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Singing As a Cultural Bridge: The Role of Traditional Japanese Children's Songs in Transnational Education

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Singing As a Cultural Bridge:

**The Role of Traditional Japanese Children's Songs in
Transnational Education**



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Abstract

This research focuses on traditional Japanese children's songs, including *warabe-uta*, *dōyō*, and *shōka*. It begins with the history and the educational applications of these songs, examining their current use in Japan's kindergarten, primary, and middle school systems. The research then shifts its focus to the cultural value of these songs from both domestic and international perspectives. Furthermore, it explores school and home music education for Japanese children in the Netherlands through observations of a music class at the Japanese School of Amsterdam and interviews with five Japanese parents. This research aims to investigate how traditional songs are used in home education to understand their cultural significance and their role as cultural bridges.

Keywords: traditional Japanese children's songs, *warabe-uta*, *dōyō*, *shōka*, cultural value, music education, educational applications

1. Introduction: Traditional Japanese children's songs in transcultural contexts

1.1. Definition of traditional Japanese children's songs in this research

Traditional Japanese children's songs include *warabe-uta* わらべうた, *dōyō* 童謡, and *shōka* 唱歌¹.

Warabe-uta are songs that children sing and pass down while playing. According to verifiable sources, the oldest *warabe-uta* is *Kotoro koto* 子とろ子とろ, which originated in the *Heian* period (794-1185)². *Kojima* (1986) listed five characteristics of *warabe-uta*³. First, they are songs sung by children in their daily lives. Second, they gradually spread and are passed on by classmates, local communities, or groups of friends. Third, they are not songs that suddenly become popular and then disappear quickly, but rather are sung by children for a considerable period of time. Fourth, there are many works with unknown authors. Fifth, they are passed down orally, through singing, rather than through written records. Based on *Kojima's* conclusion, in this research, *warabe-uta* is defined as songs that have been passed down to children since ancient times, usually linked to playful activities, such as hand-clapping and counting. For instance, *Kagome, kagome* かごめかごめ is one of the most famous *warabe-uta* in Japan (Fig. 1⁴). It is sung by children while playing a kind of circle game. A

Fig. 1 The famous *warabe-uta* “Kagome, kagome” かごめかごめ
Kagome, kagome

かごめかごめ かごのなかのとりーは いついつでやーる
Kagome, kagome, the bird in the cage, when, oh when will it come out?
よあけのぼんに つるとかめがすべった うしろのしょうめんだーれ
On the night of dawn, the crane and turtle slipped, who is behind you now?

(staff quoted from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kagome_Kagome; English lyrics is my translation.)

similar circle game in the context of English children's games would be *Ring a Ring o' Roses*.

On the other hand, the authors of *dōyō* are usually known because these songs are specifically created by adults for children. Berger (1991) referred to *dōyō* as songs composed under the influence of the so-called *Children's Songs Movement (Dōyō Undō 童謡運動)* of 1918 until the outbreak of World War II, which was named after the very first children's literary magazine published in 1918, *Red Bird (Akai Tori 赤い鳥)*⁵. The Children's Songs

Fig. 2 The *dōyō* “Red Dragonfly” 赤とんぼ
Red Dragonfly

Composed by Kōsaku Yamada
Lyrics by Rofū Miki

ゆうやけこやけーの あかとんぼ
Evening glow, small glow, red dragonfly,
おわれ てみたのーはー いつのーひーか
Being carried on someone's back, when was it that I saw it?

(staff quoted from [https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E8%B5%A4%E3%81%A8%E3%82%93%E3%81%BC_\(%E7%AB%A5%E8%AC%A1\)](https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E8%B5%A4%E3%81%A8%E3%82%93%E3%81%BC_(%E7%AB%A5%E8%AC%A1));
Four verses in total, here I excerpted and translated the first verse)

¹ Yasushi Egawa, “明治・大正・昭和の戦中戦後の初等音楽教育について—わらべ歌・童謡・唱歌を中心に—”[“Elementary Music Education in the Meiji, Taisho, and Showa Periods during and after World War II -Focus on children's songs-,”] *Bulletin of Studies of Kindai University Kyusyu Junior College Library*, no.53 (2023), 120-122.

² Eri Ando, “わらべうたの伝承と幼年期教育における文化の継承—最古のわらべうた「子とろ子とろ」の歴史を通して—”[“Promulgating Traditional Japanese Culture in Childhood Education by Means of Old Nursery Rhymes: Exploring the History of the ‘Kotoro Kotoro’ Song,”] *Geographic Generalization Study*, vol. 21, no.1 (2020), 96-97.

³ Tomiko Kojima, “日本民俗音楽再考”[“Reconsidering Japanese Folk Music,”] *Bulletin of the National Museum of Japanese History*, vol.11 (March 1986), 250-259, <https://doi.org/10.15024/00000314>.

⁴ “Kagome Kagome,” Melody, Wikipedia, accessed May 20, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kagome_Kagome.

⁵ Donald P. Berger, “‘Shoka’ and ‘Doyo’: Songs of An Educational Policy and A Children's Song movement of Japan, 1910-1926,” (PhD diss., Kent State University, 1991), 36-39.

Movement aimed to nurture children's beautiful imagination and emotions, and active songwriters included *Suzuki Miekiichi* (1882-1936) and *Kitahara Hakushū* (1885-1942). In this research, *dōyō* is defined as songs created during the Children's Songs Movement and those specifically composed for children thereafter. For instance, *Red Dragonfly* (*Aka Tonbo 赤とんぼ*) is one of the most representative *dōyō* in Japan (Fig. 2⁶). Originally published as a poem by a Japanese poet *Miki Rofū* (1889-1964) in 1921, it was later composed into a song by a Japanese composer *Yamada Kōsaku* (1886-1965) in 1927, thus giving birth to the *dōyō Red Dragonfly*.

In addition, Berger (1991) also explained the history of *shōka*, a decision that singing must be taught in schools, which was made and implemented by the Ministry of Education from 1907⁷. Besides songs later created specifically for school music classes, a large number of *dōyō* composed during the Children's Songs Movement were also selected for *shōka*. *Red Dragonfly*, mentioned above, is one such song. It is currently included in the common music course textbooks for junior high school students⁸. Therefore, in this research, *shōka* refers to songs created for school music education from 1907 to 1941, including *dōyō* from the Children's Songs Movement that are currently included in the music course textbooks.

1.2. A brief history of traditional Japanese children's songs in Japanese music education

As mentioned above, *shōka* being officially incorporated into the school curriculum means that it was not until the *Meiji* period that Japanese children had the opportunity to receive music education⁹. The incorporation of *shōka* into the school curriculum was pioneered by two figures, *Isawa Shūji* (1851-1917) and Luther Whiting Mason (1818-1896). In the early stages, a large number of Western music and songs were adopted in Japanese school music textbooks. In *Musical Instruction in Meiji Education. A Study of Adaptation and Assimilation*, Eppstein (1985) cites a Japanese critic and Normal School instructor's comment on Japan's first educational collection of school songs completed in 1885, *Shōgaku Shōkashū* 小学唱歌集, which was compiled by *Isawa* and Mason¹⁰. The critic remarked that the music in the collection was almost all based on Western compositions, and the lyrics were overly adult-oriented¹¹. For instance, *Glow of A Firefly* (*Hotaru no Hikari* 蛍の光) uses the melody of the Scottish folk song *Auld Lang Syne* with original Japanese lyrics, while the melody of *Butterflies* (*Chōchō* 蝶々) comes from a Spanish folk song¹². In this three-volume collection of 91 songs, there is no trace of traditional Japanese children's songs.

Warabe-uta were excluded for being considered "lacking elegance" and "vulgar"¹³. As Eppstein pointed out, the wholesale adoption of Western songs during this period and the introduction of *shōka* into school curriculum were seen as a reflection of Japan's eagerness to realize modernization, rather than a purely artistic pursuit¹⁴. However, Berger (1987) quoted a letter written by *Isawa* to Mason in July 1880, which pointed out that *Isawa* did not support the wholesale acceptance of Western music¹⁵. Instead, *Isawa* aimed for a fusion of Japanese traditional music with Western music but achieving this at that time proved to be extremely difficult¹⁶. This laid the

⁶ “赤とんぼ(童謡)”[“Red Dragonfly (Dōyō),”] Melody, Wikipedia, accessed May 1, 2024,

[https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E8%B5%A4%E3%81%A8%E3%82%93%E3%81%BC_\(%E7%AB%A5%E8%AC%A1\)](https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E8%B5%A4%E3%81%A8%E3%82%93%E3%81%BC_(%E7%AB%A5%E8%AC%A1)).

⁷ Berger, “‘Shoka’ and ‘Doyo,’” 42.

⁸ “中学校学習指導要領（平成29年告示）解説【音楽編】”[“Explanation of the Junior High School Curriculum Guidelines (Year 2017 Announcement) [For Music Classes],”] Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan (July 2017), 107, https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20220419-mxt_kyoiku02-100002608_06.pdf.

⁹ Elizabeth May, “The Influence of the Meiji Period on Japanese Children's Music,” *Journal of Research in Music Education*, vol.13, no.2 (Summer, 1965), 110, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3344448>.

¹⁰ Ury Eppstein, “Musical Instruction in Meiji Education. A Study of Adaptation and Assimilation,” *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol.40, no. 1 (Spring, 1985), 35, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2385000>.

¹¹ Eppstein, “Musical Instruction in Meiji Education,” 35-36.

¹² Egawa, “Elementary Music Education,” 121.

¹³ Yasuko Sotozono, “明治時代における唱歌教材の性格：「小学唱歌集」「小学唱歌」”[“The Nature of Singing Textbooks in the Meiji Period: ‘Shōgaku Shōkashū’ and ‘Shōgaku Shōka,’”] *Journal of Educational Research*, vol.3-4 (March 1970), 65, https://doi.org/10.20554/nihondaigakuyouikugakkai.3.4.0_63.

¹⁴ Eppstein, “Musical Instruction in Meiji Education,” 36-37.

¹⁵ Donald P. Berger, “Isawa Shūji and Luther Whiting Mason: Pioneers of Music Education in Japan,” *Music Educators Journal*, vol.74(2) (October 1987), 35, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3401254>.

¹⁶ Berger, “Isawa Shūji and Luther Whiting Mason,” 35.

foundation for the subsequent gradual return of Japanese traditional music to the school music curriculum in the 1910s.

In 1910, the Ministry of Education of Japan compiled and published the first singing textbook for ordinary primary schools, *Primary School Reading Songbook (Jinjō Shōgaku Tokuhon Shōka 尋常小学読本唱歌)*¹⁷. This textbook contains a total of 27 songs, with lyrics derived from poems in the Japanese language textbook of the time, *Primary School Reading (Jinjō Shōgaku Tokuhon 尋常小学読本)*¹⁸. The traditional Japanese children's songs included in the *Songbook*, such as *Spring Has Come (Haru ga Kita 春がきた)*, as well as other songs like *Hometown (Furusato ふるさと)* and *Winter Scenery (Fuyugeshiki 冬景色)*¹⁹, were either written and composed by Japanese people or passed down from long ago. This was different from the earlier teaching materials that directly borrowed Western music.

In 1918, with the launch of the Red Bird magazine, the Children's Songs Movement began, leading to the birth of *dōyō* as a new song category. In Section 1.1, when defining *dōyō* and *shōka*, I mentioned that the Children's Songs Movement in 1918 emerged as a critique of *shōka* in Meiji period. Almerée (2019) summarized those critiques of Meiji-period *shōka* by the three major *dōyō* poets of the Taisho period: *Noguchi Ujō* (1882-1945), *Kitahara Hakushū* (1885-1942), and *Saijō Yaso* (1892-1970)²⁰. *Noguchi* criticized the lyrics of *shōka* for being doctrinaire and incomprehensible, stifling the childlike spirit²¹. *Kitahara* believed that Meiji-period *shōka* excluded *warabe-uta*, resulting in *shōka* that lacked a childlike quality²². Therefore, one of the main goals of the Children's Songs Movement, represented by these three poets, was to create *dōyō* that embodied the spirit of childhood for children in contrast to *shōka*. However, since the Children's Songs Movement emerged with the purpose of criticizing *shōka* in school, it was not accepted by the school education system at the time²³. Additionally, the early *dōyō* by *Kitahara* consisted only of verses without melodies, as *Kitahara* envisioned ideal *dōyō* as melodies freely improvised and sung by children themselves²⁴. Coupled with the underdeveloped printing technology of the time, *dōyō* in the Movement largely relied on oral transmission²⁵. Songs were spread through recitation and performance among children. This practice allowed *dōyō* to spread, but also meant that its growth and reach were slower and more localized.

In 1947, under the military occupation by the Allied of World War II, the Ministry of Education issued the first *Music Edition of the Curriculum Guidelines (Provisional Version)* 学習指導要領 音楽編(試案), which was based on the formal aesthetics of Western musical culture²⁶. It emphasized the pursuit of music as an art form and implemented pure music education centered on the "beauty of music"²⁷. For instance, the textbooks included listening pieces such as traditional Japanese songs performed on instruments like *shakuhachi* (a Japanese end-blown flute), *koto* (a Japanese half-tube zither), and cello, trying to balance the proportion of Japanese and Western music²⁸. The 1951 edition of the Curriculum Guidelines was largely consistent with the 1947 edition,

¹⁷ Luli van der Does-Ishikawa, "A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Japanese Children's Official Songbooks, 1881-1945: Nurturing an Imperial Ideology Through the Manipulation of Language," (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, September 2013), 80.

¹⁸ van der Does-Ishikawa, "A Sociolinguistic Analysis," 80.

¹⁹ van der Does-Ishikawa, "A Sociolinguistic Analysis," 80-81.

²⁰ Nahed Almerée, "明治期の小学唱歌と大正期の童謡の繋がり—わらべ唄・昔話の活用と子どもの世界への関心—" ["Rethinking the Relationship between Meiji Era Shōka and Taisho Era Dōyō: The Use of Warabe Uta and Mukashi Banashi, and the Interest in the World of Children,"] *Tsukuba Studies in Literature*, vol.37 (March 2019), 23.

²¹ Almerée, "Rethinking the Relationship," 23-24.

²² Almerée, "Rethinking the Relationship," 25.

²³ Yoshiko Higashijima, "子どもと唱歌・童謡の関わりについて—唱歌・童謡の歴史と背景とともに—" ["The Relationship Between Children and Shōka and Dōyō: Exploring the History and Background of Shōka and Dōyō,"] *Bulletin of Nagoya College*, vol.61 (2023), 131.

²⁴ Higashijima, "The Relationship," 131-132.

²⁵ Higashijima, "The Relationship," 132.

²⁶ Hanae Koyama, "戦後音楽科教育の発展史" ["The Development History of Postwar Music Education,"] *Bulletin of Naruto University of Education*, vol.31 (2016), 76-77.

²⁷ Koyama, "The Development History," 77.

²⁸ Kaoru Sagawa, "音楽科学習指導要領における「日本の音楽」の変遷(1)—昭和22年の(試案)から35年(高)の改訂までの分析的検討を通して—" ["Traditional of 'Japanese Music' in the Course of Study for Music (Part 1): Analytical Review of

except for emphasizing the connection between music and social life, with a focus shifting to “music for life”²⁹. The 1958 revision of the Curriculum Guidelines introduced the concept of “common curriculum” (*Kyōtsū Kyōzai* 共通教材), specifying songs that all students across Japan were required to learn³⁰. This concept of “common curriculum” continues to this day. The *dōyō* mentioned in Section 1.1, such as *Red Dragonfly*, and those mentioned in this section, like *Spring Has Come* and *Hometown*, are mandatory pieces included in the “common curriculum” for grades 4, 2, and 6 of primary school respectively³¹.

In the 1950s, Japanese music critic *Sonobe Saburō* (1906-1980) criticized the technical orientation and focus on Western music in Japanese music education, advocating for the importance of teaching *warabe-uta* to preschool and lower-grade primary school children³². *Kojima* (2008) analyzed the *Movement of Warabe-uta* from the 1960s to the 1970s, explaining that *warabe-uta* can enhance “children’s inherent musical sensitivity” due to the linguistic system of their native language³³. However, *Kojima* (2008) also pointed out that the Movement used *warabe-uta* merely as materials for solfège practice, overlooking its inherent characteristics as songs performed in the context of playing³⁴. This partly contributed to the Movement’s eventual decline.

From 2006, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan (abbreviated as MEXT, formerly known as the Ministry of Education of Japan) has been increasing the proportion of traditional Japanese children’s songs in educational materials³⁵. Singing traditional Japanese children’s songs is a basic part of music classes in Japan’s preschool education, primary and middle schools. According to the MEXT, one of the objectives of singing these songs is to “appreciate the beauty of the country’s nature and the changing seasons, or savor the beauty of the country’s culture and the Japanese language”³⁶. In current music textbooks, *warabe-uta*, *dōyō*, and *shōka* are all designated as “common curriculum”³⁷. This means that children across all prefectures and cities in Japan are required to learn these songs. This approach encourages them to experience the songs not only as historical heritage but also as living traditions that can be enjoyed in the present days.

1.3. Other contexts beyond the classroom

While school music education follows certain patterns and rules, home music education varies greatly in different families. *Ando* (2020) focused on one of the oldest *warabe-uta* and found that it nurtured children’s imagination and creativity by passing on words, phrases, and the play style of the songs³⁸. She pointed out that *warabe-uta* in home music education initially began with a mother’s lullaby humming³⁹. Children are influenced by the melodies of *warabe-uta* at an early age. Some parents incorporate *warabe-uta* as part of early childhood education, serving as a bridge between family education and preschool education.

In preschool education, *warabe-uta* and *dōyō* occupy a significant status. One reason for this might be their unique musical features that distinguish them from other songs. *Kawase* and *Takagi* (2020) used the staffs included in *Collection of Japanese Dōyō and Folk Songs (Nihon Dōyō Min’yō Kyokushū* 日本童謡民謡曲集), *Complete Collection of Japanese Warabe-uta (Nihon Warabe-uta Zenshū* 日本わらべ歌全集), and *Songs of Japan (Nihon no Uta* 日本のうた) as analysis subjects, and extracted information on pitch interval and note

‘Course of Study for Music’ from 1947 to 1960,”] *Bulletin of the Faculty of Education and Human Studies of Akita University*, vol.62 (2007), 95.

²⁹ Koyama, “The Development History,” 77.

³⁰ Koyama, “The Development History,” 77-78.

³¹ Sagawa, “Traditional of ‘Japanese Music’,” 98.

³² Koyama, “The Development History,” 78.

³³ Ritsuko Kojima, “New Situation of Traditional Children’s Songs ‘Warabe-uta’ in the Japanese School Music Curriculum,” in *Commission for Policy: Culture, Education, Mass Media*, ed. Neryl Jeanneret and David Forrest (Bologna: July 2008), 41-43.

³⁴ Kojima, “New Situation,” 41-42.

³⁵ Kojima, “New Situation,” 43.

³⁶ “Chapter 2: Subjects Section 5: Music,” Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan, accessed December 15, 2023, https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/new-cs/youryou/chu/on.htm.

³⁷ “教科書掲載曲一覧”[“List of Songs Included in Textbooks,”] Education and Arts Press, accessed June 27, 2024, <https://www.kyogei.co.jp/textbook/es/es-r6/songlist>.

³⁸ Ando, “Promulgating Traditional Japanese Culture,” 95-106.

³⁹ Ando, “Promulgating Traditional Japanese Culture,” 104.

length from melodies of *warabe-uta* and *dōyō*⁴⁰. They found that the melodies generally fall within a narrow range where each interval does not exceed a perfect fourth, using intervals of major seconds and minor thirds to reflect a sense of “childishness”⁴¹. Through *Kawase* and *Takagi*’s analysis, it was found that *warabe-uta* and *dōyō*’s melodies are smooth and rhythmic, making them suitable for children to sing while playing games⁴². Therefore, traditional children’s songs are easily liked and sung by children.

Preschool music classes do not have standardized textbooks or curriculum guidelines. Each kindergarten selects different songs and music game methods based on its unique educational philosophy. For example, *Omi* (2001) mentions the case of *Ryugasaki Midori Kindergarten* 竜ヶ崎みどり幼稚園 in *The Significance of Children’s Singing Games in Early Childhood Education*⁴³. This is a kindergarten located in *Ryugasaki City, Ibaraki Prefecture*. Since 1983, *warabe-uta* has been introduced as a course, taught twice a week for 15-20 minutes each session (*Omi* 2001: 78)⁴⁴. Children aged 3 to 5 years old attend classes together in the same classroom. In the same article, *Omi* (2001) quoted Principal *Akiyama* of the kindergarten saying, “*Warabe-uta* helps develop the personality of young children.”⁴⁵

Another example is the *Nagoya Women’s University Affiliated Kindergarten*. *Inagi, Itō, and Yoshida* (2015) describe the songs sung during the “Kinder Concert” held annually in the kindergarten in November, mentioning that the selection of songs takes into account factors such as children’s vocal range and timbre⁴⁶.

Hasegawa (2021) conducted questionnaire surveys from 2015 to 2019 for five consecutive years on kindergarten teachers participating in teacher workshops in K City, *Kanagawa Prefecture*⁴⁷. The survey aimed to determine how many of the songs sung by the kindergarten children over the five years included *warabe-uta* and to identify any trends⁴⁸. According to *Hasegawa*’s survey results, the children in K City’s kindergartens sang a total of 25 songs over five consecutive years, of which 13 were *warabe-uta*⁴⁹. The game that children played the most was hide-and-seek (*Kakurenbo* かくれんぼ), and during hide-and-seek, they always sang *warabe-uta*⁵⁰. There was a total of three *warabe-uta* sung during this game. Other games that involved singing *warabe-uta* included rock-paper-scissors (*Janken* じゃんけん) and the red light green light game (*Daruma-san ga koronda* だるまさんがころんだ)⁵¹. Through observations from kindergarten teachers, she found that kindergarten children spontaneously adapt *warabe-uta* based on different situations while playing games⁵². Therefore, she believes that children’s improvisation and adaptation of *warabe-uta* enrich the game song versions, showcasing the depth and richness of *warabe-uta*⁵³. This insight could be helpful in developing transition programmes of early childhood education to primary school education⁵⁴.

⁴⁰ Akihiro Kawase and Yuki Takagi, “童謡の旋律における「子どもらしさ」の表現方法の抽出”[“Extracting ‘childhood’ from the Melody of Douyou,”] *Digital Humanities*, vol. 2 (November 2020), 3-25, https://doi.org/10.24576/jadh.2.0_3.

⁴¹ Kawase and Takagi, “Extracting ‘childhood,’” 19.

⁴² Kawase and Takagi, “Extracting ‘childhood,’” 17-19.

⁴³ Atsuko Omi, “幼児教育におけるわらべうたの教育的意義”[“The Significance of Children’s Singing Games in Early Childhood Education,”] *Bulletin of Kawamura Gakuen Women’s University Research*, vol. 12, no.2 (March 2001), 78-79.

⁴⁴ Omi, “The Significance of Children’s Singing Games,” 78.

⁴⁵ Omi, “The Significance of Children’s Singing Games,” 78.

⁴⁶ Shinji Inagi, Mitsuko Ito, and Aya Yoshida, “わらべうたを用いた幼児期の体系的な音楽教育の研究”[“Research for the Systematic Early-Childhood Music Education by the Use of Children’s Folk Songs,”] in *Human Ecology, Literature and Education Research*, ed. Hisashi Shibuya, no.9 (May 2015), 52-56.

⁴⁷ Mayu Hasegawa, “幼児の遊びを伴う自発的な歌に関する一考察—K市内の幼稚園で5年間歌い続けられてきたわらべうたに焦点を当てて—”[“A Study on Spontaneous Songs Accompanied by Children’s Play: Focusing on Warabe-uta Sung Continuously for Five Years in Kindergartens in K City,”] *Bulletin of Osaka College of Music*, vol.59 (2021), 20-30, https://doi.org/10.24585/daion.59.0_20.

⁴⁸ Hasegawa, “A Study on Spontaneous Songs,” 21.

⁴⁹ Hasegawa, “A Study on Spontaneous Songs,” 25-26.

⁵⁰ Hasegawa, “A Study on Spontaneous Songs,” 25-26.

⁵¹ Hasegawa, “A Study on Spontaneous Songs,” 25-26.

⁵² Hasegawa, “A Study on Spontaneous Songs,” 28.

⁵³ Hasegawa, “A Study on Spontaneous Songs,” 28.

⁵⁴ Hasegawa, “A Study on Spontaneous Songs,” 28.

From the above, it can be seen that in preschool education, traditional Japanese children's songs, especially *warabe-uta*, are widely used to develop children's cognitive, language and musical abilities.

According to Hirasawa (2018)'s statistics, the new curriculum guidelines released in March 2017 state that each grade from 1st to 6th grade in primary school learns 4 traditional Japanese children's songs, totaling 24 songs⁵⁵. In junior high school, music classes from 7th to 9th grade cover a total of 7 songs⁵⁶. In senior high school, students revisit these traditional children's songs learned in primary and junior high school to gain a deeper understanding of their meaning and emotions⁵⁷.

The current primary school music textbooks in Japan underwent a revision in 2023, published by two publishers: Education Publishing and Education and Arts Press⁵⁸. The newly revised textbooks include a variety of songs such as traditional Japanese instrument pieces, folk songs, and foreign music⁵⁹. The content now emphasizes aspects related to "thinking", such as considering the lyrics, timbre, and rhythm⁶⁰.

As for the middle school music textbooks, they were revised in 2024, published by Education and Arts Press. The new textbooks have added topics on current hot issues such as SDGs, human rights education, and international understanding⁶¹.

It can be said that current primary and middle school music textbooks are attempting to strike a balance between traditional Japanese children's songs and aligning with international standards. In other words, they aim to achieve internationalization while preserving a certain proportion of traditional Japanese culture.

The diversity of home and school music education makes me very curious about its current state. I am particularly interested in how Japanese music education is conducted outside of Japan. Do traditional children's songs still play a role in education? With this question in mind, I observed a music class in the Japanese School of Amsterdam, and had a conversation with the music teacher.

1.4. A music class and the thoughts it inspired

I visited the Japanese School of Amsterdam on February 13, 2024, and observed a fifth-grade music class. The Japanese School of Amsterdam is one of two Japanese international schools in the Netherlands, covering from the first grade of primary school to the third grade of junior high school⁶². According to the school's principal, most of the graduates return to Japan to continue their high school studies.

Before the class, I asked the music teacher about the textbooks used in class. She showed me the textbooks, mentioning that they are all designated by the MEXT and consistent with those used in schools across Japan.

The entire class was conducted in Japanese. The lesson involved playing *Pomp and Circumstance (Ifūdōdō 威風堂々)* on the recorder, a well-known march in Japan composed by the British composer Edward Elgar. It could be easily told that it was not a new lesson. The children were already proficient in playing the piece, although they needed to improve certain details such as timing, dynamics, and pauses. The teacher wrote musical symbols for crescendo, diminuendo, and other Japanese expressions on the blackboard, along with other key points. After playing the entire piece together from start to finish twice, the teacher divided the children into rows to assess their progress.

Although the class I observed did not cover traditional Japanese children's songs, I could see from the teaching methods, language usage, and board writing that children at the Japanese School of Amsterdam receive a purely

⁵⁵ Setsuko Hirasawa, "童謡・唱歌を歌い継ぐ音楽教育のあり方について—幼児期から高等教育までの展望—"["The Prospects of Music Education in Carrying on Dōyō and Folk Songs: From Early Childhood to Higher Education,"] *Bulletin of the Institute for Children's Culture Research*, vol.40 (March 2018), 63.

⁵⁶ Hirasawa, "The Prospects of Music Education," 64.

⁵⁷ Hirasawa, "The Prospects of Music Education," 65.

⁵⁸ "小学校 音楽"["Primary School Music"], accessed June 29, 2024,

<https://www.textbook.or.jp/textbook/publishing/element-music.html>.

⁵⁹ "音楽"["Music,"] accessed June 29, 2024, <https://www.kyoiku-shuppan.co.jp/r6shou/ongaku/index.html>.

⁶⁰ "改訂のポイント"["Key points of revision,"] accessed June 29, 2024, <https://www.kyogei.co.jp/textbook/es/es-r6/point#point1>.

⁶¹ "Key points."

⁶² "Introduction to Grades," The Japanese School of Amsterdam, accessed December 20, 2023, <https://www.jsa.nl/06.gakunensyukai/2023/gakunensyukai2023index.html>.

Japanese-style education.

After observing this class, I was still curious about how Japanese families out of Japan approach music education at home. Do they value traditional children's songs? If they do, in what form do they present these songs? If they do not, what are the reasons behind this, and what alternatives are used instead? Therefore, in this research, I have framed my research question as: How are traditional Japanese children's songs used by parents to convey cultural values? In Section 3, I will also present my interviews with five Japanese parents in the Netherlands to understand the state of their home music education and how they teach these songs to their children.

By exploring this research question, the cultural values carried by traditional children's songs will be further clarified. The educational approaches adopted by Japanese parents in the Netherlands will be revealed, thus helping fill the gap in existing research on the spread of the songs outside of Japan. This research can also contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics between different cultures and how traditions are maintained or transformed in transnational contexts.

2. Cultural values conveyed through traditional Japanese children's songs

2.1. Previous studies on the role of the songs

Traditional children's songs cover a wide range of themes and elements, including natural landscapes, seasonal changes, flora and fauna, traditional festivals, modes of transportation, toys and games, emotions, and more. The *warabe-uta Kagome, kagome* and the *dōyō Red Dragonfly* mentioned in Section 1.1 involve animals and insects. Ueda et al. (2005) focused their research on *dōyō* from *Collection of Japanese Dōyō (Nihon Dōyōshū 日本童謡集)*, analyzing the Japanese scenery depicted in these songs⁶³. They summarized that high-frequency elements include objects such as the sun, moon, stars, landscapes, temples, and rural scenes. They believed that these "micro worlds" constructed from scenery in *dōyō* can cultivate spatial awareness in young children who do not yet possess geographic expression capabilities. Meanwhile, although everyone's perception of scenery may vary, most people still share a consensus on these scenes. This consensus helps form the concept of "hometown" and nurtures a sense of "identity" towards regions and countries within such interconnected spaces⁶⁴. Nakayama (2009) also holds views similar to Ueda et al. Taking the lyrics of *Red Dragonfly* as an example, she believed that people of different ages and backgrounds can resonate with this *dōyō* because the images within it, such as autumn in the hometown and red dragonflies in the sunset, are shared childhood memories for most Japanese people⁶⁵. Therefore, traditional children's songs can be seen as a collection of typical Japanese images and objects. Because Japanese people resonate with these typical images and objects, they can find distinctive Japanese characteristics within these songs.

In addition to presenting a geographical representation of Japan within these songs, which strengthens an emotional resonance with the Japanese identity, another important aspect of Japanese culture embodied in these songs is the Japanese language. Bock (1949) once commented that traditional children's songs use relatively simple language, with few puns and double meanings⁶⁶. Through these songs, young children can learn specific Japanese vocabulary. For example, depending on regions, there are many different versions of counting songs throughout Japan. Here is a version that is commonly used nationwide:

<i>Ichijiku</i> いちじく	(One) fig
<i>Ninjin</i> にんじん	(Two) carrots

⁶³ Akira Ueda, Masayoshi Ootani, and Kiyoshi Miyazaki, "日本の原風景の構造とその継承 童謡から探る日本のアイデンティティ"["Structure [sic!] of Primal Scene [sic!] of Japan and Succession - Identity of Japan extracted from Nursery Rhymes,"] *The Japan Design Society*, no. 52 (July 2005), 127-128, <https://doi.org/10.11247/jssd.52.0.127.0>.

⁶⁴ Ueda, Ootani, and Miyazaki, "Structure [sic!]," 128.

⁶⁵ Atsuko Nakayama, "日本の伝統的な言語文化を育てる学習—童謡・唱歌の歌詞を見直す—"["Fostering Traditional Language and Culture of Japan: Revisiting the Lyrics of Dōyō and Shōka,"] *Instructional Materials Studies*, vol. 20 (2009), 79-86, <https://doi.org/10.18972/kyozai.20.0.79>.

⁶⁶ Felicia G. Bock, "Japanese Children's Songs," *Western States Folklore Society*, vol.8, no.4 (October 1949), 340, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1496151>.

<i>Sansho ni shiitake</i> さんしょにしいたけ	(Three) Japanese peppers and (four) shiitake mushrooms
<i>Gobou ni mukuroji</i> ごぼうにむくろじ	(Five) burdock roots and (six) soapberries
<i>Nanakusa</i> ななくさ	(Seven) vernal flowers
<i>Hatsutake</i> はつたけ	(Eight) matsutake mushrooms
<i>Kyūri ni tougan</i> きゅうりにとうがん ⁶⁷	(Nine) cucumbers and (ten) winter melons

It uses the names of vegetables in Japanese that start with numbers 1 to 10 to create a counting song, providing vocabulary for both numbers and vegetables.

Let's take a look at another counting song that is popular in *Iwate* Prefecture:

<i>Otedama ni-jū-ichi</i> お手玉二十一	(Playing with) bean bags at twenty-one
<i>San-jū furisode</i> 三十振り袖	(Wearing) long-sleeved kimono at thirty
<i>Shi-jū shimada</i> 四十島田	Shimada-mage hairstyle at forty
<i>Go-jū obasan chasenmage</i> 五十おばさん茶筌髷	Fifty-year-old aunt with a tea whisk bun hairstyle
<i>Roku-jū jū-san nagabaori</i> 六十爺さん長羽織	Sixty-year-old grandpa with a long Japanese coat
<i>Nana-jū somesome</i> 七十そめそめ	Getting emotional at seventy
<i>Hachi-jū momidashi</i> 八十もみ出し	With untangled hair at eighty
<i>Kyū-jū-kyū kan no hyakkan-zuki</i> 九十九かんの百貫づき ⁶⁸	Wearing hyakkan kimono at ninety-nine

It involves counting ages and includes vocabulary related to traditional Japanese hairstyles and clothing for men and women.

Another example of *warabe-uta* incorporates the names of fingers:

<i>Oyayubi nemure</i> おやゆびねむれ	Thumb, go to sleep
<i>Sashiyubi mo</i> さしゆびも	So does index finger
<i>Nakayubi</i> なかゆび	Middle finger
<i>Beniyubi</i> べにゆび	Ring finger
<i>Koyubi mina</i> こゆびみな	Little finger, you all
<i>Nen ne shi na</i> ねんねしな	Go to sleep
<i>Nen ne shi na</i> ねんねしな	Go to sleep
<i>Nen ne shi na</i> ねんねしな ⁶⁹	Go to sleep

This *warabe-uta* straightforwardly lists the names of the five fingers.

Besides simple vocabulary that is suitable for children to develop their language skills, the graceful language used in some songs also serves as a representation of cultural heritage. *Ishihara* (2019) shared *Maruya Saiichi* (1925-2012)'s view that *dōyō* in the *Collection of Primary School Shōka* (*Shōgaku Shōkashū* 小学唱歌集) possess a “Japanese aesthetic” comparable to that of the *Collection of Japanese Poems of Ancient and Modern Times* (*Kokin Wakashū* 古今和歌集)⁷⁰, the first imperial anthology of Japanese poetry from the early *Heian* period, characterized by its elegance, delicacy, and intelligence.

It can be concluded from the above that traditional children's songs represent Japanese traditional culture, resonate easily with Japanese people, and are among the best ways for Japanese children to learn basic Japanese vocabulary.

2.2. Specific cultural themes and symbolic elements

In the previous section, I provided several examples traditional children's songs and briefly analyzed their

⁶⁷ Noriko Kamieshū, “かごめかごめなど、どこか謎めいた「わらべうた」や「かぞえ歌」「子守歌」。各地に伝わる歌を調べてみた”[“I researched various songs passed down in different regions such as the warabe-uta like ‘Kagome Kagome’,”] accessed June 27, 2024, https://www.homes.co.jp/cont/press/reform/reform_01277/#hd_title_2.

⁶⁸ Kamieshū, “I researched”.

⁶⁹ “おうちようちえん”[“Home and kindergarten,”] accessed June 27, 2024, <http://www.ouchiyouchien.com/warabeuta/831>.

⁷⁰ Shinji Ishihara, “唱歌の文化的位置付けに関する一考察—自文化、伝統文化、古典に向けて—”[“The Cultural Position of Shōka Songs in Light of Domesticity, Traditionality, and Classicity,”] *Music Expression Studies*, vol. 17 (November 2019), 14, https://doi.org/10.34353/jmes.17.0_13.

cultural values. In this chapter, I will summarize and analyze more songs to present a more comprehensive view of their cultural values and how they are expressed, by examining the recurring cultural themes and symbolic elements in the lyrics. Given the vast number of traditional Japanese children’s songs, no single study can encompass all of them while summarizing all the cultural themes and symbolic elements they contain. What I aim to do is to identify as many representative traditional children’s songs as possible and then summarize and analyze them.

I selected two sources for analysis. One is the mini-programme *Everyone’s Dōyō* (*Minna no Dōyō* みんなの童謡), launched by Japan’s national public broadcaster NHK from April 1, 2000 to March 21, 2013. Each episode of this programme was 3 minutes long and played one *dōyō*. Later, NHK officially released a total of four DVDs titled *Everyone’s Dōyō* in 2005 and 2008. I analyzed all 68 *dōyō* from these four DVDs. The other is the two-volume collection *Japan: Collection of Dōyō, Shōka, and Warabe-uta 1 & 2* (日本 童謡・唱歌 わらべうた集 1 & 2), compiled by Kanda Kenjū, containing 206 songs in total. The reason for choosing these two sources is that they consist of traditional Japanese children’s songs that are widely recognized and cherished by the Japanese public, with high familiarity and popularity. Therefore, the cultural themes and symbolic elements reflected in these sources can be considered representative.

Additionally, I excluded songs of which original melodies are Western compositions because the Japanese lyrics for these songs might have been influenced by the original Western lyrics, thereby lacking a certain degree of originality. In *Everyone’s Dōyō*, I excluded two songs, and in *Collection of Dōyō, Shōka, and Warabe-uta 1 & 2*, I excluded seven songs. Considering the overlap of songs between the two sources, the total number of songs discussed in this analysis amounts to 203.

Out of the 203 songs analyzed, approximately 55% prominently feature nature and its elements, such as seasons, landscapes, and animals. For instance, in *Spring Has Come*, the lyrics focus on the arrival of spring through symbolic representations like blooming flowers 花が咲く and singing birds 鳥が鳴く. This reflects the cultural importance of seasonal awareness in Japanese life that observes nature’s rhythms. Other cultural themes involved include animals and insects, nostalgia and growth, tradition, family love, playfulness, festival, friendship, life cycle, and travel. The summarized cultural themes and symbolic elements are shown in Table 1.

Cultural Theme	Symbolic Elements	Song Examples
Nature and Seasons	Flowers, sea, mist, red leaves	Winter Scenery 冬景色
Animals and Insects	Puppies, red dragonfly, cattle	Red Dragonfly 赤とんぼ
Nostalgia and Growth	Bells, shells	Rainy Moon 雨降りお月
Tradition	Doll, kimono	Bride Doll 花嫁人形
Family Love	Shoulder-tapping, stove	Shoulder-tapping 肩たたき
Playfulness	Handball, toys	The Ball and the Lord 毬と殿様
Festival	Flute, drum, golden folding screen	Happy Doll Festival うれしいひなまつり
Friendship	Pathways, laughter	The Path of Friendship 仲よし小道
Life Cycle	Birds, flowers, sunset	Spring Has Come 春が来た
Travel and Connection	Harbour, ships, trains	The Harbour みなと

Table 1. Cultural Themes and Symbolic Elements in 203 Songs

Symbolic elements are concrete or abstract representation to convey cultural themes. For example, in *Spring Has Come*, blooming flowers and singing birds celebrate the changing seasons, expressing the joy of spring’s arrival. On the other hand, it should also be noted that these symbolic elements do not necessarily point to a single cultural theme. Even within the same song, a certain element may simultaneously carry multiple cultural meanings. Continuing the discussion of *Spring Has Come*, although elements like “birds” and “flowers” are clearly natural symbols, they also serve as metaphors for rebirth, new beginnings, and the cycle of life. This is why I did not categorize this song under “Nature and Season” in the table. In other words, these symbolic

elements not only have a literal, tangible meaning, but also express multiple emotions through their cultural meanings.

These symbolic elements are an essential part of understanding the depth of cultural expression in traditional Japanese children's songs. Another example is found in *Momotarō* 桃太郎, which tells the story of the hero Momotarō, who defeats ogres with the help of animals. This song is adapted from the famous Japanese folk tale *Momotarō*, but compared to the original story, its lyrics are much simplified. For example, the process of Momotarō seeking companions is omitted, as are the details of the battle with the ogres. This is because *dōyō* need to be suitable for children to sing, so they are adapted to be simple, easy to understand and memorize. The symbols of Momotarō's three companions, the dog, monkey, and pheasant carry various cultural meanings. These animals are considered representing loyalty, intelligence, and strength. This also reflects the ideal qualities of cooperation and friendship, which are important values in Japanese culture. The song conveys a sense of community and the power of working together. It is hoped that such values will be passed on to the children who sing these songs.

In addition to these specific symbolic elements, the vocabulary used in traditional children's songs also plays a role in serving cultural purposes. In Section 2.1, I mentioned that one characteristic of these songs is simple vocabulary. Besides this, the songs often incorporate repetitive phrases and motivational language structures. Taking *Momotarō* as an example again, the dog, monkey, and pheasant are common animals familiar to Japanese children. The gift Momotarō uses to invite these three companions, millet dumplings (*kibi dango* 黍団子/吉備団子), are a specialty of Okayama Prefecture, located in the heart of western Japan. The ogres that Momotarō sets out to defeat are *oni* 鬼, demons that frequently appear in Japanese folk tales. The lyrics repeatedly feature phrases like "Let's do it (*yarimashō* やりましよう)" and "Let's go (*ikimashō* 行きましよう)", as well as an exclamation of cheering "hooray (*banbanzai* ばんばんざい)", all of which create an atmosphere of excitement and celebration. The repetitive phrases make it easy for children to memorize and sing, while the motivational language structures immerse them in a cheerful mood as they sing along.

Through the examination of these songs, we can gain insight into how traditional Japanese children's songs serve as a reflection of cultural values and emotions. While the songs are often playful and simple on the surface, they are rich with symbolism that captures the essence of Japanese cultural ideals. They offer a window into the past while simultaneously shaping the future of cultural continuity. In this way, traditional Japanese children's songs provide Japanese children with not only an understanding of the cultural history of Japan but also a deeper appreciation of how traditional expressions are interwoven with contemporary life.

While these songs are deeply rooted in Japanese cultural ideals, their universal themes and symbolic elements also offer potential for cross-cultural resonance. For children outside of Japan, these songs could serve as a medium for a transnational exchange of values. The themes of nature, family, growth, and playfulness are not confined to Japan alone. They are also essential elements to many other societies around the world.

2.3. Singing children's songs in transnational contexts

Although not many, some scholars have already observed the spread of traditional Japanese children's songs outside of Japan.

Ko (2004) conducted a questionnaire survey with 205 Koreans who received primary school education in Korea during the Japanese colonial era, along with two Japanese teachers who taught music classes in Korea at that time⁷¹. The study aimed to reconstruct the actual conditions of *shōka* education under Japanese colonial rule in Korea. In her findings, during the Japanese colonial period, most primary schools in Korea did not have unified written music textbooks. Instead, teachers selected *shōka* songs independently based on their own considerations

⁷¹ Insuk Ko, "植民地朝鮮における日本唱歌教育の実態—教育体験者への質問紙調査を中心に—"["The Actual Condition of Japan Song Education in the Colonial Korea - By the Questionnaire Survey to the Educated Persons,"] *Music Education*, vol.34, no.1 (2004), 12-20, https://doi.org/10.20614/jjomer.34.1_12.

and orally taught them to students in class⁷². Those songs included classic Japanese *dōyō* like *Spring Has Come*. Despite the suppression of singing Korean songs during that time, with Japanese being the dominant language, most interviewees mentioned that they still spontaneously sang Korean children's songs at school⁷³. They also indicated that *shōka* education during the colonial era had a profound impact on them, with many choosing careers related to music such as vocal studies or becoming music teachers as they grew older⁷⁴. Ko presents the results obtained from the questionnaire survey with few comments, from which we can observe clashes between foreign cultures and native cultures. Especially under colonial circumstances, despite being compelled to accept foreign cultures, the ethnic and national identities represented by native culture continue to play a significant role, sometimes even more strongly.

Olsen (1983) investigated and discussed the cultural and musical life of Japanese immigrants and their descendants in Peru and Brazil⁷⁵. He found that in Peru, due to poor economic conditions and wartime treatment, Japanese immigrants had limited opportunities for public concerts and cultural events featuring Japanese music, while in Brazil, Japanese musical performances were frequent and well-attended by the Japanese community because of the efforts by Japanese musicians and the influx of Japanese companies. He summarized that the following five variables are factors influencing immigrants' exposure to their home country's music in foreign lands: period of immigration, location, generation, host country economic and political conditions, and host country constraints⁷⁶. This indicates that the spread and acceptance of traditional children's songs outside of Japan are determined by various factors.

Studies solely focused on traditional Japanese children's songs outside of Japan are quite rare. Therefore, I have expanded the scope of the literature review, not limited to Japanese children's songs, but restricted to children's songs in transnational contexts, in order to gain more insights.

Walker (2014) concentrated on South Florida residents with the Caribbean diaspora culture, aiming to understand the motivation and preservation process of children's songs from various cultural groups⁷⁷. He concluded that participation in singing and learning these songs helped cultivate a sense of belonging and connection to cultural roots, enhancing the overall well-being and development of children within immigrant communities⁷⁸.

Lin (2005) studied four Taiwanese children's songs from the perspective of selecting music curriculum materials for teaching American children⁷⁹. Although it does not completely align with my research topic, she mentioned in her thesis that the four principles she chose for the materials were that the songs must have melodies, be popular in Taiwan, be simple, and have content suitable for American children⁸⁰. It is easy to understand that the songs must be popular and simple because children can learn them easily. For the first principle, the songs must have melodies because the goal for American children is not learning Taiwanese language, so the emphasis of the songs should be on music rather than on language. This leads me to think about my research subjects, Japanese parents and children residing in the Netherlands. Naturally, Japanese children would have a need to learn Japanese, so would their choice of children's songs focus on language? As for the last principle, that the content of the songs must be suitable for American children, it is exemplified in the thesis that many Taiwanese children's songs contain content of mocking a person's physical shape, which is not appropriate in the United States. This

⁷² Ko, "The Actual Condition," 14-15.

⁷³ Ko, "The Actual Condition," 17.

⁷⁴ Ko, "The Actual Condition," 17-18.

⁷⁵ Dale A. Olsen, "The Social Determinants of Japanese Musical Life in Peru and Brazil," *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 27 (January 1983), 49-70, <https://doi.org/10.2307/850882>.

⁷⁶ Olsen, "The Social Determinants," 54-61.

⁷⁷ Finley Wade Walker, "Why do you sing to me? A Case Study of Form and Function of Children's Songs in the Caribbean Diaspora Culture in South Florida," (Master diss., Liberty University, April 2014), 1-88.

⁷⁸ Walker, "Why," 61-64.

⁷⁹ Pei-Ying Lin, "Development of Curriculum Materials to Teach American Children about the Culture of Taiwan Through Taiwanese Children's Songs," (Master diss., University of Missouri-Columbia, May 2005), 1-128.

⁸⁰ Lin, "Development of Curriculum Materials," 48-51.

raises another question for me: In the context of the Netherlands, would similar situations arise? In other words, could there be similar instances where traditional Japanese children's songs contain words, phrases, or scenes that are inappropriate in a Dutch context? Following these questions, I decided to interview Japanese parents living in the Netherlands.

3. Interviews

3.1. Interview design and participants

I conducted semi-structured interviews with five Japanese parents to inquire about and understand their experiences and connections with traditional Japanese children's songs, as well as their views on their children's education in these songs. The five interviewees have different professions, and their children are of different ages, presenting distinctly different situations. Interviews were conducted online, in a comfortable and private setting, to ensure interviewees felt at ease to share their experiences. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. All interviewees agreed for me to use the information obtained during the interviews for this research. Here, I have used pseudonyms for their names.

3.2. Case study 1: Mrs. N.Z.

Mrs. Z.N. used to be a flight attendant, but now holds multiple professional roles including corporate executive, founder of a charitable project, psychological counselor, and teacher. She has two children: A 15-year-old son and an 11-year-old daughter.

Regarding her experience teaching traditional children's songs to her children at home, she mainly recalls their early childhood experiences. In other words, in her home, her children were exposed to traditional children's songs when they were very young. However, she also admitted that it had been a long time since then, and some details were not very clear in her memory. Throughout the interview, Mrs. Z.N. continuously tried to recall and evoke memories from about ten years ago.

According to Mrs. Z.N., her approach to music education for her two children was not consistent. With her first child, her son, she made significant efforts and plans since he was her firstborn. Moreover, because he showed interest in music, she actively taught him traditional Japanese children's songs, such as *Tap tap tap tap*, *Long Beard* (*Ton Ton Ton Ton Hige Jiisan* とんとんとんとんひげじいさん). Considering that her son would eventually return to live in Japan, she also enthusiastically read Japanese fairy tales and picture books to him, aiming to teach him Japanese language skills.

As for her second child, her daughter, in Mrs. Z.N.'s memory, she did not teach traditional Japanese children's songs as much. This was due to several reasons: firstly, she did not feel the same free enthusiasm as with her first child; secondly, her daughter seemed more interested in dancing than singing; thirdly, Mrs. Z.N. believed that the kindergarten teachers would teach enough traditional children's songs.

In the online interview, Mrs. Z.N. showed me her piano and reminisced about how she used to play the piano while her two children danced. They often engaged in activities together as a family, such as cooking and origami folding.

Mrs. Z.N. said that she enjoyed classical music, so she took the initiative to bring the children to listen to classical music concerts. When I asked Mrs. Z.N. whether she consciously chose the songs or themes when teaching her children traditional Japanese children's songs, her answer was negative. Although her memory was not very clear, she confirmed that she simply followed the songs provided in the teaching materials she had at hand, without giving it much thought.

Mrs. Z.N. mentioned that she sent both of her children to Tulip Kindergarten for four consecutive years. Tulip Kindergarten is the only Japanese kindergarten in the Netherlands, located in Amstelveen, south of Amsterdam. Checking the kindergarten's official website reveals that they offer various programmes based on age groups, including learning hiragana, singing, calligraphy, physical education, and other activities⁸¹. Additionally, every

⁸¹ “コース案内”[“Course Guide,”] Tulip Kindergarten, accessed June 28, 2024, <https://www.tulipgaku.nl/03annnai/03annai.html>.

academic year, they regularly hold Japanese cultural event such as tea ceremony classes, *Setsubun* bean-throwing ceremony, Respect for the Aged Day letter-writing activities, which are highly characteristic of Japanese culture⁸². Therefore, it is understandable that Mrs. Z.N. entrusted the responsibility of teaching traditional Japanese children's songs to the kindergarten when raising her second child. It is likely that other Japanese parents in the Netherlands have similar thoughts and practices as Mrs. Z.N.

3.3. Case study 2: Mrs. N.O.

Until 2019, Mrs. O.N. worked as an English teacher at a public high school in Japan. After leaving that position, she moved to the Netherlands, where she now works as an English teacher at a primary school. Besides her role as a teacher, she organizes tours for Japanese parents and students to visit schools in the Netherlands, and she also writes educational articles for magazines. Mrs. O.N.'s husband is also Japanese and runs a Japanese language school where he teaches Japanese. They have a 9-year-old daughter.

I asked Mrs. O.N. about her understanding of the definitions of *warabe-uta*, *dōyō*, and *shōka*. She thinks that *warabe-uta* are unique children's songs specific to different regions. *Dōyō* are songs published by official institutions or organizations, such as bookstores, for children to sing nationwide. In Mrs. O.N.'s view, *shōka* are songs sung during school choir competitions to win prizes.

Mrs. O.N.'s daughter moved to the Netherlands with her parents when she was 3 years and 10 months old. Shortly after arriving in the Netherlands, she started attending a Dutch primary school. She is the only Asian student in her class.

Mrs. O.N. expressed her emphasis on learning the Japanese language. She agrees with the notion that the Japanese language is a part of the Japanese identity. She gave an example to illustrate why language is important. She thinks that if a child wants to express his/her feelings of liking or disliking a classmate but cannot do so fluently, the accumulation of this frustration over time can lead to mental stress. Therefore, language is very important. However, simply urging a child to learn a language will not yield ideal results. Therefore, the educational approach in Mrs. O.N.'s family is to be observers who are always ready to support. Specifically, Mrs. O.N. and her husband pay attention to their daughter's daily emotional changes and interests. For instance, if they predict that their daughter is approaching the age when she might like *Life in the Corner* (*Sumikko Gurashi* すみっくぐらし), they will buy *Sumikko Gurashi* books in advance and place them at home. Sure enough, before long, their daughter picks up these books and reads them with great interest. Similarly, the same applies to *manga*. They noticed their daughter's enthusiasm for *manga* and placed *manga* books at home in advance. Another example is buying a *Nintendo Switch*. When their daughter play the game *Animal Crossing* (*Dōbutsu no Mori* どうぶつの森), she asks the adults about any kanji she does not recognize in the game.

Regarding music education at home, Mrs. O.N. mentioned that she taught her daughter *Elephant* (*zō-san* ぞうさん), a song about elephants with long trunks and large bodies, helping her daughter learn about animals through traditional children's songs. Additionally, her daughter has a touch-and-read book with 20 traditional children's songs; when she touches a specific Kana, the corresponding song plays. Mrs. O.N. and her daughter have learned these 20 songs together. When I asked Mrs. O.N. if she actively sought out traditional children's songs to teach her daughter, she said she did not. Typically, she only thinks about singing traditional songs with her daughter during traditional festivals like Double Seventh Festival (*Tanabata* 七夕). Mrs. O.N. took a book titled *Because I'm 3 years old* (*San-sai da mon* 3さいだもん) from the bookshelf behind her and explained that it contained songs, games, riddles, and many other contents. Her daughter naturally learned to hum a traditional children's song, *The Great King Hamehameha of the South Island* (*Minami no Shima no Hamehameha Daiō* 南の島のハメハメハ大王), from reading this book on her own.

Mrs. O.N.'s daughter now speaks Japanese and Dutch. There are no Japanese-related courses at the primary school she attends, and she learned Japanese on her own out of interest. In short, they do not forcefully intervene

⁸² “年間行事”[“Annual events,”] Tulip Kindergarten, accessed June 28, 2024, <https://www.tulipgaku.nl/04gyouji/04gyouji.html>.

in her learning process but let it happen naturally. Whenever her daughter has questions about *Kanji* characters or traditional children's songs while reading, they provide explanations.

3.4. Case study 3: Mrs. Z.F.

Mrs. F.Z. works as a teacher at a university. She has a 3-year-old son, and her husband is Dutch. Therefore, her son currently holds dual Japanese and Dutch citizenship. For whether her son will stay in the Netherlands or go to Japan in the future, Mrs. F.Z. prefers to leave the decision entirely up to him. Therefore, her current plan is to cultivate proficiency in both Dutch and Japanese languages for her son.

However, Mrs. F.Z. candidly admitted that she could not distinguish clearly between what were *warabe-uta* and what were *shōka*. She had a vague definition of these songs and referred to them collectively as *dōyō* or children's songs (*Kodomo no Uta* 子どもの歌). Therefore, in choosing songs, she did not purposefully select specific songs or themes. Instead, she directly purchased a book called *200 Song Picture Books Presented by Kumon Press* (*Kumon no Uta 200 Ehon* くもんのうた 200 えほん) and taught her son the songs based on the contents of the book. This picture book emphasizes on its cover and inside pages the enriching effect of singing on vocabulary⁸³. It is divided into two main categories: "90 basic songs" and "110 expanded vocabulary songs"⁸⁴. The latter category is further divided into four parts: "playful songs/happy songs," "songs related to animals/vehicles/food/lifestyle items," "songs for the four seasons," and "songs from the heart of Japan"⁸⁵. Mrs. F.Z. explained that this picture book from *Kumon* Press was very famous in Japan. Many parents purchase books from this publisher for preschool education of their children. Besides these Japanese songs, Mrs. F.Z. usually communicates with her son in Dutch, aiming to immerse him in a bilingual environment of both Japanese and Dutch.

3.5. Case study 4: Mr. L.N.

Mr. L.N. is the only male among the five interviewees. He came to the Netherlands with his family to start a business 7 years ago, driven by the Dutch-Japanese Trade Treaty. Currently, he runs a Japanese-style *bento* food truck, with the majority of his customers being Japanese. Mr. L.N. now has a 4-year-old daughter.

Mr. L.N. said that before their daughter turned one year old, his wife was mainly responsible for their child's daily care because he was busy with establishing his business. Additionally, according to Dutch law at the time, his wife did not have a work permit and therefore could not work outside the home, so she had more time to take care of their daughter. His wife often held their daughter and hummed traditional children's songs like *Spring Has Come*. Meanwhile, Mr. L.N. would read bedtime stories to their daughter every night, including traditional Japanese folk tales like *Momotarō*.

Like the other interviewees, Mr. L.N. was also unaware of the specific classifications of traditional children's songs and the precise definitions of *warabe-uta*, *dōyō*, and *shōka*. What he could determine was that these songs were ones he had been hearing since childhood and were introduced by his parents. He categorized them all as traditional children's songs.

Now he sings these songs with his daughter or sings game songs while playing together. When I asked why he sings these songs, he explained that the reason was simple that his parents did the same with him when he was young. He has wonderful memories of that time in his childhood, so he wants his daughter to spend her childhood in the same way. Mr. L.N. clearly stated that the possibility of returning to Japan in the future is low, and he also said that when singing these songs with his daughter, he did not specifically focus on cultivating her sense of identity or on developing her Japanese language skills. He and his wife talk in Japanese at home and also speaks Japanese with their daughter. He said that he would expect everything to come naturally.

3.6. Case study 5: Mrs. I.S.

Mrs. I.S. came to the Netherlands not long ago, and this is her second year here. The whole family moved to the

⁸³ “くもんのうた 200 えほん”[“200 Song Picture Books Presented by Kumon Press,”] (Tokyo: Kumon Press, 2017), 9-12.

⁸⁴ “200 Song Picture Books,” 4-6.

⁸⁵ “200 Song Picture Books,” 4-8.

Netherlands because of her husband's job transfer from Japan. She has a 6-year-old son. Mrs. I.S. has been a housewife both before and after coming to the Netherlands.

She firmly stated that her husband's transfer in the Netherlands is temporary, and the entire family will definitely return to Japan in the future. Therefore, she consciously ensures that her son continues to be exposed to Japanese literature, which includes traditional children's songs, such as *Spring, Come (Haruyo koi 春よ来い)* and *Carp Streamer (Koinobori 鯉のぼり)*. When her son turned five, she dressed him in traditional boys' attire and celebrated the Japanese traditional Children's Day, *Seven-Five-Three (Shichi-Go-San 七五三)*. She said she hoped her son not to miss out any experiences he would have had growing up in Japan.

3.7. Discussion: Interpretation of findings

The five interviewees shared some notable similarities in their approach to traditional Japanese children's songs.

First, traditional Japanese children's songs were primarily taught during the children's early childhood. Both Mrs. N.Z. and Mrs. N.O. reminisced about teaching traditional Japanese children's songs to their children when they were young. Meanwhile, Mrs. Z.F.'s child is currently at the age when most Japanese people begin teaching traditional Japanese children's songs to their children. This indicates a general consensus that traditional Japanese children's songs are suitable for preschool-aged children.

Second, all five interviewees mentioned using third-party textbooks, books, or other media to teach songs. They all stated that they did not actively seek out or select specific songs or themes but instead purchased mainstream textbooks and used the songs provided in them.

Third, all five interviewees were uncertain about the definition of *warabe-uta*, *dōyō*, and *shōka*, leading to some differences in their personal definitions. This highlights the utility of third-party textbooks, as the interviewees did not need to differentiate between specific types of songs. They simply followed the songs provided in the textbooks for teaching.

Another point to consider is that, whether consciously or unconsciously teaching these songs, none of the interviewees could clearly illustrate the cultural significance of the songs. However, they all unequivocally acknowledged that these songs embody Japanese culture. Even Mr. L.N., who described his teaching as unconscious, is replicating his own childhood experiences of singing and playing. Isn't this, in itself, a form of passing down the traditions of Japanese family education?

It is evident that all five interviewees recognize the importance of traditional children's songs for the physical and mental development of young children. However, in actual home music education, there is little experience with teaching these songs exclusively. Clearly, in a transnational context, the proportion of traditional children's songs is smaller compared to the education implemented within Japan, as it incorporates more songs from the local country's cultural background. Furthermore, the interviewees rarely select songs by themselves because they trust the ready-made materials available on the market, which they think sufficiently cover their needs for home music education.

4. Conclusions

The main focus of this research is on traditional Japanese children's songs which include *warabe-uta*, *dōyō*, and *shōka*. It first discussed the cultural significance of these songs as recognized within Japan. Specifically, these songs are familiar to Japanese people from a young age. Their melodies are catchy, and their lyrics describe things and scenes that are familiar to Japanese culture. Therefore, these songs evoke a sense of nostalgia and fondness among Japanese people. Upon hearing these songs, Japanese people associate them with Japan as a country, as well as their hometowns or places of origin. Thus, these songs can evoke a sense of identity among Japanese people. Furthermore, the lyrics of these songs use simple language, with many songs containing basic Japanese vocabulary. For instance, a large number of counting songs include numbers and everyday items vocabulary. Therefore, the most obvious and direct cultural value of these songs is their contribution to the continuity of the Japanese language.

Next, I described and analyzed the role and position of traditional children's songs in the Japanese education system, discussing their use in preschool education as well as in primary and middle school music textbooks. These songs are widely used in preschool education because they can stimulate children's imagination, coordination, and develop their language and musical abilities. Therefore, in Japanese kindergartens, educational activities involving singing these songs and playing games with them are common. In primary and middle school music textbooks, while ensuring a certain number of traditional songs, there is also integration of international songs and current global social topics, emphasizing diversity in the materials. I also explored music education at the Japanese School in the Netherlands and home music education. Japanese children in the Netherlands who do not attend Japanese schools rarely encounter Japanese-related courses and culture at their schools. In the Japanese School, however, the academic year schedule, curriculum, language use, and textbook content are all consistent with those in Japan, preparing children for future studies and life in Japan.

Then, I analyzed 203 songs, extracting symbolic elements from the lyrics and identifying 10 major cultural themes. Additionally, I examined the vocabulary used in the lyrics, illustrating how these songs convey cultural values and preserve Japanese language.

And these cultural values also apply equally in transnational contexts, whether in colonial Korea under Japanese rule or in Peru and Brazil where Japanese reside. Traditional children's songs serve as a bridge linking Japan with other countries, and connecting Japanese people abroad with their homeland.

As for home music education for Japanese children in the Netherlands, I conducted case studies by interviewing five Japanese parents. Through conversations with them, I found that despite variations in quantity and specific song choices, Japanese parents in the Netherlands teach their children traditional Japanese children's songs, starting at around age 3. Most of them acknowledge and recognize the cultural values embedded in the songs and their role in shaping children's identity as Japanese. Therefore, the attitude towards teaching children these songs is positive. However, parents are unclear about the definitions of these songs, and their understanding of the different classifications is vague. This indicates that, while their perception of these songs is positive, it is also limited. To some extent, parents subjectively believe that these songs have cultural and educational value, and therefore teaching and singing them must be beneficial for their children. This mindset has been passed down from generation to generation. Therefore, it can be said that the recognition of the importance of traditional children's songs is still far from sufficient. Furthermore, parents generally do not select songs by themselves but rather purchase existing music books or picture books. They then interact and sing along with their children based on the songs arranged in these books. If children attend Japanese kindergartens or schools, parents tend to reduce the time spent teaching traditional Japanese children's songs at home. Because they believe that teachers at school will fulfill this role and responsibility. For children who do not attend Japanese schools, parents focus more on teaching them about Japanese culture and songs at home. This difference in approach shows how the surrounding environment shapes parental involvement in home education. On the other hand, parents with children in Japanese schools tend to delegate this responsibility to school education, placing trust in teachers to provide a comprehensive cultural education. Parents may feel less urgency to actively engage in these practices at home.

The number of interviewees this time is small and not sufficient to draw a more general conclusion. Given the opportunity, I hope to interview more Japanese parents in the Netherlands to obtain a larger sample for analysis. I am also curious whether parents' education of traditional Japanese children's songs at home is influenced by parent's gender, which can be explored in future research. Despite the small sample size in this research, I believe that it still holds some representativeness and provides insights into the current state of music education in Japanese children's homes in the Netherlands.

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Appendix: List of interview questions

1. Do you teach traditional Japanese children's songs to your child? If so, what are they?
2. Why do you teach these songs?
3. What are some of the qualities of the songs that you choose?
4. How do you incorporate music into your family routines or activities?
5. Are there any specific themes or messages in children's songs that are particularly important to you as a parent?
6. Have you noticed any specific changes or improvements in your child's behavior or skills as a result of exposure to certain songs?
7. How do you think singing or listening to songs benefits your child's overall development?
8. How do you balance traditional children's songs with contemporary or popular music in your child's musical education?