

The shift in the principle of social integration in the “Roon” movement:

from the partition of kyoyou-entertainment to the “trinity of creation”

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Songs are often used to promote social integration. In political situations like demonstrations, songs function not only to transmit intensions to opposite but also to boost the feeling of integration. The latter function cannot be observed only in special situations like demonstration. It is not a necessary condition to actualize the function. It is the hidden function of music in everyday life that is more important. For example, when one talks with a person for the first time, the music on the radio might supply the topic of conversation. A common knowledge of music might also help people to cultivate sympathy for each other. This study seeks to reveal the relationship between music and social integration in Japan.

In “Bowling Alone,” Robert Putnam (2000) explained the weakening of social integration as the decline of social capital. Social capital is the index of social integration, while connections among people are regarded as the capital. Putnam regarded the reduction in the number of bowling teams as evidence of declining social capital. He attributed the decline of social capital to television¹⁾. Nowadays, the Internet is thought of as the cause of the decline as it is possible to select the viewing content from a nearly infinite number of websites. Irrespective of attributing the cause to TV or the Internet, it has been pointed out that people are lonelier than they were before. A sociologist, David Riesman published “The Lonely Crowd” in 1950, but people in those days had never experienced genuine loneliness.

Riesman visited Japan in 1961. In 1967, his diary, “Conversation in Japan,” was published. In this book, Riesman wrote about a concert to which he had been invited by a music appreciation association. As a jazz fan, he was pleased with the concert; on the other hand, as a sociologist, he was surprised at the maturity of the audience²⁾. This association was called “Roon” and is the object of this study. Roon sought music which could be a common ground for many people in an age in which people were not as lonely as they have become. Using the historical method, this study aims to describe a possible common ground which can become the basis for social integration.

Roon was the largest association of music appreciation in Japan. According to Riesman, the English translation for Roon is “Association of Music for Workers.” Its purpose was to supply workers with the opportunity to listen to music. It began in Osaka in 1949 and spread all over Japan. The very reasonable price of the concerts produced by Roon attracted many people and at the height of its prosperity, 600,000 people were members of Roon in Japan, 150,000 of whom were in Osaka. After a peak in 1963, its membership declined. At present, it is nearly forgotten, but few music historians in Japan don’t mention it.

Roon's most remarkable characteristic was its membership system. This system made Roon different from play guides who are only mediators between a sponsor and the audience. On the other hand, Roon worked without sponsorship and instead collected a membership fee and held a concert every month. If a surplus was generated, the membership fee did not become the private property of some people but was pooled as the common property of the members. In short, the Roon system was one in which people pooled their money and held concerts. Therefore, the desires of the members were directly reflected in the concerts. Roon always sought music that could be a common ground for many people. Although the motto of Roon was "To listen to good music at a reasonable price", the music selected by Roon evolved as time passed, through a process of seeking music that could be a common ground for all ages.

The most important concept for analysis in this study is "entertainment" and "kyouyou." The literal English translation for kyouyou is "culture" or "liberal arts" but both of these translations fail to express all the implications of the Japanese. The origin of kyouyou is the Japanese translation of the German "Bildung." There have been many studies of Kyouyou in Japan. But if you understand following two points, you will not feel incomprehensible. As the first point, historically, Kyouyou was a high-brow culture that related directly to university students' culture. From the 1910s to the 1960s, students refined their personalities by acquiring kyouyou. This contrasts with the present meaning of kyouyou, which means the knowledge that educated people should naturally acquire. Considering kyouyou in this sense, we can use this definition as a basis for argument. This aspect overlaps the definition of Bildung advocated by Jürgen Habermas. Therefore, kyouyou has become profoundly connected to the public sphere. In the following essay, I trace the history of Roon through time while paying attention to the confrontation of kyouyou versus entertainment.

Roon dealt only with classical music until a popular music section was established in 1953. The principal listeners of classical music in Japan were university students before and during World War II (Kato 2005). Roon, which started only four years after the war, provided its members with kyouyou in its early days. As shown in table 1, white-collar workers who had never entered a university represented a large majority of Roon members. In addition, people without a university education in those days had a strong yearning for the university culture³⁾, so Roon in its early days filled a desire for kyouyou.

<Table 1 socio-economic class of Roon members>

	Roon Member (%)
White-collar workers	48
Blue-collar workers	37.1
Students and others	14.3

<Table 2 Number of people who regret that they did not go onto higher education >

Feelings about not proceeding to higher education?	Regret	Not regret	No reply
Male	185	83	34
Female	90	62	36

※This table was derived from 日本経営者団体連盟出版部 (1966)

After the start of the popular music section in 1953, Roon stagnated. This was because Roon defined this new section as an introduction to classical music, while it actually dealt principally with semi-classical music. Semi-classical music falls between classical and popular Music so its reputation among members was very bad. In 1956, popular music section declared independence of classic section and came to deal purely with the popular music. Soon afterwards, the number of popular music members rapidly grew and overtook that the number of members for classical music by 1958. A Japanese newspaper reported, “Roon grew up into a Godzilla.⁴⁾” From the viewpoint of scale, this process proved the limits of kyoyou and the superiority of entertainment as the common ground.

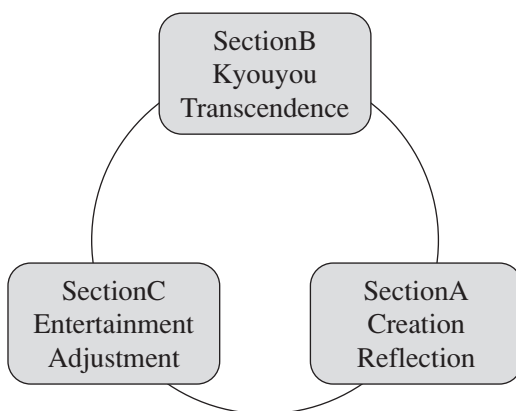
After the success of entertainment, Roon began to seek a new common ground that differed from either entertainment or kyoyou. The “original musical movement” was a challenge to create a new common ground. Roon was the first association in Japan to produce genuinely original musicals. The most important work of this movement was “Kawaii Onna” presented in 1958. It means “pretty woman” in English. Although it bore no relation to the famous American movie “Pretty Woman,” the plots are quite similar to each other. In both stories, a poor woman marries a rich businessman and the main difference between them is their conclusions. The movie is a purely a love story and has a happy end, while the musical is a story that tackles social issues and ends on a cynical note. At the end of the musical, the heroine strengthens the structure of social exploitation as a result. It was not so much entertainment as it was satire. Although at the time, “Kawaii Onna” focused on an important topic and had a big-budget production cost of twenty million yen and had a dazzling cast. The script was written by Kobo Abe, the Japanese novelist whose avant-garde literature has been translated and published in over thirty countries. He was considered many times for the Nobel Prize. He recognized the possibility of a musical to break down the word centrism which kyoyou had. Because “Kawaii Onna” was complicated for ordinary people to understand, it was criticized. But it is important that Roon had stepped forward to create a new common ground, thus affecting the direction of Roon.

In 1960, Roon was divided into three sections, A, B, and C. In Section A, original musicals, semi classical music, and other new projects were performed. In Section B, classical music was performed, and in Section C, popular music. Section B dealt with things related to kyoyou, and Section C treated things related to entertainment. The keyword for the direction of Section A was “creation.” “Creation” meant not only those artists created new works but also that audiences could refine their personalities and create new ones. The goal for audience was “creative listening.” The concept of “creation” resembled the original meaning of kyoyou.

Both creation and kyouyou include the meaning of refining the personality. This is natural because the German word “Bildung,” the origin of kyouyou, includes the meaning of construction or creation. In Roon, these terms were used in a very different context, as creation did not refer to high-brow culture. In other words, creation was used to criticize the hierarchical aspects of kyouyou.

In addition, Section A was regarded as the opponent of Section C. At a general meeting of Roon, a member of the committee said, “I hope to make Section A the center of Roon. If Section C is the center, Roon will become just a play guide.” In fact, although the number of Section C members was about ten times that of Section A, in its organization Section A was identified as the genuine center of Roon. In short, the “creation” of Section A was used to criticize the hedonistic aspect of “entertainment.”

The three-section structure of Roon can be analyzed. The Japanese sociologist, Syun Inoue proposed the notion that culture has three functions: adjustment, transcendence, and reflection. Adjustment is the function that helps people adjust to everyday life mainly through utility and entertainment. Transcendence is the function that criticizes the real world from the standpoint of idealism. Inoue pointed out that this function appears in the culture of university students, i.e., kyouyou-ism. The last function, reflection, regards the other two functions with skepticism. According to Inoue, reflection can be observed all over the world in the counterculture from the 1960s to the early 1970s. Inoue attached importance to the balance among these three functions and regarded the counterculture of the 1960s as a movement to restore it⁵⁾. According to this theory, Sections A, B, and C had the functions sequentially: reflection, transcendence, and adjustment. Roon was a place for conflict to develop among them. The question was which function was suitable as a principle of social integration existing in Roon. But its existence shows that there was a balance in Roon. The following figure shows the structure of the balance



< Figure.1 The trinity of Kyouyou-Entertainment-Creation >

After its peak in 1963, the membership of Roon began to decline rapidly. In 1965, Roon decided to abolish Section A because of its deficit and go to a two-section system. The function of reflection was lost. But the spirit of Section A continued in the “folk music movement of the Osaka Roon.” Shortly before Section A was abolished, the American folk singer, Odetta, appeared on the stage of Osaka Roon. Odetta was one of the greatest folk singers in the world and influenced many singers such as Bob Dylan and Pete Seeger. At that time, the key person for Odetta’s appearance at Osaka Roon was Toyo Nakamura. He was the first person to spread the notion of folk music in Japan. Before him, “folk song” had meant ethnic music in Japan. The new word “folk” indicated the American-style folk music of Odetta and Bob Dylan. After Odetta appeared, Nakamura became an adviser to Roon. He had many Japanese folk singers appear on the Roon stage. Most of the folk singers of the “Kansai underground folk” movement appeared on the Roon stage. They exerted a large influence on musicians who formed the world of popular music in Japan. The phrase “Roon tour” was used among them. At that time, there were few venues for amateur musicians to play their music. Roon supplied them with the opportunity. This emphasis was taken over from Section A.

In 1969, most of the staff members left Roon at the same time as a result of a conflict between the Roon labor union and the Roon committee. Nakamura gathered some of the staff who resigned from Roon and started the magazine, “New Music.” It was influential in the Japanese popular music world as the most authoritative music magazine in Japan throughout the 1970s. In addition, folk singers trained by Roon launched the URC (Underground Record Club). It was the first independent record label in Japan. It was developed by cooperating with “New Music.” The prospectus of the URC resembled that of Roon. These new initiatives such as the URC and “New Music” were the children of Roon. The part of “reflection” called “creation” was taken over by them.

Even with the success of the new flows, the number of Roon members continued to decline. In 1974, Roon changed its name to “Shinon.” At the same time, the word “creation” was removed from Roon’s statement of purpose, and it was thoroughly convicted by comment which explain the change of Roon. Roon still quietly exist and this year celebrates its sixtieth anniversary. In these sixty years, the notion of kyouyou has been defeated by entertainment, and entertainment has diversified. Though they are different phenomena, both of them have the same meaning in the point that they are remarkably decreased the function as the social common grounds. Moreover, Roon shared the common fate with kyouyou and entertainment and experienced ups and downs; it had met the factor of creation that was different from the other factors.

There are two lessons to learn from the history of Roon. The first is that common ground can become the basis of social integration and is not only traditional high-brow culture like kyouyou or entertainment. Today the loss of a common ground has caused a decline in social capital. It is important to pursue a new common ground that differs from any existing form. Therefore, the other form of common ground, creation that Roon discovered is not a relic of the past at all. The second point is that a viewpoint is critical for the social integration. The most important thing that can be learnt from Section A or its emphasis on creation is an

attitude that refuses integration by entertainment or *kyouyou*. A sound society is one in which constant social integration is maintained with the existence of groups who declare a sense of incompatibility for excessive social integration. This balance is important. Roon offers abundant material to consider what the common ground has become as the basis of the public sphere.

Reference

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