

SPA-024

The Significance of “Shigin” in Japanese American Communities: Examining Nikkei Shigin Practitioners’ Traditional Japanese Roots

Hiroshi Takasu
Nagoya College, Japan

Sahomi Honda
Chiba University, Japan

Abstract

Background

In 2015, The International Organization of Migrants announced that the numbers of immigrants has reached 244 million (3.3% of the world population). In today’s global society, an increasing number of people are traveling between countries. The musical and cultural identities of these global citizens have been a growing subject of attention in the music education community. As Japan and other countries become super-aging societies, understanding the rich, lifelong relationship that some people have with music will provide inspiration for the future direction of music education.

Prior Work

This is not the first time that researchers have focused their attention on the musical experiences of immigrants. Sean Ichiro Manes (2009) wrote about how a Japanese American Shamisen instructor translated Japanese musical notation into English along with other challenges of teaching Shamisen in the U.S. Jane Southcott & Dawn Joseph (2015) conducted semi-structured interviews with the members of an Italian women’s choir community in Australia during which they discussed the importance of combatting isolation through communal music-making.

Objective

The objective of this research is to clearly show what *shigin* musical activities mean to Japanese American communities. The art of *shigin* involves reciting Chinese poetry (or Japanese poetry written in Chinese) called *kanshi*; though this genre of traditional Japanese vocal music originally began in the 19th century, *shigin* continues to have many devotees across Japan to this day. This research will focus on the viewpoints of Japanese American participants who are active members of *shigin* poetry groups to determine what meaning people find in *shigin* recitals.

Method

We attended several meetings of *shigin* poetry groups in Seattle and Los Angeles between 2017 and 2019; after each meeting and performance, we conducted written surveys and semi-structured interviews with the participants (over 120 people in total) to determine what *shigin* meant to them.

Conclusion

We found that most of the Japanese Americans who practice *shigin* found it to be important and enjoyable in one or more of the following three ways: as a mean of networking through *shigin* performances, as an academic exercise of learning *Kanshi* poems, and as a way of maintaining a healthy lifestyle through vocalization. We also considered how *shigin*’s particular appeal is related to other musical activities.