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Japanese songs by Kosçak Yamada, Sadao Bekku and Ikuma Dan: An analytic study based on the accent theory

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Abstract

Kosçak Yamada (1886-1965) is a leading composer in the reception period of Western culture in Japan. The purpose of this research is to make clear what the “accent theory” was which Yamada developed to make his songs more suitable to Japanese accent, and to analyze his works and those of his next generation to grasp their stylistic characteristics. For this purpose, I propose here an original analysis method (herein after called “accent analysis”) and investigate how Yamada’s theory was realized in the works in question, namely in the works of Yamada, Sadao Bekku (1922-2012) and Ikuma Dan (1924-2001). At the same time, I check the opinions and statements of each composer about song-composition, and how they elaborated actually in their works in order them to sound more effective and understandable as Japanese language.

The preceding studies on Yamada’s accent theory can be divided into three categories: 1. Studies which appraise his theory as pioneer, represented by Imada 2003; 2. Comparative studies on Yamada and Dan, represented by Inoue 2001; and 3. Studies which doubt the validity of accent theory, represented by Omoto 2013. The common viewpoint of these studies is to check how Yamada’s accent theory is applied in his song works, i.e. how Japanese pitch accents are reflected to the pitch of singing melody, using mainly “Akatombo” (A red dragonfly) (1927), one of his songs for children, as an example. These studies, however, have the following two problems: They focus on an accent theory found in limited works and there are no arguments based upon a comprehensive analysis of whole song works of a composer; No attention is paid to other musical features than accent theory application. Therefore, the main theme in this thesis is to analyze the whole song works of a composer using a solid analysis method, on the following two assumptions:

Assumption 1: There may be other effective ways for Japanese song composition other than following accent theory.

Assumption 2: The ways for Japanese song composition may be changed in the course of time after Yamada.

Although Yamada’s accent theory is not a systematic one, I try here to use an objective analysis method to quantificate the consistency between the poetry’s accents and the movement of melody.

The characteristics and the tendency of above-mentioned composers are extracted based on the analysis of 134 works (1910-1959) by Yamada, 48 works (1947-1983) by Bekku and 67 works (1942-2000) by Dan: In total 249 solo art song works with piano accompaniment.

As a result of investigation, the following can be confirmed: Average conformity rate of the accent in their whole works is 52% for Yamada, 80% for Bekku and 59% for Dan: It is very different according to the composers, and the rate changes according to their composition period, respectively. In comparison with their opinions and statements, it is interesting to see Yamada's average rate was about 50%, although he advocated an accent theory and consistently insisted that the importance of his theory. So, there are inconformity between his remarks and the actual works. On the contrary, Bekku affirmed the theory and his conformity rate was the highest of three. Dan affirmed the theory at first period, but in later period he became negative, and his conformity rate decreased.

With regard to two assumptions, it can be traced that Bekku and Dan tried the composition method other than the accent theory in their works: Both of them started their career using Yamada's accent theory, but developed their own way of composition as follows:

1. Indication of parl. / recit. parts and piano pause
2. same equivalence of syllable
3. same sound repetition

Yamada used method 2 only in his late years. Contrary to this, Bekku used method 2 in whole span of his works, moreover, he used method 1 in his later period. Dan used method 2 and 3 especially in his later period.

In this way, compositional way for songs are broaden as lapse of times. It is noteworthy that Bekku and Dan's stance on the accent theory was opposite. Bekku affirmed the theory, and even adding a new methods, he maintains the faithfulness to the theory. On the contrary, Dan denied the theory in his later period, and his conformity rate became decreased as he used his new methods.

In conclusion, Yamada was advocator of an accent theory, and Bekku and Dan, used the theory as their starting point, added other different composition methods for Japanese songs, by obeying or denying Yamada's theory.

By accent analysis based on well-defined method, it is clearly showed here the stylistic differences among three composers and their changing points of tendency according to the period. I hope this analysis method is applicable to the further investigation of other composers and works.