

Furusato – a song from the heart of Japan

By Miriam Davis:

In ‘Developing Cultural Awareness’ a while ago, I wrote that knowing the stories and songs every Japanese knows, can give us insights into Japanese world view and deepen our cultural awareness. Many of us are familiar with *Furusato* (故郷、ふるさと or “Hometown”), but are perhaps not aware that this song has been suggested as an alternative national anthem to *Kimigayo*, which is opposed for its nationalistic overtones. *Furusato* is numbered among what someone has called 日本の心の歌 (にほんのこころのうた) and is a standard number at school graduations. The words were written by Takano Tatsuyuki (高野辰之) and the music by Okano Teiichi (岡野貞一).

Most Japanese know *Furusato* by heart but not that the composer was a keen Christian who gained hints for his melodies from Christian hymns. Okano (1878-1941) was born in Tottori city, Toyama. His interest in music was first awakened as a child by hearing the organ week by week at church. He was baptized in 1892 at the age of 14, and a year later, began studying organ with Adams, an American missionary in Okayama. Okano became professor at Tokyo Geijitsu Daigaku, and organist for 40 years at the Canadian Methodist Hongo Chuo Church, Tokyo. He was instrumental in producing the Mombusho (Ministry of Education) Song Books and wrote over 160 school songs, of which 50 are still sung today.

The words of *Furusato* are not the easiest to understand. Hearing instead of seeing the word おいし in the first line has led many Japanese to interpret its meaning as ‘delicious’ instead of ‘chasing’ or ‘hunting’ as it is meant to be! 友垣 (ともがき) in the second verse means ‘friend(s)’ The bond of friendship is likened to the weaving together of a fence or hedge (垣、かき). つつがなし means ‘in good health, without problems’. If you prefer a loose English translation, go to <http://www.mahoroba.ne.jp/~gonbe007/hog/shouka/furusato.html> and click on 英語訳 at the bottom. Whether in Japanese or English the words of this song help us to understand the emotions felt by the Japanese towards their *Furusato*.

おい やま つ
1. うさぎ追いし かの山 こぶな釣りし かの川

ゆめ わす
夢はいまめぐりて 忘れがたき ふるさと

ふぼ とも
2. いかにいます 父母 つつがなしや 友がき

あめ かぜ おも
雨に風につけても 思いいずる ふるさと
こころざし は ひ かえ
3. 志 を果たして いつの日にか 帰らん
やま あお みず きよ
山は青きふるさと 水は清き ふるさと

If you are not familiar with the of *Furusato*, you can listen free to a lovely arrangement on wind instruments at <http://www.wind-art.com/HP/HTML/hurusato.html>
(NB: there are a number of songs around with the title *Furusato*, including one by J-pop idol group, Morning Musume, so be sure you get the right one! For the Morning Musume *Furusato* go to <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Furusato>)