

The Case of Bach and Japan: Some Concepts and their Possible Significance

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The high quality and valuable contributions made by Japanese performers and scholars to Bach's music are widely recognised in western Bach scholarship. The critically acclaimed Bach Collegium Japan (BCJ) and its conductor Masaaki Suzuki (鈴木雅明) have gained accolades in Europe and are generally respected as one of the world's leading Bach ensembles. Masaaki's brother Hidemi (鈴木秀美) is also known internationally for his contributions to Bach's cello music as a solo and continuo cellist, as well as serving as a judge in the Leipzig Bach competition.

In terms of scholarship, Yoshitake Kobayashi's (小林義武) work on Bach's chronology, watermark scores, and handwriting made an invaluable contribution (unfortunately he passed away in 2013). Professor Yo Tomita (富田庸) is one of the most important Bach scholars today, not only for his work on Bach manuscripts and sources, but as the pioneering founder of the online Bach bibliography and editor of the forthcoming *Cambridge Bach Encyclopaedia*. I had the pleasure of translating some work for this project, written by Professor Isoyama Tadashi (磯山雅)—another scholar who has contributed internationally to Bach research. The Vice President of the International Musicological Society, Professor Ryuichi Higuchi (樋口隆一), must also be mentioned for his contributions to Bach studies; he retired from his university post in 2015 with the farewell lecture 'Bach Research and Me'.¹ Several other researchers in Japan who have produced work on Bach should also be mentioned, such as Mr Nobuaki Ebata (江端伸昭).² Over the past two years at Tokyo University of Arts (Japan's oldest and most prestigious music conservatoire) I have been impressed by the top level postgraduate research on Bach being carried out under the guidance of the highly respected Professor Osumi Kinya (大角欣矢). Indeed the online Bach Bibliography³ gives over one thousand results for Bach research written in Japanese, a testament to the importance of Japan in modern Bach research and performance.

¹ The contents of this lecture were published in *Meiji Gakuin University Art Studies*, no. 25 (Tokyo: Meiji Gakuin University, 2015).

² Mr Ebata was hailed as the world's heaviest user of the 'Bach Digital' website in C. Blanken, 'New Online Resources for Bach Scholarship', paper given at the Seventh J. S. Bach Dialogue Meeting, Madingley Hall, Cambridge University, 8–10 July 2015. It is also curious that this website is currently offered in three languages only: English, German and Japanese.

³ www.music.qub.ac.uk/tomita/bachbib (accessed 1 December 2015).

It is obvious that Japanese musicians and performers have made a huge contribution to Bach's music since the latter half of the twentieth century. However, it is tempting to question whether Bach has any relevance or connection to Japanese society in general. In the words of Prof. Isoyama:

Bach concerts from domestic or foreign performers are held almost every day; many Bach CDs and books are always on the market and are sold well. There are more than 30 Bach choirs throughout the country; in the music schools children learn quite a few [of Bach's] piano pieces.⁴

It could be said that this is a rather conservative estimate of Bach-related activity in Japan, with Masaaki Suzuki putting the number of Japanese Bach choirs between 100 and 200 as of the year 2000;⁵ Chaz Jenkins (Vice President of Universal Music, Classical, Marketing) gave a talk in 2015 showing Japan to be the world's biggest consumer of classical music CDs. He also predicted that Japan would move from being the world's second biggest classical market to the overall number one over the next year or so.⁶ The popularity of BCJ's concerts as well as the attendance of Japanese listeners at Bach festivals, such as Bachfest and others,⁷ demonstrate that within Japanese society there is a high level of awareness of Bach's music; it is often studied when learning an instrument, especially the piano,⁸ or at school. Bach, known as 'The Father of Music',⁹ is one of the most appreciated western classical composers within *Kurashiku*, the Japanese genre of classical music – which, as Wade stated, should be considered distinct and unique to Japan, with its own conventions, history, and social function.¹⁰

⁴ Tadashi Isoyama, 'Bachs Musik für Tasteninstrumente in Japan', in Martin Geck (ed.), *Bachs Musik für Tasteninstrumente: Bericht über das 4. Dortmunder Bach-Symposion 2002*, Dortmunder Bach-Forschungen, 6 (Dortmund: Klangfarben Musikverlag, 2003), 105 (original in German).

⁵ Netto Uwe Siemonâ, www.firstthings.com/article/2000/06/j-s-bach-in-japan (accessed 30 July 2013).

⁶ Chaz Jenkins, 「音楽産業の未来ナビ～音楽家としてのグローバル・キャリアを構築するために」, paper given at Tokyo University of the Arts, 3 and 4 June 2015.

⁷ I was contacted in 2014 by a Japanese-listener who was part of a group organised by Hiroko Kato (加藤浩子, a well-known scholar of Bach's music in Japan) and later by Hiroko herself – mentioning that they had heard Dunedin Consort play Bach's music in France and how they were part of a group organised for the purpose of listening to Bach's music abroad.

⁸ For information about the status and importance of the piano and Bach's keyboard works in Japanese musical education, see Kobayashi Yoshitake, 'Bach-Rezeption und Forschung in Japan', in Johann Trummer (ed.), *Bach im Mittelpunkt: Botschaften an die Aufführungspraxis: Symposion*, Neue Beiträge zur Aufführungspraxis, 4 (Regensburg: Conbrio, 2001), 152.

⁹ This nickname for Bach appeared far back in the history of Japanese music education, as stated in 磯山雅, 教養としてのバッハ, in 「バッハの生涯」 (Japan: Artes Publishing, 2012), 6. However, recent examples of this name being ascribed to Bach can be seen in the short biography on Yamaha's website at www.yamaha.co.jp/himekuri/view.php?ymd=19990321. This nickname was also used as the title of the Bach issue in KMP's music educational-based comic series; see かざま たこえ, 「音楽の父 まんがバッハ物語」, 6th edn (Japan: KMP, 1998).

¹⁰ Bonnie Wade, *Music in Japan: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 8.

Why has a country in east Asia produced performers and researchers of Bach's music, working at the highest level, and why is there such a comparatively high level of interest in his music in Japanese society? Does Japan's history of a completely different cultural background and religious tradition create a barrier to appreciating Bach's music, or is Bach's music so universal that it can transcend these differences? Is the music, with its structure and genius, so fascinating that it is loved regardless of country or culture? Perhaps, as Prof. Higuchi once said, the complexity of Bach's music offers a challenge that appeals to Japanese people.¹¹ Or perhaps there is some special connection between Japanese culture or society and Bach's music?

Dr Siemon-Netto has suggested Bach's religiosity as an explanation, offering a theory based on the work of unspecified 'Tokyo musicologists' and suggesting that Xavier's Christian missionaries planted seeds for the current 'Bach boom' in the sixteenth century by introducing and teaching Gregorian chant, which somehow complements some sort of modern day Bach mania driven by Christian values. I have found it extremely hard to identify these 'Tokyo musicologists', and in any case this is particularly problematic as no Bach-related activity took place until the nineteenth century, and Japanese Christians currently account for fewer than one per cent of the population. In any case, Bach's music has overwhelmingly been performed as concert music and most Japanese Bach fans actually identify more with Buddhism than Christianity, let alone Lutheranism.¹² It seems more realistic that, as Isoyama stated, this Japanese Bach phenomenon has its roots in the nineteenth-century modernisation of Japanese society.¹³ Indeed, Japan provides a unique example of a nation subjected to an aggressive, policy-driven western-style modernisation by its government, and illustrates how western music functions within such a process. As Butt stated in 2010:

Most interesting of all would be to take into consideration the extraordinary blossoming of interest in the music of Bach and other prominent Western composers in the Far East, specifically in Japan, Korea, and China. These are countries that have developed their own forms of modernity (together with the concomitant advantages and disadvantages this might bring) in an extraordinarily short period of time. If there is any empirical evidence to support the connections I propose between music in the Western 'classical' canon and the imperatives of modernity, here is surely where it is to be found.¹⁴

This statement opens up some interesting questions about the nature of Bach's dissemination in East Asia. This idea of Bach's reception being tied to the process of modernity in East Asia has already had some influence.¹⁵

¹¹ Ryuichi Higuchi, 'Bach-Reception and Musicology in Japan', *Meiji Gakuin University Art Studies*, 22 (July 2012), 5.

¹² Kobayashi, 'Bach-Rezeption und Forschung in Japan', 151.

¹³ Isoyama, 'Bachs Musik für Tasteninstrumente in Japan', 105.

¹⁴ John Butt, *Bach's Dialogue with Modernity: Perspectives on the Passions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 295.

¹⁵ For example, in 2013, Kayoung Lee started her article on Bach's reception in Korea by citing the same quote by Butt, written above, and subsequently provides an interesting account of

However, a lot of source work still needs to be done before the role of Bach's music in Japan can be clearly seen and articulated within this process of modernity. Studies in the reception of Bach by Japanese scholars have relied very heavily on the *hyakunenshi*,¹⁶ resulting in the idea that the first performance of Bach's music in Japan for which evidence survives was 'an air' played on violin at the Tokyo Music School in 1890.¹⁷ If taking into account only Japanese performers, then this is certainly one of the earliest performances of Bach's music for which there is hard evidence, but it seems that sources from the Yokohama foreign settlement and certain newspaper articles have not yet made their way into research on Bach's reception in Japan—there are extant sources which indicate that there were performances of Bach's music in the late 1860s and early 1870s.¹⁸

Furthermore, although it is clear that the Tokyo Music School was the centre of Bach study and performance in Japan during the mid-late Meiji era and beyond, no one has so far examined the sources from this school that cover more than sixty years and are preserved in the Integrated Arts Archive Centre at Tokyo University of the Arts,¹⁹ or the records of music scores imported by the school at this time for the study of Bach reception. Neither has there yet been a comprehensive study of concert reviews and articles from the newspapers and music periodicals relating to the activities of the Tokyo Music School. Even at this early stage I have found some interesting results, but a detailed collection and analysis of all these available sources is needed for a fuller picture of Bach's reception in the Japanese Meiji era (1868–1912) to see just how Bach's music was first received and introduced to Japan. The need for this kind of detailed source-

Bach in Korea through the process of Japanese-influenced modernity. See 'The Reception of Bach's Music in Korea from 1900 to 1945', *Bach*, 44/2 (2013), 25–51.

- ¹⁶ See 「東京芸術大学百年史」(東京：音楽之友社，1987–2003). This was a large project that started in 1987 with the aim of collecting the sources and information in one volume of 100 years of the history of Tokyo University of the Arts, 1887–1987. It is an incredibly useful and impressive collection but I am finding that some information from this early period, particularly from the *Yomiuri Newspaper*, was not included. This is perhaps due to the fact that content searchable digital newspaper databases simply were not available at that time, even now they are not comprehensive or complete to say the least and may well have been overlooked.
- ¹⁷ This was the first school that had the primary aim of the study for Western Art music in Japan and was established in 1887 and evolved out of the Music Research Committee, which had the aim of creating modern music for a modern nation; it is now part of Tokyo University of the Arts.
- ¹⁸ For information on 'Klub Germania' and a source showing the repertoire performed by them on 6 November 1869 (including the music of Bach), see 升本匡彦著，「横浜ゲーテ座：明治・大正の西洋劇場」(横浜：岩崎博物館，1986)，22–3; and for details of a performance of Bach's music by residents of the Yokohama settlement, see 「横浜と音楽」編集委員会編(横浜：横浜市教育局委員会，1986)，36–8.
- ¹⁹ This Archive Centre contains over 500 boxes holding official documents about the teachers, students, and the classes given at the school. Although not a huge amount survives, even from what is there, I have been able to identify who was responsible for teaching Bach's works and which works were chosen for certain students, and there are a few early student essays that mention Bach in the music history classes. I have recently been employed by the Archive Centre to work through some other sources which have not yet been examined.

based study continues with the Taisho era²⁰ and the early Showa until the wartime period.²¹ Japan's first composition professor, Kiyoshi Nobutoki (信時潔), also had a clear affinity with Bach's music. A collection of his writings on music has been published under the name of 'Not Bach' (バッハに非ず is a reference to Bach as meaning a river, which could perhaps be translated as 'not Bach the river'),²² but this affinity to Bach has not been explored. I am currently undertaking a historical source analysis based study, covering the period until the end of the Second World War.

As for post-war Japan's 'new start', from the 1960s to the 1980s accelerated cultural westernisation brought economic success and the rise of the Japanese middle class, mass media, and the increasing affordability and accessibility of music and musical instruments. For Bach's music, this resulted in a large increase in the number of listeners, collectors, amateur and professional musicians, and scholars, and resulted in the rise of Japanese musicology. A more sociological approach is needed to deal with these factors of the post-war period, taking into account not only data on the huge rise of the Japanese middle class and the role music had in everyday life (which is related to the increased piano, radio, and record player ownership), but also undertaking empirical case studies of how Bach's music 'gets into the reality' of Japanese society, to use Denora's words.²³

Case studies, interviews, and surveys with important academics and performers, and also amateur musicians and fans of Bach's music, will give more clues as to why Bach's music inspires musical action and so help to reveal what Bach and his music means and symbolises in Japanese society. This was the approach taken recently by Wade's research on Japanese composers in her *Composing Japanese Musical Modernity*,²⁴ which yielded some empirically-based fruitful results that allowed her to consider concepts such as modernity and Japanese society at a deeper level. I see no reason why an empirically rich study of the actors involved in Bach activity in Japan could not produce useful and enlightening results to help in considering the abstract concept of Bach's modernity in general. Bach's place in Japanese musicology could also be investigated. There has been no detailed study of Japanese musicology even on a general level; some important works have made their way into the German language, especially in the case of Bach studies (Yoshitake Kobayashi's work is

²⁰ This period sees an increased number of articles on and translations of works on music and aesthetics, alongside an increased amount of music activity among student groups, which has not yet been used in regard to the study of Bach's reception in Japan.

²¹ The Showa period comes with the issues of the rise of radio broadcasts and domestically produced records, the increase in Bach-related activity, and publications which were allowed through the wartime censorship due to the Japanese Nazi alliance, him being a German composer and this a symbol of Nazi Germany. The previously mentioned article by Kayoung Lee shows how this image also spread to Korea. This period saw the Japanese premier of both passions but, aside from this, most of the sources and Bach activity at this time have not yet made their way into the research on Bach's reception.

²² 信時裕子, 「バッハに非ず: 信時潔音楽随想集」(東京: アルテスパブリッシング, 2012).

²³ This is a large theme in Denora's approach to music sociology; see Tia DeNora, *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²⁴ Bonnie C. Wade, *Composing Japanese Musical Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

the most well-known example), but there is room for more dialogue between Japanese musicologists and the English-speaking world, and perhaps translations of work into English.

Whatever these results indicate, it is certain that there is a gap in western musicology regarding the Japanese reception of Bach, which needs to be addressed. At present, the only published academic work readily available in English is a meagre four paragraphs allocated to the subject in the *Oxford Composer Companions*.²⁵ This is symptomatic of a wider problem within western musicology; there seems to be a relative lack of research into the cultural geography of 'western classical music'. Entering 'Japan' in the search engine of the website of *The Oxford History of Western Music* produces six results—half of which state that Japan had an atomic bomb dropped on it, one stating that Japan was as an ally of Nazi Germany, another mentioning Prokofiev's stop in Yokohama, and one mentioning classical music's relatively high record sales in 1970s Japan. Is this image of Japan fit for the nation that has and continues to contribute so much not only to Bach research and performance, but also to western classical music in general?

Even in Japan-focused ethnomusicology, there has been an understandable negativity around Japan's contributions to western music in the defence of Japanese folk traditions, which faced great challenges and upheavals during Japan's Westernisation process.²⁶ Professor Ken-ichi Sasaki once noted the dismay and disappointment of western scholars turning to Japan as an escape from the problems of modernity when they find that the problems and issues of Japanese modernity are actually very similar, if not identical, to those in the West.²⁷ Indeed, what anthropologist Shuhei Hosokawa stated about modern Japanese people—that, having been severed by modernity from their own historicity and indigenous traditions, they now search for music of an 'Other'²⁸—could easily be applied to the modern condition in the West, as John Butt did when he suggested that this consequence of modernity is the 'impetus behind the

²⁵ See Ryuichi Higuchi, 'Japan', in Malcolm Boyd (ed.), *Oxford Composer Companions: J.S. Bach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 394–5; apart from this, in English, there are only journalistic articles on the subject such as the previously mentioned articles by Dr Uwe Simona. Prof. Higuchi's lecture, 'Bach-Reception and Musicology in Japan', has been published in English in Meiji Gakuin University's art studies journal but is not readily available outside Japan. Prof. Higuchi also gave another lecture, 'Johann Sebastian Bach's Music in Modern Japanese Musical Life', in Cuba but this remains unpublished, although he has kindly given me a copy of his lecture notes. Prof. Isoyama's lecture on the history of the B-minor mass can be found in English too; see Isoyama Tadashi, 'The B-Minor Mass and Japanese People', *International Symposium: Understanding Bach's B-minor Mass: Discussion Book 1*, November (2007), 344–51.

²⁶ For comments about Japanese 'iconization' and 'fetishization' of Western classical music along with the negative effects that this and modern media have had on 'local music culture', see Alison McQueen Tokita and David W. Hughes (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Japanese Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 7–11. Also, for a comment on the bias of Western music in Japanese music education, see David Hughes, *Traditional Folk Song in Modern Japan: Sources, Sentiment and Society* (Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2008), 157.

²⁷ Ken-ichi Sasaki (ed.), *Asian Aesthetics* (Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2010), x–4.

²⁸ Wade, *Music in Japan*, 137–8.

historically-informed performance movement'.²⁹ Slobin found even with folk music 'A foreign music seems like a cosy cabin in the wilderness of contemporary culture'.³⁰ Could this symptom of modernity perhaps be another factor in the Japanese interest in Bach's music? If, as John Butt states, a crucial aim of Bach's reception is to understand 'why Bach's music can still mean anything at all to us in such a changed world',³¹ surely the case of Japan must be further considered. I cannot see any reason why the current discourses of western music reception and history continue to ignore a country that has not only contributed so much to the study and performance of Bach's music, but also may soon become the biggest consumer of western classical music in the world. It seems that Bach reception studies still lack research on one of the biggest receivers of and contributors to his music in modern times. A detailed study of the sources and empirical data is required at this early stage before dealing with larger abstract concepts. The reception of Bach in Japan may hold many clues not only to the understanding of Bach's modernity but also to the cultural geography of Bach's music in general. Bettina Varwig rightly asks, if Bach represents a 'multifaceted mirror of Western civilisation', exactly 'who has been looking in this mirror over the years, and what versions of Bach or themselves have they seen?'³²

²⁹ John Butt, 'The Postmodern Mindset, Musicology and the Future of Bach Scholarship', *Understanding Bach*, 1 (2006), 10.

³⁰ Mark Slobin, *Folk Music: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 103.

³¹ Butt, 'The Postmodern Mindset', 17.

³² Bettina Varwig, 'The Worlds of Johann Sebastian Bach' [book review], *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 35/3 (September 2012), 450-1.