

TAKARAZUKA'S PERFORMANCES IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AFTER WORLD WAR II

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Introduction

Takarazuka Revue (usually called *Takarazuka*) is a prototypical example that demonstrates the modernization of Japanese dramas. *Takarazuka Opera Company* was founded by an enterpriser named Ichizo Kobayashi (1873-1957) in 1914. It is an opera company composed only of unmarried actresses, that is probably unique to Japan. It is based in Takarazuka, a suburban city near Osaka and Kobe, but it has also its own theatre at Yûrakuchô, situated just beside the Ginza, the most luxurious shopping street in Tokyo. Many people frequent these theatres, and they are both prosperous. The company has also given quite a few overseas performances, including the ones at Kaunas and Vilnius in 1975. In this paper, we discuss the overseas performance of the *Takarazuka Revue*.

Takarazuka Revue Company consists of five troupes, named Hana (Flower), Tsuki (Moon), Yuki (Snow), Hoshi (Star) and Sora (Cosmos) with more than 20 directors. They have their own orchestra and even an exclusive channel on cable TV. Their performances have been entertaining us with traditional Japanese dance, and at the same time a revue

or a musical, the scene of which is usually set in Europe or America. It is particularly noticeable that, since *Mon Paris* performed in 1927, they have consistently been producing the stereotype of the West or Europe, especially of France as is conceived by Japanese people in general. By the stereotype, we mean the lovely country France, or the flowery city Paris. It should also be noted that *The Rose of Versailles* which was first performed in 1974 is now considered as a representative work of *Takarazuka*. The original of this work is a manga written by Riyoko Ikeda, which describes the life and love affairs of Marie Antoinette in the context of the French Revolution.

Before taking up the main subject, we would like to explain briefly the history of *Takarazuka Revue*, starting with the founding principles of the founder Ichizô Kobayashi.

At the Meiji era, when Japan was rapidly promoting its modernization, Kobayashi had a dream of producing “National Theatre”, the theatre for popular entertainment that is suitable for modernized Japan. He thought Western operas translated and performed by Japanese actors would not be successful in Japan. Instead he aimed to create a new theatre for the general public which is based on Kabuki, a Japanese traditional drama, and incorporated Western music, songs and dances. That is, he tried to found his ideal theatre on the basis of harmony between the West and Japan. At the beginning of the Shôwa era, the success of *Mon Paris*(1927) and another big hit *Parisette*(1930) brought about the golden years of Parisian revues in *Takarazuka*. *When blooms the violet*, one of the French pieces sung in *Parisette*, was adopted as the anthem of the company, which helped establish the identity of *Takarazuka*. For that matter, this song in the original French piece is titled *Quand refleurront les lilas blancs*, the literal English translation being, *When blooms the white lilac*. They replaced the white lilac with the violet that reminds Japanese audience of the image of innocent girls of *Takarazuka*.

Now returning to the founder’s spirit, Kobayashi’s idea to create a new theatre for the general public based on harmony between the West and Japan has subsisted in the program as a mixture of Japanese and Western works. Before the war, even during the period when the Western revue was prosperous in Japan, works newly produced in Japanese style predominated in number. Symbolically, on New Year’s day in 1993, a double feature program consisting of a Japanese piece and a Western one, *PARFUM DE PARIS* (all the dresses were designed by Kenzo Tkada) was performed to

commemorate the completion of the New Grand Takarazuka Theatre. This shows that *Takarazuka* is still based on harmony between Japan and the West as well as the typical image of Paris.

During the Second World War, every form of amusement suffered various losses and Takarazuka was not an exception, but soon after the war it revived earlier than any other theatres. In postwar Japan, French culture was widely popular for a while, in various fields from literature, art, film, to chanson. However, American culture, particularly in the realm of amusement or consumable culture, gradually became overwhelmingly influential. And such a trend led *Takarazuka* to turn to America, in particular Broadway musicals. In 1967 the first performance of a Broadway musical *Oklahoma!* was given, followed by *West-Side Story*(1968) and *Carousel*(1969). At that time, although it was said that an actress was not physically capable of playing the male role of a Broadway musical, they managed to acquire great skills in dancing through hard training. As a result, the basis of their unique style was brought forth, the style which keeps Japanese tradition of Kabuki performances, and at the same time is composed of French image and American skills of dancing. *The Rose of Versailles* was the very embodiment of that style¹.

While creating an original image of the West inside Japan in this way, Takarazuka has been giving a Japanese image to foreign countries through its overseas performances. The next problem we would like to focus on is what kind of images *Takarazuka* wants to create in order to represent *Takarazuka* itself and to impress Japan favorably in foreign countries. For this purpose we should first make clear the background of each project of its overseas performance, from several different angles, social, political or diplomatic. And after that, we are going to examine how the program was constructed to be accommodated to each place which has a different language and culture. From this perspective, we will explain the brief history of *Takarazuka's* overseas performance in the following.

¹ About the hybridity in the Takarazuka Revue, see Takashi Kitamura "Remarks on the Creativity of Japanese Reception : from Literature to Popular Art" in *Contemporary Japan from European Perspective*, Vitauras Magnus University, Kaunas (Lithuania), 2009.

Development of *Takarazuka's* overseas performance²

Takarazuka's first overseas performance was given from October 1938 to March 1939 in 25 cities in Germany, Italy and Poland, in order to promote friendly relations among Germany, Italy and Japan. Of course, this mission reflects the political context of those days (the Anticomintern Pact in 1937 and the Tripartite Pact in 1940, concluded between three nations). At that time, Ichizô Kobayashi, nominated as Minister of Commerce and Industry of the second Konoe cabinet in 1940, had a great influence on politics as well as in business. Since then, *Takarazuka* has performed in a considerable number of foreign countries more or less on a diplomatic mission to promote goodwill between the foreign countries and Japan.

Before the end of World War II, from 1939 to 1944, *Takarazuka* visited not a few cities in Manchuria (northeast part of China) and Seoul in Korea which was controlled by Japanese military government, to entertain mainly the Japanese troops at that time. After the War, *Takarazuka* visited Hawaii five times (1955,1956,1957,1966 and 1985), New York and Canada (1959), Paris (1965), Southeast Asia (Burma, Malaysia and Singapore in 1973, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Burma in 1982), Soviet Union (including Lithuania and Ukraine) and Paris (1975-6), Central and South America (Mexico, Argentina and Brazil in 1978), New York (1989,1992), London (1994), Hong Kong (1998), China (1999,2002), Berlin (2000) and Seoul (2005).

As to the program in overseas performance, it should be noticed that there is a turning point at the performance in Paris in 1965. Up to that time, the programs were all in Japanese style, that is, they were made up of Japanese dance, chorus, Kabuki, etc. This shows, in those days, *Takarazuka* tried to present the traditional image of Japan, which was very popular among foreign people. However we should not take all the performances in foreign countries in the same way. Especially in Manchuria and Seoul, which were under the rule of Japanese army, the performances by *Takarazuka* were intended to entertain Japanese soldiers and civilians. Needless to say, occidental cultures were at that time strongly limited by the Japanese nationalism.

Among all the performances made abroad after World War II, we will focus on the four performances given in Europe. We begin with the one performed in Paris(in 1965), and secondly we will discuss the performances

² For further details of this subject, see Takashi Kitamura "Takarazuka's Overseas Performances in Europe and Asia" in *Reception of Japanese and Korean Popular Culture in Europe*, Vitauras Magnus University, Kaunas (Lithuania), 2011..

given from 1975 to 1976 in the Soviet Union and Paris, including Lithuania and Ukraine. Thirdly we will consider the performance in London (in 1994) and lastly the one given in Berlin (in 2000).

Second Performance in Europe (1965)

As we mentioned above, it was at Paris in 1965 from September to October that *Takarazuka* played a western revue abroad for the first time. The program was composed of two parts :“Japan” *Yesterday-Today-Tomorrow*, a traditional Japanese-style show and *Les Rythmes Du Monde-Takarazuka*, a western revue. The dance director was Paddy Stone who made a great contribution to *Takarazuka* in introducing Broadway musical into it. After the success of this performance in Paris, a home of “revue”, the mixture of Japanese tradition and Western style became a standard in *Takarazuka*'s overseas performance. It could be affirmed that besides typical Japanese traditional images, *Takarazuka* began to aim at presenting a modernized or westernized face of Japan which recovered its confidence through rapid and successful postwar reconstruction. To explain the relevant background, the performance in Paris was carried out exactly the next year after the Tokyo Olympic Games (1964), which was symbolic of Japanese miraculous swift growth of the economy in the postwar era. And in 1964, Japan shifted to the status of an Article 8 nation of the International Monetary Fund. It is also noticeable that the year 1964 was the 50th anniversary of the *Takarazuka Revue*. In January 1965, Japan Air Lines, JAL, which would be a big sponsor of the *Takarazuka*'s performance in Paris, started an advertisement for a package tour(=JAL PACK) to Europe. Then, its special feature was a tour of Paris. In fact, the first tour of JAL PACK was carried out in November, that is only one month after *Takarazuka*'s performance in Paris.

Thus we can say that various factors, diplomatic, economic, as well as cultural ones made possible the first performance in Paris.

Third Performance in Europe (1975-1976)³

Let us turn to « Third performances in Europe » In this case, when the project of this overseas performance was first designed, the mission

³ On this topic, see Takashi Kitamura “*Takarazuka Revue in Lithuania*” in *Japan as images :Crossing Viewpoints of Europe and Japan*, Vitauras Magnus University, Kaunas (Lithuania), 2010.

of *Takarazuka* was to achieve certain obvious political intentions, that is, an amelioration of the relation between the Soviet Union and Japan. After having established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China in 1972, Kakuei Tanaka, the Prime Minister, started out to normalize diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. In October 1973, the Prime Minister visited Kremlin to negotiate a peace treaty with the Soviet Union. But the Tanaka Cabinet was forced to resign because of a bribery scandal in December, 1974. Takeo Miki, who replaced Tanaka, had little enthusiasm for the amelioration of Japanese-Soviet relations. Nonetheless, the projects of *Takarazuka* performance in the Soviet Union subsisted due to the efforts of the people concerned. In 1975, though the relations between the two nations became deteriorated, the project of overseas performances was achieved but with great modification; performances in France were added and a series of overseas performances in 1975-1976 was titled the *Third European Performance*.

In total, *Takarazuka* gave 6 performances in Kaunas, 15 in Vilnius, 17 in Leningrad, 15 in Moscow, 19 in Kiev, and 38 in Paris. There remains no evidence to show the reason why the two Lithuanian cities were chosen as the first places of performance by the organizers of the Soviet Union. Norikazu Matsubara, the producer of the performances, tells us that he was not informed about the choice. Further research may make clear some political reasons on the side of the Soviet Union.

The program of this performance was titled *The Takarazuka* and was composed of two parts : the first part, *Fantasy Takarazuka* (by Tetsuzô Shirai) and the second part, *Beat on Takarazuka* (by Seisaku Kamogawa). Just like the double feature program at Paris in 1965, the former was a Japanese-style show and the latter was a western revue. Supported by the Japan Foundation, *Takarazuka* tried to provide the audience who was not familiar with actual Japan with an image of advanced Occidentalized country and of course the troupe should at the same time entertain them by showing stereotypical images of traditional Japan.

Performance in London (July, 1994)

This performance was first scheduled to be given in 1991 as part of Japan Festival in England, but was postponed till July 1994, allegedly because the theatre (London Coliseum Theatre) was not available during that period. However, it might be postponed intentionally in order to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the founding of the company in 1914.

It should also be noticed that 1994 is the year to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the Russo-Japanese War, though no one has ever pointed out this point. As is known, Japan had formed an alliance with England against the threat of Russia. For that matter, Japan and U.K. had a commemorative event in 2002 to remember their alliance 100 years before.

The performance in London was mainly sponsored by private corporations, in particular the Mitsubishi group. We can assume that the project was promoted for economic reasons. It was also sponsored by JAL (Japan Air Lines), and the photographic collection of the tour presents a large picture of the actresses going down the ramp of the plane.

The performance was composed of a Japanese-style show *Kasensho* (*Flowery Fan Dance*) and two western programs, that is *This Side of the Door* (drama) and *Million Dreams* (revue). We can say that in this performance, western programs were put priority, which departed from precedent.

Performance in Berlin (June-July, 2000)

The performances in Berlin were given at Friedrichstadt Palast as part of the festival called Japan Year 1999-2000. The program was the double feature, a Japanese-style show *Takarazuka Snow-Moon-Flower* and a western revue *Sunrise Takarazuka*. Thus its diplomatic purpose to strengthen the relationship with Germany was made public.

At the same time, there is no doubt that it was also intended to celebrate the Millennium, the turn of the century, since *Takarazuka* gave an extensive celebration in Japan, too, and it was certainly significant for them to visit Berlin where they gave the first overseas performance in 1938 at the beginning of the 21th century. On top of that, we should mention that the new Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre was completed in the same year, and they presented an opening performance to celebrate it in January 2001.

Conclusion

To summarize, it is obvious that various factors, namely political, diplomatic, economic, as well as cultural ones, made possible the performances in Europe after the World War II, so the purpose and the motive of the overseas performances have been almost the same since the first performance in Europe(1938-39). They were intended to create a favorable image

of Japan abroad and also to make *Takarazuka* more appealing to people at home.

To be sure, the same thing holds true in some degree for the performances given in other countries, especially in Asian countries. Next April they will visit Taiwan for the first time. Considering the tense relationship between Japan and China as well as Taiwan at present, there is no doubt that the first performance in Taiwan is also charged with a mission to carry out various purposes and functions. And this performance will be the eve of the Centenary of *Takarazuka Revue Company* in 2014.

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Abstract

Takarazuka's first overseas performances were given from October 1938 to March 1939 in 25 cities in Europe, which were designed to promote friendly relationship among Germany, Italy and Japan. Obviously, this mission reflects the political context of those days. Since then, *Takarazuka* has performed in a considerable number of foreign countries more or less supported by the Japanese government. In this study, narrowing our focus on *Takarazuka's* performances in Europe after World War II, we review its history and examine the social and political background behind each performance.

Santrauka

Pirmieji Takarazukos pasirodymai užsienyje įvyko 25 Europos miestuose 1938 m. spalį – 1939 m. kovą ir buvo skirti draugiškų Vokietijos, Italijos ir Japonijos santykių gerinimui. Be abejo, šis turas atspindi to meto politinį kontekstą. Vėliau Takarazuka rengė pasirodymus, kurie daugiau ar mažiau buvo remiami Japonijos vyriausybės, ir kitose užsienio šalyse. Šiame darbe apžvelgiama Takarazukos istorija ir socialinis bei politinis šių pasirodymų fonas, atkreipiant dėmesį į laikotarpį Europoje po Antrojo pasaulinio karo.