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From Annie Laurie to Lady Madonna: A Century of Cover Songs in Japan

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From Annie Laurie to Lady Madonna: A Century of Cover Songs in Japan

by

Gerry McGoldrick

Abstract : The foreign language cover record in Japan seems to have started (as a popular phenomenon) with Futamura Teiichi's version of "My Blue Heaven" in 1928. Stretching the definition, Western songs with new lyrics were certainly being sung in the cutting edge theaters of Tokyo by the late teens, and Western folk and popular melodies were used as early as the 1880s in Japanese primary school textbooks. By the early 1970s, however, the cover record ceased to exist as a significant commercial form, having been replaced by indigenously created, western-style popular music. In this article I briefly survey the era of the cover version in Japan – a period of slightly less than a century, all told – but focus specifically on cover records of the pre-war and post-war eras. In current popular music research, lyrics somewhat justifiably receive limited attention, however in the case of cover versions, I believe we can profit from examining the ways in which approaches to lyric translation change over time. In the present study I focus on these approaches to lyric translation. From the field of translation studies I borrow the concepts of domesticating and foreignizing translations (the former renders the text in familiar terms for the target audience, the latter emphasizes fidelity to the original language) to contrast ways that Western culture is represented and received in pre-war and post-war Japan. I connect the dramatic post-war cultural shift in Japan with the differences in cover records of the two periods, and suggest some possible reasons for the genre's ultimate demise as a widely popular form.

The foreign language *kabaa* (cover record) in Japan seems to have started with Futamura Teiichi's version of "My Blue Heaven" in 1928. Stretching the definition, Western melodies with new lyrics were certainly being sung in the cutting edge theaters of Tokyo by the late teens, and were used as early as the 1880s in primary school textbooks. With a liberal enough definition, we could go back to the military use of fife and drum bands of the 1840s, or the folksong "*Kuroda bushi*," which some sources date to the eleventh century, and the melody of which is based on an earlier piece of court music said to be of Central Asian origin. For that matter, there are surely even earlier cases where melodies were imported, probably with instruments, and had lyrics put to them. I will content myself with beginning the present study with the reintroduction of Western music to Japan in the 1880s, and tracing it to its disappearance as a significant part of the popular music landscape by the early 1970s.

This is a preliminary study, mapping out the ninety-year history of the foreign language cover as an important form. I do not consider the covers which still spring up regularly in genres like jazz (in the form of "the standard") or blues, nor the anomalies that very occasionally make the charts today. The foreign language cover plays an important part in the history of popular music in Japan, and the study was undertaken primarily with the aim of determining the extent of the topic; to chart its beginnings and endings, and secondly to consider one aspect of the cover – its treatment of the lyrics from the source language. I divide the history into four distinct periods: the Meiji and Taisho eras (1868 to 1927); the period of the jazz song (1928 to 1940); the war years (1940 to 1945); and the golden age of the cover (late 1940s to early 1970s).

A few points on my method

First, I should explain why in an essay on popular music I focus on the words, which are often regarded in scholarly music writing as an element of lesser importance in the search for meaning in popular music. In Frith's *Sociology of Rock*, for example, he quotes Greil Marcus' line that "words are sounds we can feel before they are statements to understand," and given Frith's stance on the status of sound, lyrics would seem doubly insignificant (Frith, 1978, 176). It is

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perhaps true that lyrics on their own will not explain much about popular music, however, the very nature of a foreign language cover is tied up in the words that are used, or at the very least, as Marcus would have it, the sounds that those words make.

While I tend to focus on making sense of my findings in a straightforward fashion, I do use one theoretical lens borrowed from the field of translation studies. My brief study of this relatively new field suggests that its use in the study of song translation is limited. If the ultimate aim is performance, this sort of translation is first and foremost concerned with fitting new words to an existing melody. Even at its most accurate it is unable to render the lyrics with the exactitude that reasonably competent prose translators routinely achieve. This problem is magnified by the fact that the vast majority of the translations I looked at for this project bear little resemblance not only to the style of the original lyrics, but the content as well. Most translators are satisfied with reproducing the general mood of the original lyrics, and perhaps including two or three of the songs images. As we will see, in the early period a cover may be linked to its source by something as tenuous as a theme (e.g. love or parting), or there may be no commonality at all.

That said, the field of translation studies does suggest some possible ways of looking at cover versions. Translation paradigms can be thought of as existing along a continuum from “target language-oriented” to “source language-oriented”. Paradigms tending to one side or the other of this continuum are labeled, respectively; “domesticating translation” (in which the translated text is rendered easy to understand, but perhaps over-simplified into familiar terms) or “foreignizing translation” (in which the source language is allowed to strongly influence the translated text, though the result may be somewhat disorienting to the reader) (Rubel, 2003, 6). The influence of Post-colonial studies has seen a shift to favoring the latter, in order to minimize the “ethno-centric violence” that is now seen to be intrinsic to the act of translation.

As Lawrence Venuti puts it, “Foreignizing a text means that one must disrupt the cultural codes of the target language” (Venuti, 2004, 20). While Japanese commercial music producers working in the early to mid-twentieth century may not have been driven, like the postcolonial translator, by a moral imperative to “disrupt the cultural codes of the target language,” they realized they could benefit from foreignizing their product.

In discussing cover versions, the *text* will naturally include the music and the lyrics. It would take another paper to examine how even the music is translated (in the many subtle ways that it is consciously and unconsciously made understandable for the target audience), and that these translations too fall along a foreignizing/domesticating continuum. The present project focuses on lyrics, though I am aware of a wider text.

Finally, I do attempt some quantitative analysis of the data. It is important to stress that the song sampling I use is relatively small; two hundred or so actual recordings, and about the same again in written sources. While there is a problem with generalizing too much from it, most of the sources I used were anthologies or surveys that presumably aimed at being representative, so there is some reason to believe in its validity in identifying broad trends.

The number of actual song texts that appear in the paper is unfortunately small; the few pieces that appear in each section are used to illustrate some of the characteristic features of covers from that period. My translations of the Japanese lyrics are extremely literal (or “foreignized”) in an attempt to represent the source as closely as possible.

The Meiji and Taisho eras (1868-1927)

This section will examine the period that begins with the introduction of Western music and ends just before the first popular cover version recording. I will first recount the ways in which Western music was introduced to Japan at the beginning of the modern era, touching briefly on the role of the military, and looking more closely at the role of government-sponsored education. I will then examine how songs were translated in the late 1800s in educational textbooks and compare these to translations done at the turn of the twentieth century for entertainment purposes. Finally, I will consider the factors in early recorded music that led to the introduction of Western popular music cover versions.

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Late 1800s

It has been well documented that Western music was reintroduced to Japan in the late 1800s through the institutions of the military and public education, but is perhaps less clear why the government deemed it necessary to include Western music in all levels of the school curriculum.¹ It has been pointed out that the Meiji government had little interest in art for its own sake, and that other Western arts were not introduced in the schools (Kuniyuki, Kanno, Kobayashi, 2002, 51). When Japan was forced to open to foreign trade in the late 1800s, it became clear how far it had fallen behind more modern nations, and in an effort to catch up its new leaders rethought many of its institutions (education included) using European models as guides. The Confucian concept of music's importance in moral development may have played a part in the decision too; it may have been deemed instrumental in rearing children who would become part of a modern state equal to any in Europe (Eppstein, 1994, 23). The corollary of this, of course, was the idea that Japan's own music was unsuitable for modern times (ibid., 4).

As a result, in 1879 Isawa Shuji was chosen to head a music study group for the Ministry of Education. His idea was to create a new music, a mix of European and "Oriental", with the help of a team consisting of an American music educator (Luther Whiting Mason, son of venerable hymnist and educator Lowell Mason, and one-time director of music in Boston's primary schools), three Japanese musicians, a literary scholar, an interpreter and five "officials" (May, 1959, 61).² Isawa had studied music with Mason in Boston between 1875 and 1878, and the latter is probably responsible for the preponderance of Scottish and American melodies introduced at this time.³ Through the Ministry of Education the group published three volumes of songs – entitled simply *shougakko shouka shu* (*Primary school song collection*)⁴ – between 1881 and 1884 with a mixture of borrowed and newly composed melodies, which apparently sold well even outside of schools (ibid., 62).

At any rate, the songs proved popular enough that other publishers put out similar books, and as a result the country was fairly awash in imported melodies. The book *Songs of Japan 1868-1926* lists forty of its 253 songs as coming from outside of Japan. This includes folksongs from Scotland, Ireland, England, Germany, Spain, and Italy; and songs credited to specific Composers

like Stephen Foster, Schubert, Brahms, and Rousseau. Well-known melodies include “Auld Lang Syne,” “Annie Laurie,” “Coming Through the Rye,” “The Bluebells of Scotland,” “Old Folks at Home,” “Massa’s in the Cold Cold Ground,” and “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.”

The Early “Translations”

As was mentioned at the beginning of this section, the lyrics at this early stage are partially or completely reimagined, or even replaced: *Annie Laurie*’s melody is used for *Saijo* (“Genius Woman,” 1884) takes its lyrics from the famous late eighth century female authors Murasaki Shikibu (*The tale of Genji*) and Sei Shônagon (The pillowbook of Sei Shônagon)(Shiiba, 1998, 31). Foster’s “Old Folks at Home” is borrowed for “*Aware no shoujo*” (“Pitiful girl,” 1888) to retell Hans Christian Andersen’s story of “The Little Match Girl”(ibid., 48). The love song “Coming Through the Rye” becomes “*Furusato no sora*” (“Hometown’s sky,” 1888), a children’s song about crickets, bush clover, and mommy and daddy.⁵

“Auld Lang Syne,” which appeared in the first volume of the series under the title “*Hotaru no hikari*” (“The light of the firefly,” 1881) is almost universally known in Japan. The lyrics are taken from classical Chinese texts, and describe a diligent student working through the night by any available light source:

By the firefly’s light, the window’s snow
Reading and writing by the light of the moon, accumulating.
Before you know it years have past
Open the cedar door; he’ll leave this morning.

The second half of the verse suggests a passing from one thing to another, and evokes a sense of nostalgia not unlike that found in Robert Burns’ original lyrics. The song has come to be used at graduation ceremonies and other rites of passage, and is also played in virtually every shop just before closing time to let customers know that it is time to leave; functions not entirely dissimilar to its use for ringing in the new year in many English speaking countries.

While most of the lyrics seem to be either tenuously connected to the originals, or entirely unrelated, there are exceptions: “The Bluebells of Scotland” was apparently deemed suitable for

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shaping young minds and hearts. The Japanese lyrics to *Utsukushiki* (“Beauty,” 1881) describe not just one “Highland laddie” going off to the place “where noble deeds are done”, but the singer’s three “fine” or “fair” boys going off with bow, sword, and halberd (Hal Leonard, 1997, 171). Mirroring the structure of the original lyrics (below, on the left), the three verses use repetitive phrases to steadily increase the emotional impact of the song as first the oldest, then middle, and finally the youngest son go off to battle.

Oh where, tell me where is your highland laddie gone?	Where is our fine son ?
Oh where, tell me where is your highland laddie gone?	Our fine oldest son
He's gone with streaming banners where noble deeds are done	has taken up the bow,
And it's oh! in my heart I wish him safe at home.	from his place before you he has bravely departed.

Oh where, tell me where did your highland laddie dwell?	Where is our fine son ?
Oh where, tell me where did your highland laddie dwell?	Our fine middle son
He dwelt in bonnie Scotland where blooms the sweet bluebell	has strapped on the sword,
And it's oh! in my heart I lo'e my laddie well.	from his place beside you he has bravely departed.

Oh what, tell me what if your highland lad be slain?	Where is our fine son ?
Oh what, tell me what if your highland lad be slain?	Our fine youngest son
Oh no, true love will be his guide and bring him safe again	has taken up the halberd,
For it's oh! my heart would break if my highland lad were slain	from his place behind you he has bravely departed.

Turn-of-the-Century Covers

At some point – likely after the turn of the century – Western music ceased serving simply pedagogical or military purposes and began to be enjoyed by for its own sake by a large enough segment of the population to merit public performance. Hosokawa notes that the first Western musical performances strictly for amusement took place in Tokyo, and that early on melodies taken from *Carmen*, arranged with lyrics about current events, were popular (Hosokawa et al., 1991, 5). There are accounts of performances at the Asakusa Opera in Tokyo that used western songs like *It's a Long Way to Tipperary* with “freely composed” Japanese lyrics (ibid., 6).⁶ Lyricists who wrote these performance-based songs seem to have as little concern for the source content as the earlier writers of the musical textbooks.

Other songs exist from this period that seemed to be modeled on the more exacting standards of poetry translation, achieving a fidelity to the source unmatched in the era of recorded music. For example, a melody entitled “*Rourerai*” from 1909 lists *Jiruberu* (a phonetic approximation of “Silcher”) as the composer. This is certainly Heinrich Heine’s poem “*Die Lorelei*,” set to music by Friedrich Silcher (and many others before and since), and published in 1827. “*Rourerai*,” describing the legend of the siren who lures boatmen to their deaths with her singing on rocky, fast-moving stretch of the Rhine, is a verse-for-verse match of the German original, and is more faithful than any of the cover versions from later eras I have come across.

This is one of a number of pieces that convince me that there was a marked (and understandable) difference between the lyrics in the earliest songs, developed for pedagogical reasons, and those of later songs, introduced once there was a market for western melodies as entertainment. Perhaps because these songs had a stronger relationship to the printed word than would songs in the era of recorded music, some translations of this period reached a high water mark in fidelity to the source material. Their performability is another question entirely. Judging from a 1921 essay by A.H. Fox Strangeways in *Music & Letters*, English translations of European art songs tended to look good on paper, but suffer for it in performance, and I imagine the same could be said of those in Japan (Strangeways, 1921).

Recorded Music

Gramophones appear to have been imported for sale in Japan as early as 1896, and it was soon discovered that in Japan, as elsewhere, people preferred indigenous music to the European art music initially offered with the machines (Fujie, Japan IX: 3i, Grove Music Online). Traditional Japanese music made up the bulk of record sales in the 1910s and 20s, but new songs composed with the previously mentioned *yonan nuki* scales steadily gained ground. In 1914 “Kachuusha’s Song”, composed by Nakayama Shimpei for a theatrical production of Tolstoy’s *Resurrection* became a big hit and marked the beginning of a new kind of popular song (Mitsui, 2002, 743). The song suggested that the Japanese audience was open to and interested in foreign themes and was developing a taste for Western melodies, but it would be fourteen more years before a significant portion of the Japanese public would really embrace Western popular songs.

The Period of the “Jazu songu” (1928 to 1940)

As was stated in the previous section, gramophone records had been available in Japan since the end of the 19th century, and foreign-themed recordings had received a boost in popularity by way of Nakayama Shimpei’s “Kachuusha’s Song” in 1914. A small but growing market for actual foreign popular music existed at this time; imported copies of “St. Louis Blues” for example, were available in 1923, but the song did not enjoy wide-scale popularity until its reintroduction in the 1930s (Hosokawa et al., 1991, 9). In 1924 the government introduced an economy-stimulating measure which saw duties placed on imported luxury items, essentially doubling the price of records (Kurata, 1992, 149). The effect of this on the recording industry was that more records were first increasingly pressed, and eventually increasingly recorded in Japan (Mitsui, 2002, 744). In response to this increased production, in 1927 the first three major foreign-affiliated record companies (Nippon Victor and Nippon Columbia among them) were established, (Hosokawa et al., 1991, 10). Nippon Columbia’s first hit was Futamura Teiichi’s rendition of “My Blue Heaven” 1928, the success of which launched the first era of the cover record (ibid., 10). It has been said that this record marked the beginning of the Japan’s jazz age; It wasn’t until after World War Two that the term “*jazu songu*” came to mean something more specific than “Western popular music” (ibid., 7; 13). The latest song from the pre-war period is listed as being released in March, 1940, at which point the government banned both recorded and live performances of American and British music, bringing the pre-war era of the cover record to a close (Mitsui, 2002, 745).

Komota’s *History of Japanese popular song* lists thirty-five foreign songs in the twelve-year period from the introduction of the cover until the banning of American music in 1940 – about six percent of the total (certainly incomplete) list. Other popular music competing with these covers included traditional genres from the pre-modern era; *faux* traditional music borrowing titles and themes from traditional genres, but composed in the pentatonic major and minor *yonan nuki* scales; and locally composed songs in Western styles that may or may not use foreign elements in the lyrics.

In terms of a musical description, Atkins sums it up concisely, saying “representative jazz song recordings featured polished arrangements, improvisational restraint, and lightly accented

rhythms” (Atkins, 2001, 65). There seems to be little obvious conscious domesticating occurring in the arrangements, though one can detect the beginnings of a long-running trend of musical style lag: the banjo on 1928’s “Blue sky” feels slightly dated, just as much later the 1956 release of “Heartbreak hotel” is decidedly *country* in its instrumentation and arrangement.

Lyricaly, very few of the cover songs read as essentially foreign; in “Dinah,” for example, there is no mention of Carolina or Dixie, nor any attempt to meaningfully translate the line about hopping an ocean liner (all the way) to China (one of Japan’s closest neighbors). The few songs that do exoticize borrow directly from the exoticism of the original lyrics, be it the desert in “Song of araby,” the native Indian references in “On the shore of Lake Minnetonka,” or the imagined Mexico of “South of the border”. All of this characterizes the lyrics of this period as falling very much on the “domesticating” end of the translation continuum.

In this period, as in the preceding one, there are songs whose lyrics closely follow the original, others that are built around a few images from the original, and some that are quite unrelated. “In the park” manages an effective almost line-for-line translation of the first verse of “Petting in the Park,” so that the narrative and the music move together in the same way as in the original. Though this is what we imagine a cover should do, this type of close translation is fairly rare in the pool of songs I have been working with. Most songs fall into the category of “slightly related”. An idea or image from the original is used as a point of departure for lyrics inspired by the mood which that image and the music create. Atkins characterizes lyrics of this period as “... invariably romantic, impressionistic and maudlin (with) ...apparently no sequence of thought and sentiment between the lines,” and by and large, the songs I have surveyed fit this description (Atkins, 2001, 65).

About a third of the songs retain their English title, transliterated into Japanese phonetic script (“Blue Moon” is approximated as “*buruu muun*”), and the majority of others either directly or approximately translate the original title. Some example of themes borrowed from the original: “Among my souvenirs” (1928) mentions photos and letters; “The continental” (1935) is about dancing; In “Blue moon” the singer is lonely on a moonlit night; In “Blue skies” (1939) the sky is blue, the singer happy; and in “Dinah” (1934), Dinah Lee is the prettiest girl around.

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The lyricists seem to take these images or ideas as inspirations, then fill the rest of the song with suitable pop/love song conventions.⁷

At the risk of belaboring the point, some other points of departure are:

- “Band of the century” (1939) (from “Alexander's Ragtime Band”) entreats the listener to come and listen to this (unnamed) band.
- “On a moonlit night”(1929) borrows from “Get Out and Get Under the Moon” only the notion that you'll feel better if you go walking in the moonlight.
- “Suzie”, from “Sweet Sue”, uses the words moon, stars, and dream.
- “Sky of yearning”(1934) simply borrows from “The Day You Came Along” the image that the weather clears up when the singer is with her love.⁸

In the remainder of this section I will examine the song “*Aozora*”(“My Blue Heaven”) to illustrate more concretely the characteristics of translations from this period.

“My Blue Heaven”

Gene Austin's 1927 recording of the Donaldson/ Whiting song was soon followed by a version by Paul Whiteman. Translated as “*Aozora*” (“Blue sky”) by Horiuchi Keizou and sung by Futamura Teiichi, it was released first by Nipponophone in March of 1928, then again (due to the unclear nature of copyright at the time) by Victor in September. The combined sales numbered into the hundreds of thousands of discs; along with Futamura's recording of “Dinah” it was the biggest foreign popular song of the era (Segawa, 2001, 6-7).

Austin's version is performed with solo voice and piano (and, according to Hamm, a cello in the instrumental section), and is done in a very loose and relaxed crooning style (Hamm, 1983, 358). Segawa's liner notes and the basic arrangement (particularly the distinctive opening horn riff based on Austin's first verse) suggest that Futamura's version (with the Nippon Victor jazz band) is based on Whiteman's. Both use bands with horns, strings, piano, but where Whiteman's foregrounds the saxophone and clarinet, violin and trumpet are more prominent in Futamura's

version. Futamura's version seems to belong to a slightly earlier style of jazz, with the banjo providing dixieland-like accompaniment, and a somewhat tense vocal style quite different from Austin's crooning.

Turning to the lyrics, Austin's version contains a sung section at the beginning, which in Whiteman's (and Futamura's) is turned into an instrumental introduction, eliminating these lyrics all together.

Day is ending / birds are wending / back to the shelter of / each little nest they love
Nightshades falling / love birds calling / what makes the world go round / nothing but love

The remainder of the song, musically, takes a *da capo aria* form (AABA), and is sung twice through:

When whippoorwills call and evening is nigh, / I hurry to my Blue Heaven.
A turn to the right, a little white light, / Will lead me to my Blue Heaven.
I'll see a smiling face, a fireplace, a cozy room, / A little nest that nestles where the roses bloom;
Just Julie and me, and baby makes three, / We're happy in my Blue Heaven.

Compare this to the translation:

At dusk, I look up; a sparkling blue sky.
At nightfall, I follow our house's narrow lane.
Though small, it's our merry home. The place where love's light flickers,
this very house; my blue sky.

In both songs it is evening, and the singer is going home to his cozy (or "small and merry") home, which is for the singer his "blue heaven (or sky)". The Japanese version removes words which would locate the song in a foreign country - whippoorwills, the fireplace, and possibly too, the nuclear family, which was not the ideal in 1920s Japan. The trading of "heaven" for "sky" is not completely satisfying, but the Japanese for heaven (*tengoku*) was probably deemed too cumbersome. That the Japanese translator was able to express the key idea that house itself is the "blue sky" of the title hints at a comparatively careful reading and understanding of the original lyrics. This song, then, is a clear example of the domesticating translator's tendency to remove the foreignizing details.

The War Years (1940-1945)

As was mentioned earlier, performance of live and recorded British and American music was banned some time in 1940, presumably late in the year, as a cover of “South of the Border” was released in March of that year (Mitsui, 2002, 745; Segawa, 2001, 1). The last pre-war cover in Komata’s history is listed as January of 1938. Western-influenced songs manage to continue on a little longer, but then these also disappear. The standard story is that as the war progressed restrictions on music increased, until *gunka* (“military songs”) and Italian and German classical music were all that remained. While this is basically true, Atkins devotes a chapter in his history of jazz to this period, showing that the government wasn’t as successful at stopping the music as record sales might suggest.⁹ Dance halls were closed by late 1940, but Jazz bands were still playing jazz for troops until December of 1941, when Japan declared war on the United States (Atkins, 2001, 141). Even after that some bands played somewhat jazzed-up versions of Italian and German, and Japanese military and pop songs (ibid., 130).¹⁰ By 1943, when it had all but disappeared from civilian life, Japan used short-wave radio to broadcast jazz, interspersed with demoralizing messages, to Allied troops (ibid., 158).

In late September of 1945, less than a month after Japan’s official surrender, U.S. Forces began broadcasting American music for the troops of the Allied Occupation, and brightening the airwaves considerably for the Japanese. With the country in ruins, it is surprising that as early as January of 1946 the recording industry was back on its feet, though the first foreign covers in Komata appear in December of 1948 – almost two years later (Komota, 1970, 489).

The Golden Age of the Cover (Late 1940s – Early 1970s)

In this section I will look at the post-war period of the cover version, from its beginning in the late 1940s to its end in the early 1970s. I will first discuss the context that shaped the covers of the era, then enumerate some of the ways post-war covers differed from their pre-war counterparts, including use of English lyrics, release lag, lyrical fidelity, variety and style lag. I will then

look at two different cover versions of “Heartbreak Hotel.” Finally, I will briefly consider how the cover version ceased to be a significant part of the popular music market.

Cover versions competed with a wide range of genres in the post-war period, including traditional genres played on indigenous instruments; kayokyoku (which, as a term, came into common usage only after World War Two, and refers to Japanese popular music with Western and Japanese characteristics); Japanese music in Western popular styles (known as jazz before the war); and those Western popular styles themselves (Hosokawa et al., 1991, 10). Komota’s *History of Japanese popular song* lists eighty-one cover versions between 1948 and 1966 (around which time they cease to be a significant part of the popular music market) (Komota, 1970, 470-489). This is about twelve percent of the total list; double the pre-war percentage.

Several factors could be cited for the unprecedented popularity of Western (mostly American) popular music in the post-war period. Firstly, it should be remembered that the Japanese public had not willingly given it up before the war; it had been banned. Secondly, it was widely available from military radio stations based all over the country, in much greater quantity and variety than before the war. Related to this, there was relatively little hostility on the part of the Japanese towards the American occupying force, which meant that a significant part of the population was receptive to the music. Still, for whatever reason, it may have taken a few years for Japanese musicians to begin recording covers of Western popular music after the war; the earliest I have been able to find date from late 1948, almost two years after record production resumed (Komota, 1970, 489; Segawa, 2001, 2).

The Recreation and Amusement Association, part of the American Occupation forces, very early in this period “established a nationwide network of cabarets, dance halls, beer halls, and nightclubs with live musical entertainment for the exclusive use of the Occupation forces” (Atkins, 2001, 175). These, and later non-government operated clubs, sustained many musicians’ careers at a time when a great number of Japanese were more focused on survival than entertainment. They also became training grounds for some of the biggest names in post-war Japanese music, like Eri Chiemi and Kosaka Kazuya (Fujiwara, 2000, 59; Kurosawa, 1999, 53). Clubs were segregated, which meant that white big band music was played in some clubs,

and bebop or rhythm and blues in others. Other clubs catered to country music, a relatively unfamiliar genre in Japan at this time (Atkins, 2001, 175)¹¹. Many Japanese musicians learned these new genres simply in order to survive. The Japanese general public, on the other hand, was exposed to the music largely through the U.S. Military radio, which anyone with a radio near one of the many bases scattered throughout the county could pick up (Mitsui, 1998, 278). The American presence, then, clearly enabled a large number of Japanese musicians to develop the facility to play various western popular styles, and provided an opportunity for the Japanese public to develop a taste for these musics.

Differences In Pre-war and Post-war Covers

The most obvious difference between cover versions from the pre-war and post-war period is the inclusion of English lyrics. This is notable especially because Japanese on the whole have never been proficient at the language, rendering English lyrics for most of the population, to paraphrase Marcus, sounds rather than statements. The breakdown of the 183 cover versions from the post-war period that I was able to listen to can be seen in figure 1, below. The most common type of cover uses as much or more English than Japanese, followed closely by covers that use only English, then those using only Japanese. The least common types are covers that use either a little English (typically one verse) or very little (typically the title phrase or a short refrain). All but one of the cover versions from my sampling of the pre-war period fall into one of the two right-most boxes, being either sung entirely in Japanese, or containing an English word or short phrase. This sort of cover accounts for only thirty-five percent of the total of my sampling of post-war cover versions. The dramatic rise of English in the cover versions can probably be attributed to the same factors that led to the increase in cover versions in the first place: exposure to many of these same songs in English through first military then civilian radio, and a general willingness to accept American culture.

Language	Only English	English >/= Japanese	English< Japanese	Japanese w/ English phrase	Only Japanese
Number	46	51	23	25	38
Percentage	25%	28 %	12 %	14 %	21 %

Fig. 1: Use of English in post-war cover songs

As was the practice in the U.S. at the time, several artists often covered a popular song in quick succession. The first Japanese/English language cover of a song was typically released about four months after the original's rise in the American charts (Ootake, 1999, 18-140).¹² As the originals were also getting play in Japan, the pre-war lag – sometimes years rather than months – was unthinkable. It is noteworthy that cover versions were generally better known than the originals (Kurosawa, 1999, 66). How much this was due to pricing differences, the need for an element of familiarity, promotion, or other factors, is something that needs further study.

In my sample, post-war cover versions are in general lyrically more faithful to the originals than pre-war recordings. Some translators (Hattori Raymond being the exemplar) went out of their way to include as much of the original content as possible, but even at the other end of the spectrum, there is usually some attempt at actually translating a few lines from – rather than simply going for the mood of – the original. The practice of domesticating lyrics, common in the pre-war period, is much less in evidence in the post-war period: the inclusion of English lyrics in many of the songs would seem to establish a *defacto* foreignness. Some singers or writers of cover versions, in fact, include obvious Japanese elements in an explicit attempt to make a clearly foreign song their own. Frank Nagai's version of "Sixteen Tons" includes the use of Japanese heavy lifting phrases often used in traditional folk songs (*enyasanosa* and *yoikorasa*, which might be translated as "heave ho"), and a traditional children's rain song finds its way into the middle of Frankie Sakai's version of "Singing In the Rain" (Segawa, 2001, 46; 50). One of the clearest cases of domesticating translation in the postwar era is Yukimura Izumi's cover of "Fujiyama Mama." This song was a big hit in Japan partly because of the Japanese words in the title, and despite the fact that it contains English lyrics that make light of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki just twelve years earlier.¹³ Quite understandably, all references to atomic bombs are left out of the Japanese lyrics.

The variety of genres that were covered also increased after the war: beyond the mainstream "jazz/pop vocal" variety that was the mainstay of the pre-war period (like 1948's "Sleepy My Love", and 1950's "Buttons and Bows" and "Mona Lisa"), covers of Latin, country, and later rockabilly and rock songs were also common.

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As was mentioned earlier, a “style lag” is apparent in certain pre-war covers. Futamura’s version of “My Blue Heaven,” for example, seemed to be played in a slightly earlier jazz style than the Paul Whiteman version it was probably based on – as though the band were processing (hearing and reproducing) the song in that earlier style. This phenomenon occurs very noticeably with the advent of rock and roll. Eri Chiemi’s 1955 version of “Rock Around the Clock” – often cited as the first Japanese rock and roll song – is played in a big band style, as are Yukimura Izumi’s 1957 version of “Be Bop A Lula,” and “Fireball rock,” her 1958 version of “Great Balls of Fire” (Kurosawa, 1999, 53). All of these arrangements ignore the “less is more” aesthetic that was a big part of early rock and roll.

It could be argued that what was happening was a domestication of the sound, not unlike the changes that rhythm and blues songs underwent in 1950s America when covered by mainstream white performers. This is perhaps true to a degree, but ignores the fact that these same songs, covered a number of years later by Japanese musicians schooled in the style, are much more faithful to the original American versions. Further, the earliest covers of Beatles songs – the next wave in Japanese youth music after rockabilly – are a good deal more faithful to the originals in both instrumentation and feel than the early rock and roll covers. Bands like the Tokyo Beatles were not playing rockabilly versions of “Twist and Shout” in 1964, I would argue, because they were able to navigate the relatively small style shift between the two genres. Jazz and country bands switching to rock and roll or rockabilly had many more factors to consider – changes in instrumentation, sound aesthetic, time feel etc. – and were perhaps initially unable to determine which elements were considered essential by the music’s creators and which were not.

Heartbreak Hotel

To conclude this section, I will present two versions of “Heartbreak Hotel:” one that is quite faithful to the original lyrics, and another that is less so. An interesting feature of Japanese language cover versions is that multiple translations of any given song might exist; in fact it is uncommon to see the same lyrics used by two different recording artists. The two versions presented below suggest some of the choices that translators face.

“Heartbreak Hotel” was written by Mae Boren Axton and Tommy Durden and released by Elvis Presley in January 1956 and in March it was simultaneously number one on the U.S. pop, rhythm and blues, and country charts (Brown, 1997, 64; Cotton, 1985, 74). The instrumentation is minimal (vocals, electric guitar, piano, acoustic bass and drums), but the arrangement is even more spare with verses virtually performed *a capella*, and restrained instrumentation during the refrain. There is a feeling of empty space in the song which is reinforced by the instrumentation, the arrangement, the “slap back” echo effect on Presley’s voice, and the lyrics.

Hattori Raymond arranged and translated the song for Kosaka Kazuya and the Wagon Masters, at that time Japan’s most popular *uestaan* (from the English word “*western*,” and short for “country and western”) band, who released it in June of 1956. The first cover version of an Elvis song, it was a big hit – one of only a handful of cover versions mentioned in Kurata’s *Cultural History of Japanese Records* (Kurata, 1979, 256). Instrumentation on this recording is typical for a country and western song: electric guitar, acoustic bass, piano, acoustic and steel guitar.¹⁴ It lacks the feeling of empty space in the original, and the band, used to straight country, has trouble with the song’s sense of rhythm. Again, the song was a great commercial success, but in retrospect, perhaps something of an artistic failure: in a 1990 two-CD collection of Kosaka’s hand-picked favorites he chose to include a 1965 remake recorded with a very tight band over this much more historically important recording (Kosaka, 1990, 11).

Hattori seems to have put a premium on lyrical fidelity in his translations. His work is more consistently packed with words and phrases from the original songs than any other lyric translator in my postwar period sample. He often uses a technique whereby he replaces the repetitive chorus or bridge of a song with new lyric material, thereby giving himself more space to work with. He manages to incorporate something from the original in almost every line of his translation. The form here is one English verse, followed by four Japanese verses that more or less correspond to the four verses of the original song. The lyrics appear below as they are sung. Lyrics in italics are my translations of the Japanese sections of the song. I use boldface to indicate words or phrases that seem to be directly translated from words or phrases in the original song, which appear in parenthesis at the right margin for comparison.

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Well since my baby left me / I've found a new place to dwell
For it's down at the end of lonely street at / Heartbreak Hotel,
Heartbreak is so lonely, baby, / 'Cause I'm so lonely
Heartbreak is so lonely, I could die.

I, who have been thrown away, (since my baby left me)
when I remember, I want to cry - heartbreak hotel. (Heartbreak Hotel)
That long ago dream, Lonely, I hug it, I'll stay alone. ('cause I'm so lonely)

Torn by love, young people (broken-hearted lovers)
always crowd into - heartbreak hotel. (although it's always crowded)
Even so, you can get a room. I cried alone. (you still can find some room)

[guitar, piano break]

It's a lonely street everyone is lonely (it's down at the end of lonely street)
ragged and lonely - heartbreak hotel.
The hotel clerks, in black suits (desk clerks dress in black)
have tears welling in their eyes. (the bellhop's tears keep flowin')

When the time comes and the one who left (Now if your baby leaves you)
is recalled to your mind - heartbreak hotel.
Suffering and worrying, to live or to die; it's your choice. (You'll be so lonely you
could die)

Besides the seemingly hard and fast rule that a verse must be entirely in one language or the other, there is no set pattern on the order of Japanese and English lyrics in post-war covers. Otowa Takashi translated "Heartbreak Hotel" for a 1962 release by Hori Masayuki (Satou, 2004). In contrast to Hattori's version it is quite vague, expressing, as we have seen elsewhere, the mood of the song more than translating the lyrics. This song takes the form of two Japanese verses, followed by two English verses, an instrumental break, and a repeat of the second English verse.

torn by love, one who wants to cry (broken-hearted lovers;)
always overflowing - heartbreak hotel (always crowded? Bellhop's tears keep
flowing?)

I cry so much that I'll die alone

(You'll be so lonely you could die)

*torn by love, if you want to cry
you can cry too at heartbreak hotel*

(Now if your baby leaves you)

*won't you listen to my **lonely story***

([you've] got a tale to tell)

Well since my baby left me (etc.)

Although it's always crowded / You can still find some room
For broken-hearted lovers to cry there in their gloom.
And be so lonely, baby, and be so lonely
And be so lonely they could die.

The End of the Cover Version Era

The arrival of the Beatles in 1964 ushered in a shift from rockabilly (actually, by about 1960 in Japan the word referred to pop covers of songs by Paul Anka, Neil Sadaka, Ricky Nelson, Del Shannon and the like, and Japanese songs in the same style) to what was known in Japan as “*group sounds*” (sometimes shortened to “GS”). The cover versions from this period differ from those of the early post-war period in that they are by and large sung either completely in English, or completely in Japanese – perhaps indicating a growing weariness with the mixed language song. These bands modeled themselves after the “British invasion” and American surf bands, first covering that music, and then composing their own music in a similar style (Kurosawa, 1999, 122). The trend away from cover versions continued as the *group sounds* sound was replaced by singer/songwriter-based folk music in the early 1970s, at which time the cover record ceased to be a significant part of the popular music market.

Exactly why this happened is unclear. Perhaps, as was mentioned above, the public grew weary with English on the radio. The student riots of the late 1960s were part of a general though usually subdued anti-American sentiment, and, with the end of the occupation more than a decade behind them, there may have been an unconscious feeling that it was time to stop using

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the “colonizer’s tongue.” The adoption of Western music at the beginning of the modern era was inspired by the strength of the West. Eppstein relates a possibly apocryphal but nonetheless telling story from the early modern period; The leaders of the Satsuma district in southern Japan, on hearing music coming from the British warship that had just laid waste to part of their town in retaliation for the murder of a British officer, decided on the spot that they had to adopt the music of such a powerful force (Eppstein, 1944, 10). It seems to me that a similar thought process could have been at work after the second world war – that many Japanese might have wanted to be part of the bright music sung in an incomprehensible tongue coming out of radios that had only played war songs and European art music during the darkest parts of the war. By the mid-1960s, however, the country was getting back on its feet. The 1964 Tokyo Olympics is widely held in Japan as the point at which it turned a corner in its project of post-war reconstruction. There was a renaissance in many traditional arts, and a surge in interest in all things Japanese. The turning away from cover songs and the movement towards its own popular music may well have been another manifestation of this newfound pride.

A second, quite compatible reason is suggested by Ian Inglis in his paper on British covers of American songs. He credits the Beatles and other similar groups with ending the rein of the cover in Britain. “In the space of a little less than two years (of the appearance of the Beatles), the practice of popular music in the UK was transformed from a predictable and complacent mimicry of US music to a dynamic and creative focus for much of the world’s musical styles.... which challenged traditional models of production and consumption...” (Inlgis, 2005, 166). These same models of production and consumption were disrupted in Japan, as *group sounds* rock bands, and later singer/songwriters, began to successfully compose their own songs (or have them composed for them).

Conclusion

I have attempted to sketch a history of the development of the cover version in Japan; from the proto-covers of the late 1800s, and the first real covers in the early 1900s, through the pre-war

cover record era and the wartime gap, to the post-war “golden age” of covers. Focusing mainly on the lyrics I showed the way translation styles changed from one period to the next. In the end, it might be more accurate to say that the great majority of cover versions lyrically, are adaptations rather than translations. This fact, and the use of English in the post-war period seem to back up Greil Marcus’s contention, quoted first in the introduction, that in much popular music “words are sounds we can feel before they are statements to understand.” Yet I hope I have shown that examining the changing approaches to lyric translation, as I have done here, as opposed to simply examining lyrical content, can prove fruitful.

This paper has suggested many possible further areas of study. There are several aspects of the cover that could be looked at by researchers with a postcolonial bent: first, from the point of view of Japan as a pre-war colonizer, I noticed that the sources I used mentioned exceedingly few songs from non-Western sources, for example from Japan’s own colonies in Mainland China, Taiwan, and Korea. Second, as I allude to in the last section of the paper, a case could be made for a postcolonial connection in the rise and fall of the cover record in post-war Japan. A song like “Fujiyama Mama,” for example, hits on many aspects of postcolonialism; the orientaling/othering of Japan in general, and the sexualizing of the titular female in particular, and the insensitive use of atomic bomb imagery. All of this before even looking at the cover version, penned by an American serviceman, sung by a Japanese woman – the very object of the Oriental fantasy at the center of the song – and listened to and enjoyed by a Japanese audience, including people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki who suffered through the events he so blithely refers to.

The idea of music lag was insufficiently examined here, but could be strengthened by a more detailed look at specific examples. The phenomenon is not specific to Japan. The big band versions of “Be Bop A Lula” and “Great Balls of Fire” resemble the songs of some established American artists who tried to jump on the rock and roll bandwagon in the late 1950s. Jonathan Kamin, in his 1975 dissertation “Rhythm and Blues in White America; Rock and Roll as Acculturation and Perceptual Learning”, seems to suggest (to put it simply, in problematic language) that some early rock figures acted as interpreters of black music for White America by presenting a hybrid: black music performed with enough ‘white’ sensibility to make it acceptable

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(Kamin, 1975, 25, 205). More work could be done on looking at whether or not musicians might have worked through this same acculturation process even while they produced commercial music for an audience that was a few steps behind them. Another paper could be written detailing and accounting for the sorts of subtle and not so subtle translations the music goes through in these cover songs. I hint at it, but certainly a study of greater depth is called for.

More work could also be done to broaden the sample. Web resources on cover versions have increased considerably since I first began looking in 2002, but, while what I have found on the internet only corroborates my findings, the difficulty in verifying artists, release dates, labels and the like, makes it difficult to utilize this material academically.

Footnotes

- 1 In fact, evidence exists to show that fife and drum music was already being studied for military purposes from the dutch colony at Nagasaki in 1839, almost 30 years before western powers forced the country to open its borders (Eppstein, 1994, 11).
- 2 Despite Isawa's original intention, the melodies created by Mason and the other musicians were not based on a Japanese musical principles, but used major and minor pentatonic scales with the fourth and seventh degrees removed, known as "*yonan nuki*" (i.e. CDEGAC and CDEbGAbC) (ibid., 63). The scales "gradually began to take hold in the Japanese mind," and by the turn of the century were being used in popular compositions (Okada, 1991, 286). Songs are still being written using these scales, particularly in the genre of *enka*, which is as strong a national signifier Japan as country music is in America.
- 3 Mason thought that the pentatonic scale used in many of the Scottish melodies was similar to "the" (!) Japanese scale, and so found them particularly suitable for introducing Western music principles (May, 1959, 63).
- 4 The translated titles of Japanese works (here books and song titles) have only their initial letter (and proper names etc.) capitalized, following the conventions of the *Japan Style Sheet*, to identify them as such.
- 5 Other versions exist, including a love song called *Mugibatake, the barley field* (Shiiba, 1998, 48).
- 6 The Asakusa Opera is a now legendary theater that only existed for six years; from 1917 until the Great Tokyo Earthquake of 1923. It was an early venue for Western music performances, which, more Nashville than Vienna, consisted of translations of popular songs and short pieces lifted out of or inspired by music from Western opera – Bizet's *Carmen*, mentioned above, being a particularly popular source (Zakou, 2000). *Songs of Japan*, my source for early modern music contains four pieces "from" *Carmen*, but "composed by" popular music giant Nakayama Shimpei in 1918 (Shiiba, 1998, 268-271).

- 7 From Irving Berlin's "Blue Skies," not to be confused with the identically named 1928 hit based on "My Blue Heaven"
- 8 This song is notable, however, in that it contains entire verses sung in English. I came across only this one occurrence in the pre-war period, though the practice became commonplace after the war.
- 9 Atkins also notes that when Prime Minister Tojo Hideki was confronted with the fact that his beloved "The light of the firefly" was in fact of British origin, even he refused to ban it (Atkins, 2001, 152).
- 10 Detlev Schauwecker, in a 2003 paper entitled "Verbal Subversion and Satire in Japan, 1937-1945 as Documented by the Special High Police." shows that even in this period there were people in Japan who were willing to see what they could get away with.
- 11 As early as 1934 there was enough interest in the music, apparently, to warrant locally pressed records by artists like Vernon Dalhart, Jimmie Rodgers, Riley Puckett, and Elton Britt to name a few (Mitsui, 1998, 277).
- 12 This information was gleaned by comparing dates in the time lines that run through much of Ootake's *The century of rock volume 1: 1952-1962*.
- 13 The fact that those lyrics could be sung in English is indicative of how little attention was paid to the English lyrics in most of these cover songs. This strengthens my assertion that anything more than a short phrase was probably received as sound rather than word for the average listener.
- 14 The steel guitar remained a part of the sound of many rockabilly bands, reflecting both the *western* origins of most of the bands, and their unwillingness to set rockabilly apart from that genre (Kurosawa, 1999, 123).

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