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Idolized Popular Performance: Musical The Prince of Tennis and Japanese 2.5-Dimensional Theatre

In recent years, 2.5-dimensional (2.5D) theatre has become an influential popular theatre in Japan. It is broadly defined as live theatre adapted from manga, anime, and video games. In this article, I argue that Musical The Prince of Tennis (2013–) is a cornerstone of 2.5D theatre’s history. This musical series, as well as later 2.5D works inspired by it, bears features that distinguish it from other manga- or animation-adapted theatre; one of these features is the heavy influence of idol culture. Targeted at female audiences, 2.5D plays cast idolised, handsome, but less-experienced actors who ‘graduate’ from the production after a few years. Fans of the original work, fans of the performers, and fans of the play comprise the majority of audience members. Performers maintain a paradoxically close and distant relationship with fans in order to attract them through a pseudo-intimacy that still leaves enough space for fans to create narratives about their favourite performers. Zihui Lu is a PhD candidate at the Department of Japanese Studies, National University of Singapore. Her Doctoral research focuses on the manga/anime/video game adapted Japanese 2.5-dimensional theatre.

Keywords: 2.5D theatre, audience, idol culture, *Tenimyu* (*Musical The Prince of Tennis*)

Since the new millennium, 2.5-dimensional theatre (2.5 *jigen butai*), or 2.5-dimensional musical theatre (2.5 *jigen myūjīkaru*), has been gaining popularity in Japan.¹ The number 2.5 refers to a 3-dimensional live performance that is adapted from a 2-dimensional manga, anime, or video game. Although the history of manga-adapted stage performance in Japan can be traced back to Takarazuka Revue’s *The Adventure of Shō-chan* (*shō-chan no bōken*), which premiered in 1924, 2.5D theatre, as it is also called, usually refers to plays performed after the early 2000s.² From this perspective, the premiere of *Musical The Prince of Tennis* (*myūjīkaru tenisu no ōji-sama*, usually called *Tenimyu* or

Tenimyu for short) on April 30, 2003 marks the starting point of 2.5D theatre in Japan.

Tenimyu became a phenomenon in the early 2000s, but the widespread usage of the term “2.5D musical” (*2.5 jigen myūjīkaru*) emerged much later. In November 2010, the magazine *Otome Continue* (*otome kontinyū*) published a special volume titled “2.5D Backstage” (*2.5 jigen bakkustēji*), which includes interviews with the actors of the musicals *Tenimyu* (2003–), *Nintama Rantarō* (2010–)³, and *Hakuōki* (2010–).⁴ This was probably the first time 2.5D theatre was introduced as a genre in magazines. On September 9, 2011, a subcultural information television program, MAG-Netto, used the phrase “2.5D musical” when introducing *Tenimyu*. Since then, the terms “2.5D musical” and “2.5D theatre” (*2.5 jigen butai*) have been widely used when referring to manga-, anime-, and video-game-related performances.

The popularity of manga-adapted plays in recent years has led to widespread usage of the term “2.5D theatre.” The definition of 2.5D theatre therefore is broad. Some magazine and newspaper articles, as well as the largest 2.5D theatre organisation, Japan 2.5D Musical Association (*Nihon 2.5-jigen myūjīkaru gyokai*), simply define it as theatre adapted from manga, anime, or video-games. The broad term can include all manga adaptations, such as those produced by Takarazuka Revue, Shiki Theatre Company (*gekidan shiki*),⁵ and the super kabuki series.⁶

It is understandable that the industry prefers to include more works under the name “2.5D theatre” in order to make the genre seem more popular. However, such a broad definition is not adopted in scholarship. Production companies with a long history, such as Takarazuka and Shiki, have established their own distinctive styles of theatre. Within the few academic publications on 2.5D theatre, scholars have focused on the post-2003 productions inspired by the *Musical The Prince of Tennis* series (2003–).⁷ In this article, I interpret 2.5D theatre as post-2003 productions that are somewhat similar to the *Tenimyu* series. I argue that performances of *Tenimyu*-influenced 2.5D theatre are heavily influenced by Japan’s idol culture, which distinguishes them from other plays based on 2-dimensional media.

According to Galbraith and Karlin, idols (*aidoru*) are men or women who “tend to be young, or present themselves as such”; they are produced and promoted on “interconnected media platforms”;⁸ they are not necessarily talented in their jobs, but they appeal to consumers across different demographic and social sections. The consumers, who consume the packaged and promoted materials, are fans of these idols.⁹ In 2.5D theatre, performers are managed as idols but they are, in fact, less-experienced young people working hard to progress in their careers. 2.5D series are produced as long-running seasonal shows, and performers are replaced every few years. This so-called ‘graduation system’ is a concept borrowed from the idol industry, but it fits the school-related themes of 2.5D plays perfectly and enables the performers to pursue different possibilities in their career.

Females constitute the majority of the audience for 2.5D theatre; their consumption supports the performers and the industry. To cater to female spectators, performers, like idols, actively post their daily lives on social media platforms and keep a seemingly intimate relation with their followers. In this regard, the relation between 2.5D performers and the audience is highly similar to that of idols and their fans. The audience spend money on tickets and merchandise, and at the same time, they consume the (fictional) image of performers and their private lives, and create new narratives for the next round of consumption. Meanwhile, at the centre of this consumer-oriented business, the audience of 2.5D theatre are vested with considerable power: some shows even allow them to select the cast.

The “Tenimyu”

The very first *Tenimyu* performance was presented at the Playhouse of Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre (*tōkyō geijutsu gekijō naka-hōru*) in 2003. As of 2019, this series has been continuously performed for 16 years, counting three seasons and 58 plays. The original manga, *The Prince of Tennis* (*tenisu no ōji-sama*), is a series published in the magazine *Weekly Shōnen Jump* from July 19, 1999 to August 3, 2008. Written and illustrated by Takeshi Konomi, this story about high school tennis centres around a young tennis genius named Echizen Ryōma. At the start of the manga, Ryōma enters Seishun Academy (*seishun gakuin*, sometimes called *Seigaku* for short) and joins their tennis club. The story then develops around Ryōma and his teammates’ pursuit of the National High School Tennis Championship. Although Takeshi’s portrayal of tennis techniques in this manga was realistic at the beginning, it gradually exceeded this and the characters acquired a kind of superpower. With the handsome and attractive tennis players from *Seigaku* and the rival teams, the manga quickly gained popularity, especially among female readers. In 2001, the manga was adapted into an anime and was broadcast on Animax (*animakkusu*) and TV Tokyo (*terebi tōkyō*) until 2005. The media franchise also quickly expanded into other areas, including a CD drama, video game, live-action film, and theatre.

In staging *Tenimyu*, the production team made many risky decisions, which resulted in a premiere full of uncertainties. When talking about the premiere of the first *Tenimyu* performance, the producer Matsuda said:

Our performance took place in a theatre that seats 5,000 spectators. However, because our cast are almost unknown to the general public, only half of the tickets to the premiere were sold. Nonetheless, the situation drastically changed after the first act was over. When the performance was good, the audience started humming with chatter during the intermission when the house lights were turned on. They started humming with chatter! They went out to the lobby and the girls called their friends excitedly using cell phones—social media were not in wide usage at that time.

This was the moment I intuitively felt that [*Tenimyu*] would work. We immediately decided to add another performance. After the premiere, we sold the tickets for the next day’s performance in the lobby, and the ticket

sales also went better. Sensing that this might be an extraordinary hit, we negotiated with the theatre and put on another run within that year. Although I had previously produced works where I felt good about the quality, *Tenimyu* was the first one where I was certain that its ticket sales would be successful, that it would trigger a huge wave in response.¹⁰

Nowadays, the *Tenimyu* series of stage plays is always mentioned as the production that was saved by audience response. Through SMS, phone calls, and blog posts, *Tenimyu* was brought to the attention of more people, which triggered the popularity of this series.¹¹ What appealed to the audience at the premiere was the faithful makeup and costumes and the vivid representation of 2D characters on stage. However, over the years, *Tenimyu*'s popularity was also built upon many other experiments; it gradually settled into its own style and set the standard for other 2.5D plays in terms of performance style, production procedure, franchise model, and so on. Shortly after the initial popularity of *Tenimyu* in the early 2000s, many other 2.5D plays were produced. Yokozawa Yuka claims that the production of these plays was triggered by *Tenimyu* and that they aimed to be "the second *Tenimyu*."¹²

Over a thousand plays were produced during the development of the 2.5D theatre industry from 2003 to 2019. Considering the scale of the sample, it is almost impossible to claim that all 2.5D plays are similar. However, I argue that all 2.5D plays are more or less influenced by *Tenimyu*. To adapt long narratives into stage performances, production companies divide the narrative into small pieces and produce long-running, serialised plays. Without a proper beginning, climax, and ending, 2.5D plays present rather loosely connected episodes instead of coherent stories. This lack of integration is more obvious in musical productions. The producers of *Tenimyu* and many 2.5D musical series not only present musicals that bear narratives; they also hold live concerts. Taken together, these shared features differentiate *Tenimyu* and *Tenimyu*-ish plays from Disney musicals such as the *Lion King* (1997-) and *Aladdin* (2010-), as well as from other plays adapted from manga, anime, and video games.

The Graduation System

One of the notable features of *Tenimyu* is its graduation (*sotsugyō*) system. Actors usually 'graduate' from the *Tenimyu* system after roughly one and a half years of performance. According to Matsuda, the initial reason for introducing this graduation system into *Tenimyu* was that actors in the first generation grew too old for the story, which takes place in a high school.¹³ When the first generation graduated, the oldest member was 27, which implies that the actors in *Tenimyu* are expected to be in their early 20s.¹⁴

The graduation system is not a new thing in Japanese idol culture. The first time the term 'graduation' was used was when Nakajima Miharuru and Kawai Sonoko left their idol group, Onyanko Club (*onyanko kurabu*), in 1986. Since Onyanko Club was promoted as centring around the concept of an after-school club for female high school students, it was natural for them to use the term 'graduation.' This word was increasingly used as a euphemism for members

leaving their idol groups, and even when ordinary celebrities retired. Many idol groups now adopt this graduation system, which allows matured members to pursue the next phase of their career. Since the word 'graduation' also somewhat certifies the achievement of the members, it projects a positive image and marks a new start for the member. Meanwhile, by letting old members graduate, the group can recruit new members to keep a fresh image for its fans. Sakai claims that some idol groups use this system to retain the amateurish image of their members.¹⁵ Such a sense of immaturity leaves each idol enough space for improvement. The image also aligns with the youthfulness they present, as expertise is not a quality demanded of the young.¹⁶ In theory, the graduation system affords each idol group a much longer existence.

Although the 'graduation' system was opposed by some fans of *Tenimyu* in the beginning, it was steadily accepted due to the increasing popularity of the actors in the new generations.¹⁷ The director of *Tenimyu*, Ueshima Yukio, also claims that the graduation system can be fully explained and understood within *Tenimyu*: since the story is set in a high school, it is natural to claim that the actors graduated from *Tenimyu*.¹⁸ Meanwhile, as actors are gradually polishing their acting skills and strengthening their bonds with each other, audiences perceive that they are witnessing the maturing process of the actor, and thus, they are participating in the life of the character.¹⁹ This sense of participation leads to a strong desire to care for the actors, while also increasing loyalty among the audience members.

For a long time now, performing in 2.5D theatre has been considered a passport to success. This was certainly the case during the early years of the genre when young performers, after gaining popularity by participating in 2.5D plays, would move on to television drama, film, or more serious theatrical productions. Famous examples are Shirota Yū (1985–) and Saitō Takumi (1981–), who both performed in *Tenimyu* and were later known more widely as television drama and film actors. However, the situation changed with the increasing popularity of 2.5D theatre. As 2.5D theatre is bringing considerable business potential to its practitioners, more performers choose to stay within the industry, even after receiving sufficient publicity. These performers have established a sizeable group of fans who are willing to support the performers financially by purchasing tickets and merchandise. The performers are usually involved in more than one production simultaneously and they also participate in other 2.5D plays after graduating from their current ones. They are essential assets of 2.5D productions, as their fans will become audience members and even fans of their new 2.5D play, thereby contributing to its revenue.

Female-Audience-Oriented Production: Idolised Performers

Yoshioka Shiro says that what we call '2.5D theatre/musical' today is actually *Tenimyu*-ish manga/anime/game-adapted theatre.²⁰ He continues by claiming that what differentiates *Tenimyu* from previous stage adaptations of manga is that the former casts handsome male actors (*ikemen*).²¹ *Tenimyu*'s producer Matsuda, and director Ueshima, have stated in several interviews that, since the beginning of this production, the target audience has always been young

girls.²² The team decided to dedicate the play solely to female audience members. Not only did they present an all-male cast; on the production side, they even carefully erased all footage of female staff when editing the backstage scenes recorded for the DVD.²³

At the very beginning of the *Tenimyu* series, the targeted audience were mainly fans of the original manga and anime. Although the manga was serialised in *Weekly Shōnen Jump*, a *shōnen* manga magazine, consumers of this manga and the adapted anime included many young girls.²⁴ Female readers are attracted to the manga's numerous handsome characters with different personalities—the abundant options make it easy for them to find a preferred type. This expectation, and the fantasy of seeing the gathering of attractive-looking young men, is probably shared by both female readers of the manga and audience members who may not be fans of the original text. Bearing this in mind, the production department of *Tenimyu* created a fictional world with different types of male characters that would appeal to female audiences.

Influenced by this strategy, *Tenimyu*-inspired 2.5D plays draw a larger proportion of younger audience members than other manga-adapted plays, such as those produced by the Takarazuka Revue.²⁵ Although there has never been an official study of the demographics of 2.5D fans, scholars and critics believe that fans and audience members of 2.5D plays are mainly women, ranging from teenagers to middle-aged adults.²⁶ Some long-running 2.5D series, such as *Tenimyu* and *Tōken Ranbu* (2015–), organise their fans within fan clubs.²⁷ Other plays only have official accounts on social media, which are established by the production companies. In either circumstance, the performers have to participate in the promotion process and interact with their audience. Almost all 2.5D performers hold accounts on multiple social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, a personal blog, or other fan communities. They re-post promotion information, update their daily-life status, upload rehearsal pictures, and interact online with fans. Production companies also keep close track and intimate contact with fans on social networks. Some 2.5D plays were instigated as the result of fans' pleas on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and other fan communities.²⁸

In contrast with other kinds of theatre production, 2.5D theatre tends to cast young and less-experienced performers. This is partially because 2.5D productions usually have a production duration of less than one year and they do not have enough time to train the actors. But the producers also care how similar the actor is to the original character. Even though many 2.5D actors lack sufficient training, especially in acting and singing, it does not appear to bother 2.5D fans. Audience members are sufficiently satisfied if they can witness the growth and development of actors who are striving diligently to represent the 2D character in a live performance.²⁹

I argue that the way 2.5D performers are promoted, either by the agencies or themselves, is very similar to how idols are promoted in contemporary Japan. Accordingly, the process can be explained using theories from idol studies. As Gabriella Lukács claims, the movement of “image commodities” organises the

market.³⁰ In the idol industry, the image of an idol is produced through the association of a real personality with fictional narratives. When talking about the conceptual process of producing star icons, Daniel Herwitz points out that the essence is to create an emptiness.³¹ Simply put, building a star is not about creating a perfect image, but about leaving enough space for the public and fans; a finished image is for passive consumption, whereas consumers nowadays prefer filling in the blanks with the narratives they create. This coincides with consumer culture in contemporary Japan, in which, as Ōtsuka Eiji suggests, consumers are not only consuming commodities, they are also interested in creating their own narratives.³²

The process of narrative consumption breaks with the conventional mechanism in which the consumer passively consumes the commodities produced by the creator. In many situations, a narrative is created, but the details are left to be filled by the consumer, who actively collects and interprets the information. Later, some of the consumers organize the information at hand, create a derivative work (*niji sōsaku*), such as a fan fiction, fan art, and fan video, and publish it for others to see. This new mechanism challenges the hierarchy in cultural production, giving the consumer more power to interpret the narrative and an opportunity to create new narratives. Hence, consumers effectively turn into “prosumers” who simultaneously perform the roles of the producer and the consumer, and who produce new narratives in the process of consumption.³³

Within this context of prosumerism, I regard idols and 2.5D performers as two elements of the intertextual media system in Japan, and I argue that they are consumed in very similar ways. Idols are acutely aware that their career is built upon the support of fans.³⁴ The unwritten number one rule of idols is that ‘fans are God.’ Therefore, they have to accept the narratives created by fans and present images that fit the fans’ imaginations. Similarly, the audiences are the absolute centre of 2.5D theatre, and everything is done to entertain them. Performers stay in character even after the performance, as is shown via their social media posts. Those performers who play couples or popular pairings post many pictures together to please the fans. The audience also play an active role in consuming the images and other narratives of the performer.

Spectators as Fans

The idealised images of the 2.5D performers are always linked with the characters they perform. In general, 2.5D performers are supposed to be beautiful, somewhat powerful, but still sometimes show a hint of clumsiness so that they are easier to identify with.³⁵ Inevitably, they become the target of the fans’ sexual desires. However, these desires are not necessarily real. The last thing the fans would expect to see are actual sex scenes, for this would ruin the purity of the ‘perfect’ image of the actors. Although fans love to know different aspects of a performer’s life, they still want to maintain a subtle distance from their ‘idol.’ These types of pseudo-desire and pseudo-intimacy have become key features of 2.5D theatre fans, and within the idol industry in general.

The performers in 2.5D theatre are similar to the idols who lack talents in areas such as singing, dancing, or acting.³⁶ While some of the 2.5D theatre performers who stay in this industry become experienced and improve their acting skills with many years of practice, the average level of their performance can hardly be compared with Takarazuka or 'more serious' productions. However, the audience members who are familiar with idol culture are not disappointed—they have lowered their expectations while watching 2.5D plays. These audiences do not expect 2.5D theatre performers to present perfect acting and singing on the stage. In fact, the clumsiness is considered cute (*kawaii*), and the imperfect performance becomes a point of attractiveness.³⁷

Moreover, the fans, indulging in pseudo-intimacy and pseudo-desire, are happy enough that they are able to observe the growth of their favourite characters and performers. Their desire to support and encourage young actors creates a sense of sponsorship that is similar to a mother's care and fosterage of her children. From this perspective, the audience gain pleasure from their "motherly gaze."³⁸ Some fans, while following the national or even world tours of their favourite 2.5D plays, tend to compare the quality of different performances. Their encouraging comments on social media platforms affirm the hard work and improvement of the performers.³⁹

It is extremely difficult to draw a clear line between the audience and fans of 2.5D theatre. Matsuda states that almost all the audiences of the first season of *Tenimyu* were fans of the original manga or anime.⁴⁰ However, with the development of the 2.5D industry, more people who are not necessarily fans of the original work became interested in 2.5D plays. Many of them walk into the theatre for their favoured performers, directors, a 2.5D series, or simply because they have fallen in love with 2.5D theatre as a genre. Tickets for 2.5D plays have to be purchased through fan clubs or lucky draws and are very hard to get. Although there has been no research conducted on the formation of 2.5D theatre audiences, some believe that many audience members are fans of this genre.⁴¹ Some audience members may go to the theatre for the original work, but the repeat attendees, who would participate in relevant events and purchase merchandise are the true supporters of this industry.

The success of the first season of *Tenimyu* soon gathered a large group of fans for this series. The production company of *Tenimyu*, Nelke Planning (*neruke puranningu*), founded a fan club called Tennimu Supporters Club (TSC for short) when the second season was launched.⁴² To join the club, members have to pay a 1,000 yen entrance fee and a 3,100 yen annual membership fee. The membership is renewed every year. The privileges of TSC membership include being able to purchase the tickets ahead of public sales and participating in the special events held exclusively for TSC members.⁴³ This type of officially organised fan club has become a norm, and similar clubs are associated with many long-running 2.5D productions, including *Musical Tōken Ranbu* and *My Host-chan*, to which I now turn.

The trial performance of *Musical Tōken Ranbu*, which was produced by Nelke, took place in October 2015, only nine months after the release of a game

with the same name.⁴⁴ The series is adapted from an online and mobile game that focuses on personified famous swords from Japanese history. Gamers collect cards for each of the swords and command them in battles against villains who intend to alter history. Thanks to the good-looking characters and their various personalities, the exotic background setting in premodern Japan, and the fact that all characters are personifications of historical Japanese swords, this online collectible card game gained popularity extremely quickly. On New Year's Day 2016, the second work in the *Tōken Ranbu* series was quickly produced after a trial performance. A straight play series was also produced by production company Marvelous! (*māberasu!*) in May 2016, thus establishing a two-stream system (musical vs. straight play) within the *Tōken Ranbu* series. Soon after, a fan club was formed to gather “sword girls” (*tōken joshi*)—a name derived from sword boys (*tōken danshi*), which was the official collective name given to all the swords. The production team very much values interaction with the fans. In fact, they started a poll about the nickname of the *Tōken Ranbu* musical and stage production. The poll lasted for several months, bringing much attention to the 2.5D series. In the end, the shortened names, *Tōmyu* and *Tōsute*, were announced on the official website, Twitter, Facebook, and other social media platforms.

On one hand, the interaction with the fans of 2.5D theatre on social network sites is an efficient manipulation of their earnest interest. On the other, interaction also reassures fans of their power, thereby encouraging their loyalty and further participation. The power of fans is amplified to the maximum in *My Host-chan* (*Watashi no hōsuto-chan*, 2013–). Based on a video game and television drama with the same name, the 2.5D play presents the story of different hosts—the male staff who serve female customers seeking company and conversation. Customers are able to select their favourite hosts in a host club; the ranking of hosts depends on the revenue they each make. The ranking is not only a matter of honour, but the higher a host ranks, the more it costs to make an appointment with him, and thus, the host will earn more from the appointment fees. Likewise, fans of the 2.5D series *My Host-chan* can vote to decide which actor/character will actually perform on the stage, as if they are appointing their favourite hosts. The production side has also designed multiple endings for the play. The ending of each performance is decided on the day and according to the ranking of the actors. Each ticket comes with one vote; however, the fans can purchase derivative goods of the show, which translate into additional points that help elevate the rank of the actors. This enhanced power makes fans more eager to spend money on their beloved 2.5D plays and performers.

Conclusion

The rapid development of 2.5D theatre is intertwined with popular culture in contemporary Japan and cannot be isolated from the socio-economic context in which it is located. In this article, I defined 2.5D theatre as 2-dimensional-based plays produced after 2003 that are inspired by *Tenimyu*. The analysis revealed the influence of idol culture on 2.5D theatre: 2.5D performers are promoted in ways that are similar to how idols are promoted, and loyal audiences are positioned as fans. Accordingly, the production of 2.5D theatre can be interpreted using theories from idol studies.

It is clear that the production side treats 2.5D plays as audience-oriented entertainment. Hence, the elements of idol culture in 2.5D theatre are the result of the marketing strategies of production companies. Targeting female audiences, 2.5D plays cast idolised, handsome, but less-experienced, actors who ‘graduate’ from the production after a few years. The one-way provide-consume relationship is no longer contained within the relationship between the performer and the fan. The performer, as well as production companies, expect consumers to actively collect the narratives related to the performer, and to create new narratives while consuming the existing ones. Under this model, the consumption activities will be ongoing and ever-expanding, at least in theory.

Aside from influences from idol culture, many other features are characteristic of 2.5D theatre. The most essential one is perhaps fidelity to the source. The audiences of 2.5D plays expect to see the characters on the stage “as if it jumps out from the manga.”⁴⁵ Instead of acting skills, the producers and directors of *Tenimyu*, as well as other 2.5D plays, value the aura of the performer and how similar he or she is to the character. Most Japanese manga series, the basis of 2.5D theatre, centre around teenage characters (*shōnen* and *shōjo*).⁴⁶ These young performers suit the immature but rapidly growing and developing characters perfectly. This is also encouraged by the belief that these actors are attractive to the female audience, who form the target audience of most 2.5D plays.

With the establishment of the 2.5D Musical Association, the 2.5D industry experienced a dramatic growth after 2013. With over 100 plays produced each year, it is possible to attend a 2.5D performance on any given day. Global expansion of this genre has also started with overseas performances and international cooperation. The success of the 2.5D theatre invites more extensive research as a form of popular entertainment and a genre of theatrical performance. As a sector of anime-centred media convergence (or media mix, *media mikkusu*), 2.5D theatre should be located within the context of popular culture and cultural consumption in contemporary Japan. Moreover, the distinctive stage presentation in 2.5 theatre, involving both media and musical elements, also deserves close analysis.

¹ In this article, Japanese names are presented with the family name first, followed by the given name. All translations from Japanese to English are mine unless otherwise noted. English translations of play titles and company names follow the official translations. Except for common words, such as manga, anime, and kabuki, all Japanese words in *Romaji* are written in italics.

² The Takarazuka Revue (*Takarazuka Kagekidan*) was founded by Kobayashi Ichizo, the former president of Hankyu Railway, in 1913. It was called Takarazuka Girls’ Revue (*Takarazuka Shōjo Kagekidan*) when *The Adventures of Shō-chan* was performed. Takarazuka has presented many manga-based plays. One of its most influential manga adaptations is *The Rose of Versailles* (*Berusaiyu no Bara*), which premiered in 1974.

³ *Musical Nintama Rantarō* is adapted from Amako Sōbē’s manga *Rakudai Ninja Rantarō* (1986–) and its anime adaptation *Nintama Rantarō* (1993–). The story centres on Rantarō and his friends while they attend a ninja-training school.

⁴ *Hakuōki* is based on the video game *Hakuōki~Shinsengumi Kitan~* that was released in 2008. The game was adapted into anime series, manga, theatrical performances, and live action television drama and films. The story, about a young girl and romantic interactions with members of

Shinsengumi, builds on the alternative Bakumatsu period (1853–1867) and involves supernatural elements, such as demons that subsists by feeding on human blood.

⁵ Shiki Theatre Company is known for importing Disney musicals, such as *Beauty and the Beast* (1995–2017), *The Lion King* (1998–), *The Little Mermaid* (2013–), and *Aladdin* (2015–).

⁶ Super Kabuki (*sūpā kabuki*) is a series catering to young audiences that was initiated by the kabuki performer Ichigawa Ennosuke III in 1986. Super Kabuki has been quite successful since its early years, but it only became widely known at home and abroad when the play *Super Kabuki II: Once Piece* was produced in 2015. The play is based on the popular manga *One Piece* (*wanpīsu*), and it has been repeatedly performed since its first production.

⁷ Representative scholars and their works on 2.5D theatre include Akiko Sugawa 須川亜紀子, “Fantajī ni asobu: pafōmansu toshite no 2.5jigen bunka ryōiki ファンタジーに遊ぶ：パフォーマンズとしての 2.5 次元文化領域とイマジネーション [Wandering in Fantasy: The Realm and Imagination of 2.5D Culture as Performance],” *Yuriika* コリイカ 5 (2015): 41–47; Kunio Suzuki 鈴木国男, “2.5jigen myūjīkaru 2.5 次元ミュージカル [2.5-Dimensional Musical],” *Kyoritsu Journal of Arts and Letters* 共立女子大学文芸学部紀要 63 (2017): 1–11; and Mayuko Fujiwara 藤原麻由子, “Nande utacchattan darō?: 2.5jigen myūjīkaru no kyōkai なんで歌っちゃったんだろう? : 二・五次元ミュージカルの境界 [Why Did They Sing? The Realm of 2.5D Musical],” *Yuriika* コリイカ 4 (2015): 68–75.

⁸ Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin, “Introduction: The Mirror of Idols and Celebrity,” in *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture*, eds. Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 2.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Makoto Matsuda 松田誠, “2.5jigen myūjīkaru no shikakenin: Matsuda Makoto no boijon towa? 2.5 次元ミュージカルの仕掛け人：松田誠のヴィジョンとは? [The Vision of Makoto Matsuda: The Producer behind the ‘2.5-D Musicals’],” interviewed by Norio Koyama 神山典士, *Performing Arts Network Japan*, 2015, https://performingarts.jp/J/pre_interview/1511/1.html, accessed on July 19, 2019.

¹¹ PIA, “2.5jigen myūjīkaru shijō no suii 2.5 次元ミュージカル市場の推移 (2019) [Development of 2.5-D Musical Market (2019)],” 2019, https://corporate.pia.jp/news/detail_live_enta20190704_25.html, accessed on July 19, 2019.

¹² Yuka Yokozawa 横澤由香, “Manga・anime・gēmu x butai kuronikuru 2 漫画・アニメ・ゲーム x 舞台 クロニクル 2 [Manga, Anime, Game X Stage Chronicle 2],” *Omoshii* 4 (2016): 58.

¹³ Matsuda, “The Vision of Makoto Matsuda.”

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Masayoshi Sakai, “When Idols Shone Brightly Development of Japan, the Idol Nation, and the Trajectory of Idols,” *Japan Foreign Policy Forum*, 2016, <https://www.japanpolicyforum.jp/society/pt20160407013017.html>, accessed on July 19, 2019.

¹⁶ Patrick W. Galbraith, “Idols: The Image of Desire in Japanese Consumer Capitalism,” in *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture*, eds. Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 219.

¹⁷ Matsuda, “The Vision of Makoto Matsuda.”

¹⁸ Yukio Ueshima 上島雪夫, “Hikari to odo to dansu de manga wo butai ni henkan suru 光と音とダンスでマンガを舞台に変換する [Transferring Manga into Play Using Lighting, Sound, and Dance],” interviewed by Tōko Tanaka 田中東子, *Bijutsu Techō* 美術手帳 68 (2016): 26–27.

¹⁹ Kazumi Nagaike, “Johnny’s Idols as Icons: Female Desires to Fantasize and Consume Male Idol Images,” in *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 104.

²⁰ Shirō Yoshioka 吉岡史朗, “Datsu tenimyu shikan’ wo mezashite: ‘Sakura Taisen’ ni miru 2.5jigen myūjīkaru 「脱・テニミュ史観」を目指して—『サクラ大戦』に見る 2.5 次元ミュージカ

ルの新たな可能性— [To Overcome the ‘Prince of Tennis-Centered View of History’: A New Horizon of Theatre Adaptation of Anime, Manga and Videogame as Seen in Theatre Adaptation of *Sakura Wars*],” *Asian Cultural Studies*, no. 44 (2018): 149-166.

²¹ Ibid.

²² See Makoto Matsuda 松田誠, “2.5jigen myūjīkaru wo kenin suru ‘Tenimyu’ no kakushin teki na mesoddo 2.5 次元ミュージカルを牽引する「テニミュ」の革新的なメソッド [Leading 2.5D Musicals: Revolutionary Methods of Tenimyu],” interviewed by Tōko Tanaka, *Bijutsu Techō* 美術手帳 68 (2016): 18–25; and Ueshima, “Transferring Manga into Play Using Lighting, Sound, and Dance.”

²³ As stated by the information provided by the company in charge of making the DVD for *Tenimyu*, they were specifically required to erase the scenes involving female staff. When the appearance of female staff is inevitable, they are usually covered with a mosaic. Kentarō Fukuchi. “Tenimyu DVD meikingu eizō ni josei sutaffu ga utsu tteinai ken テニミュ DVD メイキング映像に女性スタッフが映っていない件 [No Images of Female Staff in *Tenimyu* Backstage DVD Footage]” email, December 1, 2017.

²⁴ *Shōnen* stands for ‘boy,’ and *shōnen* manga literally means ‘boys’ manga.’ This manga genre targets young male readers in their teens, but it also attracts female readers.

²⁵ See Momo Nonaka 野中モモ, “2,000,000 Tennimu Fans Can’t Be Wrong (I Hope),” *Yuriika* コリイカ 47, no. 5 (2015): 106; and Sonoko Azuma 東園子, “2.5jigen fan no butai no mikata: Takarazuka fan to no hikaku kara 2.5 次元ファンの舞台の見方：宝塚ファンとの比較から [The Viewpoint of 2.5D Theatre Fans: A Comparison with Takarazuka Fans],” *Bijutsu Techō* 美術手帳 68 (2016): 82.

²⁶ Leonie R. Stickland, *Gender Gymnastics: Performing and Consuming Japan’s Takarazuka Revue* (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2008), 144–45.

²⁷ The musical *Tōken Ranbu* is adapted from the online and mobile game *Tōken Ranbu*, which personifies legendary Japanese swords and makes them travel to the past and fight against villains who intend to disturb the history.

²⁸ Akiko Sugawa 須川亜紀子, “Fantajī ni asobu: pafōmansu toshite no 2.5jigen bunka ryōiki ファンタジーに遊ぶ：パフォーマンスとしての 2.5 次元文化領域とイメージネーション [Wandering in Fantasy: The Realm and Imagination of 2.5D Culture as Performance],” *Yuriika* コリイカ 5 (2015): 46.

²⁹ Akiko Sugawa 須川亜紀子, “2.5jigen bunka towa nani ka? 2.5 次元文化とは何か? [What Is 2.5D Culture?],” *Seidosha 2.5jigen bunkaron* 青土社 2.5 次元文化論, (2014): 1–6, <https://doi.org/10.2134/ael2015.10.0007>.

³⁰ Gabriella Lukács, *Scripted Affects, Branded Selves: Television, Subjectivity, and Capitalism in 1990s Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 47.

³¹ Daniel Herwitz, *The Star as Icon: Celebrity in the Age of Mass Consumption* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 16.

³² Eiji Ōtsuka 大塚英志, *Monogatari shōhiron kai* 物語消費論改 [Narrative Consumption: Revised] (Kindle Edition), Kindle edn. (Tokyo: Asukī shinsho, 2012).

³³ The term prosumer was coined by Alvin Toffler in 1980, and is commonly seen in fandom studies. See Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (New York: Bantam Books, 1980).

³⁴ Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin, “Introduction: The Mirror of Idols and Celebrity,” *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 21.

³⁵ Kazumi, “Johnny’s Idols as Icons.”

³⁶ John Whittier Treat, “Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home : Shojo Culture and the Nostalgic Subject,” *The Society for Japanese Studies* 19, no. 2 (1993): 353-387.

³⁷ Fujiwara, “Why Did They Sing? The Realm of 2.5D Musical,” 73-74.

³⁸ Jason G. Karlin, “Through a Looking Glass Darkly: Television Advertising, Idols, and the Making of Fan Audiences,” in *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture*, eds. Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 79.

³⁹ According to my personal interviews with fans of 2.5D theatre on March 14, 2018 and April 30, 2018.

⁴⁰ Matsuda, “The Vision of Makoto Matsuda.”

⁴¹ Mayuka Nishi 西繭香, “Ninki futtō chū ‘2.5jigen myūjīkaru!’ kyūsoku na shijo kibo kakudai no yōin to māketingu senryaku 人気沸騰中‘2.5次元ミュージカル’! 急速な市場規模拡大の要因とマーケティング戦略 [The 2.5D Musical with Heating Popularity! Reasons of Rapid Market Expansion and Marketing Strategies],” *Joikyaria*, 2019.

⁴² According to the information on the TSC website, the first performance of the second season started in January 2011, but there was news regarding TSC in late 2010. Therefore, the fan club might have been founded in preparation for the second season in 2010 (<https://www.tennimu.com/supporters/privilege.html>, accessed on May 9, 2019).

⁴³ Tickets for *Tenimyu* and other popular 2.5D productions are very hard to get. During the pre-sale, there are usually several rounds of a lottery to randomly select audience members who applied to purchase tickets. Those who did not win the lottery will have to try their luck and purchase the ticket on the day of the show, if there are any left. Fan club members usually can enter an extra round of drawings before the public. Therefore, they are more likely to get a ticket.

⁴⁴ Trial performance (*toraiaru kōen* トライアル公演 in Japanese) is commonly seen in 2.5D theatre industry. The performance is open to the public. Production companies usually adjust the presentation of a certain play or even the scale of a series based on the outcome of the trial performance.

⁴⁵ Kunio Suzuki 鈴木国男, “2.5jigen myūjīkaru 2.5次元ミュージカル [2.5-Dimensional Musical],” in *Sengo myūjīkaru no tenkai 戦後ミュージカルの展開 [Development of Postwar Musical]*, ed. Kei Hibino 日比野啓, (Tokyo: Shinwasha, 2017), 17.

⁴⁶ Tsunehiro Uno 宇野常寛, *The Age of Little People (Ritoru pīpuru no jidai リトル・ピープルの時代)* (Tokyo: Gentōsha, 2011), 224.