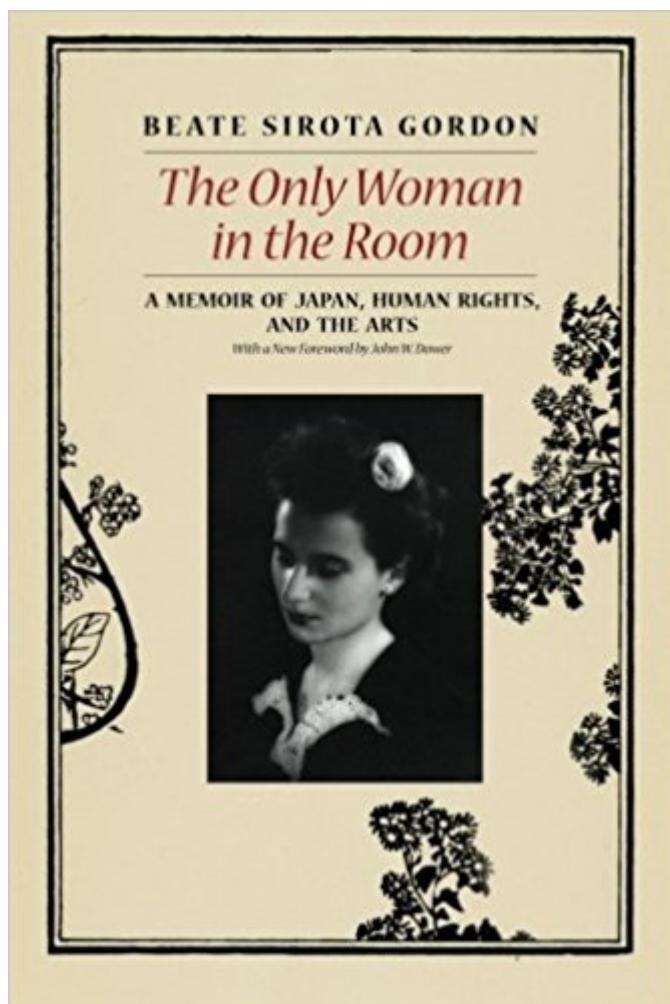


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# The Only Woman In The Room: A Memoir Of Japan, Human Rights, And The Arts



## Synopsis

In 1946, at age twenty-two, Beate Sirota Gordon helped to draft the new postwar Japanese Constitution. *The Only Woman in the Room* chronicles how a daughter of Russian Jews became the youngest woman to aid in the rushed, secret drafting of a constitution; how she almost single-handedly ensured that it would establish the rights of Japanese women; and how, as a fluent speaker of Japanese and the only woman in the room, she assisted the American negotiators as they worked to persuade the Japanese to accept the new charter. Sirota was born in Vienna, but in 1929 her family moved to Japan so that her father, a noted pianist, could teach, and she grew up speaking German, English, and Japanese. Russian, French, Italian, Latin, and Hebrew followed, and at fifteen Sirota was sent to complete her education at Mills College in California. The formal declaration of World War II cut Gordon off from her parents, and she supported herself by working for a CBS listening post in San Francisco that would eventually become part of the FCC. Translating was one of Sirota's many talents, and when the war ended, she was sent to Japan as a language expert to help the American occupation forces. When General MacArthur suddenly created a team that included Sirota to draft the new Japanese Constitution, he gave them just eight days to accomplish the task. Colonel Roest said to Beate Sirota, "You're a woman, why don't you write the women's rights section?" and she seized the opportunity to write into law guarantees of equality unparalleled in the US Constitution to this day. But this was only one episode in an extraordinary life, and when Gordon died in December 2012, words of grief and praise poured from artists, humanitarians, and thinkers the world over. Illustrated with forty-seven photographs, *The Only Woman in the Room* captures two cultures at a critical moment in history and recounts, after a fifty-year silence, a life lived with purpose and courage. This edition contains a new afterword by Nicole A. Gordon and an elegy by Geoffrey Paul Gordon.

## Book Information

Paperback: 176 pages

Publisher: University Of Chicago Press (April 11, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 022613251X

ISBN-13: 978-0226132518

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.5 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.7 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 29 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #605,024 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #105 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Asia > Japan #108 in Books > History > Americas > United States > Civil War > Women #881 in Books > History > Asia > Japan

## Customer Reviews

This engaging, modest account recalls the life and times of a woman who made significant contributions to both Japanese and American cultures, first as an advocate for civil rights clauses in the postwar Japanese constitution, later as a promoter of Asian-American amity through the arts for the Japan Society and the Asia Society. A daughter of internationally known pianist Leo Sirota, a Russian-Jewish emigre who settled first in Vienna, where the author was born, and then, with the shadow of Hitler looming, emigrated to Japan, where Sirota taught at the Imperial Academy of Music in Tokyo. There Gordon grew up and became, as she notes, "part Japanese." After attending college in California and working part-time monitoring Japanese broadcasts, she landed a research job in Japanese affairs at Time magazine after the outbreak of WWII; during the war she assumed a position on Gen. Douglas MacArthur's occupation staff, where she participated in the drafting of the new constitution, with particular attention to women's rights. Noting that she was frequently "the only woman in the room" during these experiences, she offers here quietly feminist, freshly illuminating observations about the two cultures that are distinguished by a persuasive international outlook.

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This memoir by the daughter of the famous Russian pianist Leo Sirota reveals an eventful life, recollected with succinct but vivid detail. Of Russian Jewish heritage, Gordon grew up in Vienna, about which she remembers little. Political and economic conditions compelled her family to leave Europe for Japan, where her parents planned to remain for only a few months, but they ultimately stayed for many years. Gordon herself came to the U.S. to attend college; then war broke out, and she was separated from her parents for an excruciating length of time. After Japan's defeat, she rejoined her mother and father there, and she worked for the American occupation forces. She returned to the U.S. in 1947, began a career in arts sponsorship, and became a wife and mother. Interesting reading for those who enjoy hearing about quiet but strong lives, from which personal inspiration may be gained. Brad Hooper --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

What an amazing life Beate Sirota Gordon lived. This book caught my attention because it dealt with her part in helping write a new constitution for post-war Japan. It also gives a good account of conditions in Japan before, during, and just after the war. Over half the book deals with Beate's life in various countries with a large amount of her growing years spent in Japan. This helps understand where her passion came from in fighting to include articles in the new constitution about protections for women and children. Her deep understanding of Japanese culture was key to why she knew these would be essential for the future of Japan. Fascinating family history and a great read for anyone and especially those interested in WWII history.

I got this as a gift for my mother and she said she cried all the way through it was such an incredible book

Didn't know about her and her background until I read this book. We came so close to meeting each other yet we never did. Too bad, I wished I had met her. Enjoyed reading this book very much. Although, I enjoyed reading her activities after her return from Japan, wished she wrote more of Japan during those turbulent years. With both of us being raised by a musician father and my father winning medal in Vienna as the first Japanese in music competition around the same period, am sure we would have had lots to talk about. It seems like both of our parents knew Kosaku Yamada very well. Life is indeed very interesting.

A concise, elegant autobiography by Beate Sirota Gordon, an Austrian who grew up in pre-war Japan as a child and later returned to what she very much considered her home to find her parents (music teachers who refused to abandon their Japanese students as pre war tensions mounted and were held prisoner). It chronicles not only her battle with the entrenched Japanese male authority but battles with the entrenched American male authority, who weren't necessarily any less sexist than the Japanese. She took a job with the American army as a translator and ended up helping draft Japan's post war constitution. And she did all this at the age of 22! Gordon escaped the war by going to an all girls school in California. There she encountered the feminist movement and learned a lot about women's rights issues. Upon returning to Japan, she was asked by the American government to help with the constitution. The Americans wanted the constitution written and adopted quickly, fearing the Soviets last minute entry into the war would give them influence. She went to town, drafting about a dozen articles for the Japanese constitution guaranteeing women rights in the work place, politics, health care, child custody, etc. Many were stripped out but two key

articles she drafted remained. What's more amazing is Gordon takes so little credit for her accomplishments and instead agonizes more about what was left on the cutting room floor. For several decades after, the creation of the Japanese constitution was not well publicized. The Americans feared the haste with which it was written and the fact that the job was basically given to a group of found amateurs would cause the Japanese people to reject it. It's only now that her story has been able to come out. All in all a fascinating account and hard to put down. If there's a downside it's that Gordon doesn't pump up her autobiography with more fascinating and telling anecdotes.

Beate Sirota Gordon (BSG), the author of this easy to read autobiography, had a fascinating life. Not only do you learn about her interesting talented family, but you experience WWII and the Japanese aspect of it from an unusual perspective. Of Austrian parents who moved to Japan prior to the World War, BSG was in college in the US when the war broke out. She was separated from her parents at this young age and had no idea what had happened to them for years. Because of her ingenuity and talents, especially with languages, she became part of MacArthur's team, and eventually became the person responsible for writing the women's section of the new Japanese Constitution. BSG's ideas regarding women's rights even surpassed those of the US Constitution in those times and to some extent even today. A very worthwhile book to read for any one interested in history, human endeavors and women's issues, written by The Only Woman in the Room.

It was with great pleasure that I finished this autobiography, a book that had been on my must-read list for some time. As an American women living in Japan for twenty years, her life story resonated with me. Her courage in ensuring that women and girls in Japan would have a brighter future amazes me! She's a hero!

things we wonder why we never knew before. how an American woman ended up rewriting the Japanese constitution after WW II and injecting significant feminist provisions into that country. a great holocaust related story with many happy twists.

I highly recommend this book. I urge women's study students to read it.

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