

TAKARAZUKA

Sexual Politics
and Popular Culture
in Modern Japan

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Introduction

Spectators come to the theater to hear the subtext. They can read the text at home.

Konstantin Stanislavski,
quoted in Moore 1988 (1960):28

When [Takarazuka] "stars" embody song-and-dance artifacts from America, they preserve the surface but change the context. . . . Old schmaltz become new and transcends its banality. . . . You don't notice the spin you spin with. You can only see theirs. They can only see yours.

Carr 1989:48

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

I first saw them on Japanese television in 1976: tall, handsome women with short, slick hair and husky voices—cool, confident, and dashing in their chic suits.¹ They were the players of men's roles in the all-female Takarazuka Revue (figure 1). Intrigued by these most unsterotypical women, I began to collect sundry information on Takarazuka and its cross-dressed stars, and gradually, I became aware of the high profile the Revue had occupied in Japanese popular culture ever since its inaugural performance in 1914. Revue posters brighten the interiors of trains and railroad stations; its shows and stars are featured in popular magazines; the splashy trailers for the latest Takarazuka spectacle appear regularly on television; and the actors are frequent guests on talk and game shows.

The Golden Wings (*Habatake ōgon no tsubasa yo*) was my initiation into the rococo world of the Takarazuka Revue. The musical opened in Tokyo in April 1985, after a two-month run at the Revue's home theater in Takarazuka city near Osaka. It was billed as the "sayonara performance" of Asami Rei, a leading "man" who was retiring that month after fifteen years with the company to pursue a career in the wider world of show business. Set in northern Italy in the thirteenth century, *The Golden Wings* revolves around the antics of a ruthless lord,



Figure 1. Takarazuka today: The Snow Troupe in the finale of *La Passion* (*Ra passhon*, 1989). The beplumed cast—the leading actors are wearing white—stand in front of and on the Revue’s trademark giant, illuminated staircase. From Hashimoto (1994:138).

Vittorio Ala d’Oro, “who is in truth a peace-loving man” (*Habatake ōgon no tsubasa yo*, 1985:49). He forces his deceased rival’s daughter Clarice into marriage and then attempts to seduce (or rape?) her on their wedding night—earlier that day, she had tried to stab him. The seduction scene was executed onstage in a bizarre way: as Vittorio climbed into Clarice’s canopy bed, the stage blackened and an illuminated, rotating mirror ball splattered the audience with colorful dots. As the dots swirled around the auditorium, the anxious woman’s feverish thoughts were “heard” over the loudspeakers: “Stop it! Stop it! I don’t want to think about anything anymore. I don’t want to feel anything. . . . Ahh, that’s so cool and nice. Someone’s cool hands are gently caressing my forehead. Who is it? Whose are they, those gentle hands” (38). A frisson pulsed through the audience. Clarice subsequently falls in love with Vittorio, and, dodging assassination attempts and other nefarious intrigues, they live happily ever after (figure 2).

I was hooked—not by the retrograde, if steamy, sexual politics of



Figure 2. *The Golden Wings*. Asami Rei as Vittorio Ala d'Oro and Ichiro Maki as Clarice. From Hashimoto (1994:130).

the story, but by the mostly female audience whose intense absorption in the wrenching action onstage made the auditorium sizzle with eroticized energy. During the intermission, I chatted with the "old girl" fans sitting next to me and exchanged comments with other spectators milling about the refreshment stands, all of whom had expert

opinions about Asami Rei, *The Golden Wings*, and the Revue in general. I bought all the official fan magazines and photograph albums on display in the main lobby, and after the show, I tucked myself into the crowd of fans waiting for their favorite actors to emerge from the dressing room before vanishing into the mysterious night. My first impressions of the Takarazuka Revue convinced me that there was a very interesting story to be found behind the glitter in the complex relationships interweaving the actors, the fans, the administration, and other parties, including media critics. An exploration and analysis of these intricate relationships forms one of the repeating, looping themes of my book, which is thus not a sustained piece of theater criticism.

In the following brief history of the Takarazuka Revue I emphasize those features central to my general subject of sexual politics and popular culture in modern Japan. This introduction to the theater frames and contextualizes a summary of the chapters.

REVIEWING THE REVUE

The all-female Takarazuka Revue (Takarazuka kagekidan) was founded in 1913 in the hot springs resort of Takarazuka by Kobayashi Ichizō (1873–1957), the Hankyū railroad and department store tycoon, impresario, and two-time cabinet minister.² Kobayashi was motivated to create an all-female revue in part as a novel solution to his financial woes. Two years earlier in the village of Takarazuka, west of Osaka, he had opened and then quickly closed a spa that included Japan's first indoor swimming pool. He was keen to develop the area to increase traffic on the new railroad line he had established. The spa, a Victorian-orientalist structure named Paradise (Paradaisu), attracted few guests. Kobayashi's failure to proscribe mixed bathing and the lack of heaters to warm the icy water contributed to its lack of success. Following the precedent set by the Mitsukoshi Dry Goods Store (now Department Store) in Osaka, which had established a Western-style band of boy sopranos and instrumentalists in 1911 to entertain customers, Kobayashi recruited twenty girls, trained them to sing and dance, gave them each a stage name, and scheduled their first public performance in April 1914 (Kobayashi 1961b:445–52).³ Converting the pool into the Paradise Theater "made good business sense," and the Revue was promoted as "wholesome family entertainment." Origi-

nally called the Takarazuka Choir (Takarazuka shōkantai), Kobayashi changed the name within five months to the Takarazuka Girls' Opera Training Association (Takarazuka shōjokageki yōseikai).⁴ This modification, and specifically the addition of *shōjo* (girl), set the enduring public image of the Revue, even though *shōjo* was removed when the name was changed one last time in 1940. Since the 1920s, the Revue's actors have been called "Takarasiennes" (*Takarajiennu*), after Parisiennes, in recognition of the early influence of the French revue. They include *otokoyaku*, who play the roles of men, and *musumeyaku*, who play the roles of women. Approximately 700 people at present enable Takarazuka to function. These include 350–400 performers and 300 specialists, including producers, directors, writers, costumers, set designers, instructors, and two thirty-five-piece orchestras.

The 3,000-seat Takarazuka Grand Theater was completed in 1924, the largest Japanese theater of its kind at the time.⁵ It remains one component of an expansive entertainment complex—the name was changed from Paradise to Familyland (Fuamirirando) in 1960—that comprises a library, theater arts museum, botanical garden, entomology museum, amusement park, and zoo noted for its white tiger, together with the spa. A similarly large theater was opened in Tokyo in 1934. In 1919 Kobayashi established the forerunner of the present-day Takarazuka Music Academy. Originally an integral part of the Revue, whose actors were Academy students, the two were divided into autonomous institutions in 1939. Kobayashi required that all Takarasiennes must be graduates of the two-year Academy.⁶ Today, with two huge theaters in Takarazuka and Tokyo and regularly scheduled regional and international tours, not to mention television and radio broadcasts, the Revue remains one of the most widely recognized and watched of the so-called theaters for the masses (*taishū engeki*) that were created in the early twentieth century.

The widespread popularity and social impact of the Revue is evident in the hundreds of articles that have appeared in a wide range of publications since its founding. Kobayashi, with his entrepreneurial zeal, and the flashy revue theaters that mushroomed in the late teens and early 1920s in Japan were representative of the volatile, Janus-faced culture of consumption described so richly by Edward Seidensticker (1990) and Miriam Silverberg (1990, 1991, 1992, 1993). The emergence of "a middle-class culture organized around new conceptions of family life and leisure activities" clashed with the ex-

pansion and politicization of the Japanese industrial workforce (Silverberg 1990:225; see also Gordon 1991). My focus will be the ambivalence that characterized the discourse of gender and sexuality then and continues to the present day, revealed in public debates about the meaning and significance of women—as revue actors, as fans, as delinquents, as wives and mothers, as workers, as consumers.

Takarazuka spawned over a dozen copycat all-female revues in the 1920s, as reported in the mainstream press (“Karakuri no ōi shōjokagekidan” 1925; “Nisemono Takarazuka kageki” 1923). The Tokyo Girls’ Revue (Tōkyō shōjokagekidan), established in 1917, was modeled after Takarazuka and plagiarized from the premier revue (Ōzasa 1986:73; Aoyagi 1924:26–28). Most notable was the Shōchiku Revue founded in 1928 in Asakusa, a major working-class theater district in Tokyo, which quickly became Takarazuka’s main rival in every respect. An Osaka branch of the Shōchiku Revue had been founded eight years earlier in 1920 to compete with Takarazuka on the older troupe’s home turf; it broke with the Tokyo company after World War II. Both were formally disbanded in 1990, although special performances are scheduled occasionally.⁷ From the start, the Shōchiku Revue was cast as the opposite of Takarazuka. For example, while Takarazuka productions were stereotyped as naive and romantic, the Shōchiku actors performed allegedly more mature and erotic revues. Fans partial to one revue rarely attended performances staged by the rival troupe. Moreover, after the Tokyo Takarazuka Theater was established in 1934, their regional and class distinctions were emphasized. Takarazuka was cast as an “uptown” theater attractive to girls from wealthy households, and Shōchiku as a “lowtown” theater appealing to a blue-collar clientele. Other, much smaller, Tokyo revues included the Casino Follies (opened in 1929) in Asakusa and the Moulin Rouge (opened in 1931) in Shinjuku, a student and intellectual center at the time (see Seidensticker 1990:68–87). The Nichigeki Dancing Team was established under Shōchiku’s auspices in 1936 as a revue more overtly erotic than either Shōchiku or Takarazuka (“Adeyū NDT ‘hanseiki’” 1977). These theaters and cabarets, along with cafés and coffee shops, were known generically as “revues,” although theater critics drew distinctions between grand revues, operetta revues, variety shows, and grand operettas (Ashihara E. 1936:6). Practically speaking, the Takarazuka Revue was an eclectic mix of all these types.

Takarazuka productions include Japanese-style classical dramas and historical subjects, such as the *Tale of Genji*; European-style and Broadway-based performances, such as *Mon Paris* and *West Side Story*; and folk dances from all over the world. Kobayashi, a prolific essayist, wrote many of the earliest scripts under the pen name Ikeda Hatao. The first stage shows were based on folktales and children's stories, and reviewers found them to be above all "cute" (*kawaii*) (e.g., Nishimura 1916). Within five years, Takarazuka was producing more mature musicals with a romantic twist. *Parisette*, staged in 1930, a year after the first Western talkie was shown in Japan,⁸ marked the Revue's transition to a modern and erotic style that, with the exception of the martial dramas of the late 1930s and early 1940s, has persisted to the present day. From this production onward, the actors ceased to apply the traditional whiteface (*oshiroi*), wearing instead modern greasepaint that accentuated their own features, distinguished skin colors, and demarcated more clearly a character's gender and ethnicity (figure 3). Most Takarazuka performances today consist of a musical drama, followed by a revue with quick changes of scene and subject, and ending in a finale featuring the Revue's trademark—the entire cast cascades down a giant illuminated staircase in glittering tuxedos and gowns, from which sprout huge ostrich plumes, for a final bow (see figure 1). Generally speaking, with the exception of wartime revues, contemporary Japan and Japanese were not and are not now represented on the Takarazuka stage, which instead offers audiences a chance to dream of other lives in other worlds.

THE CALL OF DUTY

The Takarazuka Revue was among the modern theaters that marked the return of women to a major public stage after being banned from public (i.e., Kabuki) performances in 1629 by the Confucian-oriented Tokugawa Shogunate.⁹ At the time the Revue was founded, actresses (*joyū*) were still publicly denounced as "defiled women" who led profligate lives. For example, Mori Ritsuko (1890–1961), one of the best known Shinpa (New School) actresses, was erased from the graduation register of the girls' school she had attended when the administrators discovered that she had pursued a career in theater (Ozaki 1986:14–15).¹⁰ Theater critics proclaimed the new coinage *joyū*, with its connotations of superiority and excellence, preferable to the older



Figure 3. The early Revue with and without whiteface. *Right*, a scene from *Five Daughters* (*Gonin musume*, 1920) with the childlike actors in whiteface. *Opposite*, in 1930 the application of whiteface was discontinued, and the Revue's cast appeared more adult, as evident in the scene from *Rosarita* (*Rosariita*, 1936). From *The Takarazuka: Takarazuka kageki 8oshūnen kinen* (1994:84) and Hagiwara (1954:13).

term *onnayakusha*, with its historical connotations of itinerant actresses who were associated with unlicensed prostitution (Asagawa 1921). It seems that Kobayashi founded the Takarazuka Music Academy not only to train students in the Western and Japanese theatrical arts, but also to reassure parents that their daughters were under the constant supervision of Academy officials who took responsibility for preventing the young women from falling into a decadent lifestyle (see his essay on the lifestyle of actresses in Kobayashi 1961a:370–73).

The Academy solicits applications from females between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four. Although those in the first group of performers were barely in their teens, the average age of entry-level students was soon increased and today most applicants are nineteen years old. As required, they are either junior high or high school graduates, or they are enrolled in high school. Academy officials continue to claim that the young women are from “good families,” and although detailed information about their socioeconomic status is kept confidential, “good” is widely understood as “affluent.” Students and Academy of-



ficials alike acknowledge that without the generous support of their parents, the aspiring Takarasiennes would be unable to attend the private singing and dance lessons necessary to keep them competitive.¹¹ According to statistical data provided to me by the principal's office, 75 percent of the students recruited between 1983 and 1987 reside in Tokyo, Osaka, and Hyōgo prefectures. That percentage has shrunk to about 50 percent today (*Fushigi no kuni no Takarazuka* 1993:101). Graduation from the Academy marks a Takarasienne's public debut as a specialist in one gender and enables her to perform onstage as a bona fide member of one of the five troupes constituting the Revue.

The five troupes are Flower (*hana*), Moon (*tsuki*), Snow (*yuki*), Star (*hoshi*), and Sky (*sora*). The Flower and Moon Troupes, established in 1921, are the oldest. The Snow Troupe was formed in 1924, and the Star Troupe in 1933. Each of these troupes possesses a distinctive character: the Flower Troupe is known for its florid but elegant style; the Moon Troupe for its exquisite charm; the Snow Troupe for its restrained grace; and the Star Troupe for its showiness (Hashimoto 1984:48; Ta-

kagi Shimei 1976:65–67). Dividing the actors into troupes and sometimes rotating them helped organize the growing number of applicants and meet the growing demand for Takarazuka performances.¹² This demand prompted the company to create a fifth troupe, whose name, Sky (*sora*), was selected from those submitted in a public competition in the fall of 1996. The new troupe debuted in Hong Kong in January 1998 and in March at the main theater. A third Takarazuka Theater is reportedly under construction near Tokyo Disneyland, and the art deco Tokyo Takarazuka Theater will be replaced by a futuristic high rise scheduled to open in January 2001 (“Takarazuka ni dai 5 no kumi” 1997; “Takarazuka to Get New Tokyo Theater” 1996).¹³

Each troupe is overseen by a (male) member of the Revue administration appointed to that post. The internal hierarchy consists of a troupe manager (*kumichō*) and a vice-manager (*fukukumichō*), drawn from the ranks of the senior actors, and several chairpersons (*zachō*) who include the leading romantic man (*nimaimē*),¹⁴ the leading woman (*musumeyaku*), the leading comic man (*sanmaimē*), and the supporting actors (*wakiyaku*). Each troupe has a leading man and woman, often paired as a “golden combination” (*goruden combi*), making it easier to satisfy more fans and their diverse tastes than if only one leading star or couple represented the Revue as a whole.

The Takarazuka Music Academy presently provides a two-year curriculum designed to teach the students ensemble playing and to equip them with the skills necessary to play a variety of roles. Forty hours a week during the first year are devoted to lessons in voice, musical instruments, music history, Japanese, Western, and modern dance, acting and theater theory, cultural history, and etiquette. The second-year curriculum is essentially the same (Ueda 1986 [1976]:48). During a three-month-long field trip in 1987, I was invited to attend several classes and to join the students for their weekly tea ceremony lesson at a nearby tea house. The young women are also drilled in the proper manner of walking and bowing by local Self-Defense Force personnel, whose presence helps clinch the overwhelmingly martial tenor of everyday life in the Academy.

The Academy, widely acknowledged as one of the best performing arts schools in Japan, is very competitive: of the 734 applicants in 1985, only 42 (or one in 17.5) were accepted. Since then, the number of applications has nearly tripled; consequently, the chance of acceptance was far lower in 1993, when 1,839 young women applied for

40 openings—one place for every 46 applicants (*Fushigi no kuni no Takarazuka* 1993:102). Aspiring students are judged on the basis of their overall physique and musical talents, in addition to their academic achievements. Rumors that some parents buy their daughter's enrollment are commonplace. The annual tuition averages nearly 300,000 yen (about \$3,000 at the current exchange rate), and the students must themselves purchase the school's gray, military-style uniform (Ueda 1986 [1976]:33). The switch from *hakama*, Japanese formal wear, to Western, military-style outfits was made in 1939.

Most of the students live with one or two roommates in the Violet (*sumire*) Dormitories,¹⁵ where the administration seeks to socialize the young women into a life of discipline and hierarchical relationships. All of the residents are required to clean the dorms, but the first-year or junior (*kōhai*) students are also responsible for cleaning the classrooms and rehearsal studios under the watchful eyes of the second-year or senior (*senpai*) students. The cleaning is done by hand without the benefit of vacuum cleaners, for Academy officials are convinced that a labor-intensive cleaning regimen builds character, ensures humility, and boosts stamina in their young charges.¹⁶ The junior-senior relationships formed at this time are maintained throughout and even beyond the young women's tenure in the Takarazuka Revue. A 10:00 P.M. curfew is strictly maintained, and first-year students are not allowed to venture outside the campus itself. Males are scrupulously forbidden from the premises with the exception of fathers and brothers, who, like all guests, are limited to the lobbies (Ueda 1986 [1976]:118–19). Although the attrition rate is not publicized, a number of students drop out midway through the spartan regimen. Many of the young women continue to live in the dormitory after they join the Revue proper, although some—leading Takarasiennes in particular—are able to maintain their own apartments and houses, sometimes with the financial support of affluent fans.

GENDERING PERFORMANCE

Upon their successful application to the Takarazuka Music Academy, the student actors are assigned what I refer to as their "secondary" genders. Unlike "primary" gender, which is assigned at birth on the basis of an infant's genitalia, secondary gender is based on both physical (but not genital) and sociopsychological criteria: namely, height,

physique, facial shape, voice, personality, and, to a certain extent, personal preference. Secondary gender attributes or markers are premised on contrastive gender stereotypes themselves; for example, men ideally should be taller than women; should have a longer, more rectangular face, a broader forehead, thicker eyebrows and lips, a higher bridged nose, darker skin, straighter shoulders, narrower hips, and a lower voice than women; and should exude charisma (*ko-sei*), which is disparaged in women. The assignment of gender involves the selection and cosmetic exaggeration of perceived nongenital physical differences between females and males, and it reinforces socially prescribed behavioral differences. An actor's inherited features became especially central to the process of gender assignment with the shift in 1930 from the traditional whiteface to modern greasepaint. Ironically, in the Takarazuka Revue, gender(ed) differences that are popularly perceived as inherent in female and male bodies are embodied by females alone. Personal motivations and desires aside, both *musumeyaku* and *otokoyaku* are products of a dominant social ideology that privileges masculinity and men.

The femininity embodied and enacted by the player of women's roles serves as a foil for the masculinity of the player of men's roles.¹⁷ Much of the training of the Revue actors focuses on learning *kata*, which refers collectively to technologies of gender, including form, posture, sign, code, gesture, and choreography. The *kata* learned by the Takarasiennes specifically involve stylized gestures, movements, intonations, and speech patterns that signify gender. A player of men's roles, for example, must stride forthrightly across the stage, her arms held stiffly away from her body, her fingers curled around her thumbs to form a fist. Her arm and hand gestures are expansive and bold; when she stands still, her legs are apart, with feet firmly planted and pelvis pushed slightly forward, Elvis style. Trousers, which are pulled over an *otokoyaku*'s elevator boots with cuff straps, help accentuate the length of her legs. In contrast, a player of women's roles pivots her forearms from the elbows, which are kept pinned against her side, constraining her freedom of movement and consequently making her appear more "feminine." The *otokoyaku* are actively encouraged to study the behavior and actions, or *kata*, of male celebrities in order to more effectively represent ideal men onstage, be they samurai or cowboys. Among the popular Japanese and foreign stars whose acting style is emulated are Ishihara Yūjirō, Ichikawa Ennosuke, Hasegawa Ichio,

Alain Delon, Maurice Chevalier, Clark Gable, James Dean, Elvis Presley, Marlon Brando, and Jack Nicholson.

Masculinity *kata* comprise attributes that may be grouped into three basic categories: physical appearance, voice and gesture, and temperament. In addition to the physical characteristics influencing her secondary-gender attribution, an actor's natural endowments are often augmented with the liberal use of makeup and hairpieces. Until Kadota Ashiko cut off her hair in 1932, *otokoyaku* either pulled their hair back into a flat chignon or stuffed it into hats but not wigs, which were deemed "too realistic" ("Takarazuka ihen" 1932). Kadota was possibly imitating the Shōchiku Revue's leading *otokoyaku*, Mizunoe Takiko, better known as Tākii, although "Modern Girls" (*modan gāru*, or *moga*) had sported short hair since the 1920s (Bollinger 1994; Silverberg 1991). Before then, short hair announced a woman's withdrawal from secular and sexual affairs; the *moga* turned hair symbolism on its head, and short hair became the hallmark of the extroverted, maverick, sexually active woman. Ever since Kadota's act, short hair, often peroxided in recent years, has remained an essential component of masculinity *kata*. A student assigned to specialize in men's roles is required to cut her hair short by the end of her first semester at the Academy. All other junior students are required to wear their hair in shoulder-length braids, until ordered to do otherwise.

Only since the premier production of *Gone with the Wind* in 1977 have leading *otokoyaku* also added mustaches and beards to their *kata*—previously, only minor characters sometimes had facial hair. In fact, Haruna Yuri, who was the first to play Rhett Butler in 1977, caused a stir when she wore her mustache offstage during the play's months-long run, ostensibly to feel more "natural" and convincing in the role (Haruna 1979:78; Hashimoto 1984:92; "Kaze to tomo ni hige ka" 1977). Clothing *kata* run the gamut from the chic kimono of an Edo-period dandy to the blue jeans of a *West Side Story* delinquent, to the boas and sequined tuxedos associated with Liberace. Yellows, browns, blues, greens, and black are considered appropriate *otokoyaku* colors; pink is the paramount color for *musumeyaku*. A white outfit denotes the star of the show (Ueda 1974:97–99).

Many *otokoyaku* have naturally low—as opposed to a *musumeyaku*'s unnaturally high—voices, although others "crush" (*tsubusu*) theirs, often by chain-smoking, to attain the requisite huskiness. Breathing must be from the stomach and not the chest. Speech *kata* include the

use of *boku*, a masculine self-referent, and the masculine *nu* (as opposed to the feminine *wa*) in the sentence-final position (Ueda 1974:62). Each Takarazuka man creates a distinct charismatic persona, amplifying and extending her individuality through her expert interpretation, combination, and manipulation of masculinity *kata* (see Robertson 1987; see also Yano 1995). She does not merely imitate or mimic actual males. Fans describe an *otokoyaku* whose masculine posturing is especially compelling as *kizatte-iru*, or "camping it up"; here "camp" is defined in a serious sense as "actions and gestures of exaggerated emphasis," rather than as a system of humor (Meyer 1994b:75; Newton 1972:107; Tanabe and Sasaki 1983:135).¹⁸

NOMENCLATURE

Kobayashi conceived of Takarazuka as Kabuki's complement but not its equal in historical prestige. The asymmetrical relationship between the two same-sex theaters is evident in their respective nomenclature. The Kabuki player of women's roles, or *onnagata*, is regarded as an exemplary model (*kata*) of "female" (*onna*) gender, and actual women have been encouraged to emulate the feminine mannerisms of the male actor (figure 4). Neither *otokoyaku* nor *musumeyaku* are terms used in the Kabuki theater. *Yaku*, unlike *kata*, connotes serviceability and dutifulness. An *otokoyaku* thus is an actor whose theatrical duty is to showcase masculinity; she is not, however, promoted as a model for males offstage to imitate.

Kobayashi resorted to the terminology of kinship in naming the Takarazuka player of women's roles *musume*, or "daughter," instead of *onna*, or "woman." The conflation of gender and kinship attribution in the vocabulary of the Takarazuka Revue reflects their mutual construction: "Neither can be treated as analytically prior to the other, because they are realized together in particular cultural, economic, and political systems" (Collier and Yanagisako 1987:7). Kobayashi's choice of nomenclature was informed by the Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*) model of female subjectivity and femininity codified in the Meiji Civil Code (operative from 1898 to 1947), as well as by the primacy of the patriarchal, conjugal household. Females acting on their own behalf outside of the household were regarded by the state as socially disruptive and dangerously anomalous¹⁹—social disorder,



Figure 4. Kabuki *onnagata*. Hanayagi Shōtarō in the role of a young woman. From *Engei Gahō* (1942:n.p.).

in other words, was a “woman problem” (Nolte 1983:3). Note, in this connection, that *Good Husband, Wise Father* was never employed as a trope for social order, nor was social disorder ever linked to a “man problem.” The public vocation of the actor, however, reversed the usual association of females with the private domain; consequently, distinctions between “private” and “public” were neither incumbent upon nor possible for Takarasiennes. As Juliet Blair has pointed out, “One result of this is that although [the actor] is aware of the dominant rules governing the society of which her small dramatic world is a part, her experience permits her to fuse the value-systems, and to

bring the . . . private interpersonal sphere of women in the home into the light of public scrutiny" (1981:205). The fusion was manipulated in a number of ways. Whereas Kobayashi sought to use the actor as a vehicle for introducing the artistry of the theater into the home (Kobayashi 1961b:460, 499, 509–10), some Takarasiennes and their fans used the theater as a starting point for an opposing strategy, rejecting gender roles associated with the patriarchal household and constructing alternative styles or modes of sexuality.

Kobayashi tempered the revolutionary potential of the actor by denying them maturity. Whether Academy students or Revue actors, all Takarasiennes continue to be referred to as students (*seito*), partly to create an aura of innocence and amateurism to minimize the distance between stage and spectator, and partly to keep their wages low relative to those of professional actors.²⁰ More important, he relegated the players of women's roles to the status of daughter, with its attendant connotations of filial piety, youthfulness, pedigree, virginity, and being unmarried. These were precisely the characteristics that Kobayashi sought in the young recruits and that marked the makings of a Good Wife, Wise Mother. To clinch the filial and paternal symbolism, he encouraged all Takarasiennes to call him Father (*otōsan*) and regarded them as members of his extended family. Gender assignment notwithstanding, all the actors thereby were daughters. Many Takarasiennes and their fans eventually appropriated kinship terminology, effectively subverting Father's filial symbolism and asserting their own.

The deployment of kinship terminology in the Takarazuka Revue recalls the parent- (father-)child (*oyabun-kobun*) type of group formation, whereby a patriarch controls a tightly knit, hierarchical following of "children"—in this case, daughters. When kinship terminology is used to denote relationships between individual Takarasiennes, it is based both on age or seniority, as "elder sister" (*onēsan* or *ane*) and "younger sister" (*imōto*), and on gender, as "older brother" (*aniki*) and "younger sister," without regard, necessarily, to literal age or seniority. Both sets of kinship terms are applied by Takarasiennes and their fans to identify both homosocial and homosexual relations between females.

The representational inequality between the Kabuki *onnagata* and the Takarazuka *otokoyaku* is paralleled by the inequality between the player of men's roles and the player of women's roles. The naive and

compliant daughter represents not only femininity but also the female subject in a patriarchal society who is excluded from participating in discourses about gender ideology and sexuality. Kobayashi, as the privileged father, invested much energy in advocating arranged marriages both for the 3,000 female clerks employed by Hankyū and for those Takarasiennes scheduled to retire (Kobayashi 1961b:465–67, 531–32; 1962:70–75). Moreover, Kobayashi argued, the *otokoyaku* participates not in the construction of alternative gender roles for females but in the glorification of men and masculinity. He even proclaimed that the *otokoyaku* is more suave, more affectionate, more courageous, more charming, more handsome, and more fascinating than actual males (1961b:467–68). Kobayashi perhaps was implying that “real” (that is, anatomically correct) males need not be suave and charming in the real world, where patriarchal privilege compensates for aesthetic deficiencies.

This introduction to the Takarazuka Revue would not be complete without a brief discussion of the relationship of sex, gender, and sexuality, which sets the stage for an exploration and analysis of the politics of sexuality in modern Japan. Theoretically, the three terms signify different things, although they are often conflated in popular discourse. “Sex,” as I use it here, denotes both a physical act (not limited to heterosexual intercourse) and the physical body distinguished by either “female” or “male” genitalia—or both, to varying degrees, in the case of intersexed persons—and by their usual capabilities, such as menstruation, seminal ejaculation, and orgasm. “Gender” refers to sociocultural and historical conventions of deportment, costume, voice, gesture, and so on, attributed and ascribed to females and males. By the same token, gender stereotypes enable people to perceive otherwise clothed bodies as either “female” or “male,” a practice that has prompted some scholars to refer to gender as “cultural genitals”: “The relationship between cultural genitals and gender attribution is reflexive. The reality of a gender is ‘proved’ by the genital which is attributed, and, at the same time, the attributed genital only has meaning through the socially shared construction of the gender attribution process” (Kessler and McKenna 1985 [1978]:155; see 153–55).

“Sexuality” may overlap with sex and gender, but it pertains specifically to a domain of desire and erotic pleasure more complex and varied than the hegemonic construction of reproductive heterosexuality (see Kessler and McKenna 1985 [1978]:1–12; Vance 1985:9). Sex,

gender, and sexuality may be related but they are not synonymous; the pattern of their articulation is negotiable and negotiated constantly. Although the three may be popularly perceived as irreducibly joined or aligned, such alignment remains a situational and not a permanently fixed condition: "*Man and masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman and feminine* a male body as easily as a female one" (Butler 1990:6; italics in the original).

Among Japanese feminists, and scholars influenced by feminist theory, sex and gender and sexuality have been distinguished in principle since around 1970 (Yuri 1985). Linguistic distinctions in Japanese between sex and gender are created through suffixes. Generally speaking, *sei* is used to denote sex, and *seisei* "sex-ness" (literally, "the sex of sex")—as in *josei* for "female" and *dansei* for "male." Since the *dan* in *dansei* can refer both to male sex and "male" gender, the suffix *sei*, with its allusions to fundamental parts (for example, genitalia), is necessary in order to specifically denote sex. Gender is denoted by the suffix *rashii*, with its allusion to appearance or likeness (*Kōjien* 1978:1214, 2300; Fukutomi 1985; Yasukawa 1989).²¹ A feminine body is *onnarashii*; a masculine body, *otokorashii*.²² The emphasis here is on the proximity of a body to a gender stereotype. When a speaker wishes to draw attention to a body's resemblance to a particular female or male, the term often used is *joseiteki* (like a/that female) or *danseiteki* (like a/that male). The difference between *onnarashii* and *joseiteki*, or *otokorashii* and *danseiteki*, is significant, although each set of terms is often used interchangeably in popular parlance. Further complicating matters is the use of the terms *onna* and *otoko* to refer to both sex and gender, distinguished only by the context.

STATION BREAK

This is the appropriate juncture to address a related issue concerning sex and gender terminology that challenges ostensibly well-meaning but relativistic and reductive notions of cultural encounter and exchange. Persons who are unfamiliar with the intellectual climate and popular culture of twentieth-century Japan might doubt that terms such as "homosexual," "heterosexual," "lesbian," "butch-femme," and so forth can be appropriately applied to Japanese sexual practices, assuming that there must be more "culturally specific" terms. If by culturally specific is meant "Japanese," then yes, of course there are

such terms and I list them below. But just as important, there are historically specific terms as well, and "homosexual" and so forth are among them.²³

Since the turn of the century and even earlier, Japanese pundits have been adept at selectively adapting, for domestic (and often hegemonic) purposes, institutions and terminologies that were devised and first popularized outside of Japan. With respect to sexological terms, Euro-American loanwords and Japanese neologisms rapidly made their way into professional and lay parlance alike. They can be found in a wide range of printed sources, including translations of foreign texts; moreover, there are many dictionaries devoted to introducing and defining such words. Loanwords and Japanese social scientific neologisms that became household words in the early 1900s included *fuan* (fan); *rabu retā* (love letter); *rezubian* (lesbian); *dōseiai*, for "homosexuality" (also referred to as *homosekushuaru*); and *iseiai*, for "heterosexuality" (also *heterosekushuaru*). Other loanwords referring to sexual practices that were introduced at this time included sapphism (*saffuo*), tribadism (*tsuribadeizumu*), and uranism (*uranizumu*) (e.g., Hayashi 1926; Kuwatani 1911; Ōzumi 1931).

Obviously, social and sexual practices labeled and categorized in the "feudal" Edo period were followed and perceived differently in the early twentieth century when the country was embarked on a course of modernization, industrialization, and selective Westernization (see Gluck 1985; Roden 1990; Robertson 1992c; Westney 1987). In fact, a new interpretation of sexual relations between females prompted the introduction of the term *dōseiai* at the turn of this century to distinguish such activities from those of males, although before long the neologism became a standard word for homosexuality in general regardless of the sex of the individuals involved (Furukawa 1994:115; see also chapter 2). Among the "indigenous" terms past and present for lesbians are *tachi* (an abbreviation of *tachiyaku*, or "leading man," similar in meaning to "butch"), *neko* ("cat," similar in meaning to "femme"), *onēsama* (older sister), *imōto* (younger sister), *join* (female licentiousness), *joshoku* (female eroticism), *gōin* (joint licentiousness), *tomogui* (eat each other), *shirojiri* ("pure white," with etymological implications of falseness and feigned ignorance), and *kaiawase* (matching shells) (Sugahara 1971:4–5). In the 1910s, words for lesbians were distinguished by girls' school: *ome* (male-female couple) was used at prefectural schools,²⁴ *odeya* (lover) at private schools,

onetsu (fever) at Ochanomizu, *ohakarai* (your own discretion) at Gakushūin, and *oshinyū* (best friend) at Atsumi (Kuwatani 1911:35). Japanese lesbian feminists today translate “butch” and “femme” as *tachi* and *neko*, and they often use the loanwords *butchi* and *fuemu* (Mizukawa 1987:23). Another current Japanese term for “butch” is *onabe*, or “shallow pot,” which is a play on *okama*, or “deep pot,” a slang word for a feminine or “passive” gay male.

For Japanese social scientists and critics, the imported terms *homosexual* and *heterosexual* helped explain historical phenomena in a new way and make sense of new categories of phenomena, such as “female” psychology, neurasthenia, and fandom. Like all other methods of classification and analysis, these terms and their definitions both opened up some new insights and closed off others. Although they are not exhaustive, the sources in my bibliography attest to the compelling interest in Japan in sexual psychology (see Frühstück 1996a, 1996b). The works of Freud, Krafft-Ebing, Carpenter, Ellis, Hirschfeld, Weininger, and others were imported directly to Japan; they were translated, often by Japanese scholars who had studied abroad, and employed immediately in the identification of social problems and their analysis and resolution, exercises in which the state became increasingly invested (see Frühstück 1996b; Furukawa 1994). I was interested to find a number of these sexological treatises in the archives of the Takarazuka Revue.

Thus my use of terms, including *homosexual* and *heterosexual*, patently is culturally and historically specific, and I am attentive to the particular ways in which they were interpreted and employed in Japan. I am also perhaps more critical than many of their Japanese users past and present of the binarist readings they could impose on the sexual practices of Japanese (and others), which are not easily containable by dichotomous categories.

PREVIEWING THE BOOK

The question of how modern Japanese reflexively create a sense of themselves as female or male, or both, as well as how some of them attribute maleness and femaleness to others, is one of the underlying themes of this book. It is also central to the discourse of national cultural identity in Japan. The Takarazuka Revue lends itself to an exploration of this discourse: it is simultaneously a popular and mass

cultural formation, a contested icon of modernity, and a site of struggle over the relationship of sex, gender, and sexuality. In chapter 1, I juxtapose current theoretical approaches to popular and mass culture with the terms and definitions developed and used by Japanese scholars and critics. One of the questions I explore is how these theories and definitions actually constituted the cultural debates in modern Japan in which Takarazuka figured significantly. But I am also committed to looking at how persons who are not and were not professional historians, social psychologists, or literary critics have negotiated the interwoven politics of sexuality and modernity. I draw an analogy between the "excessive semiosis" of popular culture and the practice of cross-dressing in an attempt to clarify the ways in which ambiguity and ambivalence have been used strategically both to contain difference and to parody the artifice of containment—as in gender. Similarly, I also address the politics of representation, which determines how "the people" are variously claimed as agents of, an audience for, and products of popular cultural forms and practices. In the process, I have taken pains to distinguish what people actually like from what critics and theorists of popular culture claim people like.

In chapter 2, I focus on androgyny, embodied differently by Edo-period Kabuki *onnagata* and modern Takarazuka *otokoyaku*, whose gender(ed) performances constitute a type of strategic ambivalence: that is, they create bodies capable of being read or understood in more than one way. This subject was inspired by the many early articles, which I excerpt, linking the establishment of the Takarazuka Revue to the problematic emergence in Japan of "androgynous" females and the diagnosis in women of the newly coined affliction, "abnormal sexual desire" (*hentai seiyoku*). I analyze at length the two basic ways in which androgyny has been rendered in Japanese either to stress sexuality or to bracket it. The fetishized, Janus-faced *shōjo* (girl) is introduced here, as she symbolizes the problematic ambivalence of modernity, the Revue theater, and female and male sexuality alike. Here, as elsewhere, while acknowledging areas of historical conjunction and cultural exchange, I take care to avoid succumbing to the tendency of forcing Japanese cultural practices into Western analytical categories and to distinguish those practices from the dominant sexual and gender ideology operating in Japan.

The general pattern of Takarazuka-state relations during the

wartime years (1931–45) in particular is the subject of chapter 3. Here, I examine the role of the montage-like Revue theater in dramatizing and aestheticizing Japanese imperial ideology, including the practice of assimilation. I review intersections of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationalism on and off the Revue stage, together with the specific Japanese orientalism informing both the imperialist project and the formation of an ambivalent national cultural identity. In this connection, I draw analogies between cross-dressing and what I call “cross-ethnicking,” both of which are at once strategies of containment and transgression. As a technology of imperialism, the Takarazuka Revue helped bridge the gap between perceptions of colonized others and actual colonial encounters; it was one way of linking imperialist fantasies and colonial realities. Consequently, I examine closely several conflicting interests—those of the state, military, corporations, fans, revue management, and social critics—that converged in and were transformed by the Takarazuka Revue. The wartime period provides an important context not only for historicizing the characteristics by which the Revue is known today but also for demonstrating the implications and ramifications of Takarazuka in Japanese society at large, past and present. Put differently, the Revue’s own cultural history and social reception complicates our understanding of Japanese society itself.

In chapter 4, the first of two chapters on fans, I trace the transformations in and discourses of fandom in modern Japan. Audiences and especially female fans of all-female revue theaters figured prominently in social critiques of modernity, and fandom was interpreted as a pathology of modernity. Male fans were not exempt from scrutiny, and I investigate their presence and stake in Takarazuka historically and at present in both chapters 4 and 5. Profiles of fans, fan etiquette, translations from fan magazines, and my own observations of Takarazuka fan clubs are among the subjects treated in chapter 4. In chapter 5, I explore the text-making activities of fans in the form of fan magazines and fan letters and the imaginary but contingent worlds they conjure up. I am also interested here in the supposedly unorthodox script in which fan letters are written, a script labeled “abnormal *shōjo* script” by detractors. Finally, I discuss the homoerotic aesthetic linking the Takarazuka actors and the New Half phenomenon in Japan, here speculating about androgyny as a body politics that serves to interrogate the naturalized dualities of male and female, masculine and feminine,

and Japanese and others (Asian and Euro-American alike). I argue that the ambivalence of the modern Japanese nation, an eclectic composite of Asian and Euro-American elements, is transposed as androgyny in the ongoing discourse of national cultural identity. An epilogue draws together the threads of the basic argument informing the book, focusing on the androgynous ambivalence of Japanese modernity.

I should make clear at the outset what this book is not: it is neither a history of the Takarazuka Revue, nor a biography of its founder, nor a history of (homo)sexuality in Japan. It is, as I have outlined, an exploration of the overlapping discourses of gender, sexuality, popular culture, and national identity as they erupted into the world framed by Takarazuka. Any interpretation of the Revue's popularity today must take into account its historical beginnings and unprecedented impact on "common sense" or the status quo. Therefore, a substantial part of my book focuses on prewar and wartime developments in the Revue and Japanese society at large. Disciplined and strategic eclecticism mark my use of theories, which I do not separate out from ethnographic description but rather use to shape and guide my narrative. As will be evident, the material under discussion does not, nor should it be made to, fit into a particular theoretical box. Rather, I have used various theories at different junctures to help orchestrate the cacophonous welter of data in ways that resonate with the historical and contextual circumstances of the phenomena producing them.

I have spent over a decade studying the Takarazuka Revue and its fan clubs from different historical and practical angles. However, the chronicle of my extensive experiences in the field is limited to those instances when their mention illustrates an important feature of the Revue. There is far too little on Japan in the Anglophone literature, and much less on the revue theater, sexuality, and gender in that country; I have no desire to dilute this investigation with an autobiographical account. Reflexivity for me lies in my sensitivity and attention to the competing historical forces and discourses shaping specific Japanese practices. I aim to complicate our image and understanding of Japan and not to problematize my own long and complex relationship to that country and culture. That is another book—a memoir perhaps, to be written much later.

By the same token, the comparatively small Anglophone literature on Japanese mass and popular cultures calls for a premium to be put on the inclusion of more Japanese "stuff"; this is not the time and place

to simply recycle old material in new theoretical vocabularies. After all, theory can only be developed and modified, as it must if it is to remain theoretical, by engaging with an ever-expanding body of tangible information (Vance 1985:18). Finally, although I am familiar with much of the scholarly literature on the relationship of theater, cross-dressing, and gender ideology, and cite some relevant sources, I have kept analogies between Takarazuka and its global counterparts to a minimum. This has been done partly for reasons of space, but also because I am in a better position to provide otherwise inaccessible information to scholars that augments the larger—mostly Eurocentric—literature. Obviously the gist of anthropological interpretation and translation relies on analogies and affinities between, across, and among cultural areas and practices. But those analogies and affinities should work together to catalyze new perspectives, insights, and understandings about a subject: they should not simply explain or rationalize B in terms of A, in which case no new information is yielded. Taking a clue from the Takarazuka Revue itself, which I conceptualize and position as a thematic nexus or node, I employ a montage-like approach: I juxtapose and layer into my narrative the relevant material necessary to make new associations and connections as a way of contributing to a new cultural history of Japan constituted by popular practices.