

ABSTRACT

Takarazuka Theatre: Cultural formation and its urban poetics in 1930s Tokyo

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The all-female Takarazuka Revue Company marks its centenary in 2014. Beginning in a suburban spa town near Kobe, the popularity of the girls' performance grew to the extent that it acquired its own theatre in the most glamorous Hibiya-Ginza district of Tokyo in 1934. It was the time when urban culture was at its peak in affecting people's leisure, fashion and other forms of offering a new life style. Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre was situated at the pivot of the city, next to the Imperial Hotel, facing Japan's first western-style public garden, Hibiya Park. The debut of the Kansai-based Takarazuka enterprise in Tokyo was a serious attempt by a local company to embark on a challenging venture in the capital. Both in terms of social and cultural context, the complexity of rapid westernization along with urbanization was much reflected in the institutional as well as theatrical nature of Takarazuka. Takarazuka Revue has since established its own performance style by creating harmony out of contrasting elements and dilemmas. This complex heterogeneity can be observed in Takarazuka productions, which through the effects of amazement and surprise, have entertained audiences and earned their popularity as 'modern'.

By looking back the debut of Takarazuka in Tokyo, this paper investigates what constituted Tokyo modernism. Furthermore, Takarazuka's significance in its urban context will be explored by reconsidering its characteristics which are defined by balancing oppositional elements such as 'city and suburbia', 'East and West', 'invention and convention', 'men and women', 'education and enterprise'. To critically contextualize the dynamics and hybrids of Takarazuka from a global perspective about modernity nurtured at the dawn of 'urbanism', theories by Yoshimi Shunya and Walter Benjamin will be taken into account. This will

further develop insights into Takarazuka's position within contemporary Japanese urban culture.