

American Music in Meiji Era Japan

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Abstract

American music was brought to Japan when the “black ships” came with military bands in 1853 and 1854. These bands played music of Stephen Foster. In the 1870s, Japanese learned about American music through Christian missionaries, visiting teachers, and the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition. In the 1880s, Luther Whiting Mason, from Boston, and Isawa Shūji created Japanese music textbooks, which included American music. Concerts of Western music were fashionable in the 1890s. It is not surprising that the music of Stephen Foster was popular in Japan throughout the twentieth century, because many different styles of Western music were heard in the nineteenth century.

Keywords : black ships, Isawa Shūji, Luther Whiting Mason, military bands, textbooks

The “black ships” of Commodore Perry included military bands when they came to Japan in 1853 and 1854. These bands brought American music to Japan, including songs of Stephen Foster. Western music was first introduced to Japan in the sixteenth century when Jesuit missionaries established schools and churches, taught choral music, and imported pipe organs. When Christian missionaries were expelled from Japan in 1613, Western music disappeared except for Dutch fife and drum corps in Nagasaki. In the 1870s, Japanese educators learned about music from the United States through military bands, Christian missionaries, visiting educators, and the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876. In the 1880s, Luther Whiting Mason from Boston, along with Isawa Shūji and Music Study Committee, created Japanese music textbooks, which included American music. By the 1890s, concerts of Western music were fashionable for Japanese high society.

This paper will examine American music in Japan in the Meiji Era (1868-1912), including songs of Stephen Foster. How was Western music brought to Japan? What types of American music were imported? Which American songbooks and music textbooks were available in Japan in the nineteenth century?

Commodore Matthew C. Perry

Beginning in 1638, Japan was closed to foreign ships except for a small presence of Dutch in Dejima near Nagasaki. The United States wanted to open Japanese ports to obtain coaling stations for ships traveling to China and to obtain a treaty regarding shipwrecked sailors from whaling ships. Commodore Matthew C. Perry (1794-1858) conducted the Japanese Expedition with his fleet of ships called the Far East Squadron. Perry first visited Japan July 8-17, 1853, with four “black ships” (*kurofune*) which had black hulls and spouted black smoke from coal-fired engines. The fleet included two steamships (*Susquehanna* and *Mississippi*), each towing a sailing vessel (*Plymouth* and *Saratoga*). Since Perry valued music to entertain the Japanese and to maintain the morale of his sailors, the ships had bands. An Italian bandmaster accompanied the Expedition to train and conduct the musicians.¹⁾

During Perry’s first visit to Japan, western music was performed on several occasions. On Sunday, July 10, there was a Sabbath service on board the *Susquehanna* with Bible reading and prayers. Three hundred sailors sang Isaac Watt’s “Old Hundredth,” accompanied by a full band.²⁾ On Thursday, July 14, Commodore Perry set foot on shore while his bands played “Hail! Columbia!” After delivering his letter from the President of the United States, Millard Fillmore, Perry announced that he would be back in the spring, with more ships.³⁾

Perry traveled to Okinawa, Hong Kong, and Macao until February 1854. In Naha (Okinawa) there was a theatrical performance on the *Mississippi* for the local nobility, with dancing and singing. In Macao, *Susquehanna*’s band gave a Grand Concert in the Philharmonic Hall with guests coming from Hong Kong by steamer. The band usually played on shore two or three times a week in Macao. In Hong Kong, there was a performance of “Ethiopian Minstrels” on the U.S. Steamer *Powhatan*. The theatre was an ample deck decorated with flags from many nations and painted scenery for two one-act plays interspersed with songs. The performance was repeated on the *Powhatan* and there was a concert on the *Mississippi* before the ships left for Japan. The entertainment on Perry’s ships often included minstrels as the crewmen emulated Christy’s Minstrels, billed as “The Ethiopians.” Christy’s Minstrels traveled in the United States and England and popularized Stephen Foster songs, although it is not known how many Foster songs were performed in the entertainment of Perry’s Far East Squadron.⁴⁾

Perry returned to Japan in February 1854 with nine ships: steam frigates (*Powhatan*, *Susquehanna*, *Mississippi*), sailing ships (*Macedonia*, *Vandalia*, *Saratoga*, *Southampton*, *Lexington*), and a store ship (*Supply*). There was a ceremonious landing at Kanagawa, near present-day Yokohama, on March 8. Drums rolled, the marines presented arms, and three bands played “The Star-Spangled Banner” for a procession of officers, sailors, and Perry with his Negro bodyguards. After discussions on shore, the Commodore left, marching to music of the bands and walking through files of marines. Later, for a burial service of a marine in Yokohama, a fife and drum corps played the “Dead March” from Handel’s *Saul*.⁵⁾

On March 27, Perry entertained the Japanese commissioners and the officers of the Far East Squadron with an elaborate banquet on board the frigate *Powhatan*. An abundance of champagne, wines, and liqueurs were served. After dinner, there was a performance of minstrels with black-faced sailors dressed in striped coats and ruffled shirts imitating Negro dancing and singing. The audience thoroughly enjoyed the performance, laughing heartily.⁶⁾

The Treaty of Kanagawa was signed on March 31, 1854, opening up the ports at Shimoda and Hakodate for refuge and supply. The *Saratoga* left for home with the bands playing "Home, Sweet Home."⁷⁾ Five ships traveled to Hakodate, on Hokkaido, where performances were held for Japanese officials on the *Mississippi* and *Powhatan*. The "Ethiopian entertainment" or minstrel show on the *Powhatan* on May 29 included a dialogue between "Mistah Bones" and "Mistah Tambo," songs including Stephen Foster's "Massa's in de Cold! Cold Ground," and a burlesque on a play "The Lady of Lyons," with young sailors dressed as ladies. The performance was greatly enjoyed.⁸⁾ There were other performances of Ethiopian minstrels in Shimoda, when more than one-hundred people attended the performance on board the *Powhatan*. In Okinawa (Naha harbor), the Treaty of Naha was signed on July 11, 1854. The parting dinner for nobility included a performance of Ethiopian Minstrels on the *Mississippi*.⁹⁾

American Music in Japan

Japanese leaders acquired knowledge from various sources about American music and other aspects of American culture. Western bandleaders directed Japanese bands. Christian missionaries taught hymns. Japanese educators traveled to the United States and American educators taught in Japan. At the Philadelphia Exhibition of 1876, Japanese and American leaders observed economic products and learned about the culture of each other's countries. Through various cultural exchanges, the Japanese Diet Library obtained American songbooks and school textbooks.

Military Bands

Japanese musicians studied Western music with bandleaders from several countries. In the Tokugawa Era, there were Dutch-style fife-and-drum corps military bands. The change to brass bands came in 1869 when the Satsuma domain hired John William Fenton, an English navy bandleader, to train thirty men in band music. Fenton instructed the Japanese navy band from 1871 to 1877, followed by the German Franz Eckert. Anna Löhr, a German instructor, was hired to teach piano to ten band members. The navy band was instructed by several Japanese musicians, including Nakamura Suketsune, who was also in charge of instructing the *gagaku* court musicians in Western music.¹⁰⁾

The Japanese Army adopted French music methods. The Army hired Monsieur Dacron, a trumpet and bugle instructor, in 1872. The army band was also directed by Japanese leaders: Nishi Kenzō, Kusaba Shinsaku, and Ozasa Hidekazu. They sent Kudō Sadaji to the National

Conservatory in Paris to study music in 1882. Charles Leroux, a French bandleader, directed the Army band from 1884 to 1889. The military bands presented a concert of Western and Japanese ensemble music for the opening of the first railway in 1872. In the 1880s, the army and navy bands performed frequently at the Rokumeikan Club in Tokyo for Western-style dances. The military bands were the first importers of Western music into Japan, although the available sources do not indicate the names of the pieces in their repertoire.

Christian Missionaries and Hymnals

Western music was brought to Japan through Christian missionaries and their hymnals. The Dutch Reformed Church and Rutgers University were important in early Japanese-American cultural exchanges. In the 1860s, Japanese students studied at Rutgers University. William Elliot Griffis (1843-1928), Rutgers class of 1869, was one of the first Americans to teach in Japan. His sister, Margaret C. Griffis (1838-1913) taught English in Tokyo from 1872 to 1874. David Murray (1830-1905), a Rutgers professor, was Superintendent of Educational Affairs in Japan from 1873 to 1878. He assisted the Japanese at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia and purchased materials for the Education Museum in Tokyo.¹¹⁾

In the 1860s, American missionaries and their wives were sent to Japan by the Episcopal, Reformed, and Presbyterian Mission Boards and women played an active role in the Christian community. Mission schools for girls taught English, using the Bible and hymns. "Jesus Loves Me" and "This is a Happy Land" were translated into Japanese, with the words written on large scrolls. Hymn books were published in Nagasaki, Kobe, and Yokohama. Mrs. James Curtis Hepburn, wife of the Presbyterian missionary who invented a system of Romanized Japanese, taught Sunday school classes for girls and boys in Yokohama. Miss Mary Kidder (1834-1910), a missionary sent by the Dutch Reformed Church, taught in Yokohama where she founded the Ferris Seminary, which exists today as *Ferris jogakuin*.¹²⁾

Japanese Educators in the United States and American Educators in Japan

Japanese educators learned about American education when the Iwakura Mission, led by Iwakura Tomomi (1825-83) traveled in the United States and Europe for eighteen months in 1871-73. The Mission included Tanaka Fujimaro (1845-1909), Commissioner of Education, who visited many schools and became Special Commissioner of Education to the Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia in 1876. Tanaka purchased \$10,000 worth of American school materials. The Meiji government issued 11,248 passports for students to study abroad. The students in the Japanese foreign study program studied in the United States 1867-78 and in Europe 1879-90. There were many opportunities for Japanese educators to learn about education and American culture in the nineteenth-century.¹³⁾

Foreign employees played an important role in the development of Meiji Japan, teaching English and many other skills essential for modernizing Japan. These foreign employees were

hired by the central government, local governments, and private organizations. They were called *oyatoi gaikokujin* or simply *yatoi* (hired menial). Marian McCarrell Scott (1843-1922) was in charge of instruction at the Tokyo Normal School (*Tōkyō shihan gakkō*) when it opened in 1872. Scott had been a principal of a grammar school in San Francisco and was a member of the California State Board of Examiners. He imported American school furniture and books. He had American texts translated and he taught through an interpreter.¹⁴⁾

David Murray (1830-1905), a Rutgers professor, was the Superintendent of Educational Affairs in Japan 1873-78. He advised Tanaka Fujimaro in the writing of the Japanese Educational Code of 1872. He assisted the Japanese leaders at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia and purchased materials for the Education Museum in Tokyo. After the Exhibition, Murray returned to Japan and was instrumental in the founding of Tokyo University (*Tōkiō daigaku*).

The Centennial Exhibition, commemorating the hundredth anniversary of America's birth, was held in Philadelphia from May through November 1876. This was a wonderful opportunity for Americans to learn about Japan and for Japanese educators to learn about American education. The Japanese exhibit featured porcelain and pottery, silk fabrics and embroideries, educational materials, and agricultural products. The display for the state of Massachusetts featured school furniture, school textbooks, and Luther Whiting Mason's music charts.¹⁵⁾

Luther Whiting Mason and Isawa Shūji

Isawa Shūji (1851-1917) and Luther Whiting Mason (1818-1896) worked together to develop music textbooks for Japan in the 1880s.¹⁶⁾ The Japanese Ministry of Education (*Monbushō*) sent Isawa to the United States from 1875 to 1878 to study the training of teachers. He attended Bridgewater Normal School in Massachusetts and studied music with Mason in Boston. Mason, director of music in the primary schools of Boston, published the *National Music Course*, the first school music textbook series in the United States.¹⁷⁾ This series included music charts, readers (songbooks for students), and teachers' manuals. Mason and Isawa developed a set of musical charts for teaching vocal music in Japan. They used melodies from Mason's charts and added Japanese texts.

Isawa and Megata Tanetarō (1853-1926), supervisor of Japanese students in the United States, were responsible for Mason's invitation to teach in Japan from March 1880 to July 1882. In Japan, Isawa was principal of the Tokyo Normal School (*Tōkyō shihan gakkō*, 1879-81) and head of the Music Research Institute (*Ongaku torishirabe gakari*), which developed music textbooks for Japanese public schools. For these textbooks, Isawa was interested in combining (*secchū*) Japanese traditional music and Western music.

In Tokyo, Mason taught children, trained teachers, organized performances, and worked with the Music Research Institute to develop textbooks. He was able to do this work through the help of interpreters and *gagaku* court musicians. Some of these court musicians were familiar with

Western music before Mason arrived: Togi, clarinet; Sanemichi Uye, cello; Oki, flute; and Tsuji, viola. Mrs. Takamine (*née* Nakamura), who played the *koto*, piano, and violin, was an interpreter for Mason. Her husband, Takamine Hideo, studied at Oswego Normal School in New York state and became the principal of the Tokyo Normal School (*Tōkyō shihan gakkō*).¹⁸⁾

Music Textbooks

The Music Research Institute published *Shōgaku shōkashū* for primary schools in Japan.¹⁹⁾ Although Isawa wanted to create a new national style of school songs by combining Japanese and Western music, most of the melodies in *Shōgaku shōkashū* were Western melodies and many were taken from Mason's *National Music Course*, which was based on an English translation of Hohmann's *Praktischer Lehrgang für den Gesang-Unterricht in Volksschulen*, a German textbook series.²⁰⁾ Mason's textbooks and Hohmann's textbooks (in English) were available in the Japanese Diet Library in the 1870s.²¹⁾

Mason was not interested in promoting American folk music or American composers. He was interested in using European songs for schools in the United States. Mason toured Europe in 1872, 1874, 1882-83, and 1890-93 to visit schools and collect hundreds of European songbooks for his library.²²⁾ Although much of the material in *Shōgaku shōkashū* is based on music textbooks from the United States, most of the music is European and not American.²³⁾ *Shōgaku shōkashū* is important because it was approved by the Ministry of Education (*Monbushō*) and used throughout Japan. Many of the songs were still present in the textbooks of the late twentieth century.

In the 1890s, Isawa published *Shōgaku shōka*, six volumes of songs for elementary schools.²⁴⁾ In theory, Isawa advocated traditional Japanese music, but in practice he used mostly Western melodies to convey moralistic ideas. He used materials from Mason's *National Music Course*, especially theoretical explanations of Western scales in his textbooks of the 1890s.

Concerts of Western Music

The Rokumeikan was a large two-story building, constructed in Tokyo in 1883 to house foreign guests. The Rokumeikan served elaborate banquets where Japanese ladies and gentlemen, dressed in Western fashions, danced the waltz, polka, quadrille, and mazurka, accompanied by the Army or Navy band.²⁵⁾ High society enjoyed concerts at the Rokumeikan, which were sponsored by the Japanese Music Society (*Dai Nihon ongakukai*). The performers were usually teachers and students from the Tokyo Music School (*Tōkyō ongaku gakkō*). European professors taught in the Tokyo Music School and many Japanese students studied abroad; for example, Nagai Shigeo (1861-1928), piano teacher, studied at Vassar College in New York and Kōda Nobu (1870-1946), violin teacher, studied in Boston and Vienna.²⁶⁾

The English language newspapers in Tokyo and Yokohama include reviews of concerts in the 1880s. The orchestra of the Yokohama Choral Society, founded in 1873, performed Gioachino

Rossini's Prelude to *L'italiana in Algeri*, waltzes of Johann Strauss, and an overture by Franz von Suppé.²⁷⁾ At a concert in Tokyo in 1880, the Imperial Marine Band, under Franz Eckert, performed music of Richard Wagner and Strauss, and the Tokyo *Gesang-Verein*, a chorus of twenty singers, performed.²⁸⁾ In 1881, the Yokohama Choral Society performed Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore* at the Gaitly Theatre.²⁹⁾ For an audience of Japanese and foreigners in 1882, the Imperial Naval Band performed eight pieces, including Wagner's March from *Tannhauser* and two fantasias on Japanese airs. Japanese musicians performed Japanese music on the *shakuhachi*, *samisen*, and *koto*, along with some Chinese music.³⁰⁾ Nevertheless, by the 1890s there was a reaction against Westernization, a resurgence of nationalism, and a decline of interest in concerts of Western music.

Conclusions

The music of Stephen Foster was popular in Japan throughout the twentieth century. Japanese people were first introduced to the songs of Stephen Foster in the 1850s through bands on American ships. During the Meiji period, Japanese people became familiar with many types of Western music: military band music, Christian hymns, school songs, and European concert music. The Japanese textbooks of the 1880s and 1890s combined traditional Japanese music with music from American and European songbooks. It is not surprising that the music of Stephen Foster has been popular in Japan throughout the twentieth century, because Japanese people were exposed to many different styles of Western music in the second half of the nineteenth century, and this music became part of their culture.

Endnotes

- 1) For a biography of Perry, see Samuel Eliot Morison, *"Old Bruin" Commodore Matthew C. Perry 1794-1858* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967).
- 2) *Ibid.*, 326, 328.
- 3) *Ibid.*, 331-35.
- 4) *Ibid.*, 340, 348-50.
- 5) *Ibid.*, 363, 370; and Matthew Calbraith Perry, *Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan*, compiled by Francis L Hawks (Washington, D.C.: A.O.P. Nicholson Printer, 1856), vol. 3, pp. 344-46, 353.
- 6) Morison, *"Old Bruin,"* 378.
- 7) *Ibid.*, 381.
- 8) *Ibid.*, 351, 394.
- 9) *Ibid.*, 397-98.
- 10) Nomura Kōichi, "Occidental Music" in *Japanese Music and Drama in the Meiji Era*, ed. Komiya Toyotaka, trans. Edward G. Seidensticker and Donald Keene (Tokyo: Obunsha, 1956), 452-57.
- 11) Sondra Wieland Howe, *Luther Whiting Mason: International Music Educator* (Warren, Mich.: Harmonie Park Press, 1997), 68-69.
- 12) Howe, "The Role of Women in the Introduction of Western Music in Japan," *The Bulletin of Historical*

- Research in Music Education* 16, no. 2 (January 1995): 84-86.
- 13) Howe, *Luther Whiting Mason*, 55-57.
 - 14) For additional information on Scott, see Benjamin C. Duke, *The History of Modern Japanese Education: Constructing the National School System, 1872-1890* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 112-29.
 - 15) *Ibid.*, 219-29.
 - 16) Howe, Mei-Ling Lai, and Lin-Yu Liou, "Isawa Shūji, Nineteenth-century Administrator and Music Educator in Japan and Taiwan," *Australian Journal of Music Education*, forthcoming.
 - 17) Luther Whiting Mason, *First Music Reader* (Boston: New England Conservatory of Music, 1870); *Second Music Reader, Third Music Reader* (Boston: Ginn, 1872).
 - 18) Howe, *Luther Whiting Mason*, 84-86.
 - 19) *Shōgaku shōkashū* [Song Collection], 3 vols. Ongaku torishirabe gakari, ed. (Tokyo: Monbushō, 1881-84).
 - 20) Christian Heinrich Hohmann, ed. *Practical Course of Instruction in Singing, Prepared on School Principles*, trans. from 5th German edition, 4 vols. (Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1856-58); *Praktischer Lehrgang für den Gesang-Unterricht in Volksschulen* [Practical Curriculum for Singing Instruction in Elementary Schools], 4 vols. (Nordlingen: Beck'schen buchhandlung, 1853-89).
 - 21) Hiroshi Yasuda, letter to author, September 21, 1991.
 - 22) Howe, "The Nineteenth-Century European Tours of Julius Eichberg and Luther Whiting Mason," *Bulletin of Historical Research in Music Education* 15, no. 1 (September 1993): 1-16.
 - 23) For a copy of the songs in *Shōgaku shōkashū* and a description of their sources, see Motohiko Saitoh's website, <http://www.geocities.jp/saitohmoto/hobby/music/primaryfiles/primary-en.html>, accessed October 1, 2013.
 - 24) Isawa Shūji, *Shōgaku shōka* [Elementary School Songs], 6 vols. (Tokyo: Dai Nihon tosho kabushiki-gaisha, 1892-93), reprinted in *Nihon kyōkasho taikai*, pp. 60-188.
 - 25) "Rokumeikan," <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/rokumeikan>, accessed September 26, 2013.
 - 26) Julia Meech-Pekarik, *The World of the Meiji Print: Impressions of a New Civilization* (New York: Weatherhill, 1986), 162-67, 170.
 - 27) *The Japan Times*, April 13, 1878.
 - 28) *The Japan Herald*, June 18, 1880.
 - 29) *The Japan Herald*, April 20, 1881.
 - 30) *The Japan Herald*, May 23, 1882.