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Taiko in Brazil: Japanese Cultural Diaspora and Hybridization Through Percussion Music

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Author

Sybert, Stephanie N

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Library Prize Reflective Essay: Finding the Taiko in the Samba

If I am to be perfectly honest, I hate researching. One of the most arduous parts of the paper-writing process for me has always been the process of forcing myself to sit down and do the legwork, to sift through list upon list of potential sources engaging in all of the formulaic resource procedure ingrained in me by freshman research courses. Once I have all of the sources, once I know what I am arguing and have my framework weaving them together into a cohesive narrative has always been the easy and exciting part. Even though I know that the end result will ultimately be rewarding, I can never shake the feeling of tedium and dissatisfaction that comes with busywork. This has been my accepted *modus operandi* for quite some time. One project would change all of that.

My project on Japanese taiko in Brazil completely changed the way that I approach the research process. For the first time since beginning my academic career here at UCLA I felt I had been given an opportunity to explore a marriage of all of my passions: music as identity, anthropological underpinnings, Japanese culture (I have been an avid student of the language for about seven years), Brazilian culture (my mother is from Brazil), the percussion traditions of both cultures, and most intriguingly the controversy of cultures that emerge in between other cultures. Given free reign, I found the motivation and fulfillment to approach research in a completely different way; rather than a formulaic hunt for the right pieces to fill in the gaps in a somewhat pre-constructed argument, my research became an organic process of learning, finding links between different sources and leaping from idea to idea and author to author. Until, with some teasing, a narrative emerged.

It all started with a youtube recording of a samba-taiko performance from a group in São Paulo. Driving drum strokes inspired the keystrokes that searched UCLA's online database for

more recordings of samba-taiko fusion music, but to no avail. The relatively minimal discourse on Japanese music in Brazil within Ethnomusicology presented somewhat of an issue. I chose to see it as a challenge. Both my passion for the topic and the test of finding enough relevant research drove me to search through all of UCLA's library databases; I expected to find most of my print sources in the Music Library or College Library, but to my surprise the greatest wealth of information came from the well-hidden Arts Library in the form of an anthology of papers on diaspora and interculturalism in Asian performing arts. Having exhausted my physically accessible print sources, I used bibliographies from this anthology as a jumping-off point and began searching for authors cited using UCLA's online library catalog, the Ethnomusicology online archive, as well as other research databases using UCLA's proxy server. From there I found a dissertation specifically on my work that, serendipitously, featured a section dedicated to the very performance group I had found on Youtube before. I knew I was on the right track.

From there I continued to branch out using cited works and related authors, and consulted several others for help. The staff at the music library were indispensable in helping me to navigate the special collections; ultimately I ended up not being able to use these sources because it was too wide in scope for my already lengthy narrative, but it was an exciting learning process. My own Professor and de facto advisor on the project, Dr. Charlotte D'Evelyn, was instrumental in not only encouraging me to continue with my work in the face of depression and other personal issues, but greatly helped me in narrowing my sources down into a more cohesive narrative and providing feedback on organizational structure. She also suggested the interviews with my old percussion teachers to help inform my musical analysis of the performance, and gave guidelines on how to approach the musical analysis.

Since there is a small but emerging narrative on Japanese music in Brazil, there are not many scholarly print sources available, but there is a wealth of information online, which is logical given that the popular samba-taiko hybrid performance genre is a recent development and that most of its participants are primarily inhabitants of the “blogosphere,” so to speak. Regarding the historical and socio-cultural aspects of my work I chose to focus on ethnographical print sources, and for specific musical terminology and instrumentation consulted both the aforementioned dissertation as well as several primary sources—music blogs and online publications from actual taiko and samba performance groups, as well as personal communications with current professors, my past percussion teachers and other performers. For specific demographic data I also consulted online databases and news reports in both English and Portuguese, relying on my own Japanese and Portuguese language skills with the help of online translation tools. Which types of sources I use in the end aligned with their relevant topics.

This entire process has been one of passionate learning: learning about music and identity; learning how to navigate different methods and types of sources, and bring them together to create not only an argument, but a story; and, of learning how to research in a way that is fulfilling, meaningful, effective, and above all else, not in the least degree boring.

Taiko in Brazil:
Japanese Cultural Diaspora and Hybridization Through Percussion Music

Stephanie Sybert

Ethnomusicology 20C: Music of Asia

Professor Charlotte D'Evelyn

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“*Taiko*,” (literally, “big drum”), can refer to either an individual drum in the highly varied family of Japanese double-headed membranophones, or to the *Kumi-daiko* (“group taiko”) percussion performance ensemble consisting of these different taiko drums (Wong, 79). Performances are highly visual, visceral, and high-energy in dynamics, rhythm, and movement, with dramatic full-body choreography and highly stylized strokes and arm movements; physical fitness and discipline are just as key to performance as musical and rhythmic skill. Taiko ensemble drumming is a relatively recent development in Japanese musical culture, which has perhaps allowed it to be appropriated and developed independently in Japanese communities in both North and Latin America. This study and musical analysis will focus on Japanese cultural diaspora through taiko music in Brazil, specifically in São Paulo -- the largest of these diasporic Japanese communities. The first part of this work will focus on the historical, musical, and cultural development of taiko ensemble drumming, and the latter part will consist of a musical analysis of two Brazilian-Japanese taiko performances which highlight the fusion of percussion styles in the emerging Brazilian taiko hybrid genre. It will explore the development of a Brazilian taiko tradition, the hybridization of Brazilian and Japanese percussion instrumentation and styles culminated in taiko, and the changing function of this music as cultural identity.

Historical Background: Japanese Immigration to Brazil

The first Japanese immigrants came to Brazil in 1908, consisting mostly of farming families that fled the overcrowded and destitute rural Japan in hopes of finding stable work and building a better life (Lorenz, 4). The sweeping government reform and modernization instituted during the Meiji Restoration dismantled the old social structures of feudal Japan in favor of Western capitalist institutions, which displaced the massive (and largely helpless) rural

population (Hashi, “Japonês です”). Between the first wave of immigration in 1908 and the onset of World War II, about 190,000 total Japanese came to Brazil, settling mostly in the rural southern areas, including the states of Paraná and São Paulo (Lorenz, 4). Push and pull factors from both sides of the Pacific encouraged this mass immigration; Brazilian landowners believed that a more acquiescent workforce of Asian agricultural laborers could help to fill the vacuum left by the emancipated slaves after abolition in 1888, and by the European laborers that refused to work under substandard conditions (Ibid.).

The Japanese Meiji government also actively supported the immigration to other nations in Manchuria and the Americas, hoping to export the excess rural population as well as outsource food and wages from these new outposts (Ibid.). However, many Japanese soon balked at atrocious working conditions and terminated their contracts soon after arrival, to which the Japanese government responded with subsidies for *Nikkei* (Japanese immigrants and their descendants) to purchase their own farms (Lorenz, 5). Further subsidies helped with the development of both business and cultural organizations within the Japanese immigrant communities in Brazil, evolving into Japanese-language publications, schools, and eventual media broadcasts (Ibid.). These Nikkei-Brazilian communities developed an identity and thrived on the basis of a government-sponsored cultivation of Japanese culture.

Immigration was temporarily halted during World War II, but unlike in the United States there was no systematic confiscation of Japanese land or property and no relocation policies on the part of the Brazilian government. This allowed for the continued immigration and relatively uninterrupted growth of the Japanese community once the war ended (Olsen 1983, 52). A second period of resettlement from 1953 until 1973 brought 60,000 more Japanese to Brazil until the Japanese government ended its sponsored immigration program (Lorenz, 5). These immigrants

were for the most part well-educated, male, and intended to stay in Brazil indefinitely, and as such influenced the development of a prosperous, educated, upwardly-mobile, and politically-active community of Nikkei-Brazilians strongly informed by both Japanese and Brazilian culture over the latter half of the 20th century. Today after over a century of development there are over 1.5 million Japanese-Brazilians living in Brazil in what is the largest population of Japanese descendants outside of Japan (Ibid.). Of this population, the city of São Paulo alone boasts approximately 700,000 Nikkei citizens (IBGE Census), as well as a dedicated Japanese cultural *bairro* (a neighborhood-community) called Liberdade. However, this successful socio-economic integration does not necessitate socio-cultural integration. As will be discussed in a later section, the Japanese-Brazilian and Latin-Brazilian peoples have respectively disparate notions of what Nikkei cultural identity means in the context of the greater Brazilian society.

Discrepant Cultural Identities and Socio-Musical Philosophies

If there is one phrase that embodies the Japanese-Brazilian cultural conflict, it is the “Japanese in the samba,” a seemingly innocuous idiom for when “someone is playing badly;” however, as Shanna Lorenz explores in her dissertation of the same name, within the context of what “samba” symbolizes in Brazilian culture, the phrase illustrates the pervasive scope to which Japanese-Brazilians have been excluded and prevented from fully claiming the Brazilian half of their identity by non-Japanese Brazilians. In Portuguese, “samba” refers not just to the music itself but also the place or “circle within which samba music is played,” and these places further represent the community as a whole (Lorenz, 1). Elaborating on place, as Hosokawa discusses, samba is played in two distinct and ideologically-loaded places: in the “house” (*casa*) and “street” (*rua*):

...[T]he ‘house’ is a safe, ordered, and homogenous place in which the members are bonded by affection and governed by patriarchal authority, whereas the ‘street’ is dangerous, disordered and heterogenous place governed by the law and contract (Hosokawa, 63).

However, Hosokawa posits that the boundary between these two seemingly incompatible spheres is blurred as they converge in different instances of Brazilian life, causing at once both order and disorder. For example, during Carnaval where beneath a “facade” of the communal participation and equality in the festivities, class boundaries are still enforced by police security forces that protect the private Carnaval celebrations of the rich from the masses (Ibid.) In addition to classism other complex issues and paradoxes play into this national narrative, such as in racism or rather the purported lack thereof in the “mythology of Brazilian racial democracy” (Lorenz, 1-2). Racial democracy refers to the idea that all citizens are *mestiço* (mixed-race) and are thus equal. This not only proves to be a barrier to the development of an antiracist movement, it also tables? the discussion of Japanese-Brazilian belonging to Brazilian society (Ibid.).

If it is this dichotic relationship between *casa* and *rua*, between classes and between races, that defines samba —which in turn “continues to stand as an unequaled marker of *brasilidade*,” (Lorenz, 2) or Brazilian national identity —then in being denied a place in samba’s definition Japanese-Brazilians are excluded a place in Brazilian society itself, and thus are further blocked from entering or beginning a discourse on issues of race and class as it pertains to them. Considering the importance of music in constructing a Brazilian national identity (Ibid.), the implication that the “Japanese in the Samba” is bad or unmusical is denying Nikkei-Brazilians the agency to construct their self-identity within Brazilian society through samba.

Though historically Japanese-Brazilians have in fact participated in Carnaval, many of those who participated purposefully engaged in distinctly Japanese displays and costumes (Hosokawa, 63-5), and even this participation is largely cursory in developing a Brazilian

identity through samba. After a century of Japanese immigration, “people of Japanese descent in Brazil are not considered ‘Brazilian’ in popular discourse, and are regularly referred to as ‘Japanese’” (Lorenz, 5). Given the role of music in Brazilian identity, music has also become “central to Japanese-Brazilian ethnic self-definition” (Lorenz, 3). It makes sense that Nikkei citizens would fiercely maintain the Japanese cultural and musical traditions (including taiko) in isolation from Brazilian culture, having been denied a place in samba. It follows then, that if a hybrid music of taiko and samba is developing and emerging, that a defined place for Nikkei citizens within the accepted notions of *brasilidade*, Brazilian national identity is too emerging. The remainder of this paper will discuss the history and evolution of taiko as a musical form, the emergence of hybrid Japanese-Brazilian taiko, and a musical analysis of this hybrid music.

Taiko In Japan

The origins of Taiko stretch back to ancient Japan, perhaps thousands of years ago, where it was heavily embedded in ancient rituals and daily life. It primarily served as solo accompaniment to sacred Buddhist ritual, or as part of the small ensemble accompaniment to dance in seasonal and regional *matsuri* village festivals (Wong, 79). Purportedly, taiko also served significant martial use during feudal warring Japan in issuing commands, coordinating battalion movement, and intimidating the enemy, as it was one of the few instruments that was loud enough to be heard over distances (Taiko Resource). Mythical folklore also ascribed mystic powers to the taiko: in a military context in which drumming was used to empower soldiers and drive away entire invading armies, and in an agricultural context in which the taiko was used to call forth rain and scare away evil spirits or blight from crops (Yoon, 420). It is also speculated that taiko’s use to signal daily village activities (such as hunting and gathering) and sacred ritual

stretches back to as far as 4000 years ago, and that because this pivotal association of the drumbeat with the flow of daily life villagers believed the taiko to be inhabited by the gods (Taiko Resource). The exact origins and contexts of the taiko are somewhat unclear, and some scholars argue that the taiko's ancient and mythical narrative is largely promulgated by modern taiko musicians in order to invoke a sort of reverence or authority for the genre (Yoon, 420). Though its origins are clouded by speculation, it can be inferred that the taiko percussion tradition is ancient, to a degree.

Historically and in modern times, taiko most notably holds a pivotal role in summer *O-Bon* (or simply *bon*) festivals held to honor the spirits of the dead; a single *odaiko* (the largest of taiko, about 400kg (Taiko Skin¹)) provides a steady beat to the Buddhist *wasan* prayer-chants which accompany the *bon-odori* dance (Wong, 79). It is in this context especially that taiko was disseminated during the Japanese diaspora in the early 20th century, as the bon festival remains integral to Japanese communities outside of Japan (Ibid.). In modern Japan, as of the late 20th century, taikos of varying size and shape are still used as accompaniment in both Shinto and Buddhist shrines, bon and matsuri festivals, and in dramatic practices including gagaku, noh, and kabuki (Yoon, 420).

Modern kumi-daiko group drumming in its current iteration is actually a relatively recent phenomenon, created by former jazz drummer Daihachi Oguchi in 1950's Japan (Taiko Center). As a result of mass death and rapid urbanization after World War II, taiko performance withered following a decline in bon and matsuri festival performance and attendance (Yoon, 420). In 1951, Oguchi revived and transformed taiko "from a solo instrument used to accompany dance, drama, and prayer, to a lead instrument" (Wong, 79) by translating simple taiko folk rhythms into more complicated polyrhythmic arrangements involving multiple drums with different roles,

not unlike a modern jazz drum kit (Taiko Center). As one of the earliest composers of modern taiko ensemble music, Oguchi helped popularize taiko group drumming, first in Japan by sparking a sort of “taiko renaissance” during the 1960’s and 1970’s in which there was renewed interest in festivals and traditional Japanese culture (Ibid.).

Inspired, other composers began to write choreographed musical performances in the kumi-daiko format (Ibid.). Various taiko ensemble groups emerged and began to shape what taiko performance would be, such as Tokyo’s Suderoku Taiko group (founded 1959), which is credited with adding the idiosyncratic “combination of choreography, dancing, and quasi-martial movements with drumming” (Yoon, 421). Oguchi, among other composers, helped to spread kumi-daiko to the Americas as he traveled and influenced the foundation of North American taiko groups, such as San Francisco Taiko Dojo, which in turn further influenced the formation of groups in Brazil, Europe, and Japan (NYT). This globalization of taiko led to its re-contextualization and to what could be the first popular modernization and independent development of Japanese traditional music outside of Japan. As American taiko performer Deborah Wong notes from her experience, as taiko has modernized into an increasingly established kumi-daiko form and expanded throughout the globe, it has largely become secularized (Wong, 79), which has perhaps both facilitated, and/or resulted from, taiko’s globalization and development in societies outside of Japan.

Taiko Development in Brazil

As discussed in the section regarding musico-cultural identities, Japanese-Brazilian communities have faced much difficulty integrating into Brazilian culture. Turning inwards from this perceived hostility, initially Japanese immigrants transformed the salon, a typically Brazilian

social and performance space remnant of the Portuguese colonial aristocracy, into a safe harbor and Japanese community space in which to practice traditional Japanese ceremonies, festivals, and forms of music and art (Hosokawa, 66). As a result, for the greater part of its history the Nikkei community sought to maintain their Japanese identity through traditional music-making practices, which left little room for new hybrid forms of Japanese-Brazilian music to develop. Thus for most of the 20th century, even into the 1980s, taiko in Brazil was primarily preserved in its traditional accompanying roles as Bon-odori folk dances and bon festival practices, which took place inside parlors in what could be called a Japanese iteration of Brazilian Carnaval (Ibid.), and Japanese Classical (*noh*, *kabuki*, *gagaku*), semi-classical (*koten*), and folk (*minyo*) music genres (Olsen 1983, 54-55). It is important to note that performance of these latter genres was largely determined by social class (Ibid.), and the maintenance of these more refined classical traditional genres could possibly reflect an attempt to reinforce or express the emerging upper class status of the Japanese within Brazilian society, through Japanese musical means. In other words, as part of a narrative of Japanese traditional culture, taiko as percussion was primarily used in traditional religious practice and festivals and traditional music forms (Lorenz, 102).

As taiko modernized and globalized, it took some time to reach Brazil. Modern kumi-daiko was unheard of in Brazil until the 1980s when groups such as Tanguê Setsuo, Brazil's oldest group (Ibid.), and Midare-Daiko emerged (Olsen 1982, 116). These early groups were somewhat slow in their development as they "...trained without the benefit of a master teacher, and... lacked the energy that the Japanese groups brought to the art form" (Lorenz, 102). Throughout the 80s and early 90s Brazilian kumi-daiko groups, and on occasion the world-renowned Japanese group Kodo, toured throughout Brazil, but without much publicity or popular

momentum (Ibid.; Olsen 1982, 116). Nonetheless, kumi-daiko did make an impact upon those whom it did reach. Taiko appealed to older generations of Nikkei as a distinctly Japanese activity for their children to participate in, and to the younger generations of Nikkei with its stylized and high-energy performances as seen on TV broadcasts of professional group shows through the late 1990's (Ibid.; Ibid.). Kumi-daiko provided a more exciting outlet for later generations of Brazilian Nikkei to continue participating in Japanese culture.

One such young Nikkei, Setsuo Kinoshita, was so inspired by taiko that in 1995 he left to better study it in Japan (Lorenz 103-4). A few years later he returned to Brazil with a Japanese kumi-daiko group in tow, and produced long and hugely popular tours that finally generated mass publicity and enthusiasm for taiko in and out of the Nikkei community. Although these tours did not persist due to tensions between the Japanese taiko group and Kinoshita, they ultimately helped to establish him as São Paulo's and Brazil's very first Nikkei taiko professor in 1999 (Ibid.) He began teaching both taiko in Brazil and samba in Japan respectively, following an ideology of using music to "[heal] the traumas of exclusion...and internalized racism that his students contend with," and helping his students to "become comfortable with both sides of their identity" (Lorenz, 111-112). In 2003, he and his students founded Wadaiko Sho (literal approximation: "living through the art of Japanese drums"), which has since grown exponentially in fame, popularity, and prestige as they toured and participated in competitions and cultural celebrations throughout Brazil and Japan, culminating in a national award-winning career of over 250 performances of mixed Brazilian style taiko as of today (Wadaiko).

Wadaiko Sho's success sparked a lasting taiko craze among young people throughout Brazil, which helped to open kumi-daiko practice to those outside the Nikkei community. Today over 150 different groups of both Japanese and non-Japanese taiko players are scattered

throughout Brazil, many of which have a majority of non-Japanese students (Nippo Brasil). For non-Japanese Brazilians, taiko immediately appeals to the samba drumming traditions and sensibilities they have grown up with, and opens a more accessible venue for them to experience Japanese culture. For young Nikkei today, now fourth and fifth generation descendants, taiko provides a more modern and exciting way to embrace their heritage through cultural activities that, rather than isolating them from the non-Japanese community as past traditional practices might have, also connects them to it (Ibid.).

In this way, the modern Brazilian taiko group is a newly forged social space for young Japanese and non-Japanese Brazilians to better understand each other, share life experiences through music, and ultimately unify under a shared culture. In addition to a hybrid student body, through his compositions for Wadaiko Sho, Kinoshita is creating a hybridized samba-taiko percussion style by incorporating elements of both (as will be discussed further in the section on musical analysis). As Lorenz postulates:

If, according to popular philosophy, to be Brazilian is to be percussive, the huge boom in taiko practice in the last few years may be as much about drumming into existence Nikkei Brazilian selves as it is an exploration of Japanese heritage. (Lorenz, 105).

After over a century of cultural disconnect, it is through a shared tradition of percussion that it appears a truly Japanese-Brazilian cultural rapport is emerging.

Musical Analysis: Hybrid Kumidaiko and Samba Batucada

The following section will outline how this new Brazilian taiko music is bridging the gap between Japanese and Brazilian percussion styles, and subsequently Nikkei and Brazilian social identities, in more concrete musical terms. It will focus on the music of Setsuo Kinoshita and Wadaiko Sho, whom we have previously discussed in social contexts. Specifically, we will look

at the fusing of Japanese and Brazilian percussion styles in two original pieces, “Taiko de Samba” and an untitled joint performance with Brazilian samba percussion group Meninos do Morumbi. (Accessible online recordings of these performances are listed in the works cited section).

“Taiko de Samba” is a prime example of the tensions and boundaries between samba and taiko that Kinoshita is pushing against. Though Kinoshita believes that his Brazilian students help to create distinctly Brazilian taiko by bringing “Brazilian kinesthetic accents to their playing,” he chose to explicitly blend Carnival-style samba (*samba batucada*) and taiko percussion by introducing samba rhythms to his compositions (Lorenz, 130). Samba batucada is the large-group style of samba that developed in the south of Brazil, specifically Rio de Janeiro, which is typically performed in the annual Carnival parades and festivities (Tara Browner, personal interview, 13 February 2014). A *bateria* is the percussion section of an *escola de samba* (samba school), as opposed to the section of dancers, and typically is large in size. “Samba de Taiko” specifically is a short and to-the-point iteration of samba through taiko, in which Kinoshita effectively translates what is essentially a samba batucada musical form into an arrangement for a smaller ensemble of five players using mostly taiko drums. As Lorenz has analyzed, Kinoshita splits up the various *bateria* parts and translates them to the different taiko drums, creating a new sound that is distinctly Brazilian-Japanese:

Incorporating samba techniques into his taiko practice, while adding taiko techniques to samba rhythms, Kinoshita achieves a creative sound he thinks of as metaphorically “planting the flag” for Brazilian Nikkei. (Lorenz, 130-131)

It is important to note that this piece was composed in protest of discriminatory practices Kinoshita was faced with at the São Paulo samba school (Ibid.), meaning that this piece doubly reinforces Nikkei *Brasilidade* (Brazilian identity) through percussion by serving as proof that

Nikkei can not only play samba style, but innovate it on their own terms. “Taiko de Samba” is an example of this new hybrid genre “that aims not at blind imitation of Brazilian samba practice but at a felicitous union of playing styles,” (Lorenz, 136). It would appear that the proverbially unmusical “Japanese in the samba” is nowhere to be found in this original and high-energy piece.

We will now follow an in-depth analysis of the specific musical elements drawn from each percussion tradition in another Brazilian taiko performance. This musical analysis will focus on an untitled collaborative performance between the Wadaiko Sho kumidaiko group and the Meninos de Morumbi band. Overall the piece is primarily a samba, using samba batucada rhythms, playing techniques, call-and-response structure, and dance movements. Japanese elements such as the instrumentation, kumidaiko rhythms, stylized movements and vocalizations, and energized playing style are also key to this performance. Any uncited information regarding primarily samba or taiko is drawn from my personal playing experience in these respective genres. More specific information regarding rhythms was solicited from my teachers Melody Takata (director of Gen Taiko, of Genyu Arts, San Francisco) regarding taiko, and Mike Atesalp (an Afro-Brazilian samba educator and performer, of San Diego) regarding samba.

Performance Context:

Here Wadaiko Sho stars in a collaborative performance with local samba batucada group Meninos do Morumbi, which is one of several government-sponsored performances and workshops the groups have created (Fundação Japão São Paulo.) Meninos do Morumbi translates to “The Boys/Kids from Morumbi,” Morumbi being a São Paulo district where extravagantly wealthy neighborhoods of high-rises physically clash with poverty-stricken *favela* slums which

embodies the extreme disparity and conflict between rich and poor in Brazil. The Meninos do Morumbi samba school was established in 1996 and caters to over 4000 mostly poor youths in the greater São Paulo area (Pimenta). It is specifically dedicated to helping the troubled youth in this area stay off the streets, stay away from drugs, and stay out of criminal activities, by providing them with a creative outlet through music education and samba performance (Ibid.).

Like the kumidaiko group Wadaiko Sho, this samba school is dedicated to enriching its youth community through cultural music. This collaboration can be viewed as an attempt to unite Nikkei and non-Nikkei Brazilians under one youth culture through percussion, or possibly as evidence of an increasingly integrated community through music. In this performance, a bateria of well over 60 drummers players in various sections of samba instruments back a small but loud section of six taiko players at the forefront of the stage. This performance demonstrates not only an abstract synthesis of Japanese and Brazilian musical styles but also a physical uniting of Nikkei and Brazilian people.

Rhythmic Framework:

As rhythm is the primary function in percussion, we will first look at the distinct rhythmic traditions that combine in this performance. In kumidaiko, rhythms are not notated but are taught orally through *kuchi-shoga* (or *kuchi-showa*, lit. “mouth song”), which are onomatopoeic syllables that correspond to different rhythmic values (Taiko Resource, “Learning Taiko”). The overarching rhythmic structure of most taiko pieces is in duple meter, but they also contain repeating and interlocking polyrhythmic patterns apportioned between the different percussion sections, and swing feel on the eighth-notes or upbeats in each pattern, features which are perhaps derivative of taiko’s jazz drumming roots, which further shares its African drumming roots with Brazilian batucada. In other words, both taiko and samba share African polyrhythmic elements (Oxfam). According to Melody Takata, the only distinctly recognizable Japanese rhythm used is the basic *Uma* (horse) rhythm, which emulates a galloping horse, which is played by the small shime daiko leader drum in the beginning taiko-centric section of the performance at timestamp 0:23’ (personal communication, 10 December 2013; “Meninos do Morumbi e Wadaiko Sho”). Uma Rhythm is a duple rhythm specific to shime daiko, and is a repeated “te-ke

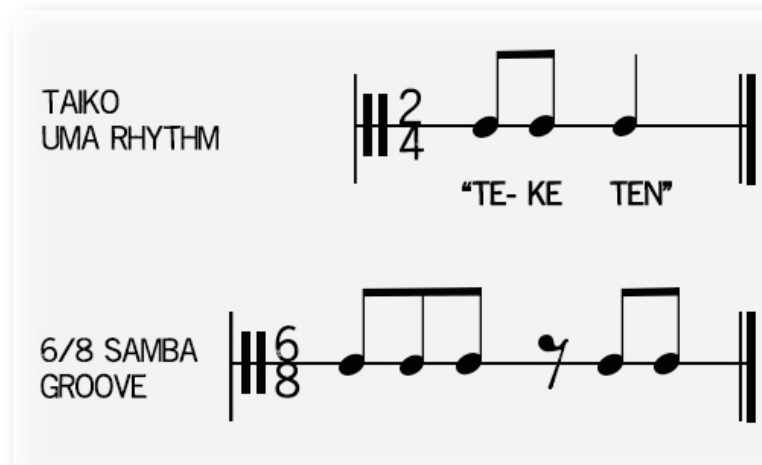


Fig. 1 - Rhythms in Meninos do Morumbi and Wadaiko Sho

ten,” te-ke being two eighth note hits to the center of the shime daiko, ten being one quarter note

(Ibid; “Learning Taiko”). The rhythm is played with a very slight swing feel to it so that the “te” eighth note is held slightly longer, and the “ke” eighth note is played closer to the “ten” quarter.

Other than this, all other discernable rhythms involved are not distinctly taiko rhythms (Personal communication, 10 December 2013), but are, according to Mike Atesalp, typical Brazilian samba batucada rhythms which over time developed from African polyrhythms (Personal communication, 11 December 2013). In this case the main rhythm of the groove is a 6/8 pattern of triplets in duple meter feel, with a rest on the 4th eighth note. The 6/8 groove can most distinctly be heard in the solo snare part at 0:14’, 1:06’, in the main groove section for the whole ensemble at 2:06’, and other groove sections throughout the recording. This rhythm is typical of samba styles from Rio (Mocidade School) and Bahia (samba reggae) (Ibid.). Though the rhythmic structures used in this performance are primarily Brazilian, there is still an evident attempt at fusing both taiko and samba rhythms.

Since percussion dominates both the kumidaiko and samba batucada ensemble sections here, rhythmic melodies are the dominant function in this performance. As the rhythmic elements used from both traditions involve polyrhythmic patterns divided between differently-voiced sections of drums, let us call the texture of this piece polyrhythmic polyphony. The group as a whole is stratified not unlike a large drum kit, by both the sonority of each drum and the layered rhythmic melodies they play: bass drums (*okedo* and *surdo*) which play the duple meter framework for the piece, medium pitched drums (*odaiko* and *timbão*) which play the main 6/8 polyrhythmic groove, and higher pitched drums playing both rhythmic fills (*tamborim*) and leader roles which play the calls (*shime daiko*, *caixa* snare, and *repinique*). Next is an introduction to these various drums.

Instrumentation and Instrument Roles:

The kumidaiko section of the group consists of six Nikkei members of Wadaiko Sho, on the following double-headed drums. (Reference Sources: Fubuki Daiko; Taiko Project; Taiko Skin¹)

Shime daiko is the smallest and highest-pitched drum in the taiko ensemble, and also the most important. It is named after the Japanese verb for “to tighten,” after the taut ropes which are woven between its two skin drumheads and tightened to tune the instrument. It is played with two cylindrical wooden *bachi* drumsticks, which results in sharper-sounding drum hits, but uses *bachi* made from lighter *hinoki* wood, allowing the shime daiko to play faster more complex rhythms. Because of its rhythmic capabilities and high pitch which cuts through the rest of the drum sounds, it is the leading drum which in taiko keeps time with *ji* backbeats. In this performance Setsuo Kinoshita uses the shime daiko to play the lead “Uma” rhythm, the Brazilian 6/8 groove, and occasionally the Brazilian *caixa* snare patterns during groove sections. However, “because the shime cannot play exactly like the snare with some of the fast patterns it is playing a simplified version of the pattern,” (Melody Takata, personal communication, 10 December 2013). In the latter half of the performance after the drum kit enters, another shime daiko enters, but both play rapid *ji* supporting backbeats rather than lead rhythms. Overall as a lead instrument, in playing both Japanese and Brazilian rhythms the shime daiko “reinforces universal orchestration ideas” (Mike Atesalp, personal communication, 11 December 2013).

Nagadou Daiko belongs to the family of middle-voiced taiko which are made of thick cow skins stretched over and tacked to large hollowed out tree trunks and played with two standard size *bachi*. In the kumidaiko ensemble it makes up the largest section of drums which play the majority of rhythmic melodies. In this performance there is one nagadou daiko which plays samba rhythmic fills and response hits using traditional taiko technique. Even though it is

not technically the big odaiko (which range from 3-6 feet in diameter), it can be referred to as the odaiko since it is the largest drum of this group.

Okedo are large deep-voiced taiko of varying sizes, named for the barrels they are constructed from. Similar to the shime daiko it uses tension from an outside network of ropes to keep its drumheads in place, which consequently means the drum can be tuned to different notes by adjusting the ropes. Okedo are unique in that with multiple drums they can function like tomtoms on a drum kit because of their variable tuning, and in that they are relatively lightweight and portable, allowing for mobile playing style (not unlike the Brazilian *surdo* bass drum equivalent). In fact, in this case the three okedo are imitating the surdo bass drum. All three okedo play the rhythmic hits in response to the leader drum “call” rhythms, and also reinforce the duple meter framework of the piece. The two larger okedo are played with *batucada surdo* technique which uses a large mallet in one hand to play the downbeats, and uses the other hand to mute or dampen the sound on the offbeats. The one smaller okedo is played using only one *bachi*, and follows in imitating the surdo with hand-muting and duple meter. The instruments in the bateria fall into similar high, medium, and low voicing categories which highly correspond to the voicings and instrument roles of the taiko drums. The surprisingly similar percussion roles between the two ensembles have likely facilitated the development of the Brazilian taiko fusion genre. Refer to figure 2 for instrument diagrams.

Repinique is a small but elongated double-headed metal drum between roughly eight to twelve inches in diameter, and has a cutting, high-pitched, somewhat metallic resonance. It is usually supported by a strap around the body or played on a stand, and one drumhead is played with a long, thin stick and sometimes also the other hand. It is In samba it is typically the leading instrument which plays complex *chamada* call rhythms in call-and-response sections and to

signal section changes or the end of the samba piece. In this performance the repinique takes a backseat role to let the shime daiko lead, and instead joins the nagadou daiko and other middle voices in emphasizing the response drum hits and patterns from the call-and-response sections. It should also be noted that the repinique in front is being played with two sticks, rather than one, in a fashion that uses the highly stylized arm and body movements of taiko.

The *caixa* is an especially flat snare drum which shares the same high-pitched leader role with the repinique, though usually in samba only one player of any of these instruments leads at any given time. In this performance one member of Wadaiko Sho switches between playing the repinique and the caixa, but does not play either of them as leading instruments. Rather the caixa is used to play and reinforce the 6/8 groove, leaving the lead rhythmic melodies to the shime daiko and the drum kit.

The drum kit is essential to both kumidaiko and samba batucada groups, in that it is a summation of all the other drum parts. In samba, when included, it serves as the leader of the bateria. It appears to be a latin style drum kit with slightly different ornamentation than the standard kit. In samba music the drum kit is sometimes made up of repinique, caixa, and surdo instead of toms, snare, and bass. At around 1:48' in the recording, Kinoshita turns around and faces the drum kit player as a signal to come in, at which point the drum kit takes over the lead drum role with what could either be high-pitched tom-toms or another repinique within the drum kit. The drum kit leads in the bateria section at which point the entire percussion ensemble is playing together for the first time. Throughout the rest of the recording, the drum kit plays the calls on its higher pitched drums and uses other effects such as the bass drum and cymbals for dramatic emphasis.

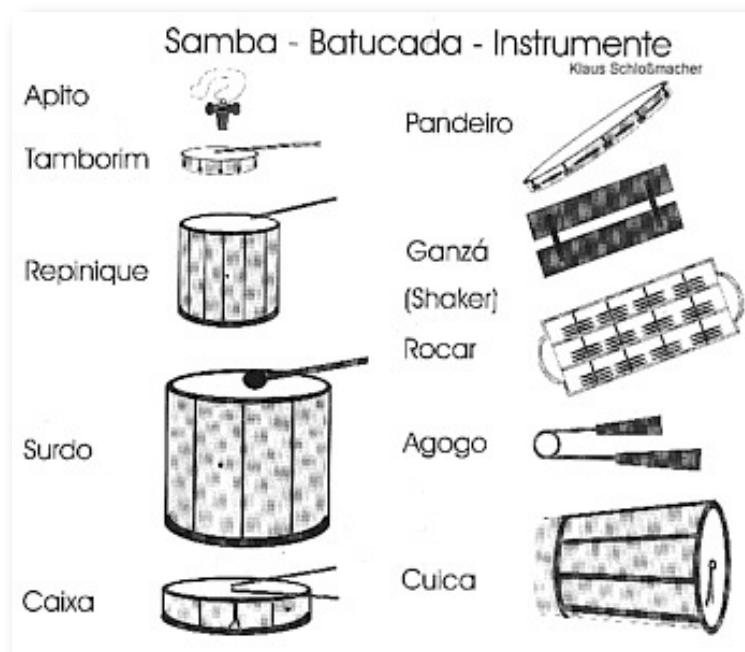


Fig. 2 - Some basic batucada bateria instruments (Schlossmacher, Batu'cava)

The *tamborim* is a small but very loud handheld frame drum that is played with a special drumstick that splits into several smaller sticks at the end for a louder and more resonant sound. It has a similar high-pitched sharp resonance to the other high-voiced instruments, but with a flatter smack-like sound. The hand holding the drum mutes and changes the tonality of the drum by pressing the fingers to the underside, and by flipping the drum while the other hand strikes upward to get different rhythmic emphasis. In traditional samba batucada and in this performance the large *tamborim* section functions as filler for the main chorus of upper-middle range of rhythmic voices, and plays part of the polyrhythmic interlocking parts such as the 6/8 groove in unison.

Also in the middle range of voices is the *timbão*, which is a long-bodied Brazilian conga-type drum, but with a sharper more metallic resonance to match the sound of the bateria. It plays complex polyrhythmic two-hand patterns which use muting, slaps, and different types of hits to get a variety of sounds. It is typically strapped to the body so that the player can march with it (as

in Carnival parades). In this performance the large timbão section serves to round out the middle-voiced percussion chorus section by playing polyrhythmic parts of the groove and the response hits.

Finally, the *surdo* bass drum, which comes in a variety of sizes and corresponding pitches, is the rhythmic center of the bateria. Using the aforementioned hand-muting techniques and large mallets, it plays the duple meter bass pattern that holds together the entire bateria percussion group. The surdo sets the tempo and serves as the heartbeat rhythm for the whole ensemble, especially during the groove. Unless the bateria is very small, most groups will have at least two to three surdos tuned to different pitches which play interlocking patterns with muting to create a melodic bassline, not unlike the bassline in a western marching band drumline. Surdos are also strapped to the body for marching, but can be quite heavy depending on the size and materials they are made of. In this performance there appear to be at least five or six surdos spread out along the stage, which play both the melodic duple-meter heartbeat bassline, but also the response hits in the call-and-response sections.

Structure:

The overall structure of this piece follows cyclical samba structure, and the growth throughout is a function of adding more layers of percussion and volume, and more complex rhythmic lines/grooves with each section change. The piece follows the typical samba batucada structure: call and response, to groove layering, to syncopated breaks (Mike Atesalp, personal communication, 11 December 2013). From this overarching format the two most prominent repeating sections are: the call and response sections, where the leader (shime daiko, ripinique in the drum kit) calls and the group responds with identical rhythm. The calls are elaborated

rhythms from the leader instrument, and the responses are unison rhythmic hits from the group. Call and response comes from African traditions (Ibid.); the groove sections, in which the entire group plays the main rhythmic groove of the piece (in this case the 6/8 pattern) together, with stratified layers of rhythm (bass, with interlocking polyrhythms in the other voices).

Each of these section changes from the call and response to the groove is marked by a longer call played by the solo lead instrument after a series of call and responses. At the end of the long call the surdos play the pickup into the groove section where the entire group joins in. This cycle of sections repeats over and over throughout the piece, and only ends based on cues from the leader instrument, not included in this recording, but consisting of a final long call into a final unison response section. The cycle of call and response, groove, can continue indefinitely, as is characteristic of samba songs played for hours on end during a Carnival parade. Overall the calls in this performance are led by the rhythmically leading shime daiko during the first half, and by the samba drum kit from 1:48' onward.

Overall, taiko and samba genres have surprisingly similar instrumentation and rhythmic instrument roles which facilitate the creation of Brazilian taiko fusion.

Other Presentational Elements:

Another key feature shared by samba and taiko traditions is the importance of movement, physicality, and visual aesthetics in the group of players as a unit.

Taiko is distinct in that choreography is a key part of the performance, and that its choreography makes use of the whole body in every note, rhythm, and pattern played. Playing taiko well is just as contingent on good posture, strength, grace, and kinesthetic awareness as it is on understanding musical rhythms. Good taiko playing starts in the feet, legs, and core in

building a strong posture with a wide stance in order to support the large, stylized, fluid arm movements which start in the shoulders and use the whole arm (Taiko Skin²). In the words of a taiko performer and blogger:

Taiko needs the whole body, particularly the legs and core, to maximize energy and regulate sound quality. Good posture, therefore, is essential. You can't get away with any slouching without sacrificing the quality of your sound and movements. Play with your body and you'll play big and look big (Ibid.).

Disciplined movement is as essential to the kumidaiko sound as the drums or rhythms, and choreography is highly codified in that certain movements must accompany certain drumstrokes.

Compare to typical samba-playing posture, in which the goal is to be as relaxed as possible with no tension in the hands whatsoever, making as small arm, hand, and wrist movements as possible so as to play difficult and fast rhythms with ease for long periods of time without injuring oneself. The typical movement for samba players is the relaxed semicircular side-to-side movement, rotating around their instrument if applicable, which stems from side-to-side movements in African dance (Mike Atesalp, personal communication, 11 December 2013). The unison side-to-side movement helps to reinforce the overall duple meter and ensure that all the drummers are playing in time, and to also to establish a fluid and repetitive physical rhythm for the played instrumental rhythms to lock into. Each player is free to move and dance within the side-to-side groove provided they can still play in-time with the rest of the group.

Overall, samba relies on all of its players settling into a relaxed groove, whereas traditional kumidaiko is reliant on exact precision in movement and sound from its players as a unit. Given that Japanese society is known for its reliance on precision, solidarity through uniformity, and highly codified social culture, and that Brazilian society is known for its relaxed, communal, and somewhat lawless social culture, perhaps this difference in philosophies of

performance movement reflects the different social contexts in which each discipline began. So it follows that given a new social context, in this case a Japanese-Brazilian one, new aesthetics of movement might emerge. This appears to be the case for this performance in which new dance movements that are neither taiko nor samba movements (personal communications, 10 and 11 December, 2013) are performed by the Japanese-Brazilian members of Wadaiko Sho.

In this performance, the Meninos do Morumbi group follows typical side-to-side samba dance movements, but the Wadaiko Sho members take these side to side movements and make them bigger and more stylized. At 1:07' when the groove kicks in, the taiko players begin hopping from side-to-side on their feet while still in the wider taiko-playing stance, creating a new kind of hybrid movement with a new, intense, and infectious energy. The tamborim players in the very back of the stage jump around in a way that is imitative of the taiko players during this movement section, with more energy and visually bigger movements than they perform for the rest of the performance. The most obvious and boldest new movement happens at 2:46' when the full-ensemble groove kicks in, and the taiko players transform the wide-stance side to side movement into an even larger side-to-side high kick, which again appears to build more energy in the whole ensemble. It is a movement that is neither taiko nor samba, according to both Ms. Takata and Mr. Atesalp, but rather a mix of both which incorporates samba's free and syncopated side-to-side movements around the drums and taiko's big and flashy full-body movements into a new hybrid aesthetic of choreography. Though it is unclear whether this act is a conscious construction of culture or not, this dance is in itself an assertion of the six taiko players within a much larger group, an assertion from the Nikkei minority to the Brazilian majority, that they are here, they are loud, that they are Brazilian and Japanese. It is an affirmation of hybrid identity through hybrid movement.

A final point to consider; changes in movement not only affect the visual presentation, but also affect subtle changes in the actual rhythms and how they are played. Coming back to Lorenz a final time, we see in her discussion on the relationship between rhythm and kinesthetics that even “microscopic difference in the timing and intensity of rhythm are an important element of individual and group style” (Lorenz, 137). In these percussion genres where rhythm is so essential —kumidaiko, samba, and now samba taiko— even subtle changes in rhythm essentially result in the construction of new rhythmic identities. Lorenz posits that “body movement undoubtedly influences the ways that rhythmic accent is incorporated into carnival samba,” and that changes in movement styles or kinesthetic accents greatly influence the actual sounds produced, with unique results (Lorenz, 138). Thus, by engaging in new hybrid styles of movement, Wadaiko Sho’s performers are not only creating a new identity-affirming culture of movement, but on a deeper and more subtle rhythmic level, a new hybrid culture of sound.

Conclusion:

In light of the striking similarities in the sonority and the rhythmic roles of the various drum types, the prevalence of polyrhythms, and certain presentation techniques, in taiko and samba, it is clear that the two genres blend very well. They are both entertaining, visually stimulating, rhythmically complex, and highly communal percussion music forms, with respectively huge sounds. Samba and taiko are an odd couple of sorts —a surprisingly good match made over distances of time, space, and extreme cultural differences, that against all odds are finally coming together. As especially evidenced in this performance, the Brazilian taiko stage is not only a proving ground for Nikkei players’ Brazilian national identity through samba

music on their own taiko-centric terms, it is a space for innovation, collaboration, and the realization of a common socio-musical narrative between Japanese and non-Japanese Brazilians.

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PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS:

Email communication with Mike Atesalp, 10 December 2013. Consulted for Afro-Brazilian samba expertise.

Mike is an accomplished instructor and performer of samba percussion, with an emphasis on Samba Batucada (Afro-Brazilian samba). He is a clinician and guest artist throughout the San Diego area and has worked with many groups including the SDSU Aztecs drumline and the Canyon Crest Academy Samba Corvo drumline, which he helped to found. I played and performed with Samba Corvo from 2010 to 2011, and learned samba batucada and samba reggae styles.

Email communication with Melody Takata, 9 December 2013. Consulted for taiko expertise.

Melody is the founder of the Genryu Arts, a Japanese arts and culture foundation in San Francisco, and director of its taiko group Gen Taiko. I attended and played in her taiko

workshops at the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California in San Francisco over the summer, 2013.

Tara Browner, personal interview, 13 February 2014.

Dr. Tara Browner is a professor of Ethnomusicology at UCLA specializing in Native North American music & dance, with extensive experience playing with Brazilian percussion groups in various styles.

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<http://www.taiko.com.br/2014/videos/>

*Please note that any Portuguese Language sources were either read and interpreted by myself,
or by Google Translate’s free service where my own Portuguese skills were insufficient.*