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THE BROADWAY-STYLE MUSICAL IN/AND GLOBAL ASIAs

1920–2019

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If you go see a Broadway musical in New York—whether it be a new musical, a revival, or a revival—chances are that you will encounter the same musical on Asian stages, too, either as a replica production or a licensed localization in translation. If you pursue a musical theatre tour in the Asias, you will be greeted with countless homegrown musicals in diverse forms and styles, all somehow bearing influences of the Broadway-style musical. We use *the Asias* rather than the singular notion of *Asia* not only to desist from the notions of one *authentic* Asia, especially from an Orientalist gaze, but also to underline the multiplicities and particularities of the many sites we attend to and explore. Through *global Asias*, we widen the geographic and historic scopes of *Asia* to include globally interconnected and shared memories and imaginaries. In the twenty-first century, the Asias are the fastest-growing market and one of the busiest hubs for musical theatre, where cultures and many forms of capital encounter and cross-pollinate. Faced with transnational investments and spectatorship, geopolitical and ideological agendas, polyvalent pursuits of desires and pleasure, the global Asias have gradually become centers of musical theatre and, in particular, the Broadway-style musical theatre.

The Broadway-style musical is a transnational deterritorialized form of musical theatre, encompassing—first and foremost—the Broadway musical, the most distinctly US American form of theatre and the world’s most popular form of theatre.² Broadway musicals have been exported to Western Europe since the nineteenth century and to East and Southeast Asia since the early twentieth century (see David Savran, Chapter 1). In the first decades of the twenty-first century, the global expansion of the Broadway musical has increasingly decoupled *Broadway* from the world’s busiest metropolis and one national tradition. As David Savran aptly noted in his pioneering essay on the “Broadway-style” musical, this complicated new genre not only “represents a meeting of many cultures . . . engaged in a multidimensional network of dynamic exchange;” but is “nonspecific enough to accommodate all . . . different forms and styles and yet remain recognizable as a musical.”³ In this chapter, the Broadway-style musical serves as an umbrella descriptor for musicals that, first, have absorbed elements of the Broadway musical as it has evolved and second, thoroughly blend popular music and many forms of theatre fare in the most hybridized manner.

While there are numerous nations and regions in Asia with vibrant musical theatre scenes, in this chapter, we will mainly focus on East Asia—the largest and most developed market of musical theatre in the Asias—as the primary example in our exploration of the Broadway-style

musical in global Asias. We use *lingua franca* in this chapter as a metaphor and critical frame for the Broadway-style musical.⁴ The Broadway-style musical is an ever-changing genre. Its many historical subgenres—the European operetta and revue, the US musical comedy, the Rodgers and Hammerstein formula, the rock musical, the post-*Hair* (1967) explicit musical, the West End and Continental European megamusical, the Sondheim musical—all further embrace a multiplicity of forms and styles. When absorbed by a wealth of cultures, this hyper-fluid genre evolves into a stateless brand or, rather, a developed cultural taste circulated across the globe. When we examine imported Broadway-style musicals and their replicas, we emphasize the canonizing nature of the *lingua franca*; when we explore homegrown musical theatre works in global Asias, we prioritize the fluidity and proteanism that the constantly mobile *lingua franca* has spawned. In what follows, we examine how East Asian musical theatre artists have strived to be fluent in the *lingua franca*, look for commonalities between *lingua franca* and various local dialects, and study how these artists make innovations as well as transformations into other previously unknown forms.

Review of Literature

Previous scholarship in English on the subject is scarce. The only study that submits a country-by-country survey of modern musical theatre in the Asias is Siyuan Liu's edited volume *The Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre* (2016). *The Palgrave Handbook of Musical Theatre Producers* (2017), edited by Laura MacDonald and William A. Everett, devotes six essays to Asian musical theatre. Other major works include Yamanashi Makiko's historical survey of the Takarazuka Revue, *A History of the Takarazuka Revue Since 1914: Modernity, Girls' Culture, Japan Pop* (2012); Hyunjung Lee's musical theatre chapters in *Performing the Nation in Global Korea: Transnational Theatre* (2015); and Jennifer Robertson's *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan* (1998). *Modern Asian Theatre and Performance 1900–2000* (2014), edited by Kevin Wetmore, Siyuan Liu, and Erin Mee, also offers insights into musical theatre.

Studies in local languages on musical theatre in individual East Asian countries are growing. In the Chinese language, there have been major contributions in historical overviews of Chinese musical theatre such as Wen Shuo's two-volume *Zhongguo jindai yinyuejushi* [*A History of Chinese Modern Musical Theatre*] (2012) and Ju Qihong's six-volume *Zhongguo geju yinyueju tongshi* [*A Comprehensive History of Chinese Operas and Musicals*] (2014). There has also been important research on musical theatre writing and production for practitioners: for instance, *Yinyueju bianju yu daoyan rencai peiyang lunwenji* [*Essays on the Education of Musical Theatre Writing and Directing Talents*] (2019), edited by Zhou Yingchen, and Fu Xianzhou's *Yinyueju yinyue chuangzuo yu yanjiu* [*Musical Theatre Composition and Research*] (2010). Fei Yuanhong has published several volumes introducing canonized Broadway-style musicals to Chinese popular readers, such as *Zoujin yinyueju beicanshijie* [*The World of Les Misérables*] (2018).

In Japanese, drama critic Senda Akihiko offers a critical understanding of Japanese musical theatre and its relationship to Broadway in the journalistic *Myujikaru no Jidai* [*The Age of Musicals*] (2000). Kamiyama Akira's scholarly series, *Kindai Nihon Engeki no Kioku to Bunka* [*Memory and Culture of Modern Japanese Theatre*] includes two volumes. Nakano Masaaki's *Suteji Sho no Jidai* [*The Age of Stage Show*] (2013) provides a transnational study of early cosmopolitan musical theatre, while Hibino Kei's *Sengo Myujikaru no Tenkai* [*The Development of Post-war Musicals*] (2017) surveys musicals in post-war Japan.

In the Korean language, two historical overviews of Korean musical theatre have been influential: Park Man Kyu's *Hanguk mujikeolsa* [*The History of Korean Musicals Since 1941*] (2011) and Yoo In Kyung's *Hanguk myujikeolui segye: Jeontonggwa hyeonksin* [*The World of Korean Musicals:*

Tradition and Innovation] (2009). Interdisciplinary studies of musical theatre have also emerged in recent years, such as Choi Min Woo's *Myujikeol sahwehak* [*The Sociology of Musicals*] (2014).

While we focus on the interconnectedness of the Asias and embed a transnational critique in our methodology, we also highlight distinct histories and artistic forms in individual nation-states in our historiography. To best examine the evolution of Broadway-style musicals in East Asia, we divide the century from 1920 to 2019 into three chronological and thematic phases. The first phase, 1920–1989, is characterized by substantial US American and European influence and burgeoning national musical theatres that referenced the Broadway style in one way or another. The second phase, 1990–2009, is marked by skillful adaptations of Broadway-style musicals and homegrown original productions. The third phase, 2010–2019, is the decade when East Asian cities became new polyphonic centers of Broadway-style musical theatre, distinguished by the polystylism of the musicals, corporate production, and the fathomless spending powers of ardent superfans.

1920–1989: Introduction of the *Lingua Franca*

East Asian countries experienced different levels of westernization from the early twentieth century onward, and the introduction of the Broadway-style musical cultivated generations of musical theatre audiences and educators in East Asia. East Asian musical theatre integrated, to varied degrees, popular songs, dances, and well-made stories—all key features of the Broadway-style book musical. Trans-Asian engagements and transit of musicians and theatre artists happened frequently until the Second World War. After the war, the unraveling and internalization of the Broadway-style musical as a *lingua franca* happened in the order of each country's political distance from the US, with Japan taking the lead, followed by Korea and then China. Musical theatre practitioners made innovations to and compromises on outdated artistic traditions in line with economic conditions, political climates, and newly cultivated local tastes. The outcome was much more than the integration of Broadway-style musical theatre form with Asian content.

Prehistory and the 1920s

Through the Nanjing Treaty (1842), the Kanagawa Treaty (1858), and the Incheon Treaty (1876), China, Japan, and Korea were respectively forced to open their doors to Europe and the US. As early as the end of nineteenth century, the Empire of Japan (1868–1947) promoted Westernization, and as part of that, European revues were a sensation.

In Japan during the 1920s, industrialists and politicians developed new urban commercial districts with Western-style theatre, railways, and department stores for new bourgeois consumers. Yuraku-za (1908) and the Imperial Theatre (1911) were the first Western-style theatres with chairs and proscenium arches, virtually functioning as variety theatres.⁵ Private multi-business groups such as Shochiku (est. 1895), Hankyu (est. 1907), and Toho (est. 1932 by Hankyu) set up revue troupes.⁶ Asakusa Opera (1917) gained popularity with imported musical theatre with considerable interpretation. In 1917, the term *myūjīkaru purei* [musical play] first appeared, but it did not directly indicate Broadway as it had a broader scope, just as the word *jazu* [jazz] covered forms from Hawaiian music to folk songs with modern tones.

In Korea, censorship to regulate mass culture and media began with the rule of the Japanese Resident-General of Korea in 1905. Assimilation to Japanese culture took place under the Japanese occupation of Korea (1910–1945). US American, European, and Westernized Japanese culture came to Korea through Japan in the 1920s and 1930s.