

Takarazuka Revue

—An Analysis of Its Reflections on Women's Situation in Japan as Women's Utopia

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Abstract: Takarazuka Revue is a well-known group that all acted by women, performing both male and female roles from various cultural stories on stage. The existence of the Revue inspires the discussion about how much it affects women's position in the society since it formed in the last century. The improvement of female benefits taken by the Revue is evident to see from economic, personal, and social spheres throughout this literature review, which is why it is known as "women's utopia." Link to the local surrounding in Japan, women is still pressured by the patriarchy power by brainwashing and misunderstanding the term "women's masculinity", however, it totally has a progressive development.

Keywords: Takarazuka Revue, Women's Utopia, Japan society

1. Introduction

The all-female Takarazuka Revue was founded in 1913 with the goal of boosting tourism and local economies while providing several opportunities for women to earn a living at the time. The Revue performed its debut performance a year later, and ten years later, it owned the prestigious theater known as "the Grand Theater" (the Dai Gekij) [1]. This review would refer to it as a women's utopia because women play both male and female roles in their performances. All performers in the Takarazuka are referred to as "Takarasiennes,"[2] and those who portray male roles are referred to as "otokoyaku," and those who play female roles are called "musumeyaku." For the first time, as a novelty, the establishment of the Takarazuka Revue gave local women a variety of jobs to choose from and enabled them to leave the house and support themselves independently.

Additionally, the revue's relevance in society has grown over time due to the nation's tremendous development. These days, it features a unique fascination with female masculinity [3], in addition to being a place for women to work. All of the actresses paid their efforts to play different roles, proving that females are the same as males and can do anything. Masculinity is no longer a symbol for males only. However, regardless of how often women assert their strength and authority, the actresses in the revue continue to be brainwashed by their male official managers, which means they remain under the patriarchal system's control [4]. Therefore, some contend that the Takarazuka Revue failed to show women's abilities and fans' likes on those "otokoyaku" is just women's impractical fantasy for men. In this review, I'll briefly describe Takarazuka and the formation of the "women's utopia." And

discuss the reasons why someone would be unhappy with the Takarazuka Revue's evolution in light of Japanese realities. Women were prohibited from working due to historical gender discrimination until the advent of the Takarazuka, who did, in fact, improve the position of women.

2. The Definition of Takarazuka Revue

Ichiz Kobayashi, a former manufacturer turned politician and the head of Japan's Hankyu Railways founded the Revue for the first time in 1913. While it was at the last station of a Hankyu line, the city of Takarazuka was well-known for its local hot springs. Its location made it convenient for people to travel within Japan, which aided in the growth of regional tourism. The Takarazuka Revue idea emerged as Ichiz Kobayashi planned to draw more people to boost railway ticket sales and support local businesses for residents. We already know that the Revue's all-female acting style, in which women portray all characters, sets it apart from other theaters. This is also the original model for Japan's kabuki before women were banned from the theater [5].

The Takarazuka Revue gained significant success over time in Japan, which allowed them to move the majority of their performances to Tokyo's Takarazuka Theater [6]. Intriguingly, the majority of their supporters and audience members are female, including working women and young girls. There are now five distinct troupes in the revue: the Flower, Snow, Moon, Star, and Cosmos Troupes. Each has a distinct personality, including traditional tales, western romance, and fresh experimental moods, respectively.

The Takarazuka Revue has also contributed to the ongoing adaptation of Asian cultures in its shows. They perform various Asian works, such as those from Indian and Chinese cultures, in addition to rewriting the Japanese tales *nihonmono* and *wamono* for the revue. For instance, in 2017, the Flower Troupe performed a stage adaptation of the girls' manga series *Haikara-San: Here Comes Miss Modern*, which was written and illustrated by Waki Yamato and serialized in the manga magazine *Shōjo Friend* from 1975 to 1977 [7]. The Revue presented the manga adaptation again in 2020 since it was popular and supported by fans [8].

3. Women's utopia

What kind of advantages may women gain from the Takarazuka Revue? We may determine three leading causes, they are from economic, social, and personal perspectives.

First and foremost, women gain directly from the economic side, as the issue of the lack of careers for women is resolved, enabling women to be financially independent. When the Takarazuka Revue was established, it was uncommon to see women leave their homes and go to different industries. Still, the bigger problem was that they needed somewhere to go. At the time, males held practically all of the occupations, and they denied women's potential, thinking that all they could do was stay home and take care of the family. Beginning in the previous century, modern ideals impacted women and encouraged them to look for professions outside of their homes. The Takarazuka Revue created numerical jobs for them so they could work and survive without support from men. The Revue addresses the lack of adequate careers for women and raises their average economic status, making it the women's utopia.

The Takarazuka Revue embodies feminine masculinity on the social side. It provides a fantasy place for women looking for this masculinity while also providing a fantasy place for women looking for this masculinity. The majority of the stories in the Revue are based on *Shōjo* and romance mangas, and it is often to see Takarazuka's fans are female. According to John Treat, this is so that Japanese women can ignore their adult female obligations while imagining themselves living in a *shōjo*-style setting with a resting area [9].

Many Takarazuka fans mentioned how much they like the on-stage male roles played by the 'otokoyaku' because they perfectly matched their idealized image of the ideal guy. In contrast to the typical salaryman/Oyaji caricature in reality, these men should be romantic, amusing, humorous, careful, clever, and incredibly gorgeous in their minds [10]. Due to countless real-world conditions influenced by the patriarchal environment, locating this form of masculinity in genuine males is rare. In order to satisfy their needs and desires, women become severely addicted to the Takarazuka when they virtually watch those 'unreal' and 'dreamy' male roles [11].

In the meantime, another justification for Takarazuka's enormous success is that female audiences may comprehend such male impressions better if they enter the psyche of 'otokoyaku.' The idea is that "I am a woman," and the job is to act like a man while attempting to understand how "his" emotion behaves on stage [12]. This is how creating an alter ego works.

Since women have been barred from engaging in theater activities in Japan for hundreds of years, the participation of women in the Takarazuka Revue today has significantly improved the status of women in the community. Women leaving their homes to go to work and abandoning their roles as moms and wives at home are becoming more frequent occurrences. As a result, the term "women" is no longer absent in society, emphasizing the importance of their identities. Additionally, by enthusiastically acting their roles on stage, the actresses in the Takarazuka Revue are demonstrating to the public the strength and competence of women and suggesting that they are capable of doing anything on par with males.

Simultaneously, their performances inspire several homosexual works and aid in social acceptability in Japan. One such example is the homosexual parodies of traditional Takarazuka productions like *Gone with the Wind* that the Tokyo theatrical company Kegawa Zoku has created [13]. In addition, the creator of "Sailor Moon" ----Takeuchi Naoko, has acknowledged that Amami Yuki and Asano Kayo, two well-known Takarazuka actresses, served as the models for her creations of the lesbian characters Hanukkah Tenou and Michiru Kailua [14]. The fact that so many viewers identify with those two characters positively impacts how society views homosexuals.

To sum up, the societal advantages gained by the Takarazuka Revue indirectly advance feminism in Japan and increase acceptance of homosexuality. The most crucial aspect is that it provides the opportunity to highlight women's identities in such a patriarchal society while courageously advocating for women's rights.

From a personal side, eventually, the "otokoyaku" ultimately has the advantage of playing women's idealized perceptions of men out of context and revealing their romantic inclinations. At this stage, fighting those forces that limit women's authority may not be advantageous for women; instead, it only serves to express their demands [15].

In addition, many outstanding works, including "The Rose of Versailles," one of the most well-known girls' manga in the world, were inspired by the Revue in addition to their wonderful works. Such a project is vital and required for the recent development of feminism in Japan. The claim made by Nobuko Anan, a visual arts and gender expert from Japan, that "The Rose of Versailles" represents the struggle between capitalism and socialism led to an internal revolution among Japanese women [16].

Later, when this manga's renown grew, the Takarazuka Revue chose to produce a performance of it on one of their stages due to the manga's numerous notabilities. Since 1974, the four troupes—aside from the Cosmos Troupe, founded at the turn of the century—have drawn a combined 1.6 million spectators [17].

Thus, a circle develops: the revue indirectly contributed to "The Rose of Versailles" fame, and subsequently, the performance drew inspiration from the manga. Every single woman's rights improved due to the internal revolution that occurred for women in Japan, which was followed by the creation of a number of such works, whatever more or less.

4. Related to Japan society

According to Takarazuka scholar Lorie Brau [18], the Takarazuka Revue's operation is entirely patriarchal, the first main argument against it being a women's utopia. Males have always been the majority of the Revue's officers and founders. Women have been given the best conditions to support themselves, yet males continue contributing. Ironically, the Revue urged all of its actresses—whether they were now employed there or had graduated—to uphold this "social responsibility" by promoting the image of "good wives and wise mothers [19]."

Additionally, the term "female masculinity," which we previously noted, refers to the inclination to transcend gender, the asexuality. Since the word "masculinity" is not a neutral concept, it is still unclear if the outcome would be advantageous or detrimental. If a woman is described as "masculinity," other people frequently have negative comments to say about her. Actresses usually work hard to put on the best performance, especially the top "otokoyaku," who have the most followers, yet the likes and loves they receive from the audience are dependent on their masculinity when they play men on the stage. The identity of "woman" is neglected at this point.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, learning specifically about the Takarazuka Revue and examining its effects on women helps us categorize how women gain from the Revue and create the "utopia." The Takarazuka's all-female actress groups, as well as many other all-female organizations, must stand out because of their outstanding contributions to demonstrating women's abilities and strengthening female authority in society. The welfare, economic, social, and personal spheres are essential to establishing the "women's utopia." The advent of the Revue successfully addressed the barrier to employment for women. As a result of its fame, many superb works directed at female audiences have emerged, focused on their preferences.

Socially, it advocates the homosexual community and works to improve LGBTQ acceptance and popularity. However, it continues to restrict women's thought processes and assign them some unnecessary responsibilities that go against the principles of gender equality. As a result, it is difficult to draw a simple judgment on whether the Takarazuka Revue is excellent or negative because of the complexity of its influences. However, considering the delight and satisfaction it brings to women, including female fans and actors, their efforts cannot be overlooked or hidden.

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