

## Remapping Country Music in the Pacific

*Country Music and Masculinities in Post-War Japan, 1945–56*

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**ABSTRACT** Studies that introduced country musicians outside the US have expanded our views on the creators of American country music. They have, however, reinforced our notion that non-US country musicians merely imitate the American “original.” More recent studies have advanced the field by asking how non-US actors use country music to manipulate the borders between their countries and the US by playing country music. Yet they emphasize that non-US actors exclusively encounter US culture through country music. This paper pushes the field forward to mapping country music onto post-war Japan, locating it within a Japanese domestic context, and showing how non-US actors used country to control the ideological context created there. By doing so, it rejects the common perception that the Japanese merely imitated the “authentic” American country music. Japanese men enjoyed American country music not simply because it was American, but precisely because they could make it their own.

This paper examines why certain male musicians played country music as they recovered from defeat in World War II between 1945 and the mid-1950s. To do so, it illustrates how men—country musicians and their critics alike—performed and discussed country music during this period. Ultimately, this paper argues that country musicians played country to embody an alternative masculinity that could serve as both a deviation and critique of the expectations and direction of mainstream Japanese society. **KEYWORDS** country music, transnational, Japan, masculinity

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“I have a peculiar habit of sensing America in things ‘purely’ Japanese,” Kazuya Kosaka asserted in his biography.<sup>1</sup> Before he was one of the most popular singers of American country music in Japan, Kosaka was a student at a prestigious private high school in Tokyo, singing country for GIs in music clubs around the military bases.<sup>2</sup> The clubs were decorated with lanterns, *wagasa* oil-paper Japanese umbrellas, artificial cherry blossoms, and framed *ukiyo-e* pictures on the walls. When he played in an Officers Club, which only higher-ranked soldiers could enter, he had to pass around a tiny pond and cross an arched bridge with red parapets. Even the railings featured ornamental tops

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1. My sincere appreciation goes to Professor Gavin James Campbell, Professor Yusuke Wajima, Alex Murphy and Toshiko Irie from our study group on Japanese popular culture during World War II and the post-war era, and Roy Hedrick III for their insightful comments and advice on this particular topic.

2. Throughout the text, I have followed the Western convention in which the given or personal name precedes the family name or surname.

made with real gold. These luxurious Japanese decorations irritated Kosaka, who had only recently been able to afford to buy jeans and Western shirts through the Sears catalog, and who had even fashioned his own imitation ten-gallon hat out of felt fabric. The Japanese gardens built by the US occupation forces reminded Kosaka that his own nation had lost control of its image. Instead of channeling the exotic Japan imposed by Americans through folding screens, traditional dancing fans, and Kyoto dolls, Kosaka chose to redefine his own Japanese manhood throughout his life.<sup>3</sup>

Despite his resentment, Kosaka dropped out of his prestigious Seijō Gakuen high school and put on a cowboy outfit to sing American country music for the GIs stationed in Japan. Kosaka later became the first Japanese star of American country music; however, his complex sentiments toward the US and his deviation from his upper-middle class status do not fit with previous scholarly views on the post-war Japanese encounter with the genre. Though scholars on country music in Japan acknowledge these musicians' upper- and upper-middle class upbringings, they do not examine how they navigated their class identities and privilege through country music in this particular period.<sup>4</sup> As a result, they tend to echo existing refrains in transnational country music studies that emphasize non-American country musicians merely imitating "original" American country songs.<sup>5</sup> More recent scholars of transnational country music have advanced the field by asking how non-US actors use country music to manipulate the borders between their own countries and the US.<sup>6</sup> Yet even these studies tend to give the impression that non-US actors exclusively encounter US culture through country music. This paper goes further by mapping country music in post-war Japan, and moreover locating it within a Japanese domestic context. By showing how non-US actors used country to shape the ideological context of their immediate surroundings, I reject the common perception that the Japanese merely imitated an "authentic" American country music. Japanese men enjoyed American country music not simply because it was American, but precisely because they could make it their own.

3. Kazuya Kosaka, *Meido in okyupaido japan* [Made in occupied Japan] (Tokyo: Kawade shobō shinsha, 1990), 106.

4. Michael Furmanovsky, "American Country Music in Japan: Lost Piece in the Popular Music History Puzzle," *Popular Music and Society* 31 no.3 (2008): 357–72; Stephen I. Thompson, "American Country Music in Japan," *Popular Music and Society* 16 no. 3 (1992): 31–38; Tōru Mitsui, "The Reception of the Music of American Southern Whites in Japan" in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. Neil Rosenberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

5. For studies on non-US country musicians, see Mel van Elteran, "Country Music in Netherlands: Why Is It Still Marginal?" *Popular Music and Society* 20 no. 3 (1996): 53–93; Elteran, "Dutch Country Music: Between Creative Appropriation and Mere Epigonism," *Popular Music and Society* 22 no.1 (1998): 91–113; Jonathan Zilberg, "Yes, It's True: Zimbabweans Love Dolly Parton," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 29 no.1 (1995): 111–125; Jane Ferguson, "Another Country is the Past: Western Cowboys, Lanna Nostalgia, and Bluegrass Aesthetics as Performed by Professional Musicians in Northern Thailand," *American Ethnologist* 37 no. 2 (2010): 227–40; Jimmy Balud Fong, "Batawa: Constructing Identity through Country Music in the Philippine Cordillera" (paper presented at INTER: A European Cultural Studies Conference, Sweden, 11–13 June 2007), 109–19, accessed 13 November 2018, <http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp/025/ecp07025.pdf>.

6. Kristin Solli, "North of Nashville: Country Music, National Identity, and Class in Norway" (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 2006); Lee Butler Bidgood, "'America Is All Around Here': An Ethnography of Bluegrass Music in the Contemporary Czech Republic" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 2011).

This paper examines why certain male musicians played country music as they recovered from defeat between 1945 and the mid-1950s.<sup>7</sup> To do so, I illustrate how men—country musicians and their critics alike—performed and discussed country music during this period. Thus, I focus on representations of country music narrated by both country musicians and their critics in magazines, newspapers, and special leaflets of radio programs. I also draw on musicians’ descriptions of their own experiences through both autobiographical accounts, as well as interviews that I conducted.<sup>8</sup> These sources show us how men sought out ideal masculinities through country music that would fit within a new Japan, rather than in relation to the US. Ultimately, I argue that these musicians played country to embody an alternative masculinity that could serve as both a deviation and critique of the expectations and direction of mainstream Japanese society.

Addressing how men used country music to construct masculinities is important because scholars have been trapped by the powerful influence of the US in Japanese popular music into reinforcing the cultural hierarchy of a feminine Japan and a masculine US. As a result, they often fail to fully interrogate the more complex operations of gender and class therein. One prominent example is the pioneering work of the sociologist Hiroshi Minami. Minami has expressed concern about Japan’s “colonized” status and sought to find a uniquely “Japanese” popular music culture.<sup>9</sup> Another example is *Nihon ryūkōka shi* (A History of Japanese Popular Music), one of the most prominent historical narratives of Japanese popular music, edited by Nobuo Komota.<sup>10</sup> Beginning his narrative with Commodore Perry’s arrival in Japan, Komota often stresses the influence of Westernization and Americanization in bringing about changes in the popular music landscape. American scholars who narrate Japanese popular music history, such as E. Taylor Atkins and Michael Bourdagh, also tend to focus on how Japanese tried to create a Japanese music scene.<sup>11</sup> These arguments are important in understanding how the normative framework of Americanization, if not American cultural hegemony, operated in Japanese popular music histories. In spite of this hegemonic influence, however, Japanese popular music has never been a strictly feminized space.

The historian Ayako Kano helps us to elaborate upon this point. She argues that Japanese public intellectuals have claimed Japan’s unique difference from the West by internalizing the paradigm of masculine US/West and feminine Japan. Calling such a

7. I developed this paper from the chapter two of my dissertation, “Après-guerre Cowboys.” Mari Nagatomi, “Tokyo Rodeo: Transnational Country Music and the Crisis of Japanese Masculinities” (Ph.D. diss., Doshisha University, 2019), 64–100.

8. We can access the magazine *Music Life* in the digital archive available through the National Diet Library (NDL) in Kyoto and Tokyo. Some of the recordings by those country musicians are only available in the Historical Recordings Collection in the National Diet Library Digital Service. I am grateful to Makoto Satō, Willie Okiyama and Shōji Asahina for accepting my requests for interviews and for providing photographs and anecdotes.

9. Hiroshi Minami, “Nihon no ryūkōka” [Popular Songs in Japan], in *Yume to omokage: Taishū goraku no kenkyū* [The Images of Dream: Studies on Popular Entertainment], ed. Shisō no kagaku kenkyū kai (Tokyo: Chūō kōron sha, 1950); Minami, “Ryūkōka no mondai” [Issues in Popular Songs], *Bungaku* [Literature], November, 1953, 1168–1172.

10. Nobuo Komota, Yoshifumi Shimada, Hiroshi Yazawa and Chiaki Yokozawa eds., *Shimban nihon ryūkōka shi* [A New Edition of a History of Japanese Popular Music] (Tokyo: Shakai shisōsha, 1994).

11. E. Taylor Atkins, *Blue Nippon: Authenticating Jazz in Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Michael K. Bourdagh, *Sayonara Amerika, Sayonara Nippon: A Geopolitical Prehistory of J-Pop* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

paradigm “reverse Orientalism,” she states that it has permitted them to neglect not only Japan’s masculine violence to its global neighbors, but also the country’s male-centered gender relations, both past and present.<sup>12</sup> Kano’s ideas can be extended to more conventional Japanese histories of popular music as well. Preoccupied with Americanization, if not American hegemony, popular music scholars and journalists have not investigated how men used popular music in Japan as an ideological battleground in asserting their own masculinities.

I believe country music in Japan in particular can offer us an effective lens in understanding how men fought out these ideal masculinities. This is because men in Japan from the prewar era until the early 1970s were preoccupied with the class image symbolized by the cowboy and the country music he played.<sup>13</sup> Historian George Mosse and sociologist R.W. Connell argue that modern nation building requires an “authentic” image of men.<sup>14</sup> They claim that such ideal masculinity, which Connell calls “hegemonic masculinity,” emerges most clearly in the presence of other “subordinated” men, such as homosexuals, boys, and men who belong to marginalized racial and class groups.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the ideal male image necessary for the maintenance of the modern nation exists only when it has alternative masculinities to dominate and with which to contrast. Country music therefore offered men in Japan a tool for navigating their class image and for exploring their ideal masculinities.

It is particularly worth addressing how men used country music to navigate their class location in the immediate post-war period. First, it was the first time that Japanese music fans and critics classified American country music as a musical genre. By then, non-classical, American-influenced popular music, including big-band jazz, hillbilly, cowboy songs, Hawaiian and tango, were labeled as “jazz.”<sup>16</sup> This change suggests to us that the Japanese made new meanings with country music while they kept consuming its repertoires from the prewar era. Indeed, it was during this moment of defeat and occupation that gendered relations between the US and Japan were most clearly pronounced. It was also a moment in which upper- and upper-middle class youth were allowed to nullify their class identities. Even though they could afford to practice music with instruments, they struggled with the lack of food. Secondly, as the musicologist Yusuke Wajima notes, this period saw a number of college-educated men take to media such as radio and print in order to fill the gap between

12. Kano points especially to Kōjin Karatani, Estuko Yamashita and Hidemi Suga. See also Ayako Kano, “Toward a Critique of Transhistorical Femininity,” in *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, ed. Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 520–54.

13. Nagatomi, “Tokyo Rodeo.” It was only in the late 1960s that they problematized the pervasive issues of race in cowboy imagery and country music for the first time. Hubbs elaborates how low-class image conceived by the middle-class affected country music stereotypes, particularly concerning of gender and sexuality. Naddine Hubbs, *Rednecks, Queers and Country Music* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014).

14. R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 76; George L. Mosse, *The Images of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6.

15. Connell, *Masculinities*, 78–80.

16. *Keiongaku to sono rekōdo* classified the “hill billy [sic] song” as a version of “swing music,” and included Jimmie Rodgers. See Masaru Karabata, Yoshifumi Nogawa and Tadashi Aoki eds., *Keiongaku to sono rekōdo*, [Light Music and Its Records] (Tokyo: Sanshōdō, 1938), 261–63. During the Pacific War, “light music” (keiongaku) was invented to avoid using the term “jazz,” a word from the language of the enemy. Some elder Japanese still use “light music” to address both modern jazz and country & western. For light music, see Atkins, *Blue Nippon*, 145–46.

elite and popular taste.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, many country musicians of the era shared a common background with these men, socialized in the same circles, and even played in the same bands. As such, although some scholars and journalists describe country music in the immediate post-war Japan as a symbol of a “colonized status of mind (*shokuminchi konjō*)” and source of nostalgia,<sup>18</sup> the musicians themselves actively took advantage of their class status to perform “low-class” music in order to propose a new, popular music culture.<sup>19</sup> Thus, their critique of conventional Japanese middle-class society through country music importantly shows us how men drew upon tropes of class in order to construct alternative masculinities in the emasculated space of immediate post-war Japan.

In the following pages, I first examine the radio show “Joke Western,” which featured one of the first recording artists of country music in Japan, the Western Ramblers. This case shows us how country & western images of Japanese cowboys were fashioned to critique conventional middle-class masculinities in order to introduce new kinds of popular music. Next, I illustrate how mainstream music journalists criticized country musicians in Japan. Their criticism shows us how they “classed” country musicians so as to legitimize their ideal image of masculinity through other styles of music, such as modern jazz. In the final section, I illustrate how country musicians learned to perform the “low-class” by interacting with lower-ranked GIs in order to embody a new male image.

#### DISPELLING TEARJERKER SONGS: JOKE WESTERN AND THE WESTERN RAMBLERS

It was through a nationally aired radio program that Japanese audiences first heard the earliest country music recording artists in Japan, the Western Ramblers. The program featured political satire and was eventually banned by GHQ and the Japan Broadcasting Company (*Nippon hōsō kyōkai*, NHK). The program’s host and writer Torirō Miki hired the Ramblers to play background music for his radio drama called “Joke Western (*Jōdan uesutan*).” Miki wrote the drama as a parody of the Japanese government as it negotiated the San Francisco treaty. The combination of the Ramblers’ country music and Miki’s parody suggests that a new type of American popular music, the western, perfectly matched Miki’s imagined Japanese post-war frontier. It successfully created an ambience in which Japanese could laugh, instead of cry, about the confusion of the post-war years, and speak out about contemporary issues, rather than quietly lamenting what they had lost during the war.<sup>20</sup>

17. Yusuke Wajima, “Sengo hōsō ongaku no ‘hōmu songu’ shikō to Miki Torirō” [Inclination for ‘Home Song’ of the post-war broadcasting music and Torirō Miki], *Taiken’yama ronsō; Bigakuben* (45), 2011, 1–27.

18. The prominent music critic Tōyō Nakamura referred to country musicians and fans in Japan this way in 1972. Tōyō Nakamura, “Naze boku wa ‘uesutan’ ga kirai ka” [Why I Dislike Country & Western], in *Nakamura Tōyō ansorōji* [Nakamura Tōyō Anthology], ed. Jun Asano (Tokyo: Music Magazine, 2011), 42. Thompson concludes that the Japanese reception of American country music was composed of urbanites’ nostalgia for (imagined) rural life. See Thompson, “American Country Music in Japan.”

19. Nagahara states that the kind of popular music critique espoused by those elites had lost its power in the 1970s, as most Japanese believed by then that their nation consisted entirely of the middle-class. Wajima also claims that Miki’s effort to fill the gap between elitist tastes and popular taste would be challenged as the myth of “a nation of the middle-class” took hold after the 1960s. Hiromu Nagahara, *Tokyo Boogie-Woogie: Japan’s Pop Era and Its Discontents* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 213; Wajima, “Sengo,” 15.

20. For Miki’s ideas about new music in post-war Japan, see, Wajima, “Sengo,” 1–27.

With the Ramblers, Miki intended to dispel the “tearjerker Japanese popular songs,”<sup>21</sup> which sold more than thirty thousand copies at the time.<sup>22</sup> These “tearjerkers” were ballads sung by male singers in the Japanese-sounding minor-pentatonic scale. In the song “Three Hundred Sixty-Five Nights” (*Sanbyaku rokujū goya*), for example, the male protagonist finally sees the morning with his mate after “crying (for) three-hundred-sixty-five nights.” “Spa Town Elegy” (*Yunomachi eregi*) describes a man visiting the town of his unrequited first love. Unable to meet his woman, he cries, instead of forgetting her and moving on, by playing his guitar and indulging himself in a dream that will never come true. Instead of envisioning new ways of life, these men mourned for what they had lost, regretting all that had happened in the war, and dreaming of what could have been if the war had not happened. These songs implied that men in the post-war era were expected to grieve.

*Asahi graph* depicted these male singers as respectable breadwinners. They wore suits and jackets with ties, and kept their hair clean-cut with pomade or with fedora hats. Some photographs might capture them in a shop, picking out foreign hats, ties, glasses, leather shoes, or travel suitcases. Another might be in a house with a lipstick box in his hand and a woman in front of him. These men looked modern, as if they sang whimsical and light-hearted jazz. But they chose to mourn inside. Toshiro Ohmi, for example, the singer of “Spa Town Elegy,” told a reporter that he wanted to sing songs “filled with sorrow.” Rikurō Tsuruta claimed that it was easier for him to express himself “with heavier songs,” although he did not identify himself as “a gloomy guy.”<sup>23</sup> This *Asahi graph* article shows that these mournful male singers were closely associated with middle-class consumer culture. Men could stay men, even while they enjoyed the “liberated” sphere of consumption, only if they felt remorse for their wartime atrocities.

Miki attempted to alter this very image of middle-class men with the Ramblers’ country & western style. The Ramblers demonstrated a more light-hearted, forward-looking, and rebellious masculinity—often called *après*, or “*apure*.” Although Miki’s female fans worried about his involvement with the *après*, he declared “*apure* is absolutely perfect for me.”<sup>24</sup> In this period, any youth phenomenon that seemed to pose a threat to morality and conventional values was called *après-guerre* (*apure* or *sengoha*). A group of prominent left-leaning scholars in the Science of Thought group (*Shisō no kagaku kenkyūkai*), for example, published a book titled *The Study on Après-Guerre* (*Sengo ha no kenkyū*) in which they attempted to understand how the defeat and the occupation helped produce these chaotic situations. For them, street children, crimes, gambling, alternative religion, sex workers, black markets, and youth suicide were *apure* phenomena, and were peculiar to the post-war period. General audiences followed suit and began calling youth deviation *Apure*.<sup>25</sup> As with Miki, the Ramblers were outlaws, embodying *apure* entirely.

21. Miki, *Jōdan* 9, 1951, 7. This leaflet was obtained from Makoto Satō, a son of the first steel guitar player in the Western Ramblers, Shin Satō. Satō was a good friend of Miki.

22. “Rekōdo kayōkyoku jidai” [The Period of Record Popular Songs], *Asahi shimbun*, 22 May 1949.

23. “Sengo dansei ryūkōkashu kokuchiban” [The Bulletin Board of Post-War Popular Male Singers], *Asahi graph*, November 1950, 16–17.

24. Torirō Miki, *Jōdan jūnen* (Tokyo: Ōzora sha, 1998), 115.

25. One of his female fans notes that student bands were often seen as typical *apures*. Miki, *Jōdan jūnen*, 116.

The Ramblers successfully satisfied audiences' curiosity for these young outlaws. "Every night the show was packed," Japan Victor producer Bumon Kofuji recollected of the Ramblers' show, *Singing Stagecoach* (*Utau ekibasha*) at the Lion beer hall in Ginza in 1951. On some nights, the police needed to regulate the crowd's overflowing excitement for Ramblers' performance.<sup>26</sup> All the band members dressed like cowboys, complete with ten-gallon hats, western boots, western shirts (some plaid, some plain and some western), and neckerchiefs.<sup>27</sup> While other musicians who played non-classical, American-influenced popular music, labeled as jazz, wore suits or dresses, the Ramblers looked more casual. And while jazz bands attracted the audience with their elaborate musical skills and exquisite lead singers, the Ramblers entertained the audience with their acrobatic antics and western-themed costumes. The Ramblers moved their bodies more freely; for certain songs, they lay down on the floor to play, while for others, the fiddler of the Ramblers sat leaning his back against the chair with his legs open, while the instrumentalists of the jazz band stood up straight. The Ramblers were also more closely grouped on stage.<sup>28</sup> Overall, the Ramblers delivered a carefree impression that challenged conventional modes of musical performance.

#### EMASCULATING JAPANESE COWBOYS

With such "unconventional" ways of performing, the Western Ramblers debuted in 1951 on Japan Victor's "Purple Label" (*murasaki-ban*), which specialized in releases by foreign artists (*yōgaku*).<sup>29</sup> It seems that they had to be labeled as foreigners to move forward in the post-war frontier in such a lighthearted fashion. At first, Japan Victor did not disclose much about the band. "I thought they were Americans," recalled the country music critic Kōtarō Yui, after obtaining a copy of the Ramblers' record, which "did not have any information about the band."<sup>30</sup> Miki also wrote that "everybody originally thought the band consisted of foreigners (*gaijin*)."<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the Ramblers sang their songs in English.<sup>32</sup> Sometimes, Japan Victor even enlisted American singers from the Occupation bases, such as Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Clark Johnston and Lance Corporal Lee Lash,

26. For a description of the Ramblers' performance at the Lion, see, Bumon Kofuji, "Uestan ramburāzu: Ekibasha" [The Western Ramblers: Stagecoach], in *America wo tsukutta hyakuikyoku* [100 Songs to Know about America] ed. Yomiuri Shinbun henshūbu (Tokyo: Yamaha shuppan, 1988), 212–13; Kōtarō Yui, liner notes to *The History of Japanese Country & Western*. Makoto Satō, the son of the Ramblers' steel guitar player Shin Satō, provided me with several pictures of the Ramblers performing at the Lion.

27. Private collection obtained from Makoto Satō. Satō provided photographs of the band and his fathers' footage in the music industry. They reveal that the Ramblers' members, including Toyama and Satō, had close connections with stars such as Katsuhiko and Yukihiko Haida, who were popular going back to the prewar era, and Torirō Miki. He also provided me handwritten music scores by his father, "Tekisasu no bara" [The Rose of Texas] and "Western X'mas." "The Rose of Texas" was recorded and sold in 1952 on Japan Victor V-40792. The recording is available in the Historical Recordings Collection of the National Diet Library.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Traditional, arranged by Yoshihiro Kobayashi, "Ekibasha," by the Western Ramblers, recorded in March 1951, Japan Victor, A1323, 78 rpm; this song is also available on Various Artists, *The History of Japanese Country & Western: Ōru sutā kyōen*, Teichiku Records TFC-1461~6, 2002. 6 CDs, disc 4.

30. Kōtarō Yui, interviewed by the author, Tokyo, 31 May 2014.

31. Torirō Miki, *Jōdan* 9, 1951, 7.

32. An early example is "I Love You Because," released in March 1951.

in their recordings.<sup>33</sup> Playing mainly instrumental tunes and singing in English, the Western Ramblers had plenty of American aura. In this way, Japan Victor was able to sell the Western Ramblers as non-Japanese, freeing them from the expectations of the ideal Japanese male image.

Even after Japan Victor disclosed that the Ramblers were Japanese, music journalists kept them marginalized within the popular music landscape. “I wish they played with more solid rhythm and that the fiddler could play precise notes,” Hakase Sogabe wrote. In so doing, he continued, they might “go beyond their emphasis on costumes.”<sup>34</sup> In an article that featured four contemporary Japanese musicians, Ramblers bandleader Hiroshi Toyama’s photo was captioned as “Western Man with a Mustache.” Toyama was pictured wearing a western shirt and cowboy hat, playing his upright bass in a dance hall (probably the Lion). On the page left of Toyama, Kōtarō Hara, a tango violinist that the writer would call “the Japanese (Barnabas von) Géczy,” posed with his fiddle, wearing a suit jacket and Lloyd glasses. While Hara’s picture was squarely placed, delivering a tidy impression, Toyama’s picture was slanted, producing more a chaotic effect. While the writer enumerated famous music teachers with whom Hara had trained, he implied Toyama played music simply by reading the music score directly.<sup>35</sup> This article seems, then, to locate Toyama, in a feminized sphere of consumption, represented by his gaudy costumes and lack of formal musical knowledge.

Another early country music recording artist, Miharū Kuroda, drew the attention of the *Asahi* newspaper when he decided to change his style from country music to modern jazz. In contrast to his “simple western songs,” the writer in the *Asahi* hoped that Kuroda “(would) not make known his defects” when switching to jazz. The writer worried that Kuroda’s lack of musical sophistication, while tolerated in his previous career as a country singer, would now disappoint his new audiences.<sup>36</sup> In the report about Kuroda’s career shift in *Music Life*, the interviewer, a jazz music collector named Yoshio Maki, articulated the difference between western songs and jazz. “I could not find,” Maki began the article, “any *shadow* of western when I met Miharū.”<sup>37</sup> For Maki, Kuroda looked as if he had stepped out of Bond Street in London or Fifth Avenue in New York. In Maki’s eyes, Kuroda did not have an “unrefined aura, like somebody coming from Texas or Oklahoma.” Kuroda claimed that he began playing western songs because he wanted to go out in western outfits. When Maki

33. Japan Victor, for example, released the recording of “I’m Movin’ On” by the Western Ramblers featuring the singer Clark Johnston in June 1951. For Lee Lash and Clark Johnston, see Kazuya Deguchi, “Okyupaido Japan to shinchūgun songu [The Occupied Japan and the Songs by GIs],” liner notes to *Occupied Japan: The Legendary Recordings by the Shinchūgun Soldiers 1950–1953*, Various Artists, Victor Entertainment, VICJ-60716~7, compact discs; Aoki also includes episodes about those singers in his prominent study about US soldiers and their musical experiences in occupied Japan. See Shin Aoki, *Meguriau monotachino gunzo: sengo nihon no beigunkichi to ongaku 1945–1958* [Figures of Encounters: Music and US Military Bases in Post-War Japan] (Tokyo: Ōtsuki Shoten, 2013), 521–22.

34. Hakase Sogabe, “Jinbutsu frashu” [Highlights of Artists], *Music Life*, November, 1951, 28–29.

35. For reception of tango music in Japan, see Yuiko Asaba, “Tango in Japan: Digesting and Disciplining a Distant Music” (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 2017).

36. “Jazu jin: Josei ni sawagareru Kuroda Miharū” [Jazz People: Kuroda Miharū Sought After Young Girls], *Asahi Shimbun*, 16 May 1953.

37. Yoshio Maki, “Hōdan rokuon ban: Biji Kuroda” [Recording of Informal Talk: Biji Kuroda], *Music Life*, March 1953, 41. Emphasis by the author.



asked, “Your main attraction was costume and music was the second?” Kuroda agreed, even admitting that he could not play well at concerts in the past. Further, Maki clarified his view of country & western as low-class and outdated music. He understood western songs in terms of Japanese narrative singing (*naniwabushi*) because of their story lines. To this, he added, “Back in the day, when we did not know much about jazz, we jumped at the melodies of the western” because they were familiar and friendly. Kuroda echoed Maki’s view that jazz was more modern than western cowboy music. “I chose jazz out of a desire to move my career from easy music to more elaborate music.”<sup>38</sup>

The interview reveals that the music writer Maki understood country as unmodern, located in a feminine sphere of excess consumption, and jazz as more modern, in a masculine sphere of musical elaboration. As Kuroda claimed, western music was “easy music,” while Maki understood its popularity in terms of its “friendly and familiar melody,” which did not require much musical education. Maki assumed that people’s tastes for western music came out of their natural instincts, rather than their “cultured” intellect. Moreover, country music, according to them, amounted to little more than mere costume play. Kuroda’s aspiration to advance his career by becoming a recording artist who could play “more elaborate music” rightly fit with Japan’s larger aspiration to recuperate from the war. In short, the conversations between Kuroda and Maki shows us how they articulated their ideas about hegemonic masculinity by “otherizing” the Ramblers and American country music in the early post-war era. For them, simple notes and chords, ostentatious costumes, and musical performances without formal musical education should not represent modern, post-war Japan. As such, they were able to project their “unwanted” musical dispositions onto country artists such as the Ramblers. By creating an alternative image of male musicians, they sought to make sense of their own ideas about hegemonic masculinity.

#### LEARNING TO PERFORM LIKE LOW-CLASS MEN

What the case of the Ramblers on Miki’s radio program shows us, however, is that country musicians did not seek simply to act out images of “uneducated” and “unmodern” men for their own self-indulgence or for the audience’s curiosity. Rather, they found alternative ways in country music to articulate their own version of hegemonic masculinity in the post-war era of “new Japan.” In particular, they used their experience playing country for lower-ranked GIs to enact an image of the “lower-class” man as representative of new Japan.

The trajectory of Hiroshi Toyama, the leader of the Western Ramblers, helps us to understand how music allowed for the expression of an alternative class identity after the disruptions of war and defeat. Toyama was born the son of the prestigious classical tenor Kunihiko Toyama, who helped to establish formal musical education in Japan. During the Pacific War, the young Toyama was sent to the Philippines as a music teacher. In Manila, Toyama enjoyed his status as a colonizer, recalling in 1951 that he was “no different than Americans (are) now in occupied Japan.” But Toyama’s status and upper-class upbringing were quickly crushed. After the US landing, Toyama and his group hid in the jungle in Cebu for the next five months. When he surrendered, Toyama looked like a “disposable

38. Ibid., 41–42.

wooden chopstick” with beriberi, heart disease, and malaria. Detained in a US POW camp in Leyte, Toyama’s only wish was to survive.<sup>39</sup>

Toyama’s physical breakdown did not allow him to reflect on the imperial violence of the Japanese Empire, in which he himself was complicit during the occupation of the Philippines. Instead, fear and despair exhausted Toyama in the US POW camps in Leyte. Each day, Toyama listened to the names of his fellow prisoners being called by US soldiers, dreading the final, fateful day when his name might come up. Pressure also came from Japanese gangsters, who would use violence to steal food from other prisoners.<sup>40</sup> But eventually, music allowed Toyama to escape from the confusion, trepidation and boredom. A US lieutenant in Toyama’s labor camp encouraged detainees to engage in entertainment activities. By joining the music ensemble *Fuji Gakudan*,<sup>41</sup> Toyama realized that he could use his creativity in arranging songs to obtain extra food, drink, and cigarettes. In spite of being held in a US-operated detention camp, music allowed Toyama to avoid the worst aspects of a prisoner’s life.<sup>42</sup>

Likewise, music opened doors for him to experience a certain “freedom” in occupied Japan. Performing western music for lower-ranked soldiers paid Toyama especially well. One day, Toyama found that particular songs thrilled white soldiers in a club. “When we played a song like ‘San Antonio Rose,’” Toyama remembered, “they got very excited and began hitting the floor with beer bottles.” Toyama, for the first time, knew that a genre called “hillbilly” and “western” was popular in the US. And this new music was lucrative. The band could get 1,000 yen (approximately 8,000 yen or \$70 in contemporary currency) for each request from these soldiers.<sup>43</sup> Toyama quit his day job in 1947 and formed his band, the Western Ramblers.<sup>44</sup>

39. Hiroshi Toyama, “Watashi no koremade” [My Life by Now], *Music Life*, December, 1951, 22–23. I obtained this issue of *Music Life*, which was not archived in the NDL, from Hideko Momata, a secretary of the president at Shinkō Music Entertainment, on 28 March 2014.

40. Saburō Kageyama, ed., *Reite tō horyō shinbun: Zetsubō kara bunkasōzō e* [Prisoner’s Newspaper in Leyte Island: From Despair to Creation of Culture] (Tokyo: Rippū Shobō, 1975), 112. Kageyama narrated these detainees’ despair in the prison and their cultural creations in the camp. They did not deal with how they viewed Japanese imperial violence. This is not the only example of how the wartime experiences of Japanese soldiers were narrated without mentioning Japanese colonial violence.

41. Ibid., 192; “#3 Fujigakudan ga kimasu” [#3 Fuji Music Band will Visit], poster, 1946; *Shōkō Shimbun*, 14 September and 21 September 1946; Also see Saburō Kageyama, ed., *Reite tō no shōkō shimbun: tezukuri shimbun ni miru horyō seikatsu* [Shōkō Shimbun Newspaper in Leyte: The Life of the Prisoners Seen in the Handmade Newspaper] (Tokyo: Saikōsha, 1980), 86. Handwritten versions of the newspapers can be obtained at the NDL in Tokyo.

42. The *Fuji gakudan* replaced Filipino bands in order to save the US recreation budget. Serving as musicians for the US functioned as another battleground for Asians under US hegemony. See Toyama, “Watashino,” 23.

43. Interview by the author with Shōji Asahina, 30 November 2013. Asahina served as a fiddler in the Western Ramblers. Another member, Teddy Hara, also states that he earned 2,000 yen per day when the monthly salary of a college graduate was only 9,600 yen. Teddy Hara, “kantōri ongaku tonō deai: Watashi to wesutan ranbulazu” [How I Met Country Music: Me and the Western Ramblers] in *Kirinuki kantōri kurabu* [Scrapping Country Music Club], 10 November 2014. *Kirinuki* is a monthly leaflet published by country music fans for their paid subscribers. For a discussion of how Japanese musicians working in the military bases earned salaries, see Mamoru Tōya, *Shinchūgun kurabu kara kayōkyoku e: Sengo nihon popurā ongaku no reimeiki* [From the Occupation Army to the Popular Music: The Dawn of Post-war Japanese Popular Music] (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobō, 2006), 54–56.

44. Akira Etō, “Hompō gakudan shōkai (10): Uestan ramburāzu” [Introducing Bands in Japan 10: The Western Ramblers], *Music Life*, March 1953, 28–29.

Toyama also learned that this music could allow for a more egalitarian relationship with the Americans. Country music was particularly popular among young whites in the lower ranks of the military, who were only permitted to enjoy nightlife in Non-Commissioned Officers Clubs (NCO) or Enlisted Men's clubs (EM). The ambience of these clubs contrasted sharply with the Officers Clubs (OC). If audiences in OC preferred quietly listening to big-band jazz or pop music while sipping classy cocktails, the audience at NCO and EM drank alcohol mixed with soda, talked and applauded louder, danced harder, and added fist-fights to the night's spectacle.<sup>45</sup> Kazuya Kosaka often played "Dixie" (I Wish I was in Dixieland) because it would electrify his white American audience. "The Southerners stood up" when Kosaka played the song and "sang along out loud with their fists raised." They lifted the spirit by "stamping the floor and whistling." Then, as soon as he and his band finished playing "Dixie," soldiers from the North started chanting "Yankee Doodle!" Kosaka remembered these soldiers from the North "were in an uproar as if they did not want to be defeated" by their Southern counterparts.<sup>46</sup> Kosaka loved to play in the clubs with these "chaotic and loud" audiences because their response made him want to "play music more passionately."<sup>47</sup>

The fiddler Seiichi Fujimoto, who eventually joined Kosaka's band, decided to make a career out of playing country & western because of this intimacy between Japanese musicians and their American audiences. Originally, Fujimoto played in a jazz combo in small cabarets in Yokohama. One day, his friend asked him to join another band to play what this friend called "western." Having no idea what "western" was, Fujimoto visited the band playing in one of the NCOs, the Zebra Club, in Yokohama in 1947. "The band members and American soldiers were like friends," Fujimoto recalled, "partying together." This rare view excited Fujimoto because "Japanese always would bow in front of Americans."<sup>48</sup> In an interview, the singer Willie Okiyama, who began his career as a singer of "western," remembered that he sometimes taught new songs to these American soldiers. "When I was playing Hank Williams' 'Jambalaya,' the newest hit song I learned from FEN (Far East Network)," Okiyama recalled, American soldiers "asked me what that song was."<sup>49</sup>

Further, for these upper-middle class youngsters, working in military bases was in itself rebellious in the face of society's norms and expectations. One of Hiroshi Toyama's sons recalls that the rest of his family, all of whom worked in classical music, disrespected Toyama's musical career because of its association with his drinking and spending habits, as well as his close contact with Japanese gangs.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, many country musicians had close contact with "outcast" communities. Mickey Curtis remembers that he and his fellow musicians met at warehouses that stored their musical instruments along with the belongings of day

45. Tōya, *Shinbūgun*, 117–18.

46. Kosaka, *Meido*, 104–105.

47. *Ibid.*

48. Seiichi Fujimoto, "Boku to uestan" [Me and Country & Western], *Tokyo uestan kojiki* [Tokyo Western History]. Accessed on 15 September 2015, <http://www.happon.com/fujimoto/novel01.html>.

49. Interview by the author with Willie Okiyama, 30 May 2014.

50. Interview by the author with Satoru Sonoda (pseudonym) 23 February 2013.

laborers without homes.<sup>51</sup> These barracks were cheaply but skillfully built with pieces of rusted tin or steel patched together.<sup>52</sup> Another singer who launched his career by singing country in “off-limits” areas in this period, Monsieur Kamayatsu, described himself as “a complete day laborer” back then.<sup>53</sup> Kamayatsu often contracted one-day jobs with booking agents called *Tachinbo* (standing boys), who stood on wooden mandarin orange boxes around these warehouses and sought musicians, shouting, “At Atsugi (military camp)! Guitars? Bass? Drums?”<sup>54</sup> As soon as musicians and agents reached an agreement, US Weapons Carriers carried them” to totally strange and mysterious nightclubs for GIs,” a frontier where anything was possible and where they would run as fast as they could to embrace “freedom” from what their polite society expected them to be.<sup>55</sup>

Items and people not easily found in Japanese “polite society” surrounded musical labor in the nightclubs. Kosaka’s description of bus rides to GI clubs helps to elaborate the unruly but colorful ambience of these commutes. Japanese prostitutes who drank with GIs jostled to squeeze onto the bus, complaining, “What is this instrument? Why don’t you organize them? They are getting in our way!” Once the bus started, GIs and these Japanese women passed whisky bottles around. Sometimes a GI borrowed a guitar from Kosaka’s band and sang. Drinking liquor, GIs would stop the bus to get more booze. Kosaka remembers black soldiers liked *Akadama* port wine. When empty bottles with the logo of a red round mark scattered on the bus floor, black soldiers would shout “Akadaama Akadaama.”<sup>56</sup> Laughter, coquettish voices, loud singing of Japanese prostitutes, African American soldiers and other GIs filled the bus. Just by commuting to the venue, these young Japanese country musicians were already rebelling against Japanese polite society.

Finally, Japanese musicians learned basic musical styles through the Far East Network. In turn, country music styles in this period helped Japanese musicians to critique the conventional popular music of their peers. While the Western Ramblers found initial success playing western swing, which was heavily influenced by big-band style jazz, they later joined other musicians in playing in the style of honky-tonk. Honky-tonk often consisted of three chords (1, 4, and 5) played by three to four members in the band. Kamayatsu, whose father was a jazz singer and teacher throughout his childhood, grew up listening to big-band jazz.<sup>57</sup> But for young Kamayatsu, “jazz was too upscale for a music apprentice like me.”<sup>58</sup> Meanwhile, Kamayatsu and other young fellow musicians could learn country songs just by listening to the radio. If they learned three chords, they could pick up their guitars and join a band.

These upper- and upper-middle class musicians used their performances for GIs and US-operated radio stations to articulate a new male image that differed from both familial and

51. Mickey Curtis, *Ore to sensō to ongaku to* [Music, War, and Myself] (Tokyo: Aki shobō, 2012), 97.

52. Kosaka, *Meido*, 99.

53. Monsieur Kamayatsu, *Musshu!* [Monsieur!], 36–37.

54. Curtis, *Ore*, 96; Kosaka, *Meido*, 100; Kamayatsu, *Musshu!*, 36–37.

55. Kamayatsu, *Musshu!* 36–37.

56. Kosaka, *Meido*, 102–103.

57. Kamayatsu, *Musshu!*, 28–30.

58. Kamayatsu, *Musshu!*, 34.

societal expectations. Keiichi Teramoto, for example, another singer of American country music in Japan, dropped out of a prestigious private high school, Keio Gijyuku, in Tokyo because he skipped classes in favor of playing country music for GIs.<sup>59</sup> Ironically, then, in a post-war frontier seemingly feminized and controlled by the US, these upper- and upper-middle class youth could reinterpret country music from below. But rather than worshipping the US, they took advantage of their class status to become outlaws, performing music for lower-ranked GIs and in critical defiance of Japanese polite society.

## CONCLUSION

Monsieur Kamayatsu, in his later years, claimed “country and western was like indie rock music in contemporary terms for us young boys back then.”<sup>60</sup> And in fact, Kamayatsu’s peer, Kazuya Kosaka, had enough followers to become a star by 1954. While a handful of adults still criticized him “an *après* singer,”<sup>61</sup> Kosaka’s outlaw image as a prep school dropout captured the hearts of many young ladies, who found his transgressions sexually appealing and his upbringing approachable. Like Miki with the Western Ramblers before him, Kosaka filled the gap of musical taste between the elite and the popular. As the disc jockey Akinobu Kamebuchi remembers, country music was “a foreign culture with new taste” that “youngsters were crazy about.”<sup>62</sup> It was different from the jazz and Latin music that the adults were attracted to. Kameguchi notes that country songs had “guitars with a good beat, fiddle that made us want to dance, and the sweet sound of steel guitars.” The singers’ simple voice and yodeling was amusing to imitate. For Kameguchi, country had pleasing tempos, urban ambience, and yet was filled with melancholy.<sup>63</sup> It seems that these youngsters found both grievance and excitement on the new frontier of a defeated Japan.

After defeat in 1945 and until the mid-1950s, country musicians in Japan played to these ambivalent feelings. Rather than sobbing, they chose to laugh in front of a loud audience. By playing a genre that only lower-ranked white American soldiers seemed to enjoy, they disguised their upper- and upper-middle class upbringing and critiqued mainstream society. Country music was a pathway for them to experience an America that they admiringly witnessed in the military bases. But at the same time, it permitted them to be outlaws from conventional Japanese society. By taking advantage of their class status, they attempted to embody alternative masculinities—the hobo, the cowboy, the rambler—that set them apart from the respectable male image that society imposed on them.

By 1956, Kosaka had put away his cowboy outfits to record repertoires sung by Elvis Presley, who had been introduced as a new country & western star at the time.<sup>64</sup> The young

59. Kosaka, *Meido*, 115; Curtis, *Ore*, 90–92; Keiichi Teramoto, *Kantori myūjikkū hitosuji: Teramoto Keiichi ga kataru ongaku to jinsei* [Devoted to Country Music: Music and Life Narrated by Teramoto Keiichi] (Kamakura: Kamakura shuppan, 2010), 32–47.

60. Kamayatsu, *Musshu!*, 33.

61. Kosaka, *Meido*, 236.

62. Akinobu Kamebuchi, *Kameguchi Akinobu no rokkun roru den: Bitoruzu izen jūrokusai no boku wa dōnatsu ban ni koi wo shita* [Rock and Roll Legacy by Akinobu Kamebuchi: My 16-year-old Self Fell in Love with 45 rpm Before the Beatles] (Tokyo: Yamaha Music Media, 2011), 92.

63. *Ibid.*, 93.

64. Takatada Ihara, “Uesutan kashu den 4” [the Legacy of Western Singer no. 4], *Music Life* July, 1956, 35.

country musicians mentioned in this paper, Kamayastu, Teramoto and Curtis, all followed him to create a rockabilly boom, which in turn became a harbinger of rock normalcy in Japanese popular music. Thus, country musicians in the immediate post-war period did not simply represent a “colonized state of mind” in the face of the US. They were active agents who used “new” kinds of American popular music to propose an alternative male image to the mainstream. But perhaps, these men needed to do so because western-themed songs by female singers gained so much popularity in this period as well.<sup>65</sup> From here, it will be necessary to study the role of women in country music in Japan in this particular period. Doing so, I believe, will allow for a better understanding of alternative female images that differed from submissive geishas and prostitutes, as well as the ways in which they threatened male privilege in Japanese popular music. ■

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65. “Tennessee Waltz” by Chiemi Eri, “Botan to ribon” [Buttons and Bows] by Mariko Ike and “Koshinuke nicho kenju” [Coward’s Two Guns] by Yukiko Todoroki gained tremendous popularity. Komota argues that the hits by Ike represented the Japanese “colonized mind” during this time. Komota, *Shimban nihon*, 72. Tompkins argues that westerns in the late nineteenth century represented the male defense of their masculinity in a Victorian culture that supported female domesticity and emotions. I believe this idea can be extended to the popularity of westerns in Japan’s immediate post-war years to understand gender boundaries in this period. Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 23–46.

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