The Nipponophone Company and Record Consumption in Colonial Korea*

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Introduction

Nihon Chikuonki Shōkai (K: Ilbon Ch’ugŭmgi Sanghoe, abbreviated as Nitchiku hereafter) was the oldest and one of the most influential record companies in the Japanese empire. In 1911, a year after Korea was formally colonized, Nitchiku opened a branch office in Kyōngsŏng (modern day Seoul, or Keijō during the Japanese colonization of Korea). It thus became the first record company to set up operations in colonial Korea and was the only one that produced Korean records until 1925.1

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1 Nittō Chikuonki Kabushiki Gaisha (日東蓄音機株式会社) was established in Osaka in 1920, and soon became one of the leading record companies. It also released Korean records from 1925 to 1928. In particular, it became well-known to Koreans because of the song “Homage to Death” (Sa ūi Ch’anmi), released on one of Yun Sim-tŏk’s posthumous records. However, Nittō failed to keep up with increased
From 1927, Nitchiku initiated the process of joining Columbia Records as a subsidiary, and Nippon Columbia was set up the following year. Accordingly, scholars in both Japan and South Korea agree that Nippon Columbia was a multinational company. However, the fact that Nitchiku was foreign-funded and foreign-managed does not seem to have received serious consideration.

Recognizing this aspect of Nitchiku’s identity is significant since it helps in understanding the formative period of the Korean record industry, not only in the political context of Korea’s relations with Japan, but also in both the East Asian and global politico-economic contexts. In this paper I investigate Nitchiku from its establishment until it became Nippon Columbia, focusing on its localization process, which helped create the image of Nitchiku as a pure Japanese company. I further explore how the transnational characteristics of Nitchiku and other record trading agencies helped create transnational record consumers in colonial Korea by exposing them to the globally popular sound culture of the era, mediated through records. In doing so, I hope to illuminate colonial Korea’s complex interconnections as well as interdependence with Japan, in the circumstances engendered by Japanese imperialism as well as the capitalism of the era.

competition from foreign-funded record companies in the late 1920s and was taken over by Taihei Records in 1935. For more information regarding the activities of Nittō Records in colonial Korea, see Bae Yeon Hyung. “Chebipy’o Chosŏn Rekodŭ Yŏnggu” Han’guk Ümbannak 3 (1993): 15-75.

A general approach to modernity in a colony is to understand it as possessing “belated modernity” in contrast to a metropole. This is in many ways a useful approach. When studying music education in colonial Korea, for example, it is quite effective. However, Andrew Jones suggests that the development of media in a metropole spreads almost simultaneously to its colonies through colonial trade routes, and it was a cultural shock to people of the era regardless of the space they occupied. Yellow Music. 11-12. I agree with Jones about the need to avoid applying “belated modernity” theory indiscriminately when approaching music mediated through phonographs and records.
Nihon Chikuonki Shōkai and Frederick W. Horn

As mentioned, Nihon Chikuonki Shōkai was not established with Japanese funding or management. According to the company’s own records, the founder of Nitchiku was an American businessman named Frederick W. Horn. Initially involved since 1896 in importing machinery and tools to Japan through his own Horn Company, Horn soon began dealing in imported wax cylinder phonographs. About a decade later in 1907, he established the Japan-American Phonograph Manufacturing Co., Ltd. (J: Nichibei Chikuonki Seizō Kabushiki Gaisha, Nichibei hereafter). After building a factory and setting up a recording studio, within a few years Nichibei became the first company in Japanese history to manufacture single-sided records and phonographs. Horn arranged for another of his ventures, Nichibei phonograph Company (also known as American Phonograph Company), to market these new products. In late 1910, Horn rebranded the marketing company as Nihon Chikuonki Shōkai (Nitchiku), and converted it into a joint stock company. By merging with Nichibei in 1912, Nitchiku emerged as the first phonograph and record company in Japan with a centralized production and distribution system. It began producing double-sided records in 1913. With this series of steps, Nitchiku progressively advanced toward becoming a major record company.

It is true that Japanese music records had been sold in Japan even before Nitchiku released its own records. However, Japan depended on the importation of both Japanese and foreign records to satisfy its record consumers until Nitchiku began putting its products on the Japanese market. Prominent agencies which imported and distributed Japanese and foreign phonographs and records, such as Sankōdō and Tenshōdō, had already been engaged in recording Japanese music since Frederick William Gaisberg (1873-1951), known as the father of sound recording,

conducted the first Japanese recording expedition in 1903. These agencies worked as intermediaries between foreign recording engineers, both from Europe and the U.S., and local talent. They were therefore able to retain major foreign record companies as their suppliers. The Japanese records that these agencies were involved in recording were still considered imported goods in Japan, since recording engineers sent master recordings to Europe or the U.S. for pressing. The finished records were then exported back to Japan. Therefore, it cannot be overemphasized that Nitchiku achieved the first comprehensive production of phonographs as well as records in Japan.

Even after Nichibei was restructured as Nitchiku, the company’s character as a foreign-funded and foreign-managed company did not change. Horn continued to lead Nitchiku as president for about a decade until 1919, when J.R. Gary, a long-term board member, replaced him as Nitchiku’s second president. In addition, the board of executives of Nitchiku at the time of its establishment were all foreigners judging from their names, which were written in katakana, and except for Gary the other four had previously worked for Horn Company. Information regarding the share distributions of Nitchiku is unavailable, but there is an episode that indicates the significance of Horn as the president and major shareholder of Nitchiku. The company had suffered financial problems due to copyright infringement from illegal reproduction since the early 1910s, and this situation eventually led Nitchiku to reduce its contributed capital by ten percent, from 100,000 yen to 90,000 yen in 1915. This was accomplished by Horn giving up his own shares to protect the other shareholders from financial loss. As a result, Nitchiku’s shareholders

4 Nippon Koronbia Kabushiki Gaisha. Koronbia 50nenshi. page not specified. The book also mentions that Matsumoto Takeichiro, who established Sankōdō, could have been named as part of the group considering his contributions to Nitchiku’s establishment. Unfortunately, he died right before this happened. According to Kurata Yoshihiro, Horn became a co-owner of Sankōdō along with Matsumoto around 1900. Nihon rekōdo bunkashi. 42-43.
decided to formally express their appreciation to Horn in an emergency shareholder meeting.\(^5\) This episode shows that Horn still took full responsibility as the head of the company when it was in major difficulty. However, once Horn resigned his position as president in 1919, he left Japan for good, having lived there for over two decades.\(^6\)

**Nitchiku’s Image Politics**

Along with its technology for producing phonographs as well as records, Nitchiku further employed adroit image politics in order to position itself as the leading record company in the Japanese empire. I use the expression “image politics” because Nitchiku accommodated itself to and appropriated elements from local circumstances in order to establish roots in Japan and its colonies. In other words, Nitchiku cultivated the image of a company with a Japanese essence. In Korea, Nitchiku also appropriated local images for Korean records, though it did not hide that it was a Japanese company.

The Japanese and English names of Nitchiku illustrate how it utilized image politics. As mentioned earlier, the initial company name of Nitchiku was Nichibei Chikuonki Seizō Kabushiki Gaisha. The word Nichibei is composed of the pronunciations of the kanji representing Japan (nichi) and America (bei). It was then changed to Nihon Chikuonki Shōkai by dropping the “bei,” which would have given the impression that the company was fully Japanese while obscuring the fact that both the U.S. and Japan were the primary countries involved in it. Furthermore, Nihon Chikuonki Shōkai was written in Chinese characters as 日本蓄音機商会, which would have suggested that the company was representative of Japan’s gramophone industry in Sinophone countries.

\(^6\) Nihon Chikuonki Shōkai. *Nitchiku Koronbia 30nenshi*. 32.
As an additional step, Nichikku was named the Nipponophone Company in English. It is easy to assume that the English name for Nihon Chikuonki Shōkai would have been Japan Gramophone Co. or Japan Phonograph Co., but Nichikku chose Nipponophone for its English name. Creating a separate English title instead of rendering the Japanese name in English was unconventional. However, I believe that it was an ingenious move. In Anglophone countries, the name Nipponophone would have had a similar effect as that of its Japanese name in Sinophone countries, in the sense that it could have been understood either as “the sound of Japan” or “gramophones of Japan.” Thus, the name again suggests that Nichikku was a representative Japanese company.

Even more innovative is that Nipponophone was an English name, but was also a name that the Japanese could appreciate. That is, Nipponophone is arranged like a Japanese expression rather than an English one by situating the sound of “の” between “Nippo(n)” and “phone.” Accordingly, Japanese could have understood the name without translating it. Deliberate or not, the choice of the name Nipponophone appears to reflect Nichikku’s complicated identity. Considering Japan’s increasing nationalism and imperialism in the early twentieth century, Nipponophone was a well-chosen name for Nichikku’s purposes.7

Nichikku’s image politics in portraying itself as a purely Japanese company can be easily observed in other areas. For example, Nichikku retained the eagle trademark of American Records, one of Nichibei’s five labels,8 with the minor modification that the eagle now sat on a Nipponophone phonograph. The eagle was not just a regular one but a

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7 In fact, the famous Singer Manufacturing Company, which maintained its universal sales system instead of a localized system, experienced two empire-wide strikes in 1932 and lost its monopoly position. In flyers and announcements, the participants in the strikes expressed their caution and apprehension about “a Yankee capitalist company.” See Andrew Gordon. Fabricating Consumers: the Sewing Machine in Modern Japan. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

8 Nichibei’s five labels were: Symphony, American, Royal, Globe, and Universal.
bald eagle, the national animal of Horn’s and most likely the other executives’ home country, the United States. In other words, though the word “America” was removed from the original name of their company, the image of the eagle was still located on the label of each Nipponophone record. The trademark then was written and pronounced “washi” in Japanese, avoiding the term “eagle” which had been used previously. This could have been meaningful for Nitchiku’s Japanese consumers. Azami Toshio, a scholar specializing in the Japanese record industry, even stated that “Nitchiku not only changed its label to Nipponophone, which meant records of Japan, but also renamed its trademark from English to Japanese, washi.” 9 With little modification, Nitchiku was able to present a Japanized image of the company without eliminating its already well-recognized eagle trademark.

Moreover, Nitchiku attempted to represent itself as a Japanese company with pictorial devices as well. As shown in Figure 1, Nitchiku used two logos for its record jackets and advertisements, a big Buddha and a Nipponophone phonograph, and positioned them in a way similar to His Master’s Voice, the trademark of Victor Records. Known as the most recognized trademark in the history of the recording industry, His Master’s Voice portrays the dog Nipper listening or trying to listen to his deceased owner’s voice coming from a Victor phonograph. 10 With this trademark, Victor could not only boast of the excellence of its audio reproduction technology, but also appeal to the emotions of record consumers. In my opinion, the overall arrangement of the two logos on Nitchiku’s record jackets is similar to that of Victor’s trademark. A possible implication is that the music from a Nipponophone phonograph can even get the Buddha’s attention and make him turn, perhaps unwittingly, to listen to the sound. Considering that many in the West recognized Japan as the land of Zen Buddhism at the turn of the twentieth

10 Nihon Bikuta Kabushiki Gaisha. Nihon bikutā 50nenshi. page not specified
century, this could be understood as Nitchiku’s effective Japanizing appropriation of Victor’s trademark.

Figure 1.11

Nitchiku later took a similar approach with Korean records by reducing the Japanese flavor and utilizing Korean motifs. As shown on the right of Figure 1, Nitchiku’s jacket for Korean records, called Ilch’uk Chosŏn Soriban (Nitchiku Records of Korean Voices), used Korean writing and pronunciation, except for “washi,” along with a localized image obtained by replacing the Buddha with a dancing girl (most likely *kisaeng*) in Korean costume. Moreover, in the 1910s Korean records shared the same labels as those in Japan, such as Royal Records, Symphony, and Nipponophone, but from the early 1920s newly recorded Korean records began to be marketed under Korean-language labels like “닙보노홍” and “일촉죠선소리반.” 12 The designs of the Korean record labels also changed to ones with a blue and red *taijitu* pattern (as on the Korean flag) or an image of the South Gate in Seoul (Namdaemun in Korean). Thus, Nitchiku’s image politics involved a localizing process, appropriating

12 Images can be seen in <Figure 5>.
images, text, and sounds from each region.

Expanding Subsidiaries and the Resistance of Related Companies

Under its second president J. R. Gary’s leadership, Nichiku grew rapidly by acquiring as subsidiaries several other well-recognized record companies in Japan. Starting with Oriental Phonograph Mfg Co. (東洋蓄音器) in 1919, Nichiku went on to acquire Standard Gramophone Co. (スタンダード蓄音器) in 1920, Teikoku Gramophone Co. (帝國蓄音器商会) in 1921, Sankōdō Menophone Co. (三光堂) in 1923, and Tokyo Record Company (東京蓄音器) in 1923. In 1925, Nichiku established Gōdō Phonograph Co. (合同蓄音機) by merging the four companies mentioned above except for Tokyo Record Co.13 Along with the records it released in Japan, Gōdō went on to release a small number of Korean records under the Hikōki (airplane) label.14

Azami Toshio and Kurata Yoshihiro emphasize the particularity of Nichiku’s acquisition of subsidiaries by calling it the “commercial law of force” (力の商法).15 In particular, Azami finds Gary’s American-style management methods to be responsible for the company’s expansion, which inhibited the development of a diverse Japanese music culture. In contrast, Tsuboi Ken’ichi approaches Nichiku’s acquisitions as a universal practice under capitalism, calling it an “M&A strategy.”16 There

15 Azami. “Nihon Rekōdo Sangyō”. 9-10; Kurata, Nihon rekōdo bunkashi. 120-122.
may be various other evaluations and interpretations, but it cannot be denied that Nitchiku, through its acquisition of subsidiaries, had grown into a major Japanese corporation with influence across Japan and its colonies.

At the same time, the process of Nitchiku’s growth was in part a process of overcoming the resistance of the companies and related organizations it targeted, for which the identity of Nitchiku was a problem. Kurata describes the following related episode. Due to the Immigration Act of 1924 enacted on May 26, Japanese were no longer admitted to the U.S. as immigrants. This not only caused friction between the U.S. and Japanese governments, but also provoked anti-American sentiment among Japanese. Nittō Chikuonki Kabushiki Gaisha (Nittō hereafter), which had been pressured by Nitchiku’s “commercial law of force,” immediately responded by promoting its products as “the pure national products of Great Japan” in its monthly catalog. As advertisements appealing to Japanese nationalism gained popularity, Nittō’s sales quickly increased. This result was possible in part because of support from related dealers in the Kansai region where Nittō was based. For example, the association of phonograph dealers representing Osaka, Kyoto, Kobe, and the central Kansai region placed an advertisement in the Tokyo Nichinichi Shinbun titled “Appealing to all Fulltime Dealers of Phonographs and Records” in June 15, 1924, which announced, “This is when we Japanese should show our spirit to the Americans, the enemies of our seventy-million compatriots.” Of course, their Kanto-area counterparts decided that “Selling products of Nitchiku is not inappropriate.” This episode demonstrates that despite Nitchiku’s multi-year efforts at image politics, Japanese phonograph dealers understood the company’s identity, and

18 For more information regarding Nittō, refer to footnote 1.
19 Along with fulltime dealers, musical instrument stores and clock shops often sold records for recording companies on consignment in Japan and Korea in the first half of the twentieth century.
there were those who felt discomfort at Nitchiku’s advancement in Japan’s record industry.

Strictly speaking, Nitchiku, which was funded and managed by American settlers in Japan, and companies like the Victor Talking Machine Company of Japan Ltd. (Nippon Victor hereafter), which was set up as a subsidiary of Victor in America by direct investment, were obviously different types of companies. Nittō however, based on the reasoning that both companies were foreign-funded and foreign-managed, maintained the same strategy in its advertisements. In 1930, Nittō again argued that its products were “pure national products (純国産品),” but those from the foreign-managed companies were “pseudo-national products (類似国産品).” It further argued that such products needed to be considered imported goods, since most profits of foreign-funded and foreign-managed companies were remitted to their countries of origin. In other words, Nittō attempted to differentiate its products from those of Nitchiku and other subsidiaries of foreign record companies because of their non-Japanese funding and management.

The Dominance of Nitchiku in Colonial Korea

Similar to other countries in the world, including Japan, Korean commercial record production began with Koreans performing in recording operations conducted by foreign engineers on international recording tours. The U.S. Columbia Phonograph Co. invited Korean musicians to Osaka for recording and, after pressing them in the U.S., began releasing Korean records from March, 1907. Victor Talking

20 Asahi Shinbun (Tokyo). June 29, 1930. 10.
21 For more information regarding these recording tours as well as the activities of intermediaries, see Yamauchi Fumitaka, “Ŭmban Sanŏp kwa Maegae Chagyong Yŏng’gu”. Hanguk Ŭmbanhak 20 (2012).
22 Bae Yeonhyung. “Columbia Rekodŭ ūi Han’guk Ŭmban Yŏnggu”. 39-40.
Machine Co. followed suit. During its recording tour through East Asia, Victor recorded music in Korea and went on to release its first records of Korean music in 1908.\textsuperscript{23} Japanese stores that specialized in imported goods such as Tusjiya, a dealer of Sankōdō, and Ori’i (織居) sold phonographs and records in the 1910s in Korea, so Korean records were most likely also sold in these stores.\textsuperscript{24} However, both Columbia and Victor became inactive in Korea as well as Japan after that time.\textsuperscript{25} This is somewhat unexpected. Dominance of the world market was the ultimate goal of these major record companies, and their competition was on a global level which included various countries in all the continents of the world. Reebee Garofalo provides a vivid description: “In the 1910s the recording industry extended its tentacles into the most lucrative markets of the world, through pressing plants in the most important areas and through subsidiaries elsewhere.”\textsuperscript{26} This being the case, the fact that the world’s two major record companies stopped sending recording tours to Japan as well as Korea from the early 1910s is highly suggestive. Then, what caused the companies to halt the tours, not to mention setting up subsidiaries or pressing plants?

Rather than offering a political explanation,\textsuperscript{27} Azami approaches the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} Bae Yeonhyung. “Victor Rekodō Han’guk Ümban Yŏnggu”. 284-285.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Bae Yeonhyung. “Ilch’uk Chosŏn Sori Ümban Yŏnggu (1)”. 95.
\item \textsuperscript{25} According to Lee Jin-won, the only exception was Victor’s 1915 recording made specifically for Mulsan Kongjinhoe. This was an expo-like event intended to show Korea’s progress since its colonization by Japan in 1910. For more information see Yi Jin-won. “Taehan chegukki ŭi Ûmban Nogūm e Taehan Kochal”. 101-105.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Reebee Garofalo. “From Music Publishing to MP3: Music and Industry in the Twentieth Century”. 326.
\item \textsuperscript{27} It is conventional to attribute the situation in Korea to Japanese colonial rule, but this merits some skepticism. If colonization was the reason for the end of recording tours by foreign engineers, other similar cases where major record companies avoided local recording in formally colonized areas need to be provided. Even if the particularity of Japanese imperialism is thought to be the reason, it needs to be demonstrated that Japan’s colonization was so distinctive that major record
\end{itemize}
issue from the perspective of the global economy. He states that “The reason foreign-funded European and U.S. companies became less directly involved with Japan in the Taisho period (1912-1926) could be that independent Japanese record companies had formed in Japan and were consistently expanding.” 28 Nitchiku, with its capacity to produce phonographs and records independently, had various advantages compared to the major record companies based in Europe and the U.S. regarding the production and circulation of records in Japan and its colonies. The situation became even worse for foreign companies, since other record companies in Japan soon joined Nitchiku in producing Japanese records or even illegally reproducing them. Azami’s explanation can be also applied to colonial Korea, where Nitchiku had maintained operations since 1911.

Among Nitchiku’s many advantages, the following three can be seen as significant. First, due to the colonial relations between Japan and Korea, Nitchiku would have easily found intermediaries who could make informed decisions about which artists would be best for their catalogs and arrange recording sessions on behalf of them. Second, Nitchiku could produce and distribute records more rapidly in its market than European or U.S. companies, which had to press records in their home countries and then import them back to Japan. Third, Japanese companies did not pay import taxes on the records they sold in Japan’s colonies and, needless to say, in Japan itself. Thus, it was neither cost-effective nor time-effective for European or American companies to produce local records in the Japanese Empire.

companies had to suspend direct recording operations in Korea. Moreover, this explanation becomes more problematic when Japan itself is considered. Japan was not the colonized but the colonizer.

The Response of Major Record Companies to Japan’s 1924 Tax Law

The world’s major record companies, nonetheless, did not simply retreat from doing business in Japan. As Japan continued to import large numbers of records in various genres, from classical to ethnic and popular music, it was still a major market for companies based in Europe and the U.S. Mark Mason describes the experiences of Victor, one of the two top exporters to Japan: “The U.S. firm in 1916 characterized its business in Japan as “large and exceedingly valuable and profitable,” and as the Japanese economy boomed towards the end of World War I and the popularity of recorded music reached new heights, Victor’s exports to Japan grew still further.” Mason adds that even without making direct investments, Victor still made a “good profit” for many years until Japan promulgated the Law Concerning Import Taxes on Luxury Goods which set an extraordinary 100 percent tariff on phonographs, records, and related products from July 1924. Likewise, the major foreign record companies conducted lucrative business in Japan and its colonies, selling their products through their dealers and agencies, even without being seriously involved in producing local records.

The major record companies’ export-based profits did not last long. The yen outflow caused by the importation of luxury goods, including phonographs and records, was considered a significant hindrance to the reconstruction of Japan after the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. As previously mentioned, the Japanese government began imposing a 100 percent tariff as a countermeasure the following year. Considering Japan’s purchasing power for records, the major record companies must have taken the situation seriously. For example, the U.S. exported 215,141

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31 Azami. “Nihon Rekōdo Sangyō”. 12; Choe Ch’ang-ik eds. *Han’guk taejung kayosa*. 42-43.
records to Japan in 1922, but the number dropped dramatically to 20,646 in 1925, according to a report by the U.S. Department of Commerce.\(^{32}\) The German government statistics office, Statisticsches Reichsamt, reveals that German record exports to Japan reached 155,000 in 1922, and the number likewise declined to 84,212 in 1924.\(^{33}\) Therefore, Victor and other major record companies were pressured to set up subsidiaries and pressing factories in Japan to avoid heavy taxation of their products. Within a few years they also established themselves in colonial Korea and began producing Korean records.

No longer enjoying a special advantage by being based in Japan, Nichikō had other problems to overcome. As the acoustical recording era was ending, Nichikō needed to secure electrical recording technology, in which a microphone was used to convert sounds into electrical signals, and a new line of phonographs which could play records with higher fidelity. This technology was state-of-the-art for the era. Record companies headquartered in Europe and the U.S. adopted electrical recording systems in the middle of the 1920s, and Victor with its “orthophonic” system, which was known as the world best, was on the way towards Japan’s borders. Thus, J.R. Gary made a decision which affected Nichikō’s identity. From 1927, Nichikō went under the umbrella of the Columbia Phonograph Company by yielding its shares to British Columbia (35.7%) and U.S. Columbia (11.7%).\(^{34}\) Made in response to the drastic changes in both the Japanese and the world recording industry in the mid-1920s, this decision must have been intended to help Nichikō maintain its status as well as its influence in East Asia. From 1928, L.H. White from U.S. Columbia took charge of restructuring Nippon Columbia, and was appointed as president in the following year. Both A. D. Brian and E. B. シデル (possibly Sidel) from the U.K. became vice presidents.\(^{35}\)

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The Nipponophone Company and Record Consumption in Colonial Korea

Reconsidering Nitchiku’s Identity

Does this mean that Nitchiku was completely independent from major foreign record companies before it joined Columbia? There appear to be substantial differences among scholars regarding this issue, with much conflicting information. For example, Azami Toshio states that “Nitchiku was a company which was born in Japan, so it did not have any affiliations with major record companies in Europe and the U.S…”36 Kurata Yoshihiro appears to take a similar position. He carefully attempts to prove his hypothesis that Yuchi Keigo (湯地敬吾) was responsible for the “nationalization” of record production in Japan, saying that “the technology to produce domestic records was made possible by the efforts of Yuchi Keigo.”37 On the contrary, Pekka Gronow asserts that Nitchiku was established in 1908 as a Japanese subsidiary of the Columbia Phonograph Company, referencing Inoue Toshiya and Dietrich Shulz-Köhn.38 Gronow further states that “The first Japanese records were pressed in Europe or in the U.S.A., but a record factory was established in 1908 by or in cooperation with Columbia.”39

One of the most significant reasons that scholars cannot agree about this issue is the lack of primary sources. Another important reason is that a variety of relationships between parent companies and their subsidiaries existed, from hierarchical to substantially independent regarding both finances and management, as both Gronow and Jeffery Jones indicate with multiple examples.40 Then, did Nitchiku have any connections with other major record companies? If so, what kinds of relationships did

37 Kurata. Nihon rekōdo bunkashi. 67-68.
Nitchiku have with them?

There is a document that demonstrates Nitchiku’s connections with U.K. and American record companies. Photocopies of a rare catalog of Nitchiku’s products, called “Nipponophone Foreign Records” (Figure 2) are featured at Nipperhead, an Internet site devoted to antique phonographs.41 This approximately 40-page catalog has comprehensive information on Nipponophone-labeled records as well as various kinds of phonographs and accessories. The English catalog was intended for foreigners, as shown by the section “To Foreign Residents and Tourists” on page 25. About half of the catalog is devoted to a list of singers, while the other half mostly contains new releases of foreign records categorized as military band music recorded by the British Royal Military Band and the Metropolitan Band-New York, instrumental solos, concert songs and ballads, as well as recitations and character sketches. Presented as souvenirs for visitors to Japan, the catalog has two pages of additional records of Japanese band music, played by the Imperial Japanese Naval Band and the Toyama Military Band. Ten pages are devoted to advertisements for Nipponophone phonographs and related products such as record carrying cases, record files, and others.

Figure 2.

It is not clear when the catalog was published, but based on the fact that the Nipponophone label along with the Washi trademark are present, the catalog must have been printed before Nippon Columbia was set up in 1928.\textsuperscript{42} However, the reason the publication date was most likely in the first half of the 1910s, and not in the 1920s, is that all the British and U.S. records are double-sided, but the Japanese records advertised in the catalog are both single- and double-sided. Nitchiku began releasing double-sided records in February 1913, and by 1915 all single-sided records were collected and destroyed.\textsuperscript{43} Therefore, the presence of single-sided records in the catalog demonstrates that it was most likely published in Nitchiku’s early period. Moreover, the kinds of phonographs advertised in the catalog, such as Nipponophone No. 30 and No. 35, Nipponola, and the Nipponola Grand, are identified as “the varieties of products at the time of Nitchiku’s establishment” in the company’s official history.\textsuperscript{44} Therefore, it is safe to conclude that the catalog was produced between 1913 and 1915.

The catalog reveals some clues to Nitchiku’s relationships with major foreign companies. On the first page of the catalog, under the title “All the Music and All the World,” Nitchiku announced that, in response to demand for foreign records, it had acquired original recordings of London artists and would continue to issue American records intermittently. Furthermore, 22 British artists, along with their photos, are introduced across two pages under the titles “Some of Our Artists” and “Some More of Our Artists” respectively. Does the term “our” expose the relations

\textsuperscript{42} For a few years after Nippon Columbia was established, some records continued to be released with the Nipponophone label. However, these label designs were recognizably different from the ones in the Nitchiku period, and contained the text “Columbia Made Washi Record.” See Onishi Hidenori. SP Rekōdo Rēberu ni Miru Nitchiku-Nippon Koronbia no Rekishi. 16-17.

\textsuperscript{43} Kurata. Nihon rekōdo bunkashi. 294-295.

\textsuperscript{44} Nihon Chikuonki Shōkai, Nitchiku (korombia) 30-nenshi (Kawasaki: Nihon Chikuonki Shōkai, 1940).
between Nitchiku and companies in Great Britain and the U.S.? I acknowledge that the catalog alone is not sufficient to make an informed judgment that Nitchiku was a subsidiary of Columbia or another company. However, it does demonstrate that Nitchiku may have been affiliated with major record companies. If not, Nitchiku at least rented master recordings from or exchanged them with Columbia or others from the time of its establishment. The nature of this relationship, whether it was more complimentary or hierarchical, remains to be studied.

The Record Business and Diverse Population in Colonial Korea

Scholars have shown great interest in Korean record production and consumption in the 1930s, when multiple record companies competed for their market shares in colonial Korea. Under the direction of dedicated A&R departments for Korean records, various genres of records were continuously released, and new stars and hit songs emerged. This was also a time when the colonial government began proactively controlling and even utilizing popular music. However, there is a lack of research regarding the 1910s and the 20s when Nitchiku was active. In my study of

45 An invention by Eldridge Johnson must have allowed the production of foreign records in Japan. According to Gronow and Saunio, Johnson’s invention of 1910 was a process for producing wax plates called “matrices.” The impact of his invention was significant, since original recordings could be made into multiple matrices which could be pressed simultaneously in different locations. See Pekka Gronow and Ilpo Saunio. An International History of the Recording Industry (London: Cassell, 1998). 10.

46 The artists and repertoire (A&R) division of a record label is responsible for scouting and managing artists and / or songwriters as well as marketing and promoting their works. It is worth noting that all Korean SP records released during the colonial period were pressed in Japan except for those released by U.S. Columbia and Victor.
Korean record market, I start with the question that when Nitchiku opened its branch office in 1911, who composed its main audience? In other words, did Nitchiku intend to mainly target Koreans? To answer the question, it is necessary to keep in mind that colonial Korea was not a space where only Koreans lived. From the late 19th century, European and American missionaries, diplomats, and businessmen took up residence in major Korean cities. In addition, Japan’s colonizing process in the early twentieth century facilitated the settlement of substantial numbers of Japanese. Korea in the early twentieth century was therefore multicultural.

Since phonographs and records were luxury items in the early twentieth century, it is strongly possible that the record companies planned to market to Japanese and other foreign residents in Korea along with Koreans. That is, Nitchiku would have targeted all the populations in Korea which they deemed able to afford to purchase records regardless of their nationalities or ethnicities, in an attempt to secure the Korean record market. For example, the number of Japanese residing in Korea was recorded as only 15,829 in 1900, but the number increased to 171,543 in ten years. By the 1920s, it had already reached 347,850 and numbered over half a million in 1930.47 Moreover, the majority of Japanese residents lived in cities where record culture exerted its influence more strongly than in rural areas. In 1915, the total ratio of foreigners residing in Korea was only 1.8 percent, but the percentage of Japanese living in cities had reached 30.5 percent.48

In colonial Korea, not only were the numbers of city-residing Japanese and other foreign settlers high, but the high economic capacity and education level among them also merit attention. Based on the information in a table titled “Occupations of Japanese Residents in Korea,

1910-1940” prepared by Jun Uchida, Japanese settlers categorized as officials or professionals by the colonial government made up 19.5 percent of the Japanese population in Korea in 1910 and 29.3 percent in 1920. This percentage increased consistently, with the number rising as much as 37.4 percent by 1945. Formally educated, salary-earning Japanese professionals and officials along with the aforementioned other foreign residents were likely to have had great consuming power for records.


51 Map by the author, based on an advertisement by Nitchiku in the *Maeil Sinbo*. May 30, 1913.
Then, identifying the areas where Nitchiku established exclusive dealers can provide useful information about whether the company targeted multicultural audiences, especially Japanese. The following figures show the distribution of the Japanese population in Korea (Figure 3) and the nationwide distribution network of Nitchiku (Figure 4). By comparing these two figures, it becomes obvious that the locations of the dealers largely conformed to the population distribution of Japanese and other foreigners in the Korean peninsula in a similar time period. In other words, Nitchiku’s exclusive dealers were located in the cities in which the largest numbers of Japanese and other foreigners resided. Admittedly, the distribution of the foreign population and Nitchiku’s network do not exactly match. However, the reason that there was no exclusive dealer in an established major city like Kaesŏng, but one in Chŏngjin with a population of only 5,539, must be related with the fact that 52 percent of Chŏngjin’s population was Japanese.

**Nitchiku’s Korean Records**

Major record companies in the first half of the twentieth century not only manufactured records but also more expensive phonographs. Thus, recording local music was considered a prerequisite for them to market their phonographs. Nitchiku also showed great enthusiasm for recording Korean music when it entered the Korean market. U.S. Columbia and Victor with their recording tours in the 1900s only recorded a few scores of Korean records. Bae Yeonhyung, based on comprehensive bibliographical research on Korean SP records, reports\(^{52}\) that Nitchiku, after its first recording, released about 100 single-sided records of traditional Korean music from September, 1911 under the Royal Record

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Nipponophone label. Several famous Korean traditional musicians of the era, Song Man-gap, Mun Yong-su, Pak Chun-jae, Kim Hong-do and Sim Jong-sun performed on these records. In spring 1913, Nitchiku conducted its second recording session in Tokyo. This time, around ten performers took part in recording 170 record sides, and most of the music consisted of various traditional music genres. This music was mainly released on double-sided records with the Nipponophone label. Interestingly, two singers, Kim Yong-sik and Kim Un-sik, recorded hymns in Korean, reflecting the influence of Protestantism on the music culture of colonial Korea. In addition, Ku Sung-hyon recorded imitations of animal sounds. In this way, Nitchiku’s Korean records began to show diversity in terms of genres and performers.

Unfortunately, Nitchiku did not make a consistent effort to provide Korean music to Korean consumers after the second recording. In fact, Nitchiku did not record Korean music for about ten years after 1913, but only intermittently reproduced records from matrices prepared previously. Bae points out that Nitchiku advertised quite frequently when it began operating in Korea, but from 1916 it printed almost no advertisements including the content of Korean records, and the total number of advertisements for Korean records in the Maeil Sinbo decreased considerably. As the only Korean newspaper available in the 1910s, the Maeil Sinbo was the main venue for Nitchiku’s advertisements. Even taking into account the fact that Nitchiku was the only company which produced Korean records from the 1910s until the middle of the 1920s, this approach might have been problematic if Nitchiku had mainly targeted Koreans for Korean record consumption.

Whether it was because the record consuming power of Koreans had increased or Nitchiku gained ground after overcoming the serious piracy issue or both, Nitchiku eventually resumed activity in Korea and recorded 140 pieces of Korean music around 1922. According to Bae, these

53 Bae Yeonhyung. “Ilch’uk Chosŏn Sori Ėmban Yŏnggu (2)”. 250.
recordings showed the increasing numbers of *kisaeng* performers taking part in recorded music. After 1925 Nitchiku established a recording studio in Kyŏngsŏng, which enabled musicians to conduct multiple recordings in various traditional genres. The resulting records have become important resources for the study of Korean traditional music. Further, records of new genres of music were also produced. These included Japanese popular music styles as well as *ch’angga* (J: shōka).55 Classical musicians recorded Western folk songs and hymns. Chorus music and children’s songs as well as instrumental music can also be found, among other styles. The labels of these records contained design elements which were more specifically Korean, including the language used, as can be seen below.

![Figure 5. Nitchiku record labels in the 1910s (a) Nitchiku record labels in the 1920s (b)](image)

After Nitchiku’s transition to Nippon Columbia, Nippon Columbia went on to produce the greatest number of Korean records in colonial Korea using its “viva-tonal” recording system. It is worth note that Korean SP records released during the colonial period, including Nitchiku’s, were all pressed in Japan except for the ones released by U.S.

54 Bae Yeonhyung. “Ilch’uk Chosŏn Sori Ŭmban Yŏnggu (2)”. 262-263 and 269.
55 *Ch’angga* is a genre of songs popular in the early 20th century in which Western songs, especially hymns, marches, and folk songs, were adapted and given Korean lyrics or were composed for school music instruction as well as other purposes, notably promotion of enlightenment (kyemong) and independence.
Koreans become Consumers of Diverse kinds of Music

If Korean records released in the 1910s and 1920s were mostly of Korean traditional music, were Korean audiences, especially young ones, satisfied with listening to those records and waiting for records with new styles of music to be released? Though records are known as a form of mass media, record consumers in the formative period of the recording industry might not have exactly fit such a categorization. In colonial Korea, they must have been wealthy Koreans, young urbanites with Western-style educations, some Christians, or those in the entertainment business such as *kisaeng*. In other words, they were so-called modern Koreans. In this case, it is likely that records popular among young Korean urbanites at that time had significant foreign content. Koreans who were interested in modern culture and knowledge as well as entertainers such as *kisaeng*, who also performed for Japanese, might have been exposed to diverse kinds of music from various countries.

As a matter of fact, Nitchiku intended to market both Korean and Japanese records to Korean consumers from the start of its business in Korea. According to a 1911 advertisement in the *Maeil Sinbo* for the opening of Nitchiku in Korea, the company stated that it would sell recently released Japanese records as well as Korean records released that year. The *Dong-A Ilbo* carried advertisements for thousands of Japanese records under the Washi and Orient labels as well as Ilch’uk Chosŏn Soriban. Moreover, the Japanese records mentioned in the advertisement

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57 This does not necessarily mean that Korean traditional music genres were not popular. Besides the 1910s and 20s, they were consistently recorded even in the 30s.
59 *Dong-A Ilbo*. January 30, 1927.
might not have included only Japanese-language records, but also those released by Nitchiku in Japan, including records of foreign music. This situation was not new. According to Bae, even before the colonization of Korea, records of Korean traditional music, Western music, and Japanese music were in circulation in Korea. Therefore, Korean record consumers in the 1910s and 20s were already exposed to globally distributed music of the era.

In the early 1900s, Japanese trading agencies helped diversify record markets in the Japanese empire by importing varieties of music from American and European record companies, especially Western classical music. For example, Sankōdō, which operated dealers in Korea even before Nitchiku set up its Korean branch, imported records from U.S. Columbia, British Gramophone, German Beka, Lirophone, U.S. Victor, and even French Pathé as early as the 1910s. If those records were sold in Japan, they must have been available to Korean record consumers one way or another. Thus, Korea as a colony of Japan also took advantage of the rich repertoire of transnational music records. The number of Korean record consumers might have been small, but modern Koreans were exposed to global sound culture almost simultaneously with record consumers in Japan as well as the other parts of the world.

An example that alludes to Korean consumption of foreign records is a 1924 feature article titled “Judging Yuhaengga’s Popularity among Female Students” in the magazine Sinyŏsŏng (New Women). Under the subtitle “admonishing female students and women’s schools,” the article, containing contributions from six Korean leaders in culture and education, expresses deep concern about the popularity of yuhaengga among female students. Songs provided as examples of yuhaengga by the contributors of

60 Bae Yeonhyung. “Ilch’uk Chosŏn Sori Ŭmban Yŏnggu (1)”. 93-94.
61 “ Yöhaksanggye Yuhaengga Sibi” Sinyŏsŏng 6 (1924): 46-53. Yuhaengga before the 1930s referred to popular songs regardless of genre, so even traditional songs were also considered Yuhaengga. See Chang Yu-jŏng, Oppa nŏn p’ungsakchaengi ya: taejung kayo ro pon k’undae ūl p’ungsŏng. 170-171.
the article were “枯れスズキ,” “리수일과 심순애 (a Korean adaptation of 金色夜叉の唄),” “ああ、世はゆめや、ゆめなりや,” “Carmen,” and “Fra Diavolo.” The kinds of songs cited as popular among female students in the mid-1920s were Japanese songs, those adapted from Japanese popular songs, and other foreign songs.

Admittedly, it is necessary to consider the popularity of these songs in relation with the development of modern theater in colonial Korea, especially songs sung during intermissions, and Western music education through schools and churches as well as print culture which provided lyrics in magazines, leaflets, and songbooks throughout the early twentieth century. At the same time, the sounds coming from a phonograph at a record dealer, a café, a kisaeng house, or a wealthy home must have captured the ears of Koreans and fascinated their minds. Nitchiku and Japanese trading agencies, by providing recorded music of Korea and foreign countries through their long-term business, must have stimulated modern Koreans’ longing for new kinds of music.

**Conclusion**

Studies of Korea under Japanese rule have generally focused on the bilateral relationship between Japan as colonizer and Korea as colonized. However, by examining Nitchiku’s identity as a transnational company in which the U.S. and Japan were the primary conturies involved, I attempt to identify the ways in which Nitchiku maintained its position as the dominant record company in both Japan and Korea. Though I do not ignore the fact that Nitchiku’s being based in Japan must have helped the company to conduct business in the Japanese empire, its ability to act like a so-called national company greatly contributed to its success. Through

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62 To indicate the diversity of the songs, I intentionally wrote each title in its original language.
masterful appropriation of sounds and images, Nitchiku represented itself as a pure Japanese company. Interestingly, such localizing methods, which Nitchiku applied to its operations in Japan and colonial Korea, helped prompt nationalistic historical interpretations of the formation of the Korean popular music industry. The activities of Nippon Columbia after 1935, when Japan’s industry nationalization policy caused it to become a fully Japanese-funded and managed company, reinforce such interpretations.

Nitchiku maintained special relations with major companies in order to diversify its catalog and cater to multicultural consumers in both Japan and Korea as well as the rest of the Japanese empire. Likewise, Japanese trading agencies also sought profits transnationally while delivering global sounds to locals. Not only Japanese, but also Koreans and other foreigners in the Japanese empire, therefore, could be almost simultaneously exposed through records to the global sound culture of the era. Studying the ways in which the recording industry operated in the early twentieth century reveals that colonial Korea was not just a space confined by Japanese imperialism, but was also a very pervious space, especially to transnational capital and culture.

References

The Nipponophone Company and Record Consumption in Colonial Korea

Choi Hye Eun

This paper is a history of the Korean record industry in the 1910s and 20s, focusing on the record company Nihon Chikuonki Shōkai (Nitchiku hereafter). As the first record company in the Japanese empire and the only one which operated a Korean branch until the middle of the 1920s, Nitchiku provides a gateway for understanding the formative period of the Korean record industry. In this paper, I pay special attention to the fact that Nitchiku was a foreign-funded and foreign-managed company and explore how it was able to take root in its markets by studying the company’s localization strategies, which I call “image politics.” I challenge the common perception that Nitchiku was an independent company and thereby demonstrate that it had special connections with major record companies in Europe and the U.S. even before its transition to Nippon Columbia. I also argue that consumers targeted by Nitchiku in the Korean market were not limited to Koreans, but also included multicultural groups residing in colonial Korea, especially Japanese. Such a business approach helped expose Korean record consumers to the global sound culture of the era, mediated through records. In doing so, I hope to illuminate how colonial Korea was intricately interconnected and interdependent with Japan in the circumstances engendered by Japanese imperialism as well as the capitalism of the era.

Keywords: Nipponophone Company, foreign-funded and foreign-managed company, image politics, early 20th century
20세기 초 일본의 선구적인 레코드 회사였던 일본축음기상회(Nipponophone Company, 약칭 일축)는, 식민지 조선에서도 1911년부터 지점을 개설하고 조선음반을 생산하는 등 음반 시장을 개척해 나간다. 일축은 순수 일본기업이 아니라 일본에 기반을 둔 외국인의 투자에 의해 세워진 외자기업이었으며, 이들 투자자들이 경영에도 직접 참여하고 있었다는 사실은 오늘날까지 한국의 음반사 연구에서 큰 고려의 대상이 되지 못하고 있다. 따라서 본고는 일축이 설립된 1910년경부터 콜롬비아의 자회사로의 편입이 시작된 1927년까지의 기간 동안 일축의 기업 형성 과정을 고찰함과 동시에, 일축이 외자기업이라는 이슈를 극복하고 민족기업으로의 이미지 창출을 위해 일본과 조선에서 어떠한 현지화 전략을 구사했는지를 살펴 보고자 한다. 본고는 한 걸음 더 나아가, 일축의 1910대 전반기에 발행되었을 것으로 추정되는 일축의 외국레코드 카탈로그를 토대로 일축이 과연 세계적인 메이저 회사들과는 무관하게 독립적으로 운영되었는지에 의문을 제기한다. 한편, 일축이 조선에서 음반 사업을 시작한 1910년대에는 조선인들의 음반구매력이 아직 본격적인 허도에 올라가지 못하였고, 음반의 구매 가능성이 큰 일본인들 및 외국인들이 많이 거주했던 조선의 도시들에 일축의 특약점이 위치했다는 점에 근거하여, 일축이 조선에 살고 있었던 다양한 민족을 대상으로 하는 음반산업을 구상했을 가능성도 탐색해 본다. 그러한 다민족을 위한 일축의 음반유통이 조선인 음반소비자들을 당시의 글로벌한 음악문화의 소비자로 창출하는데 기여하였다는 점도 아울러서 살펴본다.

주제어: 일본축음기상회, 외자기업, 현지화 전략, 20세기 초