

Music Culture in Senegal: Focusing on the *Tama*

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Place of fieldwork: The Republic of Senegal

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- Research background

Many researchers have studied African music culture. For instance, the French musicologist Arom analyzed the musical structure of traditional music in Central African Republic, especially from the perspective of polyrhythm (Arom, 1991). Further, cultural anthropologists have studied cultural and social aspects of music. In Japan, Suzuki (Suzuki, 2000) and Yanohara (Suzuki; Kawase ed., 2015) have carried out analyses of the involvement of young people with urban music. Currently, studies on music in Africa are not yet comprehensive in terms of both musical structure and its social aspect.

- Research purpose

The purpose of this research is to analyze the structure of music in Senegal that utilizes a musical instrument called the *Tama* and to clarify its social position. To analyze the musical structure, I recorded performances and then transcribed the music notes. I also learned how to play the *Tama* to help the analysis. It is said that the *Tama* once played the role of a talking drum; however, this function as a communicative tool has been substituted by other devices such as cellular phones. This research could investigate the transformation of its social role.

- Results and achievements of fieldwork

During my fieldwork, I stayed in a small town N in the department of Mbour. This town is home to a variety of people from diverse ethnic groups and nationalities. We could sometimes hear the sound of various drums in the center of town. One is called the *Tama* in the Wolof language. It is traditionally a talking drum of Senegal. It is placed under the player's armpit, and the player changes the tension of the cords along the side of the drum by constantly closing and opening his/her arm to change its pitch. Today, its importance as a linguistic tool has decreased. In fact, it is now used more as a musical instrument to accompany *Taasu* (word play) and popular music.

- Implications and impact on future research

I was able to interview *Tama* players and collect data on how to make and play the *Tama*. However, those interviews did not suffice; this will be an issue for my next fieldwork. Furthermore, I want to try to devise a new musical notation system for the *Tama* based on sound recording and video data collected, because it is a difficult task to adapt African music to the grammar of the musical notation system of Western music.



Photo 1. A *Tama*



Photo 2. The act of playing the *Tama*



Photo 3. The process of making a *Tama*

● References

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*The titles of Japanese references have been translated into English by the author of this document.