

## Preface

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This volume is a collection of three peer-reviewed essays which have been organically expanded from their original versions published between 2014 and 2017.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, they have been re-written in a more accessible language for a broader readership than the limited academic community.

What the phenomena described in this booklet have in common is the fact that they are all media-related appearances in the spectrum of popular culture in contemporary Japan, while possessing music as their secondary tool: Takarazuka Revue is primarily a theatrical genre, anime is fundamentally a visual medium, Murakami Haruki publishes (mainly) literary works. Moreover, an essential focus is placed on music and its function to retrieve more powerfully messages which would otherwise get lost in the communication process. Music enhances the emotional layers of cultural experiences and highlights their hidden significances.

The first essay – “The Magic of Love” – deals with Takarazuka Revue, a highly popular all-female musical theater in West-Japan, which has proved itself along its centennial existence both a faithful mirror of and an influential model for the Japanese society. Founded in 1913 by Kobayashi Ichizô, one of the most significant entrepreneurs in prewar Japan, Takarazuka Revue is simultaneously conservative in its gender representation and progressive in its performance practice, thus turning into a contradictory symbol of the Japanese modernity, while being Japan's leading figure in

entertainment industry. It emerged from the syncretic, cross-gender tradition of the centuries-old classical Japanese stage arts and challenges that very tradition through the creative employment of Western music and dramatic plots, additionally reconstructing in a specific way asymmetric interactions between identity and alterity, model and copy, history and geography, obtrusively displayed in sparkling tunes, fairy-tale-like sceneries and gorgeous costumes. The essay takes into account the multiple dimensions in Takarazuka Revue's administration and self-orchestration such as performance politics, the economical supervision of brand-related consumption, the socio-cultural management of actresses and fandom (fans and fan communities) as well as the performances themselves, and focuses on some of Takarazuka Revue's strategies to construct cultures – indigenous as well as alien – by means of theatrical reproduction. Particularly the last 26 years – since the opening of the Grand Theater in Takarazuka in 1993 – marked an unexpected tendency in Takarazuka Revue's public appearance, visible, on the one hand, in the increasing lavishness of its performances and the intensified commercialisation of the increasingly androgynous *otokoyaku* [female impersonators of male roles in Takarazuka Revue] figures, and, on the other hand, in the highlighting of individuals, societies and empires as key entities in structuring the dramaturgic flow. This essay's goal is, therefore, to analyze Takarazuka Revue's position as cultural institution within the Japanese late modernity, possibly carrying deep-going and wide-reaching messages of a new identity paradigm based of “love” in its body as a local mass medium.

The second essay – “Once Upon a Time in Japan” – tackles the anime soundtracks composed by Kanno Yôko, a reputed (female Japanese) composer, for three anime productions: “Magnetic Rose” (22-minutes long anime movie included as the first part of the trilogy *Memories*, 1995), *Cowboy Bebop* (26-episodes TV anime series, 1998) and *Wolf's Rain* (26-episodes TV anime series, 2003). Kanno Yôko's music powerfully supports and accompanies the

dramaturgic structure developed by the anime director Morimoto Kôji, Watanabe Shin'ichirô and Okamura Tensai in their efforts to visually create alternative universes, either by bringing into foreground Giacomo Puccini's (1858-1924) spectacular, haunting music, refreshed by her own compositional vision with warm sensitivity and in-depth insight, or by combining in a colourful rainbow-like spectrum different styles and musical genres (ranging from US music and counter-culture of the 1940s-1960s, sounds of the era of early rock from the 1950s-1970s, Western country music and Arabian inflections). For once, there is the critical examination of Kanno Yôko's creative compositional strategies in her taking over Giacomo Puccini's stylistic characteristics as well as her coping with Western counterpoint and harmony techniques as well as Eastern a-rhythmicity. Furthermore, there is a specific "gendered sincerity" in Kanno Yôko's music to which both anime specialists and anime fans repeatedly referred as possibly being Kanno Yôko's "secret tool" on her way towards popularity and financial success. Taking these both elements into account, the essay suggests various interpretation options beyond the orientalist temptation as reflected in the employment of songs and arias alongside animated structures.

The third essay – "The Unbearable Lightness of Longing" – critically approaches Murakami Haruki's writings, which, in international literary circles, are often situated at the crossroads between enthusiastic readers, with corresponding financial results, and discontented critics, who crushingly categorize them as consumption or trash literature. Comparable with Paulo Coelho's literary works, Murakami Haruki's writings – both novels and short-stories – offer, though, unexpectedly keen insights into the aesthetic-ideological mechanisms of syncretic cultural structures of late modernity. Musical entities in Murakami's novels are analysed as a means to construct a late-modern form of "artistic syncretism", while taking into consideration the stress ratio between the popular reception of Murakami's literature and the critical

rejection it faces coming from the literary establishment in Japan, on the one hand, and the subtle tension between the contents and the formal tackling of that very contents, on the other hand.

My goal in compiling this collection was to transmit a sense of musicality which can be encountered – and *felt* – while savoring products of Japanese popular culture. This goes decidedly beyond the all-too-fluid, all-encompassing consumerism of the Japanese cultural industry and its (in)famous perishability. At its innermost integration in the flow of life, music is far more than a purely sensorial-cognitive adventure: the musicality of the human existence refers to that *musicalisation* process which allows us, ephemeral beings, to catch glimpses of eternity in the quotidian phenomena around us. My hope is that a readership of undergraduate and graduate students in the fields related to arts, media, anthropology, international/intercultural exchanges, economics and politics of mass entertainment as well as regular citizens searching for information on the dynamics of late-modern societies will find insightful answers in this collection of essays.

May the Force be with us all!

*Hiroshima, June 2019*

# The Magic of Love

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## On Being and Loving: Takarazuka Revue

### 1. Introduction: the theatricality of culture

In the aftermath of the triple disaster of March 2011, it is still an open secret that Japan is redefining superpower<sup>2</sup> – though as a cultural issue; a faithful interpreter of its ambitions is the popular all-female musical theater Takarazuka Revue. Alongside its centennial existence (since 2013), Takarazuka Revue, Japan's leading figure in the entertainment industry, has proved itself a contradictory symbol of modern Japan, a virtual battlefield between gender, culture and politics. Simultaneously anachronistic in its gender exhibition and progressive in its performance practice, Takarazuka Revue reconstructs in a specific way asymmetric interactions between identity and alterity, model and copy, history and geography, obtrusively displayed in sparkling tunes, luxurious sceneries and gorgeous costumes. While focusing on the last 26 years, since the opening of the new Grand Theater in Takarazuka in 1993, which marked an unexpected revival in Takarazuka Revue's self-orchestration through the increasing lavishness of its performances and the intensified commercialization of its increasingly androgynous *otokoyaku* [i.e., female interpreters<sup>3</sup> of male roles in the Takarazuka Revue] figures, the forthcoming analysis underlines some of Takarazuka Revue's strategies to

construct cultures – indigenous as well as alien – by means of theatrical reproduction, highlighting individuals, societies and empires in the dramaturgic flow. Some of these very strategies to construct, develop and eventually implement its – and by extension: the Japanese – historical worldview employ a new form of cultural imperialism<sup>4</sup> with love<sup>5</sup> as both ideological base and aesthetic superstructure of late-modern identity.<sup>6</sup> As to be shown further below, the transition from ethics to aesthetics and from imagination to ideology in the public staging of love reflects Takarazuka Revue’s metamorphosis from an insignificant socio-cultural medium to a powerful political-economic message in postwar Japan.

Most academic discussions on Takarazuka Revue tackle the problematic of the androgynous and fascinating *otokoyaku* figures.<sup>7</sup> This essay<sup>8</sup> focuses, though, on the tension between the androgynously charismatic *otokoyaku* figures and the apparently conformist and submissive *musumeyaku* [i.e., female interpreters of female roles in the Takarazuka Revue] figures, with the goal to reveal some strategic assertions at the very core of the project of culture construction in the light of its theatrical sublimation proposed by Takarazuka Revue through the stature of its actresses<sup>9</sup> as embodied by *otokoyaku* and *musumeyaku*: On the one hand, there is extroversion and self-confidence; on the other hand, there is cuteness and fragility.

Takarazuka Revue’s self-advertisement as a “dream world of love” stated and displayed publicly as well as its emphasis on friendship and human togetherness bound by individual excellence for the insiders will lead the focus on disclosing the way cultural phenomena are reflecting and converting, and then again, are being reflected and converted by social, economic and political factors. The analysis is pursued on two levels: (i) the intrinsic level referring to the form and contents of the performances; (ii) the extrinsic level connected with the cultural, social, economic and politic dimensions of the Takarazuka Revue as historical