

Empirical research on the selection of works by student orchestras in prewar Japan

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This is an empirical analysis of the formation of the repertoire for orchestral music, one genre of Western music, to understand the acceptance of Western music in Japan up until the prewar Showa era. Because the young intelligentsia played a central role in the widespread popularization of Western music, the sample used is the 405 performances up until 1941 by nine student orchestras established nationwide between the later Meiji and Taisho eras, and their orchestral repertoire (1,560 programs in total). After identifying the top ten most performed works, I examined the exogenous factor hypothesis of the selection of works: was the selection of works in these performances influenced by other groups and media? This analysis measured the binary selection factor regarding whether a particular work was performed, and used a logistic regression analysis with the qualitative binary variable as the dependent variable. The independent variables were exogenous factors with an impact on the selection of works by student orchestras: “other groups” and “media.” I used the Tokyo Music School and the New Symphony Orchestra for the “other groups.” I used music magazines and Western music records from Japan as proxy variables for “paper media” and the “new media.”

The analysis revealed that various factors are linked to individual works, but overall the selection of works in student orchestra performances is strongly linked to mass media, namely music magazines and domestically produced records, with influence shifting from music magazines to records from about 1926/1927. This result clearly shows the impact of the change in communication methods from Taisho to early Showa, from the “paper media” era to the appearance of new media, so this is the first data-based demonstration of the impact of the media on repertoire formation.