“Folkloric Music” as Pleasure Revived in Cities

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The most important characteristic the Japanese folkloric music has is to improvise words best suited to the mood of the moment, or to pick up the words that have been sung from old times, to a tune. There we find one of the most spontaneous behaviour of musical expression.

In contrast to the above, at Edo (now Tokyo) from the Early Modern Times to the Present Days, much of people did not sing “min’yo” (folk songs), but they sang “zokkyoku” short popular tunes sang to the accompaniment of a Shamisen, or popular songs. Among the “zokkyoku” they used to sing, there were genres of songs like “Dodoitsu” (ditties) that can be sung easily by improvising the words, though the sentiment that can be expressed by this genre of songs is very much limited. In that context, we must say that the music of people at Edo at that time from the Early Modern to the present day, as an act of expressing their feeling, was extremely poor.

It is with karaoke that the citizens of the present day cities who have half lost the habit of singing have regained that habit. With karaoke, there exists a normative form even for singing, not to mention improvising the words, so much so that there is little space left for spontaneity. However, we can say that at least the act of singing spontaneously, that is, the very essential part of the folkloric music, is barely revived among the city dwellers with the help of karaoke, produced in its turn, by the development of audio devices.