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A Study of Japanese Concepts of Community

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Abstract

How can Community Music Therapy be practiced in Japan? This paper aims to describe two Japanese concepts of community – 'shakai' and 'seken' – and to explore the relation between these two concepts and the practice of Community Music Therapy in Japan. 'Shakai' is an official equivalent for society while 'seken' is a traditional view of the world as human relationships. It is probable that these two concepts represent the basic ideas of community in Japan. So far, there has been no thorough attempt to clarify the relevance of these concepts for music therapy practice and theory, in spite of the fact that music therapy has grown and developed in Japan over a number of years. In this paper, I will illuminate the Japanese situation and problem of community, present the possibility of Community Music Therapy in Japan, and discuss implications for Community Music Therapy.

Introduction

The international animate discussion of Community Music Therapy has had a strong and significant impact on Japanese music therapy. As a result, the interest in Community Music Therapy has grown rapidly in Japan for these two years. In 2004 the annual conference by the Japanese Association of Music Therapy invited Brynjulf Stige as one of the keynote presenters. The title of his keynote presentation was 'Community Music Therapy and Cultural Change'. During the annual conference in 2005, some Japanese music therapists presented their music therapy practices which focused on community.

However, all presenters used the term Community Music Therapy, without translating the word 'community' into Japanese. Indeed, I couldn't find any Japanese words for 'community' when I worked as an interpreter for Stige at the conference in 2004. Why didn't they translate 'community' into Japanese? Why couldn't I find any words for 'community'? These questions are the starting points of this paper. I will focus on Japanese concepts of community which could become the keywords in Japanese music therapy. I will also discuss the situation of community in Japan.

Stige (2004, p. 91) mentioned that the word 'community' is in use both for denotation of a social system (for instance a locality and its inhabitants) and of experience (of togetherness of having mutual support). Ansdell (2004, p. 76 ff.) described that community has become less a real place and more a process and an achieved experience. What is the difference between such western thoughts and the Japanese concepts of community?

As a Japanese music therapist who has experienced western cultures, I am often confused by the Japanese society and the relationships with others in Japanese ways. At the same time, it seems to me that the Japanese traditional way of human relationships can give some new

direction to Japanese music therapy. Ikuno (2005) described that the Japanese/Asian human relationships which once were so difficult for her self-realization, finally started to carry a different interpretation and influence on her way of living and working. Japanese music therapists who sympathize with her feeling may be more than a few. To explore Japanese concepts of community is to take interest in our own identity as persons and music therapists.

Posing a Question

Since Japan introduced the western social systems and values, a large number of Japanese words were translated for those western systems and thoughts. These equivalents became 'an official language' in Japanese modern society. In contrast, some western words, for instance 'community', were borrowed directly from English, and were written phonetically with Katakana. Why wasn't 'community' given any Japanese words?

Some traditional Japanese words were replaced by those "officially" created words. However, the traditional Japanese words have survived among people for over 100 years. In this paper, I will try to describe both 'shakai' which is an equivalent for the English word 'society' and 'seken' which has survived as an essential concept of community in Japan.

I pose two questions:

1. How can Japanese Concepts of Community be described in English?
2. How could Japanese Concepts of Community be related to the practices of Community Music Therapy in Japan?

It might be meaningful to describe Japanese concepts of "community" in western language, especially in English. Although Community Music Therapy is a focus in Japan, very few Japanese music therapists have joined in an international discussion in Community Music Therapy in spite of the fact that the interest in Community Music Therapy has increased rapidly. This situation exists partly because of the difficulty of translating Japanese concepts of community and human relationships into English. However, it comes mainly from the difficulty of understanding the complicated aspect of Japanese community. I will try to eliminate these barriers as much as possible.

Japanese Concepts of Community

Wakonyosai – Japanese Spirit and Western Knowledge

In 1868 the Edo shogunate ended as a result of the Meiji restoration. In the Edo period, Japan had closed its door to most western countries. The Meiji government undertook a plan for enriching the nation and building up defences and urged modernization through westernization. Thus, modernization was equated with westernization in Japan. The word 'kindai-seiyoka' means modernization-westernization. The government introduced all kinds of western social systems and infrastructures rapidly and intensively, for instance, parliamentary democracy, financial systems, educational systems, medical systems. Nevertheless, the westernization did not have an affect on the Japanese approach to human relationships. Though the Meiji government never planned to retain the traditional approach, Japan wasn't deprived of its spirit and body by the western social systems and values. Indeed, 'wakonyosai' which means Japanese spirit and western knowledge became an ideal in Japan. In such a situation the government decided to create a large number of new Japanese words.

Two Japanese Concepts of Community

Kinya Abe (1935-) is one of the leading scholars in historical science and western medieval history. In addition, he expands the study of Japanese through a keyword 'seken'. Mainly, I will describe the Japanese concepts of community on the basis of his ideas.

1 *Shakai*

In 1877 the Japanese government coined the term 'shakai' as the official word for 'society'. This was part of a governmental project which sought to translate western words into Japanese. The word 'shakai' is of Chinese origin. In the remote past, the word meant only religious festivals, and afterwards the word became to mean organizations. In Japan, the word 'shakai' had meant only churches, which had been written about in Dutch literature.^[1]

After the Meiji restoration, the government and the intellectuals understood that independent individuals and societies based on relationships between independent individuals existed in western countries, and they wanted to establish such a society in Japan. Western cultures presuppose the existence of independent individuals to form societies, that is to say, societies consist of such independent individuals. The intention of each independent individual decides

the way societies exist. The word 'kojin', as an equivalent for individual, took root in Japanese society around 1884. It was 7 years after 'shakai'. It means that 'shakai' has existed in a very different way from societies in western cultures. An 'individually-based' society had never existed in Japan.

Previously the Japanese language did not have any words for such a society. 'Shakai' took a position as an equivalent for society in western ways. Japan has accepted the western social system and values without establishing of independent individual in western ways. This incoherence has subsisted in 'shakai'. When we use this word, we imply societies in modernized- westernized Japan. 'Seken', a traditional word, which had been used for society (or community) until then, disappeared from official documents.

2 Seken

'Seken' represents the Japanese traditional concept of human relationships. 'Seken' has been a kind of world view in Japanese culture. Though it involved the wholeness of nature before, now it means an approach to human relationships. In Japan, an 'individual' had been a member of 'seken'. When one spoke in a meeting, one had to be sure that his/her opinion harmonized with the interests in his/her'seken'. In this way, one's real opinions were hidden behind 'seken'.

The speeches for seken were called 'tatemae' (principle, words, theory), and it was distinguished from 'honne' (actual intentions). Here the distinction between 'tatemae' and 'honne' appeared in the relationships between 'individual' and 'seken'. The relation between 'tatemae' and 'honne' has become more complicated after the modernization-westernization. 'Tatemae' is often a principle or theory from western cultures while 'honne' is based on 'seken'. The official speech is 'tatemae', and it is seen in a different dimension from 'honne' which is close to the way of living.

'Seken' is a given. 'Seken' is not formed by the individual's intention, and the way 'seken' exists isn't decided by the individual's intention. About the Japanese mentality of givens, Ikuno writes about her impression on the Japanese attitude:

However, for the last year or two, I also feel the sense of unknown liveliness in the midst of the miscellaneous duties and expectations publicly and privately put on me from the people around, even though these do not exactly and directly match my self-realization. If I express this phenomenon in just one Japanese word, it could be "Ikasareteiru" [=to be made to live by a greater purpose] (Ikuno, 2005).

Even if Japan has established a modernized and westernized society, 'seken' is predominant among the Japanese. Also Ikuno (2005) referred to the unspoken rule of our community, which is "Be a useful member of the community before being a unique individual!", "In order to achieve the community goal, an individual should not stick to his/her personal wish." The Japanese are often regarded as people who like the authority and are poor in the expression of personality. In such cases the authority for the Japanese is 'seken'.

Discussion

In the historical view, the Japanese concepts of community can be explained with the two words - 'seken' and 'shakai'. The Japanese live in both 'shakai' and 'seken'. However, the situation of community has changed rapidly. Here I will comment on the situation of community in Japan today, and afterwards I discuss the possibility of Community Music Therapy in Japan.

The Situation of Community

There were two waves of modernization-westernization in Japan. The first one was the Meiji restoration and the post-war recovery after the Second World War. Before World War II, Japanese society, even in cities, had a kind of 'mutual aid system' which was called 'Mukousangen-ryodonari' (neighbours). This was the smallest unit of a local community.. There people helped each other in their daily lives. In the militaristic climate of the war, it worked as a protection for the people in the community – a way of watching over each other.

After the war was over, the whole situation in society was completely changed. Ikuno described (2002, p.190) that we [the Japanese] did have a custom of helping as a basis for daily life until the Western value system began to dominate our society to be "fast, strong, and effective." An economic flourishing was aimed in the name of 'post-war recovery'. A number of people moved from rural districts to cities. As a result, the structure of the population in rural districts was changed. In cities 'kakukazoku' (core-family) became prominent from then on. 'Kakukazoku' is a style of family which consists of only parents and children. These families were isolated in local communities without relationships from generation to generation. At the same time, each

member of 'kakukazoku' was isolated in each family because they were not at home together because of work, business, study, and other factors.

In addition, Japan has not built any really good relationships with other Asian countries before/during/after the war in spite of its geopolitical position. Japan is isolated among neighbouring countries in Asia. In other words, Japan is isolated in the Asian community as a nation. Japan has such double-isolation in/outside of the nation, and the Japanese live under difficult conditions and suffer 'the chronic feeling of isolation'. Especially after the collapse of the bubble economy which occurred in the first half of 1990's, the feeling of isolation has deeply acted on the mentality of the Japanese. Recently, symbolizing such a social mood, we often hear phrases like *lost self-confidence*. The suicide rate has increased in these ten years, especially among men who are in their prime. A number of pupils are truants and they stay at home in the daytime.

In addition, 'seken' gives a complicated perspective to such a situation. It is often perceived that people share a much stronger sympathy with people who live in distance than those who live in the same area. Abe mentioned (1997, p. 94) that the attendance at funerals is a duty in 'seken'. A Japanese person would attend funerals of members of his/her own 'seken' even if it is held in a distant place while the Japanese don't tend to attend funerals of neighbours if they aren't members of one's own 'seken'. In such a situation, it is extremely difficult to define the term community in Japan and see how the concepts of Japanese community are embedded nowadays.

The Possibility of Community Music Therapy in Japan

Although Japanese music therapists are interested in Community Music therapy, there are very few descriptions about Community Music Therapy in the Japanese music therapy literature. Only one Japanese music therapy scholar writes about Community Music Therapy. Yu Wakao who is a composer, an improviser, and a professor cultural studies at Kobe University, writes:

For instance, a goal of music therapy is that the client would join an ordinary amateur choir. What can a music therapist do for his/her wish? What will happen if the music therapist negotiates with the choir to accept him/her as a member of the choir? In many cases they reject the proposal. However, it is possible that some choirs decide to accept him/her. If so fortunately, how can the choir accept him/her? What will happen if the choir does "musicking" in the new style for him/her?

.....It can be understood that if the situation develops successfully in such a way, a change occurs in the choir. Then the change can be an important empowerment for the goal of music therapy. It is more meaningful to change the environment, culture and community than to change an individual (Wakao, 2004).

Wakao has started an initiative in Community Music Therapy in Kobe, a city in the western part of Japan, in cooperation with other music therapists. A big earthquake attacked Kobe in 1995 and they lost everything instantly. Over 6,400 people lost their lives and a number of people moved to new places. The survivors had to reconstruct their community with new members. Through such a difficult experience they learned the significance of 'community'. In 2002, two music therapists began their clinical work together at two institutions near Kobe as part of local welfare for the handicapped, supported by the Government and the county. These activities were regarded as recreation for children who went to special schools or adults with mental retardation. They had two groups per a week. Now one of the institutions is an experimental space for Community Music Therapy.

A Community Music Therapy project has already finished in Yokohama, a city in the eastern part of Japan. Two music therapists, two assistants, a composer, a director, several amateur musicians from Yokohama and several professional musicians cooperated with each other to work with ten children who went to a special school run by Yokohama City. This project had the ecological perspective. The practices in both Kobe and Yokohama might have started using the Community Music Therapy practices from Europe as a model. But after finding their own ways that were suitable for a Japanese worldview, culture, and social system, the practices became model cases of Community Music Therapy in Japan.

However, as I mentioned, a feeling of isolation has spread among people in Japan, not only the handicapped or the sick but also people who have no such pathology. I think that Community Music Therapy can help to create 'community' for many people. Indeed, the word 'community'

has been one of the keywords in Japanese business. Many seminars and events focus on 'community'. The attempt to build community schools[2] has been implemented in several areas, for example, in one district of Tokyo. The promotion of community music which is based on the British model is very active. In these situations, professional musicians and music educators work together for people. Recently, the interest in 'community' has certainly increased. It can be said that the mental problems, the feeling of isolation, or the loss or lack of 'ibasho' (places where people feel comfortable to be) leads to the need of 'community'. Stige (2004, p.103) mentioned that community music therapists work with the *relatively disadvantaged*. In this sense, people who lost 'ibasho' can be the participants in Community Music Therapy. It is certain that they are relatively disadvantaged in the society.

Japan has a number of well-organized musical groups, for example, choirs for children, choirs for older persons, brass bands and orchestras for children, and other groups. It is possible to cooperate with these groups in order to practice Community Music Therapy. Indeed, some choirs for children have already functioned as 'ibasho' for children who are alienated from their school. Community Music Therapy can create 'ibasho' as 'community' for such children by involving people from families and local communities. A family choir with a music therapeutic perspective will be established in Kanagawa County in 2006 as a basis of a choir for children. Some music therapists will work as advisers in this activity. In such cases 'community' may be an open space where children feel comfortable to be. The use of musical infrastructures can be an important way to encourage Community Music Therapy in Japan in addition to building new projects.

The word 'ibasho' is a keyword when we think of the feeling of isolation. The word 'ibasho' consists of two parts, 'iru' (be, exist) and 'basho' (place). If 'community' created by Community Music Therapy is 'ibasho', the first purpose is not 'to do something there' but 'to be there'. I think that the idea of place for being/existing is deeply rooted in Japanese mentality. In 1961, Masao Maruyama, a Japanese thinker who lived from 1914 to 1996, argued that the 'doing' value penetrated into Japanese society after the Meiji period while the 'being' value continued to be rooted strongly among people. He regarded the 'doing' value as a value which the western culture brought into Japan and it became dominant in the Japanese society. This was a perversion of values and the re-turn of values is needed. Here we can see the similarity with 'seken' and 'shakai'. About the 'being' and 'doing' values, Ikuno described;

I came to rationalize our achievement by using the labels "doing" and "being."
The health in "doing" means "functions recovered, abilities developed, and growth measurable through use of quantitative data." On the other hand, the health in "being" is "the person is becoming happier and fuller, the existence is approaching a greater well-being, even though the functions and the abilities have not changed."

[...]

Japanese medicine, which had committed itself to only "doing" in the past few decades, is now also introducing the concept of "QOL" (Quality of Life). However I feel something even more static, introspective, or "non-purposeful" as a quality in music therapy. This quality might be related to a life view buried deeply inside the Japanese' mentality, not only "Ikiru" (to live purposefully), but also "Ikasareru" (to be made to live by a greater purpose.) Japanese music therapy should develop means to recognize, deepen and communicate ways of well-being, across the doing and the being (Ikuno, 2005b, para 16).

It is probable that 'ibasho' will become a keyword of Community Music Therapy in Japan. 'ibasho' is related to 'seken' and 'community'. It is very meaningful to introduce Community Music Therapy to Japan. As Maruyama pointed out, a re-turn of values is needed. The practices of Community Music Therapy can present some aspects of community in Japan, where the 'being' value could exist in a renewed way.

Conclusion

The Japanese culture has some specific aspects of 'community' - 'seken', the 'being value', and 'community' as 'ibasho'. What is the difference between Community Music Therapy in Japan and Community Music Therapy in others cultures? Ikuno asserts:

Co-existing in an organic way by equally cherishing the self in the vision of others and the others in the vision of the self, sensing the diverse vectors of natures and wills of the both. In such "relationships between human-beings," I see in one sense how Japanese or Asian therapy can be. And to cultivate/nurture the sense for this kind of "relationship", music can be a great medium (Ikuno, 2005a, para 10).

If music can be a great medium, how can community music therapists be in the Japanese society? What can community music therapists do in the Japanese context? I would conclude this article with a passage by Abe, as follows:

People who are sophisticated are those who can be in a position to change 'seken' and work on others through one's own way of living. The sophistication has been 'individual' and the individuals wish to actualize themselves... .. However, in 'seken' the individuals had to cultivate themselves, understand their own position, and have their own role in 'seken' (Abe, 1997, p.180).

If Community Music Therapy changes 'community', it is probable that Japanese community music therapists work for changing 'seken'. For this reason Japanese community music therapists should endeavour to develop themselves and they should know their role in 'seken'. Japanese community music therapists have an important role to play in the Japanese society.

Notes

[1] During the Edo period, Japan took a national seclusion policy. Only Netherlands and China were permitted to trade with Japan.

[2] The innovation of public schools where members of the local community participate in school committees.

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