



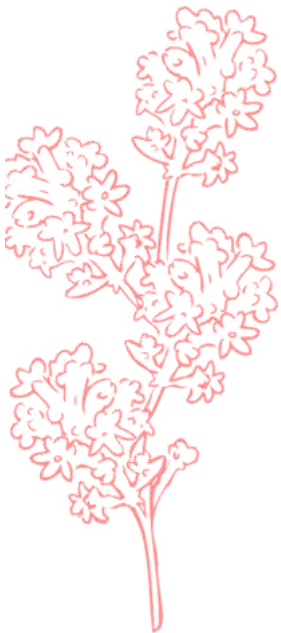
HST352
Women in Japanese History

*Western Music and Female
Musicians in Meiji Japan*

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Introduction

Until Meiji period, there was a limited opportunity for people to learn Western music in Japan. The first encounter of Western music for Japanese happened during the sixteenth century when Francis Xavier (1506-1552) brought Christian church music and several Western musical instruments such as the flute, viola, and small keyboards to Japan.¹ Yet, instruments such as the piano and violin only became popular and affordable in Meiji period after Japan invited foreign music educators. Also Japanese women received proper Western music education abroad. In this exhibit, Nagai Shigeko, Kōda Nobu, and Kuno Hisako whom all had studied abroad to learn Western music in Meiji period are introduced as valuable contributors to Western music education in Meiji Japan. Also, the exhibit illustrates their struggles for having a successful music career when women were still expected to stay inside the home.

¹ Iida, "The Acceptance of Western Piano Music in Japan and the Career of Takahiro Sonoda," p. 20.



Background of Western Music Education In Meiji Period

Since the establishment of the Fundamental Code of Education in 1872, a compulsory education system was promoted by the Meiji state.² Multiple schools, from kindergartens to universities, were built based on Western education models.³ Among them, the following schools are known to have included Western music education: the Tokyo Normal School, the Tokyo Women's Normal School, and the Peers' School.⁴ Luther Whiting Mason (1818-1896), an American music educator is considered one of the major contributors to Western music education in the Meiji period. He promoted singing class in the above mentioned three schools with his Japanese assistants from 1880 to 1882.⁵ Meanwhile, Mason was also working at the Music Institute where he taught singing, piano, organ, violin, theory, and music history.⁶ The Music Institute was established in 1879 by the Music Study Committee.⁷ It was renamed Tokyo Music School in 1887 and today it is known as part of the highly reputed Tokyo College of Fine

² Howe, "The Role of Women in the Introduction of Western Music in Japan," p. 86.

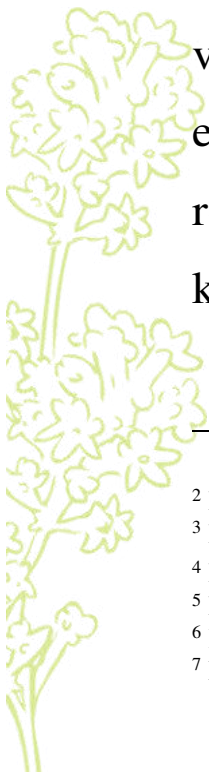
³ Howe, "The Role of Women in the Introduction of Western Music in Japan," p. 86.

⁴ Howe, "Women Music Educators in Japan during the Meiji Period," p. 104.

⁵ Iida, "The Acceptance of Western Piano Music in Japan and the Career of Takahiro Sonoda," p. 41.

⁶ Iida, "The Acceptance of Western Piano Music in Japan and the Career of Takahiro Sonoda," p. 87.

⁷ Howe, "The Role of Women in the Introduction of Western Music in Japan," p. 87.

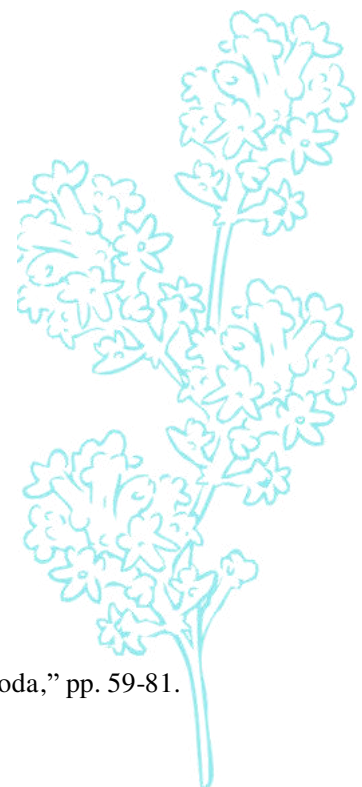


Background of Western Music Education In Meiji Period

Arts in Ueno, Tokyo.⁸ Even after he left Japan, his teachings were passed down to his Japanese assistants and students who later became the important contributors to Western music education in Japan. The following three sections introduce the Japanese women, Nagai Shigeko (1861-1928), Kōda Nobu (1870-1946), and Kuno Hisako (1885-1925) who were the important contributors to promoting Western music in Japan by passing down Mason's teachings to next generations and develop Western music education.⁹

⁸ Howe, "The Role of Women in the Introduction of Western Music in Japan," p. 88.

⁹ Iida, "The Acceptance of Western Piano Music in Japan and the Career of Takahiro Sonoda," pp. 59-81.



Nagai Shigeko (1861-1928)

Nagai Shigeko was an adopted child of a family physician Dr. Nagai.¹⁰ At the age of 10, she studied abroad as one of the five girls who joined the Iwakura Mission.¹¹ These five girls Yoshimasu Ryu, Ueda Tei, Yamakawa Sutematsu, Tsuda Umeko, and Nagai Shigeko were all coming from upper-class families.¹² In this exhibit, only Nagai Shigeko of these girls will be covered as she directly contributed to Western music education in Meiji Japan. After graduating from New Haven High School in the U.S., Nagai continued studying music at Vassar College in New York and received a Certificate in Music in 1881,¹³ becoming the first Japanese to study music abroad and receive a certificate in music. Soon after returning to Japan, she became a highly demanded music teacher as the first Japanese piano teacher.¹⁴ In 1882, she was invited by Mason to work as an assistant piano teacher at the Music Institute.¹⁵ Then, she also started teaching piano at the Tokyo Women's Normal School.¹⁶ As indication of her value as a teacher, when she was twenty-one years old, she was receiving thirty yen per month which was three times higher than the average school teachers.¹⁷ However, she retired about ten years later because she realized her limitation in teaching

¹⁰ Howe, "The Role of Women in the Introduction of Western Music in Japan," p. 90.

¹¹ Howe, "The Role of Women in the Introduction of Western Music in Japan," p. 90.

¹² Howe, "Women Music Educators in Japan during the Meiji Period," p. 103.

¹³ Howe, "The Role of Women in the Introduction of Western Music in Japan," p. 90.

¹⁴ Howe, "The Role of Women in the Introduction of Western Music in Japan."

¹⁵ Iida, "The Acceptance of Western Piano Music in Japan and the Career of Takahiro Sonoda," p. 45.

¹⁶ Iida, "The Acceptance of Western Piano Music in Japan and the Career of Takahiro Sonoda," pp. 90-91.

¹⁷ Iida, "The Acceptance of Western Piano Music in Japan and the Career of Takahiro Sonoda," p. 59.

Nagai Shigeko (1861-1928)

piano after marrying and having children.¹⁸ Yet, as she was the first piano teacher in Japan, it is safe to say that she largely helped produce many Japanese music teachers at the Music Institute. One of her students was Kōda Nobu who became an distinguished pianist and violinist.¹⁹ The next section introduces Kōda's life as a music teacher and professional musician.



¹⁸ Iida, "The Acceptance of Western Piano Music in Japan and the Career of Takahiro Sonoda," p. 77.

¹⁹ Iida, "The Acceptance of Western Piano Music in Japan and the Career of Takahiro Sonoda," p. 66.

Kōda Nobu (1870-1946)

Kōda Nobu was a talented pianist and violinist. She was born into the famous Kōda family that included renowned novelist Kōda Rohan.²⁰ She learned vocal music, piano, and violin at the Music Institute from 1882 to 1885.²¹ After becoming one of the institute's first three graduates, she started working at her alma mater as an assistant.²² Several years later, she studied abroad in Boston and Vienna. In Vienna, she studied violin, piano, composition, counterpoint, and singing at the Vienna Conservatory until 1895.²³ Having this extensive knowledge of music, she also started composing in a Western-style which was unprecedented in Japan at the time.²⁴ However, she was blatantly criticized for her assertiveness. As she had the most successful career as an educator at the time, the stigma and criticism seem exceptionally intense in her case. Because of her assertiveness, she was called “Queen of Ueno” and a “Tyrant”.²⁵ Moreover, a rumor about her having an affair gained the public's attention and led her to leave the Tokyo Music School in 1909.²⁶ This shows how even a highly demanded female educator could lose her job and reputation in an instant when she did not fulfill the ideal of femininity.

²⁰ Howe, “The Role of Women in the Introduction of Western Music in Japan,” p. 95.

²¹ Howe, “The Role of Women in the Introduction of Western Music in Japan,” p. 95.

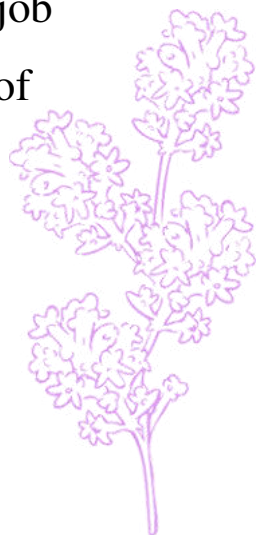
²² Howe, “The Role of Women in the Introduction of Western Music in Japan,” p. 95.

²³ Howe, “The Role of Women in the Introduction of Western Music in Japan,” p. 95.


²⁴ Howe, “The Role of Women in the Introduction of Western Music in Japan,” p. 96.

²⁵ Howe, “The Role of Women in the Introduction of Western Music in Japan,” p. 96.

²⁶ Howe, “The Role of Women in the Introduction of Western Music in Japan,” p. 96.



Kuno Hisako (1885-1925)



Kuno Hisako (1885-1925) was one of the most popular pianists around the end of Meiji period to the beginning of Taishō period. Before describing her life, it must be stated that Kuno was the product of musical teachings and knowledge that have been passed down from Mason to Nagai, one of his assistants, to Kōda whom she learned piano from. However, unlike Nagai and Kōda, she did not have a wealthy upbringing as she lost both of her parents when she was around six years old.²⁷ After being taken into the custody of her uncle, she started learning Japanese music through the lessons of *shamisen* and the *nagauta*.²⁸ Then, at the age of fifteen, she entered the preparatory course of the Tokyo Music School and shifted her specialty to Western music.²⁹ While she was studying at the Tokyo Music School, she was already growing her popularity as an excellent pianist as she was mentioned in the newspapers.³⁰ As soon as she graduated, she started working as an assistant instructor at the Tokyo Music School.³¹ To indicate her popularity then, a music magazine at that time describes her performance at a concert as a “milestone in the history of music in Japan” with 500 people attending the concert.³² However, Kuno tragically ended her music career.

²⁷ Iida, “The Acceptance of Western Piano Music in Japan and the Career of Takahiro Sonoda,” p. 82.

²⁸ Iida, “The Acceptance of Western Piano Music in Japan and the Career of Takahiro Sonoda,” p. 82.

²⁹ Iida, “The Acceptance of Western Piano Music in Japan and the Career of Takahiro Sonoda,” p. 82.

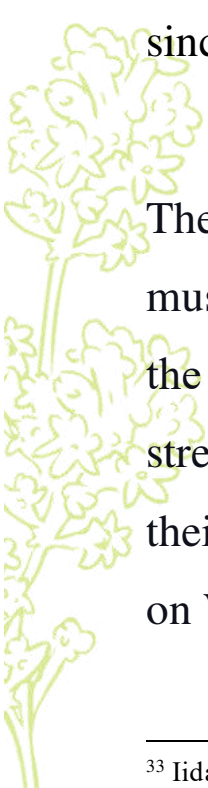
³⁰ Iida, “The Acceptance of Western Piano Music in Japan and the Career of Takahiro Sonoda,” p. 83.

³¹ Iida, “The Acceptance of Western Piano Music in Japan and the Career of Takahiro Sonoda,” p. 83.

³² Mori, “A Historical Survey of Music Periodicals in Japan: 1881-1920,” p. 45.

Kuno Hisako (1885-1925)

After she achieved remarkable success as a pianist in Japan, she went to Vienna to further her music career.³³ But as she started to realize her immaturity in piano skills, the rigorous practice and the pressure of representing Japanese pianists mentally and physically exhausted her. So, she committed suicide during her stay.³⁴ Although the cause of her suicide is unclear, after her death, Kanetsune, an acquaintance of Kuno who was a music commentator described her as “a victim of Japan in transition”.³⁵ He explains that she lived in the “unhealthy atmosphere” which he points out as Meiji society where she could not advance her performance due to lack of professional audience.³⁶ Yet, her popularity as a pianist in Meiji Japan would perhaps represent how far Western music has been promoted during Meiji period since Mason arrived in Japan.



The last section examines the learning environment of Western music in Meiji period. The establishment of *ryōsai kenbo shugi* or the “good wife, wise mother ideology” by the Meiji state in 1895 strengthened the idea that women should stay inside and serve their families. While this ideal might have had a positive impact on Western music education by promoting music lessons for girls,

³³ Iida, “The Acceptance of Western Piano Music in Japan and the Career of Takahiro Sonoda,” p. 91.

³⁴ Iida, “The Acceptance of Western Piano Music in Japan and the Career of Takahiro Sonoda,” p. 93.

³⁵ Iida, “The Acceptance of Western Piano Music in Japan and the Career of Takahiro Sonoda,” p. 93.

³⁶ Iida, “The Acceptance of Western Piano Music in Japan and the Career of Takahiro Sonoda,” p. 93.

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it could also impose negative stereotypes for female musicians. In Meiji period, women were expected to develop morality by taking various kinds of lessons. Music lesson was one of the accepted ways to prepare for being a good wife.³⁷ After Japanese-made pianos became affordable to the middle-class family, piano lessons gained popularity and were conducted at school and home.³⁸ Consequently, being a music educator became many girls' dreams.³⁹ On the contrary, *ryōsai kenbo shugi* made women's pursue of a professional music career difficult. Women who pursued music careers were considered immoral by abandoning the traditional path for women: marriage. Evidently, the depiction of female violinists associated with immoral character frequently appeared in literature around the time.⁴⁰ Furthermore, dynamic movements that naturally involve in playing a musical instrument, in particular violin, seemed to have created a stereotype for female violinists as having an aggressive personality. There was a perception that being a violinist was a man's occupation because of the intensity and strengths required in playing the instrument.⁴¹ These negative perceptions of the public towards professional female musicians could have been contributing to the tendency of girls to pursue a career as a music educator instead of a professional musician. In fact, there were

³⁷ Sakamoto, "Keiko suru musumetachi no meiji nihon to seiyō ongaku," pp. 62-63.

³⁸ Maema and Iwano, *Nihon no piano 100-nen*, p. 129.

³⁹ Sakamoto, "Keiko suru musumetachi no meiji nihon to seiyō ongaku," p. 67.

⁴⁰ Takahashi, "Meiji-ki no baiorin: sono imēji to nihon tokuyū no juyō no shosō," p. 163.

⁴¹ Mehl, "A Man's Job? The Kōda Sisters, Violin Playing, and Gender Stereotypes in the Introduction of Western Music in Japan," p. 102.

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only three out of twenty-two people who graduated from the performance course at Music Institute in 1885, the year of the first graduates, since many changed their studies to become a music teacher rather than a professional musician.⁴² This raises the question whether girls truly dreamed of being a music teacher or if they felt the need to compromise their ambition of being a professional musician because of the emphasis on marriage and ideal femininity in Meiji period. Although the question is beyond the scope of this exhibit, it seems that women had to struggle between fulfilling their potential, interests, and dreams, and answering the societal expectations to be a “good wife and wise mother”.

⁴² Iida, “The Acceptance of Western Piano Music in Japan and the Career of Takahiro Sonoda,” p. 93.



Conclusion

This exhibit introduced three women; Nagai Shigeko, Kōda Nobu, and Kuno Hisako who contributed to promoting Western music in Meiji Japan as music educators and professional musicians when Western music education in Japan was still in its infancy. However, these women also faced certain stereotypes that could endanger their careers. In fact, even musicians who were highly demanded in Meiji Japan as educators could lose their employment if they were not feminine enough. Even today, the contribution and legacy of female musicians in Meiji Japan are often forgotten or ignored in Japanese music history. However, omitting women's contributions to society should not be how history is told. Since this exhibit only mentions three women who stood out in the Meiji Western music education, further documentation and discussion of female musicians should continue.



Gallery - Western Music in Meiji Period



Figure 1. Tokyo Music School, 1911. National Diet Library Digital Collections.



Figure 2. Screenshot of Nobu Koda: Violin Sonata No.1 Es-major, University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, 2018. YouTube.

https://youtu.be/yryTmyT_0QA



Figure 3. Yōshū Chikanobu 揚洲 周延, Baian Shōkazu 梅園唱歌図, 1887. [Waseda University Library](#).



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