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# The Leisure of Girls and Mothers: Affective Labor, Leisure, and Taste in the Transnational and Transmedia Adaptations of *Stella Dallas*

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**Abstract** Analyzes the cultural capital attached to gendered leisure activity and work in the story *Stella Dallas* as it moves from novel to film and from the United States to Japan to create its own genre of mother melodrama as *A Mother's Song* (Haha no kyoku, 1936). By comparing these texts and their creators, the chapter develops an understanding of the symbolic properties of leisure across cultures in the early twentieth century. It argues that various versions of the story use the category of the girl (*shōjo*) to explore a potential space of leisure outside the workplace or the heterosexual family unit. Of course, this space was also easily occupied by expectations that the leisure would cultivate the young woman's taste and domestic skills. Considering a flexible use of the concept of affective labor, the paper looks at the ways these texts used aspirational activities on the edges of "leisure" to negotiate various anxieties surrounding wage and unpaid domestic labor by women in the early twentieth century in relationship to class and sexual identities. A central case is the use of piano playing in the Japanese versions as a multifaceted activity, both work and leisure, that could represent good taste and potential for marriage, while also providing access to professional activity and a way for women to support themselves outside the family structure. In the Japanese case, this allowed them to remain permanently attached to what was seen as girl culture, including aspirations to cross cultural spaces and media, as does the entertaining story *Stella Dallas*.

**Keywords** Yoshiya Nobuko, *Stella Dallas*, women, cinema, adaptation, Japan

## Introduction

Chino Bōshi's playful book *Literary Girl's Companion* takes up works of contemporary literature it classifies as "girls' fiction" (*shōjo shōsetsu*).<sup>1</sup> For Japan, one definition of the *shōjo* (girl)<sup>2</sup> is that she is a "non-worker."<sup>3</sup> Chino's volume itself is a sort of celebration of play and reading for fun in a "girlish" mode. He associates that leisure with the girl and girls' magazines, particularly *Girls' Companion* (*Shōjo no tomo*), which was published from 1908 to 1955.<sup>4</sup> Chino Bōshi's book recasts the term "girls' fiction" from the prewar period to talk about contemporary women writers and comic books, and reflects on what it means to read them as producers of leisure material rather than works of literature and art that could be handled with traditional academic tools. He ends his book talking about his plans to use his own "free time" (*jiyū jikan*) to extend his "study trip" (*shūgaku ryokō*) to Paris.<sup>5</sup> My translation of the term "study trip" is awkward precisely because the meaning lies between work and play, denoting a form of leisure that may result in cultivation and learning but might also result in a product for which the player is paid (here a book). Often behind such trips and leisure activities by a girl is the domestic and wage labor of a parent or other supporter who makes them possible.

It is this ambiguous and gendered interaction between work and leisure that I will explore, in particular the anxieties concerning the relationship between the two as grappled with in the works of fiction and film examined in this article, namely the American and Japanese adaptations and translations of the novel *Stella Dallas*, a story of a mother and daughter's pursuit of cultural capital through tasteful leisure. I should note that these texts and adaptations are fictional representations with different contexts, which each bear their own perspectives on these issues. In fact, the "girl" culture associations of the various American and Japanese, men and women creators of these works frame the perspectives on work and leisure in their work.

In 1920s Japan, we see terms related to the "study trip" above, such as "self-cultivation" (*jishū*) and "cultivation" (*shūyō*), connected with girls and young women. "Cultivation" was a key concept in 1920s and 30s Japan, when it stood at the interstices of work and leisure and was thought to be acquired through a combination of schooling, reading, and white-collar work. This type of work included that performed by what came to be known

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1 Chino Bōshi 千野帽子, *Bungaku shōjo no tomo* 文学少女の友 (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2007). Clearly Chino's adoption of the "girl" stance is playful.

2 *Shōjo* is now taken to be an untranslatable Japanese concept that it is retained in Romanization rather than translated in English language scholarship. See, for example, Frenchy Lunning, "Under the Ruffles: Shōjo and the Morphology of Power," *Mechademia* <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/mechademia/toc/mec.6.html>, 3–19.

3 Chino Bōshi, *Bungaku shōjo no tomo*, 8.

4 *Shōjo no tomo* 少女の友 (Tokyo: Jitsugyō no Nihonsha, 1908–1955).

5 Chino, *Bungaku shōjo*, 218.

as “working women,” *shokugyō fujin*, in what were seen as higher echelon service industry areas such as “elevator girls,” department store clerks, telephone operators, and typists. These sorts of jobs were distinguished from the physically-demanding labor of so-called “factory girls,” *jokō*, who came largely from poor families under a form of indentured servitude and who fueled Japanese economic growth in the 1910s and 20s, particularly through their work in the textile industry.

Many social pundits and educators interested in the situation of upper middle-class women thought the experiences of “working women” should be re-deployed after marriage in service to husband, children, and extended family. Whatever its intentions, “cultivation” necessarily enriched both the work and leisure experience for women of that era and could not but help spilling over beyond the confines of non-wage labor of marriage and childrearing, as shown by Barbara Sato.<sup>6</sup> This quality distinguished “cultivation” from its related precursor, the “good wife, wise mother” (*ryōsai kenbō*) education promoted during the Meiji period. Compared to the “good wife, wise mother” educational goal, “cultivation” and its companion “hobbies,” *shumi*, were more flexible and less institutionalized.

Indeed many of these working women did not marry, being sometimes able to make that choice due to the degree of financial independence they had gained through their work. Those who did marry came with new skills and interests such as flower arranging, piano playing, and sewing, or routines of service industry politeness, which would be directly employed as part of the affective labor for the household. Others might be more focused on the education of children or self-fulfillment at home. The experiences of these working women would leave imprints on the education of their daughters. While the work of these married women moved into the domestic sphere and separated from wage labor, it also often remained in conversation with it.

As Kathi Weeks and others have shown, it can be remarkably difficult to talk about women’s non-wage labor as much as it has been a frequent topic of inquiry among feminists.<sup>7</sup> Particularly difficult in this respect are the more thoroughly “immaterial” forms of labor, for which Hardt and Negri have proposed the term “affective labor.” Referring to the entertainment industry, they say, “this labor is immaterial, even if it is corporeal and affective, in the sense that its products are intangible, a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion.”<sup>8</sup> As a category this might

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6 Barbara Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 134–151.

7 Kathi Weeks, “Life Within and Against Work: Affective Labor, Feminist Critique, and Post-Fordist Politics,” *ephemera: theory and politics in organization* 7, no. 1 (2007), 233–249.

8 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 292–293. This form of “affective labor” is connected to the concept of “immaterial labor” sketched by young Karl Marx in his *Grundrisse*.

well extend to self-cultivation performed by women, and perhaps children. Veblen, the first sociologist of leisure, defined leisure primarily as the conspicuous non-engagement in productive labor. He defined the work of servants and housewives who are facilitating the leisure of the gentleman head of the household, but also are not engaged in productive work, as performing “vicarious leisure” or providing leisure for others and enhancing through their own non-engagement in productive labor the conspicuous waste of their master. He writes:

In this way, then, there arises a subsidiary or derivative leisure class, whose office is the performance of a vicarious leisure for the behoof of the reputability of the primary or legitimate leisure class. This vicarious leisure class is distinguished from the leisure class proper by a characteristic feature of its habitual mode of life. The leisure of the master class is, at least ostensibly, an indulgence of a proclivity for the avoidance of labor and is presumed to enhance the master’s own well-being and fullness of life; but the leisure of the servant class exempt from productive labor is in some sort a performance exacted from them, and is not normally or primarily directed to their own comfort. The leisure of the servant is not his own leisure. So far as he is a servant in the full sense, and not at the same time a member of a lower order of the leisure class proper, his leisure normally passes under the guise of specialized service directed to the furtherance of his master’s fullness of life. Evidence of this relation of subservience is obviously present in the servant’s carriage and manner of life. The like is often true of the wife throughout the protracted economic stage during which she is still primarily a servant—that is to say, so long as the household with a male head remains in force.<sup>9</sup>

As Japanese middle-class households in the 1920s moved away from having maids or servants, the burden of providing a fully comfortable domestic space fell on the housewife’s shoulders alone. Magazines, especially *Shufu no tomo* 主婦の友 (The housewife’s friend, 1917–2008) emphasized the need for the housewife to serve as both the efficient “manager” and the servant in the household, providing spouse and children with some space for leisure rather than pursuing their own goals.<sup>10</sup> In the case of a daughter, this may often take the form of creating space to acquire “taste”

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9 Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class. An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1899), 59. Later he refers to the vicarious consumption of goods such as “food, clothing, dwelling, and furniture by the lady and the rest of the domestic establishment” as a “subsidiary range of duties” executed to enhance the conspicuousness of the consumption of time and substance by the gentleman, *ibid.*, 68.

10 Sarah Frederick, *Turning Pages: Reading and Writing Women’s Magazines in Inter-war Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 85–92. One excellent resource on views about middle-class children in this period is Mark Jones,

through activities that might look like leisure but are in fact training for the affective labor she may perform later in either a service industry or as a wife and mother.<sup>11</sup>

As indicated above, the transcultural aspect of these efforts is important, particularly in the aspirational experience of girls and women in 1920s and 30s Japan. As we see from Chino's examples, the "girl" has been a figure ambiguous not only in her relationship to adulthood and childhood, but also in her cultural location: she is often a culturally hybrid or even cosmopolitan figure. There are some historical reasons for this: the early twentieth-century magazines that helped to popularize the term were very much a part of the Meiji Era (1868–1912) culture that valued culturally Western things. Many of the readers were students at missionary schools and were learning English there, acquiring school routines based on European models. But it was also because the "girl's" leeway for "leisure" made this cultural mix a part of the conception of this figure from the start.

The image of the *shōjo* is that of a girl who has been given the time to consume products and develop skills on her own that allow her a certain fluidity to become more cosmopolitan and move across cultures, but also to cross class divides through education. At least in novels and movies, she often has a complicated family situation (orphaned, mixed marriage parents, foster parents, etc.) that is designed to signal a complicated identity.<sup>12</sup> Her leisure also gives her the time and space for a more intense and broader range of emotions, which in turn allows her to be imagined as empathizing beyond identity markers dear to her parents.

Living during this flexible period between the confines of parental authority and marriage, she was able to explore through "cultivation" multiple possible futures and identities with an imaginary unlimited by physical location. The most mobile of women—generally speaking, the most wealthy—had options such as studying abroad or extensive travel.<sup>13</sup>

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*Children as Treasures: Childhood and the Middle Class in Early Twentieth Century Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard East Asia Monograph Series, 2010).

- 11 Veblen himself rather stresses the need of the gentleman to acquire the trappings of taste through what in fact is an "arduous application to the business of learning how to live a life of ostensible leisure in a becoming way," which includes learning a foreign language, playing an instrument passably well, and acquiring the capacity to distinguish fine foods from regular fare, see Veblen, *Theory*, 74–75.
- 12 One excellent example is the silent film *Japanese Girls at the Harbor* (Minato no Nihon musume 港の日本娘, Shimizu Hiroshi 清水宏 director, 1933), which uses the space of Yokohama to link the cultural hybridity of schoolgirls going to Christian schools to a biracial character. It also considers how these identities operate across multiple class positions, from a girl who falls into prostitution and lives in a housing project with a house-husband (often shown doing the ironing) to her friend who lives in a house with a picket fence.
- 13 Sally Hastings, "Travelling to Learn, Learning to Lead," in *Modern Girls on the Go: Gender Mobility and Labor in Japan*, eds. Alisa Freedman, Laura Miller, and Christine Yano (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 193–208; Sarah Frederick,

For most, however, this movement took place through the fictional stories and the multiple media, especially photography, recorded music, and film that were increasingly circulating during the first part of the twentieth century. Such stories themselves were leisure material, but they also showed alternate ways of living in relationship to gendered leisure and work.

Considering a case of both cross-media and cross-national translation is useful to understand the specifics of the Japanese situation and Japanese media, as well as for a comparative understanding of the changing relationship between leisure and modernity more generally, particularly as these stories are highlighting changing notions of gender roles and sexuality. A similar trajectory across countries, languages, and media from Victorian England to Japan and China of Ellen Wood's melodramatic *East Lynne* (1860) has recently been followed by Xuelei Huang; my method is similar in focusing on retellings in multiple media, and shares the interest in complicating "influence" relationships. In the media-rich and increasingly globalized nature of media of the early twentieth century, specific stories circulated in conjunction with more general sets of codified images, sentiments, and genres that affect their reception in ways both globalized and localized.<sup>14</sup> For this purpose, I will focus on the travel of a particular novel and film from America to Japan and into film adaptations to consider their framing of leisure and taste among girls and women in 1930s Japan as the plot and the imagery move across spaces and languages.

The product is itself meant for consumption as leisure material, but it also engages in some meta-reflection on the intersection of women's and girls' activities that have a leisure aspect with social change, class, and sexuality. In all versions, we see a distinction between the successful self-cultivation for vicarious leisure on the part of the girl, contrasted with a failure to match the norms of a socially acceptable provider of vicarious leisure on the part of her mother. Ultimately the "mother love" that is a theme in all versions is cemented by the mother giving up the financial support that allows for her own "leisure" and moving into manufacturing labor so that her daughter may develop the wherewithal to rise socially. As a result, the girl is allowed to fully engage in the cultivation of skills and tastes that prepare her for affective labor in an upper-class, cosmopolitan, and cultivated married life. The character of her cultivation as affective labor (or the preparation for it) is highlighted through the fact that the steps preparing her to become a housewife and provider of vicarious leisure are the same that opened the way for her to become a professional entertainer.

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"Beyond *Nyonin geijutsu*, Beyond Japan: *Kagayaku* Writings by Women Travellers in *Kagayaku* (1933–1941)," *Japan Forum* 25, no. 3 (2013): 395–413.

14 Xuelei Huang, "From *East Lynne* to *Konggu Lan*: Transcultural Tour, Trans-Medial Translation," *Transcultural Studies* 2 (2012): 48–84.

## *Stella Dallas*

The American novel *Stella Dallas*, by Olive Higgins Prouty (1892–1974) of Massachusetts, was published in 1923.<sup>15</sup> It was first made into a film in 1925, in a silent version directed by Henry King and starring Belle Bennett, Lois Moran, and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.<sup>16</sup> Another better-known film version directed by King Vidor and starring Barbara Stanwyck came out in 1937, followed by a long running radio drama (1937–1955) sequel, which is sometimes credited as being the first “Soap Opera” and was sponsored by Bayer and Double Dandrine Shampoo.<sup>17</sup> There was also a 1990 remake called *Stella* with Bette Midler.

In American film studies, the 1937 *Stella Dallas* is often marked as the quintessential “maternal melodrama,” and was the focus of extended debates among feminist film critics.<sup>18</sup> While the novel began in serialization and Prouty claimed not to want it to be too melodramatic or cliché, it already contains many references to the film culture of which it will become a part. It uses cinematic language “close ups” and people imagining becoming “like folks in the movies.” At one point, the teenage daughter Laurel, who has come to Mrs. Morrison’s house for the first time, has a glance at the elegant living room before she is noticed. “It was like a scene at the ‘movies’ with all those books, and the piano, and the comfortable chairs, and the big portrait hanging over the fireplace, and the pretty lady behind the steaming tea-kettle, and the dog, and the boys (there were three of them in the room. One of them, the littlest one, was seated in her father’s lap)—only it was real!” But as she looks at her father, “suddenly the room faded, disappeared, and a close-up of his face dawned on the screen before her, as it were. Why, her father was gazing at the lady behind the tea-kettle, as if—as if—! Laurel had seen too many close-ups of faces not to recognize that look! She drew in her breath sharply. It flashed over Laurel that perhaps this man wasn’t really her father after all!”<sup>19</sup>

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15 Olive Higgins Prouty, *Stella Dallas* (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, 1923).

16 Henry King, dir., *Stella Dallas* (Samuel Goldwyn, Inc., 1925).

17 King Vidor, dir., *Stella Dallas* (Samuel Goldwyn, 1937). Lux Radio Theatre, starting off with a one-hour presentation introduced by Cecil B. DeMille (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n1X0s6h1kxI>). It was then restructured to fifteen-minute installments written by the Ann and Frank Hummert’s Hummer Radio Factory, 1937–1955, as “The famous story of mother love and sacrifice.” The source for the sponsorship information is Jim Cox, *The Great Radio Soap Operas* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 2008), 229–230.

18 Linda Williams, “Something Else Besides a Mother: *Stella Dallas* and the Maternal Melodrama,” *Cinema Journal* 24, no. 1 (Fall 1984): 2–27; E. Ann Kaplan, “Mothering, Feminism, and Representation: The Maternal Melodrama and the Woman’s Film 1910–1940,” in *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman’s Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 130–135; E. Ann Kaplan, “The Case of the Missing Mother: Maternal Issues in Vidor’s *Stella Dallas*,” in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. P. Erens (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 126–136.

19 Prouty, *Stella Dallas*, 42–43.

Meanwhile, his story has its own Japanese history. Rewritten as *Haha no kyoku* 母の曲 (A mother's song) by the popular woman writer Yoshiya Nobuko 吉屋信子 (1896–1973), the story was reset in Japan and serialized from 1936–1937 in a heavily illustrated version in the mass-market women's magazine *Ladies' Club* (*Fujin kurabu*, 婦人倶楽部). When this "translation adaptation," *hon'an*, was released as a book in 1937, Yoshiya claimed in the postscript that her novelization was created at the behest of "Mr. Mori" of the Shintōhō movie studio in preparation for a film version.<sup>20</sup> Mori refers to a producer at the studio who was also regularly involved in overseeing the adaptation and translation of stories that had potential for theatrical production. Interestingly, he had also overseen a direct translation (with the original American setting) of the novel *Stella Dallas* into Japanese, collected with *La Bohème* in an anthology of *Popular World Literature* (*Sekai taishū bungaku zenshū* 世界大衆文学全集), a collection itself created as leisure reading for the type of social climbers depicted in the novel.<sup>21</sup>

The film adaptation of Yoshiya Nobuko's version was released as a film in December 1937, starring several famous actresses. As the US version of 1937 with Barbara Stanwyck was only released in August, it is unlikely or impossible that the makers of the Japanese version, with its release date in December 1937, directly incorporated elements from it, even though there are some uncanny similarities. Like *Stella Dallas* in the US, *A Mother's Song* spawned multiple remakes and TV dramas in Japan over the years. Having consulted with both the film studio and the magazine, Yoshiya writes that they were in favor of her "taking the theme from *Stella Dallas*, and moving it into a story of Japanese mother-love [. . .] In both East and West a mother's love is the same. However, I think I was able to depict this mother, who holds on to this ignorant but pure, rich love for her daughter, in a way that will go over especially well in Japan and, without forcing things, transfer the story so that it depicts Japanese customs as well as a Japanese mother, daughter, and husband."<sup>22</sup> While the title character is the mother and not the girl, it is this relationship and contrast between mother and daughter that highlights the position of the girl as being in a temporary space of "leisure" enabled by her mother's sacrifices, and the layers of class, taste, work, and sexuality that surround the girl as a figure developing the skills for refined vicarious leisure in modern Japan (Fig. 1).

#### STELLA DALLAS IN THE US

In the American version of the novel, the drama surrounds the eponymous Stella Dallas, a 30-something mother who has married Stephen Dallas, a richer man who worked as a factory manager in her hometown of

20 Yoshiya Nobuko, "Sakusha no kansō 作者の感想 [The author's thoughts]," in *Haha no kyoku*, in *Yoshiya Nobuko senshū* 吉屋信子選集 (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1938), 301.

21 Purōchi プローチー (Prouty), *Sutera darasu* ステラ・ダラス [Stella Dallas], trans. by Mori Iwao. *Sekai bungaku zenshū* vol. 20, (Tokyo: Kaizōsha, 1928).

22 Yoshiya, *Haha no kyoku*, 301.



Figure 1: Cover of Program for Tōhō Studios Nagoya Takarazuka Theater showing *A Mother's Song*, December 1937, featuring actress Hara Setsuko as Keiko, holding a piano score.

“Milhampton Massachusetts” (a fictional hybrid of various Massachusetts mill towns). The man is rather easily seduced by this lower-class woman in large part because he is depressed, having just broken up with the love of his life and fiancée, Helen Morrison, a move he makes because his own family’s fortunes have fallen and he does not wish to make her suffer from his newfound poverty. He and Stella have a child, Laurel, whom he adores. He also rebuilds his financial situation to the point of getting a job in New York. Stella refuses to go with him, preferring to stay behind in Milhampton with her friends, and so that Laurel can remain in the same private girls’ school in their town. Although now raised in status through her marriage to Stephen, she still feels uneasy acting the part of the upper-class wife. To her later detriment, one of her fun-loving friends in Massachusetts is Ed Munn, a horse track regular and drinker with class origins closer to Stella’s own. In New York, Stephen happens upon Helen Morrison as she is riding a horse in Central Park, a clear marker of high respectability and the skills associated with upper class vicarious leisure. Helen is now a widow with two sons, but is still in love with Stephen. Although Stella continues to raise Laurel, making her fashionable clothing

from pattern books and magazines, Laurel looks up to the more graceful and refined Helen Morrison, to whom Stephen has introduced her during a holiday visit.

Stella draws her own models for how to dress and apply make-up primarily from magazines and movies, but these are often incongruous with her actual surroundings. Particularly in the film versions, this excess of lace, frills, bold patterns, and make-up is highlighted as Stella's failing and the visual suggestion is that these are what drove Stephen Dallas away and certainly would drive potential suitors for Laurel away. In many senses, Stella tries too hard, makes too many outfits, and applies too much make-up. She also has poor taste in leisure goods.<sup>23</sup> She likes popular music and cheap fiction. In the 1925 film, she goes for the "latest Elinor Glyn" novel rather than Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*, which has been lent to her by the mother of a potential suitor of Laurel's at a high-end resort to which she has taken Laurel to meet high class people in a leisure setting (Laurel is seen playing tennis, boating, and the like).<sup>24</sup> Eventually Stella sees herself through the eyes of the rich young boys and girls with whom Laurel is socializing and realizes that she must separate herself from her own daughter if Laurel is to be able to marry any of these young gentlemen. She agrees to divorce Stephen so that he may marry Helen and have them raise Laurel together, an arrangement that Laurel only agrees to when Stella pretends to get engaged to the alcoholic and vulgar Ed Munn, who also tends to make lascivious comments toward Laurel. In the silent movie, this is dramatized by Stella frenetically playing the piano while singing a love song to Ed's photo, all as an intentionally tasteless performance to repulse Laurel (while of course this is not audible in a silent film, the images highlight the ineptitude of her playing and her uncontrolled emotional state).

These performances seem genuine—and genuinely abhorrent—to Laurel, but Helen sees through what Stella is trying to achieve based on her own intuition as "a mother." Stella disappears from Laurel's and Stephen's life, and starts working in a factory, getting by with Ed Munn's support

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23 Another important aspect of excess in Stella's behavior is getting drunk (with Munn). This view of drinking as an impropriety for women (but not the husbands of the leisure class) is marked by Veblen: "The ceremonial differentiation of the dietary is best seen in the use of intoxicating beverages and narcotics. If these articles of consumption are costly, they are felt to be noble and honorific. Therefore the base classes, primarily the women, practice an enforced continence with respect to these stimulants, except in countries where they are obtainable at a very low cost. From archaic times down through all the length of the patriarchal regime it has been the office of the women to prepare and administer these luxuries, and it has been the perquisite of the men of gentle birth and breeding to consume them. Drunkenness and the other pathological consequences of the free use of stimulants therefore tend in their turn to become honorific, as being a mark, at the second remove, of the superior status of those who are able to afford the indulgence." Veblen, *Theory*, 70.

24 Elinor Glyn is the creator of the concept of the "it girl." The film is a bit self-reflexive in this way, and one imagines that Elinor Glyn is something probably closer than Bernard Shaw to the Hollywood world of which the film is a part.

(but not in a romantic relationship). Eventually Ed shows her the newspaper announcement for Laurel's wedding. In one of the most famous final scenes of all of the American movies, Helen makes sure that the curtains of their grand home in New York remain open so that Stella, who is coming there to get a glimpse of her daughter's wedding through the window, can see the success of her sacrifice as Laurel marries a young gentleman amidst the rich surroundings inside (notably this famous scene is *not* a wedding in the original novel, but rather a debutante style tea for Laurel—her options remain open and the event contrasts directly with the unsuccessful birthday party that Stella had planned). While Stella is a middle-aged mother and usually analyzed as such, we can also read her entire life motivated by the wish to remain a sort of "girl." This aspect appears in her bearing and in her highly vicarious pleasure in Laurel's success. While her own problems in "taste" are partly due to class and upbringing, they manifest themselves to a major degree in her efforts to remain too girlish for her age. Many have wondered how she could be so successful in making tasteful dresses for her daughter, while failing so miserably when doing the same for herself. But one reason for her failure is that her own clothing is too young for her, and her makeup and hairstyles are depicted as being heavily artificial in order to keep her looking young.

Her girlish dreaming, which is based partly on the movies and which had led her to pursue Mr. Dallas, exceeds the boundaries of decorum. When she and Ed Munn go to buy decorations for Laurel's birthday party, they behave like children on the train, he throwing spitballs and she giggling. Her excessive girlishness is mistaken by others for improper sexuality and bad breeding, while it is largely about trying to hold on to "friends" from her youth and to a sense of play. To others it seems like she is wasting time and is too much at leisure, going about town, even as her real intentions are to help her daughter in securing a match with an upper class gentleman. The enduring marker of her class background is her inability to use the resources made available to her by Dallas to make the best of her leisure opportunities to cultivate herself, even as she succeeds in creating the environment for Laurel to do so. In Japan, this would be the equivalent of failing to apply her "cultivation" properly, even as her dress-making for Laurel meets with some success. The more properly brought up Ms. Morrison is able to fully integrate home decorating, managing the household, bringing up her children, and low-key elegance into the perfect performance of vicarious leisure; she wears lovely dresses, rides horseback without risking proximity to the racetrack, and avoids exaggerating effects in her make-up. As Stella is unable to work out this integration, it is only when she eschews the environment provided by Dallas, supports herself, and removes herself from Laurel's environment completely that Laurel is able to pursue her cultivation unimpeded, unmarred by the uncanny vision of a girlish older woman accompanying her own daughter. A disturbing aspect of the novel is the apparent message that a woman such as Stella, who did not grow up to acquire the skills needed to provide high-end

leisure in her youth, cannot acquire the taste necessary to be accepted as an adult in a different social class. She simply has to return to her original environment, moving from vicarious leisure to work in a factory. The creators of the 1937 film especially explore the tragic aspect of Stella's quandary, building a strong sense of empathy for her that is shared by Helen in a further sign of her social refinement. It is through this fictional and exaggerated plotline of melodrama, of which this film becomes a quintessential example, that Stella is granted some space to be happy and that her awkward but understandable desire to enjoy life a little bit—just as girls and women going to see this movie might—is given the rationale of being part of the self-sacrifice for her daughter. An important key to sympathy for Stella is the clear indication that she works hard to support Laurel's move into the apparently effortless beauty of Helen Morrison's home: we see Stella sewing, ironing, decorating for a party, and so on, even if she has trouble keeping up with all the housework and her home is a bit slovenly. Her domestic affective labor is realistic and visible. This is played out with an important difference in a particular scene in the silent film and the 1937 version. At one point, Stephen makes a somewhat sudden visit back to Milhampton and there is a sense that he comes bearing some warmth or hope for his relationship with Stella. In the silent version, one problem with the sudden visit is the slovenliness of the home. Stella's dressmaking items are scattered everywhere and the kitchen sink is piled with dishes. Stella quickly makes herself up and does her hair, but the performance is not successful. In the 1937 version, however, Stephen comes into a living room nicely decorated for Christmas, and Barbara Stanwyck is wearing the most subdued and tasteful dress and hairstyle we see in the whole movie.

While most analyses of the films are about Stella's bad taste in clothing and read her extravagant behavior (mistakenly) as excessive sexuality, this homemaking work and its challenges are quite important. In 1937, we see a gesture to the aspirations of the moviegoer to truly succeed at these affective labors, but for good measure the scene is followed by the gut-wrenching tragedy of Munn ruining Stella's otherwise convincing and sincerely felt performance. In all American versions, and in the Japanese as well, Stella ultimately needs the space of a resort hotel for her daughter to interact sociably with the right kinds of boys, and she needs to hide away in her room as much as possible. Finally, it is important to acknowledge the place of the black maid in Laurel's household at the birthday party film scenes (in the 1937 version, she is played by Hattie McDaniel of *Gone with the Wind*). In each version, the overlap between Stella and the maid's role is highlighted. In the silent film, a pair of maids are quite comically called in to put on airs for the birthday party, popping up each time the doorbell rings in a highly choreographed way. Barbara Stanwyck's Stella also carefully places her maid, who casts a somewhat doubting expression that seems to question the likelihood that her performance will succeed. Since Stella has grown up as a sort of scullery maid for her own father in their mill town, there is an awkwardness to the two women being together and

sorting who will perform what affective labor for the birthday party, with Stella being jumpy and ill at ease as she waits for the guests where she will try to perform a cultivated caring mother for them. She quickly realizes that the party has already been ruined by gossiping among Stella's friends about her cavorting with Ed Munn—they have forbidden their children to come. This outcome does not seem to affect the maid, though presumably she will lose her job as Stella's status declines. The setting in depression era America and the slippage and tension between working class women and the black servant women is one of the very American aspects of the film. Laurel is depicted in the novel as a girl not engaged either now or in the future in productive labor and she remains so in the movie versions. But in the original novel, her potential future employment in the service industry as a pianist and music teacher rather than providing vicarious leisure for a gentleman from the leisure class is a serious option. Once Stella realizes she must convince Laurel to live with Helen and Stephen in New York if she is to have any hope for marrying up, she agrees to the divorce and pushes Laurel to go to live with her father and Helen Morrison. However, Laurel's sympathy and love for her mother prompts her refusal to leave. She would rather stay and go to work as a stenographer. Stella is upset about this prospect:

A stenographer! Laurel, her beautiful Laurel, shut up all day long in an office, reeking with tobacco smoke? Laurel the servant for a lot of men, taking dictation, taking orders? Laurel wearing paper cuffs and elastic bands and pencils in her hair; eating lunch out of a box with a lot of other girls, also wearing paper cuffs and elastic bands and pencils in their hair? No. No. It musn't be. It simply musn't be. Why, even she herself wouldn't have been a stenographer. [...] It would be like planting an orchid between the cobblestones at the corner of Washington and Winter Streets to stick Laurel in front of a typewriter, inside one of the big grimy office-buildings downtown. She'd get all dust and dirt and trampled and spoiled in no time. She musn't be sacrificed like that! Why, New York would go simply crazy about Lollie. It would exclaim over her, oh-and-ah over her, like the people at the Horticultural Shows over some new amazing flower. Oh, gracious, what can I do? What can I do to save the kid?<sup>25</sup>

Here she sees that her own cultivation work for Laurel, her exhibition piece for the "Horticultural Show," is about to fail and be trampled upon. She has to give up her hobby of mothering the girl to help her marry up and to put her into the hands of those able to make this possible. The failure

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25 Prouty, *Stella Dallas*, 270–271. The quote is already long, but at this juncture, Stella considers suicide, stopping mostly because this would damage Laurel's reputation, particularly given that her grandfather committed suicide as well—it might be seen as a family disposition.

would be her daughter having to do this sort of office work, rather than marrying and taking care of her husband through tasteful affective labor at home. Instead, the plot leads to a distinct opposition in their respective activities: the daughter fully at ease to come out in New York society and the mother working in a sweatshop. The *Time* magazine headline for the review of the silent film was: "Sweat-Shop Employee, She Looks on from the Street at Her Daughter's Debut."<sup>26</sup> Laurel is thus able to go from girl to wife with no interruption, directly applying the good manners and cultural skills she cultivated as a student to the domestic space. We learn no more about their marriage after Stella has witnessed its conclusion from outside the window. Stella's project of raising the girl is complete and the audience can enjoy her "success" while seeing the tragedy of their separation as the necessary condition of this success and joining in Helen's empathy. As Lauren Berlant writes in *The Female Complaint*, in *Stella Dallas* "modern love's promise of transcendence and deracination from the determinations of history are available as grounds for and explanations of dependable life only to people with money. For the rest, romantic heterosexuality provides a motor for class mobility."<sup>27</sup> Although it takes two generations, this is quite arguably the overall message of America's *Stella Dallas*. As Berlant shows, Prouty's later novel *Now, Voyager* and its film version starring Bette Davis more fully problematize the role of heterosexuality in American class, and more fully reflect Prouty's own bisexuality.

Given the leisure culture of film itself at this time, the cinema is much more Stella's taste than that of the prim ladies at the resort or from the private school looking down on her. Via Helen and Laurel's own respect for Stella, the audience's empathy is with Stella as well, even if they might not wish to wear her outfits. In fact, there is even something appealing in Stella's vernacular speech and her "fun" sort of playful taste in movies, music, and clothing. The women at the resort who criticize her are rather stodgy and hypocritical, laughing at her living in another town than her husband, though in one case the woman herself is divorced while, as Stella points out, she herself "is only separated." Again, the film's audience, which showed its appreciation through the box office success, is likely much closer to Stella's world than to her husband's, and while they might wince at her outfits, they know that the inspiration comes from the same magazine advertisements and movies that they are scouring. Again, the echo with audience's own aspirations is strong in the 1937 movie, when Stella tells Steven that she "wants be like all the people in the movies doing everything well-bred and refined." The movie has held longstanding interest in large part because it helps to bring out the inconsistencies in and anxieties about class mobility and self-transformation through leisured consumption of

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26 "Sweat-Shop Employee, She Looks on from the Street at Her Daughter's Debut," *Time* magazine, May 28, 1923.

27 Lauren Gail Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 175.

fashion and beauty products that were part of the late 20s and 30s milieu of post-Depression America. This interest was enhanced by the excellent acting through which both Belle Bennett and Barbara Stanwyck in their respective versions brought out the grotesque as well as the appealing aspects of this misguided and ambitious mother figure.

#### STELLA DALLAS IN JAPAN: A MOTHER'S SONG

Turning to the Japanese version, *A Mother's Song* (*Haha no kyoku*, 1936; film 1937),<sup>28</sup> how are these dynamics transformed in the nearly contemporary rewriting and remake in Japan? Yoshiya Nobuko's "translation" offers a complete resetting of the story in Japan, with Laurel becoming Keiko (played by the great Hara Setsuko [1920–2015] early in her career), Stella the mother named Ine, Stephen Dallas a doctor named Junji, and Helen Morrison a professional pianist named Kaoru (played by another major actress, Iriye Takako [1911–1995]).

Both the Japanese novel and the film are replete with references to and influences from multiple entertainment platforms including the cinema, serialized fiction, book anthologies, radio shows, and live and recorded music, as well as live theater, all of which thematize leisurely consumption of popular culture and its relationship to domestic life, labor, and status during the early years of the Pacific War. Some of the Japanese changes from the original versions highlight related but divergent views of social class, women's labor, and marriage in the two contexts (though we have at least five versions, each with its own context, namely: Prouty's *Stella Dallas*, Henry King's silent film *Stella Dallas*, the adaptation novel by Yoshiya Nobuko *Haha no kyoku*, the film of *Haha no kyoku*, and King Vidor's sound film of *Stella Dallas* with Barbara Stanwyck). The silent film *Stella Dallas* was listed in the top three for 1926 by Japan's major film magazine *Kinema Junpo*, and it is not surprising that the development of Japanese versions found interest.<sup>29</sup> Yoshiya Nobuko was chosen for this adaptation task just as she reached a high point in her popularity. In some sense she resembled Higgins Prouty, author of the original, but she was more famous and prolific in serialized fiction. Yoshiya refers to Prouty in the adapter's post-script as "an American woman writer," an American equivalent of herself.

By 1928, Yoshiya had made enough money from royalties and film adaptations to make a well-publicized trip around the world with her partner Monma Chiyo. Yoshiya lived with Chiyo from 1923 to Yoshiya's death in 1973, and adopted Chiyo in the postwar period. Also of significance to this chapter is that on her return from that trip she went to California and toured Hollywood with Sōjin, a Japanese actor active in Hollywood who at the time was playing various "Oriental" characters (though never Japanese

28 Yamamoto Satsuo 山本薩夫, dir. *Haha no kyoku* 母の曲 (Tokyo: Tōhō Eiga, 1937).

29 Takeda Shiho, *Yoshiya Nobuko kenkyū* [A study on Yoshiya Nobuko] (PhD diss., Gakushūin University, 2013), 125.

ones). Yoshiya had many interactions with the film industry in Japan, including consulting on the Japanese subtitles for *Little Women*, starring Katharine Hepburn (1933). Her daily writing routine involved writing all morning and going to see movies with Chiyo in the afternoon.<sup>30</sup> Her novelization was also influenced by plot patterns of Japanese and “Western” movies (she watched both), and we can imagine that she was adapting not only this particular novel but also drew on a range of related plotlines. While we might expect that Yoshiya as a person with a same-sex partner might alter the plot to suit her own biography, that is and is not the case, just as Higgins Prouty’s own bisexuality does and does not appear in this work explicitly. Meanwhile, the director of *A Mother’s Song*, Yamamoto Satsuo (1910–1983), was a leftist director and student of Naruse Mikio (1905–1969), who seems to have taken on this project for income more than passion for the storyline.<sup>31</sup>

As Takeda Shiho has pointed out, a major difference between these texts is that the mother in the Yoshiya version and its movie adaptation does not herself aspire to rise to the higher ranks of providers of vicarious leisure, even if she sometimes makes attempts to learn certain skills under pressure.<sup>32</sup> The source of the daughter’s own taste is the readings suggested by her father and the school, as well as the cultivation of her own musical talent. Yoshiya specifically writes that her text contests the “good wife, wise mother” education popular in the day, where an educated mother was considered necessary to raise the class status of her daughter. This is why Yoshiya refers to both Ine and Stella as “ignorant” in the postscript to her novel adaptation of *Stella Dallas* in 1936, without meaning this as a criticism. Instead, Yoshiya idealizes a mother like Ine, whose source of mothering is “love” and diligence. She writes in the magazine serialization that this “stupid mother” is one who can be idealized as much as any product of modern education or even the “cultivation” of the workplace, the view that white-collar work would cultivate the taste of a woman for the benefit of her future marriage. This does not mean that she rejects the educational system, but rather that she values other aspects of it, namely the female friendships and humanistic learning that girls experience there. These are not instrumentalized for marriage and family but of value for themselves. This stance on “girl” culture and its life-long value is expressed in her 1921 essay on erotically charged friendships among schoolmates, “Loving One Another,” which argues for a celebration of such friendships (rather than fear of them) because of the positive role they can play in fostering ethical behavior.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps reflecting the leftist

30 Yuka Kanno, “Implicational Spectatorship: Hara Setsuko and the Queer Joke,” *Mechademia* vol. 6 (2011): 287–303.

31 Yamamoto Satsuo, *Watakushi no eiga jinsei 私の映画人生* [My film life] (Tokyo: Shin Nihon Shuppansha, 1984), 65; see also the translation of this work, *My Life as a Filmmaker* (Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies, Ann Arbor, 2017), 11–12.

32 Takeda, “Yoshiya Nobuko,” 145–150.

33 Yoshiya Nobuko, “Aishiau kotodomo” 愛し合うことども [Loving one another], *Shin shōsetsu*, January 1921, 79–80. To this end, she quotes Edward Carpenter and his views on same-sex love as a kernel for socialist democracy.



Figure 2: Schoolyard as space of leisure and management of social hierarchies.

inclinations of the director Yamamoto Satsuo, even as he worked within a popular film production studio, the film would go beyond the novel in emphasizing the cruelty of educational institutions as they try to incorporate all aspects of girls' cultivation into the broader purposes of the family and the imperial-state.

The opening of the 1937 Japanese film first shows us the schoolyard, the institutional space that frames girlhood, and the students arranging flowers in the yard (Fig. 2). In the next shot, we see the PTA (Parent Teacher Association) meeting of mothers and the principal in a tearoom (Fig. 3).

The PTA meeting includes two important details. First, the room has an Ikebana flower display, which seems to have been arranged by the girl students whom we saw in the schoolyard in the opening shots of the film. It is part of their trained leisure skills that will help them perform their expected work as wives and mothers later. While this might be seen as simple cultural education, the principal's speech makes clear the importance placed on the cultural modeling that the mothers are to perform in order to have successful daughters. The composition of the scene, with the principal in the center and the mothers lined up on both sides, emphasizes the gender division of labor that the school expects after adulthood. In a later scene, Ine also tries to learn Ikebana to please her husband, and her inability to do it well is seen as sign of her hopelessness. The playful space of the schoolyard is constituted by the surrounding institutional buildings, but still allows for free play. In the school's tearoom, the manners learned in school are employed in a more regulated fashion under the guiding gaze of the school principal. Secondly, we see the women drinking coffee out of Western cups. Ine first displays her country background by bringing the coffee to her mouth with the stirring spoon (Fig. 4). From the start, her "taste" is put front and center. But rather than



Figure 3: PTA meeting with school principal, organizing the role of mothers' leisure activities and reading in their childrearing.

putting on airs in public like Stella, Ine is shown as awkward and miserable in this environment. Her only aspirations for tasteful leisure are shown within the domestic setting.

The formal conversation led by the principal is about elements from the mothers' own experiences as girls that might be useful to guide their daughters. The other mothers prod Ine into describing her childhood reading material, which turns out to have been limited and decidedly lowbrow, taken from entertaining storytelling (*kōdan*), including humorous samurai tales. Her admission makes everyone laugh, as it neither demonstrates literary refinement nor displays any of the erudition shown by the other women who for the 1910s would seem to have been highly educated. We do not hear what they read, but we would expect a combination of modernized neo-Confucian moral tales, some Western literature, and perhaps children's stories from modern girls' magazines. But it is made clear that the daughter of this "stupid mother" has actually developed a most refined talent for piano playing.

This formative text by a "writer of girls' fiction" about "motherly love" also shows the effort needed to develop such a skill as playing the piano well, which is commonly associated with emotional richness. It is this exertion for the "cultivation" discussed earlier that results in the difference in social standing between those who have acquired such vicarious leisure skills and those who have not. Though beyond the scope of this chapter, the screenplay for the 1950s Japanese remake opens with the schoolgirls talking about what they might do together during the summer vacation. When Keiko (the counterpart of Laurel in the Japanese version, appropriately written using the character 桂 to represent a laurel of flowers) says she must focus on her piano practice, the other girls criticize her diligence



Figure 4: Ine (Hanabusa Yuriko) displays table etiquette errors when drinking Western tea at the PTA meeting and is scorned by the other mothers.

after she has left: "I guess she's too good to play with us!"<sup>34</sup> This reflects the more ambivalent but central role of the piano playing, an invention of Yoshiya for the story in the 1930s Japanese versions. Importantly, it is this skill that allows Keiko to move across the various public, domestic, and media spaces of the film and across the borderline separating work as a music entertainer and providing vicarious leisure to her family. In the novel adaptation by Yoshiya, Keiko is described first in terms of an image of bourgeois elegance, out of place in a working class house. She plays a lacquered piano, wearing a neatly tied *obi*-belt over a crisp morning glory print cotton summer kimono, looking cool and refined on a hot day. This is a look that is nicely translated into the white polka-dotted dress of Hara Setsuko, the actress playing this role, in the film version.<sup>35</sup> Her mother is introduced as one "we would never guess could be the mother of this lovely *shōjo*, if we did not hear the girl call out 'Mother'." The mother is described as tired and overworked, with an "overly rich voice," and she loudly complains of being hot and overwhelmed by the plinking (*ponpokopon*) of the piano. Her name, "Ine" (稲), meaning "grain of rice" sets her up as a simple girl from the country and foreshadows her later difficulties with the etiquette of eating Western food and interacting with upper class people.

Two kinds of "leisure" for women are contrasted in the mother-daughter pair: the daughter's is that of a student in a girls' school, who studies classical piano and uses polite language while acquiring the skills that will

34 Koishi Eiichi 小石栄一, dir., *Haha no kyoku* 母の曲, (Shintōhō Studio, 1955), scene 1.

35 As suggested by the illustrations in the serialized version, Keiko seems to have been written from the outset for Hara Setsuko, who may be best known outside Japan for her role as Noriko in Ozu Yasujiro's *Tōkyō Story* (1953).

qualify her to provide high-class leisure to the leisure class; the mother's is that of a temporary relief from the hard work of securing her husband's comfort and her daughter's acquisition of upper-class tastes and skills by herself enjoying Japanese popular entertainment, period films, radio storytelling, and popular songs. These, she says, are consumed without much effort, unlike the *Anthology of World Literature* and the *Anthology of Modern Literature*, which her husband had bought her to "better her taste," but which were lacking in pronunciation guides for the characters and were full of long foreign names in *katakana* script.<sup>36</sup> In later scenes, Ine is shown lacking interest in eating Western food or interacting with foreigners at a resort. This lack of higher aspiration in Ine's own leisure pursuits is a major difference between the American and Japanese texts. Rather than attempting to be too girlish, as Stella does with her outfits, Ine maintains her purity as a loving mother by not displaying interest in upward mobility for herself. Such purity of spirit is strongly associated with the "girl," *shōjo*, and with the *shōjo* writer who created this adaptation (Fig. 5).

This addition to the plot works powerfully in a sound film. For Keiko, piano playing is initially a "hobby," *shumi*, but for Kaoru it has become a career. In both cases it is seen as an indicator of good "taste," the terms used for "hobby" and "taste" being the same. In the American silent film *Stella Dallas*, the mother's home also has a piano and Stella herself plays it in the key scene where she performs her "love" of Ed Munn. Laurel is often posed near the piano as if she plays it. In the 1925 American book version that contains stills from the movie, there is a lovely photo of Laurel and her beau on the piano bench.<sup>37</sup>

While this is not a major part of Prouty's written story, it is likely that Yoshiya Nobuko picked up these elements from the visual features of the illustrated book and the silent film, which had been released in Japan in 1927. In fact, these images of the girl playing the piano that we see in the illustrations accompanying Yoshiya's adaptation, as well as in the silent film have been influential in Japanese popular culture, from melodrama to contemporary schoolgirl *anime*. In something akin to Mariam Hansen's concept of vernacular modernism, these visual images of cultured leisure travel across boundaries as they find their way into Yoshiya's novel and its film adaptation in new ways, including the addition of the medium of radio, on which Keiko makes her piano debut (Figs. 6, 7, and 8).<sup>38</sup> In 1930s Japan, a piano was directly associated with Western culture and a bourgeois lifestyle. The whole set of piano associations in European and

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36 Edward Mack shows that these volumes were important signs of cultural capital in this period while at the same time they were part of the spread of high literature into mass culture. See Edward Mack, *Manufacturing Modern Japanese Literature: Publishing, Prizes, and the Ascription of Literary Value* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 126, 131.

37 Prouty, *Stella Dallas* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1925), n.p.

38 Miriam Bratu Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," *Modernism/modernity* 6, no. 2 (1999): 60.



Figure 5: Keiko's taste in Western dress and rose decoration on the piano is contrasted with Ine's efforts at Ikebana. Here Keiko suggests that her mother move the arrangement to the parents' room, representing also the ways that Ine's cultural accomplishments are socially confined to the domestic and Japanese sphere whereas Keiko's have the potential for personal pleasure, cosmopolitan cultural capital, and professional independence inside and outside the home.

American culture is already present in Japan via literary works and films. At the same time, the meaning of a lifestyle associated with piano playing and its relationship to gender roles is expanding from this original context while continuing to draw on the range of meanings and status ascriptions associated with it. The place of the piano as an "instrument of the middle classes" has been noted by Max Weber,<sup>39</sup> and this is clearly the mode in which Laurel interacts with the piano in *Stella Dallas*.

During the Meiji period, the piano had been a sign of substantial wealth but by the 1930s, a broader range of individuals owned a piano. In her aspirational drive for her daughter, Ine has urged her husband to purchase one for Keiko. From the outset, Keiko's knowledge of classical music is a symbol of her effort at "cultivation" and is contrasted with the mother's ignorance and lack of taste. Her mother often asks Keiko to play something less depressing and more lively, perhaps the "Jaa, jaan jaan, jaan" that one hears at dramatic moments of a radio story show. An early scene in the movie has Keiko trying to teach her mother to say "Mendelssohn's *Gondellied*."<sup>40</sup> Ine tries to learn the name, but when she attempts

39 Max Weber, *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music*, ed. and trans. Don Martindale, Johannes Riedel, and Gertrude Neuwirth (1921) (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958), 120–124.

40 Felix Mendelssohn composed two piano pieces of that name, both of them belonging to the genre "Lieder ohne Worte" [songs without words] which he invented with his sister. The first (Op. 19.6) was published in London in 1932, the second (Op. 30.6) was written in 1833 and published in Bonn in 1836.

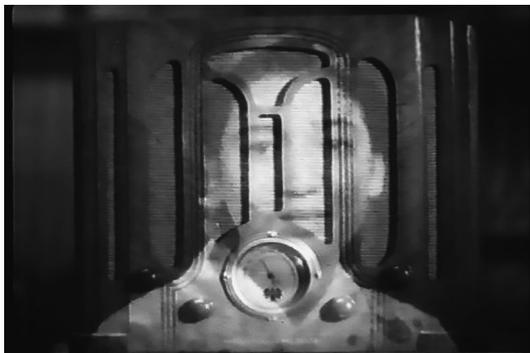


Figure 6: Keiko speaks through the radio to her mother, “Where are you?” as Ine listens to her live piano performance.



Figure 7: Keiko’s face superimposed on the piano, highlighting its important role in in her identity.



Figure 8: Keiko’s face fades into her mother’s, highlighting the importance of Keiko’s cultural accomplishments for her own aspirations as a mother.

to explain to her husband what Keiko is playing, she botches it as Gondelied's *Mendelssohn*. The difference is not only between lowbrow and highbrow, but also between pre-Meiji Japan and modern Japan as symbolized (simplistically) by ignorance about and familiarity with western things. In the Japanese film, it is not so much the piano itself but the image of a young woman playing it that is beginning to mean something on its own, including access to Western culture and a sense of interiority and self-direction. Given the references to the husband's work in colonial Manchuria, this knowledge of the west is being deployed in this 1937 film in connection with Japanese claims to special status within East Asia based on mastery of European cultural refinements, an important element of 1930s Japanese imperialist ideology. Orientalist taste already has an important role in the original American *Stella Dallas* novel. Laurel's emerging acculturation and her step-mother's established taste is marked by their knowledge of foreign literature, and, interestingly, also by their appreciation of the opera *Madama Butterfly*. Stephen Dallas is proud of Laurel's cultured taste for art, music, and the exotic when she describes her response when she heard an orchestra play a tune from the opera: "And all of a sudden I saw that lovely Japanese lady in the beautiful white satin kimono on her porch with the pink sky beyond, singing about her baby. The orchestra played it lots of times after that. I asked them to, and it's my favorite piece of music now".<sup>41</sup>

Unlike Laurel, Keiko plays the piano quite seriously, and this becomes a central feature in the plot. Near the beginning of the novel adaptation, Junji has already learned that his first love, Kaoru, is now a professional pianist. Having just returned from Korea, where she has been teaching piano at a mission school, she would be giving a concert right there in Fukuoka that fall.<sup>42</sup> That Kaoru is a professional pianist highlights the link between the skills of a professional entertainer and a provider of vicarious leisure in a family environment. Even when Kaoru is playing the piano on stage and in a professional capacity, her visible cultural sophistication also makes her an appealing enough mother figure (or sister figure) for Ine to pass Keiko off to her, and it certainly is part of her continued appeal for Junji (Fig. 9).

The piano also provides feminine atmosphere in Kaoru's home, where it is surrounded by flowers and Western statues. When Ine first visits Kaoru in the novel, she sees that the whole modern apartment décor works together, from grand piano to Western side tables to a lapis lazuli vase with a yellow rose. Particularly in the film, the piano is the centerpiece of

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41 Prouty, *Stella Dallas* (1923), 32.

42 Kaoru is an unusual figure in the images of Korean mission school teachers, who were usually western or Korean women. The missionaries themselves were often in an ambiguous position, sometimes supporting nationalist movements, but also trying to make peace with the colonizers. As their goal was more to proselytize than to intervene, a (possibly Christian) Japanese pianist might have been an imaginable character. Yoshiya might also have wanted to create a sort of "Westernesque" figure in Kaoru. See Indra A. Levy, *Sirens of the Western Shore: The Westernesque Femme Fatale, Translation, and Vernacular Style in Modern Japanese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).



Figure 9: Professional pianist Kaoru (Iriye Takako) gives Keiko a lesson at her modern apartment.

a glamorous apartment set in high-key lighting. Visually it parallels the architecture of the modern institutions displayed: the school and the hospital, both all bright and white. At the same time it marks a feminine space where only the characters Ine, Keiko, and Kaoru ever appear and never any equivalent of the school principal. This visual similarity between the professional and domestic spaces represents the way the piano is used to present the possibility of a woman supporting herself, no small feat in 1930s Japan.<sup>43</sup>

I would argue that both Yoshiya Nobuko the author (who did not marry) and the actress Iriye Takako (at this point single and successful) represented similar hopes for young women. Kaoru's ability to transform her own artistic skills into a career provides an alternative to the marriage plot ending and an alternative to playing piano simply in order to be a good marriage candidate and create a pleasant domestic atmosphere. Indeed, another important change in the Japanese story is that Kaoru has never married (Helen Morrison was a widow with two sons and a deceased toddler daughter—all used as a basis for her "motherly" potential), choosing to channel her "passion" into the piano and making this a way to support herself. While Laurel's "leisure" is playing tennis, Keiko has instead a "hobby" that might extend across the boundary of work and play. While she does marry a young scientist at the end of the story, he "wants her to continue with her piano career and to be happy," and there is a sense that she could

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43 That the "translator" Yoshiya Nobuko is able to live on her own and support herself and her girlfriend by writing fiction as well as side projects like this translation is also well-known to many of the readers and viewers as well. This comes only from later history, but Hara Setsuko would also become famous for remaining single, and was until her recent death often referred to as an "eternal maiden."

use this skill to support herself should the marriage with which the film culminates not work out.<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile, Kaoru's piano skills had supported her in a job. After Junji broke off his engagement to her, she took a job in Korea as a piano teacher. Otherwise, she might have fared like the harassed stenographer Stella feared Laurel might become. With the elevated cultural status connoted by the piano and her study in France, and her pent-up passion for Junji, she moves to the colonies to put her hobby to good use to support herself. Her marriage to Junji later means that her piano can finally be transformed into part of her gracefulness as a doctor's wife.

In both the marriage and the work at the Korean mission school, her hobby is part of respectable affective labor that also takes on a more material quality when it helps support the East Asian power balance—the Japanese figure acquires Western “cultivation” and brings it to the Korean colony. Of course, a mission school is not an outpost of the Japanese empire, and it is unclear whether there could be any historical basis for such a character. But in the symbolic layout of the novel, Kaoru's time in Korea has two purposes. One to purify her of her failed engagement by spending time abroad. The second to show her ability to share her European taste with colonial subjects, just as Junji shares his knowledge of western medicine by going to Manchuria to help combat a “new influenza” there. But Kaoru's work remains within a sisterly girl's sphere where she maintains independence, while Junji is sent where he is told. Visually he is placed (by the director, Yamamoto) in hospital settings that are quite forbidding.<sup>45</sup> In the film version, the Korean mission school is not shown framing Kaoru's life, but strong emphasis is given to her status as an independent performer and teacher. Kaoru becomes more fully the type admired by young Japanese women at the time, as shown in the book version through Keiko's girlish crush on her in an early scene where we see Kaoru from Keiko's perspective: “Behind her father, there was a beautiful woman, pure like a white lily and wearing stylish western clothing.” When her father asks whether she likes this woman, she gushes: “Oh, yes, I like her so very much. If she were a teacher at my girls' school everyone would be all worked up and have crushes on her—[...] Junji laughed happily. Indeed it made him happy to see his love, Kaoru, reflected so fondly in the eyes of an innocent girl!”<sup>46</sup>

In the novel version as well, Yoshiya has the Helen Morrison counterpart be not a mother, but a single woman who has never had children. The basis of the empathy between Ine and her is their “women's heart” rather than “mother love.” They also interact in a warm sisterly fashion, somewhat along the lines of the female homosocial sphere of Japanese girls'

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44 In the 1950s Japanese version the groom is an opera singer, which gives a greater sense of shared interests, though perhaps more anxiety about their future together.

45 Of course, the mission school is an institution as well. The imagery is, however, absent, and Kaoru is presented as an independent figure able to go there or not at her own volition.

46 Yoshiya, *Haha no kyoku*, 33.



Figure 10: Keiko's mother and teacher are posed like schoolgirls in sisterly romances as they watch Keiko being courted by a wealthy boy at a resort.

fiction, and this is highlighted in a two shot of the mother and stepmother that mimics the illustration styles of Takabatake Kashō's pairs of girl friends popular in the same era (Fig. 10). In this sense, the two "mothers" are changed back to "girls" and are allowed to maintain some of the *shōjo's* flexibility regarding a future marriage. While technically Kaoru does marry Junji when Ine steps aside, this is barely perceptible in the film version. Her empathy for Ine is very strong and her bond with Kaoru is stronger than in the American equivalent.

Without the conceit that they understand each other as "mothers," they are instead bonded as women, and women who are basically on their own—Junji is usually off in the empire dealing with "the strange form of influenza" rampant there. The "jun" of his name implies purity, and perhaps his efforts are what allows them a pure girlish place in Japan, though this is somewhat speculative. Minaguchi similarly argues for this importance of the kind male character in this film version, though I see it more through his absence than anything else.<sup>47</sup>

The *shōjo* character Keiko does get married, but much more highlighted in the film is her success story as the girl artist. Not only is she able to move comfortably in all spaces of Japanese-style and Western-style homes, schools, and resorts, but she is also able to be present through the air, playing on the radio in public. Meanwhile, the classic melodramatic moment of their marriage, so highlighted in the American versions and Yoshiya's novel as well, is usurped by the powerful scene of Ine listening to her on the radio, a scene with a long set-up that takes up much more screen time than the wedding, and is clearly a "tear jerker." It is here in

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47 Kiseko Minaguchi, "Yamamoto Satsuo's *Haha no kyoku* [Mother's melody]: Making a Father's story of *Stella Dallas*," *Iconics* 6 (2002): 89-110.

Kaoru's apartment, listening to Keiko's piano performance, rather than in the wedding scene, that Ine looks with admiration and tears of joy on her daughter's success.

Although Prouty's *Stella Dallas* is less expansive about the various trajectories for young women than her later novel *Now, Voyager*, we see in *Stella Dallas* an element that is seldom noted, but may have inspired part of Yoshiya's plot. Being released from a guardian role is a key in Stephen Dallas's financial freedom to marry someone like Stella in the original novel, and amazingly, Japan plays a role in this:

If Stephen's mother hadn't died just when she did; and if, on top of that Stephen's sister Fanny hadn't received, in reply to an application she had made to teaching a girls' boarding school in Japan, summons to sail immediately, Stephen's infatuation would probably have burned itself out before he was in a position to consider additional financial burdens of any sort. Suddenly Stephen found himself free and unfettered. There was no more need to send weekly checks to Chicago. There was no more need to send letters there, or to go there from time to time himself. Stephen was entirely cut off from his old associations, his laboring boat had lost even its dragging anchor, and was touching the shores of a country on the other side of the earth.<sup>48</sup>

Fanny herself becomes a "girl" type character who can remain single without relying on her brother or parents and travel to Japan, just as Kaoru went to Korea of her own volition. Going out for this kind of immaterial labor opens up space for Fanny's own experience of travel as a single woman. It also eases Stephen's financial situation and time constraints, which allows him to pursue his apparent sexual interest in Stella. Somehow Fanny also becomes like a character in one of Yoshiya Nobuko's novels.

More broadly, looking at the scholarly discussion of the American movie *Stella Dallas*, we can see critics only recently beginning to talk about the same-sex erotics implied in certain scenes between Helen and Stella, an element that I think is picked up on much earlier by Yoshiya Nobuko.<sup>49</sup> An important aspect of this is that Helen has the manners to put Stella at ease in her home, in a way she never was able to be at, for example, the resort. Obviously, looking at the role played by women as providers of and objects of representation in leisure entertainment across multiple cultural spaces and media can be revealing about how these spaces and media might reflect and be agents of social change. We can see here that all of the texts are on some level conservative about gender roles and marriage—in

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48 Prouty, *Stella Dallas*, 90–91.

49 Patricia White, *Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 94–134. She also explores the implications of Laurel and Stella comforting each other in the bunk on the train.

all versions the happy ending is brought about by a girl marrying a man from a good family and her mother getting to see it. At the same time, we can also see that, particularly for audiences such as the Japanese, with access to multiple versions the multiple visual images, plot alterations, sounds, and fashion choices used to represent forms of work, home life, and leisure did open up some space for imagining a range of trajectories and developing empathy for them.<sup>50</sup> After 1937, the “girls” culture came under government attack because of the idleness associated with it and the non-productive nature of passionate friendships among girls. Deborah Shamoan writes: “But by the late 1930s, what had once seemed an innocent way to prevent girls from becoming prematurely sexually active now interfered with the wartime government’s total war strategy. The attack on girls’ culture was not a condemnation of homosexuality but of sentimentality. The *shōjo* was by her nature nonproductive and non-reproductive, but the total war effort could not afford to allow any citizen to be idle, even the formerly protected girl students.”<sup>51</sup> *A Mother’s Song* is produced at the cusp of that shift towards viewing girlhood as underproductive. This suggestion is supported by a change in the 1950 remake: the “other man,” called Ryūsaku (竜作 “Dragon Maker,” evoking an organized criminal) in the earlier version, is renamed Kokusaku (国作 “Nation Builder,” a sort of name only popular during the long Pacific War). His wartime-tinged masculinity is depicted as an impediment to the mother-love and girlhood that came to be seen as the essential element of the story during the previous decades.

At the same time, I would argue that the multiple layers of translation and re-visualizing of *A Mother’s Song* and *Stella Dallas* in the Japanese setting also allowed for other readings. Even from the perspective of the state, there were two separate demands on the former leisure space of the girl and young woman. As Yoshiko Miyake shows in “Doubling Expectations,” during the 1930s and 40s the Japanese state needed both women’s factory labor and reproductive labor, and vacillated in its support for these two contradictory policies.<sup>52</sup> Although piano may be a way to make a living or improve the feel of the household in the early 1930s, it became increasingly associated with leisure rather than productivity. For the creators of the novel adaptation and film, however, leisure associated activities remain an important space for difference and interpersonal relations. In that context, the sympathy for an array of women characters in the different versions of this story—and perhaps especially for the financially

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50 There might be some question of whether audiences in 1937 would remember the 1927 film, but given that it was listed among the top three films in 1927’s *Kinema Junpo*, and seen as worth remaking and adapting in these ways, they might well have done so.

51 Deborah Shamoan, *Passionate Friendship: The Aesthetics of Girls’ Culture in Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2011), 56.

52 Yoshiko Miyake, “Doubling Expectations: Motherhood and Women’s Factory Work under State Management in Japan in the 1930s and 1940s,” in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 267–295.

independent Kaoru in the 1937 film—suggests that there was a legitimate space for an independent life outside the constraints of labor as good wives, wise mothers, or workers for the war effort in a way sanctioned by the family-state. While Kaoru does act as a “mother” to Keiko, she is not a part of reproductive culture. Even Ine’s life at the end of the film version is seen as a pleasant one, with Ryūsaku helping her (unlike her single life in the *Stella Dallas* versions). We see her not in the factory, but walking home from it in a relaxed mood, peeping at the happy Keiko from outside Kaoru’s apartment, and listening to Ryūsaku bringing her various good news about Keiko’s radio performance and then her marriage. Ine and Ryūsaku have found a space for themselves as friends and companions who do not seem to be married and each have an independent job, no longer in danger of being laughed at, and eating and enjoying things that are to their own taste. Depending on the creator, attitudes regarding work vary. Yoshiya Nobuko focuses on the mother’s newfound virtue as an obedient worker who does not go on strike and makes sacrifices so that her daughter can have a career as a pianist *and* a good marriage. The wedding takes place on May 1, and there is a mention that this International Workers’ Day is *not* celebrated at her factory. Accordingly, she is working on the morning of Keiko’s wedding, having to rush to go see it. The novel was published just after the “February 26 Incident,” an attempted coup in 1936 that led to a crackdown and the suppression of May Day celebrations.

Meanwhile, Yamamoto Satsuo’s film depiction of the final scene reflects his Marxist inclinations. Altering the famous American film scenes of the mother viewing the wedding through a window, Yamamoto shows her in the lead up to this scene first walking toward the wedding venue in the shadow of a smokestack filmed in the style of Soviet industrial photography. Eventually she is prevented from reaching a point from which to gaze at this scene as she is knocked over by the rich wedding guests in their cars. The plot device of the new stepmother alerting the mother of the bride’s appearance remains, but the cars and the forbidding building keep them apart. The use of the car to separate the privileged from the rejected is a trope in Japanese films of this era, one example being the party parking lot scene in *Japanese Girls at the Harbor* (*Minato no Nihon musume*, 1933) where a spurned schoolgirl wanders in frustration (and in some peril) among the departing cars as a big party from which she has been excluded is ending. Yamamoto’s take reflects more strongly a sense that the future privileged life of Keiko and her chances of performing for privileged audiences come at some cost, not only for her mother, but also for the class of workers of which she is a part.

Returning to the American versions, we see that one of the most disturbing aspects of the final scenes is the way that Laurel’s wedding seems to have to rely on Stella becoming a sweatshop worker. At the same time, one of the most brilliant and appealing aspects of the Stanwyck performance is the purity of her look and the girlish joy in her eyes at her daughter’s wedding. This look captures something of the audience’s own feeling

as spectators, combining their experience as workers, of some sort, and, at this moment in the theater, their feelings of women in a moment of escape into leisure.

## Conclusion

Veblen had focused on the behavior of the “leisure class” and the various layers of people supplying the wherewithal of services, entertainments, status props, and goods. He did not study the leisure times enjoyed by the classes pursuing productive labor. The text, serialized illustrated text, film, radio performances, and film series forms of the Stella Dallas story analyzed here take a broader view. They deal with different cultural layers of leisure pursuits and the tension marking the borders between them; with the labor necessary to acquire the skills to become a high class independent entertainer and/or a candidate for the vicarious labor of an upper class wife and mother, who would then herself also have access to upper class leisure pursuits; and with the laborious acquisition of cultural skills as a condition for a girl’s upward mobility and the emotional and life sacrifices this demands of her mother.

There is a certain self-referentiality in these works, as they themselves are geared towards filling the leisure hours of working urbanites with works that address serious and challenging issues in a melodramatic form. As the likely audiences are girls and women, research that would specify the actual historical reader and viewership would be helpful for an analysis of whether we are seeing a new gendered urban public that is consciously targeted by writers and filmmakers.

There is a clear difference in perspective between mother and daughter in all versions. As the girl engages subjunctively in what the “Theoretical Essay” called “autotelic” pursuits of serious leisure, the mother is committed to the utterly “heterotelic” goal of gaining access for her daughter to upper-class circles and their lifestyle, in which she herself has never felt comfortable. Moving away from this inside perspective to a functional analysis, Laurel/Keiko’s self-cultivation ends up opening the door to her social advancement and a professional career. The Javanese youths acquiring the social skills of being “gaul” in Nancy J. Smith-Hefner’s study in this volume are having a good time in an environment to which they aspire, but for which they lack the means. In a functional perspective, the acquisition of social routines in the mall might serve many of the boys well in finding a white-collar job and might help the girls to an upward marriage. The risk in their real lives is to be drawn into anomic leisure pursuits considered unhealthy by the forces of order, while Keiko/Laurel is depicted as naturally immune to them in the idealized depictions of *Stella Dallas*.

The focus of these works is on the “young girl” period between school and marriage and between a state where the girls’ acquisition of cultural skills is still supported by the work of the parents and the moment when

the options of professional independence and housewife become pressing concerns. It is also depicted as a period of close relationships between girls as well as competition and bonding between women to secure the best future for these girls. As the plot and story, as well as many of the cultural accouterments of lower- and upper-class leisure, move across linguistic, cultural, and media borders they interact with different local audiences and their concerns at the given time.

At the same time, the fact that the original context is the urban United States gives Stella Dallas in Japan a particular attraction, because it deals with a quandary also experienced by the urban classes here, and it does so with the normative cachet of being actually Western rather than westernized. This cachet might also have been important as a cultural protection as the Japanese film version implied a critical take on the government's wartime strategies for women's employment. The creators of these works focus on the interstices between leisure and work to talk about the position of women vis-à-vis class and sexuality in their given contexts. Given the particular context of *Haha no kyoku*—the Japanese government's promotion of women as workers in wartime production and mothers of future soldiers—the insistence on the legitimacy of “Western” cultural skills as qualifiers for professional women entertainers and cultivated wives might be read as a defense of the cultural contribution of the very *shōjo* whose unproductive lifestyle was under official scrutiny.

The smooth insertion of references to the colonial enterprises in Korea and Manchuria might be read as a reassurance that the immaterial labor performed by these women was part of the projection of a beneficial modern Japan. In all contexts, the different players (including those same creators) are depicting leisure as determined by class, are showing that the only way for a girl of lower class background to rise to the upper class is through the cultivation of the cultural skills required at that level for providers of vicarious leisure, and are claiming that while the sacrifices this demands of the mother are heartwrenching, they are unavoidable and necessary.

## Figures

Fig. 1: Cover of Program for Tōhō Studios Nagoya Takarazuka Theater showing *A Mother's Song*, December 1937.

Fig. 2–10: *A Mother's Song* (*Haha no kyoku*), 1937.

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