural background of the composer. The view of national-style composition as portrayal of Japanese life is of particular interest in the sense that the early Shōwa period first saw the adoption of elements from traditional Japanese music in instrumental art music (Lehtonen 2015, 6). Certain influences from traditional music had already been adopted in vocal music, for instance in the well-known song compositions of Taki Rentarō (滝廉太郎, 1879–1903) and Yamada Kōsaku (山田耕筰, 1886–1965) (Kojima 1962), but the early Shōwa period finally saw the adoption of these elements also into instrumental music on a wider scale. This brings the discussion on portrayal of everyday life also to a musical context separated from the lingual dimension represented by lyrics.

At the same time that the national school of composition began to emerge, however, there was also an emphasis on the need of adopting solely Western techniques of composition. Many composers in favour of this approach criticized composers of the national school for their inability to portray Japanese life in musical terms. This viewpoint was brought out for instance by Hara Tarō in his article *Nihon kokumin ongakuron no seikaku* (The nature of theories on Japanese national-style music, *Ongaku hyōron* 10/1936) in which he attacked the composers of the national school for their distorted portrayal of everyday life in Japan. According to Hara, composers taking influences from traditional music sought to portray the Japanese everyday culture by making allusions to the life of an idealized countryside where the tradition of folk songs was supposedly still strong, but had in reality distanced themselves from the harsh realities that the people of the rural districts had to face. Therefore, according to Hara, the tendency to make allusions to traditional music portrayed a false everyday culture, existent solely in the work of the composers.

There were many others sharing Hara’s views. Similar thoughts were expressed by the critic Yamane Ginji and the composer Fukai Shirō, while composers of the national school defended their viewpoints in these debates. The debates have already

been well covered in previous research (e.g. Komiya 1976 and Akiyama 2003) and I will not deal with them any further in this paper, but here I would like to take notice of one viewpoint in particular. According to Fukai, traditional Japanese music was already too antiquated to portray the everyday life of contemporary Japanese (see Akiyama 1979, 21–22). The views voiced by Hara and Fukai suggest that portrayal of everyday culture by adopting certain elements from traditional Japanese music was portrayal of a culture of the past.

For many composers, then, making allusions to traditional Japanese music in European-style composition seems to have stood for the portrayal of the Japanese everyday life. Therefore, one hint towards locating reflections of everyday life in works of art music in the early Shōwa period is seeking for these reflections in the influences from traditional music. This is also the viewpoint that this paper will mainly focus on. However, it is also essential to keep in mind that influences from traditional music were not the sole way of portraying everyday life, and that many composers of the national school did not seek to depict everyday culture via allusions to traditional music. For instance, Matsudaira Yoritsune's (松平頼則, 1907–2001) choice to adopt influences from traditional music was purely aesthetic (see Galliano 2002, 85), and, moreover, the genre that he was most influenced by was the court music *gagaku* – music with hardly any connection to the ordinary people and therefore rather unsuitable to portray everyday life. An another example, Mitsukuri Shūkichi's (箕作秋吉, 1895–1971) system of “Japanese harmony” based on traditional music was purely theoretical by nature and held no connection to everyday culture based on Mitsukuri's (1948) writings. While the approaches represented by Matsudaira and Mitsukuri are only two examples among numerous others, by bringing out this point I would like to stress that, as noted also above, to be able classify musical material as portrayal of everyday culture, one must be aware of the views voiced by the composers and take into account the genre of traditional music that the composer makes allusions to as well as the social context of this genre.

Before looking into the art music of the period in more detail, I would briefly like to discuss the views towards Japanese-style composition in *kayōkyoku*, the popular music of the time. If we consider Kikuchi's (2008, 1) thought on popular music to be the most representative type of music of the society, this might reveal interesting aspects towards portrayal of everyday life in musical terms. The division between popular music and art music did already exist at the time period discussed in this paper (Kikuchi 2008, 43), but the contrast was still not sharp among the composers, as many composers of art music wrote also works of popular music. Kishi Kōichi (貴志康一,

1909–1937) even quoted the hit song *Kimi koishi* (1928), considered to be the “first Japanese jazz” in the second movement of his orchestral work *Nihon sukecchi* (Japanese sketches, 1934). In this sense, it is possible to discuss both musical worlds in similar ways to a certain extent.

As in vocal art music, the idea of composing music in Japanese style was already existent in popular music prior to the Shōwa period. One of the earliest examples is *Kachūsha no uta* (Katyusha’s song, 1914), considered to be the very first Japanese hit song (Kikuchi 2008, 15). The song was originally used in stage adaption of Leo Tolstoy’s *Resurrection*, and the composer, Nakayama Shinpei (中山晋平, 1887–1952), was instructed by the theatre director and lyric writer Shimamura Hōgetsu to write “not a school song or a Western hymn, but a melody between the Japanese tradition and Lied” (see Saitō 1996, 64). The Japanese quality of the song is enhanced naturally by the Japanese lyrics as well as by the fact that the lyrics are divided into verses of five and seven syllables in length as Japanese poetry in general, while the Western quality is apparent in the little words “lala” that Nakayama added into the lyrics.

Musically, *Kachūsha no uta* is an interesting combination of Japanese and Western concepts. The melody is based on the pentatonic scale *yonanuki*, originally created for music combining Japanese and Western elements (Komiya 1976, 94). The “major” *yonanuki* (for example, C-D-E-G-A) is equivalent of the *ritsu* type scale used in the traditional court music *gagaku* and the “minor” *yonanuki* (for example, A-B-C-E-F) is equivalent of the *hirajōshi* tuning of the *koto*, and in this sense, the scale certainly does bring a “Japanese” quality to the music. However, *yonanuki* is also based on Western diatonic scale and contains also a key that can be defined (hence the name *yonanuki* or “omission of the fourth and the seventh degree”). Accordingly, melodies composed using the *yonanuki* scale tend to resemble melodic movements of Western, rather than traditional Japanese music (Kojima 1962). In this sense, *Kachūsha no uta* is a song combining two musical worlds. Similar aspects are met also in Nakayama’s later hit compositions such as *Tōkyō kōshinkyoku* (Tokyo march, 1929), which adopts the minor *yonanuki*, and in particular *Sendō kouta* (Boatman’s song, 1923) in which the singer has to adopt traditional Japanese singing techniques (Kikuchi 2008, 15). These kinds of musical elements later became the foundation of the “Japanese-style” popular song *enka* in the post-war years.

Interestingly, *Kachūsha no uta* has a Japanese quality even in spite of its connection to Russia. At the same time, Sassa Kōka (佐々紅華, 1886–1961), the composer of the above-mentioned hit song *Kimi koishi*, commented that even when composing music in Western idiom, that is, adopting Western instruments as well as

concept of harmony and form, the music itself should succeed in portraying the life of the Japanese people (see Kikuchi 2008, 27). Therefore, we can easily conclude that the issue of compositional style existed in both art music and popular music, and that the program or the musical material solely do not wholly define the nature of the everyday life portrayed in the songs, but both of them have significance for the subject.

Portrayal of everyday life in works of Japanese art music composers

To give some examples of how the theme of everyday life was dealt with in art music, I will next discuss the approaches proposed by three composers in detail: Kiyose Yasuji of the national school, Hashimoto Kunihiko representing both national-style and European-style composition and Moroi Saburō opposing the national school of composition. While naturally not encompassing the whole Japanese compositional culture or all viewpoints, they have been chosen as particularly representative examples of certain approaches to portrayal of everyday life musically.

As discussed above, one of the key methods of portraying life in Japan musically was adopting influences from traditional Japanese music. As the folk song traditions of the Japanese rural areas in particular may be considered to be representative of everyday life (e.g. Galliano 2002, 104), one of the most explicit ways of portraying everyday culture is composing music adopting influences from folk music. A very representative composer of such approach was one of the foremost advocates of the national school of composition, Kiyose Yasuji (清瀬保二, 1900–1981), who also actively took part in discussion on Japanese music and Japanese culture in general (Akiyama 1979, 11). Although he never quoted folk songs as material in his works as such, he was well-known for his portrayal of Japanese culture and nature via music influenced by the style and liveliness of folk music (Togashi 1956, 139). Some works representative of this include *Inaka no odori* (Dances of the countryside, 1930) and *Kyōdo buyō* (Dances of home district, 1933) for piano, which clearly hint a connection to the folk song traditions of the countryside in their treatment of melodies and lively rhythms in spite of being purely instrumental works.

While many of Kiyose's works are flooded with influences from Japanese folk traditions, however, there are no definitive indications towards a connection to everyday life in the music. Even if the Japanese folk songs themselves do represent a type of everyday culture, this is not sufficient to qualify as portrayal of everyday life. What however links the characteristics encountered in Kiyose's music to Japanese everyday culture are his writings, which very often deal with the topics of Japanese

culture and music. Kiyose claimed that the Japanese had distanced themselves from their own culture and connection with the nature, and discussed that while Westernization had become a part of the Japanese society, the basis of the culture was still the same and had not altered even with the changes of the society (Kiyose 1981a, 11; Kiyose 1981b). Kiyose did acknowledge that contemporary Japan was not the Japan of the past, but wished to remind the Japanese people of their own, continual cultural background that still existed strongly in spite of Western influences (Kiyose 1981b, 55). He favoured a compositional style carrying a “Japanese spirit”, something that would differentiate the music from that of the West.

For Kiyose, then, the concept of everyday life lay in the Japanese culture of the past that was, according to him, unquestionably also part of the life of contemporary Japan. In musical terms, there are two characteristics enthusiastically discussed by Kiyose strongly hinting towards portrayal of everyday life through this thinking. They are the adoption of pentatonic scales resembling those encountered in Japanese folk music, and composing in a “monotonic style”, by which he meant music that was simple on the outside but full of subtle nuances on the inside, possibly incomprehensible to non-Japanese listeners (Kiyose 1981a, 12). According to Kiyose himself, these two characteristics were representative of the unchanging “Japanese spirit” that he sought to manifest. These two characteristics were also acknowledged as fundamental qualities of the traditional music of Japan already at that time, as discussed for instance by Sunaga (1934, 114). Based on this, Kiyose tied together these influences and everyday culture and used them as inspiration for his work composed for Western instruments. When indicating that the Japanese had distanced themselves from the Japanese way of life, it seems that Kiyose was musically portraying the everyday life that he himself idealized but represented the past for many others.

Kiyose’s ideas (among others of the national compositional school) were under harsh criticism for their inability to face the reality of the countryside that they so enthusiastically made musical allusions to. Moreover, while stressing the rather ambiguous concept of “Japanese qualities” that was possibly incomprehensible to non-Japanese people, the concept was impossible to define even for Kiyose himself when asked about it (see Kiyose’s interview in Hirata 1936, 55). Still, I would argue that in musical terms, Kiyose’s works reflect his thought very accurately. While the allusions to folk songs possibly indeed portray the everyday life of the past, he composed for Western instruments using Western notation, very clearly indicating that he did not deny Western influence in contemporary Japan. Kiyose rarely quoted material from folk music directly in his work; rather, he composed in ways resembling the folk music

and sought to capture the same spirit in his music. Such works include the above-mentioned *Inaka no odori* and *Kyōdo buyō*, among numerous others. In other words, rather than seeking to portray Japanese everyday life with the choice to make direct allusions to folk music, Kiyose looks at the Japanese culture from a contemporary perspective – something that he himself also commented on (Kiyose 1981a, 11).

In Kiyose's work, we meet a concept of everyday life portrayed musically, one based on folk music traditions but voiced mostly via Western compositional techniques. Above all, the everyday life that his music portrays is a culture rooted in the past while being alive in contemporary society. Japan was already industrializing at a fast pace in the early Shōwa period and saw also waves of migration from the countryside to urban areas. Since Kiyose did not take life in cities as a theme in his work, his approach might even be regarded as a theoretical portrayal of everyday life in Japan, in a sense a theory expressed via musical language. With his music, Kiyose clearly states that the everyday life of Japan is rooted in the past even when surrounded by the modernized culture, but what he does not explicitly bring out is the portrayal of everyday life in those modernized, urban areas. This is possibly his personal comment on the contemporary state of affairs, but also the viewpoint that the composers criticizing the national school most opposed when referring to the national style of composition as a style of the past. Then, we once again come back to the question of contradictory compositional styles and approaches differing from that of Kiyose's leaning towards folk music of the countryside: the explicit portrayal of everyday life in the urban districts.

One of the most peculiar solutions to the contradiction between compositional styles and portrayal of everyday life was offered by Hashimoto Kunihiko (橋本国彦, 1904–1949). Hashimoto was a versatile composer, who on the one hand caused a shock in the musical world by writing the first Japanese songs in impressionist style (Dohi 1987, 62), but on the other hand was also employed as composer of popular music songs in the record company Nippon Columbia. This versatility marked his whole career to the point that might be regarded even as contradictory. For instance, while being one of the founders of the originally anti-academic composer group *Shinkō sakkyokuka renmei* in 1930, he was later appointed professor of composition at the prestigious and highly academic *Tōkyō ongaku gakkō* (today: music faculty of the *Tōkyō geijutsu daigaku*).

The versatility of Hashimoto's work is also present in his approach towards compositions dealing with everyday life, which he was, according to Saegusa (2012, 30), interested in portraying musically. Being celebrated as a composer of vocal music,

Hashimoto's works in the beginning of the Shōwa period in particular manifest interest in dealing with the theme of everyday life that is voiced via two different compositional methods. Firstly, Hashimoto took part in the *shin minyō*, or “new folk songs” movement, which sought to evoke the spirit of the rural folk songs by imitating the style and rhythm of the songs both lyrically and musically (Komota et al. 1994, 95). His well-known works of *shin minyō* include *Fujisan mitara* (When viewing Mount Fuji, 1929), *Oroku musume* (1929) and *Taueuta* (Rice planting song, 1930), among others. Songs like *Taueuta* recall the style of the working songs of the countryside including shouts typical during the work, while *Fujisan mitara* is a song of nostalgia towards one's native place. *Shin minyō* as poetry seeks to capture the spirit of the folk songs, so it is natural that also the music strives for the same effect and imitates the musical style of the folk songs. In his *shin minyō* songs, Hashimoto makes numerous allusions to singing techniques, instruments and melodies used in traditional folk songs.

Based on this, Hashimoto's approach may seem similar to the one represented by Kiyose. *Shin minyō* was however only one side to Hashimoto's work. He composed also numerous popular songs depicting urban cities of contemporary Japan, while works such as *Okashi to musume* (Sweets and the girl, 1928) take life in Paris as their theme. This contradiction of themes was taking place on also in the popular music of Japan, generally resulting from the migration from the countryside to the cities. Popular songs such as the above-mentioned *Kimi koishi* became sales hits even when not containing an explicitly Japanese element, but at the same time, there was also a huge demand for songs of *shin minyō* (Hughes 1991, 4). This might partially be explained by the fact that *shin minyō* were seen as songs of nostalgia for one's home district (Ogawa 1999, 217).

While Hashimoto's work reflects the very same phenomenon, the seeming contradiction in his music was in reality not a contradiction at all, at least based on his writings. He considered folk songs and *shin minyō* to be musical portrayals of the life of the people in the rural districts, and when thinking about what could be a similar kind of tradition for the urban people, he came up with the concept of “folk songs for urban people” (*shimin no tame no minyō*) (Hashimoto 1930, 105). This concept stood for music that captures the spirit of the urban everyday life and ideals much in the same sense that folk music reflects the life of the countryside. In this subtext, it is particularly interesting to examine what kind of musical devices Hashimoto used to portray everyday life via the so-called folk songs for urban people.

While Hashimoto's *shin minyō* songs contain numerous allusions to traditional music, songs depicting urban life are mostly composed in Western idiom with very few

hints towards any kind of Japanese qualities. For instance, songs like *Horobasha* (Wagon, 1931) do not clearly indicate a cultural surrounding but are composed in Western style, in this case using habanera-like rhythmic pattern. There are certain shared characteristics, such as the occasional adoption of the *yonanuki* scale even in these songs, but otherwise the contrast with the *shin minyō* songs is stark. This becomes clear for instance by comparing the above-mentioned songs *Oroku musume* and *Okashi to musume*. The vocal line in *Oroku musume* adopts glissandos and scales typical of traditional Japanese music, while the piano part imitates the heterophonic effect met in a lot of traditional music by playing the same melody with the vocal line but in a free rhythm. This is in clear contrast with *Okashi to musume*, portraying life in Paris and being based solely on Western concepts of harmony.

Hashimoto's songs also broaden the concept of Japanese everyday culture, since even works such as *Okashi to musume* become understandable as "folk music for the urban people" when examined in their cultural context. In the late 1920s, there was a Paris boom in Tokyo, originating from revues based on French shows (Ogawa 1999, 221). *Okashi to musume* is a continuation of this trend and is therefore, in a sense, a song reflecting the everyday life in Tokyo in spite of its theme connecting to Paris. In Hashimoto's case, allusions to traditional musical genres of Japan carry the meaning of the countryside, while music composed in European style depicts urban life in big cities. Music of both styles were written for people who could relate to the music, and in this sense, Hashimoto's work is strongly tied to contemporary everyday life between two cultural backgrounds.

What is common between Kiyose and Hashimoto is that the works discussed have been of narrative nature. They contain a program, at the very least an indication towards a particular extra-musical theme, as in the case of the piano pieces by Kiyose. In Hashimoto's vocal music, it may be argued that the poetry itself requires the musical solutions applied by the composer, and this is further enhanced by the fact that the poet usually defines the musical style of Hashimoto's songs (Shibaike 1996, 243). This calls for discussion on still one more approach to musical portrayal of everyday life, that of absolute music without Japanese-sounding elements.

Finally, I would like to discuss the approach represented by Moroi Saburō (諸井三郎, 1903–1977). Moroi acquired his composition diploma in Germany and was in favour of adopting German compositional techniques (Akiyama 1979, 12). He wrote mostly absolute music, meaning works such as symphonies and sonatas without an indicated program. Based only on Moroi's works of absolute music, it is naturally impossible to find any connection to everyday life. What however strongly suggests that also his

works do portray a type of everyday life are, like in the case of Kiyose and Hashimoto, his writings. As Hara and Fukai, also Moroi was critical of the idea of portraying Japanese life by making allusions to traditional music. In his article *Sakkyokukai no mondai* (The issue of the compositional world, *Ongaku hyōron* 1/1937), he brings out the idea that Japanese composers should indeed write music in a Japanese style, meaning that even when composed in Western idiom, music should portray the life of the Japanese people. According to Moroi's view, however, the life of the Japanese people differed from that represented by the national school: rather than trying to compose in a "Japanese-sounding" style, they should concentrate on writing music that would reflect the realistic situation in Japan, that is, the atmosphere and development of the modernizing Japanese society using contemporary compositional techniques rather than making allusions to traditional music.

On an artistic level, Moroi saw that the fundamental difference between Japanese and European music was that Japanese music was "narrative" by nature while European music was "singing" (see Akiyama 1979, 36). Moroi also stressed the fact that most of traditional Japanese music was narrative and that the Japanese people did not really have a tradition of absolute music – a view shared also by contemporary researchers such as Sunaga (1934, 108). If we take the assumption that music reflecting the mood of a society is already narrative by nature, then, according to Moroi, this type of music would be Japanese in style. Moroi composed mostly seemingly works of absolute music, including many concertos, sonatas and five symphonies with no references to a narrative or a program in their titles. If we, however, assume that Moroi himself lived up to his own compositional ideals, what is the Japanese everyday life like in his works?

In Moroi's work, life in Japan is portrayed in a dark manner. In particular his second symphony (1938) and second piano sonata (1939) reflect a very dark and intense atmosphere in a mostly atonal compositional style as opposed to his early tonal works, possibly resulting from the outburst of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937. In this sense, also the portrayal of the everyday culture draws a rather dark impression of development since the beginning of the Shōwa period. Of course, the everyday life portrayed in Moroi's works differ greatly from those portrayed by Kiyose and Hashimoto in the sense that Moroi takes a more intellectual approach of portraying the society on a general level. What further confirms this is his musical language bearing no connection to the traditions close to ordinary people as opposed to the previously-mentioned composers, but a style completely of Western and arguably intellectual origin.

While being only three examples, the approaches represented by Kiyose, Hashimoto and Moroi draw an interesting and somewhat contradictory portrayal of everyday life in Japan. All three composers were in favour of writing music that would somehow portray the life in Japan, but their compositional approaches and motivations differed greatly. Kiyose was the keenest advocator of the national school, whereas Hashimoto composed in both Japanese and Western styles, further underlining the already existent contradiction of two different kinds of everyday cultures. Moroi promoted a compositional style based purely on Western idiom but regarded the narrative aspect of traditional Japanese music as something that would also appear as a “Japanese element” in music composed in European style. Even with the different approaches, all of the composers seem to agree on one thing: that the musical portrayal of everyday culture was found in relation with the past, either by taking influences from musical traditions of Japan or by denying them altogether as musical material but emphasizing some other aspect met in the music.

Music culture and art music composition as portrayal of everyday life

Above, I've discussed various approaches to portrayal of everyday life in the art music of the early Shōwa period Japan. These views were often contradictory with each other and resulted in heated discussion: many composers focused on arguing about compositional styles rather than trying to build a new Japanese style together to the point that Akiyama (1979, 26) saw the debates as a tragedy of Japanese music. Based partly on these debates, I would finally like to bring the issue to a broader examination. That is, not focusing on what the composers thought of being representative of Japanese everyday life in music, but what kind of portrayal of everyday life these different views themselves carry.

The criticism towards the national school of composition cited above seems to carry the idea that music should portray everyday life realistically. In this sense, of the composers discussed in this paper, the one closest to authentic portrayal of everyday life was Hashimoto, who took into account different viewpoints. But what is, in fact, “realistic” portrayal of everyday life in musical terms? Moroi, for instance, advocated a compositional style portraying life in Japan realistically but was an enthusiastic supporter of the German tradition of absolute music – hardly a style that has any connection to the everyday life in Japan. In the end, all of the various contradictory views represent intellectual discussion based also on artistic preferences. Moreover, the criticism by Hara and Yamane was at least partially based on political views, as they

were leftist thinkers and accused the national school of composition for ultranationalism (see Akiyama 2003, 525), although this criticism was not justified (e.g. see denial of ultranationalist thinking in Kiyose 1981a, 13). In this context, it is futile to try to prove any of the approaches “right” or “wrong”.

There is, however, one point that all of the various approaches do prove. Is it not so that all of the compositional methods and approaches are, in fact, a type of portrayal of the everyday life as such, as represented by the composers? When analysing the lyrics of Japanese popular music, Mita (1967) has commented that while the lyrics do not portray reality as such, they do serve as a database of social psychology on the feelings of those making and listening to the music. I would like to broaden this thought to the analysis of everyday life as portrayed Japanese art music: not looking only for factual references to everyday life, but paying attention to the meanings and hints that the musical material itself carries. Already the fact that there were composers writing music in both European and Japanese styles goes to prove that a conflict of two cultural backgrounds as well as assimilation of a new culture was strongly taking place. Therefore, even if not being a consciously made decision, music culture as a whole indeed reflects aspects of everyday life: some of the composers longing for the past, others enthusiastically embracing the new.

In other words, the seemingly contradictory tendency for music to be composed in either Japanese or Western style, or in some cases juxtaposing both styles, is actually a very accurate portrayal of a society with an everyday culture between different backgrounds. In this sense, also works of art music by Japanese composers become a database of one kind on everyday culture or the society in general. In this everyday culture portrayed musically, there is one key factor that draws a picture of a society leaning more towards Western than Japanese background. While works of even the national school of composition indeed adopted elements from traditional Japanese music, the music was still composed mostly for Western instruments using Western notation and based at least partially on Western harmony. Indeed, based on this, the music portrays Japan using Western devices. Therefore, the works discussed in this paper strongly hint an everyday culture of modernization with perhaps longing towards the past. In this sense, all of the composers represent a modernized, Westernized Japan, in spite of them advocating or criticizing the methods of the national school.

Of course, the everyday life represented in Japanese art music is solely that of the composers, that is, everyday life as understood by a rather limited group of people already involving in an art form originally European. To some extent it is everyday

culture approached from an intellectual viewpoint. It is perhaps even so that the economist Mita Sekisuke (under the pseudonym Ishida) commented in 1938 in his article in *Ongaku kenkyū*: the Japan as depicted by art music composers lacks the participation of the ordinary people and is only intellectually-defined “Japanese spirit” in contrast with that defined by the ordinary people by their actions (see Akiyama 2003, 543). Nevertheless, even if being everyday life as portrayed from an intellectual viewpoint, the music itself still serves as a database of Japanese culture of a certain period of time. It is easy to conclude that, whatever the compositional methods and approaches, in this sense all of the composers succeeded in their portrayal of everyday life in art music.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have dealt with the various approaches to the theme of everyday life in the early Shōwa period as portrayed in art music, seldom studied in the context of social themes related to Japan. As has been proven, many Japanese composers approached the subject with some relation to musical genres originating from the Japan before Meiji restoration – either by denying the traditional genres or by embracing them as influences. For composers like Kiyose Yasuji, this held the somewhat ambiguous meaning of Japanese spirit, while in the works of *shin minyō* composed by Hashimoto Kunihiko alongside with his “folk songs for urban people” draw a picture of a Japan with two kinds of everyday cultures. Moroi Saburō’s approach of absolute music is above all intellectual and extends the concept of everyday culture in art music to a context of reflecting the atmosphere of the society. What truly makes the methods discussed a portrayal of their time is that similar approaches were also met in popular music aimed for the masses, using naturally different musical devices but still representative of the very same issues.

Of course, discussing everyday life from the viewpoint of Japanese art music composers gives us only one approach to the subject, or, one might say, the viewpoint of a very limited group of people that represented an art form still not widely recognized in Japan of the time. Moreover, as an art form originally European, it is natural that the music draws a picture of a modernized society. Naturally, the subject calls for discussion on other genres of music. Alongside with art music and popular music discussed in this paper, the early Shōwa period saw also attempts to revive and renew various genres of traditional Japanese music, and the Shin Nihon ongaku (New Japanese music) school had been active since 1920 in promoting works of traditional-

sounding music for traditional instruments, however based partially on concepts borrowed from European music. To fully understand the everyday life as portrayed in the music of the early Shōwa period, the music culture should be examined as a whole – including also more examples of art music.

One of the aims of this paper was to give some ideas and hints on how to approach the subject of everyday life portrayed in Japanese art music. The methods and results are not nearly sufficient to draw up definite conclusions. Still, while admitting the insufficiency of the viewpoint of this paper, I hope that I have succeeded in presenting one possible approach or a starting point for further research on the subject. Music is not an art form that can be cut off from the society, not even when it is absolute by nature. Rather, it carries a remarkable amount of data of the society it was composed in. This is also true for art music, often thought of being separate from everyday life, but still portraying one kind of everyday culture as understood by the composers. I hope that this paper has proven a viewpoint seldom heard among scholarly research of Japanese studies and brought up awareness of this particular database of cultural information.

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