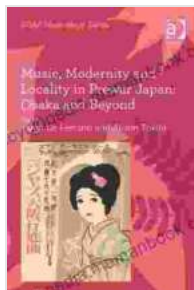


# Music Modernity and Locality in Prewar Japan: The Interplay of Western and Japanese Cultural Influences

## Abstract

This article explores the complex relationship between music modernity and locality in prewar Japan (1868-1945). It examines how Western musical influences were absorbed and reinterpreted within local Japanese contexts, resulting in a unique and vibrant musical landscape. The article draws upon historical, musicological, and cultural studies research to provide a comprehensive understanding of this dynamic period in Japanese music history.

The Meiji Restoration of 1868 marked a significant turning point in Japanese history, initiating a period of rapid modernization and Westernization. Music was one of the many areas affected by this transformation, as Japan eagerly embraced Western musical forms and instruments. However, this process of musical modernization was not simply a one-way transmission of Western culture to Japan. Rather, it was a complex and multifaceted interaction that resulted in a unique blend of Western and Japanese musical elements.



## Music, Modernity and Locality in Prewar Japan: Osaka and Beyond (SOAS Studies in Music) by Carolyn Chen

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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## **The Early Years: Experimentation and Innovation**

In the early years of the Meiji period, Japanese musicians experimented with a wide range of Western musical genres, including classical, popular, and military music. The Imperial Japanese Army Band, established in 1872, played a crucial role in introducing Western band music to Japan. Western-style conservatories were also founded, such as the Tokyo Music School (now Tokyo University of the Arts) in 1879, which provided training in Western musical theory and performance.

One of the most influential figures in the early development of Japanese modern music was Kosaku Yamada (1886-1965). Yamada studied composition in Germany and became a prominent composer of both Western and Japanese music. His works, such as the "Symphony in D Minor" (1925) and the "Kabuki Overture" (1929), successfully fused Western and Japanese musical elements.

## **The Rise of Japanese Folk Music**

Alongside the adoption of Western musical forms, there was also a growing interest in traditional Japanese folk music during the Meiji period. Scholars and musicians began to collect and document these songs, which had previously been passed down orally from generation to generation.

One of the most famous examples of this revival of Japanese folk music is the "Min'yō" movement. Min'yō are traditional Japanese folk songs that reflect the lives and customs of different regions of Japan. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, these songs were popularized through performances by professional singers and the publication of songbooks.

### **The Influence of Nationalism and Militarism**

As Japan became increasingly militaristic in the lead-up to World War II, there was a growing emphasis on promoting Japanese culture and identity through music. The government encouraged the creation of music that celebrated Japanese history, tradition, and military strength.

One of the most iconic examples of this trend is the "Gunka" (military song). Gunka were patriotic songs that were used to boost morale and glorify the Japanese military. They were widely performed by soldiers and civilians alike, and became an important part of Japanese popular culture during the war years.

### **Resistance and Contestation**

Despite the government's efforts to control and promote certain types of music, there was also a vibrant underground music scene in prewar Japan. Artists and musicians who resisted the official narrative found expression in jazz, popular music, and experimental music.

For example, the jazz pianist Tsutomu Sekine (1910-2001) played a significant role in the development of Japanese jazz. He introduced bebop to Japan in the 1940s and became an influential figure in the postwar jazz scene.

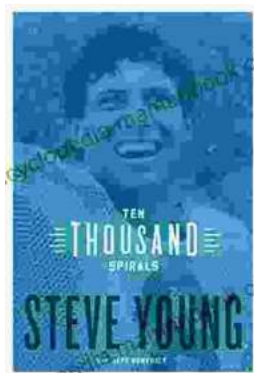
The music of prewar Japan was a dynamic and complex blend of Western and Japanese influences. Through a process of experimentation, innovation, and contestation, Japanese musicians created a unique musical landscape that reflected the rapid social and cultural changes of the time. This period laid the foundation for the vibrant and diverse music scene that exists in Japan today.



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