The Life and Times of Shin’ichi Suzuki

Fumiyo Kuramochi
Translated by Fumiyo Kuramochi with Lili Selden

Chapter 2

1. Early Years and Youth

Shin’ichi Suzuki was born on October 17, 1898, in Higashimonzen-chō, Nagoya, as the eldest son of Masakichi and Ryō. Although Ryō was not legally married to Masakichi, such domestic arrangements were not uncommon within the societal conventions of the time. Nonetheless, such apparent familial concord was exceptionally rare. In fact, Shin’ichi was Masakichi’s third son, preceded by two elder sons, one of whom died in infancy.[1]

At the close of the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), Japan experienced a fleeting economic boom. However, rising apprehension concerning the southern expansion of the Russian Empire soon precipitated a climate of fiscal austerity. Despite these prevailing conditions, Masakichi’s manufacturing enterprise entered a phase of accelerated growth, strengthened by the progressive formalization of mass production methods. Within this context, Shin’ichi was reared in a prosperous household, accompanied by numerous siblings—five brothers and four sisters, three of whom died at a young age—and attended to by several domestic staff.

The Suzuki family, steeped in the ethos of the former samurai class, upheld rigorous standards of discipline and propriety. Male children, upon completion of the customary morning salutation, were required to assume the formal seiza posture during meals. Chores were systematically assigned, and particular emphasis was placed on meticulous attention to etiquette—for instance, aligning guests’ footwear with precision.

This practice embodied the Zen precept kyakkashōko, an admonition to “attend to one’s own feet,” signifying the imperative of continual self-reflection and humility. (Note: In Japan, where wearing shoes indoors is traditionally prohibited, the custom of neatly arranging one’s footwear remains a routine practice even in contemporary society.)[2]

Childhood Recollections

Upon entering elementary school, Shin’ichi came under the profound influence of his homeroom teacher, Mr. Shibata (details unknown)—a man of gentle temperament, though exacting in matters of discipline and fiercely devoted to education. Among his classmates was Mori, who served as class president for all six years. Mori’s family struggled financially, and he delivered newspapers to help support his family. Although Shin’ichi, the vice president, was unauthorized to accompany him in his work, it is said

that for three years he rose each morning at five o'clock to assist Mori with his deliveries.[3]

Growing up adjacent to the family's musical instrument factory, Shin'ichi regarded violins as little more than toys. He would later recall that during quarrels with his siblings, they would strike each other with violins without concern for their value or purpose. Because of high demand, some fifty craftsmen worked overtime every evening in the factory, and during his elementary school years, Shin'ichi would frequently visit the factory's handcrafting department at night. There, enthralled, he would listen to the workers recount mesmerizing tales of heroic exploits—popular kōdan narratives of the time—as they deftly whittled wood. Just as these stories reached their dramatic climax, one of the craftsmen would declare, "Now then, let's toast some mochi (rice cake)." At once, Shin'ichi would dash back home—just next door—to fetch the mochi, returning eagerly to roast them together as he begged to hear the rest of the tale.[4]

Commercial School Years

In 1910, Shin'ichi enrolled in Nagoya Municipal School of Commerce, an institution whose curriculum spanned five years at the time. He began assisting at his father Masakichi's violin factory during the summer holidays.[5]

The headmaster of the School of Commerce, Yoshiki Ichimura (1868–1941), was a man who had devoted his entire life to the advancement of commercial education. Shin'ichi would later recall that Ichimura "had a profound and formative influence on me."[6] Prominently displayed at the front entrance of the school was a wooden plaque inscribed with the maxim, "Character first, skill second."[7] Shin'ichi recounted that this ideal remained "a guiding light throughout the path of my life,"[8] and it was a phrase he often inscribed by hand on the thick, decorative paper strips he presented as personal gifts in later years.

During the four years that Yoshiki Ichimura, founder of the Ichimura Educational Institution, served as principal of Nagoya Commercial School, the school sent representative exhibitors to three international expositions—the St. Louis World's Fair, the Japan–British Exhibition, and the Panama–Pacific International Exposition—as a leading commercial school of Japan.[9]

A Classmate's Cheating and a School-wide Strike

Rather than devoting himself earnestly to his study, Shin'ichi spent much of his time reading philosophical and Zen treatises. Although his independent readings did little to increase his class ranking, he was held in high regard by his peers. Indeed, he served as class president for four consecutive years, beginning in his second year.[10]

During the final exam period in the year Shin'ichi was to graduate, a student reported on a classmate who had been caught cheating. In response, a third student condemned

the act of reporting, inflaming passions that devolved into a physical altercation. When questioned by the homeroom teacher, Shin'ichi declared that "we all participated." Although he had taken no part in the violence, he found the act of informing on peers to be distasteful and chose to assume collective responsibility as class president. Returning to the classroom, he addressed his classmates: "Let us protect our friendships by saying we were all complicit. I ask that we all accept failure together this year." The entire class agreed.

Upon conclusion of the investigation, ten students, including Shin'ichi, were suspended indefinitely, and ten others reprimanded. These sanctions, rather than drawing the incident to a close, aroused sympathy among the student body and ultimately led to a strike that spread across the entire school.

On the night of the incident, Shin'ichi confessed everything to his father and asked for permission to repeat the academic year and graduate a year late. Masakichi simply replied, "I suppose it can't be helped."[11] Shin'ichi would later recall that his father uttered these words with "a truly noble smile."[12]

The strike lasted a full week, until a notice was issued for all students to return. Headmaster Yoshiki Ichimura addressed the 1,700 students through tears, delivering a heartfelt speech and announcing that the exam would be re-administered. In the end, every student graduated.[13]

This episode from Shin'ichi's youth highlights his pure resolve to "never deceive oneself,"[14] and it stands as a testament to his integrity and leadership.

2. Youth

Shin'ichi was sixteen when the Great War began. As German exports of musical instruments abruptly halted worldwide, orders began pouring into Masakichi's factory from overseas. Although the Suzuki factory swiftly grew to become the largest of its kind in the world, Shin'ichi witnessed how his father continued to live by his lifelong principles of frugality, honesty, and exacting attention to detail.

Around this time, two chance encounters would profoundly shape the course of Shin'ichi's life: one with the writings of Tolstoy, the other with the sound of Mischa Elman's violin. Despite these encounters being mediated by geographical and temporal distance, they marked Shin'ichi's journey into the vast ocean of life, as though unseen hands were guiding him during those impressionable teenage years.

The educational credo he would later champion—"Man is a child of his environment"—is an unmistakable reflection of his developmental path and of the numerous luminaries from whom he gleaned wisdom and insight. What follows is an account of

some of these momentous figures.

A Pivotal Moment

One day, at the age of seventeen, Shin'ichi was idly tapping away on an English-language typewriter—then a rare instrument—in his father's factory office, without feeding paper into the machine. Mr. Yamazaki, the office supervisor, came by and gently reprimanded him: "Mr. Shin'ichi, you shouldn't strike empty keystrokes." Caught off guard, Shin'ichi reflexively replied, "I'm just mimicking what I've seen."

Overwhelmed by shame at having told a lie, he bemoaned his cowardice and, unable to bear his own indignation, returned home. Yet he could not stay still. He went out for a walk, and while wandering aimlessly through town, happened into a bookstore. There, a volume caught his eye—Tolstoy's Diary. The page he opened to bore these uncompromising words: "To deceive oneself is worse than to deceive others."

Shin'ichi would later describe this moment as "one of the first and most profound turning points in my life."[15] Stirred to the core, he dedicated himself to the study of Tolstoy's complete works. The "small book" remained his constant companion, accompanying him wherever he went, and over the course of the intervening years he repeatedly pored over every chapter, pondering their lessons deeply.[7] He also immersed himself in Western philosophy and Zen Buddhist texts, embarking on a lifelong journey of personal and philosophical inquiry.[16]

Shin'ichi had a maternal uncle named Fusan Asano, a Zen monk as well as a man of letters, who later became the abbot of Chūzenji Temple.[17] Presumably thanks to guidance from his uncle, Shin'ichi became an avid reader of works such as Shushōgi by Dōgen (1200-1253), a prominent Zen Buddhist monk, and the writings of Daisetsu Suzuki (1870–1966), and began to pursue Zen in earnest from this period onward. The influence of Zen thought would quietly manifest in many of Shin'ichi's actions and choices throughout his later life.[18]

It was also around this time that Shin'ichi listened to a rendition of Ave Maria performed by Mischa Elman (1891–1967) on a gramophone purchased by his father—a moment that left him deeply moved by the sheer beauty of the sound. Utterly captivated, he listened repeatedly to the record, later writing in his memoir that it was at this moment that "his inner eye for music was opened for the first time."[19] Until then, he had scarcely regarded the violin as a musical instrument, but at the age of seventeen he finally began to practice on his own to find a way to emulate Elman's sound. Although entirely self-taught, he eventually managed to play Haydn's Minuet in his own way.[20]

One charming side note: The phonograph of that era was a large box topped with a horn-shaped speaker. Shin'ichi once confided to the author, with a gentle smile, that as

a small child he genuinely believed there were people inside the box performing the music.

Children Like Angels

After graduating from Nagoya Municipal School of Commerce at the age of eighteen, Shin'ichi began working at the Suzuki Violin Factory, where he was placed in charge of export operations. Rising at five every morning, he would take an early walk with his younger siblings, finish breakfast, and proceed to the factory, where he stood in line with the workers, waiting for the gates to open. He later remarked that this routine laid the foundation for his lifelong habit of early rising. Upon returning home, Shin'ichi would be welcomed by an adoring crowd of children from the neighborhood. Time spent with them and his siblings was, in his own words, "the most enjoyable part of my day."[21]

As a teenager, Shin'ichi often played with his brothers and sisters, as well as the children in his neighborhood. Gradually, he was filled with a sense of wonder and prayerful reverence about the innocence of young children. He observed that children around the age of four or five live in pure innocence: They are trusting, loving, knowing nothing of hatred, and dwelling peacefully in their quest for joy. It was at this time that a "great inner revolution" ignited within Shin'ichi's heart, marking the beginning of "a deeply meaningful internal task."[22]

This pivotal question—why a child so pure and beautiful might become a miserable and sorrowful human being in adulthood—eventually led Shin'ichi to grapple seriously with the fundamental nature of education.[23]

3. A Fateful Encounter

Around age twenty, Shin'ichi developed a mild respiratory illness. As part of his recuperation, he spent three months in Okitsu, a coastal district of Shizuoka City. During this stay, he became acquainted with another lodger, Ichirō Yanagida, a businessman from Nemuro in Hokkaidō. Such was their friendship that Shin'ichi eventually grew close to Yanagida's family as well.

The following year, Marquis Yoshichika Tokugawa, a schoolmate of Yanagida's, planned an expedition to Shumshu Island at the northern edge of the Kuril chain. The journey combined scientific inquiry with adventure, and thanks to Yanagida's recommendation, Shin'ichi was invited to join.[24] The innumerable opportunities presented by the expedition proved to have a

profound impact on Shin’ichi’s life.

Beyond shaping the trajectory of the young man’s life in his twenties, Yoshichika Tokugawa would go on to support Shin’ichi for many years in pursuit of his ideals. Before going further, let us take a closer look at the man himself.

Tokugawa Yoshichika

Yoshichika Tokugawa (1886–1976) was the nineteenth head of the Owari Domain, one of the three most prestigious branches of the Tokugawa clan—the Gosanke—who supported the Tokugawa shogunate for over 260 years and were positioned to succeed the shogun if no direct heir existed. After the Meiji Restoration, Yoshichika became part of the new nobility and was granted the title of marquis, ultimately remembered as “the last feudal lord.” The author had the opportunity to interact with him only once, but he left a strong impression—a man of slender build, yet exuding courage and refined dignity.

From early childhood, Yoshichika was thoroughly trained in the etiquette and traditions passed down through the Tokugawa family. After completing a degree in Japanese history at Tokyo Imperial University (known today as the University of Tokyo), he went on to study biology, while also cultivating a deep appreciation for the arts and maintaining a strong interest in politics. The year he completed his course in science, he established a biology laboratory in his own home. He later built a research facility in Ebara District, then on the outskirts of Tokyo.

The Owari Domain—eventually incorporated into modern Aichi Prefecture, including the city of Nagoya—was blessed with abundant forest resources that had been managed since the Edo period. In 1923, Yoshichika founded the Tokugawa Institute of Forestry Administration, which continues its work to this day.[26]

He was also an accomplished hunter. It is said that he hunted twelve bears in Hokkaidō, where his former vassals had settled as pioneers. Later, in British Malaya, he hunted tigers alongside the local sultan, contributing to friendly relations with the Malay states. For these exploits, he came to be known as “the Lord who hunted tigers.” In addition to English, German, and French, he was also fluent in Malay.[27]

Shin’ichi was introduced to Marquis Tokugawa by the aforementioned Ichirō Yanagida, and the following year, he traveled to Tokyo for the first time to pay his respects in

person.[28] That encounter would prove to be a pivotal moment—one that would profoundly alter the course of Shin'ichi's life thereafter.

Expedition to the Northern Kurils

In 1918, Marquis Tokugawa embarked on a month-long sea expedition aboard a freight vessel originally used to deliver supplies to fishing grounds. The main purpose of the journey was the biological study and collection of specimens from the Northern Kuril Islands. The party included thirteen members in total, among them Ichirō Yanagida, Tokugawa's wife and several relatives, the pianist Nobu Kōda (often called Nobuko), Shin'ichi, and researchers from the Biological Institute.

Their expedition party's first destination was the village of Yakumo, where the Tokugawa family maintained a villa. The settlement had been founded in the Meiji period by former retainers of the Tokugawa clan, and the arrival of the "Lord's entourage" was met with a grand welcome. Their mode of transport was anything but grand: they were seated in daihachiguruma—wooden carts drawn by horses—but with their old retainers lined up in deeply respectful bows, the group made their stately way toward the Tokugawa villa.[29]

As an aside, it was during a later visit to Europe that Yoshichika encountered a number of bear carvings in Bern, Switzerland (Note: the city's name meaning "bear"). Struck by their charm, he thought them well-suited as a potential off-season craft for the settlers of Yakumo. He purchased a few pieces and, upon his return, encouraged the making of similar carvings as souvenirs—a practice that would go on to become a hallmark of Hokkaidō's regional folkcraft.[30]

Next, the group paid a visit to the Yanagida family home in Nemuro before finally setting sail for the Northern Kurils. The "submerging blue" of the sea and the cobalt sky, so radiant and pure, pierced Shin'ichi's gaze and etched themselves into memory. Along the way, the party encountered sea lions and whales. While the researchers busied themselves collecting and cataloging plant specimens, Shin'ichi and Nobu Kōda had little to occupy them and spent their time admiring the wildflower meadows that flourished across the remote islands.

While walking along the northern edge of Shumshu Island, they came across a rare patch of moss clinging to the cliffs that rose sharply from the sea. One of the researchers from the Tokugawa Biological Institute was eager to retrieve it. Having once been a baseball pitcher in his student days, Shin'ichi offered to try. With a small collecting spade in hand, he boldly declared, "Leave it to me... I'll get that moss." His aim was true, and the spade landed precisely where intended—but it didn't return. Calmly masking his inner panic, Shin'ichi turned and said, "Now, for the finishing touch." This time he hurled a stone with all his might. By some stroke of luck, it struck the spade, dislodging it and completing the retrieval. Though triumphant on the surface, Shin'ichi

privately vowed in that moment: “Never again will I attempt anything of the sort.”[31]

From nearly a month of sharing meals and sleeping quarters, the party grew close—almost like a family. Although the vessel was originally a freight ship, it housed a salon where Shin’ichi had the opportunity to perform on the violin, accompanied by Nobu Kōda.[32]

Moved by Shin’ichi’s playing, Yoshichika formally encouraged him to pursue musical studies in earnest. Kōda, affirming the young man’s potential, strongly seconded the idea and promised to introduce him to her younger sister, Kō Andō.[33]

At this point, it is worth briefly introducing Nobu Kōda (1870–1946), who not only accompanied Shin’ichi on the violin and advocated for his formal training, but whose life offers insights into Japan’s musical landscape at the time. She was connected to Shin’ichi’s father, Masakichi, and she was the elder sister of Kō Andō—who later became Shin’ichi’s respected teacher upon Yoshichika’s recommendation.

Nobu Kōda

Nobu Kōda is best known as a pianist, yet she was also a skilled violinist and the composer of Japan’s first sonata written in classical form: the Violin Sonata in D Minor. Born into the Kōda family, which served the government as low-ranking officials with modest stipends following the Meiji Restoration, Nobu was raised in a household that placed extraordinary importance on education. Despite their limited means, the family dedicated themselves wholeheartedly to cultivating the intellectual and artistic abilities of their children. Her siblings went on to distinguish themselves in many fields: her eldest brother became president of Sagami Spinning Company; her second brother, Shigetada, adopted the name Gunji and joined the navy, eventually leading a pioneering expedition to Shumshu Island in the Northern Kurils. It was in honor of Shigetada’s memory that Nobu chose to participate in the aforementioned journey. Her fourth brother, Shigeyuki, was better known by his pen name—Rohan Kōda, a prominent writer of the Meiji era. Her fifth brother, Shigetomo, became an accomplished historian. Several other siblings died young. Her youngest sister, Kō (Kō Andō, 1878-1963), born eight years later, studied in Berlin and became one of the finest violinists of her time. Kō would go on to become Shin’ichi’s respected mentor.[34]

In 1882, Nobu began her formal studies in music at the Ongaku-Torishirabe-Kakari (Music Research Institute), the precursor to Tokyo Music School (now Tokyo University of the Arts), where she was appointed a denshūnin—a trainee well-versed in traditional Japanese music who would receive Western musical training. Under the

demanding guidance of her mother, she had already mastered Japanese traditional vocal music and instruments such as, nagauta, shamisen, and koto. At the Institute, she studied piano, violin, and vocal music, graduating at the top of her class in 1885, at the age of fifteen. For the next four years, she served as an assistant instructor, mentoring her students.[35]

When the Institute became Tokyo Music School in 1887, its faculty expanded to include foreign nationals such as Rudolf Dittrich (1861–1919), a Polish-born Austrian and student of Joseph Anton Bruckner (1824–1896). Although his primary specialty was the organ, Dittrich was a versatile musician, proficient in piano, violin, and orchestration. Quickly recognizing Nobu's promise, he tutored her in violin until his return to Europe was prompted by the outbreak of the First Sino-Japanese War.[36]

In 1889, shortly after the promulgation of the Constitution of the Empire of Japan, the nineteen-year-old Nobu departed for Boston as Japan's first government-sponsored music student. She enrolled at the New England Conservatory for a term, where she studied violin under Emil Mahr (1851–1914), a pupil of Joseph Joachim (1831–1907), and piano under Carl Fael (dates unknown).[25] Following a brief return to Japan the following year, Nobu set off again—this time to Vienna, the heart of the European music world, where luminaries such as Bruckner, Johann Strauss II (1825–1899), and Johannes Brahms (1833–1897) were still active.[37]

At the Vienna Conservatory, she studied violin with Joseph Hellmesberger Jr. (1855–1907), the son of director Joseph Hellmesberger Sr. (1828–1893). Though younger in age, Nobu shared the halls with future legends like Fritz Kreisler (1875–1962) and Georges Enesco (1881–1955). She also studied piano with Frederick Singer (dates unknown), and composition and counterpoint with Robert Fuchs (1847–1927). Her academic excellence was widely recognized: Madame Rosa von Gerg (dates unknown), who supervised her choral training, gifted Nobu a rare Amati violin. However, the instrument later proved difficult to maintain in Japan's climate, prompting her to request a replacement—one that she would cherish for the rest of her life.[38]

At age twenty-five—returning to her homeland for the first time in six years—Nobu held a celebratory homecoming recital at Tokyo Music School's auditorium. The program was both ambitious and eclectic: a blend of Western and Japanese pieces, including piano duets, violin concertos, organ solos, chamber music, orchestral works, lieder, and ensembles of traditional instruments. Nobu's artistry was on display not only in her multiple roles as a soloist, chamber musician, and vocalist, but also as an arranger, and the concert was widely acclaimed.[39]

Upon her return to Japan, Nobu dedicated herself wholeheartedly to the violin. In a private performance, she became the first Japanese musician to present Bach's monumental Chaconne. Later in her career, Nobu studied piano under Raphael von

Koeber (1848–1923), a Russian philosopher. Despite having trained with both Nikolai Rubinstein (1835–1881) and Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840–1893), Koeber was invited to Japan to teach philosophy at Tokyo Imperial University. He later joined the faculty of Tokyo Music School (now Tokyo University of the Arts), where his musical insight deeply influenced Nobu. As she continued her studies with Koeber, her technical brilliance and interpretive depth were increasingly recognized, leading to her appointment as professor of piano at the institution.

In addition to her piano instruction, Nobu also taught composition and vocal music. Among her notable students were composer Rentarō Taki (1879–1903) and soprano Tamaki Miura (1884–1946), both of whom subsequently played significant roles in Japan's musical heritage.

Despite her success as a distinguished professor, Nobu's teaching career was cut short. At the time, many of the country's most promising musicians were women, and the relative decline of male performers led to increased scrutiny of female educators—including Nobu herself.[40] Speculation and criticism eventually escalated, fueled in part by misinformation. In 1909, she was compelled to take a leave of absence at her own request.

Just thirteen days later, Nobu departed for Germany, where she reconnected with former colleagues in Berlin and Vienna. Visits to Paris and London also provided emotional healing after the ordeal she had endured.[41] While staying in London, she attended the Great Exhibition and happened to reunite with Masakichi Suzuki, the violin maker for whom she had once written a letter of recommendation.[42]

Upon returning to Japan the following year, Nobu acted on her belief that "the spread of music begins at home" by establishing a private teaching studio. She also taught piano to members of the imperial family and, in celebration of Emperor Taishō's enthronement, composed a choral symphonic work titled Imperial Accession Celebration Suite, which she dedicated to the occasion.[43]

In 1918, she built a music hall adjacent to her home, naming it Yōyō Gakudō. Three years later, in 1921, she invited world-renowned violinist Mischa Elman to perform there, accompanied by pianist Arthur Loesser (1894–1969). Among those in attendance were Shin'ichi and other members of the Suzuki Quartet.[44]

Having nurtured many talented disciples over the years, Nobu eventually succumbed to heart disease and passed away peacefully at her home in Kioichō, Tokyo, in 1946.[45]

4. The Path to Music

Life at the Tokugawa Residence

Despite the strong encouragement of Marquis Tokugawa, Shin'ichi had all but abandoned the idea of becoming a performer, anticipating opposition from his father, Masakichi. After persistent and expertly applied persuasion by the marquis, however, Masakichi finally relented. In 1919, therefore, Shin'ichi moved at the age of twenty-one to Tokyo in search of a home. When his efforts proved fruitless, the marquis generously invited him to lodge at the Tokugawa estate. It was a gathering place for some of the era's leading scholars and literary figures, and Shin'ichi was fortunate to spend innumerable hours in this vibrant intellectual milieu.[46]

He received weekly violin instruction from Kō Andō, while concurrently pursuing a rigorous musical education under the tutelage of distinguished instructors, including solfège with Sadayuki Sawazaki (1889–1949), music theory with Ryūtarō Hirota (1892–1952), and acoustics with Hisao Tanabe (1883–1984). On one occasion, Andō invited him to attend the graduation recital at the Tokyo Music School, an institution she had long encouraged the young Shin'ichi to consider. Yet, having been exposed to recordings of performances by world-renowned artists, Shin'ichi found the quality of the student performances wanting. Consequently, he declined Andō's recommendation and expressed his intention to continue private study. In retrospect, Shin'ichi would refer to this decision with characteristic humility as a youthful indiscretion. Nevertheless, Andō, exhibiting commendable openness, accepted her pupil's choice with the gentle admonition: "Well, either way—apply yourself earnestly to your studies."[47]

At this juncture, it is fitting to delve into the life and career of Shin'ichi's mentor, Kō Andō (née Kōda), whose distinguished artistry shaped his formative years. A leading figure in Japan's musical landscape of the time, Andō stood among the nation's preeminent violinists and played a pivotal role in connecting Shin'ichi to the artistic lineage of Joseph Joachim.

Kō Andō

Kō Andō (née Kōda, commonly known as Kōko) was eight years younger than her sister Nobu Kōda, and from an early age was immersed in traditional Japanese arts. At the age of three, she began studying classical Japanese dance, and under the strict guidance of her mother, she memorized all one hundred classical poems of the Ogura Hyakunin Isshu. By five, she commenced training in koto music, and by eight had attained the advanced certification of okuden. Around the age of ten, she accompanied her sister Nobu to visit Professor Dietrich, who, upon observing Kō's hands, recommended that she pursue the violin.

Following this advice, she enrolled in the specialized division of the Tokyo Music School, studied violin under Dietrich's instruction, and advanced to the preparatory division at age thirteen. Her studies expanded to include piano, choral singing, vocal music, harmony, and acoustics—all of which she mastered with distinction. Her consistently outstanding performance earned her a scholarship that exempted her from tuition fees. Upon her sister Nobu's return from overseas study, Kō continued her training under her guidance, always maintaining the proper decorum of a respectful student. At eighteen, she graduated at the top of her class and became a research student. Her graduation recital featured Fantaisie Appassionata by Henri Vieuxtemps (1820–1881).[48]

In 1899, Kō was selected as a government-sponsored overseas student and departed for Europe. Upon arriving in Vienna, she reunited with her former teacher, Professor Dietrich, and expressed her earnest wish to study under Joseph Joachim, who had long served as director of the Berlin Hochschule für Musik. Dietrich cautioned her about the considerable difficulty of such an undertaking, but Kō remained steadfast in her aspiration and proceeded to Berlin.

Joachim instructed her to sit for the entrance examination of the Hochschule, which she passed with distinction. She initially studied for approximately one year under Joachim's assistant, Karl Markese (dates unknown), before being accepted as a pupil of the master himself. Although Joachim would later suffer from gout and lose the ability to play, Kō was fortunate to have joined his studio as one of his final students, when he still frequently demonstrated passages on the violin himself. Kō pursued her studies with great diligence, not only in violin but also in piano, chamber music, orchestral performance, harmony, and counterpoint.[49]

In 1903, following four years of study abroad, Kō returned to Japan and was appointed professor at the Tokyo Music School (now Tokyo University of the Arts). She also served as concert-mistress of the school's newly established orchestra, contributing significantly to its early development.[50]

At the age of twenty-seven, she married the literary scholar Katsuichirō Andō (1879–1962). Shortly thereafter, Andō accepted a professorship at the Third Higher School (now Kyoto University) and relocated to Kyoto. The couple maintained a long-distance marriage—an uncommon arrangement at the time—meeting on weekends in Shizuoka, a midway point between Tokyo and Kyoto. Despite the challenges, Kō raised five children with seeming ease.[51]

Upon her retirement from the Tokyo Music School in 1932, Kō was appointed as the first Japanese juror for the inaugural International Competition held in Vienna. Other members of the jury included such eminent figures as Bronislaw Huberman (1882–1947), Jenő Hubay (1858–1937), Joseph Szigeti (1892–1973), and George Enescu

(1881–1955), making her inclusion a singular honor. The competition drew participants from thirty-two countries; among them, Ryōzō Okuda (1903–1993) received recognition in the vocal category. The winner of the violin division was the twenty-five-year-old Gioconda de Vito (1907–1994).[52]

5. Toward a New World

Approximately three years after the conclusion of World War I, Shin'ichi—having spent some eighteen months residing at the Tokugawa estate—was invited by Marquis Tokugawa to accompany him on a voyage around the world. As his formal violin studies had only recently begun, Shin'ichi initially declined the offer. However, during a subsequent summer recess, he returned to his hometown and relayed the marquis's proposal to his father, Masakichi.[53] To Shin'ichi's surprise, Masakichi responded with unexpected enthusiasm: "If you're traveling with Mr. Tokugawa, I have no concerns. It would be worthwhile to see the world at least once."[54]

Still hesitant to interrupt his musical training, Shin'ichi returned to the Tokugawa residence. Over a meal, he informed the marquis that his father had offered to fund the journey with 15,000 yen—approximately equivalent to 21 million yen in 2025. Upon hearing this, the marquis remarked, "Tell him you are accompanying me and accept the money. Travel as far as Berlin, then allow yourself to encounter an unavoidable circumstance that compels you to remain there. Stay for as long as the funds allow, and devote yourself entirely to serious violin study."

Recognizing the wisdom of the suggestion, Shin'ichi replied, "Thank you—I gladly accept." With further arrangements facilitated by the marquis, Masakichi gave his consent. Thus, in 1920, at the age of twenty-two, Shin'ichi set sail for Marseille.[55]

During the month-long voyage, Shin'ichi enjoyed the company of the Tokugawa party while experiencing the varied landscapes and cultures of Shanghai, Singapore, the Indian Ocean, and other ports of call. Along the way, he developed a close rapport with a German engineer, and after disembarking in Marseille, he accompanied the engineer to his residence in Berlin.[56]

Decades later, Shin'ichi reflected in The Sense of Childrearing that "Traveling through Germany, I sensed a distinct chromatic quality shaped by its natural scenery; traveling through France, I sensed another, shaped by its own. I found this profoundly fitting."[57] In this passage, he references the tonal characteristics of several painters—including Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1601–1669) and Pieter Pauwel Rubens (1577–1640)—suggesting that, along the journey from Marseille onward, Shin'ichi had the opportunity to view their works firsthand.

Upon arriving in Berlin, Shin'ichi took lodging for three months at the Hotel Excelsior

and devoted himself to the pursuit of an ideal mentor suited to his aspirations.[58] Nearly every evening, he attended concerts, immersing himself in the city's vibrant musical life. Among the distinguished performers he encountered were Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962); Alexander K. Glazunov (1865–1936), conducting the Berlin Philharmonic; Richard Strauss (1864–1949); Pietro Mascagni (1863–1945), who directed a chorus of one thousand voices; Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924); Artur Schnabel (1882–1951); and Wilhelm Furtwängler (1886–1954), who introduced Arnold Schönberg's (1874–1951) expansive symphonic poem *Pelleas und Melisande*, and others.

Shin'ichi was fortunate at the time to have opportunities to hear contemporary works from around the world, introduced by the Society of Contemporary Composers chaired by Busoni, which allowed us to grasp the prevailing trends in the world of composition.[59]
Among the ensembles he frequented, Shin'ichi most consistently attended performances by the Busch Quartet, while he never missed a concert by the Klingler Quartet.[60]

The Sought-After Mentor

When three months of concert-going in Berlin had not led him to the mentor he desired, Shin'ichi began to consider relocating to Vienna. However, one evening at the Sing-Akademie, a performance of Mozart's Clarinet Quintet by the Klingler Quartet moved the twenty-four-year-old so profoundly that he momentarily lost all sense of self.[61]

Convinced that Karl Klingler was the very mentor he had long sought, Shin'ichi—still lacking proficiency in German—immediately composed a letter in English requesting acceptance as a pupil. A reply arrived shortly thereafter, inviting him to visit the following Wednesday. On the appointed day, Shin'ichi set out in high spirits, but he mistakenly went to the wrong address and arrived at Klingler's residence more than an hour late. After apologizing profusely for the oversight, he summoned his courage, asked to become Klingler's student, and performed Rode's Concerto. He faltered during the performance and, believing all hope was lost, prepared to leave. Instead of dismissing him, however, Klingler asked, "When will you be able to come again?" Shin'ichi became Klingler's sole private student. The master, then thought to be around forty-five years of age, was of stately build and possessed a warm and gentle charisma.[62]

Karl Klingler was a distinguished violinist, violist, composer, and pedagogue. He studied violin under Joseph Joachim and composition with Max Bruch (1838–1920). He was also said to have been held in great affection by Johannes Brahms. At a young age, Klingler was appointed concertmaster of the Berlin Philharmonic; he later served as violist in the Joachim Quartet and subsequently became a professor at the Berlin Hochschule

lfür Musik and also led the Klingler Quartet.

At the time, the Klingler Quartet stood alongside the Busch Quartet as one of Germany's foremost chamber ensembles. The quartet's instruments reflected its remarkable refinement: Klingler himself played a 1725 Stradivarius, which had been played by Joachim; the second violinist and the cellist also performed on Stradivarius instruments; and the viola, played by Klingler's elder brother, was crafted by Gasparo da Salò (1540–1609).[64]

Klingler's lessons typically spanned approximately two hours and encompassed multiple études and repertoire, reflecting a multifaceted approach. Importantly, his instruction did not focus solely on technique; rather, he emphasized the transmission of the "soul of art." In his autobiography, Shin'ichi later wrote, "I was never scolded during a lesson. He was a truly gentle teacher, and his character radiated a loving kindness."[65]

In *Nurtured by Love,* it is stated that Shin'ichi studied concertos and sonatas during the first four years and chamber music during the subsequent four years, but the author—having spoken directly with Shin'ichi in his sixties—records that the initial period consisted of études and concertos, while the latter four years were devoted to chamber music. However, he had no intention of becoming a violinist; instead, he devoted himself solely to seeking an answer to the question, "What is art?"[66]

Klingler frequently hosted home concerts at his residence, and Shin'ichi was regularly invited, gaining invaluable exposure and learning opportunities through these intimate musical gatherings.

Klingler, who for Shin'ichi was "the mentor who most profoundly empowered him," was also a man of resolute conviction. As Shin'ichi later heard in Japan, Klingler stood alone in opposition when Hitler ordered the removal of the statue of Joseph Joachim—his own teacher, who happened to be Jewish—from the entrance hall of the Berlin Hochschule für Musik. This act of dissent ultimately led to Klingler's expulsion from the institution.[67]

Shin'ichi's autobiography notes that around the time Klingler turned seventy-five, he sent a tape recording of his performance of Bach's Unaccompanied Sonatas to Shin'ichi in Japan on the occasion of Christmas. Regrettably, however, the physical recording has not survived.[68]

Around the time his lessons with Klingler commenced, Shin'ichi followed the recommendation of a Japanese professor, left his hotel, and took up lodging in the home of a widow raising three children. By happenstance, both the landlady and her elderly housekeeper were hard of hearing, which allowed Shin'ichi to practice the violin as

freely as he wished. Living there also afforded him opportunities to observe and learn about various aspects of German domestic customs.[69]

Let us take a moment here to offer a brief account of Karl Klingler. What follows is an excerpted translation from the liner notes of the reissued CD released by EMI Records under the TESTAMENT label.

"**Karl Klingler** was born in Strasbourg in 1879. He received his earliest instruction in violin from his father Theodor, a violist. Already performing Mozart sonatas by the age of five, Karl subsequently received the tutelage of Heinrich Schuster (details unknown) and then, in 1897, entered the Berlin Hochschule für Musik. At the Hochschule, he studied violin under Joseph Joachim, eventually becoming one of his most devoted pupils. He also studied composition under Max Bruch and Robert Hahn (details unknown). Recognized for his exceptional artistry, Klingler was awarded the Mendelssohn Prize in 1900. The following year, at the age of twenty-two, he was appointed Second Concertmaster of the Berlin Philharmonic, a position he relinquished in 1903 to succeed Karel Halíř (1859–1909) as professor at the Hochschule. In the 1906 season, Klingler performed as violist with the Joachim Quartet.

With the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, Klingler was conscripted into military service but returned home in 1916. The following year, in 1917, he married Margarete von Gwinner (1888–1973), the daughter of a wealthy Jewish banker. Klingler, now a father of four, appeared destined for a life of personal fulfillment. Yet the tide of history was rapidly turning.

By the time the Nazi regime began its ascent, Klingler had reached the height of his professional career. Despite the increasingly precarious circumstances of having a Jewish spouse, he refused to compromise his principles. In protest against the removal of Joachim's statue from the Hochschule für Musik, he resigned his professorship.

Subsequently exiled to Hanover, Klingler continued to perform for military audiences as a means of safeguarding his wife. After the war's conclusion, his musical activities were largely limited to informal quartet playing. He passed away in Munich in 1971.

Despite the restrictions imposed on Klingler's career, his legacy endures through the Karl Klingler Foundation, the chamber music competition bearing his name, and the lasting influence of his students. Among these students was Shin'ichi Suzuki, a seminal figure who fundamentally transformed string pedagogy in the twentieth century."

Author's abridged translation from Tully Potter (1988).[70]

Friendships in Berlin

Let us now turn to materials concerning Shin'ichi's social circle during his time in Berlin. The following is a summary of his own recollections, as cited by Kenji Mochizuki, who later played a key role in the global dissemination of the Suzuki Method and served as the director of the Shin'ichi Suzuki Memorial Museum during his final years. Mochizuki contributed an article to the *Shimin Times,* a local newspaper in Matsumoto City, in 1999.

In 1924, when Shin'ichi was twenty-six years old, a commemorative photograph was taken at a farewell gathering for Viscount Hidemaro Konoe, who was later recognized as a foundational figure in Japanese orchestral music. The image captured nine Japanese students then studying abroad in Berlin. Among them was Hideo Saito (1902–1974), a cellist four years Shin'ichi's junior, who had made a brief visit to Berlin en route to Leipzig for cello studies. Saito would later become a formative mentor to conductor Seiji Ozawa.[71]

Coincidentally, around that same time, Shin'ichi's younger brother Fumio (1900–1945) also visited Berlin while traveling to Leipzig to study cello with Julius Klengel (1859–1933). During this visit, Saito received informal training from Fumio, whom he deeply admired.

According to Shin'ichi, Saito's cello technique made remarkable progress during his second period of study in Berlin, when he studied under Emanuel Feuermann (1902–1942) at the Hochschule für Musik. Upon returning to Japan, Saito joined the New Symphony Orchestra (now the NHK Symphony Orchestra), where an encounter with Josef Rosenstock (1895–1985) prompted his intensive study of conducting. Later, in reference to Saito's publication "Principles of Conducting", Shin'ichi remarked: "My violin textbooks have already been translated into English, and yet this—arguably the first conducting method manual in the history of global music education—has still never been translated. That's quite strange, isn't it?"[72]

Around that time, Shin'ichi began traveling to Leipzig—where Fumio was staying—to study composition under Georg Alfred Schumann (1866–1952). However, after some weeks, he was so overwhelmed by the magnificence of Brahms's symphonies that he became disheartened, and consequently turned from studying composition to learning

orchestration instead.[73]

A Guarnerius for Two Thousand Yen

The 15,000 yen in travel expenses from Masakichi had initially been intended to cover one year abroad for Shin'ichi.[74] However, Germany in the aftermath of World War I was gripped by severe inflation.

Amid the relentless inflation in postwar Germany, Shin'ichi was approached by a German acquaintance who conveyed that an elderly woman wished to sell her violin. Though uncertain of its authenticity, Shin'ichi was immediately drawn to the beauty and elegance of the instrument, which bore the inscription "Josef Guarnerius, 1725." He agreed to purchase the violin for 2 million marks—at the time equivalent to 4,000 yen in gold, or approximately 16 million yen in 2025.

Troubled by the instability of the mark, Shin'ichi made several phone calls offering payment in yen or U.S. dollars, but the seller remained adamant that she would accept marks and only marks. He rushed to the bank, arriving mere minutes after closing, and with the weekend intervening, returned three days later. By then, the mark had depreciated dramatically, allowing him to withdraw the same 2 million marks for just 2,000 yen.

When he presented the instrument to Klingler and recounted the episode, the maestro was astonished—both by the instrument's quality and by the improbably low price. While Shin'ichi prized the acquisition, he later confessed to feeling a sense of remorse for having obtained such a fine instrument at such little cost. He would reflect on that period as "a nightmare of inflation."[75]

Nonetheless, the violin would ultimately serve a greater purpose. During a temporary return to Japan, Shin'ichi brought the instrument home with him, enabling him to show it to his father. This encounter with a world-class violin was a turning point that led Masakichi, in his later years, to immerse himself in a profound quest for musical resonance.[76]

Michaelis and Einstein

In 1925, at the age of twenty-seven, Shin'ichi returned briefly to Japan and gave a well-received recital at the Hōgakudō in Tokyo. Around the same time, Dr. Leonor Michaelis (1875–1949), a distinguished biophysical chemist whom Shin'ichi had come to know in Berlin, arrived in Japan to take up a professorship at the Aichi Prefectural Medical School in Nagoya. He was soon invited to the home of Masakichi Suzuki.[77]

Dr. Michaelis was also an accomplished pianist. Together with his wife—a trained vocalist—they maintained close friendships with Marquis Yoshichika Tokugawa and Albert Einstein.[78]

In Shin'ichi's memoirs, he notes that in 1926, when Dr. Michaelis was invited to join the faculty of Johns Hopkins University in the United States, he "kindly took me to Professor Einstein's home." The details of this encounter, however, remain uncertain: Einstein's visit to Japan in the fall of 1922 lasted only a few months, while Dr. Michaelis resided in Japan from 1922 to 1926. If one is to speculate, it is conceivable that Michaelis stopped in his native Berlin en route to the United States and brought Shin'ichi with him to visit Einstein.

Whatever the precise circumstances may have been, Einstein warmly accepted Michaelis's request to take an interest in Shin'ichi's musical growth. He often invited Shin'ichi to home concerts and accompanied him to public performances, encouraging connections with musicians and cultural figures.

Einstein himself was an accomplished violinist. According to Shin'ichi's recollection, he played "with a soft tone and flowing fingers," and his favorite piece was Bach's Chaconne.[79]

One evening, following a dinner and home concert, Shin'ichi—responding to a request from Einstein and others—performed a concerto by Max Bruch, despite feeling embarrassed by what he considered his limited abilities. After the performance, a woman of around seventy turned to Einstein and remarked:

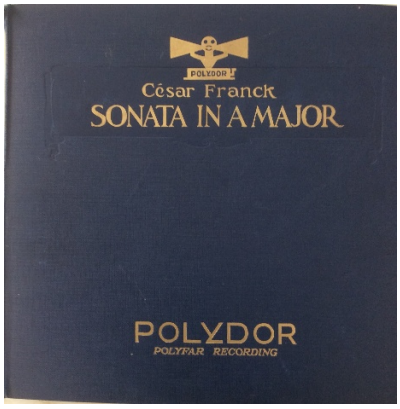
"Mr. Suzuki grew up in Japan, a country utterly different from our own, and was shaped by Japanese sensibilities. Yet he has just performed Bruch's German Concerto. Listening to him, I truly felt the artistic spirit of Bruch as a German composer. I cannot help but wonder—does Mr. Suzuki play with the same feeling we do?"

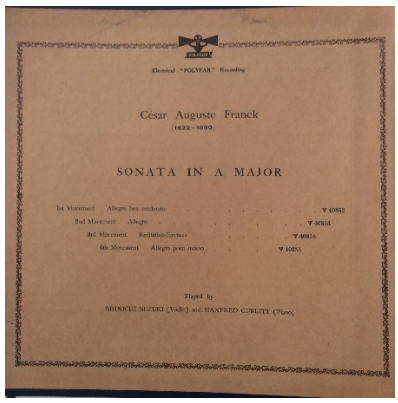
To this, Einstein replied: "People everywhere share the same humanity." Shin'ichi was deeply moved by these words, for he sensed within them the pulse of a vast and noble humanism.

On another occasion, Einstein—who was close to Adolf Busch (1891–1952)—invited Shin'ichi to attend one of Busch's concerts. Upon arrival at their pre-arranged meeting place, Shin'ichi found Einstein already waiting. Even in such small gestures, Einstein's respectful demeanor toward those younger than himself left a lasting impression; it revealed the depth of his humility and humanity.[81]

The photograph shown here is a portion of a letter from Einstein addressed to Shin'ichi.

The First Sonata Recording by a Japanese Artist





In 1928, Shin'ichi became the first Japanese musician to record a performance abroad, under the Polydor label—which, at the time, operated as a British subsidiary of Deutsche Grammophon. The work was the complete Violin Sonata by César Franck (1822–1890), with Manfred Gurlitt (1890–1972) at the piano. The recording was issued as a set of four 78-rpm SP records.

Another Japanese expatriate studying violin in Berlin at the time was Jun'ichirō Natsume, the eldest son of novelist Sōseki Natsume and later concertmaster of the Tokyo Philharmonic. One day, Natsume heard the beautiful strains of Franck's Sonata on the radio and, curious to know who was playing, inquired about the performer. It turned out to be Shin'ichi Suzuki.[82]

Waltraud Prange, Life Partner

Waltraud Prange (1905–1999) was born in Berlin as the youngest of three siblings in a well-to-do family. She began studying piano at the age of six and later studied both piano and voice at the Stern'sches Konservatorium. Her father was an executive at a chocolate company and also owned a business dealing in lacquer and animal glue. Until the outbreak of the Great War, the family lived in comfort, but following the devastating hyperinflation that swept through Germany, much of their wealth was lost virtually overnight.[83]

Even so, the family adapted by taking in boarders at their spacious home. As a musical household, the Pranges found resilience through art: Waltraud's brother supported the family by leading a small orchestra, and Waltraud herself resumed her studies in piano and vocal music at the Stern'sches Konservatoriu. Though she was aware of the sweeping changes in the outside world, she felt little of it directly. At times, the siblings would hold home concerts with her brother on violin, her sister on piano, and Waltraud singing.[84]

One day, at a home concert hosted by acquaintances, Waltraud met a young violin student, Shin'ichi Suzuki, then studying abroad in Berlin. When Shin'ichi offered to escort her home, Waltraud gladly accepted. The following day, he visited her house and was introduced to her family.

From that point on, Shin'ichi became a frequent visitor to the Prange household. He accompanied Waltraud to numerous concerts and home gatherings hosted by families such as the Einsteins and the Klinglers. On occasion, he even took the place of Waltraud's brother as the violinist in their home performances.

Around the same time, Shin'ichi's younger brother, Fumio, had come to Leipzig to study cello, and the two brothers occasionally met during that period. To Waltraud, Fumio was as pleasant in character as Shin'ichi, yet Shin'ichi remained exceptional; she believed that people like him were exceedingly rare, and she felt that his entire life existed for the sake of others.[85]

After five years of courtship, Shin'ichi and Waltraud resolved to marry. Waltraud was a devout Christian and sang in the choir at Berlin's St. Matthew Church, occasionally serving as a soloist. Unbeknownst to her, Shin'ichi had been attending services regularly and had converted to Catholicism well before their marriage.[86]

When Shin'ichi informed his father, Masakichi, of their engagement, his eldest brother, Umeo, traveled from Japan to visit. Masakichi raised no particular objections. However, Waltraud's mother faced criticism from relatives who questioned how she could allow her daughter to marry a man from a distant and unfamiliar country like Japan.

Shin'ichi, however, never intended to take Waltraud back to Japan. He told her plainly, "We will live in Switzerland. You cannot live in Japan."[87]

On the day of the wedding, the couple walked toward the altar, led by two children scattering flower petals, as the organ and choir filled the church with music. After the ceremony, they proceeded down the church steps on a crimson carpet, accompanied by a violin rendition of Ave Maria with organ accompaniment. Awaiting them were two pure white horses harnessed to a carriage, with two coachmen—one in front and one behind—ready to escort them.

To be continued.

Photo Credits

Fig. 1. Shin’ichi Suzuki. Collection of the Talent Education Research Institute.
Fig. 2. Marquis Tokugawa and Mrs. Suzuki. Collection of the Talent Education Research Institute.
Fig. 3. Nobu Kōda. National Diet Library Collection.
Fig. 4. Kō Andō. National Diet Library Collection.
Fig. 5. Karl Klingler and Shin’ichi Suzuki. Collection of the Talent Education Research Institute.
Fig. 6. Japanese students in Berlin. Shin’ichi Suzuki Memorial Museum Collection.
Fig. 7. Albert Einstein. Collection of the Talent Education Research Institute.
Fig. 8. Waltraud Prange. Collection of the Talent Education Research Institute.
Fig. 9. “Alli Prange.” Collection of the Talent Education Research Institute.
Fig. 10. Shin’ichi and Fumio in Berlin. Collection of the Talent Education Research Institute.
Fig. 11. Wedding reception in Berlin. Collection of the Talent Education Research Institute.
Fig. 12. Wedding in Berlin. Collection of the Talent Education Research Institute.

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