

ISAWA AND MASON

A Study of Early Music Education in Japan

by

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#1

Contemporary Japan is filled with Western music, even though this music has a history of barely a century in the country. Yet Japan may well have had an introduction to Western music considerably before this with the advent of Francisco de Xavier,¹ the first Jesuit preacher who arrived in Japan in the mid-16th century. He brought with him a medieval musical instrument in the lutemandolin style. Also, the Tensho Juvenile Mission to the Vatican in the late 16th century, sent by the provincial feudal lords of the Kyusyu area, studied the string quartet. On their return to Japan, they played European music in Kyoto in the presence of the Shogun. Hideyoshi.

It is clear, however, that the real introduction of do-re-mi-fa music took place in the days of the Meiji restoration. That was the time when Japan truly turned from feudal to modern ways.

The government enforced many policies, from military to the educational, based on the European systems, which were called new and advanced.

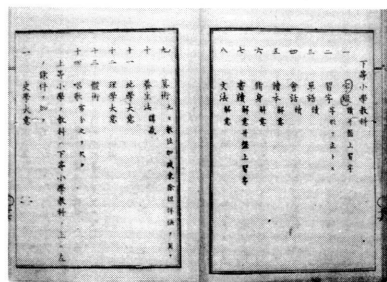
Hundreds of bright young Japanese students were sent to learn about European culture and civilization. On the other hand, the government invited many European experts from the technologically advanced countries as counsel. These "experts" were nicknamed "oyatoi-kyoshi" and received extraordinarily high payment, as high as the salary of the current prime minister.

Medical doctors, law professors, language teachers, specialists in agriculture, civil engineering,

educators and practitioners in the fine arts were all invited to Japan. The Meiji government was quite willing to learn from all the European cultures to make Japan anew in order for it to become a country of international cultural standards.

In 1872, the government initiated an educational system. This was the first time in Japan for there to be systematic school education throughout the entire country. Before, private institutions had independent classes, which were all different. The new curriculum for elementary level schools included:

- 1 Spelling
- 2 Penmanship
- 3 Vocabulary
- 4 Conversation
- 5 Reading (Comprehension)
- 6 Moral Education
- 7 Book Reading (Literature)
- 8 Grammar
- 9 Mathematics
- 10 Hygiene
- 11 Geography
- 12 Science
- 13 Gymnastics
- 14 Singing (music) - *No use for the present*



New curriculum for elementary school

Elementary schools were immediately built over almost all of Japan, regardless of whether in big cities or small villages. The Japanese were quite naive about the governmental decree and took the new educational policy to be exceedingly important.

The new curricula were all in place in the newly built schools by 1873 except for item 14, Singing (music).

#2

The main theme of this article is precisely that, item 14, Singing (music), in the educational system.

Generally speaking, the Meiji Government studied the cultures of England, France, Germany, Holland and the United States. Ideological theory for law and philosophy came from France and Germany; from England came practical items such as technology. The educational system came from France. It is not clear why the French educational system was chosen but perhaps some French law professors were involved with the Meiji government so it convenient to learn from them.

However, item 14 was a major problem, for France had established the "conservatory system" to teach music outside the regular elementary school system. Thus, they were obliged to suspend the implementation of this subject which was done by adding the phrase "no use for the present."

The intelligent Japanese acknowledged the value of fine arts as an educational tool even then, but they were not versed in the ways to implement the teaching of the subject. Much discussion was held about the music. Which music would be used? Would it be Japanese traditional music or Western music? Would it be Japanese music for a nationalistic education or Western music for a new, advanced culture?

Japanese traditional music - songs - are, roughly:

- 1 Yoh-kyoku - Musical accompaniment to Noh plays
- 2 Naga-uta - Accompaniment to Kabuki theatrical plays
- 3 Ko-uta and its equivalent -
Teahouse entertainment
- 4 Warabe-uta - Traditional children's song

The government's Ministry of Education considered that numbers 1 and 2 were too sophisticated, and believed that even the words were too difficult for children to understand. Number 3 was considered indecent. Thus, it was concluded that 4 was the easiest and might be appropriate for the new education. It was felt that music classes centered on Japanese music would not be adequate for the new system and new era.

Ultimately, the government concluded that the music curriculum should be centered on Western music that contained some material for Japanese taste. Once the decision was made, the fact was that Western music was virtually foreign to the Japanese, including government officials. Then information came from a Japanese student in Boston that children's music classes had begun in the Boston area and that training courses for music teachers were also available at some schools. On receipt of this information, the Ministry of Education asked for details from the Japanese Consulate General which had opened in New York in 1870. Then a consul was sent by himself to Boston to get more information about it.

#3

Usually, music is not included in regular elementary school curriculum in European countries. Basically, the private conservatories are the professional institutes for training musicians. Traditionally, the public schools concentrated on so-called reading, writing and arithmetic. A few private schools enjoyed music classes. It is true that education belongs in a trinity of intellectual courses, courses of virtue and physical training - in other words, education for the brain, the heart and the body.

In this sense, the traditional European way of school education had kept to item 1, while items 2 and 3 were supplied through time after school.

Music courses at regular elementary schools were initiated in the mid-nineteenth century in the United States in the Boston area. It was a first in world history. America was a newly developed country, a vast continent being opened by pioneers. The only culture was that the Native Americans. The culture

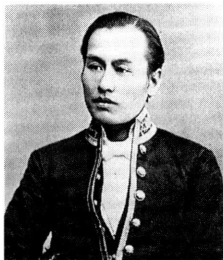
of the European settlers had had little time to develop. Therefore, it was seen that schooling was an important cultural tool and even music should be taught in the schools.

Musical courses actually began as church singing classes. Many people wanted to avoid the chaos of hymn singing during church services. Some leaders organized singing classes but these leaders were not really professionally trained. In 1832, one of these, Lowell Mason (1792-1872) a self-taught musician, established the Boston Academy of Music, which was the first music teacher training school. The school sent teachers throughout the area, even beyond New England. Thus, music in public schools was begun in the U.S. Lowell Mason can be called the initiator of music education in the public school system.

Among the first graduates from the Boston Academy of Music was another Mason, Luther Whiting Mason (no relative to Lowell) who became a very important figure in the development of Western music education in Japan.



Luther W. Mason



Syuji Isawa

#4

Syuji Isawa (1851-1917) was the son of a humble Samurai² from the Takatoh³ province. He was very bright and was awarded a governmental scholarship. He went to Tokyo and graduated from Daigaku Nankoh, now Tokyo University. At the age of 24, he was appointed the principal of the Aichi Normal School. A year later, he received an astonishing appointment to go to the U.S. to study the educational system, with an emphasis on elementary schooling. He left Japan from Yokohama on July 18, 1875.

Information from the Japanese Consulate General

in New York shows that Isawa went to Boston and entered the Bridgewater State Normal School (the first State Normal School in the U.S.), where he studied for two years. He worked hard and his school scores were very good in everything except for the two subjects of English pronunciation and singing (music). His command of English reading and writing was fairly good but his study of spoken English in Japan was quite different from the real pronunciation in Boston. The first foreign language he learned was Dutch, so he was greatly influenced by the Dutch. Japanese and Dutch influences on the English language - those formed a base for his English pronunciation. Isawa had a struggle to reform his English speech.

Another struggle was music.

This was the first time Isawa learned of the do-re-mi-fa music. Basically, the Samurai families of feudal Japan did not consider music highly. Indeed, it was almost neglected. Isawa, the son of Samurai, was unfortunately almost tone deaf. The school dean, Professor Boiden, had known of Isawa's difficulty and his cultural background and kindly offered to cancel the music - he suggested that music not be counted as a graduation credit. But Isawa's pride as a Japanese student made him reluctant to accept this offer. And by that time, Isawa had studied the importance of music in elementary schooling.

The basic premise for children's education in the Boston area was strongly influenced by the Pestalozzi philosophy, which emphasizes the value of children's behavior. Singing (music) was apparently a valid school subject. Isawa decided to study music intensively with a private tutor. There was a well-known music teacher by the name of Luther Whiting Mason - yes, he was one of the two Masons of whom I have written.

Isawa went to Mason to learn music privately. He studied earnestly for about a year. During this time, the two became fast friends - something which influenced the introduction of music education later in Japan.

Luckily, Isawa was able to obtain a basic command of Western music and obtain full credit for graduation from the Bridgewater State Normal School. When he had graduated, he wrote a special

report to the Minister of Education in Tokyo, "Expectations for Implementing Singing (Music) in the New School System in Japan." He now believed firmly in the value of music in the elementary school curriculum. Isawa joined Harvard University's Department of Science where he studied for about a year. He returned to Japan in 1878.

The following year, the National Institute of Music (Ongaku-torishirabe-gakari) was built. Isawa was a central figure at the institute. The main task for this institute was to establish a curriculum and to prepare a textbook for singing (music) to be incorporated at elementary schools throughout Japan.

#5

Isawa was the only Japanese who knew, "What Western music is, how it is to be performed and why to teach it to children." He wanted to invite his private music tutor Luther Whiting Mason as an expert in music education to Japan to help him. Frankly speaking, the task was too great for Isawa alone.

The government acknowledged his idea and invited Mason to help Isawa to begin to incorporate into curriculum the subject of singing (music) which they had temporarily not used. Mason was willing to accept this invitation and arrived in Tokyo in March of 1880.

The first step in their joint work was for Isawa and Mason to compile a textbook for music education. The main idea, which was acknowledged by the government was that the music could be in the Western style but with Japanese feeling. Thus, the words and lyrics used in the textbook were to be Japanese while the musical notes were to be western. Half the songs could be Japanese, half western.

Isawa organized the editing committee, which included Japanese language professors and poets. Mason recommended appropriate Western songs to the committee, which discussed the sentiments - would they be good for Japanese children or not? The difficulty of putting Japanese lyrics to Western songs was also considered. The lyrics were not translations of the originals but were newly written and based on the Japanese esthetic or famous literary works.

For example, the famous Scottish folk song

"Annie Laurie" was used in the textbook with the Japanese title "Saijo," which means "talented women." The content of the Japanese lyric was based on two famous women in literature - Murasaki-shikibu⁴ and Sei-shoh-nagon⁵ of the 11th century.

Another funny example is that of a foolish bird catcher, Papageno, who appears in Mozart's famous opera, "The Magic Flute." One of the most popular arias he sings "I'd like to have a girl friend." This was put into the textbook with a Japanese lyric, "Sincerity is most important to human beings."

How big is the difference between the original and textbook version!

The textbooks were designed in three volumes. Volume 1 begins with very simple music theory and 31 easy songs follow - one third of which were composed by committee members (maybe including Isawa and Mason) and the rest were Western melodies with decent Japanese lyrics.

In Volumes 2 and 3, the number of Western songs is increased tremendously. Songs for the higher grades were brought from the West. They came from the textbook printed in Boston that L.W. Mason himself had compiled some years before. The three volumes of the textbook include 91 songs and, to my eyes, about 20 percent were of Japanese taste. The composer's name is not printed in the volumes.

Volume 1 of the music textbook was released in November 1881. Historically, it was the first Japanese music book printed with Western music notations with the words in Japanese. Volumes 2, 1883 and 3 were released by March of 1884. Isawa's efforts to start "music" as an elementary school subject took a step forward.

The national Institute of Music (Ongaku-torishirabe-gakari) was in the process of training 22 students (9 males and 13 females) to be teachers of music; the institute was also compiling texts. At the same time, Mason was trying to teach Japanese children at the elementary school that belonged to the Tokyo Normal School and the kindergarden of the Tokyo Women's Normal School. The responses of Japanese children to the Western music material was also being studied.

In spite of feelings of embarrassment by the adults, the teachers and children reacted very well, even enjoying the subject. It seemed to the personnel of the Institute of Music that the results were good. The Meiji Empress even visited the Tokyo Women's Normal School to see the new method of music education and she was really impressed.

A wall chart of music was released with Volume 1 of the music text. The wall chart was a quite convenient teaching aid, created by Mason himself. It was awarded a prize at the Paris Exposition of 1879 as an effective educational tool.

Now so far, Volume 1 of the textbook and the wall chart were prepared and the teachers were all trained in Japan. But there was a major difficulty: the musical instrument needed. The five upright pianos at the institute came with Mason from the U.S. The piano was a very expensive instrument for regular elementary school. The koto, the Japanese harp, was tried but this did not work because the traditional koto tuning are very different from do-re-mi-fa.

Isawa and Mason remembered the scene at the service in a tiny church back in the American countryside - an organ with a foot pedal system. The real name was harmonium, and it is much cheaper than a piano.

Soon, because of their recommendation, every normal school was equipped with a harmonium.

The first Japanese harmonium was made by Yamaha Torakusu in 1887 on Isawa's advice. It helped lower the price of harmoniums in Japan. In several years, almost all the elementary schools around Japan were equipped with harmoniums. (The first Japanese-made piano appeared in 1899.) In 1887, the National Institute of Music became the National Music College and Isawa was appointed its president.

As for Luther Whiting Mason, he taught at some prestigious schools, including the School of Peers (Gakushuin). He returned home to Boston in 1887 on the expiration of his contract. He very much wanted to return to Japan but the Japanese government did not renew the contract.

Notes:

- 1 Lived 1506 - 1552, the prince of Navarra Kingdom (now north eastern part of Spain). He initiated the Jesuit in 1534.
- 2 Warrior. The Japanese of chivalry in the feudal time.
- 3 Now a part of Nagano prefecture, about 200 kilometer west of Tokyo.
- 4 She wrote an important novel of Japanese literature "Genji-monogatari" in early 11th century.
- 5 The author of famous collection of essays "Makurano-soh-shi" in early 11th century.

伊沢とメイソン —— 日本の音楽教育初期の研究

服 部 公 一

日本の音楽教育は愛知師範学校長であった、伊沢修二の米国ボストン留学にはじまると言っても過言ではない。

米国で組織的な音楽教育が開始されたのは、十九世紀中頃のボストンであり、それはまさに伊沢の留学、明治七年（1874年）と期を同じくするものであったのだ。

ヨーロッパ先進国、ドイツ、フランスなどでは小学普通教育課程に於てはほとんどがかえり見られることのなかった“音楽”がアメリカでその教科にとり上げられ、それが近代化作業中の国家であった日本政府により採用される——という筋道はあまり知られていない。

その筋道を伊沢修二とルーサーWメイソンに焦点をあてて研究したものである。