

MUSUMEYAKU REVISITED

Gendered Significance and Marketing of the Takarazuka Revue

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Thesis Supervisor: Dr. A. Ezawa

Student: Siyu (Angela) Chen 1233696

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1. INTRODUCTION

Sugar, spice and everything nice – the Takarazuka Revue’s extravaganza and glittery dreams are well known within the theatre world. The Takarazuka Revue is a theatre group founded by Kobayashi Ichizou in 1914. Characteristic of the Takarazuka Revue is that all roles – women, men, children, etc. – are played by unmarried, female performers. Ever since Takarazuka’s popularity boom in the seventies, the Revue enjoys an ever-growing love of its vast fandom. Takarazuka’s great popularity is generally attributed to its male-role actresses; over the years they have allegedly come to almost monopolise the fans’ affection and are celebrated as inspirational beacons and an important source of empowerment. For many fans, it is no exaggeration to say that this theatre is their escape from patriarchal oppressions. Although Takarazuka is considered a source of female empowerment by its predominantly female fans, it is likewise arguable that the Revue’s traditions and organisation have been inherently patriarchal. While male-role performers have access to every chance of promotion and are bathed in full attention, the female-role performers in contrast are rarely paid any tribute and can only strive to become the ‘most suitable foil’ at best. In the very recent years, it is possible that the situations for *musumeyaku* have changed however. It is in this light that I wish to re-examine the position of the *musumeyaku* and the Takarazuka Revue’s gendered traditions. Particularly, I will focus on the marketing and promotion strategies for *otokoyaku* and *musumeyaku* by the Takarazuka organisation respectively. The research question to guide this research with shall be: “What is the significance of *musumeyaku* within Takarazuka’s micro-society, and how do they represent femininity in macro-society?”

Before being able to look at how the position of *musumeyaku* may or may not have changed, I shall go through a study of secondary sources on the Revue, gender studies and modern marketing. Once having created a literary framework, I wish to conduct a

comparative analysis between the older and the latest productions by Takarazuka. The types of production I will be turning to shall be stage performances, merchandising, and finally Takarazuka publications (books and magazines). I wish to look into the possible changes within the marketing and promoting of *musumeyaku* by the company to determine whether their micro-social status has changed in recent years. Like many types of popular media, Takarazuka too reflects the ideas about gender and gender roles in its own society, after all. By conducting a study of the changes or the evolution of specific performances and publications, some shifting notions may possibly be identified.

2. THE APPEAL OF TAKARAZUKA

The Takarazuka Revue

The Takarazuka Revue is a theatre company founded by Kobayashi Ichizou in 1914 as an attempt to revive his hot spring resort's declining business. The founding meant a revolutionary return of women to the public stage ever since the ban of women from Kabuki theatre by the 17th century Shogunate.¹ The Takarazuka Revue is for many a direct inversion of the all-men Kabuki. One only needs to mention a Japanese theatre company wherein solely unmarried women perform, and the Takarazuka Revue is perhaps the first to rise in people's minds.

Within the Revue, the performers - called 'Takarasiennes' derived from the French term *Parisienne* – are distinguished as *otokoyaku* and *musumeyaku*. *Otokoyaku* refer to the actresses specialised in male roles and undergo a long and strict training on masculine performatives. The *musumeyaku* are their feminine counterparts whose field of expertise lies in playing female roles. The present structure of the Revue is based on a division of five troupes, Flower, Moon, Snow, Star and Cosmos, and at the top of each troupe stands one *otokoyaku* as its crown jewel, the Top Star. As the title 'Top Star' suggests, she stands at the very top in the theatre's hierarchy.² Second in line is the second tier *otokoyaku* or Second Man. A couple of third tier *otokoyaku*, the Third Men follow her rank, and next in line come the lower ranked *otokoyaku* called the *Otokoyaku* Stars. For the female-role actresses, the top tier position is that of the appointed 'First Lady' of the Top Star, the Top *Musumeyaku*. At present, no official ranks are acknowledged for lower tiered female-role actresses.

The Otokoyaku - A Monopoly of Affection

¹ Robertson, 1992, p 422

² Miyamoto, 2014, p 43

For many, Takarazuka's appeal lies at its high budget stage and their bedazzling costumes. While the *musumeyaku* dance in the dresses straight from the childhood-dreams of many, the *otokoyaku* don magnificent costumes as only to be seen in the glittery world of Takarazuka. For most, however, the true lure that far surpasses any of the Revue's extravaganza is the presence of the male-role actresses. Indeed, the fame and glory the Takarazuka Revue enjoys is almost entirely to be attributed to the *otokoyaku*. According to the research of Stickland, the *otokoyaku* have come to "almost monopolise the fans' affection"³ while the *musumeyaku* remain largely on the background if in the picture at all. This overwhelming contrast of popularity can be explained by examining the appeal of *otokoyaku*.

For fans, a reason behind *otokoyaku*'s appeal is arguably rooted in the remnants of Confucianism in Japanese society. In the rigid gender society of Japan, girls are raised while taught that their sex destines them for wife- and motherhood. While romantic fantasies are not discouraged, for many, wifehood may mean the grave of much coveted romance. Although a terribly dated ideology, the influence of the Meiji ideal of the 'Good Wife and Wise Mother' in modern women's upbringing is undeniable. Under this influence, in practice a life as wife or mother is for many a life of imposed social duties and submission to men.⁴ Even though standards of femininity may slowly be catching up with the progress of society, the virtues for a woman still revolve around her contributions to the family system of patriarchy. Even today marriages in Japan remain mostly characterised by social obligations and little romance, Sechiyama asserts.⁵ Considering these pressuring circumstances, it is indeed unsurprising that the largest and most passionate group of Takarazuka fans are by far middle-aged, married women. The section to follow shall serve to shine light on this phenomenon.

Every time before the opening of a grand spectacle, a fan may but hope to acquire perhaps one single ticket for the show. Relentlessly dialling and redialling the hotline or

³ Stickland, 2004, p 260

⁴ Sechiyama, 2013, p 62

⁵ Sechiyama, 2013, p 85

restlessly staring holes into the computer screen as one waits for the ticketing webpage to load is an occurrence many fans are more than used to. Even outside the box office as early as two o'clock in the morning, it is possible to see a seemingly endless queue of fans who have come to try their chances at getting a ticket. Such is the popularity of the Takarazuka Revue and its male-role performers. Takarazuka's long-lasting success rests in great part on the present day image of the *otokoyaku* as initiated by pre-war Takarasienne Kasugano Yachiyo (1929-2012). While the initial model for the *otokoyaku* used to be one that was carefully constructed after the image of real men, Kasugano ventured with the portrayal of men with refinement and androgynous beauty.⁶ In contrast to the earliest *otokoyaku*, the 'androgynous *otokoyaku*' do not represent men in the raw; instead, they present an ideal of masculinity – "a man without dirt, sweat, roughness, and a need to dominate".⁷ For many contemporaries of Kasugano, the new generation of *otokoyaku* became the counter-image of the patriarchal standard of masculinity⁸ and a symbol of comfort. Through the androgynous *otokoyaku* as medium, women sought after a window for escape from reality. Before long, Kasugano's ideals of masculinity proved its overwhelming success and established the *otokoyaku* image for all male-role actresses to come.⁹

Another appeal to Takarazuka is because it offers an alternative to conventional media and their representation of gender. Many may agree that the presentation of women has gained a rather sour aftertaste be it in oldest of literature or the most modern of movies. Although male characters are usually carefully written with variety in abundance, more often than not female characters fall into the conventional tropes shaped under patriarchal influences. Some female characters are sloppily written, while others are deliberately designed to function as empty shells for the audience to fill themselves in and be swept away

⁶ Suzuki 2013, p 45

⁷ Brau, 1990, p 81

⁸ Grajdian, 2011, p 14

⁹ Suzuki 2013, p 45

by the hero. Alternatively, however dapper or independent a heroine is depicted to be, that in the end her existence still proves to be in sole purpose of serving the male interest is what the majority of fictive works are guilty of. Although arguably the Takarazuka Revue's productions are not much more emancipated in the representation of genders (which I shall elaborate on in a later chapter), for a great number of Takarazuka fans the *otokoyaku*'s existence and function are sufficient comfort and compensation.

According to Matsuo and Nakamura's research, many female fans find themselves unable to fully enjoy conventional media because they cannot suture with the male characters. Their informers let know that this be because they have no phallus and therefore have difficulty overcoming the barrier of sex.¹⁰ Counting in all the issues as described above, in summary, we can conclude that many fans experience a certain entrapment that they wish to overcome. In overcoming this problem, the *otokoyaku* may serve on four levels.

The first I wish to discuss is the actresses' femaleness; for many, the entertainment value in fictive works is the identification process with the personas. Through the *otokoyaku*'s femaleness as medium, the fans may transcend their own sexed bodies and find a new possibility to suture with male characters.¹¹ If previously an obstacle for fans in enjoying conventional media was the inability to identify with male characters, and we consider the fact that most characters (well-written or not aside) are indeed male, then it is indeed no surprise that *otokoyaku* may be seen as a new gateway to many joys to such fans.

On the second level, it is possible that some relief may be felt in a cross-gender experience. Most if not all women in Japan may have to deal with society's rigid gender norms on daily basis. Unable to go through life as an 'individual', it is almost as though women are first seen for their sex before being approached as a human being. Under such circumstances, it is not inconceivable that some individuals might wish for a temporary

¹⁰ Matsuo and Nakamura, 2002, p 65

¹¹ Ibid.

escape from their gendered bodies. A temporary liberation from this physical entrapment can be achieved through a momentary discard of their femaleness and adulthood with the *otokoyaku* as medium.¹² By looking to the young male-role actresses for live example, some female fans can embrace the thought of transcending their femaleness. In order to provide a clearer understanding, I wish to look at the mechanisms and theories behind the transcend of gender.

Indeed, like Judith Butler has argued in her infamous article “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” it is definitely possible to achieve a (temporary) transcend from gender-defined bodies. “[G]ender is no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity, instituted through a stylized repetition of acts,”¹³ Butler writes. In simpler terms, she tries to explain that one’s gender is neither determined by their sex (locus), nor a never changing aspect in someone’s identity. In human society however, what is being defined as ‘man’ or ‘woman’ for example, is influenced firstly by a perceived sex, and also through a ‘normalised’ behaviour taught and passed on from generation to generation. A ‘gendered’ behaviour has been instituted through a stylisation of the sexed body, and as such become understood as unconditionally linked to one sex. Consequently, any behaviour that deviates from what has been understood as ‘natural’ to one specific sex is often interpreted as conflicting to what has been perceived as ‘mundane’. This repeated behaviour or act, Butler calls the ‘performative’ of gender.¹⁴ She compares this ‘performative’ with theatrical acts; on stage it is not the identity of the performer who defines the character that is being played, but their ‘act’. If we consider a very blunt and general example in theatre or films, a villain is a villain not because the performer of this character is necessarily an unscrupulous individual. It is ultimately their actions that are commonly agreed to be ‘bad’ within contemporary standards that define the

¹² Matsuo and Nakamura, 2002, pp 69-70

¹³ Butler, 1988, p 1

¹⁴ Butler, 1988, p 2

character's moralities. In terms of gender, this is not very much different, except that most 'actors' of a gender are firstly type-cast and secondly, may not be aware of the existence of the 'script' they have been working with. In this context then, I wish to compare this 'script' to gender norms in society.

As we keep Butler's gender performative theory in mind, it is conceivable that the male-role actresses of Takarazuka fulfil the role of a signifier of this possibility. Firstly, if a spectator has not considered the possibility of discarding their constructed gender, the *otokoyaku*'s existence might serve to introduce this concept. Secondly, in the case that a spectator has been aware of any possibilities, the *otokoyaku* may in turn become an inspirational example for the fan; a symbol to refer to when they feel discouraged to deviate from the gendered norms.¹⁵ Not only on-stage do *otokoyaku* put up masculine performatives, even off-stage these actresses carry themselves in masculine manners. More explicitly, although an unwritten rule, Takarazuka's *Sumire Code* emphasises the protection of the Revue's dream world. Within this specific context, that is to say that *otokoyaku* try their best in maintaining their public image as being 'masculine'. Accordingly, before a star's retirement it is arguably next to impossible to see *otokoyaku* wearing their hair long or dressed in fashion even bordering femininity off-stage. (Here I say 'off-stage' because sometimes *otokoyaku* are cast in female roles in productions despite their assigned stage-gender.) Likewise, *musumeyaku* also carry themselves as the pure princesses of the Revue in public eye. Hence, by not only looking to *otokoyaku* as 'an actress for a role' on stage, but also as a continuous masculine celebrity, fans may find encouragement in pursuing or accepting their own desires.

The third liberating factor from undesired womanhood I wish to discuss is the simulation of the school system that is characteristic of the Revue.¹⁶ In this school system, all

¹⁵ Brau, 1990, p 80

¹⁶ Ibid

performers – regardless of age and rank – are referred to as students. Correspondingly, it is not until a performer's retirement, or 'graduation', *sotugyou* in Takarazuka terms, that Takarasiennes move past their student-status. This simulation of timeless youth may help fans deliver themselves from the duties womanhood demands¹⁷ and let themselves be lost for three hours in the dream world of Takarazuka.¹⁸ For these reasons, it is possible to say that male-role actresses embody a widely shared dream among the female fans of the Theatre.

Finally, on the fourth, though more distant level, for many spectators it may be very inspiring or heartening to see women getting more significant roles in dramatic productions for a change. Although Takarazuka has many productions that are originals by the Revue's production theme, the Theatre frequently stages adapted plays as well. Many beloved grand productions such as *'The Great Gatsby'*, *'The Scarlet Pimpernel'* or classics like *'Hamlet'* have been adapted for Takarazuka's theatres. Most of such grand productions however, have men as its protagonists while women remain within the conservative tropes. For women in mixed-sex theatre companies to get male leads is an occurrence once in a blue moon. In Takarazuka however, as all roles are without exception played by women, actresses too can bathe in the full spotlights. Again, still the characters that were originally to be played by female actresses are now reserved for *musumeyaku*, but arguably because overwhelmingly greater attention is being paid to their masculine counterparts, it is easier to neglect the fact that the conventions are merely being repeated, only this time by Takarazuka. On this topic I shall elaborate in a later chapter.

Up until this point we have briefly discussed the appeal *otokoyaku* and their positions within the Takarazuka Revue. We have seen that *otokoyaku* are regarded as the heroines to look for inspiration and therefore idolised as an important source of empowerment; they are revered as the incarnation of many a suppressed desire by the Takarazuka fandom. As

¹⁷ Matsuo and Nakamura, 2002, pp 69-70

¹⁸ Singer, 1996, p 179

Robertson argues in her essay, *otokoyaku* are the “exemplary female who can successfully negotiate both genders... without being constrained by either”.¹⁹ In contrast, it is as though the *musumeyaku*’s existence does not even enter the equation. In the following subchapter I shall examine the role of the female-role actresses in Takarazuka.

The Musumeyaku – In the Shadow of the Spotlights

In his essay, “*the Study of the Musumeyaku, 1992*”, Ishii Tetsuya considers the role of the female-role actresses of Takarazuka as he guides the reader through the history of the shaping of the *musumeyaku*. Herein, Ishii argues that the model of the *musumeyaku* is based on the image of women or image of actresses as constructed by former board chairman Shirai Tetsuzou in the twenties of the previous century. Shirai’s construction of this image was heavily influenced by the operas, operettas, revues and musicals he had seen during his study in Euro-American countries.²⁰ The initial model of the *musumeyaku* in Shirai’s time was, unlike in the nineties, based on a young and beautiful maiden who is troubled with hardships in both life and love life. Although incredibly ‘conservative’, Ishii euphemistically calls, the appeal of such a maiden is that rather than relying on personal independence in face of hardships, she bears with her cruel fate with undying passion. If one equates the acquisition of romance to the ultimate goal of life for a woman, then by sacrificing herself for the sake of love, this maiden can be considered a victor in life. As such, the image of ‘the bearing woman’ has won the affection of many Japanese contemporaries of Shirai.²¹

An alternation to the initial model of the *musumeyaku* was made by Shirai after his encounter with Parisian revues wherein he was deeply inspired by the Etoiles – the great stars of the stage. Shirai was impressed by how these performers ‘filled the stage with their personal charms’ and the star power fuelled by ‘the ego of the performer’. Shirai’s impression

¹⁹ Robertson, 1992, p 433

²⁰ Ishii, 1992, p 73

²¹ Ishii, 1992, p 74

was that in contrast to contemporary musicals or theatres which required seamless cooperation of the performers, the Parisian revues allowed for the Etoiles to shine as individual stars. Having found the model that Shirai had wished for his Takarasiennes, he returned to Japan with this new vision.²² However, it can be argued that Shirai was not shy in taking artistic liberties in creating his ultimate model for the young actresses of Takarazuka. Even though ‘the ego of the performer’ that had awed Shirai so became essential for the *otokoyaku*, for their feminine counterparts such ego was not allowed.

Considering the overwhelmingly larger popularity of the Revue’s *otokoyaku*, it is truly hard to imagine that in the early years of Takarazuka, it used to be the *musumeyaku* who were bathed in full attention.²³ In the pre-war period, Takarazuka’s highlight was the naiveté and sweetness of its performers. Although the identity of the stage characters’ portrayed by the young performers was not exactly convincing, the audience was able to embrace the heart-warming ambience in theme of the Revue’s motto: “Brightly, purely, righteously and beautifully.”²⁴ Shirai was a passionate lover of song and came to value singing skills above everything else in the promotion of his actresses. Although a good voice was greatly appreciated in both *otokoyaku* and *musumeyaku*, for the latter, a supreme singing voice was mandatory. Three early female-role performers are argued to have set the trend for all future *musumeyaku* to come, namely the renowned nightingales Kusbue Yoshiko, Tachibana Kaoru and Miura Tokiko. For Shirai, if a *musumeyaku* did not have a singing voice capable of capturing the spectators’ hearts, then she can but hope to ever be allowed a spot on stage. This has become a criterion for all *musumeyaku* that has been upheld until present day.²⁵

A shift in the balance of popularity between the male- and female-role actresses was brought by an important turning point in the Takarazuka history. The construction of a new

²² Ibid.

²³ Ishii, 1992, p 77

²⁴ Suzuki, 2013, 39

²⁵ Ishii, 1992, p 76

theatre with a massive capacity to house up to four-thousand spectators and increased ease of access to the Revue lead to an immense change in the audience's reception. In addition, the invention of portable microphones and improved costume credibility made the difference between the sexes more perceptible.²⁶ While the first generation male-role performers still carried about them a very uncanny air that hovered awkwardly between two polar sexes, the later generation of *otokoyaku* started donning tuxedos with increasing confidence and proudly wearing their hair short. This development enabled *otokoyaku* to adopt the aforementioned 'ego of the performer' which is arguably a must in achieving true stardom. As progress continued, before long the improved images of the tuxedoed *otokoyaku* became the symbol of Takarazuka and the theatre's source of appeal.²⁷ By the end of the eighties of the previous century, the *otokoyaku* have come to almost monopolise the fans' affections²⁸ and set the status quo of what we see in present day. For the *musumeyaku* however, this shift in popularity meant more consequences than simply lessened affection.

The Study of the Musumeyaku – The Musumeyaku-Ron

The original image that Shirai or the audience had envisioned for *musumeyaku* was in all probability not the female character who remains blindly servile in face of *otokoyaku*. No matter how we look at the status quo however, it is hard to regard the *musumeyaku*'s role as otherwise. If the servile maiden is neither what the producers nor the fans desire in a *musumeyaku*, then how is it possible that this model does not seem to have changed since post-war era?

What became apparent in the inter- and post-war era in Takarazuka was that as a criterion, *musumeyaku* were not only expected to excel at singing, but also to be a perfect

²⁶ Suzuki, 2013, 39

²⁷ Suzuki, 2013, 40

²⁸ Ishii, 1992, p 77

support, a foil, for the *otokoyaku*.²⁹ Although specialised in masculine performatives, there are in fact quite many physical difficulties and restrictions for the female *otokoyaku* in playing men convincingly, Ishii argues. As such, *musumeyaku* were imposed with the task to ‘cover for’ and ‘correct’ any imperfections or shortages of her masculine counterpart so that the latter can shine fully on stage.

Covering for the *otokoyaku*’s mistakes is no task of simplicity; the *musumeyaku* is also expected to do so all the while taking care as not to become an ‘obstructive love

rival’ for the spectators. Many fans are said to harbour

feelings that bear semblance to romantic interest for the *otokoyaku* or her stage character. If the *musumeyaku* partner does not execute her duty ‘appropriately,’ she may easily be regarded as an obstacle to the fans in loving their favourite star. A prime example was Ooura Mizuki’s First Lady, Hibiki Mito. According to Shirai’s research, Hibiki used to be hated by many Ooura fans. What many fans were not aware of however, was that even though Ooura was a talented dancer, her success was in great part with due to Hibiki’s self-sacrificial effort. A dance move considered one of the most difficult is the ‘lift’. In Takarazuka, lifts – as the name suggests – refer to the *otokoyaku* lifting her partner off the ground and spinning in rotational dance with the *musumeyaku* in her arms. This dance move is a loved one among the Takarazuka fans as it is a sublime chance to demonstrate the *otokoyaku*’s masculinity and physical prowess in being capable of dancing while carrying another adult woman. For Ooura,



Figure 1: Top Musumeyaku Misaki Rion and Top Star Asaka Manato performing the ‘lift’. Photo from Misaki’s Farewell Show *Million Carat!!*

²⁹ Ishii, 1992, p 79

lifts were a special challenge however. What many of her fans did not know was that she was rather concerned about the condition of her knees. Therefore, in order to relieve Ooura from any more strain on her knees, Hibiki had always made sure to take as much of her own weight as possible during dance sequences wherever required.³⁰ During lifts, rather than letting Ooura lift her from the ground, the *musumeyaku* would jump and use her own arm- and abdominal strength to keep her legs aloft. With the increased momentum of her jump, the *otokoyaku*'s spin would become easier, faster and smoother as well. And yet, Hibiki or any of her *musumeyaku* peers are not the ones to receive praise for her own physical strength; instead the *otokoyaku* remain the ones admired for lifting their partners with no apparent effort. The fact that many Ooura fans never noticed their star's weakness is arguably evidence of Hibiki's success as supporting *musumeyaku* in covering her partner's weaknesses inconspicuously.

Generally speaking there are three types of *musumeyaku* in Takarazuka. The first type is the *musumeyaku* who wholly submits to the *otokoyaku*'s masculinity.³¹ This type of *musumeyaku* suppresses her own talents in order to make her partner appear in better light through contrast. She is called the “*unobtrusive musumeyaku*.” Under the popular association of ‘femininity’ with ‘inferiority’ and ‘desirable femininity’ traditionally with ‘purity,’ the virtue of purity gained an unfortunate twist and got the characteristics of ‘oblivion’ and ‘obedience’ attached to it. As such, the name “*oblivion feigning musumeyaku*,” *kamatoto musumeyaku*, came to existence and is by far the most prominent image of Takarazuka's female-role actress.

The second type of *musumeyaku* is the “*independent musumeyaku*.” This type of *musumeyaku* are performers with solid confidence in their own skills and in demonstrating these, they take no ‘weaknesses’ or ‘handicaps’ of their *otokoyaku* partner into account. This second type however, is often criticised for bad cooperative skills and poor compatibility with

³⁰ Ishii, 1992, p 80

³¹ Ishii, 1992, p 81

the Top Star. They are considered egocentric performers who steal the *otokoyaku* of their limelight which, in turn, would make the show lose its central focus. Often, if said *musumeyaku* is a top tier performer, she is consequently held responsible for bringing the stage into chaos.³² Hence, while it is arguable that this type of *musumeyaku* is more skilful than the first category, she is not the popular type.

The third and last type of *musumeyaku* is what Ishii calls ‘the middle way *musumeyaku*.’ This type of *musumeyaku* performs without restraining herself all the while demonstrating reverence for her *otokoyaku* partner. Although it might be tempting to say that all female-role actresses should simply strive for this middle way balance in order to achieve success, Ishii wishes to point out two fatal weaknesses to this last type.³³ In order to be successful, a *musumeyaku* of the third category needs a thorough understanding of her *otokoyaku* partner. If she does not have a full grasp over her partner’s strengths and weaknesses, tendencies and habits, then it is likely that this third type of *musumeyaku* may not be able to display her full potential; she shall risk becoming the ‘egocentric’ *musumeyaku* who, rather than supporting or augmenting her partner’s talents, would become an obstacle. The second problem Ishii identifies is that because this third type of female-role actress needs to consider all kinds of aspects of her *otokoyaku* partner in order to avoid the trap of the aforementioned risk, she cannot flourish fully as a performer of her own.³⁴

To demonstrate, Ishii yields Top *Musumeyaku* Akishino Miho as an example of the third category. According to Ishii, Akishino was considered to be the best kind of *musumeyaku* partner at her time. She was not exceptional at dancing, singing or acting, but she was loved because of her effort in devoting herself wholly to her Top Star, Takashio Tomoe. Takashio did not excel at any skill either, but exactly because she was paired with a mediocre performer that was Akishino, Takashio had to give her fullest to shine without being

³² Ishii, 1992, p 85

³³ Ishii, 1992, p 87

³⁴ Ibid.

dragged down by her partner. Akishino in turn, had always been the endeavour type. In consideration of her own limits she turned ‘not becoming Takashio’s obstacle’ into her chief task. Her ‘heroic sacrifice’ as Ishii calls it, became Takashio’s drive to refine her skills until she became the star people acknowledged as worthy of a Top’s. As such, this ‘heroic sacrifice’ – although incredibly conservative and patriarchal – became a key element within the desirable model of the *musumeyaku*.

Considering the challenges as mentioned above, it is truly no surprise how much more than individuality or special talent, it has come to be that ‘compatibility’ with the Top Star has become the norm for choosing a *musumeyaku* partner. Quite possibly it may take some time before *musumeyaku* are finally given the recognition that is due under the current operating system. This system is called the ‘Star System’, and has governed the Takarazuka Revue from the 1980s. This system is a powerful factor that has protected the theatre company’s popularity for the past few decades.³⁵ As was exemplified earlier, the Top Star of each troupe is the pride of Takarazuka and the main source of the Revue’s longstanding popularity. Once a performer reaches Top status however, the end of her term in the company also comes in sight. “This limited term is highly significant for the existence of the revue itself,”³⁶ Miyamoto asserts. All Top Stars live in fullest glory in the Revue, but this full stardom is not meant to last for a long period. Most Tops until now have retired after approximately two to four years standing at the paramount of Takarazuka. Notable exceptions have almost doubled that time, but none have stayed without finally yielding the position to the appointed next Top. In theory, all performers in the theatre company can assume top position; and this open possibility is what keeps fans of stars of all ranks on their toes. In practice however, until an *otokoyaku* has ascended to second tier position, the development of her career is per definition entirely unpredictable. For instance, if an actress loses interest in performing for Takarazuka

³⁵ Miyamoto, 2014, p 43

³⁶ Ibid.

or sees no prospect in ever achieving Top Status, she may announce retirement any time. This uncertainty in itself is a worrying and yet exciting element that keeps fans who have loved their star from early on ardent in their support. A young *Otokoyaku* Star or Third Man may get an important part in a play, but that is not to say she will keep it in a next production. Whether a performer can get promotion is heavily dependent on the number of fans she manages to attract, after all. Within this clever marketing strategy of Takarazuka, neither the fans nor the performers can let down their guard and have to work with all their might on the path to Top position. Once a performer has ascended the highest position, the knowledge of the star's finite term in turn, is to further excite the fan's devotion³⁷ and treasure this impermanence. Though perhaps not in the Revue's explicit intention, in contrast, for the *musumeyaku* this marketing system only serves to push them further into the background. Earlier in this chapter I have discussed that the promotion of a female-role actress is almost to be called 'dictated' by her compatibility with (the appointed successor of) the Top Star. This in itself, I could argue, might be a blatant parallel to women's positions in patriarchy, where women's significance only counts next to men. In addition, as no official ranks below 'Top *Musumeyaku*' are being recognised for female-role players, and 'good compatibility' is something beyond anyone's control, the Star System as exemplified above is hardly effective in promoting support within fans. Within Takarazuka's operating system, what becomes all the more obvious is the vicious cycle wherein the *otokoyaku* gain increasingly more support while lesser and lesser attention is reserved for the *musumeyaku*.

The role of the *musumeyaku* may perhaps constitute standing next to *otokoyaku* as their foils, but to be the 'perfect foil' is a task with plenty at stake. A *musumeyaku*'s survival depends on the finding of the perfect balance on the tightrope they walk: while being forbidden to put the *otokoyaku* to shame, they are likewise prohibited from stealing the show.

³⁷ Miyamoto, 2014, p 43

Her sacrifices are all for the sole purpose of fulfilling the Takarazuka Revue's main objective, namely to turn the *otokoyaku* into greatness. Though, however far in the background the *musumeyaku* may be, we have also seen that her role is indispensable. In conclusion, it is possible to say that this is how in Takarazuka's tradition, the only way for *musumeyaku* to be is the beautiful foil who may excel at singing, dancing and acting, but always kept on a distance a few paces away from true stardom.

3. RESEARCH

The previous chapter briefly touches upon the structure of the Takarazuka Revue and its founding history. Therein, I have also discussed the significance of the Revue's supporting pillars, the *otokoyaku*, and examined the meaning to *musumeyaku*'s role in the theatre company. Now, in this following chapter, I shall seek to shed light on the *musumeyaku*'s position and Takarazuka's marketing strategies through an analysis of primary material.

First and foremost, the Takarazuka Revue revolves around its stage performances. Every year, two performances are held by each troupe, bringing a total of ten shows on the stages of the Takarazuka Grand Theatre and Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre. If we consider that the stage performances are the Revue's centre, then an analysis of these would be most significant in examining Takarazuka's marketing of the *musumeyaku* and what these actresses stand for in micro- and larger society.

Case Study – the Marketing of Musumeyaku in Theatre

The years 2016 and 2017 are eventful years for the Takarazuka Revue. In September 2016, the Revue saw the retirement of the last 100th Year Anniversary Top Star, Moon Troupe's Ryuu Masaki. Then one after another, all other Troupes too announced their farewells to one or both top tier performers. The announcement of a Top's retirement is for any fan news that comes with many entangled feelings. It is both a grand spectacle wherein the retiring performer is presented in fullest limelight, as well as an emotional end to the star's identity once frozen in an ageless dream. The Takarazuka organisation makes no light of this special event either; greatest effort and care are put into the commemoration of the retiring Top. Whether this Top be an *otokoyaku* or *musumeyaku* however makes the greatest difference in the Revue's marketing strategies.

As exemplified in the earlier chapters, the marketing of the Top Star has always been the central focus in Takarazuka's Star System. Even though in name the Top *Musumeyaku* stands on equal ground with her partner, nowhere else than in retirement events is the actual difference in attention as strikingly visible. Although retirement performances are not the standard in Takarazuka, they are not unrepresentative of the Revue's conventions. It is in this light that I wish to look at the marketing of performers and the significance thereof in retirement programmes in special.

The first performance of choice for the analysis will be the retirement performance of Moon Troupe's former Top, Ryuu Masaki. '*NOBUNAGA – The Will to Power –*' (2016) tells the story of Oda Nobunaga and his climb to power, wherein the Top Star plays the title character. The Top *Musumeyaku* who remains with the Troupe, Manaki Reika, is given the role of Oda's wife, Kichou.

'*NOBUNAGA – The Will to Power –*' is a Takarazuka original especially written in light of the Top Star's retirement. Many symbolisms and choices designed to compliment Ryuu's person can be seen within this production. In line with any production by the Takarazuka Revue, the Top makes her entrance almost immediately with the curtains' rise and hardly ever disappears from audience's view until the very end of the show. Similarly, the protagonist's every action is also portrayed in positive light regardless its nature. An example is the scene wherein Oda is met directly with the resistance of the Shogun. The Shogun being the person with both nominal and factual authority is the greatest eyesore to Oda in his quest for true power. Upon the Shogun's arrival in that scene, Oda makes attempt to assassinate the former in hope to neutralise the power fraction. He is handed a loaded rifle by his vassal and fires his first shot, but misses. Immediately he is handed a second rifle but misses his mark again. Without a second warning, the vassals are then revealed to have betrayed Oda and have joined side with the Shogunate. They draw their swords and attack their former Lord, but are

beaten literally single-handedly by the unarmed Oda, leaving the Shogun shout and screech in terror. I wish to argue that this scene is very telling of Takarazuka's attitude towards their Top Stars. Although initially, Oda may seem incompetent in missing two consecutive shots at a distance that is arguably rather small, before long this 'misconception' is already cleared up by having the vassals reveal themselves as traitors, implying that the rifles had been tampered with. Then, by having Oda beat the vassals while entirely weaponless in a surprise attack, again the Top Star's character is glorified as a hero who demonstrates aptness in overcoming any dire situation. In turn, the Shogun is discredited by having him screech unbecomingly to contrast against Oda's collectedness, making it harder for the audience to take this person of power seriously. Although lawfully speaking Oda's actions may seem nothing short of violent and rebellious, the Shogun's display of incompetence leaves the spectators with little doubt that the state would be in better hands if entrusted to the hero of the story.

In sharp contrast, Top *Musumeyaku* Manaki is given but little tribute. Not long after Oda makes his entrance, Kichou emerges as a protective and skilled woman leading a small unit of female fighters. However, she states her name, delivers two more lines and engages in battle for a few seconds. But as suddenly as she appeared, she exits again upon sighting her husband's army arriving. After her first exit, Kichou will not appear on stage again until half an hour later into the show. Her second time on stage comes and goes as quickly as her first, and it would take yet another thirty minutes before she makes her third appearance. Kichou's third scene however, lasts but a little over four minutes, wherein she merely serves to take a bullet for her husband and declare her unending reverence for him before dying. The fourth and final time Manaki can be seen in this production is within a split-second flash of Oda's memories, then the story moves on to focus entirely on the male leads again. Though Kichou's heroic actions and function in the story are being mentioned by the other characters during every absence, I wish to argue that the script offers Manaki little to no opportunities to

work with this character, let alone demonstrate any talent. Considering how this *musumeyaku* managed to climb to top tier position within half the usual time for female-role players, it surely is remarkable how little opportunities are given to her.

Contrastingly, the Second and Third Men of this play do fulfil significant roles as an important Italian missionary and Oda's closest vassals respectively. Third Men Miya and Nagina are given chances to partake in full dance sequences, given solos and duets, as well as lines that are significant for the development of the plot. Needless to say, the Top Star's appointed successor Tamaki Ryou too is given an undeniably important part within the production. Although in name these three actresses are lower ranked than the Top *Musumeyaku*, all have significantly more stage time and opportunities at demonstrating their skills than the First Lady.

The care paid in designing *NOBUNAGA – The Will to Power* – for the retirement of the Top Star is remarkable. Firstly, although the story's setting takes the narrative to the late 16th century, the theme of the production is rock and roll. Although Ryou has achieved first tier status, even the Revue itself openly admits that traditional dances and song are by far not the Top's strongest assets. Euphemistically, her ineptness at traditional performance is excused as 'unbefitting of the energetic young Top Star'.³⁸ Additionally, many symbolisms are designed to give this retirement performance special meaning. For example, within this rock musical, Oda is although no romanticist, a man who sincerely loves and respects Kichou. Upon her death, his vassal inquires whether he is troubled by the pain of losing his wife and the crushing burden of the state on his shoulders. Then Oda replies: "within me dwells a dragon. In the attempt to break free and soar the skies, it writhes painfully in this carcass".³⁹ The 'dragon' in Oda's words is a direct reference to Ryou's name, meaning dragon in Japanese. Likewise in the final number, a song that describes Oda Nobunaga as a valiant

³⁸ "NHK Special – Takarazuka Top Legend – 100 Years Of Passion", 2014

³⁹ 「私の中には巣くう龍がいる、この身体引き裂き大空飛び立とうと身を悶える龍が」

dragon is installed, as well as a dramatic closing scene wherein he cuts the ropes of his sails to reveal the enormous image of a dragon.

Similarly and perhaps more importantly, this final scene also symbolises the Top Star passing the baton to her successor. During one scene where Oda looks at the peace he has created with satisfaction, Roltes suggests making a journey across the sea. “I guess this is my



Figure 2: Oda Nobunaga's sail. Screenshot from Ryuu Masaki's Retirement Performance '*NOBUNAGA – The Will to Power –*'

farewell then,” Oda answers,⁴⁰ and the two make preparations to set sail together. Once on the ship however, Oda makes up his mind. “You can go.

Much remains to be done for you at this place still.

I shall go alone,” he says.⁴¹ Entrusted with Oda's will, Roltes gleefully accepts and watches as the other departs to see the new world. The finale showing a unified state under Oda Nobunaga's name cleverly compares Japan to the Moon Troupe that was unified under Ryuu Masaki's name. All the more explicitly, through the final message passed on from Top Star to Second Man, the play also signifies a significant rite of passage. In parallel with Oda setting sail and leaving behind a world he built to Roltes, Ryuu in turn leaves the Moon Troupe in Tamaki's hands, and departs to explore the world outside Takarazuka. Although the scriptwriters may be guilty of some clumsy writing here and there, the effort they put into preparing a momentous farewell for the retiring Top, as well as introducing the new Top, is truly noteworthy. Reversely, even though the Top *Musumeyaku* is to stay with the Troupe and

⁴⁰ 「これで見納めか」

⁴¹ 「お前も行け。まだ、この場所で、やり残した事があるのであろう… 儂は一人で参る」

will become the new Top's First Lady, very little effort was made for her sake. With a mere fourteen minute of total stage time and her character's actions mostly being narrated by other characters in the play, Manaki is not given much opportunity to present herself or appeal to the audience as a performer. Her function in the play might be no more than making Oda appear in better light as both a potent ruler and a good husband. Likewise, Kichou's sentimental death only serves to demonstrate how Oda is not the callous monster enemies (and history) describes him to be. All in all, it can thus be argued that Manaki fulfilled no more than the role of a plot-device, if not an entirely disposable one at all. Just like in the chapter that discusses the *musumeyaku*'s sacrifices to make the *otokoyaku* look better, Manaki's sacrifice here is her own opportunity to shine.

Another performance that lends itself to fitting demonstration of Takarazuka's marketing strategies is *Lucifer's Tears*. This is the retirement commemoration of Snow Troupe's Golden Combi, Asami Hikaru and Maikaze Rira in 2006. I shall not go into great detail for the analysis of this production, but I do wish to point out that the similarity lies at the imbalance of attention between the Tops. For *NOBUNAGA – The Will to Power* – it would be tempting to explain the division of stage time between Top Star and Top *Musumeyaku* by the fact that it was the *otokoyaku*'s last show. *Lucifer's Tears* however, cannot be excused on this ground. Even though the 2006 performance is supposed to be the retirement commemoration of both top tier performers, a striking difference can be seen between both the writing and planned stage time for the actresses respectively. In similar fashion with Ryuu's retirement performance, Snow Troupe's show is filled up by Asami's presence in almost its entirety. Contrastingly, the retiring Top *Musumeyaku* Maikaze does not make her entrance sooner than almost forty minutes into the play, and has a total stage time of barely a quarter of an hour. The Second Man on the other hand, enjoys the spotlights for almost an

hour in a ninety minute show as a carefully written secondary protagonist with a significant back-story and character development.

In this production, Lucifer (Asami) is a demon that thirsts for the agony of humankind. In the grip of hatred and despair, day by day Lucifer loses sight of his former identity as an Archangel, until he meets the mortally ill prostitute by the name of Lilith (Maikaze) on her death bed. Lilith is a blind woman who was left with no other choice than selling her body in order to live. Despite her past of being abused, mutilated, and abandoned by her own mother, she holds no grudge against her, nor lost reverence for the Christian God. Before dying, Lilith shows Lucifer a glimpse of human compassion and reminds him of his own goodness. Under the inspiration of Lilith, Lucifer decides to redeem himself by solemnly accepting God's punishment and work his way towards repentance. As such, in the exact manner as in *NOBUNAGA – The Will to Power* –, the Top *Musumeyaku*'s role might be seen as no more than the personified 'good morality' of the 'morally dubious' Lucifer.

While both given examples are retirement commemorations rather than regular shows, neither is unrepresentative of Takarazuka's stage performances. Whether it be a regular show, a show commemorating one or both top tier actresses' retirement, or a debut performance of a new Top, '*hiroume kouen*', most have a distribution of role-importance in common with the two examples given above. In the span of ten years between 2006 and 2016, little improvement can be seen in the attention reserved for *musumeyaku*. Neither productions chosen for demonstration offer chances for the First Ladies to demonstrate their skills, nor create further opportunities for her to invite more affection from fans. It can be said that the marketing strategies employed by Takarazuka does not regard their Top *Musumeyaku* in favour, and that is not even addressing the lower ranked *musumeyaku*. Some exceptions do exist to this tendency, but they take up but a marginal percentage of all productions.

The final production I have chosen for analysis is another Takarazuka's original, *Golden Desert*, the Flower Troupe retirement performance of the former Top *Musumeyaku* Kano Maria of 2017. As a reverse of *NOBUNAGA – The Will to Power* –, this time it is the Top Star Asumi Rio who will continue her career with the troupe while her First Lady graduates. *Golden Desert* takes its audience to an ancient kingdom in the deserts of Esfaan. The kingdom's traditions dictate that when a person of noble status is born, a slave of the opposite sex shall be assigned to the newborn and be raised together. The slave system has been upheld for centuries and is designed to both serve the highborn and protect them from harm and humiliation. If a noble person commits a crime for example, the assigned slave shall receive full punishment in their master's stead. The story follows the crown princess Talharmine (Kano) who has been given the boy slave Giy (Asumi). Under the slave system and wealth of her kingdom, the princess grows up into a wicked young woman. Giy in turn, growing up under his mistress' absolute authority and abuse, has turned into an embittered young man. One day, a foreign prince by the name Theodoros arrives and seeks the princess' hand in marriage. Despite the abusive life Giy has lived by the princess' cruelty, the prince's proposal awakens his romantic feelings for Talharmine. Similarly, the princess too harbours romantic feelings for her slave, but was never able to admit or submit to them. Unable to reciprocate, the princess accepts Theodoros' proposal. To spite her slave and compensate for her personal frustration however, she demands to keep Giy at her side at all times, to make him witness her life as another man's wife. The royal wedding is fast approaching, and with every passing day, the hidden feelings of the master-servant duo grow more turbulent. Then, on the night before the wedding, Talharmine and Giy give in to their desires and make love. Once they realise what they have done however, they are terrified of the consequences and decide to elope. The two are caught before they manage to even set one foot outside the palace. Upon capture, a witness reports to have seen the princess engage intimately with her

slave. In order to save her own skin, Talharmine decides to accuse Giy of raping her and sentences him to death. Giy is beaten to an inch of his life and cast into prison. In the dungeons, he learns of his birthright and the tragic history that led him to live his current miserable life and is determined to take revenge. As the story unfolds, we follow both Giy in his vendetta, as well as Talharmine, whose life escalates out of control bit by bit under the tyranny of her husband.

In absolute contrast with the first two productions, the Top *Musumeyaku*'s stage time and importance in the play are, for once, comparable to the Top Star's. On the one hand, *Golden Desert* is very exceptional in this aspect, while on the other, the quality of the production may leave no little room for improvement. Never minding the historic likelihood of the other-sex slave system as upheld in Esfaan, a fictional country clearly modelled after ancient Arabic societies, many plot points within the script are rather haphazardly written as well. For example, however blinded by lust Talharmine and Giy might have been during the night of intercourse, it would have been wise to have considered checking the chamber for privacy before acting. Afterwards, when the two decide to escape, a key factor of them being caught is because the princess was slow on bare feet as she was unable to find her shoes. Once captured by the palace guards, the aforementioned eyewitness also reveals that he had set the princess up by stealing her shoes to sabotage her escape. Though possibly gratuitous, I wish to point out the dubiousness of a wealthy princess owning but one pair of shoes, and let her fate depend on such triviality. If anything, more than misfortunes or ingenious plotting by the antagonist, the couple's untimely capture appears to be caused by sheer carelessness or idiocy.

According to my research at the Takarazuka theatre and fan comments, Talharmine is a severely disliked character among the audience. She is described as 'arrogant', 'childish', 'selfish' and 'unreasonable' among others by many spectators. Although by far not everyone was fan of the retiring Top *Musumeyaku*, a consensus was that many saw Kano Maria leave

the theatre company in incredibly negative light. Many fans shared with me that if the script or characters had been written well and with logic, they might have liked the princess as a villain-protagonist instead. As it was however, they cannot help but be left with an incredibly negative image of the *Takarasienne* Kano Maria. In Takarazuka's conventions, *musumeyaku* only rarely get parts that are remotely describable as 'large' in face of the Top Star's overwhelming presence. As '*Golden Desert*' demonstrates however, once a female-role actress is assigned a larger role, again she is not allowed to shine in positive light due to the poor writing quality.

Case Study - Purchasable Commodities

Just like with the stage performances, with one mere glance into Takarazuka's official shop, the Quatre Rêves, and it is clear as day where the emphasis lies in the Revue's marketing. Within the large number of racks and displays, countless commodities highlighting the Theatre's Top Stars or other *otokoyaku* stars can be seen. Some commodities are tributes to one troupe's Top Star, while others feature all five troupe leads together. Merchandise that feature Top *Musumeyaku* are available as well; with the most adorable dresses and gaudy make-up they stand as the beautiful partners next to their respective partners. Although the number of commodities in special light of the first tier *otokoyaku* are at a rough estimate of eighty percent and *otokoyaku* merchandise in general take up approximately ninety to ninety-five percent of all available wares, *musumeyaku*-only merchandise may not even take up one percent of the shop's total stock.

The official shop's merchandise range from monthly magazines that highlight the Revue's stars, to daily supplies such as handkerchiefs with the names of the Top Stars embroidered in fancy script. Stage photographs and post cards are sold in large numbers and

make up a great part of the Quatre Rêves collection. Among the rows and rows of 2L-sized photographs and post cards, more than half are prints of close-up shots of a Top Star. While some items have the troupe's *Golden Combi* as print and present both on equal footing, the photographs that are tributes to the *musumeyaku* are of arguably insignificant number.



Figure 3: Photograph of stage photos and post cards of the Star Troupe in Takarazuka City Quatre Rêves

Figure 2 is a photograph taken at the Quatre Rêves in Takarazuka City in March 2017. The picture shows a display of stage photos and post cards of the Star Troupe. The seven columns on the left of the top shelf are all single tributes to the troupe's Top Star, Kurenai

Yuzuru, while the right side of the shelf contains merchandise featuring the second and third men Nanami Hiroki and Rei Makoto. The two rows on the bottom shelf display merchandise of performers of all ranks with retired performers included. Among these photographs only six are *musumeyaku* merchandise, but more remarkably, none but one features the current Top *Musumeyaku* Kisaki Airi (hot pink photograph on the most bottom row).

Likewise in the bookstore section of the Quatre Rêves, countless books and play guides can be found in special light of the Theatre's Top Stars. Many if not most have a first tier *otokoyaku* on the cover while a small number have their respective First lady at her side. *Otokoyaku* specific publications or Top Star retirement commemorations fill the shelves of the store; in contrast however, looking for *musumeyaku*-only specials almost seems like a near-impossible task. As far as the Takarazuka Revue's official shop database shows, the earliest *musumeyaku* special was published in 1995 in tribute to the retiring Moon Troupe

First Lady Asano Kayo. In the following years more *musumeyaku* tributes have been published by the Revue's publishing company till present day. Within the time span between 1995 and the present however, merely thirteen publications have been made in special light of female-role actresses. One out of thirteen is the 2006 *TAKARAZUKA YOUNG STAR GUIDE Musumeyaku Edition* while the other twelve are retirement memorials of the more popular Top *Musumeyaku*. Needless to say, with five troupes active within the Revue over a span of twenty-two years, a significantly larger number than twelve Top *Musumeyaku* have retired from the Theatre. And yet but twelve have received proper commemoration. In stark contrast, every year dozens of *otokoyaku* specials are being brought out. Unsurprisingly, it is the Top Stars who receive most tribute, but even the second- and third-tier *otokoyaku* are paid no little attention. To exemplify, in the year 2016 alone, eleven specials have been published as tribute to *otokoyaku* of all ranks. For decades, photo albums by the title '*personal book*' have been published that highlight third or second tier *otokoyaku* stars individually. Some more popular *otokoyaku* stars even have multiple such albums published in their honour. When comparing the number of publications featuring male- and female-role actresses respectively, a rough calculation brings us to a ratio of barely five percent for *musumeyaku* specials.

If one considers firstly the performances by the Revue and secondly the purchasable commodities, this askew balance surely invites one to wonder just how much the Takarazuka Revue cares for their female-role players. Although the number of publications on *musumeyaku* almost appears insignificant in face of the overwhelming number featuring their masculine peers, I wish to propose that there is – although slight – an increase in both appreciation and effort in the marketing of *musumeyaku*. The following section shall serve to illustrate.

Case Study – The Portrayal of Musumeyaku in Printed Media

Varying from memorial specials to monthly magazines, the Takarazuka production team publishes many types of printed commodities on regular basis. As previously discussed however, the overwhelming majority of all past published works are tributes to mainly the *otokoyaku*, while *musumeyaku* receive but little attention. However, in the most recent years, the balance between the tributes paid to male- and female-role actresses has changed ever so slightly. Until 2010, in the monthly magazine *Takarazuka GRAPH* for example, the pages on which *musumeyaku* can be seen or are even mentioned take up no more than five percent. With every passing year however, there is a gradual increase of attention for *musumeyaku* and the number of pages dedicated to them.

In 2016, a special tribute was published in light of Moon and Cosmos Troupe's First Ladies, Manaki Reika and Misaki Rion: *Deux Princesses: Reika Manaki & Rion Misaki PHOTOBOOK*. This publication is a 'special' in many ways, as it is neither a retirement commemoration of either actresses, or a combined tribute with *otokoyaku*. It is an unprecedented happening within Takarazuka's history for *musumeyaku* to be marketed in this way. Before diving into analysis and to understand the significance of this publication better, I shall first zoom in on the gendered marketing in printed media.

In Morris' essay on gender in advertisements, she discusses how men and women are being depicted in printed media. Her research covers a wide span of printed media in 108 countries, amongst which Japan. She demonstrates through her results how the constructed ideals and stereotypes are universal in the advertising of women and men respectively. While men are pan-culturally advertised with emphasis on status, power and independence, in contrast, representations of women are commonly designed along traits like tenderness and cooperatives as desirable femininity.⁴² In other words: men dominate, and women

⁴² Morris, 2006, p 13

cooperate.⁴³ In resonance, Fratto distils a few points of interest in her essay on the image of femininity in Japan. She discusses a dichotomy that exists for the image of men and women in Japan. This dichotomy is “the androcentric paradigm that views, explains, and understands the world in dualistic terms.”⁴⁴ Within this format, ‘man’ is made opposite ‘woman’, and ‘powerful’ is associated with the former, while ‘powerless’ is automatically ascribed to the latter. Powerlessness however, has been idealised in femininity as ‘desirable’ for the patriarchal interest.⁴⁵ Fratto also exemplifies how in Japan there is the dominant image of the woman being either a ‘mother’ or a ‘prostitute’. Allegedly within this old and false dichotomy, the ‘mother’ would signify obedience and is evidence of male supremacy, and the ‘prostitute’ would stand for unsuccessful male conquest. As the anti-image of the controllable and desirable ‘mother’, the ‘prostitute’ then, comes to embody the ‘untamed nature’ and is therefore an embarrassment to patriarchal dominance.⁴⁶

Modern society has been attempting to break away from this old dichotomy; through modern media, it is possible to see how and to what extent this constructed ideal is being replaced. While old stereotypes are constantly being replaced by new ones, there remains a striking contrast between the constructed ideal of femininity, and actual female identity.⁴⁷ It is essential that women should overcome the socially imposed definitions of what they are supposed to be. Indeed, depictions and representations in media inform their audience not what reality is, but rather, what it ideally is supposed to be. The constructed ideal also serves to ‘teach’ or ‘correct’ how others should be looked at, and in turn, how others look at the consuming audience (i.e. the reader). These images heavily construct ideals that manage social perceptions and actions, whether consciously or subconsciously.⁴⁸ As such, these

⁴³ Morris, 2006, p 14

⁴⁴ Fratto, 1995, 20

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Fratto, 1995, p 24

⁴⁷ Fratto, 1995, pp 13,14

⁴⁸ Morris, 2006, p 13

presented ideals have become stereotypes, and these stereotypes are then understood as the ‘model’ or ‘norm’ for any person presumed applicable to. Similarly, any actions or traits that deviate from this ‘model’ would not be accepted and are possibly discouraged through negative feedback.

In Takarazuka’s marketing and advertising, the same tendency as in conventional media can be identified; *otokoyaku* are portrayed as powerful and independent, while *musumeyaku* are depicted as delicate and dependent, which are then euphemistically described as ‘cute’. *Otokoyaku* have always been marketed for their masculinity, and in many ways in similar fashion as men in conventional media. One of the many examples is Snow Troupe’s current Second Man, Nozomi Fuuto’s *Personal Book* of 2015. The cover of the photo album depicts the actress sitting by a cruiser style motorcycle. Aside from her clothing that is traditionally associated with masculinity, Nozomi also sits with her legs wide and her body hunched beside the vehicle. Rather than traditionally feminine traits such as innocence or elegance, the image’s composition suggests a certain roughness and wildness to the model. For the accentuation of Nozomi’s masculinity, shots of her with a *musumeyaku* (Nonoka Himari) are also taken for contrast. In one shot, Nozomi rides the motorcycle while Nonoka is seated on the back, her posture recoiled while in tight embrace to the *otokoyaku* for security. This series of images implies a certain narrative and role for both actresses. Amongst a great many photos of the *otokoyaku* with the motorcycle, only a few depict her with a *musumeyaku* partner. It is possible to interpret this as Nozomi being portrayed as an independent, wild character who is unrestrained by anything, though at the same time, she also has a softer side as the ‘protector of a young maiden’. Though unsurprising for a ‘personal book’ of a specific star, the *musumeyaku* is never depicted on her own without Nozomi. If we assume that the dichotomy as explained by Fratto is applicable here too, then as a contrast to the ‘independent

male', Nonoka here stands for the 'dependent female' who takes no actions without the former's guidance or initiative.

In photo albums, *otokoyaku* are almost always portrayed in ways *musumeyaku* or women in traditional context would usually not be. An example that may serve as an accurate representative is Sagiri Seina's *Personal Book*, 2010. In this volume, Sagiri too is granted many solo shots with her in various settings, contexts and fashion styles. Similarly to Nozomi's shots with the motorcycle, Sagiri is photographed in a garage with many types of cars. On many photos, the star sits wide-legged in poses that suggest roughness, openness and dominance. For yet another demonstration, in another shot, Sagiri is depicted with a large bruise on her cheekbone and nose. This particular shot bears striking semblance with many other *otokoyaku*'s in their respective albums, one of which is Sena Jun's *Personal Book*, 2002. In one photo Sena's face is damaged as well. Holding a bandaged hand up to the wound, the *otokoyaku* looks straight into the camera. Both shots of Sagiri and Sena suggest that they were involved in a fight. As neither *otokoyaku*'s facial expressions suggest shame or grief, it is possible to interpret them as either the victor of the battle, or in case of defeat, that they are not disheartened. Perhaps even more explicitly than the aforementioned photos with the vehicles, these battle-worn looks imply a much more robust and masculine image for the depicted actresses. This kind of portrayal is very rare for women in traditional media, and for female-role actresses of Takarazuka entirely unthinkable even.

How are *musumeyaku* commonly being represented in printed media? It is not until the most recent years that female-role actresses have come to be represented more and as individuals in Takarazuka's publications. As exemplified in earlier chapters and briefly here above, *musumeyaku* are usually used as supplementary tools to flatter their masculine counterparts. In many ways, they fulfil a very similar role to that of women in conventional media outside the Takarazuka Revue; femininity is more often than not advertised for the

patriarchal interest and as objects of desire. One glance into mainstream magazines targeted at women, and almost immediately the eye is caught by dozens of tips for improving a woman's beauty and attracting more romantic or sexual attention from men. Even less subtly perhaps in magazines targeted at men, the portrayals of femininity almost reduce women to flesh for carnal desire, a trophy of successful masculine conquest.⁴⁹ Although scholars like Brau, Robertson, Matsuo and Nakamura may claim otherwise,⁵⁰ I wish to argue that when it comes to the portrayal of female- and male-role actresses together, Takarazuka may in fact not differ so much from mainstream media. Perhaps less explicitly so to some extent, these portrayals are not exactly asexual.

For this demonstration I wish to refer to *Personal Books* again. In the second volume of *Personal Book 2002*, *musumeyaku* Ayano Kanami is featured as a 'guest model'. The series is placed in a setting that appears to be a hostess bar. In the first shot the *musumeyaku* is seated on a sofa while caressing the cheek of the featured *otokoyaku* Sena Jun. Sena does not reciprocate the physical contact, and instead sits with her arms wide, hung over the back of the couch. While the *otokoyaku's* eyes are locked with the viewer's through the camera, Ayano looks into a distance. In another shot of the same series, Sena has laid down against the armrest with Ayano lying limp on her body. While the *otokoyaku* still holds gaze with the reader, the *musumeyaku's* head is turned away and only her back can be seen. The setting of a hostess bar in combination with the nightclub getup of both actresses gives the images a suggestive implication. The two shots placed in consecutive order also serve to narrate a story. While in the first photo the 'hostess' appears to be conscious, in the second photograph, her limp pose suggests unconsciousness or submission. In line with the Takarazuka tradition for *musumeyaku*, Ayano plays a supportive role on different levels in this series. Firstly, the *musumeyaku's* femininity in both clothing and pose fulfil the purpose of juxtaposing with

⁴⁹ Morris, 2006, p 15

⁵⁰ Brau, 1990, p 88; Matsuo and Nakamura, 2002, 60; Robertson, 1998

Sena's masculinity. Secondly, her submissiveness serves to contrast against and highlight the *otokoyaku*'s dominance. Thirdly, in the second shot where Ayano's back is turned to the viewer, a clearer distinction is created between fore- and background; with Ayano fading into the background as yet another decoration of the set, Sena's presence is accentuated further. Finally and remarkably, with Sena's ascend to Top Star position in 2005, Ayano also becomes her appointed First Lady. A striking resemblance with Fratto's explanation of the dualistic image of a woman being either 'prostitute' or 'mother' can be seen herein. As exemplified earlier, because the 'prostitute' is the proof of unsuccessful male dominance, 'prostitute' must be conquered in order to rectify the embarrassment to patriarchy. Within this series of the *Personal Book*, this 'hostess' may stand for the 'prostitute' who is being conquered, and with the pair-up of the actresses in 2005, the 'prostitute' has been successfully converted – or tamed – into the 'mother'.

A similar setup can be seen in Sagiri's *Personal Book* as well. This volume features a series that tells quite an alarming story. The series begins with a panel where we see Sagiri standing at a doorway in a somewhat seductive pose. As the story progresses, we follow this persona further into the building and meet the *musumeyaku*, Momohana Hina. Momohana is seated on a couch and is offered a glass of champagne by Sagiri who is looming over her. In every shot that follows, Sagiri closes the distance between herself and the *musumeyaku* with her gaze fixed on the latter. Meanwhile, Momohana's eyes cloud over increasingly more, until the shot where she is depicted lying down and the content of her glass slightly lessened. Sagiri sits beside the *musumeyaku* with a subtle smile playing around her lips, and in the final shot, we see her holding Momohana in her arms. The implication in this story is heavily influenced through the champagne. From the series of depictions of Momohana until she finally ends up in Sagiri's arms, and the fact that but a small sip seems to have been taken from the champagne, it is possible to interpret these as Sagiri having drugged the beverage for her own

(dubious) interest. As *otokoyaku* represent men and *musumeyaku* women in Takarazuka, the story that is being told here is again one that parallels patriarchal fantasies; it is a story of successful male conquest at the expense of women.

As we have seen through the analyses above, the portrayal of femininity (i.e. the *musumeyaku*) in the Revue is not unlike that of conventional, mainstream media. Now having examined the trends in the portrayal of femininity in printed media, I shall return to the *musumeyaku* special that was the outset of this section: *Deux Princesses: Reika Manaki & Rion Misaki PHOTOBOOK*. This photo album was published in 2016 by the Takarazuka Revue. It features the Moon Troupe Top *Musumeyaku* Manaki Reika and Cosmos' Top *Musumeyaku* Misaki Rion. This publication is very unique in the sense that it is the Revue's first personal tribute to *musumeyaku* without it being a retirement commemoration, or marketing them as accessories for *otokoyaku*.

Normally, in order to 'compensate' for the *otokoyaku*'s femaleness, *Musumeyaku* are almost per definition dressed up in hyper-feminine fashion for added contrast. As in Takarazuka, the female audience is 'supposed' to identify themselves with *musumeyaku* and desire the *otokoyaku*,⁵¹ it is possible to say that the Revue has been imposing a standard of femininity on women. For persons who already fit into the hyper-feminine image that corresponds with the female-role actresses it may not prove much of an issue. But for the individuals who cannot find themselves within this imposed model, the traditional image of *musumeyaku* may be nothing but an irksome disapproval of their own identity. Conceivably, this is yet another reason why the *otokoyaku* might be a more appealing alternative for many fans. In *Deux Princesses* too, the clothes worn by the actresses are still mostly very feminine, but it does not end here. The photo album includes a variety of themes. The themes range from anything from casual to formal, sexy to cute, and even from masculine to feminine.

⁵¹ Grajdian, 2011, p 13

Unlike how female-role actresses have previously been portrayed, *Deux Princesses* is arguably ground-breaking in its images of diversity. The album's title – which translates to 'two princesses' – is a clear reference to the two *musumeyaku* featured herein. Stereotypically, what most people associate with a princess are luxury, flamboyance, and dreamy romance. And likewise, the aesthetics for a 'princess' are often imagined and designed along these characteristics as well. Although it may not be the desire of every female fan, Takarazuka's dreamy narratives strongly glorify princesses as the desirable woman. For a consumer who is only offered the image of the 'classic princess' to work with but cannot place themselves in this model, it could be very difficult to try grow a fondness for, let alone identify with these *musumeyaku*.

Deux Princesses however, offers a wider range of possibilities for being a 'princess'. For example, the first pages of the photo album shows the actresses in lounge wear. While clothed in slouchy sweaters and cardigans and their hair only fixed with the simplest of accessories, the actresses are portrayed to be enjoying a casual day in a home setting. In another series of photographs, these women are photographed wearing an oversized blouse and plain jeans, a simple, checked dress, or other clothing pieces readily and cheaply available in the most common shops. Some images display these actresses attending a summer festival, while in others we see them laying back on an ordinary lawn, or spending private time with a pet dog. These casual getups are conventionally not the first images that would cross somebody's mind when thinking about royalties, and yet, the title of this album dictates that these women are princesses nevertheless. Although the photos are without doubt heavily staged, the casualness in these shots does deliver a message: a woman does not need to be clad in gowns or surrounded by unrealistic luxuries in order to be a princess; instead, anyone is or can be a princess if they want to be.

The diversity in themes brings another potential source of empowerment. A series in the photo album features Manaki in male attire – an incredibly rare phenomenon within Takarazuka for *musumeyaku*. This series is a shared tribute with three junior *otokoyaku* in a boy-band setting wherein Manaki is the band-lead. Usually when *musumeyaku* share tributes with *otokoyaku*, it is always the latter who stand in full spotlight regardless their rank. In this series however, *Top Musumeyaku* Manaki stands in the centre of attention. Previously, only *otokoyaku* were the women who could ‘undo’ their femininity and thus be admired as the “exemplary female who can successfully negotiate both genders... without being constrained by either”.⁵² Upon entrance to the Revue *otokoyaku* are selected based on traditionally masculine features such as their physical height and depth of their voices. Therefore it is arguable that liberty was made available only for those who were ‘inherently’ more masculine to begin with. But now, by portraying a *musumeyaku* as a man, a new doorway is opened for greater liberty; as such, the ‘release from gendered bodies’ is no longer a privilege solely for *otokoyaku*.

Another break from tradition in this publication is the highlighted theme of friendship. Takarazuka is not unlike any other type of popular media with its strong focus on romance and heteronormativity. Persons of the same sex can be friends, but oftentimes the moment the other sex comes into the picture, the attention of the narrative starts to shift towards the romantic developments between man and woman. In conventional media, if two main protagonists are of different sex, it is as though it has been dictated that friendship is impossible between the two. Even if possible, it can only exist in initial phase; further developments will be inserted that hint strongly at eventual romantic outcome. In this same tradition, women have mostly been represented as the target of romantic or sexual interest, whereas the representations of men come in much greater variety. In *Deux Princesses*

⁵² Robertson, 1992, p 433

however, more than romance, friendship seems to be the celebrated theme. Manaki and Misaki are both students from the 95th class of the Takarazuka Music School, and have been on close terms with each other. Although *otokoyaku* friendships and pasts have always been a popular topic, the highlight of relationships between *musumeyaku* is a first in Takarazuka's publications. *Deux Princesses* is very unique in how it advertises female-role players in comparable ways to their masculine counterparts. Not only are there many images wherein the actresses can be seen spending time together, but also in-depth interviews are available that share their personal stories about themselves and each other. In-depth interviews of *musumeyaku* about *musumeyaku* are incredibly rare. Usually, interviews of *musumeyaku* are either very short and only cover some technicalities, or the actress is primarily asked to talk about *otokoyaku*. In addition, we also get a glimpse of Manaki and Misaki's time as classmates in the Music School, as well as their respective childhoods to offer the reader an idea of who these people are, and how interactions between these women might look like. In direct contrast to how femininity has usually been portrayed, now 'women' are represented as human beings who can exist for themselves, and not only next to masculinity or within the patriarchal context. It is truly noteworthy how, for once, *musumeyaku* are being marketed as individual performers, rather than a 'foil' to *otokoyaku*. Conceivably, with so many added dimensions to these actresses – something most other *musumeyaku* have not been offered – it is much easier for these women to appeal to Takarazuka's fandom for greater affection.

- Offering choices deviating from the patriarchal model of femininity
- Offering chances to appeal to fans
- Offering images of women not only existing next to masculinity (but friends). Women being something else than male's 'target' (platonic)
- Presenting the 'real' image of femininity as 'desirable'

4. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

[Insert discussion and introduction to conclusion]

I wish to point out the irony of Takarazuka fans who long for escape from patriarchy, and instead consume yet another form of patriarchy to achieve this goal. If anything, the patriarchal portrayals by the theatre company are perhaps just an ‘acceptable version’ rather than an ‘alternative’. Perhaps it is because the ‘male dominance’ is being exerted by the female *otokoyaku* or a desirable form of masculinity, that this can be condoned and even applauded. An overwhelming majority of Takarazuka’s fans have a strong predilection for *otokoyaku*, while their attitude for the female-role players remain mostly indifferent or negative. Conceivably, it is because little to no attention is being paid to *musumeyaku*, her oppressed position can be overlooked by the fans. The largest and most ardent group of fans are middle-aged, married women. If we consider their position in Japanese patriarchy, it is likely that the *musumeyaku*’s image may become too much of a painful reminder for their own situations if thought about more deeply. Instead, it is conceivable that what remains visible for such fans is how the female *otokoyaku*’s masculinity and power are being highlighted, while at the same time, they may be entirely unaware of the *musumeyaku* being sacrificed for this end.

More than just ‘lovers’ of something, fans can be considered ‘consumers’ of a fandom. In consumption, whether it be tangible or intangible products, the drive of the consumer is influenced and stimulated through exposure by marketing.⁵³ That is to say, the more a product is being promoted and made accessible, the more likely it will be consumed. In reverse, the lesser a commodity is available or the consuming motivation is being stimulated, the lesser the likeliness of the consumption hereof shall be. In the case of the consumption of

⁵³ Edwards, 2010, p 77

musumeyaku by fans, this latter explanation is most probably applicable. As Takarazuka fans have always been exposed to images and advertisements of *otokoyaku* in all shapes and sizes, this marketing only serves to augment the fans' affections. In contrast, because there is so little stimulus for the fan-consumption of *musumeyaku*, it results in lesser demand, which in turn leads to lesser consumable material. As such, a vicious cycle has come into existence in the fans' and the Takarazuka Revue's attention for *musumeyaku*.

[Insert conclusive conclusion]

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Illustrations

Figure 1. Top *Musumeyaku* Misaki Rion and Top Star Asaka Manato performing the ‘lift’. Photo from Misaki’s Farewell Show *Million Carat!!* (Asahi Shimbun, March 31st, 2017)

Figure 2: Oda Nobunaga’s sail. Screenshot from Ryuu Masaki’s Retirement Performance ‘*NOBUNAGA – The Will to Power –*’ (TCA Pictures, 2016)

Figure 3: Photograph of stage photos and post cards of the Star Troupe in Takarazuka City
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