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## THE JAPANESE RECEPTION OF GEORGE SAND THROUGH THE MUSIC OF FRYDERYK CHOPIN

### Introduction

Attracted by the distinctive elegance and emotions in Chopin's works, many Japanese pianists, as well as amateurs of classical music, choose to visit Poland for a short or longer period, to study or to attend Chopin-related events such as the International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition and Chopin and His Europe festival to deepen their understanding of his music and its source.<sup>1</sup> As they approach the composer's inner world, the Polish tradition of performing Chopin's music, and the discourse regarding Chopin's person and his works in wider Polish society, they would refresh their interest in the image of George Sand, the woman with whom he spent his life beyond the homeland as he created masterpieces in Majorca, Paris, and Nohant.

While Chopin's autographed manuscripts, correspondence, the *Method of Piano*, and the words of his pupils serve as fundamental materials for deciphering his personal and musical ideas, the character of Chopin, his health, lifestyle, and the process of music-making captured by George Sand in her writings comprise one of the inspirational sources. Sand's *Un Hiver à Majorque*, *L'Histoire de ma vie*, *Impressions et souvenirs*, as well as her letters, show how the French writer witnessed Chopin as a solitary genius who struggled with his innermost musical voice.

Seeing Japanese in the context of George Sand, questions would arise: How do they take a position to the way Sand describes the artistic self of Chopin? What are the feelings Chopin derived from his time spent with Sand,

<sup>1</sup> About Chopin's reception in Japan e.g. L.Z. Niekrasz, *Chopin gra w duszy japońskiej*, Kraków 2000; K. Ōshima, 'Recepcja twórczości Chopina w Japonii,' transl. J. Ossowski, 2008, Chopin.pl; H. Takasaka, 'Pokolenie Nintendo. Dlaczego Japończycy tak kochają Chopina?,' *Tygodnik Powszechny* 2010, No. 41; S. Okumura, 'Chopin w Japonii. O współczesnych gustach muzycznych Japończyków i ich miłości do Polskiego Kompozytora,' *Meakultura* 2017; R. Janczarek, 'Fryderyk Chopin i Furederikku Shopan - recepcja muzyki Fryderyka Chopina w kulturze japońskiej,' *Roczniki Kulturoznawcze* 2020, vol. 11-12, pp. 171-206.

which Japanese imagine and through which they get inspired? How do they empathize (or not empathize) with each of the great artists? How does their idea regarding Sand's impact on Chopin's life differ depending on their gender?

Based on the words of Japanese musicians and amateurs who have experienced the lifeworld in Poland, I will cut out a picture of the "Japanese" reception of George Sand through their thoughts on Chopin. Besides the existing written and spoken texts available in academia and media, in-depth semi-structured interviews with Japanese pianists and Chopin amateurs I have conducted from June to October 2021 and January 2022 are the main materials.<sup>2</sup> Besides an approach of narrative studies and discourse analysis,<sup>3</sup> the method of the critique of fantasies used in literary studies has been applied to the analysis of the words of my interviewees.<sup>4</sup>

### The general reception of George Sand in Japan

George Sand is known in Japan as a liberated woman and Chopin's lover as well as the author of pastoral novels and children's stories imported in the wave of Japanese' aspiration to the West.

The translation of Sand's works into Japanese should be located in a wider context of Japan. Some of Sand's works, such as *La Mare au diable* (first published in 1912), *La Petite Fadette* (1924), *Indiana* (1937), and *Les Maîtres sonneurs* (1937) were published early while others, such as *Elle et lui* (1948), *François le Champi* (1949), *Mauprat* (1950), *Le Marquis de Villemer* (1950), were

<sup>2</sup> The interviews with 13 pianists (9 females and 4 males) and 12 amateurs (8 females and 4 males), sampled through the snowball method, were held via Zoom, recorded and transcribed by the author, except for one female amateur, who preferred a written form and answered to my questions by emails. All the interviewees were in Poland to study and/or attend Chopin-related events, especially the Chopin Competition. Two amateurs were in their 60s, five in their 50s, and five in their 40s, while one pianist was in her 60s, two in their 40s, five in their 30s and five in their 20s. Three pianists lived in Poland, while other interviewees and I were in Japan. Each interviewee is given an altered first name except for Kayo Nishimizu, who preferred to use her name.

<sup>3</sup> For more information regarding the method, cf. Y. Shibata, 'Japońskie podejścia do polskości muzyki Fryderyka Chopina' in *Lokalne, narodowe, i inne*, ed. P. Binder, Warsaw 2014, pp. 363–84.

<sup>4</sup> Fantasies are various kinds of imaginations, pictures, emotional themes, mystification, hallucinations, dreams, and illusions that draw features from myth and stereotypes and haunt our consciousness. Cf. M. Janion, *Kobiety i duch inności*, Warsaw 2006, p. 6. For a detailed discussion, cf. M. Janion, *Wobec zła*, Chotomów 1989.

translated after World War II together with various works of European and American literature during the boom of Western literature reflecting people's admiration for the Western civilization and their wish to gain freedom and new knowledge to improve their life.

The majority of Sand's works available in Japan have been pastoral, rustic novels and children's stories. Mystic and socialist novels created under the influence of Lamennais and Leroux or the political brochures written during the February Revolution were not popularized. *La Mare au diable* and *La Petite Fadette* are relatively widely read to this day partly thanks to the Iwanami paperback series.<sup>5</sup> Referring to the popularity of *La Petite Fadette* translated into Japanese as "A Fairy of Love" (*Ai no yōsei*), Chiyo Sakamoto and Chikako Hirai observe that besides the mysterious and poetic title attracting readers, the setting of the French village at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which seemed exotic as well as nostalgic to Japanese, the simple plot, and the universal theme of youth's first love, were among its reasons.<sup>6</sup> Young people seeking "authentic," inner beauty of individuals regardless of their social status and physical appearance, as well as the importance of adjusting their sense of self to be accepted by the community, might have resonated with the image of the ideal members of the modern Japanese nation consisting of small communities of docile people.

The primary image of Sand in Japan created in public discourse is that of a "beautiful woman dressed as a man" (*dansō no reijin*) and Chopin's lover. While the first biography, written by Hitoshi Kondō (1921–2015) and published in 1948, focused on her "satanic" desires and romances and depicted the egoistic character of Sand capriciously preying upon men to fulfill her lust and fantasy,<sup>7</sup> André Maurois's biography translated into Japa-

<sup>5</sup> The series of pocket-size books modeled after *Universal-Bibliothek* of Reclam Verlag established in Japan in 1927. *La Petite Fadette* and *La Mare au diable* were first published from the series in 1936 and 1952 respectively and have been repeating reprints to this day. *Indiana* and *Les Maîtres sonneurs* were published in 1937, while *Elle et lui* in 1950.

<sup>6</sup> C. Sakamoto, C. Hirai, 'Sando sakuhin no hōyaku gaishi' in *200 nen me no jorujū sando. Kaishaku no saisentan to juyōshi*, Tokyo 2012, s. 218.

<sup>7</sup> In the afterword of this short biography focused on Sand's relationship with her lovers, the author (a historian of French literature and alpinist) denies her agency in the following way: "The fact that Sand had a relationship with many men was a happy thing for herself. It is sure that literary criticism, social philosophy, music and paintings conveyed to her by the mouths of these men powerfully grew in her heart." Kondō concludes: "How would George Sand, who broke down traditional morality and acquired freedom as a woman, appeal to the heart of the women of our country, which is at the dawn of women's lib-

nese in 1954 allowed the readers to capture a detailed picture of Sand's life. Among the fans of Maurois's biography was Chiyo Uno (1897–1996), a popular writer and entrepreneur, who saw herself in Sand as a person who was loyal to herself and lived as a subject, financially independent and freed from her father's or men's power.<sup>8</sup> Thanks to the books published after Maurois's biography, the negative image of Sand as a monstrous woman who hunted for men faded, and Japanese books on Sand's relationship with Musset and Chopin are written from a neutral perspective.<sup>9</sup> However, a large number of books that focus on her romance available in Japan continue to disregard the true values of Sand's works.

After the first exposition on Sand in Tokyo held in 1989 upon the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the French Revolution, her works started to recapture the interests of female scholars. Before this event, Sand Studies were led by male scholars. With the rise of women's studies and the number of female graduate students, since the 1990s, the perspective of gender, together with that of psychology and folklore, is often used to analyze her works.<sup>10</sup> The second renaissance was marked by the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sand's birth in 2004, with several symposia and conferences on Sand's works followed by the publication of related volumes;<sup>11</sup> Sand's selected works embracing nine volumes (*Mauprat*, *Spiridion*, *Consuelo*, *Jeanne*, *La Mare au diable*, *L'Histoire de ma vie*, *La Ville noir*, *Contes d'une Grand-mère*, and correspondence)<sup>12</sup> also began.

eration? I would like to know it" (H. Kondō, *Jōen no sakka - joruju sando*, Tokyo 1948, p. 159.

<sup>8</sup> C. Hirai, *Nihon ni okeru joruju sando - Nihon saisho no hon'yaku "ruisetsu" no nazo*, Tokyo 2004, pp. 40–5. In a talk with a writer Tsuyako Abe published in a literary monthly, Uno says she sees Sand's act of writing as a way of expressing her energy and empathizes with Sand as a prolific writer and a woman: "She wrote works. However, it was one of the ways of expressing her vitality. Loving someone, giving birth to children, building a house, writing... writing was only one part [of Sand] as a person who makes her living (*seikatsusha*). [...] This book [Maurois's biography] is very interesting for me because it is not a biography of a writer, but a biography of a *seikatsusha*" (*Gunzō* 1954, December issue).

<sup>9</sup> C. Sakamoto, N. Takaoka, 'Denki no shuppan dōkō to bungakushijō no ichi' in *200 nenme no joruju sando - kaishaku no saisentan to juyōshi*, p. 229.

<sup>10</sup> C. Sakamoto, H. Nishio, K. Murata, 'Kenkyūshi in: *ibidem*, pp. 236–7.

<sup>11</sup> C. Akimoto et al., *Joruju sando no sekai - seitān 200 shūnen kinen shuppan*, Tokyo 2003; Société Japonaise des Études Sandiennes, *Les Héritages de George Sand aux XXe et XXIe siècles. Les Arts et la politique*, Tokyo 2006.

<sup>12</sup> G. Sand, *Joruju sando serekushon*, 9 vols., eds. M. Perrot, A. Mochida, K. Ōno, Tokyo 2004–2013.

More accessible sources regarding the image of Sand which classical music amateurs and musicians in Japan are books on Fryderyk Chopin and media representations. Besides Chopin's biographies,<sup>13</sup> correspondence,<sup>14</sup> and words by his pupils,<sup>15</sup> works by Japanese music critics and musicologists such as Kazuyuki Tōyama,<sup>16</sup> Masumi Konuma,<sup>17</sup> and Yūko Kosaka<sup>18</sup> are widely available and read to this day. The film *Desire for Love* (*Pragnienie miłości*, dir. J. Antczak, 2002), and to a lesser extent *The Blue Note* (*La Note bleue*, dir. A. Żuławski, 1991) and *Children of the Century* (*Les Enfants du siècle*, dir. D. Kurys, 1999) also project an image of Sand.<sup>19</sup> In these popular works as well as feature articles in such music magazines as *Friends of Music* (*Ongaku no Tomo*) and *Chopin* or comic strips on the website of the influential National Piano Teachers' Association of Japan, Sand is represented as the partner of Chopin's dramatic romance and a mature, passionate woman who dedicated her love to the great artist. Rather than being a fantastic figure of a poisonous woman, Sand's face as a mature woman who protected Chopin is emphasized, while she also appears in history textbooks as a precursor of feminism and women's rights in a positive way.

<sup>13</sup> Relatively read to this day are the following publications: A. Cortot, *Shopan*, Tokyo 1952 [1949]; B. Smoleńska-Żelińska, *Chopin no shōgai*, trans. T. Sekiguchi, Tokyo 2000; S. Delaigue-Moins, *Noan no shopan to sando*, trans. Y. Kosaka, Tokyo 1992 [1986].

<sup>14</sup> My interviewees often referred to the following publications: A. Hedley (ed.), *Shopan no tegami*, trans. Y. Komatsu, Tokyo 2003 [1962]; A. Mochida (ed.), *Joruju sando kara no tegami – supein mayoruka tō, shopan tono tabi to shōgai*, Tokyo 1996; Z. Helman et al. (eds.), *Shopan zen shokan 1816–1831 nen – Pōrando jidai*, trans. T. Sekiguchi et al., Tokyo 2012; Z. Helman et al. (eds.), *Shopan zen shokan 1831–1835 nen. Pari jidai (jō)*, trans. T. Sekiguchi et al., Tokyo 2019; Z. Helman et al. (eds.), *Shopan zen shokan 1836–1839 nen. Pari jidai (ge)*, trans. T. Sekiguchi et al., Tokyo 2020.

<sup>15</sup> J.J. Eigeldinger, *Deshi kara mita shopan – sono piano kyōikuhō to ensō bigaku*, trans. J. Kometani, H. Nakajima, Tokyo 2020 [2005].

<sup>16</sup> K. Tōyama, *Shopan*, Tokyo 1988.

<sup>17</sup> M. Konuma, *Shopan to sando – ai no kiseki*, Tokyo 2010 [1982]; M. Konuma, *Shopan – shitsui to kodoku no saibannen*, Tokyo 1992.

<sup>18</sup> Y. Kosaka, *Jiritsu suru onna – joruju sando*, Tokyo 1998.

<sup>19</sup> Written fictional works concerning Chopin and Sand such as Keiichirō Hirano (*Sōsō*, Tokyo 2001, 2002) and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz (*Noan no natsu – shopan to joruju sando*, trans. M. Tsukada, Tokyo 1998) were not read by my interviewees. Tōru, an amateur, explains the reason why he tried to read Hirano's work but resigned as follows: "As I read different biographies, I care about facts, and I somehow feel reluctant to follow the development of a story that is based on facts but is a made-up one."

Seeing these sources available in Japan, it would be safe to say that despite the image of Sand as a liberated and passionate woman, the negative fantasy of Sand as a seductive woman who destroyed men's lives is not perceptible, if not absent, in contemporary Japanese society.

### **Sand as Chopin's self-sacrificing (Japanese) mother**

Then what image of George Sand do Japanese pianists and amateurs who have studied or enjoyed Chopin's music in Poland develop as they experience the lifeworld of the composer's birthplace?

Most interviewees have formed their image of Sand from Chopin's letters, biographies, and books about Chopin, her letters cited in these books, and music magazine articles or films about Chopin. To a lesser extent, they name *La Petite Fadette*, *Un Hiver à Majorque*, and their physical trips to Majorca and Nohant as a source. Many of them started to imagine Sand's personality from materials regarding Chopin after they arrived in Poland as they "wanted to know" about the composer. Characteristically, *Lucrecia Floriani*, whose protagonist Prince Carol is said to caricature the egoistic character of Chopin, has no Japanese translation. Through curiosity, my interviewees just knew the plot and referred to this work as an outcome of the inevitable conflict of the personalities of Chopin and Sand, but not to criticize Sand.

The dominant image of Sand they shaped is that of a woman who took care of Chopin, without whose help the Polish composer would not have made such achievements. Yumi, a former pupil of Ewa Pobłocka and Bronisława Kawalla, explains: "She was outspoken, raised children by herself, and was active in loving people. She was devoted, and self-sacrificing. What I often hear is that Sand protected a weak Chopin, and I think it was the nature of their relationship." Haruto, a male pupil of Alicja Paleta-Bugaj, presents a similar thought: "She was masculine and frank. Chopin was quiet, and I think Sand was one of the very few persons to whom he could open his heart to build an intimate relationship. [...] As they were so different, I assume there were many things she did not understand about Chopin. She was a person, with whom he could interact at a deep level."

Mari, a former pupil of Regina Smendzianka and contestant in the 15<sup>th</sup> Chopin Competition, agrees: "I think Sand's impact was the biggest. There are many great works produced after Chopin met her. Also, I feel her impact on those pieces he made after they parted. [...] She understood Chopin, this is for sure." Regardless of age, gender, and professors, Sand is imagined by the interviewed pianists as the *necessary* supporter for Chopin if not the most important person in his life.

There is no difference in the general image of Sand between pianists and amateurs. Tōru, an avid lover of Chopin's music frequenting such events as the Duszynki Festival, Chopin and His Europe, and the Chopin Competition, asserts: "Almost all pieces from opus 35 to 65 were completed in the summer, in Nohant. That is why I think Sand's contribution to Chopin's works is huge." Naoko, an amateur pianist and Chopin Studies scholar has visited Nohant four times and says: "There are 48 pieces Chopin composed in Nohant, and they are the greatest pieces. He was given that big room with lots of sunshine on the first floor in Nohant, focused on composition as Sand cared for his health. When I listen to these masterpieces, I feel thankful to Sand for the environment that gave birth to these works. [...] Without her, Chopin could have died earlier."

Ken, a regular at the Chopin Competition since 2005, has a similar image of Sand: "[...] perhaps as the biggest supporter of Chopin. Just thanks to her presence, he could compose masterpieces until the end of his life. [...] Besides biographies, as I trace the great works he made, they correspond to the period, during which Chopin lived together with George Sand. This tells me what it meant for him." Sayaka evaluates her positive impact on Chopin: "Sand was a strong woman who loved men and had the charm to be loved, with strong maternity, was a good correspondent, a social woman. [...] I am thankful to her because, without her, the music Chopin left would have been different."

A self- and other-presentation analysis shows that the words my interviewees apply to Sand's character concerning Chopin are foremost positive. Being aware of a discourse negatively portraying Sand as a "wicked woman," Sayaka forms her image through Chopin's music: "Some speak ill of George Sand, but I think being with such a bad person, it would have been impossible to write such beautiful pieces. The relationship between a man and a woman can be understood only by them. I think music offers the right answer."

Frequently used are such words as "strong," "relaxed," "mature," "self-sacrificing," and "devoted," as well as words stressing Sand's caring nature and commitment, namely, "mother-like," "maternal" and "maternity." Eri, a former pupil of Tatiana Shebanova and contestant in the 14<sup>th</sup> Chopin Competition, refers to a popular representation of Chopin to show Sand's patience: "In the film [*Desire for Love*], Chopin is depicted as a very nervous person, even more than I thought. If he was all the time like that, I wonder how hard it was for Sand. I think she was a dedicated person with a strong sense of maternity. [...] Made clear soup, especially for him. Food was directly related to his health. She cared about Chopin."

In the mind of the Japanese, Sand assumes the face of a self-sacrificing

mother who unconditionally accepted Chopin's self and helped him fulfill his mission as a great artist. Mami, who studied with Janusz Olejniczak, describes the warmth offered by Sand: "Rather than romance, it was a more family-like relationship. I imagine George Sand as a mature, relaxed woman." Pointing out the pharmaceutical and medical knowledge of herbs Sand gained from her tutor Jean-Louis François Deschartres and applied to improving Chopin's health, Naoko likewise exclaims how Sand "indeed became a mother" to Chopin.

It is possible to risk a statement that a somewhat transcendental picture of Sand shaped by my interviewees evokes the image of the idealized "good wife and wise mother" (*ryōsai kenbo*)<sup>20</sup> that was established in the modern Japanese discourse regarding the centrality of home for the nation. Paradoxically, what is emphasized in the national discourse on the ideal Japanese woman has been the ability to manage her household so that males could focus on their work to develop the nation. As a consequence, "the mother" who builds a "healthy home" not only functions in a concrete relationship of a mother and a child but surpasses the mundane realm, it also assumes the position of a valuable symbol.<sup>21</sup> The desexualized bond between Sand with Chopin is not problematized by any of my interviewees as they seem to perceive it as the indispensable condition for Chopin's sacred activity of "giving birth" to his masterpieces. Satoshi, a piano professor and a passionate Chopin Studies scholar observes: "I think there was no sexual relationship between them. She loved Chopin with her maternity, which Chopin used it." Sand's motherly figure thus becomes a *natural* setting for the interviewees – for whom the middle-class idea/ ideal of home seems to be valid.

What is highly evaluated by Japanese pianists and amateurs is thus the *space* in the strange land Sand offered Chopin. Shōko Kusuhara, a professor at Toho Music University and a devoted reader of Chopin's letters, declares that Sand's support as a progressive intellectual allowed Chopin to create his great pieces. Crucially, she regards the loneliness of Chopin as

<sup>20</sup> The "good wife, wise mother" is an ideology that defines a woman as a member of a modern nation by putting her in the nation's building unit of a family. As a mother, the woman raises children while as a wife she bears the full responsibility of conducting housework to "support" her man who is directly engaged in productive activities to serve the nation. Cf. S. Koyama, *Ryōsai kenbo to iu kihan*, Tokyo 1991, p. 58. In the family, the role of the "wife" is often assimilated to that of the "mother" who keeps forgiving and accepting "childish" men. Cf. C. Ueno, *Kindai kazoku no seiritsu to shūen*, Tokyo 1994.

<sup>21</sup> M. Ōhinata, 'Bosei gainen wo megutte' in *Shinhen nihon no feminizumu: Bosei*, eds. M. Amano et al., Tokyo 2009, pp. 60–2.



a Polish artist in France as being *recognized* by Sand.<sup>22</sup> My interviewees agree with her idea that Chopin who did not express his feelings needed Sand's "presence" as she could confirm the meaning of his existence even without words. Kayo Nishimizu, a pianist based in Poland often feels that an introverted Chopin was "more Japanese" than she is, and says that it was thanks to Sand who offered him the mental as well as physical refuge that Chopin came to hold the sense of fulfillment and hope as an artist:

Chopin felt that Sand understood him without expressing it with words. No matter what capricious and selfish things he said, how sick he was, Sand tolerated it as a mother, a lover, and an artist. I think at some moment she got really tired. And Chopin treated her as *the* person who understood him. That is why Chopin said nothing bad about her. [...]

Chopin's works usually end gloomily except for small pieces such as nocturns. However, many of the later works, be they *Ballades*, *Sonata in B Minor*, *Fantaisie*, and the *Heroic Polonaise (A flat major, op. 53)*, end with joy and show a sense of fulfillment and hope as an artist. I feel that they end with a sense of hope, also thanks to Sand. [...]

I do not like her that much, but she loved Chopin so much. There was a time when she was a passionate lover, and Chopin felt her as a great supporter. He relied on his mother and sisters, and Sand could play their role for him. Away from Poland, he found the asylum, his place, exactly in her.

For Kayo, Sand was the person whose existence enabled Chopin to develop his belief in the future through his creative activities.

As these words suggest, rather than the *femme fatale* aspect of the French writer who "seduced" and then abandoned the Polish composer, the Japanese musicians and classical music amateurs emphasize the maternal nature of Sand as well as her ability to make "home" and support her partner, so that their place becomes the basis of his work and life.

Remarkably, my interviewees lack interest in Sand's love affair with other males or her work outside the home she made for Chopin. Many of them have never read any of Sand's books, while three female pianists read *La Petite Fadette* and two *Un Hiver à Majorque*. Among amateurs, Naoko has read all of Sand's works available in Japanese though she found them rather boring. Saori, a semi-professional pianist who has studied in France with Jeannine Bonjean, often reads Sand's letters to Chopin<sup>23</sup> and explains why she is not interested in the works of Sand: "I rarely think of Sand after Chopin's death. I do know she did something like a politician, but after all,

<sup>22</sup> "Joruju sando to iu onna – shopan no tegami wo yominagara," Shōko Kusuhara Official Website, January 27, 2016 (acc. 2023-09-09).

<sup>23</sup> A. Mochida (ed.), *op. cit.*

what she aimed at was to live according to her desire. I do not know about her artistic side as I have not read novels. However, I somehow think the fact they are not read suggests they are outdated, just as music pieces that are not played lack charm.”

The meaning the Japanese pianists and amateurs find in the life of Sand is, therefore, confined to her role as a motherly figure who gave Chopin, albeit for a limited period, her unconditional love to let him concentrate on creating great musical pieces.

Recognizing the “brutal” end of the relationship and the tendency to justify her point of view, the interviewed pianists and amateurs emphasize the maternal aspect of George Sand, without whose presence Chopin could not have pursued his artistic mission. Rather than as the counterfeiter of the memory, Sand is imagined as the strong woman who nurtured the Polish, or their, hero.

### Identification with Chopin the realist

Interestingly, most of the interviewees stress the difficult character of Chopin as a human and admire Sand’s effort. The words used to define Chopin’s character include: “nervous,” “difficult,” “delicate,” “selfish” and “sick,” while even such a strong term as “unbearable” often appears. Feeling the extremely delicate and nervous aspect of Chopin, Ai, a contestant in the 17<sup>th</sup> Chopin Competition, with due respect for the fantastic composer, is critical of his selfishness: “I don’t intend to be on Sand’s side, but [reading Chopin’s letters – Y.S.] I felt how hard it was for Sand although she was also a difficult character. Chopin was so nervous, he reacted this way when she said something, and that way when she said another, on and on. If we just focus on his musical part, it is just great. But someone like a “100% male-character” guy, clear and simple, would not have created such works.”

Reading a passage on Chopin from *L’Histoire de ma vie*,<sup>24</sup> Satoshi agrees with Sand: “I feel Chopin did make Sand angry. [...] He was quite selfish though it was normal for that level of artist. Sand saw it and did her best, as a writer. Raising children and enjoying romance, she was proliferate, and spent much time writing; I assume there was a lot of compromise. In

<sup>24</sup> G. Sand, *Waga shōgai no ki*, vol. 3, trans. S. Katō, Tokyo 2005, p. 265. In October 2021 and January 2022, to gain detailed opinions, I asked 6 interviewees to read a passage from *L’Histoire de ma vie* (Chap. 13, Part V) and from *Impressions et souvenirs IV*. The Japanese text of the latter was taken from: C. Sakamoto, Y. Katō, *Joruju sando to yonin no ongakuka – risuto, beruriōzu, maiyabēa, shōpan*, Tokyo 2013, KOBO EPUB edition.

this sense, Chopin looked very selfish and lived in his dream. I think Sand was right to say that he lived only in his dream and had difficulty living in this life.”

Deeming such a character of Chopin to be inseparable from the beauty of his music, many female interviewees show their sympathy for Sand as a woman. Out of her love for the composer, Sayaka has visited most Chopin-related places including Majorca and Nohant, and had a strong sense of sorrow when she looked out of the window of the former Chopin’s room imagining how he felt leaving the house – not knowing for the last time. Despite her affection, she would not empathize with him: “I love Chopin, but I would certainly not be able to live with him. As a woman, perhaps I feel close to Sand.” Emiko, a former pupil of Piotr Paleczny, declares that she is “exactly this type of woman who gets caught by Chopin due to his great talent.” Similarly, discussing the depressive character of Chopin in her weblog, Shōko Kusuhara empathizes with Sand: “Chopin was cheerful, kind, and attractive in fashionable circles, but in private life, he was lost in fantasies, could not get over anxieties, and was an *unbearable* man [emphasis – Y.S.]. Even so, Sand was fascinated and captivated by the magic of the piano sounds which only genius Chopin could create, and she kneeled before his talent... I understand her mind and heart as one of these women. I think I know how one’s shock and respect for someone whom s/he cannot reach transforms into love”.<sup>25</sup>

Notably, as working women engaged in the public role of educating music students and fulfilling their careers as concert pianists, Shōko and Emiko are both impressed by Sand’s strength. However, they do not necessarily empathize with Sand as *an artist*. Emiko remarks that if she had the same talent that Chopin had, she would struggle and pursue to concretize his artistic vision in this world. Ai observes that it was Chopin himself who had a hard time facing himself: “Perhaps it was more difficult for him to face himself. [...] If he had been suffering from his unbearable part, I would empathize with him more. I think he was most suffering from this part of himself. Sand was solving her problems by putting them out, while Chopin put his problems in this [inner – Y.S.] direction. I empathize with Chopin. It is such a part which makes us want to know him more.” Rather than Sand, what they identify with, therefore, is Chopin’s loneliness, his problematic, artistic self, and the vision and ideal he pursued thanks to such a complicated and inward character.

Then are the Japanese interviewees also the “romantics” who do not compromise with humanity or cannot accept any reality just as George Sand

<sup>25</sup> “Joruju sando to iu onna.”

depicted Chopin in *L'Histoire de ma vie*? When reading Sand's description of Chopin as the typical artist, who did not wish to comply with humanity or accept reality and was destined to be "burned down with the dream of ideal in this world",<sup>26</sup> pointing out the multiple versions of his manuscripts, Naoko, as well as Satoshi, approves Sand's observation stressing the idealist aspect of Chopin in terms of sound and his works which he repeatedly revised after publishing them or during lessons to confuse future scholars. Curiously, Naoko indicates that Chopin did *not* pursue what was fixed – or unattainable.

Though generally agreeing with the way by which Sand captured Chopin, many interviewees, especially pianists, understand Chopin as a realist. Ai plainly remarks: "I would not agree with Sand's opinion that Chopin did not accept reality as it was. I never thought that he did not accept reality. Rather, he was very realistic." Kōhei, a former pupil of Katarzyna Popowa-Zydroń, agrees with Ai's thought: "Chopin is very cool-headed. He never escaped from reality as Schumann did. You can say he was a realist. When we see his works, they are beautiful but extremely logical." Trying to describe what Chopin aimed to express through his music, Eiji, a contestant in the 18<sup>th</sup> Chopin Competition, feels the distance Chopin had for himself: "Rather than hope, I think it is reminiscences. It is to look back at things from some distance. It is not total darkness, but as a whole, it is acceptance and resignation. I think it is like a point of resignation. I think he is very objectively observing himself."

A similar opinion is expressed by Emiko, who declares that Chopin was never a person who dreamed of things that he could not achieve. In her opinion, Chopin accepted his fate, and he was not the angel who could not endure the harshness of this world: "I think he of course had the ideal. He did not compromise when making music but accepted his circumstances and other things. I think he never was a person who dreamed of things he could not realize." In other words, the romantic thoughts and ideals of Chopin are felt to be, in some ways, realizable to her.

Kumi, another contestant of the 18<sup>th</sup> Competition, articulates Chopin's wish:

I think there is a sanctuary, or beauty Chopin saw in human beings. He writes his music knowing all the bad feelings, about the country without sovereignty, illness, and various negative experiences. There are parts with venomous color, but what he wanted to tell is not there. [...] He tried to create a sacred space in his music, the original beauty of humans, which could break if we touched. It is what a hu-

<sup>26</sup> G. Sand, *Waga shōgai...*, p. 265.

man has made. As we perform, if there are miracle moments or sounds that surpass us, I think it is a good performance. [...]

Humans are in nature. I think sacred things are sort of natural. There is no clear boundary between them, as humans are part of nature. As we talked about Zen and the cosmos, the idea about the cosmos is what humans have made. I think Chopin found beautiful things we would capture with the 6<sup>th</sup> sense in humans, the cosmos, nature, and everything.

Kumi thinks that the sacred space, that Chopin established in his music out of the beauty of nature and humans, can be realized through her piano performance. Resonating with her words and other interviewed pianists and amateurs, Naoko sees the essence of Chopin's music in its naturalness "as if it were born exactly now" – that is what the pianists and listeners wish to *attain* together.

### Conclusion

The analysis of the words of the Japanese has cut out a picture of their reception of George Sand. Following the general image of Sand as a liberated woman and a caring lover of Chopin dominant in contemporary Japanese society, my interviewees understood Sand as a maternal figure, without whose support Chopin could not have created his masterpieces or realized his vision of the world. Regardless of gender or age, they hold a positive image of Sand as the basis of Chopin's existence, but not an evil woman harmful to men's lives. While some felt sympathy for Sand as a woman attracted to Chopin the genius, what they more empathize with is the artistic vision of Chopin and his effort to concretize his ideas in this world.

The words of the Japanese pianists and amateurs presented above suggest their distinct agency. Despite admiration and gratitude for the motherly care and home Sand offered to Chopin, many of the interviewees do not fully agree with her view of Chopin and believe in the possibility of realizing Chopin's ideas by sharing a space, the sense of nature, and humanity with others.



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### ABSTRACT

The article examines the reception of the George Sand's image by contemporary Japanese pianists and classical music amateurs who have studied works of Fryderyk Chopin or attended Chopin-related musical events in Poland. A contextual analysis