

POPULAR MUSIC IN MILLENNIAL JAPAN

Traditional Japanese music *gagaku*



BASIC AESTHETIC PRINCIPLES

AS RELATED TO TRADITIONAL JAPANESE MUSIC

- Meditative and spiritual
 - Slow-paced music
 - Contemplative, intuitive
 - Imitating natural life sounds
- Bypassing individuality
 - Individual ego must retreat at the expense of collective ego
 - One writes music in the spirit of artistic school he belongs to
 - Highly ritualized performance, strict compositional structure
- Maintaining aesthetic principles
 - philosophical principle of *naru*: music as “becoming” (evolving through its own temporal movement)
 - poetic principle of *jo-ha-kyū*: art as “flow of nature” (structured by Introduction-Development-Conclusion)
 - sensory principle of *ma*: emphasizing the “space” of time (signified by silences between phrases or single notes)

THE ORIGINS AND TRANSFORMATIONS OF JAPANESE POPULAR MUSIC

- Nara period (553–794)
 - Japanese monks brought music from China
 - It became adopted as “refined music” (*gagaku*)
 - *Gagaku* introduced first musical instruments on Japanese soil:
 - percussion (*taiko*), string (*biwa*, *koto*, *shamisen*) and wind (*hichiriki*, *shakuhachi*, *fue*)
- Tokugawa period (1603–1868)
 - Shoguns isolated the Japanese archipelago, but not entirely (e.g. the Dutch settlement on *Dejima*)
 - Rise of the “townsman culture” (*chōnin bunka*) with its strong passion for music and theatrical arts
 - Pleasure quarters (*yūkaku*) such as Yoshiwara were spaces where musical performance was flourishing
 - The *kabuki* theater introduced by Izumo no Okuni (1574–1640) – the first Japanese “celebrity-entertainer”

THE ORIGINS AND TRANSFORMATIONS OF JAPANESE POPULAR MUSIC

- Meiji period (1868–1912)
 - Traditional arts were (com)modified with the entry of foreign and Japanese capital
 - “embracing the West” (Fukuzawa) versus “expelling the barbarians” (Tokutomi)
 - Inculcating national sentiments through “national music” (*kokugaku*)
 - Adopting Western ceremonial music for military purposes
- Taishō period (1912–1926)
 - Popular culture including music performance was gradually commercialized and censored
 - “modern girls” (*moga*) and their cosmopolitan “culture of taste” (e.g. devotion to jazz and dance)
 - Establishing music revue Takarazuka (1914): all-female, cross-dressing, cross-gender performances
 - Building new commercial ballrooms in the capital where *moga* can dance and entertain themselves

THE ORIGINS AND TRANSFORMATIONS OF JAPANESE POPULAR MUSIC

- Shōwa: (pre)war period (1926–1945)
 - The cultural and political zeitgeist of “falling into a dark valley” (Akutagawa)
 - Anti-Japan or anti-war music/lyrics avoided or heavily censored
 - Performances of American and British music banned (1942)
 - Steel guitars, ukuleles, and banjos outlawed (1944)
- Shōwa: postwar period (1945–1989)
 - Japanese popular culture censored and Americanised during the US occupation (until 1952)
 - The earliest popcultural exports were not music, but film/anime (*Gojira*, *Astro Boy*, *Ultraman*)
 - *Enka*: sentimental romantic ballads in pentatonic minor scale (e.g. Kiyoshi Hikawa or Hibari Misora)
 - The annual NHK TV music show *Kōhaku Uta Gassen*: maintaining the conservative musical status quo

ENKA

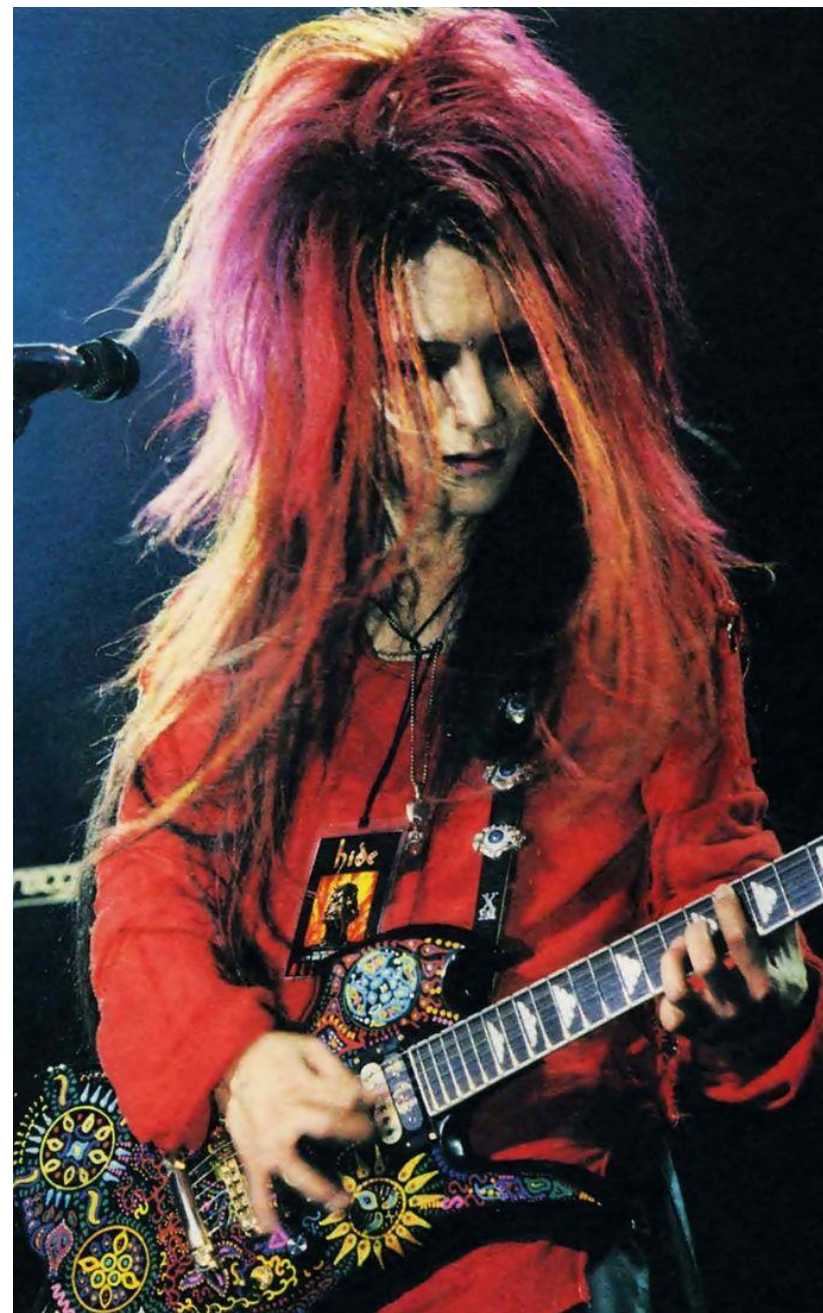


ELECTRIFYING JAPANESE POP

ELECTRIC GUITAR BOOM IN POSTWAR JAPAN:

- The first “electric boom” (*ereki būmu*) occurred between 1964 and 1967 (more than half million electric guitars sold)
- Japan’s first rock LP is released in 1964 (*Korezo Surfing* by The Blue Jeans), introducing a new guitar model (Mosrite Mark 1)
- Playing guitar covers and forming bands became a new cultural phenomenon, shaping lives of Japanese high school/university students
- The Japanese “guitar heroes” of this period were musically too tied to Japan’s hierarchically structured, largely conservative culture industry
- Japan as the leading consumer and imitator of postwar British/American pop-rock:
 - 1960s: The Ventures, The Beatles (initiating a boom of “Beatlesque” copycat bands in Japan)
 - 1970s: Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple (introducing lengthy guitar solos when touring Japan)
 - 1980s: Kiss, Aerosmith, David Bowie (emphasizing both artistic performance and visual spectacle)

EREKI BOOM



THE DEVELOPMENT OF ELECTRIC BOOM IN POSTWAR JAPANESE POPULAR MUSIC

- Origins of *ereki būmu* (1960s)
 - Guitarists Takeshi Terauchi and Yūzō Kayama: strict forms of composition, spectacular virtuosity
 - Coming from affluent/pedigreed families, studying at elite universities, even playing at military bases
 - Differing from their idols, i.e. the British-led music revolutionaries with lower/middle-class background
- Emasculation of *ereki būmu* (1970s)
 - The “founders” dismissed new anti-mainstream/countercultural forms of music during student upheavals
 - Heavy-rock templates retreat at the expense of soft-rock and singer-songwriter pop (e.g. Yōsui Inoue)
 - Emergence of Japanese pop-oriented bands (e.g. Southern All Stars) and electronic projects (e.g. YMO)
- Revival and retreat of *ereki būmu* (1980s)
 - “Visual Kei” (*bijuaru kei*): Japanese heavy metal groups visually influenced by glitter rock of Bowie or Kiss
 - Hide (from X-Japan) and Tak (from B’z) are among the most popular icons of Japanese pop-music history
 - Eventually, the commercial blend of rock, blues and synth pop prevailed, paving the way for millennial J-pop

JAPANESE POP AND THE ROLE OF CULTURE INDUSTRY

- The 1990s as the fundamental shift in Japanese popular music more toward dance-oriented “idol pop”
- Preceded by the boy band *Johnnys* (1962–1967) which adopted the American style of good-looking adolescents who can dance while singing
- Millennial J-Pop:
 - pop divas (Ayumi Hamasaki, Hikaru Utada)
 - boy bands (*SMAP*, *Exile*)
 - idol groups (*Morning Musume*, *AKB48*)
- J-pop music and performance: basic features
 - Singers must both dance and act while retaining their youthful looks even when becoming adults
 - Songs are typical of short and repetitive refrains with minimalist and easy-to-follow lyrics
 - Dance movements are synchronized and specific to each song, albeit stemming from one root template
- Managing entertainment agencies (*jimusho*)
 - Strict training and managing of Japanese adolescents based on American models of music performance
 - Agencies operate as hierarchical Japanese corporations (Kitagawa’s “Johnny and Associates” since 1962)
 - Kitagawa’s marketing strategy: promotion via television, exploitative business practices, homoerotic styling



JAPANESE POP AND THE ROLE OF TRANSNATIONAL NETWORK

- Japanese pop was created globally and perpetuated in the feedback of transnational circulation
- The hybrid nature of Japanese pop-rock
 - 1920s: Japanese-American jazz performances grows popular (along with Filipinos)
 - 1960s: American-style musicals inform the performance of Japanese boy bands
 - 1970s: Consuming and emulating British/American pop-rock (cf. *ereki būmu*)
 - 2000s: Blending Japanese and American “cultures of taste” (e.g. Hikaru Utada)
 - 2010s: Korean idol bands start gaining popularity in Japan (cf. K-pop boom)
- The issue of cultural exportation
 - Foreign receptions of Japanese popular music usually exhibit their own form of agency
 - “cultural feedback”: Japanese music as unintelligible-but-fascinating (cf. “Orientalism”)
 - “cultural flavor”: the amount of cultural traits that make a popular text *somewhat* Japanese
- The process of cultural domestication
 - American concepts must be localized and repackaged for the Japanese audiences (and vice versa)
 - “reverse importation”: Japanese musicians become validated at home after gaining status abroad
 - The “big in Japan” syndrome: foreign bands losing their popularity at home but succeeding in Japan

JAPANESE MUSIC IDOLS

AND THE ROLE OF AFFECTIVE ECONOMICS

- Contemporary Japan: structural dependency on idols, celebrities, and all things “cute” (*kawaii*)
- Cultivating J-pop singers as “idols” (*aidoru*), where exceptional talent is not essential (cf. *tarento*)
- Selling idols as “media darlings” that can generate income from both music and non-music sources

- Cute female idols first noted in Japan in the 1970s (e.g. Saori Minami, Momoe Yamaguchi, *Pink Lady*)
- The Japanese media were utilizing and popularizing the image of “(beautiful) young girl”, or *(bi)shōjo*
- Japanese idols correlate with cuteness, innocence and sublime eroticism (cf. the 1980s’ *rorikon* boom)

- “affective economics”
 - building and maintaining relationships to shape desires and impact purchasing decisions (Jenkins)
 - Affect (*moe*): change in body/mind resulting from encountering another body/mind (cf. maid cafes)
 - *Moe* usually represents an intensive affective response to fictional characters and/or factual celebrities
 - “suspension of disbelief” is essential for *moe*, while idol is a common object of affective desire (cf. *otaku*)

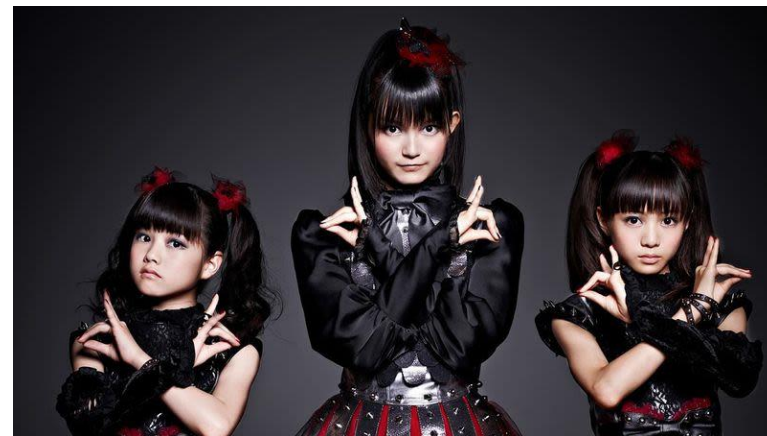
THE DIVERSITY OF KAWAII IN J-POP



Single-kawaii (Yuria Kizaki)



Mass-kawaii (AKB48)



Gothic-kawaii (Babymetal)



Hyper-kawaii (Kyari Pamyu Pamyu)

AKIHABARA AND AKB48

- Place: Akihabara
 - a space for hyperreal escapism, cuteness syndrome, information fetishism, and infantile capitalism
 - Originally an “electronic town” (*denkigai*), but since 2000s “the holy land of otaku” (*otaku no seichi*)
 - Now the “showcase” for the governmental project *Cool Japan*, and the birthplace of AKB48
- Band: AKB48
 - One of the most successful J-pop acts ever
 - Originally an underground music act, whose members soon became “national idols” (*kokuminteki aidoru*)
 - Originally marginal subcultures, the AKB fans (*otaku*) are being (ab)used for political and commercial agendas
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- Concept: AKB Business
 - The culture industry of capitalizing on relations between idols and fans (*AKB shōhō*)
 - Fans not observers, but participants who more or less directly interact with idols (cf. the “handshake events”)
 - Idols not stars but servants who appeal for further support (e.g. fans buying more copies of the same record)



J-POP AND BEYOND: THE VIRTUAL IDOL

- The shift of Japanese characters and idols from 2D to 2.5D, and eventually to 3D
- The popularity of transhumanism in Japanese popular culture (androids, dystopia)
- Miku Hatsune: Japan's leading virtual idol
 - 2007: inventing a voice synth software (Vocaloid by Crypton)
 - 2007–2010: developing a dancing “vocal character”
 - 2010: First performance of Miku in Zepp Tokyo
- The *kawaii* style was adapted from AKB48: between pure innocence and youthful eroticism
- Miku as part of *dōjin* culture: fans create derivative works or send feedback to the producers
- Miku as a socio-economic assemblage that emerges from both fan and business activities

MIKU HATSUNE

- **Age:** 16
- **Height:** 158 cm
- **Weight:** 42 kg
- **Favorite genre:** J-Pop, dance pop
- **Favorite tempo:** 70-150 BPM
- **Best voice range:** A3–A5



MIKU HATSUNE LIVE (cf. the Plato's Cave metaphor)

