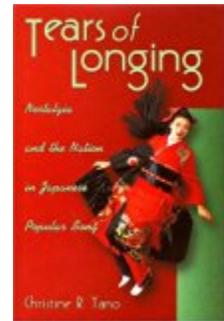


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Christine R. Yano. *Tears of Longing: Nostalgia and the Nation in Japanese Popular Song*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002. 255 pp. \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-674-01276-9; \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-00845-8.

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For Crying Out Loud: An Almost Audible Academic Analysis of Japanese Pops

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Music is difficult to describe, though it includes lyrics. Moreover, popular song may not come to mind in a cultural sound bite of Japan. However, this book describes, analyzes, and interprets *enka* in a way that lacks only actual audio.

The book is neither an endorsement nor an advertisement. "Let me say at the outset that I do not approach *enka* as a fan of the music," Christine R. Yano states in the prologue. "Indeed, my own distance from it makes it all the more suitable as the focus of a study of what George Lewis (1987; cf. Bourdieu 1984) calls 'taste cultures,' especially as they intersect with concepts of emotion, gender, history, identity, and here, nationhood" (p. 3).

The scope of the book is ambitious because of the elusive nature of music and the culture of this particular kind of song. The purpose is to convey the experience of *enka*, as well as to study the phenomenon by techniques as precise as content analysis of the lyrics. The content of the work is presented in seven chapters: cultural logic, definitions, production, staging, excesses, consumption, and longing.

The stated purpose is twofold. First, the book studies the tears that *enka* produces as a crying song, *naki-bushi*, "songs whose merit is measured by their ability to elicit tears" (p. 4). Second, the book studies *enka* as its repu-

tation as an expression of the heart and soul of Japanese, *nihonjin no kokoro*.

The author sums up the business of *enka*. "The *enka* industry itself has become synonymous with pre-industrial 'Japan,' where business was conducted on a human scale. In the end, according to this construct, bureaucratic structures and decision-making come down to hard-working individuals who meet heart-to-heart. This is not nostalgia. It is a national cultural industry that takes its patterned practices from a reconfigured past and heroicizes them" (p. 76).

Discussion about production describes a typical performance. "The mostly nighttime sets help fans visualize the *enka* imaginary: its snowy inns, empty wharves, and forlorn-looking bars. Here, one can see the performer in a melodramatic context enacting the story, 'living' the song" (p. 85).

The presentation of supplementary information is good. For example, among several tables are the word frequency in song texts, male and female poses, and recording sales. The several music samples scattered throughout the chapters are musical notation excerpts, for example, comparing accented repeated notes in songs titled "Sake Of The Heart" and "Flowers In The Snow."

The method allows sophisticated musical analysis and explanation while being accessible to scholars who are not music experts. For example, "In Japanese vocal theory ... the chest voice and the nasal voice are used

most frequently in *enka* and may be considered characteristic of the genre. The nasal voice in particular is farthest from the Western *bel canto* ideal, and so becomes an even more distinctive cultural marker” (p. 110).

The wide-ranging approaches to the topic include contrasts between the songs of women and the songs of men. The chapter on excesses contrasts love in *enka* lyrics, thereby defining “the gendering of *enka*” (p. 97). “A woman’s heart loves foolishly.... Men’s songs sing instead of *otoko-michi*, the ‘path of a man,’ and his longing for *furusato* hometown” (p. 97).

The only parts of the book that seem forced are when the author struggles to define the link between nostalgia and the nation mentioned in the subtitle. “Desire becomes a volatile commodity ‘in heat’ for the nation, the culture, the race” (p. 122). However, such sentences can be read as a commendable effort to answer the research question, “If *enka* provides one version of an imagined Japan, who is doing the imagining and to what purpose? In other words, whose ‘Japan’ is this?” (p. 5).

1992 was the central year of the author’s fieldwork, in which she was “an *enka* fan club member, a karaoke

student, an observer of the training and recording process, a live concert and studio audience member, a media viewer, an amateur performer, an interviewer, and an interviewee” (p. 10).

The story of *enka* is not finished. However whether *enka* will continue for long is a valid question. The author cites “contingencies” such as “waning domestic popularity, dependence on state support, internal divisions, and pan-Asian markets and singers” (p. 9).

The practice of *enka* is increasingly by women, according to the author, with what she readily defines as her “American ear” which evaluates differently than the Japanese listeners with whom she has spoken extensively for research. “Women have become the cultural transmitters, the mouthpieces of this form of national culture.... In general men, not women, control what is bought and sold” (p. 57).

The book is valuable for researchers, students, and music lovers who want to know what *enka* is, as an introduction or an in-depth study. The term derives from “en”-speech-and “ka”-song.

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