

SPA-024

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

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### 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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.