

## **Borders of Tradition: Social Innovation, Hybridity and Consumption of Traditional Music in Contemporary Japan**

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In July 1998, a report concerning the reform of the National Curriculum Standard by the Curriculum Council of the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture (MEXT) marked a strong change in the history of Japanese policies concerning school education. Given the sporadic occurrence of this type of reform (the Curriculum Standard had only been revised six times since World War Two), its contents were welcomed as a major innovation in social policy matters and originated a debate that extended outside the national borders (Shigehisa, 2002).

Within the context of a shift from common educational experience to emphasized individual potential, the revision introduced the compulsory study of traditional Japanese musical instruments into the middle school curriculum. Such a decision did not come abruptly, nor radically unexpected, given that since the 1960s and 1970s there had been an ongoing process of inclusion of “Japanese music” in school education, in which the then Ministry of Education, the Tōkyō Academy of Music and the teachers themselves took part (Pecore, 2000). However, the 1998 report stood out for its institutionally encompassing nature, which collided with more rooted patterns of musical transmission (e.g. the *iemoto* 家元 system) and appeared to lay the foundation for the establishment of new social systems of traditional music education.

Given its historical significance and the public attention it attracted, the 1998 revision of the National Curriculum Standard is used in this paper as an example of the many ways in which intimate and public spheres are intertwined in the discourse on traditional music in Japan. In particular, the paper focuses on three aspects of the processes of production, reception and institutional treatment of what is commonly and misleadingly labeled “Japanese traditional music:” 1. The music-makers’ growing tendency to hybridize their specially transmitted repertoire in order to meet and please the taste of contemporary public (Lancashire, 2003); 2. The extent to which the intimate sphere of those who are active in the consumption of music is affected by both these processes of hybridization and their public handling; 3. The way macro-level social actors set up innovative strategies that deal with “Japanese traditional music” and the individual.

It will become apparent that the three plains are deeply intertwined and constantly interacting with one another, suggesting the possibility for the application of a symbolic interactionist approach to the public sphere (Blumer 1969; Goffman, 1967). Furthermore, attention will be paid to the transformation from the old existing system of transmission and fruition of traditional music to a more in-step-with-the-times system grounded on new social needs. Questions will be raised as to

which social actors or forces determine such needs as well as to the threat they may pose on preexisting social structures.

Finally, this paper will maintain that hybridity plays a major role among Japan's contemporary social innovations in the consumption of traditional music and that employing such a concept can be productive in the analysis of the interaction between public and intimate spheres of social life.