

**Gender Gymnastics:
Performers, Fans and Gender Issues
in the Takarazuka Revue of Contemporary Japan**

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any institution of tertiary education. All sources are acknowledged in footnotes and the bibliography.

Leonie Rae Stickland

ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the Takarazuka Revue, an all-female musical theatre company, seeking to investigate its relation to broader issues of gender in contemporary Japan. Takarazuka has simultaneously reinforced and challenged the gender norms of Japanese society for the past ninety years, and indeed provides insights into the construction of those very norms. Takarazuka takes images of masculinity and femininity from mainstream society, the media, arts and popular culture, in both Japan and other countries, and reconstructs them according to its own distinct notions of how gender should be portrayed, both on and off its stage, not only by its performers, but also by fans and creative staff. Unlike in other single-sex theatrical genres featuring cross-dressing, such as Kabuki, gender is the essential focus of every performance in Takarazuka. Takarazuka's practices show that gender is not inherent, but must be learned through observation, imitation and direct instruction, and that various versions of male gender can be assumed for specific purposes, even temporarily, by biological females (and vice versa). Takarazuka's relationship with gender extends well beyond the stage itself; and one of the ways in which this thesis goes beyond other studies is its focus on the whole life-course of Takarazuka performers, including their girlhood and post-retirement years.

The relationship with gender issues encompasses fans as well. The popularity of Takarazuka's male-role players (*otokoyaku*), in particular, indicates that the manipulation of gender within a theatrical context has great appeal for audiences. However, many Takarazuka fans, especially female fans of the *otokoyaku*, evidently not only passively consume the artistry of gender impersonation on its stage, but also actively contribute to its production by communicating their expectations about gender performance to the actors and the Takarazuka administration, and by

encouraging each performer to sustain her stage gender off-stage when she appears in public, at least to a certain extent. The emotional investment of fans in supporting Takarazuka is often intense and long-lasting, and their attraction to Takarazuka clearly is not necessarily based solely upon sexuality, as other studies have proposed, but involves broader issues of gender.

The influence of Takarazuka derives not only from its performances, but also from many other aspects of its organisation and gender-linked practices. Takarazuka's existence and details about its members and various unique practices are widely publicised by the media. Its influence upon the social construction of gender in Japan extends beyond the confines of its theatres, its versions of gender roles affecting the lives of many in the general populace apart from those directly involved in performing in, creating or supporting its productions.

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ABBREVIATIONS

O(S)SK: Ōsaka shōchiku [shōjo] kagekidan (Osaka Shochiku [Girls'] Opera Company). The word *shōjo*, and its initial, were removed in 1943.

S(S)KD: Shōchiku [shōjo] kagekidan (Shochiku [Girls'] Opera Company) (Tokyo). The word *shōjo*, and its initial, were removed in 1945.

NOTE ON NAMES AND TRANSLATIONS

Japanese surnames precede given names in this thesis, except in citations of works published in English by Japanese authors. Macrons indicating long vowels are omitted in the case of place names, but retained in direct quotations and in citations of Japanese-language sources. Romanisation of Japanese words follows the Hepburn system, with slight modifications. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.