

**CROSS-MEDIALITY  
AND THE INVINCIBILITY OF VULNERABILITY:  
THE RUROUNI KENSHIN PHENOMENON**

Maria GRAJDIAN<sup>1</sup>

---

***Abstract***

*This paper focuses on the colorful and dynamic reflection of the Japanese cultural imperialism, with its idiosyncrasies and contradictions, in the domestic media, particularly in the “Rurouni Kenshin” phenomenon, a typical example of Japan’s wakon yōsai (“Japanese spirit, Western technology”) strategy of simultaneously absorbing and resisting the West. An emblematic case of “media transfer” or “cross-mediality” (starting as a popular shōnen manga by mid-1990s with sequels in early 2010s, including an additional light novel in 1996, evolving to a cult TV anime series and six OVAs targeted at the same shōnen audience from 1996 until 2001, and three live-action movies in 2012 and 2014), the Rurouni Kenshin brand remains in the consciousness of 1990s-teenagers as a symbol of faith and empowerment, in strong contradiction with Japan’s realities of the so-called “lost decade”. Conversely, as to be analyzed in the current paper, Takarazuka Revue Company’s staging of Rurouni Kenshin in 2016 had to overcome two major challenges – the (predominantly) female audience and the limitations of the theatrical genre – while keeping up with the aesthetic-technical details of its performance standards and complying with the prevalent ideologies of the wakon wasai (“Japanese spirit, Japanese technology”) policies openly promoted by the Abe administration, thus aligning to similar ardent efforts within the Japanese entertainment industry and media landscape.*

***Keywords:*** cross-mediality; Japanese media; masculinity; Japanese popular culture; entertainment industry; cultural consumption

---



---

***1. Introduction: masculinity and cultural imperialism***

---

When released as a *shōnen* manga in 1994, at the height of what would be later labelled “the lost decade”, *Rurouni Kenshin* turned quickly into a cultural phenomenon, carrying the weight of being an undisputed inter-generational icon, which transports beyond political borders its local message strongly infused with ethnocentric undertones of resistance, empowerment and liberation. The goal of this paper is to highlight the colourful and dynamic undertones of the Japanese cultural imperialism, with its idiosyncrasies and contradictions, as dealt with products of Japanese popular culture. In order to illustrate the main characteristics of the Japanese cultural imperialism and its reflection in domestic media as well as

---

<sup>1</sup> Maria Grajdian, Hiroshima University, grajdian@hiroshima-u.ac.jp.

its international ramifications, especially in its *wakon yōsai* strategy of simultaneously absorbing and resisting the West, the phenomenon *Rurouni Kenshin* is taken as a practical example. There are two main reasons why, eventually, *Rurouni Kenshin* turned out to be the most suitable tool in bringing across the characteristics and functions of media narrative within the complex – and at times, all-encompassing – project of employing culture as a means to attaining a leading role within the world community.

The first reason is *Rurouni Kenshin*'s construction of masculinity and masculine role models. As I argue elsewhere (*Alternative Realities, Alternative Masculinities: An Empiric Inquiry into Japan's Video Game Culture and Its Global Impact* and *Gender Acrobatics: The questionable liberalism of popular culture and the emergence of alternative masculinity patterns in late-modern Japan* (both forthcoming, 2019), unlike classical masculinity (also depicted as “toxic masculinity”, see Kimmel, 2012, 2015 and Hooks, 2000, 2004), late-modern masculinity is patterned upon what I regard as three fundamental paradigms: the “Luke Skywalker” paradigm, the “Harry Potter” paradigm and the “Rurouni Kenshin” paradigm. Apart from generational and cultural-geographical differences, which are carefully analysed in the afore-mentioned papers, what these three new masculinity paradigms have in common are three major questions they arise and two necessities they highlight in envisioning the late-modern masculine man as a response to the increasingly empowered and liberated late-modern woman – feminine or not (Butler, 1993: 35-54; Grajdian, 2005: 27-31; Kristeva, 1974: 142-155; Haraway, 1991: 45). They are inevitable in comprehending the changing dynamics of late modernity – and with it, the flexible dynamic among nations, dictated by new patterns of political awareness and inter-relatedness:

- a. the questioning of the traditional image of an almighty invincible hero who challenges – and eventually defeats – the irreversibility of death;
- b. the questioning of (physical) strength, aggressiveness and ruthlessness as exclusive tools in attaining supremacy and total control;
- c. the questioning of sexuality and financial/material wealth as defining characteristics of an accomplished man;
- d. the necessity of vulnerability, of feeling, understanding, accepting, respecting and showing emotions within the process of progressing from childhood/adolescence/young adulthood through the challenges of an exceptional life;
- e. the necessity of acknowledging and respecting the others – friends, family, enemies – in their radical otherness, and thus carving one's path through life not as a solitary individual, but as a social, loving human being.

Later on, I shall delve more deeply into these five elements while referring to the two major dimensions of classical imperialism based on patterns of masculine perception and development (provide and protect, on the one hand, and overcome

and achieve, on the other hand), and how they metamorphose into fundamental metrics in promoting, propagating and implementing fresh structures of identification and communication, based on cooperation and compassion, rather than competition and efficiency (Bauman, 2001a, 2001b; Castells, 1997a and 1997b). Moreover, the male characters embodying these features and questions call for action and initiative in here and now, critically counter-reacting to current tendencies to mechanize, virtualize and digitalize human interactions.

The second reason resides in *Rurouni Kenshin*'s powerfully cross-medial presence. An emblematic case of "media transfer" or cross-mediality (starting as a popular *shōnen* manga by mid-1990s with sequels in early 2010s, including an additional light novel in 1996, evolving to a cult TV anime series and six OVAs targeted at the same *shōnen* audience from 1996 until 2001, and three live-action movies in 2012 and 2014), the "Rurouni Kenshin" brand remains in the consciousness of 1990s teenagers as a symbol of faith and empowerment, in strong contradiction with Japan's realities of the so-called "lost decade" (see Drazen, 2003: 97-103; Furuhashi, 1996-1998; Watsuki, 1994-1999). Conversely, as to be analyzed in the current paper, Takarazuka Revue Company's staging of *Rurouni Kenshin* (in 2016, February 5 – March 14, at Takarazuka Grand Theater in Takarazuka, and April 1 – May 8, at Takarazuka Theater in Tokyo, by the snow troupe, with topstar *otokoyaku* Sagiri Seina and Himura Kenshin and topstar *musumeyaku* as Sakihi Miyu as Kamiya Kaoru) had to overcome two major challenges – the (predominantly) female audience and the limitations of the theatrical genre – while keeping up with the aesthetic-technical details of its performance standards and complying with the prevalent ideologies of the *wakon wasai* ("Japanese spirit, Japanese technology") policies openly promoted by the Abe administration, thus aligning to similar ardent efforts within the Japanese entertainment industry and media landscape (see Iwabuchi, 2015: 422-424; Robertson, 1998: 175; Valaskivi, 2013: 489; Nye, 2004). The *Rurouni Kenshin* phenomenon appears of particular interest due to the complex dialectical representation of late Tokugawa period and early Meiji period, its major historical background, which has been inspiring consumers to turn gradually aware of the power and impact of popular cultural artefacts on the perception and processing of reality in an increasingly interconnected world dominated by information, which is delivered and implemented – after having been previously carefully selected and geo-politically adjusted – by mainstream media.

In accordance with these two elements, which make the *Rurouni Kenshin* franchise a powerful tool in mediating the dialectics of Japanese cultural imperialism, I have structured the current paper into three main parts: firstly, a critical presentation of the initial productions of Rurouni Kenshin as manga and anime, followed by the analysis of its profound impact (in 2.1. *Rurouni Kenshin: manga and anime releases*). In a second step, the live-action cinema versions of the *Rurouni Kenshin* motive and its subsequent staging as live theatrical performance are observed, with

particular focus on the subtle transition from being mainly a *shōnen* genre in mainstream media targeted at a specific demographic group: teenage boys and adolescent male citizens between 12-20 years old, towards the *shōjo* (literally, “young unmarried woman”) demographic (in 2.2. *Rurouni Kenshin: live-action movies and theatrical performance*). The final point of preoccupation quests for an answer to the question of why *Rurouni Kenshin*’s latent cross-mediality (or media transfer) might be the solution towards a more compassionate, more profound communication between human actors both within the same society and among different societies, by mediating the connection with one’s own feelings (in 2.3. *Rurouni Kenshin: cultural consumption as a (major) means to connect with one’s deep emotions*).

From my experience with non-Japanese and Japanese consumers of products relating to Japanese popular culture, the easiest and safest way to address such sensitive concepts as “emotions”, “compassion” or even “worldwide domination” is by creating an open space of honest communication, in which the topic being discussed is unequivocal in its message and relevant in its popularity. “Safe” refers here to the ability of convincing the informants – as a group and as individuals – to listen long enough until the major points of the argumentation are made, with further discussion following immediately, while “popularity” is closely, inevitably connected to that topic’s financial success at the box-office (Hendry, 2000: 26-49; Mathews, 2000: 27-31; McGray, 2002: 48; Tobin, 1992: 11-16). As it will be highlighted in the *Conclusion: mainstream media and impactful messages*, the process of connecting with one’s deep feelings, both positive and negative, has become intrinsically bound to specific products of popular culture, with producers and consumers simultaneously interacting and questioning the prevalent ideologies as well as the aesthetic *status-quo*.

---

---

## ***2. Rurouni Kenshin and its cross-medial malleability***

---

---

During my discussions on the powerful dialectics swirling late-modern popular cultures (Japanese or not) around the world, *Rurouni Kenshin* came up repeatedly as a practical example of how contents turn into mass-media phenomena, which then, again, metamorphose into lifestyle models and existential trajectories. Both Japanese and non-Japanese consumers of the *Rurouni Kenshin* franchise (apart from the video games releases, which I am not dealing with in this paper) referred to Himura Kenshin’s universe as a secure emotional space, in which all kinds of good and evil can happen, and the occurring contradictions serve solely to counterpoint the steely logic of consumerism and efficiency slowly, but clearly, suffocating social actors in late-modern, post-industrialized, service-based nations.

---

*2.1. Rurouni Kenshin: manga and anime releases*

---

When originally published as a manga series, *Rurouni Kenshin: Romantic Folk Tales of a Meiji Swordsman* (1994-1999, 28 volumes, by Shūeisha's weekly *Shōnen Jump*), written and illustrated by Watsuki Nobuhiro, turned out to be a huge financial success, mainly because it reflects the confusion of the Japanese society after the big economical disenchantment in the early 1990s. It confronted large segments of the Japanese readership with the visualization of history as a negotiation process between social actors living in the present, rather than a fixed monolith perpetuated by schoolbooks (Köhn, 2005; Havens, 1970; Foucault, 1966). Precisely male teenagers and adolescents, so-called *shōnen*, at which this manga series was targeted, were by far the most affected by the loss of faith in the leading elite with their technocratic visions which occurred during the "roaring 1990s" in Japan: Himura Kenshin (also known as "Hitokiri Battosai", Himura the Manslayer), the former kill-for-hire assassin with incredible fighting skills who had helped the establishing of the Meiji Restoration by siding with the pro-imperialist *ishin-shishi* (nationalist patriots) against the shogunate's forces, including the elite *shinsengumi* (newly selected corps) swordsmen, has become a wandering samurai who protects the people of Japan with a vow to never kill again in order to repent for his previous crimes. The TV anime series directed by Furuhashi Kazuhiro included 95 episodes, was produced by Studio Gallop (episodes 1-65) and Studio Deen (episodes 66-95) and released originally by Fuji TV between January 10, 1996 and September 8, 1998. Further six OVA (Original Video Animation) movies by the same director were released in 1999 and 2001 by Studio Deen, focusing on Himura Kenshin's life on the background of the historical turmoil of the *bakumatsu*.<sup>2</sup> Among the six OVA, only the first four were comparably impactful for non-Japanese audiences, as they explain the traumatic past of the main character, Himura Kenshin. The final two OVAs, which tell the story of the main character years later, when he is haunted by the memories of those he had killed and gradually loses contact with his current life, especially his wife (Kamiya Kaoru, the female main character of the series) and their son, Kenji, weren't particularly popular among fans, as it presents the late Himura Kenshin as a fallible hermit, broken by remorse and nightmares and unable to tackle his responsibilities as a mature citizen, husband and father. The dark, highly conflictual OVAs are a strong contrast to the light-hearted episodes of the TV series, with hilarious moments of silly fun in spite of the serious tone of the topics it deals with.

This is probably the main reason why the TV anime series captured the attention and the hearts of Western audiences, in addition to the Japanese viewers: specific

---

<sup>2</sup> *Bakumatsu*, literally being translated as "the end of the curtain", refers to the end of the Tokugawa shogunate, equaling the decision to abolish the politics of the *sakoku* (seclusion), which had been installed in 1603 and had closed-off Japan to the outside world, apart a small Chinese and Dutch commercial island, Dejima, in Nagasaki.

elements which teach them fundamental lessons about life and history while at the same time allowing them the loftiness of soft non-judgmental entertainment. Eleven years after the Meiji Restoration, Himura Kenshin lives his life in the stress ratio between a nomad and a pilgrim (Bauman, 2000), painfully aware of the corruption and violence, which dominate the world he had once helped build up. Strictly faithful to his vow to never kill again, he experiences the hardships and injustices of ordinary people, and does his best to help and protect them, while getting to know new friends – in the characters of the *kendō* master Kamiya Kaoru, of Myōjin Yahiko, the new *kendō* apprentice and successor of an old samurai family who was brutally annihilated during the bloody fights of the Restoration, or in the friendship and competitive nature of the elite fighter Sagara Sanosuke – as well as in the confrontation with old and new enemies. Kenshin's most memorable sentence, in which he explores his own faith in a better world, comes up in the first episode, in which he essentially utters his credo and his new ideal in life:

剣は凶器。剣術は殺人術。それが真実。かおる殿が言っていることは、一度も自分の手を汚したことがない者が言う。甘い戯言でござる。けれども、拙者は真実よりもかおる殿の言う戯言の方が好きでござるよ。願わくは、これからの世にはその戯言は真実に成ってもらいたいでござるな。

*“A sword is a tool to kill. Swordmanship is a skill to kill. This is the truth. What Miss Kaoru says is sweet chatter told by people who have never got their hands dirty. However, I prefer indeed Miss Kaoru's sweet chatter over the truth. My hope that in the world we're building now, that sweet chatter will replace the [current] truth.”*

In Kaoru's affection, Yahiko's unconditional admiration, Sanosuke's ambitious playfulness, Kenshin discovers gradually the warmth of friendship and loyalty as an act of receiving and giving, instead of a competitive endeavor, which had been the existential paradigm in his earlier years. By settling down in Kaoru's run-down *dōjō* (training site for swordsmanship with swords made out of wood), he learns to experience the quiet beauty and the soft joys of a peaceful family-oriented life. However, the double-sidedness of peace, political stability and economic prosperity is revealed in another key-sentence, from episode 30, expressed by Ōkubo Toshimichi:<sup>3</sup> “旧時代を壊すことより新時代を築く方がはるかに難しい。 (“It is much more difficult to create a new order than to destroy the old one.”). The task of building a new Japan – patterned upon Western models according to Meiji ideology – was to overtake that very West as a strategic resistance to colonisation and historical oppression. The bloody reality of the war is

<sup>3</sup> Together with Kido Kōin and Saigō Takamori, Ōkubo Toshimichi is regarded as one of the most powerful politician of the Meiji-Restoration (1868): the so-called "triumvirate of the Restoration" (Iwata, 1964: 2).

shown without restraint. While Himura Kenshin's fights for justice occur in an era in which the syndrome "The world is full" has just started to emerge and to push for a new behavior towards the weak, the poor, the under-privileged, the words of Shishio Makoto, his arch-enemy, resonate through late-modern audiences as a credible warning in light of current realities: "強ければ、生き、弱ければ、死ぬ。" ("If you are strong, you live; if you are weak, you die.", repeated as a leitmotiv throughout episodes 36-39). While it might be true that the path to forgiveness begins with the ability to live with the quotidianity of death, as Heidegger would put it, someone as Himura Kenshin, who does not take life – his own and of his human fellows – for granted, is a symbol for the visionary warrior who does believe in radical upheavals in the name of progress, but not at any price, such as the pains and deaths of regular citizens turning into calculable collateral damage (Heidegger 1984, quoted in Žižek, 1989: 142; McClain, 2002; Yoshino, 1992). His worldview of a bright future with happy people transforms him into an outsider with the only solution to try to help those around him, who depend on his skills, and to protect them.

The conclusion of the entire series – and the essence of what might be labelled the Japanese solution to late-modern conflicts and tribulations – is found in the words of the boy Seta Sōjirō, himself an innocent victim turned into a heartless assassin: "でも、弱いってことはそんなに悪いことなの?" ("But is it so bad to be just weak?", episode 38). It reminds of the belief, sometimes lost in the rush for progress and development, that humans are free and possess the ability to discern freely, but more often than not yield it for the sake of comfort and certainty, and distance themselves from the creative core of their identity through the easy delusion of instant gratification and immediate pleasure on the cost of healthy, long-term benefits which require hard-work, patience and discipline. Like Luke Skywalker or Harry Potter in different universes, Himura Kenshin has as existential goal to help and protect others, even if that means to sacrifice himself – as once upon a time, others did, so that he could live: his broken ego finds amidst the pains and sufferings of those around him its healing power again. Repentance is the requirement to his forgiveness – or better said, self-forgiveness – and of his new identity construction as a chance for the survival and thriving of those loving and needing him. *Rurouni Kenshin's* character preaches acceptance of differences and the will to move on historically, as one big family on this beautiful planet. Before the plethora of popular, rather than academic publications referring to 'herbivore men' (*sōshoku[kei] danshi*) and the loss of masculinity in late-modern Japan, specifically over the last 2-2,5 decades, Himura Kenshin offered by mid-1990s the model of a fallible and soft masculine man, able to live in the present while accepting his past (Kristeva, 1974; Kimmel, 2012; Lyotard, 1979): his highly stylized stature serves as a symbol for social actors in a new world order, one based on cooperation and compassion, on love as a flexible compositum of friendship, responsibility towards the weak and young and loyalty towards the elderly and the strong. It powerfully opposes the emerging 'masculinity of self-sufficiency'

occurring currently worldwide as an almost natural and by all means understandable reaction to the “individuality of self-sufficiency” aggressively promoted, propagated and implemented by the feminist movement. In doing so, *Rurouni Kenshin* laid more than twenty years ago the foundation of a fresh paradigm of humanity based on tenderness and mutual acceptance as a counter-movement to the modernity’s project of individualism, competition and efficiency.

---

---

## 2.2. *Rurouni Kenshin: live-action movies and theatrical performance*

---

---

As the 1990s *shōnen* generation matured and turned into full-fledged grownup men, in the first half of the 2010s, the time was ripe for new *Rurouni Kenshin* releases: the live-action movies *Rurouni Kenshin* (2012), *Rurouni Kenshin: The Kyoto Inferno* and *Rurouni Kenshin: The Legend Ends* (both 2014), directed by Ōtomo Keishi and with Satoh Takeru and Takei Emi in the lead roles, were distributed by Warner Bros in Japan and had a fair amount of success at the box-office, with ticket sales which doubled the production costs. The elegant, realistic choreography enhanced the popularity of the wandering samurai, with young vigorous actors and actresses giving life to the beloved characters years after their original manga publication. When Takarazuka Revue Company took over the *Rurouni Kenshin* topic and transformed it into a live performance, there were two main challenges it had to deal with: the (predominantly) female audience and the limitations of the theatrical genre. Widely promoted as *shōjo* (literally “young unmarried woman”), the typical Takarazuka Revue fan and audience member is represented as a teenage girl falling deeply in love with the coolly reticent *otokoyaku* (literally “men’s roles”, referring to female impersonators of male roles in Takarazuka Revue), but complying with the cute submission displayed by *musumeyaku* (literally “daughter’s roles”, referring to female impersonators of female roles in Takarazuka Revue). The Takarazuka Revue performances are staged according to the flowery ideology of a roccoco world full of romantics and particularly full of longing for romantics, with specific aesthetic-technical stage design and costumes details, which complete this carefully crafted and publicly advertised image.

The transition from the manga/anime version of the *Rurouni Kenshin* representation of history to its version with human actors – live-action movies or all-female live theatrical performances – was facilitated by what might be labeled “latent cross-mediality” of the Japanese entertainment industry, with popular plots and topics migrating between mediatic levels with various degrees of success (Ortolani, 1995; Powell, 2002; Takaoka, 1943; Watanabe, 1999). Interestingly enough, while non-Japanese viewers had difficulties in coping with the cinema versions of *Rurouni Kenshin*, they empathized more profoundly with Takarazuka Revue’s version, in spite of Takarazuka Revue being virtually unknown outside of Japan. Accordingly, the perception and mental-emotional processing of its message were easier, and felt more familiar, as one female fan aged 21 put it.



To non-Japanese, mostly Western, observers of modern-contemporary Japan, the socio-cultural contextualization of Takarazuka Revue as the self-advertised “icon of Japan” and a “world of love” with its actresses, particularly its female impersonators of male roles promoted as symbols of masculinity and pioneers of social change, took place while considering its institutional position within the highly corporationist entertainment industry in Japan, and enclosed by the cultural-intellectual hybridization which occurred in Japan since 1868 (Watanabe, 2002: 184-189; Ueda, 1997: 44-46). On the greater background of the actresses’ strict educational system within the Takarazuka Music Academy, in which “friendship, hard-work and (individual) excellence” (Ueda, 1976: 55; Stickland, 2008: 52-69) serve the more comprehensive model of a dynamic community based on compassion, respect and trust among its members – after all, the supreme goals of any enlightened society in late-modern era –, *Rurouni Kenshin*’s characters and the ideals they represent, believe in and fight for metamorphose into tangible goals for average participants in the audiences, compounded by specific elements included in Takarazuka Revue as a geopolitical and historical appearance. In time, Takarazuka Revue moved towards the centre of the Japanese cultural consumption as a mass-media phenomenon, and it ended up being considered the foundation of the Japanese entertainment industry, both ideologically and aesthetically.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it continued the cross-gender stage representation, based on the premodern tradition of all-male stage arts such as *Nō* and *Kabuki*, within a very strict hierarchical and educational system, but it challenged it through the employment of female actresses and Western music, stage design and technology as well as the actresses’ outlook and costumes.<sup>5</sup> Takarazuka Revue’s longevity (114 years, since its foundation in 1913) is essentially equivalent to eons in terms of the volatility and competitiveness of the Japanese entertainment system and is mostly due to its ability to both reflect public opinions and to create new trends to be taken over by other mainstream media (TV & cinema, anime/manga, video games, social

<sup>4</sup> The aesthetic dimension of Takarazuka Revue influence on the domestic popular culture is recognizable in the mostly androgynous characters with endlessly long legs, incredibly big eyes as well as hair dyed in all imaginable colors. The ideological aspect of Takarazuka Revue’s impact of Japanese popular culture is obvious in the energy, passion and vitality radiated by plenty of such productions, as well as in the denomination of Japanese modern entertainment industry as a long, uninterrupted history of love, friendship and courage, which is supposedly to go back to Takarazuka Revue’s motto ‘Purity, Righteousness, Beauty’ (*Kiyoku, tadashiku, utsukushiku*). Already during the late 1960s, an inquiry among the readers of the weekly magazine *Shōnen Jump* (grounded 1968) revealed friendship (*yūjō*), hard-work (*doryoku*) and victory (*shōri*) as keywords with highest priority among manga and anime consumers. (Köhn 2005: 245; Saitō, 1996: 11-13; Tobin 1992: 15).

<sup>5</sup> See other cross-gender phenomena in late-modern Japan, such as the TV celebrity Matsuko Deluxe (prompting Japanese citizens to talk about “men, women and Matsuko Deluxe”) and a great part of the *visual-kei* movement (boys-bands dressed up as women in glamorous roccoco outfits, with glittering makeup and extravagant hairstyles).

network channels, etc.). This dialectical interaction has been repeatedly noticed by scholars of the manifold exchanges between producers and consumers of popular culture as the secret recipe to construct “artistic value” as a result of a continuous negotiation between these two major parameters of the entertainment industry (Böhme, 2001). Both accessible and saleable, Takarazuka Revue has been fulfilling a major function in mediating non-Japanese contents to Japanese audiences (in its vast majority, 95-97%, female citizens between 35-60 years old, and belonging to mid- and upper middle class) and impacting upon them in their perceived roles as mothers and educators (and consumers with a huge financial power; (Hirabayashi, 1935; Grajdian, 2011: 19-21; Ueda, 1997: 142-147; Ōtsuka, 1991).

Conversely, for non-Japanese audiences unfamiliar with Takarazuka Revue’s complicated background, the sense of futility and emotional frugality conveyed by the performance *Rurouni Kenshin*, which was one of the most successful performance of Takarazuka Revue’s recent history, running with closed ticket houses since the first day of the ticket-pre-sale, is magnified by the austere stage design, in striking contrast with other typical Takarazuka Revue performances. Himura Kenshin’s second title-song, 「微笑みを交わして」 *Hohoemi wo kawashite* “Smile at each other”, talks most intensively about those fleeting moments of togetherness and acceptance, and thus aligns to similar ardent efforts within the broader Japanese entertainment industry and media landscape.

### 微笑みを交わして

目覚めれば、朝陽がまばゆく  
道を行く人々が  
微笑みを交わす  
何気ない景色が  
どれほど尊いものか  
人は忘れてしまう。

戦に明け暮れ、焼け落ちた家  
戸惑いに涙も出ない子供  
それが思い出  
ただ一つのささやかな幸せが  
どれほど大切か、  
人は忘れてしまう。

だから微笑んで生きていたい  
小さな幸せを守りながら  
誰もが愛する人と家を築いて  
春の陽射しの

### Smile at each other

When I wake up,  
the morning sun shines dazzlingly  
and people walking in the street smile.  
People forget how precious  
such fleeting moments are.

Battles day after day,  
Burnt out houses,  
Children too stunned to cry,  
All those memories!  
People forget how important  
simple, humble happiness is.

This is why I’ll keep on living,  
Smiling,  
and protecting [their] small happiness.  
So that anyone can build a house  
with those he loves,

ぬくもり分かち合えるよう  
人と人が  
微笑み交わし合えるよう

And share with them  
the warmth of the sunshine in spring.  
So that people can [continue to]  
smile at each other.

In doing so, the cathartic experience of the live performance is backed by a specific social-political agenda reinforced by aesthetic-ideological patterns reminiscent of the Japanese establishment, and slowly but decisively complying with the prevalent ideologies of the *wakon wasai* (“Japanese spirit, Japanese technology”) policies openly promoted by the Abe administration in recent years: a reinvigoration of modernity and humanity as a tender, soft endeavor, characterized by a more compassionate, more profound communication and interaction between human actors both within the same society and among different societies. *Rurouni Kenshin*’s second title-song sums up the main characteristics of Japanese late-modernity, and the pragmatic way in which it strives to move forward from being an importer of cultural assets to becoming an exporter of those very cultural assets it had originally imported, after having carefully japanised them: within the *wakon yōsai* strategy implemented during the Meiji period, by mid-1860s and originating in the premodern *wakon kansai*,<sup>6</sup> there are carefully preserved elements, until present-day Japan, which make Japanese culture both fascinating and slightly out-of-reach: the song represents one of many critical statements at the ideological climax of a long history of transforming the external inputs into national cultural assets, which would subsequently turn into economic and political power. It brings home, “domesticates” for non-Japanese audiences – and scholars – the ineffability of classical Japan, while subliminally questioning traditionally transmitted forms of thinking and artistic expression: at the very least, catharsis is replaced by atmosphere and slow emotions, by the self-aware immergence into the frugality of life without expectations of moral teachings or profound messages (Böhme, 2001; Morikawa, 2003; Azuma, 2000).

---

*2.3. Rurouni Kenshin: cultural consumption as a (major) means to connect with one’s deep emotions*

---

The major challenge when dealing with Media Studies, is to keep an objective focus while being aware of the dangers to rely too much on the messages conveyed by mass-media. This challenge multiplies when approaching non-Western media, like the Japanese one, with its own intricacies, emulating Western models, but developing in time their own dynamics and modes of expression and of interacting with audiences. *Rurouni Kenshin*’s cross-mediality, particularly after its Takarazuka Revue live performance, served as an important turning-point both in

---

<sup>6</sup> *Wakon kansai* (“Japanese spirit/roots, Chinese technology/knowledge”) refers to the long centuries in which China had served as to Japan the main source of information and instruction.

highlighting the advantages of live experiences over recorded ones or of real-life events over virtual ones, on the one hand, and in reminding of the power of community as the driving force for individual excellence, on the other hand (Berlin, 1988: 48-79; Grajdian, 2009: 22-54; Kawasaki, 1999: 16; Kawasaki, 2005: 174; Etō & al., 2007; Hashimoto, 1999; Iwahori, 1972; Kobayashi, 1955; Tsuganesawa, 1991). Indeed, this fundamental feature of the Japanese society – its strictly collective-oriented hierarchical structure – and its impact in a changing world in which the individual feels increasingly isolated and lonely in spite of a progressively permanent connection to the others due to digital media largely available and affordable, is easier to observe once the animated characters and actors in live-action movies turned into actresses working hard to empathize with thousands of spectators expecting catharsis, relief from inevitable obligations and escape from quotidian disappointments. Furthermore, raising questions about fundamental values (loyalty, responsibility, trustworthiness, hard-work, discipline) and ethical coordinates (reliability, stability, kindness) which seem natural in the worldview of highly educated scholars, becomes less complicated to react to once the fantasy world of anime spanning dozens of hours on TV or cinema broadcast turned into a live theatrical limited to a 3-hours immediate experience (Bauman, 2000; Eagleton, 2003; Miegel, 2007).

While talking with both Japanese and Western fans of the *Rurouni Kenshin* franchise, in the newly discovered humanity of the *Rurouni Kenshin* topos at the microlevel of the individual conversation, non-Japanese fans could find an emotional space which allowed them to transcend the otherness of present-day Japan and to incorporate it within their own system of values and beliefs – or, better said, the experience of the process of moving closer towards *Rurouni Kenshin* beyond its entertaining superficiality, helped them find in themselves those values and beliefs which the older generation seems to struggle so much to mediate to the younger generation. By learning to respect – and accept – “Japanese culture and society” in its radical alterity, as Emmanuel Levinas would refer to it, and *Rurouni Kenshin* as an element of the macrouniverse of the Japanese mainstream media, Western members of the fan community, online as well as in the real world, learned to overcome in the intrinsic microinteractions with fellow-fans the sheer immensity of overwhelming information flows permeating our daily lives, and particularly aggressive in the cyber-world. Thus, in spite of being a typical cross-medial product of the highly volatile Japanese macroindustry of cultural consumption, *Rurouni Kenshin* – as a phenomenon, as a symbol, as a role-model – turns into a key to understanding late-modern “Japanese culture and society”, its inner mechanisms and outer representations, its longings and its impacts. In other words: there was the micro-level of the actual interaction based on the consumption of *Rurouni Kenshin* as a cultural artefact and as a mediating element of Japanese culture with its own relevant impact on international audiences. Additionally, there was the macro-space of mainstream media and online platforms whose very existence depends on the sheer number of subscribers,

fighting for commercial supremacy. In-between the micro-experience with immediate humans and the instant validation which comes from directly relating to fellow consumers and the macro-industry of capitalist merchandizing and advertising, the humanity of the social actors involved is mercilessly negotiated. From this perspective, *Rurouni Kenshin*'s main contribution to making the world a better place is in creating, and mediating, powerfully relatable contents while still following the rules of the entertainment market – and therefore, finding a path to reach the audiences, both domestically and globally.

Simultaneously, during the hermeneutic interpretation based on fieldwork and literature review, which allowed for a nuanced analysis of the interaction between Japanese consumers of the *Rurouni Kenshin* franchise (video games included) and the larger Japanese society, it became obvious that Japanese fans of the *Rurouni Kenshin* media releases, most of them currently in their mid-30s to mid-40s, rely heavily on the memories of their adolescence and the way they perceived and processed their first encounters with the franchise in order to find effective way to respond to the challenges of everyday life. This turned, subsequently, in an important statement for me on how humans relate to and interact with media on a daily basis. On a deeper level, though, it meant starting to think on how they, those media consumers, give in unconditionally to the overwhelming temptations and delusions of instant gratification created by mainstream media, or, in less common cases, on how they resist the almighty media and its pervasive infiltration into all domains of life. I became genuinely curious as to why *Rurouni Kenshin* seemed to serve so deeply as an existential lighthouse: On a superficial level, *Rurouni Kenshin* with its basic graphic design and its plain retelling of history employing simple characters easy to identify with, could make much more comprehensible the intrinsic complicated dynamics of the Japanese geopolitics of financial gains via its entertainment media under the governmental half-hearted surveillance (usually known under the more generous label of “cultural imperialism”), while promoting soft power as a new means to climb the ladder of international recognition, than the elaborate theories of cultural analysts. On a more elaborate level, though, *Rurouni Kenshin* with its lovely characters full of vitality implemented both in quotidian activities and in life-and-death confrontations pointed towards an aimed instilling and reinforcement of emotions as basic assets in one's journey through life. This approach to individual existence as a juxtaposition and at times a dialectical conflict between emotions and rational facts is not new in Japanese culture and society – as the classic principle of *giri-ninjō* proves –, but turning it into an essential coordinate in the human being's life with the eventual victory of the latter, is.

Within the all-too-common techno-orientalization of Japan occurring bi-directionally – that is, both in the Western discourse involved in making sense of Japan and its sometimes incomprehensible realities and in Japan's own representation of itself as special in its uniqueness –, the lack of emotions and its immediate consequence, the cold automatic smile and non-committal bow, have been playing a fundamental role in dealing with it. As recent years and particularly

the domestically involved international research with the everyday life in Japan has started to uncover, Japanese popular culture serves, as in any other late-modern, post-industrialized, service-based economy, as a major outlet to help consumers to connect with one's deepest emotions, to release them, and to recover from what otherwise would mean a continuous repression, resulting, as currently discovered and discussed in the socio-psychiatric discourse, either in self-harm, depression and suicide or in violence against other fellow-citizens.

The lack of awareness concerning one's emotions and the years-long trained ability to repress them due to a strict and highly stratified educational system, leads to their automatic denial and a very deep-seated inability to feel those emotions. This, in turn, has as the main effect a lack of empathy, defined as the ability to feel the emotions of others, to emulate their pains and their joys, to join them in their emotional journey through the world. Combined with integrity, which is the consistence of one's individuality in its most profound characteristics, and the mindful balancing of quotidian challenges and their overcoming by staying true to who we are at our very core, empathy leads to compassion. Empathy can be cognitive (we recognize mentally how someone might be feeling, under specific circumstances, mostly because we have experienced ourselves similar situations) or emotional (an indirect connection to how things might feel, because we couldn't possibly experience those feelings, like in knowing that it hurts to pick up a beautiful flower, so we admire and let it be, for it to keep on living and for others to be able to admire it, as well). On the other hand, compassion has been defined in various ways, depending on the philosophic-religious context in which it happens to be momentarily encountered, but they all have one shared trait: the ability to empathize with those around each individual, without getting engulfed by their overwhelming pain or pleasure, and to stand by them, aware of one's own individuality and inner distance, either to help them overcome the pain or join them in their pleasure, thus enhancing it. Compassion includes the ability to feel and act on kindness, while being aware of one's individuality and individual path in life and in the world. Without proper education in the field of emotional processes, though, empathy cannot emerge and develop; without clear acknowledgment of ethical norms and regulations in their universal-historical, rather than geographic-national, emergence and development, integrity is absent, as well. Compassion, which has been proved to be the real foundation of any over-individual human grouping, doesn't exist. Following the rules, particularly in the advent of the intense globalization of values and worldviews as occurring currently, cannot offer the impression of safety and protection as it used to do, when Japan and its population were still deeply relying on their own isolation for making it through the history and building up their own universe. The necessity of individual awareness and personal choices related to the well-being of others as a direct consequence of those very decisions is for its most part news to Japanese average citizens – and still, it is precisely the message of this awareness of one's own role within the community at large which had that huge impact more than 20 years ago

in the release of *Rurouni Kenshin*, which would become, due to this message, the powerfully impactful franchise we know nowadays.

---

### ***3. Conclusion: mainstream media and impactful messages***

---

I argue that this is possibly the strongest impact the *Rurouni Kenshin* phenomenon might have on audiences Japan-wide and around the world: the re-consideration of emotions, one's own of the others, through the critical lens of mass-media. In spite of allegations of child pornography against Watsuki Nobuhiro, released publicly in November 2017 and resolved with a fine of 200.000 JPY in February 2018, the tremendous popularity of the *Rurouni Kenshin* franchise, lasts until present moment, and continues to inspire hundreds of thousands of consumers of Japanese popular culture worldwide: on the one hand, non-Japanese fans seem to find in the manga and particularly anime versions of *Rurouni Kenshin* a balanced harmonization of the centuries-old and tension-loaded concept of *giri-ninjō*: the former assassin chooses to employ his skills (his old *giri*, the obligation to submit to his codex of honour) in the service of the community and of the ordinary people (*ninjō* – his own emotions and his own sense of justice), motivated by a deep sense of the futility of life (*mono no aware*, usually translated as “the pathos of things” and referring to the fact that the beauty of everything that exists resides in its very transience) and the impossibility of a quick retribution, and decides for a slow repentance instead of a fast death, as the old samurai codex would require. On the other hand, in the live-action movies and in the syncretic, highly ambivalent version of Takarazuka Revue, *Rurouni Kenshin* provides self-awareness of its position within the historical continuum as an embedded element which facilitates a sense of expansion beyond the limitations of the theatrical medium, highlighting the idea that overcoming old limitations is possible: change must happen from within the system and change resides in the individual, who can transcend time and space in his quest for new shores. Particularly, the syncretic medium of the musical theater, regarded both as a historical institution and a symbol of Japan, compounds *Rurouni Kenshin*'s significance: the power of live representation emerges as a new form of Soft Power, threatening to discomfort and finally to disrupt traditionally confirmed concepts of identity, self and culture (Turner, 1968; Ōtsuka, 2004; Bourdieu, 1998; Anderson, 1988; Anderson, 1991). Superficially conventional and stylistically eclectic, ideologically confusing and aesthetically challenging, naïve, cool and charismatic, *Rurouni Kenshin*'s representation of identity and the re-making of Japan in Takarazuka Revue's version transforms the franchise into a messenger of love and tenderness, at the core of the complicated network of politically staged nostalgia and economically reinforced loneliness, in a future world order in which the principles of cooperation and integrity, loyalty and respect would govern, as gate-keepers towards a paradigm of humanity with love, caring and compassion as driving forces.

For compassion to thrive, it needs the power of public representation and open confirmation. It also needs the additional lessons in vulnerability – that is, that colossal sense of liberation and empowerment which come from acknowledging and accepting oneself in one's own fragility and ephemerality, flaws and discontinuities included. Himura Kenshin's incredible strength consists exactly in his ability to switch on his own from being an assassin-for-hire, mercilessly fighting for ideals he doesn't really understand, but which provide him with a bonding element for his individual inner cohesion, towards a less unified version of himself, nevertheless, more deeply connected to his core of kindness, compassion and love. In his re-construction process of who he really is and in the positive confirmation coming from those around him, Himura Kenshin discovers the beauty of acceptance as well as that sense of gratitude towards life as a continuous journey. This is, I would argue, the relation between Himura Kenshin as a figure of the entertainment industry and its millions of fans both in Japan and worldwide: his imperfection and his transitional motions in countless rites-of-passages, which serve as interfaces for growth and gradual self-awareness, and which lead, eventually, to a fresh self. His willingness to embrace vulnerability as existential strategy endears him to those around him, and gradually helps him overcome his complicated past.

This is a powerful inspiration for young Millennials and those 1970-X-Gens (or *shinjinrui* representatives, the Japanese correspondence to X generation in Japan), precisely the original target audiences: in learning to deal openly with one's weak points, in acknowledging one's flaws, resides the strength to take responsibility and look for solutions instead of playing the victim of uncontrollable circumstances. No one can control the starting point of one's life, but every person can decide the direction in which to move through this wonderful journey in the world, and do his/her best to make it a story full of good memories. The pathetic fatalism of Japanese intellectuals with their dramatic tendency to focus on the problems instead of the solution, is replaced in Himura Kenshin's life-story with practical examples on how to overcome hardships and be true to yourself, how to identify with honesty and straightforwardness one's weaknesses and limiting beliefs and to turn them into powerful tools to move forward in life, how to learn to give love and accept love in return – all of them important lessons in maturity and the courage to graduate necessary rites-of-passages. To the late-modern dissolution of the grand narratives of abstract personality and multilayered individuality, *Rurouni Kenshin* as a product of popular culture promoted by various outlets of mass-media over more than two decades of interactive negotiation and creation, responds with pragmatic solutions, highlighting the urgency for empathy and integrity, reunited in the capacity to feel – and show – compassion. It is a practical textbook in the course of "Humanity 2.0", when emotions are not only re-invented, but also taught as mandatory disciplines.



**References and bibliography**

- \*\*\*. 2016. *Rurouni Kenshin*, performance pamphlet, Takarazuka: Takarazuka Kagekidan.
- \*\*\*. 2016. *Rurouni Kenshin*, DVD, Takarazuka: Takarazuka Creative Arts.
- Anderson, B.** 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso.
- Anderson, P.** 1988. *The origins of postmodernity*, London: Verso.
- Azuma, H.** 2000. *Fukashina mono no sekai* [The over-visualised world], Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun.
- Bauman, Z.** 2000. *Liquid modernity*, Cambridge: Polity
- Bauman, Z.** 2001a. *Community: Seeking safety in an Insecure World*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Bauman, Z.** 2001b. *The individualized society*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Berlin, Z.** 1988. *Takarazuka – A History and Descriptive Analysis of the All-Female Japanese Performance Company*, Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International.
- Böhme, G.** 1995. *Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Ästhetik*, Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Press.
- Böhme, G.** 2001. *Asthetik: Vorlesungen über Ästhetik als allgemeine Wahrnehmungslehre*, München: Wilhelm Fink Press.
- Bourdieu, P.** 1998. *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Butler, J.** 1993. *Bodies that Matter – On the discursive limits of “sex”*, London/New York: Routledge.
- Castells, M.** 1997a. *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, Volume I: The Rise of the Network Society*, Cambridge, MA & Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Castells, M.** 1997b. *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, Volume III: End of Millennium*, Cambridge, MA & Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Drazen, P.** 2003. *Anime explosion! – The What? Why? & Wow! of Japanese Animation*, Berkeley: Stone Bridge.
- Eagleton, T.** 2003. *After theory*, New York: Basic Books.
- Etō, S. et al.** 2007. *Takarazuka Kagekidan sutadīzu: Butai o 100-bai tanoshimu chitekina 15 kōza* [The Takarazuka Revue Studies: 15 Intellectual Lectures To Enjoy the Stage 100 Times], Tokyo: Ebisu Kōshō.
- Foucault, M.** 1966. *Les mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines*, Paris: Gallimard.
- Furuhashi, K.** 1996-1998. *Rurouni Kenshin: Romantic Tales from Meiji Era* [Rurouni Kenshin: Meiji-Kenkaku Rōman-tan], Tokyo: Studio Gallop/Studio Deen.
- Grajdian, M.** 2005. *Takarazuka Revue oder die Überwindung der Tradition*, Wilhelmshaven: Florian Noetzel.
- Grajdian, M.** 2009. *Flüssige Identität: Die postmoderne Liebe, die Takarazuka Revue und die Suche nach einer neuen Aufklärung*, Bucharest: National Music University.
- Grajdian, M.** 2011. “Kiyoku, Tadashiku, Utsukushiku: Takarazuka Revue and the Project of Identity (Re-)Solidification”, in *Contemporary Japan* 23 (1), 5-25.

- Grajadian, M.** 2014. "TakaWiki and the Dialectics of Fandom and Knowledge in Late Modernity", in *Japanese Studies in Russia*, June 2014. Retrieved from [http://japanstudies.ru/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=419](http://japanstudies.ru/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=419). Accessed on November 28th, 2018.
- Haraway, D.** 1991. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, New York: Routledge.
- Hashimoto, M.** 1999. *Subarashii Takarazuka Kageki – Yume to roman no 85-toshi* [The Wonderful Takarazuka Revue: 85 Years of Dreams and Romance], Takarazuka: Takarazuka Kagekidan.
- Havens, Th.R.H.** 1970. *Nishi Amane and Modern Japanese Thought*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Heidegger, M.** 1984. *Sein und Zeit*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Press.
- Hendry, J.** 2000. *The Orient Strikes Back – A Global View of Cultural Display*, Oxford & New York: Berg.
- Hirabayashi, T.** 1935. "Takarazuka onna fuan retsuden" [Life-stories of female Takarazuka fans], in *Kageki* 10: 73-75.
- Hooks, B.** 2000. *All About Love – New Visions*, New York: Harper Perennial.
- Hooks, B.** 2004. *The Will to Change – Men, Masculinity and Love*, New York/London: Washington Square Press.
- Iwabuchi, K.** 2015. "Pop-Culture Diplomacy in Japan: Soft Power, Nation Branding and the Question of 'International Cultural Exchange'", in Ang, I., R.J. Yudhishtir, P. Mar (guest eds.), *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Volume 21, Issue 4: 419-432.
- Iwahori, Y.** 1972. *Isai Kobayashi Ichizō no shōhō: Sono taishū shikō no rejā keiei shuhō* [The specific business strategy of the genial Kobayashi Ichizō: His mass-oriented leisure enterprise methods], Tokyo: Hyōgensha.
- Iwata, M.** 1964. *Ōkubo Toshimichi – The Bismarck of Japan*, Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Kawasaki, K.** 1999. *Takarazuka – Shōhi shakai no supekutakuru* [Takarazuka – The spectacle of the consumption society], Tokyo: Kōdansha.
- Kawasaki, K.** 2005. *Takarazuka to iu yūtopia* [The utopia called Takarazuka], Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Kimmel, M.** 2012. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kimmel, M.** 2015. *Angry White Men – American Masculinity at the End of an Era*, New York: Nation Books.
- Kobayashi, I.** 1955. *Takarazuka manpitsu* [Takarazuka miscellanea], Tokyo: Jitsugyō no Nihonsha.
- Köhn, S.** 2005. *Traditionen visuellen Erzählens in Japan – Eine paradigmatische Untersuchung der Entwicklungslinien vom Faltschirmbild zum narrativen Manga*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Kristeva, J.** 1974. *La révolution du langage poétique*, Paris: Seuil.
- Lytard, J.F.** 1979. *La condition postmoderne – Rapport sur le savoir*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.
- Mathews, G.** 2000. *Global Culture/Individual Identity – Searching for home in the cultural supermarket*, London/New York: Routledge.
- McClain, J. L.** 2002. *Japan: A Modern History*, New York: W. W. Norton.
- McGray, D.** 2002: "Japan's Gross National Cool", in: *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2002, 44-54.

- Miegel, M.** 2007. *Epochenwende: Gewinnt der Westen die Zukunft?*, Berlin: Ullstein.
- Morikawa, K.** 2003. *Shuto no tanjō: Moeru toshi Akihabara* [Learning from Akihabara: The birth of a personapolis]. Tokyo: Gentōsha.
- Nye, J. S.** 2004. *Soft Power: The Means to Succeed in World Politics*, New York: Public Affairs.
- Ortolani, B.** 1995. *The Japanese Theatre – From Shamanistic Ritual to Contemporary Pluralism*, Princeton/New Jersey: Princeton University.
- Ôtsuka, E.** 1991. *Shōjo minzokugaku* [The *shōjo* ethnography]. Tokyo: Kōbunsha.
- Ôtsuka, E.** 2004. *'Otaku' no seishinshi: 1980 nendairon* [The spiritual history of the *otaku*: Essays on the 1980s], Tokyo: Kōdansha.
- Powell, R.** 2002. *Japan's Modern Theater – A Century of Change and Continuity*, London: Japan Library.
- Robertson, J. E.** 1998. *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Saitō, J.** 1996. *“Shōnen janpu” no jidai* [The “Shonen Jump” era], Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Stickland, L.** 2008. *Gender Gymnastics: Performing and Consuming Japan's Takarazuka Revue*, Melbourne: Trans Pacific.
- Takaoka, N.** 1943. *Kokumin engeki no tenbō* [A Vision of the People's Theater], Tokyo: Yoshi Bundō.
- Tobin, J.J.** 1992. “Domesticating the West”, in Tobin, J.J. (ed.), *Re-Made in Japan – Everyday Life and Consumer Taste in a Changing Society*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1-41.
- Tsuganesawa, T.** 1991. *Takarazuka Kageki senryaku: Kobayashi Ichizō no seikatsu-bunkaron* [The Takarazuka Revue strategy: Kobayashi Ichizō's lifestyle philosophy]. Tokyo: Kōdansha.
- Turner, V.** 1968. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Ueda, S.** 1997. *Takarazuka, waga Takarazuka* [Takarazuka, my Takarazuka], Tokyo: Hakusuisha.
- Ueda, Y.** 1976. *Takarazuka ongaku gakkō* [The Takarazuka music academy], Osaka: Yomiuri-Life.
- Valaskivi, K.** 2013. “A Brand New Future? Cool Japan and the Social Imagery of the Branded Nation”, in *Japan Forum*, Volume 25, Issue 4: 485-504.
- Watanabe, H.** 1999. *Takarazuka Kageki no hen'yō to Nihon kindai* [Takarazuka Revue's metamorphose and the Japanese modernity], Tokyo: Shinshokan.
- Watanabe, H.** 2002. *Nihon-bunka modan rapusodī* [The Japanese culture, a rhapsody of modernity], Tokyo: Shunjūsha.
- Watsuki, N.** 1994-1999. *Rurouni Kenshin: Romantic tales from Meiji era* [Rurouni Kenshin: Meiji-Kenkaku Rōman-tan], Tokyo: Shūeisha/Shōnen Jump.
- Yoshino, K.** 1992. *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan: A Sociological Enquiry*, London/New York: Routledge.
- Žižek, S.** 1989. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, London/New York: Verso.

## APPENDIX: THE RUROUNI KENSHIN FRANCHISE

Year	Title	Medium
April 25, 1994- November 4, 1999	<i>Rurouni Kenshin: Romantic tales from Meiji era</i> 『るろうに剣心：明治剣客浪漫譚』 <i>Rurouni Kenshin: Meiji-Kenkaku Rōman-tan</i>	Manga, 28 volumes, Weekly Shōnen Jump
January 10, 1996- September 8, 1998	<i>Rurouni Kenshin: Romantic tales from Meiji era</i> 『るろうに剣心：明治剣客浪漫譚』 <i>Rurouni Kenshin: Meiji-Kenkaku Rōman-tan</i>	Anime TV series, 95 episodes, Fuji TV
December 20, 1997	<i>Rurouni Kenshin: Requiem for the Ishin Patriots</i> 『るろうに剣心：一維新志士への鎮魂歌』 <i>Rurouni Kenshin: Ishin shishi e no chinkonka</i>	Anime movie, Studio Gallop
February 20, 1999- November 22, 1999	<i>Rurouni Kenshin: Recollection and Reminiscence</i> 『るろうに剣心：明治剣客浪漫譚、追憶編』 <i>Rurouni Kenshin: Meiji Kenkaku Rōman Tan- Tsuioku-hen</i>	Original Video Animation, Studio Deen, 4 episodes, 29 minutes each
December 12, 2001	<i>Rurouni Kenshin: Reflection</i> 『るろうに剣心：明治剣客浪漫譚、星霜編』 <i>Rurouni Kenshin: Meiji Kenkaku Rōman Tan, Seisō-hen</i>	Original Video Animation, Studio Deen, 1 episode, 90 minutes
December 17, 2011- June 23, 2012	<i>Rurouni Kenshin: New Kyoto Arc (The Cage of Flames)</i> 『焔の獄：ホムラのオリ』 <i>Zenpen Homura no Ori</i> and <i>The Chirps of Light</i> 『光の囀：ヒカリのサエズリ』 <i>Hikari no Saezuri</i>	Anime film series, 2 episodes, 45 minutes each, Studio Deen
August 25, 2012	<i>Rurouni Kenshin</i> 『るろうに剣心』	Live-action movie, Warner Bros, 135 minutes
May 2, 2012-June 4, 2013	<i>Rurouni Kenshin: Restoration</i> 『るろうに剣心-キネマ版』 <i>Rurouni Kenshin Cinema-ban</i>	Manga, 2 volumes, Weekly Shōnen Jump
July 4, 2014-September 4, 2014	<i>Rurouni Kenshin: Master of Flame</i> 『炎を統べる：るろうに剣心・裏幕』 <i>Honō wo Suberu: Rurouni Kenshin, Uramaku</i>	Manga, 1 volume, Weekly Shōnen Jump
August 1, 2014	<i>Rurouni Kenshin: Kyoto Inferno</i> 『るろうに剣心：京都大火編』 <i>Rurouni Kenshin: Kyoto taika-hen</i>	Live-action movie, Warner Bros, 139 minutes
September 13, 2014	<i>Rurouni Kenshin: The Legend Ends</i> 『るろうに剣心 伝説の最期編』 <i>Rurouni Kenshin: Densetsu no saigo-hen</i>	Live-action movie, Warner Bros, 135 minutes
2016, February 5- March 14, 2016 (Takarazuka Grand Theater); April 1, 2016- May 8, 2016 (Tokyo Takarazuka Theater)	<i>Rurouni Kenshin: Romantic Tales of the Meiji Era</i> 『るろうに剣心：明治剣客浪漫譚』 <i>Rurouni Kenshin: Meiji Kenkaku Rōman-tan</i>	Live performance, Takarazuka Revue, snow troupe
September 4, 2017- present	<i>Rurouni Kenshin: Hokkaido Arc</i> 『るろうに剣心：明治剣客浪漫譚、北海道編』 <i>Rurouni Kenshin: Meiji Kenkaku Roman-Tan, Hokkaidō-hen</i>	Manga, 1 volume, Weekly Shōnen Jump

***The author***

**Maria Grajdian** is Associate Professor of Media Studies & Anthropology of Subculture(s) at Hiroshima University, Graduate School of Integrated Arts and Sciences. She holds a Ph.D. in musicology from Hanover University of Music and Drama, Germany. Her research focuses on Japanese contemporary culture (Takarazuka Revue, Ghibli Studio, Murakami Haruki), the history of knowledge (Japanese encyclopedias) and the dynamics of identity in late modernity. Recent publications include a number of research articles in academic journals as well as books on contemporary Japanese culture such as *After Identity: Three Essays on the Musicality of Life* and *Cyberspaces of Loneliness: Love, Masculinity, Japan* (both 2019). Currently, she is preparing two books: *The Archaeology of Desire: How Takarazuka Revue Has Impacted the World* and *Beautiful New World: The Poetics and Pragmatics of the Japanese Cultural Imperialism*, within the research project called *Takarazuka Revue's Metamorphosis from a Local Stage Art towards a Global Medium* (『宝塚歌劇の質的変遷—地域芸能からグローバルなマスメディアへ』) funded by the (Japanese) Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research/Kakenhi, Wakate B, 17K17952, April 2017 – March 2021), in which she acts as principal investigator.