



# The *Iemoto* System in Japanese Performing Arts in Southern California: Its Transformation and Influences on the Diaspora Musical Practices<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This study examines the transformation of the *iemoto* system as a cultural institution that has shaped traditional Japanese music in southern California. The *iemoto* system is a hierarchical structure of teachers and students within a school of an art. The system prescribes specific processes for transmitting the art, as well as special teacher-student relationships within the structure. In southern California, the *iemoto* system has transformed itself to cope with Japanese-American environments. This transformation involved the weakening of ideological principles as the foundation of the *iemoto* system and produced features distinctive in southern California.

## 1. Introduction

The *iemoto* system has played significant roles in the transmission of various Japanese performing arts. Sociologists have studied the *iemoto* system in its close historical ties with the Japanese feudalistic social structure as well as its continuity, prosperity, and problems in modern Japan. They suggest that the *iemoto* system continues to survive in changing Japan due to its deep roots in Japanese socio-cultural history and mentality

(Kawashima 1957; Nishiyama 1982a, 1982b; Shimazaki 1953; Ortolani 1969). As the *iemoto* system expands beyond Japan, one asks whether it can effectively function in societies outside Japan. If the system changes, one asks how that change will affect the Japanese arts that depend on the system. This study explores such questions overlooked in previous studies through the examination of *iemoto* system in southern California, particularly in *koto* (zither), *min'yō* (folksong), and *nagauta* (a vocal genre accompanied by *shamisen* or three-stringed lute).

Based on my fieldwork observation and interviews<sup>2</sup> conducted mainly from 1994 to 1997, I suggest that the *iemoto* system has transformed itself in Southern California to accommodate a different set of social, cultural, and psychological factors, and that this transformation has led to the transformation of various musical practices. Although ethnomusicological studies on culture change, particularly as a result of Western influence on non-Western culture, have largely focused on the resultant musical changes, I argue that cultural institutions involved in music, such as the *iemoto* system, also change through cultural contact, and that such an institutional change could become a key cause to produce transformations in musical practices. I also point out that the Japanese language is a key element from a linguistic point of view in the formation/transmission of the hierarchical *iemoto* system; in other words, the loss of the Japanese language is likely to undermine the system. The transformation of the *iemoto* system in southern California also suggests that the Japanese vertical society as exemplified in the *iemoto* system is not as static as so persuasively described by Nakane (1967), but can be adjusted to the needs and conditions of the people involved. Such a view of social structure/system supports the idea pointed out in recent socio-anthropological theories that individual agencies are not only controlled by the social structure/system, but also control it through rational choice of action to generate social/cultural change. In the following sections, I first explain what the *iemoto* system is, then I outline the historical background of the *iemoto* system in southern California, and finally I describe its transformation and influences on the musical practices.

## 2. The *Iemoto* System

*Iemoto* (家元) refers to the headmaster of a school of an art.<sup>3</sup> The *iemoto* system is a hierarchical structure of teachers and students organized under the supreme authority of the *iemoto*. The *iemoto* system prescribes specific processes for transmitting the art, as well as special teacher-student relationships within the structure. Although the *iemoto* or *iemoto*-like masters have existed as early as the Nara period (710-784) in the world of *gagaku* (court music) (Hirano 1981), it was only around the mid-Edo period (the 18<sup>th</sup> to the early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries) that the “*iemoto* system” was established with the invention of the *natori* (名取) system (*natori* literally means “taking a name”) (Nishiyama 1982b: 474-5, 484).

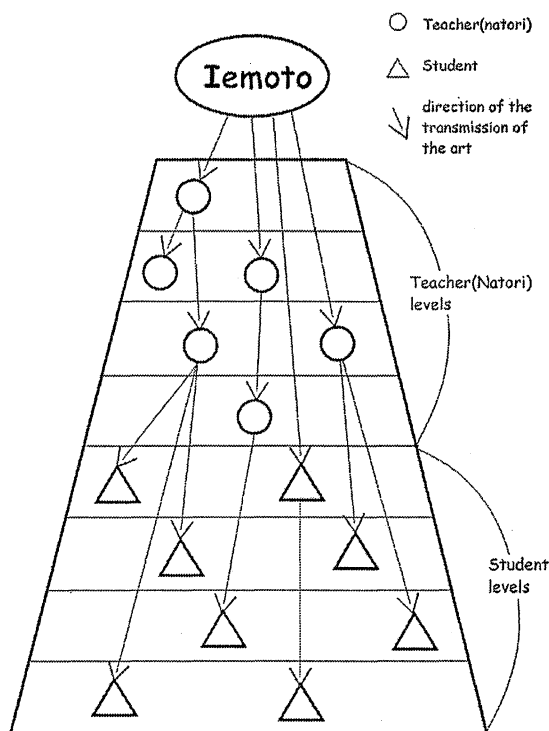


FIGURE 1 *Iemoto* System

The *natori* are licensed disciples who are given professional names from the *iemoto*. As licensed professionals, *natori* are allowed to teach lower level students within the school (see Fig. 1). However, they cannot issue *natori* licenses or any other licenses to their students. They can only request the *iemoto* to issue the licenses for their accomplished students. By separating the right to teach and the right to license, the *natori* system, thus, became a convenient means to reproduce and effectively disseminate the art of the school under the *iemoto*'s control.<sup>4</sup>

The teacher-student relationships and the ways of transmitting the arts within the *iemoto* system are very much prescribed by the moral values that have supported the feudalistic *ie* structure<sup>5</sup> or the origin of the *iemoto* system. *Ie* (家), translated as "house" or "household," refers to more than a simple conjugal family in the customary sense found in contemporary Japan and elsewhere. It is a unit of several families, including both blood-related and non blood-related, that are hierarchically ordered and bound by a particular task or goal, such as agriculture, military affairs, religious rituals, and political administration. Through the process of its historical evolution, the *ie* structure has been combined with various moral values derived from religious beliefs, such as a Confucian sense of hierarchical loyalty, a Buddhist emphasis on patriarchal lineage in the transmission of tradition, and a Shinto view of the veneration of ancestry (Heine 1995: 34). Supported by these moral values, the *iemoto* system, a product of Edo feudalism, survives to the present day Japan, which is based on the ideals of capitalism and democracy. Far from declining, the *iemoto* system has even prospered and expanded its sphere of influence to various performing arts genres and other cultural practices that are not traditionally associated with the *iemoto* system.<sup>6</sup> This means that the *iemoto* system is not static but is rather flexible and adjusted to different conditions to maintain its essential ideological principles (explained later) in contemporary Japan.

Sociologist Nishiyama attributes this continuity and prosperity of the *iemoto* system to the Japanese mentality of attachment to authority, particularly one with traditional and historical values (1982b: 425-7). This

mentality has been tenaciously maintained in Japanese society even with the onslaught of Western moral values, which have been only partially adopted. Today's *iemoto* system is not a relic from the past, but one of the various fictitious *ie* structures, which have been supported by this mentality and are still prevalent in Japanese society (Heine 1995; Hsu 1975, Kawashima 1957, Murakami 1979, Nakane 1967). *Ie*-ism continues to function "as a pattern or model of Japanese social behavior that is considered 'the basic principle on which Japanese society is built'" (Heine 1995: 33).

### 3. Historical Background of the *Iemoto* System in Southern California

In southern California, the Japanese community came into existence in the 1910s, and some immigrants who had some experience in Japanese performing arts such as *yōkyoku* (vocal music for *nō* drama), *biwa* (pear-shaped lute), *shakuhachi* (vertical bamboo flute) and *koto* (zither) started to teach their arts.<sup>7</sup> At this early stage, there were already some teachers introducing themselves as belonging to specific schools of arts, such as Yamada and Ikuta Schools of *koto* and Kanze and Hōshō Schools of *yōkyoku*. Distinctions among the different schools based on the *iemoto* system were thus well recognized and maintained among the Japanese immigrants and their descendents. However, this does not mean that the constraints and rules inherent in the *iemoto* system were fully practiced. For example, there was a case where a former female itinerant entertainer from Japan who had settled in California visited Japan in the early 1920s for the purpose of acquiring a *natori* license. She directly asked the *iemoto* of the *nagauta* school where she used to belong to issue her a license. On the grounds that she had been performing for a long time, she was exceptionally granted a *natori* license without the formal examination usually required for it.<sup>8</sup> As this episode reveals, the regulations for granting the *natori* license to the emigrants were looser. In pre-World War II California, the factional boundaries among different *iemoto* schools also

seemed to have been loose. A Nisei *koto* teacher, Wakita Kayoko (脇田佳代子),<sup>9</sup> recalls that there were even some occasions where *koto* performers of different schools played together.<sup>10</sup>

Japanese performing arts transplanted by the first generation of Japanese immigrants (Issei) were eventually transmitted to the American-born second generation (Nisei), and in the period between the late 1930s and the outbreak of World War II, there appeared some Nisei who had studied Japanese classical dance in Japan under Japanese masters and returned to the U.S. with their *natori* licenses. Unlike the aforementioned example, these Nisei went through the formal procedures to become *natori*-licensed teachers.

During World War II, Japanese performing arts further prospered in the Japanese American concentration camps, where more than 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry living in the west coast of the U.S. had been interned under the pretext of national security. Recreational activities including music and dance were encouraged within the camps as an outlet for the internees' anger and anxiety in the abnormal camp life.<sup>11</sup> The prosperity of Japanese performing arts in camps established the basis for their recovery in the postwar Japanese-American community. With the amendment of the immigration laws in 1952, the postwar Japanese immigrants, the so-called Shin-Issei, began to settle in Los Angeles and its environs. Among them were quite a few teachers of Japanese performing arts. Together with the Nisei teachers, they have greatly contributed to the development of Japanese performing arts in the postwar Japanese American community and were also instrumental in bringing in the direct influences of the *iemoto* system in the U.S. through their intimate relation with the *iemoto* in Japan.

#### 4. Transformation of the *iemoto* System and its Influences on the Musical Practices

The Nisei and Shin-Issei teachers, nevertheless, could not maintain the system as it was in Japan. They faced three main obstacles: 1) the shift

of the students from Issei and Nisei to Sansei (the third generation) and younger generations who are more Americanized in their language, moral values, and mentality,<sup>12</sup> 2) the American socio-cultural environment, which is different from that in Japan, and 3) the teachers' own recognition of the negative aspects of the *iemoto* system. These obstacles undermined the following four ideological principles pertaining to the *iemoto* system: 1) loyal obligations; 2) the absolute value of the authoritative ranks; 3) a teacher-student relationship that emphasizes hierarchical distinction; and 4) a teaching method that emphasizes imitation. In the following sections, I will illustrate each of the above issues.

#### 4.1 Loyal Obligations

As a fictitious *ie* structure, the *iemoto* system involves moral values of obligation and loyalty. Within the system, students are indebted to their teachers and the *iemoto*; in return for their teachings of authentic art and repertoire, the students assume the following loyal obligations: a) personal attachment to one's teacher and the school, b) loyalty to the art and repertoire of the school, and c) monetary obligations (Kawashima 1957: 329-331). Theoretically these obligations are sanctified by the moral value of loyalty; they are "voluntary acts" but not duties. In reality, however, they often become inescapable burdens on the students in Japan. In California, the obligations taken for granted in Japan have been undermined, a development that can be analyzed as follows.

##### 4.1.1 Personal Attachment to One's Teacher and the School

Within the *iemoto* system, a student should be personally and emotionally attached to one's own teacher and the school. The student must not switch his/her teacher even within the same school.<sup>13</sup> It goes without saying that he/she must not be engaged in other schools or become independent. These rules do not work in California because: 1) the students in California – predominantly Japanese-Americans – value individualism

and democratic human relationship rather than attachment to a single authority, 2) less competition among teachers in California makes it easy to establish oneself as the *iemoto* of a new school, 3) less competition among different schools in California weakens one's feeling of belonging to a particular school, and 4) the linguistic and geographical distances of the Japanese-American students from the *iemoto* and the school in Japan weaken their sense of belonging to them. Below are two examples to illustrate these points.

In 1994, six among ten *min'yō* teachers in California were the *natori* licensees produced by Satō Matsutoyo (佐藤 松豊), the pioneer *min'yō* teacher in California; She had taught these students and intermediated between them and her *iemoto* in Japan for their licenses. However, only three of them still belonged to her school in 1994. Due to some personal troubles within the school, the rest became either the *natori* of other schools, or *iemoto* of a new *min'yō* school. Matsutoyo described such students as "infidel" (*susande iru*) with great disappointment.<sup>14</sup> However, from the viewpoint of Western moral principles of democracy and individualism, there is no reason to stay with a single teacher. Students can implement their right to select and change teachers to effectively pursue their artistic goals. As Nishiyama details, it is not unusual, even in Japan, for a disciple to break off from a school and establish his/her own school (1982b: 448-459). This phenomenon has become especially prominent since the 1950s, and was called the "*iemoto* boom" (*ibid.*: 265). In California, becoming a new *iemoto* is even easier due to less competition among teachers.

The second example concerns the disciples of Kudō Kazue (工藤 和枝), the pioneer *koto* teacher in post-World War II Los Angeles.<sup>15</sup> Within the Miyagi School where Kudō belongs, there is a sub-organization called Miyagi-kai (Miyagi Group), which consists only of the *natori* disciples. In Japan, once a student becomes a *natori*, it is mandatory for her/him to become a member of this group. The members receive the Miyagi-kai newsletters, and are allowed to perform in the concerts officially sponsored by the Miyagi-kai. For Japanese *natori* disciples, membership in the Miyagi-



kai also grants them certain social reputation. Following the Japanese practice, all *natori* disciples of Kudō belong to the Miyagi-kai for some time, but many of them eventually quit the group because firstly, they cannot read the Miyagi-kai newsletters, which are written only in Japanese, and secondly, they cannot perform in the Miyagi-kai-sponsored concerts anyway, which are held in Japan.<sup>16</sup> Thus, they cannot find any benefit in maintaining the membership by paying the annual fee (5,000 yen in 1994, which was approximately \$50). Moreover, Miyagi School is the only school of *koto* currently taught in southern California. Without a rivaling school, learning the *koto* becomes more important to students than school competition.

#### 4.1.2 Loyalty to the Art and Repertoire of the School

One of the most important objectives of the *iemoto* system is to preserve and maintain the arts and repertoire established by the *iemoto*. Disciples, thus, unite themselves as a faction and monopolize and protect the arts and repertoires of their *iemoto* within the school, while they become non-receptive to the arts and repertoire of other schools. Such loyal obligation to the arts and repertoire of the *iemoto* has been loosened in California for various reasons. In the *koto* genre, this loosening occurs because the majority of the students do not speak Japanese and tends to avoid vocal pieces, which are a major part of the traditional *koto* repertoire. The paucity of purely instrumental pieces within the traditional *koto* repertoire has led some *koto* teachers to expand their repertoire by borrowing pieces from rival schools and unauthorized sources. For example, many *koto* teachers in California who belong to the Miyagi School have incorporated contemporary instrumental pieces by Japanese composers like Sawai Tadao (沢井 忠夫).<sup>17</sup> Sawai is a *koto* composer-performer, who originally belonged to the Miyagi School. Seeking creative activities beyond the confines of the *iemoto* system, he left the school and opened his own *koto* school as an independent *koto* professional. Thus, teaching and playing Sawai's compositions are not accepted within the

Miyagi School in Japan. However, teachers in California violate this rule to accommodate their students. They also frequently incorporate in their concert programs the *koto* arrangements of popular music such as the songs by the Beatles, as well as Western classical music such as the works by Bach and Mozart. Such acceptance is seen in Japan as well. What is unusual in California, however, is the domination of new compositions and arrangements over the traditional ones.

Expansion of repertoire has also occurred in *shamisen* music. There are various sub-genres within *shamisen* music, such as *nagauta*, *tokiwazu*, and *kiyomoto*, which are differentiated by the types of *shamisen*, repertoires, and performance techniques.<sup>18</sup> In Japan, *shamisen* musicians specialize in one *shamisen* genre, and never play the repertoire of others, especially on stage. In California, there are only *nagauta shamisen* teachers,<sup>19</sup> but they are asked to accompany Japanese classical dance, which uses a variety of *shamisen* genres as its accompaniment. Due to the lack of *shamisen* specialists other than in *nagauta*, the rule is ignored in California. For example, Kineya Kichisabuō (杵屋 吉三郎) learned and taught the *shamisen* repertoire outside of his specialty. And he even enjoyed cultivating the sounds of various *shamisen* on his *nagauta* instruments.<sup>20</sup>

Expansion of repertoire has also occurred in the *min'yō* genre. Traditionally professional *min'yō* singers specialized in the songs of their native regions because articulation of the local languages (dialects and accents) is so important in *min'yō* singing.<sup>21</sup> For example, Satō Matsutoyo specialized in songs of the western part of Japan where she is from. After living in the U.S. for 30 years, Matsutoyo now sings and teaches songs from other parts of Japan. She expanded her repertoire to accommodate her California students who emigrated from various parts of Japan and requested that Matsutoyo teach songs from their own home towns. Matsutoyo further expanded her repertoire by learning from her old Issei students the regional variants of the famous folksongs, which she had never known in Japan. She states that having been able to absorb such song

variants maintained by the Issei is the most grateful experience she has had in the U.S.<sup>22</sup>

Performance techniques particular to specific schools can also be changed in California, demonstrating that loyalty to the *iemoto*'s art and tradition is weak here. Several Shin-Issei who had learned *koto* from Kudō Kazue of the Miyagi School in Los Angeles pointed out that Kudō has developed her own performance techniques, slightly different from those employed by the Miyagi School in Japan. For instance, in the technique called "*suku*" (picking up), the performer picks up a string with the back of the thumb pick. The angle that the string and the thumb makes is somewhere around 45 degrees, because the performer uses a corner of the square pick. However, Kudō puts the thumb almost perpendicular to the string.<sup>23</sup> Another example is the technique called "*chirashi-zume*" or "*shu*" (rubbing). In this technique, the performer strongly rubs a string with the right side of the third finger pick. However, Kudō uses two fingers, the second and the third, for this technique.<sup>24</sup> Kawabata Saeko (川端佐枝子), a student of Kudō and a teacher for her institution, the Kudō Koto Music Conservatory, suggests that these techniques modified by Kudō produce stronger and clearer sounds than the original techniques of the Miyagi School.<sup>25</sup> Since Kudō has been the leading figure of *koto* music in Los Angeles in post-World War II, her influences have reached many local *koto* teachers and students. Kudō's performance techniques, although different from those taught in Japan, are now a mainstream in Los Angeles.

#### 4.1.3 Monetary Obligations

In Japan, students accept their monetary obligations to their teachers. In addition to regular lesson fees, students give gratuities to their teachers, and pay all the required expenses for their staged performances called *osarai kai* (おさらい会). In California, these monetary obligations are not taken for granted, because it is often difficult for Japanese-American students to understand the concept of *osarai kai* as their Japanese counterparts do. In Japan, *osarai kai* is not considered a public concert,

but a staged rehearsal, to which the students' relatives and friends are invited to attend to witness their artistic progress. Thus, *osarai kai* is usually free, and oftentimes serves complimentary food to the audience. This system of *osarai kai* costs students tremendously. It is common that an *osarai kai* costs a student 100,000 yen (about \$1000) or even more.<sup>26</sup> For many students in California, such monetary obligations seem not only illogical, but also economically difficult to fulfill.

Kudō Kazue, the pioneer *koto* teacher in Los Angeles, understands the American viewpoint. To reduce the students' financial burden, she has adopted a concert style; she charges admission fees for her students' staged performances and opens them to the public. This new system has been very successful. For instance, her students' concert in 1993 was held in the Japan America Theater, with the admission fees ranging from \$10 to \$15. The theater with the capacity of about 800 people was filled with almost 700 members of the audience. The concert style of financing the staged performances has now been adopted by many teachers in California.

As the staged performances become concerts, appropriate preparation is needed. To sell tickets, the program has become more varied to entertain the general public, which consists not only of Japanese and Japanese-Americans, though predominant, including the students' family members and relatives, but also people of other ethnic backgrounds, such as the students' friends and people from the local community. For instance, the *koto* concerts by the students of Kudō and those by one of her leading disciples, Awaya Yōko (粟屋 陽子), include not only classical and contemporary *koto* pieces, but also *koto* arrangements of popular and Western classical music. They also explore special attractions such as performing the *koto* with the mandolin, *pipa* (Chinese lute), Japanese drums, or symphony orchestra, and combining the *koto* performances with flamenco dance, demonstration of Japanese flower arrangement, or shadow puppet theater. By successfully appealing to the general audience, the concert style performance not only reduces the students' financial burden, but also allows them more opportunities to perform on stage.

The concert style, thus, has various merits, yet some teachers are concerned with the decline of traditional repertoires caused by the system. How to balance transmission of tradition and economic feasibility remains a problem for individual teachers.

#### 4.2 Absolute Value of the Authoritative Ranks

Authoritative and clearly defined titles and ranks within the *iemoto* system are highly esteemed and powerful in Japan due to Japanese respect for authorities (Nishiyama 1982b: 425-447). Suffice it to say, teachers with higher ranks automatically gain not only more respect and power, but also more financial rewards.

This practical value of the authoritative ranks has lost its effects in California. First, the Japanese-American students place higher importance on attaining musical proficiency rather than achieving ranks. Since the license fees are extremely high (in the case of *koto*, for example, ranging from \$400 to \$5,000, depending on the rank), there are even some students who refuse to apply for the licenses.<sup>27</sup> For them licenses or ranks are so-to-speak “degrees,” which should be given for one’s accomplishments, not for the money one pays. Second, the value of the licenses as teacher’s certificates does not appeal to the Japanese American students, because most of them do not aim at becoming teachers. They learn traditional Japanese music to maintain or enhance their ethnic identity and/or cultural heritage. Thus, in California, ranks or licenses are not established as a symbol of authenticity or as a teacher’s certificate.

The indifference to ranks is also clearly seen in typical concert programs in California. In Japan, *koto* concert programs list different ranks among the *natori* licensees, such as *kyōshi* (教師 teacher), *shihan* (師範 master), and *daishihan* (大師範 great master). In California, however, the *natori* licensees of any ranks are all equally given the title, “teaching degree,” on the programs.<sup>28</sup> This leaves audiences to direct their attention to ability instead of rank distinctions. From an artistic point of view, this is a positive change,

because as suggested by Nishiyama, too much dependence on authoritative ranks prevents people from cultivating their own ability of evaluation, and enables the incompetent to disguise as competent, abusing the authoritative titles to cover the reality (1982b: 436).

The reduced value of authoritative ranks in California, however, has a negative consequence too, that is, significant economic damage to the teachers of traditional music due to the decline of the number of students who become the *natori*. The main source of income for the teachers of traditional music is not the lesson fees, but the license fees and commissions paid by their students. As mediators between the students and the *iemoto*, the teachers receive part of the license fees as commissions. In California, the decline of students receiving the *natori* license has made it almost impossible to make one's living solely by teaching traditional Japanese music. This economic hardship leads to a vicious circle, discouraging Japanese-American students from joining the profession. In the late 1990s, it was already a concern of the Shin-Issei and older Nisei teachers teaching at the time that no professional teachers would be produced from the Japanese-American community to succeed their positions. With the aging and passing of these generations, the situation is becoming even more serious.

#### 4.3 A Teacher-Student Relationship that Emphasizes Hierarchical Distinction

Within the *iemoto* system, the teacher-student relationship is defined by the moral value of hierarchical loyalty, a Confucian value combined with the traditional Japanese *ie* ideology. The hierarchical distinction between a teacher and his/her students should always be recognized and demonstrated by the student's prescribed modes of speech, attitude, and behavior. The students also feel an obligation to the teacher for his/her transmission of the authentic art and repertoire of the *iemoto*. Such a teacher-student relationship within the *iemoto* system has been justified

and maintained by the moral values of hierarchical loyalty, respect for authority, and feeling of obligations.

This hierarchical teacher-student relationship in the *iemoto* system has become loose in California. One of the main reasons is that such a teacher-student relationship contradicts the American ideology of democracy and egalitarianism. The *koto* teacher Awaya said, “The teacher-student relationship is ‘closer and friendlier’ in America. In Japan, students pay more due respect to their teachers” (もっと先生を立てる motto sensei wo tateru).<sup>29</sup> There is no doubt that American students, too, pay respect to their teachers, and have a sense of appreciation for their teachings. However, the teacher-student relationship in California is not restrained by those feelings of respect and appreciation. Rather, it is a “contract-based” relationship in a broader sense – that is, there are certain agreed-upon rules between teachers and students regarding what they can or cannot do in their respective positions.<sup>30</sup> The students, regardless of their respect and appreciation for their teachers, exercise their rights to the fullest based on those rules. Thus, they maintain a more democratic relationship with their teachers without unnecessary reservations or humiliations.

Another factor for the loosening of the hierarchical teacher-student relationship in California is the loss of the Japanese language among Japanese American students. Since Japanese is a rank-indicative language, this means the loss of rank distinction as expressed through the students’ language toward their teachers. Moreover, the use of English – a more status-neutral language – makes the student’s attitudes and behavior also more status-neutral.<sup>31</sup> For instance, a Nisei *koto* teacher, Wakita Kayoko, explained that the manners and behavior of one of her Sansei (third generation Japanese American) students, who understands some Japanese, changed as the language shifted from Japanese to English in the lesson. As soon as English conversation starts, she acts and speaks much more informally. She can even say to Wakita, “Well, I’m tired today,” something a Japanese student would not say to his/her teacher directly and during lessons.<sup>32</sup> Due to Japanese sensitivity to rank order, Japanese has developed

into a language rich and elaborate in status-indicative expressions, but poor in status neutral vocabulary, and thus, it “forces the actor to make a binary choice between respectful, formal behavior and disrespectful, informal behavior” (Lebra 1976: 70-1). This behavioral dichotomization forced by the Japanese language dissolves as the speaker switches his/her language to English.

The consequence of this change has two sides. On the one hand, it simply implies the separation of musical sound from its originally associated behavior, manners, and concepts. As Alan Merriam pointed out in his anthropological study of music, musical culture consists of not only the sound, but also music-related behavior and concepts (1964). Japanese-American parents often send their children to Japanese arts lessons (music, dance, martial arts, etc.) not only for cultural enrichment, but also for the Japanese moral and behavioral disciplines learned through the arts, such as how to politely act and show respect to their teachers, including the way of vowing. However, with the loss of the Japanese language, traditional Japanese manners and behavior are gradually being lost in the transmission of Japanese music in California, and thus, this musical culture is being learned only partially, with more emphasis on the sound.

On the other hand, the loss of traditional manners and behavior in the transmission of traditional Japanese music can realize more open relationships between teachers and students. Traditional obedience and reservation expected from the students of Japanese arts keep them respectfully distanced from the teacher, but this distance can often restrict the students’ access to knowledge and techniques. Establishing a more neutral relationship with the teacher, students can more freely ask questions and interact with their teachers.

#### 4.4 A Teaching Method that Emphasizes Imitation

Traditionally, Japanese musicians learn their art through exact imitation of their masters (Kawashima 1957: 323-4). Unlike Western classical music, there is no systematic pedagogy. From the very beginning,



students learn the formal repertoire – not the exercises – through imitation (ibid.: 323-4). Teachers do not explain their art comprehensively. They rather grudge directly teaching their techniques, and expect their students to learn it by imitation and by trial and error. There is a common Japanese phrase, “the art is a thing to steal” (芸は盗むもの *Gei wa nusumu mono*). Here the word, “steal,” does not have a negative connotation as it usually has, but suggests that the students are not supposed to expect their teacher to teach them, but should learn the art from the teacher by earnestly listening to and watching him/her. As long as the acquisition of the art is confined in the imitation, the teachers as the sole source and model for learning can maintain their superiority and power of control over their students. Thus, the lack of organized pedagogy functions as a means to render the teacher’s control effective, and to maintain his/her authority.

Some teachers in California have discarded this traditional teaching method for the following reasons. First, Japanese-American students do not have the attitude of “stealing” the teachers’ art. They rather assume that teachers will teach because that is what they are paid for (the idea is based on the contract-based teacher-student relationship as discussed in the previous section). Second, most Japanese-American students learn traditional Japanese music as a hobby, not to become teachers or professional performers. Thus, they tend to be dependent upon the teachers’ leadership. Finally, some teachers who did not like the traditional method used when they were students in Japan are unwilling to use it now.

Because of these factors, some teachers in California have adopted alternative teaching methods. For instance, Awaya Yōko, a *koto* teacher, touches the students’ hands and fingers to teach appropriate positions. Traditional Japanese teachers would not touch, but rather let the students imitate.<sup>33</sup> A *nagauta* teacher, Kineya Yasofuji (杵屋 弥曾藤), tries to provide verbal explanations of the performance logics as much as possible. For instance, when the student cannot understand oral mnemonics traditionally used in *nagauta* lessons (口三味線 *kuchi jamisen*), she would show the beat by counting, “One and two and...,” and the like, and if there are certain tricks for specific performance techniques, she would explain them verbally. Yasofuji

maintains that although there are certain things that can be learned only by imitation, traditional Japanese teachers would grudge teaching what could be learned by explanation. Irritated by such a practice, Yasofuji rather avoids it.<sup>34</sup>

Yasofuji also invented an original competency-level system to effectively motivate and guide her students to the higher stages. Unlike the ranking systems in such genres as *koto* and Japanese classical dance, there are no rank distinctions below the *natori* level in *nagauta*. Thus, the *nagauta* students' first objective is to acquire the *natori* license. However, this objective seems too far away for the beginners. Without knowing how much effort and time they need to devote to finally reach the *natori* level, students feel at loss and are discouraged. Yasofuji motivates and guides her students by giving them more viable, step-by-step objectives. In Yasofuji's original system, the students are required to progress through four different levels – beginner, intermediate, advanced, and master – before receiving the *natori* license. To pass each level, students have to master ten pieces specifically selected by Yasofuji for each level. The higher the level, the greater the difficulty of those required pieces. Thus, her students are to master forty pieces with a variety of techniques before receiving the *natori* license. These efforts on the part of the teachers are foreign to the traditional teaching method, which ultimately requires the students' own strong desire for learning.

### 5. The *Iemoto* System as a Tie between Southern California and Japan

In spite of the various changes discussed above, the *iemoto* system continues to exist in California, as teachers in California keep their ties with their *iemoto* in Japan. As a mediator of the *iemoto* system between the two countries, teachers in California, in a sense, have dual approaches to the system. On the one hand, they transform the system in their relation to the U.S., accommodating it to the local needs and conditions as well as pursuing their own policies. On the other hand, they maintain and respect the system in their relation to Japan.

I suggest the three main reasons that teachers in California maintain their involvement in the *iemoto* system. First, they need to belong to a particular *iemoto* so that their students can acquire the *natori* licenses. Although the value of the license as a teacher's certificate is less regarded in California, there are still students who wish to acquire it as a token of their accomplishments, if not as a certificate of teaching. The power of the *iemoto* as the sole authority able to issue the *natori* license is still in effect in California.

Second, since teachers in California are mostly those originally trained within the traditional *iemoto* system, they understand the system, and thus, tend to have an active sense of belonging and obligation to the *iemoto* than their Japanese-American students. For instance, a *nagauta* teacher, Kineya Yasofuji asked for her *iemoto*'s consent in introducing her own competency-level system of teaching. Another example is a *koto* teacher, Hashibe Hiromi (走辺 洋美), a "direct disciple" (直弟子 *jikideshi*) who had learned directly from the *iemoto* (or *sōke* 宗家)<sup>35</sup> of the Miyagi School before she began to teach in California in 1975. After more than twenty years of teaching in Los Angeles, she still teaches the traditional repertoire of the school and also performed in the centennial anniversary concert of the founder of the school (Miyagi Michio 宮城 道雄) in Japan in 1994.<sup>36</sup> In 1993, Hashibe began to perform contemporary pieces as a member of the fusion group, Kokingumi (古今組), together with a *shakuhachi* player, Yoshizawa Masakazu (吉沢 政和), and a Tsugaru-*shamisen* (a folk *shamisen* genre) player, Takahashi Tateo (高橋 建夫). When she performed with the group in Japan, she reported it to the *iemoto* because she considered it as her obligation to the school.

Third, teachers in California maintain their involvement in the *iemoto* system because their main musical resources including musical scores and musicians still derive from Japan. For instance, scores of newly composed pieces, as well as those of less popularized musical genres such as *hayashi* (flute and percussion ensemble) are not publicly available in either Japan or the U.S. Thus, if teachers in California do not have such scores, they need to make some arrangements with their colleagues or teachers in Japan

to acquire them. Such arrangements are difficult without their association with the *iemoto* system. The *iemoto* system is also an important route, through which teachers in California invite professional performers from Japan. These guest performers from Japan can raise the quality of the concerts, and also inspire the students in California. However, it is almost impossible to invite performers from different schools because of the exclusive and conservative nature of the *iemoto* system. Only within the *iemoto*-based relationship bound by the sense of loyalty and obligation, teachers in California hold the right to seek assistance from the school they belong to, while their Japanese colleagues and teachers have an obligation to provide such assistance.

As explained so far, the *iemoto* system functions as an important tie that connects the teachers in California with Japan, and this tie plays an important role in their activities in the U.S.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

This study examined the *iemoto* system in southern California in comparison with that in traditional Japanese context. It demonstrated that the *iemoto* system as transplanted in southern California has undergone significant changes, and in turn, generated various changes in musical practices. This development has essentially resulted from the loosening of the hierarchical teacher-student relationship that was derived from the *ie*-ideology of feudal Japan. Although the Japanese vertical society was described by Nakane as rather a static structure (1967), this study revealed its variability and adaptability to the needs and conditions of the people involved. The individual agencies engaged in the *iemoto* system were found to be not only the controlled, but also the controller of the system, making rational choice of action to generate changes. This study also proved that the loss of the Japanese language among the younger Japanese American students propelled the loosening of the hierarchical *iemoto* structure. Language not only conveys specific meanings, but also prescribes certain modes of behavior, which, in turn, affects personal relationships.

It should be noted, however, that the *iemoto* system has never been static in Japan either. Due to a variety of factors including rapid Westernization since the Meiji period (1868-1912), alternative ways of transmission have been attempted within and beyond the framework of the *iemoto* system in Japan.<sup>37</sup> Those changes were, however, only superficial or exceptional. The ideological principles as the very basis of the *iemoto* system are still tenaciously maintained in contemporary Japan. In southern California, by contrast, such ideological principles themselves have significantly been weakened, and this transformation, in turn, has greatly influenced the way Japanese performing arts have developed there.

The changes that have occurred in southern California overcome the conservatism and authoritarianism of the *iemoto* system, which have become subject to criticism in Japan as well, with the democratization and capitalist development of Japan. Such changes could, however, threaten the primary function of the *iemoto* system, that is, the preservation and transmission of arts, at the same time. For instance, emphasis on the instrumental repertoire of *koto* among Japanese Americans results in the exclusion of most of the traditional *koto* repertoire centering on singing. Moreover, such an imbalanced transmission of arts, combined with the rationalist, ability-oriented disinterest in ranks and licenses, makes it difficult to develop Japanese American professional teachers. This has become a very serious problem in southern California with the aging of Nisei and Shin-Issei teachers. Whether newly immigrated Shin-Issei take over the leading role, or Sansei (third generation) and Yonsei (fourth generation) teachers are somehow raised in the community, or without any successors, Japanese performing arts decline in southern California — the answer is yet unseen.

As a tentative conclusion of this study, I would like to address the following three points: 1) the *iemoto* system is subject to more radical transformation outside Japan once it is detached from the Japanese socio-cultural environment and mentality that support the system; 2) cultural institutions, such as the *iemoto* system, transform themselves to accommodate specific social, cultural, and psychological factors; and 3) transformed cultural

Cultural institutions, whether in the form of conservatories or traditional systems, exist in many musical cultures. The study of such musical institutions and their changes and effects on musical practices is an important key to understanding the transformation of musical traditions.

Finally, I propose the following two research possibilities to further develop this study. First, the large-scale Japanese diaspora communities exist in Hawai'i and some South American countries as well. Comparative study of the *iemoto* system in such diverse areas will provide further insights into the above-mentioned three points. Second, cross-cultural comparison and analysis of the ways traditional musical institutions (e.g. the *iemoto* system) have changed through immigration, colonialism, Westernization, tourism, technology, and the like, will greatly help us grasp the complex issues involved in the transmission of arts in contemporary world from diverse points of view.

### Notes

- 1 This is a revised and translated version of the article originally published in Japanese (Waseda 2001).
- 2 All interviews were conducted primarily in Japanese.
- 3 The position of *iemoto* is either hereditary or non-hereditary depending on genres. When the *iemoto* is hereditary, but the blood-related disciples (usually sons) of the *iemoto* are considered incapable or inappropriate to succeed to the position, an alternative is sought among the non-blood-related disciples and adopted as an heir to the *iemoto*.
- 4 With the expansion of the *iemoto's* authority, the rank of intermediate teachers with the *iemoto*-like authority began to appear and was admitted as branch families. In this case, the *iemoto* as the head family to unify such branch families may be called *sōke* (宗家), which is originally a synonym of *iemoto* (Hirano 1981).
- 5 The *ie* structure here should be distinguished from the *ie* system (*ie seido*) established in the late 19th century as part of the Meiji civil laws.
- 6 Nishiyama points out the existence of the quasi-*iemoto* system in the worlds of religion, calligraphy, painting, and avant-garde dance among others (1982b: 289-309), while Kurokawa suggests the unmistakable influence of the *iemoto* system in the transmission of Hawaiian *hula* in Japan (2000).
- 7 See Waseda (2000) for more details on the development of Japanese performing arts in southern California.

- 8 A story narrated by Kineya Yajūrō IX (九世杵屋彌十郎), the ninth *iemoto* of the Yajūrō Branch of the Kineya School of *nagauta*, in an interview by author, Tokyo, Japan, 6 September 1995.
- 9 For the names consisting of Japanese surnames and given names, I use the order of the surname first, the given name last, following the Japanese practice. Also, Chinese characters of Japanese names, when available, are provided in their first appearance.
- 10 Wakita Kayoko, interview by author, Los Angeles, 6 August 1994.
- 11 See Waseda (2005) for more details on the performing arts activities in the Japanese American concentration camps.
- 12 The students of Japanese performing arts examined for this study were predominantly people of Japanese ancestry, including Issei, Shin-Issei, and their American-born descendants. The generational composition varied by genre. For instance, in *koto*, the students were mostly of younger generations, including children of the Shin-Issei, while in *nagauta* and *minyō*, the students were mostly of the Japanese speaking population of Issei, Shin-Issei, and Nisei.
- 13 The following situations are the only exceptions to this rule: 1) the teacher decides or agrees to send his/her student to another teacher, and 2) the teacher passes away.
- 14 Satō Matsutoyo, interview by author, Gardena, California, 11 August 1994.
- 15 Kudō Kazue immigrated to the U.S. in 1954, and began teaching in Los Angeles in 1955 as a Miyagi School *koto* instructor. She later established the Kudo Koto Music Conservatory (a *koto* school appointed as the Los Angeles branch of the Miyagi School) and the Koto String Society (a non-profit organization to support Kudō's disciples). She has also performed in the soundtracks of numerous movies and TV series, such as *Sayonara, Dr. Zhivago*, *Tora, Tora, Tora*, and *Mission Impossible*.
- 16 Kawabata Saeko, interview by author, La Crescenta, California, 14 August 1994.
- 17 Other contemporary Japanese composers whose *koto* instrumental pieces were adopted by the *koto* teachers in California include Matsumoto Masao, Nagasawa Katsutoshi, Hirai Kōzaburō, Fujii Bondai, and Matsumoto Tsutomu.
- 18 There are largely three types of *shamisen*: *futozao* (wide-neck), *chūzao* (medium neck), and *hosozao* (narrow neck). Each type differs in not only the width of the neck, but also the size of the sound box, thickness of the skin, and the weight. Moreover, within the same type (e.g. *chūzao*), there are several kinds varying according to the genre for which they are used.
- 19 According to my research in 1997, there were only three *shamisen* teachers in southern California at the time: Kineya Kichisaburō, Kineya Jōrokushō, and Lillian Nakano, all of whom were specialized in *nagauta*. Kineya Kichisaburō has passed away in 2004.
- 20 Kineya Kichisaburō, interview by author, Gardena, California, 4 August 1994.

- 21 Satō Matsutoyo, interview by author, Gardena, California, 11 August 1994.
- 22 *ibid.*
- 23 Awaya Yōko, telephone interview by author, 7 February 1999.
- 24 *ibid.* Kawabata Saeko, interview by author, La Crescenta, California, 14 August 1994.
- 25 Kawabata speculates that since Kudō was originally trained in the Yamada School, which uses a stronger touch than the Ikuta School, of which Miyagi School is a branch, her unique techniques reflect her Yamada School background (Kawabata Saeko, interview by author, La Crescenta, California, 14 August 1994).
- 26 Kawabata Saeko, interview by author, La Crescenta, California, 14 August 1994.
- 27 Kawabata Saeko, interview by author, La Crescenta, California, 14 August 1994.
- 28 *ibid.*
- 29 Awaya Yōko, interview by author, Gardena, California, 3 August 1994. The quote was originally in Japanese except for the English phrase, “close and friendly,” which was used by Awaya to express the teacher-student relationship. The interview itself was conducted in Japanese.
- 30 Nakane Chie explains that this contract-based relationship that clearly defines the limits of power from the top (teacher) and from the bottom (student) is typical in the West, while the Japanese relationship tends to become either authoritarian (infinite power from the top) or “democratic” in the Japanese sense (infinite power from the bottom) (1967: 141-145).
- 31 See Chapter 7 of my dissertation (Waseda 2000) for details of the aspects of language’s effect on the teacher-student relationship.
- 32 Wakita Kayoko, interview by author, Los Angeles, California, 6 August, 1994.
- 33 Awaya Yōko, interview by author, Gardena, California, 22 August 1995.
- 34 Kineya Yasofuji, interview by author, Sypress, California, Sep. 12, 1994.
- 35 See footnote 4 for the explanation of *sōke*.
- 36 Hashibe Hiromi, interview by author, Alhambra, California, 10 August 1994.
- 37 Changes within the *iemoto* system include diffusion of teaching method using musical scores and development of practice books in the fields of *koto*, *shamisen*, and *shakuhachi*. Transmission beyond the *iemoto* system includes teaching of traditional Japanese music in educational institutions and at the training institute of National Theatre.



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