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Music Education for “Musically Talented Children” in Japan: A Career Path Toward Professionals and Three Music Education Organizations

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Abstract: Japan has been one of the leading countries in Asia, where many world-class music professionals are continually produced. As an insider, the author has witnessed and experienced how “musically talented children” are raised in Japan for more than three decades. The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to articulate the career path for becoming professional classical musicians from infants through college period. The findings are four folds: (1) piano is the most popular instrument, to begin with from early age, (2) most young children participate in music competitions, (3) there are three critical periods when young children have to decide whether they continue to study music or quit, (4) Two music universities, the Tōhō Gakuen Music School and the Tokyo National University of the Arts are the top schools in producing professional musicians, particularly in the piano, the violin, and the composition fields. In addition, the systems of three notable music education organizations, the Suzuki Methods, the Tōhō Music School for Children, and the PTNA, are explained.

Keywords: Music education, Musically talented children, Music methods, Music career path

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Japan has produced numerous world-renowned musicians, including Seiji Ozawa, Mitsuko Uchida, Tōru Takemitsu, Midori Gotō, Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi, and Hiromi Uehara, to name a few. Furthermore, Japan is also well known for famous music education organizations such as the Suzuki Method and the Tōhō Music School for Children. Therefore, it can be said that Japan is one of the leading Asian countries providing professional classical musicians to the world. With this fact, it would be natural for people outside of Japan to become interested in how these talented musicians have been educated and the system of education that keeps producing high-quality musicians until today.

This paper aims to provide basic information regarding the system and education for musically talented children in Japan. I limit the term “musically talented” as within the genre of Western classical music since this term has been conventionally used as such meaning worldwide. I also focus on piano and violin education since these two instruments are the most popular and regarded as the symbol for musically talented children.

The term “musically talented children” does not imply that musical talent is innate or inborn. I agree that “musical talent” comes primarily from a good environment and students’ combined efforts, parents, and teachers. Scripp et al. (2013) called it “acquired expertise.” “Expertise requires that an immense amount of time be committed to high-quality practice (Scripp et al. 2013).” So, readers are to be reminded that “talented” does not mean “born genius” in this paper. Consequently, I do not mean “music education for talented children” as equal to finding children who are born with musical gifts, and I would like to define it as “intensive and high-quality music instruction to acquire musical expertise.”

2. General Path to Becoming Professional Musician in Japan

2.1. From Infants until Elementary Schools

As of today, it is pretty standard that children start music lessons from a very young age. According to the surveyⁱ by Bandai Corporation (Bandai Co. 2014), a piano was ranked the top as after school learning activity among girls aged between three and fifteen (Table 1). Another survey (Gakken 2019) revealed in 2019 that piano is the top-ranked after-school learning activity for girls

ⁱ Bandai corporation is a toy manufacturing company and Gakken is a company that produce educational products of all kinds both in software and hardware. These surveys by both companies have often been cited in academic paper elsewhere and reliable.

between ages six and ten. (Table 2) Overall, the piano is the most popular instrument for young children to study music. The fact that beginning a music lesson in Japan is almost identical to beginning a piano lesson has not changed since I had reported in 2012 (Ogawa 2012).

In general, the age of beginning music lessons is between three and six.

Table 1. List of Popular Learning Activities for Girls (age 3 to 15) in Japan.

Rank	Activities	Percentage
1	Piano	28.5
2	Math and Japanese	17.8
3	Swimming	14.8
4	English/Calligraphy	12.3
5	Abacus	7.3

N = 400. Cited from Bandai Survey 2014.

Table 2. Ranking of Music Learning Activities by Age and Gender.

Age	Ranking	
	Boys	Girls
6	3	2
7	3	1
8	5	1
9	6	2
10	8	1

N = 100 in each grade and gender. Cited from Gakken Survey 2019.

Typically, there are two paths to begin with music lessons. The first one is to enter a private music school. There are variety of schools from a small local to internationally chained schools, such as YAMAHA music school or Suzuki Method. Commonly, chained music schools are usually affiliated with music companies. Besides YAMAHA, other music companies KAWAI, Roland, or CASIO, own their music schools. Music retailers run the other type of chained music school. One of the largest schools is Shimamura music company that has 168 music schools nationwide.

The second path is to become a student of an independent home music teacher. It is impossible to count the number of such music teachers since no qualification is required to claim. In Japan, anybody can become a music teacher regardless of her/his background. Nevertheless, in general, home music teachers have studied music at music college or college of education. It is also to note that almost all teachers are piano teachers. A piano is the most popularly studied musical instrument in Japan among the youth. Therefore, Japan is a piano-dominated country (Ogawa 2012). Since there is no license or certificate needed to be a music teacher, the levels of music teachers significantly vary. So, a student may receive inadequate or even wrong instruction from a low-level music teacher.

The difference between the two paths is that the music schools provide various music activities such as singing, movements, solfège, games before or with the piano lesson. In contrast, home music (piano) teachers tend to focus on teaching piano only. The lesson fee is fixed and disclosed in private music schools, whereas the lesson fee varies and is not always disclosed. The private music schools have the intention to sell the musical instruments to the students of their products. In contrast, home music teachers do not usually have other intentions than teaching music. Parents' decision of which path to choose depends on their circumstances and the future of their child. If they would like to have their child systematic and comprehensive music lessons, they would choose the private music schools. However, in most cases, such schools require parents to attend the lesson and are distant from their homes. If they would like to have their child take a music lesson near home, they tend to choose a home piano teacher.

Who would be more likely to take the initiative to begin music lessons, parents or a child? In Japan, there is no definite answer. In my thirty-five years' experience as a music teacher educator, a child is more likely to take initiatives influenced by his/her siblings or friends. It is often the case that a child might want to do the same thing as his/her brother or sister who has already begun studying music. In another case, a parent who has studied music or is a music specialist would like her/his child to study music to follow. Alternatively, parents, who intend to make their child a professional musician are more likely to take the initiative. In any case, many children aged three to six, most likely girls, begin to study piano. The race to become a musician begins at this age.

Once children become students of either home teachers or private music schools, they are encouraged to play at a concert or a competition in front of an audience. Home music teachers tend to focus on hosting the concert, while private music schools tend to participate in competitions. The concerts hosted by home music teachers are usually held once or twice a year. It is also expected that home music teachers sometimes co-host the concerts when they do not have enough students.

There are countless piano competitions in Japan for young children. Some of them are nation widely organized, whereas some of them are held locally. In addition, some music companies and music retailers have competitions where the students who belong to those schools are strongly encouraged to participate. The notable music competitions for elementary school children include the PTNA piano competitionⁱⁱ. The Glänzen Piano Competition, the YAMAHA junior piano competition, the KAWAI piano competition, and the Student Music Concours of Japan. Almost all students I have taught had experience participating in competitions. Therefore, it is fair to say that Japanese children who study music, mainly piano, are motivated and raised by competitions (*All Music Competition Guide* 2021).

Table 3 List of Notable National Piano Competitions for Childrenⁱⁱⁱ.

Name of the Competition	Established	Age Range	Category	Number of Participants	Organization
Student Music Concours of Japan	1974	10~22	Piano, Violin, Cello, Flute, Voice	Not disclosed	Mainichi Newspaper
KAWAI Piano Competition	1968	12~16	Piano	Not disclosed	KAWAI Corporation
KAWAI Piano Competition for Children	1968	6~12	Piano	Not disclosed	KAWAI Corporation
PTNA Piano Competition	1977	5~Adults	Piano	Over 30,000	Tō-on Kikaku
YAMAHA Junior Piano Concours	2016	8~18	Piano	Not disclosed	YAMAHA corporation
Glänzen Piano Concours	2009	5~Adults	Piano	Over 40,000	Glänzen Piano. Association

The age of twelve to thirteen might be critical for children to decide whether they should continue studying music or quit. For example, children might decide to continue to study music because they have improved their techniques and skills, or they would like to study music further to become musicians or music teachers. In another case, children would like to continue music because they purely enjoy music and have fun. In contrast, children quit music because they get bored with the lessons, do not get along with their music teachers, or lose their music interest. However, it is more likely that children quit because they become too busy to prepare for the entrance examination of junior high schools or catch up with their classmates' levels of study skills. Instead of practicing music, they go to private preparatory schools--Juku--to study mathematics and English to complement their learning at schools. Once they quit music, they usually do not study music again unless they take music classes or belong to music clubs at the university level.

When a child decides to continue to study music and wishes to improve their performance skills, they usually change their music teacher introduced by the former music teacher. New teachers tend to be more experienced, more famous, or music faculty members of music conservatories. In a private music school case, children would be placed in more advanced classes. They would have higher-level music instruction and be given more opportunities for public performance.

The tendency for students to participate in competitions continues. Notable nationwide piano competitions such as the PTNA, the Glänzen, the YAMAHA, the KAWAI, and others have categories for junior high school and senior high school students. The requirements for the contestants vary, and so do methods of judging. However, students chosen as national finalists in any competition would play excellently and show their high-level performance techniques. Some competitions offer special awards for the national winners or finalists. The finalists of the particular class in the PTNA play piano concerto with orchestra^{iv}. The Junior

ⁱⁱ <https://www.piano.or.jp/english/> accessed on June 4, 2021.

ⁱⁱⁱ The author limits to number of music competitions with the criteria of the years of history and number of participants over 10,000.

^{iv} <https://compe.piano.or.jp/repertory/g-toku.html> accessed on June 15, 2021.

Classical Music Competition of Japan awards the winners the air tickets to Vienna and performance opportunities^v. The KAWAI competition gives the winners lessons from famous pianists, guest performance opportunities at the competitions, and various events. These seem to be effective in motivating young competitors to participate.

It is of note that junior high school students begin studying musical instruments other than piano and violin. This can be explained by the fact that after-school music club activities start from junior high school. Those who have studied music before entering junior high schools are likely to choose brass bands or choirs to play various musical instruments and ensembles. In general, most wind and brass players and singers in Japan have begun studying their instruments at this age.

When the students become sixteen and wish to pursue music further, they must decide whether they should go to upper music high schools or traditional upper high schools. In Japan, the youths go to upper high school from 10th grade (sixteen years old). Japanese upper high schools have three categories, regular high schools, occupational high schools, and high schools for the arts (including upper music high schools). Students who wish to major in music can go to either upper high schools, upper high schools for the arts, or a regular upper high school with a music course. Today, there are eight music upper high schools, three upper schools for the arts, and fifty-four regular upper high schools with music courses (Table 4). Among upper music high schools (N = 8), all schools are attached to the music universities except one private school (Table 5).

Table 4. Number of Music Senior High Schools and Schools with Music Course in Japan^{vi}.

	Upper Music High School	Upper High School for the Arts	Upper High School with Music Course
National	1	0	0
Public	1	3	29
Private	6	0	25

N = 65.

Table 5. List of Music University with Upper Music Senior High School^{vii}.

University	Affiliation	Estimated Number of Students
Tokyo National University of the Arts	National	120
Kyoto City University of the Arts	Public	120
Musashino Academia Musicae	Private	63
Kunitachi College of Music	Private	160
Toho College of Music	Private	Unknown
Tokyo College of Music	Private	210
Toho Gakuen School of Music	Private	180
Ueno Gakuen University	Private	105

At the upper music high schools, students study music theory, music history, and solfège as well as individual performance lessons. Some schools offer individual performance lessons as a part of the curriculum. However, some public schools do not offer music lessons as a part of the curriculum due to the educational law or lack of teachers. In such schools, students must take music lessons outside the school. Students who live in the local area often go to Tokyo or Osaka to take a famous teacher or a professor at a music university. In this case, students must pay the lesson fee as well as transportation costs every time.

The upper high schools affiliated with music universities have several advantages over other independent upper music high schools. First, those schools are usually located within or close to the campus of the respective music university. Students are usually allowed to get inside the university facility and use it. Students can also participate in the university events such as faculty concerts or workshops. In addition, it is expected that university professors teach performance lessons. This means that students at these high schools receive university-level education all the time. With this environment, upper music high school students can imagine how their near future would like and prepare for the next step much more ahead of time.

^v <https://www.tiaa-jp.com/jcmci/prize/> accessed on June 15, 2021.

^{vi} These data are confirmed and counted by the author from the home pages of each school and Wikipedia. <https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

^{vii} The data was made by the author according to various sources from the official school websites.

By the time of a year before graduation, students are getting ready for the entrance examination of music colleges and music universities. Students begin studying compulsory musical works for the examinations. Almost all students at this stage know their abilities and potentials as a musician, especially piano and violin majors. According to their judgment, they decide which music university to go to. This is the second critical timing for the youth to move on their music study toward the future. Some students give up music and change their major. Some decide to become music teachers of elementary or secondary schools and choose teacher training colleges. While high-level students apply to the top-ranked music universities in Japan, some students consider studying outside Japan. It gives better conditions if they wish to be world-class musicians.

2.2. Music Universities and Beyond

In Japan, the academic year begins from April in every school from kindergarten through university. Therefore, the entrance examination of each school usually takes place between January through March. Entrance examinations start from private universities from mid-January through February, whereas the dates of national and public universities are fixed and held only twice within two to three weeks. So, it is expected that students, regardless of their targeting academic fields, apply for the universities at least one private university and two national or public universities according to the examination schedule.

Likewise, students who wish to enter music university or college take entrance examinations at least twice, private and public/national universities. Forty-three music universities and colleges comprise one national, three public, thirty-two private universities, and seven junior colleges. However, musically talented students usually tend to choose national and public music universities due to the reasonable tuition and the quality of education and environment. The Tokyo University of the Arts is the only national university and considered the most prestigious music institution in Japan. Three public universities of arts, Kyōto City University of the Arts, Aichi University of the Arts, and the Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts, are also famous for their excellence. Besides national and public universities, several private universities are famous for producing high-level musicians. These include, but are not limited to, Tōhō Gakuen School of Music, Kunitachi College of Music, Tokyo College of Music, Musashino Academia Musicae, Shōwa University of Music, Senzoku Gakuen College of Music, Osaka College of Music (Table 6).

Table 6. List of Notable Music Universities in Japan.

University	Affiliation	Year of Establishment
Tokyo National University of the Arts	National	1890
Kyoto City University of the Arts	Public	1969
Aichi University of Arts	Public	1966
Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts	Public	1986
Tōhō Gakuen School of Music	Private	1961
Kunitachi College of Music	Private	1926
Tokyo College of Music	Private	1907
Musashino Academia Musicae	Private	1929
Shōwa University of Music	Private	1930
Senzoku Gakuen College of Music	Private	1924
Osaka College of Music	Private	1915

The study period at music universities and colleges would be the last critical point to decide whether students could become professional musicians. The criteria to make their decision are clear - winning of the prestigious music competitions. Only winners of the music competitions are given the ticket to the professional musicians. An exceptionally very small number from the thousands of music majors can survive. Of course, some students become professional musicians without competition screening. However, that is quite rare. Almost any music primary students wishing to be professional musicians challenge at least one prestigious music competition. As of today, there are five top-ranked music competitions for pianists and violinists (Table 7).

Table 7. List of Top Ranked Domestic Music Competitions in Japan^{viii}.

Title	Established	Venue of the Final Round	The 1st Prize Award
The Music Competition of Japan	1932	Tokyo	¥600,000
Hamamatsu International Piano Competition	1991	Hamamatsu, Shizuoka Pref.	¥3,000,000
Sendai International Music Competition	2001	Sendai, Miyagi Pref.	¥3,000,000
Tokyo Music Competition	2003	Tokyo	¥1,000,000
Takamatsu International Piano Competition	2006	Takamatsu, Kagawa Pref.	¥3,000,000

The Music Competition of Japan (TM CJ) is the oldest and most prestigious competition in Japan. It has piano, violin, composition, voice, cello, flute, oboe, clarinet, horn, and trumpet. Therefore, it is fair to say any Japanese professional musicians have participated in the competition, and most of the prize winners have successful professional careers after the results. I have tallied and calculated the competition winners between 2010 and 2020 in the piano, violin, and composition category (N = 143). Table 8 shows the number of the prize winners by the university^{ix}. Some numbers include post-undergraduate students and high school students (Table 8).

Table 8 shows that two universities, Tokyo National University of the Arts and Tōhō Gakuen School of Music (TGSM), are the most prize-winning institutions in Japan, particularly piano and violin categories. Tōhō Gakuen exceeds Tokyo National University of the Arts (TNUA) in the piano and violin categories. In contrast, the Tokyo National University of the Arts occupies nearly fifty percent of the winners in the composition category. Tokyo College of Music (T.C.M.) ranked third with 9.1% of the entire winners. It might be true that the probability of becoming professional pianists or violinists, let alone composers is much higher when students are accepted by TNUA, TGSM, or T.C.M. than other music universities. Therefore it is commonly acknowledged that the shortest way to become a musician is to study at Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music or Tōhō Gakuen School of Music unless you are going to a foreign university.

Table 8 Number of Prize Winners of the TM CJ 2010-2020 by the University and the Category^x

Name of University	Piano (%)		Violin (%)		Composition (%)		Total (%)	
Tokyo National University of the Arts	16	38.1%	13	27.1%	26	49.1%	55	38.5%
Tōhō Gakuen School of Music	19	45.2%	21	43.8%	5	9.4%	45	31.5%
Kunitachi College of Music	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	5.7%	3	2.1%
Tokyo College of Music	0	0.0%	6	12.5%	7	13.2%	13	9.1%
Osaka College of Music	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4	7.5%	4	2.8%
High School	4	9.5%	7	14.6%	0	0.0%	11	7.7%
Foreign Institution	2	4.8%	0	0.0%	2	3.8%	4	2.8%
Other Universities	1	2.4%	1	2.1%	6	11.3%	8	5.6%

At this moment, the long journey toward the professional musician from the infants finally reaches the goal. Just only a few outstanding students out of a countless number of children can become professional musicians. However, those young musicians are not necessarily promised for the rest of their lives. Some of them are pretty lucky if music universities hire them as full-time employees. Nevertheless, the rest must live by their music performance on a day-to-day basis. In general, the income from performing classical music concerts is not that high. Therefore, they must teach music for a living. Even top-ranked young musicians are taking time to teach music. The current situation in the Corona disaster has made the lives of musicians even more difficult.

^{viii} The author limits to number of music competitions with the criteria of the years of history and amount of the 1st winners over ¥1,000,000.

^{ix} <https://oncon.mainichi-classic.net> accessed on June 8, 2021.

^x The data are taken from the official websites of the competition and the websites of individual winners to verify their schools graduated.

They have lost their incomes due to the cancellation of concerts and lessons. Living as a professional artist is not an easy life. However, all of them are proud of themselves, feeling the significance of betting their lives as musicians.

3. Major Japanese Organizations for Musically Talented Children

As I have sketched in the previous section, there are several paths to become professional musicians from a very young age. There are at least three mainstreams to have children become musicians, but are not limited to: The Suzuki Method (TERI), Tōhō Music School for Children (TMSC), and Piano Teachers National Association (PTNA).

3.1. The Suzuki Method

The Suzuki Method is probably the most popular among the Japanese-born music education methods in the world^{xi}. The Suzuki Method was founded by Shin-ichi Suzuki (1898–1998) in 1946 in Matsumoto city and was initially developed for the education of the violin. The institution was first called “Talent Education Research Institute (TERI).” When the institute was authorized by the Ministry of Education in 1950, it began to grow. The Suzuki Method became famous outside Japan in 1958 when the movie of a grand concert in that thousands of small children played the violin together was filmed at the annual convention of the Ohio String Teachers Association at the Oberlin College^{xii}. Mr. Suzuki and his students made the concert tour to the United States in 1964 and made overwhelming success. As of 2015, there were twenty-three Suzuki schools with about 20,000 students and 1,000 teachers throughout Japan (Nishino 2015).

The primary objective of the Suzuki Method is not to make professional musicians. It is essentially an education for human development through music. The current president of the TERI, Ryugo Hayano, stressed that the method is to "develop children its potential as human beings with rich sensibility^{xiii}." The Suzuki Method also stresses that talent is not a gift or given, instead is in every human being and can be developed with appropriate methods. It is called “the mother tongue method.” There are at least five core principles in this method: early start, intuition, repetition, good environment, and listening. Parents or guardians of the children are required to attend the lesson and their practice at home.

Currently, the Suzuki Methods in Japan has six courses: violin, piano, flute, cello, infants, and adults. The method consists of ten steps throughout four instruments: (1) pre-elementary, (2) elementary, (3) pre-intermediate, (4) intermediate, (5) pre-high, (6) high, and (7) graduation, (8) post-graduation A, (9) post-graduation B, and (10) port-graduation C. One of the unique points of the Suzuki Method is that the music pieces for the graduation examination are pre-determined in each grade. Any students in the Suzuki Method must play the same pieces to move on to the next stage.

In sum, the Suzuki Method is a considerably unified curriculum, and it requires all students to master pre-fixed pieces. This indicates that they know the same set of music repertoire (Ogawa 2011).

There are strict rules to become a teacher of the Suzuki Method. According to the official website, there are three steps to becoming a fully qualified piano and flute teacher^{xiv}. The first step is to become an “apprentice teacher”. An apprentice teacher must be a former Suzuki Methods student or current student with the grade of post-graduation B or above^{xv}. An applicant will interview three qualified teachers and perform a piece for around five minutes by memory. The president of the TERI will decide whether to approve or not based on the results and the committee's recommendation.

Once admitted, an apprentice teacher must serve as an assistant to the qualified teacher for at least three years. The duties of an apprentice teacher include attending every event, lesson observation, studying the philosophy of the Suzuki Method. He or she also must take lessons on how to teach the Suzuki Method from an upper-class teacher for at least ten to fifteen hours. Upon completing all requirements, an apprentice teacher will be admitted to the next class and become an “associate teacher”.

An associate teacher is qualified to teach the class of “graduation” or below. The duty of the associate teacher is the same as an apprentice teacher. With more than one year of experience as an associate teacher, he or she can be promoted to a full teacher with the recommendation of his/her mentor teacher. As far as reading from this process, becoming the Suzuki Method teacher needs more than performance skills. The teachers must understand the philosophy of the Suzuki Method as well as the contents. Plus, they

^{xi} <https://www.suzukimethod.or.jp/english/index.html> accessed on April 18, 2021.

^{xii} <https://internationalsuzuki.org/suzuki-chronology> accessed on April 18, 2021.

^{xiii} https://www.suzukimethod.or.jp/english/president_msg.html accessed on May 23, 2021.

^{xiv} This qualification process is disclosed in the piano and the flute section only.

^{xv} An applicant who was not a student of Suzuki Method can also be admitted with specific added requirements.

must have a good sense of educator. The Suzuki Method teachers are more than musicians. They are messenger and living symbols of the Suzuki Method.

3.2. Tōhō Music School for Children

Tōhō Music School for Children (TMSC) is Japan's oldest and the most successful music education school for musically talented children^{xvi}. As I have reported in the previous section, the TMSC maintains the leading position in winning the music competitions, particularly in the piano and the violin at The Music Competition of Japan. Moreover, many world-class Japanese professional classical musicians, including Seiji Ozawa, Mitsuko Uchida, Akiko Suwanai, are alumni of the TMSC. Without a doubt, this fact proves that the education of the TMSC is better than any other music education method for producing professional musicians in Japan.

The TMSC was founded in 1948 by five musicians and music critics: Hideo Saitō-, Motonari Iguchi, Minao Shibata, Takeo Itō, and Hidekazu Yoshida. They wrote five statements when the school was initiated, which was titled “Statement for opening”,

- (1) Music Class for Children^{xvii};
- (2) Start music lessons as early as possible.
- (3) Through music dictation, nurture musical sense: an ability that rightly recognizes melody, rhythm, harmony, and that understand what musical sound is.
- (4) Music theory and musical knowledge are to be taught accordingly.
- (5) Distinguish various styles of musical performances so that every student can find his/her own. The ensemble is as important as individual performance.

Since then, the school has continued to grow and expand. Currently, the school has its headquarters in Tokyo and twenty-seven branch schools across the nation.

Although the TMSC seems to be a strict training school for making musicians, it is not so. According to the rationale of the TMSC from the official website states:

Education in music schools aims to nurture children's sensitivity and develop their talents in various ways. In addition to nurturing this natural sensitivity, the founders of the music school aimed to provide students with rigorous and thorough instruction according to their abilities and achieve a high standard of musical perfection^{xvii}. (translated mime)

From this statement above, the TMSC inevitably aims to develop talents in a broader sense, not limiting its music. The TMSC believes that giving the best quality of music education will achieve a high level of excellence as a human being.

There are three significant components in the TMSC education regarding the curriculum: individual lessons, solfège, and ensembles. These three are "pillars" of the TMSC curriculum (Ogawa 2011). The school starts from age three until eighteen. Solfège and ensembles are given once a week to all students. The length of classes varies according to age. However, usually, the class lasts sixty minutes for age three to five and eighty minutes for upper ages in solfège classes. Ensemble class is usually two hours long. Solfège classes are divided by levels of musical skill. Individual lessons are given either at school or at the instructor's home, depending on the situation. Besides the powerful instrument, students of the TMSC above ten can choose another field as a sub-major. The area includes keyboard solfège, singing, wind instruments, sight-reading, composition.

One unique characteristic is that the TMSC does not have a concrete “steps” or “grade” system in three areas. Instead, instructional methods and contents are dependent on individual teachers to a great extent (Ogawa 2011). The reasons can be thought that determining concrete steps will trade flexibility to fit each student’s needs and levels, plus the TMSC put more emphasis on human relationships than mechanics of hierarchical “steps”. The TMSC thinks that teachers are curriculum in themselves, not a part of it. Since the TMSC is a branch of an academic institution, it does not have to “sell” products. Their products are the results of music competitions and the number of alumni or professional musicians.

Another unique characteristic is that the TMSC does not restrict the musical instruments to choose. Students can choose virtually any instruments as central, including voice and composition. This could be made possible since Tōhō Music College operates the TMSC, and faculty members of the college are also teachers of TMSC.

The TMSC is directly tied with the Tōhō School System. In this way, TMSC has been quite successful from its inauguration until today, and there is no institution or any other education system in Japan like the Tōhō School System. Most graduates go to

^{xvi} <http://tohomusic-child.jp> accessed on May 6, 2021

^{xvii} <http://tohomusic-child.jp/outline/philosophy.html> accessed on May 20, 2021.

music high schools after they graduate to pursue their careers as music majors. Those who are pretty good potential to be professional musician go to Tōhō Music High School, which is directly connected to Tōhō Music College. Therefore, it is inevitable that the TMSC functions as a center of recruiting students to the high schools and Tōhō Music College.

3.3. *The Piano Teachers National Association*

The Piano Teachers National Association (PTNA) is an organization consists of piano teachers across Japan. The PTNA is not an organization to promote its method nor an institution for it. It is a piano teachers union that seeks to promote music culture through the piano. The focus of this organization is primarily teachers, not students. Most of the events and activities are designed for teachers' enhancement of their qualities and abilities. The PTNA has a pretty sophisticated system to select talented pianists through competitions and seminars. I believe that it has more advantages in finding musically talented children than any other type of organization.

The PTNA was founded in 1966 as the former name Tokyo Ongaku kenkyūkai (Tokyo Musical Research Society), established by Yasuko Fukuda (1933–2001). She was a music teacher at a public school before she began to run this organization. In 1968, The PTNA was inaugurated. Since then, the organization continues to grow. According to the official website, several members in 1990 was around 2,200. As of January 2020, the number of members is 18,363.

The PTNA has officially announced its "vision" and three "missions" on its official website. Its "vision" is "to making the "human power" cultivated through music a force in society, and "missions" are (1) to allow piano teachers to grow, (2) to give piano teachers performance stages and motivation, and (3) to give a chance to people who are about to encounter the piano. Since the PTNA is not a music education system, it does not have a philosophy. Instead, it encourages each teacher to have their philosophy to enhance piano teaching qualities. The PTNA allows any philosophy or policy of music teachings such as Suzuki, Yamaha, or even old traditional European ideas as far as their mission is to be implemented.

The PTNA has one headquarters in Tokyo, 120 branches, and 500 stations nationwide. Each branch and station is a unit where most activities occur, such as piano concerts, piano teachers' meetings, etc. Each PTNA member must belong to one of these branches or stations. The PTNA has developed a wide range of activities: (1) competitions, (2) STEP project, (3) piano seminar, (4) teacher accreditation, (5) concert piano, (6) partner competitions, (7) introducing piano teachers, (8) database of piano literature, and (9) research on piano and music culture^{xviii}.

Competition is the PTNA's most important activity. There are three divisions, solo, duo, and "Grand Muse." The solo division has ten levels by age (A1, B, C, D, E, F, Junior G, G, Pre-Special, and Special). G level and above are for those who wish to be professional pianists. Each level has its compulsory pieces to be played. The critical pieces represent four musical styles: Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and Modern/ Contemporary. Each contestant is asked to choose two pieces from different styles.

The highest level in the competition is called the "Special category". The PTNA explains this on the official website: Special is the highest level of the PTNA Piano Competition. This grade is known for the best domestic competition for Japanese pianists who pursue an international career, and we usually have a big audience in the finals. The Special category has four screening auditions before the final round. Repertoire includes an Etude (by Chopin and a contemporary composer), Baroque style work (i.e., Bach), piano concerto performance with the orchestra, 40~55 min solo recital, and a new work by a Japanese composer. In addition, the Special category winner receives a concert with the orchestra and several other performance opportunities, including concert tours abroad.

"STEP" is the PTNA's unique event where many students of the PTNA teachers can participate in this meeting and be evaluated by certified judges. It is a stage performance opportunity open for pianists of all ages and levels, taking place all over Japan throughout the year. Judges listen to their performance and give them evaluations of five levels: S, A, B, C, D. There is no winner or loser in "STEP". Instead, it is an opportunity to know other students' levels or meet each other and exchange information with teachers and students. It also functions as rehearsals for the coming competitions.

A piano seminar is where the PTNA provides the member an opportunity to study. The topics of the seminar are not necessarily related to piano education. Attending these seminars is a prerequisite for accreditation of the member. Teacher accreditation is also an important activity for the PTNA. There are three levels for this accreditation; (1) Elementary level, (2) Intermediate level, and (3) Superior level. Candidates are asked to pass four kinds of examination in each level; (1) teaching skills, (2) performing skills, (3) history of music, music theory, and piano pedagogy, and (4) report on seminar and piano teaching (Ogawa 2011).

Indeed, there is not such a unique piano teachers organization as the PTNA in other countries. I believe that these days, the PTNA has strong reasons to exist. First, it provides very precious opportunities both for teachers and students to communicate with

^{xviii} <https://corporate.piano.or.jp/project/index.html> accessed on May 23, 2021.

each other. Second, it functions very effectively in continually finding talented young pianists since it has a nationwide network in which all students' information is gathered through branches and stations (Ogawa 2011). All activities are operated fairly, and these are open to any members who wish to participate. Especially in competitions and other events of selecting students, all information and results are disclosed to the public. The PTNA also accumulate vast piano literature, including commissioned Japanese pieces.

4. Recent Projects by Tokyo National University of the Arts

Tokyo National University of the Arts has been the most prestigious music universities in Japan for over 150 years. This is the oldest and the only national institution of music where a significant number of music performers and leading music educators have graduated. However, TNUA has not been active in music education for talented children until recently. There has not been a connection between early music education and the university. This may be why Tōhō Gakuen School of Music exceeds the TNUA in the piano and the violin at music competitions because the TGSM has an education system directly connecting infants through adults. In need of more early music education, the TNUA has recently launched two projects: "Early Music Education Project" and "Geidai Junior Academy".

The "Early Music Education Project" started in 2014. It is essentially an off-campus one-time music lesson for elementary and junior high school children. The professors of the TNUA visit local cities to have lessons and workshops. Five students are selected by audition before the session is held in each city site. Each student receives forty minutes lesson as well as comments from the professor for free. The instruments for this project are piano, violin, cello, brass, and winds. The "Early Music Education Project" is the first attempt to provide early music education for talented children after World War II by the national university. However, this project is merely a one-time event. Children had lessons from the professors only once. There is no follow-up advice for them.

"Geidai Junior Academy" is a project in that junior high school students receive intensive high-level music education of piano, violin, cello, brass, and winds from faculty members of the TNUA at the campus. This project started in 2017, and about twenty students are chosen each year. These students have an hour lesson and two solfège classes twice a month. Upon audition, selected students have a chance to play concerto pieces with the orchestra. This project seems far better than the "Early Music Education Project" since students can continuously receive music lessons until they become a senior high school. It fills the gap period between elementary school age and senior high school age. In this way, the TNUA can connect from the junior high school age to the university. However, the connection from the infants to the junior high school is still missing in the TNUA education system.

5. Conclusion

This paper aimed to introduce a general path to the professional musicians and representative music education organizations in Japan. The piano is the most popular musical instrument to study music from a very young age. Children who study piano grow up in music competitions. Nevertheless, extremely few can survive and become professional musicians. There are three critical periods for children to decide whether they move on or quit studying music: graduating from elementary school, graduating junior high school, and being a student at a music university.

Both the Suzuki Method and the Tōhō Gakuen Music School do not claim their mission as educating professional musicians. Instead, both seek human development through music. Nevertheless, the two schools are quite different in concept and curriculum. The PTNA is a unique organization where piano teachers play a central role rather than students. Although the National University of the Arts has just recently started early music education projects, there is still a missing gap between early music education and music education at the college level except for the Tōhō Gakuen Music School case. After all, if a child wishes to be a pianist or a violinist, the best way seems to become a student of the Tōhō Gakuen Music School or Tokyo National University of Art via private music schools.

It can be emphasized that there has never been strong support from the government of Japan to educate musically talented children from the begging stage through the professional level. The national university of the arts does not have elementary and junior high schools of music nor the program to connect between the beginning stage and the college. Only the Tōhō Gakuen College of Music has a complete system of education musically talented children from a very young age to a professional level. It is logically assumed that why the graduates of the Tōhō Gakuen schools have been so successful in winning prestigious competitions and succeeding as professional musicians.

The implications of this study, particularly for the readers outside of Japan, are at least three folds. First, Japan has been a prosperous county continuously producing excellent professional musicians due to one-hundred-and-forty years' experience of professional music education and the music school networks by music instrument companies throughout the nation. Second, regardless of achievements, the Japanese government has never been actively involved in building a music education program for professionals from the beginning stage until the college level. There is a lacking stage to connect between the beginning level and nearly the professional level. The Tōhō Gakuen school is the only system of such kind. Therefore, the most successful path toward

a professional classical musician would be to send children to the Tōhō Gakuen school. Third, it becomes clear that there is no systematic public educational system for the genre of popular musicians. It should be noted that the sharing market of classical music among music genres is relatively thin compared with other genres. I think the government should consider this fact and change the structure of making professional musicians.

Today, professional musicians worldwide were suffering to survive because of the Covid-19 situation since last year. Even top-ranked performers have lost their income due to concert cancellations. Many musicians are giving online performance concerts or online lectures on their music areas, disregarding the musical genres. Although concert listeners are gradually coming back to the halls and enjoying live performances, most music lovers, including myself, use online streaming services, including YouTube, Spotify, and Apple Music. It seems that the whole aspects of the relationship between music and human are changing. It is implicated that the current system of professional music education has not been able to cope with this unprecedented situation and seems outmoded. The traditional method and curriculum do not give students skills to survive without an in-person audience and communication technology. At this transitioning time, music educators across the nations are now facing to rethink of how to teach music from beginners through the professional levels.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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