Music Education in Japan
An observational and comparative analysis

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Note About Transcription System and Translation

In this thesis, Japanese names are written with first names followed by last name. Japanese words are written using italics, even if they are loanwords. Long vowels in Japanese will be written using the Hepburn Romanization system, which means macrons are used for a, e, o and u. All translations within this thesis are my own, unless otherwise stated.

Background

This research idea first came to mind during my visit to Japan on an exchange program. The exchange program was primarily not based in music, being a language exchange one, but I chose to take music theory and history classes to finally delve into the music subject, something I had not done on a bigger scale at university level. During my second semester at Saga University I took music theory classes, and at the same time joined the university school orchestra as a first time violin player. I noticed during my visit, what seemed to be a more proficient knowledge of music among most of the students in comparison to students in Swedish schools, even though they were in many cases without a musical background, or for example, a musician by choice. The city I lived in did not have any large musical institutions mainly focused on music, but musical culture is thriving, with several orchestras on school and state level performing at all kinds of venues. Speaking with Japanese friends, and comparing their knowledge to my own school background, it seems that there is a larger focus on music education in general in Japan. It is here I found an interest in the music education in Japan and wanted to know why it seemingly managed to educate such a large amount of basic proficiency in music, and in addition, from my own observations, how the amount of highly skilled musicians in general was seemingly so high. This thesis had the original purpose to research collectivistic characteristics within Japanese music education, and compare them to more Swedish individualistic characteristics. This proved to be too big of a task, and there I narrowed it down to only compare the main differences in the educational system of Sweden and Japan within the music subject.
Introduction

Music education has been suggested to be beneficial to students in four categories: success in society, success in school, success in developing intelligence and success in life.¹ Music education in itself as well as the general education is something that has been affected by constant change throughout the years. In Sweden, originally the church was responsible for the music education which led to an almost singular focus on chorus singing and religious related activities. This has changed now in the 19th and 20th century, with more of a focus on modern music and less chorus, taking away most, if not all, religious connotations from the music subject. In Japan, music education saw big changes through modernization as well.²

With changes in education systems comes changes to the roles of individual subjects such as music. During modernization periods of western world education systems in the past, both structures and roles for education were seemingly very similar. Introducing the modern education system to other parts of the world introduced new ideas and ways of thinking from these areas into the education. Does education adapt to these areas or does education make these new frontiers adapt to it? The topic on Japanese education is something that this thesis seeks to delve into. This thesis will seek to find out the function of Japanese music education in comparison to the Swedish music education, if there are any differences these answers might be contained within the general structure of the respective nation’s education system itself.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this thesis is to—while actively comparing both the Japanese and Swedish school systems—research and analyze how music education is constructed in curriculums and what function it serves as a subject.

¹ Ken Petress (2005). The Importance of Music Education.

² Nybond, Alexander (2010). Musiken och nationsstaten under Meiji-perioden
To achieve this purpose the following research question will be used:

- What function does music education serve in present day pre-high school education?

Method and Materials

This thesis uses qualitative research methods in form of interviews and also a direct observation conducted in a Japanese music class setting which both were conducted in a school in Saga, Kyushu. One interview was performed with a former teacher of music, now currently working as advisor for other teachers and people engaging in musical activities such as orchestras. The second interview was conducted on site at an elementary school with a current music teacher and an assistant teacher. No interviews were conducted with Swedish teachers or school staff. The interviews are followed up by documental analysis and comparisons from both Swedish and Japanese sources.

The research question mentioned above also serves as the variable I measure in this qualitative research. To properly be able to analyze this variable—music education’s function—this thesis will first of all define the structure of the music subject as a whole. This will be achieved by studying Japanese school curriculums and asking teachers directly how they conduct their classes. For the Swedish perspective, personal experience from the Swedish school system (mandatory pre-high school education) will be applied, but the Swedish version of the school curriculum will also be analyzed. This method is similar to Kristina Jonsson’s text *The music subject and its function and status in primary school* where she interviews teachers and school principals at elementary schools in Sweden. For this reason, I chose to travel to Japan personally to visit schools and talk to teachers to achieve the same goal.

To further develop knowledge on the structure of classes, direct observations of a music class in Japan were executed in conjunction with the interviews. Additionally, the observations were chosen to be part of the research as a way to confirm if the contents of the curriculum are actually activities performed within schools.

The interviews were followed up by analysis based on documental research from Swedish and Japanese sources in form of school curriculums and other documents. In the first part of the analysis section, this thesis will cite the Japanese and Swedish music education curriculums. The Swedish curriculum, titled Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet 2011, is written and published by The Swedish National Agency for Education, in Sweden known as Skolverket. Skolverket serves to oversee the Swedish school system for children as well as adults and is directly connected to the Swedish government. While seemingly no official abbreviation in English of the organization exists, in this thesis we will refer to it as NAE from here on. The Japanese curriculum by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, abbreviated as MEXT (Japanese: Monbukagakushō). MEXT is one of the ministries by the Japanese government and regulates virtually every aspect of the education system or process in Japan. MEXT writes and publishes the so-called Gakushū shidō yōryō, or government curriculum guidelines which are enforced by the regulation of the School Education Law, or Gakkō kyōiku hōshikō. The Japanese government curriculum specifies materials taught at all levels of pre-university education, elementary, middle and high schools, either public or private. The Swedish counterpart is similarly enforced through law, but the curriculum itself is written and published separately according to school level. As of this writing, the current documents in effect are: Curriculum for elementary school, Lpfö 98, Curriculum for Elementary, Preschool and After-school activity facilities, Lgr 11, and Curriculum for High school, Gy 2011. The version used for this thesis is Lgr 11, published in 2011, and in effect for Swedish elementary school for ages 7-16. The Japanese Curriculum covers all pre-university levels but I will focus on the middle school level, chūgakkō, which ranges from ages 12-15, Japanese school year 1-6. The part I will focus on in the Swedish curriculum will cover the same age group, but school grades 6-9. The reason I choose to cover these grades are that at this level the education is compulsory in both countries. Respective curriculums on music education in Japan and Sweden will lay down a basis for research and comparison.
How the curriculum will be used in a structural analysis of the function of the music subject and how it will be conducted will be explained now. In order to grasp the structure of the music subject we must acknowledge what parts make up the subject, in the same analogy that a physical structure as defined in dictionaries, is constructed from several parts and these parts must be understood in order to know its function. This thesis seeks to define these parts, and they are:

- Goals or aims of the education
- The methods and tools used to achieve these goals,
- The purpose of these goals

Now, the purpose of the goals might suggest a relation to the purpose of the music subject as a whole mentioned further back in the thesis as one of the research questions. But while function as a word is defined\(^4\) as “[...] The purpose for which something is designed or exists; role.”, this thesis chooses to make that assumption that the written purpose of the curriculum does not translate into its function. I would like to explain it in this glassware analogy. While there a several types of glassware, we shall use a tumbler for this analogy. A tumbler is constructed with the goals in mind to serve as a tableware, this is part of its structure among things like glass or plastic physical structure. But what the actual purpose of the tumbler is to be is unknown. Surely, the general consensus is that a tumbler is used as drinkware for liquids. But it may also be used for flowers as a flower pot in the mind of the end user. This is why while the tumbler was structured with the purpose of serving as tableware for liquid drinks, the end user—the owner of said tumbler in this case—decided the function of the tumbler in his/her own environment. In the same way music education is assumingly structured with a purpose in mind—for this thesis to be extracted from curriculums—but might serve a different function in the minds of the end user. It is this deviation from an original purpose of a product, in this case music education, ending in some different function applied by the end user this

thesis seeks to find and to compare. This thesis will analyze this different perceived function of music education in Sweden and Japan.

In regards to the end user as mentioned before in the glassware analogy, the end user is obviously the user of the tumbler, or owner of the tumbler. For this thesis however, the end user of music education might not be that obvious. The student on one hand might have a clear choice, as they would assumingly be the end user of a product, being the music education in form of classes and music activities that are formed and structured by the curriculum with its own purpose in mind. The teachers, on the other hand, must also be considered into the equation: where do they belong? In the case of the curriculum-student relation it might indicate that they are only a mediate, serving to achieve the goals of the curriculum. But on the other hand, the teacher might also be seen as an end user, as they are using and applying the curriculum to the classroom by teaching its contents to the students. In this case the product would be the curriculum itself, and the end user—the teacher—figures out its function by her or himself and applies it to the classroom. In the general sense the teachers are assumed to work to implement the contents of the curriculum in the classroom and not to deviate from it. But this illustrates that it is important to factor in both the student and the teacher as possible end users; to show how they see music education and what its function is. That is why not only curriculum analysis but also qualitative interviews as well as direct observations are applied to this thesis to be better able to observe the different perspectives.

In addition to on site observations and interview conducted in Saga, Japan. Previous experiences within Japanese education on university level will also be included in the analysis.

Notes regarding the observation and interview

Due to ethical considerations, the location and name of the school observed as well as all subjects involved including interviewees, have been chosen to be kept anonymous for this thesis. The interviewee as well as the subjects of the observations were informed beforehand that they would be fully anonymous in this research.
Analysis

Curriculum

From here on, this thesis will delve into the Japanese and Swedish curriculums and how the two compare with one another. As mentioned in the methods section of this thesis, the important parts to extract from the curriculum are: Goal—or aim—of the education, the methods to achieve that goal and the purpose of said goal. This section will be keeping these parts in mind throughout the analysis. First up in the definition of the main goals, or aims, as stated by respective national school curriculums.

Goals

The Swedish curriculum—for this thesis taken from the online English PDF released form of the general school curriculum⁵, in the aim section of the music subject—states in this excerpt:

Teaching in music should aim at helping the pupils to develop knowledge which makes it possible to participate in musical contexts, both where they play and listen to music.

It continues to talk about the opportunities to be given to the students:

Teaching should give pupils the opportunities to acquire music as a form of expression and means of communication. Through teaching, pupils should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge in using their voices, musical instruments, digital tools and musical concepts and symbols in different musical forms and contexts.

Already, from these excerpts, it is demonstrated that the main aims of the education are to foster an interactive relation between student and the music subject as well as promoting involvement in musical activities through listening and actual performance of music. This in turn is supposed to lead to a developed musical way of expression and function as a communicative tool in itself. These keywords *involvement, expression and communication* are important to note when comparing to the Japanese curriculum, later on in this section.

The curriculum further states that students will be given opportunities to develop a musical responsiveness that in turn will make it possible to cooperate with others in creating, arranging and performing music in different forms. This is important, as could further be assessed from the curriculum, since students are also given the chance to develop a trust for their own ability in regards to singing and playing music and to develop musical creativity. The creativity part of the music subject also is important in this thesis comparison towards the Japanese education system and will be further discussed later on.

Additionally the curriculum suggests that the student’s experiences (with music) shall be immersed through meetings with other students’ musical experiences. What it seemingly expresses here is that not only a single genre shall be focused on, for example classical music, but rather, several genres will be included such as rap and choir music. Furthermore, other musical cultures are also made to “[...] contribute to pupils developing their knowledge about and gaining an understanding of different musical cultures, both their own and others”, as stated in the curriculum.

To summarize the *goals* of the music subject, firstly we have to focus on giving the student an opportunity and confidence to be able to express his or herself through music and using music as a communicative tool to interact with others in both song and play. Secondly, to be able to develop a creative musical ability to be able to represent and communicate their ideas and finally; to develop knowledge of different musical cultures and their ways of expression and to be able to analyze and discuss these differences. To list these main points, here follows a list:

- Confidence and ability to express oneself through music. Music as a communicative tool.
- Creative musical ability
- Knowledge of different musical cultures and genres

This concludes the Swedish section in regards to the goal of the music subject and the analysis will now continue into the Japanese curriculum.

In the Japanese curriculum, accessible from the MEXT website,\(^6\) within the music section chapter the three main objectives of the subject are listed, firstly:

> To cultivate an interest in and respect for sound and music, and to foster an attitude of brightening and enriching one’s life through music, by experiencing the joy of musical activities. (Chūgakkō gakushū shidō yōryō, 2011)

Comparing this excerpt to the Swedish curriculum, there is no mention of cultivation of an interest and respect towards music, which is quite interesting to note. From personal experience in the Swedish music education system it indicates that students are not required to find music interesting personally as an individual. However, as long as you participate in lessons and attempt to involve yourself in musical activities, this would seemingly please the teachers. This connects to statement made in the Swedish curriculum section where participation and involvement in music activity is said to be one of the goals of the subject. This is not to state that in the Japanese school system involvement is not encouraged, but rather on the contrary, it seems to harbor more involvement from students in musical activities even outside class settings. This will be further touched upon in the observation section later on. While teaching students to develop interest in music is stated in the curriculum, this does not assume that students as a whole are educated to join a consensus and form a uniform interest. This is further explained in the document Chūgakkō gakushū

*shidō yōryō kaisetsu,* or translated to the middle school curriculum exposition, where each statement in the curriculum is further explained and defined. Here it is said that the student should strive to find out what sound and music means for themselves, and that students individually should pay attention to the differences in gentle and rough sounds in music. This leads to the student developing knowledge of the structure of music and sound to allow them to personally develop interest towards music.

Secondly, the following statement in the objective chapter states the following:

*To perceive the richness and joy of various types of musical expression, acquire basic skills for music-making and foster the ability to make music in a creative and original manner.* (Chūgakkō gakushū shidō yōryō, 2011)

Here it is illustrated that as similar to the Swedish curriculum, that a focus on various types of musical expressions is a main point, but also fundamental skills and knowledge are part of the education to foster student’s abilities to create music. The curriculum exposition further explains that the student shall be able to discover different musical types of expressions and to, through music activities in class, be able to perceive similarities and characteristics of these musical expressions. Furthermore, in regards to fostering creative ability among students, it is stated that musical ability is educated through a trial and error process where the students shall be influenced by their individual musical expression to become imaginative and creative.  

Thirdly, it is listed that another objectives is:

*To savor the value and beauty of various types of music and foster a wide-ranging and independent ability for appraising.* (Chūgakkō gakushū shidō yōryō, 2011)

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8 Mext.go.jp,. (2015). p.30
The keyword here for this objective is appraising; it is also one of the two main contents in the general music education as written in the curriculum with music-making being the second. The appraising refers to the assessment ability of various different kinds of music and their musical structures and individual components as made clear by the curriculum exposition. Furthermore, through this assessment ability, the students are to relate the musical themes to cultural, historical or spiritual features. The focus is seemingly that individual student should be able to assess themes within music and to be able to relate these themes with not only themes from their own country but also other countries and their culture to further allow the student to expand not only their musical knowledge but cultural and historical knowledge as well.

The chapter regarding the music subjects continues through each respective school year and their objectives, or aims, for the education. To summarize the main points from the aim sections of the curriculum, it can be assessed from these excerpts that the keywords are cultivated interest, music-making and appraisal which are all repeated keywords throughout all the school years in the curriculum. These all condense into a general idea that is seemingly applied throughout Japanese music education, and now to list the main points of the Japanese curriculum here follows a list:

- Cultivate interest
- Music-making, fundamental musical ability
- Appraisal of various musical types

This concludes the Japanese section on aims for the Music subject. This analysis has so far established the goals for the education in both curriculums as stated in the lists above. I mentioned three keywords in the Swedish curriculum section of this chapter I wanted special focus on, involvement, expression and communication. This thesis will further go into this after defining the contents of the education as laid out by the curriculum, and this following section

will serve as a reference table for the observation and method and purpose section and to further define the *structure* of the music education.

**Contents of Education**

The Swedish curriculum lists the core contents in three categories, *Playing and creating music, Tools of music* and *Context and function of music*. The first section involves performances of songs, melodies and accompaniment from different genres in ensemble form. Likewise, there is also performance by ear training, or aural skills, in different genres. Improvisation is also done to drum accompaniment, various chord progressions, or melody loops with voice and instruments. In regards to music creation, there are exercises in creating different genres such as ballads and creating sound compositions and songs. Finally, the curriculum states a focus on musical representation in different forms of expressions.

The Japanese curriculum has a similar section, called music-making, that is separated into three sub-categories: *singing, playing instruments* and *creative music making*. Firstly, the singing section mentions a focus on perception and adaptation where the contents of a song, genre, lyrics and musical mood first are analyzed and from there develop an idea how to express oneself through singing the song. All while perceiving the role for each part—bass, tenor, alto or soprano—and the resonance of the choir as a whole. In the *Playing instruments* section the focus is identical to the singing section but the tools are changed—this time the physical instruments such as recorders are used instead of the human voice. Essentially, there is a focus on perception of musical genres and themes in songs followed up by adapting to these while playing one’s instrument. A *Creative music making* section follows, that states students should be taught to create simple melodies with creative expressions by perceiving the characteristics of language and musical scales while keeping in mind things such as characteristics of individual sound components and aspects like repetition, contrast and variation.

In the Swedish *Tools of music* section students are taught to take care of their voice and hearing; how hearing impairment can affect them while listening and performing music and

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10 Skolverket.se,. (2015). p.97
how this can be prevented through extra care. The rest of the sections mention the theoretical side of music education, such as musical symbols, the notation system, rhythm, pitch, tempo etcetera. Moreover, how these can be applied to conventional analog tools but also digital tools for music creation, recording and processing.

A corresponding Japanese part of the curriculum, labeled tools of music, does not exist. However, its content is rather stated in other previous contents such as singing, playing instruments and creative music making. In comparison to the Swedish curriculum, no statement is written regarding the care of voice and hearing in the curriculum nor are there mentions of usage of digital tools for music creation.

The last Swedish section titled Context and functions of music states that students become familiar with sound and music’s emotional, physical and conceptual effect on people. It is written that one of music’s functions is to signify identity and group affiliation in different cultures, with a main focus on ethnicity and gender. Another focus point is how music is used in different media such as film and computer games to impact people’s emotions, and how instruments function differently in different genres and contexts such as symphony orchestra or rock bands. Lastly, historically important milestones, composers and events in music history are brought up as well as different genres throughout the historical epochs.

The final section in the Japanese curriculum regarding contents of the education is titled appraising and refers to the perceptual abilities of music. How through listening students are to perceive connections between elements and structure that make up music and moods within music, and how through appraising the student are to find “characteristics of music in relation to the culture, history and other arts which comprise its background”. Furthermore, students are educated to appraise the diversity of music by listening to traditional music of Japan and the local area in addition to various types of music from various people in the Asian region.

It can be assessed from these contents in the curriculum that while the overall contents of the education are similar, the methods of the education somewhat differs. The Swedish school

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education has a more digital approach to music education where many schools in recent years have chosen to apply small devices such as tablets into education and have introduced students to music creation in computer software. There is also a seemingly bigger focus in the Japanese education system towards listening to music in various ways and to see the structure of music; a more theoretical focus in general. On the other hand, in the Swedish system, there is a seemingly bigger focus on the practical side of music in both educating how to take care of oneself during musical activities and also in performing music. This difference in focus of theoretical and practical education is important to note and will be made clearer in the next section.

Methods and Purpose (Observation and Interviews)

This section will tackle the data collected through observation followed by the interviews conducted at a middle school to further understand the methods used in Japanese and Swedish school systems. Previous experience from Swedish school system in addition to the Japanese school system on a university level will also be taken into this analysis.

I participated in a class of first year students within the middle school where the main themes of the lesson were: music theory in form of rhythm, appraisal of musical features such as pitches and scales and finished by a choir singing session of a song called Soko ni kaze ga iru. Two teachers were present, one main teacher and an assistant teacher.

The music theory and rhythmical training was a supplied document with written music arranged in different rhythms. The class, in cohesion, attempted to clap their hands to the rhythm. Similar rhythmical exercises are held in Swedish education as well, but often when rhythms are explained the teachers choose to apply instruments such as drums or smaller percussion instruments. In the interview, I inquired about this and the teacher stated that depending on supplies in the school (the instruments in this case) they would use instruments to demonstrate rhythms. But the interviewee stated that depending on the teacher, different methods might be used such as instrumental demonstration. I followed up my question

12 Jonsson(2014)
regarding instruments and how students are allowed to use these. In the classroom itself, there was a variety of instruments, ranging from simple recorders to orchestra equipment such as timpani (percussion instrument). The recorder is the most-used instrument in most schools according to the interviewee, followed by keyboard harmonica. The presence of such high grade instruments in the classroom surprised me. Such instruments are generally not present in Swedish public schools by comparison. Cultural art-focused schools may in many cases include high end instruments in Sweden as well, but the obligatory general education school does, from personal experience, not contain any of these instruments. Rather, they are stocked with a variety of small band-oriented instrument such as guitars, drums and smaller instruments that are easy to produce sounds on—such as harmonicas. I was generally surprised that the students were not using any of these instruments in the classroom. From a Swedish perspective, use of instruments often occurs in music class, if not almost every class. The interviewee told me that while sessions with instruments such as the recorder are conducted, the main practical parts of music education are done outside of class, therefore, outside of the formal educational system in so called **bukatsu**, or club activities.

Club activities—that students are encouraged to join— are places where students after school can go to participate in activities they are fond of. The activities supplied varies from school to school, but in many schools there is always one type of musical club available, ranging from all kinds of musical genres such as jazz bands, Hawaiian music club, chorus club and different kinds of sizes of orchestras and bands—such as brass bands. I experienced these club activities at university level when joining the school orchestra for the majority of my one-year exchange. Imai Haruto, in his thesis about sociology of amateur orchestras at university level mentions one of the benefits of joining such club activity orchestras such as the one I did. One of the keywords he uses are **shōgai gakushū**, meaning lifelong learning. He connects this word with regional culture and how the orchestra acts as a promotional tool for this. While this thesis won’t delve further into Imai’s thesis, the importance of club activities used as promotional

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tool is something I want to bring into the analysis. This thesis second main interviewee, a former teacher at a school and current musical advisor and brass orchestra conductor, also spoke about the club being used as a promotional tool as a secondary purpose after its role as an extra after-school activity. The interviewee mentioned how musical related clubs such as brass bands not only perform internally within school but in many cases seek to compete against other schools at both regional and national levels. The clubs are allegedly encouraged to work as a team to represent not only themselves but their school on regional or national levels. In the previous curriculum section of this thesis I mentioned three main points to compare between the two nations school systems, one of them being communication. The way of using music as a communicative tool was seemingly in the case of the Swedish curriculum something more focused on personal expression and using music as a tool to communicate these expressions. Something this thesis seeks to bring into focus here is that while the Swedish system seemingly seeks a more individual approach for music as a communicative tool, on the other hand the Japanese system seemingly has a more group oriented approach. For here it can be assessed that in the Japanese school system—even though it is technically outside of the system due to being a club activity—through bringing together students in groups such as orchestras encourages them to communicate themselves as a group through music on both local and national levels. On the other hand, in Sweden there exists music competitions but they are in most cases limited to cultural arts school since general public school do not possess the same level of focus on music activities. In fact, in Sweden, there is no form of club activities in the same regard as Japan, but rather students are assumed to take on musical activities outside of school themselves rather than through the school. Music activities in Swedish schools are rather constrained to a more local level or more often than not limited to school performances only. It can be concluded here that the club activities in Japan, in addition to the way the music system in laid out, also plays a major role to help student use music as a communicative tool.

In Sweden, the use of music as a communicative tool is a bit different. Since there are no club activities on the same level as Japan, students expressing themselves through music are mostly active on a local level. From personal experience as well, it can be assessed that students are more encouraged to form a personal musical expression to express to others. To explain why this is so, we need to look at one idea mentioned in the curriculum. In the introduction section
of the music subject in the curriculum, it is stated that music has different functions and meaning depending on the individual. Moreover, music serves as an important part of what people share socially and it can influence the development of the individual’s identity. Furthermore, in the aims section of the curriculum, it is stated that students should be given the opportunities to develop an ability to communicate with their own musical thinking ideas. From this it can be assessed that Swedish music education focuses on music as a communicative tool on a personal level, encouraging personal expression through music, while on the other hand Japanese schools encourage using music as a communicative tool on a group level. And while this is outside of this thesis’ research area, this assessment might also help explain how orchestras and other larger musical group activities are more prominent in Japan even at non cultural arts university level. While in Sweden on the same university level there are rarely any orchestral related activities at non-cultural arts universities there exists instead, a variety of smaller group-related activities such as rock or pop bands which are created by individuals rather than the schools themselves. While being beyond the scope of this thesis, this may relate individualistic versus collectivistic notions of society, and may be an interesting field of research with focus on music and music education.

Returning back into the observation, the class continued into a hearing training with notes and musical scales and how they are perceived. As stated in previous section, in the curriculum it is written that students are educated to learn to perceive the characteristics of individual sounds, chords and melodies. In this particular lesson, the students were to recognize different musical scales, from major to minor and what makes them sound different. It was followed with theoretical explanations and continued to the last part of the class which was singing of the song Soko ni kaze ga iru. After the observation, I concluded that the majority of the entire lesson was a theoretical one, focusing on the structures of music such a musical scales. Since this observation was only done in one class, I had to ask the interviewee regarding other classes. The interviewee mentioned something interesting; that while practical exercises do exist in many forms such as chorus and sessions with instrument such as the recorder the students are encouraged to seek more practical appliances or music through musical club activities. This is an important point to make that the theoretical side and practical side seems to be separated, even though the actual lessons are also contain practical exercises. This makes sense considering that club activities are such normal occurrences in present Japanese
schools. From personal observations it can be assessed that there are musical-oriented clubs in almost every school and the main music education does not necessarily need to apply practical music sessions on a regular basis. On the other hand, in Sweden since club activities are next to non-existent, as mentioned before, the music education seemingly has to apply more of the practical side of music education into the actual classroom.

In summary, so far throughout this analysis this thesis has gone through the curriculum part by part in order to assess how it is generally structured, what the goals or aims are for the education and what methods are used. The Swedish aim for the music subject is seemingly more focused on educating the student to express oneself more personally through music and uses music as a communicative tool in this way. While on the other hand, the Japanese system encourages a more group-oriented approach, using music as a communicative tool through a stronger focus on chorus singing and group-oriented musical club activities. The Swedish methods, or procedures in education, are seemingly partly different where a practical approach to educating music is more prominent. An on the other side of the spectrum in Japanese school education the theoretical aspects of music is—in comparison—of bigger focus.

There is one final aspect not yet touched upon and that is the purpose subject mentioned earlier in the thesis. This relates to the glassware analogy made previously where the meaning of purpose was explained as the purpose of the end product as defined by its creator—in this case the maker of the glass ware—during the products inception.

The Japanese school system has one general idea often mentioned throughout curriculums and various other documents. This is the term called *ikiru chikara* which, according to MEXT,\(^\text{15}\) consists of three virtues sought to be educated to the students. Officially by MEXT it is

translated as zest for living. In the interviews conducted for this thesis both interviewees were asked this question, and in a general consensus they stated the following in regards to the music subject’s role in zest for living. The music subject serves as a helpful role in giving the students essential life skills and zest for life. It also encourages self-discipline and cooperation skills with other people as well as being able to be considerate with other people. Lastly, it helps to develop a rich human nature. These words are repeated and defined by MEXT in similar manner. The interviewee stated that MEXT defines the music subject’s main purpose as help to develop this zest for living within students, mainly to increase cooperative skills and to be considerate to other people and other people’s work in addition to giving them actual practical skills within music that student may seek to apply themselves later in life.

In the Swedish curriculum it is stated that music is a social subject that the students are supposed to communicate with each other and in different ways create music together. Jonsson in her thesis further states that the purpose of the education is to promote personal responsibility and cooperation skills within students.

Function

Up until now this thesis has defined the main parts of the music subject and education—goal, method and purpose—in order to come to a conclusion on the function of music. As explained in the Methods and Materials section of this thesis, the function refers to the appliance of a

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product chosen by the end user. For we have now already defined the purpose of the product—music education—as defined by its creator, in the previous section. In this section this thesis seeks to assess the general function of the music subject.

Jonsson in her thesis asked several principals and teachers what they deemed the function of the Swedish music education system to be.\(^{18}\) Her results show that there are five main functions prevalent. These are listed below

- Music as a way to promote cooperation and unity
- Music as respiration
- Venues of music;
- Music subject as a part of the Swedish culture

The reasoning behind music being a tool to promote cooperation and unity is explained by Jonsson as a result of students taking extra care to be perceptive with the classmates during the lessons since that is a requirement in order to achieve best results in for example an ensemble. Or rather in comparison to other subjects where the students are in many cases working on their own problems and solving them, such as mathematics, the music subject forces students to cooperate in order to actually get results such as a proper performance.

In Japanese schools this seems to be a main role of the music subject as well. In this thesis observations and analysis of the curriculum, there is seemingly a bigger focus on chorus activity in comparison to the Swedish music subject. Performing in a chorus requires unison between all members musically by making sure things such as keeping one owns tone together with the group. This perception ability has already been discussed in previous section of this thesis, and how the Japanese music subject has such a big focus on it. I noticed during my stays in Japan how important it is in any context, not only musically, to be able to feel the atmosphere. In Japanese this is commonly referred to as *kūki o yomu* and while it is not clearly within this research to discuss the relation, it might be interesting to note that the importance of being able to feel the atmosphere is essentially educated to students in music education.

\(^{18}\) Jonsson (2014). p.21-24
and there might be a direct relation to this term used seemingly mostly by youths. This could be something promising for possible future research.

Music as referred to as respiration, confers how the music subject itself functions as a compensation against a more theory-based subject, allowing students to essentially take a break from these to conduct more practical studies. One of the principals interviewed in Jonsson’s research said that “Through the music subject the students get a fun and pleasure-filled break, so they in turn reserve energy to later tackle on the bigger, more theory based subjects”.

In my personal experience, there seems to be a very common consensus among students when comparing the music subject to other subjects. That is not to say the music subject is not taken seriously since it is graded like all other subjects. But on the contrary, since it was seemingly seen as a fun subject, students would look forward to going to class.

On the other hand, in Japan there seemingly was no status of music as a type of break from the other subjects. Seeing as assessed already in this thesis, the Japanese music subject is more theory heavy and there is no possibility of a break from these subjects. So it can be assessed from the general consensus is music is seen as a normal subject.

*Venues of music* refers to how music is appearing outside of classroom in events such as school introduction and exit ceremonies where students are always performing. One of the teachers in Jonsson’s study said that they ‘push’ students to perform at these ceremonies. This only further supports the notion that music education in Sweden seeks to support students to express themselves personally as discussed earlier in this thesis.

In Japan, this function does exist as well. But despite musical activities being more prevalent in Japanese schools, the club activities as mentioned in previous sections are not an actual part of the curriculum nor the school system. They are, however, supported by respective schools economically and with teachers as advisors. Thus, this thesis wishes to mention that while the Japanese music subject does retain similarity to the Swedish counterpart, it is an indirect process where the classroom supports musical club activities through theory lessons and

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19 Jonsson (2014). p.22
encouragement. These club activities lead to performances done on school level up to national level as mentioned previously.

The next section on music as a way to experience Swedish culture is explained in Kristina’s thesis as a tool for not only Swedish students but even non-Swedish attending Swedish schools can take part of Swedish culture and cherish its traditions.

The Japanese music subject also has a heavy focus on national culture and tradition and conveys these ideas through music. In fact, in the curriculum there are mandatory songs that to some extent must be included in the education. Some songs being focused on a natural theme while some more nationalistic. This is what the interviewee mentioned a product of the moral education system that rose up after the ‘westernizing’ and a requirement for ‘nationalistic specific ethical values to strengthen unity[...]

Conclusion

It is throughout this research of the curriculum and observations conducted in Japan that this thesis can assess that Japanese music education has similar functions to Swedish music education. But, methods and purposes tend to vary. The Swedish system puts seemingly a bigger focus on individual expressional ability among students and focuses on a more practical education. While on the other hand, the Japanese system seemingly focuses on a more group oriented education and has more theory-heavy focused education to support musical club activities outside school. This focus on group oriented activities might be an indication to how Japan as a more collectivistic thinking society reflects itself onto the music education, or vice versa. But this however was not the main scope of this thesis but might serve, as previously mentioned, as focus point for further research in Japanese collectivistic thinking versus music education’s group oriented focus.

Another observation I made was how music instruments in Japanese education seemingly were not used as much during classes in comparison to Swedish education. It could be

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20 Nybond, Alexander(2010). *Musiken och nationalstaten under Meiji-perioden*
assessed here that the Swedish education with a more focus on individual expression with many music activities involving instruments in classrooms try to put more emphasis on the playful aspects of music education by giving the students chances to be more interactive with music. In contrast, in Japan the classroom seemingly in most cases serves put more emphasis on the fundamentals of music at a theory level. This is not to say as previously mentioned that instruments are not used in lessons, but it can be assessed here that the focus in the classroom differs. Also previously mentioned is bukatsu aspect, how students are more encouraged to continue, if interested, with music outside the classroom in these club activities. It is here the students are more engaged in musical activities on a daily basis, even when there is no daily music classes. While these are not directly emphasized in the school curriculum, music education in Japan seem to serve a function to support these bukatsu activities, musical related ones, by providing fundamental knowledge of the music subject on a theory level and giving simple lessons in actual performance with instruments to introduce the students who are interested to continue on with musical activities in bukatsu.

In summary, the music education in Japan seemingly has two main functions in comparison to the Swedish music education. Firstly the focus on group oriented activities, which translates well into the bukatsu activities where in most if not all cases students conduct musical activities in groups such as bands. Secondly the focus on giving the students the fundamental knowledge of music to support students seeking to continue with music in the bukatsu club activities is seemingly another function. These functions are not strictly stated in curriculums. However as mentioned in the glass analogy in the methods sections of this thesis, the actual function of a product might not necessarily be equal the function, or purpose, intended by its creator. And from these observations and analyses I were able to assess these two functions as seen by the end user the teacher and students.

Summary

This thesis aims to analyze the function of music education in Japan through comparison with Swedish education system and observations done on site in Japan. The reason for my research is that I wanted to understand why I, in my own observations, saw a comparatively larger
amount of basic to intermediate level-proficient musicians in Japan in comparison to my home nation of Sweden. I based my hypothesis for this research on the idea that this initial observation might be the product of a different music education system, an education system that works under a different function or purpose. That is why I chose the research question to find out the function of music education in Japan.

A qualitative direct observation was conducted in a school in Japan to collect data to be able to confirm contents in school curriculums and also observe any new perspectives. This was followed up by interviews with teachers and staff, as well as personal contacts such as past students of the Japanese education.

The thesis is composed of two main chapters, analysis and function. The analysis chapter is divided into smaller sections, or chapters, that examines different aspects of the school curriculum followed by data collected during observations. The second chapter wraps this up in an attempt to understand the function of Japanese music education and its comparison to Swedish education.

The conclusion outlines that while the Japanese and Swedish music education system shares many functions their methods and purposes are different. The results were unexpected in that there was more hope to see a major difference in the function of the music as a whole. But, the results were still interesting. The Japanese education seemingly has a more focus on group oriented activities, possibly related to collectivistic ideals in society, and seeks to provide fundamental knowledge of music to students and to encourage further practical appliances of music outside of class in the so called bukatsu club activities.

For further research, I hope to be able to delve more into this research topic with possibly a focus on collectivistic themes and ideas in the education system and how they compare to a nation that is by definition, individualistic.

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