

6. BRIEF HISTORY OF FIXED DO SOLMIZATION IN JAPAN

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Abstract: *The Fixed DO solmization system which is used mainly in Latin language countries and the former USSR, was introduced to Japan by pianist Kiyohide Sonoda in the 1930s. The effectiveness was soon recognised in the out-school music education setting but the school music curriculum continued to use the Movable DO as the compulsory solmization system. Within a half century, however, Fixed DO naturally developed and not only pupils but teachers who had been taught in Fixed DO in their childhood became comfortable teaching and learning in Fixed DO. Subsequently, Movable DO in school textbooks has become very limited.*

Key words: *fixed DO solmization, music education in Japan, solfege, Kiyohide Sonoda*

1. Introduction

The Fixed DO Solmization is used mostly in non Anglo-Saxon areas. The definitions of Fixed and Movable DO systems and Solmization vary, depending on the topics, contexts and background of the authors. In this paper, the terms are generally used as follows:

- Fixed DO – is note names, and also solmization syllables. The dual nature normally combines the symbols in the staff notation, note names and their actual pitches;
- Movable DO – is solmization syllables normally used in conjunction with letter note names, whilst not exclusive. It represents the relative intervals from the key notes of each piece or section of music;
- Solmization – is part of musicianship training of music reading, normally using *DoReMi* syllables and a pupil's own voice.

2. Discussions

The two systems, Fixed and Movable DO, have long been in constant debate and comparison, whilst the two systems are very different and cannot be subject to direct comparison. In Movable DO, for example, the entire process is based on the theory of key and Tonic, while Fixed DO is merely reading or singing note names with their actual pitch. What is meant by the word 'sense of key' is also different. Movable DO educators mean relative sense of intervals and their positions within the scale, while Fixed DO educators mean simply different colours of different tonalities. Moreover, it is often criticised as if Fixed DO confuses #, *b* and natural in one syllable (1:4, 2:366), possibly because Movable DO needs different names for different pitch intervals. In the Fixed DO practice, distinction of chromatic names is less important. Fa# is often called Fa if there is not enough time to sing, omitting the word but keep thinking Fa# in mind. For example, *MiReMiReMiSiReDoLa-* is easily understood as 'For Elise' without using the two Re#s. The two systems, therefore, simply have very

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different characteristics and process of sight-singing, that is, theoretical versus intuitional. The Fixed/Movable DO debate tends to polarise in specialist and generalist views, or professional sector and non-professionals (3), despite that Fixed DO is not the Absolute Pitch or talent-based skill of minority elite. In the areas where Fixed DO is used, *Solfège/ Solfeggio/ Formation Musicale* is the most essential subject in musicianship training (4:48, 5, 6: 81, 7:71). Positive examples of Fixed DO can be seen not only in Latin language and former USSR countries but also in Japan where Fixed DO was introduced long after Movable DO.

In the former USSR, for example, Fixed DO *solfeggio* is used as essential musicianship training. As Brainin notes, the 'Russian *solfeggio*' is a comprehensive musicianship training which develops 'predicting ear' of music (8:2-3). It involves both fixed and relative pitch senses. The entire content of music education and consistency from infant to higher education has long been under strict quality control by professionals of music and music education (9:120), which enabled pupils transferring between specialist- and non specialist- sectors smoothly. It is worth mentioning that school pianos in some Eastern European countries are rarely in tune, and can be as flat as half or more tone. The very out of tune piano that Western researchers sometimes created for Absolute Pitch research purposes is merely a conventional school instrument in this area. Teachers and pupils therefore have to allow some flexibility in 'fixed' and 'absolute' pitch sense, in another word, flexibility and relative pitch sense within their Fixed DO system.

Japan probably is a unique example in the Fixed/Movable DO comparison. The national music school (Tokyo Music School, est. 1879) initially used English and Japanese note names with Cipher system, since the first official foreign music teacher was from the USA. By the 20th century, German teachers became the major influence, and this was eventually replaced by German and Japanese note names with Movable DO (10). In the general schools, music has been taught by Japanese note names and Japanese style cipher system, the latter of which was to be replaced by the Tonic-Solfa of Protestant Missionary influence (10, 11:94), and this became the Japanese Movable DO with staff notation in the very early 20th century (12:149-150). In theory, Japanese National Curriculum never left the set of Japanese note names and Movable DO since then, apart from the short period of World War II when foreign terms were forbidden.

In the 1930s, however, pianist Kiyohide Sonoda (1903-1935) introduced French Fixed DO *Solfège* and Absolute Pitch training for children. His son, Takahiro Sonoda (1928-2004) became the first Japanese child to be trained for Absolute Pitch in Fixed DO system. Before his studies in Paris (1931-32), he had taught the piano in so-called 'traditional' style, using German note names, and matched the symbols in staff notation and keys on the instrument (13:51). In Paris, Sonoda saw Fixed DO *solfège* and its effectiveness. In France, the *Galin-Paris-Cheve* cipher notation was once employed in schools by the Paris Society for Elementary Instruction in 1905, but it was later abandoned and officially

returned to the traditional *solfege* in 1923 (14:52, 15:113). Galin initially used 'Movable' DO, while his idea of training children to memorize seven notes with sol-fa names suggests his 'Movable' DO system a 'modified Fixed DO', not the Movable DO of the theoretical sense (16:57-67). At that time, again, the Japanese mainstream was Movable DO, and Japanese musicians did not possess Absolute Pitch themselves. Sonoda's method was to become the base of modern Japanese music education for children in both specialist and general educations.

Since then the Fixed DO has been used in out-school music education, while the Movable DO has been taught in schools with government sanction. The two systems were therefore to co-exist for a long time. K Sonoda taught children himself together with his colleagues from Tokyo Music School, holding private infant music classes in Tokyo, and the success was obvious. He predicted that the Japanese children with *solfege* training 'would soon become able to play the piano as fluent as the adult specialist music students (of his time) within a year or so of learning' (17:63). Vocalist Kita who studied in Italy, a colleague of Sonoda, continued Sonoda's work with children in Tokyo (12:150) and he published the Japanese edition of Danhauser & Lemoine *Solfege* excerpts in 1950 (18). After the World War II, the founders of "Toho Music School for Children", cellist Hideo Saito and critique Hidekazu Yoshida, launched Fixed DO *solfege*-based music lessons in their specialist training course for children (19:2), where Seiji Ozawa and Mitsuko Uchida learned amongst others. Yamaha and Kawai opened non-specialist music schools of *solfege* for infants in 1954 and 1956 respectively. Sumiko Tanaka, the piano teacher known for her compilation of the long-seller piano tutor book '*Iro Onpu*' (Coloured Notes) in 1955, concluded pupils 'who first showed good use of Fixed DO also learns Movable DO easily'⁶⁹ (20:29).

Fixed DO began to influence even in general schools in the 1960s (3:214) where the solmization system was supposed to be Movable DO. In the 1970-1980s when the Fixed/Movable DO debate became fierce between specialist musicians and the Movable DO educators, composer Akira Miyoshi predicted Fixed DO's dominance in near future 'just the matter of time'⁷⁰ (12:156). The effectiveness of Japanese in-school music education became noted (21:77-78) and Japanese pupils' pitch and harmonic memories became very strong (22). Children typically learned *DoReMi* by the Fixed DO system or just as the note names at the pre-school age, either at Yamaha/Kawai -type music schools, private piano lessons, or from friends and families, followed by the Movable DO and Japanese note names at schools, and either German note names if willing to study classical music further, or English one when involving pop music making with friends. Up to the 1980s, primary school music lessons of a song in F major typically began with solmization in Movable DO (F as DO), followed by learning its tune by recorder in *DoReMi* note names (F as FA). Needless to say, the confusion of pupils in the school music lessons became a notable problem

⁶⁹ Tanaka, S. (1978), *Iro Onpu Ho*, Shinkyo Gakufu Suppansha, p.29

⁷⁰ Miyoshi, A. (1979) cited in Saisho, H. (1998), *Zettai Onkan*, p.156

(23:37, 12:153). The National curriculum has inevitably become less imposing of Movable DO. It was not only confusing for pupils but also became unpopular among music teachers who themselves are already of Fixed DO generation (24, 23: 38). The compulsory Movable DO has eventually become limited in C major and A minor, and *Do Re Mi* fully became the note names, without losing traditional Japanese names in teaching. In the 1990s, school music textbooks already taught Fixed DO as note names, using a keyboard⁷¹, despite the National Curriculum did not instruct so. Fixed DO's dual nature, singable note names and solmization syllables, was perhaps an advantage over Movable DO which needed a separate set of note names and theoretical understanding. Japanese musicians and music lovers typically manage different systems together, and the most common set in classical music specialist education has long been the set of 'German key names, German and Fixed DO note names, and Fixed DO solmization' of which Hosono (25:26) describes 'the perfect fusion of Germanic and Latin systems'⁷².

Japan introduced Fixed DO as it was, by professional musicians who studied in France, Italy and so forth. The musicians involved were aware of the need and the age group which should be targeted. In short, professional musicians who encountered the Fixed DO system and their strong wish to improve Japanese standard of musicianship by faithful learning from Europe eventually swayed Movable DO of government sanction, without losing German/English note names. The nationwide and natural development of Fixed DO in Japan evidenced that Fixed DO is not a system just for Absolute Pitch possessors or specialist training for talented, but a very possible system for everyone, as long as the time and method are appropriate. Sonoda's method was to become the foundation of modern Japanese music education for children in both specialist and general educations.

3. Conclusions

For Fixed DO, the three points: 1. teaching young children, 2. teaching by professional musicians and 3. constant use of the piano or keyboard instrument, seem particularly contributing. It was a great fortune that Sonoda, knowingly or not, fulfilled such requirements. Japan now has rich experience in developing musical ear by Fixed DO. It is worth mentioning that the early-year and primary teacher training of the country traditionally cover some singing and keyboard skills as the compulsory elements since its 19th century inception. Its singing in kindergarten and schools has long been accompanied by the piano by class teachers themselves.

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⁷¹ Ichikawa, T. and Hatanaka, R. et.al. (ed. 1993), *Ongaku 3*, Kyouiku Geijyutsu Sha

⁷² Hosono, T. (2002), *Solfège towa Nanika* : 25-36

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