IDOLS AND OTOKOYAKU:

THE INFLUENCES OF GENDER AND

POLITICS ON FANS OF JAPANESE

PERFORMING ARTS

by

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DEDICATION

To Mom and Dad, who have been a constant source of love and support (even if they don't always understand what my research is about). Absolutely none of this would've happened without everything you have done and sacrificed for me. I love you both so much.

To my friends, Chelsea, Claire, and Kevin who have been my cheerleading squad, my therapists, and my distractions when I needed a break. I'm truly so very lucky to have friends as amazing and wonderful as you.

And to my cat, Lucifer, who can't read this dedication, but works very hard at being a good boy and a skilled cuddle buddy.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
48G	48 Group
AKB	AKB48
AKS	AKS Corporation (株式会社AKS)
CD	Compact Disc
COVID-19	Novel Coronavirus Disease 2019
DVD	Digital Video Disc
IP	Internet Protocol
J-Rock/J-Pop	Japanese Rock Music/ Japanese Pop Music
K-Pop	Korean Pop Music
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
LGBT+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, etc.
METI	Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry
NMB48	Namba 48
MNL48	Manila 48
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
Revue	Takarazuka Revue Company
SDF	Self-Defense Forces
Takarazuka	Takarazuka Revue Company
US/USA	United States of America
UN	United Nations
VSCO	Visual Supply Company

ABSTRACT

AKB48 and the Takarazuka Revue are two Japanese performing arts groups with all-female casts that have been widely promoted in Japanese popular culture both domestically and abroad. Because both the Takarazuka Revue and AKB48 have been used at points to promote Japanese nationalism and conservatism and because of the extensive research regarding gender performance, production, and consumption found within each groups' performances and audiences, I examined the political and social impact of these groups: specifically in relation to the role of women, feminism, and gender equality in Japan. I conducted an online survey of 114 fans and non-fans of the Takarazuka Revue and AKB48 to determine if and how the association with conservative and nationalist politics impacts the way audiences of Japanese popular culture view gender relations and equality in Japan. Generally speaking, audiences did seem to be somewhat influenced by the political associations of these groups, but they were most strongly impacted socially. Collectively speaking, fans most disagreed with feminist and equality initiatives not associated with conservative politics, but most disagreed with conservative and nationalist rhetoric overall. However, even amongst fans there is a gendered divide wherein male fans most disagreed with feminist and equality initiatives not associated with conservative politics, but female fans most agreed.

I. PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The Takarazuka Revue and AKB48 are two well-known performance groups with all-female performers that are associated with the Japanese soft power movement known as *Cool Japan*. These groups have often been examined for the ways in which they produce and perform gender as well as how their audiences interact with it. The Takarazuka Revue is a theater troupe whose female actors perform in the roles of both men and women, but their performances are often tagged as sensual and directed towards female audiences (Robertson, 1998; Stickland, 2010). Conversely, AKB48 is an idol pop group whose (mostly underaged) female performers often perform in sexy music videos and stage performances geared for a male audience (Aoyagi, 2000; Keith & Hughes, 2016). These groups' involvement with gender roles, production, performance, and consumption have been studied extensively (Aoyagi, 2000; Cogan & Cogan, 2006; Frühstück, 2005; Keith & Hughes, 2016; Robertson, 2014; Toth, 2008; Yano, 1997).

Both groups have been included to some degree in a significant body of research that examines gender production and consumption within the Japanese performing arts. Women in Japan were banned from performing on the stage until 1877 (Oshio, 2002:763) and previous studies show in great detail the persistent issues with the authority and authenticity of female performers, as well as concerns about the ways in which ideas of women and femininity are produced and consumed with Japanese arts (Anan, 2011; Aoyagi, 2000; Cogan & Cogan, 2006; Frühstück, 2005; Keith & Hughes, 2016; Robertson, 2014; Takemura, 1995; Toth, 2008; Yano, 1997). AKB48 and the Takarazuka Revue have both been largely scrutinized from the purview of gender production and consumption. However, there is almost no examination of if and how the production of gender in each group affects fans' perception of gender or gender relations overall.

Both of these groups are dominated by women performers. AKB48 is a pop group within the subgenre known as idol pop. Currently at 107 members - aged 14 to 29 - AKB48 is the largest pop music group in the world (AKB48 Official Website, 2020). Membership rotates annually based on the age and popularity of the performers, with each year's members chosen in a voting system by fans at the end of each year (Liu and Wakatsuki, 2017). AKB48 has sparked five different sister groups in Japan and nine other groups across Asia, collectively known as the AKB48 Group or 48G (Viegas, 2019). While the performers of AKB48 and 48G are mostly teenagers and underage girls, their primary fan base is middle-aged men.

The Takarazuka Revue is an all-women theater school in which its performers act in both male and female roles. Since its inception in 1913, the Takarazuka Revue has sparked decades' worth of backlash, discussion, study, and debate about gender, sexuality, and popular culture (Robertson, 1998:xi). Originally designed as a form of family-friendly entertainment to attract tourists to the town of Takarazuka, the immensely competitive school has sparked numerous copy-cat performance groups across the country (Robertson, 1998:4). While the school denies using homosensuality to market towards female audiences, the primary audiences of the Takarazuka are typically women and housewives, drawn in by the non-conformist productions of gender and relationships on the stage (Robertson, 1998:16).

Interestingly, both the Takarazuka Revue and AKB48 have had close ties to conservative and nationalist parties in Japanese government and have occasionally been used to support and advertise those parties' political goals and values (Aoyagi, 2000; Funakoshi, 2014; Roberston,1998; Stickland, 2010; Thomas, 2014). Japan's Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, has used AKB48 to promote his Liberal Democratic Party's conservative agendas (such as

changes to Article 9 of the Constitution and increasing membership in the Self-Defense

Forces) (Funakoshi, 2014). Similarly, the Takarazuka Revue performed shows that promoted

Japanese nationalism and the war effort during World War II (Robertson, 1998). However,

the effect of each group's nationalistic ties has not been examined in prior research.

Despite countless analyses of gender performance, production, and consumption

within Japanese arts and popular culture, none of the prior literature uses the Takarazuka

Revue or AKB48 to explore the intersectionality of politics and gender in Japanese arts and

popular culture. In 2013, Abe announced to the United Nations General Assembly his

government's plan to increase women's empowerment and create "a society in which

women shine" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). While Japan has long ranked highly in

many global development indices, it ranks almost at the bottom in many gender equality and

equity indices (Scheider, 2014). As the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in

Japan, Abe has acted as the spearhead for economic initiatives to increase the role of women

in the workforce dubbed *womenomics*[1]. However, there have been widespread concerns from

feminists both within Japan and across the globe that these economic initiatives, rather than

helping women in Japanese society, can actually disadvantage women and create further

inequalities along gender and class lines (Kano and Mackie, 2013).

Despite his call for economic reform, Abe is widely remembered as a staunch anti-

feminist in his first tenure as Prime Minister from 2006 to 2007, during which time Abe

"declared gender equality a threat to Japanese culture and family values" (Itô, 2015). While

Abe and the LDP may not be following a fully feminist agenda in the pursuit of their

economic goals, this is not the first time that Japanese politicians have used the feminist

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[1] Womenomics, originally coined by Kathy Matsui, is widely used in Japan as it is also a play on the colloquial phrase for the wider sphere of Abe's economic initiatives dubbed "Abenomics." (Abe, 2013)

movement to increase their party's power. As seen in the history of relations between politicians and feminists, "policy makers have appropriated the discourse of feminism in order to achieve national goals of economic and demographic growth" (Kano, 2018).

In addition to gender equality initiatives, Abe and his party have launched an international soft power push known as *Cool Japan*. In 2010, the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI) created the Creative Industries Promotion Office to develop and promote cultural and creative industries as part of the concept of *Cool Japan* (METI, 2014). *Cool Japan* is a soft power movement in which Japan exports popular culture to other countries to improve its political, social, and relational standing in the world, much in the same way that South Korea has utilized the *Hallyu* movement or The United States has used Hollywood (METI, 2014). *Cool Japan* attempts to utilize cultural diplomacy through the distribution of Japanese cultural and artistic products like "manga, anime, and games, but also extend[ing] to fashions [*sic*], food, traditional arts and crafts, and tourism" (Kim, Kim, and Connolly, 2016:541). Both AKB48 and the Takarazuka Revue have been associated with *Cool Japan* initiatives.

Throughout this thesis, I seek to determine how the political associations of these groups influence the social and political opinions of fans, specifically regarding their opinions on gender relations. To do this, I will compare the political and social opinions of audiences of AKB4 and the Takarazuka Revue with those of the general population and determine patterns and connections with the political rhetoric to which each group is connected. These two groups have been chosen as an area of focus because they are both popular forms of all-female performance in two different fields of the performing arts, have historical associations with political influences, are important agents in the *Cool Japan* movement, and have a gender dichotomy in their target audiences (male fans of AKB48 and

female fans of Takarazuka Revue) which will provide nuance to the gendered perspective of this research. By studying this, we can examine the extent to which politicians and governments may utilize popular culture forms to further political goals, both domestically and abroad. Bearing in mind that the previous research on these groups was widely focused on gender studies, this thesis will give particular focus to how gender roles, gender equality, and feminism are perceived by or reflected within these groups and their audiences.

Considering how both AKB48 and the Takarazuka Revue have been included as agents in the *Cool Japan* push, particular concern should focus on how these groups produce and perpetuate Japanese gender relations and political agendas. Because both groups are or have been associated with Japanese nationalism, it is important to understand how these groups impact peoples' understanding and perceptions of Japanese politics and values and how that in turn can affect political and gender relations across the globe.

Chapter two of this thesis will review the history and prior literature related to gender relations in Japan, AKB48 and the Takarazuka Revue and their respective industries, and the political associations of these groups as part of *Cool Japan*. This chapter will provide an overview of the issues related to gender construction, production, and performance and the related intersectionality with authenticity and power. This will provide the foundational knowledge for the issues and why AKB48 and the Takarazuka Revue are relevant points of study in this thesis.

The third chapter will define the methodology for the survey used in this study. I conducted an online survey with 114 viable participants and measured their opinions on political and social issues in Japan to determine if and how the LDP has an effect on fans of *Cool Japan* mediums. In this chapter I explain how the survey was designed, how participants were recruited, and how the data were analyzed.

The fourth chapter details the findings discovered through the survey. These findings were divided into their respective groups – Takarazuka Revue Fans, AKB48 Fans, Fans of Both, and the Control Group. Groups were compared to one another and general response trends are defined at the end of this chapter.

The fifth and final chapter of this thesis discusses the implications of the findings. Each hypothesis was measured against the data and analyzed for validity. Additionally, I explore audience's opinions of gender performance with AKB48 and the Revue, and gender movements and political issues in Japan. I explain the limitations to my research and explore how this study can be improved or used for future research.

Throughout this thesis, I seek to answer the following questions: how does association with Japanese conservatism and nationalism affect audiences' political and social opinions; does the Takarazuka Revue and AKB48's involvement with conservative politics impact their fans' perceptions of women and gender; and how do these fans' political and social opinions differ from those who do not engage with these performance groups? Based on the implications of prior literature, I hypothesize that: fans will be more receptive to nationalist rhetoric or opinions than non-fans; AKB48 fans and male fans from both groups will have a greater frequency of nationalistic opinions; Takarazuka fans and female fans from both groups will have a more positive view of feminism and gender equality; fans as a whole will have less favorable views of feminism and gender equality than non-fans, but more positive views of the current status of gender relations in Japan.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The work within this thesis was influenced by several theoretical frameworks from different disciplines including sociology's symbolic interaction theory, cultural theory within

popular culture, and feminist theory; mass communication's cultivation theory; and political science's soft power theory. Together, these theories create a holistic analysis of the effects of and influences on popular culture within Japan. Symbolic interaction theory and cultural theory within popular culture help us to define what is popular culture, decipher the messages and meanings conveyed within it, and examine how audiences consume and interpret it. Cultivation theory further reveals how audiences internalize the images and messages they consume through media and popular culture. Feminist theory helps us examine popular culture within the purview of gender - specifically how gender is produced and consumed within popular culture and Japanese audiences. Finally, we cannot ignore the political and international influence of Japanese popular culture, especially because these groups have been or are being used to promote Japanese soft power across the globe, thus the inclusion of soft power theory.

Symbolic Interaction Theory

Symbolic interaction theory is a concept within sociology that asserts that "society is created and maintained through repeated interactions among individuals" through the use of language and symbols, whose meaning is then derived from these interactions (Carter and Fuller, 2015:1). When applied to popular culture, this means that people derive meaning from media that they interact with, based on what meaning that media has developed for them through their interactions with others (Trier-Bieniek, 2014:92). In other words, how a word used in a song or how a character is portrayed in a movie will mean different things to different people based on meanings they attribute to them. For example, how AKB48 conveys youth in its performances and performers may read to some audience members as innocence and to others as hypersexuality. Within the Takarazuka Revue, the cross-gendered

performances may read to some as subversive challenges to gender roles and to others as homosexual or homosensual relationships.

The meaning that audiences derive from specific performances will impact how they internalize that performance and its meaning. Because most of the previous research on AKB48 and the Takarazuka Revue study their performances from the purview of symbolic interactionism, this research will - rather than develop new perspectives on this theory - use this previous research as a foundation for the meanings audiences may take from these groups' performances.

Cultural Theory and Popular Culture

Popular culture is difficult to define because, ultimately, the definition will contrast and exclude other categories of culture such as folk culture, mass culture, high culture, dominant culture, and working-class culture (Storey, 2018). However, we can break it into its parts. Cultural theory defines culture as "the texts and practices whose principal function is to signify, to produce or to be the occasion for the production of meaning" (Storey, 2018:237). The term *popular* is what makes this definition difficult, but we will rely on the four meanings that John Storey details: "well-liked by many people," "inferior kinds of work," "work deliberately setting out to win favour with the people," and "culture actually made by the people for themselves" (2018:237). There are debates on which of these is the most fitting definition, but for the purposes of this research we will take the definition of that culture that is well liked by many people. Despite the subjectivity of just how many people is "many", this is the most apt definition regarding the mediums I write about in this thesis.

However, "work deliberately setting out to win favour with the people" may be an appropriate definition if we find that political associations do influence audiences. In this context, Storey's structuralist conjecture that "popular culture [is] a sort of ideological machine that more or less effortlessly reproduces the prevailing structures of power" may be proven true (2018:9).

Even so, previous studies in popular culture do delineate a distinction between performance and message. Within this delineation, audiences may appreciate or even thoroughly enjoy the aesthetics of a song or performance, regardless of if they agree or disagree with the messages that may be conveyed therein (Storey, 2018:132-133). We already can see examples of this in previous studies of Chinese and Korean fans of Japanese anime and manga. Despite the massive popularity of these mediums in China and Korea, fans in these countries can mentally separate the enjoyment they derive from Japanese products with their negative perceptions of the Japanese government or society (Kamm, 2019).

In this way, popular culture can be a site of resistance and incorporation (Storey, 2018). This is especially so when considering the symbolic interactionist perspective of cultural theory in which popular culture is used by subordinate groups to resist dominant social symbols, and by dominant groups can assimilate or reify those same symbols.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory is a framework shared across the social sciences, but for the purposes of this analysis we will look at the theory specifically within the disciplines of sociology and anthropology. Feminist theory explores both the context of gender, and inequalities as they relate to gender (Carlson and Ray, 2011). For this research, we will

address the examination of gender inequality, gender difference, the male gaze, and Asiacentrism within feminist theory.

Feminist theory's main focus is arguably that of gender inequality, specifically the oppression of women and gender minorities. John Storey highlights four different feminist perspectives on gender inequality: radical, Marxist, dual-systems, and liberal (2018). Radical feminism is the perspective that the patriarchal system is the primary cause for women's oppression (Storey, 2018:135). Marxist feminism identifies capitalism as the culprit of oppression in a system of capital valued over labor (Storey, 2018:135). Dual-systems posits that both of these systems - capitalism and patriarchy - are to blame for the oppression of women (Storey, 2018:135). Liberal feminism, however, does not posit a specific system as the cause for oppression, but attributes oppression to a male prejudice (whether conscious or not) that is rooted in everyday life, practice, and law (Storey, 2018:135).

Within this thesis, we could easily argue that any of these perspectives is relevant. The radical perspective examines how a patriarchal society and government in which women have little representation uses women to promote political messages. The Marxist perspective reveals how women performers are cultivated, marketed, and sold by male management in a capitalist popular culture enterprise. The Dual-Systems perspective connects the government patriarchy and the capitalist systems in an oppression that is not just political but economical. Finally, the liberal perspective can reveal an underlying prejudice in the ways female performers are interpreted or consumed not just by male audiences, but female audiences as well.

The liberal feminist perspective is particularly connected with studies on the male gaze. The male gaze is the idea that the design of women in media productions, imagery, marketing, and performance is done so with the male audience member in mind. As such,

women performers typically function more as objects for male gazes than as proxies for female spectators, usually through visual hypersexuality (Mulvey, 2006). This, as I will later examine, is especially true of idol pop groups like AKB48 wherein (usually) underaged girls are said to be role models for other young girls, but dress provocatively, kiss other female members, and dance erotically (Keith and Hughes, 2016:484).

Finally, an important perspective within feminist theory to consider is that of Asiacentrism. As Jing Yin details, feminism in Asia does not hold the same meaning that it does in the Western or African context (2009:83-84). Cultural considerations must be made for how the goals of feminism are developed, interpreted, and promoted outside of the Eurocentric context. For example, the emphasis that much of Western feminism places on individualistic rights and expression may not be the goal of a society in which the advancement of the collective is the ideal (Yin, 2009: 80). By viewing global feminist movements through the Western lens, we risk ignoring non-Western women's goals, definitions, and ideals - essentially replacing one form of oppression with another (Yin, 2009: 81). This thesis, written by an American of Euro-ethnic descent and raised in the Western context, is no different. While I cannot say that this thesis will not be influenced by the Western definitions of feminism, I do endeavor to avoid negating the non-Western perspective. In the spirit of an Asiacentric feminism, I aim to present a Japanese perspective of feminist and gender movements, to not equate any gender oppression that may be revealed as distinctive of Japanese culture, and to consider the perspectives within this research from non-Western ideologies.

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory was developed by George Gerbner and Larry Gross and describes how media shapes the way people interpret the reality around them (1976:191). Historically, Gerbner's research has focused on television specifically because he considered it a main enculturation tool in the modern age (1976: 175). In his research, Gerbner found that those who watched television more heavily had cultivated attitudes that the world depicted in television was reflected in the wider reality (Potter, 2014:1010).

Gerbner supported a theory not limited to any one particular media form, but on the broad messages people in society receive in their daily course of life and how those messages affect the meanings they associate with the world (Potter, 2014: 1016). Because popular culture and *Cool Japan* involve several different forms of media entertainment, Gerbner's approach to cultivation analysis was deemed the most relevant. His approach to cultivation theory is helpful to determine how exposure to politically associated media entertainment cultivates perceptions or assumptions of political and social issues within Japanese media audiences.

Soft Power Theory

Developed by Joseph Nye, soft power is a political concept which is defined as "the ability to affect others to obtain preferred outcomes by the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuasion, and positive attraction" (Nye, 2011: 19). Based mainly on three resources - culture, political values, and foreign policies (Nye, 2011:84) - soft power is used as a form of cultural diplomacy through which "the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples" helps to foster mutual understanding and relationships (Zamorano, 2016: 169).

However, the effectiveness of soft power - especially pop culture exports - has been widely debated. On the one-hand, there is a widespread condemnation of soft power as a purely Americanizing force and that the United States is the world's only true beneficiary of soft power (Atkins, 2017:203). Others argue that while the US has been a major soft power force, it is not the only one and others can use the creative and cultural industries to export their own nation brands (Iwabuchi, 2015:420). In either case, there is a general consensus that - just as there is a hierarchy in political, military, or economic might - there is a separation of countries into dominant and dominated spheres of soft power influences (Lemos, 2011:2).

The same issues that we see in definitions of popular culture permeate analyses of soft power as well: what is culture and what exactly are cultural exports exporting (e.g. mass culture, dominant culture, subversive culture, traditional culture, etc.); do traditional or mass (i.e. popular) cultural products work better as soft power mediums: and are political messages or ideologies really carried through these products? The goals and effectiveness of soft power movements have been widely debated, but many seem to agree that there is at least a certain power that is gained through cultural diplomacy, if nothing more than social clout and awareness of a country, its people, and its products (Iwabuchi, 2015:420).

Without much intentional design, Japan has historically been the hegemonic soft power agent in Asia (Garvizu, 2017:21). However, in more recent years, South Korea and China have posed a threat to this hegemony with the massive success of Korea's *hallyu* exports and China's economic dominance in Asia. With the challenges presented by South Korean and Chinese cultural export movements, Abe's *Cool Japan* initiatives are the first time the Japanese government has made a conscious, concerted effort to export not just Japanese cultural products, but Japanese cultural values. In the current world order where political

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conquest is won not through military might alone but by diplomatic or cultural power, the effect of cultural exports from Japan are of significant interest, especially in those countries with which Japan historically has had strained ties.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

Across the globe, gender and sexuality are inextricably linked to power and agency. AKB48 and the Takarazuka Revue are all-female groups primarily managed and run by men, commodifying the bodies of women to promote politics and capitalism. Thus, gender, power, and agency are no doubt in play. To study the relationships between these aspects, this chapter will review prior literature focused on gendered politics in Japan, AKB48 and the Takarazuka Revue and their respective industries, and the soft power politics involved in their promotion with *Cool Japan.*

POLITICS OF GENDER: A HISTORY OF GENDER AND POLITICS IN JAPAN

Modern Japanese feminism can be traced back to the late 19th century during the Meiji Restoration (Molony, 2018). Amongst a plethora of political and social reforms - including the removal of bans on women from performance stages - women began to advocate for equal rights and increased protections under the Meiji Constitution (Molony, 2018). However, the constitution developed in 1889 instead limited many of those rights, prohibiting women from joining political parties or rallies for change (Molony, 2018).

The next several decades saw various women's movements. The New Woman (*atarashii onna)* and Modern Girl (*moga*) challenged traditional gender roles and performances (Robertson, 1998:213-214). The Bluestocking Society was much more Confucian in its ambition that women be financially independent to raise their families without having to rely on their husbands (Mackie, 2003:48). Even so, these women challenged traditional norms of respectability and spatial boundaries and often faced government bans and opposition.

The Allied Occupation of Japan after defeat in World War II brought with it equal rights in the new constitution developed by primarily American writers (Dower, 1999:352).

Americans were thus credited with protecting equal rights suffrage, effectively disregarding almost a century of work by Japanese women and activists (Dower, 1999:352). Some have suggested, however, that the international influence of the Allied Occupation on constitutional protections for gender equality, as well as the international pressure from organizations like the United Nations that have pushed Japan to ensure greater gender equality and equity, have created a nationalist backlash against feminism (Mackie, 2003:220; Ito, 2015).

Under Abe, the LDP has had a resurgence in conservative and nationalist ideology, including pushes for history textbook reform, promotion of marriage and childbearing, and challenges to the constitution - specifically to Article 9 which prohibits Japanese engagement in military activities (Abe, 2007). With this increased conservative and nationalist fervor is a condemnation of feminist movements, framed as an external international threat to the traditional Japanese family.

Abe - the longest serving prime minister and leader of the LDP - has spearheaded reform and initiatives to increase economic opportunities for women dubbed *womenomics*. However, despite changes in labor laws that supposedly prohibit discrimination and secure protections for women in the workplace, inequality and discrimination is still rampant (Ito, 2015).

Ayako Kano provides a data-focused economic context for these issues of inequality. Kano contends that Abe's childcare initiatives further diminish women's economic independence, making them reliant on their husbands until they can go back to work after caring for the children; but by the time they go back to work, they are usually stuck with part-time or low-salary positions due to inexperience in the field and time away from work (2018). Kano argues that "womenomics seemed to be a policy to make women work harder

than ever before, both inside and outside the home" (2018). With a 30.2% difference in pay

between men and women (Abe, 2013), Japan has the third largest gender pay gap of all

OECD countries (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2018). While

the number of women in the workforce in Japan is a higher percentage than those in the

United States, 55% of female employees are in "so-called 'irregular' positions, lacking job

security and benefits," compared to 23% of male workers (Mishima, 2019). Mackie and

Kano argue, " 'womenomics' is a policy for recharging the economy and refortifying the

nation, not for improving the situation of women" (2013).

Even within his party, Abe has faced opposition over his *womenomics* initiatives. Some

have accused him of converting to the "feminine madness" and his party faced significant

backlash after two of the women he added to his cabinet had to resign in the face of

corruption charges and violations of voting laws (Scheider, 2014:56). In addition to these

scandals and issues, many conservative Japanese nationalists accuse Abe and the LDP of

bowing to external, international pressures by caving to UN demands for more gender

equality (Scheider, 2014).

Ultimately, Abe's party has fallen short of its intended goals[2]. Part of these failures

can be attributed to laws and policies that have no teeth to ensure compliance; part can be

attributed to non-specific plans to achieve these goals. In addition to these limitations is a

persistent national sentiment that while women and men deserve equal respect, there is a

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[2] These included: increasing female representation in leadership positions by 30% by 2020 (this goal was dropped to 7%); increasing female labor participation to 73% by 2020 (67% as of 2017) (Mori, Nobuhiro, and Inoue, 2018); increasing the percentage of women returning to work after their first child to 55% by 2020 (53% as of 2019) (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, 2018a); reducing the number of children on daycare waiting lists by increasing the number of childcare facilities and reducing childcare waitlists to zero by 2017 (although the number of children on waitlists did drop below 20,000 for the first time in ten years, over 19,000 are still on the list. The target date has been pushed to 2020) (Mori, Nobuhiro, and Inoue, 2018); and increasing the percentage of fathers who take paternity leave to 13% by 2020 (5% as of 2017) (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, 2018b).

gendered notion of labor divisions wherein women (i.e. wives) are responsible for the home and family and men (i.e. husbands) are the economic caretakers (Scheider, 2014). As Ayako Kano puts it: "the end result is that women are being asked to do an impossible acrobatics act, to become breadwinners and leaders without being too threatening to men, to the traditional family system, or to their reproductive labour at home" (2018).

ADORABLE, KIND, BEAUTIFUL: AKB48 AND THE JAPANESE MUSIC INDUSTRY

During the Edo period (1600-1867) women were banned from performing on public stages due concerns regarding prostitution, effectively eliminating an entire gender from the performing arts for centuries. While this ban was officially lifted in 1877, it has continued to have effects on gender roles and dynamics in the Japanese performing arts into the present day (Oshio, 2002:764).

Satomi Oshio shows the need for further consideration for gender roles in the Japanese performing arts by exposing how limited the stage still is for women. For example, professional female performers of traditional music and theatre forms such as *kyôgen* and *nô* were not officially recognized until the mid-1990s (Oshio, 2002:766). While surveys by the Japanese Council of Performers' Organizations suggest that the performing arts are equally representative of male and female performers, female performers are generally regarded as inauthentic amateurs, incapable of comparing with their male counterparts (Oshio, 2002:763-765).

Brian and Gina Cogan examine the role of visual presentation in the Japanese punk and pop music industries and how the authenticity of women is critiqued in those genres. By examining two popular bands in the punk and pop industries - Shonen Knife and Puffy - they argue that both are "'authentic' in a female-centered, visually oriented, poppy,

commodified way that, moreover, subverts traditional, male-dominated versions of authenticity" (2006:70).

The term 'authentic' is very subjective. Thus, Cogan and Cogan make sure to evaluate the authenticity of Puffy and Shonen Knife both within the ideas of authenticity for their respective genres, but also in a cross-comparison of authenticity between men and women. For the pop-genre band Puffy, "the very commodification of the women in Puffy, and their use and subtle subversion of this commodification, adheres to ideas of pop authenticity" (Cogan and Cogan, 2006:71). However, within the punk genre, this commodification of Puffy marks them as inauthentic. Additionally, because Puffy do not write their own music but are subject to the artistic design of male manager, Tamio Okuda, they are considered inauthentic when compared to the creative control of Shonen Knife (Cogan and Cogan, 2006:71).

While Shonen Knife may have more creative control than Puffy, they still must negotiate their authenticity in a genre dominated by men. As Oshio describes it, "there is a general tendency to regard male performance as 'authentic' whereas women 'learn' and follow" (2002:765). Cogan and Cogan supplement this by quoting Marxist theory that masculine workers produce commodities for feminized consumers (2006:83). As such, because Shonen Knife "also operate within the boundaries of mainstream commodity forms" their authenticity is also threatened (Cogan and Cogan, 2006:79). Cogan and Cogan maintain that "because women have so often been identified with commodification and consumer culture, authenticity for female musicians comes in different forms than it does for male artists" and this idea of authenticity will be subjective to the time and place of the audience (2006:7).

Sarah Keith and Diane Hughes explore this commodification and perpetuation from the perspective of idol bands, AKB48, Sakura Gakuin, and Babymetal. Through the use of young-coded vocal characteristics, posing, dressing, and lyrics, these bands are able to perpetuate the image of girlhood even into their twenties (Keith and Hughes, 2016). These girls are trained by the music industry and follow a set of well-defined yet unwritten rules which control their singing, lyrics, and physical gestures (Keith and Hughes, 2016:474). For example, AKB48 has members that range from 12-29 years of age and while its younger members may not need to exaggerate their girlishness, the older members do. These markers include: higher vocal registers with few markers of trained singers such as vibrato; singing in a school choir-like group rather than as individual performers (Keith and Hughes, 2016:478); singing songs about friends, school, adolescent love, sweet snacks, and flowers (Keith and Hughes, 2016:479); and dressing in school uniforms or filming music videos in schoolyards (Keith and Hughes, 2016:474).

Hiroshi Aoyagi argues that commodification of female-idols by their primarily male fans and management "implies a double objectification: as objects to be viewed and as objects to be desired" (2005:77). Aoyagi touches on a point made in Rio Hiiragi's film *Tokyo Idols*, that many male fans feel more comfortable with these cute idols than with real-life women, hinting at an almost predatory-like desire for these young girls who have no choice but to smile and love their fans (2005:77). Aoyagi voices many concerns about how idols produce adolescence and fragile femininity in their performances: "purity associated with the so-called 'cute idols' is a made-up image. It's made for the actors to put on a childish act in order to attract boys' attention and be marketable to them… this is far from being 'pure'" (2005:116).

The objectification of these women as innocent girls and their commodification, pose some significant concerns. At the same time that the performers are exaggerating their performances to code them as young, school-age girls, they are also hyper-sexualized. AKB48's management company, AKS, received criticism for the music video for *Heavy Rotation* which featured members (some as young as thirteen) in lingerie, naked in bathtubs, licking milk out of bowls, and kissing one another. However, this did not damage the massive success of AKB48 and girlhood continues to be "used as a trope by older idols to satisfy the male gaze" (Keith and Hughes, 2016:484). By comparing how these performers exemplify and exaggerate girlishness against female performers in other genres, Keith and Hughes reveal how the markers of femininity and girlishness are a production to appeal to target audiences.

Audiences do not just passively consume the gender produced by performers in music and theatre, but can actively engage with the content and derive agency through it. Csaba Toth uses ethnographic research in clubs in Shinjuku and Shibuya and interviews with fans to show how female J-Pop performers and their fans reproduce, enact, and challenge prescribed gender and sexual roles in J-pop club scenes (2008). While idol pop is typically designed for the male gaze, Toth argues that through women's engagement in clubs and performances by J-Pop performers, they navigate and formulate their own identities and relationships (2008:111). In this male dominated industry, "some female performers [have] managed to carve out a representational space by highlighting girl themes that energized girl solidarity and [hold] up the possibility for a re-articulation of young femininity" (Toth, 2008:112). In this way, performers and their fans can subvert the male gaze and male power structure and form their own agency within it.

Ian Condry analyzes the globalizationist aspects of hip-hop culture in Japan through this lens by exploring how female rap and hip-hop performers navigate cute (i.e. feminine) and macho (i.e. masculine) stereotypes in the genre (2006). Condry reveals how, although women are the driving force behind the production and consumption of popular culture in Japan, their relative absence from the hip-hop genre reveals the social implications of ignored and marginalized voices in society. Unlike how female fans in the J-Pop club scene have used pop music as a unifier, Condry claims that "the importance of the female fans has not (yet) translated into a sizable presence of women rappers on stage" (2006:165). Condry also provides resources that support issues of authenticity asserted by Keith and Hughes, showing that while the female singers may be more popular, they are considered less authentic by both other rappers and fans.

AKB48 encapsulates all of the ways in which female performers in Japanese rap, punk, and pop struggle with issues of authenticity, commodification, and objectification. As young girls designed and managed by men, their performances are dictated by stereotypical performance markers of youthful femininity and innocence, regardless of their age or the audience they are selling to. The commodification and authenticity of their performance is constantly criticized, even within the pop idol world.

PURITY, HONESTY, BEAUTY: THE TAKARAZUKA REVUE AND JAPANESE THEATRE

Japanese theatre has long celebrated gender-bending as an art form, but the stage has historically been quite limited for female performance. *Kabuki* theater has been widely celebrated throughout Japan as a traditional theater art form for over 400 years. The form itself was marked by a great degree of gender reversal and eroticism, excessively colorful and faddish costumes, and exoticism (Kawatake, 2003:128-129). Its very name, *kabuki,* at the

time meant "deviant" or "departing from the norm" (Kawatake, 2003:128). Although it was a woman who founded *kabuki* theater, a mere twenty-six years after its conception, women were banned from its stage (Kawatake, 2003:128).

Women were eventually replaced by boys and, later, young men, and *kabuki* theatre was forced to develop a convincing female form known as *onnagata*[3]. With exaggerated grace and movements, the *onnagata* performers have been hailed as the epitome of femininity and women have often strived to emulate that femininity in their personal lives. Although women can technically now perform in *kabuki* productions, the *onnagata*'s performance is so dramatic and stylized that natural women in those roles are so poorly received by *kabuki* audiences that they rarely perform (Swindlehurst, 2019).

Many Takarazuka scholars can trace the inspiration and influences of *kabuki* on the Revue. Like the traditionally all-male cast in *kabuki*, the all-female case of the Takarazuka Revue performs in both male and female roles. The all-female school and cast of Takarazuka are assigned roles to perform as part of the Revue: *musumeyaku* (daughter role) or *otokoyaku* (male role). While the Revue has had some Japanese productions, its most popular productions have been Western-based, such as *Gone with the Wind, Elizabeth, Romeo and Juliet,*

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[3]Women were later replaced with young boys because their smaller physique and higher voices helped them pass in female roles better. But, as with women, the *kabuki* boys' emphasis was on their good looks and "the focus was exclusively on the boys as objects of lust" (Kawatake, 2003:132). As these young boys became increasingly popular among even priests and warriors, they were then also banned from the stage in 1652 (Kawatake, 2003:133). Due to protests and petitions, *kabuki* was reinstated in 1653. However, in this new form men were required to cut their forelocks – considered to be a symbol of boyish beauty – to signal their transition into adulthood and eliminate their eroticism (Kawatake, 2003:134). This, supposedly, ended the male actors' involvement in prostitution as men at the time were not supposed to engage sexually with other men after reaching adulthood (Shively, 1978:37). However, it was more-or-less known that the *kabuki* male actors who replaced them continued on their secondary roles as same-sex prostitutes. O*nnagata* were consistently linked to prostitution and homosexuality throughout history (Kawatake, 2003:166). When *kabuki* entered into an era where its emphasis shifted from physical appearance to artistic ability, the role of *kabuki* actors, specifically *onnagata,* departed from its more sexual past.

and *West Side Story*. Currently on the stage are performances of *Once Upon a Time in America* and *A Farce in Pigalle* (Takarazuka Revue, 2020).

The Revue was founded as a music academy for girls and young women by Kobayashi Ichizo in 1913. With the motto of "purity, honesty, and beauty," the purpose of this academy was twofold: to train these women to be the Confucian ideal of good wife, wise mother, and to capitalize on their performance and bring business to the town of Takarazuka (Robertson, 1998). Students enter the two-year school between the ages of 16 and 20 and are strictly trained in theatre performance and Confucian ideals. Students progress through the school, ultimately joining the connected theatre revue. Their exact ages are kept secret, but all performers must be unmarried (MacGregor, 1996). Because their formation into mothers and wives is the final goal of the school, all students are expected to resign from performances before marrying. Though originally designed as a form of family entertainment, the current fan base is primarily women, but the family-focus is still maintained in the many generations of women from the same family who are all fans and attend performances together (Stickland, 2010).

Jessica Hester examines the historical influence of Western theatre in Japan with specific focus on women's participation and gender production in the Takarazuka Revue. Her chapter analyzes the role and production of *otokoyaku* and their connection to Western (specifically American) values and culture. With their strong Western influence on their dress and behavior, *otokoyaku* represent a status otherwise barred to Japanese women: the domestic social status of a man and the international political status of a Westerner (Hester, 2009:193). *Otokoyaku*, Hester argues, are androgynous not just in their gender performance, but in their ethnic performance. They walk the line of man/woman and Westerner/Japanese (Hester, 2009:192).

Hester reveals how gender performance in the Takarazuka Revue is not just linked to ideas of national identity and body, but also social ideas of femininity and masculinity by examining the roles and delineation of *otokoyaku* and *musumeyaku* (2009). Immediately, the semantics are at play in these roles. The comparison of "role" (*yaku*) in *otokoyaku* versus the "form/archetype" (*kata/gata*) in *onnagata* implies that while the *onnagata* embody their performance and become women, the *otokoyaku* are merely playing a part. To fully construct and embody the woman, an *onnagata* should be expected to perfect their form by applying the feminine to their everyday lives as well; they should dress, speak, and act like women. The *onnagata*, then, was not a performance but a personification of the "patriarchally inscribed, state-regulated 'female' gender" and was a model for offstage females to emulate (Robertson, 1998:55). They also acted as an object for the male gaze, expressing the "ultimate ideal of woman from the male viewpoint, epitomizing what men want women to be" (Oshio, 2002:765).

Otokoyaku, on the other hand, have been actively limited from fully appropriating a male gender. When watching a *kabuki* play, until the actor speaks, it can be almost impossible to tell if an *onnagata* is in fact a man or woman. In o*tokoyaku*, on the other hand, it is almost exceedingly easy to tell. As implied by the use of *yaku* in their title, *otokoyaku* are only meant to represent a man on the stage, not embody or serve as a model for emulation (Robertson, 1998:59). Indeed, this would subvert the goal of the academy to train women to become wives and mothers. While *otokoyaku* should project the female ideal of a man, they were not to become them. By drawing from "the primacy of the female bodies," *otokoyaku* ensure "that their secondary, 'male' gender [is] kept in check by their primary, 'female' gender" (Robertson, 1998:78). They do not become men as the *onnagata* become women, but appear as neutral and employ an "'androgynous charm' by blending markers of 'female' and

'male' gender" (Robertson, 1998:78). Ironically, the juxtaposition of the ideal man in a female body subverts the very patriarchal gender norms that Kobayashi was trying to reinforce, creating a feminist and even perhaps lesbian or transgendered subtext.

Although the Revue is most famous for its *otokoyaku*, it is in the *musumeyaku* that gender characteristics are most exaggerated. The femininity of the *musumeyaku* "is staged in order to make the player of men's roles appear more masculine in contrast" (Robertson, 1998:200). They run and walk with exaggerated hand and arm movements, dress in conspicuously frilly and childish costumes, and are prohibited from playing the most sensual and dynamic parts – typically parts based on Western women (Robertson, 1998:82-83). To maintain the purity of the *musumeyaku*, these sensual parts are instead assigned to *otokoyaku* who must then regender their performance (Hester, 2009:197). Only the *otokoyaku* - the men - can be sensual. While *onnagata* became the epitome of women, *musumeyaku* became a parody of them.

Some feminists argue that *otokoyaku* do not challenge gender norms, but systemize them. The strongest and most dynamic characters are the *otokoyaku* - the men - further reaffirming their place above the *musumeyaku* and women in general (Strickland, 2008:173). Kobayashi himself affirms this with his comment that "by performing as men, females learned to understand and appreciate males and the masculine psyche" to better prepare themselves for best serving their husbands when they eventually became wives (Robertson, 1998:67).

Nobuko Anan examines the gender dynamics in the Takarazuka Revue and compares them with feminist/LGBT theatre productions inspired by the Revue to reveal the ways in which female audiences use these productions to negotiate conventional gender and sexual norms in Japan. Anan argues that while these productions may not necessarily be

overtly or directly feminist, audience members can use them to subvert societal norms through homosocial and homosexual performances. Much in the same way that women in the J-Pop club scene are unified, Anan believes that the same-sex eroticism and performance unites female fans in "what might be called a 'girls' aesthetics,' which challenges modern constructions of Japanese womanhood" (2011:105). Whether they actually identify as lesbian or not, fans can find pleasure in the possibilities of the bodies on the stage: possibilities to either challenge gender norms and take on "male" roles like the *otokoyaku* or possibilities of desire for or from the *otoko/musumeyaku* (Anan, 2011:101).

Much of the prior literature concerning gender subversion in the Takarazuka focuses on the LGBT+ (specifically lesbian) perspective. Additionally, it mostly addresses the production of the performers and there is very little research about the effect of the designs of Takarazuka or the social/political messages imparted by performances. Jennifer Robertson does explore the history of the impacts of and on fan clubs of the Takarazuka, but her research is outdated by almost twenty years. While her research is informative to understanding some of the critical response or fan appeal of the Takarazuka, it is limited in examination of the Takarazuka design for the male or female gaze.

Nevertheless, Robertson's research does provide some of the first analyses of audiences and fans of the Takarazuka Revue (1998). Her research reveals how female fans are a particularly prominent site for social criticism and social anxieties applied to them: fears of subverting traditional gender roles through Western, LGBT+, and sexual influences. Although nowadays the Revue has a 95% female fan base (MacGregor, 1996), Robertson follows the transformation of the Takarazuka fan base from equal parts men and women to primarily women and social implications of that change. She suggests that by targeting female audiences and equating them with commodification (of Takarazuka), the Revue

reifies the Marxist value that Keith and Hughes cited - that men are producers and women are consumers (1998:155). Robertson uses this analysis of the Takarazuka fans to show that while the production of Takarazuka may perpetuate heteronormative, patriarchal norms, the actors have also inspired their fans to resist and subvert these roles and expectations (1998:175).

THE STARS ALIGN: A COMPARISON OF AKB48 AND THE TAKARAZUKA REVUE

Many people, including former stars in the industry, have compared AKB48 and Takarazuka[4]. While no formal research analyzes the similarities between these groups, it is undeniable that they share many similarities in their design, popularity, fans bases, and political affiliations.

The Takarazuka Revue and AKB48 have struggled with issues of authenticity since their inception. Until the 1990s, the directors and producers for Takarazuka were exclusively men and so the female gaze that is purportedly in Takarazuka is, in fact, designed primarily by men. In the case of AKB48, lyricist Akimoto spearheads performer (i.e. product) design, music video production, and lyric writing. Akimoto himself admits that they often innuendo-laden lyrics of AKB48 are of his own fantasies: "I was often asked how someone like me, who is over 50, can write songs for young kids...the lyrics that they want to misbehave or take off their uniforms are not real words from the girls, themselves" (Geary and Chan, 2012). Thus, we see issues surrounding the Marxist theory reviewed by Keith and Hughes (wherein men are producers and women are consumers), and issues of hyper-sexualization and gender performance.

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[4] See interview with former Takarazuka *otokoyaku*, Jun Sena (2017).

Both AKB48 and the Takarazuka Revue rely on the idea that they are avenues in which amateurs can become diamonds. Members of AKB48 are not known for their innate talent, but appeal to audiences based on their hard work and progression. Selected through audition processes and playing off cultural values of *ganbare*[5], idols emerge relatively unpolished onto the mainstage. With the support of their fans and through their own hard work and determination, they grow and become idols. Although Takarazuka performers undergo two years of training prior to their debuts, compared to other stage actors they are still considered amateurs. The main attraction for the audiences of these women is that fans of both AKB48 and Takarazuka Revue get to watch their stars grow and become famous. Often compared to mothers and fathers, these fans cheer on their idols/actors from the sidelines - or rather, the audience .

However, fans are not left to just passively watch their stars' success. Fans of both groups are actively involved in assuring their favorite idol/actor's popularity and ranking within their respective groups. Each year, AKB48 holds elections whereby fans can vote for their favorite stars. Those with the most votes gain the highest ranks within the group, granting them access to better opportunities such as music video spotlights, advertising and marketing features, and more publicity options like variety shows. Issues with commodification are again brought up here, however, as each vote requires first the purchase of a CD. Some fans spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to ensure the success of their favorite member(s) (Liu and Wakatsuki, 2017).

Much in the same way that AKB48 members are tracked and ranked by their audiences, fans of the Takarazuka Revue are able to watch as their favorites progress from

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[5] *Ganbare* is both a Japanese word and cultural concept. Literally translated as "persevere" or "persist," *ganbare* has a strong cultural meaning of working hard and trying one's best, despite the outcome or oppositional forces.

novice students to top stars. Seniority in the Takarazuka is a bit more traditionally ranked than the capitalist influences in AKB48, but senior members of the Revue monopolize the spotlight with prime placement in performers, more frequent sponsors on ads, and better treatment by both fans and management (Takahara, 2004). Fans are so important to the success of the stars that, when the Takarazuka Revue tried to introduce male actors in 1946, the male actors never debuted on the stage due to the strong opposition by the fans (Takahara, 2009).

Fans aren't relegated to just sitting in the audience or buying CDs, however. AKB48's key marketing motto is 'idols you can meet'. In addition to daily concerts at their headquarters in the Akihabara district of Tokyo, fans can regularly interact with their idols through get-togethers, public photo shoots, pen-pal correspondence, hotlines, webchats, and more. The most popular of these interactions are the handshake ceremonies. Fans can buy tickets to meet their idols in timed handshake events during which fans have approximately 5-10 seconds with each idol to introduce themselves, give gifts, and shake hands. An interesting thing to note are the sexual connotations linked to these handshake events. As detailed in *Tokyo Idols* - a documentary about the idol industry in Japan - "a handshake [is] a very sexual gesture…. It seems innocent from the artist's perspective, but fans see the sexual component" (Hiiragi, 2017:12:43). In these ceremonies, idols may be exposed to sexual solicitations and harassment[6], or even violence[7].

Naomi Miyamoto argues that it is the fans, rather than issues of gender, that make the Takarazuka Revue (and AKB48) most notable (2014). While the Takarazuka is not

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[6] *Tokyo Idols* shows live footage of several handshake ceremonies in which fans overstep their bounds and hug, kiss, or refuse to let go of their idols' hands until security intervenes (Hiiragi, 2017).
[7] In 2014, two members were attacked by a fan with a saw and suffered lacerations and broken bones (Anon., 2014)

advertised as 'actors you can meet,' they do engage their fans personally. As Tatsuya Kusaba describes it: "Unlike other celebrities in the entertainment business, fans can hand letters, shake hands with actresses and watch them walk out of the theater every time after a performance" (Takahara, 2009). Miyamoto describes how fans coordinate amongst themselves to show solidarity with their favorite stars. Takarazuka fans have a strict code of behavior that regulates who sits where during performances, what they wear (both to performances and outside them), what they chant or call out, who stands when and where outside of the theatre, etc. (Miyamoto, 2014). Fans are very involved in not just the rankings of their favorite idols and actors, but in their personal lives as well. As students without agency managers, Takarazuka performers instead have fans who assist them by providing services such as boxed lunches, transportation to and from practices, and even providing a sort of security against crazed fans (Takahara, 2004). Kusaba attributes the endearing success of the Takarazuka Revue to the emotional and physical connection between fan and actor.

However, obscured by the images of stars' naive wholesomeness, *ganbare*, and fan loyalty are the seedier issues of power and control. Neither AKB48 nor Takarazuka members have full bodily autonomy. Both groups are run by all-male management who dictate what they wear, what roles they play, the lyrics or lines they say, and how they act - both on and off the stage. Even when fans get out of control, performers may not have any recourse or protection from their management[8].

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[8] As in the case with NGT48 member, Maho Yamaguchi, who was attacked outside her apartment by two male fans. When AKS covered up the incident and left both men free without charges, Yamaguchi went to social media to complain about her plight. Ultimately though, she was left to publicly apologize for "causing a commotion" when AKS characterized her as mentally ill in the press (Yamamoto, 2019). Other idols - though not under AKS' management -have committed suicide to get out of contracts that would otherwise leave them in massive debt (Adelstein, 2018).

Both groups also require that their members engage in no personal romances or relationships (Takahara, 2009). The "asexual and agendered fantasy space" created between actors and fans must be preserved at all costs, even if it denies actors personal relationships (Stickland, 2008:141). Takarazuka Revue members are expected to refrain from relationships both to appeal as non-heteronormative bodies for their fans, but also to preserve themselves for their future husbands. Actors are barred from even speaking to men in public and, outside limited interaction with fathers and brothers, no personal interaction is allowed with men (Stickland, 2008:148).

By remaining similarly unattached, AKB48 members can continue to tout the idea of innocence, here read as physical purity. Although Japanese courts recently determined that these companies cannot force their members to not engage in relationships (Adelstein, 2018), members have nonetheless been met with extreme measures of retaliation and shame over supposed occurrences of impropriety. One notable case is that of Minami Minegishi from AKB48; after a photograph surfaced of Minegishi leaving her boyfriend's home, she shaved her head (an old Japanese symbol of contrition) and released a tearful apology on YouTube for her "thoughtless and immature actions." Minegishi was demoted from one of the top spots within AKB48 to a trainee position for "causing a nuisance to the fans" (Keng Fatt, 2019).

While much of the previous studies on AKB48 and the Takarazuka Revue have focused on social issues and influences, they are also both heavily involved in political issues as well. AKB48 is one of the most popular cultural resources that the LDP uses to further policy agendas. For almost two decades, the group has been used to sell Japanese bonds (McCurry, 2015), advertise suicide prevention and rice faming programs (McCurry 2015), encourage voting in gubernatorial elections (Torres, 2012), support enrollment in the Self-

Defense Forces (SDF) (Funakoshi, 2014), and promote changes to the Japanese constitution (Funakoshi, 2014). Akimoto himself is heavily connected to the Japanese government, securing roles as advisor to Tomomi Inada (minister of *Cool Japan),* chairman of the *Cool Japan* council, and as an executive board member of the 2020 Olympics Organizing Committee (McCurry, 2015). Through Akimoto's influence, AKB48 gained power as a national and international cultural ambassador for Japan's political policies (McCurry, 2015).

While the Takarazuka Revue is not as inextricably tied to Japanese government officials as AKB48, it has promoted government policies since World War II. Japanese officials realized quickly how popular forms like theatre could be used to not only convince people to join the military front, but to celebrate Japanese heroism while belittling the enemy (Atkins, 2017: 161). These performers promoted service and glorified soldiers' sacrifice (Atkins, 2017:171). As such, when sandwiching Japanese political rhetoric - especially wartime rhetoric - with these performances, audiences may be more accepting of the realities presented therein.

The Takarazuka Revue may not be immediately politically connected like AKB48, but some former members of the Revue have made their way into political offices after they graduated. Miyuki Hatoyama was First Lady to Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama - one of the few Prime Ministers not a member of the LDP (Takahara, 2009). Chikage Ōgi was one of the top *musumeyaku* in the 1950s before becoming Minister for Construction, Minister for Transport, and Minister for Land, Infrastructure and Transport (Luke, 2016:129). Ōgi was also the first woman appointed president of the House of Councilors (Luke, 2016:129). Originally a member of LDP, Ōgi left the party and founded the New Conservative Party, though this new party still maintained a partnership with the LDP. As a member of the New Conservative Party, she advocated for revisions to the constitution, addressed concerns

regarding SDF recruitment, and vowed to provide a "moral ground" for Japan (Luke, 2016:128-129). Ōgi used her experience in the Takarazuka Revue to both project traditional notions of femininity and to reinforce traditional Confucian values in Japanese politics (Luke, 2016:134).

COOL JAPAN: JAPAN'S REVITALIZATION OF SOFT POWER

In a world in which military might is curtailed by international agreements and UN law, soft power and cultural diplomacy are the primary means through which a country can export its culture, language, and ideologies. Japan has traditionally been the hegemonic power force in Asia. However, in more recent decades, there is growing competition, particularly from China and South Korea for resources, trade partnerships, political power, and social clout. As such, Japan has been utilizing more and more soft power forces in order to attract tourists and social and political partners.

According Hwa Kyun Kim, Andrew Kim, and Daniel Connolly, Japan's cultural influence started as early as the 1970s, cresting in the 1990s (2016:540). During those years, Japan dominated as a hegemonic media exporter both in Asia and across the globe without much deliberate effort to produce globally marketable content (Kim, Kim, and Connolly, 2016:540). Pop-culture elements such as anime, manga, J-rock, and Harajuku fashion spread across the globe.

In the early 2000s, however, Japan saw a decline in its previously effortless distribution, while the South Korean soft power movement known as *hallyu* took off. Contrary to Japan's indeliberate spread of soft power through media, the South Korean government made no secret of its efforts to export its entertainment as a form of soft power (Kim, Kim, and Connolly, 2016:540). In response, in 2010 METI created the Creative

Industries Promotion Office to develop and promote cultural and creative industries as part of the concept of *Cool Japan* (METI, 2011).

 Cool Japan attempts to utilize cultural diplomacy through distribution of Japanese cultural and artistic products like "manga, anime, and games, but also extend[ing] to fashions [*sic*], food, traditional arts and crafts, and tourism" (Kim, Kim, and Connolly, 2016:541). Although focused on popular culture mediums, the Japanese government consistently describes the *Cool Japan* projects as policies, strategies, and initiatives (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2014). Thus, *Cool Japan* has become a nation-branding effort designed to both increase Japanese exports and social and political power. However, the effectiveness of this project has been widely debated. Many argue that by lumping together such a hodgepodge of cultural and social mediums, the *Cool Japan* policies are too stretched with no specific goals or outcomes (Kamm, 2019: 130).

 Additionally, many have criticized *Cool Japan* as a reactionary movement, not an initiative. Previously, Japanese officials and bureaucrats saw no merit in the popular culture industry as either a political tool or as a snapshot of Japanese culture. In their minds, the only culture worth exporting were traditional elements such as *sumo* or *kabuki* (Garvizu, 2017:206). However, with the massive international popularity of Japanese anime, manga, and video games, the government finally saw both political and economic potential in popular culture products (Garvizu, 2017:206).

 By increasing the global popularity of cultural and media features, Japan can again exercise its political clout in Asia in a competition against its biggest soft power rivals, China and South Korea. However, its attempts to align those rivals with Japanese ideas does not seem to be going well. For example, Ling Yang and Yanrui Xu, found that Chinese fans of BL (boys love) manga make a clear distinction between a cool cultural Japan and a bad

political Japan (Kamm, 2019). Although Japanese products have been wildly popular in China and Korea (despite bans and government embargos on Japanese goods and products), the historical tensions between Japan and their home country is still well-known to Chinese and Korean fans.

Ironically, soft power theorist Nye suggests that many of the political goals of the LDP may be the very factors that undermine its *Cool Japan* project the most. Because of the concerns for power dynamics between Japan and China, especially amongst escalated tensions regarding contested lands in the Sea of Japan/South China Sea[9], visitations to the imperial Yasukuni Shrine[10], as well as difficult relations with North and South Korea[11], the push for militarization by the LDP may subvert Japan's soft power goals (Nye, 2011:160). With the threat of military force lurking in the background, social and political relations impacted by *Cool Japan* become strained, increasingly when considering how some of the groups associated with *Cool Japan* (such as AKB48) have been used to promote militaristic SDF and Article 9 agendas. Thus, Japan's *Cool Japan* movement faces many more cultural, social, and political barriers as a soft power force than efforts like the *hallyu* movement in South Korea.

Nevertheless, Japan has made concerted efforts to not only export Japanese cultural products to these countries, but to set up Japanese subsidiaries within them. AKB48 received funding from *Cool Japan* to establish sister groups in Jakarta, Shanghai, Bangkok,

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[9] Japan has been engaged in several territorial disputes regarding islands and rocks in waters near Japan with Russia, South Korea, and China for more than a century.

[10] A Japanese shrine devoted to soldiers during World War II. Visits to the shrine by Japanese politicians, notably Shinzo Abe, have been condemned by both China and South Korea and are a major point of contention between the countries.

[11] Among these are the territorial occupation of the Koreas, the forced sexual slavery of comfort women, kidnapping of Japanese citizens by North Korea, and military threats. Most recently, North Korea has fired missiles over Japan, while free trade agreements have been dissolved with South Korea. Additionally, South Korea has banned many Japanese products over concerns of nuclear contamination after the Fukushima incident in 2011.

and Manila (RocketNews24, 2012). The most recent group in India held auditions last year and had over 10,000 entrants (Viegas, 2019). While the international sister groups are not expected to perform in Japanese and are made up of local performers (Geary, 2012), their design and top management are all Japanese (Viegas, 2019).

The head of AKS, Yasushi Akimoto, is a chairman of the *Cool Japan* Council and is also an organizing committee member of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, which has proposed using members of AKB48 as part of its opening ceremony (RocketNews24, 2015). Many have accused Akimoto of using his government positions to further his own pet projects, awarding AKB48 and its subsidiaries tax dollars to further his own economic enterprise (RocketNews24, 2015). Many also lambast the international marketing of AKB48, saying it perpetuates embarrassing stereotypes about Japan and Japanese women (RocketNews24, 2015).

The Takarazuka Revue has not faced the level of criticism that AKB48 has overseas, but it also has had a smaller international presence. Whereas AKB48 has established sister groups across Asia, the Revue is still solidly anchored in Japan. While the Revue has ventured overseas before with more than 24 international tours since 1938 (Sakane, 2006), more often fans of the Takarazuka Revue will visit Japan to see performances at the original Grand Theatre. The Revue was originally established for the sole purpose of bringing tourists to Takarazuka, and still does its job very well, even playing into some of the goals of *Cool Japan* which include increasing tourism to Japan (METI, 2014). For example, since its 2006 tour in South Korea, fans have been able to buy travel packages to Japan with an itinerary devoted to the Takarazuka Revue (Sakane, 2006).

The effects of the political associations with *Cool Japan* exports are of particular relevance to the research within this thesis because of the social power that media and

popular culture can have. As Nye describes it, "a country that stands astride popular channels of communication has more opportunities to get its messages across and to affect the preferences of others" (Nye, 2011:169). As such, political messages associated with certain soft power exports may influence audiences to align with those messages

III. METHODOLOGY

The data examined in this thesis was gathered through an online survey administered to fans of AKB48 and the Takarazuka Revue. Considering this researcher's background in anthropology, the design of this survey was largely directed by anthropological survey methods[12], but are relevant across all social science fields, including sociology. I originally intended to use a combination of in-person interviews with and participant observation of fans at group performances and fan events. My reasoning for this was that these venues and events would host fans who most closely aligned with Leonie Stickland's definition of fans. Additionally, those who attend these events in-person would be those fans who were living in or visiting Japan and so would have - in theory - a greater familiarity with social and political issues in the country. However, due to funding options and complications to travel caused by COVID-19, the format was changed to an online survey. Considering the original intent of in-person interviews, but the limitations offered in a written survey a combination of both open-ended questions and Likert-type statements were used.

Two surveys were created, both offered in English and Japanese. The survey was originally designed in English, translated into Japanese by the researcher, and verified by native Japanese speakers. The first formatted the original interview design as open-ended questions that required respondents to write out their opinions or views. The purpose of this design was to replicate the in-person interview but still solicit opinions rather than provide fixed responses. However, this was short-sighted in a few regards. First, while respondents may be willing to talk to an interviewer with open ended questions in-person, they were less likely to take the extended effort to respond in a written setting. Second, open-ended

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[12] The primary guide for survey design and analysis was H. Russell Bernard's *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches.*

questions were great for gathering individuals' opinions about topics, but did not provide a systemized unit of measurement or unidimensional variable to compare opinions across groups of study and control. As such, a second survey was created with the majority of questions converted into a Likert scale format. Demographic questions were preserved and some opportunities within the survey were offered so respondents could elaborate on their answers, but all others were structured with a seven-item Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. However, with this format, I fell into the same trap mentioned by H. Russell Bernard in *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*: "A problem with fixed-choice questions is that people focus on the choices they have. If they'd like to offer a response other than those in front of them, they won't do it" (2018: 207-208). This explains why, although questions soliciting elaboration were presented in the Likert survey, they were not answered.

As such, all respondents were given the link to both surveys, asking that they answer the Likert survey and providing them with a second link to the open-ended survey with the notice that they take it only if they would like to elaborate on their responses overall. Because there was the opportunity for respondents to answer both surveys, the response rates and statistical data were only taken from the Likert-style survey. Response rates to the open-ended survey aligns with the time-frame during which the Likert-style survey was answered, so it is assumed that those who answered the former also answered the latter. As such, only the numbers for the Likert survey were considered in the analysis. The open-ended survey was instead used to garner greater understanding and context to participants' responses to the Likert survey.

THEORY AND REFERENCE LITERATURE

Questions were divided into three major categories: those related to political issues in Japan, those related to feminism and gender movements in Japan, and those related to gender performance within each group. These sections were randomized, but each section was presented to all respondents. Those in the Control Group were given questions related to gender performance within generalized popular culture rather than specifically Takarazuka Revue or AKB48. The questions developed for this survey were inspired by surveys, interviews, and prior literature by Hiroshi Aoyagi, Jennifer Robertson, Vera Mackie, Ayako Kano, Brian and Gina Cogan, and Sarah Keith and Diane Hughes.

In his ethnography of idol performers Aoyagi conducted interviews and participant observation with over 300 informants including performers, producers, writers, and fans. Aoyagi's goal was to immerse himself in the field of idol production and gather information about the commercialization of idols and the idol industry. He originally introduced himself as a researcher but faced many cultural communication issues wherein interviewees would often express a public opinion (*tatemae*) instead of their own personal feeling (*honne)* to save public face. As such, Aoyagi took on other roles - such as commenter or writer - in order to blend in better and get more of the *honne* perspective. Aoyagi ultimately conducted recorded interviews with 84 of these participants, but his research was supplemented with participant observation at idol concerts (both in the audience and backstage), public events, media productions, and informal fan get-togethers (Aoyagi, 2005, 39). I based my original interview design off Aoyagi's, with the understanding that my position as a Western researcher would likely produce *tatemae*-type answers. The change to the online format helps solicit more *honne*-type answers wherein respondents can perhaps feel less judged by answering anonymously

on a computer or device. My desired sample pool (200) was based on Aoyagi's resultant participant total, altered slightly to fit the capabilities of my funding and outreach.

Robertson's study of fans of the Takarazuka Revue served as an inspiration for questions related to how fans participate with and view their respective groups. Robertson uses a mostly historiographic approach, translating letters to Takarasiennes from fans, opinion pieces in fan magazines, and historic data of fan club membership; this is supplemented with some interviews between Robertson and fans as well (1998). Robertson suggests that a siren's call for many Takarazuka fans is the homosensuality and/or the non-normative gender production in the performances. As such, I developed questions within the survey to determine how fans differentiate between the female performers and their performances and if those performances resonant with fans as true representations or caricatures of real-life gender production.

Cogan and Cogan's and Keith and Hughes' work regarding the authenticity of Japanese female performers also inspired many of the questions focused on the women of AKB48 and the Takarazuka Revue. Both articles detail how femininity is produced by female performers and the implications of that in the authenticity of their performances. Because both the Takarazuka Revue and AKB48 produce exaggerated forms of femininity, but in different ways, Cogan and Cogan and Keith and Hughes' work inspired me to ask respondents how they viewed femininity and masculinity in these performances. Similar to those questions inspired by Robertson, the goal of these questions was to determine if respondents view the gender roles and productions in these performances as true representation or caricatures.

Mackie and Kano have written various articles regarding feminism, gender movements, and political issues in Japan - both together and separately. Their work provided

context for many of the questions focused on gender and political issues in my survey. In their joint article, "Is Shinzo Abe Really a Feminist," Kano and Mackie suggest not only that *womenomics* disadvantages women economically, but that inequalities persist for both men and women because of those initiatives (2013). In other articles, Kano explores the global aspect of feminist and LDP initiatives and some of the effect these have had, including the globalized feminist issue of comfort women (2001, 2011). Both authors detail some of Abe's history with feminism and Mackie devotes an entire book to the history of feminist movements in Japan. Thus, I was inspired by Kano and Mackie to include questions that would gauge the following: what respondents think of feminist movements in Japan, how respondents differentiate between feminist movement in Japanese versus in other countries, how respondents believe *womenomics* initiatives have helped women and/or men, and if respondents believe there is gender equality in Japan.

SURVEY DESIGN

The questions inspired by the aforementioned researchers were compiled into a survey which was designed to answer the following questions: how does association with Japanese conservatism and nationalism affect audiences' political and social opinions; does the Takarazuka Revue and AKB48's involvement with conservative ideologies impact their fans' perceptions of women and gender; and how do these fans' political and social opinions differ from those who do not engage with these performance groups?

First, I established demographic questions as a baseline measurement of who was participating in the survey. Participants were asked to verify of which group(s) they were fans. Anyone who answered that they were not a fan of either AKB48 or the Takarazuka Revue was added to the Control Group. All respondents were also asked demographic

questions regarding gender, nationality, age, and type and length of fan involvement. The optional open-ended survey also asked these items with fixed-answers. Respondents in both surveys were asked to describe the gender roles they see in their lives as open-ended questions to provide context on their awareness and/or opinion of gender construction in their society. Respondents were also asked to list any other female Japanese performance groups that they were fans of to determine if there were patterns in the groups that fans are involved with. This information could then provide opportunity for future research amongst other female performance groups.

After these baseline questions were answered, participants were shown questions relevant to their selections. For example, if participants answered that they were only fans of AKB48, they were presented with only those questions related to AKB48's performance; or if a participant said they were not a fan of either group, they were only presented with questions for the Control Group. Similarly, if a respondent answered that they were younger than 18, the survey automatically ended per Institutional Review Board guidelines.

These questions were divided into three major categories, those related to gender and performance, those related to feminism and feminist movements in Japan, and those related to LDP policies and ideologies. All participants were shown the same questions regarding feminism and LDP policies, but gender and performance questions were tailored to each group. For example, a fan of the Takarazuka Revue would see the Likert statement "the performances of the Takarazuka Revue represent real women," but AKB48 fans would see "the performances of AKB48 represent real women." While the spirit and intent of each question remained the same, sentences were altered to reflect the group of study. A complete list of all questions for both surveys is available in Appendices A and B.

LDP platform items were chosen as the baseline of study for respondents' political opinions for a few reasons. First, the LDP has been the longest-lasting and most influential political party in modern Japanese politics and so would have a greater political and social impact than other party platforms. Second, LDP is a political party known for its historically conservative and nationalist rhetoric and so would be a good measure for alignment with conservative and nationalist ideology. Finally, and most importantly, both the Takarazuka Revue and AKB48 have been used by LDP (primarily through LDP's pet project *Cool Japan*) to promote Japanese political and social values. Thus, statements related to LDP's platforms were deemed most useful in measuring the impact of political influences on fans of AKB48 and the Takarazuka Revue.

All answers were encouraged, but optional except for two: agreement that they consent to the survey and age to verify that they were over 18. The survey was designed so that it would ask respondents to answer unanswered questions, but would otherwise let them progress through the survey. The reasoning for this was a sensitivity to individuals' comfortability in answering questions for which they feel they either don't have sufficient knowledge to answer or for which they may feel uncomfortable answering. My reasoning was that it was better to have one or two statements left unanswered rather than the remainder of the survey unanswered if a participant was unable or unwilling to respond. Data analysis took into account fewer responses on particular questions.

RECRUITMENT

Based on the internet's role as the primary mode of interaction amongst fans of AKB48 and the Takarazuka Revue, as well as the researcher's funding and travel limitations, this survey was ultimately dispersed online. There were three groups of subjects evaluated

within this research: fans of the Takarazuka Revue, fans of AKB48, and a Control Group of non-fans. The definition of "fan" in this scenario relied on Leonie Stickland's description of fans not as passive consumers, but as active participants in the production and consumption of the Takarazuka Revue and AKB48 (Stickland 2010). As such, fans were contacted based on their associations to social media groups, websites, and public online connections with the Takarazuka Revue and AKB48. They were asked to confirm in the survey in what ways they engage with the group(s) through a listing of options for which they could select multiple items. This included activities such as: attending live performances, buying merchandise from the groups, creating fan art, joining fan clubs, posting to online forums or chat rooms, reading magazines or blogs related to the groups, or writing letters to group members. Respondents were also offered the option of "other" and asked to elaborate other ways in which they participated as a fan.

Links to both the Likert and open-ended surveys were shared publicly on these platforms and in comment areas of public posts associated with these groups, along with information about the research. Links were also posted to private social media groups and websites with the permission of their moderators. The posts with the links included an introduction by the researcher, a brief explanation of purpose of the research, and a link to the survey on an external platform. The survey was administered online via Texas State University's Qualtrics system based on its security, ease of use, and data hosting capabilities. Participants could then voluntarily follow the link and respond to the survey online. No

connection was made between the social media platforms and the respondent's answers as the link brought the respondents to an external survey where they could answer anonymously. Within the post with the survey link, I requested that participants share the survey with others who may be interested in its content to create a wider snowball-recruitment and larger participant pool.

A control group was selected through a similar method of link sharing but on social media platforms and websites associated with Japan or Japanese popular culture not specific to the Takarazuka Revue or AKB48. All control participants verified within the survey that they are not a fan of either the Takarazuka Revue or AKB48.

I also employed the use of my own personal contacts in Japan to share the survey amongst people who may be part of the group of study or the control group, asking them in-turn to share the survey if they were so willing. My personal contacts were sent the same recruitment letter as non-personal contacts. While some of my personal contacts may have participated in the survey, because my only interaction with them regarding this survey was to send them the link to the external Qualtrics survey, there is no identifiable way to measure who answered it and what their answers were.

The aim of this design was to make the research as blind as possible with no specific focus on the participant's gender, age range, occupation, etc. While the survey was targeted towards Japanese nationals and residents, participation did not require this due to the

AKB48's and the Takarazuka Revue's international following. Data about age, gender[13], and

nationality were collected, to examine patterns based on those qualifiers. No personally

identifiable information (such as occupation, name, address, etc.) were connected with these

data. As a safety measure against bot/spam respondents, IP addresses were automatically

recorded by the Qualtrics system, but were extracted and deleted from the resultant data.

Because of the snowball-nature of this survey, there was no particular number of

anticipated responses. However, I did expect at least 100 respondents of fans and 100

respondents of a control group. This number was chosen based on participant response

rates in other research regarding the Takarazuka Revue and AKB48 by Robertson and

Hiroshi. Due to the limitations in this research, this sample size is not expected to be

representative of the population, but should be large enough to reveal patterns in opinions

for preliminary research.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

As surveys were submitted, they were separated into two primary groups: Control

Group and Fans (group of study). All responses were then examined to determine if there

were errors in submission, blank responses, conflicting answers within the same survey, or

other issues that may compromise the data. If these data were significantly compromised, it

was excluded from the overall research analysis. For example, if no questions regarding

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[13] Due to translation equivalency issues between English and Japanese, female/woman and male/man were used interchangeably. While I recognize that there is a distinction between social gender and biological sex, for the purposes of the translation in this study, female and woman are interchangeable, as are male and man.

opinions on social or political issues - the main point of study - were answered, they were

excluded from the data. However, respondents that left some individual answers blank but

otherwise completed the full survey were included in the data set per the voluntary answer

design.

All data were aggregated and broken down into groups for further analysis:

Takarazuka Revue Fans, AKB48 Fans, Fans of Both, and those who were fans of neither

(Control Group). Within each group, Likert items were quantified where they were assigned

the following values:

1 = Strongly Agree
2 = Agree
3 = Somewhat Agree
4 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
5 = Somewhat Disagree
6 = Disagree
7 = Strongly Disagree
0 = I don't know or I am not familiar

The quantified responses were separated into tables based on agreement with Likert

items and compiled into divergent stacked graphs for a visual analysis of each response.

Patterns were measured within the same groups (Takarazuka Revue Fans, AKB48 Fans,

Fans of Both, or Control Group) and between groups (Takarazuka Fans to AKB48 Fans,

Fans of Both to fans of the individual groups, fans of each group and Fans of Both to the

Control Group) to determine overlaps or patterns in opinions. Responses were also

compiled and divided by gender identity to determine patterns based on gender.

Each question was pre-determined by the researcher based on their alignment with

LDP policies. Eleven items had a positive alignment with LDP policies, three items had a

negative alignment, and seven items were neutral (based instead on gender performance

within groups). Those responses that more closely aligned with LDP topics and platforms were considered conservative. It was assumed that if respondents agreed more strongly with LDP statements, it was more likely that LDP was able to influence audiences' opinions through AKB48 and the Takarazuka Revue. Conversely, the more strongly respondents disagreed with LDP statements, the less likely LDP was able to influence audiences.

Reception and frequency of conservative and nationalist rhetoric and opinions was determined by their overall agreement with LDP policies. Agreement was determined by any answer that included "Strongly Agree," "Agree," or "Somewhat Agree" with each LDP-aligned statement. Once patterns were determined, these were measured against the hypotheses to determine their validity.

Similarly, views of feminism, gender equality, and gender relations were measured by agreement or disagreement with both LDP and non-LDP aligned statements focused on gender relations. Those that had the lowest levels of agreement with non-LDP statements were considered to have less favorable views of gender equality and feminism in Japan. Those that had the highest level of agreement with specifically gender-focused LDP statements were considered to have the highest levels of satisfaction with the current status of gender equality in Japan. These were also analyzed in two sets: one based on gender and one based on the group (Takarazuka, AKB48, both, or control).

IV. FINDINGS

A total of 298 respondents answered this survey. 184 were excluded based on issues with the completed survey, leaving 114 viable respondents remaining. Of this, 24 completed the optional written survey wherein they could expand upon their answers. These responses were divided by their fan group (Takarazuka Revue, AKB48, Fans of Both, and fans of neither) for quantitative analysis. Afterwards, responses were compared between groups and the Control Group to determine trends.

TAKARAZUKA RESPONDENTS

Eighteen respondents who took the survey identified themselves as fans of the Takarazuka Revue. Amongst this group, there was an almost even split of respondents from Japan and from the United States (33.3% and 38.9% respectively). All Japanese fans responded to the survey in Japanese while all other fans responded in English. The higher percentage of Japanese respondents from fans of Takarazuka Revue than from other fan groups likely indicates more familiarity with Japanese political issues than non-Japanese fans.

Other respondents came from Australia, Singapore, France, Finland, and New Zealand (5.6% each). Some non-Japanese fans described how they discovered the Takarazuka Revue while studying in or visiting Japan. So, unlike fans mentioned in Sakane's article who made trips to Japan with the express purpose of seeing the Takarazuka Revue live, the fans who responded to this survey credit their time in Japan as a catalyst to becoming a fan. However, one American respondent became a fan after seeing the Revue during one of its few international tours and described how it was one of the reasons why they eventually went to Japan. This is evidence, to at least some degree, that *Cool Japan* is successful in its design to promote tourism to Japan.

No respondents identified themselves as male. In fact, all but one respondent (who identified as gender fluid/non-binary) identified as female. This was not unexpected, however, based on prior studies of Takarazuka Revue fans. While Robertson and Stickland do show that there are male fans of Takarazuka, they are comparatively very few. Robertson explored a few reasons for it, but responses to this survey indicated that perhaps one of the largest reasons is the focus on the female-gaze in the performances. One Japanese fan describes *otokoyaku* performances as "acting as a man for women," and that the *otokoyaku* "plays the male that women prefer."

Fans of Takarazuka were, overall, older than fans of AKB48. There was an even split between ages 25-34 and 35-44 (27.8% each), followed closely by fans who were 18-24 (22.2%). The rest were ages 45-54 (5.6%) and 55-64 (16.7%). The older audience for the Takarazuka Revue likely has a few causes. First, the Takarazuka Revue is over 100 years old and has older fans because of that longevity. Second, as Robertson and Stickland mentioned in their works, fans of Takarazuka Revue share their love for it generationally - grandmothers, mothers, and daughters will often go to shows together and share a love for the Revue. As such, many older women are still fans.

For similar reasons, fans of Takarazuka Revue have been so longer than those of AKB48. While the majority (50%) have been fans for only 1-5 years, some respondents have been fans for over 20 years (22.2%). Other respondents said that they have been fans for 6-10 years or 11-15 years (11.1% each), and one respondent (5.6%) has been a fan for less than a year.

Respondents were asked to detail how they participate as fans and were allowed to select as many items as they participated in. Takarazuka fans participated in every form listed. Amongst Takarazuka fans, buying merchandise was the most popular way of

participating with 94.4% doing so. Many also read magazines or blogs associated with Takarazuka (77.8%). Having observed the social media sites where the survey was shared, I can confirm that many of the posts were fans sharing articles and interviews from official Takarazuka magazines, or blogs from Takarazuka actresses. The majority of fans also attended live performances (72.7%) which aligns with the fan culture that Robertson and Stickland describe in detail. An international fan described how she hosted Takarazuka nights for fans and to introduce others by watching recorded performances of the Revue. This does not seem to be a one-off case either as another respondent cited watching a DVD with a friend who was already a fan as her introduction to the Revue. These sorts of interactions allow fans, who are otherwise unable to see the Revue live, to both watch the performances and interact with other fans.

Interestingly, although the survey was shared online only 55.5% said that they participated in online chatrooms or web forums related to Takarazuka. This suggests that the survey was shared more widely than on the social media platforms on which it was originally posted. 22.2% of fans said they were members of official fan clubs and made some sort of art inspired by the Revue.

Table 1: Takarazuka Respondents

Gender	Percent	Number
Gender Fluid/Non-Binary	5.6%	1
Male	0%	0
Female	94.4%	17
Age		
18-24	22.2%	4
25-34	27.8%	5
35-44	27.8%	5
45-54	5.6%	1
55-64	16.7%	3
65-74	0%	0
Length of Involvement		
Less Than 1 Year	5.6%	1
1-5 Years	50%	9
6-10 Years	11.1%	2
11-15 Years	11.1%	2
16-20 Years	0%	0
Over 20 Years	22.2%	4
Participation		
Attend Live Performances	72.2%	13
Buy Merchandise	94.4%	17
Create Art	22.2%	4
Member of a Fan Club	22.2%	4
Participate in Online Chatrooms/Web Forums	55.5%	10
Read Related Magazines/Blogs	77.8%	14
Write Letters to Performers	61.1%	11

AKB48 RESPONDENTS

The majority of participants in the survey identified as fans of AKB48 with a total of 73 respondents. This group was by far the most diverse, but none of the respondents were from Japan. The majority of respondents were from the United States (30.9%). The next largest populations were from the United Kingdom (7.3%) and Italy (5.5%). Respondents from Turkey, France, Chile, the Philippines, Brazil, Vietnam, Argentina, and Malaysia consisted of 3.6% of respondents each. Finally, there was one respondent (1.8%) each from Lithuania, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, New Zealand, Tonga, Australia, Canada, China, Ireland, the Netherlands, Maldives, Panama, Germany, and Czech Republic.

There are many reasons why AKB48 fans are more spread across the globe and reference more (as we will see later) online-based forms of participation. AKB48's promotion as a government representative puts them at the forefront of Japanese image production as evidenced by their consideration as headliners in the 2020 Olympics. Additionally, AKB48 is newer and first established its presence primarily online while the Takarazuka Revue is an older institution which relies more-so on the popularity of its live performances in the city of Takarazuka. Finally, AKB48's presence in other countries through other 48G performance groups means that they have a strong foothold in other countries or areas of Japan. In fact, many fans cited other 48G performers as their introduction to AKB48, such as Produce48 (South Korea), NMB48 (Osaka), MNL48 (The Philippines), Nogizaka46 (Tokyo). Many more fans who did not cite a 48G group as their original foray into AKB48 cite them as other groups of whom they are now fans. All of this creates opportunities for a greater international audience.

Compared with the Takarazuka respondents wherein no fans identified as male, male AKB48 fans were the largest gender group with 49.3% identifying as such. However, AKB48 fans are also more gender-diverse than Takarazuka fans with 45.2% identifying as female and 5.5% as gender fluid/non-binary. The large male demographic amongst AKB48 fans was not unexpected based on prior literature which explores the male-gaze in AKB48 performances. What was unexpected was the almost equally large group of female fans. However, many respondents described some of AKB48's more recent efforts to appeal to female fans, though the prior literature does not focus on this.

Fans of AKB48 were, overall, younger than fans of Takarazuka, but they were also more diverse in age. While the majority of fans were 18-24 years of age (63%), there was a wider range of other ages than amongst Takarazuka fans: 25-34 (30.1%), 35-44 (5.5%), and

45-54 (1.4%). The prior literature suggests that AKB48 fans are primarily middle-aged and older men, but the respondents here are much younger and gender diverse than this suggests. There could be a couple reasons for this. First, because of the online format through which this survey was shared, older fans may not be as present online and thus not participating. Alternatively, because prior literature specifically focuses on Japanese fans of AKB48, it could overlook the younger demographics across the globe. However, the fact that all fans 35 and older were male still adheres to the prior literature's suppositions regarding the demographics of fans.

AKB48 fans are much newer to AKB48 than Takarazuka fans are to the Revue. However, considering the longevity of Takarazuka mentioned earlier, this is not unexpected. The majority of AKB48 fans, 57.5%, have been so for 1-5 years. About half as many fans have been so for 6-10 years with 26%. 11% have been fans for less than a year and 5.5% have been fans for 11-15 years. No fan could be so for longer than 15 years because AKB48 has only been around since 2005 so its fan base will be relatively newer. However, as far as knowledge of Japanese culture and social and political issues goes, the newness of AKB48's fans may indicate a relative unfamiliarity when compared to Takarazuka fans.

Like Takarazuka fans, AKB48 fans were asked to detail how they participate by selecting items from a list or detailing additional/other options. However, compared to Takarazuka fans who participated in many forms of fan involvement to relatively high degrees, AKB48 fans were scattered across the board as far as how they participated. There were only two clear majorities, with 72.6% of fans participating in online chatrooms and web forums and 71.2% reading magazines or blogs associated with AKB48. Again, having observed many of the AKB48 social media pages where this survey was shared, a large number of posts from participants were sharing AKB48 articles or blogs/social media posts

from performers. For the remaining participation items, involvement was relatively low when compared to the Takarazuka Revue's fans with the largest group buying merchandise (43.8%). Others created art (19.2%), attended live performances (5.5%), were members of fan clubs (9.6%), and wrote to members of AKB48 (1.4%).

While two fans did say that they attended AKB48's famous handshake events, the majority of fans indicated that other ways they interacted as fans was through online resources: watching variety shows and music videos online, streaming music or videos, Nikkei rankings, online news, and Instagram. The members of AKB48 have a significantly stronger online presence than Takarazuka Revue members, posting regularly to platforms like Instagram, Line, and YouTube. This likely is a contributing factor to the primarily online fan interaction in this survey. This online participation may also be because of the more global fan set that responded to this survey that may have limited physical connection to Japan which would otherwise allow them to participate in other ways.

Table 2: AKB48 Respondents

Gender	Percent	Number
Gender Fluid/Non-Binary	5.5%	4
Male	49.3%	36
Female	45.2%	33
Age		
18-24	63%	46
25-34	30.1%	22
35-44	5.5%	4
45-54	1.4%	1
55-64	0%	0
65-74	0%	0
Length of Involvement		
Less Than 1 Year	11%	8
1-5 Years	57.5%	42
6-10 Years	26%	19
11-15 Years	5.5%	4
16-20 Years	0%	0
Over 20 Years	0%	0
Participation		
Attend Live Performances	5.5%	4
Buy Merchandise	43.8%	32
Create Art	19.2%	14
Member of a Fan Club	9.6%	7
Participate in Online Chatrooms/Web Forums	72.6%	53
Read Related Magazines/Blogs	71.2%	52
Write Letters to Performers	0.01%	1

FANS OF BOTH RESPONDENTS

A small portion of respondents (seven individuals) said that they were fans of both Takarazuka Revue and AKB48 and were given their own category for study: Fans of Both. Though not included in my hypothesis, I was interested to see how fans of two all-female performance groups who have opposing gaze design and from different fields (theatre vs. music) compare to fans of individual groups.

This group, overall, was demographically fairly diverse when compared to other groups. This group was primarily female (42.9%), but did include a relatively larger portion of other genders with males and gender fluid/non-binary individuals at 28.6% each. They were also fairly spread out age-wise. The majority (57.1%) were aged 25-34, but 28.6% were 18-24 and 14.3% were 65-74.

Respondents were from four countries, with the majority from the US (57.1%). There was also one fan (14.3%) each from Japan, Vietnam, and Paraguay. All respondents, however, answered the survey in English, regardless of nationality.

Overall, this group was relatively new to both the Takarazuka Revue and AKB48, but had been fans of AKB48 for slightly longer. For the Takarazuka Revue, the largest group of fans had been so for less than one year (42.9%). The rest had been fans for 1-5 years (28.6%), 6-10 years (14.3%), and 11-15 years (14.3%). For AKB48, the majority had been fans for 1-5 years (57.1%). 14.3% of fans had been so for less than 1 year, 6-10 years, and 11-15 years each. For those that had known the Takarazuka Revue for less than a year, all had been involved with AKB48 prior. A reason for this may be that, because Takarazuka Revue has a comparatively smaller online presence, AKB48 may have been the in-road for many fans into lesser-known forms of Japanese popular culture. Only two fans had been fans of both groups for an equal amount of time (1-5 years and 11-15 years respectively).

Respondents participated as fans within both the Takarazuka Revue and AKB48 primarily online, with 85.7% participating with both groups in online chatrooms and web forums. Additionally, 85.7% interacted as Takarazuka fans by reading magazines or blogs online and 100% did so as AKB48 fans. Buying merchandise was close to having a majority with both groups - 42.9% buying Takarazuka merchandise and 57.1% buying AKB48 merchandise. Other forms of participation were very low: 0% were members of a Takarazuka club, but 14.3% were members of an AKB48 club; 14.3% attended live performances; and 14.3% described other forms of participation such as watching performances online. Interestingly, the only fan to attend live performances of both groups was not from Japan, but from the United States. None of these fans made art or wrote to performers and had, overall, a weak participation rate outside of online platforms. This

suggests that these fans may either not be as involved with either group or may be so more passively than those who identify as fans of one group or the other. Their relative newness to the groups may also be a contributing factor, where online platforms are more readily accessible mediums for learning about these groups.

Table 3: Fans of Both Respondents

Gender	Percent		Number	
Gender Fluid/Non-Binary	28.6%		2	
Male	28.6%		2	
Female	42.9%		3	
Age				
18-24	28.6%		2	
25-34	57.1%		4	
35-44	0%		0	
45-54	0%		0	
55-64	0%		0	
65-74	14.3%		1	
Length of Involvement	AKB48	Takarazuka	AKB48	Takarazuka
Less Than 1 Year	14.3%	42.9%	1	3
1-5 Years	57.1%	28.6%	4	2
6-10 Years	14.3%	14.3%	1	1
11-15 Years	14.3%	14.3%	1	1
16-20 Years	0%	0%	0	0
Over 20 Years	0%	0%	0	0
Participation	AKB48	Takarazuka	AKB48	Takarazuka
Attend Live Performances	14.3%	14.3%	1	1
Buy Merchandise	57.1%	42.9%	4	3
Create Art	0%	0%	0	0
Member of a Fan Club	14.3%	0%	1	0
Participate in Online Chatrooms/Web Forums	85.7%	85.7%	6	6
Read Related Magazines/Blogs	100%	85.7%	6	7
Write Letters to Performers	0%	0%	0	0

CONTROL GROUP RESPONDENTS

Sixteen respondents stated that they were not fans of either AKB48 nor the Takarazuka Revue and were added to the Control Group. Of this group, 56.3% considered themselves male and 43.8% were female. While a quarter (25%) of the respondents were from Japan, the largest group were from the US with 31.3%. Respondents also came from six other countries: Russian Federation (12.5%), Germany, Malaysia, India, the Philippines, and Canada (1 respondent or 6.5% each).

The Control Group was not as age-diverse as other groups. Exactly 50% of respondents were aged 25-34 years of age. The next largest age group were ages 18-24 at 31.3% and the remainder of respondents were ages 35-44 with 18.8%. The ages for this group more closely aligned with the Takarazuka Revue Fans than with AKB48 Fans.

While all respondents in the Control Group did not consider themselves fans of either Takarazuka Revue or AKB48, they were all asked if they were familiar with either group. The majority (62.5%) were familiar with just AKB48, while 25% were familiar with both. 12.5% had not heard of either. Only Japanese respondents were familiar with both. This suggests that Takarazuka Revue has a fairly small presence outside of Japan, which is evidenced by the Revue's infrequent international tours, smaller online presence than AKB48, and smaller response rate than AKB48. Additionally, the Takarazuka Revue does not have the same set up with sister groups in other countries like AKB48 does, which gives AKB48 a larger presence outside of Japan. Respondents were also asked if they were fans of any other female-only performance groups and those that answered included many of the same groups that AKB48 fans did, again providing evidence of AKB48's larger international presence and identity as a major actor in *Cool Japan*.

Table 4: Control Group Respondents

Gender	Percent	Number
Gender Fluid/Non-Binary	0%	0
Male	56.3%	9
Female	43.8%	7
Age		
18-24	31.3%	5
25-34	50%	8
35-44	18.8%	3
45-54	0%	0
55-64	0%	0
65-74	0%	0
Familiar With…		
AKB48	62.5 %	10
Takarazuka Revue	0%	0
Both	25%	4
Neither	12.5%	2

RESPONSE TRENDS

All Likert-statements and their answers were compiled into divergent stacked bar graphs. Likert statements were then split into two groups: statements that align with LDP platforms and policies and statements that did not. The closer to one (Strongly Agree) that respondents scored on each of these statements represented their strong agreement with them. These were separated this way to have an easy viewing of how closely, as a trend, groups of respondents were to agreeing or disagreeing with LDP (i.e. conservative or nationalist) ideology. The graphs did not include the statement "I am familiar with Shinzo Abe's 'womenomics' policies" as this statement was only used to determine if a respondent would be able to answer questions related to *womenomics* policies. If respondents disagreed to this statement, they were not shown items three and four from the LDP platform statements.

There was a set of neutral statements that were not associated with LDP policies or platforms, but were included in the survey to examine respondents' perceptions of gender performance. These were not included in the divergent graphs as they would not exemplify how much respondents agreed or disagreed with conservative Japanese ideologies. The classifications for each statement are defined in Appendix C.

Considering the order of the statements above, it was expected that graphs of those who trended disagreement with LDP policies would see a far-left trend on the graphs at first that would shift towards the right as a diagonal decreasing function. As such, group responses that trended disagreement with LDP platforms would show to the furthest left statements at the top (Strongly Disagree) and furthest right statements at the bottom (Strongly Agree). Group responses that trended agreement with LDP platforms would show

further right statements at the top (Strongly Agree) and furthest left statements at the bottom (Strongly Disagree). These divergent graphs are exhibited in Figures 1-4.

Overall, fans of the Takarazuka most disagreed with LDP-platform statements. Interestingly, however, AKB48 fans were not the group that most agree with LDP statements as was expected. In fact, they were the next group to have the largest disagreement with LDP platforms. Instead, Fans of Both agreed with LDP statements the most by a large margin, and the Control Group stood solidly between Fans of Both and AKB48/Takarazuka fans. Table 5 shows the varying degree of agreement each group had with each statement.

Table 5. Fans Who Agree with Likert Statements Divided by Group of Study

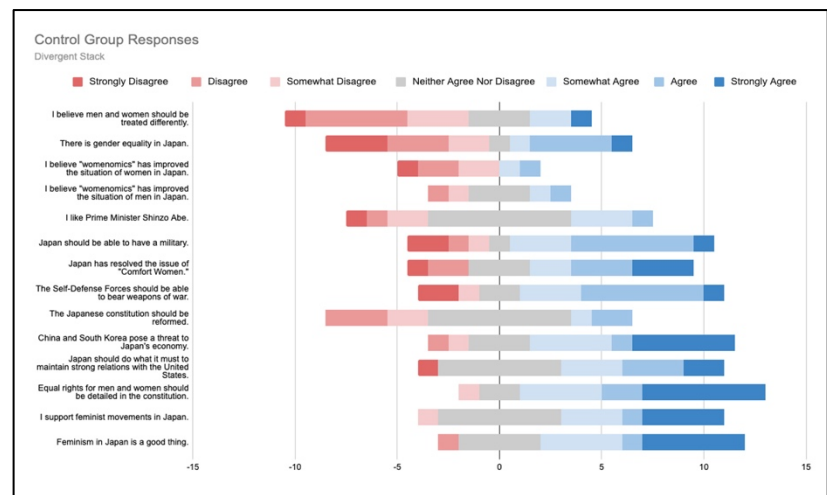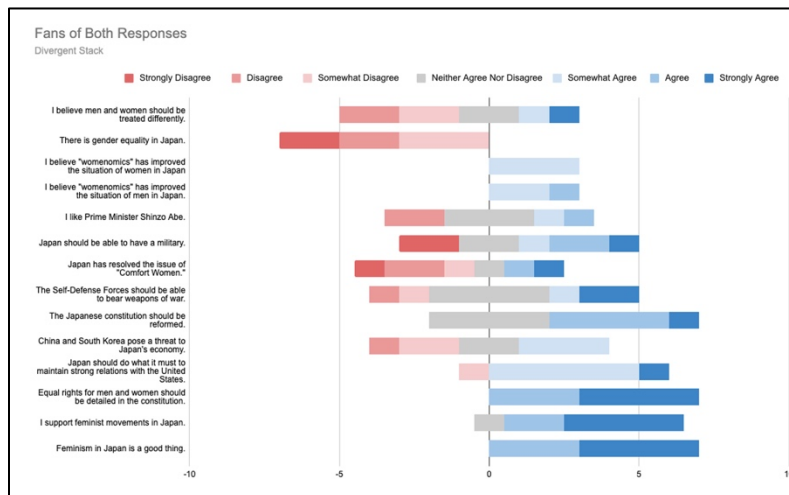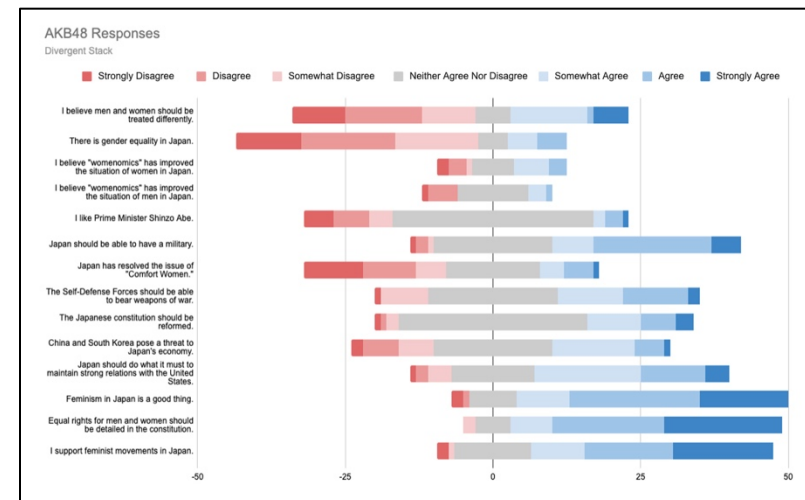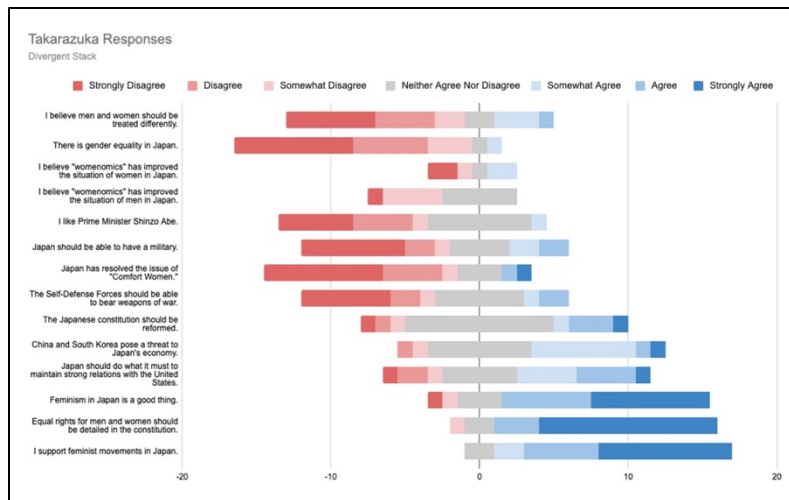|	Takarazuka Fans / N=18	AKB48 Fans N=73	Fans of Both N=7	Control Group N=16
I believe men and women should be treated differently.	22.20%	27.40%	28.90%	18.80%
	N=4	N=20	N=2	N=3
There is gender equality in Japan.	5.60%	13.70%	0%	37.50%
	N=1	N=10	N=0	N=6
I believe "womenomics" has improved the situation of women in Japan.	11.10%	12.30%	42.90%	12.50%
	N=2	N=9	N=3	N=2
I believe "womenomics" has improved the situation of men in Japan.	0%	5.50%	42.90%	12.50%
	N=0	N=4	N=3	N=2
I like Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.	5.6%	8.2%	29.6%	25%
	N=1	N=6	N=2	N=4
Japan should be able to have a military.	22.20%	43.80%	57.10%	62.50%
	N=4	N=32	N=4	N=10
Japan has resolved the issue of "Comfort Women.	11.10%	13.70%	28.90%	50%
	N=2	N=10	N=2	N=8
The Self-Defense Forces should be able to bear weapons of war.	16.70%	32.90%	42.90%	62.50%
	N=3	N=24	N=3	N=10
The Japanese constitution should be reformed.	27.80%	24.70%	71.40%	18..8%
	N=5	N=18	N=5	N=3
China and South Korea pose a threat to Japan's economy.	50%	27.40%	42.90%	62.50%
	N=9	N=18	N=3	N=10
Japan should do what it must to maintain strong relations with the United States.	50%	45.20%	85.70%	50%
	N=9	N=33	N=6	N=8
Equal rights for men and women should be detailed in the constitution.	77.80%	63%	100%	75%
	N=14	N=46	N=7	N=12
I support feminist movements in Japan.	83.30%	63%	85.70%	50%
	N=15	N=46	N=6	N=8
Feminism in Japan is a good thing.	88.90%	56.10%	100%	62.50%
	N=16	N=41	N=7	N=10

Takarazuka Fans, AKB48 Fans, and Fans of Both all agreed with the LDP statement that "Japan should do what it must to maintain strong relations with the United States." However, rather than a direct agreement with LDP practice, this could be representative of their own associations with the US. As previously indicated, a large number of respondents were from the US with 54 of 114 respondents (47.4%). As such, agreement with this statement may reflect their own biases as Americans rather than direct agreement with LDP policies and practices. This supposition can be supported by the Control Group – with a much higher rate of Japanese participation – who did not have a high percentage of agreement with that statement. Instead, the Control Group most agreed that: "Japan should be able to have a military," "the Self-Defense Forces should be able to bear weapons of war." and "China and South Korea pose a threat to Japan's economy."

If there is a total-item correlation between LDP-aligned and non-aligned items, we would expect that those groups that agree the least with LDP items would agree the most with the three non-LDP items. However, this was not so. While we would expect that Takarazuka fans would score the highest in non-aligned items, based on the agreement (or lack thereof) with LDP-aligned items, they were surpassed by Fans of Both. As such, Fans of Both agreed most strongly with both LDP and non-LDP platform statements. The order of those who agreed most with non-LDP aligned items were Fans of Both, Takarazuka Fans, the Control Group, and finally AKB48 Fans.

There could be two reasons for this discrepancy. First, because the items were not pre-tested, there could be a lack of total-item correlation amongst survey items. This means that agreement with LDP-aligned statements does not indicate disagreement with non-LDP statements. Another possible reason for this discrepancy is the effect of studying one very

large group and comparing it to much smaller groups. AKB48 had 73 respondents while Takarazuka had 18, Fans of Both had 7, and the Control Group had 16. The greater number of AKB48 respondents against the smaller sets, may reveal either greater diversity in their answers, or illuminate discrepancies in the data set. This could be verified by using this survey as a pre-test, restructuring some items, and determining Cronbach's Alpha amongst the data sets to determine statistical correlation between items.

We can also see these discrepancies in the divergent stacked graphs. Within each graph, Likert statements were ordered with LDP-aligned statements listed at the top and non-aligned statements at the bottom. In a stable sample with total-item correlation, we would then expect a diagonal decreasing function, reflecting strong disagreement with LDP-aligned items at the far-left steadily moving to the right until the non-aligned statements have a far-right alignment with strong agreement. Conversely, strong agreement with LDP-aligned items should be reflected in a diagonal increasing function wherein the LDP-aligned items reflect strong agreement at the far-right, steadily moving to the left until non-aligned statements have a far-left alignment with strong agreement. These graphs are represented in Figures 1-4.

Figure 1. Takarazuka Responses

Figure 2. AKB48 Responses

Figure 3. Fans of Both Responses

Figure 4. Control Group Responses

Based on the hypotheses, we would expect the Takarazuka fans' graph would represent a decreasing function and the AKB48 fans' graph to represent an increasing function. However, while the graph for Takarazuka fans reflects a fairly clear decreasing function, graphs for the other groups do not. The graphs for AKB48 and the Control Group may suggest that there isn't a total-item correlation, but the Takarazuka graph suggests that there may be a correlation. There was no definition amongst LDP-align items of what would be the most LDP-aligned and so there is likely to be items which break the clear diagonal of the function. However, all graphs do still show that there is strong disagreement with most LDP-aligned items and strong agreement with most non-aligned items, though each group reflects these agreements to varying degrees.

The Control Group's response trends more closely resemble those of AKB48 fans, suggesting that both are more LDP-aligned than the Takarazuka Revue fans. However, the Control Group does trend more non-LDP aligned than the AKB48 group. A major point to consider at this time is that both the Control Group and Takarazuka Revue Fan group are quite small when compared to the AKB48 group. As such, the data from the control and Takarazuka groups may not be as representational as the data for AKB48.

Response trends were also analyzed based on gender groups. Although the hypotheses only mentioned men and women as gender groups for study, gender identification options such as gender fluid/non-binary and other were included in the survey in recognition of the spectrum of gender identities around the world. Although these non-cis-heteronormative gender distinctions are still not widespread in Japan, they were included because these identities are gaining traction in Japan. Additionally, they were included because of the known global influences of each group and expected participation from individuals outside of Japan.

As expected, men trended as the group that most agreed with LDP-aligned statements. Men also trended as the group lowest in support of feminist movements in Japan and highest in satisfaction with current gender relations in Japan. Regarding feminism and gender relations, men most disagreed with the statement that "feminism in Japan is a good thing," and most agreed with the statement that "I believe men and women should be treated differently."

Also as expected, women trended the as the group that least agreed with LDP-aligned statements, but did not trend as the group highest in support of feminist movements in Japan, nor the lowest in satisfaction with current gender relations in Japan. Instead, gender fluid and non-binary individuals surpassed women in both of these categories. This is very likely because feminist and gender movements – while often focused on securing equality and rights/opportunities for women – frequently also spark equality measures for non-cis-gendered and non-heteronormative individuals. As such, support in these areas by individuals who do not identify specifically as either men nor women is often out of support for their own rights and opportunities. Table 5 shows the varying degree of agreement individuals had with each statement based on their gender identities.

Table 6. Fans Who Agree with Likert Statements Divided by Gender

	Female Fans / N=54	Male Fans / N=38	Gender Fluid/Nin-Binary Fans / N=7
I believe men and women should be treated differently.	20.4%	42.1%	42.9%
	N=11	N=16	N=3
There is gender equality in Japan.	5.6%	21.1%	0.0%
	N=3	N=8	N=0
I believe "womenomics" has improved the situation of women in Japan.	16.7%	18.4%	0.0%
	N=9	N=7	N=0
I believe "womenomics" has improved the situation of men in Japan.	7.4%	7.9%	0.0%
	N=4	N=3	N=0
I like Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.	5.6%	15.8%	14.3%
	N=3	N=6	N=1
Japan should be able to have a military.	40.7%	60.5%	28.6%
	N=22	N=23	N=2
Japan has resolved the issue of "Comfort Women.	7.4%	28.9%	57.1%
	N=4	N=11	N=4
The Self-Defense Forces should be able to bear weapons of war.	27.8%	50.0%	14.3%
	N=15	N=19	N=1
The Japanese constitution should be reformed.	31.5%	31.6%	28.6%
	N=17	N=12	N=2
China and South Korea pose a threat to Japan's economy.	33.3%	47.4%	57.1%
	N=18	N=18	N=4
Japan should do what it must to maintain strong relations with the United States.	48.1%	63.2%	57.1%
	N=26	N=24	N=4
Equal rights for men and women should be detailed in the constitution.	87.0%	76.3%	100.0%
	N=47	N=29	N=7
I support feminist movements in Japan.	87.0%	78.9%	85.7%
	N=47	N=30	N=6
Feminism in Japan is a good thing.	85.2%	55.3%	100.0%
	N=46	N=21	N=7

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

After examining overall trends, the data were divided by group and by gender and compared against the original hypotheses. Answers from the open-ended surveys were also reviewed to garner a more in-depth understanding of respondents' thoughts and opinions on gender relations, gender performance, and political issues in Japan.

FIRST HYPOTHESIS

My first hypothesis was that fans will be more receptive to nationalist rhetoric or opinions than non-fans. As mentioned earlier, this was measured by compiling the levels of agreement that fans had with LDP-aligned Likert statements and comparing rates of agreement between the groups of study (fans) and the Control Group (non-fans). It was assumed that those who most agreed with LDP-aligned statements were most receptive to nationalist rhetoric or opinions. Thus, fans would most agree with LDP statements and the Control Group would most disagree. When we study each group individually by breaking them into four categories – AKB48 Fans, Takarazuka Fans, Fans of Both, and the Control Group – this hypothesis was invalidated. In fact, the Control Group of non-fans was the second highest in agreement with LDP statements. Fans of Both were in the highest agreement with LDP statements, while AKB48 Fans and Takarazuka Fans were third and fourth respectively in agreement rankings.

When we combine all fans together as one group of study and compare it against the Control Group, fans far out-rank the Control Group with the highest levels of agreement with LDP statements. Although this comparison proves the hypothesis, we should certainly consider here that number of fans also far outweighs the number in the Control Group – 98

71

individuals versus 16. Because of this even discrepancy, it is very likely that the rate of agreement between the groups is also skewed.

Let us assume that the four-group analysis is more representational because of the smaller sample sizes (although AKB48's number is still much larger than the rest of the groups combined). There may be some explanations for why the Control Group ranks so highly in agreement with LDP policies. First, the Control Group had the largest number of respondents who were from Japan. As such, they will be more heavily exposed to and familiar with LDP's platforms, policies, and rhetoric than the other groups. Because of this, they may have higher levels of agreement with those policies and platforms than individuals who are not familiar with LDP or Japanese politics. Second, individuals' political leanings may be more strongly affected by other mediums than by association with these performance groups. This ties in closely with the third option. It may be that the LDP is not actually very politically influential in popular culture and does not have a strong impact on fans who are associated with these performance groups. In this case, it would be evidence that fans absorb little to no political influence through *Cool Japan* mediums. This would undermine one of the primary goals of *Cool Japan*, but the possibility that there is no political influence through *Cool Japan* has been explored in prior literature.

Though the strong rates of agreement from Fans of Both may invalidate these three suppositions, we must also keep in mind that the Fans of Both group was the smallest of all groups, thus, it is very likely not representational. Overall in this study, however, it would suggest that there are no significant political impacts on fans who are associated with AKB48 or the Takarazuka Revue.

SECOND HYPOTHESIS

My second hypothesis was that AKB48 fans and male fans from both groups will have a greater frequency of nationalist opinions. This was measured in the same way as the first hypothesis, but the data were also divided by the gender of respondents rather than just by fan group. For the gender analysis, the Control Group was not included as we were only looking at the opinions of male fans in this case.

As seen in the first hypothesis, the first part of the second hypothesis does not hold true, unless we only compare AKB48 Fans to Takarazuka Fans. However, when we compare AKB48 Fans to Fans of Both, Fans of Both agreed with LDP statements almost twice as much as AKB48 Fans percentage-wise. The only LDP-aligned statement that AKB48 Fans agreed at a higher percentage than Fans of Both was the statement "there is gender equality in Japan." Otherwise, Fans of Both had higher percentages of agreement on all LDP-aligned statements than AKB48 Fans.

When we look at the gender of fans, however, this hypothesis holds true. Male fans agreed with LDP-aligned statements at higher percentages than women on every statement. Although, there were a couple statements were women's rates of agreement were very close to those of the men. 7.4% of women and 7.9% of men agreed that "*womenomics* has improved the situation of men in Japan." Additionally, 31.5% of women and 31.6% of men agreed that "the Japanese constitution should be reformed."

There are few possible explanations for why part of this hypothesis holds true and the other doesn't. First, as mentioned earlier, AKB48 Fans had a much higher response rate than other groups. When we compare AKB48 Fans to other groups, we must consider that the others are not fully representational; these groups may have higher frequencies of nationalist opinions that are not evidenced in the limited sample sizes. Also, however, we

know that AKB48 Fans have an almost even number of both male and female fans which leads me to my second explanation. Prior literature focused primarily on the male demographic of fans, but this study suggests that there are much higher participation rates from female fans the previously evidenced. The lower rates of nationalist opinions among female AKB48 fans may offset those of male fans, thus creating an overall lower agreement with LDP policies. Regardless, these data suggests that AKB48 fans are not as receptive to nationalist rhetoric and opinions as previously hypothesized, but that men are more receptive than women.

THIRD HYPOTHESIS

My third hypothesis was that Takarazuka Fans and female fans from both groups will have a more positive view of feminism and gender equality. This hypothesis was analyzed by measuring the rates of disagreement with LDP-aligned gender statements and rates of agreement with non-LDP aligned gender statements. For example, if an individual selected "Strongly Disagree" to the statement "I support feminist movements in Japan," they were assumed to not have a positive view of feminism. If they selected "Strongly Agree" to the statement "I believe men and women should be treated differently," they were assumed to not have a positive view of gender equality.

Interestingly, although Takarazuka Fans had very high rates of agreement with those statements that were assumed to indicate positive views of feminism and gender equality, they were not the highest rates of agreement. Instead, Fans of Both had the highest rates of agreement on all items. However, if we examine how Fans of Both compared to Takarazuka Fans on their disagreement with LDP-aligned gender statements, Takarazuka Fans most disagreed and Fans of Both most agreed. This suggests that Takarazuka Fans are most

dissatisfied with the current status of gender relations in Japan while Fans of Both are most satisfied. This is evidence that there is not a total-item correlation and so satisfaction with LDP gender initiatives does not indicate dissatisfaction with alternate gender and feminist movements.

Although gender fluid and non-binary individuals ranked highest in their positive views of gender and feminist movements, within the parameters of this hypothesis it holds true that women had more positive views than men. Unlike Fans of Both, however, women ranked both highest in positive views of gender movements and highest in dissatisfaction with the current gender relations in Japan (again, excluding the higher rates in both areas amongst gender fluid and non-binary individuals).

Much like in the second hypothesis, there are things to consider about why part holds true and part does not in the third hypothesis. First, Fans of Both were not previously accounted for in my original hypothesis which focused primarily on only AKB48 fans *or* Takarazuka fans. If we do not account for Fans of Both, then the first part of this hypothesis holds true. Second, if we do account for Fans of Both within the scope of this hypothesis, we must consider that the number of Fans of Both is smaller than Takarazuka Fans so they are not equally representational. As such, there may be more negative views of feminism amongst Fans of Both that were not otherwise measured. Third, if we still include Fans of Both in this hypothesis, we must also consider that Takarazuka Fans are primarily women with only one gender fluid/non-binary respondents. However, 28.6% of Fans of Both were gender fluid/non-binary. As reviewed previously, gender fluid and non-binary individuals generally have higher rates of support for feminist and gender movements. The higher percentage of these individuals within the Fans of Both group may be a contributing factor to higher rates of support for feminism and gender equality.

FOURTH HYPOTHESIS

My last hypothesis was that fans as a whole will have less favorable views of
feminism and gender equality than non-fans, but more positive views of the current status of
gender relations in Japan. Using the same system of measurement in the third hypothesis, I
measured rates of agreement with LDP-aligned gender statements and disagreement with
non-LDP aligned gender statements between the groups.

Like in the first hypothesis, if we consider each group individually – AKB48 Fans,
Takarazuka Fans, Fans of Both, and the Control Group – this hypothesis was invalidated.
Regarding less favorable views of feminism, we would expect that the Control Group would
rank lowest, but they were instead the second highest, only very closely beat out by AKB48
Fans. However, if we consider all groups of study compared to the Control Group, the
Control Group ranks lowest, proving the hypothesis true. Like in the first hypothesis,
though, we must consider that the sample sizes between these two groups is heavily skewed
and likely not fully representational.

Regarding the current status of gender relations in Japan, the Control Group had the
second highest rates of positive views when we would expect them to be the lowest.
Takarazuka Fans and AKB48 Fans were both lower than the Control Group in this regard.
Again, however, if we consider the all fans groups and compare them against the Control
Group, then fans hold more positive views of the current status of gender relations and the
hypothesis holds true.

This hypothesis should be studied from the stand point of all fans compared against
the Control Group. Yet we know that the skewed samples between these two are not
representational, so I've also considered this hypothesis from the perspective of all four

groups. If we assume that the analysis between just the two groups is representational or, at least suggestive, this hypothesis holds true.

GENDER PERFORMANCE

Although the Takarazuka Revue's management denies using homosensuality in its production design, Takarazuka Revue fans are very aware of at least a strong element of female-gaze in its performances. Many fans reference the homosensuality of *otokoyaku*, saying that performers are "acting as a man for women" and one fan lamenting that she "wouldn't mind being/seeing a little more *otokoyaku* around, both in men and women." Other fans described the ways in which *otokoyaku* perform as the idealized man; some describe the *otokoyaku* men as "impossibly handsome," and others describe the sensitivity they don't otherwise see from men in their daily life, with a willingness to woo and cry over their women. As one fan puts it, "Takarazuka revue [*sic*] shows are acting to present female audiences ideal romance or fantasy which do not exist in reality."

The fans of the Takarazuka Revue certainly focus a bit more positively on the *otokoyaku* than on the *musumeyaku*. When asked to detail how they see *musumeyaku* displaying femininity, fans describe how *musumeyaku* must be cute and traditional and are "'devoted' to their *otokoyaku* counterpart, mirroring a woman's position in society to devote herself to her husband." As Robertson suggests, this may also support the reification of traditional gender roles wherein the *otokoyaku* are given the spotlight and power while *musumeyaku* are the beautiful supporters for their story. One fan identifies this herself:

> Femininity for the musumeyaku... is traditional Japanese femininity prior to marriage. There's a reason they're musumeyaku and not onna-yaku (mostly) - life after marriage is not alluring, so the show ends there. They're sweet, pliable, and usually not too motivated. That said, musumeyaku roles are broadening in the past few years! There is hope! Possibly reflecting broader trends in Japanese society.

All of those who responded agreed that the performances by the Takarazuka Revue only represented an idealized form of femininity. Interestingly, however, some attributed it to Japanese men's desire for femininity - not female desire - despite a fairly wide agreement amongst respondents that the Takarazuka Revue was intended for a female audience. However, this may be because fans are considering the goals of the Takarazuka school, as many referenced the purity and elegance of the performers per the school's design.

Similarly, AKB48 fans are not unaware of the gendered issues surrounding the group. AKB48 fans seem somewhat divided, some defending AKB48 over cited concerns of authenticity and eroticism, and some criticizing it. One fan acknowledged the divide, stating that:

> The messages sent by AKB48 can be very mixed. If one were to judge them on the lyrics of their songs, I can certainly see how one would get a very negative perception about them supporting only the most negatively regressive form of femininity. On the other hand, that isn't what tends to be shown on their TV shows where they often engage in sports, academics, and comedy. Physical comedy isn't something women can even usually do in the west, at least it is heavily discouraged, but AKB48 members engage in it quite regularly.

Other fans also compared AKB48 members to Western performers, often in a defense of AKB48's femininity and sexually tinted performances. One respondent compared the AKB48-type performance of femininity to those forms found in Instagram models or VSCO girls. Many described AKB48's performances as pure or innocent when compared to the "sexually aggressive or cool" Western performers. A male fan describes his own dawning understanding that the pureness of AKB48 members is a defining attractive feature:

> A major part of AKB's appeal is in their "pureness" and representation of the ideal girl. As a man I personally enjoy idols for the cuteness and the 当たり障りのない [safe/not-harmful] content they create. I don't know if the escapism and 癒し [healing] I get from watching them is tied to their femininity, but subconsciously it must play a part as I also like watching male idols joke around and have fun on tv, but I don't enjoy it in the same way

Supporting Keith and Hughes' and Cogan and Cogan's research, fans themselves are able to detect the ways in which AKB48 portray innocence and adolescence in their

performances. Fans described the visual and vocal differences they saw between women they knew in real-life and AKB48 performers, as well as between the performers when they were on-stage and off-stage. Many noted their "very frilly and glittery" clothes, that they are "always smiling and acting cute," and they sing in "high-pitched, singalong and usually upbeat songs about infatuation/love and hopes and dreams of youth."

While most fans distinguished that the femininity portrayed in AKB48's performances is exaggerated for the audience's gaze, some fans see similarities to their everyday life. One fan from Pakistan found that AKB48's performances were a break away from the overtly sexually aggressive performances you see in the West and agreed that the gendered norms displayed by AKB48 were similar to those in his own country. Most of those who agreed cited either traditional roles in their countries or the plethora of different roles and gender performances, agreeing that while not everyone may act like members of AKB48 in daily life, some do. As one fan describes it: "their genuine openness makes them feel like very normal and regular people and demystifies femininity and opens up a wider range of ways in which women can engage in the world."

Many fans described issues they have with the heavy male-gaze and over-sexualization of AKB48 performers. But much like how Chinese and Korean audiences can separate their appreciation for Japanese media from their political opinions of Japan (Kamm, 2019), the AKB48 fans in this survey acknowledged a separation between their appreciation for AKB48's content and concerns over the images portrayed within it. One fan described their discomfort with the portrayal of femininity in AKB48 performances:

> They definitely hit up a masculine side by being 'empowered' to some degree to perform and show their personality. But truly pulling back the curtain shows none of that is true. The girls fit a perfect feminine box; cute, pretty, talented (but not better than a man), and most disturbingly, young. Too young if you ask me. They play right into the Japanese market for young girls. Far too sexy for their age, even if it's not outwardly explicit. The girls have little control over what they perform, how they have to act, etc. They, like all idols, are expected to be 'on', cute, pretty, and all too eager to perform (read: serve) at any moment.

Interestingly, one female fan described how it was AKB48's scandals that introduced her to the group: "I started seriously looking into the group and idols in general after the Minegishi Minami scandal in 2013 and was really surprised at how much I liked it."

Some fans do disagree with the prior literature, asserting the AKB48 is appealing more and more to female fans rather than just male fans. One fan described them as "icons of inspiration rather than attraction" and that "they are trying to attract the female market" by being more authentic. Aoyagi argues this is not the case in his interview with producer of Cutie Smile Productions, Akihiko Nakahiro: "When I asked if he had any interest in targeting female audiences, he did not deny it, but said that such a concern was secondary" (2005, 107). Most of the respondents to this survey agreed that while AKB48 can and does appeal to some women (as evidenced by the 45.2% of female respondents), it is ultimately designed for male audiences.

One female fan in particular neatly summed up many of the gendered issues evidenced in the prior literature and by respondents to this survey:

> The "idol you can meet" gimmick is an excuse to have voting/ handshake tickets. These tactics are so older men are attracted to "meet" girls whose image is of young, cute, pure and down-to-earth. The group has the dating ban, creating the image that they have no experience in romance therefore are not high maintenance. I understand the group is supposed to be like a school where members improve skills to be idols, however it's obvious when: members never really improve talent, the group is too big to offer opportunity, their performance are judged by their predominantly male fans who value affection instead of professionalism, and that dating scandals hurt their careers more than poor talent will. Many give the excuse that AKB48 isn't meant to be talented however if they wanted to be called a girl group, a standard of talent and musicality has been to be established but it is not. Overall, the community needs come to terms and accept that the group is a gimmick. This gimmick is successful because of the traditional view that women should be young and innocent. The group embody this by monitoring their idol's image, the costumes/ dresses worn in music videos, and amateurish stage performances. The masculinity isn't show within AKB48 itself but rather their fans. As mentioned, it is predominantly of older men see [*sic*] seek affection from these idols... I find it impressive that their influence lasted as long and became as widespread as it did however, their decline may also reflect the evolution of a society that is straying away from the outdated view of women.

Overall, fans of AKB48 and the Takakura Revue were not very familiar with feminist movements in Japan, but they did have some general ideas about gender equality in Japan. Takarazuka fans were very abstract in their descriptions of gender equality. Those fans that described it, did so as concepts wherein the idea of gender did not exist and where "human beings are judged based on the quality of their work or character." On the issue of gender inequality in Japan, one fan detailed a unique perspective they had as a non-binary individual who presents as both genders at different times: "While I was in Japan, I presented male and found that life was much simpler. I was respected by my classmates more than when I presented female, and I did not have to deal with unwanted male advances either." For those respondents who were familiar with *womenomics* policies, all agreed that the policies had made no significant change for women and in fact may have increased economic strains on women. All respondents agreed that there had been some changes in gender equality in the past century, "however, certain old mindsets remain."

Most AKB48 fans described gender equality as equal treatment and anti-discrimination under the law. While most respondents took this in the context of women, describing inequalities women face, one respondent mentioned how men are also limited by gender inequality, wishing for equality "for men to be able to be more feminine and not be confined to the ideals of toxic masculinity." There was a fairly even divide otherwise between fans who thought that gender equality could work within conventional gender norms and those who wanted to abolish or change pre-existing gender norms.

On the question of if there is gender inequality in Japan, all but one fan agreed that there is. Most fans cited issues they were familiar with: Confucian principles of traditional gender roles, economic inequalities in Japan, housewives, etc. However, one fan specifically

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pointed out the issues that Cogan and Cogan and Condry highlighted regarding inequalities in the entertainment industry:

> I think AKB48 actually exemplifies this - young women who have a largely middle-aged male fan base who can pay/invest money to see them in person. Because of their spending power, they dominate the fanbase although AKB is also popular with high school students of all genders. The idea of women - particularly minors - as visual objects to be consumed is very troubling and probably is indicative of a more pressing gender inequality in Japan more generally.

POLITICAL ISSUES IN JAPAN

Similar to gender movements in Japan, most Takarazuka and AKB48 fans were not overly familiar with *womenomics* specifically, but many were familiar with Shinzo Abe and other political policies. For those that were familiar with *womenomics*, many saw it as an opportunity for women to break out of the traditional housewife role, but were fairly ambivalent on the overall success, citing continued economic inequality between men and women. One fan interestingly described *womenomics* using the idol industry as a simile: "For the country, [it]'s untapped potential. Much like in girl groups, they could earn more if they could attract more female fans instead of the traditional males. I can see male Japanese getting intimidated with females being economically independent, but as time goes on, it's most likely going to normalize."

Fans were familiar with other political issues in Japan - such as war activities, tensions with China and South Korea, and comfort women - to varying degrees. Both Takarazuka Revue and AKB48 fans agreed that Japan should not be allowed to go to war. It could be that these respondents know the prohibition against war imposed on Japan, but it could also be based either on familiarity with Japan's imperialist past or influenced by UN law and general global doctrine against war. All AKB48 fans and most Takarazuka fans agreed that the SDF's role should be to help during natural disasters, much like the US's National Guard. However, one Japanese fan thought that SDF's role should be expanded to

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protect against invasion, including giving them weapons of war to do so. Even some of those that believed the SDF should not be able to bear weapons of war said they understood why Japan would consider doing so, citing increased tensions in Asia and the dwindling US military support in recent years.

As far as tensions go, while some fans acknowledged that China was a growing economic challenger, most still see Japan as the economic powerhouse in Asia. Most agreed, however, that tensions between Japan and South Korea on the topic of comfort women had not been resolved. Some individuals described how it could be a tricky situation, with both Japan and South Korea going back and forth on the issue. Nevertheless, most respondents and especially AKB48 Fans agreed that Japan had more or less swept the situation under the rug, leaving it unresolved.

Overall, fans were not fans (pun unintended) of either Shinzo Abe or his major policies. A couple respondents noted they appreciated some of Abe's policies, but otherwise thought that he was not very open to diversity - either gender or ethnic. In fact, the only changes to the Japanese constitution that respondents supported were increased protections for women (such as reproductive rights) and ethnic minorities that have otherwise not been acknowledged in the constitution.

LIMITATIONS TO THIS RESEARCH

The responses to gender movements and political issues in Japan are some prime examples of the limitations of this research. Questions in these areas were important to study if and how the influence of LDP in *Cool Japan* and, specifically, all-female performing groups impacted audience perceptions of these issues. However, they were developed with the understanding that not every respondent would be familiar enough with these issues to answer in full, if at all. This was also an expected problem in the original design with in-

person interviews in Japan, but the understanding here was that people in Japan may at least have a better likelihood of familiarity with the topics. Moving the survey to an online format increased the likelihood that respondents would be unfamiliar with these topics.

Although in-person interviews were preferred, there were several advantages to conducting this survey online. The spread of COVID-19 in Japan expanded significantly at the same time I expected to conduct interviews in Japan and the barring of in-person meetings and large crowds, as well as the closure of the performance venues for both AKB48 and Takarazuka Revue would have meant an immediate end to this research. Second, the content of some questions may have been uncomfortable for respondents to answer in person if they felt they may be judged for their opinions. The online format provided a safe and more confidential-feeling setting for these responses. Third, the soft power movement is worldwide and a main measurement of this research is the impact of political messaging in Japanese popular culture. While I intended to study specifically Japanese responses at the onset of this research, I cannot deny the international scope of these groups' impacts and an online survey allowed me to more readily study the responses to political messages across the globe. That being said, the increase in the global respondent pool did increase the likelihood that participants did not have enough background knowledge to answer all questions of the survey to their full potential.

Of course, the largest limitation to this study is the sample size. As mentioned several times throughout the findings analysis, the skewed sample sizes between groups of studies are not representational. To have a better representative sample, we would need larger numbers of viable responses from at least the Control Group and the Takarazuka Fan group. By focusing these samples on Japanese audiences, we may also gain a better definition

of the political and social influences on those who are most familiar with and exposed to them.

A control group of individuals with sufficient background knowledge of Japan and Japanese popular culture is harder to recruit than fans who interact on specific websites or fan rolls. This makes recruitment for control participants significantly harder than participants in the group of study. Ideally, a control group could be sourced from in-person or online surveys administered through a group or company that has access to a wider set of Japanese individuals or individuals familiar with Japan who are not affiliated with the Takarazuka Revue or AKB48.

While prior research has shown that the audiences for both AKB48 and Takarazuka Revue interact primarily online, AKB48 had a significantly higher response rate than Takarazuka Revue fans. There may be many reasons for this. The overall age of Takarazuka Revue fans is higher which could correlate to less usage of online sites where this survey was listed. Infrequent usage means that new posts (like for this survey) may be lost in the mire of daily posts. Additionally, AKB48 is a newer idol form andwas established during the tech age whereas Takarazuka Revue has been around for over hundred years. This means that the Takarazuka Revue has had to make purposeful efforts to move its fans online whereas AKB48 started online. This could result in fewer fans participating online for the Takarazuka Revue than for AKB48. Recruitment at fan events or performances would increase the sample size for Takarazuka fans.

This study could also be strengthened by completely redesigning the online survey. If we consider this survey as a pre-test, we can use a total-item correlation to determine which Likert statements truly help measure agreement with and influence of nationalist rhetoric and gender relations in Japan. A couple items stand out from this survey that may not fully

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represent these areas of study and could be replaced. Considering the global responses, there are too many caveats for why participants would agree or disagree with statements like "Japan should do what it must to maintain strong relations with the United States," and "China and South Korea pose a threat to Japan's economy." Statements like these could be replaced with others that more neatly define the influence of specifically LDP rhetoric and policies, rather than the possible influences of the audience's nationality.

Based on responses to some survey items, I realized that there are items that could be ambiguous or recognizant of wider political ideologies. For example, responding "strongly disagree" to the question that "the self-defense forces should be able to bear weapons of war" may be influenced by external events, such as the high visibility of anti-police brutality protests that were in the news when many respondents answered this survey. It also does not consider if respondents may be pacifists and against weapons of war for any country. Many respondents were also confused by the question "please describe the gender roles you see in your life" and replied with answers as simple as "I don't know how to respond to this question" or "...". For this particular question, I was trying to avoid a huge list of options that describe the spectrum of gender identities and roles, but considering the responses received this may have been preferable for respondents. Or, it may be that the questions should be eliminated altogether as it does not strongly correlate to respondents' opinions on gender or political issues.

This survey was originally written in English and then translated to Japanese and verified by native speakers. However, as in any translation, there is margin for error in the meaning and translation. While overall responses from participants who took the survey in Japanese did not readily indicate any major misunderstandings or issues in translations, one

Japanese respondent did note confusion on wording in a translation[14]. As such, errors in translation or cross-language understanding should be expected, especially because I cannot readily clarify a question with a respondent in an online format. Having the survey back-translated or translated by others who are more familiar with academic English and Japanese would strengthen the Japanese language surveys. Alternatively, delivering the survey in-person would provide the opportunity to clarify the intent of questions so that respondents can feel comfortable with their answers.

FUTURE RESEARCH

There is no shortage of literature on gender performance and production in the Japanese performing arts, nor is there a shortage of studies on the intersectionality of gender movements and political issues in Japan. However, few previous studies review all of these in a cross-sectional context, examining how gendered and political issues impact gender performance, production, and audiences. As exemplified throughout this thesis, all of these aspects weave together in a complex tapestry that has become *Cool Japan*. This research is only one of the first stepping stones to a greater expansion to this field, reviewing the intersectionality of gender, politics, and performance. There are many paths that lead from here.

First, this research is fairly small in its scope, especially when we consider the size of the Control Group and Fans of Takarazuka against Fans of AKB48. To have more comprehensive and representational data, this survey should be expanded and replicated, perhaps also supplemented by interviews and participant observation. This survey should

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[14] One respondent who answered in Japanese did indicate some confusion about questions in the survey, but because other respondents did not voice similar confusion, I cannot know for sure if the issue is one of comprehension or translation.

serve as a pre-test and preliminary findings in the field and should not be considered the final product. By replicating this research either through another online survey or with interviews and observation, we can account for undefined variables and shortcomings in this study.

The online format of this survey also made it quite ambitious, measuring the impact on a global audience rather than just a Japanese audience. It would be important to measure both of these audiences separately so that we can compare the impacts on each group. This would provide explanations for political influences on certain individuals (e.g. if Japanese respondents agree more with LDP statements because they are more familiar with the policies or if they are actually influenced through these mediums). However, it would also help provide a context on the success of LDP policies and *Cool Japan* abroad versus domestically.

This study also does not cover male performance groups. While Aoyagi and many others do examine the issues of gender production amongst male idol performers, there is certainly room for study on the intersectionality between gender performance and political rhetoric like in this study. By expanding this survey into the world of male performance groups we can verify how the gender of performers and their audiences are influenced by political and social issues. As Sabine Fruhstuck puts it gender studies "cannot limit itself to women but must research women and men as well as interactions and exchanges between different social spheres, aiming for an integrative perspective" (2005, 174). Only by studying the impacts of both male and female performance groups can we gain a holistic perspective of the social and political impacts of gender performance in the Japanese performing arts.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this study, I sought to examine how associations with Japanese conservatism and nationalism affected audiences' political and social opinions. I also sought to determine if the Takarazuka Revue's and AKB48's involvement with conservative politics impacts their fans' perceptions of women and gender, and how these fans' political and social opinions differ from those who do not engage with these performance groups.

Responses suggest that there is at least some influence on audiences. This study was somewhat limited by the global influences of AKB48 and the Takarazuka Revue, bringing in participants from around the world who are not necessarily familiar with the political and social associations and influences of each group. If nothing else, though, respondents' interest in Japanese popular culture mediums like AKB48 and the Takarazuka Revue makes them more interested in Japan overall. This in turn generates increased interest in Japanese history and political and social issues. In this way, *Cool Japan* is successful as a soft power tool. Whether or not the audiences are politically influenced by specifically LDP platforms promoted through *Cool Japan* remains to be seen, however.

Rather than political issues, audiences seemed more impacted by social issues, though not necessarily in the ways expected. Much of the prior literature suggested that AKB48 fans would be largely anti-feminist or reticent to gender equality initiatives outside of economic equality, but this study shows that AKB48 fans are much more open to feminist and gender equality movements than supposed. It could be due to the larger-than-expected female fan base in the respondents for this survey, but it could also be suggestive of the influences that female performers have as presented by Keith and Hughes and Cogan and Cogan. Many AKB48 fans cited concerns over the hyper-sexualization of young performers, but many also explained how they still found the performers subversive and inspirational.

These fans explained that their concerns helped them to see the issues with gender inequality in Japan.

As a general trend, *Cool Japan* is successful in influencing fans towards certain social opinions. Within this influence, however, fans seem to be divided along gendered lines. While male fans seemed to be positively influenced towards traditional gender roles and negatively influenced towards non-LDP associated gender and feminist movements, the opposite can be said of female and gender fluid/non-binary fans. This is very much in line with prior literature, but it's interesting to see how these female fans (especially AKB48 fans) also reconcile the conservative production of gender in these groups with the agreement with feminist and gender movements.

The verdict is still out if political influences strongly impact fans of Japanese performing arts. Prior research has long suggested that political messaging can be difficult to export through soft power, especially to countries with which there are political tensions. However, the social influence is certainly present. Although AKB48 and the Takarazuka Revue have long been associated with the promotion of traditional gender roles, some of their fans seem inspired by their performances and performers to subvert these and other gender issues. The biggest determinant of how audiences are affected is reflected along gendered lines, not performance group. This reflects a continued dynamic between gender, politics, and power. If nothing else, the impact of these groups and *Cool Japan* has helped fans to build an understanding and image of Japan's political and social issues, especially those issues that are reflected and produced in AKB48's and the Takarazuka Revue's performances.

APPENDIX SECTION

APPENDIX A: OPEN-ENDED SURVEY

SURVEY QUESTIONS – GROUP OF STUDY (FANS OF AKB48/TAKARAZUKA REVUE)

Demographic/Baseline Questions
What gender do you identify as?
- Male
- Female
- Gender Fluid/Non-Binary
- Other

How old are you?

▼ Under 18 ... 85 or older

What nationality are you?

▼ Japan ... Zimbabwe

Please select which group you are a fan of.
- The Takarazuka Revue
- AKB48
- Both
- Neither

How long have you been a fan of the Takarazuka Revue?
- Less than 1 year
- 1-5 Years
- 6-10 Years
- 11-15 Years
- 16-20 Years
- Over 20 Years

How did you originally become a fan of the Takarazuka Revue/AKB48?
How do you primarily interact with the Takarazuka Revue/AKB48? (Please select as many as apply)
- Attend live performances
- Member of a fan club
- Write letters to the members
- Create art related to the Takarazuka Revue/AKB48 (writing, drawing, music, etc.)
- Participate in online chatrooms/web forums
- Read magazines or blogs related to the Takarazuka Revue/AKB48
- Buy merchandise of the Takarazuka Revue/AKB48 (magazines, DVDs, CDs, etc.)

- Other (Please specify)

Are there any other Japanese female-focused groups or artists that you follow? If so, please list them.

Gender/Gender Performance Questions (all answers are open-ended text boxes)
Please describe the different genders and gender roles you see in your life.
What do you think women's role is in Japanese society?
What do you think men's role is in Japanese society?
In your opinion, how does the Takarazuka Revue/AKB48 embody femininity in their performance? What about masculinity?
Is this version of femininity/masculinity similar to what you see in your everyday life? How so?
What do you consider gender equality?
Do you think that men and women should be treated equally or differently? In what ways?
Do you think there is gender equality or inequality in Japan? How so?
What do you know of Abe Shinzo's "womenomics" policies?
What differences (if any) do you think these policies have made for women in Japanese society? For men?
How do you think women differ from men in modern Japanese society? Is this different from the previous century?
Do the Takarazuka Revue's/AKB48's performances represent real or ideal women? Why do you think that?
How do the performers of the Takarazuka Revue/AKB48 compare to women in your everyday life?
What do you think is the aim of feminism in Japan?
What are your opinions on Japanese feminist movements?
Do you think feminism in Japan is different from feminism in other countries? How so?
Do you think feminism in Japan is (in general) a good or bad thing? How so?

Political Questions (all answers are open-ended text boxes)
Do you support a specific political party or platform? Which one(s)?
What political or social issues are you most concerned with and in what way?
Do you think Japan should be able to go to war? Under what circumstances?
What type of role do you think Japan plays in Asia? (mediator, economic power, social leader, etc.).
Are you familiar with the issue of 'Comfort Women?' If so, do you agree or disagree with Japan's political position that it has resolved the issue of 'Comfort Women?' Why or why not?
What do you think of Japan's standing in relation to other developed powerhouses such as the US, UK, EU, China, etc.?
Do you like Shinzo Abe as the Prime Minister? Why or why not?
What role do you think the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) should play in Japan? Internationally?
Do you think the SDF should be able to bear weapons of war? Why or why not?
Do you think the Japanese constitution should be changed? In what ways?
What rights for men and/or women should be protected by law or in the constitution?

SURVEY QUESTIONS – CONTROL GROUP
Demographic/Baseline Questions
What gender do you identify as?
- Male
- Female
- Gender Fluid/Non-Binary
- Other

How old are you?

▼ Under 18 ... 85 or older

What nationality are you?

▼ Japan ... Zimbabwe

Please select which group you are a fan of.
- The Takarazuka Revue
- AKB48
- Both
- Neither

Do you know of the groups AKB48 or the Takarazuka Revue?
- I know of AKB48
- I know of the Takarazuka Revue
- I know of both
- I don't know either

Are there any other Japanese female-focused groups or artists that you follow? If so, please list them.

Gender/Gender Performance Questions (all answers are open-ended text boxes)
Please describe the different genders and gender roles you see in your life.
What do you think women's role is in Japanese society?
What do you think men's role is in Japanese society?
Do you think the embodiment of femininity and masculinity that you see in popular culture is similar to those you see in everyday life? How so?
What do you consider gender equality?
Do you think that men and women should be treated equally or differently? In what ways?
Do you think there is gender equality or inequality in Japan? How so?
What do you know of Abe Shinzo's "womenomics" policies?
What differences (if any) do you think these policies have made for women in Japanese society? For men?
How do you think women differ from men in modern Japanese society? Is this different from the previous century?
What do you think is the aim of feminism in Japan?
What are your opinions on Japanese feminist movements?
Do you think feminism in Japan is different from feminism in other countries? How so?
Do you think feminism in Japan is (in general) a good or bad thing? How so?

Political Questions (all answers are open-ended text boxes)
Do you support a specific political party or platform? Which one(s)?
What political or social issues are you most concerned with and in what way?
Do you think Japan should be able to go to war? Under what circumstances?
What type of role do you think Japan plays in Asia? (mediator, economic power, social leader,   etc.).
Are you familiar with the issue of 'Comfort Women?' If so, do you agree or disagree with Japan's political position that it has resolved the issue of 'Comfort Women?' Why or why not?
What do you think of Japan's standing in relation to other developed powerhouses such as the US, UK, EU, China, etc.?
Do you like Shinzo Abe as the Prime Minister? Why or why not?
What role do you think the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) should play in Japan? Internationally?
Do you think the SDF should be able to bear weapons of war? Why or why not?
Do you think the Japanese constitution should be changed? In what ways?
What rights for men and/or women should be protected by law or in the constitution?

APPENDIX B: LIKERT SURVEY

SURVEY QUESTIONS – GROUP OF STUDY (FANS OF AKB48/TAKARAZUKA REVUE)
Demographic/Baseline Questions
What gender do you identify as?
- Male
- Female
- Gender Fluid/Non-Binary
- Other

How old are you?

▼ Under 18 ... 85 or older

What nationality are you?

▼ Japan ... Zimbabwe

Please select which group you are a fan of.
- The Takarazuka Revue
- AKB48
- Both
- Neither

How long have you been a fan of the Takarazuka Revue?
- Less than 1 year
- 1-5 Years
- 6-10 Years
- 11-15 Years
- 16-20 Years
- Over 20 Years

How did you originally become a fan of the Takarazuka Revue/AKB48?
How do you primarily interact with the Takarazuka Revue/AKB48? (Please select as many as apply)
- Attend live performances
- Member of a fan club
- Write letters to the members
- Create art related to the Takarazuka Revue/AKB48 (writing, drawing, music, etc.)
- Participate in online chatrooms/web forums
- Read magazines or blogs related to the Takarazuka Revue/AKB48
- Buy merchandise of the Takarazuka Revue/AKB48 (magazines, DVDs, CDs, etc.)
- Other (Please specify)

Are there any other Japanese female-focused groups or artists that you follow? If so, please list them.

Gender/Gender Performance Questions: unless otherwise noted, all answers are seven Likert items ranging from Strongly Agree – Strong Disagree

Please describe the different genders and gender roles you see in your life.

        Answer: Open-ended text box

The embodiment of femininity in Takarazuka/AKB48 performances is similar to what I see in my everyday life.

The embodiment of masculinity in Takarazuka/AKB48 performances is similar to what I see in my everyday life.

I believe men and women should be treated differently.

        Would you like to detail how men and women should be treated differently?

            Answer: Yes (open ended text box) or No

There is gender equality in Japan.

I am familiar with Shinzo Abe's "womenomics" policies.

        Answer: Agree or Disagree. If select agree, show the following statements.

            I believe "womenomics" has improved the situation of women in Japan.

            I believe "womenomics" has improved the situation of men in Japan.

The performances of the Takarazuka Revue/AKB48 represent real women.

The women of the Takarazuka Revue/AKB48 are similar to the women in my everyday life.

What do you think is the aim of feminism in Japan?

        Answer: Open-ended text box

I support feminist movements in Japan.

Feminism in Japan is different from feminism in other countries.

Feminism in Japan is a good thing.

Political Questions: unless otherwise noted, all answers are seven Likert items ranging from Strongly Agree – Strong Disagree

Do you support a specific political party or platform? Which one(s)?

        Answer: Open-ended text box

What political or social issues are you most concerned with and in what way?

        Answer: Open-ended text box

Japan should be able to have a military.

Japan has resolved the issue of "Comfort Women."

I like Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

The Self-Defense Forces should be able to bear weapons of war.

The Japanese constitution should be reformed.

Equal rights for men and women should be detailed in the constitution.

China and South Korea pose a threat to Japan's economy.

Japan should do what it must to maintain strong relations with the United States.

SURVEY QUESTIONS – CONTROL GROUP

Demographic/Baseline Questions
What gender do you identify as?
- Male
- Female
- Gender Fluid/Non-Binary
- Other

How old are you?

▼ Under 18 ... 85 or older

What nationality are you?

▼ Japan ... Zimbabwe

Please select which group you are a fan of.
- The Takarazuka Revue
- AKB48
- Both
- Neither

Do you know of the groups AKB48 or the Takarazuka Revue?
- I know of AKB48
- I know of the Takarazuka Revue
- I know of both
- I don't know either

Are there any other Japanese female-focused groups or artists that you follow? If so, please list them.

Gender/Gender Performance Questions: unless otherwise noted, all answers are seven Likert items ranging from Strongly Agree – Strong Disagree
Please describe the different genders and gender roles you see in your life.
 Answer: Open-ended text box
The embodiment of femininity in popular culture is similar to what I see in my everyday life.
The embodiment of masculinity in popular culture is similar to what I see in my everyday life.
I believe men and women should be treated differently.
 Would you like to detail how men and women should be treated differently?
  Answer: Yes (open ended text box) or No
There is gender equality in Japan.
I am familiar with Shinzo Abe's "womenomics" policies.
 Answer: Agree or Disagree. If select agree, show the following statements.
  I believe "womenomics" has improved the situation of women in Japan.
  I believe "womenomics" has improved the situation of men in Japan.
What do you think is the aim of feminism in Japan?
 Answer: Open-ended text box

I support feminist movements in Japan.
Feminism in Japan is different from feminism in other countries.
Feminism in Japan is a good thing.

Political Questions: unless otherwise noted, all answers are seven Likert items ranging from Strongly Agree – Strong Disagree
Do you support a specific political party or platform? Which one(s)?
      Answer: Open-ended text box
What political or social issues are you most concerned with and in what way?
      Answer: Open-ended text box
Japan should be able to have a military.
Japan has resolved the issue of "Comfort Women."
I like Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.
The Self-Defense Forces should be able to bear weapons of war.
The Japanese constitution should be reformed.
Equal rights for men and women should be detailed in the constitution.
China and South Korea pose a threat to Japan's economy.
Japan should do what it must to maintain strong relations with the United States.

APPENDIX C: STATEMENT CLASSIFICATIONS

LDP-ALIGNED STATEMENTS:
1. I believe men and women should be treated differently.
2. There is gender equality in Japan.
3. I believe "womenomics" has improved the situation of women in Japan.
4. I believe "womenomics" has improved the situation of men in Japan.
5. I like Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.
6. Japan should be able to have a military.
7. Japan has resolved the issue of "Comfort Women."
8. The Self-Defense Forces should be able to bear weapons of war.
9. The Japanese constitution should be reformed.
10. China and South Korea pose a threat to Japan's economy.
11. Japan should do what it must to maintain strong relations with the United States.

NON-LDP ALGINED STATEMENTS:
1. Equal rights for men and women should be detailed in the constitution.
2. I support feminist movements in Japan.
3. Feminism in Japan is a good thing.

NEUTRAL STATEMENTS:
1. The embodiment of femininity in Takarazuka/AKB48 performances is similar to what I see in my everyday life.
2. The embodiment of masculinity in Takarazuka/AKB48 performances is similar to what I see in my everyday life.
3. Feminism in Japan is different from feminism in other countries.
4. The performances of the Takarazuka Revue/AKB48 represent real women.
5. The women of the Takarazuka Revue/AKB48 are similar to the women in my everyday life.

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