

Abstract

The all-female Takarazuka Revue, founded in 1914, provides a cogent context for analyzing the relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality in Japan and illuminates the inception and reproduction of socio-cultural norms and the emergence of subcultural styles. Through the refraction and recontextualization of the “male” and “female” gender into Butch and Femme, the Takarazuka Revue provoked discourses on the relationship between eros and modernism, and provided a new style of Japanese Lesbian subculture. The general purpose of this paper is to achieve a better understanding of the symbolic, dialogical processes involved in the construction of sex, gender, and sexuality and, by association, Japanese social organization.

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Butch and Femme On and Off the Takarazuka Stage: Gender, Sexuality, and Social Organization in Japan

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GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION IN JAPAN

Introduction: Gender-Discourse

At the crux of social organization are situational and strategic interactions. Gender, and the relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality, are socio-historical constructions: products of multiple, competing discourses conducted over the course of, on one level, a culture's history, and on another level, an individual's life (Firth 1963; Foucault 1980; Kessler and McKenna 1985; Silverman 1985; Vance 1985). Discourse on sex, gender, and sexuality--vectors of social organization--produce, transmit, and reinforce power and socio-cultural norms, but they can also resist and undermine these norms, becoming in the process a "starting point for an opposing strategy," such as the creation of a subculture (Foucault 1980:101).

The Takarazuka Revue provides a cogent context for making problematic the inception and reproduction of socio-cultural norms, and for analyzing the discursive tension between those norms and subcultural styles. I pay particular attention to the strategic interactions among the Revue's directors, performers, their fans, the mass media, and the State over the nature of the relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality on and off the Takarazuka stage. These competitive discourses illustrate the symbols employed and manipulated in various contexts by their users. My intention is to achieve a better understanding of the symbolic, dialogical processes which inform Japanese social organization, and more specifically, the relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality.

First, a review of the definitions of several key terms: "Sex" refers to the various capabilities of female and male genitalia, such as menstruation and seminal ejaculation. "Gender" pertains to socio-historical conventions of deportment attributed to either females or males (Kessler and McKenna 1985:1-12). "Sexuality" may overlap with sex and gender, but remains a separate domain of desire and erotic pleasure (Vance 1985:9). Sex, gender, and sexuality, though related are not interchangeable. The degree of their relationship, or lack thereof, is socio-historically negotiated and negotiable. In Japan as in the United States, a person's gender is assigned and (hetero) sexuality assumed at birth on the basis of genital type, although this is neither an immutable assignment nor an unproblematic assumption. The Japanese recognize two sexes and two genders, however "male" gender and "female" gender are not ultimately regarded as the exclusive province of anatomical males and females. Sex, gender, and sexuality may be popularly perceived as irreducibly joined, but this remains a situational rather than a permanently fixed condition (see Meigs 1976:406).

Linguistic distinctions between sex and gender are created through suffixes. Generally speaking, sei is used to denote sex, as in josei for female and dansei for male. Since the dan in dansei--dan may also be read as otoko--can refer to both male sex and "male" gender, the suffix sei, with its allusions to fundamental parts--genitalia, for example--is necessary in order to specifically denote sex. Gender, on the other hand, is denoted by the suffix rashii, with its allusions to appearance or likeness (Kojien 1978:1214, 2300; Fukutomi 1985). A "female"-like person is onnarashii, a "male"-like

person, otokorashii. The emphasis here is on a person's proximity to a gender-stereotype. When attention is drawn to an individual's resemblance to a particular female or male, the term often used is joseiteki (like a/that female) or danseiteki (like a/that male). Ultimately, that an individual resembles a particular female or male is because both parties approximate a more generic gender-stereotype. The difference in referent between onnarashii and joseiteki is significant, although the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably in popular discourse.

Gender and Hierarchy

The Takarazuka Revue (Takarazuka kagekidan) is an all-female theatrical troupe founded in 1914 by Kobayashi Ichizo (1873-1957), the Hankyu railroad and department-store tycoon. The Takarasienne, as the actors are called--after Parisienne--include otokoyaku, who specialize in representing "male" gender, and musumeyaku, who specialize in representing "female" gender. Upon entering the Takarazuka Music Academy, they are assigned their "secondary" genders based on height, voice, facial shape, personality, and, to a certain extent, personal preference. Further, the assignment is based on contrastive gender stereotypes themselves; for example, that "males" ideally should be taller than "females," have a lower voice than "females," have a rectangular face, in contrast to the rounder "female" face, and exude kosei (charisma), which is disparaged in "females."

Since its founding in 1918, the Academy has solicited applications from young women between 15 and 24 years of age, with the majority averaging 19 years of age. Graduation from the two-year Academy marks a Takarasienne's public debut as a gender-specialist, and enables her to perform on stage as a member of the Revue proper.

Why an all-female theatre? What are the various tactical levels on which gender is deployed? Where and how does sexuality fit? My focus is narrowed to the early history of the Takarazuka theatre, roughly between 1920 and 1940, when the relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality was first explicitly and implicitly addressed by the directors, performers, fans, journalists, social critics, state censors, and other interlocutors. (I alternate between past and present tense, as much of what I emphasize also pertains to the present-day theatre.) A historical perspective highlights the dialectical nature of the strategic interaction of ideas and practices revolving around sex, gender, and sexuality. Whether examined individually or collectively, sex, gender, and sexuality are not premised on a single determinant. We cannot begin to recognize, much less to understand, present-day discourses on sex, gender, and sexuality, and on social organization, without some knowledge of the history of their construction. A key question is how the connection with the past constrains and shapes the dynamics of such discourses in the present (see Collier and Yanagisako 1987:46).

Among other designs, Kobayashi conceived of the all-female revue as a commercially viable complement of the all-male Kabuki theatre--complementary, perhaps, but not equally privileged or prestigious, for reasons related to Japanese paternalism in general and to Kobayashi's choice of nomenclature in particular. Kabuki onnagata, as the name implies, are regarded as exemplary models (kata) of "female" (onna) gender for females offstage to approximate.

The yaku in otokoyaku, on the other hand, connotes serviceability and dutifulness. Otokoyaku thus showcase the potentiality, rather than modeling the supposed actuality, of "male" gender.

Kobayashi resorted to the terminology of kinship in naming the Takarazuka "female" gender-specialist musumeyaku, or "daughter role," instead of onnayaku, or "female role." Collier and Yanagisako have shown definitively that "gender and kinship are mutually constructed. Neither can be treated as analytically prior to the other, because they are realized together in particular cultural, economic, and political systems" (1989:7). The conflation of gender-and-kinship attribution in the vocabulary of the Takarazuka Revue substantiates superbly the principle that gender and kinship are mutually constructed. Musumeyaku refers to a particular type of "female" role, that of "daughter" (musume), with its attendant connotations of filial piety, youthfulness, pedigree, virginity, and unmarried status. In fact, these were precisely the characteristics Kobayashi sought in the young recruits. To clinch the filial symbolism, Kobayashi encouraged all Takarasienne, regardless of their gender-assignment, to call him otosan, or Father. Later I will show how Takarasienne and their fans appropriated kinship terminology effectively to subvert Kobayashi's filial symbolism and assert their own.

The representational inequality between the Kabuki onnagata and the Takarazuka otokoyaku is paralleled by the inequality between the otokoyaku and the musumeyaku, an inequality which mirrors the hierarchical construction of gender in Japanese society. The musumeyaku, as the naive and compliant "daughter," represents not only "female" gender but also the female subject in a patriarchal society who is excluded from participation in discourses on "female" gender and sexuality. Kobayashi, on the other hand, as the privileged "father," invested much energy in advocating arranged marriages for Takarasienne, emphasizing the state-sanctioned "good wife/wise mother" model of "female" gender (Kobayashi 1960:27, 29, 34, 91).

The otokoyaku, Kobayashi argued, participate not in the construction of alternative "female" gender roles, but in the glorification of "male" gender. He proclaimed that "the otokoyaku is not male [sex], but is more suave, more affectionate, more courageous, more charming, more handsome, more fascinating than a real male" (Kobayashi 1960:38). The subtext of Kobayashi's statement is that real--that is, anatomically correct--males need not be this way in the real world, where patriarchal power compensates for aesthetic deficiencies.

For an anatomical female to assume "male" gender is for her to rise in the gender hierarchy, which--like the case of the Edo-period merchant who bought a samurai sword in order to achieve the appearance of higher status--is potentially subversive, from a patriarchal point of view. Therefore, Kobayashi, along with male journalists and, later, the State, sought to limit the scope of the otokoyaku's "male"-like behavior to the Takarazuka stage.

The otokoyaku, according to Kobayashi, was neither a model of an alternative "female" gender, nor a model of "male" gender for males offstage to approximate. Rather, otokoyaku ultimately enhanced the "good wife/wise mother" role. Kobayashi theorized that by performing as otokoyaku, females learned to understand and appreciate the male/"male" psyche. When they

eventually retired from the stage and married, they would be better able to perform as "good wives/wise mothers," knowing exactly what their husbands expected of them. Significantly, even after graduating from the Academy and joining the Revue proper, a Takarasienne is still called "student" (seito), for, as Kobayashi believed, the wedding ceremony marks the start of her real career, whereupon a woman becomes a full-fledged actor, and the conjugal household her stage.

Enter the Shojo

In order to show how Takarasienne interpreted and appropriated their assigned genders, and resisted and undermined Kobayashi's designs in the process, it is necessary to review from another angle the origins of the Revue and its popular reception.

Originally called the Takarazuka Choir (Takarazuka shokatai), Kobayashi changed the name within five months to the Takarazuka Girl's Opera Training Association (Takarazuka shojo kageki yoseikai). This name change, specifically with the addition of the term shojo, set the enduring public image of, and audience for, the Takarazuka theatre, even though shojo was removed in the final name change in 1940.

A brief digression on the significance of shojo is in order. Literally speaking, shojo means an "a-not-quite female." To become a "fully female" adult in Japan requires marriage and motherhood. The shojo category of "female" gender was expanded in the early twentieth century with the advent of the "new working woman" (shinshokugyofujin) and her jaunty counterpart, the "modern girl" (modan garu, or moga for short). Shojo then, denotes both virgin females between puberty and marriage, and that period of time itself (shojoki) (Kawahara 1921:112). The State's emphasis on universal (although segregated) education, together with the notion that a brief stint in the burgeoning industrial and commercial workforce was a desirable thing for females, effectively increased the number of years between puberty and marriage (Murakami 1983).

Tenure in the Takarazuka Revue further lengthened the shojo period, a point made in an article on a leading Takarasienne, in a newspaper article which bore the headline: "Still a shojo at 36" (Shin Nippo, April 2, 1940). This was not intended as a compliment. Takarasienne by definition were unmarried, but the reporter here was drawing attention to the lack of correspondence between chronological age and shojo existence.

Kobayashi envisioned Takarazuka as a world of "dreams and romance," and named the early theatre complex "Paradise" to emphasize symbolically its idealism. He was inspired by a new genre of literature, shojo fiction (shosetsu), most tenaciously associated with Yoshiya Nobuko (1904-73), an influential, prolific author, and a Lesbian. Her widely-read stories framed female couples in a dreamily romantic, sweetly erotic light. Unlike her fiction, Yoshiya's own lifestyle was patently political, even subversive, in that she openly rejected marriage and motherhood (Ozawa 1985; Tanabe 1986; Yoshitake 1986). Kobayashi shared Yoshiya's romantic vision, but colored it heterosexual: his dream world was one in which gallant males were sustained by adoring females. The irony remains that this idealized vision of heterosexuality was enacted by an all-female cast. It was an irony that,

initially at least, was lost on Kobayashi, but not on either the performers and their fans, or on the critics. Contrary to Kobayashi's original intentions, Takarasienne inverted the image of the shojo, and also set an enduring style for Japanese Lesbian subculture: namely, Butch/Femme.

Refracted Gender Roles

I utilize Adrienne Rich's "idea of a lesbian [sic] continuum" as a strategic tool for articulating and evaluating the ways in which the Takarazuka theatre served as the the medium of resistance of the "good wife/wise mother" role, and, for some Takarasienne and their fans, as the style of a Lesbian subculture. Rich's concept of "lesbian continuum" spans the wide range of woman-identified experience, from resisting the bride-price to choosing a female lover or life partner (Rich 1983; Zita 1982:166-67).

In early twentieth-century Japan, female couples were referred to by the following expressions: the generic doseiai, or "same-sex love," and more popularly, "Class S" (kurasu S). The "S" stands for sex, sister, or shojo, or all three combined. The term "Lesbian," to my knowledge, was not used to name an identity until the 1970s. Today, "Class S" continues to conjure up the image of two schoolgirls, often of some disparity in age, with a crush on each other, an altogether typical and accepted feature of the shojo period of the female lifecycle (Mochizuki 1959; Norbeck and Befu 1958:109). Parents and society-at-large censure casual heterosexual relations, the prevention of which is the reason for the persistence of Takarazuka's strict "females only" policy. One Takarazuka director, Takagi Shiro, further proposes that the "presence of males would pollute the very essence of Takarazuka," which he regards as a "sacred site" (1983:76). This unprecedented reversal of the tenacious myth that females are ritually polluted due to their sex roles, primarily menstruation and parturition, alludes to the paradisiacal "otherness" attributed to Takarazuka.

Among Takarasienne, one slang expression used since the 1920s to refer to female couples has been deben, from demaebento, or "take-out lunch box." The basic idea is that intimacy between two cloistered females is analogous to gohan (rice) and okazu (dishes eaten along with the rice) (Kasahara 1981:44). Equally longstanding, both among Takarasienne and between them and their fans, has been the use of the kinship terms, aniki (older brother), and imoto (younger sister), to denote either a female couple or Lesbian sexuality. Top otokoyaku Ashihara Kuniko was severely reprimanded in 1933 by Kobayashi for not discouraging her fans from calling her aniki. Ashihara was revered by her fans as "being as refreshing and gallant, and as assertive and resolute as an older brother." Although these were the very qualities Kobayashi attributed to the otokoyaku, it was not the kind of filial symbolism he had in mind. He argued that the nickname ultimately compromised her offstage onnarashisa, or "female"-likeness, as well as the Revue's reputation (Ashihara 1979:157).

Whereas the focus of the terms doseiai and "Class S" is on the same sex of the couple, the Takarazuka expressions highlight the pair's differential gender roles. I submit that in the sex-segregated, homosocial climate of Japan, homosexuality among shojo was far less problematic--innocuous even--than a female sexuality premised on heterogender (Butch/Femme) coupling, which

was perceived as a heretical refraction of the heterosexual norm. The Takarazuka Revue was the medium through which gender-undifferentiated shojo elder and younger sisters were refracted and bifurcated as Butch older brothers and Femme younger sisters. As the headline of a newspaper article on Takarazuka proclaimed: "From Class S to feverish yearning for otokoyaku." The male author went on to assert that the evolution of Lesbian, and, specifically, Butch, sexuality was the "direct result of females playing male roles" (Osaka Nichinichi, July 21, 1930). Needless to say, he limited both the historical and conceptual sweep of the "lesbian continuum" to the Takarazuka otokoyaku.

The erotic potential of the Takarazuka otokoyaku was recognized within a decade of the Revue's founding. In his 1921 book on the lifestyle of the Takarasienne, Takarazuka historian Yomogi Kawahara included a chapter on love letters from female fans which he regarded as examples of, in his words, "abnormal psychology" (hentai seiri) (Kawahara 1921:113). Eight years later, in 1929, the mass media began to sensationalize the link between the Takarazuka theatre and Lesbian practices. For example, the Shin Nippo, a leading daily newspaper, ran a series on Takarazuka called "Abnormal Sensations" (hentaiteki kankaku). The male author was alarmed that otokoyaku would begin to feel natural doing "male" gender. Their private lives, he fretted, would soon "become an extension of the stage" (16 March 1929).

His worst fears came true when, less than a year later, the leading dailies exposed the love affair between Nara Miyako, a leading otokoyaku, and Mizutani Yaeko, the leading woman of the Shinpa (New School) theatre. What this and other critics found most alarming was nothing short of a revolutionary change of context, namely, the transformation of the otokoyaku from the showcase of "male" gender to the stereotype of the Butch female. What had been perceived as artifice on the stage had revealed itself as natural offstage. For Takarasienne and their fans, resistance to prescribed sex and gender roles, and sexuality, lay precisely in changes of context (see Nestle 1985:236). Inasmuch as many Takarasienne had applied to the Academy because they were avid fans and wanted to be closer to their idols (Kawahara 1921:16), or because they wanted to do "male" and in some cases "female" gender, the stage was an extension of their private lives, and not the reverse (see interviews and biographies of Takarasienne in the fanzines, Kageki and Takarazuka Gurafu).

The critics were particularly disturbed by the realization that the Takarazuka otokoyaku could effectively undermine a gender-role—the "good wife/wise mother"—that was premised on the conflation of sex, gender, and sexuality, and on women's dependence upon men. Consequently Nara, the Butch, was pushed into the damning limelight; Mizutani was treated more leniently for the likely reason that, as the Femme, she did not appear different enough to be perceived as a sexual heretic (see Nestle 1985:234). The press reported that "Nara has the charisma to attract women" (Taisho Nichinichi, November 31, 1929), that "even married women tell their husbands they are more attracted to Nara," and that "widows find Nara most attractive" (Osaka Nichinichi July 21, 1930).

The veiled account of the incident in Kageki, one of the three official Takarazuka "fanzines," assumed the opposite stand. Although she was not mentioned by name, Mizutani was likened to a vamp preying on naive and

impressionable "students," who were cautioned to maintain a "respectable distance" (resupekutaburu iisutansu) from her kind (No. 124, July 1930:6-8).

The brouhaha over the Nara-Mizutani affair was part of the larger discourse on the problematic relationship between eros and modernism in early twentieth-century Japan. The revue "Parisette," staged in 1930, ushered in Takarazuka's overtly modern and "erotic" phase (Kyoto Shinbun, 20 November 1920). From this production onward, Takarasienne ceased to apply the traditional stage makeup, oshiroi (whiteface). Modernism warranted a transition from denaturalized flesh to its naturalization. The whiteface had disguised the fact that the mask work by Takarasienne was their gender-speciality, which, as it turned out, did not so much hide as reveal their sex and sexuality (see Nathan 1974:97-98).

The further naturalization of "male" gender-specialists was initiated by Takarasienne themselves, beginning with otokoyaku Kadota Ashiko's sudden decision to cut off her hair in the spring of 1932. As reported in the press, Kadota was irked by the unnaturalness of having to stuff her regulation long hair under every type of headgear except wigs, which the management had deemed would give otokoyaku an overly natural appearance. Takarazuka fans, like the "modern girl," had sported short hair (dampatsu) at least a decade ahead of their idols (Osaka Asahi, 17 July 1923). Hair is redolent of symbolism throughout Japanese history; prior to the moga, short hair on a woman announced her withdrawal from secular and sexual affairs. The "modern girl" turned hair symbolism on its head, so to speak, and short hair became the hallmark of the extroverted, maverick woman. The Takarazuka otokoyaku gave short hair yet another symbolic meaning--Butch sexuality--which the management eventually sought to neutralize and redefine by assuming authority over haircuts. Since at least the postwar period, and probably before, a student selected to represent "male" gender is ordered to have her hair cut short by the end of her first semester at the Academy. Until then, all students are required to wear their hair in shoulder-length braids.

So many of Kadota's otokoyaku colleagues followed suit that a worried Kobayashi offered them money and "gifts from Tokyo" in exchange for growing out their hair (Nichinichi 24 April 1932). Critics, meanwhile, had a field day with the new bobbed look: newspaper articles referred disparagingly to the haircuts as "male heads" (otoko no atama) and noted that many otokoyaku had also appropriated the term boku, a self-referent that signifies "male" gender.

The naturalization of "male" gender-specialists gathered momentum with leading otokoyaku Tachibana Kaoru's proclamation in February, 1932, that, "I just don't feel like a female" (watashi wa onna to iu ki ga shinai). She went on to dismiss marriage as "the vocation of sheltered gals" (hako-iri garu no shigoto). One male journalist likened Tachibana to Yoshiya Nobuko, the author of shojo fiction, whom he claimed "lived like a garcon (garuson)". "Too many women," he concluded angrily, "have forgotten that they are female" (Osaka Mainichi, 10 February 1932). Bemoaned in general was women's loss of onnarashisa, or "female"-likeness, to an epidemic of "abnormal psychology" (Osaka Mainichi, 10 February 1932; Nichinichi, 18 and 24 April 1932; Hochi, 26 July 1932). The naturalization of "male" gender and its self-conscious appropriation as both a new gender identity for women and as a subcultural style, was perceived by Kobayashi and by male critics as altogether

unnatural. The disjunction between sex and gender critical to the charm of the otokoyaku on stage, was unacceptable offstage, inverting as it did the supposedly natural inequality of male and female sex and gender, and effectively subverting Kobayashi's idealized vision of heterosexuality. The heated discourse on eros and modernism in the context of the Takarazuka Revue substantiates Dick Hebdige's observations about the relationship between cultural norms and subcultural style: "In most cases, it is the subculture's stylistic innovations which first attract the media's attention," and which, when that style is confused with deviance, "can provide the catalyst for a moral panic" (1979:93).

Conclusion: Singularizing "Female" Gender

All the adverse publicity motivated Kobayashi to remove the now problematic term shojo in the final name change of 1940 for two ostensible reasons: to acknowledge the more eroticized content of the modernizing theatre, and to prepare for the short-lived inclusion of a men's chorus. Kobayashi's controversial plan to recruit male vocalists was a strategic move to denaturalize otokoyaku style, and to deflect allegations of lesbian relationships among Takarasienne and their fans; the invisible but audible presence of anatomically correct males would set things straight.

Political factors served to exacerbate the "moral panic" over "male"-like females. The late 1930s and early 1940s was a period of intensified militarization and of the State's increasing control over women's minds and bodies. Pronatal policies and the cult of sanctified motherhood took precedence over the mobilization of female laborers, despite the steady depletion through conscription of the male workforce. Not surprisingly, Takarazuka otokoyaku were desanctioned: they were singled out and denounced as the "acme of offensiveness" (shuaku no kiwami) (Osaka Asahi, 15 May 1939), and in August 1939, the Osaka Prefectural Government (Public Peace Section) outlawed otokoyaku from public performances in that prefecture (Osaka Nichinichi, 20 August 1939). All Takarasienne were ordered to reform their "abnormal and ostentatious" lifestyle and to conform to a strict dress code (Kokumin, 6 September 1940; Osaka Asahi, 20 August 1939). They were not permitted to answer fan mail, much less to socialize with their fans (Osaka Nichinichi, 19 August 1940).

The State, colluding with Kobayashi, sought to limit the symbolic cogency and allegorical potential of Takarasienne to the image of the "good wife/wise mother"--an image further reified at that time as Nippon fujin, or "Japanese Woman" (Osaka Choho, 7 September 1940). Typical of the musicals staged during this period of governmental censorship was "Illustrious Women of Japan" (Nihon meifu den, 1941), a nationalistic extravaganza dedicated to heroines, mothers of heroes, and "women of chastity," hardly the stuff of shojo fiction nor inspiration for Butch/Femme style (English Mainichi, 22 February 1941).

From its establishment in 1914, the social organization of the Takarazuka Revue has reflected and refracted "female" and "male" gender roles and modes of sexuality. Discourses on the relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality were central to the popularity and viability of the Takarazuka theatre, both as an idealization of heterosexuality and as an inspiration for lesbian style. Until the military State attempted to singularize the

dialectical nature of these discourses, the social organization of the Takarazuka Revue--and, by extension, Japanese society at large--was a mosaic of discursive feints and parries between multiple interlocutors over the relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality.

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