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Japan: The Japanese Film Musical

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THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MUSICAL

Edited by Corey K. Creekmur and Linda Y. Mokdad

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II. JAPAN

Aaron Gerow

A DELIGHTFUL ANXIETY

Accounts of the Japanese film musical tend to reveal a mixture of anxiety and euphoria over issues of film genre and national identity. If many film critics compared Japanese musicals to their American counterparts, they often lamented the former's inadequacies. One playwright cited both national character and transnational conditions in criticising Japanese musical films:

The Japanese film world did not spend enough time analyzing the development and structure of American music or the musical. As long as it failed to perform the detailed work necessary to overlap the films with Japan's unique national character, it could not produce a true, full-blown Japan-made musical. This was a problem not only of the industry system, but also of the state of the Japanese and their relation to America. (Nagasawa 1999: 31)

If Japanese, however, were being blamed for inadequately digesting the American culture they consumed, an introduction to a two-volume collection of musical film scholarship found potential delight in such fissures. Declaring that 'Japanese cinema was ultimately unable to internalise the Hollywood musical' and 'establish a fixed genre called the musical', it said the resulting mishmash of forms and techniques could be all the more surprising

and delightful – ‘one could call this heaven’¹ – because spectators were not habituated to genre expectations.

Writing on the Japanese musical is thus framed by a set of worrisome but potentially thrilling questions. What is a musical and do Japanese examples fit the definition? How can Japan make musicals if the form, if not the concept of film genre itself, seems closely implicated with Hollywood cinema? Worries about whether Japanese can equal Fred Astaire parallel post-colonial anxieties over whether Japan can be modern when modernity is so intimately tied to the West. Many desire a ‘true Japanese musical’ – a purity of Japaneseness and genre – hoping that the term is not an oxymoron. Yet the pleasures of impurity hover just off-screen.

Such anxieties are evident not merely in criticism, but also in the films themselves, as many revolve around conflicts between old and new, rural and urban, masculine and feminine, and Japan and America, self-consciously appropriating existing musical forms, but not always wholeheartedly. I argue that, in an industrial structure that was not conducive to public genres, it was the resulting hodge-podge of readings of musical strategies, the gaps between genre expectations and between national identities, that constituted much of the pleasure of Japanese musical films. If these approximated the ‘utopia’ often ascribed to the musical imagination (Dyer 1981), it was only as a self-conscious one, remaining aware, to the degree of suffering anxiety about it, of the fragility of its imaginings. Japanese musical films thus tread the fraught, but delightfully precarious tightrope between lamenting Japan’s conflicted identities and celebrating their hybrid mixture. Perhaps they offered a form of ‘vernacular modernism’ (Hansen 1999) for spectators trying to come to grips with these problems of Japanese modernity, acknowledging its incompleteness while relishing its inadequacy.

INTERPRETING FRAGMENTARY GENRES

There are literally hundreds of Japanese films where songs constitute a central part of narrative or spectator pleasure, thus fitting a ‘semantic’ definition of the musical, following Altman’s terminology (1986). Most commentators pare this corpus down, but given the imbalance in cultural flows between Japan and America and the overbearing presence of Hollywood models, the process of delineating genre has not always been ideologically innocent. War-time politicians could complain of ‘Americanised’ music in movies, but they or their descendants failed to develop a viable ‘counter-cinema’ which valorised pre-modern song. Western critics desiring essential Japanese difference ignored music films, even as many Japanese filmmakers explored mixtures of popular music (jazz, pop, *chanson*, and so on). This muddle is one factor in the hesitation towards defining genre evident in Japanese musical films.

Japanese musicals did not become a genre with the firm industrial definition evident in, for instance, Thomas Schatz’s analysis of Hollywood studio genres (1988). This is not because the numbers were insufficient to create a critical mass; rather, lines of musical film production were so varied that strict channels of influence and genre construction were hard to discern. The potential sources for Japanese film musicals were multifold. Many pre-modern forms of theatre, such as *Noh* and *Kabuki*, were constituted by combinations of music, dance and sung narration. Efforts to introduce European theatrical realism at the beginning of the twentieth century excluded those forms, and there were attempts at true opera in the 1910s, but it was ‘Asakusa opera’ that proved influential, taking the music of *Carmen*, for instance, and changing the lyrics and stories for audiences in Asakusa, Tokyo’s plebeian entertainment district. That influenced the Takurazuka theatre, the musical stage revues begun in the 1910s which featured women playing even male roles (Robertson 1998); musical comedy revues like Enomoto Ken’ichi’s *Casino Follies* (*Kajino fōri*) that reigned in Asakusa after opera’s decline in the 1920s; or the theatrical revues of Furukawa Roppa that Tōhō put on for new middle-class audiences in Tokyo’s Yūrakuchō in the 1930s. These forms were supported by the importation of varieties of Western music, from classical to jazz; the development of hybrid forms of Japanese popular music such as *kayōkyoku*; and the rise of the record industry.

Hollywood musicals, seen from the beginning of the sound era, influenced Japanese film musicals, but they do not constitute their sole origin. One could, for instance, trace strands of Japanese musical cinema back to the *kouta eiga* or ‘song films’ of the silent era, such as the monumental hit *The Caged Bird* (*Kago no tori*, Matsumoto Eiichi, 1924), in which the *benshi*, or a separate singer, would croon a song at emotional points in the story, accompanied by lyrics superimposed on screen.² *Kouta eiga* arguably established the pattern for the dominant form of utilising song in Japanese cinema: the *kayō eiga* or ‘popular song film’. Banking on ties between film and record industries, *kayō eiga*, as with *kouta eiga*, exploited a hit song but rarely created a narrative array of songs. Many Japanese critics declared that *kayō eiga* were not musicals, but as Michael Raine has argued in his study of *Janken Girls* (*Janken musume*, Sugie Toshio, 1955), such an insistence on ‘integrated’ musicals ignores how varied Hollywood musicals can be, and how much *Janken Girls* shares with backstage or teen musicals. Yet Raine also stresses how the film deviates from American musicals discursively (in being subject to different terminological categories), semantically (in reinforcing local conventions regarding gender division) and syntactically (not following the dual-focus narrative structure Altman has stressed in the American musical) (2002). He considers how this *kayō eiga*’s showcase of celebrity helped manage the audience’s relationship with a burgeoning consumer economy and the American other.

Yet with the term *kayō eiga* being applied to *geisha* films (like those starring Takada Kōkichi), melodramas (*The Katsura Tree of Love* [*Aizen katsura*, Nomura Hiromasa, 1938]) and gangster flicks (Suzuki Seijun's *Tokyo Drifter* [*Tōkyō nagaremono*, 1966]), the form of *kayō eiga* was, in the words of the producer and critic Negishi Hiroyuki, like an "all-purpose kit" applicable anywhere' (1999: 98), filling box-office or narrative gaps for any genre film.

This is why Negishi refrains from calling *kayō eiga* a genre, but I think its amorphousness is typical of Japanese musical films in general. Multiple terms exist for designating musical films in Japan beyond *kayō eiga*, including *ongaku eiga* (music films), 'revue films', 'operetta films', *myūjkaru*, and so on. Since many insist on distinguishing these categories, no term exists to designate the entire corpus of movies utilising songs. That is why the editors of the above anthology felt compelled to invent one: *utau eiga* (literally, 'films that sing').

The multitude of categories is partially a structural factor of the Japanese film industry. When Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano writes about 'the fractured nature of Japanese "genre" types' in her analysis of Shōchiku's Kamata studio, she underlines the importance of comparing not only the array of genres between countries but also their differing conceptions of genre itself (2008). While we should not use the fragmentation of film categories in Japanese cinema to essentialise a film-going culture that somehow rejects repetition, we can consider how particular socio-economic structures, in history, have distributed patterns of sameness and difference in disparate ways.

One of the peculiarities of Japanese film output has been the relative strength of proprietary cycles or series over genres. While *jidaijeki* (period films) and *gendaijeki* (contemporary films) are terms used across the industry as broad classes (though not necessarily 'genres'), the majority of categories espoused in critical, advertising or even fan discourse centre on single studios: Nikkatsu Action, Tōei *ninkyō* (chivalrous gangster) films, Tōhō *salaryman* comedies, and so on. If, as Rick Altman argues, 'by definition, genres are broad public categories shared across the entire industry' (1999: 59), the fragmentary nature of genres in Japanese film is partially due to the power of studios to keep them non-public. Such power is grounded in the fact that studios were vertically integrated long before and after the Hollywood studios were. Many studios were started by exhibition companies to supply product, so production policy favoured proprietary studio styles and cycles that were distinct from the fare of other theatres. Companies defined themselves as much through their cycles as through their strengths in public genres. The long-lasting tendency in the film industry to produce more films rather than make more prints also favoured easy-to-reproduce series over more varied genre films. Series sometimes composed of dozens of films with the same plots and characters formed the centre of Japanese popular cinema, reminding us that any fragmentation of film categories was still defined by a particular distribution of repetition.

As studios attempted to monopolise categories of sameness, interpretation and adaptation became central to producing difference. Other studios attempted to copy successful cycles to varying degrees of success. Successes, however, rarely made the form public, as Daiei's or Nikkatsu's attempts at *ninkyō* movies, for instance, became less established public categories than Daiei and Nikkatsu films. Filmmakers in other studios, if not also their audiences, were less borrowing the syntactics of successful forms than interpreting, even adapting them. Altman notes that 'genre films begin as reading positions established by studio personnel acting as critics, and expressed through film-making conceived as an act of applied criticism' (1999: 44), but at least in the case of Japanese cinema, genre films continued to be reading positions long after their start. In fact, one of the ways proprietary genres instilled product differentiation was to re-read themselves, inserting self-reflexive parody or other genres. Adding songs – and interpretations of musicals – was one of the privileged means for genres and series to re-identify themselves through difference. They less defined than interpreted genre.

One particularity of Japanese musical films was that, with Hollywood a persistent though not necessarily domineering presence, they interpreted not just other Japanese musicals and genres, but also the American genre, if not America itself. This was not a simple US–Japan dynamic, but one that involved readings crisscrossing amongst various domestic genres and other cultures. It was often a humorous, even parodic process, as musical leads were frequently comedians like Enoken (Enomoto) or Roppa who could self-consciously cite the artificiality of genre, if not also at times the artificiality of identity.

A NOT-SO-ENERGETIC BOY

Tōhō was a central purveyor of 'films that sing' as studio style. The debut work of its predecessor, PCL (Photo Chemical Laboratories), was a musical film, *A Topsy Life* (*Horoyoi jinsei*, Kimura Sotoji, 1933); the fact it was sponsored by a beer company underlines how much Tōhō's image would eventually become linked to a modern, urban and arguably Western consumer and musical culture. The company's strategy of building theatres in new city centres such as Yūrakuchō coupled them to places of consumer spectacle (the department stores of the neighbouring Ginza district) and a new capitalist economy manned by an emergent white-collar worker – termed a '*salaryman*' – and symbolised by the Marunouchi district next to Yūrakuchō. Tōhō played to this audience, starting with its stage revues and continuing with its proprietary film cycles, by offering narratives of labour in a new, light urban modernism, often through music.³

The two films I look at, *Harikiri Boy* (*Harikiri bōi*, Ōtani Toshio, 1937) and *You Can Succeed Too* (*Kimi mo shusse ga dekiru*, Sugawa Eizō, 1964), mark

different stages of Tōhō's musical engagement with the *salaryman*. The former was based on a short stage musical that Furukawa Roppa's troupe performed in 1936 as part of his effort to speak for the *salaryman* class. It represents a formative period, one attempting to interpret that emerging class as well as the musical's potential in Japan. The latter came after the *salaryman* had developed into the post-war 'company warrior' and Tōhō had succeeded with *salaryman* comedies such as the 'Company President' (Shachō) series begun in the early fifties; it thus utilised song to reinterpret existing forms, including the American musical, at a point when they begin to come under question.

Harikiri Boy, literally 'Energetic Boy', appeared when the *salaryman* film, if not the *salaryman* himself, had just appeared. Shōchiku had proffered compelling depictions of the new but economically precarious office worker in its *shōshimingeiki* (films of the urban middle class), the most famous being Ozu Yasujiro's *I was Born But ... (Umareta wa mita keredo, 1933)*, in which two sons protest their father's subservience to the boss. Roppa, who was an intellectual film critic before becoming an entertainer – and thus well aware of the contemporary film scene – moved away from Shōchiku's melodramatic depiction of capitalism's impact on the urban family, and towards a focus on space outside the home as literally utopian that would typify Tōhō *salaryman* movies.

Music became one of the primary means of inflecting Tōhō's proprietary formula. For while music in Shōchiku's first talkie, *The Neighbor's Wife and Mine (Madamu to nyōbō, Goshō Heinosuke, 1931)*, was an invasive presence threatening the *salaryman* at home, *Harikiri Boy* completely divorces song from the domestic sphere. Nogawa, a *salaryman* played by Roppa, is henpecked by a wife who insists on payday that he return home promptly with his salary intact. Beginning at home, the film does not offer a song until Nogawa has arrived at work. Roppa's motto was 'It's heaven if you sing' (the title of another Roppa revue), so a singing workplace could be heaven, but the wife's insistence on Fordist efficiency at home (in contrast to Nogawa's languor), as well as the boss's harassment of a typist, the girlfriend of Nogawa's co-worker, render the home an extension of capitalist labour economy, and the workplace a perverse reversal of the domestic inequality of power. The true place of refuge is the café, the popular yet notorious site of social drinking in the 1930s that would evolve into Japan's hostess bars. There Nogawa and his office buddy Maeda are regaled in song by a bevy of beauties in an opulent set clearly inspired by Hollywood musicals.

If this is utopia, the film ultimately figures it more in the original meaning of the term: as a 'non-place', one that is not only financially ruinous, but also of dubious reality in the diegesis. *Harikiri Boy*, with its eponymous hit song, may offer a more hopeful fantasy than that given to Shōchiku's *salarymen*, but it undermines it in the end. Abundance, energy, intensity and community – four

elements of the utopian sensibility Richard Dyer cites in the musical (1981) – are clearly evident in the café scenes, but they are unstable due to a lack of transparency (Dyer's fifth element); this utopia continues only as long as the money lasts, and may not even be real. The fact that Nozawa and Maeda are inebriated in the café, that the typist ambiguously straddles the inside and outside of their musical fantasy, and that the evening of song abruptly ends, leaving large narrative gaps, suggests that the musical extravaganza may just be a drunkard's reverie.

If *Harikiri Boy* has a dual-focus narrative, it is not centred on the romantic couple (Oda and the typist are secondary characters), or even on East/West or tradition/modern divides (even in a kimono, Nogawa's wife rules over a Westernised abode), but on the oppositions between home and office, the domestic and spaces of play, the wife and Nogawa. These oppositions are not easily resolved. There is no two-shot of Nogawa and his wife after the opening sequence; his concluding close-up after returning home reveals a face full of bruises courtesy of an off-screen spouse. Rather than seeking a utopian solution to these gender divisions – and their related spatial oppositions – the film almost masochistically revels in the male worker's suffering. Roppa interprets the *salaryman* as a lonely figure stuck between home and work, neither space offering solace because both are castrating (the former ruled by the wife, the latter by the boss or the anonymous corporation). Tōhō's later *salaryman* movies take up this reading and seek a solution by celebrating the liminal space that is neither home nor work: the clubs or cafés of after-work carousing.

As a formative work, *Harikiri Boy* is ambivalent towards the identity established in such clubs. Work is an ambiguous space: it has what is present in the café but absent at home – song – while still being shrouded by economy realities (in the form of bill collectors) and a threatening boss. The café is a better asylum (the boss cannot pursue the typist there), but while it can express a fantasy world of song and dance unavailable elsewhere, one led by the poor *salaryman*, it continues only as long as he has the money, which is wrung out of him by women who are really in control. As part of the film's masochism, Nogawa does not mind this, and this dilettantish enjoyment of wine, women and song, to the point of partially drowning in it, is part of Roppa's star persona. But his punishment at the end, the unreality of the café utopia, as well as the manipulative rule of the hostesses, suggest that song and dance – if not also the musical genre and the Western modernity it epitomises here – can only be appreciated in Japan if facilitated by a similar dilettantish masochism, one that recognises its futility, its calculating capitalism, its foreignness, but still keeps coming back for more – though hopefully not too frequently. This hesitation implies that the musical cannot become a Japanese genre because it must remain something to be appreciated from a self-conscious, interpretive distance. It also represents a pre-war recognition of the impending problems of

modernity, an alluring but impossible utopia for which there is no alternative here, since even dilettantish hesitation is perversely modern. While uninterested in contemporary reactionary calls to defend 'tradition', *Harikiri Boy* fails to find a counter 'Japanese' modernity.

YOU CAN SUCCEED TOO

Roppa's distance from the musical and the *salaryman* narrative was in part due to their formative flux; in the 1930s white-collar workers were still a precarious minority and musicals a commercial question mark. With post-war high economic growth, narratives of *salaryman* security and Japanese modernisation were solidified through such popular series as Tōhō's 'Company President' comedies, which lauded the 'average *salaryman*', in part by reflecting frustrations over company hierarchies and lampooning corporate bosses. By the early 1960s, demonstrations against the US-Japan Security Treaty (Anpo) and new waves in cinema and other arts increasingly questioned post-war modernisation.⁴ Even at Tōhō, *You Can Succeed Too*, following in the footsteps of comedies like *Japan's Age of Irresponsibility* (*Nippon musekinin jidai*, Furusawa Kengo, 1962), utilised music to reinterpret the *salaryman* cycle, overlapping conflicting views of the company with the America-Japan divide. Billed as a 'large-scale musical comedy', it came closer than *Harikiri Boy* to Hollywood's utopian, dual-focus narration, while also revealing anxieties about identity, modernisation and the musical genre.

Persistent anxieties over the musical were reflected in the fact that *You Can Succeed Too* was not sold as part of a musical lineage. It shares much with *Harikiri Boy*, from its portly comedic lead, the after-hour club scenes and manipulating club hostesses, even to the disappointment after a night of drinking. Yet Tōhō's press sheet did not cite this genealogy but presented the film as a subset of the *salaryman* comedy, a suggested ad line declaring: 'Let's jump! The decisive edition of Tōhō's *salaryman* comedy!' Publicity materials cited Broadway (which Sugawa visited in preparation) and musicals such as *My Fair Lady*, but subsumed them to corporate identity ('A musical strategy Tōhō is known for!'). There was anxiety over selling a musical, even though the genre was increasingly popular in Japan, evidenced by *West Side Story*'s long run, *My Fair Lady*'s becoming the first Broadway production performed in translation in Japan, and Kikuta Kazuo's stage musicals, including *You Can Make Money Too* (a precursor to *You Can Succeed Too*). Musical films hit the theatres, including Katō Tai's *Brave Records of the Sanada Clan* (*Sanada fuunroku*, 1963), Okamoto Kihachi's comedic mixture of *Noh* and jazz in *Oh, a Bomb!* (*Aa bakudan*, 1964) and *Asphalt Girl* (*Asufaruto gāru*, Shima Kōji, 1964), an attempt at an American-style musical directed by Shima Kōji and choreographed by Rod Alexander of *Carousel* fame. Yet Tōhō cited problems

in reception: 'There has been a great increase in people seeking out the pleasures of the musical, but there are still those who interpret it as high-brow.' It attempted to reassure theatre owners by naturalising the form ('there are times when anyone wants to sing out loud') and claiming it was just a cover spread over the stable framework of the *salaryman* comedy.

Nevertheless *You Can Succeed Too* was closer to the dual-focus structure of the Hollywood musical, using it to reveal corporate divisions rarely foregrounded in *salaryman* comedies. The film opens by contrasting Yamakawa, an employee of a tourist agency so set on success his exercise ritual is practically Fordian, with Nakai, a handsome but lethargic dreamer with little ambition. Their different attitudes towards the rat race are overlain with other oppositions, primarily that between American business efficiency (introduced by Yōko, the President's daughter freshly back from the States) and the old-fashioned Japanese personal care Nakai offers, but also those between urban and rural (represented by Ryōko, Yamakawa's girlfriend, who sings of the countryside), and male and female. These polarities are crystallised in the bravura 'In America' number, where Yōko Americanises her father's company through a communal song and dance. The lyrics underline the contrasts:

In America, work is work and play is play
 In America, yes is yes and no is no
 In America, I am I and you are you . . .
 In America, dishwashing is a man's job
 In America, the man pays the bill . . .
 In Japan, even if your pants are old
 In Japan, at least your tie is American.

Each description of America implies the opposite in Japan, but they can verge on the parodic, with the Japan lyrics also treading the line between self-denigration and Homi Bhabha's mimicry. The song represents a divided Japan after the defeat of Anpo demonstrations and just before the Tokyo Olympics, which proclaimed Japan's full membership in the global economy.

In good musical fashion, the conflict between Japan and America is supposedly solved by the romance between Nakai and Yōko, and confirmed when, at the foot of Mount Fuji, she abandons the song 'In America' for his 'A Dream Desert'. This is not the simple confirmation of Japanese identity, however, because 'A Dream Desert' is actually about Taklamakan, a Chinese desert formerly bordered by the Silk Road, the ancient artery connecting East and West. Perhaps this proposes a hybrid union between the two, one facilitated by the musical. Japanese music films often utilise a mixture of narrative styles, genres and musical forms (Nagasawa 1999: 33); Makino Masahiro's *Singing Lovebirds* (*Oshidori utagassen*, 1939) combines *geisha* and jazz, his

Hanako-san (1943) the Hollywood musical and war-time propaganda, and *The Happiness of the Katakuris* (*Katakuri-ke no shiawase*, Miike Takashi, 2002) the musical with murder and clay animation. Many blend musical styles, as *Harikiri Boy* throws in *rōkyoku*,⁵ and *You Can Succeed Too* Buddhist prayer drums. Some have commented on the 'nationless' (*mokuseki*) quality of *You Can Succeed Too* (Kobayashi 1999), but we should not mistake stylistic hybridity for progressive cultural hybridity. As Koichi Iwabuchi warns us about 'hybridism', 'nationlessness' has often functioned as another way to tout Japanese uniqueness⁶ (2002).

In Nakai's song, the opposite of 'America' is not Japan but a 'hometown of my heart', a 'desert not yet seen' concocted by a dreamer. It is a non-place like in *Harikiri Boy*, but here associated with home – in a film that never depicts home or even the perennial post-war hometown, the countryside (*inaka*). While Roppa's film could not successfully contrast American and Japanese modernities, Sugawa's has the post-war confidence to do so, but partly by transforming Japan into Taklamakan, a space constructed through foreign dreams. In *You Can Succeed Too*, this proceeds through tourism, as Japan asserts itself in an America/Japan dynamic through becoming the homely (in Nakai's old-fashioned care) object of American sightseeing. Playing for the other is one of the foundations of performance in a 1964 musical.

The film, however, registers anxiety over the Japanese identity Americans may be consuming; nostalgia for a fictional past is tempered by fear of becoming the primitive racial or feminine other. 'In America' proclaims a reversal of Japanese gender relations when women kick the men out of the office during the number. Stuck in the hall, they commence a 'primitive' dance in red light, acting like 'cannibals' until the President notes they have mistaken themselves for Africans. The worries that Americans may tour Japan as they do the Serengeti, or view all Japanese as *geisha*, overlap with long-held concerns that Japanese have neither the musical sense nor the physical body to perform a true musical (Iwamoto 1991). Japanese popular culture, however, has often adopted racist images in order to identify with white Euro-America and elevate itself over others (Russell 1991); here Japan is given the power to render ethnic others, ranging from the Ainu of Hokkaidō (their designs visible when Nakai visits there) to the Polynesians of Hawai'i (the décor of the Hakone hotel), touristic objects. In rising to America's height while also parodying it, Japan seemingly proclaims it can succeed too in making a movie musical.

The anxiety that Japanese may be blacks to Americans, however, means that Japan's success may not have trickled down to the primitive *salaryman*. This is powerfully expressed in the 'I Can't Succeed' number. While beginning with a cameo appearance by Ueki Hitoshi, creating a link to the 'Irresponsible' series through its star, it moves on to more serious political resistance, as Yamakawa, after his inability to secure a contract, leads a legion of frustrated *salarymen*

on a march through the Marunouchi district that resembles the Anpo demonstrations and descends to them wailing like banshees. The problems are never really resolved, however, as the number just ends with a cut to Yamakawa drunk outside Ryōko's establishment, a scene that concludes with the song 'Come to the Country', as if that is the political and musical solution to the primitiveness imposed by capitalist geopolitics.

The incompleteness of this resolution signals that *You Can Succeed Too*, like *Harikiri Boy* before it, may remain sceptical of its own resolutions. This is most evident in the film's gender divisions. Nagai in particular is victim to the manipulation of feminine power, as he is even forced into a woman's dressing gown in the apartment of Beniko, the President's mistress. One could say he recovers his masculinity through taming the emasculating Yōko, but his victory is only partial (it does not provide narrative closure, occurring halfway through the film) and is countered by that of Ryōko, who tames Yamakawa's plan to sacrifice love for male success. Further, Nagai's success is only achieved through the American gaze, not just because his kindness to an American couple brings the agency valuable business, but his assumption of the Japanese phallus – seeming to put Mount Fuji on his palm – is only an optical trick visible from the Americans' camera.

That may be reading against the grain, but optical devices serve in the film as a means for conscious self-reflection. The wall in Beniko's apartment is a *trompe l'œil* painting and Ryōko's restaurant offers the pre-cinematic device of the *sōmatō* (phantasmagoria). But with those shadows on the wall being the only rural vision we get in a resolutely urban film, *You Can Succeed Too* relies on such optical devices for some of its 'truths'. While the multiple mirrors in Yōko's room in the Hakone hotel could signify an identity split between aggressive careerism and a 'womanly' desire to be loved, she herself sings 'When I look in the mirror I can't lie to myself'. This assertion of honesty through visual projection could be the film's way of justifying the musical, claiming that its musical numbers, more spontaneous than those in *Harikiri Boy*, project an honest transparency that is utopian, while still offering Japanese a more definite 'place' than in Roppa's film. But in Yōko's room, the movie shows this projection to be split, as if not only the musical, but also the self seeing and seen therein, are multiple and detached. This may epitomise the optical geometry of genre in Japanese cinema, but *You Can Succeed Too* asserts an honesty to this splitting of identity and interpretation, acknowledging its constructedness.

You Can Succeed Too may be more optimistic about the musical than *Harikiri Boy* is, but it always also foregrounds the artifice of the genre. This is perhaps no better represented than in the concluding scene, where Yamakawa, Yōko and Ryōko meet Nagai at some far-off construction site to tell him of his success. Befitting the conclusion of a musical, the four each reprise their

songs, weaving them into a unity. The real setting, however, suddenly shifts to artificial backgrounds – even though their location has not changed – as they conclude their songs with a leap in the air and a freeze frame. Perhaps the artificial settings may underline the utopian quality of their community, one reinforced by their defiance of gravity, but this is a movie that ends the freeze frame with them plummeting to the ground.

This is a reminder that *You Can Succeed Too*, like many other Japanese musicals, is always on the verge of falling into another genre, underlining how the musical, if not also the issues of identity and nationality frequently imbricated with it, is a precarious and often tense system. But the fall here is both unexpected and a thrill, a play on a clichéd ending that not only re-reads other musicals, but also asserts the fact that the precariousness of the Japanese musical – its self-reflexive detachment – is part and parcel of its pleasure. The musical may often represent an Americanised modernity, one linked by *Harikiri Boy* and *You Can Succeed Too* with different stages of Japan's *salaryman* corporate culture, but the hesitation towards defining the genre in these works reveals their contradictory ambivalence, if not parodic resistance towards modernisation and the ideological processes of defining Japanese national identity in the capitalist world system. The pleasure of precariousness, however, underlines that this is not a rejection of Western modernity from without, but rather a hesitant play on it from within, teetering on its very edge. The musical in Japan can thus become a vernacular – a home – for speaking the anxieties of modernisation, only because, like these *salarymen*, it remains detached from home even as it anxiously, and not unproblematically, delights in imagining a 'non-place' for Japan to reside.

NOTES

1. A quote from the uncredited preface, 'Subete no eiga wa "utau eiga" ni tsūjiru', in Sasaki Atsushi and Tanji Fumihiko (eds), *Utaeba tengoku: Nippon kayō eiga derakkusu—Ten no maki* (Tokyo: Media Factory, 1999), p. 4.
2. For more on *kouta eiga*, see Sasakawa Keiko, 'Kouta eiga ni kansuru kiso chōsa', *Engeki kenkyū senta kiyō* 1 (2003), pp. 175–96; and Hosokawa Shūhei, 'Kouta eiga no bunkashi?', *Shinema dondon* 1 (2002), pp. 12–15.
3. Iwamoto Kenji underlines the role of 1930s musicals in imagining a bright, commercial *modanizumu* distinguished from the heavy issues of cultural or political modernism (*kindaishugi*): 'Wasei myūjīkaru eiga no tanjō', in Iwamoto Kenji (ed.), *Nihon eiga to modanizumu* (Tokyo: Riburopōto, 1991).
4. The years 1959 and 1960 saw massive demonstrations against the renewal of the US–Japan Security Treaty, which gave America considerable power to maintain its military presence in Japan. The connections between this political movement, which ultimately failed, and the Japanese New Wave have been explored by David Desser, *Eros Plus Massacre* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988) and Maureen Turim, *The Films of Oshima Nagisa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
5. *Rōkyoku* was a form of narrative song popular at the turn of the century.

6. He points out that many advocates of hybridism or nationlessness in Japan use such concepts precisely to argue the superiority of Japanese national culture as hybrid.

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