

## MILITARISM IN JAPANESE SCHOOL SONGS

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*Shōka*, the Japanese term for School Song, is an innovation of the early Meiji Period. Both, the term and the music genre, had become a necessity following the promulgation of the Education Law in 1872 which stipulated that music had to be an obligatory subject in elementary and secondary schools. Its implementation had to be postponed, however, because in traditional Japanese music there were no songs with easily singable melodies and understandable texts suitable for school children. Such songs had, therefore, to be commissioned, composed or authorized by a department of the Education Ministry, called “Music Investigation Committee” (*Ongaku Torishirabe Gakari*), created especially for this purpose.

Consequently, there exists a fundamental difference between *shōka* in Japan and school songs in the West. While in the West school songs are usually selected by a song book editor or the music teacher from existing songs, according to their personal taste, without any interference by the authorities, regarding *shōka* in Japan this was not the case. In the Meiji period and up to the Pacific War School songs were determined by governmental initiative or supervision (*kenteizumi*) by an Education Ministry department. As a result, *shōka* convey the official policy or opinion on matters that were perhaps veiled - intentionally or not - in official documents, but had to be formulated clearly in order to be understood properly by the tender young minds of school children. Examination of *shōka* books may, therefore, provide a veritable voyeuristic experience for anyone wishing to obtain information on the official Japanese policy not otherwise easily or clearly available. School songs functioned, consequently, as a tool of education, indoctrinating and brainwashing the young generation in all matters relating to morals, civic duties and political views that the authorities wished to impose. It is, therefore, impossible to overestimate the decisive influence of these songs on the character formation of the young people who were

educated in the elementary and secondary school system from the beginning of the Meiji era onward.

The songs in the first *shōka* books, published in 1881 - *Shōgaku shōka shū* ("Collection of School Songs for Elementary Schools") was edited by the Education Ministry's Music Investigation Committee. Most of the songbooks that followed in the Meiji period were also published by the Education Ministry or were authorized by it. Only these books were permitted for use in schools. The songs in the first *shōka* books dealt mostly with natural phenomena, such as flowers, birds, the wind and the moon, likely to foster love of nature and also love of the fatherland where these beautiful things exist. These songs, apparently innocent, frequently function as camouflage of a patriotic education that presents natural phenomena also as models for emulation - for the cultivation of morals, good behavior, and proper manners. There are also songs that convey clearer patriotic messages, such as emperor worship, and traditional values drawn from history and mythology. Positive characteristics, such as diligence, reliability, honesty and studiousness also rank prominently among the values encouraged. In these first songs, patriotic values were presented in quite reasonable and not obsessive proportions, as in every culture that educates its youth to the love of its fatherland. Emphasis was placed on peace and harmony as national and universal ideals.

The initiators and founders of music education in the form of *shōka* in Japanese schools, educationalists Megata Tanetarō (1853-1926) and Isawa Shūji (1851-1917), recommended it for purely pedagogical and social, not political, reasons to Vice-Minister of Education Tanaka Fujimaro (1845-1909) in their "Plan (*mikomisho*) for Launching a Project of Music Investigation Regarding School Songs", submitted in 1878:

"At present all educators in Europe and America consider music as one of the subjects of education since music refreshes the mind of schoolchildren, provides relaxation from the effects of hard study, strengthens the lungs, promotes the health, clears the voice, corrects the pronunciation, improves the hearing, sharpens the thinking, pleases the heart well also, and forms a good character. These are its direct advantageous effects functioning in the classroom, while its corresponding indirect effects, functioning with regard to society, are its capacity for providing recreation profitable for society, for turning it naturally toward the good, and removing it from evil, for the advancement of society in civil

manners, for elating people, for praising royal virtue, and for the enjoyment of peace. The general substance of those effects mentioned above is such that their presence can be observed in the civil conduct of all the various European and American countries."

An abrupt and dissonant change occurred in 1891, when for the first time the term "enemy" (*teki*) appears in one of the school song collections. Up to that time these were populated only by family members, friends, teachers, historical heroes and, of course, the Emperor as an object of adoration. The songbook *Kokumin shōka shū* ("Collection of school songs for citizens") by Koyama Sakunosuke (1863-1927), however, includes a song entitled *Teki-wa ikuman* ("Ten thousands of enemies"). This was by no means the personal caprice proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain of a nationalist songwriter. In those days, Sino-Japanese relations had already deteriorated, and it was still three years before the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1894. The Japanese authorities had obviously already determined that the time had come to inject a martial spirit into school childrens' minds. In the same year, the term *gunka* ("military song") also appeared in the context of school education. *Gunka* songs had indeed existed earlier, but they were common in the army, and from there they penetrated to civilians' consciousness and throats. But the credit for the deliberate and systematic introduction of *gunka* into the school system belongs to no less a personage than the Minister of Education, Inoue Kowashi (1843-95). He issued an order to elementary schools nationwide in 1891: "When military gymnastics are assigned to elementary school male pupils, *gunka* should be used to raise the morale of gymnastic drill". The educationalist Kaigo Tokiomi comments on this twenty-four years later: "*Gunka* were thus quickly introduced into school education..." Military songs appeared from then on as part of the official school curriculum. The volume *Shōgaku kyōiku gunka shū* ("Collection of military songs for education in elementary schools") was published in 1892, the year following the publication of the Education Minister's order. A "Collection of school songs for Grand Festivals and for National Holidays" (*Taisai shukujitsu shōka shū*), edited by Oka Yakichi in 1892, includes nine military songs. These are still relatively harmless, doing no more than praise historical war heroes, Japanese as well as foreign, who should serve as models for emulation.

In 1892, *Nihon gunka* ("Military songs of Japan") appeared, edited by Nōsho Benjirō (1865-1936), who in his preface emphasizes the combination of studies and a martial spirit:

"Songs for stimulating the spirit of loyalty and patriotism and the enthusiasm for diligent study and strict behavior".

The first song, *Umi yukaba* ("When going to the sea"), still camouflages militaristic intentions by resorting to almost literal quotations from the *Man'yōshū*, a collection of classical lyrical poetry, considered appropriate for legitimizing any purpose, however aggressive. The *Man'yōshū* is replete with war imagery, and this was made use of to convey nationalistic ideas of heroism:

"When going to the sea -  
Corpses of those drowned.  
When going to the mountains -  
Corpses sprouting grass.  
By the August Emperor's  
Very side may we die -  
Regret there is none".

From this poetical diction it is only one step to a more overt encouragement of aggression and self-sacrifice. Dying for the Emperor, rather than living for him, unlike Western patriotism, is advocated as the most sublime purpose of life, as expressed in song Nr. 6, *Susume susume* ("Advance, advance"):

"Tarō's corpse is falling,  
Jirō's corpse is falling too.  
Whether dying or living -  
For the Emperor  
Advance, advance!  
My soul and my body too  
I sacrifice for my Emperor.  
Through water, through flames too,  
Through whatsoever -  
Advance, advance!"

This song, by the way, was sung to the melody of the March Song of the American Civil War.

Song Nr. 10, *Kirubeshi*, (“One must cut them down”) incites a merciless attack on the enemy:

“They must be cut down, cut down - cut, cut, cut!  
Enemy soldiers in any number, many as they may be,  
Until the Japanese sword breaks,  
They must be cut down - cut, cut, cut!”

A so-called “Meritorious War” (*Kōsen*) in song Nr. 21, is characterized by a total disregard for human life:

“While stepping over a mountain of corpses -  
Advance, advance!  
While raising the war cry -  
Advance, advance, make a raid!...  
While jumping over a sea of blood -  
Attack, attack!”

All this, and more in the *ame* spirit, was published in 1892 - still two years prior to the Sino-Japanese war, at a time when Japan was not yet at war with any country. These school songs provide early evidence that the Japanese government was already busy with the mental preparation of school children for the war to come, when they would be soldiers fighting in that same spirit.

The subtitle “For elementary school pupils' sports-day marches” on the title page clarifies the purpose of the collection *Shinpen gunka* (“New Military Songs”) by Oku Yoshiisa (1858-1933) of 1893. The connection between military songs and spiritual education is emphasized in the same year also in *Seishin kyōiku taigai gunka* (“Military songs for spiritual education and foreign relations”) by Nagai Kenshi (1865-1940).

All these are school songs, or songs intended for schools, even if called “military songs”, published on the initiative of the Education Ministry, or at least authorized by it, during the three years preceding the Sino-Japanese War. In 1894, immediately after Japan's victory, and still before the peace treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895, the Japanese Education Ministry hurried to authorize the publication of a seven-volume-series entitled “Military Songs on the Great Victory” (*Daishō gunka*), edited by Yamada Gen'ichirō. This series was granted the official rank of textbooks (*kyōkasho*) for the instruction of school songs

in elementary schools and secondary schools. The purpose of these songs is formulated in the introduction to the first volume:

“Our educators ought to induce energetically the aspiration of patriotism into these little citizens ... and should devise a method for evoking a spirit of enmity (*tekigai*). By collecting in this volume all the resulting grand distinguished services of our loyal and courageous warriors and their other glorious deeds we look forward to the exaltation of our nation's fighting spirit and patriotism”.

The “spirit of enmity” is one of the purposes for whose inculcation one ought to strive. This is in sharp contrast to the spirit of peace, calm and harmony that the earlier school songs had preached. Japan is openly presented here as a “military state” (*gunkoku*). Moreover, it is emphasized that military songs, and not necessarily regular school songs, are the kind of songs whose diffusion is an educator's duty. Some of the songs describe the course of the most important and well-known battles of the Sino-Japanese War. The descriptions emphasize heroic feats in a style that is not only florid, but also presents them as models for imitation. Values that are highlighted are self-sacrifice for the Emperor and the fatherland, and also the worthlessness of life, in the spirit of the Shinto revival, as opposed to the sanctity of life represented by Buddhism.

“The soldier offering his life to the Emperor and to the country -  
Advances on and on...  
In their traces -  
Rivers of blood, mountains of corpses”.

Another value emphasized in some of the songs is the pride of the unit:

“Wherever turns the August army  
To serve its August country -  
No enemy is left there anymore...”

One of the basic values featured in many variants is courage, especially of the few against the many:

“Grasp the gun, shout “strike, strike!”  
To the enemy approaching right and left”.

Warriors' camaraderie also figures among the values that these songs encourage:

“Forgetting even the pain  
Of his dripping blood,  
He draws near the [wounded] captain:  
“Go and escape, flee to safety,  
Mount this horse of mine,  
My end will be here,  
You will go back”.

These songs not only celebrate Japan's victory over China, as the series' title suggests, but also crown the warriors with garlands of glory, and commemorate the war dead. Beyond that, one cannot but regard these songs also as the beginning of systematic education toward self-sacrifice for the Emperor. The songs indicate an intensive spiritual preparation of the youth for the next war - no matter when, where and against whom it might break out. According to this long-range planning, if and when Japan would go to war again, it would find its youth prepared, on the basis of the education it received since before the Sino-Japanese war, and also after it, and of which the school songs are a significant and integral part. This education trend, clearly reflected in the school songs, gradually and consistently grew stronger in the course of the ten years between the Sino-Japanese and the Russo-Japanese wars.

In 1895, the year when the Sino-Japanese War ended, *Chūkun aikoku shōgaku shōka shū* (“Collection of school songs on loyalty and love of the fatherland for elementary schools”) appeared. It contains a significant number of *gunka*. This indicates that the militarist tendency did not come to an end when the Sino-Japanese War was over, but continued with undiminished vigour.

One year after the end of the Sino-Japanese War, in 1896, *Shinpen kyōiku shōka shū* (“New edition of an educational school song collection”) appeared. This was a set of eight volumes for grades 1-8 of elementary and secondary schools, containing twenty-seven to thirty-six songs each, published with the authorization of the Education Ministry that is, expressing the official view of the Japanese authorities regarding all the subjects dealt with. The songs show that even in the absence of hostilities and any defined enemy, the militaristic tendency increased, and simultaneously, the indoctrination activity in this spirit intensified:

“Instead of swords -  
The sounds of hundreds of guns.  
Drive away the advancing enemy”.

At this time no country was defined as an “enemy” of Japan. But this did not prevent the Japanese leadership from preparing the youth for fighting a future enemy and for the next war. This education is implemented systematically from the lowest grades onward. Already in grade 2 a “Battle song” is taught in which the two main units are eulogized - the army and the navy:

Army

Those who are coming - oh horror - are the enemies...  
The bullets' hail is scattering in confusion...  
Look! The army is striking forward,  
The enemy's defenses are crumbling”.

Navy

Burning ships and sinking ships,  
Unable to do anything.  
The remaining enemies  
Make every effort to escape”.

This is sung to an elegant melody from Rousseau's *Le Devin du village*, formerly adapted to a Japanese children game song.

The title “Snow in the Capital” (*Miyako-no yuki*) in the volume for grade 7 seems likely to arouse expectations of an idyllic song about the enchanting snowy landscape of Kyoto. But after the poetical opening, a chilling continuation follows:

“More immense than the snow  
Is the glitter of the sword,  
Redder than the flower  
Is the blood of the hero”

In 1900 appeared the collection *Kyōka tekiyō yōnen Shōka* (“School songs for the instruction of children”) by Tamura Torazō (1873-1943) and Nōsho Benjirō, authorized by the Education Ministry. These serious pedagogues could not refrain from including military songs, according to the instructions of the Education Ministry. Already in the volume for grade 2 we find the song “Soldiers”

“Japan's soldiers of high reputation  
Take care well and obey orders,



Know how to advance,  
Do not know how to flee.  
We too shall soon become soldiers...  
If we go to the battlefield  
We shall not flee even if we die".

This song is sung to the melody of a harmless, innocent German folksong, *Gestern abend ging ich aus* ("Yesterday evening I went out for a stroll in the forest").

It can serve as an example of the future that is envisaged for these children, even at such a tender age, and that readiness to die which would lead to the piloting of *kamikaze* planes in World War II. This song, and others from the same period, clarifies the ideals toward which young people were systematically educated throughout their school years. One of the most conspicuous among these ideals is self-sacrifice. This is featured in the song "The subject's Duty" for grade 3:

"We, the subjects of Japan,  
Have a duty toward the country.  
On our shoulder - a gun,  
At our side - a sword.  
Come, get up, boys, for the Emperor...  
Defend, boys, throw your lives away!"

This self-sacrifice is channeled to the figure of the Emperor in whose name all the purposes of fighting are defined. Thus in the song "For the Emperor" for grade 4:

"For the Emperor forget your body,  
Throw away your life without hesitation.  
This is, unequalled in the world,  
The way of the court-faithful  
In the Rising Sun's country".

This education propagates the spirit of self-sacrifice not only as a demand. It becomes an integral part of human nature, common to all the citizens of Japan. This ideal is further consolidated in grade 6, in the song "This body of mine":

"To the Emperor I consecrate this body of mine,  
Even one drop of blood is precious indeed.

If I do not let it flow in this way  
I cannot escape the shame of unfaithfulness”.

The spirit of self-sacrifice figures in the higher grades in its most concrete expression, as in the song “Subjects of the August Country” , in grade 7:

“Even amidst raining arrows and bullets - fearlessly advance!  
Even under striking swords - undauntedly advance!  
Rifles' noise resounds, battle cries are heard.  
Consecrate your heart to the Emperor!  
Step even over mountains piled up with corpses - advance!  
Dance even over rivers of blood - advance!”

Another notion that these songs advocate is colonialism, as in the song “For the Emperor” for grade 4:

“The dignity of the Imperial Throne -  
Has it not the fame of ruling the world?  
The reputation of the country called the Rising Sun's -  
Has it not the fame of shining over the earth?”

This ideal is formulated still more forcefully in the song “Strong Man - Strong Country” for grade 6 that defines the rule of force as a privilege granted by nature to the strong over the weak. The pride of the yellow race is also appealed to against the axiom of the white race's supremacy, and also the Oriental pride of the East that refuses to regard itself as inferior to the West:

“The strong man exists, the weak man is destroyed,  
The strong country prospers, the weak country collapses...  
This one, the strong one,  
Be his skin white or yellow - what does it matter?  
The strong country, be its location  
West or East - what does it matter?”

In the Taishō and Shōwa periods, including the 1930s and up to the Pacific War, nothing innovative can be observed as far as militarism in Japanese school songs is concerned, but only a direct continuation and even intensification of the previous militaristic policy.

In 1932, the song book *jinjō shōgaku shōka* ("Songs for Elementary schools - revised edition") was published. Already for grade 1 it includes the song *Heitai-san* ("Mr. Soldier"):

"The soldier is shouldering his rifle,  
Is walking march-like...  
The soldier is good-looking...  
The soldier is courageous.  
I like the soldier very much".

The volume for grade 5 already includes a song celebrating "Sending off for enlistment" (*Nyūei -o okuru*):

"Born as a courageous youngster,  
Grown up to defend the country,  
Your chance is enviable...  
The glorious service fulfil to the end,  
Go ahead for the country's sake".

In grade 6, a song expresses the parents' hope and prayer for their enlisting son - not for his safe return, as would have been in a Western country, but on the contrary:

*Shusseī heishi* ("Soldier's departing for the front")  
The father's hope:  
"Go, go fast, my child.  
The old father's hope is one:  
Your rendering heroic service for the country.  
With admiration for a dutiful child  
To enrich our home".  
The mother's prayer:  
"The old mother's hope is one:  
If you go to the army,  
Take care of your body.  
If killed, then by a bullet,  
Rather than dying of sickness".  
The younger brother's wish:  
"Happy, happy, daring, happy  
Am I, the younger brother  
Of the soldier going to the front.  
Dear brother, I too shall later follow.

We brothers shall together  
Attack the enemy”.

Music education is dealt with in the *Kokumin gakkō -rei shikō kisoku* (“National School Ordinance Regulations”) of 1941;

“The courses in the performing arts and in music are to be designed so as to cultivate the capacity for singing songs correctly and appreciating music, **and to purify the national sentiments**. The policy of instruction in the performing arts is, first, to place value on spiritual discipline, without lapsing into the instruction of technical skills; secondly, to impart knowledge about the characteristics of our country's performing arts and skills; thirdly, to cultivate the creative capacity for labor”.

The keywords in the definition of these objectives, “national sentiments” and “spiritual discipline”, may best be understood as euphemisms for patriotism in the nationalistic sense of the term. This was the ruling consideration in school education from then on, leaving no room, in music, for purely aesthetic or artistic values or accomplishments, which were relegated to the status of “technical”, namely meaningless and superfluous skills, and therefore to be avoided. The second objective, “to impart knowledge about the characteristics of our country's performing arts and skills” was coupled with a total exclusion of any foreign music composition, unlike the school songs of the early Meiji period that included many Western melodies, thus carrying cultural chauvinism to the extreme.

Between 1941 and 1943 the Ministry of Education published six song books under the titles *Uta-no- hon* and *Shotōka ongaku*. These song books were published as *Kokutei kyōkashū* (“Textbooks prescribed by the state”). In *Uta-no- hon 1*, the song *Heitai gokko* (“Soldier Game”) reveals a militaristic tendency:

“We are strong.  
The enemy's soldiers are fleeing”.

The most gruesome of these songs is *Mugon-no gaisen* (“The wordless triumphal return”):

"The uncle who smashed the enemy  
Has wordlessly returned today.  
At the wordless warrior's triumphal return  
The plum blossom's fragrance  
Permeates his body.  
Everyone bows wordlessly.  
When for us too sometime  
The day will come  
To serve on a mission  
For our August country,  
Uncle, you will be an example for us."

The song *Sen'yū* ("Comrades in arms") carries indoctrination to morbid extremes:

"If we die, then let it be on the same day,  
At the same time.  
If one dies later and one sooner,  
The one will carry the other's bones  
At the time of assault.  
Bound together by a vow,  
You and I..."

Perhaps the most aggressive of these songs is *Tokubetsu kōgekitai* ("Commando Corps"):

"Smash the enemy's main force  
At one blow -  
This day, this time has long been awaited.  
Through to the bottom of the turbulent seas  
To ride like an arrow into the realm of death  
Five ships...  
When the sound of explosions  
Resounds in the sky,  
The tide boils in Pearl Harbor,  
Raising pillars of fire in succession,  
The enemy's big warships are sinking...  
Oh, in the holy war of Greater East Asia,  
Pledging themselves to be killed in the waters,  
Young cherry blossoms first to fall -  
Respect them, the Special Commando Corps."

All these school songs are based on the Japanese government's understanding that those Japanese soldiers who fight so heroically in the wars were the former pupils who had learned the songs at school some years earlier, singing them with child-like enthusiasm under the guidance of their patriotically, militaristically inspired teachers, and had undergone the whole process of systematic indoctrination and brainwashing among whose significant and effective tools these school songs ranked. A child who learns such an inspiring song at school will continue to sing it also after returning home, on the playground and in any other context. When he does so, he will always be sure of earning the approval and encouragement of parents, siblings, relatives, friends and all the adults around him who influence his personality from childhood till adolescence. The systematically tendentious instruction method of these songs suggest that there may be a reasonable doubt, whether, without this indoctrination, the soldiers would have gone to fight with such vigor, determination and readiness to become cannon-fodder. When one evaluates these songs as tools of deliberate and well-planned indoctrination, one can understand that they indicate a tendency of Japanese nationalist-militarist policy long before Japan actually went to war.

Since Japanese school songs were a means of indoctrination for official militarist tendencies and policies, and a mental preparation for future wars, they deserve to be taken seriously as historical sources because they were published, commissioned and authorized by the Japanese government's Ministry of Education.

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