

English Summary

The Suzuki Method and its Genesis. A Case Study of a Transculturation Process in Music Education

1. Research Goals and Methods

This thesis investigates the educational concept of the so-called Suzuki Method [*suzuki mesōdo*: スズキ・メソード], which was developed by the Japanese violinist and violin teacher Shinichi Suzuki (1898–1998) since the 1930s. The purpose of this endeavour is a retrospective exposure of the Suzuki Method taking into account the original sources and putting them into context. In doing so, two partial aspects are focused: a) a reconstruction of the original conception and b) an analysis of its further development and the international transfer as a transculturation process. Both aspects are to be treated as comprehensively as possible with an historical-critical approach (chapter 1.3).

Epistemologically, this study is in the field of comparative music education, which according to Bernd Clausen (2009) puts a fundamental focus on the continuous reflection of cultural contexts regarding the research object. A first and fundamental step is the continuous reflection on my own position as researcher and interpreter. Along with this goes the awareness of problems in translating Japanese terms into the German language as both Japanese and German are already culturally connotated (chapter 1.5, 1.5.1). Furthermore, an analysis was undertaken of all available texts as well as audio and video files in the context of Suzuki method. Among these are in particular the works of Shinichi Suzuki, the secondary literature about his persona and the Suzuki Method, the publications of the Talent Education Research Institute (Suzuki Association in Japan), brochures on the Suzuki teacher training, the music recordings of Shinichi Suzuki, and the radio and television contributions on the Suzuki Method in German, English and Japanese. In addition, a specifically designed qualitative interview study was conducted by the author with authorized Suzuki teachers in Japan and Germany who were interviewed comparatively with the goal to explore the historical circumstances through reports and to unlock their practical and personal approach to this method (chapter 1.6).

2. Reception of the Suzuki Method

Up until today, the Suzuki Method has gained a firm foothold on all five continents. Nevertheless, the reactions to the method are very contrary. On the one hand, it is considered a drill method that makes children compliant and

well-trained, and its allegedly robot-like playing is criticized. On the other hand, however, it is seen as a particularly child-friendly method which is said to apply progressive educational approaches, offering a cosmopolitan component that joins people from different cultures and nations. Moreover, a striking phenomenon for its reception in German-speaking countries is the emphasis on its alleged pure Japanese character. In this context, it is argued that the method was influenced largely by Zen Buddhism (chapter 1.4.1). However, this assertion could not be proven anywhere in my research.

Instead, it became clear that Suzuki's ideas were influenced by numerous non-Japanese stimuli and trends which shaped the country's political, cultural, and social changes alongside Japan's modernization during the Meiji period. The alleged authentic 'Japaneseness' (see Mehl 2009), particularly highlighted by the label "Zen", complicates not only the analysis of the Suzuki Method considering its practical-educational aspects, but also increases the danger to adopt the method only on the monolithic understanding of 'the Japanese'. This is reinforced by the fact that 'Japaneseness' is connoted positively in many cases. However, this approach also results in constituting specific boundaries of an alleged obscure culture and its supposedly uniform character – a fact which needs to be questioned considering Edward Said's concept of Orientalism (chapter 1.4.3). Interestingly, this emphasis of the Japanese is not only adapted by non-Japanese recipients but also by Japanese Suzuki practitioners who place a nationalistic value on the Suzuki Method.

With this emphasis on the supposed authentic Japanese character, an interesting phenomenon regarding the global distribution of the concept becomes apparent: After the Suzuki Method had left its Japanese habitat at the end of the 1950s, it developed much better internationally than in Japan, its country of origin. Regarding its transfer to Germany, it meanwhile shows numerous differences to its original conception. A crucial difference was identified in my interview study with both German and Japanese Suzuki teachers who work in the field of instrumental teaching: The core of the Japanese practice is a tone-concept, called *oto* [音] in Japanese, which means that the quality of the tone is equated exactly with the quality of the personal character. This principle takes shape to the effect that the personality of the performer and his tone should be influenced in mutual dependence during the improvement process. This concept of *oto*, however, could only be found among the Japanese Suzuki teachers (chapter 1.1).

3. Reviewing Shinichi Suzuki's Written Sources

Apart from the problematic fact that the simplified label 'Japanese' tends to obscure the essence of the Suzuki Method, a significant discomfort became apparent in studying Suzuki's written sources. Throughout his long life, he wrote at least 18 monographs, four anthologies and more than 70 articles (see table 1: Tabelle 1). Four of the monographs (1946, 1958, 1966, 1969/2013) were translated into English. His most famous work *Ai ni ikiru* [愛に生きる] (1966) (Eng.: *Nurtured by Love* 1969, 1983, 2013, Ger.: *Erziehung ist Liebe* 1975, 1994/2011) has been translated into many languages and must be regarded as the only translated primary literature in German-speaking countries. Since his writings were written mostly in Japanese, a high language barrier inevitably exists for researchers who do not speak Japanese. However, regardless of the translations available, only a fraction of his many writings has been intensively studied in Japanese research. Two publishing houses brought out the *Collected Works of Shinichi Suzuki* [*Suzuki Shinichi zenshū*: 鈴木鎮一全集] (1985, 1989a). As Kubo (2014: 42) already pointed out, both publications cannot be considered reliable because several passages in both volumes deviate in wording from the original.

His book *Ai ni ikiru* (1966) has contributed enormously to the worldwide dissemination of the Suzuki Method. Shinichi Suzuki's wife, Waltraud Suzuki (1904–2000), translated the book into English for the first time as early as 1969. Her achievement must be particularly appreciated as she supported her husband tirelessly not only privately but also in his educational profession. Analyzing the translation more closely, however, its insufficient philological quality must be mentioned, visible through mistranslations in detail as well as the omission of some pages compared to the original edition (chapter 2.5.3). Because the German edition of this book is in turn a faithful translation of the English version, it must be assumed that this problematic translation has helped to shape the reception of the Suzuki Method in German-speaking countries.

4. Cultural Background for Suzuki's Concept

In order to contextualize the Suzuki Method, it is necessary to make a differentiated analysis of its cultural background in Japan. To describe this background as "webs of significance [Bedeutungsgewebe]" (Geertz 1987: 9) which the actors have woven for comprehensible reasons and have then developed further, an unbiased view of the 'Japanese' needs to be elaborated. This view stands in opposition to the predominant reception of the Suzuki Method. The latter can be understood only as a construct which presents itself as vague and indefinable in order to avoid a closer look.

Suzuki's educational concept underlies the political, social, and cultural upheaval during Japan's modernization in the Meiji period which presents itself as an eclecticism expedited by the government in which Western ideas are adopted selectively and reinterpreted. The music reform by the Meiji government was also carried out under such specific political intentions. On the one hand, the aim was to convey the impression of a successful modernization outside Japan, and on the other hand, it wanted to 'reconstitute' the Japanese national character at home, idealized in a retrospective sense and emphasized on harmony in the Japanese-Confucian sense. To this end, the Institute of Music [Ongaku Torishirabe Gakari: 音楽取調掛] was specifically established in the Ministry of Education. In the "National Music [*kokugaku*: 国楽]" their plans were manifested in the preference of Western melodies and musical notations, but the music genre *zokkyoku* [俗曲], which was handed down among the middle classes was 'cleansed' because of its alleged lack of morality (chapter 3.3, 3.4).

The way to this "National Music" can be described with the cultural-theoretical term of transculturation which was coined by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz (1881–1969) and has since then been established as a descriptive model for complex and reciprocal cultural transfer processes. In the same way as the term transculturation does not imply a one-sided assimilation process, the way to the "National Music" does not automatically imply a process of a one-sided adoption of the Western music in the Japanese music scene. In the process of transculturation, the loss of previous cultural elements can also result in unexpected and completely new phenomena. Thus, in the process of the establishment of the "National Music", original Japanese elements were lost, while new Western elements were introduced instead. In blending both developments, however, a new cultural form arose, which was revealed as "National Music" (chapter 3.5). This was done intentionally and shows how deliberately the Meiji government, and the Institute of Music respectively, strove to constitute or construct the *new* Japanese.

These upheavals in the Japanese music scene are not only crucial for decoding the genesis of the Suzuki Method but are also linked to Shinichi Suzuki's biography. Suzuki grew up in the midst of the rapid dissemination of the Western music in Japan and was thereby influenced strongly by the trends of the cultural goods imported by the West. This historic and intellectual background later provided the elements for his educational concept. His family, especially his father Masakichi Suzuki (1859–1944), played an important role in this context as he became active precisely during this musical turnaround in the field of instrument making and eventually played a significant role in the history of Japanese violin making (chapter 4.1.1).

5. The Suzuki Method

Shinichi Suzuki first called his educational concept “Talent Education”. Today it is known as the Suzuki Method. This concept, originally applied only to instrumental pedagogy, was extended to school and kindergarten education (chapter 5.7). Suzuki left behind numerous writings, in which he talked about his thoughts about education and music philosophy, but mostly he did not mention explicitly whether and from which contemporary trends or authors he himself was influenced. In the 1940s, he had formulated his “Talent Education” clearly in a nationalistic and imperialistic context, expressly planning to make an impact on the level of educational politics of the empire.

Against this background, his widely known mother-tongue concept points back to his imperialistic attitude during the 1940s. At the time, he limited the admirable ability for language acquisition only to the Japanese language. In this context, the Japanese language is ascribed a cultural superiority in the imperialistic sense, and its uniqueness and complexity are particularly emphasized (chapter 5.1). However, the question remains why he chose a Western instrument, the violin, and not a traditional Japanese instrument for his “Talent Education” when he aimed to create a specific Japanese educational method. Here *his* meaning of Japanese is clearly visible, which reveals an ambivalent attitude. On the one hand, his earnest and passionate study of Western music is shown but on the other hand it reflects the quite typical concept of the time regarding the modernization of Japan where imported products from the West were supposed to be mastered at an excellent level in order to reach a comparable and finally superior level in comparison to the West (chapter 5.5).

His educational concept is based on his specific conception of mankind which he developed at the latest since the 1950s under the large influence of the French physician Alexis Carrel (1873–1944). At the centre of this conception is the idea of the adaptability of every human being whose personal impacts are determined only by the environment (chapter 5.3). Against this background, his central term *sainō* [talent: 才能] means not only the sum of what a person has acquired from his environment, but also the individual personality per se. He rejected every innate potential which could be used as an argument for evaluation of educational results and believed that every human being would be reshaped arbitrarily only by the influence of its environment. With this specific growth theory, he aimed at optimizing the human being who should be raised to be a socially ‘good’ person by creating the ‘correct’ environment. The designers of that environment, teachers, parents, as well as other people involved in the life of the child, take on the task to equip the child with abilities that go far beyond musicality. His ideal human being

is to be understood as a person who is well-connated with the ideals of virtue in the Japanese-Confucian sense (chapter 5.9).

In Suzuki's teachings, the improvement process of the person is measured particularly by the tone formation whose optimization is connected directly to the optimization of the person (chapter 5.8.4). The inspired *oto* is considered a mirror of the human condition and the nature of a performer, which allows moral and social values to be measured, corrected or indirectly demanded. Suzuki aimed at a tone formation which is produced by the performer as far as possible without his or her conscious will. This approach confirms precisely the core of his educational idea: a selfish or disobedient attitude on the part of the child would have to be eliminated first. The mutual and dependent optimizing process of tone and personality is dangerous in the sense that it can easily become a vehicle for an aggressive re-education. Depending on his or her sensitivity and the concrete demands from the environment, the student may come into conflict with him- or herself in a way that emotions are consciously or unconsciously suppressed and his or her behaviour is adapted to the respective demands of the environment (chapter 8.2). This ultimately anti-individualistic concept of *oto* completes Suzuki's teaching of musical instruments which forms a cohesive unit with the violin technique, the Suzuki materials, and the graduation system as conceptual pillars.

The worldwide recognition of the Suzuki Method occurred only after its successful reception in the USA (chapter 6.2) where most of the Suzuki students are taught today. While the concept, originally tailored specifically to the violin, was adjusted only to three other instruments in Japan – the cello, the piano and the flute – its application at the international level has been now extended to more than ten other instruments as well as voice (table 5: Tabelle 5). In German-speaking countries, the Suzuki Method was first introduced in 1967 by the composer, musicologist, and music pedagogue Siegfried Borris. Between 1976 and 1979, an extensive research project was carried out in order to test the applicability of the Suzuki Method in Germany. This project stimulated further intensive studies of the Suzuki Method which resulted in the establishment of the method in Germany in the 1980s (chapter 6.3).

Despite the international success, in global comparison, the Japanese Suzuki Association of all associations is struggling with a declining number of students. Accompanied by this, is a shortage of candidates for Suzuki teachers, which in turn made a reform of the teacher training model necessary a few years ago. The reason for this stagnation is the fact that the Japanese Suzuki Association had been formed in complete dependence on Suzuki's personality. This is shown by the fact that a critical discourse could be never developed around Suzuki's teaching. His teaching was interpreted by the Suzuki followers as unchangeable knowledge

whereby they avoided any critically reflective discussions (chapter 7.3). Most certainly, this is related to Suzuki's charismatic personality which is also emphasized by non-Japanese observers (e.g. Abel-Struth 1985/2005: 399). The untransparent and closed attitude of the Japanese Suzuki Association is also visible when it comes to the arbitrary editing of Suzuki's writings for the publication of the *Collected Works of Shinichi Suzuki* (1985, 1989a). Here, they undertook changes of certain terms or simply omitted parts of the original texts without any reason. This approach can only be summarized that a special protective mechanism became effective that was intended to worship Suzuki and to protect his reputation.

The fundamentals of Suzuki's educational concept have not experienced any significant innovations since the beginning of his "Talent Education". However, the impression of inconsistency can hardly be denied. This is already visible by the fact that the concept is shaped by very different elements. In addition, its intended position changed constantly: Suzuki began violin teaching for very young children and then he tried to use his "Talent Education" for a totalitarian public school system. Later, his educational concept was directed at parents and was supposed to be understood as the "social movement [*shakai undō*: 社会運動]", and finally it was intended to contribute to peace and international understanding. Furthermore, he incorporated doubtful ways of thinking into his theory such as Carrel's metaphysical-mystifying study of man. In addition, he used his characteristic language style to equate human growth with that of animals and plants (chapter 7.3).

6. Cultural Transfer Process: Transculturation

The Suzuki Method is to be understood as a product of cross-cultural processes as it is involved in a sequence of interlocking stimulations, transfers, and permeations which has not been completed until today. This is already tangible at the very beginning, when the concept, developed in Japan, was initially designed for a Western instrument, the violin. The method's genesis and the main lines of its cultural entanglements can therefore only be understood from the context of Japan's history and educational policy at the time. Nevertheless, the notorious but unproductive indication that the method seems to be somehow of Japanese nature cannot be precisely concretized and therefore remains indefinable and untenable. Rather, it requires an explanation as an aspect of the history of reception itself.

In the present thesis, the construction of 'Japaneseness' of the Suzuki Method could be classified in three different ways: The first is an understanding of the Japanese postulated by many Western writers in particular under the assumption that the method is influenced by Zen Buddhism. The second is the understanding of Japanese Suzuki practitioners who want to ascribe a nationalistically excessive and exclusive character to the Suzuki Method because of its Japanese origin. Fi-

nally, the third type of 'Japaneseness' is that mentioned by Suzuki himself: he wanted to embed it in the imperialistic context of his time (chapter 8.1). However, these three simplistic Japan postulates are in opposition to the analysis of complex transfer and adaptation processes which, selectively promoted by active participants, progress between and through respective culture areas. These processes can be defined very well with the term of transculturation that describes such targeted processes of transfer and adaptation (chapter 3.5). Thus, the nationalistic connotation and Suzuki's imperialistic argumentation apparently disappeared without trace when the Suzuki Method was transferred to Germany. Instead, an influence of the mystified Zen Buddhism, which was understood as typical Japanese, was additionally constructed.

The comparative analysis of the Japanese and German Suzuki Method brought to light further differences which can be attributed above all to the respective meaning of the sound and the correlating conception of mankind. The Japanese Suzuki Method aims at a comprehensive human education in which the moral power of the *oto* sound manifests itself. It is based on the idea of an insubstantial individual that is only shaped or comes into being through external factors. In contrast, the German Suzuki practice does not normatively connect the musical activity to the player's personality. In the background, there is obviously the concept of a pre-given individuality of each human being that is also emphasized when it comes to the acquisition of musical skills. The respect for the individuality of the student corresponds to the fact that the original Japanese graduation system could not be adopted in Germany or was adopted only in a modified form. It was adapted to the needs and possibilities of the participants. In the Japanese Suzuki Method, a great emphasis is placed on listening and what can be heard. Accordingly, it should also be possible to hear the development of the performer's personality only from his or her playing. In the Japanese, highly standardized and well-formed graduation system, in which all candidates must have their always identical examination pieces assessed in the form of a submitted recording, the individuality of the student does not necessarily come to the fore (chapter 8.3).

How mutual cultural transfer processes take place in transculturation, was exemplified here by the Suzuki teacher training system. After Suzuki's death, the original Japanese teacher training system was initially organized as a full-time study course at a central institute. This model was transferred to Europe and Germany only in a modified form. It was established as a model that can be completed in stages or part-time (chapter 6.3.2). In Japan, a new model which offers candidates more flexibility and is structured similarly to that of Europe and Germany, was introduced only in 2011 in parallel with the old model. Since 2018, the new model is the only one offered in Japan (chapter 7.5.3). The change of the

Japanese teacher training system was the result of a financial crisis of the institute that, due to lack of candidates, has to introduce a reform (chapter 7.5.2). However, it is obvious that this decision was encouraged through comparing the success of its international variants (chapter 8.3).

It must clearly be stated here that the ‘original’ Suzuki Method in the sense of a fixed and unchangeable time capsule does not exist. The transfer of its elements did and does not happen unilaterally in an asymmetrical proportion of copy and original, but rather takes place constantly as a mutual negotiation, interpretation, and reception of selectively evaluated elements.

7. Review and Outlook

The analysis of the Suzuki Method touches on many different disciplines and therefore requires an interdisciplinary approach analogous to that of transculturation. Its complex development history across several cultural regions can most sensibly be described with the approach of transculturation. The term best explains the process of its development as an action which its participants take consciously and selectively. In studying the written sources, it became apparent that the genesis of the method has hardly been investigated even in Japan because little attention was paid to Suzuki’s early writings. Research revealed that he was deeply involved in the imperialism and the propaganda music during wartime.

In analysing his method with a transcultural approach, it becomes apparent that we cannot insist on a pure Japanese origin. Rather, Suzuki took over many ideas, amongst other things, from his stay in Germany, and from the pedagogical and biologicistic discourses at the time, for example from Carrel, possibly also from Tolstoi. In contrast, his human and social ideal, which he tried to achieve through music education, remains rooted in the Japanese variant of Confucianism. An influence of Zen Buddhism, however, could not be proven.

The spread of the method, first in the USA and then worldwide, shows that the method is highly flexible. For example, in Germany it developed new facets of transculturation, as its Japanese nationalistic background as well as the fixed graduation system disappeared. Also, the concept of a pre-individual human education and its control through the sound *oto* were not pursued in favour of a music education which rather takes into focus a practical application of the method. Without these transformations, the success of the method would not have been possible; its lack thus also explains the current problems of the Japanese Suzuki Method.

After the study of its genesis and transcultural formations, further research should focus more on the presence and practical applications of teaching with the Suzuki Method. Methodologically, interview studies and observed teaching could

be an appropriate option. In the field of historic research, Suzuki's involvement in the propaganda machine during the war would have to be investigated in more detail because the archive documents have hardly been studied in this respect and were only accessible to a limited extent for the present thesis.