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Music as an Instance of Postcoloniality: Rethinking the relationship between Music and Literature as a Point of Resistance

The Western tonal music has achieved a global hegemony in the past few centuries. The modern theory of Western music which foregrounds tonality with equal temperament and harmonious polyphony has a mere history of three centuries, but it has successfully spread all over the world acquired semblance of universality. In truth, theoretically speaking, it is a very specific system largely based on the theological perspectives of the West. The rules of the cadenza, which call for the resolution of the disorder and for the return to the tonic, is closely related to the Christian theology. This very specific musical system has spread and become dominant due to the imperialistic expansion of the Western political powers.

Curiously, the domination of the Western music has not only affected the musical scenes of the non-Western cultures, but to other cultural activities, including the literary. As the Western harmonics requires the stable pitch, it has prioritized integral harmonic overtones and marginalized non-integral ones. This has led to the strict distinction of musical tones from other tones (noises). Heterophonic music in the postcolonial cultural loci which normally combines human voices and musical accompaniments has been outlawed as the former contain a great deal of non-integral harmonic overtones. Instead, Western-style chanting in vocal representations with stable pitches has been made authoritative. Vocal music has become more and more ostracized in favor of (harmonic) instrumental music, expelling literary elements out of musicality.

This paper, mostly on the basis of the scrutiny into the process of Japanese acquisition of Western musical theories in modernity, attempts to demonstrate how it has distorted both musical and literary experiences of the Japanese culture and to explore the ways to restore musicality in its full sense in the "postcolonial" setting.