

**Takarazuka's *Gone With the Wind*: Performing America and the
(De)nationalization of Japanese Women's Bodies**

Introduction

Since Japan's defeat in World War II and the subsequent occupation by the Allied Powers, Japan has constructed its postwar national identity in relation to the USA. In the 1980s, when Japan consolidated its status as one of the world's wealthiest nations, the USA fell from its privileged status as the cultural object of desire, but from the 1990s onward, it has returned to hold the center of Japan's political concerns. Japan's financial and military cooperation with the USA in such incidents as the Gulf War and the Iraq War breaches Japan's postwar pacifist constitution, which declares an eternal renunciation of any war. Together with the fact that the constitution was written and enacted under the aegis of the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, this renewed role as a participant in US-led invasions, seems to return Japan to its postwar relationship with the USA.

In this presentation, I will examine how the Takarazuka Revue, Japan's all-female musical/revue company, signifies the role of the USA in Japan's postwar national identity. I will discuss its adaptation of *Gone with the Wind*. My concern is to look at the ways the company reinforces the modern, nationalist and heterosexist ideology of Japanese women's bodies as the bastion of national essence, which the company perceives is threatened in Japan's national identity crisis since the 1990s. Seemingly contradictorily, for this purpose, the company has its members perform Americans. I will elaborate on the complex workings of identifications in this production. However, I also suggest that Takarazuka's cross-gender performances actually go beyond the intentions

of the theatre's management, both eviscerating the official narrative and revealing lesbian and transgender desires among performers and fans.

I. Historical Background

Before discussing Takarazuka's *Gone with the Wind*, I will give a brief historical overview of Japan-USA relationship as well as Japanese women's bodies constructed in the tension. Japan's modernization began in the late nineteenth century. Capitalist modernity caused fundamental changes in many aspects of Japanese life, but the male Japanese intellectuals associated these changes with Westernization, particularly Americanization. As a reaction to this, by the 1920s and 1930s, as Harry Harootunian points out, these intellectuals "sought in historical representations a refuge against the alienating effects of everyday modern life and thus attributed to art and culture ... absolute value that remained immune from the changing valuations of the market and the political world" (xxi).

Kokutai, a corporeal regime which strictly regulated the people's physical bodies in the 1930s as a wartime ideology, is a manifestation of such aesthetization of Japaneseness. Translated as national body, *kokutai* defines the Japanese as the members of the extended Imperial Family sharing everlasting Japanese essence embodied by the Emperor. In *kokutai*, Japanese women's bodies were assigned the role of "good wives, wise mothers," who reproduce culturally pure Japanese males who can fight for the Emperor the Father in his "holy" battle to "free" Asia from the yoke of Western imperialism and to establish the Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere as a further extension of the Japanese Imperial Household. Thus, while men were associated with the progressive power to transform Japan into a modern nation-state, women were fixed in

traditional roles as the core of the national essence.

After the defeat in World War II, Japan was occupied by the USA from 1945 to 1952, and the word *kokutai* is no longer used officially. However, the modern construction of Japanese women's bodies still haunts Japanese society. It keeps coming back whenever nationalists and masculinists perceive the threat to Japan's national identity in relation to the USA. A good example is contemporary visual artist Murakami Takashi's theorization of postwar Japan as "Little Boy." In his catalogue titled *Little Boy*, which was published in 2005, he defines Japan as "Little Boy" in relation to the USA as adult man. As you might know, "Little Boy" is the nickname of an atomic bomb dropped onto Hiroshima, and thus Murakami links what he perceives as the feminized status of Japan to the defeat in "the war with the USA," ignoring all the other elements involved in the war. Murakami claims the necessity of getting out of the feminized status of Japan, but in such an attempt, there is no place for women. From such a stance, it would not be difficult to imagine a resurgence of the desire to regulate women's bodies as self-sacrificing or self-effacing "good wives, wise mothers," which is another side of the desire to claim or bring back masculinist Japan.

Below, I will first explain Takarazuka as the theatre apparatus and then discuss its *Gone with the Wind*.

II. What is Takarazuka?

The Takarazuka Revue was founded in 1913 by Hankyū Railway and Department Store tycoon Kobayashi Ichizō (1873-1957) as "wholesome family entertainment" for the purpose of attracting households along the railway to the spa near Takarazuka Station. In the company, women performers play both female and male roles in excessively

melodramatic, heterosexual romances mostly set in nostalgic, imaginary Western countries. Since its inception, the company has been enormously popular to this day. Although it enjoyed both male and female audience members from different generations in the prewar period, since the 1950s, it has attracted mostly women in their thirties or older (Robertson 142).

In 1919, the surprising success of the revue led Kobayashi to establish it as an independent theatre apparatus associated with the newly founded Takarazuka Music Academy. Ever since, Takarazuka performers are all graduates of the academy. In addition to theatrical training, they are also required to learn traditional Japanese female etiquette. For this reason, even though Takarazuka stages Las Vegas or Broadway-style shows, the academy is known as the best school for future “good wives, wise mothers,” which is the prewar construction of Japanese womanhood as mentioned earlier. Takarazuka’s famous motto is “Purely, Righteously, Beautifully,” and the performers must leave the company when they get married.

The Revue operates on a strict gender hierarchy, even though it is an all-female company. In the academy, students are assigned what Jennifer Robertson calls “secondary genders,” either male-role or female-role, by the male management (11). The assignment is based on “both physical (but not genital) and sociopsychological criteria: namely, height, physique, facial shape, voice, personality, and to a certain extent, personal preference,” and the students carry their secondary genders throughout their tenure at the company (Robertson: 11-12). Selected male-role players are acclaimed as the top stars, while the female-role top stars are seen merely as a foil. Takarazuka is thus structured first by gender hierarchy between the male administrators and the female

performers, and secondly, by gender-role hierarchy among the performers.

III. Takarazuka's *Gone with the Wind*: A Site of Contested Desires

Gone with the Wind has been one of the most popular Takarazuka works since its first production in 1977. The most recent production took place in 2004. Takarazuka's *Gone with the Wind* has a circular structure; it begins with the scene in which Rhett leaves Scarlett and ends with the same scene. Therefore, the play functions as an explanation of what led Rhett to this decision and offers a warning or a moral message to the female audience members: Scarlett is a bad model with whom they should not identify if they want to retain (or obtain) their status as happy married women. In the Takarazuka version, the couple has no children, so unlike the original novel and the film, the death of their daughter Bonnie cannot be the final blow to their relationship. Rhett has decided to divorce Scarlett, because she cannot share the same attitude toward the past with him. His heart overflows with nostalgia and even patriotism for the lost South, feelings that Scarlett lacks. On the contrary to Rhett, Scarlett keeps looking forward and thus embodies modernity, which is itself marked by a sense of progressive time. Indeed, the Takarazuka version emphasizes Rhett's patriotism even by staging his dance in the battlefield, where he heroically declares to the other soldiers, "Gentlemen! We will hold onto the pride of the South to the very end. For the South! For the South!" It is important to note that, at the play's conclusion, Scarlett is deprived of her famous closing lines. She does not get to say, "Tomorrow, I'll think of some way to get him back. After all, tomorrow is another day" (1037). Instead, she just wails, begging him not to leave her, and the play goes back to the first scene, in which Rhett leaves her. There is no tomorrow for Scarlett, no tomorrow with her loved one. She is confined to the circular

structure of the play, and all progress for her ceases.

The production is filled with almost excessive references to the beautiful, graceful, traditional Old South as the eternal motherland. At the beginning of the play after the scene of Rhett's departure, the curtain opens, and we see yet another scrim with the letters "GONE WITH THE WIND" on it. As the scrim opens, Scarlett's girlhood is enacted through dance and song. While she dances with a large number of young men, she sings with them, "Graceful country, beloved country, beautiful South, our spiritual home." This effect suggests to the audience that what they are viewing and listening to is that which is supposedly "gone with the wind," yet remains as the hidden truth beneath the veil. In other words, traditional Mother South was destroyed by the forces of modernity represented by the North, but behind the veil, the Old South still persists. The tension between modernity and patriotic longing for a vanishing tradition is the central theme of Takarazuka's *Gone with the Wind* as well as of the original novel and film versions, but Takarazuka version links such tradition specifically with the conventional gender norms. In light of this, what is expressed in this scene is the idea that traditional femininity is in danger in the face of modernity but is kept deep inside of Southerners. I need to note here that in this scene Mother South and the traditional Southern femininity are represented by Scarlett who is supposedly protected by men who surround her. Since she does not conform to patriotic womanhood, there is an ironic twist in this scene, which I will discuss later.

Interestingly, the Takarazuka management views the original *Gone with the Wind* from the postwar Japan's nationalist perspective, and it seems to identify the lost South with the lost Japan as the nation-state threatened in the face of modernity, even though

Gone with the Wind is the pop cultural icon of America, the victor. For example, in one scene that does not appear in either the novel or the film, Southern veterans exhibit anger toward those who celebrate the “new age,” saying that the current prosperity of the South is based on the great sacrifices of former soldiers. In the originals, the South does not recover enough to claim its prosperity; in postwar Japan, however, the opposite was true. The veterans sing about their lost home: “Home, home/ Sweet and faraway memories/ Green mountains, green villages/ Sweet longing/Home, home.” This depiction of the South as a natural paradise evokes a typical Japanese nostalgia for rural roots before the capitalist modernity. And such a paradise is where “good wives, wise mothers” reside.

The question is: why does Takarazuka use this iconic American work to display Japanese nationalist and masculinist sentiments? It may be simply that these sentiments are manifested through *Gone with the Wind*, which happens to be an American piece. However, it is odd, because these sentiments are the reaction to modernity associated with the USA. One possibility is that the management may have strategically used this American work as a mask to convey its anti-American sentiment. In other words, Takarazuka’s *Gone with the Wind* might be a parody of this American work.

Michael Taussig’s theorization of mimesis and alterity is helpful to understand such performance of Takarazuka. He writes:

Mimetic faculty is the nature that culture uses to create second nature, the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore differences, yield into and become Other. The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power. (xiii)

Examples of such mimesis include the Songhay people's possession by the spirit of the oppressor French Major, during which they draw power from the white man while mocking his grotesque but funny bodily symptoms that accompany the trance (240-241). Here, while the parodic desire marks the difference between Self and Other, the border between them is simultaneously blurred, and likewise, the location of power, which is released through mimetic practices, is obscured.

Likewise, what Takarazuka male management is doing may suggest its desire to obscure the postwar power relationship between the USA and Japan. If this is the case, the highly patriotic phrase "*okuni no tame*" (war time expression, meaning "for the nation"), which appears so frequently in its *Gone with the Wind*, may not mean "for the South"; rather, it may imply the management's desire to challenge US hegemony under the mask of sympathy/identification with the South in the face of modernity and to regain the aristocratic status Japan supposedly possessed before the defeat.

In the perspective of the Takarazuka management, it is women's bodies that are invested with unique Japaneseness. This further complicates the dynamics of mimesis and establishes an even more complicated network of referents.

The existence of male-role players certainly unsettles the nationalization and essentialization in the representation of women's bodies. The founder Kobayashi stressed that male-role players are essentially heterosexual, Japanese women disguised as men, but he also attempted to create modern "New Women," by which he meant Japanese women who fulfill Euro-American external standards of feminine physical beauty but who retain their core Japanese feminine essence (Robertson 134). These ideas echo Taussig's suggestion that mimesis can let the Self remain the same through the

appropriation of the Other:

[M]imesis registers both sameness and difference, of being like, and of being Other. Creating stability from this instability is no small task, yet all identity formation is engaged in this habitually bracing activity in which the issue is not so much staying the same, but maintaining sameness through alterity. (129)

This may help explain Takarazuka's mimesis of Anglo-American theatrical performance. Takarazuka performers should be able to perform Europe/the USA as a sign of mastery of modernity, but this performance is a mere façade to keep their Japanese feminine essence intact.

More importantly, as Japaneseness is inscribed on women's bodies, casting women in the roles of Western men undermines the Western referent. The cross-gender casting destabilizes the taking on of the modern—one sees traditional Japaneseness in the woman performer who is playing that male role. In this sense, cross-gender casting is reactionary. It keeps Old Japan in place. This may be how the management intends cross-gender, cross-racial casting to function, and it carefully monitors the doubleness of Takarazuka performers. What is interesting is that many fans do not share this view. As I will elaborate below, it is in the reception, in the audience, that there exists a potential for subversion, as well as perhaps in the grand success and experience of the performers themselves.

So far, I have discussed how nostalgia in Takarazuka functions from the management perspectives. However, nostalgia also entails a subversive possibility if we look at it in relation to Celeste Olalquiaga's theorization of allegory. She argues that allegory, as opposed to the symbolic system, does not promise the condensation of

signifier and signified, as “[a]llegory’s metaphorical comment on reality is the perfect emblem for a perception always one step removed from its source” (21). She explains that allegory, even though it longs for the condensation, fails to achieve it, and that in its obsessive efforts, allegorical production ends up being saturated with floating signs that are not anchored in single meanings. Moreover, in its repeated failure, allegory ends up annihilating the progression of time or historicity (Olalquiaga: 22). Olalquiaga suggests that postmodern cultural anxiety caused by the disruption of the symbolic system turn people, who long for intense and concrete experiences, to allegory, which, in its efforts to fill the signifying gap, ironically “replenishes the ensuing vacuum with the multiplication of signifiers” (22). The desire for intensity caused by fear against the world with simulacra ironically results in proliferating fakes.

Takarazuka’s *Gone with the Wind* might function as allegory for male management, which desires to resist what it perceives as the fragmentation of national identity and ideal Japanese womanhood in its political relationship with the USA. However, the piece does not eventually fulfill the management’s desire. As allegory, it instead exposes the constructed nature of the symbolic system. Olalquiaga writes,

[I]t is precisely in this failure [of allegory] to achieve condensation that the arbitrariness of the symbolic is exposed. Allegorical distance underlines the constitutive difference between referent and representation. So, while allegory fails to reestablish an origin and its consequent truth, it succeeds in pointing out the obviously constructed quality of symbolic truth. (22)

As an example of such nature of allegory, she discusses the popularity of 1950s and 1960s space-age retro in 1980s U.S.A., represented by science fiction films. For instance,

B movies from the 1950s and 1960s, with their excessive melodrama, satisfied the desire of those in the 1980s for the intensity, which is intended to fill in the vacuum generated by collapse of the symbolic (Olalquiaga: 23, 33-34). However, these melodramas are too excessive to be taken as real, and thus provides the viewers with detachment to reflect on their anxiety (Olalquiaga: 34). Likewise, in the melodramatic space in Takarazuka's *Gone with the Wind*, the intense emotions become hyperbole, never coming to rest on single meanings. In addition, most importantly, women enacting heterosexual romances can never achieve the unification between their bodies and such a gendered and sexualized ideal. The decontextualized space on Takarazuka's stage—in the sense that it is Japanese (masculinist) ideology which comes out of American male characters (played by Japanese women) supposedly from the time of the Civil War—gets saturated with floating signifiers. This is probably what many fans enjoy. Under Takarazuka's conventional motto of "Purely, Righteously, Beautifully," they can secretly harbor this space, in which their sexual desire is not forced to rest on nationalist heterosexism. If Takarazuka management uses its seeming sympathy with the American Old South as a mask for its nationalist and masculinist sentiments, the fans exploit such sentiments as a mask for their transgressive desire.

From this perspective, it is possible to subversively re-interpret the masculinist discourse of Takarazuka's *Gone with the Wind*. For example, Scarlett's dance with her admirers at the beginning of the play can mean something different than the masculinist portrayal of woman as the core of tradition. Women's bodies in this scene demonstrates that it is the masculine, sensuous woman Scarlett who is positioned at the core of the nostalgic space, and she is surrounded by male-role players or women transgressing the

boundary of conventional womanhood. This scene can subversively show that Scarlett is admired not by men but by androgynous women. Importantly, male-role players do not replicate “real” men. Even with the stereotypically masculine bodily movements and male costume, they apparently do not even try to look “real” men, as can be seen in their use of feminine make-up, such as red lipstick. This may remind one of typical colonial practice, which forbids the colonized to be exactly like the colonizer. However, the administration’s strategy coincidentally helps encourage performers and female audience members to acknowledge women’s transgressive bodies. Thus, in this scene, beneath a protective veil, lesbian and transgender desires are preserved.

Another example of signifier’s slippage is seen in the presence of two Scarletts, which is unique to the Takarazuka version. Scarlett II is an alter-ego to Scarlett that only she can see. Although Scarlett is a female character, due to her masculine nature according to male Takarazuka director/playwright Ueda Shinji (Ueda 1997:156), a male-role player is often cast in this role, and therefore, she performs female gender in this play. Scarlett II is performed by an actor who is a specialist in the opposite gender of the one who performs Scarlett, and the actors alternate roles during the run. Narratively, the function of two Scarletts is clear. The unwomanly Scarlett is seen as schizophrenic, and it is the revelation that she loves patriotic Rhett which brings the two Scarletts into one. As Scarlett II disappears, Scarlett says, “I have finally become who I am,” suggesting she has achieved organic femininity. Yet, such representation of gender as the stable referent is unwittingly undermined by the very assignment of a male-role player to either of the two Scarletts, because it demonstrates that both Scarlett/Scarlett II and male-role players can freely go back and forth between female gender and male gender. Moreover, having a

female-role player perform the same role as a male-role player contains another subversive possibility: it shows that a female-role player (typically hyper-feminine) can also perform as a masculine, sensuous woman, which is regarded as the purview of male-role players. Having them take turns daily further blurs the difference between the two. It is true that Takarazuka's assignment of male gender to female students itself deconstructs the conventional idea that female gender resides in female bodies and vice versa, but Takarazuka continues to reproduce a strict gender hierarchy, with male-role players always placed in a privileged position. In this context, seeing both male-role players and female-role players perform the two *Scarletts* complicates the clear boundary between these two genders. Thus, the allegorical space of the American Old South in contemporary Japan or contemporary Japan in the American Old South is where female audience members can see other women's bodies freed from the burden of nationalist and masculinist ideologies. In this sense, there are two layers of parody in the space of Takarazuka's *Gone with the Wind*: the fans find parodic pleasure in watching the management's parody of the original *Gone with the Wind*.

IV. Conclusion

In this presentation, I discussed that in the Takarazuka Revue's *Gone with the Wind*, nationalization and essentialization of female gender and sexuality are contested by female audience's subversive appropriation of the power apparatus. Takarazuka's masculinist management tries to instruct women audience members that good Japanese women should be positioned at the core of the national tradition, which is evoked under the mask of the Old South. In contrast, female audience members appreciate the allegorical nature of Takarazuka and harbor lesbian and transgender desires under the

mask of “pure, righteous, and beautiful” Japanese women. As former male-role top star Hyūga Kaoru mentioned that these codes were just rules of “games” (Kawasaki 193), these women simply need heterosexist and nationalist motto as a façade to protect their homosocial/homosexual space.

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