3.1 Introduction

The term min’yō has rural resonances. To most Japanese the true folk song is a ‘country’ song, made by the rural working class for its own amusement, transmitted across the generations by untutored singers. Yet all accept that min’yō encompasses much more than this. The Edo period had its hayari-uta, urban popular songs which spread to the rural areas. Then there are zokuyō, rural songs which were re-formed, nurtured and propagated in the urban amusement areas – and then often recirculated in the countryside as hayariuta. The twentieth century brought shin-min’yō, ‘new folk songs’ mostly written by urban lyricists and tunesmiths motivated by considerations quite other than those which spawned the ‘true’ rural songs. Not only do many min’yō thus have urban connections, but the cities now take the lead in min’yō performance and transmission. The development of the broadcasting and recording industries, coupled with a national prosperity which has brought the products of those industries within the reach of every Japanese, has allowed the urban centres to influence (some say dictate hegemonically) the tastes of the whole populace. Scholars working at urban institutions have had a powerful impact on both the performance of folk song and the ideology surrounding it. Even more importantly, Japan, 90 per cent rural a century ago, is now predominantly urban (80 per cent by some definitions).

Chapter 2 focused on the ideal-typical traditional village as the primary locus of pre-modern folk song. The present chapter charts the birth of the modern min’yō world, an event in which the smaller towns often acted as midwife. In Chapter 4, the focus will shift to the modern urban centre. In Chapter 5 we consider folk song activity in the modern countryside, which can no longer be viewed even in relative isolation from the influences of the city. The impact of globalization will receive separate attention at various points.
3.2 The emergence of urban folk song: enabling factors

The cities of Japan, ancient and modern alike, naturally drew much of their population from the countryside. Only in the twentieth century, however, was the influx of rural residents accompanied by the emergence of folk song as a discrete and significant form of urban musical activity. This development can be seen as the result of the combined workings of several interrelated factors, varying in importance and in the period of effectiveness.

(1) **The tremendous population shift from rural to urban** is obviously a consideration, although its precise effects on musical behaviour are less intuitively obvious. During the century preceding the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan’s population held steady at around 30 million, of whom some 10 per cent are estimated to have lived in cities of over 10,000 people. Edo’s population may have surpassed 1 million, while Osaka and Kyoto held 3–400,000 and Kanazawa and Nagoya around 100,000 (Hall 1970: 210). Since then, the urban population has grown steadily while rural figures remain practically constant. Today, over 80 per cent of 130 million Japanese are ‘living in cities’ (EOJ: 8.176). This urban growth resulted largely from migration from the countryside: throughout the twentieth century a goodly proportion of Japan’s urbanites were country-born. The rural origin of much of the urban populace was merely an enabling factor, not a sufficient condition.

(2) **The image of the peasant has been gradually upgraded** since the Meiji Restoration. In the preceding Edo period, the official ideology of social class was a modified Confucian four-tiered system: samurai, farmer, artisan, merchant in descending order. (Outside this system were the emperor and nobility above and various outcasts below.) In theory, the peasant (again, using this term in a non-pejorative sense) was ranked above the urban craftsmen and merchants. In reality, members of the latter two classes generally received more prestige. This was partly because of the relative wealth and resultant influence of the merchants in particular, but also because the city was perceived as the centre of culture and the peasants as boors and bumpkins. After all, it was in the city that one could rub shoulders with samurai—perhaps even gain a financial advantage over an improvident warrior. In the city a new and attractive popular culture had developed: Kabuki for the merchant and samurai, koto and tea lessons for their wives and daughters, woodblock printing and so forth (see Moriya 1984; Nishiyama 1964, 1997). The merchant class also gradually acquired access to much of samurai culture,