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## History of a Cultural Conquest: The Piano in Japan

### Abstract

Any short review of the penetration of European music into Japan and its enthusiastic appropriation calls for a different approach to the controversial question of acculturation. The rapid growth in the piano's popularity in Japan, together with the implicit musical revolution, could also occasion a parallel with the similar process of acculturation which occurred in Eastern Europe (for instance the Romanian Principalities). Musical Westernization (including the institutional and educational reform) might, in contradicting the traditional local musical concepts, mirror a different perspective on intercultural communication and contemporary cultural education.

### Introduction

In the following essay, the piano represents not just the musical instrument exclusively designed for the Western music, but is also a symbol of that part of European culture which has an incontestable potential to be assimilated and appropriated in spite of conflicting structural differences. Both in Japan and some south-eastern European countries, it seemed logical that the local (monodic) musical traditions would reject a harmonic instrument. Instead, the Western music paradoxically became one of the main triggers for Europeanization. European music, namely the style embodied in the piano from the beginning of the Meiji era (albeit preceded by the organ in the first European cultural contacts in the 16<sup>th</sup> century) became dominant especially in Japan, as illustrated by the huge number of Western-style amateurs or professional musicians, the music industry and the number of students and musicians in Europe or North America. As far as music is concerned, the usual allegations on acculturation are at least disputable, recalling Béla Bartók's intuitions on cultural meetings and customary frontiers differing from linguistic or geographical ones.<sup>1</sup> In addition to a brief reevaluation of issues of Europeanization, the interesting encounter between European music and the Japanese people, whether followed throughout their recent history or compared with similar processes in Eastern Europe, can shed light on a fundamental feature of the Japanese: the cult of learning.

### Europeanization

In the most commonly accepted interpretation today, the concept of 'Europeanization' barely covers the psycho-sociological impact or the subjacent mutations in the cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Bence Szabolcsi, *Béla Bartók Weg und Werk. Schriften und Briefe* [Béla Bartók Way and Work. Writings and Letters], München: Bärenreiter, 1972.

behavior of the ‘conquered’ lands. In the last century, this term acquired three principal usages: the classical connotation with aggressive colonization, the assimilation with the recent cultural policies of the European Union, and finally the old-fashioned concept equating Europeanization with the idea of progress.

In the first place we ought to mention the frequently used idea stating that Europeanization was the forcible imposition of the European style – a concept predominantly championed by Communist ideology, but disseminated around the free world too. The European inclination for self-denial and the fear of Eurocentrism which began in art towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was reinforced throughout the twentieth from the avant-garde’s manifestos in a number of important sociological works.<sup>2</sup> Upton Close stated in 1925: “It [i.e. the Eastern culture] has maintained a remarkable resistance to the aggressive Western culture which a half century ago invaded its very heart to attack it”.<sup>3</sup> Even if the hypothesis of an aggressive cultural colonization, despite its persistence, appears scarcely sustainable, the logical fragility of such an allegation did not prevent its stubborn persistence.

Besides, the European opening to other cultures during the 19<sup>th</sup> century went in both directions. Ever since then, borrowings from non-European art forms have become much more than just an exotic fashion; the cultural export was compensated by a corresponding import. The enthusiastic reception by the Japanese for European art, and the interest of European artists of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in non-European forms and aesthetics guide us toward the working assumption that these encounters in art were desired and sought after. The presence of the Europeans and some of their foreign customs, behaviors etc. were probably felt as disturbing, but European art forms were not. Any possible reluctance did not apply to culture, especially to music. Persuasion or authoritarian methods to introduce the foreign styles, if any, were not imposed by the Europeans themselves, but seemingly by the local authorities, eager to become compliant with the new partners, and not related to the nature of the art itself.<sup>4</sup> Obviously, one cannot easily imagine that at that very historic moment the cultural behavior of the Europeans was similar to that of the *conquistadors* in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, or that they could have employed those special means of ‘persuasion’ employed by Peter the Great to convince the Russian nobility to adopt Western-style fashions and manners...

Another perspective on Europeanization is equating it with ‘EU-ropeanization’.<sup>5</sup> We can discern the influences of our own time in these approaches, rather targeting the current newcomers to the EU. The interpretation of historical facts in the light of contemporary preoccupations was already noted by Benedetto Croce in 1955.<sup>6</sup> Several research papers have

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<sup>2</sup> R.W. Cox, ‘Civilizations and the Twenty-first Century: Some Theoretical Considerations’, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 1, 2001, pp. 108–109.

<sup>3</sup> U. Close, ‘Europeanization and the Ancient Culture in Pacific Asia’, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 122, *The Far East*, Nov., 1925, p. 174.

<sup>4</sup> Even the most obtuse Europhobe could never imagine a conditioning of export by wearing a top hat or authorizing a free passage if one played a Beethoven symphony...

<sup>5</sup> Andreas Faludi, ‘The Europeanization of Planning and the Role of ESPON’, 2012, [www.ucd.ie](http://www.ucd.ie) (accessed 27.06.2013), p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Benedetto Croce, *History as the Story of Liberty*, London: George Allen and Unwin Limited, 1955, quoted in R.W. Cox, ‘Civilizations and the Twenty-First Century: Some Theoretical Considerations’, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 1, 2001, p. 105: “The practical requirements which

aimed to outline ‘the difference between Europeanization and European integration’.<sup>7</sup> “In its most explicit form Europeanization is conceptualised as the process of downloading European Union (EU) regulations and institutional structures to the domestic level”.<sup>8</sup> In most contemporary writing ‘Europeanization’ means European civilization. The cultural implications are eschewed with finesse and deflected toward technicalities and institutional relations. The five definitions of Europeanization identified by Johan P. Olsen<sup>9</sup> do not satisfactorily encompass the cultural ‘face’ of the process. No organization can control a whole sociocultural process, even if we refer to one largely driven by the political authorities, as was the case in Japanese society during the Meiji Era. The adoption of European culture was a process that cannot be separated from the natural evolution of the society, even if the role of the authorities was noticeable. In traditionalist Japan, the adoption of new music was stimulated by popular preference.

Finally, we should also mention the old empirical perception, nowadays repudiated by both the political and scientific worlds, but still persistent: the perception that associates Europeanization with the idea of progress. The prestige of European culture, more than conceited self-evaluation, is proved by the concrete behavior of an impressive number of Asians. European universities crowded with Japanese and Korean students, and the numerous European-style art events in the Asian cities, as reflected in sociological surveys or in direct confessions, confirming the level of this attraction.<sup>10</sup>

In conclusion: even if some parts of European civilization were probably seen as inconvenient or shocking in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Asia, European culture, namely the musical culture, did not need any pressure to conquer Japanese society. On the contrary, music was the main enticement that facilitated a positive response to other less attractive aspects of European civilization. One might consider that the meeting of Europe with the Far East was more or less forced, only if the concept of culture is expanded to include those elements which traditionally defined civilization. But even starting from this standpoint, one cannot suppose any constraint to the art forms so ardently adopted.

The fact that European music was not just adopted quickly, but became even more popular than Japan’s own traditional music raises the question put by Mamoru Watanabe: ‘Why do the Japanese like European music?’<sup>11</sup> The answer to this question is not simple; it might be

underlie every historical judgment give to all history the character of ‘contemporary history’ because, however remote in time the events there recounted may seem to be, the history in reality refers to present needs and present situations wherein those events vibrate”.

<sup>7</sup> K. Howell, ‘Developing Conceptualisations of Europeanization: Synthesising Methodological Approaches’, *Queen’s Papers on Europeanization*, No. 3, 2004, <http://www.qub.ac.uk/> (accessed 27.06.2013), p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Johan P. Olsen, ((i) enlargement; (ii) European-level institutionalization; (iii) the export of European institutions to the wider world; (iv) the strengthening of the European ‘project’ as a political ambition; and (v) the domestic impact of European level institutions). ‘The Many Faces of Europeanization’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 5, 2002, p. 923.

<sup>10</sup> Self-evaluation has become an attention-grabbing element in current ethno-musicological analyses (see Speranța Rădulescu in *Chats about Gypsy Music*, Bucharest: Paideea, 2004, pp. 17 and following).

<sup>11</sup> M. Watanabe, ‘Why Do the Japanese Like European Music?’, *International Social Science Journal*, Vol. 34, No. 4, 1982, pp. 657–665.

sketched out from an overall picture covering history, social psychology, the emic perspective, synchronic comparison, and last but not least, the peculiarities of European music which proved to be the only musical style to resist a specific ritual context. We should recall that at about the same time, the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, all kinds of Western music conquered a large number of countries all over the world, no matter what the characteristics of the local tradition.<sup>12</sup> The theory of the pressing donor and the resistant recipient appears hackneyed, considering that European music was given a positive reception in so many different countries.

### Synchronic comparison

When comparing the Western acculturation in Japan to the similar processes occurring in about the same period in Eastern Europe, we must take some important differences between European and Asian cultural styles into account. The main traditional difference between Western and Eastern cultural styles, although not reducible to a scheme, might be defined by the ratio between preservation and renewal. The Oriental pattern allows for a simultaneous coexistence of different cultures, keeping each tradition unmingled, while in Europe the dominant pattern is evolutionary: successively, a dominant culture-style is totally, or at least mainly, replaced by a new one.<sup>13</sup>

Romanian musical culture was structured according to the Oriental pattern. Several unmixed cultural identities cohabited: Romanian folklore, handed down together with foreign lay forms through many centuries; and Church music, derived from the Byzantine tradition, which was also unmingled since the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The Western musical style was already present in the Romanian territories in the Catholic Churches (from the 14<sup>th</sup> century in Wallachia and Moldova, and even earlier in Transylvania), yet it did not exert any influence beyond that, being enclosed in its specific ritual milieu and coexisting separately with the other musical styles until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The connection between the European musical culture and the Romanian tradition burst out in a spectacular way, in less than two generations, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The penetration of this new music was not as sudden as in Japan, yet it became dominant in about the same period as the Meiji Restoration. Western music became all-powerful in the cities, literally sweeping aside a whole secular tradition which had resisted other attempts at influence. The novelty of this acculturation resides as well in its speed as in the force of the change. The change was not just a new art form, but an important part of the Western cultural style, including its specific cultural behavior inclined to renewal and replacement. Such a phenomenon occurred in Japan too, but to a lesser extent; the strong influences on civil life and musical education did not interfere with the traditional rituals. One cannot

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<sup>12</sup> The spread and increased popularity of Western-style music in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Eastern Europe (Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia), South America (Brazil), Japan etc., has been widely acknowledged and can be found in any music history text book. Specific references concerning Romania: Cosma, Octavian Lazăr, *Epoca Enesciană. Gîndirea Muzicală 1898–1920* [The Enescu Epoch; Musical Thinking 1898–1920], Vol. VI, 1984 in *Hronicul muzicii românești* [Chronicle of Romanian Music], București: Ed. Muzicală, 1973–1988.

<sup>13</sup> Veronica Gaspar, 'Zeitliche Gesichtspunkte in einer besonderen Kulturbegegnung: die westliche Musik in den rumänischen Länder' [A Temporal Prospect on a Special Cultural Encounter: The Western Music in the Romanian Countries] in *Geschehnisse der Deutsch-Rumänischen Akademies 2008 Tagung*, Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur Mainz, p. 6.

imagine in Japan the slightest change in a Buddhist ceremony justified by aesthetic reasons, as happened in Romania with important parts of the Orthodox Church ceremonial.

The appropriation of Western music as if it was their own music<sup>14</sup> occurred in both Romania and Japan. “Of course, we Japanese know that Western culture is not home-grown, but it is a fact that seldom enters our minds because we have become so accustomed to it.[...] Our feeling about Western culture is that it is not the culture of the West, that is to say of a specific geographical region, but a culture that has today attained world standing and must be studied and assimilated if we are to keep up with the times. For the Japanese, it possesses supra-regional and universal significance”.<sup>15</sup>

At the beginning of the 20th century Western music became dominant in Romania and, even more so than in Japan, its influence went as far as the annihilation of the traditional music in the collective conscience<sup>16</sup>. The feeling of recovering not just a place but a time through Western art was equally common to both Eastern Europe (e.g. Romania) and Eastern Asia (e.g. Japan). Watanabe came to a similar conclusion: ‘We can now even rephrase the question and ask: ‘Why do the Japanese prefer European music to their own traditional music?’ The only possible answer is: ‘Because European music is more relevant to present-day life in Japan, which is not all that different from the Western lifestyle’.<sup>17</sup>

It might be also relevant that the piano had become an emblem of the social status as an added value in young girls’ dowries. “It had always been the custom in Japan for young women to learn the tea ceremony, *ikebana* or to play the *koto* before getting married. After the war, this custom, which was observed throughout the country, was extended (mostly) to the piano, the violin and even the harp”.<sup>18</sup> We should note that in Japan the *koto* had played this dowry function in the past, while in Romania the girls’ educational acquisitions had only become real assets after Europeanization.

At the beginning of the 20th century the Western music had taken over musical education and most public concerts in Japan. The same process had occurred earlier in Romania, where public music (ceremonial, military) and a significant part of the Orthodox Church service had been Westernized. The fiddlers’ bands had adapted their tunes to the novel harmonization and, in the cities, even such important customs as Christmas celebrations underwent radical change. For instance the Christmas carols (*colinde*<sup>19</sup>) were largely replaced by so-called ‘star songs’ influenced by (or modified according to) Western music. The fir tree, omnipresent in almost all houses after 1900 as a Christmas symbol, had been traditionally employed for the death ritual (especially for the death of a young person) symbolizing both the cutting of the life and permanence of the after-life; a ritual far from any connection with the Advent or the Mysteries of Joy.

Apart from the political implications, singling post-war Japan out from other musical receivers, the struggle for a national musical culture sooner or later became a major

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>15</sup> Watanabe, ‘Why Do the Japanese Like...’, p. 659.

<sup>16</sup> Gaspar, ‘Zeitliche Gesichtspunkte...’, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Watanabe, ‘Why Do the Japanese Like...’, p. 662.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>19</sup> *Colinde* are an old musical Romanian tradition, performed since prior to Christianity, mostly around the winter solstice.

preoccupation for local musicians. The Western style was preferred by all the public and threatened to interfere with and even replace the indigenous musical traditions, as was the case in the Eastern Europe at the beginning of the century. “The perseverance and the passionate enthusiasm with which the Japanese have been studying music [...] have led many Westerners to the mistaken assumption that the Japanese have lost the true feeling for their own music”.<sup>20</sup>

The risk of losing their own traditions was greater for Romania, just because the pressure towards European culture was coming spontaneously from the public, to a more or less organized degree. In Japan it was the very social and institutional organizations which were the leading factors in slowing down the processes of contamination and replacement. An organized system like the Meiji government, besides its Westward opening, also sought to preserve the ancient Shintō and samurai culture from the ‘soulless’ modernity of the West.<sup>21</sup> This did not result from any will to totally replace the traditional Japanese music with that of Europe. “The intent of the ruling establishments during the period of Meiji was to create a new national Japanese music through the combination of European and domestic culture”.<sup>22</sup>

In Japan, as in Romania and seemingly other places too, voices were raised in concern at the threat to which traditional music was being exposed because of the increasing public preference for Western music. The 1924–1925 *Japan Yearbook* claimed that “Music in Japan exists in two distinct forms, one of them Japanese music handed down from old Japan, and the other Western music [...]. Until about ten years ago these two often appeared side by side on the same concert program, but of late they have become separated. There are therefore two sorts of music lovers... Generally speaking, students and other young men prefer Western music”.<sup>23</sup>

In Romania the concern about the loss of tradition had already started earlier, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from the civil society: cultural personalities and musicians. In Japan public voices against the Europeanization of music were set up in the Shōwa era mostly due to political reasons. The Japanese musicians’ standpoint became significant only after the Second World War, namely in 1953 with the ‘Goat Group’ (Hikaru Hayashi, Michio Mamiya and Yūzō Toyama)<sup>24</sup> and the ‘Group of three men’ (Toshirō Mayuzumi, Yasushi Akutagawa and Ikuma Dan).<sup>25</sup> The sensitive issue of recent history, together with the ‘cultural chauvinism’<sup>26</sup> of the pre-war and war years, created a dilemma for Japanese

<sup>20</sup> Eta Harich-Schneider, *European Musician in Japan*, [www.libweb.hawaii.edu](http://www.libweb.hawaii.edu) (accessed 15.02.2013), p. 419.

<sup>21</sup> Ricardo Duchesne, ‘The Uniqueness of the European Civilization’, *Studies in Critical Social Sciences*, Vol. 28, Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2011, p. 237.

<sup>22</sup> J. Vičar, ‘European Classical Music in Today’s World’, *Acta Universitatis Palackianae Olomucensis – Aesthetica*, No. 19, 2000, p. 170.

<sup>23</sup> Christina DeCiantis Davison, *The ‘Patron Saint of Music’: Beethoven’s Image and Music in Japan’s Adoption of Western Classical Music and Practices*, partial completion of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree at the School of Musicology, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> J.A. Herd, ‘The Neonationalist Movement: Origins of Japanese Contemporary Music’, *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 27, No. 2, Summer 1989, p. 120.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134 and following.

musicians after 1945. They were keen to develop an original creation and not to compile just a hybrid imitation of Western style, while nevertheless remaining free of any political connotation: “Should post-war composers identify with pre-war nationalism, with all its political implications, or should they strive for autonomy and develop entirely new styles with no links to the Japanese past?”<sup>27</sup> During this time, the general public continued to buy pianos and to listen to European music, no matter what the official standpoint was.<sup>28</sup>

It is worth mentioning an additional grievance against the public’s propensity for Western music; the dissatisfaction shared by most 20<sup>th</sup>-century composers, be they Japanese or Romanian. That particular Western music which conquered the broader public was not that of the present time, but the music of the past European tradition: the classical-romantic style of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Thus, the musicians’ struggle concerned not just the space of a tradition, but the music of the present time. Paradoxically, if at the common level the Western music was perceived as a mark of modernity, for the musicians it appeared quite the opposite. In other words: the spatial conflict of ‘piano versus *koto* (or dulcimer, *kobuz* etc.)’ turns into the temporal antagonism ‘piano versus electronic music’. From this standpoint, the promotion of traditional folklore in the musical creation was no longer a nationalist issue, but a way of finding a professional identity.<sup>29</sup> The time difference between the Romanian and the Japanese composers’ reaction is due to the Romanians’ more rapid adaptation to the new musical languages existent in modern Europe. The musical reform, ironically born at the same time as the broadening of the classic-romantic style, was perceived (and at the common level still is) as more distant from the average audience than any domestic musical traditions. The old European musical style, which may well be called ‘the acculturation style’, became burdensome not so much for the national traditions as for 20<sup>th</sup>-century professional musicians.

### History of a special affinity

The Japanese capacity for cultural absorption did not start with the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europeanization. Along the centuries, foreign artistic influences were appropriated and absorbed into the domestic cultural heritage. Ever since the Heian period the Japanese borrowed instruments, styles, genres from Chinese and Korean music. They have appropriated genres, artefacts or tools every time they came into contact with other cultures. In the past the Japanese discovered the Chinese *guzheng*, from which they created their national music instrument, the *koto*. Some traditional musical genres were also adaptations from foreign culture that succeeded in bolstering the Japanese cultural heritage, like the *komagaku* and *tōgaku* court musics, or even the *shōmyō* chant.

The first contacts with European music took place in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when Jesuits from Portugal arrived in Japan and began their Christian mission. Initially the Jesuits had been

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<sup>26</sup> Ury Eppstein, ‘School Songs before and after the War: From *Children Tank Soldiers* to *Everyone a Good Child*,’ in *Monumenta Nipponica*, 1987, quoted in *The ‘Patron Saint of Music’...*, p. 32.

<sup>27</sup> Herd, ‘The Neonationalist Movement...’, p. 133.

<sup>28</sup> Professor Taneda Naoyuki related that during the war one could find at least a piano in every quarter of Japanese cities, in spite of the nationalist politics.

<sup>29</sup> Actually, most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s musical creations draw on themes, instruments, rhythms etc. from different musical cultures, not necessarily those from the composer’s own country.

skeptical about the reception of European cult music within such a different musical tradition. They soon realized that not only this music was not rejected, but it was even a significant element of attraction to the foreign religion. The consequence was the import of musical instruments and scores from Europe and the adaptation of some traditional Japanese instruments.<sup>30</sup> “The music used in worship would probably have been mostly motets and mass movements, and the viola, *rebec*, trumpet, *charamela* (shawm), lute and even the organ played by Westerners enjoyed widespread popular use after being introduced by missionaries”.<sup>31</sup> In 1556 books of *cantus planus* (plain chant) were brought into Japan. A year later the first choir was mentioned. From around 1560 onwards there were reports of violas and keyboard instruments, which are not specifically described but could be clavichords, cembalos or virginals. Music schools were created in the mission centers to teach performance, singing, religious dramas and even secular European songs.

European-Japanese contact in these times was unidirectional, from Europe to Japan, with one single recorded exception. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, four young Christianized Japanese traveled in Europe (1582–1590) in order to know European musical life better and to be presented to the Pope, but also to testify in Europe about Christianity in Japan and the accomplishments of the Jesuit mission in the Far East. At the initiative of *visitor* (inspector) Alessandro Valignano, the young Japanese of prominent families, Don Manchio Itō and Don Miguel Seizaemon, attended by Don Martinho Hara and Don Julião Nakaura, left Nagasaki in 1582 and arrived in Portugal in 1584.<sup>32</sup> By any standards their journey had been remarkable. During their travels in Europe the four young men had audiences and more or less formal meetings with the most powerful European nobles such as King Philip II and two Popes, Gregory XIII (who welcomed the young men with ‘pomp and public honor’) and Sixtus V. They were received by many of the most important political, ecclesiastical and social figures in the places they visited. The account of this voyage was written in a book *De Missione*, 34 dialogues translated into Latin and intended to be a textbook for the Jesuits’ colleges and seminaries in Asia. The destinies of the young men and of the book are described by Eta Harich-Schneider in 1973 and particularly by Derek Massarella in 2012.<sup>33</sup> During the promotional tours made after their return in Japan, they presented some technological ‘miracles’ brought from Europe such as the astrolabe, the terrestrial globe, and others: among them, there were musical instruments in the place of honor as well.

Surprisingly, it was not only the stringed instruments, which resembled certain Japanese instruments, which won popularity, but also keyboard instruments such as organs. It was

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<sup>30</sup> The double-reed *shawm* (which still exists today), an adaptation of the *rebec* lute into the *kokyū*, etc. Harmonic instruments such as bamboo organs were destroyed with the suppression of Christianity at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>31</sup> Luciana Galliano, *Yōgaku: Japanese Music in the Twentieth Century*, Lanham, MA: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2002, p. 28, quoted by Christina DeCiantis Davison, *The ‘Patron Saint of Music...’*, p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> Machio’s younger brother Jeronimo Itō was an accomplished keyboard player. It seems that he had even performed for the feared Shōgun Oda Nobunaga.

<sup>33</sup> E. Harich-Schneider, ‘Renaissance Europe through Japanese Eyes: Record of a Strange Triumphant Journey’, *Early Music*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1973, pp. 19–26, and D. Massarella (ed.), ‘Japanese Travellers in Sixteenth-Century Europe: A Dialogue Concerning the Mission of the Japanese Ambassadors to the Roman Curia (1590)’, *The Journal of the Hakuyt Society*, Vol. 25, Third Series (presented in public conference in February 2013).



no coincidence that during the Christians' persecutions in the 17<sup>th</sup> century this was the type of musical instrument chosen for destruction, and not those which were relatively similar to Japanese instruments (such as the shawm, for instance, which is still used today). The Tokugawa shōguns, in their intention to protect the Japanese cultural identity from dissolution under Western influence, deemed this particular type of religion and its associated art to be more dangerous than other foreign influences. The severity and radicalism of the measures testify to how seriously this threat was perceived, proving at the same time the alarming popularity of Western culture among the people. Therefore the shōguns' intransigence seemed rather European-like; namely to cut off any trace of 'heresy' instead of tolerating it in Asiatic style, as had formerly been done with other foreign cultural influences.

After two centuries of isolation, the Meiji period again brought a European cultural dowry. This time there were two capital differences: the 19<sup>th</sup>-century symbolic equivalents of the astrolabe and lute were no more conditioned by the Christian cross, and the people's increasing interest was not only sustained, but also stimulated by domestic cultural, political, educational and administrative personalities eager to assimilate and fructify the cultural seeds of Europe. Among them music was less reluctantly received. The piano rapidly became the symbol of the deep restructuring of the Japanese people's collective mentality, as happened in Eastern Europe. The difference in the roles of the piano in Asia and Europe would be confirmed by the musical evolution to come: first and last the frequency of the piano's use in Eastern Europe illustrated the psycho-social ideal of a European status, while in Japan it was mainly the ferment for a musical culture to be learned, and for the sake of which other European aspects could be accepted too. An important member of the Meiji educational research team, Shūji Izawa, declared the piano was "the highest and best musical instrument of the world".<sup>34</sup> Soon Japanese society considered it a 'good habit' to own a piano rather than a car. This instrument became a symbol of Western orientation, and naturally children learned to play the European piano repertoire.<sup>35</sup> Actually, the piano did not annihilate the Japanese soul, but became a representative part of it for the entire century.

The economic and industrial consequences of this cultural acquirement were not slow in coming. Starting from 1900, the Yamaha factory became the world's leading piano manufacturer, and in 1927, Koichi Kawai founded the Kawai Musical Instrument Research Laboratory. The production of pianos in Japan mainly involved not big, expensive instruments meant for philharmonic stages, but small, cheap specimens to be used by everyone and which could find a place in any dwelling. Soon, Japanese piano brands came to conquer the whole world, including Europe. A sustained demand for instruction in Western music and the numerous Euro-Japanese musical hybrids zealously created by the composers of the time attest to a general 'thirst' for this novel art form, born from curiosity, desire of knowledge and enchantment. "The thirst for knowledge, which in any case had been a characteristic feature of our people from time immemorial, now assumed an existential significance. The importation of European culture was seen not merely as a way of enriching the life of the community, but as a necessity for the survival of that community as a

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<sup>34</sup> Vičar, 'European Classical Music...', p. 171.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem.

nation”.<sup>36</sup> The innate Japanese cultural openness made them one of the most, if not the most ready for musical assimilation in the world.

Another anti-European campaign began in the pre-war and wartime Shōwa era. It was directed toward ideology and principles, and not necessarily against the concrete musical (or technical) expression. At least as far as music was concerned, the novelty of anti-Europeanism was less popular. “Despite this open rejection of Western influence, the thriving market of Western-style performance, musical education, and composition continued to flourish throughout the Second World War, and Beethoven’s work remained a cornerstone of Japanese musical life”.<sup>37</sup> Witnesses from the war years report that the piano was still an omnipresent accessory in people’s lives. Despite the shortcomings due to the war, the people continued to find resources for instruments and music lessons.

After the war, the Japanese involved in European classical music began to export their talents. Together with thousands of young Japanese studying in European music schools, many accomplished artists made their careers on European and American concert stages. There were even times when the majority of the students in universities such as the *Hochschule der Künste* in Berlin or the Music Academy in Graz were Japanese and Korean. Besides, these countries have provided a significant ratio of prize-winners at international performance competitions. Japan is also an important partner in the theoretical debates, and is also one of the leading voices in musical pedagogy (e.g. the Suzuki Method<sup>38</sup>). It is thus clear that music has become one of the fields where the Japanese have tried hard to beat the Europeans with their own weapons, together with science, technology and other less acknowledged fields<sup>39</sup>.

In the 1990s, a decrease in the Japanese public’s interest in European classical music has been remarked on. The reason can hardly be found in economic causes (recession, saturation of the market etc.), nor can it be just the result of an intentional campaign aiming at promoting national Japanese music (ethnic or contemporary).<sup>40</sup> As was already noted, the anti-European campaign promoted during nationalist rule did not discourage the Japanese from buying pianos, taking lessons and assiduously attending concerts. As for contemporary creativity, in Japan just as everywhere else, most of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century musical language only has a limited audience of initiates.

The decrease in classical music is a global phenomenon, in our opinion, due to the raising of a less educated audience. The classical compositions are less popular in other countries too, especially in Eastern Europe. We cannot ignore the strong demarcation line splitting global contemporary society according to the degree of education. The audience for classical music (as well as for books, art movies or museums) needs a specific education,

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<sup>36</sup> Watanabe, ‘Why Do the Japanese Like...’, p. 659.

<sup>37</sup> DeCiantis Davison, *The ‘Patron Saint of Music’...*, p. 32.

<sup>38</sup> Shin’ichi Suzuki (1898–1998), violinist and pedagogue, was the creator of a method for musical initiation called *sainō kyōiku* (talent education) addressed to children aged between 3–5 years, based on his theories about language acquisition, the role of the environment and developmental teaching. The Suzuki Method aims to forge ‘children with noble hearts’ through musical environment and musical education.

<sup>39</sup> ‘For instance, outside the German-speaking regions of the world, Japan is the leading country in Goethe studies. Watanabe, ‘Why Do the Japanese Like...’, p. 658.

<sup>40</sup> Vičar, ‘European Classical Music...’, p. 172–173.

time and motivation. In this regard, the Japanese public is still one of the most educated in the world. Even if the classical music consumers have fallen away everywhere else, in Japan their percentage in society is still one of the largest.

However, though the appetite for Beethoven is declining, some important parts of the Western style are still substantially represented in 'light' music. The decrease of interest in European music indicates the decrease of mass interest in classical (i.e. professional) music, and does not imply a recrudescence of the old domestic traditions. The local folklore, no matter how officially encouraged, cannot reach the popularity level of fashionable international light music. Besides, the so-called traditional products largely promoted by the mass media are mostly adaptations, far from the original source. Even Japanese ethnomusicologists and traditional connoisseurs denounce the average broadcast 'Japanese popular music' as hybrids lacking authenticity. The same phenomenon occurs in Romania too, where the broadly encountered popular music (the 'new folklore') has little connection with genuine peasant traditions. Neither the traditional nor any national musical school have benefited from the decline of European classicism, but the music demanded by the less educated social stratum has done so. We can ascertain, regarding contemporary music, that European acculturation implies less culture and a more commercial mentality. The places where European musical culture is surviving are coincident to those social environments which place special concern on education. In this respect, Japan remains a privileged territory. This explains why European cultivated music has survived in Japan to an even greater degree than in most European countries.

### **The 'music of acculturation'**

A particular part of European music has a proven power to seduce and dominate, found in two hypostases: cultured ('classic' 'serious') and entertainment ('light'). The higher professional level is confined within a specific and well-delimited cultural time, mostly the classic-romantic period (the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries), with some before/after extensions. The popular light level is built on a universal ground arising from European traditional language, enriched with various non-European features (African or South American rhythms, Oriental melodic inflections etc.<sup>41</sup>) and local folkloric elements, which is permanently evolving under the influence of fashion.

Besides universality, both cultured and light music have two essential particularities in common: the tonal system and the simultaneity of more or less complex musical strata. These particular features would normally prevent European acculturation in countries with completely different musical traditions such as Japan or the European south-east. Therefore, a specialized analysis of the musical elements which favored that special permeability could be useful. Such an analysis, unaffected by the socio-cultural arguments outlined above, is still lacking. It was the widespread popularity of the organ (in the 16<sup>th</sup> century) and piano (in the 19<sup>th</sup> century), which brought polyphony and harmony with them, which proves that transcending that particular otherness was more than an exploit of some skilled musicians.

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<sup>41</sup> The recordings sold and the size of concert audiences prove the extent to which music market leaders such as the Beatles, Elvis Presley, Michael Jackson, AC/DC, the Rolling Stones etc. etc. actually dominate any local music performers.

The Japanese people's innate zeal to thoroughly acquire any new teaching<sup>42</sup> can only partially explain the assimilation of a musical style apparently so distant from the local pattern. Singing with several voices and performances on harmonic instruments, by people coming from a monodic cultural tradition, seem to contradict not only the overriding of a firm sociological threshold, but also the neurological mechanisms of musical reception. In 1956 Leonard Meyer had conceptualized the term of 'musical expectancy'. He asserted that we are captives of the habits of our musical surroundings which influence not only our preferences or value judgments, but even perception itself. The numerous field researches in the 1960s and 1970s were later confirmed by the event-related potential studies (ERP), especially after the development of the imaging technologies that found the center of the musical negativity in the human brain.<sup>43</sup>

However, more recent research has revealed supplementary complex processes concerning the rejection of musical novelty/incongruity, and discovered that musical competence (instruction) is essential for overcoming initial resistance. The way the habituation to a particular kind of music can affect the understanding and appreciation of other kinds of music<sup>44</sup> has received a nuanced response from the latest cognitive science studies. Musical competence can overlap the natural barrier of negativity.<sup>45</sup> Many experiments have demonstrated higher adaptation and brain elasticity in musically-educated people. That means that even if a human being is sociologically and neurologically conditioned by a specific cultural matrix, this conditioning can be attuned through education. Thus, before mentioning the innate capacities of the European musical language to spread, we should draw attention to Japanese cultural behavior toward knowledge as shaped throughout the centuries.

The precondition of any cultural compatibility would seem to be the existence of some common (or related) features. This raises the question of the degree to which cultural harmonization needs a pre-existent similitude, or is just a matter of education. The salient differences between Oriental and European music might seem to require a radical change

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<sup>42</sup> During the Jesuits' period, the Japanese also endeavored to learn foreign languages such as Latin and Portuguese.

<sup>43</sup> Techniques such as positron emission tomography (PET) and functional magnetic resonance scanning, together with studies of localized brain lesions, have shown that listening to music activates a wide distribution of brain areas. Among thousands of research studies: S. Koelsch, 'Neural Substrates of Processing Syntax and Semantics in Music', *Current Opinions in Neurobiology*, Vol. 15, No. 2; *Cognitive Neuroscience*, April 2005, pp. 207–212; J.J. Bharucha, Keiko Stoeckig, 'Reaction Time and Musical Expectancy: Priming of Chords', *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, Vol. 12 No. 4, Nov. 1986, pp. 403–410; M.A. Schmuckler, M.G. Boltz, 'Harmonic and Rhythmic Influences on Musical Expectancy', *Perception & Psychophysics*, Vol. 56, No. 3, 1994, pp. 313–325, etc.

<sup>44</sup> Riccardo Brunetti, Marta Olivetti Belardinelli, 'Effects of Musical Acculturation: Learning, Reproducing, and Recalling Music from Different Cultural Traditions', *Proceedings of the 8<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Music Perception and Cognition*, Evanston, Illinois, USA, August 3–7, 2004, S.D. Lipscomb et al. (eds.), p. 392.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Vuust et al., 'Is Musical Competence Left Lateralized? Pre-Attentive MEG Responses to Rhythmic Incongruency', *Proceedings of the 8<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Music Perception and Cognition*, Evanston, Illinois, USA, August 3–7, 2004, S.D. Lipscomb et al. (eds.), pp. 292–293.

of both perceptive psychology and cultural behavior.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, some of the similarities between European and Japanese music suggest that their incompatibility is not totally insurmountable.

One of the arguments on the origin of European music, namely natural resonance, or the belief in sound vibration and especially the concept of *ma*<sup>47</sup> could have prepared Japanese listeners for another way to deal with resonance. It is true that Japanese music is more fluid, but Western metric pulsations are not so far from the binary succession of *omote-ma* and *ura-ma* (close side and opposite side), particularly because of their organization in fairly equal time units (measures). The ambiguity of pitches is a matter of differences in performance, starting from a structured modal system based on similar steps to European tones and half-tones. This division of the octave is closer to the European diatonic structure than to the Indian quarter-tone scale or Arabian chromatics.<sup>48</sup> In the same vein, the musical meeting between Western Europe and the southern part of the Romanian Principalities might seem even more stunning, considering the melodic contour and the rhythmical flexibility.

The phonetic clarity of the Japanese syllabic structure of speech could be another favorable meeting point with European music. Besides, we should add that the apparent rigidity of the European musical style based on a written score does not actually occur in live performances. Even if European performers do not have the concept of *ma*, the breaths, the stopping (*fermatas*), the *rubato*, the pauses meant for the expressive temporality of the musical flow might have some degree of kinship.

Regarding the superposition of the voices, we ought to remember Béla Bartók's theory concerning the harmonization of popular tunes<sup>49</sup> caused by the translation of the horizontal tunes onto a vertical plane. It may be a hazardous hypothesis that a process issued from the creative thought of a great personality might actually reflect a real mental process: a spontaneous fluctuation to and from both the dimensions of a musical language, favored by the natural resonance of the sound. Anyway, such a sensorial ability presupposes a significant mental elasticity, not realizable without a complex and sustained musical education. Eta Harich-Schneider stated that Japanese musicality is a real quality derived from their music itself.<sup>50</sup>

The discussion on the Japanese capacity for musical absorption, whether innate or shaped, is far from being settled as long as the arguments out of education remain mere conjectures which are hard to demonstrate. Irrespective of the debate on the specifics of Japanese music, the differences exhibited almost never refer to strict musical issues, but to

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<sup>46</sup> We have already mentioned that the 17<sup>th</sup> century persecution against Europeanism included the destruction of the polyphonic instruments such as organs, and the forbidding of choral ensembles.

<sup>47</sup> Empty spaces between sounds giving the listener time to hear the sounds echo and to deepen their significance.

<sup>48</sup> This particularity could be another argument against the theory of a deliberate European cultural colonization. Both India as the Arabian countries underwent much more European domination, so European music should surely be more present. In reality the European music, be it classical or light has less popularity in those places, no matter how charismatic the performers are.

<sup>49</sup> Bartók Béla, *Notes on the Folk Song* (Romanian translation), București: Editura de stat pentru literatură și artă, 1955, p. 58.

<sup>50</sup> Harich-Schneider, 'European Musician...', p. 419.

philosophy, meaning etc. But even if the cultural signification and the philosophy of the perception rigorously separate Japanese music from European, the physical phenomena themselves are, in fact, less incompatible.

In a similar way, any discussion on the intrinsic virtues of the European music is contaminated by political and social interpretations. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the general opinion was that the European musical system “was so perfect that it could become a source of musical satisfaction and inspiration for members of other cultural regions and ethnicities”.<sup>51</sup> Today such assertions are usually dismissed; official statements draw on the equality of any (musical) culture. In both standpoints we can find bad faith and ideological interference rather than scientific research. It is ignored that the 19<sup>th</sup> century’s European acculturation was not the first of its kind and not unique. One ought to remember the Islamic acculturation of the whole of North Africa. It was not so extended, but much more dominant, generating total changes not just in religion, but also in language, clothing, art and cultural behavior. A similar process led to the pacific expansion of Buddhism that has exerted a complex influence on a large part of Asia.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century’s European acculturation does not even resemble its former missions of Christianization. This time the means of communication were improved enough to generalize a life-style, trade paths and cultural behavior. Subsequently the ideologies (religion included) and art forms were spread too, each with more or less popularity or duration. These art forms frequently operated as seductive triggers. Among these, music had the most powerful impact. Yet the same mechanism of cultural export also included non-European features. An obvious example of a musical culture caught in a similar global trend came from South America: their dance rhythms dominated a significant proportion of light entertainment music during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These dances, or African drums, especially in the second half of the last century, never aroused any discussions referring to cultural colonialism or compulsion. The same is true of young people’s contemporary clothing and accessories all over the world, such as tattoos and piercings. It is true that the international opening and globalism started from Europe, but in the same time and in the same way, the artistic, stylistic and gastronomic cultures of non-European origin were exported, and sometimes generalized.

## Conclusions

The astonishing assimilation of European music in Japan on both major occasions (16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries), but especially in the latter case, reveals a) some psychosocial aspects; b) a different approach to musical adaptation and c) an educational issue which is re-actualizing the concept of higher culture, nowadays shadowed by strict geographical criteria.

The piano, embodying the significant differences between the two musical cultures, symbolically represents the evolution of European music in Japan and also the role of Japan in the contemporary musical world. Hence, a pattern for cultural harmonization based on the knowledge of culture appears to be relevant, either in the presence or in the absence of preceding common elements.

Unlike other countries where European musical acculturation occurred more or less spontaneously, the penetration of this music in Japan was organized and institutionalized.

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<sup>51</sup> Vičar, ‘European Classical Music...’, p. 172.

Asian cultural behavior, exponentially represented by Japan, did not permit a total replacement, but rather the coexistence of old and new art forms. This has built up the premises of seriousness and resistance in time.

The decline in the attraction of the European model is in fact the decline in the attraction of higher culture, be it European or not. European culture, namely European professional music, is about to become better represented in Japan. If at the present time the Japanese have any rivals in musical achievements (competitions, personalities etc.), they come not from Europe, but from China.

To the question of why the Japanese could have been seduced by a such different musical culture, there are three possible answers: a) the seductive potential of the new culture; b) the fact that the apparent initial differences might be less insurmountable; c) the Japanese type of cultural opening and absorption is very strong, and thoroughly maintained by a consistent educational system forged over centuries. The third argument remains the most significant, especially if we consider that Japan is a huge cultural assimilator – something provable throughout its history. The Japanese have appropriated all kinds of genres, artefacts or tools every time they come into contact with other cultures.

The Japanese lessons of seriousness and dedication, reflected by their education in a broader sense, might be seen as a signal to reconsider the concept of culture as re-actualized by the current spiritual poverty of Europe. Japan did not import a cultural replacement, but acquired a novel form of art to appropriate, and in the meanwhile acquiring an opportunity to learn.

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