

Music scores purchased by the Japanese Ministry of Education and Western songs in songbooks published during the Meiji Era

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Songbooks with many Western songs represent a substantial proportion of the scores published in Japan during the Meiji Era (1868–1912). As most scores published in the early Meiji years do not identify composers, the sporadic research done to date on identifying the original versions of the foreign songs has made little progress. The few existing studies of the channels through which the foreign songs were imported into Japan have failed to shed light on the process as a whole. This paper confirms that European and American songbooks purchased by the Ministry of Education and currently held by the National Diet Library were important sources in the compilation of the Meiji songbooks. Statistical analysis reveals that 30% of the Western melodies in the songbooks can be traced to scores purchased by the Ministry of Education. While scores purchased in the early Meiji years were mainly published in the United States of America, those purchased in mid-Meiji were mainly from German-speaking countries. As well as reflecting the shift of Japan's educational model from the USA to Germany during this period, this resulted in the inclusion of a great number of songs with German origins in the songbooks, since the American scores already included many German songs, some with texts in Ch. H. Hohmann's English translations. Of further interest is the fact that the scores purchased by the Ministry of Education include many hymns. The evidence presented by these scores is vital to our understanding of the reception of Western music in Meiji-era Japan.