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| Engeki Kairyō Kai |
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| A quasi-government agency and prelude to modernist movement in Japanese theatre.  From its early days, the Meiji government adopted an ambivalent and self-contradictory policy towards theatre. On the one hand, it continued the Tokugawa period censorship when deeming theatre subversive or otherwise “injurious to public morals;” on the other hand, it wanted theatre to help promote its nation-building programs to make Japan an equal to the Western powers. The latter aspect of the policy was prompted in part by the surprising discovery of Meiji leaders during their tour to the West that theatre was part of the high culture in the West worthy of entertaining the upper classes and foreign dignitaries. Kabuki caught the attention of Meiji leaders as a potential Japanese counterpart of Western drama. The desire of Meiji leaders coincided with the indigenous modernist efforts to reform this traditional performing art to suit the needs of the times, particularly those of Morita Kan’ya XII (1846-1897), actor and manager of an important kabuki family line who had connections with government officials. It is this coincidence that led to the creation of Engeki kairyō kai (Theatre Reform Society), launched in August 1886 at the proposal of Suematsu Norizumi (1855-1920), journalist-turned-politician and son-in-law of Itō Hirobumi, Japan’s first prime minister, with Itō’s own endorsement. Its founders include Foreign Minister Inoue Kaoru, Education Minister Mori Arinori, business leader Shibusawa Eiichi, and influential scholars Yoda Gakkai and Fukuchi Ōchi. |
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